



## Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

### From the memories of Don Archer & other Villagers

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At the beginning of World War 2, the so called Phoney war, a North Country division, the 50th was stationed in the Vale of Evesham. We had a detachment of the RASC in the village, with the sound of marching feet shouted order & music from their very fine band. The memorial Hall became the mess & the Guard room, the village green became a mud patch as it was a car park for their vehicles & even the staddle stones were painted white so they could be seen in the blackout.

What is now the garage for Peacock House was the cook house where Frank Colman from Ely worked preparing their meals. As with many of the troops they were adopted by villagers & he was looked after by the Nicholls Family at nr 1 the Green. Mr Nichols was the shepherd for Mr Grey at the Manor his wife was known in the village as “Ma Nicks”

Stella Fletcher also tells us how her mother Mrs Roberts from the Smithy, also did all she could for these young 19 & 20 year old boys before they went to France

One of the soldiers Harry Laidlaw of the 150<sup>th</sup> Field ambulance wrote back to Mrs Roberts, from France on 1st March 1940

*Dear Mrs Roberts*

*The kindness and love you showed me at a time I most needed, will forever remain a lovely memory that will never die, and as time goes on may God's blessing be forever with you my Fairy Godmother.*

[Harry Laidlaw was subsequently evacuated from Dunkirk in June 1940 & was later posted to Egypt, where he was killed at the age of 21.]



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Their officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Jon Johnson wrote to the Archers on behalf of his troops on the 28<sup>th</sup> Dec 1939 thanking them for all their kindness & had the letter signed by all the soldiers.

J. A. Johnson 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt  
523 Patrol Coy RASC  
B.E.F.  
Sunday April 1<sup>st</sup> 1940.

Dear Mr Archer

I got back on Friday from a little trip to another part of France, and found a parcel of cigarettes and chocolate from you, together with a letter. Thank you very much indeed, it is very kind of you. I have not written to you before, as I have such a lot of correspondence to answer, that I am sure I shall never get through it all, I was never a good correspondent. I have written to you several times, and I hope she passed on my news to you.

We have moved on again to another place, but I have been left behind here in "my chateau" with one man or a new party. The remainder of Pat Coy left yesterday morning. So now I am here, all alone, a regular "king of the castle". I have no work to do in any way at all. I have just to wait for the next lot to come in and hand over to them. I expect to be here about 14 to 21 days, as it is a real rest for me, suit me.

The housekeeper of the chateau is a marvellous French cook, as she is cooking my meals, and they are very



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good too. Her husband used to be a waiter in a Paris Hotel, so he never like meals. I have a lovely little room with 3 easy chair, a thick carpet, a nice fire, and French window, with the door opening on to the lawn. The sun goes south west, and is sunny all day. I sit in a deck-chair outside the door, in the lawn and go to sleep every afternoon. My butler is also here and looks after my bedroom and study, keeps them tidy and clean. So you will see, that life at present, for us days at least is very congenial.

The weather here is excellent. The Daffodils are out in the garden, and all the plants are well through the soil. The garden, as I sit here on the lawn writing this letter, is looking the flower beds, and everything looks neat and tidy. Now all the troops have gone, everything is very peaceful and quiet this Sunday morning. The whistles and clacks in surrounding farmyards are making the only noise. None at this moment, seem a long way away.

Once again thank you very much for the present. I found waiting for me when I got back here. Please write again, I am always very pleased to receive letters, even if I am not so prompt to reply.

Yours sincerely  
Tom.





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After the evacuation Cleeve Prior paid host to a unit of six RAF meteorologists & their driver attached the Royal Artillery. Whose function was to provide secret weather information for the location of German guns and for the optimum efficiency of our own artillery. They describe how they were lifted off the mole at Dunkirk & from Margate were transported to the railway halt at Cleeve Prior.

This is described as “a wooden platform about 100yds long with a building of wood, presumably the booking office, in the middle. In the usual railway lettering was the village name Cleeve prior on top of the wooden building”

Having then been put up in the village hall eaten & slept for 11 to 12 hours they started to explore the village & soon discovered the Kings Arms. They recount:

*“At the entrance to what is now the car park was a double gate, and the car was a pretty well maintained garden. As we stood by the gate a youngish woman approached, and having discovered who & what we were invited us in to the garden, seating us in a pleasant summer house while she went in search of her father, the licensee. In a short time this gentleman appeared with an enormous enamel jug of beer & four pint pots. Having served in France in WW1 he wanted to learn all about our activities, an a pleasant couple of hours were spent with more beer until opening time at 6.00pm*

*We let the licensee know that what little money we had would almost certainly be French, A believing that we would give him the correct rate of exchange he seated us in a corner of the bar where the entrance is today. At about 8.30 he told us that his wife had prepared a special meal for us, roast duck, pea’s new potatoes, with stewed gooseberries to follow.*

*The army in its wisdom had declared a curfew in to billets at 9.30, we were somewhat late. The next day we were all charged with being absent. This was ridiculous as the Army had no jurisdiction over RAF personnel, however after a lot of argument and discussion each one of us was addressed by the Colonel. I was first. After listening to my explanation, in particular the wonderful meal, he*



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*dismissed the charge, with the comment that I had done much better than he had"*

The next day the RAF received order to report to the air ministry in London.

In the summer of 1940 those not in other organisations registered at the police station & were enrolled in the Local Defence Volunteers



L-R  
Fred Basket  
Cyril Bunn  
Len Edwards  
Norman Fairfax  
Jack Ankers  
John Sheaf  
Eric Carter  
Fred Brooks  
Eli Ankers  
Peter Milward  
Jack Wilks  
Dave Spiers

Fred Basket –

In the 1930's he was the Caretaker at Cleeve House, Owned by a Birmingham company "Brades", a house for the workers to use for holidays & breaks.

Jack Ankers- Every two or three months Jack had to be re-assessed for service but as he was working in agriculture e was never called in to active service. Having joined the LDV he used to spend many hours in a van/lookout post at the end of mill lane, he tells how he use to patrol the village, man the fire point at the side of the warehouse, now in army hands & man the Bren gun position outside his farm at Lynwood . This was opposite the vicarage which was the home guard headquarters as the rev JR Whittaker was the first commanding officer.



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John Sheaf- Farmer at Bay Tree farm

Eli Ankers- Partnered with Don Archer [not in picture] used to keep vigil on Low Hill with the orders to harass enemy paratroopers until a more significant mopping up force arrived

Of the other we know very little any information would be helpful to fill in the picture

In the desperate days of 1940 Royal Engineers put coils of Dannert wire along the shallow stretches of the Avon to impede the crossing of invading German troops. By the end of the war this had become a tangled mess of rusty wire, nettles & Brambles. Don tells how they had to pull it all out by tractor, compact it the best they could & buried it in a big hole