

# THE FRIENDS OF CROOME



NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2018 Issue 29

## A CREATION OF GENIUS

by Catherine Gordon



*Croome circa 1850 David Birtwhistle*

Around five years ago, when the Croome Heritage Trust approached me to write another book on Croome, my immediate enthusiasm was tempered with a fair degree of caution. Now more familiar with Croome's mysteries and contradictions, I was aware of the challenges I faced but the chance to develop and update earlier themes from my book on the Coventry family history proved irresistible. The general aim was to focus on the major transformation of Croome undertaken by the 6th Earl from the mid-eighteenth century until his death in 1809.

Although there was nothing unusual in his ambition, the Earl was an extraordinary man with such impressive talent, taste, and commitment, there was certainly scope to explore how he shaped the project into something quite exceptional. Much outstanding scholarship had already been devoted to

Capability Brown and Robert Adam's contribution, notably the park, the park buildings and the stunning interiors and contents, so this was an opportunity to highlight the extent of the Earl's input into the project, his friendship with Sanderson Miller, and the close and influential relationship he established with Brown and Adam.

I also felt it was important to look at the less familiar parts of the story, not least the structural history and remodeling of the house, such an integral part of the whole and still not fully understood. Little had been published on the subject previously, yet it is a part of the story that holds vital clues to this early phase of Brown's career and its client's purpose, preferences and involvement. Although the house still hides many secrets, and long may it continue to do so, many interesting



**Croome circa 1750** *David Birtwhistle*

discoveries had been made during its remarkable restoration by the National Trust. Within the Croome archives and elsewhere there was also ample evidence to piece together a substantial part of its intriguing history, correct past assumptions and indicate the probable extent of Lord Coventry's role in its transformation.

Work on the book progressed slowly. I received much valuable support and advice from many people but there was a daunting amount of detail to condense, much conflicting evidence to confront and inevitably new facts will still emerge. Hopefully I began to gain some insight into how the remodeling process may have evolved and into the enigmatic Earl himself, who grew ever more fascinating and impressive as the facts unraveled. It was important to make the book accessible to as wide a readership as possible.

I was always aware of the many Croome people who share an enviable knowledge about different aspects of its history as well as the constant stream of new enthusiasts who seek useful background information. I also wanted the book to be visually appealing as a tribute to the Earl's extraordinary aesthetic sensibilities, and to make the most of the many Adam drawings that survive and the many other superb items within the Croome collection. I was delighted when David Birtwhistle, an artist already with close connections with Croome, agreed to paint a series of watercolours to illustrate the evolution of both the building and its setting to be placed in sequence at the heart of the book. The paintings are quite beautiful in themselves and also raise many interesting questions and possibilities about how the building and park may have looked through specific stages

of their history. With his usual skill and flourish, David enhanced each painting with interesting period touches that reward close examination.



**Croome circa 1650** *David Birtwhistle*

On 24 April this year, a celebration was held at Croome to mark the publication of the book. Largely organised by John Henderson and Jill Tovey, with considerable help from National Trust staff and volunteers and others, the event was sponsored by Savills, Cripps LLP and the Kysant Charitable Trust. Around 100 guests gathered in the Long Gallery to listen to four excellent talks given by the architectural historian, author and television presenter, Jeremy Musson, who wrote the Foreword to the book; Frances Sands, Curator of Drawing and Books at the Sir John Soane's Museum; Dame Rosalind Savill, the world-renowned porcelain expert and former Director of the Wallace Collection; and Croome's General Manager Michael Forster-Smith. It was a special way to celebrate not just the publication of the book but Croome itself and the amazing achievement of its creation and restoration.



# HOLISTIC GRAZING by Katherine Alker

When the farm tenancy for South Park came up for renewal in 2012 it was an opportunity to review how the land was grazed to better meet conservation objectives and improve biodiversity of the grassland, as well as the opportunity to look for a way of providing the right 'look' for the 18th century 'Capability' Brown landscape park.

We converted the land back to pasture from arable in 2002, and from then until 2012 the tenant of the land grazed it quite intensively for about 9 months every year with cattle and sheep. Following the decision to review the grazing of South Park, an interim measure of grazing with just sheep was put in place between 2013 and 2014 to allow us to find a suitable tenant. Before any cattle could come into the area, in spring 2015 work was undertaken to get on top of the large number of dock, ragwort and thistle, which were the result of previous management.

Rob allayed our fears that we would see strips of grazed and un-grazed land, and that the landscape would look patchy, so we agreed a trial period of 3 years. In the summer of 2015 Rob introduced a herd of 40 traditional breed cattle to the land. Aberdeen Angus and short-horn cattle were brought onto South Park which is about 140 acres in size. He has now grazed that area for the last two years using the holistic system and we have extended his tenancy for a further 7 years.

The added bonus of this system is significant improvements in the diversity of wildlife that we've now got across the park, with mammals such as field voles and harvest mice seen frequently, and kestrels drawn in by increased opportunity for food. Holistic grazing also improves the soil and increases organic matter.

"It's really satisfying to see the cattle thriving while also enhancing the wildlife and environment the cattle are in" said Rob Havard. "When I started farming there was always this tension between the ecology and productivity of the farm business but with Holistic Planned Grazing everything moves in the right direction giving me the opportunity to expand my small farming business while also enhancing the natural habitats on the land."

I'm really happy that we have found a solution which improves things for the biodiversity of flora and fauna; the parkland looks as it might have done in the C18th; the farming business is productive and we're also being used as an example of best practise for Holistic Grazing across the Trust.

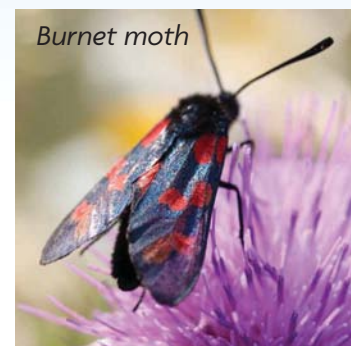


*Kestrel, hunting in the south park*

After meeting other prospective tenants who weren't quite the right fit, we met Rob Havard and he proposed the move to a holistic grazing system. We had discussions about our aims for the land, and he explained the holistic system which means that cattle graze the land year-round; the animals are allowed to graze a small area at a time, and are kept in with electric fences. They are moved from one compartment to another every few days and they are not allowed to over-graze the land. The rotation is somewhere between one to two months before the stock are back on the original patch. The idea is to allow for a variation in the grass height to give wild flowers more opportunity to flower and seed, as well as creating the right conditions for other wildlife to thrive.



*Meadow brown*



*Burnet moth*

# REVEALED PART 2

## *How an obscure book of poetry led to enlightenment*

by Mike Payne

Regular readers of this publication may recall an earlier note I wrote about the two wives of Thomas William Coventry, youngest son of the 6th Earl. The chance discovery of a book of poetry has thrown new light upon the identity of Catherine Clarke who became his first wife.

Contained within this small volume is a stanza entitled The Rose of Cray which reads:

Not Beauty's charms, nor Music's magic pow'r,  
Could guard from Death that blooming fading flow'r!  
Scarce had it blossom'd half a Summer's day,  
When all its fragrant sweetness died away!

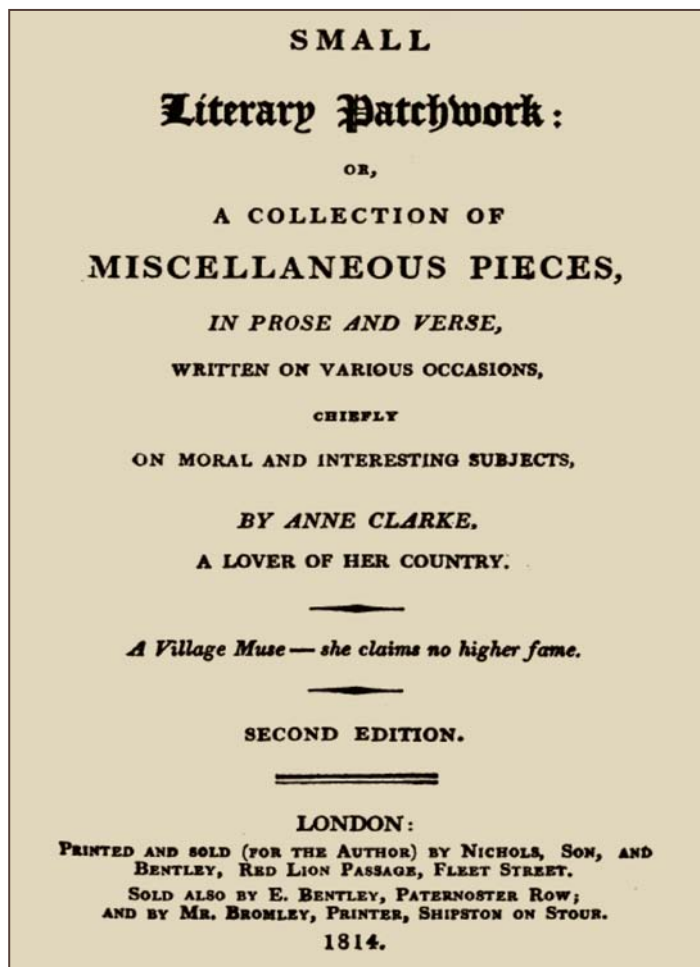
A footnote informs the reader that the subject was the late Hon. Mrs T.W. Coventry who died at the early age of twenty-four years and about one month; being the mother of six children, five of whom (a son and four daughters) survived her. The author, Ann Clarke of Shipston-on-Stour in Warwickshire, turns out to be the aunt of Catherine Clarke and this volume provides sufficient information to identify the true origins of the Clarke family.

John Clark (the family later added the final 'e') was born in 1719 in Church Honeybourne, Worcestershire. On his marriage he inherited from his family a small freehold estate in Pebworth, which at that time was in Gloucestershire. Here they raised their family. John was a land surveyor and a clerk to the Commissioner of Taxes for a division of the county. He worked on a number of Inclosure Awards in the area. His two sons, Henry and John, also became land surveyors but it was to John that he left his estates. One of their sisters, Ann, remained unmarried and became our "village muse".

John Clarke junior married a Catherine Beale in 1777 in Barford, Warwickshire. They only had one child, Catherine, born in about 1782. John established his business in Evesham and at one point was Clerk to the Trustees of the Alcester to Campden turnpike. John died in 1797, two years after his father, aged only 40. In his will he left his estates to his wife together with £500. He also left £500 to his daughter when she reached 21 and the rest of his assets in trust for the benefit of his wife and daughter with his friend Matthias Stratton as trustee.

This was the Catherine who married Thomas William Coventry in 1800 and, as Catherine Gordon's evidence suggested, did have Evesham roots, but was of independent means. So, with apologies to Catherine Gordon, a salutary lesson has been learnt about relying solely on the evidence of the basic genealogical sources.

This new evidence explains the background to the sale of the Pebworth estate by Thomas William, together with his wife and mother-in-law, in 1803 to two spinster sisters from Chipping Camden. Unfortunately, the conveyance does not provide sufficient detail to identify the plot.



It appears that the sale of the family seat did not go down well with Ann Clarke and we leave her the final word with another footnote in her book which quotes extensively from the poem to which it refers:

"My late honoured Father's little paternal inheritance (consisting of a small freehold cot, and a few parcels of freehold lands, &c.) devolved in reversion to the late Hon. Mrs. Thomas-William Coventry (the only surviving child of my eldest brother); who, with her husband, and her mother (the late widow Clarke), passed a fine, and sold it! deeming it, no doubt, too contemptible a possession to remain in a patrician family. Ah! thou once happy Cot! how short-lived were thy patrician honours! Hadst thou descended to me, a poor insulted, unprotected plebeian! how would I have still decked thy now mouldering walls with the sweet scenting woodbine and rich-flavoured grape! the fine Bury-pear and choice Apricot, &c. And from the wild-spreading branches of the ever-green holly-hedge (literally planted by my revered Father!) I might, perchance, with "roses undistilled," which "thrive best in privacy," have formed a nice chaplet for the modest brow of some modern poet!"

# SLOW-WORMS THRIVING

by Mark Grimshaw

First published in My Volunteering July 2018

Croome's parkland is pleased to see its slow-worms are flourishing since their relocation over five years ago, and the ongoing conservation of their habitat will hopefully help them thrive there.

Back in 2013, 600 slow-worms were moved from a site in Pershore to an area of land within Croome's 700-acre parkland. This was considered an ideal relocation spot as it had a similar soil structure and plant species to their previous home, with no other existing slow-worm populations. It also provides a habitat in which they can hunt - and hide safely from cats and dogs, which often pose a threat to them.



*Craig Welsby checks for slow-worms*

The parkland team have recently made improvements to these areas by strimming three-metre square expanses of grass and covering them with sections of corrugated iron and roofing felt. Being cold-blooded, slow-worms rely on the warmth of the sun so will bask on these and warm up away from the shade of the longer grass and shrubs and safe from the risk of predation. Hibernation sites (Hibernacula) were also created, providing areas where the animals can take shelter in the winter and find safe refuges to hibernate.

Slow-worms, which are legless lizards rather than a worm or snake, are relatively common in the United Kingdom and can often be found in compost heaps, enjoying the warmth. They feed on worms, slugs and other invertebrates. The oldest recorded slow worm was a reported 54 years old, but generally they will live for around 30 years in the wild and grow up to about 50 centimetres long.



“The speed with which slow-worms (and other reptiles) started using the strimmed areas demonstrates the importance of basking areas for these cold-blooded animals” said Craig Welsby, Assistant Ranger. “Anyone with an overgrown bit of garden can provide similar habitat by creating a few areas of shorter vegetation and laying down small corrugated ‘tins’ or pieces of roofing felt. Even if there are no reptiles around, these areas are likely to be used by voles and invertebrates.”

As a conservation charity, it's vital that we look after these places so that wildlife such as slow-worms can continue to thrive, and every penny that visitors spend on entrance fees, buying a cup of tea, or a gift in the shop helps towards this work.

Gilbert Coventry, 4th Earl of Coventry  
Johann Kerseboom (National Trust, Antony)



# GILBERT

## 4TH EARL OF COVENTRY

by **Robin Eagles**

Editor, *House of Lords (1715-90) History of Parliament*



*Gilbert, 4th Earl of Coventry  
with Two Huntsmen in a Landscape  
by John Wootton (National Trust, Antony)*

Gilbert Coventry (c.1668-1719) was fairly unusual in the aristocracy of 18th-century England having been apprenticed to a Dutch merchant when a young man. The younger son of a younger son, he had little expectation of inheriting the peerage, but the deaths in succession of his brother (the 2nd Earl) and nephew (the 3rd Earl) brought him to the title in his mid-40s. Prior to that he had had an uneasy relationship with his family and at one point was even barred from the family estates.

In 1692 his situation was so desperate that he even considered enlisting in the army as a private soldier. Marriage in 1694 to the daughter of Sir William Keyte of Hidcote, Gloucestershire finally offered him some alleviation from financial worries and in the years leading up to his succession he was able to wield a degree of political influence in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, though perhaps significantly he never sought election to Parliament himself.

The unexpected death of his nephew, Thomas, while still a student at Eton, finally brought Gilbert to the earldom. His principal focus thereafter seems to have been the question of the succession. By his first wife (who had died a decade earlier) he had one daughter, Anne, married to Sir William Carew of Antony House in Cornwall. In the summer of 1715 he married again. The new Lady Coventry, daughter of a director of the New East India Company, was reputed to be 'a vast outlandish fortune' and Coventry himself dubbed her 'his Indian Queen'. In spite of predicting confidently soon after the marriage that he would shortly make his new father-in-law 'grandfather of a brave boy', there was no heir and when Coventry died in 1719 the barony became extinct.

The descent of the earldom and viscountcy of Deerhurst, however, was governed by different rules according to a 'special remainder' contained within the 1697 patent of creation. Thus on Coventry's death he was succeeded in the peerage by William Coventry, MP for Bridport, a great nephew of the 1st Baron Coventry. Many of the estates were inherited by Gilbert's daughter, Lady Anne Carew, leaving his widow to struggle to secure what was owing to her. In February 1720 she complained of having 'got all I could at the division at Croome though with a hard and high hand Sir William [Carew] told me my horses were dead so I could have no others'.

The parliamentary lives of several members of the family have already been covered by the History of Parliament project, most recently biographies covering the 2nd, 3rd and 4th barons and the first four earls, all contained within the 1660-1715 volumes published in 2016. The ongoing Lords project will pick up where these left off and continue through to 1790. It is planned that all of these articles will eventually be made available online.



*Gilbert Coventry  
4th Earl of Coventry  
Michael Dahl (National Trust, Antony)*



Princess  
Alexandra  
Suff

Lady  
Royale

Anne Blanche  
Alice Coventry  
Princess Duleep Singh

# I AM ARCHIVE

by Nicola Hewitt

September 2017 saw the opening of the 'I Am Archive' installation at Croome with its initial stories, documents and objects, and it has proved to be a bit hit with visitors. Later in the year Croome's archive research team met together to decide on the next areas of research to reflect this year's National Trust theme of 'Women and Power' commemorating one-hundred years of women's suffrage. The team decided on which women associated with Croome and the Coventry family to research.

Some characters produced great stories but others, unfortunately, had more limited information available. From these, six were chosen to be included as part of **I Am Archive**, together with an object symbolising their story.

**Lady Anne Savile:** Daughter of 'Keeper' Coventry, she married William Savile and was deeply involved during the Civil War including the siege of Sheffield Castle.

**Princess Anne Duleep Singh:** Daughter of the 9th Earl of Coventry she married Prince Victor Duleep Singh, son of the last Maharajah of Lahore. She lived in France and was interned by the Germans during World War II.

**Peggy Pitches:** Wife of the 7th Earl of Coventry, she took a leading role in running the estate due to her husband's ill health and also authored 'The quality of a woman'.

**Grace O'Malley:** Pirate Queen of Ireland, she led the clan O'Malley in the sixteenth-century and met with Queen Elizabeth I as an equal. Maria Gunning the first wife of the 6th Earl of Coventry is a direct descendant of hers.

**Princess Sophia Duleep Singh:** Sister-in-law of Anne Coventry, she went from socialite princess to prominent suffragette and campaigner for women's votes, questions were asked about her at government level.

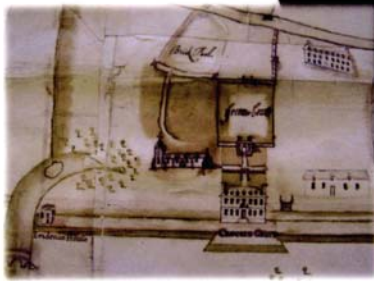
**Eleanor Coade:** Ran a successful business producing Coade stone ornamentation and statues, of which there are many fine examples at Croome.

I started at Croome as a volunteer and got involved in researching the returning Croome collection that was going straight out onto display. Research is something I enjoy, and I carried on visiting the Croome Archive at The Hive in Worcester to expand my knowledge of the

## The death of Thomas – the rightful heir to the Coventry seat

In May 1744, **Thomas Henry Coventry** Lord Deerhurst heir apparent to William 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Coventry died at his father's London residence in **Grosvenor Square**. His body was transported to the family vault at Croome. The obituary in The London Post highlights his good nature and the affection and esteem he was held in by his family and friends. This is echoed in the record of his burial written by the parish priest of Croome D'Abitot.

As a result of his death his brother **George William** became **Lord Deerhurst** and then later inherited his father's title becoming the **6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Coventry**.



Coventry family and Croome. Having become a member of staff I continued visiting the Hive and other archives and often came across weird/interesting topics which I would relay to the Croome staff team. We would discuss them and in turn they were would often be relayed to the volunteers at Croome Court as part of daily briefings.

Some of the topics covered have included: The death of Lord Deerhurst, the 6th Earl's older brother, his not being buried in 'woollen', and what that meant. Also, a newspaper story entitled "The misfortunate offspring of the Miss Gunnings". Who were the children of the two Gunning sisters and why should they be termed 'misfortunate'?

And there was an article on the link between the Long Gallery chimneypiece and the Royal Coronation coach, another on the 9th Earl of Coventry's triumphs at the Grand National, and fire at the 6th Earl's Piccadilly house.

These were well received so, at the end of last year it was decided that it should be a regular feature of the volunteers' briefings and the challenge for me was to produce a 'document of the week' to share with volunteers. In fact, they have gone down so well, that a suggestion has been made to add them to **I Am Archive** to enhance the information available for Croome's visitors to enjoy.

## Marked by Misfortune: the children of the Gunning sisters

These two extracts report an **accident** involving **Lady Augusta Clavering** and her 'Near Fatal' accident in Rome. The bottom article says that this highlights the **misfortunes** that plague the offspring of the Miss Gunnings. **Who** were the offspring and **why** do they claim this about them?

On the 7th inst. Lady Augusta Clavering, daughter of the Duke of Argyll, now resident at Rome, being alone in her own apartment, set fire by accident to the muffin gown she had on.

The trepidation and fright natural on such an occasion prevented her from opening the door so readily as the world otherwise have done, so that by the time she came into the next room, where was Mr. Clavering, with several other gentlemen, the whole of her dress was in flames.

Fortunately the gentlemen did not lose their presence of mind, but rolled the carpet round her, which happily extinguished the flames, but not till her legs, breasts, hands, and face were burnt in a shocking manner.

In the town of Haddington, a cat has brought forth a kitten having two heads, with two ears on each, and a large one in the middle.

Thomas Thistle, otherwise Oxford Tom, the noted horse-

Exert from Hampshire Chronicle 5/4/1790

- You can see from the document in 1790 she was seriously injured when her dress **caught fire**
- Subsequent reports state that the original reports were greatly exaggerated, the gentlemen put out her dress before she was seriously injured

The article below on Lady Augusta has been added in for your amusement. Nowadays we can have loved ones made into diamonds ... in the 18th century they could ...

The new Queen of Hungary is now pregnant with her 16th child.

Lady Augusta Clavering, by being nearly burnt to death at Rome, established the truth of the remark, that the offspring of the Miss Gunnings have been marked by misfortunes—her sister, Lady Derby, and her cousins, Lord Deerhurst, Lady Ann Foley, and Lady Maria Byronson, are ferocious testimonies of this!

A curious scheme was discovered about three years ago in France; the art of calcining dead bones, and making them into glass *i. e.* the bones of them; it would be very comfortable to see our ancestors displayed on a side-board. All members of fawning clubs should be made into *water-glass*—fat Aldermen into *decanters*; and poor dogs, who can't drink, into *water-glasses*—fine ladies might be calcined into *snuffing-bottles*, and the ladies and gentlemen of Sadler's wells into *tumblers*.

The following curious snuffing was lately described in

Exert from a column of Stamford Mercury 2/4/1790

## Link between the Long Gallery chimney piece and the Royal Golden State



Coach

### Chimney piece in the Long Gallery

- Designed by **Robert Adam**
- Carved by **Joseph Wilton** in 1766
- Paid £338
- 2 life-sized caryatids, nymphs of Flora holding a floral wreath

### Golden State Coach

- Designed by William Chambers (1723-1796)
- Made by coach maker Samuel Butler
- Painted panels by Giovanni Batista Cipriani (1727-1785)
- Gilded carved sculpture by carver **Joseph Wilton**
- Gilded and painted wood and leather
- Gilder was Henry Pujolas
- Commissioned for George III in 1760 for George III's coronation and wedding to Princess Charlotte in 1761



# FAMILY FUN AT CROOME

by Natalie Ray

It was the late 1990s and many a year since the house at Croome had welcomed visitors. In the grounds, hordes of drunken teens partied from dusk to dawn at the Hellfire ball. A girl in a long, blue dress stood somewhere between the dodgems and the dance floor, staring wistfully at the building. For a moment, she longed to explore it, to learn its secrets. The moment passed, it was her round at the bar and she came back down to earth with a bump.

I was the girl in the blue dress, and over the years I caught occasional snippets of news about Croome. In the back of my mind was a yearning to visit. Eventually, my husband and I decided to take out an annual National Trust membership. Much to my delight, Croome was our local National Trust property and it soon became our favourite family day out.

These days, we are regular visitors. Every Thursday, my four-year-old has a day off preschool and I ask what she'd like to do. Inevitably, she wants to go to Croome. Weekends aren't much different, we can often be seen wandering around the grounds as a family. Sharing our favourite views on social media, picnicking by the lake or playing in the park.

When the girls learnt to ride a bike, we weren't sure where we could take them to practice cycling. Somewhere with smooth paths, a few undulations to test them and plenty of places to play. Somewhere safe and dog friendly where my husband and I could walk the dog while the girls raced off, just in front of us. Somewhere with lovely cafés, delicious cake and plenty of toilet stops. Of course, Croome was the natural solution.

Nowadays at four and six years old, the girls are seasoned cyclists. They've learned to ride up and down hills, on rough terrain and in all weathers. And it's thanks to the perfect opportunity they've had to hone their skills at Croome. You've probably spotted them at some point with their wonky cycle helmets, sometimes even sporting a tutu. They're usually racing with the little one desperate to outdo her big sister.

If the dog has a rare day off, we explore the house. The girls love the little playroom in the basement. They spend hours playing with the sand in there, making hills and lakes before being tempted away by the delicious smell of cake from the café next door. If we visit at lunchtime, they always opt for the children's lunchbox, carefully choosing their favourite snacks.

The playground and natural play area are favourites too. Whether they swing on the swings, slide down the slide or build a den, they're immersed in imaginative play from the moment they arrive. Some days, we'll spend hours there, just listening to their games or watching them make friends with other children. Another new discovery for us has been the beautiful walled garden. Strolling through the tunnel and searching for the resident toad. Smelling all the gorgeous flowers and playing garden games on the lawn. The incredible greenhouses are a must-see too, and I can highly recommend their cake.

Friends are openly amazed about the amount of time we spend at Croome, but no two visits are the same. There are few places where you can entertain two young children and a dog all day and know that you'll be back there again next week and do something completely different. Perhaps next time we'll take the route past the hide and watch little birds feasting on the feeders. Maybe we'll explore the ice house or cycle down the big hill. Or take the tour of the old school again, listening to fascinating tales of history and childhood in a bygone era.



Peter Young



# NIGHTINGALES IN THE PARK

by Mark Grimshaw

A secretive bird which likes nothing better than hiding in the middle of an impenetrable bush or thicket, nightingales arrive in April and sing until late May and early June. They leave again from July to September. Slightly larger than a robin, the nightingale is a small passerine (perching) bird best known for its powerful and beautiful song. It is plain brown above except for the reddish tail and is buff to white below, a quite unremarkable bird to look at. The song of the nightingale however has been described as one of the most beautiful sounds in nature, inspiring songs, fairy tales, opera, books, and a great deal of poetry.

Nightingales are most vocal when establishing their territories during May and the males can be heard singing through day and night. The name 'nightingale' came about because of its habit of singing long after dark, unusual (but not exclusive) for British birds. Typically they live for around two years, the oldest recorded is 8 years old.

In the UK nightingales breed mostly south of the Severn-Wash line and east from Dorset to Kent. The highest densities are found in the south east: Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Kent and Sussex. Croome is lucky to currently have a habitat preferred by the nightingale; it is a secretive bird which prefers living in the middle of an impenetrable bush. It requires open scrubby ground on which to feed and plenty of cover. The conditions in the shelter belt at Croome are perfect for the nightingale, a central open area with sparse ground cover, with high canopy tree cover and dense scrubby bush either side. They are more often heard than seen.

Over the last 40 years there has been a 90 per cent decline in numbers of nightingales in the UK, and the emerging picture indicates their range is continuing to contract towards the extreme south east of England. There are many factors involved both here in the UK and in their wintering grounds in Africa but two of the most prevalent in the UK are destruction of the habit by development and the rise in the deer population, including the Muntjac that we have at Croome, who have a destructive effect on the low growing vegetation of their preferred environment.

The team at Croome have consulted with specialist ecologists and ornithologists to ensure that the nightingale habitat at Croome can be preserved and a programme of work was undertaken over the winter in 2016 to further develop the habitat we have. This involved coppicing blackthorn and covering the stools with the brush to allow for regrowth and to create the dense cover that the nightingales like. We also manage the numbers of deer on the estate to help prevent the loss of nightingale habitat.

The ranger team worked hard over the past few winters to create further brashy habitat that nightingales love. We're pleased to report that as usual the first nightingales were heard in early April this year, and they have been regularly heard - and even seen, which is quite unusual - in the shelterbelt throughout the breeding season.

*Research for this article was obtained in the main from the British Trust for Ornithology*





Peter Young

# CROOME WALLED GARDENS

by Victoria Cronin

A series of art exhibitions have been on display in the Walled Gardens at Croome this year, showcasing the talent of local artists including sculptors Simon Probyn, Diccon Dadey, Daren Greenhow, Steph and Paul Simmons and Alison Bowyer. All of the artwork has been a great draw for both new and returning visitors. Although selling lots of pieces of art wasn't necessarily the main reason for the Cronin family's decision to try something new with the exhibitions this year, it has resulted in a surprising number of sales, and has added value to the entire visitor experience.

An exhibition of breath-taking iPhone photography by Shirley Jones, a stunning display of paintings by Shelly Perkins, which she perfects using digital methods and the intricate work of Worcester Embroiderers' Guild have been on show inside the visitor centre. Visitors can admire the artwork in a modern, spacious gallery and browse the gift shop that has been stocked using items carefully selected from unique suppliers and local artists.

Many visitors have returned several times already this year to see the changing art exhibitions, as well as to watch the gardens change at different stages of the seasons. Comments from visitors who can see all of the hard work that has been put into the restoration are especially heart-warming. A loyalty card scheme is now being offered to local people and supporters who wish to return several times in the season.



Peter Young

One of the most exciting things is 'the promised rose garden' which has been in full bloom since the beginning of June. Extra work to maintain the roses has been a priority this year as they will be one of the main features a family wedding at the end of August. A book telling the story of Chris and Karen Cronin's journey throughout the last 18 years of owning and restoring the gardens is now available in the visitor centre shop and on the Walled Gardens' website. "The gardens are really starting to mature and are looking at their best now that we have a great team on board," explains owner Karen Cronin. "One of our biggest challenges this year has been with the weather. Our plans to create a new Mediterranean garden over the winter had to be put on hold due to the unusual amount of rainfall. And we have faced the opposite with a summer heatwave which has scorched everything so we're struggling to keep on top of the watering maintenance," adds Karen.



Peter Young

The Walled Gardens are open every Friday, Saturday, Sunday (and Bank Holiday Monday until the end of September. Opening times are 11am-5pm (last entry 4pm) and tickets (£5 adult / children free) are available from Croome National Trust visitor reception. The funds raised go towards the ongoing restoration, which was entirely funded by the Cronin family prior to the gardens being open to visitors.