



# THE FRIENDS OF CROOME



## NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2021 Issue 36

### Croome in springtime and early summer 2021



Above: Swan and cygnets on the river © John Hubble Below: Herbaceous bed overflowing with flowers and foliage © Katherine Alker

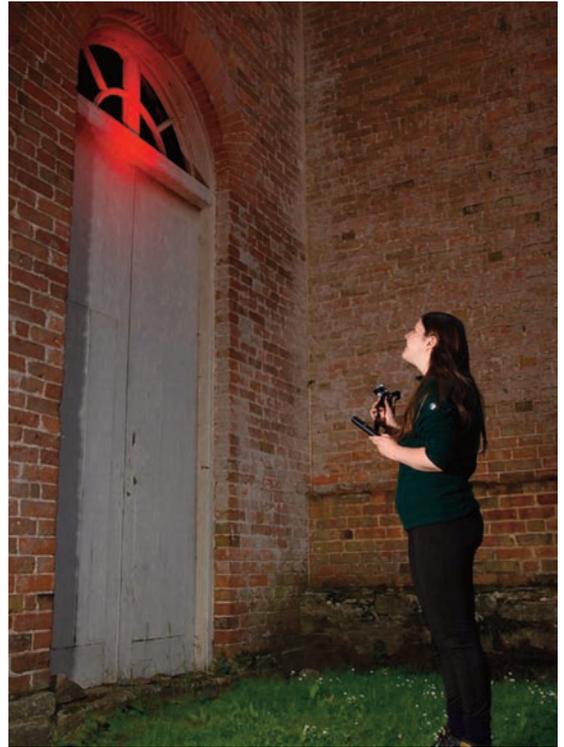


[friendsofcroome.org.uk](http://friendsofcroome.org.uk)





Repairing and straightening the fencing near the court drive © Helen Dorey



Bat surveying at Temple Greenhouse © Mike Glyde



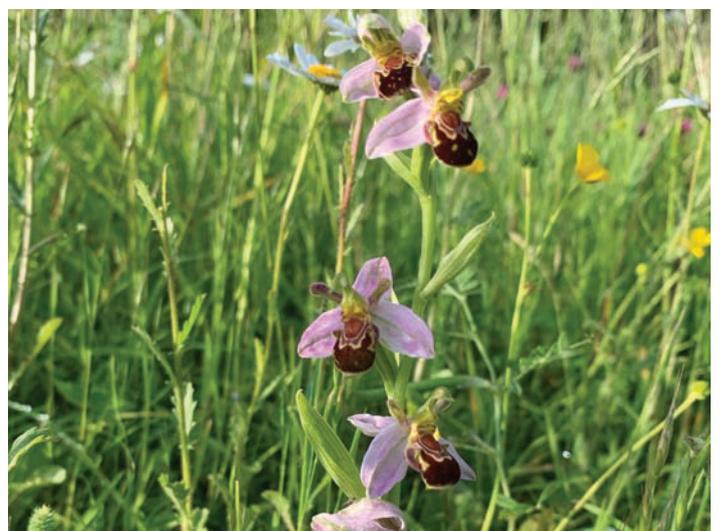
Replacing broken glass at the Rotunda © Katherine Alker



Freshly emerged Scarce Chaser © Mike Averill



Pyramidal orchids in the Evergreen Shrubbery © Mark Harter



Bee Orchids in South Park © Sarah Dunsgate

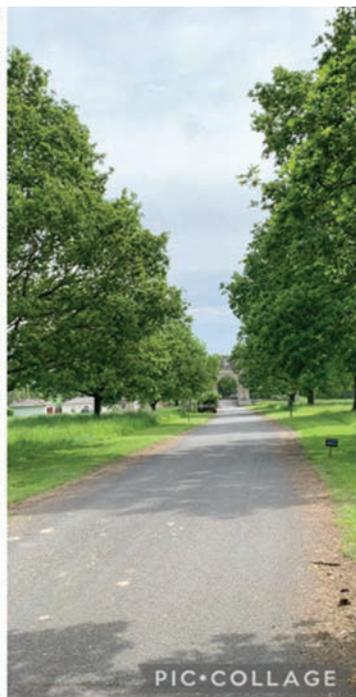




Little Owl © John Hubble



Trimming back the oak trees on the court drive and clearing the old carriage drives through The Belt and Cuckoo Pen © Helen Dorey



# Church and Bells of St Mary Magdalene Croome D'Abitot

by *Paul R Smith*

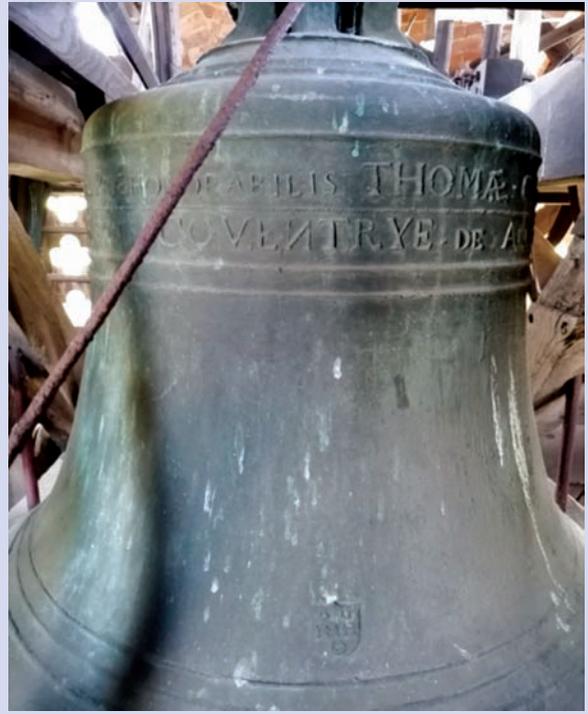
The original church at Croome, then dedicated to St James, is thought to have stood on lower ground to the north west of Croome Court. Following the improvements to the court in 1751-52 by the sixth Earl of Coventry, it was decided to demolish the existing church and build a new one on elevated land north east of the court as an eyecatcher. The present church, being consecrated on 29 June 1763, had the bells from the old building installed.

Each of the six bells are dated and carry an inscription:

- 1: 1812. The Revd John St John Rector. N Higginson, Church Warden.
- 2: 1652. Jesus be our good speed. John Landsion, Church Warden.
- 3: 1652. Singe we meryly toe god on hie. Ralph Goodhall, Church Warden.
- 4: 1651. In time of need god be our speed. John Pensham, Church Warden.
- 5: 1651.
- 6: 1699. Thomas comitis de Coventre. Vicecomitis Deerhurst et Baronis coventrye de Allesborough.

Thomas Coventry (born 1633) was an accomplished ringer. He became 2nd Earl of Coventry in 1699, the date bell 6 was cast. Bells 2,3,4 and 5 were cast by the Worcester foundry John Martin. The heaviest weighing just over half a ton. John Martin also cast the bells at nearby St Denys, Severn Stoke.

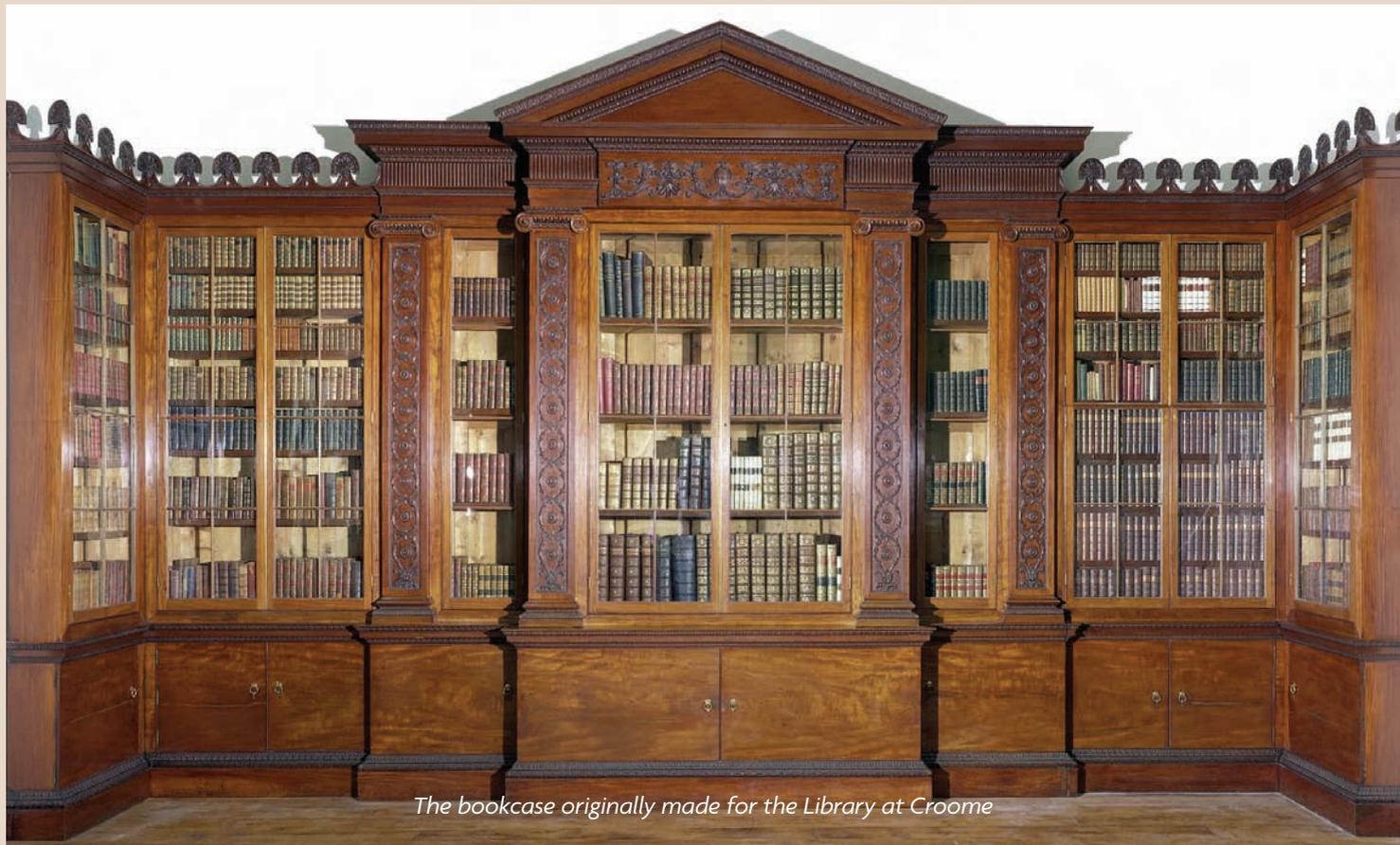
The church was made redundant in 1973 and vested in the Churches Conservation Trust (previously the Redundant Churches Fund) in 1975. Following closure the bells were seldom rung, their condition deteriorated and the wooden wheels which enable the bells to be swung gradually became too weak to be used. A minor patch up enabled them to be used on 1 January 2000 to celebrate the new Millennium.



There then followed a silence of 11 years, during which time the National Trust was establishing itself at Croome. The parkland was crying out for the bells to be heard again so my father Martin Smith and I and my uncle Nigel Davis did many weeks work on the wheels and clappers. On 30 May 2011 the long silence was at last broken, and every Sunday afternoon in the ensuing ten years (Covid permitting), the bells have been rung to the delight of visitors to the parkland at Croome.

A photograph taken in Croome tower on 3 June 2012 following a full peal of the bells rung to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. This was only the fourth full peal rung at Croome, the first being on 26 December 1889. A full peal takes 3 hours of non-stop ringing to complete. The ringers pictured are, left to right: Nigel Davis, Paul Smith, Alan Bagworth, Richard Pullin, Nick Brown and James Mort. Willing ringers are all drawn from neighbouring towers such as Worcester, Pershore, Upton upon Severn, Powick, Malvern, Dumbleton and Cheltenham. It has been a very satisfying project to be part of and it is always an enjoyable occasion to visit the church and to ring the bells.





*The bookcase originally made for the Library at Croome*

# THE RETURN OF THE LIBRARY BOOKCASES TO CROOME COURT

by *Nicola Hewitt*

This year sees the return to Croome Court of a section of monumental 18th-century Robert Adam designed bookcases on a three-year loan from the V&A museum in London. The bookcases are returning on after 20 years in the V&A's stores, for a series of public engagement events. A significant section of the mahogany bookcases remains on display in the V&A's British Galleries.

Thanks to co-operation between the Victoria & Albert Museum in London and the National Trust, the bookcases can now be enjoyed by the public in their original home. The museum acquired the bookcases in 1975 as nationally significant works of art when Croome Court was being used as a school. Their importance to the nation is reflected in the V&A's desire to save them, when all hope of their future public display in Croome Court seemed lost.

In the coming months, the disassembled pieces of the bookcases, weighing several tons, will be painstakingly removed from 22 storage cases in front of the public in the Long Gallery. Visitors can expect to see beautiful carving, complex joinery and very busy conservators and curators at work!

Over the next three years, the bookcases will be carefully conserved and reassembled as part of an evolving display. This is a rare opportunity for the public to see the research and installation of such important pieces of furniture in action.



*Conservators examine and record the condition of a section of the bookcases*

The bookcases, designed in 1763 by Robert Adam, are regarded as the first rank of any designed and made in 18th-century Britain. They were made specifically for Croome Court and designed to fit precisely around each of the Library's walls using his innovative neo-classical, architectural principles. They were constructed by Vile & Cobb, King George III's own cabinet-makers, who were paid the equivalent of seven years' wages of a skilled tradesperson for their work.

*continues on p 7*

# THE BULKELEY CONNECTION

by **Hugh Worsfold**

John Bulkeley Coventry was the youngest son of the 5th Earl of Coventry and his wife Elizabeth Allen. The couple had three sons; the eldest, Thomas, predeceased his father in 1744 and of course the second was George William who became the 6th Earl of whom we all know a tremendous amount!



*5th Earl of Coventry by Sir Godfrey Kneller, 1720*

John Bulkeley Coventry was born on 21 March 1724. He was initially educated at Winchester College from 1731 and later matriculated at University College, Oxford, as did each of his brothers, in 1740, aged 16. When George William succeeded his father as Earl in 1751, he vacated his seat as Member of Parliament for Worcestershire. John was elected unopposed to succeed him in a by-election. He held the seat until 1761.



**Spring Hill House**

For a time, John lived at Spring Hill House near Broadway, Worcestershire. The 6th Earl had the property built and it was intended that the house would be a place that he could escape to from Croome. However, it was initially occupied by his younger brother John when he was MP for Worcestershire. John left the property when he inherited the Burgate Estate in Hampshire from a cousin. Spring Hill House was subsequently occupied by the 6th Earl's son John.



*John Bulkeley Coventry by Allan Ramsay*

Where did John's second name of Bulkeley come from? Well, we have look to his father, the 5th Earl, and his father's sister, Anne, who married Sir Dewey Bulkeley. The family seat of the Bulkeley family was the manor of Lower Burgate near Fordingbridge in Hampshire. Sir Dewey was Sheriff for Hampshire from 1704 to 1705. He was also a member of parliament and here we have another link to the Coventrys. He was returned unopposed for Bridport in 1719 at a by-election caused by the raising of his brother-in-law, William Coventry who held the seat, to the peerage. He was elected again in 1722 but did stand at any subsequent elections. He died in 1735.



The manor and estate had passed to a William Bulkeley of Eyton in Cheshire during the reign of Henry VI. One of his descendants was a James Coventry Bulkeley who when he died left the manor and estate to his cousin John Bulkeley Coventry, son of the 5th Earl. However, one of the conditions of his will was that his cousin must adopt the Bulkeley arms and add Bulkeley to his surname. Thus, when probate was granted in 1764, he became John Bulkeley Coventry-Bulkeley.

John died on the 16 March 1801 and the manor and estate of Lower Burgate passed to his nephew John, son of the 6th Earl of Coventry and Barbara St John. Sometime after 1810 the Coventry family purchased the adjoining manor and estate of Upper Burgate but continued to live in the manor house in Lower Burgate. The family continued to live in the manor house and run the estates of Lower and Upper Burgate.

Towards the end of the 19th-century and in the early 1900s parts of the estate were sold off. Eventually it was all sold in 1939. Thomas Coventry, pictured right, in the 1920s, was a great-great grandson of the 6th Earl of Coventry and lived at the manor until his death in 1933.



*continued from p 4 "The Return of the Library Bookcases"*



*Decorative section of bookcase ready for closer inspection*

The design of the Library, along with the Long Gallery and Tapestry Room, was conceived by Adam as an entire work of art that included all interior fittings and fixtures and reflected the architecture of Croome Court as a whole. The effect of the completed Library was considered ground-breaking.

Adam's ionic pilasters within the central bookcase section are echoed by the ionic frame of the Library's Venetian window. The honeysuckle motif in the cresting also reflects Adam's design for the Library's ceiling plasterwork. Adam based the elements of these monumental furnishings on the stone architecture of ancient Greece and Rome.



*Princess Sophia Duleep Singh with her animals*



# Lady Anne Blanche Alice Coventry and Princess Sophia Duleep Singh

by **Maggi Davis**

“The death occurred yesterday, at the age of 91, of the Earl of Coventry at his Worcestershire seat, Croome Court... It is understood that the only members of the family who were present at the bedside when the Earl died were Lady Coventry, Princess Duleep Singh, and the Hon. William Coventry.”

This death notice stood out for me. Why would a Sikh Princess be in attendance at the deathbed of a member of the English Aristocracy? The Princess at the Earl's bedside was his third daughter Anne Blanche Alice. Her status as a Sikh Princess was through her marriage to Prince Victor Albert Jay Duleep Singh of Lahore. Victor's father became the Maharaja of Punjab in 1843 when he was just five years old, but the Punjab was subsequently annexed in 1849 (a source of deep bitterness) and Queen Victoria took possession of the famous Koh-i-noor diamond which had deep cultural significance. The family settled in Elveden Hall in Norfolk.

Victor had been a fellow student at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge of William Coventry; but unlike his friend was admitted to Sandhurst becoming a Captain in the Royal Dragoon Guards. The men also had gambling in common causing them both to become bankrupt. Edward, Prince of Wales, helped to persuade Anne's father that Prince Victor was a suitable match. Queen Victoria was Godmother to both Victor and Sophia his youngest sister. She granted the family a grace and favour apartment at Hampton Court and an annual allowance.

Anne married Victor on 4 April 1898 at St Peter's Church in Eaton Square, London. The marriage was attended by many of the most powerful aristocrats in Britain including the de Rothschilds and Lord Carnarvon (Egyptologist). Queen Victoria sent a bust of herself as a present to grace the couple's house.

Victor dearly wanted his wife to see India, but the Indian Government felt that even Ceylon (later Sri Lanka) where they spent their honeymoon, was too close for comfort. On their return Queen Victoria invited them to a state ball which went some way to placating them for being turned away. In a subsequent audience with Anne, the Queen advised her to take Victor away from London and live abroad in peace. She also told Anne not to have any children. There would therefore be no heir to challenge for the throne of the Punjab.

Anne's marriage gave her a new sister-in-law, Princess Sophia, with whom she had a lot in common. They were both strong minded women. Anne was stylish and Sophia tried to emulate her in her dress sense. Both were interested in country pursuits, horse riding and dogs. Sophia copied Anne in breeding and showing dogs, first Borzoi and then (like Anne) Pomeranians, winning particular recognition for her 'Charming little black Pomeranian, Joseph.' Victor and Anne followed his godmother's advice 'splitting their time between Paris and Monte Carlo but returned to England regularly to attend balls and other social events.'





*Lady Anne Blanche Alice Coventry on the occasion of her marriage to Prince Victor Albert Jay Duleep Singh in 1898*

Sophia grew up with the insecurity of a displaced family and a profligate father. Anne's family had financial issues of their own leading to the sale of the contents of the Tapestry Room at Croome. Both women were aware of the need to stand up for themselves and indeed were willing to flout convention. Anne's marriage was 'The first interracial marriage between titled families.' Sophia embraced daring pursuits, her early adoption of bicycle riding attracted the attention of the newspapers and was frowned upon by many. Sophia's older sisters, were appalled when she took up smoking (a fashionable pastime). She also played in one of the first women's field hockey teams.

Lord Curzon's Indian Coronation celebrations in 1902 gave Sophia and her sisters the chance that they craved to visit India. Excluded from the formalities, the princesses took the opportunity to tour the Punjab, visiting the places ruled by their father. Sophia was inspired politically by Lala Lajpat Rai and took a close interest in the independence movement. She also took the opportunity to educate herself in the history of the Punjab and its language.

Overwhelmed by the poverty and deprivation in India, Sophia began to see herself as a philanthropist as well as an activist. She returned to England with a mission. She oversaw the improvement of conditions for the Lascars who worked in



*Lady Anne and Prince Victor with their beloved dogs*

the London Docklands. She continued her interest in Indian politics but more significantly became an active agent in the Suffragette movement. This embarrassed the Coventry family at times and Lord Deerhurst was keen to get retractions from the press if mention of Princess Duleep Singh implied that his sister Anne was a suffragette rather than her sister-in-law.

Indian women suffragettes are largely forgotten. On the day of George V's Speech to parliament (6 February 1911) 60,000 women marched including a contingent of Indian women. Sophia blocked Herbert Asquith's car as it left Downing Street. Time and again it was too embarrassing to have Queen Victoria's goddaughter arrested and she was released without charge. This 'privilege' has succeeded in sidelining Sophia's importance in the movement. She was a close ally of Emmeline Pankhurst and was central in many suffragette direct actions. Sophia was also part of The Women's Tax Resistance League which led to her having her jewellery confiscated on more than on occasion. Each time suffragettes swamped the auction room and bought back the jewels for their rightful owner.

When war was declared Sophia began to mobilise Indian women to raise money to support Indian soldiers who had been sent to Europe ill equipped for the climatic conditions. She also nursed troops at Brighton Pavilion. Many were amazed

to see the Indian Princess and were delighted to receive the signed photographs and mirrors that she gave them.

“When Lady Coventry wrote a letter to the Worcestershire Advertiser in May 1917, in praise of the special contribution made by the women of the county to the war effort, she could be justly proud of the role played by her own family.” In France her daughter Anne was doing her own work for the war effort. In both world wars Anne received medals from the French government. Having moved to France to avoid the stigma of bankruptcy, it was from here that news came to Sophia of the death from a heart attack of her brother Victor on 7 June 1918. He was buried in the Cimetière de Monaco, high on a hillside overlooking his beloved Monte Carlo. During WWII Sophia lived in Penn, Buckinghamshire, taking in refugees and became a special godparent to her housekeeper Bosie’s child. She never married and like Anne didn’t have children

of her own. WWII was harsh for Anne. In December 1940, she was imprisoned by the Nazis because she held British papers. Cold and harsh conditions were suffered in the prison camp. In 1941 Anne was released as she was over 60. She survived by selling her furniture and jewellery. Anne died in France in 1956 and was buried with her husband in Cimetière de Monaco. Sophia had died peacefully in her sleep on 22 August 1948.

Maggi Davis

<sup>1</sup> Newspaper Cutting (unknown newspaper) - March 13 1930. Chris O'Donnell, Facebook, 13 Mar 2021; <sup>2</sup> Making Britain <https://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/sophia-duleep-singh> accessed 24 July 2021; <sup>3</sup> Anita Anand, *Sophia*, Bloomsbury, 2015. p136; <sup>4</sup> 'I am project' — thanks to Nicola Hewitt. <sup>5</sup> <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/croome/features/did-you-know/>; <sup>6</sup> Mirza, Heidi Safia. “CHAPTER 14: Postcolonial Subjects, Black Feminism, and the Intersectionality of Race and Gender in Higher Education.”; *Counterpoints*, vol. 369, 2009, pp. 233–248. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/42980391](http://www.jstor.org/stable/42980391). Accessed 25 July 2021; <sup>7</sup> Catherine Gordon, *The Coventys of Croome*, 2000 p. 195.



Princess Sophia Duleep Singh selling “The Suffragette” outside Hampton Court Palace, where she had a suite of apartments



**THE WORCESTERSHIRE TEAM AND THE EARL OF COVENTRY, 1927**  
*Back Row:—C. Preece, J. B. Higgins, C. V. Tarbox, J. MacClean, H. L. Higgins, H. O. Hopkins, L. E. Gale.*  
*Seated:—Fred Root, M. K. Foster. The Earl of Coventry, “Dick” Pearson, The Hon. J. B. Coventry.*

# The Cricketing Coventrys

## Part One: The 9th Earl

by **Clive O'Donnell**

The Coventry family has had a long and illustrious association with Worcestershire County Cricket Club and cricket in general, at all levels of the game from the test match arena to the village green. The first cricketer of note was the 9th Earl, George William, (1838-1930). He became a member of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) in 1856, at the age of 18, the year in which he played his first game at Lord's for the I Zingari club against the Household Brigade.

That summer cricket matches arranged by the Earl were reported in the local Worcester press. In September, a party of 'Worcester gentlemen' travelled to Croome to take on an XI of Severn Stoke Cricket Club, including the Earl and Mr W Coventry. Despite the long grass and the uneven ground on the field below the Panorama, a good game was played with a comfortable victory for the visitors. 'A capital luncheon' was provided at the Boar's Head.

In 1859 George William was elected President of MCC, 'the woolsack of cricket', the youngest office holder over a period of nearly 200 years from CJ Barnett in 1825 to Kumar

Sangakkara in 2021. The Earl played occasionally for the MCC as well as for various parliamentary elevens and other representative sides. He was known as a 'hard, slashing hitter and slow lob bowler'.

On 3 March 1865, just over a month after his marriage to Lady Blanche Craven, the Earl of Coventry was present at a meeting in Worcester at The Star Hotel (now the Whitehouse) by Foregate St. Station, at which the Worcestershire County Cricket Club was formed. He was one of the founding committee members under the presidency of Lord George Lyttelton.

He played regularly for the newly formed county club for the next decade or so. In 1868 he was in the Worcestershire 22 that defeated the United South of England, a side that included a 20-year-old WG Grace, at Boughton Park by 57 runs. George William had the dubious distinction of being stumped in both innings by different wicket keepers. The bowler on both occasions was England's oldest test debutant, James Southerton who took 24 wickets in the match. The umpire who gave the Earl out was the famously named Julius Caesar.



*George William, 9th Earl of Coventry (1838-1930)*

That same summer the Earl opened the batting for the MCC in a much-heralded game at Lord's against the touring Australian Aborigines. Creating great interest wherever they played the tourists, hampered by the absence due to illness in the second innings of their best batsman, Bullocky, lost a closely contested game by 55 runs. The Earl was bowled by Mullagh for 25 in the first innings and by Cuzens for 11 in the second. In 1871 he hit 94 for the Gentlemen of Worcestershire against the Gentlemen of Herefordshire on Widemarsh Common in Hereford. It wasn't the start of a run of form though, as he followed up his big score with five consecutive ducks!

When the annual Boughton Park 'cricket week' was first established in 1872, the Earl was a supporter of the event and an occasional participant. In August, 1876, having played for

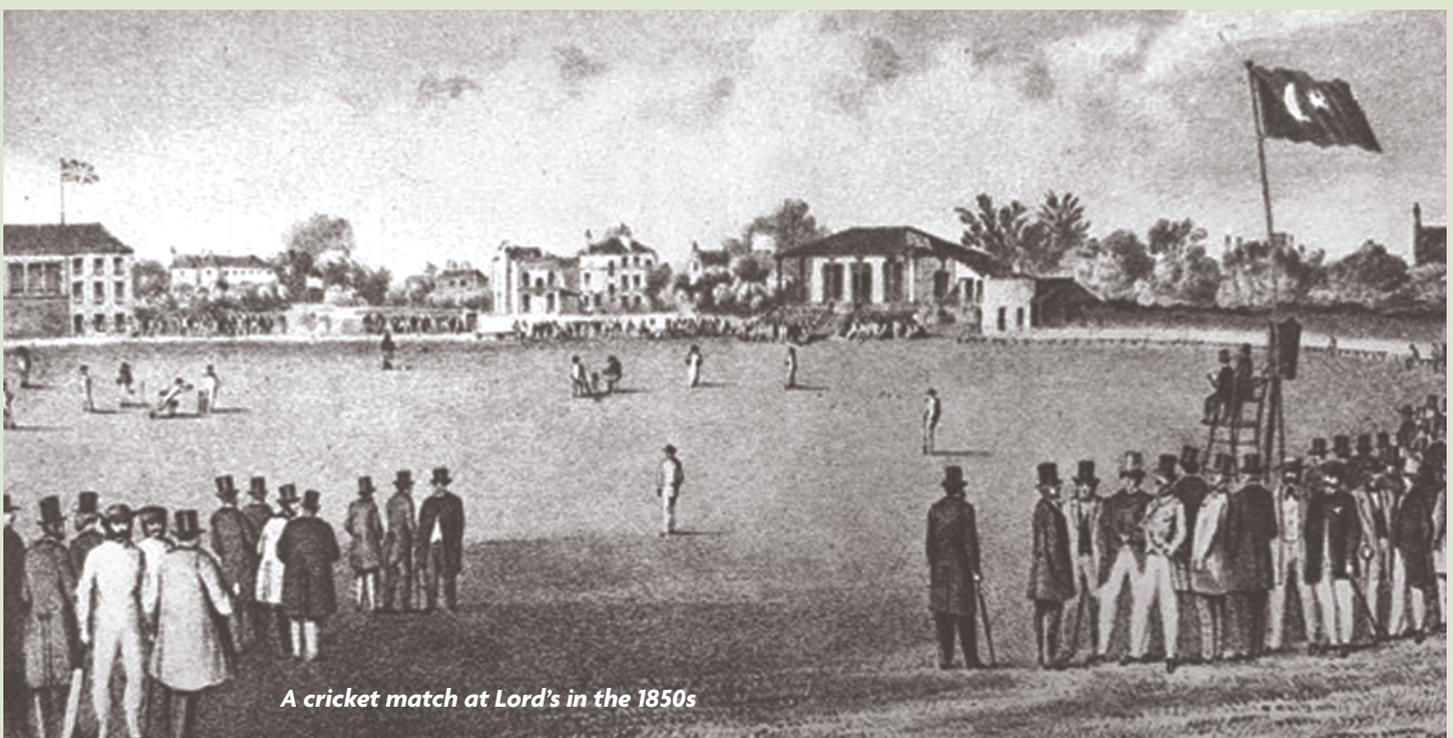
Worcestershire against the Free Foresters at Boughton, he invited the Worcestershire side to play his own XI at Croome a week later. The country was in the grip of a heatwave with temperatures in excess of 30C and swimming races in the Severn. Batting first Worcestershire scored 122, with the Earl taking three wickets as well as three catches. Lord Coventry's XI could only muster 68 all out in reply, the Earl contributing the second highest score of 13. There was time for the visitors to have a second innings, which wasn't part of the main match, which Worcestershire won by 54 runs. Viscount Deerhurst, who was in the Worcestershire XI, opposed to his father, failed to trouble the scorers in either innings!

In 1877 the Earl assumed the Presidency of Worcestershire CCC, a post he was to hold initially for 30 years until 1907, a period in which the county side won the Minor Counties Championship four years running and was elevated to first class status in 1899. On a number of occasions, when the club was in financial difficulty, he helped to balance the books with generous donations. He was President again in 1920 and from 1925 until his death in 1930. He maintained a keen and active interest in cricket at New Road well into his 80s. In the team photograph on p11 taken in 1924 (not 1927 as captioned) he was mortified to be wearing a countryman's flat cap as he did not have his trademark tall silk hat with him. He insisted he sat next to his favourite cricketer, Dick Pearson, a professional who had given Worcestershire sterling service over a twenty-five-year period.

He lived to see his grandson, John Coventry (who will feature in a future article) assume the captaincy at New Road, in the season before he died in March 1930. At the joint funeral of Lord and Lady Coventry, there were many tributes to the Earl including one from the County Club. A wreath from the MCC said 'A tribute to an ex-President and in affectionate remembrance of the oldest member'.

It's arguable whether cricket featured as highly in the Earl's sporting interests as country pursuits and horse racing, but he certainly left his mark in a positive way on our summer game.

*Clive O'Donnell*



*A cricket match at Lord's in the 1850s*