

THE FRIENDS OF CROOME PARK



AUTUMN 2010 ISSUE 13

NEWSLETTER



Photos: John Hodson

Something in the water...

John Hodson
Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

Many visitors to the park this summer will have noticed the large amount of algae on the lake and river.

Algae occur in many forms and are present in most water bodies - becoming obvious when ideal growth conditions simultaneously occur.

Most of us have forgotten the hot dry spring and early summer that helped trigger the algal growth. Algae thrive in sunlit, warm shallow water; you may have noticed that in the shade of overhanging trees the water was free of algal mats and the water was extremely clear.

A major factor in its rapid growth is agricultural runoff, something Brown couldn't contemplate when planning a reflecting lake. Algae uses chemicals such as nitrogen and phosphorous (in artificial fertilisers) in the same way

that arable crops do.

When any one of these factors disappear the algae dies off; its presence this year doesn't mean it will occur in such profusion again. Trying to remove it by hand would be futile and soul destroying as it is capable of multiplying faster than it can be removed.

All is not doom and gloom as this year the lake hosted an extremely rare insect: small red-eyed damselflies spend a lot of time sitting on floating vegetation, especially algal mats.

First found in Britain on the Essex coast in 1999, they were locally abundant in the southeast by 2002 and have since spread west and north.

The first Worcestershire record occurred in 2006 at Ryall when up to 8 individuals were found. Nothing much was then seen until this year when a few were seen at Ipsley Alders

Nature Reserve in Redditch.

At Croome they were first seen at Snape Wetland on 8th August followed by huge numbers on the Croome River. The species was observed along the entire length of the river and the population was estimated to be in excess of 200. Egg laying was observed and it is hoped they survive to emerge next year. The last sightings were on the lake on 12th Sept.

Another notable insect in the form of a bumble bee (*Bombus ruderatus*), first recorded in Worcestershire this year, was observed in good numbers in the hay meadow south of Westfield Lane feeding on the abundance of red clover.



£1
where sold

www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk

WELCOME

Welcome to your Autumn 2010 newsletter.

Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this latest edition. There's so much going on at Croome at the moment - and so many memories to be shared. I hope you'll enjoy this latest edition - and perhaps put pen to paper to share some of your own in future issues.

Happy reading!
Wendy

Your Committee:

Chair:

Eric Jones

Vice-Chair:

John Henderson

Treasurer:

Alan Lee

Secretary:

Tony Perfect

Membership:

Diana Skeys

Officers:

Christine Adams

Wendy Carter

Eileen Clement

Graham Evans

Nigel Matthews

Geoff Sherwood

Jill Tovey

Chairman's Note

As I write in mid-September we are looking back on a rather disappointing summer as far as the weather is concerned, but Friends' enthusiasm is too robust to be affected by the very "British" weather and there have been some good days when the sun has shone on Croome. One of these days was Sunday, 8th August, when Michael led a walk around the outer eye-catchers. You can read more about this in Paul Stanley's account on page 9.

The Park was the setting for a highly informative walk in April with Katherine, the Garden and Park Manager. In May Nigel Matthews gave Friends the benefit of his knowledge of "A Changing Landscape". A very enjoyable May holiday in Kent and a visit to Compton Verney in July gave members the opportunity to explore further afield and to compare other properties with Croome.

Our President, Sir Roy Strong, spoke to Friends at the reception before a successful "Rising Stars" concert in late June. We're also grateful to Sir Roy for agreeing to be one of the speakers at an important National Trust fundraising dinner to be held in the Court in November. We are fortunate to have a distinguished President who is so willing to support the Friends and the Trust.

We look forward to other Friends events to come, including the annual and very popular visit to the Walled Garden, a quiz evening in October and, in November, a talk by Leonard Edwards, "The Croome I grew up with". We hope that Leonard and future speakers will have the assistance in the acoustically difficult Canteen of a new PA System which the Friends intend to purchase.

The Oral History Project continues to flourish and a new and different



Our Patron & President at the Rising Stars concert in June

enterprise was launched over the August Bank Holiday weekend. With the help of a band of willing Friends volunteers, a second-hand bookstall made a modest but significant profit which encourages us to look forward to a more permanent "shop" where we can extend what Croome has to offer visitors while at the same time raising funds to assist the work of the property.

The Croome we enjoy today is largely the outcome of the inspiration and imagination, above all, of the 6th Earl, 'Capability' Brown and Robert Adam and their ability to see Croome in the round while set in a wider landscape. Just as Brown no doubt looked out to the Malvern Hills, for example, and saw beyond the Park he was to create, so I hope we can follow his eyes and vision, seeing the British countryside we are blessed with in a rounded and holistic way; our National Parks need to be safeguarded, our wildlife and our coastline protected and the rural way of life understood and appreciated. Croome, which is cared for so lovingly, should remind us of all that is part of our precious national heritage and is beyond the property's confines but deserves the same care and appreciation.

Eric H. Jones

Chairman, Friends of Croome Park
September 2010

Patron: George Coventry (13th Earl of Coventry) President: Sir Roy Strong

Spring Break

Nick George
Friends of Croome Park member

This year's spring holiday was a very happy affair, well arranged by Connie with her usual thoroughness.

We visited eight properties from very grand houses and castles to beautiful gardens, many of which were owned by the National Trust. We all had opinions as to which we liked most - they all had different things to admire and were very interesting.

Our hotel was on the hillside above Maidstone - the evening breeze was very welcome as the temperatures during the day were in the upper 20s! The accommodation was very good and the staff most helpful.

This is the second holiday I've been on with the Friends and I look forward to others in the future. The holidays are really enjoyable so why not come discovering new places and joining a group of people with similar interests?



Events - join in!

A reminder of our autumn events ...

Wed 20th Oct, 7.15pm - 1940s Canteen
Quiz evening with Paul Stanley

Wed 10th Nov, 7.15pm - 1940s Canteen
"The Croome I grew up with"
talk by Leonard Edwards whose father was
caretaker at Croome
(followed by finger buffet)



*Dates for your New Year diary
(booking forms available from
mid-November) ...*

Tue 18th Jan 2011
Festive meal

Wed 16th Feb, 7.15pm - 1940s Canteen
"The Story So Far"
talk by Sarah Kay, Project Curator,
Croome Court

Sat 26th & Sun 27th Feb
Tour of Croome Court
with Michael Smith

Thur 24th Mar
AGM

Membership renewals

Alan Lee
Treasurer, Friends of Croome Park

A number of friends have asked if it is possible to renew membership directly into the Friends bank account, avoiding the use of cash or cheques.



Well the simple answer is YES.

Both Standing Orders and

Direct Bank Transfers are available.

Any Friend wishing to use either method can contact me ALAN LEE on 01386 750498 or email deffordalan62@tiscali.co.uk.

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

Getting into a scrape...

Sarah Kay
Project Curator, Croome Court

Annabelle Monaghan, a painting conservator, is coming to Croome in the next few months to open up some paint 'windows' in the Dining Room.

This involves, in a limited and controlled way, carefully and gradually removing successive layers of paint right back to the substrate of wood or plaster to see, literally, how many layers and colours there are.

The aim is to help us understand, in a very physical and visual way, the evolution of the Dining Room's decorative schemes. But we also want to use the work as a visitor engagement opportunity and to whet people's appetite for what this exercise can reveal about the evolution of the Court's decoration.

We have chosen the Dining Room to start with because it is of course the space where we are encouraging visitors to have the debate with us about the notion of 'Taste' and, in particular, what it might mean in relation to the present Hare Krishna picking-out of the 18th century Rococo plasterwork. Some people feel this is a travesty and is ruining what is arguably the best Vassalli plasterwork in the house. Others find it pretty, fun and a perfectly relevant part of the Court's long and varied history. (By all accounts, the Hare Krishnas undertook the work 'with great sincerity and respect).

Both standpoints are valid and whichever camp you fall into, what is certain is that the room's current paintwork provides a useful and stimulating talking point, causing some heated and passionate debates. This is great and goes to show how much people care about Croome and how fascinating, and important, its story is.

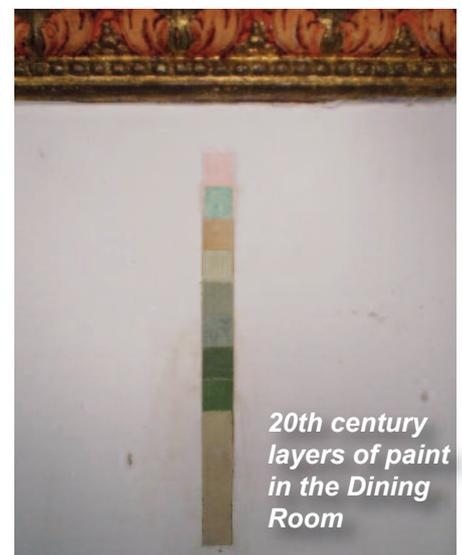
We already know from documentary sources that there is a long history of green in the room. In the 1930 Inventory on the death of the 9th Earl of Coventry, it was referred to as The Green Dining Room and an early 1900s reference describes 'the lovely dining room with its exquisite garlands and flowers on pale green walls'.

As a result of Annabelle's investigations we hope to gain a much better understanding of what the room looked like historically, certainly in paint terms. We can bring together the physical clues with the documentary evidence and build up the historical picture. If we take things a step further we can examine cross-sections of the layers under a microscope, identifying pigments and layers of dirt and attributing dates to those layers.

However, Annabelle's present work will only be a beginning. She will be opening up her paint windows in a few selected areas, not the whole room. We have to be careful

about jumping to premature conclusions because paint layers can vary in different areas. For example... Did the painter happen to clean off his brush on a particular patch of wall and in so doing put more paint on it? Was this part touched-up when it got marked or damaged? Did they test out different colours on this area? So we try to select protected or higher-up areas for examining the layers, where they are less likely to have been interfered with. But we also of course want them to be visible to our visitors.

We are planning this exercise as a taster of the kind of work we will be doing more extensively throughout the Court in view of visitors once we get underway with our funding for restoration and conservation work. There'll hopefully be lots more fascinating investigation to come...



20th century layers of paint in the Dining Room

Pirate ancestry

Sheila Harris
Friends of Croome Park member

Maria Gunning, the Irish beauty who married the 6th Earl of Coventry, had an illustrious pedigree as she was directly descended from the powerful and formidable 16th century Irish Pirate Queen, Grace O'Malley (b1530 in Co Mayo). Grace became a legend in Irish history with poems, ballads, a musical and many books written about her.

Maria's bloodline to Grace O'Malley is traced through her mother Bridget's line who was the daughter of the 6th Viscount Mayo, Theobald Bourke. He inherited a title that had been passed down from his great great grandfather Tibbott Bourke. Tibbott (b1567) was the third son of Grace, born on a galley on the high seas, who became as famous as his mother in political Irish

history. He was knighted by James 1 in 1603 and created Viscount Mayo by Charles I in 1627.

A best-selling biographer of both Tibbott and Grace O'Malley is historian Anne Chambers who has written extremely detailed accounts of their lives in the restless, turbulent times in which they lived.

Oral History ... life on the base

Eileen Clement
Oral History Co-ordinator

A trip to Bhaktivedanta Manor, the Hare Krishna headquarters, in June this year was fascinating and led to several more contacts with devotees who were at Croome. Interesting memories of this period will emerge in due course. Recordings made since 2007 are being edited and further excerpts will be available by the end of this year.

As RAF Defford celebrates its 70th Anniversary I thought it appropriate to recall one or two of Ken Ashenden's reminiscences of his time as an electrician at Defford in 1947/48:

"There were snow drifts of six foot at Boscombe Down on either side of the road and it was one of the worst winters I can remember. I got on the train for Worcester, hopefully to arrive at Defford, but it didn't go any further than Cheltenham. I was stuck at Cheltenham in the evening in full kit wondering what to do. I slept in the waiting room at the railway station, which you

could do in those days because there was always a fire in the waiting room. I put my kit down on a bench seat in this empty waiting room and dozed off. I was awoken through the night and the place was full of ex servicemen or servicemen going here, there and everywhere. About five or six the train, which was still delivering the milk, came and I got on it and arrived at Defford Railway Station. From there I was taken in one of the Air Ministry vehicles to the RAF station at Croome. The billets where we slept and ate were

fairly close to the Marble Arch.

"This Saturday night a crowd of us went to this Monkey House just to try the cider, green stuff it was in those days and from there on we decided to go to the Oak and have a game of darts and I play the piano as well and we had a nice sing song. We all had our bicycles supplied by the Air Ministry and, of course, we had to cart these bikes back up the fields about eleven o'clock with cider and beer inside us and we had to get up early in the morning on Sunday for church parade. When I woke up in the morning I looked at my uniform and it had got cow muck all over it!

"Static pools, they called them, were built all over the place as a reserve fire fighting source of water where there wouldn't otherwise be any. This one was about fifty yards from the Officers' Mess and, occasionally, if the weather was right and we fancied it we had a dip in there."



RAF Defford at 70

The annual RAF Defford Reunion took place in Croome Court on Saturday July 17th, as part of the National Trust's "RAF Defford at 70" themed weekend (July 17th and 18th) at Croome Park. The occasion also served as a public launch for The Defford Airfield Heritage Group..

Bob Shaw
Friends of Croome Park member

The veterans who had served at Defford, with their families and friends, gathered for the Reunion in The Tapestry Room at Croome Court to enjoy the event which was organised principally by Graham Evans (Chairman of the Defford Airfield Heritage Group, DAHG) and Albert Shorrock of the RAF Defford Reunion Association. Albert himself is a true veteran of RAF Defford having served at Defford from 1942. A splendid lunch was prepared and served by Sylvia Evans and her team.

The Tapestry Room housed a fine series of display boards by Mike Dean of the Purbeck Radar Museum Trust on the development of aviation radar during and after World War Two, together with a display of World War radar equipment restored by the Electronics Restoration Trust and shown by DAHG member Tony Waller. Other wall displays included an introduction to the establishment of DAHG.

Guests attending the Reunion mingled with National Trust visitors who were also able to see a fine display in the Dining Room by Graham Evans of photographs of the glory days of RAF Defford. Also on display were three paintings presented to the DAHG for safe keeping and display by Lloyd Griffiths, son of Group Captain Frank Griffiths, illustrating "The Walrus and the



Submarine" episode so memorably described by Frank Griffiths in his book "Angel Visits".

Elsewhere, Albert Shorrock's scale model of RAF Defford was on display in the marquee on the South Lawn, where Antony Whitehead and Dennis Williams of DAHG displayed a variety of fascinating relics recovered from the Defford Airfield site. These included Antony's latest prize discovery - an almost intact radome thought to be from a Barracuda. Outside the marquee was the star of the show; the Merlin engine recovered from the crash site of Spitfire EN915 which Group Captain J.A. McDonald was forced to abandon near Defford in 1945 when the rudder jammed.

In a ceremony after lunch in the Saloon, Mike McDonald, the son of Group Captain McDonald, presented a framed copy of the superb David Shepherd painting of Spitfire EN915. This was accepted by Albert Shorrock on behalf of the Reunion Association and passed

to Christian Walker of the National Trust for safe keeping and permanent display by The National Trust at Croome. Mike spoke movingly of his father's time as C/O of Defford and his very hands-on approach to the dangerous work of piloting the great variety of aircraft used for radar trials and development at the Telecommunications Flying Unit (TFU) at Defford.

A second presentation then followed when Bill Sleight, formerly Head of Engineering at TFU Defford, presented to the National Trust a Roll of Honour of those who gave their lives on service at RAF Defford, together with a reproduction of the Memorial Window at Goodrich Castle in memory of the tragic crash of Halifax V9977 in 1942, which killed the gifted scientist Alan Blumlein with all eleven scientists and aircrew on board. In presenting the framed displays to Christian Walker, representing The National Trust, Bill Sleight was accompanied by Nic Shelley who served at Defford and whose brother is among the names listed on the Roll of Honour, which The National Trust accepted to put on permanent display.



Michael McDonald & Albert Shorrock



Christian Walker, Nic Shelley & Bill Sleigh

The displays for the Reunion, mostly organised or planned by members of DAHG, remained on show to the public for the whole of the "RAF Defford at 70" weekend. The event also included a display of WW2 vehicles, a brass band in The Temple Greenhouse, a re-enactment of an RAF Operations

Room in The Long Gallery of the Court and an amplified group with rather good lead singer who performed Songs from the 1940s on the South Terrace.

The weather for the event, with a southerly breeze, sunshine and high clouds, was perfect for the occasion. The only disappointment was the non-appearance of the scheduled fly-past by the Lancaster, perhaps coupled with earlier disappointment that Lloyd Griffiths was not able to arrive, as had been hoped, in his autogiro which was out of commission – like Spitfire EN915 it had lost its rudder!

Altogether a great day and a great weekend. Thanks to the National Trust who were supported all the way by DAHG and by the Reunion Association and all the volunteers who worked so hard to ensure a successful event.



Albert Shorrock, Graham Evans & Lloyd Griffiths

The Defford Airfield Heritage Group

The Defford Airfield Heritage Group (DAHG) seeks to research, preserve and record the history of Defford Airfield, working in full support of the National Trust, in partnership with the RAF Defford Reunion Association and co-operating with The Friends of Croome Park.

The site of RAF Defford was requisitioned from the Earl of Coventry in 1940, and the airfield was built on part of Croome Park to the east of the Coventry family's Croome Court home, with runways on Defford Common.

RAF Defford became the main airfield in Britain for the development of radar during and after WWII. The airfield housed the Telecommunications Flying Unit (TFU), the flying side of the Telecommunications Research Establishment (TRE) which moved from Swanage to Malvern in May 1942. The experiments and developments in radar carried out at Defford were of great significance, playing a vital part in helping the Allies to win the war and paving the way for many electronic applications which we now take for granted.

The airfield closed in 1957 when it was decided the runways were too short for modern jet bombers, and the unit transferred to nearby RAF Pershore. However, a variety of ground-based radar experiments and activities continued on part of the airfield site up to the present day.

The Aims and Objectives mission statement of the DAHG includes a commitment to research, record and preserve the history of Defford Airfield, especially the work of the Telecommunications Flying Unit in the development of Radar.

Activities of the DAHG include:

1. Recording – new written accounts, oral history, and airfield archaeology
2. Research – using existing documentary, cartographic and photographic sources
3. Archiving – accessing, cataloguing and preserving historical material
4. Display – of information and artefacts
5. Publications – articles, books and website
6. Support and encouragement of restoration of early Radar equipment for display and demonstration, by the Electronics Restoration Trust

Contacts at DAHG are:

- Chair: Graham Evans (tel: 01684 295327)
- History, Archives, Archaeology: Dr. Dennis Williams (tel.: 01886 830295)
- Secretary: Dr. Bob Shaw (tel.: 01386 852059)

The activities of the Group are steered by the twelve Founder Members:

Phil Butler, Clive Davies, Graham Evans, Mike Freer, Ron Henry, Stephen Reglar, Bob Shaw, Peter Trevett, Tony Waller, Dennis Williams, Antony Whitehead, Roger Wintle.

Most of the members of DAHG are members of the National Trust and of The Friends of Croome Park.

The DAHG is closely associated with The RAF Defford Reunion Association, membership open to those who served or were employed at RAF Defford, their family members and associates.

Contact: Albert Shorrock, 68 Charles Road, Halesowen, B63 4DD

FRIENDS FORUM

“The Old Flower Gardens” - a puzzle solved!

John Ralph
Friends of Croome Park member

Despite living many miles from Croome I have been a “Friend” for several years, having joined soon after taking part in the Oral History Project. Eileen Clement interviewed my aunty Marge Hemming and me and makes reference to such in the booklet summarising her work. The photograph on page three of the booklet (that’s me!) was taken in 1939 at about the time I was sent from Hornchurch, Essex, to live with my grandparents at “The Old Flower Gardens, Croome”. The latter address has long intrigued my grandparent’s family and their descendants but recent events at Croome are revealing the origins of the place.

My grandfather, James Hemming, was a Forester on the Croome Estate for some forty years and lived at Croome for a significant part of that time with his wife Emily and their family.

My sister Janet was born at the house in 1943 and we both have fond memories of the area. We always felt that the old cottage was linked in some way to the grand Court House a mile or so away but no one seemed to know how. Now it seems the mystery is being solved.

I was contacted a few months ago by Ashley Ryall who wanted to know if I had any knowledge of Croome that might add to his research into the origins of the area in which I had roamed far and wide in my early years. I set down what I could and received a letter of thanks along with a copy of the 1796 “Snape” plan which was also reproduced in Issue 12 of The Friends Newsletter.

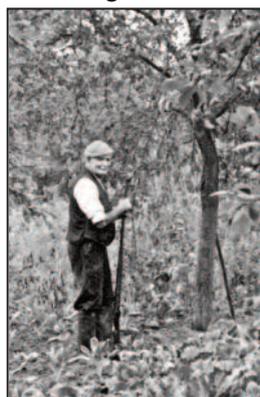
Ashley drew my attention to the location of a building in the North West corner of the map and

suggested that this seemed to match the “The Old Flower Gardens” pretty well. I was excited when I saw the map and feel sure Ashley was right. Even the outline shape is right- that’s how the cottage was when I took this 1955 photo. The house has been extended and altered by the



owners of the property since my grandparents left in the 1970s. The grounds are now landscaped not cultivated with root crops and fruit trees which my grandfather was so proud of. The photo shows him in typical spare time mode and gran tending to her chickens.

Snape’s plan of the Flower Gardens indicates that the latter extended as far as the High Green road and that a large ornamental pond was in place at the time as well as several buildings in addition to the cottage. During the time I lived at Croome the areas to the North and South of the house were densely wooded. I regularly played in the woods; climbing the trees to get good views of the surrounding countryside, including Defford Airfield when it became operational. The only structure I ever came across was an aviary in which Mr Denly, the gamekeeper, raised pheasants.



The aviary was at about the location of the pond and was surrounded by rhododendrons I recall.

The trees either side of the narrow path to the south and near the cottage were mostly yews or similar evergreens while those closer to the High Green road were not climbable (by me!) and more widely spread. I distinctly remember collecting chestnuts from a large tree on the Pirton road side of the wood and sometimes congregating with friends around a stocky multiple trunked tree that stood on the corner of the High Green / Pirton road junction.



My most recent visit to Croome was in November 2009 when I was rather shocked to see that the majority of the aforementioned trees had been removed. I now know why but it’s still sad to see yet another piece of the landscape of my childhood memories disappear along with such things as the iron bridge, the funeral gates and the wide open North Field where I flew my model aeroplanes.

It’s about time I introduced myself to the current owners of the house; my sister did just this quite a few years ago and received a very warm welcome.

In the meantime I look forward to receiving future Newsletters and seeing how the National Trust’s Croome Project unfolds.

A guided walk to the outer eye-catchers

Paul Stanley
Friends of Croome Park member

At 10.30am on a bright August morning a group of 45 intrepid walkers departed the RAF Canteen on a leisurely walk around the Croome Estate, under the leadership of Michael Smith - who optimistically announced, to raised eyebrows from those who know him, that we'd be back by 3.30 at the latest!

During the past two years walks have taken place in both torrential rain and in blistering sunshine, so it was refreshing to have a pleasant mixture of sun and cloud and temperatures around 22 degrees this time round.

The first part of the walk took us to the Ice-House (nice to see it fully restored, with its superb thatched roof), after which we followed the old path through the trees adjacent to the Walled Garden onto the Rotunda. A treat awaited us here as we were given a sneak preview inside the building. Whilst much work remains to be done it is clear that, once the intricate plasterwork has been fully restored, this former 'entertainment area' will be a delight for all Croome visitors.

From the Rotunda we wandered our way round the back of the private residences down to the southern entrance of Croome Court. We understand that it is hoped to open this route up to all visitors next year, thereby providing a new circular walk from Reception to the Court.

Leaving the Court behind us the group proceeded along the river to the Park Seat (or Owl's Nest as it is known to some), before crossing wheat fields and joining the road to Dunstall Castle. The restoration work at the castle is very impressive and it was wonderful to see the towers restored to their former glory. From there it was a short walk to Dunstall House where the packed lunches awaited us in the beautiful gardens of the Clemas family's lovely home.

Fully refuelled and refreshed we wandered down lane, up hill and across field to the Panorama Tower. This for me was the highlight of the day, as we climbed to the top of the tower to take in the wonderful views of the surrounding countryside. It was a delight to see how near to completion this project now is and it is sure to be a star

attraction for visitors over many years to come. And congratulations to Monty, who became the first dog up the tower in many a long year!

Already behind schedule we decided to take a short cut back. Unfortunately the route of choice, which comprised fallow fields earlier in the year, turned out to be fully cropped and impassable in August! Plan B was rapidly implemented, and we all eventually arrived back safe and sound around 4.30!

A wonderful day was had by all, thanks to the enthusiastic and informative Michael Smith; the Friends of Croome Park organisers; Mike & Janet Clemas; the Canteen staff who provided the lunches; and last but not least all those who participated in the walk. Hopefully even more of you will be able to join us next time around.



Photo: Mike Clemas

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

Please email croome-editor@hotmail.co.uk or write to:

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

The deadline for the next issue of the magazine is 6th March 2011

Garden and Park Update

Katherine Alker
Garden and Park Manager

After a very dry June and July, the rain we had in August was very welcome in the garden – although other departments at Croome may feel differently about the wet weather! The farmers managed to get in their harvests in good time and now the fields are greening up well. The river is also 'topped up' to a more normal level.

Recent tasks for the garden team have included hedge pruning and weeding, tidying in the garden, fencing in the parkland, apple picking and strimming. There was also perry pear picking at a certain Friend of Croome – Dr Eric Jones' - house. The apples and pears are taken by the Fleece Inn (NT owned pub at Bretforton) and made into

Fleece Folly Cider and Perry.

In some respects it's the 'calm before the storm' for us as a lot of our major projects take place over the winter; this winter we'll be planting more trees in the Arboretum and more herbaceous plants in the Evergreen Shrubbery. I'm also hopeful that we'll get the Listed Building Consent needed to replace the sash windows of the Temple Greenhouse.

The largest planting project this winter will be the re-establishment of 'Old Wood', an area to the east of NT land, between South Park and the



Thursday volunteers fencing in the parkland

huge white 'golf balls' on the West Mercia Police site. It is currently arable land, but by the end of the planting season next March we'll have planted 5000 trees (hopefully)!

It's thanks to the hard work of the garden volunteers and staff, along with support in terms of donations from groups such as the Friends of Croome, that we can continue to restore the garden and park at Croome to such a high standard.

Walled Garden visit

Christine Adams
Friends of Croome Committee Member



Photo by Tadijo Szczepanik (see www.croome.fotopic.net for more)

Thank you to the enthusiasm and generous hospitality of Chris and Karen Cronin who welcomed 67 Friends into their walled garden in September. Some members had the pleasure of visiting for the first time while others had the excitement and joy of seeing the fabulous progress made on the restoration.

This year's 'wow' factor was the preparation of the Rose Garden with the restored Adam sundial and stone seats, some bought with donations from the Friends. We are now greedily looking forward to seeing the roses planted and in bloom!

Newsletter Distribution...

Can you help us to keep down our newsletter costs?

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

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

Recollections of a Land Agent - part 2

John Henderson
Vice Chairman, Friends of Croome Park Committee

I was overawed frankly by the Agent, David Meyrick, who I suppose was only ten or fifteen years older than me. He had been in the post for eight years and had really begun to bring round the Estate's fortunes, implementing phased repair and improvement programmes, preparing long term plans for farm amalgamations and instituting regular Farm rent reviews. He had coped with the resulting Tenants' Revolt, construction of the M5 smack through the middle of the Estate and much more.

His secretary was Mrs Fothergill and the Estate Clerk was Mr Hartland, who handled all the wages, financial records, tax returns, mapping and other records. Not a computer or calculator in sight, of course, just mental arithmetic, an adding machine and, occasionally, a ready reckoner! There was the Forestry Department and quite a big Building Department, headed by the Clerk of Works, George Kingdom with Malcolm Walford as his Clerk - and there was me.

I had married Cara in March 1968 and we went to live in an Estate house, Mount Pleasant, Pirton; charming and happy but, in the winter, the coldest house I have ever known! I had been Assistant for only nine months but really knew nothing of the business of the Estate; Mr Meyrick had kept this very much to himself. One morning, he called me into his Office. I wondered as usual what I had done wrong; he had that effect on me! He told me that he was finishing as Agent and going to manage his father's estate in Wales. He had recommended to

the Trustees that they should appoint a Firm of Land Agents to manage Croome as this would be more cost effective than employing a Resident Agent.

There were times when the Trustees did not take their Agent's advice! Fortunately for me Mr Meyrick told me to read the files and take over as Acting Agent when he left in September 1967. If it hadn't been for the patience and help of Mr Hartland, Mrs Fothergill and all the rest the Trustees might well have regretted their decision to give me a go. The senior Trustee was Colonel Osbert Walter Dudley-Smith. He was my daily mentor, a much loved and respected man, whose late mother, the daunting Lady Barbara was the eldest daughter of the 9th Earl of Coventry.

I hadn't long been in charge when, one night, gravel was thrown up at our bedroom window by a neighbour telling me that one of the Pirton Church Farm Barns was on fire. I quickly got dressed and rushed there but the firemen could do nothing to save the timber barn range. Soon after, Cara and I were coming home

from an evening do in Pershore and on the turn to Croome the sky was again lit up, this time by a Dutch Barn fire at another Estate property, Allesborough Farm. I witnessed yet another casualty of a fire raiser. I only gathered later that the Police had been enquiring as to my identity. I had been seen at both fires; a secret luxury enjoyed, I gather, by pyromaniacs!

I think it was the summer of '68, when a woman called at the Estate Office. She lived at Deerhurst, Gloucestershire, just south of Tewkesbury, where there was a lovely Estate farm, to enquire why all the elm trees were dying. I rather pooh-poohed the idea but, on inspection, found that she was right.

This was the beginning of the elm disease outbreak which swept through from the west country killing elms, whether young saplings or majestic mature trees. The elm was known as the Worcestershire weed. It was the main species in most of the old woodland and it also provided massive screens where it had taken over hedgerows. The loss of wonderful timber was a

tragedy and instead of a growing capital asset, it actually cost money to clear; but as the dead trees were gradually removed, new vistas began to open. You could at last appreciate better the rolling Croome landscape and the purpose of the eye-catcher features that had long been lost.



In the next issue...John discovers archives and inventories and realises he'll never make it in the world of interior design.

The 'Real' 6th Earl

Jill Tovey
Croome Estate Archivist

So who was this man who created the 'Croome' we all know and love today? What was he like a husband, a friend, a brother, a father?

As archivist, having got to know him through twenty-five years of contact with all he left behind (and importantly, what he didn't leave behind), I've formed certain ideas about what he was like – inside; the first and foremost being that he was an uncompromising perfectionist, constantly striving to achieve an ideal that was in his own head. In this we perhaps get an insight into George William as a brother and a younger one at that, his grief at the death of Thomas was huge, they were so close that he said he felt he had been severed into two. They had been classical scholars at Oxford together, so both were men of high intellect and probably discussed the burgeoning move to towards classicism, becoming to be seen in the mid-18th century as a perfect ideal. It was possibly his striving to bring to fruition his brother's ideas that was at the root of his perfectionism, which went on to colour all his life.

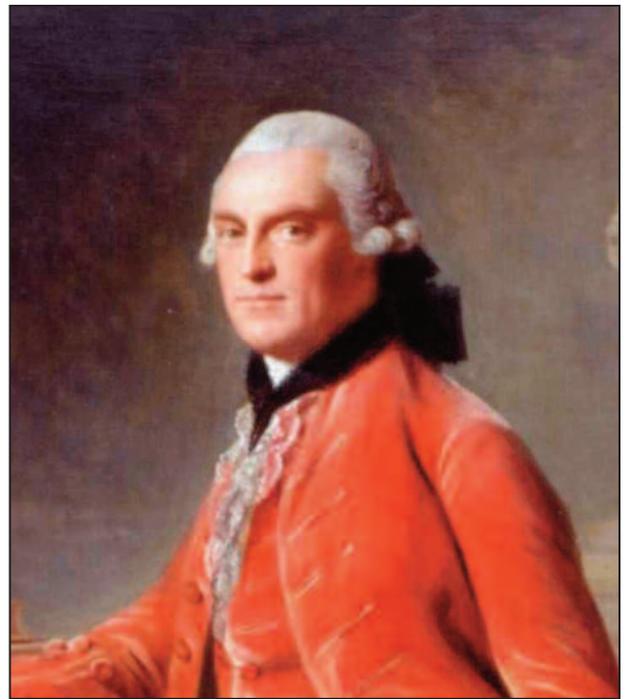
So – he was a devoted, adoring brother. But what sort of husband was this perfectionist? He undoubtedly loved both his wives, no marriage of convenience for him. The first, Maria, was at the time 'the most beautiful woman in London', perfect you might say, so George William had to have her and what man wouldn't be beguiled by her? But, sadly, she didn't match him in intellect and after bearing him four children, she died at the age of 29, possibly from consumption, her constitution weakened by the use of white lead make-up. Four years later he married again and Barbara was very much his

perfect wife (he addressed her 'My dearest life'), they liked the same things and she was beautiful too. They had three children and she was a devoted step-mother to Maria's children and they perhaps needed some love, because they seem to have got little from their father after they reached adulthood.

Sadly Maria's children fell far short of their father's ideals when they all got into various 'social scandals', so he cut them off completely. Even when his son was blinded at the age of about 20, he would not change his mind and never spoke to him for the rest of his life. It seems, then, that he wasn't a very loving father; but this also throws some light on his attitude to Barbara, because his son wrote letters to her for years, pleading that she intervene in the dispute and one must assume that she tried, but all to no avail, maybe because of his utter disappointment in them. It's hard for a man who can control the perfection of material things when he sees no such perfection in his offspring. His devotion to Barbara, therefore, had its limits – he was always in charge and she knew her place; perhaps that's why the marriage worked.

As a friend, we know little of him – he kept almost no personal correspondence, perhaps aware that posterity might make judgements; but we judge anyway and ask why? Just a very private man, perhaps.

It was in his attitude to the creation of the idyllic ideal of



Croome that his perfectionism turned into obsession. He controlled every aspect of it, even when working with potentially powerful men like Brown and Adam, he 'called the shots'. Every bill for the work passed through his hands for approval and, thankfully for us, was filed and kept. His plant collection was second only to that at Kew; there are six hundred bills from London nurseries in the archive, including some first introductions to Britain. He had to have the best of everything and through this became a real leader of fashion of the time; though of course, having enough money helped a lot.

The man I know as the 6th Earl of Coventry then is an intelligent, handsome, rather obsessive perfectionist, powerful because of his wealth and position in life. But there are some things we shall never know about him – did he laugh much, could he be 'fun', could he be gentle and kind? Would I have liked him?.....Probably – in close up there is a certain softness about the face in the portrait, so I think the man inside was sensitive as well as proud and certainly, if his portrait is anything to go by, he could have made me go weak at the knees !