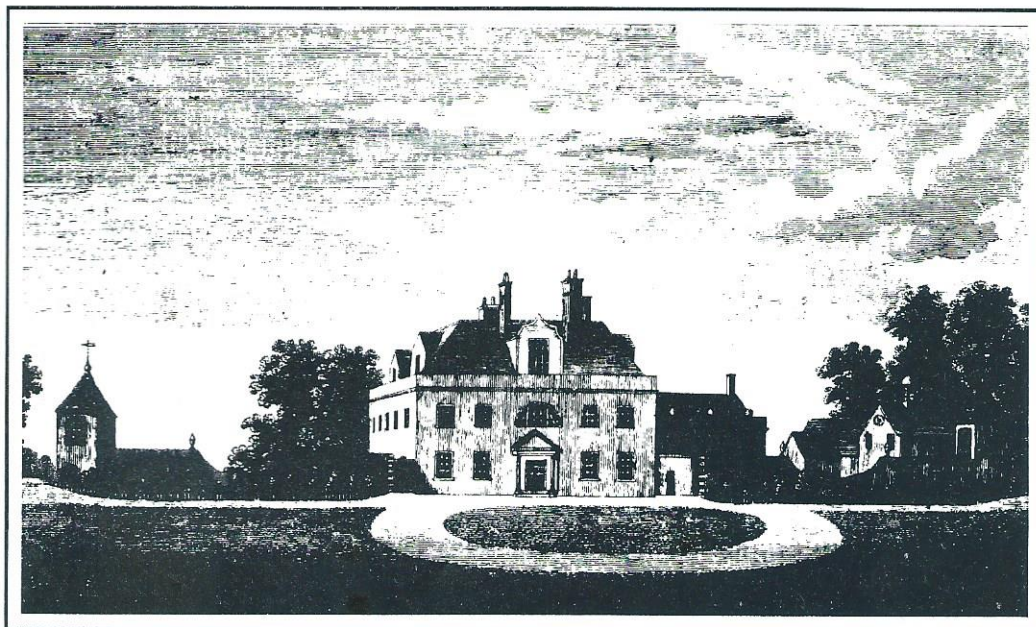


## 2. THE AUBERIES

Rev. Sperling, in his by now famous letter quoted in our introduction, said that Auberies, formerly a small copyhold, only rose to importance when Robert Andrews built his house. Certainly tradition says that it was not an old house and not on a manorial site. A 15th Century reference to a "Bulmere tenement formerly Aubrys" is the most likely explanation of its name. The first Robert Andrews from Suffolk went to Middleton before becoming a yeoman farmer at Bulmer. He was on the poll list in 1711 and died in 1735. A Bulmer Roman Catholic, Charles Stafford, owned Auberies mansion in 1717 and lost his property in the early 18th Century. We are told that this came into the possession of Robert Andrews. The Daniel family of Grandon Hall, the big manor house nearby, were also Catholics and Barbara, a widow, lost property at the same time. Grandon diminished as Auberies became grander.

### **The New Man**

Andrews' son, also a Robert, born in 1726, continued to add to the estate. This man was immortalised by a local lad Thomas Gainsborough who shows him masterfully posed in shooting garb against an elegant rococo iron bench alongside his wife in a beautiful silk dress in the grounds of their improved estate. If ever a young painter earned his money by satisfying patron and posterity, Gainsborough did. In 1988 the Bulmer Village Festival brought him to life again to paint his picture in front of about 100 villagers in 18th Century dress.



Andrews saw himself as not only a landed proprietor with a "seat" (shown in the engraving) but also as philosopher king, reporting on his agricultural experiments and lending his wisdom for the betterment of the neighbourhood. He drained the heavier land with drains a rod apart and chalked them. He kept accounts which were by no means usual in the 18th Century. He took his turn to present the vicar to the living in 1757 and he led the perambulations of the village to beat the bounds four times between 1762 and 1804. He died in 1806.

The estate "admirably disposed for the purposes of agriculture" was auctioned in London by Mr. Christie after Andrews' death. The mansion 47ft front by 39 ft deep with circular brick walls springing from the angles of the building flanked by pavilions, one for tools and the other for pigeons, had five rooms on the ground floor, four bedrooms and a nursery on the next and four garrets for servants on top. The whole thing has a nice 18th Century look and sound with pleasure ground, bowling green, fruit walls, ha-ha, leaden statue and carriage house. The Cold Bath had a dressing room and was of tiled brick "supplied by an abundant and never-failing spring of remarkably cold water."

At the Big House during the Napoleonic war the new owner, C Greenwood, described as "the great army agent" had the parish surveyed in 1807 "at his sole expense". Having mapped it he set about altering it. A new house was built, a lake was added and the park was made grander. Col. Meyrick, the next owner, added to the new house. Caledon Alexander came in 1845. He had retired from the Guards, became Vicar's Warden and devoted himself to country house cricket. An article in "The Field" gives the recollections of a man who played at Auberries in 1847. Alexander was a benevolent despot to his young players. On the eve of battle they were addressed in these terms: "Now, you are in early tomorrow, so off to bed - no cigars or whisky and sodas tonight." That's the life; but against it we must put the comment of a Bulmer man, "Of course, no farm worker played cricket till the first world war. It wasn't till then that they had recognised hours and Saturday afternoons off." To this another Bulmer man added, "And the licensing laws helped a bit by keeping them out of the pubs on a Saturday afternoon." History is not simple.



*The Auberries Today*

Then in 1857 came James St. George Burke, Q.C. His wife had already died and her coffin was brought in a specially hired train to be buried in Bulmer churchyard. He was a lawyer for the railways. In 1859 he gave a reading of 'Macbeth' to the elite of the area for the soup fund. It is impossible not to wonder if any hunting and drinking landowner applauded inwardly when J. St. G.B. reached in Act One, "If it were done when 'tis done - then 'twere well it were done quickly", or coughed during Act Five's "Damned be him that first cries, 'Hold enough!'".

#### **Embosomed in Gentle Acclivities**

In July 1860 three thousand people "availed themselves of the privilege of exploring the park and gardens of the Auberies" during a floral and musical fete. The Essex Standard describes the five hundred acres as a "nobleman's demesne in miniature in which a beautiful and shady lake lies embosomed in trees and gentle acclivities. In the afternoon fashion and beauty were conspicuous. In the evening when the price of admission was reduced many of the working classes were present in their holiday suits".

Such floral language demands the surge of massed women's voices for its musical accompaniment. The fete got the Grenadier Guards band.

#### **Trouble in The Servants' Quarters**

In 1871, Mr. Burke, his four daughters and a step-niece had eight servants living in: Governess, footman, cook, two lady's maids, a kitchen maid and two housemaids. The coachman and groom lived over the coach house. The gardener's house also housed the gamekeeper. The butler lived in Sandy Lane.

The cook's wages in 1874 were £28 per annum and £2.12s washing money. The maids got £18 but only £1.12s laundry money. They grumbled about the disparity in laundry allowance so the Squire noted in his diary that in future he will pay greater wages instead of laundry money and if they did not approve they could look for another master. By 1878 he was able to write in his journal, "the estate consists at present of about 2,131 acres of which 1,911 are in Essex and 220 in Suffolk".

#### **Improvements**

It's a pity that there was no local painter to portray him on his acres though one of his sons had just finished the first good maps for the area as part of the Ordnance Survey and these show the estate in all its detail. He did commission some sculpture however and two handsome stone cats were positioned on the front entrance gates. Mr. Burke thought their backs too smooth so he got a ladder, a hammer and a chisel and roughed them up a bit himself. There is a local legend that on Midsummer's Eve the cats are supposed to change round. (Nervousness?).

In the grounds was an ice-house. A hole was dug in the ground and wide cavity walls filled with straw. When winter came sixteen men were employed to cut ice from the pond to fill it. The roof was thatched. When ice was needed in the summer it was rushed to the house in a barrow. Mr. Burke's anger when a man left a candle near the thatch and burned the ice-house down is still talked about.

Two sons were Lieut. Colonels. One succeeded his father for only a few months, dying in 1881 of disease contracted in the campaign against the Afghans. His brother Walter was gazetted out of the Royal Engineers to take his place. Given his connection with the Ordnance Survey we may not be surprised to find that the Auberies collection of maps is outstanding. One beautiful hand-drawn map shows the best tracks home to the house after the hunt had finished anywhere in the region. His notebooks are also very interesting. His engineering interests show in his drawings for farm buildings and he designed a number of estate houses.

### **The Lads Leave the Land**

Col. Burke's accounts show the effect of the depression in farming. Wheat which averaged fifty shillings a sack between 1847 and 1867 was down to ten shillings in 1895. In 1899 he writes, "Wages rose to 12/- a week from 15 April for no reason whatever but the scarcity of labour in consequence of nearly all the lads forsaking the land as soon as they grew up". For years it used to be said that "a sack went home every week on a man's back". That is, the weekly wage equalled the value of a sack of wheat. Tenant farmers offered evidence that they were making a loss in order to get rents down but the Estate farming account itself shows a loss some years.

Other things are recorded in the Colonel's notebook. The farm men's allowance of meat for the Christmas dinner in 1882 was 2lbs to a single man, 3lbs between them for man and wife, down to 1/2lb for a child under ten. The fiddlers for the Workhouse Feast (at Sudbury) cost 7s.6d. in 1883. In 1891 a Peregrine Falcon was trapped by the keeper. And as with all landowners he records the weather in some detail. In 1896 the winter was so mild that there was no frost sufficient to fill the ice-house.

After so many earlier changes of owner, it is pleasant to record that there have been Burkes at the Auberies for over 100 years and that father and son still run it today. Italian prisoners of war were blamed for breaking off the tail of one of the cats during the last war; but present day dwellers in Bulmer can be grateful that the working parkland painted by Gainsborough is still there. The trees of the Auberies make living in Bulmer particularly rewarding.

One of Robert Andrews' farming reports began: "Walking by the side of one of my fields, I observed...". One wonders what he would have thought if he could have observed a Bulmer farmworker two hundred years later sitting high up in the luxurious cab of one of today's enormous tractors.

If the diesel runs out, will Bulmer's drivers, civil servants and teachers have to go back on the land? In the Alexanders' time the estate had over forty farmworkers. One hundred years ago there were 154 farmworkers in Bulmer as a whole. In 1978 seventeen managed with the help of machines. Maybe "the lads" will have to come back to the land.

### **At Home on the Range**

Sid Rowe, born in 1884, was one of the lads who did go on the land - at Auberies and at eleven years of age. It was a fifty nine hour week and hard work; but the way he remembered it when he was in his nineties made good listening: "I used ter scare rooks. I had two or three year at it. I had to goo over the farm like a ranger. I had a short pistol -that weren't for shootin' any distance! They called it a horse pistol. That went with powder and caps. I had to load it meself. I fired it when I want to. That was a good life really. They knew where to look for me! I ranged all over the farm where there was rooks about. That was a sort of free life really. In rain I was there but I made a little old hut and kep in the dry."

### **In a Due State of Manurage**

In the summer of 1875, an Auberies inventory for the home farm and taken from the master's notebook details the acreage of crops and the number of stock: 49 acres of wheat, 34 of barley, 16 of oats, 9 of peas, 2 of potatoes, 10 of swedes, 10 of mangolds, 4 of cabbages, 9 of clover, for hay, 18 of red and white not for hay, 50 of grass for hay and finally 60 acres of grass not for hay. Animals were as follows: 10 horses, 11 cows, 11 heifers, 7 calves, 220 sheep, 140 lambs and 36 pigs of all sorts and sizes.

When the estate had been sold after Andrews' death, it was said "to be calculated for the reception of a Respectable Family, to be celebrated for Beauty and Salubrity of situation, to possess strong Fertile land in a due state of Manurage, with suitable Portions of Meadow and Pasture with Cottage dwellings, interspersed with Plantations and large spreading Timber Trees, Feathered nearly to the Ground."

It was a fine piece of auctioneer's prose but it also mentioned in small print some morethings that mattered: "populous Sudbury" supplied dung manure, the navigable Stour brought "coal to calcine lime" inwards and provided "a ready market" outwards, chalk was available from "the almost immediate neighbourhood", there were several "covers for Field sports" and the whole was "fifty four miles from London." Now Sudbury has just finished filling in the biggest chalk pit with its rubbish, the lime kilns are gone and the Stour Navigation is closed; but otherwise the Particulars of this much admired Freehold Estate hold good today and are in effect a valuable study in Economic History (those Capital Letters are catching).

At the turn of the century most of the lads worked on the estate or for the tenant farmers. Some were servants. Two of today's residents started work as back 'us boys cleaning the boots, knives and boot scrapers and carting coal scuttles. Other lads went into quite an important local industry, brickmaking, and later we shall visit Hurrell's Hole. A man of that name went much further than we shall -down under. Mary Hurrell got £4 poor relief in 1855 because her man had been transported. Searchers out of Hurrell family trees have an interesting task because although Wm. Hurrell was given ten shillings by the parish for his girl's clothes in 1818 the churchyard holds a grand Hurrell monument and one of them farmed Goldingham.

*(A book of Bulmer surnames is available to any one interested and copies of publications about the local area's history can be had from Bulmer Local History Group at 6, Park Lane, Bulmer Tye.)*