

Our History



CRATHORNE HALL
HOTEL
YARM, NORTH YORKSHIRE

The beginning

James Lionel Dugdale (1862 - 1941) laid the foundation stone of Crathorne Hall in December 1903 and the house was completed in June 1906. It was the largest country house built during the reign of Edward VII. The Architect was Sir Ernest George who had a large and successful practice. He designed an imposing classical south facade overlooking the Leven Valley and on the north side (the main entrance) he designed an interesting and original courtyard with two bell towers in the corners.

The builders were George Trollope & Sons and the fine quality stone was taken from Shaw End Quarry, near Whitby, by the Weatherill family. On most days there were a hundred men working on site and the working day began at 6.30am and ended at 6pm. Wages for the bricklayers were 10 old pence an hour and a penny less for stonemasons (because they were able to spend more time indoors). These rates equalled top London pay so were considered generous.

The Dugdale family planned to move into the Hall immediately after the 1906 Epsom Derby. Their horse, Picton (born at Crathorne in 1903) was one of the best colts of his day and was entered for the race with high hopes. The contractor for the electrical generator and fittings vowed that every window in the Hall would be a "blaze of light if Picton wins the Derby, even if it bursts this whole generating plant!" Although Picton was just beaten into second place he still beat the previous record time so no doubt the lights blazed as promised.

Crathorne Hall was built with 115 rooms, 41 of which were bedrooms. There were 26 live-in

servants who occupied the servant's wing built around a courtyard adjoining the main block on the eastside. In Victorian and Edwardian times houses increasingly contained rooms used for specific purposes, such as ironing clothes, or making biscuits and bread, or cleaning and polishing the silver. This required servants with different skills and training. At the Hall, servants with 14 different skills and disciplines were required to look after the various functions in the house. Some servants had titles that have long since disappeared, such as Scullery Maid, Still-room Maid and Odd Job Man.

The Dugdale family having made money in the Lancashire cotton trade, bought the Crathorne Estate in 1844 mainly for the partridge shooting and trout fishing, but it was several decades before the family moved there permanently. The previous owners of the estate had lived at Crathorne for five centuries and taken the name Crathorne in the 14th Century.

The 1844 auction catalogue saw the potential for the building of a fine Country House on the estates. It stated:

"To a lover of the picturesque it affords facilities for the erection of a mansion seldom, if ever, exceeded, combining the richest, with the most sublime varieties of nature. The varied and beautiful wooded vale of the romantic River Leven in the foreground, and the majestic Cleveland Hills in the distance".

It was to be sixty years before the Hall was built but the setting is indeed spectacular and is still unspoilt today.

A unique history

The Hall was designed for entertaining on a large scale and so has become a perfect Country House Hotel. It was still apparently possible in the early 1900s to contemplate building a private house of this size and the 29th April 1911 edition of Country Life stated:

“Crathorne Hall takes its place pleasantly and naturally in the long lineage of English Domestic Architecture. It relies for its effect on an unaffected study of the character and requirements of a Country House”.

The size of the Hall perhaps reflected Lionel Dugdale’s wife, Violet’s supposed ambitions to launch her son into politics and her daughter into an advantageous marriage. If these were her wishes she succeeded as her daughter, Beryl, married the Earl of Rothes at Crathorne in 1926 and her son, Thomas Lionel (1897 - 1977) became the Conservative MP for the Richmondshire Division in 1929. Seven years later Thomas married Nancy Tennant who was a talented painter, some of whose works hang in the Hall. She was born in 1904 when her father was eighty one and a half. She was the last of his 16 remarkable children - the best known being her half-sister Margot Asquith, wife of the Prime Minister. After the death of Thomas’s parents during the war, he and Nancy

moved into the Hall. Sir Thomas Dugdale (as he became in 1945) was Minister of Agriculture in Winston Churchill’s post-war cabinet but resigned from that position on a matter of principle in 1954 over the Crichel Down affair. He took the unusual step of accepting full responsibility for the mistakes made by the civil servants in his department and this case is still frequently quoted in the media as the last time that a cabinet minister resigned on a matter of principle. In 1959, 30 years after becoming an MP, he was created a Peer and sat in the House of Lords as the first Lord Crathorne.



Thomas Dugdale's life as an MP meant that many of the distinguished political figures of the day stayed at Crathorne. Conservative Prime Ministers, Sir Anthony Eden, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Harold Macmillan (later Earl of Stockton) and Sir Edward Heath, all stayed at the Hall on more than one occasion. The pleasures of a visit were enhanced by the Country house cooking of Mrs Davidson who was famous for her cooking of game, her home-made soups and rich desserts and cakes. She started work at the Hall in 1910 only retiring when the family moved out in 1977! The Hall had a particularly good cellar for keeping wine at a constant temperature and humidity. Port was a favourite and when the butler, Mr Jefferys suggested serving "the usual" it was a bottle of Taylors 1927 vintage. Another feature was nursery tea with Nanny Messenger and the Dugdale's sons James and David. Nanny ruled the roost in the most benevolent way and treated everyone who came to tea in exactly the same manner - Prime Ministers included.

Apart from the political guests there were guests, such as Lord Mountbatten. He spent much of his weekend visit repairing the boys' elaborate train set. Group Captain Douglas Bader, the Battle of Britain hero, lost both of his legs while training to join the RAF, (the film "Reach for the Sky" is the story of his life) was a popular visitor and meant that there was never a dull moment for anyone. The Queen Mother came for a small lunch party in March 1968 before performing an opening ceremony nearby and Prince Charles dropped in with the racing driver Graham Hill in 1974.

Nancy Crathorne spent much of the 60's restoring and running the Georgian Theatre Royal in nearby Richmond and many of the performers stayed at the Hall. These included the two Grand Dames of English Theatre, Edith Evans and Sybil Thorndyke. There were musicians such as Yehudi Menuhin and composers such as Benjamin Brittain. A more unusual visit came about when son James played the drums in the Cambridge University Footlights Review in 1963. The entire cast, which included John Cleese, Tim Brooke-Taylor, Graham Chapman and Bill Oddie stayed for a week. The home team had never had an invasion of such highly spirited satirists before but coped



A community hub

Crathorne Hall formed the centre of an agricultural estate and so was a focus for village activities. Church Fetes, Christmas Parties for the children and Sports Days for the village school were regular events as were various charity events drawn from a wider area. The family events which the village attended were the coming of age parties. The first was for Lionel's son Tom (as he was known) which had to be delayed for a year because he was still at the front in 1918. Although in the thick of the fighting for 18 months he came through safely at a time when life expectancy was measured in weeks. As the Yorkshire Post for 6th September 1919 put it:-

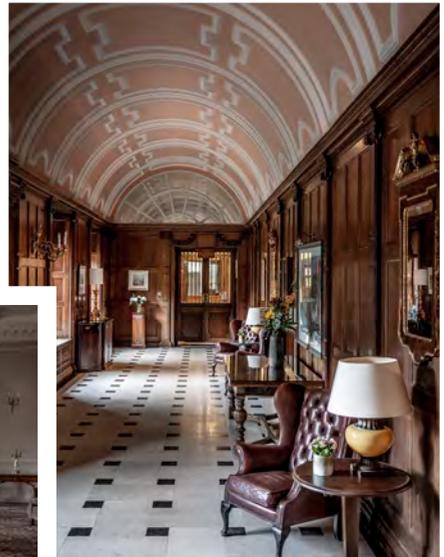
"The congratulations he and his family have received on the present occasion may, therefore, well be imagined".

"On Thursday Mr and Mrs Dugdale gave a garden party to personal friends from all parts of the Country. Yesterday, at noon, the whole of the school children were entertained to dinner followed by a diverting conjuring performance; and a merry time they spent. Then, at night,

under the glow of electric light and a brave array of gay festoons, dinner was served to about 150 tenants and work people; and afterwards, in one of the marquees, transformed into a balloon there was a dance, attended by twice as many more young people from the surrounding district".

In calmer days the coming of age of Tom's sons, were celebrated, James in 1960 and David in 1963. These happy occasions were again attended by the village and tenant farmers.

The last large village event at the Hall was a Silver Jubilee celebration for Queen Elizabeth II on 7th June 1977. After a day of festivities 200 villagers and their friends feasted off a specially fattened ox which was roasted on a spit in traditional fashion on the front lawn.



Crathorne Hall in wartime

During the two great wars Crathorne Hall and the adjoining buildings played a different role. In November 1914 Lionel and Violet Dugdale made these buildings available for a Voluntary Aid Detachment Hospital for Belgian and British troops. Violet herself commanded this British Red Cross VAD and her skills as a nurse were considerable. In the second World War there were 99 hospital beds in the Hall but they were never used (one more bed would have meant higher pay for the matron). Also Imperial Chemical Industries had an agreement that they would move into the Hall should they lose their own

headquarters on Teesside. Their offices were not bombed and nor was Crathorne, in fact the only wartime loss was the fine iron railings between high brick piers along the southern end of the kitchen garden. These were removed to be melted down for aircraft production. Within days of them being cut down the order to do so was withdrawn as it turned out that the melted down material was unsuitable for aircraft production. Unfortunately many places like Crathorne throughout the Country lost fine metalwork to no avail.

The final chapter

Thomas Dugdale, first Lord Crathorne died peacefully at the Hall on 26th March 1977 (8 years after his wife Nancy) when his son James inherited the title, and became the second Lord Crathorne. James married Sylvia Montgomery in 1970 and two years later David married Susie Powell. Just before the final move from the Hall in 1977 to two houses on the estate, the Dugdales gave an Edwardian Costume Ball. It was a wonderful and elegant finale and the family left as it had arrived - *"in a blaze of light"*.

The Ball also set the scene for the future festivities that would take place in the Hall on a regular basis following the house's successful transition into a Hotel. Now many more people enjoy visiting or staying and entertain their own guests in these beautiful surroundings every day of the year.

Crathorne Hall Hotel

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