

WELFORD-ON-AVON · THE BIDFORD ROAD, SOUTH-WEST OF
THE VILLAGE

Cress Hill

*An open-field furlong, an orchard close, a ruined lock, a summer view and a five-acre field
the village bought for itself: the history of the hill where Welford meets the river.*

Drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive
(folder references in grey). A companion to the essays on the Parish
Council, the playing field, the Four Alls and Boat Cottage.

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“View from Cress Hill 1910.” The printed caption reads “River View, Welford-on-Avon”; the mount gives the place and year. The Avon bends away towards the village, with orchard trees and roofs on the skyline. 53/05

Leave Welford by the Bidford road and the houses thin out where the ground starts to climb. On the right the land falls away in a steep grassy bank to the river; ahead, the road goes on over the brow towards Barton and Bidford, and a lane turns off south to Dorsington and Pebworth. This rise is Cress Hill. C. J. Woodward, opening his history of the village, placed it in one sentence: behind the village to the south “lie Welford Hill and Cress Hill, the latter descending in a steep grassy slope to the river bank” 19/30.

Cress Hill is not a building. It has no deeds in the archive and no single file of its own, so its history has to be assembled from the edges of other stories: an enclosure award, an auction notice, a boating book, a ruined lock, an asparagus grower’s memories, a parish clerk’s carbon copies, a county officer’s plan. About sixty items in the Society’s archive mention it. Put together, they show a place that changed character three times. For centuries it was farmland, first open-field strips and then fruit. For two hundred years its foot was a working stretch of navigation, with a lock that boatmen and villagers knew by the hill’s name. And since 1960 a field on its river side has belonged to the people of Welford, bought,

in the words of the trustees who paid for it, “to preserve it for the village in its natural state” 57/02.

This essay follows those three lives in order, and then looks at what the village has made of the field in the sixty years since it became public land. Notes on gaps and disagreements between the sources are at the end.

The lie of the land the hill, the road and the view

Welford sits in a loop of the Avon. The river comes down from Stratford past Binton Bridges, swings west round the church and the mill, and then turns south-west towards Bidford. Woodward described the setting as he revised his history in the 1930s: to the north “rises the wooded height of Binton Hill, while behind the village to the South lie Welford Hill and Cress Hill”. A rich alluvial soil and a mild climate, he went on, “make Welford a fruitful spot, and its many acres of orchard land contribute much to its beauty especially in Spring and Autumn” 19/30.

Cress Hill is the western end of that higher ground, where it runs out against the river below the mill. The Ordnance Survey six-inch map of 1903 shows it clearly. South-west of the village the Bidford road runs out between orchards, marked with the surveyors’ little tree symbols, and where it bends towards the river two labels sit on the bank: “Old Weir” and “Old Lock” 46/14. The County Land Agent’s plan of 1972, drawn on the 1905 twenty-five-inch survey, shows the same spot in detail: a triangular field, Ordnance Survey number 100, wedged between the road and the river, with the old lock at its western corner and the remains of the weir running out across the stream 06/12.



The hill on the 1903 six-inch map. Detail of the Society's copy of Gloucestershire sheet I S.E. The village and its orchards fill the loop of the river; at the lower left, where the road to Bidford meets the Avon, are "Old Weir" and "Old Lock". The upper lock is marked by the corn mill. 46/14

The road itself is younger than the hill. When Welford's open fields were enclosed under the award of about 1801, the commissioners laid out five public carriage roads, each forty feet wide. The first in the list was the "Bidford Road", "leading out of Welford from Boyce's Gate straight line Westward to Angle at South end of Briar Furlong, thence straight Westward to Pasture Gate at entrance to Barton". The second, the Braggington Road, left it "at turn near South end of Briar Furlong" and ran south to the Dorsington boundary; the third, Headland Road, came down from Church Lane "to Bidford Road at Cross Furlong" 20/04, 47/98. These are the roads that still meet at the foot of Cress Hill. The 1938 draft parish history in the archive says that old Welford people still called one of them "the New Road", though it was by then 138 years old 54/105. In 1849 an auctioneer described the hill as being "on the road leading from Welford to Barton" 11/30; in 1915 H. M. Woodward

wrote of “the road that leads over Cress (or Crest) Hill to Barton” 21/01–21; by the 1920s it was simply the Bidford road. By 1987, the electoral register treated “Cress Hill” as an address in its own right 30/05.

From the top there is a long view. Every writer who stood there mentions it. Garrett in 1906 thought it “one of the prettiest views to be anywhere obtained upon the river Avon” 11/33; the County Land Agent in 1972 wrote of “high ground with extensive views over the Avon Valley” 06/12; an estate agent in the 1950s sold a thatched cottage in the middle of the village partly on its “long prospect from the front to the slopes of Cress Hill” 11/30. The photograph at the head of this essay, taken in 1910, shows what they meant: the river curving away through meadows towards the mill and the village roofs, with orchard trees and the dark line of Binton Hill beyond 53/05.

The name Cress Butt, Cresshill, Crest Hill

The spelling has never settled. The parish council’s own papers of 1959 to 1961 use “Cress Hill”, “Cress hill” and “Cresshill” almost interchangeably, sometimes in the same letter, and the solicitors who conveyed the land called it “Land at Cresshill Farm” 57/02. The County Land Agent wrote “Cresshill” throughout his 1972 report, though his own plan is headed “Parish Council Field, Cress Hill” 06/12.

The earliest form in the archive is a field name. A 1969 analysis of Welford field names, compiled by a local history group from documents then at Manor Farm, the enclosure award and records at the Shakespeare Institute, lists among the old open-field furlongs and meadows a “Cress Butt” 08/12. A butt was a short strip of ploughland, often at the edge of a field where the furrows ran out against a slope or a boundary, and the name suggests that “Cress” belonged to a piece of the open fields before it belonged to the whole hill. The archive copy is a cleaned-up machine reading twice removed from the original sheets, so the form needs checking, but it fits. The County Surveyor’s field-name map in the same group of papers writes simply “Cress Hill” 08/20–29.

Visitors heard something different. J. H. Garrett, the Bristol headmaster whose boating book *The Idyllic Avon* came out in 1906, consistently wrote “Crest Hill”, and the Society kept two copies of his pages 11/33, 15/04. H. M. Woodward’s “Book of Gossip” of about 1915 hedges with “Cress (or Crest) Hill” 21/01–21, and the Society’s

own note on C. J. Woodward's 1931 speech identifies his "Cress Hill" with Garrett's "Crest Hill" 11/25. "Crest" is an easy mishearing of a local word, and it suits a hilltop, but it seems to be an outsider's version: no Welford document in the archive uses it.

Garrett also recorded the most cheerful piece of folk etymology in the whole archive. A villager told him that the hill took its name from a battle fought there, "though time had brought about a slight alteration in the name, for the battle was the Battle of Crécy!" Garrett could not resist:

From this it would appear that the writers of English history have fallen into error, and put the Black Prince to quite an unnecessary amount of travel, since it was at Welford that the Battle of Crécy was fought and the enemy so utterly routed!

J. H. Garrett, *The Idyllic Avon* (1906), pp. 200–201 11/33

Nothing in the archive explains the name seriously. Place-name scholars generally take "cress" in English names to come from Old English *cæurse*, watercress, which would suit springs on a hillside above a river; the 1924 sale of the cottages on the hill mentions a pump that served two houses, so water was there to be had 11/30. But that is general knowledge rather than anything the Society's papers say.

Nor do the papers connect the hill with the village's other "Cress" names. Cress Farm stands on the High Street, an old farmhouse "of various types of architecture from Elizabethan to Georgian", once the home of the Jacksons and Bromleys, once a beerhouse called the Holly Bush, and later the Welford branch of the Littleton and Badsey Growers 10/01. Cress House, where Mr and Mrs Kirk lived in 1950 and the Festival of Britain publicity committee met in 1951, is nearby 01/56, 55/01. Both are in the middle of the village, half a mile from the hill. It is tempting to think that Cress Farm once worked land on Cress Hill and so carried the name into the street, or the other way round; "old Billy Jackson" of Cress Farm built The Poplars at the corner of the Cress Hill road 19/26, 21/01–21. But nothing in the archive proves the connection.

From open field to orchard to 1849 and after

Before 1800 Welford farmed in the medieval way, in great open fields divided into furlongs and strips, with meadows by the river and common grazing. The 1969 field-name sheets record the

furlong names that survived in documents: Lower and Over Court Furlong, Town Meadow, Church Field, Upper and Lower Pool Dole, Middleborough Field, Colly Pit Furlong, Long Comb Furlong, Far Sands and Cress Butt, with notes such as "open field, strip cultivation" and "so much land allotted to each man for cattle" 08/12. The enclosure of about 1801 swept this away. Some 650 acres were divided among the proprietors, the new forty-foot roads were laid out, and the rector was given land instead of tithes 54/105, 47/98. The Society's 1967 history of the nineteenth century argues that before enclosure the typical Welford man was an independent cottager with three to six acres, "never 'cap touching'", and that by the end of the century almost every entry in the registers read "labourer" 40/01.

Enclosure created the hedged closes that later sale notices describe, and it was as one of these that Cress Hill first appears as property. On 11 April 1849 George Mann held an auction at the Bell Inn. His main lot was the Four Alls estate at Binton Bridges, with its toll bridges, wharf, fishery and islands, then occupied by the widow Lucy Mills. Lot 2 was something quite separate:

All that close of valuable Arable Land planted with Choice Fruit Trees called Cress Hill on the road leading from Welford to Barton...

Sale particulars, 11 April 1849, as copied into the Society's notebook of sale notices 11/30

The close measured 4 acres, 3 roods and 16 perches, and was described as "Arable & Orchard", with a land tax of 10s 7d a year. The bidding, pencilled on the original and copied by the Society's compiler, shows how much it was wanted. E. Parker opened at £350; a Mr Smith, J. Stanley and Parker pushed it up in fives to £410; a Mr Mansell bid £415. But the vendor's reserve was £470, and the lot was "bought in". The Four Alls itself, with its house, orchard, bridges and islands, sold the same day to Mr Stanley for £200, though that lot was burdened with a life interest, two mortgages and a legacy 11/30.

The contrast is striking. A hillside close of under five acres drew bids of more than £400 and still did not sell, while an inn, a toll bridge and nearly ten acres went for half that. The encumbrances on the Four Alls explain part of the difference, but not all of it. Fruit land near a village with a carrier trade to Birmingham was valuable. The 1938 draft parish history describes how Welford growers, with no market for fruit and vegetables at Stratford,

“started out from Welford in the evening and went as far as Henley-in-Arden where they stopped at The Bird-in-Hand till midnight”, and then went on to reach Birmingham market about five in the morning, so avoiding paying toll twice at the gate between Henley and the city 54/105, 20/01.

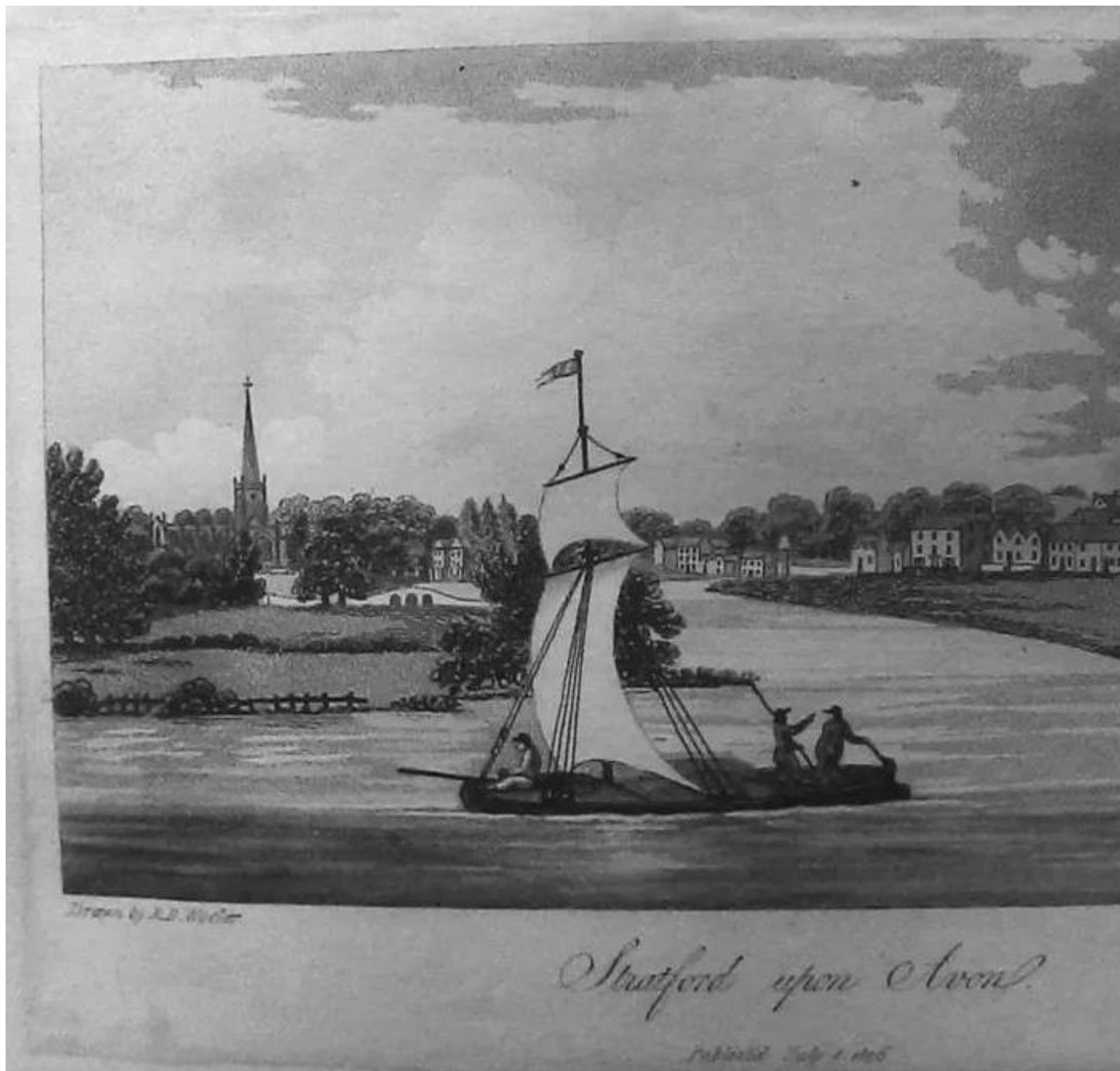
Fruit stayed the hill’s main crop for the next eighty years. When Garrett climbed up from the river in the early 1900s he saw “large plantations of cherry and plum trees in the scene” and sheep grazing the rough pasture of the slope 11/33. Arthur Matthews, son of the village blacksmiths, told the Society that “Cress Hill to the church” was “all a fruit orchard — plums, apples, damsons, few cherries” 08/04. The Society’s notes on horticulture described the land “from Cress Hill to the church & to Headland Road” as “orchard & market garden”, with the orchards “planted by Mr Hawkins” 08/07. The 1924 sale on the Bidford road offered a field “planted with choice Plum and Apple Trees” at the foot of the hill 11/30, and the 1972 plan still shows the parcel next to the parish field as orchard 06/12. Gilda Gray, writing to a fellow Society member in 1977, remembered being told that before the First World War Welford was “the choicest market-garden growing village”, its saladings three weeks ahead of the Vale of Evesham 08/03.

In the same letter Mrs Gray mentioned a watercolour by Barbara Kaufmann, hanging in the house of the late David Careless, of a field she thought “the epitome of old Welford — the lavender blue atmosphere I considered remarkable — to me it was Welford”. The copyist read the field’s name as “Quisstill Field” 08/03. The Society’s commentary suggests that this may be a misreading of “Cress Hill Field”. If so, the archive records a painting of the hill that it does not hold.

The navigation 1630s – 1870s

The river at the foot of the hill was, for more than two centuries, a highway. William Sandys of Ombersley and Fladbury was granted letters patent by Charles I in the 1630s to “make the Avon passable by boats of reasonable burthen from Severn... unto or near the city of Coventry”. His engineer, William Say, built locks and weirs, and within a few years barges were reaching Stratford 52/09. The Upper Avon Navigation Trust’s 1968 summary puts the date at 1630 and says the river was divided in 1664 into the Lower Avon, from Tewkesbury to Evesham, and the Upper Avon, from Evesham to Stratford 06/13.

The traffic was heavy. A 1751 Act fixed rates for carrying goods between Worcester and Stratford: two shillings and fourpence a ton for "Wine, Cyder, Merchants goods of every kind", one shilling and eightpence a wey for wheat, barley, malt, beans and peas, sixpence a ton for iron, brick, stone and timber, one shilling and sixpence a ton for coal. In the 1700s there were about four hundred barges on the Avon, most carrying around thirty tons, some forty or fifty. Daniel Defoe noted in 1725 that by the river "they drive a very great trade for sugar, oil, wine, tobacco... iron and, in a word, all heavy goods", and took back corn and cheese 52/09.



An Avon barge under sail, 1806. "Stratford upon Avon", an engraving published in July

1806, used by the Society to illustrate the kind of flat-bottomed, single-masted craft that worked past Welford. 52/16

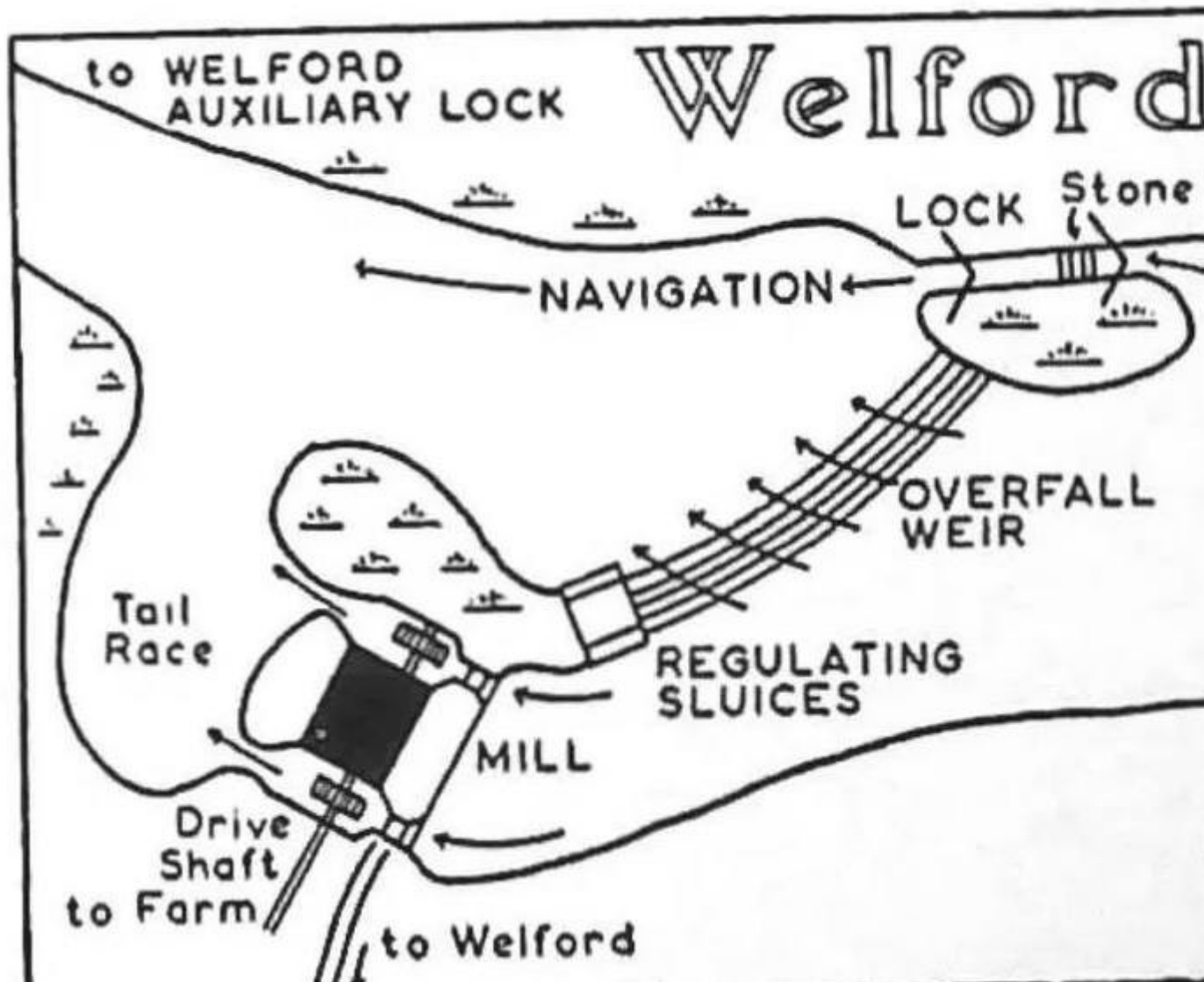
Most of those boats did not sail up the river. On the Avon, unlike a canal, they were not drawn by horses but by teams of men called bow-hauliers, harnessed to a loop of rope tied to the top of the mast so that the line cleared the bankside trees. A book of 1845 quoted in the Society's river talk described "five or six strong men... tugging laboriously — it is a painful sight to see these men dragging their barge along this river". Farmers disliked them crossing their land; on other waterways they had a reputation for stealing hens, geese, eggs and firewood 52/09.

There was no continuous towpath. H. M. Woodward explained in a letter on bow-hauling that the path changed banks wherever the river or buildings required. Above the lock at Cress Hill it ran on the right bank to Black Cliff, crossed to the Gloucestershire side, and crossed back at Green Hill near the Binton bathing-place. It was never a public footpath, and it does not appear in the Welford enclosure award as a right of way would have done; in Micham meadow its track could still be traced as a low mound 20/01. The 1938 parish history adds that the haulers "followed the river bank till they stopped with their boats, and pushed across the river to continue on the other side... there is probably no one alive now who could point out all the old crossing places" 54/105.

Welford had wharves at the foot of Boat Lane, where coal was landed and the Bear, later the Boat Inn, served the boatmen. The old house "was an Inn where the bargemen used to assemble, and it was sometimes a very rough place" 54/105, 52/09. Steam came late and briefly: the steam barge *Bee*, serving Lucy's mill at Stratford and able to tow three barges, appeared in 1862, and by 1873 she was the only craft still trading on the Upper Avon 52/09.

The lock below the hill New Lock, Lower Lock, Cress Hill Lock

Welford had two locks. The upper one stood at the mill, on the far side of the weir from the village. Charles Hadfield and John Norris, surveying the river for *Waterways to Stratford* in the 1960s, described it as rectangular, of local lias laid dry, 57 feet by about 13, with a lift of 6 feet 4 inches. Their sketch plan of it survives in the archive, with an arrow pointing downstream "to Welford Auxiliary Lock" 52/48.



Welford upper lock and mill, from Hadfield and Norris. The arrow at top left, "to Welford Auxiliary Lock", points downstream towards the lower lock under Cress Hill. North is to the right. 52/48

The lower lock, which the navigation called Welford New Lock, was about half a mile downstream, on the left bank, directly under Cress Hill. Hadfield and Norris give the only measurements the archive has. The chamber had been about 60 feet long and 12 feet wide, built of local lias, with a lift of only 1 foot 9 inches; it probably had double head and tail gates with balance beams. The four main gate head stones still marked the chamber, with their quoin grooves, and on the lower ones the hinge-strap anchor brackets and one iron hinge strap were still in place. The overfall weir had gone. They told readers to reach it along the riverside path "into a meadow high above the river, which makes a wide bend westwards", or to "walk down across the meadow from the Bidford

road out of Welford village" 52/48. That meadow is the field the parish now owns.

A lift of under two feet is very small. A lock like this was not there to climb a hill but to hold up the water below the mill weir so that loaded barges did not ground in the shallows; Garrett noticed that after its destruction "the water is but shallow in this part of the river" and rushes were spreading 11/33. The names reflect its history: "New Lock" because it was added after the original works, "Lower Lock" in Garrett's book, "Auxiliary Lock" on Hadfield's plan, and the 1968 restoration scheme's "Lower Welford" 11/33, 52/48, 06/13.

To people in the village it simply belonged to the hill. One of the Society's nineteenth-century histories says that "40-ton barges were hauled by men from Cress Hill Lock" 40/01. The 1938 draft history notes that "remains of old locks can still be seen at Cress Hill, Weston and Luddingtons" 54/105.

Two memories bring the working lock to life. John Wilson, the Black Country orphan who became Welford's carrier and the founder of the Virginia Cottage family, came to the village as a boy around 1841 to live with his grandparents. He came by water: in his family's words, "The Avon was then navigable to commercial traffic and he landed at Cress Hill where there then was a weir and lock gates" 33/42-46, 44/01-41. And C. J. Woodward, opening the Society's "Life in Welford" exhibition in 1931 at the age of 93, looked back to the 1840s:

He recollected going to the top of Cress Hill, to watch the River below. The coal boats, and occasionally a barge go through the Locks, on their way to Stratford.

Report of C. J. Woodward's speech, *Stratford Journal*, 1931 11/25

Woodward, a retired principal of the Birmingham Midland Institute and uncle of the Society's founders H. M. and N. F. Woodward, also remembered strolling players in Jackson's Barn at the Wake, and the old square pews and two-decker pulpit of the church 11/25. His glimpse of coal boats from the hilltop is the last eyewitness account of the lock at work.

The railway and the ruin 1859 – 1877

The railway ended all this. The Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway gained control of the Upper Avon in 1859, and through it the Great Western. Once the branch line from Honeybourne to Stratford was open, the company had every reason to let the river decline. It practically stopped traffic above Evesham, and by 1873 the state of the Welford locks was a scandal. The upper lock's gates had to be forced open; the lower one, "Welford new lock (below Cress Hill)", was described as

useless and broken, part of it being swept away, the remainder hanging on desolate and weary.

Report of 1873, quoted in the Society's river talk 52/09

In June 1875 the GWR directors resolved to stop taking tolls. Their right to abandon maintenance was challenged, but the Railway Commissioners confirmed it in 1877, and the Upper Avon was left to decay 52/09, 06/13. The wharves at Boat Lane fell out of use; the Boat Inn burned down in 1885 and became a private house 52/09. Garrett, a generation later, still blamed the railway: the company had bought the navigation "in order to abolish the competition of water-carriage with the railway" and "deliberately allowed it to fall into decay, costly as it had been to construct" 11/33.

A picnic place for Bidford trippers 1900 – 1950s

The ruin made Cress Hill a destination. Garrett's chapter on Welford is the best description of the hill in the archive, and it deserves to be quoted at length. He and his companions had rowed up from Bidford, lost their lunch chicken overboard under the willows below Hillborough, and come to "Welford lower lock":

The lock is broken down and, together with the weir, makes quite a picturesque ruin. It was built in a substantial way of large blocks of grey stone, and many of these are upheaved and scattered, and it is a matter of great wonderment how the structure could have been reduced to so utter a ruin... We leave our boat in the old lock and climb the steep bank of the field adjacent. It is a fine, wild bank, partly covered with bushes, and the hill of which this field is one side is called Crest Hill. The gate of this pleasant bushy and banky field leads from the road which comes up from Welford on to Crest Hill, and from this gate one of the prettiest views to be anywhere obtained upon the river Avon presents itself.

J. H. Garrett, *The Idyllic Avon* (1906), pp. 198–199 11/33

The view, he said, was “too wide and panoramic for representation in a picture”. The Avon came down “meandering through green meads, from where the mill and some of the houses of Welford are visible amongst the trees a mile away”; there were “large plantations of cherry and plum trees”, Binton Hill “looking very dark with its woody covering” behind, and in the foreground “the steep slope of the rough pasture, which has sheep grazing upon it” 11/33. The 1910 photograph at the head of this essay was taken from very nearly the same spot.

Garrett added a picture of how the place was used:

The broken-down lock and weir and this lovely river-side hill are commonly the end object of boating parties, and on Saturday and Sunday afternoons a good many of the Bidford trippers get as far as this in their boats, and sit about upon the great stones of the lock or upon the neighbouring green banks. At other times it is a quiet and serene spot left to the sheep with, perhaps, a solitary fisherman standing or sitting upon a stone and dangling his line into the deeper water.

Garrett, p. 199 11/33

Boats going further had to be hauled over the stones of the lower lock and then lifted out again at the mill, where the upper lock was “also out of use” 11/33. Later in the book Garrett walked inland, going “up Crest Hill past that gate whence you get the fine view of the Avon, and through the village of Dorsington to get to Pebworth” 11/33. The Society marked these pages in pencil for reading aloud at its meetings, and they evidently remained a favourite.



"The Old Lock at Cress Hill, Welford-on-Avon." An "Adona" real-photo postcard, no. 1332, posted from Welford by "Alfie" to his mother in Clevedon with a George V stamp, so between about 1912 and the mid-1930s. The fallen lias blocks and paving match Garrett's description. 52/88

Commercial photographers came too. The postcard above, captioned on its face "The Old Lock at Cress Hill", shows exactly Garrett's scene: big dressed blocks tumbled into the water, stone paving and coping along the bank, reeds growing between them and meadow beyond 52/88. The 1910 view from the hill was another commercial card, printed as "River View, Welford-on-Avon" 53/05. Welford in these years was a summer resort. Garrett heard that the village took up to fifty lodgers in August 11/33, and Gilda

Gray recalled the women of the 1920s letting rooms to as many as a hundred summer visitors 03/04.

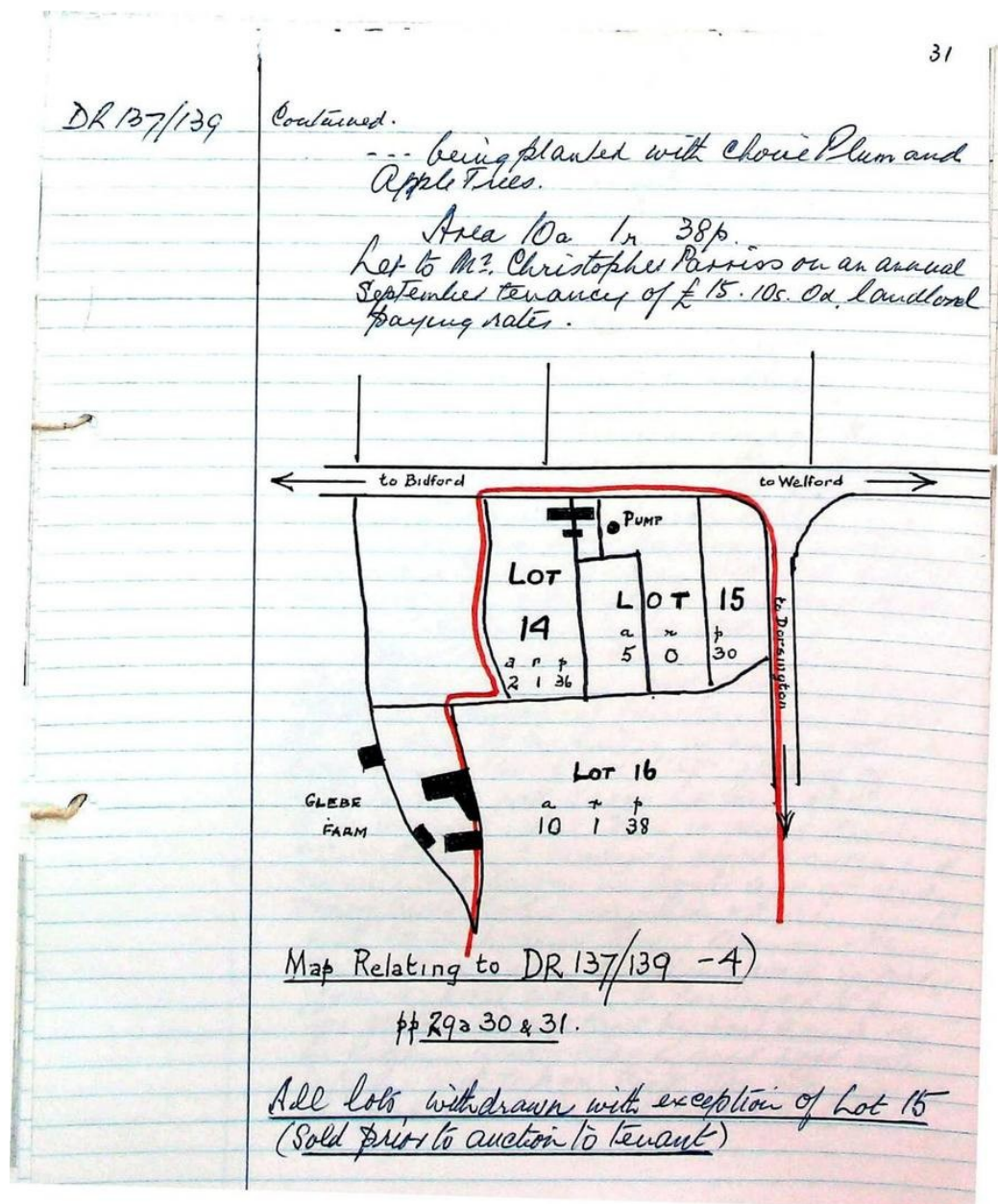
Visitors remembered the hill long afterwards. Phyllis Eastgate, writing at the age of 96 in 1994 about summers in Welford between about 1905 and 1914, listed the mill with its wheel, weir and eel trap, the houses they lodged in near the Bell and opposite the school, and added: "Cress Hill we liked too" 36/01. A woman whose parents came to Welford in 1929 recalled walks as a child with Rose Blundell, "down Boat Lane, across the paddock which belonged to Boat Cottage, through the mill farmyard and along the osier beds to Cress Hill" 49/01. That riverside route matters later in the story, because it was exactly the access the village would one day find blocked.

Houses on the hill road 1900s – 1980s

The road over the hill gathered its own small community, and the archive catches its people at odd moments. At the village end, H. M. Woodward noted around 1915 that "The Poplars", a house "at the corner of the road that leads over Cress (or Crest) Hill to Barton", on the south side of the Barton road, had been built by "old Billy Jackson", the Welford worthy whose tombstone in the north-west corner of the churchyard showed a shepherd in a smocked frock with his crook, his dog and grazing sheep 21/01–21, 19/26. In 1906 Woodward recorded that old Mrs Marshall, "commonly believed to be a witch" and said to have been shot at in the form of a hare and found nursing her leg, had lived in a cottage "at the corner of the Cress Hill road; Broad lives there now" 21/22–66.

On 25 May 1920 Kibler Morgan auctioned the contents of Cress Hill House on the premises: 84 lots of furniture, bedding and "various agricultural pieces". The compiler of the sale notebook found no record of the proceeds, and the archive does not say who had lived there 11/30.

Four years later the hill was being sold off in pieces. On 15 March 1924 Edwards, Son & Bigwood held a sale at The Bungalow, Headland Road. Lots 1 to 13 were building plots and new rough-cast bungalows on the Bidford and Headland roads, "charming sites for moderate sized residences or week-end cottages". Lots 14 to 16 were on Cress Hill itself 11/30.



The 1924

Cress Hill lots. The Society compiler's copy of the sale plan: Lot 14 (Hill Crest), Lot 15 (Avon View) and Lot 16 (orchard) on the south side of the Bidford road, with the shared pump, the lane to Dorsington and Glebe Farm. The note reads "All lots withdrawn with exception of Lot 15 (Sold prior to auction to tenant)". 11/30

Lot 14 was "Freehold Property with view of River Avon known as Hill Crest, Cress Hill": a brick and slated cottage with an entrance lobby, a living room and kitchen each with a range, a pantry and three bedrooms, a small paved yard, outbuildings and 2 acres 1 rood 26 perches of garden and pasture, with vacant possession. Lot 15, "the adjoining Freehold Small Holding known as Avon View, Cress Hill", was a similar cottage with five acres of pasture and arable fronting both the Bidford road and the Dorsington road, let to Mr R. Rushton at £20 8s a year. Water for both came from a pump in the Avon View enclosure. Lot 16 was ten acres of "Old Turf

Land... planted with choice Plum and Apple Trees", let to Christopher Parriss of the village stores at £15 10s. Everything was withdrawn except Avon View, which Rushton had bought privately before the auction 11/30.

The Rushtons stayed on the hill for decades. A memoir of village life in the 1930s and 1940s describes how "Mr Rushton kept 2 cows in a field on the Barton side of Cress Hill and he cycled round the village with two milk cans on the handlebars; knocking on the kitchen window he filled jugs straight from the churn". He was still doing it during the Second World War, until bottled TT milk came from the village shop; the writer remembered a medical student friend "horrified to discover how her rather warm milk had been delivered" 49/21. The house survey of about 1960 lists "Mr Rushton, Cress Hill Farm", an agricultural holding 20/06. A Gwen Rushton later gave the field for the churchyard extension and money towards the church bells 29/28, though the archive does not say how she was related.

The fullest picture of farming on Cress Hill comes from Mr Lively, born in 1899 and interviewed by the Society in the 1970s. In September 1932 he took 7½ acres "on Cress Hill which runs from the Whynes to Zara House & back to Hunt Hall Farm", renting from Mr Harold Hawkins, "who also built Zara House". He and his brother dug the whole of it by hand with a two-tined fork, working until eleven at night; it took them seven weeks, and then they hired a caterpillar tractor to break it down. They grew asparagus of the varieties Connover's Colossal and Late Giant Mammoth, in beds three feet by six. A bed took three years before it could be cut and then lasted sixteen. At the peak there were 3½ acres of asparagus, with other crops between the rows and cereals on the rest. From about 1948 he kept pigs on a further 3½ acres, in a shed behind the spinney, selling them as stores at eight weeks or as porkers at fourteen at Stratford market. His produce went to Messrs Daniels in the Birmingham vegetable market on Mr Wilson's motor lorry 08/05, 08/07. It is the most detailed account of a working smallholding anywhere in the archive.

Other names cluster round the hill in the middle of the century. Bernard Harris remembered evacuees from Birmingham sharing the school and the Memorial Hall with village children in turns, and watching the fires and searchlights of the worst night of the Coventry blitz "from a bedroom at (now) Zaria on Cress Hill", which is probably Harold Hawkins's Zara House 36/13. In the war the Serjeantsons, who lived in "the first house on the left on Bidford Road going towards Cress Hill", turned their kitchen into a jam

factory each summer, with local women making hundreds of pounds of jam for the ration 49/02. The 1950 register of "People in Welford" has Mr and Mrs Jack Ayer at Cress Hill 01/56.

When Welford and Weston came to spend the surplus from their 1953 Coronation celebrations, the committee chose to put up two roadside seats, one at Weston Turn on the Milcote road and one on Cress Hill. Bob Wright, the Parish Clerk, wrote to the county's divisional surveyor and the Rural District Council in May 1954; the RDC agreed to maintain both seats, a site meeting was held on the evening of Thursday 3 June, the county approved in late June and laid hard standings, and on 21 May 1955 Wright reported that both seats were in position 55/05. Whether the Cress Hill seat survives, the archive does not say.

In the 1957 river carnival, held in a meadow upstream of the village, second prize in the raft race went to "Mayflower III", entered by Mr E. J. Winter of Cress Hill 01/18. Bernard Wilkes, a pig farmer and market gardener who made cider as a hobby, kept "the Veg Shed at bottom of Cress Hill" 29/28. John Wilson, who had landed at the lock as a boy, ended up owning a house there called Cress Hill View, and the Booth family ledger records paying the tithe redemption on it 44/01-41, 31/01. A 1932 will left "about three acres known as Hare Pits and situate in Cress Road" to Edgar Mills Davis 42/29.

By the 1987 electoral register "Cress Hill" had its own heading, with Greenacres (Michael Eynon, who had kept the Four Alls a decade earlier, and the Gossages), Hillcrest (the Hands family), Home Farm (the Sellars) and Cress Hill Farm (John and Jean Taylor); on Barton Road was a house called Cress Hill View 30/05. Hillcrest is very likely the Hill Crest of 1924.

The county's field to 1959

The cottages and smallholdings were on the south side of the road. The field on the river side, with the old lock at its corner, had a different history. By the 1950s it belonged to Gloucestershire County Council, a leftover of the years when Welford was in Gloucestershire. The parish moved to Warwickshire only in 1931, and Woodward's revisions to his history, changing "the Gloucestershire bank of the river" to "what was till 1931 the Gloucestershire bank", show how recent that felt 19/30.

How the county came to own the field is not recorded. Gilda Gray, writing in 1974 about Welford fifty years earlier, remembered that when the Milcote estate was sold after the First World War, "Gloucestershire County Council had bought certain fields for smallholdings for the returned village war heroes" 03/04. The 1960 conveyance calls the land part of "Cresshill Farm" 57/02, and the house survey of about 1960 has Mr Rushton at Cress Hill Farm 20/06. It is a reasonable guess, though only a guess, that the field was part of a county smallholding. The county certainly owned other land in the village: in the 1930s it repeatedly refused to sell the Trust a plot behind Cross Farm, and in 1982 the Parish Council was renting a playing field on the Barton road from Gloucestershire County Council 60/01.

Twenty-five years looking for a field 1934 – 1959

The body that bought Cress Hill had been formed for a quite different purpose. In 1934, after two public meetings in the Memorial Hall, the village adopted a scheme drawn up by H. M. Woodward to make sure that money raised by fêtes went only to things "of permanent value to the Village". The Welford-on-Avon Trust, set up by an agreement of 14 November 1934, was to spend at least three-quarters of its money on land for a children's playing field and riverside or pleasure grounds, with the rest divisible between the church, the Methodists, the Memorial Hall and the hospitals fund. Its first trustees were Captain Walter Dingley, H. M. Woodward, A. T. H. Montague, Edgar Mills Davis, V. E. Mainwaring, H. C. Setten and Miss Cathleen Boraston. Ralph Webb presented a silver challenge cup for the horse sports, and the trustees went on listing it among their assets for fifty years 60/01, 57/04, 57/06–15.

The minute book is, in the words of the Society's summary, "a study in frustration". The trustees looked at Keyter Close and rejected it. They tried for two acres behind Cross Farm, which Gloucestershire County Council declined to sell, again and again, despite appeals to the local MP. Fool's Close had no approach road. Mr Bluck would not sell. A site of Mrs Meinhardt's was agreed at £300 in 1938 and fell through in 1939. Then the war came, the fêtes stopped, and the money went into savings certificates and defence bonds. It grew slowly, to £678 by 1945 and £865 by 1954, while the founders died one by one 60/01.

After the war the search resumed. In 1948 the Parish Council looked to the Trust for a playing field 58/07. In 1956 a piece of land in the Knap was offered at £400, accepted, and then dropped. The Bidston allotments were offered at £100, but at a meeting in April 1957 one of the allotment holders, Councillor G. Edgington, warned that if the trustees went ahead the tenants would petition the Ministry of Agriculture, and they backed off. In the end the county bought 1.515 acres of the allotments for the school, on condition that the school field also served as a village children's playing field 60/01, 59/10. By 1959 the Trust had money, a deed and a quarter of a century of disappointments.

“A chance too good to be missed” 1959 – 1961

The turning point in Cress Hill's history is documented almost day by day, because the Trust kept carbon copies of everything 57/02, 58/06, 60/01.

The central figure is Gilda Gray, wife of the Rector, the Rev. K. A. Gray. She was a forceful presence in mid-century Welford: a long-serving parish councillor, a historian of the Women's Institute, and later the author of many of the house histories and talks in the Society's archive 03/01–19, 21/52–66. In 1959 she was chairman of the Parish Council. That September news reached her that someone was making enquiries about buying Cress Hill “for a commercial enterprise”. The archive never says what the enterprise was. The council asked her to approach Gloucestershire County Council unofficially, and the county's Land Agent said the council would sell the field to the parish for £100. On 26 November she wrote from the Rectory to Alderman Walter Dingley, chairman of the Trust:

In September last information reached me that enquiries were being made about the purchase of Cress Hill for a commercial enterprise... they requested me as chairman to make unofficial inquiries to the Gloucestershire County Council asking if they were selling the field, and if they were, if they would give the Parish Council the first refusal, so that the field could be preserved in its natural beauty... It has been suggested that the Village Playing Field Trust money could be used for this purpose as the field is a favourite with village children giving safe access to the river... I think you will agree that this is a chance too good to be missed — so little of Welford's natural beauty remains.

Mrs Gilda Gray to Alderman W. L. Dingley, 26 November 1959 57/02

Her council met on Thursday 3 December, so she needed an answer quickly. The trustees met at Dingley's house, Whitegates, at seven on the evening of Tuesday 1 December, with Edgar Davis, Jack Garner, A. J. Montague and the secretary R. E. (Bob) Wright; Miss Mabel Basson sent apologies. They first noted the death of H. C. Setten, a founder trustee. Then:

Cresshill. The chairman reported that he had received a letter from Mrs G. Gray, chairman of the Parish Council, stating that Cress Hill field — some five acres in extent — had been offered for sale by the Gloucestershire County Council to the Welford-on-Avon Parish Council for the sum of £100... It was unanimously agreed that Trust Fund money should be made available provided the field was retained as an open space and preserved in its natural beauty.

Trustees' minutes, 1 December 1959 60/01

The letter to Mrs Gray the next day put it more warmly, saying that the trustees would provide the money "in order to preserve it for the village in its natural state". On 8 December the Parish Council sent its thanks: "The action of the trustees is very much appreciated" 57/02.

The legal work took longer. On 13 May 1960 G. F. Lodder & Sons of 50 Henley Street, Stratford, wrote to Dingley about the "Land at Cresshill Farm, Welford on Avon". Mrs Gray had telephoned in the absence of Mr J. M. Lodder; Mr Wright was "indisposed"; the title was registered at the Land Registry; a transfer was being prepared for the council to sign; and completion was fixed for 24 May. Their statement listed the £100 price, £6 6s for their own charges in obtaining copies of the register, drawing the transfer, making searches and getting councillors' signatures, £1 8s in search fees and 4s for registration: £107 18s in all 57/02.

Dingley paid on 23 June 1960, sending £102 3s 9d in cash and a cheque for £5 14s 3d, and asked the solicitors to tell him "as soon as this land becomes vested in Welford-on-Avon Parish Council". The same day he told Bob Wright that the land had been paid for 57/02. A largely illegible note on Rectory paper, with sums for posts at 7s 6d and 8s, shows Mrs Gray already working out the cost of fencing 57/02.

The field needed putting in order, and in particular a sound boundary along the road. In January 1961 Bob Wright, by now Clerk to the Parish Council, forwarded the bills, saying that "Mrs. Gray has been in touch with you about this". Dingley paid them on

1 March, twelve five-pound notes and the rest in cash, “in complete and final settlement in respect of the purchase and work done”. The Trust’s minute book gives the details: £49 16s to Tom Hawkins for labour and nails for fencing, and £22 4s 10d to Peter Hartwell, timber merchant of Weston-sub-Edge, for gates, posts and pales, £72 0s 10d in total 60/01.

For the rest of the Trust’s life, every statement of its accounts carried those two lines at the foot: “Land Cress Hill” and “Clearing Fencing Etc”. They were the only substantial spending it made in its first thirty-six years 57/06–15.

Open space or playing field?

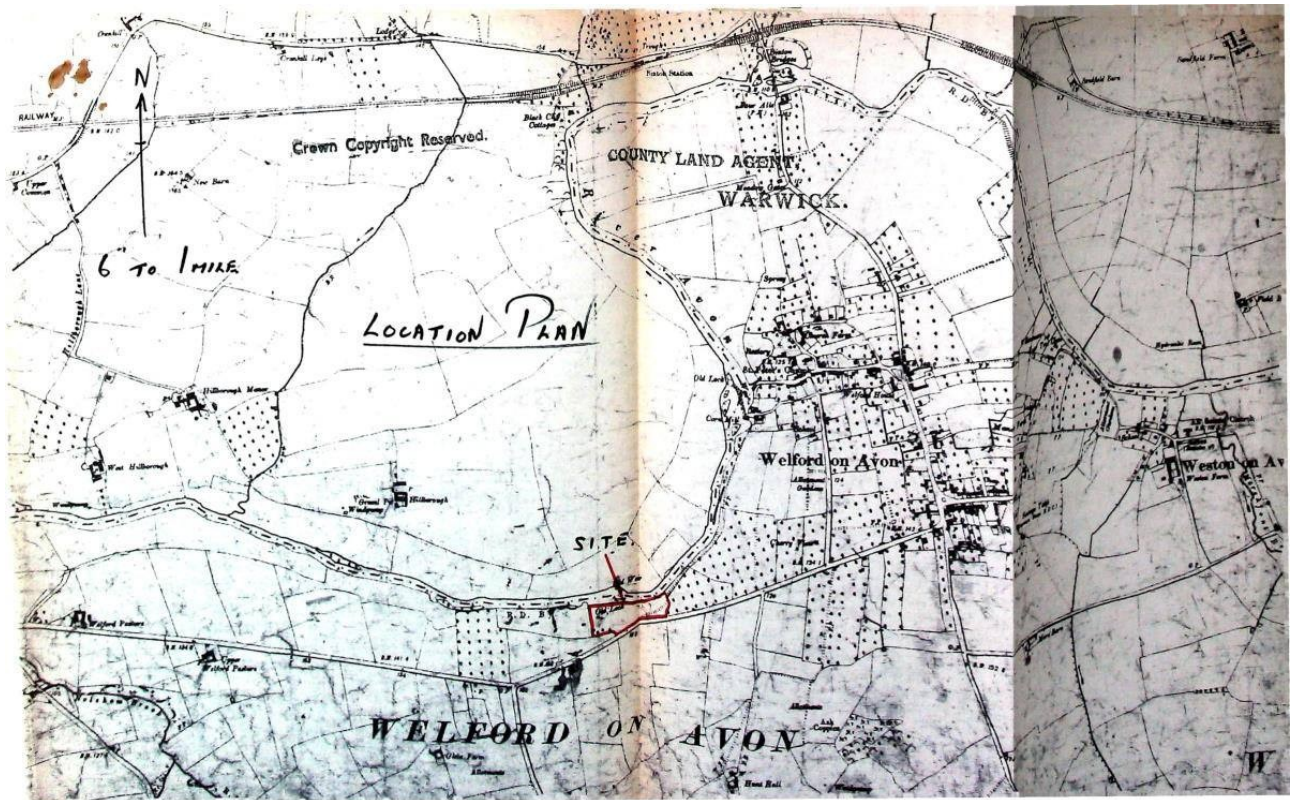
The purchase solved one problem and exposed another. Cress Hill was not a playing field, and the Trust’s deed said its first object was a playing field. The trustees had also given the money to the Parish Council outright, rather than buying the land in their own names, which kept within the deed’s rules but left the field’s status unclear 57/06–15.

The question came up when the Trust applied to register as a charity under the Charities Act 1960. In 1968 D. L. Jaques of the Charity Commission asked, among other things, who owned the land at Cress Hill. Wright and Dingley replied that the Parish Council owned it, the trustees having found the money. When the Fund was registered on 12 August 1968 as charity no. 254926, the Commission’s N. P. Morris observed that Cress Hill should strictly have been conveyed to the Parish Council on the trusts of the 1934 agreement, not free of trust, and that the council ought to register it with the Department of Education and Science as a recreational charity 57/14. Nothing in the archive shows whether that was done.

The village itself seemed untroubled. At a public meeting in the school on 13 March 1968, Dingley told eleven villagers that Cress Hill had been bought and fenced with Trust money, and that the trustees had worked with the allotment trustees to get land beside the school for children to use out of hours. The minutes record: “The question of using Trust funds for the purchase of Cress Hill field was raised. It was generally thought that this had been an acquisition to the village and a wise purchase” 60/01.

The Trust lasted another seventeen years. Its remaining money, £3,142, finally went in January 1985 towards the eight acres of the Cinder Meadow, bought by the Parish Council for £18,000 as a

playing field. Bob Wright closed the minute book with a list of the posts he had held since 1934, ending “Chief Mourner”, and the words “Fund at Peace at last. Deo gratias!” 60/01. Cress Hill was its first and, until the very end, its only land.



Location plan, 1972. The County Land Agent’s six-inch plan, with the parish field edged in red where the Bidford road meets the river, south-west of the village. The orchard symbols that covered much of Welford are still marked. 06/12

The river comes back 1964 – 1974

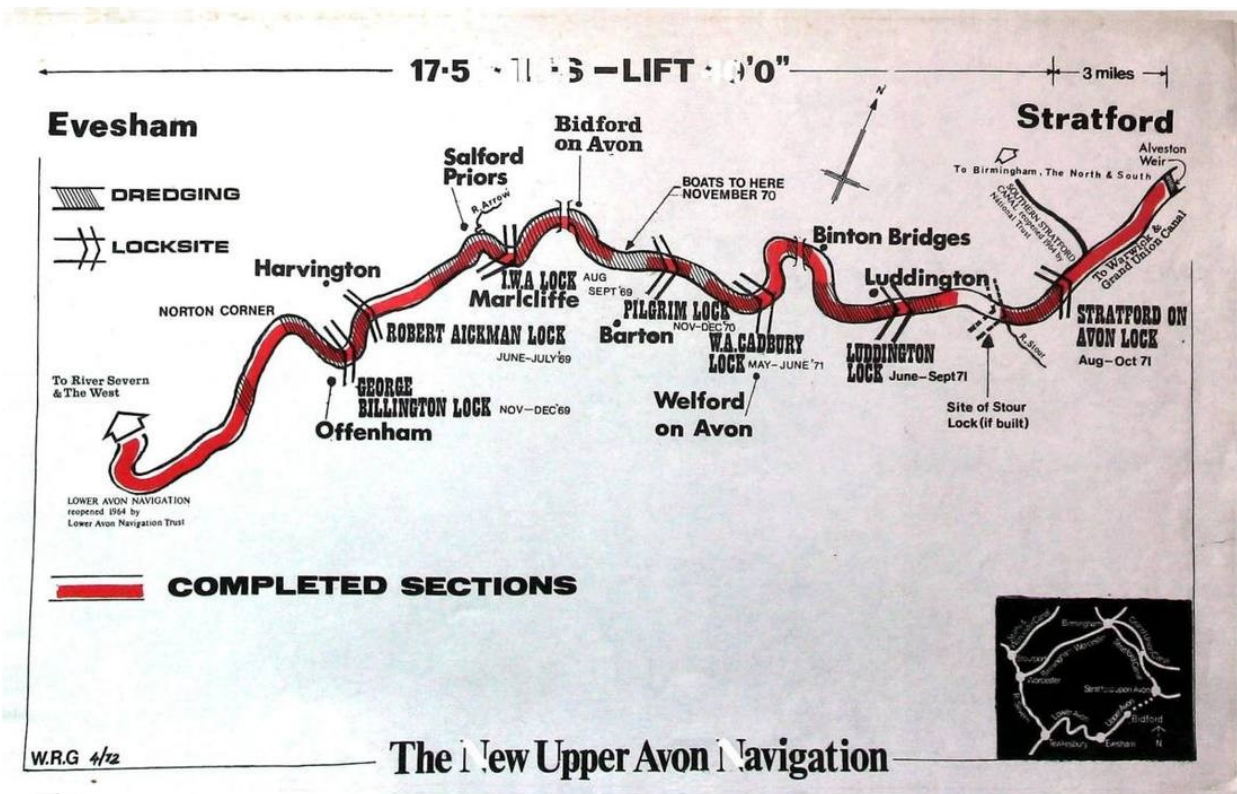
Within ten years of the purchase the river below the field came back to life. The Lower Avon had been restored by 1964 and the Stratford Canal reopened by the National Trust the same year, leaving the Upper Avon as the one missing link in a circuit of waterways joining Stratford, Birmingham, Worcester and Tewkesbury. In 1965 a committee of the Inland Waterways Association became the Upper Avon Navigation Trust, a charity chaired by Sir Fordham Flower. In 1968, at the request of the Severn River Authority, it published an outline scheme, drawn up by David Hutchings, Major C. B. Grundy and Robert Aickman 06/13.

The scheme proposed “a virtually new navigation” at lower water levels than the old one, with heavy dredging and a series of new locks, at a cost of £250,000 to £300,000. Only four of the old weirs survived, including Welford’s at the mill. Its table of works listed

two sites at Welford: Upper Welford, using the existing weir and lock site at the mill, with a lift of 5½ feet, and Lower Welford, with a new weir at the existing lock site under Cress Hill and a lift of 3 feet 06/13.

For a few months in 1970 it looked as though the new lower lock might be built on the parish's own land. On 2 November David Hutchings wrote to H. W. Passmore of the Parish Council. The Trust had wanted to move the lock from the northern bank, Mr Muscott's land, to the southern bank, the parish field, because there "we should occupy land which was probably of the least agricultural value", boats would have easier approaches without turning sharply across the current, and there would be less spoil to dig out. A site meeting with the council had been arranged for the following Saturday. But the Severn River Authority's engineer insisted that the promontory jutting from the north bank above the old lock be removed whichever bank was used, which took away one of the main advantages, and Hutchings asked the council to cancel the meeting. If the lock went on the north bank, he added, the Trust would still need about 200 square yards of the council's field, "about 15'0" x 15'0\"", to anchor the weir, and the structure could be underground if the council wished 06/16.

In the end neither plan was built. In June 1971 the *Herald* reported that the Trust had scoured the riverbed nearly nine feet below water level at Welford, which had "levelled-off" the river so that there was "no longer a need for the weir and lock at Lower Welford". One new lock between Welford and Bidford, the Pilgrim Lock, would do the work of three. Hutchings himself was uneasy: "We are lowering the river between its banks — we could be taking out the river's foundations" 13/17. The new lock at Welford, the W. A. Cadbury Lock, was built at the mill site in May and June 1971, much of the work done by volunteers, Army units and prisoners 06/18. The ruins under Cress Hill were left where they were.



"The New Upper Avon Navigation", April 1972. The Waterway Recovery Group's chart from the papers of Mr Holman, with completed sections in red: Pilgrim Lock at Barton (November–December 1970), the W. A. Cadbury Lock at Welford (May–June 1971), Luddington and Stratford. No lower lock at Welford appears. 06/18

Warwickshire County Council expected a "surge of interest" once boats reached Stratford, and in March 1972 its draft Upper Avon Policy Plan proposed boating centres at Bidford and Welford. Welford, it decided, was too "fragile" for one in the village itself, and suggested Binton Bridges instead, with limited moorings in the old mill basin; a reader of the council's copy wrote a large "No" beside the moorings 06/18. The new navigation opened to Bidford at Easter 1971, boats reached Stratford in 1972, and the Queen formally reopened the Upper Avon on 1 June 1974 06/18, 52/59.

The Land Agent's report 1972 – 1973

The Parish Council, meanwhile, had a field it was not sure what to do with. In 1968 the county's review of public footpaths had proposed a new description for path SD 26c: "From the top of Cress Hill north-eastwards across Parish Field over stile to the left bank of River Avon joining footpath No. SD 26a. Padded track 2 ft. – 4 ft. wide" 12/03. The field was walked, but it was not managed. In February 1972 the council received a report from C. G. Birt, the County Land Agent at Warwick. It began with a striking claim:

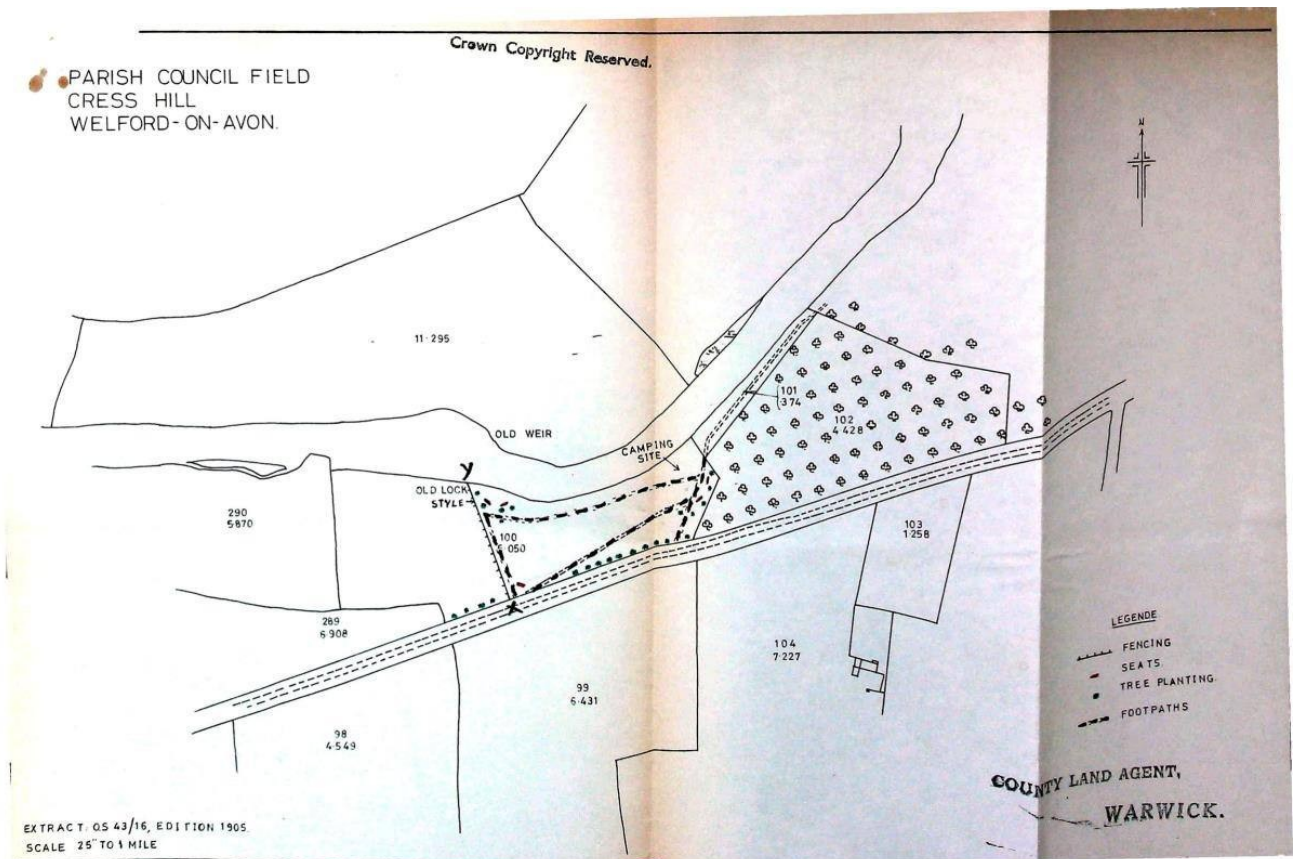
Cresshill, owned by the Parish Council for the benefit of the people of Welford-on-Avon, stands on high ground with extensive views over the Avon Valley. It is unique in Warwickshire having frontage to the River Avon which is now navigable.

C. G. Birt, County Land Agent, 9 February 1972 (the last phrase underlined in the copy) 06/12

The report was frank about the state of the field. Much of it had become overgrown with thorn bushes and was “not fully accessible for local people and the general public”, and thistles had “gained a firm control of the western half”, so that complaints from neighbouring landowners “could be expected”. It had “considerable potential” for leisure viewing, camping, picnicking, fishing and cattle grazing 06/12.

Birt proposed five pieces of work, to be phased over several years. Paths and rides should be opened up through the bushes. Earth steps, held with timber boards and pegs, should be cut down the hill from the main entrance to the old lock, to make a circular walk. Simple seats of elm or oak planks on two uprights, “inexpensive, and blends into the countryside”, should be set at the best viewpoints. Trees should be planted, because “elm disease has affected the elm growing in the locality” and 1973 was to be “Plant a Tree Year”: oak, Norway maple, silver birch and willow, with school children and the Youth Club encouraged to take part. And a post and rail fence should act as a hand rail for the footpath and contain stock, with a stile or kissing gate into the western part 06/12.

The western half should be mown, by hand flail on the slopes and by scythe on the steepest parts, and sprayed for thistles and nettles. A local farmer could then graze it, rent free for the first few years. The 300 yards of fishing could be let for about £30 a year. Scouts, Guides and youth groups could camp at long weekends in return for clearance work, with a standpipe from the main in the road verge for about £60. If the council treated the field as a “picnic site” for the public, the county could put the scheme forward for a 75% grant from the Department of the Environment under the Countryside Act 1968, while the council kept control of management. The costed appendix, at January 1973 prices, came to £132.74 with voluntary labour and free county trees, or £134.70 net if the grant route were taken 06/12.



“Parish Council Field, Cress Hill.” The County Land Agent’s proposals drawn on the 1905 25-inch Ordnance Survey: field 100 between the road and the river, the OLD LOCK and stile at its corner, the OLD WEIR across the river, a camping site, a loop of footpaths, roadside tree planting and the fence line X–Y. Parcel 102 next door is still orchard. 06/12

“An improved field,” Birt concluded, “would be an asset to the village, providing interest and better facilities for the parishioners for recreation and leisure. Failure to undertake action to control the bush and weed growth now will only lead to further deterioration and added expenditure” 06/12.

“Only villagers” 1972 – 1975

The council’s copy of the report, apparently marked for Mr Holman, shows how its proposals went down. Someone numbered the sections in red, ticked the grant paragraph, added “& Sycamore” to the tree list, and wrote “Not yet” against camping. Against the suggestion that the fishing be let to raise money, the same hand wrote: “No — only villagers” 06/12.

That pencilled phrase turned out to be council policy. When the newly formed Welford Angling Club asked to fish from the field in 1975, the council agreed, but, as the *Herald* of 4 July reported, “it was to be made clear to the club that all villagers, and only

villagers, had the right to fish from this frontage” 24/11. Someone in the village boxed the paragraph in pen on the cutting.

Yet on the wider question the answer went the other way. At the Trust’s public meeting in May 1972, someone raised the use of Cress Hill field. “It was pointed out that this was a matter for the Parish Council and the Council did not wish to place restrictions on non-villagers using the field” 60/01. The field, it seems, was open to anyone to walk on and picnic in, but its fish were for Welford. Birt’s argument that a public “picnic site” could attract a grant may have been one reason not to close it.

The way down to the river 1977

Mrs Gray’s 1959 letter had said that the field gave village children “safe access to the river”. In 1977 that turned out to matter more than anyone could have expected. The old corn mill had been converted to a house, and its owner, Brian Eccles, built a wall across the path to the bridge, weir and eel traps, and put up a sign saying there was no right of way. He said the weir and bridge were unsafe. The *Herald* reported on 13 August:

A wall built beside Mr Eccles’ property at the Old Mill has infuriated villagers, now completely cut off from the river... Now they have to go to Cress Hill—where the parish owns a field—to get down to the river.

Stratford Herald, 13 August 1977 12/05

Villagers pointed out that public access had been a condition of the mill’s sale, and the county gave Eccles a month to remove the wall and sign or face proceedings under the Highways Act 1959 12/05. The archive does not record how the dispute ended. For the time being, though, the field bought eighteen years earlier was the village’s only public way to the water, and it was the same walk that children had taken before the war, “through the mill farmyard and along the osier beds to Cress Hill”, only from the other end 49/01.

Sheep, scrub and elms 1988 – 1990s

Looking after five acres of steep hillside was a recurring headache. Birt had recommended grazing, and by the late 1980s the council had a tenant whose sheep were on the field. In September 1988 Councillor David Wilshaw showed a council meeting “a smashed-up

sign which had been recently erected to warn dog owners of sheep grazing on Cress Hill". He said: "I feel that this is someone, perhaps a dog owner, who does not like what this sign says and as far as they are concerned they will see that it is destroyed." The chairman agreed the sign had to be replaced for legal reasons, and Councillor Anne Wright undertook to do it 59/11.

In May 1989 Don Hildred of Church Lane sent the council a report on the parish's wildlife and footpaths. He listed the birds that had declined or gone, both spotted woodpeckers, tawny and barn owls, marsh tit, little owl, grasshopper warbler, and blamed the growth of the village and the loss of mature trees. He praised "a few old meadows that seem to have escaped from the common fate of sprays and fertiliser", with "a good example at the top of Cress Hill". But he was blunt about the parish field:

Cress Hill provides a fine scenic site, and is already owned by the Parish Council. Unfortunately it has not been managed and is now largely overgrown with a dense hawthorn/elderberry scrub. The large elms in the lower corner are sadly missed and replacement growth from suckers is still small. The site could well be opened up to let in more light and so increase species diversity.

D. W. Hildred, report to the Parish Council, 30 May 1989 05/13

He also warned that the riverside footpath SD 26, downstream of the Mill House, was overgrown, and that beyond the first stile the bank was steep and needed terracing, as did "the section approaching the Cress Hill area": both were "substandard and dangerous in any damp part of the year" 05/13. The elms Birt had worried about in 1972 had died; the thorn he had wanted cleared had won again.

By the mid-1990s the struggle had become village lore. At a History Society evening, members heard readings that included a story about "the problems the Parish Council has had over the years clearing Cress Hill" 38/01. A former rector's widow, writing to the Society about the big farms to the south, described an estate stretching "over to the top of Cress Hill! If only footpaths were used" 03/39.

What the hill has meant a summing up

Taken together, the sources show Cress Hill doing a surprising amount of work for a few acres of hillside. It was a furlong of the

open fields, and then a fruit close valuable enough to draw £415 at auction in 1849 and still not sell. Its lock was the place where a Black Country orphan first set foot in Welford, where an old scientist watched coal boats as a boy, and where men put their shoulders to the bow rope to haul forty-ton barges upstream. Its ruin and its view drew Bidford boating parties, postcard photographers and a Bristol headmaster who thought it one of the prettiest prospects on the whole river. Its roadside cottages produced the village's milk, asparagus and pigs. And when it was threatened with "a commercial enterprise" in 1959, it was the one place on which the Welford Trust, after twenty-five years of frustration, finally spent its money.

That purchase is the reason Cress Hill has a history at all as a public place. The trustees were careful about what they were buying: not a playing field, not a camp site, not a marina or a lock, but open land to be "preserved in its natural beauty". Every later proposal, from the navigation trust's lock in 1970 to the Land Agent's steps and seats in 1972, had to be fitted to that idea, and the council's pencilled notes and its rules on fishing show a village deciding, slowly and sometimes inconsistently, what kind of place it wanted. The constant complaint about thorn and elder is the other side of the same choice. Land kept "in its natural state" on a steep riverbank turns, unless someone keeps cutting it back, into scrub.

There is also a continuity that the people involved may not have noticed. Garrett's Bidford trippers in 1906 sat on the stones of the lock and admired the view; the trustees of 1959 bought the field because children used it to reach the river; the Land Agent in 1972 wanted seats at the viewpoints and steps down to the old lock; and the villagers shut out of the mill in 1977 went to Cress Hill to get to the water. For more than a century the hill has mattered for the same two reasons: the view from the top, and the way down to the river at the bottom.

Gilda Gray's phrase in 1959, "so little of Welford's natural beauty remains", was written as the village was filling with post-war bungalows and its orchards were giving way to gardens. Sixty years on, the field she persuaded the Trust to buy is still there at the end of the Bidford road, still sloping to the river, with the stones of the lower lock somewhere in the reeds at its foot.

Gaps and conflicting sources

GAPS

- **No deeds or title in the archive.** The conveyance of 1960 and the council's later file are not here. The Warwick County Record Office deposit CR3640 lists "Welford on Avon Parish Council's purchase of land at Cress Hill, 1959–1980" as item 12 50/41. That is where the plans, transfer and later management papers should be, including whether the field was ever registered as a recreational charity as the Charity Commission advised in 1968.
- **How Gloucestershire County Council came to own the field** is not recorded. The link to post-1918 smallholdings on the Milcote estate 03/04 is my inference, not something any source says about Cress Hill.
- **The "commercial enterprise" of 1959** that prompted the purchase is never identified 57/02.
- **Origin of the name.** No source in the archive discusses it beyond Garrett's Crécy joke. The link between "Cress Butt" in the 1969 field-name sheets and the hill is likely but unproven, and the sheets themselves are a machine reading that needs checking against the originals 08/12. Nothing connects the hill with Cress Farm or Cress House in the village.
- **The lock's building date.** No source says when Welford New Lock was added to the navigation, or who built it.
- **Owners between 1849 and the county.** The close was bought in at £470 in 1849; who sold it, and who owned the river field before the county, is unknown. It is also not certain that the 1849 close and the 1960 parish field are the same piece of land.
- **Cress Hill House (contents sold 1920)** is not identified with any later house, and its occupant is not named 11/30.
- **The Barbara Kaufmann watercolour** of "Quisstill Field", possibly Cress Hill Field, is not in the archive, and its whereabouts after the Careless house sale in 1977 are unknown 08/03.
- **Outcomes not recorded:** whether the 1972–73 works were carried out, how the 1977 mill path dispute ended, and whether the 1955 Coronation seat on Cress Hill survives 06/12, 12/05, 55/05.
- **Nothing after the mid-1990s** on the field's management.

CONFLICTS AND CORRECTIONS

- **The postcard caption.** The archive transcript of 52/88 reads the caption as "The Old Lock & Weir, Welford-on-Avon". On the scan it reads "The Old Lock at Cress Hill, Welford-on-Avon", which fixes the view as the lower lock. The project notes have been corrected.
- **Size of the field.** The 1959 letters, the 1972 report and the Trust's accounts say about five acres (two hectares) 57/02, 06/12, 57/06–15, but the 1905 Ordnance Survey on the 1972 plan gives parcel 100 as 6.050 acres 06/12.
- **The purchase cost.** Lodders' statement and Dingley's letters total £107 18s 0d 57/02, 60/01, but every later Trust statement records the cheque as £107 3s 9d on 23 June 1960 06/05, 57/06–15. The £102 3s 9d cash part of Dingley's payment may have become confused with the total.
- **The fencing bills.** The 1961 minute gives Tom Hawkins £49 16s and Peter Hartwell £22 4s 10d 60/01, which adds up to the £72 0s 10d receipt. The letter copies in 57/02 and 58/06 have "D. Hawkins" (typed "Hekins") and garbled sums. This essay follows the minute book.

- **Completion date.** The solicitors fixed completion for 24 May 1960, but the money was not paid until 23 June 1960 57/02.
- **County in 1849.** The sale notice places Cress Hill “in the county of Warwickshire”, though Welford was in Gloucestershire until 1931 11/30, 19/30. It may be a slip by the auctioneer or the copyist.
- **Navigation dates.** The Society’s river talk dates Sandys’s letters patent to 1635 and the split of the river into Upper and Lower Avon to 1717 52/09; the 1968 restoration scheme gives 1630 and 1664 06/13.
- **Names of the lower lock.** “Welford new lock” (1873 report), “Welford lower lock” (Garrett), “Welford Lower (New) Lock” and “Welford Auxiliary Lock” (Hadfield and Norris), “Cress Hill Lock” (40/01) and “Lower Welford” (1968 scheme) all appear to mean the same structure.
- **Mr Lively’s landlord.** The first copy of the interview reads “Mr Harold Hawthorn[e]”; the fair copy reads “Mr Harold Hawkins (who also built Zara House)”, and Hawkins fits the orchards “planted by Mr Hawkins” 08/05, 08/07. Zara House and Bernard Harris’s “Zaria” are probably the same house.
- **Location.** The summary of the County Surveyor’s field-name map groups “Cress Hill” with names east of the village 08/20–29, but the 1903 map, the 1972 plans, Hadfield and Woodward all put it south or south-west, on the Bidford road 46/14, 06/12, 52/48, 19/30.
- **Lower Welford lock.** The 1968 scheme and 1970 letter planned a new lock here 06/13, 06/16; the June 1971 *Herald* says it was dropped after deep dredging 13/17, and the 1972 chart shows only the W. A. Cadbury Lock at Welford 06/18.
- **Who may use the field.** In May 1972 the Trust minuted that the council did not wish to restrict non-villagers 60/01; in 1975 the council restricted fishing to villagers only 24/11. These are not strictly contradictory, but they pull in different directions.
- **Cross and Cress.** The Trust’s 1934–37 attempts to buy land “behind Cross Farm” 60/01 concern a different site, but W. Wyatt appears at “Cross Farm” in 1893 and at Cress Farm in 1901 01/38–46, 46/37–95, and the enclosure award’s “Cross Furlong” lies where Headland Road meets the Bidford road at the foot of the hill 47/98. The two names may have been confused somewhere.

MAIN SOURCES

- 57/02, 58/06, 60/01, 57/04, 57/06–15, 57/14, 06/05 — Welford-on-Avon Trust Fund papers, minute book and accounts, 1934–85 (purchase 1959–61; Charity Commission 1968)
- 06/12 — C. G. Birt, County Land Agent, report on the use of land at Cresshill, 1972–73, with plans
- 11/33, 15/04 — J. H. Garrett, *The Idyllic Avon* (1906), pp. 197–212
- 11/30 — Society notebook of sale particulars, 1815–1956 (1849, 1920, 1924)
- 20/04, 47/98, 54/105, 08/12, 08/20–29, 40/01 — enclosure award, roads, field names and parish histories
- 52/09, 52/48, 52/16, 20/01, 11/25, 33/42–46, 44/01–41, 46/14 — the navigation, the locks, bow-hauling, early memories and the 1903 map
- 06/13, 06/16, 06/18, 13/17, 52/59 — Upper Avon restoration, 1968–74

- 08/03, 08/04, 08/05, 08/07 — Gilda Gray's 1977 letter and the 1970s interviews
- 53/05, 52/88 — photographs
- 12/03, 12/05, 24/11, 59/11, 05/13, 38/01, 03/39 — footpaths, angling, the mill path dispute, sheep, wildlife and clearance
- 19/30, 19/26, 21/01–21, 21/22–66, 49/01, 49/02, 49/21, 36/01, 36/13, 01/56, 01/18, 20/06, 29/28, 30/05, 31/01, 42/29, 55/05, 03/04, 50/41 — village memories, registers and context