



CAPABILITY BROWN 300  
**THE BIRTH OF THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE GARDEN**  
THURSDAY 30 JUNE

The British have only one totally original cultural export: the landscape garden. Originating in early 18c rebellions by Charles Bridgeman and William Kent against what they saw as the geometrical tyranny of the Continental formal garden such as could be seen as Versailles or Herrenhausen, the landscape garden then developed at Stourhead under the inspiration of Old Master paintings, to present a series of views that would remind spectators of such famous works by Claude Lorraine as Aeneas at Delos now in the National Gallery. The linkage between gardening and views went so far at Rievaulx Terraces as to direct the walker along a bow-shaped ridge to look down on a succession of different views of Rievaulx Abbey as if watching an early form of cinema. Meanwhile, the idea of a garden offering a journey through literary experiences of classical and ancient British history was investigated in depth at Stowe, where Lancelot Brown, born 300 years ago this year, began his career alongside Bridgeman and Kent. But Brown's career only took off when he saw an opportunity of presenting the landscape garden to potential patrons as having 'capabilities' i.e. of making money. By replacing expensive flower beds with swards of green grass nibbled by sheep, the landscape garden, instead of being a liability, could become an asset. The great naturalistic gardens of Harewood, Blenheim, Badminton, Burghley, Petworth and roughly 160 others ensued, in turn to inspire gardens on the continent from Sweden to Hungary, and, across the pond, in the United States.