



Milton Abbey and its Landscape

The historic Milton Abbey church near Blandford Forum, a 14th Century gem needing significant repair works, was awarded a grant of over £1.2 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) during 2016.

The grant of £1,249,200 amounts to 73% of the total cost of a major visitor welcome and repair programme, urgently required to preserve the Abbey for future generations, and enhancing its integration within a stunning 500 acre landscape designed by Capability Brown.

The Rt Revd Nicholas Holtam, Bishop of Salisbury, said:

“Milton Abbey is one of the gems of the Diocese with a deep Benedictine tradition of prayer and hospitality with new opportunities for pilgrimage. The Heritage Lottery Fund's generous support will restore the Abbey, revitalise its internationally significant Capability Brown landscape, reveal the rich history of the site and breathe new life into this wonderful Christian site for all its visitors.”

The grant is being used to achieve the repair of key features of the Abbey including internal and external masonry, the tower windows, ceilings and vaults. Historic walks, drives and viewpoints in the grounds are being rediscovered and discreet, oak-clad pods will be installed to host toilets, a kitchen, an office, and storage facilities.

The Revd John Simmons, Chair of the Milton Abbey Standing Committee, added:

“It was particularly exciting to receive news of the grant in the year when our major multi-media exhibition celebrating the 300th anniversary of the birth of Capability Brown has made such an impact at the Abbey.

“The exhibition was open daily during last summer, featuring photos, art, film, access to the stunning landscape, and interactive activities, especially for children.”

Nerys Watts, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said:

“The tercentenary of Capability Brown's birth inspired a great deal of interest in the work of England's greatest gardener. There could not have been a better time to embark on this ambitious project at one of Brown's most impressive landscapes at Milton Abbey. This National Lottery grant will breathe new life into the grade I listed building and surrounding parkland, ensuring visitors can discover its many charms for years to come.”

2016 indeed proved a great year for Capability Brown and for Milton Abbey. Awareness of the importance of the Milton landscape has soared. The multi-media exhibition attracted over 4,500 visitors and gained widespread publicity.

Presentations included paintings by Tim Scott-Bolton, a massive artwork by Royal Academician Stephen Farthing, a range of artwork from Dorset Visual Arts, embroidery by the National Guild of Embroiderers, and a film narrated by John Phibbs - shown in a dedicated cinema space.

A 3D digital topographical model was produced and used as a digital guided tour, with the help of an iPad linked to a TV monitor. Guided routes through the landscape were designed and printed in leaflet format for visitors. Visitors arrived from our local villages, from the South West of England, other parts of the UK, and abroad. Local schools participated vigorously, and volunteer engagement rocketed in 2016, with support from contributing artists, NADFAS, and local residents.

The wonderful thing - thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund - is that 2016 was not simply a once-and-for-all occasion at Milton Abbey, but the beginning of a new way of appreciating, caring for, and understanding Brown's landscape, with new ways of engaging with visitors. Milton Abbey will be hosting a new landscape exhibition in the Summer of 2017, with major emphasis on the work of 'Capability' Brown.

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About the Heritage Lottery Fund

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