



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

On 16th May 1662 Edward Pilkington sold to John Bennet a dwelling house in Cleeve Prior along with several pieces of arable land including 'one land shooting in Earls Way next unto the Common in Hayling Stones.' This was all for the sum of 200 marks. Other land owners of that date included Thomas Harbourne. on 5th May 1617, Edward, together with his wife Jane, conveyed to Thomas Harbourne and John Walker, 50 acres of arable, 8 acres of pasture, plus common pasture in Cleeve Prior and Littleton to hold in trust.

The Harbourne family were living in Cleeve Prior and the Littleton's at the time the Parish Registers, which were started in 1590, and they appear as landowners taking Leases at the Manor Court. The first one which relates to the area of land where the present Prior House stands is dated 1649 and says:

*Thomas Harbourne [47] and Leonard Harbourne [40] by Copy 20th April, 8th year of King James hold for their lives successively according to Custom one cottage on a piece of land called Backehouse Leys worth "pann" above the rent 13/4d. Fine £3 rent 6d, Both Living.** The reversion to Edward Harborne [14] and Richard Harborne [4] on the rent and service above. Both living.*

The Parliamentary Survey of 1649 also mentions a cottage built by Thomas Harborne on a 'void piece of land called Backehouse Leys', and mentions all 4 above named.

Thomas Harborne is recorded as having considerable landholdings, including 'Gilberts Close' in 1622 and appears to have a wood yard and sawmills.

On the 1772 Snape pre-enclosure map of Cleeve Prior there is a house shown on the site of Prior House along with a single strip of land in the Quarry Field as owned by Leonard Harborne. By the time of the Corn Rent map of 1776 he still has the 'house and garden' and had been given land which stretched to the site of Cream Cottages but no longer had land in the fields.

We understand from documents of Anne Charlett's referring to her 1st allotment:

"on the North by the public road leading out of the village of Cleeve Prior and by the tenements, garden and allotment of Leonard Harbourne.... and we do award, order and direct that the hedges ditches mounds and fences to this allotment on the north against the road and the allotment of L Harbourne shall be hereafter kept and maintained by the said Ann Charlett and the owners and proprietors of the said allotment for the time being."

This is followed by



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

“ and we do award allot set out assign and appoint unto the said Dean and Chapter and their successors the said Leonard Harbourne as their grantee for lives by way of the Court Roll of the said Manor, all that plot piece or parcel of land as the same is now admeasured staked and set out lying in the Paddock containing by statute measure 0-1-20 and bounded on the North side by the street of Cleeve Prior aforesaid on the East side by an ancient enclosure belonging to the said Thomas Rock on the S side by the first allotment herein before made to Ann Charlett for her 2 yard land and on the W by the tenement and garden belonging to the said Leonard Harbourne.....and the said Leonard Harbourne as their grantee as aforesaid is made in lieu of full satisfaction and compensation for the copyhold ridge of land of the said L Harbourne lying in the open fields by this Act directed to be divided and enclosed.

The family in Cleeve Prior dies out and Leonard Harborne seems to have passed away with very little in April 1794.

Peter Newman records

“In the roof space of the house, above the bathroom and dining room, are marks on the wall of the Georgian frontage that shows that the front part of the house put on in about 1790 and was originally attached to a building that had the typical steep apex of the traditional cottages found in Cleeve Prior.”

We read from [the family history of the Smithin family](#) that in the will of Joseph Smithin 1780 he states

“ I Give and Bequeath unto my Daughter Ann (Wife of John Rock of Cleeve Prior) three Guineas to be paid to her within Six Months next after my Decease”.

This is the first mention of the Smithin family later to become tenants of the farm, and who were obviously distant cousins

In 1779 the Dean and Chapter of Worcester “Renewal of Copyhold” records John Rock [baker] of Cleeve Prior being granted in land named in trust by Thomas Laughton

The Dean and Chapter granted to John Silvester and John Slatter of Salford in 1815 [in trust for John Rock the younger- [who had just married] of Cleeve Prior half yard land of Thomas Sandall and 1 house and 1 yard land of Thomas Yates, 1 loft and half yard land called Charlett’s with a common oven [probably means a lime kiln] with the appurtenance in Cleeve Prior in the occupation of William Huband.

1829, the Dean & Chapter granted Peter Lunn of Norton and Lenchwick and Robert Silvester [20]



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

"1 house and half a yard of land called Bealow, one house and 1 yeard called Lammas, 1 house and 1 yard land and 3 selions of demesne [held by Manor and kept for profit, not farmed out] formerly Low Yards, and selion of land at Rudlow now in the tenure of William Lunn, 1 cott and 8 acres [Hullins] Dean and Chapter of Worcester Renewal of Copyhold"

1834 John Rock has Top Farm he leaves it to wife Elizabeth [nee Lunn]

1848 Dean & Chapter grant to Robert Silvester [40] and John Smith [28] in trust for Thomas Laughton the reversion of Peter Lunn

1857 the painted glass window in the sitting room of Prior House, now in Hartlebury Museum, was put in by his sister Elizabeth [nee Lunn] Rock, born 1781, and dedicated to the Rev Matthew Lunn. It was made by Doe and Rogers of Colleys Yard, Worcester. Rev Matthew Lunn was born 12/2/1780 and went to Magdalen Coll Oxford, was vicar of St Peter Worcester, vicar of Kempsey, [where there is a memorial to him] He was also Canon of Worcester Cathedral and was buried in Kempsey in 1872. There is a photo of him in the Worcester RO, also a book of poems and cuttings including a sonnet

"On a stalk of grass plucked from the grave of a brother in the Churchyard of Cleeve Prior".

This may be John Lunn who was drowned on the Avon when boating with John Rock in 1834 John Rock, born abt 1816, married Louisa and lived in Upper House. He was a Farmer with no children, and he left his estates to hi wife an subsequently his niece Louisa Newton who resided there until well in to the 20th century

The chronicler adds the 1851 census

Name of curier, or other person, who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851	Head of Family	Age	Sex	Marriage	Occupation	Place of Birth																																																								
Elizabeth Nash	Head	47	W		Widow of 110 acres, 6 1/2 labourers	I. I.																																																								
Cordelia D ^o	Serv	22	U		Servants Daughter	I. I.																																																								
Sophia D ^o	Serv	22	U		I. I.	I. I.																																																								
Total of Persons...				8	10																																																									
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Name of curier, or other person, who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851</th> <th>Head of Family</th> <th>Age</th> <th>Sex</th> <th>Marriage</th> <th>Occupation</th> <th>Place of Birth</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Henry Lockins</td> <td>Serv</td> <td>22</td> <td>M</td> <td></td> <td>Farmer's Son</td> <td>Worcester</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Amelia Lockins</td> <td>Grand Dam</td> <td>67</td> <td>F</td> <td></td> <td>Widow</td> <td>I. I.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Peter Lunn</td> <td>Head</td> <td>68</td> <td>M</td> <td></td> <td>Farmer</td> <td>I. I.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Anne Lunn</td> <td>Wife</td> <td>64</td> <td>F</td> <td></td> <td>Farmer's Wife</td> <td>Birmingham</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Elizabeth Lunn</td> <td>Serv</td> <td>52</td> <td>F</td> <td></td> <td>Widow</td> <td>I. I.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>William Lunn</td> <td>Serv</td> <td>22</td> <td>M</td> <td></td> <td>House Servant</td> <td>I. I.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Thomas Lunn</td> <td>Serv</td> <td>22</td> <td>M</td> <td></td> <td>do. do.</td> <td>I. I.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>							Name of curier, or other person, who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851	Head of Family	Age	Sex	Marriage	Occupation	Place of Birth	Henry Lockins	Serv	22	M		Farmer's Son	Worcester	Amelia Lockins	Grand Dam	67	F		Widow	I. I.	Peter Lunn	Head	68	M		Farmer	I. I.	Anne Lunn	Wife	64	F		Farmer's Wife	Birmingham	Elizabeth Lunn	Serv	52	F		Widow	I. I.	William Lunn	Serv	22	M		House Servant	I. I.	Thomas Lunn	Serv	22	M		do. do.	I. I.
Name of curier, or other person, who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851	Head of Family	Age	Sex	Marriage	Occupation	Place of Birth																																																								
Henry Lockins	Serv	22	M		Farmer's Son	Worcester																																																								
Amelia Lockins	Grand Dam	67	F		Widow	I. I.																																																								
Peter Lunn	Head	68	M		Farmer	I. I.																																																								
Anne Lunn	Wife	64	F		Farmer's Wife	Birmingham																																																								
Elizabeth Lunn	Serv	52	F		Widow	I. I.																																																								
William Lunn	Serv	22	M		House Servant	I. I.																																																								
Thomas Lunn	Serv	22	M		do. do.	I. I.																																																								



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer



 [Report issue](#)

Name: Henry Adkins

Gender: Male

Marriage Date: 2 Jun 1842

Marriage Place: Cleeve Prior,Worcester,England

Spouse: Elizabeth Rock

The 1851 census has Henry Adkins recorded as Elizabeth Rock's son in Law, and as Cordelia is her daughter the Chronicler is making the assumption that the Henry Adkins on this record is married to or partner of Cordelia. We have evidence that a Henry Adkins married Elizabeth Rock in 1842 . It is more confusing that if you research the parentage of Amelia Adkins it also shows a Henry Adkins as her father. On the 1861 census when Elizabeth is still alive it records:

Elizabeth as a farmer of 120 acres employing 7 men 3 boys and 2 wagoner's

Cordelia as a farmer's daughter

Henry Adkins As a farmer

Presumably as Elizabeth is now quite old Henry is already running the farm. We do not that Cordelia and her sister were step sisters

1856-60 Elizabeth Rock [widow of John] has Top Farm leaves it to Cordelia her daughter

1862 Cordelia Rock daughter has tenancy d 1862 she leaves house to her niece Amelia Sophia Adkins, Whose father is the Henry Adkins on the 1861 census later Lunn who she brought up after her mother dies in Childbirth

In the wills of 1863 we see

ROCK Cordelia.

Effects under £4,000.

16 March.

The Will

of Cordelia Rock late of the Parish of Cleeve Prior in the County of **Worcester** Spinster deceased who died 10 November 1862 at the said Parish was proved at **Worcester** by the oaths of Robert Lunn of Norton in the said County Farmer Henry Adkins of Cleeve Prior aforesaid Farmer and Jonathan Slatter of South Littleton in the said County Farmer the Executors.



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

Looking back at the 1851 Census

Elizabeth Rock		67
Cordelia Rock	daughter	34
Sophia Rock	Step sister to Cordelia	28
Henry Adkins	Son in law	54
Amelia S Adkins	Grand daughter	7
Peter Lunn		69
Anne Lunn		64
Elizabeth Lunn		52
Catharine Bennett		15

At this stage the chronicler is confused as other documents state that Amelia is Elizabeth Rocks Niece

Also we have the record that shows Henry and Elizabeth were married

England, Select Marriages, 1538-1973 MARRIAGE & DIVORCE	Name Henry Adkins
	Spouse Elizabeth Rock
	Marriage 02/06/1842 Cleeve Prior,Worcester,England

1876 it appears that Henry Adkins is the tenant and when he dies in 1875 John Adkins his son takes over running the farm, in 1869 he was recorded as living in Kemises House. In 1881 John is still recorded as farming 160 acres

The chronicler confirms that on the 1881 census Amelia is not recorded as living in the village and the house is called "Napp " or "Rapp" house

The ownership has now passed in to a trust, probably at the time it passed to Amelia this is corroborated when Robert Lunn was spoken of by Charles Lunn in correspondence in 1871 as having Amelia Sophia as his 'ward'. Whilst John is the Tenant an extension he seems to have done which was not liked by Charles Lunn. He was the nephew of Henry Adkins snr, his brother also Henry was living in Salford and was co-trustee of the Lunn Trusts, with Charles Lunn and J Slatter.

The chronicler clarifies that James Son also called Henry has the middle name of Slatter, therefore we can presume at this stage that J Slatter was a relative.

There are records showing:

"Paid off on 16/3/1883 value £409/17/6, rent £159/10/-."

He claims reimbursement from buildings etc. and a big row ensues. In 1882 H Adkins writes to Robert Lunn to say 'tenant has been fleeced'. J Adkins claimed



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

“£192/10/- for excess rent ending 1879 in place of building he was deprived of for about 3 years and such as now standing has been completed barely 3 years. Handling materials for new building 1878, '79, '80, £60, on Slatter and Silvester’s holding.” [these were bad years for farming as crops lost because of bad weather.]*

After a dispute over the Lunn's Trust, Charles and Amelia moved all deeds to Dunnet Moore Bayley and Greatrex, 17 Temple Row Birmingham.

In 1878 there was a report on the condition of a farm and buildings called Slatter & Silvester’s Farm. It goes on to say

“.....the buildings at Cull's House [Charlett’s House] is a dilapidated state but the barn is in the process of repair.”

The chronicler states that this was presumably a part of Top Farm which had been sublet to Slatter one of the trustees.

Following this Amelia Sophia, leaves property to Charles Bateman Lunn her son

John Adkins remained in charge of the farm as late as 1882 as he wrote to the trustees requesting a kitchen range and chimney piece, 5 venetian blinds, letter box in front door, wine cellar as fitted, hat rail and pegs in hall and on landing.

In 1881 Charles Lunn is recorded as living in Kings Norton with the family his occupation is given as

Occupation: Voice Trainer & Singing (Music)

In 1882 an advert to let the farm was put in to Bells Weekly Messenger and Farmers Journal for

“160 acres 2 roods 16 perches arable meadow, orcharding and pasture. Capital residence 2 good new fold yards and 3 cottages”

*Apply J Slatter, Mickleton
R Lunn Solicitor, Stratford*

A Letter to Robert Lunn from George Lunn recommended Joseph Smithin, a friend as tenant and J Slatter writes that the tenancy starts in Nov 1882.

With the house now in the occupation of Mr J Smithin -, there was a notice for building repairs on the 19/ 11/1883 from the Council to alter the WC and soil pipe and to disconnect them from the inside drains.



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

In a letter to Robert Lunn, solicitor, from Charles Lunn, he pointed out that Amy and Ann always said there was a smell when they lived there. In 1883 the water closet had been in place for 40 years. With the Pipe two yards from kitchen window going towards the front of the house. Charles stated that he had visited Cleeve Prior to disconnect WC until builder repaired it.

When J Smithin took over there were bills for repairs and alterations, cutting panels out of door, fixing a gully and trough in the rook, 2 pump leathers to the pumps in the back hall. The complete painting and repairs in 1882, referred to the long room. This was known as the table tennis room which ran over the halls on the first floor with a very definite 'join' in the bricks which were not well keyed in, a Victorian addition at some time. Don Archer, like us, had no idea what it was meant for. His family used it for table tennis, as did our children.

On 12/3/1883 there is a bill from Wm Davis [builder] to J Slatter [Mickleton] for repairs completed at Mr. Smithin's house and buildings, including the orchard wall, yard wall and door, hanging new gates and, repairing fences on the farm. It required 200 bricks for the wall.

The next record that we see was made under the Finance Act 1910

No 133.

Description: House buildings land- A 164-1-32,

Rateable Value: £180/17/6,

Occupier: J Smithin,

Owner :CB Lunn

Interest of owner :HD,

Actual or estimated rent : £235, occupier pays rates, taxes & insurance, owner pays repairs.

Fixed charges easements common rights & restrictions - footpaths.

Site value deductions claimed [ie claimed for tax reduction for having footpaths running over the land]

Particulars description and notes made on inspection 9/10/1913.

Brick and slate house in good repair, 2 attics, 5 bedrooms, 3 reception rooms, kitchen, br kitchen, offices, dairy, cellar.

Valuation includes	34,35, 136 & 137	£5300.
	164acres 32r 32p	£3830,

Ded't market value of site if divested of structures timber, fruit tree and other things growing on the land		£1470
--	--	-------

Building and structures	£1150
Timber	£ 40
Fruit trees	£ 140
Other things growing on land	£ 160



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

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. "...."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."

"When my family moved from Gloucestershire, near Cirencester, they had to bring all their livestock by train, unload them from the railway trucks & drive them along the roads to Cleeve."

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



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

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.

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.



In March 1945, with Don still as tenant, Chris Grey sold the Manor to Mr AE Wiley Chairman of Ansell's Brewery. The Manor lands were expanded over the next 16 years but with his impending retirement, Mr Wiley started to sell the estates off in various lots. The first to go were the Worcester Meadows which were sold to a George Edward Goodman, the owner of



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

Moor Hall Farm, at Wixford, whose lands we believe, bordered those of the Manor on the Warwickshire side of the Avon

The Mill itself was then attached to the Top Farm lands and on 19th January 1955, Arthur Wiley sold it in its entirety to Wrekin Brewery, an old Shropshire brewery now absorbed into the Ansell's Company



The final piece of the jigsaw was when the manor itself was sold to the Lloyd Brothers who kept it going as a much smaller farm, till the 80's





Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

On 25th February 1964, the brewery sold the farm to Don & his sister Mrs E.E. Archer, and In 1966 we see the first mention of the interest in fishing on the river when the Archers entered in to a lease with Yardley Wood Social Club giving them the right to fish on the river.

There is now a surprising twist in our story as a new landowner started to buy property and dominate the village. They were the Birmingham Anglers.

This organisation had been started in 1883, and by the 1970's it was reputed to be the largest the largest fishing organisation in the world with a membership of nearly 70,000 members and 1200 affiliated clubs. Their first acquisition was the fishing rights from the Yardley Wood Social Club, closely followed by Worcester Meadows from George Goodman and the final piece of the jigsaw was the purchase of Top Farm in 1968 from the Archers for £35,500. **The Archers actually sold out to** Mr. Stanley Smith of 24 Baker St Sparkhill and William Coyne of 31 Mayland Crescent Hall green, hen trustees of the Birmingham Anglers Association

In 1972, the farm outbuildings and workable farm lands, were sold to Tony Farmer, with the trustees of BAA holding the mortgage

The balance, the Worcester Meadows the escarpment, river bank & Mill were retained by the BAA, but in 1973 the farm house, now called Prior House, had already been sold off to Peter Newman.





Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

Top Farm was eventually split up into parcels, with land sold for the racing stables, and the farm buildings sold for conversion to houses, with residual pockets retained by Tony Farmer for his own use.

It appears that at some stage the Birmingham anglers owned the old Brades house on the hill as they subsequently sold this and the escarpment to Mr & Mrs Baker who own it today.

The Worcester meadows were sold to Bomford & Evershed, which became Sandfields Farms Limited, after liquidation, leaving The Birmingham Anglers with the old Mill site and the fishing rights on the river.




Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

EDWARDS, BIGWOOD & BEWLAY

Auctioneers and Estate Agents, Surveyors and Valuers
158, EDMUND STREET, BIRMINGHAM, 3
Telephone: 021-236 8477

PARTICULARS
WORCESTERSHIRE
THE ATTRACTIVE FREEHOLD
GEORGIAN COUNTRY HOUSE
TOP FARM
CLEEVE PRIOR
Near EVESHAM



FOR SALE BY PRIVATE TREATY
VACANT POSSESSION ON COMPLETION

When the Newman family bought Prior House it was in a sad state and they have kindly shared with the Chroniclers their findings when they first moved in to the property.



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

Notes and pictures of Prior House, Cleeve Prior when purchased by Peter & Elizabeth Newman in 1973



These pictures on sheet 1, show the holes in the roof, cement plaster render on the walls and blown bricks on the front elevation. It was thought that the render was original as the stone beneath was rubble not cut stone. Many windows were broken as the house had been vandalized and the plants in the garden, which included a huge variety of Michaelmas daisies grown by Mrs. Archer, had all been taken. The condition of the house had caused concern, it gets listed in Mercer's book English Vernacular Houses. As the house was listed the Worcestershire County Council served a repairs order on the owners, The Birmingham Anglers, for the house to be repaired with a given time. This is an unusual step for a council to take, as they can end up having to pay for the repairs themselves, and then have to try to recover their costs. The BAA had hoped to demolish the house to make a road into the Paddock, and build houses there. The BAA then put the house up for auction after the repairs order had expired! A copy was attached to the front door when we viewed. Our bid was successful and we were the owners of a grade 2 listed building in desperate need of urgent repair, with an expired repairs order in place

Sheet 1



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

We asked George Farndon, an architect we knew from Inkberrow, to survey the house and to draw up plans for its restoration to make it into a family house for us and our 3 sons.

The survey showed the wall thickness and it clearly showed the early, the Georgian & the later Victorian changes. These plans are now in the Worcester Record Office.

Sheets 1,2 & 3 show the exterior condition



Sheet 2



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer



Sheet 3



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer



Sheet 4

Sheet 4 shows the view of the back, mostly Victorian additions, and the exterior of the huge bake oven, at one time used by farmer John Rock to bake on a small commercial scale. The local directory refers to him as Farmer and baker or Grocer



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer



Sheet 5

Sheet 5 shows the courtyard with the flagstone surface and brick building, next to a single privy, behind this and facing into the garden was a 3 seater privy with the seat still in place. Behind these was the ash pit. Outside this yard we found the original cobbles which we cleared and kept free of weeds. There was a covered way on each side, slated. We took the dilapidated one over the kitchen window down and restored the other, setting in the stone slabs we found in the dairy to make seats and a table. It appears these covered areas were put in during the 1870's when John Adkins was the tenant. The records office hold details of all the improvements made for him, as well as the planting of cherry trees.



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer



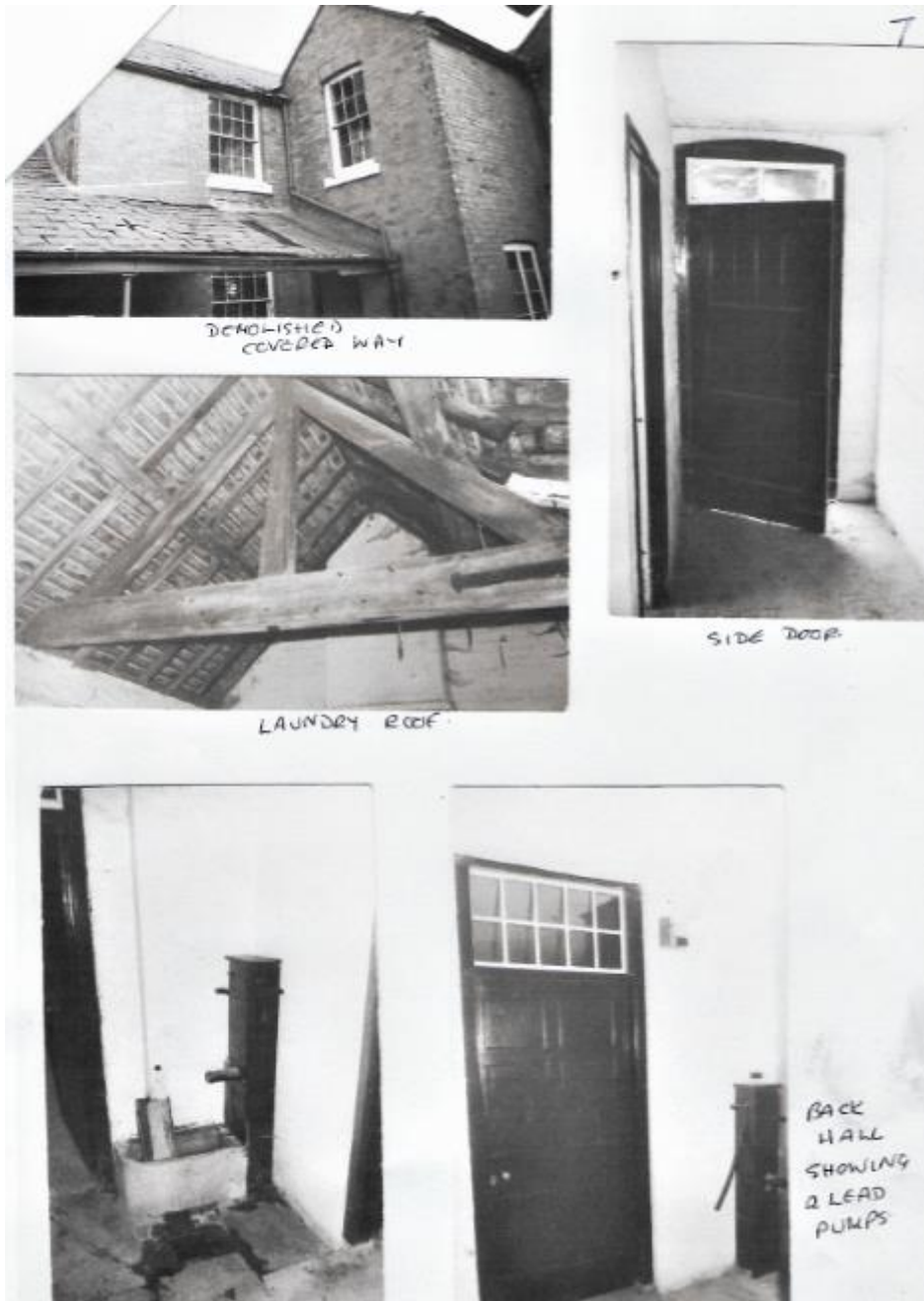
Sheet 6

Sheet 6 shows the old kitchen and dairy. The dairy end had mesh cover to the window, and the stone slabs to keep the butter cool can be seen. On the walls here and upstairs in the room above, were shelves for cheeses made by the rocks. This was probably a single cheese similar to single Gloucester. To the left of the range was a blocked up bake oven, large and deep, this had been blocked up in the 1890's, and inside was a coin, a shoe, a newspaper and the original tools apart from the bread peal. I only obtained a bread peal when we bought a property in Herefordshire, which had a former bakery building at the rear. No ovens just the peal! In the corner of the kitchen was a lone piece of concrete which when removed showed a stone drain cut into the slab to drain the dairy. So useful when washing the floor, and this ran out in to the old, open drain which runs alongside the house down the village. Upstairs was a WC which once also ran in to the open ditch. This was the subject of some heated correspondence in the C19 before the ditch was covered over, when there was a smell from the ditch that was upsetting some people. The correspondence revealed that the WC was one of the first in the Vale of Evesham, dating back to the 1840's, and also flushed from a roof supply of water. In the ash pit outside was the remains of the old blue and white patterned toilet, broken up sadly. On the side of the house at first floor level is a patch of brick amongst the stone at the site of this WC so it must have been put in from the outside.



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer



Sheet 7

Shows the timbers and beams in the room off the kitchen [our laundry] and the two lead pumps that were each side of the back hall, one for water from the well beneath and the other which gave water from a cistern under the floor of the middle hall.



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer



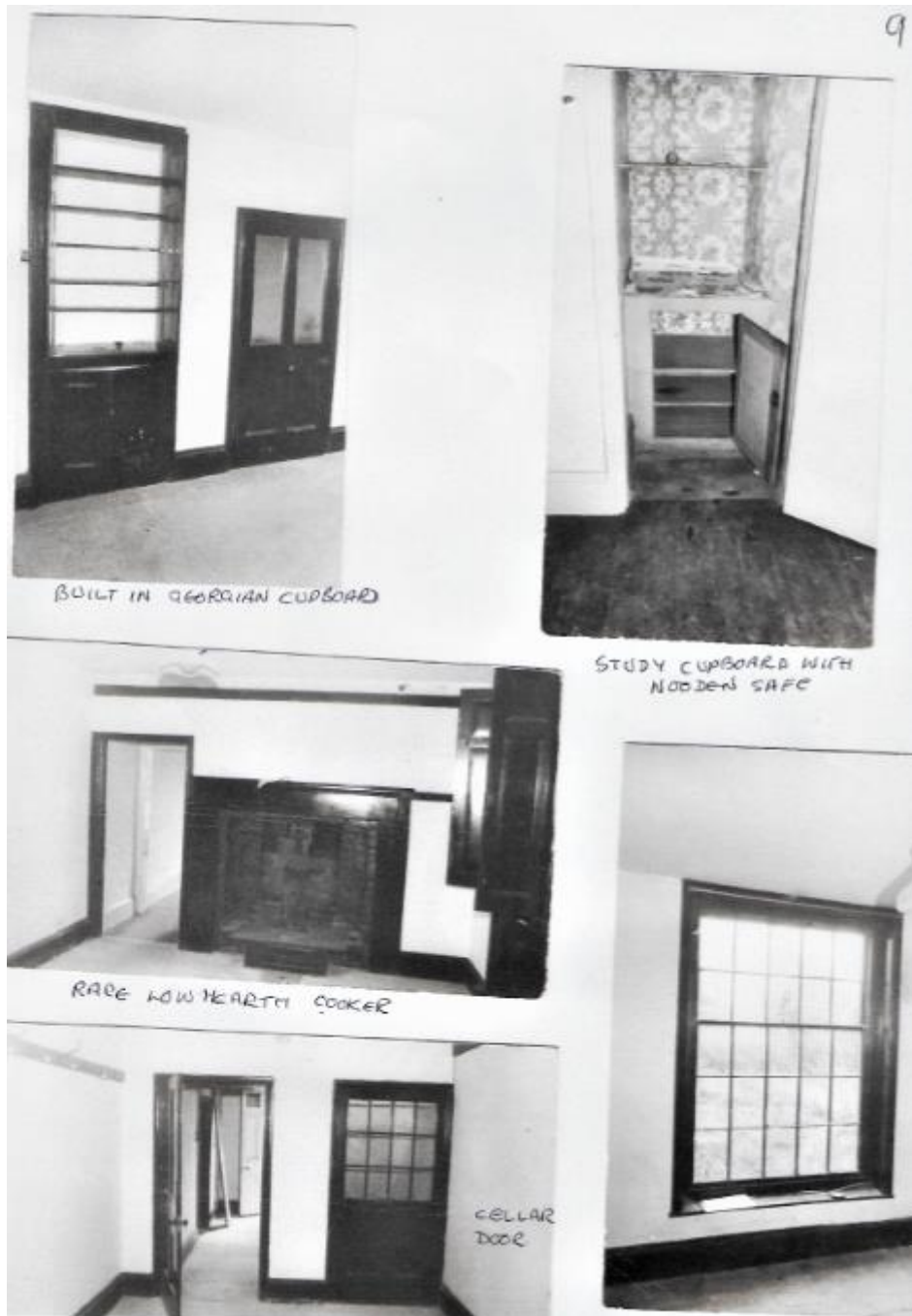
Sheet 8

Sheet 8 shows the flag stoned middle Hall with the two rare built Georgian cupboards, listed for their rarity. In front of the one on the left was a flagstone that could be lifted out to show a lead lined cistern. This was fed from a lead lined trough which ran around the main roof [the Georgian build] collecting rainwater, you could hear it running in when it rained. A door went down from here into the cellar where the cider was stored. This flooded regularly so we put in a sump with a pump.



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer



Sheet 9

Sheet 9 shows a shallower built in Georgian cupboard in the dining room, also stone flagged and in the fireplace a rare low hearth oven. [There is a picture of one of these being used at the Manor] In the study was a cupboard with a built in wooden safe



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer



Sheet 10

Sheet 10 shows the stone flagged front hall, the double front door. The only fireplace that was changed was the lounge one, all the others were just covered over and easy to restore. The lounge window which looked out on to the courtyard was formerly a painted memorial window to the Rev. Mathew Lunn, put there by his sister Ann, related to the Rock family. After a pane was broken when the house was empty, Don Archer arranged for its removal to the county museum at Hartlebury. It is to be seen on the right hand side of the staircase to the first floor.



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer



Sheet 11

Sheet 11 shows the staircases and landings, the archway linking the Georgian front to the Victorian addition on the site of the original stone cottage.

In one of the front bedrooms on the first floor when it was being decorated, we found a drawing beneath the layers of paint and paper. This was of B Wheeler the stonemason, drawn & signed by G knight and J Charlton, done in 1824



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Prior House [Top Farm]-From notes by Peter Newman and the recollections of Don Archer

The house had been called Top Farm, and we discovered the name Prior House had been dreamed up by the auctioneers to try to make the house sound more attractive to potential purchasers. It came however without the orchard with its mulberry, walnut and copper beech. These were badly overgrown and needed attention. So we looked after the orchard and were able to rent the field known as the paddock on the Enclosure & Tithe maps. We cleared out the pond and allowed it to refill. Despite offers for both the BAA refused to sell, and to obtain the orchard we had to buy Cream Cottages when they were put up for auction, selling them on and reuniting the orchard with the house. More financial problems beset the BAA and they put the Paddock up for auction refusing to take offers before the auction as they had for Cream Cottages. After a very nervous few weeks we were able to buy the Paddock at auction, at a price which set a new record for local land at the time. But this field was also reunited with the house. We built the stable and garage block in local stone, much reclaimed from the pond infill and brought in a drive from the top,.

It had been called Slatters & Silvester's Farm in the C19, and was possibly built by one of them around 1790, but soon rented to the Rock Family who also had Upper House. Their son John lived there with his family, and his widow continued to farm the land after his death and then their son in Law Henry Adkins farmed it. His wife had died in childbirth leaving a daughter Amelia Sophia, who married Charles Lunn, a music teacher from Edgbaston. John Adkins rented it for a while during the agricultural depression. Then it was rented to Charles Smithin for many years, and then to the Archer family, who were then able to buy it. We were privileged to own it and to be able to restore it in the 1970's and had many happy years there with our children & animals.

The Cleeve Prior Chroniclers would like to again thank the Newman family for sharing with them their vast knowledge and memories of Prior House & Cleeve Prior

The Chroniclers

Bibliography

Notes & research by Peter & Elizabeth Newman

The Recollections of Don Archer

Research of archives with kind permission of the Birmingham Anglers Association