**The Walks**

The suggested walk mapped in red (2km, 1 ¼ miles) enters the grounds of King’s and St John’s Colleges, for which a fee may be payable (for fees & opening times check the ‘Visitor Guide’ at [http://www.cam.ac.uk/about-the-university/visiting-the-university](http://www.cam.ac.uk/about-the-university/visiting-the-university)). An alternative route shown in yellow is of similar length and with free access via Silver Street and Garret Hostel Lane.

**The life of Lancelot Brown**

1716 – Born Kirkharle, Northumberland
Baptised 30th August

1732 – Apprenticed to ‘trade crafte or misterie of gardening’

1739 – Moved south to Stowe, then to Hammersmith to set up on his own account, creating over 250 garden works

1764 – Appointed Master Gardener at Hampton Court Palace

1767 – Purchased Manor of Fenstanton & Hilton

1772 – Brown appears on St John’s College Order to repair riverbank

1773 – Brown invited to produce a scheme for St John’s College gardens

1778 – Brown paid a ‘piece of plate to the value of £50 for improving the walks’

1779 – University Chancellor invited Brown to do ‘some alterations’ for The Backs (plan in Cambridge University Library)

1783 – Died 6th February. Buried in Fenstanton

**Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown and The Backs Cambridge**

In Roman times the hinterlands of Cambridge Colleges were marshes and water meadows. Between 1086 and 1279 the river was canalised and straightened to make wharves for salt, flax and corn which was then transported along lanes connected to the market. By 1500 the town was alive with commerce and the Stourbridge Fair held near the Leper’s Chapel was the largest in Europe.

From the 14th century monastic houses and the colleges transformed the town by acquiring land and gradually removing the wharves. For example, Henry VI took land to build King’s College Chapel. Over time this reduced the economic wellbeing of the town and the colleges were able to increase their holdings further. David Loggan’s map of 1688 (2) shows the college acquisitions west of the River Cam.
In 1765 a new bridge, designed by James Essex, was built by Trinity College as part of the colleges’ continuing land purchases. In the 1760s and 1770s the floodplain land was turfed to create lawns and the area became known as ‘The Backs’ (3).

The Colleges were evolving as separate entities with different formal garden design principles applied to each segment of the Backs. Thus, Lancelot Brown was first approached by St John’s and worked from 1773-78 on preparing plans for the College Gardens (4).

In his capacity as University Chancellor, the Duke of Grafton invited Brown in 1779 to suggest ‘Some Alterations’ to the Backs as a whole. Brown proposed that the single landscapes be unified into one park with four separate paddocks; widening the river to create a lake; and removing formal avenues, college bridges (5,6,7) and boundaries.

Brown was praised for his paper plan (overleaf) and doing ‘wonders on a plain surface’, the Colleges could not agree on his radical vision of a surrogate mansion in a park landscape and the plan was never realised. Brown was presented with a silver salver for his efforts.

‘beautiful Colleges, groves, gardens and green fields lying on the banks of the river ... agreeably intermixed; and the stone bridges of several Colleges over the river add to the beauty of it.’

Cantabrigia Depicta, Jeremy Bentham, 1763

The unified park landscape would be focused on James Gibbs’ Fellows’ Building (1) at King’s College, with neighbouring buildings of Trinity and Clare Colleges featuring as secondary outbuildings. Whilst Brown was praised for his paper plan (overleaf) and doing ‘wonders on a plain surface’, the Colleges could not agree on his radical vision of a surrogate mansion in a park landscape and the plan was never realised. Brown was presented with a silver salver for his efforts.