

THE FRIENDS OF CROOME



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NEWSLETTER

Chinese Bridge reconstruction at Croome

by Katherine Alker

The biggest project in the parkland at Croome this year is the re-instatement of the Chinese Bridge across the mile and three quarter man-made river. The design for the new bridge is based on the detailed notes and drawings in a 1754 publication called 'Improvements in Architecture and Carpentry' by William Halfpenny, who designed the original bridge in the 1740s (the bridge can also be seen in the iconic 1758 painting of Croome by Richard Wilson).

When Lancelot 'Capability' Brown arrived at Croome in 1751, having just been commissioned by the 6th Earl of Coventry to redesign both the house and landscape, he would have seen the relatively newly built bridge spanning a short, straight section of water. Unlike the church and village, this Chinese style bridge was incorporated into Brown's design for the landscape, and the bridge stood until it fell into disrepair, and collapsed into the river sometime in the late nineteenth-century.

Contractors WM Longreach started work on site at the end of April, and created a dry working area by siting two huge water-filled dams across the river. An exciting part of this for many of the visitors who were watching from the old bridge was the fish rescue! A large number of tench and rudd, along with a few eels and fresh water mussels, were moved over the bunds into the river. Once the area was ready, two concrete pads were poured into shuttering set into the riverbed on which the wooden piers would stand. The bridge itself was constructed offsite by the Green Oak Carpentry Company. They used green oak for the main span of the bridge and greenheart, a durable wood considered to be one of the



Chinese Bridge under construction © James Dobson

best-suited woods for use in water, for the piers. The oak finials along the bridge were turned on a lathe.

The bridge was swung into place in sections by a huge crane at the end of May, and it was incredible to see the giant jigsaw of the Chinese Bridge, which we knew so well from the drawings, come to life. During the next year or so the oak will slowly dry and cracks will appear in the wood, these are to be expected, and are known as 'shakes'. In the Wilson painting the bridge appears to be painted a whitish colour. Over the coming months the final decision as to whether our new bridge should be painted will be made.

The new bridge is simply stunning, and has dramatic impact on views across the parkland and from the court. It's wonderful to see another part of the restoration of the eighteenth-century design at Croome put back in place.



The reinstated Chinese Bridge at Croome © Katherine Alker

www.friendsofcroomepark.org.uk

Friends of Croome EVENTS 2015-16 by Christine Adams

2015

Thursday 15 October

'Return of the Coventry Collection' a talk by Michael Forster-Smith, Croome General Manager - 7.15pm (refreshments from 6.45pm).

Thursday 26 November

'Going going gone' a light-hearted evening with local auctioneer Charles Robinson and a talk by former Croome Visitor Services Manager Wendy Carter on the early days of the National Trust at Croome - 7.15pm (refreshments and free-to-enter antiques valuation competition included). Please bring along an item for the auction.

Tuesday 8 December

'Make your own Christmas Angel' a fun morning making pretty angel peg dolls for the festive tree or as a charming gift - 9.45am for 10.00am start (lunch optional).



A Christmas Angel

Tuesday 15 December

Coach trip to Ludlow Tinsel Market and Food Centre - depart 10.00 am; return 4.00pm.

2016

January (tba)

Festive meal at The Oak Inn, Woodmancote near Defford.

February (tba)

'Behind the Scenes' tour of Croome Court with Michael Forster-Smith, Croome General Manager.

Thursday 7 April

Friends of Croome Annual General meeting.

April (tba)

Return of the ever-popular Friends of Croome quiz evening with Paul and Judith Stanley.

May (tba)

Friends of Croome annual holiday, to York.

A Beautiful Survivor from the Croome Tapestry Room

by Jill Tovey

One small and elegant piece of furniture that was made in 1767 especially for the Tapestry Room, survives in the Croome Estate Trust Collection. It is a Water Stand, designed by Robert Adam and manufactured by Mayhew & Ince; made specially to hold a beautiful and unique Ewer and Basin, dated 1767, from the Sèvres factory in Paris. This water set is oval in shape and intricately painted with a decoration of dense patterns in delicate shades of purple, red, blue with gilding, on a white ground. The pattern is of almost unequalled quality – so superlative that, after seeing it King Louis XV ordered a copy to be made for his own collection.



Sèvres Ewer and Bowl © Joanna Gwilt

There's no record of the 6th Earl of Coventry visiting Paris after 1764, so all his subsequent dealings must have been by letter. One such letter to him in March 1767 from Bachelier, the Art Director at Sèvres, begins: I have delivered to Mr Foley 'le jatte et le Broc' you have ordered me to have made... it cost the huge sum of 480 livres (£20). Mr Foley would have arranged the transport to England.

The wood chosen for the stand to hold it was Padoukwood, which is bright red when freshly cut, so would have married very well with the brilliant colours of the tapestries. The bill of September 1767 from Mayhew & Ince describes it as 'A very neat Carved Stand for Ewer & Basin of Redwood & Varnished, £14-17s-0d'. However, perhaps because of difficult communication in the eighteenth-century, the holder

for the basin is slightly too deep and it isn't easy to fit the jug between the supports onto the lower platform. But these slight anomalies in no way detract from the perfect marriage of wood and porcelain, in that neither outshines the other, but they complement each other perfectly.

Symbolically, this beautiful 'marriage' is the first object to be returned to Croome Court after 65 years, as the centrepiece of the exhibition, mounted in what is still known as the Tapestry Room. It is displayed alone, dramatically lit in the otherwise darkened room, as an icon of the 'Loss and Survival' of the eighteenth-century Coventry collection. What makes the display even more pertinent is that the unveiling of the rather battered early eighteenth-century panelling reveals a previous layer of loss in this enigmatic house. Next door, in what was the Library, is the exhibition telling the story of the 'Loss and Survival' of the Croome Tapestries. The rest of the Collection still owned by the Croome Estate Trust will return to Croome on long-term loan in 2016.



Water Stand © Joanna Gwilt

Croome update

by Michael Forster-Smith

The first part of 2015 has been another strong period of visitor number growth, with over 90,000 visitors coming to Croome between March and July this year. This is 11,000 up on the same period last year and indicates that the recent road closure at High Green has not had significant negative implications on the number of people able to get to Croome.

Over 39,000 visitors have ventured onto the Sky Café scaffold platform, and a similar number have visited the RAF Defford museum with a good number of positive comments and reviews received for both ventures. With events such as the Summer Reading Challenge and Teddy Bear zip wire drawing significant crowds during the school summer holidays, there is a real sense that Croome is a National Trust property open to everyone, no matter what their interest or background.

At Croome we are certainly fulfilling the National Trust's ambition to "care for special places, forever, for everyone." Alongside the considerable growth in visitor numbers we have also advanced well with our long-term project to restore Croome's eighteenth-century landscape and architectural design. Another milestone was reached at the end of July with the opening of the newly restored Chinese Bridge, carved from oak and modelled in accordance with William Halfpenny's original late-1740s design. The opening ceremony brought together those who have contributed to this wonderful project, with the ribbon being cut and the bridge declared open by Martin Drury, chairman of the Monument 85 Fund, which granted the majority of the financing for the project. Lord Flight of Worcester also made a speech thanking the Croome Court Appeal Committee for their funding contribution to the project to reinstate the bridge.

Work is also progressing well on the Croome Redefined package of repair projects at Croome Court. The main structural repairs within the mansion are now complete, the new lead roof is largely finished and repairs are well underway on the sash windows. We anticipate that all of the high-level work on the exterior of the court will be complete by the end of September this year, which is our provisional date for removing the Sky Café scaffold. Once the interior repairs are complete we will begin the preparations for the return of the Coventry collection of furniture and paintings, scheduled for spring 2016.



The Sky Café scaffold platform at Croome Court © NT Croome



With regard to safeguarding Croome's wartime history, the repair of the Ambulance Garage is now finished. Visitors were able to gain a first glimpse of the interior of this building during our 1940s weekend in the middle of July, and we hope to open the building fully in the autumn. Our preparatory work for the next stages of restoring the Sergeants' and Orderlies' Quarters and Latrines includes protected species surveys and structural investigations, both of which are being carried out this summer. Bat and newt surveys are a regular part of our restoration planning and it is notable how nature at Croome has benefited from our programme of restoration work over the last two decades, with growing numbers of protected species happily sharing Croome with ever-greater numbers of visitors.



Window repairs underway at Croome Court © NT Croome



Changing colours at Croome, September 2015 © NT Croome

A dastardly misdemeanour at Pirton Pool (or “The Croome Affray”)

by Derek and Diana Skeys



The White Horse, Pershore (demolished in the late-1800s) © Marion Freeman

It was December 1844. George William the 9th Earl of Coventry had inherited the title in 1843 at the age of 5 years. Trustees, one of whom was Richard Temple who lived at The Nash, were then running the estate.

The social and economic conditions in England at that time resulted in many of the poor turning to poaching, to either provide food or add to their income by selling rabbits and hares for 2s 6d each. A night's poaching could bring in more than several weeks wages, but those taking part were taking a huge risk. Conviction led to “transportation beyond seas’ or ‘imprisonment and hard labour’.

Landowners recruited armies of watchers to support their gamekeepers and go out at night to try and apprehend the poachers, and all sides were only too keen to turn any encounter into a fight.

The members of a poaching gang from the Newlands area of Pershore, many of whom had previous convictions for poaching, were: Joseph Turvey, Samuel Dingley, George Lippett, Samuel Turvey, George Brant, Thomas Hooper, John Cook, Joseph Tandy, William Cosnett, Thomas Collins and William Broomfield.

A raid was planned for the evening of 19 December 1844. The target ground was land belonging to Lord Coventry at Park Farm near to Pirton Pool. The gang leaders met up at 11.00am at the White Horse public house in Pershore. The plan was for all the gang members to meet up at Stocking Bank at 6.30pm.

In the meantime the gang leaders agreed to try and obtain as many guns as possible and meet up again at 5.00pm. This gathering ended up as something of a drunken spree, those involved having drunk copious quantities of cider. As a result the gang did not meet up at Stocking Bank until after 7.30pm, before setting off towards Besford and on to Pirton armed with 7 guns and four cudgels.

Joseph Hooper, who had been appointed head gamekeeper by Richard Temple, had received information of the likelihood of a raid that evening and had recruited a posse of 10 watchers to go out on surveillance under the leadership of Thomas Staite. Other watchers were: Staite's brother Charles, their brother-in-law Samuel Reynolds, Richard and William Compton, Samuel Miller a boatman from Worcester and George Bayliss, William Andrews and John Francis all farm labourers from Clifton.

The watchers met up at Hooper's house and then made their way to Rabbit Bank, where they were alerted to the presence of poachers by the barking of dogs. As Richard Compton climbed over the gate across the Park Farm drive he saw a number of men approaching him. At first the poachers thought he was one of their number but, when they realised he was not, one of them struck Compton over the head with the butt of a gun, whereupon he fell back and was beaten and kicked by several others.

Three of the gang came up behind Thomas Staite and William Compton. Staite began lashing out with his stick when he received a blow on the head from the butt of a gun the force of which broke the stock. Staite uttered a loud groan and fell to the ground. As the other watchers approached they decided that discretion was the better part of valour and ran away as fast as they could with the poachers shooting at them. One was peppered with shot in both hands; two others had their hats blown off. Only William Compton was left; he was surrounded by several poachers and given a severe beating.

The poachers made their way home carrying their equipment and 7 hares, arriving back in Pershore by 1.00am. After they had disappeared, Richard Andrews returned to the scene in search of Thomas Staite. He found him lying in a ditch smothered in blood and quite insensible. Andrews and Richard Compton carried him back to the gamekeeper's house. Joseph Hooper's wife was at home. She immediately sent for the local doctor. Dr George Miller Pritchett arrived from Kempsey at 2.30am, cleaned Staite's wounds and arranged for him to be taken to Worcester Royal Infirmary. Staite was operated on by Mr Matthew Pierpoint, but died on Christmas Eve.



The exterior of Croome Court, 1904 © Country Life

The Compton brothers were able to identify some of the gang, as they too had been born and lived in the area of Pershore. The poachers duly appeared at Worcester Assizes on 12 March 1845. Ten prisoners were brought to the bar to face five indictments (George Lippett gave evidence against his fellow prisoners).

They were charged with having wilfully and with malice aforethought killed and wounded Thomas Staite by feloniously assaulting him with certain guns and bludgeons inflicting diverse mortal wounds, fractures and contusions whereof he did languish and die. The second indictment charged the accused with assaulting William Compton with intent to kill and

murder him, the third charged Thomas Collins with shooting at George Bayliss with intent to kill and murder him, and the remainder of the gang were charged with aiding and abetting. The fourth charged Samuel Turvey, Thomas Hooper, Joseph Turvey and Joseph Tandy with assaulting Richard Compton with intent to kill. The fifth indictment charged all of the accused with feloniously shooting at John Francis. To all these indictments each pleaded not guilty.

Richard Godson QC presented the case for the defence. He contended that not one accused could be convicted of murder, that the gamekeeper Staite had been killed was undisputed, but it could not be proved that the acts that caused his death were carried out with malice aforethought. There was absolutely no proof of a concerted plan amongst the prisoners to resist any keepers, in fact it could be contended that far from being an unprovoked attack on Staite and his companions it had been a case of the former rushing in amongst them, laying about them with all his might with a heavy loaded bludgeon. Finally, Mr. Godson appealed to the jurors' sensibilities: "Let the jury reflect that upon their verdict depends the fate of ten poor wives and fifty children, and consider that the whole matter in dispute was a few hares, protected for the amusement of an infant seven-year-old Earl."

The jury retired for a quarter of an hour. On their return the foreman delivered the verdict: "We find the prisoners guilty of manslaughter." The court resumed at 9.00am the next day, when the judge sentenced the Turveys, Dingley and Tandy to transportation for life; Hooper, Broomfield and Cook to transportation for 10 years; Brant to transportation for 7 years; and Cosnett and Collins to 2 years imprisonment with hard labour. The case had lasted for 17 hours.



Pirton Pool clear and calm © James Hetherington

What became of the men who were transported to Australia? Thomas Hooper 'drowned himself in a fit of insanity' on 8 August 1863. Francis Dingley died in Tasmania on 13 March 1846/8. George Brant died on 30 July 1848. Samuel Turvey married in 1858 at Hamilton, Tasmania and died on 9 March 1880. Joseph Tandy died at Launceston, Tasmania on 23 July 1880, suffering from Erysipelas. Joseph Turvey died on 11 June 1884 age 84, in the New Town Pauper Establishment, Hobart, Tasmania.

The development of airborne radar

by Graham Evans

At **Orford Ness** in the mid-1930s Sir Robert Watson-Watt and Arnold 'Skip' Wilkins of the National Physical Laboratory first developed equipment for the detection of aircraft. The location's remoteness and difficult access soon prompted the need for a more suitable base for the growing number of staff working on radar.



Buildings at Orford Ness used for early radar research
© English Heritage



Remains of D-site, TRE Worth Matravers © Phil Champion

So, it was at nearby **Bawdsey Manor** the first 'Chain Home' towers were perfected. This enabled aircraft to be detected up to 100 miles away, and proved decisive in winning the Battle of Britain in 1940. The vulnerable position right on the coast, however, led to another relocation, to Dundee, but only for a short while. The team had by this time been named the Air Ministry Research Establishment (AMRE), with its dedicated flight of 10 aircraft, the Special Duties Flight (SDF) at **RAF Martlesham Heath** moving to Scone, near Perth.

This proved unworkable and two months later the SDF moved to **RAF St Athan** in South Wales. It was soon realised that this was also far from ideal. In May 1940 the AMRE was relocated to **Worth Matravers** in Dorset and became the Telecommunications Research Establishment (TRE). At the same time the SDF moved to Christchurch, but in August 1941 it moved yet again, this time to **RAF Hurn**, where it combined with the aircraft of the Fighter Experimental Establishment and the Blind Landing Detachment and was renamed the Telecommunications Flying Unit (TFU).

Following Operation Biting in February 1942, where a raid of a German Giant Wurzburg radar installation secured vital components, it was decided that Worth Matravers was vulnerable to a reprisal raid.

Consequently on 26 May 1942 the TRE relocated again, this time to **Malvern**, with the TFU transferring to the airfield still under construction at **Defford**.

The TFU tested newly invented radar equipment created by the scientists at Malvern. One of the more important systems, the Air to Surface Vessel radar operated with information supplied by the code breakers of Bletchley Park, was installed in aircraft of Coastal Command and led to the destruction of the U-boat fleet and subsequent winning of the Battle of the Atlantic during 1943.

By 1957 the size of the new generation of aircraft, especially the V-bombers, proved too great for the runways of Defford and what became the final move of aircraft was made to **RAF Pershore**. Finally in 1976 the unit was disbanded and the end of an era had finally arrived.

The development of radar can still be followed at certain National Trust properties including Attingham Park (RAF Atcham), Blickling Hall (RAF Oulton), Hughenden Manor, Orford Ness, Tatton Park, as well as Croome (RAF Defford).

Let the bells ring out at Croome

by John Henderson

The sound of church bells drifting over the parkland on a Sunday has been a regular delight for visitors for the last four years or so. It has all been possible due to Paul Smith and his team, who have been presented recently with an award for their regular ringing at Croome by Loyd Grossman, of Masterchef fame and the Chairman of the Churches Conservation Trust, which owns the church and churchyard.

The bells had only been in intermittent use over recent decades and needed care and attention. Paul, with his father and uncle undertook the task. The large wooden wheels which provide the leverage to operate each bell were restored and the bearings and bolts for each of the six bells were eased, lubricated and tightened.



The Bell Frame at Croome church © Philip Halling

Of the bells themselves, five were removed from the earlier church near the court to be re-hung in the new church in 1763. Of these, four were cast during the Commonwealth, the heaviest of which weighs over half a ton. The fifth bell dated 1699 was cast in Gloucester. A sixth bell dated 1812 was brought from London and added to the peel in the present church.

For all who visit Croome, when the bells are sounding, a real impression of rural tranquillity is conveyed, enhancing the visual delights of the landscape. For this, we all immensely grateful to Paul and his band of enthusiastic bell ringers.

New layout to celebrate the revival of the Croome Walled Gardens

by Victoria Cronin



The Walled Gardens at Croome
(www.theenglishgarden.co.uk)

The Walled Gardens at Croome Court opened to the public on special dates this year, revealing plans to develop a modern look on the eighteenth-century Georgian gardens.

Chris and Karen Cronin bought the walled garden in 2000, when it was nothing more than an overgrown wilderness with dilapidated buildings. Since then, they have invested an enormous amount of time and money restoring the seven-acre site and its associated buildings to create one of the finest Georgian walled gardens in the UK.

A total of 1km of paths, which will divide the gardens into six discrete zones, are to be laid by the end of October 2015. Each zone will have a unique shape and theme within the broader story. The paths will all be 2.5m wide, steel-edged with a 'Forest of Dean' aggregate surface finish.

140 fruit trees are to be planted 'espalier' style along the primary paths. The avenues will portray the history of apples and pears with a mixture of heritage and modern varieties from Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.

Further planting this year includes 6,000 daffodils, 1,000 crocuses, 200 hyacinths and 200 tulips to complement the 1,000, which already populate the east-facing border. Other work to be carried out includes a new 'state of the art' irrigation system to be installed by early spring 2016.

'Plum Lines'

by Rachel Sharpe and Eileen Clement

At the Croome Redefined 'Year Ahead' meeting in February, Plum Lines, a poetry project which will fulfil the ambition of the 'People's Collection' (outlined in the original Croome Redefined funding bid), was first conceived. It is an innovative outreach and creative arts project in partnership with Pershore Library. Inspired by the history of the Croome Estate Jam Factory and the role of the 9th Earl of Coventry in helping to set up the Women's Institute in Pershore, Croome will be creating an exhibition of pots of jam, which hold the key to one hundred women's stories from World War I. But these won't be ordinary jam pots; we will be working with a contemporary glass artist to create 100 bespoke pots, each one depicting a poem inspired by a local family's story.

To do this Plum Lines need you! We are at the very early stages of planning. If you would like to join the team of staff and volunteers who will be guiding the project, please let Rachel know. In addition we have sixteen funded workshop days where participants will have the opportunity to work with two professional



Pershore Women's Institute (formed in 1916) © Marion Freeman

poets to create a personal poem based on their own family's history from the Great War. One of these days will be dedicated to Croome volunteers and staff. If you would like to take part please let us know.

We are also looking for other groups who may like to host one of the other 15 poetry days. If you are a member of a group outside of Croome that may be interested, or know of a group that might like to take part (each workshop will need at least 20-30 participants), again please let us know.

Alternatively, if you have a World War I memory (no matter how small) you would like to share, please contact Rachel on rachel.sharpe@nationaltrust.org.uk or Eileen on emcyaffleash@talktalk.net

A Scandalous Church Monument

by Bruce Watson (Worcestershire Recorder, Spring 1999)

(The Worcestershire Recorder is the Newsletter of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society)

Today, Elmley Castle church seems like an archetypal Worcestershire parish church, but it contains a funerary monument which is a reminder of an early eighteenth-century scandal. After the death of the first Earl of Coventry in 1699, his second wife Elizabeth commissioned a large marble monument to perpetuate the grandeur of her late husband.

This monument included a life recumbent marble figure of the late Earl and a lengthy Latin eulogy of his merits, plus a description of his second wife's family history – explaining how she was of noble descent. However, the Earl's son claimed his stepmother's family history was bogus and she was really the daughter of a wood turner, niece to the Earl's housekeeper and that before her marriage she had been one of the Earl's household servants. It was also alleged by the Earl's son that his stepmother



*First Earl of Coventry (1699)
Marble by William Stanton
© The Church Monuments Society*

had inveigled his elderly father into a second marriage. As a result of these allegations litigation started. It sounds just the sort of story that keeps the "News of the World" in business today.

The result of this sorry story was that the completed monument was refused admission to Croome D'Abitôt's church to join the other monuments to the Earl's ancestors. So, in 1700 when Elizabeth, the Countess Dowager (died 1714) married Thomas Savage, Squire of Elmley Castle, she brought the monument to her first husband with her and had it set up in the transept or chapel adjoining the north aisle of the church, next to the monument to her second husband's family. Elmley Castle church is open daily and is well worth a visit. It has a splendid font supported by fierce-looking reptilian dragons.

Summer Reading Challenge 2015

by Rachel Sharpe



Lemn Sissay performs to a packed audience at Croome

The Summer Reading Challenge is a national initiative to encourage and support children to read during their long holiday from school. The opportunity for participants' families to visit and enjoy events at Croome has proved a huge incentive for young people across Worcestershire to take part.

This year our partnership with the libraries and learning service was an enormous success, with everyone pulling out all the stops to make each of the three daylong events a resounding success; we've received so many supportive comments about how welcoming Croome is for new audiences.

We had the great pleasure of welcoming Cathy Cassidy, one of the country's bestselling children's authors, whose official opening of this year's reading challenge was so inspirational some audience members were brought to tears. Her assertion of the importance of libraries and reading in the lives of children reverberated across the whole event.

Those who had the chance to witness internationally acclaimed author and broadcaster Lemn Sissay in action will surely never forget how he held the audience enthralled throughout each of his performances. His opening of the new RAF audio trail 'Under the Radar' was a special moment, and he was genuinely thrilled by the outstanding quality of the children's poems which feature on the trail's listening posts. This and his enjoyment of the entire experience at Croome was something

he shared afterwards with his thousands of followers on social media. The young poets who performed a slam about the boys' school at Croome were overjoyed to be sharing a stage with their hero.

John Dougherty, another celebrated author, delighted visitors with his readings and songs. He also introduced the three young winners from last year's writing competition, who have worked with children's author Roddy Brooks to create a wonderful new children's book 'Croome Through Charlie's Eyes', and thanked the individuals from Croome who have provided advice throughout the project. John's countdown to the official launch of the new work was magical, with children in the audience eagerly downloading the book there and then.

We were also joined by local artist Peter Chand whose storytelling in the church was beautiful. The poetry workshops with Brenda Read-Brown and Roy MacFarlane were very well attended and thoroughly enjoyed. Sorcha Cummins' puppetry performance storytelling was full to bursting; she is developing a real following amongst Croome's visitors. Finally, the Croome Encounters actors were quite literally mobbed by children after some spell-binding performances of 'The Great Escape' in the court.

Nationally, Lemn Sissay is a spokesperson for community cohesion and the arts. It is fitting to finish with his words: "Really important work is happening here, really important!"