

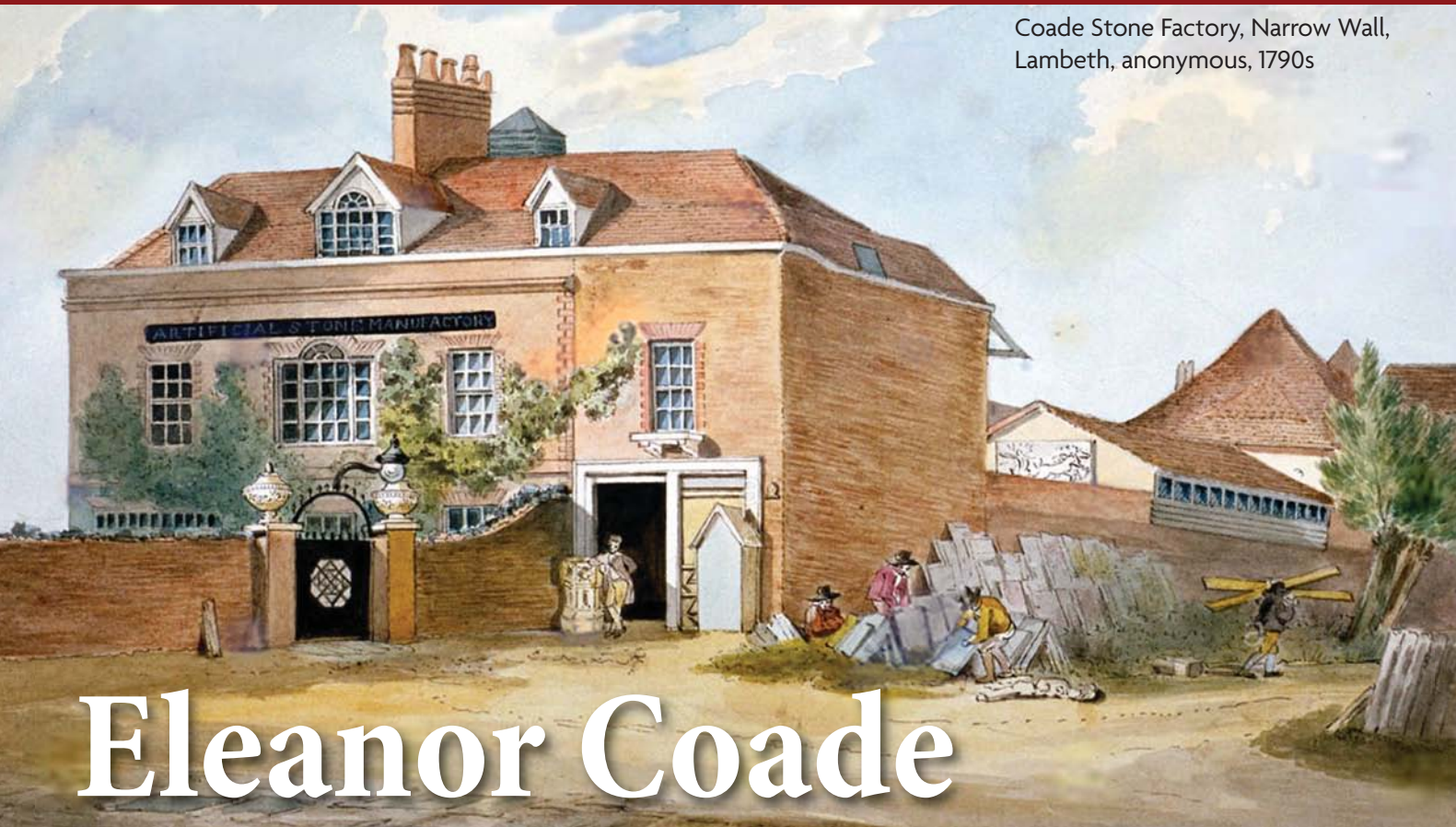
# THE FRIENDS OF CROOME



## NEWSLETTER

Spring 2018 Issue 28

Coade Stone Factory, Narrow Wall,  
Lambeth, anonymous, 1790s



## Eleanor Coade

### a Georgian Heroine by Joanne Major and Sarah Murden

Eleanor Coade (1733-1821) was an extremely successful businesswoman during the Georgian era, something which was highly unusual. It seems likely that she inherited her business acumen from her grandmother, Sarah Enchmarch, a formidable woman from Tiverton, Devon who took over the running of the family textile business for some twenty-five years following the death of her husband, Thomas in 1735.

On reading Sarah Enchmarch's will (proved in 1760), it is clear that as well as providing for her sons, she wanted to ensure that her six daughters were well provided for and that the legacies they received were to be for their use, exclusive of their husbands or future husbands. Sarah also left a legacy of five hundred pounds for her two Coade granddaughters, money that would be invaluable

to Eleanor when she came to establishing her own business. Eleanor is noted for the invention of a product known as Coade Stone, also called Lithodipyra; the secret of its manufacture endures to this day. She ran her very successful manufacturing operation for over fifty years by the King's Arms Stairs on Narrow Wall in Lambeth, having taken over the ailing artificial stone business of a Daniel Pincot in 1769.

You rather get the impression that Eleanor was not a woman to be trifled with and she certainly stood her ground, as shown in the Public Advertiser of September 1771, when she wanted to make it very clear that Daniel Pincot was certainly not the owner of the business, despite rumours to the contrary.



Coade Stone Factory Yard on Narrow Wall, Lambeth c.1800 by Shepherd.



Eleanor Coade trade card

*"Whereas Mr Daniel Pincot has represented himself as a partner in the Manufactory conducted by him, ELEANOR COADE, the real proprietor, finds it needful to inform the public that the said Mr Pincot is no other than a servant to her and that no contracts, or agreements, discharges or receipts will be allowed by her, unless signed by herself."*

The product Eleanor developed was described in a sales brochure for her showroom which opened in 1799, as giving 'durability resembling Jasper and Porphyry. Frost and Damps have no effect upon it, consequently it retains a sharpness not to be diminished by the changes of climate.'

Every piece of stone sent out had the name COADE indented on it, effectively copyrighting Eleanor's work. She was certainly not backward in coming forward in promoting her



Carrie Wishart

A Coade Stone Sphinx at Croome

product and the brochure listed numerous places across Britain where you could see examples of her work.

Coade stone was exported around the world, everywhere from Philadelphia to Poland. Eleanor opened a gallery to which the public were admitted between 10am and 4pm for one shilling per person, so she even managed to make money by charging people to see her work, let alone sell it - what a businesswoman she was!



# Enigma

by Kirsty Bothma and  
Joe Tierney (first published in WR magazine)

*We often feel closest to Elgar when we listen to his music, but to know the world in which he walked is to colour our image of him further. To stand within the four walls of the humble cottage where he was born is to be immersed in a world that Elgar believed already contained music that was there for the taking.*

On 2 June 1857, The Firs, an early 19th century Worcestershire cottage in Broadheath, became the birthplace of Edward Elgar. His father was then an itinerant piano tuner, church organist and amateur violinist.

His mother, a farmer's daughter, wanted above all things a country life for her children. Three older children had been born to them in Worcester and there would be three more when they returned to the city; Edward was the only child to be born in Broadheath. The family life in this cottage was ideal; his mother could communicate to her children a simple faith, which viewed the countryside and the changing seasons as God's promise of immortality.

Elgar's father spent most of the week lodging in Worcester; he would come home at weekends with musical friends and, through him, the family was introduced to much that was best in the music of that time. In 1859, when Elgar was 2 years old, the family left Broadheath. His father's expanding business forced them back into Worcester city. His mother, however, continued to send her children to Broadheath for summer holidays, where they stayed on a farm by the common. Elgar's memories of these holidays were so idyllic that he returned there again and again through later life, almost as if to consult the place.

Although Edward Elgar only spent the first two years of his life there, it is this space that remained close to his heart for the rest of his life. On receiving his baronetcy in 1931, he requested the title Baron Elgar of Broadheath. Before his death in 1934, he confided to his daughter Carice his desire to be remembered there. In 1935, Carice, with the help of Alderman Hubert Leicester, persuaded the corporation of Worcester to purchase The Firs and simultaneously sent out word that all memorabilia relating to her late father be returned to the cottage. Through modern eyes, the cottage forms the nucleus of a museum dedicated to the life of

England's greatest composer. At its conception, the birthplace took on a much simpler, more human form: a daughter, mourning for and commemorating her father.

The birthplace of Sir Edward Elgar is most definitely home to 'Land of Hope and Glory'. Set in sight of his beloved Malvern Hills, this small family home in the village of Lower Broadheath is the perfect environment for nurturing a creative genius. Perhaps by wandering around the garden over the cottage threshold a spark of inspiration may alight in our welcomed guests.

When the National Trust was asked to take over the running of the Birthplace, significant work was undertaken to convert some of the office space into another exhibition room which houses Elgar's desk, examples of his manuscripts and other memorabilia from his study. Other previous office space has been developed into a kitchen, tea room and a small shop. Prior to opening under National Trust stewardship, we have undertaken work in the cottage to return a sense of the ages to this special place. The entrance space has been dressed to replicate the cottage in 1857, while the remaining space in the cottage is given over to exhibition space, as had been the case previously. We have curated the collection to reflect the cottage as Carice intended, creating an immersive setting using earthen colour schemes and evocative display.

We also employ the most up-to-date conservation doctrine and techniques to care for the vast collection and archive, which numbers almost 15,000 objects in total, and we can't wait to share the process with our visitors. After all, we are fundamentally a conservation charity and it's important that our visitors and supporters see how their contributions help preserve these special places.

When we took over the property, the garden was in need of some tender loving care. The team of garden volunteers and staff from nearby Croome took on the work with relish. We



*“My mother’s wish for a country life prompted father to go to Broadheath ... only a hamlet, with a handful of houses, large clump of fir trees by the entrance gate of Newbury House and a wide stretch of heath known as common’. We were always taught to adore him in the smallest flower that grew, as every flower loves its life. And we were told never to dare destroy what we could not give - that was, the life - ever again.”*

Lucy Elgar Blake 1912

*“Whether the countryside makes the genius or however that may be, it is certain that no-one was ever more imbued with the very spirit and essence of his own country than Elgar, it was in his very bones. Worcestershire was everything to him; the very look of spring coming, the cottages, the gardens, the fields and fruit orchards were different to his mind in Worcestershire.. from walking, driving and bicycling, There was very little of the county he did not know, and his memory for every village however remote and every lane however twisty and bewildering was extraordinary.”*

Carice Elgar Blake

have also recruited some garden volunteers for The Firs who have shown real dedication in keeping the garden tidy and full of flowers. We very much hope that our visitors will enjoy the revitalised experience at The Firs, Elgar’s birthplace cottage, and will feel free to comment and advise us on how we might further develop an understanding of Elgar’s life and work here.

During the course of the next five years, we aim to demonstrate that Sir Edward Elgar’s story, with its origins in this humble yet beautiful cottage on the outskirts of Worcester, can bring enlightenment and joy to visitors in the twenty-first century. Should we succeed in finding new ways to bring Elgar’s music to visitors and educational groups, then we very much hope to take on a longer-term responsibility for the site and continue to share the cottage that inspired Elgar throughout the whole of his lifetime.

We are open every Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday over the winter months from 10.00am to 4.00pm. We also offer exclusive group visits on Tuesdays, while Wednesdays and Thursdays are saved for conservation work on our collection. We have many concerts and recitals coming up over the following months with our resident orchestra, Volante Strings, and guest performers from all over the country. We are trying to bring back the live musical element to the site and surprise our visitors

when they least expect it. ‘I have visions of visitors ambling to the cottage, drawn by the sounds of a lone cellist at the foot of the garden,’ dreams our House Steward Joe Tierney.

Along with welcoming our day-to-day visitors and groups, we want the community of Worcester to feel part of this five-year project and help us keep this special place open forever for everyone. We have grand schemes of creating projects with our neighbours of Lower Broadheath and Worcestershire as a whole. Our volunteers here at The Firs are vital to keeping the Birthplace alive; we have such a dedicated and enthusiastic team that have devoted many an hour to making the visitor experience as great as possible. If you would like to join the team, we are always looking for friendly and welcoming individuals no matter their knowledge on the great man himself. As we are such a small site, volunteers, visitors and staff collaborate together to really make a difference here... and you can too.

For every National Trust member who visits, we gain £2.50; for every membership you buy, we get to keep all the proceeds and even the money from the tea you drink and the cake you eat; it all goes towards the conservation cause. So come along and see how you can help keep the Birthplace alive.

*“It gives me enormous pleasure to see The Firs returned as close as possible to its appearance in 1857 when Edward, my great-uncle, was born there. My earliest memories of the little cottage are associated with Carice, Edward’s daughter, in her home, Woodend (now sadly demolished), opposite the Birthplace. My twin sister and I would eagerly look forward to visiting the cottage, not only because Mrs Goodman the caretaker would offer us delicious bread and honey, but because we had always known that this tiny cottage was a very special place. We knew that a member of our family whom we had never met was someone whom we now realise would influence not only our lives but countless others worldwide. I am proud that the National Trust has reinstated so successfully the atmosphere of Elgar’s day. My wish is that all visitors will share something of my passion for the place.”*

Hilary Elgar, Sir Edward Elgar’s great niece





# Garden and Park Update

by Katherine Alker, Garden and Outdoors Manager

We've been busy in the garden and park! The biggest parkland project for a couple of years was completed in November 2017. The weir had been leaking for a while, and combined with the dry winter of 2016/17, the water level in the river and lake looked dreadfully low during most of 2017.



The carriage splash, which was being worn away in the central section, has been rebuilt using blue lias stone. We see blue lias used in many places around Croome; the estate walls, some of the culverts; local houses. Quite a few people asked me why the carriage splash had been built much higher than it was before - I can reassure you that it hasn't! It was extremely important to keep all the levels the same as they were originally intended. This means that the water should cover the carriage splash entirely, with the weir holding back the water until it reaches a certain depth, and then allowing it to overflow into the brook and eventually into the River Severn.



Since the snow fall and heavy rain over the winter, the river level has dramatically increased and water has been pouring over the weir for several weeks now. Water problems can be notoriously difficult to fix - water has found a route along the southern outside edge of the weir, so there is a small amount of work to be done to plug that leak, but the repair and restoration of the carriage splash and weir has been successful.

Upcoming work this year includes more path repairs; our increased visitor numbers throughout the year means that we have more wear and tear in the garden. Most of the paths

were laid over 12 years ago and are due for an upgrade now. We'll continue with the woodland work to remove conifers and re-plant broadleaf species, amongst other work. We shall also aim to keep the garden looking as good as possible.

I must thank the Friends for their continued generosity and support of garden and park projects. In January the memorial to the 6th Earl in the Home Shrubbery was completed. Over the past few years thanks to donations from the Friends of Croome, the stone plinth was repaired; the urn was pieced back together, with the odd new piece where

we couldn't find the original; and finally the plaque with wordy inscription in memory of George William, 6th Earl of Coventry was installed. Nothing of the original plaque remains, and after considerable deliberation with conservators and our curator, slate was the chosen material. We have the complete wording from the Hortus Croomensis, and it proved quite a challenge for the stone carver as there is so much text in a relatively small space! The end result is a spectacular plaque, carved by hand, with stirring words to remember the great man who had the work of art that is Croome, created from a morass.



# The Coventry Collection Returns to Croome Court

by Jane Gallagher

When the local auctioneers Bentley, Hobbs & Mytton of Worcester held their four-day sale at Croome Court, Worcestershire, beginning on 7 December 1948, no one could have imagined the complete reversal of fortune that awaited the house some 70 years later. This was the culmination of seven other sales held that year at Sotheby's in London, which included French and English furniture, continental porcelain, Chinese ceramics, Old Master paintings and drawings, books, carpets, wallpapers, and other works of art. Many pieces had been commissioned or purchased by the 6th Earl of Coventry; many others were subsequently added by the 9th Earl, who crammed the house with objects, creating the comfortable and cluttered Edwardian interiors that can be seen in historical photographs.





*The Saloon c.1915-20  
(Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service)*

In 1887 a trust was set up by the 9th Earl to ensure the continuity of Croome Court, the park and a collection of chattels as 'heirlooms', and in 1921 he extended it to include the wider Croome estate. Following his death in 1930, the title passed to his grandson, George William. However, the events of the Second World War were to change Croome irrevocably: the 10th Earl was killed at Dunkirk in 1940, leaving his six-year-old son as heir, and in the same year Croome was requisitioned by the government. Part of the park was occupied by the RAF, and secret research into airborne radar technology was soon carried out, whilst the house itself was one of a number identified as a refuge for the British royal family in the event of an evacuation from London. For a short while it was also leased to the Dutch government for potential use by Queen Wilhelmina. It was handed back to the Croome Estate Trust in 1946; by that time, in the straitened circumstances after the war, it had become completely untenable as a private residence for the widowed Countess and her young family.

Important heirlooms were sold during this period by the Trustees. They had little choice: many of the objects were too large or too grand for the smaller house on the estate to which the family had moved. American museums purchased major pieces from Croome for display in their galleries of European art. The future of the house itself was precarious, for demolition was a distinct possibility; safeguarding highly significant pieces of eighteenth-century craftsmanship, even overseas, was undoubtedly then the Trustees' best option. In 1949, for example, the Trustees agreed to the sale of all the architectural elements of the Tapestry Room to the Metropolitan Museum, New York. The room was dismantled, crated up and shipped across the Atlantic. It was reconstructed in the museum in 1959 to create a complete ensemble with its original set of Gobelins tapestries, commissioned by the 6th Earl in 1763. These had been sold much earlier by the 9th Earl in 1900 to repay family debts, and were later acquired by the Metropolitan Museum, with the help of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, which had bought the dispersed elements of the Tapestry Room.

It took the Croome Estate Trustees some time to find an alternative owner for the Court, but eventually in 1950 the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham acquired the building and 30 acres of land and established St. Joseph's School. It is surprising, perhaps, that some valuable and significant heirlooms remained in the house; these included a magnificent pair of pier glasses designed by Robert Adam, commissioned in 1765 for the Long Gallery, which was put into use as the school refectory. These were also later acquired by the Metropolitan Museum in 1959.

A group of family portraits was also retained in the Saloon though their original carved and gilded eighteenth-century frames, commissioned by the 6th Earl from William Linnell, were sold to the Metropolitan Museum in 1960 (the pictures were re-set in plain frames). The magnificent set of library bookcases designed by Robert Adam for the 6th Earl and made by the cabinetmakers Vile & Cobb also remained in the house until the 1970s; at that time, owing to their heavy use as stationery cupboards by the school, they were acquired by the V&A Museum.

The family portraits similarly remained in situ, even after the school was closed in 1979 and the Court was sold to the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, becoming Chaitanya College in 1980. The Hare Krishna community of over 400 people added their own layer to Croome's history, most memorably with the colourful decoration they applied to the plasterwork in the Dining Room.



*The Dining Room*

*Decoration by the Hare Krishna community and the Golden Box ceramics installation*

The Hare Krishna community lived at Croome until 1984. Thereafter the property passed through various ownerships and was put to a number of alternative and at times insensitive commercial uses. When the opportunity arose to reacquire the house, the Croome Estate Trustees established the Croome Heritage Trust which purchased the property, reuniting it with the historic parkland which the National Trust had gradually begun to acquire and restore in the 1990s. The house is now leased to the National Trust for 999 years, and once again forms the core of the complete work of art envisaged by the 6th Earl, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and Robert Adam.

With the purchase of the house came the opportunity to return the collection of objects still retained by the Croome Estate Trust. A project to reintroduce and present the objects, most of which were temporarily on public view at Kelmars Hall, Northamptonshire, got underway and in early 2017 the majority of the collection returned to the house.

Many of the most significant objects are those commissioned by the 6th Earl for both Croome Court and Coventry House in London. These include pieces designed by Robert Adam and made by some of the leading cabinetmakers and carvers of the period, notably Mayhew & Ince, Vile & Cobb and France & Bradburn. Surviving designs by Adam for some of the pieces, together with an extensive archive of bills submitted by the craftsmen, are to be found in both Sir John Soane's Museum, London, and the Croome archive (now held by the Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service). The 6th Earl was a Francophile. He bought French furniture, tapestries, and important pieces of Sèvres porcelain, including a richly enamelled tea service or *déjeuner 'du roi'* of 1764 painted with pastorals after François Boucher and possibly originally commissioned by Madame de Pompadour.

The approach to the presentation of the collection at Croome is different to that at most other National Trust properties, given that it is incomplete, thus precluding the re-creation of furnished interiors. Its display and interpretation reflects the original creative partnership between the 6th Earl and Robert Adam, together with the various craftsmen with whom they shaped Croome. By working with contemporary artists and designers, the presentation offers visitors a different perspective on the objects and different ways of appreciating them.



*The Golden Box*

In 2016, the ceramics conservator and artist Bouke de Vries worked with designer Gabby Underwood to create an imaginative display of the ceramics collection, including the highly significant pieces of Sèvres porcelain. The result is the Golden Box), a walk-in display case in which the objects and their reflections surround the visitors, providing an experience that captures the imagination. Will Datson, a Bristol-based designer and maker, was commissioned to produce a striking installation in the Entrance Hall about the original mahogany hall chairs, commissioned by the 6th Earl for this room and originally used by visitors to the house. To draw attention to the chairs, which otherwise might go unnoticed, and to announce to today's visitors that they can expect the

unexpected as they explore the house, three of the original chairs are surrounded by Chair Play, a construction of metal and plaster chairs based on the design of the original.

Some objects are displayed in a more traditional and manner to highlight their importance and to share with visitors the extent to which the 6th Earl was a trend setter. A pair of commodes, made by Mayhew & Ince in 1764 and among the first pieces of Neo-Classical furniture to be created in Britain, is showcased in the Lord's Dressing Room.

Through Trust New Art, the National Trust's contemporary arts programme generously funded by Arts Council England, the team at Croome is leading a project involving local community groups working alongside the artist Chris Alton. Mentored by the artist Hew Locke, they will be using the collection to create interventions inspired by Robert Adam's design work for the house.

New installations on the first and second floors of the house offer visitors a glimpse of other aspects of the collection. These include the remnants of the once magnificent bed designed by Robert Adam for the 6th Earl shortly before his marriage to his second wife Barbara St John, and also a display of family pictures, including a group portrait of the 5th Earl and his family.



*5th Earl of Coventry and family in the Park at Croome,*

Further major projects are underway, including the re-display of the Saloon with its original family portraits, all of which survived the sales. In 2016 two of their original carved and gilded picture frames were purchased by the National Trust with the help of the Monument 85 Trust Fund and the Friends of Croome. Having been sold from the Metropolitan Museum's collection, they had suffered an ignominious fate, being cut down in size and converted to mirror frames. A major conservation project entails reconstruction to their original size and the careful re-carving of all the missing decoration. Once complete they will be used to frame the portraits for which they were originally designed. This perhaps epitomises the story of the Croome collection: despite all the losses it has suffered, it has nevertheless survived to create a rich and inspiring resource for artists, designers and visitors.

# Otters Spotted at Croome

by Mark Grimshaw

A regular visitor to Croome has spotted the often elusive otter during his walks. As a regular walker around Croome, John Hubble had noticed fresh water mussel shells (known as swan mussels) scattered along the river, and even a dead pike. He was fascinated to know what might be feeding on them.

John approached Katherine Alker, Croome's Garden and Park Manager, and was given permission to erect a hidden camera. After filming at a few locations with no success, he was lucky enough to spot and photograph an otter during an early morning stroll with his dog Christie. He relocated the camera trap and was finally rewarded with footage of not just a single otter but what appeared to be an adult with a juvenile.



John Hubble

*Adult and juvenile otters caught on hidden camera*

Otters are one of the UK's best conservation success stories of recent years. Improved water quality, the banning of pesticides and increased protection enabled them to bounce back from near extinction in some areas between the 1950s and 1970s.

The river at Croome is not a natural river; it was dug out by hand in the 1750s and 1760s to create a water feature as part of 'Capability' Brown's grand design for the landscape, and is almost a mile and a half long. As there is no natural spring or stream to keep the river topped up, many underground drains were built to carry the water into the river from miles around. They also to help drain the parkland, which at one time had been extremely boggy.



Sue Hubble

*John Hubble sets up his camera*

## Improving our lake and river

Staff and volunteers at Croome have carried out work over the past 21 years to restore the man-made lake and river. This has created more wetland habitat, resulting in better water quality and an increased abundance of fish and other aquatic food sources, which in turn has encouraged otters to use the area.

"Since dredging 50,000 tonnes of silt from the river from 2003 to 2005 to restore the waterway we've seen an influx of a great variety of wildlife. We are delighted to see otters in the park now," said Katherine Alker, Croome's Garden and Outdoors Manager. "Along the river there is a varied amount of bankside vegetation, with overhanging trees and shrubs, which is perfect cover for when otters want to move around unseen. The cover also allows opportunities for underground holts (otter homes) between roots, as well as above-ground areas called 'couches' where otters rest during the day.

## Other wetlands

In addition to the lake and river we have also created and managed several other areas of wetland around the parkland which are helping us to improve the habitat and attract different species of wildlife. We now regularly also see cormorants, kingfishers, common frogs and toads, a variety of ducks, widgeon and geese all of which are feeding in the wet areas of the parkland."



# Britain's Hidden Ice Houses

by Sophie Campbell

First published in the *Daily Telegraph* 12.12.2017

Winter, eh? As snow sweeps across Britain, causing the usual disruptions to modern life, spare a thought for the junior outdoor servant in the 18th-century country house. For them, a freezing morning meant getting up at first light to hack ice from the nearest shallow water, then carting the painful slabs back to be stored with layers of straw and sacking.

Until the second half of the 19th century, when imported ice and refrigeration took over, the hacked ice was stored in a purpose-built ice house, usually on the north side of a house, usually near the kitchen, and often hidden in a shrubbery or fashionable wilderness. They were made of brick and normally, though not always, took the shape of a giant egg; two thirds below ground for insulation, a third above, with igloo-style doorways for access.

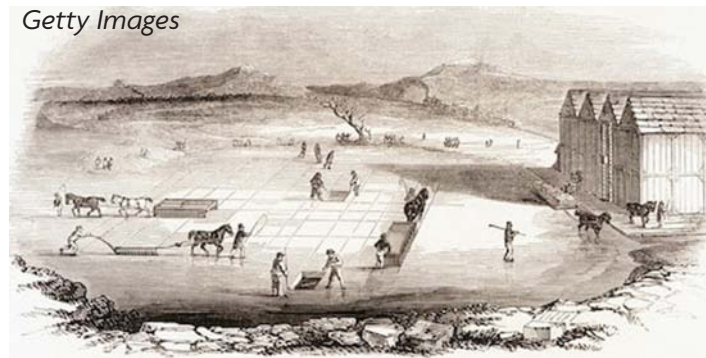
I always look for them if I'm exploring a country house and feel irrationally chuffed if I find one that's not signposted. One of my favourites is at Croome, Worcestershire home to the Earls of Coventry, who gave Lancelot "Capability" Brown his first full-scale commission. Their ice house is a perfect egg, restored a few years ago with the help of a photograph published in 1957 but probably taken a decade or two earlier, showing the ice house with a thatched roof. The conical thatch gives it an archaic charm - Asterix would have loved it.

"Thatch was quite unusual," says Michael Forster-Smith, who oversaw the restoration for the National Trust, "Normally ice houses have earth mounds, so without the photo we might never have known. Although Compton Verney, which isn't that far away, has thatch, too."

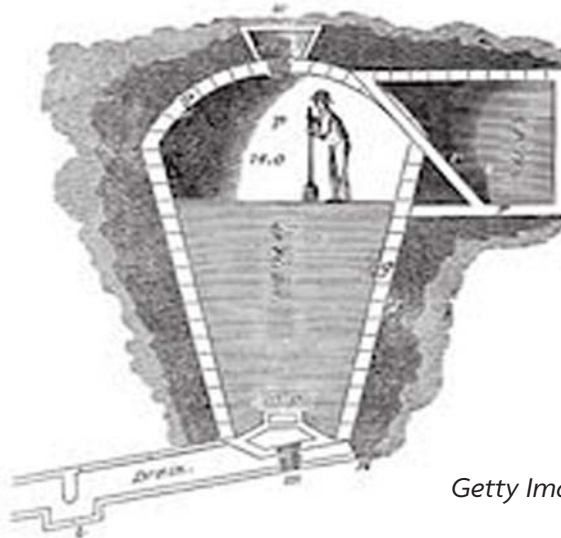
Croome also has an ice pond, the only surviving one I've seen; an elegant stone-edged ellipse, about four inches deep, which must at least have made life easier for the servants. During restoration they found that meltwater from the ice house fed back into the pond. The ice from ice houses was

never used in food; even in those hardy, self-sufficient days they balked at filthy water, frozen or not. Ice was used in the kitchen, packed around food in ice chests or around wine in ornate coolers, and quite possibly taken on the earliest picnics.

Getty Images



Michael points out that winters seem to have been colder in the eighteenth century and a good store of ice would keep for a year or more before its replenishment in cold weather.



Getty Images

The ice house is hidden evidence of the sheer effort involved in producing something we now take totally for granted. Tell that to the children as you send them on an ice house hunt, while the rest of us thank our lucky stars, as the snow falls, that we're not on pond duty.



# I Am Archive

By Mark Grimshaw

Volunteer Barbara Wild browses the archive

Peter Young

'I Am Archive' is an imaginative and stimulating experience showcasing stories from Croome's extensive historic records in imaginative ways. Visitors can search through archive boxes aiming to share some of Croome's fascinating stories - they may even come across a prosthetic ear and eye ball!

Archives are often considered the domain of the historian or researcher, with overtones of reading rooms, online catalogues and stores tucked well away from public view. Not everyone wants to be a researcher but there is a growing appreciation of how important archival material is - we all create our own archive and a trail in life, whether we like it or not.

"The new archive room project is not about recreating the Croome archive or even providing access to all of it, as the archive is carefully looked after at The Hive in Worcester. Instead, we seek to create an imaginative and stimulating experience for visitors to explore what archives are all about, why Croome's archive is so important and to help visitors reflect on their own archive in life." Clare Harris, Creative Director.

The team of staff and volunteers have been busy going through Croome's archive at The Hive, gathering resources. This is quite a complicated process so we are taking a modular process and will be experimenting with different ways to engage with our visitors. Over the course of researching Croome's history many fascinating items have come to light such as an 18th lottery ticket, a remedy on how to cure human worms, love letters and letters that reveal turmoil and scandal.

One of the many stories for visitors to discover includes is a prosthetic severed ear, which is nailed to a piece of wood. It represents the time when Lord Thomas Coventry held the position of the Keeper of the Great Seal of England and was publicly slandered and accused of taking bribes. The men involved were punished for two days by being paraded through the streets on a horse backwards, before having their ears nailed to a pillory in public and then condemned to prison for the rest of their lives.

The design of the archive, which can be seen on the first floor of the house, was created by ERM, the winners of our 2016 Design Competition who creatively merged the worlds of installation art, sculpture and architecture into this exciting design.



Peter Young

The Design Team

Led by architect and stage designers, Elena Thatcher, Ruth Hall and Max Jones, this contemporary sculptural form references traditional archive storage and shelving, and provides a flexible and interactive display, whilst also offering a vision of archive that creates a bridge between old and new.



Peter Young

Croome archivist Jill Tovey opens the exhibition

At its centre visitors will experience an immersive infinity effect, which emphasises the extent of the knowledge vein running through the heart of Croome and offers a moment to wonder at the scale and value of archives; past, present and future.

# A Stroll in the Park by Mike Jackson

Croome Court is one of our 'local' National Trust properties. In fact, it was the second property we visited, at the end of March 2011, just after we'd become members of the National Trust. On a bright but cold winter's morning, we made our fifth visit to Croome. The ideal setting for a bracing walk, and not only to recover from some of the excesses of Christmas, but also take a peek inside the house since we'd not done that since 2011.

I wasn't expecting to see the Malverns covered in snow, and looking even more stately, impressive, and higher than we normally see them. What a surprise! Once at Croome, we had magnificent views of the whole line of hills due west. The snow had somehow 'etched' new landscape perspectives that we'd never observed before.

The first place we headed to was Croome's 1940s-style canteen to enjoy a cup of frothy cappuccino to set us up for the walk around the park. In the past we've taken in the whole circuit of the park, to the far end of the Croome River. This time, we walked to the Island Pavilion, and back along the far side of the Croome River to the Chinese Bridge. After touring the house, we headed to the Rotunda and along the east side of the Walled Garden to exit through the Visitor Centre. It was a walk of around three miles, and most welcome.



Mike Jackson

Inside Croome Court, there are few significant changes from our last visit, although I think there were more rooms open on the first floor. The Robert Adam ceiling in the Long Gallery is a sight to behold. The decorated plaster-work of the dining room is as delightful as ever, likewise the main doorway and ceiling of the Saloon. The bare wooden walls of the Tapestry Room are testament to what was; the tapestries now hang in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. A painting of Croome by Richard Wilson in 1758 is on display in one of the ground floor rooms. Not much has changed in the intervening 260 years.

Two exhibits stand out above the others. I love porcelain, and in the dining room there is a stunning exhibit, The Golden Box (designed by Dutch artist Bouke de Vries, whose War and Pieces we saw at Berrington Hall in April this year), of some of Croome's porcelain. The Golden Box took my breath away. The wallpaper in the Chinese Bedroom on the first floor caught my eye, as did the portraits of the 9th Earl of Coventry and his wife propped up against the wall of an adjacent room.



Mike Jackson

On the first floor, in what was Lady Coventry's Dressing Room, is the recently opened 'I Am Archive', a vortex construction that will eventually house information and documents about Croome. A truly inspirational design.

Finally, it was outside again through the doors of the Saloon, and on to the south-facing steps flanked by two sphinxes. In the early afternoon sunshine, the light coloured stone of the façade glowed a deep gold. At the Rotunda there was a good view over much of the park to the west and south. Croome was heaving with visitors, all taking advantage of the lovely day, many following children along the 'Gingerbread Trail', or taking dogs for walks in the park's wide open spaces. Everyone seemed to be having fun, as we did, and we look forward to our next visit some time during 2018.



Mike Jackson