



# KITLEY HOUSE

— Estate & Gardens —

*Pax Potior*

*Bello*

*Peace is more  
powerful than War.*

*- Kitley Family*

*motto*



*A Guide to Kitley House*



## *The Beginnings of Kitley House*

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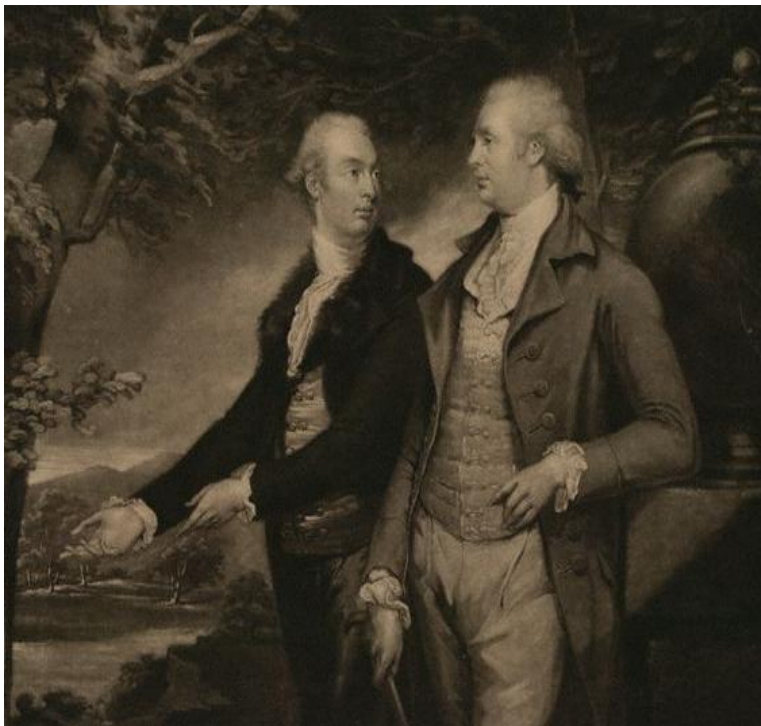
Welcome to Kitley House.

Once a family home turned hotel and restaurant, Kitley has a diverse history, its location a picturesque snapshot of tranquillity and abundance. As you step through the doors and into a property steeped in so much history and tradition, we hope that you will become familiar with a building full of not only character and charm, but of many influences and styles. Its sympathetic Tudor style is also enriched with Regency elegance and Jacobian gentility. Its story is not yet complete, and many aspects of the house still remain undiscovered- the Bastard family still reside in Yealmpton however and interest from the public continues to make Kitley House a very unique and historical destination.

Thought to have been built during the reign of Henry VII by Thomas Pollexfen, the house has early Tudor origins; some speculate that the house was built between 1457 and 1509. The Pollexfens (pronounced Poulston) resided at Kitley until 1710, when Edmund Polloxfen died. Anne, the heiress

of the estate, married William Bastard of Gerston Manor, an estate located near Collapit Creek, not far from Kingsbridge estuary. The family became tied to the Bastard line, a line that could be traced back to the Norman conquest of 1066. William was MP for Dartmouth and recorder of Totnes during the period of 1603-1625 when King James I was on the throne.

Edmund Bastard, a Lt Colonel and second son of Colonel William Bastard, eloped to Greta Green with Spanish Galleon Heiress Jane Pownoll, whose father gained her fortune by capturing the '*La Hermoinda*' Frigate in 1763. Captain Pownoll and the HMS Apollo brought back a tremendous fortune of £500,000, £65,000 of which was the Captain's share, and Jane took the opportunity to invest wisely. She and her husband are said to have been so determined not to be caught in their flight, that William hired out all the carriages in Plymouth to prevent detection. The HMS Apollo can be found (in model form) upon the upper landing of the house, at the top of the magnificent 18<sup>th</sup> century wooden staircase. Colonel William Bastard himself was respected for his command of the East Devonshire Militia in 1779 and his son Edmund Pollexfen Bastard became Colonel of the same regiment in 1799. In 1782 Edmund became a member of Parliament for Truro and was a keen member of the Tory party throughout his life. His nephew, also called



John Pollexfen Bastard & Edmund Bastard by Samuel William Reynolds  
(son of Joshua Reynolds) 1795.

Edmund, succeeded him in 1812 in the Devonshire constituency. Figures of military and political aptitude, the Bastards were influential and fashionable, witnessing a great amount of cultural and social change over the centuries, as well as making the house famous through many different spheres.

## *Literature and Art: the prominent cultural influence of Kitley House*

Kitley has seen many famous faces come and go during its existence, particularly those linked to art and culture. Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) stayed at the house whilst on a sojourn around the South Hams in 1762 with his friend the famous portrait artist Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792).

Reynolds himself hailed from the nearby town of Plympton, and at 39 years old (not yet awarded his

knighthood) he had relatives to visit and paintings to inspect. Reynolds by that point had become a renowned portrait artist in London and had also made a name for himself in the West Country. He had painted a

striking portrait of Anne Bastard circa 1757 five years previously, and it certainly leaves a lasting impression. The painting not only demonstrates the skill and talent he had for his vocation, but shows how Anne is portrayed as both attractive and respectable within the portrait. With her hand on her hip and her gaze looking outside the frame, she is

made to seem elegant and striking, whilst embodying the poise and mystique so admired by Reynolds in Greek and Roman classic art. A self portrait of Reynolds was hung at Kitley in the drawing room up until a few years ago.



Sarah Catherine Martin (1768?-1826), famous for her poem '*The Comic Adventures of Old mother Hubbard and Her Dog*' was aunt to the Pollexfen-Bastard children, following the marriage of Edmund Pollexfen Bastard to her sister Judith Ann Martin on 2 July 1809. Sarah wrote the poem in 1804,

allegedly to amuse the children. It is thought that the character of Old Mother Hubbard is actually based on Kitley's resident housekeeper, whose cupboard is located in the area which is now the basement where the housekeeper had her sitting room. In 1806, after sending her manuscript to John Harris, a London based publisher, Sarah was soon asked if Harris and his publishing company could create 10,000 copies to distribute. And the rest as they say is history! Sarah wrote another adventure for Old Mother Hubbard and her dog in 1806 and the poem is still as cherished as it was two hundred years ago.



Sarah also captured the hearts of some very prestigious admirers. While her Old Mother Hubbard charmed a nation of children, she became closely linked to Prince William Henry, who later became King William IV. At 17 years old she could have been married into royalty and become Queen of England, though she later declined his proposal.

Susan Pollexfen was the mother of poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) in Dublin. William Pollexfen was his maternal grandfather, and his character is revealed to be quite fearsome to the young Yeats, who recalls "for all my

admiration and alarm, neither I nor anyone else thought it wrong to outwit his violence or his rigour" in 'Reveries over Childhood and Youth'. Yeats looked up to the 'Lear-like figure' that influenced his young life and provides an interesting account into the military background that dominated the reputation of his grandfather. Elizabeth Polloxfen (born 1798) was William Butler Yeats' great grandmother and married Irish merchant William Middleton when she was just 15 years old. Kitley's Irish connection had begun generations before William Butler Yeats was born, opening another window of enquiry onto the Kitley House story...

## *A Setting of Natural Beauty: the House and its Design*

At the head of the Yealm estuary's wooded creeks sits Kitley, its Tudor heritage still identifiable, if a little influenced by the renovations of 1820. The grounds in particular were enhanced by Late Georgian taste, particularly by the construction of a dam across the tidal waters, creating a freshwater lake. The house itself was taken into the considerably well traversed hands of Humphry Repton's youngest son George Stanley Repton (1786-1858), who had previously worked under John Nash (1752-1835) and became interested in cultivating the Tudor and traditional styles within his work. Kitley's 'Late Regency' interior allowed the house to combine the old and the new, mixing tradition and trend and incorporating the most sought after elements of any fashionable country home at that time.

Kitley bore a close resemblance to other local country houses of the era c. 1720, particularly Anthony, Plympton House and Puslinch. With its 600 acres of grounds and mile long driveway to the house, the house itself stands as a remarkably clear construction, its silvery Devon marble-granite effect and tapering shapes as striking in daylight as in moonlight.

Kitley's entrance hall still bears the early marks of the family ancestry, its mock heraldic shields and banners demonstrating to any visitor the pedigree of the family tree and the proud reputation of its early Tudor age. Pre-dating Repton's work is the grand central staircase, which was an unusual feature for 17<sup>th</sup> century Devon houses. With its fluted and spiral balusters, arched doorways, fielded panelling and inlaid steps, it sets a grand tone and demonstrates excellent craftsmanship.

In 1820 Repton started work by making water-colour drawings of his plans for the house from each aspect as he saw that it could do with improvement. The H shape of the original 16<sup>th</sup> century house is still visible, its courtyard filled in by a low wing added by Repton. Behind this is a large window (added in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) above the staircase in the Great Hall, which is dominated by a clock and belfry on the west side. Repton's reworking of the property was extensive and radical; the ground floor of the Tudor house became the basement of the Georgian one. A terrace was designed to conceal the basement level on the south side where the ground drops. The east side saw a saloon added to the east forecourt but the Georgian entrance on the

North side was altered only slightly. Repton replaced the hipped roofs and sashes by gables and mullions and added pinnacles to the parapet.

The thickness of the internal walls in the middle of the house proves that much of the Tudor structure was integrated into the 18<sup>th</sup> century rebuilding, but the north and south fronts were then rebuilt. This, coupled with the changes to the surrounding landscape, was designed to enhance the natural beauty of the area and capture the trend for picturesque homes and gardens.



Kitley's fascinating history does not end here, as there is still so much more to discover. We hope that this has enlightened you as to the many intriguing elements of Kitley, and that you may be keen to further explore the house's unique past. We can recommend the following texts for further reading:

- Simon Jenkins' superb 'England's Thousand Best Houses' (London: Penguin Books, 2003), which provides excellent introductory information. Other local houses are listed in this volume and are described with a keen sense of detail. It is worth noting that Kitley is now placed well within the top 200 best houses in England!
- After Sarah Martin came W.B Yeats in the Kitley connection to literature, and 'Reveries over Childhood and Youth' (which can be downloaded from [www.gutenberg.org/ebooks](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks)) is a very honest and lyrical recollection of childhood memories and family recollections by the poet.
- [www.thejohnsonsociety.org.uk](http://www.thejohnsonsociety.org.uk) contains some fascinating information regarding Dr Johnson's trip around Devon with Reynolds in 1762, including a recreation of the steps taken by the two men by Johnson enthusiasts.
- Mike Brown's 'A Guide to the Heraldry at Kitley House', particularly for those interested in medieval history and for those who would like to get to know the terminology within Heraldry.

