

Welford-on-Avon · Binton Bridges, the Gloucestershire end

The Four Alls

A king, a parson, a soldier and a farmer: two centuries of the inn at the bridge-foot, its toll gate, and the people who kept it.

Drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive (folder references in grey). A companion to the essays on the Bell Inn and on working lives in Welford.



Binton Bridges and the Four Alls, about 1900–09. Postcard from the online catalogue copied into the archive. The rendered inn with its long signboard stands at the Welford end of the bridge; anglers sit in a punt under the small arches and onlookers gather by the pub door. 52/52

The sign at the bridge-foot

Most people who come to Welford by car arrive the same way. They leave the Stratford to Evesham road, cross the low run of arches that carries the lane over the Avon, and the first building they meet on the Welford side is the Four Alls. It has stood there, in one form or another, for well over two hundred years, and for most of that time it was more than a pub. Until 1893 its keeper also kept the gate of the last toll bridge in Warwickshire or Gloucestershire. Its owners collected the wharf dues of the river trade. Its landlords let out boats and fishing, served the boatmen, hosted the meeting that ended the tolls, launched the 1950s river carnivals, and, in the Easter floods of 1998, sheltered stranded

customers while army cadets roped holidaymakers out of the caravans behind it.

The name comes from the sign. In 1906 the Bristol schoolmaster J. H. Garrett, boating up the river for his book *The Idyllic Avon*, described it with obvious pleasure:

"The Four Alls" is a public-house at the bridge-foot, having a sign bearing the portraits of four personages important in the management of public affairs, each of whom does all of something, as thus: A king who rules over all; a parson who prays for all; A soldier who fights for all; a farmer who pays for all.

J. H. Garrett, *The Idyllic Avon* (1906), p. 208 · 11/33, 15/04

A writer signing himself "J. H." in the *Birmingham Weekly Post*, some time before 1931, gave the four figures speaking parts: the king says "I rule all", the parson "I pray for all", the soldier "I fight for all", "and the last, 'And I pay for all.'" He counted the Four Alls as one of Welford's three famous features, with the Maypole and the lych gate 13/23. A rambling column of 1938 simply asked its readers, "you have heard of that famous sign?" 15/12. The Four Alls is an old English sign found in other places too, and the joke has always been the same: the farmer, who does the paying, is the one who keeps everyone else. In a parish of farmers and market gardeners, the joke landed.

Garrett noticed something else. Because the inn sat on the Gloucestershire bank, right on the county boundary, it was "a meeting-place for the men of both counties". Over their beer they argued about ploughs, cows and the best feed for cart-horses, and "as the inn itself is in Gloucestershire, the men of this county have the advantage in being able to tell the Warwickshire men to get back into their own county whenever they become too argumentative" 11/33. That boundary shaped the inn's whole history. It is why the Four Alls collected tolls from Warwickshire travellers, why the river trade paid dues at its wharf, and why, until Welford moved into Warwickshire in 1931, the inn's licensees appear in Gloucestershire directories rather than Warwickshire ones.

Before the inn: the ford and the horse-bridgeMiddle Ages to 1790

The crossing is much older than the pub. Welford's own name, as one Society history puts it, means "the ford through the willows", and that writer placed the ford at the Four Alls 39/01. The river is broad and shallow here and splits into several channels around islands, called aits. That is why "Binton Bridges" has always been plural. The writers of the 1920s and 1930s were still explaining this to their readers, a little puzzled to find what looked like one bridge 13/22, 15/12.

M. Deverson's history of the bridges, which survives in several copies in the archive, says the first bridge was a narrow packhorse bridge that reached only

part of the way across, from the Binton bank to an island. Two mills worked here: Binton Mill on the north bank, and a Welford mill probably in the meadow still called Milham, "to the southeast of the Four Aills". Both were valued in 1291, and the Welford one was still attached to the manor in 1609 52/60, 13/32, 07/09. The land on the Welford bank belonged to the lords of Welford manor, later the Dukes of Dorset. The Binton bank belonged to the Marquises of Hertford of Ragley. The tenants on each side were supposed to repair the bridge, and often did not. The Warwick Sessions presented Edward Welles of Welford in 1674 "for not repairing the part of stone bridge in Binton", and others in the years that followed 07/09, 52/09.

Repairs were paid for in 1726, 1727 and 1730. Then, in 1783, William Silvester, who owned several of the aits, took down the old horse-bridge and built a run of small stone bridges just wide enough for a waggon. He put a gate at the south end, the Welford end, and charged an unofficial toll of a shilling a journey 07/09, 52/09, 52/60. This is the first clear record of the toll gate that would belong to the Four Aills for the next hundred and ten years. No document in the archive names the inn before about 1800. The authors of the Society's river talk said frankly, "The Four Aills was certainly there around 1800 but I have not been able to trace its origins" 52/09. But a house at the gate that took the tolls is exactly the kind of place that becomes an inn, and the two probably grew up together.

John Edkins and the tollc.1790–1841

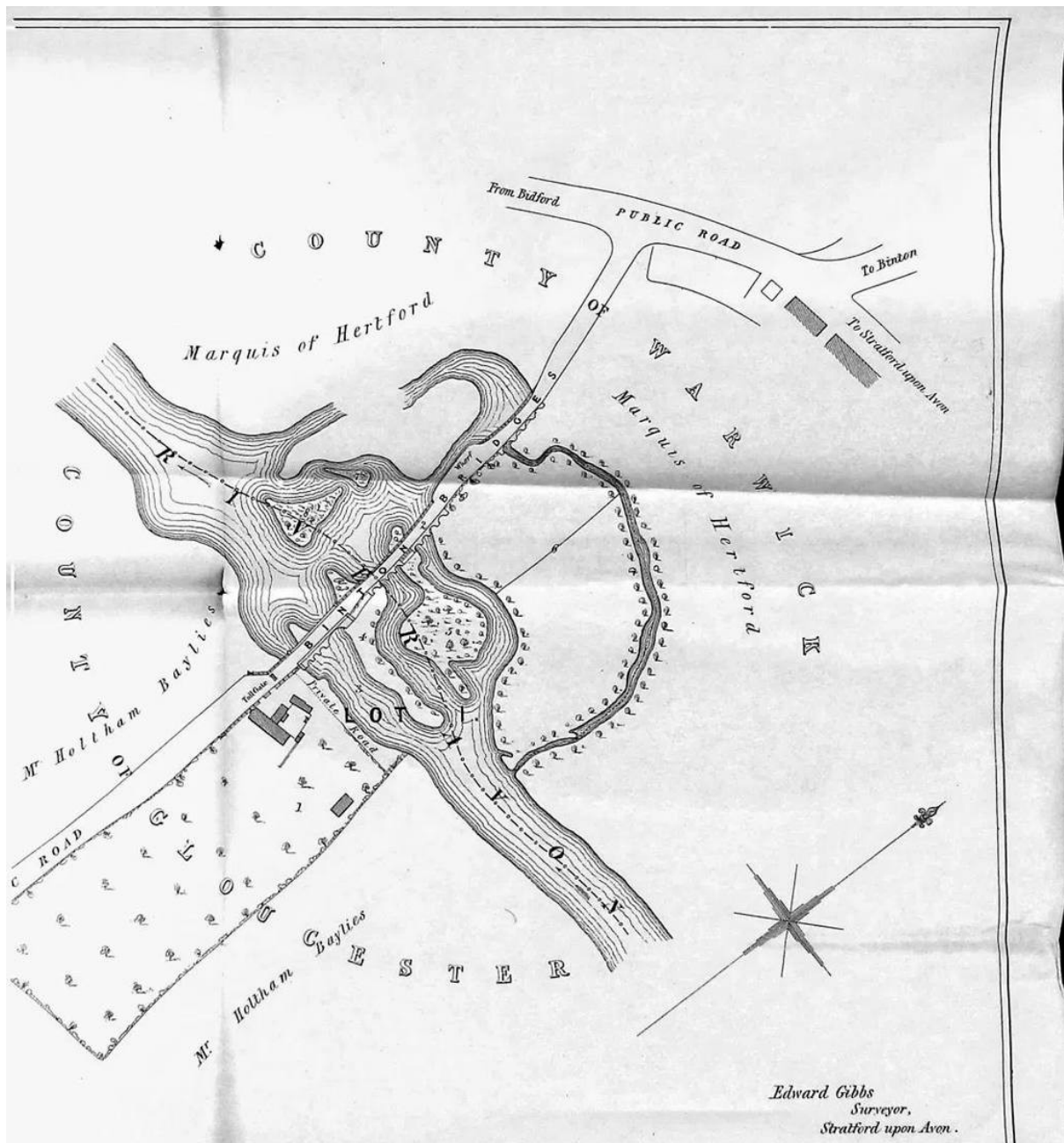
Silvester's bridges did not last. By about 1790 the crossing was in "a most dreadful state of repair", and floods sometimes covered it for six or eight weeks at a time. The parishioners of Welford, Weston and a ring of villages from Quinton to Barton petitioned the Duke of Dorset for a new bridge "at the charges of the Counties of Gloucester and Warwick". The petition is a catalogue of near-drownings. John Boyce, a Welford carrier, was swept two hundred yards downstream with his horse. William Sale, a butcher, was washed off the bridge and drowned. William Sandford, "servant to your Grace", overturned his waggon and lost a load of coal 07/09, 52/09. Among the sixty-seven Welford men who signed were a Thos. Edkins and a Matt Mills 07/09. Both surnames matter to the Four Aills. The Edkins family held it at the turn of the century, and the Mills family held it for most of the next.

The petition failed, and the problem ended up in court. A document of 1 October 1802 described the bridges as "unsafe and dangerous" to people, horses and cattle, "very low, ruinous, broken and in great decay". It names the Four Aills as owned by a Mr J. Edkins, who was collecting the tolls. He and J. Slatter of Priors Salford, who held the aits on the Binton side, were indicted for failing to repair the bridge 52/09. The same year, Welford's enclosure award

was drawn up. It mentions the inn three times, always as a landmark: the "Road from Four Alls Eastward" along the river for the Baylies estate, a public gravel pit in Bridges Field bounded "on North by Ancient Inclosure belonging to Four Alls", and a 42-acre allotment bounded by "ancient inclosures being to Four Alls and the Private Road by Riverside" 01/70, 20/04, 22/12, 47/98. "Ancient" here is a legal word. It means the inn's closes were already enclosed before the award, which suggests the Four Alls had held land by the bridge for some time.

The lawsuit forced a settlement. On 2 August 1804 John Edkins agreed with Thomas Hunt of Stratford, William Bayliss of Welford and John Tommes of Long Marston that, if they could raise £200 by subscription, he would give up "all rights and title to the aforementioned bridge and the taking of tolls", at a price to be set by two referees. Anne Slatter, John Slatter's widow, signed a similar agreement a fortnight later 52/09. The archive holds an undated estimate from William Hunt to rebuild the bridge for £965 10s. It would have levelled the road "from the Corner of Edkins House" and added "a good Oak Draw Bridge", a reminder that masted boats still came up this far 52/35–36, 52/06. The work was done between 1804 and 1809, and the five southern arches of the present bridge date from then 52/60, 07/09.

It is not clear that Edkins ever actually lost the tolls. Later sale particulars show the bridges, their tolls and the wharf still sold with the inn as private property in 1849 and 1866, so whatever the 1804 agreement intended, the toll stayed with the Four Alls. The Edkins family stayed too. The 1841 census, the first to name people, begins its Welford book with John Edkins, aged 75, farmer, at "Binton Bridge House" 48/01. A J. Edkins had been churchwarden when a new bell was cast in 1796 21/50, 40/01. Whether "Binton Bridge House" in 1841 and "Edkins House" in Hunt's estimate were the inn itself or a farmhouse beside it, the archive does not say.



The Four Alls estate, Victorian sale plan by Edward Gibbs, surveyor, Stratford. The road crosses the braided Avon on Binton Bridges. Lot 1 lies at the Gloucestershire (Welford) end, with the inn and outbuildings beside the toll gate, the orchard, a private road along the bank and the numbered islands. Mr Holtham Baylies owned the land on either side, and the Marquis of Hertford the Warwickshire bank. Probably the plan for the 1866 sale, which 30/03 attributes to Gibbs. 52/57; compare 30/03, 52/60

The Mills family and the widow at the gate 1841–1866

For the middle of the nineteenth century, the Four Alls belonged in practice to one woman, Lucy Mills. In 1841 a John Mills, 60, farmer, and Lucy Mills, 45, were living with their children John, Arthur and Sarah at a house the transcriber

read as "Mill [?] House" 48/01. By the spring of 1849 John was dead. On 11 April that year, at the Bell, the auctioneer George Mann offered:

All that commodious & Convenient Messuage or Tenement pleasantly situate on the Banks of the River Avon at Binton Bridge with the Garden, Productive Orchards, Stables, Meadow & Pasture Land, Closes, Naytes, & Islands thereto belonging, also the Right of Fishery ... Tolls payable at the Gate erected at the bridges ... & the Wharf at such bridges with the Tonnage dues & other perquisites ... now in the occupation of Mrs Lucy Mills, widow.

Sale of 11 April 1849, copied from SBT ER6/17/1 · 11/30, p. 3–4

The lot was sold "subject to the Life Interest of a Lady now in her 58th year", which fits Lucy. It also carried two mortgages of £636 and a legacy of £100 payable at her death. The researcher who copied the sale into the Society's notebook also copied the bidding. A Mr E. Parker ran it up against "Mr J. Mills", "Mr M. Mills" and "Mr Mills", presumably Lucy's sons trying to keep the place in the family. It was knocked down to a Mr Stanley for £200 11/30. Because Lucy kept a life interest, nothing changed at the bridge. In the 1851 census she is head of the household at the "Four Alls Inn, Binton Bridge", widow, 57, innkeeper, born in Welford, with her son Matthew, 30, a farmer of 110 acres 14/12. Matthew was literate and trusted enough to be the census enumerator for the outlying farms that year 14/14. The Post Office and Bristol directories of 1856 and 1859 list "Mills, Lucy (Mrs.), Four Alls" among Welford's three inns, beside the Bell and the Boat 48/13–16.

The 1861 census gives the best picture of how the business worked. At the Four Alls Inn, Binton Bridge, Matthew Mills, 40, is the victualler, with his wife Martha, 28, from Grafton, three young children, and two visitors, one of them a midwife. Lucy, 63 by the census (she was probably nearer 70), is entered as a lodger and widow, and her occupation is "collector of bridge tolls" 48/04. The son kept the bar and the mother kept the gate. A Gloucestershire directory of the early 1860s, which survives only as a garbled machine transcription, appears to list her still: "Lane, Lucy (Mrs.), 'Four Alls'", where "Lane" is almost certainly a misreading of Mills 34/52.

In 1866 the whole estate came up again, this time by Thomas Bennett at the Red Horse Hotel, Stratford, on Friday 1 June, in one lot. The printed particulars are the fullest description of the old inn:

A FULL LICENSED ROADSIDE COUNTRY INN, called "THE FOUR ALLS," pleasantly situated on the Banks of the River Avon, at Binton Bridges, in the County of Gloucester. The Inn and Premises comprise large Parlour, Kitchen, Bar, Four Bedrooms, Brewhouse, Cellar, Dairy, Barn, Mealhouse, Stable and Loft over, Cowhouse, and other Out-offices, with a good Garden attached.

Particulars of sale, 1 June 1866 · 30/03 (also typed copies in 03/22, 07/09, 52/60)

With the inn went arable land planted with fruit trees and offered as building plots, "houses being in great demand in the neighbourhood", old pasture, orchards and islands, 9 acres 3 roods 18 perches in all. Above all, it included "the Bridges over the River Avon, known as 'Binton Bridges' and the Tolls payable thereat, and the Wharves on such Bridge, with the Tonnage and other Dues", worth about £60 a year. "The Tolls for passing over the same are readily collected by the Occupier of the Inn, the Gate being within a few yards of it." A right of fishery "affords excellent sport for Excursionists and Visitors to the Inn". Viewing was by application to "Mrs. Mills, at the property", and early possession could be had 30/03. The acreage, 9a 3r 18p, is exactly that of Lot 1 in 1849, so this was the same estate. After at least twenty-five years, and probably longer, the Mills family's time at the Four Alls was ending.

The inn was a working smallholding as much as a pub. It brewed its own beer, kept cows and made butter in its dairy, stored meal and grew fruit, and it had the toll and the wharf. The Society's river talk explains the wharf. The tonnage dues on goods landed at the Binton Bridges wharf, where osiers and milled grain were loaded and coal unloaded, and where boats turned, "then belonged to the owner of the Four Alls" 52/09. Mrs Horne, talking to the antiquary H. M. Woodward in 1906, remembered that "the boatmen who came up the river and stayed at the Four Alls used to make the poker hot and burn holes in the beam over the fireplace". She did not know why. The villagers never did it, only the boatmen 21/25.

Walton, Davis and the end of the tolls 1866–1893

Who bought the Four Alls in 1866 is not recorded in the archive, and the 1871 census pages for this end of the parish are missing 48/05. When the record resumes in 1881 the innkeeper at "Binton Bridges, Four Alls Inn" is transcribed as William Walker, 41, born at Quinton, with his wife Mary, 49, born in Warwickshire. The surname is marked doubtful, and the same doubtful surname is given to a young farmer, Thomas H., in the next house 48/06. Ten years later the 1891 census finds a widow, Mary Walton, 59, publican, born at Stratford, keeping the Four Alls with her daughter Amy and son-in-law George Hawkins, a gardener, and two grandchildren, one only days old 48/07. Mary's age and birthplace fit the 1881 Mary exactly, and a T. H. Walton, farmer, appears in the 1900 directory 46/99. So the 1881 landlord was almost certainly William Walton, not Walker. Mary seems to have carried on the licence after his death. Amy's middle name, Hiron, and her birthplace, Shotton, hint that Mary had been married before.

Another name belongs to these years, but only in memory. In 1938 the *Evesham Journal* reprinted a photograph of the freeing of the bridge, and an old villager, Harry Sutton, told the reporter, "That toll bar used to belong to the Four Alls when a Birmingham man the name of Davis was the proprietor. It must be nearly fifty years ago" 01/40. Deverson's history repeats this 52/60, 07/09. Davis may have been the owner while the Waltons held the licence. The newspaper account of 1893, however, says payment for the bridge was made to "the owners, Messrs Dutton & Hudson of Warwick" 52/09. By then the rights may have passed through more than one pair of hands.

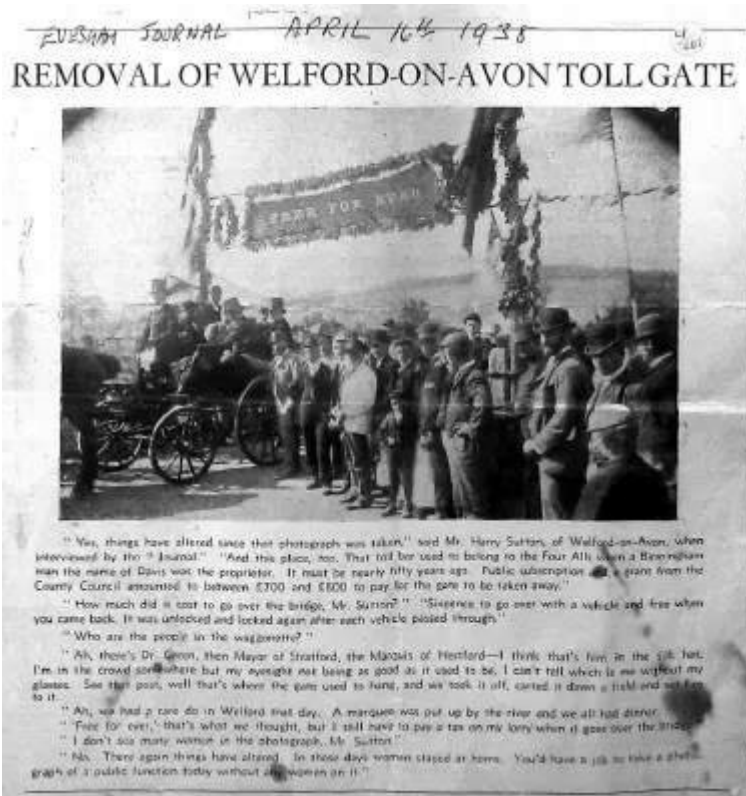
Whoever owned it, the toll had become hated. "The imposition has been felt to be particularly irksome for a long time past," the *Herald* wrote. Roland Harris remembered how in the 1880s the carter Perks loaded fruit and vegetables for Birmingham market each evening and crossed the bridge with two horses, and the story went that he paid the toll only once for the round trip 07/09, 52/60. Harry Sutton remembered the charge as "sixpence to go over with a vehicle and free when you came back. It was unlocked and locked again after each vehicle passed through" 01/40. One Society paper summarises the toll-keeper simply as living "at the Four Alls, at the Welford end of the bridge" 01/38-46.

The two county councils, newly created in 1889, each put up £250, and the neighbourhood raised £200 more. The plans were settled in the inn itself:

Binton Bridges: A meeting was held at the Four Alls on Wednesday evening last for the purpose of making final arrangements for the public opening of the above bridges. The 26th April was fixed for the ceremony.

Stratford Herald, 24 March 1893, reprinted 26 March 1943 · 01/43, 52/09

On Wednesday 26 April 1893 the Snitterfield Brass Band led over two hundred schoolchildren down from Welford. An evergreen arch "immediately over the famous gate by the sign of the Four Alls" read WELCOME on the Warwickshire side and FREE FOR EVER on the Gloucestershire side, and Warwickshire travellers were "compelled to pay a nominal toll up to the last moment". The Marquis of Hertford took the key and opened the gate, the gates were burnt in the next field, and there was a lunch in a marquee by the river 52/09, 31/12, 07/09. A piece of gate that escaped the fire became a holder for a map of Welford, later owned by Mr A. Montague 52/60, 01/39. The Four Alls lost its oldest source of income that afternoon. Characteristically, the sale of the neighbouring Baylies farm the same year noted that the end of the tolls would raise land values 11/30.



"Free for ever", 26 April 1893.

The crowd at the toll gate by the Four Alls on the day the bridge was freed, as reproduced in the *Evesham Journal*, 16 April 1938, with Harry Sutton's memories of Davis's toll bar. 01/40

The toll house did not vanish at once. William Sabin, interviewed for the Society in old age, remembered arriving in Welford as a small boy in the mid-1890s "to the Tollgate by the Four Alls", before his father took the tenancy of the Shakespeare about 1900 08/06, 08/07.

The Edwardian inn 1893–1931

Kelly's directory of 1897 lists "Frazer George, Four Alls P.H." 46/98, 48/19–20. By the 1901 census the licensee was Albert Price, 28, innkeeper on his own account, born in Birmingham, with his wife Annie, 23, from Studley, and a fourteen-year-old housemaid, Annie Ainge 48/08. The Prices stayed at least thirteen years. In 1911 Albert, now 37, licensed victualler, and Annie, assisting in the business, had two children, and the inn had ten rooms. Only the Bell, with eleven, was larger 48/11. In 1914 Kelly's lists "Price Albert (Mrs.), Four Alls P.H.", which suggests Annie was then running the house in her own right 48/21–22. The enumerator's summary book for 1911 ends its walk through the parish "out to Binton Bridges, the Four Alls Inn, Hazelwood Villa, Wood View". It notes an empty house by the inn, and records that the estate agent Vincent Mainwaring had built a pair of villas in the plum orchard opposite 48/09, 48/11, 21/07. The Four Alls was no longer alone at the bridge, though as late as 1901 there was still no building between it and the Bell 46/37–95.

These are the years of the postcards. Three Edwardian views in the archive, two by W. A. Smith and one in another hand, show the masonry bridge and the inn from the Binton side. They show a pale rendered building of two storeys with attics, sash windows, tall chimneys and a long signboard across the front, with a big-roofed barn beside the bridge. Punts sit on the still water, full of anglers in one and young women in white blouses and boaters in another 52/52–54. A 1910 card in another series shows the brewery's name painted on the end wall: LUCAS / LEAMINGTON. So by then the Four Alls was a tied house of Lucas & Co. of Leamington 53/35–42.



The Four Alls from the side, about 1900–09. "Binton Bridges" by [W. A.] Smith. The inn's gable end faces the camera; a man stands at the garden gate, possibly the landlord, and the bridge rises steeply to the right. 52/53

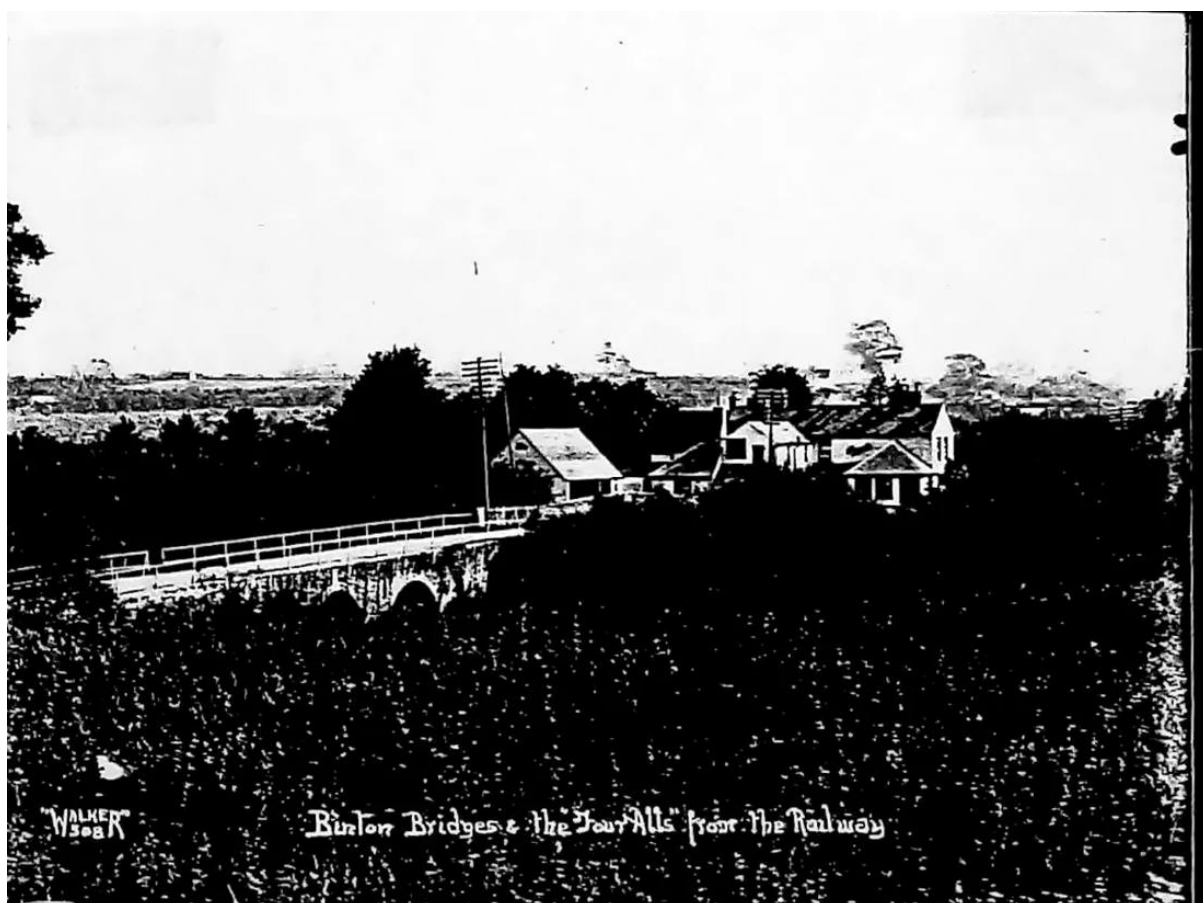
The river was turning the inn into a resort. Garrett found "boats on hire here, both at 'The Four Alls' and at Welford Mill", on what an angler swore was the best stretch of the Avon. The angler claimed sixty pounds of roach and bream in an afternoon, "another afternoon, and not the one when any reliable witness was present" 11/33. The 1866 particulars had already advertised the fishing to "Excursionists". In the village's mock alphabet in the *Book of Gossip* of about 1915, "F. is the Fame of our famous Four Alls, a house by the Bridge which is handy for calls" 21/01–21. One hostile report, quoted in the Society's river talk, is attributed to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch: "I could not remember a place so utterly godforsaken as this beside the bridge." The talk gives no source for it, and it should be treated with caution 52/09.

The river also came in. During one great flood of about 1912, which the *Herald* compared with the flood of 1588, "the water was in at the Four Alls inn and at

Welford Mill house" 23/84–90. Floods remained the price of the site. In 1935 an *Evesham Journal* correspondent, lamenting the new red brick of Welford, still remembered "the toll gate by the 'Four Alls'" from his boyhood in the 1880s 20/01. After 1931, when Welford moved into Warwickshire, the bridge no longer marked a county boundary. The 1938 rambler thought Gloucestershire had ceded the parish "somewhat reluctantly, I imagine" 15/12.



"Binton Bridges & the Four Alls", about 1910–19. Pleasure boaters in a punt beneath the arches; the inn's chimneys and signboard behind. The same view, with the LUCAS / LEAMINGTON brewery lettering legible on a 1910 copy, is in 53/35–42. 52/54



"Binton Bridges & the Four Alls from the Railway". A Walker postcard taken from the embankment of the Stratford to Honeybourne line, looking down on the bridge and the inn with its neighbours. Undated, probably Edwardian or inter-war. 53/11-24

Hotel, carnival and caravans 1939-1972

The Second World War brought hard winters. In the first winter of the war, a woman who grew up in Welford remembered, "the ice was so deep we walked from the Four Alls to the mill along the frozen river", and the army was asked whether the ice should be blown up to save the bridge 49/02. A snapshot in the archive is captioned on the back "Walking on ice from 4 Alls to Welford Mill 40/41" 49/23. Bernard Harris remembered riding a bicycle on the river from the Mill to the Four Alls 52/09.



"Walking on ice from 4 Alls to Welford Mill 40/41". Villagers on the frozen Avon in the winter of 1940–41. 49/23

In 1950 a list of "People in Welford" put Mr and Mrs Witcombe at the Four Alls, on the Binton road 01/56. That is the only post-war landlord the archive names before the 1970s. The inn had also become the village's link to the outside world. In March 1951 a Festival of Britain committee member apologised for missing a meeting because they had been about to catch "the 8.14 bus from the Four Alls" 55/10.

For a few summers in the 1950s the Four Alls was the starting line of Welford's river carnival, run by the Welford and Weston Conservative Association. Newspaper reports call it the "Four Alls Hotel". In the third carnival the decorated boats "left the 'Four Alls' Hotel for the landing stage further down the river", headed by the River Queen, Miss Sheila Lively, in cream brocade, and followed by Alcester Young Conservatives' "Lady of Shalott", whose occupant lay so still the crowd feared she had fainted 01/15–25, 52/09. In 1958 "the decorated boats started from the Four Alls Hotel and a large crowd gathered in the Big Meadow to give them a hearty welcome". Anthony Kershaw MP, standing in for John Profumo, gave a short talk on Cyprus 01/01–385, 52/09. In 1959 the boats again travelled "from the Four Alls to the Big Meadow", and the Army's Viking galley slaves threw their taskmaster into the river 01/15–25.

Behind the inn, the meadow became a caravan site. A Society photograph shows static caravans beyond a little footbridge, with a notice reading "CAR PARK FOR PATRONS ... AT OWNERS' RISK ... BOATING ... NO PICNICS" 16/50, 16/00. The village survey of 1960–64 counts the Four Alls Inn, a caravan "for staff", and sixteen caravans on the Four Alls site, out of about a hundred in the parish 20/06. When the Upper Avon was reopened to navigation in the early 1970s, the county's draft policy plan (March 1972) proposed a boating centre at Binton Bridges "below the bridge by the Four Alls". It named the Four Alls, with

the White Lion and the Pleasure Boat at Bidford, as pubs with "a role to play in providing riverside facilities, including mooring space". Its map marks the "Four Alls Caravan Site" 06/18.



The Four Alls caravan site. Undated, probably 1960s or 1970s. The notice reserves the car park for patrons and mentions boating. 16/50

The bridge changed around the inn. In the early 1960s the county wanted to rebuild it as a wider road. According to a later parish councillor's leaflet, Gilda Gray, the rector's wife and parish council chairman, "fought to save what we have today", and the work cost six months of road closures 47/80–90. A culvert was cut near the Four Alls to relieve flooding, "an area notorious for floods". In 1980 the north end was widened and strengthened for £25,000 and a footway added 52/60, 01/41, 52/09.

Restaurant and riverside pub 1972 to the present

By the late 1970s the Four Alls was selling itself as somewhere to eat. In the Parish News for the Silver Jubilee in June 1977 it advertised "Large Car Park — Restaurant — Morning Coffee Bar — Snacks. Under the personal supervision of Michael J. Eynon, Chef/Proprietor, M.H.C.I.M.A., F.C.F.A. (C.G.) — Cordon Culinaire. Telephone: Welford-on-Avon 213" 03/142, 03/141. Eynon was still living in the parish, at Greenacres on Cress Hill, in 1987. By then the electoral register put Tony F. Minshull at "The Four Alls Inn", Binton Road 30/05.

The inn kept its place in village life. In 1980 the History Society thought its new seats might be extended "to the Four Alls" 37/01-04. In 1989 a resident asked the parish council to extend the riverside footpath from Boat Lane to the Four Alls, "as it must have so run in the old navigation days" 05/13. When the Memorial Hall needed repairs in 1991-92, one of the fund-raisers was a "Four Alls parachute jump" 60/07.

The worst moment came in the Easter floods of 1998. A caravan was swept from the site behind the pub into the Avon at Binton Bridges. The *Herald* reported that Welford was hit hardest "nowhere more so than the Four Alls pub which lost its power during the evening and provided a home for many stranded customers". Landlady Lesley Back appealed for help, and three officer cadets from Sandhurst, Peter Beaumont, Barry John and Nick Lilley, roped themselves together in pairs and brought holidaymakers out of the flooded caravans 29/23.

The inn is still the way into the village. When the parish replaced its village signs for the Golden Jubilee in 2002, the first of the three sites was "the northern point of entry into the village, adjacent to the Four Alls" 28/01. For the Diamond Jubilee in 2012 the village walk to Bidford started from "the Four Alls Car Park" 53/43. The archive's 1866 commentary ends simply: "The Four Alls still stands beside Binton Bridges on the Welford side of the river" 30/03.

What the Four Alls was

Read together, the sources show an inn that changed its trade every generation while staying in the same spot. Around 1800 it was a toll house with a licence and some land, held by a farming family, the Edkinses, who were answerable in court for the bridge. Under the Mills family it was a family enterprise: a widow at the gate, a son behind the bar and on 110 acres, a brewhouse, a dairy and a wharf. In the late Victorian years it passed to tenants and outside owners, Walton, Davis, Dutton & Hudson, and Frazer, and lost its toll. The Prices ran it as an Edwardian tied house for anglers and boaters. In the 1950s it was a "hotel" and carnival harbour, and from the 1960s a caravan site and restaurant. Through all of it, it was the first building on Welford soil, where the counties met and argued and where the river trade stopped to pay. Its landlords are mostly names in census books. But the farmer on the sign, the one who pays for all, would have recognised nearly every one of them.

Keepers and owners of the Four Alls

Every name the sources give, in date order. A date means the year a record names that person, not the start or end of their time at the inn.

Year	Name and role	Source
1783	William Silvester builds stone bridges and sets up the toll gate at the Welford end (no inn named)	07/09, 52/60
c.1790	Thos. Edkins and Matt Mills among the signatories of the bridge petition	07/09
1802	Mr J. Edkins, owner of the Four Alls, collecting the tolls; inn's "ancient inclosures" in the enclosure award	52/09; 01/70
1804	John Edkins agrees to relinquish the bridge and tolls to Hunt, Bayliss and Tommes	52/09
1841	John Edkins, 75, farmer, Binton Bridge House; John and Lucy Mills nearby	48/01
1849	Mrs Lucy Mills, widow, occupier with life interest; estate sold to Mr Stanley for £200	11/30
1851	Lucy Mills, widow, 57, innkeeper; son Matthew, 30, farmer of 110 acres	14/12, 14/14
1856–59	Mrs Lucy Mills, Four Alls	48/13–16
1861	Matthew Mills, 40, victualler; Lucy Mills, collector of bridge tolls	48/04
c.1863	"Lucy Lane" (probably Mills), Four Alls	34/52
1866	Mrs Lucy Mills in occupation; inn, bridges and tolls auctioned 1 June	30/03
1881	William Walton (transcribed "Walker [?]", 41, innkeeper, born Quinton; wife Mary	48/06
c.1888–93	"A Birmingham man the name of Davis", proprietor of the toll bar (from memory)	01/40, 07/09
1891	Mary Walton, widow, 59, publican, born Stratford	48/07
1893	Messrs Dutton & Hudson of Warwick, owners of the bridge, paid off when tolls end	52/09

Year	Name and role	Source
1897	George Frazer, Four Alls P.H.	46/98, 48/19–20
1901	Albert Price, 28, innkeeper, born Birmingham; wife Annie	48/08
1910	Lucas & Co., Leamington, brewery sign on the inn	53/35–42
1911	Albert Price, 37, licensed victualler; ten rooms	48/09, 48/11
1914	Mrs Albert Price, Four Alls P.H.	48/21–22
1950	Mr and Mrs Witcombe	01/56
1977	Michael J. Eynon, chef/proprietor	03/141, 03/142
1987	Tony F. Minshull	30/05
1998	Lesley Back, landlady	29/23

Where the sources disagree

- **Walker or Walton in 1881.** The 1881 transcription reads the innkeeper as William Walker, with the surname queried. His wife Mary's age (49) and county match the 1891 widow Mary Walton (59, born Stratford), and a T. H. Walton farmed nearby in 1900. Walton is the better reading. 48/06, 48/07, 46/99
- **Who owned the toll at the end.** Harry Sutton, in 1938, and Deverson's history both say the toll bar belonged to the Four Alls under "a Birmingham man the name of Davis". The 1893 newspaper account says the bridge was bought from Messrs Dutton & Hudson of Warwick. Neither name appears in the censuses. Both may be right at different dates, or one may be an owner and the other a lessee. 01/40, 52/60, 52/09
- **Owner or occupier in 1866.** The Society's river talk says the Four Alls was "owned by Mrs Lucy Mills". The 1849 sale sold the freehold to a Mr Stanley subject to her life interest, and the 1866 particulars describe her only as the occupier. She was almost certainly a life tenant, not the owner. 52/09, 11/30, 30/03

- **Lucy Mills's age.** She is 45 in 1841 (rounded down), "in her 58th year" in 1849, 57 in 1851, and 63 with a query in 1861, when she should have been about 69. 48/01, 11/30, 14/12, 48/04
- **When the first bridge was built.** Deverson's history says the packhorse bridge is first recorded in the early thirteenth century (52/60, 13/32). The version in 07/09 says the early seventeenth. The river talk says thirteenth. 52/60, 07/09, 52/09
- **When the bridge was rebuilt.** 1804–09 (52/60), 1806–09 (07/09), and an account for work 1804–08 (52/09). 52/60, 07/09, 52/09
- **The mill meadow.** "Milham" in 52/60 and 13/32, "Ham" in 07/09. Field names elsewhere support Millham. 52/60, 07/09, 11/30
- **Albert Price's birthplace.** Birmingham in 1901; Warwick, Balsall Heath in 1911. Balsall Heath is a Birmingham suburb, so these probably agree. 48/08, 48/11
- **William Sabin's birth year and the toll gate.** One note says 1898, the other 1890. If he arrived "to the Tollgate by the Four Alls" at six, that was after the tolls ended in 1893, so his family lived in the former toll house rather than collecting tolls. 08/06, 08/07
- **The building.** The 1900s postcards suggest two storeys with attics (52/52); the 1910 card is described as three storeys (53/35–42). Both may describe the same front. 52/52, 53/35–42
- **Which parish.** The online catalogue captions one view "Binton"; the inn stands on the Welford (formerly Gloucestershire) bank, as the 1866 particulars and all the censuses confirm. 52/53, 30/03

Where the sources are thin

- **Origins.** Nothing in the archive names the Four Alls before 1802, and no deeds survive. The building's age, and whether the inn and the toll house were ever separate buildings, are unknown. The inn does not appear in the statutory list in Folder 47.
- **1866 to 1881.** The buyer in 1866 is not recorded, and the 1871 census pages for Binton Bridges are missing from 48/05.
- **1914 to 1950 and after 1950.** No licensees are named between Mrs Albert Price (1914) and the Witcombes (1950), and after that only Eynon (1977), Minshull (1987) and Lesley Back (1998). Licensing registers or the brewery's records would fill these gaps.

- **The Quiller-Couch quotation** ("so utterly godforsaken") is given without a source in 52/09 and has not been checked.
- **The "Edkins House"** of Hunt's estimate and the 1841 "Binton Bridge House" may or may not be the inn.
- **The carnival "Hotel"**. The 1950s reports are cuttings; the exact year of the third carnival (with Sheila Lively as Queen) is not on the copy.

Sources used

- Bridge and toll history: 07/09 (Binton Bridges, 1790 petition, 1866 particulars), 52/60 and 13/32 (M. Deverson, Binton Bridges), 52/09 (river talk script: 1802 indictment, 1804 agreements, wharf dues, carnivals, 1893 opening), 52/35–36 and 52/06 (Hunt's estimate and drawing), 52/57 and 30/03 (Gibbs plan and 1866 particulars), 03/22 (typed particulars), 01/38–46 (cuttings incl. 1938 Sutton interview, 1943 "50 years ago"), 31/12 (1893 opening).
- Enclosure: 01/70, 20/04, 22/12, 47/98.
- Sales: 11/30 (1849 sale and bids; 1893 Baylies sale).
- Censuses: 48/01 (1841), 14/12 and 14/14 (1851), 48/04 (1861), 48/06 (1881), 48/07 (1891), 48/08 (1901), 48/09–11 (1911).
- Directories: 48/13–22 (1856, 1859, 1897, 1914), 34/52 (c.1863), 46/98 (1897), 46/99 (1900).
- Descriptions and memories: 11/33 and 15/04 (Garrett 1906), 13/22–23 (J. H., Birmingham Weekly Post), 15/12 (1938), 21/01–21 (Book of Gossip, Mainwarings), 21/25 (Woodward 1906, Mrs Horne), 08/06–07 (Sabin), 20/01 (1935 Evesham Journal), 23/84–90 (flood), 49/02, 49/23 (ice 1940–41), 01/56 (1950), 55/10 (1951 bus), 47/80–90 (bridge in the 1960s), 39/01, 37/01–04.
- Twentieth century: 01/01–385 and 01/15–25 (carnivals), 16/00 and 16/50 (caravan site), 20/06 (1960–64 survey), 06/18 (1972 Upper Avon plan), 03/141–142 (1977 adverts), 30/05 (1987 register), 05/13 (1989), 60/07 (1992), 29/23 (1998 floods), 28/01 (2002 signs), 53/43 (2012).
- Pictures: 52/52, 52/53, 52/54, 52/57, 53/11–24, 53/35–42, 01/40, 49/23, 16/50.