

Capability Brown and Thomas Gainsborough: nature as art or art as nature

Start date Friday 28 January 2022 **End date** Sunday 30 January 2022

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge
CB23 8AQ

Tutor **Caroline Holmes** **Course code** 2122NRX075

Director of ISP and LL Sarah Ormrod

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Tutor biography

Caroline Holmes is a Garden Historian who has lectured for many years for Cambridge University ICE; for The Arts Society throughout Britain and in New Zealand, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain; as well as several specialist travel companies, cruises and tours sponsored by the US Institute of Classical Architecture and Art in France. She gave the lecture 'Claude Monet and his garden at Giverny' for Viking TV <https://viking.tv/live/monday/explore-claude-monets-life-in-giverny-with-guest-lecturer-caroline-holmes> Author of twelve books, her latest is *Where the wildness pleases – the English Garden Celebrated*. Design consultancies include two for churches, currently a William Morris inspired setting for All Saints, Cambridge, and 2008-2016 Tudor-inspired gardens for a Humanist Renaissance 'journey' around Notre Dame de Calais. Recipient of 'The Gertrude B Foster Award for Excellence in Herbal Literature' in 2011 and 'The Elizabeth Crisp Rea Award' in 2017 from the Herb Society of America.

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the Terrace Bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

20:30 – 22:00 **Introduction: Georgian culture and patronage** including the importance of the Grand Tour

22:00 Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30 Breakfast (for resident only)

09:00 – 10:30 **The genesis of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown as landscaper – Kirkharle to Stowe**

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 **The silken thread of pose and poise: the artistic roots of Thomas Gainsborough**

13:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16:00 Free time

16:00 Tea

16:30 – 18:00 **The busiest idlest place in the world – Bath: portraits, connections and the changing face of England**

18:00 – 18:30 Free time

18:30 Dinner

20:00 – 21:30 **The School for Scandal?** Students are invited to bring in prose, poetry or music that evokes the worlds of Brown and Gainsborough to share with the group and to discuss – suggestions include Theatre: Richard Brinsley Sheridan; David Garrick and the revival of Shakespeare; social Commentary William Hogarth or Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*; etc.

21:30 Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Sunday

07:30 Breakfast (for resident only)

09:00 – 10:30 **Nature as art** – weather permitting we will take a stroll around the grounds of Madingley Hall to view its Brownian landscape and setting

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 **Art as nature** – a concluding comparison of England's first landscaper and the originator of the English landscape painting school

12:45 Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

The course will introduce you to:

- 1) An appreciation of the 18th-century Enlightenment in Britain expressed in paintings and landscapes
- 2) How England's natural rural countryside is managed into sinuous profitable landscapes

Content:

In this weekend we will explore an eclectic mix of profitable, artistic and moral landscapes in 18th-century England. We continue to enjoy the legacy of Brown - an 'earthmover' who transformed estates into profitable sinuous landscapes - and Gainsborough - an originator of the English landscape painting school. Both were country boys who retained connections to Suffolk and Northumberland, whilst enjoying the patronage of many great houses such as Chatsworth and Alnwick as well as Prior Park in Bath. At a time when science and the arts were the prerequisite of polite conversation we will compare several Brownian landscapes – Stowe, Blenheim, Claremont, Croome, Harewood and Kew as well as the paintings of artists such as Joseph Wright of Derby and Johan Zoffany. Political allegiances provide strong networks for the two men, patrons who commission architectural conceits, landscapes and portraits to further their interests. Saturday evening provides time to explore social, moral and daring pursuits in words and music.

Presentation of the course:

The lectures will be illustrated with historic and contemporary images, weather permitting a walk around Madingley's landscape and class discussion. All students are invited to select prose, poetry or songs to share with the group on Saturday night. This provides an excellent opportunity to widen the scope of the weekend.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- 1) have a greater understanding of England's mid eighteenth century planted and painted landscapes
- 2) understand how 'country boys' Brown and Gainsborough succeeded
- 3) identify the works of both men in and around many of England's houses and gardens

Reading and resources list

Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course.

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Brown, Jane	<i>The Omnipotent Magician – Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown 1716-1783</i>	Chatto & Windus 2011
Foreman, Amanda	<i>Georgiana’s World</i>	Harper Collins, 2001
Hamilton, James	<i>Gainsborough – A Portrait</i>	W&N 2017
Shields, Steffie	<i>Moving Heaven & Earth – Capability Brown’s Gift of Landscape</i>	Unicorn 2016
Sloman, Susan	<i>Gainsborough in Bath</i>	Yale University Press

Websites:

Lancelot Brown

http://www.capabilitybrown.org/sites/default/files/capability_brown_at_blenheim_palace.pdf

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lists/explore-capability-browns-landscape-gardens>

<https://www.parksandgardens.org/people/lancelot-brown>

Also websites of Alnwick Castle and Syon Park

Thomas Gainsborough

Gainsborough’s House reopening Spring 2022 <https://gainsborough.org/about/museum-news/>

Victoria & Albert Museum, London has excellent articles and access to its collections online:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O118142/showbox-exhibition-box-thomas-gainsborough/>

National Gallery, London

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/thomas-gainsborough>

For a fascinating discussion of Mr. and Mrs. Andrews filmed for the National Gallery:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_w--aEYmH8