

# THE FRIENDS OF CROOME PARK



SPRING 2012 ISSUE 16

NEWSLETTER



Croome's furniture at Kelmarsh Hall

## The Croome Collection

Jill Tovey  
Croome Estate Archivist

The Croome Estate Trust still owns a collection of the very best furniture, paintings and porcelain that once graced Croome Court. In time, under agreement with the National Trust, these wonderful pieces will return to the house for which they were made.

In the meantime some of them are on exhibition at Kelmarsh Hall, Northamptonshire, as many of you may know.

In 1945, when the war was over, Croome Court, having been requisitioned by the Government for the duration, was handed back to the Croome Estate Trustees. The dilemma for them was what to do with

such a wonderful building and its very important contents in the radically changed circumstances of post-war Britain; spending vast sums on the upkeep of such places could not be justified in those days of austerity.

The decision was made to put the house on the market but it wasn't easy and it was nearly four years before they found a buyer in the shape of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham. Their dogged determination to preserve the building rather than demolish it, as happened to about sixty such places during the period, paid off – thankfully for us today!

The family moved to

Earl's Croome Court, a much smaller house that could not accommodate all the furniture so, sadly, the greater part of the contents had to be sold.

However, the nationally important pieces, designed specially for Croome, were kept; it is an iconic collection of work by the premier designers and craftsmen of the period. The family portraits are there too, along with other paintings including, of course, the famous forward-looking picture of Croome Court by Richard Wilson, done in 1758 before the building work was finished.

*Cont. on page 4...*

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

## WELCOME

I don't know about you but I'm looking forward to a summer of great weather and countryside walks. I hope you'll be able to join in with our events.

I also hope you'll enjoy reading this issue - many thanks to everyone who's helped to make it so interesting. And apologies to anyone who's contribution has been missed - we've had so many it was impossible to fit them all in! I hope their stories will help inspire you to share yours!

Happy reading!

Wendy

### Your Committee:

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Jill Tovey

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Alan Lee

Secretary:  
Tony Perfect

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Christine Adams  
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Phil Douce  
Graham Evans  
Tim Hickson  
Geoff Sherwood  
Paul Stanley

# Chairman's Note

We are delighted that Jeremy Musson has agreed to be our new President for the next two years. We had the opportunity of showing him round Croome on the day of the AGM but unfortunately he had to leave in the afternoon. You may have wondered whom we could find to succeed Sir Roy Strong, so here are just a few of the credentials he will bring:

- Between 1993 and 1995 he was the NT's Asst Historic Buildings curator in East Anglia.

- For nine years he was Architectural Editor for Country Life and has since freelanced as an architectural historian, author, lecturer and editor: a recognised authority on British country houses, historic buildings consultant, founder of Wheatsheaf Press, TV presenter and co-writer of 14 BBC2 programmes.

- Amongst other titles, Jeremy has written 'English Country House Interiors' and 'How to Read a Country House'. He has been involved with Nyman's Garden in Sussex.

Although unable to remain for the AGM he had prepared the following:

*'I am so pleased to accept the honour of the presidency of the Friends of Croome Park in succession to Sir Roy Strong - and hope that I can be of some service to you, the Friends. You, each and everyone, play such a key role in supporting the work of the National Trust and the Croome Heritage Trust, at Croome. There can be no doubt that the extraordinary legacy of the 6th Earl of Coventry at Croome Court (and his patronage of three of the greatest English designers, 'Capability' Brown, Robert Adam and James Wyatt) deserves to be better known and better understood and in this endeavour Croome can never have enough "Friends".*

*Therefore I was hugely impressed to hear that there are over 412 of you. I know that you are already ambassadors: ambassadors not just for this glorious place but also for all the threads of art, culture, landscape, human life and experience that are enshrined here. The house and the landscape which surrounds it are deeply important for our nation's cultural heritage. I heartily endorse all that you do to encourage the preservation and revival of this place and also to record living memories and stories of twentieth century life at Croome Court. I look forward to learning more with you all in the coming months" Jeremy Musson LLb(Hons) M Phil*

We are indebted to Eileen Clement for meeting Betty Jones in Cheshire to record her moving story as a Land Girl at Croome and we look forward to Betty's second talk on 28th July. The Oral History Project helpers are making headway with the seemingly endless succession of wonderful contributions to be



recorded about life, learning and work around Croome. Unless recorded, it is too easy to forget the how things were. These were instanced by the absorbing talk in February by Graham Evans and Dennis Williams on Defford Aerodrome during and after the War, when thousands of Forces and Civilian recruits made the best of things here during the most difficult of times. Compare this to the privileged life led by Lady Dorothy Fraser, a daughter of the 9th Earl of Coventry, about which we heard as if she had been present at the AGM, through her 1961 BBC recording. What strength of character they all showed!

The Secondhand Bookshop is proving to be an astonishing success in bringing in valuable income; over £3,000 in the first six months. Three vital ingredients are necessary for its continuing success - the dedication of the small group who sort, price and stack (Phil Douce, Lesley Tanner and Pam Gerrard with touches on the tiller by Vice-President and its founder, Dr Eric Jones); the continuing flow of books, so generously donated; those of you who buy and trade them again for more! This additional income will help us to provide more to beautify Croome, to assist in displaying and presenting memorabilia and to help with the equipment to make life easier for the worthy and hardworking staff and volunteers.

I would remind you of the Photographic Competition, organised for the Friends by Paul and Judith Stanley. We have an exciting events programme for the next six months (see opposite), all arranged by our invaluable Events Team, to whom we are all really grateful. My continuing thanks go to all the Friends' Committee members, who work tirelessly to make things happen for the enjoyment of Croome.

I am looking forward to our social on 19th May when we can meet up in the stately surroundings of the Long Gallery and enjoy an eclectic selection of music transcribed for recorders of all sizes by the talented 'Major Pipework Consort'.

This newsletter covers such a variety of subjects - from specialists like Jill Tovey and others inspired to record their own stories or insights. I am sure you will enjoy it.

**John Henderson**

Chairman, Friends of Croome Park, April 2012

## Snap Happy

**D**on't forget to enter our first ever photographic competition!

Just to remind you, 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.

The closing date is **31st July 2012** so there's still time to get snapping and enter your pics.

The best photographs will be displayed at Croome and visitors will be able to vote for their favourites.

Entry forms have been sent to all members - 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.*

## Buildings Update

**W**e're delighted to tell you that in September 2011 the National Trust declared the Outer Eye-Catchers inalienable. This special legal power of the NT means that the Panorama Tower, Dunstall Castle and Pirton Castle protects the follies for the future.

In addition, the purchase of the Red Wing was completed in early October. This derelict service wing was acquired by the Croome Heritage Trust, with the NT simultaneously taking a 15 year lease.

If you've visited recently you'll have seen the scaffolding that's been erected to keep the building wind and water tight. One of the worst affected rooms, thought to have been where the 6th Earl retreated to in his later years, still has original wood panelling but also has a large hole in the roof and a virtually non-existent floor.

Much work needs to be done!



## Events - join in!

Sat 19th May, 7.15pm

**Major Pipework Consort, The Long Gallery**  
*performing a selection of music spanning 500 years*

Tue 22nd May, 6.30pm  
**Evening Bird Song Walk**  
*with Simon Barker*

Thur 14th June, 10.30am - 5.15pm  
**Boat Trip from Upton to Worcester**  
*on M.V. Conway Castle (& return)*

Sat/Sun 16th & 17th June, 10.30am  
**Visit to Walled Garden at Croome**  
*by kind invitation of Chris & Karen Cronin*

Wed/Thu 27th & 28th June, 6.00pm  
**Restoration Walk**  
*with Katherine Alker, Park and Garden Manager*

Tue 10th July, 9.45am - 4.30pm  
**Visit to Tyntesfield**

Sat 28th July, 7.15pm

**Land Girls (pt 2)**  
*talk by Betty Jones*

Sat 18 August, 10.30am - 3.30pm  
**Outer Eye Catchers Walk & Picnic**  
*with Michael Smith (7+ miles)*

Tue 18th September, 1.00pm  
**Visit to the Morgan Factory**

Sun 10th - Thur 13th September  
**Holiday in Northumberland**

Tue 9th October, 10.30am - 1.00pm  
**Links with Pirton and Croome**  
*morning walk with Derek Skeys followed by lunch in the RAF Canteen*

Wed 17th October, 7.15pm  
**Quiz Evening RAF Canteen**

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

# The Croome Collection continued

Jill Tovey  
Croome Estate Archivist & Friends of Croome Park Vice-Chair

There is far too much to describe it all here but perhaps details of a few of best pieces will give a flavour of the whole collection.

The very fine pair of satinwood and holly commodes, commissioned from Mayhew & Ince in 1765, demonstrate detailed and highly skilled work depicting classical images and designs that the 6th Earl and Robert Adam were exploring and experimenting with.

Another famous partnership - that of William Vile and John Cobb - was frequently engaged in the production of furniture for Croome. During the third quarter of the 18th century more than 1,300 items appear in the accounts for which over £3,000 was paid to the pair by Lord Coventry: a considerable sum at the time.

These commissions included many chairs, in particular a set of 8 designed by Robert Adam with carvings by Sefferin Alken, who had been involved

in carving at Croome since 1761. The collaboration of architect and craftsmen owes much to the influential patronage of the 6th Earl.



Other pieces that stand out are the set of ten window seats designed by Adam for the Long Gallery (two pairs remain in the ownership of the Croome Estate Trust). These were made by royal cabinetmakers William France and John Bradburn in 1766, with carvings again by Alken.

There are some beautiful porcelain pieces too, amongst them a very important Basin & Ewer made at the Sevres factory in 1764 to fit into a stand designed by Adam for the Tapestry Room. King Louis XVI liked these so much that he ordered a set for himself.

The Earls of Coventry were always great patrons of the local Worcester porcelain factory; the most renowned purchase being the Dessert Service, with a pattern of rosebuds in relief, by Flight & Barr that was made especially for the 7th Earl, the 'Blind Earl'. The original service remains in the collection, though copies are still marketed today.

Although the collection is not large enough to furnish Croome Court as it was in former times, there is certainly enough to display as evidence of yet another aspect of the 6th Earl's desire to achieve an ideal of perfection and

enlightened good taste that such patrons were yearning towards in the mid-eighteenth century.....and not only that, in many cases he was leading the way.

## Kelmarsh Hall

The Croome collection at Kelmarsh Hall can be visited on Thursdays (not 2nd Aug) and Bank Holiday Sundays, Mondays and Tuesday until the end of September.

The gardens are open from 11am, the house from 12am. A newly refurbished tea-room serves refreshments and lunches.

Kelmarsh is 11m north of Northampton and 5m south of Market Harborough.

For more information call 01604 686543 or visit

[www.kelmarsh.com](http://www.kelmarsh.com)



# Social Evening & Concert

Major Piperwork was formed in 2002. Its players are all amateurs and members of the Cheltenham and Gloucester branch of the Society of Recorder Players.

The ensemble aims to bring the pleasures of the recorder to a wider audience and to raise money for charitable causes. It performs music ranging from Early through Renaissance and Baroque periods to traditional folk airs and modern pieces.

Since its formation the ensemble



has given concerts locally and in France.

Instruments played include Great Bass, Bass, Tenor, Alto and Soprano recorders. After the performance

audiences are welcome to come, look, and find out more about playing them.

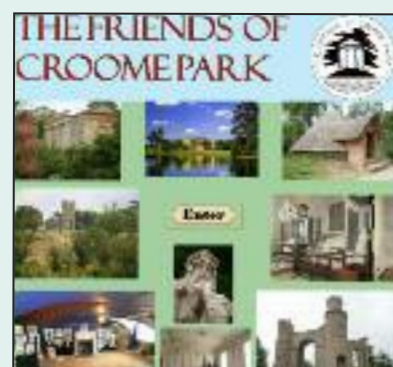
Major Piperwork will be joining us and performing for our social evening at Croome Court on Saturday 19th May. Email [croome-events@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:croome-events@hotmail.co.uk) for more information.

## Website

Our website [www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk](http://www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk) has recently been updated.

The site now provides a detailed insight into the history of Croome Park and some of its greatest influences.

There are full details of recent and future Friends events, past copies of the Newsletter; many new photographs and more.



## Oral History Update

Work continues apace with plenty of new information coming in. A new display, together with boards of photographs kindly donated by Leonard Edwards, was erected in the Servants' Hall in the Court in early November and the response has been really positive.

The excerpts in the Audioposts have been changed, giving different aspects of the history of Croome. We are currently working on producing folders on specific aspects to add to this display, the first to be St Joseph's Special School. The CD is progressing and it is hoped this will be available before the end of 2012.

The Worcester Records Office requires a gold disc copy of every recorded interview and these are now up to date. We have purchased special, acid-free, folders to store old press cuttings and photographs and Erica Kenway is looking after this.

From time to time we receive artefacts and wonder if anyone can throw any light on the use of a very large wooden pestle, presumably from the days of the school?

Our team has grown to eleven as we welcome Mary Evans who is researching the Croome Hunt, which is something I have wanted to do for some time.

The rest of the team are Claire Parry, David Hutt,

Eileen Clement  
Oral History Co-ordinator

Ellen Moore, Erica Kenway, Graham Cartwright, Jane Hulse, Phil Douce, Sue Smith, Tim Hickson and me. We all wear badges to alert visitors and volunteers to the Oral History Project, which needs as much publicity as possible.

### Croome before the NT - photos

Those of you who have visited the Court recently will have seen the new display panels portraying the Oral History Project in a manner befitting its excellent content.

Eileen Clement, who heads the project, would like photos of Croome before the National Trust that can be incorporated into the display.

If you have any such photos please can you send them to Eileen at:

[croome-oral-history@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:croome-oral-history@hotmail.co.uk)

### Ring in your ears

Keep your ears peeled for the Queen's Jubilee and this year's Olympics...the bells of the Church are due to be rung.

More information can be obtained from the Friends noticeboard in the RAF building.

# Croome at War - High Green

Bob Shaw  
Friends of Croome Park member

These photos were taken from a low flying 'plane from RAF Defford. Sqn Ldr (later Group Capt) Frank Griffiths and his wife Ruth, lived in a flat upstairs in the Coventry Arms. The photos come from the collection of Douglas Fisher, who was the cine cameraman in the Film and Photographic Dept at TRE, Malvern. Griff and Doug Fisher were great friends and it is likely that Griff was flying the plane and Doug took the photos.

Photos © Robert Fisher.



*The M5 now dissects the sunlight fields beyond the village of High Green*

*The log yard is in the foreground of this High Green photo - The Coventry Arms is on the road leading to Croome on the right and the orchards are to the north.*



*The Builders' Yard, High Green, now home to the National Trust and Croome Estate Offices*

## Defford Airfield Heritage Group

We've been involved in refurbishing and rearranging the display in the exhibition room next to the RAF Canteen, which now includes Albert Shorrock's magnificent model of the airfield. Also in hand is a further display in the basement of the Court.

Albert Shorrock was elected Honorary President of the Group

at our AGM in November.

A number of our publications are available in the shop at Croome, including a leaflet and postcards; we're working on further publications including a guide book and a book about the unique Boeing 247D DZ203 that played such an important role in the development of radar systems.

During 2012 you can catch us at a number of events:

- 7th/8th July - 40s Weekend, Croome
- 14th July - Defford Air Day, Defford
- 8th/9th Sep - Heritage Open Days, Croome

For more information contact Graham Evans 01684 295327 or Bob Shaw 07778 773499.

### Books, books, books

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

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

Please leave donated books at reception - thank you.



# My Croome...

Gill Fone  
Friends of Croome Park member

My first visit to Croome was in 1940 when I was four years old. My maternal grandparents, James and Sarah Stevenson, lived at Pershore Lodge (next to the London Gate), 1939 to 1952.

The war hadn't long started and the threat of invasion in Britain was very real. My family was living in Ipswich, Suffolk, and, like many families we were encouraged to move away for a short while in the summer of 1940 – hence my introduction to Croome. How my grandparents found room for five extra people in the two up and two down lodge I'll never know. We were there for eight weeks during the year that RAF Defford was constructed.

Throughout the Park units, Nissan huts, quarters, officers' mess accommodation and NAAFI etc. went up quickly. Luckily the NAAFI was opposite the lodge and, on occasions, a tin of salmon or other luxuries were passed over the hedge! Winnie, one of the NAAFI personnel, made soft toys and for many years I treasured a horse she made for me, using a green floral material and a tail and mane from brown wool.

We had no electricity or water. Lighting came from paraffin lamps, water – ice cold and crystal clear - from a well in the garden. Cooking and heating came from a large range with a fire grate that heated the hot plate and ovens. Grandma produced hearty meals; veg and fruit were grown in the garden. They kept bantams mainly for eggs but I think some went into the pot! Mr Denley, a butcher from Worcester, visited twice a week along with a grocery van with provisions from Pershore.



Our summer visits were eagerly awaited. When we alighted at Shrub Hill in Worcester we'd run down the hill to the Corn Market and climb on to the Mark's blue buses. Once we saw the London Gate I could hardly contain myself - my grandparents and a lovely time were waiting.

On subsequent wartime visits I would roam the camp, visit the cinema and play with Lord Bill, who had succeeded his father (killed in action in May 1940) at Croome Court. It was the 10th Earl who said that my grandparents could live at Pershore Lodge

“for ever” - but it was never put in writing.

Following the death of the Earl in 1940, Croome Court went into a slow decline; even as a young child I could see that.

As I got older I'd collect the milk. I carried a gallon hand churn through the garden, past the ice house and church, through the fields to High Green to a farm where milk was ladled into the churn. The lid was put firmly in place and woe betide if I spilt any!

Countess Coventry rode with the Croome Hunt and I remember one occasion when the meet gathered at the London Gate – such a colourful sight – horses, riders and hounds.

In 1947/8 I visited again. I regularly put a jar of wild flowers on Lady Joan's grave, who'd recently died age 24. I also witnessed Lady Deerhurst's funeral procession. She lived at Pirton Court and is buried in the vaults of Croome's church.

The Coventry family moved to Earls Croome in 1948 and the Court was taken over by St. Joseph's Catholic School. In 1952 Pershore Lodge was wanted to house nuns and my grandparents were moved to Severn Stoke. It was a sad time - even though there were poor amenities they loved their life there. The nuns cycled everywhere and their habits would billow like parachutes, such a funny sight. Grandfather died, 83, in 1953 and Grandma died, 85, in 1958 in the care of her daughter.

After 1952 I didn't visit again until 1961 whilst on honeymoon in Malvern. The Park was covered in caravans and heavy plant machinery - it was a base while the M5 was built, slicing the Estate in two. In 1968 I joyously moved to Worcester.

Pershore Lodge was empty. The garden was overgrown and the windows broken. The row of outhouses at the bottom of the garden (the toilet, wash house and wood store) was falling down. Peeping through the Lodge windows showed that there was an equal mess inside.

When the school left the Court lay empty until, in the early 70s, the Hare Krishna movement moved in. Later, plans were put in place for a hotel and restaurant. I used to cycle to Croome and looked with dismay at how it was looking. I'd call on Mr Edwards at the Caretaker's Cottage, where we would commiserate about the future of Croome.

Then in 1996 the National Trust took over the Park. Pershore Lodge had some repairs to make it habitable. After many visits I have observed the restoration of the Park - it is a wonderful transformation. In the last 70 years I have seen many ups and downs at Croome and I feel it is now in safe hands for ever. I now live in Frome, Somerset, and make at least one visit to Croome each year.

# FRIENDS FORUM

## The Coventrys at Earl's Croome

Revd Geoffrey Moore  
Friends of Croome Park member

When the Coventry Family left Croome Court in 1949 they moved into Earl's Croome Court, about four miles away. The 10th Earl was killed in battle at Givenchy, France, in 1940 and so it was the 11th Earl and his family who set up their home at Earl's Croome.

George William (Bill) Coventry moved into a house which had been used by the services during the Second World War. It stands alongside the A38 between Worcester and Tewkesbury and is approached by a long avenue of trees. Although no longer owned by the family, it still has the family crest on either side of the pillars marking the entrance to the drive.



At the rear of the property on Church Lane off the A4104 Upton-upon-Severn to Pershore Road stands the Norman church of St. Nicholas, Earl's Croome, which became the spiritual home for the Earl.

The name 'Coventry' was a familiar one in Earl's Croome village as many had lived here in the past and the graveyard contains a number of old stones engraved with the name.



Bill's Sister Lady Maria Coventry, who in recent years had her own home on the other side of the A38, was a supporter and regular worshipper at Earl's Croome Church right up until her death in 2007.

Although there are now no 'Coventry' family members living in the village, there are three pews in the church that still retain the red embroidered cushions bearing the familiar family coat-of-arms, marking where those last Coventry residents took their seat for services.



The name of the 10th Earl (George William Coventry) appears on the church war memorial board, with no title, together with three other members of the family who died in the 1939-1945 war.

It is well worth visiting this ancient Norman Church, whose churchyard contains the mortal remains of more recent members of this important family. As the church is not normally open other than for services, it is necessary to ring and arrange a visit to see inside. Contact the Church Warden, Ruth Brown, 01684 594531.

## Murder Most Horrid?

What a shock to see one of the normally hardworking volunteers taking a rest ... with a fork by his side. For one moment I thought I'd walked onto the set of Midsomer Murders!



Gill Glenwright



# Colonel Osbert Dudley-Smith

John Chugg  
Friends of Croome Park member

Colonel Osbert Dudley-Smith was the son of Lady Barbara Smith, sister of the 9th Earl of Coventry. He was born and raised at the family home, Strensham Court. He was only five feet six inches but got into the Grenadier Guards through family influence; the regulation was six feet.

He always read a lesson at Earls Croome Church and had a constant habit of clicking his heels together and then raising himself on the balls of his feet when reading from the lectern. He stuttered quite badly and it must have been difficult for him when he read the lesson. He had his own family pew about four pews from the front, on the right hand side, and sat on a seat embroidered with the Coventry crest...God help anyone who mistakenly sat in the Coventry pew!

He always dressed in a Coventry well-cut suit, gold watch and chain, neat military moustache and never wore an overcoat even in the coldest weather. His only guard against the weather were sheepskin gloves. He was quite often accompanied by Lady Betty Aylesford, a very elegant attractive woman whom, I believe, was a cousin. Colonel Dudley-Smith employed a butler who wore a black coat and pinstripe trousers. Mr and Mrs Maund, who lived in the lodge cottage at the bottom of the drive, cleaned for him and Mr Maund did all the odd jobs. I

Colonel Osbert Dudley-Smith on right



remember Princess Duleep Singh, who was Anne Coventry, the great-aunt of George William Coventry (known to friends as Bill), the 11th Earl, and his new wife Maria Medart (known as Mimi), the American heiress, who was allegedly one of King Farouk's harem, coming to Earls Croome Church. At that stage Bill was smartly dressed and in the Guards. It appeared that Bill wanted the money and Mimi wanted the title.

Colonel Dudley-Smith had two whippets who went everywhere in his car. He could be seen almost every day driving round the Estate noting everything about how the estate farms were run. A creature of habit, he nearly always parked his car at the Salt Baths to eat his lunch.

I often visited him at Levant Lodge – the door was always opened by the butler. The

Colonel's office and living room on the first floor was a former large bedroom with a most lovely view over the Point-to-Point Course towards the Malverns. It had the most beautiful furniture and oil paintings from Strensham Court. He had a dread of the house catching fire and, in the adjoining bathroom next door, he had installed a rope ladder.

Seasoned oak planks had been selected for his coffin and were kept behind the Carpenters' Workshop. He is buried on the north side of Earls Croome Church in the family vault next to Lady Maria Coventry, who was the last of the direct line.

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:

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

**The deadline for the next issue of the magazine is 17th August 2012**

# Friends on Tour

Jackie Eyles  
Friends of Croome member

On 10th September 2011 a group of intrepid Friends began a tour of Norfolk.

A bright, early start led us across the country bound for Norwich...via the National Trust's Anglesey Abbey. The founding of the Abbey dates back to 1135 but the core of the house is C17th; what's seen today is the creation of one man - Huttleston Broughton, 1st Lord of Fairhaven. Between 1926 and 1966 he transformed the former Augustinian Priory into a comfortable country house.

Sunday morning started with an interesting tour of Norwich and then on to the NT's Blickling Hall. As their guidebook says "Blickling is everyone's idea of a great Jacobean country house." - simply stunning! The Long Gallery was 123 feet long.

On Monday we had a short time in Norwich before heading for a river trip on the Norfolk Broads. I thoroughly enjoyed the leisurely pace of the boat - the Broads are a beautiful landscape with a variety of flora and fauna. The variety of birds was fabulous and to see

otters playfully cavorting along the river bank was a joy.



The afternoon took us to the NT's Felbrigg Hall. Built in two contrasting periods - 1620s and 1680s - it was enriched with grand pictures and furniture in the C18th. Almost lost in the C19th, it was lovingly restored by Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer in the C20th - the involvement of the Wyndham family since the 1620s being an ups and downs tale of family fortunes. Another full day was rounded off by a convivial evening at the hotel.

The following day we headed to Sandringham...but not a Royal in sight. The house, built for Edward VII, is lavishly furnished but retains the feel of a well-loved home. The grounds are simply wonderful - a place to relax and spot the gravestones that

commemorate the Queen's corgis. The museum was fascinating and the church had a really spiritual atmosphere.

After checking out of the hotel on the final day we headed to Ely. I couldn't resist the cathedral - founded as a monastery in 673 by St Ethelreda, a Saxon princess. Henry VIII closed the monastery in 1539 but it has continued to exist as a cathedral. Something that shouldn't be missed if you ever visit is the museum of stained glass with its fascinating exhibits.

After lunch our excellent coach driver brought us back to Croome. During the journey we reflected on such a wonderful tour - well done Connie for organising another excellent tour and here's to the next one!!

## Holiday anyone?

This year we're heading to Northumberland between 9th and 13th September.

If you'd like to join us contact [croome-events@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:croome-events@hotmail.co.uk)

# Birds at Croome

Around 40 Friends of Croome attended a fascinating talk by Simon Barker (National Trust Advisor on Wildlife & the Countryside). They heard how the balance of birdlife at Croome has changed over the past 10 years as a direct result of the renewal and restoration of the landscape and the development of the Wetlands on the Estate. He explained how and why a few species had declined in numbers whilst others had thrived and benefited from the changes.

It was interesting, and somewhat surprising, to learn that the following are now amongst the birds who reside or are often seen in transit at Croome:-

Barn Owl; Grey Heron; Peregrine Falcon; Shoveler; Canada Geese; Hawfinch; Pintail; Snipe; Cuckoo; House Martin; Redshank; Stonechat; Gadwall; Lapwing; Reed Bunting; Stock Dove; Green Sandpiper; Lesser Spotted woodpecker; Reed Warbler; Teal; Greenshank; Little Egret; Sedge Warbler; Tufted Duck; Green Woodpecker; Meadow

Paul Stanley  
Friends of Croome Committee

Pipit; Shelduck; Wigeon.

Simon informed us that, over the last seven or eight years there have even been rare sightings of a Great Grey Shrike and an Osprey (on migration north) through the Park ..... so the future is looking rosy for the birds at Croome.



Tufted duck (c) Wendy Carter

# Recollections of a Land Agent - part 4

John Henderson  
Chairman, Friends of Croome Park

There was a very fierce storm at New Year in 1976, causing widespread damage to the roofs of houses, farm buildings and in the woods. It blew down a massive cedar on the right of the Temple Greenhouse, fortunately away from the building. Some years later, I arranged for its neighbour on the left to be felled, as its branches kept dislodging slates and I feared for its stability too. When this monster was felled, we counted the annual rings - right back to 1760, when the Greenhouse was built. Lord Coventry asked for a cross section of the trunk to be cut to make a table but I never found out what happened to it.

Talking of Lord Coventry, by a curious quirk of law he became owner of the centre block of the Estate and other bits, which his great grandfather had put into trust in 1887. His Lordship let me continue as his Agent whilst I managed the remainder belonging to the Trustees.

The Estate had not been conveyed for about 300 years. It

was a massive task - thousands of ordnance survey field numbers had to be scheduled and areas recalculated where boundaries had been altered since production of the 1904 OS Edition. Seven copies of every large OS Sheet had to be edged and tinted by hand, in pink watercolour for farmland and green for the woods. Philip Serrell of TV fame, now't but a lad then, was seconded from a Worcester firm for several months to help. The whole process took us about five years, off and on. It was a ghastly experience!

His Lordship decided to enlarge shooting on his part of the Estate. Thousands of partridge and pheasant were incubated in the Hospital Buildings, now the Visitor Centre, and reared on the field where the car park is; he made a Shoot luncheon room at one end of the range. So many pheasants survived though, that I received claims from quite irate farm tenants experiencing crop losses from all the grazing game birds.

One Autumn Lord Coventry and

his farm tenants, the late John Stone and Bert Collins, arranged a cross-country jumping course in the Park, with the route crossing Temple Greenhouse cover, not far from the Greenhouse itself. Fortuitously, this magnificent building afforded shelter where a crowd foregathered to watch Captain Mark Philips, negotiate the Course.

Life was never dull under Lord Coventry. He gathered some self-acknowledged experts to drain Pirton Pool, a 25 acre lake near Croome, to de-silt and stock with trout. Not much heed was paid to rules and the first I knew was when I received animated reports that the fields down to the motorway were flooded and fish were floating in the ditches. They had breached the bank with a JCB and made a gaping hole! Eventually, two metres of silt were dug out and spread over the adjoining farm land.

*In the next issue...John gets a new boss and is wooed by the National Trust...*

## Gardens Update

We've been busy as ever during the supposed 'quiet' months. Amongst other things we've laid several hundred metres of hedge, pruned all recently planted parkland trees and carried out woodland work.

Hugh and Justin, the wardens, have been busy in the Wild Walk North (just past the RAF play area) making an appropriately named Wild Play Area. They've made balance beams out of logs, chairs out of tree stumps and den making is encouraged!

I must thank the Friends of Croome for your generous

donation which has enabled us to buy a tractor-mounted post-rammer. We've got 120 tree guards to make at Middle Grove - that's 480 posts to bash - so having this bit of kit will really speed up the job and save us and our volunteers from exhaustion!

As a team we're looking forward to 2012 - as well as hoping for a more normal amount of rain this year.

Katherine Alker  
Garden and Park Manager

Thanks as always to the garden and park volunteers, and to the Friends for your continued support of our department at Croome.



# Croome - an A to Z

Sheila Harris  
Friends of Croome Park member

**A**dam, Robert, renowned Architect. Designed many items inside and outside the Court, including ceilings, fireplaces, the church and the Temple Greenhouse.

**B**rown, Lancelot, known as 'Capability'. Exceptional garden designer and architect, began creating the natural landscape and pleasure grounds from boggy pasture in 1751.

**C**hurch of St Mary Magdalene was built in a Gothic style. It contains numerous monuments to members of the Coventry Family from 1634 to the 8th Earl in 1843.

**D**unstall Castle was designed by Robert Adam in 1765, restored in 2010. He built this Gothic ruin as a folly 1 mile south of the Court.

**E**arl of Coventry – the 6th Earl inherited Croome Court in 1751 and set about renovating the Court and grounds with great vision and enthusiasm.

**F**urniture. The 6th Earl collected fine pieces of French furniture or British pieces created in the French style that were exquisitely carved by the very best craftsmen of the day. Many items can be seen at Kelmarsh House.

**G**rotto. This unusual "cave" was built by 'Capability' Brown beside the lake. It was embellished with gems, crystals and fossils and a statue of Sabrina, the Goddess of the River Severn, holding an urn through which water ran into a small pool.

**H**a-ha. 'Capability' Brown dug two ditches to keep the cattle from straying into the Pleasure Grounds and the parkland; allowing unrestricted views across the scenic rolling countryside.

**I**ce House. This has been recently restored with a thatched roof and is just a short walk through woodland from the church.

**J**ourney of Croome. Since the Coventry family sold the Court in 1948 to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese for St Joseph's School, it has been in the ownership of various others, including the Hare Krishnas from 1979 – 1984, and is

now in the safe hands of the National Trust.

**K**ing George III and Queen Charlotte were entertained by the 6th Earl of Coventry at Croome Court in 1788.

**L**ake. The attractive shrubbery walk starting by the church leads to the large ornamental lake which is joined by a man-made snaking river. Here, magnificent mature trees provide shade and ornamental bridges cross the waterways.

**M**aria Gunning was the Countess of Coventry and first wife of the 6th Earl. Maria was an impoverished but beautiful Irish girl who caught the Earl's eye. She died from consumption in 1759, aged only 32, weakened by lead poisoning caused by the heavy makeup so popular in those days. After giving birth to 3 daughters she produced the son and heir ... the 7th Earl.

**N**AAFI. The first building you enter is now a 1940s-style canteen where delicious dishes will tempt you. In 1939 Croome Court became home to RAF Defford, which played an important radar research and development role during the war. The aerodrome closed in 1957 and an exhibition of the RAF days is displayed in the RAF building.

**O**uter eye-catchers walks are organised around the field boundaries of the estate from where many follies, including Pirton Castle, Dunstall Castle and Panorama Tower can be seen.

**P**anorama Tower was completed in 1812 and designed by the architect James Wyatt who included many of Robert Adam's unfinished plans.

**Q**ueen Victoria is reputed to have visited the Court as a child when she planted an acorn. I wonder if one of the oaks now standing grew from that tiny acorn...

**R**otunda. This spectacular domed summer house appears suddenly at the end of a tree-lined path surrounded by huge Cedars of Lebanon. It has recently been restored and through the windows

you can see the most beautiful intricate plasterwork.

**S**axon Tower is better known now as Broadway Tower and is a popular landmark of the Cotswolds. It is said that on a clear day 14 counties can be seen from the top of this 3 turreted tower. This was a favourite spot of the Coventry family for picnics.

**T**rees. 'Capability' Brown planted specimen trees and exotic plants collected by enthusiastic botanists from all over the world, some of which can still be discovered in the parkland.

**U**rn and statues beside the lake commemorate various important people. There is a fine memorial to 'Capability' Brown with wording to mark his achievements.

**V**iews from many vantage points stretch far into the distance showing the brooding Malvern Hills, green valleys and rolling countryside.

**W**orcestershire This is the most beautiful county of undulating countryside in which the imposing Palladian Croome Court was built.

**S**phinx (with apologies!). There are a pair of very imposing, and exposing, Coade Stone sphinxes guarding the steps of the south front door. You can't miss them!

**Y**ork. The Duke and Duchess of York, later to become King George V and Queen Mary, were great friends of the 9th Earl of Coventry. They planted a tree in the grand shrubbery walk on their visit in 1894.

**Z**eal – Z is for the zeal, dedication and enthusiasm of all the staff and volunteers of the National Trust in their endeavour to make Croome a very special place to visit. Congratulations to them all!

**Fancy coming up with your own A-Z of Croome? We'd love to hear your alternative takes on the place we're all so familiar with!**  
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