

## The Kerrisons of Hoxne

The first of the Kerrisons to be connected with Hoxne, although he never lived here, was **Matthias**, born in 1742 at Kirstead in Norfolk (about 5 miles from Bungay). He came from a family of yeoman farmers and millers at Seething, but his father Roger had acquired land at Kirstead through his marriage. His parents had six sons and two daughters, and as one of the younger sons Matthias at 15 was apprenticed in 1757 to a cooper at Swainsthorpe near Norwich. Barrels made by coopers were then used extensively to transport corn, flour and other goods by water. When he finished his apprenticeship aged about 21, Matthias found work on the Waveney and on the only part of the river which had been canalised – the 7 miles between Bungay and Beccles – known as the Bungay Navigation, which had locks at Geldeston, Ellingham and Wainford. This was in private hands. In 1757 the Bungay Navigation and Bungay Staithe, with its granaries and maltings, had become the property of Thomas Sheriffe, who traded in coals, corn and timber. As owner of the Navigation Sheriffe was entitled to duties on cargoes passing through its locks, and responsible for maintaining the sluices, banks and lock gates. He employed Matthias on repairs and in 1765 entrusted him with the management of the Navigation. In 1768 Sheriffe and his father in law were both bankrupt, and Sheriffe suddenly died by drowning. Kerrison apparently profited by their business failure, buying up property cheaply and starting in trade in this year.

In 1770 he married, and he laid out the £3000 fortune brought him by his wife in mortgages, which eventually netted him £80,000 - £100,000. Also in 1770 he occupied a corn granary at Bungay Staithe. By 1781 he had maltings, a brewery and several public houses. During the American War of Independence East Anglia was heavily engaged in supplying flour and other goods to the British troops. In 1783 the government halted deliveries to the troops, and the new owners of the Bungay Navigation were left with considerable stocks on their hands. In 1784 they were declared bankrupt and Matthias bought the Navigation and Bungay Staithe for £8000. The purchase probably included the mansion beside the Staithe (Staithe House) as the family moved into it in 1785. He promptly tightened up the operation of the Navigation. In the years 1783- 1801 he acquired farms with valuable timber, and rented sawhouses and pits at the staithe, so that he was able to take advantage of the wartime need for timber( principally for shipbuilding) during the Napoleonic Wars. He probably benefited from the rapid wartime inflation in the price of corn. He seems to have had extensive business at Yarmouth, and he also invested in Government stock.

He was widowed 1812. In 1820 he records that he had had 57 years in trade, 53 of them profitable “by having a General Knowledge of diffirents of Commerce and of Land, by Purchasing and Selling parts of it again, where I could be a Gainer, some of my neighbours had but little knowledge of it.” Matthias seems to have been a shrewd businessman who lived frugally “though never penuriously”. In other words when he made money he lived in moderate comfort but did not spend extravagantly and he saved for the future. . Indeed in 1782 one of his brothers, in need of funds, wrote to him saying “I know you have a nest egg of Cash”.

The pattern that emerges is of a businessman able to withstand the economic crises that bankrupt his competitors, probably because of his careful nature and the varied sources of his income, from malting, brewing, the timber business, rents of farms and inns, mortgage lending and dealings in Government stock. He was a pillar of the establishment, a churchwarden of Holy Trinity, Bungay and 30 years a magistrate.

But he also had an unfortunate reputation – when he thought himself in the right, which was always, he was vulgar, aggressive and rude in pursuing his interests, and entered into many lawsuits against his neighbours. His son Edward seems to have been conscious of the damage being done to

the family name. Matthias could be vindictive and persistent in his animosity. He had such a bitter dispute with the Mann family, that he stipulated in his will that none of his property should be sold or leased to them after his death. He left only £5 apiece to his only daughter and her sons because they annoyed him with requests for money.

But his granddaughter Mary had his approval. She had married in 1810 Henry Maynard, the nephew and heir of Charles, Viscount Maynard, owner of Hoxne Hall and 3,440 acres in Suffolk, as well as estates in Essex and London. This seems to have prompted him to try to raise his family to the ranks of the landed gentry. In the peace after Waterloo in 1815 the price of corn and land dropped, the value of government stocks fell, and estates came onto the market. So Matthias changed his business strategy and bought land. In 1818 he purchased the Hoxne estate from the Maynards for £49,000, at a large discount for letting Mary and Henry have its use until the death of Lord Maynard. On his death in 1824 Henry and Mary inherited the other estates of Charles Maynard, and Matthias took possession of the Hoxne estate now valued at £125,000. In 1823 he had also purchased the Cornwallis estate in Brome, Oakley and Eye, and he continued buying up other properties until his death. When he died at Staithe House, Bungay, in April 1827, he was still a provincial merchant from a lower order of society, still in "trade", but his estimated fortune was over £850,000. His monument remains in Holy Trinity Church, Bungay.

It was up to his son **Edward**, a very different character, to transform the social position of the family. He inherited wealth from his father, but he won acceptance socially through his military service.

He was born 30 July 1775 at Staithe House, Bungay. (Some sources give the year as 1774 or 1776, but 1775 is the date recorded in the parish register of Bungay Holy Trinity church.) It is not known where he was educated – possibly Bungay Grammar School. When a young man his father involved him in his business, as he acted as his father's agent at Yarmouth corn market. But he seemed not to like the life and in about 1795/6 he enlisted as a private soldier, while England was at war with revolutionary France. After 6 months (possibly as the only way of rescuing his son from the life of a common soldier who had taken the king's shilling on the drumhead, or being otherwise reconciled to his son having a military career) his father purchased him a commission as a cornet in the 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskilling Dragoons on 23 June 1796. He took to army life and rose rapidly through the ranks. He quickly made Lieutenant in 1798 and purchased a captaincy in the 47<sup>th</sup> Foot in the same year. Shortly after, still in 1798, he exchanged this for a captaincy in the 7<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons which had a better prospect of active service. This regiment (converted to 7<sup>th</sup> Hussars in 1807 – only the second regiment to gain this honour) – was very fashionable, officered mostly by sons of the nobility, It was so noted for its dash and panache, that it was nicknamed The Saucy Seventh. He served on the Helder (Netherlands) expedition in 1799, being in action on 19th September, 2nd and 6th October. He was promoted to Major in 1803, and was Lieutenant Colonel of the regiment (and so its commander in the field) from 4 April 1805. So he went from private soldier to colonel in just 10 years.

in October 1808 the regiment was sent to Spain, to reinforce Sir John Moore and was involved in the retreat to Corunna, seeing action at Benavente in December where Kerrison reportedly fought and killed the French commanding officer, and suffered a broken arm at the battle of Corunna. The regiment suffered heavy losses, only 90 of 749 men and officers returned to England fit for service. On 20 October 1810 having won fame at Corunna, at a time when military heroes were especially revered, and many county gentlemen were serving in the militia, he married Mary Martha Ellice, daughter of Alexander Ellice of Pittencreeff in Fife (deceased), a wealthy merchant, at the fashionable

church of St George, Hanover Square. He was promoted full/brevet [i.e. without a colonel's pay] colonel on 4 June 1813. The regiment had been reformed, and returned to Spain in September 1813. It crossed the Pyrenees and wintered at Bayonne. Kerrison commanded the regiment at the passage of the Oloron and fought at Sauveterre, Orthes and Toulouse in 1814. At Orthes the 7th made the only effective charge and were the only cavalry regiment mentioned by Wellington in despatches. Kerrison was awarded the Army Gold Medal and the officers of his regiment presented him with a piece of plate worth 200 guineas in testimony of their admiration of his gallantry. By June the regiment was back in England on the South Coast, and keeping order during Corn Law riots in London. Kerrison was knighted in January 1815 by the Prince Regent at Brighton where the 7th were stationed.

When Napoleon escaped from Elba the regiment was mobilised. On 16 June 1815 they fought at Quatre Bras; on 17 June at Genappe, the 7th were in the rearguard protecting the British withdrawal from Quatre Bras to Waterloo. They repeatedly charged the Lancers at the head of the French column, after which only 19 of 120 men remained in the saddle. "The bravery of the 7th Hussars shone most conspicuously". On the 18th at Waterloo they were stationed at the extreme right of the allied line, 300 yards north of the Chateau of Hougoumont. They were not used until 5pm, but then charged 12 or 14 times. Kerrison was severely wounded in the leg and his horse was killed under him. He was remounted and continued to command until the end of the battle. Five days after Waterloo on 22 June 1815 Kerrison was made a Companion of the Bath. He was later present at the siege of Cambrai, and the surrender of Paris. The regiment for 3 years formed part of the army of occupation around Paris.

In August 1819 he was promoted Major-General, and in 1821 he was made Knight Commander of Royal Guelphic Order (KCH) – a new order created in 1815. He was apparently living again at Brighton, and on the recommendation of Wellington he was created baronet, of Wick House, Sussex, on 27 July 1821, on the occasion of the coronation of George IV<sup>th</sup>. This hereditary title really underlined his entry into elite society. His active service in the army, owing to the permanent leg injury he received at Waterloo, was now over, but in 1830 he was made Colonel-in-Chief of the 14<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoons – this being a ceremonial position, as patron of the unit, granted to distinguished retired general officers. As a captain in the Suffolk Borderers Yeoman Cavalry from 1831- 1850 he spent twenty years training the reserves. Other honours and promotions followed - Knight Grand Cross of Hanover (GCH) in 1831, Lieutenant General in 1837, Knight Commander of the Bath (KCB) on 18 July 1840, and full General in 1851.

His reputation as a soldier had meanwhile enabled him to enter parliament – as MP for Shaftesbury in Dorset 1813-18, and Northampton 1818-20, a seat in parliament being a symbol of gentry status. He cannot have attended the House much at this time as he was still on active army service. His father's purchase of the Cornwallis estates in 1823 gave them almost a controlling interest in the borough of Eye (once the smallest borough in England) and he was returned unopposed on a vacancy at Eye in February 1824 "despite some delays and disgruntlement on the part of the Corporation." He gave a sumptuous entertainment at the White Lion for his constituents to celebrate. Of his 35 years in parliament, 19 were spent in support of the government of the day (including the premiership of his old commander Lord Wellington) and 16 in opposition. He was certainly active in the years 1824-32 as shown by his voting record, aside from a leave of absence in 1827 to settle his affairs when his father died and he came into his inheritance. He was a Tory, who voted against Catholic and Jewish emancipation and the Irish Franchise Bill, and was regarded as a "moderate Ultra". But he also presented petitions from Eye and Hoxne Hundred in 1830 for relief

from agricultural distress, and an anti-slavery petition. He fought bitterly against the 1832 Reform Bill but wrote "If [the reformers] could prove the country would be saved in prosperity, they should be welcome to the interest I have in my borough". His brother-in-law Edward Ellice was a prime mover of the Reform Bill and supporter of Lord Grey on the other side of the House. In October 1829 Kerrison returned Philip Sidney the son-in-law of the Duke of Clarence as the second member for Eye. After the Reform Act of 1832 Eye's representation was reduced to a single member and Kerrison was returned unopposed. But it seems he was no speaker. Frederick Henniker who had also been interested in standing for the Eye constituency, after the election declared the new member had insufficient talent "to command, or even excite attention" and was "surely not capable of speaking". Unfortunately Hansard at that period was not the full record we have now, so it only records him speaking in the House on four occasions between 1833 - 41, all short interventions which added together would only fill half a page. He was MP until 7 July 1852 when he made way for his son.

In 1827 he had inherited about 10 thousand acres of land, including 47% of Hoxne. It also was 85% of the land in Oakley, 83% of Denham, 62% of Eye, 55% of Brome and 22% of Yaxley. Clearly how he conducted himself would have a very great effect upon the local community. The borough of Bungay appointed him Town Reeve (as his father had been) in 1827, but he soon severed all connection with the town, selling all Matthias' property there. In the summer of 1829 he acquired a town house at 13 Great Stanhope St, Mayfair. In 1830 he almost completely rebuilt Hoxne Hall, to designs of Sidney Smirke, as his country seat and renamed it Oakley Park. It was described as a spacious and elegant Grecian structure...finished with exquisite taste. The furniture, mostly in the style of Louis quatorze, was said to be costly in the extreme. "Vases, Buhl cabinets, porcelains meet you at every turn". A grand opening was held in the Park where tenants, workmen and all the poor inhabitants of Hoxne, Brome, Oakley and Denham were invited for a dinner of plum pudding, roast beef and mutton and plenty of ale, followed by sports and dancing. A few days later a grand ball was given for the first families of the neighbourhood.

Although not a progressive man (he opposed proposals to bring the railway to Eye) he was a more than conscientious landlord and concerned to relieve agricultural distress. The 30's and 40's were a time of unemployment, acute distress, and riots in agricultural districts, and Suffolk had the highest number of prosecutions in the country for arson attacks. Although there was trouble nearby in Thorndon, Horham and Redlingfield, there was none in Hoxne, Denham, Eye and Oakley. His practical experience of responsibility for the welfare of troops may have helped, because in 1835 he began to let out allotments to agricultural labourers in Eye, Oakley, Brome, Hoxne and Yaxley. For the first year they had only to pay for tools and seeds, but thereafter would be subject to the normal rent and rates. By 1844 it was noted there were now about 200 allotments, each about ¼ acre, in Hoxne. At the Oakley Park fete in 1839 the 22 boys of Hoxne school presented accounts of the garden allotments that they also cultivated and prizes were awarded for the best vegetables from the cottagers' allotments. On 7<sup>th</sup> January 1840 his tenants presented him with a piece of silver plate, 3' high, which could contain a gallon of wine, in token of their high regard for him as a landlord, and for his unwearied exertions to promote the interests and welfare of all classes. In his thankyou speech he referred to the numerous cottage gardens on his property, and the willingness of his tenants when asked to give up land for the benefit of the poor. In July 1850 at his rent audit at the Swan in Hoxne he unexpectedly refunded to his tenants 10% of their half year's rent.

In 1844 at Hoxne he announced that he was erecting a Sunday School for 80 children, and that cottages were being erected near the church for 10 respectable and industrious old people to

occupy for life rent free. He did not offer them as almshouses or charity, but as rewards for “long lives of honest labour and of steady and sober conduct”. By 1845 the Oakley Homes had their first tenants. Elsewhere in the district he erected Eye National School for both sexes on Castle Hill, and established a dispensary. For his batman, who saved his life at Waterloo, he had a house built within the shell of Eye castle and in 1842 he also erected St Mary’s Cross on Oakley Park terrace to commemorate his favourite charger who had carried him in his campaigns in Holland, the Peninsular War and the Battle of Waterloo. He was regarded as benevolent and kindly, and when he died after just an hour’s illness at his house in Great Stanhope Street on 9 March 1853, as it says on his memorial, he was “held in honour by all who knew him”.

He had four children, his son Edward Clarence, and 3 daughters, Anna, who married John, Lord Henniker in 1836, Emily Harriet, who married Viscount Mahon, later Earl Stanhope, in 1834, and Agnes Burrell, much the youngest, who married William, Lord Bateman on 13 May 1854.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet, Sir **Edward Clarence** Kerrison was born on 2 January 1821 at Brighton. His life was very different from both that of his grandfather and his father, because he was born from the start to wealth, privilege and high social position. He was educated at Eton, and then Christchurch College, Oxford, and his whole life was spent as an MP and country gentleman. He had country seats at Brome Hall and Oakley Park, and a town house at 51 Berkeley Square, and was a member of 3 London clubs, the Carlton, the Travellers and the Marlborough. On 23 July 1844, aged 23, he married Caroline Margaret the daughter of Henry Fox-Strangways, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Ilchester, but they had no children. After their marriage they lived at Brome Hall. He succeeded his father as MP for Eye from 1852 and as baronet in 1853. Apart from inheriting land he became the patron of 9 livings, with the right to appoint priests to the churches of Hoxne and Denham, Braiseworth, Palgrave, Stuston, Brome, Thrandeston, Eye, Scole and Breckles in Norfolk. As MP he represented Eye until 1866 when he became MP for East Suffolk from 1866-67. In parliament, Hansard records his great interest in the Reformatory Schools’ Bill of 1857. He believed that “a system of reformation should...form part of the treatment of juvenile criminals” and that ratepayers should pay to maintain the reformatories. He maintained that £2000 a year would be enough for a reformatory in Suffolk for the juvenile criminals of the county. He also wanted to see voluntary contributions given in aid of emigration and the placing of boys out to preventive and ragged schools. Curiously he also subscribed to *The Index*, a confederate propaganda newspaper during the American Civil War, and was part of a pro-confederate parliamentary lobby – the Southern Lobby.

At home in Suffolk he served as a magistrate and deputy-lieutenant of the county. Following his father’s example he was known as a generous landlord and described as a “great friend of the agricultural labourers”. Between 1853 and 1882 he spent £21,000 out of his income improving the Oakley Park and Brome Hall estates. He built and renovated the cottages on his estate replacing clay and thatch with brick and tile. He was President of the Royal Agricultural Association in 1865 and his excellent relations with his tenants and labourers enabled him to act as a conciliator in disputes between farmers and the National Agricultural Labourers’ Union in the 1870’s, when he persuaded his tenants to recognise the union. He treated his employees well, providing social welfare and sick care in Hoxne in the form of nurse Harriet Pentney. In 1875 he was credited with having planned more institutions and public works than any other man in Suffolk in the preceding quarter century. His achievements included the Thorndon Reformatory later known as Kerrison School, the foundation of Eye Medical club, the erection of a flax works at Eye, and the promotion of the new Town Hall completed in 1857, to which he contributed half the cost. Departing from his father’s opposition to railways, he helped promote the Mellis and Eye branch railway which carried

passengers until 1931 and goods until 1964. His wife was a patron of the redevelopment of Eye Grammar School and the Guildhall.

Here in Hoxne we still have reason to be thankful to the Kerrisons. In the church the lamps were provided by the parishioners in memory of the 1<sup>st</sup> baronet, who in 1836 gave the church a barrel organ; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet converted it into a single manual organ (placed in front of the Maynard memorial). In 1869 the 2<sup>nd</sup> baronet met most of the cost of the new pews in the body of the church; in 1875 the bells were rehung after he provided new oak timber for restoration of the frame; in 1877 he again met most of the cost of the pews in the North aisle (since removed), the pulpit, reading desk and lectern, and in 1878 he gave a carved oak screen.

And it was Sir Edward Clarence Kerrison who gave us St Edmund's Hall, for use as a Reading Room and library, for lectures and concerts. Its architect was James Kellaway Colling, who also carved the church screen. It was opened in November 1879 and remains Kerrison's lasting legacy. He wanted to encourage temperance and provide both entertainment and education. To that end he also provided 400 books. It is not known what they were, and what he considered suitable reading material for the parish.

In failing health he retired from public life in his last years and died at Brome Hall in 1886 "honoured and beloved by all" and the baronetcy became extinct. His estates, which then had a gross annual value of £18,608, passed to his youngest sister, Agnes Lady Bateman (1831-1918). She also died at Brome Hall, where she had lived for many years, on 13 March 1918, and was buried at Shobdon in Herefordshire. She was the last surviving member of her branch of the Kerrison family and after her death the Kerrison estates were broken up. Oakley Park was finally demolished some time before 1930 and Brome Hall in 1958.

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