



# Cryfield Grange

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## *A Brief History*

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WARWICK**







## Introduction

**T**HE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK was founded in the mid-1960s, on land donated by the City of Coventry and the County of Warwickshire. So the University looks towards the busy cities of Coventry, Birmingham and the industrial West Midlands, and also has a foot in the typical landscape of rural Warwickshire. The boundary between the Coventry and the Warwickshire land is Gibbet Hill Road – a name recalling the gruesome fact that, between 1765 and the 1820s, a gibbet stood there to hold the bodies of local felons.

In fact, local Warwickshire connections feature largely in the nomenclature of University buildings, ‘Cryfield’ being one of the more important. It appears in the Vice-Chancellor’s residence (Cryfield Old Farmhouse), a major student hall of residence, a row of cottages built to house students with families, and one of the University’s most recent purchases – Cryfield Grange, an ancient Warwickshire farmhouse, and a listed building, now renovated for use by international scholars visiting the University under the auspices of the Institute of Advanced Study. It is a name that traces back for almost a thousand years, through a time when this area looked to the south and east for leadership and attachment.

Cryfield Grange itself was the centrepiece of Cryfield Grange Farm – one of three local farms whose properties now form the University campus. The smaller Cryfield House Farm centred on what is now the Vice-Chancellor’s residence and was attached to

it. Cryfield Grange was a large, active farm and was once an integral part of several very different yet very important agricultural and political networks. Though the ownership of Cryfield Grange has varied over the years, its importance is undisputed and its history is a microcosm of local, regional, and national trends. \*



*Some of the first Warwick students*



## phase 1

## Croiles felda: the first Millennium

**T**HE NAME 'CRYFIELD' suggests sinister connotations, particularly when combined with Gibbet Hill! In fact, it developed from a corruption of 'croiles felda' – 'open land by the fork', most likely referring to the course of the Canley Brook whose path passes through land connected to Cryfield Grange. The earliest recorded use of the name dates from 1154 AD, but palaeo-meso- and neolithic (500,000 – 2,000 BC) as well as bronze and iron age (2,000 BC – 43 AD) artefacts have been discovered on campus, indicating significant human activity since prehistoric times.



*Reconstruction by the 3-d Visualisation Centre of an Iron Age settlement on campus*

Sustained and larger-scale settlement in the area came during the Roman occupation of Britain (c. 43-410 AD). Archaeological work carried out on campus discovered fragments of mosaic, leading investigators to conclude that a fairly high-status building or buildings were located near Cryfield Farmhouse and Cryfield Grange, possibly including a temple. Both the Watling Street and the Fosse Way – ancient tracks converted into arterial roads by the Romans – pass near Cryfield. Warwickshire was heavily fortified during the early stages of Roman rule,

and with a major Roman fort at Lunt, less than four miles away, it is entirely possible that a large farm or villa was centred on the Cryfield area.

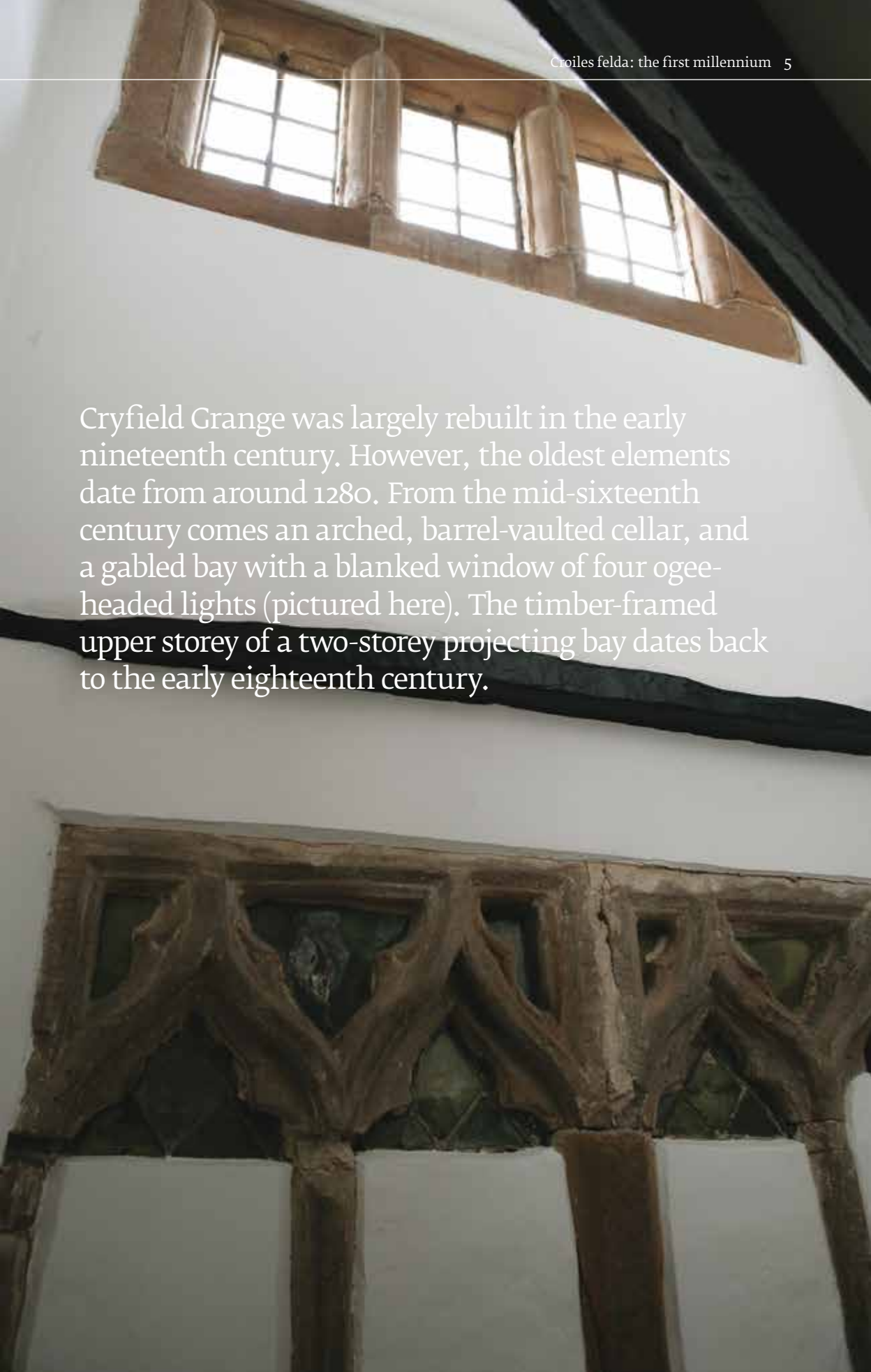
Post-Roman usage is more difficult to trace. There is evidence of a small community where Gibbet



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*Hunting wild boar in the ninth century*

Hill Road now crosses the Canley Brook and parts of the campus display evidence of ancient coppicing. By Saxon times, the area around the Grange had become a royal estate and hunting park. King Ethelred (968-1016) spent considerable time in the area. Enduring, though probably apocryphal, stories from this time tell of a foreign earl who was given leave to live near Cryfield Grange. To supplement his income he turned to banditry along the Kenilworth Road. He became such a terror that locals petitioned to the king for help. Royal troops were required to forcibly evict the earl and restore order to the area. \*



Cryfield Grange was largely rebuilt in the early nineteenth century. However, the oldest elements date from around 1280. From the mid-sixteenth century comes an arched, barrel-vaulted cellar, and a gabled bay with a blanked window of four ogee-headed lights (pictured here). The timber-framed upper storey of a two-storey projecting bay dates back to the early eighteenth century.

## phase 2

## Middle Ages: continuity and change

**T**HE GRANGE REMAINED in royal hands until after the Norman conquest of 1066. An established story relates that a group of Cistercian monks from Radmore, Staffordshire, petitioned the Empress Mathilda to be allowed to move to a quieter location. In 1154-55, these monks were granted part of the royal estate encompassing Cryfield and began constructing their monastery. Because of the Cistercian need for a quiet, rural location still within reach of a major urban centre (Coventry was one of the country's largest cities and most important economic centres at this time), a village named Cryfield (possibly the settlement at the Canley Brook) was moved a mile or so to the west and renamed Hurst. This would also have been seen as a good location for the Cistercians because another abbey of the same order was located at Coombe, only a few miles away. Silence did not prevail, however. Due to traffic on the Kenilworth Road and foresters in the surrounding woods, the monks could get no peace. Less than a year after their move to Cryfield they shifted again, this time to neighbouring Stoneleigh, where they resided for the next 381 years.

More detailed research, however, indicates a more complex story. Monks certainly relocated to the area but it is not at all clear that they had ever intended to settle in a permanent fashion at the Cryfield site. Rather, the magnificent *Stoneleigh Leger Book*, a history and account of the abbey at Stoneleigh compiled from about 1392, indicates that Cryfield was a small hamlet located near the site of Cryfield House Farm and occupied until well after the monastery's founding, as was the neighbouring hamlet of Hurst. In a tax survey conducted in 1305 Cryfield

was listed as having 16 persons subject to tax and Hurst 17. There was likely some displacement of tenants from Cryfield to Hurst in the early stages of the monastery's foundation, but the lack of social problems that occurred in similar situations at other abbeys suggests that such displacement was temporary. In fact, in 1332 the king ordered that Cryfield provide a stone of wax to be burnt before the image of the Virgin

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Cistercian monks practising choral singing





*Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire*

## In the thirteenth century, Kenilworth Castle was attacked in the longest castle siege in English history.

at Stoneleigh Abbey each year, indicating that the hamlet was a going concern after the Abbey's establishment.

Regardless of the specific details of the founding of the Cistercian Abbey, Cryfield Grange was a prosperous and important element of the monks' establishment. The *Stoneleigh Leger Book* details an extensive farm at the Grange, but one that was integrated into a larger whole, with Stoneleigh Abbey controlling around 10,000 acres centred on Warwickshire but stretching as far as the Cotswolds. This successful, centralised and increasingly intensive agricultural practice shaped the landscape at Cryfield and beyond. Other related activities also changed local geography. One

of the most notable features of the medieval Grange, for instance, was the series of mill ponds constructed along the Canley Brook to the south of the Grange buildings. Originally designed to be used as fish ponds for the abbey, after the monks' departure the ponds were converted into mill pools. There is evidence of several dams which may have failed at certain times and may have needed to be rebuilt. Though none of the ponds are still visible, at least three mill dams can still be seen. Mills, allowing the monks to grind grain and cereals grown on their land, would have been of significant economic importance to the Abbey and surrounding communities.

Attachment to a monastic house did not protect the Grange from the world around it. Indeed, local and national politics had a direct impact on the Grange and its prosperity. During the Second Barons' War (1264-67), for example, Kenilworth Castle (less than three miles to the south west) was attacked in the longest castle siege in English history. Troops loyal to King Henry III spent almost seven months in their attempt to defeat the forces of Simon de Montfort, fifth Earl of Leicester. Though eventually successful in the siege, royalist troops quartered at the Grange managed to burn it down through their negligence. It took until about 1280 before the farmhouse and outbuildings were fully habitable again and the oldest elements of the current Grange buildings date from this rebuilding. This siege was also the genesis of an enduring local legend speaking of a tunnel connecting Cryfield Grange to Kenilworth Castle. ✱



Stoneleigh Abbey commanded excellent tracts of land and an important place in the country's geography.



## phase 3

## The local nobility – the Lords Leigh



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Sir Thomas Leigh, c. 1504-71

**T**HE DISSOLUTION OF ENGLAND'S monasteries by order of King Henry VIII in 1534 has received considerable historical and popular attention down the years. Without question, this event had a major impact on English society. However, other changes were also significant. Prior to the dissolution of the monasteries, for example, agricultural practices were changing. The Abbey had begun to enclose its fields and convert them to grazing land and pasture. Pasturing animals required significantly fewer human hands and led to a slow but steady depopulation of the area. This pattern culminated with the establishment of a new farm – Cryfield House Farm – in 1597, a separate agricultural entity about a half mile to the north of Cryfield Grange. Cryfield House Farm was all that remained of a hamlet that had comprised twelve houses. Neighbouring Hurst suffered the same fate, shrinking during this time from nineteen houses to just one.

Stoneleigh Abbey was not particularly well managed, nor particularly large, and Henry's commissioners found only about £215 of portable wealth when the Abbey was broken up in 1536 and not inconsiderable debts. Nevertheless, the Abbey commanded excellent tracts of land and an important place in the country's geography. The estate first went to Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, and Henry VIII's brother-in-law. By the 1560s, however, Sir Thomas Leigh, freeman of the Mercers' Company and Lord Mayor of London in 1558, purchased Stoneleigh and considerable other tracts of land in the area. This created a connection between the Leigh family and Stoneleigh that lasted well into the twentieth century.



Jane Austen, 1775-1817

The Leighs, despite being ennobled on two occasions, played only the most minor role in national politics. At a local and county level, however, they were much more active. By 1873, the Leighs owned almost three per cent of all land in Warwickshire with an income from their estates totalling over £23,000. Though connected through marriage and related to a number of leading aristocratic families, it is the family's connection with Jane Austen that is perhaps its most enduring claim to fame: Chandos Leigh, first baron of the second creation, was Austen's cousin. The author

spent time at Stoneleigh in 1806 and Austen scholars consider her to have modelled parts of Sotherton Court in *Mansfield Park* on the Abbey. The Leighs also appeared to have taken very seriously their perceived paternalistic duties towards their tenants and the other residents of Warwickshire. When they were forced to sell some of their lands in the late nineteenth century, tenants were explicitly given the right of first refusal on the properties up for sale. \*

## phase 4



Building a haystack, 1803

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## Cryfield Grange: a prosperous Midlands farm

**W**ITH REGARD TO THE GRANGE, three valuable accounts have survived. The first documents the very complicated series of sales and resales of the Stoneleigh land, mostly between members of the Leigh family, conducted in December 1639. Coming a century after the dissolution, this series of documents reveals a large, prosperous

and valuable property. This assessment notes specific fields and pastures connected to the Grange spreading over an area of at least 1,300 acres. The farm appears to have been used as a mechanism for the transfer of property and funds through marriage and was valued at £2,500, or almost £215,000 at current prices. This was a significant sum for the seventeenth century and shows Cryfield Grange as a nucleus of the Leighs' growing agricultural empire. A second account, this time a valuation, was made in 1817. It shows a much smaller farm, but one in good working order. That year the farm's fields, buildings and other chattels were assessed with an annual value of £590 14s 7d, translating today to a sum of



Types of plough used in 18th century England

£25,000. The surveyor noted at the bottom: 'This Farm is in a good state of cultivation and has been recently much improved by Draining &c &c.'

The 1817 inventory shows that the farm was worked according to prevailing agricultural practice, introduced into England in the previous century. Its field rotation was one of pasture, wheat (and possibly barley), turnips, fallow and seeds, with meadow for cutting hay: this pattern, with slight variation, was typical for the strong soils common in this area. There would also have been a herd of dairy cattle, and we may assume that, like most farms in the vicinity, Cryfield Grange contributed to the production of Warwickshire cheese. This was made both for family consumption and for sale at the annual cheese fairs in Coventry and Rugby. One type of local cheese, Warwickshire Truckle, was a particular favourite in eighteenth-century London, and now, in the twenty-first century, is once again being made commercially in the West Midlands. \*

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Mary Evans's Picture Library

*A farming family bringing in the hay, 1799*

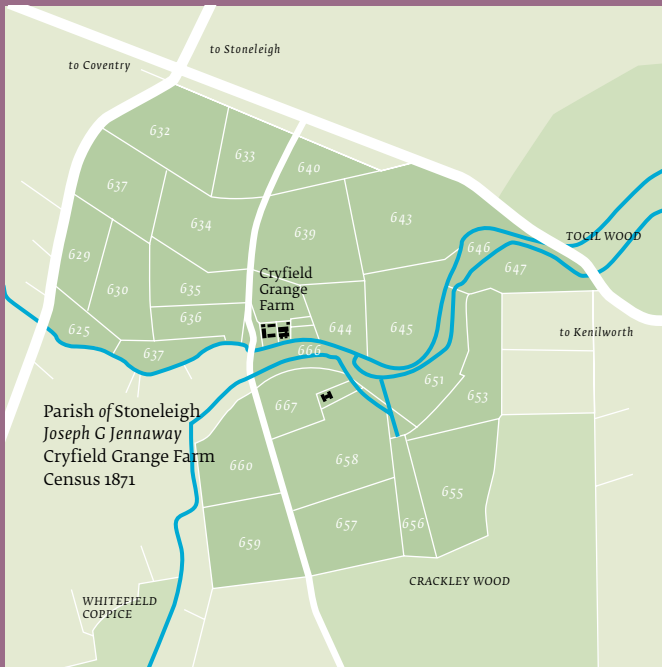
## phase 5

# The nineteenth and twentieth centuries

**I**N 1871 ANOTHER INVENTORY was taken of all the farms owned by Lord Leigh. Perhaps the most extensive and detailed survey of Cryfield Grange conducted, this report shows a now less prosperous farm. With a yearly valuation of only £390 2s od (or about £18,000), Cryfield Grange was being squeezed. Joseph Jennaway, who had by then been the farm's tenant for four years, was commended as 'hard-working and business-like', but after two bad seasons and labour problems, was said to be 'altogether unsettled and defeated', although he had managed to get a great part of the land in good condition. When this evaluation of the farm is taken alongside the corresponding evaluation of neighbouring Cryfield House Farm – where 'none of the grass land is of first rate quality' and parts 'exceedingly poor' – a picture is formed of tired land. Clearly, too, the necessary capital was not available to re-invest in the maintenance and modernisation of buildings and drainage that these old farms now needed.

Demographic changes were also having an impact on the area. Though Coventry took until after the Second World War to reach its current boundaries, the city and Kenilworth were both growing. By comparison, the village of Stoneleigh, to which Cryfield Grange was nominally attached, stayed relatively the same size (possibly helped by occurrences such as Lord Leigh closing all public houses in the village after drunken residents laughed at his daughter one Sunday when she rode to church on a tricycle). Additionally, at some point in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries wealthy Coventrians began to build villas along the ancient Kenilworth Road. In a piecemeal process, parts of Cryfield Grange Farm's land were also being sold off for housing development. This process of disposing of their once-extensive

land holdings was continued by the Leighs throughout the twentieth century, as death duties, income and property tax, plus changes in agricultural practice and needs, made it difficult to afford such great landed estates. In the 1930s, for instance, Lord Leigh began to sell land in Canley, to the north of the Grange and the future campus of the University of Warwick, to the city of Coventry. The Leighs lived at Stoneleigh Abbey until 1990. In 1996, Lord Leigh transferred ownership of the Abbey and close to 700 acres of parkland to a charitable trust. ✱



*Cryfield Grange Farm 1871 (from the census map)*



## phase 6



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A ploughing contest, mid-twentieth century

## The last years of Cryfield Grange Farm

**I**N THE LAST YEARS of the nineteenth century, Cryfield Grange Farm was rented by the Hague family – a tenancy that lasted through three generations. They seem to have had good business sense. In 1912, for example, an Oswald Hague borrowed £500 to develop property on Argyll Street in Coventry. The Hagues also had the distinction of employing Thomas H. Edgar, 16 years old in 1941, Warwickshire’s champion ploughman that year. Photographic evidence also indicates the Hagues worked the Grange in the 1950s. The farm

grew cereals and potatoes, and catered for beef and dairy cattle; there was also a high-intensity poultry unit which was, apparently, highly profitable.

In 1978, though, Cryfield Grange was sold by public auction. It is not clear what prompted the farm to be sold. Perhaps the last Hague had retired or died and Lord Leigh decided that was an appropriate time to make a change. The auction catalogue shows a farm in apparent good order, complete with its poultry unit and extensive outbuildings. The property was listed as encompassing



The view across the fields towards Kenilworth

approximately 292 acres and seems to have had all modern conveniences. Oak Tree Cottage, a converted barn to the south of the main farm buildings, was sold as a separate property, and the main farm buildings converted into a private residence. ❁

## phase 6

# Cryfield Grange in the twenty-first century: a meeting place for international scholars

**I**N 2007, THE UNIVERSITY bought Cryfield Grange from its current owner, Mr Brian Dickens, and proceeded to convert it into accommodation for international academics visiting Warwick under the auspices of the Institute of Advanced Study (IAS),

established in the same year. The Grange is an

important asset for the IAS, one that helps it to fulfil an essential strand of its mission – to enhance opportunities for international scholars to work with Warwick researchers and to engage with postgraduate students for extended periods of time. Its Visiting Fellowship Scheme has brought to the University a stream of distinguished academics from North America, Australia, Africa, Asia and Europe, who have delivered public lectures, participated in other events and postgraduate training activities and worked towards setting up collaborative research projects with Warwick academics. Cryfield Grange, with its extensive gardens, tennis court and large, comfortable reception rooms, provides a base that allows Visiting Fellows to feel part of the University, as well as getting to know one another.



So once again Cryfield Grange is home to an (albeit shifting) community of scholars – a situation that would surely win the approval of its original, monastic inhabitants. ✱





# The Institute of Advanced Study: promoting international scholarship

**E**STABLISHED IN 2007, Warwick's Institute of Advanced Study is at once a concept, a funding body, a strategy and a cluster of physical locations dedicated to enriching the University's research environment. The Institute aims to enhance opportunities for international scholars to engage with Warwick; to foster new collaborative research groups (including international collaborations) at Warwick; to promote interdisciplinary research across all Warwick faculties; to enrich the research environment for postgraduate students and early career researchers; and to increase public engagement with Warwick research nationally and internationally. \*



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Also consulted were documents in the Coventry City Archive and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Record Office.



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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