

Creating a Capability Brown Landscape

KS2 Activities



Photographer - Georgia Smith

Lancelot
'Capability'
Brown
Landscape Architect
born at Kirkharle
1716

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Lancelot Brown was born here at Kirkharle in 1716, 300 years ago. He walked to school at Cambo and back every day (3 miles or 4.8 kilometres - about 23 football pitches to school and then the same back again). When he left school, at the age of 15, he worked for the owners of Kirkharle. At that time, the Loraine family owned Kirkharle. He learned his skill of creating landscapes in this little corner of Northumberland.

Lancelot's landscape designs involved moving earth, creating lakes and planting trees. The aim was to create enjoyment for all visitors. Lancelot had the extraordinary skill of seeing how to improve what was already in a landscape. He could see the capabilities. This earned him the name Capability Brown.

Lancelot Capability Brown decided to create a plan for a lake in the landscape at Kirkharle, for the young Sir William Loraine (cousin to Lancelot's nephew, as his brother John had married into the Loraine family).

Information about the site from Historic England:

Kirkharle was a medieval settlement. The Loraines were landowners there as early as the fourteenth century. Sir William Loraine (1658-1743) succeeded to the Kirkharle estate as second Baronet in 1718. His Uncle was Sir John Fenwick of Wallington and Sir William was a barrister in London. In 1701 Sir William was elected as an MP. Whilst he lived at Kirkharle he built a new mansion house, out-houses, gardens, fountains, and fish ponds. He restored and refurbished St Wilfrid's church and 1694-1738 planted many hedgerows, forest and fruit trees. He did a great deal of work on the land, building new farmhouses and buildings. His work on the land would have had a great impact as it included draining boggy areas and clearing stones to prepare the land for useful cultivation. His works are probably the reason that Kirkharle village, that formerly stood immediately to the west of Kirkharle Hall (south of Kirkharle Burn and to the left of the entrance road to Kirkharle), was rebuilt slightly further south and west, where the houses are today. The original village is probably where Lancelot Brown was born.

The A696 did not exist until 1830 and divided the Kirkharle estate. The A696 was a link road to Edinburgh, built as a turnpike road, suggesting the funds to build/maintain the road came from tolls. A Turnpike Trust would have existed to do this. A Toll House existed at Ponteland by the bridge. A toll gate existed, the Knowes Gate, at Kirkwhelpington. Information about Northumberland turnpike roads can be found here: <http://www.turnpikes.org.uk/map%20Northumberland%20turnpikes.jpg>

Working for Mr Brown

1. You are working for Lancelot Brown and need to investigate the site to help him update his plans. Lancelot would have used existing maps and plans. Maps were not as detailed as we have today, but the Loraines would have had plans of the Kirkharle estate. You have a plan just showing the lake.
 - a. Explore the area around Kirkharle Lake, starting from the entrance gates. You need to find out as much as possible about what is here, so that you can update your plan. Look for places where you can look at the lake and see what is here e.g. the bench up the bank on the right. Are there any other good vantage points?
 - b. Having different views will give you a better idea of what is here, including which parts of the landscape are the lowest and which are the highest. Look for what there is in the landscape around the lake; don't forget to include what is over the hedges and fences. What is around the lake will affect how you look at the lake. Think about the view from Kirkharle Hall (now the farmhouse - the large house facing the lake). Here are some ideas of things that Lancelot needs marking on a plan (include anything else you think would be useful):

Buildings	High points	Information panels
Bridges - why are they where they are?	Low points	Grass areas
The river (Kirkharle Burn)	Single trees	Fences
Where the water for the lake comes from and where it leaves the lake	Clumps of trees	Walls
Benches	Paths - gravel and grass	Roads

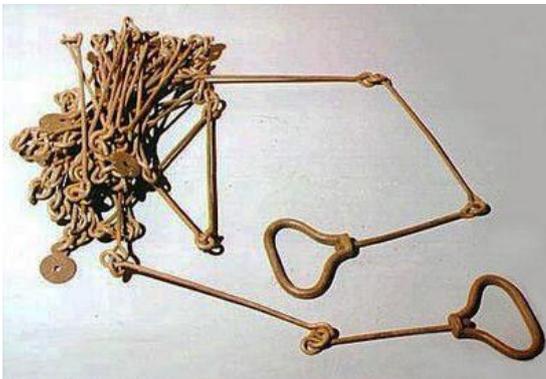
- c. **Mark these on the plan provided that only shows Kirkharle Lake.** You are doing what Lancelot and his team would have done. They would have walked the landscape, or ridden about it on horseback for larger properties. This would help Lancelot to appreciate what was already there and what might be changed for the better.
2. Look at your copy of Lancelot's original plan. The plan needs to be rotated 30 degrees counter-clockwise to match the orientation of the plan you are working on. Lancelot's plan is not aligned with the North. Most maps are aligned North-South, that way we always know how to look at a map. Lancelot was only concerned with ensuring that the Loraine family understood his design, in relation to their house, or maybe any original plans drawn for the Loraine's were drawn this way.
 - a. Identify any differences between the original plan and what you can see today - even the tree planting. Note these on your plan.
 - b. Why do you think that there are differences, is there anything missing?
3. Lancelot has decided to continue to develop the lake further, so that it is more like his original plan. Your next task for Lancelot is to plan for an extension of the lake - from the white bridge over Kirkharle Burn to the start of the lake. To keep the circular walk around the lake Lancelot wants you to leave a wide enough gap for the path as you come over the white bridge.

- a. How wide could the lake extension be at this point? Try pacing out a width that would fit in the space. Would it look like a river flowing into the lake? You have two options:
- Join the extension to the existing lake, or
 - Leave a gap between the extension and the end of the existing lake

What do you think would be Lancelot's choice?

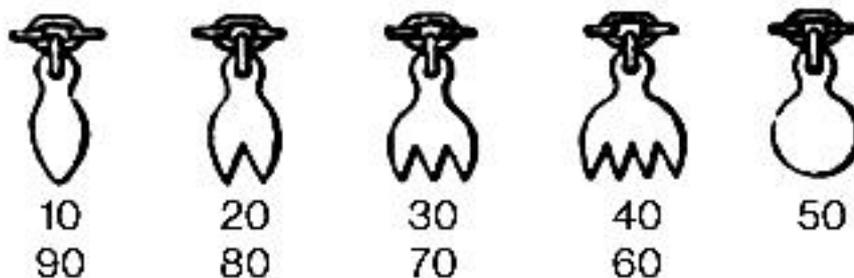
Would it look like a river flowing into the lake? What would look best and encourage visitors to walk over the bridge and take the walk?

- b. Measuring the space - Lancelot did not have very sophisticated tools. His main tool would have been a set of metal chains for measuring, called a Gunter's Chain:



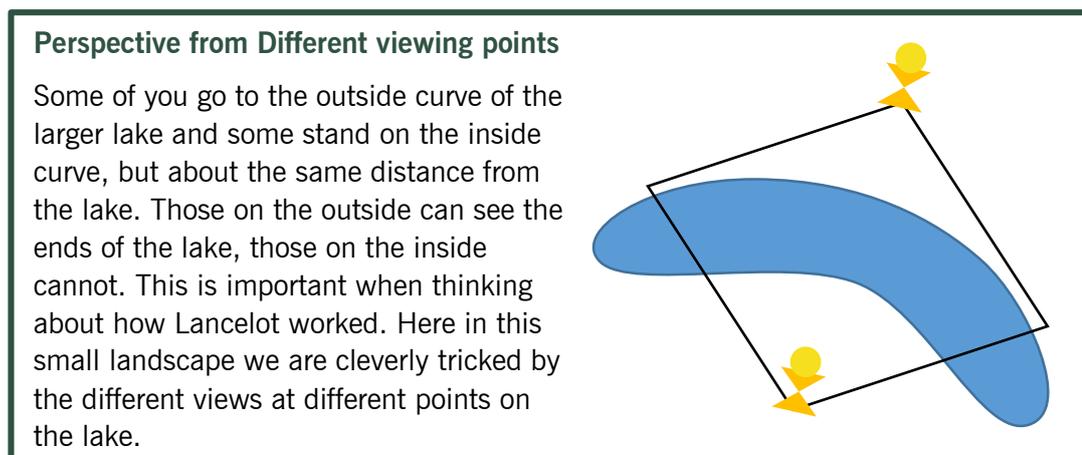
A Gunter's Chain was a 66 foot (20.1 m) chain made of 100 thin iron links measuring 7.92 inches (20.1 cm) each. 66 feet is the length of a cricket pitch. 80 Chains equal one mile! One mile is about 1.61 kilometres.

The chain included markers every 10 links, called tallies. The marker at 10 and 90 would be the same, another design at 20 and 80, another at 30 and 70, again at 40 and 60, and another at 50. Why were these markers important?



- c. You have lengths of knotted rope (the knots are every 20 cm - so a bit like a Gunter's Chain). It is 200 cm long (how many metres?). Work in two teams and use them to:
- Measure how long the lake extension will need to be
 - How wide it would be to fit in the space
 - Draw it on the diagram with a note of the measurements and whether it would be a separate lake or join up with the existing lake
 - Estimate the area of the lake extension

4. Lancelot often included structures in his designs (see resources provided). He wants you to help him plan and design a feature for Kirkharle.
- a. What might it be?
 - Sculpture
 - Bridge
 - Building or shelter for visitors to view the lake
 - Other idea
 - b. Where would be a good place for it?
 - c. What would be a good theme for the design?
 - d. What would it be made of?
 - e. Some things Lancelot wants you to think about:
 - Scale - width and height e.g. Grey's Monument in Newcastle is 40 m high (built in 1838, so not around during Lancelot's lifetime)
 - Views - use the frames near the lake - how would the curve of the lake affect the impact of the view of the new structure?
 - Lancelot wants you to think about the curve of the lake and how it affects what you see from different places. Find out for yourselves how it works:



- f. Mark where it would go on your plan with notes about the design - including its features, what it would be made of and how big it would be.

5. What do you think of the lake design?

a. Is it natural looking?

b. What has been the impact of the main road?
