

Somerleyton Hall

Did any of you watch the edition of Countryfile last October which was filmed at the Somerleyton estate in Suffolk? More importantly, did anyone make the connection with Crossley Heath?

Hugh Crossley, the present Lord Somerleyton, who was showing Matt Baker around the estate and explaining the WildEast project, is a direct descendant of one of the Crossley brothers who founded The Crossley Orphan Home and School in the 1860s.

We thank him for writing this explanation of WildEast for us and for confirming that he still feels a connection to Halifax and Crossley Heath.



Six generations on from John and Martha Crossley

The Halifax spirit/work ethic continues to drive a Crossley descendant to this day at Somerleyton Estate.

I can still hear Matt Baker's last tip after a long hot day's filming in glorious sunshine, "Has anyone ever told you about log lines?" I had been struggling to 'sell' WildEast – a new landscape scale nature recovery charitable foundation I had recently set up with two farming friends – to the millions of viewers who tune in to Countryfile. As I am sure the media students amongst you know already, log lines are those comments you have prepared, like a politician might, to get your main point across; and Matt was telling me this at 6pm AFTER the director had called it a wrap!

Joking aside, Matt Baker and Polly the director could not have made filming easier or more natural. Matt's professionalism and charm made me feel as if I filmed with him every day and, as a bonus, Somerleyton shone under a perfect mid-summer sky.

We were very lucky to run into Countryfile at a time when they were trying to break into more controversial topics rather than the engaging but rather 'Topsy and Tim' version of farming. To be able to say on camera that we farmers (and consumers) have a great debt to nature and need to move towards returning 20% to her was a fantastic opportunity that gave WildEast a stampede of interest which still reverberates, so we remain indebted to them.

What WildEast is focusing on is that this isn't really about farming but culture. We farmers AND consumers together need to embrace a complete reset of our relationship with planet earth. We have become 'too human' and our relationship with nature has become almost completely digital. As author Yuval Harari was saying on the radio the other morning, "We live in other men's dreams". Our agriculture and food production policies were forged on the dreams of men who had fought two world wars and felt the extreme privations of occupation, starvation and

rationing – food security and increased production was everything. This has been remarkably successful for 70 years, spurred on by the industrial and chemical advances of those wars and later the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy); successful but at a catastrophic cost to nature, to animal welfare and ultimately to human health and happiness. WildEast was born to forge a new set of dreams built around co-existence and compromise rather than 'everything now' and to return 20% of land to the wild as our 'debt covenant' with Mother Nature.

I like to think Somerleyton under the Crossleys was forged on the anvil of the industrial revolution in Halifax. I cannot claim any right to feel this way but, in many ways, six generations on from John and Martha Crossley, who started Crossleys Carpets, I feel as blessed and enriched to be carrying on the Crossleys of Halifax legacy of hard work and enterprise down at Somerleyton – WildEast is my Crossleys Carpets and WE Educate is a central pillar of the charity. I very much hope that the strong bond with Crossley Heath School, a painting of which hangs behind me as I type, remains strong into the next generation and that many of you find the time to visit Somerleyton; you will all always be welcome.

HUGH SOMERLEYTON



Hugh is pictured on the left with WildEast's other founding trustees.

The Crossley Family



John Crossley, junior



Francis Crossley



Joseph Crossley

John Crossley senior was a self-made man and bought a small mill at Dean Clough in order to carry out his carpet weaving business. When he died in 1837 the business was taken over by three of his sons and became the largest carpet manufacturer in the world during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The buildings at Dean Clough eventually covered 20 acres and over 5,000 people worked there.

Francis Crossley was the son credited with the expansion of the company, as he pioneered the use of steam power in carpet manufacture. The family held strong values derived from their Congregationalist faith and went on to benefit the town with many charitable works. These values were also apparent in their business dealings; Francis paid equal wages to men and women doing the same jobs and John Crossley and Sons was one of few industrial businesses to operate a profit-sharing scheme for the staff.

Each of the brothers had a large mansion built for themselves: Francis at Belle Vue in Hopwood Lane, where many of us will remember the Halifax library being based, along with the large glass house and aviary (This has now been renovated as a function venue and renamed Crossley

House), Joseph at Broomfield and John at Manor Heath. Hugh told me how privileged he had felt to be able to stand in his great, great grandfather's bedroom on a visit to Crossley House. The brothers provided almshouses for retired workers on Margaret Street, near to Belle Vue, and on Arden Road, as well as financing Park and Square Congregational churches. After a visit to Canada and America, Francis wanted to share some of the enjoyment he had experienced in the beauty of the scenery with the people of Halifax and engaged Joseph Paxton to design People's Park, which was made available to the people of Halifax in 1857.

In that same year, Frank Crossley, as he was known, wrote to his brothers outlining a scheme he had in mind to endow an orphan home. Both were in agreement and by 1864, with the building work nearing completion, the doors of The Crossley Orphan Home and School at the top of Skircoat Moor were opened to the first six young boys. The Crossley and Porter Schools grew from that institution and eventually became The Crossley Heath School.

Francis was Mayor of Halifax in 1849 and 1850 and was elected Liberal MP for Halifax in 1852, later becoming MP for the West Riding of Yorkshire. He was created a baronet in 1862 for his political activities and philanthropic works.

Somerleyton Hall, near Lowestoft, was bought by Francis as a country retreat and, after his death in 1872, his wife Martha spent most of her time there.

Savile Brinton Crossley, 1st Baron Somerleyton

Savile was the only child of Francis and Martha. He served as MP for Lowestoft and later for Halifax. Having been appointed Paymaster General in Balfour's government, he was raised to the peerage and held the office of Government Whip in the coalition government of David Lloyd George.

Francis Savile Crossley, 2nd Baron Somerleyton

Known as Frank, he was unsuccessful in his attempt to become MP for Halifax in 1928, following a military career which saw him wounded and taken prisoner in France during WW1.

Savile William Crossley, 3rd Baron Somerleyton

Hugh's father, known as Bill, served as Lord-in-waiting from 1979 to 1992 and was Master of the Horse to the Queen from 1991 to 1998.

Hugh Francis Savile Crossley, 4th Baron Somerleyton

Born in 1971, Hugh served as Second Page of Honour to Elizabeth II for a year at the age of 12. He owned restaurants in London and an entertainments business before taking over responsibility for Somerleyton Estate when his father died in 2012.



SOMERLEYTON
HALL & GARDENS

This roundel, used in publicity for Somerleyton, incorporates the demi-hind which is part of the Crossley family coat of arms and still appears at the top of the school badge. It also used to feature on sixth form ties but was perhaps most prominent on the Crossley's carpet on the floor of the school library.

Photos left: Crossley House, Dean Clough and People's Park.



The Eurasian lynx is the symbol of WildEast, with a significant area of the map of East Anglia included within its outline.

Somerleyton Estate

Somerleyton Hall is the family home of Hugh, his wife Lara and their three children John, Christabel and Margot. The magnificent gardens, which include a yew hedge maze dating from 1846 and peach cages and glass houses designed by Joseph Paxton, are open to the public, as is the Hall during normal times.

The 5000-acre estate also encompasses a large natural lake, holiday cottages, lodges, a hotel and a country pub. One fifth of the estate has been committed to re-wilding, with red and fallow deer, pigs, ponies, cattle and sheep all enjoying the wild land system.



The Maze.



Fritton Lake.



The Crown at Somerleyton

Those of you who follow the Netflix series 'The Crown' will already have seen parts of Somerleyton Hall without realizing it. The Christmas scenes in Series 4, depicting the Royal Family at Sandringham House, were actually shot at Somerleyton. Apparently, Netflix got in contact, out of the blue, after searching for suitable locations. There are similarities between Sandringham and Somerleyton, with both having been original Jacobean houses that were remodelled in the Victorian era.

The actual filming took place over only three days in early March, just before lockdown. It took twelve days and a very smooth operation, however, to pack away Somerleyton's furniture and treasures, repaint certain areas and dress The Hall for a Royal Christmas.



Photographs courtesy of NETFLIX.