

Plum Weddings

Four centuries of orchards in a river-bend village: the parsonage orchard and the crab mill, the cherry closes of the inclosure award, the night carts to Birmingham, the pot-hampers and commission notes of the fruit boom, and the old trees left standing among the houses.

A long essay (about 9,000 words, plus a chronology and notes) drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive. Folder references are in grey. Every picture is from the Society's own scans. Gaps in the sources and places where they disagree are gathered at the end.

1. Orchard country
2. The parsonage orchard
3. Crab Mill Lane
4. Hucksters and fruiterers
5. Cherry Orchards in the award
6. Boney in the orchard
7. Orchards for sale
8. The night carts
9. "A very large Fruit Growing Industry"
10. The village among its trees
11. Pots, Prolifics and commission
12. Gooseberries at the front
13. Between the wars
14. Plum jam and rabbit stew
15. Orchards into gardens
16. What is left
17. Chronology
18. Gaps and conflicting sources

Joseph Hancox, the old market gardener whom the village called "Old Joe the Badger", had a saying for the end of a good summer. When the plum crop had been heavy, he said, the autumn brought a run of marriages, and these he called "Plum Weddings" 20/01. The phrase says a good deal about Welford-on-Avon. For about three hundred years the village lived partly on fruit, and in its best decades fruit set the rhythm of the year: blossom in April, gooseberries in June, cherries in July, plums and damsons in August and September, apples into the winter. A good crop meant money in cottages that had little of it, and money meant weddings.

This essay follows the orchards of Welford through the papers the Local History Society has collected. They are an uneven set. There are no orchard account books, no nurserymen's invoices for the planting of a whole field, no tithe map and almost no photographs of anyone at work among the trees. What survives instead are deeds and wills that mention an orchard in passing, the 1802 inclosure award with its little closes of cherry and pear, sale particulars that boast of trees "in full bearing", a handful of

salesmen's accounts and soldiers' letters, and the memories of people who were children when the orchards were still everywhere. Put together, they tell a story with a clear shape: small cottage orchards and cider mills in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; a great expansion of fruit-growing in the nineteenth, driven by the Birmingham market; a peak around 1890 to 1920, when sale particulars could call Welford "the centre of a very large Fruit Growing and Market Gardening Industry"; and a long retreat in the twentieth century, as orchard after orchard became a building plot.

1. Orchard country Soil, river and the Vale of Evesham

Welford sits inside a loop of the Avon four miles south-west of Stratford, on the upper edge of the Vale of Evesham. Until 1931 it was in Gloucestershire. Its soils are river gravels and light loams, warm and quick to drain, and the village lies low and sheltered. The 1920 sale of Cleavers described its garden as as "planted with the choicest dessert fruit in full bearing", with good turf "under which lies a valuable bed of Gravel & Sand" 11/30, and the 1892 sale particulars put the same point more grandly, praising the "unequalled quality of the Land" and its suitability for "the large and early supply of every description of Fruit and Garden produce" 25/08.

Early was the key word. In October 1977 the History Society recorded the local belief that produce in the Welford area ripened "three weeks ahead of normal", and hoped that older inhabitants could explain why 37/01-04. Gilda Gray, interviewed the same year, said that Welford's saladings reached market three weeks before Evesham's 08/03. For a fruit-grower, three weeks mattered more than anything else. The first cherries and gooseberries of the season fetched the highest prices, and growers who could get them to Birmingham before the Vale's main crop arrived could make in a week what the latecomers made in a month.

The village also stood in a region that had grown fruit for centuries. A traveller's account copied into one of the Society's Evesham files describes the Vale as famous "for fruits, especially pears which grow in every hedge and make a very pleasant drink called perry which is much drunk ... and passes among the meaner people for a kind of wine though it's but cold and windy" 32/24-39. A study of probate inventories from the Vale parishes in the years after 1702, in the same file, found that "fruit trees and rushes were profit-

making crops" among the farmers whose goods were listed at death. Welford is not in that sample, but there is no reason to think it differed from its neighbours across the river.

Visitors noticed the trees long before they noticed anything else. The guidebooks and walking pieces collected by the Society return to them again and again: "the fertile vale of Evesham, known far and near for its fruit farms" 23/84–90; "on every hand the Vale of Evesham, with its orchards and rich meadows" 23/97–107; "orchards laden with apples" 13/27; "many acres of orchard land" 19/30. In April 1916 George C. Michael, R.E., published "An April Song" with the refrain "Orchard land! Orchard land! Damson blossom, primrose bloom", and a verse in which "all the orchards shimmer white" above the water by Welford church 23/91–96.

2. The parsonage orchard 1588 to about 1700

The first orchard in the archive appears in a flood. In 1588 the Avon rose with terrible speed. A contemporary account, copied in several of the Society's files, says the water "rose a yeard every howre from eight to ffowre" and that it "cam into the psonage of Welfords orchard and filled his fishe poole", then took away the sign-post at the Bear, carried off Edward Butler's cart and was seen below Bidford 21/49 · 02/04 · 08/20–29. It is a vivid glimpse. The rector of Welford had an orchard beside his house, close enough to the river to be drowned, and a fish pool near it. Medieval and Tudor parsonages often had both, and the archive's later glebe terriers show that the orchard by the parsonage was still there two centuries afterwards.

Other early orchards come to light in deeds. In 1600, the forty-second year of Elizabeth's reign, a small plot near the church was let on a lease of two thousand years. The lease was still the title to the land in the nineteenth century. John Blundell, a gardener, took the property in 1875; by his will of 1886 he left it to his wife, describing himself by then as a carrier; and in the autumn of 1889 his widow Harriet sold "the orchard" to Charles Timms for £60 10/17 · 10/18. A two-thousand-year lease was a device to give a tenant something close to freehold, and its survival on a plot described as an orchard suggests that the land had been an orchard or garden for most of that time.

A deed of 1686 conveys "an orchard, garden and close" of about half an acre from J. Oakes, a blacksmith, to William Battersbie, a weaver 10/24. The parties are telling. These were craftsmen, not

farmers, and the orchard was part of a cottage holding. That pattern holds right through the archive. Welford's orchards were not, for most of their history, the property of a few big estates. They were the back gardens and little closes of weavers, coopers, blacksmiths, carriers and labourers, each with a few trees whose fruit could be eaten, pressed, sold or swapped.

A will of uncertain date shows the same thing. Thomas Badson, a stone-cutter of Binton, left a cottage, garden and orchard in Welford, then occupied by William Blundell, together with a "Crab Mill" 03/32. The phrase brings us to the most durable of Welford's orchard buildings.

3. Crab Mill Lane The cider mills, 1723 to 1972

A crab mill was a cider mill, so called from the crab apples once pressed in it. Welford had at least one, and probably two, by the early eighteenth century. A footpath called the Liney, which runs off the High Street by the Maypole, was known in old deeds as "Crab Mill Lane" 10/03, and a field off Barton Road was called Crab Mill Butts, a name that survived into the 1892 sale particulars 25/08.

The fullest record is a bundle of eight deeds now in the county record office at Warwick, which the Society calendared as "Deeds relating to Cottages & a cider mill at Welford - 1723-1806" 13/36 · 63/03. They open in January 1723 with Charles Sandford, a cooper, and his wife Mary mortgaging their cottage for £35. Whoever summarised the deeds wrote "for cider?" in the margin beside the next one, and the guess is a good one. A cooper made barrels, and a cooper with a cottage and a mill was well placed to make and sell cider. By 1746 the property had passed to Walter Parker, a yeoman, for a total of £47 5s.

Walter Parker's will, made in 1754 and proved in 1767, divided his property between two kinsmen. To John Harris he left "a house, orchard & cider-mill" then occupied by William Turner and Richard Pace. To Joseph Harris he left the house he lived in himself, together with "the cider-mill adjoining, called Sandford House", a name that still remembered the cooper. Ann Parker, in 1775, left three more messuages "with gardens and orchards" at the upper end of the village. Joseph Harris made his own will in 1790, and when it was proved in 1806 the messuage and cider mill passed to his widow Hannah and then to their son John 13/36. The Harris family were to stay at the Cider Mill for another century.

Whether the cider mill of these deeds is the building now called Cider Mill House is not proved by the documents, but the coincidence of name, family and position makes it likely. The village notes on house no. 40 describe an Elizabethan house thatched with rush, owned by the Gamage family early in the eighteenth century, standing on the Liney with its stone crusher and two presses still usable 10/03. When the house was listed in 1967 it was described as eighteenth-century red brick with an attached timber barn, "unspoiled by restoration" 13/02 · 30/07. The later statutory list adds that the cider mill at the right-hand end, by then detached, still had its "timber beam and post with stone trough and wheel" 47/1-66.

How it worked is described by two writers forty years apart. In 1906 the river traveller H. Garrett, staying in the village, noted "an old barn called the Crab Mill, which contains one of those cider-mills with a great stone crusher which is drawn round by a horse when cider is being made" 15/04 · 11/33. A handwritten parish history of about 1938 says the same: "There is also an old Cider-Mill where the apples were crushed by a big rolling-stone drawn by a horse round a circular trough" 54/105. The crushed pulp, or pomace, was then built up in layers and squeezed in the presses, and the juice left to ferment in barrels.

A pony used to tread round & round revolving the mill stones & the resultant pressings were removed with a shovel. All farmers made cider & gave it to their employees as part of their wages. When wages rose this practice ceased.

Notes of a village meeting, early 1970s 24/01

That last point is the key to why so many Welford holdings had a few apple and pear trees. Cider was a currency. Farmers paid part of their labourers' wages in it, especially at haymaking and harvest, and the custom lasted in the West Midlands until the late nineteenth century. When the Rectory gave a supper for 130 people at the coronation of 1902, "unlimited Bass and cider flowed all day as from a perennial fount" 23/91-96.

The last of the Harris family at the mill is remembered unkindly. Gilda Gray, writing about 1970, said the mill was worked in "Wicky" Harris's time in the early 1900s, "before he lost his wits", and then by Charles Horne 21/65. A footnote in the Book of Gossip of 1915 calls him "John Harris the crazy hermit of the Cider Mill", and records that his sister Susannah, a dressmaker who played the chapel harmonium, drowned herself 21/17. The 1901 census and its

later reading give a John Harris, 29, house painter and market gardener, living alone at the Cider Mill 46/37-95, and Kelly's directory of the period lists "Harris John, Cider mill" 46/98. By the valuation of 1911 the property belonged to John Harris, "a pauper lunatic", and was let to Horne 18/14.

Charles Horne, the son of a farm labourer and about seventy-two in 1916, was one of the subjects of the unsparing "Welford Book of Gossip", a private notebook begun in 1915 by a churchwarden who was very probably H. M. Woodward. The writer met him one day looking aggrieved and asked what the matter was.

"Well," said he, "I got that young Ted Johnson to help me to pick pears, but when we got to the Cider Mill orchard I found he warn't strong enough to shift the ladder so I had to shift it meself, and when I done it, darned if he warn't afeared to go to the top, so I had to pick the top of the tree meself with him a standing on the bottom round of the ladder smoking a cigarette, and me paying him half a crown a day for it."

The Welford Book of Gossip, 1916 21/14

The story is a reminder that the trees were tall. Old standard pear and cherry trees were picked from long wooden ladders, and getting the top of the tree was a young man's job. The derelict cottage by the mill, with its "garden adjoining the old Cider House", later became the site of the Memorial Hall, opened in 1923 12/09 · 18/13. In 1931 the remains of the mill were noted beside Mr Bryan's house next to the hall 11/25, and the Kelly's directory of 1914 lists Samuel Bryan, painter, at the "Cider house" 48/13-22. The 1950 and c.1960 house lists put the Edkins family there, with business premises 01/56 · 20/06.



Ci

der Mill House, 1992. The thatched house on the old Crab Mill Lane, listed Grade II in 1967 and described then as “unspoiled by restoration”. 15/08 fig 58

Welford's other cider press was at the water mill. A memoir of the Second World War recalls that at the mill “you could go to the eel traps, see the corn being ground, or the apples being pressed for cider. This was run by the Hawkins family” 31/06. The History Society's survey of old farms says cider was made at the corn mill “up until 1952/54” 37/01–04. The mill's own historian adds that the press stood in the carpenter's building, “used by local farmers in the days when there were orchards all around Welford”, and was driven by a shaft from the waterwheel 52/09. Both presses ended up in the same place. The village talk of the mill says its press went to Mary Arden's house at Wilmcote, and in the 1990s the Society was told that “the cider presse and vat from Welford's cider mill are at Mary Arden's” 52/09 · 38/01–03. The mill's historian adds a doubt: eight presses had since been sold from the museum, and no one knew whether Welford's was among them.

4. Hucksters and fruiterers The eighteenth-century fruit trade

Fruit was being sold off the village long before the great expansion of the nineteenth century. The clearest evidence is a letter from the Rev. Joseph Greene, master of Stratford grammar school and rector of Welford, to his brother Richard in Lichfield. Greene recommended two Welford men as a cheap way of sending parcels between them: John Boyce and William Sandford, "hucksters & fruiterers", who "seldom fail going hence to Birmingham once a week, with fruit, calves & whatever they can get carriage of, & commonly load back with coals for our neighbourhood" 11/23 · 34/51.

The Society's notes date the letter 1870, but that cannot be right. Joseph Greene was rector in the eighteenth century, and the note in 11/23 itself points out that the spelling and phrasing are of that period and that the date is very probably 1770. A William Sandford also appears in the 1802 inclosure award, occupying the Duke of Dorset's cherry orchard off Duck Lane 47/98; he may well be the huckster or his son. The Sandford name links the cider mill of 1723, the fruit carts of the 1770s and the cherry orchard of 1802, and it is hard not to see a family whose living came largely from fruit.

The letter shows the trade's basic economics, which hardly changed in the next century and a half. Welford had more fruit than it could eat. Stratford was a small market and close enough for any grower to supply. Birmingham, twenty-five miles away and growing fast, could absorb as much as the Vale could send. A cart that went up with fruit and calves and came back with coal paid both ways.

5. Cherry Orchards in the award Inclosure, 1802, and the glebe terrier, 1807

The best single picture of Welford's orchards before the Victorian boom is the inclosure award of 1802, which reorganised the open fields and listed every old enclosure in the parish with its owner, occupier and area 01/70 · 47/98 · 22/12 · 20/04. Most of the village's orchards were among these "ancient inclosures", the closes around the houses, and the award names many of them.

Three were called simply Cherry Orchard. The Duke of Dorset owned one of about two acres, occupied by William Sandford, and the award's footpath number 6 ran "out of Duck Lane by the end of the Cherry Orchard". Richard Fletcher held a Cherry Orchard of 1 acre 0 roods 13 perches, and William Jackson another of 1 acre 2 roods. Jonathan Izod's close was described as a "Cherry and Apple Orchard" of 1 acre 1 rood 28 perches. William Baylis, the largest

freeholder, had Pear Tree Close of 3 acres 0 roods 16 perches, Scullers Orchard, and another orchard of three roods. Edward Moore had a Long Orchard. Eliza Toms held a close called simply The Orchard, and John Morley a Croft Orchard beside it. William Allcock had a malthouse and orchard of just over an acre, and Thomas Adkins a house and garden with a nursery, perhaps where young fruit trees were raised 47/98 · 01/70.

The most striking thing about the award is the number of small entries. About twenty-five owners are listed with nothing more than a "Site of House, Garden & Orchard", typically between a quarter and half an acre. Abraham Commander, John Adkins, Matthew Mills, "—— Mace" and Edward Moore all held such plots. A few entries read "Orchard (arable)", which suggests land that had been planted with trees but was still ploughed underneath, the common practice of growing vegetables or corn among young fruit trees 47/98. In other words, by 1802 the typical Welford household with any property at all had a few fruit trees.

Footpaths ran through the orchards. Path 1 led from Stoney Stile Lane "over Long Close, Broad Close, Hains Orchard, Peartree Close and Wesson Close" towards Weston; path 7 led "out of an Orchard belonging to William Baylis" 47/98. Some of these paths still exist, and in the 1960s the parish footpath review was still describing them by their orchards: a path through the "Cherry Orchard (Orchard Nurseries)", another through Boat Orchard, and the flood steps at Pear Tree Close 12/03. The name of the orchard on path 1 is uncertain. Different transcriptions of the award read it as Mains, Harris or Haum Orchard; the 47/98 typescript has "Hains".

The church's land shows the same pattern in miniature. In the exchanges of 1802 the rector received from William Smith a homestead with "Home Close, Orchard Ayte and Goodwin Close", about 5¼ acres beside the river, and an orchard of 2 acres 3 roods 9 perches 47/98. The glebe terrier of 1807, the official description of the rector's property, lists the Orchard and the Noet beside the parsonage, bounded by the orchards of Edward Harris, William Alcock, William Westwood and George Alcock, and by "Vincent's orchard". A small orchard off the street became, much later, the site of Glebe Cottage 02/01-12 · 18/28 · 26/10. The rector's orchard was still there a century and a half later. A benefice schedule lists plot 332, "The Cherry Orchard", of about 2.4 acres, and a 1930s list of glebe has "The Nayte, Orchard 2½ acres" standing unlet 19/22 · 02/01-12.

A survey of the Duke of Dorset's estates in 1811 records field names in Milcote, Weston and Welford that tell the same story from the farm side: Pear Tree Ground, Cherry Hill, Cherry Orchard, Hop Yard and Milcot Orchard 08/13. Hops are a surprise, and nothing else in the archive mentions them.

6. Boney in the orchard 1814 to 1815

Orchards were the village's open spaces as well as its larders. When Welford celebrated the peace at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the effigy of "Boney" was burnt in Nathaniel Moore's orchard, which later became part of The Homestead on the High Street. Mr Mills made the effigy. After the bonfire tables were set out along the High Street from the Maypole to the Bell, each of the principal houses provided a table, and several householders made puddings for the feast. So that every pudding would be ready together, the church bells were rung to tell the cooks when to put them in the pot 01/95 · 01/97. One account calls them plum puddings and gives the recipe to Aunt Rebecca Hopkins; the typist of another wondered, in brackets, whether they were "plum or meat?" 01/97 · 26/14. The archive dates the celebration three ways: 1815 in the church-bells notes, early May 1814 in Woodward's commonplace book, and 11 April 1814 in a later summary 01/95 · 20/01 · 40/01.

In the same summer of 1814 one of the best orchards in the village came up for auction. On Wednesday 17 August, at Mrs Bromley's at the Bell, the auctioneer offered "a Capital Orchard planted with choice fruit trees now in full bearing, with a good Malthouse", about an acre and a half near the church, together with a barn and stable. Lot 3 was simply the "Quantity of Prime fruit now growing in the said Orchard with the aftermath", that is, the crop still on the trees and the grass underneath 11/20 · 09/13-17. Selling a standing crop separately from the land was normal practice. A buyer with ready money could take the fruit, pick it and market it, while the land changed hands at Michaelmas. Joseph Hancox was still buying crops on the tree this way a century later.

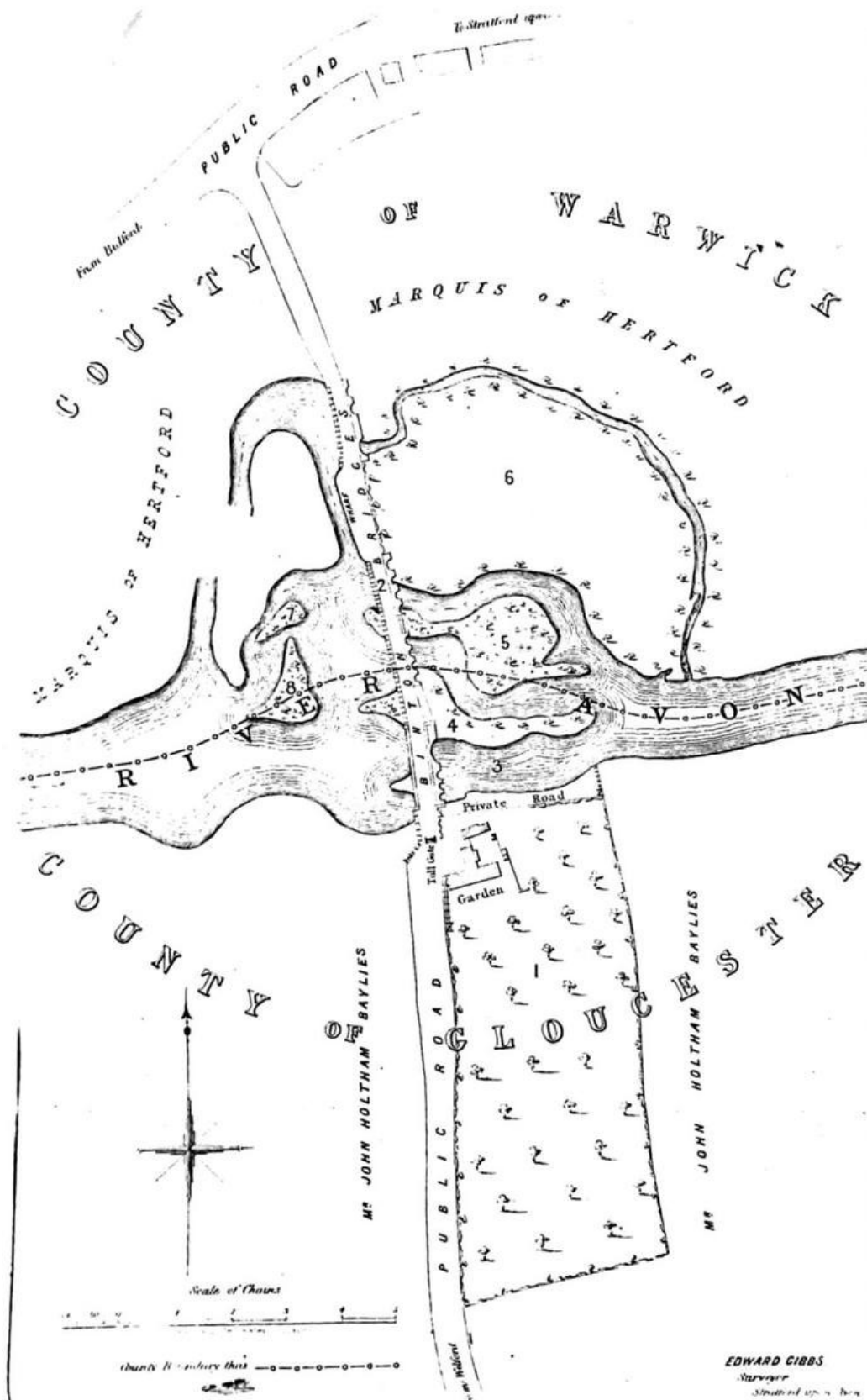
7. Orchards for sale 1820 to 1890

Through the middle of the nineteenth century, Welford's orchards appear mainly in sale bills, and the language of the bills grows steadily more enthusiastic. They were written to attract buyers, so their claims need care, but they show what auctioneers thought would sell.

An undated bill offers Jacketts Close, "planted with cherry trees", 1 acre 2 roods 27 perches, occupied by John Need 11/30. In 1847 a blacksmith's shop was sold with its orchard; in 1848 a malthouse came with an orchard of an acre of "choice & thriving Fruit Trees", occupied by William Cox. On 11 April 1849 the sale of a property at Binton Bridges included "Productive Orchards", and land on Cress Hill of 4 acres 3 roods 16 perches "planted with Choice Fruit Trees". In 1850 Mr George's house came with two acres of gardens and orchards. In 1862 and 1863 houses near the church, sold by the Tipping and Gibbs families, each had an "Orchard planted with choice Fruit Trees" and a pew in the church thrown in 11/30.

The landowners who mattered most were planting too. Charles Davenport was rector of Welford for forty-five years from 1820, and the parish history is unkind about his ministry, but it records that "his sons developed the glebe and other farming land they held by planting orchards" 19/02 · 19/45. That is the earliest reference in the archive to deliberate planting on any scale, as opposed to the inheritance of old cottage trees, and it fits the national picture. In the middle decades of the century railways, the repeal of the corn laws and the growth of industrial towns made fruit more profitable than corn on light land near a market.

The most detailed sale of the period is that of the Four Alls inn and Binton Bridges, auctioned at the Red Horse in Stratford on 1 June 1866 30/03 · 03/22 · 07/09. Beside the inn was "a very excellent piece of arable land ... in a high state of cultivation, planted with thriving and productive Fruit Trees, and presenting a favourable site for building purposes, houses being in great demand in the neighbourhood". With it went "a capital piece of old pasture land ... with several smaller pieces of Grass Land and Orcharding". Edward Gibbs's plan shows the arable and orchard of plot 1 beside the road, and one of the river islands, plot 5, is described as "Island Pasture and Orchard" 30/03. The phrase about building sites is worth noting. Already in 1866 an auctioneer saw fruit trees and housing as two uses of the same piece of ground, and that pairing runs through every later sale in this story.



The Four Alls estate, 1866. Edward Gibbs's sale plan. Plot 1 beside the road was "planted with thriving and productive Fruit Trees"; plot 5 in the river was "Island Pasture and Orchard". 30/03

Other bills follow the same pattern. In 1869 the manor of Little Dorsington came with a "Capital Orchard". About 1875 the lychgate cottages were sold with garden land "well planted with Fruit Trees", occupied by Metcalf 11/30. On 29 September 1887 a deed for the Fletcher property near the church was made with Thomas Howse of 446 Coventry Road, Birmingham, who described himself as a "fruit salesman" 13/37 · 15/03. Five years later Howse paid £400 for a lot at the Baylies sale 25/08. A Birmingham fruit salesman buying land in Welford is a small but telling sign of how closely the village was tied to the city market by the 1880s.

8. The night carts Birmingham market, about 1840 to 1900

Before the railway reached Binton in 1879, and for some growers long after, Welford's fruit went to Birmingham by road, overnight, in a horse-drawn cart. Several people described the journey, and their accounts agree closely.

The fullest is H. M. Woodward's sketch of Joseph Hancox, written in the 1930s from the old man's own stories 20/01. In his early days, Hancox said, the market cart was loaded at the end of the day and about six in the evening he set off by cross-country roads through Aston Cantlow to the Birmingham road. At the Bird in Hand outside Henley-in-Arden, a house kept by "Mother Rainbow", Hancox and the other carriers met, had supper and waited until midnight. Only then did they go on.

The reason for this wait was to enable them to pass all the remaining tollgates within the same day and so avoid paying toll twice. On arriving in Birmingham the produce was sold early in the morning, the whole business being over by about 6 A.M. The buyers were largely if not chiefly women, and Joseph said they were a very shrewd and businesslike lot of people, and quite jolly withall when business was done.

H. M. Woodward on Joseph Hancox 20/01

The parish history of about 1938 tells the same story without names. "Fruit growing has increased from small beginnings. At one time there was no market for fruit and vegetables at Stratford, and the fruit-growers used to take their produce to Birmingham." They stopped at the Bird in Hand till midnight and reached the market about five in the morning, "in this way they avoided paying toll twice at the toll-gate between Henley and Birmingham" 54/105.

Roland Harris remembered that in the 1880s the carter was Mr Perks, who with one assistant loaded the wagon with fruit and vegetables, crossed Binton Bridges with two horses, changed horses at Henley, and sold in Birmingham between four and six in the morning 11/21 · 13/32 · 52/35-47. Harris summed up the village's reputation in a sentence: "Welford & district was noted for plums & cherries."



Joseph and Selina Hancox. The photograph pasted into H. M. Woodward's commonplace book. Hancox, market gardener and churchwarden, carted fruit by night to Birmingham as a young man and was "Old Grandad" of the 1918 cherry-picking verse. He died in 1919.
20/01

Hancox had a market gardener's view of everything. His father John owned houses and orchards, and his brother James was listed as a fruit grower 20/01 · 46/15-36. The family worked the land between Bridges Cottage and The Orchard 10/43. In old age he would come

into Woodward's cherry orchard and sit in the shade of a tree telling stories, and the best of them were about cherries.

He would ... tell us tales of the old cherry-picking gang of which Ned Gibbs was leader. Ned would rear a 40 round ladder in the middle of the orchard supported only by a pair of props. He would then go to the top of the ladder, get over, and descend the back side of it. In the Rectory orchard was an enormous old cherry tree, as large as an oak, and one summer, when Joseph had bought the Rector's cherry crop, he built a platform in the tree and used it as an observation post to watch the picking and to guard his cherries from the birds. No ladders were long enough to pick the top of the tree and it had to be "laced" — that is, ladders were lifted into the tree and tied in position as required.

H. M. Woodward 20/01

Three things stand out from this passage. Picking was done by gangs, who went from orchard to orchard. Crops were bought on the tree, so that the Rector, who owned the biggest cherry tree in the village, sold its fruit to a dealer rather than picking it himself. And the trees were huge. A forty-round ladder is about forty feet long, and a cherry tree "as large as an oak" that could not be reached even with one was a very old standard tree, the kind that had been planted in Welford's closes for generations.

It was in this passage, too, that Woodward recorded Hancox's saying that "a good plum season was generally followed by several weddings, and these were called 'Plum Weddings'" 20/01. Fruit paid for things that otherwise had to wait.

9. "A very large Fruit Growing Industry" The Baylies sales, 1892 and 1893

By the 1890s the expansion had turned Welford into a fruit village, and the clearest evidence comes from the break-up of the Baylies estate. The Baylies family had been the chief landowners in the village since the inclosure, and in 1892 and 1893 most of their property was sold.

The first sale, at the Bell on 4 May 1892, was addressed "To Small Capitalists, Market Gardeners, and Others" 25/08. Almost every lot had fruit on it. The Bell Garden, 1 acre 1 rood 7 perches, occupied by Yeomans, was planted with fruit trees. A cottage near the Rectory had a garden "very early and productive and well planted

with Fruit Trees". The old Boat Inn had an orchard "well planted with Fruit Trees". Two pieces of the Lime Ground on Headland Road were partly in fruit, and so were Crab Mill Butts on Barton Road, held by George Cole, Wynn's cottages on Chapel Street, and Scullards. Pear Tree Close, 3 acres 0 roods 20 perches, the same close William Baylis had held in 1802, was occupied by A. G. Harris. There was a Little Orchard in hand. The particulars explained why buyers should be interested:

Welford is now the centre of a very large Fruit Growing and Market Gardening Industry ... The Land is in a high state of cultivation and suited to the large and early supply of every description of Fruit and Garden produce.

Sale particulars, 4 May 1892 25/08

The second sale, on 21 June 1893, offered the 110-acre farm tenanted by William Wyatt, including Walnut Tree Close, and several large pieces of garden land 11/30. The Meadow Ground by Binton Bridges, 7 acres 3 roods 26 perches, was "planted with Fruit Trees in full bearing", held by D. W. Haines on a lease to Michaelmas 1900. Briar Furlong on the Bidford road, 7 acres 3 roods 4 perches, was "planted with Plum, Pear & Currant Trees in full bearing", held by George Cole and Charles Brotherton on a lease to 1901. Hare Pit came with an orchard called "Penny Copper", about thirteen acres in all. Scullards appeared again, "well planted Fruit Trees".

These are the largest fruit holdings named anywhere in the archive, and they show that by the 1890s fruit was being grown on whole fields of seven or eight acres, let on lease to market gardeners, not only in cottage closes. The planting under the trees is described too: plums and pears above, currants below. That was the standard Vale of Evesham system, with bush fruit between the rows of standard trees, so that the ground earned money while the trees grew.

The particulars also pointed to a change that would raise land values. The tolls at Binton Bridges were about to be abolished, and Binton Station was close by 11/30. The bridges were freed in April 1893. At the ceremony the Mayor of Stratford said he believed there would be "a great reduction in the price of jam, for the fruit was largely grown in that neighbourhood" 31/12. The Mayor's remark was half a joke, but it was based on fact. The jam factories and canneries of the Midlands depended on cheap fruit from the

Vale, and every toll removed from the road made Welford's plums cheaper to deliver.

10. The village among its trees About 1880 to 1914

The Ordnance Survey maps of the period show the result. On the 1883 map the village is “surrounded by dotted orchards” 48/27, and on the six-inch map revised in 1900 and published in 1903 the orchard symbol fills almost every enclosure between the church and Weston, along the Binton road towards the Four Alls, and across the slope of Binton Hill on the far side of the river 46/14. A later village talk, describing the 1901 map, put it simply: the village was “a straggling collection of buildings on the three main streets amid a series of fruit orchards and farms” 46/37–95.



Welford in orchards, 1903. Part of the six-inch Ordnance Survey sheet (1903 edition). The small circles are fruit trees. They fill nearly every close from the church to Welford Farm, the

ground beside the Four Alls at Binton Bridges, and the slopes of Binton Hill across the river.
46/14

Arthur Matthews, whose family were the village blacksmiths, remembered that "Cress Hill to the church was all fruit orchard: plums, apples, damsons and a few cherries" 08/04. Another of the market-garden interviews says the orchards there were planted by Mr Hawkins, the landlord of the Cress Hill land 08/07. A visitor of about 1905, a child from Birmingham, recalled the village stores by the Maypole, with "an old orchard & a pump which delighted us children" 36/01.

The county council took an interest. In November 1900 Gloucestershire County Council sent Mr W. Iggulden to give lectures on orchards in the village, on the 6th and the 20th, and the parish council minutes record that they were "well attended" 18/13 · 18/20. Lectures of this kind, on pruning, spraying, grafting and the choice of varieties, were part of a national effort in the 1890s to modernise English fruit-growing in the face of imports. Locally, men with capital were still planting. John Wilson, who died in 1903, planted land with fruit trees 18/13.

Orchards were still the setting for village festivities. When Edward VII's coronation in June 1902 was postponed by his illness, the villagers insisted on holding their supper anyway, "in Mr Wyatt's orchard under tents" 23/91-96. A later wake roasted an ox in Boat Orchard 21/56.

In 1906 H. Garrett rowed up the Avon and stayed in Welford. From the top of Cress Hill he looked back over the river to the village, where the mill and some of the houses were "visible amongst the trees a mile away", and wrote that "there are large plantations of cherry and plum trees in the scene" 15/04. He also caught the mood of the village at the end of the fruit season:

There is work to be done, of course, though, now the corn is carried and the damsons are gathered, the urgent business of the year is done with. You may think of going to Stratford market next Friday, but the Friday after will do as well.

H. Garrett, 1906 15/04 · 11/33



“River View, Welford-on-Avon”, about 1910. The Avon from Cress Hill, close to the viewpoint Garrett described in 1906. The village lies among the trees on the skyline. 53/05

G. W. Wright, writing about the village in 1915, put the trade at the centre of its economy: “Fruit growing and market gardening are the principal industries, and are in a progressive state. Large quantities of very fine fruit are produced, and sent away to the markets — cherries and plums are, perhaps, the specialities, although other fruits are extensively grown” 25/07 · 15/10. He also noticed the first sign of the change that would end it. Cottages were being taken by people who worked elsewhere, so that one cottage formerly let at £4 a year now fetched £12.

The Kelly's directory of 1914 lists a dozen market gardeners in Welford, among them the Bassons, the Blundells, Samuel Broad, Thomas Bryan, Edward Hancock, the Hancoxes and Henry Sabin 48/13–22. Nearly all of them grew fruit. A market gardener in Welford meant someone with a few acres of plums, gooseberries and currants under which grew peas, beans, radishes and lettuce.

11. Pots, Prolifics and commission Selling the crop, 1912 to 1921

By the early twentieth century most Welford growers no longer drove to Birmingham themselves. They sent their fruit by rail to a

commission salesman, who sold it in the market and posted back an account with a cheque. Two such accounts survive among the papers of the Matthews and Wright families of Virginia Cottage, and they are the nearest thing in the archive to an orchard's books 10/39 · 10/40.

Both are on the printed forms of J. H. Buttler, "Fruit, Flower, Rabbit, Poultry and Vegetable Salesman, and General Commission Agent", of Smithfield Market, Birmingham. The first, dated 6 July 1912, is made out to Mr A. Wright for 27½ pots of gooseberries sold at about 5s 6d a pot, with smaller lots of red currants, and after carriage, toll and commission were deducted it came to a net £6 2s 1d. The second, from August of the same year, is for S. R. Matthews: Egg plums at 5s a pot, Victorias at 6s, and a few pots of a variety written as "Moores", sent by passenger train, grossing £3 10s and netting £2 13s 9d.

TELEGRAMS:
"BUTTLER, SMITHFIELD, BIRMINGHAM."

Telephone: MIDLAND 1767.

BANKERS:
LLOYDS' LIMITED, JAMAICA ROW,

SMITHFIELD MARKET,

Birmingham,

July 6 1912

10/39

Sold for and on Account of Mr. A. Wright

By **J. H. BUTTLER,**

FRUIT, FLOWER, RABBIT, POULTRY AND VEGETABLE SALESMAN,

AND GENERAL COMMISSION AGENT.

Empties and Labels forwarded on Application.

Specialities: Rabbits and Poultry.

Date.	Pkgs.	Description of Goods.	Sold at	£	s.	d.
July 2	6 pots	G. Berries	5/6	1	13	"
3	6 "	do	5/6	1	13	"
6	11 "	do	5/6	8	"	6
	4 1/2 "	do	2/9	11	"	
	1 1/2 "	Black Currants		10	"	
Dear Sir/Enclosed please find Cheque valued 6/2/- and my best for you trusting your favour for Tuesday from J.H.B. J. H. BUTTLER.						
Charges. 1 st 2 nd 3 rd 6 th			£	s.	d.	
Carriage	...	2. 8	2. 8	5-8		
Toll	...	9	9	1. 10		
Commission	...	2. 6	2. 6	6. 1		
Telegrams	...					
Less 2 pots 10/- + 1/2 1/2 Black Currants			Nett Proceeds £			
				6	2	1
				5	2	1

All Empties are sent to be filled and consigned solely to myself, if not returned will be CHARGED at cost price.
Herewith I beg to hand you particulars and Account of Sales of Goods received as above, which I hope will give satisfaction.
Soliciting a continuance of your favours, I remain, Yours respectfully,

To Prevent Errors all Consignments should be duly advised.

J. H. BUTTLER.

Goose berries to Birmingham, July 1912. J. H. Buttler's account to A. Wright, with carriage, toll and commission deducted at the foot. 10/39

The "pot" was the standard measure of the Vale of Evesham fruit trade, a wicker hamper of fixed size. The pot-hamper appears in a painting by Mr Boydell, "The Back of the Farm", described in a press cutting about pictures of Welford: in it "a fruit-packing shed is introduced with figures of the men packing the fruit in pot-

hampers for market" 23/91-96. The painting itself is not in the archive.

A household account book kept at Virginia Cottage shows a whole season's selling in 1915 31/01. From June the entries run: two pots of gooseberries at 6s 6d, "less carr[iage] & com[mission]"; two at 5s 6d; three at 6s 3d; three and a half at 7s; three at 8s. In late June there are peas and lettuce. In July come red and black currants by the pound, and at the end of the month "3½ pots Prolific Plums". In August the plums go on, and then the entries become simply "Produce — B'ham", sums of between ten shillings and nearly six pounds. The account book shows what the commission notes cannot: the steady weekly trickle of fruit from a smallholding through the summer, each consignment worth a pound or two, adding up to the year's cash income.

TELEGRAMS:
"BUTTLER, SMITHFIELD, BIRMINGHAM."

Telephone: MIDLAND 1767.

BANKERS:
LLOYDS' LIMITED, JAMAICA ROW,

SMITHFIELD MARKET,

Birmingham,

Aug 30 1912

10/40

Sold for and on Account of M^r S. R. Matthews.

By J. H. BUTTLER,

FRUIT, FLOWER, RABBIT, POULTRY AND VEGETABLE SALESMAN,

AND GENERAL COMMISSION AGENT.

Empties and Labels forwarded on Application.

Specialities: Rabbits and Poultry.

Date.	Pkges.	Description of Goods.	Sold at	£	s.	d.
<i>24.</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Rob Egg Plums</i>	<i>57.</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
	<i>1</i>	<i>Victorias</i>	<i>67.</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
	<i>4</i>	<i>Rob v</i>	<i>37.</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
		<i>} Pass & trans</i>				
<i>24</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Rob Egg Plums</i>	<i>57.</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
	<i>2</i>	<i>Moore</i>	<i>67.</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Dear Sir/ Enclosed please find</i>						
<i>Cheque valued 2/13/9 done my best</i>						
<i>for you. trusting your favours</i>						
<i>Yours truly,</i>						
<i>J. H. Butler</i>						
<i>Less 2/13/9 done 12.0</i>						
<i>Toll 3 1.2</i>						
<i>Comm 4 as charged 10.10</i>						
<i>1/2</i>						
Charges						
		<i>Carriage</i>	<i>6-0</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>0</i>	
		<i>Toll</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>9</i>		
		<i>Commission</i>	<i>2.10</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>6</i>	
		<i>Telegrams</i>				
				<i>£</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
					<i>9</i>	<i>-</i>
					<i>1</i>	<i>11</i>
					<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>
						<i>16</i>
						<i>3</i>
				Nett Proceeds £		
					<i>2</i>	<i>13</i>
						<i>9</i>

All Empties are sent to be filled and consigned solely to myself, if not returned will be CHARGED at cost price.
Herewith I beg to hand you particulars and Account of Sales of Goods received as above, which I hope will give satisfaction.
Soliciting a continuance of your favours, I remain, Yours respectfully,

To Prevent Errors all Consignments should be duly advised.

J. H. BUTTLER.

Plums to Birmingham, August 1912. Buttler's account to S. R. Matthews for Egg plums, Victorias and "Moore". 10/40

The varieties named in these papers are the standard Vale plums of the period, and the order of the accounts follows the season: Prolifics first, then Egg plums, then Victorias. A cutting of August

1921 in the archive gives the week's wholesale prices at Pershore, Evesham, Stratford and Coventry: apples (Quarrenden, Worcester Pearmain, Lord Grosvenor), plums (Pershores, Victorias, Czars, Belle de Louvain, Diamonds, Purple Egg) and damsons 23/54-69. In the same year Woodward noted that he had "started Growers Sales (Coventry) Welford Growers" 18/19. Coventry, like Birmingham, was a hungry industrial town within a cart's or a lorry's reach, and a cooperative sale there was an attempt by Welford growers to keep more of the price for themselves.

12. Gooseberries at the front The First World War

The war took the young men who picked the tall trees, and the clearest record of what that meant for a fruit-growing family is a run of letters from Jim Matthews, a Welford market gardener serving with the 1/6th Gloucesters in France, to his mother at Virginia Cottage 43/02-84. Before he enlisted he had been working a plot of market-garden ground, which the family called "Jim's Lime Ground", and his letters keep returning to it 43/83.

In May 1917, waiting at the base depot, he was glad to hear that there were "signs of being a good crop of gooseberries & I should think there will be some plums unless the blossom fails". In another letter he asked, "Are the trees in bloom yet," and wondered how Wilson would "manage to pick the fruit if there is much of a crop". From the front line on 15 June he asked: "How are things looking now, are the gooseberries turning out well & is there plenty of pickers about, I wish I was there to attend to it, but I cant be in two places at once." In July he saw in the Herald that gooseberries were "selling very well". On 29 July he wrote: "I am glad to hear Wilson is getting on alright with the work & that the gooseberries are selling so well, I suppose he will soon be starting on the plums now. Is there many prolifics this year." He asked how they had managed to get the cherries picked.

soon as I possibly can, also send them my
proper address, as they addressed the other
to the Base. I hope your rheumatics are
better. I haven't had a letter from you lately.
Did you put me in the parcel - How are
things looking now, are the gooseberries turning
out well & is there plenty of pickers about, I
wish I was there to attend to it, but I can't
be in two places at once. Well I can't stop
to say any more now. Please remember me to
all & don't worry about me as I am quite
alright. With love & best wishes to all
I remain
your loving son
Jim

"Are the gooseberries turning out well". The second page of Jim Matthews's letter of 15 June 1917 from the front line, asking whether there were plenty of pickers and wishing he were home to attend to the crop. 43/10

His last letter, of 7 August 1917, written two days before he died, hoped the weather would be at its best so that they could get the egg plums in, and that they would sell well 43/13. Jim Matthews was killed on 9 August 1917.

1917 was also the year of the biggest cherry crop anyone remembered. Woodward's chronology records it in four words: "Great Frost / Late Spring / Largest Cherry Crop" 18/19. In 1913,

the same chronology notes, "C.O. bought Cherry orchard", and in 1914 Woodward "started Market Gardening with Horace". The Book of Gossip contains a verse about picking in a Welford orchard the next summer. It describes the cherry-minders running beneath the trees at dawn to scare away the blackbirds and starlings, and the pickers at work through the day.

*While to and fro beneath them the cherry-minders run
With tom-tom and with tin can, and muzzle loading gun.*

...

*We rear our lofty ladders and prop them in the trees,
It's pleasant picking cherries on summer days like these.
And where the spreading branches the deepest shadows cast
Old Grandad sits and tells us quaint stories of the past,
Of famous cherry-pickers, so jolly and so bold,
And how they worked and feasted in sunny days of old.*

"Cherry Picking, 1918", in the Book of Gossip. A footnote says "Old Grandad = Joseph Hancox" 21/16

The verse ends with thanks to "those strong men and brave / Who guard our pleasant Home-land on Continent and wave", a reminder of who was not there to pick. Joseph Hancox died the next year 18/19.

The war also changed the land. Quiney's Leys, a field later bought as a playing field, was cleared by German prisoners of war, and Mr Stanley, one of its owners, turned it into market-garden land. Mr Sabin, born in 1890, returned from the war in 1919 and planted fruit trees there as Stanley's employee 08/06 · 08/07. The playing field was never made. In the 1970s damsons, plums and apples from that planting were still fruiting on the verges.

The Milcote estate sale of 1916 brought more orchards onto the market. It included Cherry Orchard Farm in Welford, about ten acres held by Mr Turvey, the Hunt Hall Peartree Ground, the orchard of the Mill House, and orchards at Rumer Hall 13/39–51. About the same time the Mainwarings bought a plum orchard by Binton Bridges, opposite the Four Alls, and built villas on it 21/07. That was exactly the use the 1866 auctioneer had foreseen.

13. Between the wars 1919 to 1939

In the 1920s the orchards were still a selling point, but increasingly for a new kind of buyer. When Boat Cottage was sold in 1923 it

came with a grass orchard of young trees; Vine House had a "Fruit Room" 11/30. In 1924 a row of building plots on the Bidford road at Cress Hill was offered "with a large number of well grown Fruit Trees", and the auctioneers' notes explain that the plots were aimed at buyers of week-end cottages, second homes for people from Birmingham. The adjoining field, "planted with choice Plum and Apple Trees", 10 acres 1 rood 38 perches, was let to Christopher Parriss of the Maypole stores for £15 10s a year 11/30. A descendant later wrote that his great-uncle and that uncle's brother "had the cafe and orchards around Welford" 42/26-28. In 1923 and 1924 there were allotments at Convicts Orchard, a piece of ground rented in four shares 36/05 · 08/06.



"The 'Jitty' between the orchards". An undated print captioned by hand. The jitties, or narrow footpaths, of Welford ran between orchard hedges, and several still do. 49/10

Children grew up among the trees. Sam Broad, who lived at The Headland on the corner of Mill Lane in the 1930s and 1940s, owned orchards of mainly cherry trees on at least two sides of the village school. To keep the birds off he strung lengths of string through the trees and tied tin cans to them, and the children in their classrooms could hear the clank of the cans as he walked round pulling the strings 10/47. A school memoir recalls the joy “when fresh fruit was picked (again by pupils)” for the school dinners 36/06. Later generations told tales of scrumping apples 38/01–03.

The most famous accident to an orchard tree in Welford happened in a thunderstorm on Tuesday 24 September 1935, when lightning struck the maypole. The pole, about sixty feet high, snapped near the ground and fell across the road, “the top crashing into a plum tree”. The shilling in the copper dome was quickly found, and “the weathercock itself finished in an amusing position — as though it were roosting in the plum tree!” 01/76 · 20/16.

Miss M. O. James of The Nook in Frog Lane turned the village's fruit into a business, bottling it for the Stratford hotels 13/15 · 36/14. A house sale of 1940 gives a sense of what a good Welford garden held by then: Sefton Cottage's lawns were “studded with various kinds of fruit trees, including walnut, apple, pear, plum, damson & hazel in full bearing” 11/30.

14. Plum jam and rabbit stew The Second World War and after

The Second World War briefly made every fruit tree valuable again. A memoir in the archive explains that with no freezers, “Bottling was the main way to preserve fruit, also jamming, but this depended on obtaining sugar. Miss James, who lived in Frog Lane, did this as a living and supplied the hotels that remained open in Stratford. She had a store shed stacked from floor to ceiling” 36/14. Jean Stone, who visited from Birmingham as a child, remembered going home by train from Milcote with food: “always ... plums from my uncle's trees. Also rabbits as my father went rabbiting. What I remember most about wartime food is Plum Jam and Rabbit stew, both of which were hard to come by in Birmingham” 36/08. Sugar was the problem, as it had been in the First War, when a Welford woman sending plums to a soldier wrote that “i cant git sugar” to make them into jam 30/01.

The village Vegetable, Fruit and Flower Show, revived at Manor Farm in 1943, ran through the late 1940s and 1950s 54/01. Its

schedule had classes for pears, cooking apples, dessert apples, coloured plums, Pershore plums and green plums, and the 1947 judges “spoke of the high standard of the exhibits for the season, especially the dessert apples and plums”. The prize lists name the Bassons, the Garners, S. Bennett, R. S. Wimbush of Pear Tree Close and A. B. Hancox, a family name that runs right through this story.

Commercial growing went on after the war, but on a smaller scale. In 1949 a property in Chapel Street called Suncrest was advertised as a “Residential Fruit Farm” with 200 fruit trees and 450 soft-fruit bushes 11/30. Alec Bryan remembered the Bramleys and the “Warners” apples 19/54. Bob Wright grew strawberries and raspberries for Stratford market 11/54. Albert Marshall kept a smallholding on Barton Road where he grew fruit and vegetables for market 42/26–28. And cider was still pressed at the mill until the early 1950s 37/01–04.

15. Orchards into gardens 1930 to 1990

The orchards did not disappear all at once. They became gardens, then building plots, and finally names. The history of Cherry Croft shows the first stage. In 1932 David and Elsie Roberts bought Croft Cottage on the south side of Church Street and renamed it Cherry Croft 49/01 · 49/38. David Roberts was a keen photographer and had his darkroom “in a shed at the bottom of the orchard”. When their daughter Nancy married in 1953, with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, taking the service, the reception was held “in a marquee in the orchard” 49/02 · 49/07. Later, part of the orchard became the new graveyard, which Mrs Roberts refused to be buried in: “I don't want to be buried amongst Dr Stuart's hens” 49/02.



Cherry Croft in the 1950s. The house bought and renamed by David and Elsie Roberts in 1932, photographed under a cherry tree in full blossom. 49/32

Other orchards went to public uses. In the 1950s and 1960s the parish council's files deal with Grist's Orchard as a site for a new burial ground 50/41. In 1935 the Silver Jubilee committee hoped to use Parkes Orchard for the children's sports 60/09. Miss Wedgwood bought Pear Tree Close, the house there was built in three sections for the Wedgwood family, and the footpath was diverted 37/01-04 · 24/01.

Most went for housing. The 1987 electoral register shows the result street by street 30/05. On Barton Road there was The Old Orchard; on Binton Road, Long Orchard Farm and Little Orchard; in Church Lane, Orchardene; in Church Street, Cherry Croft and The Orchard; in Duck Lane, Pear Tree Close, Orchard Bank and three houses at Orchard Nurseries; on Headland Road, Orchard Cottage, Cherry View, Apple Edge, Orchardside and Orchard Corner; on the High Street, Apple Trees, the Cider Mill and Grist's Orchard; and a whole close of nine houses called Orchard Close. A map of house names

made in 2014 adds Applegarth twice, Pear Tree House and Vineyard 47/665. The orchards had become an address.

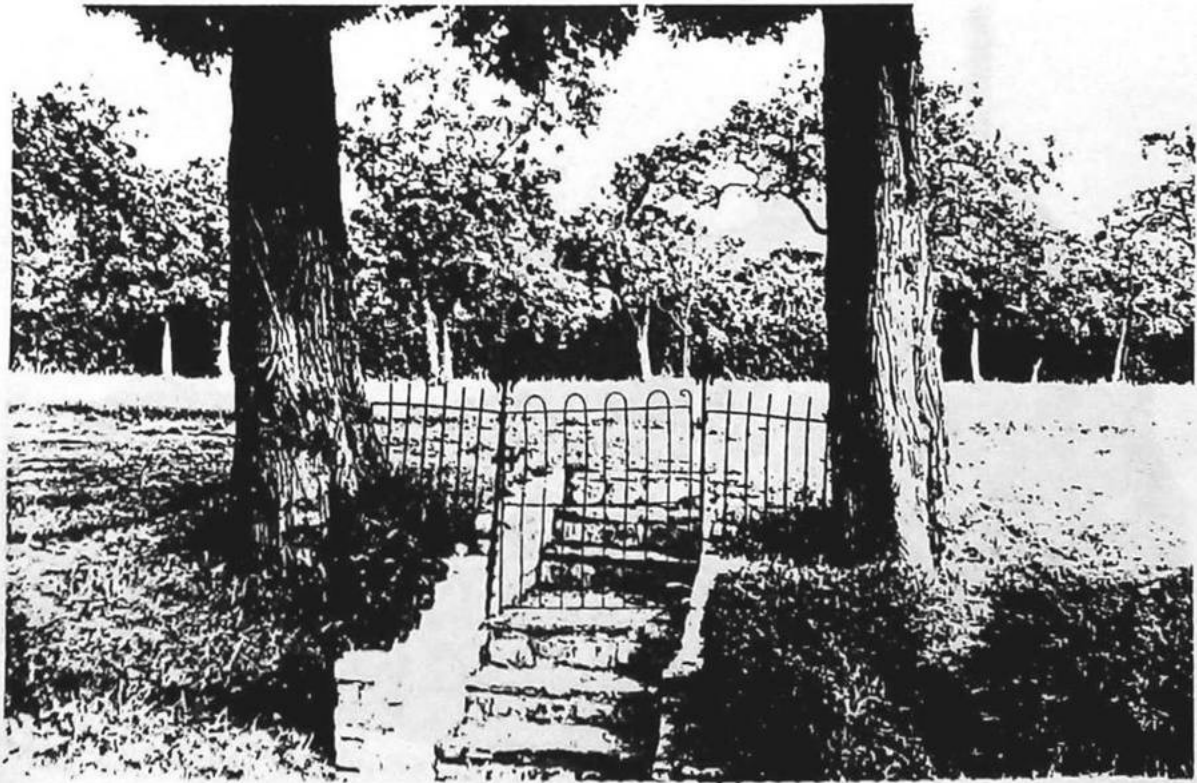
The most argued-over relic was the cider mill. In 1971 and 1972 the History Society tried to have its equipment preserved, suggesting the green in front of the Bell as a site and Avoncroft Museum at Bromsgrove as an alternative home. Demolition of the mill was thought unacceptable to the district council, and in 1972 the Society read letters from the Camella Development Company about its plans and “expressed satisfaction” 37/01–04. A village meeting heard that the new owner meant to display the stones permanently in front of the new development 24/01.

16. What is left 1992 to 2006

The 1992 Conservation Area Study is the last survey of Welford's fruit trees in the archive 15/08. It found orchards reduced to remnants: “orchard remnants” along Barton Road among caravan parks and smallholdings; the old orchard opposite Manor Farm with its stone steps and gate; and “the gnarled pear tree” on the Post Office green. Its authors wrote with some feeling about the old trees.

There are many old fruit trees in and around the village. Although some of these appear at first sight to be insignificant as specimens they are attractive during blossom and harvest time and are reminders of the past rural community. Many are interesting varieties no longer grown commercially. Of particular interest is the old orchard opposite Manor Farm with its unusual flight of stone steps and ornamental entrance gate.

Conservation Area Study, July 1992 15/08



The orchard opposite Manor Farm, 1992. The stone steps and gate that the Conservation Area Study singled out as the most interesting survival of the village's orchards. 15/08 fig 13



The Post Office green, 1992. The study described it as a small green “with its gnarled pear tree”, spoilt by the clutter of signs and seats. 15/08 fig 22

The tree schedule attached to the study lists 205 trees, and many of them are apple, plum, cherry and pear 15/08. The study also

warned against the fashion for Leylandii hedges, which it called “out of character with the traditional English rural scene”.

The last orchard story in the archive is a quarrel over a few trees on an allotment. The Shorthouse Bidston Allotment Trust's tenancy agreement forbade tenants to plant any trees or shrubs “except small ground fruit trees such as currant or gooseberry” 59/01–15. Don Hildred had rented one and a half plots for about eighteen years, having taken them at a trustee's invitation as a home for his collection of apple and pear cordons, which had been displaced by development in Church Lane. In 2001 the trustees objected to the trees. After threats to cut them down and letters from solicitors, an agreement was signed on 10 August 2001 under which Hildred lodged £200 against their eventual removal. In letters to the trustees he defended his trees: an ‘Arthur Turner’ which “nearly always has a magnificent crop of many crates of fruit”, a ‘Monarch’ which with it gave cooking apples “from September to April”, and a waist-high ‘Orleans Reinette’ forty-four years old. He also offered a verdict on the whole history this essay has traced:

Welford used to have many smallholdings, and these fell out of fashion, largely, I presume, by failure to keep up to date with modern practice in replacing the orchard stock.

D. W. Hildred to the allotment trustees 59/01–15

That is one explanation. The archive suggests others. Welford's orchards grew because the village was close to a big market, its soil was warm and early, and its land was held in small pieces by people who needed cash. They declined because the same nearness to Birmingham and Stratford that had made fruit profitable made houses more profitable still. From the auctioneer of 1866, who saw the Four Alls orchard as a “favourable site for building”, to the week-end cottage plots of 1924 and the closes of the 1960s and 1970s, the fruit trees were always one use of land that had another waiting. What survives is the pattern of jitties between the old closes, a few gnarled trees in gardens, the steps opposite Manor Farm, the crusher at the Cider Mill, and the names on the gates.

Chronology

1588	Flood fills the fish pool in the parsonage orchard. 21/49
1600	Plot near the church let on a 2,000-year lease; later called the orchard. 10/17–18
1686	Orchard, garden and close sold by J. Oakes to William Battersbie, weaver. 10/24
1723	Charles Sandford, cooper, mortgages the cottage later linked to a cider mill. 13/36

1754	Walter Parker's will leaves a house, orchard and cider mill, and "Sandford House" with its cider mill, to the Harrises. 13/36
c.1770	Joseph Greene describes John Boyce and William Sandford, "hucksters & fruiterers", carting fruit weekly to Birmingham. 11/23
1802	Inclosure award lists three Cherry Orchards, Pear Tree Close and about 25 house-and-orchard plots. 47/98
1807	Glebe terrier names the parsonage Orchard and its orchard neighbours. 02/01-12
1814	"Capital Orchard ... in full bearing" auctioned at the Bell; "Boney" burnt in Nathaniel Moore's orchard (or 1815). 11/20 · 01/95
1820-65	Rector Charles Davenport's sons plant orchards on the glebe and their own land. 19/02
1849	Cress Hill land "planted with Choice Fruit Trees" and Binton Bridges orchards sold. 11/30
1866	Four Alls sale: arable "planted with thriving and productive Fruit Trees", a "favourable site for building". 30/03
1880s	Mr Perks carts fruit to Birmingham overnight via Henley. 11/21
1892	Baylies sale: Welford "the centre of a very large Fruit Growing and Market Gardening Industry". 25/08
1893	Briar Furlong and Meadow Ground sold "in full bearing"; Binton Bridges freed of tolls. 11/30 · 31/12
1900	County council orchard lectures by W. Iggulden. 18/13
1902	Coronation supper in Mr Wyatt's orchard. 23/91-96
1903	Six-inch OS map shows orchards round almost the whole village. 46/14
1906	Garrett sees "large plantations of cherry and plum trees" and the horse-drawn crab mill. 15/04
1912	Buttler's Smithfield accounts for gooseberries and plums. 10/39-40
1915	Wright: "cherries and plums are, perhaps, the specialities". 25/07
1916	Milcote estate sale includes Cherry Orchard Farm. 13/39-51
1917	"Largest Cherry Crop"; Jim Matthews writes home about gooseberries and plums, and is killed on 9 August. 18/19 · 43/10-13
1918	"Cherry Picking, 1918" verse. 21/16
1919	Fruit trees planted on Quiney's Leys; Joseph Hancox dies. 08/06 · 18/19
1921	Welford Growers start sales at Coventry. 18/19
1924	Cress Hill building plots with fruit trees offered for week-end cottages. 11/30
1935	Maypole struck by lightning falls into a plum tree. 01/76
1943	Vegetable, Fruit and Flower Show revived at Manor Farm. 54/01
1952-54	Last cider pressed at the mill. 37/01-04
1971-72	History Society tries to save the Cider Mill equipment; press later at Mary Arden's. 37/01-04 · 38/01-03
1987	Electoral register lists more than twenty houses named after orchards or fruit. 30/05
1992	Conservation Area Study records orchard remnants and old varieties. 15/08
2001-	Allotment dispute over apple and pear cordons. 59/01-15

Gaps and conflicting sources

WHAT THE ARCHIVE DOES NOT HAVE

- No orchard account book, nurseryman's bill or planting record survives for any Welford holding. The only commercial figures are two salesman's accounts of 1912 and one household account book of 1915 10/39 · 10/40 · 31/01.
- There is no tithe map or apportionment in the collection, so there is no complete list of orchards between the 1802 award and the 1883 Ordnance Survey.
- No photograph shows anyone picking, packing or carting fruit in Welford. The painting of a fruit-packing shed with pot-hampers is known only from a press description 23/91–96, and the farming notes record Gilda Gray's view that no market-garden photographs exist.
- There are no records of cider-making beyond the deeds, descriptions and memories quoted here: no cider sales, no excise entries, no orchard leases for the Cider Mill.
- Variety names are scarce before the twentieth century. The archive names Prolifics, Egg plums, Victorias, Pershores and Czars among plums; Bramleys, “Warners”, ‘Arthur Turner’, ‘Monarch’ and ‘Orleans Reinette’ among apples. The 1992 study says many of the old village trees are of varieties no longer grown, but does not name them.

WHERE THE SOURCES DISAGREE OR ARE UNCERTAIN

- **Joseph Greene's letter** is dated 1870 in the Society's transcript, but its writer was an eighteenth-century rector, and the note in 11/23 argues for about 1770. This essay follows 1770.
- **The peace celebration** with “Boney” in Nathaniel Moore's orchard is dated 1815 in 01/95 and 01/97, early May 1814 in 20/01, and 11 April 1814 in 40/01.
- **The orchard on footpath 1** of the inclosure award is read as Hains, Mains, Harris or Haum Orchard in different transcriptions 47/98 · 01/70.
- **The cider-mill deeds** of 1723–1806 are not explicitly tied to the present Cider Mill House. The link rests on the Harris family's long occupation and the name; the village notes also mention a Gamage ownership in the early 1700s 13/36 · 10/03 · 21/65.
- **The Cress Hill orchards** are said by Arthur Matthews to have run “Cress Hill to the church”; one interview names the landlord who planted them as Hawthorn(e), another as Hawkins. The land from the Cider Mill to Headland Road is called “Long Ground” in one reading of 08/04 and may be “Lime Ground”, which appears in the 1892 sale 08/04 · 08/05 · 08/07 · 25/08.
- **The Welford cider press** at Mary Arden's house may no longer be there: the mill's historian was told that eight presses had since been sold 52/09. It is also not clear whether the press that went to Wilmcote came from the Cider Mill, the water mill, or both 38/01–03.
- **The author of the Book of Gossip** is not named in the notebook. It is very probably H. M. Woodward, who compiled 20/01 and 18/19, but this is an inference.

- **The 1920 sale** of a house near the church with an orchard of “choicest dessert fruit” has no recorded result 11/30.

ON LENGTH

The essay runs to about 9,000 words of text, and about 10,000 with captions, chronology and these notes. The archive is rich on the sale of orchards, the road to Birmingham and the memories of the twentieth century, but thin on the working orchard itself, and the remaining gap has been left rather than filled with general Vale of Evesham history.

MAIN SOURCES

- Deeds and wills: 10/17, 10/18, 10/24, 03/32, 13/36 and 63/03 (Warwick CRO DR 163/1–8), 13/37.
- Inclosure and glebe: 01/66–73, 01/70, 47/98, 22/12, 20/04, 02/01–12, 26/10, 19/22, 08/13.
- Sale particulars: 11/20, 09/13–17, 11/30, 30/03, 25/08, 13/39–51, 33/07–41, 29/12.
- Memoirs and notebooks: 20/01 and 18/19 (H. M. Woodward), 21/01–21 (Book of Gossip), 21/22–66 (Gilda Gray), 54/105 (c.1938 history), 08/01–19 (market-garden interviews), 10/32–56 (house notes), 36/01–14, 49/01–39.
- Trade: 10/39, 10/40, 31/01, 23/54–69, 43/02–84.
- Descriptions: 15/04 and 11/33 (Garrett 1906), 25/07 (Wright 1915), 23/84–107, 32/24–39.
- Maps and surveys: 46/14, 48/27, 15/08, 30/05, 47/665, 47/1–66, 13/02, 30/07.
- Later papers: 37/01–04, 38/01–03, 24/01, 52/09, 54/01, 50/41, 59/01–15, 60/09.