

WELFORD-ON-AVON · THE RIVER AND THE VILLAGE, 1588 TO 2012

When the Avon Comes In

A mill house a yard and a half deep, a bridge under water for weeks at a time, a woman swept from her car, caravans tipped into the river: four centuries of flooding in a village built inside a bend of the Avon.

Drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive (folder references in grey). A companion to the essays on the Four Alls, Boat Cottage and Cress Hill. Newspaper photographs in the archive are described rather than reproduced; every picture here is a print, drawing or map from the Society's own scans.

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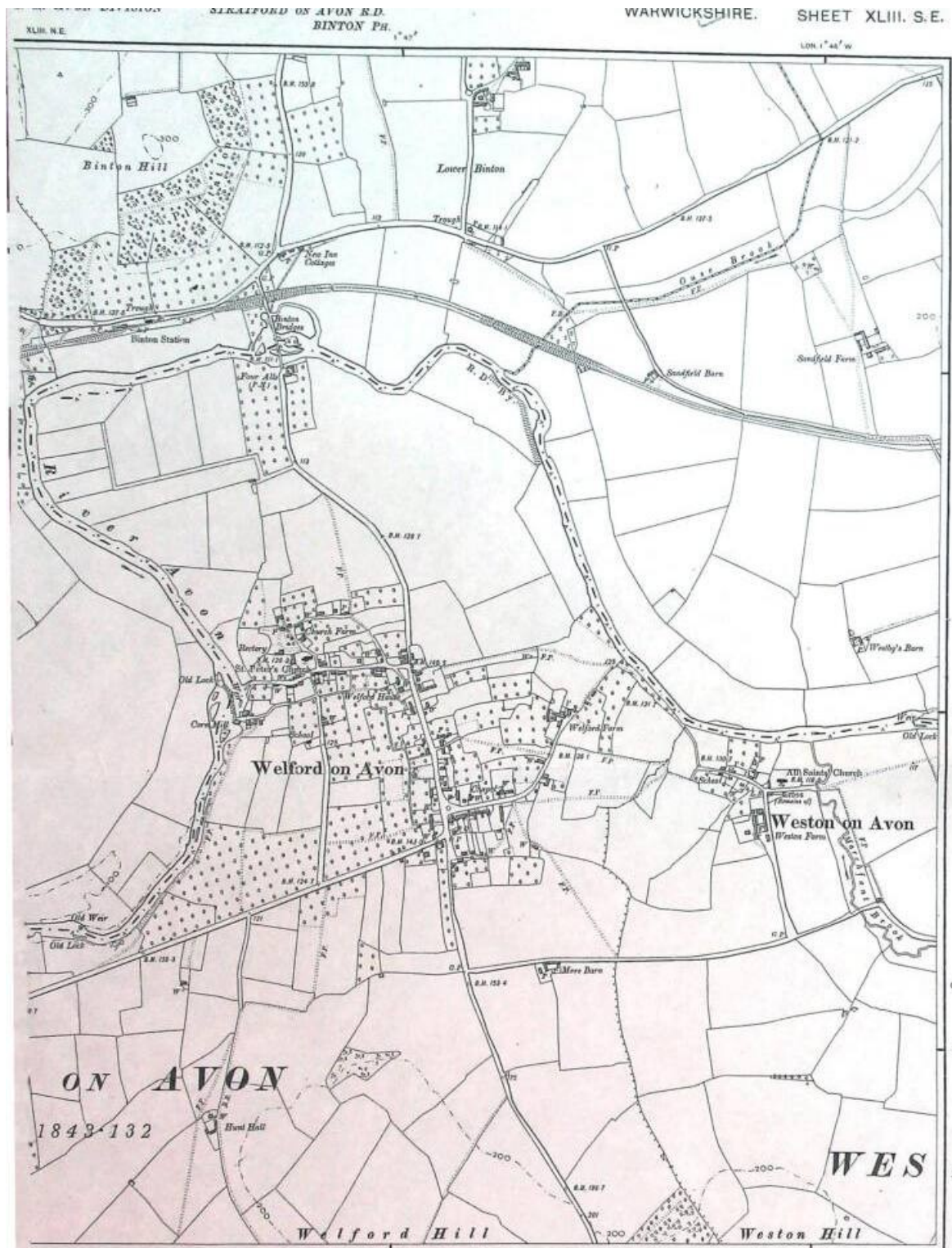
The caravan site below Binton Hill, under water. One of 51 snapshots in an undated family album of a great flood. The spring foliage, the tipped caravans and the sheep being moved along a lane (below) match the Herald's account of Easter 1998. 41/34

A village in a loop

Welford is a river village that mostly keeps its feet dry. That is the first thing the archive makes clear, and it is easy to miss among the drama of the flood stories. The old village sits on a low rise of gravel inside a tight meander of the Warwickshire Avon. The river comes down from Stratford past Luddington, swings north and then west around the top of the village, runs past the church and the mill, and turns south-west towards Binton Bridges and Bidford. Across the water, on the Warwickshire side, Binton Hill and Wasen Hill rise steeply. On the Welford side the ground slopes gently up from the meadows to the High Street and on to Welford Hill.

The Ordnance Survey six-inch map of 1903 shows the shape exactly 46/14. The loop of the river is almost closed. The village of Welford lies in its southern half, and Weston-on-Avon sits further east where the Marchfont Brook comes in. Between the houses and the river, inside the bend, is a wide empty space of meadow, crossed by a single track to the old lock and the corn mill. The map's surveyors marked spot heights there: around 128 feet in the meadows north

of the church, rising to the high 130s and 140s in the village street. A few feet of height is the whole story of Welford and its floods. The meadows go under. The houses, with a few exceptions, do not.



The Avon's loop around Welford, Ordnance Survey six-inch map, 1903 edition. Binton Bridges and the Four Alls are at top left, the corn mill and "Old Lock" beside the church, and a second "Old Weir" and "Old Lock" at lower left below Cress Hill. The open ground inside the bend is the flood meadow. 46/14

Why the village stands where it does is explained in a set of lecture notes on local geology kept by the Society 10/28, 10/29. Through the Ice Age, the writer explains, the Avon alternately dropped gravel on the insides of its bends and cut down quickly into its bed, "leaving the original deposited gravels high & dry above the flood level." These old river beds are the terraces. There are five in this part of the valley, the earliest the highest, and "the terrace at Welford is mainly No 2." The terraces, the notes continue, became "corridors of movement" along which people settled from the Neolithic onwards, precisely because they were dry ground beside good water. A hand-annotated base map in another folder colours the Avon blue and edges it with a strip of green tick marks labelled "flood plain," with the gravel terraces hatched in orange above it 03/21-31. That strip of green is where the water goes. The orange is where people built.

The same notes observe that the Avon is still carving its valley deeper. Its floods are not an accident that happens to the landscape. They are the process that made it.

Two hundred and more years of human building have pushed against this arrangement in three places. The first is the crossing at Binton Bridges, at the north-west corner of the loop, where the road from Stratford and Evesham has to cross not only the river but a quarter of a mile of floodplain to reach it. The second is the riverside itself: the mill and the old Bear Inn at the bottom of Boat Lane, which stand right at the water's edge. The third, and newest, is the caravan and chalet park by the Four Alls on the low ground near the bridges. Almost every flood in the archive is a story about one of these three places.

"Under his bed" before 1588

The archive has almost nothing from before Elizabeth's reign about the river's behaviour. The one medieval scrap is a deed of 1330, written in French, among the Milcote and Weston papers 15/14. It lets William and Beatrice de Brule repair a breach and attach a pond to William de Careswell's land, on condition that they "must not flood his meadows or harm his Weston mill." Even then, the meadows by the river were worth protecting and water was something neighbours went to law about.

The richest evidence for the earlier sixteenth century comes, oddly, from inside the account of the 1588 flood. The writer of that account wanted to show how extraordinary the flood was, and the

way he chose to do it tells us what ordinary floods were like. He appealed to the oldest man anyone could remember. "Old Father Porter," he wrote, had been buried about four years earlier, "being then a hundred and nine years of age." Porter had lived in the mill house all his long life, and "he knew it under his bedd." That is, in the ordinary run of floods, perhaps several times in a lifetime that reached back to the 1470s, the Avon had come into the mill house far enough to reach the old man's bed. The great flood of 1588 was remarkable not because the mill house flooded, but because it flooded "a yeard and a halfe" higher than Porter had ever known.

Porter's age should be taken with some salt. A hundred and nine is possible but rare, and village memory likes a round, astonishing number. The point stands regardless. The people who lived and worked at the river's edge expected it to come into their houses. The mill had to be by the water. The inn at the bottom of Boat Lane served the river trade and the ford. They took the risk because the river was their living.

A note in a 1970s volunteer's papers connects "Old Father Porter" at the mill with the Porters of Mickleton, who moved to Welford Mill 01/44-46, 18/23. If that is right, the mill was a family holding and Porter's knowledge of the river was inherited as well as lived.

The flood of July 1588 18 July 1588 (or 19 July 1587)

The most famous document in Welford's history is a memorandum written into the first volume of the parish register. The register begins in 1561, and the parish lists of its contents compiled in 1965 and later include, among the terriers and levies, a "memorandum of a flood 18 July 1588" 02/02, 02/03. The archive does not hold a photograph of the register page itself. What it holds is a whole family of copies, of which the most careful is a handwritten transcript headed "Book. A. Page 100 — The Great Flood of July 18th 1588" 52/65. The version below follows the spelling printed by the Stratford Herald from an "exact copy" supplied by R. F. Tomes, which agrees closely with that transcript 52/25.

The xviiiith of July anno dom 1588 in the morning there happened about viii of the clocke in Avon such a sudden floode, as carried away all the hey about Avon and did much harme; yt was higher than ever it was knowne by a yard and a halfe and somithing more, owlde ffather Porter buried about iiii years past being then a hundred & nyne years of age never knewe yt soe high by a yeard &

a halfe, dweling in the mill house he knew it vnder his bedd but this flood was a yeard and a halfe in the house, and cam in soe suddenly that John Pennes wife then Millard was soe amazed that she sate still till she was almost drowned and was well nigh besides herselfe and soe farr amise that shee did not know her owne child when yt was broughte vnto her ...

Welford parish register, Book A, p. 100, as printed in the Stratford Herald 52/25

The flood broke without warning on a summer morning, at haymaking. The account is precise about the timing: it began at about eight o'clock and "rose a yeard every howre from eight to ffowre." Eight hours of rising at that rate is an extraordinary rise for a lowland river. Whatever the exact figures, the people who saw it remembered the speed above all.

The writer then followed the water outwards from Welford. It broke down Grange Mill, upstream, "the crack thereof was heard at Holditch." It broke up houses in Warwick and carried away "theire bread, beefe, cheese, butter potts, pannes, and p'vision," took ten carts out of one town and three wains with the goods of Mr Thomas Lucy, and broke both ends of Stratford bridge. Three men crossing that bridge reached the middle and found they could go neither forward nor back. In Welford's own fields it "drowned three furlongs of corn" and "unthatched the mill," uprooting willows and sallows along the banks.

The most vivid scene happened in Hillborough meadow, across the river from the village. One of the daughters of a man named Sale, of Grafton, was out at the hay when the water came. She "had no shift but to get upon the top of a haycock and was carried thereupon by the water a quarter of a mile well nigh, till she came to the very last bank of the stream." There she was taken into a boat, and that boat was nearly swamped too, until "another boat coming rescued them soon."

The last lines return to the village. The water "came into the parsonage of Welford's orchard and filled his fish pool," it took away the sign post at the Bear, the inn at the bottom of Boat Lane that later became the Boat and is now Boat Cottage, it carried Edward Butler's cart off downstream until it was "seen beneath Bidford," and it reached the vicarage at Weston, "and made Adam Sanders thence remove and took away half a hundred pounds of hay."

It is a remarkable piece of writing for a parish clerk. It is not a list of losses for a tax claim. It is a story, written to be remembered, with a human centre: a terrified woman in the mill house who did not know her own child, a girl afloat on a haycock, three men stranded on a bridge. That is one reason it has been copied so often. The other reason is the date. July 1588 was the month the Spanish Armada came up the Channel, and for guidebook writers ever since, a flood in Armada year has been irresistible.

Some of the memorandum's place names need explaining. The Society's typed copy guesses that Grange Mill was at Bidford 02/04, but a gazetteer of Warwickshire mills in the archive identifies it as the mill at Grange, near Warwick, held as "Grainge Mills" from 1535, and records that "Welford-on-Avon's parish register records the mill being broken down in the great flood of 1588" 04/01-14. Holditch, where the crack was heard, is not identified anywhere in the archive. Hillborough is the hamlet across the river; the 1901 census records a Welford man born there 01/35.

One flood, many copies

Because the 1588 memorandum has been copied so many times, the archive is an unusually good place to watch a historical text change as it passes from hand to hand. The source chain, as far as the folders show it, runs like this.

DATE	COPY	REF
undated	Manuscript transcript "Book. A. Page 100", with the transcriber's note that "the remainder of this page has been cut away and a little of it torn"	52/65
30 July 1875	Stratford Herald reprints the entry "after a major Avon flood in 1875"	08/20-29
Oct 1883	Parish magazine prints the extract; C. J. Woodward copies it "literally" into his notebook	21/49
c.1870s-80s	Herald cutting "The Great Flood at Welford in 1588", from R. F. Tomes's copy, adding the Tewkesbury date	52/25
1890	Printed in Sidney Lee's <i>Stratford-on-Avon</i> , p. 161, as Woodward notes	26/10
1907	Woodward, <i>Notes on Welford Church</i>	02/05, 26/10
c.1912	Herald "Walks round Stratford" prints it during a new flood, "about 324 years ago"	23/84-90
1931	Shown as an exhibit at the Welford exhibition of historical records	01/45, 11/27
7 July 1937	Birmingham Mail, "As Shakespeare knew it"	01/44

DATE	COPY	REF
undated	Society typescript extract, two pages	02/04, 05/04
1984, 2000	Read aloud at Society meetings	37/01–04, 38/01–03
c.2012	Quoted in the Society's illustrated talk on the river	52/09

The copies agree on the shape of the story and disagree on almost every detail that can be checked. The date is the first problem. The register, Woodward, the parish inventory and the Herald all say 18 July. The Society's own typescript says 13 July 02/04, and a modern machine transcription of a second copy of that typescript reads the year as "1533" 05/03–09, which cannot be right since parish registers were only begun in 1538. Both are almost certainly misreadings of a typed "18" and "88."

The more serious challenge came from the Herald's nineteenth-century editor. Having printed Tomes's copy, he added that "a notice of this remarkable flood appears also in the records of the town of Tewkesbury, but it is there stated to have occurred on the 19th of July, 1587." Tewkesbury described "a very great and sudden inundation of the rivers Severn and Avon," with haycocks swimming so thickly down towards the long bridge that the townsmen stood on it with pitchforks and poles to break them up, "lest the bridge should be carried away by the force of them." The editor thought Tewkesbury was probably right, because "the entry in the Welford Register was made some years after the occurrence of the flood" 52/25. The Society's river talk accepted the argument: "it is believed the year it happened was 1587 not 1588" 52/09. The manuscript transcript supports the idea that the entry was written up later, in one hand, as a retrospective account. Nobody in the archive has gone back to the Tewkesbury source to check it. For now the honest statement is that the great flood happened in July of 1587 or 1588, and the Armada link may be a coincidence of later dating.

The miller's wife has at least five names. The manuscript has "John Pennels wife then in Millard" 52/65; the Herald prints "John Pennes wife then Millard" 52/25; Woodward's notebook "John Penne's wife, then millard" 21/49; the 1875 reprint "John Penny" 08/20–29; and the Society typescript "John Perry" 02/04. "Millard" here seems to be an occupation or a status, "then the miller's wife," rather than a surname, though one copy reads it oddly as a place. Thetford field in the typescript is Welford field in the Herald and the talk. Edward

Butler, whose cart ended up below Bidford, is “Edward Bat...” in the manuscript, so even his surname is uncertain 52/65.

Retelling also added things. One undated set of notes on the parish history says a Nine Men’s Morris board cut into a field behind the Rectory “was destroyed by the flood in 1588” 37/01–04. Nothing in any copy of the register says so. A notebook in another folder turns the girl from Grafton into “Old mother H[?]” and a companion haymaking in Hillborough meadow, carried by “a great wave” on a haycock “across Avon & the NATE, up to the wall of the Rectory” 20/02. In the register she ends at “the very last bank of the stream” and is rescued by boat. The wall of the Rectory is not mentioned. These are the ordinary changes that happen to a good story told many times, and they are worth noting because the 1588 flood is now so often told from memory.

What the copies do agree on is enough. A sudden summer flood in the late 1580s rose faster and higher than anyone alive had known, flooded the Welford mill house to above head height, carried away the season’s hay and part of the corn, unroofed the mill, nearly drowned a girl from Grafton, and broke bridges from Warwick to Stratford. It is the benchmark against which every later Welford flood has been measured.

The crossing under water 1500s to 1980

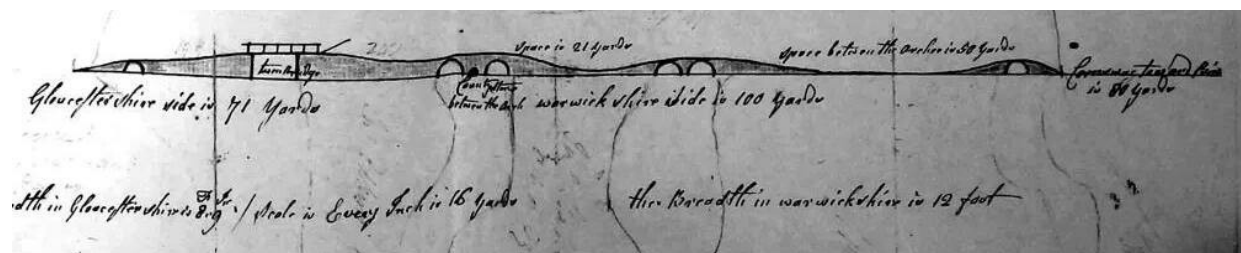
Until the 1930s Welford was in Gloucestershire and Binton, across the river, was in Warwickshire. The crossing between them at Binton Bridges was a county boundary as well as a river crossing, and its history is a history of floods. Mary Deverson’s account of the bridges, written for the Society and reprinted several times, is the main source 07/01–11, 13/32, 52/60.

For centuries there was only a narrow packhorse bridge, reaching part of the way across from the Binton side where an island splits the stream. Beyond it, travellers forded. On the Welford side, an old track ran down to “the crossing place at the bottom of Boat Lane,” where a boat was kept to ferry people across to the Hillborough side in flood. A volunteer’s note records that the boat “was tied” to a willow called the Rector’s willow, and that men still used the ford and the track to Hillborough in 1948 01/35. When the river was up, the boat was the only way across.

In 1783 William Silvester, who owned several of the aits, or islands, in the river, took down the horse bridge and built in its place “a

series of small stone bridges just wide enough for waggons to pass over,” with a toll gate at the south end and an unofficial toll of a shilling. They had no parapets and accidents were common. Worse, the low causeway and its narrow arches dammed the floodwater. In Deverson’s words, the bridge “fell into a very bad state of repair through much use and bad weather conditions, causing the river to flood. Sometimes the water covered the bridge for up to six or eight weeks at a time.” A newspaper feature of the early 1980s puts it more briefly: the bridges “were under water for weeks during floods” 01/38–46.

Six to eight weeks is a long time for a village to be cut off from its market town. Around 1790 the tenants of Welford and Weston and the landowners of half a dozen neighbouring parishes petitioned the Duke of Dorset, the lord of Welford, to join the Marquis of Hertford in pressing for a proper county bridge. The petition is reproduced in the talk script 52/09. When the counties did not act, a public subscription paid for rebuilding between 1804 and 1809.



Binton Bridges before the rebuilding, about 1800. The low causeway runs 71 yards on the Gloucestershire side and 100 on the Warwickshire side, with a handful of small arches to let floodwater through, a county stone between the arches and a timber “turn bridge.” The long spaces without arches are where the water backed up. 52/35

A drawing of the old causeway survives in the Society’s papers 52/35. It shows a long shaded bank with only six or seven small arches along its whole length, and gaps of 21 and 50 yards with no openings at all. Anyone who has watched the meadows at Binton fill can see the problem. When the river spilled across the floodplain, the causeway acted as a weir. A builder’s tender in the same bundle, from a William Hunt, offers to build a new crossing with an oak drawbridge for £965 10s, and includes a clause that tells its own story: Hunt would “keep the whole in repair for two years from the time it is finished and if the Flood should damage it in that time I will repair it and then keep that part in repair two years after” 52/06. Nobody building at Binton could pretend the floods would not come. The talk script notes that Hunt’s design does not seem to have been the one built, since an 1849 drawing shows a bridge without a drawbridge and a different number of arches.

The present bridge has twelve arches. According to Deverson, the five southernmost date from the rebuilding of 1804 to 1809 and the rest are substantially Silvester's. The many flood arches on the northern approach are the answer to the six-week floods. A postcard of the early twentieth century shows the main river arches beside the Four Alls, with men on the parapet and a punt beneath 52/52-57.



Binton Bridges and the Four Alls, early twentieth century postcard. The arches here carry the main channel; a long run of smaller flood arches continues across the meadow to the north. 52/52-57

The crossing has been adjusted for floods ever since. Deverson records that "a culvert has been made near the Four Alls, greatly easing the flood situation." An unidentified newspaper feature, probably of the early 1980s, headed "New look for 'Silvester's Bridge'", describes contractors widening the carriageway and notes a culvert built "near the Four Alls, an area notorious for floods" 01/38-46. In 1979 the Parish Council printed a reply from the County Engineer to residents' complaints about the work then going on: only three flood arches were being widened for now, but "the intention is to widen all the flood spans on the northern approaches to the main river bridge" to make them safer for pedestrians, with the main channel bridge to follow "many years away" 18/07. In 1980 the north end was widened and strengthened for £25,000 and a footpath added 52/09. Stratford's district council resisted a further widening scheme planned for 1985-86, partly because it would bring heavier traffic through a conservation area.

None of the sources says exactly when the Four Alls culvert was built.

Locks, weirs and landowners 1635 to 1971

From the 1630s the Avon was a navigation, made passable for barges by William Sandys under letters patent granted by Charles I in 1635 52/09. Navigation and flooding were tied together from the start. The locks and weirs that held up water for the barges also changed how floods behaved, and every attempt to improve the river had to answer the landowners' question: will it make the floods worse?

The Act regulating the navigation and its rates, which came into force on 29 September 1751, required that "the locks, weirs, bucks, winches, turnpikes, dams, floodgates, and other engines may for the future be kept in good and sufficient order and repair" 52/09. Welford had two locks, the old one by the mill and a second below Cress Hill, both marked on the 1903 map. One Warwickshire survey explains how the old flash locks worked: they had only one pair of gates, so boats went downstream on the "flash" of released water and were winched upstream against it 03/21-31. At the mill itself, the weir to the north "with flood gates in between" was, for the mill enthusiast H. E. S. Simmons, who inspected it in 1943 and 1944, what "adds greatly to the beauty of the mill's surroundings" 52/09.



We

Iford Mill, the pool and the weir, early spring. The mill was largely demolished in 1973 and rebuilt as Old Mill House. Its weir and flood gates controlled the river at the village's most exposed point. 52/30

Trade on the Upper Avon dwindled after the railways came, and the navigation was abandoned in 1877. Late Victorian schemes to reopen it ran straight into the floods argument. A 1905 booklet published at Evesham by the River Avon Improvement Association records that at a Worcestershire inquiry in April 1897, the only opponents were riparian owners on the Upper Avon, represented by counsel, who "strongly urged that the floods on the River would be aggravated by the suggested works to their injury." They had another reason, the booklet adds, which they did not make public: the "excursionists" a navigation would bring 11/31. The commissioners answered that there would be no increase in floods, "but possibly a diminution," and pointed to the Commission of Sewers set up for the Lower Avon in 1891 "for the purpose of giving better control over the floods." The point that the legal level of the river had been fixed by an Act of George II, and that the navigation owners' neglect gave landowners no new rights, was the kind of argument that kept the matter in committees for another seventy years.

When the Upper Avon Navigation Trust finally began work in the late 1960s, it made flood relief part of its pitch. Its outline scheme

of 1968 stated the aim: "to re-open to navigation the Upper Avon, at the same time improving the drainage of the valley and also reducing the tendency of the river to flood." The Trust had its proposed lock and weir sites checked by the Severn River Authority's engineer, who agreed they "should not adversely affect drainage nor increase the risk of flooding" 06/13. A Warwickshire leisure study of 1972 noted, with pencil marks beside "Welford-on-Avon," that landowners "feared flooding and trespass and although they are now no longer concerned about the first – the benefits of the Trust's heavy dredging programme are obvious to those who know the river – potential trespass is still a source of anxiety" 06/18.

The dredging was dramatic at Welford. In 1971 the Herald reported that the Trust had "scoured the river bed nearly nine feet below water level at Welford," levelling the river surface so that there was "no longer a need for the weir and lock at Lower Welford." The project leader, David Hutchings, admitted that "deep dredging could undermine the river banks" 13/17. A year earlier, the Trust had been negotiating with Welford Parish Council over siting the Lower Welford lock on the council's Cress Hill field 06/16. Whether the dredging and the new locks changed Welford's floods is not something the archive can answer. The great floods of 1998, 2007 and 2012 all came after it.

Floods remembered, 1875 to 1912 1875 · 1912

Between 1588 and the twentieth century the archive goes almost silent on Welford's floods. There is no account of a particular flood in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, beyond the general complaint that Silvester's bridges were under water for weeks. The churchwardens' accounts, which survive in part from 1617 to 1765, record payments to travellers with letters of request, among them, in 1727, "a man that was flooded out of the Bristol marshes," but nothing about Welford's own water 03/01–19, 17/01. The parish chest was evidently not where floods were written down.

What the archive does show is how each new flood sent people back to 1588. The Stratford Herald reprinted the register entry on 30 July 1875, because "there had been a great flood along the Avon in 1875" 08/20–29. The paper's 1998 history of local floods, "It's happened before...", picks out 1867, 1901, 1932, 1947 and 1968 as Stratford's great floods 29/23. The archive holds no Welford account of any of the Victorian ones. The 1875 reprint is all that

survives of that summer's flood, and it tells us more about the paper's sense of history than about what happened in the village.

The first flood of modern times that Welford people described for themselves came in the summer of 1912. A Herald series called "Walks round Stratford" reached Welford during the flood and broke off its description of the weirs at the mill to report it 23/84-90:

The Avon was on Tuesday in high flood. After the seventeen hours' continuous downfall of Monday the river, which was bank high, overflowed, and a very serious flood ensued. All the low-lying ground between Stratford and Bidford was submerged, and Binton Bridges were covered and almost for a time impassable. The river rose considerably on Tuesday night, and it was reported that the water was in at the Four Alls inn and at Welford Mill house.

Stratford Herald, "Walks round Stratford", about 1912 23/84-90

The writer added, a little defensively, that Welford was "not more unfortunately situated than its neighbours, and certainly not worse off than it has been on previous occasions," and then printed the whole of the 1588 entry, "about 324 years ago," which fixes the date to 1912. The places named are the usual three: the bridges, the inn by the bridges and the mill.

Sixty years later, Mr Hawkins, whose family had worked Welford Mill since 1895, told a Society meeting about the same summer. The minutes of that evening in September 1972, run as a quiz with a panel of long-standing villagers, record that 1911 "was a year of drought," when cattle were driven from Long Marston all the way to the mill to be watered and then driven back. "The following year - 1912 - was a year of flood & stooked corn had to be carried up on the Hillboro' side to high ground" 24/01. Stooked corn means the harvest had been cut and set up in the fields to dry. The flood, like the one in 1588, came at the worst point of the farming year, and the people on the Hillborough side saved what they could by carrying it uphill.

The same panel recalled that boats from the mill used to ferry men across the river to work in the fields on the Hillborough side. In ordinary times that ferry was a convenience. In flood it was the only link between the farms and their land.

Floods also turn up in the minute books as small practical nuisances. At its meeting of 16 April 1919, Welford Parish Council

noted, among the bad state of the roads and a complaint about overhanging hedges, the “flooding of footpath by ‘The Ashes’” 18/14. A note in a carrier’s recollections, about the cart that took Welford fruit to Birmingham market by back roads to avoid paying the bridge toll twice, adds in brackets the cryptic line “(me during the floods)” 11/21. Whatever the writer meant to add, it was never written.

Above flood level

The clearest sign of how Welford people thought about floods is in the way property was sold. The Society’s summary of sale particulars from 1815 to 1956 includes an auction of 17 March 1923, whose first lot was Boat Cottage with its garden and orchard running down to the river 11/30. The particulars praise the orchard, the frontage to the road and to the private road to Welford Mill, and close the description with the selling point: the property “is above flood level & forms one of the most attractive properties in this popular residential village.” Boat Cottage is the old Bear Inn, whose signpost the 1588 flood carried away. The auctioneer was presumably right about the house in ordinary floods. The Environment Agency’s outline for 2007, discussed below, reaches the Boat Lane area.

A later note on the same sheets observes that “meadow land often shown to be on the river flood plain.” Another lot, sold on 10 June 1949, was a timber and thatched riverside bungalow with an acre and three quarters of meadow, whose single large room had double doors at one end “enabling a boat to be stored during the winter,” and which “stands on brick piers to avert any danger of flooding” 11/30. It is a neat picture of how people built for the river in the twentieth century: up on piers, with room to keep the boat inside when the water came.

Not everyone could build that way. A Herald tribute to Mrs Jane Higgins on her hundredth birthday, in about 1971, written by her former neighbour Doris Toye, describes the cottage where Mrs Higgins lived when the Toyes arrived in 1939–40 13/07. It had no gas or electricity, and the outside tap froze every winter. “When floods came up through the floor she raised the bed on bricks,” and after one flood she was found sweeping out the mud, remarking “Worse things happen at sea.” The summary does not say where the cottage stood, and Mrs Higgins was born in Quinton, so it is possible that the flooded cottage was outside the parish. The habit

it describes, raising the bed, is the same one the miller's household must have known when old Father Porter "knew it under his bedd."

The mill family had their own relationship with the river's dangers. The Society's river talk records that Tom Hawkins, the miller from 1895, "had an unusual psychic ability. If someone drowned in the river and could not be located he was rowed along the river until he had a physical reaction showing where the body was" 52/09. Whatever one makes of the claim, it shows that drownings were common enough for a man to be known for finding the bodies.

Outsiders noticed the river too. A 1938 feature in a series of Shakespeare-country walks, worried that Welford had been "found" and might lose its soul to weekend bungalows and a lido, described the villagers as "kindly folk, inclined to gossip of other days, of happenings by flood and fire" 15/12. By then the floods were part of the way Welford talked about itself.

When the river froze 1894 · 1940–41 · 1947 · 1963

The river's other winter extreme was ice, and ice brought its own flood danger when it broke. George W. Wright, who came to Welford in June 1894, began his memoir of twenty years in the village with the frost of that Christmas 15/10, 25/07:

At Christmas in this year 1894 occurred a severe frost and snow storm. The river was frozen over and skating and other sports indulged in. This has only happened once since, and then, to nothing approaching it in severity. It was contemplated holding a Fete on the ice, and pigs were killed for roasting, but a thaw upset calculations, and the Fete was abandoned.

George W. Wright, "Looking Backwards over Twenty Years", 1915 15/10

Wright adds that the length of the river from Welford Mill to Binton Bridges was measured over the ice, "at equal distance from either bank," at one mile and a furlong, "the best reach for a pull in the immediate neighbourhood." The measurement is a reminder that this stretch, the one that floods, was also Welford's playground.

The second great freeze in the archive came in the first winter of the Second World War. Dr Fisher, daughter of David and Elsie Roberts of Cherry Croft, wrote to the Society enclosing photographs, most of them taken by her father, a keen amateur

photographer with a darkroom in the orchard shed 49/01. In her letter she recalled:

The first winter of the war the Avon froze, the ice was so deep we walked from the Four Alls to the mill along the frozen river and as it melted there was a lot of worry that the lumps of ice would damage the bridge at the Four Alls and the army was called in to advise if the ice should be blown up.

Letter to the Society from Dr Fisher (née Roberts) 49/02

The photograph she sent is captioned on the back, on a Kodak postcard, "Walking on ice from 4 Alls to Welford Mill 40/41" 49/23. Eleven people stand in a line on the river in long coats and caps, the banks deep in snow. With it came two pictures of the mill wheel and gearing thick with ice, captioned "The Mill 40/41" and "The Mill winter 40/41," and an uncaptioned view of dark water pouring over a weir edged with ice 49/24-26. Strictly, the "first winter of the war" was 1939-40, while the photographs say 1940-41. Either the captions or the memory are a year out, or both winters froze.

49/103





Left: "Walking on ice from 4 Alls to Welford Mill 40/41." Right: "The Mill winter 40/41." Snapshots sent to the Society by Dr Fisher, probably taken by her father David Roberts. The worry as the ice broke up was that floating blocks would batter Binton Bridges. 49/23, 49/26

The worry about the bridge is important. When a frozen river thaws, broken ice can jam against bridge piers and weirs and dam the water behind it, so the thaw after a freeze is itself a flood risk. Calling in the army to consider blasting the ice shows how seriously the village took the threat to its only crossing.

The famous winter of 1946-47 brought ice, then snow, then floods. The Society's river talk records Bernard Harris's memory of riding a bicycle on the frozen river from the mill to the Four Alls, with a slide along the middle of the river from the mill, and of walking home from the grammar school in Stratford when the buses stopped, "especially up an icy Borden Hill" 52/09. The talk illustrated that winter with a picture of crowds walking on the ice at Stratford. A later Herald cutting kept in the same folder, from

January 2013, prints the same photograph as one of a series taken by Sam Gee during "The Big Freeze" of January 1963 52/26. So the picture is 1963, not 1947, and it is not Welford. Bernard Harris's ride may belong to 1947 as the talk says, or to one of the other freezes; the script is the only source.

March 1947: the railway bridge Thursday 13 March 1947

The winter of 1946–47 was one of the hardest of the century. The Herald's front-page weather column, written as that winter ended, called it "this year of outrage 1947: abnormal cold for an abnormal time; an almost unprecedented blizzard; and now the third worst flood of the century, followed within two days by a gale of almost unexampled fury" 13/30. When the snow melted in March, the rivers rose fast. At Stratford the Avon rose on the Thursday night, and on the Friday the water covered the Bancroft, cut off the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, flooded Waterside and the Bridge Foot bus station and stood in the Red Lion and the Unicorn. It was the third worst flood of the century at Stratford, 16 inches below the level of May 1932 at Stratford Mill 05/01, 13/30.

On the night of that Thursday, 13 March, Welford had its worst flood tragedy in the archive. The Herald of 21 March 1947 led its front page with it 05/01, and the Society's river talk quotes the report in full 52/09. Harold Stewart Turner, a 43-year-old company director, and his wife Violet Agnes Turner, aged 39, of The Croft, Headlands Road, were driving home and reached the railway bridge at Binton, where the road dips under the single-line railway. As they were nearly home, they decided to try to get through. The engine stopped, water welled up through the floorboards, and they got out to wade home, "the flood being only knee-deep." A few yards on, a dip in the road dropped them into water almost up to their necks, with the current tearing at them. They struggled back to the car, only to find it had been pushed into deeper water.

They clung to each other and to the car, shouting for help, and all the time the current was growing stronger. The woman grew weaker, and eventually, despite everything he could do, she was torn from Mr. Turner's grasp and was swirled away into the darkness.

Stratford Herald, 21 March 1947 05/01

Mr Turner climbed onto the roof of the car, but nobody heard his shouts until the water was within a few inches of him. P.c. West of Binton arrived, lowered a rope from the bridge and began to haul. Then, "above the roar of the flood," he heard a train coming along the single track. The space between the rails and the parapet was narrow, and letting go of the rope might have killed the man below. West held on, half over the parapet, "the rope biting into his hands," while the train passed. P.c. Cox came from Stratford, and between them they pulled Mr Turner up, though he swung like a pendulum and caught under the bridge before they freed him. His ordeal lasted over two hours. He was taken to Stratford Hospital and discharged the next day. When the Herald went to press a week later, Mrs Turner's body had still not been found.

The Herald's front page photograph, by Thos. F. Holte, showed the car with only its roof above "the swirling flood," the road marked by a fence and hedge, the railway embankment in the foreground. The archive's copy of that page carries blue ink marks beside the caption and "Welford-on-Avon tragedy" underlined. Fifty-one years later, the Herald's history of floods remembered it in one sentence: "One Welford woman drowned that year after falling into deep water and the Herald's front page showed a picture of her car submerged in the water with only the roof visible" 29/23. That is a compressed and slightly wrong version. She did not fall in. She was torn from her husband by the current after both had been forced back to the car.



Floodwater under the railway bridge on the road into Welford, date unknown. The village nameplate stands at the water's edge and a board on the bank advertises the Welford, Weston, Binton and Luddington sewerage scheme by the Droitwich Construction Co., which should date the picture once the contract is traced. This is the kind of dip that trapped the Turners' car in 1947. 52/24

An undated photograph in the river folder shows exactly this hazard 52/24. The road runs under a bridge between two stone abutments, with a WELFORD ON AVON sign standing in the water and a current line running through the arch. The Society's cataloguer took it to be the Binton railway bridge. It cannot be the 1947 flood, because the contractor's board on the bank advertises a sewerage scheme for Welford, Weston, Binton and Luddington that was surely later. It shows that the dip kept flooding long after the Turners' night.

The 1947 flood left one more trace in the archive. At a meeting of Shipston Rural District Council reported in the same Herald issue, Mr S. A. Seymour complained that during the flood "water passing Weston Mill smelt like a sewage farm, yet this was the water it was intended people should drink" 05/01. The chairman told him he could have said so in committee, to laughter. The Society later took "Floods of '47" as one of the subjects for an evening of "Voices from the Past," and kept a bundle of cuttings on the floods of that year 37/01-04, 19/21.

“Flooding seemed to happen every winter” 1940s to 1990s

The big named floods dominate the record, but the people who lived in Welford in the mid-twentieth century remembered something more routine. Dr Fisher’s letter, after describing the frozen river, says simply: “Flooding seemed to happen every winter and often the only way to Stratford was via Milcote and Clifford Chambers” 49/02. With Binton Bridges under water, the village could only reach Stratford by going east through Weston and round by Milcote, a long detour on small roads. The road to Stratford was a seasonal road.

The village adapted in small ways. When the County Council reviewed the public footpaths in 1968, the parish proposed adding a path it called SD 27a, running from Pear Tree Close up steps on the south side of the bridle road to Weston and along under the hedge above it, “to exit by Weston Fields Council Houses. This path is used in time of flood” 12/03. When the bridle road along the river went under, people walked the higher path. The proposal records a habit that must have been much older than the paperwork.

Welford also gave to other people’s floods. After the North Sea surge of February 1953 drowned hundreds along the east coast, the Welford branch of the British Legion sent two guineas to the Eastern Counties Flood Disaster Fund, “one which we hope will not re-occur” 56/08, and the Amateur Dramatic Society voted three guineas to a village collection for the flood victims organised by Mrs Rushton 61/01–09.

The Gloucestershire Record Office’s catalogue of Welford parish records lists, among photographs of the church and village from 1887 to 1968, pictures of “river Avon floods, 1953, 1968” 02/01. Those photographs are not in the Society’s archive. The 1953 Avon flood is not mentioned anywhere else in the folders, and the 1968 flood, which the Environment Agency’s map shows as the most extensive of all, has no written account in the archive. These are the biggest gaps in the twentieth-century record.

As the river reopened for boats in the 1970s, the low ground by Binton Bridges was being looked at for leisure. A Warwickshire report on recreation along the Upper Avon, of 1972, suggested that Welford and Bidford were “the two natural choices for the location of Boating Centres on the Upper Avon” and that a new caravan and tent site might be needed near Stratford, “well screened” and close

to the main road. It added: "Although a direct river access for boat launching is desirable, the danger of flooding should be considered. The Binton Bridges area might be suitable" 06/18. Elsewhere it warned that the landscape had limited capacity for camp sites and "flood danger is another hazard." A caravan site by the Four Alls appears in an undated photograph in another folder 16/50, and the Herald in 1998 speaks of a caravan site behind the Four Alls. Twenty-six years after the report, the danger it mentioned came true.

The outlines on the map

The best single picture of where Welford floods is a modern one. On 6 November 2012 the Environment Agency produced, apparently at the Society's request, a "Historic Flood Map Outlines centred on Welford-on-Avon," reference 3784, at a scale of 1:15,000 52/19. It draws the recorded extent of four floods over an Ordnance Survey base: 1968 in pink, 1985 in light blue, 1998 in dark green and 2007 in cream. (The map is Crown and Agency copyright, so it is described here rather than reproduced.)

Looking at the scan, the 1968 flood was by far the largest. Its pink fills the whole meadow inside the northern loop, from the river nearly up to the B439 below Binton Hill, and a wide band on the east bank by Sandfields Farm and the old Experimental Horticulture Station. At the north end of the village it reaches the edge of the gardens between the church and Manor Farm. The 1985 outline hugs the river: a broad blue strip along the south-west bank below the village towards Binton Bridges, and along the east bank towards Luddington. The 1998 outline appears only as narrow green strips on the east bank and patches inside the loop and at Weston. The 2007 outline is small but in a sensitive place, around Boat Lane and the Rectory at the north end of the village, with a strip on the south-west bank.

The village core, on its terrace, sits almost entirely outside every outline, but it is very nearly surrounded. The Society's talk put it drily: the map "suggests it does not help the village being built in a loop of the river" 52/09. The contour heights on the base map make the same point: around 35 to 40 metres at the river, 45 to 52 in the village street.

The map has limits that are worth stating. It shows how far each flood spread, not how deep it was. The colours are drawn as layers, so where outlines overlap only the top colour shows, and an area in

pink may also have flooded later. This probably explains why the 1998 outline looks so modest when every other source makes 1998 the worst flood in living memory at Welford. It begins in 1968, so the floods of 1947, 1912 and earlier are not on it. And it was made three weeks before the floods of late November 2012, so that flood is missing too. The talk script calls the first outline 1969, and one catalogue summary of a cropped copy says the 1985 outline is the largest; the map itself, with its legend, settles both points in favour of 1968.

Easter 1998 Maundy Thursday 9 April 1998 and the Easter weekend

For anyone in Welford today, “the flood” most likely means Easter 1998. More than twenty-four hours of heavy rain, starting on Maundy Thursday, 9 April, sent the Avon, the Stour and the Arrow over their banks across south Warwickshire. The Stratford Herald of the following Thursday, 16 April, ran the headline “FLOOD OF THE CENTURY” and called it the worst in the area for 125 years, “a once in 120 years event.” Caravan parks were evacuated, streets and homes flooded, bridges damaged or closed, and the clean-up across the region was put at £500 million 29/23. The Society kept six pages of that issue, and they are the fullest account of a single flood in the archive.

Welford’s part in the story centred, once again, on Binton Bridges. A Herald photograph showed passers-by surveying “the wreckage of a caravan swept from the site near the Four Alls pub into the River Avon at Binton Bridges, Welford.” Another showed Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service using a boat “to check out the caravan site at Welford.” Victoria Minett’s report, “Bringing out the best... and the worst,” told what had happened at the pub:

Welford was badly affected by the flooding—nowhere more so than the Four Alls pub which lost its power during the evening and provided a home for many stranded customers. However if it had not been for three brave young army cadets, things could have been much worse.

Stratford Herald, 16 April 1998, p. 18 29/23

The three officer cadets from Sandhurst, Peter Beaumont, Barry John and Nick Lilley, answered a plea from the landlady, Lesley Back, to rescue holidaymakers trapped in caravans in the field behind the pub. They worked out a plan in which two of them at a

time went out to the site and back, roped together, until everyone was safe. It took more than three hours of wading through freezing water in near darkness. "You would have thought they were fully trained officers by the way they behaved," Mrs Back told the paper. She herself fed and housed 36 people in her living room for two days.

The same page reported a rescue just along the river at Weston-on-Avon on the Thursday afternoon. Mike Reid, a 63-year-old builder of Milcote Road, saw two women, a mother and her teenage daughter, trying to cross a torrent running across the road and shouted to them to stop. He was fetching a rope when the mother slipped and went under. "Without thinking I jumped in and held her," he said. A barbed wire fence caught his legs, ripping them badly but holding him against the current. He had two artificial hips and a replaced shoulder and could not get out, so he clung to the woman while her daughter struggled under a hedge on the far side of the flow. Help came from the farmer Richard Bluck and his wife Phillipa, who arrived on a tractor. "Richard was the real hero," Reid said, "he was standing waist deep in water to help get us out." Back at home Reid could not get warm and had chest pains; the ambulance could not get through the floods, so a police helicopter lifted him to an ambulance waiting nearby. It turned out to be stress, not a heart attack, and he discharged himself in the early hours to free the bed, getting home by a long detour thanks to a lift from the Herald's own distribution manager 29/23. The Bluck family appears elsewhere in the archive, in photographs from an earlier generation farming in the parish 50/203-205.

Several villagers recorded the flood for themselves. At the Society's meeting of 29 May 1998, Dave Wilshaw showed a video made from the Women's Institute photograph album, followed by a pond-life video and "the recent flooding of the village during the Easter W/E., particularly the rescuing of sheep from Small S Synders [?] Meadow" 38/01-03. The river talk of about 2013 used pictures provided by Joyce Skinner, "the recorder of many village events," as "reminders of the 1998 flood," and others from Mike and Carol Shepherd of Old Mill House, "of what happened to them ... in the same year" 52/09. The archive's scans include one view over flooded meadows taken from an upper window, past a roof slope, which the cataloguer places in the Shepherds' sequence on the strength of the slide numbering alone 52/23. Joyce Skinner's pictures cannot be picked out from the scans with any confidence.



Flooded meadows seen from an upstairs window, probably Old Mill House in 1998. The attribution rests on where the slide falls in the Society's river talk, not on anything written on the print. 52/23

The album

The most vivid record of a Welford flood in the whole archive has no words on it at all. It is a set of thirteen black album pages holding 51 colour snapshots of a severe flood, four to a page, without a caption, a name or a date 41/34. The Society's catalogue describes it only as "The River Avon in flood."

The pictures themselves place it. Brown water stands across the meadows beneath a steep wooded hill. Chalets and caravans stand in the river, one tipped on its end, others half submerged. A road disappears under water past a 30 sign and a red warning triangle, with a line of cars and a removal-type van waiting at the edge. Onlookers stand where the water crosses the road. Two cars are under water nearly to their roofs beside an overturned caravan. Later pages show the aftermath: boats and caravans piled under blue tarpaulins on a muddy field, a white car with its windscreen cracked and its bonnet heaped with debris.

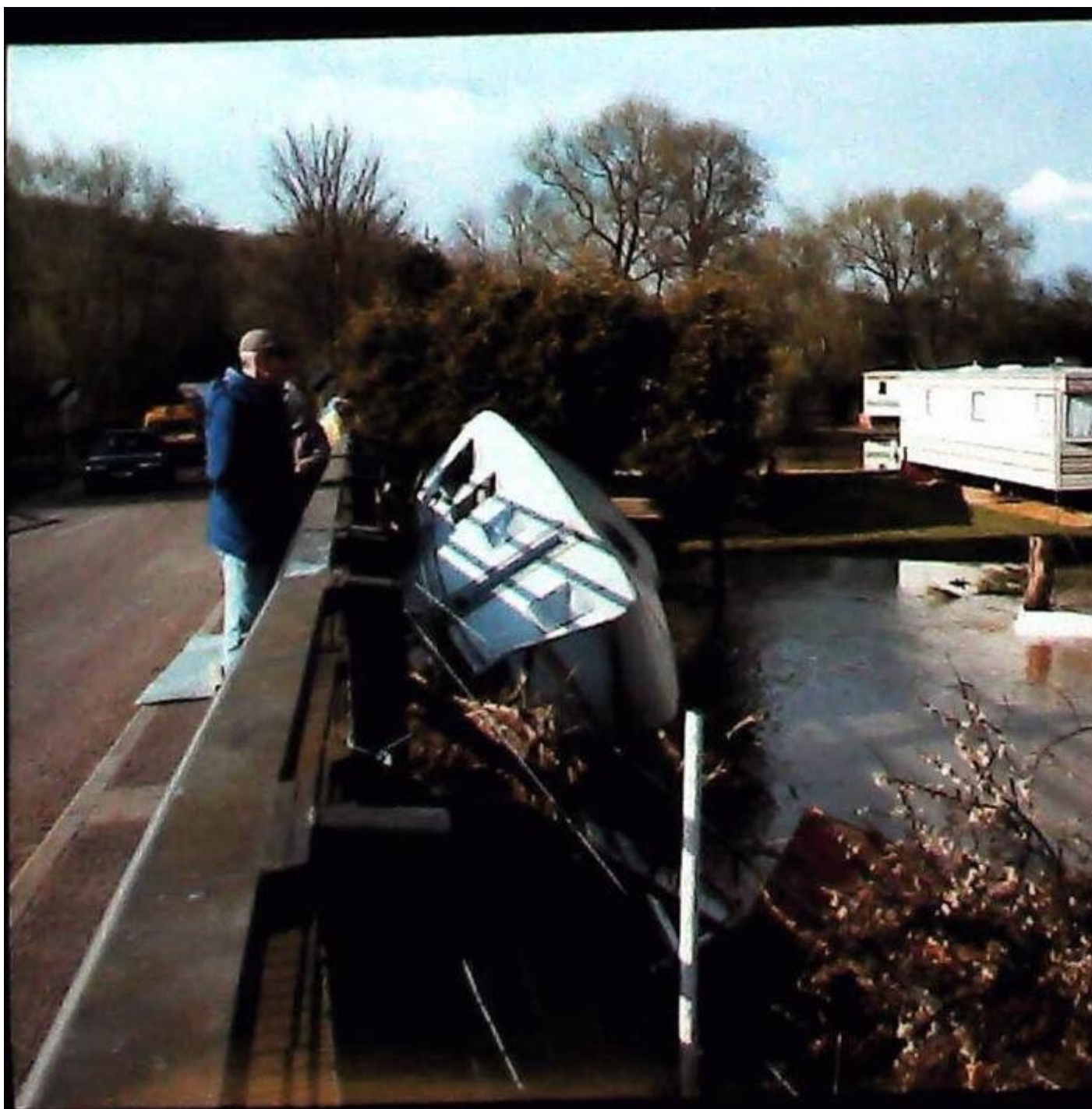


The road closed by water, and cars caught near the caravan site. Two of the 51 snapshots in the undated album. 41/34

The hill is Binton Hill, and the caravan park below it is the site by the Four Alls. The date is not written anywhere, but the evidence points strongly to Easter 1998. The trees are just coming into leaf, and daffodils show in the verges in several pictures, which fits early April. The caravans swept into the river match the Herald's "wreckage of a caravan swept from the site near the Four Alls pub into the River Avon at Binton Bridges." And a run of pictures shows a flock of sheep being driven along a wet lane by people on foot with a tractor and pick-up, which fits the Society's minute about "the rescuing of sheep" from the Synders meadow at Easter 1998. The November 2012 flood is the only other candidate in the archive, and the November photographs in the Herald show autumn colour, not spring growth.



Moving the sheep. A run of pictures in the album shows a flock being brought along a lane out of the flood, matching the Society's note of "the rescuing of sheep" from the Synders meadow at Easter 1998. 41/34



Looking down from the bridge at the wreckage. An overturned craft lies against the bank with the caravans beyond, the scene the Herald photographed at Binton Bridges. 41/34

A second, smaller album of thirteen flood snapshots, also uncaptioned, shows brown floodwater in front of a long white inn, a riverside green with a sign reading "SWIMMING HERE IS DANGEROUS," and a road junction with traffic lights with the floodwater at the end of the street 41/07. Welford has no traffic lights. This looks like a town, possibly Stratford, and it is left out of this account until someone can identify it.



The valley full. The flood spread across the meadows, seen from higher ground. 41/34

2007 and 2012

Nine years after the “once in 120 years” flood, it happened again. On Friday 20 and Saturday 21 July 2007, floods hit about fifty communities across south Warwickshire and flooded around five hundred homes. The Herald’s “Flood Special” of 26 July asked on its front page: “They said that the 1998 floods were a ‘once in 120 years’ event. Nine years later we were flooded again... WHY?” 42/15. The pages the Society kept cover Stratford, Bidford, Wellesbourne, Henley-in-Arden and above all Shipston, where the Stour rose six feet in the town. A farming page reported that rivers rose “two feet an hour” instead of the usual one, and an Alderminster farmer called it the worst since Easter 1998 42/08. Neither cutting mentions Welford. The only Welford evidence for 2007 is the Environment Agency’s outline, which shows the water reaching the Boat Lane and Rectory area at the north end of the village.

The archive’s last flood came in late November 2012. A cutting from the Midweek Herald of Tuesday 27 November 2012 shows a lorry driving straight at the camera through deep floodwater past a 30 sign, throwing a brown wave across the road, with a van coming through more slowly behind. The caption reads: “Escape from Welford... Drivers battled through the floods to get out of the village and onto the Evesham Road” 52/21. A second photograph from the same assignment shows a car driving through water

breaking over its bumper beside the post-and-rail fence of the bridge approach: "A motorist risks driving over Binton Bridges, near Welford, which was closed for several days" 52/22.

The floods of 2012 came three weeks after the Environment Agency had drawn its map of Welford's historic floods for the Society. The same autumn, the Society was printing out the Domesday entry for Welford and gathering material for its talk on the river 52/26. The record of floods was being assembled while the water was still coming.

How the village remembers

The 1588 memorandum did not survive by accident. It was copied, printed, exhibited and read aloud, and the way Welford has used it says something about how a village holds on to its own past.

For guidebook writers it became a fixture. The same paragraph, with small changes, appears in a Festival of Britain leaflet of 1951, a later tourist leaflet and other promotional pieces in the archive: "The Church records, which date from 1560, carry an interesting account of the Avon in flood in the year of the Spanish Armada" 55/11, 13/06, 01/75-89, 11/53, 55/02. In 1937 the Birmingham Mail's feature "As Shakespeare knew it" quoted the entry to sell Welford as a place where visitors could see the lych gate and the mill "as Shakespeare saw it" 01/44. The link to the Armada did the work that the link to Shakespeare did for the rest of the district.

For the village itself the entry was a treasure to be shown and protected. At the 1931 exhibition of historical records organised by H. M. Woodward, the newspaper report opened under the heading "FIRE AND FLOOD," and the proceeds went towards a safe to hold the parish register 11/27. The exhibition, in other words, raised money to protect the very book in which the flood is recorded. Copies of the Herald's cutting on the flood of 1588 went into the county collections and are listed in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's catalogue of Welford material 06/20, 13/31, 19/37.

The Local History Society has returned to floods again and again. At its 1984 evening of readings, "Whispers from the Past," the programme ran "from the 1588 flood to 1969," and Mr Bastow opened it by reading the account of 1588 37/01-04. At a meeting in January 1994, Mr N. Smith read three pieces "about inclement weather in Welford including floods, which as the present weather was not good we felt was very appropriate." In May 1998, a month

after Easter, the members watched the video of the flood. At the annual meeting of March 2000 the committee read pieces researched at the Stratford Records Office, including the flood of 1588, and the secretary's report the following year summed up the evening: "Interesting to learn of floods and fires years ago" 38/01-03. The river talk of about 2013, with its section headed "Floods and frozen rivers," brought together the 1588 entry, the 1947 tragedy, the Environment Agency map, Joyce Skinner's and the Shepherds' pictures of 1998 and Bernard Harris's memory of cycling on the ice 52/09.

Floods and fires go together in nearly every one of these programmes. The church fire of 1884 and the flood of 1588 are Welford's two great disasters in the written record, and between them they mark the edges of what the village has had to endure. The 1938 writer was right that Welford liked to "gossip of other days, of happenings by flood and fire." The archive is that gossip, written down.

A chronology

The table below lists every flood or freeze the archive records with a date, and what it says happened in or near Welford.

DATE	WHAT THE SOURCES RECORD	REF
1330	Weston deed forbids a new pond to flood William de Careswell's meadows or harm his mill	15/14
c.1470s-1584	Floods reach "under his bedd" in the mill house in Father Porter's lifetime	52/25, 52/65
18 July 1588 (or 19 July 1587)	Sudden summer flood; mill house a yard and a half deep, mill unthatched, hay and corn lost, girl carried on a haycock, Bear sign carried off, Weston vicarage flooded	52/65, 52/25, 21/49, 02/04
1783 to 1809	Silvester's low bridges at Binton under water "for up to six or eight weeks at a time"; petition c.1790; rebuilding 1804-09 with flood arches	07/01-11, 52/09, 52/35
1875 (summer)	Herald reprints the 1588 entry after a great Avon flood; no Welford details	08/20-29
Christmas 1894	River frozen from the mill to Binton Bridges; skating; planned fête on the ice abandoned at the thaw	15/10, 25/07
1912 (summer)	After 17 hours' rain, Binton Bridges covered, water in the Four Alls and Welford Mill house; stooked corn carried to high ground	23/84- 90, 24/01
April 1919	Parish Council notes flooding of the footpath by The Ashes	18/14

DATE	WHAT THE SOURCES RECORD	REF
1939–41	River frozen; villagers walk from the Four Alls to the mill; army consulted on blasting the ice to protect the bridge	49/02, 49/23–26
1940s	“Flooding seemed to happen every winter”; Stratford reached only via Milcote and Clifford Chambers	49/02
13 March 1947	Snow-melt flood; Violet Turner swept away from her car under Binton railway bridge; her husband rescued by two constables	05/01, 52/09, 13/30
1953	Photographs of Avon floods listed at Gloucestershire Record Office; village gives to the East Coast flood fund	02/01, 56/08, 61/01–09
1968	Most extensive flood outline on the Environment Agency map; flood-time footpath SD 27a proposed	52/19, 12/03, 02/01
1979–80	Flood arches on the northern approach to Binton Bridges widened; culvert near the Four Alls at an unknown date	18/07, 52/09
1985	Flood outline along both banks on the Environment Agency map; no written account	52/19
9–12 April 1998	“Flood of the Century”: caravans swept into the river at Binton Bridges, holidaymakers rescued by Sandhurst cadets, 36 sheltered at the Four Alls, sheep moved from the meadow, rescue at Weston	29/23, 41/34, 38/01–03
20–21 July 2007	South Warwickshire floods; outline reaches Boat Lane and the Rectory	42/15, 42/08, 52/19
late Nov 2012	Drivers struggle out of the village to the Evesham Road; Binton Bridges closed for several days	52/21, 52/22

Read down the right-hand column of what happened, and the pattern from the first section holds. The water comes into the mill, the inn by the river, the crossing at Binton and, since the 1970s, the caravans on the low ground by the bridges. The roads in and out go under, so the village is cut off, sometimes for days and in the eighteenth century for weeks. People drown not in their houses but on the roads and in the meadows: a girl at the hay in 1588, a woman in her car in 1947, nearly a mother and daughter at Weston in 1998. The houses on the gravel terrace, the ones the guidebooks photograph, have very rarely been touched. Welford’s floods are a story about how the village is joined to everywhere else.

Gaps and conflicting sources

WHERE THE SOURCES DISAGREE

- **The year of the great flood.** The register, the Herald and Woodward give 18 July 1588. The Herald's nineteenth-century editor cited Tewkesbury records dating the same flood to 19 July 1587 and thought Tewkesbury more reliable, because the Welford entry was written up some years later 52/25; the Society's talk agreed 52/09. Nobody in the archive has checked the Tewkesbury source.
- **The day.** The Society typescript gives 13 July 02/04 and a machine transcription of its copy reads the year as 1533 05/03–09. Both look like misreadings of 18 and 88.
- **Names in the 1588 entry.** The miller's wife appears as the wife of John Pennels, Pennes, Penne, Penny and Perry; the field as Thetford or Welford; the cart owner as Edward Butler or Edward Bat... 52/65, 52/25, 21/49, 08/20–29, 02/04. Grange Mill is placed at Bidford with a question mark in the typescript, but a mills gazetteer identifies it as Grange near Warwick 02/04, 04/01–14.
- **Additions to the story.** Claims that the flood destroyed a Nine Men's Morris board behind the Rectory 37/01–04, and that haymakers were carried "up to the wall of the Rectory" 20/02, are not in any copy of the register.
- **Father Porter's age** of 109 is as the register gives it and cannot be checked.
- **The 1947 death.** The 1998 Herald says the Welford woman "drowned ... after falling into deep water" 29/23; the 1947 report says she was torn from her husband's grasp by the current after both were forced back to the car 05/01.
- **The wartime freeze.** Dr Fisher remembers "the first winter of the war" (1939–40); her photographs are captioned 40/41 49/02, 49/23–26.
- **The ice photograph in the river talk** is shown as Stratford in 1947 but is Sam Gee's photograph of January 1963 52/26.
- **The Environment Agency map.** The talk calls the first outline 1969; the map's legend says 1968. One catalogue summary of a cropped copy says 1985 is the largest outline; the full map with its legend shows 1968 as the largest 52/09, 52/19.

WHAT IS INFERRED HERE

- The undated album 41/34 is dated to Easter 1998 from the spring foliage and daffodils, the caravans in the river and the sheep, which match the Herald and the Society's 1998 minute. Nothing on the pages says so.
- The upstairs view 52/23 is attributed to Old Mill House in 1998 only from its place in the talk's slide sequence.
- The flooded railway bridge 52/24 is undated; the sewerage contractor's board on it should make it datable.
- The ice photographs 49/23–26 are attributed to David Roberts because his daughter says he took most of the pictures she sent.
- Where Mrs Higgins's flooded cottage stood is not stated 13/07.

WHAT THE ARCHIVE DOES NOT HAVE

- A photograph of the 1588 register page itself; the folders hold only copies.
- Any account of a Welford flood between 1588 and 1912 beyond the general complaint about Silvester's bridges. The great Stratford floods of 1867, 1875, 1901 and 1932 have no Welford record.
- The photographs of Avon floods in 1953 and 1968 listed at the Gloucestershire Record Office 02/01, and any written account of the 1968 or 1985 floods.

- Joyce Skinner's record of 1998 and the Shepherds' pictures, beyond the single scan thought to be theirs.
- Any Welford-specific report of the July 2007 floods.
- The date of the culvert near the Four Alls, and any record of flood defences, warnings or insurance claims in the village.
- Anything after November 2012.
- The Herald photographs of 1947, 1998 and 2012 exist in the archive but are newspaper copyright and are described rather than reproduced. So is the Environment Agency map.

SOURCES

- 1588 flood: 52/65 (manuscript transcript), 52/25 (Herald cutting), 21/22–66 at 21/49 (Woodward, from parish magazine 1883), 02/02–05 and 05/03–09 (inventories, typescripts), 08/20–29 (Herald 1875), 26/10 (Woodward 1907), 23/84–90 (Herald c.1912), 01/44–45, 11/27 (1931 exhibition, 1937 Mail), 20/02, 37/01–04, 04/01–14 (mills gazetteer)
- Landscape: 46/14 (OS 1903), 10/28–29 (geology notes), 03/21–31 (annotated map), 52/19 (Environment Agency map, 2012)
- Binton Bridges: 07/01–11, 13/32, 52/60 (Deverson), 01/38–46, 52/06, 52/35, 52/52–57, 18/07, 52/09, 01/35 (ferry)
- Navigation: 52/09, 11/31 (1905 booklet), 03/21–31, 06/13, 06/16, 06/18, 13/17
- Houses and people: 11/30 (sale particulars), 13/07 (Mrs Higgins), 15/12 (1938 feature), 24/01 (1972 quiz), 18/14, 11/21, 12/03
- Ice: 15/10, 25/07 (Wright), 49/01–02, 49/23–26 (Fisher letter and photographs), 52/26 (1963)
- 1947: 05/01 (Herald 21 March 1947), 13/30, 52/09, 52/24, 19/21
- 1953 and 1968: 02/01, 56/08, 61/01–09
- 1998: 29/23 (Herald 16 April 1998), 41/34 (album), 38/01–03 (Society minutes), 52/09, 52/23, 50/203–205
- 2007 and 2012: 42/15, 42/08, 52/21, 52/22
- Memory: 55/11, 13/06, 01/75–89, 11/53, 55/02, 06/20, 13/31, 19/37, 37/01–04, 38/01–03