

Special Feature

A Lord at the Lodge

At the West End of the south aisle of St. Mary's Church, Shipton - Under - Wychwood is a colourful stained-glass window, allegedly rescued from a bombed London church. If you go outside the Church, and look under the same window, you will find twin plaques marking the burial sites of Hugh Burdett, Sixth Baron Latymer, 1876 - 1949 and Hester Frances, wife of Hugh Burdett Baron Latymer, 1878 - 1961.

Although this couple lived in Shipton within the life of many of the present inhabitants, they seem to be remembered by comparatively few. They lived with their family at Shipton Lodge from 1926 to 1949. After his lordship's death, Lady Latymer moved to the house now known as Hunters Lodge, Shipton, where until her death twelve years later, she was famous for breeding French bulldogs.



Lord Latymer and family
1909

The Puzzle of the Peerage

The Latymer peerage is one of England's oldest baronies, having been created by writ dated 25th February 1431. How is it possible, you will ask, that a man who lived in Shipton in our time could have been only the sixth holder of a title created five hundred years earlier? Interestingly, it is not because the five previous barons lived to be 100 each, but because the title fell into abeyance for 336 years, following the death of the fourth baron in 1577, leaving four daughters but no son.

Baronies by writ are heritable by and through females as well as males. The doctrine of "abeyance", a phenomenon

unique to English peerage law, arises when there is no son to inherit but more than one daughter. This peculiarity is due to the fact that the ordinary rule of primogeniture, which applies to all male descent, is ignored in such cases. When there are two or more daughters all are regarded as equal co-heirs. The result is that no one daughter can inherit until

the issue of the other daughters is extinct. Thus the title is in the meantime in a state of suspended animation. This is a process which obviously can take, and in some cases like this one, has taken many generations stretching over the centuries.

It was not until 1913 that the ancient peerage of Latymer could at last be called out of abeyance in favour of Francis Burdett Thomas Coutts-Nevill, who was summoned to Parliament as the fifth Baron Latymer. This shadowy figure came of a seriously wealthy family, being a great - nephew of the fabulous Baroness Burdett-Coutts, "the richest heiress in all England", who became banker to Queen Victoria.

Continued on page 49

His only son Hugh Burdett Money-Coutts, the eventual purchaser of Shipton Lodge, was, on graduating from New College, Oxford, offered a career in the family bank. However after a few years he decided he was not cut out for serious work in the City and yearned for the life of a country gentleman. On his marriage at the age of 24, and financed by his father he bought an extensive estate in North Devon known as Studleigh Court, near Tiverton, with a mansion and a score of tenanted farms. He became a Captain in the Royal North Devon Hussars and saw active service in Gallipoli where he was brigade machine-gun officer, struggling under the dreadful conditions of that appalling campaign. Like so many of his colleagues, he contracted near - fatal dysentery. He was invalided from the army in 1917. Only the passage of time, he said, and his wife's unceasing care, eventually restored him to health.

Retrenchment

It is unlikely that the Wychwood villagers were impressed by a lineage pre-dating the War of the Roses, or that their curiosity was much stirred by their new neighbours! Hugh had succeeded as sixth baron on the death of his father in 1923. By the time of his move to Shipton in 1926 the family needed to readjust their way of life. The sale of the Devon farm had been necessitated by a stockbroker's disastrous mismanagement of his father's investments (not a good thing to befall anyone, particularly a Coutts!). In common with many others of his formerly super-affluent background, living on the cusp of a social revolution accentuated by World War, he did not find it easy to adapt. Disillusioned as he had been by the economic conditions of

post-war farming, he felt that farmers were being exploited by middle men, he longed for some form of co-operative marketing, which did not then exist.

Last Words

His rare interventions at the House of Lord's in the controversies of the day were "humorous and hard hitting". One of the hot issues of the day was the proposed abolition of the death penalty. An amusing incident occurred in 1948, when the BBC broadcast a fictional play in which a Lord Latymer was horribly murdered. This drew a characteristically robust disclaimer from Hugh, which was published in "The Times". Even though it was only a fictional death, there was little doubt which side of the debate he favoured!

Sadly, Hugh himself died a year later. Let the final words come from the Lord at the Lodge:

"In 1926 we migrated once more to a little house (with no land) in a charming Cotswold village. It is a peaceful backwater. Our financial sails are furled to bare poles before the devastating blast of the post-war budgets. We have many innocent pleasures, few responsibilities and are as happy on the whole as when we lived in a large house, owned several thousand acres of land, and found employment for about forty of our fellow countrymen. Whether our present condition confers greater or lesser benefit to the community in general, is a question to which there are different answers given by different people."

Anthony Cronk