

THE FRIENDS OF CROOME



NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2024 Issue 42

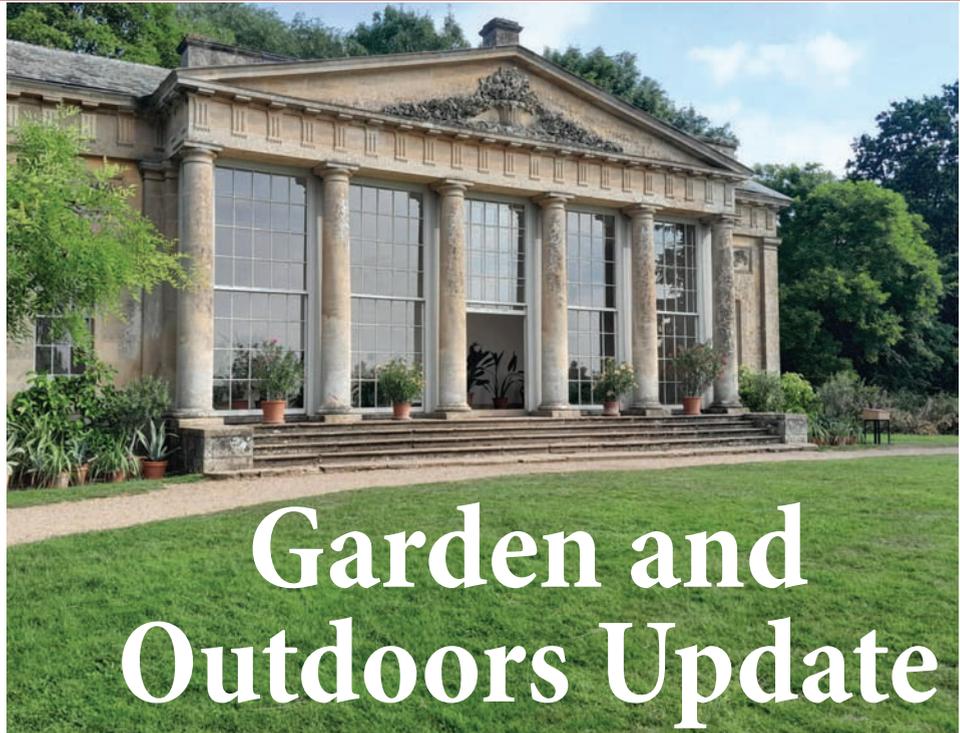
The year is flying by and we're racing to keep up with all the tasks in the garden and park. If you've taken a walk round recently, I hope you've enjoyed the Pages from Nature exhibition both inside the court and out in the garden. The Garden team have been doing well to keep the place looking good and there are plenty of plants in flower to enjoy. They also built a Bug Hotel in the Wild Walk ready for summer activities. The Ranger team have been kept busy in the further reaches of the park, repairing tree guards, estate walls, doing surveys to monitor ash dieback and moving items around ready for Summer of Play!

I'm really pleased to say that we have some much-needed work scheduled in on the Temple Greenhouse in September, so you'll see scaffolding covering the building for about a month. The Garden Team will be moving the plants inside the building earlier than normal so they are not in the way.

Visitors will still be able to access the building through the central door and the scaffolding won't be too hefty so the building will still get good amounts of light.

The western end of the building has been getting damp as the rain has been dripping off the roof and directly onto the lower section of the stonework under the window. In summer 2023, we installed a temporary chutelet on the roof to push the rainwater further away from the building so it lands on the gravel below. This has worked really well, so a chutelet will be properly fixed onto each side of the building in the upcoming work.

The work also includes stonework repairs to a few small areas of the Bath Stone, and repointing and repairs to the brickwork on the bothy at the rear of the building. We will be adding a gutter along the back of the bothy, with a down pipe to fill a tank so the garden team can use the water on the plants in the Temple Greenhouse. There will be a land drain installed to take excess rainwater away from the building. The work can go ahead thanks to a donation that we received



Garden and Outdoors Update

from a private individual, as well as property funds. We have sought Listed Building Consent for the work and had archaeological advice. We've also got an ecologist involved throughout as there are bats using the building as a roost. Over the summer Worcestershire Bat Group carried out some surveying across the site. On one visit in June they counted 152 Lesser Horseshoe bats at the Temple Greenhouse!

We look forward to the work being completed in October. The building will then be given chance to dry out and once that has happened, we will tackle the repair work to the inside of the western end of the building where plaster has come off the wall due to the damp. That work won't happen for at least a year but getting this work done in September will be a great start to getting the building sound again.

On another note, October and I are doing a 25km walk along and across the River Thames in September to raise funds for the charity CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably).

Every week 125 people in the UK take their own lives, and 75% are male. CALM exists to change this by offering life-saving services, provoking conversation and bringing people together to reject 'living miserably'. Please consider sponsoring us - *Team Triple C* at [Justgiving.com](https://www.justgiving.com). £8 is enough to fund one potentially life-saving call.

Katherine Alker
Garden and Outdoors Manager



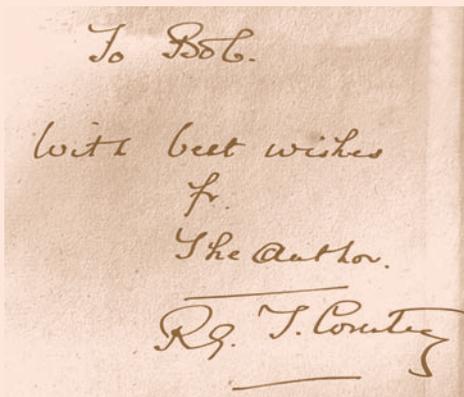
Richard Coventry in later life

Richard George Temple Coventry: Scholar, Sportsman, Soldier, Poet

by Clive O'Donnell

'I have walked in the ways where the world comes not, and found
A joy in the common things of day's rich round -
In the clouds and skies, and a river's wandering sound.'
(from 'The Common Things')

I recently came across a slim volume 'Songs and Poems' (1933) inscribed 'To Bob, with best wishes from the author, RGT Coventry'. I recalled that a previous edition of the Friends of Croome newsletter had reproduced an earlier poem of Coventry's, 'The Malvern Hills' (1907), with a caption that he was a great-grandson of the 7th Earl of Coventry. I decided to find out more about his life and was fascinated by what I discovered.



Coventry's dedication and signature in his 1933 'Songs and Poems'.

Born at Earls Croome on 22nd October 1869, a son of Captain William Coventry and Frances Norbury, Richard George Temple Coventry was educated as a boarder at Hereford Cathedral School and then at Brasenose College, Oxford. He won scholarships to both and would proudly relate how his education hadn't cost his parents a penny. At Oxford he quickly made a name for himself on the rugby field, winning a blue in 1889, 1890 and 1891 playing at half back. Oxford had an even record over his three appearances, with a win, a draw and a loss. Coventry also played for his college at cricket, but with little success.

On leaving Oxford in 1892 with a degree in history, he read for the Bar but was never called. Back in Worcestershire he was made captain of the Worcester Rugby Club, based at Pitchcroft from 1893 until the club disbanded in 1896 (reformed in 1910.) During this period Coventry also represented the Midlands and toured New Zealand. Rugby was far from being his only sporting interest. He was an accomplished skater winning several competitions in Switzerland, and in true Coventry tradition, an obituary described him

as a 'clever fisherman, shot and horseman'. His literary talents came to the fore in the first decade of the new century with volumes of poetry published in 1907 and 1908; one of his poems 'Solitude' being chosen for an anthology of English verse. He was also a regular contributor to Country Life and other publications.

During World War I Coventry served with the Worcestershire Regiment under Lord Dudley, initially as a Lieutenant with a reserve unit of the 6th Battalion. Later promoted to Captain, he wrote a number of poems about the war drawing on his first-hand experience of the conflict in France. In tone and content he was more Rupert Brook than Wilfred Owen.

'Immortal Aisne that English blood
Hath swollen to so deep a flood,
Outrun your hollow banks that so
The crimson streams may overflow,
And lands new-born of them may be
Enriched of larger liberty.'
(from 'The Wine-Press of God')

After the war, with his rugby playing days behind him, Richard Coventry was happy to pass on his knowledge and expertise in various guises. He wrote for the Daily Mail, reporting on games and analysing tactics, most notably during tours by the All Blacks. Closer to home he was an active President of Worcester Rugby Club, seldom missing a home match at Perdiswell. He often held lectures on developments in the game, denouncing any unsporting play.

He was a sociable man with a wide circle of friends, and a great favourite in his home village of Storridge. As well as tending his own garden he planted a variety of bulbs and other plants around Old Storridge and Alfrick, creating a wonderful canopy of colour each spring.

'O climb with me to Storridge height,
And view its wide demesne,
And you shall see as fair a sight,
As eye hath ever seen.'
(from 'Storridge')

Coventry died, aged 69, in Devon on 19 January 1939, during a visit to his brother William in Paignton. He left his bungalow, land and furniture at Old Storridge to Christopher Paget Norbury, requesting him to permit Major Fetherstonhaugh to enjoy the privilege of fishing the water. Another bungalow, furniture and his motor car was bequeathed to Ronalie Whitaker, £100 was given to Dick Coventry with the residue of his property left to his nephew, William George Coventry.

'I shall lie full of rest,
In the soft fold
Of earth's green garment dressed,
And as of old
On me the dawn shall break,
The sun set slow,
And though I may not wake,
Yet shall I know.'
(from 'A Beatitude')



The Oxford University XV of 1889 with Coventry on the ground in the centre

A Touch of Ceramics by Hugh Worsfold



The collection at Croome Court of ceramics was produced by several manufacturers. The best is on display in the Golden Box in the Dining Room and contains items mainly by four manufacturers: Flight, Barr and Barr, Chamberlain & Co, Sevres and Meissen.

Flight, Barr and Barr

In 1751 a porcelain factory had been set up by John Wall and William Davis at Warmstry House on the banks of the River Severn in Worcester. They had worked together previously to develop porcelain - John Wall was a physician and William Davis an apothecary. They sought advice and help in developing the product from the Bristol porcelain manufactory of Lund and Miller. Wall and Davis's factory was known as "The Worcester Tonquin Manufactory"

In 1783, the factory was purchased by Thomas Flight - the former London sales agent for the concern - for £3,000. He let his two sons run the concern, with John Flight taking the lead role till his death in 1791. In 1788 George III, following a visit to the company, granted it a royal warrant, and it became known as the "Royal Porcelain Works". They had their difficulties as the factory was not in a good state of repair and their chief decorator Robert Chamberlain left to set up his own business. Production was limited to low-end patterns of mostly Blue and White porcelains after Chinese porcelain designs of the period.

In 1792 the surviving brother Joseph took Martin Barr as a partner, trading as Flight & Barr. In 1804 the firm was operating as Barr, Flight & Barr and Martin Barr junior had joined the firm. The manufacturing partnership continued until 1813, when on the death of Martin Barr senior there were new changes to the official title of the firm which became Flight, Barr & Barr. The partnership of Joseph Flight, Martin Barr, and George Barr continued until Flight's death in 1838 when Martin and George Barr decided not to continue the business and it was amalgamated with the larger and more successful Chamberlain company.

Above are two examples of their work in the collection, both of which were commissioned by Peggy Lady Coventry, wife of the 7th Earl. The first we know well as the Blind Earl's service. It is part of a 42-piece dessert service, moulded and painted with bouquets of roses and other flowers within gilt scroll border. Impressed marks circa 1820. However, the Worcester factory of Flight, Barr and Barr had begun making this design, originally called the 'Chelsea Rosebud', over 50 years before in 1768.



Lady Coventry ordered the service because she had seen it before at the home of her father Sir Abraham Pitches (a brandy merchant by profession). He had some of the original 'Chelsea Rosebud' design. She liked it because the tactile nature of the design was such that her husband would be able to feel it. The design had actually gone out of fashion and the factory had stopped making it. Lady Coventry commissioned the factory to resurrect the design but she wanted some changes to the design and service. There was to be more pronounced scalloping to the edges, some square plates and the leaves were to be a darker colour.

The second example is a shaped square dish, one of four, forming part of a thirty-six-piece service painted with baskets of various flowers on stone ledges, the pale lilac borders gilt with the Coventry coat of arms within gilt foliage rims. This service was also commissioned by Lady Coventry and the invoice in the archives shows the cost being £196, about £15,000 in today's money.

It is believed that the painting of the flowers on the various pieces may have been done by Thomas Baxter who has been described as "the most accomplished artist who painted Worcester porcelain in the first half of the nineteenth-century". Also, it has been said that all the flowers depicted were grown at Croome, but this is not certain.

Chamberlain and Co

Robert Chamberlain served his apprenticeship in the factory begun by Dr John Wall in 1751, and he and his two sons Robert and Humphrey were employed as decorators by Thomas Flight before starting their own production in around 1792. Following the elder Robert's death in 1798, this firm belonged to his sons and traded as H. & R. Chamberlain.

During a visit to Worcester in September 1807, the future King George IV toured both principal porcelain factories - Barr, Flight & Barr, as it was then called, and H & R Chamberlain - and granted each of them his Royal Warrant. From the Chamberlain factory he ordered dinner, dessert and breakfast services; each piece to be decorated in a completely different pattern, described by Chamberlain as 'copied from old India and other China'. The 140-piece Harlequin dessert service was the first to be delivered, in July 1811. Following this Royal patronage, they set up a showroom in London.



As mentioned earlier they merged with Flight, Barr and Barr in 1838 and continued to trade under the name Chamberlain and Co. The company went from strength to strength and still exists today. Above are two examples of their work in the Collection. The first we are familiar with from a selection of the plates that appear in the ceiling of the Golden Box: a dinner plate which is part of the 118-piece Worcester blue-ground service in the collection. It has the Coventry crest surrounded by the motto and surmounted by an Earl's coronet. The pale blue-ground borders with panels of flowers with gilt foliage. Circa 1840. The second, which is stored on the 2nd floor of Croome Court, is described as a saucer-dish forming part of a thirty-eight-piece tea service; the date of manufacture is not known.



Sevres Porcelain Manufactory

The Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres is one of the principal European porcelain manufactories. Located in Sèvres, Hauts-de-Seine, France, it is the continuation of Vincennes porcelain, founded in 1740, which moved to Sèvres in 1756. It has been owned by the French crown or government since 1759 and has always maintained the highest standards of quality. Almost immediately, it replaced Meissen porcelain as the standard-setter among European porcelain factories, retaining this position well into the 19th century.

The Manufacture de Vincennes was founded thanks to the support of Louis XV and his mistress Madame de Pompadour, in order to compete with factories such as Chantilly in France and Meissen in Germany. In 1756, the manufactory was moved to a building in Sèvres, built at the initiative of Madame de Pompadour, near her château de Bellevue. In 2010 it became a public organisation, its mission, in accordance with its origins in 1740, is to produce ceramic works of art using artisanal techniques, including both reproductions of old models and contemporary creations.

Above is an example of Sèvres in the Coventry collection. The description for this beaker reads - a Sèvres later-decorated bleu-celeste flared two-handled beaker, one of a pair, with panels of musical trophies and flowers in gilt foliage cartouches, with a minute rim chip, blue interlaced 'L' marks. The date of manufacture is not known.



Meissen

Meissen porcelain or Meissen china was the first European hard-paste porcelain. Early experiments were done in 1708 by Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus. After his death in October 1708, Johann Friedrich Böttger continued von Tschirnhaus's work and brought this type of porcelain to the market, financed by Augustus the Strong, King of Poland and Elector of Saxony.

The production of porcelain in the royal factory at Meissen, near Dresden, started in 1710 and attracted artists and artisans to establish, arguably, the most famous porcelain manufacturer known throughout the world. Its signature logo, the crossed swords, was introduced in 1720 to protect its production; the mark of the swords is reportedly one of the oldest trademarks in existence.

Meissen remained the dominant European porcelain factory, and the leader of stylistic innovation, until about the 1760s when the new styles introduced by the Sèvres factory meant they became the world leader.

Above is an example of Meissen in the collection: a Meissen pot-pourri bowl painted with flower sprays and insects and moulded relief with garlands of flowers (handles restored) blue crossed swords mark, circa 1880.



The Four Seasons Statues at Croome

by Faye Claridge

Many will have seen images of the last known of 'The Four Seasons' statues that once graced the Evergreen Shrubbery at Croome. For many years four white plinths have indicated their original positions. Now in the innovative spirit of the 6th Earl of Coventry, new sculptures are being created to take their place where the missing Coade stone garden statuary once stood. As well as being attractive in themselves, they will inspire a range of engagement activity, including a new volunteer-guided sculpture walk for visitors.

The new outdoor sculptures, themed on the four seasons, will be installed at Croome in October. Each sculpture has been co-designed through workshops with four groups: Croome volunteers, looked after young people with Green Fingers, participants from HMP Hewell and women receiving wellbeing support through the JOY project. Through seasonal creative sessions, participants produced a rich variety of creative ideas and images in response to Croome's history, nature and current use.

Each community group worked within the theme of one season developing a range of creative responses taking Croome and its landscape as inspiration. Volunteers and staff created group poems, water colour meadows, nesting boxes and cyanotype images of flowers whilst thinking about summer. At a visioning session in June the groups were able to meet, and it was inspirational to see the work of different groups. Some of the artwork and words written from within HMP Hewell were particularly moving.

At Croome we will soon see large plasma-cut steel spheres. The wooden plinths on which they will rest are from the fallen 'Capability' Brown cedar: will remember that fateful day when it fell into the lake! The sculptures will capture the essence of Croome through the seasons, whilst reflecting issues explored by the groups around climate change, land access and inclusivity.



The Four Seasons is particularly special because it's being co-created with some vulnerable communities that face the greatest barriers to the benefits of heritage and culture. It feels like we're embracing the National Trust's pledge 'forever, for everyone' and hopefully inspiring many others, for years to come, to see their place in this special landscape. The Four Seasons commission is funded through grants and support from Arts Council England, the National Trust and the Friends of Croome.



Croome's Fabulous Flora and Fauna by Richard Clifford

I started working at Croome in May 2022 as a facilities assistant and as I started to find my way around the site I realised just how much mother nature had blessed the place. Being a hobbyist wildlife photographer I was in my element, spending lunch breaks and days off searching for my next project. Now springtime is when this place is at its best in my opinion and with all the care and attention given by Croome's rangers and gardeners the flora and fauna can't wait to literally spring into life.



An early snowdrop near the Church



We all know how stunning the snowdrops and bluebells are but look a little closer and you will find many more of nature's delights. Garlic mustard can be found growing within the shrubberies and hedgerows where you will also see mating Orange Tip butterflies and it's very easy to find their bright orange eggs (above right and below left).





Many other species of butterfly can be found around the site during summer with some of the rarer ones being Grizzled Skipper, Clouded Yellow and I am currently undertaking a survey for West Midland Butterfly Conservation to try and find the eggs of the Brown Hairstreak.

The riverside is alive with insects and a fantastic place to see dragonflies and damselflies. Many species can be found including Emerald and Red Eyed damselflies (right).

Otter and kingfisher can be spotted occasionally along the river but this calls for early starts and piles of patience to get any good views.

Early summer brings the much loved Swallows (below) and House Martins (below right) which can both be found nesting and raising their young, with the Swallows around the RAF area and the House Martins nesting under the eaves of the Court.



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Kestrels (above) can be seen regularly hunting around the meadows and hedgerows and the fabulous Little Owl (above right) can sometimes be seen roosting in the fallen oak.

In autumn and winter many birds fly south and insects either die off or hibernate amongst the log piles and vegetation. You may think there is not much to be seen at this time but Croome is now becoming a well-known hotspot for rare or unusual fungi. Visitors have come specially to see the rare Wrinkled Peach fungus (below) which we seem to have in abundance here at Croome due to the many elm logs that are scattered over the site: I counted around 150 of these last year. Most sites would be pleased to have just one!

I can't leave without mentioning this picture I took of a Frosted Bonnet fungus (right). As luck would have it was actually covered in frost and this image found its way onto BBC's Winterwatch where Chris Packham raved about it.

These are just some of my personal highlights but there is so much more to be found at Croome and hopefully I can share some more of it with you in the future.



© Richard Clifford



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Summer Progress Update: A New Chapter in the Croome Walled Gardens *by Chris and Karen Cronin*

Mosaic Garden: A Masterpiece Unveiled

The all-new Mosaic Garden, an intricately crafted kitchen garden-inspired piece by the talented Claire Cotterill, is officially complete! This unique addition to our gardens is now open for visitors to admire and enjoy.



Middle Section Development: Onward and Upward

Exciting advancements are happening in the new middle section, with groundwork finished and the water feature taking shape. Next up is the installation of steel edging for the steps and handrail posts. Front and back steps are being added, along with side ramped paths to ensure accessibility for wheelchairs and trampers. Over the winter, a stunning sculptured water feature made from stainless steel will be designed and installed, ready to be unveiled to visitors next year.





Croome Gallery & Pottery: Art in Bloom

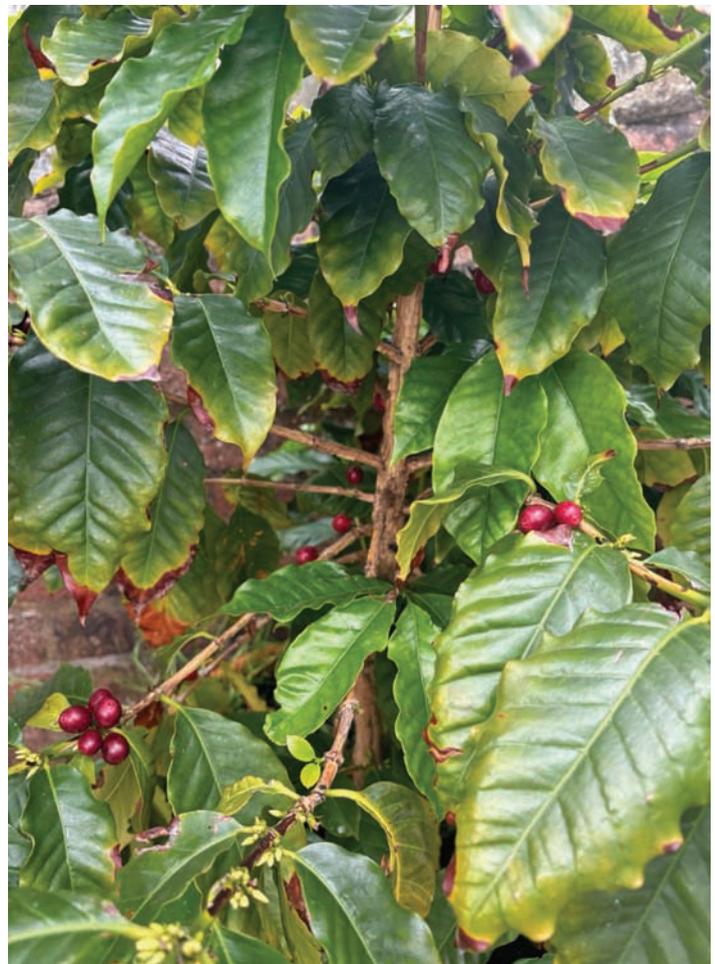
Croome Gallery & Pottery continues to shine with monthly art exhibitions. Sarah, our talented artist in residence, has been capturing the magic of The Walled Gardens through her enchanting sketches. Her new design, inspired by the garden's walls, flowers, and produce, is a must-see. The gallery also offers a stunning collection of handmade gifts, including bespoke plant and vegetable labels and chopping boards crafted from unique off-cuts from the Pineapple House.



Gallery Hours: Extended Through Christmas

The Gallery will remain open on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays until Christmas. From October, entry will be free when the Walled Gardens close for the season.

Visit Croome Gallery & Pottery between 11 am and 4 pm to enjoy the latest exhibitions and unique handmade items.



Bountiful Harvest: Apples, Tomatoes, and More

The gardens are flourishing with apples, tomatoes, courgettes, cucumbers and melons. This year, the Fig House has yielded a crop of bananas, and we are proud to announce our first-ever coffee beans are growing!

Restoration Spotlight: The Pineapple House

The restoration of the Pineapple House is making great strides. Dan has been meticulously handcrafting bespoke frames, with a total of 30 windows spanning the length of the greenhouse. By the end of September, all windows should be in place, ready for glass installation and painting during the winter months. Stay tuned for more updates next season as the gardens continue to grow and flourish!





Broadway Tower (Henry William Taunt c.1900)

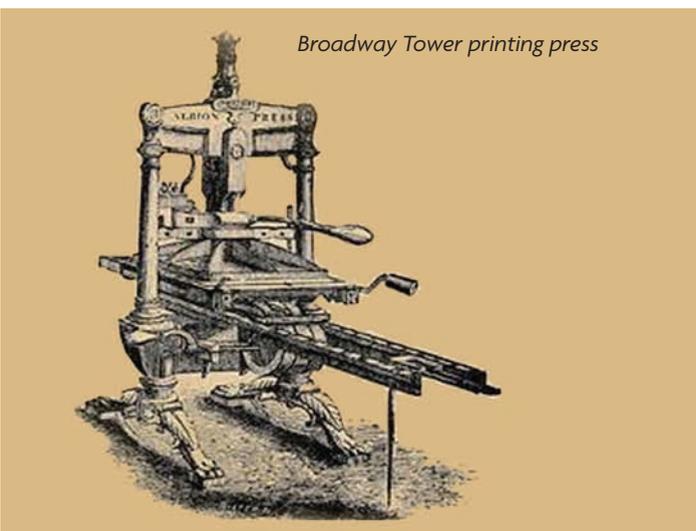


Broadway Tower after the Coventrys

Information from the Broadway History Society

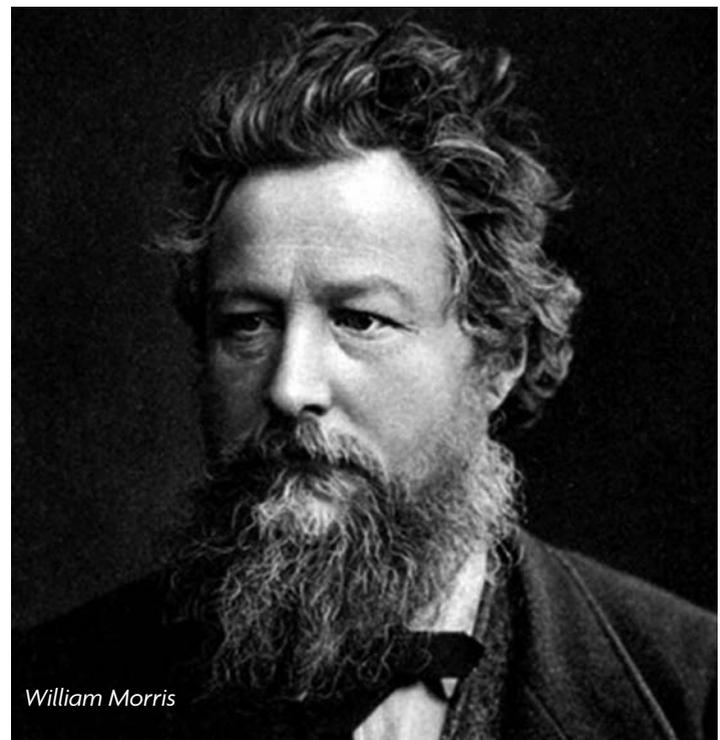
On the death of the 6th Earl of Coventry in 1809, John Coventry, the Earl's son with Barbara St John, inherited the tower and surrounding land. In the 1820s it was sold to Sir Thomas Phillipps who owned the nearby Middle Hill estate. Phillipps was born in Manchester but was brought up by his grandparents who lived near Broadway. His grandfather farmed several hundred acres and the family had been renting farmland in the area from the Coventry family since 1706. From 1827, Sir Thomas used the tower to house a printing press.

attracted many visitors including the English artist and designer Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris, famous as a textile designer and founder of the British arts and crafts movement. It is believed that Morris wrote a letter from the tower which led to the formation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877. Price, known affectionately by his friends as the 'Knight of Broadway Tower' departed the Tower after 11 years, when he reluctantly gave up his tenancy in 1878.



Broadway Tower printing press

Phillipps ceased to use the tower in 1863. It was used by glove-makers before 1866 when Cornell Price took out a lease on the building as a holiday home. The tower with its wonderful views



William Morris

The tower continued to remain part of the Middle Hill estate. In 1930, the Hollington family moved in as tenant farmers, cooking on a portable stove and climbing the winding stairs by candlelight as there was no electric light or gas. During World War II, whilst tenanted by Hollington (who had joined the Observer Corps), the tower was used as a lookout post to map enemy aircraft.





The tower remained part of the Middle Hill Estate until 1949 when, on the death of Miss Emily Hingley (who, with her sister Lucy, had owned the estate since the end of the Great War), it was offered to the National Trust as a gift, but declined. In 1952 ownership of the tower passed to the Hon. Frederick Anthony Hamilton Wills, subsequently 2nd Baron Dulverton of Batsford (1915-1992). The land surrounding the tower was developed into a country park with its own herd of red deer and the tower restored and converted into a museum, and opened to the public in 1975.

In 1950, an above-ground concrete slab observation post was built: a basic structure consisting of two small rooms equipped with little more than a telephone that connected the post to a regional control centre. In 1961, during the 'Cold War', a secret Royal Observer Corps bunker was built near to the tower. As part of a network of bunkers around the country, it served as an early warning system – to monitor the effects of radiation from a nuclear attack. The bunker was manned until 1991 and has since been restored and is open to the public on certain weekends of the year. In the early-1960s the tower was the home of an elderly woman, employed as a caretaker, and a large number of cats. Visitors were allowed to climb the stairs to the top of the tower on payment of sixpence.

Since 1980, the grounds and the tower, with its magnificent views across 16 counties, have been in the private ownership of the Will family and open to the public most days.



Croome Church Bells *by Paul Smith*



Hatchway in the ringing chamber at Croome



Bell being lowered through the hatchway



At Matthew Higby's workshop

The church of St Mary Magdalene at Croome was dedicated on 29 January 1763 after being relocated in the remodelling of the Croome Estate by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown under the instructions of George William, 6th Earl of Coventry. Thomas Coventry, the 2nd Earl from 1699, was an accomplished ringer. The tenor bell was recast in that year and carries his name and the Coventry Arms. Following the closure of the church in 1973 the ring, originally cast in 1651, was little used and eventually fell into disrepair. A 'DIY' restoration project in 2011, celebrating the Centenary of the Worcestershire and Districts Change Ringing Association, led to the tower's revival.

Great efforts have been taken to ensure the continued use of the 260-year-old installation, the sound of which, on nearly 700 occasions (usually Sunday afternoons) since 2011, has brought much favourable attention. So much so, a surprise offer to pay for a complete "professional" restoration was received. The £45,000 project to rehang the bells has been accepted and should be completed during 2024. This will provide new wheels, sliders, pulleys, clappers and metal headstocks. Each bell will be turned by 45 degrees to present an unworn face of the sound bow for the new clappers to strike. Bells 1,3 and 6 will be tuned to better fit in with bells 2, 4 and 5 but retaining their "old style" characteristics. The existing oak wooden frame will be retained. The trap doors were opened and the bells removed from the tower on 9th and 10th April then transported to Matthew Higby's foundry in Somerset. Return of the bells is hoped for by late summer 2024.

