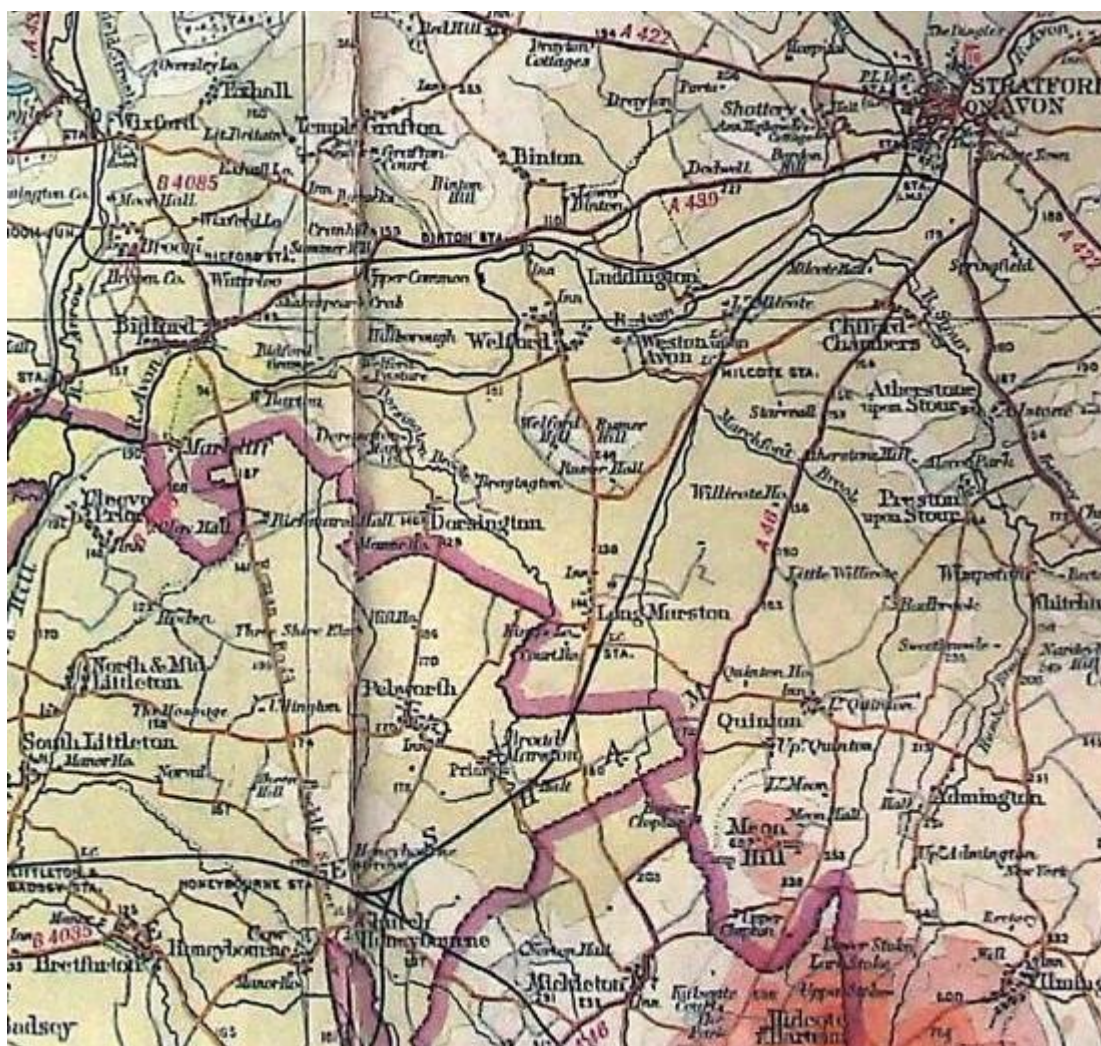


Welford's Railways

A village that never had a station of its own, served for a century by two country lines, one at each end of the parish: stone blocks for a horse tramway, a halt at Milcote, a station by Binton Bridges, signalmen in the village, and the long quiet after the trains.

Drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive (folder references in grey). A few dates from general railway histories are used for context and are marked as such; everything else comes from the archive. A companion to the essays on roads and traffic, the Four Alls, flooding and working lives.

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The two lines around Welford. Detail of a Bartholomew half-inch contoured map, copy marked "Warwickshire, Feb 1951". The Stratford to Broom line runs along the north bank of the Avon past "Binton Sta." to Broom Junction; the Great Western branch runs south-west from Stratford past "Milcote Sta." and Long Marston to Honeybourne. Welford sits in the angle between them. 31/05

A village between two lines An introduction

Welford-on-Avon never had a railway station. No line ran through the village street, no goods yard stood at the end of Boat Lane, and no train ever stopped within the old settlement. Yet for about ninety years, from the 1850s into the 1960s, Welford lived within reach of two railways and depended on both. To the north, across Binton Bridges, a single-track line ran along the Warwickshire bank of the Avon from Stratford to Broom Junction, with a small station at Binton, three-quarters of a mile from the village by the directories' reckoning 46/98. To the east, beyond Weston-on-Avon, the Great Western's branch from Stratford to Honeybourne passed through the Milcote estate, with a station at Milcote, a mile and a half away 46/98, 48/13–22. Kelly's directory of 1897 places Welford by

exactly those two points, “1½ miles west from Milcote station on the Honeybourne and Stratford branch of the Great western railway, and ¾ mile from Binton station on the East and West Junction railway” 46/98.

The two lines had different characters and different owners for most of their lives. The Milcote line was Great Western, part of a company whose trains ran to Paddington, Cheltenham and the West Country. The Binton line was a small independent railway, the East and West Junction, later the Stratford-upon-Avon and Midland Junction, which a Welford soldier in 1917 remembered as “slow & sure” 43/02–84. After 1923 it was part of the London Midland and Scottish. Welford people used both, and the village’s estate agents advertised both, as in 1927, when a house was offered “within 1½ miles of Milcote (GWR) and Binton (LMS) stations” 11/30.

The Society’s archive does not hold a railway collection as such. There are no company records, no timetables kept for their own sake, no station accounts and no photographs of either Binton or Milcote station buildings. What it holds instead is scattered evidence from every other kind of record: directories and census returns, sale particulars, a parish council minute book, a mill invoice, a seed merchant’s bill, a pantomime programme, letters home from a soldier, a newspaper report of a drowning, an oral-history interview, a councillor’s news sheet. Put together, these show how a village without a station still organised much of its life around the railway: how people went to work and school, how fruit and eels left and coal and parcels arrived, who in the village worked on the line, and what happened when the trains stopped. This essay follows that evidence in roughly chronological order. Where the archive is silent, as it is on most of the big dates in the lines’ histories, the essay says so rather than filling the gap with guesses. The final section lists those gaps and the places where the archive’s own sources disagree.

Before the railway River, road and carrier, to the 1850s

The best witness to Welford’s transport before the railway is Charles J. Woodward, a retired science teacher from Birmingham who opened a village history exhibition in 1931 at the age of 93. His memories reached back to about 1842, when he was four or five. “There were three or four ways of travelling in those days,” he told the audience. His grandfather at The Hollies “not infrequently walked to Birmingham and back again”. Later the family took the

coach from the Lamp in Bull Street, Birmingham, to the Swan at Alcester, and walked the rest of the way. "Another mode of travel was to go by Great Western Railway as far as the nearest station and then to walk." The first time he came to Welford he rode overnight in the fruit cart of David Rouse, a Binton fruiterer who went to Birmingham market 11/25.

Woodward also remembered standing on top of Cress Hill to watch "the coal boats and occasionally a barge go through the locks on their way to Stratford" 11/25. In the 1840s the Avon was still a working river through Welford, with locks at the village and barges carrying coal upstream. That river trade is one of the things the railway would end, and it is worth holding Woodward's picture of it in mind.

The village's own trade went by road. Welford's market gardeners and carriers took their fruit and vegetables to Birmingham by cart, overnight. Joseph Hancox described the routine to H. M. Woodward early in the twentieth century. The produce was gathered and packed during the day, and in the evening the carts were loaded. They crossed Binton Bridge, paying the toll, went across country through Binton and Aston Cantlow to the Birmingham road at Wootton Wawen, and stopped at the Bird in Hand at the foot of Liveridge Hill, kept by "Mother Rainbow", where as many as twenty carriers sat over supper until after midnight. That way they passed all the toll-gates on the main road twice in the same twenty-four hours and paid only once. Woodward's heading for the story is exact about its date: this was how Hancox took fruit to Birmingham market "before the railway was made to Binton" 21/1-21.

Letters also came on foot. In the 1860s and 1870s the postman, Tommy Porter, set out each morning from Stratford, walking "via Shottery over the fields by the railway station to Clifford Chambers, Milcote, Weston, Welford, Long Marston and Dorsington to Pebworth", blowing a horn as he entered each village 11/22. By then Stratford had its station, but the post still went round the villages at walking pace.

The directories of the 1850s measure Welford against a railway that was some way off. The Post Office Directory of Gloucestershire for 1856 describes Welford as a township and parish "6 miles from Honeybourne station on the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton line of railway", and the 1859 Bristol directory repeats the six miles 48/13-22. Weston-on-Avon, in the same series, was "4 miles east from Honeybourne station" 34/53. Honeybourne was the nearest point on the national network. For a Welford household in the

1850s, that meant a walk or a cart ride of six miles before a train could be caught.

Stone blocks for the tramway The Stratford and Moreton Tramway, 1821–26

Welford's first connection with a railway came a generation before any train ran near it. It came through James Mills of The Hollies, needle-maker, maker of winnowing machines and patron of papier-mâché, who died in 1840. His great-grandson H. M. Woodward wrote that "when the old Tramway was made from Stratford to Moreton-in-the-Marsh between 1821 and 1826 James Mills became a sub-contractor on the work undertaking to bore the stone blocks to which the rails were to be fixed" 19/28.

The Stratford and Moreton Tramway was a horse-drawn line, opened in 1826, running south from a wharf at Stratford through the Warwickshire countryside to Moreton-in-Marsh, with a branch to Shipston-on-Stour 22/06. A magazine article by Michael Woods in the archive describes how it was built. It had iron rails, but no sleepers as later railways had them. "The rails were carried on blocks of stone approximately two feet square, and drilled to take the clamps which secured the rails to them." Many of the blocks were still being dug up in Woods's day when a gas main was laid along the Shipston road. The construction gave trouble: the blocks sank into the clay and the rails spread, because, Woods thought, the contractor had skimmed on foundations and ballast. Some of the blocks were lias limestone from Wilmcote, and Woods thought it "highly likely that some came from Binton quarry, for we know that James Mills, of Welford, was paid 4d per block for drilling the holes" 22/06.

The Society's notes on The Hollies, made from an account book that Alec Bryan lent to a later meeting, give more detail than any printed source. They are rough, but they read like figures copied from the original:

The Railway Feb 1st - Ap. 22nd 67 days 6 horses men & boys - at £2.2. a day · Rail Road company in conjunction with Geo. Stephenson's brother · all the stones for tramway cut at wharf at Stratford · Stones went from Binton by river, & cut into blocks at Stratford · Bored for 4d a piece · 1 man at 3/- a day Pen stone cutter · 1149 stone blocks Geo. Osborne · Henry's boated 1735 blocks.

Notes on The Hollies and James Mills 11/24

The figures suggest a substantial job: sixty-seven days with six horses and a gang of men and boys at two guineas a day, and nearly three thousand blocks either cut or carried by two named men. The stone was quarried at Binton, boated up the Avon to Stratford and cut on the wharf there. In a talk given to the Society, a speaker drawing on the same account book added that Mills was “a contractor who did work with George Stephenson supplying & having cut the stone blocks” 21/22–66. The notes say the company worked “in conjunction with Geo. Stephenson’s brother”, which is not the same claim, and neither statement can be checked from the archive.

Several sources go further and say that Mills made the wheels as well. A 1931 newspaper report of the Welford exhibition says that his memoranda showed he “contracted to bore the stone blocks for the Stratford–Moreton tramway and made the wheel pattern for its branch line in 1826” 01/38–46. Michael Woods writes that he “also made the pattern from which he is said to have cast the waggon wheels for the tramway” 22/06. The fuller exhibition report, in which part of the text is lost at a column cut, lists all his trades and ends with “his work for the branch railway” 11/27. None of the original documents behind these statements is in the archive.

The talk that drew on the account book called the tramway “the first railway in the world” 21/22–66. The archive’s own commentary on a later village history corrects this: the Surrey Iron Railway opened in 1803 and the Stockton and Darlington in 1825, before the Stratford line 40/01. What can be said is that a Welford man helped to build one of the earliest railways in the Midlands, using stone taken from the parish’s doorstep and carried on the river that the railways would later empty.

There is a further connection that the archive records in two separate places without joining them. John Boynton, speaking to the Society on “Railways around Welford” in 1997, named William James as “the father of railways” and the promoter of the first line in the area 38/01–03. A history of the Avon navigation in a different folder notes that William James bought the Upper Avon navigation in 1813 and went bankrupt in 1822 52/59. These are the same man. For a few years the owner of the river that ran past Welford was also the promoter of the tramway for which Welford stone was bored, and both enterprises left him ruined.

The tramway's later history belongs to south Warwickshire rather than to Welford. Woods says that the Moreton to Shipston section was converted to steam in 1889, the horse tramway from Longdon Junction to Stratford was worked "probably until the early years of this century", and the Shipston line closed in 1960 22/06. A field-names article elsewhere in the archive notes that a "Station Field" near Shipston dates from that conversion to steam 08/01-19. In Stratford, the line's memory survives in the Tramway Bridge, which a later Society walk crossed on its way out of the town 13/27.

A route on paper The Midland and Eastern Counties Railway, 1845

The next trace of railways in Welford's records is a scheme that was never built. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Records Office holds, among its Welford estate papers, a "return of landowners on proposed route of the Midland and Eastern Counties Railway", dated 1845 (reference ER 8/5/26) 06/20, 13/31. The archive holds two copies of the Records Office's typed guide to its Welford sources, and the Society marked this entry on one of them, but the return itself is not in the archive.

1845 was the height of the Railway Mania, when hundreds of lines were promoted and most were never built. A landowners' return was a standard part of a scheme's application to Parliament: it listed the owners and occupiers of every parcel of land the line would cross. The existence of one for Welford means that some promoter, in that year, drew a railway across the parish. Which way it ran, which fields it would have taken, and how far the scheme got are questions the archive cannot answer. The return would answer them, and it is one of the first documents a researcher on this subject should look at in Stratford.

Navvies at Mickleton The Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway, 1851

The line that did bring the railway within six miles of Welford was the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton, known to its customers as the "Old Worse and Worse" 30/02. It ran from Worcester through Evesham and Honeybourne towards Oxford, and in the summer of 1851 its construction produced the most famous incident in the district's railway history.

The archive holds a research pack on the “Battle of Mickleton Tunnel”, compiled by Gerry Love in 2006. The tunnel, at Mickleton about six miles south of Welford, was unfinished. The contractor, Robert Mudge-Marchant, had stopped work in June 1851 over about £34,000 he said he was owed, and the railway company ordered its engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, to take the works back. Brunel gathered navvies from along the line and marched them on the tunnel by night. Berrow’s Worcester Journal of 24 July 1851, transcribed in the pack, describes the magistrate Mr Ashwin being woken after midnight at Bretforton, sending to Coventry for soldiers, and meeting Brunel and his solicitor at the works at two or three in the morning. By then “the men under the control of Mr Brunel, from 1,800 to 2,000 in number, came from various points on the works”. One man was found to be carrying two pistols. Ashwin read the Riot Act, and there were skirmishes with the contractor’s men, who numbered no more than 150 30/02.

Accounts of the result vary. Heads and limbs were broken, but nobody seems to have been killed, and the dispute went to arbitration by Robert Stephenson and William Cubitt. The pack’s sources disagree on the number of navvies (2,000 or 3,000), on how long the stand-off lasted, and on how heroic Brunel was. L. T. C. Rolt calls it “a highly organised military operation”; Adrian Vaughan and Terry Coleman call it an illegal show of force. Gerry Love underlined that disagreement in his notes 30/02. The tunnel was finished in the spring of 1852 30/02.

Nothing in the archive says whether any Welford men were among the navvies or the contractor’s gangs, or whether anyone from the village went to watch. The pack was collected because the battle was local, not because Welford took part. Its importance for Welford is what the finished line made possible. General railway histories date the opening of the line through Honeybourne to 1853, and the directories of 1856 and 1859 measure Welford from Honeybourne station 48/13–22. Woodward’s phrase about going “by Great Western Railway as far as the nearest station and then to walk” fits these years, although the line he means was still the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton at the time 11/25.

The Honeybourne branch and the river 1859 to 1877

The railway came closer in 1859, when the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton opened a branch from Honeybourne north-east to Stratford-upon-Avon. The opening date comes from general railway

histories; the archive does not record it directly. What the archive does record, in several places, is the branch's most lasting effect on Welford: the end of the river navigation.

The Upper Avon, the seventeen and a half miles of river from Evesham up to Stratford, had been made navigable in the seventeenth century, with locks and weirs including two at Welford. In 1859 it came under the control of the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway, "and thus, shortly afterwards, of the Great Western Railway" 06/13. A 1905 booklet published by the River Avon Improvement Association tells the rest from the traders' side:

The Great Western Railway Company acted upon it with conclusive effect in regard to the Upper Avon. On the completion of their branch line from Honeybourne to Stratford-on-Avon they neglected the navigation works and practically stopped the traffic above Evesham, and in June, 1875, the Directors resolved to discontinue taking tolls thereon and to abandon the navigation.

William Smith, *The River Avon: Why its Navigation should be Restored*, 1905 11/31

In 1877 the river's traders applied to the Railway Commissioners to compel the Great Western to restore the locks. The Commissioners held that, under the navigation Act of 1751, the duty to repair depended on collecting tolls, and since the company had stopped collecting them, nothing could be ordered. The traders were advised that the ruling was wrong in law, but "as they were only a body of private individuals and had already incurred very heavy expenses they determined not to incur the further cost of fighting a powerful Railway Company with unlimited means" 11/31.

The Society's own river talk adds a Welford detail: by 1873 Welford Lock was described as being in a ruinous condition, with the gates having to be forced open 52/09. Thirty years later J. H. Garrett, rowing up from Tewkesbury for his book *The Idyllic Avon* (1906), found the lower lock at Welford a ruin of grey stone blocks "upheaved and scattered". He knew whom to blame: "The ownership of the locks and rights of navigation by barges, or cargo boats, was bought up by a railway company, in order to abolish the competition of water-carriage with the railway. Having purchased this property, the company deliberately allowed it to fall into decay" 11/33.

The dates in the archive do not all agree. One article says the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton effectively abandoned the

navigation as early as 1857; others give 1875 for the Great Western's decision and 1877 for the Commissioners' ruling; and the river talk at one point says the river "was abandoned in 1877" 52/59, 06/13, 11/31, 52/09. The sequence that best fits the documents is neglect from the late 1850s, formal abandonment in 1875 and the ruling in 1877. Either way, the coal boats Woodward watched from Cress Hill in the 1840s had gone by the time the railway was twenty years old. The river did not carry commercial traffic past Welford again. When the Upper Avon Navigation Trust drew up its restoration scheme in 1968, it described everything above Evesham except four weirs as "completely derelict" 06/13.

One family memory shows what was lost. John Wilson, a Black Country orphan who became a Welford carrier, arrived in the village as a boy "by water", travelling "by boat (canal and river) to land at the lock gates in the village of Welford" while the river was still open to commercial traffic 44/22. After the 1870s no child would make that journey.

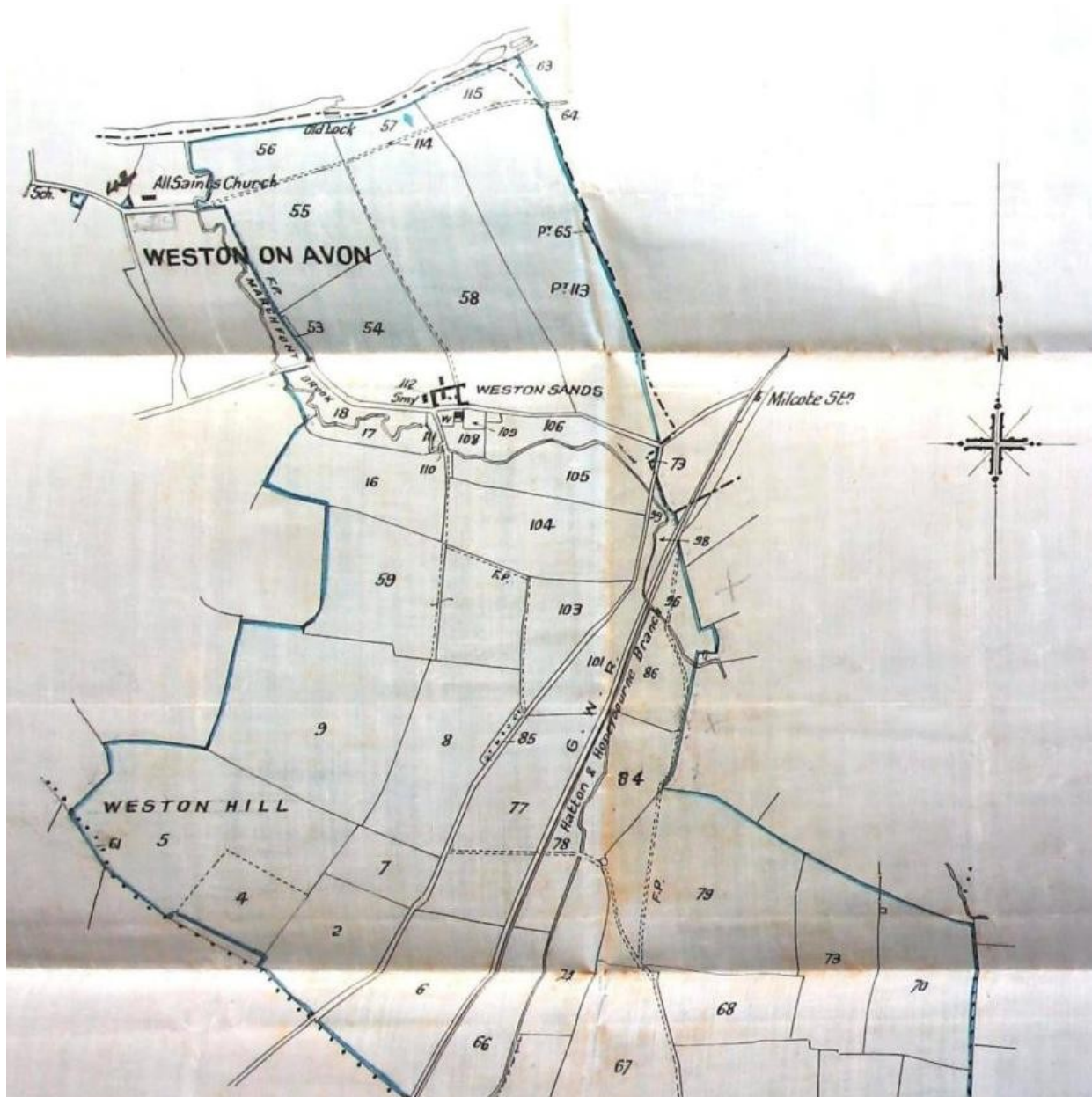
The branch opened another connection at about the same time. A sale of Stratford property in April 1877 included, "in lots to suit purchasers", thirty-one original shares in the Stratford-on-Avon and Hatton Railway 11/30. That line, from Stratford north to the main line at Hatton, was opened in 1860 according to general histories, and it joined the Honeybourne branch at Stratford. Together they made a through route from Honeybourne by Milcote and Stratford towards Warwick and Birmingham. The sale particulars record no buyer for the shares.

The earliest railway worker in Welford's records belongs to the same years. In the census taken on 7 April 1861, the household of Henry Ingram, farm labourer, included his son Alfred, aged 18, "railway gate keeper" 48/04. The census does not say where Alfred kept his gate. The nearest crossings were on the new Honeybourne branch, and a footpath schedule of 1968 names one of them, Chambers Crossing, on the Milcote estate 12/03, 13/39. Whether that was Alfred Ingram's post is not known.

Milcote stationThe Great Western side

Milcote station stood in the old parish of Weston-on-Avon, in Gloucestershire until 1931, on the land of the Milcote estate. The Victoria County History places it precisely: "At Lower Milcote, or Milcote-on-Avon, is a moated site, roughly 200 ft. square; and ½ mile south of this is Milcote Station, on the Stratford and

Honeybourne branch of the Great Western Railway, which runs through the whole length of Milcote" 51/01. An estate plan of 1886 for Weston Farm shows roads running south-east from the farm "to Milcote Station and Stratford-on-Avon" 13/40.



The railway across the Milcote estate. Sale plan for Weston Sands and Knobs (Nobbs) farms, sold to O. W. Buttler, at six inches to the mile. The line is lettered "G.W.R. Hatton & Honeybourne Branch", and "Milcote Stn" is marked where the road crosses it. The plan is undated; it probably belongs to the break-up of the Milcote estate, which Gilda Gray recalled as under way in about 1924. 13/38, 03/01-19

The station was a mile and a half from the middle of Welford by road. The most direct route ran east from the village through Weston. In January 1899, when Gloucestershire County Council asked parishes to suggest roads to be "mained", that is, taken over

and maintained by the county as main roads, Welford Parish Council's clerk proposed just one: "From Welford Corner through Weston-on-Avon to Milcote Station, about 1¼ mile" 18/21. It is the clearest sign in the archive of how much the village valued that road. The minutes do not say whether the county agreed.

The station's appearance is not recorded in the archive. There is no photograph of Milcote's buildings, platforms or goods yard, and no plan. The nearest image is of its neighbour down the line. A newspaper cutting reproduces an old glass-plate photograph of Long Marston station, the next stop towards Honeybourne, with a group of passengers in their best clothes waiting on the platform. Someone has pencilled "G.W.R. at Long Marston" across the sky 10/13.



Long Marston station, the next stop south of Milcote. A newspaper reproduction of a glass-plate photograph, probably late Victorian or Edwardian. The printed caption guessed the party was off on a summer outing to the seaside. The archive has no photograph of Milcote station itself; Gloucestershire Archives lists a photograph of Long Marston station of about 1900 among its Welford papers. 10/13, 02/01–12

Census returns name some of the men who ran Milcote. In 1881 the station master was Samuel Hitchman, aged about 46, born at Moreton-in-Marsh, living at Milcote in Weston parish 48/06. In

1901 the station was “run by Charles Mathews” 48/08. In the 1920s and after, the station master was Francis James Nelder. He appears as “of Milcote in the County of Gloucester, Railway Station Master” among the trustees of the Welford and Weston Memorial Hall in a deed of 1926, and again as a surviving trustee, now “of Milcote in the said County of Warwick”, in a deed of 7 July 1952 60/04. The county had changed around him in 1931; the station master had not. In 1934 a pantomime party from the Welford Methodist Sunday School owed him its best day out, as described below 03/01–19. A station master who served on the village hall trust for more than a quarter of a century was a figure in Welford life, though no recollection of him as a person survives in the archive.

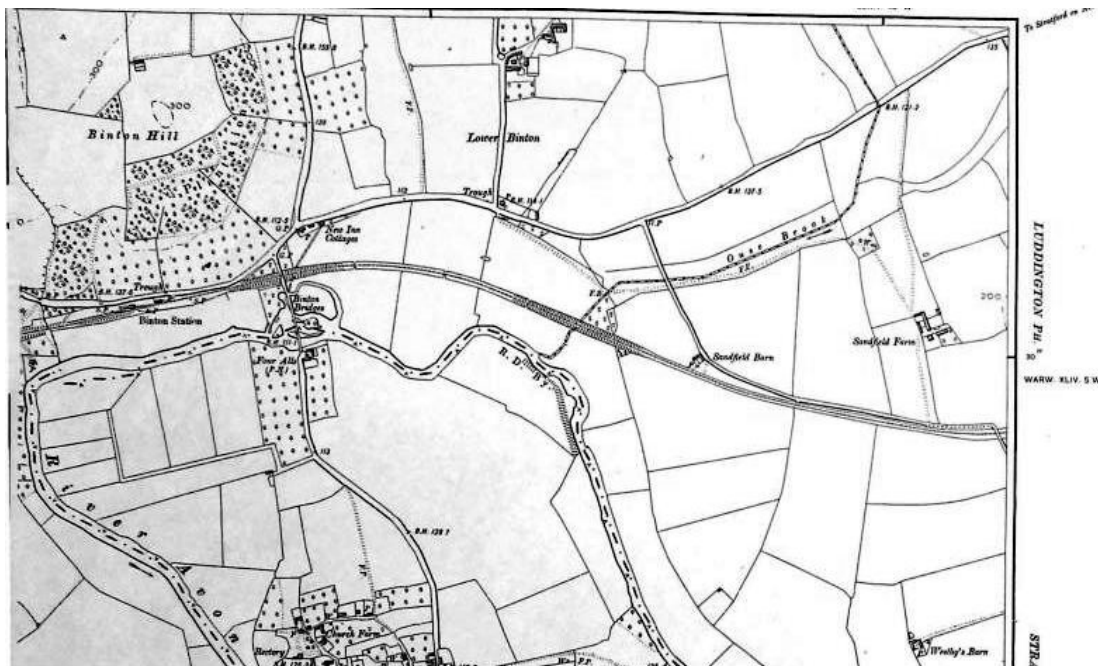
The line through Milcote was also a landmark. Writers describing the ruins of Mount Greville, the fortified house that the notorious Ludovic Greville built at Milcote in the 1560s and 1570s, placed it by reference to the railway: “on the hill to the right of the Great Western Railway going from Milcote to Stratford-upon-Avon” in a Stratford Herald series of November 1899, and “on the hill to the right of the Great Western Railway line which used to run from Milcote to Stratford-upon-Avon” in a later Society draft 31/10, 10/14. Archaeologists working from aerial photographs in the 1960s and 1970s did the same, recording cropmarks “SW of the railway station” at Milcote and “between railway and river” near the sewage works 10/28.

Binton station The East and West Junction line, from 1879

The second line came along the north bank of the Avon. It was built by the Evesham, Redditch and Stratford-upon-Avon Junction Railway, a short connecting line from Stratford westward to Broom, where it met the Midland Railway’s line between Redditch and Evesham. The Alcester Society’s industrial archaeology survey, a copy of which is in the archive, says it “opened in 1879” 03/21–31. It was worked by the East and West Junction Railway, whose own line ran eastward from Stratford, and its stations in the immediate area were Binton, Bidford and Broom 03/21–31, 46/98.

Binton station stood just across the river from Welford, at the north end of Binton Bridges. A walking guide of the 1930s puts it in a sentence: “A few yards from the bridge foot is Binton Station on the old East and West Junction Railway, and just beyond the railway is the main road from Stratford to Bidford” 15/12. The line ran along

an embankment between the river and the main road, and the Welford road passed under it by a bridge just north of Binton Bridges. That bridge would matter in 1947.



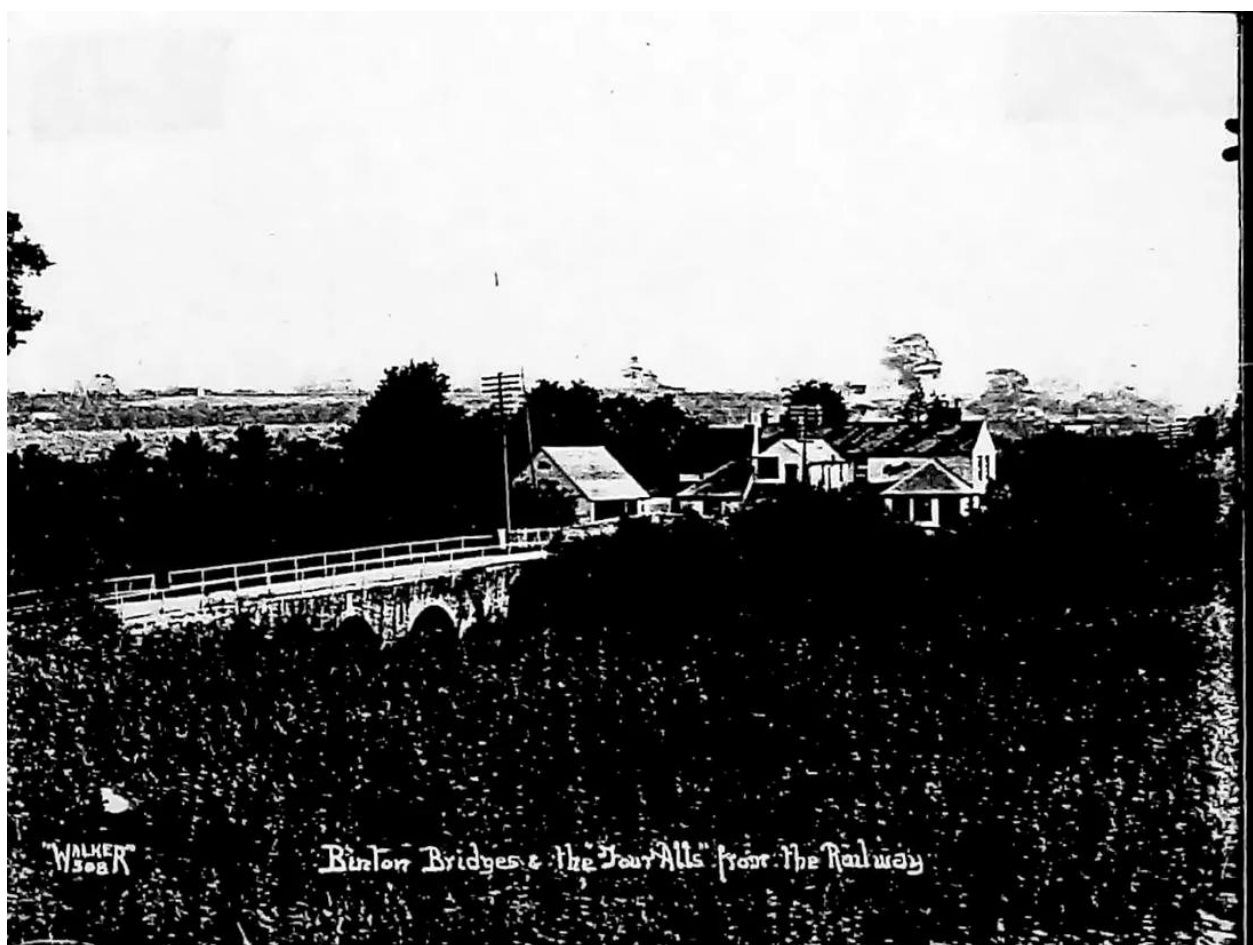
Binton Station and the line along the Avon, 1903. Ordnance Survey six-inch map, 1903 edition (Gloucestershire sheet I S.E. and Warwickshire XLIII S.E.). Binton Station is at the left, just above Binton Bridges and the Four Alls; the line runs east past Sandfield Barn towards Stratford. Welford village is at the foot of the detail. 46/14

The men who built the line included at least one Welford family. Alec Bryan, writing about Magpie Cottage, recorded that in the late nineteenth century it was “the home of the Gould family”, and “this family helped on the construction of the S.M.J. railway from Broom to Stratford. This was why one member of the family was known as navy Gould” 11/01–13. The note uses the line’s later name; in 1879 it was not yet the S.M.J. The cottage took its name from a magpie the Goulds kept in a wicker cage by the front door.

The date of Binton station is one of the places where the archive disagrees with itself. The industrial archaeology survey gives 1879 for the line and for its stations at Bidford and Broom 03/21–31. A Society talk on Welford in the early twentieth century, comparing the modern map with the Ordnance Survey of the time, says that “Binton station opened in 1885” 46/37–95. No source in the archive explains the later date, and general railway histories agree with 1879. The same talk adds that four trains ran each way daily between Stratford and Evesham 46/37–95, the only service frequency the archive gives for either line, though it does not say for which year.

The railway changed the meaning of Binton Bridges. For centuries the bridges had been the village's link to the Warwickshire bank and the Stratford road, and since the early 1800s they had carried a toll that Welford people resented. Now they also led to a station. When the bridges were freed from toll in April 1893, the railway was part of the celebration. An evergreen arch "spanned the roadway close to the railway bridge, bearing the inscription GOD SAVE THE QUEEN", and the official party from Stratford arrived "by the 2 o'clock train" before the gate was locked and its key handed to the Marquis of Hertford 31/12.

Two months later the railway appeared in a sale. On 21 June 1893 the trustees of J. H. Baylies sold farms and land in Welford at the Red Horse in Stratford, and the auctioneers pressed the point: "The abolition of the Tolls on Binton Bridges must materially enhance the value of these properties, many of which are near to Binton Station on the East & West Junction Railway. Milcote Station on the Gt. Western Railway is about a mile & a half from the bulk of the lots." The same particulars describe a farm bounded by "the road leading from Welford to Binton Station" 11/30. Within fourteen years of its opening, the road over the bridges had acquired a new name.



“Binton Bridges & the Four Alls from the Railway.” A Walker series postcard, undated but probably Edwardian or inter-war, taken from the railway embankment north of the river. The archive’s summary says the embankment was that of the Honeybourne line, but that line ran a mile and a half to the east; the only railway beside Binton Bridges was the Stratford to Broom line. 53/11-24

The railway also left a small mark on the parish’s accounts. When the Parish Council approved Welford’s return of property values to Gloucestershire County Council in 1896, the list ran: houses, farms, lands, mills, “Railways £25 gross rental, £20 rateable value”, canals, wharfs and woods 12/09. Railway property inside Welford parish was assessed at a little under one per cent of the total. The return does not say which line, or which piece of track, the figure covered.

One cryptic note may refer to the line. Among jottings about the Boat Inn, someone wrote “Carr S.R.J. rly. — 1892” 11/15. James Carr kept the Boat in the 1890s 18/13. The note might record some dealing between Carr and the railway, or the initials might be a misreading of S.M.J. It cannot be interpreted from what survives.

Fruit, eels, coal and a safe What the stations handled

The archive has no goods ledger for either station, and no figures for what Welford sent away by rail. What it has is a series of small transactions, each recorded for some other reason, that show the stations at work.

Eels went from Binton. Mr Hawkins of the mill told a Society meeting that his grandfather had put in the eel traps at the weir about a hundred years earlier. "As many as half a ton of eels were caught in a night. These were boxed and taken to Binton Station for transporting to Birmingham where they were sold" 24/01.

Coal came to Binton. A billhead of 1907 from Welford Mill, made out by T. Hawkins senior to a Mr G. Emery, is printed with the mill's railway connections at the top: "Stations:—BINTON, E. & W. Junction; also Midland Traffic. MILCOTE, G.W.R." The account begins on 4 September 1906 with "Hauling 9 Ton 3 cwt coal from Binton station", charged at eighteen shillings, followed by barley meal, potatoes and the carriage of furniture 52/61. A miller who printed both stations on his stationery expected his customers to send goods by either line. The phrase "also Midland Traffic" shows that Binton connected with the Midland Railway at Broom, giving Welford a route to Birmingham and the north that did not depend on the Great Western.

Parcels came to Milcote. In February 1916 J. A. Matthews of Virginia Cottage ordered his vegetable seed for the season from Toogood & Sons of Southampton, seedsmen to the King: three kinds of peas, broad and runner beans, sprouts, carrot, cauliflower, lettuce, parsnip, savoy and marrow. The invoice notes that the goods went "by rail, carriage paid, to Milcote station" in one package 14/03.

The parish safe came to Binton. In 1895 Gloucestershire County Council urged parishes to look after their records, and after some delay Welford Parish Council agreed to buy a safe for not more than £6. On 1 October 1896 the clerk reported an offer from Wolverhampton of "a good iron Safe 28"×24"×18" (inside measurements) and lettered 'Welford-on-Avon Parish Council' delivered carriage paid to BINTON Station for the sum of £6=10=0", and the council accepted it 19/24. The extract names the maker as R. M. Lord; Woodward's summary of the same minute

says R. M. Ford 18/13. Someone, presumably, collected the safe from the station by cart.

Fruit, Welford's main product, must have gone by rail in quantity, but the archive does not show it directly. Joseph Hancox's story of night journeys by road is explicitly about the years before the railway reached Binton 21/1-21. The 1893 sale particulars recommend the land to "Fruit Growers, Market Gardeners and Capitalists generally", with the stations as a selling point 11/30. At the opening of the toll-free bridge the Mayor of Stratford predicted that jam would get cheaper, since the fruit was grown locally 31/12. In 1898 a correspondent described Evesham sending plums "daily" from its two stations and growers complaining about railway rates 23/27-29; the same grievance must have touched Welford. But there is no consignment note, no grower's account and no memory in the archive of Welford fruit being loaded at Binton or Milcote. It is a real gap, because the railway's effect on market gardening was probably the largest economic change it brought to the village.

Road carriers did not disappear. Directories continue to list Welford carriers, and the roads essay follows them into the motor age. John Wilson of Virginia Cottage took produce to Stratford market by cart and carried the village women to Stratford on Fridays with planks across the cart 44/22. The railways took the long hauls to Birmingham and beyond; the local trips to Stratford stayed on the road until the buses came.

The Parish Council and the railway 1894 to 1914

Welford Parish Council was formed in 1894, and H. M. Woodward's notes of its first minute books mention the railways three times. Two have already appeared: the safe delivered to Binton in 1896, and the 1899 request to have the road to Milcote station "mained" 19/24, 18/21.

The third is a pair of bare headings. On 20 April 1899, and again on 6 July 1899, the council discussed the "G.W.R. Power Bill" 18/13. Woodward did not copy the minute, and the archive does not say what the bill was or what the council thought of it. A "powers bill" was the usual way a railway company asked Parliament for new authority: to build or widen lines, buy land or raise money. Parish councils were often consulted when land in their area was affected. Whether the 1899 bill concerned the Honeybourne branch, and whether it was an early step towards the doubling of the line

described below, cannot be told from the archive. The full minute book, if it survives, should say.

The directories of these years show how the railway map looked from the village. Spennell's almanack for 1900 gives Welford as "5 miles from Stratford, 1 from Binton station, and 2 from Millcote" 46/99. Kelly's directory of 1914 repeats the 1897 wording but names the Binton line the "Midland and Stratford Junction railway" 48/13-22, a garbled form of its new name. In 1909, according to general railway histories, the East and West Junction and its neighbours had been combined as the Stratford-upon-Avon and Midland Junction Railway, the "S.M.J." of later Welford memory.

Railway families The men and women who worked on the lines

Because Welford had no station, it had no station master's house and no cluster of railway cottages. Its railway workers lived scattered among farm labourers and market gardeners, and the census enumerators wrote them down among everyone else.

The longest-serving was Thomas Smith. In 1881 he was 51, living in Welford with his wife Hannah, and described as "Packer on Railway Line", born at Cleeve Prior. A packer was a platelayer, one of the gang who kept the track level by packing ballast under the sleepers. In 1891 he was 61 and a "platelayer [on the railway]", with his married daughter Ellen Paddock and a grandson of three months in the house. In 1901, a widower of 70 in Back Lane, he was still a "Packer of Railway" 48/06, 48/07, 48/08. Twenty years on the permanent way, still working at seventy, is a hard life written into three lines of the census. The 1901 return gives his birthplace as Welford rather than Cleeve Prior; one of the two entries is wrong.

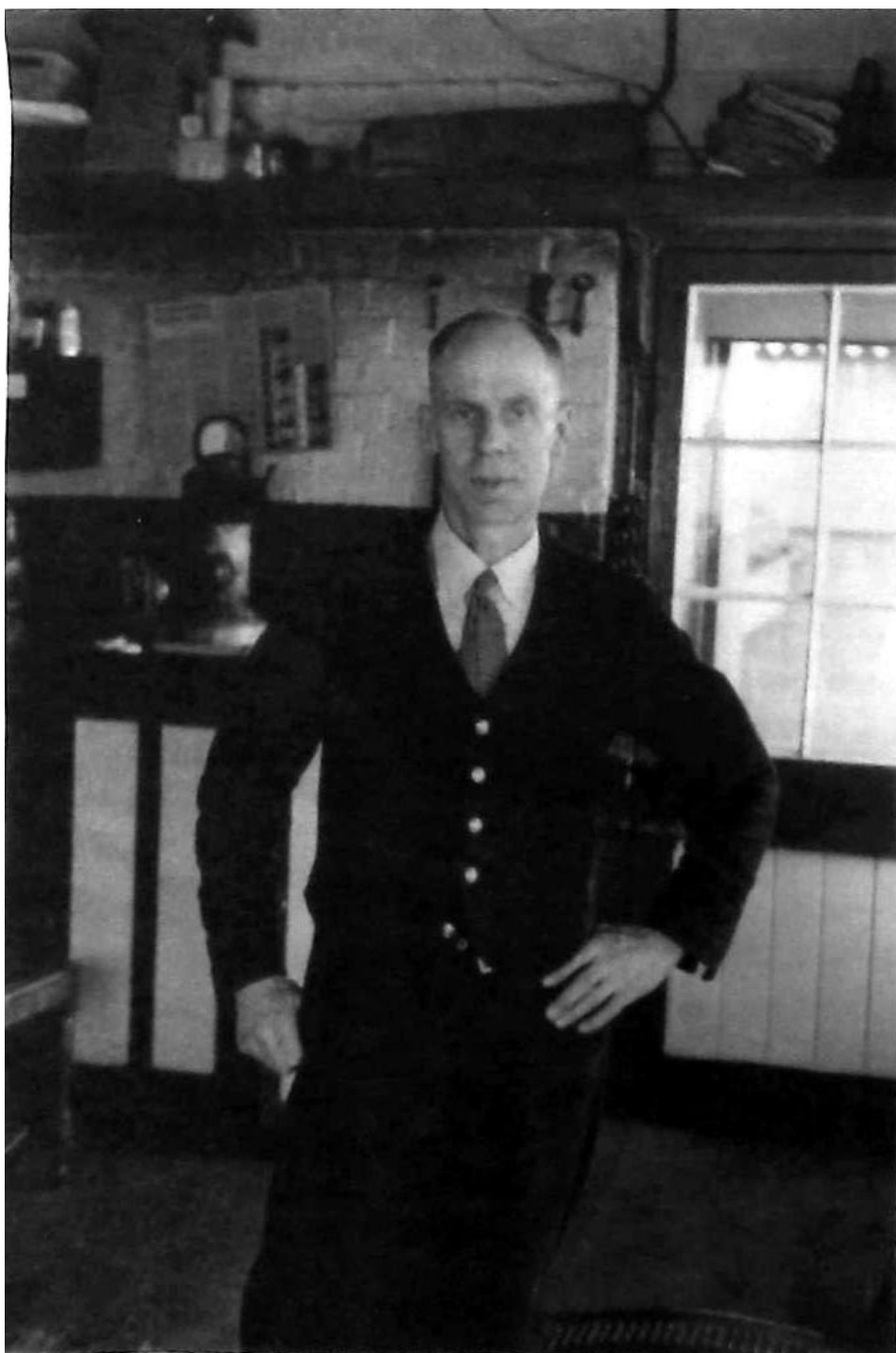
By 1911 Welford had a retired railwayman of a different rank. Richard Fletcher, aged 58, "Retired station master", born at a place in Gloucestershire read as "Hunston [?]", lived with his wife at Holly Dene in ten rooms, one of the largest households in the village by room count 48/09, 48/10. The archive does not say where he had been station master. His presence fits a wider pattern in the 1911 census, which shows Welford already becoming a place people retired to.

The Davis family of Chapel House sent several of its members to work for railways elsewhere. Eva Davis married Ernest Whittemore,

a "Railway Guard" of Bordesley, Birmingham, at Welford parish church in October 1904. Her nephew Frank Matthew Davis was a railway clerk living in Maidenhead in 1933, in a house he had named "Welford". Her niece Edith Mary Davis was herself a railway clerk when she married Stanley Jarrett, railway clerk, of the Great Western station house at Wednesbury, at Welford Wesleyan Chapel in 1932. His father was a station master 42/29. In 1923 another niece, Emily Eva Davis, had married the son of a "District Relief-man (Railway)" 42/29. For a Methodist family of smallholders and a school attendance officer, the railway offered steady clerical work and respectable marriages, mostly away from the village.

Between the wars, railwaymen were a recognised part of Welford society. Writing to the Stratford Herald about 1987 to defend the village of fifty years before, a correspondent signing as "Disgruntled Welfordian" listed what Welford had in 1937: "three bakers, three signalmen, two railway platelayers, two builders, three grocers' shops, several professional businessmen (who caught the train to Birmingham everyday from Milcote Halt), and several building workers" 01/01-385. Three signalmen and two platelayers in a village of a few hundred people was a significant share of its working men.

One of those signalmen can be named and seen. In the 1952 deed appointing new Memorial Hall trustees, alongside the station master Nelder, is "Percy Halford Barnett Railway Signalman" of Welford 60/04. The archive also holds a photograph, captioned in capitals "Perc Barnett, Signal Man in Milcote Signal Box, c 1955" 50/03. It is the only picture in the collection of a Welford railwayman at work.



Perc Barnett in Milcote signal box, about 1955. He wears the sleeved waistcoat that railwaymen commonly wore. A kettle sits on the stove, notices are pinned to the wall and a window looks out on the line; the levers are out of shot. Percy Halford Barnett, railway signalman of Welford, was made a trustee of the Memorial Hall in 1952. 50/03, 60/04

Another signalman appears in an oral-history interview. Mary Green, née Weatherhead, who lived at South View near the Maypole from 1940 to 1962, told the Society in 2018 that her father came from Huddersfield and “was a railway signalman”. Asked whether it was true that he sometimes worked in Cheltenham and

cycled there, she agreed 48/45–64. Cheltenham is about thirty miles from Welford by road. The interview does not say which boxes he worked, or whether the cycle ride was to a regular post or a relief turn.

The railway, then, gave Welford a small but steady body of skilled and semi-skilled work from the 1860s to the 1950s: gate keeping, platelaying, signalling, the station master's post at Milcote, and clerical jobs for those willing to leave. Boynton made the same point in 1997, telling the Society that "the railways gave a lot of men work in different ways", and adding that before electricity reached the line about 1910, the signal lamps were oil lamps "and therefore had to be lit by men walking from Signal to Signal" 38/01–03. The date he gives for electricity on the line is not confirmed elsewhere in the archive.

"Slow & sure" The S.M.J. in Welford memory

In January 1917 Private James Arthur Matthews of Welford, the son of the family at Virginia Cottage, travelled from his training camp to a new billet in Maidstone. He wrote home: "We came G W to Paddington & then through the tube to Victoria, & from there to Maidstone on the South Eastern & Chatham Railway, it reminds me very much of the S.M.J.R. slow & sure, it took us two hours to come about 40 miles" 43/02–84. He assumed his mother would know at once what he meant. The Stratford-upon-Avon and Midland Junction was, by reputation, a slow line, and a nickname often given to it in later railway writing turned its initials into "Slow, Mouldy and Jolty". Jim Matthews was killed in Belgium in August 1917.

A comic alphabet of Welford, written in the village "Book of Gossip" around 1915, gives the railway its letter: "R. is our Railway connection by which we ride quickly to London or Brum, or Redditch" 21/1–21. London presumably meant the Great Western from Milcote; Redditch could only mean the line from Binton to Broom Junction and then north on the Midland. The rhyme is ironic about many things, but the list of destinations is real.

After 1923 the S.M.J. became part of the London Midland and Scottish Railway, and Welford's sale particulars changed their initials accordingly. A plan of Church Farm House in 1920 shows the road out of the village marked "To Milcote G.W.R. Station" at one end and "To Binton Bridges & S.M.J. Station" at the other 11/30. By 1927 the particulars for The Retreat speak of "Milcote

(GWR) and Binton (LMS) stations”, and in 1929 Fern Bank in Boat Lane was “1 mile from Binton Station” 11/30.

Boynton’s 1997 talk recalled two kinds of traffic on the S.M.J. One was iron ore, which he described as going to “the steel mills in Broom”. Broom was only a junction, and the minutes probably compress what he said about ore trains passing through it. The other was the “Banana train”, which ran from Bristol’s docks at Avonmouth to Stratford and on to St Pancras in London, and “proved to be a very popular run with the railway men, because it gave them work for a number of continuous days” 38/01–03. These trains passed Binton, beside Welford’s bridge, but the minutes do not say when they ran, and no Welford source mentions seeing them.

A through route The Great Western line after 1908

In the early twentieth century the Great Western turned its quiet branch through Milcote into part of a main line. The archive’s commentary on the Milcote estate plan says that the line “opened as a through route around 1908” 13/38, and general railway histories agree: by about 1908 the Great Western had completed a new line south from Honeybourne to Cheltenham and a new North Warwickshire line from Birmingham to Stratford, and the Honeybourne to Stratford branch was doubled to carry through trains between Birmingham, Bristol and the south-west. An aerial photograph taken at Milcote in July 1970 still shows “a curving double track” through the fields 20/7–15.

Boynton dated the through services to the 1920s, telling the Society that “Between 1920 - 1930 we had the line Stratford - Honeybourne - Broadway - Cheltenham” 38/01–03. The record of his talk is brief and the dates may be the minute-taker’s. What matters for Welford is that, from this time, the trains passing Milcote included long-distance expresses between the Midlands and the West Country. A Stratford man writing to the Herald about 1987 remembered the Great Western stations of the area, “beautifully kept, prize-winning flowerbeds”, and complained that if the area had stayed in the Western Region “we would still have a through route to the West Country” 01/26–33. A Welford-born woman recalling Stratford between about 1925 and 1945 said “the Railways (2 stations) gave an excellent service to Liverpool, London, Cornwall, York and ‘all places between’” 44/22.

The name that Welford people attached to this service was the Cornishman. Both the 1934 Sunday School outing and a wartime memory of travel from Birmingham, described below, use it 03/01-19, 36/08.

Commuters, scholars and outings The 1920s and 1930s

Between the wars the railway was part of ordinary life for a section of the village. Gilda Gray, writing for the Women's Institute's fiftieth anniversary in 1974, described Welford as it was in about 1924: still in Gloucestershire, governed from Campden by the Marston Sicca Rural District, with only about six villagers owning cars. "The few grammar school boys and girls either cycled or went by train from Milcote to school in Campden" 03/01-19. To reach Campden from Milcote meant a change at Honeybourne onto the old Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton line, which climbed through the very tunnel Brunel's navvies had fought over.

Commuters went the other way. The 1937 letter-writer remembered "several professional businessmen (who caught the train to Birmingham everyday from Milcote Halt)" 01/01-385. The letter calls it a halt, though every other source in the archive calls Milcote a station. The difference may only reflect how a small country station felt to the people who used it.

For some, the train was the last resort after the buses stopped. A woman who grew up in Welford before and during the Second World War wrote to the Society in 2012 that "a bus service of sorts started about the time I was due to go to school", eventually won by Stratford Blue. "The last bus left Stratford at 6.0 and after that the only way home was to catch a train from the GWR station and get off at Milcote station and walk home - about 2 miles." She added: "I saw the station had gone when I visited this year" 49/20.

The railway also carried the village on its outings. In 1923 the Welford ladies' hockey club paid the Great Western Railway £1 10s 4d for a journey to Winchcombe; its other away matches went by Mr Stormont's motor 63/02. For a fête in the 1930s, the organisers resolved to write to "the Midland Red and Railway Co's, also Cycling Clubs" for publicity, and later to "post the Railway Stations" with notices 57/01. A Society panel in 1977, remembering Welford before electricity, spoke of "many visitors from B'ham" and of excursion trains, in a minute whose wording is partly uncertain 37/01-04. Gilda Gray recalled up to a hundred summer visitors

lodging in Welford in the 1920s 03/01-19, and Garrett in 1906 counted up to fifty lodgers in August 11/33. The archive does not say how they arrived, but most must have come by train to Stratford, Binton or Milcote.

The best single story of a railway outing comes from a pantomime programme. In 1934 the Welford-on-Avon Methodist Sunday School put on *Aladdin*, with twenty-seven named parts and sixteen "Chinese boys and girls", nearly all children from Welford families. On the inside page, in ink, someone recorded the reward:

1934. The Cornishman Train Stopped at Milcote Station by arrangement of Mr Nelder, Station Master GWR, with two Booked Coaches for our Party.

Programme for *Aladdin*, Welford Methodist Sunday School 03/01-19

The party was taken, apparently, to Weston-super-Mare, and the outing was recorded as "a great success" 03/01-19. An express that did not normally call at a country station was stopped there, by the station master's arrangement, to pick up two carriages of Welford children. It is the clearest evidence in the archive that the station and the village knew each other well. A trip to Weston-super-Mare was a popular day out in the period; the Stratford memoir mentions "train to Weston-Super-Mare followed by a return boat trip to Ilfracombe" 44/22.

The railway at war 1939 to 1945

The Second World War made the lines around Welford a target. Peter Barnes, district councillor, printed the 1941 photograph of the Welford-on-Avon Home Guard in his news sheet in 2013, with a note that the unit had "protected our villages and even more important our railway line", and that Milcote station "was bombed and machine-gunned a number of times" 36/44. His wording, "GWR Milcote and LMS Milcote station", mixes up the two companies: Milcote was Great Western and Binton was LMS. He also recalled an unexploded bomb found in a garden at Weston Sands in the late 1960s, when the family had to be evacuated while the Army removed it 36/44.



Welford-on-Avon Home Guard, 1941. According to a note printed with the photograph in 2013, the unit guarded the railway lines at Milcote, and the men had no guns until 1942.
36/44

A Society meeting in 1985, devoted to reminiscences of the village, recorded the same memories in another form. Besides the bomb that landed in a wall at Weston Sands Farm and smashed the greenhouse, "a plane crashed not far from the village and the railway lines were bombed", along with Milcote Farm 37/01-04. The minutes refer to a picture, "image 65", which is not in the archive's scan. No date is given for any of the raids, and the archive has no contemporary report of damage to either line.

The trains kept running, and they brought people to the village. Jean Stone, who visited Welford from Birmingham as a small child during the war, remembered:

We would arrive at Milcote Station. From there we walked or my uncle would be waiting for us with his horse and trap. We went home on Sunday evenings on the Cornishman Express and we would wait for what, to a small child seemed hours, on Stratford Station for often the train was held up if there had been a raid, or if the line was being repaired after a raid the previous night. The train would come into the station all blacked out and puffing steam and sparks. This frightened me and I would run and hide behind my mother.

Jean Stone, wartime trips from Birmingham 36/08

She went home with plums from her uncle's trees and rabbits her father had caught, "Plum Jam and Rabbit stew, both of which were hard to come by in Birmingham" 36/08. In a few lines her memory shows the railway doing what it had done for Welford for eighty years: bringing visitors from Birmingham and taking the village's produce back.

Under Binton railway bridge 13 March 1947

The railway features in one of the worst accidents in Welford's records. In March 1947, after the hard winter, the Avon rose in one of the great floods of the century. On the night of Thursday 13 March, Harold and Violet Turner of The Croft, Headland Road, were driving home to Welford. The Stratford Herald of 21 March reported what happened when their car reached Binton railway bridge, the bridge by which the Stratford to Broom line crossed the road just north of Binton Bridges.

"When the couple reached the bridge they decided that as they were near home they would try to get through." The engine stopped and water welled up through the floor. They left the car to wade home in what seemed knee-deep water, then plunged into a dip in the road and found the water almost up to their necks. They struggled back to the car, which had been pushed into deeper water. Violet Turner, aged 39, grew weaker and was torn from her husband's grasp and swept away. Harold Turner climbed onto the roof of the car 05/01.

The rescue happened on the railway itself. P.c. West of Binton heard his shouts and lowered a rope from the bridge.

P.c. West had lowered a rope from the bridge, and was striving to haul the man up when he saw a light approaching along the single line railway track. He thought that help had arrived, when suddenly, above the roar of the flood, he heard the noise of an approaching train. The space between the track and the railings that form the parapet of the bridge is small, yet to have loosed the rope might have meant Mr. Turner's death. P.c. West hung on, and while the train passed clung perilously half over the parapet, the rope biting into his hands.

Stratford-upon-Avon Herald, 21 March 1947 05/01

With P.c. Cox from Stratford, West then hauled Turner up "to the railway track on the bridge", after an ordeal of more than two hours. Violet Turner's body had not been found when the paper

went to press 05/01. The report confirms two small facts about the line in its last months as a passenger railway: it was single track at the bridge, and trains were still running at night in March 1947.



Floodwater under the railway bridge on the Welford road. Undated photograph. The Welford-on-Avon nameplate stands at the water's edge, and a contractor's board behind it advertises a sewerage scheme for Welford, Weston, Binton and Luddington by a Droitwich firm, which should date the picture if the scheme can be traced. It is almost certainly the Binton railway bridge, and it shows the hazard that killed Violet Turner in 1947. 52/24, 05/01

The last years 1947 to the 1960s

The archive is weakest exactly where a history of the railways most needs it: on the closure of the two lines. None of its minute books, newspaper cuttings or letters records the last passenger train at Binton or at Milcote, the end of goods traffic, the removal of the track or the demolition of the stations. What it has is a handful of dates in later commentaries, and they do not agree.

For the Binton line, the commentary on the 1951 Bartholomew map says that the Stratford to Broom line "closed to passengers in 1947" 31/05. The Alcester industrial archaeology survey says it "closed to passengers in 1949 although it carried freight until 1960" 03/21-31. General railway histories support 1947. The Bidford station buildings and bridge were destroyed in 1965, and

the Broom station tracks lifted the same year 03/21–31. The archive says nothing about Binton station's buildings.

For the Milcote line, the same map commentary says that the Honeybourne to Stratford line "closed in 1969" 31/05, 31/10. Boynton told the Society in 1997 that "the last passenger train was in 1952" 38/01–03, which cannot be right for the line as a whole if, as the Perc Barnett photograph shows, Milcote signal box was still manned about 1955 and the 1970 aerial photograph still shows double track 50/03, 20/7–15. The minutes of his talk may have attached the date to the wrong service. Francis Nelder was still "Railway Station Master" of Milcote in July 1952 60/04, which is the last firm date in the archive for the station in use.

The national context shows only obliquely. A Stratford man's letter to the Herald, about 1987, dates the decline of the local railways to 1963, when control of the lines around Stratford passed from the Western Region of British Railways to the London Midland Region, "about the time things started to get worse" 01/26–33. The year is the one in which the Beeching report proposed closing a large share of Britain's branch lines and stations. An article on the Triumph motorcycle works, filed for other reasons, notes that the post-Beeching cuts would in any case have forced the firm onto road haulage 04/01–14. No Welford source in the archive records an objection to any closure, or a petition, or even a mention of the last train.

After the trains From the 1970s to the Greenway

Once the lines were closed, the question was what to do with them. The Parish Council kept a copy of the Parish Councils Review for winter 1971, probably for its article on "Disused Railway Lines". A new procedure, effective from 20 September 1971, gave local planning authorities the first say in how closed lines should be used, "e.g., for roads, footpaths and bridleways", before British Rail could sell the land 06/02. In March 1972 Warwickshire County Council's draft Upper Avon Policy Plan, written as boats were about to return to the river, proposed a picnic site at Binton Bridges "on the north bank between the river and the disused railway, with access from the Binton road", and a possible marina at Stratford "immediately south of the disused railway line" 06/18. The railway that had closed the river navigation in the 1870s was now, closed itself, a feature on the plans for reopening it. The Upper Avon was reopened to boats in 1974 52/59.

Some railway memories became local politics. About 1984 the Stratford District Council committee that resisted widening Binton Bridges also recommended “opposition to the North Warwickshire railway closure” 01/38–46; that line, from Stratford to Birmingham, survived. The 1991 Stratford memoir ends with a sentence that could stand for many: “I would like the railway back – with somewhere to GO on the trains!” 44/22.

The trackbed of the Great Western line between Stratford and Long Marston became a path for walkers and cyclists, known as the Greenway. The archive does not record its opening. It first appears in the Society’s minutes in November 1999, when Rosemary Hale suggested a talk on “the Greenway”, and again in 2000, when the September meeting might be “on the causeway/Greenway” 38/01–03. By 2011–13 Peter Barnes’s news sheets were reporting on it regularly: complaints that “Greenway Milcote area” had lost its rural look because the verges were cut five or six times a year; a petition in the café against charging for the Greenway car park; volunteers who had “already started at Milcote” looking after the car parks; and new warning signs at the “Milcote greenway crossing” 47/91, 47/93, 47/94, 36/44. In 2013 he could report that “the Greenway looks great this year after less cutting last year more flowers more grasses ... dog roses look lovely and wild asparagrass appeared” 36/44. The station where Francis Nelder stopped the Cornishman for the Sunday School has become a car park on a footpath.

The railways also became a subject of local history. A Society panel in early 1979 took questions on “Old routes to Stratford; Railways” among other topics, and the minutes list railways among the Society’s recurring subjects 37/01–04. In September 1994 Eddie Roberts showed about a hundred of his seven hundred slides of “the old Stratford line”, with the steam locomotives of the 1950s, and of the preserved railway at Toddington and Winchcombe, whose members hoped one day to reach Cheltenham racecourse 38/01–03. In May 1997 John Boynton spoke on “Railways around Welford”; the minutes of that talk, quoted throughout this essay, are the closest thing the archive has to a history of the local lines 38/01–03.

What the railways made A conclusion

The railways never came into Welford, and perhaps that is why they left so light a mark on its records. There was no station to photograph, no goods yard to lease, no railway cottages to sell, and

no company office in the village to write letters. The village met the railway at its edges: at the bridge foot by the Four Alls, and at the end of the road through Weston. The archive reflects that: almost every piece of railway evidence in it was kept for some other reason.

Read together, though, those pieces show the railway shaping Welford in at least four ways. It ended the river trade, and with it the barges, the coal boats and the locks; Welford's lower lock became a picturesque ruin within a generation of the Honeybourne branch opening. It gave the village's market gardens, its mill and its households a link to Birmingham, the Black Country and the wider country, carrying eels and fruit out and coal, seed and iron safes in. It gave a small number of Welford men skilled, steady work: as gate keeper, platelayer, signalman and station master, and, for some, as clerks and guards far from home. And from the 1920s it made Welford, for a few people, a commuter village, with businessmen catching the Birmingham train from Milcote and grammar school children going to Campden.

It also left Welford with memories that outlasted the trains: the Cornishman stopped for a Sunday School party; the blacked-out express coming into Stratford "puffing steam and sparks"; a policeman clinging to a bridge parapet with a rope in his hands while a train went by; a signalman with his hand on his hip beside the stove in Milcote box. The tramway blocks bored by James Mills, the shares in the Stratford and Hatton line, the 1845 landowners' return and the S.M.J. that was "slow & sure" all belong to the same story, which is much bigger than any one folder in the archive suggests. The Greenway now carries walkers and cyclists past Milcote on the Great Western trackbed, and most of them will never know that a signal box stood there, or that Welford people once planned their days around the 6 o'clock bus and the last train.

Gaps and conflicting sources

WHERE THE SOURCES DISAGREE

- **When Binton station opened.** The industrial archaeology survey gives 1879 for the Stratford to Broom line and its stations 03/21–31, and a note on Magpie Cottage agrees 11/01–13. A Society talk says "Binton station opened in 1885" 46/37–95. General histories support 1879.
- **When the Binton line closed to passengers.** 1947 in the map commentary 31/05; 1949 in the industrial archaeology survey, with freight continuing to 1960 03/21–31.
- **When the Milcote line closed.** 1969 in two archive commentaries 31/05, 31/10; Boynton's talk, as minuted, says the last passenger train was in 1952 38/01–03,

which conflicts with the station master still in post in July 1952 and the signal box manned about 1955 60/04, 50/03.

- **When the Upper Avon was abandoned.** 1857 by the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton 52/59; June 1875 by the Great Western 11/31, 06/13; “1877” in the river talk, which is the year of the Railway Commissioners’ ruling 52/09, 52/59. The river talk also says the Great Western, rather than the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton, gained control in 1859 52/09.
- **Mills and the Stephensons.** The Hollies notes say the tramway company worked “in conjunction with Geo. Stephenson’s brother” 11/24; a talk based on the same account book says Mills “did work with George Stephenson” 21/22–66. Neither can be checked from the archive.
- **“The first railway in the world.”** Claimed for the Stratford and Moreton Tramway in a talk 21/22–66; corrected in the archive’s own commentary, which points to the Surrey Iron Railway of 1803 and the Stockton and Darlington of 1825 40/01.
- **Thomas Smith’s birthplace.** Cleeve Prior in 1881, Welford in 1901 48/06, 48/08.
- **The maker of the parish safe.** R. M. Lord of Wolverhampton in the minute extract; R. M. Ford in Woodward’s summary 19/24, 18/13.
- **Milcote “Halt”.** The 1987 letter calls it a halt 01/01–385; every other source calls it a station, and it had a station master.
- **Which railway passed Binton Bridges.** The summary of the postcard “Binton Bridges & the Four Alls from the Railway” says it was taken from the Honeybourne line embankment 53/11–24. That line ran through Milcote, a mile and a half east; the line beside the bridges was the Stratford to Broom line. The 2013 news sheet similarly writes of “GWR Milcote and LMS Milcote station” 36/44; Milcote was Great Western, Binton LMS.
- **The line’s name in 1914.** Kelly’s directory calls the Binton line the “Midland and Stratford Junction railway” 48/13–22; its name from 1909 was the Stratford-upon-Avon and Midland Junction.
- **Boynton’s iron ore.** The minutes say the ore went “to the steel mills in Broom” 38/01–03. Broom was a junction with no steelworks, so the record of the talk is probably compressed.
- **The estate plan’s date.** The archive summary dates the Milcote estate plan to after 1908 because the line became a through route then 13/38. The plan itself is undated; the break-up of the Milcote estate about 1924 is a more likely occasion 03/01–19.

WHAT THE ARCHIVE DOES NOT HOLD

- Any record from either railway company: no timetables, station accounts, staff records, goods ledgers or correspondence.
- Any photograph of Binton or Milcote station buildings. The only station photograph is of Long Marston 10/13; Gloucestershire Archives lists another, of about 1900, among its Welford papers 02/01–12.
- The 1845 landowners’ return for the Midland and Eastern Counties Railway, which is at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (ER 8/5/26) 06/20, 13/31.
- The James Mills account book quoted in the Hollies notes and the 1931 exhibition 11/24, 21/22–66.
- The Parish Council’s full minutes on the “G.W.R. Power Bill” of 1899 18/13.

- Any record of the closure of either line, the last trains, the lifting of the track or the demolition of the stations; and any record of the Greenway's opening.
- Any evidence of how much Welford fruit went by rail, or by which station.
- The dates of the wartime bombing at Milcote, and the picture referred to as "image 65" in the 1985 minutes 37/01–04.
- Where Alfred Ingram kept his railway gate in 1861, and where Richard Fletcher had been station master 48/04, 48/10.
- The Aladdin programme of 1934 and Jim Matthews's 1917 letter are summarised and transcribed, but their scans are not among the images in the archive's PDFs, so they could not be reproduced here.

ITEMS THAT LOOK RELEVANT BUT ARE NOT ABOUT WELFORD

- "The carriers' carts before the 1908 railway" in Woodward's 1936 cutting refers to Tanworth-in-Arden and the North Warwickshire line, not Welford 20/01.
- The road that "dives under a railway bridge" in a 1930s guide is at Mickleton on the way to Campden 13/22.
- The German aircraft crew member caught "running along the railway track" in 1941 was at Shirley, near Birmingham 36/16.
- The 1969 court case about a railway accommodation bridge (Greenhalgh v. British Railways Board) was kept as general guidance on footpaths 06/15.

DATES FROM OUTSIDE THE ARCHIVE

- These come from general railway histories and are used only for context: the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton line through Honeybourne, 1853; the Honeybourne to Stratford branch, 1859; the Stratford to Hatton line, 1860; the formation of the Stratford-upon-Avon and Midland Junction Railway, 1909; the grouping of the railways, which put the S.M.J. into the LMS, 1923; the Great Western's through route via Honeybourne and Cheltenham, completed about 1908; the Stratford Greenway on the former Great Western trackbed from Stratford to Long Marston.

SOURCES

- Directories: 48/13–22 (1856, 1859, 1897, 1914), 34/52–53 (c.1860s), 46/98 (Kelly 1897), 46/99 (Spennell 1900), 51/01 (VCH, Milcote).
- Censuses: 48/04 (1861), 48/06 (1881), 48/07 (1891), 48/08 (1901), 48/09–10 (1911).
- Tramway: 11/24, 11/27, 19/28, 21/22–66, 22/06, 01/38–46, 40/01, 08/01–19, 13/27.
- Railway Mania and Mickleton: 06/20, 13/31, 30/02.
- The river and the railway: 06/13, 11/31, 11/33, 52/09, 52/58–59, 44/22.
- Milcote: 13/38, 13/39, 13/40, 18/21, 31/10, 10/14, 10/28, 12/03, 60/04, 14/03, 03/01–19, 50/03, 20/7–15.
- Binton: 03/21–31, 11/01–13, 15/12, 46/14, 46/37–95, 31/12, 11/30, 12/09, 11/15, 19/24, 18/13, 24/01, 52/61, 53/11–24.

- People and memories: 01/01–385 (1987 letter), 01/26–33, 21/1–21, 42/29, 43/02–84, 48/45–64, 49/20, 63/02, 57/01, 37/01–04, 38/01–03.
- War and flood: 36/08, 36/44, 37/01–04, 05/01, 52/24.
- After closure: 06/02, 06/18, 01/38–46, 47/91, 47/93, 47/94, 36/44, 31/05.
- Background: 11/25 (C. J. Woodward, 1931), 11/22 (Tommy Porter), 23/27–29 (Evesham fruit and railway rates), 04/01–14 (Triumph and the Beeching cuts).