

Croome Collection Coventry Family History

George William Coventry, Viscount Deerhurst and 9th Earl of Coventry

Born 1838, the first son of George William (Viscount Deerhurst) and his wife Harriet Anne Cockerell. After the death of their parents, George William and his sister, Maria Emma Catherine (who later married Gerald Henry Brabazon Ponsonby), were brought up at Seizincote, but they visited Croome regularly. He succeeded as Earl in 1843, aged only 5 years old. During his minority his great-uncle William James (fifth son of the 7th Earl and his wife 'Peggy') took responsibility for the estate, with assistance from his guardians and trustees: Richard Temple of the Nash, Kempsey, Worcestershire and his grandfather, Sir Charles Cockerell. When the 9th Earl came of age at 21 he let William James and his wife Mary live at Earls Croome Court rent-free for the rest of their lives.

George William married Lady Blanche Craven (1842-1930), the third daughter of William Craven, 2nd Earl Craven of Combe Abbey, Warwickshire. Together they had five sons: George William, Charles John, Henry Thomas, Reginald William and Thomas George, and three daughters: Barbara Elizabeth, Dorothy and Anne Blanche Alice.

In 1859 George William was elected as president of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC). In 1868 he was invited to be the first Master of the new North Cotswold Hunt when the Cotswold Hunt split. He became a Privy Councillor in 1877 and served as Captain and Gold Stick of the Corps of Gentleman-at-Arms from 1877-80. George William served as Chairman of the County Quarter Sessions from 1880-88. From 1886-92 he was honoured with the Mastership of the Queen's Buckhounds, and then again from 1895-1900. He served as Lord Lieutenant and Custos Rotulorum of Worcestershire from 1891 onwards. In 1901 he became High Steward of Tewkesbury and was presented with the Freedom of both Tewkesbury and Worcester. He was created Honourable. Colonel of the 3rd and 4th Battalions of the Worcestershire Regiment.

In 1891 the 9th Earl bought the fishing lodge called Wardens House, in Leintwardine, Herefordshire. This was a favourite holiday spot for the family and the collection includes a diary detailing time spent there. It remained a popular retreat for them until 1920, after which the Earl's rheumatism made fishing impossible.

Community was very important to the 9th Earl and his family and they involved themselves in many local affairs. On Christmas Eve every year the Earl and his wife handed out gifts of beef and bread to all the tenants and their children. This was a tradition which marked the start of the Christmas festivities on the estate. In 1890 George William established a jam and pickle factory in a former industrial building near Pershore station. This enabled his tenants to sell their produce at fair market prices, thereby saving the cost of railway carriage and the risk of sending large consignments of perishable goods on long journeys. In 1915 Lady Coventry and their daughters organised a fund-raising concert at Croome in aid of the Red Cross. They were to become absorbed in many fundraising schemes.

The 9th Earl died on 13th March 1930 following an illness that lasted 12 days, aged nearly 92. Three days later his wife Blanche died also. A joint funeral was arranged that was attended by many; they had been married 65 years.