Pryor:

This interesting surname is of Anglo-Saxon origin, and derives from the Olde English pre 7th Century "prior" a prior, a monastic official immediately subordinate to an abbot, and would have originated as an occupational name for the servant of a prior. Later, the name became a nickname for a person bearing the qualities associated with a prior. The creation of surnames from nicknames was a common practice in the Middle Ages, and many modern-day surnames derive from medieval nicknames referring to personal characteristics, as in this instance "the official one". The surname is first recorded in the early 13th Century (see below), and other early recordings include: Roger le Priur, noted in the Feet of Fines of Cambridgeshire (1237), and Nicholas le Prior, a witness in the Assize Court Rolls of Somerset (1268). In the modern idiom the surname has many variant spellings including: Prier, Prior, Pryer and Pryor. On January 15th 1541, Ellen Pryor married John Ashbey at the Church of St. Lawrence Jewry and St. Mary Magdalene, Milk Street, London. A Coat of Arms granted to the family depicts three red chevronels on an ermine bend, between four gold stars of eight points wavy, the Crest being a star (as in the arms). The Motto, "Malo mori quam feodari", translates as, "I would rather die than be disgraced". The first recorded spelling of the family name is shown to be that of Roger Priur, which was dated 1205, in the "Curia Regis Rolls of Suffolk", during the reign of King John, known as "Lackland", 1199 - 1216. Surnames became necessary when governments introduced personal taxation. In England this was known as Poll Tax. Throughout the centuries, surnames in every country have continued to "develop" often leading to astonishing variants of the original spelling.

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