

WELFORD-ON-AVON · FROG LANE

Priors Lee Cottage

A low thatched cottage in Frog Lane, the people who can be placed in it, the neighbours whose lives surrounded it, and what the village's own archive can and cannot tell us about its owners.

Drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive. Folder references are shown in grey. Only fifteen of the archive's 991 scanned files name the cottage, and none of them is a deed, so the owners of the house are not known from these sources. Parts of this account are inference. Those parts are marked as such, and the gaps are listed at the end.



priors Lee Cottage, Frog Lane. A real-photograph postcard captioned in the negative "An Old World Cottage, Welford", numbered F98 and signed by a photographer whose name reads as Walker Scott. The album slip names the cottage but gives no date. 53/16

A cottage with a short paper trail

Most houses in Welford-on-Avon leave a long trail in the village archive. The inns turn up in sale catalogues and licensing directories, the farmhouses in enclosure awards and tithe papers, and the bigger houses in auction particulars with their rooms measured to the inch. Priors Lee Cottage is different. It is a small thatched house in Frog Lane, the short lane off the Long Marston road a little south of the Maypole, and it appears in the archive mostly through the eyes of the planners and surveyors who came to

look at Welford's old buildings after the Second World War. Before 1957 it is not named at all.

That does not mean it is new. Every surveyor who looked at it agreed that it is a timber-framed cottage of the seventeenth century, and the photographs show a roof whose bulk and patching speak of long use. What the archive lacks is the paperwork of ownership: no deed, no sale notice, no will and no house history of the kind the Society compiled for its neighbours. The owners of Priors Lee before the late twentieth century are simply not recorded in it. Even for recent decades the sources name the people who lived in the house, which is not quite the same thing, since a resident might be a tenant.

So this essay works outwards from the building. It starts with where the cottage stands and what its name might mean, then looks closely at the fabric as surveyors and photographers recorded it, and follows the long and slightly confused story of its listing. The second half turns to people. It sets out everyone the archive places in the house, and then the households of Frog Lane from the 1840s to the 1990s, among whom the cottage's earlier occupants almost certainly stood, even though no census or directory names them. It ends with a plain list of what is missing and where the sources disagree.

Where it stands

Frog Lane leaves the main road through the village on its east side. That road was called Main Street on the planners' lists until the 1960s, when someone went through the official typescript, struck out "Main" and wrote "HIGH" over every entry 13/02, 30/07. South of the old Post Office the same road becomes the Long Marston road, the forty-foot road laid out by the enclosure commissioners in 1801-02 "leading out of Welford at Birds Lane" 20/04, 47/98. The enclosure award names the roads it made, and Frog Lane is not among them. That suggests an older village lane, too minor to need defining, though the archive has no early map that names it.

Several documents fix the lane close to the Maypole green. When The Nest, the cottage next door to Priors Lee in the listed group, was auctioned in 1955, the particulars described it as "near the Maypole, just off the Long Marston Road", standing "at right angles to the Road with small gardens surrounding it on three sides" 11/30. In 1849 a Stratford surveyor, Edward Gibbs, took levels through the village "for sanitary purposes". One of his stages ran "from May

Pole to opposite Barton Road and Mrs. Timms", a distance of 4.63 chains, or about a hundred yards. A later reader of the typed copy pencilled beside it "[?] Cottage, P. Barnett" 19/52. Mrs Timms's house was the cottage still called Tymms Cottage, beside The Nest, and the Barnetts lived in Frog Lane in the 1950s. So the lane's houses stood roughly opposite the Barton Road turning, about a hundred yards from the Maypole.

The clearest description of the cottage's own position comes from the footpath surveyors. Warwickshire's 1961 Statement of public paths describes footpath SD 28a as running "from the Welford-on-Avon-Long Marston road, 75 yards south of Welford Post Office, eastwards for 100 yards", and a later hand has pencilled "Saw Pit Close" beside it 12/03. In 1968 the parish reviewed every path for the Countryside Act, and the new description of SD 28a is the only document in the archive that uses Priors Lee as a landmark:

Entrance from Bird's Lane (Long Marston Road) by "The Retreat", through Frog Lane wicket gate opposite Priors Lee (not to be locked), along path to Devon Cottage to another wicket gate (also not to be locked), through Sawpit Close by step-stile to Pool Close and Chapel Street. Padded track 2 ft. wide.

1968 review of Welford footpaths, schedule sheet 3 of 3 · 12/03

A walker in the late 1960s therefore came off the main road by The Retreat, went through a wicket gate facing Priors Lee, crossed to Devon Cottage, and struck off over Sawpit Close to Chapel Street. Gilda Gray used the same path in 1977 to place Nickall's Cottage in Chapel Street, "where Saw Pit Close stile crosses the footpath from Chapel St. to Frog Lane" 08/01-19.

The planners' lists give the order of the listed houses. The 1960 provisional list walks up the east side of Main Street from south to north and names Weston Close, The Nest, Prior's Lee Cottage and then Hornby Cottage, the old Post Office 13/03. The 1992 Conservation Area study numbers them the same way, as map references 29, 30, 31 and 32 15/08. That order suggests Priors Lee is the member of the group nearest the Post Office, with The Nest and Tymms Cottage beyond it and Weston Close at the far end by The Retreat. It is only a suggestion. The lists follow a surveyor's route rather than a map, and the footpath description could be read as putting Priors Lee further along the lane. No plan in the archive is clear enough to settle exactly where the cottage stands.



Welford on the 1903

Ordnance Survey six-inch map (Gloucestershire sheet I SE). The village was still in Gloucestershire. Frog Lane is among the orchard closes east of the main road, south of the Maypole; at this scale individual cottages are not named. 46/14



STREET VIEW WITH MAYPOLE WELFORD ON AVON. W.A. SMITH.

"Street View with Maypole, Welford-on-Avon", a W. A. Smith photograph of about 1900–1920. Frog Lane opens off this stretch of road a little to the south of the Maypole green.
46/09

What the name might mean

The cottage's name is written four ways in the archive. The planners' lists and the statutory list use "Prior's Lee Cottage" with an apostrophe 13/02, 13/03, 47/38. The photograph album, the 1987 electoral register and a 1994 letterhead drop the apostrophe and write "Priors Lee" 53/16, 30/05, 60/06. The Society's notebook of "Houses in Welford about 1960" spells it "Priors Leigh" 20/06. The 1992 Conservation Area study prints "Prior's Lee", which is a typographical accident rather than a variant 15/08. All of them clearly mean the same house.

Nothing in the archive explains the name. The obvious guess links it to Welford's medieval landlords. In 1059 Sweyn, Earl of Gloucester, gave Welford to the Saxon priory of Deerhurst on the Severn below Tewkesbury, a cell of the abbey of St Denis in Paris, and Domesday Book records Welford as fifteen hides belonging to Deerhurst 01/101, 02/15–25. The Victoria County History typescript adds that Ralph of Welford sued the prior for five hides between 1190 and 1203, that Henry VI gave Deerhurst to Eton in 1447, and that Edward IV passed it to Tewkesbury Abbey in 1467. By 1539 Lodovic Greville died holding two Welford manors, "Wernesford Grevill" and "Abbot's Welneford" 02/01–12. A prior did own Welford for some four hundred years, so a close or meadow called something like "the prior's ley" would not be surprising.

The second half of the name fits that reading. "Lee", "leigh" and "ley" are the common forms of the Old English word for a woodland clearing, which later came to mean a meadow or a piece of grassland. That meaning is general place-name knowledge, not something the archive records for Welford. The difficulty is that no field called Prior's Lee, Prior's Ley or anything like it appears in the archive's field-name papers, in the 1802 enclosure award, or in the deeds of the neighbouring houses.

There is a good local reason for caution. Frog Lane's houses changed names freely in the twentieth century. Weston Close was "Rest Awhile" when the Winsors lived there and in the sale particulars of 1927 and 1937, and a later owner, Mr Doherty, renamed it Weston Close because that name appears in its deeds as a field boundary from before enclosure 11/10, 11/30. The Retreat was also called The Poplars in 1911 and is now The Old Well House

48/09, 46/37-95. Elsewhere in the village, Sideways became Jasmine Cottage, Maycott became Apple Trees and Cabeen became Flower Cottage 13/03. The earliest firm date for the name Prior's Lee is the survey of March 1957 behind the 1960 provisional list. It could be an old field name revived, as Weston Close was. It could equally be a romantic name chosen by an owner who knew that Welford had once belonged to a priory. The archive supports both possibilities and proves neither.

The building

The fullest description of the cottage is its statutory list entry, which the archive holds as item 38 of a typescript of all sixty-six listed items in the parish. It reads in full:

House. C17 with later alterations. Timber-frame with painted plaster or brick infill; hipped thatched roof with brick end stacks. 2-unit plan plus outshut on left end. EXTERIOR: single-storey plus attic; 2-window range. Entrance to left end has C20 catslide porch with battened door to side and 3-light leaded window to front. Ground floor has 2 bay windows with hipped tile roofs over 1:3:1-light leaded windows with iron opening casements; 2 raking dormers have 2-light leaded casements with iron opening casements. Outshut to left end has 2-light leaded casements.

Statutory list, Frog Lane, first listed 1972, grade II, group value · 47/38

Read slowly, this describes a very typical Welford house. A "two-unit plan" means two ground-floor rooms side by side, usually a hall or living room with the main hearth and a smaller service room or parlour. "Single storey plus attic" means bedrooms tucked into the roof space, lit by dormers that break the slope of the thatch. The "outshut" at the left end is a lean-to under a continuation of the roof, the usual way a small cottage gained a dairy, a scullery or a store. The two brick chimney stacks stand at the ends of the roof rather than in the middle. This reading of the plan applies general knowledge of English vernacular building to the list description. Nobody has published a survey of the inside, and the archive holds none.

The nearest thing to an interior is the description of The Nest when it was sold in September 1955. The Nest is "a very small timber framed semi-detached cottage with thatch", in the same listed group and of much the same kind 13/02. Its particulars list a living room fourteen feet by eleven "with inglenook chimney place 3'

deep", exposed timber framing, fixed cupboards and a store, a study with a fireplace that could become a kitchen and bathroom, and one bedroom upstairs, fourteen feet by twelve and a half. Outside were a timber pail closet, a coalhouse, a lean-to store and a summer arbour. There was mains electricity, but water came from "a joint well on the front boundary with the adjoining property", and sanitation was still a pail closet 11/30. Priors Lee has two bays and an outshut, so it was a little larger, but the inglenook, the shared well and the lack of drains give a fair idea of what living in a Frog Lane cottage meant until the mid-twentieth century.

The list's dating of the house to the seventeenth century matches what the archive says about Welford generally. Of the sixty-six listed items in the parish, forty-five are dated to the sixteenth or seventeenth century and twenty-six are thatched 47/1–66. The Victoria County History typescript counts "about 30 timber-framed buildings, none earlier than the 17th century; two-thirds are thatched" 02/01–12. A timber frame filled with plaster or brick, a thatched roof and a low profile of one storey and an attic is the standard form of the village's older cottages, and Priors Lee is a good example of the type.

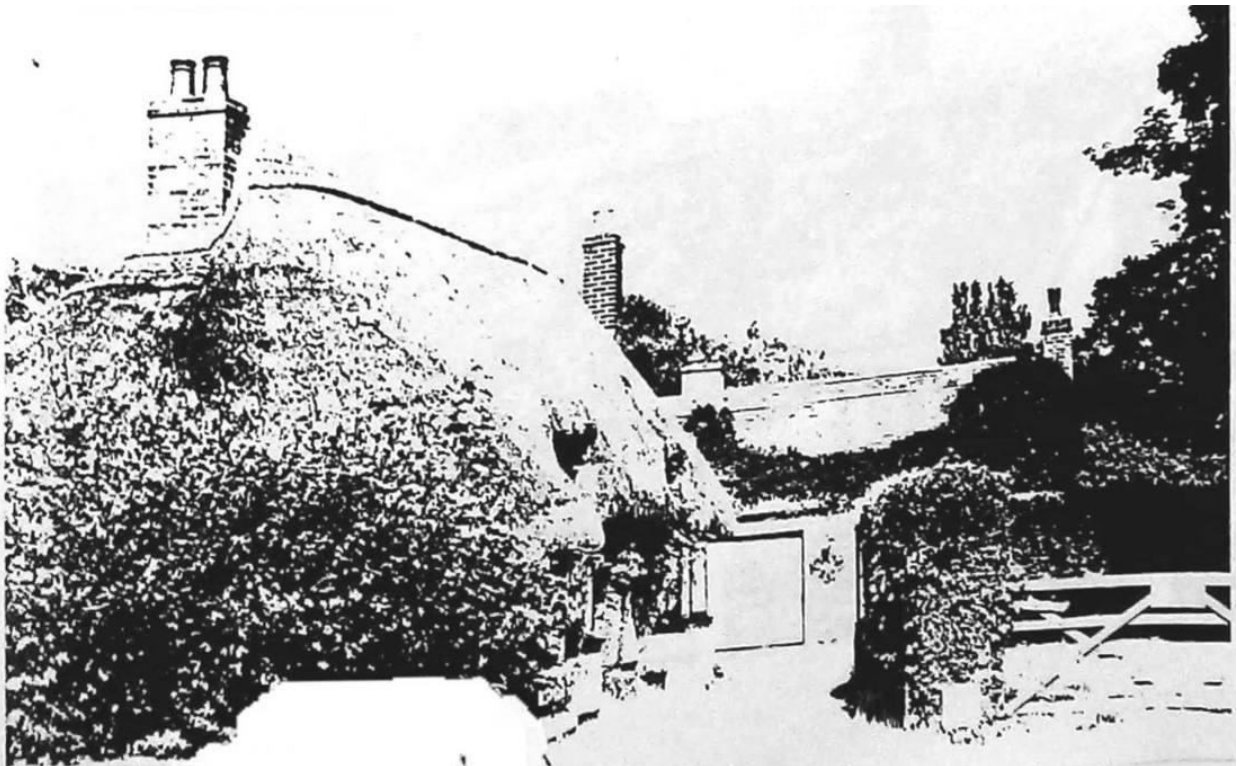
The earlier descriptions are much shorter, but they add one useful detail. The 1957 survey says only: "Timber framed cottage with thatch. Mostly new fenestration" 13/03. The later list typescript repeats this and adds "Colourwashed plaster infilling. 1 storey and attic" 13/02, 30/07. "Mostly new fenestration" means that by 1957 most of the windows had already been replaced. The leaded casements with iron opening lights, and the two bay windows with their little hipped tile roofs, look like a twentieth-century restoration in the old-fashioned manner, and the list dates the porch to the twentieth century. The surveyors who compiled the 1967 list complained in their introduction that Welford was "an extremely pretty and well-known village but it is now residential in character and a large number of cottages have been somewhat over-restored" 30/07. They did not name Priors Lee in that complaint. Its windows probably belong to the same story, but that is an inference.

Three photographs

The archive holds one photograph that is certainly of Priors Lee, one that is described as showing it, and one of Frog Lane that may or may not include it.

The best is the postcard at the head of this essay, item 53/16 in a photograph album. A typed slip under the print reads "Priors Lee Cottage / Frog Lane (undated)". The caption printed in the negative is partly lost where the white lettering falls across pale brickwork; it reads "An Old W[orl]d Cott[age], [W]elford". The negative number F98 and the photographer's signature, read as Walker Scott, are at lower right. The Society's notes on the album point out that the caption itself names only Welford, so the identification as Priors Lee rests on the album slip 53/16.

The photograph agrees closely with the list description. The roof is an enormous hipped thatch, laid in visible courses with horizontal liggers and plainly patched, for the tone changes between the middle and the right-hand sections. Two eyebrow dormers break the slope, each over a small window. Beneath them are two small bay windows with their own little roofs, as in the list entry, and there is a brick stack at each end of the ridge. At the left a close-boarded fence on a low brick wall hides a lower thatched range, which is probably the outshut. A worn path runs to the door. Nothing in the picture dates it. Its format, a real-photograph postcard with a printed caption and a series number, suits the first half of the twentieth century, but that is a judgement from the format, not evidence.



Priors Lee Cottage in 1992, as reproduced in the draft Conservation Area study. The text gives "fig 56" as the photograph for map reference 31, Prior's Lee Cottage, and this is the image on that page. The photocopy has lost most of its midtones. 15/08, PDF p. 56

The second photograph comes from the draft Conservation Area study of July 1992. Its entry for map reference 31 reads "Prior's Lee Cottage, Frog Lane. Serial No 18A/31 Grade II. Timber framed cottage with thatch, one storey with attic" and refers the reader to figure 56 15/08. The image on that page shows a thatched cottage almost smothered in climbing plants, with a tall brick chimney at the left end. The match with the postcard is good, but the photocopy is too harsh to be certain, and the study's figure numbers are not printed under the pictures themselves.



"Frog Lane", a W. A. Smith photograph of about 1900–1920, with an unnamed artist at his easel in the lane. The hand-lettered mount names the lane but not the houses. 46/10

The third picture has the most atmosphere. W. A. Smith set up his camera in Frog Lane on a winter or early spring day, when the trees were bare. A man in a flat cap and dark jacket sits on a stool at a tall easel, painting a long, low thatched cottage that joins a timber-framed house with a gabled front. A tall hedge of woven stakes runs along the lane. The mount says only "Frog Lane" 46/10. The Society's note on the print suggests that the buildings are probably among the three listed in the lane, and the evidence goes no further than that. Phyllis Eastgate, who spent childhood summers in Welford between about 1905 and 1914, remembered artists painting in the village before the war 36/01, and the

Birthplace Trust holds eight watercolours of Welford by E. Phipson dated 1895 46/01–12. Frog Lane's thatch was evidently one of the things they came to paint.

Listed, regraded, listed again

The cottage's official status has been recorded at least six times, and the records do not agree. The table sets them out in date order.

DATE	RECORD	WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT PRIOR'S LEE
Mar 1957	Survey for the Rural District provisional list (printed Nov 1960) 13/03	Sheet 18/31, Grade III. Listed under Main Street, east side. "Timber framed cottage with thatch. Mostly new fenestration."
1967 or later	Statutory list no. 2396, pp. 160–178 13/02, 30/07	Frog Lane, SP 1551 18B/31, Grade II, group value. No listing date printed, though most entries carry 6.2.52 or 5.4.67.
1960s–early 70s	Handwritten copy with local suggestions 30/06	Frog Lane, 18/31, Grade III.
1972	Statutory list typescript 47/38	"First listed 1972." Grade II, group value. C17. Full description quoted above.
17 Dec 1983	Society's review sent to the Parish Council 10/32	Frog Lane, 18/31, Grade III.
Jul 1992	Draft Conservation Area study 15/08	Map ref 31, serial 18A/31, Grade II.

Some of this can be reconciled. Grade III was a non-statutory grade for buildings of local interest. It was dropped around 1970, and most of Welford's Grade III buildings were later raised to Grade II 13/03, 30/06. That fits a cottage that was Grade III in 1957 and became Grade II on the statutory list in 1972. The Society's 1983 review still shows Grade III because it was working from the 1960 list, which it called out of date; its covering letter asked the Parish Council to request a new survey 10/32. The blank listing date in the typescript at 13/02 suggests the entry was added to the 1967 volume by a later amendment, which would also fit a 1972 listing. That is an inference from a blank, not a recorded fact.

What cannot be reconciled from the archive is the reference letter. The typescript lists give "18B/31", the 1992 study "18A/31", and the Society's lists simply "18/31". The difference probably reflects a change in the official sheet numbering rather than any change in the building, but the archive does not say so.

Whatever the paperwork, the planners always saw Priors Lee as part of a group. Every version of the list ends the entries for Weston Close, The Nest and Prior's Lee Cottage with the same line:

"Weston Close, The Nest and Prior's Lee Cottage form a group" 13/02, 30/07. In listing language that is what "GV", group value, means: the three buildings matter more together than each does alone. When Warwickshire County Council drew up its first Conservation Area proposal for Welford, probably between 1968 and 1970, Frog Lane was one of the streets it named, with Boat Lane, Church Lane and Church Street, the High Street and Chapel Street 06/10. The lane has been inside the conservation area ever since.

Owners and occupiers: what the record holds

It helps to be clear at the outset about what kind of evidence survives for the people of Priors Lee. An owner holds the title to a house and appears in deeds, wills, sale particulars, land-tax returns and rate books. An occupier lives in it and appears in censuses, electoral registers, directories and parish lists. The archive holds no deed, will or sale record for Priors Lee, and it holds no rate book or land-tax return for Frog Lane. Every person it connects with the cottage is therefore an occupier. Some may also have been owners; the records do not say.

The people the archive names at the cottage are few. The table lists all of them, with the households that can only be suggested as possibilities kept separate.

DATE	NAME	SOURCE AND STRENGTH
c. 1960	Mr Hatton	"Mr Hatton, Priors Leigh" in the Society's notebook "Houses in Welford about 1960". Named at the house. 20/06
1986–88	John L. Sullivan, Mary Sullivan, Maria C. Sullivan	Register of electors in force Feb 1987 to Feb 1988, "Priors Lee Cotta[ge]". Named at the house. 30/05
1991	Larry Sullivan; Mrs M. Sullivan	"Larry Sullivan of Frog Lane" and "Mrs. M. Sullivan" in Memorial Hall papers. The house is not named; identified by surname and lane. 60/06
26 Jun 1994	Writer unknown	Letter headed "Priors Lee Cottage, Frog Lane", tel. 750320. The signature is lost from the scan. 60/06
1995	Mary Sullivan	VE Day memories mentioning her daughter Maria. The house is not named; identified by the names. 36/21–29

For the years before 1960 no one is named at the house, but two sources narrow the field. The first is the census, from 1841 to 1911, which records the households in and around the lane, though never a house called Priors Lee. The second is the Society's list of "People in Welford 1950", which names the residents of Frog Lane but not

their houses 01/56. The next sections walk through those households in order. They are the cottage's neighbours, and if Priors Lee was lived in during those years, its occupants were among them.

The lane in the nineteenth century

The family names of Frog Lane run deep. The Society's notebook of Welford wills includes a Thomas Tymms of Welford whose will was proved in 1612 11/26, and the house historian notes that Tymms Cottage once belonged to "the old Welford family of Roberts" before passing to the Tymms family, "who were masons and some of that family altered it to its present form" 11/09. Whether the seventeenth-century Thomas Tymms had anything to do with the lane is unknown, but the name was in the village when Priors Lee was new.

The 1841 census is the first to list the village household by household. Its schedules include Thomas Iles, aged about 60 and of independent means, with a female servant, Mary Hurst, followed by Benjamin Neal, an agricultural labourer, and his family 48/01. Both names reappear in the only surviving deed for The Nest. That deed, of 1891, describes the cottage as "formerly in the occupation of Thomas Iles (died 1854) or his tennants" and the garden called Collins Close as "formerly in the occupation of Benjamin Neale (died 1865)" 11/09. So in 1841 the Iles and Neal households were very probably at The Nest and its garden.

Ten years later the 1851 census gives Thomas Iles a more telling description. At schedule 118 he is "Thos. Hiles (?)", a widower of about 75 born at Cleeve Prior in Worcestershire, "Proprietor of Houses", with a housekeeper, Mary Clark, a sempstress 14/12. A proprietor of houses was a man who lived on the rents of cottages he owned. The deed's phrase "Thomas Iles or his tennants" suggests he let The Nest at times. It is possible that he owned other cottages in the lane, perhaps including Priors Lee, but the archive does not say so, and this is the kind of question only the deeds at Warwick could answer.

The 1851 schedules that follow show who lived around him. Schedule 119 is John Gould, a schoolmaster, with a lodger, Thomas Hunt, a journeyman carpenter of 28. Schedule 120 is John Neal, an agricultural labourer, with his wife Sarah, a sempstress. Then come George Dunning, an agricultural labourer with three sons; Judith Garfield, a widowed fieldwoman of about 55 from Oxhill, entered as

a pauper; Charlotte Rouse, an unmarried glover of 55, also a pauper; and John Timms, a master bricklayer of 59 employing one labourer, with his wife Susanna and two grandsons 14/12. The enumerator's spelling of several names is uncertain, but the cluster is clear.

By 1861 the order is reversed but the people are recognisably the same. Schedules 140 to 146 run: Judith Garfield, now an almswoman of 58, with her son William; Charlotte Rouse, an almswoman of 66; George Lawrence, a young farm labourer, with his brother John; John Timms, master bricklayer, 68, "employing 1 man and 2 labourers", with his wife Nancy, his son John, a bricklayer, and two grandsons; Thomas Hunt, now a master carpenter of 37, with his wife Ellen, a gloveress, and their sons Herbert, 4, and Edwin, 1; Mary Sturch, a sempstress of 53, living alone; and then William Hornby, the master carpenter at Hornby Cottage 48/04. The deed of The Nest names Mary Sturch as its occupant until her death in 1891 11/09, so this sequence walks through the lane and out to the main road at the Post Office.

Charlotte Rouse is the one person from these lists of whom a vivid memory survives. In 1906 the Welford schoolmaster's friend C. J. Woodward collected village anecdotes, and Mrs Horne told him:

Charlotte Rouse was an old woman who lived in a cottage in Frog's Corner. Her cottage was part of what is now (1906) Mrs Laurence's cottage. She used to "charm warts" for the village children. Mrs Horne has been to her to have her warts charmed. She counted the warts, which in Mrs Horne's case numbered 21, and cut a corresponding number of notches in a stick, repeating, at the same time, some kind of incantation. She gave Mrs Horne the stick and told her to bury it. Mrs H. did so and her warts disappeared. The old lady was a pleasant cheerful body, not at all witchlike.

Woodward's notes of Mrs Horne, 1906 · 21/22–66

A second version of the note adds that the cottage "belonged lately to Mrs Fryer and is now occupied by Mr Laurence" 21/22–66. In 1911 Arthur Lawrence, a commercial traveller in soft goods, was living at Devon House, an eight-roomed house 48/09, and Devon Cottage is the house the 1968 footpath reaches after the wicket gate opposite Priors Lee 12/03. Putting these together, "Frog's Corner" was very probably the old name for this corner of Frog Lane, and Charlotte Rouse's cottage became part of Devon House. That is an inference, but a well-supported one. It means that in the

1850s and 1860s the children of Welford went down Frog Lane, past Priors Lee, to have their warts charmed.

The 1881 and 1891 censuses show the same pattern. In 1881 schedule 51 is William Hornby, master carpenter, then Mary Sturch, unmarried, 68, then Ellen Hunt, a widowed glover 48/06. In 1891 William Hornby, now 76, is followed by Ellen Hunt, 71, a widow, with her son Herbert, a bricklayer's labourer of 34, his wife Rosa, a dressmaker, and a baby, Tom 48/07. Mary Sturch had died, and the enumerator recorded uninhabited houses on that page.

These lists raise a real puzzle for the history of Priors Lee. In 1861, 1881 and 1891 the enumerator goes straight from the Hornby household at the Post Office to Mary Sturch at The Nest, or to the Hunts, with no household between. If Priors Lee stood between The Nest and the Post Office, as the planners' order suggests, it was either empty at each of those censuses, or not a separate dwelling, or the enumerator's route did not follow the lane in the way the lists imply. Alternatively Priors Lee lies further down the lane, and its occupants are hidden among the Garfields, Rouses, Lawrences and Timmses of 1851 and 1861. The surviving transcripts cannot decide between these explanations, and the 1871 return in the archive is incomplete 48/05. What can be said is that the people who lived beside Priors Lee in the nineteenth century were labourers, almswomen, a sempstress, a glover, a schoolmaster and a family of master builders, and that one of them charmed warts.

The Timms and Hunt families

Two families dominate Frog Lane's nineteenth-century records, and both were builders. John Timms appears in 1851 as a master bricklayer employing one labourer, and in 1861 as a master bricklayer employing one man and two labourers, born at Long Marston, with his son John also a bricklayer 14/12, 48/04. The house historian found "one John Tymms Mason" in the 1850 directory 11/09, and the Gibbs survey of 1849 used "Mrs. Timms" as a landmark 19/52. It was this family, according to the house history, that "altered it to its present form", meaning Tymms Cottage next to The Nest. A family of master bricklayers living in the lane for a generation or more may well have worked on the other cottages there too, but nothing in the archive records it.

The Hunts were carpenters. Thomas Hunt is a lodger and journeyman carpenter in 1851, a master carpenter with his own household in 1861, and both Thomas and William Hunt appear as

Welford carpenters in the directories of the 1850s 48/13–22. His widow Ellen was living in the lane in 1881 and 1891. Their son Herbert, born about 1857, grew up there and stayed. In 1901 a Society talk on the census found that "several of the cottages in Frog Lane were shown as unoccupied", but "Timms Cottage, however was occupied by Herbert Hunt, aged 44 a labourer and bricklayer, his wife Rose and 6 children" 46/37–95. The census lists that household under "High Street", and records immediately after it one house being built, one uninhabited house in occupation and two uninhabited houses not in occupation 48/08. In 1911 Herbert Hunt, 54, was a labourer at Welford Mill, living in five rooms at a house the enumerator's book appears to call "Turnus Cottage", which is surely a misreading of Timms or Tymms Cottage 48/09, 48/10. One family thus lived in the lane from at least 1861 to 1911, in or beside the cottage that still carries the name of the Timms family before them.

The uninhabited houses of 1901 matter for Priors Lee. If the cottage was then empty, it would explain why it cannot be found in that census. Empty cottages were common in Welford at the time. The enumerator counted eleven uninhabited houses in the parish 48/08, and agricultural depression had been pushing labourers off the land for a generation. This remains a possibility, not a finding.

Into the twentieth century

In 1911 the enumerator's summary book walks through this part of the village in a sequence that can be followed house by house. Schedule 50 is Holly Dene, where Richard Fletcher, a retired stationmaster of 58, and his wife had ten rooms. Schedule 51 is Miss Annie Maria White, 44, of private means, alone in three rooms. Schedule 52 is Herbert Hunt's household. Schedule 53 is The Retreat, also called The Poplars, home of Frank Robert Windsor, 38, of private means, and his wife Hilda, in nine rooms 48/09, 48/10. Again there is no household that can be fitted to Priors Lee.

Miss White is the best-documented resident of the lane in the early twentieth century. The parish magazine's obituary of her, in 1960, says that she "came to Welford in 1889, with her mother, from Childswickham. They bought the little house in Frog Lane known as The Nest" 01/90–99. In 1901 her mother Frances, a widow of 70, and Annie M. White, 33, both born at Childswickham and living on their own means, are recorded at schedule 58 48/08. The obituary goes on: she was a Sunday School teacher under Rector Davenport,

a member of the first dramatic society and the choral society, the Women's Institute's first secretary, and she worked for both Welford and Weston churches. "Coconut matting for the aisles was bought the hard way in those days. Miss White earned the money by blackberrying!" 01/90-99. She later gave the Society a scrapbook of village news from about 1900 to the First World War 19/21.

The Windsors at The Retreat were incomers of a different kind. Frank Windsor was born in Shropshire in 1873 and married Hilda in 1900. A correspondent remembered him as "a small, well built man five feet three inches tall, with sandy hair and a moustache", very good at bridge. The couple tried several businesses in Welford, including dog-breeding and a boarding house, and left after the First World War 46/37-95. The house history of Weston Close says it was called Rest-a-While "when Mr and Mrs Winsor lived there" 11/10, so the Windsors seem to have occupied it as well as, or after, The Retreat.

The sale particulars of the 1920s and 1930s describe the southern end of the group. On 31 March 1927 Kibler Morgan offered The Retreat at the Grand Hotel in Birmingham, with "two genuine old brick, tiled and half timbered Cottages known as Rest Awhile and The Nook" adjoining. Rest Awhile was occupied by its owner and had a sitting room, a dining room "with inglenook and bacon cupboard", a living room, a dairy, three bedrooms and a workshop of timber and corrugated iron. The Nook had a living room, scullery and two bedrooms, and was let to a Miss Bixby on a yearly tenancy. Neither lot sold 11/30. In July 1937 the whole property was sold for £2,100, with Rest Awhile and The Nook "both let to good tenants" at £50 and £25 a year, and wayleave rents of four shillings for the electric cables and poles 11/30. These were tiled cottages, so neither was Priors Lee, but the electricity poles mark the arrival of mains power in the lane by the late 1930s.

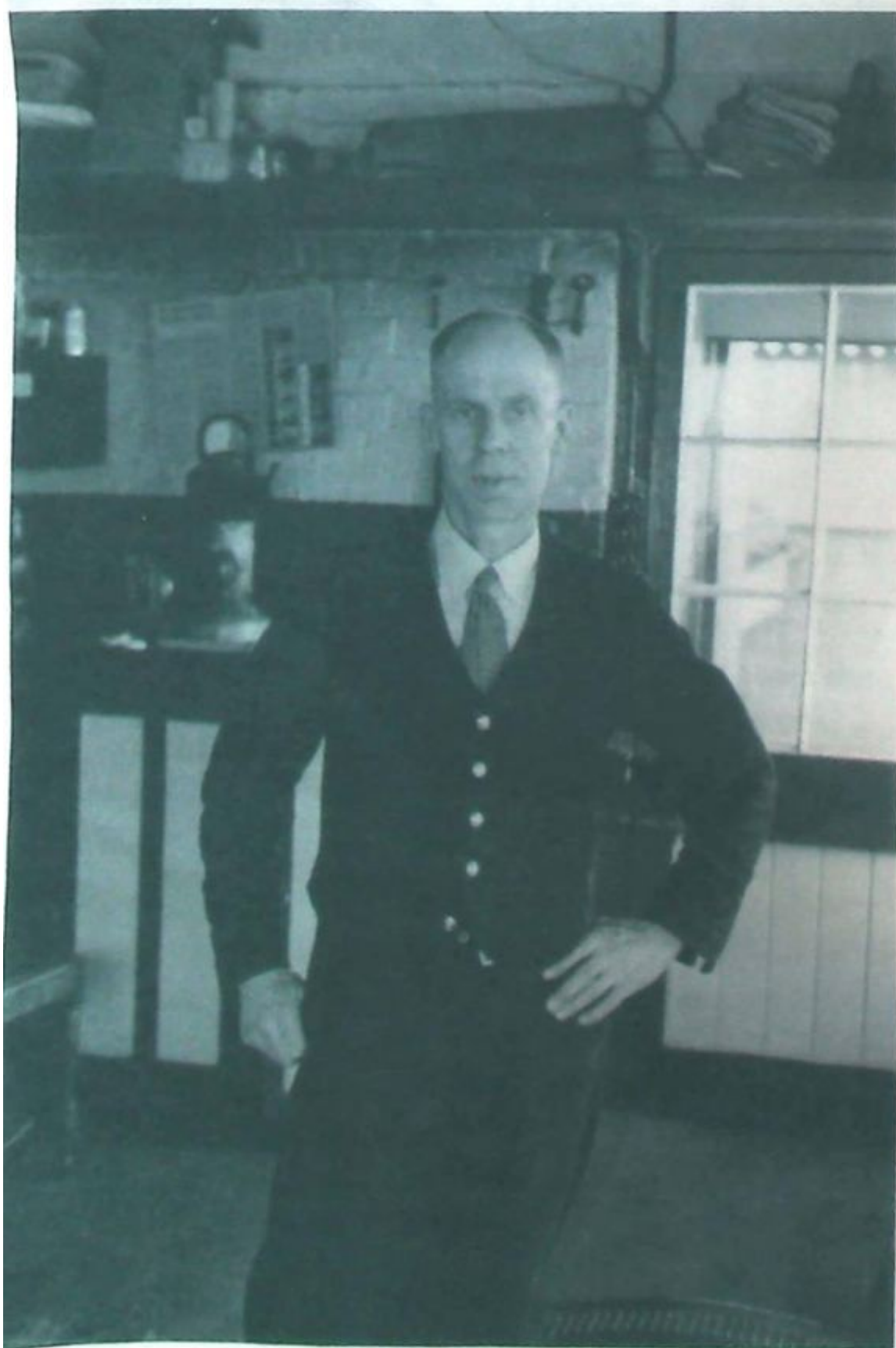
One tenant of The Nook deserves a place in any history of Frog Lane. A wartime memoir in the Society's 1995 VE Day collection recalls that "Miss James, who lived in Frog Lane", bottled fruit for a living and "supplied the hotels that remained open in Stratford. She had a store shed stacked from floor to ceiling with bottles and jars which was always a wonder to see" 36/14. Her death is reported in an undated Stratford Herald cutting: Miss M. O. James "had lived in Welford for the past 25 years at 'The Nook'", had "established a fruit bottling company and was at her work up till the last", and was a regular at the parish church 13/15. The cutting names W. J.

Matthews as chairman of the parish council, which the Society's notes date to about 1950-51. So Miss James lived at The Nook from about the mid-1920s until about 1950. The first version of this essay suggested she might have lived at Priors Lee; the Herald cutting shows that she did not.

Frog Lane at mid-century

The Society's list of "People in Welford 1950" gives the residents of Frog Lane in this order: Miss White; Mr and Mrs Percy Barnett; Mr and Mrs Barnett senior; Mr and Mrs Doherty; Mrs McKenny and Mr McBane; Miss James; and Mr Fred Bluck, Mrs Bluck senior and Miss Bluck at Mere Farm 01/56. Most of these can now be placed. Miss White was at The Nest, Miss James at The Nook, and the Blucks at Mere Farm out along the lane. The Dohertys were at Rest Awhile, which Mr Doherty renamed Weston Close. By March 1959 Mrs Bert Doherty was writing from The Retreat as honorary secretary of the Dramatic Society 11/14.

The Barnetts were almost certainly at Tymms Cottage. The pencilled note on the 1849 survey gives "[?] Cottage, P. Barnett" for the house that had been Mrs Timms's 19/52, and the 1960 notebook lists "Mr P. Barrett, Timmis [?] Cott.", which is very probably the same man with his name misspelt or misread 20/06. Percy Barnett appears elsewhere in the archive. A photograph captioned "Perc Barnett, signal man in Milcote signal box, c 1955" shows him in the box on the Stratford to Honeybourne line near Weston-on-Avon 50/03. Mr and Mrs P. Barnett organised the dances at the Memorial Hall after the village fêtes of the late 1930s and ran the ices and lemonade stall 54/02. In 1953 Mrs P. Barnett was collecting for the village Coronation fund, including a contribution from her neighbour Miss White 03/01-19, and a Mrs Barnett paid her subscription to the History Society through the 1970s and early 1980s 12/07, 27/01-09.



PER
SIG
IN
C

"Perc Barnett, signal man in Milcote signal box, c 1955". Percy Barnett lived in Frog Lane, very probably at Tymms Cottage, two doors from Priors Lee. 50/03

That leaves two names from the 1950 list without a house: Mr and Mrs Barnett senior, and the household of Mrs McKenny and Mr McBane. If Priors Lee was occupied in 1950, its occupants were very probably one of these two households. By elimination, Mrs McKenny and Mr McBane are the likelier candidates, since the elder Barnetts may have shared a house with their son or lived at the cottage the 1960 notebook lists as a conversion into three flats. This is reasoning by elimination from an unordered list, and it should be treated as no more than a lead. Neither name appears anywhere else in the archive.

The 1950s brought the first sales and changes of hand recorded in the lane since the 1930s. Miss White eventually needed care and went to Arden House, where she died in 1960, aged 94 according to the parish magazine 01/90–99. The Nest was auctioned on 21 September 1955 and, according to pencilled notes, sold for £500 to Mr Wilfred Biddle after bidding rose from £100 in small amounts 11/30.

The Society's notebook "Houses in Welford about 1960" then lists Frog Lane as it stood in that year: a house converted into three flats (Mrs Cope in Flat 1, Mr Zatopek in Flat 2, and a garage flat); Major Norris at Weston Close; Mrs Mackenzie at The Nest; Mr P. Barrett at Timmis Cottage; Mr Hatton at Priors Leigh; and Mr Spooner at Devon Cottage 20/06. This is the first time anyone is named at Priors Lee. Nothing else in the archive mentions Mr Hatton, so his first name, his dates and whether he owned or rented the cottage are all unknown. The notebook was compiled to show how fast the village was changing. Its totals, dated September 1964, counted 302 houses, 89 bungalows, 108 caravans and 61 outstanding planning permissions, and were used in a letter from the Rectory objecting to another caravan site 20/06.

The later twentieth century

For the 1960s and 1970s the archive names no one at Priors Lee. The neighbours continue to appear. Sue Spooner of Devon Cottage paid her subscription to the History Society in 1976 and later years, and a Mrs Forbes of Frog Lane paid hers in 1974 12/07, 27/01–09. Mrs Forbes's house is not given; she could have lived at Priors Lee, but there is nothing to show it. In 1978 the History Society's committee agreed to ask "Mr Hood, of Frog Lane" to become its auditor 37/01–04, and the 1987 register shows Frank and Betty Hood at Weston Close 30/05.

The register of electors for 1987-88, with a qualifying date of 10 October 1986, gives the fullest picture of the lane in the archive. Isabella B. Davies was at The Nest. Michael G. and Margaret E. Garratt were at Devon Cottage. Frank and Betty Hood and Michael J. and Diana E. Benson were at Weston Close. And at "Priors Lee Cotta[ge]" were John L. Sullivan, Mary Sullivan and Maria C. Sullivan 30/05. The Sullivans are the only household the archive firmly places at Priors Lee, and they appear in it more than anyone else connected with the cottage.

Their part in village life is recorded through the Memorial Hall. The hall had opened in December 1923 as the village's war memorial. By the winter of 1990-91 subsidence, poor drainage, tree roots, roof spread and a worn-out floor had brought it close to closure, and a poster warned that about £20,000 had to be found. At the 67th annual public meeting the structural engineer recommended new drainage, pruning of the neighbouring conifers, underpinning, a check of the roof and a new floor. Three volunteers agreed to cost the options. Ken Clifton of Barton Road would look at rebuilding. "Larry Sullivan of Frog Lane said he would investigate another option which was to completely refurbish the hall as well as carry out the repairs" 60/06. The minutes put it more briefly: "The idea of increasing the amount spent on the Hall to include modernising the kitchen and providing changing rooms etc. was also suggested. Mr. Sullivan volunteered to look into the refurbishment of the Hall" 60/06.



The Memorial Hall in 1932. Sixty years later Larry and Mary Sullivan of Priors Lee were among the villagers who worked to save it. 53/11

On 7 March 1991, after an extraordinary public meeting, the whole management committee led by Alex D'Adda resigned. At the meeting of 11 March that formed a new committee, sixteen people attended, and "Mrs. M. Sullivan" was one of them. Alan Smart became temporary chairman, Barbara Ladbury secretary and Jean Stone treasurer. When the old committee's floor contractor was quoted as saying the floor was near the end of its life but in little danger of collapse, "Mrs. Sullivan questioned whether it was considered safe for the 'Over 60s' to use the hall and the general consensus of opinion was Yes" 60/06. "Larry" was presumably the name John L. Sullivan went by. The identification rests on the surname and the lane, which is strong but indirect.

Three years later the cottage's address appears at the head of a letter. On 26 June 1994 someone writing from "Priors Lee Cottage, Frog Lane, Welford-on-Avon", telephone 750320, invited Bob Wright of "Homestead", as a trustee of the Memorial Hall, to a special meeting of the management committee on Wednesday 29 June. The meeting was to discuss "a proposal for a new kitchen and storage facilities with provision for the later addition of changing rooms to enable stage performances", funded partly by "a short

term bank loan to enable the work to be completed this Autumn" 60/06. The scan stops mid-sentence before the signature, so the writer is not known. One of the Sullivans, acting for the committee, is the likeliest, but that is a guess. The letter shows, at least, that the refurbishment Larry Sullivan had offered to cost in 1991, with its new kitchen and changing rooms, was still being pursued from Priors Lee in 1994.

Mary Sullivan also contributed to the Society's collection of wartime memories gathered for the fiftieth anniversary of VE Day in 1995 36/14. She grew up in Liverpool. She remembered a great-aunt's dockside terrace where a German bomb demolished every outside toilet but one, and the Liverpool saying "if you see a queue, join it – you never know what you might get". She remembered a Sunday when a land mine exploded in the park opposite her church: "All the windows and doors were blown out. Everyone stood up with fright but the Priest never flinched. Everyone knelt down and the service carried on as though nothing had happened" 36/21. She lent a handkerchief her father had sent her "when he was serving abroad for six years during the war", with "the prayer and crucifix ... given to him by an old lady when he was marching to the front line in Italy" 36/29. And she told the story of her younger daughter Maria, who at seven, when her class was doing a project on the war, "proudly told her teacher that her mummy had told her all about it because she was bombed and EVAPORATED!" 36/23. That is the Maria C. Sullivan of the 1987 register. These small memories are the most personal glimpse the archive gives of anyone who lived at Priors Lee, and they come from a woman whose own childhood was spent far from Welford.

The archive's record of the cottage ends with the 1992 Conservation Area study and its photograph of a thatched house almost hidden by climbing plants 15/08. Who lived there after the mid-1990s is beyond the archive's reach.

What the cottage tells us about Welford

A house this thinly documented can still say a good deal about its village. Priors Lee belongs to the large class of small seventeenth-century houses that made Welford's reputation as one of the prettiest villages near Stratford. For two centuries cottages like it housed labourers and craftsmen. The house historian thought The Nest "remained in its original form till recent times" 11/09. Frog Lane's nineteenth-century households were exactly that kind of people: a master bricklayer and his men, a carpenter, a sempstress,

glovers, fieldwomen and almswomen, and a landlord who lived on the rents of his cottages.

By 1901 several cottages in this corner of the village stood empty. Then, in the twentieth century, they were rediscovered by painters and photographers, who sold them as "Old World" cottages on postcards, and by people who came to live in Welford rather than to work its land: a retired stationmaster, a couple of private means who bred dogs, a fruit-bottler supplying Stratford's hotels, a railway signalman. George Wright, the headmaster, was already complaining in 1915 that thirty-three new red-brick houses had made Welford "quite suburban" 46/37-95.

The changes to Priors Lee follow that pattern exactly. Its windows were "mostly new" by 1957, it acquired a porch in the twentieth century, and its neighbours were given new names drawn from old deeds. The surveyors who listed it were watching a village turn residential and worrying about over-restoration. The 1960 notebook in which Mr Hatton appears was compiled to count the houses, bungalows and caravans that had arrived since the war. By the 1990s the people at Priors Lee were organising the rescue of the village hall and writing their wartime memories for the History Society. The cottage had become what most of Welford's old cottages are now: a cherished, listed home in a conservation area, lived in by people who care about the village.

Where the rest of the story may be

The owners of Priors Lee before the late twentieth century, and most of its occupants, could probably be found, but not in this archive. The Society's own notes point to the Warwickshire County Record Office, which holds the Parish Council's deposited records, including deeds, as collection CR3640 50/41, 50/101-106. Beyond that, the usual sources for a house history would be worth searching with Frog Lane, Collins Close and Sawpit Close in mind: the tithe map and apportionment, the land-tax returns and the Sackville estate papers for Welford, which was a Gloucestershire parish until 1931; the valuation records made under the Finance Act of 1910, which named owners and occupiers of every property; the 1921 census and the 1939 Register; and the electoral registers between the wars. None of these is in the archive, and this paragraph is a research suggestion, not a description of anything the Society holds. Any one of them could put a name to Priors Lee in a year where this essay can only list its neighbours.

Gaps and disagreements

- **No owners recorded.** The archive holds no deed, sale particulars, will, rate book or land-tax return for Priors Lee. Everyone it connects with the cottage is an occupier; whether any of them owned it is unknown. The Society's numbered house histories cover The Nest, Tymms Cottage and Weston Close but not Priors Lee 11/09, 11/10.
- **Named occupants are few.** Only Mr Hatton (c. 1960) and the Sullivans (1986–88, and by inference 1991–95) are placed at the house. The 1994 letter's writer is unknown because the signature is lost 20/06, 30/05, 60/06.
- **The name.** It is spelt Prior's Lee, Priors Lee and Priors Leigh, and first appears in the survey of March 1957. The link to Deerhurst Priory's lordship of Welford is a plausible guess, not a recorded fact, and no field called Prior's Lee appears in the enclosure award or field-name papers.
- **Exact position.** The planners' order (Weston Close, The Nest, Prior's Lee, Hornby Cottage) suggests the cottage is nearest the Post Office end of the group, but the 1968 footpath description and the census sequences could be read otherwise. No plan in the archive settles it.
- **Listing date and grade.** Grade III in 1957, 1983 and a 1960s copy; Grade II in the 1967-or-later list and in 1992. The statutory typescript says "first listed 1972" 47/38, while the list volume at 13/02 gives the entry no date. The sheet reference is 18B/31, 18A/31 or 18/31 depending on the source.
- **Street.** The 1960 list puts the cottage under Main Street, east side, and the 1901 census lists the neighbouring Hunt household under High Street; every later list uses Frog Lane 13/03, 48/08.
- **Census.** No census from 1841 to 1911 names the cottage, and in 1861, 1881 and 1891 the enumerator passes from the Post Office to The Nest or the Hunts with no household between. Priors Lee was either empty, not a separate dwelling, or elsewhere in the lane than the planners' order implies. The 1871 return in the archive is incomplete 48/04–48/07.
- **1950 occupants.** By elimination the likeliest occupants in 1950 are Mrs McKenny and Mr McBane, or Mr and Mrs Barnett senior 01/56. This is reasoning from an unordered list. The first version of this essay suggested Miss James, but the Herald cutting at 13/15 shows she lived at The Nook.
- **Barnett or Barrett.** "Mr P. Barrett" of Timmis Cottage (c. 1960) and Percy Barnett (1950) are very probably one person 20/06, 01/56, 19/52.
- **When the Whites came.** The parish magazine says Miss White and her mother came in 1889 and bought The Nest, but the deed of 1891 says Mary Sturch occupied it until her death that year, and the Whites are not in Welford in the April 1891 census 01/90–99, 11/09, 48/07. The purchase was probably in 1891.
- **Miss White's age.** She is 33 in 1901, 44 in 1911, and "aged 94" at her death in 1960, which would put her birth around 1866. The three figures do not agree 48/08, 48/10, 01/90–99.
- **Frog's Corner.** Identifying Charlotte Rouse's "Frog's Corner" with Frog Lane rests on her neighbours in the 1851 and 1861 censuses and on Arthur Lawrence's Devon House in 1911. No source states it outright 21/22–66, 14/12, 48/04, 48/09.
- **The photographs.** The postcard is identified as Priors Lee only by the album slip, and it is undated 53/16. The 1992 photograph is matched to the cottage by the study's figure reference, not by a caption under the image 15/08. The W. A. Smith view of Frog Lane does not name the cottages it shows 46/10.

- **Interior.** No survey or description of the inside of Priors Lee exists in the archive. The reading of the two-unit plan is based on the list description alone, and the interior described is The Nest's, from its 1955 sale.

Sources

- 01/56 People in Welford 1950 · 01/90–99 parish magazine, obituary of Miss Ann White · 01/101 and 02/15–25 Brief Notes on Welford Church
- 02/01–12 Victoria County History typescript, manor of Welford · 03/01–19 Coronation fund cash book, 1953 · 06/10 County Conservation Area proposal, c. 1968–70
- 08/01–19 Gilda Gray letter, Aug 1977 · 10/32 Society's listed buildings review, 17 Dec 1983
- 11/09 and 11/10 house histories: The Nest and Tymms Cottage; Rest-a-While, now Weston Close · 11/14 parish magazine, Mar 1959 · 11/26 notebook of Welford wills · 11/30 sale particulars 1815–1956 (Rest Awhile and The Nook, 1927 and 1937; The Nest, 1955)
- 12/03 Stratford Public Paths Statement 1961 and 1968 Welford review, footpath SD 28a · 12/07 and 27/01–09 Society cash books
- 13/02 and 30/07 statutory list no. 2396 (1967 or later) · 13/03 provisional list, Nov 1960 · 13/15 Herald cutting, death of Miss M. O. James · 30/06 handwritten list with suggestions
- 14/12 1851 census · 15/08 draft Conservation Area study, July 1992, map ref 31 and fig 56 · 19/21 Society's index of deposits · 19/52 surveyor's levels, 1849
- 20/04 and 47/98 enclosure award roads, 1801–02 · 20/06 Houses in Welford about 1960 · 21/22–66 Woodward's village anecdotes, 1906–07
- 30/05 register of electors 1987–88 · 36/01, 36/14, 36/21, 36/23, 36/29 letters and VE Day memories, 1994–95 · 37/01–04 Society minutes
- 46/01–12 W. A. Smith photographs, 46/09 and 46/10 · 46/14 OS six-inch map, 1903 · 46/37–95 Society talk on the Garrett walk and the 1901 census
- 47/1–66 statutory list typescript, item 47/38 · 48/01 1841 census · 48/04 1861 census · 48/05 1871 census (incomplete) · 48/06 1881 census · 48/07 1891 census · 48/08 1901 census · 48/09 and 48/10 1911 census · 48/13–22 directories
- 50/03 photograph of Perc Barnett, c. 1955 · 50/41 and 50/101–106 Warwick deposit handlists · 53/11 Memorial Hall, 1932 · 53/16 photograph album, Priors Lee Cottage · 54/02 fête reports, 1937–39 · 60/06 Memorial Hall papers 1985–94