

Burton Bradstock A Trail and Tale





A Brief History

The village of Burton Bradstock has an interesting history going back to ancient times. Lying in a fertile valley half a mile inland from the sea at the western end of Chesil Beach. It is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the Jurassic Coast, which is a World Heritage Site. Archaeological evidence such as coins, skeletons and barrows prove that first the Romans and then the Anglo-Saxons had settlements here. Indeed the first half of the village's name is Saxon - Bridetone; 'ton' means 'enclosed farmstead' on the River Bride.

'Bridetone', which eventually became 'Burton', is listed in Domesday Book (1087), as two manors, the larger belonging to the King (William the Conqueror), and the smaller including the church, to the Abbey of St Wandrille in Normandy. Details of land use and population are also listed showing the basic activities of ploughing, grazing, spinning and milling to have been carried on in and around the settlement by 'villeins, serfs, cottars and bordars'. There is a limited edition facsimile copy of the Dorset folio from Domesday Book in Burton Bradstock Community Library, so why not pop in and read the details.

Henry I gave the King's Manor to the Abbey of St Stephen in Caen, Normandy, but 200 years later it is listed as owned by St Stephen's in Westminster. The smaller Church Manor was exchanged in 1286 into the ownership of the Priory of Bradenstoke in Wiltshire, from which comes the second part of the name of the village. The two Manors were joined sometime in the middle of the 15th Century and from then the two parts of the village's name were used.

Circa 1590, the estate was granted to John Taylor, a London Merchant dealing in flax and hemp, and through his daughter Elizabeth the estate descended through the female line, eventually coming to the Pitt-Rivers family. The family also owned huge estates on the Dorset/Wiltshire border and founded the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford.

Flax and hemp had always grown well in the damp, mild climate of the area. By the early 13th Century, we know that most villagers grew both, spinning and weaving the crop into ropes and nets and this, with farming and fishing, provided a reasonable living. In 1786, Richard Roberts arrived in Burton Bradstock and amalgamated these cottage industries, setting up two mills using the new machinery of the Industrial Revolution powered by water diverted from the River Bride.

The Pitt-Rivers family owned most of the village but they didn't live here. General Augustus Pitt-Rivers built the two late Victorian villas on the cliff at Hive Beach as summer residences but only came on Rent days. Captain George Pitt-Rivers (1890-1966), 11th Lord of the Manor, decided after WWII to sell his Burton Bradstock estate. The first houses went up for sale in 1951 and 1952; he then decided to sell the vast majority of his remaining land and property in the village in an 'Auction Sale' on Thursday 31 July and Friday 1 August 1958.



You will find this plaque on the wall of the Village Hall in Church Street in the centre of Burton Bradstock. Begin your walk here.



Plaque by the front door of the Village Hall designed and purchased by Village Community Groups.

The Village Green was previously called 'Parish Pump' because in the 18th and early 19th Centuries villagers used to draw their water from a pump here. On the Green is a seat commemorating the accession of Edward VII, later extended in memory of D-Day and the American Servicemen billeted in Burton Bradstock.

Words in bold text indicate the subject of the adjacent photograph.

The **Village Hall** was originally the WI Hall, built in 1931 with money given by two local ladies. In 2005, the WI leased the Hall to the Village Hall Trust for 40 years. Opposite are the gates to the Rectory, a Grade II listed mid-19th Century building with to the left what was its Coach House, now a separate dwelling. Looking to the right across the road, is Manor Cottage, the Air Raid Warden's house in WWII [plaque top right of front door], and behind you is St. Lawrence where a small chapel stood along with a graveyard.



Walk round the **Green** to the **Library**, a former Wesleyan Methodist Chapel listed and dated 1825, which since 2013 has been a Community Library staffed by volunteers. Go in (opening times on notice board) and see the Mural, Millennium Tapestry and two Victorian Truncheons. Next door is the Grade II listed **White House**, the oldest dated house in the village (date stone 1635), built by Simon Bowring whose initials are

above the date. An original pump is by the entrance gates. In the late 17th Century, the house became part of Sumner's Farm estate with a tenant farm on the site of the present Village Hall. On 13 July 1854 'a calamitous fire' destroyed fifty houses in this area but spared the White House. (Exeter Post)

Continue down Middle Street. On your left is Beulah Cottage, a local name often given to houses where a widow or spinster lived. Notice the large south-facing upstairs window on the gable end, probably put in to aid sewing. Opposite is the Red House, a Grade II listed Georgian house with an early 19th Century front door. **Ingram House**, another listed Georgian building, was probably built and certainly extended by Admiral Ingram, a contemporary of Nelson and a close friend of Admiral Hardy and Richard Roberts.





Middle Street joins Shadrach at the little green known as Five Elms, but only one tree remains. On the left is **Girt (Great) House**, a Grade II listed Queen Anne house with a layer of brick covering stone. It seems that the name 'Shadrach' comes from Shadrach Stone, a Portland smuggler who bought land in Burton Bradstock, miles away from where he was well known.

Walk ahead passing on your right a row of original farm cottages; the middle one, **Townsend**, was originally Townsend Farmhouse surrounded by fields until it was compulsorily purchased in 1951. On your left, the group of cottages formed Shadrach Farm and Stables until 1971.



Turn right into Annings Lane. On your left, the **raised terrace** was built (date stone 1993) on land previously allotments tended by school children as part of the Dig for Victory campaign in WWII. In the 1950s, it was proposed that a new Village School should be built here but this came to nothing. In South Annings (right) and Lower Townsend (left) is social housing built following

the Councils Compulsory Purchase of Townsend Farm. Opposite Norburton, turn right down The Drain, so-called as water from the hills formerly drained down here before a flood alleviation scheme was constructed, and at the end turn left.

Old Piggeries' on your right started life as a Stable and Wagon House shown on the 1837 Tithe Map, probably housing men upstairs. The tall building ahead was the new Grove Mill, now flats, which was the first **Flax-Swingling Mill** 'introduced in the West of England...erected by Richard Roberts 1803.' (See Stone Plaque). The flax was beaten and crushed by swingling machinery into tow, the raw flax fibre, before hackling at the second mill downstream. The shadow of the old machinery bays can still be seen in the brickwork. Later, Roberts added a spinning mill at the taller eastern end of the building.



The Mill was an extension of the earlier 17th Century Flour Mill on the opposite bank of the leat, now Mill House. The undershot wheel lay between the old and new mills. In letters, Roberts complained about the inadequate water supply so, as soon as technology allowed, the new mill had a small turbine fitted, the remains of which lie on one side of the forecourt. After the time of Roberts and his sons, Grove Mill turned to processing cattle meal and flour for bread made in ovens at the back of Mill House. Former stables at the western end of the mill complex have been converted into a garage.



Sluice Gate



Site of Mill Wheel



Leat

If you walk along the footpath at the end of Grove Road, you will come to the sluices originally built by Roberts to divert water from the River Bride along the Mill Leat to provide the power for his mills. Upstream were Withy beds, used for rick and house thatching spars and lobster pots, and the complex of hatches and reservoirs with a ‘retting pond’ in which the pulled flax stalks would be laid for a month to release the fibres before swingling.

Retrace your steps to the Drain but continue along Grove Road. Immediately on your right is the former Coach House, now a garage, at the end of Grove House garden. Next is **(The) Grove House**, a Grade II listed small, thatched Georgian country house surrounded by its original stone wall and with an ancient Mulberry Tree opposite the front door. The house



was built in 1781 by a wealthy widow, Mrs Martha Best, who Richard Roberts married soon after coming to the village in 1786. They had five children; one son, Richard, was a Midshipman on board Nelson’s Victory at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 and he brought the news of victory to England, staying overnight at Grove House on his journey from Plymouth to London. This now quiet road would have been busy with people and carts in Roberts’s time. Grove House was sold in 2015 for only the fourth time in its history.

Pass through the ball-capped old gate pillars to Darby Lane, but before turning left look quickly at the rest of Grove Road, one of the prettiest in Burton Bradstock. Nos. 40 & 41 were bought for cash, 'in excess of £1,000 the pair,' in 1952 by the Bull family. **The Stable** on your right (built 1966), and Stable Cottage (built 2003) blend in perfectly with the older houses. Look at the ducks at **Duck Cottage** – a straw duck on the roof and Grace by the front door. Further up on your left is Old Butchers, built in the style of a Dorset Longhouse, which traded as the village butcher until 1972.



Before 1966



and after



Walk along Darby Lane, which was probably named after the man who was part owner of the Spinning Mill in 1830. Pass **Darby House**, an elegant Grade II listed house and find the **ammonites** in the walls of No. 42.



On the right are typical tenant cottages where for centuries the women worked at home, braiding new nets by hand from a large hook in the lintel. Until the 1990s, these were virtually untouched, still with dirt floors; now refurbished, they retain memories of Burton Bradstock's fishing past in their names: **Lerret** – a traditional Dorset double-ended flat-bottomed boat built for buoyancy and for launching off steep shingle banks; **Seine** – a drag net useful especially for mackerel, then the main catch; and **Killick** – a stone anchor used by fishermen on Chesil Beach.



Turn left into Church Street. On your left is The Magnolias, a Grade II house with the date stone AH 1795 (Ann Hansford). It has had a long association with the village school and was often called 'the school house' as teachers lived and taught some lessons there. Next is **Rookery Cottage**, listed and with evidence dating the building to C15 and early C17, possibly originally the Novice House for the monastery next door.



Cross **Clapper Bridge** over the leat created by Richard Roberts to run water from The Grove to his Spinning Mill south of the church. 'Clapper' is the old name for a bridge on stone piers. Set in its own grounds with a pillared gateway is

The Old Monastery, until recently called The Rookery. It was first a monastic retreat, extended in 17th Century into a farmhouse and with C19 additions. It was sold in 1958 for £5k; in 2007 the asking price was £1.75m.



Walk on to the Timber Bridge, now metal, where the two watercourses converge. Harnessing these was the secret of Richard Roberts's success. Hive Beach and Café lie ten minutes walk across the field and lane, turning left along the B3157 (Coast Road) and then right up Beach Road. On your left you will see Bind Barrow Hill, thought to be an ancient burial site. To continue the village trail, retrace your steps past Magnolia Farm (1765) to the Village School.

This **Church of England VC Primary School** was opened in 1865 with records beginning in 1871. A Sunday School existed before this and we know Roberts sent his child workers there to learn their Catechism and reading. In 1890, 140 pupils were taught in one divided room by the Head and one certificated Teacher. At the time of writing, 84 pupils are taught by a Head, 4 Teachers and several Teaching Assistants with the School's maximum intake being 105.



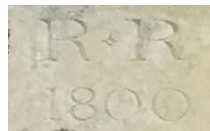
The **Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin** stands on 12th Century foundations in a cleared churchyard. Take a few minutes to look around its interior noting the 14th Century font bowl which stands on a 12th Century base, and the nave which was rebuilt in the 14th Century. In 1897, an extensive restoration in the Arts and Crafts style took place with the addition of the pulpit and 'Seagull' lectern in the 20th Century. (See excellent guide by Jane Stubbs).



As you exit the North door, directly opposite is **Rose Cottage**, one of the most photographed in Dorset.



From the Church door, take the diagonal path and then turn left down Mill Street; opposite Old Walls look up to the left to see the initials R*R 1800. This marked Richard Roberts's Warehouse and 'Counting House', which later became workers cottages with No. 4 at the far end bordering the old rope walks. The Spinning Mill, called 'Lawrence's'



after the owner of the first mill there c. 1750, stood adjacent to and in front of **Mill Terrace**. Roberts had in total 200 machines and employed men, women and children working 12-hour days. "He preferred girls 8 -10 years of age who were most obedient to command", and with small fingers to clean under the machines. (RB Howarth Notes 1966) Many children were orphans from towns and cities. In letters, Roberts complains that the men disappeared to fish and "were given to drinking ale and cider". Sailcloth, nets, linen, rope and other flax and hemp products were sent all over the world from here.

The 2008 development of the site was sympathetic. The Old Mill House was the Manager's house until the 1930s. The **stone** commemorates Roberts's original mill of 1790 and the new one built after the fire in 1874. Nos. 1-5 Flax Mill are in restored old buildings with artefacts preserved inside and out and the leat still running behind.





Continue down Mill Street; Shadrack Dairy Farm ('k' not 'h' for postal address differentiation) mainly 17th Century, has recently been rescued from falling into total disrepair. The Hawkins family ran this farm and bought the house and 91 acres in 1958 for £7,250. The new owners who bought the property in 2011, have restored old **milk churns** to their place on the cylindrical, **concrete blocks** which were put there in WWII to be used to block the road in case of invasion. Opposite are cottages, four of which were sold in pairs in 1958; Nos. 79 & 80 going for £280 and 81 & 82 for £300.

Next you will see **The Three Horsehoes**, one of the two remaining village pubs out of 15, most of which were only rooms in cottages selling cider. Do not miss the Roman **stone head** of a woman on the double wooden gates. Its history is not known. Before the 1958



sale, this thatched pub was just a small bar entered through the first door. Adjoining the pub was the Village Post Office with a bay window and its entry door round the corner in the High Street. In the 1958 sale, Palmers Brewery bought the Post Office, and Stores for £1,100 and extended the pub.



A new **Post Office** and shop was set up where you see it now; it was bought by the Village in 2002 with the help of a legacy. Before turning into the High Street, notice the Inn sign **Coat of Arms** – Vi et Vertute – “By Strength and By Virtue”, the motto of Farriers.



If you were to turn left along the High Street, you could follow an alternative route to the beach, passing the Playground and going up Cliff Road to the right of the garage. On the corner is Southover, one of the oldest streets in the village. Until 2001, there was another village pub there called The Dove Inn, built in the early 18th Century. It is now two private houses.

To continue the circular walk, turn right into the **High Street**. Just for interest, across the road and down the track lies the site of another of Burton Bradstock's claims to fame. At Manor Farm, Bunny Lenthall bred pure prize-winning **Dorset Horn Sheep**. In 1958, he returned from a trip to Australia with a stud



ram from a hornless Tasmanian breed, very similar to the Dorset Horn and by cross-breeding created the **Poll Dorset** breed in England. This massive Manor Farm estate stretching across the cliffs at Freshwater to West Bay, was bought by an 'outsider' at the 1958 Auction for the highest price achieved in the sale - £19,500. Bunny emigrated to Australia in 1966 and continued to breed Dorsets.



Next to Horseshoe Cottage on the High Street is the **Reading Room** listed and dated 1879, which was given to the village by Captain Pitt-Rivers in 1958 for use as a base for the Parish Council and the Bride Valley Branch of the Royal British Legion. Reading Rooms were a common feature in late Victorian England where, for 1d membership, working men could read newspapers and periodicals, play billiards and chess and 'escape the daily grind of work, the wife and children and

yet be safe from the hazards of the public houses'. (Temperance Society) In the 20th Century, slide shows and mixed social gatherings took place there and most recently it was used by the village Youth Club.

Turn right up **Donkey Lane**, so-called because of the donkey-powered pump once sited behind No. 57 at the top of the lane on the left. On the right is the intriguingly named 'Back Of November'; in the past, the villagers said the area was dark 'like the back o' November'. During restoration, evidence dating from Henry VIII's reign has been uncovered in No. 61.





At the top of the lane you are back on Church Street. Turn left to The Pound, the area where the road is at its widest by **The Anchor Inn**. This is one of the oldest parts of Burton Bradstock; the site of the old village pound, used to pen cattle and stray animals, and of the village stocks. St Lawrence's Chapel stood to the right and its burial ground ran down to the Village Hall. **No.9 The Pound**, formerly called 'Chapple House' and constructed on the remains of St Lawrence's (notice the chapel window), was once the Poor House. Opposite is The Anchor Inn, the 'posh' pub in days gone by, because it had a lounge bar, although most locals used 'The Snug' which was the base for the old village Thrift Club.



You have now completed your walk around the centre of Burton Bradstock, this picturesque West Dorset village with its many listed buildings and in such a beautiful setting.

The 1958 Sale changed the village into one with many second homes, but luckily most of the owners soon move here permanently. The villagers take great pride in living in 'This Gentle Place' (Douglas Northover) in the Bride Valley. In 2015 Burton Bradstock once again won the 'Best Large Village' Award, largely due to the work of the Village Volunteers, who freely give their time to keep Burton Bradstock looking so good. There is a great sense of community here; it is a wonderful and welcoming place to live and to visit.



US Soldiers watch Net Braiding 1944



Grove Road c. 1910



US Officer speaking to pupils 1944



Post Office on High Street 1930s



Taking Shingle Off Hive Beach 1935



Cattle passing The White House 1950s

'Old Burton'

Sources:

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Bridport Museum	Photographs	
Imperial War Museum	Photographs	
David Edwards	Photographs	

Thanks are also due to the many villagers who have answered my questions about the history of Burton Bradstock.



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For further information on anything to do with Burton Bradstock, go to:
<http://www.burtonbradstock.org.uk/>

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