



Croome Chronicle



© Hugh Warwick

“Come up and see me some time. I’ll be in the Boudoir”

As Croome continues to expand and as Croome Redefined pushes out the boundaries, this rapid growth has led to the creation of the post of Volunteering Manager and to the appointment of Emily Martin. Michael introduced Emily at the ‘Pimms in the Park’ volunteer evening and she was given a warm welcome.

Emily is gently amused to be working in the Boudoir – pop up to the first floor of the Court (as and when the current asbestos removal work allows it) and you may well find her there. The word Boudoir derives directly from the French to sulk and has come to mean a private sitting-room. None of this is at all relevant to Emily as she smiles with delight at her new role and is determined to have an open-door policy to encourage volunteer involvement.

Emily grew up near Stowe, so she’s no stranger to the work of Lancelot Brown – in fact she’s a huge fan. She worked for English Heritage at Kenilworth Castle and when they bought the J W Evans silver factory in the Jewellery Quarter of Birmingham she took over the responsibility of managing the volunteers who help to demonstrate and maintain this fascinating preservation of a working silver factory containing silver dies, tools, working machinery, stock and records. This was her training ground and she’s overwhelmingly enthusiastic about her challenging new job and impressed by the quality of the volunteers: “They’re so passionate about Croome and so generous with their time. I want to put processes in place to make full use of their skills, to maximise their enjoyment and fulfilment. We’ll provide training and development and maintain ongoing support.”



At the top of Emily’s task list is the establishment of the Volunteer Development Team, one of the requirements of the Heritage Lottery Fund, using the skills register and some personal recommendations to put together a team of people with experience in recruitment, training and mentoring. They aim to nurture volunteers through the early stages of their involvement and monitor them for ideas and feedback as they gain in knowledge and experience.

Organisations such as the Voice and the rota co-ordinators are helping to channel views and issues in her direction. This new team will be a key tool to help her achieve her aims, putting a system in place which will look after volunteers’ requirements as a whole while also being able to give individual focus where required.

“Volunteers,” says Emily “are integral to the future growth of Croome. Through developing our volunteering systems and processes we can make sure that they are well trained, well looked after and happy and confident in their roles.”

We hope Emily will be very happy in her Boudoir and we wish her every success.

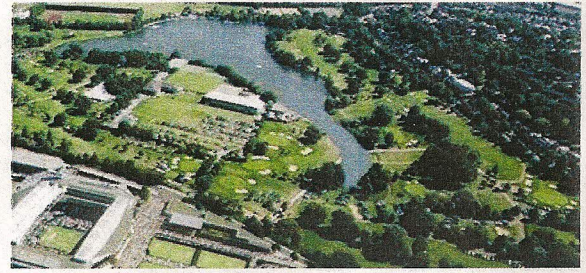
By Sue Coleman

ROYAL COURT TO TENNIS COURT

by Di Dickinson

In 1764 Lancelot had a lot on his plate, creating landscapes the length and breadth of the country. He had just been appointed HM Surveyor of Gardens and Waters, was 'well in' with George III and work on London's gardens and parks was continuing apace Hampton Court, Syon House, the Queen's House (now Buckingham Palace), Kew Gardens, Richmond Park and many more.

Twelve hundred acres in Wimbledon were owned by Earl Spencer, and he wanted a change from his Renaissance gardens and park to a now fashionable natural landscape. He wanted a view from the house across parkland to a lake, with picturesque clumps of trees. Brown created his 30-acre lake from springs which rise on Wimbledon Common and flow down to the River Wandle in Wandsworth.



Fast forward 250 years. And you are watching the tennis on television. In a few empty moments between sets, the camera idly pans round you see a spectator asleep, a pigeon on Centre Court roof, the crowds on Henman Hill (or Murray Mount) eating choc-ices and then ... a park, with a lake and lots of trees. Yes, Wimbledon Park, the remains of the very same one landscaped by Brown. It has undergone a lot of changes, and most has succumbed to residential development as various owners have taken profits. Today, the Wimbledon Park Heritage Group and the London Borough of Merton look after it, and defend it against further encroachment. They are passionate in their defence — 'the views, the lake, the grassy lawns, the ancient oaks, all have the mark of this master of landscape'.



An area of old-planted woodland, Horse Close Wood, which pre-dates Brown, survives on the northern boundary and some of Brown's cedars and pines grace the gardens around. His lake hosts sailing and canoeing, there are golf courses, tennis courts, an athletics club and a Heritage Trail. And yes, Wimbledon Village, not demolished by Brown, is still there. I think Brown would be pleased to see the ravages of development have at last halted and the remnants of his parkland are finally being cherished, and utilised to enrich the lives of Londoners.

ANY ANSWERS ? - YES!

by Mike Payne

I was interested to see the query about the 9th Earl's schooldays, raised by Keith Evans, and his reference to my earlier article in the Croome Chronicle.

By a strange coincidence I have recently discovered that the 9th Earl was not at Eton at the time of the 1851 Census as previously assumed and probably did not start there until the Michaelmas term of that year. Whilst researching something else I came across the 13 year-old in the census returns for a private preparatory school for sons of the gentry run by Reverend James Augustus Williams, the Curate of Ashleworth in Gloucestershire. So we definitely know where the ninth earl was on the night of 30 March 1851. Catherine Gordon makes reference to a letter from Reverend Williams to the Earl in *The Coventrys of Croome*.

The school had been started by the Reverend Henry Adams Sergison Atwood, soon after he became Vicar of Ashleworth, in the neighbouring hamlet of Hasfield. When the new Ashleworth vicarage was completed in 1845 he moved himself and his school there. In 1847 he sold his interest in the school to his new curate, James Williams, who ran the school at the Vicarage until 1852 when he moved it to Dummer, Hampshire. At this point Williams gave up his Church of England appointment and concentrated on his school.

In the 1851 Census the school had 15 9-12 year-old boys resident at the Vicarage. As well as the 9th Earl of Coventry the list included Lord Montgomerie and Charles Talbot, the son of William Henry Fox Talbot of Laycock Abbey. It was apparently known locally as the second house of lords.

The Croome Chronicle is by volunteers for volunteers. The Editors are: Sue Coleman; Di Dickinson; Phil Douce; Kath Morris, Alexis Robinson, Chris Wynne-Davies and Paul Walby. To contact the Chronicle email croomechronicle@gmail.com or speak to one of the editors.

Our fantastic cover photo is by Hugh Warwick, looking over Westfield.

It was a gorgeous sunny summer, and as always there was plenty going on in the garden and park. Two ha-ha projects have been completed, with extensive wall repairs along the Evergreen and Home Shrubbery ha-has, and the newly restored steps into South Park from the Rotunda are starting to be well used. The herbaceous beds in the garden have been looking really good, with plenty of colour throughout the year; even in October we've got Chelone, Verbena, and asters still flowering.



Looking forward to the winter months, we have a significant amount of tree work to do in the Park. A scrubby woodland area – on the left as one enters South Park from the London Arch area – will be gradually felled. Hugh has applied and received felling licences, and our aim is to restore the area to pasture as shown on the 1796 Snape survey. There are a few decent oak trees within the scrubby woodland which will be left standing, and we may need to plant just a few parkland trees in that area once all the felling is complete.

ROSIE'S CAKE SALE

Some of Croome's Friday 'shifters' decided to try and join the Macmillan Cancer Support Biggest Coffee Morning fundraising event by offering a cake sale on Friday 27th September. The canteen joined in with the generous offer of a scrumptious sponge to be raffled – won by Christine Wallis. The photograph shows some of the cakes before anyone had a chance to try them. The event raised £135.35, so a tidy sum. THANK YOU to everyone who planned, made, bought and ate!

Photo by Kath Morris

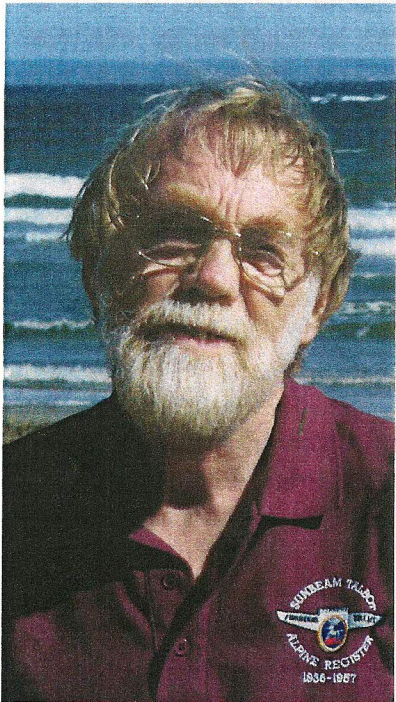
Another exciting project is to open up the eastern section of the Home Shrubbery. This will allow visitors to walk from the Church, past the bird hide, across the drive and into the Home Shrubbery to the Rotunda – in fact, it's a very pleasant route to the Court. In order to open this route, we need to carry out some tree work, as well as some archaeology to find the carriage route, and then rebuild the carriageway. We have had a very generous donation to do this work. There are the remains of the urn dedicated to the 6th Earl in this area of the Home Shrubbery.

These remains will be recorded, then probably removed and put into store, ready to be restored when we have the funds. We anticipate that the route will be open to the public in Spring 2014.

Over the winter we'll also be continuing with the hedge laying in the car park, carrying out fencing and tree planting in the park, working on the herbaceous beds in the garden, providing firewood for the hungry fires at the court, and much more. Looking forward to 2014, we're planning more canoeing sessions on the river; trialling orienteering in the park; having more frequent opening of the Eye-catchers from March to October, as well as continuing to present the C18th restored landscape to the highest standard that we can. Thanks to everyone involved with work in the garden and park, you're all very much appreciated.



For many of you, a familiar comment. But how many have actually taken any notice? I certainly didn't. When I first visited Croome, probably not long after the National Trust opened its doors to the public, the 'bare bones' of the Court attracted me, and whenever we had friends staying we brought them to look round. One of them suggested I become a volunteer...



What would I do? At other National Trust properties I have visited I've had an image of starchy retired "pillars of the local community" room stewards but the Croome 'stewards' were pleasantly different.

So I picked up a Volunteer form and eventually got round to filling it in. Having found a couple of people who rashly agreed to provide a reference I sent it off. Many months later I'm thinking 'they obviously don't need me', as I had heard nothing from anyone. Then one of my referees told me he'd sent off a reference for me and I saw a glimmer of hope. A few more months went by then out of the blue an email from Robert Payne asked if I'd like to attend an Induction Course 'next Wednesday' (I got his email on the Thursday before), and he'd also like to see me beforehand. The brief meeting with Robert done, I met up with the six other new volunteers and enjoyed an interesting day finding out more about this fascinating home of the Coventry family and the following variety of owners. I also found out that the reason my application took so long to process was due to changes within the Volunteering Office, hopefully now sorted with the help of Robert and the arrival of Emily Martin.

Since I started in August it's been a very interesting (and steep!) learning curve. The knowledge and experience of the 'established' volunteers has been quite illuminating and inspiring and coupled with my own curiosity about the fabric of the

Court I am gradually pulling together the information and stories I need to share with the great variety of inquisitive visitors. The generally pleasant autumnal weather has also helped !

Do I regret volunteering? Definitely not! I enjoy the contact with people and watching the developments within the Court and the adjoining Red Wing and I'm looking forward to a greater involvement with this superb reflection of days gone by.

PARIS FASHION WEEK



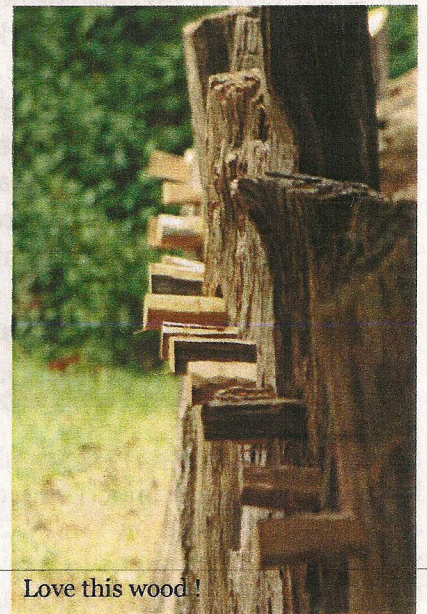
The welcoming and friendly volunteers at Croome 'dress to kill' (though the word 'Discworld' keeps screaming at me). Very brave to pose for a photo taken by a Chronicle editor chaps. Thanks Di !

NEXT ISSUE OF THE CHRONICLE

The Spring issue of the Chronicle will highlight the work of the many groups of volunteers now working on various Croome Redefined projects.

If you are on one of these groups and would like to report to us about what you are doing, trying to achieve and generally how it is all going we would love to hear from you.

The editors at the Chronicle would like to hear from any volunteer about their experiences at Croome and we'd be happy to print any of the great photos we know you take.



Love this wood !

THE FIRE BRIGADE COMES TO CROOME

by Lionel Matthews

On the evening of Monday 15th July a fire drill was held at Croome involving the fire brigade. Volunteers were asked to come along to provide crowds of extras. The Monday was in the middle of the hot spell with the temperature, even at 6 o'clock, in the mid to high 20s C. We all decided to wait in the mess room in the court, where it was cooler, for the exercise to start. Some of the advance guard of the fire brigade had already arrived and after Kim had dealt with them, he called us to the briefing in the entry hall.

We volunteers had three roles, some to be room stewards, some to represent visitors and a couple of people to be walking wounded. Anne and Erica volunteered to be walking wounded. We all set off to take up our position in the rooms whilst the "walking wounded" took up their positions in the butler's pantry. Kim set off the fire alarm and the volunteers in their normal room steward role led out the "visitors" making sure that we closed all the room doors behind us. We then strolled out into the warm evening air and assembled in our muster area to the west of the house.



Our names were ticked off from the signing-in sheet and our involvement in the exercise was finished, so many of us decided to watch the rest of the proceedings. Those of us who are old enough to have reached our second childhood were thrilled to see a Big Red Fire Engine roll up, shortly followed by a second one. Hoses were quickly run out and breathing apparatus donned. Finally the fire-fighters, now with their breathing apparatus, went inside to look for the casualties.



A group of fire-fighters had taken a pump down to the river, connected the large hose and started practicing. The assembled volunteers thought that Katherine looked a bit anxious on seeing her lake being drained.

....and then we all went home agreeing that we had had a fun time.

SHAGGY DOGS AND TALL TALES

by Kath Morris

Every garden steward must have their own favourite doggy story and much as we love our canine visitors they can give us some anxious moments - as well as some laughs. Here are three of my recent favourites.

I approach a kind-looking gentleman by the grotto with dog and no lead: "Have you got a lead for your dog?"

"Well yes, I have. My problem is that my granddaughter has taken her little brother for a run around the lake on it."

Sure enough two small figures, one on a lead, appear racing around the far side of the lake. The dog and grandpa look on, somewhat bemused.

"As you can clearly see," says the rather haughty lady, arising crossly from her deck chair, "my dogs do have leads...." The dogs, now leaping joyously towards the Island Pavilion after a splash in the lake, are trailing their leads behind them. Yes, they do have leads. They're just not attached to the owner.

soulful brown eyes and glossy black coat, he wore a harness with metal handle, lead and fluorescent yellow tags. Wagging his otter tail, he was the perfect picture of a highly disciplined guide dog. Only he wasn't. She whispered to me conspiratorially as she went through the door - "He's not really a guide dog. I love to have him with me and he's no trouble, so I just use the harness".

A delightful lady told me, as she prepared to leave the Court, how much she had enjoyed her day, her lunch and her walk with her beautiful Labrador. With huge



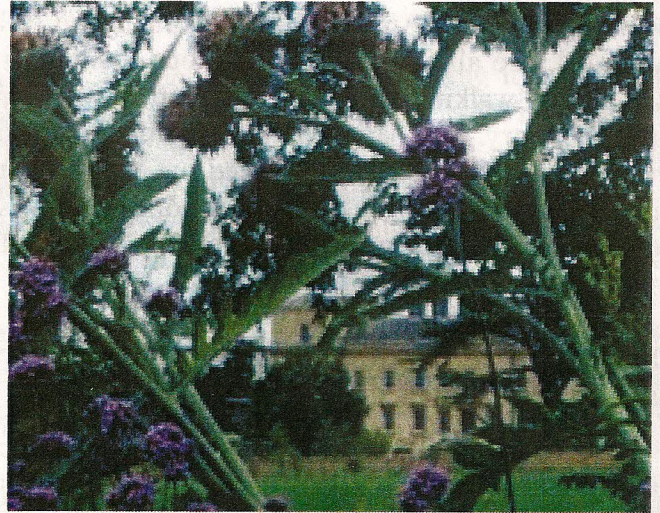
WHAT IS *THAT* ?

by Sue Coleman

The wonderful summer weather has given the flowering beds in the Park a splendid opportunity to flourish and the garden volunteers have spent many happy hours tweaking and pruning and keeping the weeds at bay. The big attraction, and subject of much curiosity from our visitors, has been the giant thistle-like flower towering over the heads of its neighbours.

'Can I just ask you a question ...' We were just wondering' 'Do you happen to know?' Few pass by without a comment, an enquiry, a murmur of admiration.

The stately, upright plant with its grey green foliage which has been causing all the excitement (and attracting plenty of bees) is a **Cardoon** or **Artichoke Thistle**, Latin name *cynara cardunculus*. Growing to a robust 2.5 metres, it isn't actually a thistle nor even an artichoke but a member of the asteraceae (aster) family; plants in this group are of great economic importance since they figure in the production of cooking oils, sweeteners, coffee substitutes and herbal teas. They include marigolds and daisies, echinacea and yarrow, fleabane and chrysanthemums. Native to the Mediterranean, the stately cardoon with its fat thistle buds opening into lush purple-blue flowers in late summer features in culinary records as far back as the 4th century BC. In North America it grows wild and it was recorded in the gardens of colonial America. The RHS selected it as one of the top plants of the past 200 years.



It's possible to eat the large flower buds but the stalks make a tastier meal. They need to be blanched and then dipped in batter, coated with breadcrumbs and fried in hot oil. As well as being a good source of fibre, they are rich in minerals; they taste like a rather bitter asparagus. The Italians are particular fans of the cardoon using it to make soup and risotto. Left as it is, it will make an attractive winter feature in the Park.

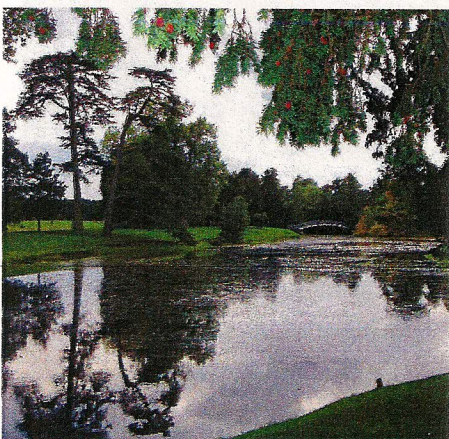


Many of the trees and flowers we see in restored parks and gardens today owed their existence to their importance in a culinary or herbal context. It's interesting to note that plants such as dandelions were introduced from America for their use as salad greens but herbalists found important medicinal uses for the roots too and the flowers can be used in wine-making. 18th century gardens incorporated many plants for this reason.

Who knows what treats the 6th Earl liked to see coming out of the kitchen but I do like to think of him smacking his lips in anticipation of a plate of battered cardoon.

THE WOW FACTOR

by Lyn Heath



Whilst stewarding in the garden in August I was positioned lake side of the Dry Arch Bridge when a husband and wife walked under the bridge and just stopped in their tracks. The comment was "Wow! what a surprise, we didn't expect to see a view like that". I mentioned to them that had 'Capability' Brown been around he would have been delighted to hear their remark as that was the response he would have been hoping for when designing that particular walk. I then went on to explain the changes the National Trust had made this year to reinstall the original vista. As the two American ladies I talked to a couple of years back said to me when I explained the Worcester Drive outlook over the Dry Arch Bridge, "Gee. Does that mean Capability Brown invented the 'Wow' factor?" I had no answer to that one!!

Sir John Coventry, grandson of Lord Keeper Coventry, was elected MP for Weymouth in 1667. Notoriously, he attracted attention because of a comment made in Parliament in 1670, when he suggested a tax on theatres. Sir John Birkenhead remarked that the theatres had been of great service to the king, Charles II, prompting Coventry to ask him if he meant 'the men or women players'. This was seen as an offensive reference to the king's relations with Nell Gwyn and Moll Davis.

Later, Coventry was assaulted by troops of the Duke of Monmouth ("with the approval of the king himself"), and his nose was 'slit to the bone'. The House of Commons was so affronted that the 'Coventry Act' was passed 'to prevent malicious maiming and wounding'.

The Coventry Act of 1671: "By this statute it is enacted, that if any person shall, of malice aforethought, and by laying in wait, unlawfully cut or disable the tongue, put out an eye, slit the nose, cut off the nose or lip, or cut off or disable any limb, or member of any other person, with intent to maim or disfigure him, such person, his counsellors, aiders and abettors, shall be guilty of felony, without benefit of clergy."

Attempts to discredit Coventry because of his Roman Catholic beliefs failed. His uncle, Henry Coventry, urged him to marry someone who was both a protestant and rich enough to help clear his debts, which by 1667 were £2,000.

Coventry, nonetheless, condemned the Duke of York as a protector of Catholics and called for his removal from the king's presence and councils. 'When inebriated at a coffee house in the city', he was heard to say the duke was a papist and a traitor. When he died, unmarried, in 1685, he left bequests to the poor English nuns at Paris and the English College in Rome, and asked to be buried in one of the queen's chapels if he died in England and a Roman Catholic church if he died abroad.

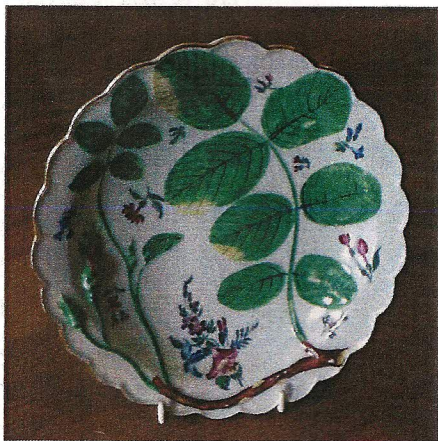
His final resting place is unknown but the Coventry Act lived on and was only repealed in 1828.



THE BLIND EARL PLATE

by Pam Addis

When I first heard that the 7th Earl of Coventry had purchased a quantity of Worcester Porcelain in the Blind Earl pattern I assumed that the pattern had been named specifically for him. But no, the pattern had actually been made in Worcester since 1760 although only in a limited number of shapes — a circular tea plate, a twig-handled sweetmeat dish and an oval spoon tray.



All the designs feature embossed rose leaves with applied rose buds painted on glaze in naturalistic colours. Some known examples have assorted flower sprigs painted among the leaves and it seems as though both the Chelsea and the Worcester factories were using similar moulds.

Catherine Gordon in 'The Coventrys of Croome' says that the 7th Earl was a collector of porcelain and that among his acquisitions were pieces of this pattern. In 1820 during the Flight, Barr and Barr period of ownership at Worcester, he commissioned a set of tableware to this design. The Earl was blind and presumably the tactile quality of the porcelain appealed to him. Further shapes were added to the collection and the Porcelain factory recognised the marketing potential of renaming the range 'Blind Earl' to enhance its prestige.

Earlier this year I was very pleased to locate a 'Blind Earl' plate described as being made by the Worcester Porcelain Factory c 1798. Interestingly, the pattern remained in limited production until the mid 1980s.

FIFTY SHADES OF GREEN

by Sue Coleman

(Putting Croome to the test)

A group of us recently visited The Laskett, the Herefordshire garden of the well-known historian and garden writer, lecturer and critic, Sir Roy Strong. (Thank you to the Friends of Croome for a great day out and to Sir Roy for being a charming host).

In one of his books, Sir Roy writes that King John's Hunting Lodge at Odiham near Basingstoke, the creation of the great decorator John Fowler, is the most perfect formal garden he had ever seen. It was inspired by Lawrence Johnston's Hidcote Manor:

"Hidcote taught me that the test of a good garden was if it was as interesting to visit on the coldest January day as it would be on a day in floriferous balmy June".

I thought I'd put Croome, a landscape creation with an inner garden, to the test ...

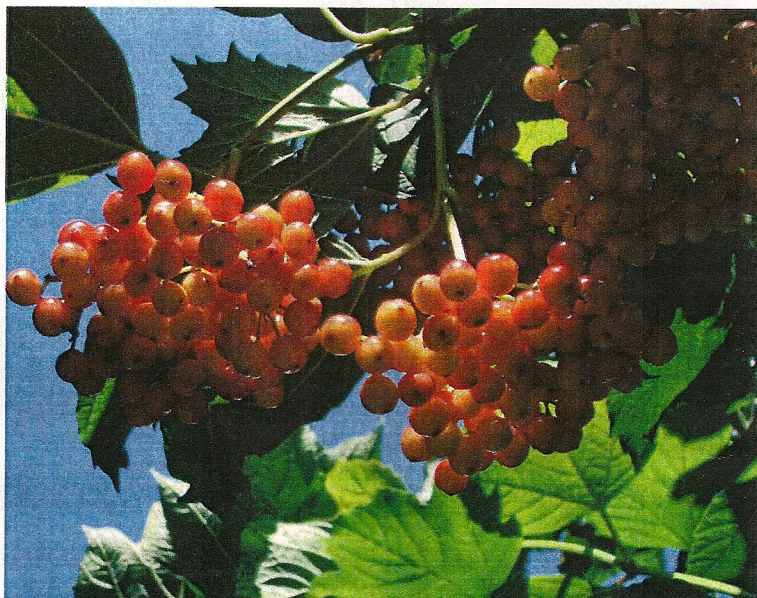
The gardening volunteers were out in the Park in early September, and watched the cows newly released on Church Hill overcome with greed and curiosity against an ever-changing early autumn sky. We worked in Sweetbriar Walk which was a mass of blackberries and hawthorn berries and big fat acorns. There were sloes in the hedgerows, apples in the orchard, the first conkers. The air smelled of damp earth and wood smoke and we were looking forward to the jewelling of the viburnum berries, the blackening of the privet, leaf fall, the golden progress of autumn, hips and haws, frosted spider webs, Halloween ...

As we lamented the end of summer, we talked of wild and glorious Croome on a winter's day when the wind gallops through the Evergreen Shrubbery and up Church Hill and explodes with rain drops, when the Wild Walk groans and mutters and the Malverns vanish into the storm.

Then winter, the breathless splendour of great frosted trees, ice on the lake, tracks in the snow.

So to the long-awaited signs of spring, snowdrops in the church shrubbery, aconites by the lake, a brief hint of warmth in the sun and birds busy in the trees, the cowslips and primroses, fritillaries and bluebells, leaf buds bursting open, fifty shades of green. Spring slides into summer, long buzzing scented days when Sabrina wears nothing but a smile. Deckchairs on the grass and Pimms in the Park, honeysuckle and roses, viburnum and lilac, swathes of buttercups and ox eye daisies.

It's all very English, very Croome, sailing through Sir Roy's little test and displaying the glory of the seasons to make sure we keep coming back.

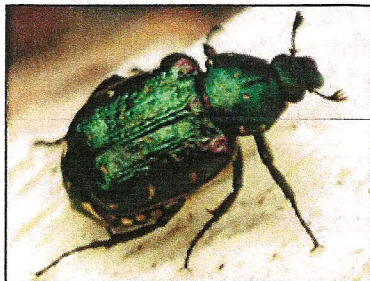


THINGS WE DO AT CROOME

by Kath Morris

Who would have thought we could get so excited about frass – the droppings of the Noble Chafer beetle larva. Resembling instant coffee granules, we found the frass in great abundance in the trees at Tiddesley Wood Orchard, but alas not at Croome.

This was the biodiversity group's second field trip; the first one took place mid-July and focused on training volunteers to monitor the flower and grass varieties in Church Hill Meadow. Happily we found that the diversity of flora was increasing and we shall continue to monitor in future years.



The Noble Chafer beetle is not only very handsome but is also increasingly rare. The fruit-growing regions of Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire are key

areas of distribution and it would have been wonderful to find traces at Croome. However, it's still possible: next year we shall be looking out for a 20mm long metallic green beetle during the peak flight season of late June to August.

