

THE FRIENDS OF CROOME



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NEWSLETTER

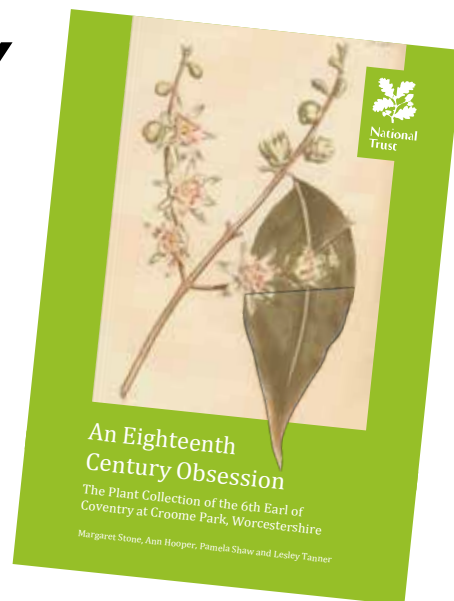
Happy 10th Birthday Croome Plant Research Group

by Jill Tovey

The Croome Estate archive holds a huge collection of bills for plants bought by the 6th Earl of Coventry in the 18th century. He was an obsessive collector, determined to obtain for his gardens the rarest and most beautiful available. When it became apparent how important the collection was, in 2006 the Croome Plant Research Group was founded; its purpose to explore this treasure trove of plant history.

The group's members were mainly drawn from the Worcestershire branch of what is now Plant Heritage – all experts in the field plant history. There are more than six hundred bills from between 1748 and 1800, so using photocopies of these bills, the project began – it was the start of a phenomenal amount of work. Names of plants had changed over the years, after the introduction of the Linnaean naming system, therefore the huge first task was to check and rename hundreds of items. Then it was to compare the dates they arrived at Croome with the presently documented date of introduction. In this the internet was invaluable and hours were spent trawling through websites and links to past publications from all over the world. Then checking, checking and checking again.

Around seven years later it was felt that the time had come when results could be published. Therefore, Margaret Stone, Ann Hooper, Pamela Shaw, and Lesley Tanner spent many more hours writing a lengthy article and producing tables with details of when and from where the plants came to Croome. The result was an academic paper published in the magazine of the prestigious Garden History Society, which was very well received and much complimented by the garden history world. It showed that in the eighteenth century the 6th Earl of Coventry brought to Croome new trees and shrubs from all over the world; among them the first known introductions to Britain of at least 60 varieties. It showed Croome



The front cover of 'An Eighteenth Century Obsession – the Plant Collection of the 6th Earl of Coventry at Croome Park, Worcestershire'

and the 6th Earl to be again in the vanguard of fashion in the 18th century.

The other highly important result of the research is that Katherine Alker has been able to bring back to Croome authentic varieties of plants that once graced the shrubberies and flower beds. Also, research into the varieties of vegetables and fruit bought for the walled garden, carried out by Chrissy Ching, has been invaluable to Chris and Karen Cronin.

Earlier this year, the Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust suggested publication in book form to be sold in the Croome shop, in order that this important piece of work could be appreciated by the wider public. Katherine found a publisher and the Friends of Croome committee agreed to fund the publication, the proceeds of which will be used to buy ever more plants for Croome.

Now, on the 10th anniversary of the founding of the group, with gratitude to the Friends of Croome, 'An Eighteenth Century Obsession - the Plant Collection of the 6th Earl of Coventry at Croome Park, Worcestershire' will soon be on sale in the shop, price £4.00. It is an important contribution to British plant history.

www.friendsofcroome.org.uk

Grayson Perry: The Vanity of Small Differences

by Maureen Shears

Prior to my visit to the exhibition of his tapestries at Croome Court, I knew three things about Grayson Perry: he won the Turner Prize; he dresses as a woman; he appeared on *Have I Got News for You* where he impressed me with his wry sense of humour. My knowledge of modern art was similarly scanty: I have visited Tate Modern, I knew about Tracey Emin's unmade bed and Damien Hirst's cow pickled in formaldehyde. In short, I was an ideal candidate for an intensive course of art appreciation! And that is exactly what I got from Amy Foster-Smith's extremely interesting and well researched lecture on the six tapestries on display over three rooms in the house.

What impressed me personally was the amount of detailed research that went into the creation of the tapestries. In his exploration of the British class system, Perry spoke to members of the working class in Sunderland, the middle class in Tunbridge Wells and the landed gentry in the Cotswolds. His discoveries enabled him to portray the features of the different classes as demonstrated by their dress, possessions and attitudes. The result is a remarkably accurate but nevertheless affectionate representation of 21st century Britain. Perry manages to make us all examine ourselves and our place in society, from those who want to escape from the working class, as illustrated by the child's graduation photograph proudly displayed on the wall, to those whose treasured possession is a cafetière (the chalice of the middle classes according to Perry) to those who are burdened by their ancestry.



Amy Forster-Smith and one of the Grayson Perry tapestries

Taking his inspiration from William Hogarth's eight satirical paintings entitled *A Rake's Progress*, Perry traces the journey made by a fictitious character, Tim Rakewell, from his working class origins to "the sunlit uplands of the middle classes" (Perry's own words) and from thence to the world of the landed aristocracy, before meeting his death in a road accident. His journey is the vehicle for Grayson Perry to explore issues of class, politics and British culture as well as making a moral point: "He had so much money," says the nurse who tended him at the scene of the fatal accident, "and yet he still ended up in the gutter."

Perhaps even more impressive is Perry's extensive knowledge of art history shown by the way his tapestries echo medieval religious paintings and later works such as Van Eyck's *The Marriage of Jan Arnolfini* and Landseer's *The Stag at Bay*.

My visit to the exhibition at Croome certainly made me much more appreciative of what Grayson Perry – and by association other modern artists – achieves through his work. It was definitely worth a visit, not least because the rooms at the house provided a fitting setting for such beautiful works of art. My drive home under a spectacular orange harvest moon rounded off a memorable evening.

Garden and Park update

by Katherine Alker

It's been a busy summer - but I think that's becoming the norm at Croome isn't it? The celebration of Brown's 300th anniversary is in full swing. We have created some information panels in the Rotunda which explain a little about Brown's life and work, his design at Croome and also how the National Trust has restored the landscape over the past 20 years. Ceryl Evans, director of the Capability Brown Festival 2016, visited in July and was really impressed with everything that is going on here.

Visitors are keen to find out more about the Croome story and these panels are perfect for that. Our Brown exhibition in the court 'A Creative Collaborative' opens at the end of September until 8 January 2017, and will give a chance to see some archive items and find out more about Brown's work at Croome.



Katherine Alker with Ceryl Evans in the Rotunda at Croome ©Rachel Sharpe

'Brown at Work' has been a great success with families over the holidays. You can't have missed the big colourful installation on the lawn between the Long Gallery and the river. We worked with Kathrin Böhm, an artist, who suggested the idea of working with the soil to get people to understand how Croome was created. Along with a small group of volunteers' input, the idea evolved into the big work site where people could wear hard hats and hi-viz jackets to dig to create their own landscape.



Liz Turrell, Sue Coleman, Kathrin Böhm, Katherine Alker, Ted Rice, Kiki Claxton ©Jack Nelson



'Brown at Work' July 2016 ©Jack Nelson

Garden and Park update continued...

Excitingly we are one of 8 places chosen to be in the set of 'Landscape Gardens' stamps to celebrate Brown's 300th anniversary. The stamps are available in Post Offices and can be ordered online at <http://shop.royalmail.com/icat/landscapegardens> We had a lot of media interest in this and I was interviewed on several radio stations including Hope FM in Dorset and live on BBC Hereford and Worcester!

We were fortunate to also appear on Gardeners' World on BBC 2. I spent a day filming in July and we featured in an episode in August. I was really pleased with how wonderful the park and garden looked. After the airing we had a lot of visitors saying they'd seen the programme and wanted to see the place for themselves which is great!



Katherine Alker and Harriett Baldwin and a rather large version of the stamp!



As well as all this, the restoration work continues. The Friends of Croome paid for the plinth for the 6th Earl's urn to be repaired last year, and now the urn has been restored and repaired, and will be returning to sit a-top the plinth in the Home Shrubbery sometime in October. It's an important memorial to be restored and the next step will be to research what the plaque on it might have been made of and how that might have looked. The wording as noted in the Hortus Croomensis is as follows:

**TO THE MEMORY OF
GEORGE WILLIAM,
EARL OF COVENTRY,
THE FOLLOWING LINES WERE
INSCRIBED BY HIS SUCCESSOR, Oct. 25, 1809.**

Sacred to him, the Genius of this place!
Who reared these shades, and form'd these sweet retreats:
With ev'ry incense-breathing shrub, adorn'd,
And flowers of fairest hue! His cultur'd taste,
And native fancy bade the scene, around,
Rise perfect: and the muse, whom much he lov'd,
Still joys to haunt it. Crown'd with length of days,
He lived - one wish alone unsated: much
His loyal heart had cherish'd a fond hope
To hail this day of jubilee - and close
His earthly course, in Britain's hour of joy.

Over the next few months we shall be planting out in the parkland again; there are still many more parkland trees to go in, as well as a beech grove in Westfield. Hugh, our Area Ranger, will be managing the installation of Croome Carriageways Circuit; a combination of restoration work to carriageways in the wider parkland and building a few new sections, which will allow people to get out and enjoy a 6.5km circular route through the woodlands and parkland either walking or running, or even on their bikes. We look forward to this being complete in Spring 2017.

There will also be some repair work in the Temple Greenhouse over the winter months. The moulding above two of the sash windows actually fell off earlier in the year; it was made safe and we plan to repair this in November. Some of the slabs in the floor have also sunk. Our structural surveyor advised us to close

a section of the building, and further investigation will take place in November once the 'Capability' Brown inspired Embroidery exhibition has been removed.

In the garden there will be more bulb planting, winter work in the herbaceous beds which have looked stunning this year, and lots of pruning to keep that natural, but controlled look!

I hope you manage to visit the garden and park over the winter to see what we're up to and to enjoy the landscape in what has been a very special celebratory year.

St John family connections at Croome

by Frances Bevan

When the Friends of Lydiard Park visited Croome Court recently we already knew of two connections between the Coventry family and our St Johns, but during our visit I discovered a third.

The St Johns share a common ancestry with the Tudors through Margaret Beauchamp whose first husband was Oliver St John. Her daughter by her second husband, John Beaufort, was Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII. Lydiard House and Park is on the outskirts of Swindon and was home to the cadet branch of the St John family for more than 500 years while the senior branch of the family was based in Bedfordshire.

Barbara St John was the fourth daughter of John St John, Baron St John of Bletsoe and his wife Elizabeth Crowley and became the second wife of George William 6th Earl of Coventry in 1764. It was a thrill for me to stand in the rooms once occupied by Barbara, despite the modern bathroom fittings.

It would appear that the Earl's second marriage was much happier than his first to society beauty Maria Gunning and here we have our second link to the Coventry family.

The disreputable Frederick St John, known as Bully, was the heir to several titles and a great fortune which he set about spending as fast as he could. He bought racehorses, lots of them, and commissioned George Stubbs to paint a few of them, he bought shed loads of Sèvres porcelain and he liked to party. Maria Gunning numbered among his many mistresses.

This was the limit of the St John connections to the Coventry family at Croome as far as I knew, until I visited the church of St Mary Magdalene and saw the magnificent memorial to Mary Craven, wife of Thomas Craven, 2nd Baron Coventry of Aylesborough, who died giving birth to a son on October, 18, 1634.

Mary Craven was the daughter of Sir William Craven and Elizabeth Whitmore and immediately we have a family connection to the St John family.

Mary's aunt, Margaret Whitmore, her mother's younger sister, became the second wife of Sir John St John 2nd Baronet. She also appears on a fabulous memorial in St Mary's Church, Lydiard Park, commissioned by Sir John some three years before Margaret died and more than 10 years before his own death. Perhaps there are still more family connections to discover!



The effigy of Margaret Whitmore on the St John tomb in St Mary's Church, Lydiard Park

Vinery uncovered in Croome Walled Garden

by Chris and Karen Cronin

Sixteen years after restoration work began in the Walled Gardens, we were confident that we had discovered all of the secrets that this historic site would ever be likely to yield. At least, that was until a few weeks ago when we began uncovering the remains of the 'Bothy' at the end of the Hot Wall. It was earmarked to become the new public toilet block and a planning application had been submitted for a change of use. Initial ground works revealed a series of underground arches along the back wall, indicating that the structure was most likely to be something of more significance. However, the position of these arches was very curious, being along the back wall instead of the front.

It is well documented that Vineries from mid to late 1800s featured arches at the front of the building. This was accompanied by soil filled external trenches, in which the roots of the vines were planted, and the stems were then trained under the arches and up close to the glass ceiling. So what had we found?

We now know that it is, in fact, the Vinery designed by George Tod for the 6th Earl of Coventry in 1805 which we had previously mis-identified during some earlier excavation work under the current Vinery. It took a visiting family, who were fascinated by the discovery, to actually make the link and put us (and the experts) back on track. Also, thanks to Jill Tovey, we now have a copy of the invoice which came to £141.00.



Chris Cronin and the newly-discovered vinery

In the meantime, development continuing with repairs to the building so please come and check our progress from time to time. work has been halted while we try and find another location for the public loos. However, we are

Croome's Golden Box - a unique experience in ceramics

by Mark Grimshaw



Inside the Golden Box

In 1948 Croome was sold, the 10th Earl had died in France in 1940 and the family trust was no longer able to keep the court viable as a home, and at the same time most of the collection was sold. Some 1,200 objects from the collection remained in the care of the Croome Estate Trust ever since but not kept at Croome. Following a very recent major repair programme to the building and installation of new services, the property will be taking back on loan a substantial collection of furniture, ceramics and paintings. The challenge now is how best to display them.

Bouke de Vries, a Dutch born artist, was commissioned to create an installation incorporating the finest of the ceramics. His Golden Box gives a new perspective on the fascinating objects within our ceramics collection. The former dining room which had been decorated in a very colourful style, with its painted fruits and flowers, during the period the Hare Krishna movement owned Croome, was chosen to exhibit this installation. On entering the dining room, visitors are wowed by a giant reflective golden box, a room within a room which entices visitors to walk through the reflective cube whose interior is encrusted with exquisite pieces of Meissen, Worcester and Sèvres porcelain from Croome's collection. Plates, terrines, vases and teapots adorn its walls and ceiling, allowing close up inspection in a highly unusual setting. The box reflects the viewer, the surroundings of the room and even glimpses of

'Capability' Brown's landscape beyond it – they all become part of the experience. The Golden Box is a unique experience allowing visitors to immerse themselves in a sea of ceramics, and more and more are coming to Croome to experience it first-hand.



A reflected landscape



The Golden Box at Croome ©Jack Nelson

Croome Carriageway Circuit

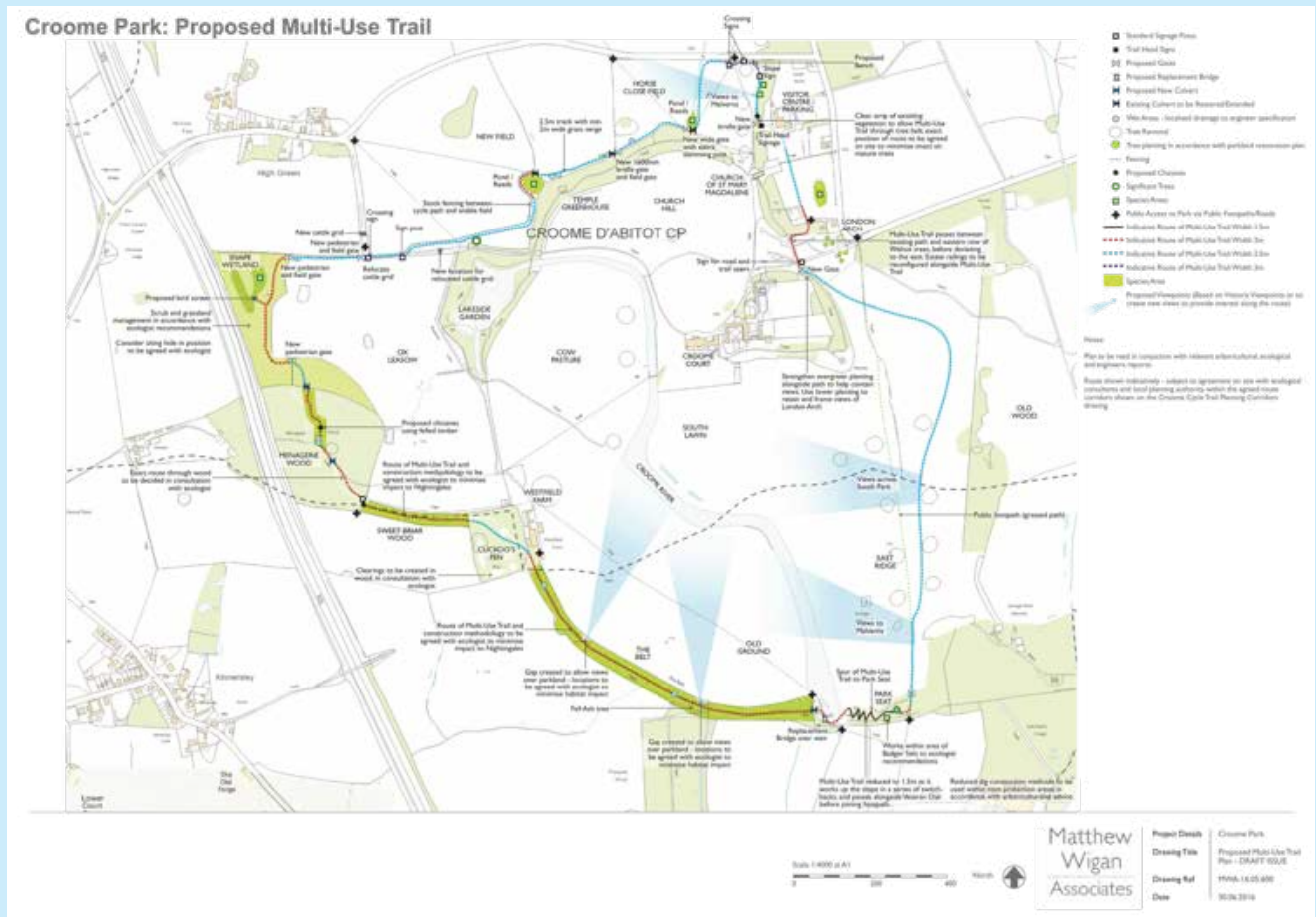
by Hugh Warwick

Croome is one of ten National Trust sites selected throughout the country to build a multi-use track. We are working in partnership with Sport England, who are providing 50% match funding to all of the projects with the aim of making it easier for everyone to get outdoors and active. The 4 miles long hard surfaced track has been carefully designed to take visitors around the outer edges of Croome's 'Capability' Brown landscape, taking in historic views and vistas from some of the eighteenth-century carriageway routes.

The Croome Carriageway Circuit will provide a gentle, route for walking, running, dog walkers, mobility vehicles and pushbikes, offering a family friendly, traffic

free environment to visit the quieter corners of Croome. We hope to open the track in the Spring of 2017.

Over the last 18 months or so, an increasing amount of time has been devoted to the careful planning of the track. I think it'll be a fantastic thing for Croome, allowing year round access to the less reached corners of the estate. We are hoping to invite contractors to walk the route in late August, prior to receiving and considering quotes and hopefully starting the construction work by November 2016. I'm very much looking forward to sharing the wider estate with our visitors, showing them some of Croome's hidden gems.



Route of the proposed multi-use track at Croome

News from Defford Airfield Heritage Group (DAHG)

by Bob Shaw

The RAF Defford Museum has now welcomed 100,000 visitors the target being reached in August this year. The Museum opened to the public in September 2014, so the landmark has been achieved in less than two years. We had expected the Museum to be busy in the first year of being open, then in the second year interest would slacken off. But this has proved not be the case, with numbers week on week significantly up in the second year.

activities to which we are committed by the Project Plan submitted by DAHG on behalf of the DAHG/NT partnership – a video; guide book; outreach lectures; leaflets, RAF Walks and RAF Defford Heritage Day. These tasks are all complete or in hand.

DAHG were also instrumental in securing funding to restore and preserve the former Ambulance Garage to house the Canberra and other exhibits, and the former Mortuary, which provides the Museum with a



Nose section of Canberra in the restored RAF Defford Ambulance Garage ©Kathryn Rudd

One reason for this may be opening of a second restored building with the Canberra nose section exhibit. Also the exhibition 'Women of RAF Defford - Heroines of Croome at War' which has generated considerable interest, especially the stories of the wartime romances of young men and women serving at RAF Defford, and the bravery and skill of the 'Flying Wrens' who flew on radar trials, and endured hazards including encountering enemy aircraft over the sea.

DAHG were instrumental in securing for the National Trust a grant to restore the RAF Defford Station Sick Quarters. Following this, DAHG applied for and received an HLF grant for the fitting out the Museum buildings. DAHG is now completing the associated

vital store. We are now embarked in support of the National Trust in applying for an HLF grant to restore the Sergeants' and Orderlies' Quarters and associated latrines buildings. These will provide multi-purpose facilities for visiting school parties, other groups, lectures, exhibitions and research.

Together with the previous restoration by the National Trust of the main Station Sick quarters buildings (to accommodate reception, restaurant, toilets, offices and second hand bookshop), this will complete the task of restoring and preserving all the historic RAF buildings which survive on National Trust land, and putting the buildings to good contemporary use.

Summer Reading Challenge 2016

by Becky Wilks

For the fourth year running thousands of Worcestershire families have enjoyed authors, actors, musicians, craft workshops, games and the beautiful landscape of Croome. The Summer Reading Challenge in partnership with Worcestershire Libraries and Learning Service is a wonderful initiative to get children reading throughout the long summer holidays and a real opportunity for Croome to reach out to new audiences winning over both young and old to our conservation cause.

Working with Lemn Sissay MBE, Cathy Cassidy, Jeremy Strong, Steve Cole, Tom Palmer, Jonathan Emmett and many others has helped raise the profile of Croome to an audience of readers nationally. As part of the events, bespoke projects have been commissioned such as children's books, poetry slams and competitions. Due to the popularity of the events we have attracted the attention of the National Trust's very own publisher who we are currently in talks with to develop our ideas nationally as part of the National Trust's Children's Book Festival.



Summer Reading Challenge at Croome, July 2016
©Jack Nelson

Anyone who was here on any of the days will have been captivated by the music and laughter echoing around the court, so many happy smiley faces who couldn't fail to be won over by Croome's unique charm. None of this would be possible without the commitment and energy of Croome and Worcestershire Libraries and Learning Service volunteers and staff. Thank you to all involved and we're already looking forward to reliving the magic in 2017. Can we top this year's record breaking figure of 5,223 visitors to Croome for the Summer Reading Challenge?

Surprise Party

by Eileen Clement

On 13 August five generations of the Newman family and friends celebrated Hilda Newman's 100th birthday with a surprise party in the RAF Canteen. Jayne Bosley and her team supplied a lovely afternoon tea with delicious cakes, tea or coffee and Prosecco or Buck's Fizz. Hilda was Lady's Maid to the Countess of Coventry (née Nesta Donne Philipps) from 1935 to 1939 and she had her own room on the top floor of the Court. She has fond memories of this time and was pleased to return to the Court, but did not feel up to visiting the second floor. Lady Coventry enjoyed embroidery and Hilda, who was a seamstress, took up this pastime too, completing a hunting scene recently donated to the Oral History Project. This was displayed in her room and her relations immediately recognised it as it used to hang on her wall. Hilda has made a huge contribution to the Oral History Project for which I am extremely grateful and I was delighted to be included in her celebrations.



Hilda, and her friend Beryl, talking to her grandson
©Matthew Newman



Hilda with friends and family in the Long Gallery of Croome Court
©John Hubble

Siti Khalijah Jones and Croome

by Eric Haris Jones

Siti loved gardens and took great pleasure in cultivating her own. She never failed to appreciate all four seasons and the distinctive beauty of each. From the moment I started volunteering at Croome in 2003, Siti took a keen interest in this National Trust property near our home. She was especially supportive during my five years as first Chairman of the Friends of Croome. She participated in events and activities, except anything involving much walking! Walking for its own sake is not a Malaysian pastime; it is something for mad Englishmen (and Welshmen), as well as others from a cold climate. Throughout my time as Chairman and up to the formal opening of the Chinese Bridge in July 2015, which we both attended, Siti enjoyed playing her full part.



Eric and Siti Jones

My wife had come a long way from Malaysia to marry me. There was a civil ceremony in Cardiff, the city where I had been brought up, followed the same day by a Muslim ceremony in London. Siti's parents' family had come originally from Sumatra, and they and their children, including Siti, lived in a recently developed Malay village, Jenderam. The village was overrun in the Japanese invasion in 1941/42. During the dark days of the occupation, Siti, who was regarded as "a quiet but very intelligent little girl" helped her mother in the paddy fields.

Such was the world some 8,000 miles away from which Siti Khalijah came initially to the Malayan Teachers' College, near Wolverhampton, to teach her own language, combined with a pastoral role. The emergency college had been set up by the Malayan government of the time, because of the instability caused by the Communist Emergency, which soon followed the defeat of the Japanese, as well as a shortage of qualified teacher trainers.

These were important years in terms of Siti's experience of a very different culture, landscape - and, not least, climate. I arrived at the College a little after Siti to teach English. It was only after Siti had returned home when the emergency college closed that I realised I should have proposed to her before she left. Happily, a proposal of marriage in a small blue Air Letter form was accepted. The early years of marriage were spent in flat Essex before the move to Malvern and the Hills, hills which never failed to give us much pleasure over the years.

Siti taught herself English before setting foot in this country. She was not only a dedicated teacher but also life-long student. Having attended a prestigious college for Malay women in Malacca, Siti took an Open University degree while living in Guarlford, a degree combining both arts and science courses. A dedicated teacher, from 1993 until 2015, Siti derived much fulfilment from teaching the Muslim students at Malvern Girls' College, which later became Malvern St. James School.

Siti and I sought to participate fully in Guarlford and Malvern life from the moment we moved to our home in late 1976, and enjoyed Malvern's musical life especially. Siti made many friends over the years, and they have paid warm tribute to her as a Lady and someone invariably smiling, gentle, calm, thoughtful and kind. She was always open-minded and interested in other people and faiths. Not everyone who knew Siti was aware that she was a devout Muslim who prayed every day. She always said that her faith was in her heart. It could be said that Siti lived her faith day-by-day by being the person she was, without other outward expression.

With a Malaysian niece and a friend who met Siti at the Malayan College before I did, I hope to write a book about Siti's life which will tell more about her unusual, even remarkable life. It will be entitled A Muslim Lady in Malvern.

Siti passed away in January this year and Eric would be grateful to receive any memories readers might have of Siti as he works on the book over the coming months.