

LATE SPRING OUTING

Wednesday 19th June 2024

Rousham Gardens, Oxfordshire, OX25 4QU

Rousham is recognised as one of England's most significant gardens, exemplifying the earliest phase of English landscape design and retaining much of the original vision of its designer, William Kent. Many features that appealed to 18th-century visitors remain accessible to contemporary audiences. Frequently cited by prominent garden designers, Rousham stands out for its preservation and lack of commercial development—there are no tearooms or shops, offering visitors the opportunity to explore the gardens at their own pace. Notable highlights include the walled garden, which contains herbaceous borders, a small parterre, a pigeon house, and espaliers.



Kent designed Rousham as a sequence of scenes, each one unfolding as you move — a proto-cinematic landscape. Unlike later Capability Brown parks, Rousham is intimate, architectural, and symbolic.

The **Walled Garden** is the most structured part of the estate, and it contrasts deliberately with the looser landscape outside.

The **Parterre** is defined by sharp lines, boxed borders, and ever-changing seasonal plants.

The **Praeneste** features a seven-arched arcade, inspired by the historic sanctuary at Palestrina, which acts as an architectural centrepiece. This structure frames views of both the rill and the river, intentionally evoking a sense of antiquity and the impression of a “discovered ruin.” In addition to its evocative atmosphere, it also serves as a dramatic theatrical backdrop within its environment.

The **Herbaceous Borders** are expansive and classic in design — these were added during the 19th and 20th centuries, blending well with the existing landscape.

The **Pigeon House** represents traditional estate prestige as well as a historic source of food.

The **Kitchen Garden** remains fruitful to this day, with espaliered fruit trees gracing its perimeter walls.

The **Roses and Trained Fruit** reflect the estate’s longstanding traditions in gardening practices.

The **Rill and Water feature** is a narrow, regulated watercourse that serves several purposes: it directs visual focus, contributes auditory and kinetic elements, links the Praeneste to adjacent ponds, and evokes the concept of “sacred water” consistent with classical traditions. This rill is noted as one of the earliest instances of naturalistic water design within England.

The sculptures at Rousham serve not merely as decoration, but as moral signposts.

Visitors will observe: Apollo, Pan, The Dying Gaul, Lion Attacking a Horse, Venus and The River God

The ancient Longhorn herd is integral to the estate's ongoing legacy. The herd contributes to grassland maintenance, upholds the pastoral landscape characteristic of the 18th century, and enhances the enduring atmosphere of the estate.

Rousham is among the few Kent landscapes that have remained largely unaltered over time, preserve their initial narrative sequence, were not redesigned by “Capability” Brown in the 18th century, and continue to be free from commercial development.

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