

## **Celebrate Capability Brown and visit the stunning gardens of Shakespeare's England in 2016**

2016 marks the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 'Capability' Brown and many of Shakespeare's England gardens are celebrating with a host of special events and activities. From recreated Elizabethan Gardens, restored Victorian Gardens, garden tours to outdoor plays, picnics, garden exhibitions, shows, trails and live music, there is plenty to see and do in the charming gardens of Shakespeare's England throughout 2016.

**Compton Verney** will host a number of special events throughout 2016. The grounds are a perfect Brownian landscape in miniature with a lake, chapel, walks and specimen trees. Visitors can see a display about Brown's vision and enjoy tours to highlight the Brownian elements. There will also be talks by leading academics and Head of Landscape & Gardens, Gary Webb. Plus there will be a special weekend focusing on Brown and the Georgian period in which he came to Compton Verney featuring costumed characters and demonstrations by rural craftsmen. The Chapel, a rare example of which Brown designed, will open following a restoration. Visitors can also see new interpretation points throughout the landscape which will give them an insight into the rich history it holds.

Celebrate the anniversary with **Warwick Castle's** History Team as they guide visitors through 64 acres of 'Capability' Brown's first independently commissioned gardens. For the first time ever, the secrets of Brown's work are revealed in their glory; from his landscaping of the grounds, structuring of his planting, and the irreversible features installed in the 1750s that changed Warwick Castle forever!

Enjoy '*Magic at Midsummer*' at the **Royal Shakespeare Company** from 19 - 25 June at the Avonbank Gardens. These free activities mark Midsummer and the return to Stratford of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, including *The Fairy Portal Camp*, a feast of dance, song and fire. Led by Slung Low Theatre Company, the activities reopen the connection between us and the spirit world on Midsummer's Eve. Families can also enjoy a range of free theatre at The Dell, the RSC's open air performance space, on Saturdays and Sundays throughout the summer. Over the weekends amateur, semi-professional theatre groups and colleges will perform theatre inspired by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Dates to be announced.

Visit **Wroxall Abbey**, a luxury hotel near Warwick, and enjoy a number of beautiful outdoor settings, ranging from well-tended lawns with unrivalled vistas, to a 'crinkly-crankly' walled garden built by Sir Christopher Wren. Ancient yew hedges and fruit trees offer an air of

intimacy, whilst the wider grounds are often used for a range of outdoor activities, games and team building events.

**The Bell at Alderminster**, a country pub near Alscot has connections to Capability Brown. It is known that Brown and the original James West, the owner of Alscot, were friends and it is likely that he was involved in the garden design. The Alscot estate will hold an Arts Trail in 2016 plus the Alscot's *Alternative to Chelsea* event on 7 June which gives visitors the opportunity to view the private gardens of Alscot Park and lunch at The Bell. There are some magnificent old trees (approx. 450 years old) in the grounds, in particular cedar, venerable tulip and sweet chestnut. Amongst the herbaceous borders there are some wonderful sculptures to admire. Booking is essential. The event starts at 11am and the cost is £30pp.

The Gardens at **New Place**, Shakespeare's final home, are of national and international importance. They are cultural and recreational assets in their own right, Grade II listed on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. The Great Garden was the site of the first Shakespearian theatre (1827), and has served as a pleasure ground since Victorian times. In the early 20th Century, the gardens were re-modelled by designer Ernest Law, and the Wilderness Bank created with advice from influential plants woman Ellen Willmott. To mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust plans to re-imagine New Place and transform the site with a contemporary landscape interpretation. This will include a deep pool, lit by an eternal glow beneath the water and surrounded by stone seating and pleached trees. Sonnets and plays will be engraved into the floor around the pool and the pattern working through the garden is one of ripples spreading outwards from the pool. The sunken Knot Garden will be restored to its former glory in the spirit of the original design by Ernest Law. The Grade II listed Great Garden, the largest surviving part of Shakespeare's own garden, will be conserved and restored. Visitors will be able to see the sculpture trail of eight bronze monuments by American sculptor, Greg Wyatt, each inspired by a Shakespearian play.

At **Anne Hathaway's Cottage & Gardens**, explore 9 acres of beautiful English country cottage gardens where Shakespeare wooed his wife. Regarded as the quintessential country cottage, it has inspired countless painters and photographers with its beautiful blooms all year round. Explore the 19<sup>th</sup> century garden and orchard, with a variety of flowers, vegetables and fruit trees, and learn how traditional methods and classic planting schemes are still used today. To the right of the orchard is a path leading to the Shakespeare Tree Garden. Created in 1988, it is planted with most of the trees mentioned in Shakespeare's writings. Visitors can listen to Shakespearian verse in the beautiful sonnet arbour, and follow the sculpture trail. The living Willow Cabin is also mentioned in Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*. Medlar trees are found in the plays *Measure for Measure* and *As you like it*.

**Hanbury Hall** will celebrate the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday of their restored gardens in July with their head gardener, who was the head gardener 21 years ago, and is still the head gardener today. The biggest month with the most impact in the gardens is at the end of April when the tulips and hyacinths are out in the parterre. The Hall is also hosting an exhibition of photographs from the 'International Garden Photographer of the Year' from 15 February – 26 April which will include stunning photographs of gardens around the country. **Upton House** will be hosting the 'Dig for Victory' Garden with themed 1940's activities and **Charlecote Park** with its Capability Brown connections will be celebrating the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Visit the stunning wildflower garden throughout the summer at the **Stratford Butterfly Farm** and watch the butterflies in their natural habitat. Butterfly nectar plants and a special butterfly meadow mix of 80 different species are planted so the garden continually blooms.

The **Lord Leycester Hospital** is an amazing collection of mediaeval architecture. Erected in the early 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the half-timbered buildings are now a retirement home for old warriors and their wives. Hidden behind the Master's House is a tiny, beautiful, tranquil garden which has been lovingly restored by a past Master's wife. Unique features include the 12<sup>th</sup> Century Norman arch, a stone vase reputed to have crowned the 2,000 year-old Egyptian "Nilometer" and a very early pineapple pit.

Explore the 10 hectares of **Ragley Gardens** which surround the Hall and date back to 1681. Although the 170 hectares of parkland were designed by 'Capability' Brown during the 18th century, little is known about the gardens prior to 1871. It is thought that the Capability landscape came right up to the Hall itself until garden designer Robert Marnock enclosed the 10 hectares as pleasure grounds, planting them with trees and shrubs around meandering pathways and creating a formal Victorian flower garden.

Enjoy a garden fit for a queen at **Kenilworth Castle's** Elizabethan Garden. Originally designed for Queen Elizabeth I when she visited the Castle, the Gardens were faithfully recreated by English Heritage in 2009. As the gardens celebrate their 7th year, they offer a beautiful addition to the castle. See the magnificent carved arbours; a bejewelled aviary; an 18-foot-high fountain carved from dazzling Carrara marble.

**The Old Slaughterhouse** is an Arts and Heritage Studio in the heart of Stratford upon Avon. In 2016 the company will be working with Stratford in Bloom on an Art in the Landscape transformation of the Service Yard, their access area. Although currently neglected, it is a conservation area that is steeped in heritage and was once covered with beautiful gardens and walkways. The Studio will explore its heritage and create urban planting schemes as well as developing an arts and heritage garden, including a sculpture commission.

**The Fleece Inn** at Bretforton features a beautiful old orchard as its pub garden and regularly hosts seasonal events. A visit is a 'must see' in March to May for its Blossom and the illustrious Trail which includes some of the most delightful scenery. The annual celebration of the World's finest "gras" starts on St George's Day at the Inn and continues with a special asparagus menu and the famous Gras Auctions throughout the months. October sees the Apple & Ale festival where the orchard apples are pressed using traditional methods to create the Inn's our Ark Cider!

**Mallory Court Hotel** outside Leamington Spa boasts stunning gardens with manicured lawns, trimmed hedges and flower displays arranged into six areas. These include the Old English rose gardens, the pond garden with original stone paths, mature trees and shrubs and the kitchen garden, where a range of herbs, vegetables and soft fruits are grown for use in the kitchens. The kitchens work closely with the garden team to steer what is grown in order to keep the menus fresh and exciting. Take a walk through the grounds and find a wealth of fresh produce growing from figs and soft fruits to herbs, salads, root vegetables and more exotic and hard to grow offering such as artichokes and asparagus.

Visit **Batsford Arboretum** in the last week of February to see the snowdrops at their absolute peak. March is the perfect time to see the golden daffodils. Wander through swathes of yellow and enjoy the spring sunshine. Blossom takes centre stage in April as the collection of Japanese flowering cherries blooms, marvel at the blooms of the 73 species of Magnolia. Batsford is home to one of the biggest, oldest and best Davidia trees in the country and should be at its very best during May. The arboretum is ablaze with autumnal colour from early October to mid-November. Centre stage are the maples and cherries in every hue from flame reds to salmon pinks and sunshine yellows as well as the liquidambar tree – with its multi-coloured leaves from deep purple to pale gold.

Join **Go Gotswolds** for guided tours in 2016 which stop at Broadway Tower, the "brainchild" of Capability Brown. The tours stop at seven different locations including Snowhill where you can see the stunning snow drops in February and daffodils in March. During July and August the lavender is out in its full glory at Cotswolds Lavender Farm where the tour stops.

The 16 restored gardens at **Hill Close Gardens** in Warwick feature brick summerhouses, plants displayed in special theatres and a fine collection of period garden tools. During the year visitors can see Victorian species of daffodils, blossom on 80 different fruit trees, herbaceous borders and plants housed in a glasshouse. The Snowdrop weekend takes place on 6 & 7 February when the snowdrops can be seen in two special borders, one with Victorian varieties and the other with modern varieties, including the 'Warwickshire Gemini'.

The Victorian Easter takes place from 26 - 28 March

when visitors can see heritage daffodils, primroses and cowslips dotted around the gardens. The Cafe will be transformed into a Victorian tearoom with staff in costume. Themed displays in the cafe and around the summerhouses will bring to life the way Victorians celebrated Easter. On 30 April the gardens will come alive with a celebration of May Day and springtime. Visitors can re-live folk traditions and heritage with special displays of maypole dancing and folk dancing.

With so many stunning gardens to explore and a host of exciting outdoor events, Shakespeare's England is the place to visit in 2016!

**For more suggestions and family friendly accommodation in Shakespeare's England visit <http://shakespeares-england.co.uk>**

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**Notes to editors**

Shakespeare's England is the official destination management organisation for Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick Districts. It is a public-private sector partnership representing the leading tourism businesses and organisations in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick, Royal Leamington Spa, Kenilworth and surrounding market towns and villages. For more information visit please visit <http://shakespeares-england.co.uk/about-us>

More information on Shakespeare's England can be found at [www.shakespeares-england.co.uk](http://www.shakespeares-england.co.uk) [www.facebook.com/ShakespearesEngland](http://www.facebook.com/ShakespearesEngland) and Twitter [@ShakespearesEng](https://twitter.com/ShakespearesEng)

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