



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Don Archers Memories of Cleeve Prior

My grandfather farmed in Gloucestershire and his father in Cleeve Prior. They were tenants of Top farm & took over the tenancy at Michaelmas 1921. I was then aged 5

Top Farm, now Prior House, consisted of two sets of farm buildings, one at Top Farm & the other at Cleeve Barn. The Farm had 175 acres. There was one field on the same side as the farm house called the Paddock, all the rest went from Froglands lane up to the Warwickshire border at Marlcliffe and also stretched down to where the Mill stood and had a river frontage of almost a mile.

There were fields called Fox Hill, Little Fox Hill and Boot Meadow, [because of its shape]. Almost opposite the confluence of the Arrow & the Avon, where the river takes an "S" bend, is where they drove the cattle across in the 30's & 40's. The farm had about 100 cattle & 30 or so went across the river for grazing, these were the mature two year old dairy cattle.

Froglands was part of the 1000 acres of farmland belonging to the Manor. All the land from the Froglands to the Coppice, incl the Greenery was Manor land & in 1926 the Manor sold the land along the Evesham Road to the County Council. The council then let this land out as small holdings which were in great demand as the agricultural depression was at its worst.

This brought different people into the village from Badsey and Littleton to work the land, and their dialects were distinctly different to that of Cleeve. Thee & thy were then spoken in the village and different words were used for the same farm implements. Rivalry & sneering went on between Cleeve & the folk of Littleton & Badsey.

Field Barn was then all arable land and at harvest time all the boys in the village would lead the horses and wagons along the road to & from the Manor, carrying heavy ton loads. Top Farm had four horses and a nag, which lived in the old stable and next to him was the trap house. Don's mother was a



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townswoman with no liking for horses, so Don & his sisters were taken to school by their mother in a trap driven by a pony, no large horses for Mrs Archer.

Education was at Greenhill School and then the Grammar School. Once there travel to school was from the railway station, the closest was Salford Prior, until the General Strike, when the trains all stopped and Don then cycled to school. Don recalled a friend of his, Harold Reeves, walking over the footbridge to Salford Station, to catch the train to Birmingham, and staying there in digs for a week, working in the City. Later he would be taken by train to Broom junction to catch the train.

Field Barn always had beef cattle in the yard being overfed during the winter and manure was taken from there to nearby fields to be scattered. The barn was also used for storing hay, straw & farm implements.

The farms in Cleeve in the 1920's /30's were

- Jack & John Sheaf at Bay Tree Farm
- The Stocks from Home Farm
- The Archers at Top Farm
- Chris Grey at the Manor

Chroniclers Note: The manor farm now included Kemises Farm which had been absorbed into the Manor Lands see Cleeve Prior Manor & the Village 1900 to the Present Day.

The Sheaf Family have been in the village for over 200 years, they had a small farm which included Pinkerson Meadow, & stored hay in a Dutch barn by the river, from where they fed the cattle in the winter.

Harry Stock farmed from Hadrill's property which was the farm house, and his land went right along Hoden Lane. Cecil Stock was a real famer, working for the love of the land & not the money.

When the Archer family moved from Gloucestershire, near Cirencester, they had to bring all their livestock by train, unload them from the railway trucks &



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drive them along the roads to Cleeve. Poverty in the village was never as severe as in the towns & cities. The only recognised holidays on the farm were Good Friday & Christmas Day. Don's father died when he was 18 years old & he had to take over the farm, and Chris Grey from the Manor came & gave him advice. He only had sheep for three years, he bought them for 10shillings each & it cost him 10 shillings for them to be brought down from Scotland on the train.

Most of the farms in the village were mixed farms. Although there was a cider mill in the village Don had to take the fruit from the farm to the Ivy at Littleton where it was made in to cider. All the workers on the farm were given cider & the average farm worker would drink several pints a day during harvest time. Before Don came to the Cleeve he was given cider & he was not then 5. The tradition was that the last few drops in the jar were scattered on the ground as an offering to the spirits or fairies, and he also used to do this. He had a number of apple trees, Blenheim's, an early Pippin, and Catshead etc. Where the close is now was one of Top Farms orchards, there was a cherry orchard in Mill Lane and a further orchard where don built his retirement home, "Archer House". There were also pear trees & from this they made perry on the farm.

Sixteen acres was the largest field on Dons farm, and every boy was expected to know the names of the surrounding fields

- The First Hill
- The second Hill,
- Longstones,
- Cow ground,
- Green Ground
- Pilkington.



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Don as well as the other farmers also rented land in the Cotswolds where it was colder & more suited to growing sprouts, the pickers had to be taken in by lorry.

The Old Villagers

Mr Smithin was a member of Evesham RDC and a JP, and he and Mr Hiorns [who bought the Manor from The Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1915] were considered the most important figures in the village. There was a blacksmith and his funeral was on the same day as that of Mr Hiorns, and Jack Sheaf told Don that there were 2 or 3 villagers who on coming out of the church said *“we’ve been to the funeral of the Lord of the Manor and now we are going back into the church for that of the local blacksmith”* which they duly did.

Don does not remember a resident blacksmith in Cleeve Prior, but one used to come from Bidford one day a week to shoe the horses at the forge.

There was a village stone mason.

Ernest Gould was the village Carpenter

Brothers Sam & Tom Gould did all the odd Jobs in the village

Jack Taylor was the village boatman and he used to hire out the flat bottomed boats with cushions & a gramophone to go up the river. He was also the village pig killer as a lot of the cottagers had a pig at the bottom of their gardens in a sty

Within the village the doctor, vicar & farmers were generally respected, the farm labourers were considered lower class.



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Don remembers the post office & two shops in the village, "Prior Close" was a sweet shop [on west end] run by a Mrs Howes. She had a hard life- an invalid husband and two sons & a daughter.

Pear tree cottage housed the village shoemaker.

The Baker came from Littleton delivering his supplies in a horse & trap



Cleeve Mill

The weir was Saxon & it was considered a wonderful engineering feat to dam the river, construct the millstream and build the mill. The river is now a 1/3 its original size and it is considered that 2/3 of the mill is still there under the ground. The course of the river was altered as there were extensive reed beds, also a lock on the opposite side together with a number of Cleeve Prior footpaths.

The Owen Stone

Opinion has it that this was originally a wayside cross transported from somewhere as it is Cotswold stone. John Sheaf used to graze cattle there, Dons mother always said it reminded her of a font.

From recollection 10th November 2000