

Welford-on-Avon Parish Council

Introduction

Welford-on-Avon Parish Council first met on Thursday 20 December 1894, at half past five in the evening, in the Board School. Five men sat down that night: John Izod, Francis Parish, Arthur Harris, Frederick Brookes and John Wilson. They elected Izod chairman, Wilson vice-chairman, the assistant overseer Francis Ladbury Thompson clerk, and the manager of the Old Bank in Stratford treasurer (18/13). Ninety years later, in March 1984, a successor council of eight was exchanging contracts on eight acres of riverside meadow for £18,000, and could tell the village that "for the very first time in the records of the Parish Council we have our own Sports Ground" (58/09; 60/01).

This essay tells the story between those two moments, and a little beyond. It is built almost entirely from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive: the council's own minute-book extracts, its letters and notices, the papers of the village trusts it worked with, and the newspaper cuttings the Society kept. Folder and item numbers are given in brackets, so (18/14) means Folder 18, item 14. Where a link between two documents is my own reading rather than something a document states, it is marked as inferred.

Three features shape the whole story.

First, Welford was a Gloucestershire parish until 1 April 1931. For its first 37 years the council answered to Gloucestershire County Council and to the Marston Sicca Rural District Council at Long Marston. After 1931 it dealt with Warwickshire, the Stratford-on-Avon Rural District and, from 1974, Stratford-on-Avon District Council. The move cost the village part of its own paper trail. When Gilda Gray asked at Gloucester's Shire Hall in the late 1950s about early Welford records, she was told that "all records relating to the Marston Sicca Rural District, which was now a part of Warwickshire, had disappeared!" (17/07).

Second, a parish council has very few powers of its own. It cannot build roads, lay sewers or decide planning applications. Most of what the Welford council achieved it did by asking, protesting, lobbying and co-operating: with the rural district over the Maypole Green in 1908, with the Post Office over a telegraph pole in 1926, with the county planners over new bungalows in 1962, and with the Upper Avon Navigation Trust over a lock in 1970. The archive shows a council that was persistent rather than powerful.

Third, the council never worked alone. Its history is tangled with the village's charities and trusts: the Freckleton Charity, the John Cooper Foundation, the Rawlins Charity, the Memorial Hall trustees, the 1934 Village Trust Fund and the 1940 Shorthouse Bidston Allotment Trust. Much of what the council did, and much of what survives about it, sits in those trusts' papers rather than its own.

The sources are uneven. For 1894 to 1926 there are H. M. Woodward's careful notes of the first two minute books, made in April 1940, along with his lists of councillors (18/13–18/21;

19/25). For 1927 to 1948 there is very little from the council itself. From 1949 the picture fills in again, thanks to a list of councillors for 1949–64 (19/06), the papers of Bob Wright, who was clerk in the 1950s, and Gilda Gray's long chairmanship. The 1960s to 1990s come mostly through cuttings, parish magazine pages and the Society's own minutes. The council's original records, 1849–1992, were deposited at the Warwickshire County Record Office in October 2000 as collection CR3640 (50/41). This essay has not seen them; their catalogue is used to show what they cover.

The essay runs in date order, then turns to the people: the chairmen, clerks and councillors who appear in the archive. It ends with a table of key decisions, a list of points where the sources disagree, and a list of sources.

Before the council: vestry, officers and awards

For three centuries before 1894, Welford was governed by its vestry and by a set of unpaid parish officers chosen from among the farmers and tradesmen. The archive holds modern transcripts of their accounts, and they show a working system of local government long before anyone called it a council.

The churchwardens' accounts run, with gaps, from 1617 to 1763 (17/01). They cover the church fabric, the bells, the steeple rebuilt in 1628 and the relief of poor travellers "out of Ireland" in the 1640s. The petty constables' accounts survive for 27 years between 1694 and 1735 (17/02). Each constable was chosen for a year, swore his oath before the justices and was repaid from a parish levy. Two overseers of the poor were chosen each year to raise the poor rate and spend it on pensions, clothes, rent, fuel, nursing and burials; their accounts survive for eleven years between 1677 and 1715 (17/03). A fieldsman looked after the open fields, paying boys to scare birds off the corn and mending the field gates (17/04). Surveyors of the highways, required by the Highways Act of 1555, mended the roads with parishioners' compulsory labour and a levy for stone. In 1730 the surveyor spent 13s 9d "in drink for labors and men with teams" (17/05).

The common thread is the levy and the "allowing" of accounts. Each officer spent his own money during the year, then raised a rate and had his accounts approved by a handful of leading parishioners whose signatures recur: Silvester, Holtom, Bromley, Moore, Waldron. In effect, these men were Welford's council, meeting as the vestry. One of the archive's notes records that vestry meetings were held at the Bell, where the Duke of Dorset's agent also held the manor court leet and rent audits (11/15).

Two other institutions mattered. The first was the manor. Through the Sackville family, Dukes of Dorset and later Lords Sackville, the manor owned much of the parish into the 20th century. The early council would still be writing to Lord Sackville's agent about a burial ground in 1911–20 (18/14). The second was the enclosure award of 1802, which ended the open fields and set out the parish's roads and footpaths in law (01/70). Almost every footpath dispute in this essay, from 1895 to 1971, went back to that award. In October 1938

H. M. Woodward drew up "A Schedule of the Public Footpaths of Welford-on-Avon as described in the Parish Awards", listing seven footpaths across the new enclosures, eight across the old enclosures and a 15-ft bridle road to Weston (18/15).

The 19th century brought outside bodies that took work from the vestry. The Stratford Poor Law Union took over poor relief after 1834; by 1911 the "Clerk to the S-on-A Guardians" was managing a pauper's property in the village (18/14). Directories list a paid assistant overseer who doubled as the parish clerk. Joseph Grindon held the posts of "assistant overseer, parish clerk & deputy registrar of births & deaths" (48/13-22). The parish clerk of the church was a different, much older office. In 1663 an agreement made the church's parish clerk responsible for keeping the church clock (01/100-109). The council's own deposit at Warwick begins with an 1849 "Survey of levels in the parish of Welford on Avon for sanitary purposes", which shows the parish already worrying about drainage a century before mains sewers arrived (50/41, item 9).

The Local Government Act of 1894 changed this structure. It took civil business away from the vestry and gave every rural parish with more than 300 people an elected parish council. Smaller parishes kept a parish meeting of all electors. Welford was well above that threshold. The new councils could look after footpaths, allotments, parish property, charities and village greens, and could make a small rate. They also had a duty to appoint overseers, which they did each April. The Act's other half created rural district councils. Welford's was Marston Sicca, based at Long Marston, and it held the real powers over roads, drains and housing.

There was, inevitably, continuity of people. Francis Parish, who moved Izod's election as chairman in 1894, was still being appointed an overseer in 1915 (18/13; 18/14). The council's first clerk, F. L. Thompson, was the parish's assistant overseer. The council started by asking where it stood. On 20 April 1895 the clerk was told to "make enquiries as to Local Charities and report thereon". By January 1896 he had to report that he "had as yet been unable to obtain any further information" (18/17).

The Gloucestershire council, 1894–1931

The founding five

We know the first councillors unusually well, because H. M. Woodward knew most of them and wrote down what he thought of them when he made his notes from the first minute book on 30 April 1940 (18/13). His sketches are frank.

- **John Izod**, chairman 1894–1904, came from "an old Cotswold yeoman family" and "looked a typical farmer of the better class", but "was not a successful man of business". About ten years later he went bankrupt, left Welford, and died at a place called Cold Comfort between Milcote and Preston on Stour.
- **John Wilson**, vice-chairman, was "a self-made man, a Nonconformist and a radical", said by village gossip to have started as a rag-man. He built up an oil round, bought land, planted fruit trees and came to own "a considerable amount of property in the village". In late 1902 he fell from his trap coming home from Stratford market, broke his neck, and died weeks later in Stratford Hospital. He died on 28 February 1903 (18/19).
- **Francis Parish** was a gentleman farmer at Welford Hill who "looked rather like an army officer" and was "evidently a drinker".
- **Arthur Harris** kept the old Post Office in Chapel Street and sang in the church choir. He died after a fall down the stairs, and "it is said that his corpse was gnawed by rats".
- **Frederick Brookes** was "a small man with a twisted mouth and bleary eyes" with an exact memory. He could still point out where the bargemen had crossed the river when the Avon navigation was in use. He lived on the private road from Headland Road to the Mill, and died in 1925 (46/37–95).

The council grew from five to seven members during the 1890s: G. D. Whitehead, landlord of the Shakespeare Inn, joined in 1896, and Joseph Hancox in 1897 (19/25). Woodward's list of councillors to 1925 survives as 19/25, and the full membership is set out in the "Members" section below.

The first business, 1895–1906

The first minute book shows a council finding its feet with small, practical matters (18/13; 18/20; 18/21).

- **Footpaths.** In April 1895 the council wrote to James Carr asking him to remove an obstruction to a right of way in Boat Lane. By July the chairman could report it removed. Boat Lane would cause trouble again 75 years later.

- **The Maypole.** On 2 January 1896 the council "Resolved Unanimously" to let Cleveland Green of Welford House "erect [a] Maypole on the Village Green, to stock up the hedge, fence with iron hurdles and to plant same with shrubs and flowers" (01/88). Over the next decade it varnished the fencing (1898), fitted six iron bands to the pole (1898), had J. J. Hancox stop the cracks (1900), and gave Mr J. Hawkins junior the key to the enclosure (1903). In 1906 it decided against repainting the pole, because the clerk reported it would have to be taken down to do it.
- **Parish property and paperwork.** In October 1896 the council bought a safe for £6 10s from R. M. Ford of Wolverhampton. The "old iron parish document safe" was still in the school 60 years later, with an enamel washbowl standing on it (17/07). The council also defined the "Old Mill Road" from the enclosure award at James Carr's request, and appointed a waywarden.
- **Roads.** The county twice postponed handing highway powers to the district councils. In January 1899 the clerk proposed, as a road for the county to maintain, the road from Welford Corner through Weston-on-Avon to Milcote Station, about 1¼ miles (18/21). The council also paid £3 5s to repair the footbridge over Dorsington Brook (October 1899).
- **Technical education.** In 1900 the council asked Clifford Chambers and Marston Sicca to join it in arranging county-funded instruction "such as Fruit Culture". The result was two lectures on orchard cultivation by Mr Iggulden in November 1900, which "are said to have been well attended" (18/20). This suited a village of market gardens and cherry orchards.
- **Charities.** In 1902 the Charity Commissioners found that the Freckleton Charity had no legal trustees. It had been founded in 1592 by John Freckelton alias Haines, who left £1 a year from land at Milham, 13s 4d of it for the poor. The council nominated John Wilson and Frederick Brookes. The trustees of the J. H. Bayliss estate agreed to resume paying the charge, with about £8 of arrears (18/18).
- **Schools.** After the Education Act of 1902, the council was asked to appoint a school manager. On 4 November 1903 it recorded that it could not, "because no one will serve under the conditions of the new Act" (18/13). By 1907 it had found one, Tom Skinner.

There were also small dramas. In April 1900 John Wilson was disqualified for not attending, then readmitted when he explained himself. In 1904 Frank Robert Windsor was elected and resigned almost at once, and Edward Hancox took his place. The council also owned a derelict cottage and garden next to the Cider Mill cottage. In 1904 and 1905 it turned down both would-be tenants and a solicitor's offer to buy. Woodward noted that this was "the site now occupied by the Mem. Hall" (18/13).

In June 1906 the council took its first collective stand. The Board of Education proposed closing Long Marston Grammar School, endowed by the John Cooper Foundation. Welford resolved that before anything was done, a meeting should be called of the Cooper trustees, Marston Sicca Parish Council and every parish under the scheme, with a Board representative present (18/16). The school was not saved, but a new scheme approved by the King in Council on 22 April 1910 gave Welford a representative governor. Edward Hancox held the seat from 1910, then Levi Stanley from 1913 and H. M. Woodward from 1916 (18/16).

The second book, 1907–1926

The second minute book is fuller, and Woodward's digest names who attended each meeting (18/14). Five themes stand out.

The Maypole Green and the lost cross. Shortly before Christmas 1907, Thomas William Massey was thrown from his trap and killed on the Maypole Green coming home from market. The coroner's jury recommended levelling the green to the road. In January 1908 the council gave the Marston Sicca R.D.C. permission to remove the soil and lay a drain (01/88). Woodward added that "it was in carrying out the above work that the last remains of the old Market Cross were removed" (18/14).

Allotments and land. The Small Holdings and Allotments Act of 1908 brought applications for land. Lord Sackville offered part of a field on Mr Steadman's farm, but the applicants would not work it. In January 1909 the clerk reported that 10 of the 20 applicants were unsuitable, and that with the allotments already in the parish it was "not practicable" to ask the Board of Agriculture for more (18/14).

The burial ground, 1911–20. This was the longest-running item in the book. In July 1911 the council asked Lord Sackville for a plot. He would not give one, but might help buy land by the school. In 1912 his agent said he would "probably give ½ an acre to the Church". The council then resolved to close the churchyard as soon as possible and asked the Rector what he was doing, so that it could decide whether to call a parish meeting to adopt the Burial Acts. Letters to the Rector went unanswered in 1913 and 1914. In April 1920 the agent wrote that Lord Sackville "had sold the ground which he had offered" (18/14). The parish meeting to adopt the Burial Acts was eventually held on 11 February 1935 (09/07). A site was found only in the 1960s, when "a well known parishioner" gave land for a churchyard extension (09/09).

Charities and services. In January 1912 the council resolved that the income of the Rawlins Charity, founded in 1727 to teach eight poor boys, "is not being applied as it was intended to be" and told the clerk to take it to the Board of Education (18/17). No answer was ever recorded (17/07). The council asked for a public telephone call office in July 1913, and the Post Office promised one "as soon as possible" only in April 1920 (18/14). It refused to share

the cost of a motor fire engine with Stratford in 1913, and noted the start of weekly half-day closing at the post office in April 1911.

War and its aftermath. In October 1914 the council called a parish meeting on Gloucestershire's War Relief proposals. Later wartime business included War Food Societies (1916) and a Pig Club (1918). The derelict parish garden by the Cider Mill fell vacant when its tenant, Charles Horne, died in 1917. The council resolved to keep it for a Parish Room, and in January 1919 earmarked it as the "Site for War Mem. Hall" (18/14). In April 1919 it recorded that 12 new working-class dwellings were needed. It complained of the "dangerous corner at Bell Inn" and asked the AA for a sign in 1920–21. The Rural District refused to widen School Lane because there was not enough traffic (18/14).

The Memorial Hall quarrel

The War Memorial Hall was the council's idea, but it became the village's most bitter quarrel. In 1918 "the Chairman of the Parish Council called a public meeting" that decided to build a hall on the land near the Maypole and raised about £540 (23/91–96, p.6). Costs then rose from an estimated £1,100 to £2,000–3,000. A Mr Marks offered a cheaper timber and asbestos hall and a playing field. When the glebe field "Coyney's Leys" (nine acres) came up for sale he bought it all for £500, by arrangement with Levi Stanley, who wanted four acres. Remarks about the deal offended Marks and he withdrew.

At the public meeting that followed, the council's chairman Tom Hawkins denied knowing anything of the arrangement. W. J. Matthews said Hawkins had been at a meeting in the Bell the night before the sale, where it was explained. Stanley refused to repeat the remarks. When asked whether the Parish Council would serve on a new committee, Hawkins replied that he "did not know. He thought the Council was 'fed up'" (23/91–96). The newspaper gives no year. The glebe sales in Woodward's notes for 1920 make about 1920–21 likely (inferred). The hall was finally opened in December 1923, on its own trust deed of 1926 (06/08).

Collapse and revival

The quarrel may explain what happened next. After April 1921 the council could not raise a quorum. There was none in July and October 1921 or January 1922. Woodward wrote simply: "No Council till Ap. 1925" (18/14). For three years Welford had no working parish council. The link between the hall row and the collapse is my inference; the minutes give no reason.

The revived council of April 1925 was Tom Hawkins, A. J. Montague, Levi Stanley and Woodward, joined in July by the Rector, the Rev. Arthur James Davis, as chairman (19/25). It acted quickly. In July 1925 it called a public meeting about a new maypole, since the 1896

pole had blown down in November 1923. In January 1926 it reported that the parish meeting had opened a subscription for a new pole inside a low stone wall "in place of the present spiked iron railings" (01/88). The Post Office would move the telegraph pole on the green only if the council paid £13. The council refused, asked again whether it could be done for free, and in May 1926 voted to put up a parish notice board instead (18/14).

The new maypole, 59 ft 9 in of Norwegian timber with ironwork by the blacksmith A. A. Matthews, was raised on 2 May 1927 inside a wall of Hidcote stone. The opening ceremony on Empire Day was performed by E. R. Thompson, "Clerk to the Parish Council, and this year Mayor of Stratford-on-Avon" (01/87). The minute books record F. R. Thompson as clerk from 1916 (18/14). These are probably the same man, with one initial misread (inferred). The Thompsons served as clerks for more than 30 years. Then, on 1 April 1931, Gloucestershire's Welford became Warwickshire's.

Warwickshire, the Trust Fund and the war, 1931–1948

A new county

On 1 April 1931 the Provisional Order Confirmation (Gloucestershire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire) Act moved Welford, Weston-on-Avon, Clifford Chambers, Dorsington and Long Marston into Warwickshire, and the Marston Sicca Rural District went with them (web: search results for Long Marston and the UK BMD district list; pages not opened). Welford came under the Stratford-on-Avon Rural District. The archive treats the date as settled. The 1940 Shorthouse deed describes the parish as "formerly in the County of Gloucester" (59/01). Gilda Gray, writing years later, put the change in "1930, when county boundaries were revised" (17/07). The church stayed in the Diocese of Gloucester; the parish magazine still carried the Gloucester Diocesan Gazette in 1972 (18/06).

For the council the change mattered in practical ways. Its letters about drains, roads and planning now went to Warwick and Stratford instead of Gloucester and Long Marston. Some of its own history went missing in the transfer, as Gilda Gray found (17/07). For the 1930s there is no run of minute-book notes: Woodward's notes stop in 1926. The council's work in these years has to be read from other bodies' papers.

Chairmen of the 1930s

Two chairmen are known for the 1930s. The Rev. A. J. Davis, Rector of Welford, chaired the council from 1925. He was still "Rector of Welford and Chairman of the Parish Council" when he presided over the public meeting about King George V's Silver Jubilee in 1935, with about thirty people present (60/09). By December 1938 the chairman was Herbert Charles Setten, a retired manufacturer. When the Duke of Kent visited Welford on 13 December 1938 as Vice-Patron of the National Council of Social Service, Setten and Alderman W. L. Dingley received him at the Memorial Hall. The Duke asked about the Maypole "and was interested

to learn that Welford had had such a landmark from time immemorial". He then watched part of the Amateur Players' Joan of Arc play (11/19; 62/01, p.91).



The Village Trust Fund, 1934

The most important development of the decade was not the council's own work. In 1934 two public meetings in the Memorial Hall, on 15 February and 10 May, adopted a scheme drawn up by H. M. Woodward. Its purpose was to make sure that the profits of village fêtes went only to things "of permanent value to the Village" (60/01). Seven trustees were appointed: Capt. Walter Leslie Dingley, Woodward, Arthur Thomas Hargrave Montague,

Edgar Mills Davis, Vincent Edward Mainwaring, H. C. Setten and Miss Cathleen May Evelyn Boraston. The Memorandum of Agreement with the Fête Committee is dated 14 November 1934 (06/14; 57/06).

The deed shaped the council's relations with the trust for the next fifty years. At least 75% of the money was to buy "a children's playing field" and riverside land for pleasure grounds. Up to 25% could go to the churches, the Memorial Hall and the Hospitals Fund. Clause 6 laid down that the trustees could not "hand over any property possessed by them to the Parish Council or other public authority" without a public meeting's consent (57/06; 60/03). In practice the trustees held the money, and the council was the body that could own land and claim grants. Each needed the other.

The trustees spent the late 1930s looking for a field. They considered Keyter Close, land behind Cross Farm, Fool's Close, "the Cinder Meadow", Mr Bluck's land and a site belonging to Mrs Meinhardt (60/01). The Cinder Meadow would come back fifty years later. Grants turned out to depend on the land being held by a public authority. In 1937 the trustees resolved "to explore the position of the Parish Council to acquire land in order these grants might be obtained". An extraordinary general meeting on 24 March 1938 voted 27 to 1 that the trustees could fund "the Parish Council or other local authority to acquire and equip a playing field" (60/01).

The council then negotiated for Mrs Meinhardt's land. Setten reported its progress to the trustees. Warwickshire County Council offered 25% of a £630 cost, up to £157 10s, and the Rural District offered another 10%. The trustees authorised cheques so that "the Parish Council [could] pay the deposit of ten per cent on the purchase price" (60/01). Then the war intervened. By early 1940 "owing to the war all grants had been suspended", and "negotiations between the Parish Council & the representatives of Mrs Meinhardt had fallen through" (60/01). This was the first of four failed attempts to give Welford a playing field.

Other business of the 1930s

The council's own records at Warwick show other concerns: a file on the 1937 Alcester, Shipston and Stratford (River Avon Area) Planning Scheme, and rights-of-way maps and schedules from 1932–51 (50/41). On 11 February 1935 a parish meeting was called "To adopt the Burial Acts, 1852 to 1885", which allowed the parish to create a burial board and cemetery (09/07). As the 1966 appeal later explained, "the Parish Council had adopted the Burial Act" but no site could be found (09/09). The Millers Close council houses had been built on the old Harris's Close by 1935 (18/15; 20/01 p.15). That was the first council housing in the village. It answered the need for 12 working-class dwellings that the council had recorded in 1919 (18/14), though the houses themselves were built by the Rural District.

Woodward's own footpath schedule of October 1938 recorded which paths had fallen out of use (18/15). It is not stated to have been made for the council. Its timing, alongside the council's rights-of-way file of 1932–51, suggests that it was (inferred).

Allotments for the poor, 1940

On 14 June 1940 Herbert Stephen Shorthouse of "Solano", a company director, settled about 5¼ acres of Churchfield Close as a charity. The land was already let as allotments (59/01). The rents were to be shared out each Christmas among up to twelve "old and poor cottagers of Welford". The deed said that preference should go to spinsters and widows, and that no one was to be excluded "merely because he or she is in the habit of using profane language". Its first trustees were Setten, W. J. Matthews and A. T. H. Montague. The clause that mattered most for the council's future was the last: new trustees were "to be nominated by the Parish Council, or by any council that takes it over" (59/01). This gave the council a permanent role in the allotments, which it still had in 2006 (59/02).

The war years

The war left few traces in the council's papers. The Warwick deposit has a file on Warship Week, 1941–43 (50/41). The Trust Fund resolved in March 1942 that "in view of war conditions no further public meetings be called during the war", and put its money into War Savings Certificates and Defence Bonds (60/01). Village effort went into other bodies. From 1943 to 1955 Mrs Roberts's committee ran a Flower Show and Fête at Manor Farm, which raised nearly £1,500 for the hall, the band, the clubs, the Maypole's upkeep and the Forces Comforts Fund (58/09).

One undated Herald report records the council having "the iron railings around the chestnut tree on the Maypole Green" removed. Its transcriber suggested this belonged to the wartime scrap-metal drives of 1940–43 (13/15). The members present, however, were W. J. Matthews (chairman), Mrs G. Gray, Mrs E. Roberts, H. C. Setten, W. E. Swinnock and R. E. Wright (clerk). Mrs Gray and Mrs Roberts were first elected after 1948, and Wright was clerk by 1951. That makes the report about 1950–51, not wartime (inferred; see the next section).

Starting again, 1948

The council was quick to try again after the war. On 18 February 1948 its clerk, C. W. Brooker, wrote to the Trust Fund's secretary, W. E. Swinnock. He reported that a public meeting on 6 February had heard "the Chairman of the Parish Council on the negotiations to date for the acquisition of two fields for the purpose of a playing field", and had asked the trustees "to co-operate with the Parish Council in further negotiations" (58/07). Which two fields is not recorded, and nothing came of them.

The same year saw a change in the village that would transform the council. In January 1948 the Rev. Karl Ashbolt Gray became Rector of Welford (19/02). His wife Gilda joined the Women's Institute in February 1948. She later described a village with "crying needs... sanitation, housing, refuse collection, mains water, mains drainage, electricity for Weston" (03/01–19).

"Petticoat government" and the post-war council, 1949–1960

The 1949 election

The Women's Institute decided to put up two candidates for the parish council: Mrs Ethel Roberts and Mrs Gilda Gray. "I well remember the first election with its banners 'Down with Petticoat Government!'" Gilda Gray wrote in 1975. "But we were elected and all the twenty three years I served as a parish councillor I knew the W.I. was backing me, and gradually these much needed amenities, and others, came" (03/01–19).

A handwritten list of councillors for each three-yearly election from 1949 to 1964 confirms the result (19/06). The 1949 council had five members: H. Setten (chairman), W. Swinnock, Wilson Matthews, Mrs Ethel Roberts and Mrs Gray, with C. W. ("H.") Brooker as clerk. It was the first Welford council known to include women. Both women stayed on: Mrs Roberts until at least 1952, and Mrs Gray, listed as "Mrs Karl Gray" after her husband, on every council to 1964.

The chairman in these years is less clear than 19/06 suggests. The list makes Setten chairman continuously from 1949 to 1955. Yet a printed notice calling a public meeting of the parish council for 19 January 1951 is signed "W. J. Matthews, Chairman" (55/01–03). An undated Herald report also names "Mr. W. J. Matthews (chairman)" at a meeting attended by Mrs Gray, Mrs Roberts, Setten, Swinnock and R. E. Wright as clerk (13/15). Setten was certainly chairman again by October 1952 (55/01–03). The likeliest reading is that Wilson James Matthews, the haulage contractor of Bell Bank, chaired the council for a year or so around 1950–51. This is inferred from the two documents against the list.

WELFORD-ON-AVON

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PARISH COUNCIL. — At a meeting of the Parish Council last week it was reported that the iron railings around the chestnut tree on the Maypole Green had been removed and the seat repaired. Action had been taken concerning footpath obstructions. A memorandum was read from the Women's Institute complaining of the open sewer in the meadows leading to Weston and the Clerk was instructed to bring the matter to the notice of the R.D.C. It was decided to ask the R.D.C. to take over and maintain the seats in the Headland-road, as the Parish Council was not empowered to do so. Present were: Mr. W. J. Matthews (chairman), Mrs. G. Gray, Mrs. E. Roberts, Messrs. H. C. Setten, W. E. Swinnock and R. E. Wright (Clerk).

DEATH OF MISS M. O. JAMES. — The death occurred suddenly last week of Miss M. O. James, who had lived in Welford for the past 25 years at "The Nook." Miss James had established a fruit bottling company and was at her work up till the last. She took an active interest in the village especially in the parish church, of which she was a regular attendant. The funeral service at the parish church on Friday was followed by cremation at Birmingham.

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That meeting shows the council's ordinary business. The railings round the chestnut tree on the Maypole Green had been removed and the seat repaired. Action had been taken about obstructed footpaths. A memorandum from the Women's Institute complained "of the open sewer in the meadows leading to Weston", and the clerk was told to take it to the R.D.C. The council asked the R.D.C. to maintain the seats in Headland Road, "as the Parish Council was not empowered to do so" (13/15). The W.I.'s link to the council is visible here: its complaint went straight to the councillors it had helped elect.

Bob Wright, clerk

Robert Edward Wright of The Homestead was the most important single figure in the council's post-war administration. The 19/06 list names him clerk from 1952. He was already writing as "Clerk to Welford-on-Avon Parish Council" in the Festival of Britain file of 1951 (55/11) and sits as clerk in the c.1950–51 report above (13/15). He was still clerk in 1961 (57/02). After his death a eulogy listed his offices: Clerk of the Parish Council, Secretary and Treasurer of the Welford Trust Fund, Clerk to the Governors of the John Cooper Foundation, Trustee of the Freckleton Charity, and Trustee of the Shorthouse Bidston Allotment Trust (11/54). In 2006, when he resigned from the allotment trust, the parish clerk thanked him for "exceptional service to the village community over almost 50 years" (59/02). His papers are why so much of the 1950s survives in the archive.

Festival and Coronation

The Festival of Britain, 3 May to 30 September 1951, came to Welford through the council. The Ministry of Health allowed councils to spend money on it (Circular 12/50), and the Rural District wrote to all parish councils in April 1950 (55/11). Welford's council called a public meeting in the Memorial Hall on 19 January 1951, attended by about forty-five people. A motion to celebrate "in the villages" was amended by a large majority so that the celebration would be "directed towards visitors and not villagers" (55/01–03). The co-ordinating committee, chaired by the Rector with Wright as secretary, produced a leaflet of 3,000 copies, revived the Welford Wake in Chapel Street, and ran a programme of maypole dancing, a river carnival and open gardens. The Festival Office had no grants to give (55/11).

The Coronation of 1953 went the other way. Setten, as chairman of the parish council, chaired the public meeting of 7 October 1952, with 30–40 present. It elected a Coronation committee whose celebration was "explicitly for the villagers": souvenirs for every child up to 15, a picnic, a bonfire and £50 of fireworks (55/01–03). The leftover money paid for two Coronation Memorial Seats, one at Weston Turn and one on Cress Hill. The County Surveyor required "the Parish Council [to] agree to maintain the seat and also indemnify the County Council". The Rural District's General Purposes Committee agreed in May 1954 to take on maintenance instead, "so the Parish Council didn't have to" (55/05). The seats went in about May 1955.

Services: water, light and drains

The council's Warwick deposit shows the services it was pressing for in these years: water supply (1952–74), street lighting (1955–56) and sewerage (1965–68) (50/41). A newspaper report from the mid-1950s explained the delay in piped water. Any supply for Weston depended on a scheme for Welford's 700 residents, and Welford's own wells still gave good water. Wright, "clerk to Welford Parish Council, said that this was probably an answer to the long delays in the piped water scheme" (50/105; 50/106). A photograph shows the builder

A. G. Rodenhurst, later a councillor, filling a bucket at the village pump, which carried a notice that the water must be boiled.

In 1962 the county still recorded that only about 260 of some 340 homes had mains water, that there was "no sewerage, only septic tanks", and that main drainage was at least three years away (06/09; 19/44). Gilda Gray's account says these amenities came "gradually" with the council's pressure (03/01-19). The archive does not show the date of each.

Mrs Gray takes the chair

In 1956 Mrs Gray became chairman, and she held the post until about 1971 (19/06; 57/11). On 22 November 1955 Wright sent her a printed summons to the council meeting at the County Primary School on Thursday 1 December (18/09). By then she was already campaigning. On 16 May 1956 the Warwickshire Playing Fields Association wrote to Wright that "Mrs Gray of Welford Vicarage" had phoned about an all-purpose playing field. It advised that the field must be "vested in the Parish Council" to get the full grants: 25% from the county and 10% from the Rural District, plus a possible Ministry of Education grant (57/15).

The 1950s brought a second and third attempt at a playing field. In 1954 Wright, as parish clerk, wrote to Alderman Dingley that no annual public meeting of the Trust Fund had been held "for some years". The council asked where the fund stood (57/15). At the meeting that followed, the fund stood at £865 2s 8d. Wright and J. Garner were elected trustees in place of two who had died. Weston people argued that they had helped raise the money and should have a vote (57/15). In June 1956 the council considered Mr Richards's application to use part of his back land as a playing field, and replied that it was "suitable in situation and extent". A piece of land in the Knap was offered at £400 the same year (57/15; 60/01). Neither went ahead.

The third attempt caused the sharpest row of the decade. The Shorthouse allotments were offered at £100. At a joint meeting of the trustees and the council on 26 April 1957, "Mr G. Edgington, member of the parish council and an allotment holder, voiced his disapproval... and stated that if it were proceeded with the tenants would petition the Ministry of Agriculture in protest" (60/01). The trustees backed off. In December 1957 the Rural District acquired 1.5 acres of the Bidston allotments for the school instead. Work on the school playing field began in 1961. In 1962 the council agreed a licence with the Education Committee so that all village children could use it outside school hours (59/10). A later chairman described it as one of the few school fields in the county, "if not the only", open after school (59/10). The licence terms survive: the council was to provide its own gate, lock it each evening and pay half the insurance (06/03).

Cress Hill, 1959–61

The council's main land purchase of the period came from a threat. In September 1959 Mrs Gray heard that Cress Hill, the riverside field by the old lock west of the village, was wanted "for a commercial enterprise". Gloucestershire County Council, which still owned it, would sell it to the parish council for £100. She wrote to Dingley on 26 November 1959 suggesting the Trust Fund pay, since the field "is a favourite with village children giving safe access to the river" and "so little of Welford's natural beauty remains" (57/02). The trustees agreed on 1 December "to preserve it for the village in its natural state". Completion took place on 24 May 1960 at £107 18s with fees. In 1961 Dingley paid a further £72 0s 10d for clearing and fencing, partly in £5 notes (57/02; 58/06).

Cress Hill, about five acres, was bought by the council and paid for by the trust. That arrangement respected the deed's clause 6, which barred the trustees from handing property to the council. The Charity Commission later noted in 1968 that the land "should have been conveyed to the Parish Council upon the trusts of the 1934 Agreement, not free of trust" (57/14). Cress Hill remained council land. Sheep belonging to a council tenant were grazing on it in 1988 (59/11).

Growth, the river and the footpath war, 1960–1979

Fighting the bungalows

Welford grew faster in the late 1950s than at any time before. The county's figures put the population at 664 in 1931, 787 in 1951 and about 1,000 in 1962, with some 90 of its 340 dwellings built since 1951 (06/09; 19/44). Gilda Gray remembered permits "for 20 houses and 30 houses" and a third council estate going up at Headland Rise. "The parish which had had no births for three years, became aware of babies in perambulators being wheeled through the village" (17/07).

The council could not refuse planning permission, but it could complain, and it did. In 1962 a county planning report opened: "On a number of occasions recently the Welford Parish Council have expressed their dissatisfaction and concern with regard to the number and design of new dwellings erected at Welford" (19/44). On 2 April 1962, representatives of the County Plans Sub-Committee, the Rural District and the parish council inspected the new bungalows. They found cramped plots, too many bungalows and roofs "far too flat" (06/09). The report proposed a written policy: severe restriction until main drainage arrived, special care in the old streets, and new houses outside a "green line" only for agriculture. A later hand wrote across the top of the archive copy: "Welford Village Development policies grew out of this" (06/09).

Gilda Gray's own account adds a detail the report leaves out. The county planning committee, she wrote, "had no personal knowledge of the beauty and attractiveness of this South Warwickshire village" until "one early summer morning they were enticed en masse – by the Parish Council Chairman, to come and see for themselves". As a result, "a new school

should be one of the first requirements". She told the Education Officer it should be "For at least two hundred children" (17/07). The essay is anonymous but is attributed to her in the archive, so the "Parish Council Chairman" here is very probably herself (inferred).

The bridge, the kerbs and the maypole

Two memories of Mrs Gray's chairmanship survive from later residents. A news sheet by the county councillor Peter Barnes recalled that "in the early sixties we had a new bridge on three of the four All's" at Binton Bridges. "Mrs Grey, who was chairman of the parish council and the vicar's wife at the time, fought to save what we have today... without her fight it would be like a main road through the village. She also did not like the kerbing of the High Street so she had it turfed to cover it up" (47/80-90). The council's file on "improvements to the road layout at the Bell Inn" dates from 1962 (50/41).

The 1938 maypole was found rotten in the 1960s. "Mrs. Gray, chairman of the Parish Council, with fellow-members Messrs. Wilfred Hawkins and T. Holman and Mr. R. Wright (clerk)" examined it at Alec Bryan's yard. They concluded that cutting out the bad patches would leave "about 20 feet or less", a stump compared with 65 or 70 feet. "Mrs. Gray promised to make inquiries regarding a new pole, either timber or metal" (01/75). The new pole of 1967 was metal, an anonymous gift later identified as from Mr Jefferson of Welford House. The parish magazine credited "Mr. Corah, the parish councillor who had the oversight of the purchase and erection of the new maypole" (01/84; 01/85). Richard Corah appears on the 1964 council (19/06).



By 1964 the council had grown from five to seven members: Mrs Gray (chairman), T. Holman, H. D. Kirk, A. Rodenhurst, Howard Hawkins, Frank Edginton and Richard Corah (19/06). It belonged to the Warwickshire Association of Parish Councils, which held its 16th annual meeting at Shire Hall in October 1964 (19/08). It also kept copies of the national Parish Councils Review, marking articles on footpath repairs, highway verges and committee secrecy (06/02; 06/15).

The council chases the trust

The longest correspondence of the 1960s was between the council and its own village trust. In 1965 the council asked the Trust Fund to help with children's playground equipment costing about £320. The trustees agreed in principle (57/13). Then, from November 1965, the clerk H. W. Pulham, M.B.E., of "Imbros", Binton Road, wrote again and again to ask when the trust would hold the annual public meeting and present the accounts that its deed required. He wrote on 15 November 1965, 25 March 1966, 7 May 1966, 6 June 1966, 9 December 1966, 22 February 1967, 5 April 1967 and 5 October 1967. The last letter said the enquiry "is not idle curiosity" and asked whether the trust had registered as a charity (57/13; 57/11). The trustees' solicitors confirmed in December 1967 that the council "is right to ask the trustees for accounts" (57/14).

The trust was registered as charity no. 254926 on 12 August 1968 (57/14). The council's replacement clerk, H. W. ("Harry") Passmore of 45 Avon Crescent, Stratford, continued the pressure. In March 1970 he complained that twice in fifteen months the council's requests had been ignored (57/13). In March 1970 the council bought swings, a 21-ft steel slide and a climbing frame from Charles Wicksteed of Kettering for £230 7s. It then spent eighteen months chasing the promised contribution, first through the clerk and then through its new chairman R. Lucas. In October 1971 Dingley cashed 30 savings certificates to pay £100 (57/11). The Charity Commission objected in 1972 that equipment for a school field "appears to be contrary to the trusts of the charity", and chased the trustees until January 1974. No reply survives (57/11).

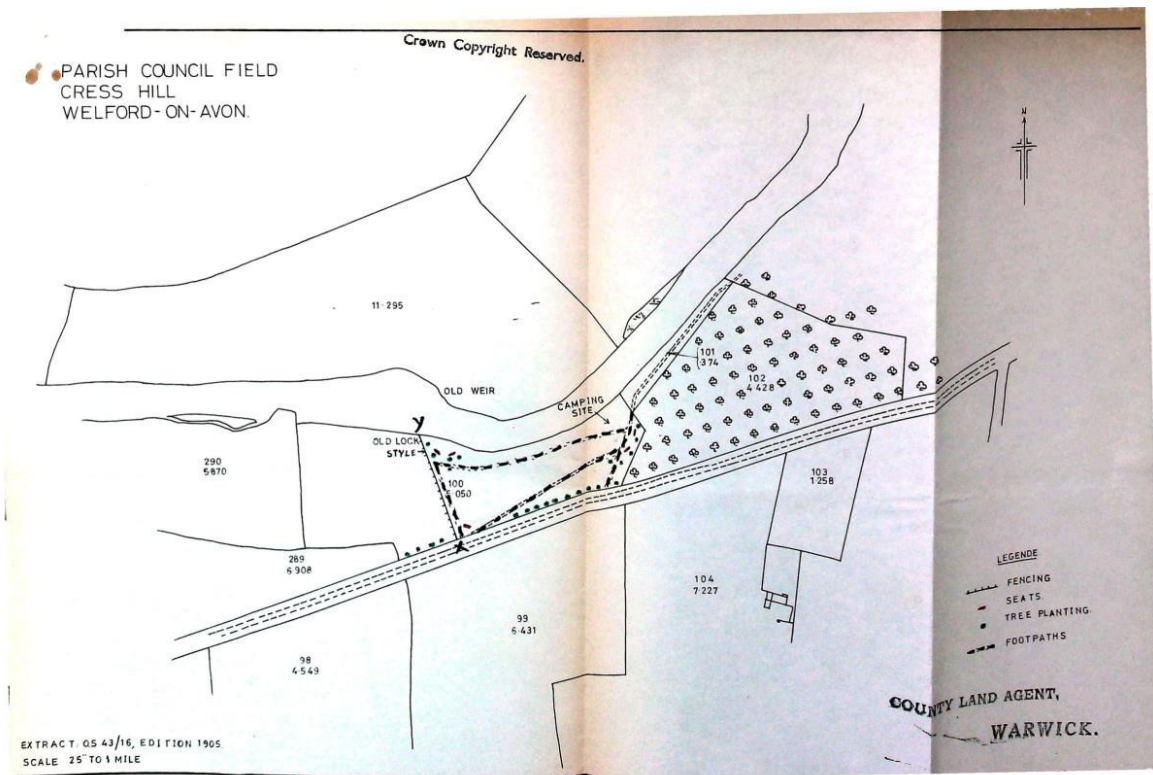
Weston and the 1966 review

In 1966 Warwickshire's review of county districts under the Local Government Act 1958 proposed merging Welford-on-Avon and Weston-on-Avon into a single parish. Weston's parish meeting resolved unanimously on 14 September 1966 to ask the Minister instead for "a group of parishes with one Parish Council", with seven members from Welford and two from Weston. It feared that Welford's larger electorate could otherwise leave Weston with no councillor (06/21). The council's own copy of the county review is at Warwick (50/41, item 12). The archive does not record the outcome. The same tension between the villages had surfaced in the 1950s, when Weston people asked for a vote on the Trust Fund (57/15).

The river

The restoration of the Upper Avon Navigation brought the council into national waterway politics. The Upper Avon Navigation Trust's 1968 outline scheme put two new locks at Welford (06/13). In November 1970 the Trust wrote to Passmore that it had hoped to move the new Lower Welford lock to the south bank, onto the council's land at Cress Hill. The river authority's engineer insisted on removing the north-bank promontory whichever bank was used. The Trust therefore asked the council to cancel the planned site meeting, and asked for only about 200 sq. yds of council land to anchor the weir (06/16).

In 1972 the County Land Agent, C. G. Birt, reported to the council on what to do with Cress Hill. It was overgrown with thorn and thistle, but "unique in Warwickshire having frontage to the River Avon which is now navigable". He proposed paths, steps down to the old lock, plank seats and tree planting for "Plant a Tree Year" 1973. The net cost, with a 75% Countryside Act grant, would be £134.70 (06/12). The copy is marked "Copy for Mr Holman?", and a councillor's pencilled reactions run down the margins.



The council was wary of the boats. The county's draft Upper Avon Policy Plan of March 1972 said Welford was too "fragile" for a boating centre, put one at Binton Bridges instead, and suggested limited moorings in the old Mill basin. T. Holman's copy has the Welford section bracketed and a large "No" beside the Mill-basin moorings (06/18). In August 1972 the chairman of the Warwickshire CPRE warned in the Birmingham Post that a marina "would fill

the village's quiet side-streets with cars" (06/17). The council's Upper Avon Navigation Trust file runs from 1939 to 1980 (50/41).

The Boat Orchard dispute, 1969–72

The council's most serious legal trouble began with a routine footpath review. On 22 April 1969 a special parish meeting, chaired by Mrs Gray "with the six other councillors and 33 electors present", considered the county's review of public paths. It affirmed, with no elector dissenting, that the path from the river end of Boat Lane through the orchard of Boat Cottage to Welford Mill and weir had been used for generations: "Here the Map is incorrect" (06/01). Passmore sent the claim on 29 May 1969. The county declined to act in October (06/25, cited in 06/01).

The land belonged to Eric C. Fisher, head of Melford Construction of Stratford, who had built a new house there in August 1969 after winning a planning appeal against the council's opposition. In December 1970 he issued a High Court writ for slander of title against the council, claiming substantial damages and £1,000 costs. The council's solicitors refused to accept it, so it was to be served on the clerk, Passmore, "who has given notice that he is resigning from the clerkship" (06/23). Fisher told the Evening Journal in February 1971 that Mrs Gray had conducted "a personal vendetta". He said she had told him the council "did not accept the Minister's decision and would do everything to prevent me from building the property", and that his workmen were "continually harassed by Mrs. Gray" (06/24).

Mrs Gray replied: "Personalities have nothing to do with it. But the parish council has to stand up for the rights of the villagers. We are not standing firm out of cussedness. This land, together with the adjoining footpath, is an integral part of village life, and was once used by people for mooring their boats" (06/24). The council asked the county for a public inquiry. In 1972 Fisher was still writing to the Herald that the council had never secured a path to the weir and would "lay claim to a fictitious public footpath". His advice was: "It is far better to accept progress and mind your own business" (06/11). The archive does not show how the writ ended.

Ron Lucas and the 1970s

By mid-1971 the chairman was R. (Ron) Lucas of Gorse Hey, a company director, with E. D. Avery as clerk (57/11). Mrs Gray's 23 years as a councillor, counted from 1949, end at about 1972 (03/01–19; inferred). Lucas was also a district councillor, and he became a trustee of the Village Trust (57/11; 60/05).

The defining row of his chairmanship was over the Memorial Hall. In 1975 inflation and new safety rules left the hall committee needing £500 for statutory works. At a public meeting the villagers voted unanimously to keep the hall. Lucas called the meeting a "mini-referendum", warned that £500 "will be 2p on your parish rate next year", and proposed that the council take the hall over. When he said the hall committee was trying "to make the parish council out to be a bad monster", the hall chairman Winston Walker replied: "That is a

damnable lie." A councillor, David Noakes, observed that the meeting was turning "into a battle between the two chairmen". The meeting settled on asking the council for £250 (60/05).

Other business of the decade appears in the Warwick catalogue: tree planting (1969–78), the investigation of Drift Road (1970–72), the church clock (1970), a plaque on the site of Weston's pound and stocks (1974) and drainage at Barton Road and Church Lane (1974–80) (50/41). In 1977 the clerk wrote to village societies about celebrating the Queen's Silver Jubilee (37/01–04). In March 1979 the annual parish meeting complained that nobody knew what was being done at Binton Bridges. Lucas printed the County Engineer's answers in a notice and invited electors to the next council meeting, "as always" (18/07).

Cinder Meadow and the modern council, 1980–2017

Richard Webb and the playing field at last

By 1980 Richard Webb of The Laurels, Church Street, was chairman. That year the Village Trust, following a 1968 resolution, asked him to join the trustees (60/01). He was the obvious person for local societies to approach. In 1983 the Local History Society sent him its list of houses it wanted listed, and in 1986 it copied him its objection to plans for Glebe Cottage. Joyce Skinner, "on behalf of the Parish Council", reported back that the owners had been asked for new plans (10/32–56; 14/08; 37/01–04).

The Village Trust had held its money for fifty years without finding a field. Attempts to wind it up were defeated in 1981 and 1982. At the 1982 meeting, a proposal to give £1,500 to the Memorial Hall found no support (60/01). Then, in early 1984, the trustees' notice in the Parish News proposed winding the trust up "in view of the efforts of the Parish Council to purchase a playing field" (58/09).

At the trust's annual meeting in March 1984, "Mr R. Webb, chairman of the Parish Council was asked to report. It was stated that the Parish Council was in the process of exchanging contracts for the purchase of 8 acres of land for £18,000 — the site being at the Meadows, the old football field." David Wilshaw proposed, and C. Dudley seconded, that the trust's funds be handed over. The motion was agreed unanimously, and "There was no discussion" (60/01). On 8 January 1985 the fund was closed and £3,142.30 was transferred to the council's account at the Midland Bank "to help with the purchase of Cinders Meadow as a village playing field" (58/01; 58/08).

The council's notice to the village was jubilant:

"For the very first time in the records of the Parish Council we have our own Sports Ground of approx. 8 acres at Cinder Meadow off the Binton Road. The field is approached by turning

down the accommodation road which leads to the boating station. The Welford Football Club are already playing their league games there... It is open to the whole village, so if you want to jog, run or kick a ball etc., please help yourself" (58/09).

Webb's chairman's letter reported that the transaction had been "approved and checked by the District Financial Audit and an independent lawyer". A sub-committee under Bruce Organ would run the field, and the trust's nearly £3,000 would "be a great help towards reducing our loan from the bank" (58/09). The clerk, Mrs Williams, told the trust's secretary that "already a football team and a cricket team have been formed". Bob Wright, who had been the trust's starter, fête secretary, trustees' secretary, trustee and treasurer since 1934, wrote beneath his copy: "Chief Mourner — 1934–1985 — Fund at Peace at last. Deo gratias!" (60/01).

The Cinder Meadow had been on the trustees' list of possible sites in the 1930s (60/01). The fifty-year delay is the clearest example in the archive of the gap between what the village wanted and what a parish council could actually buy.

The 1984 notice also listed the whole council:

Office	Name
Chairman	Richard Webb
Vice-Chairman	David Wilshaw
Councillor	Bruce Organ
Councillor	Howard Bastow
Councillor	Joyce Skinner (chairman, planning sub-committee)
Councillor	Mike Lamb
Councillor	Anthony Davies
Clerk	Mrs Jean Williams

Source: Parish Council notice, Parish News, 1984 (58/09). Private telephone numbers in the original are left out.

Fraser Pithie's council

Webb was succeeded by Fraser D. Pithie of 11 Headland Close. In May 1988 Pithie, as chairman, presented Webb with a token of thanks in front of Jean Williams (clerk), David

Wilshaw (vice-chairman), the district councillor Tony Winson and councillor Anne Wright (01/31).



The Pithie council was busy with housing. In September 1988 it wrote to every household in the village, urging residents to back its objection to Gordon De La Mare's plan to replace The Willows, Long Marston Road, with four houses (01/27). The district council received 138 objection letters and refused the scheme in November 1988 (01/26). At the same time the council was pressing for housing of the right kind. In the autumn of 1988 it set up a sub-committee on starter homes for young people, chaired by David Barrett, and asked for six bungalows for elderly people to be built urgently at Millers Close (59/11). A letter in the Herald that year captured the dilemma. Welford had become "one of the expensive property villages in Warwickshire owing to its location, beauty and parish council management", so that "only the relatively wealthy can afford to buy a property in the village" (01/26).

The same 1988 meetings dealt with the allotment trust. In summer 1988 Ken Clifton was co-opted to the council in place of Mrs Helen Bevan. Wilshaw raised "the loss of two trustees" of the Shorthouse trust, which left Bob Wright as the only one. Pithie dismissed "ridiculous rumours" and said the council's aim was "purely to safeguard the ground and its continued use as an allotment". On 14 September he appointed Michael Shorey and Ken Clifton as trustees (59/11). Other business recorded that month included rerouting Davenports Brewery lorries away from Church Street, permission for W.I. and Scouts fêtes on Maypole Green, flying a flag from the Maypole for Battle of Britain Day, and replacing a smashed sign about dogs and the sheep on Cress Hill (59/11).

In October 1991 the council marked David Wilshaw's retirement as vice-chairman after 16 years on the council, six as vice-chairman (01/32).

The hall again, and the churchyard

The Memorial Hall came back to the council twice. In 1985 the council paid about £400 towards a £3,300 new roof under a Rural Community Council grant scheme (60/06). In

1990–91 a structural survey found subsidence, and the hall faced closure unless about £20,000 was found. At the 1991 public meeting, Pithie reminded villagers that the hall "was a war memorial that had been built by the efforts of villagers nearly 70 years ago". He said not to try "would be a gross abdication of our responsibilities to this village and to those who the hall stood in memory of" (60/06). The council proposed asking villagers, perhaps by referendum, whether to fund the hall through the precept. It estimated that 25p a week on each person's poll tax would raise about £9,000 (60/06). The hall committee resigned on 7 March 1991 (60/06). The archive does not show the final settlement.

In the same months the Department of the Environment closed St Peter's churchyard to new burials from 27 January 1991. That passed "the responsibility of the upkeep and maintenance of the churchyard from the parochial church council to the parish council" (60/06). The burial question the council had first raised in 1911 thus ended with the council maintaining the old churchyard.

Into the 21st century

By 1996 the chairman was Mrs Joy Fry (38/01–03). The later papers in the archive come mostly from the allotment trust and the British Legion.

- **Remembrance.** In about 1997 the British Legion branch gave its Union Flag to the council. The council undertook to arrange the two-minute silence outside the Memorial Hall on Armistice Day. When the branch dissolved in 2001 "due to lack of members", the council took over the poppy wreath at St Peter's (56/15).
- **The allotments.** In 1999 Don Hildred, a former Spitfire pilot and allotment tenant, reported to the council on the run-down field (59/07). In 2001 the council repeated that its "sole responsibility is the appointment of Trustees" (59/10). After trustee Ken Clifton had a neglected asparagus plot ploughed in October 2002, Hildred's solicitors threatened court action. On 4 February 2003 the council, having had to find a third trustee twice in two years, decided not to appoint another until the legal position was clear and sought the Charity Commission's advice. The clerk was Mrs Joan Dowell (59/07). In 2004 the council appointed Fraser Pithie, the former chairman, as a trustee (59/05).
- **Roads and signs.** In 2002 the county's Traffic Group copied its letters about new village signs to "Mrs J Dowell – Clerk to Welford-on-Avon Parish Council" (28/01).
- **Bob Wright's retirement.** On 6 December 2006 Mrs Vanessa Lowe, clerk, wrote from the council's address at The Headland, Headland Road, accepting Wright's resignation as an allotment trustee, almost 50 years after he first served (59/02).

- **Jubilee.** For the Diamond Jubilee in 2012, the programme included the dedication of "the New Jubilee Commemorative Seat around the Chestnut Tree led by the Chairman of the Parish Council" on Maypole Green (53/43).

The Neighbourhood Plan

The council's biggest recent decision falls outside the archive. Under the Localism Act 2011, parish councils could write neighbourhood development plans that carry legal weight in planning decisions. Welford-on-Avon's plan went to referendum on 12 October 2017. According to the district council's published results, 445 voted yes (86.9%) and 67 no, on a turnout of 39.86%, and Stratford-on-Avon District Council formally made the plan on 11 December 2017 (web: [Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Welford-on-Avon Neighbourhood Plan](#); [referendum result](#); these pages were found by search but could not be opened from here). The plan gave the council a direct say over where and how the village grows, which earlier councils had only been able to claim by complaint and inspection.

Search results also give the council's minutes of 1 May 2024, which record Henry Burgoyne-Probyn elected chair and Martyne Ellard vice-chair for 2024/25, on a council of six seats (web: search result only; not opened). These names have not been checked against the council's own site.

Members: chairmen, clerks and councillors

At least 13 chairmen and 10 clerks can be named from the archive between 1894 and 2024, though the record has gaps, especially from 1927 to 1948. The tables below put together every name found. Dates are those at which a document shows the person in office, not necessarily the start or end of their term.

Chairmen

Years in office (as recorded)	Chairman	Source
1894–1904	John Izod, farmer	18/13; 19/25
1904–1907	Tom Hawkins	18/13; 19/25
1907–1911	John Riching (died in office, 1911)	18/14; 19/25
1911–1916	Levi Stanley	18/14; 19/25
1916–c.1921	Tom Hawkins (again)	18/14; 23/91–96
1922–1925	No council: no quorum	18/14
1925–1935 or later	Rev. Arthur James Davis, Rector	19/25; 60/09
1938–1939	Herbert Charles Setten	11/19; 62/01;

		60/01
1949	H. C. Setten	19/06
c.1950–51	Wilson James Matthews (inferred from two documents)	55/01–03; 13/15
1952–1955	H. C. Setten	19/06; 55/01–03
1956–c.1971	Mrs Gilda Gray, wife of the Rector	19/06; 57/02; 06/24
c.1971–1979	Ron Lucas	57/11; 60/05; 18/07
c.1980–1988	Richard Webb	60/01; 58/09; 01/31
1988–1991 or later	Fraser D. Pithie	01/27; 59/11; 60/06
1996	Mrs Joy Fry	38/01–03
2024/25	Henry Burgoyne-Probyn	web search result only

Two chairmen served twice: Tom Hawkins and H. C. Setten. One, Levi Stanley, came in when the sitting chairman died. The longest serving was Gilda Gray, at about fifteen years in the chair and 23 years on the council (03/01–19). The 19/06 list spells her as "Mrs Karl Gray", and its typed copy (19/07) as "Mrs Kate Gray". Both are slips for the wife of the Rev. Karl Ashbolt Gray.

Clerks

Years (as recorded)	Clerk	Notes and source
1894–1916	Francis Ladbury Thompson	assistant overseer; resigned April 1916

		(18/13; 18/14)
1916–c.1927	F. R. (or E. R.) Thompson	assistant overseer; Mayor of Stratford 1927 (18/14; 01/87)
1948–1949	C. W. Brooker	58/07; 19/06
c.1951–1961	Robert Edward ("Bob") Wright, The Homestead	55/11; 19/06; 18/09; 57/02
1960s–c.1969	H. W. Pulham, M.B.E., "Imbros", Binton Road	57/11; 57/13
c.1969–1970	H. W. ("Harry") Passmore, Stratford	resigned during the Fisher writ (57/13; 06/23)
1971	E. D. Avery	57/11
1984–1988	Mrs Jean Williams	58/09; 01/31
2002–2003	Mrs Joan Dowell	59/07; 28/01
2006	Mrs Vanessa Lowe	59/02

The clerks show how the council's work changed. The Thompsons were paid officials who were also assistant overseers, collecting the poor rate. Brooker's letterhead gave the Rural District's own telephone number, 2247, which suggests he was an R.D.C. officer clerking part-time for the parish (58/07; 55/11; inferred). Wright was a villager who did the work for decades alongside the trusts. Later clerks were usually paid part-timers.

Councillors

1894–1925 (from Woodward's list, 19/25, and his minute-book notes, 18/13–14):

Elected	Councillor	Notes
1894	John Izod	chairman 1894–1904

1894	John Wilson	vice-chairman; died 1903
1894	Francis Parish	farmer, Welford Hill; overseer to 1915
1894	Arthur Harris	kept the old Post Office
1894	Frederick Brookes	vice-chairman 1903; Freckleton trustee
1896	G. D. Whitehead	landlord of the Shakespeare Inn
1897	Joseph Hancox	
1899	Tom Hawkins	chairman 1904 and 1916
1903	John Riching	chairman 1907; died 1911
1904	Frank Robert Windsor	resigned at once
1904	Edward Hancox	vice-chairman; Cooper governor 1910; died 1913
1907	Levi Stanley	chairman 1911–16
1907/08	Francis Parish	re-elected
1910	Samuel Broad	vice-chairman 1916
1910	Alfred Wincote	vice-chairman 1917
1911	Arch Wright	replaced Riching
1919	W. J. Matthews	
1919	F. C. Parish	
1919	H. M. Woodward	historian of the minute books
1925	Rev. A. J. Davis	chairman
1925	A. J. Montague	

1949–1964 (from the election list, 19/06):

Election Members

1949	H. Setten (chairman), W. Swinnock, Wilson Matthews, Mrs Ethel Roberts, Mrs Gilda Gray
1952	H. Setten (chairman), W. Swinnock, Mrs Ethel Roberts, Mrs Gray, G. Edginton
1955	H. Setten (chairman), Mrs Gray (chairman from 1956), G. Edginton, W. Johnson, J.

Garner

- 1958 Mrs Gray (chairman), W. Johnson, T. Holman, H. D. Kirk, Wilfred Hawkins
- 1961 Mrs Gray (chairman), W. Johnson, T. Holman, H. D. Kirk, Frank Edginton
- 1964 Mrs Gray (chairman), T. Holman, H. D. Kirk, A. Rodenhurst, Howard Hawkins, Frank Edginton, Richard Corah

Later councillors named in the archive (not a complete list): David Noakes (1975, 60/05); the 1984 council of Richard Webb, David Wilshaw, Bruce Organ, Howard Bastow, Joyce Skinner, Mike Lamb and Anthony Davies (58/09); Fraser Pithie, Anne Wright, David Barrett, Allard, Spicer, Ken Clifton (co-opted 1988) and Mrs Helen Bevan (resigned 1988) (59/11; 01/31). In 2024 the search results list Henry Burgoyne-Probyn, Martyne Ellard, Paul Stanley, Sam Kynaston and Sam Bell (web search result only).

Five lives

Holtham Mills Woodward (councillor from 1919) came to Welford in December 1902, after the death of his Aunt Jane, and restored the Hollies. He became churchwarden in 1911, market gardener, Freckleton trustee, Cooper governor and school manager (18/19; 18/14). He drew up the 1934 trust scheme and the 1938 footpath schedule. In April 1940 he made the notes from the first two minute books that are the basis of this essay's first half. His character sketches of his fellow councillors give the early council a human face.

Gilda Gray (councillor c.1949–c.1972, chairman 1956–c.1971) was the dominant figure of the post-war council. She was elected as a W.I. candidate against "Petticoat Government". She pressed for drainage, water and electricity, the new school, Cress Hill and a playing field, and fought the bypass bridge and the High Street kerbs (03/01–19; 17/07; 47/80–90). Her opponents found her formidable: Eric Fisher accused her of "a personal vendetta" (06/24). She also co-founded the Local History Society in 1969, whose archive this essay draws on (18/02).

Bob Wright (clerk c.1951–1961, trustee c.1954–2006) linked the council and the village charities for half a century. His papers are the source for the Festival of Britain, the Coronation seats, Cress Hill and Cinder Meadow (55/05; 55/11; 57/02; 60/01; 11/54).

Herbert Charles Setten (chairman 1938 and 1949–55) was an original trustee of both the 1934 Trust Fund and the 1940 Shorthouse trust. He received the Duke of Kent in 1938 and chaired the Coronation public meeting in 1952 (57/06; 59/01; 11/19; 55/01–03). He died in 1958 (60/01).

Tom Hawkins (councillor from 1899, chairman 1904 and 1916) chaired the council through the First World War and into the Memorial Hall quarrel. He was the man who told a public meeting the council was "fed up" (19/25; 23/91–96).

Key decisions

The table lists the council's main recorded decisions, newest first. "Decision" includes resolutions, purchases and formal stands; outcomes are those the archive records.

Date	Decision	Outcome	Source
2017	Neighbourhood Development Plan put to referendum	86.9% yes; plan made 11 Dec 2017	web search results
4 Feb 2003	Refuse to appoint a third allotment trustee until the legal position is clear	Charity Commission advice sought	59/07
c.1997 / 2001	Take on Armistice Day silence and the Remembrance poppy wreath from the British Legion	Done when the branch dissolved in 2001	56/15
1991	Consult the village on funding the Memorial Hall through the precept (about £9,000)	Hall committee resigned 7 Mar 1991; outcome not recorded	60/06
Sept 1988	Write to every household against the Willows scheme	138 objections; refused Nov 1988	01/27; 01/26
Sept 1988	Appoint Shorey and Clifton as allotment trustees; press for elderly bungalows and starter homes	Done	59/11
Mar 1984	Buy 8 acres at the Meadows (Cinder Meadow) for £18,000	Village Trust gave £3,142.30; field opened for football and cricket	60/01; 58/09
1975	Grant to Memorial Hall; chairman proposes council takeover	£250 grant asked; takeover rejected	60/05
Mar 1970	Buy playground equipment from Wicksteed for £230 7s	Trust paid £100 in Oct 1971	57/11
Apr 1969	Claim the Boat Orchard footpath in the county review	County declined; slander-of-title writ, Dec 1970	06/01; 06/23–24
1965–70	Press the Village Trust for public meetings and accounts	Meeting Jan 1968; charity registered Aug 1968	57/13; 57/14
1962	Complain about the number and design of new houses	County inspection 2 Apr 1962; village development policy	19/44; 06/09

1962	Licence to open the school field to all village children	Agreed with Education Committee	59/10; 06/03
1959-60	Buy Cress Hill from Gloucestershire County Council for £100	Completed 24 May 1960, paid by the Trust	57/02
1957	Joint meeting on using Shorthouse allotments for a playing field	Tenants protested; trustees withdrew	60/01
1954	Ask the Coronation Committee's memorial seats be placed at Weston Turn and Cress Hill	R.D.C. took on maintenance; seats in place 1955	55/05
19 Jan 1951	Call a public meeting on the Festival of Britain	Celebration aimed at visitors	55/01-03
6 Feb 1948	Report on buying two fields for a playing field	Trust invited to join; no purchase	58/07
1939	Negotiate for Mrs Meinhardt's land (£630) with county and R.D.C. grants	Fell through when war suspended grants	60/01
11 Feb 1935	Parish meeting to adopt the Burial Acts	Adopted; no site found until 1960s	09/07; 09/09
1925-26	Call parish meeting for a new maypole and stone wall	Pole raised 2 May 1927	01/88; 01/87
1922-25	No quorum: no council	Revived April 1925	18/14
1918	Chairman calls public meeting for a war memorial	Memorial Hall opened Dec 1923 after a long dispute	23/91-96
Jan 1919	Keep the parish garden by the Cider Mill as site for the War Memorial Hall	Hall built on the site	18/14
1911-20	Seek a new burial ground from Lord Sackville	Land sold elsewhere, 1920	18/14
Jan 1912	Resolve that the Rawlins Charity is being misapplied	Referred to Board of Education; no answer recorded	18/17
Jan 1908	Allow the R.D.C. to level the Maypole Green after a fatal accident	Last remains of the market cross removed	01/88; 18/14

June 1906	Demand a joint meeting before Long Marston Grammar School closes	New Cooper scheme 1910 with a Welford governor	18/16
1902	Nominate trustees for the Freckleton Charity	Charity put on a legal footing, 1903	18/18
1900	Arrange orchard lectures with neighbouring parishes	Held Nov 1900, "well attended"	18/20
2 Jan 1896	Permit Cleveland Green to erect a maypole and fence the green	Pole stood until 1923	01/88
1895	Order removal of an obstruction in Boat Lane	Removed by July 1895	18/13

Where the sources disagree

- **The chairman around 1950–51.** The 1949–64 list makes Setten chairman throughout 1949–55 (19/06), but a January 1951 notice and an undated Herald report name W. J. Matthews as chairman (55/01–03; 13/15).
- **The date of the 13/15 report.** Its transcriber suggests the early 1940s. The members named, including Mrs Gray and Mrs Roberts, who were first elected about 1949, place it about 1950–51.
- **When Bob Wright became clerk.** 19/06 says 1952. He signs as clerk in the 1951 Festival file (55/11), and he is still clerk in 1961 (57/02), though another summary names H. W. Pulham as clerk in "the 1960s" (57/11).
- **The clerk in 1927.** The 1927 maypole record calls him E. R. Thompson (01/87); Woodward's notes call the 1916 appointee F. R. Thompson (18/14). A local article spells it "Thomson" (11/44).
- **The Trust deed's date.** 10 May 1934 (public meeting and Warwick catalogue), 9 August 1934 (signatures and a 1966 council letter) and 14 November 1934 (heading) are all given (06/14; 57/06; 50/41; 57/11).
- **The year of the county transfer.** 1931 in the deeds and official sources; "1930" in Gilda Gray's essay (59/01; 17/07).
- **When the Legion branch began.** The council's 2001 letter says it "started around" 1921; the branch's own records say 1947 (56/15).
- **Mrs Gray's first name.** Gilda in her own signed pieces (03/01–19; 57/02); "Kate" in the typed list (19/07); "Frieda" in one note (47/80–90); "Mrs Karl Gray" in the handwritten list (19/06).

- **The Memorial Hall dispute's date.** The newspaper report of the Coyney's Leys quarrel has no year. About 1920–21 is inferred from the 1920 glebe sales in 18/14.

Sources

Archive (Welford and Weston Local History Society, "Claude 1000" scans).

- Council minute extracts and lists: 18/13 (Book I, 1894–1907), 18/14 (Book II, 1907–26), 18/15 (footpaths, 1938), 18/16 (Cooper Foundation), 18/17 (charities), 18/18 (Freckleton Charity), 18/19 (Woodward's chronology), 18/20 (technical education), 18/21 (highway powers), 19/25 (councillors 1894–1925), 19/06 and 19/07 (councillors 1949–64), 01/88 (Maypole minutes 1896–1926).
- Council papers and notices: 06/01, 06/03, 06/12, 06/16, 06/21, 06/23–24, 06/11, 06/18, 18/07, 18/09, 13/15, 55/05, 55/11, 55/01–03, 59/02, 59/07, 59/10, 59/11, 58/07, 58/09, 56/15, 28/01, 50/41 (Warwick deposit CR3640 handlist).
- Village Trust Fund: 06/05, 06/14, 57/02, 57/06, 57/10, 57/11, 57/13, 57/14, 57/15, 58/01–09, 60/01 (minute book 1934–85), 60/03.
- Other village records: 01/26–33, 01/75–89, 03/01–19, 09/07, 09/09, 11/15, 11/19, 11/44, 11/54, 17/01–07, 19/44, 06/09, 06/10, 20/01, 23/91–96, 37/01–04, 38/01–03, 46/37–95, 47/80–90, 50/105–106, 53/43, 59/01, 60/05, 60/06, 60/08, 60/09, 62/01.

Web. Most web pages could not be opened from this environment, so the web facts below come from search results and should be checked before reuse.

- [Stratford-on-Avon District Council: Welford-on-Avon Neighbourhood Plan](#)
- [Stratford-on-Avon District Council: referendum result](#)
- [Welford-on-Avon, Wikipedia](#) and [UK BMD: Stratford on Avon district](#), for the 1931 transfer
- [Welford-on-Avon Parish Council minutes, 1 May 2024](#), for the 2024 officers