

Croome Chronicle

WINTER 2009

No. 2.

COURT OPENING SUCCESS



By Christian Walker, Operations Manager

Croome Court had its official opening on 25 September to an audience made up largely of volunteers as a celebration of their work for the National Trust. The rain kept away for the grand event hosted by Jane Farrington, Chair of The National Trust West Midlands Regional Committee and Eric Jones, Chair of the Friends of Croome Park that included a brass band playing an especially composed fanfare to accompany the opening of shutters. Other guests included the current Earl of Coventry, the National Trust's Regional Director Liz Roberts as well as members of the local community and also a number of Hare Krishnas that used to live at the Court. The Court opened to the public the next day and now over two months later almost 16,000 people have visited the Court and Park. It has been hailed as a great success by members of the National Trust team, both on site and at Regional Office.

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Gardeners' Diary

Katherine Alker: Success of digging for summer victory



NOW IN!
Extended ranges
in the Croome
shop now in...





Editorial

Welcome to the second edition of the Croome Chronicle, the first proved to be very popular and so a huge thank you to those that took the time to prepare articles.

Life at Croome continues at a fast pace, the quiet period after the initial opening of the Court that many were looking forward never seems to have arrived! Already event planning for 2010 and bookings for tours and groups has the team busy. The events programme for 2010 that will be released shortly contains a full range of events seeing the return of the popular ones for example Kite Flying now to be extended to a week.

However also there will be a host of new events including an exciting programme of musical concerts commencing on June 5 with a very special concert to be opened by Dame Janet Baker that will feature a unique celebration of Elgar in the magnificent Long Gallery overlooking the Malvern. Wind in the Willows will also be coming to Croome next year as part of National Trust Picnic Week so watch out for Toady at the Court and Rat on the river!

The autumn weather has been quite kind at Croome and despite the recent down pour we have had a warm autumn encouraging visitors to enjoy Croome for longer. Despite the dramas with the Buggy the scare stories of opening a new National Trust house never materialised at Croome.

Since our Pimms event the now much larger team is coming together with an incredibly exciting 2010 ahead of us as we enter a year of Croome Reunited - landscape and Court as one again.

Well done everyone and Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Christian Walker
Operations Manager

You have not had breakfast until
you have had a Croome Breakfast!

Breakfast
at Heather's



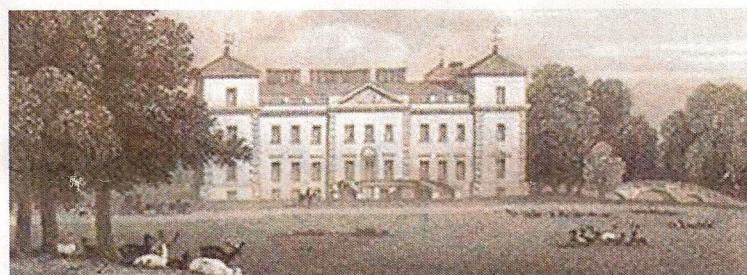
Cobbles & Paths - Archaeology Update

By Jeremy Milln, Croome Archaeologist

South Worcestershire Archaeology Group members, working with Martin Cook MifA, worked hard through September ahead of the team forming the new hoggin paths. The challenges were to record and interpret features either because they were to be buried or because we needed the interpreted information for the design and conservation process.

Apart from detecting a number of agrarian furrows and shallow ditches associated with medieval ploughing in the orchard and past the church, the excavation for the route actually proved pretty uneventful. There was excitement as the contractors passed the ice-house and here archaeology collaborated with Katherine Alker's patient garden volunteers to excavate, lift and carefully relay on a new bed all the uneven stones of the ice-crushing floor. Done in the rain with little more than barrier tape to fend off the contractor's plant as he scarified and rehoggified, this was quite an achievement.

Closer to the Court the route twice crosses Capability Brown's notable drain, providing an opportunity to observe Georgian engineering such as Brunel would have been proud a century later.



Then at the house itself the fun really began. We learned that the original cobble sealed under the present tar & chip surface, extends right round the north side in a huge arc going some distance under the grass beyond. Then on the west side we found another such arc, albeit here very damaged by the introduction of services in recent years. Going on round to the SW of the Court the cobbles give way to hoggin at a fence line, resolving into a cambered path that bifurcates: one way heading down to the site of the Chinese Bridge, the other round the south of the Court to belly out in front of the portico steps.

All this became clear on area excavation, but what made the exercise more interesting still was the finding of significant deposits of domestic refuse and building debris extending beneath the Brown-period paths. We had detected, but alas did not have time to investigate, evidence of the pre-Brown Court with pottery and window glass of the seventeenth century.

It soon became apparent that the conservation and repair of these historic surfaces could not be completed by the date of opening of the Court on 25th September. So a length of temporary path has been built. It has been deliberately constructed from stone rather than hoggin to emphasise that it is not to stay, but has been sited to give visitors a good look at the archaeological and conservation work which the damaged surfaces W of the Court need. As I write this in early Autumn, we are just starting work on the new car park and re-profiling the ground S of Church Shrubbery which was levelled for hutments during WWII, so here again archaeology will be at work recording ancient features and informing restored ones.

Hidden doors and empty spaces...

By Sarah Kay, Project Curator



As you know, it has been a long haul getting the Court open, and much of my Project Curator time and that of Jill Tovey's Archivist time has been spent as part of the interpretation team, putting the information from the archive to good use. The archive provides the historic gems and gold dust that illustrate the significant themes and stories that we want to share with our visitors about Croome Court, the 6th Earl and his family.

Now that we are up and running, I am keen to get back to digging into the archive to continue the documentary research and commissioning the surveys (finances depending) which is the physical research that underpins our understanding of the evolution of the building and its interiors. Little by little, we hope to answer some of our questions and conundrums.

North or South?

One of those questions is, which was the principal entrance to the Court, north or south, and whether this had changed over time? I was pleased to find confirmation that, at least in 1824, it was the North. William Dean, the gardener, who wrote "An Historical and Descriptive Account of Croome D'Abitot - Hortus Croomensis, which was effectively an early guide book, states:

"Introduced by the northern Entrance, the Stranger is usually conducted to the Hall, whence he is led, through the numerous suit [sic] of apartments, open to public inspection..." It is pleasing to think that today, almost 200 years later, 'strangers' are still being 'introduced' in to the northern entrance and led through the rooms that are open to the public....

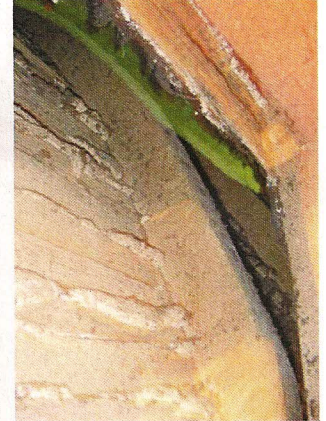
Not-so-intriguing discovery in the basement...

Unfortunately, the base of the large square pillar on a plinth of dressed stone, half-subsumed into the corner wall beneath the South Portico steps, is not necessarily quite as exciting as first thought....

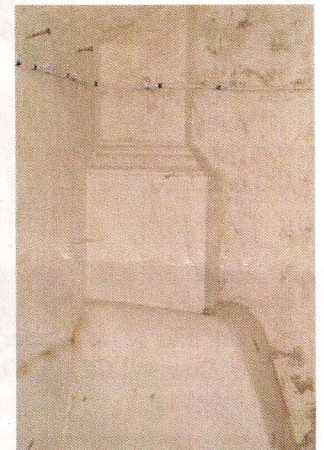
It is indeed matched by another on the opposite corner (now separated by a brick partition wall), but it transpires that they are actually the bases of the pilasters (flat pillars) which form either side of the South Portico itself.

Architectural/Archaeological Survey

I am excited to say that the architectural survey of the fabric of the building is finally getting underway. Kirsty Rodwell is the architectural historian who has been commissioned to carry this out and she will be combining physical investigations



Above: Two images taken by in August this year showing the opening up of the void above the Saloon ceiling. Right the pillar!



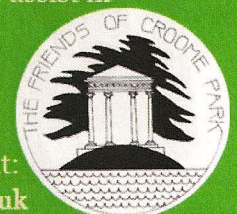
of the Court with historic documentation from the archive, and so liaising closely with me and Jill. For example, she will be crawling into roof spaces, looking into the void above the Saloon (see two images below) and examining timbers and brickwork in order to try and date them.

Note the curve to the domed ceiling and the plaster 'nibs' coming through the laths - this is (scarcely) what holds in place the plaster and, by extension, the elaborate plasterwork decoration below...found during the summer behind sealed doors on the first floor!

The Friends of Croome Park

Founded in 2004 to promote the National Trust property, Croome Park, and to assist in encouraging appreciation and understanding of its history.

For further details, how to join and up coming events visit:
www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk

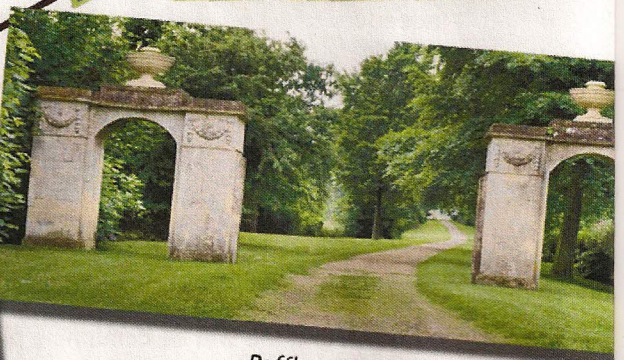
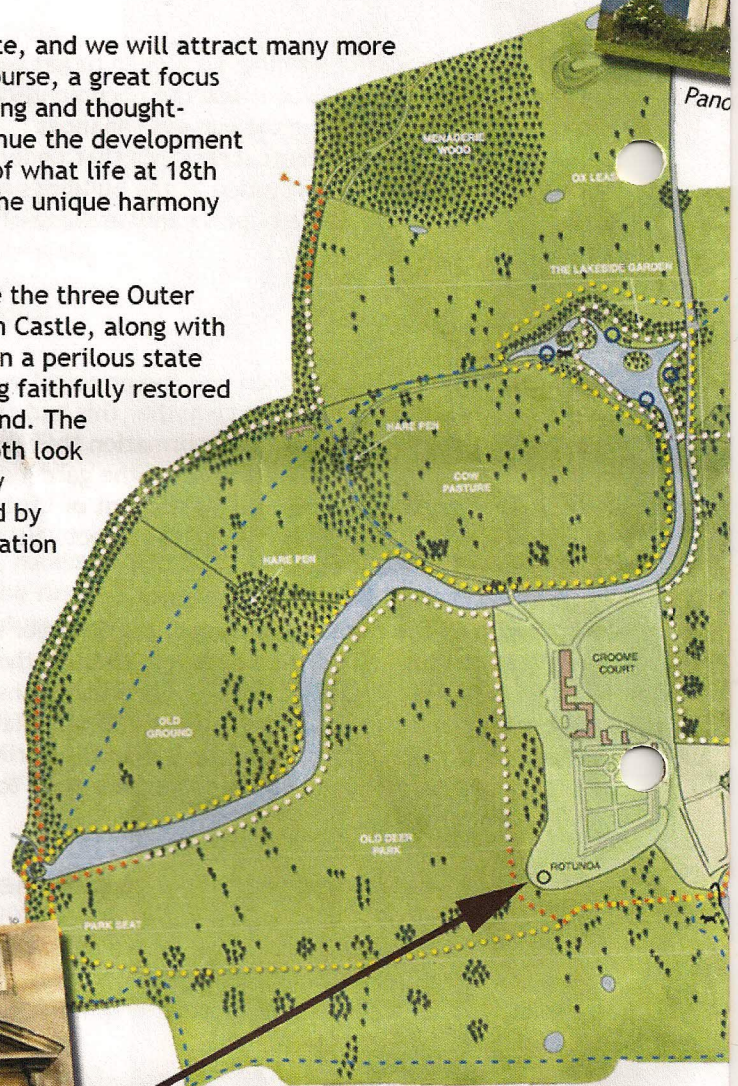


Follies, castles, kitchens, a court and a weir -

We are now one month on from all of the hustle and bustle of opening the Court; and what a great success it has been! Thousands upon thousands of visitors came to Croome in October and November, and their feedback and comments on visiting have been excellent. Great endeavour went into making this first month of opening work so well, all of our volunteers and staff have made an important contribution to our collective achievement - even some of our visitors were required to make huge efforts, braving the newly laid muddy paths to make it to the mansion!

Croome now has a new identity, a Parkland and Mansion estate, and we will attract many more visitors, keen to see how our story progresses. There is, of course, a great focus currently on the Court, and rightly so, it is wonderfully exciting and thought-provoking house to visit, but it is vitally important that continue the development of estate as a whole to provide our visitors with a full sense of what life at 18th century Croome was all about. Above all, we must treasure the unique harmony which exists here between the land and the built structures.

Major restoration work continues with our projects to restore the three Outer Eye-catchers, Dunstall Castle, the Panorama Tower and Pirton Castle, along with the Rotunda. These wonderful follies, all of which had been in a perilous state outside the National Trust's influence until recently, are being faithfully restored with the help of substantial grant funding from Natural England. The scaffolding is down on both Pirton and the Rotunda, which both look splendid, their restored stonework now picked out by the low autumnal light. The Panorama project is due to be completed by the end of November, at which point we will begin the restoration of Dunstall Castle. The intention is to open these buildings together in the spring next year.



Dunstall Castle, restoration begins Dec 2009

Rotunda under restoration

Raffle raised funds to return Worcestershire Gate

quite a year of projects at Croome

A projects update with Michael Smith, Croome Property Manager



Rotunda



Ice House before



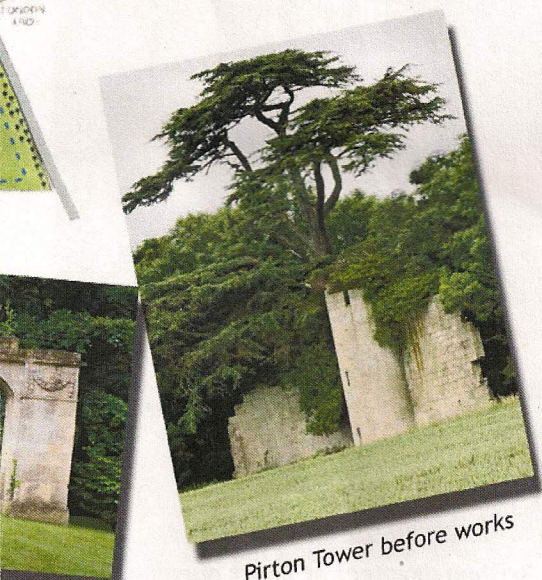
Ice House after



In terms of our visitor facilities, the former RAF Medical Inspection block is now home to the second phase of our visitor centre. Heather and her catering team have worked tirelessly to look after rapidly growing number of visitors, making the very best of the brand new kitchen facilities. We anticipate that visitor numbers will grow further as we enter 2010, and have therefore begun a project to double the number of hard-standing car-parking spaces at Croome. We are also shortly to begin building a play area in the shrubbery beyond reception. The play equipment will be themed on the RAF at Croome and, all being well, will be in place for the February half term.

There are yet further major projects on the cards in the parkland, we soon begin works to repair the leaking weir at the end of the Croome River, and hope to carry out a further stretch of ha-ha restoration before the spring. We will also be starting on the next phase of path reinstatement, designed to allow visitors to the Court to travel up to the Rotunda, and towards the Riverside, where we have obtained funding to put a low-key wooden bridge in place.

The new (slightly muddy) section of path, running from the church to the Court, is now beginning to settle down, and thankfully the underlying pebbles are appearing through the sandy, silty top layer. It always takes a little while for things to settle down after major change, but we now have a vastly improved property for our visitors to enjoy, with tremendous potential still to be explored. I wonder where this great adventure, this restoration of a masterpiece of 18th century landscape architecture, will take us next?



Pirton Tower before works



Pirton Tower

Images thank you to the National Trust Photo Library & Clive Stanley and Mike White

Croome - Whose Story?

By Joyce Wallace, Croome Outreach Officer

Top Trunks 2 game cards returns to Croome this Autumn, produced alongside Whose Story? 2009 community partner Stanley Road Primary School and photographer Ming de Nasty. As a card game, trail and learning tool it makes learning about trees and the cultures they derive from fun. I recently led an assembly at Stanley Road to highlight their project achievements and showcase a film of how it developed.

Top Trunks will be available for sale at £1.50 from reception from mid November. The proceeds will be used to develop and produce Top Trunks 3 (adding 4 more trees to the pack) for Autumn 2010.

As part of engaging with local community groups I recently attended and promoted Croome Park at Worcester Afro Caribbean Association launch event at George V Community Centre, Brickfields. The day included Caribbean cooking, gospel music, community stalls and a helicopter fly over. It was a fantastic opportunity to meet members of the community who wouldn't normally visit National Trust properties, and share what Croome has to offer.

In October as part of an overarching NT campaign called Crumble Rumble, helping children to understand food going from 'plot to plate'. A small group of parents and children from local community organisation Asha Women's group spent a morning with Catering Manager, Heather Waddoups in October. They had 'great informative, fun' exploring the varieties of apple at Croome, making delicious crumbles; as well as spending time at Croome for the first time. They are now considering a vegetable patch at their future venue.

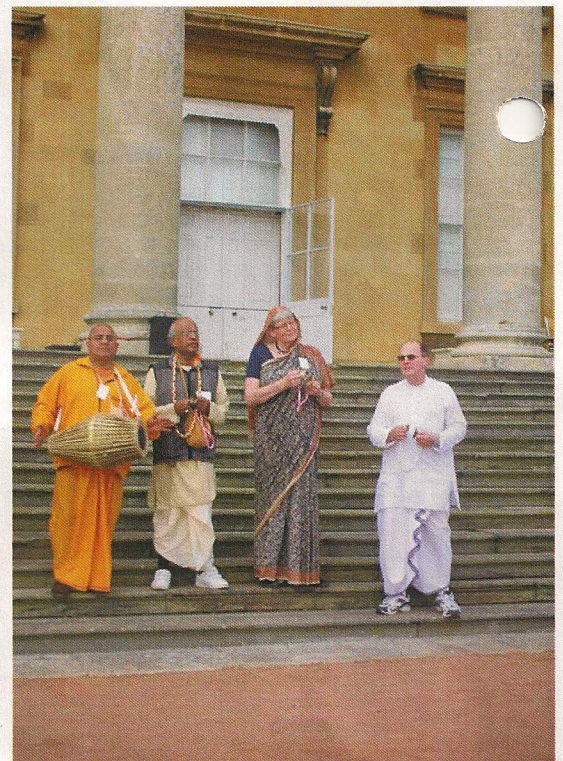
Hare Krishna devotees from Malvern, Leicester, Birmingham and Devon celebrated at Croome Courts illustrious opening in September, performing 'kirtan' (meditative chanting). Several had lived or

Lovebites sold in Court

visited the court during it's time in Hare Krishna ownership and had not returned for over twenty years. It was an emotional experience and for some it 'felt like coming home'. Devotees have provided us with oral history including the fact they used to have a shop in the basement that sold 'Tracker' style cereal bars they produced called 'Lovebites'. As well as video footage of Hare Krishna children performing in Indian classical plays in the Court.



Joyce Wallace on the go at Croome



Hare Krishna devotees at Court opening



NEXT TIME IN THE CHRONICLE...

- Events 2010 revealed - Is that Ratty on the river?
- Music Concerts
- Details of the new shop coming in 2010



The Gardeners' Diary

with Katherine Alker, Garden & Park Manager



Autumn Glory in the Park

Even with all the excitement of the court opening, life still goes on in the garden and park!

The Garden and Park Team have been incredibly busy over the past few months. Jobs have included pruning the hedges around the car park and worksite area; labelling the fruit trees in Sandy orchard; pruning the trees and shrubs in the Wild Walk; apple picking in our orchards for The Fleece Inn to make cider called 'Fleece Folly' (available on draught at the inn which is a NT establishment in Bretforton near Evesham); large scale pruning of the laurels along the Worcester Drive and in other parts of the garden; raking paths; leaf collecting; and coppicing trees around the Rotunda in order to open out the views from the building.

We've also been diversifying into furniture removals! In the past couple of months we have moved many tables and chairs into the court, sofas out of the court, fridges and freezers in the RAF building, desks into the new office at RAF building and moved the old vending machine offsite too!

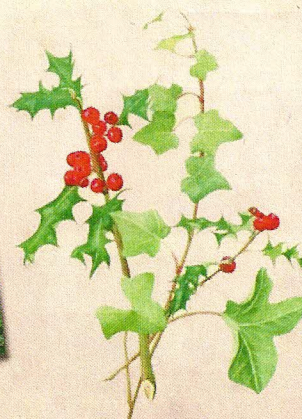


Since the NT acquired the Outer Eyecatchers in May this year, we have about another 25 acres of land to look after. The huge cedars along the ridge at Pirton Castle have had their first tree surgery in decades, and we shall soon be replacing the very dilapidated fencing there too.

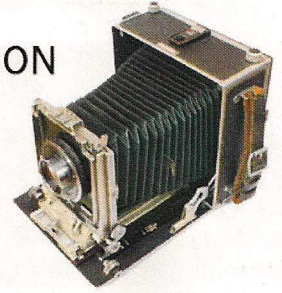
The Dig for Victory plot is still producing veg, which flies off the shelf when put out for donations in reception. There is still spinach, kale and cabbage to be harvested. This first year has been a great success, and next year we shall be adding to the crops that we grow.

Overall it's been a lovely summer and autumn in the garden. We've got lots of planting, guarding, mulching, chipping and much more to look forward to over the Winter. Thanks as always to all the garden and park volunteers, and also to Hugh.

Merry Christmas everyone and best wishes for 2010!



PHOTOS OF SEASON



Clockwise from far left: Strange guest to court, Hugh trying the Stair Climber, the dig for cobbles, Gen having a go on the climber and Michael dressed to impress the BBC!. Entries for the next quarter to christian.walker@nationaltrust.org.uk



COMING EVENTS AT CROOME PARK

FOR VOLUNTEERS & STAFF

JANUARY

January Tours of the Court for Staff & Volunteers - Details to follow

4th Feb

28 January, 18.00 PreSeason Meeting for all the Croome Team - Looking back at 2009 and ahead to the 2010 season. From January a sign up sheet will be in 'The Mess' (Volunteers & Staff Room, RAF Building)

FEBRUARY

11 February, 11.00am PreOpening Coffee Morning for Volunteers & Staff in the Canteen - last chance!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY - Details to follow

12 August Pimms in the Park

21 September Volunteers' Trip

9 December Volunteers' Christmas Meal 2010