

The Pryors Centenary 2004: A Personal Account by John Mark

(revised 2023)

Imagine the early surroundings of our buildings, the Pryors, before they were built on the Heath. There were very few houses and East Heath Road was a mere track in front of Foley House (11 East Heath Road). There was a farmhouse and outbuildings on the site of the present buildings.

Probably the best understanding is given by early maps. The Hampstead Town

and Froggnal map of 1762 (not shown here) shows Cannon Hall and Squire's Mount to the north, but also the Chapel and Long Room in Well Walk and a single building listed as the Pryors. The accompanying description is "A messuage the dwelling house of and belonging to Mr. John Hornsby with stables, cowhouses, shed, necessary yard and garden". The Newton Map of 1814 (Figure 1) is even more interesting. It shows two buildings on the Pryors site within the Parish of St. John. We can clearly see the track which passes at the end of Well Walk, past the Vale of Health turning up to the Spaniards and going straight on to North End. Further detail is given on the 1894 map (Figure 2) which shows a large building on the Pryors site somewhere between the present blocks. What must be stabling and outhouses are at the back of the garden, just along from what is now the rear entrance of Block A.

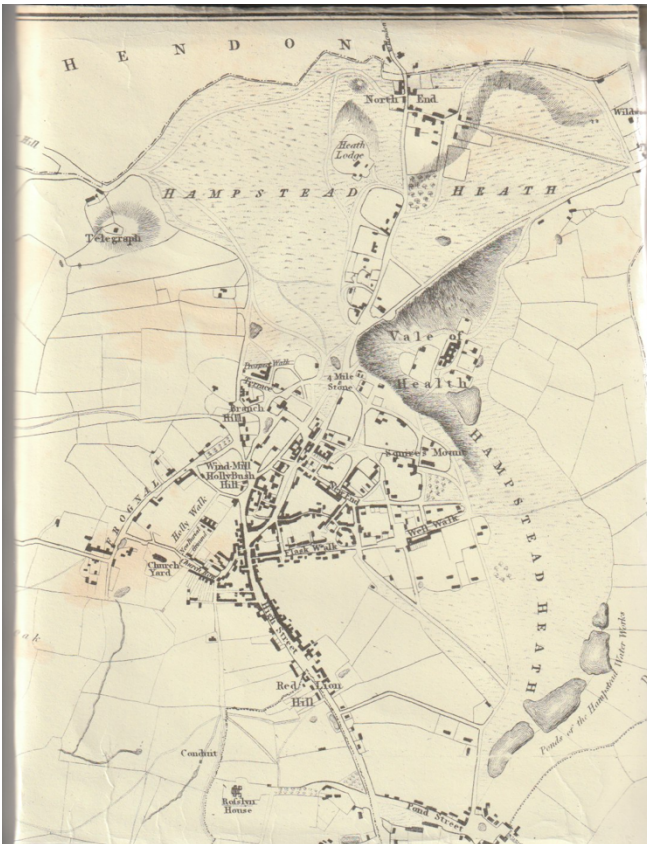


Figure 1: Map of Hampstead 1814 J&W Newton

So, what was this building and who occupied it? Both Foley House and the Pryors were associated with the Hoare family whose family tree is in the Hampstead Museum. In the early nineteenth century the building was occupied by Thomas Marlborough Pryor (a brewer) and his wife Hannah, daughter of Samuel Hoare II of Heath House. The building was known as East Heath Lodge. Pryor died young and his son Robert Pryor lived here from 1850 to 1865 and then it was bought by W.S. Cookson of Lincoln's Inn. The Times of Saturday July 7th 1877 records the death of William Strickland Cookson on July 5th 1877: "on the 5th instance at his residence of the Pryors". Whence the Pryors was bought by Walter Field who had rented a studio in East Heath Road from the owner of the Pryors. Walter Field became a well-known painter, mainly of landscapes in oils and water colours. He was the son of Edwin Field (1804 -1871)

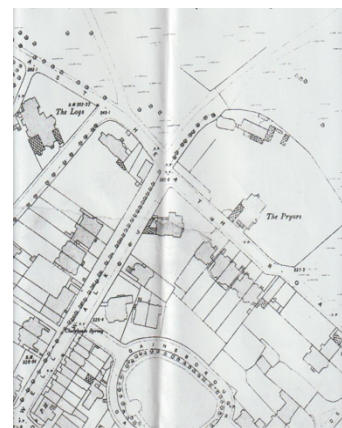


Figure 2: Map of 1894

both a law reformer and amateur artist who lived in Squires Mount. Walter Fields is an important early figure in our story because he lived in the Pryors until his death and some of his paintings are now in Burgh House.

Now the picture becomes more precise with the use of the Rate Books and the perusal of newspapers. The St. John Hampstead Rate Book of 6th April 1900 shows Walter Field as the owner and occupier with the property described as house, gardens, studios and stables. The gross estimated rental was £400, the rateable value £334 and the rates for sewers, lighting and the general rate are recorded. Walter Fields died on January 10th 1902 at the age of 64 and his widow Mrs. Mary Jane Fields lived at the Pryors until her death shortly after.

One must understand at this point the pressures on both rural Hampstead and the Heath itself. In 1884 a large house in Belsize Gardens was demolished to make way for Manor Mansions and in 1893 Ornan Mansions was put up on Alfred Bax's Ivy Bank Estate. In 1898 the construction of the more contentious Gardnor Mansions in Church Row involved the demolition of a row of original houses there. It was clear that mansion blocks were moving up the hill. The Hampstead Heath Protection Society was formed in 1897 but did not intervene in Church Row as it first limited itself to the protection of the Heath. The Hampstead Antiquarian and Historical Society, formed in 1898, was concerned, but were too late to organise any meaningful resistance. The Hampstead Heath Protection Society had much more success when Bellmoor was demolished and the new flats constructed in 1929. Two floors were lopped off the original design of this looming presence at the top of East Heath Road.

The story of the efforts to develop the Heath by Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson, the Lord of the Manor of Hampstead, merits a little retelling. From 1829 onwards he sought to develop his various estates in the locality, notably including East Park, a wide strip of land to the east of the Vale of Health and the Hampstead Ponds. His general intention was to develop Hampstead Heath, over which copyholders and other local inhabitants had certain rights. The struggle was long and protracted, moving to centre stage. So the development of the Pryors, on part of the Heath which was already private land, was much less contentious. When Mrs. Field died, the original Pryors building was sold. (See the web page for the drawing by E. Stamp in February 1902.) The advertisement in the Times refers to this auction held by Messrs G.W. and H.G. Potter on 6th June 1902 and merits quoting in full, including the remarks about the water supply and the drains (also on web page). The very next day, the Hampstead and Highgate Express of 7th June 1902 announced that "the Pryors East Heath Road, the residence of the late Walter Field was sold by Messrs. W.G. and H.G. Potter at the Mart for £11,550". This is about £1,089,000* in 2013 prices. The furore was to follow as the construction of the Pryors began. The architect of this Edwardian baroque style building was Paul Waterhouse, son of the famous Victorian architect who built the Law Courts in the Strand and the Natural History Museum besides much else. Would he have thought it to be an appropriate backcloth for the filming of "The American Werewolf in London" in the 1970s I wonder?

Like his father Alfred and his son Michael, Paul Waterhouse became President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and also designed Lyndhurst Road Chapel. It is surprising that RIBA does not have the original plans of our buildings but my search continues. The builder and developer was George Washington Hart who had, according to Christopher Wade¹ strong Irish connections. Together with another architect C.H.B. Quennell, he had already built high quality houses in Redington Road (1875 onwards) from the sale of this component of the Maryon Wilson estate. They had also developed the meadows of Platt's Farm which Hart named as Ferncroft, Hollycroft and Rosecroft Avenues, officially approved in 1896, and which are today familiarly known to estate agents as "the Croft Estate". So, when George Hart came to construct the Pryors he had plenty of previous experience.

The furore was now to follow, worthy of like protests today. The elegant Foley House opposite Block A dates from 1698, being built for J. Duffield, the first manager of the Wells Spa. The Hampstead and Highgate Express of 13th December 1902 carried a letter from Mr. A.L. Clarke of Foley House on the proposal to build on the Pryors Estate and urging the preservation of the fine trees now standing there. He commented that "it appeared that blocks of flats were contemplated, unless the opportunity were taken of adding the estate to the Heath" but events were moving too quickly. The same issue has a letter from the Honorary Secretary

¹ Wade, C. The Streets of Hampstead, Camden History Society, 2000

of the Hampstead and Heath Protection Society addressed to the London County Council (LCC) on the subject before the County Council for making a road near the site of the Pryors, for the erection of the buildings thereon and the conversion of gas lamps to incandescent lighting. These matters were referred to the Trees and Open Spaces Committee.

Pevsner only refers to the Pryors in so much as it blocked the view of the Heath, especially for No.50 East Heath Road now known as Klippan House, formerly named Thwaitehead. This was built by Ewan Christian, another President of the Royal Institute of Architects, for himself in 1881. With its impressive chimneys, this house was set at an angle to provide views of the Heath, “but since blocked by flats of 1904 by Hart and Waterhouse”. Indeed, the very existence of the Heath is shielded until one gets to the junction of Well Walk with East Heath Road. More elegant and less contentious in many ways was the extensive development of Gainsborough Gardens, began in 1884, with its own private road, impressive lodge and well planted oval circus which was once a lake and at the beginning had tennis courts.

A letter in The Times on Tuesday 14th June 1904 about the Pryors is worth quoting from extensively. Headed “Tree Vandalism on Hampstead Heath”, reference is made to ruthless tree mutilation upon Hampstead Heath. The writer speaks about the private estate of The Pryors, secured by a builder, who “has since erected upon part of the land a huge mass of flats with no pretensions to architecture whatsoever save those of disfiguring the landscape. This much is admitted on all sides”. He lambasts the London County Council for not protecting eleven very fine elms alongside the flats, one of which was felled and the others “so mercilessly cut as to leave them little more than one sided deformities”. This pollarding of large elms in June was done because “the trees excluded some of the light otherwise going into the windows of the flats but this should have been considered before the ugly pile was reared”. The writer signs himself off simply as “Hampstead”, after concluding that “it is obviously the duty of the County Council to order a strict investigation”.

When was Block A first occupied as construction went on apace? The Hampstead Drainage Register shows the drainage plans for numbers 1 to 32 of Block A dated the 4th February 1904 and drainage plans for the “2nd block of flats for numbers 34 to 57” dated 2nd July 1908 and 28th January 1909. Block A was completed in 1904. It is in the Rate Books of 6th April 1905 that we find a Miss Gertrude Miller occupying no. 22, which was owned by Mr. J. Millar with a gross estimated rental of £75 and a rateable value of £63. The Pryors occupation was gradual. In April 1904 it was the upper floors which were occupied first, and nine flats were rated. By Michaelmas 1904, more are recorded including No. 9 which was owned and occupied by Mr. James Spear with a gross estimated rental of £75 and a rateable value of £63. As we occupy this now it is interesting to note that these sums are equivalent to £7,051* and £5,923* per annum in 2013, using the purchasing power historical series. As for Block B, it first appears in the Rate Books of 1910. No. 35 was owned and occupied by Clarence Montagu with a gross estimated rental of £92 and a rateable value of £77 which are £8,649* and £7,239* per annum in 2013 prices.

Another source which confirms the evidence of the rate books and drainage plans is more above ground – the invaluable street directories which run from 1873 to 1940, housed in the Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre. These directories are an invaluable source of economic and social history, giving a flavour of what life was like and how it has changed. The format varies, but generally they have a calendar for the year, a list of the public officers starting with the mayor, a history and details of parish officers. The street directory is in fact a directory of private residents as well as a trades directory of shops and businesses, interspersed by advertisements and pictures of local buildings and views. Many of the directories ended with a visitors guide to pleasure and health resorts, giving the residents of Hampstead an alphabetical guide to the pleasures of the many seaside resorts accessible by London by rail: for example, Bigbury on Sea and Frinton, with train times, prices and possible hotels. Indeed, these directories had as much information as one would normally need and were possibly easier to use than Internet search engines are now.

From our specific point of view, I can identify the progress of buildings in East Heath Road over a long period, for the street directory is an alphabetical list of both streets and numbers and names of buildings in those streets, listing all occupiers. In The Hampstead and

Highgate Express Directory for 1873, East Heath Road first appears and is called “The Heath to Heath-side-road”. There appeared to be just one resident” Pollock, A.A. of Heathfield. However, in Kelly’s Hampstead and Highgate Directory for 1888/9, our busy road is now called East Heath Road and “on the left side” we find the entry of Field, Walter The Pryors”. This continues up to 1901 when we find the entry “Field Walter, A.R.W.S. artist (The Pryors)” There is no directory for 1902 and in the street directory for 1903 there is nothing for the Pryors. Why not? The simple reason is that the Pryors had been demolished after the death of Walter Fields on Friday January 10th 1902. Block A was built in 1904 and Block B in 1910. The Street Directory 1904 has nothing as Block A may well be completed but was not yet rated or occupied. However in the Street Directory 1906, we find a list of residents for Block A, beginning with Alfred Moore caretaker in No.6 and the names of the occupants of what was then No.13, (the present 12A) as well as Nos. 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31 and 32. The Street Directory 1907 shows other flats being occupied, including the aforementioned James Spear in no.9.

From now on it was clear that the bourgeoisie were moving in, as advertisements appeared in The Times, announcing the availability of flats to rent and ensuing vacancies for servants. An advertisement of 9th March 1905 tells us about “a new block just completed actually on the heath with every convenience, large private gardens, rents £85 - £175”. This is about £7,900 to £16,400* in 2013 prices. There was a similar notice two days later and soon others followed at intervals. One that gives us the flavour of the times goes as follows “Hampstead –flats to be let. Rental £100 to £250 (£9,369 to £23,420* in 2013 prices) The Pryors Hampstead. Built right on the heath with charming and uninterrupted views. Electric light: passenger and tradesmen’s lifts: telephone. Liveried porters.” Then there are others for servants. A typical one on 14th December 1922 announces the vacancy for “Cook – General £38- £40 (£1,811 -£1,906* in 2013 prices) for 36 the Pryors, lady, one gentleman, one boy, house parlourmaid kept separate bedroom.” Whilst all of this was going on we learn from The Times that Lady Hoare, accompanied by Sir Samuel Hoare MP opened a bazaar and garden fete at the Pryors in aid of the needs fund of Christ Church Hampstead where about £1,000 was required for the school, new vicarage and repairs to the church steeple. This is more evidence of the connection between the Hoare family and the Pryor family as previously stated in this document.

It appears that from the end of World War I (1918) until the sale of the Pryors to Buckingham Properties Ltd. in 1975 that the Pryors buildings enjoyed a period of unrivalled stability in its century long history. But Block A narrowly escaped destruction in World War II in 1944 when a V-1 rocket landed near what is now the children’s’ sandpit towards the Vale of Health. Diane Raymond in Appendix A gives further details.

A very good article in the 28th March 1968 issue of The Hampstead and Highgate Gazette by Christopher Gotch who used to live in No.46 the Pryors and was an architectural journalist, gives us the flavour of the Pryors in the long period that the flats were rented and before long leaseholders set about imposing their own personal stamp on the interior décor of their flats and in some cases made structural changes. I refer to the long narrow feel of Block A with six flats on each floor with the common parts with marble floors. On the outside there is a touch of elegance with the odd gabled dormers and corner oriels. Even though each of the flats are different in their own way, they were conceived as an integral whole, with good sized principal rooms, all facing outwards, balanced by a horde of smaller ones over the internal wells. Bedrooms were over bedrooms; bathrooms were over bathrooms and kitchens over kitchens. Christopher Gotch went on to say that Block B was almost square in plan, with four identical units for each floor. Known today as the “richer block”, Block B was altogether more ponderous and ambitious in concept. There are three large bay windowed rooms, an outer and inner hall and an old-fashioned kitchen and scullery arrangements. The flats were designed for married couples with one or two children and a live in servant. The whole plan was to keep the servants and family quite separate, with two doors to the dining room and a door in the passage to isolate the kitchen area and servants’ quarters from the family.

The Pryors has usually benefited from long serving porters, notably Mr. Davis,

Mr. Shaw and Mr. Connell, not forgetting Dorothy Shaw and Pauline Connell. When the Pryors was first built gaslight predominated and heating was entirely by open fires. Mr. Wildman, the former gardener of my late aunt, told me that the coal was laboriously hauled up to each flat by an external hoist in the well. When changes have been made in later years, many interesting fireplaces have been revealed. Rubbish was removed by this method too. For a much more complete account, see the words of Diana Raymond in Appendix A and Bill Shaw in Appendix B.

In mid 1975 the two blocks of fifty-eight flats were sold by the Pryors Ltd. to Buckingham Properties, a subsidiary of Slater Walker. This ushered in a new era of asset strippers. The pressure of events was beginning to tell. The increased demand for electricity had meant the introduction of a transformer chamber and then the extension of the electricity substation at basement level in Block A. The Pryors Ltd. itself had applied on 10th October 1972 to demolish two gable ends above flats nos. 55 and 57, which may have been an early effort to develop the roof space. This application was refused on the grounds that “it would have an adverse effect on the general character of the building and a detrimental effect on the visual amenities of this part of the Hampstead Conservation Area”. And then there was the car park and the garden. The first invasion was granted on 7th July 1965 when six car spaces were fashioned in front of Block B. The second was a much larger development after the Pryors Ltd. applied for 840 square yards of additional car parking. This was granted on 27th February 1969 and is the basis of the car park as we know it today.

It must be said that 1975 brought a new wave of immigrants who were attracted by the long leases, the unrivalled position, the remaining garden which seemed a part of the Heath and the studied symmetry of the décor and the convenient arrangements within the flats, not to mention Mr. Shaw the porter. That is when Sara and I, Phillip Hodson and Anne Hooper, George Browning and Christian Levitt came to live here. The existing tenants either resisted massive rent increases under the leadership of Douglas Peroni of No.16 or began to buy their flats at handsome discounts, either from Buckingham Properties or the succeeding Spoolbest Ltd. These included Zorka Flajsner who had been here for fifty years, Diana Raymond who was here even longer, Professor David Barton and Kersten and Jimmy and Mary Wellard to mention just a few. When Buckingham properties had made enough money, they sold the two blocks to Spoolbest Ltd. for a reputed £350,000 in December 1977, (£1,897,000* in 2013 prices) although Buckingham Properties had originally said that their purchase was “a long-term investment”. The new owner, Mr. Bruce Rough, said that he wanted to sell the flats to the remaining tenants who paid rent. By this time thirty-three flats were held on long leases. This entrepreneur told the tenants that the smaller flats were worth between £29,000 to £40,000 (£157,000-£216,800* in 2013 prices) and said he was prepared to sell them across the board at a price of some £17,500 (£94,870* in 2013 prices). Jimmy Wellard told me about his little walks with Mr. Rough on the Heath before he bought No.14 for himself and Mary Wellard and No. 5 for his sister Kay. Mr. Rough also offered “disturbance allowances running into several thousands of pounds” to existing tenants who could not afford to buy but were prepared to leave. Douglas Peroni of No.16 eventually surrendered and we will come to this flat again. It was not long before Spoolbest sold the freehold on to Greenheath Ltd., a misleadingly environmentally friendly sounding name for this next and smaller operator.

Now the battle was joined for control. A critical mass of long leaseholders was in place whose interests were very different from a freeholder who at once attempted to maximise the revenue from service charges payable six months in advance and extract any further development potential from the blocks. One of David Aarons of Greenheath’s first actions was to put in a planning application for dividing his own flat No.54 in Block B into two flats, using the roof space. At an early meeting with me he said it would be for his parents or grandparents but I didn’t believe a word! Permission was granted in January 1979, the architect being the unfortunate Christopher Gotch. Whilst the long leaseholders had organised some opposition, Greenheath was emboldened by this first victory and tried the same tactics for flat No.16 in Block A which had been previously occupied by Douglas Peroni. This had been bought in the name of Dr. Patricia Kenyon, an American lawyer who was Aarons’s wife. Now the residents were highly organised and sought advice from a barrister specialising in planning applications.

The proposal was turned down by the London Borough of Camden, after petitions from flat owners, on the grounds that it involved the loss of family accommodation. Dr. Kenyon appealed to the Department of the Environment but the appeal was dismissed in a letter of 13th November 1980. The inspector confirmed that it breached the family accommodation policy of the District Plan and added that it would have adversely affected the amenities of the adjoining flats. This was a second bruising defeat after the rejection on 9th June 1980 of Greenheath's application for intrusion into the garden for an additional six car spaces. Residents had also resisted plans to fell trees in the car park to create more car spaces and had chained themselves to the tree.

The struggle continued for a little longer as Greenheath tried to impose its will over internal decorating plans and other matters. The Long Leaseholders Association were armed with solid residential support and not least a legal fighting fund and top legal advice. Following a heroic almost all-night negotiation between David Aarons and David Shaw of the managing agents Gross Fine Krieger Chalfen and the two Michaels- Michael Blum and Michael Ridgway - the agreement was made for the residents to purchase the freehold. This meeting was fraught with drama. Initially the two Michaels were prepared to risk their own capital (which they did not have!). To push it through they then made it (in today's modern idiom) an Initial Public Offer (IPO) which then became open to all residents. The Hampstead and Highgate Gazette of the 7th October 1983 reported that the sum paid was over £60,000 (£176,000* at 2013 prices). In fact, the sum was £62,500 (£184,000* at 2013 prices) and included the freeholds, the grounds, the porter's office and flat. Greenheath's actions against six residents and their counterclaims were dropped. Miriam Blum collected the £1,000 (£2,944* in 2013 prices) from each flat. The freehold was now held by the Pryors Ltd.; a company set up and run by the residents. In the words of Christopher Wade, "the Pryors now rides again".

This does not mean there are no problems but until recently they have been relatively minor. The twice-yearly service charge had both a current service charge component and a reserve/sinking fund to ensure that long term maintenance – particularly the exterior decoration and repairs- is safely funded. There are often arguments about priorities – should money be spent on the exterior or decorating the interior? These correspond to family type arguments but are usually resolved in a friendly manner. Then there is the question of maintaining good managing agents, not to mention keeping a healthy flow of residents who are willing and able to serve on the Board of the Pryors. There is the problem of absentee owners who do not live here. At present about 25% of the flats are sublet but the predominance is still of owners who live here and work in London. A recent problem is that of political correctness. I transferred the swing from our former garden of no. 9 Lyndhurst Road and we put it firmly in the Pryors garden. Phillip Hodson did the skilled work of its foundations and John Mark and Michael Blum lent some muscle. In a way it was a symbolic act, saying to Greenheath that the Pryors was incontrovertibly our home. This swing safely served the children (and adults!) of the Pryors or many years until it had to be removed because the Health and Safety Executive condemned it as dangerous. I expressed the hope that the same would not be said about champagne corks flying around at the birthday party. Yet in these days of safety first, Burgh House did not allow candles on the birthday cake in 2004! I had hoped that the candles would be blown out by Diane Raymond who was the oldest resident and a young girl to symbolise the younger generation.

One of the vital instruments established on the acquisition of the freehold was the reserve fund. Firstly, the conflict between the residents and the successive freeholders led to a reluctance to pay reserves. Secondly, the building itself needs continual maintenance of the structure. One of the first actions of the newly formed Pryors Ltd. in 1983 was to spend some £750,000 (£2,208,000* at 2013 prices) on the thorough overall of both blocks, covering everything from dry rot, the roofs, to painting the exterior and so on, concentrating on securing the buildings. Both blocks were scaffolded during the spring and summer months. The sums that had to be raised by the long leaseholders were very considerable, both in absolute terms and in relation to the nominal market value of the flats. Indeed, most long leaseholders were hard pressed to find the funds needed to meet their share. Many had to borrow more money from their mortgage company, in some cases from family relatives and sell antiques and other personal items. The way we did all this depended upon our individual circumstances, but whatever were the different ways, everyone realised that contributing to reserves, as well as the

normal service charge, was the way forward to smooth out expenditure. The Reserve Fund, until its unfortunate demise, funded two major sets of work on the core of the building, with a maintenance programme planned five to seven years ahead. The Reserve Fund was also used for major internal redecoration as well. In sum, we were able to undertake major works without a levy. However, there were two occasions when the Board had to act very promptly to safeguard the reserve fund and the service charge monies which mount up. Cheques are now made out to the Pryors Ltd and both vigilance and control are needed to look after our collective interest. It is difficult to have 100% security, but with Directors who are residents this is safely achieved.

One of our current preoccupations is devising the new lease which clarifies many issues, including making the right to collect reserves unambiguous. Immediate past expenditures include the £340,000 (£450,000* in 2013 prices) spent on major works in 2004/2005 and in 2006 £59,000 (£74,480* in 2013 prices) was spent on replacing the water main from the street into Block A. We had to cope with the dry rot in Block A which cost some £98,000 (£123,700* in 2013 prices) to eradicate, although the net cost was reduced to about £25,000 (£31,560* in 2013 prices) after the insurance claim. For the next few years, we needed six figure sums to deal with the renewal of water mains for the south side of Block A and for both the south sides and north sides of Block B. In addition, funds were disbursed to modernise both the electricity and gas supplies in both blocks. It was far better to do this by contributing an average of £3,000 (£3,623* at 2013 prices) or so a year per flat via the Reserve Fund for the next five years rather than having what would be a necessary levy of an average of £15,000 or more (£15,950* at 2013 prices) all of a sudden in 2012. Furthermore, it would be more expensive to collect the monies in some ad hoc fashion. Our finances, since the acquisition of the freehold up to the demise of the reserve fund, have been sound. An historical analogy could be the contribution of Walpole to national finances – instituting a sinking fund to help reduce the national debt. The Pryors was, however, a little different. We had a sinking (reserve) fund to finance necessary expenditure in advance and avoid both a Pryors debt and the payment of interest on such a debt. Buildings are like people- they need constant maintenance and if this is done the expectation of life will be extended for these 100-year-old buildings.

When histories like this are written, most people scrutinise them eagerly, hoping to find that where they live had been occupied by eminent people both past and present. Or perhaps you may eagerly scan this account to see if your name is mentioned! For the Pryors, this would indeed be a lengthy catalogue. So just let me start with a handful of people, mainly in the past, which are my discoveries. After all this is a history of a building which may well have a greater claim to immortality and longevity than its occupants. In the trawl of obituaries in The Times and the secondary sources of books on Hampstead, I highlight the following. We have R.M. Leonard who in July 1941 and was the Secretary of the Anti Bribery League, a timely marker at present. Then Major Evan Rowland Jones (No.43) sounds another interesting figure. He died on 16th January 1920 and is described as “soldier, author and journalist”. His widow lived on in the Pryors until February 28th 1927. He was Liberal MP for Carmarthen in 1895 but was more famous for organising the Welsh citizens of Milwaukee into the Lincoln Anti- Slavery League. He is reputed to have seen and spoken to Abraham Lincoln just as at least one present resident has seen and spoken to Bill Clinton. And then there is a puzzle. In my trawl through the street directories, when I looked at the year 1911, I found that the two blocks were fully occupied for the first time, including No.12A which was formerly no. 13. The puzzle is No.15 where the name W.W. Asquith appears. This gentleman remained in the Pryors until 1919. I have investigated him, starting from H. H. Asquith but searches so far have revealed nothing except that he was educated at Clifton College and then possibly Balliol College Oxford University. Was he part of the H.H. Asquith dynasty? Herbert Asquith became Earl of Oxford after serving as Prime Minister from 1908 to 1916. Another puzzle is that the prolific author, John Mortimer, told Christopher Wade that he was born in the Pryors in 1923 but which flat?

Better known in the various books on Hampstead one can mention Edith Poutiatine of No.54, a Russian Countess, who died in 1928. Then there were Jean Forbes Robertson and Andre van Gysegham of the acting profession. The former was one of the first Peter Pans. The architectural connection is symbolised by Sir Ian and Lady Macalister, with Sir Ian the secretary

of the Royal Institute of British Architects for some time. Of the more recent past, people who are artists and writers have been able to live in the Pryors, despite the almost continuous rise in property prices. A constant refrain is that Hampstead is becoming richer and richer, with students being unable to afford bed sitters, which no longer exist anyway. It is said that artists and writers can't afford to live in what is now becoming more and more gated communities. But this is just not true. Here at the Pryors let me mention my old tennis partner and British Museum companion Jimmy Wellard who died in 1978. Jimmy was a journalist and travel writer who wrote fiction and nonfiction, writing three books on the Sahara and others on Italy and the French foreign legion. He succeeded in buying two flats in the Pryors and not just one! There is also Erich Segal, classical scholar, marathon runner and best known for *Love Story*, which he claimed to have written in an afternoon. He told me when he first moved in that the security arrangements here compared poorly with the electric fences surrounding properties in Princeton. I told him that when I first moved into the Pryors that one could just stroll into the building, both at the front and the back and there was free access from the garden onto the Heath. He was very surprised!

Long term residents included the family of Victor Willing and Paula Rego who came here in 1976. Victor, who is no longer with us, was described as an existentialist painter and Paula was well recognized. Even longer-term residents are authors: Ernest Raymond who died in 1974 and his widow Diane Raymond. The work of Ernest is commemorated on the Hampstead plaque outside Block A. For living history I attach as Appendix B, Diana's memories of the Pryors when I interviewed her before the Burgh House party in November 2004.

In this account I have by no means done justice to other residents eminent in their fields both past and present. I am mindful of both their inherent modesty and security so I hope they will forgive any omissions. Of course, the majority of residents have tended to be from the professions: lawyers, bankers, judges, business executives, academics and a goodly smattering of psychotherapists and psychiatrists. There are also plain hedonists who enjoy the Pryors, people spending the golden years of a relaxed retirement, former politicians and even oligarchs and professional footballers. However, I do not wish to avoid the seamier side of life which is a reflection of our society. We are not all goody goody two shoes and pillars of society. There was the resident who said he was going out to buy a bottle of wine for supper and never returned to his wife. Let me also mention the gentleman who owned a drinking club in Belsize Park and used to come home both with black eyes and many interesting ladies. Then there was the family who tried to remove a supporting wall in their flat! They owned other mansion blocks and had a bare footed slave. They seldom paid their bills and were accustomed to throwing warrants in the faces of the bailiffs who tried to serve them. On a lighter note, there is the story of Bernadette. This young lady was extremely mischievous and was in the habit of burning the bonfire on November 5th at teatime, upstaging Bill Shaw who had carefully built it and was expected to light it. We have had a succession of bonfire parties in the past. Now Health and Safety and Halloween has taken over and these celebrations have been discontinued. Yet the life of the Pryors goes on, with families moving in and out and the age structure of the blocks changing. Many of us have seen our families grow up and depart, leaving us peacefully calm, and in my case reducing the need to play football and cricket in the garden. Yet others come in with their children and grandchildren and the garden is still big enough to cope both with quiet reading, barbecues and games.

Appendix A: Diana Raymond's Memories of the Pryors 23rd November 2004

Diane and Ernest moved into the Pryors in August 1941 paying a rental of £150 per annum (£6,481* at 2013 prices). At this juncture of World War II five flats were empty.

The lift we use today was for people only- for other hoisting arrangements see the next paragraph. Whenever Diana wanted the lift, particularly for the pram with her son Peter, she had to ring the bell and get the porter, Mr. Davis. He had a brass handle control in his flat which fitted into a slot in the lift to make it function. He delivered people upstairs and downstairs and was needed for this function amongst others.

There were also wooden lifts in the well, used for coal on the way up and rubbish on the way down. When the whistle blew in the morning, with a contact in each flat, you knew it was your own turn. This was usually about 8.a.m. Her scullery overlooked the well and the hoist was brought up to the level of the window. Coal had to be lifted off and rubbish put on. The hoist had to be wound up and down by the porter. This arrangement continued until went the late 60s and Chastine Barton, another long-term resident also remembered it well. Similar arrangements existed for Block B.

Diana remembers Mr. Davis as a sombre, solemn thick set person man with grey hair. He wore a hat and had a uniform rather like those people one sees nowadays outside the Dorchester! His short jacket, dark blue with gold buttons, was braided. Liveried porters were quite common at the time. As he worked with the hoists, he sometimes sung hymns in the well!

Bill Shaw came on a bicycle for his interview when just out of the Navy. Ernest Raymond lobbied people for the Pryors company to appoint Bill. This happened in 1949. There was also a day porter called Mr. Ong.

Towards the end of the war, people got used to flying bombs. The V1 rockets were very noisy, sounding like several engines at the same time. A particular one sounded serious because the noise stopped: always an ominous sound. Diane rushed to Peter and threw herself on top of him which was what was supposed to be done. Then there was an almighty explosion, the ceiling fell down, soot came down the chimney and glass was everywhere with the windows being blown out. The rocket landed on the patch north of Block A where an indentation can be still seen. The north side of the block suffered more. From time to time afterwards, ceilings and plaster in some of the flats continued to fall down on occasions. The only casualty of this rocket was Mr. Blue of Foley House who was old and frail. A ceiling fell on his head and he died a little later. All this happened in July 1944. Diana recalls a pleasant lady in her dressing gown sweeping up the glass.

A greater noise than the actual rockets came from the anti aircraft battery on the Heath at the back of the Pryors looking back over to London. In his book "The Last to Rest" Ernest Raymond conveys the atmosphere of the war very closely.

Diana's nephew Patrick flew with a Canadian aircrew, completing 36 sorties. He remembers his 21st birthday party with his friends in No.22 and going into the Wells.

Peter Raymond played with the daughter of Jean Forbes Robertson one of the earlier Peter Pans. She was the daughter of a famous actress Johnston Forbes Robertson. Her portrait is in the Garrick.

Diana thinks the Pryors family must have bought our buildings at the auction in 1902 and built the flats. Their agent Mr. Fripp was very polite and used to discuss the rent with Ernest. This was very different from Bruce Rough who used to ring up Diana at 21.00 in the evening to discuss the sale of the flat with Diane. Diane agrees with me that the flats has good interior designer in the later days of the Pryors family. On the front of the Pryors there is a plaque for Ernest Raymond and in the garden a seat in memory of Diane who died in 2009, living in the Pryors from 1941 to 2009. A perceptive intellectual, much less demonstrative than her husband and with a carefully worked out Anglican faith, I found her of much support in difficult circumstances.

Appendix B. Bill Shaw's Memories of the Pryors 27th November 2004.

He used to cycle here from Earlsfield near Wandsworth south of the river every day. The hours of duty here were from 08.00 in the morning to 22.00 in the evening so there wasn't very much

time for sleep! This went on for two years whilst Mr. Shaw was a day porter. When Mr. Davis retired, Ernest Raymond organised the petition and Bill got the job which he held for 39 years. His starting pay was 30 shillings a week.

Bill also recalls the anti- aircraft guns at the back of the Pryors and there was a hut for Army personnel. The chatter of the guns used to shake Block A

Bill confirms the lift arrangements in the wells. There were six lifts in Block A and four in Block B for coal and rubbish. This went on until the late 60s.

Besides all his other positive qualities, Bill was a hero. He saved Block B of the Pryors in 1977. An electric cable dropped from the ceiling on top of the plastic rubbish bags in the basement. Mandy Bakhtiar alerted him as she smelt the burning. A hypothesis was a tramp had got into the well and dropped a cigarette end which started the fire. Single handed, Bill put it out before the fire-brigade got here. He inhaled some of the smoke which blackened his lungs but as a tough member of the Royal Navy quickly recovered.

Bill recalls Mr. Pryor as a very pleasant gentleman. The Blocks were sold because the rented flats were not making much money. It was Mr. Reeves in No. 30 who was an architect responsible for the tasteful interior design.

Bernadette of No. 42 was always in mischief. Her main crime was to set the bonfire alight at 16.00 before Bill was due to light it at 19.00. She later became a doctor.

Mr. Boon of no.25 had drinking club in Belsize Park. He used to appear with quite a few girl friends and was often worse for wear!

Many more memories passed away with Bill who died on the 3rd July 2007 aged eighty three. Sara and I went to his funeral in Ramsay which was conducted in the same optimistic and positive way that he lived his life.

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I was helped immensely by Malcolm Holmes, who retired as Head of Camden's History Archives in 2007 after forty years of wonderful service to historians. He guided me through one of the country's largest local history collections, which fills two miles of shelving and includes 50,000 images, 100,000 newspaper cuttings and 200,000 entries.

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*Occasionally I use www.measuringworth.com to convert historical values into present amounts. I use the Retail Price Index measure. This only gives some idea of relative values for a number of reasons but is of some interest. They are severe underestimates of Hampstead property values nevertheless.

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