

THE FRIENDS OF CROOME PARK



SPRING 2011 ISSUE 14

NEWSLETTER



1 Down 6999 To Go...

The early part of 2011 will be remembered by the Garden and Park team at Croome as 'the one when we planted thousands of trees'. We have planted, guarded and mulched 7000 trees at Old Wood, part of the old Aerodrome. The area was wooded in the 18thC and can be seen on Snape's 1796 map of Croome. The northern part of the woodland still exists but the southern part has been farmed.

After lengthy discussions by the NT legal team, the Society of Merchant Venturers (the land owners) and West Mercia Police (part funding the planting as it screens their site), work was agreed. The area was deer fenced and we were able to start planting, later than I'd

hoped, on Feb 10th. An army (a gaggle? a bevy? a tribe?) of volunteers turned out on Valentines Day to help plant ... the chance of being filmed for BBC Countryfile may have helped entice them! We featured for about 10 mins the following weekend and, of course, Julia Bradbury gallantly planted one ash tree.

Trees planted include beech, lime, hazel, holly, oak, field maple and birch. Those planted in February are already in leaf and doing well. March and April were so dry that we had to water in the trees as we planted them. In places the ground was like concrete and we had to use mattocks to break it – not the best start for the trees so I hope by the time you read this we've had some decent rain.

Katherine Alker
Park and Garden Manager

Old Wood is not open to the public but the planting can be seen from the ridge in South Park; in fact it's quite incredible to see the whole site planted up from there. We have replanted about 10 acres. There is an old RAF concrete road through the site and we have also left a couple of 'rides', wide pathways which are left unplanted.

The restoration of Old Wood is another great step in the restoration of Croome's parkland. It will be well worth it as we start to see it growing. The regular garden and park volunteers have been absolute stars – variety is normally the name of the game but they've done about 10 weeks of tree planting. I'd like to say a huge thank you to them as well as to Hugh, Jez and Seb.

£1

where sold

www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk

WELCOME

Welcome to your Spring 2011 newsletter.

Thanks to all our contributors, Croome is a very special place to many of us so it's great to hear all your memories & stories as well as those of the staff and specialists. I hope you enjoy this newsletter and that it will inspire you to share some of your own stories with us.

Happy reading!
Wendy

Your Committee:

Chair:
John Henderson

Vice-Chair:
Jill Tovey

Treasurer:
Alan Lee

Secretary:
Tony Perfect

Membership:
Diana Skeys

Officers:
Christine Adams
Wendy Carter
Eileen Clement
Phil Douce
Graham Evans
Nigel Matthews
Geoff Sherwood
Paul Stanley

Chairman's Note

We are now in our seventh year. It is time to record a full and active year as well as to record thanks to all who have given time so freely in order to provide an interesting programme for our nearly 400 members. Support is what we are about and that is what we continue to give to Croome Park. This was acknowledged very generously on two successive occasions held in the Long Gallery during the year by first Dame Fiona Reynolds, Director General, and then Sir Laurie Magnus, Deputy Chairman of the Trust.

The Committee has formally met six times since our last AGM. As well as regular reports on Finance and Membership, we have dealt with a range of business and had regular reports on Croome developments. Members of the Committee have also had smaller, informal meetings for specific purposes; and that's not counting the constant e-mail traffic that is now such a feature of communication.

Oral History Project and Events

Two dimensions of our work have particular importance: the Oral History Project led by Eileen Clement and the Events Sub-Committee, chaired by Christine Adams. Without these the Friends would be very much the poorer. The Oral History Project flowered in 2005 when we obtained Lottery Funding; now we hope another landmark of this project will be reached later in 2011 with the likely production of a CD, Croome Voices, on which everyone will be able to hear a selection of those memories so splendidly captured before they were lost for ever.

Whether it is the Spring holiday visit to Kent arranged by Connie Cook or the varied programme of talks, visits and tours, not to mention a very successful quiz evening, there has been a great deal to entertain and inform members during the year thanks to Christine's team and other helpers - too much activity and too many helpers to identify in detail here.

Newsletter and Website

The Friends Newsletter is an important source of interest and information and I should like to record my appreciation of Wendy Carter's work as Editor this past year. In addition, John Willis set up and has maintained the Friends website for some years but would be glad to hand the responsibility on now. We are grateful to John for all his work on this valuable means of communication.

People

I am sure members would join me in acknowledging the continuing involvement

of our Patron, George Coventry, the 13th Earl, and of Sir Roy Strong, our distinguished President. Sir Roy kindly agreed to speak at a November event in the Court; he treated those present to an authoritative and entertaining talk. (Ed. See our stop press on the back page)

A Chairman is always grateful for the support of an able Secretary and Treasurer and I have been fortunate in that respect this year, as in previous years, and I thank Tony Perfect and Alan Lee respectively. Moreover, I should like to express thanks to Michael Smith and the Croome staff who support the Friends and make this a property for all volunteers to be proud of.

As I retire I hope those I cannot name without over-extending this list will forgive me. I am pleased that Graham Evans represents Croome's RAF Defford history and its interests on the Committee; and I should like to thank one non-committee member for what she does for us both in giving outstanding talks and also in behind the scenes help and that is Sarah Kay.

Retrospect

We were a small band of volunteers who gathered, along with Croome staff, at a preliminary meeting to form the Friends on 29th June 2004, leading to a further meeting to develop a formal constitution. We launched in Earl's Croome Village Hall on 29th March 2005, when I was appointed Vice Chairman. The following year I became Chairman.

In the first years, the Park was still in the early stages of restoration and the Court was out of bounds. How different it all is now and how much there is to enjoy - though I would not wish to underplay the quieter pleasures of the early years.

Continuing success

John Henderson joined the Committee as Vice Chairman in 2006. He has not only made a very significant contribution over a period of years but he has done so with a background of invaluable first-hand knowledge of the estate and its history from 1967 to 1996, when the National Trust arrived. I thank John for his support and I thank all Committee members, past and present, for their help and support given to me in carrying out what has been the pleasure of the role of Chairman for the past five years. I naturally wish the Committee and the Friends as a whole continuing success in the future.

Eric H. Jones

Chairman, Friends of Croome Park
March 2011

Congratulations!

Eileen Clement
Oral History Co-ordinator

On 8th December last year one of our faithful members, Albert Shorrocks, celebrated his 90th birthday. Unbeknownst to him a surprise party was organised by Graham and Sylvia Evans in the RAF building. Albert's neighbour brought him to Croome where Heather provided a lovely lunch for 28 RAF comrades and friends. For once, Albert was speechless – for a moment!



The Friends of Croome Park wish you many happy returns, Albert.

Renewal

If you haven't done so already, please don't forget to renew your subscription to the Friends of Croome Park.

Contact Diana on
croome-membership@hotmail.co.uk

Holiday anyone?

There are still spaces left on our annual holiday. This year we're off to Norfolk. We've got plenty of visits planned as well as leaving a little time for you to spend as you like.

If you'd like to book your place/s or you'd just like more information please contact Connie Cook on 01386 552541.

Events - join in!

A reminder of our events ...

Sun May 8th

`Changing Landscape`
a walk with Nigel Matthews

Wed & Thu June 22nd & 23rd

`Continuing the Restoration`
a walk in the Park with Katherine Alker, Park and Garden Manager

Thur July 7th

Outing to Weston Park

Sat August 6th

Guided walk with Michael Smith to the Outer Eye Catchers

Sat to Wed September 10th to 14th
Norfolk Holiday

Sun September 18th

Visit for first time visitors to Walled Garden
by kind invitation of Chris and Karen Cronin

Wed October 12th

`Birds in the Park`
a talk by Simon Barker

Wed November 9th

General Knowledge Quiz with Paul Stanley

Tues November 15th

Visit to Back to Backs Birmingham

Email: croome-events@hotmail.co.uk

Membership renewals

Alan Lee
Treasurer, Friends of Croome Park

We thought we'd give you a quick reminder that you can now renew your membership by paying directly into the Friends bank account, avoiding the use of cash or cheques.



Both Standing Orders and Direct Bank Transfers are now available.

Any Friend wishing to use either method can contact me ALAN LEE on 01386 750498 or email [deffordalan62 @tiscali.co.uk](mailto:deffordalan62@tiscali.co.uk).

If you prefer to continue to use cash or cheques please remember both will still be available.

Croome Court: The Structural Evolution of a Building

Sarah Kay
Project Curator, Croome Court

I am hugely indebted to Catherine Gordon, Architectural Historian and author of *The Coventrys of Croome*, who has been working on this for us. She, Jill Tovey & I have had some wonderful, exciting and baffling conversations in the process of trying to tease out the historic evidence and clues within the fabric of the Court. I recently gave a talk to the Friends of Croome entitled 'The Story So Far' and used Catherine's analysis where she sets out the five main phases of building or structural change, as below. These phases are all associated with key members of the Coventry family. This is really helpful in helping us get our heads round how the Court has evolved and who was responsible for making the changes:

1. Pre-1640 – The Tudor and Jacobean House (c. 1610-1625). Thomas 1st Baron (Lord Keeper)
2. Mid 17th Century – The Caroline House (c. 1640-1649). Thomas 2nd Baron
3. Early 18th Century – Proposals and Alterations (1669-1719). Gilbert 4th Earl
4. Mid 18th century – The Palladian Re-modelling (1751-1758). George William 6th Earl

5. 19th & 20th Century – Modifications & Modernisation (1809-1948). 9th Earl & C20th owners

We have also been inviting lots of experts and advisers to come and examine the Court from their specialised points of view, carry out surveys and give their opinions. All the time, we are gaining greater insight not only into its historical evolution and periods of significance but also its character and personality.

There is no question that Croome is about quality and is an iconic fountainhead of 18th century design but the more we become familiar with the building, the more its idiosyncrasies and imperfections emerge. Visiting experts, whilst thrilled to finally get to visit Croome, have exclaimed 'It's all a bit of a compromise' or even 'it's all a bit of a bodge'!

It starts before you even get inside. For example:



Balustrade of the north steps overlap the ground floor window

-The balustrade of the North Steps overlap the ground floor window sills rather than the wall which seems unnecessarily quirky and possibly unintentional

-The Venetian windows do not align with the tops of the sash windows, a problem that is exacerbated by the dominant cornices above the other ground floor windows.

-Main stairs windows offset due to Red Wing. They had to be off-set and as a consequence appear as an after-thought, which they may well have been.

-Inside the Court, the external symmetry seems to have been adopted somewhat half-heartedly within and reveals itself to be largely a superficial veneer (which tallies with the fact that underneath the Court's skin lies an earlier skeleton).

-The back stairs levels do not align with windows inside. The cornices, dado & panelling are crudely done and mis-matched.

Because it was not a new-build and had to accommodate several earlier structures, architecturally it is quirky, imperfect and all a bit of a compromise. But we love it all the more for it. What this does is to deepen our relationship with the building and increase our affection for it.

The Croome Court that we see today is superficially of the mid-Georgian period. Quintessential, neo-Palladian buildings of the Georgian period are calculatedly cool and austere but Croome is not like this. It is not full of cold, hard marble; it is not a series of vast intimidating spaces designed to make you feel awestruck and insignificant. Think of its worn stone-flagged floors showing the passage of time and people's feet, think of the warm, rich mahogany details, think of the intimate, delightful rococo plasterwork. It has warmth and personality, it is somewhat battle-scarred because of everything that has been thrown at it over the centuries, it has come through

many different phases of structural change and use and has re-invented itself and survived. It starts to feel like an old, familiar, comfortable face with wrinkles and lines that speak of the experience of life.

And actually, it is largely because it is empty, without a collection of furniture and objects that would help to pull it all together stylistically and unify the spaces, that we are able to be more critical because we can see everything exposed and naked. And isn't it amazing, that even unfurnished, it still manages to make you feel welcome, rather than feeling cold, empty and unwelcoming?!

As Catherine Gordon sums



The main stair windows are offset due to the Red Wing

up in her report, "There is something undeniably alluring about its picturesque charm, its imperfections and anomalies which make it seem both accessible and mysterious. These qualities seize the imagination, excite curiosity and inspire a remarkable sense of loyalty and commitment".



The Venetian windows (circled) do not align with the tops of the sash windows

Oral History...Croome Revisited

Eileen Clement
Oral History Co-ordinator

In 1935 Hilda Newman became personal maid to Lady Coventry and stayed with her until the war in 1939. Hilda has many happy memories of her time at Croome and told me she would love to revisit her room in the Court. This room is right on the top floor and Hilda uses a wheelchair, so the challenge was on.

I managed to persuade some volunteers that this was a good idea and one sunny afternoon in October Michael Smith and Alice Padley joined

Phil Douce, Tim Hickson and myself. Hilda's son and daughter-in-law brought her to Croome and we managed to carry her right to the top. Hilda was thrilled to revisit after more than seventy years.

Hilda continues to help with queries and is always ready with answers, which help to complete the Oral History jigsaw.

Many thanks, Hilda.



The Defford Airfield Heritage Group

Bob Shaw
Friends of Croome Park member

The Group has been set up to research and record the history of RAF Defford, the airfield built on part of Croome Park in 1940, which became a centre for top secret radar research. It will also act as a resource in support of the National Trust, who recognise that the airfield and the Second World War is an important part of the history of Croome.

The Group has been accepted by the National Trust (at Regional level) as a volunteer Supporter Group in support of the aims and objectives of the National Trust.

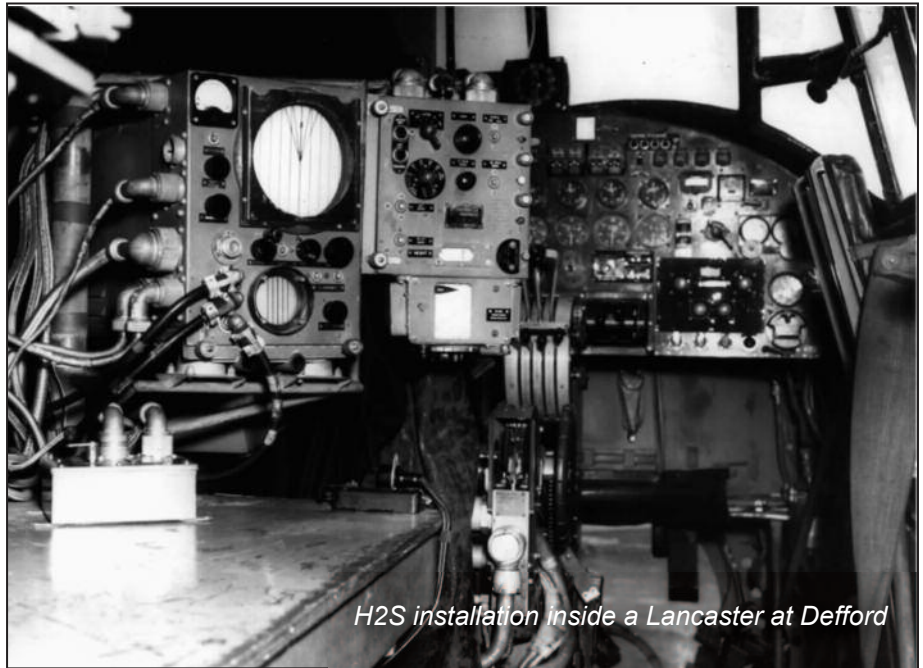
The DAHG has a strong educational and outreach ethos and is pursuing the mission it has set itself in a number of ways. The leaflet prepared by our Chairman, Graham Evans, to explain the airfield and radar development to visitors has gone on sale at Croome, together with a greetings card featuring a cartoon by Michael Barnard showing Croome at War.



Wellington fitted with ASV radar at Defford

The Group is preparing a booklet to a similar size, style and format to the National Trust guide to Croome, which will tell visitors more about this facet of the long and varied history of Croome. Our Vice-Chairman, Dennis Williams, has been invited to speak at a National Trust Lecture Lunch in November on the subject of RAF Defford and Croome at War.

Meanwhile, the Group is in discussion with Michael Smith and his colleagues about short,



H2S installation inside a Lancaster at Defford

medium and long term opportunities for displays at Croome on this subject. It is hoped that the painting donated by Michael McDonald of the Spitfire EN915 from which his father, Group Captain J.A. McDonald, bailed out over Defford in 1944, will go on show. In time this can be displayed alongside the Merlin engine and other parts of EN915, recovered in an archaeological dig near Cheltenham. Also to be displayed in the near future, we hope, will be the Roll of Honour of those who gave their lives in the dangerous business of flying radar research at Defford.

Archaeological visits to the airfield by members of the Group, with the permission of Mr. Troughton and the Society of Merchant Venturers, continue to produce treasures including an ASV Mark IX radome from a Barracuda, some Merlin engine parts, wing tanks thought to come from an Avro Ashton and what is probably an elevator mass-balance from a Sea Venom. Meanwhile, the Radar Restoration Trust, a constituent of our Group, represented by Tony Waller and Richard Hankins, have restored to working order an "H2S" radar as used by Bomber Command and added this to their magnificent collection of wartime and vintage

radar equipment.

Last but not least, Simon Blumlein who is the son Alan Blumlein, the outstanding scientist who was killed with his colleagues from Malvern and Defford in the tragic Halifax crash in 1942, has joined our Group. Himself an electronics engineer, he brings vast knowledge of the history of radar and electronics warfare.

It is pleasing to note that one of the buildings in the West Mercia Police Compound on Defford airfield has been named in memory of this great scientist "The Alan Brumlein Building" and Simon was present at the ceremony.

Anyone interested in the Defford Airfield Research Group, please see our web-site <http://deffordairfieldheritagegroup.wordpress.com/images/> or contact Graham Evans on 01684 295327.



Radome and scanner of H2S "blind bombing" radar on a Lincoln at Defford

Project Croome

Eric Jones
Vice President, Friends of Croome Park
(formerly Chair of the Friends)

While there is much evidence of the restoration of Croome and the Court, in particular, to be seen in the Spring of 2011, there is much more work going on behind the scenes which is hidden from the view of visitors; the detailed and quite complex planning of the longer-term restoration of Croome to something akin to the property's former glory – or even perhaps better than that. Visitors see the partial repair of the north entrance steps and balustrades, the continuing restoration of the Rotunda and the virtual completion of the Panorama Tower, for instance, but they do not witness the constant meetings, the planning and the paperwork, not to mention the burning of much midnight oil, that is the essential underpinning of this large and ambitious enterprise, the restoration of Croome Court and Park.



I joined the People, Engagement and Conservation Group (PEC) back in June 2008 as Friends' Chairman. Together with Jill Tovey and Eileen Clement, I have witnessed and played a small part in discussion of both the broad sweep and some of the minutiae of transforming an empty mansion into an interesting and engaging place for visitors.

In August 2010 PEC turned into the Croome

Court Executive Group and I found myself recycled onto this new planning committee. The initial creative phase was seen to be largely completed and attention was now focusing on consolidation and much more long-term project planning. Fundraising is, of course, central to the whole endeavour, especially preparation of the Lottery bid which is so crucial; while money from the Wolfson Foundation has already enabled restoration of the Rotunda to be undertaken, as well as making possible the real open fire that has brought warmth and cheer to the Entrance Hall. It is also in the nature of restoring a property in the



Court's condition that contingencies will arise which require urgent action and funding, necessitating some adjustment perhaps of carefully considered priorities.

It has been very genuinely a privilege and a pleasure to spend many hours over the last two and a half years as a witness to the hard work, dedication and imagination brought to bear on Project Croome by so many people and particularly by Croome's own staff and others from the Region.

I believe it is extremely important to emphasise this and for us all to play our part as Friends and volunteers in making visitors more aware of the fact that what they see when they visit the Court is the tip of a very large iceberg of work and planning that will, over time, come to fruition and make Croome an even more special place than it is already. Patience will be rewarded.

FRIENDS FORUM

The Salt Baths

My first recollection of seeing the Salt Baths was when my grandfather had taken me hunting on the lead rein and hounds were drawing through the Salt Baths Cover. My grandfather, who was a friend of the 9th Earl of Coventry, told me quite a lot about the Salt Baths and how they were used.

There were two sections about twenty feet apart, one for the 9th Earl and his visitors and one for his racehorses. The human section was about 40' x 20' with a 6' deep bathing pool, the sides and floor all lined with 6" x 6" white glazed tiles. The horse section was 20' x 60', with a gentle slope where they walked in and the water would be up to their knees.

The 9th Earl and his guests would arrive by horse and carriage to soak in the brine bath. The water was pumped from the well, which was 6' wide, stone lined, with an oak surround to the pump house. There were large copper boilers where the water

John Chugg

Friends of Croome Park member

was heated and a man was employed to stoke these up.

Lord Coventry had two Grand National winners, Emblem and Emblematic, 1863 and 1864, and these horses used the pool along with Captain Coventry's racehorses, who were trained at Croome Court in the yard behind the main stable block and indoor riding school. There were over 20 stables with green doors and they were demolished in the late 1960s. It has always been a great benefit to racehorses to soak their legs in salt water to harden them and, when my father trained racehorses, I used to be sent down to the Baths with a ten gallon milk churn to collect salt water for their legs.



Interior & wall of well, 2009

Quiz evening

On a cold October evening the heat was on, as 18 teams (71 contestants) went into battle to determine the brains of Croome Park for 2010. The teams pitted their wits against one another for 3 hours on a range of General Knowledge with specialist rounds as varied as Movie Stills; Rock'N'Roll Music; Anagrams; and The Musicals. Surprisingly only one team, the Seggie Merecats, managed to get all 5 of the National Trust/Croome Park questions correct!

The Anagram round proved to be the real head scratcher, as the room fell deadly silent for 10 minutes and brain cells went into overdrive!

During the interval a delicious ploughman's supper was served, some lovely fudge went on sale and a raffle took place.

Over the course of the evening three teams managed a maximum score during a round. Both 'ATWA' and 'The 99%'ers' achieving maximums in 'Whose Life Was It Anyway', whilst 'The Unfunded' achieved the same feat in 'Art & Literature'.

At the end of a fast moving and testing evening the honour of being Champions fell to 'The 99%'ers (Larry & Mary Gleaves and John Lambeth), with

Paul Stanley

Friends of Croome Park member

'Not Over The Hill' (Jennie & Mike Brown; Barbara Dymock and Ann Peach) taking the runners-up spot by the narrowest of margins from 'The Butchers'.

An enjoyable time was had by all and a repeat is planned this year when, hopefully, even more teams will participate and try to de-throne this year's worthy winners.

Many thanks to all the contestants who helped make this such a successful event.

Appeal for Info

Would anyone know how to find out if my father was ever stationed at Croome? I know he was in the RAF police and was at Pershore, possibly Defford? His name was Douglas George Kingdon.

If any one has any ideas, please contact Wendy croome-editor@hotmail.co.uk in the first instance.

With thanks, Mary Kingdon

Hare Krishna cinnamon cake

Carol Lewis
Friends of Croome Park member

My daughter was given this recipe by the Hare Krishnas on one of her visits to the Court.

1 lb. Plain Flour	1 lb. Butter or margarine
2 Teaspoons Baking Powder	1 lb. Brown Sugar
Good Pinch of Salt	2 Eggs, fresh or reconstituted
½ oz. Powdered Cinnamon	A little Milk if necessary

Time: about 45 mins (using 2x 7"x3" deep tins) or 60 minutes (using 1x 12"x4" tin)

Temperature: Gas Mark 4; 350* F; Solid fuel, oil etc- moderate

Method

- Line cake tin with paper
- Sieve the flour, baking powder, salt and cinnamon into a bowl
- Beat the fat and sugar until soft and creamy
- Beat the eggs and add them to the fat mixture, alternatively with the sieved flour mixture
- Beat well and add a little milk if necessary to bring to a light consistency
- Pour into a prepared cake tin ('s) and cook as detailed above.

Serve with Cinnamon Cream (optional):

8 oz. Butter or Stifly Whipped Double Cream
8 oz Icing Sugar
2 teaspoon Powdered Cinnamon

Method

If using butter: Cream the butter and sugar together, cream in the cinnamon.

If using cream: Whip cream till stiff and fold in cinnamon.



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 or write to:

Wendy Carter
Friends of Croome Newsletter Editor
c/o The National Trust
Builders' Yard
High Green
Severn Stoke
Worcestershire WR8 9JS

The deadline for the next issue of the magazine is 10th August 2011

Gardens Update

Katherine Alker
Garden & Park Manager

As mentioned elsewhere, most of the winter period has been taken up with tree planting at Old Wood. But there have been other jobs to keep us busy; we continued to remove the frost damaged viburnums and have started the year's weeding. We'll have to do some extensive planting in the Autumn to replace some of the lost shrubberies; and no, we probably won't be using *Viburnum tinus*! In the Wild Walk the removal of damaged shrubs has widened the path to a size more appropriate for the number of visitors we now have....every cloud!

Tree work in the park has continued with Hugh taking the lead. Unfortunately several of the oaks are displaying early signs of Acute Oak Decline so,

after taking advice, we made the decision to fence the oldest trees to prevent the cattle getting in and possibly spreading the disease and fell some of the younger affected trees. We were able to mill the trunks into planks and hope to use these as benches.

By far the most exciting news in the garden is the return of the sash windows in the Temple Greenhouse. The windows, frames and sills are completely new but based on photos and sketches from the Hortus Croomensis (1824) and Country Life (1911), amongst

others. The glass has a lovely 'wobble' in it and has been deliberately offset so that we get the correct look of very old fashioned glass.

I hope you've had chance to see them. If not, you have the rest of the year - we've decided to leave them in for everyone to admire until Spring 2012, when they will be removed and stored in the bothy behind the TGH, as was done in previous centuries. Having the windows will allow us to increase the variety and number of more exotic and tender plants – just like the 6th Earl did in the C18th. I



A Day of Two Halves

A chilly, blustery February morning saw a group of Friends set off with Michael Smith on the first of his 2011 tours of Croome.

Entertaining, witty and informative as ever, Michael took us first into the new shop. Oak-framed and constructed by a local company the new building is due to open by May. On to the Ice House, resplendent under its newly thatched roof. This was designed to be seen and appreciated, sited as it is on the route between the Court and the Church. We followed the old path through the trees, past the plinth which formerly held the urn commemorating the 6th Earl. Then, as the magnificently restored Rotunda came into view, the sun briefly shone from behind heavy black clouds. The rotunda isn't quite finished but the stunning plasterwork could be seen as we peered through the windows. Michael told us about the innovative method devised during restoration of keying the plaster to the brickwork; using pink hair nets!

Christine Adams (morning)
Sheila Harris (afternoon)

As the afternoon sky cleared, we continued along the overgrown path to the Court.; it is hoped to repair this path to provide a circular walk. Vast areas of scrub have been cleared, new tree planting has taken place and work is happening on the overgrown ha-ha. Once in the Court we donned plastic slippers and were led up the back staircase. Michael showed us empty bedrooms with fireplaces of different vintages and it was amusing to see so many rooms with a huge bath standing in the middle. The views from the windows were exceptional, looking over the sweeping park to the Malverns, the church and the river snaking through the landscape. Regrettably there was evidence of water seeping through the ceilings and urgent work was taking place to repair the damage, especially in the Long Gallery where some plasterwork had collapsed. It must be a never-ending struggle to maintain such a building. It was certainly a fascinating tour behind the scenes of this great house and Michael's enthusiasm and knowledge were boundless.

Newsletter Distribution...

Can you help us to keep down our newsletter costs?

If you would like to collect your copy of the newsletter from the Croome offices or receive it by email, please let us know.

We'll need your email address to notify you that it's available. Please contact our membership officer, Diana Skeys at croome-membership@hotmail.co.uk

Recollections of a Land Agent - part 3

John Henderson
Vice Chairman, Friends of Croome Park Committee

I began to realise there was some history to Croome when the Colonel showed me the boxes of archives he had painstakingly sorted into some useful order. These were stored next to my office. Occasionally I would spend five minutes, which inevitably extended to an hour, just looking through the papers. There were family letters, mainly 18th and 19th century, some not for general consumption but so intriguing; correspondence between the 6th Earl of Coventry and Lancelot Brown and Robert Adam; diverse invoices for the re-modelling of Croome Court; bills for stonework, joinery, locks and latches, bills for furniture, pictures and silver, plants and wages sheets and rent rolls.

Occasionally I would receive an enquiry from a researcher, asking for details of a bill, which I would copy and send off. Gradually, the flow of requests increased as there was a surge of interest in the 18th century landscape movement. Publishers wanted photographs of Richard Wilson's Croome Court. 1978, for instance, coincided with the 250th anniversary of Robert Adam's birth and in 1983, Roger Turner's biography of Capability Brown was published for the bicentenary of his death. There were scholarly articles and books on various of the furniture makers and a magnificent book on Coade Stone, of which Croome has a large collection. I had neither the time nor the expertise to handle these enquires so the Trustees appointed an Archivist, Jill Tovey, in 1981. It is her meticulous work over the succeeding years that has brought order, meaning and insight to the archives.

Whilst the archives were a sideline for me, the collection of furniture, pictures, porcelain and silver, removed from Croome Court when it was sold in 1948, was my responsibility. Much was on loan to other large houses or kept in store. Lord Coventry, the 11th Earl, returned from London to live on the Estate. Earl's Croome Court was being re-modelled when I took over and the Trustees decided it should be made ready for his Lordship. There was nothing in the house so we had to buy acres of carpet; I have Scottish forebears and was "economical" in my choice. Looking back, they were really horrible. How Lord Coventry must have groaned ... but he never said anything to me!

Furniture and pictures began to roll in from diverse places. The house was alarmed and pictures were hung. Books were loaded onto library shelves and the silver was cleaned. Crested dinner services were stored and wonderful Meissen and Sevres pieces displayed. It was a treasure trove. The Trustees commissioned a new inventory and valuation from Christies for the chattels and Gooden & Fox valued the pictures. Previous inventories taken over the years were stored in the archives and there were catalogues of successive chattels sales; there had been a four day sale of surplus furniture when Croome Court was sold after the war. Oh to be about then with a little money!

I enjoyed fascinating days with experts who described items meticulously, verifying and identifying provenance, and I began to realise what an important and valuable collection it was. In the office,

the Agent sat behind a knee-hole desk with a tarnished silver pen tray on it. There were three carved elbow chairs, in which Trustees sat for meetings, and two small watercolours. Christies' valuer came along; my Georgian desk was immediately removed to his Lordship's study. The Paul Storr pen tray was whisked away and the three Vile and Cobb chairs went to join the others at Earl's Croome Court to make up the incredibly valuable set of eight, likewise the two Paul Sandby paintings. I quickly had to refurnish my office with an unfashionably large Edwardian Partner's Desk and three awful plastic swivel chairs!

Some items of furniture too large for Earl's Croome Court remained at Croome, then still a school, like the full length family portraits and the magnificent glazed library bookcases carved by Sefferin Alken. The Trustees had to sell some to cover Inheritance Tax, others were put into store. Carved window pelmets found their way to a Scottish National Trust house in Charlotte Square, Edinburgh and the bookcases were eventually removed lock stock and barrel and are on display in the V&A Museum. A well known Fine Arts dealer from London turned up one day at Croome Court in his Rolls Royce to inspect and value a pair of console tables and pier glasses, still in the Salon. I know they were sold, but the only thing I remember about his visit that day was that for some reason he had a beautiful live parrot, like a Macaw, in a brass cage on the back seat!

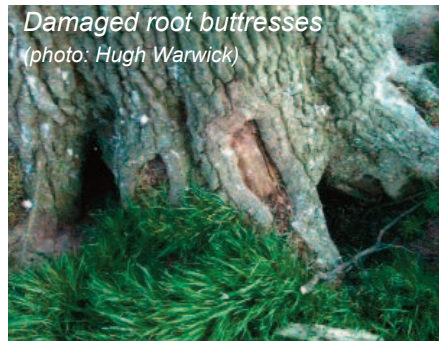
In the next issue...John decides that he can play 'Capability Brown at his own game...

Protected! Croome's veteran trees

Simon Barker
Wildlife & Countryside Adviser

Croome's parkland trees are one of the property's most valuable features. Besides their significance in the landscape, collectively they support a nationally important community of rare beetles which live in decaying wood. Many of the trees date from the Brownian landscaping during the second half of the 18th century, although some are much older and must have been well established by the time that Brown incorporated them within his grand scheme.

Decades of cultivation to grow arable crops within the parkland caused serious damage to the trees as their roots were subject to continued disturbance and they suffered impacts from chemical fertilisers & pesticides. During the period 2002-2005 the National Trust restored 160 hectares (400 acres) of the park to permanent grassland, managed without inputs of artificial fertilisers and pesticides. Restoring the parkland landscape also released the old parkland trees from many



Damaged root buttresses
(photo: Hugh Warwick)

of the pressures which were damaging their health.

Replacing ploughing with grazing livestock did not prevent tree damage altogether, however. Cattle & sheep can damage trees by excessive trampling around their roots and by chewing their trunks in search of nutrients. A visit to Croome last September by Brian Muelaner, the Trust's specialist adviser on ancient trees, highlighted a few trees for whom damage by stock

was a problem. Since then Park Warden Hugh Warwick, working in co-operation with our tenant farmers, has been busy fencing around the base of these trees to protect them from direct damage by stock. This action should ensure that they have the best chance of prolonging their natural lives for as long as possible. Hopefully, they will continue to be features of the landscape and homes for rare beetles at least until the long term replacements planted by the Trust have matured to take their place.



New fencing (photo: Hugh Warwick)

Stop Press...

It is with great regret that we announce the resignation of our President, Sir Roy Strong. We received the following from Sir Roy:

'This brings sad news. I feel that I must resign as your President. Last Wednesday 16th March the Trustees of the National Trust met and declined the offer of The Laskett Gardens, the house and its contents with an endowment of £2.5 million. This puts me in a quite impossible position as I am sure you will understand. My position vis-à-vis Croome is quite untenable. I wish you luck.'

The Laskett Gardens is Sir Roy's home. We would like to thank Sir Roy for his involvement with the Friends and send him our best wishes. We are in the process of looking for our next

President and will keep you up to date.

Our Chairman of five years, Dr Eric Jones, stepped down at our AGM in March. John Henderson was elected as our new Chairman and Jill Tovey elected as Vice-Chairman. They will be supported by a team of 11 Officers - please see page 2 for a full list.

It was with much sadness that our great friend Ann Meadows passed away last year. Ann had spent several years recording the wildflowers of Croome and had worked closely on a number of Friends projects. She is much missed.