

## **LADY LASKEY**

Peronelle Laskey was born Peronelle le Breton, the daughter of Sir Edward and Lady le Breton, who owned Loders Court and the Manorial Estate, which included a great number of the village houses and tenanted farms. Her grandmother, who was a widow with three sons and who had cousins in Dorset, bought the Court in 1917. Soon after that, Peronelle's father married and the family eventually owned and lived in the Court. She came to Loders when she was six weeks old and lived there until she was eighteen, except for her time away at school, which began when she was seven and a half. Before that she had a governess and, being an only child, found life in the village somewhat lonely.

When Peronelle left school, she studied Domestic Science and later did a secretarial course. She worked for the War Office, (now the Ministry of Defence), during the Second World War, their offices being situated at that time in Blenheim Palace, near Oxford. Immediately after the war she was sent to Europe, an experience she found fascinating. She went first to Paris and then to Berlin.

It was in Berlin that she met Mr (later Sir) Denis Laskey, later to become her husband. They were married in Loders Church on 11th October 1947 and Sir Denis went on to have a most distinguished career in the Diplomatic Service. They lived in Berlin, New York, a long spell in England, then Rome, Bonn, Romania and, before retirement, Sir Denis was British Ambassador in Vienna. They had four children, Edward, Michelle and the twins, Ellen and Audrey.

In 1962, after Sir Edward le Breton had died, the Estate was split up and sold, including Loders Court, which was bought by The Hon Alexander Hood, now Viscount Hood. Sir Denis and Lady Laskey renovated the house at Loders Mill, to which they retired at the end of his diplomatic career. Sir Denis died in 1987, when they had been married 40 years and Peronelle continues to live in Loders, visited frequently by her daughters and four granddaughters, to whom she is very close. Her son, Edward, a barrister, lives in Hong Kong.

## INTERVIEW 4

INTERVIEWER: Pat Hughes

DATE: 1988

LADY PERRONNELLE LASKEY  
LODERS MILL  
LODERS

Formerly Perronnelle le Breton, daughter of Sir Edward le Breton, whose mother bought Loders Court in 1917. Married Sir Denis Laskey, diplomat and lived abroad until they retired and came back to Loders.

1 JANUARY 1923 -

## Reminiscences of Lady Peronelle Laskey

*You say there was a class structure in the village; could you explain that to me?*

Well quite clearly according to old Mr Bishop there were three classes; there were the upper classes, which was the Clergyman and his wife, the people who lived at Uploders House and the people who lived at The Court.

*Who lived at Uploders House in your time?*

He was called Paterson. He was an ex-public school master and I think he had ten children - there was certainly a girl called Nona who was not the youngest and she was called Nona because she was the ninth child. And he was a tremendous gardener. He built up that garden. They would have been slightly older than my parents and the children were slightly older than me and I therefore didn't know them very well. Nice people.

*And they kept horses there didn't they?*

No they didn't; they were tremendously keen tennis players. I don't think they had horses. And of course they had the whole house, which is a big house, but in those days everybody lived in big houses.

*So they were the upper classes, and the middle classes were ...?*

The middle classes - there was a sub-division of the middle classes of the owner farmers who were much smarter, and the tenant farmers who were less smart. For instance, the Crabbs were owner farmers; the Bishops were not. The Wallbridges who lived at Lodgers Farm were not - there weren't very many owner farmers except the Crabbs, and Ren Crabb though in a smaller way was an owner farmer. Ren can't have been there when I was a child because he's too young - I think his father was killed by a cow. A cow or a bull, which shows they're more dangerous than one thinks really. Anyhow, he was the third that I can think of of the owner farmers, and as I said the Wallbridges. There was a very definite difference. And then you got the farm labourers who really lived in many ways an easier life because the cottages were small, and I mean they had to get up and start fires and all that sort of thing, but the food was probably fairly simple and I suppose the mother kept the garden up to a certain extent but the father came back and did the heavy digging. And I always remember them sort of gossiping over the wall - it was the people in the cottages who had time to talk to you, and the fathers were very nice but the wives really hadn't got time to talk to you. I hardly knew her by sight - she was always sort of running.

*I can believe that!*

But the others, they did netting for pocket money. That was a regular thing, the van came round with the ropes and they did the netting, sometimes in the garden they used to put it on the porch door - I've got a picture of Nellie doing that - and that made a little extra money. But I got the feeling that they all had time to spare; the day was comfortably full but that was that.

*Raymond*



1. *And were you born in Loders yourself?*

I actually was born in London but I came down when I was about 6 weeks old,

*So Loders is really the place you knew as you grew up,*

Yes, I was there solidly until the war began, Until I was 18,

*And tell me about your family - your father bought The Court,*

My grandmother bought The Court in 1917 - she was a widow, she had three sons, two of which were unmarried, my father I think had just got engaged, so she rather wanted to make a home for the family. And she had cousins in Dorset, which I suppose is why she was attracted to the place. And well she just bought it, she bought it from the Colvilles,

*Then where did you go to school initially when you first went to school?*

I had a Governess; I didn't go to school until I was <sup>eleven</sup>~~seven~~-and-a-half I think, and then I went to school in Worcestershire - right away,

*And what was life like for you in the village when you were a child?*

It was in a way more lonely - I wasn't allowed to play with the village children. And I wasn't even allowed to join the Guides. And so there was a car and a chauffeur and you went to see the local children, but they weren't Loders children. [I mean, Bill Budden and so on I can remember very well seeing them and playing about, but I really was not allowed to play with them.]

*And you were an only child?*

An only child, yes. And that was quite strict, in a way I mean we were all quite friendly with them but there was no question of playing with them,

*And what did the village look like then?*

Curiously enough it's much prettier now because in my day - I mean obviously in a previous generation it was probably pretty, but the farm labourers had these cottages, they covered the thatch with corrugated iron which is a very sensible form of roofing but an exceedingly ugly one. And now I mean - and awful little outhouses and everything you can think of, and this is where the pig was. Anyhow, the houses didn't look nearly as good as they do now and they've been lovingly looked after and plaster taken off the stone walls and the thatch put back. The village street is much prettier now than it was when I was a child,

*And were there more shops and businesses in the village do you remember?*

I don't think there were. I notice <sup>Harold Brown</sup>~~Brian~~ talks about one or two but he was a bit older than me - he was talking about pre-first War most of the time I think. I just remember the shop was the other side of the road and it was kept by Bill Budden's Grandmother. And there was a little sweetie

shop, and the Post Office was separate and was kept by his mother, but they were next door to each other on the other side of the road. Old Mrs Budden I think had her shop where Pound Cottage is and what I would call young Mrs Budden - Vera's mother-in-law - had the Post Office next door. I think it was only a Post Office, I don't think she sold anything, it was Granny Budden who sold the sweets. She was a dear old thing. And the other thing was there were definitely witches in the village.

*Oh now that is interesting: tell me about that.*

Well Mrs Budden wasn't one, but there was dear Mrs Richards who was rather like Mrs Budden to look at which is why I thought of her, who was a White Witch and she used to cure things. And then there were two others whose names I have mercifully forgotten - it would be libellous I suppose - who were Black Witches. They used to, you know, make cows ill and things like that by putting spells on them. And my mother had a story - she rather liked one of the Black Witches and she said she was wrestling with some problem (she never would tell me what it was) and the Black Witch appeared saying she wanted to see her. She appeared to know of this problem - she said she couldn't think she couldn't have known by any natural means - and gave her advice. Mama who was obstinate did the opposite thing and always regretted it. And she said she never could see how this woman could have known she had a problem but apparently seemed to know what the problem was.

*But these witches were quite openly witches were they? I mean they would admit to being witches?*

I would think so, I mean we all knew they were. I mean I didn't ask them but .... Old Mrs Richards I mean she was a healer much more and I think that was quite ..... But the other ones - well there seemed to be no secret.

*And the White Witch used remedies - herbs and this sort of thing - because this was quite common wasn't it?*

Yes; I think she used herbs, and I suppose the spells she put were good spells. I mean she was a dear old thing. The others - the one I remember most was quite young actually, I found out afterwards she must have been when I saw her about 40-ish I should think. Probably I should think a gypsy; I remember enormous black eyes.

*And what was the attitude? There seems to have been quite a bit of witchcraft in Dorset - what was the attitude of the Church towards this? It must have been quite a problem.*

I don't remember any problem at all. I don't remember any of the Clergymen mentioning it - it would have been Mr Hutton. I never remember it being mentioned by the Huttons one way or the other. I mean by the time he moved on the Second World War was on and I think the witches had died and not been replaced.

2 *And what about the Church in those days - was it full?*



Not very; there were far more services of course, which I suppose ... I mean there was morning service, there was Matins, there was always a children's service and an evening service. No they weren't very well attended; no I don't think they were much better then than they are now, not that I remember.

*But the people who went - did the farmers go much more than they do now?*

No; very little. It was always a complaint. They came for Harvest Thanksgiving. And my father used to get very cross with the visiting Clergy because some of them used to say 'Now you're all here for Harvest Thanksgiving why don't you come for the ordinary service', and Papa said that was totally wrong because the farmers said why should we ever go again when we're always scolded when we do come! They used to come in considerable numbers for the Harvest, but I don't think even Christmas, it just was the Harvest.

*That's surprising isn't it because you think of everybody going to church in a village, but perhaps that was an earlier time.*

I think that was before the first World War. As I say I don't remember.

*So your life really was more in the county than the village.*

Yes it was; it was bound to be really. And of course the roads were much emptier, and besides we had a chauffeur, it was so easy. ?? had to get out the car and take me if I wanted to go. *for Center*

*And you had a car, but did you ever go round - had your father ever gone round - in a trap?*

There was one with a donkey, we had an old donkey and I used to <sup>occasionally he</sup> ~~ease him in~~ <sup>bundle</sup> round ~~legs~~ in it. But that was rather a joke; there was an old trap there and the old donkey was more or less retired, and occasionally if they didn't know what else to do with me to make a change I was bundled into that thing and taken round the lanes; it was artificial.

*Did you do a lot of riding?*

No, my father wouldn't let me ride because I was an only child, which was very foolish. So I did none. That's not true; I learned to ride with Mr Bishop and I did ride round with him, but I never hunted.

*Well that is quite a dangerous sport actually.*

Yes; it was less dangerous in those days because I think people rode better and you didn't get the weekend riders. They're the dangerous ones.

*Now there was a little train that went through the village wasn't there?*

Yes, it very much dominated our lives. It was almost like a little toy train, made little chuff chuff noises, and it - I think about four or five a day. I'd want someone to be more accurate about that, but it seemed to me that perpetually you would hear this "chuff chuff". You had to be