

THE FRIENDS OF CROOME PARK



SPRING 2010 ISSUE 12

NEWSLETTER

Reflections on a new era at Croome...



Photo: Katherine Alker

A very warm welcome to our first newsletter of the year! We've got a brand new look to greet our first full season of opening Croome Court, now as much part of our lives as the parkland we have cared for since 1996.

Our cover photo shows a scene emblematic of the visual harmony between Croome's buildings and designed landscape - the honey-coloured stone of the mansion reflected in the clear blue water of the lake, surrounded by verdant trees and pasture, with a glimpse of Croome's church

catching the eye in the distance....

This familiar scene has resonated across the ages....The same view was chosen by Richard Wilson for his 1758 painting of Croome. At the time this vision of an idealised, artificially-created landscape would have seemed revolutionary but today we so readily accept this 'English' landscape as our natural scenery.

The reuniting of the park with the mansion seems as new and exciting for us as it must have done for Wilson, Lancelot Brown and the 6th Earl of Coventry in the 18th century, when Croome as

we know it was first created.

Just like our forebears there are exciting times ahead. The Punchbowl Gates will be restored, windows in the Temple Greenhouse are to be replaced and work will, at some point, begin on reinstating the Chinese Bridge - the structure from Wilson's painting missing in the photograph above.

We are at the beginning of a brand new chapter in Croome's history. Many new adventures lie ahead as we adapt to life with both parkland and mansion to share with our visitors and Friends alike....

www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk

WELCOME

Welcome to your Spring 2010 newsletter.

Many of you will know that Lindsay Gray, our newsletter editor of the past few years, stepped down from the role in early 2010. I've taken on the role and wish to pass on my own thanks to Lindsay for producing such an informative publication - I can only hope I live up to her standards!

With a new editorship comes a new design but hopefully an equally interesting read. I welcome any feedback, thoughts and comments. Please see the Friends Forum on the back page of the newsletter for contact details.

Happy reading!
Wendy

Friends AGM

Chairman's Report 2010

We are now in the sixth year of the Friends' existence. Our last AGM was held on 26th March, 2009, in the Croome Park Canteen, where we are this evening, so the Report covers the year since then. I can say again that it has been another successful and full year, thanks not least to the continuing contributions to our activities made not only by Committee members but also a wider circle of active members who give help in providing events for everyone to enjoy. Support is what the Friends are about and that is what we continue to give to this National Trust property both financially and in other less tangible ways.

The Committee has met 7 times during the year in the Carpenter's Workshop where, for the good of the cause, we have continued to cope with Arctic temperatures in spite of a log fire. (I should add here that in future meetings will be held in the Canteen). As well as regular reports on Finance and Membership, our Committee has dealt with a wide range of business of interest and concern to the Friends. Most importantly and of great interest, we have had regular reports on a range of developments at Croome.

Of course, the year's highlight for all of us was the opening of the Court on 25th September when I had the privilege of joining Jane Farrington, Chair of the West Midlands Regional Committee, in welcoming all present to a truly memorable occasion. With the re-uniting of Court and Park, the way they were intended to be by the 6th Earl, the Croome experience is transformed and has led, not least, to a significant increase in Friends' membership numbers to over 400.

EVENTS

Once more the Friends have benefited from the varied programme of activities put together by our hard-working Events Sub-Committee, chaired by Christine Adams. In

October, Friends enjoyed a short break in Cornwall, with a varied itinerary including a visit to Lanhydrock, one of the National Trust's outstanding properties in the South

West. Other events have included visits to the Walled Garden to see the continuing restoration work being undertaken by Mr and Mrs C. Cronin and a successful Festive Meal at the Yorkshire Grey. We've also had talks on the "Croome D'Abitot/ Bunceton, Missouri Connection" by Arthur Casey and "The Croome Court Tapestry Room" by Susan Leech. Michael Smith has led tours of the Court and walks.

NEWSLETTER

Our Newsletter has continued to help keep members informed about Croome and the Friends and we are indebted to Lindsay Gray for her excellent work as Editor. Lindsay has now vacated the Editor's chair, which has been taken over by Wendy Carter. Wendy, as they say, needs no introduction; certainly not to the many of us who remember her as a very successful Visitor Services Manager here at Croome.

ORAL HISTORY

The Oral History Project continues to flourish and amass more fascinating memories of Croome before the National Trust, thanks to Eileen Clement and the team she leads. There is ample material now not only to support the display in the Court and a travelling exhibition but also to enable talks to be given which focus exclusively on the Project.



BOOKS

For some years, a team of Friends led by John and Joan Willis built up a very healthy balance sheet by providing refreshments at events and on weekends. Since the Canteen opened, we've been hoping to establish a second-hand bookshop as an alternative source of income.

Lack of a suitable home has delayed the launch but I am pleased to say that we can now look forward to opening it next to the Reception area, taking the place of the present shop.

We are hoping to combine this enterprise with a Friends' corner, with a notice-board as a focal point providing information about our group and its work. Watch this space!

FUNDING

As with all Supporters' Groups and NT Associations, a key part of our function is to help provide funding which might not otherwise be available to properties and this we continue to do.

Recent gifts to Croome have included a camcorder and a digital camera, both of which will help to keep visual records of the ever-changing Croome scene. Please see the list on the Friends' notice-board in Reception for a full list.

PEOPLE

At this AGM, we should thank retiring members of the Committee for their contributions. We warmly thank Janet Soley and John Lanigan, who are not standing for re-election, and also record what might almost be described as the end of an era with the retirement of Joan Willis as Secretary.

Joan, like John, her husband and our first Treasurer, who retired from the committee last year, is a founder member of the Friends and has been Secretary since 2004, when we began. It would be impossible to do justice

to Joan's contribution to the Friends both as Secretary and in other ways, but I did, in acknowledging John's contribution last year, refer to the way in which they had both planted the acorn from which our sturdy oak, the Friends of Croome Park, has grown and I do so again this year in describing the inspiration, the tireless work and support Joan, too, has given to our organisation.

We thank you, Joan, for all that you have done to make the Friends such a success. Your achievement and John's will be long remembered and valued.

We should also acknowledge with appreciation the continuing involvement with the Friends of our Patron, George Coventry, the 13th Earl, and our President, Sir Roy Strong, the distinguished historian and former Director of the National Portrait Gallery and of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The Friends are fortunate to have their support.

EXTERNAL LINKS

Amongst our several not-so-visible roles, we maintain regular contact with the Regional and Central Offices. Your Chairman attended the Trust's AGM during the year at Heelis, its Swindon headquarters.

As this summary demonstrates, there is much to celebrate as we look back on the past year. As ever, a significant number of active Friends – too many to mention by name – help to make the Friends successful. We are volunteers and give our time and expertise freely, believing, as we all do, that Croome is a special place which more than repays our efforts with its beauty, interest and rich history.

Thank you to all Friends for your continuing support of the Friends of Croome Park.

Eric H. Jones
Chairman
Friends of Croome Park
March, 2010

Bookworms needed!

Planning is well under way for a second-hand bookshop in the Reception area, taking the place of the present shop which will soon have a new home. The expectation is that the Friends Second-hand Bookshop will open at the end of May or early June (no date fixed yet).

We shall be seeking donations later on but this is NOT a request for books at this stage. We already have more than enough for our opening stock and we have no storage space for more.



However, more volunteer help to run the bookshop would be welcome from now on. We have a core planning group but more hands would make lighter work when the shop opens.

Unearthing Croome's past

The practice of archaeology is rather unlike Time Team. Certainly the NT offers no glamorous budgets for big yellow diggers, fancy graphics, helicopter fly-overs or 'celebrities' pontificating about the past. It can be quite humdrum; such is the diligent process of quiet research and the delivery of soundly evidenced-based advice to ensure the conservation work we do passes muster. Time Team's 3-day approach makes great TV but for conservation would lead to mistakes.

Jeremy Milln, NT West Midlands Regional Archaeologist

CROOME RIVER

Friends may know that over the years the South Worcestershire Archaeological Group (SWAG) has excavated at the Carriage Splash which crosses the river at its southern end. The Splash is designed to be permanently covered by about five inches of water - SWAG has been able to examine the finely laid stone setted approach but not the structure of the submerged causeway. Emergency repair to stem a leak provided an opportunity to record a brick culvert beneath the Splash, the remains of its surface and a series of posts alongside.

It may be a surprise to learn that the river has a plug, just like your bath, if rather bigger. This original plug was made 250 years ago from oak and fits snugly in a timber hole. Held within a jointed frame stuck into puddled clay and lifted via a vertical post, the whole plug assembly is protected by a screen of oak and wrought iron bars designed to prevent the river's fish being lost when drained. Components of the plug



and screen permanently submerged are in excellent condition but those above the water must have rotted away by the early 20th century as there is evidence of extensive repair. The plug is now repaired and we are researching the form of the screen so that it can be accurately repaired later in the year.

FLOWER GARDEN

Continuing Phil Smith's research on the Arboretum, a second student from Pershore College (Ashley Ryall, Bsc Horticulture) has been looking at the adjacent Flower Garden. This appears on the Snape plan with an oval ornamental pool, a series of glasshouses and a bothy cottage. Part of the site is now privately owned but the NT has the majority. Almost nothing is visible today, save a heavily silted central depression signifying the site of the pool. We evaluated the evidence archaeologically during a brief respite in our long winter.

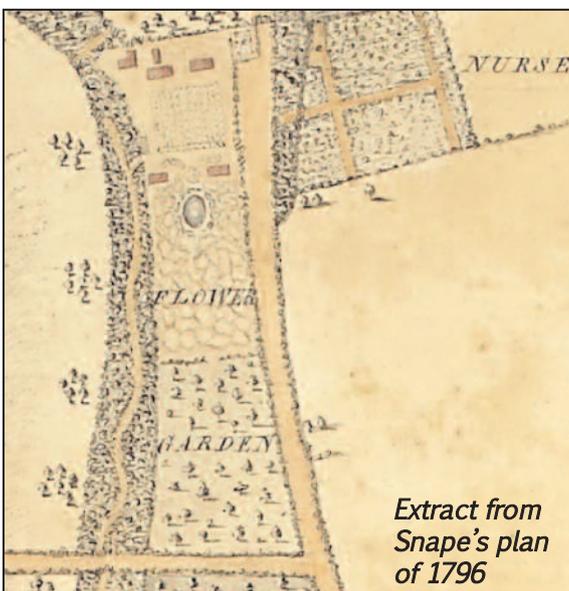
A single trench located one of the glasshouses which turned out to be a form of pit house possibly with a forcing hot bed, a tufa ground and a perfect gravel-topped path with a lias edging. There seems little doubt the Flower Garden has enormous potential for our understanding of contemporary gardening, preserved, as it has been, from later change.

HOME SHRUBBERY

At the end of March SWAG volunteers, led by Martin Cook, investigated the path system through the Home Shrubberies.

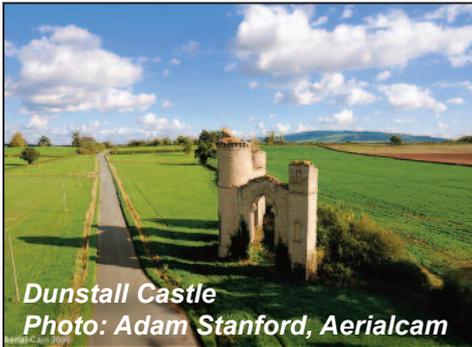
Initial results confirm how little it has changed from Brown's day. Hoggin is used for a cambered drive of eight foot width, taking in the Rotunda. There are lesser paths too; some apparently always grass and detectable only as earthworks.

Cobbles have been encountered close to the south wall of the walled garden as though a fancy path here was created to give close appreciation of exotics trained to the wall. Old iron nails stud this wall in such density and number that it must have been one of the busiest areas of the 6th Earl's grounds.



Extract from
Snape's plan
of 1796

DUNSTALL CASTLE



*Dunstall Castle
Photo: Adam Stanford, Aerialcam*

In the early 1970s necessary remedial work - done without recording or research - resulted in a loss of structure and the use of inappropriate

materials. Most of the turret atop the centre tower was thrown down the stair-well and the result capped with concrete. Elsewhere work which had originally been done with local blue lias stone was done using Cotswold oolite.

Our archaeological research was able to detect that the turret had originally been built (in 1765) like a little pepper-pot with stone steps extending almost to the very top. The Croome papers record that in 1771 the turret was to be taken down and enlarged (cost £20). However, the archaeology illustrated that the builder merely added a new skin to the wall to make it

appear enlarged. It also told us that the high oculus shown in the Burney watercolour and in a little vignette in the Snape Map cannot have held a lantern as it had almost certainly been 'blind'. The impression is that, as at Pirton, the circular stair simply ends at a quarter landing open to the elements and the graffiti artist (if anyone can identify, 'JM, HM or DG who inscribed their initials in 1956, please let us know). Rather than restoring it slavishly, we are rebuilding with a larger turret closed with a roof so that visitors can be accommodated more easily.

Dunstall Castle, uniquely among the 'eye-catcher's, was occupied domestically. It seems a pair of cottages were pinned to its back wall almost from the start. They are just visible in the Burney and as ghosting lines in the Castle's masonry.

Were they the hovels of squatters or were they the rustic abodes of the Castle's keepers? What form did they take and when were they abandoned? Once repairs have been completed and it is safe to work there, we will try to find out.

Dunstall Castle Restoration

Leon Bennett, Foreman &
Katherine Alker, Gardens & Park Manager

Dunstall Castle, the eyecatcher to the south of Croome Park, is currently being restored by Croft Construction. Leon Bennett, a stonemason for 15 years, is the Foreman. Also working on the project are Sam Gaze and Brad Hessian, stonemasons, and Dylan Hislam an apprentice stonemason in his first year.

Work started in January 2010. The first task was to open up the staircase for inspection and remove the concrete cap from the top of the tower, which had been put there in the 1970's. Over 12 tonnes of debris was removed from within the tower, most of it old bird nests, along with six of the original steps and the original landing which had been thrown down the void at some point (these are being kept in store).

The restoration of the tower is progressing well About 15 tonnes of blue lias stone have been used to rebuild the outer tower, which is bought from Tout Quarry in Somerton (in the 18th C the stone would have been dug out from the area around Croome). Around 3200 bricks to date have been used to rebuild the inner tower.

The project is due to finish in July 2010. Visitors will be able to climb the spiral staircase to an enclosed landing, then up a ladder through a skylight onto the rooftop viewing platform to get 360deg views of the surroundings, including the Rotunda and Croome Court, over the crenellations.



Thickening of the turret wall. Photo: J Milln

Croome and RAF Defford

There can be few, if any, National Trust properties which present visitors with a greater contrast at the beginning of their visit than Croome Park. While most come to see the Park and now, of course, the Court as well, it is the RAF buildings that visitors see first: all go through Reception, and many have food and drinks in the very popular Canteen. After this, the Court and the Park beckon as Croome's 18th Century grand design begins to be revealed.



Eric Jones
Friends of Croome Park Chairman

Over the past year or so, and especially since the opening of the Court, visitor numbers have benefited from a great deal of helpful publicity in the media, including regional television. Two recent examples of this publicity are articles in the April editions of *Worcestershire Life and Choice*, the magazine for retired people. As we would expect, the articles focus on the 6th Earl and Lancelot Brown especially.

Perhaps future publicity will also give particular attention to Croome's much later history and, in particular, the Defford years; a compelling source of interest across the generations. It is notable that Croome is attracting all age groups. No doubt the recently opened RAF-themed playground will prove a considerable attraction to the youngest visitors, for whom it will provide an early introduction to

the war-time significance of RAF Defford.

In the Autumn 2009 edition of the Friends Newsletter there was a very interesting article by Bob Shaw about Michael McDonald and his father, Group Captain J A McDonald CBE AFC, the Commanding Officer of RAF Defford from October 1943 to October 1946. It was a pleasure for me to meet Michael McDonald when he attended our AGM in March of this year.

Defford is especially associated with RADAR, but Bob Shaw's article reminds us that Group Captain McDonald championed work on automatic blind landing. This is something which I benefited from on a flight into Boston, Mass., years ago. We were informed with some satisfaction by the BA Captain that, after landing with a bump, he had been able to land using this gear when other flights had to divert because of the heavy sea mist over Logan

International Airport. I little realised then but I know now that there was an RAF Defford connection to thank for our safe landing!

Defford, as we know, played a crucial part in Britain's war effort and is something to celebrate. The 'RAF Defford at 70' event in July will remind us of Defford's important history and peace-time as well as war-time contribution, just as we have been reminded of it in previous years with a flypast from a Lancaster bomber providing a proud and emotional moment for those watching below.

Other episodes in the 20th Century story of Croome may have their local interest but none can compare with the momentous and *national* importance of RAF Defford. I know from speaking to groups and societies across the county that when I refer to the Defford years, recaptured in some of



people who should be helped to understand the debt of gratitude we shall always owe to Croome's RAF years.

No-one could be more passionate about Croome's heritage, the Court and the Park, than I am; but in its contrasting and very different way, I believe RAF Defford offers much to celebrate too. We should be proud of Defford's crucial part, and the role of the men and women stationed here, in ensuring the peace that was so yearned for during the war.

It is worth bearing in mind that the RAF buildings could so easily have been lost forever; they were to be swept away in due course when I began volunteering at Croome in 2002. At that time those of us who thought the buildings and what they

represented should be kept as part of our heritage appeared to be the minority. But that changed and the rest is history! We now have not only a carefully restored RAF sick bay but it has also become a National Trust restaurant called, quite rightly, a Canteen.

the memories recorded by the Oral History Project, interest immediately quickens. This is especially so amongst older members of the audience for whom there is a personal association with that time.

The RAF building has many reminders and illustrations of the Second World War years; but I suggest even more can be done to bring this period to the attention of all visitors, not only those who already bring their own memories with them but also younger



Photos of 2008's '1940s Weekend' re-enactors by Wendy Carter

Oral History ... and llamas

Eileen Clement
Oral History Co-ordinator

We now have a team of 10 volunteers working on different aspects of this project; Ann Meadows, Claire Parry, David Hutt, Ellen Moore, Jane Hulse, Lee Rawson, Linda Pritchard, Phil Douce, Sue Smith and myself. I would like to acknowledge the work Nick Holland has done updating the computers and wish him well in his new job. This leaves one large gap in the team – we need someone who is computer literate to copy recorded interviews on to Audacity and generally keep the database up to date. If this is for you please get in touch with me.

Having purchased a second recording machine, Claire and Lee have undergone training and have now begun interviewing. They're full of enthusiasm and looking forward to recording further aspects of life on the Croome Estate before the National Trust. Since Croome Court opened to the public last

September many people have visited for the first time for forty years or more, with more fascinating memories, so it is good to be able to conduct more interviews.

The small exhibition and second audiopost have been located in several Worcestershire libraries are due to go to Tewkesbury Library towards the end of April. Linda is organising the location of this display and we are looking for more venues - we'd be grateful to hear of any contacts/suggestions for the future.

Enid Smith recalls the Hare Krishna devotees in Kinnersley in the early 1980s:



Enid Smith

"I remember one evening we were sitting out here and suddenly my husband and I were aware of bells ringing in the background and we thought whatever's happening, you know, and suddenly this apparition came round the corner – this group of people in their long flowing robes, ringing the bells and chanting the Hare Krishna. But the thing that struck us most was at the front they were leading two llamas. I've never seen llamas in the streets in this country before.

Later in the year they had an Open Day. We went up to that. They had lots of displays. They had singing and dancing, but the thing that struck me then was they had this temple, which was, I think must be the stables or something; I tried to identify where it was but, when you went into it the thing that struck you was pink, the walls, everywhere was pink, and it was full of these, like dolls, dressed in colourful Indian dress, all over the walls and everywhere – actually very striking."

Who do you think you are?

A few years ago I inherited from my mother 2 small miniatures. Written on the back were the names "Earl of Coventry" and "Countess of Coventry".

Sheila Harris
Friends of Croome Park member

The family legend handed down was that somehow we were related. Last year, after much research and help from the Croome archivist, Jill Tovey, I finally established that these miniatures were indeed of the 6th Earl of Coventry and his first wife, the stunning Maria Gunning!



The story unfolded and with the help of the book "Coventrys of Croome" (pg 162) it was confirmed that his grandson, the 8th Earl, fell in love with a local girl named Elizabeth White and he settled her in Severn Bank House in 1820 where they had 3 children and she changed her name to Williams. This house is currently up for sale if you have a few spare million!

Their oldest son, George, also has a son named George who married my great grandmother, Caroline Milward (my mum's 'Grannie Williams'). I was so glad to learn that, although the 8th Earl was not free to marry her, it was a love match and she was accepted by the family.

It's so exciting and such fun to discover more pieces of the family jigsaw. I keep dipping and diving into it and gathering information and photos of churches where



Sheila with Sarah Kay

family were married and buried (including Elizabeth White and her son George in St Denys' churchyard, Severn Stoke). Like the programme "Who Do You Think You Are?" on the TV, I now know who I am... the 5th great granddaughter of the 6th Earl of Coventry!



Croome Court Architectural Survey

Sarah Kay
Project Curator
Croome Court

As part of building up our understanding of Croome Court we need to carry out an Architectural/Archaeological Survey. The aim of this is to investigate the historic fabric of the Court and discover what physical cues there are buried in the fabric to the earlier houses on the site, what remains of them at the core and what those tell us about how the building evolved. This is important for our own understanding and so that we can better respond to visitors' questions about the history of the Court.

For example, were the wooden stairs at the west end always in that position? Was their status ever more than a back stair? Was there another, more impressive staircase elsewhere in the house before the 1751 re-modelling? Was the Saloon always its present double height? What were the historic uses of the spaces, especially the domestic offices?

How did the Court relate to the Red Wing? What was the number of bays (windows) on the north and south façades before the re-modelling and how much were these re-configured for the sake of symmetry?

The answers to these questions and others will hopefully emerge

through physical investigations and 'opening-up' work, but also by combining the clues with documentary evidence from the archive. Some work on this has already started but we are hoping that the survey proper will be taken on by Catherine Gordon. As an Architectural Historian, the author of the 'Coventrys of Croome' and someone who has huge enthusiasm for Croome and lots of prior knowledge of the place and its history, she is an ideal person to do this.

We also want to think about how we can involve our visitors in the processes and the findings, and unravel Croome's fascinating history before their eyes in as transparent a way as possible.

A Croome Childhood in the Forties

Geoff Sherwood

Friends of Croome Park Committee member

I suppose my earliest childhood memories are of growing up at the Worcester Lodge. We had a wonderful view of the Panorama Tower from the front and of the park from the back. The drive, that began at the Lodge, ran uninterrupted to Croome Court. Sadly the drive is now cut completely in half by the M5 motorway.

We had no electricity, no running water and a bucket toilet in a little grove of trees near the house. We had a wonderful old black-leaded "Range" cooker with a good oven and a side boiler. Lighting was by oil lamps and candles - I remember being carried up stairs to bed by candlelight and having a little night-light in my room.

In the summer the "Range" was let out and my mother cooked on a paraffin stove with 2 burners and an oven. I remember being fascinated by the glass reservoir of oil which fed the burners and the stove was gravity fed; the oil made a "bubbling" noise at regular intervals. During the summer my dad would clean the chimney. This consisted of putting a small bail of straw up the chimney then, at 4am, setting it on fire!!!

I also remember mum and dad using a "cross-cut" saw on the grass at the front of the lodge to cut up a large branch they had obtained for winter fires. Haywards of Tewkesbury came round with a "mobile hardware shop" at regular intervals and supplied us with paraffin oil and other domestic items. Bread came from Derretts at Severn Stoke and the local butcher was Jack Manton. My parents would often cycle to Upton upon Severn and I would ride on the back of my mothers bike in a basket seat.

Our only water supply was the village pump in High Green, next door to no.17. My parents would

take empty buckets on the handle bars of their bikes, 2 buckets each, cycle to the pump, fill them up and push the bikes home! Eventually Lady Coventry had a rotary pump installed in our garden but this was never very successful and the water was always an interesting colour.

With the aerodrome installed at Defford, a fruit and veg man named Mr Spence had set up in one of the bothies outside the walled garden. My mother and I would walk from the Lodge to the Court, picking mushrooms and blackberries. We 'd take them to Mr Spence who would supply the Officers Mess. Times were not very easy and my mother would make some extra money by doing this. On our return journey, we would pick more mushrooms and she would cook them for lunch.

My Father had worked in the gardens at Croome for 24 years, having gone there when he left school at Severn Stoke. However, following the sad death of the 10th Earl in France in

1940, Lady Coventry

was forced to lay off many staff, including my father. My mother continued to work at the Court and during that period I had a marvellous time for a little boy; taken for rides on their shetland pony by Bill and Lady Maria Coventry, having tea in the housekeepers room and of course ice cream in the kitchen served up by the butler himself, Mr Latter! Happy days!

There is one memory that my mother retained almost until the end of her life. In May 1940 the Dutch Royal family were evacuated from Holland on a British destroyer and Queen Willemina came to Croome for a short time. My mother was sworn to secrecy but later was able to recall how she saw the Queen descending the main staircase with her bodyguards and several times saw her walking in the walled garden. The Forties were truly momentous times at Croome!.



An eye for Croome?

Would you like to join a small group to organise an exhibition / competition of photographs taken at Croome Park?

The Friends of Croome Park Committee has given enthusiastic approval to a proposal to organise an Exhibition / Competition to raise funds.

We now need a few people to help turn this idea into reality by establishing the criteria, sorting the logistics and undertaking administrative tasks. You don't need to be a keen photographer to join the group. Your joining will not exclude you from submitting your own photographs.

If you would like to get involved or discuss the task further please contact Ann Meadows by emailing



AnnCP2010@aol.com.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Ann

Garden and Park Update

Katherine Alker
Garden and Park Manager

I always seem to start by saying how busy we've been in the garden and park at Croome and yet again this is true!

We saw the first signs of spring in Church Shrubbery when the snowdrops emerged rather later than in the past few years, after what was a cold winter. Croome Park looked particularly pretty covered in snow for a week or so - and with the temperature below freezing for well over a week maybe it was a more normal winter for a change.

Winter jobs for Hugh, I and the garden volunteer team have included tree planting in the parkland; many hundreds of metres of hedgerow planting in the park and the car park; mulching the beds in the garden; and path clearance in the shelter

belts. We've also planted over 7000 snowdrops in Church Shrubbery (we should have quite a spectacular display next year), a couple of thousand daffodil bulbs and several hundred bulbs for pots inside the Temple Greenhouse, including Crown Imperial Fritillaria, hyacinths and lilies. Hopefully you'll have spotted spring flowers such as hellebores, aconites, cyclamen and primroses on your recent walks around the garden.

The Dig for Victory gardener volunteers have been hard at work too and what looks like a bare patch of ground at the moment has had muck (courtesy of the Walled Garden) dug in over

the winter. The beds have been boarded, the ground raked and seeds sown. It won't be too long before we see the fruit - and more importantly the vegetables - of their labour!

Something new for us this year is getting fresh flowers into the Court. It would have been the gardeners' responsibility to get cut flowers for the house in the 6th Earl's day so it seems appropriate that the same

happens today. Over Easter, the Flower Arranging volunteers presented daffodils (from the Home Shrubbery) in the Entrance Hall and just this week we have arranged parrot tulips. I have been working with Karen Cronin at the Walled Garden so that in the coming months we can get some of the cut flowers from them, as would have happened during the time of the 6th Earl. All the flowers used will be the same varieties as those grown in the 18th century so visitors will be seeing authentic Georgian Style arrangements.

Looking ahead there are many jobs coming up in the next few months for us in the garden and park. Maintenance of the garden is becoming rather a large task with the weeding of the beds and flowering studs, shrub pruning and general tidying taking up a lot of time. By the time you read this we'll hopefully be well on the way to having an extra pair of hands in the garden in the form of a part-time Gardener. We hope to have the windows back in the Temple Greenhouse before next winter and planning for this is underway. The plant collection in the greenhouse has had to be kept to a minimum while we await the return of the windows but now, with the help of the Croome



Scilla peruviana (K Alker)

Plant Research Group, we can start to think about what might have housed there in the 18th century and start to locate specimens to rebuild the exotic plant collection.

There is always more to do in the parkland, and now that the temporary Chinese Bridge is in place more visitors will be taking the opportunity to walk from the Court directly out into the park. Hugh will be taking the lead on parkland work in the future and tasks for the coming season will include maintaining the rides along Sweet Briar Walk, which is now open to the public, allowing one to walk through the shelterbelt from the end of the river; ensuring the guards in the parkland are secure to prevent the cattle from eating the growing tips of young trees; and keeping all footpaths on our land clear and passable.

As ever, it is thanks to the fantastic garden volunteer team and Hugh that Croome Park looks so good. As our visitor numbers and our opening hours increase, so does the challenge to maintain the standards that we set ourselves, but our aim will always be to present Croome to the highest standard possible.

Many thanks to the Friends of Croome Park for their recent donation towards planting in the



Potentilla (K Alker)

Recollections of a Land Agent - part 1

John Henderson
Vice Chairman, Friends of Croome Park Committee

I qualified as a Land Agent in 1964 and then spent a couple of years in Australia doing nothing like Land Agency. I'd better explain that a Land Agent is someone who manages Landed Estates. Forty years ago Land Agents were distinguished by wearing tweed jackets and flat hats with a propensity for hunting, shooting or fishing. Although I did have a tweed jacket, I looked foolish in a flat hat and could neither hunt, shoot nor fish; fairly important prerequisites for one who dreamed of being a Resident Agent, managing an extensive, beautiful country estate.

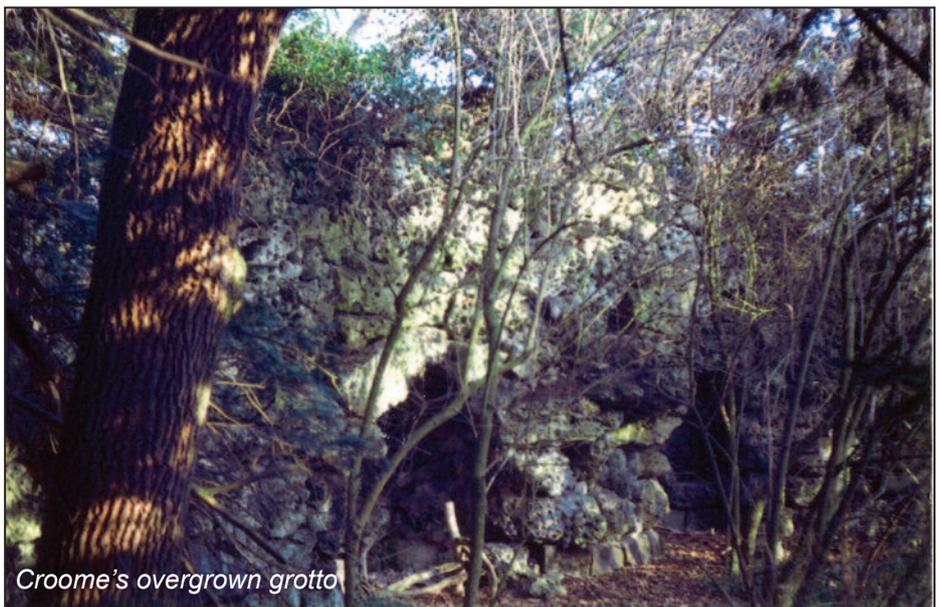
On my return from Australia I found myself in June 1967 broke and unemployed. At this somewhat unpromising point I sought the hand in marriage of one Cara Beresford-Stooke. She agreed and so, astoundingly, did her father. It thus became urgent and imperative that I should find wholesome employment. I scoured every Land Agents' Society Journal for vacancies and saw one for an Assistant to the Agent for the Croome Estate Trustees in Worcestershire. Living then in Derbyshire, I knew nothing of Worcestershire nor of Croome.



John & Cara's wedding day

I suspect that there were no other applicants as I was accepted. My appointment in October 1967 was very firmly

Assistant to the Agent, a much humbler position than Assistant Agent. I found digs for the first week or so at the Pool House, Upton on Severn, run then as a Guest House by two ladies, one of whom had a prosthetic hand. She could not help it of course but there was something vaguely unsettling when, at breakfast, this same pale plastic replica handed you a plate of sausages, egg and bacon!



Croome's overgrown grotto

My little office was separate from the Agent's Board Room and Offices at High Green. It was actually where Michael Smith has his office now. My early duties were to familiarise myself with the Woods, as I was to oversee the Forestry Department of six men. The saw-mill opposite the Estate Office was being dismantled but there was the Pickleyard nearby. Here, small thinnings were cross cut and pointed with a mobile saw bench and the resulting fence and gate posts were treated hot and cold in a large Creosote Tank, for sale or for estate use.

My inspection took me round the 1,100 acres of woods on the Estate from Powick to Upton Snodsbury, Grafton, Pershore and Drakes Broughton and around the main block centred on High Green; compartment by compartment, recording condition and making recommendations.

The fact that all this had been well recorded for years was neither here nor there but I did get to know the woods - as far as I could. Most needed some sort of care and attention after the ravages of two world wars and a lack of staff to maintain newer re-planting in large woods like Croome Perry.

I fought my way round a wood near the office called, quaintly I thought, Boathouse Cover. I took a hacker with me and was astonished to come across a large stone urn, overgrown by

brambles, and there were various other buildings which I felt sure everyone had forgotten. They hadn't, of course, but with no money available for such frivolities they had been left to their own devices. Gradually, when the men had the odd few hours, the rides to the Wyatt, or Lakeside Urn as it's now known, and to other buildings were slashed clear. Sabrina at the Grotto was revealed and so was the main alcove, its roof studded with flourspar and other crystals, sheltering a dilapidated rustic wooden seat. Alders had seeded right down to the water's edge; everything was so overgrown, you could only catch glimpses of the lake and its reeds.

Find out why John was suspected of being a pyromaniac in the next issue...

The Youngest Resident of Croome at War?

Bob Shaw
Friends of Croome Park member

The last edition of the Newsletter reported on meeting Michael McDonald, son of Group Captain J.A. McDonald, who told of his adventures as a five year old living in the grounds of Croome Park during the War.

It was suggested Michael must have been the youngest resident of Croome at War but now there is another candidate – Roger Knowles, son of Flight Lieutenant Eric Knowles DFM. After earning the DFM sinking U-boat U-541 when with Coastal Command, Eric flew experimental radar trials with the Telecommunications Flying Unit from November 1944. In February 1947, he switched to ground duties at Defford as Chief Air Traffic Controller.

Roger lived with his parents in the huts of the Officers' Married Quarters (OMQ) adjacent to the WAAF Site, off the road towards Pershore a few hundred yards to the east of the London Arch. From his family hut Roger had a good view of aircraft being worked on in the dispersal areas around the Technical Site. On occasions, on a Saturday morning, his father would take him for an illicit flight, perhaps in an Oxford or a Wellington. Eric Knowles' flying log book shows that he flew 27 different types of

aircraft from the unique Boeing 247D DZ 203 to Spitfire, Brigand, Meteor and Canberra.

So Roger is a candidate for the title of "The Youngest Resident of Croome at War" - although his parent's accommodation in the OMQ hut, which he describes as a cold and primitive, would not have been as pleasant as the C.O.'s house enjoyed by his young contemporary, Michael McDonald.

All trace of the OMQ area where Roger lived has long disappeared but some of the Technical Site buildings and other traces of the aerodrome still survive; it is to be hoped those RAF buildings which do remain in this area, and form a magical time-capsule, will be preserved in memorial to the scientists and aircrew of TFU Defford who played a brave and dedicated part in one glorious chapter in the history of Croome.

Michael McDonald returned to Croome for this year's Friends AGM and was given a guided tour of the Court and Park, including a visit to the site of the C.O.'s House and the Officers' Mess which is now being grassed over. At the AGM in the evening he was introduced by our Chairman and welcomed to the meeting. Michael has joined the Friends and is keen to see the wartime history of Croome preserved and presented to the public.

The flying career of Michael's father stretched back to the last days of the First World War. As a young Pilot Officer he flew in the Chanak Crisis of 1922—1923. It's now emerged that one of the Bristol Fighter aeroplanes he flew during the campaign in Turkey has not only been preserved but is still flying! Bristol F2B Fighter D-8096 is still airworthy with the Shuttleworth Collection at Old Warden in Bedfordshire. Group Captain McDonald's log book shows that he piloted D-8096 on a sortie from the aerodrome at San Stefano in the British enclave on 3 Nov 1922.



Michael McDonald and his family will be honoured visitors to the Shuttleworth Collection this summer, when he will show his grandsons "the aeroplane your Great Grandfather flew". Michael and family have also promised to attend the RAF Defford Reunion on July 17th, during the National Trust's "RAF Defford at 70" weekend. And an invitation is on its way to Roger Knowles in the hope that the two once very young residents of Croome at War will be able to meet, with other Veterans at the Reunion.

FRIENDS FORUM

We'd love to hear from you for our new 'Forum' feature of the newsletter. 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 or write to:

Wendy Carter
Friends of Croome Newsletter Editor
c/o The National Trust
Builders' Yard
High Green
Severn Stoke
Worcestershire WR8 9AR

The deadline for the next issue of the magazine is 20th September 2010