

WELFORD-ON-AVON · FARMING, 1086 TO 1992

Corn, Plums and Asparagus

Nine centuries of farming in a river-bend village: open fields and tithe corn, inclosure and the labouring poor, the fruit and salad gardens that claimed to beat the Vale of Evesham by three weeks, and the slow turn from fields to houses.

A long essay (about 10,000 words) drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive. Folder references are in grey. Every picture is from the Society's own scans. Gaps in the sources and places where they disagree are gathered at the end.

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Most of the people who have lived in Welford-on-Avon since the Norman Conquest earned their living from its fields. They ploughed strips in the common fields, mowed the riverside meadows, fattened cattle on the pastures, and later filled every spare yard of ground with plum trees, strawberries, radishes and asparagus. The Society's archive does not hold a single farm account book, but it holds a great deal else: a Tudor survey of the manor, wills that leave oxen and strikes of barley, the inclosure award that redrew the parish, nine censuses, a run of sale catalogues, and the memories of men and women who picked peas for a shilling a pot. This essay follows the land from Domesday to the conservation study of 1992.

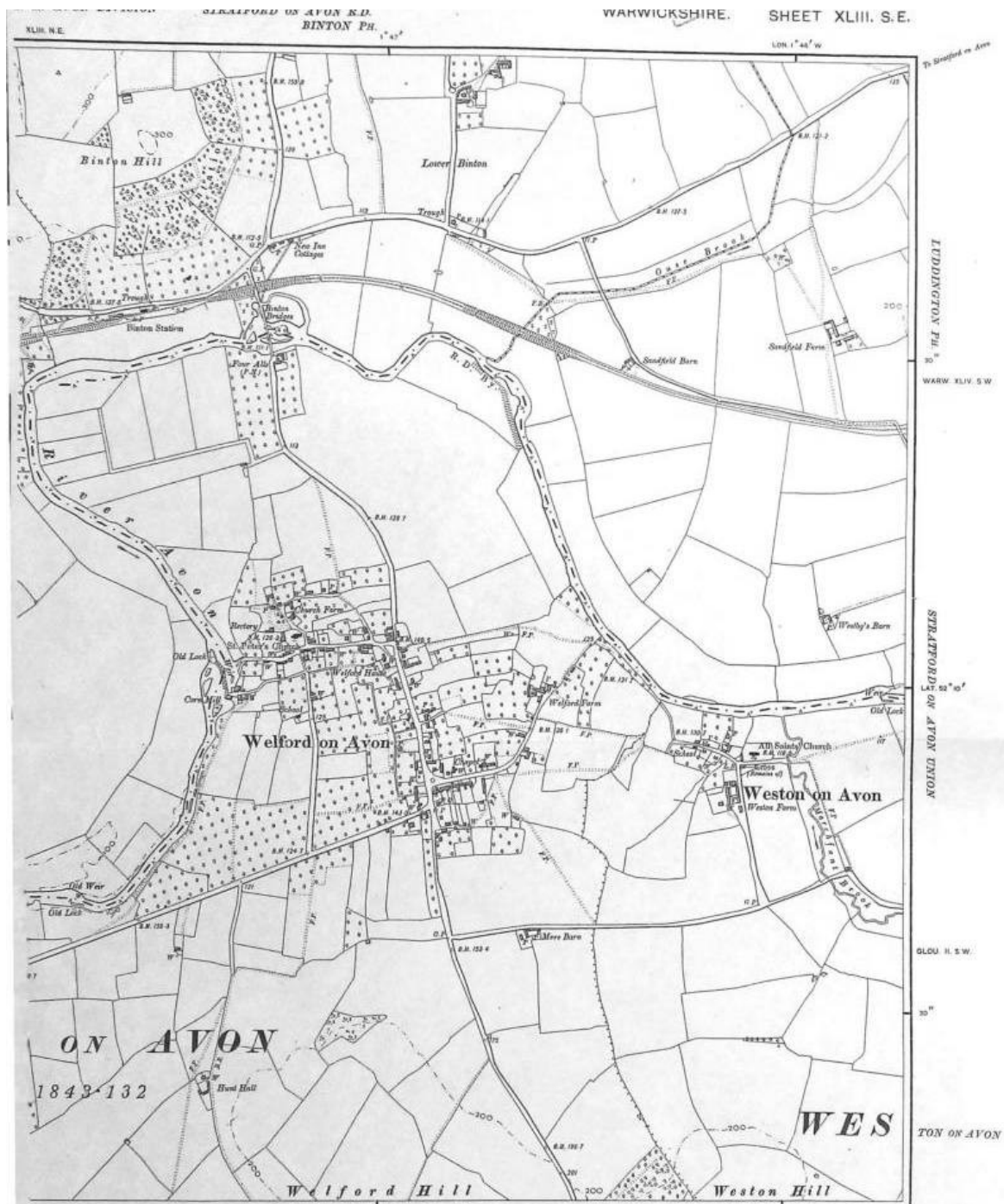
The land in the bends oil, river and parish

Welford sits inside a deep loop of the Avon, with the river on three sides and the ground rising gently to Welford Hill in the south. The Victoria County History described the land as lying between 100 and 200 feet above sea level, fertile, with "much market gardening"

and "little timber" 02/06. Kelly's directories of 1897 and 1914 give the farmer's view: "The soil is a rather heavy mixed loam; subsoil stiff clay. The chief crops are wheat, beans, barley and roots" 48/13–22. Thomas Rudge, writing in 1803, called the soil "rich, and abundantly fruitful, in nearly equal parts of tillage and pasture" 01/58.

The village belongs to the Feldon, the open, mostly arable country south of the Avon. When Mike Woods, a local writer on farming, spoke to the Society in January 1982, he contrasted it with the Arden to the north, where farms were small and carved out of woodland and their produce went to the dairy trade of Birmingham. Feldon villages like Welford were nucleated: the farmhouses stood together in the village street, and the fields stretched out around them 37/01–04.

The parish itself changed shape. Until 1894 it reached into Warwickshire, taking in the hamlets of Bickmarsh and Little Dorsington, while the village and its own fields lay in Gloucestershire. An order of 31 October 1894 made the Warwickshire part a separate parish, and in 1931 the whole of Welford was transferred to Warwickshire 48/13–22, 02/06. That is why the sources give such different areas: 2,800 acres in 1803, 1,705 acres in 1856, 2,797 in 1897, 1,826 acres of land in 1914 and 1,343 in the VCH 01/58, 48/13–22, 02/06. Any figure for "Welford" has to be read with the boundary of its date in mind.



The parish in 1903. The Ordnance Survey six-inch map shows Welford inside its loop of the Avon. The dotted tree symbols mark orchard ground: around the church, along the Binton road, at the Four Alls and on the slopes south of the village. Hunt Hall, Mere Barn and Welford Hill lie out in the hedged fields to the south. 46/14

Fifteen hides 1059 to 1540

Welford first appears as farmland in a monastic estate. In 1059 Edward the Confessor gave Deerhurst Priory, with its lands, to the abbey of St Denis near Paris, and Welford came with it 02/06. Domesday Book, in 1086, lists "Welleford" at fifteen hides among

the villages held by "the church of St Denis of Paris" in Deerhurst hundred 26/10. A hide was a unit of tax assessment, notionally the land that supported one household, so fifteen hides marks a substantial manor.

The Domesday text, copied by Rudder and reprinted by C. J. Woodward in 1907, goes on to count the ploughs, villeins, bordars, slaves and mills, but it does so for all six St Denis manors together: fifteen ploughs in demesne, seventy-five villeins and twelve bordars with thirty-nine ploughs, thirty-eight slaves and four mills worth 40 shillings 26/10. Welford's own share of those ploughs and people cannot be separated out. The hamlet of Bickmarsh, by contrast, had its own entry: one hide held by a woman called Eddiet, with two ploughs in demesne, one villein, one bordar and four slaves, worth 20 shillings.

The manor's mills ground the parish's corn by the ford below the church. By 1291 there were two, worth 20 shillings each, and they stayed with the manor into the seventeenth century 02/06. The church too lived off the land. The rectory was worth £29 15s 10d in 1547 20/02, a sum drawn largely from tithes, the tenth of every crop and young animal owed to the parson.

Being owned by a French abbey had consequences. During the wars with France the Crown repeatedly seized the priory's lands, and the king presented rectors to Welford in 1321 and 1359 "by reason of the voidance of the Priory of Deerhurst" 20/02. In 1447 Henry VI gave Deerhurst to Eton College; Edward IV restored it and in 1467 gave it to Tewkesbury Abbey, which held Welford until the Dissolution 02/06.

The manor in 1552 copyholders, virgates and selions

The best picture of the medieval farming village comes from a survey made just after the Dissolution, when the Crown prepared to sell the manor. The Society's notebook of Hockaday abstracts copies it from the Public Record Office 20/02. It sorts the tenants into three kinds.

The free tenants paid small fixed rents "by what service is not known". Stephen Harison held two and a half virgates for 3s 4d a year; William Millward one virgate for 8s; Richard Cowper three-quarters of an acre for 13½d. A virgate, or yardland, was the

standard peasant holding of the open fields, often around thirty acres scattered in strips.

The site of the manor itself, "with all houses built thereon and all lands, meadows, feedings & pasture", had been let in 1539 for forty years to five men together, John Harding, Richard Holtam, William Roberts, Henry Roberts and John Heyns, for 106s 8d a year. Its land included "72 selions of arable land in Salbrokefield containing 24 acres". A selion was a single ploughed strip, so this one entry shows the open-field pattern at work: seventy-two strips averaging a third of an acre each.

Most villagers were copyholders, holding their land by a copy of the manor court roll. John Warde's holding, granted in 1541, gives the clearest picture of a working farm. He had a house and six acres of arable, plus two acres in Sholibreade field, two "fitties" in Stabroke field, two acres in Myddlebarrow, an acre in Westfield and half an acre of meadow in Downe Meadow, with "pasture for 3 animals & 15 sheep". He paid a fine of 13s 4d to enter, a quarterly rent, a payment called "tything silver", and on his death his heir would owe the lord a heriot of his best cow. George Holt held a virgate and a half, including seven acres in Middlebarrowe field. The other copyholders were James Robins, Walter Bromley, Thomas Warde, Walter Smythe, William Roberts, John Hamlins, Thomas Hewes, Elizabeth Harding, John Bromley, John Welles, John Cox and John Heynes, and together the customary tenants paid £17 5s 2½d a year 20/02.

The survey also names the meadows that would matter for centuries: Bidston meadow, and "6 acres of meadow beyond Avon called Hilborough otherwise Grafton meadow". The two water mills and the fishing in the Avon were let to John Greenhill, his wife Eleanor and their son Abraham for £4 6s 8d for the mills and 13s 4d for the fishing. The surveyors noted that the woods on the manor would "but suffice to repair the same and to maintain the hedges & fences". In 1553 the manor was sold to William Willington of Barcheston for £834 14s 3d, and from him it passed to the Grevilles of Milcote 20/02, 26/10.

The wills of the 1540s show what these holdings produced. Hary Roberdes in 1545 left a strike of wheat and one of barley to the church, an ox and a young mare to his son Thomas, and a cow, a heifer and "half a quarter of whet" to each of his four daughters at their marriage. Thomas Welles, husbandman, in 1546 left his son John "2 oxen, 2 kyne & 4 shepe and half my cart and half my plough", with half his crop of corn "now being in the fold", on

condition that the son paid half the rent. William Robarte left wheat and malt to the church, calves, heifers, his dun mare, a "red browne musseled bullock", loads of wheat and barley, and to each unmarried godchild "a shock of barley" 20/02. These were mixed farmers: corn for bread and malt, oxen for the plough, cows and a few sheep.

The new lords were not always welcome. On 18 March 1576 the Privy Council asked Sir Thomas Lucy and two others "to hear complaints of the tenants of Welford against Lodowick Greville" 20/02. What the tenants complained of is not recorded.

Haycocks on the flood the meadows in July 1588

The parish register preserves the most vivid farming scene of the sixteenth century. On 18 July 1588, the summer of the Armada, the Avon rose "a yard every hour from 8 until 4 o'clock". It "drowned three furlongs of corn in Welford Meadow", unthatched the mill, came into the parsonage orchards and "filled his fishe poole", took away the sign at the Bear inn, carried off Edwin Buller's cart, and in Weston "tooke away half a hundred pounds of hay" 21/22–66, 20/02.

Haymaking was in full swing. "One Sale's daughter" was in Hillborough Meadow "removing of a haycocke" when the water came. She climbed on top and was "carried there upon by the watter a quarter of a mile wel neigh" until she was taken into a boat and rescued 21/22–66. The Society's own notebook version has "Old mother H—" and a companion carried across the river on the haycock "up to the wall of the Rectory" 20/02. The flood is a reminder that the riverside meadows, so valuable for hay, were also the most exposed land in the parish.

Parsons, tithes and barns 1600 to 1790

For two centuries after the Dissolution the farming of Welford is seen mostly through the eyes of its rectors, because the parson was the one person in the village with a legal claim on everybody's harvest. Tithe corn was collected in kind, stacked in the rectory barns and threshed there, and quarrels over it reached the courts.

The Civil War made those quarrels worse. In 1646 and 1647 John Trapp, the Puritan scholar who held Welford rectory alongside his school at Stratford, brought proceedings against Thomas Bowen and others who had withheld their tithes; among the parishioners

named in the dispute were Anne Griffin and members of the Martin family 03/38. The papers do not say how much corn was at stake, only that some farmers refused to pay a rector put in by Parliament.

The rectory's own buildings show how much tithe corn there was to store. A glebe terrier of 1713 lists two barns. One, of six bays, had by then "neither stick nor stone standing" 19/31. A six-bay barn was a large building, and its loss suggests the rectory had once taken in more corn in kind than it did by the early eighteenth century, perhaps because some tithes had already been turned into cash payments. Rudder recorded in 1779 that two yardlands of glebe, the rector's own farmland, had been lost from the living 01/10.

The churchwardens kept up an older war against the creatures that ate the corn. Their accounts for 1740 record bounties paid for seventy hedgehogs at fourpence each, forty-five adders at twopence and seventy and a half dozen sparrows 17/01. Hedgehogs were believed to suck milk from cows lying in the fields, and sparrows took grain from the standing crop and the stacks. Parishes all over England paid such bounties under Tudor vermin acts, and Welford's figures show a village still farming on the old pattern.

Two county historians give a sense of scale. Sir Robert Atkyns, writing about 1700, counted ninety-eight houses and about 450 people in Welford, of whom eighteen were freeholders 01/10. Samuel Rudder in 1779 described "a rich soil, abundantly fertile in corn and pasture" and noted the oddly crooked roads, which ran zig-zag because they followed the headlands of the open fields 01/10. In 1776 thirty Welford men voted in the county election as forty-shilling freeholders 01/58, which suggests a village with a broad layer of small owners alongside the lord's tenants. That layer of independent landholders would matter a great deal a century later.



Church Farm, the house called Cleavers. One of the Georgian farmhouses built in the village after inclosure. An oral account by Mrs Gray recalled that it was "never finished inside", most probably because corn prices fell before the owner could complete it. 46/04, 21/62

The inclosure about 1800

The open fields of Welford were inclosed by Act of Parliament at the very end of the eighteenth century. The strips of Salbrook, Middlebarrow and the other common fields were pooled, surveyed and reallocated as compact blocks, each owner receiving land in proportion to his old rights, and each new allotment had to be hedged and ditched at the owner's expense.

The Society holds a copy of the commissioners' accounts, which show what the process cost 47/98. The whole bill came to £1,751 5s 6d. Parliamentary fees took £225 0s 2d; the commissioners themselves £132 6s; the surveyor, Stephen Godson, more than £181. The largest single item was £278 7s 9d for fencing the rector's allotments, because the rector received land in place of his

tithes and the other proprietors had to pay for hedging it. The parish clerk received a guinea. The cost was then charged to the owners according to the land they received. The heaviest payers were Mr Baylis at £450, Mr Badson at £185 11s 8d, the Duke of Dorset, lord of the manor, at £171 15s 11d, Elizabeth Tomes at £151 10s 11d and William Smith at £126. At the bottom of the list were owners charged only a few shillings, men whose allotments must have been a few acres or less 47/98.

The award also laid out the roads that still shape the parish. It set out five public carriage roads forty feet wide between the hedges, thirteen private roads giving access to the new allotments, and two gravel pits for road repair 20/04. One provision protected the poorest villagers. The cottages built on the waste, on land that belonged to no one in particular, were exonerated from claims because the lord gave up his rights over a piece called Turdhill Ayte 20/04.

<u>Bridges Field</u>				
Rectors	1 acre	2. Roads		
" (1)	4 ..	3 ..	5 Ponds	Sunderhill Farming
" (6)	4 ..	1 ..	30 ..	
Wm Baylis (1)	38 ..	3 ..	5 ..	Upper Court Farming.
" (Sect)	42 ..	0 ..	0 ..	
" (1") (Part of)	23 ..	1 ..	19	Part of 1st Allot for Holgrove Estate.
John Baylis (1)	3 ..	3 ..	10	
Rich Fletcher (1)	14 ..	3 ..	21	
Rev John Morley (1)	7 ..	2 ..	4	
	137	0	14	

Notes from the award. A page from a Society member's notebook of extracts from the inclosure award, including the Bridges Field allotments. The award map itself is not in the archive. 22/12

The effect on farming was immediate. Rudge in 1803 wrote that "by the late inclosure a large quantity of good land has been brought into cultivation" 01/58. Mike Woods explained the pattern to the Society in 1982. Once a farmer held his land in one block, it no longer made sense to live in the village street and walk out to

scattered strips. New "green field" farmhouses went up in the middle of the allotments, and Welford Hill Farm out on the southern slope is one of them. The years of inclosure were also the years of the French wars, when wheat prices doubled, and the profits paid for new brick farmhouses in the village too 37/01-04. Church Farm may be one of them, left unfinished when prices collapsed after 1815.

A survey made for the Duchess of Dorset in 1811 names some of the new farms and their fields: Rumour Hill Farm, the Hop Yard, Bridge Field Close and Windmill Nap 08/13. The names record a windmill that has otherwise left no trace, and a hop yard, a crop now forgotten in Welford. Field-name sheets compiled for the parish in 1969 preserve more of the older landscape: Cress Butt, Pool Dole, Colly Pit Furlong 08/12. A "butt" was a short strip at the edge of a field, a "dole" a share of meadow, and a "furlong" a block of strips in the open field. The names outlived the strips by a hundred and seventy years.

The tithes were settled in two stages. The rector received land at inclosure in place of the tithes of the old open fields, and the remaining tithes were converted into a rent-charge in 1838 08/15. The Society's typed notes on the tithe apportionment give the rector's rent-charge as £500 14s 10d, but the land-use totals in the same notes do not add up and appear to have been mis-copied, so the 1838 figures for arable, meadow and pasture cannot be relied on.

Flax, gloves and machines the village's side trades

Farming families did not live from crops alone. Rudge recorded that Welford women spent the winter spinning flax for manufacturers at Stratford, and that flax growing had once been considerable in the parish but had been given up 01/58. Flax had been promoted in the district for more than a century: in 1677 Andrew Yarranton proposed a linen industry at Milcote, just across the river 19/28. Parson Greene's register between 1771 and 1790 names flax-dressers and weavers among Welford's householders 21/66.

Gloving lasted longest. Women and girls stitched leather gloves at home for masters in Worcester, holding the leather in a stitching vice known locally as the "Donkey" 21/66. The census of 1851 counts six glovers among Welford's women, and in 1881 gloving

was still listed alongside field work as women's employment 01/49, 48/06.

Two village craftsmen made farm machinery. James Mills of the Hollies, who died in 1840, was both a farmer and an agricultural engineer, with patents for winnowing machines, ploughs and cultivators. A model of one of his machines survives in the hands of Alec Bryan 19/28. G. Allcock of Church House made drill ploughs and winnowing machines 19/28. Their work shows that Welford's farmers were taking up the new mechanical aids of the early nineteenth century, and that some of those aids were built in the village itself.

Labourers, fieldwomen and glovers 1841 to 1881

Inclosure concentrated the land in fewer hands. By the time the census began to record occupations, Welford had become a village of labourers who worked for a handful of farmers. In 1841 about 105 men were returned as agricultural labourers against eleven farmers 48/01.

The census of 1851 is the fullest. The Society's tables cover Welford together with Weston, 774 people in 197 houses 01/49. Among men aged fourteen and over were 151 agricultural labourers, 21 farmers, 9 farmers' sons working at home, 2 bailiffs, 6 wagoners, 7 shepherds, 2 thatchers and 4 millers. There was one market gardener and four gardeners. Twenty-eight boys under fourteen were working as agricultural labourers or plough boys. Twenty-six women were listed as fieldswomen, and six as glovers.

Those figures describe a large workforce on a few big farms. Joseph Hughes farmed 240 acres with twelve labourers and three boys 14/12. Across the river, Adkins of Milcote farmed 850 acres and employed fifty men 14/13. A boy started as a crow-scarer or plough boy at eight or nine, became a carter's lad, and might end as wagoner or shepherd, the senior men of the farm. The women came out to the fields for weeding, haymaking, gleaning after harvest and potato picking.



Re-thatching a cottage, about 1930. From a Walter Scott view pack. Thatchers worked on ricks as well as roofs: in 1851 two are counted among Welford's farm workers. 16/25

The labourers' lives were hard enough to produce a national movement in this district. Joseph Arch, the hedger from Barford who founded the National Agricultural Labourers' Union in 1872 and later sat in Parliament, worked in Welford, trimming hedges and felling and barking oak in the woods. Mr Horne remembered him as "a tall strong man and the best hedger he ever knew", a teetotaller who studied geography in the evenings, lodged with Joe Simmons and sometimes preached at the chapel. He used a seven-pound axe all day long. "He once stood in a waggon in the orchard at the back of Cress Farm and addressed the villagers, and it is said that his voice was heard as far as the Coppice on Roomer Hill" 21/41. Other accounts put his meetings on the Magpie or Maypole Green, with a farm wagon for a platform, and say that after he spoke one of the village women climbed onto the wagon and made a speech of her own 54/105, 11/01-13. An old lady who remembered

him told one writer that he was "a small man with a very big voice" 11/01-13. The archive does not record whether a Welford branch of the union was formed.

Cress Farm is itself a sign of how village life worked. In the mid-nineteenth century Robert Berwick was farmer there, kept the Holly Bush beerhouse and ran a carrier's cart to Birmingham 10/01. The farmer was also the publican and the link to the city market, and the cart that took his produce to Birmingham would later carry the produce of the whole village.

The census of 1881 shows the old pattern still in place but beginning to shift. Samuel Tysoe farmed 630 acres at Rumer Hill; Bickmarsh Hall, then still in the parish, ran to a thousand acres. Women were still returned as glovers and field women 48/06. But by then the village had already begun to grow fruit.

The big farms names that recur

The directories let us trace the larger farms through the century. In 1856 the farmers named include J. H. Baylies, Robert Berwick, the Gunns, the Hornbys, Slatter at Welford Pastures, the Tomes family and Tysoe at Rumer Hall 48/13-22. Several are the same families who paid for the inclosure fifty years earlier. Baylis or Baylies, the heaviest payer in 1800, was still the leading name in 1856, and it was the break-up of the Baylies property in the 1890s that did most to turn Welford into a market-garden village.

By 1914 the farms had new tenants. Lewis Hawkins was at Church Farm, the Izods at Rumer Hall, Parish and Son at Welford Hill and Postlethwaite at Welford Pastures 48/13-22. Out on the edge of the parish, Hunt Hall and Mere Barn were worked as large mixed farms well into the twentieth century, with tied cottages for their men 20/06. The barns of these outlying farms, built after inclosure, are the subject of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings survey of 1985, discussed below.

The fruit and salad village 1840 to 1890

The shift from corn to fruit began quietly. A sale of 1849 describes the close on Cress Hill as "planted with choice fruit trees" 10/01, and the parsonage had its orchards as early as 1588. But the change that turned Welford into what a Society member was later told had been "the choicest market-garden growing village" 08/03 came from the east, out of the Vale of Evesham.

Around Evesham a particular form of tenure had grown up, known as the Evesham Custom. A tenant who planted fruit trees, asparagus beds or other long-term crops on rented land could, when he left, claim their value from the incoming tenant rather than from the landlord. In effect the improvements belonged to the grower, and could be sold on. In 1912 or 1913 a paper by Raymond Webb, copied into the Society's files, described the result: market-garden ground in the Evesham district had grown from about 1,000 acres to more than 10,000, and men who had been labourers had become small growers on a few acres each 23/30–53. The same system spread up the Avon to Bidford, Cleeve Prior and Welford.

Welford had what the system needed. Its loam was light enough near the river to warm early in spring. It had a large population of labourers who knew how to work land, and its thirty-odd freeholding families of the eighteenth century had left a tradition of small ownership. It had Berwick's carrier's cart and the road to Birmingham.



Looking down from Cress Hill, about 1910. The village seen through its orchards, with the church tower in the distance. The close on Cress Hill was already "planted with choice fruit trees" in 1849. 53/05, 10/01

Breaking up the Baylies farm 1892 and 1893

The decisive moment came in the early 1890s, when the farm built up by the Baylies family was sold off in small lots. The agricultural depression that began in the late 1870s had driven down the price of wheat, and land that could only grow corn was hard to let. Land that could grow fruit and vegetables was another matter.

The Society holds two sale catalogues. The first, of 1892, was the sale by the trustee of the late John Holtham Baylies of thirteen lots of freehold land, most of it garden ground already planted with fruit. One lot was later conveyed to Thomas Howse of Birmingham for £400, which suggests it did not sell at the auction itself 25/08. The second, of 1893, is more revealing 11/30. Lot 1 was still a conventional farm of 110 acres, with seventy-four acres of arable in Bridges Field. But lot after lot below it was described as fruit garden. Briar Furlong was "planted with plum, pear and currant trees". Lot 4, at Cullapitt and Middleborough, was let as allotments, and the old open-field names of 1552 reappear as names of gardens. The auctioneers explained why buyers should be interested: "Welford is now the centre of a large Fruit growing and Market Gardening Industry." They also pointed out that if the tolls on Binton Bridges were abolished, as was being proposed, the value of the land would rise further, since growers would be able to get their carts to Stratford station without paying at the bridge 11/30.

The buyers included both local men and outsiders. One name stands out in the memories of the next generation. John Wright, according to Mrs Gray, "bought up so much of Welford and divided it up into small pieces" 21/62, selling plots to labourers who wanted land of their own. Whether he was a speculator or a benefactor, the result was the same. Welford became, as later residents put it, a "freehold village" of "independent people" 08/04, 08/07, where a man could own an acre or two of plums and work it with his family.



"The Jitty between the orchards." A coloured postcard of one of the footpaths that ran between the fruit gardens. The garden plots were often reached only by these narrow paths. 49/10

The garden years 1891 to 1914

By the end of the century Welford's character had changed. Kelly's directory for 1897 stated simply that "the principal industry is market gardening", while still listing wheat, beans, barley and roots as the chief crops of the farms 48/13–22. The population was 591. The glebe, which had once included open-field strips, was a compact 107 acres.

The census shows the transformation. In 1901 there were nineteen market gardeners in the parish against nine farmers, with about eighty labourers 48/08. By 1911 households headed by market gardeners were scattered through the whole village. Kelly's of 1914 lists the gardeners by name: the Bassons, Blundell, Broad, the Bryans, Hancock, the Hancoxes, Horne, Wilson Matthews, Sabin and others 48/13–22. The same surnames turn up on the rat-hunt photograph of 1930 and in the flower-show lists of the 1940s.

Old Joe the Badger

The best record of a grower's life is the reminiscence of Joseph Hancox, known in the village as "Old Joe the Badger", written down by C. J. Woodward's family and copied into the Society's notebooks 20/01, 21/01–21. The Hancoxes are in the parish registers from 1561. They were, in Woodward's account, of a middle rank, independent of the farmers but not accepted by them, and Joe felt "snubbed" by the big farmers all his life.

Joe made his money from fruit. He bought the Rector's cherry crop as it stood on the trees, and then had to guard it. The cherry gang, led by Ned Gibbs, picked the crop while Joe kept watch from a platform built in the branches. He had a saying for what a good year did to the village: a good fruit season was generally followed by several weddings in the autumn, and he called them "Plum Weddings". Woodward heard the saying repeated in May 1920 and noted that "Rose Farley and Bullock had a plum wedding" 21/01–21.

The heart of the trade was the night journey to Birmingham. Joe's cart left Welford about six in the evening, loaded with fruit and vegetables, and went by Aston Cantlow towards Henley-in-Arden. The carters waited at the Bird in Hand near Henley, kept by a woman they called "Mother Rainbow", until after midnight, so that they would pass the turnpike gate on a new day's ticket and not have to pay the toll twice. They reached the Birmingham market before dawn. Selling was over by six in the morning, and the buyers

were mostly women: hawkers and greengrocers who would push the produce round the city streets that day 21/01-21.



Joseph and Selina Hancox. "Old Joe the Badger" died in November 1919. The garden land

was made over to his son, who "was not a successful man and was compelled to sell it".
20/01

A verse called "Cherry Picking 1918", kept in the same files, shows how the cherry orchards were protected. The cherry-minders scared the birds with a tom-tom, a tin can and an old muzzle-loading gun, and "Old Grandad" in the verse is Joe Hancox himself 21/01–21. Charles Horne, an ex-navvy who became a market gardener, told a story of picking pears in the Cider Mill orchard. The Mainwarings had a plum orchard near Binton Bridge. Each family had its own plots, often scattered over the parish like the strips of the old open fields.

Pickers and growers

The busiest season brought outsiders. Pea picking needed hundreds of hands for a few weeks, and gangs came out from Birmingham and the Black Country. A piece called "The Romance of the Picker", kept in the Society's files, describes a pea field near Welford in full harvest 23/29. Pickers were paid a shilling for forty pounds, the standard "pot". They could be a handful. Charlie Sabin, interviewed in the 1970s, remembered that when his family took the Shakespeare inn, about 1900, the previous landlord had lost his tenancy after some four hundred pea pickers "from all over the district" celebrated too hard and broke every window in the pub. Charlie blamed the beer. The pickers were horse dealers too, and showed their horses up and down Chapel Street 08/04, 08/06, 08/07, 13/14.

The growers organised. Littleton and Badsey Growers, the growers' co-operative of the Vale, opened a Welford branch, first called "Welford Growers", based at Cress Farm 10/01. H. M. Woodward and the rector, Mr Davis, were remembered as founder members 08/03. The co-operative bought seeds, boxes and fertiliser in bulk and sent members' produce to market under one name. When the Society asked the company for its records in 1977, it replied that it had none, and gave a different founder, a Mr Sutton 37/01–04.

Success had a cost for those without land. George W. Wright, writing "Welford-on-Avon: Looking Backward" in 1915, called fruit growing and market gardening "the principal industries" and said they were "in a progressive state", with "large quantities of very fine fruit" sent away to the markets. But he also complained that more than thirty cottages once within the reach of the farm labourer had been "closed against him owing to people bidding over his head". One cottage formerly let at £4 a year now let at £12,

"and there are other cases equally flagrant" 25/07. The village's prosperity was pushing out the men who worked on its farms.

Not everyone wanted the land that was offered. The parish council's minutes record a circular about the Small Holdings Act in 1906, and in 1908 Lord Sackville, still lord of the manor, offered land for allotments. The applicants were unwilling to take it on his terms. In 1909 the council found that ten of its twenty applicants for smallholdings were unsuitable 18/14. The minutes do not say why, and the most likely explanation is that the villagers who wanted land already had it.

War and the smallholders 1914 to 1930

The First World War took young men out of the gardens and left the work to women and the old, as the cherry-picking verse of 1918 suggests. After the war the land market moved again. In the years after the war, Mrs Gray recalled, the Milcote estate across the river was sold, and Gloucestershire County Council bought fields to let as smallholdings for returned soldiers 03/04.

The Church sold land too. In 1920 the glebe farms were auctioned 11/30. Weston Glebe Farm, thirty-four acres, was advertised as a "most desirable Small Holding" and sold to Mr Prosser for £1,950. Bunkers Hill Farm, seventy-nine acres of "wheat, bean and pea land", failed to reach its reserve and was withdrawn at £1,900. The descriptions say a good deal about the time: a holding of thirty-four acres was now a smallholding, and the selling point of the larger farm was peas.

In 1924 building plots were offered on the Bidford and Headland roads, each with its fruit trees already growing 11/30. Villagers who wanted ground but not a whole plot could take allotments, which were laid out at Convicts Orchard in 1923 and 1924 36/05. Allotments had a long history here. A page from a Society notebook records the Bridges Field allotments set out under the inclosure 22/12.

Asparagus, rats and the mill the 1930s

Before 1914 Welford's reputation rested on its earliness. H. M. Woodward told Gilda Gray, who wrote it down in 1977, that "the quality and earliness of Welford's saladings were unrivalled", and that they reached market three weeks before those of the Vale of

Evesham 08/03. Between the wars the crop that best showed what a smallholder could do on this soil was asparagus.

Mr Lively, born in 1899, described his own start to an interviewer from the Society 08/05, 08/07. In September 1932 he took seven and a half acres on Cress Hill, running from the Whynes to Zara House and back to Hunt Hall Farm, renting it from Harold Hawkins, who had built Zara House. He and his brother dug the whole piece with a two-tined fork, about seven weeks' work, and then hired a Caterpillar tractor to break it down. The main crop was asparagus, of the varieties Connover's Colossal and Late Giant Mammoth, planted in beds three feet by six. It took three years from seed to the first cutting, and a bed lasted sixteen years. At the height of the business he had three and a half acres of asparagus, with other crops grown in the rows between, and cereals on the rest. They "used to work up to 11 p.m." The produce went straight to Messrs Daniels in the Birmingham vegetable market on Mr Wilson's motor lorry. From about 1948 Lively also kept pigs on another three and a half acres, selling stores at eight weeks and porkers at fourteen weeks and more at Stratford. A crop that needed three years before it paid anything, and then paid for sixteen, suited a grower whose tenure was secure.

The pests were still there. A photograph of about 1930 shows the members of the "Welford-on-Avon Rat Hound Supper", who had killed 612 rats. The men named on it include Mainwaring, Basson, Sabin, Blundell, Gould and Stanley 16/54, several of them market-garden families from Kelly's list of 1914. Rats in the corn ricks and the fruit stores were the twentieth-century successors of the sparrows and hedgehogs on which the churchwardens had paid bounties in 1740.



The Rat Hound Supper, about 1930. The caption records 612 rats killed. Among the men named are Mainwaring, Basson, Sabin, Blundell, Gould and Stanley. 16/54

The mill was still grinding. Tom Hawkins took Welford Mill in 1895 and worked it until 1939. It was then sub-let to a Farmers' Association of seven or eight local farms, who used it to grind their own feed. In 1947 Harold Hawkins was making cattle food there, and after 1956 Alec Baldwin ran it. It closed in 1958, and its machinery was taken to Sarehole Mill in Birmingham 52/09. A mill had stood on that site since at least 1291, and it closed only when the corn farms it had served had become gardens and the remaining farmers bought their feed from merchants.



Welford Mill across the pool. The weir and the wheel. The manor's two mills are recorded in 1291 and 1552; the last miller left in 1958. 52/30

Digging for victory 1939 to 1945

The Second World War brought every spare piece of ground back into food production. When the Society collected wartime memories, the same picture came back again and again 36/14.

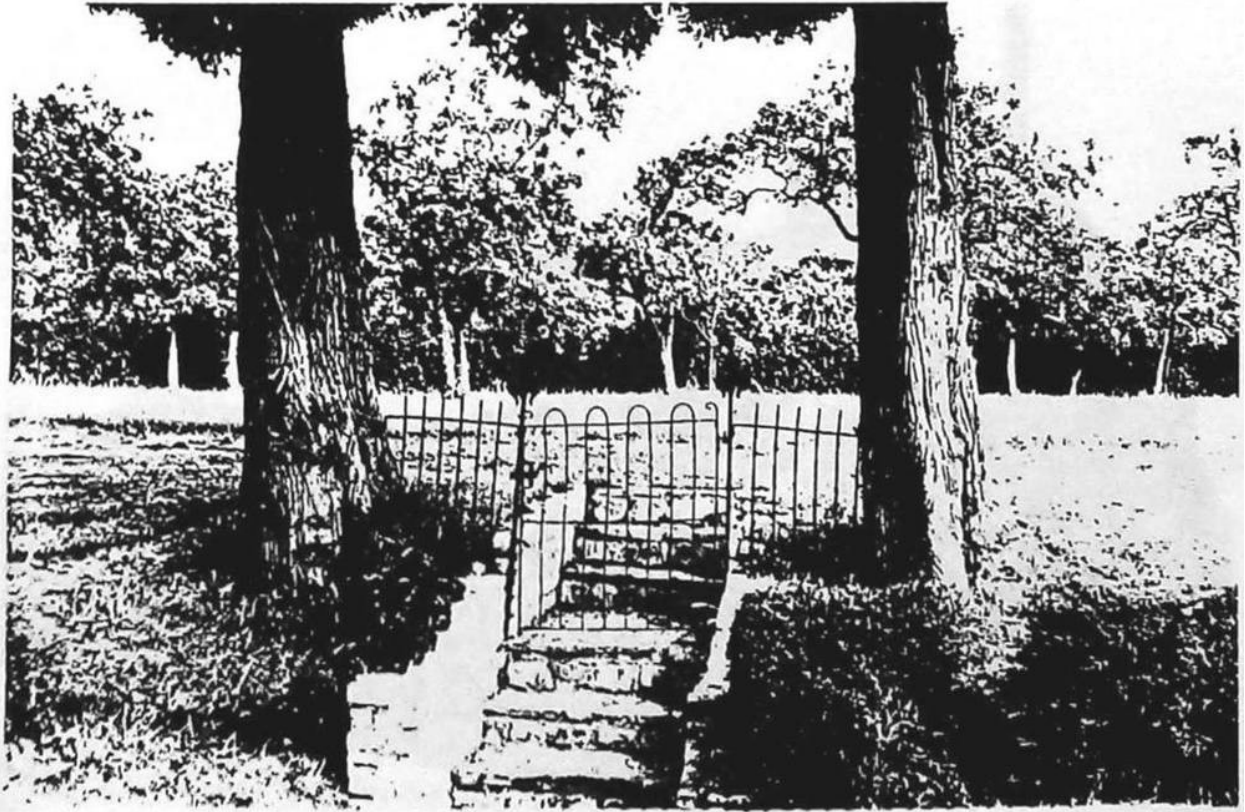
"Everyone grew their own vegetables - all the playing field, as well as the present allotments, was ploughed into growing land." Almost everyone kept hens, ducks or geese, "a pig or sometimes a goat for the milk". Men went rabbiting with ferrets and terriers, and fish and eels were taken from the river. Miss James of Frog Lane bottled fruit for the Stratford hotels. Bartering was common. Land Army girls came to work on the farms.

Millie Bott remembered looking after the Land Army girls and feeding them despite rationing 36/9-10. Florrie Wright, who manned the Air Raid Warden's post at Manor Farm, entertained soldiers of the Sussex Yeomanry to tea on Sundays: "being on a farm we always managed to get enough food and even cooked them

a roast beef dinner for their farewell party" 36/11-13. At the school, the eleven- and twelve-year-olds grew potatoes on rented ground, and every year the pupils were allowed twenty half-days off for the potato harvest 36/06. One evacuee remembered that she always went home with plums from her uncle's trees and rabbits her father had caught, so that "what I remember most about wartime food is Plum Jam and Rabbit Stew" 36/08.

The war years also produced the village's most lasting gift of land. By a deed of 1940 Herbert Stephen Shorthouse of Solano, Welford-on-Avon, settled about five acres, one rood and twenty-five perches of Churchfield Close on trustees to be let as allotments, with the income to go to up to twelve old and poor cottagers of the village, in money or in kind 59/01-15. One of the trustees was Arthur Thomas Hargrave Montague of Holly Cottage, farmer. The land became the Shorthouse Bidston Allotment Trust, and its name keeps alive Bidston meadow from the survey of 1552.

In 1943 the village revived its Flower Show, held at Manor Farm. The schedules show how much of the show was about produce rather than flowers: there were classes for round and kidney potatoes, white and coloured, for cabbages and cauliflowers, for dessert apples, and for plums, divided into "coloured" and "Pershire". The prize lists are full of the old garden names: Basson, Garner, Wright. By 1951 the show had raised £1,027 for village causes 54/01.



Steps and gate "opposite Manor Farm", 1992. Figure 13 of the Conservation Area Study, showing "the remnants of an orchard with an interesting set of steps and gate". The study kept the Manor Farm orchard inside the conservation area. 15/08

From fields to houses 1945 to 1992

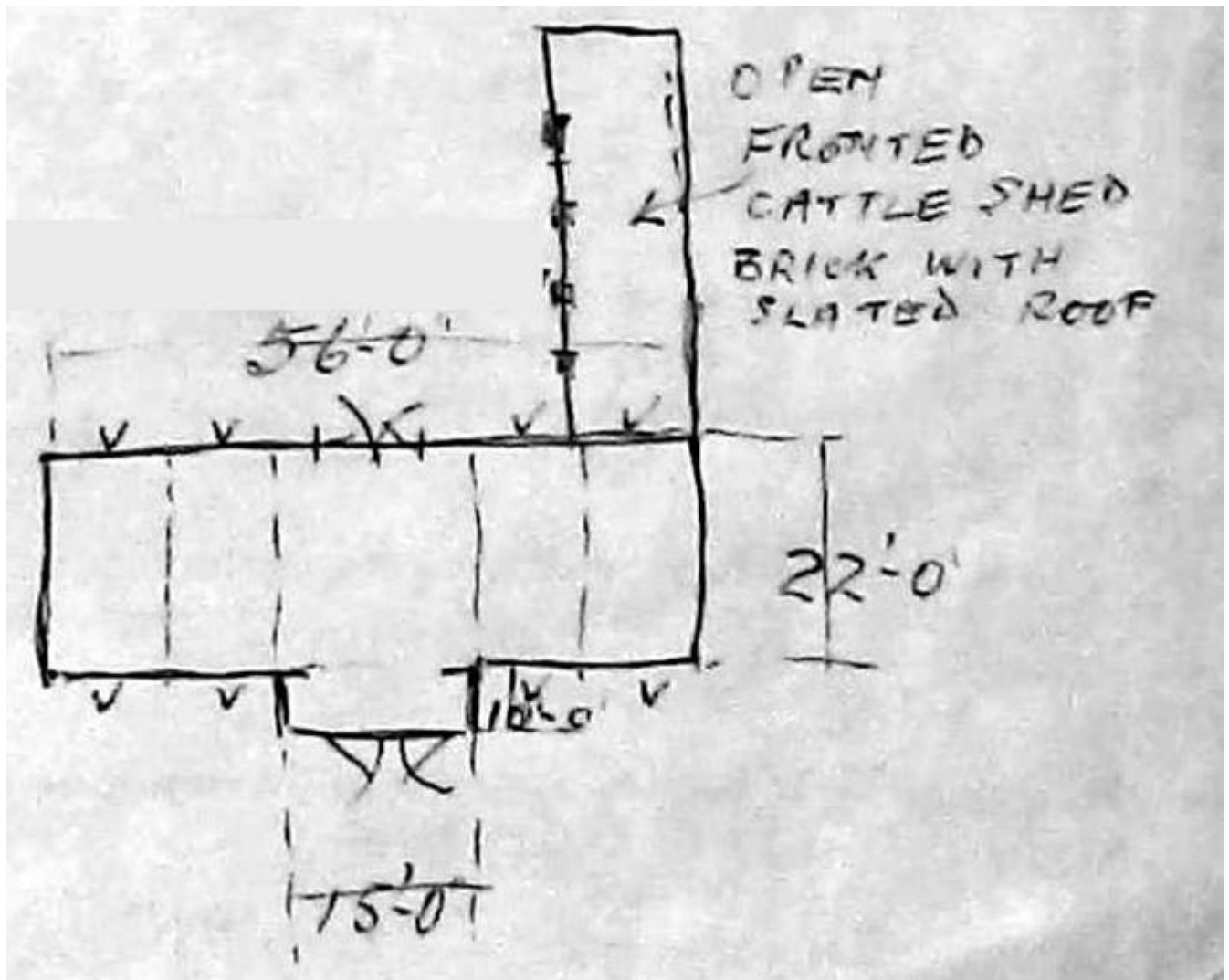
After the war the smallholdings carried on, but the village around them changed. A house-by-house survey made for the parish in the early 1960s marks each property with its use 20/06. About ten are noted as smallholdings: Mr and Mrs Fakes, Mr A. Gould, Mr and Mrs J. Edkins, Mr Croft on Headland Road, Mr Brown at One Acre, Mr R. Hawkins and others. There was a poultry farm. Some cottages are marked as tied cottages, belonging to Hunt Hall and the other big farms. But the same survey counted 302 houses, 89 bungalows and 108 caravans, and a later note gave 391 houses and bungalows and 120 caravans. Caravan sites had opened at the Four Alls, at Mill Lane, on the Barton Road and in Hunt Hall Lane. The writer of the note observed that caravans already made up a quarter of the village's dwellings.

Much of the new building went onto old garden ground. The plots offered on the Headland and Bidford roads in 1924 had been sold "with fruit trees", and later roads such as Headland Rise, Headland Close and Millers Close filled in more of the old garden ground. Some of the gardeners themselves lived in the new houses: a list of

Welford market gardeners compiled by the Society places Lizzie and Bill Lively in Millers Close, Percy Lively in Headland Rise and Jack Wright in Headland Close 08/01-19.

The land that remained open was no longer always farmed. In 1960 the parish council bought a field of about five acres at Cress Hill, running down to the old lock on the Avon. By 1972, when the County Land Agent reported on it, much of it was overgrown with thorn, thistles had taken the western half, and the agent proposed turning it into a picnic site with seats, paths and new trees, with grazing to be let rent-free at first 06/12. The hillside where Lively had dug seven and a half acres by hand in 1932 had become amenity land. The County Council's Upper Avon Policy Plan of the same year was concerned with boats, moorings and caravan sites, not crops 06/18.

The working buildings of the farms changed use as well. In 1985 the Society joined the national Domesday Survey of Barns organised by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, which aimed to record every traditionally built barn in England and Wales nine hundred years after Domesday Book 14/10. Four Welford barns were surveyed. Two, at Baskerville Cottage in Church Lane and the Barn House in Chapel Street, were already homes. The Littleton and Badsey Growers' barn in the High Street, fifty-seven feet by nineteen, of four bays under small flat tiles with an "eyebrow in roof line at eaves", was in commercial use. Only one was still used for animals: the open-fronted brick cattle shed with a slated roof on Welford Hill Farm, fifty-six feet by twenty-two, of five bays.



The barn on Welford Hill Farm, 1985. The surveyor's sketch for the SPAB barn survey: "Open fronted cattle shed, brick with slated roof", 56 ft by 22 ft. It was the only one of the four barns surveyed still in farm use. 14/10

Even so, the memory of the smallholding village was strong. In about 1987 a review of a village play in the Stratford Herald described Welford's people of fifty years before as "penniless farm labourers". A reader signing himself "A Penniless Peasant" wrote back to object. There had been, "to the best of my recollection, few if any 'penniless farm labourers', or, for that matter, not all that many dependent entirely upon a weekly wage". Instead, "many others in Welford were independent, earning a living, in whole or part, from their smallholdings. From these they produced eggs, poultry, pigs, vegetables and fruit in season. They may not have gained great wealth, but neither were they 'penniless'" 01/52. It is the voice of the freehold village that John Wright and the sales of the 1890s had made.

The Conservation Area Study of July 1992, prepared for the district council, treated the farming landscape as heritage 15/08. It praised the water meadow between the rectory and the river as "reminiscent of Constable", the "old orchards, hedgerows and period walls", and the staddle stones that once held granaries off the ground. It noted glasshouses and an important hedgerow boundary. It kept Barton Croft and the Manor Farm orchard inside the conservation area. Among the things it said spoiled the village were Leylandii screens and the Mill Farm caravan site.

What remains reading the village

Most of Welford's farming history can still be read on the ground. The crooked roads that puzzled Rudder in 1779 follow the headlands of the open fields, and Headland Road keeps the word. The forty-foot roads of the inclosure award run out to the farms that were built in the middle of their new allotments. Field names such as Cress Butt, Pool Dole and Colly Pit Furlong, and the Middleborough and Cullapitt of the 1893 sale, descend from the Myddlebarrow field and the strips of the Tudor copyholders. The Bidston allotments carry the name of the meadow listed in 1552. The barns of Baskerville Cottage and Chapel Street, and the growers' barn in the High Street, are farm buildings turned to other uses. And in odd corners of the village, behind walls and up narrow jitties, the last of the plum and cherry trees still stand.

The story the archive tells is not a simple one of decline. For about seven centuries Welford was a corn and cattle parish of open fields and common meadows. For a century after inclosure it was a village of labourers working for a few large farmers. Then, between about 1890 and 1950, it became something less usual: a village of small independent growers, owning or renting a few acres each, sending fruit, saladings and asparagus to Birmingham by night. That world depended on cheap carriage, family labour and a market that wanted early produce. When those things changed after the Second World War, the land became more valuable for houses than for plums, and the village that the growers had built was gradually filled in.

A chronology dates from the archive

1059	Edward the Confessor gives Deerhurst Priory, with Welford, to St Denis, Paris 02/06
1086	Domesday: "Welleford", 15 hides, St Denis 26/10
1291	Two mills, worth 20s each 02/06
1467	Manor passes to Tewkesbury Abbey 02/06

1539	Manor site let for 40 years; mills and fishing let to John Greenhill 20/02
1545–46	Wills of Hary Roberdes, Thomas Welles and William Robarte 20/02
1552–53	Crown survey; manor sold to William Willington for £834 14s 3d 20/02
1576	Tenants' complaints against Lodowick Greville 20/02
1588	July flood drowns three furlongs of corn in Welford Meadow 21/22–66
1646–47	Tithe dispute, Trapp against Bowen and others 03/38
c.1700	Atkyns: 98 houses, about 450 people, 18 freeholders 01/10
1713	Glebe terrier: six-bay rectory barn gone 19/31
1740	Bounties on hedgehogs, adders and sparrows 17/01
1776	Thirty Welford freeholders vote 01/58
c.1800	Inclosure, cost £1,751 5s 6d 47/98
1803	Rudge: "a large quantity of good land" brought into cultivation 01/58
1811	Survey of the Duchess of Dorset's farms 08/13
1838	Tithe rent-charge 08/15
1851	151 farm labourers, 21 farmers, 26 fieldswomen (with Weston) 01/49
1892–93	Baylies land sold in lots as fruit and garden ground 25/08, 11/30
1895	Tom Hawkins takes Welford Mill 52/09
1897	Kelly: "principal industry is market gardening" 48/13–22
1915	George W. Wright on cottage rents rising from £4 to £12 25/07
1919	Death of Joseph Hancox, "Old Joe the Badger" 20/01
1920	Glebe farms sold 11/30
c.1930	Rat Hound Supper: 612 rats 16/54
1932	Lively takes 7½ acres on Cress Hill for asparagus 08/05
1940	Shorthouse allotment deed 59/01–15
1943	Flower Show revived 54/01
1958	Welford Mill closes 52/09
1972	Cress Hill field overgrown; picnic site proposed 06/12
1985	SPAB barn survey 14/10
1992	Conservation Area Study 15/08

Gaps and conflicting sources

WHERE THE SOURCES DISAGREE

- The date of inclosure.** The typed abstract of the award has "1801" pencilled on it 47/98; another copy is catalogued as 1802 01/70; the glebe terrier of 1807 and the Hockaday notes say the inclosure took place in 1800 26/10, 20/01. The Act, the survey and the award were probably spread across these years, but the archive holds no original to settle it.

- **The size of the parish.** The figures range from 1,343 to 2,800 acres 02/06, 01/58, 48/13–22, and one source gives 5,026. Most of the difference comes from Bickmarsh and Little Dorsington, which were in the parish until 1894, but the sources rarely say which boundary they mean.
- **The 1588 flood.** The register transcript has "one Sale's daughter" carried a quarter of a mile on a haycock from Hillborough Meadow 21/22–66; the Society's notebook version has "Old mother H—" and a companion carried "up to the wall of the Rectory" 20/02.
- **Joseph Arch.** Mr Horne remembered "a tall strong man"; another informant remembered "a small man with a very big voice". His open-air meeting is put in the orchard behind Cress Farm in one account and on the Magpie or Maypole Green in others 21/41, 11/01–13, 54/105.
- **Littleton and Badsey Growers.** Village memory names H. M. Woodward and Rector Davis as founder members 08/03; the company told the Society in 1977 that it was founded by a Mr Sutton as a private society, and that it had no records 37/01–04.
- **Mr Lively's landlord** is written "Mr Harold Hawthorn[e]" in the rough interview notes and "Mr Harold Hawkins" in the fair copy. A Mrs Wilfred Hawkins on the contacts list supports Hawkins 08/02, 08/05, 08/07.
- **The pea-pickers' riot** rests on Charlie Sabin's memory alone 08/06, 13/14. His birth year is given as both 1890 and 1898, so the event can only be dated to about 1900.

WHAT THE ARCHIVE DOES NOT HOLD

- **Domesday figures for Welford alone.** The entry gives Welford's fifteen hides but counts ploughs, people and mills only for the six St Denis manors together.
- **The inclosure map.** The award is known from abstracts and notebook extracts 47/98, 20/04, 22/12; its map is not among the scans, so the new allotments cannot be plotted.
- **Reliable tithe figures.** The typed notes on the 1838 apportionment give a rent-charge of £500 14s 10d, but their land-use totals do not add up 08/15. There is no tithe map in the archive.
- **Farm records.** There are no farm account books, wage books, crop returns, agricultural statistics, or a copy of the wartime National Farm Survey of 1941 to 1943.
- **The co-operative's records.** Littleton and Badsey Growers said in 1977 that it had none for Welford.
- **Occupations after 1911.** Nothing counts farm or garden workers between the 1911 census and the house survey of the early 1960s, so the decline of the market gardens cannot be measured, only described.
- **"Three weeks before Evesham."** The claim rests on one remark of H. M. Woodward's, remembered by Gilda Gray in 1977 08/03. No price lists or market records support or contradict it.
- **Old Joe the Badger.** The stories of the Rector's cherries, the cherry gang and the night carting come from the Woodward family's memoir of Hancox, written after his death 20/01, 21/01–21. No other source checks them.
- **Hop yard and windmill.** The 1811 field names Hop Yard and Windmill Nap 08/13 are the only evidence for hop growing or a windmill in Welford.

MAIN SOURCES

- 26/10 C. J. Woodward, Notes on Welford Church (1907): Domesday text, Rudder 1779, glebe terrier 1807
- 02/06 Victoria County History typescript; 01/10 Rudder and Atkyns extracts; 01/58 Rudge 1803 and 1776 voters
- 20/02 Hockaday abstracts: 1552 survey, Tudor wills, 1576 Privy Council, 1588 flood
- 21/22–66 Woodward notebooks, including the 1588 register entry and 21/41 Joseph Arch; 21/01–21 Hancox sayings
- 03/38 Tithe dispute 1646–47; 19/31 glebe terriers; 17/01 churchwardens' accounts
- 47/98, 20/04, 22/12, 01/70 Inclosure award abstracts and accounts
- 08/12, 08/13, 08/15 Field names, 1811 survey, tithe notes; 19/28 crafts and machinery
- 48/01, 01/49, 14/12, 14/13, 48/06, 48/08, 48/09–12 Censuses 1841 to 1911; 48/13–22 directories
- 10/01 Cress Farm; 11/01–13 and 54/105 cottages and old farms
- 25/08 Sale 1892; 11/30 sales 1893, 1920 and 1924; 25/07 George W. Wright, "Looking Backward" (1915)
- 20/01 Hancox memoir; 23/29 "The Romance of the Picker"; 23/30–53 Raymond Webb on the Evesham Custom
- 08/01–08/07 market-gardening interviews (Lively, Sabin, Matthews) and Gilda Gray's notes; 13/14 Sabin cutting; 03/04 Mrs Gray on the 1920s
- 18/14 Parish council minutes; 36/05 Convicts Orchard allotments
- 16/54 Rat Hound Supper; 52/09 the mill
- 36/06–36/14 Wartime memories; 59/01–15 Shorthouse deed; 54/01 Flower Show
- 20/06 House survey, early 1960s; 06/12 Cress Hill report 1972; 06/18 Upper Avon plan 1972; 14/10 SPAB barn survey 1985; 01/52 Herald letters c.1987; 15/08 Conservation Area Study 1992; 37/01–04 Society minutes, including Mike Woods's 1982 talk
- Pictures: 46/14, 46/04, 22/12, 16/25, 53/05, 49/10, 20/01, 16/54, 52/30, 15/08, 14/10