

THE FRIENDS OF CROOME



NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2025 Issue 44

RAF Defford Museum at Croome

by **Jonathan Wootton**

The hidden gem that is part of the National Trust Croome site and not always the place visitors directly head for is the RAF Defford Museum. This year has seen some record-breaking numbers visiting the museum due to the VE day celebrations on Saturday 10 May, the actual VE day of course being 8 May.



Lizzie Allsop

Preparations for the day were held in conjunction with the National Trust. Interviews and articles were held with the local radio and newspapers with good mentions in the national newspapers too that ensured some excellent promotion for the events. Some of these are now held in posterity on the BBC sounds archive should you wish to follow the link and listen again or hear for the first time. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0l8ltpq>

On the day itself there were stands in the Sergeant's and Orderlies' Quarters building manned by museum volunteers and the cadets from Pershore ACT who provided some brilliant flight simulators. In addition, there were four musical interludes provided by the Malvern Hills Brass Band and the wonderful vocals of Lizzie Allsop. This resulted in record numbers attending Croome, just over 3,200, and the museum surpassed itself with a record 764 visitors coming through the doors.

RAF Defford was a Class A airfield. The name is derived from the A-shape layout of the runways and was intended for use by heavy bombers and transport aircraft. After a short period as a Bomber Command operational training unit, the airfield was taken over in May 1942 by the Telecommunications Flying Unit. At the height of the war, over 2,500 servicemen and women were stationed in buildings in and around the park at Croome. Over 100 aircraft were stationed at the airfield at any one time, with examples of practically every type of British military aircraft and also some American aircraft too, all there to test the new airborne interception radar that was being developed by the scientists billeted at Malvern College. The amazing thing is, and why it was subsequently nicknamed the Secret Airfield was because nobody outside these environments had a clue what was going on. Without these endeavours and breakthroughs, Britain could have been a very different place and was as significant as Bletchley Park in securing victory. One of the more well known and well used discoveries made at Defford was the development of automated landing technology. The first landing taking place in 1945. The facilities at the airfield changed significantly during its early life. Initially many personnel were billeted in tents. For a period, they even had to be bussed offsite to take showers! But over time more and more buildings were added, accommodation blocks, mess halls, large hangars used as installation workshops, and so on.



Defford Airfield was decommissioned in 1957. The new V-bombers being introduced into the RAF were larger and heavier than previous aircraft, needing longer and stronger runways which Defford could not provide. Most of the buildings were demolished, and the taxiways and dispersal points removed. The airfield continued to be used as a base for radar testing, it was one of the UK's early radio astronomy observatories, and it became a military satellite communications hub. Two radio telescopes were commissioned in 1962. These were used for the study of quasars, meteorological research, and tracking Russian and American satellites.

In 1980 the MOD decided to consolidate its various satellite communications establishments and move them to Malvern. In the following years several satellite dishes, or 'terminals', were erected, many protected by the "golf balls" we have come to associated with such technology. The Defford facility played a significant part in the development of Skynet and had a major role in the Falklands, Bosnia and Gulf wars. The Defford facility was eventually closed in 2005, and is now occupied by West Mercia police.

Our Family at Croome Court: The Early Years

by **Leonard Edwards**



In 1948, my father Albert Edwards was offered the position of caretaker and residential engineer at the new boarding school at Croome Court. The school was moving from its location at Sambourne near Redditch. Besford Court was the senior school and if the junior school moved to the Court, it would only be 2 ½ miles away, plus the new buildings would allow a greater intake of boys. My aunt had worked at Besford since leaving school and did so until she retired. My mother worked for a short period in the Besford estate office. The school administrator, Father Warner, had met my father at plays put on by the local amateur dramatic society which had been staged at Besford.

My father had been discharged from the army and had casual jobs. Father Warner asked to see him and told him that a job was available at Croome if he wanted it. This was the start of our family's life at Croome. We were living in north Worcester at the time and for the next two years he cycled every day to and from the Court. In 1950 my mother and I moved to Croome where I lived for 24 years and my parents for 47 years. We were given a set of rooms above the stables in the courtyard which would have been used by stable lads. I remember that we had rugs over concrete floors, and there was a large cast-iron bath in the centre of the bathroom. It was in this flat that my brother Gerard was born.

The boys and nuns did not move to Croome immediately. The new kitchen was installed with a steam boiler for the ovens, water boilers and a new coke cooking range. A number of the rooms were decorated and school furniture and other facilities that a residential building needed were put in place. The courtyard was a huge playground and very shortly after the school arrived, the cobbles were replaced with slabs. This made the whole area an ideal place to ride my trike and play with my outdoor toys. Little did I know that the plinth I rode around once held the Robert Adam stable lamp.

In the early days I was very much supervised because of all the dangers you can imagine a place like Croome could present. My pre-school days were spent following the workmen and other people around the Court mimicking their activities with my spade, bucket, tiny wheelbarrow and other toy tools all of which were provided so that I could take part in the activities. One of the first phrases I could write was "wet paint," which I did on freshly painted surfaces that the painters had just finished.



It was a child's paradise with all the activities and places one could explore. When I now look back on those days, I had no understanding of how privileged I was and just accepted it was my right to race about the place, play on the two fields, and play hide and seek in the court during the holiday time when both boys and sisters vacated the school.

In the early 1950s we often had family gatherings during the summer holidays when the boys were away for the summer break. My mother arranged for them all to travel out from Worcester using Miss Mark's coach. The day was spent playing sport on the field, walking the grounds, and having a buffet tea in the house and

garden. I have photographs of some of my relatives helping to rake the hay from one of the fields. My grandfather and uncle would spend pleasant afternoons fishing from the bridge on the lake.

About 1957, it was proposed that the stables below us were converted into two classrooms. Naturally this was not an ideal situation with the family living above. The southeast wing of the courtyard was converted into our new house. Interestingly our lounge and dining room both had 18 foot ceilings, and the lounge was 20 feet long by 18 feet wide. The whole house was heated by a single bar electric fire and then later we had a solid fuel stove in the sitting room.



My father was on call 24 hours a day when we were on the premises. Over the years he tackled jobs from a simple repair of a door lock to replacing windows, and eventually he was proficient enough to strip down the heating boilers, replace joists and tackle more complex repairs. Contractors were brought in when there were major building works to be completed.

Throughout the time we lived at Croome we were the only family to stay in part of the building. In the early days there were several ladies who resided in the court and were employed to help with the children. The only other person living there permanently was the kitchen hand, who had a room in the stable block. In the rear yard, in what was once the groom's house, lived the priest and his housekeeper. Other ladies who cleaned or helped in the kitchen came from local villages on a daily basis.

One activity I very much enjoyed was one Thursday every month my father drove the maintenance Bedford lorry to Evesham to collect coke from the gasworks. I sat on the engine cowl between my father and mother for the journey. In those days seat belts and child restraints had not been introduced. Life at Croome was just one big adventure. The Coventry's coach acted as a prop for highway robbers or a Wells Fargo shoot out. The yard was marked out in chalk for roadways or a railway. The list could go on, but it all added up to happy preschool days.



Sir Edward Elgar and the Cottage that Sparked a Legacy

by Ellen Cooper

When we think of Sir Edward Elgar, we often picture the grandeur of concert halls, the sweeping melodies of the Enigma Variations, or the stately charm of Pomp and Circumstance. But Elgar's story begins far from the spotlight - in a modest cottage nestled in the Worcestershire village of Lower Broadheath. Today, this unassuming home is cared for by the National Trust, and it holds the key to understanding the roots of one of Britain's greatest composers. Edward Elgar was born here on 2 June 1857. At the time, the cottage - known as Newbury Cottage - was home to his parents and three siblings. Though it may seem small to us now, it would have been a comfortable and typical family home in the mid-19th century. Edward's father, William Henry Elgar, born in 1821, had moved to Worcester at the age of 20 to pursue a career as a piano tuner. It was in Worcester that he met Ann Greening, whom he married in 1848. William was more than a craftsman - he was a gifted musician, playing violin in the Worcester Cathedral Orchestra and serving as organist at St George's Roman Catholic Church.

A turning point came in 1844 when William was invited to tune the piano of Dowager Queen Adelaide, widow of King William IV, at Witley Court. This royal commission allowed him to advertise his services "By Royal Appointment," earning him a reputation among the local gentry as a trusted and skilled tuner.

In the 1850s, the Elgar family moved to Lower Broadheath, settling into the cottage where Edward was born on the 2 June 1857. The family remained here until 1859, moving when Edward was just two years old. While he likely retained no personal memories of the cottage, his sister Lucy later wrote fondly of their time there: 'How well I remember the day he was born! The air was sweet with the perfume of flowers, bees were humming and all the earth was lovely - There seemed to be, to us little ones, a lot of unnecessary running about in the house, and Father came tearing up the drive with a strange man in a carriage, and before that, an old lady whom we had never seen before arrived with a large bag, and we were told by the younger maid there was a baby in that bag!'

William's growing success enabled him to open the Elgar Brothers Music Shop at the top of Worcester High Street - now the site of H&M. The family lived above the shop, and it was here that Edward's musical journey truly began. Surrounded by instruments and sheet music, he taught himself to play and compose, relying heavily on the resources of his father's shop.

Though the family had left Lower Broadheath, they returned regularly from 1867 onwards for summer holidays. These visits left a deep impression on Edward. Playing in the fields and woods with his siblings, he found inspiration in nature and imagination. His earliest surviving composition, Humoresque: A Tune from Broadheath, captures the spirit of those carefree days. Years later, in 1907, Elgar released The Wand of Youth Suites, a collection of pieces that revisited the joyful memories of his childhood in Lower Broadheath. These works are a musical love letter to the place that shaped his earliest dreams.

So why is Elgar remembered here, in this humble cottage, rather than in the grand homes he later occupied in Malvern or London? Because this is where he wanted to be remembered. His friend and fellow composer Herbert Howells recalled a touching moment from 1929:

'Another day he came out of rehearsal, on the Monday, which was always a general rehearsal day at the Three Choirs Festival... and he said "Have you had enough of music today?" and I said, "Yes, more than enough." "So have I", he said.

"Well, let's go up and see where I was born." Well, that meant going over the River Severn, and out into the country for about five miles to the cottage, Broadheath, which in those days was not titivated at all, it was just as it was - almost, I should think, identical to what it was when he was there, when he was born. And he went through to the cabbage patch, along the path, and up to the front door; and a woman carrying a baby-in-arms came and let him in, called him 'Master' I remember. He said to me, "Oh, do you mind first if - I want to go right up to the little room where I was born - I want to go alone?" I said "Of course not". So I stayed and talked to the woman with the child... and then he came down and said

"Come up with me now, come and see where I came into this wicked world."

Coming away... I remember he said, "I don't expect much from the nation, but if they think it worthwhile, I wish they would buy this little cottage." And then he said, "It's the only wish I've got - about the nation and me". It's worth noting that Elgar never owned the cottage, nor was he involved in its upkeep. One can only imagine how the woman living there must have felt - perhaps honoured - to have such a distinguished person visit her home.

Elgar's life was filled with accolades. He received honorary doctorates from Oxford, Cambridge, and Yale, and became the first Professor of Music at the University of Birmingham. He was knighted in 1904, made an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Music in 1905, admitted to the Order of Merit in 1911, appointed Master of the King's Musick in 1924, and made a Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order in 1928. In 1931, just three years before his death, he was granted a baronetcy. He chose the title Sir Edward Elgar of Broadheath - a final tribute to the place of his birth.

After Elgar's death in 1934, his only daughter, Carice Elgar Blake, took it upon herself to honour his wish. Carice, named after her mother Alice (a blend of 'Caroline' and 'Alice'), was deeply devoted to her father's legacy. In 1935, she persuaded Worcester Corporation to acquire the cottage, which was then leased to a trust dedicated to preserving Elgar's memory. She wrote to family, friends, and acquaintances, gathering letters, memorabilia, and personal items to build the archive and museum we are familiar with today.

Carice passed away in 1970, but her vision lives on. The Elgar Foundation continues to own the visitor centre and leases the cottage. In 2017, the National Trust took over the lease - a lease now approaching renewal. Thanks to Carice's dedication, and the continued care of the Elgar Foundation and the National Trust, visitors today can step into the world of Edward Elgar and experience the place where his remarkable journey began. The cottage stands not just as a birthplace, but as a symbol of creativity, memory, and the enduring power of music rooted in place.



Artists at Croome Court

by **Hugh Worsfold**

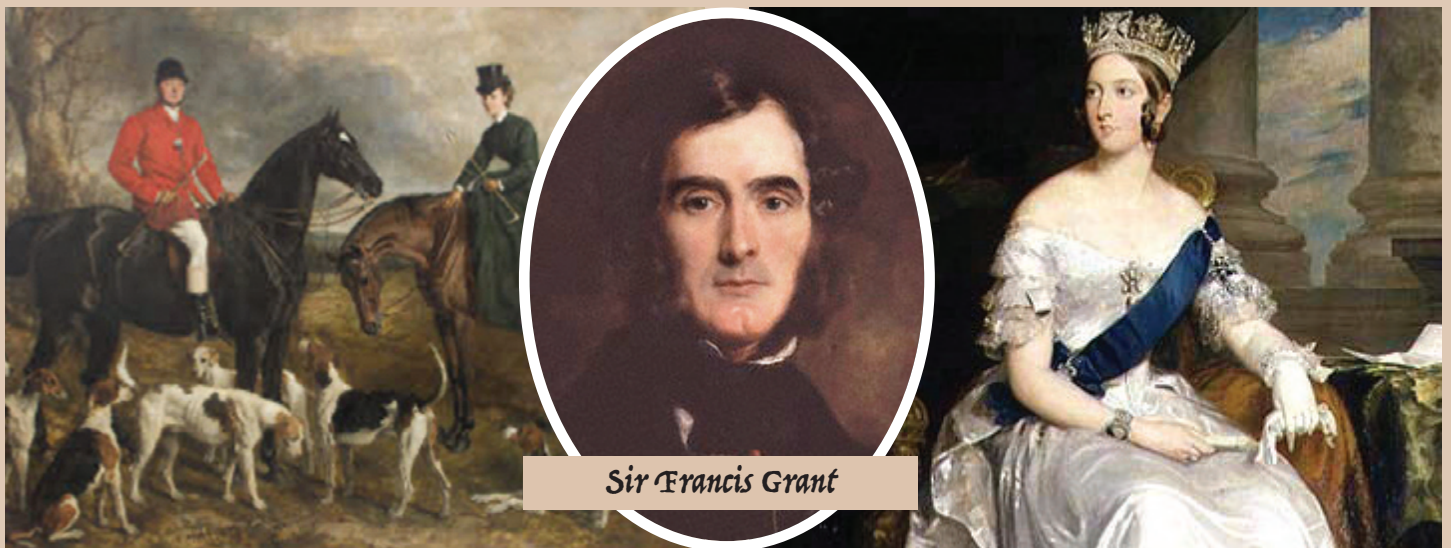
As volunteers at Croome, or just members of the Friends of Croome, we are all familiar with many of the portraits and other paintings either currently on display or in the painting stores on the second floor of the Court. However, like me you may not know a great deal about the artists themselves. This article looks at five of them.



Allan Ramsay

Allan Ramsay - He was born in Edinburgh in 1713, the eldest son of Allan Ramsay, poet and author. He is responsible for the famous portrait of the 6th Earl in his red coat, top right, and the portraits of the 'three brothers' currently hanging in the 'Coventrys in Art Exhibition'. From the age of twenty he studied in London under the Swedish painter Hans Hysing and at the St. Martin's Lane Academy. He left in 1736 for Rome and Naples, where he worked for three years under Francesco Solimena and Francesco Fernandi.

In 1738 he returned to Britain settling in Edinburgh but later with his second wife he went back to Italy from 1754 to 1757. He was a prolific portrait artist. In 1761 he was appointed as Principal Painter in Ordinary to George III - top left is one of a number of portraits he painted of him. He died at his home in Dover in 1784 and left a series of 50 royal portraits to be completed by his assistant Philip Reinagle. One of Reinagle's sons was named Ramsay and became an artist too.



Sir Francis Grant

Sir Francis Grant - He painted the amazing hunting scene with the 9th Earl and Lady Blanche that hangs in the Chinese bedroom. He was born in 1803 the fourth son of Francis Grant, Laird of Kilgraston, near Bridge of Earn, Perthshire, and his wife Anne Oliphant of Rossie. He was educated at Harrow School and Edinburgh High School.

His father, a plantation owner in Jamaica, died in 1818, leaving money to his seven children. Initially Grant intended to become a lawyer, but he left his studies after a year, and took up painting. He possibly spent time in the Edinburgh studio of Alexander Nasmyth. Grant, through his second wife, gained access to a clientele in the hunting set at Melton

Mowbray, where he hunted himself, and took lessons with the artist John Ferneley. He acquired a reputation as a painter of sporting subjects, and in 1834 exhibited at the Royal Academy. He did not just paint sporting subjects: between 1834 and 1879 he contributed 253 works, many of which were full-length portraits, to the Royal Academy exhibitions. Portraits included Disraeli, Viscount Palmerston and Queen Victoria.

After some years of gradually failing health, Grant died of heart disease suddenly at his residence, The Lodge, Melton Mowbray, on 5 October 1878, and was interred in the Anglican cemetery, his relations having declined the usual honour of burial in St Paul's Cathedral.

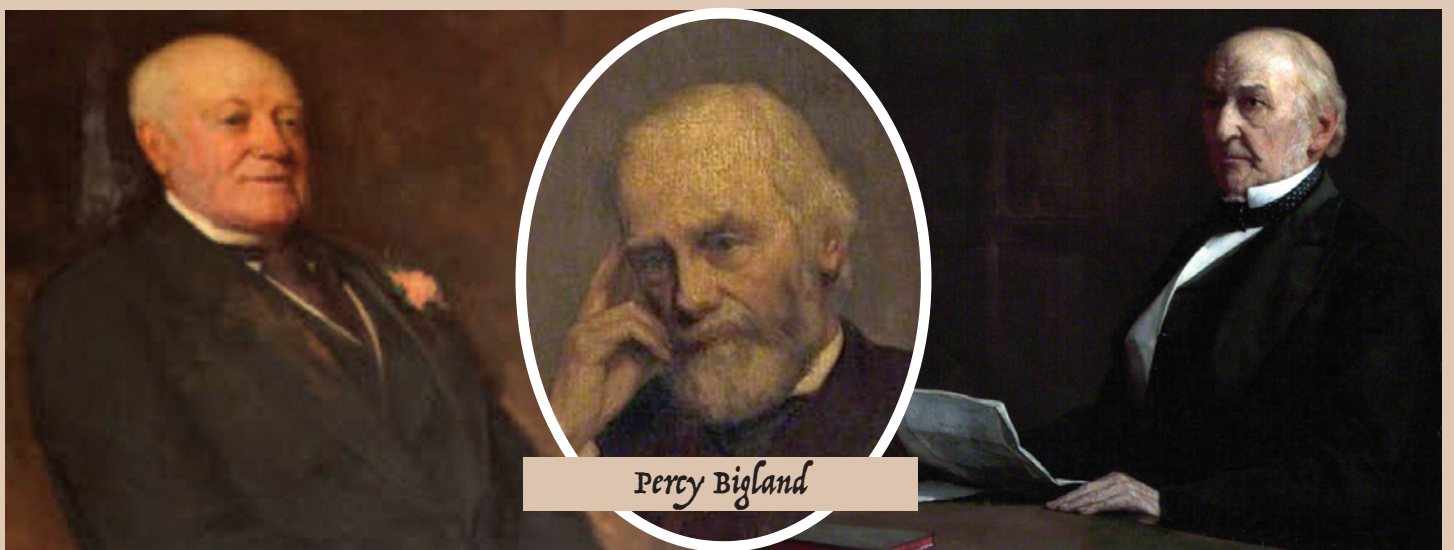


Sir Peter Lely

Sir Peter Lely - Born in 1618, he was a painter of Dutch origin, whose career was nearly all spent in England, where he became the chief portrait painter to the court. We know him for the two portraits of the Hon. Henry Coventry (above left) and Sir William Coventry, sons of the 1st Baron by his second wife, currently hanging in the 'Coventrys In Art Exhibition'. Lely arrived in London around 1643. His early English paintings, mainly mythological or religious scenes, or portraits set in a pastoral landscape, show influences from Anthony van Dyck and the Dutch baroque. His portraits were well received, and he succeeded Anthony van Dyck (who died in 1641) as the most fashionable portrait artist in England. He became a freeman of the Painter-Stainers' Company in 1647 and was portrait artist to Charles I. His talent ensured that his career was not interrupted by Charles's execution, and he served Oliver Cromwell, whom he painted "warts and all", and Richard Cromwell.

Among his most famous paintings are a series of ten portraits of ladies from the Royal court, known as the "Windsor Beauties", formerly at Windsor Castle these are now at Hampton Court Palace. He did a similar series for Althorp of 12 of the admirals and captains who fought in the Second Anglo-Dutch War, known as the "Flagmen of Lowestoft", most of whom are now owned by the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich.

Lely lived from about 1651 to 1680 at No. 10-11 Great Piazza, Covent Garden and was knighted in 1679. He died the following year at his easel in Covent Garden, while painting a portrait of the Duchess of Somerset. Sir Peter was buried at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden. Above right is a painting by him of James II when he was Duke of York before he succeeded to the throne.



Percy Bigland

Percy Bigland - He was the painter of the portrait of the 9th Earl currently hanging in the Coventrys in Art Exhibition. Bigland was born in 1856, the son of Edwin Bigland, of Birkenhead. His family were Quakers and he, like his brother, was educated at one of their schools - Sidcot School near Winscombe in Somerset. He studied art in Munich for seven years before returning to England, where he lived in London, Liverpool, and Beaconsfield. He was a regular exhibitor until 1925; he died in 1926.

He was principally a portrait artist but did some landscapes. He painted the portraits of a number of well known figures including W E Gladstone, above, and Joseph Rowntree. He travelled to America three times where he largely painted portraits.



Richard Wilson

Richard Wilson - Painter of the scene of Croome Court, dated 1758, that is currently in the Tapestry Room. He was born in 1714, the son of a clergyman in the village of Penegoes in Powys. In 1729 he went to London and began his career as a portrait artist which he did for many years. However, he always wanted to paint landscapes. Below alongside a portrait of the artist by Anton Raphael Mengs is a landscape he did in 1745 of Caernarfon Castle in Wales.

From 1750 to 1757 Wilson was in Italy, and became a landscape painter on the advice of Francesco Zuccarelli. Painting in Italy and afterwards in Britain, he was the first major British painter to concentrate on landscape. His style was also influenced by the

Dutch landscape tradition. John Ruskin wrote that Wilson "paints in a manly way, and occasionally reaches exquisite tones of colour".

He concentrated on painting idealised Italianate landscapes and landscapes based upon classical literature. However, when his painting, *The Destruction of the Children of Niobe* (c.1759–60) won acclaim he gained many commissions from landowners seeking classical portrayals of their estates. His landscapes were acknowledged as an influence by Constable, John Crome and Turner.

Richard Wilson died in Colomendy, Denbighshire on 15 May 1782, and is buried in the grounds of St Mary's Church, Mold, Flintshire.

Picture credits: Allan Ramsay - self portrait c.1737 (National Portrait Gallery); Francis Grant - self portrait 1845 (National Portrait Gallery); Sir Peter Lely - self portrait, c. 1660; Portrait of Pery Bigland (National Portrait Gallery); Portrait of Richard Wilson by Anton Raphael Mengs 1752

English Buildings A Connoisseur of Views

by **Philip Wilkinson** englishbuildings.blogspot.com

On a couple of occasions in the past I've explored the grounds of Croome Court in Worcestershire, and have looked not only at a building in the park near the great house but also further out, to take in structures built as eye-catchers in the wider landscape. One of these outlying buildings that I'd not seen was the panorama tower, which was put up on the western side of the estate, in part as an eye-catcher and in part as a place from which to admire the views. Recently I set off to find the panorama tower, an exercise that first off all meant getting over to the western side of the M5, the motorway having sliced through the old Croome estate, cutting the tower off from the house, park, and other eye-catchers. Coming out of the village of Kinnersley, I missed the place where I thought it was, and so pulled in where there was a parking space near a road junction. As soon as I got out of the car and peered over a gate I realised that I could see the tower not far away across a field – I'd reached the right place, by accident rather than design.

The tower, I saw, was round, domed, and classical in design. James Wyatt was the architect but apparently he based the tower on a drawing by Adam, so its design is earlier than the years on either side of 1810 when it was built. It's very plain – the columns are Tuscan, the niches blank, the cornices simple, the dome shallow. Yet the overall effect is satisfying, thanks to the rhythm of the openings, the relationship between the lower section and the small domed upper storey, and the modest way in which the building occupies its elevated position, not dominating it but offering itself up and affording views eastwards towards Croome itself and westwards towards the Malverns and the Welsh hills.



The tower's builder, the 6th Earl of Coventry, had a thing about towers and views, as many landed aristocrats did in the 18th and 19th centuries. The panorama tower beautifully complements the medieval-looking eyecatchers elsewhere in the park and also reminds us that the earl built the great Broadway Tower, miles away to the southeast on his Spring Hill estate. This is a sizeable and impressive presence on the Cotswold scarp, built to give views over thousands of square miles towards Croome and, again, far into Wales. Although much preoccupied with gardening and building, the earl must have been aware too of the beauty of Britain as a whole, and his towers – pigeonholed by some as 'mere' follies, both enhance that beauty and aid its appreciation.

William Coventry's Cambridge Connection

by Adam Edwards

A chance discovery during a Cambridge College Treasures display has led Adam Edwards - who spent many school holidays visiting his grandparents, Albert and Lily Edwards, at Croome Court - to explore the archives in an effort to shine a light on the early life of William, the 5th Earl of Coventry.

Using the archive at Pembroke College in Cambridge, as well as various wills, registers and histories, a research paper that considers the academic world William briefly stayed in and why Pembroke College was chosen has been prepared www.friendsofcroome.org.uk/newsite/research.htm.

The Cambridge of the 1690s was a microcosm of the political and religious arguments of England, often to the point of vendetta. As several succession crises took hold of the country, the controversies of doctrine in the Anglican Church and the rights of the Monarchy drove the formation of the Whig and Tory parties that came to dominate British politics for the next century and a half. Questions bloodily thought answered on the fields of the British Civil War continued to rumble on into the 18th century.

We get to glimpse into a college, moderate in its politics and its means, setting its own path of architectural ambition, and launching the career of another paragon of 'The Enlightenment,' Sir Christopher Wren, as well as discovering a fleeting connection with that family and William Coventry.



Above: *The 5th Earl of Coventry in Peer's Robes, attributed to the circle of Sir Godfrey Kneller (Lübeck 1646/9 - London 1723). (Croome collection)*



This ferment of strife within the Establishment also led to the flowering of The Enlightenment, with figures such as Isaac Newton dominating scientific and educational thought. A heady cocktail of ideas and principles that William Coventry as a teenager was exposed to, before returning to London and eventually a political career in the shadow of, and ultimately opposed to, Sir Robert Walpole. In the forthcoming research article, we will get to see how the importance of family connections shaped William's career, as well as how the foibles of patronage could make or break one's fortunes.

A pair of silver candlesticks donated to Pembroke College by William Coventry sheds light on the birth of a tradition of gifts by students to Pembroke, another echo of the Civil War, replacing treasures lost to a misplaced and mistimed act of loyalty to the Crown.

Left: *Pair of William and Mary candlesticks with engraved arms, crest and mantling. Given by William Coventry, Fellow Commoner, 1692. (By permission of The Master and Fellows of Pembroke College, Cambridge).*



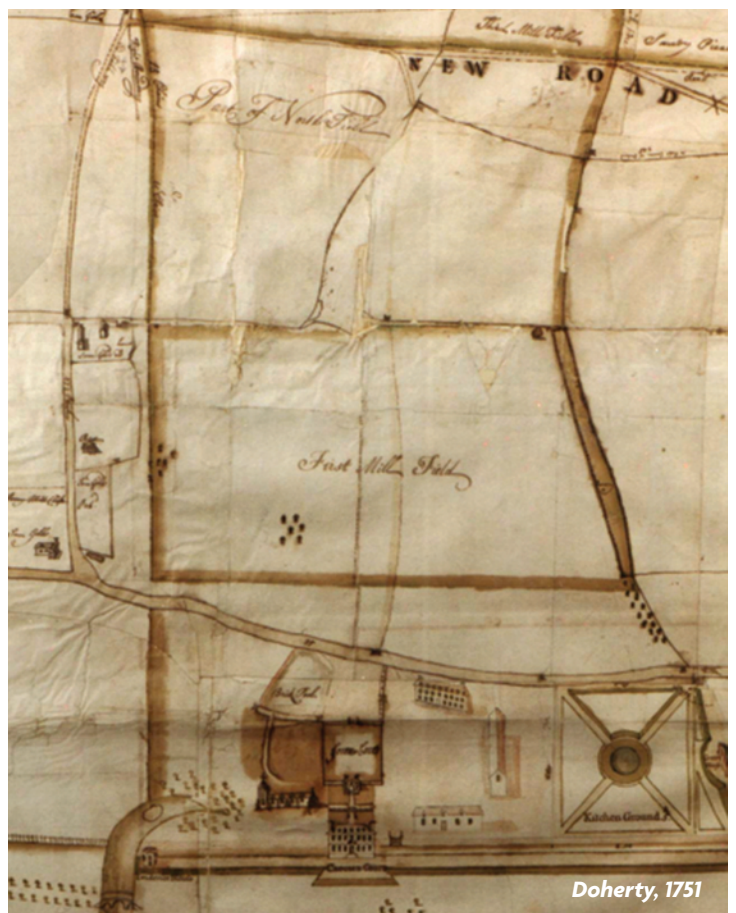
Croome Garden & Outdoors update

by **Katherine Alker**

You can't have failed to notice that the summer has been very warm and exceptionally dry so far. This has caused the garden and park team to think even more about how we can make the place resilient to this type of weather as it seems to be becoming the norm, as well as increased flooding in winter months.

This is all very apt as in July we unveiled the wonderful new Four Seasons statues in the Evergreen Shrubbery. This area of the garden at Croome has undergone significant changes over the centuries; in the early 1700s it was part of the farmland at Croome, with dwellings located nearby as shown on the Doherty map (right) – the court is at the bottom of the map.

As we all know, the 6th Earl employed Lancelot 'Capability' Brown in 1751 to transform the land surrounding Croome Court into a beautiful, designed landscape. The Evergreen Shrubbery was part of the garden which had interest year-round, it being full of shrubs which flowered in late winter and spring, and of course many evergreens with different shaped leaves and a variety of shades of green.



Doherty, 1751



View from the top of the Evergreen Shrubbery, 2003



Hopcraft, 1810

The Snape map, 1796, shows this area fully planted, however by 1810, the Hopcraft map shows a different story, with a large gap in the planting. The Hortus Croomensis, 1824, tells us that four Coade Stone statues of the seasons were in place. Could this gap have been made because the area flooded frequently and plants would not survive?

During the 20th century arable farming took over most of the land at Croome. At some point at least one of the original Four Seasons statues was taken to the Rotunda, but we have no idea where these statues are now. The National Trust started its massive restoration work in 1996 when it acquired the landscape, and in the early 2000s the final harvest was taken, and the Evergreen Shrubbery replanted.

The shrubbery established well, however, during the massive summer floods of 2007, many of the plants at the bottom of the shrubbery died as they remained underwater for weeks. Looking at the historic plans we realised that the Earl had adapted Brown's design to include a gap and the statues. When reviewing whether to replant the area, we decided that because flooding looked more likely with climate change, the best course of action would be to leave a gap in the planting and re-instate the statues.

In 2010 we installed four wooden plinths to represent the statues. I remember discussion with previous curators about what we could put there on a more permanent basis, but it wasn't until 2019 that we got going with the Four Seasons project – or so we thought!

The pandemic put a stop to that, and we couldn't restart until Jenine McGaughran, Croome's Creative Producer, was able to get stuck into the project in 2023. We appointed artist Faye Claridge who worked with four groups of participants to find out what the seasons meant to them. Volunteers from Croome, members of the groups Joy and Green Fingers, and men from HMP Hewell all took part, with each group representing a different season. Taking information from the participants at workshops, Faye designed four new statues which incorporate timber from the cedar tree which fell near the lake in 2019.

The resulting statues are a great representation of the seasons - metal spheres with imagery of Croome and lots of seasonal details cut into them sit on top of the huge chunks of the cedar. We hope that these will remain in the Evergreen Shrubbery for at least the next ten years and provoke discussion and admiration. If you haven't seen them yet, I hope you are able to visit soon and see them for yourself.

There is an accompanying exhibition on the first floor of the house which describes how the new statues were created in more detail, and of course you get great views of the park from the windows too.



Update from Croome Walled Gardens

by Chris and Karen Cronin

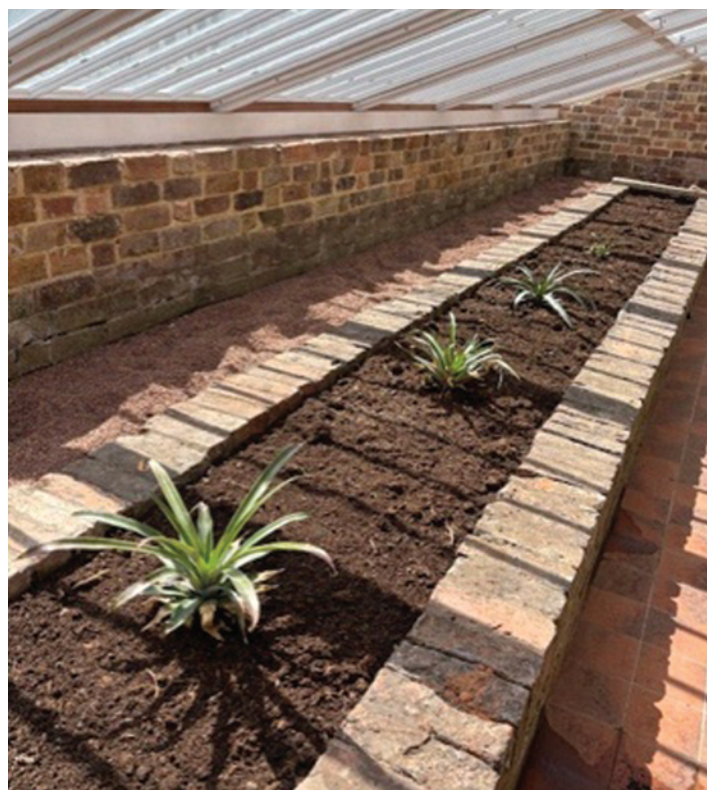


The visit of Harriet Baldwin, MP May 2025

We are delighted to share the latest news from the Walled Gardens at Croome following a busy and rewarding summer season. Since we reopened to the public in April, there have been many exciting developments as we continue to celebrate 25 years of restoration. One of our most anticipated projects reached completion this season. The restoration of the historic Pineapple House is now finished, and we are pleased to report that eight pineapple plants have been carefully potted and are settling well into their new environment. This much-loved feature of the garden has been beautifully brought back to life, and we are thrilled to see it thriving once again.

In May this year, we marked a major milestone in our journey. The newly completed Water Garden was officially unveiled by Harriett Baldwin, MP. This special occasion celebrated 25 years since the beginning of our restoration work and was a heartfelt moment for everyone involved. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all who have supported us over the years. Your encouragement and contributions have made this achievement possible.

Throughout the summer, the gardens have flourished in parts despite the dry weather. The warm conditions benefited the apricots and peaches along the south-facing border, and our tropical plants flourished in the glasshouses. However, some of the other produce struggled due to the lack of rain. One exciting addition this year is a small but healthy patch of grapevines, kindly donated by the Head Gardener at Madresfield Estate. These vines are now thriving in their new home and we look forward to seeing how they develop in the seasons to come.



Inside the Pineapple House, July 2025

This summer also saw the introduction of two new events in the gardens. In July, we hosted “Hortus Croomensis” a special fundraising event organised by Croome Heritage Trust. Guests enjoyed talks from three inspirational figures in the world of horticulture. Chris Beardshaw, Jekka McVicar and Nicholas Dunn all shared their expertise and passion for garden design, herbs and trees in a beautiful setting that truly reflected the spirit of the event.

All profits from the day are being donated to support disadvantaged young people studying horticulture, through an exciting partnership with Pershore College.

We also trialled our first “Taste of Croome” event, which celebrated the rich heritage and produce of the gardens. The afternoon began with a guided tour featuring highlights from the 25-year journey of restoring the gardens. Guests then gathered to watch a live cooking demonstration by Chef Felice Tocchini from Feli’s Kitchen in Stoulton.

Using fruits and vegetables picked fresh from the gardens that morning, Felice created a series of vibrant, seasonal dishes. Visitors enjoyed tasters, took home recipe cards and left inspired to try new ideas in their own kitchens. We hope to offer more of these unique experiences in the future, so please follow our website and Facebook page for updates.



The freshly-planted grapevines

Taste of Croome, July 2025



The Walled Gardens are open every Saturday and Sunday from April to September, including Bank Holidays. Opening hours are 11 am to 5 pm, with last entry at 4 pm. Admission is £7 for adults and children under-14 can visit free of charge (usual National Trust admission applies). All proceeds help to support the ongoing restoration and care of the gardens.

Croome Gallery and Pottery is open every Friday, Saturday and Sunday as well as on Bank Holidays from April to September. During October to December, opening hours may vary. Access is via the National Trust visitor centre, and there is no additional charge when the Walled Gardens are closed. Follow the signs to the garden gate, down the hill behind the gazebo.

Thank you once again for your continued support. We look forward to sharing more with you in the spring next year.