

CROOME CHRONICLE

WE'RE ON OUR WAY!

I'm sure you've all heard the fantastic news that we were successful in our second round bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The grant application was years in the making, and involved many people. It means that we will be awarded a £1.8 million grant towards the cost of Croome Redefined, the next major phase in our restoration of Croome.

The cost of Croome Redefined is £5.03 million and will be spent over the next 5 years. It includes over £4 million of repairs to Croome Court, completely re-servicing the house by rewiring and plumbing, installing a new heating system and providing suitable toilet facilities.

Just under £1 million will be spent on interpretation and engagement. In essence we will share the house in many new ways with our visitors and across all four floors, focusing on the many and varied strands of Croome's history, as set out in our Activity Plan.

Since taking on our stewardship of Croome Court in late 2007, we have worked hard to generate the funding to make up the total cost. £1.8 million will come from the HLF, but we have also secured strong financial support from the National Trust's Senior Management Team and Trustees who have granted us £2.23 million from central National Trust funds. A further £1 million has come from our public fundraising appeal, donations, legacies, events and charitable trusts which have all taken a lot of time and effort from all members of our team to nurture.

The positive decision from the HLF will also allow us to take on a 999 year lease of the mansion house from the Croome Heritage Trust which is great news in itself, securing the National Trust's involvement with Croome Court in the very long term.

The major repair work is due to start at the end of 2013 and last for two years, so we will need your help to plan how we can continue to open Croome Court whilst the contract gets underway. We will be running 'Conservation in action' activities and events to get our visitors involved and interested in what we're doing.

We have just appointed Cate Statham as our new Project Coordinator. Reporting to Richard Higgs, our Senior Project Manager, she will provide administrative support to Croome Redefined for the next five years. The next steps are to plan and advertise for 2 new staff roles which are being funded from the HLF grant. These are a Creative Director who will mastermind the visitor engagement work we plan to carry out and a Partnerships Officer who will build on the connections we have made with local schools and colleges, and bring new and lasting partnerships with local organisations into our work to restore and share historic Croome.

We realise that the documents that have been written to support the Heritage Lottery Fund bid are extremely detailed (and rather weighty!), particularly the Activity Plan and Conservation Management and Maintenance Plan, and we are working to produce a summary of the main points of both to share with everyone. The Activity Plan outlines all the activities, equipment, use of spaces, special events and new staff and volunteer roles that we will implement over the next 5 years, and the Conservation Management and Maintenance plan considers both the history of Croome Court and the provisos we need to make to care for it in a sustainable way in the future. We have copies of these documents in the Volunteer Library (2.1.11 and 2.1.12) - please feel free to have a look through to get a taste of our plans.

Since getting the green light from the Heritage Lottery Fund, we are able to invest time in refining our plans and programme of work in Croome Court for 2013. We intend to recruit and induct our new staff before Easter next year. We will update you on progress as soon as we can, and we realise how important it is to consult you on these developments as well as keeping you informed of what's happening.

Thanks to all of you for making this next stage in our restoration of Croome possible, and thank you again for all the help, advice and support you have given to get us to this momentous point in Croome's history.

Michael Smith, Property Manager

Stopping here for Croome

by Chris Wynne Davies



Bradshaw's Guide, the book that inspired the BBC TV series *Great British Railway Journeys*, contains a nice reference to Croome as a place to visit. The 1863 edition of Bradshaw's says: "Defford - The Abbey Church at Pershore, and Croome Park, the Earl of Coventry's fine seat, are well worth a visit". Defford station lay on the Birmingham to Bristol line. Local services between Birmingham and Gloucester called here until early 1965 when the station fell victim to the infamous Beeching cuts.

(Andrew Smith 1962)

What is Taste ?.....

by Don Neil & Di Dickinson

.... we are asked in the Dining Room of the Court. I think the 6th Earl of Coventry could have told us.

Don Neil, supremo of Monday shifts, came across a Christie's sale held in July 2012 in which a picture from the Croome collection went under the hammer. The artist, Willem van de Velde II died in 1707, but George William, 6th Earl, who is described in the catalogue as an 'outstanding patron of the arts and collector' is the first recorded owner of the painting. In 1843, when the 9th Earl inherited the title at the tender age of 5 years, others were necessarily handling administration of the Croome estate. The Christie catalogue goes on 'Accumulated debts and the prospect of a long minority no doubt encouraged his trustees to sell *en bloc* six of the outstanding pictures in the collection, including this Van de Velde, to Baron Lionel Nathan de Rothschild.' Baron Rothschild was a near neighbour of the Coventrys' London home, with a house at 148 Piccadilly. More pictures were sold at auction in the following year.

The Willem van de Velde II picture was regarded as 'a perfect gem of the master' exhibiting 'refined technique and his unique ability to render light and atmosphere'. It first went on the open market in 1937 where it realised £2,100 at Sotheby's, was sold again as part of an *en bloc* purchase of Old Masters in 1942 and was acquired by The Pieter and Olga Dreesmann Collection of Dutch and Old Master Paintings in 1998.

At this year's sale the work realised a price of £4,073,250.



Coventry House

by Mike Payne & Di Dickinson

It is interesting to reflect, when we talk about the Coventry family travelling between Croome and their London house, that the journey to London by coach would have taken three to four days. Coaches travelled at about six miles an hour, and the distance covered depended on the number of daylight hours. Until the Turnpike Act of 1706, which allowed the setting up of Turnpike Trusts which could charge for the use of stretches of road, there had been little improvement to the tracks and paths since Roman times. During the 18th century, local Trusts began to establish and maintain toll roads. However, development was piecemeal, and it wasn't until the General Turnpike Act of 1773 that improved surfaces became more widespread.

So after enduring a long and uncomfortable journey, the family would have arrived at Coventry House. Piccadilly runs along the side of Green Park, in those days a haunt of thieves and robbers, and a renowned duelling ground. Close by was St James's Palace, where the court of King George III resided. A large town house, The Queen's House, just round the corner, was the private residence of Queen Charlotte. Only in the 19th century was it to be extended and become Buckingham Palace and home to Queen Victoria. Piccadilly Circus was not developed until 1819 to link Piccadilly to Regents Street.

Catherine Gordon, in her book *The Coventrys of Croome*, researched Coventry House, and it has, like Croome, had many uses. It still stands today at 106 Piccadilly, adjacent to the Park Lane Hotel. Since 2007 it has been the London campus of the Malaysian - owned Limkokwing University of Creative Technology. Their website (www.limkokwing.net/united_kingdom) contains some photographs of the exterior and interior.



The Ninth Earl and his Domestic Staff

By Mike Payne

As stewards in the Court we are often asked about the number of domestic staff that were retained by the family. Luckily the census returns give us a useful snapshot of the domestic arrangements every 10 years from 1841 to 1911, which covers most of the life of George William, 9th Earl of Coventry.

At the time of the **1841 Census** none of the family was resident at Croome and the house was being looked after by a few retainers. The 8th Earl was at Coventry House in Piccadilly with his brothers John and William and William's wife and eldest daughter. They were being attended by a domestic staff of 16. Meanwhile his grandson George William, aged 3, now styled George Deerhurst, was staying with his grandmother Harriett Cockerell further along Piccadilly, near Apsley House, with his mother and sister. By the time of the **1851 Census** George William was already the 9th Earl, even though he was only 13 and a schoolboy at Eton. Croome Court was again being minded by a few servants.

By **1861** George William has attained his majority and has taken up residence at Croome. The staff levels reflected the needs of a single gentleman and consisted of four males and seven females in the house. Their roles were:

House steward	Valet	Under Butler
Steward's boy		
Housekeeper	Cook	2 Housemaids
Stillroom maid	Laundrymaid	
Scullery maid		

There were of course other staff such as grooms, coachmen, gardeners, etc but these lived in the stable yard or the cottages, as appropriate.

By **1871** George William has married Lady Blanche and they already have five children. The domestic staff has been adjusted to match the needs of the household and now has seven males and sixteen females. Their roles were:

Butler	Valet	Under Butler
Footman	Steward's room boy	
Odd man	Gas man	
Housekeeper	Lady's maid	Cook
3 Nurses	3 Kitchen maids	Stillroom maid
3 House maids	3 Laundry maids	

In **1881** the Earl and Countess were at home with their three daughters and William (Thomas, the youngest son, was not born until 1885). The three eldest sons were at Eton. The staff levels are similar except that a governess has been added to attend to the educational needs of the young ladies. The domestic staff consisted of:

House Steward	Valet	Under butler
Footman	Steward's room boy	
Odd man		
Governess	Housekeeper	Lady's maid
Cook	Nurse	Nurse maid
Stillroom maid	3 House maids	3 Laundry maids
Kitchen maid	Scullery maid	

In **1891** the Earl and Countess were at home with their six youngest children, Blanche's mother and two visitors. The domestic staff has reached a peak at 26 and consisted of:

House steward	Valet	Under butler
3 Footmen	Steward's room boy	
Odd man		
Governess	Housekeeper	Cook
Nurse	3 Lady's maids	3 Laundry maids
Stillroom maid	5 House maids	Kitchen maid
Scullery maid		

It is interesting to note that at this time the governess was German and of the three lady's maids, one was from France and one from Luxembourg.

In **1901** the Earl and Countess had two children living at home, Reginald (31), who had become a barrister, and Dorothy (28), as well as their grandson Osbert Smith (2) who was the son of Lady Barbara. The domestic staff in the house were:

House steward	Valet	2 Footmen
Steward's room boy	Odd man	
Housekeeper	Cook	2 Lady's maids
3 Laundry maids	4 Housemaids	
Stillroom maid	Kitchen maid	
Scullery maid		
Nurse		

In **1911** the last publicly-available census, we find in the Court the 9th Earl (72) and the Countess (68) and their barrister son, Reginald William, who was to be married later that year. The domestic staff has now reduced to:

House steward	2 Footmen	Steward's room boy
Odd man		
Cook	Lady's maid	3 Laundry maids
Stillroom maid	Kitchen maid	Scullery maid
3 House maids		

Any who are unsure of the respective duties of the various grades of domestic staff could do no better than to consult chapter 41 of Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management. This is freely available online at www.mrsbeeton.com.

The Croome Chronicle is in its third year of publication. It is edited and produced by volunteers.

Please send us your ideas, articles and stories. We can't promise to print everything as we have limited space but we will do our best. Use the boxes in the Mess or the Volunteers room in the Court or email us at: croomechronicle@gmail.com

The Chronicle editors are :-
 Sue Coleman
 Kath Morris
 Di Dickinson
 Alex Robinson
 Phil Douce



LOOKING THROUGH OUR

Eyes for the wind. That's what the word windows means - and it is probably a good description of the draughty apertures that served as windows in the past. Glass was rarely used in the windows of ordinary homes until the mid 16th century. You might find glass for stained glass windows in churches, glasses to drink from, or to contain perfumes and potions, but in domestic buildings prior to the mid 16th century, windows were likely to have wooden shutters, oiled cloth, paper or even thin sheets of horn, rather than glass.

The wealthiest homes, amongst which early Croome manor houses might have numbered, would have had at least some glazed windows at this time. They would have been constructed from a lattice of lead strips (comes) into which small panes of glass called quarrels or quarries were nailed, the soft lead reinforced by iron bars. The vertical bars were known as stanchions, the horizontals saddle bars. The stone or wooden uprights which formed the framework for the window were the mullions. There was an economic advantage in using diamond panes rather than square or oblong, as small sections of expensive glass could be utilised in the triangles around the sides of the window.



Stanway House

Square or oblong panes became popular later when the Elizabethan age brought prosperity to England – and windows of a larger size. Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, built in the late 16th Century dazzled visitors with the extent of its windows 'Hardwick Hall, more glass than wall' was the way it was described by awe-struck locals.

However, for a stunning example of a Jacobean House of the early 17th century, you need go no further than Stanway House in Gloucestershire with its stone mullions, Jacobean gables and leaded lights. National Trust's Chastleton is also of this period.

Prior to 1674 glass used in windows was Broad Glass. Molten glass was blown to form a cylinder, cut, re-heated and flattened to form sheets, cooled on a bed of sand and polished. The panes were small, greenish, with a rippled effect and often contained imperfections.

The earliest Crown Glass was recorded in 1674 and used until the 1830s. In this improved technology, molten glass was blown into a large bubble, pierced and spun into a disk about four feet in diameter, making it

possible to produce glass panes which were of better quality and larger dimensions.

The age of the sash window was upon us. However, there was no sudden cut-off point and because Crown glass was expensive, casement windows with leaded lights continued to be popular through the 17th and early 18th centuries.

Single sash windows were probably copied from France and introduced into England in the later part of the 17th century – sash being a corruption of the French word 'chassis', a framework. In these windows only the bottom frame moved to be supported by wooden pins when open. The double-hung sash was a breakthrough. Here technology used in earlier centuries for drawbridges and portcullises was adapted to produce a system of counterbalanced weights allowing both top and bottom panes to be moved independently. The earliest sashes of this kind date from the beginning of the 18th century. Soon they were being used extensively and the design evolved, using ever more slender glazing bars made of Baltic pine rather than heavy oak.

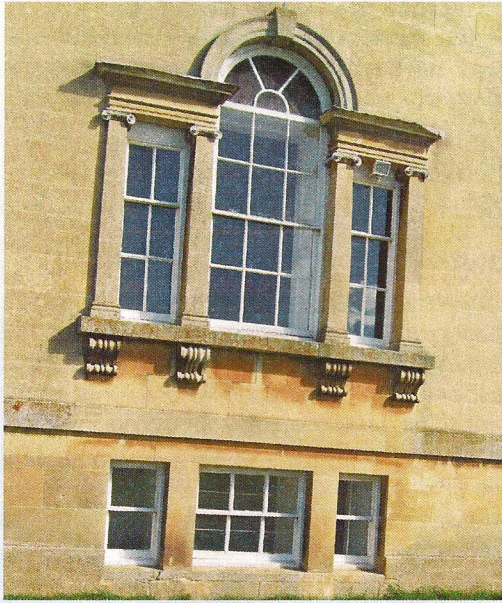


Stanway – the history of windows in one wall.

MANY WINDOWS

by Kath Morris

When the Sixth Earl and his Clerk of Works envisaged the carefully designed vistas from Croome Court, they must have delighted in the opportunities offered by relatively new window technology: 18th century windows could capture views, rather than just letting light in.



Venetian Window at Croome

By the mid 18th century, when the 6th Earl began work on Croome Court, the familiar Georgian design of 'six over six' had become the most popular design, the overall size of the window always kept in proportion with the façade of the building following Palladian principles. It is interesting to compare the larger panes and slender glazing bars in the main part of Croome Court with the heavier style sashes of the Red Wing, basement and stable block.

Venetian windows, first used in Britain by Inigo Jones in 1623, were popular as more decorative features of Georgian houses. At Croome there are Venetian windows illuminating the two pavilions from the south side of the house, although the long gallery south window only appears as a Venetian window on the exterior wall. A further Venetian window is squeezed into the corner of the building to illuminate the main stairway at first floor level, whereas below it, at ground floor level, we find a semi-circular Diocletian window (named after the windows of the baths or *thermae* of Diocletian in Rome).

As a precaution against fire after the Great Fire of London the Building Act of 1709 required that 'no door or window frame of wood should be set nearer to the outside face of the wall than four inches'. This was increased to nine inches in 1774. This legislation initially applied to London, but in a few years the rules were adopted in the rest of the country. Have a look at the windows at the Court. They are deeply inset as compared with earlier sash windows in Broad Street, Pershore.

The notorious window tax - which might or might not have been associated with the saying 'daylight robbery' - was introduced in 1696 to raise much-needed cash in the reign of William III. It was repealed in 1851. Houses with over twenty windows paid 8 shillings tax. However, it cannot be concluded that all bricked-up windows were a means of avoiding window tax. Sometimes, rather strangely, they were more of a stylistic feature added to achieve symmetry or maybe to match the use of interior space.

Are we any nearer to solving the conundrum of our 'hidden window' in the basement? Catherine Gordon (*Croome Court Structural Evolution 2010*) describes the windows of 'Croome House', the Caroline House, as being 'cross casements originally with wrought-iron frames and leaded lights'. The hidden window could well be part of Croome House, which was begun in 1640 and completed round about 1649. But could the window have been part of an earlier house? As we have seen, leaded casements were used over a wide period, which makes it difficult to date them without careful research into the surrounding materials, the level of the windows - and so on. The answer to the conundrum at present is the usual tantalizing 'much further research needs to be done' and 'watch this space' - literally in this case!



Early sash windows in Pershore are flush with the surrounding walls

Garden and Park Update

by Katherine Alker

I can't believe that we're well into Autumn already – the summer has flown by. The wet and warm weather over the past few months kept staff and volunteers extremely busy weeding the megabeds, flowering studs, and throughout the pleasure grounds in general. I hope you'll agree that the garden has looked good this year; we are looking at herbaceous catalogues and putting orders together for more plants right now to edge ever nearer to the vast variety and huge number of plants that were part of Brown's design, and were grown at Croome during the C18th.

Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday Volunteer groups were delighted when we finally finished hand-pulling the ragwort from Horse Close, Church Hill and South Park after over a month, as it can be a back-breaking job and the end never seems to be in sight! It was well worth it as we could then sell the meadow grasses for hay and bedding. We've now got sheep grazing Horse Close and South Park too.

The Dig for Victory plot has continued to be a great success, with luscious lettuce, beautiful beans, superb spinach, brilliant beetroot and lots more produce to harvest (alliteration for 'onions' anyone?!). The donations we get for the produce enables this plot to be totally self-sufficient, which I think chimes well with the 1940's way of life.

The Worcester (Punchbowl) Gates project has been ongoing for a while: stone work repairs have been done, metal gates should be installed by the time you read this I hope! Garden and Park Team will carry out further work around the area to fencing and vegetation. I hope you can make it down there to see the results!

The river crossing to replace the wobbly Black Bridge is progressing behind the scenes – we have submitted our designs for Planning Permission, and all being well should be able to get started on the work in January.

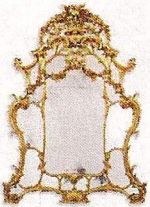
Winter work for Garden and Park staff and volunteers will include tree and hedge planting in the parkland; hedge laying in the car park; pruning and fencing in various locations in the garden and parkland; providing firewood for the increasing number of open fires in Croome Court; and much more!

I hope you are able to get out into the garden and park over the winter – a bright and sunny winter's day is perfect for a walk! A huge thank you to everyone who volunteers with us, come rain or shine; I really enjoy your company, and appreciate your hard work and dedication.

If Only !

By Phil Douce

Over the last two years a number of pieces of furniture originally made or bought for Croome by the 6th Earl of Coventry have appeared back on the market through Christie's in New York or London.



We have all seen the information about the George II Giltwood overmantle mirror that was purchased by the 6th Earl for Lady Coventry's Dressing Room. This fetched £313,250 including buyer's premium at Christie's recent sale. This mirror (Lot 143) was sold in the 1948 sale at Croome for £58, which was less than half its estimate.



A Louis XVI ormolu-mounted bois satine, tulipwood and parquetry commode date circa 1763 bought by the Earl from Poirier in Paris, which has been sold earlier this year for \$644,000 (£364,460) again including buyer's premium. In the 1948 sale at Croome this item (Lot 172) was sold for £680 against an estimate of £160. It was originally in the Yellow Drawing Room at Croome.



Another item from the Yellow Drawing Room was a Louis XV ormolu-mounted Tulipwood, Kingwood, Amaranth and Bois de Bout marquetry Secretaire á abattant by Bernard II van Risenburgh circa 1760. This was originally sold as Lot 173 in the 1948 sale for £4,000 against an estimate of £1,200. It was sold in May this year at Christie's fetching \$786,406 (£444,800).

Robert Adam and Fort George

by Tim Hickson

How did Robert Adam afford to spend almost five years on a Grand Tour of Italy? Where did he learn to construct buildings? To answer these questions we need to look at one of Scotland's many turbulent periods of history.

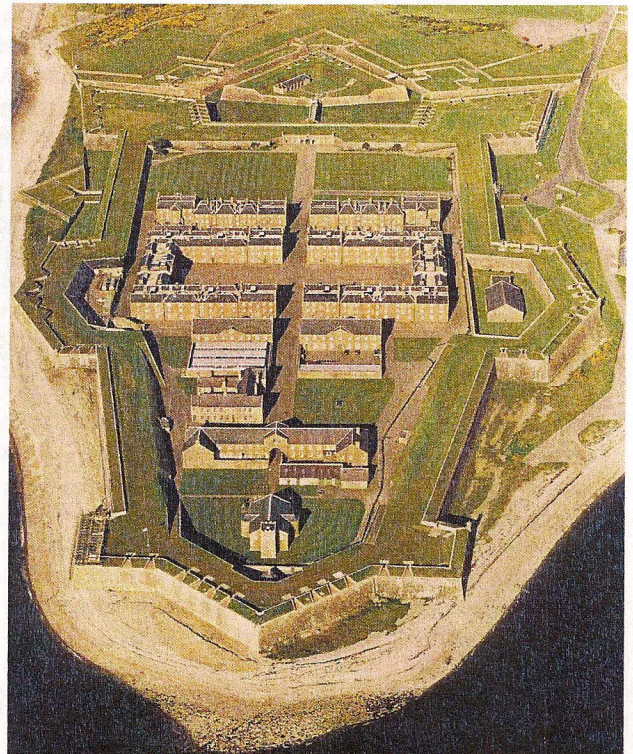
When the Stuart King Charles I was deposed and executed in 1649, the Scots proclaimed their support for Charles II. Cromwell, having failed to persuade them otherwise, then invaded Scotland, resulting in his victory at the Battle of Dunbar. However, a year later, Charles came south with a fresh Scots Army. That adventure ended badly at the Battle of Worcester. This should have put an end to the trouble in Scotland but there remained serious unrest amongst the clans in the Highlands. As a result formidable, garrisoned citadels were built either end of the Great Glen, one at Inverness and the other at Inverlochy.

When, in 1660, Charles II was restored to the throne, he withdrew the garrisons and slighted the fortresses. When he died, his brother James II gained the throne. Popular in Scotland, as a Catholic, he became so unpopular in England that he was removed and the Protestant William and Mary replaced him – causing more disaffection amongst the largely Catholic and Episcopalian Highland clans. So Inverlochy fortress had to be rebuilt (and named Fort William), Fort Augustus (at the western end of Loch Ness) was erected, and Inverness Castle was reinforced.

The Hanoverian George I was viewed even more dimly by the Highlanders who wanted the Stuarts returned to the throne. Risings began in 1715 and, in spite of the new forts, infantry barracks and military roads that were built, they kept doing extensive – and expensive damage. The Jacobite rising led by Prince Charles Edward Stuart again set off south before turning back at Derby. His army then rampaged through the Highlands until, on the 16th of April 1746, the Battle of Culloden put an end to the rebellion.

King George II and his Government had had enough of these troubles and the huge financial waste they caused. To produce a lasting solution to the problem, money was spent lavishly. So the network of military roads begun in 1724 by Major-General George Wade was to be greatly extended, medieval castles across the Highlands and Islands were converted to barracks, and Fort Augustus was repaired. Fort George (the old Inverness Castle) presented more of a problem. Partly because of its position, it had fallen far too easily to siege; furthermore as its new garrison was projected to be 2000 'wild and licentious' soldiers, the ladies of Inverness were having severe attacks of the vapours. So the new military engineer for Northern Britain, Major-General William Skinner, settled on a barren spit of land jutting into the Moray Firth, 11 miles east of Inverness, at Ardersier, for the second Fort George. His design was stunning and, when built, it became 'one of the outstanding artillery fortifications anywhere in Europe'.

The contract to build the enormous structure was won by Robert Adam's father, William. He was a famous architect who had carried out work at Edinburgh Castle and built many of Scotland's great houses. However, before Fort George could be started, William died and his eldest son, John, took over with 20 year-old Robert as his partner. For the next 20 years, Fort George dominated the family business. Since Colonel Skinner was also charged with surveying and reporting on all the forts in Ireland, he spent only a few weeks each year at Ardersier. That meant that the Adam brothers were left responsible for all that went on at Fort George during the construction season from April to September. Within 5 years of their father's death it is reckoned that the brothers made £10 000 out of the contracts there. (Rough estimates suggest this would be worth several million pounds today.)



To quote from the magazine *The Queen's Own Highlander*,

'When Robert Adam left Fort George for his Grand Tour in September 1753 the outer works and Ravelin were complete and the two main bastions were well advanced. The domestic buildings were still at a very early stage, but their architectural merit can be partly attributed to him. The Ravelin Guard House was complete, the North and South Barrack blocks were designed, the Barrack Storehouse, the Staff Blocks and probably the Chapel, too, were at the preliminary draft stage: so their designs were certainly inspired, if not actually designed by the great Robert Adam.

For its part, the Fort can justifiably be claimed as indispensable to Scotland's greatest architect. It provided him with practical building experience, with leisure time to study architecture, and with the financial backing for his Grand Tour that set him on the way to the top.

With Adam's genius in its pedigree, it is hardly surprising that the Fort's appearance is so special.'



In August Hugh & Kerry were married in the Saloon at Croome, the first wedding at the Court under the National Trust.

The flower team - Jane, Linda, Jennie, Sue and Angela — were delighted to do the flowers both in the Court and for the reception in the barn at Westfield Farm. Hugh & Kerry chose shades of green, white and cream for all the arrangements. Flowers and foliage in these colours were used in the saloon fireplaces and small vases on the top of the mantelpieces.

The barn presented more of a challenge because of a central row of pillars and so after a meeting with Hugh & Kerry it was decided to decorate these with back to back displays. Two were decorated with large swags of

foliage and for the other two Sue designed four metal cages containing oasis. These were hung on the pillars and when soaked in water weighed over three kilograms. The flowers and foliage were then positioned in the oasis by one person standing on the hay bales surrounding the pillar whilst another passed the flowers and gave directions as to where they should go.

We used lilies, alstromerias, Anastasia chrysantheums and carnations. Most of the foliage was gathered by Hugh from the woods.

Jane and Angela made the bouquets, buttonholes and table arrangements. Hugh put large branches of hazel into buckets of sand around the sides of the barn which had



Stranded in Cape Town with an agonizingly painful slipped disc, thoughts of Croome soar to giddy heights of fantasy. What if South Africa had figured in the route of the Grand Tour. Even now, the National Trust might be pondering what to do with a Cape Dutch style mansion, elaborate gardens with fountains, perhaps an 'eye catching' replica of Table Mountain and the Twelve Apostles. Bobotie, river fish and smoked eel would figure highly on the Canteen menu; for special events they'd be grilling wildebeest with rosemary and kingklip with coriander. The quintessential Englishness of Pimms in the Park would represent as chocolate chilli martinis and house music.

How easily would the RAF buildings have converted to a shanty town. A crinkly faced man as old as the hills drifting with his saxophone round the car park, playing sultry jazz for small change to buy his beer and biltong, while hopeful small children in brightly coloured clothes dance energetically in the dust in return for sweets or a handful of coins. A group of hadeda birds, a type of ibis, screeching and swooping like witches on broomsticks, take up residence near the lake and add authenticity to the Halloween trail. Guinea fowl waddle through the Home Shrubbery.

Back in the real world, less fanciful links are few. But here's a snippet for cricket lovers. The 9th Earl, as is widely known, was a great sportsman; he sent his second son, Charles John Coventry, to Eton, an institution which from 1730 had a huge influence on the playing and administration of English cricket. Charles played cricket for Worcestershire when it was classified as a 'minor county' without first class status. He was a right-handed batsman: 'a fair bat with a free style who can hit hard'. In 1888/1889 the first English cricketing tour to South Africa took place. The South African team was not well thought of so the selectors didn't feel the need to select a strong team to beat them. So it was that Colonel Charles Coventry was invited to tour SA with Major Wharton's side in the first two test matches to be played against South Africa. Batting at No 10 he didn't shine but he did contribute to the wins with a solid 12 runs in the first match and 1 in the second. And so, in my 5th week of house arrest in the Western Cape, I gaze out at the Atlantic Ocean and ponder the irony of my own imprisonment against the distant view of Robben Island where Nelson Mandela spent so many years, and close my eyes and think of the green green grass of Croome - toasted teacakes, leather on willow. My journey here took 18 hours door to door. I wonder what Charles John Coventry would have thought about that. **Sue Coleman**

? Shopping Days to Christmas?

By Kath Morris

Our volunteers and staff in the shop are well prepared for the Christmas season with an enticing display of goodies. Don't forget to call in to see what they've got. Here's a personal choice, ranging from little gifts and stocking fillers to luxury presents.

Mini bags of potpourri at £3

Folding seat mats - A great gift for walkers - or any one else who loves a warm sit upon in a cold place - a bargain at £3.50

Colourful packs of 'gold, frankincense and myrrh' handmade soaps at £2.25 each.

Fantastic Christmas tree decorations - £3.50 each

Spring bulbs priced from £7.50 for narcissi to £12 for a magnificent basket of hyacinths.

Truffles - £15 for 3 boxes

Stripy scarves - excellent value at £12 as they're cheaper than similar ones seen elsewhere.

Downton Abbey jigsaws: now, might someone like one of those - £13

Fabulous rugs ranging from £12.50 to a luxurious Irish Foxford rug at £75

Remember these are the prices without taking into account a volunteer discount. You don't have to make a special shopping trip AND you are helping Croome. What's to lose ?