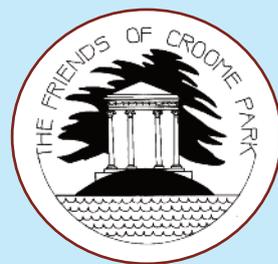


# THE FRIENDS OF CROOME PARK



AUTUMN 2012 ISSUE 17

NEWSLETTER

£1

where sold

## Entering the Secret Garden

### A work in progress...

**I**t has been over 12 years since we first arrived at Croome.

The Gardeners Cottage, which was to be our new home, could barely be found among the brambles and self-seeded trees. Hardly surprising, considering the prior 50 years of neglect from everything except nature. The giant Walled Kitchen Gardens beyond, which once fed the entire Estate, lay in ruins.

After a year of hacking away the overgrowth and debris, it was possible to identify the remains of an array of early Victorian Hot Houses, which included Pineapple pits, a Melon & Cucumber House, a Fig House and a massive Vinery. Furthermore a 100m long Hot Wall was discovered within the gardens.

With the site clear the next step was to decide on what to do with it. There was no legal obligation, beyond repairing the perimeter walls, to do anything. However, the remains of the Hot Houses provided

Chris & Karen Cronin  
Owners, Croome's Walled Kitchen Gardens

ample evidence of their former glory and full restoration had to be the preferred course of action.

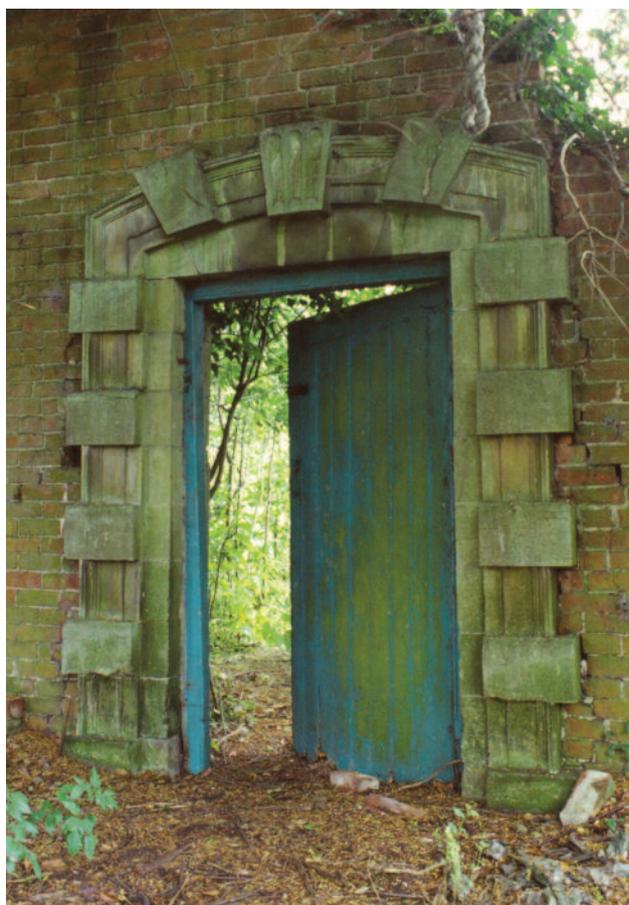
Work began on the Melon House and progressed to the Fig House. Structure

planting of fruit trees along the perimeter walls and large borders were dug and weeded in preparation for vegetables and flowers. As soon the glass houses became serviceable they were put to work and filled with plants of all kinds.

A landscaping plan was agreed and the main body of the garden was divided into three zones. The upper section was to be largely orchards of fruit trees with wild flowers while the main middle section was returned to rows of vegetable and

soft fruit beds. This left an opportunity to do something different in the lower gardens. A giant formal Rose Garden with over 400 rose plants was constructed. The centre piece is the Robert Adam Sundial which was discovered in pieces scattered around the gardens.

*cont. on pg 4...*



[www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk](http://www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk)

## WELCOME

This summer I've had the great pleasure of having an excuse to belatedly catch up with two very good friends of mine - thanks to Chris and Karen Cronin for sharing their fabulous story with us.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter as much as I enjoyed editing it. Yet again I remain inspired by the many Friends who contribute so much. I always say it but I do hope their stories inspire you to share yours

Happy reading!

Wendy

### Your Committee:

Chair:  
John Henderson

Vice-Chair:  
Jill Tovey

Treasurer:  
Alan Lee

Secretary:  
Tony Perfect

Membership:  
Diana Skeys

Officers:  
Christine Adams  
Wendy Carter  
Eileen Clement  
Phil Douce  
Graham Evans  
Tim Hickson  
Geoff Sherwood  
Paul Stanley

# Chairman's Note

Our Editor, Wendy Carter, has compiled a wonderfully varied, colourful and informative Newsletter. It takes tact and perspicacity to tease articles from contributors and knowledge and expertise to ensure that what appears is factually and historically correct. Wendy has again hit the jackpot with this Issue!

After twelve years, Dame Fiona Reynolds is stepping down in November from her role as Director General of the National Trust. She was handed the poisoned chalice to modernise this old fashioned institution with new 'governance' from the top right through to a reduction in the number of Regional Offices. For staff, it has been a difficult and sometimes painful time but Dame Fiona has handled the chalice with courage and honesty. She has seen membership top the four million mark and the volunteer base increase to over 67,000 members. She becomes Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge in the New Year. During her several visits here, Dame Fiona was a real encouragement to both staff and volunteers, speaking eloquently of the importance of Croome.

Her successor is Dame Helen Ghosh, currently the permanent secretary at the Home Office. She read Modern History at Oxford and has since worked in the Departments of the Environment and Work and Pensions, HM Revenue and Customs and the Government Office for London. Returning to environmental issues, she became permanent secretary



at Defra in 2005 and she has also worked at the centre of government, with two spells in the Cabinet Office. We shall look forward to meeting her and wish her every success in this demanding and vital post.

I want to trumpet the exceptional results reported elsewhere, of 'trading' in the first complete year of our Second-hand Bookshop in the Basement at Croome. We also received an overwhelming response to the Photographic Competition organised by Paul and Judith Stanley with over 200 photos received for a 2013 Calendar. The best of these were selected and displayed at the Court and an incredible 1,862 individuals voted submitting a total of 9,132 choices!

The Events Committee led by Christine Adams has produced for your enjoyment an exciting variety of meetings and visits well into next year, so that the Friends can continue to support and enliven interest in Croome and all its extraordinary facets.

### John Henderson

Chairman, Friends of Croome Park, September 2012

## 2013 Calendar - YOUR photos!



Thank you to everyone who entered our Photo Competition to win a space in our 2013 calendar.

It was hard but we managed to shortlist about 15 photos for each of the 4 categories - and visitors to Croome voted on these throughout August.

Calendars will be on sale at Friends' events for £5.00 and on NGS day 7th October near Reception. They can be purchased by post at £6.00 (including P&P) from: Connie Cook, 11, Whitcroft Road, Pershore, Worcs., WE10 1EN (Tel: 01386 552 541).

*(Final posting for Christmas: 20th November 2012)*

## Books Galore

Our second-hand bookshop, situated in the basement of the Court, has raised more than **£5,700** in its first year - all for the benefit of Croome.

Congratulations to those whose brainchild it was, to those volunteers who operate and oversee it and, most of all, to those who continue to contribute saleable books and those who keep buying them!

We welcome clean copies of paperbacks, fiction, crime, history, buildings and children's books to sell. You can leave donated books at reception - thank you.

**Don't forget to visit us.**



## Events - join in!

Thur 27th September, 7.15pm

### **Top Secret Boeing**

*talk by Bob Shaw, author of 'Top Secret Boeing'  
RAF Canteen*

Tue 9th October, 10.00am

### **Links with Pirton and Croome**

*morning walk with Derek Skeys followed by lunch in the  
RAF Canteen*

Wed 17th October, 7.15pm

### **General Knowledge Quiz Evening**

*with Paul Stanley RAF Canteen*

Tue 4th December 9.30am

### **'Make your own Christmas Arrangement'**

*Wreath making & table top decoration with Jane Hulse,  
RAF Canteen*

Tue 15th January 2013, 7 for 7.30pm

### **Festive Meal**

Tue 12th Feb 2013

### **Lecture Lunch - "Great Country House Interiors"**

*President Jeremy Musson  
Long Gallery, followed by hot buffet lunch*

Tue 26th Feb 2013

### **Behind the Scenes Tour of the Court**

*with Property Manager, Michael Smith*

Thur 14th Mar 2013

### **Croome: An Evening of Memories**

*Including extracts from the Oral History Project with  
Eileen Clement*

Thur 18th Apr 2013

### **AGM**

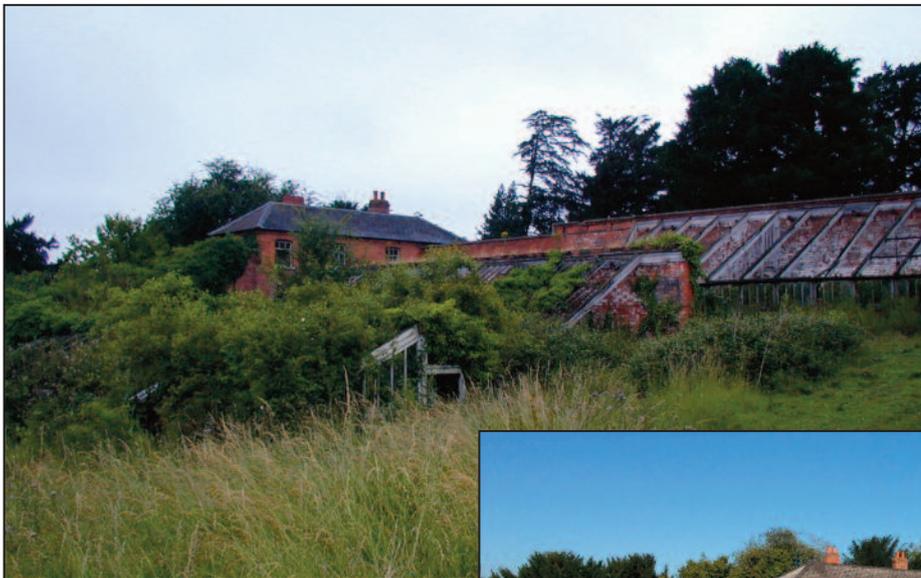
For more information about events visit  
**[www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk](http://www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk)**

**Email: [croome-events@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:croome-events@hotmail.co.uk)**

# Croome's secret garden

...continued from front page

Chris & Karen Cronin  
Friends of Croome Park members & owners of Croome's Walled Garden



*The seven acre Walled Kitchen Garden at Croome Court is known to be one of the largest of its kind. The Hot Houses and other garden structures, some of which date back to early 18th century, are among the finest examples of their time. The combined length of the walls stretches for nearly a kilometre and is made up from over 1,000,000 bricks.*

The 18th century Dipping Pond has recently been fully restored and, with the aid of modern technology, is once again providing the main source of water for the gardens. The Fig House hosts, among other exotics, banana plants which are now producing fruit.

Future plans include an ambitious new Palm House, in part of the original Vinery. One of the back sheds hosts a wealth of fascinating artefacts that have been found within the gardens over the years; enough to start a museum!!

It's funny to think that we originally saw this as a five



year project. Along the way we have encountered many hefty challenges. Some have required research and learning, others hard effort and persistence. All equally enjoyable and highly rewarding experiences

Sustainability has always been a key issue but until now restoration has taken priority.

We currently sell most of the produce to the NT for their canteen. Moving forward we will need to increase output from the gardens in order to help fund the venture. However, garden tours continue to bring much welcomed donations along with friendly and enthusiastic visitors. The joy of helping to bring these beautiful gardens back to a better state of health is something to be shared.



## Thank you!

The Friends of Croome Park Committee would like to thank Chris & Karen Cronin for kindly sharing their garden with many of our members since our inception in 2005.

# Oral History Update

Eileen Clement  
Oral History Co-ordinator

Our thanks go to the volunteers who painted the ceiling white in the Servants' Hall in the Court in order to make it easier to see the Oral History display. We are also extremely grateful to Ted Lerner who has worked hard to enhance the lighting. He tells me this is a temporary measure and hopes to make further improvements in due course.

A folder of information and photographs about St Joseph's School was produced in time for the low-key reunion of ex-pupils, which coincided with the 1940s weekend. This was well received.



Betty Jones visiting her old room at Croome Farm

In July we were pleased to welcome Betty Jones on her return visit to Croome to share her memories when she was a Land Girl. Betty was delighted to have the opportunity of visiting Croome Farm whilst she was in the area, when Philip and Rebecca Troughton

made her very welcome. She was thrilled to see her old room again, which she found very emotional.

The CD of Croome Voices is progressing nicely and it is hoped it will be available in the Autumn.

A national appeal for the Red Wing is being launched on 3 September and we are looking for local people's personal memories and family stories of the Red Wing to portray the human side of the former servants' quarters at Croome. Please contact me by email at [croome-oral-history@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:croome-oral-history@hotmail.co.uk) or on 01684 891815 if you can help.

## Thank you...

As Eileen mentioned, Betty Jones was a young Land Army recruit in 1943. Fresh from the Black Country and knowing nothing of farming life, she was posted to Croome Farm. In July she visited the farm for the first time in 70 years. Below is an extract of her letter to our Chairman, John Henderson, shortly afterwards.

"I was not disappointed at the farm. Mr. and Mrs. Troughton were so kind - despite the fact that they were having alterations taking place they took me all round the farm house. There were a lot of changes.

My bedroom was still there but so different; a television and a radiator - what luxury - I felt quite sad when I stood there and looked to see where I put my candlestick and box of six matches. How things have changed.

I went up into the attic where we stored apples in boxes all over the floor and had to go up every now and again to sort out the bad ones.

The big range that was in the kitchen had gone, that was all being altered, the large beam across the ceiling was still there where sides of bacon always hung. Mrs. Troughton was interested to hear what it used to be like.

They no longer have to pump their water - 50 pumps a day we all did and extra at the weekend.

The door to the cellar at the side of the house had been blocked in - that was where we carried the buckets of apple juice down. The cider press was at the back of the house, before it was in the orchard opposite the house.

It was such an experience going round. Most of the buildings have gone - the barns and the cowsheds and a lot of hedges.

Andrew took a picture of me standing by the gate into the orchard - at the back of me was the field where I first met the cattle - the gate and the hedge have gone but the field is still there."

# Defford Airfield Heritage Group

Bob Shaw  
Friends of Croome Park member

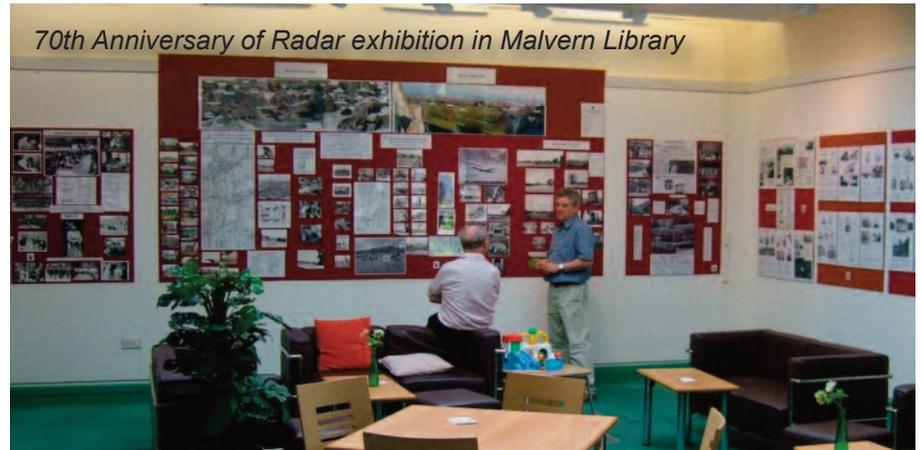
The Defford Airfield Heritage Group (DAHG) is recognised by the National Trust as an authorised support group, with our key members enrolled as NT volunteers to provide historical information and displays to inform visitors about Defford Airfield, which is regarded as an important part of the history of Croome Park.

There is a growing realisation that the airborne radar research and development carried out in Croome Park and over the airfield was of great historical significance. The contribution of Defford airfield to national survival and victory puts it up there with Bletchley Park in historical importance. RAF Defford was 'No Ordinary Airfield'.

An integral part of DAHG is the Electronics Restoration Trust, where DAHG members Tony Waller and Richard Hankins repair and restore vintage (Second World War) radar equipment. Recently a Group meeting was held at ERT premises in Cradley near Malvern, where we marvelled at the range of their collection, many being radar sets first developed and tested in the grounds of Croome Park, and the incredibly high standard of workmanship involved in the restoration of this equipment.



RAF Defford provided the flying facilities for scientists at the Telecommunications Research Establishment (TRE) at Malvern. Members of DAHG, especially Ron Henry and Dennis Williams, worked with colleagues from the Malvern Radar and Technology History Society to set up an



exhibition in Malvern Library that marked the 70th Anniversary of the arrival of TRE, simultaneous with the arrival of the Telecommunications Flying Unit (TFU) at Defford. The exhibition was a great success, attracting much interest, many visitors and extensive coverage by the local media.

The annual RAF Defford Reunion was held at Croome on July 7th. The weather was terrible but the veterans who served and worked at Defford, which closed in 1957, were not deterred and despite the rain turned up to meet again with each other and to talk to visitors who came to see the DAHG display. The weather on the Sunday was kinder and many more visitors stopped to talk to DAHG members and veterans who were on duty.

The first book to be published by DAHG, 'Top Secret Boeing' by Bob Shaw, was launched at the start of April and is selling well in the NT Shop at Croome (also Waterstones, W.H. Smiths in Malvern and Worcester, and local bookshops). The book is important to those interested in the story of 'The Secret Airfield' at Croome as it provides a great deal of insight into the flying radar research at Defford and the personalities involved. It has attracted considerable coverage in local and national media with some very favourable

book reviews. There can be no doubt that taking the story of 'The Boeing' to tell the very important story of RAF Defford helps encourage more visitors to come to Croome to find out more.

Bob will be delivering a lecture to The Friends on September 27th, where he will tell more about the People, Planes and Personalities he encountered in research for the book. This follows a lecture to the volunteers in June, where he suggested that visitors could be pointed to the book as source of information on and insight into Defford airfield. Dennis Williams will be speaking at a National Trust lecture lunch, provisionally entitled 'Life and Death at RAF Defford', on November 14th.

Membership of DAHG (incorporating the RAF Defford Reunion Association) continues to grow, with the AGM and Lunch due to be held after the wreath laying at the RAF Defford Memorial, on November 11th. For further information, contact Graham and Sylvia Evans on 01684 295327.



# My Croome...

Eric Jones  
Friends of Croome Park Vice-President

Ever since the acquisition of the Court and its opening to the public in September 2009, there has been dramatic and continuing change at Croome that has transformed the property almost out of recognition. This is especially so from the point of view of those, like myself, who began as volunteers some ten years ago. At that time we were a very small band of Garden Stewards on duty in the Park when, in my experience, the most frequent question asked by visitors concerned the Court and its ownership. As we looked towards the Court from Church Hill all we could say, very tentatively, was that perhaps one day the Court might have new owners who would secure its future ... and we could only hope that this would be so.

The restoration of the Park itself still had a very long way to go in those days; only the Wilderness Walk had been completely restored. Of course, clearance work had been going on for some years and anyone who has seen photographs of the pre-National Trust days at Croome will know how much had already been done even by 1999, thanks to the heroic efforts of the Croome Volunteers. When I became a volunteer in 2002, Reception was a leaky, elderly caravan and the first morning task of staff was to bail out any overnight rain. The caravan was replaced by a small tent in which leaflets would blow about if there was a breeze. A portakabin subsequently made life easier for staff and this was one of several changes around this time which marked a turning point in Croome's fortunes. In particular, Michael Smith's arrival, and Wendy Carter's as Visitor Services Manager, meant we now had a very creative and energetic partnership leading the property so that the pace of development and change quickened markedly.

The infectious enthusiasm that has always been one of the hallmarks of staff and volunteers



alike at Croome also characterised the formation of the Friends. The group was formally launched on 30th April 2005 and the first edition of what was then called the "Croome Times" was published a month before. John Willis was Editor. John and his wife, Joan, were very much at the heart of these and other initiatives and continued for several years to devote time and energy to supporting Croome. I was Vice Chairman for the first year of the Friends' existence and then Chairman for five years until 2011. One particularly profitable Friends' enterprise was the refreshment tent we set up when events brought extra visitors to the Park; visitors appreciated the tea and cake provided long before the restored Canteen was opened.



The advent of the Canteen, making the Friends' tea tent unnecessary, was one tangible example of the transformations in scale beginning to take place at Croome, all encouraging more visitors to spend time at Croome. Visitor numbers increased and so did the membership of the Friends from 115 in August 2006 to c400 now. There were other changes and new dimensions to the Croome experience even before the reintegration of the Court made the 6th Earls' and Brown's design whole again. Certainly one of the most significant was the Oral History Project, led by Eileen Clement, the launch of which was greatly assisted in 2005-06 by a successful Lottery bid. Throughout this time and continuing to the present, an increasingly varied and ambitious Friends' Events programme organised by Christine Adams and her team has given all of us much pleasure and interest.

Thus, an unstoppable momentum was established in the early "pre-Court" years both by a small core of staff and by a relatively small band of dedicated volunteers and Friends who together worked hard and with immense enthusiasm to revive Croome's fortunes; it was a momentum crucial to underpinning more recent successes, including the milestone reached with the Court's just-in-time acquisition a few short years ago.

# FRIENDS FORUM

## Growing up at Croome

Mary Evans

Friends of Croome Park member

In May 1951 I moved from the New Forest to the Croome Kennels with my parents and baby brother when my father became huntsman to the Croome Hounds. Hounds had been kept at Croome from 1600 to 1719 and from 1738 to 1843. In 1874 the 9th Earl founded the "Earl of Coventry's Hunt"; it became the Croome Hunt in 1882. The hunt buttons still bear the Coventry's coronet today.

The kennels are situated next to Croome's Menagerie Wood. The front of the house there was designed by Adam and the 6th Earl had intended the Menagerie for exotic animals and birds. The area between our house and the kennels was surrounded by a high brick wall, providing a wonderful grass yard for the hounds to exercise and lie in the cool of the trees during hot summers.

The woods and park provided an exciting playground with numerous areas to explore. I was particularly drawn to the woods, which reminded me of the New Forest. On the

edge of the wood close to our house a varied collection of snowdrops appeared at the end of winter. Spring was my favourite time with an abundance of violets, primroses and a carpet of bluebells. Boathouse wood was wonderful to explore – the grotto and parts of the iron bridges, which we would balance on not realising there was a lake underneath because it was so overgrown. We often had picnics at the far end by the weir where we could paddle during hot weather.

We would walk over the fields to High Green to collect milk from Mr Mugglestone's farm next door to the estate office, which was also an off-licence selling home-brewed cider. Most of the houses in High Green were occupied by Estate workers. Mr Page's farm, High Green Farm, provided an opportunity for us to earn extra pocket money during the hop-picking season. The hopyards extended to the Pirton road.

On Sunday mornings we walked across the field at the back of our house, along Jubilee Drive, through Croome Park to the Court for mass. The Court was a residential boys' school run by Catholic nuns. During the early 1950s an air force base was situated on the hill above the Court and some of their staff families, including the Group Captain's wife and daughters, attended the services. The chapel was in the Red Wing but, later, the Indoor Riding School Barn near the Walled Garden was converted to this purpose.

On Coronation Day, 2 June 1952, the air force hosted a party for the local children. We played games in front of the Court and tea was served on trestle tables at the top of the steps. In the evening

we watched the coronation parade on a tiny television in the Officers' Mess - this was the first time I had seen television.

The air force hosted the Opening Meet of the hunt. This was a spectacular sight at the top of the hill in front of the church and



the Group Captain provided drinks for the mounted followers.

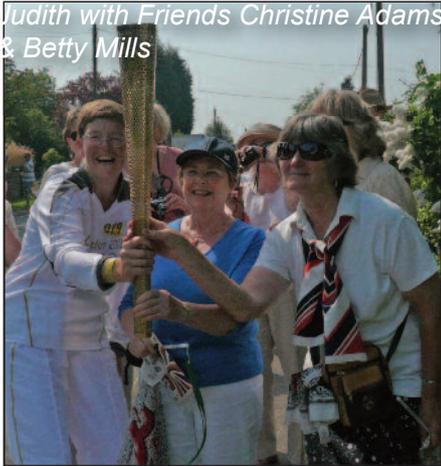
After the air force left, the site was taken over by the construction company building the M5 motorway; the lanes became full of fast moving lorries with many of them ending up in ditches. The countryside was never the same - hedges were ripped up and the lanes widened. Menagerie Wood was sliced in two, which put an end to our walks through to the park.

I had hoped to get married in the (Catholic) Church at Croome but it was not licensed for weddings. Instead we held our reception in the Court. Our photographs were taken on the steps and the reception was held in the Long Gallery.

When I visit Croome Park now I realise how privileged we were to have spent our childhood in such idyllic surroundings.

# Friends Member carries the Torch

Judith with Friends Christine Adams & Betty Mills



Congratulations to Friends of Croome member Judith Stanley who was chosen to carry the Olympic Torch through Callow Hill on 24th May 2012.

Judith was chosen primarily on the basis of voluntarily running the Hindlip Badminton Club for the past 17 years. The great news is that the selection panel also took account of her voluntary work at Croome, both as a volunteer and as a Friends event committee member.



# ...I've been to Worcester to see the Queen

As if it wasn't enough that one of our Friends carried an Olympic torch, another Croome volunteer and Friends event committee member, Sue Lloyd, was chosen to represent the charity Cruse Bereavement to meet the Queen as part of her Diamond Jubilee visit to Worcester's Guildhall in July.

Sue said "I gave the non-obligatory bob and shook her hand -



(c) Mike Henley

gently. I said I was from Cruse Bereavement and that I believed she was our patron. She replied "Indeed I am, and what a worthwhile cause it is."...so my fifteen second engagement with the Queen was over in a flash.

"The atmosphere was tremendous - it was a truly memorable day and an experience I shall look back on with pride."

Sheila Harris  
Friends of Croome Park member

# It's a Scandal!

"Lucy Locket lost her pocket, Kitty Fisher found it  
Not a penny was there in it, only ribbon round it"

Kitty Fisher, a famous 18th century Courtesan, was described as having beauty, wit and charm and was well known throughout the land; her portrait was painted by Joshua Reynolds.

It was reported that one day she met Lady Coventry (Maria Gunning) in the park. Lady Coventry asked her for the name of the dressmaker who had made her stunning dress. Kitty replied that she should ask Lord Coventry as he had given it to her!

The altercation continued with Lady Coventry calling her an "impertinent woman". Kitty replied that she would have to accept the insult because as Maria had recently married Lord Coventry (6th Earl), she was now socially superior to her. She added that she intended to marry a Lord herself to be able to answer her back! Read into this what you will and do look up Kitty Fisher, she died in 1767.

(Lucy Locket was a barmaid at the Cock Alehouse in Fleet Street, London. The pocket was the small pouch/bag carried by ladies.)

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](mailto: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 March 2013**

# News from the garden

Katherine Alker  
Garden and Park Manager

In my last update I said I hoped to have more rain this year than last... well, that has certainly been the case! The garden and park have not suffered too much with the wet weather; the mature trees were showing signs of stress in the drought last year, but this year the balance has been redressed and they are doing well. The water level in the lake has remained at a decent height and there has been little weed on the lake – probably due to the combination of lower temperatures, higher rainfall and the barley straw bales.

On the other hand, fruit harvests are likely to be disappointing due to late frosts damaging blossom and low temperatures preventing what

fruit there is from ripening fully. A few areas of the garden and park have remained waterlogged almost all year so far, and the wet and warmish weather has been ideal for growth when it come to weeds!



As always, our dedicated volunteers have turned up in all weathers to carry out a variety of tasks including weeding, pruning, ragwort pulling, reed removal, working the vegetable patch, tree guard

making and, on occasion, car parking! We have also been joined by Tom, a student from Harper Adams University, for 9 months for his placement.

The number of Garden Stewards is continuing to grow, providing an invaluable presence in the garden (and in the park for those who venture further afield), giving a warm welcome, answering questions and generally keeping an eye on things.

A great big thank you from the Garden and Park team to the Friends of Croome for their generous donation that will enable us to purchase plants for the Temple Greenhouse. And for your continued support of our department.

## Bats in the Belfry

Wendy Carter  
Friends of Croome Committee

With their diverse long-term features and low intensity management, churchyards have great potential to be fabulous wildlife-rich environments.

The Friends have long had an interest in the churchyard of St Mary Magdalene at Croome. The owners, The Churches Conservation Trust (TCCT), recently commissioned an ecological appraisal of the church and churchyard. The subsequent report suggests a number of actions to help balance the needs of wildlife and conservation with the desire to 'tidy up' the churchyard. So what do the churchyard and church add to Croome's flora and fauna?

The combination of grassland species is typical of the lowland meadow that probably existed when the churchyard was enclosed. The management and mowing has ensured a stable floral habitat with species like agrimony, ladies bedstraw, bird's-foot trefoil, meadow vetchling, knapweed and autumn hawkbit. Wildflower-rich habitats like this support good numbers and a variety of invertebrates; in turn supporting birds and bats.

As the churchyard meets the Church Shrubbery, this woodland edge habitat contains potential basking spots for grass snakes and slow-worms. And did you know that bramble is a fantastic resource of food and protection for insects and birds alike? The stretch along the eastern

and northern boundaries also provides connectivity to the woodland edge. It needs to be managed to control its encroachment into the churchyard and to maintain its biodiversity potential but this is easily done by managing the meadow in front of it. Along with self-seeded sycamores, smaller patches can be removed without significantly reducing the benefit.

Gravestones are important for the often over-looked cryptogams (mosses, liverworts, algae and lichen). These indicators of air quality provide an important part of our local biodiversity as they have very specific needs for growth, only growing on certain stone or at certain angles, for example.

The report doesn't suggest that TCCT do nothing. Paths and selected areas around gravestones could be mown, for example. Saplings and some scrub could be removed and the old yew hedge reduced in height. To enhance wildlife features it suggests erecting bat and bird boxes as well as creating a compost/leaf pile for reptiles. Most of all, it says that our churchyard is a stable habitat in an unstable world for wildlife and it should be managed sensitively with regular monitoring of the wildflower-rich grass sward.

For more information about The Churches Conservation Trust [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk)

# Recollections of a Land Agent - part 5

John Henderson  
Chairman, Friends of Croome Park

In 1980, Lord Coventry decided reluctantly to sell his part of the Estate. Both he and his sister Lady Maria, the late Patron of the Friends of Croome Park, had been very welcoming to me and Cara, and were kind and patient, when sometimes difficult matters of management arose.

Lord Coventry was keen for his Estate to be sold as one lot, preferably to an Institutional buyer, but of course there were sharks floating around looking for a bargain to asset strip. Fortunately, Sun Alliance & London Assurance Company were looking to enlarge their farmland investment and submitted the best bid.

On 29th September, Michaelmas Day, 1981 we in the

Office waited with baited breath for word that the transaction had been completed. There was an hour's delay, whilst Sun Alliance hunted round for another million pounds to make up the sale price, before we were metamorphosed into employees of Strutt and Parker. Lord Coventry had arranged for that, for which I was very grateful, and I continued to act independently for the Trustees, a bit for Lord Coventry and a chunk for his second wife under a divorce settlement. I boasted that when Sun bought the 8,000 acres from Lord Coventry, it doubled the size of their agricultural portfolio!

Sun were good, if exacting, owners. They expected annual increases in revenue, which we somehow managed to achieve, but they were also prepared to invest in capital improvements. Making an exception to their

requirement for a financial return, they saved the Owls Nest (Park Seat) from collapse and restored a marvellous listed dovecote on Hermitage Farm, Wadborough, as well as maintaining the garden buildings. However, they simply would not countenance the desilting of Croome River, which had become clogged with reeds following the 1976 drought; after all, where was the return?

Talking of returns, I should mention that apart from really wonderful and supportive staff right the way through, an indispensable asset was my wife. Apart from soothing my furrowed brow, through all the years, she was a superb hostess to a succession of my bosses. It always helps when they actually look forward to an estate visit!

*In the next issue...John's final chapter as Croome's Land Agent!*

## Out & About with Friends...



*With thanks to Paul Stanley & Jenny Brumhead for events photos*

# Memories of a Gardener

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When my father, Leslie Sherwood, left school in Severn Stoke he joined his brothers, Tom and Ernest, on the Croome staff. He became a Garden Boy. He remained there for over 20 years under both the 9th and 10th Earls.

One of his jobs was mowing the lawns. By the 1920s motorised mowers had begun to appear but Croome had a mechanical mower drawn by a pony or donkey; as a Garden Boy, Dad led the pony or steered the mower. An early photo of dad shows him holding a birch broom, or Besom, sitting with a group of gardeners.

As time went on, my father was promoted to work "inside", which meant working in the Glass Houses. Amongst other things, he learnt the art of vine dressing. Grapes were grown inside a large greenhouse - Dad remembered large bunches being taken to the Shrewsbury Flower Show where the 9th Earl often won awards.

The greenhouses had to be heated in the winter and the gardeners had to take turns in stoking up the boilers, which often meant the duty gardener sleeping in a bothy. When my parents lived at Worcester Lodge Dad had to cycle to the Court during the night to take his turn...whatever the weather, the greenhouses had to be a constant temperature.

With no M5 cutting through the park, Dad could ride along the drive, past the Punch Bowl Gates, over the Dry Arch Bridge and through the five-barred swing gate. At that point he would have to get off his bike to open the gate - that's where he sometimes had a problem. The area around the Dry Arch was reputed to be haunted and, although my father was no coward, he could find it a bit daunting at 11.30 on a windy winter's night! He was sometimes known to go the long

way through High Green.

Dad told the story that one dark night a stable lad was returning to the Court after a night at the Old Boar's Head in Severn Stoke. He was closing the swing gate when he saw a most hideous apparition coming towards him, white and moaning. Having heard the ghost stories he ran for his life back to the stables. Only later did he discover that two of the other lads had been waiting for him - one wrapped in a white horse blanket!



My father remembered the Temple Greenhouse with its original windows and underfloor heating fuelled by a fire in the bothy behind. There's a little bedroom upstairs behind the bothy - it must have been rather cosy in there at night with a good fire going...providing you could forget the ghost stories.

The gardeners liked to work at the Temple Greenhouse, away from the Court and the eyes of Head Gardener, Mr Wilson. Sweeping leaves off the paths was a popular job and dad said if they spotted Mr Wilson approaching when the job was nearing completion, they'd pull some leaves back over an already swept path to eek the job

out a little longer.

In 1928 dad and two of his fellow gardeners, Charlie Jones and Harold Salisbury, wrote their names on the wall of the bothy. Last time I looked, most of my dad's name had sadly worn away but the names of Charlie and Harold are still there.

During the 9th Earl's time the only workers allowed to cross the lawns at the South were stable lads, who were held in high regard by his Lordship. This meant a long walk for garden staff! The stable lads dressed in white shirtsleeves and dark waistcoats - when the 9th Earl's eyesight was failing the gardeners would strip down to shirtsleeves and waistcoats to walk safely across the lawns. A canny lot are gardeners!

Sadly, when His Lordship, the 10th Earl, was killed in France in 1940, cut backs had to be made. Eventually my father had to leave, along with many other domestic staff. Lady Coventry let us keep the Lodge and my mother continued to work at the Court.

My father moved to Defford Aerodrome and helped to lay the runways; not quite the peace and tranquility of Croome. Lady Coventry gave my dad a glowing, handwritten reference, which he treasured. When my parents died I searched everywhere but I never found it. I think my mother must have thrown it away by mistake.

A final thought. When I am in the church, each Tuesday, I often think of dad; how he once pumped the little organ for a Coventry family wedding and how, each Christmas he would collect moss from the woods to decorate the windowsills; how his job was to thoroughly clean the Bonyngé memorial in the churchyard until it was gleaming white. I wonder, will it ever be gleaming white again?