

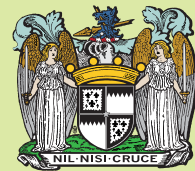
# John Dobson's Lake

**Bolam Lake was created by the famous architect John Dobson in 1816 and commissioned by the owner of Bolam Estate, Reverend John Beresford (later Lord Decies).**

John Dobson (pictured right) had an illustrious career, spanning more than 50 years, designing buildings across the North East of England. Today you can see his work at Newcastle Central Station, (Old) Eldon Square and the east side of Grey Street, Newcastle.



In 1816 local landowner Reverend John Beresford (later Lord Decies) felt compelled to do something for the local people who were suffering due to a period of agricultural and economic decline. His answer was to ask Dobson to lay out an artificial lake, with a dam at its eastern end, "necessary islands" and adjacent woodland plantations in an area to the south of Bolam Hall within the wider estate with which he is also responsible for landscaping.

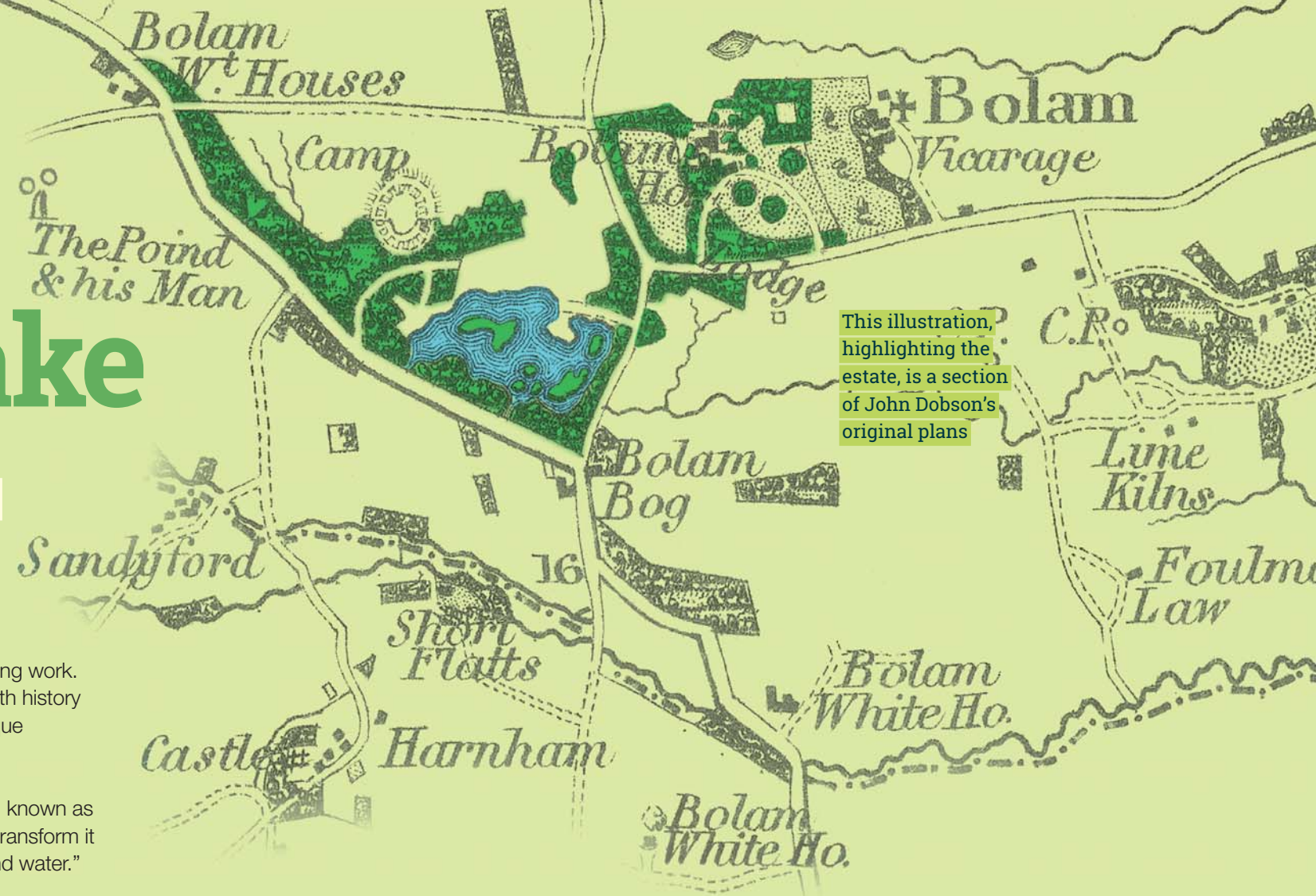


**The Reverend John Beresford (later Lord Decies) Coat of Arms**

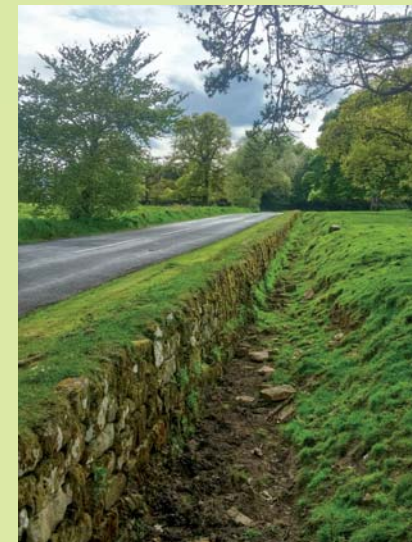
Bolam Lake is a rare example of his landscaping work. At Bolam he found that "topography unites with history to provide the landscape gardener with a unique opportunity."

The lake at Bolam was once a boggy swamp, known as the Bolam Bog, but John Dobson aspired to transform it into "an airy landscape of buildings, woods and water."

To produce the perfect landscape, Dobson used many of the principles crafted by celebrated gardeners such as Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, who was born 5 miles away at Kirkharle, and Humphrey Repton. These include: variety, association and grandeur. He included a 'ha-ha' to provide a seamless barrier with uninterrupted views; he planted a range of rich, ornamental trees, such as fir and spruce, intertwined with oak, lime, beech and elm trees to provide a variety of foliage; while views toward 15th Century Pele tower at Shortflatt gave the landscape a historical association. The steep sided hill and abrupt rocks around Harnham village in the distance completed the 'picturesque' view. But the lake was pivotal to his plans. A jewel in the foreground, reflecting light, providing depth and variety and mirroring the brilliance of the plantation.



This illustration, highlighting the estate, is a section of John Dobson's original plans



A 'ha-ha' is a steep sided ditch which provides a barrier to stop livestock from straying onto other land

The lake and plantation took 3 years to complete, providing much needed work for local people. Workmen were paid 1 shilling a day to build a dam and line the lake with clay. By 1900, the Bolam Estate employed 3 gamekeepers, 6 woodmen and private policemen to patrol the perimeter, but the expense of keeping up the Estate became costly. By 1945 Bolam had grown wild and in 1972 Northumberland County Council bought it as a small Country Park "for passive recreational activities with the existing rural character and attractiveness of the lake and its surroundings remaining unspoilt."

