

GASPÉ OF YESTERDAY

THE KIRKE BROTHERS IN GASPÉ  
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Stirring naval action in Gaspé Bay  
in 1628 / 29 as the Kirke brothers  
captured supply ships bound to Qué-  
bec and the relief of Champlain's  
colony.

Ken Annett

THE KIRKE BROTHERS IN GASPE

With reference to Gaspé Bay in his volume, "L'Ile Percée", the author John Mason Clarke remarked:

"...How often these broken flanks of mountains which make the Forillon have gazed upon momentous events parading the waters of Gaspé Bay. In between them De Roquemont scurried with his supply ships intended for the starving tenants of Québec when the fleets of Kirke were snatching New France from the hands of Champlain, and here they were found, captured and sunk..."

To which the author adds in his book "The Heart of Gaspé":

"It was in 1628 that Admiral Kirke of the English fleet overhauled the French commander, De Roquemont in Gaspé Bay, where he had taken harbour, and fought him to his complete finish, burning his vessels laden with supplies for the forces at Quebec and capturing an enormous booty. The Dieppoise Englishman tarried awhile on Gaspé Basin, and Faucher says that while there he burned a cache of grain belonging to the missionaries..."

HISTORICAL      Only two years after the founding of Québec by  
BACKDROP      Champlain and his Huguenot associates in 1608,  
King Henry IV of France was assassinated, leaving his great work of national reform incomplete. As his son and heir, Louis XIII to be, was only nine years old, the Queen Mother, Marie d'Medici, assumed the role of Regent. Soon France was once again plunged into civil strife through political and religious intrigue. Following the death of the Queen Mother,

HISTORICAL  
BACKDROP  
CTD

Cardinal Richelieu became the power behind the throne and the chief architect of French policy until his death in 1642. He was unremitting in his hostility towards and savage percecution of the Huguenots.He

warred against them and in 1628 captured the Huguenot stronghold of La Rochelle after a long and bitter siege remember for the heroism of its defenders. Though Richelieu succeeded in breaking the political and military power of the Huguenots he failed to despoil their spiritual heritage and religious influence. And,significantly for New France, this savage round of Huguenot persecution incited sympathy and support of other European nations, such as England,for the Huguenot cause.

The rise of Cardinal Richelieu to power in France was reflected in a dramatic change of Huguenot fortunes in New France. Prior to Richelieu's time Huguenot traders had worked cooperatively with Catholic associates in the founding of Port Royal, Tadoussac and Québec, Now, in 1625, a year after Richelieu came to power in France, the first members of the Jesuit Order arrived in Quebec and began a persistant campaign against Huguenot presence and influence. As militant champions of Catholicism the Jesuits were implacable foes of Protestantism in general and the Calvinist Huguenots in particular. With the support of their Order in France and sympathy of Cardinal Richelieu they mounted an effective lobby at the Royal Court in Paris against Huguenots in New France. As early as 1627 they scored their first major "victory" in securing the revocation of trade privileges held by the Huguenot De Caen Company in New France. Richelieu promptly awarded that charter to the exclusively Catholic "Company of One Hundred Associates". Such "de facto" exclusion of Huguenots to trade rights in New France anticipated by some sixty years the "de jure" Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.

In the adversary situation created in New France by the Jesuits and Cardinal Richelieu the Huguenots were not without significant resources and power to retaliate. As established international traders, the Huguenots could enlist support from other nations,such as England, when faced by persecution and commercial loss. King Charles the First of England was sympathetic and supportive of the Huguenot cause. The merchants of Dieppe and other seaports along the English

HISTORICAL  
BACKDROP

CTD

Channel, both English and French, helped the Kirke brothers to mount expeditions to harass the maritime supply lines of the Company of One Hundred Associates and raid their posts in New France. The account that follows recalls one such action in Gaspé Bay.

THE KIRKE  
BROTHERS

The Kirke brothers, David, Lewis, John, James and Thomas were the sons of Jarvis (Gervase) Kirke and his wife, Elizabeth Gowding (Goudon) The eldest, David, was born c.1597. The family was of the Huguenot faith. The father's origins were in Derbyshire, England while the mother was of the French culture. That she imparted the French language and culture to her sturdy, sea-faring sons would have significant implications for the distant colony of Québec in due time.

As a consequence of the interests and activities of Jarvis Kirke as an international merchant trader, operating both in England and France, it was not surprising that his sons took to the sea quite naturally to find fame and fortune. The merchant traders of Dieppe were well informed about French exploration and trade in the new lands of Acadia and Québec across the Atlantic. In 1627 Jarvis Kirke was a member of a consortium of merchant traders that formed a company to trade and colonize in the St. Lawrence. But, as noted above, the policies of Cardinal Richelieu were hostile to the plans of the new company. Jarvis Kirke had influential English partners and friends, including Sir William Alexander who had been granted the lands now comprising the maritime provinces of Canada and the estuary of the St. Lawrence. Alexander and the King encouraged and supported Kirke in the preparation of a fleet of three ships in the Spring of 1628 to attack the French in the St. Lawrence. The ships, under the command of Captain David Kirke, were manned by some two hundred Huguenot seamen and were equipped for hard fighting. They sailed in company with ships of Sir William Alexander that were bound for Nova Scotia and reached Tadoussac (founded in 1600 by the Huguenot, Chauvin.) in July. A vessel carrying supplies for Champlain at Québec was seized and a delegation of Basque traders dispatched to Quebec to demand its surrender. When Champlain refused to surrender David Kirke and his brother captains proceeded to cruise the River St. Lawrence from Tadoussac to Gaspé with the view of intercepting

and capturing any French ships bound for Québec with men and supplies.

De ROQUEMONT FLEET The Kirkes may well have had prior information that a major effort would be made by France that summer of 1628 to move urgently needed supplies to Québec. In fact a fleet of four vessels commanded by Admiral Claude Roquemont de Brison, with supplies and some 400 colonists, had sailed from France bound for the St.Lawrence. Having crossed the Atlantic this fleet assembled in Gaspé Bay. The Kirke brothers learned of the arrival of the De Roquemont fleet at Gaspé and hastened to attack.

NAVAL BATTLE Two accounts exist of the capture and destruction of the fleet of Admiral De Roquemont by the Kirkes. The first holds that De Roquemont sailed from Gaspé Bay hoping to evade the Kirke ships in the fogs of the St.Lawrence. The second account, documented by a descendant of the Kirkes, recounts that the fleet of De Roquemont was surprised by the Kirke ships within Gaspé Bay and captured after a short, fierce naval engagement. Admiral De Roquemont, his crews, the colonists including M.de la Tour and others of note were taken prisoner. The quantity of supplies and munitions seized was said to be so great that it taxed the ability of the Kirke brothers to carry it off.

When news of this disaster reached France, Captain David Kirke and his brothers were charged with treason by the King and Council, declared to be public enemies and condemned to be burnt in effigy. In England there was rejoicing as David Kirke and his men returned victorious with shiploads of prisoners and the supplies that had been destined for the relief of Québec.

SEQUEL Aware that the situation of the Québec colony must be desperate, the Kirke brothers lost no time in organizing another expedition to the St.Lawrence for the Spring of 1629. Consequently on March 25th this expedition sailed from Gravesend with the following ships:

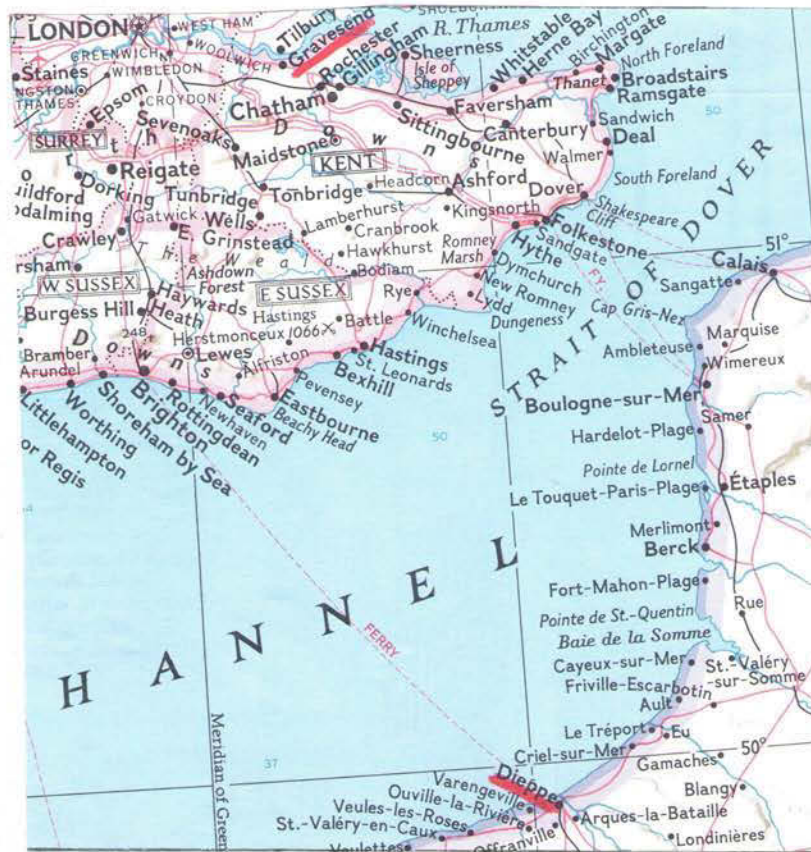
ABIGAIL	- 300 tons	Capt.David Kirke
WILLIAM	- 200 tons	Capt.Lewis Kirke
GERVASE	- 200 tons	Capt.Brewerton
GEORGE	- 200 tons	Capt.Thomas Kirke

together with two other ships and three pinnaces -"all well manned, armed and furnished with Letters-of-Marque under the Broad Seal of England. It would have been more than likely that this Kirke fleet

SEQUEL met at rendezvous in Gaspé Bay after their Atlantic  
1629 crossing. It is on record that Champlain had sent his  
CTD brother-in-law, Eustache Boullé, downriver to Gaspé to  
seek urgently needed supplies. He had met there with  
Emery De Caen who was en route to Québec with relief and who had  
the misfortune to encounter the Kirke ships and have his vessel  
and cargo captured.

QUEBEC FALLS While the details of that summer of 1629 on the  
TO KIRKES St. Lawrence are beyond the scope of this account  
suffice it to say that Champlain was obliged to  
surrender Quebec to the Kirkes and return to France. The flag of  
England replaced the Lily Flag of France over Quebec as of July 19th.,  
1629.

In recognition of his services David Kirke was  
knighted by the King of England in 1633 and subsequently became  
the first Governor of Newfoundland.



### DIEPPE

Seaport of northern France on the English Channel, its name recalls the Viking era when the Norsemen found its "diep" or coastal inlet a convenient harbour. Trade by its mariners made it prosperous as early as the 14th century.

In the reign of King Henry the Fourth it was a center of the Huguenot faith. The name is all too well known to Canadians for the "Dieppe Raid" of World War II.

### GRAVESEND

River port on the Thames some 22 miles down stream from London. Settled in Roman times, it was included in the Domesday Book of the Norman era for its landing place. Long associated with British maritime trade, it was a natural point of departure for the Kirke expedition of 1629 to the River St. Lawrence and the capture of Québec from Champlain.