

The Lancelot Brown bank account in the ledgers of Drummonds Bank: a landscape historian's view by Dr David Brown

When Peter Willis wrote the article, 'Capability Brown's account with Drummonds Bank, 1753-1783', published in *Architectural History* in 1984, he noted that the material 'deserves to be better known'. Early bank records provide a rich vein of information on the financial activity of many persons of historical interest but the [Brown account](#) for garden historians is a very special source. The other well-known record of Brown's financial activity is the surviving notebook held at the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society. Both sources are far from complete and yet provide crucial information that fills in gaps in the information provided by other, more dispersed, records (such as correspondence, estate records and the like). Above all the [Drummonds](#) account provides an over-arching structure to his independent career. Before 1753, beginning in 1750, Brown briefly held an account at Hoares Bank on Fleet Street but this has very little information in respect of who payments were made to and from whom they were received.

It is worth noting that many of Brown's clients had accounts at Drummonds, Hoares or one of the other banks then operating and whose ledgers have survived. These can be correlated with Brown's account to confirm the identity of clients and sites, although there are quite often interesting discrepancies (often due to the chain of delivery of payments!). An analysis of client bank accounts, for instance, demonstrates that the 'General Keppel' from whom payments were received in Brown's own account in the mid-1760s is General William Keppel of Dyrham Park, Hertfordshire rather than, as previously assumed, General George Keppel, 3rd Earl of Albemarle, of Elveden, Suffolk. In this way information using Brown's own account in conjunction with information from his client's bank accounts and other sources can challenge or confirm attributions of Brown's work.

The information contained within the Brown account for the payments made to the host of people that Brown worked with over his career casts valuable light on the way in which his business was organised. As one of the more thoroughly researched and recorded mid-eighteenth-century 'improvers', the archetypal 'capability man', Brown's business provides a blueprint for understanding the beginnings of landscape gardening as an industry. Many of his assistants or associates went on to have successful careers in their own right - the 'school of Brown' includes Adam Mickle of Bedale, the architect William Donn, Thomas White and Nathaniel Richmond. The Drummonds account provides invaluable information on the earlier careers of these and the other 'gentleman improvers' who worked with him for a time.

Analysis and further research based on the Drummonds accounts to date has hardly scratched the surface of what might be discovered by further cross-referencing with other material available elsewhere. The publication of the Brown account in its entirety by the Royal Bank of Scotland provides a unique opportunity for everyone with an interest in the life, career and historical context of the country's best-known garden designer.