

# THE FRIENDS OF CROOME PARK



AUTUMN 2011 ISSUE 15

NEWSLETTER



## Securing The Red Wing

Michael Smith  
Property Manager

The 'Red Wing' was once integral to life at Croome, containing kitchens, offices, servants' quarters and an apartment used by the 6th Earl of Coventry in his latter years.

The building largely dates from the early 1750's, although there is strong archaeological evidence that it incorporates remnants of an older range of buildings. In English Heritage's designation of Listed Buildings, the Red Wing and Croome Court are considered one entity. The two structures are historically inseparable – the two interconnecting doorways, nowadays closed, once allowed communication between these two bustling centres of activity.

Those in the Coventry's service, the boys of St.

Joseph's School and Krishna devotees all remember moving freely between the Red Wing and the Court. Sadly the two halves of one building have been in separate ownership and management since the Croome Heritage Trust acquired the Court in 2007.

Whilst repair work has proceeded apace on the Court, the Red Wing has visibly slipped in to a serious state of disrepair. Heritage organisations including the Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust, English Heritage and the National Trust voiced strong concerns for the future of the building. Malvern Hills District Council recognised the need for urgent action and served a Repairs Notice on the Red Wing in November 2009.

On 26th July 2011, hope

for a positive future for the Red Wing at last emerged, following MHDC's Executive Committee's decision that a Compulsory Purchase Order to acquire the building was the only route left for sympathetic ownership and eventual repair. The Croome Heritage Trust are the proposed partners in this. The National Trust intend to act in partnership with the CHT to bring about a swift resolution to the building's plight. English Heritage is also helping with the promise of funds for the repair works.

With a fair wind, maybe even by the time you read this article, we very much hope that a brighter future for this key piece of the Croome heritage 'jigsaw' will have come to light.

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## WELCOME

Welcome to your Autumn 2011 newsletter.

It's been another busy summer for the staff and volunteers at Croome as well as for members of the Friends - you'll read about their outings in this edition.

Thanks, as ever, to all our contributors. I hope you enjoy reading this and that you too will be inspired to share some of your own stories with us.

Happy reading!  
Wendy

### Your Committee:

Chair:  
John Henderson

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Phil Douce  
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Nigel Matthews  
Geoff Sherwood  
Paul Stanley

# Chairman's

## Note

Dear Friends

This is my first Newsletter as Chairman, after the well-earned elevation of Dr Eric Jones to Vice-President. By the way, the Committee is still carefully considering names for a possible new President of The Friends as successor to Sir Roy Strong, following his unexpected relinquishment of the post in March.

This year's Events Programme, so ably arranged by Christine Adams and her sub-committee, has been full of variety, including Reg Moule's funny and informative talk on Spring Gardens and three wonderful walks led respectively by Nigel Matthews, Katherine Alker and Michael Smith. I had to miss Michael's walk and am envious of those who had the privilege of being the first members to see the view from the top of Dunstall Castle and climb the graceful staircase of The Panorama Tower to experience its very purpose.

We have enjoyed happy trips to Weston Park, Shropshire, another 'Capability' Brown landscaped Park near Telford and to the Prince of Wales' lovely gardens at Highgrove near Tetbury containing all his contemporary ideas as well as new twists on old ones.

This is where one has to admire the integrity of the modern conservators. They do not allow themselves the exhilaration of trying out new fashions, whether in garden design or new building. All the time, they must consider what is there, why and how to explain its purpose. Better to unearth it, record it and cover it over again than to bulldoze it out or put it in the skip. That latter choice is the province of the property owner and whilst we admire and revere his legacy, the 6th Earl of Coventry certainly introduced irreversible changes and no doubt both he and Mr Brown were accused of wanton destruction by their contemporaries.

The restraint of the conservator has been brought home to those of us preparing the room in the basement of The Court for The Friends' Second Hand Book Shop. We are very grateful to Michael and his team for allowing us this



wonderful facility. The walls have been dusted and washed to retain the existing lime-wash finish. The last century water pump will remain as an interesting feature and the much abused door is retained but protected again with hardboard as it may well date from the earlier house.

To provide better lighting in the room, a redundant length of conduit through the wall has been used to thread a new cable to avoid drilling a hole. In this day of chucking out old and replacing with new, it is enlightening to see the work of conservation in practice and to appreciate the process. We thank Sarah Kay and Catriona Hughes for all their help on conservation and Ted Lerner for his handiwork, along with Kim and other NT Staff for the immense task of bringing down the book cases from the old shop, lugging books and other heroic deeds.

By the time this is published, the Friends' Second Hand Book team, headed by Phil Douce, will have had their baptism of fire, opening on the August Bank Holiday and continuing, we hope, with Friends' volunteers collecting books from donors, sorting and cataloguing. Our thanks to Eric Jones, and others, for their tenacity in seeing this idea come to fruition after so long.

Being a Friend is a real privilege. We absorb Croome in all its facets; we are entertained by Events, see other elegant properties and delight in each other's company. Not least, we are pleased to offer modest funds for worthwhile projects. That is why I hope you enjoy being a Friend of Croome Park! Now read on and revel in the rest of this Newsletter!

**John Henderson**  
Chairman, Friends of Croome Park  
August 2011

# Snap Happy

Connie Cook  
Competition Co-ordinator

The Friends are holding their first ever photographic competition and we'd like you to enter!

The theme of the competition is 'The Four Seasons at Croome' and we are looking for interesting and original pictures of the Croome Estate (whether of the Court, parkland, gardens, wildlife or any other aspect of Croome).



The top 12 photographs will be included in a Croome calendar and Christmas cards.

To enable you to capture all four seasons, entries will be accepted up until 31st July 2012.

The best photographs will be displayed at Croome and visitors will be able to vote for their favourites. The 12 photographs receiving the most votes will be included in the calendar. In addition the overall winner will have their winning photograph printed on the front of Croome brochures. The results of the competition will be announced in September 2012.

You can submit as many entries as you wish although, in order to open the competition up to as many people as possible, no individual will be allowed to have more than one photograph printed in the calendar. There is no

entry fee for this competition.

Entry forms have been sent to all members and extra ones can be downloaded from our website.

*Photographs must be 7 x 5 inches (18 x 13 cm) maximum and must not be enhanced in any way. Please note that we are unable to return any photographs entered in this competition.*

## Events - join in!

**Wed 12th October**  
**'Birds in the Park'**  
a talk by Simon Barker

**Wed 9th November**  
**General Knowledge Quiz with Paul Stanley**

**Tue 15th November**  
**Visit to Back to Backs Birmingham**

**Tue 6th December**  
**Preparations for Christmas**  
**Wreath making and cake decoration**

**Tue 17th January 2012**  
**Festive Meal at The Oak, Defford**

**Wed 15th February**  
**"RAF Defford"**  
a talk by Graham Evans & Dennis Williams

**Tue 28th February**  
**Behind the Scenes - Croome Court tours**  
**with Michael Smith**

**Tue 22nd March**  
**Friends of Croome Park AGM**

**Thu 19th April**  
**Tyntesfield**  
a talk by Peter Riley

**Sat 19th May**  
**Social evening with music by**  
**"Major Pipeworks"**  
**in the Long Gallery**

**Sat 16th & Sun 17th June**  
**Walled garden visit**

**Email: [croome-events@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:croome-events@hotmail.co.uk)**

# The Sherwoods of Croome Park

Geoff Sherwood  
Committee member, Friends of Croome Park

**M**y Grandfather, John Sherwood, was born at Birch Green, Severn Stoke in 1856. After attending Severn Stoke school, together with his four brothers he came to work for the 9th Earl of Coventry on the estate.



My Grandad worked with farm horses, as did his two brothers Bert and Frank. Grandad graduated to Head Carter, Frank was a waggoner and Bert was a Horseman. The three brothers often worked together, especially when hauling timber from the woodlands on the estate and in the Park.

In those days Croome Court had its own fire engine which, of course, was horse-drawn and my Grandad drove it; Bert and Frank would have been part of the crew.

The original fire notice which hung in Croome Court is now in the Estate Office in High Green and makes interesting reading. There was a very exact procedure to be followed in case of fire which included ringing both church and house bells and catching the horses.

Once, when some cottages caught fire in Pirton, Great Uncle Bert insisted on finishing his "bait" before clambering aboard the engine ... so Grandad drove off without him!

Bert soon caught up with them near the Flower Garden. Sadly the cottages burned down.

Jim Sherwood, one of the other brothers, was Herdsman on the estate, looking after Lord Coventry's prize herd of Hereford cattle. He was quite a character and lived near the Panorama Tower.

A few years ago, an article appeared in Berrows Worcester Journal about the Sherwoods of Croome and great uncle Jim was described as "a wild haired bearded man who strode around the roads of Croome."

Jim used to often go on a "bender" and one day the foreman reported him to the 9th Earl who said, "Oh leave him be, he's a good herdsman, he'll get over it"-- as of course he did!

I think one of the proudest days of my Uncle Jim's life must have been during a Royal visit to Croome when he had to answer questions about the cattle in front of the then Duke of York!

An incident took place involving Bill, my Grandad's

other brother. He was always known as "Boxer" Sherwood and had a variety of jobs around the park. One day he was hedge laying near Defford Common, when a large billy goat, one of a herd that the 9th Earl was very proud of, attacked him.

"Boxer" took up a defensive position with his long handled hedging hook, struck out at the goat and killed it! This was indeed a catastrophe- he was working on his own and there were no witnesses.

The 9th Earl liked to be "hands on" as they say and Bill was brought before His Lordship. "Are you hurt Sherwood?" he asked. "No m'lord" said Bill. Lord Coventry said, "well thats an end to the matter, I would rather lose a goat than a good man." Bill kept his job!

These, and other incidents, always increase my respect for the 9th Earl and his relationship with his employees and tenants.

My father worked in the gardens at Croome for 26 years. I hope to write about his experiences in a future newsletter.



# Croome's Wildlife Highlights

John Hodson  
Volunteer

In my article last year I talked about the algae in the river. A lack of rain caused similar conditions this year and the algal bloom returned, though in a reduced state possibly due to the barley straw sausages installed across the water intake points.

However, all clouds have a silver lining and the green clouds on the river again provided ideal conditions for last year's newcomer to the park, the small red-eyed damselfly. Mated pairs and egg laying were observed in 2010 but the only way to prove successful breeding is to look for and identify the larval cases.

Known as an exuvia this is the empty shell left behind by the larva after metamorphosing from an aquatic to an aerial insect. The exuvia are usually found on the stems of vegetation or man-made

artefacts providing vertical surfaces close to water. A search by Mike Averill (County Dragonfly Recorder) and myself revealed that they were not easy to find or identify! But with the aid of a microscope Mike eventually identified small red-eyed damselflies amongst the specimens collected.

A visit to the park in late April was enhanced by the discovery of 3 singing nightingales. Finding nightingales within the county is now much more difficult than 15-25 years ago. When I moved to High Green to work on the Croome Estate (in the early 1970s) it was sometimes possible to hear up to 6 individual birds from the village, with many more just beyond earshot. Then, as the UK population began to decline, those left in Worcestershire centred

themselves on the Croome area.

Unfortunately a singing nightingale does not mean a successful breeding pair and new research reveals that nightingales that sing throughout the night and late into the season are probably unpaired; songsters that stop singing and give the appearance of moving on are probably paired with parental duties.

The reasons for decline (50+% between 1995-2002) are not fully understood but changing habitat on African wintering grounds and the effects that a rising UK deer population has on woodland habitat here are possible factors.

So the lesson is that if we see any species in suitable habitat at the right time of year, it does not necessarily mean that it is breeding there successfully. All may not be as rosy as it appears.

## Oral History Update

Eileen Clement  
Oral History Co-ordinator

73 interviews have now been conducted, the last eleven during the August Bank Holiday when the Hare Krishna devotees held their Festival at Croome. We now have a much clearer picture of the period 1979 to 1984 when ISKCON members lived at Croome. It is obvious this period is remembered with affection by many and we are grateful to those who have shared their memories and memorabilia. Phil Douce and I enjoyed meeting devotees and find their reminiscences fascinating. Sunday was busiest - the sun shone and everyone enjoyed it.

Rasesvari (Sally Sutton) told me of an experience she had on her first visit to Croome:

*"As I went upstairs you come to the end of the corridor...facing the Oratory...at the right hand side you open the big door and there were some steps up, a window at the end, two little bathrooms and two big rooms. I think they were eventually done as sort of Chinese type rooms. I thought this is beautiful the way it is set out, it seemed quite separate with this beautiful big window looking out over the lake and I went into the right hand side one and just very quickly and fleetingly saw a lady...and her action was to turn her face away very quickly. I'm not afraid, but I*

*had a sort of funny feeling and I came out quite quickly and went to find everybody else.*

*The same day I found myself walking round with Mr Edwards and we came to a painting in the big room and I looked at her and I knew that this was the lady that I'd seen. I actually told Mr Edwards and said the only thing was she only had half a face. She was, years ago, one of two sisters who lived at the Court, Maria Gunning. Apparently the story was that she had used powder with lead that had eaten away her face. Mr Edwards didn't know which room I was in and when I told him, he simply said "Oh yes, that was her room". It was scary, but amazing."*

Much more editing has now been done and we have started work to produce a CD of excerpts from interviews, which we hope to sell in 2012. Grateful thanks go to the

Worcester/Malvern Centre of the National Trust for their generous gift towards this project. We are also extremely grateful to Betty Jones who has kindly donated a substantial amount to help us proceed with the CD.

I should also like to take this opportunity to thank all volunteers in the Court who pass on details of people with varying memories of Croome. Keep up the good work!



Actors at Croome's recent Hare Krishna Festival

# The Defford Airfield Heritage Group

Bob Shaw  
Friends of Croome Park member

The Defford Airfield Heritage Group (DAHG) was established last year in association with the Friends of Croome Park to research, record and preserve the history of RAF Defford and the role of the airfield especially in vital radar research during the Second World War.

The Group works in support of the National Trust at Croome, providing expert advice, information and display material to help inform visitors to Croome, and the community at large, about this very important chapter in the story of Croome.

Accordingly it is pleasing to report that DAHG has been formally recognised as a National Trust Supporter Group and members of the Group enrolled as volunteers at Croome.

Meanwhile, DAHG is working with the National Trust to improve the visitor information room and set up a display, hopefully in the Court. This will help respond to the considerable interest shown by visitors in the story of the RAF and Croome at War.

For many years, the RAF Defford Reunion Association has been run by the indefatigable Albert Shorrock, as a means of keeping in touch with veterans, friends and families of RAF Defford. Albert is now retiring and the Reunion Association has merged with the DAHG, who will

now be responsible for keeping in touch with veterans and organising the Reunion event.

This year, the Reunion was held on Saturday, September 10th, in and around the restored RAF buildings at Croome. There was a display of photographs, many of them not shown before, and other material, including the Merlin engine from the crashed Spitfire of Group Captain McDonald (Station Commander 1943-46), as well as artefacts and relics from recent archaeological visits to the airfield. The magnificent model of Defford airfield, made by Albert Shorrock and now donated by him to the NT at Croome in the care of DAHG, together with other display material, was much admired by



*Albert Shorrock with the Merlin engine, recovered and restored from the crash site by aviation archaeologists of DAHG*

visitors. Also displayed in the RAF information room next to the canteen were the Roll of Honour and the Spitfire painting, both presented to the National Trust last year. DAHG members were in attendance with their displays over the whole weekend.

The following Saturday,



*Anthony Whitehead of DAHG answers questions*

September 17th, members of the Group were in attendance at 'Defford Air Day', a fly-in held at the grass air strip of Croft Farm, which is just off the southern boundary of the former airfield. This is always a very pleasant event which takes place annually in aid of the Air Ambulance and the Air Missionary Service. See <http://www.defford-croftfarm.co.uk/deffordairday.htm>

As in previous years, the wreath laying ceremony at the RAF Defford War Memorial in Defford Village will be at 11am on November 11th. The ceremony will be followed by a buffet lunch for Reunion and Group members, arranged by Sylvia Evans, in Defford Village Hall. This will be followed by the AGM of DAHG – all current members of the Reunion Association, together with DAHG members are invited. Further information and notice of the AGM will follow.

For more on the DAHG, contact our Chairman, Graham Evans (01684 295327) or Secretary, Bob Shaw (01386 852059) or see our web-site <http://deffordairfieldheritagegroup.wordpress.com/>

## Books, books, books

**Don't forget to visit our new bookshop when you next visit Croome.**

You can find us in the basement of the Court and we're open during normal opening hours.

We hope to have a volunteer in the bookshop as often as we can but if there isn't anyone there please leave your donations in the honesty box.

**We look forward to seeing you!!!**



# A National Treasure

Eric Jones  
Vice President, Friends of Croome Park

In March, 1945, Croome Court was visited by James Lees-Milne, the Country Houses Secretary to the National Trust since 1936. He played a crucially influential role in the Trust's development and, more especially, in its acquisition of so many of the properties we take for granted today. He resigned in March, 1966. Lees-Milne always had great admiration for Croome, although in Worcestershire, *A Shell Guide* (1964) he observes, "All the Adam fittings of the superb interior have been dismantled and sold piecemeal, including one of the best ceilings to America." Clearly, his visit to Croome was at a low point in its long history.

An aesthete, a prolific writer and an outstanding diarist, Lees-Milne – "Jim" to his many friends and associates – is someone to whom the National Trust and its many members and visitors owe a great debt. As late as the 1930s the almost exclusive focus of attention was the natural landscape, with only two properties, Barrington Court and Montacute House, both in Somerset, representing Britain's great heritage of country houses. This began to change thanks to Lees-Milne and a few others of like mind. One very significant group of properties were bequeathed to the Trust in the 1940s, all without heirs on the death of the owners: Attingham Park, Stourhead, Blickling Hall, Lower Brockhampton and Hanbury Hall. The pace and the urgency of acquisition quickened in the post-war period when it became clear that only the National Trust could effectively save many country houses and estates in otherwise inauspicious times.

Lees-Milne was a Worcestershire man and our county is not endowed with very many country houses of distinction. For this very reason, perhaps, Lees-Milne took special interest in such properties as Hanbury and Croome. The 1950s saw a huge loss of country houses; casualties of war and its aftermath, as well as family circumstances. Moreover, the social and political climate of the time favoured post-war reconstruction not the preservation of ancient buildings and the way of life associated with them. Jim, however, rode to the rescue of some of the most vulnerable and appealing. He would often put

his bicycle in the guard's van of the train in London and then complete his journey on two wheels, parting from understandably bemused aristocratic owners when he left by the same means, after careful and tactful inspection of the potential National Trust property. He would then report back to the Trust's small London office in Buckingham Palace Gardens. In this way the fourteen properties of Lees-Milne's 1992 book, *People and Places*, subtitled "Country House Donors and the National Trust", were acquired.

Lees-Milne had both good taste and good judgement. He was first and last a romantic, unlike the more academic and dry Nikolaus Pevsner, to whom we also owe a great deal in relation to the preservation of so much of our architectural heritage and the evaluation of its merits. Lees-Milne, like his friend John Betjeman, had a passion for his chosen field. By today's standards, he was certainly eccentric. He was also a complex man but he made many friends in high places and chronicles his relationships and encounters vividly in his diaries. There's little doubt he would have been impatient with our more bureaucratic age as well as some aspects perhaps of today's egalitarianism and its influence.

Nothing, however, should detract from Jim's legacy.

We benefit from that legacy today at Croome and we do so not only because of his pervasive, benign and powerful influence both during and after his years working directly for the Trust, but also because he lived to see and celebrate the National Trust's acquisition of Croome Park in 1996, after he had written "to all and sundry". He died not long afterwards and was described in the *Times* obituary as "a national treasure". The Worcestershire and national treasure that is Croome is a very fitting memorial to James Lees-Milne. Born in Wickhamford Manor in 1908, he died in Tetbury on 28th December 1997. A friend of the Prince of Wales and also Lady Morrison of Madresfield Court, amongst many others, he had a long life and one that all who care for Croome should think well worth celebrating.

# FRIENDS FORUM

## The 9th Earl's horses

John Chugg

Friends of Croome Park member

Teddy Middleton lived opposite the Gay Dog at Baughton when I was a child. He told me that he was a groom at Westfield Farm hunt stables both before and after the Great War. His day would start at 5am going over our land (Red Deer Farm), over the Old Ground, past Dunstall Castle, over Wadleys Farm, through Pheasant Wood to the back of the Menagerie to be at work for 6am. The whole yard had no electricity and each of the twenty horse stalls was lit by hurricane lamps.

On hunting mornings the hunt horses were led through Menagerie Wood to the back door of the Huntsman's house where a superb large mounting block still stands. In order of preference the Huntsman mounted first, followed by the First Whipper-In, then the Second Whipper-In. Before the Great War the Master was Lord Charles Bentink and his Huntsman, Will Friend. Mr W Jardine-Gresson, who lived at Severn Stoke House (now the site of fourteen bungalows), and whose fortunes came from tea plantations, took the Mastership from 1914-1926, with Bert Hawtin as his Huntsman.

The Croome Hunt's use of Westfield Farm as stables came to an end when Mr Gresson built new stables in the Kennel Yard; these were cage boxes with a large oak presentation plaque mounted in them from Mr Gresson. These were burnt down some 30 years ago.

During the late

sixties Bert Collins stood four stallions at Westfield Farm; Chingnu, Rajan, Clear Run and Melodic Air. This stud produced some useful Flat, National Hunt and Point-to-Point winners. All 20 stalls had the names of the original hunters on oak plinths on the opposite wall. Some of the names were Radium, Bruno, Motor, Chichester, Bredon, Alvechurch, Peter, Siddington, Rafferty and Adam. The harness room, with pine boards and fittings, was situated at the top far end of the yard with the hayloft and oat store above the next building. Underneath were two large stallion loose boxes, each with an opposite door, which led into an exercise yard under a large Dutch barn. In the corner next to this was housed a large boiler used to cook linseed and oats for mashes after the hunt. The Stud Groom's house is in the centre of both yards with a porch entrance facing south.

I rode my father's thoroughbred mares to Westfield Farm to visit Bert Collins's stallions. I would go across the Standings, down by the Deer Park Wall behind Park Seat, through Pheasant Wood

and the Menagerie.

The Coventry Stakes at Royal Ascot were named after the 9th Earl who also bred Emblem and Emblematic, full sisters, who won the Grand National in 1863 and 1864. The 9th Earl was also a successful breeder of National Hunt and Flat Race horses and raced a numerous amount of his stock himself.

The 9th Earl built two large stallion boxes at the bottom of Knights Hill Cover below the Panorama Tower to stable his two thoroughbred stallions. There are still signs of the louvred vents to allow air into the boxes and also the corner manger and chain to tie up the horse. There was also a Dutch hay barn, now collapsed, a well and the foundations of the stallion handler's two up and two down cottage. The two stallions kept there were Umpire, an American horse, and Flash in the Pan, who won the Chester Cup. These two thoroughbreds were kept for the 9th Earl's own use and, for a small fee, he let tenant farmers use them to cover their mares to breed Point-to-Pointers, hopefully to run in the Croome Farmers' Race at Upton-upon-

Severn Point-to-Point. He also had a gravel drive laid out from Worcester Lodge to these stables under Knights Hill Cover so that he and his guests could go from Croome Court by carriage to inspect them. The stallion boxes are now very dilapidated but, when erected in the 1860s, were ahead of their time.



# Blind Earl beauty

The 7th Earl of Coventry became known as "The Blind Earl" after he lost his sight in a terrible hunting accident, attempting to jump a 5-bar gate, in 1779.

When he decided to purchase a porcelain service, he chose a particular pattern which was embossed so that he could actually feel the decoration - like Braille. It also contained imaginary colourful butterflies and insects and tiny clusters of flowers but its most important features to him were the raised rosebuds and raised bright green leaves surrounded by a gold scalloped edge.

The service was made in soft paste porcelain and painted in vibrant, attractive colours.

The pattern was originally created by Chelsea Porcelain Factory in 1768 and called "Chelsea Rosebud". When the factory closed down its employees moved to Royal Worcester Porcelain Company where it continued to be produced.



By kind permission of the Worcester Porcelain Museum

Sometime after the Earl purchased the service its name was changed to "Blind Earl" in his honour but few people actually know the story behind this. Today you can buy a modern version of the cup and saucer in the Museum shop but this is not in relief and so I feel it has

Sheila Harris  
Friends of Croome Park member

completely lost its uniqueness.

Three plates are on display in the Museum and it was also mentioned in our Guide's talk when a dish was passed around for inspection and I was able to close my eyes and feel the embossed rose buds and leaves just as the Earl would once have done. It was most attractive and I was delighted to have the opportunity to examine it, feel it and enjoy it.

Do go and see it for yourself!

## Worcester Porcelain Museum

As well as the Blind Earl ware, the Worcester Porcelain Museum houses the world's largest collection of Worcester Porcelain. The ceramic collections, archives and records of factory production, form the primary resource for the study of Worcester porcelain and its history

Why not combine your next visit to Croome Park with a visit to the Worcester Porcelain Museum.

Until the end of October, the Museum can be visited Mon-Sat 10am to 5pm. from 1st November until Easter the museum is open Tue-Sat 10.30am to 4pm.

The Museum is situated on Severn Street in Worcester (WR1 2ND for those technologically-savvy readers with online maps and sat-navs)!

The Museum can be contacted on 01905 21247.

For more information visit

[www.worcesterporcelainmuseum.org.uk](http://www.worcesterporcelainmuseum.org.uk)

Whether you want to share a visit to Croome, write to your Committee members, send in a photograph or feedback on an event you've attended, we'd love to hear your thoughts.

Please email [croome-editor@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:croome-editor@hotmail.co.uk) or write to:

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Friends of Croome Newsletter Editor  
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**The deadline for the next issue of the magazine is 15th March 2012**

# All in a Warden's Work...

As a warden I look after Croome's parkland and woodland. In the summer that means lots of happy days on the tractor topping the footpaths. It takes me about one full day every fortnight - it's a great opportunity to keep an eye on the less visited corners of Croome to remind myself of jobs that need doing - hopefully I remember them by



the time I get back to the yard!

The majority of the parkland jobs are taken care of by our gang of Thursday volunteers; the Tuesday group focus more on garden jobs.

Over the past year or so we've repaired and reinstated the cleft oak paling fence at the top of the Dry Arch Bridge, hung and fixed gates, erected, fixed and removed fences, coppiced rideside planting in Menagerie Wood, cleared fallen trees from paths and fencelines, netted festering pike from the river, planted thousands of trees, felled a few dozen trees, chipped tonnes of brash and cleft the ash rails which are now in use in the overflow car park ... and a few other jobs too.

By the time you read this, we'll have made benches from

Hugh Warwick  
Croome Park Warden



two oaks I felled due to acute oak decline and the concern that it could spread to neighbouring oaks. It'll be great to add to our benches and even better to be making them ourselves from Croome timber for what must be the first time in decades! In fact, if you go into Croome's new shop and look at the apex of the ceiling you'll see more timber from the same trees.

## Visit to Weston Park

On a day of sunshine and showers 51 Friends of Croome travelled to Weston Park, the 17th Century ancestral family home of the Earls of Bradford - with its 1000 acres of 'Capability' Brown designed parkland. The picturesque and extensive grounds included formal gardens; woodland and lakeside walks, a Victorian conservatory and deer park. During the day members took the opportunity for an informal chat with Martin Gee (Head Gardener), whose family have lived and worked on the estate since 1803.

The highlight for many however was the tour of the house with its magnificent set of French Gobelin tapestries. Six sets of these tapestries were produced in the 1760's for English stately homes - one set residing at Croome Park before being sold by the 9th Earl of Coventry in 1902, and ultimately finding their way to the Metropolitan Museum in New York.



Paul Stanley  
Friends of Croome Committee

Art lovers had a double treat with an extensive collection on display in the house including paintings by Stubbs, Constable, Reynolds, Gainsborough and Van Dyck amongst others. Meanwhile, in the Granary Building, there was a more contemporary exhibition by the sports artist Ben Mosley ...and an original Rolf Harris.

Amongst the many other wonderful exhibits were the Silver display; a pair of Louis XIV cabinets (bought for just £80), the photograph and accompanying guestbook signed by Bill Clinton, Boris Yeltsin, Tony Blair and other world leaders who attended the G8 summit held at the house in 1998; and the stunning and enormous Doncaster Cup horse racing trophy (the precursor to the St Leger).



# Recollections of a Land Agent - part 3

John Henderson  
Chairman, Friends of Croome Park

The Trustees appointed me as Agent in September, 1969. The early 1970's saw much work designing and erecting farm buildings and a couple of dairy complexes as well as continuing the cottage and house modernisation programme. Mains water and sewerage only came to Severn Stoke and environs in the early '70s, although most of the properties had been wired for electricity in the '50's and early '60s. Croome was the largest Estate in Worcestershire (about 13,500 acres). The Georgian garden buildings were all listed as of historic and architectural importance and needed repair.

My predecessor had saved the Panorama Tower on Cubsmoor by repairing the roof and had inserted metal-framed windows reclaimed from the wartime Defford Aerodrome buildings (the latter graced the Wyatt folly until very recently). With help from grants from the Historic Buildings Council I carried on the programme.

An architect specialising in restoration supervised work on Dunstall Castle, where the big arch had been ready to collapse. The Temple Greenhouse and Island Pavilion were re-roofed in grey Welsh slate. The Grotto was made safer but the Ice House and Owls Nest (Park Seat), were beyond our budget. As a condition of the grants, the Trustees had to provide public access for a minimum one day a week. The Trustees agreed to my suggestion that to provide a convenient circular walk, a new bridge should be erected over the Boathouse Lake by the Dry Arch to match the existing pair. We also moved the Wyatt Urn to what we thought was a more

aesthetic location - so that it could be seen from the Island Pavilion. Of course, the National Trust, purists that they are, have moved it back again, re-roofed the Island Pavilion and Temple Green House in green Westmorland slate and I occasionally hear of dark threats to the third bridge!

To be honest, the grounds were a mill-stone. They produced no income but they required expenditure on clearance and re-planting and maintenance for access to the listed buildings and eye-catchers. My predecessor had planted plots of dark evergreen *Abies Grandis* in the amenity belts as an experiment and apart from hardwoods, I thought larch would look nice in the Boathouse Cover, all with the aim of economic forestry. I didn't like yew trees, which I considered depressing and would have felled as many as possible in the Temple Greenhouse and Church Covers as yew wood was fetching a good price. Alas, the yews were too manky and except for one or two, weren't worth felling. Lucky, because now the experts say they are a marvellous evocation of Brown's philosophy!

The Old Park was rough grazing and, as elsewhere, I gave permission to farm tenants to plough up these old pastures so that they could have a flexible and more profitable rotation. One timber merchant expressed interest in felling all the old field oaks in the Park and on Cubsmoor but the price wasn't worth it so many of them are still there today. Now, they are worshipped as veteran trees harbouring multitudinous wildlife and the Old Park, now returned

to permanent pasture is an integral part of the Brown Landscape. Then, it simply wasn't recognised as special; after all, the motorway had been driven straight through it.

During my time at Croome, the Department of Transport decided that the two-lane motorway, barely twenty years old, should be completely re-surfaced. This was wonderful as the old chibbled up tarmac made excellent farm roads and forestry tracks.

It was only a few years later that it was decreed that the motorway should have three lanes each way, which meant a complete re-build. This caused a massive upheaval as additional land on one side or the other had to be sold for the widening. There were five miles of it running through the Estate and four road and two farm bridges were affected. They could not be widened and had to be completely replaced.

Some of you may remember. An evening for each bridge was designated. The motorway was closed, crowds gathered on the adjoining bridges and at the sound of a klaxon, the chosen bridge was blown up, to great cheers from the onlookers. Very exciting for us country folk - particularly seeing the big diggers move in to clear the debris with fantastic speed so that the motorway could be re-opened by the morning.

*In the next issue...John discovers that a hole has appeared in Pirton Pool and fishes are swimming in ditches!*

# Garden Update

Katherine Alker  
Garden & Park Manager

The past few months have flown by and we've been kept busy in the garden and park with a variety of jobs. Most recently Hugh, Jez and myself, along with the Thursday volunteers, have become proficient at assembling and dismantling marquees and gazebos! We put up and took down well over a dozen for the Hare Krishna festival. The department worked really hard for the event and I'd like to thank everyone who helped us.

We've also been busy preparing the Home Shrubbery for opening; Thursday volunteers have honed their fencing skills and installed about 200 metres of stock fencing and gates along the line of the ha-ha. This will keep the cattle in the field and the public away from the deteriorating brick wall. I've overseen the restoration of the hoggin carriageway leading up to the Rotunda - it's almost ready for opening. Hopefully we'll be able to open the Rotunda and some of the Home Shrubbery this Autumn.

The Tuesday gang have weeded, pruned and re-guarded the car park hedges to encourage the plants to thicken up and improve the first impression of Croome for our visitors. All of the hedges in the circular clumps in South Park and Horse Close as



well as some on North Field Bank have been pruned –the Sunday Volunteers getting stuck into the most overgrown with the bowsaws – and fencing repaired where the cattle have been a bit



*Nigel Matthews & John Sayers celebrating 15 years of volunteering at Croome*

enthusiastic with their scratching against the posts.

You may have noticed that the reeds are starting to take hold along sections of the river again. It's been almost 8 years since the major dredging work of the lake and river removed tonnes and tonnes of reed and silt. We are now donning the waders and digging out the re-growth in the lake; the section from the Black Bridge to the Chinese Bridge will be done by contractors next year.

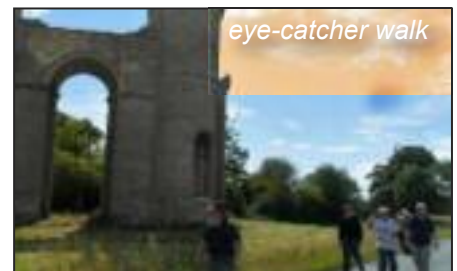
Hopefully Friends will have visited the garden recently and seen the bench in the grotto. In agreement with her family, I arranged to have this bespoke bench made in memory of Ann Meadows, a lovely lady who really enjoyed the garden and park at Croome. Do come and sit here and enjoy the views of the lake.

Our link with the Vale Landscape Heritage Trust is going strong; we have visited the plum orchard at Hipton Hill several times this summer to help prune fruit trees and pick plums for the markets and Pershore Plum Festival. In return they visit

Croome during the winter to help with tasks such as planting.

We had a very enjoyable walk to all three Eye-catchers in August with the Sunday volunteers. After arriving in time for morning tea at Pirton castle, we made to the Panorama Tower for lunch, where we celebrated John and Nigel's 15 years of volunteering at Croome with a tasty cake made by Betty. Onwards to Dunstall Castle, where we climbed the spiral staircase to enjoy views back to the Rotunda, then back across South Park for our afternoon cuppa in the canteen. Tea breaks are very important to the garden gang you know!

We're very lucky to have received a donation to continue



the flower arrangements in the Court. The small group of Flower Volunteers do a fantastic job creating spectacular displays using mainly flowers that were available in the C18th.

Congratulations to Jez who has passed his chainsaw licence to fell small trees. Now he can work with Hugh to do coppicing, felling and other tree work in the woodlands and shelterbelts that surround the garden and park.

It's been a very busy but enjoyable summer. I hope the garden volunteers have found it so too! My thanks to all of them, and Hugh and Jez for their hard work. Winter's coming and that can only mean more tree planting - I hope everyone's got some energy left!!