

THE GOLDEN AGE OF BURTON BRADSTOCK

JACK BAILEY talking to JOHN GRANTHAM at his home at Long Bredy in 2004.....

Edited by Sheila Spencer-Smith

“Alec Pitt-Rivers was very fond of Burton Bradstock,” *said Jack*. “ In his home at Rushmore Park in Hampshire he had all sorts of stuff found washed up on the beach here . . . whale bones, whale ribs and all sorts of things all labelled *Washed upon the beach at Burton Bradstock*.

“When my father came out of the army after World War One he got a job as the Estate Foreman at the Pitt-Rivers large estate at Rushmore. We moved into the Park House in 1919 ...it’s still there in the middle of Rushmore Park. He was with the General’s son, Alec, who was the father of the Pitt-Rivers of Hinton St Mary. I went to Tollard Royal School for a while and then I went to Gillingham Grammar School and I used to stay there. My mother thought she’d better go back in to teaching again and she went off into Wiltshire somewhere. My father stayed at Rushmore. By then Alec Pitt-Rivers was getting very weak. He had a soft spot for Father. He left instructions that when he died Father should “screw him down.” They always used to talk about that. When Alec died in 1927 the estate was directed partly from Hinton St Mary but Father stayed on in Rushmore.

“In about 1928 or 1929 Mother took over Long Bredy School. This worked in quite well because Father kept an eye on the estate at Burton Bradstock all through my boyhood. In fact my first memory of Burton Bradstock goes back to 1925. My father used to come down every year for three or four weeks every August with Mother and me. You know where the Cliff Hotel and Barton Olivers are on the cliff? There’s a flat piece of land there. Well, Alec Pitt-Rivers put up a World War One army hut there and we used to stay there. Father used to come to “tidy up Burton” as we used to say because Pitt-Rivers held the farms in Burton Bradstock. They were controlled from Hinton St Mary and there was no one resident in Burton Bradstock to keep an eye on them. Father used to go round and appraise all the Pitt-Rivers farms, like Cogden. He kept an eye on the rents and so on and told Hinton what work needed doing on them. There were about fourteen or sixteen workmen, you know, who worked on the houses and cottages. The

estate workshop was just by The Anchor where the lane goes round. The big jobs they let out to bigger firms but small things were done by father.

When Alec Pitt-Rivers died his sons, Captain George and Michael took over. And then when Rushmore was sold Father moved down to Burton Bradstock for the rest of his working life and until he retired moved into the school house at Long Bredy with Mother and me. This was about 1929, I suppose. He went down to Burton every day and had to open five gates to get there.

As a child I remember Burton as a small village with fishermen who still wore their blue jerseys and so on. They were family owned and the family names hung on for years in the village because the families stayed for year after year and I knew the youngsters as I was growing up. There was always one chap in the season who used to go up on the cliff and wait at the top and when he saw the mackerel straying he'd shout *Mackerel!* And it was relayed all down the village . . . *Mackerel! Mackerel! Mackerel!* . . . and they all came belting up Cliff Road and down the track. This was the main way down in those days. There's a footpath that goes from behind the garage across the fields to the Hive you could use if you were in a hurry.

“They used to have horses and carts waiting down in the village. All this mackerel had to be carried from the beach up the track to the top of the cliff and down the road past the house on the left which used to be a thatched cottage where a farmer lived who kept two or three cows. We used to get our milk from there.

“There were the same number of boats at Swyre and Puncknowle. They used to catch so many mackerel sometimes that the whole beach was strewn with fish they didn't want. One year when it happened Baverstock Knight, the local land agent there, persuaded them to collect them up and strew them about on a field near The Bull at Swyre. You could see the effect for years afterwards and he kept trying to tell the locals that is what they ought to do, manure their fields.

“The women would come round with baskets selling the fish and a lot would go elsewhere. The women used to make the nets too. A cottage industry. The cord was

brought round to them and they usually did it where there were two cottages together so they could natter to each other at the same time. I used to see them sitting at their doorways right the way down through the valley.

“The important thing to remember is that now the road goes down to the Hive from the coast road. Father supervised that road being built. You know that as you go down that road there is a house on the corner, originally built of wood, and Father had that built for Pitt-Rivers. In my time you couldn’t get down that way. Every day a couple of white horses and a cart went down and very fine sand was sifted out of the shingle and hauled back up the track and down the road to Burton. Because it was so fine it sold at a much better price for building purposes. The sand is just the same today.

“You know *Greystones*, the little grey bungalow by the side of the villas on the cliff? The Estate had that built, overseen by Father, and that’s where he died because when he retired he and my mother lived there.

“By then the toilets, supervised by Father, were built. From the bungalow they could look down to the beach and could see the toilets. You see the Pitt-Rivers had the idea they could make them pay but it didn’t work like that. Father used to get so cross. “One would go in,” he used to say. “And then ten would follow and they’d all hold the door open for one another so they didn’t have to put their pennies in the slot.”

And then when Burton Bradstock was sold everything changed.

Michael Pitt-Rivers was the one most interested in Burton Bradstock. The rents were only minimal, though. Burton had got quite a different sort of history from the other Bride Valley villages. You must remember that the parish of Burton Bradstock ran right up to Cogden and down to West Bay where father looked after the tall flats (*Pier Terrace*) because it’s on this side of the river. Burton people were different too. Most of the chaps didn’t work on the land but spent their time fishing when they could. On a summer evening when the weather was all right and the mackerel were about they’d be down there and you’d see five or six boats go out. The one that got in the water first had the choice of pitch.

Father wasn't very strong and he lived till he was in his seventies. The Pitt-Rivers were good to him and gave him a pension. They knew when they had a good man. Father could turn his hand to this and keep an eye on things, you know. He had some sort of sympathy for the place and got on with the people and the farmers. And that's why Burton was a unique sort of place. Something-or-other kept the whole thing going. Father stayed on working after the sale because there were a few properties that needed seeing to, as I remember it.

"The houses and cottages were offered for sale to the tenants and sold off very cheaply, around £100 to £200. I don't remember any sort of indignation in the local paper about anyone being turned out or anything. I can't remember anyone moving at that time but over the years they did. And more building went on. The first two buildings in Annings Lane were bought by two retired Harley Street specialists. Suddenly you realised that Burton was changing. Gradually Annings Lane was noted as being where all the posh houses were, you know.

"I knew the village through my friend Leonard Starkey, and of course through Father. In the late forties and early fifties I can only remember the post office and one shop, (*Bridge Stores*), though there might have been another. The population must have been four or five hundred, I think. At the end of the 1800s and early 1900s Burton went through its industrial phase when what's- his- name came down from Cogden and built their factory. Most of it was to do with weaving of some sort or another. I couldn't tell you what. I don't think they made ropes.

And then, of course, there was the flooding. I can tell you a lovely story about that. It was 1967, I think, when Martinstown held the country's record with eleven inches. I measured nine inches during the day at Litton Cheney school. It rained and rained and all of a sudden the water from the top end of the valley came down with a rush. The main centre of the depression was Hardy's Monument. The water was up to the counter in the shop at Burton. That was terrific. All the way down the valley always tended to flood. Pitt-Rivers owned the foreshore, of course and the estate was responsible for keeping the river mouth clear at Freshwater after big storms. I'm talking about the 1920s and 1930s and there

weren't tractors and diggers in those days. Father would take two or three men down there and they used to get the river flowing again. But when their backs were turned a big wave would come and fill it all in again.

"Freshwater developed as a caravan site from small beginnings about the same time as the one at Swyre, about thirty years ago or something like that. The same with the Golf Course. I don't know when that started, but all this happened post war.

"You don't notice change so much when it is gradual. Burton has always been a communal sort of place. A good example of that is the Women's Institute Hall (*now leased to the Village*). It was a masterpiece when it was built (*1931*). Burton WI was almost the first in the county. The building of the sea road down to the Hive made a lot of difference. I reckon the National Trust has done a wonderful thing down there. I've seen the coast road change tremendously in my lifetime. Once it was like a lane in places and in such a bad condition that sometimes transport couldn't get along it from Swyre to Burton.

"Nobody living at that time would have dreamt there would be all this expansion and the vast number of motor vehicles passing through the village.

"But there are still interesting things washed up on the beach at Burton Bradstock. Some things don't change."