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# Aspects of Chilham

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## Lancelot “Capability” Brown

After the First World War, when the trees planted by Charles Stewart Hardy beside his lake had reached maturity, one of Chilham's legends began to develop: *the park is beautiful - “Capability” Brown was here – hence Brown created all this beauty.*

Though perpetuated by Dorothy Stroud's biography of the great man, this is just a myth.

Brown was indeed here – (briefly in July 1777 & August 1778) but his main surviving legacy to the place is rough grass down beside the new tennis courts, below the bowling green – where there used to be ornamental terraces & closely-planted beds – all destroyed at Brown's instigation.

Amongst Brown's proposals recorded by Thomas Heron the castle's owner, we find:

*“All the gardens below the House destroyed & made a pasture open to the paddock”*

*“the wall of the Upper Terras [sic] to be taken down & the ground from the House sloped to the wall of the next Terras”*

*The sunk fence & wall [the ha-ha] to be continued to the clump on the mound near the castle*

He said the stables on the forecourt should be moved close to the entrance gate or round to the side *“by the old ditch nearest the house”* - a proposal of Christopher Greaves, Heron's multi-talented steward who considered Brown's engagement expensive & unnecessary.

Brown declared the park *“so well wooded that it only wants a little opening”* [tree-felling] *“he gave no directions ..... he said there was little necessary. The truth is he had little time for it.”*

Finally, in 1779, Brown *“sent a drawing for a Green House, which is very pretty & well designed”* - it disappeared long ago.

The Wildmans (Heron's more wealthy successors) removed the old stables & built a new block below the castle.

In 1861 Colebrooke's *claire-voie* (railings on the park wall) could still be seen from the house &, where Hardy would locate the tree-fringed lake, there was a small square pond with a bush in the middle.

Sir Edmund Davis recreated the missing top terrace in the 1920s.

Alone of Brown's structures, the extended ha-ha does survive, but, otherwise, it is almost as if he was never here.

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