

THE FRIENDS OF CROOME



NEWSLETTER

Spring 2023 Issue 39



Croome Garden and Park update

by **Katherine Alker**

Winter is never a quiet time for us in the outdoors, and this year has been no exception! The proper cold snap over the winter was welcomed in the garden and park – it seems like we haven't had a really cold winter for a while, so it should help with pest and disease management. It also gave the opportunity for some beautiful photos so hopefully you were able to get here for a walk and see the place with a dusting of snow.

Thanks to a donation from the Friends of Croome, we have been able to purchase a smart new cold frame. The garden team are very excited about this as it will enable us to propagate our own plants, including we hope, some of the trees which were planted back in the 18th century for the 6th Earl of Coventry.



friendsofcroome.org.uk



In the garden, the whole team worked together to create a new retaining wall by the Dry Arch Bridge; for some time now the earth bank has been slowly crumbling so a plan was made to install a retaining 'wall' made of oak sleepers. We took back the soil to create a clean edge to the bank, and then neatly install the sleepers. We made sure that the pathway was wide enough for the tramper to get through with plenty of space. The garden team have planted vinca just behind the sleepers which will spread and provide ground cover across the area. I've already seen people sitting on the sleepers, stopping for a rest and to admire the view of the lakeside – so it has turned out to be multi-functional!



Late last Autumn we had a shock when one of the old yew trees in the Home Shrubbery suddenly toppled over. Thankfully no-one was injured and after consulting two tree experts separately, we were told that it was not something that could have been predicted. The brash was cleared up quickly, but the logs had been left in a pile for a couple of months. These have now been cleared away and we'll rake and then seed the area when the temperatures increase and the grass can germinate.



I'm sad to say that we are having to do quite a bit of felling in both the garden and the parkland due to the disease Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*). The Woodland Trust states that Ash Dieback will kill around 80% of ash trees across the UK. At a cost of billions, the effects will be staggering, changing the landscape forever and threatening many species which rely on ash. I suppose we can compare it to the devastation of Dutch Elm Disease in the 1960s.

At first glance you may not think we have that much ash at Croome, but when you start to look there are groves of ash down the Evergreen Shrubbery and behind the Temple Greenhouse, in the Church Shrubbery and of course in the woodlands such as Cuckoo Pen and Menagerie Wood. Ranger team Hugh, Helen and Craig have been felling some of the ash trees and we've had to get contractors into dismantle some of the large ash trees within the garden areas. The one you see in the photo is near the Cattle Rush in the Evergreen Shrubbery, but sadly there are ash trees which need to be felled across the whole site.





In brighter news, flowers are starting to bloom making us think of Springtime! Snowdrops are in full effect at the moment throughout the Church Shrubbery and Winter Aconites are bringing a splash of yellow around the lakeside and in the Evergreen Shrubbery. It won't be long before we can get that beautiful scent of the daphnes in flower in the Wild Walk and the Evergreen Shrubbery, banks of primroses around the lakeside and the fritillaria nodding in the sunshine near the statue of Pan.

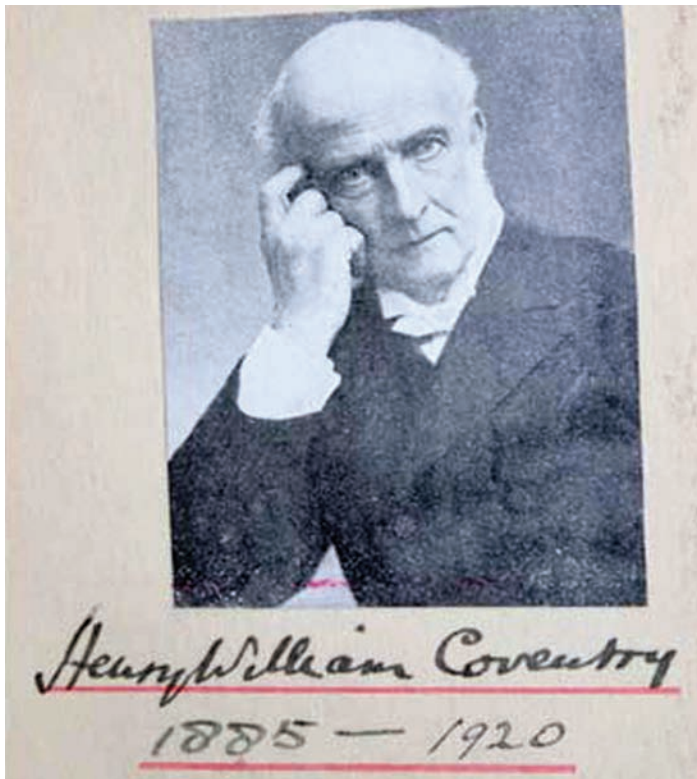
Thanks as always to you all at the Friends of Croome who support so much of what we do and who are always interested in the progress of restoration in the garden and park.

Photographs by Katherine Alker, Liz Greatwich and Dawne Middleton.



The Clerical Brothers

Part 2: The Rev. William George Coventry by Hugh Worsfold



The Rev Henry William Coventry was the elder of the two clerical brothers who were sons of the Hon William James Coventry, the younger son of the 7th Earl of Coventry. Henry was born on 24th December 1829 and was one of eleven children. He married Lelia Louisa Colquitt-Craven at Northleach, Gloucestershire on the 21st April 1868. Her parents lived at Brockhampton Park in Gloucestershire. Henry was educated at Winchester College and the archive there would indicate that he was a bright pupil as by October 1847 he was in the highest class. He went up to Pembroke College, Oxford in 1848 graduating with a BA in 1852 and his MA was conferred in 1885, the year he was appointed an Honorary Canon at Worcester. Whilst at Oxford he took up rowing and was awarded a rowing Blue. Henry was a member of the Oxford Eight crew that won the Grand Challenge Cup at the Henley Regatta in 1852. He also crewed for his college at Henley and at various other regattas for example those held at Worcester.

In February 1853 at Worcester Cathedral the Bishop of Worcester held a General Ordination and Henry William Coventry was admitted into Holy Orders. The following year he took up the post of Rector at Woolstone in Gloucestershire which he held for fifteen years, the position then being taken by his younger brother Gilbert George Coventry. During the period 1855 to 1859 he was also curate of the adjoining smaller parish of Oxenton. However, during his time at Woolstone his duties could not have been too onerous as he was able to take time out to travel around Europe. During some of his travels he witnessed some important events. In September 1860 Henry was travelling in

southern Italy during the uprising there and saw in Naples the arrival of General Giuseppe Garibaldi at the head of victorious troops. Henry also witnessed the subsequent Battle of the Volturno and the triumphal entry into Naples of King Victor Emmanuel. In 1864 he was in Kiel in Denmark at the time the Prussian Army invaded Denmark at start of the German - Danish War or sometimes called the Second Schleswig War. His next appointment was in 1870 as Rector at St Deny's church, Severn Stoke, Worcestershire.

Henry was to remain at Severn Stoke up until his death on the 10th April 1920 aged 90. He last preached on Christmas Day 1919. It is recorded that outside his pastoral duties he was very interested in agriculture and the affairs of the County. It is said that his hobbies were gardening and farming and in one obituary it is noted that he was a 'shrewd judge of cattle'. On land which belonged to the Rectory he kept pigs, sheep and poultry. Due to his understanding of agricultural matters he was extremely popular with local farmers. Henry was also an authority on bees and for many years was Chairman of the Upton-on-Severn Bee-keepers' Association.

When the Worcestershire County Council was formed in 1889 Henry became an Alderman of the Council. He was also a Justice of the Peace and for over 25 years he was Chairman of the Upton-on-Severn Bench. The Rev Henry Coventry held two other clerical posts. In 1878 he was appointed Rural Dean of Bredon and in 1885 an Honorary Canon of Worcester. This photograph is from the Worcester Cathedral archives. Henry's wife passed away in 1899. They had four children.

Following Henry's death the writer of one obituary visited Severn Stoke and wrote: I came away feeling that the parish had lost a pastor who was a kindly gentleman, and who set an example of industry and devotion - one who dealt impartially with all who came to him and who gave his best to the service of others. Canon Coventry was a combination of the parson and the squire, and he fulfilled in the best possible manner the obligations of both positions. One can safely say that Canon Coventry served his God and his parish faithfully and well.



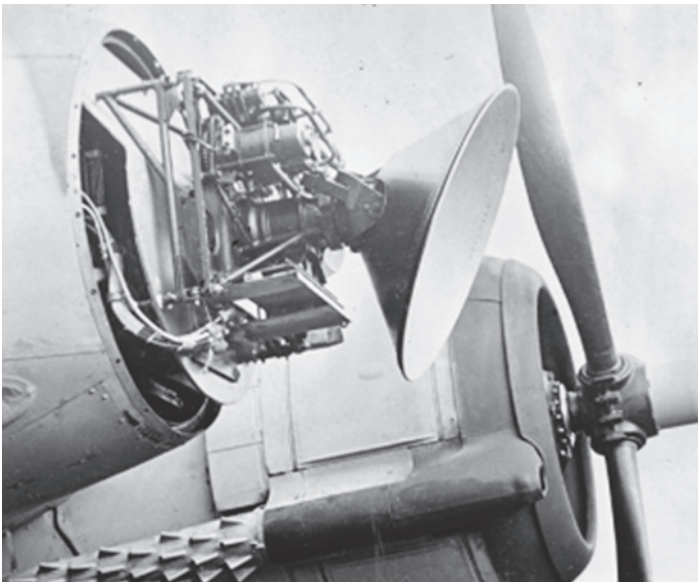
'A rather special RAF station' by Tim Barney

A few words about RAF Defford, the aeronautical neighbour of the Croome Estate, and home of airborne radar

The familiar word 'radar' is actually an acronym, that stands for 'Radio Detection and Ranging'. Many British people believe that radar was invented by scientific 'boffins' in this country, but actually the first radar was developed by German physicist Christian Hülsmeyer in 1904, before the First World War.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, all the major nations had radar systems in service, and the importance of ground-based radar in winning the Battle of Britain, is widely known. Without the early warning of enemy raids provided by radar, the battle would probably have ended very differently. However, the Battle of Britain was followed by the night-time Blitz, and the Telecommunications Research Establishment, or TRE, based near Swanage in Dorset, was tasked with developing an airborne radar for finding enemy planes in the dark. The crucial breakthrough came with the invention of the cavity magnetron, a device that could produce short-wavelength, high energy waves that greatly increased radar detection ranges and accuracy.

Meanwhile, during 1941, a new airfield was being constructed on Defford Common, overlapping onto the eastern side of the Croome estate. In those days it was no use complaining if the government requisitioned your land! RAF Defford became operational in September 1941, as a training airfield for bomber crews. In May 1942, the TRE was moved inland, for security reasons, to Malvern College in Worcestershire. At the same time the organisation's flying arm, known as the Telecommunications Flying Unit or TFU, took over the RAF Defford airfield. From this moment on, Defford ceased to be a typical RAF station, and was swiftly transformed into a top secret radar and electronics research base, with up to 3,000 staff on site. Half of these were service personnel, the remainder civilian scientists and engineers. In addition Defford was notable for its large contingent of highly qualified female personnel, including civilians, WAAFs and WRNS.



AI radar mounted in a Beaufighter aircraft

A vast array of electronic devices were developed at Defford over the next fifteen years. These fell into three groups: devices for navigation, devices for locating the enemy, and devices for interfering with or 'jamming' the enemy's radars. We can only touch on some of the most important in this article.

- GEE was a navigation device that projected an invisible electronic grid across the sky. Equipment in the aircraft then enabled the crew to work out where they were on the grid.
- H2S (the source of the name is still a bit of a mystery!) was an airborne radar that scanned the terrain below the aircraft, and displayed a crude 'radar map' to the crew.
- OBOE was a night bombing aid. Two radar beams in the UK were arranged to cross over the target in Europe. The plane then flew along one beam, and dropped its bombs when it reached the other. Not all the devices developed were purely military. In January 1945, Defford's runway saw the world's first completely automatic, hands-free landing of an aircraft – a commonplace event nowadays, of course!



Boeing 247 performing the first automatic landing

Work carried on after the war, but by 1957 Defford had been closed – a victim of the new, large jet bombers, which needed longer runways. The main railway line next to the airfield made expansion impossible.

However TRE's inventions continued to make news. The Vulcans that bombed Port Stanley airfield during the Falklands War, used a later version of H2S for navigation and bombing – while the radio telescope dish that can be seen today from Rebecca Road, is operationally linked to telescopes elsewhere in the UK, including Jodrell Bank. In fact Sir Bernard Lovell, father of Jodrell Bank, once led the wartime H2S development team, at Malvern and Defford!

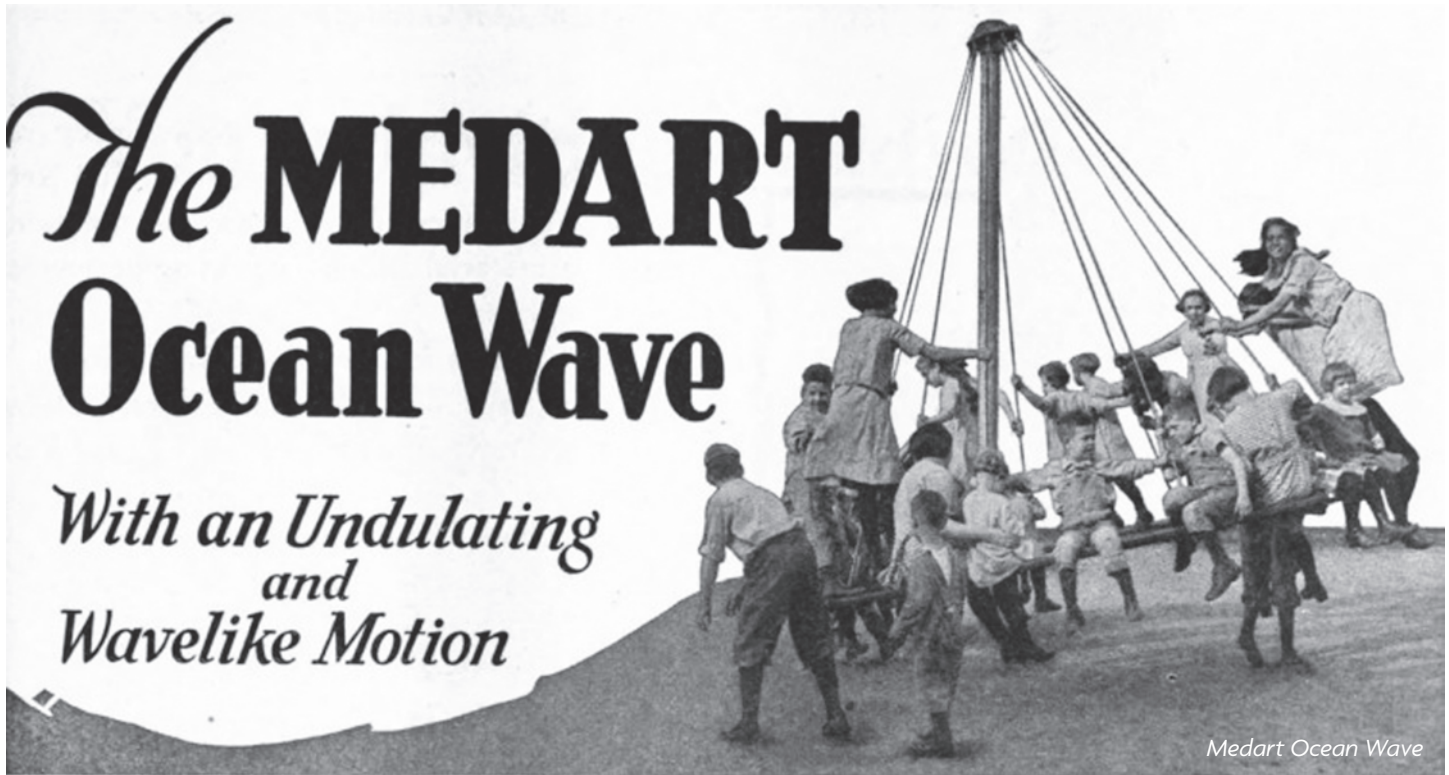


A telescope dish, part of the 'Merlin' network

The RAF Defford Museum at Croome, offers the full story to visitors, together with guided walks and talks about the airfield's history.

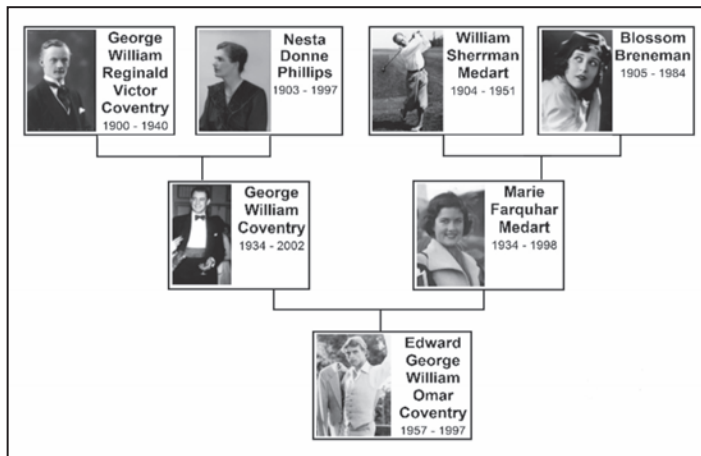
'Burgers and Bombs'

by Nicola Hewitt



'Surf, Sweat and Tears', Croome's latest exhibition tells the story of Ted Deerhurst only son of the 11th Earl of Coventry and his first wife Marie "Mimi" Medart. Ted became Britain's first professional surfer and went on to shape and design surfboards, he also appeared in several surfing films, but as you will see, the design and manufacture of sporting equipment, and appearing in front of the camera, was in his genes.

Manufacturing Co. in St Louis made sports, gymnastic and children's play equipment. But his passion was golf and he spent most of his time on the golf course becoming a leading amateur golfer. It was on a golfing tour in Hollywood that William met Blossom, romance ensued and they were married on 10 October 1928.



Ted's family tree

Ted's maternal grandmother was born Blossom Breneman on 14 March 1905 in St Louis, Missouri the daughter of Edward Breneman and Bessie Parker. In the 1920s she became a silent movie actress initially in New York and then in Hollywood with a contract with MGM, using the stage name Rose Blossom or Rose Donal and often playing cowgirls. At just 5 feet tall she was noted for her slight build and stature.

His grandfather, William (Bill) Sherman Medart, was born 24 November 1904 in Belleville, Illinois to Phillip S. Medart and Norma Bischoff. After leaving the University of Missouri, William was employed for a short while selling bonds and insurance before joining the family firm as a company representative. The family-owned Fred Medart

After honeymooning in Chicago, the couple returned to Hollywood where Blossom completed what would be her final movie, Cecil B. De Mille's production 'The Bride of Colorado.' Less than 5 months after the wedding the couple separated and Blossom filed papers against her husband and her in-laws. She alleged that her husband was a dangerous man who gambled and drank, citing instances where her gun-carrying husband would fire the weapon out of windows and that he refused to give her any money or allow her to earn any. The suit against her in-laws was to prevent them "meddling" in the marriage, giving him liquor and urging him to leave her.

Eventually the couple got back together having come to an agreement where she would give up acting, he would leave the family firm, cut back on the golf and together they would open a business. They leased an orange-painted A&W Root Beer stand with 8 stools at the corner of Clayton Road, repainted it white with green trim, bought 50 lbs of ground beef, enough to make 250 burgers which they would sell at 15 cents each, baked some coconut pies, got ice cream and coffee and hoped for the best. On the evening of 9 October 1930, they opened their business - their first sale an ice cream. By 11.30pm they had sold out. Fortune had smiled on them, by coincidence a parade was happening that evening, a few blocks away, and parade-goers swarmed in for snacks.

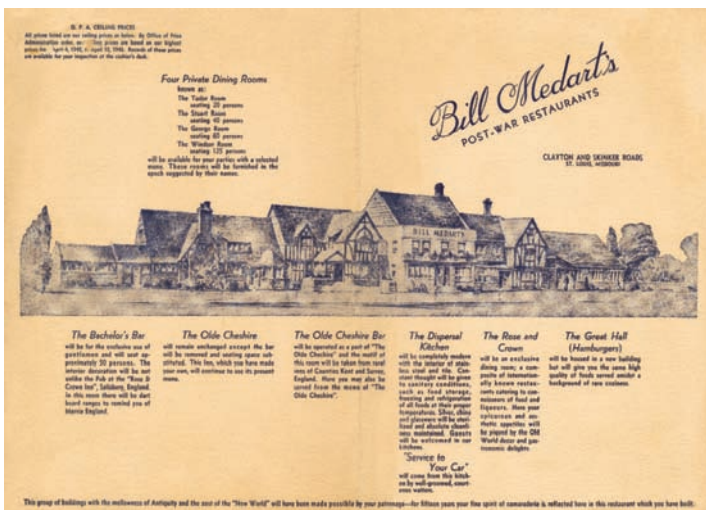
Over the next few years, the business quickly outgrew its original stand and was replaced first by a log cabin and then by a neat red brick building. Bill would cook the burgers and Blossom would make coconut pies. Their signature burger containing a meat patty, lettuce, pickle, onion and a secret mayonnaise-based sauce was half-cloaked in a napkin to protect against leakage. In 1932, they opened a second restaurant which was run by Bill's father, Phillip, whose own gym equipment company had been hit badly by the depression.



Blossom and Bill Medart making a burger in November 1930 (St Louis Post Dispatch)

The 'Olde Cheshire' a 2-storey restaurant and tavern was added to the west side of the Medart's original hamburger stand in 1939. This gave them a more formal restaurant and a tap room able to seat 100 diners and was based on a fourteenth-century English cottage. This was soon followed by further extensions throughout the 1940s until the couple had a complex of restaurants and bars built to look like an English village.

eight months, through which customers had to pass. Those months were full of hostilities including "harsh words", fistfights, stink bombs and a real bomb. Lawyers for Bill tried to get a court order to limit the picketing, complaining that the strikers had used the word "rat", this was a slur for a non-union operator. The strikers responded saying they were not referring to Bill or Blossom but actual rodents.



Cover of Medart Restaurant Menu January 1946 showing the English village complex



Waitress Strike 1941 (St Louis Post Dispatch)

Although, everything seemed to be progressing smoothly for the couple, running a restaurant was not without its problems. In July 1941, frustrated by long hours and low pay, the waitresses at Medart's went on strike. Their demands were a pay rise from \$7 to \$15 for a six-day week, uniforms to be provided by the restaurant and additional employees to clear tables. Bill refused, saying that the demands would ruin him. A picket line was formed which would last

Bill got into a fight with a Bartenders' Union leader who admitted "slugging him". Bill was fined \$500 for hitting the managing editor of the St Louis Labor Tribune with a beer bottle in a separate incident. Stink bombs were regularly thrown at the premises. On 20 November 1941 a bomb damaged the roof of the Old Cheshire. Eventually, on 16 March 1942, Medart's settled with most of the waitresses' demands including one week's paid holiday. Bill died in Paris in 1951, age 46, his death ruled as suicide following a fall from a fifth-floor hotel window. Blossom later remarried and eventually sold Medart's in 1960. She died in 1984.



Croome House, Worcestershire, seat of the Earl of Coventry

Celebrations of the coming of age of the Earl of Coventry

Illustrated London News, May 1859

"On Monday 9 May 1859, George William 9th Earl of Coventry came into possession of the title and estates of Croome, which have been in abeyance since the death of his grandfather in 1843. The high esteem in which the family is held in Worcestershire was shown by such a demonstration as was probably never known before in the county.



Severn Stoke en fete for the Earl of Coventry's coming of age, 1859

The village of Severn Stoke adjoins the ancestral seat, Croome House, and also Severn Bank, the residence of the late Viscount Deerhurst, father of the present Earl. It was therefore the centre of attraction, and was thronged with visitors. At 3.00am bell ringing and salvos of cannon commenced and were continued throughout the day. The houses were decorated with evergreens, flowers, flags, and elaborate devices; while the roads were spanned by triumphal arches. Numerous simple displays also showed the delight of the rural population at the auspicious event. At 10.00 am congratulatory addresses were presented at Severn Bank – one from the tenants, and another from the inhabitants of Pershore, to which his Lordship replied in a feeling and appropriate manner.

At 11.00am Divine service was performed at Severn Stoke church, which was crowded. His Lordship was attended thither by Viscount Elmley, Lord H Lennox, the Hon. W Coventry and other distinguished friends. A most impressive address from the text 1 Kings iii. 7-10 was delivered by the Rector of the parish the Hon. and Rev. T Coventry, uncle of the noble Earl.

A procession was afterwards formed, headed by the Pershore brass band and banners, to Cubsmoor, an elevated site near Croome House where an immense tent had been erected. Here meat of every kind, to the extent of about a ton, nine cwt. of plum-pudding, 23 bushels of bread, three hogsheads of ale and two hogsheads of cider, were distributed amongst the labouring families, as were also the plates, manufactured at Worcester for the occasion. Dinner being concluded, his Lordship visited the tent, and was received with loud cheering and waving of handkerchiefs. Dancing and rustic sports, with a magnificent display of fireworks, concluded these rejoicings.

Croome House was superbly decorated. His Lordship arrived at about 4.00 pm, and was received with loud cheering and hearty congratulations by his tenantry and friends. Dinner was provided in an elegantly constructed marquee; and upon the Earl's health being proposed it was received with a most enthusiastic demonstration of attachment and gratification. His Lordship heartily reciprocated the good wishes of which he was the object.

The 'faithful city' of Worcester displayed a profuse array of flags and decorations, and bell-ringing and cannon ushered in the day. A grand banquet was held at the Guildhall, at which there was a large assemblage of the nobility and gentry of the city and neighbourhood – Sir E A H Letchmere, presiding. The toast of the evening was enthusiastically received by the company, upstanding with "three times three and one cheer more," and Earl Beauchamp returned thanks on behalf of the young Earl.



Rejoicings in the park adjoining Wick House, Pershore

Upton on Severn was decorated with innumerable devices of laurels etc, interspersed with the Earl's colours and flags. An influential committee having been formed for the purpose, a substantial repast was provided by subscription for about twelve hundred of the poor and labouring classes, including the parochial and Dissenting schools, and the inmates of the union workhouse. At about 1.30 pm his Lordship arrived in a phaeton, when an extemporaneous address was delivered, to which he gratefully replied amongst loud and reiterated cheers. The gentleman and tradesmen of the town also dined together, and an enthusiastic reception greeted the toast of the day. Rustic games concluded the rejoicings.

About two hundred and seventy of the labouring classes of the villages of Boughton, Hill Croome and Earls Croome, partook of an excellent dinner of roast beef and plum-pudding, provided by subscription. Dancing and other amusements followed, and the houses were decorated in an exceedingly tasteful manner.

At Deerhurst dinner and tea were provided for a large number, and the day was observed as a general holiday, the same enthusiasm which everywhere prevailed being observable. The railway station and hotel at Pinvin were profusely decorated, and a scrumptious dinner was provided for upwards of a hundred of the cottage tenants. The health of the noble Earl was drunk amid deafening cheers, and dancing kept up during the evening.

At Powick two hundred of the cottage tenants were provided with an abundant feast. Bell-ringing and firing of cannon were continued throughout the day, and the feeling of the population was expressively shown by the taste and industry displayed in the decoration, and loud cheers given at the mention of the name 'Coventry.' The school children were also provided with a repast by the kindness of one of his Lordship's tenantry, and a china cup, commemorative of the event, presented to each. Foot-races and other exercises followed.

At the village of Grafton Flyford the event was also celebrated with hearty spirit and good will. At the request of the parishioners, Divine service was held in the morning; and in the afternoon tea, cake etc, were provided by subscription for nearly three hundred people; and decorations of every description evinced considerable taste and judgment. Hearty cheers for the Earl of Coventry closed the day's rejoicings.

At Upton Snodsbury his Lordship provided dinner for one hundred and twenty of his tenants, which comprised two cwt. of beef, two legs of veal, ham, pork, vegetables, and one cwt. of plum-pudding (all hot). The

health of the noble Earl solicited a long and loud burst of cheering as usual. The inhabitants also drank tea together, and spent the evening in sports and dancing.

The event was celebrated at Pershore on the Tuesday, as a great portion of his Lordship's estates lie in this locality, and therefore many persons would be provided would have been prevented attending on the preceding day, when the tenants were all invited to Croome House. The fine old town, completely inundated with visitors presented a sense of gaiety which it is impossible to describe. Flags and decorations of all kinds were conspicuous in every part of the town; numerous garlands and festoons spanned each street, and the greatest care had been taken to make the devices and inscriptions appropriate.

Rejoicings in the park adjoining Wick House near Pershore. At 3.00 pm a procession was formed, which, preceded by the band marched to the beautiful park fronting Wick House, about three quarters of a mile distant, which had been kindly granted for the occasion by its owner. Several visitors from Worcester were in the park and appeared to take much interest in the subsequent proceedings. A committee had been appointed to superintend the amusements in the park, and those gentlemen had provided means for several most excellent and manly old English games, which were entered into by all parties with much spirit.

Between 4.00 and 5.00 pm Lord Coventry arrived in town from Croome. The horses were then taken out of his carriage, and eight or ten sturdy men, having buckled on the harness, drew his Lordship and party, amidst loud hurrahs and vivas, in state to the park, preceded by the Pershore brass band, playing appropriate music. His arrival in the park was greeted by the thousands assembled there by one loud and long protracted cheer, which was subsequently repeated. His Lordship expressed his thankfulness to all present, or who had at all participated in the festivities of the day, and continued on the platform some time to witness the sports that were proceeding.

The festivities in honour of the coming of age of the Earl of Coventry extended over a wide district, reaching from Pershore to Upton upon Severn. It was most interesting to observe the intimate communion between all classes so manifest throughout the whole of these rejoicings, and which, indeed, could alone have produced such a demonstration. In conclusion, let us hope that the Earl of Coventry will prove himself worthy of this enthusiastic welcome, and that the inhabitants of Worcestershire will ever show the same good English feeling they exhibited on this occasion."



St Mary Magdalene, Croome

A Very Public Archaeology of Death: St Mary Magdalene, Croome D'Abitot

by **Howard Williams**

Over 330 churches are cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT). One fine example is the 'Georgian Gothic' of St Mary Magdalene, Croome D'Abitot. It was constructed in 1763 as an integral part of the 'Capability' Brown landscape gardens of Croome Park, now a National Trust (NT) property.

Its predecessor, the medieval church of St James, was regarded as too close to the freshly remodelled house and so it was demolished. The new church was integral to the design of his Palladian mansion and Arcadian landscape which launched Brown's career in landscape design. It is perhaps most often considered as one of a series of landmarks within the gardens, but it was also a carefully designed structure with a splendid array of memorials. The exterior was designed by Brown, with the interior designed by Robert Adam. Formerly an Anglican church, it is now a Grade I listed building, relinquished to the CCT in 1975 having been cared for by the Coventry family to 1949.

As a mortuary archaeologist, upon visiting I was fascinated but how the church serves as an example of the public archaeology of death. This is because the church might attract many more visitors who might not otherwise explore historic parish churches and their memorials and its details are well-represented online via the websites of (among others) Historic England, the CCT and the National Churches Trust. Having said that, I do feel it is still something of a missed opportunity that the online descriptions of the memorials are very limited in these contexts, with Historic England simply stating: 'In chancel outstanding series of Coventry

family monuments from 1639 onwards (the barons and earls of Coventry).' Meanwhile, the National Churches Trust merely says: 'Opulent monuments brought from the old church, long since demolished, show the former Barons and Earls of Coventry in their full glory.' The NT guidebook for Croome discusses the church but the memorials receive only passing reference.



The interior of Croome church



Yet for the visitor, the memorial dimensions of this estate church are very prominent indeed. The chancel takes up considerable space as it serves as the mausoleum of the Coventry family, thus providing a retrospective reorganisation of past generations by incorporating the memorials from the earlier church and dated from 1640 onwards (the first baron died in 1639). The four magnificent 17th-century tombs with fine statuary celebrate illustrious ancestry of the family. These have been joined more recently by one effigy (of Henry Coventry son of the 1st Baron Coventry and dating from 1687) which was originally installed in St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, where he was buried, and transferred to Croome in 1915. Thus, today, the church is a memorial amalgam over five centuries of an aristocratic family, with the latest memorial dated as recently as 2002.



Monument to Henry Coventry (d.1686)

Absences are also telling. For instance, the CCT's website states: 'The monument to the 1st Earl, who died in 1699, is missing because the 2nd Earl disapproved of his father's second marriage, at an advanced age, to a servant, Elizabeth Graham. His monument is now in the nearby church of St Mary's at Elmley Castle instead.'

On display there are memorials to conservation itself. Hence, there is a slate late 20th-century plaque to its status as a 'redundant church'. The memorial to the church's redundant but consecrated status. 'Please respect it accordingly'. Next, there is a plaque designating it under the care of the CCT. And there is an interpretation panel giving a brief history to the Trust and the church itself. Yet, what is lacking, however, is an explanation of the date and character of the many well-preserved memorials one sees which span the 17th to 21st centuries. The interpretation panel provides some useful context for the CCT's responsibilities and a brief introduction to the building but not the monuments, despite them being a striking collection of 17th and then 19th to 21st-century mural monuments, many evoking neo-classical tomb and draped urn motifs. While different in detail and scale, they represent a coherent continuity in material and general style. Meanwhile, the churchyard is a further zone of remembrance now safely within a National Trust property.



Monument to the 1st Baron Coventry (d. 1639)

Whilst access requires NT membership, visitors can not only experience an 18th-century church but a fine series of 17th to 21st-century funerary monuments in a pristine condition and secure context. They reveal the changing and complex relationship between Christian places of worship and funerary commemoration down the centuries. However, while 'very public', this is a largely untapped resource for a 'very public archaeology of death'. By this I mean that it represents an important, accessible and well-maintained case study which serves to educate those of all ages and backgrounds regarding the changing nature of human responses, attitudes and practices surrounding death, burial and commemoration in the past. Simultaneously, it serves to offer us a place of reflection on present-day and future concerns and understandings of mortality for those individuals with a personal faith of whichever religious tradition and those who do not in equal measure.

This is a topic I have researched and feel passionately about for museum collections as well as ancient monuments including prehistoric tombs and early historic burial sites. Yet how we effectively conserve, interpret and use tombs and memorials in public education also applies for church and churchyard monuments. Croome's church shows us the potential of our historic environment for 21st-century engagements with, and conversations about, human mortality past, present and future. Might further interpretation panels and/or online resources help the Croome tombs tell their story far and wide?

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The Well Masters working to improve our irrigation system

Update from the Walled Gardens

by **Chris and Karen Cronin**

With a recent global pandemic and East/West wars, it's been a time of uncertainty for us all. Yet, within the high walls at the epicentre of Croome, work has continued, almost seamlessly, with the restoration project. A host of new features are on target to be unveiled when we open to our visitors at Easter. We want to share, exclusively with the *Friends of Croome*, a few highlights that you can expect to see when we open the Walled Garden gates this season.

After the prolonged summer drought, we decided to dredge the deep well at the top, in the hope that this might assist in providing a supplementary water feed for our otherwise struggling irrigation system. We contracted the husband-and-wife team, *Well Masters*, to undertake the works. After 5 days of excavating, we were relieved to learn that no suspicious remains were found. However, the original 15m long/deep cast iron pump dating back to 1820, which had mysteriously been cut up and thrown back down at some point, was retrieved along with 10m of sludge, tree trunks and other mixed debris. We now have the remains of the pump on display and, with the introduction of a new electric pump, the well has become a major contributor to our modern irrigation system.

Our focus has been on the latest feature which I have been referring to as the *Silence Garden* and Karen is calling the *Mosaic Garden*. So, the *Mosaic Garden* is going to be the first feature intended to provide our visitors with a tranquil arbour where they can ponder the wider Gardens from within a relatively central location, whilst enjoying some shade, courtesy of the climbing grape vines kindly gifted by Madresfield Court. The Mosaics will be installed during the season and there will be scheduled workshops for those interested in learning about this amazing skill whilst contributing to a unique and long-lasting work of art.

Next, and with huge excitement, we will be introducing a residential pottery workshop and exhibition in the Visitor Centre this year. Master potter, Peter O'Neil and his wife Sarah, will be joining forces with us to offer a brand-new experience for our visitors. We have rebuilt and are currently converting an old utility building outside the walls into the *Kiln Room*. We hope to open this offer on Fridays, when the Walled Gardens are otherwise closed, as well as at weekends. More information to follow soon. These are just some of the highlights - you will have to come and see the rest for yourselves!



Constructing the Mosaic Garden



The Kiln Room in progress

