

LATE SPRING OUTING

Wednesday 19th June 2024

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Rousham Gardens, Oxfordshire, OX25 4QU

One of England's most important gardens, Rousham represents the first phase of English landscape design and remains almost as its designer William Kent left it. Many of the features that delighted its 18th-century visitors are still there for 21st-century visitors to enjoy. A favourite of many great garden designers, Rousham is completely unspoiled and uncommercialised – no tearoom and no shop – just glorious gardens to explore at your leisure. Don't miss the walled garden with its herbaceous borders, small parterre, pigeon house and espaliers.



William Kent was a painter, stage designer and architect who spent time in Italy, the influence of which can clearly be seen in the gardens at Rousham, he was one of the pioneers of what was known as the 'New English Style of Landscape.' Until then gardens had been in a more formal style, the garden today still retains a quality of Englishness and unbroken harmony between house, garden and countryside.

The garden was commissioned in the early 18th century, by General James Dormer a soldier who had fought with the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim. Kent, who was at the centre of the picturesque movement, developed and completed the original design by the royal gardener, Charles Bridgeman. He saw the garden as a stage so that every path culminates in a statue or building and gives a sense of drama to the garden visitor at centre stage.



There are said to be a thousand ways to walk around the garden, but the journey begins at the bowling green, with a vast hedge on the south side; the first thing that catches your eye is a great lawn framed with a wide path and beyond it a statue of a lion attacking a horse by Peter Sheemakers. From the house, this statue draws your eye and then leads it onto the cuttle mill and finally to the eye-catcher perched on a hill in the distance. From the bowling green, you can take any number of paths. One way takes you into the William Kent gardens with pools, a rill, cascades, statuary, and a seven-arched colonnade called Praeneste modelled on the ruins at Palestrina in Italy, which is set into a steep bank overlooking the river Cherwell and the Heyford bridge.

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In contrast to William Kent's eighteenth-century 'Pleasure Grounds', on the south side of the house, are three seventeenth-century walled gardens. Deep herbaceous borders spill over the paths, peaches, apricots, plums and pear trees are trained against the ancient brick walls, a pool with a fountain surrounded by roses and a path framed with espalier apples takes you to an archway leading you into the well-stocked kitchen garden and then a quaint arched gap in a box hedge leads you into a smaller garden with a circular dovecote and a Mulberry tree overlooking a box parterre full of roses.

Beyond the ha-ha, in the park surrounding the garden is a rare herd of longhorn cattle.

