

Treasures from Croome Court to be exhibited at Kelmarsh Hall

Kelmarsh Hall, near Market Harborough in Northamptonshire, was designed by James Gibbs in 1730 and has over the years been home to the Hanbury, Naylor and Lancaster families. This beautiful Palladian house is surrounded by its working estate, grazed parkland and stunning gardens. Nancy Lancaster was responsible for redecorating the house and for laying out the gardens. It is a Charitable Trust and is open to the public.

Croome Court in Worcestershire was built for the 6th Earl of Coventry by Robert Adam and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, the latter also landscaping the parkland. The building was completed in 1758 and the Earl with relish accepted the challenge of furnishing it. He retained the leading London cabinet-makers of the period, most of them grouped in and around St. Martin's Lane, and their accounts are in the main extant, a rare survival. The Earl was amongst the first to cross the Channel in August 1762, immediately after the Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years War. He returned to London imbued with the first flush of French Neo-Classicism and a love of everything French, having purchased remarkable tapestries and porcelain and, through the marchand mercier, Simon Phillippe Poirier, furniture and objects. He greatly encouraged Robert Adam in his promotion of Neo-Classicism in this Country.

In 2005 the Trustees of the Croome Estate transferred the Coventry family archive, including the cabinet-makers' and artisans' accounts, to the Worcester Record Office in lieu of Inheritance Tax. Thus they are now in the public domain.

Since the 11th Earl's death in 2002 it has become necessary for the Trustees to find a new home for the furniture and family portraits which were retained from the major sales which were mounted after the last war. Happily these pieces are to be exhibited at Kelmarsh Hall until further notice – documented examples by Vile and Cobb and France and Bradburn (the Royal cabinet-makers) and Mayhew and Ince, some designed by Robert Adam, are to grace this quintessential English setting. The long-term intention is for the remaining core of the collection to be returned to Croome Court through the Croome Heritage Trust in partnership with the National Trust which owns the parklands and gardens. Apart from the fascinating recent exhibition 'Treasures from Croome Revealed' at the Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum in 2005, the Croome collection has very seldom been exhibited. Now as with the archive, it awaits a wider audience.

For details of opening dates contact the Kelmarsh Estate Office 01604 686 543