



**BRIDAL PARTY:** The bridesmaids make last minute adjustments as they arrive at Sommerleyton Church, centre, and above right, the bride's inscribed, 22ct gold court ring.

SOMERLEYTON

# Suffolk estate is a perfect setting for a 'magical day'

Pictures: ANDY DARNELL

By STEPHEN PULLINGER

The bright wedding finery brought a rainbow of colour to the gloom of a winter's afternoon.

And the timeless beauty and serenity of St Mary's Church, set back from the road in splendid isolation, made the perfect setting for one of the region's weddings of the year.

Only the sunshine was missing, bemoaned one villager who had come to watch. That had disappeared under a steely grey sky two hours before the bells began pealing to welcome guests to Sommerleyton.

The marriage of Lord Sommerleyton's son and heir, the Hon Hugh Crossley, to his fittingly radiant bride Lara Bailey brought guests from as far afield as India, New Zealand and the United States.

Figures from some of the region's most prominent families - including Sir Nicholas Bacon, Viscount Coke, the Cators and the Buxtons - squeezed into the intimate candle-lit church alongside loyal estate workers, among them head gardener Bob Coutts.

In keeping with his reputation for the endearingly unorthodox, even Mr Crossley's pet mongrels Roxy and Judas were in attendance.

A number of villagers stood at a respectful distance in the churchyard to send off their favourite son and admire the fashions, including, of course, the dress.

One elderly woman, who declined to be named, revealed her husband had worked for the estate for 50 years and his father had worked for Lord Sommerleyton's father for 60 years.

After a normally deserted field had become a packed car park and the last guests had hurried in, came the moment for which everyone had been waiting - first the arrival of the bridesmaids and page boys and then the bride.

The three bridesmaids, all nieces of Mr Crossley, drew admiring comments about their pretty patterned, coffee-coloured dresses. The page boys, one skipping ahead, included two of Mr Crossley's nephews and a cousin of Miss Bailey.

They waited at the church entrance while the bride exercised her right to be five minutes late, finally arriving in a fittingly-regal black Rolls Royce, which carefully manoeuvred so her door opened on to the green carpet that had been laid over the muddy



**HERE COMES THE BRIDE:** Hugh Crossley and Lara Bailey and below, the bride's proud father.

church approach. As she adjusted her headdress, all eyes were fixed on Miss Bailey's outfit which had been specially made by the Queen's dressmaker Stuart Parvin. An off-white jacket in silk brocade was complemented by a silk tulle dress of the same colour.

Once inside the church, an opening prayer by the Rector of Sommerleyton, the Rev Roger Kent, was followed by a service of traditional hymns and readings, with the sermon delivered and marriage ceremony conducted by the Lord Bishop of Norwich, the Rt Rev Graham James.

During the registration of the marriage a haunting version of the Sull Aria from the Marriage of Figaro was performed by Clare Lloyd and Alex Kidgell.

As the newly-married

couple emerged from the church, the beaming bride showed well-wishers her 22ct gold court ring, engraved with the date and a private message from her husband. Softly-glowing lights on the sweeping drive of Sommerleyton Hall beckoned the wedding party to

the reception, inside giant tepees as well as the main house.

Speaking to the EDP yesterday, before their honeymoon flight to Tanzania from Heathrow, Mr Crossley, 37, paid tribute to the meticulous preparation by estate staff and head chef Alan Leech.

"I would also like to thank the Lord Bishop of Norwich for making it such a magical day for us," he added.

On their return, the couple will begin their quest to lead Sommerleyton Hall into a new green era, replacing the oil-fired boilers by wood-burning central heating in time for next winter. And in the lead-up to 2013, the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Crossleys at Sommerleyton, they will seek to carry out a major revamp of the popular gardens. One of their ideas is the creation of an Elizabethan garden to evoke the memory of the house that existed on the site before the present Victorian stately home.



**MORNING SUIT:** From top, Lord Sommerleyton; Charles Meyrick with champagne for the couple's drive home; the groom arrives with his best man Thomas Leveritt.