

Broome Park

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Today, Broome Park is well known locally as a Grade I listed high class hotel and golf course, but not so well known, for its distinguished owners and history.

Broome was a manorial holding in the parish of Barham owned by the Digges family and in Henry VIII's time was farmland. The Digges family were influential landowners and engineers and did work to improve Dover's harbour. John Digges, son of Sir Dudley Digges of Chilham Castle, lived at nearby Digges Court (which still survives) and upon the death of his father inherited a substantial part of his estate. However, the younger son, Leonard, took as his share, a much smaller area known as Broome.

The first house was completed in 1639, following the purchase of the site in its sheltered valley from Leonard Digges by Basil Dixwell. He had become MP for Hythe in 1626, Sheriff of Kent in 1627 and was made Baron in 1628. Stables, a brew house and gardens were also created. Sir Basil died in 1642 with no heirs. His nephew, Mark, inherited but died soon after, leaving everything to his three-year-

old son, another Basil. His uncle, Colonel John Dixwell was appointed guardian and managed the estate.

The Colonel held strong Parliamentary views and was a signatory to the death warrant of Charles I. He was also responsible for the defence of south-east England. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the Colonel fled the country, dying in America, aged 82, in 1689. Meanwhile, young Basil had come of age and was recreated Baron by Charles II. But he died young in 1668, leaving everything to his three-year-old son, yet another Basil, who lived another 82 years, dying in 1750. His sole heir was his sister's granddaughter Elizabeth, who married George Oxenden.

Sir George had to take the name of Dixwell as a condition of the inheritance, but died in 1753, leaving the estate to his father who gave it to his son, Henry Oxenden, born in 1756. He modernized the house. Sir Henry was a brilliant engineer and was involved in further improvements to Dover Harbour. A commander of a troop of Yeomanry, he died in 1837. The Duke of Wellington was one of his coffin bearers.



Col John Dixwell MP



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The Oxenden family stayed at Broome Park until 1911, when Sir Percy sold it for £14,000 to its most famous owner, Colonel Herbert Kitchener, later to become Field Marshall Lord Kitchener of Khartoum.

Herbert Horatio Kitchener, born in 1850, was one of England's most distinguished soldiers. Map maker, engineer and campaigner, he had earned a great reputation throughout the Empire. Today, he is perhaps best known for his face on a poster appealing for volunteers upon the outbreak of the First World War.

With the mansion in need of many repairs, Kitchener's favourite niece, Nora, personally supervised a major programme of restoration and improvements to the house while her uncle was away on army duty. The building was strengthened and the addition of two magnificent fireplaces and the very ornate ceiling in the grand entrance hall show symbols reflecting Kitchener's life as a soldier and the campaigns in which he was involved. His intention was to house his collection of antiquities, acquired from his many journeys abroad, as well as provide a place to enjoy his retirement. However, Kitchener was drowned in 1916 when HMS Hampshire struck a mine and sank off the Orkneys. Unfortunately, he never lived in the mansion. With all the work still going on, he stayed in a cottage in the grounds during his visits.

The Field Marshall never married. His nephew, Toby, Viscount Broome, inherited Broome Park and subsequently leased it to boxing promoter, impresario and



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entrepreneur, Australian Hugh McIntosh. When declared bankrupt, McIntosh surrendered the lease to Toby's widow, but, with the mansion in great need of repair, the Viscountess had no wish to live there.

Between the two World Wars many of the great country houses declined, caused by death duties and the economic situation. This became a national concern.

Broome Park came to the attention of Mr G.C. Jell who bought it and opened it as an hotel. During World War II, the house and estate were requisitioned for military use as a hospital, with several Scottish regiments stationed there as well as a Canadian tank regiment. It is rumoured that tanks lie buried beneath the present golf course! After the war, the house resumed its prewar role until 1979 when the Jells retired. Mr Jell sold the mansion following the deaths of his son in a swimming accident in Australia and of Mrs Jell, who never recovered from a fall down the stairs at Broome.

Golf Leisure bought the estate and constructed the golf course. Eighteen time share apartments were created in the house and, later twenty-six units known as Regency Villas were built within the grounds. The house became a popular venue for various functions, including a wedding venue after Kitchener Hotels became the owners in 2017.

For further information see <https://www.broomepark.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Broome-Park-A-Brief-History-Leaflet.pdf>