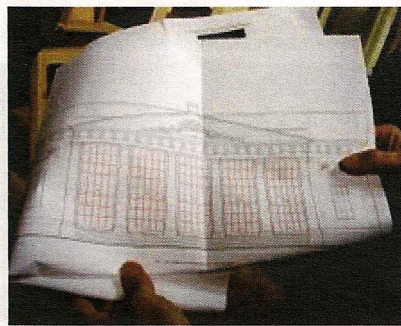


CROOME CHRONICLE



SASH - SATIONAL!

One of the most exciting changes in the Park took place this year when the Temple Greenhouse was transformed by the addition of sash windows to the 18th century design. An original drawing by



Robert Adam dated 1760 is in the John Soane Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields in London. In the original drawing the sashes and glazing bars showed a pattern of 6 panes across by 5 high to each sash, but Country Life magazine published an article in 1915 showing 5 across and 4 high; this is

thought to be as per the original installation by Hobcraft and this was the pattern used.

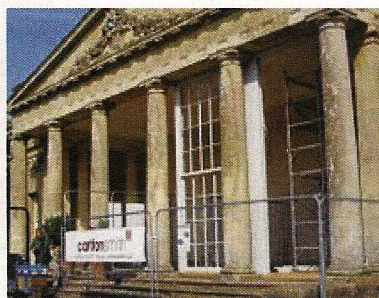
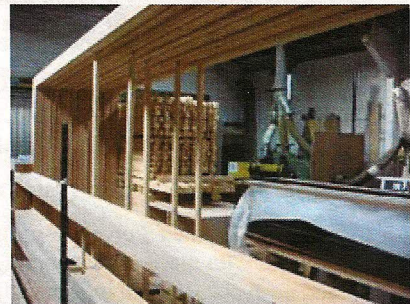
We invited Mark Carlton Smith, MD of Carlton Smith Projects Ltd, to tell the Chronicle a little about his involvement with the project:

"When I was 17, my family moved to a former Croome Estate house in Kinnersley and since then I have remained in the area, established a joinery business in Pershore and now live in another house that was part of the original Croome estate. Because of these connections with Croome I was especially pleased when we were awarded the contract to produce and fit the sash windows for the Temple Greenhouse. I started the joinery business in 1980 and we now employ twenty four people and produce high quality bespoke joinery.

I believe that attention to detail is what differentiates a mediocre job from an excellent one and, working alongside John Goom Architects, we have attempted to replicate the original sash windows, wherever possible using materials that would have been available at the time of the initial installation by John Hobcraft in 1763. The only information we had regarding the original windows was a photograph, a short passage from the Hortus Croomensis mentioning that the windows were removed

during the summer months, and some holes in the floor of the Temple Greenhouse. Extensive research to discover if any other similar removable sash windows were in existence drew a blank, so in conjunction with John Goom we had to establish the design for ourselves.

It was decided to make the windows in European Larch and the glass was toughened partly for safety reasons and partly because it tends to have a rippled effect reminiscent of the glass that would have been available originally. The sash windows themselves are the largest we have manufactured. They are 4.65m high and 2.1m in width which posed problems in the workshop as it is extremely difficult to reach the centre of each window when it is on a bench but Simon Lloyd, the joiner responsible for their manufacture, made certain adaptations and managed very well.



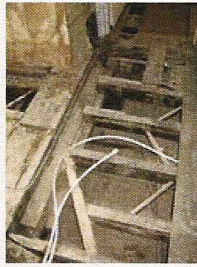
Actually getting the joinery to the location was another consideration as there is no vehicular access to the Temple Greenhouse. Luckily the weather remained dry and we were able to drive across the field, form a ramp across the haha and carry the joinery to the site. The sash boxes were installed and then the lights hung; this was a difficult operation as we had to suspend an extremely heavy sash window in place high above the ground and attach the sash cords without them dropping back down into the boxes. The employees who worked on this project are to be commended for their tenacity in what was a difficult job requiring a good deal of physical strength.

We consider ourselves privileged to have been able to contribute to the refurbishment of Croome. Hopefully the windows will be in place for many years to come and will continue to enhance the Court and its gardens and bring pleasure to the many visitors."

A HANDFUL OF DUST

In February this year, at the request of Catriona Hughes, an outline inspection was made of the Long Gallery ceiling. This followed the snow we had over the previous weeks and the water ingress at the junction of the bay window with the main gallery ceiling.

Boards were lifted in the bathrooms either side of the bay window on the floor above, and a section of the frieze was removed on the north side of the bay. This followed the falling of a decorative leaf from the ceiling, which was found on the floor.



Adjoining the main beam spanning the bay there is a smaller beam housing the ceiling joists. The supporting superstructure was found to be sound although there were signs of both common Furniture and Death-watch beetle. The condition of the tie beam where it has been partly exposed is extremely poor and its load-bearing capacity may well be compromised. The south end of the beam may turn out to be the same.



Some work to tie up the ceiling superstructure and plasterwork has taken place - the studs holding up the plasterwork are visible above

A SMOOTHER PATH

The “ooohs” and “ahhhs” from visitors being taken to the Court on the buggy as we pass our wonderful ice-house will now be smoothed out as the ‘buggied’ and broken paving has been superbly re-laid.

An added benefit of the enforced re-routing was a sharp rise in shop takings - up 27% per average transaction and with more people coming through the door. The planned new buggy route will collect and drop people from the area adjacent to the shop - so let's hope those £s keep rolling in.

the bay in the Long Gallery. It was found that some previous repair work had been carried out using acrylic filler. The supporting laths provided little structural support and the plaster was easily removed.



Earlier this year at one of the Croome-a doodle-do evenings volunteers were allowed to view the condition of the first floor above the Long Gallery bay window with John Goom the conservation architect. It was interesting to see the condition of the main beam, the north end of which had turned to dust. John put his hand into the remaining beam and again pulled out dust. 12 to 18 inches of the north end of the original beam is in this condition. He explained the next stage of the process where extremely small drill holes will be made into the remaining beam until solid wood is found. How close this is to the retaining wall will determine the urgency of the repairs.

As always this takes money and until further funds are found we have to make do with the temporary, but perfectly adequate repairs.

PD

With reference to the Cliveden Conservation Workshop Report on the Long Gallery ceiling.



VIEWPOINT

I found myself smiling at the antics of one volunteer on ‘front door’ duty the other week. Every time visitors entered he greeted them like long lost best friends. He tailored his welcome speech to each individual or group and by the time they came to me in the next room they were still smiling and genuinely enjoying their visit already. I had a lot to live up to, but encouraged by his commitment I hope they journeyed on from me with those smiles still on their faces. It was in stark contrast to a previous week where the ‘greeter’ did anything but. He handed out the sheet, told of the DVD in the Billiard room and glumly informed people that the tea room was not open.

We are all different and our approach to our roles at Croome is hugely coloured by our own background and experiences, but I couldn't help thinking that sometimes we lose sight of why we volunteer at Croome. I'm not talking about the reasons that drove us to go along to the recruitment sessions – anything from ‘bored at home’, ‘just retired’ to ‘want to put something back into the community’ but rather why we saw it as a ‘desirable job’.

As my colleague, the genial host, said later that afternoon “People pay hard earned money to come and have a good day out – and I'm going to make sure that's what they get”.

That is what we lose sight of. Treating each visitor with a huge smile, welcoming and open body language, engaging them in the magic of Croome, making their day out memorable – not just making our rota duty day ‘OK’ or another afternoon ticked off. We should all be taking our role as the face of the National Trust with the professionalism that the job deserves and nothing less.

I know I have to ‘pull up my socks’ and get back on course and not be sidetracked by other issues such as whether we agree or disagree with management decisions or policy – there are forums where these can be debated and it should not be on the ground floor at Croome during opening hours. It is a good time to remind myself what a fabulous place Croome is, what a great job I am privileged to have and how proud I am to be involved.

Hard? Harsh? As much on myself as anyone else.

GARDEN AND PARK

by Katherine Alker

As always we have been very busy in the garden and park, and I hope you'll agree all the hard work is well worth it as the place is looking great this year!

Now that we've had some decent spells of rain I am less concerned about the newly planted trees over at Old Wood than I was a month or so ago – in fact most of the whips are showing signs of life which is very encouraging after such a dry Spring.

The dedicated and enthusiastic garden volunteers have been carrying out a variety of jobs as usual: the Tuesday and Sunday groups have been hedge pruning and mulching along Westfield Lane and at the Arboretum; now the rain has come, plants are putting on growth spurts so we've been doing a lot of weeding and pruning in the garden; the Thursday gang are now pros at installing stock fencing and gates because, in preparation for opening the Home Shrubbery, we've been fencing off the crumbling ha-ha around the Rotunda. We've also dealt with a couple of large limbs of a plane tree and a cedar; done some wood chipping; done acres of strimming and had the odd bonfire!

The Dig for Victory plot is again providing a tasty variety of fruit and veg which is put out for the public to have in return for a donation.... although my spies tell me that a lot of the produce ends up going home with staff and volunteers - I hope you're enjoying it!

We seem to be having some success with reducing the amount of blanket weed on the lake this year. It's impossible to say if that is due to the barley straw bales that we put in the water back in the

Spring, or if it is due to the weather conditions we've had – but whatever it is, the reflective quality of the water is much improved this year.

There have been a couple of changes staff-wise in the Garden and Park Dept; Seb has sadly now completed his college placement year at Croome and is returning to Harper Adams to continue his Countryside Management course. Julia Harrington has joined us until October; she'll be gardening one day a week and focussing on the herbaceous beds. Recently Jez and Hugh had a successful and interesting trip to the Arb Show at Bathurst Estate near Cirencester, and I had a trip to Kelmarsh Hall for the annual regional Head Gardeners' meeting.

I would like to say a big thank you to all the garden volunteers and staff who work so hard to make Croome look so wonderful, you all make such a difference and we really appreciate it.



Watching the gardeners at work - these inquisitive cattle were told to mooove on.

'Capability' Brown & the Landscapes of Middle England

www.comptonverney.org.uk

Katherine Alker highly recommends this exhibition, at Compton Verney until 2nd October (not Mondays). Croome is featured and there are items from the archive on display. 2 for 1 admission for NT members & volunteers (don't forget your cards). There's also an exhibition of Stanley Spencer's paintings featuring 'The English Garden'. (tel: 01926 645500)

A RACING WINNER

In 1902 Australian-born Selwyn Edge drove a pale green Napier car in the Gordon Bennett Cup - yes, that Gordon Bennett! This was the infancy of motor car racing in Europe. Three English and three French cars took part, the winning country to host the race the following year. Edge won. However, health and safety was alive and kicking 109 years ago - racing on England's roads (for this was before the days of race tracks) was considered unsafe. Ireland rescued the national pride and offered to stage the 1903 race. England had raced in green colours because our national colours of red, white and blue had already been taken (by Italy, Germany and France respectively). The Napier cars again raced in a pale olive green, and as an expression of gratitude to Ireland the colour was named British Shamrock Green. And so, well into the second half of the 20th century, various shades of green ruled the tracks, the darker moss green becoming known as British Racing Green and adopted later by the likes of Bentley, Lotus and Cooper in their racing hey-days.

Which brings me to the Morgan Raffle ... Sunday 30 May dawned grey and wet ... yes, it was raining, hard, and it hadn't rained hard for months. Lord Flight, chairman of the Croome appeal committee, and Charles Morgan, owner of the Morgan car company, sheltered under umbrellas. Everyone clustered on the South steps of the Court. But sleek, shiny and oh-so-desirable the British Racing Green Morgan 4/4 sat under the Croome gazebo and awaited its new owner. Generously donated by Charles Morgan, the raffle had raised nearly £85,000 for Croome - £13000 more than had ever before been raised in a raffle for a Morgan car. And the St Mary Magdalene bells rang out, for the first time in 11 years. To the immense disappointment of the large majority of Croome's ticket holding volunteers, Surrey-based David Lloyd Langston was the lucky man. David regularly holidays in Bromyard (handy for servicing!) but had never been to Croome. He bought his ticket on-line: an amazing £35000 worth of tickets had been sold in NT's first foray into on-line raffles. Although delighted with his new toy, Mr Lloyd Langston had a rather pressing problem: Mrs L L didn't like the colour. Indeed, she disliked it so much, she said she wouldn't go in the car. What a dilemma ... wife? car? car? wife? As far as we know, he didn't ask for a re-draw, and the dreams of more than a few lie in tatters on the Smoke Room floor.

Never mind, the current raffle has a first prize of £10000. Fiat 500 anyone?

DD

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER PICTURES?

By Sarah Kay

It is thrilling that Jack-a-Dandy, The Great Horse, has come home after having left Croome Court in 1948. It is the first of what we hope will be many wonderful welcome home stories. Now that we are showing him to visitors, people are naturally asking, "What about all the other pictures? How many are there? When will they return to the Court?"

The short answer is that there are quite a lot but they won't be coming back for some time yet, probably a few years in fact. The reason is that we first need to restore the fabric of the building. As you have no doubt noticed from the bits of plasterwork falling off, sagging beams, and the wind and weather coming through windows on the first and second floor, the Court is not really in a fit state to house precious works of art – Jack needed to come back when he did because the opportunity of the loan could not be missed and for the time being he should be fine in the Saloon where we are not aware of any urgent building repairs.



6th Earl, c1740, Allan Ramsay, (WRO)

Meanwhile, the bulk of Croome's surviving collection is displayed at Kelmarsh Hall in Northamptonshire. It includes a number of very important pictures which both complement the house in artistic quality and embody the history of the family that created it.



Thomas, Lord Deerhurst, c1740 Allan Ramsay (WRO)

Star items include the alluring 1764 ¾-length portrait of the 6th Earl by Allen Ramsay that hung above the Library chimneypiece.



Also that iconic vision of Croome from the south by Richard Wilson (1758) which possibly hung in the Coventry's London house originally, but was brought to Croome in the 19th Century and hung in the Yellow Drawing Room along with its partner Zuccarelli's Landscape with the Rape of Europa, both in superb, matching, English Rococo frames.

There is also an exquisite pair of small mythological pictures by Filippo Lauri.

In terms of family portraits, there is Cornelis Johnson's iconic picture of Lord Keeper Coventry in his robes, of 1626 (WRO);



Also a charming 'conversation piece' by Charles Phillips, showing 5th Lord Coventry with Lady Coventry being wheeled through the landscape in an invalid's 'chariot', with Lord Deerhurst and the future 6th Earl standing at their side; and a pair of beautiful Cotes pastels of the celebrated Gunning sisters of 1751, to name but a few.



William Dean, the Head Gardener, described some of the 6th Earl's staggeringly important collection of paintings in his 1824 Guide Book to Croome, but sadly the 6th Earl's son, the Blind Earl, sold many of these after his father's death in 1809. This was due to a combination of the estrangement between them and his not being able to appreciate the paintings owing to his blindness. In February 1810, Christie's held a sale of "Italian, French, Flemish and Dutch Pictures, the genuine property of a nobleman".

In the Saloon hung a set of 8 large family and royal portraits from at least the 6th Earl's period if not earlier: Thomas, Lord Coventry, Lord Keeper to Charles I; and Thomas, 2nd Lord Coventry, by Vandyke; Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton; and Maria Gunning, Countess of Coventry, by Hamilton; King George II, by Hudson; William III, by J.Riley; Countess of Coventry; and Earl of Coventry, School of Kneller. (The original over-door portraits in the Linnell frames were those of Sir Henry & Sir William, sons of the LK).



They continued to hang in the room during the occupation of the school and the Hare Krishnas. Their specially designed frames by William Linnell were in 3 sizes: the smallest as over-doors, medium above the chimneypieces and the largest on the west and east walls. So important are these frames that they are now in the Met (sold by the Coventry Trustees in 1960), whilst the paintings themselves are still thankfully in the collection (but not at Kelmarsh) and will return to the Saloon. Jack will make way for them and go to his historical position at the top of the main stairs, the only other space large enough to take him!

Sharing these paintings with our visitors will be a wonderful way of telling the human stories of Croome: the characters, their legacies, their achievements, their strengths and weaknesses. The challenge, as and when these important pictures return, will be positioning them within the Court in historically accurate and appropriate locations and managing the risk of light damage in a way which does not compromise the all-important views out into the designed landscape.

FROM CROOME TO CAREW by Sarah Kay

You may be interested to know that the National Trust property Antony, in Cornwall, holds several Croome-related paintings in its collection. This is because Lady Anne, daughter of Gilbert, 4th Earl of Coventry, married Sir William Carew of Antony in 1714. She took paintings and furniture from Croome to furnish her new home in Cornwall that her husband was building and, when her father Gilbert died in 1719, she also took Coventry family documents with her to Antony, it being the end of the direct Coventry line. (The 5th Earl of Coventry came from a different branch of the family.) These documents are now in the archives at Cornwall Record Office.



In the year of her marriage, 1714, Gilbert commissioned the painter Michael Dahl (Stockholm 1656? – London 1743) to paint portraits of himself, his daughter Anne and her husband Sir William. These paintings are still at Antony:-

Manner of Michael Dahl. Lady Anne Coventry, Lady Carew (1695-1743/4) Oil painting on canvas, inscribed with identity, and Dahl pt., circa 1715.

Michael Dahl, Gilbert Coventry, 4th Earl of Coventry. Coventry (c.1668 - 1719) Oil on canvas, signed and dated, Michl Dahl pinx:/ 1714. A full-length portrait of the father-in-law of Sir William Carew of Antony, 5th Bt, wearing crimson velvet and ermine trimmed, peer's robes, no doubt shortly after his succession in 1712.



Antony also has in its collection portraits of:

- Thomas Viscount Deerhurst, later 2nd Earl Coventry
- Winifred Edgumbe, mother of Gilbert and wife of Thomas 5th Baron/1st Earl
- Thomas 3rd Earl (who died 1712 aged 10) mistakenly later inscribed Mr Edgumbe
- Margaret Jefferies of Croome d'Abitot, Lady Coventry, mother of the Lord Keeper (but painted a century later)
- a Dr Andrew Coventry (1764-1832) [?]

... AND BEHIND ME IS THE MAN WHOSE VISION IT ALL WAS ...

We all say it, don't we, as we welcome visitors to the Court and point to the portrait standing on the easel. It is, of course, Allan Ramsay's portrait of the 6th Earl. The copy is a mere shadow of the original, but still makes a statement in the empty space of the Entrance Hall. If you haven't yet seen the original, you have a treat in store.

Along with full-length portraits, painted around 1740, of the three Coventry brothers as young men, it is presently in the Croome exhibition at Kelmars. All are owned by the Croome Estate Trust. The frame for the 1764 painting was carved by Sefferin Alken (who charged the princely sum of £32 10s) and it was hung, by Robert Adam, over the chimney-piece in the Library. The bill stated that the frame was "finish'd in Whiteing" ready for gilding, indicating that Alken was a carver, rather than a carver and gilder.

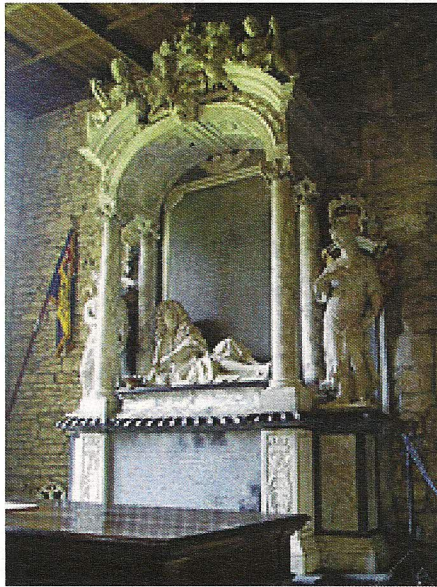
But what do we know about Allan Ramsay? Well, actually he was quite a remarkable man. Born in 1713 in Edinburgh, son of a Scottish poet of the same name, he took fashionable society by storm when he set up a studio in London in 1738 after pupillages in London, Rome and Naples under leading Swedish and Italian painters. Rather like Capability Brown, he was blessed with a personality and set of social skills which, together with his artistic talent, made him sought-after as artist and friend by the rich and influential families of his day. Ramsay soon came to the notice of the King George III, and in 1761 (although some sources say 1767) the ultimate accolade was being appointed to the post of Principal Painter in Ordinary to King George III. He held the post until 1784, and during that time painted numerous portraits of the King and Queen Charlotte, many of which were given as gifts to ambassadors and colonial governors. As was the practice with most great artists, Ramsay would have left the painting of a large part of the pictures to his studio assistants - of whom David Martin and Philip Reinagle were probably the best known. His drapery painter, who he shared with Thomas Hudson, was Flemish artist Joseph van Aken, an established artist in his own right. Usually the commissioned artist painted only the face, leaving others to fill in the rest. Ramsay would send van Aken drawings and instructions suggesting postures and draperies, but some artists relied more heavily on van Aken's judgement. His output was such that Horace Walpole is reported as saying "almost every painter's works were painted by van Aken". In later life, and after an accident to his arm, Ramsay returned to Italy leaving Reinagle to complete a series of fifty royal portraits.

Ramsay travelled extensively in Europe, and particularly loved Italy. He was a classical scholar, an accomplished linguist, author and researcher of antiquities and archeological sites as well as paintings and drawings of old masters. Alastair Smart, in his biography of Ramsay, says "... (he) was unquestionably the most erudite artist of the age". His friends included such celebrated men of letters as Adam Smith, Horace Walpole, Samuel Johnson and James Boswell. He turned to more literary activities and became active in politics. He wrote political pamphlets on issues of the day and was a noted anti-slavery intellectual. His second wife was a niece of Lord Mansfield, the English judge whose rulings in 1772 were instrumental in leading to the end of slavery in the British Empire. Queen Charlotte was a direct descendant of the mixed European and African lineage of the Portuguese Royal House and it would be surprising if Ramsay's decision not to attempt to hide these characteristics was of no significance to the Abolitionist Movement.

After Ramsay's death in 1784, Sir Joshua Reynolds succeeded to the role of the King's Principal Painter. And it seems that even in those days, cut-backs were the name of the game. Reynolds' fee for holding the post was reduced, from the £200 per annum which Ramsay received, to £38. He is reported as remarking that "even the King's Rat Catcher was better paid".

STEPMOTHER PROBLEMS - 17th CENTURY STYLE!

A short, sharp summer shower had left the air heavy with a sweet, earthy smell as I pushed open the wooden gate to St Mary the Virgin Church in Elmley Castle and walked up the long gravelled drive. Turning the old iron door handle and entering, the ancient font was to my right, but to my left was what I had come to see: the magnificent 17th century memorial to Thomas, 1st Earl of Coventry (d 1699), the work of William Stanton (1639-1705).



The strange tale of the feud between the 2nd Earl and his stepmother is told in the Church.

“... The Coventry Memorial erected by the Countess-dowager (who afterwards became Mrs Savage of Elmley Castle) to the memory of her husband the Fifth Baron Coventry who was created the 1st Earl of Coventry by King William III. He is buried at Croome D’Abitot church adjoining the seat of the Earls of Coventry. This monument was intended for erection there, but was refused admission by the 2nd Earl (who was son of the 1st Earl by a former wife). The first part of the lengthy Latin inscription contains a eulogy of the Earl. The second part was intended to commemorate the Countess-dowager, by whom the monument was created, blank spaces being left on which to insert the date on her death. Translated from Latin it reads as follows - Elizabeth, his Countess-dowager, descended from the noble family of Graham, and daughter of Richard, son of Richard Graham Esq of the County Norfolk, who fought bravely in the rank of Captain for King Charles I - as a token of sincere love and deep regard and in time of a grateful mind, remembering the tender affection of her Lord and Husband toward herself. Not being blessed with any offspring, she erected this monument in her grief, and desired that after her death her body might be buried with her beloved husband.

The 2nd Earl declared that the pedigree given was false and refused to allow the monument to be erected at Croome, and took action against Gregory King, the Lancaster Herald who composed the inscription, in the court of Chivalry, for contriving a false pedigree, with false arms for the Countess, to the great injury of a noble family and scandalous abuse of posterity. He claimed that the Countess was not the daughter of Richard Graham of Norfolk, but of Richard Grimes, a mean person, by trade a turner, and sister of Richard Grimes, a waterman. She had been a niece of the Earl’s housekeeper and a servant in his household, and he had married her in his declined old age.

The final result of the litigation is not known. The monument was taken to Croome shortly after the Countess married Mr Savage of Elmley Castle. On being refused admission, it was brought to Elmley by order of Mr Savage, and erected in its present position.

Elizabeth Savage died and was buried at Elmley, but the date was never filled in on the monument. The entry in the Register is the only memorial of her. It is as follows -

1724 - The Right Honourable Elizabeth, Countess-dowager of Coventry, wife of Thomas Savage of Elmlye Castle Esquire (sic) buried April 10th . . .”

The memorial had been showing signs of its age, but in 2010, at a cost of £35,000, it was dismantled and a restoration programme completed. The angels’ wings are now returned to their former gilded glory, but the Earl retains his broken finger! If you haven’t seen this Memorial, take a trip out to Elmley Castle. It’s very impressive.



DD.

Our thanks to John Lannigan, Croome volunteer who suggested this topic and to St Mary’s Church for their permission to reproduce the story extract. Our grateful acknowledgement to Photographer Aidan McRae Thomson for allowing us to use his pictures.

BEE NEWS By Keren Green, Croome Beekeeper

With the bitter winter weather I was delighted that all my bees survived.

Oil seed rape, abundant in this area, is a huge source of nectar; with such a hot, dry April it arrived early and the bees gratefully gorged themselves. The beekeeper has to be extra vigilant and keep a close eye on the rape flower; we must harvest the honey as soon as it starts to turn, extract it and store it for bottling. Too late and the honey sets in the comb and is of no use to the bees or us. Oil seed rape sets quickly making good quality set honey.



A wonder of nature takes place at this time when bees begin to increase their numbers by swarming. The flying workers, the queen together with some drones, leave the hive en-mass to set up home elsewhere while the hive they vacate is ready with food, brood, young bees and queen bee to carry on the line.

The swarmed colony is our main workforce in honey production, so beekeepers inspect their hives weekly for signs that bees are preparing to swarm and take appropriate action to hang on to their precious bees. Next task the July harvest – busy times!

CRACKING THE COADE

I stepped across the threshold of the Philpott Museum during a very wet visit to Lyme Regis and looked down to see this striking ammonite design paving – a tribute to the fossil heritage of Lyme and the Jurassic Coast, but also to Eleanor Coade, a resident of the town in the late 18th century. The story of Eleanor Coade's successful factory and showroom in London is probably familiar to most of our readers, and we have all been shown the Coade name inscribed on such Croome treasures as Sabrina and the Dry Stone Bridge. Her West Country connections are perhaps less well known. The 'Coadestone' ammonite pavement in Lyme showed that new work is being produced in the same tradition. It was laid in 1990 when the museum was restored.



Eleanor was born in Exeter in 1733, the daughter of a prosperous wool cloth finisher who came from Lyme. The family moved to London and when her father died bankrupt in 1769 Eleanor, now in her middle thirties and unmarried, took on a struggling decorative 'stoneware' business from one Daniel Picot. She expanded the business, broke company with Daniel Picot, who apparently tried to manage her rather than the other way around, and employed a talented sculptor named John Bacon to design for her and supervise her factory.

In 1758 Robert Adam had returned from visits to Rome and newly excavated Herculaneum fired with enthusiasm for all things classical. He responded to the appeal of this new durable decorative ware, ceramic rather than stone, and partly through his patronage Coadestone became extremely popular in the estates of the Georgian wealthy classes. It was widely used for civic purposes in London and exported as far west as the USA and as far east as St. Petersburg.

Eleanor, known as Mrs Coade though she never married, reclaimed her West Country origins when she took over Belmont House from her uncle in 1784. The same house was in 1968 to become the home of John Fowles the author of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* – a double artistic heritage. The ornamentation of the house is a stunning example of the product which the indomitable Mrs Coade had so successfully marketed.



The craftsman who designed and laid the pavement at the Philpott Museum was Philip Thomason, a specialist (and not the only one) in new Coadestone who is based in Ilminster some fifteen miles away from Lyme. Did he somewhere unearth the secret recipe used in the factory in Lambeth? Apparently not. He claims that it was through guesswork that he was able to recreate her formula almost exactly, enabling him to produce

work of the same durability and fine detail. His proximity to the source of fine ball clays from Dorset gives him easy access to the same natural resources which we believe were used by Eleanor Coade.

KM

Thanks to Mary Godwin of the Philpott Museum for information about the ammonite pavement. Photo of Belmont House by Ballista.

A Year at Croome

Katherine's View:

Back in Spring 2010, a young student wearing a heavy metal band black t-shirt, came to meet me to discuss spending his placement year at Croome in the Garden and Park dept. As we stood at the top of a very cold and windy Church Hill, me in my sweatshirt, fleece and woolly hat and Seb just in his t-shirt and jeans, I realised that he was made of strong stuff and would be perfect to join us for the year!

So from July 2010 Seb joined the team for three days a week. He took to the work like a duck to water, quickly becoming a valued part of the team and getting on well with the volunteers. During the year Seb took part in jobs such as tree planting, pruning, fencing, weeding, chipping, strimming and much more. He carried out extensive surveys in the garden and parkland, photographing, measuring and documenting all of the larger trees. He also spent some time at The Weir doing archaeological excavation and set up Geo-caching at Croome.

Seb's time with us has flown by. We have had several meetings with his tutor over the year, and he leaves us with an excellent report. Now he's heading back to Harper Adams to continue studying Countryside Management. He is greatly missed by the Garden and Park dept and we wish him every success for the future!



Seb's View:

From the moment I started at Croome it felt 'right'. I was welcomed with open arms by everyone I met and have made what I hope to be permanent friendships. Everyone has been brilliant - not only the garden and parks team but all the staff and volunteers at Croome. I've enjoyed the work - from completing the ancient tree survey to strimming the HaHa and fencing. I really feel and hope it's made some difference to Croome. I was amazed by the diversity of the landscapes at Croome and the knowledge required to manage each very different area. I have particularly enjoyed working in the woodlands and want to develop my knowledge and skills in this area. I would like to thank Katherine and Michael for giving me the opportunity to work at Croome and making the past year a great experience, along with Jez, Hugh and I guess Ted... haha. Cheers Guys.

My working holiday in the Lake District - May 2011.

By Graham Cartwright

Having volunteered for around a year I decided that I liked the National Trust ethos so looked for ways to extend my involvement with it. I therefore decided to book a Trust working holiday path laying in the Lakeland Fells. The description of the trip talked about a one hour walk to the work site and strenuous work once at the site. It also talked about bunkhouse type accommodation, good wholesome cooking and great camaraderie amongst the holiday parties.

The base camp was situated on the western shores of Lake Windermere with the work site a 30 minute mini bus ride followed by a one hour walk near the summit of the Pike of Blisco at a height of around 1900 feet. Our task was to establish an approximately 80 metre section of a footpath in an area where walkers had taken various routes up the hill and were thus damaging turf cover. If left alone this would have resulted in a wide grey gash down the side of the hill.

On day one our trusty band set out in our mini bus with our two volunteer leaders to the top of Wrynose Pass where we met with three members of the Trust Lakeland Path Team whose job it was to plan the work, teach us path laying and keep us safe whilst working. From the bus, we had the one hour walk over quite rocky terrain (beware twisted ankles) carrying picks, shovels and crowbars, finally reaching the work site to experience high winds, heavy rain and low cloud. "I volunteered and paid for this" was a thought that crossed my mind. The bags of large rocks from which the path was to be built were waiting for us having been previously placed by helicopter all the way up the job. Lunch breaks took place at the worksite with shelter from the winds being a priority. One of the NT Path Team lived in an adjacent valley and had to walk 90 minutes up and over the Pike to get to us. It was his quickest way to work!!

Throughout, our leaders kept us going with great humour and common sense, planning the menus, doing the shopping and organising our cooking and cleaning rotas. The Path Team supported us with great patience and I came away not only with a huge sense of achievement but with immense respect for what are maybe some of the unsung heroes of the National Trust. Maybe we "Country Park Types" should spare a thought for these amazing people who work so hard to maintain the beauty of these wilderness areas.

Roll up for a Hare Krishna Ice Cream!

Looking for a slightly different Croome experience this year? Then keep the weekend of 27th and 28th August free and come along to the Hare Krishna Festival. An anticipated 160 people from the Hare Krishna community, who lived at Croome Court in the early 1980's, are giving help and support with many followers from all over the country expected to attend.

With the emphasis on their own style of healthy vegetarian eating, plans include a Food Marquee featuring 'Ready Veggie Cook'. It's hoped to serve free food to everyone at lunchtime and the intriguing Hare Krishna ice cream will be available. There'll be dance, theatre and live music performances as well as lectures on Hare Krishna philosophy. Children's activities, face painting and food tastings will take place in the Park with stalls selling Hare Krishna books and products. And if you've always wanted to try on a sari (come on guys you know you want to!) this could be your chance. Members of the Hare Krishna community will join volunteer stewards in the Court where there'll be an exhibition and a showing of Hare Krishna DVDs. It's set to be an exciting insight into the Krishna days at Croome.

THE EDITORS

Sue Coleman ; Di Dickinson ; Phil Douce; Kath Morris and Alexis Robinson.

Please let us have any ideas for articles or comments on anything in this issue.

Either drop them in the Chronicle boxes at the RAF building or in the Volunteers' Room, or email us at:

croomechronicle@gmail.com

An interesting encounter!

By Barbara Chapman

I'd only been a volunteer at Croome Court a matter of days when a chance encounter with a young visitor changed my thinking about the house.

A boy no older than 12 or 13 was in the Dining Room on his own. I asked the usual questions - did he like it? would he change it? then moved on to generalities and asked whether he often visited NT properties. "Oh yes, but this is my favourite." "Why?" I asked. "Because it's alive!" was his response. Somewhat surprised that one so young was so enthusiastic I asked him to explain the thought behind the comment. "Well, most houses I visit stop at a certain date. This one doesn't. After the people (the Coventrys) left, the RAF came, then it was the school, then the Hare Krishnas and finally it was the club so its history has continued, and still does with the NT having it".

I'd never considered this before but he is so right. Our continuing history is unique. So next time visitors say the Dining Room ought to be taken back to its original colours, it might be worth recounting this tale and reminding them that this would in fact be removing or whitewashing a facet of the Court's history and denying it to future generations - maybe even to this young boy's children..

Croome Plant Research Group

By Katherine Alker

Since its creation over 5 years ago, the members of Croome Plant Research Group have been beaver away behind the scenes, poring over the details of the eighteenth century plant bills, which are now kept at Worcestershire Record Office. The aims of the group are to find out more about the plants that the 6th Earl of Coventry was buying, and more about the nurseries which were selling the plants. All plants have a generally accepted date of introduction into Britain, and so far CPRG have made the exciting discovery that the Earl had a few plants at Croome before the official introduction date. Geranium palatum, a native of Madeira, has an official introduction date of 1788, whereas it was bought by the Earl in 1783; Hemerocallis fulva 'Flore pleno', native to China, has an official introduction date of 1860 whereas it appears on the plant bill in 1792.

There is a booklet on sale in reception written by the CPRG volunteers which gives further information about the research and discoveries that have been made.

Black Bridge re-opens

August sees the reopening of the temporarily stabilised bridge, but only two people at a time may cross. Great work by the garden staff under direction of the engineer.

PIMMS IN THE PARK Tuesday 9th August.
A must go evening!

VOLUNTEERS DAY TRIP to Attingham Park on 13th September - keep the day free, booking soon.

