



Cryfield Farmhouse

A Brief History

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WARWICK

The view across the fields towards Kenilworth at the back of the Farmhouse



Fragments of mosaic have been found on the site at Mill Hill Field indicating that at one time a high status Roman building, possibly even a temple, was located on the site.

phase 1

Croiles felda: Pre-history to the Middle Ages



STANDING AT CRYFIELD FARMHOUSE, looking out over the sports pavilion and the rolling hills south towards Kenilworth, it is difficult to imagine Cryfield as anything but a part of the campus of the University of Warwick. In fact, the University represents only the most recent chapter of the long history of this land.

The earliest recorded usage of the name dates from 1154 AD: *Croiles felda*, or 'open land by the fork', most likely referring to the path of Canley Brook, which crosses to the northwest of the current Cryfield. Palaeo-, meso-, and neolithic (500,000-2,000 BC) as well as bronze and iron age (2,000 BC-43 AD) artifacts have been recovered on campus. The first evidence of relatively continuous human activity at Cryfield, however, dates from approximately 3,500 BC. Several Roman finds, including fragments of mortaria, have been recovered from the vicinity of Cryfield Farmhouse.

During Saxon times there was a royal house at Cryfield with King Ethelred (978-1016) spending considerable time in the area. It is the monastic settlement of 1154-55, though, that marks the first well-documented permanent settlement at Cryfield. Cistercian monks from Radmore in Staffordshire petitioned the Empress Mathilda to move to a quieter location. Land was granted on the royal estate of Stoneleigh near the site of the current Farmhouse. Cryfield proved no quieter, however, and the monks moved again in 1156 to the site Stoneleigh Abbey in Kenilworth now occupies. The whole estate was ceded to the Cistercians and remained under their management for the next 335 years. Massive sandstone walls buried in the Farmhouse's garden, combined with suggested evidence from aerial photographs, makes it possible that original monastery buildings were located on the farm. Prior to the monks' arrival at Cryfield, there was a hamlet near the site of the current Farmhouse called Cryfield. The villagers were moved to a new site to the west. This new village was named Hurst, and several farms in the area still bear the name. There is evidence that a village named Cryfield survived the monastic settlement and even paid for a stone of wax to be burnt before the image of the Virgin at Stoneleigh in 1279. By the fifteenth century, though, only Cryfield Grange remained: today, it is still a large and active farm, located approximately half a kilometre south of Cryfield Farmhouse.

To the north-east of the Farmhouse, a high hill marks not only the highest point of land on Warwick's campus, but also one of the most intriguing stories of the site. The hill has an elongated mound on its crest, consistent with a Bronze Age barrow, or burial mound. Due to the age, soil type, and fairly constant agricultural use of the land for almost a millennium, it is unlikely that there are any remains of the person in whose honour it was raised. The mound, however, was re-used in the late middle ages and by the 16th century a windmill had been raised on the hill. To the very end of Cryfield's days as a farm, that field was known as Mill Hill Field.



Right and top right: reconstruction by the 3-d Visualisation Centre

phase 2

Monastery to private land: 1538 to the seventeenth century

*St Bernard of Clairvaux,
founder of the Cistercian order*

IN 1534, IN ONE of the most remembered acts of English history, Henry VIII dissolved the country's monasteries and religious houses. Included in this sweeping series of changes was the Cistercian abbey at Stoneleigh. While the Domesday Book listed the original monastery at Radmore as overseeing some 280 people and having lands sufficient to pasture 2,000 pigs, Henry VIII's assessors found Stoneleigh Abbey in disorder and disrepair. The Abbott and his 11 monks appear to have been only too happy to leave and offered no resistance. The Abbey and its manor were valued at £241 19s 4³/₄d in buildings and £173 15s 3d in goods. In 1538, Henry sold the estate to Robert Boucher and his wife Elizabeth, servants at the royal court.



Mary Evans Picture Library

It is at this time that Cryfield farm fades from active history. The monastery lands were eventually sold by the Boucher family and over time were bought up by the Leigh family. This powerful family came to own thousands of acres in Warwickshire and seems to have run a well-ordered estate. An extensive farm was created around Cryfield Grange. The Grange was a large concern, including a series of mills and mill dams constructed on Canley Brook over several hundred years, which would have been of significant economic importance to the area.

It is likely that in the 1600s a farmhouse was constructed on the site of the current Cryfield Farmhouse. A senior farm hand or steward to the tenant of the Grange undoubtedly used this house, which was much smaller than the contemporary building. The farm's position, not only on excellent farmland, but also astride the Kenilworth Road and close to Coventry, must have made this property desirable and profitable.

The walnut tree in the garden at Cryfield Farmhouse was planted in the 17th century. At that time most houses of substance had a walnut tree as the nuts were highly prized for their nutritional value.



The Gatehouse Balcony at Stoneleigh Abbey



phase 3

Cryfield: A Georgian and Victorian Farm

An inventory of the goods and chattels of Richard Thompson of the parish of Stoneleigh dated 2 November 1727 which totals £30 16s 0d (now equal to £3,384)

In purse and apparell £1 10s 0d
a small parcel of Hay £2 0s 0d
a small Rick of oates £2 2s 6d
a small parcel of white peas £1 17s 6d
sixty one sheep at £7 10s 0d
2 old Cows 2 Heiffers and one Lame Cow ... £6 15s 6d
2 Lame mares and Gears £1 2s 6d
one sow and 9 piggs £1 5s 0d
9 geese one Cock & 3 hens £0 11s 0d
corne growing upon the ground £1 2s 6d

In the KITCHEN

1 table 3 old chairs one forme 1 spit 2 stools
one Gun one frying pan
some books some pot books & earthen ware ... £0 18s 6d

In the PARLOUR

One bed & bedstead & pillows & 2 Blankettes
1 pair of sheets 2 table
Clothes 1 Trunk 1 glass 4 Cheesses £1 4s 6d

In the NETHER ROOM

1 bed and bedstead
Coffer & a small parcel of woole £0 17s 6d

In the BREWHOUSE

Three kettles 1 iron pot 3 old tubbes
And two barrells £0 12s 6d

In the BUTTERY

4 Barrells 1 Tubb 1 old forme £0 6s 0d

In the CHAMBER 1 bedstead 2 wheels

1 forme at £0 4s 0d
4 hives of Bees at £0 5s 0d
a small parcel of five jewell at £0 3s 0d
one spade one hatchet one hook £0 3s 0d
Lumber and things over lookt £0 5s 6d

CRYFIELD HOUSE FARM TOOK on its modern shape when, towards the end of the 17th century, the Leigh family decided to split approximately 200 acres from the 900 or so of Cryfield Grange Farm and make a wholly independent farmstead. From the early 1700s until the farm ceased operating as an independent property in the 1970s, Cryfield House Farm remained approximately the same size and was worked by a series of tenants who lived in the Farmhouse, which in the 1820s was rebuilt in its present form. A glimpse of what the older Farmhouse may have looked like can be gleaned from an inventory of the goods of Richard Thompson, its first tenant. At the time of his death in 1727, the inventory shows that there were six rooms in the house: a kitchen, a parlour, two bedrooms, a brewhouse, and a buttery. Thompson took over the farm around 1680. Sadly, there are no surviving plans of the house as it was rebuilt in the 1820s, nor of subsequent alterations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, identifiable original features include a bay window with shutters, the house's main staircase that is set to one side (an unusual feature in local architecture), and the cellar.

In the early plans of the farm site, one of the outbuildings is listed as the duck run/ milking parlour with a now demolished chicken-run next to it. Located around the farmyard (now the sunken garden), these buildings would have been the focus of considerable domestic activity. Pigs would have been kept on the property, as well as horses for ploughing. The series of tenant farmers who worked Cryfield Farm most likely grew cereals as their primary crop on a six-use rotation. A typical pattern for the strong soils common in the area was (1) wheat, (2) beans, (3) wheat, (4) fallow (occasionally turnips substituted for this), (5) wheat/barley, and (6) seeds. As Cryfield Farm was divided into several fields, different rotations would be in effect each year giving the farmer the chance to have almost half his arable land growing his primary crop. Dairy cattle were kept, and census records show shepherds living at Cryfield and the Old Brickyard Plantation.

The original beams make a period feature in one of the beautifully restored first floor bedrooms



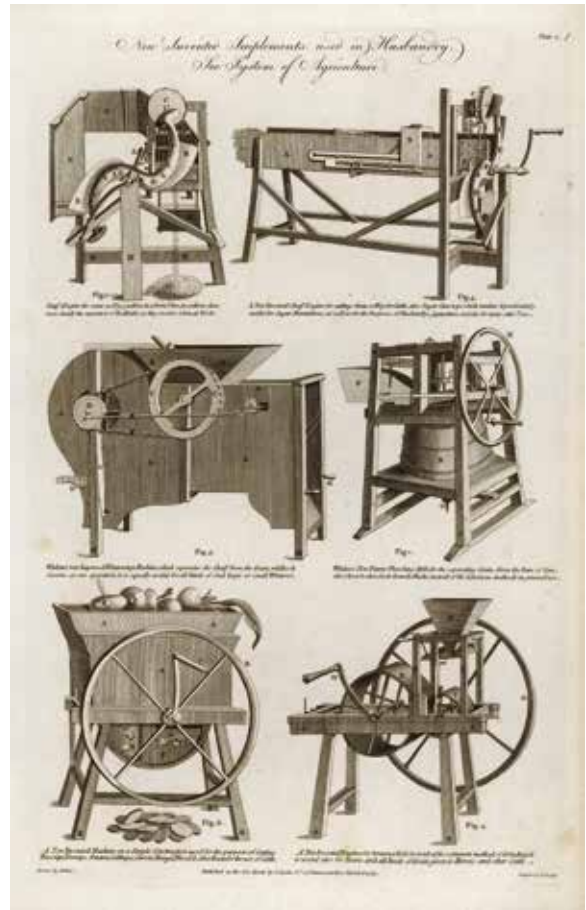
In 1727, Cryfield Farmhouse had six rooms: a kitchen, a parlour, two bedrooms, a brewhouse and a buttery.



Warwickshire Truckle cheese was a particular favourite in eighteenth century London. In the twenty-first century, it is once again being made commercially in the West Midlands.

Perhaps its most famous agricultural product was Warwickshire cheese – a staple farm product across north and west Warwickshire. Each farmhouse, Cryfield included, had a cheese room and cheese making was an important activity in the yearly cycle of the farm. Despite the popularity of the product, few farms had large dairy herds – Cryfield Farm probably had no more than a score of dairy cows at any time - so cheese was made in fairly small quantities with most going to the family's use. Even so, enough cheese was being produced in Warwickshire to warrant annual cheese fairs in Coventry and Rugby. As in other dairying regions of the country, women would have been primarily responsible for cheese making. Depending on the size of the herd available and the skill of the individual, this represented a chance for women to contribute directly to the farm's cash profits.

Bricks and mortar are interesting, but it is always the inhabitants of buildings that truly capture the imagination. The men, women, and children who have lived in the Farmhouse have left precious little record of their lives and, until quite recently, almost no personal mementos of their time there. The Lords Leigh owned the land and rented it to various individuals and families until the land was sold in 1928. Among the longest tenants to work Cryfield were the Swinnertons. Edward Swinnerton, for instance, was at Cryfield since at least 1871. After his death in the late 1890s, his sister, Mary, carried on the operations of the farm until the late 1920s and her occupation was listed as 'farmer' on the 1901 census. The farm then passed into the care of the Edgar family, though the land was likely owned by the Hollick family who eventually sold it to Warwickshire County Council. The Edgars farmed Cryfield Farm until after the Second World War when the lease was taken by the Palmer family.



Next to the farmhouse is the oldest oak tree on campus which has grown here for more than 240 years.



phase 4

Cryfield Farm: The 1960s and '70s



BY 1965 CLARENCE J. 'JOHN' and Margaret Forsyth and their family lived at Cryfield Farm. These were years of great change in the area for, in the mid-1960s, the University of Warwick was established. The land it was built on was donated by Coventry City Council and Warwickshire County Council. The Warwickshire land included Cryfield Farm and the Farmhouse, and was farmed by Forsyth until 1973 when he decided not to renew his tenancy. The Forsyth family left Cryfield on Micheltmas Day of that year, ending several centuries' continual occupation as an active farmhouse.

The University was not entirely sure what to do when the Forsyths departed, but ended up accepting the advice of its lawyers and prepared to lease the farm in partnership with another local farmer. The University would act as the sleeping partner in the arrangement in return for 1 per cent of the profits.

This was a sensible arrangement for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the 1970s were a time of significant and substantial growth for Warwick. As it matured into its teen years, the University looked to expand and at that time planned to build a 1,200 unit residential village, starting with the Cryfield Halls and eventually encompassing the Redfern and Hurst buildings. These new residences were being built in stages on land formerly part of the Cryfield House Farm. As Forsythe had noted upon his departure, this continual encroachment was squeezing the farm down to a size where it was no longer a profitable concern on its own.

Therefore, in August 1973 when the University posted advertisements of the lease in local papers, they hoped to attract an established farmer who could work Cryfield but not have it as the sole centre of his operations. To this end, the University specifically excluded the Farmhouse and its outbuildings from the new lease. The winning bidder for the lease was S.J. Pattison, a 35 year-old with 15 years of farming experience, a BSc, and an agricultural certificate and the current farmer of the New Era farm in Coventry. He planned to farm in the 'orthodox manner', mainly cereals, but also one field of carrots, and some sheep.

In the mid-1960s, the University of Warwick was established on land donated by Coventry City Council and Warwickshire County Council. The first 340 undergraduates were admitted in 1965.



In 1977, the University had 4,500 undergraduate and postgraduate students; 30 years on, Warwick's student population stands at around 16,000.



phase 5

The Farmhouse, 1973–85



THIS LEFT THE QUESTION of what to do with the Farmhouse which by then had certainly seen better days. The University was prepared to make it habitable and the Students' Union was eager to have the space for its growing clubs and societies. More excitingly, though, the University administration and especially Jack (later Lord) Butterworth, the University's first Vice-Chancellor, wanted to see Cryfield Farmhouse and its outbuildings become the heart of a new social centre for the growing student community at Cryfield. The Rootes building and pre-expansion Students' Union buildings were seen as too small and too far away to be a social hub for the inhabitants of the new Cryfield residences. Even at this early stage, though, there was a strong, if latent, desire on the part of the University's administration to see Cryfield Farmhouse used in some capacity as academic housing.

The clubs and societies of the Students' Union made good use of the Farmhouse and its buildings. At various times, the Amateur Radio Society, the Pottery Club (a fire in one their kilns nearly burnt down one of the barns), the Automotive Club, and the Dramatic Society, to name but a few, all had space at Cryfield. The student newspaper, *The Warwick Boar*, operated out of one of the outbuildings and the Modern Dance Society had space as well. However, despite their enthusiasm, the space was not really suitable for such use and it became increasingly apparent that a significant renovation of the house and barns was needed.

In the late 1970s, with the idea of the 1,200 unit 'Cryfield Village' with the Farmhouse as its social hub finally being set aside (only approximately 800 units were completed in the end and the University focused its residential attentions elsewhere), a firm decision was finally

taken. The Farmhouse was converted into three flats, designed mainly for use by postgraduates, married faculty and students, or visiting academic staff, and one of the barns, known as the milking parlour, was turned into a pub of the same name.

This arrangement seemed to work for some time. The Milking Parlour pub opened in October of 1979 and remained open until at least June of 1989. It was described as the best place on campus to get a drink in the early 1980s and remained a popular student watering hole despite its notoriously unreliable heating system and draughty situation.



phase 6

The Vice-Chancellor's residence

BY THE LATE 1980s, however, senior officers at the University felt that Warwick's Vice-Chancellor needed an appropriate campus-based residence not only to live in, but also to entertain and socialise with members of the University's growing and diverse community. Around the time of Warwick's founding in 1965, property at 110 Kenilworth Road in Coventry had been purchased and had been given over to the use of Jack Butterworth and his family. With his retirement in 1985 plans were drawn up for the renovation and modernization of the Farmhouse and its outbuildings, financed by the sale of 110 Kenilworth Road. Vice-Chancellor Dr and Mrs Clark Brundin were the



first occupants of the new 'Vice-Chancellor's Lodge' in 1991. They were followed by Sir Brian and Lady Follett (1993–2001), who discovered interesting 'lodgers' in the roof – a colony of pipistrelle bats which were duly ringed by University scientists. Professor David VandeLinde became Vice-Chancellor in 2001. He and his wife, Margie, lived in the Farmhouse until his retirement in 2006; they initiated the conversion of the Barn into a dining facility and oversaw considerable replanning of the garden – at this time, a sunken garden was created in the old farmyard.

Warwick's fifth Vice-Chancellor, Professor Nigel Thrift, moved into the Farmhouse with his wife, Lynda, in the late summer of 2006. They, too, discovered 'lodgers' – a group of common newts which had made their home in the cellar (luckily, the Vice-Chancellorial cat, Ginger, has shown no desire to explore this part of the house!). On the day that they moved in, they were greeted by a barn owl flying from the roof – a sign, perhaps, that Cryfield Farmhouse still retains the memory of its ancient connections with the land.



The campus is home to over 100 different species of bird and is highly ranked in the recently compiled 'Duck Density' league tables of UK universities.



This history was researched and written by W H Rupp, a PhD student in the Department of History, and produced in the Communications Office, the University of Warwick.



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The majority of the estate papers for the Leigh family and Stoneleigh Manor are held at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Records Office in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Warwickshire County Records Office in Warwick holds additional Stoneleigh papers as well as an extensive collection on all aspects of Warwickshire history. The Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick holds all the University archives.