



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Top Farm, The Mill and the River Later Years

In one of his accounts of his family history Don Archer tells us how Froglands was part of the 1000 acres of farmland belonging to the Manor. Top Farm, now Prior House, was part of that estate and it 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.

When Don took over the farm on the death of his father, Chris Grey who was the then owner of the Manor was his mentor and guided him through his early years. In March 1945 Chris Grey, sold the manor to Mr AE Wiley Chairman of Ansell's Brewery who held it until his retirement from the Brewery in 1961, when he in turn sold it to the Lloyd Brothers, and we now start to see the breakup of the old farm lands in Cleeve Prior.

In January 1955, he had already sold Top Farm in its entirety to Wrekin Brewery, an old Shropshire brewery now absorbed into the Ansell's Company., It was interesting that the lands at the top end of the village once part of the Farm owned by Chris Grey were not in the residual Manor Lands when they were sold to the Lloyds in 1961. The Mill and Worcester Meadows had at some stage been sold elsewhere . From looking at various deeds we can see that by this time Worcester Meadows were now in the ownership of a George Edward Goodman , the owner of Moor Hall farm, Wixford, whose lands must have presumably bordered those of the Manor on the Warwickshire side of the Avon. The mill and the lands along the river had now been attached to top Farm



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In February 1964, the brewery sold the farm to Don & a Mrs E.E. Archer, widow. 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 for the fishing rights on the river.

The next stage of village history started with the Worcester Meadows being sold by George Goodman to a Mr Stanley Smith and William Coyne who subsequently bought Top Farm in 1968 from the archers for £35,500.

We have no evidence of the connection between the trustees and the Yardley wood Social Club, but we know that in 1977 the trust sold all the assets to a company called Birmingham Anglers Ltd.

This 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

On documents dated 1971 there are listed 109 leasehold, freehold legal rights to fishing have been formed in to a Trust as yet unnamed .

1971 the assets of the then unnamed trust listed as:

- *Land and Farmhouse at Top Farm Cleeve Prior Worcestershire*

Which are amongst the 14 that they are listed as owning

By 1974 there are listed as owning the rights to 109 leasehold, freehold legal properties including fishing rights, and the assets in Cleeve Prior are now shown as being split into two :

- *Land and Farmhouse at Top Farm Cleeve Prior Worcestershire,*
- *Retained portions of Land and Farmhouse at Top Fam Cleeve Prior Worcestershire*



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This was because in 1972 the farm out buildings and workable farm lands excluding Worcester Meadows the escarpment, river bank & Mill, were sold to Tony Farmer, with the trustees holding the mortgage, thus still listed as an asset. This was shortly followed in 1973 , when the farm house, now called Prior House, was sold off to a Peter Newman.

Eventually Top Farm was split up into Parcels with land sold for the racing stables, and the farm buildings sold for conversion to houses, and residual pockets retained by Ton 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 it and the escarpment to Mr & Mrs Baker who own it today. The Worcester meadows was 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.

We are pleased to announce that the Birmingham Anglers has agreed to lease this land back to the village for a peppercorn rent, for the foreseeable future