

Religion in Welford-on-Avon

Introduction

For nine hundred years religion in Welford-on-Avon has meant, above all, St Peter's Church by the old ford, and for the last two hundred it has also meant the Methodist chapel in Chapel Street. Between them, church and chapel shaped how the village was governed, how its children learned to read, how it buried its dead, how it marked a coronation or the end of a war, and even how it rang its puddings into the pot. Around them ran an older layer of belief that the clergy never quite stamped out: witches who froze plough horses on the Binton road, a hare that turned out to be an old woman, and a recipe for selling your soul in the church porch at midnight.

This essay follows that story from the Saxon priory that first owned Welford to the parish of the early twenty-first century. It draws on the papers of the Welford and Weston Local History Society, scanned in the project's archive. References such as 26/10 or 44/31 are the Society's own folder and item numbers, so any statement can be traced back to the document behind it.



FIG. 2.

St Peter's from the south-east around 1850, drawn by J. M. Woodward and printed in his brother C. J. Woodward's 1907 paper on the church (26/10). It shows the battlemented aisles and the half-timbered south porch that the 1866 restoration swept away.

The archive is unusually rich for a village of six or seven hundred people. It holds a notebook digest of Welford's church history from the Hockaday abstracts of the Gloucester diocesan records, running from the 1270s to 1792 (20/02). It holds a typed transcript of the churchwardens' accounts for 29 years between 1617 and 1763 (17/01), the Committee for Plundered Ministers' orders of the Civil War (03/38), and two printed histories of the rectors (19/02, 47/70). C. J. Woodward's 1907 notes on the church preserve the memories of

villagers who sat in its box pews in the 1840s (26/10, 05/03). His relative H. M. Woodward's book of anecdotes, collected in 1906 and 1907, is a folklorist's notebook of witchcraft and custom (21/22–66). A churchwarden's private "Book of Gossip", begun in 1915, judges the Rector's sermons and the neighbours' theology with startling frankness (21/01–21). For the chapel there is Wendy Atkins's research on Henry Hopkins, the Methodist shoemaker (44/31), the 1913 stone-laying report (05/06), and circuit magazines from 1930 and 2001 (05/09, 44/31). Parish magazines from the 1950s to the 1970s show the weekly round of services, weddings and fêtes (49/07, 19/34, 19/48, 18/06).

A companion essay in this project, *St Peter's Church, Welford-on-Avon: a history*, describes the church building in detail: its Norman arcades, the fourteenth-century chancel, the restoration of 1866–67, the tower fire of 1884 and the bells. This essay does not repeat that architectural story. It uses the building only where it explains how people worshipped, and turns instead to the people: the monks and absentee rectors, the squarsons, the Wesleyan cobbler, the churchwardens who paid bounties on hedgehogs, the women who rang the bells for the first time in 1973, and the villagers who believed a witch could make bread jump out of a baker's basket.

Three threads run through what follows. The first is that Welford's religion was for centuries run from somewhere else: from Deerhurst on the Severn, from the abbey of St Denis near Paris, from Tewkesbury, from Gloucester, and from the great houses of the Grevilles and the Sackvilles. The second is the long and mostly friendly rivalry between church and chapel, broken sharply only once, in the 1840s, over who should teach the village children. The third is the way religious institutions became the village's welfare office, school, burial board and festival committee, roles they gradually handed over to the parish council and the state in the twentieth century.

The sources do not always agree. Dates for the founding of the chapel range from 1801 to 1861, the great fire is sometimes dated 1888, and church guides repeat traditions that no document supports. Where the sources conflict, the essay says so, and a closing section gathers the main disagreements and the gaps.

Origins: monks, a French abbey and a church by the ford

Welford's religious history begins as a footnote to a monastery forty miles away. Deerhurst, on the Severn below Tewkesbury, was one of the oldest Christian sites in the West Midlands. The Society kept two guides to it: H. M. Taylor's *Deerhurst Studies* of 1977 and Edward Gilbert's guide to the priory church and Odda's Chapel (29/04–06). Gilbert traces Deerhurst to the kingdom of the Hwicce, with a first church of the seventh century or earlier, a famous carved font rescued from a farmyard, and animal-head stops on its arches.

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29/05

A Guide to the Priory Church AND Saxon Chapel

DEERHURST, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

by

EDWARD GILBERT, Ph. D.



Animal head from middle door in entrance porch
(c. 804 A.D. See pages 3 and 7)

THE PROPERTY OF THE
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LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Edward Gilbert's guide to Deerhurst Priory Church, kept by the Society because Welford belonged to Deerhurst for most of the Middle Ages (29/04-06). The cover shows the carved animal head from the middle door of the entrance porch.

At some point before the Norman Conquest, Welford was given to Deerhurst. Gilda Gray's history of the rectors says the Earl of Gloucester made the gift (47/70). The Victoria County History typescript in the archive says that at Domesday the abbey of St Denis, near Paris, held 15 hides in Welford as part of Deerhurst, which had been given to the abbey in 1059 (02/06). A notebook of extracts from the Hockaday abstracts adds a careful warning. Edward the Confessor's writs of 1062 and 1065 granting "Deorhyrste" to Westminster Abbey did not include the priory or its lands, "e.g. Welford" (20/02). So for three centuries Welford answered, in the end, to French monks.

The Domesday entry, as summarised for the Society, gives Deerhurst's Welford estate 15 hides and 15 plough teams, with 75 villeins, 12 bordars and 38 serfs, four mills and 36 acres of meadow, though the figures may cover five other small villis counted with it (07/01). Weston-on-Avon, the neighbouring parish whose fortunes became tied to Welford's, belonged to Evesham Abbey, and its Domesday entry mentions a priest (07/01). Weston's own written history is older still: the notebook copies Saxon charters of 716 and 773 that name it (20/02).

The first known rector of Welford is Baldwin, Prior of Deerhurst, in 1065 (19/02, 47/70). In practice the parish was probably served by monks or chaplains sent from the priory, with the prior as rector and patron. The oldest parts of the present church, its round-pillared arcades and chevron-carved south doorway, date from the later twelfth century (02/06, 26/10). The building sits by the ancient ford at the mill, and the VCH suggests its tall tower served as a landmark for travellers crossing the Avon (02/06).

The quarrelsome rector

The first rector with a personality is Ralph de Welford, put in by the prior in 1190. He fought Deerhurst for thirteen years over 600 acres of Welford land (19/02, 47/70). The VCH puts the same case in legal terms: Ralph of Welford sued the prior for five hides between 1190 and 1203, and five hides is roughly 600 acres, so the two accounts agree (02/06). Gilda Gray says the case was important enough for Mauger, Bishop of Worcester, to ask the Pope's advice in Rome. Ralph lost, and she thought the priors afterwards kept the living in their own hands, "monks worked in the parish but the authority was vested in the Prior" (47/70).

Kings, queens and absentees

The Hockaday extracts show how easily outsiders could reach into a small parish. In 1273 Bishop Giffard of Worcester complained that William Rufus had "entered into Church without being presented or instituted" (20/02). Rufus was a pluralist who also held prebends at Westbury-on-Trym and Hereford and the living of Inkberrow, so much of his work at

Welford would have been done by hired chaplains (47/70). In 1279 the bishop admitted Philip of Staunton, formerly precentor of Wells (20/02, 19/02).

In 1283 the bishop wrote to the prior of Deerhurst asking him to present Nicholas of Cleve, clerk to Queen Eleanor, even though the prior had already presented his own man. The bishop had received letters from the Queen and from the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and was "desirous not to incur indignation of the King" (20/02). It is a rare glimpse of royal patronage working on a village living. The rectors' booklets call this man Nicholas de Clare and suggest he was the Queen's chaplain and man of business (19/02, 47/70).

War with France turned Welford into a royal gift. Because Deerhurst was a cell of a French abbey, the Crown seized it whenever the two kingdoms fought. The Hockaday notes record royal presentations in 1321, "by reason of the late voidance of the Priory of Deerhurst", and again in 1359, "on account of war with France" (20/02). Master Walter le Stoke, admitted in 1308, was the last rector the prior presented for some time. The Bishop of Worcester trusted him to sort out the affairs of Alcester Priory (47/70).

In 1364 three rectors followed in quick succession. Sir William de Scanceby died that year, Robert Jones of Beckford held the living for three months, and John Power was instituted in September. Gilda Gray thought this showed the Black Death at work in Welford (47/70). The great plague was in 1348–49, but a second outbreak struck in 1361–62, so the guess is reasonable but not proven.

Tewkesbury's monks

In 1447 Henry VI gave Deerhurst to his new college at Eton. Edward IV restored it, then in 1467 gave it to Tewkesbury Abbey (02/06). From then on Benedictine monks of Tewkesbury served Welford. One of them, "Waltherus Williams, priest and monk of Tewkesbury", died as rector and was buried in the nave, where the indent of his lost brass can still be seen (47/70). His date is given as 1484, 1454 and 1488 in different sources, a reminder of how hard worn Roman numerals are to read (26/10, 02/06).

After Williams the record goes quiet. Gilda Gray thought the see of Worcester was then in the hands of absentee Italian bishops and the parish was left without an instituted rector. In 1497 "the men of Welford demanded that the Bishop visit them" (47/70). Woodward's 1907 notes give the bishop's fee for this special visitation as four marks (26/10). It is the earliest sign of Welford's parishioners acting together over their church, and it was to demand more attention, not less. About 1531 a writer recorded that Tewkesbury monks "served Welneford" in the chantry and in the school, "where four boyes be taught" (26/14). On the eve of the Reformation, then, Welford had a church served by monks, a chantry where masses were sung for the dead, and the beginnings of a school.

Weston, the sister church

Welford's story is bound up with that of All Saints', Weston-on-Avon, across the fields, whose vicar so often appears in Welford's records. Weston belonged to Evesham Abbey, not Deerhurst, and lay in the diocese of Worcester (07/01, 21/47). Its church is almost all of one build. Sir John Greville of Milcote, by his will proved in 1480, asked to be buried at Weston and left £50 "pro edificatione ejusdem", for the building of it, together with money for a chaplain to sing for his soul for seven years (21/47, 51/01). A chantry chapel of St Anne stood on the south side of the nave until the Chantries Acts of 1545 and 1547 closed it, and a squint in the arcade still looks towards where it was (21/48, 51/01). Weston keeps the Greville brasses of Sir John (1546) and Sir Edward (1559) and a medieval bell inscribed GABRIEL, cast about 1450, probably at Leicester (10/11-16; a note filed in 02/01-12). The vicar of Weston in the 1640s was John Trapp, who also took over Welford in the Civil War (03/38). From the 1860s the two livings were held together by the rector of Welford (48/13-22), and they shared a parish magazine and, from 2006, a benefice (47/68).

Reformation, Civil War and Restoration

The Reformation reached Welford through its owners before it reached its pulpit. Tewkesbury Abbey was dissolved in 1539. The VCH typescript says the right to appoint the rector went to the new Bishop of Gloucester in 1541, to Sir Ralph Sadleir in 1547, and back to the see in 1552 (02/06). The manor, with its two water mills and Avon fishing, was surveyed and sold in 1552-53 to William Willington of Barcheston for £834 14s 3d (20/02). It passed through his daughter to the Grevilles of Milcote and later to the Sackvilles, Dukes of Dorset (02/06, 26/10).

The change of masters did not empty the village of monks. Gilda Gray believed that Tewkesbury's monks "had seen what was coming" and arranged their futures. In 1541, by agreement between the Dean of Westbury-on-Trym, the late Abbot of Tewkesbury and several gentlemen, Richard Ewer, "of the Order of St. Benedict", became rector (47/70). Monks were still "living and working at the Rectory and at the mill" in the 1550s, and one of them, John Woode, later became rector himself. The register records his marriage in 1562 and his burial in 1581 (47/70). A monk who married was the Reformation in miniature.

The wills of ordinary parishioners from these years survive only as notes. Hary Roberdes (1545), Thomas Welles and Willyam Robarte (1546) and Wyllyam Shakell (1546-47) left oxen, heifers and strikes of barley (20/02). The notebook does not say whether they also left money for masses or lights, as pre-Reformation wills usually did, so their religious bequests cannot be judged from the archive.

Richard Quene and the Vicar of Bray

The most human figure of the Tudor changes is Richard Quene, another Tewkesbury monk, who became rector and then married. The rectors' booklets say he was deprived for marrying in Mary Tudor's reign, when clerical marriage was forbidden again (19/02, 47/70). His name is said to survive in the field called Quiney's Leys, and his son became an usher at Stratford Grammar School (47/70). A manuscript talk in the archive, probably by Gilda Gray, tells the period from a strongly pro-Catholic viewpoint. It mentions "priests who kept to the old way of faith" and calls Quene's successor, Chancellor John Williams, rector 1554–59, "a real Vicar of Bray" (18/23). Williams was a lawyer and pluralist who, in Mrs Gray's words, did well "by bending to the left or right as the times demanded". He died of apoplexy on the road from Painswick to Gloucester, and she doubted he ever came to Welford (47/70).

The registers begin in 1561, under Elizabeth (26/10, 02/02). The first volume also contains the famous memorandum of the Avon flood of July 1588, which rose a yard an hour from eight in the morning until four. It filled "the parsonage" orchard and fish pool, carried off the signpost of the Bear inn, and came into the vicarage at Weston, making Adam Sanders flee (05/04, 02/04). The parish also bought silver. Its Elizabethan communion cup and cover of 1576, the vessels for the new Protestant communion in both kinds, is now kept at Gloucester Cathedral (47/685).



FIG. 5.—SACRAMENTAL VESSELS.

"On the 4th (2 feet 6 inches)

"Sacramental vessels" from Woodward's 1907 paper (26/10). The tall silver cup and cover in the centre is the Elizabethan communion plate of 1576; the pewter chalices and paten either side are later.

Drake's chaplain

In October 1581 the living went to Philip Jones, vicar of Cirencester. Both rectors' histories say he had sailed round the world with Sir Francis Drake as chaplain on the *Golden Hind* (19/02, 47/70). He rode between Welford and Cirencester to oversee his curates, and "made himself heartily disliked" by denouncing the landowners and merchants who had grown rich on monastic lands while making no provision for the poor (47/70). He started a school in a house in Church Lane. One version calls it Tower View, Church End Lane (19/02, 19/45); the 1996 revision calls it Box Tree Cottage (47/70). The patrons by then were the Grevilles, and Lodowick Greville of Milcote, who quarrelled with his tenants in 1576 (20/02), was later pressed to death for the murder of his steward (10/11, 21/23). A preacher who attacked greedy landlords had an obvious target close at hand.

The Civil War: Bowen and Trapp

Edward Vernon, rector from 1592 until his death in 1631, was a "family man, a gentleman of standing in the neighbourhood", and his time was "a mellow period" (47/70). His successor, Dr Jenkin Bowen, met the Civil War. After Parliament's forces burned Milcote House, Bowen, a royalist, was removed as a "delinquent" and the rectory was given to John Trapp, the Puritan schoolmaster and vicar of Weston (03/38, 47/70). Trapp's Bible commentaries are still read, and Mrs Gray placed his famous library in what became the dining room of the old Rectory next to the church (47/70).

The papers of Parliament's Committee for Plundered Ministers show that Welford did not accept him quietly (03/38). Bowen and his agent, William Miller, went on collecting the tithes, and Bowen told the parishioners not to pay Trapp. The Committee summoned them in June 1646. In August 1647 it ordered a group of parishioners, Anne Griffin, widow, Edward Pratt, John Wells, John Alexander and Robert and Edward Martin, to pay whatever two local justices decided, on pain of arrest by the Serjeant at Arms of the House of Commons. Anne Griffin fought back with a petition: Trapp had made her pay tithes, she said, but refused to pay his own share of Parliament's taxes on the hamlet of Bickmarsh (03/38). The notebook in 20/02 adds that the churchwardens' accounts touch on Laud's reforms and the Presbyterian Directory of 1648, which replaced the Prayer Book, before a long gap in the accounts from 1648 to 1675.

"Welford was fiercely Royalist", Mrs Gray wrote, "and I think was probably unkind to John Trapp" (47/70). That judgement goes beyond the documents, but the tithe dispute shows at least that some parishioners preferred their ousted rector to Parliament's man.

Restoration and the age of the squarsons

Bowen came back in 1660. In thanks he gave the parish a church clock, which ran until the tower fire of 1884 (47/70, 26/10). In 1662 he and his curate, Richard Jackson, signed the declaration under the Act of Uniformity, accepting the restored Prayer Book (03/38). His successors were presented by the Pastons, who had acquired the patronage through loans

to the Grevilles (19/02). William Izard was instituted in 1667 and paid £26 16s 3d in first fruits, the tax on a new rector's first year's income (03/38).

Not every rector was a credit to the parish. Robert Talbot, rector in the 1700s, ran up debts of £700 and was deprived in 1709; a margin note in the notebook calls him an absentee "heavily in debt" (20/02). When Edward Astley arrived in 1712 the rectory was ruinous, and the bishop ordered him to spend £200 rebuilding it (19/31). Astley stayed more than fifty years. The 1971 booklet calls him a magistrate, an agriculturalist and "a squarson of the best type", the parson who was also the village squire in all but name (19/02). Joseph Greene, rector from 1771, kept unusually careful registers, and John Hunt (1790–1820) saw the parish through enclosure, when the open fields were divided and the rector received land in place of tithes (19/02, 47/98).

Worship in the parish church, 1790–1904

The Georgian church was a place where everyone had a fixed seat, and the seat said who you were. That is the clearest lesson of C. J. Woodward's notes of 1907, which record the church as an old villager remembered it before the restoration of 1866 (05/03, 26/10).

Tithes, glebe and enclosure

First, though, the rector had to be paid, and until 1801 he was paid in kind. Tithe meant a tenth of the parish's corn, hay and young animals, collected in the fields. Welford's inclosure award, abstracted in a 24-page typescript, swept that away. It gave the rector, John Hunt, several allotments of land "for his tithes", freed the old inclosures, houses and gardens from tithe, and turned the rest into fixed yearly money rents (47/98). The rectors' histories date the commissioners' work to about 1794–1813 (19/45, 47/70). The booklet of 1971 says Hunt's father's legal firm handled the enclosure "without great acrimony" (19/02).

The result was a rector who farmed. In the 1890s and 1900s the directories describe the living as a rectory with about 107 acres of glebe and a residence, in the gift of Lord Sackville, worth about £280 a year (48/13–22). The glebe made the rectors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries landowners and employers as well as priests. It also tied them to the farming economy, which is why the Tithe Act of 1936 and the glebe sales that followed were such a break (19/02).

Box pews and the lordship pew

Woodward's informant described a church in which tall box pews filled the nave. From inside them a worshipper could see only the rector in his pulpit and, above the narrow chancel arch, a brightly painted Royal Arms with boards of the Ten Commandments beside it (05/03, 26/10). The pews were allotted to particular houses in the parish. A few benches were set aside for labourers and the poor.

One pew caused more trouble than all the rest. The "Lordship Pew" was for Lord Sackville's tenants and employees, and two families competed for it: the Vincents and the Gunns from

the mill. Whoever arrived first shut the others out. The rector, Mr Davenport, tried to end the squabble by taking the door off the pew. Old Vincent, "who was not a very regular churchgoer", then took to sitting with his legs stretched across the opening, so that anyone who wished to enter "had to step over them" (05/03).



FIG. 1.

The interior around 1850 (26/10, fig. 1). The Royal Arms and the tablets hang above the narrow chancel arch, and the high box pews fill the nave, exactly as Woodward's informant described.

Bassoon, fiddle and flutes

Music came from the west gallery. Mr Strong, the village grocer, led the singing. He announced each psalm and hymn with the words "Let us sing to the praise and glory of God" and then said whether the tune was "old fashioned" or "new fashion". The instruments played by villagers in the gallery were "the bassoon, the fiddle, the clarinet and two flutes" (05/03). The schoolchildren sat in a second gallery in the north aisle (26/10). This was the church band of Thomas Hardy's novels, and it vanished in Welford, as almost everywhere, when the Victorian restorers took the galleries down.

The Methodists were part of this congregation too. Woodward recorded that they attended the parish church in the morning, and that their leader, the shoemaker Henry Hopkins, sang with the rest (26/10). The chapter on the chapel below explains why they stopped.

The Davenports

Two rectors, father and son, spanned most of the nineteenth century. Charles Davenport, rector from 1820 to 1865, was also headmaster of Stratford Grammar School and vicar of Stratford, so he cannot have spent much time in Welford (26/10). The 1971 booklet calls him "pedestrian" (19/02). His son James became his curate in 1847 and rector in 1865, and also held Weston, which from then on was usually served by the rector of Welford (48/13–22). James held the parish until his death in 1904, fifty-seven years as curate and rector.

James Davenport was an early Tractarian, a follower of the Oxford Movement that sought to restore Catholic order and sacraments to the Church of England. He restored frequent Holy Communion and built the church school (19/02). In 1866–67 he oversaw a sweeping restoration paid for by the patroness, Elizabeth, Countess De La Warr: the galleries, box pews and Royal Arms went, the chancel arch was widened and the church refitted for a sacramental worship focused on the altar (26/10). The Tractarian tone may explain one small mystery. Georgian writers gave the church's dedication as the Holy Trinity, and the name St Peter seems to have reached the Ordnance Survey map through Davenport himself (26/10).

The village remembered him as a family man. H. M. Woodward's anecdotes say that James Mills of The Hollies made some of the first iron perambulators, and that one was bought by Rector Davenport "for his thirteen children" (21/22–66). When the tower burned on 13 December 1884, villagers carried the pews, pulpit and communion table out into the churchyard and stood on the aisle roofs to save the nave (24/04). The church reopened on St Peter's Day 1885, a choice of date that shows the new dedication had taken hold (see the companion St Peter's essay).

Confirmation at Campden

One of Woodward's informants, his elderly "Aunt Rebecca", remembered her confirmation. Welford was then in the diocese of Gloucester, and candidates had to travel to Campden to meet the bishop. Rebecca went with a party in a hired vehicle. Afterwards they dined at Campden, and on the way home they called at different houses to set people down. "At almost every house where they called they were offered a glass of wine each. Aunt Rebecca

says that she had five glasses before she got home" (21/38). It is a reminder that a confirmation was also a rare outing, and that Victorian piety and Victorian hospitality were not always far apart.

Bells, churchyard and the long search for a burial ground

The church spoke to the whole village through its bells, and received the whole village into its churchyard. Both made religion something nobody in Welford could quite avoid, whatever they believed.

Ringin' for sermons, kings and puddings

The churchwardens' accounts are full of bells. They paid for bell ropes, a new frame for the great bell in 1624 and £5 11s 2d for "mettle for ye bell" (17/01). They also paid the ringers every year on Gunpowder Plot day, 5 November, and for royal occasions: the restoration holiday on 29 May, Queen Mary's funeral in 1695, Queen Anne's accession in 1702 and George II's coronation in 1727 (17/01, 20/02). Bells told the village the time of service, but they were also the loudest way of announcing loyalty to the Crown and the Protestant succession.

In 1721 the old bells were taken up the Avon to Stratford and recast by Richard Sanders of Bromsgrove into a ring of six (24/04). The tenor carried a verse that sums up the purpose of a church bell: "I ring to sermon with a lusty bome" (24/04). Ale was bought at nearly every stage of the work, as the 1980s annotator of the accounts noted with some amusement (20/02).

The bells could be put to less solemn uses. When Welford celebrated the peace at the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, it burned "Boney" in effigy in Nathaniel Moore's orchard. Tables were set out down the High Street from the Maypole to the Bell Inn, each provided by one of the principal houses. So that all the puddings were cooked at the same time, "the church bells were rung when it was time to put them in to boil, and again when it was time to take them out" (01/95, 21/22-66).

Silence and a new ring

The tower fire of December 1884 wrecked the old ring, and James Barwell of Birmingham cast a new six in 1885 (24/04). By 1957 the wooden frame was worn out and the bells fell silent. The Rector, K. A. Gray, launched a restoration appeal in 1958 that raised about £1,600 (01/92, 24/04). Early in 1960 the bells went to John Taylor & Co. of Loughborough, and the parish magazine followed their progress (01/96, 18/34). They came back recast in an iron frame and named Gabriel, Rudhall, Timothy, Harold, Robert and Peter. The Archdeacon of Cheltenham rededicated them at Evensong on Michaelmas Eve, 28 September 1960 (01/94,24/04).



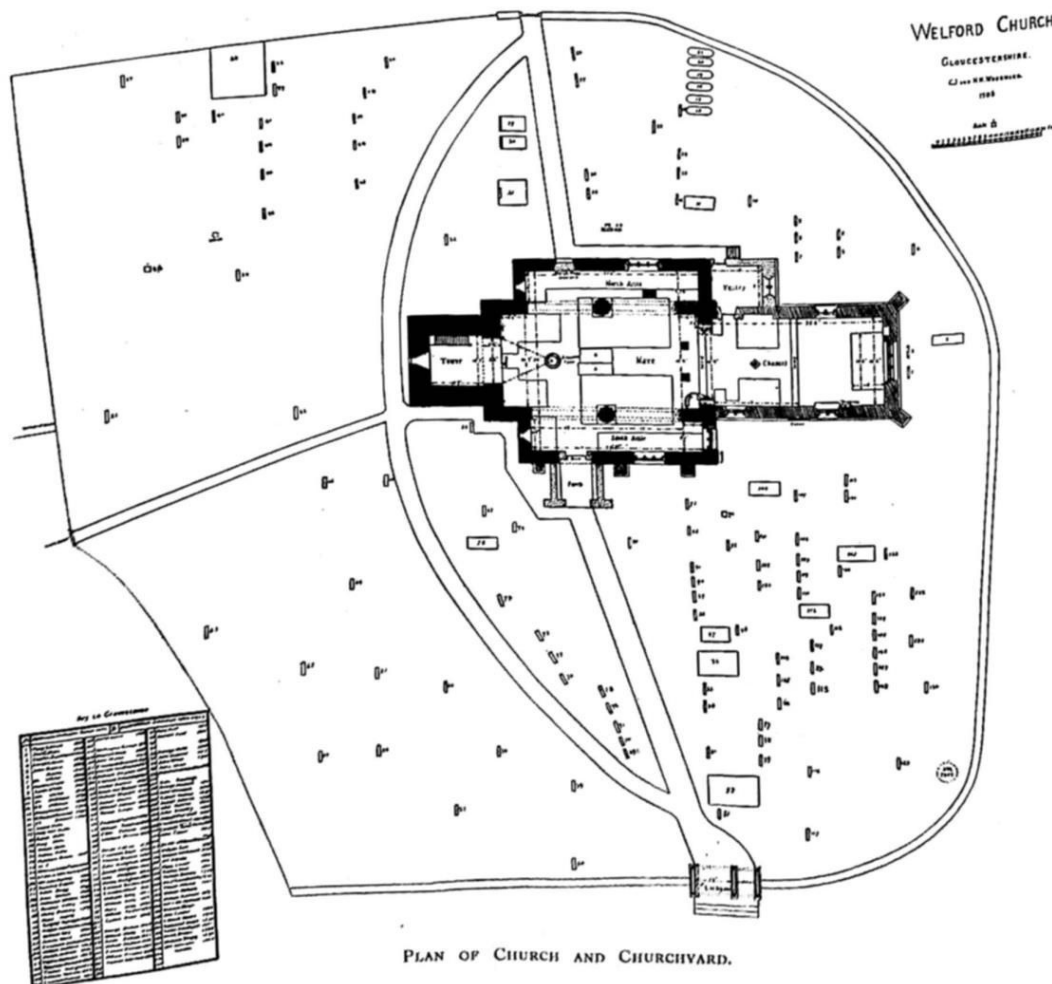
The recast bells in the churchyard in 1960, with the old lychgate behind them. The back of the print reads "St Peter - 6 bells recast 1960. New frame being assembled. Note Old Lych Gate - Rebuilt 1969" (41/29).

Ringling had always been, as one parish news item put it, "the coveted art of the male parishioners". On Sunday 9 December 1973 that changed: "for the first time ever a team of ladies from our own parish rang the Church bells for Family Communion" (01/90). The

cutting names Miss Hopkins, Mrs Hughes, Miss C. Evans, Miss B. Fisher, Miss A. Lintin, Miss K. Kershaw and Mrs D. Lovell, and thanks parents "for their excellent cooperation on practice evenings" (01/90). In 1980 two trebles, Constance and Rose, completed the octave, and the Dean of Gloucester dedicated them on 23 November (01/93, 24/04).

God's acre

The churchyard was the parish's only burial ground for most of its history. When C. J. Woodward and his nephew mapped it in 1906 they recorded about 133 marked graves around the church, an orderly sample of the many thousands of unmarked burials beneath (26/10). The lychgate at the entrance had two openings. Woodward noted that the wider one was used only at funerals, when the coffin rested under the roof until the rector came to meet it (26/10).



Plan of church and churchyard, made for Woodward's 1907 paper (26/10). The small marks are the graves Woodward and his nephew recorded around the church.

By then the churchyard was full. The parish council's minutes record a long and fruitless search for a new burial ground between 1911 and 1920. Lord Sackville offered half an acre, on condition that church people and Nonconformists had equal rights of burial, but the scheme collapsed and he sold the land (18/14, 09/01). In late 1933 the Parochial Church Council tried again. Its appeal leaflet explained that no new grave could be dug "without disturbing earlier burials", which was "painful to public sentiment". It proposed land on Rumer Hill, about a mile from the village, for about £120, and repeated Sackville's promise of equal rights for Nonconformists (09/02). The leaflet was signed by the Rector, A. J. Davis, and the churchwardens H. M. Woodward and Olive Hancox.

The village could not agree. A newspaper report of about 1935 describes "a bitter fight" ended by a poll, which voted 160 to 75 for a public cemetery under the Burial Acts rather than a churchyard extension (13/13). A parish meeting was called to adopt the Acts (09/07). Yet no cemetery followed. Thirty years later the Rector and wardens admitted that "no suitable site could be found". After the war the church had tried to buy a site but was outbid by "a speculative builder". Finally, in the mid-1960s, "a well known parishioner" gave land for a churchyard extension in which anyone who died in the parish would have the right to burial. The 1966 appeal asked for help to fence it and to rebuild the unsafe lychgate as an exact replica (09/05, 09/09). Some fifty-five years of argument about where Welford should bury its dead ended in a gift.

Churchwardens, vestry and the parish as government

For most of Welford's history "the parish" meant both a congregation and a unit of local government, and the same handful of men ran both. The churchwardens kept the church in repair, but they also relieved travellers, killed vermin, answered to the church courts and, with the overseers and constables chosen at the vestry meeting, looked after the poor and the roads. When the Rector and wardens deposited the parish records at the Gloucestershire Record Office in 1971, the catalogue listed not only registers and churchwardens' accounts but vestry notices, constables' and overseers' accounts, settlement, removal and bastardy papers, militia and highway surveyors' papers, and the records of the Freckleton and Rawlins charities (02/01).

The churchwardens' accounts

The wardens' accounts survive for 29 years between 1617 and 1763, and a Society member copied them out by hand (17/01, 02/03). Most years open with the archdeacon's visitation at Campden and appearances at the church courts at Stow and Gloucester, where the wardens had to answer for the state of the church and the behaviour of the parish (17/01). In 1617 they paid for a new church door, shingling, and "three hundred tenpenny nayles",

and a man came from the bishop "to see the decay of the church". From 1617 to 1628 they fought a lawsuit with "Vicar Hall", apparently the vicar of Weston, over glebe; in 1628 a Mr Clinke was paid to remove the suit from London (17/01, 20/02). That same year the mason Barnabie Trimnell and the carpenter Phillip Clough rebuilt the steeple, and the register records a special levy for the roof (17/01, 02/02).

Building materials came from close by: stone from Binton for the church walls, lead carted from Stratford, and constant small sums for clock repairs and bell ropes (02/03). The names of craftsmen recur, among them the bell-mender Battersbee and the Hornby carpenters, after whom Hornby Cottage is said to be named (20/02). Communion wine was a regular item, a reminder that the Prayer Book communion, though infrequent, was paid for out of the parish's own pocket (20/02).

Charity at the church door

From the 1640s the accounts show the church as a welfare office for people passing through. Travellers carrying passes or letters of request received a few pence: "a gentell woman with 4 children that came out of Ireland", soldiers and seamen, a maimed soldier after Monmouth's rebellion, people "lost by fire", and, in 1685, "a poore man and child ransomed from the turks" (17/01, 20/02, 02/03). The copied accounts also mention a "mad minister" given alms (02/03). The overseers paid weekly pensions to the village's own poor (02/03). Charity of this kind was a Christian duty, but it was also a way of moving strangers on before they could claim a settlement in the parish.

The wardens paid bounties on animals thought to damage crops. Hedgehogs, "urchins" in the accounts, fetched 4d each, adders 2d, and sparrows were paid for by the dozen. In 1740 the wardens paid for 70 hedgehogs, 45 adders and 70½ dozen sparrows (17/01). The modern annotator noted with interest that the accounts used the word "hedgehog" for the first time in 1729 (20/02).

A parish split between counties

Welford's church rates were complicated by geography. Until 1931 the village was in Gloucestershire, while its hamlets of Bickmarsh and Little Dorsington lay in Warwickshire. In the 1670s the Warwickshire justices had to decide whether the hamlets should pay a fifth part of Welford's church and poor levies. In 1681 they ruled that the hamlets should pay towards Bidford instead (10/11–16). The same tangle explains why Anne Griffin, in 1647, could complain that John Trapp had not paid Parliament's taxes on Bickmarsh (03/38). Welford stayed in the diocese of Gloucester even after it moved into Warwickshire in 1931, and it still does (19/02, 47/685).

From vestry to parish council

The vestry met in the church or, as often in English villages, in the inn. Gilda Gray's notes say the Bell Inn, formerly the King's Arms, was the village's meeting place until the school opened in 1863 (21/22–66). In 1894 the new parish council took over the vestry's civil business. The clergy did not disappear from village government: A. J. Davis, rector from 1904, was a district councillor and chaired the parish council in the 1930s (19/02, 60/09). The trust deed of the village playing field in 1934 allowed a quarter of its funds to be shared between the Parochial Church Council, the Methodist trustees, the Memorial Hall and the hospitals (57/04, 57/06–15). Church and chapel had become partners in the village's institutions rather than its government.

The office of churchwarden changed too. It had been a man's job for three centuries. By 1933 one of the two wardens was Olive Hancox (09/02), and from about 1949 into the 1970s Miss Hilary Sutton Hopkins served beside Harold Hawkins and later W. Hawkins (02/09, 49/07, 19/34, 18/06). The Book of Gossip of 1915 was itself the private notebook of a churchwarden, whose frank opinions of the Rector appear later in this essay (21/01–21).

Chapel folk: Methodism in Welford

The Wesleyan Methodist chapel in Chapel Street has been Welford's second religious home for over two hundred years, and the street is named after it. Its story is mostly told in the archive by its own people: a 2001 history by Ted Howell for the circuit magazine, the late Wendy Atkins's research on its nineteenth-century leader, newspaper reports, and recollections of the families who kept it going (44/31, 05/05, 05/06, 10/41–48).

Wesley's country

Methodism came to the Avon valley early. A circuit minister's letter of about 1930 recalls that the Rev. Samuel Taylor, vicar of Quinton from 1738 to 1772, was a friend of John Wesley and sat in the first Methodist Conference of 1744. Wesley visited Quinton, and in March 1776, refused the church at Campden, he preached at Pebworth instead: "the vicar of Pebworth was no weathercock, so I preached in his church and, I believe, not in vain" (05/09). An old Welfordian told the Society in 1972 that Wesley, on his rounds, always stayed with a Mr Eden at Pebworth (24/01).

In Welford itself, Ted Howell found records of "protestant dissenting subjects" of George III meeting in private houses in the 1790s (44/31). Benjamin Cox's survey of chapels in the Vale of Evesham quotes the Rev. W. H. B. Gibbon, writing in 1903, that Methodism "was first introduced into the district by a Welford family of the name of Adkins, who gave the site for the chapel" (15/05).

The barn chapel of 1801

The chapel's own tradition dates it to 1801, when "the land and a 'new erected building' were conveyed to a group of nine men for use as a chapel, the price being only five shillings". The building, Howell wrote, "was not much more than a barn", and throughout

the nineteenth century money was spent keeping it in repair (44/31). The Evesham circuit's list of chapels, printed about 1930, gives Welford as 1801, older than Evesham's own chapel of 1808 (05/09). A Society note says the chapel was "converted from a barn in the year 1810", the barn belonging to Chapel House, a small farm of the mid-1700s next door (05/05). The farmyard in front was pulled down and the duck pond filled in, but the old stable was kept "for the use of the visiting minister to put his horse in" (05/05).

The early Methodists did not see themselves as leaving the Church of England. Wesley had told his followers to attend their parish church, and in Welford they did. A thesis quoted by the Society says that until the 1860s the Wesleyans "still attended morning service in the church, walking in procession, as a witness, through the village – a very courageous act in a rural area, where the so called 'Dissenters' were different from the majority" (10/31). Howell agreed that "many people attended both places of worship" (44/31).

Henry Hopkins, shoemaker

For most of the nineteenth century the chapel meant one man. Henry Hopkins was born in 1820, the son of Thomas Hopkins, master boot and shoemaker, who was appointed church steward at the trustees' meeting of 1827 (44/31). Henry followed his father's trade in Chapel Street and became superintendent of the Sunday School at nineteen. He held it for sixty years. His obituary in the Stratford Herald said that when he began "there was no popular education and the children attending had to be taught the rudiments of education before they could receive the teaching of the School" (44/31). A note in the same bundle says the chapel was used for reading and writing lessons as well as singing and Sunday School (44/31).

Hopkins was musical, a trained singer who formed a chapel choir and gave evenings of sacred song. His son Charles and his daughter played the harmonium; Charles died aged seventeen in 1880 (44/31). The Herald's reports, from 1878 onward, show a busy chapel year:

- On 31 May 1878 the annual sermons for the Wesleyan Sabbath School drew friends from Stratford, Bidford and the surrounding villages, and "many were unable to get in". The next evening the teachers and scholars gave a service of song, "Eva", from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (44/31).
- In December 1878 Thompson Sharp of Ettington lectured on volcanoes and ended with "a miniature chemical exhibition of a volcano in action". In January 1879 a magic-lantern show illustrated *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the Life of Christ, with Sankey's hymns (44/31).
- In May 1882 a deputation of the Blue Ribbon Army from Bidford held a tea meeting, and about forty people, Hopkins among them, signed the temperance pledge (44/31).

- At the Sunday School festival of January 1886, 190 children, teachers and friends sat down to tea; then the tables were relaid with nuts, figs, oranges and mince pies for 200, and presents were delivered by a "postman" (44/31).

The Sunday School ranged from 18 scholars to 112. In February 1896 it was said that 800 scholars had passed through it in the fifty years since 1846 (44/31). Three of them became Methodist ministers in the nineteenth century, and one more since (44/31, 15/05). In 1898 the editor of *The Quiver* awarded Hopkins a bronze medal for 64 years' Sunday School work, and the chapel's renovation was completed in the Diamond Jubilee year of 1897. He died in April 1899, in his eightieth year (44/31).

One of the chapel's occasional preachers was Joseph Arch, the hedger who founded the agricultural labourers' union. H. M. Woodward was told in 1906 that Arch lodged in Welford while trimming hedges, was a teetotaler who studied geography in the evenings, and "sometimes preached at the Chapel". His voice was so strong that the Hornes could hear him from their house, and when he once addressed the villagers from a waggon behind Cress Farm he was heard "as far as the Coppice on Roomer Hill" (21/41).

The quarrel over schooling

The one serious break between church and chapel came over children. In about 1851 James Davenport, then curate to his father, proposed an Anglican Sunday School and then a day school on land given by Countess De La Warr (17/07). Gilda Gray, the Rector's wife, told the story from the chapel's side: the Wesleyans already had a Sunday School, and "Another Sunday School? This was too much! – the Wesleyans stopped attending the parish church – a rift between chapel and church started to appear, and increased as the years went by. The tragedy of it all!" (17/07). Howell put it more mildly, saying that "a disagreement with the local Anglican church over schooling" led the Methodists to start holding formal services of their own (44/31). Wendy Atkins concluded that relations were friendly "at all times, except for the period in the 1840's when education was discussed" (44/31). Hopkins later sat on the School Board, so the chapel had a voice in village education after all (44/31). The companion essay on Welford's schools tells that story in detail.

Rebuilding the front, 1913

On Good Friday 1913 the trustees decided to renovate the chapel, and found "much more required attention than had been originally contemplated". A subscription list, an August Bank Holiday social and a fête in the Park, which raised £100, paid for a new front with arched windows and a porch (05/05, 05/06). On a Saturday in November 1913 memorial stones were set in the new front wall, each with an offering of £5. Florence Hopkins laid the first in memory of her grandfather Henry. Others were laid by Mr Hyde of Evesham for the trustees, Miss Sophia Biss, Mrs E. V. Parriss, Alfred Davis for the Sunday School scholars, and Mr Gray of Bidford in memory of his father, who had often preached there (05/06).

The day showed how far relations with the parish church had mended. The service after the stone-laying was held "in the schoolroom, kindly lent by the Rector", and tea was served in the Gymnasium lent by Cleveland Green. The day's collections came to nearly £8, and "the Wesleyans of Welford are to be congratulated upon the way in which they have worked heartily together" (05/06).



"Opening New Wesleyan Chapel, Welford-on-Avon". The postcard is filed with the date 1914, after the 1913 rebuilding of the front (16/27; a second print is 16/46).

Chapel House and the Davis family

Alfred Davis succeeded Hopkins as Sunday School superintendent. He lived at Chapel House, joined to the chapel, and his house was open to visiting preachers (42/29). His family were the core of twentieth-century Welford Methodism. Circuit magazines carry obituaries of Alfred, who died on Christmas Day 1930, and his wife Emily, who died in October 1933 (42/29). In 1930 the chapel added a new brick vestry. A circuit magazine of that year shows the opening, and lists the Evesham circuit's thirteen chapels with 414 members. Weston's own Methodist chapel, built in 1836, was by then "now closed and for sale" (05/09).



"The Welford Vestry Opening", from page 7 of a Methodist circuit magazine of about 1930 (05/09). None of the people is named.

The families who supported the chapel can still be named. The Parrisses, Harrises and Hancoxes were its mainstays, and Chris Parriss was the first person married there after it was licensed for weddings (05/05). Notes compiled in 2013 identify Welford members who gave a guinea each to the Methodist Twentieth Century Fund of 1899–1904. They include the Bassons of The Orchard, whose daughter Mabel "played the harmonium with aplomb", and Gladys Hancox, who "could be seen walking out every Sunday in her Sunday-best finery – as opposed to her regular apparel of Wellington boots and aprons!" (10/41–48). In 1934 the Methodist Sunday School staged *Aladdin*, produced by Mabel Basson and Hubert Parriss, and for its outing the Cornishman express was stopped at Milcote station to take the children to the seaside (03/12).

Two hundred years

In July 1981 the chapel celebrated its 180th anniversary with a service that included "Tell me the stories of Jesus", sung by the Sunday School, and a talk on the "History of our Church 1801–1981" (05/09). For the bicentenary in 2001 Ted Howell wrote that "a congregation of about 40 today would be considered almost a full house". The church council had decided to sell Chapel House, whose rent had long been the chapel's main income, to pay for new toilets, a tea room and a meeting room. The village's children's groups, "Sunrisers" and "Sunsetters", were by then led by "a very capable and enthusiastic Anglican lady" (44/31). The celebrations ran from 2 to 5 September 2001, with a history exhibition and a thanksgiving service led by the Rev. Donald Eadie (10/11–16). The chapel's old cups and

saucers, printed "Wesleyan", survived to remind members that their society was older than the Methodist union of 1932 (44/31).

Church, school and charity

Until the twentieth century almost every school and charity in Welford was religious in origin, run by clergy, or held in trust "for the poor of the parish" by the rector and churchwardens. The archive's education sources are covered fully in the companion essay on Welford's schools; this section picks out what they show about religion.

Teaching the boys to read

The first recorded school was a religious one. About 1531 Tewkesbury monks served Welford's chantry and its school, "where four boyes be taught" (26/14). Fifty years later the Puritan-minded rector Philip Jones started a school in a house in Church Lane (19/02, 47/70). In the eighteenth century Richard Rawlins left, by his will of 1727, £3 a year for a master to teach eight poor boys to read and write. His tablet on the chancel wall asks the rich "to increase its Fund and to respect his Grave" (26/10). Reading was the key to the Bible and the Prayer Book, and every charity school of the period had a religious purpose as well as a practical one.

The clergy taught informally too. H. M. Woodward recorded that Miss Hotchkiss, "a lame woman who was educated by Mr Hunt a former Rector of Welford", kept a little school in a cottage, and that his own aunts learned their letters from her (21/39).

Two Sunday Schools and a National School

By the early nineteenth century the Wesleyans were teaching village children to read in their chapel on Sundays, "because there was no popular education" (44/31). The Church responded through the National Society, founded in 1811 "for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church" (10/31). James Davenport raised £328 for a Church day school on land given by Countess De La Warr and Baroness Buckhurst, and the National Society paid for its floor (17/07). The school's opening is dated 1851, 1852, 1863 and 1865 in different sources, a muddle discussed in the schools essay. Its papers, from 1854 to 1947, were kept with the parish records and deposited at Gloucester in 1971 (02/01).

The Church school was the cause of the church-chapel rift described above. Yet it also became shared ground. In 1873 a School Board was formed, with an elected board on which the Methodist Henry Hopkins sat (46/98, 44/31). In 1866 the faculty for the church's restoration allowed services to be held in the schoolroom while work went on (02/01), and in 1913 the Rector lent the same schoolroom to the Wesleyans for the service after their stone-laying (05/06).

Parish charities

The directories of the 1890s and 1900s describe Welford's charities as worth "about £4 yearly", with a share in the Cooper Trust education charity (48/13–22). The parish records deposited in 1971 included papers of the Freckleton and Rawlins charities (02/01). These small funds were administered by the rector and wardens, and they were not always administered well. In 1912 the new parish council complained that the income of the Rawlins charity was being misapplied (18/14).

Charity also flowed outwards. Victorian evangelical churchwomen like "Aunt Sophie" Garrett, described in the 1915 Book of Gossip, did nearly all their needlework "for the benefit of the Church Missionary Society or the Zenana Mission", which sent women missionaries to India (21/01–21). The chapel sent the proceeds of Henry Hopkins's song evenings to the Methodist Children's Home in Bonner Road, London (44/31). At the Coronation of 1953 the village celebration committee, chaired by the Rector, bought presentation Bibles for the children through the British and Foreign Bible Society, at a cost of £35. The last £7 15s 1d of the fund was shared in 1955 between Welford Church, Weston Church, Welford Chapel and the Memorial Hall (03/06–03/08).

A missionary from Welford

One Welford-born man took the village's faith further than anyone. John Howell was born in Welford on 23 January 1861 and trained as a blacksmith and maker of farm implements (07/06). He became a lay preacher and YMCA worker in Birmingham and was baptised at Christ Church, Aston, in 1885. When a fire destroyed the Baptist Missionary Society's property at Leopoldville in 1886, he heard the appeal from his minister and decided: "I have no money to give, but if the Lord wants me I will give myself for Congo" (07/06). He went out in 1889, built the mission's paddle-steamer *Pioneer* at Kinshasa, made 170,000 bricks for the school-chapel at Bolobo, studied at a Birmingham hospital so that he could act as the mission's unofficial doctor, and served on the Congo General Conference of Missions. His memorial notice, written about 1927, says he died with a smile as "How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds" was sung to him (07/06). The blacksmith's skill that served Welford's farms built a steamer on the Congo.

Faith in the twentieth century

The twentieth century opened with a rector who wanted to be a squire and closed with a priest-in-charge shared among several villages. In between, Welford's churches marked two world wars, lost the farmland that had paid their clergy, welcomed an Archbishop of Canterbury, and turned from running the village to serving it.

The last farming parson

Arthur James Davis came from Cainscross, near Stroud, where Gilda Gray recorded that he had shown courage in a cholera epidemic, and "read himself in" at Welford in October 1904 (19/02, 21/02). He was rector for 43 years. The official memory of him is generous. He was a farmer-rector, a district councillor, chairman of the parish council and "a shrewd judge in the cattle markets of the Midlands" (19/02). The east window of 1924 remembers his elder son Basil, who died while an Oxford undergraduate (19/02).

The churchwarden who kept the Book of Gossip from 1915 was less kind. He found the Rector "a self centered anxious man" who rendered the services well but often lost his place, and in the pulpit was "a windy person and weariness". Yet he was "not a hypocrite", for "he preaches to himself as much as to us". Davis "would like to be a 'Squarson' – the strong willed, autocratic, but kindly ruler of his parish", but was "far too nervous and uncertain of himself for the part" (21/02). A note added in February 1919 records that the Rector's wife had become a Christian Scientist (21/03).

The same notebook shows how much religion still sorted Welford society in 1915. The Haynes family at The Ashes were "old fashioned evangelical" church people, with "such a dread and hatred of popery and ritualism" that the writer suspected "there is more hatred of Popery than love of God" in Mrs Haynes. Her husband worried about "the plots and intrigues of Jesuits and Ritualists" (21/04). John Wright of Church Farm, opposite the Rectory gates, was a Congregationalist and his wife a Baptist; he was a local preacher, though the writer doubted he was "really a religious man" (21/11). A young man of the Laurence family was in Australia "working for the Church with a view to taking orders" (21/06).

The First World War left the parish its main memorial. The oak chancel screen, carved by Joseph Northcott of Devon and erected in 1926, is dedicated to the men of the parish who died, with a tablet naming nineteen of them (see the companion First World War essay). Davis saw the sale of the Milcote estate in 1923 and the move from Gloucestershire to Warwickshire in 1931, though the parish stayed in the diocese of Gloucester (19/02). The Tithe Act of 1936 forced the sale of much of the glebe. The 1971 booklet called Davis "the last, for good or ill, of the notable agrarian rectors of Welford" (19/02).

Karl and Gilda Gray, 1948–1971

Karl Ashbolt Gray arrived in January 1948. His first task was repair, and his appeal of December 1949, signed with the churchwardens H. S. Hopkins and H. Hawkins, asked "every responsible person in the parish" to help find £1,200 of a £1,650 bill. Members of the Parochial Church Council called on each household to collect gifts and promises (02/09). Weston's church was restored in 1953–54, the Rectory modernised in 1958–59, and the bells recast in 1960 (02/11).

Gray was also, as rectors had been for centuries, the village's natural chairman. He chaired the committees for the Festival of Britain in 1951 and the Coronation in 1953 (55/01–03).

The Coronation plan began with a church service in the morning and a short service on Maypole Green at three o'clock, before the children's dancing, the tea, and a bonfire and beast roast on Welford Hill (03/09). His wife, Gilda Gray, was an equally public figure. She served 23 years on the parish council, wrote the histories of the rectors and the Women's Institute, collected witch stories from old villagers, and drafted a talk on witchcraft on the back of an envelope addressed to her at the Rectory (03/04-05, 47/70, 21/52-66, 18/39).

The parish magazine, numbered from 1949, shows the weekly life of the joint parish of St Peter's, Welford, and All Saints', Weston. The October 1953 issue lists Holy Communion, Mattins, Evensong and Sunday School at both churches, a Welford harvest festival on 2 October, and Weston's patronal festival on All Saints' Day (49/07). Notices ask that "Churching, Baptism and Marriage" be arranged in good time, and that the Rector be told when anyone is ill. Beside them sits the monthly infant welfare clinic in the Memorial Hall, with free cod liver oil (49/07). The choir had spent 10 September on an outing through Malvern, Abergavenny and the Wye valley, ending at Tewkesbury: "Deo Gratias" (49/07).



12 September 1953: from left, the Rector Karl Gray, churchwarden Hilary Hopkins, Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher, churchwarden Harold Hawkins and, probably, the verger Sidney Quiney (49/06).

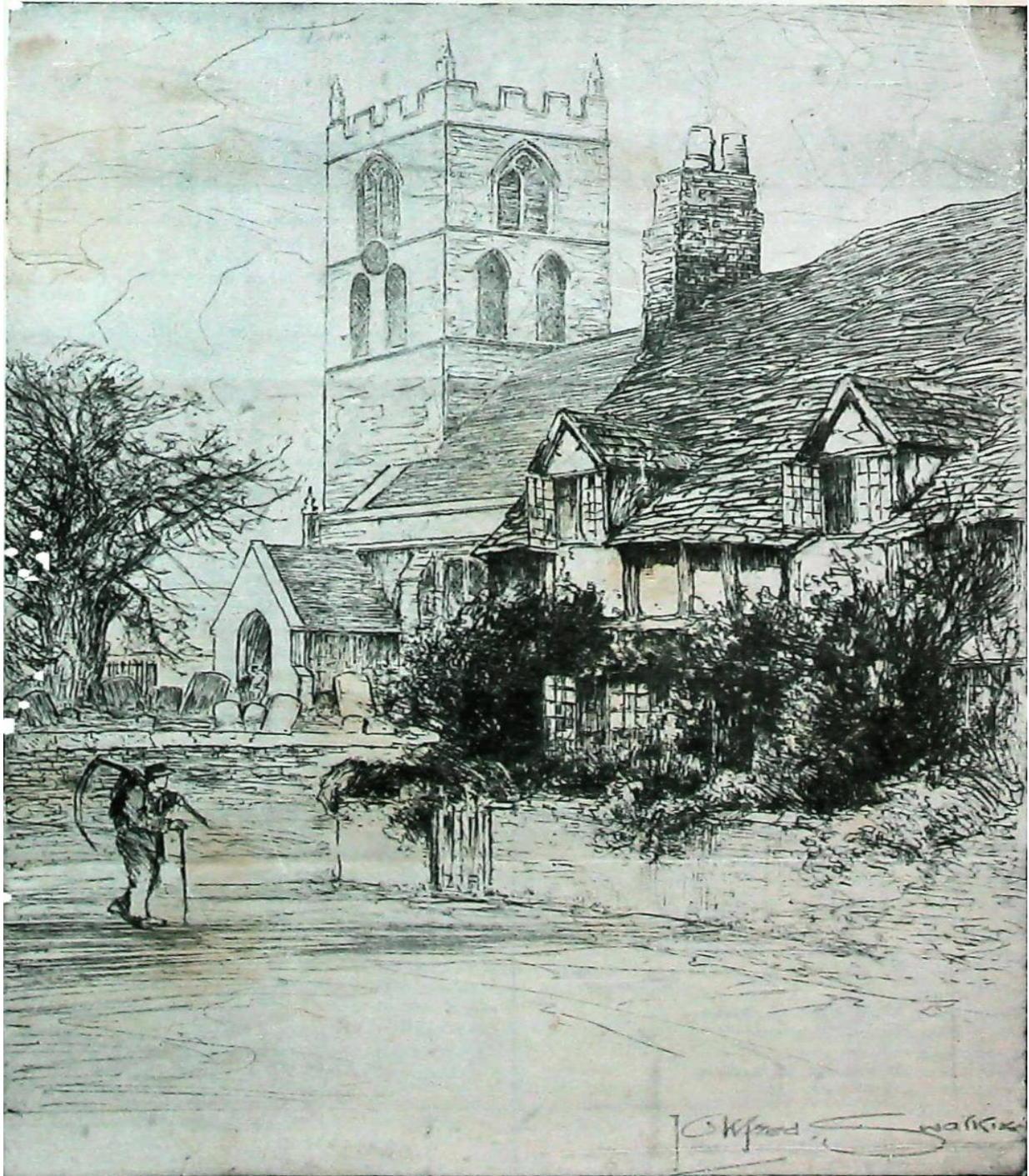
Two days later Welford had its most distinguished visitor. On 12 September 1953 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, married Arthur Michael Harington Fisher and Nancy Gillian Savile Roberts at St Peter's (49/07). The bridegroom shared the Archbishop's surname, which suggests a family wedding, though the magazine does not say so. Photographs of the Archbishop in cope and mitre at the church door were kept by the bride, Jane Fisher, and later given to the Society (49/05, 49/06).

In August 1971, at Evensong, Gray dedicated an oak board listing the rectors since 1065, lettered by John Bowler and given by Miss Constance Howlett (19/02). Ill-health forced him to resign that month. On 31 August, 55 parishioners went by coach and car to see him

instituted as vicar of Somerford Keynes with Shorncote, near Cirencester (19/48). A copy of that parish's history is in the Society's archive, presumably a souvenir of the day (30/12).

A changing Church

The magazines of the early 1970s show the wider Church changing. In June 1971 the Bishop of Gloucester warned that only 436 and 437 men had been ordained in the last two years, against 600 needed (19/34). That spring eleven candidates from Weston and six from Welford were confirmed at Stow-on-the-Wold (19/34). In October 1971, during the vacancy, the Four Oaks Methodist Church Choir gave a recital for the church fabric fund, a small sign of easier relations between the denominations (19/48).



The cover etching used on the parish magazine in the 1960s and 1970s, here from August 1972 (18/06).

Gray's successor, J. David Strong, arrived in 1972. In August he introduced an experimental pattern of 9.30 at Welford and 11.00 at Weston, with a shorter family service at Welford on the fourth Sunday (18/06). The Mothers' Union hosted the Campden Deanery festival, with Jack Marshall's team ringing the bells, and the church garden party in the Rectory garden made a record £395 (18/06). Later rectors were David Hawkins (1979), George Baisley

(1983), Philip Berrow (1987) and Roy Wyatt (1995), followed by the Rev. Tirsh Grigor as priest-in-charge from 2006 (47/67, 47/70). The old Rectory beside the church was sold in 1979 and a new one built (47/70).

The money had to be found locally. A 1993 appeal sought £20,000 for the two churches: £6,500 for Welford's tower and £12,000 for Welford in all, and £8,000 for Weston (02/10). In 2006 the parishes became part of the Benefice of Quinton and Welford with Weston (47/68). Welford's rector had served Weston since the 1860s; now one priest served three villages. The Society's own officers show how bound up the church still was with village life. Howard Bastow, its chairman until his death in 1988, was remembered as a churchwarden, parish councillor and keen walker (38/01).

Wakes, witches and the older faith

Official religion in Welford was always surrounded by an unofficial one. The church's calendar gave the village its feasts, and the church's words and sacraments gave its folk magic some of their power. The best evidence comes from two collectors: H. M. Woodward, who wrote down old stories in 1906 and 1907, and Gilda Gray, the Rector's wife, who added more from living memory around 1970 (21/22–66).

The Wake

The Welford Wake was the village's great annual feast. "Years ago the Wake was a great institution in Welford. People came to the village from all the country round, everybody had a houseful of visitors and it was a time of great eating & drinking" (21/37). A later note says it was held "in front of the lychgate", before Calthorpe Cottage was built, with an ox or a pig or both roasted in Boat Orchard and "much feasting & dancing" (21/56). The Monday evening after Wake Sunday was the time for wrestling, which began once the public houses had closed (03/13).

Wakes began as church festivals. A cutting from the parish magazine of July 1883, which Mrs Horne sent to Woodward, explains that they were annual feasts "to commemorate the dedication of Churches", when people came to the church with candles to "wake", or watch, in their devotions. When Charles I's government tried to suppress wakes in 1627–31, one bishop reported that on those days "the service of God was more solemnly performed, the Church much better frequented, than on any other Sundays" (21/45). The magazine was evidently defending a custom some Victorians thought disorderly.

A later hand on the wrestling note says that Wake Sunday was "the Sunday nearest 19 July" (03/13). That date fits neither St Peter's Day (29 June) nor the movable feast of the Holy Trinity, the two dedications the church has had. The parish magazine of July 1884 confirms the timing, announcing that "Sunday the 20th will be Welford Wake" (21/46), but the archive does not explain why the feast fell then. The Wake survived into the 1950s as a fund-raising event: its account contributed to the Coronation celebrations in 1953 (03/06–03/08).

Loyal toasts and bonfires

Some customs were political as much as religious. At the old Boat Inn, a stranger who walked in found a poker quietly put in the fire. When it was hot, a loyal toast was given and the poker plunged into the chimney beam, leaving rows of small holes that could still be seen. The tradition, Mrs Gray wrote, was that "Welford was always loyal to the old ways, the Stuarts, the 'King over the water'". A stranger who did not recognise the ritual paid for a quart of ale (21/56). The parish church, meanwhile, paid its ringers to celebrate the Protestant deliverance of Gunpowder Plot day every November (17/01). Both loyalties lived side by side in the same village.

"Welford for Witches"

The most striking thing in the folklore is how long Welford believed in witches. Roughly a third of Woodward's notebook is witchcraft (21/22–66), and an old couplet, recited at a Society meeting in 1972, summed up the village's reputation (24/01):

Welford for Witches, Binton for Bitches, & Weston the End of the World.

The stories Woodward collected in 1906 follow patterns found all over England.

- **The wounded hare.** John Wilson, coming home from shooting one evening, wounded a hare in the leg. It ran straight to old Mrs Marshall's cottage at the corner of the Cress Hill road and jumped through the window. Wilson looked in and found no hare, only the old woman "sitting on the floor nursing her leg ... and cursing Wilson". She "was obliged to leave the village because of her supposed witchcraft" (21/30).
- **The bewitched wife.** A man named Smith, by 1906 in the Stratford workhouse, complained to the Rector, Mr Davenport, that Susan Harwood of Weston had bewitched his wife (21/30).
- **The baker's basket.** A baker delivering to the Rectory refused to go to the back door, because a witch there "would make the bread jump out of his basket" (21/30).
- **The brew that would not boil.** A maid at the Moat House in Dorsington refused the witch Edkins her balm on brewing day, and the brew would not boil until she raked out the fire (21/34).

The witch's power was imagined as a kind of reversed church. Mr Horne told Woodward that "if you wished to become a witch or a wizard you had to go into the Church porch at midnight, repeat the Lord's Prayer backwards, and take bread and wine into the mouth and then spit them out again" (21/30). The recipe only makes sense to people who took the prayer and the sacrament very seriously.

Witches in living memory

Gilda Gray found the belief still alive in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1970 Arch Gould, an 85-year-old market gardener, told her that Welford's witch used to sit on a gate on the Binton road and bewitch the horses in the field opposite, so that they would not draw the plough or the harvest waggons, while she sat "shrieking with laughter" (21/52-66). Mrs Wilson Matthews, who died in 1969, remembered her father, William Hawker, telling her that a witch called "L — G—" turned herself into a cockerel and crowed from a stile on the Binton road until the plough horses bolted. Hawker was the Methodist Sunday School superintendent (21/55). Chapel piety and witch belief sat in the same head.

The fullest story came from Mary Ann Russell of Tower View, Church End Lane, born in 1874, who died in 1958. As a small girl she saw her widowed mother fall ill with a shaking sickness, and one night heard shrieking and laughter downstairs: "It was the witch ma'am, she was giving a party!" Her mother walked to the Wise Man of Redditch, who took a shilling and told her to cross water on the way home, then scratch herself and say "ABRACADABRA" before the first woman she met. At Binton Bridges they met "L... H...", who "ran down Meadow Lane screaming". The mother recovered. The woman, Mary said, used to try to entice children into the river meadows in fog, and "had to leave the village. I can remember seeing her go with her few sticks piled into a cart with her black cat sitting on the top" (21/53).

The 1972 panel of old Welfordians still remembered the remedy: if a witch had harmed you, you should "nick her arm & draw blood & she couldn't do it on you again". Mr Harris's grandfather, a carpenter, told a witch that "if I have to make your coffin I'll see you lay on some nails" (24/01). Gilda Gray herself prepared a talk on witchcraft, tracing it from medieval ideas of magic through the 1542 statute and the repeal of 1735 to Margaret Murray's theories and the modern revival (18/39).

Ghosts and graves

Woodward also recorded ghosts. Spot Loggin, a former rector of Long Marston and a skilled blacksmith, was said to drive his trap along Bird Lane at midnight (21/33). Under the hearthstone of a cottage beside the churchyard, Captain Palmer's builders found a skeleton and some coins, which the village took to be the bones of a Jewish pedlar believed to have been murdered there about sixty years before (21/08). These stories cluster, like the witches, around the church, its porch, its rectors and its burial ground: the places where the boundary between the living and the dead was supposed to be thin.

Where the sources disagree or are thin

Much of Welford's religious history comes from local writers copying, and sometimes improving, each other. The main conflicts and gaps are set out below so that readers can weigh them.

Disagreements

Question	What the sources say	Best reading
When the chapel began	Meetings in private houses in the 1790s; land and a "new erected building" conveyed in 1801 (44/31, 05/09, 15/05); converted from a barn in 1810 (05/05); "built in 1861" (05/06, Herald 1913)	1801 for the society and first building; 1810 may be a later conversion or a slip; 1861 may mark a rebuild. No deed survives in the archive to settle it.
What happened in 1913	Cox says the chapel was "rebuilt"; E. Howell wrote that "only the front wall was rebuilt" (15/05)	Howell and the Herald (05/06) agree on a new front, window and porch, not a new chapel.
Who gave the chapel site	The Adkins family (Gibbon, 1903, in 15/05); a conveyance to nine men for five shillings (44/31)	Both may be true if the Adkinses were the sellers.
When church and chapel fell out	"the 1840's" (44/31); about 1851, when Davenport proposed a Sunday School (17/07); the Wesleyans attended church "until the 1860's" (10/31)	The quarrel probably began around 1851 and the break was complete by the 1860s.
Henry Hopkins	Superintendent "60+ years", but a medal in 1898 for 64 years; died aged 78, or "in his eightieth year" (44/31)	Born 1820 and died April 1899, so 78 or 79.
Davis or Davies of Chapel House	"Alfred Davis" in the Herald and family papers (05/06, 42/29); "Alfred Davies" and "Edgar Davies" in a Society note (05/05)	Davis, as in the certificates.
Richard Quene's deprivation	Under Mary Tudor, for marrying (19/02, 47/70); under Edward VI (18/23)	Mary's reign fits a deprivation for marriage; under Edward clergy could marry.
The 1273 patron	Matthew Paris, "Abbot of St Denis and Prior of Deerhurst" (47/70)	Matthew Paris was a monk of St Albans who died in 1259 (general knowledge, not in the archive), so this is a confusion.

Nicholas of Cleve or de Clare	"Nicholas of Cleve" in the Hockaday abstracts (20/02); "de Clare" in the booklets (19/02, 47/70)	The abstracts are closer to the record.
Philip Jones and Drake	Both booklets say he was Drake's chaplain on the <i>Golden Hind</i> (19/02, 47/70)	Drake's chaplain on the voyage is usually named as Francis Fletcher (general knowledge), so the claim needs checking.
Jones's school	Tower View, Church End Lane (19/02, 19/45); Box Tree Cottage, Church Lane (47/70)	Unresolved; possibly two names for neighbouring houses.
The tower fire	1884 (26/10, 24/04, 47/70); 1888 (19/02, 19/45, 02/08)	13 December 1884, fixed by the Herald report (24/04).
Walter Williams's death	1484, 1454 and 1488 (26/10, 02/06)	1484 is the most common reading of a worn inscription.
The 1588 flood	13 July (02/04, 05/04); 18 July (02/02, 26/10, 21/22–66); one copy reads "1533" (05/04)	July 1588; "1533" is a misreading.
Wake Sunday	"Sunday nearest 19 July" (03/13); Sunday 20 July in 1884 (21/46)	Consistent, but unexplained by either dedication.
The witch driven out	"L... H..." in Mary Ann Russell's story (21/53); "L— G—", the cockerel witch (21/55)	Possibly one woman remembered two ways, or two different women.

Two smaller points: Gilda Gray places Bishop Mauger's consultation with the Pope at "the Lateran Council" (47/70), but Mauger died in 1212, before the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 (general knowledge); and the 1913 memorial stone is dated 20 November, a Thursday, while the Herald says the stones were laid on a Saturday (05/06).

Gaps

- **Chapel records.** Wendy Atkins found "no records or account books up to 1900" for the long middle of the nineteenth century, so the chapel's story between the 1820s and 1879 rests on later memory and the Stratford Herald (44/31). The 1801 deed and the 1868 Charity Commission certificate she cites are not in the archive.
- **Numbers.** The archive has no figures from the 1851 census of religious worship and no bishops' visitation returns for Welford, so it cannot say how many people went to

church or chapel at any date before the parish magazines. The chapel's congregation of "about 40" in 2001 is the only modern figure (44/31).

- **Other denominations.** Apart from the Wesleyans, the archive shows only individuals: a Congregationalist and a Baptist at Church Farm in 1915, and a Christian Scientist at the Rectory (21/03, 21/11). There is no evidence of a Catholic, Quaker or other congregation meeting in Welford.
- **Parochial Church Council minutes.** The PCC's own minutes and most vestry records went to the Gloucestershire Record Office in 1971 and were not scanned for this archive (02/01).
- **Recent decades.** After the 1990s the sources thin out to guidebooks, a 2001 chapel history and a few notices. The archive does not record, for example, how the 2006 benefice changed the pattern of services.

Sources

All references are to the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive, by folder and item number, as scanned in the project's Claude 1000 folder.

Church history and the rectors. 20/02: notebook digest of Welford's ecclesiastical history from the Hockaday abstracts, with notes on the churchwardens' accounts (1980s). 19/02: *The Rectors of Welford-on-Avon*, booklet for the Rectors' Board, 1971. 19/45: "Rectors of Welford", manuscript, about 1970. 47/70: Gilda Gray, *Rectors Past and Present*, 1996, revised to 2006. 47/67: list of rectors 1065–1987. 18/23: manuscript talk on the Reformation at Welford. 03/38: Committee for Plundered Ministers and diocesan notes, 1646–1679. 19/31: rectory dilapidations, 1713–15. 02/06: typescript of the Victoria County History entry for Welford (VCH Warwickshire vol. 5, 1949). 07/01: Domesday notes. 29/04–06: Deerhurst guides.

The church and its worship. 26/10: C. J. Woodward, notes on Welford church, 1907, with J. M. Woodward's drawings, the churchyard plan and the church plate. 05/03: Woodward's notes on the pews and church music. 02/01–12: parish records catalogues (1965, 1971), copied churchwardens' and overseers' accounts, the 1588 flood memorandum, appeals of 1949 and 1993, and the list of works 1948–71. 17/01: churchwardens' accounts 1617–1763, typed transcript. 05/04: 1588 flood extract. 47/68, 47/685, 26/14: church guides and notes, 2003–2009. 47/98: inclosure award abstract.

Bells and churchyard. 24/04: E. A. Harper, talk on the bells, 1999. 01/90–99: bells papers, including "Belles of the Bells" (1974), the 1958 appeal, orders of service for 1960 and 1980, and parish magazines of 1960. 41/29: photograph of the bells, 1960. 18/14: parish council minute digest, 1908–25. 09/01, 09/02, 09/05, 09/07, 09/09: burial ground papers, 1911–1966. 13/13: newspaper report of the burial poll, about 1935.

Methodism. 44/31: Brian Atkins bundle, 2001, with Ted Howell's chapel history from the *Stratford & Evesham Methodist Circuit News* and Wendy Atkins's chapter on Henry Hopkins. 05/05: Society note on the Wesleyan chapel. 05/06: *Stratford Herald*, 28 November 1913, stone-laying. 05/09: circuit magazine page with the 1930 vestry opening, and the 1981 anniversary service. 15/05: extract from B. C. Cox, *Chapels and Meeting Houses in the Vale of Evesham*, with E. Howell's correction. 16/27, 16/46: postcard of the new chapel's opening. 42/29: the Davis family of Chapel House. 10/41–48: Methodist donors, notes of 2013. 10/11–16: parish magazine, September 2001. 03/12: Methodist Sunday School *Aladdin*, 1934.

Education and charity. 17/07: Gilda Gray on Welford's schools. 10/31: D. Ray, "Education in Welford and Weston", quoting J. Colston's thesis. 46/98: directory entries. 48/13–22: directories, 1850s–1910s. 07/06: memorial notice of the Rev. John Howell. 03/06–03/09: Coronation accounts and plans, 1953.

Twentieth century. 21/01–21: "The Welford Book of Gossip", 1915–1950. 49/05–07: Archbishop Fisher's visit and the October 1953 parish magazine. 19/34, 19/48, 18/06, 18/34: parish magazines, 1960–1972. 55/01–03: Festival of Britain and Coronation committee minutes, 1951–55. 57/04, 57/06–15: playing field trust deed, 1934. 03/04–05: Gilda Gray on the Women's Institute. 30/12: history of Somerford Keynes. 38/01: Society minutes, 1986–2000.

Folklore. 21/22–66: H. M. Woodward, *Welford Anecdotes*, 1906–07, continued by Gilda Gray about 1970. 24/01: Society "quiz" of old Welfordians, 15 September 1972. 03/13: note on the Wake wrestling, 1940. 18/39: Gilda Gray's notes for a talk on witchcraft. 01/95: "An Unusual Use of Church Bells", parish magazine, October 1960.

Pictures. 26/10 (church about 1850, interior, church plate, churchyard plan), 29/04–06 (Deerhurst guide), 16/27 (chapel opening), 05/09 (vestry opening, 1930), 41/29 (bells, 1960), 49/06 (Archbishop Fisher, 1953), 18/06 (parish magazine cover, 1972).

Companion essays in this project. *St Peter's Church, Welford-on-Avon: a history*; *Education in Welford-on-Avon*; *Welford-on-Avon in the First World War*; *The Welford Maypole*.

Statements marked "general knowledge" in the section on disagreements come from outside the archive and were not checked against a source for this essay.