

THE AUTUMN NEWSLETTER

Welcome to Issue 11 of your newsletter. The highlight of the recent months is of course the opening of Croome Court to the public – the two parts of Croome are back together at last!



Lindsay Gray

CROOME REUNITED ...

Jane Farrington (Chair National Trust West Midlands Regional Committee) and Eric Jones (Chair of Friends of Croome Park) were the hosts for the formal opening of Croome Court on Friday 25th September 2009. Over three hundred guests were on the south side of the Court at 3.00pm for the opening celebrations. Standing on the steps overlooking the gathering, Eric spoke on behalf of the Friends, after Jane Farrington had welcomed the guests and set the scene for this occasion which was being witnessed by Volunteers, Friends, staff, local VIPs, contractors, consultants and residents:

"It's a great pleasure to add my welcome to you all on this very special occasion. It's a celebration of 13 years of achievement by the National Trust in restoring Croome – first the Park and now the Court. We're only at the beginning of the restoration of the Court, of course, but already the mansion feels "lived in" and loved. So many people have played a part in bringing us to this exciting moment of celebration: those in the National Trust who had the foresight to save this property from a very different future; the Croome Heritage Trust; all the staff here at Croome, as well as regional and national staff; National Trust members; Friends of Croome Park and Volunteers.



We would not be here, though, if it were not for the vision, taste and ambition of the 6th Earl, who died 200 years ago this month. The Earl, together with "Capability" Brown, Robert Adam and many, many others created here a Georgian masterpiece which we are privileged to enjoy today. In this sense, we owe the Earl and his successors the greatest debt of all and, quite simply, we would not be here enjoying this moment without their immeasurable contribution and achievement.

When I first started volunteering here at Croome back in 2002, the small band of volunteers who were here then could never have dared dream that such a day as this would come. The Court was in private ownership and even the Park was still in the very early stages of restoration. So many visitors would come, look across to the Court and ask volunteer Garden Stewards like myself "What about the House, does it belong to

the Trust?" Now, thanks to the Croome Heritage Trust, the Court is safe and in caring hands. I say "caring" particularly because conservation must always be at the heart of the National Trust's mission. It is little short of a miracle, I think, that so much of Croome has survived the centuries, when so many country houses have been lost over the years – and especially in the dire decade of the 1950s. It is now up to us in our various ways and roles to ensure that it is here for future generations to enjoy.

Much of the strength of the National Trust comes from its large membership – now 3.6 million – but, in addition, Croome's Volunteers are part of the 55,000 or so Volunteers nationally who, together with Centres and Supporter Groups, represent a huge force to be reckoned with. Volunteers freely give their time to this and other properties because we care for our heritage and identify with a particular place. We share a pride in achievement with the National Trust and a passion for "our" property.



Volunteer numbers at Croome have recently been substantially increased in anticipation of the Court's opening and now, well trained and well-briefed, we're all raring to go as one united team ready to play our part on this great stage called "Croome". Much history and many dramas have been played out here over the centuries and there are many stories for us to tell. We shall also have the privilege and the pleasure of showing visitors what is here to see and have the opportunity to engage them and their ideas on how the property might be presented over the coming years, a much more active approach perhaps in this respect than has traditionally been the case in the National Trust.

As well as Volunteers and the support they give to Croome, there is the voluntary Supporters Group formed in 2004, the Friends of Croome Park, and many members of the Friends are here today. Our membership has reached 350, and our Membership Secretary is kept busy with a steady flow of new applications, a flow which will no doubt continue and even increase as new visitors come to discover the Court and the Park. We support Croome in several ways and especially in funding projects and new equipment. Funding support of all kinds is vital to the National Trust, as we all know, and, just to give three of the most recent examples, the Friends have purchased a

marquee, a "Topper Deck" for grass cutting and a camcorder to record for the archives the process of peeling back the layers at the very moment when some important discoveries are made. The Friends' Oral History Project, "Croome before the National Trust", has made and continues to make a very significant contribution also, some of the evidence for which can be seen as you explore the Court and the displays today.

Strength in numbers of Volunteers is important, then, so is enthusiasm. We are a strong, dedicated and peaceful army ready to work and campaign for this special place. Sometimes when I give talks or take visitors around Croome I say "There was an essential army of largely anonymous workers here who, over many decades, worked with picks, shovels and the various tools of their trades to bring the Earl's vision to fruition." We may not be anonymous today, but we are today's army working with the two Trusts to perpetuate a remarkable legacy for everyone to enjoy.

I thank the National Trust and the Region and, on the Trust's behalf, I thank all Volunteers and supporters for their vital contribution. Let us today celebrate not only Croome but our history and our wider cultural heritage. As the campaign slogan says, "History Matters". Croome brilliantly illustrates this truth.

Let us together toast Croome and its future now as we celebrate this moment - with the 6th Earl and all his craftsmen and workers no doubt smiling down upon us... To Croome, its past and its future...

Please join me now as we count down to another moment of theatre on Croome's magnificent stage... Ten, Nine, Eight..."

On "one" the Court's window shutters were thrown open simultaneously by staff and Volunteers listening to the countdown and Orichalcum Brass played a stirring fanfare. The Court is open!

Eric Jones

OTHER NATIONAL TRUST PROPERTIES – AN OCCASIONAL SERIES

Mottisfont, near Romsey, Hampshire

Mottisfont is famous for its walled rose garden and Whistler's 'trompe l'oeil' in the old Abbey – when I visited many years ago I was told off for putting my finger up to the painting to make sure it wasn't real! The beautiful River Test flows through the grounds, full of Rainbow Trout of all sizes and hues. In June the garden is full of the scent of every type of rose you could imagine. I visited recently in September and there was still plenty of colour and scent to fill the senses. My favourites are Eglantyne for its amazing aroma and Graham Thomas for its colour and form – it also has a very delicate aroma of 'good tea'.



Lindsay Gray

(This is the third of a series of such short articles in the Friends Newsletter. We invite your contributions.)

Once a fully fledged Priory, Henry VIII of course knocked it about a bit, and the ruins were bought by William Lord Sandys and turned into a very charming house. The house and grounds were given to the National Trust in 1957.

If you ever get the chance to visit this part of the world, Mottisfont is a perfect place for a picnic, a walk along the Test, and a chance to decide which roses you'd like in your garden!

A VOLUNTEER AT CROOME

When an ankle injury temporarily curtailed my activities as Garden Steward, I readily agreed to be a Church Steward until my ankle healed. Now that things are back to normal I am combining the two jobs and thoroughly enjoying it. I come on at 10am and go up to the church. I enjoy meeting and talking with people, having spent most of my working life doing just that, and being a church steward gives you a wonderful opportunity to meet our visitors, answer their questions and pass on knowledge and experiences of Croome.

I try to walk round the gardens 2 or 3 times during the day and again enjoy talking to the visitors, although always being very much aware that folk often just want a quiet stroll around the park without their reveries being interrupted by an enthusiastic steward.

My father worked for 26 years in the gardens at Croome both as a Garden boy during the 9th Earl's time and for several years for the 10th Earl, until his (the 10th Earl) untimely death in France in 1940. In his later years I used to bring my father back to Croome and he would constantly bemoan the state of the gardens and parkland. As I walk round the lake on a Thursday, I often picture my Dad working away there and just wish he had lived long enough to have seen the transformation.

Croome church is a wonderful "stepping off" point for a walk around the park, giving a marvellous view of the landscape. We get a steady stream of visitors, even more now Croome Court is open and most have to pass the church at the start of their visit.

Croome church is unique both in its location and history for where else do you find a church with an exterior by Lancelot "Capability" Brown, an interior by Robert Adam with carvings by Grinling Gibbons on one of the memorials and such a wonderful view from the west doors, themselves designed by Robert Adam. Soon the carved wooden font, by Sefferin Alken, will be back in the church and will be another interesting feature for visitors. The remains of many of the Coventry family lie in the vault beneath the church and I am given to understand that my late uncle, Ernest Sherwood who lived in High Green, was the last person to open it up before the funeral of the last member of the family to be interred there.

To end on a brighter note however, my Dad used to recall how he pumped the old pipe organ (now in nearby Pirton church) at the wedding of one of the 9th Earl's children. He said that one of the wedding hymns was "The voice that breathed o'er Eden" and that the church was so packed that many folk stood outside on church hill. It was a lovely sunny day and the church bells were rung merrily - maybe they will ring again!

Geoff Sherwood

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Thanks to offers from new volunteers at Croome this Project is more active and I'm grateful to Nick Holland, Ellen Moore and Linda Pritchard for their contributions over the last few weeks. It's hoped to train a few willing people in interviewing and scanning in the next month or so as the list of possible interviews grows weekly.

Betty Jones was a Land Girl based at Croome Farm and has written down her memories, which make fascinating reading. Below is an excerpt:

"Harvesting was the time I really enjoyed. It had to be done while the weather was dry and sunny. But it started as soon as daylight started and went on till dark. They were long days, but it didn't worry me. Because food was so scarce the farmers sowed the corn right to the edges of the field, so a path for the tractor to start with the cutter and binder behind had to be cut. So we went round the edge with a scythe, an odd implement to look at. Once you had the knack it was quite pleasant swinging from side to side and cutting the corn. Then we had to quickly gather what we had cut and tie it into sheaves with a handful of the corn. When the machine got going we followed behind. It was a clever little machine cutting and then binding the corn with string and throwing the sheaves out to the side.

We gathered one sheaf under each arm and stooked them. Two in the middle leaning slightly together with the corn heads at the top, then two more the one side and two more the other – keeping them in a straight line up the field. This is something else we never see now. It was so nice to see all those stooks standing so neatly in the rows. At that point we prayed it wouldn't rain it was so important to get it into the barns completely dry otherwise it would rot and the corn would be of no use.

After a couple of days we would go out and load the corn onto drays or lorries; it had to be done with the heads into the centre so that any heads that dropped off stayed on the vehicles. What was left on we swept it up, bagged it and I used it with the cows' food."

Eileen Clement

NOTES FROM THE ARCHAEOLOGIST

South Worcestershire Archaeology Group members, working with Martin Cook MifA, worked hard through September ahead of the team forming the new hoggins 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 Kath Alker's patient garden volunteers to excavate, lift and carefully re-lay 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 re-hogginified, 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 of 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 hoggins 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 hoggins 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 October, we are just starting work on the new car park and re-profiling the ground South 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.

Jeremy Milln

Our volunteer archaeologists have been carefully uncovering the cobbles at the North Front of the Court with trowels and brushes - very exciting. You can just distinguish parallel ruts left by the wheels of carriages over time. As a comparison, see two historic (early 1900s) photos: the 9th Earl on horseback outside the North Front with two of his daughters, and the 9th Countess of Coventry in a carriage with a female companion, both of which



show the cobbles in situ. These two photos are courtesy of Worcester Record Office.

The newly-installed interpretation material inside the Court, specifically the Long Gallery, has been developed by members of the PEC (People, Engagement and Conservation) Group made up of Staff, Volunteers, Contractors and Friends, and produced by Mike Oakenfull of Querceus

Design. The figures represent the various craftsmen who created the Long Gallery to Adam's design in the 1760s, and evoke the fact that the ten niches around the room were once populated by life-size plaster figures after the Antique by John Cheere (see article below by Crispin Powell), and are long-since dispersed. We are very excited in anticipation of having visitors' and Friends' reactions to the interpretation when the Court opens properly at the end of September.



Sarah Kay

THE 'MISSING' CHEERE STATUES

In her talk at the Friends Social Evening in November 2008, Jill Tovey mentioned the mystery surrounding the whereabouts of the ten Cheere statues from the Gallery and I think I know where three are, at least. Two are all the way over in the Los Angeles County Museum and one, 'Mercury', was much nearer to home at Kenwood House, the English Heritage property in north London. Perhaps the curators in LA know where the others went to. The grisaille over the Gallery chimney piece has also gone across the pond, to the Met in New York.

As the 6th Earl's taste in furniture was as exceptional and as ground breaking as his landscaping I suppose we should expect American galleries to have fallen over themselves to acquire pieces from Croome. Globe trotting Friends might be interested to know the grand side tables and mirrors from the Gallery are shared between the Met and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The side tables and mirrors from the Saloon are much closer to home, at Temple Newsam near Leeds.

Although it's a long way to go and see the Tapestry Room in the Met, Lord Coventry was the first of six English patrons to commission one. Others still exist at Osterley, Weston Park in Shropshire and Newby Hall in Yorkshire. As Osterley is NT they might put out the welcome mat for a future Friends visit.

Crispin Powell

GUIDED WALK TO THE OUTER EYE-CATCHERS

On Saturday 8th August 2009 a group of Friends gathered outside the RAF building for a guided walk to the outer eye catchers with Michael Smith, Property Manager.

For once it was a glorious day and the first stop was the Arboretum where Michael explained the plans for this part of the park over the next couple of years. He pointed out the work done by the loyal garden volunteers, in particular the coppicing and hedge laying work already completed that looked superb.

From there we progressed to Diane and Derek Skeys's house in Pirton for lunch in their garden. They had set out the garden with small tables with beautiful tablecloths and chairs, which provided a wonderful setting for a delicious leisurely lunch.

After lunch the party progressed across the fields to Pirton Tower, which is undergoing renovation after its acquisition by the Trust.

It's hoped that the work here will be completed by the end of September.

The group then progressed through the fields to the bridge across the motorway and via the road to the Panorama Tower, which is also under renovation. The builders were on site at the Tower, which allowed those who wished to don hard hats, and jacket and go up the Tower. The views from near the top were superb allowing sight of the Court and as far as the Broadway Tower.

At this point some of the party opted to return to the park thanks to Caroline who has arrived in the NT vehicle. The remainder walked back to the National Trust offices at High Green where ice creams and cold drinks were provided and proved very welcome.

In all a wonderful day out and many thanks to Michael for all his explanations along the way.

Phil Douce

YOUNGEST RESIDENT OF CROOME AT WAR?

I recently had the privilege of meeting Michael McDonald, the son of Group Captain J A McDonald, CBE, AFC, the Commanding Officer of RAF Defford from October 1943 to October 1946. He kindly allowed me to access and photograph his father's Flying Log Book and other private papers at his home in Buckinghamshire.

As Station Commander of RAF Defford, Group Captain McDonald and his family lived in the Commanding Officer's House in the grounds of Croome, close to the Officers' Mess, and located on the knoll overlooking the Court and the Park. The buildings were demolished after RAF Defford closed in 1957, but the footings and access roads remain on the grassland within the London Arch and between the Drive and the Church.

As a five year old, Michael remembers roaming the Park. He was enchanted by the Grotto, which he called the Romantic Garden, the statues and stonework among the undergrowth, and the terrors of "The Pit", a dangerous place for a small boy which we now know as the Ice House. The Park was wonderful to explore, but as the only child within the Top Secret security base, it was a lonely place too. Michael's best friend was a kindly German prisoner-of-war, whose job it was to cut the grass in front of the house – a continuous, non-stop job using a scythe.

Later, the family moved to a house called Hind Fields at Overbury. But Michael feels he can well lay claim to be the youngest person to have lived at Croome during the War.

Group Captain McDonald, who was familiarly known as “Mac” by everyone in the RAF from Air Chief Marshall Sir John Slessor downwards, was born in 1898, and had a long career in the RAF starting in the First World War. In January 1921, he joined HQ Communications Flight at Northolt as a young Pilot Officer with 56 hours flying time in his log book. The Chanak Crisis in Turkey in 1922 forced the British



Government to rush reinforcements to the area, and “Mac” was posted to No.4 Squadron. He and his fellow pilots flew their Bristol Fighters off the deck of HMS Argus to land in the Dardanelles neutral zone, even though none of them had flown off an aircraft carrier before. Later, this experience was put to good use when forces were rushed to the crisis in Shanghai in 1927, and “Mac” had to learn quickly to fly float-planes as well as landplanes. After serving with various squadrons in the UK, he was posted to India in 1943, only to return to England in the autumn to take command at Defford.

On arrival at Defford, “Mac” found morale had been dented by a series of fatal crashes. Experimental test flying of radar was a dangerous business for aircrew and scientists alike.

He set about restoring morale by leading from the front. He piloted many of the different aircraft at Defford, including such challenging types as the Corsair, Typhoon, Tempest and the jet Meteor. He was obliged to bail out of a Spitfire which buried itself in the ground near Cheltenham. Most memorably, he championed the pioneering work on automatic blind landing, and personally piloted the aircraft on many of the trials and demonstrations. He identified correctly the need to sell the idea to Government officials and, with the end of the war in sight, the Civil Aviation authority. We have to thank the pioneering drive of “Mac” McDonald for the ability of modern airliners to take off and land in all weathers by day and by night, something we now take for granted. After the War, as Deputy Commandant of Heathrow Airport, “Mac” would have had the satisfaction of seeing his early vision brought to fruition with the integrated blind-landing system of the Trident airliner. Group Captain J.A. McDonald, CBE, AFC, died in 1983, aged 85.

Michael McDonald last visited Defford when he attended the RAF Defford Reunion in 1994, and he was delighted to hear of the great progress made since then at Croome by the National Trust and the supporting volunteers. He was unable to come to the 2009 Reunion (held for the first time this year in the Court itself), as the date clashed with the family gathering for his 70th birthday! But he sent a message of encouragement and support to the veterans and volunteers at the Reunion. Michael hopes to visit Croome again soon, and perhaps re-live his boyhood memories.

Bob Shaw

WEST MIDLANDS SUPPORTER GROUPS REGIONAL CONFERENCE

On a pleasant early autumn morning in September, about sixty representatives gathered at Charlecote Park for one of the occasional Conferences organised by the West Midlands Region. Liz Roberts, the Regional Director, Jane Farrington, Chair of the Regional Committee, and others, including Christine Doyle, Marketing & Communications Manager, spoke about current

National Trust strategy; and Lucy Armstrong, Project Curator for the Atmospheres project, gave an interesting account of original ways in which the Trust is seeking to make properties more “atmospheric” in terms of their particular character and period. Candles and artificial wood smoke scents, we were told, were amongst the ways in which an atmosphere could be created.

Your Chairman, Vice Chairman and Treasurer attended this Conference on the Friends behalf. I think we found the occasion informative, and we learned amongst other things that the Handbook and National Trust house style will change very soon, with, for instance, “The” dropped from the Trust’s title.

Tours of the house and garden rounded off the day and we came away feeling that it had been time well spent, though more opportunity for sharing ideas by Supporters Groups in a forum, say, would have been welcome; we were rather spoken at a little too much.

Eric Jones

VISIT TO KELMARSH HALL

On Thursday 25 June as the party of friends waited on a slightly chilly morning for our coach to arrive, as a first time visitor to Kelmarsh, I was quite unaware of the treat in store. We were quickly and uneventfully taken to our destination in Northamptonshire, the coach driver skilfully squeezing the coach through the gates clearly not designed to accommodate this particular form of transport.

At last we were treated to the first sight of the Palladium design house built in the early 1730s. The sun was out to greet us and from then on we enjoyed an almost perfect summer’s day. We had arrived a little early, but after a few minutes were split into two parties to tour either the house or the eagerly anticipated Croome Collection.

I joined the party that initially toured the



house. The guide was very good at relaying the history of the house and family. The feel of the house, although now not occupied, was very much of a home, albeit a very exclusive and “country life” home. This was undoubtedly due to the influence of Nancy Tree (later Lancaster) who was largely responsible in the late 1920s for the re-styling of the house, the presence of cut

flowers all through the rooms, a lasting recognition of her influence. I particularly liked the library, but there was much to admire and the presence of family connections very apparent.

Finally we were to see the Croome Collection and were not disappointed. As we walked up the staircase we were immediately struck with the wonderful sight of the Coventry portraits and landscapes of Croome. The rooms have been well laid out to allow good access around the furniture to view closely all the detail. The portrait of the 6th Earl of Coventry in the dining room was for me the pinnacle of the tour and the most lasting memory of the day. I'm glad to have seen the collection at last, rather than just images in publications.

After the two tours we had our lunch and had time to walk around to explore the grounds and gardens. It was a perfect June afternoon, the vista from the house to the lake, the view from the rose garden to the Church, the long herbaceous borders, full of colour, and the walled garden being carefully tended by the volunteer gardeners. Everything a garden should have was there to be enjoyed. Time slipped away and we were all too soon rejoining the coach having had our afternoon tea.

It was a wonderful day out and I can only thank the organisers for their efforts which I know were not inconsiderable.

Alan Gath

PHOTOS FROM THE PARK

Tadjio has been taking his amazing photos throughout the park over the past few months. To see photos of all aspects of Croome, including the opening of the Court please visit the website www.Croome.fotopic.net. Tadjio would welcome any comments you have on his photos.

Tadjio Szczepanik

WEEKEND IN CORNWALL

On 1st October 21 Friends set off by coach for a short break to view National Trust properties and gardens in Cornwall. After a break for coffee we stopped at Killerton, an 18th century property near Exeter. There we toured the house which contained a fascinating collection of 18th to 20th century costumes. In brilliant sunshine, many of the Friends enjoyed a tour of the gardens, some riding an NT buggy. Then on to our hotel at Carlyon Bay near St Austell for the next four nights.

The next day our itinerary took us to the Tate Gallery and Barbara Hepworth Museum in St Ives but unfortunately these were closed, so we diverted to Falmouth to explore the town and visit the recently opened Maritime Museum. That afternoon we travelled on to Marazion to visit the 12th century castle at St Michael's Mount. As the tide was in we travelled to the Mount by boat –



much to the delight of some of our party, fortunately the water was calm. Once on the island we climbed the "Pilgrim's Steps and Path" which is a very steep cobbled uneven route to the Castle entrance. The Chief Guide met us and led us round the Castle, explaining its history.

Day three took us to the Eden Project and the Lost Gardens of Heligan. At the Eden Project we met our guide who gave us a most informative tour of the Rainforest Biome. We were guided through the steamy rainforests of Malaysia, West Africa and South America where we saw cocoa beans and coffee beans growing. Then on to the Mediterranean Biome where amongst



other fascinating plants we saw citrus fruits and cotton plants growing. At Heligan we were able to explore the Jungle Walk and other parts of this historic garden which was only rediscovered in recent years.

Sunday took us to the National Trust's magnificent Lanhydrock. Greeted by the Visitor Services Manager, we then toured the historic house and grounds including the 17th century gatehouse, the 19th century house with its servants' quarters, and learned something of the devastating fire which occurred in the 1880's. The same afternoon we visited Trelassick Gardens positioned at the head of the Fal Estuary. In the evening after dinner we were all relaxing in our hotel rooms when suddenly the fire alarm went off and everyone, many in their pyjamas, had to evacuate the building. It was a false alarm caused by someone leaving a space heater switched on below the smoke sensor!!

The following day we checked out of our hotel, stopping for coffee at Buckfast Abbey, home to a community of Benedictine monks, before arriving in Bristol to visit SS Great Britain. She was the first ocean liner built of iron and after an interesting history of travelling the world ended her sailing days in the Falklands where she was used as a floating warehouse before being scuttled. In 1970 she was returned to the dry dock in Bristol where she was built and was "refitted" to show how the first class and steerage accommodation on board would have looked. She was "relaunched" on her glass plate water within the dry dock in 2005, her 162nd birthday.

It was then back to Worcestershire having thanked our coach driver for taking us to our various destinations and also Connie for organising the trip.

John Willis

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Although reports elsewhere in the Newsletter cover most of the main news from Croome, there are one or two other things to be said. Above all, the first weekend of the Court's opening, 26th and 27th September, was a great success: the number of visitors was over 1,700. Staff and Volunteers were at full stretch and, although no doubt a tiring weekend for those who had earlier been heavily involved in all the preparations for opening, it was surely very rewarding to have so many people come to see "Croome Reunited".

Some visitors, of course, came with memories of fairly recent years and, for them, the "Croome before the National Trust" displays must have been especially interesting; others no doubt came with great curiosity to see a building which had been mysterious and closed for so long. All were fascinated and it's safe to say, impressed. Many favourable comments were received, and similarly there was praise from many who had also been at the Friday opening event. The full television and press coverage almost certainly helped to increase visitor numbers over what was surely a memorable weekend.

I wish to put on record our thanks and appreciation of all the work done by Regional staff to make Croome Court's opening such a success; they, together with Croome staff, worked as a dedicated team in what was a challenging and well-executed feat of organisation. Friends and Volunteers particularly thank our Regional Director, Liz Roberts, for the tribute that was paid to us all by the opening event.

The same weekend saw return visits to the Walled Garden by the Friends to see what further transformations had taken place during the year. Return visitors and newcomers alike were hugely impressed by the restoration work being undertaken and already achieved, as they were also by Chris and Karen Cronin's generous hospitality.

The Friends Newsletter has been highly praised during the year by Heelis, and we were told it is seen as one of the leaders in the field and so, too, is the Friends organisation itself. Caroline Cooper from Heelis paid us a second visit in August to learn more about the Friends and to gain ideas and suggestions for other Supporter Groups in the process of being set up.

In conclusion, I would like to put on record the Committee's appreciation of Lindsay's excellent work in editing our Newsletters and, for my part, to thank both Lindsay and the Committee for their continuing support of the Friends - their support of the Supporters!

Eric Jones

SOCIAL CALENDAR

- 10 Nov 09** – Social Evening with talk "Croome D'Abitot Worcestershire/Bunceton Missouri Connection" by Arthur Casey, followed by a finger buffet at the RAF Building, start 7.15pm
- 20 Jan 10** – Festive Meal, venue to be arranged
- 16 Feb 10** – Talk by Susan Leech "Croome Court Tapestry Room" at the RAF Building, start 7.15pm
- 27 & 28 Feb 10** – Tours of Croome Court with Michael Smith, Property Manager
- 25 Mar** – AGM

Details of all the above events will be emailed/posted to you by members of the committee prior to each event, but put these dates in your diary now – it's a great programme

Christine Adams

YOUR COMMITTEE

Here are the members of your committee, appointed at the AGM:

Chairman:	Eric Jones
Vice Chairman:	John Henderson
Secretary:	Joan Willis
Treasurer:	Alan Lee
Membership Secretary:	Diana Skeys
Programme Secretary:	Christine Adams
Members:	Eileen Clement
	Geoff Sherwood
	Jill Tovey
	John Lanigan
	Graham Evans
	Wendy Carter
	Janet Soley
	Michael Smith (NT)

AND FINALLY ...

Please email your articles for the Spring 2010 newsletter to me at any time.

With thanks to Susan Keys, Chris Cronin, Tadjio Szczepanik, Jeremy Milln, John Willis, Robert Shaw, Lindsay Gray, Worcester Records Office and The National Trust for the photos.

Lindsay Gray
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BRAINTEASERS

Spring 2009 Answers

Q. At whose court were the Gunning sisters presented, and, between them, can you name the three Dukes they married?

A. George II
Duke of Coventry
Duke of Hamilton
Duke of Argyll



Stourhead in Wiltshire – another beautiful National Trust garden