

## SECTION 4 – CLIFFORDS MESNE A SHORT HISTORY

The origins of Cliffords Mesne are shrouded in mystery. What is known is that the family of William the Conquerors uncle, another William, who came over with his nephew in the conquest of 1066, adopted the family name of Clifford in the late 11<sup>th</sup>/early 12<sup>th</sup> century from their castle of Clifford in Herefordshire.

The village is mentioned in King Williams Domesday book, as 'Cliffords Meend/Mynde', as being 'forest waste belonging to Cliffords', perhaps meaning that the village was only a tiny settlement at the time of the Norman Conquest.

The Clifford family maintained a strong relationship with the various dynasties of English kings throughout the next four centuries, with one descendent, Roger, being made the Earl Marshal of England in 1307, and commanding a force at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314 against Robert the Bruce's Scots, where he was killed among much of the English nobility. His son, also Roger, was executed for high treason by King Edward II in 1322 following a baronial revolt.

In relation to the village of Cliffords Mesne, the term 'mesne' (pronounced 'mean') relates to one of two things.

Firstly, mesne profits are derived from when ownership of a piece of land is disputed, and, following the ensuing legal process, the profits from the land made between the start of the legal process and the final settlement were known as mesne profits.

A second meaning for mesne applies to people of dignity and high standing, such as the Clifford family, in that if a higher lord holding land for the crown granted some of his land to lesser lords, then they would become mesne lords.

Judging by the local history of the Clifford family, whose powerbase remained in Herefordshire for two centuries before moving to Skipton in Yorkshire, the latter would seem a plausible explanation, with the village being part of land gifted to the family by a higher lord, possibly one of the Earls of Hereford or Gloucester.

During the time of the Hundred Years War (1337 – 1453) the village is described as having '2 bows (archers) and 3 swords (footmen)' to provide for the local militia, although there are no other indications of the villages size at this time.

Following the middle ages, the village is first commented upon in a book by W.S. Symonds from during the English civil war in 1643, where the Parliamentarian general Sir William Waller is described as resting his troops in Gospel Oak in Cliffords Mesne on his way to join the relief of the Roundhead troops in Gloucester.

In this period the villages' geography was very different to what it is today – instead of the woods that today surround the village (including the coniferous Newent wood which was planted around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), the land was largely covered in heath land very similar to that on May Hill. It is also

reputed to have had an undesirable reputation for the amount of highwaymen who operated in the area.

The next few centuries were relatively quiet for Cliffords Mesne, although numerous small businesses, such as the quarry at the crossroads, and a nail shop which is now the Yew Tree Inn were started.

The first available map of the area is the 1838 Tithe map. It shows Cliffords Mesne as a widely dispersed collection of about forty dwellings most in agricultural tenancy although 'The Oaks' and 'New House' (Springfield Grange) are listed.

On the 1887 Map 'Manor House' (Manor house farm) has also been listed as has 'The Beeches'. The number of dwellings had increased and there was evidence of substantial quarrying activity. With the increase in population came an increase in village amenities – the village hall (initially built as a school) was built in 1863, and St. Peters church was completed in 1882 (although not shown on the 1887 map).

The majority of the village and its surroundings must have been incorporated into a family estate at some time during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as in 1912 the 'Clifford Manor' estate (which seemed to comprise of over half the dwellings in the village and most of the farms) was sold off lot by lot. Each lot was purchased separately thus dissolving the estate.

For the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the village remained a sparsely populated backwater with houses depending on fresh water from wells and no other amenities. In the 60's this changed with the arrival of piped water and electricity, this precipitated the building of many new houses particularly in the village centre along side the main Newent to Glasshouse road.

Today the village consists of around a 100 dwellings . The lack of mains drainage, the local topography and its designation as a conservation area means that this number is not likely to increase significantly in the future.