

THE FRIENDS OF CROOME



NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2022 Issue 38

A Knight Errant in Boardshorts

by Nicola Hewitt



Ted with cat taken c1981– photo taken by Susan Knight

Back in 2018 I was asked by Rachel Sharpe, Creative Partnerships Manager for the National Trust at Croome, to research the Coventry family since their departure from Croome in 1948, for a potential future exhibition. I started with the tenth, eleventh and twelfth Earls and their offspring, and found Ted or to give him his full name Edward George William Omar Coventry, Viscount Deerhurst. A surfer! From Worcester? A charitable foundation to teach blind children to surf! An environmentalist and model who turned his back on the life of a British aristocrat. And he loved cats! I was hooked.

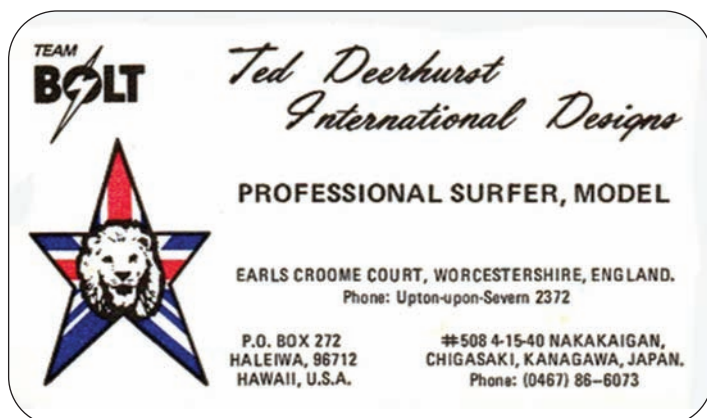
I contacted the Museum of British Surfing in Braunton, Devon, who had articles on their web page about Ted, to see whether they could help or point me in the direction of someone who could. “You should try Duncan Coventry” they suggested after providing me with some bits and pieces, “he’s got some of Ted’s things and a Facebook page all about Ted”. They were wrong. Duncan has a whole archive of material that belonged to or was about Ted, which he

kindly shared. He also told me of a book he was hoping to get published about Ted’s life written by Andy Martin, one of Ted’s friends and a Cambridge University lecturer. “But you should also speak to Linda Nash, she’s one of your volunteers at Croome. She knew Ted” he wrote in one of his emails. I went back to Rachel with some provisional research on the Earls, but raving about this Ted character and the book, Michael happened to be in the office and said that Duncan had also spoken to him about the book.

Next stop was Linda, for more about Ted. When Linda first met Ted, she was married to the Australian surfer Kevin Cross and together they ran Creamed Honey, a surfboard factory in Braunton, North Devon. At that time, the Australian surfers there revolutionised British surfing and surf board manufacturing, they were the local heroes of the surfing world bringing new and exciting surfboard manufacturing and surfing ideas, often having surfed all over the world. Ted came to Creamed Honey to order a custom-built board

friendsofcroome.org.uk

and asked if he could watch the board being made, which takes approximately three weeks. A custom-built board was designed to complement the individual surfers surfing style and the conditions that the board would be used, wave size, strength of waves etc. This was achieved using the latest board building technology and experience of the board builders of the time coupled with the surfing experience of the builder.



Ted's business card, from Duncan Coventry's archive

Ted came into the factory most days over the next few of weeks to observe the process. When the board was ready Ted returned with his father who had come to pay for the board, which Ted put into his father's black limo sticking out of the back window. True to form Ted had not let on that he was a Lord and Linda said the first she knew of it was when she asked his father for a cheque guarantee card, and noticed the name on the card was the Earl of Coventry. Linda also recalled how every morning you would see Ted out on the beach doing Tai Chi before heading out surfing.



Sabre Advert, from Duncan Coventry's archive, photos by Tim Barrow and Dan Markel

As well as becoming Britain's first professional surfer, Ted went on to design and shape boards, and developed his own clothing and surfing accessory brand. This Sabre advert features Ted in one of the bedrooms at Earls Croome Court. Tim Barrow, a friend of Ted's, who shot the pictures for this advert and many others of Ted, recalled how they got into trouble with the Earl for using family antiques without permission.

Born 24 September 1957, Ted was the only child of George William Coventry, 11th Earl of Coventry, and his first wife Marie Farquhar Medart, (known as Mimi). His parents divorced in 1963 with Mimi gaining custody of Ted but with the proviso that he remained in the United Kingdom and have a proper English education. However, in 1967 Mimi returned to her native USA taking Ted with her and triggering a protracted legal battle. In 1972, the American courts ruled that Ted (now aged 14) must return to the UK and Mimi was ordered to deliver Ted to his father 2 days later, but Ted who had pleaded with the judge to remain in the USA, vanished. Unable to produce her son Mimi was jailed for contempt of court. Hearing this Ted contacted her lawyers and agreed to return to the court. Despite pleading to stay with his mother in America and vowing to return as soon as he was 18, the judge ordered him to return to the UK with his father.

This whole episode, together with his contrasting experiences in the English and American school system obviously had a lasting impact on Ted. In the archive is a movie outline of his life written by Ted, within this is a section on the divorce and the custody battle. He refers to it as the trauma of his young life, the cold-hearted prep school of England, the joy of school in Santa Monica, learning to surf, skateboard and bike and the devastation of having to leave and return to England.

The Excalibur Cup and Excalibur Foundation were founded by Ted as a way of giving back to those less fortunate and a way of sharing the spirit of surfing. Ted thought surfers should be Knights Errant in boardshorts, riding the waves, acting with chivalry and charity. What I probably should have explained was that Ted loved Arthurian legend and elements from it appear throughout his life. In 1986, Ted held his first Excalibur Cup in Florida, his former school friend, actress Heather Thomas and musician Jack Sonni of Dire Straits, helped promote it; the prize – a sword worthy of any knight. The first contest was won by a 14-year-old. Not just any 14-year-old though. Kelly Slater would go on to be world champion 11 times and is regarded as the greatest professional surfer of all time. The Excalibur foundation was formed as a non-profit corporation run by volunteers. Professional surfers would take blind and disabled children out surfing. Shared adventure days working with Down Syndrome, visually impaired, wheelchair bound youngsters aged 11 to 25 using oversized body boards. He set up at least six centres doing this on the east coast of America, California and Australia. Rocky Sheldon explained why he did it.

"I used to help Ted with the special needs kids paddling them out and pushing them into small waves as they rode towards their parent near the shore at Haleiwa. It took a lot of work and time to go through all the legal liability issues and permits. It was a thing he did 'cause the looks on those kids faces while riding a wave on a surfboard with professional surfers assisting them was the greatest thing that anyone could give another person. It was truly magical to be around these kids and their parents for this life altering experience for all of us. Miss Ted a lot still."

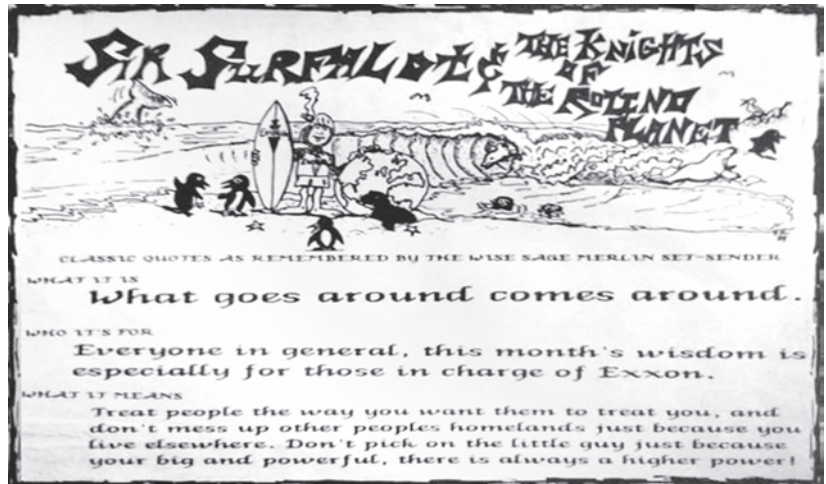
But it was not until 1994 that he managed to obtain the required permits to set up a centre in Hawaii. A newspaper article in the Hawaii Star-Bulletin from 10 October 1994, describes how Ted stands on a beach waiting for someone, anyone to come. It doesn't look good as long after the start time no-one has come. Then at last a



Kelly Slater, from Duncan Coventry's archive

father with his Down Syndrome son arrive. The piece describes the son catching his first wave "It wasn't much by North Shore standards, a gentle foaming wall that deposited him on the sand, but his face lighted up with a smile that turned a beautiful, sunny day even brighter". The day finishes with the father promising to spread the word and bring his son's classmates next month.

Ted was also into environmental issues and looking after our planet. Another friend of Ted's, Patrick Keiser, shared with me a character he drew for Ted which Ted used to promote these environmental issues: Sir Surfalot and the Knights of the Rolling Planet. One piece Patrick still had was in response to the Exxon Valdez oil spillage of 1989.



Sir Surfalot – Patrick Keiser

In 1997, Ted was found dead in the kitchen of his home in Hawaii. He was 40 years old. The official cause of death was heart failure, although Andy Martin in his book suggests an alternative. He had earned the respect of the Hawaiian locals through his environmental campaigns and they gathered with his friends to paddle out from Sunset Beach as his ashes were sprinkled upon the waves.

I could relate more memories his friends have shared of him, or I could recount my visit to Paul "Blackie" Blacker's surfboard factory where I got quite high on the fumes and fell in love with the resin -dripped floor, but I leave the last words to Ted and his reply when asked in an interview to describe surfing. "Like jumping off a three -storey house and then have the house chase you down the street"

The Cricketing Coventrys

Part Three: The Hon. John Coventry by Clive O'Donnell

The Hon. John Bonyng Coventry may not have been President of the MCC like his grandfather the 9th Earl of Coventry, or played test cricket like his uncle, Charles, but he could justifiably claim to be the most accomplished cricketer in the Coventry family. Born in London on 9th January 1903, the fourth child of Viscount Deerhurst and his American wife, Virginia Lea Daniel, John was educated at Eton where he was coached at cricket by the legendary England and Yorkshire all-rounder, George Hirst. Aged only 16, he made his first-class debut for Worcestershire against HK Foster's XI at New Road in 1919 and that same summer kept wicket for Moseley Second XI.

However, it was as a bowler that he first came to the fore the following summer. Due to a number of absences, he found himself plunged into the most difficult of fixtures for his County Championship debut, Worcestershire's away game with Yorkshire at Brammall Lane, Sheffield. The local reporter did not have a high opinion of the Pears XI, describing the visitors as 'one of the weaklings of the championship'.

Coventry though acquitted himself well. After remaining not out in the first innings, admittedly facing only one ball from his Eton coach, Hirst, he earned plaudits for his bowling from the Yorkshire Post: 'This young bowler has an easy graceful action which the batsmen play carefully'. Bowling slow left arm, his first two championship victims were none other than two of the finest openers of the day, Percy Holmes and Herbert Sutcliffe, who were respectively stumped and caught behind by Arthur Jewell. A fortnight later, against Gloucestershire at New Road, he dismissed the England great, Walter Hammond. Looking back now at his early prowess as a bowler it's surprising how little he bowled in the rest of his career.

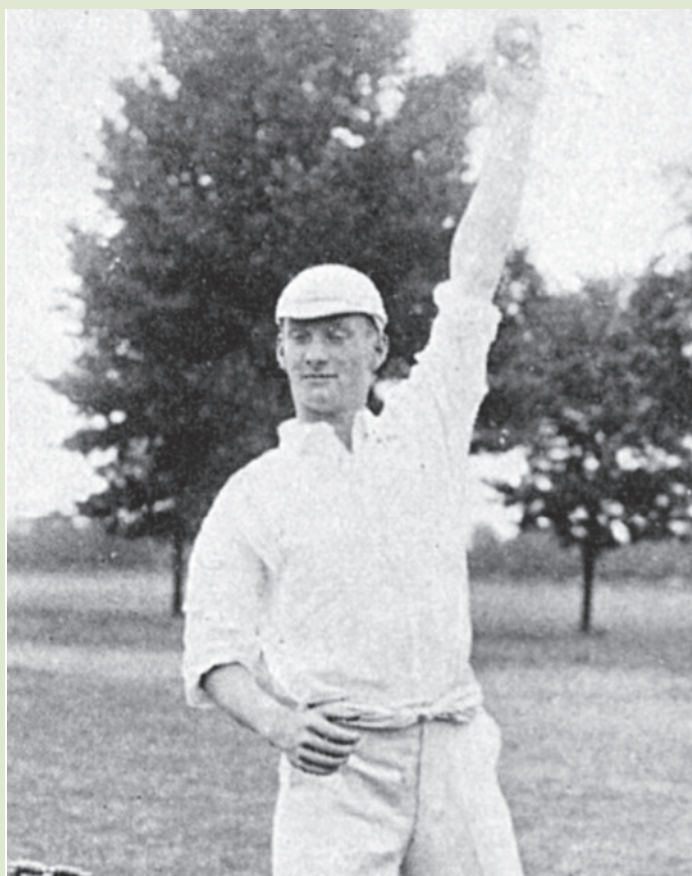
Coventry left Eton in the summer of 1921 having twice played in the showcase fixture of the Public School cricket season against Harrow at Lord's. The Cricketer magazine, in its first year of publication, captured this photograph of Harrow batsman, Leonard Crawley, himself later to play for Worcestershire, being caught in the outfield off Coventry's bowling for 103.



ETON v. HARROW, AT LORD'S, JULY, 1921.

L. G. Crawley (103), caught in the long field by H. D. Sheldon off the Hon. J. B. Coventry's bowling.

At Oxford, he represented Magdalen College at football and cricket. He played in the Probables v Possibles trial match but didn't make the University XI to gain a coveted Blue, although he was 12th man for the annual Lord's fixture with Cambridge.



Coventry during his time at Oxford

Playing for Worcestershire in the university holidays, Coventry made the highest first-class score of his career, 86, against Derbyshire at New Road in August 1922. He was renowned for his big hitting, and his frequent sixes were met with the cry of 'Well done, the Hon. John!' from the New Road faithful, with whom he was extremely popular.

Quite the society figure, prior to the 1923 season he was present at the opening of the first circular dance floor in London at the Lambs' Club. When asked by a reporter about his cricket prospects, he said his ambition was to score 1,000 runs in a season. Sadly, he never bettered his total of 544 runs made that season in 1923, although he didn't appear that regularly due to other commitments.

In 1926 Coventry didn't feature for Worcestershire, due in part to injuries sustained in a motoring accident. He was a passenger in a Morris Cowley, borrowed from the Guinness Family, which crashed into a wall after flattening a lamp post on Ealing Broadway at 4.00 o'clock in the morning. Returning from a ball, he and the driver, James Drummond, of Greenwich Naval College, were both thrown from the car and taken to hospital by ambulance.

After playing in six matches in the first half of the 1927 season, he didn't appear again following the death of his father, Viscount Deerhurst on 8 August. He drifted away from cricket for almost two years until he unexpectedly assumed the Worcestershire captaincy during the 1929 season after Maurice Jewell resigned due to ill health. Coventry played in all fourteen of the remaining first class matches that summer, presiding over seven draws and seven defeats. It ended a dismal decade of cricket at New Road, with Worcestershire winning only 27 of 267 first class matches played in the 1920s.



Worcestershire v Sussex 1925, Coventry is seated far right



Worcestershire captain 1929 and 1930

1930 did not start well for the Coventry Family. On 13 March, John's grandfather, the 9th Earl of Coventry died aged 92, followed three days later by his grandmother, Lady Coventry, the Earl's wife of 65 years. His elder brother, George, later to be killed at Dunkirk, was elevated to the title of 10th Earl of Coventry. Nevertheless, it was a busy year for John Coventry. Having become Mayor of Worcester the previous November, the youngest in England aged 26, he was subsequently elected Alderman by his fellow councillors, who he assured that his civic duties would take priority over cricket if there was a clash.

The cricket season began with great expectation as the first game at New Road was against the 1930 Australian tourists with Don Bradman in the side. In his dual capacity as Mayor and Captain of the County XI, Coventry hosted a dinner for the tourists in the Guildhall. Unfortunately, he was taken ill, and bed ridden with 'Malta Fever' (brucellosis) which meant he had to miss both the dinner and the match – as well as the first half of the season. Worcestershire's recently appointed Secretary, Cyril Walters, assumed the captaincy. It must have been a blow for Coventry to miss two such prestigious occasions and indeed his illness forced him to go away for an extended

period of recuperation. He was back in mid-July and in his second of eight games as captain, Worcestershire recorded an innings win against Leicestershire at New Road, a game in which a young Reg Perks, took 7-20. Worcestershire ended the season in ninth place in the County Championship – the county's best finish since 1911. Replaced by Cyril Walters as captain in 1931, Coventry played just four more times in subsequent seasons making the last of his 75 first class appearances in 1935. His record was a modest one – batting average 14.75, bowling average 45.81 – but he was an entertaining cricketer who was perhaps better than those figures suggest, certainly with the ball.

During World War II, he served with the Grenadier Guards and afterwards was a senior partner in Tattersalls, the bloodstock auctioneers. He married relatively late in life in 1942 to Sybil Duse (née Tattam). She would accompany him on business trips to California and Florida.



John and Sybil Coventry boarding the Caronia at Liverpool in 1963 on a trip for Tattersalls to Florida visiting potential racehorse purchasers

John Coventry was found dead through natural causes at a house in Norfolk Road, St John's Wood on 4 July 1969, fittingly close to Lord's, where he had first made his mark as a cricketer nearly 50 years earlier. He was 66.



Woolstone Church, near Cheltenham

The Clerical Brothers

Part 1: The Rev. Gilbert George Coventry by Hugh Worsfold

Gilbert George Coventry was one of the eleven children of the Hon. William Coventry, the youngest son of the 7th Earl of Coventry. Gilbert's elder brother, Henry William, also entered the church and will be the subject of a second article.

Gilbert was born on 18 July 1842 at Earls Croome. Initially educated at home, it is recorded that his governess in 1851 was a Mrs. S Payne. At the age of 19 he was living with his brother William George Coventry, sixteen years his senior, who was a captain of the militia. From living with his brother, he went to Pembroke College, Oxford where he obtained a BA in 1866. He had decided on a career in the church.

His first clerical appointment was recorded in the Pall Mall Gazette of 25 September 1867: he became the Curate at Bishop's Hatfield in Hertfordshire. The following year he was ordained a priest by the Bishop of Worcester and was appointed Rector of St Martin's church at Woolstone near Cheltenham on the 29 December 1869.

He also became the Rector of the neighbouring village of Oxenton the following year, as the two churches had been a joint benefice since 1653. Woolstone was the smaller of the two parishes having a population of 72 recorded in 1892 compared to 136 for Oxenton. Woolstone church needed restoration and between 1869 and 1872 there were many fundraising events some of which were held in Cheltenham, including concerts at the Corn Exchange and Assembly Rooms. It is recorded in a periodical 'The Cheltenham Looker On,' that the Rev. Gilbert's wife was involved in selling tickets. The restoration to Woolstone Church was carried out during 1872 and 1873 and cost £1,060 (approx. £66,500 in today's money).

Gilbert had married Mary Jackson on 11 December 1870 in London. On the marriage certificate her father's occupation is shown as 'Gentleman' and Gilbert's father's occupation is shown as 'Peer's son'. Strangely, Gilbert's occupation is shown as 'Clerk', even though he had been ordained the year before.

Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
Clerk	W. Larges St	William James	Rev's Son
		Coventry	
	7 Upper Brighthelm	Thomas Jackson	Gentleman

Gilbert's occupation is shown as 'Clerk' on the marriage certificate

Rev. Gilbert's time at Woolstone was not without controversy. In the Cheltenham Chronicle of 1 October 1872, it is recorded that a petition against the extension of pub opening hours had been signed by him. His right to do this had been questioned. In the Gloucester Journal of 16 December 1881, it is recorded that he was accused of religious intolerance because he turned a girl away from the village school because she had attended the chapel at Oxenton rather than Woolstone church.

Early in his time at Woolstone he became involved with organisations outside the parish. On 17 April 1875 he was elected Guardian of the Tewkesbury Union Workhouse for the following year, and, on the same date, the Gloucestershire Echo reported that he was a guest at a Conservative dinner held in Winchcombe. He occasionally preached outside his parish: for example, at the Winchcombe Harvest Festival on the 13 October 1888. The Rev. Gilbert was involved in local politics, being elected a rural councillor for Tewkesbury District in 1894. He was also a keen grower of vegetables often winning prizes at local horticultural shows.

Rev. Gilbert featured in the Gloucester Journal on 14 September 1889 following a potentially embarrassing incident: it was reported that at the Cheltenham Police Court the Rev. G G Coventry, Henry Lane, William Cresswell and Walter Washbourne were charged with trespass in pursuit of game on land occupied by William Holmes at Bishops Cleeve. All were acquitted.

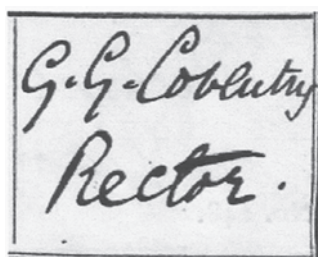
Disaster struck on 14 December 1889, when the Rectory at Woolstone was destroyed by fire. Gilbert and Mary had been staying in Weston super Mare for a few days and the rectory was occupied by the butler and three female servants. The staff took the opportunity to give the rectory a thorough clean and had a fire in

one of the rooms to air it. On retiring to bed, they thought the fire had died out: unfortunately, this was not the case and at 4.30 the next morning the cook was alerted to the property being on fire. The butler and servants were able to rescue some valuable oil paintings, plates and furniture with the help of some of the villagers before the rectory was destroyed. The rectory was rebuilt by the end of 1891 at a cost of £6,000 (over £500,000 in today's money). A housewarming was held on 9 January 1892 to which all the parishioners from Woolstone and Oxenton were invited – there was much singing and dancing, it is recorded.

Sadly, Mary, Rev. Gilbert's wife, passed away suddenly on the 25 September 1890. However, in the next two years it was twice announced that Gilbert was to remarry (firstly, to Ella Fitzroy of 9 Eaton Square, London and secondly to Annie, daughter of Admiral Sir George Duckworth-King Bt. of Wear House in Devon), but neither marriage went ahead.

Later it was found that Gilbert was having financial problems. On the 25 July 1903 the Gloucester Citizen reported that 'A receiving order has been made against Gilbert George Coventry, clerk in holy orders.' The next month the Gloucestershire Echo reported on a creditors' meeting and said that 'Gilbert had a debt of £4,428 and was living beyond his income'.

The Rev. Gilbert died on 16 April 1906 at the home of his sister at Duffield Park in Derbyshire. It is reported that at the time of his death he had only £5 to his name. He is buried at Woolstone church: Rector there for 36 years, he was well liked by his parishioners. Despite extensive searching a photograph of the Rev. Gilbert has not been found but his signature has been discovered.



In my research for this article I made contact with Caroline Meller of the Gotherington and Area Local History Society. Caroline had already carried out extensive research into the Rev Gilbert and her help in supplying much of the information for this article is much appreciated.

Hugh Worsfold



Pale and Interesting

a visit to Croome Church by Nilly Hall, July 2021



We chanced upon this architectural gem last week (21 July 2021). It is the eighteenth-century Gothic revival church of St. Mary Magdalene at Croome D'Abitot, Worcestershire; a garden temple of a church designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown as an 'eye-catcher', to complement the landscaped grounds of Croome Court.



Above: The interior is equally delightful, having been designed by Robert Adam in the new 'Gothick' style, with vaulted ceilings, intricate centerpieces, and a simple, geometric marble and slate floor.



Above: A group of seventeenth-century monuments were transferred from the earlier church, contrasting in their opulence with this pretty, airy interior.



Above: Here is the effigy of John, 4th Baron Coventry (d.1687) by Grinling Gibbons, his hand reaching out to Faith.



Above: Here lies Thomas, 1st Baron Coventry (d.1639), Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England.



Above: Across from Thomas, 1st Baron Coventry is his daughter-in-law, Mary. She is holding a baby, indicating that she died in childbirth, and two other children kneel at her feet (below).



Down the hill from the church the house is a work in progress having had various occupants over the past 70 years including a school and, for a while, members of the Hare Krishna movement. The visit to the beautiful church on the hill suggested that – at least once upon a time – it was what you could buy if you had the money. We wonder if that is still true...



Elgar's birthplace, The Firs, Lower Broadheath, near Worcester © National Trust

Elgar and his beloved dogs



Sir Edward Elgar, The Master of English Music

There was one more unfinished symphony in the world when Sir Edward Elgar died in 1934 at his Worcester home, within a few miles of the four-roomed cottage at Lower Broadheath where he was born 76 years before; he left the score of his Third Symphony uncompleted.

His father had a music shop in Worcester and was organist at one of the churches. The son picked up most of his music himself in this congenial atmosphere. He learned the violin and the bassoon, and took his father's place at the organ. For the first thirty years he earned a scant living as a professional, and in 1890 his *Froissart Overture* was produced at the Worcester Festival. Six years later, Manchester heard his *Enigma Variations*.

The young Elgar composed a steady stream of music at Powick asylum, near Worcester (Daily Telegraph)



After this he was no longer the minor country musician: his music and his name were known throughout England. In 1900, his *Dream of Gerontius* proclaimed him a genius, a master who was lifting English music to a high place in the world. It has been said that his genius put England on the musical map again.

Not many composers have enjoyed a Festival of their own music, but three whole days were dedicated to Sir Edward's music while he was still in the forties. Whether it was a symphony or an oratorio, or a little gem of a song for children like *Woodland Stream*, he never lacked inspiration.

He was knighted, he was admitted to the Order of Merit (the highest honour an Englishman can receive), and was made Master of the King's Musick, yet he would rather discuss dogs and horses than music. He so disliked publicity that even applause was painful to him. He remained a shy countryman, who enjoyed making things with his hands at his carpenter's bench, and loved nothing better than a joke.

One story told of him is that when he and many other distinguished guests attending a festival were lodged in a school building without bells to the rooms, he went out and bought a weird collection of instruments, rattle, drum, trumpet, cuckoo, mouth-organ, and others, and distributed them among the guests. He made a list for the maids, and in the morning took up his position on the stairs to enjoy the orchestra of the guests calling with their instruments for hot water, baths, tea, and papers! (1938)



Lord and Lady Coventry on horseback with hounds by Sir Francis Grant, 1873. (Presented to his Lordship on his retirement as first Master of the North Cotswold Hunt)

Lady Blanche Craven (1842-1930)

© *The Scotsman*, 17 March 1930

Lady Blanche Countess of Coventry died early yesterday at Croome Court, three days almost to the minute after the death of her husband, the famous racing Peer and 'Father' of the House of Lords. For 65 years she had been a devoted wife. She remained with her husband in his illness to the last, and within an hour of his death she took to her bed, saying more than once that she now had no desire to live any longer. The third daughter of the second Earl of Craven, she was 87 years of age, and the 65th anniversary of her marriage with the late Earl of Coventry was celebrated in January 1930

The finest tribute of her devotion was that paid by her husband on the occasion of their diamond wedding, when there were present their six sons, three daughters, and 21 grandchildren. "If," he said, "I would ascribe to one thing more than another the happy position in which I find myself today, I would lay it to the care and devotion of Lady Coventry, who for so many years has been my helper and my friend. She is the best wife a man ever had, a true helpmate of whom, whatever I could say, would fall short of the truth."

The charm and warmth of her nature won Lady Coventry popularity wherever she went. She took an active interest in all forms of social work, particularly the Red Cross Society, and she did much for the local organisation in Worcestershire.

Her father disapproved of hunting, and Lady Coventry hunted little before her marriage. Afterwards she became an enthusiastic follower of hounds, accompanying the Earl until late in life. The following anecdote illustrating their common interest in this sport was often told by Lord Coventry. Neither he nor Lady Coventry knew fear, and on one occasion they had cleared several obstacles when they approached a stone wall. The wall was of no great height and they rode at it side by side. When they could see over it they discovered to their horror that a deep disused quarry lay immediately on the other side. They sat well back in their saddles and held on to the reins like grim death.

The bottom of the quarry was covered with loose stones, and they were both thrown. One horse was killed, but Lord and Lady Coventry escaped with a severe shaking and slight concussion.



The Earl and Countess of Coventry on the occasion of their 62nd anniversary of their wedding (24 January 1927)