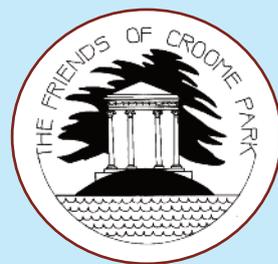


THE FRIENDS OF CROOME PARK



SPRING 2013 ISSUE 18

NEWSLETTER

Croome in New York

Jeremy Musson
President, Friends of Croome Park



*Tapestry Room from Croome Court, Gift of Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1958 (58.75.1-22)
Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

As part of a recent lecture tour of the AUS, I was lucky enough to spend some time in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York. I took particular interest in the 'English Period Rooms' there, which as well as the Kirtlington Park room and Robert Adam's Lansdowne House dining room, include the Croome Court tapestry drawing room. These three rooms together are among the most important and best authenticated historic English rooms in American museums. Having recently become associated with Friends of Croome Park, I was particularly keen to see this tapestry room again.

Such English period rooms were often acquired, especially in the 1920s and 30s, as backdrops against which to display English furniture and works of art. These rooms at the 'Met' might almost be considered as works of art in their own right – especially the richly coloured and feminine Croome Court tapestry room.

Physically, it is found next door to the cool, classical and masculine Lansdowne House dining room – a sculpture gallery and eating room combined – and I felt that the contrast of the two spaces is especially revealing.

The Croome Court room is intimate and warm in feel, the tapestry, furniture and pier glass all contribute to an intense architectural and decorative encounter. It was sold from the house in 1902, and finally carefully re-assembled in the Met in 1958, and it has been well studied for decades - Lord Coventry's shopping trips to France are well documented, as are his discussions with the Gobelins factory. Sometimes in the welter of information, it is easy to overlook the simple experience of the room as an architectural space. It is easy to focus on the detail and the two dimensional decorative quality, or on the elegant Boucher roundels.

Cont. on page 4...

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www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk

WELCOME

Gosh, I'm glad spring seems to have finally sprung. I'm looking forward to long walks in the countryside without having to wear many many layers.

As John says in his Chairman's note, there is a super variety of contributions to this edition of your newsletter - bringing together just some of the myriad parts of Croome's history.

I hope you enjoy reading it and perhaps thinking about how you too can contribute to our continued enjoyment of this wonderful place.

Wendy

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Chairman's

Note

As you work your way through this Edition, you will surely be astounded by the extraordinary variety of interests that contributors extract from a few hundred hectares of real estate in Worcestershire. I love Michael Smith's resumé of the last thousand years (page 7), which really puts into context what a remarkable leap of faith the Croome Estate Trustees, Croome Heritage Trust and National Trust have shown in the newly signed 999 year lease of Croome Court.

There are so many aspects to bringing to life the atmosphere of times past, so that we as visitors and observers can relish for perhaps only a moment, what it must have been like to live in one particular era. The recollections of those who actually lived here like those of Margaret Merchant (page 8) are gems to add to our Oral History Library. Beyond living memory, an authentic view of life lived, whether by aristocratic owner or estate worker can only be built on wide background study, like the research for the Chinese Bridge (page 5) or on Croome Church (page 10). From these pages, you will absorb how much research and collation of facts is necessary to record the history of the Tapestries (page 1) or the plant lists (page 12).

This same application, with the addition of endless imagination, is required now to envisage the next period of development for Croome to define how its history



can provide pointers for scholarship, enjoyment and participation for future generations. They must learn of the incredible work achieved at Croome with such fortitude during the last war, as demonstrated by the Defford Airfield Heritage Group piece (page 6). The heritage of the future is dependent on what good we learn from the past.

We hope that the Friends of Croome Park play their part, including the Oral History Project, so ably established by Eileen Clement, and the exciting Programme of Events, arranged by Christine Adams and her sub-committee. We are proud to provide funds towards projects at Croome, aided by the fantastic proceeds from the second hand book shop. My thanks go to Michael Smith, National Trust Property Manager and vital committee member, his staff and our members, who contribute so much.

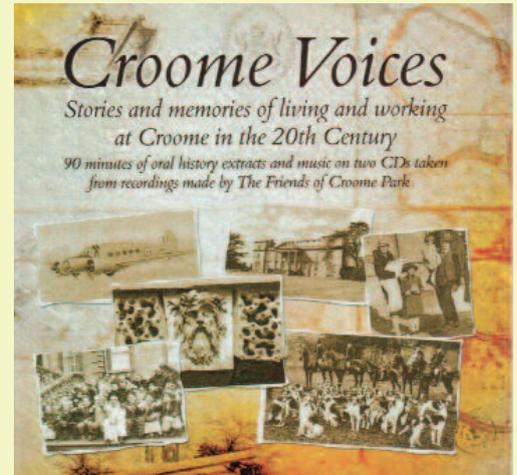
John Henderson
Chairman, Friends of Croome
Park, April 2013

Oral History CDs - Now Available

Our Oral History Project (OHP) has been running for several years. In the process of this project, more than 100 hours of interviews have been conducted and recorded. The many and varied personalities with their recollections and anecdotes are both informative and entertaining.

The best of these recordings are now available on two CDs comprising 90 minutes of listening. The excerpts are beautifully enhanced by a range of sound effects, from background music and birds singing to children playing and the clip-clopping of horses.

You can buy your copy of the CD for just £10 from Croome's reception or direct from Eileen Clement, the driving force behind the OHP and this enterprise (there is a postage charge of £1.20 if ordering by post from Eileen). Please contact Eileen on 01684 891815 or email croome-oral-history@hotmail.co.uk for more information or to buy a CD.



Book Worms

Thanks to all of you who visit and support our second hand bookshop in the basement of Croome Court.

We welcome clean copies of all books - please leave donated books at reception - thank you.

Oh, and don't forget to keep visiting us!

Renewal

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

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

Events - join in!

Thur 25th April, 7.15pm

'Signals Intelligence in World War II'

a talk by Mike from GCHQ (in preparation for the Friends outing to Bletchley Park in July) RAF Canteen

Thur 2nd May, 7.15pm

RAF Defford - Achievements and Losses

lecture by Dennis Williams, DHAHG
(organised by Defford Airfield Heritage Group)

Tue 21st May (6-8pm)

'Continuing the Restoration'

a walk with Katherine Alker, Park & Garden Manager

Sat 22nd June, 6pm

Music in Croome Church

concert by Major Pipework Consort, in celebration of the 250th anniversary of St Mary Magdalene

Thur 11th July, 8.30am-6pm

Bletchley Park

coach trip to the top secret WWII intelligence and computer HQ

Sat 17th Aug, 1pm

Eye-catcher Viewing

with Property Manager, Michael Smith followed by cream teas in the Rotunda

Thur 5th September, time TBC

Sir Roy Strong's Laskett Garden

morning visit to the garden, lunch and tour with tasting at Weston Cider

Sat 21st & Sun 22nd September, 10.30am

Visit to Walled Garden

by kind invitation of Chris & Karen Cronin
Sat - return visitors / Sun - first-time visitors only

Email: croome-events@hotmail.co.uk

www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk

Croome in New York

...continued from front page

Jeremy Musson
President, Friends of Croome Park



For me, however, the fullness of the room's impact is in the overall architectural effect of the decoration, with the Boucher medallions depicted as if hung against a crimson and dark pink background. This scheme was contrived by the architect Jacques-Germain Soufflot (1713–1780), and the decorative painter Maurice Jacques (1712–1784). The Boucher medallions are shown as if they are suspended from a frame-like border of carved and gilded wood. The plasterwork ceiling seems to float above these rich red walls, and the faux architectural framing details within the tapestry create a

fantasy structural effect, as if the occupant of the room stands within a garden tent, in a secluded garden. The garlands of flowers and fruits refer to the plenty of the land and the Arcadian joys of landscape (and landowning).

While I stood in that gently lit interior, and discussed it with the current curator, I became aware, in the corner of my eye, of the reflection in the Adam designed pier glass, which gave an additional feeling of depth to the tapestries, especially to the exotic birds depicted as if flying through the space. Again this suggests a three-dimensional space, as if this room was a structure open to a garden filled with flowers and exotic birds. It is as if one is in a fine, tented pavilion in a fantasy landscape.

It seem the room was first conceived in 1763, but this room seems such a feminine interior that it was possibly devised with a future wife for the widowed peer in mind, or even conceivably to honour Lord Coventry's young second wife, Barbara St John, who he married in 1764 – celebrating her love of

birds and animals, reflecting the actual menagerie and model farm he built her in the park.

The whole playful interior intended as a fantastical stage for a young beauty, to whom Lord Coventry was devoted. It was certainly a space in which she could



hold court, in a shimmering silk dress, pale skinned against the crimson tapestry, most probably poised above a silver tea service, surrounded by elegantly dressed friends. It is wonderfully preserved at the Met today, and a privilege to see the ensemble.

Visiting Croome's Tapestry Room

If you fancy a trip over the pond to the Big Apple, The Metropolitan Museum of Art is on Fifth Avenue and is open Tues-Sun.

You can see more of the collection on www.metmuseum.org and search for 'Croome Tapestry Room'



Photos; Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Gift of Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1958 (58.75.1–22)

Get Involved

Your committee needs you! You don't have to do anything now but we'd love it if you'd sit down and contemplate giving us a hand.

Several committee members are due to stand down in 2014 and we need your help. If you can attend 4-6 meetings a year and help out at some of our events then why not think about standing for election next year?

Keen to organise? Eileen Clement, our Oral History Project Co-ordinator, would like to step back from the project and hand over the reins to someone else. If you've got a keen interest in Croome's history and would like to play a bigger role in securing it for the future, please get in touch with Eileen on 01684 891815 or email

croome-oral-history@hotmail.co.uk

Fancy editing our newsletter? Wendy Carter, our newsletter editor, is looking to step down after the autumn edition. If you've got editing experience, a creative touch, are familiar with desk top publishing software and know a little about Croome then drop Wendy a line at croome-editor@hotmail.co.uk for more information.

If you're at all interested in finding out more about serving on our committee, then don't hesitate to speak to one of us at an event or contact John Henderson, Chair of the Friends, on 01905 371218 or email johnandcara@hotmail.com

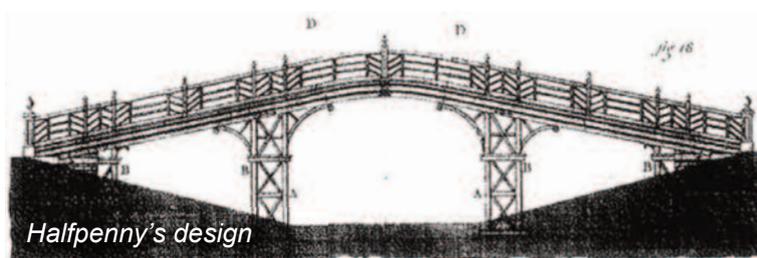
Chinese Bridge

Michael Smith
Property Manager

When looking at Richard Wilson's 1758 painting of Croome, the visual importance of the Chinese Bridge in the perfect landscape setting of Croome Court is clear. However, by the time of the first photographic record of Croome in the 1860s the Chinese Bridge had disappeared from the scene.

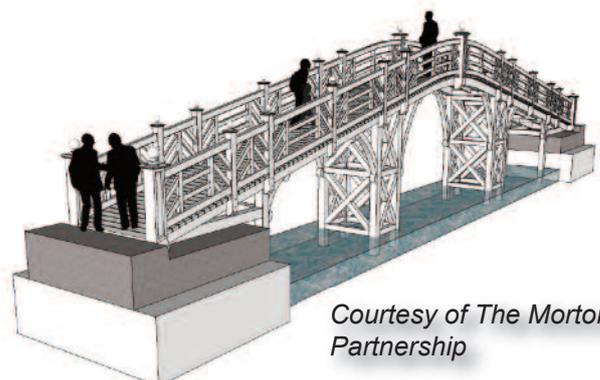
This important component of Croome's central parkland has since been sadly absent but, all being well, 2013 will mark the return of the Chinese Bridge!

The original bridge was designed by the 'architect and carpenter' William Halfpenny and completed in the late 1740s during the period when George William, not yet the 6th Earl of Coventry, had begun to oversee the beginnings of the great change to Croome's design. The first canal-like section of the ornamental Croome River, immediately to the west of Croome Court, had been completed by 1748. Halfpenny's bridge spanned the new water and served as a herald to the assembly of parkland follies that were to ornament the landscape as it was transformed over the next six decades.



We presume that the wooden frame of the Chinese Bridge had rotted by the mid 19th century. Whilst no physical trace of the structure remains today, Halfpenny left us a clear drawing of the bridge complete with dimensions and annotations. We intend to use these plans to faithfully recreate the Chinese Bridge over the course of the coming year.

The opportunity to restore this wonderful piece of Croome's heritage is all thanks to a grant from the Monument 85 Fund, a fund established with a substantial gift from the late Simon Sainsbury in 1985 for the restoration of the National Trust's gardens, parks and associated landscapes. The whole team at Croome is extremely grateful for this donation and we will work hard to ensure that a Chinese Bridge once again graces the landscape at Croome.



Defford Airfield Heritage Group

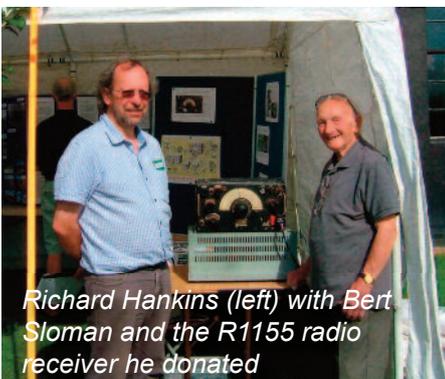
Bob Shaw
Friends of Croome Park member

The Defford Airfield Heritage Group (DAHG) is a National Trust Supporter Group at Croome Park, which works closely with (and shares many members with) The Friends of Croome Park. DAHG rounded off 2012 with a series of events in the autumn.

DAHG Heritage Weekend

The National Trust at Croome Park participated in Heritage Open Days on Sept. 8th/9th, with the estate open with free admission. Members of DAHG took the opportunity to impress members of the public with the Defford Airfield story. We were favoured with fine weather, welcome relief after the rain-sodden horrors of July's Reunion.

Furthermore, we were restored to our preferred position for the display, with a marquee next to the Restaurant. This housed a display including some new material since the previous showings, thanks in particular to Dennis Williams, Antony Whitehead and Richard Hankins.



Richard Hankins (left) with Bert Sloman and the R1155 radio receiver he donated

DAHG Volunteers on duty were kept busy through both days with a constant stream of visitors wanting to know more about Defford Airfield, the Top Secret base in the grounds of Croome Park. DAHG member Shaun Pocock, who served at Defford, was able to give visitors a first hand account of life and work at RAF Defford.

AGM

On Sunday Nov. 11th, members of the Group gathered at the RAF Defford War Memorial in Defford village for the wreath

laying. This was followed by the Reunion Lunch and Group AGM in Defford Village hall.

Group Visit to John Hancock's collection

20 or so members of DAHG, together with some members of (MRTHS) the Malvern Radar and Technology Historical Society, visited the private aviation and military collection of John Hancock at Rowley Farm, Holt Heath, on Sept. 29th.



Visiting John Hancock's collection

This was a memorable afternoon. John Hancock has assembled a magnificent collection, which is beautifully presented. The display board, exhibit labelling and overall presentation would put to shame many exhibitions that are open daily to the public and make an entry charge.

The highlight was perhaps the immaculately preserved Canberra forward fuselage (if only we could have this for a Defford Airfield Heritage Centre at Croome). But there were many other superb exhibits including piston and jet engines, ejector seats and all sorts of aviation and military items of equipment and memorabilia. Thanks to John Hancock and his wife who treated us so hospitably.

Sales

The book 'Top Secret Boeing', by Bob Shaw,

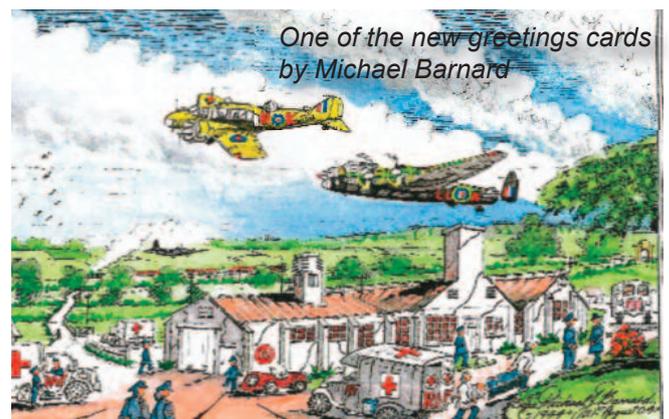
published on behalf of DAHG, continues to sell well with the prospect of a third print run imminent. The book provides insight into the top secret flying radar research carried out at Defford Airfield and is required reading for anyone who wants to know more about 'Croome at War' and much else besides.

The Chairman of DAHG, Graham Evans, has published some greetings cards, which are

on sale in the NT shop or directly from Graham himself at 58 Digby Drive, Mitton, Tewkesbury, GL20 8AL, tel. 01684 295327 – or catch him any time he is at Croome (which is often). Bought directly from Graham, the cards cost £1

each plus, if appropriate, 50p postage – the same postage (50p) applies if you buy 5 cards for £5! Cash or cheques payable to DAHG please. All proceeds go to Group funds and help fund the Group's activities.

The high quality and very versatile greetings cards measure 21 x 15cm and feature a painting by a DAHG member, veteran Michael Barnard, with an account of life at RAF Defford on the back. The card, which comes with an envelope, opens up to provide plenty of space inside for you to write your greetings or even a two page letter!



One of the new greetings cards by Michael Barnard

History in the Making...

George Coventry
13th Earl of Coventry

When I succeeded to the title nine years ago, the Park had already been owned and managed by the National Trust for eight years but the Court was still in private hands.

I would sometimes look across the Park to the Court and mutter to myself a quotation from my old headmaster, a mathematician, "How nice it would be if....". He used this to describe a desired outcome and then set about trying to show it was provable or possible. At this time I did not think my desire for Croome was possible but, one day, when speaking to Peter Scott, one of the Trustees of the Croome Estate Trust, he said "You never know..."

Here tribute must be paid to the trustees, Peter Scott, Peter Beresford and their predecessors who, in circumstances not always easy, managed and protected the assets of the trust set up by the 9th Earl, so that when the Court came on the market, they were able to purchase it. The National Trust, having then recently burnt their fingers in guano, was not in a position to purchase it itself.



I do not think there was ever any intention within the family or the Croome Estate Trust other than that the Court should now be joined again with the Park under the management of the National Trust. We therefore celebrate the signing of the 999 year lease and it is sobering to think that the Court and the Park have already been around for a quarter of that period, and some sort of a dwelling on the site for possibly seven hundred years.

I look forward to the future with enthusiasm and with the hope that all those involved, including the National Trust, the Croome Heritage Trust, the volunteer groups who are so vital to it all, and the family will be able to work together for the good of the whole.

I have always believed that the whole history of Croome is important. Obviously, in particular the

6th Earl and his personal vision and ability to recognise the genius of men like Brown and Adam; and the 9th Earl who did so much to ensure the protection of his heritage.

The wartime years with RAF Defford will clearly be of continuing interest and the School and Hari Krishnas have their own tales to tell.

It may be interesting to develop new themes and ideas, but one must never forget 'the core'.

Michael Smith
Property Manager, Croome Park

The Croome Heritage Trust and the National Trust have worked in partnership for the last 6 years as joint custodians of Croome Court. Following the signing of our new long-term lease we can look forward to this union continuing for another 999 years, the CHT as owners of Croome Court and the NT as their tenants, together restoring historic Croome.

So much has been achieved in such a relatively short space of time by this alliance. The funds needed to restore Croome Court have been raised, the Rotunda repaired, hoggin paths reinstated and the Court opened to the visiting public. Imagine how much more might be achieved with the application of the same energy over the next 999 years!

To put this vast stretch of time into some context, it's interesting to think how much life has changed over the previous 999 years at Croome. If we were to travel back in time to 1014 we would find the country in political turmoil following the death of King Sweyn Forkbeard, his son Canute preparing to flee England as Ethelred the Unready returned to reclaim his throne. It would be another 5 decades before Urse d'Abitot crossed the English Channel to lend his name to that part of Worcestershire which we all hold so dear. A further 5 centuries would pass before the Coventry family began their stewardship of Croome and the emergence of the National Trust would follow some 300 years after that!

No doubt the next 999 years will hold an equal measure of challenge and surprise, but I am sure that the mutual determination of the two Trusts to protect all that is special about Croome will see us through the twists and turns of fate, together. In fact it is impossible to imagine how the National Trust could care for Croome's heritage without the generosity and support of our distinguished landlords, to whom we are eternally grateful.

FRIENDS FORUM

A 50s Childhood at Croome

Margaret Merchant
Friends of Croome Park member

I am the middle child of five, born in 1946 to Ray & Queenie Scott at Croome. My grandad & granny Scott lived at Croome Farm and we lived across the field at Stone Cottage. My dad was their youngest son and foreman at the farm. Also working the farm were Eric & Ken Odell who lived next door to us with their mother who we called Dodo.

The farm at this time was a very mixed affair with sheep, cattle, dairy, pigs and various cereal crops. There were also free range and battery hens, bees and large orchards full of apples and plums.

Dad & grandad embraced all the modern farm machinery that became available after the war. They had several types of tractor including a little grey Ferguson, an Oliver and Standard Fordson, also a Caterpillar and a Case (tractor enthusiasts will know what these were). There was also a combine harvester that had just come in but I remember that previously they had a binder that cut the wheat then made the stooks, which were propped up to dry and then put through the threshing machine to extract the grains of corn.

My mother, Queenie, worked especially hard and, as well as coping with 5 children, did a variety of local jobs. These included hop tying and picking at High Green Farm and working in the walled garden at Croome Court, which was then a commercial nursery run by the Passeys. The younger children had to go with her to these jobs - it always seemed very hot in the garden and greenhouses. She also helped with the teas for the boys at Croome Court, which was then a Catholic School.

As children in the 50s we had an astonishing amount of freedom; we roamed the farm and local area, which at that time was a bustling environment with the airfield on our doorstep, the parkland and a large farm to explore.

Food rationing largely passed unnoticed by us as we had a plentiful supply of fresh milk straight from

the cows, eggs, honey, as much fruit as we could eat plus the occasional chicken. Butter was handmade on the farm in a wooden churn that was turned by a handle until it made a thumping noise; granny then patted it into shape with wooden butter pats. There was also fresh pork when a pig was slaughtered - watched with fascination by us.

We went to school in Severn Stoke. A bus picked us up and dropped us off at the top of Birch Lane, which meant quite a long walk, especially for the youngest children, of about a mile to the school. Luckily there was very little traffic then.

Sometimes we had pocket money to spend at the sweet shop in Severn Stoke; it may have sold other things but I never noticed those. Lunchtime involved the whole school walking in crocodile to the village hall where a hot meal was served.

Although Croome is a small hamlet it was well served by a visiting butcher, a baker and the wonderful Onwards. This was a large silver van whose sides rolled up to reveal a treasure trove of household essentials.

There was a small shop at High Green, opposite the Estate Office, run by Miss Sherwood. We used the NAAFI near Marble Arch (London Gate) and our Sunday papers and comics were delivered to Reggie

Childs at his cottage for us to collect.

Just inside Marble Arch at that time were the officer's houses, a crescent of possibly ten houses and a swimming pool if I remember correctly. Nearby there were the accommodation blocks for the service men - the concrete road still remains.

This concrete road takes you into the deer park (part of the farm) and along the edge of the airfield. This had a high perimeter fence with barbed wire to keep it secure. We spent a lot of time there watching planes land and take off; the landing lights were in the park. The airfield remained operational until the late 50s and we saw the modern jet aircraft

Mum with 4 of the children, taken in 1953. Margaret is the little girl at the front (Jean is held, George on the left and John on the right)



take over from wartime planes. Some hangars remain at the far end of the airfield and are visible on the walk from the Court to Dunstall Castle.

Croome church had quite a large congregation at this time and we attended regularly. My brothers had to pump the organ each Sunday. It is no longer in the church and I cannot remember who played it. Reverend Cheeseman was the vicar of both Croome and Pirton. We were members of the choir and we practised at Pirton church.

In the photo we are dressed up and all together so I assume we are on our way to the Court to celebrate the Coronation. There were games such as a sack, egg and spoon and three legged races

with prizes of money in a brown envelope. I must have won something to remember that at age 6. In the evening there was a bonfire and fireworks.

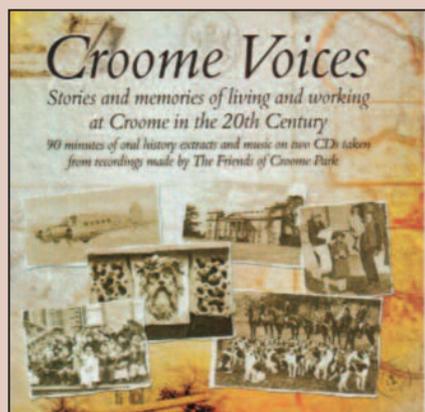
By 1960 grandad and granny retired from farming. Dad didn't want to take it over so, following the farm sale when the stock and equipment were sold, we moved to Defford and they moved back to Stottesdon, Cleobury Mortimer.

Having read Betty Jones' story in the last newsletter of her time spent on our farm during the war, I wanted to tell this tale of my memories of Croome. Very little had changed during this period - apart from the modern farm machinery that became available after the war.

Oral History Update

Eileen Clement
Oral History Co-ordinator

The 'Croome Voices' 90 minute double CD was produced at the end of November, in time for Christmas, and I am pleased to report that half of the 200 have already been sold. The discs comprise narration and excerpts from as many of our interviewees as possible from over 100 hours of recording.



This would never have happened without the tireless work and advice from Julia Letts, Oral History expert, who has supported and encouraged the Oral History Project all the way through.

Many of you will have seen Hilda Newman on Countryfile in December and it is rewarding to know that I was able to introduce her to the BBC team.

I have decided to spend less time on this project now and intend to wind things up in March 2014. In the meantime, I am putting together a folder on Croome hunt, horses and farms. If anyone has any information or contributions please get in touch with me,

Mary Evans or John Chugg. This is an important part of Croome's history and more information should be available.

Is there anyone who would like to carry on the work of this project, which is enjoyable, challenging and time consuming? I have met some wonderful people during the last eight years and everyone has been so helpful and willing to contribute. Please get in touch if you'd like to know more about how you can help.

To obtain a copy of 'Croome Voices' for £10 please contact me on 01684 891815 or croome-oral-history@hotmail.co.uk.

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 1st July 2013

From the garden & park...

Winter has flown by and I can't believe it is already spring (will someone tell the weather please)! We've been kept busy parkland planting, hedge-laying, splitting firewood for the court, ditching and digging drainage channels, building tree guards and much more.

One of the planting projects has been at Pirton Castle, one of the eye-catchers, where we own not only the building but also about 12 acres of land. You probably know that along the top of that ridge there are more than half a dozen mature cedars of Lebanon. During February we planted young specimen cedars and built protective guards around them to ensure the continuity of planting there for many years to come.

The bird hide, located in Church Shrubbery, has been a great success in its first few months of existence. Visitors are enjoying the chance to see birds including great spotted woodpeckers, nuthatches, dunnocks, coal tits and chaffinches

up close and personal. Thanks to all the garden stewards for topping up the feeders as they pass by.

I hope that by now you will have had chance to see the new bridge at the lake, which replaces the Black Bridge that was installed in the 1970s by the then land agent, a certain Mr John Henderson. The location of the new bridge allows the visitor to now have the surprise of the lake in front of them as they emerge from under the Dry Arch Bridge, as Brown had intended in his 18th century design. The oak used in the new bridge came from nearby NT property, Brockhampton.

I must say a huge thank you to the Friends for a significant donation to my department for the purchase of a forwarding trailer (see picture). I shall be purchasing the trailer as soon as possible and it will be an invaluable help in our woodland work, such as shelterbelt management, coppice restoration in Lickmoor Coppice and the felling

Katherine Alker
Garden and Park Manager

of large areas of alder in South Park to restore pasture.

There is plenty to keep our staff



and volunteers busy in the coming months; more planting in both the park and the pleasure grounds; further repairs to the estate walls at Croome as well as to the boundary walls at Middle Littleton tithe barn (also within our portfolio of properties to manage along with The Fleece Inn at Bretforton); woodland work; weeding and pruning in the pleasure grounds; and work on the Dig for Victory patch. Let's hope the sun shines this summer!

250 years young

When George William Coventry inherited Croome and became the 6th Earl, the landscape he saw was very different from the one we see today. There was a house, of course, but a major change has been the positioning of the church - the church of St James, dating from 1258, once stood close to the house.

This changed when work began on the redesigning the house and park. Around 1758 George William came to an agreement with the Bishop of Worcester to take down St James church and rebuild on a hill overlooking the house and parkland. Around 1760, when work was already in progress on the house, the site was cleared and building commenced. Masonry from St James is said to have been included in the construction of the new church and there is evidence that some of the roof timbers come from a much older building, which bears this out.

It is worth reminding ourselves of the renowned craftsmen involved - Lancelot 'Capability' Brown designed the exterior and some of the interior; Robert Adam took over in 1761 and his hand is seen all over the interior. Joseph Rose the Elder is responsible for the ceiling mouldings, John Hobcraft carved the remarkable pulpit and Sefferin Alken carved the mahogany font. Two lesser known individuals are remembered in their own way. Both men (one a joiner from Pershore) worked on the church and engraved their names on two windows!

Several Coventry memorials were brought from the old church and now stand in the chancel. One, to the 4th Baron, was carved by none other than Grinling Gibbons;

Geoff Sherwood
Friends of Croome member & Church Steward

another famous craftsman. Together with the memorials came the remains - a large vault was constructed under the new church for re-interments. Family members have since been placed in the vault, the last in 1948: Lady Virginia Deerhurst. At that time, one of my uncles who worked on the estate, Ernest Sherwood, was involved in opening and closing the vault. He explained to me how it was done and the procedure that had to be adhered to.

The wonderful old bells that are rung today also came from the old church and are one of the oldest ring of bells in the country. They have recently been lovingly restored.

The church of St Mary Magdalene was consecrated in 1763. The dedication to St Mary Magdelene is interesting. There is speculation that it might have been in memory of the 6th Earl's late wife, Maria. What intrigues me is that of the six Marys mentioned in the New Testament, why Mary Magdalene? She was one of Our Lord's most faithful followers and comes into particular prominence at the time of the resurrection...food for thought!

One thing to remember is that the church of St Mary Magdalene is still consecrated. It is owned and cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust and lies within the benefice of Kempsey with Severn Stoke and Croome D'Abitot whose Rector is the Reverend Mark Badger. During the summer there will be an exhibition in the church. "Major Pipeworks" woodwind group will help celebrate the anniversary with a concert in the church on June 22 (see events diary) and the annual Parish Service will be on the 30th June - all are welcome to attend!

Recollections of a Land Agent - Final Part

John Henderson
Chairman, Friends of Croome Park

The 60s and 70s were periods of demolition in urban and rural landscapes. New functional farm buildings replaced old vernacular buildings that couldn't accommodate bulk storage and mechanical cleaning. I did my bit.

The 80s relented and conversion was the password. The colourful Hare Krishnas had vacated Croome Court and there followed an unhappy time when it became a centre for government sponsored youth training courses and nearly a hotel. Eventually it was bought by Christopher Buxton with a view to converting it into apartments or whatever planning permission could be obtained - ostensibly to save the place from ruin - but this coincided with a property recession lasting for years.

Then, in the early 90s, his architects began drawing up elaborate plans for its conversion to a hotel and conference centre - and the inevitable 27 hole golf course. Sun Alliance did not object to the course overlapping the minimal 38 acres of the Court's grounds, so plans included drives all over the park with bunkers and greens and a new bridge over the middle of Croome's river. This had been the accepted planning formula throughout the country for

"saving" historic houses and parks. Apparently though, this was one desecration too far. Much to my annoyance then, the Daily Telegraph Architectural Correspondent led a campaign to say that this was sacrilege - and Croome featured amongst the examples.

Earlier, I had been wooed by the National Trust's Geoffrey Howarth who enquired whether Sun Alliance would donate 4-500 acres from the heart of their Estate to the Trust. His intent was to preserve what he, with a handful of others, deemed to be an extraordinary historic landscape. He took me to a conference where there was potent lobbying for government aid to preserve historic landscapes, as well as buildings, before they were all overrun.

The idea of Sun Alliance, a public company, donating anything to anyone was laughable. The Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust had done much to slow the passage of the golf course plans. Negotiations limped on until, in 1994, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) was established. Suddenly, there was the prospect of real money being available to enable the National Trust to acquire and restore Croome's 'Capability' Brown landscape. The Trust prepared a ten year restoration programme, which won the largest grant then

made by the HLF.

Like so many institutional investors, Sun Alliance decided to vacate the agricultural market in 1996. They agreed to sell about 671 acres of their holding to the National Trust, to include the garden buildings, surrounding farm land and woods. We had negotiated hard for the best price for our Clients and then, blow me, if Sun's Publicity Department didn't decree that £400,000 of it should be handed back, in consideration of Sun Alliance's name continuing to appear in publicity material!

At the same time, I had advised the Trustees that perhaps it was time for them to sell their acres where I could see no prospect of increased income. They agreed and, happily for me, they agreed to sell to their sitting farm tenants - deals were struck in almost every case.

Sun Alliance received a very sensible price for the rest of their Estate from the Merchant Venturers of Bristol. Their then Agents, Carter Jonas quite understandably, chose my bright clever young assistant to act for them and I bowed out after 29 years with a sigh of relief and pleasure that she would be able to continue and improve on everything.

What more could a retiring Resident Land Agent want?

STOP PRESS...

There are good prospects of a permanent museum to RAF Defford with the next RAF building to be restored. The former 'Decontamination Annexe' completes the complex that includes the canteen, kitchen and reception. DAHG have secured assurances of major funding for the project. The National Trust will be responsible for restoration and DAHG will be responsible for furnishing the interior - providing display material and organising a programme of exhibitions. A project board is being set up to steer the project. We anticipate the Defford Airfield Heritage Museum will be a significant attraction and we'll keep Friends updated on progress.



Croome's 18th century plant collection

Jill Tovey

Friends of Croome Park Vice-Chairman

In 2003 the BBC made a programme about the restoration of Croome Park in their *Hidden Gardens* series. The main focus was the uncovering of Brown's lakeside garden, the dredging of the lake and the replanting of the evergreen shrubbery, once the historic paths had been uncovered. But they needed to get a broader picture of the 6th Earl's thinking and intentions in the 1750s, when he was creating his idyllic vision. In doing so, the BBC asked to see the collection of bills for plants from the period. I duly brought out from the archive the box of 600 bills dating from 1750 to 1800.

The presenter of the programme was Chris Beardshaw, landscape architect and plant expert – also ex-Pershore College and one time President of the Friends of Croome. I think it's fair to say that he and the whole BBC team were astounded by what they saw; These things that to me, as a complete novice, were just another box of bills were apparently a treasure trove of plant history. Chris began delving in among them and in no time at all pulled out at random two items that seemed to be at

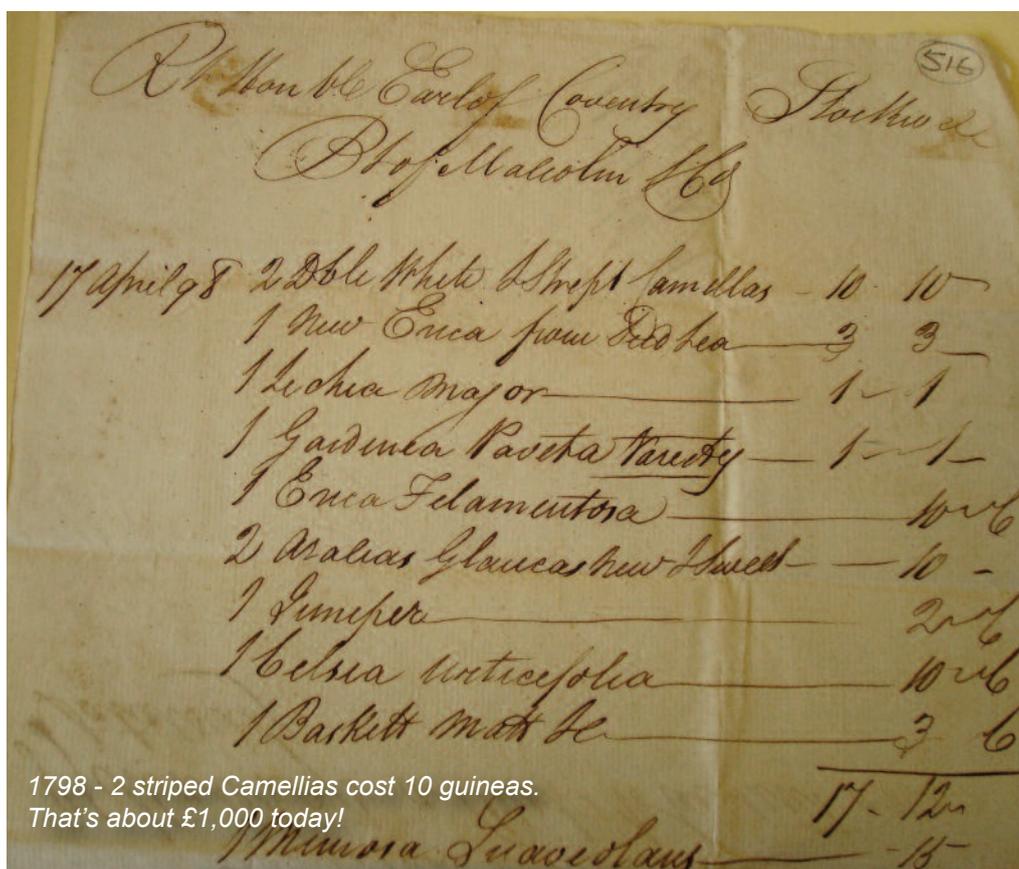
Croome well before their known date of first introduction to Britain – so once again, as in so many instances, the 6th Earl of Coventry was in the vanguard of 18th century fashion.

After the programme was transmitted I was contacted by Maggie Campbell-Culver, a plant historian, whose book 'The History of Plants' had not long been published. She was very

of plants and historical sources, during the ensuing six years the group have delved back into plant history with fascinating results. Plants have been identified and given their Linnaean names and, yes, some new first introductions to Britain have been confirmed at Croome. This has been time consuming work requiring much dedication but they all say that it is

engrossing and just a little addictive!

Before too long they will officially publish their results, so I shan't steal their thunder by saying much more now; only that Croome will probably be once again a talking point in academic circles.



excited by what she'd seen and, to cut a long story short, she introduced me to members of the Worcs. branch of the NCCPG (National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens). With their cooperation, in 2006 we set up a group to research in depth this unique collection – we called ourselves the Croome Plant Research Group (CPRG).

The basic information was entered into a database and, using their own huge knowledge

Now that the collection is at The Hive in Worcester, once the results have been fully published we intend to deposit a copy on a CD to be read with the original bills by future researchers.

The important spin off from their work has been that the members have been able to be a huge help to Katherine in identifying and sourcing authentic species for replanting in Croome's shrubberies and flower beds.