



Croome Chronicle



THE VOICE — FIRST WORDS

Cast your mind back to a dark and wintery night last November. An open meeting had been called by Michael Smith to explore whether the volunteers at Croome wanted a representative body to be set up and, if so, what did they expect it to do? The first litmus test would be to see if anyone turned up on the night; despite the darkness and the cold, many of us did. With Michael in the chair, ideas were floated, bounced around and modified or not before being written down as the consensus of opinion by Becky Wilks, the custodian of the white board and red marker pen.

It proved to be a memorable evening from which a list of key points were produced which would form the basis of the way forward and yes, volunteers did want some sort of formal collective representation. The name for this chosen on the night was the Volunteer Voice.

Michael and Becky quickly produced a draft Charter which thankfully covered all the points raised at the meeting without running into too many pages - no mean feat. The main objectives include the development of a bridge between Croome staff and volunteers, bringing together and communicating between volunteers working in different areas and providing an opportunity for all volunteers to help shape the future of Croome via contributing to the annual Business Plan.

On to the selection of representatives; all of whom were nominated by volunteers and fast forward to mid March 2013 when the Volunteer Voice committee had its first (informal) meeting. Graham Cartwright was elected as Chairman and Rosie Styles (to the relief of the others) agreed to be Secretary. The meeting also decided how each representative should be allocated a group of volunteers. Democracy at its very best ensured that each committee member taken alphabetically was allocated a block of names from the wider volunteer pool, also taken alphabetically. This meant that each member of the committee was given a mix of volunteers from all areas of Croome – a great start.

Michael Smith was invited to the first official committee meeting in April 2013 and said how he hoped opinions from volunteers could be channelled through the Volunteer Voice into the annual Business Plan. He went on to share information and ‘guidelines’, (not to be ignored), passed down from National Trust Central,

which proved to be a complete revelation! The checks and balances which are required in the formation of the annual business plan are complex; the overriding constraint being that money cannot be found for projects unless they are in the budget (or paid for by some philanthropic benefactor). So if there is something which volunteers feel strongly about that will cost money to sort, it needs to be in the budget. Michael invited the Volunteer Voice to send a member to the monthly Property Meetings and promised to include volunteers in the future appointment of a Volunteering Manager.

Following the April meeting, committee members sent out individual emails to their volunteer groups, introducing themselves and arranging meetings where possible so that volunteers could put a face to the name. These meetings provided an opportunity for committee members to explain the main aims of the Volunteer Voice, to gather information on the topics close to the hearts of volunteers and to point out that many minor irritations could be dealt with at Rota Co-ordinator level.



Perhaps because of its high impact on both the visitors’ experience and on the volunteers, most of the concerns expressed related to the buggy service and these issues are being taken up with management. So what of the future? It is still early days for the Volunteer Voice, but hopes are high that it can work as a unifying body, helping both management and volunteers understand where each is coming from and unifying their efforts to make Croome all that it can and should be.

At the next Volunteer Voice meeting, Phyllida Shaw, the evaluation consultant to Croome Redefined, will be outlining the potential role which volunteers can take and exploring the mechanisms for their involvement.

As more information is passed between management and the Volunteer Voice watch out for emails dropping into your mailbox to keep you up to date with developments. Of course this will only be effective if you as volunteers give your feedback, so please don’t hesitate to tell the Volunteer Voice your thoughts on the issues which affect us all.

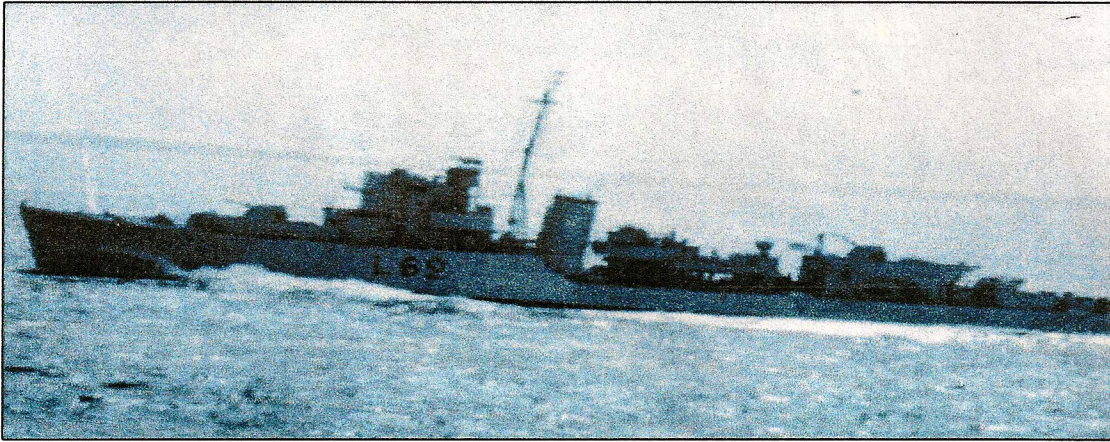
Sylvie Partridge June 2013

H.M.S. CROOME by Ken Rogers, Chris Wynne-Davies and Chris Corfield

Curious connections

Ever wondered how Croome, Billy Connolly and Ferrari cars are connected?

Read on...



A Hunt Class Type-II destroyer of the Royal Navy, HMS Croome was built in January 1941 at Alexander Stephens and Sons in Glasgow, the very shipyard where Billy Connolly served his apprenticeship as a welder. She served during the Second World War, spending much of the time in the Mediterranean, operating from Gibraltar and Alexandria. An excellent ship, she displaced only 1,050 tons and was armed with six 4-inch guns and various anti-submarine weapons. Later that year while the *Croome* was escorting a convoy from Liverpool to Gibraltar, she spotted the submarine *Baracca* on the surface.

The *Baracca* was one of six Marconi-class submarines built for the Royal Italian Navy. It seems, however, these submarines were not good in rough seas - the guns became unusable and the torpedoes were easily deflected in a swell. On 8 September 1941, *Croome* and the *Baracca* met. The *Baracca* dived as the *Croome* turned towards her at full speed. After two depth-charge attacks, the *Baracca* surfaced astern of the *Croome*, which opened fire with all guns as she went about. The Italian submarine returned fire with her main gun but the shots went wide, the gun deck was then cleared by the *Croome*' Lewis guns. As the *Croome* approached, the Italians began to abandon ship. The *Croome* rammed the *Baracca* just abaft the conning tower. The submarine sank immediately by the stern and exploded underwater. .

The fight was one-sided (during the engagement a Wellington bomber from 221 Squadron based in the Mediterranean came to the *Croome*'s aid) and 28 of the *Baracca*'s crew were killed and 32 survived and were picked up by the *Croome*. The *Baracca* was named after the ace Italian fighter pilot Count Major Francesco Baracca who was fatally shot down in World War I.

And Ferrari ? Stay with me. In 1923, Enzo Ferrari met the Countess Paolina, mother of Count Francesco Baracca, who used to paint a horse on the side of his planes. The Countess asked Enzo to use this horse on his cars, suggesting that it would bring him good luck. The original "prancing horse" on Baracca's airplane was painted in red on a white cloud-like shape, but Ferrari chose to have the horse in black (as it had been painted as a sign of grief on Baracca's squadron planes after the pilot was killed in action) The prancing horse has been the official symbol of Ferrari automobiles ever since they began manufacture.

What became of HMS Croome? She survived the war but had a very short life, being broken up at Briton Ferry, South Wales on 13 August 1957.



Did 'The Big Yin' ever own a Ferrari or visit Croome? What's certain is that Croome will continue to surprise us.

COLLECTIONS OF THE 9th EARL OF COVENTRY

by Jill Tovey

During the second half of the 19th century and on into the 20th century, the 9th Earl of Coventry was an avid collector of antique furniture and pictures. Wherever he was in the country he seems to have found time to browse antique shops and purchase items that took his eye. It was an eclectic mix of objects, though the common link seems to have been that, to his eye, they fitted into the collection that the 6th Earl had had made for Croome in the 18th century.

There exist in the Croome archive 108 bills for furniture bought from antique shops and auction houses, the earliest date is 1887 (though earlier bills may not have survived) and the latest is in 1919, when he would have been 81. Apart from London, they come from all parts of the country — usually from places with a race-course — Birmingham, Hereford, Worcester, Cheltenham, Monmouth, Gloucester, Salisbury and Dublin. It is worth speculating that he might have been using his ‘winnings’ either from the racing or from betting to fund his extravagance.

It was from a dealer in Dublin that he bought a *Fine Chippendale mantelpiece, elaborately decorated, Spanish mahogany* for £80, this, we now think, is the one in the room now used as an office. He also purchased at least eight other mantelpieces in marble or wood. Other very expensive items were: A set of 14 Chippendale chairs in red Morocco from Christie’s for £63; a pair of *beautiful, genuine old Adam mirrors* for £120 (from Gill & Reigate, London); a pair of Black Buhl Cabinets and a pair of Louis XVI chairs for £120. ‘Chippendale’ was his favourite, but he also bought ‘Sheraton’ and ‘Adam’, though I think that these were probably generic terms. From the Wormington Grange sale in 1904 he acquired a *Spanish mahogany Chippendale Secretaire bookcase with shaped, glazed panes and a cupboard under* (£46) and *The Frightened Horse* by Ward (£5-5-0).

To show the variety of his purchases, here are items from three bills from 1906, at the height of his spending:

Bill No. 210	Bill no. 211	Bill no. 209
Chippendale washstand	Sheraton writing table	2 old blue dishes
Chippendale toilet mirror	Mahogany washstand	1 Wedgewood plate
Sheraton Dressing table	Plated Tray	Folding Screen
Plated Cruet	Teapot	Pair brass candlesticks
Mahogany Tea Caddy		Large Bowl
Wire plated baskets		6 plates

We know from old photographs of the interior of Croome Court, that in the early 20th century the house was filled with a seemingly eclectic, untidy clutter, which could well have sprung from the Earl’s obsession with collecting, as demonstrated by these records.

He also bought pictures, both prints and originals. Many had horse related subjects, mostly by J Fearnley and J. Ward. His ancestor Maria Gunning was also a favourite subject, he paid £189 for *Countess of Coventry as a Market Girl with a basket of eggs*, by A. Pond, from Christie’s, from the collection of the Earl of Cork (9th Dec. 1905, lot 67) and another picture of Maria Gunning, by Finlayson Read (Christie’s, 20th July, ’08). In 1920 he purchased seven pictures in one sale, including a Hogarth for £52-17-6 and a Ward for £55-2-6.

He seems to have been more particular in his picture buying, mostly restricting himself to subjects that were relevant to his life or to Croome.

In summary, the 9th Earl of Coventry seems to have been a man who had money to spend and could indulge his whims in whatever direction fancy took him. This was perhaps at the expense of ‘modernizing’ his country house, even proudly revelling in the fact that the Saloon hadn’t been re-decorated since the 18th century.

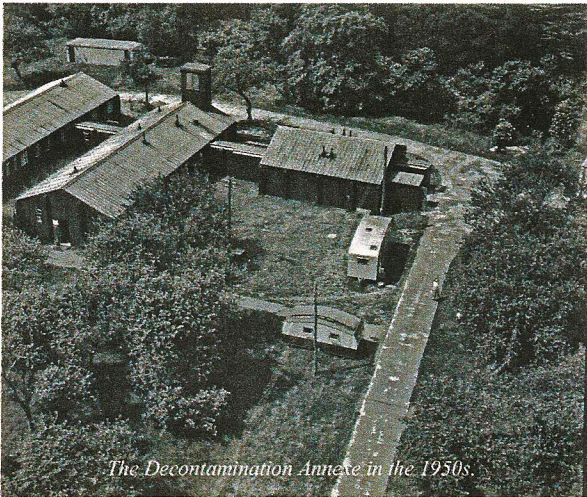
STEADY PROGRESS TOWARDS NEW MUSEUM by Bob Shaw

Plans to restore the Decontamination Annexe building (adjacent to Reception and restaurant buildings) to its former RAF appearance externally, and internally for use as the Defford Airfield Heritage Museum, are progressing steadily.



Thanks to the initiative of DAHG, the National Trust has received an offer of grant of up to £85,000 towards the estimated cost of £125,000 to restore the building for the purpose of housing the Museum. The National Trust at Croome has underwritten the balance of £40,000 needed to enable work to start, but hopes to recover this money by applications to Charitable Trusts.

The offer of the grant to fund the greater part of the work comes thanks to generosity of the Evesham-based company Severn Waste Services, via the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. The offer is conditional on the National Trust having the project accepted by and registered with Entrust, the enforcement agency for the HMRC approved scheme, and making formal application to Severn Waste through their disbursement agents. The National Trust has appointed a surveyor to take charge of the building works, and set up a Management Board for the project consisting of Michael Smith, the Property Manager at Croome; Dennis Williams of DAHG, who is to act as Curator of the Museum; and Bob Shaw, Secretary of DAHG.



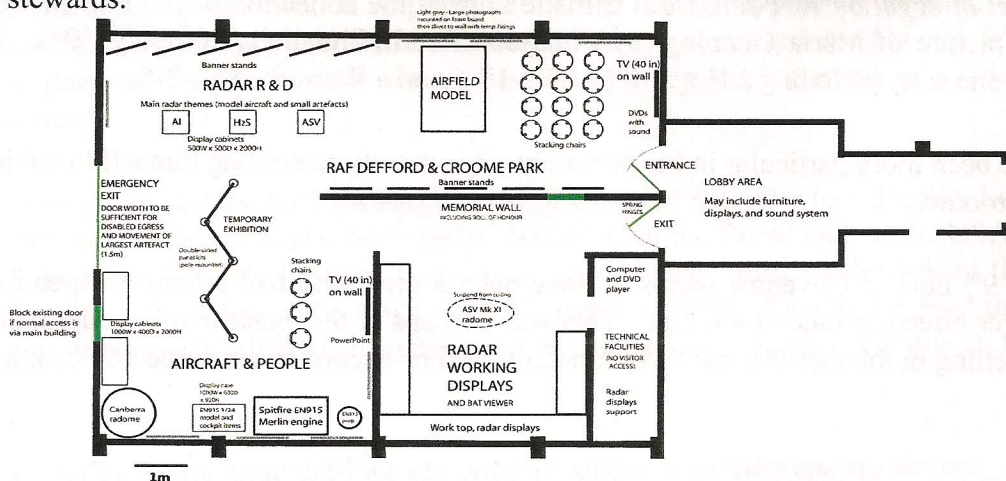
The Decontamination Annexe in the 1950s.

It is envisaged that the National Trust, who owns the building and the land, will be responsible for all aspects of the building – heating, lighting, safety, repairs, security, stewarding and so on. DAHG will be responsible for designing and fitting out the interior as a flexible exhibition space and organising a succession of exhibitions in that space. Part of the building will be set out for displays of vintage radar equipment by the DAHG members of the Electronics Restoration Trust (ERT). The February edition of the DAHG Newsletter 'Contact!' gave full description of the planned layout of the building.

DAHG is now seeking funding, estimated at around £30,000, to fit out the interior of the museum, and organise a programme of events and 'outreach' activities, aimed at putting on record and publicising the extraordinary airborne radar achievements of the service personnel and scientists at RAF Defford.



It is hoped to open the Defford Airfield Heritage Museum in the first half of 2014. With regard to stewarding the museum and satisfying the interest of visitors, in due course it is expected DAHG will arrange training courses and briefing for volunteer stewards.



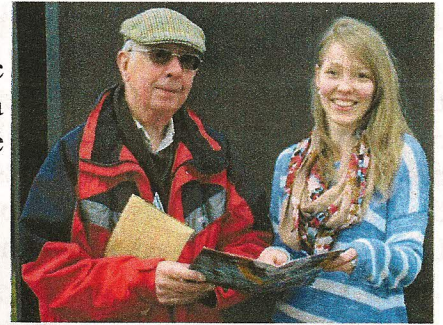
DAHG — WALKING THROUGH HISTORY by Bob Shaw

The “RAF Walk” designed and planned by DAHG, was launched on May Day Bank Holiday.

The route of the RAF Walk enables visitors to Croome to learn more about RAF Defford and its achievements, as well as the location of various sites and features of the airfield which can still be seen from Croome Park. The route is on National Trust land and public footpaths only – it does not take visitors onto those parts of the airfield which are private property so not open to the public.

A guidebook to the walk, prepared by Dennis Williams and volunteer graphic designer Matt Jarvis, is on sale on Reception price £1. The Guidebook provides a potted history of Defford Airfield and a map, and takes the visitor stage by stage through the walk, identifying points of interest.

Bob Shaw with Becky Wilks at Croome (Photos: Dennis Williams)



DAHG GUIDED WALKS - VOLUNTERS NEEDED !

During the months of September, October and November 2013, at the request of Tracey Blackwell and the Visitor Services team, DAHG will be providing Guided Walks for parties of visitors who want to learn more about the Airfield story. These Guided Walks will be each Saturday, starting at 10.30 and more volunteers are needed to act as guides. Full training and briefing will be provided at a pre-training session in August conducted by Walk Guide Leader Dennis Williams. If you would like to be trained as an RAF Walk Guide, learn more about the Airfield, and lead some Walks, please contact:- BobShaw at shaw@springlea1.freemove.co.uk and 07778733499; or Dennis Williams at DennisJWilliams@aol.com and 01886 830295 or speak to Tracey Blackwell

VISIT TO WEST MERCIA POLICE SITE

On May 12th, there was a Group visit to the West Mercia Constabulary security compound on the airfield, which the police inherited from QinetiQ in 2002. The visit was arranged by DAHG member Brian Smith, who heads up the Police Records and Archives in the very fine Sir Bernard Lovell Building on the site. After a fascinating tour of the police facility where some features of the airfield survive, the party went on to a memorable visit to the former Technical Site, under the leadership of Dennis Williams, who had secured the permission of the landowner and the farmer – vital for any visit to this private area.



If you would like to know more about the activities of DAHG and perhaps become a member of DAHG, please contact Bob Shaw, Hon. Secretary DAHG, on shaw@springlea1.freemove.co.uk or 07778 733 499. New members are always welcome – annual subscription £5, benefits includes ‘Contact!’, our Group News letter, five times a year; and an opportunity to participate in preserving and presenting to the public what was achieved at the top secret Defford Airfield in Croome Park.

TOP SECRET BOEING

This book, published by DAHG, provides insight into the secrets of RAF Defford, while telling the life story of one unique aircraft that served at Defford - a Boeing 247D, the only one of its kind in this country - and the aircrew and scientists who found it the ideal vehicle for airborne radar research. 'Top Secret Boeing' is proving to be something of a best seller, and is now well into its third print run. There will not be a fourth print run! So when present stocks are exhausted, there will be no more. If you want a copy, as a present or for yourself to read, buy it now!

On sale in the National Trust Shop - Volunteer discounts apply.

GARDEN AND PARK by Katherine Alker

As always we've got plenty going on in the outdoors at Croome. A large section of the ha-ha wall between the Evergreen Shrubbery and Church Hill is being rebuilt by Croft contractors, and Louis James stonemason is rebuilding the ha-ha wall around the Home Shrubbery. Both of these projects are being largely funded by Natural England. I'm especially looking forward to seeing the steps between the Home Shrubbery and South Park restored, as visitors will no longer have to retrace their steps back down the hill from the Rotunda; they will have the option of walking out into the wider parkland.

Essential repairs to the London Arch will be taking place later this month and into July. Contractors Treasures will be constructing a temporary scaffold on both sides of the arch so that they can work without disruption to traffic passing underneath. Work consists of replacing some of the worn out flashing and re-pointing, including ensuring the day and night panels at the top of the arch are secure. We hope to raise further funds to allow more work on the London Arch in the next 12 months.

Another upcoming project is the replacement of the Chinese Bridge. We are in the early stages of design and getting planning permissions. We hope that work will commence later this year, with the bridge in place, having a dramatic impact on views in the parkland and from the court, by Spring 2014.

Aside from these projects, work continues in the garden and park by the team of staff and volunteers. I hope you'll agree that the herbaceous beds in the garden have been looking wonderful this year, with plants establishing well and flowering freely; we shall continue to weed, prune and plant these areas.

We are planning some major work in the park to remove some of the non-historic areas of scrubby woodland. Hugh has been in discussion with the Forestry Commission and is drawing up plans to phase the work, which will take place once we have the appropriate felling licences. The Estate Wall volunteers are continuing their work to rebuild the blue lias walls. Having completed the gateway on the route to Dunstall Castle, they are now working on an area behind the Park Seat.

Thanks as ever to the wonderful gardeners and stewards who spend so much of their time working in the outdoors at Croome!

TAPESTRY ROOM UPDATE by Phil Douce

Following the last report on the Tapestry Room, and the proposed initiative to have photographic reproductions made for the room, there has been considerable progress.

Mr PJ Keeling who owns Zardi and Zardi, the company that will be handling the work, visited Croome some weeks ago and was shown round the Tapestry Room by myself and Michael Smith. "PJ" took various measurements and photographs away with him. In April he visited the Metropolitan Museum in New York and spent some considerable time with Elizabeth Cleland who is responsible for the Tapestry Room in the Met. They discussed at some detail the quality of the photographs that will be needed to satisfy our requirements and following that visit Zardi and Zardi are progressing the initial work on colour matching, in particular the reds which are the most difficult colour to get correct.

As far as the money is concerned and we are looking at a budget of about £ 28,000 to £ 30,000. Lord Flight, who is the Chairman of the fundraisers here at Croome has been in contact with the Royal Oak in the USA who support the work of the National Trust in the UK. He has also been in correspondence with Beth Bottrill of the National Trust who is working with Sean Sawyer who runs the Royal Oak NT support charity. Sean has agreed that the Royal Oak might help fund the tapestry project when their support of the work being done currently at Knole in Kent is completed.

Things are moving, but it will be some time until we see our reproductions in the Tapestry Room.

A CENTENARY TO CELEBRATE

by Kath Morris

All those who enjoy historic buildings could this year remember Lord Curzon - a pioneer in the history of conservation.

In the 19th century the idea that there could be any control of what people did with their own private property seemed inconceivable - and dangerously radical. Stonehenge, our most iconic ancient monument, was privately owned and falling more and more into decay. Visitors came. They left litter that encouraged burrowing rodents and in exchange they plundered stone fragments, chipped from the ancient stones. The private owner declared this reminder of our ancient past 'not the slightest use to anyone now' and proposed to sell it off to a railway company.

John Lubbock, Liberal MP for Orpington, was first in the battle to preserve Britain's heritage with the Ancient Monuments Bill passed in 1882. Much watered down by the time it was put to the vote, it only covered buildings that had been transferred to government ownership. Yet it established the idea that we did have a heritage that was worth preserving for posterity, rather than being plundered for souvenirs and desirable artefacts.

However owners were still pulling down buildings of historical worth, or rebuilding and altering tastelessly in order to modernise and extend. William Morris was one who championed the rights of buildings - setting up the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877, the first pressure group concerned with historic buildings. The National Trust was founded in 1895 and bought its first building for £10 in 1896. Anyone know what that was? (See below—sorry no prizes).



Lord Curzon of Kedleston in his capacity as Viceroy of India been influential in preserving some of its major heritage sites, including the Taj Mahal, so he had great conservation credentials. When he saw Tattershall Castle in Lincolnshire being sold and its magnificent stone fireplace about to be stripped out and shipped to an American dealer, he stepped in and bought the Castle and its contents at the 11th hour.

The experience encouraged him to press for legislation and in 1913 the Ancient Monuments and Amendments Bill was passed. For the first time it gave government the the right to step in and act when a historic building was under threat. The right of enforcement in relation to preserving ancient buildings which had seemed insupportable in 1882 was now law, even if it only covered buildings built before the end of the mediaeval period and excluded inhabited dwellings.

Much water went under the bridge, many buildings were destroyed before we reached the level of protection which exists today. Croome, neither mediaeval nor uninhabited, would have had no protection under the legislation of 1913. Buildings of special architectural or historic interest were recognised by the Town and Country Planning Acts of 1932 and 1944. The listing of buildings was introduced during the Second World War with the intention of recording buildings that would have to be rebuilt if destroyed. Shortly after the War, the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 (section 30) made provision for the government to compile lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest.

However, historic buildings continued to be demolished in the 1950s and 1960s, until new planning procedures with more teeth were laid down in the Planning Act of 1968. This Act explicitly used and defined for the first time the term 'listed building'; a status which now carries full statutory obligations of care and conservation. Subsequent legislation has strengthened the obligations placed on owners of listed buildings, even though (as we are well aware) these are often ignored.

However let's remember Lord Curzon on the centenary of his Bill. He set the foundations for what was to follow and also bequeathed Tattershall to the National Trust on his death in 1925 - further reason to be grateful.



On Tuesday 30th April, following the abdication of Queen Beatrix, the new Dutch King Willem-Alexander was sworn in at a ceremony in Amsterdam's Nieuw Kerk, becoming the first king of the Netherlands in more than 120 years. This being Queen's Day, a national holiday in the Netherlands, the Dutch dressed in their traditional orange and partied the day away.

On that same day the Tuesday gardeners came upon three stray Dutch ladies from Arnheim, wearing orange headgear and having their own little celebration in the Park. We told them about reports that the Dutch Royal Family took sanctuary at Croome during World War II and issued an invitation to King Willem-Alexander and his wife, should they ever be in the area.

What a coup for Croome - would it take long to get the bedrooms ready?

Our three Dutch visitors had a lovely time and were thrilled to pose with the tractor, and the gardening team, before they went on their merry way.



Meeting and Greeting on the front door is my preferred duty, and the challenge of trying to decide where visitors come from on the basis of their speech complements my interest in linguistics. Some two years ago I opened the door to an older man:

"Welcome to my humble home. Are you local?"

"No, but I am the 13th Earl of Coventry".

There was a stunned silence on my part, then,

"Welcome to *your* humble home."

But getting back to the "Colonial Coincidence". On a Friday afternoon late last year a couple arrived and I handed out the house plan with the usual spiel - and then said, "Do I detect an antipodean accent?" "*You're right.*"

"New Zealand?" "*Yiss*" I then crossed my fingers - "Wellington?" "*Yiss !*" More fingers crossed. "Karori?"

"*B---dy Hell!*" Then the final bow at a venture, "Messines Road?"

At this point there was a stunned silence followed by, "*We live at 59 Messines Road!*"

I then had to confess that I have a daughter who owns a property at 34 Messines Road, and I was really chancing my arm.

I sometimes wonder if, when they got back to New Zealand, they said to their friends, "We went to this stately house in England and this guy knew exactly

ANY ANSWERS ?

This query has been raised by volunteer Keith Evans. Can anyone out there help ? We know that the 9th Earl attended Eton from 1851, and presumably had been raised at Sezincote—or had he ?

"I have been considering Spye Park near Calne in Wiltshire, and what might have taken place there in 1847. A question which might relate to this is as follows. In 1847, the year of his 9th birthday, was the 9th Earl yet away at school (I note Mike Payne's review of the censuses in issue 9), and where (in any case) was "home"? Who was his guardian? By then he had neither parent still living, nor any of his grandparents, nor his Coventry step-grandmother. And would the family have had a coachman or coachmen at their command, wherever they were?"

And (not trying to ask too much here!) does the Coventry archive give us names of coachmen?

Meanwhile, Spye Park was the home of the Lord of the Manor of Bromham, aged 13. More usefully, one Coventry Starky lived there, the boy's uncle. The actual owner was Maria Barbara Bayntun Lowe, Coventry's mother, who had been living in Croydon since re-marrying in 1834. Maria Barbara was grand-daughter of the 6th Earl and Maria through their daughter Maria Alicia. Therefore there is a family connection. Coventry Starky and his siblings were second cousins to the 9th Earl's father (never himself Earl, of course) and his siblings, and I speculate that family ties might have brought about a desire to visit. I suppose that all I am wondering is whether there was one of the 9th Earl's uncles or great-uncles resident at Coventry House in 1847, and able to get a coachman when he wanted one."

Answers to the Croome Chronicle please—email address below.

The Croome Chronicle is by volunteers for volunteers. The Editors are: Sue Coleman; Di Dickinson; Phil Douce; Kath Morris and Alexis Robinson. To contact the Chronicle email croomechronicle@gmail.com or speak to one of the editors. We would also be delighted to receive articles for publication on any subject to do with Croome..