

CROOME TIMES

The Newsletter of The Friends of Croome Park. No 6 – December 2006

Welcome to this our 6th edition of Croome Times. As we near the end of our 2nd year we can report that it has been a very successful one – our membership has grown to 139 and our serving of refreshments at special weekends throughout the year has raised the princely total of just over £1300.00. Thanks must be given to those who have given up their time to serve the visitors from our gazebo shelter and a very special thanks must go to our team of bakers.

Visits to the Walled Garden

At the kind invitation of Chris & Karen Cronin, two visits were paid in September to that part of the Walled Garden owned by them to see the progress they were making with its restoration. Both days were sunny and warm and on each occasion some 30 members were able to see the immense amount of work undertaken to restore the greenhouses etc. Chris and Karen told us the Garden was overgrown like a mini Heligan when they bought it. They still have considerable work to do to bring it to its former glory and we have been invited to visit again to see the further progress – so watch this space!



members viewing a restored greenhouse in the Garden

The Talents of the Coventry Family

Early in October over 70 of our members attended a most interesting talk given by Catherine Gordon, author of “The Coventrys of Croome”, and Jill Tovey, Archivist for the Croome Estate Trust. Their talk which was illustrated by slides and readings, gave us an insight into the varied lives the members of the family led and how they spent their leisure time. Their talents included painting and poetry. An extract was also given from the diary of Lady Harriet Anne Cockerell that described her visit to the Continent in 1828. Lady Harriett married the 8th Earl’s son in 1836 and died in 1842 aged 29.



Catherine & Jill at the meeting

The first entry from the Diary is given below. Further entries will be given in future editions of the Newsletter.

Diary of Harriet Anne Cockerell - 1828

First entry- July 18th.

Left Hyde Park Corner at 10 o'clock for a tour of the Continent. Our party consisting of Papa, Mama, Bab, 2 men & 2 maids and Bourghese (the Courier who went with us to Calais). Horses went very slow indeed, changed at Dartford, went to The Bell by mistake, bad horses, boys very saucy. We afterwards found out that the London boys were paid a shilling a horse for taking them there. Changed again at Wright’s Hotel, Rochester, very good and got to Sittingbourne at a ¼ after 6 o'clock where we had some mutton chops, which we found very acceptable tho’ not over good. Left at 7 o'clock, the country very pretty, the corn almost ripe & very yellow. We observed an apple tree in flower and full of fruit. Also we passed a number of Cherry Orchards & Hop Gardens, but I certainly prefer dear Gloucestershire to all these beauties. It was a lovely evening, roads very bad & we did not arrive at Wright’s Hotel at Dover till near 12 o'clock when we got some tea & went to bed.

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Menagerie Wood Project

Pathfinding!

(Nigel Matthews)

Project Days in Menagerie Wood have been ones of contrast. The first saw good weather and primroses with the woods coming to life after winter, the last one was blessed with thunder, lightning and heavy rain. The first 2 days have concentrated on locating the main path, the 3rd day focussed on clearance either side of the main route that had been established.

Split into small groups the Sunday Volunteers and Friends have cautiously at times opened up trenches at intervals from the gateway along the assumed route of the path. The look and feel of the ground have taken some time to adjust to and have been different on each visit. The main difficulty has been in determining where the edges of the path might exist, however we have been able to establish that a compacted gravel path did remain about 6in below the soil level and that its width

indicated it was a carriageway (10 –12 ft. Some clearance in places was needed to find the edges.

The group by the gateway found more remains of the stone gateposts and one hinge but it will take further detailed excavation here to establish the position of the posts and whether they were contemporary with the carriageway.

Near the bridge over the culvert it became more difficult. The trenches reveal that the culvert bridge appears to have been constructed after the original path was laid. A number of the secondary drainage ditches constrain the path route. On the motorway side of the bridge the path was overlaid with a significant depth of clay soil for a short distance, probably spoil from the ditches dug either side. Certainly some days there is standing water either side and it is quite boggy. We can speculate that this length of the path was affected adversely by the ground conditions and needed the drainage measures we can see today. On both sides cut and moulded stonework and old brick was found embedded in the path surface which looked like hardcore rubble from elsewhere in the park. Moulded brick from a previous building has been found incorporated in the ha-ha, and it has been used in foundations. Maybe this was from the same source.

On the second pathfinding day the latter reaches of the path appear to have regular spaced tree trunk remains either side – this has led to speculation that they may be yew stumps indicating a planting arrangement similar to the wild walk. This remains to be confirmed.

Looking back along the path you can see the gentle curves marked by posts so typical of Brown's attention to tantalising the viewer with what to expect next.

The path that joined the carriageway from the shelter belt has been far more elusive. There was no sign of it where it was estimated from maps it should have joined the carriageway, however, the disturbance caused by the drainage channels may have destroyed this evidence.

The second visit has managed to confirm the presence of a narrow foot path with a loosely compacted gravel surface some 20yds in from the fence. Little of it has yet been marked as the clearance work will be more substantial as the path seems to have been abandoned some time ago (maybe when drainage work severed the connection)

There is still considerable work to do on the pathfinding and allied clearance work. The next working day is Dec 3rd – please come the effort is worthwhile.

A big, big, thanks to all who have come on the days, and to Ted and Michael for getting the

equipment ready and getting it to and from the wood.

Archaeology at the “Carriage Splash”

(Mike Ellison & Hilary Burton)_

At the request of The National Trust a group of South Worcestershire Archaeology Group (two of which, Hilary Burton and Mike Ellison are F o C committee members) volunteers undertook a dig which was filmed by the Channel 4 "TIME TEAM" crew for a special programme to be shown in April of next year.

The "dig" was a continuation of the uncovering and appraisal of the "carriage splash" at the southern end of the lake/river in Croome-Park, near Pershore.

This excavation is ongoing as it was started a year ago and continued during the Archaeology weekend this summer.

This weekend there were three separate elements.

1. A continuation of the exposure and detection of the track away from the water in a northerly direction. The track is well built of individual stone pieces placed in a distinct pattern. There are well defined edge pieces at either side of the (approximately) ten feet wide surface which has a centre line of stones in the same direction. The main surface has stone laid at right angles to the side and centre stones and at right angles to the direction of traffic on the track.
2. A test pit was dug about 15 yards in a northerly direction in the expected path of the track. The edge of the track was exposed but no evidence of a side road (which maps had indicated) was found.
3. On the southerly side of the "splash" more ground was uncovered to expose an area of roughly laid stone which it is speculated might have been a turning point for the carriages.

The SWAG members were filmed digging the several areas of the site and obeyed instructions not to look at the camera!. As the weather was dull and overcast in contrast to the previous filming on the Croome Estate in June in bright sunshine the problems of continuity will be interesting in the finished programme.

At the same time a little further down the river Mike Ellison helped Michael Smith (the Croome Park properties manager) open for the sake of the cameras a sluice gate or "plug" which can be used to control the level of water in the lake. This was not easy and necessitated the use of waders, crowbar and lump hammer!



Filming at the “splash” site

The film crew professed themselves pleased with all our efforts and it will be interesting to see if any escapes the cutting room floor.

Supporter Groups Annual Conference

(Eric Jones - Friends Chairman)

On 23rd October, Eileen Clement and I went to the Supporter Groups Annual Conference at Coughton Court. Approximately 45 representatives of various regional associations and centres attended, 17 N.T. staff members, and 7 Regional Committee members. After Liz Roberts, the Regional Director, gave an overview of the Trust's strategy and, in particular, its return to financial health, referring to what she called the "triple bottom line" of money, people and conservation, we were split into three groups.

Disappointingly, after useful discussions in the morning, lack of time in the afternoon led to the programme being curtailed, so that there was no sharing and cross fertilisation of ideas. Instead, we were promised summaries on paper. I have still not received mine at the time of writing, and I suspect others have not had the promised feedback either. Not, I am afraid, one of the Trust's organisational successes.

As a footnote, let me add I attended the N.T. AGM in Cheltenham at the beginning of November and was pleased, not least, to see the Croome stand there. It was a much better organised and rewarding event, as it needed to be to cope with around 700 members and a huge number of Trust staff.

Oral History Project Exhibition

"Croome before the National Trust – the story so far..." (Caroline Livingstone)

Saturday 14th October saw an exciting milestone in our Oral History Project, with an interim exhibition held at Earl's Croome Village Hall. The afternoon was a resounding success with over 150 people attending. One family even came especially from Sussex bringing some photographs from 1967; a valuable addition to our collection.



Caroline Livingstone & Eileen Clement at the Exhibition

The exhibition was opened by Julia Letts, of the Oral History Society, who was on hand with her portable equipment to record visitors' memories. We also scanned a number of relevant and interesting photographs brought in by members of the public.

On show were just a small number of the press cuttings, pictures and other documents collected to date. Visitors were also treated to a 15 minute audio-visual presentation, which included scanned photographs and sound clips from some of the 26 interviews recorded so far.

Eileen Clement, Caroline Livingstone, Charlotte Davies and Sue Lloyd would like to thank the Friends catering team for providing and serving tea and cakes. Special thanks go also to Pat and Catherine Griffin for their work in distributing leaflets.

The event was a great achievement all round; we have learned a lot and the final show at the end of the project will be even bigger and better and The Friends of Croome Park gained 9 new members.

Caroline & Eileen must be congratulated on the quality of the displays at the Exhibition and the large amount of hard work that they have put in to make the project a great success. Ed.

From The Property Manager

(Michael Smith)

After a brief late summer lull in our usually hectic project schedule, the National Trust regional team gathered at Croome in early November to set out restoration plans for the coming year. These meetings are always full of lively debate, with specialists in fields as diverse as archaeology, nature conservation, agriculture, garden history, and architecture keen to put forward their perspective on the future of the park.

Despite these varied (and often passionately presented!) points of view, we always seem to be able to agree a way forward that is of greatest benefit to the park as a whole; not so much a compromise, but more a team effort that brings better results than had the project been approached from any one slant. A good example of this process at work can be seen in the newly dredged pond to the north of the Evergreen Shrubbery. The work here will provide a better habitat for birds and amphibians, help provide better drainage for the farmland, as well as restoring an important visual feature of the landscape. There is certainly plenty of work planned for the park during the close season, including further reinstatement of irogates and railings, more tree and shrub planting, and the restoration of the statue of Pan. In fact there seems to be more on the cards now than ever before!

William Dean

William Dean was Head Gardener at Croome to the 6th and 7th Earls for nearly 40 years until his death at Croome on 11th May 1831 aged 64. He is buried

in the churchyard behind the Church of St Mary Magdalene.

His grave is in need of restoration having been covered with lichen and grass. The Friends are looking into the possible restoration of this important grave so that it can be seen by visitors to the Park.



William Dean's Grave

Research is also underway to find out about Dean's family. If any member has any information as to his early years before coming to Croome or about his family, please let Joan Willis know.

Croome Outing to Dinefwr

(Sue Coleman)

On 12 September 2006 a number of volunteers and Friends went on a day outing to Dinefwr. The forecast was appalling, Wendy was laid low with flu, and we'd just discovered that the new tearoom at Dinefwr was closed until October. It could only get better ...

'Don't touch anything!' warned Paul Faulkner our host for the day and Property Manager for Carmarthenshire, raising his voice over a mixture of Radio 1 and Five Live 'There's a lot of wet paint'. We were being treated to a special viewing of Newton House, a recently acquired National Trust Property, prior to the opening of the basement and ground floor to the public in early October and the contractors were working at full speed to meet the approaching deadline. They had already removed 6 tons of rat droppings – thankfully, before our arrival, and were busy at work on the butler's pantry.

We began with coffee and a talk by Paul. Dinefwr, he explained, comprises 800 acres of park, 1 Iron Age Fort, 2 Roman Forts, 1 Medieval Castle, 2 Medieval Towns, the 18th century Home Farm and Newton House, a 17th century mansion – all set in a Lancelot Brown 'inspired' landscape.

We were taken on a tour of part of Newton house which was built in 1660, in continuous family ownership for over 500 years and often regarded as a bit of a blot on the landscape. A Gothic façade was added in the 1860's but death duties forced the break up and sale of the estate in the 1970's and bit by bit the National Trust has been acquiring it. The Trust will refurbish and redecorate and, because all the original furnishings have long gone, aim to furnish in keeping with the chosen year of 1912.

Paul already has responsibility for the nearby gold mines, a couple of beaches, a hill farm; now a large chunk of Dinefwr has been added – the Home Farm in 2001 and the Inner Courtyard and Servants' Quarters of the house in March 2006. A Roman fort was sought here and they came up with two!

We heard some of the stories behind the house, the mystery of the dead black cat, the hidden shoe, the National Trust ceiling thoughtfully decorated with acorns several hundred years before its time. We saw the Drawing Room, the Servants' Quarters, the Wine Cellar, the Butler's Kitchen. And did I hear someone say they caught a glimpse of the ghost of Lord Edward Rhys...?

Then out to the gardens unexpectedly basking in September sunshine – lovingly tended, we were told, by 2 sets of volunteers. They've already planted 2,500 oak trees – so only 3 thousand to go!

Wendy had thoughtfully arranged a buffet lunch so after a break we set off to explore the 5 newly uncovered and charted walks and to tackle the climb up to the medieval castle (maintained by the National Trust) The walks are delightful, taking in various visitor attractions – the pigeon house and bird hide, pump house and slaughterhouse, ice house and mill pond.

The Castle Walk is just over 2km and provides spectacular views of the house and grounds, of old oak, ash and sycamore woodland, of fallow deer and the rare White Park Cattle, of the Tywi valley with the river winding and sparkling in the sunshine. The high spot in every sense has to be the castle itself – seeped in history, imposing, romantic, and atmospheric – and sympathetically made safe so that we could enjoy the spectacular views from the battlements and the keep.

Visit Dinefwr soon – it's a delight.

Members' Meeting

Our next meeting for members will be held on 25 January 2007 at Severn Stoke Parish Hall. This will be principally a social evening with wine and nibbles. During the evening members will be able to view some of the material collected for the LHI project and learn about some of the exciting developments within the Park planned by the Trust for 2007. We hope to see as many of our members as possible at this meeting.

And Finally

We wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and a Healthy and Prosperous New Year.