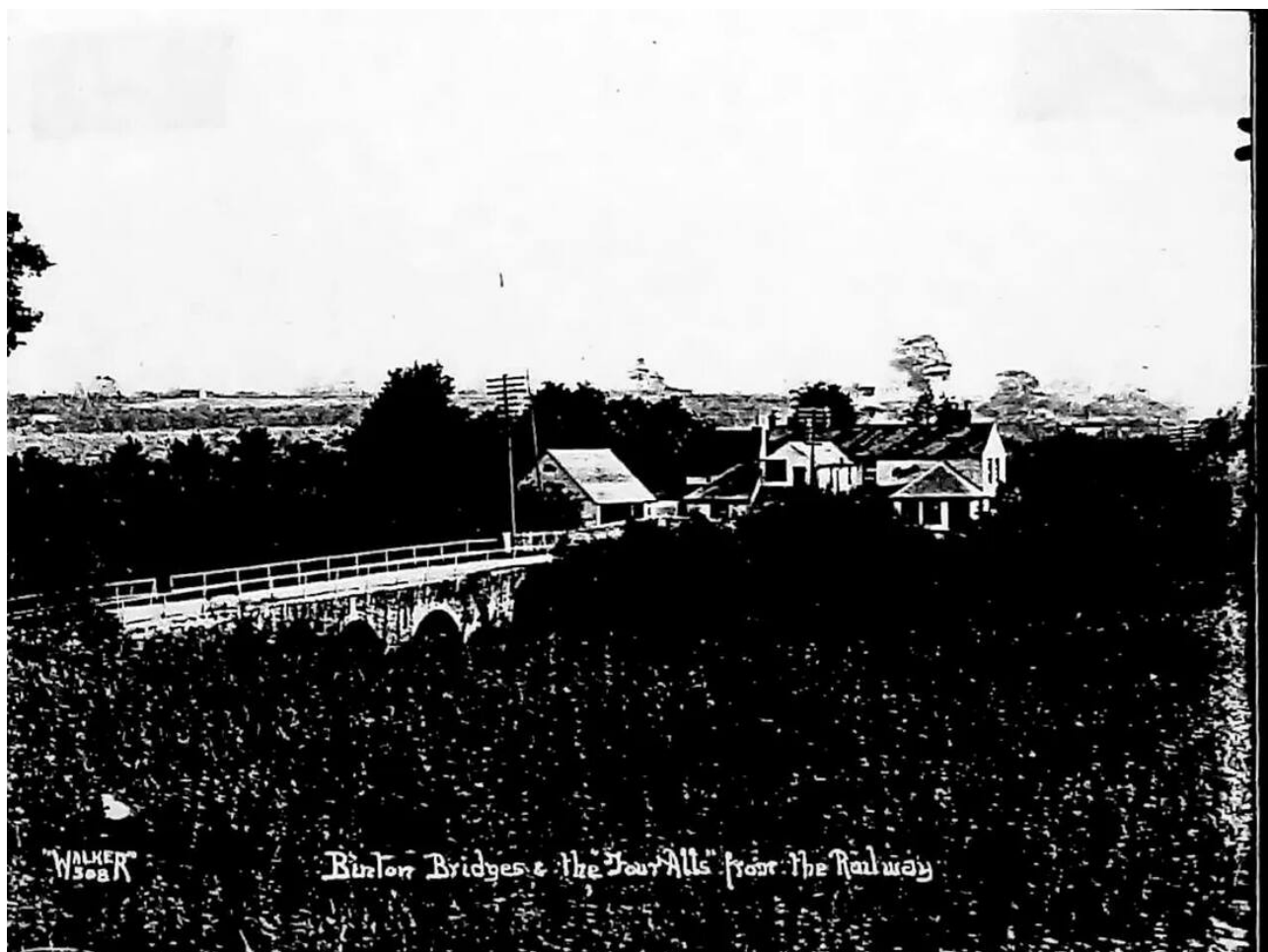


Roads and Traffic in Welford

Fords, enclosure roads, a toll bridge freed “for ever”, carriers’ carts, a dangerous corner by the Bell, and the long argument about how much traffic a riverside village should take.

Drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive (folder references in grey). A companion to the essays on the Parish Council, the Four Alls, Boat Cottage and Cress Hill.

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"Binton Bridges & the Four Alls from the Railway." A Walker postcard, early twentieth century. For most of Welford's history this was the only way out of the village to the north: a causeway of arches across the river and its islands, with the inn that once kept the toll gate at the Welford end. 53/11-24

Most villages are crossed by a road. Welford is reached by one. The village sits on the south bank of the Avon, inside a long loop of the river, and the road that ties it to Stratford and the wider world has to cross the river to do it. For seven hundred years or more that crossing was at Binton Bridges, a mile to the north, where a narrow, often ruinous causeway carried carts over the river and its islands to Binton and the Stratford-Evesham road. Southward, the roads go out across the old open fields to Long Marston, Barton and Bidford, and eastward to Weston. None of them was ever a great through route. A motoring guide written before 1931 said of Welford and its neighbours that "there are no main roads in their neighbourhood, so that the 'speed merchant' is unknown thereabouts" 13/23.

That sentence holds most of the story. Welford's roads were never a turnpike, never a trunk road, never a bypass. Their history is local and practical: who mended them, who paid to cross the river, how

fruit and vegetables got to market, where the dangerous corners were, and, in the last sixty years, how much traffic a pretty village on a dead-end loop of road should be asked to take. The Society's archive holds a great deal of this, scattered across constables' accounts, an enclosure award, sessions papers, a petition, newspaper cuttings, parish council minutes, memories taken down by C. J. Woodward and H. M. Woodward, postcards, and late twentieth-century correspondence. This essay puts it in order. Notes on gaps and on places where the sources disagree are at the end.

A village at the end of its roads the lie of the land

The 1903 six-inch Ordnance Survey map, a copy of which is in the archive, shows the pattern that still holds 46/14. The Avon comes down from Stratford, swings south past Binton, and then loops round Welford on its west and north before running away towards Bidford. The village lies inside the loop: church, mill and rectory on the river side, the houses strung along High Street, Church Street, Chapel Street and Boat Lane, and the Maypole Green at the crossroads in the middle. Binton Bridges, with Binton station and the Four Alls beside them, are at the top of the sheet. Weston-on-Avon is a separate small village to the east, joined to Welford by a road across the fields.



The roads on the 1903 six-inch map. Detail of Gloucestershire sheet I S.E. / Warwickshire XLIII S.E. Binton Bridges and Binton station are at the top left, where the road from Welford crosses the river and the railway. Weston-on-Avon is to the right. The roads to Long Marston and Barton run south from the village across land enclosed a century earlier. 46/14

Two things about this map matter for everything that follows. The first is the county boundary. Until 1931 Welford and Weston were in Gloucestershire, while Binton, on the north bank, was in Warwickshire. The boundary ran down the middle of the river at Binton Bridges, so the bridge was divided between two counties, and later between two county councils. That division shaped who would and would not pay for it for two hundred years. The second is the absence of any through road. The Stratford-Evesham road, later the A439, runs along the north bank of the river. Welford lies off it to the south, reached by a side road over the bridge. A traveller going anywhere except Welford, Weston or the villages beyond had no reason to come through.

The survey of the village made in 1962, quoted in the archive, describes Welford as lying “south of the A439” in exactly these terms 19/44. The Society’s 1992 study of the village’s character describes the approaches the same way: by the Long Marston road, the Binton road, the Clifford road and the Barton road, each arriving from open country 15/08. Within the loop, the old village streets were narrow and irregular. The same pre-1931 guide warned of “cunning corners – of which motorists do well to beware”, and added that “dogs still have a habit of taking their siestas in the middle of the roadway, and fowl, children, and aged and infirm villagers occasionally resort thither” 13/23.

Fords and old ways before the eighteenth century

The village’s name tells us where traffic began. Welford, “Welneford” in early forms, is a ford name, and the archive’s notes on place-names derive it from the river crossing 01/58. Where exactly that ford lay is not agreed. The notes compiled from the *Victoria County History* put the ancient ford by the mill, with the church tower as the landmark that guided travellers to it 09/06. A paper written around 1971 puts an ancient ford at Binton Bridges and claims it was used by British tribes; the same paper describes Binton Road, High Street and Bird Lane as tracks across marshy ground leading towards Meon Hill, and claims a Roman quay base at the mill 10/26. A third tradition places a ford, and later a ferry, at the bottom of Boat Lane, crossing to Hillborough on the far bank. That one at least is well remembered. Alf Ivens was still using the ferry and ford at Boat Lane in 1948 01/35.

The three need not exclude each other. A river this size, before the navigation works deepened it, could be forded in several places in a dry summer, and the bend round Welford offers more than one shallow. What the sources do not give is any firm evidence for which crossing was the original “Welneford”. The claim about British tribes and a Roman quay is not supported by anything else in the archive and should be treated as a local tradition.

Firmer ground is offered by the charters. A talk recorded in the archive, given by a Mr Holman, describes the road down Boat Lane to the ford and on to Clifford, and identifies it with a “here-peth” named in an Anglo-Saxon charter 10/28. *Herepæð* is the Old English word usually translated “army road”, and charter writers used it for a main through route rather than a field lane. If Holman’s reading is right, the way through Welford to the Boat

Lane crossing was a recognised road before the Norman Conquest. In the same set of notes a Mr Gray traces a Roman road coming up from Long Marston 10/28.

The best attested ancient road is on the parish's western edge. The *Victoria County History* notes record that Buckle Street, part of the Roman road from Alcester to Chipping Campden, runs along the western boundary through Bickmarsh, and that it was already "Buggeldshael" in a charter of 967 09/06. Buckle Street was never a Welford street. It skirts the parish rather than entering the village, but it is the oldest dated route in the area. A note on the Domesday entry adds that Welford had an interest in salt, and suggests a possible saltway, one of the routes by which salt from Droitwich was carried across the Midlands 10/30. No line for it is given.

For the medieval and Tudor village the archive has almost nothing on roads as such. The same *Victoria County History* notes make the point that most of the parish's present roads were laid out in 1801 at enclosure 09/06. Before that, the village streets ran much as they do now, and beyond them tracks wandered across the open fields between the strips, shifting as the furlongs were ploughed. The one crossing that mattered for the outside world was already the bridge at Binton, and it has its own story below.

The parish and its highways 1690s to 1830s

From the sixteenth century until the nineteenth, every English parish was responsible for its own roads. The Highways Act of 1555 made each parish choose a surveyor of the highways each year, an unpaid local man, and required the householders to give several days' labour, or send a cart and team, to mend the roads. Parishes that let their roads decay could be presented at quarter sessions and fined. The system was cheap, amateur and much resented, and it produced the earliest records of roads in Welford.

The constables' accounts for 1694 to 1735 show the parish meeting these obligations 17/02. There is a payment of 6d for a "presentment ffor Highways", the fee for a formal report on the state of the roads to the justices. There are payments of 4s 6d to the surveyors of the highways. There is also £1 14s 10d of "Bridge money", the parish's share of a county rate raised for the repair of county bridges. That last entry is a reminder that, even in the 1690s, the bridge was a larger matter than the parish could handle on its own.

The surveyors' own accounts survive for 1726, 1730 and 1733, with a further account for 1737-38, but they are not in the Society's archive. They are at the Gloucestershire Record Office, and the archive holds only the catalogue entries 02/01-12. One detail in the catalogue stands out. In 1730 an "ale account" was disallowed. The surveyors had apparently charged the parish for drink supplied to the men doing the statute labour, and whoever examined the accounts refused it. The same habit turns up again at Binton Bridges in 1808, when the bridge-building account records "For beer 1/-" 52/09.

A small charity also helped. Thomas Mills's charity paid 3s 4d a year towards the repair of the highways, charged on the meadow called Synderham 02/01-12. It was not much even then, but it shows that someone in the village thought the roads worth a bequest. By 1837 the parish had a Surveyor of Highways who made a formal return to the county; the archive notes the reference to it at the record office 06/20. In the 1851 census the occupation table lists one roadman among the villagers 01/48-101, by then a paid labourer rather than a farmer doing his turn.

The parish surveyors lasted in Welford until the end of the century. In 1896, two years after the new Parish Council first met, the council appointed a waywarden 18/13. Under the Local Government Act of 1894 the waywarden represented the parish on the highway authority, which in Welford's case meant the Marston Sicca Rural District Council. The old system of a parish surveyor and statute labour came to an end then.

The roads of the enclosure award 1800 to 1802

The single biggest change to Welford's roads came with the enclosure of the open fields. The Welford enclosure award is dated variously in the archive as 1800, 1801 and 1802, and the date is discussed in the notes at the end. Whatever the year, the commissioners did what enclosure commissioners did everywhere. They extinguished the tangle of field tracks, laid out new roads between the new hedged fields at fixed widths, and set out which of them were public and which private 20/04, 47/98.

The award created five public carriage roads, each 40 feet wide between the hedges 20/04, 47/98, 01/48-101:

ROAD	LINE SET OUT IN THE AWARD	NOW
Bidford Road	From Boyce's Gate to Barton Pasture Gate	Barton Road and the road over

ROAD	LINE SET OUT IN THE AWARD	NOW
		Cress Hill
Braggington Road	Towards Braggington, in the south-west of the parish	Line uncertain in the archive
Headland Road	From Church Lane to Cross Furlong	Headland Road
Long Marston Road	From Birds Lane to Meere Farm	Long Marston Road
Bridges Road	From the Kings Arms to Binton Bridges	Binton Road

Forty feet was the standard width for enclosure roads, wide enough for carts to pass and to get round the deep ruts that every unmetalled road developed in winter. The tarmac strips now running down the middle of those roads, with wide verges on either side, are the result. Wide verges of the same kind line the main roads outside the parish. In the early 1980s a speaker from the county wildlife trust showed the Society a stretch on the Evesham road near the Binton turn that was being mown only in part, so that its wild flowers and butterflies could survive 37/01-04.

Alongside the public roads the award set out thirteen private roads, for the use of particular owners and occupiers. They included a Mill road 17 feet wide, a road to Wont Hall 25 feet wide, a 12-foot Church Road for the people of Bickmarsh and Little Dorsington, who had to reach Welford church, and a road from the Mill to the Ford 20/04, 47/98. There were seven public footpaths, eight private ones, and a bridle road 15 feet wide from Duck Lane to Weston. Two gravel pits were set aside, in Church Field and in Bridges Field, to supply stone for mending the roads. Every other way across the old fields was stopped up.

The award also fixed the village's gates. Tom Harris, the postmaster, told H. M. Woodward that gates had crossed the road from Welford to Weston and on towards Milcote 20/01. These were field gates, not toll gates. Where a road ran through pasture it was cheaper to gate it than to hedge both sides, and travellers opened and shut them as they went.

In October 1938 H. M. Woodward went through the award with a modern map and noted what had become of it 18/15. Several of the footpaths were disused by then. Some names had moved. Keyte Lane had become Church Lane; Harris's Close, beside the old roads, had become Millers Close, where the council houses stood. He listed the old roads of the village core, which the enclosure had left alone: High Street, Church Street, Church Lane, Boat Lane, Chapel Street and Duck Lane. Boat Lane, he noted, is called Mill

Lane in the award. That is a useful reminder that a road's name follows whatever it leads to, and that the ferry at the bottom of the lane mattered more to later villagers than the mill did.

The Parish Council inherited the award's private roads, and with them some arguments. In 1896-97 James Carr asked the council to define the boundaries of the "Old Mill Road" 18/13. The minutes do not say what the dispute was, but a private road set out in 1801 for named users was exactly the kind of way whose status could become uncertain within a century.

The horse-bridge at Binton to 1802

Binton Bridges is the centre of this history. The archive holds more on it than on any other piece of road, and the main accounts are a history written by Mr Deverson and sold by the Society as a booklet at 10p 07/01-11, 37/01-04, a long illustrated talk on the river given to the Society 52/09, and a run of newspaper cuttings from 1893 to the 1980s 01/38-46.

The crossing is a strange one. The river here is braided around several low islands, which the records call aits, and the bridge is not one span but a long causeway of small arches hopping from bank to island to bank. That is why it is "Binton Bridges" in the plural. A 1938 account of a ramble along the river remarks on exactly that: one bridge "spoken of in the plural" 15/12.

Deverson traces a packhorse bridge here to the early 1600s. It was narrow, with no parapets, and for a long time it was the only crossing of the river within five or six miles 07/01-11. The land on the south bank belonged to the Duke of Dorset and that on the north bank to the Marquis of Hertford, so it was used by the tenants of both great estates as well as by everyone else carrying grain to market. The tenants whose land bordered the river were supposed to keep the bridge in repair in place of tithes. Warwick Sessions records show that they did not always do so. Edward Welles of Welford was presented at Epiphany 1674 "for not repairing the part of stone bridge in Binton". John Welles of Old Stratford was presented in the 1670s, and Thomas Frock of Shipston in 1681 07/01-11.

The bridge was patched rather than rebuilt. Stone and lime were paid for in 1726, in 1727, when John Silvester did the work, and in 1730, when the parish surveyors paid 07/01-11. In 1783 William Silvester, who owned several of the islands, took down the old

horse-bridge and replaced it with small stone bridges just wide enough for waggons. He put a gate at the south end and charged a toll of a shilling. Deverson calls the toll “unofficial”: there was no act of Parliament behind it, as there would have been for a turnpike. Silvester’s bridges fell into disrepair, and in wet seasons the approaches flooded for six to eight weeks at a time 07/01–11.

A Georgian drawing in the archive shows the crossing at about this period, with a “turn bridge” and the county boundary stone 52/35. A turn bridge was a swing or lifting section that let boats on the Avon navigation pass. The river was a working waterway, and the bridge had to let barges through as well as carry carts over.

The condition of the crossing produced the most vivid document in the whole archive on roads: a petition from the people of Welford and the surrounding parishes to John Frederick, 3rd Duke of Dorset, asking him to join the Marquis of Hertford in pressing for a proper bridge paid for by the counties 07/01–11. It came from tenants in Welford and Weston and from landowners in Quinton, Mickleton, the Marstons, Pebworth, Dorsington, Bickmarsh and Barton, and it had 67 Welford signatures. To make its case it listed the accidents at the crossing:

John Boyce, a carrier, swept 200 yards down the stream, and later thrown in with his team. William Sale, a butcher, drowned. Two men and a boy swept away, but landed safely in a meadow. Thomas Osborn’s team and wain overturned, and a horse drowned. William White, a similar accident. William Sandford, the Duke’s own servant, lost a load of coal and nearly his life.

The accidents listed in the petition to the Duke of Dorset, as summarised by Deverson 07/01–11

The list reads like a register of the people who used the road for a living: a carrier, a butcher, farmers’ teams, and the Duke’s man bringing coal, which came up the river by barge and had to be carted inland. It is the nearest thing in the archive to an accident record before the twentieth century. Among the signatories were Hancox and Allcock, names that recur in the village for the next hundred years 07/01–11. The petition failed. The counties did not build a bridge.

The petition’s date is uncertain. Deverson gives “about 1790” 07/01–11. A newspaper article of the early 1980s gives 1807 01/41. The Duke of Dorset of 1790 was indeed John Frederick, which fits Deverson, but the petition calls the other landowner the Marquis of

Hertford, and the Earl of Hertford was not made a marquis until 1793. Either the petition is later than 1793 or the title has been modernised in copying.

Rebuilding the bridges 1802 to 1809

If the counties would not act, the courts could. A document at the record office dated 1 October 1802, quoted in the Society's river talk, is an indictment of Binton Bridges 52/09. It describes them as unsafe and dangerous to people, horses and cattle, needing a fence or wall at the sides, and "very low, ruinous, broken and in great decay for want of due reparation". It names the two men held liable for their upkeep. One was J. Edkins, who owned the Four Alls at the Welford end and was collecting the tolls. The other was J. Slatter of Salford Priors, whose name survived in "Slatter's aits", some of the islands on the Binton side.

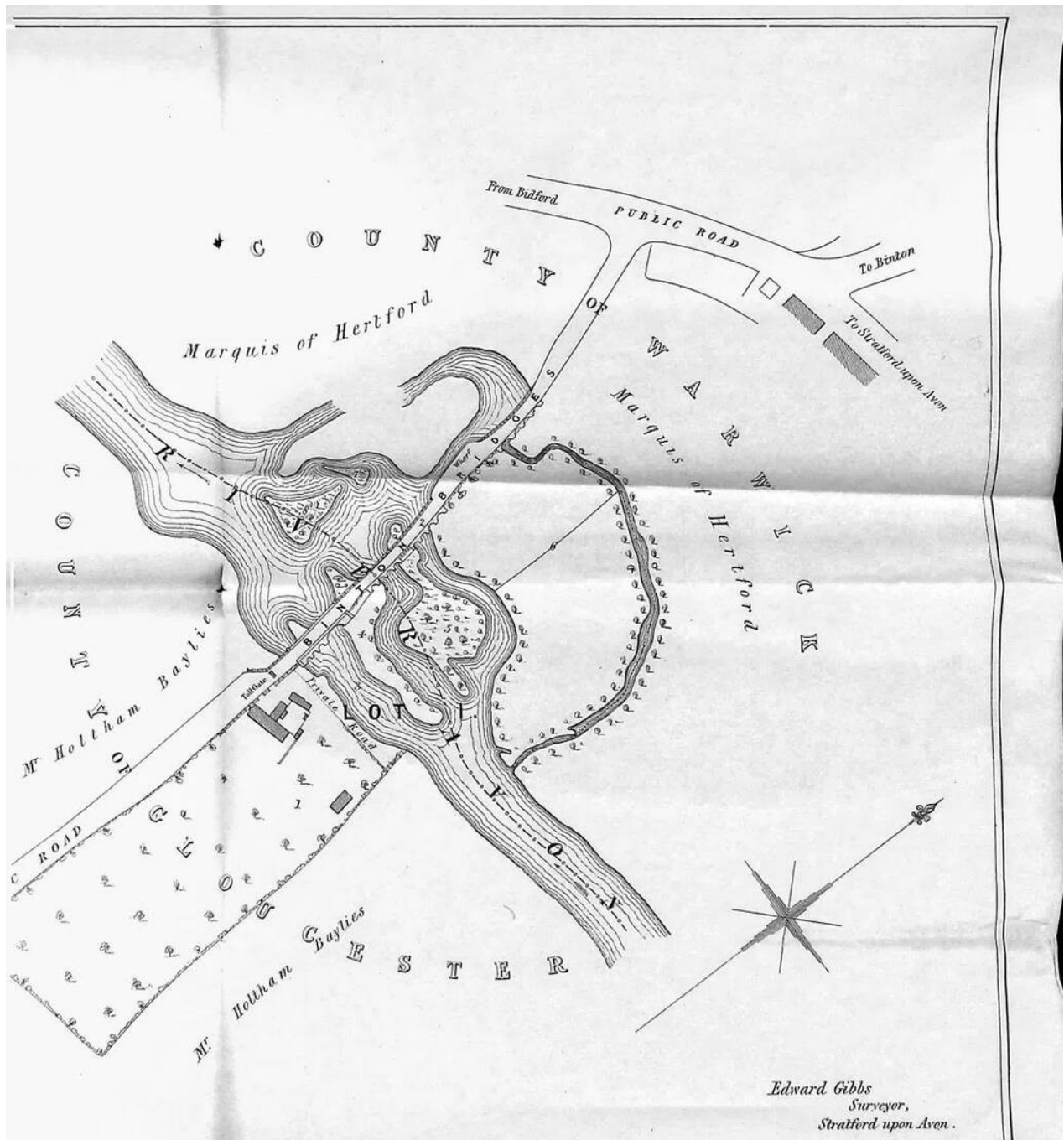
The indictment worked as a lever. On 2 August 1804 John Edkins signed an agreement with Thomas Hunt of Stratford, William Bayliss of Welford and John Tommes of Long Marston 52/09. The three had committed themselves to raise £200 by subscription towards building new Binton Bridges. In return Edkins gave up to them and their heirs all his rights and title to the bridge and to the taking of tolls. The price he was to be paid was left to two adjudicators, James Clarke of Evesham and John Whitehead of Barford. On 16 August a similar agreement was made with Anne Slatter of Salford, John Slatter's widow. The subscription had to be raised by 1 January 1805 or the agreement would lapse.

It evidently was raised, because an account survives for work on the bridge from 1804 to 1808 by an unnamed contractor 52/09. It opens on 3 September 1804 with "Myself and lad helping Mr Bushell to take measurements of the bridge", and among its later entries, on 21 July 1808, is the shilling for beer. An undated drawing of the proposed bridge, seen from upstream, marks the county boundary in mid-river. It gives the length on the Gloucestershire side as 71 yards and on the Warwickshire side as 100 yards. Oddly, it gives the width as 12 feet on the Warwickshire side but only 8 feet 9 inches on the Gloucestershire side 52/09. The difference may reflect which parts were new and which were Silvester's older work.

Deverson's summary is that the present bridge of twelve arches was built by subscription in 1806-09, and that its five southern arches date from then while the rest is mostly Silvester's work of

1783 07/01-11. The river talk's documents, with work starting in September 1804, suggest an earlier start, and a 1980s newspaper article gives 1804-09 01/41. The likeliest reading is that surveying and preparation began in 1804 and the main building followed.

The result was a better bridge, but not a public one. The 1804 agreement transferred the right to take tolls along with the bridge, and tolls went on being taken for another 85 years.



Edward Gibbs's sale plan of Binton Bridges. Drawn by a Stratford surveyor for a sale of the bridge property, it shows the bridge crossing the braided river, the county boundary, the Toll Gate and a private road, with the Marquis of Hertford's land on the Warwickshire side. A

later note calls the road a turnpike, but the bridge was a private toll, never a turnpike trust.
52/52–57

Sixpence and back free 1809 to 1893

For most of the nineteenth century, anyone driving a vehicle out of Welford to Stratford paid to cross the river. The toll was 6d for a carriage and more for waggons, and Harry Sutton, interviewed in 1938, added that steam engines paid more still 07/01–11, 01/38–46. There was a locked wooden gate for vehicles and a smaller one for people on foot. Sutton described how it worked:

“Sixpence to go over with a vehicle and free when you came back. It was unlocked and locked again after each vehicle.”

Harry Sutton of Welford, *Evesham Journal*, 16 April 1938 01/38–46

The gate was at the Welford end, beside the Four Alls, and the toll-keeper lived at the inn 01/38–46. Sutton remembered that the toll bar belonged to the Four Alls “when a Birmingham man the name of Davis was the proprietor”. Deverson repeats that the tollgate later belonged to the Four Alls under a Birmingham proprietor named Davis 07/01–11. The 1893 account of the freeing says, however, that the bridge was bought on the morning of the ceremony from its owners, Messrs Dutton & Hudson of Warwick 31/12. It may be that the inn’s landlord collected the tolls while a separate firm owned the bridge, or that ownership changed hands in the last years. The archive does not trace it.

There is one snapshot of what the tolls were worth. A sale of 1866 offered the tolls, the wharves and the dues together, worth about £60 a year, with Mrs Lucy Mills in occupation 07/01–11. At sixpence a vehicle that is roughly 2,400 paying crossings a year, or about eight on an ordinary working day, though the wharf dues must account for some of it. For a village of Welford’s size, with Weston and Long Marston behind it, that seems plausible.



Binton Bridges. A postcard view of the causeway of low stone arches. The bridge was free by the time this was taken, but it was the same narrow structure that had carried tolled traffic for most of the nineteenth century. 52/52-57

Two stories about avoiding tolls survive, and they are often confused. The first concerns Joseph Hancox, "Old Joe the Badger", whom H. M. Woodward knew in 1914 as an old man and fellow churchwarden 20/01. In his early days Hancox took fruit to Birmingham market:

"The market cart was loaded up at the end of the day, and about six P.M. he would start, proceeding by cross country roads via Aston Cantlow on to the B'ham and Stratford Road. At 'The Bird in Hand' outside Henley-in-Arden ... a house kept by 'Mother Rainbow', Joseph and other carriers used to meet, have supper, and wait till midnight before proceeding on their journey to Birmingham. The reason for this wait was to enable them to pass all the remaining tollgates within the same day and so avoid paying toll twice."

H. M. Woodward, notes on Joseph Hancox 20/01

Those tollgates were on the Birmingham-Stratford turnpike, not at Binton. A toll ticket was usually good for a return through the same gate on the same day. By waiting until midnight, the carriers made sure that their outward passage through the gates north of Henley and their return the following afternoon fell on the same day's

ticket. The produce was sold in Birmingham early in the morning, mostly to women buyers, and the business was over by about six. Then came the long drive home.

The second story is Roland Harris's memory of Mr Perks the carter in the 1880s, who also took produce overnight to Birmingham market by way of Henley, "perhaps so the toll was paid only once", as Deverson puts it 07/01-11. Deverson attaches this to the Binton toll. It would only save money at Binton if Perks crossed the bridge once, since Binton's toll was charged one way only. Both stories show the same thing: carriers planned their routes and hours around tolls, and the turnpike road to Birmingham shaped Welford's trade as much as the bridge at Binton did. No turnpike ever ran through Welford itself.

"Free for ever", 1893 the end of the tolls

The tolls were ended by the new county councils, created in 1889. A meeting about freeing the bridge was held on 24 March 1893, and stewards were named for the celebration: Cleveland Green, Harpur Baylis, G. Horseman and W. Wyatt 01/38-46. The money came from three places. An account written in April 1893 and reprinted in *Parish News* by the Society says that £700 was needed, "£250 from each of the county councils, while the remaining £200 has been collected by the neighbourhood" 31/12. Gloucestershire and Warwickshire, each owning half the bridge, each paid half the grant.

The ceremony took place on a Wednesday afternoon. A wooden map-holder in the village, made from the old gate post, is painted with the date: "Made from the gate post of Binton Bridges opened to the public April 26 1893" 01/38-46. Deverson gives the same date 07/01-11, and 26 April 1893 was a Wednesday. The 1893 account describes the day:

"The finger-post on the Stratford to Evesham road directing wayfarers to Welford had been garlanded with evergreens and flowers. Flags hung on the branches of the trees on the approach to the bridge, and an arch of evergreen spanned the roadway close to the railway bridge, bearing the inscription GOD SAVE THE QUEEN. The bridge itself was bravely arched with evergreens and bunting, and the concluding erection — immediately over the famous gate by the sign of the Four Alls — bore two inscriptions, on the Warwickshire side WELCOME and on the Gloucestershire side FREE FOR EVER."

"The Freeing of Binton Bridges", April 1893, reprinted in *Parish News* 31/12

Warwickshire travellers, the account notes drily, had been made to pay "a nominal toll up to the last moment that any such demand could be made". Just before two o'clock the Snitterfield Brass Band marched down from Welford at the head of more than two hundred children from the Welford School Board district, which covered Welford, Dorsington, Weston, Long Marston and Binton. The Stratford party arrived by the two o'clock train at Binton station, beside the bridge. The gate was locked, and its "formidable looking" key was handed to the Marquis of Hertford. The bridge had been bought that morning. Afterwards the Mayor of Stratford predicted that jam would get cheaper, since the fruit was grown just across the river 31/12.

The account calls Binton Bridges "the last toll bridge in Warwickshire or Gloucestershire". That is the writer's belief rather than a checked fact, and other private toll bridges certainly survived elsewhere in England well into the twentieth century. But it says something about how the bridge was seen: as an old imposition, "a particularly irksome one for a long time past", that the new democratic county councils had at last removed.



“Free for Ever”, April 1893. The waggonette of dignitaries and the crowd under the banner at the toll gate, as reproduced in the *Evesham Journal* of 16 April 1938 with Harry Sutton’s memories. A later reprint of the same photograph dates it to 1892. 01/38–46

Forty-five years later the *Evesham Journal* printed the photograph of the opening and asked Harry Sutton about it. He remembered the day: “Ah, we had a rare do in Welford that day. A marquee was put up by the river and we all had dinner.” Then he added: “‘Free for ever,’ that’s what we thought, but I still have to pay a tax on my lorry when it goes over the bridge” 01/38–46. His joke marks the change from one way of paying for roads to another, from the toll gate to the road fund licence.

The gates themselves, Deverson says, were burnt in a field 07/01–11. Something of them was kept. The 1893 account says the key was returned to the keeping of Mr Green, and was to be kept in a carved oak box made from one of the gate-posts 31/12. Deverson and a later cutting describe instead a holder for a map of Welford made from a scrap of the gates or a gate post, owned by the late Mr A. Montague, painted with the date of the opening 07/01–11, 01/38–46. There may have been two relics, a key box and a map holder. Whether either survives today, the archive does not say.

Carriers and market carts 1840s to 1920s

For most villagers before the motor age, the road meant the carrier. A carrier was a man with a covered cart and a horse who went to the market towns on fixed days, carrying goods, parcels, produce and passengers for a fee. Welford, with no railway station of its own and its market gardens producing fruit and vegetables, depended on them.

C. J. Woodward, recalling how he first came to Welford in the 1840s, gave a picture of the choices 11/25. "There were three or four ways of travelling in those days", he said. The first, "which could only be adopted by a few, was to walk". His grandfather at The Hollies sometimes walked to Birmingham and back. 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. Or they went by the Great Western Railway to the nearest station and walked from there. Woodward himself first came in a carrier's cart:

"I rode in a carriers cart owned by David Rouse, a fruiterer of Binton who went to Birmingham market. Some of us, wanting to come to Welford, would start back with him from Birmingham at 5 oclock in the afternoon. (I leave it to you to imagine how long the trip took.)"

C. J. Woodward, recollections 11/25

One version of the transcript adds in handwriting that they reached Welford "in the early Morn".

The censuses and directories in the archive name the village carriers decade by decade 01/48–101, 11/01–13, 10/01–08:

YEAR	CARRIER OR ROAD TRADE	SOURCE
1841	John Pearce, carrier	census
1850	Samuel Rouse, carrier	directory
1851	Samuel Head and William Head, carriers; one roadman in the occupation table	census
1856	Six miles from Honeybourne station; letters via Stratford	directory
1861	Samuel Brooks, common carrier; Robert Perks, carrier and market gardener, born Alcester; William Blundell	census
1860s–80s	Robert Perks, carrier to Stratford and Evesham, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; Robert Berwick, carrier to Birmingham	Society files

YEAR	CARRIER OR ROAD TRADE	SOURCE
1897	John Ritchings, carrier; John Wilson, oil dealer and carrier; Milcote station 1½ miles, Binton station ¾ mile	Kelly's
1901	George Emery, carrier, Chapel Street	census
1914	No carrier listed; Reginald Rushton, mail contractor; letter boxes at Churchend and Rumer Hill	Kelly's

The pattern is clear. Welford had at least one carrier, and often two or three, from the 1840s to the 1900s. There were two kinds of service. One was the local round to the market towns, Stratford and Evesham, a few days a week. The other was the long overnight run with produce to Birmingham. Robert Perks is the best documented of the first kind, carrying to Stratford and Evesham on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 11/01–13. Robert Berwick ran to Birmingham 10/01–08.

The 1897 directory lists John Wilson as oil dealer and carrier, and John Ritchings as carrier. Both men were also on the Parish Council. John Wilson, whom H. M. Woodward describes as a self-made radical, fell from his trap returning from Stratford Market in 1902 and was killed, and in April 1903 “John Riching” was elected to the council in his place 18/13. If the directory’s carrier and the councillor are the same man, as seems likely, Welford lost one of its carriers on the very road he worked.

A family of carriers in the next village is remembered in detail. Jane Higgins of Quinton, who lived from 1871 to 1972, was the Quinton carrier to Stratford for more than forty years and never changed from horse to lorry 09/08, 09/13–17. Her daughter’s husband, Marshall, was the Welford carrier. The two sources disagree on his first name.

By 1914 the directory lists no carrier for Welford. Instead there is a mail contractor, Reginald Rushton, and letter boxes at Churchend and Rumer Hill 01/48–101. The carrier’s trade had not vanished, since Marshall was still carrying, but the railway stations nearby and the coming of motor vehicles were taking it apart. After the First World War the produce that the carriers had taken to Birmingham went by motor lorry. Two accounts in the archive both say so, though one gives the lorry to Wilson Matthews and the other to “Mr Wilson” 08/05, 08/07.

Two railways and a road to the station 1850s to 1960s

Welford never had a station of its own, but it had two within reach. Binton station, on the East and West Junction line, later part of the Stratford-upon-Avon and Midland Junction Railway, stood at the north end of Binton Bridges, three-quarters of a mile from the village by the 1897 directory. Milcote station, on the Great Western line from Stratford to Honeybourne and Cheltenham, was a mile and a half away to the east, beyond Weston 01/48-101. In 1856, before either was convenient, the directory reckoned Welford as six miles from Honeybourne station 01/48-101.

The railways changed how roads were used. Instead of the long road journey to market, a farmer or market gardener now had a short haul to a station. Binton station handled freight. The archive mentions eels sent from there 24/01, and the parish safe, bought by the Parish Council in 1896 for £6 10s from R. M. Ford of Wolverhampton, presumably came the same way 18/13. The Stratford party for the 1893 freeing of the bridge came by train to Binton station, beside the bridge 31/12.

Milcote mattered more for passengers, and its road became a council concern. In 1896-97 a proposed transfer of highway powers was postponed. In 1899 the parish clerk proposed "maining" the road from Welford Corner through Weston to Milcote Station, a distance of a mile and a quarter 18/21. To "main" a road was to have it declared a main road under the 1878 Highways Act, so that the county paid for its upkeep instead of the district. The archive does not record whether the request succeeded.

For the twentieth century there are glimpses. The Great Western line through Milcote became a through route around 1908 13/38. In the 1920s grammar school pupils from Welford took the train from Milcote to Campden, or cycled 03/01-19. In 1934 the Cornishman express stopped at Milcote 03/01-19. A letter written about 1987 recalls that in 1937 three signalmen and two platelayers lived in the village, and that commuters took the train from Milcote Halt 01/52.

The archive says nothing about the closure of either line. Binton station and Milcote both closed in the twentieth century, but no cutting, minute or letter in the collection records when, or what the village thought about it. The same 1987 letter gives the result in a single contrast. In the 1930s people went to work by train. By the 1980s the school run alone was "a stream of as many as 40" cars 01/52.

The Parish Council and the roads 1894 to 1926

The Parish Council first met on 20 December 1894 at the Board School. H. M. Woodward, who joined it in 1919, later made a digest of its minutes, and roads run all through it 18/13, 18/14. The council was not the highway authority. That was the Marston Sicca Rural District Council for ordinary roads and Gloucestershire County Council for main roads and the county's half of Binton Bridges. But the parish council was the body that villagers complained to, and it passed their complaints up the line.

The first items were small and local. There were obstructions to the footpaths in Boat Lane. The waywarden was appointed in April 1896. James Carr wanted the "Old Mill Road" defined. In 1899 there was a footbridge over the Dorsington Brook to see to 18/13. The same year the clerk proposed that the road through Weston to Milcote station be made a main road 18/21. In April 1903 the council received a copy of the Gloucestershire County Council by-law made under the Locomotive Act of 1898, "for deposit in Parish Safe" 18/13. That act regulated traction engines on the roads, the heavy steam engines that hauled threshing machines and timber from farm to farm and that had once paid extra at the Binton toll.



Church Street before tarmac. A postcard view of the early twentieth century. The surface is

rolled stone and dust, rutted by cart wheels, the kind of road that the 1801 gravel pits were set aside to mend. 53/09

In April 1908 the council discussed a proposed wooden footway at Binton Bridges 18/13. The bridge carried carts and people on the same narrow carriageway, and the minutes give no sign that the footway was built. Proper provision for pedestrians on the bridge had to wait until the 1980s.

During the war the council's business turned to war relief, food societies and a pig club. In January 1919 it complained of the bad state of the roads and of flooding on the footpath by The Ashes 18/14. In January 1920 it raised the widening of School Lane. The Rural District Council refused, on the grounds that there was too little traffic to justify it 18/14. That refusal is a good measure of the village's roads at the end of the horse age. Even a lane past the school was not thought busy enough to be worth widening.

From 1913 to 1920 the council pressed the Post Office for a public telephone call office in the village. In April 1920 the GPO promised to provide one "as soon as possible" 18/14. The telephone does not belong to roads, but it belongs to traffic in the wider sense. It marks the moment when some of what had gone by carrier, letter and messenger began to travel by wire. In 1926 the council found itself in a dispute over a £13 telegraph pole put up on the Maypole Green 18/14, the first sign of the overhead wires that the 1992 conservation study would list among the things that spoil the village 15/08.

There was no council at all from 1922 to 1925, when no meeting reached a quorum 18/14. Woodward's digest is thin after 1926, and the archive's run of parish council business for the next forty years is patchy. That gap matters for this essay. The years when the motor car arrived in Welford are the years with least on record from the council.

Traps, the green and the Bell corner 1902 to 1921

The first road deaths in the archive are not motor accidents but falls from traps. A trap was a light two-wheeled cart pulled by a pony or horse, the ordinary transport of a small farmer, tradesman or carrier. In 1902 John Wilson, the parish councillor and carrier, fell from his trap on the way back from Stratford Market and was killed 18/13. Woodward's character sketch of the founding

councillors calls him “the self-made radical killed falling from his trap”.

Five years later the same thing happened in the middle of the village. The council minute of 29 January 1908 records it:

“Thomas William Massey was thrown from his trap and killed on the Maypole Green when returning from Market one night shortly before Christmas, and at this meeting of the P.C. a letter was read from the Marston Sicca R.D.C. asking permission of the P.C. to carry out the Coroner’s recommendation that the accumulation of earth on the green at this point should be removed.”

Parish Council minutes, 29 January 1908, in H. M. Woodward’s digest 18/13

Woodward added a note: “It was in carrying out the above work that the last remains of the old Market Cross were removed.” The coroner’s recommendation, made to stop another accident, cost the village its last trace of a medieval monument. It is the earliest case in the archive of a pattern that runs through the rest of the century: a road safety measure taken in the old centre of the village, and someone afterwards counting what it cost.



“The Maypole, Welford-on-Avon”, about 1920. The green at the meeting of High Street, Chapel Street and Barton Road, with the roads already curving round it on both sides. It was

here, on the raised ground of the green, that Thomas Massey was thrown from his trap in 1907. 53/02

The Maypole Green is a road junction as well as a green. High Street, Chapel Street and the Barton road meet there, and traffic goes round it on both sides. That is why the 1992 conservation study described it as having a “roundabout effect” and recommended altering the road layout to lessen it and give more space to pedestrians 15/08. The postcard of about 1920 shows the same shape already in place.

The other notorious spot was the corner by the Bell Inn. The road from Binton comes into the village past the Bell and turns sharply into the High Street. In October 1920 and again in January 1921 the council minuted the “Dangerous Corner at Bell Inn”, and in January 1921 it asked the Automobile Association to provide a sign 18/14. Asking the AA, rather than the highway authority, was common practice then. The motoring organisations put up many of the early warning signs at their own expense, and the AA’s yellow signs were a familiar sight on country roads between the wars.



“By the Bell Inn”, 1900s. The road narrows between cottage gardens and house walls as it

comes into the village. The corner here was the one the Parish Council called dangerous in 1920–21. 53/11–24

Among the councillors at those meetings was W. J. Matthews 18/14. A Wilson James Matthews of Bell Bank appears in 1940 as a haulage contractor 59/01, and Wilson Matthews is named as the man who started the village bus in the 1920s 03/01–19. They seem very likely to be the same man, though the archive does not join them up in so many words. If so, the councillor who sat while the Bell corner was discussed lived beside it, and was one of the first people in the village to make a living from motor traffic.



The Bell Inn, 1947. A row of white posts now guards the frontage at the corner. The signs read "Flower & Sons, Ales & Stouts" and "Hovis". 53/11-24

Bicycles, motors and the village bus 1890s to 1940s

The machine age reached Welford's roads through the forge. The Matthews family were blacksmiths at the Forge in Chapel Street. Two accounts in the archive say that grandfather Matthews made the first pedal bicycle in the district 08/04, 08/07. In 1917 Harold

Matthews started a new side to the business, "the sale and repair of cycles and accessories", in a shop where Barndale now stands. In 1934 he moved to the site of the present garage 13/01, 01/14. The smithy itself moved next to the garage in 1936, and a brother built up a haulage business that ran until 1962 08/04, 08/07. The line runs from horseshoes to bicycles to petrol in one family.

When Harold Matthews retired in 1969, *Parish News* asked him about the old days. He said that "the first car in Welford was owned by Mr. Cleveland Green, who closely resembled Edward VII. He lived at Welford House and his car was a one-cylinder Rover" 13/01. Rover's single-cylinder car went on sale in 1904, so Green's car probably dates from the decade before the First World War. Cleveland Green was one of the stewards at the freeing of Binton Bridges in 1893 01/38-46. So the man who helped celebrate the end of the toll gate was also, it seems, the village's first motorist.

The garage passed from Matthews to Les Wilshaw, who expanded it. His son David joined him in 1975, and the firm traded as L. W. Wilshaw & Son until Les died in 1984. David kept the name. The old anvil was still at the garage and in use, and the forge bellows went to a museum, probably Mary Arden's House 01/14.



"Maypole Café, Welford-on-Avon." A postcard from the early motoring years, when a café by the green could expect custom from visitors arriving by road. A single motor car stands in the distance on the otherwise empty street. 16/48

Writers who came to Welford in these years noticed above all how quiet it was. J. H. Garrett, boating up the Avon in 1906, wrote that the world “is going at a great speed somewhere outside, but that hardly concerns Welford, or the people who lean on their garden gates and converse with deliberation and for as long as they will with every passer-by” 11/33. The motoring guide written before 1931 found no main roads and no “speed merchant”, only dogs asleep in the roadway 13/23.

Gilda Gray, writing in 1974 about the village as it was around 1924, gave the clearest account of the transition 03/01-19:

“About six residents in the village owned motor cars. The rector had a motor bike and sidecar. A village motor bus, Wilson Matthews’ new venture, had just started.”

Gilda Gray, 1974, describing Welford about 1924 03/01-19

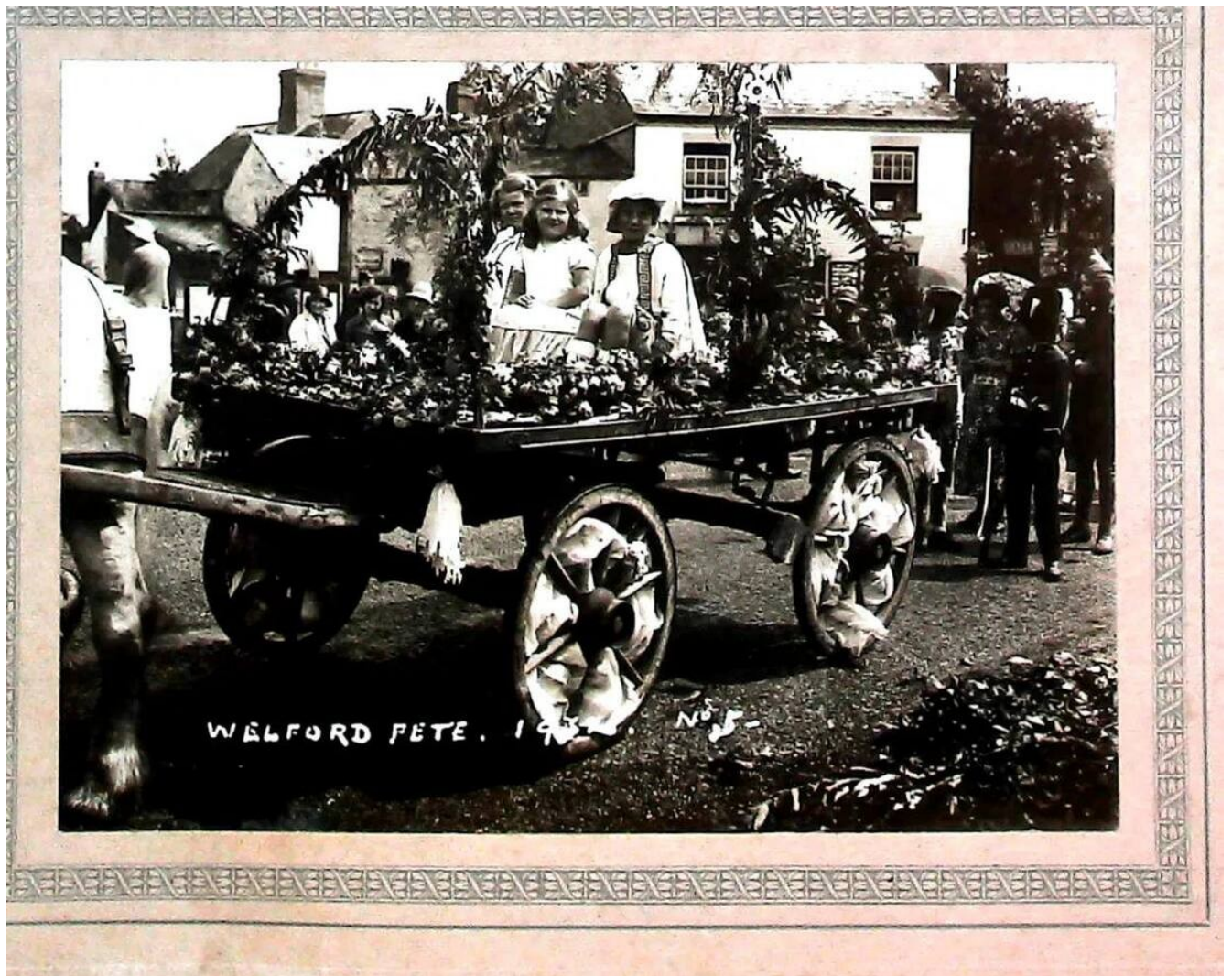
The grammar school children of her day went to Campden by train from Milcote or cycled. The rector’s family had their own sad connection with motoring. Basil Davis, the rector’s son, was killed in a motorcycle crash at Cambridge on 1 March 1923 23/97-107. It happened far from Welford, but it was the first motor death in the archive to touch the village.

The village bus lasted. When Ruby Bungalow on Barton Road was sold in 1947, the particulars pointed out that it was “on the Motor Bus route” 11/30, a selling point worth printing. The archive holds no bus timetable, no record of which company ran the service after Wilson Matthews, and no record of when the route changed. The 1938 interview with Harry Sutton shows that by then he was running a lorry over the bridge he had seen freed as a young man 01/38-46. By 1940 Wilson James Matthews was a haulage contractor 59/01, and the fruit and vegetables that the carriers had carried overnight to Birmingham went by motor lorry 08/05, 08/07.



Boat Lane, 1928. The lane that led down to the ferry and ford was still an unmade village track at the end of the 1920s, with people walking in the roadway. 16/33

Horse transport did not vanish overnight. At the village fête of 1932, a farm waggon decked with greenery carried children through the village behind a horse 16/55. Within a generation such a cart had become an object of display rather than work. At the 1958 carnival the novelty was veteran cars, the oldest a 1909 Thorneycroft 01/22.



“Welford Fête”, 1932. A farm waggon dressed for the fête. Carts like this had carried the village’s produce to Stratford and Birmingham for a century. 16/55

One change in these years shifted the responsibility for every road in the parish. In 1931 Welford and Weston were transferred from Gloucestershire to Warwickshire 01/38–46. One archive source gives the date as about 1933. From then on, both halves of Binton Bridges and all the village’s roads were the business of one county council, and later of one district council, Stratford-on-Avon. The two-county arrangement that had shaped the bridge’s history since the seventeenth century was over.

Floods and frost 1947

The low road between the village and the bridge, and the dip under the railway bridge at Binton, had always flooded. Silvester’s crossing had been under water for weeks at a time in the eighteenth century 07/01–11. In the floods of 1947 that weakness

cost a life. The Society's river talk quotes the newspaper report 52/09.

Harold and Violet Turner of The Croft, Headland Road, were driving home at night and reached the railway bridge at Binton, where the road was flooded. Being near home, they decided to try to get through. The engine stopped. They left the car to wade home in what seemed knee-deep water, but a dip in the road plunged them up to their necks, and when they got back to the car the current had pushed it into deeper water. Violet Turner was torn from her husband's grasp and swept away. Harold Turner climbed onto the car roof. PC West of Binton heard his shouts, lowered a rope from the railway bridge and was hauling him up when a train came along the single line:

"The space between the track and the railings is small yet to have loosed the rope might have meant Mr Turner's death. PC West hung on while the train passed clung perilously half over the parapet, the rope biting into his hands."

Newspaper report of 1947, quoted in the Society's talk on the river 52/09

PC Cox from Stratford arrived and the two officers pulled Turner to safety after two hours in the water. Violet Turner's body had not been recovered when the report was written.

The same winter brought the opposite problem. Bernard Harris remembered riding a bicycle on the frozen river from the mill to the Four Alls. He also remembered that when the buses stopped running he had to walk home from the grammar school in Stratford, "a long walk to Welford, especially up an icy Borden Hill" 52/09. By 1947 a schoolboy expected to go to school by bus. Thirty years earlier, his counterpart would have taken the train from Milcote or cycled.

Bungalows along the roads 1945 to 1975

After the Second World War the roads laid out in 1801 became building plots. Between 1931 and 1951 the parish population rose from 664 to 787. By 1962 it was estimated at about 1,000, and some 90 new dwellings had been built since 1951 19/44. Most were bungalows, and most stood along the enclosure roads: Barton Road, Headland Road and Binton Road. The council houses were built on cul-de-sacs. In April 1962 representatives of the county, the rural district and the Parish Council walked round the new bungalows and did not like what they saw. They found some too cramped, too

many bungalows altogether, roof pitches too flat, and ribbon development along the roads, with no main drainage 19/44.

Ribbon development is a road phenomenon. It happens when building land is cheapest along existing roads with frontage and services, and the result is a village that stretches out along its approaches rather than thickening round its centre. The 1938 rambler had already noticed bungalows on the river banks 15/12. By the 1960s the forty-foot enclosure roads were lined with them, and the people who lived in them needed cars.



A Welford junction in the motor age. Probably the 1950s or 1960s. A fingerpost with a banded post stands at the junction, and the road now carries painted white lines. 16/06

In 1972 the reopening of the Upper Avon to navigation brought a new fear. A *Birmingham Post* feature that year carried a photograph of a quiet Welford side-lane with a single car in it. Its caption warned that such lanes “may become jammed with weekend traffic” if the restored river brought a boat marina to the village. Neville Hawkes of the Warwickshire branch of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England was quoted as saying that a marina “would fill the village’s quiet side-streets with cars”. Someone in Welford marked that paragraph in blue ink 06/17. The fear now was not bad roads but too much traffic on good ones.

The Parish Council took up particular junctions. In July 1975 the *Herald* reported that the council had asked the county to look again at the traffic hazards where Barton Road meets High Street. The county replied that since a previous assessment and minor modifications, “no accidents involving injury had occurred and there was, therefore, no reason for any further changes” 24/11. The exchange shows how traffic was now judged. A villager’s sense of danger was set against the county’s count of injury accidents, and the count won. The archive does not hold the accident figures themselves.

The bridge in the motor age 1950s to 1980s

Binton Bridges were built for carts. Twelve narrow arches, partly of 1783 and partly of 1806–09, were now carrying lorries, buses and the cars of a growing village. At some point a weight limit was imposed. A *Stratford Herald* column, probably of the 1960s, ran the old “Free for Ever” photograph because a new weight limit had reminded Mrs V. Sutton of West View, Welford, of the day the tolls were lifted 01/38–46. In the early 1980s the Society was told that the bridge was now listed, so that any changes or repairs would need planning permission, and that the 12-ton limit on lorries would be kept. Members commented that it needed enforcing 37/01–04.

Increasing traffic had caused a partial collapse of the bridge some years earlier, according to a newspaper report of the early 1980s 01/38–46. That report, headed “New look for ‘Silvester’s Bridge’”, described a £25,000 scheme to widen and strengthen the first section of the carriageway in time for summer traffic. A culvert had been built near the Four Alls, “an area notorious for floods”. The county planned a footpath along the whole bridge, but only the first section could be done at once. The rest depended on future funds 01/38–46. The Society’s conservation sub-committee followed the repairs closely, and was relieved to hear that the damage was less than first thought and that the bridge would not be closed 37/01–04.

The larger scheme came next. In about 1984 Warwickshire County Council proposed to widen the Welford-side section of the bridge, with the main work planned for 1985–86. Its aims were to “reduce delays, improve pedestrian safety and provide an alternative emergency river crossing between Stratford and Evesham” 01/38–46. Stratford District Council’s planning committee opposed it. A wider bridge would bring more traffic through Welford, a

conservation area. The section to be widened was an ancient monument, and the work went against villagers' wishes. Councillor Percy Wheeler put the argument most plainly: the longer the narrow bridge stayed as it was, the less heavy traffic would use it, and there was no point in the county wasting money on something residents did not want 01/38-46.

That argument turns the whole earlier history upside down. For three centuries Welford had petitioned, subscribed and celebrated to get a better crossing of the river. By the 1980s its representatives were fighting to keep the crossing narrow, because a narrow bridge was the best traffic control the village had. The archive does not say how the dispute ended. The bridge was not widened along its whole length, and the 12-ton limit stayed, but no cutting in the collection records the county's final decision.

Conservation, junctions and signs 1980 to 2003

From the late 1970s the Welford and Weston Local History Society became one of the voices in arguments about the roads. Its conservation sub-committee, led by Judy Roberts, corresponded with the planning authorities about the Binton Bridges repairs and about footpath upkeep 37/01-04. In 1980 Mrs Roberts asked the committee for its opinions on the new road signs, so that she could pass them to the Parish Council. In 1984 the Society objected to the Maypole development at the corner of High Street and Chapel Street, partly over parked cars and the danger to pedestrians. The houses were built anyway 37/01-04. The minutes also mention a note, from Mrs Ethel Roberts's papers, on how the names of the village roads had changed. It appears to have been lost 37/01-04.

By then the car was part of every daily routine. The letter of about 1987 contrasts the 1930s, when signalmen and platelayers lived in the village and commuters took the train from Milcote, with the 1980s school run, "a stream of as many as 40" cars 01/52. A notice of 1985 about bus tokens for pensioners survives, issued from Polmark on Barton Road, though it sits among papers about Clifford and may concern that parish rather than Welford 60/06. A police talk to the Society mentioned the car park at the Bell 38/01.

In July 1992 Stratford-on-Avon District Council published a conservation area study of the village, prepared by Alan Smith and Partners with Clent Landscape Design 15/08. It described how each

approach road reaches the village from open country and how quickly some lose their character. "Barton Road stretching westwards very quickly loses its village character", it said. Of the road surfaces it wrote:

"Unfortunately tarmacadam seems to be the dominant surfacing material in the conservation area. The use of stone sett kerbs on some of the roads and lanes is attractive. Of particular quality is the stone flag paving to some of the cottages on Church Street, Boat Lane, fronting Flower Cottage, outside Manor Farm, and the stone sett footway outside Mill Farm."

Welford-on-Avon Conservation Area Study, July 1992 15/08

The study listed among the things that spoil the village concrete bollards, modern street furniture and overhead wires. It recommended removing the wires, replacing the street furniture, and redesigning the Maypole area "by altering the road layout to lessen the effect of a traffic roundabout and increasing the amount of pedestrian space" 15/08. Eighty-five years after the coroner had the earth cleared from the green to stop traps overturning, a consultant was recommending changes to the same spot to stop it feeling like a traffic island.

The last project in the archive is the smallest and the best documented. For the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002, the History Society and Welford Wives together replaced the village nameplates on the approach roads 28/01. Peter Deakin of Boat Lane led it for the Society and Mrs Lorna Smith for Welford Wives. Warwickshire County Council's Traffic Group had no objection, but set conditions: no red, sensible sizes, and a clearance of one metre from the carriageway. It recommended its own supplier, Nuneaton Signs. The signs show the village name, the Maypole and the river. They were planned for three entry points: the northern entry by the Four Alls, the southern entry on the Long Marston Road, and the western entry on Barton Road. Members of both societies put up the first two themselves, on the Long Marston approach, at three o'clock on 17 April 2003. Nuneaton Signs put up the last two on Barton Road on 22 May 2003; one post had to be 500 mm longer, at £10 extra. The total cost was £987.01 including VAT, shared equally 28/01.

The signs stand at the points where the enclosure commissioners' roads cross into the village, and the northern one is at the Four Alls, where the toll gate used to be.

What the roads have made a summing up

Taken together, the sources show a village whose roads were shaped by one crossing and one act of planning. The crossing was Binton Bridges. Welford's connection to Stratford, its market and later its railway depended on a narrow causeway split between two counties, privately owned, often ruinous, and tolled for more than a century. The village's collective effort on roads went into that bridge: the presentments of the 1670s, the petition with its list of the drowned, the subscription of 1804, the procession of 1893, and the fight in the 1980s to stop it being widened. The act of planning was the enclosure award of about 1801, which laid out the forty-foot roads to Bidford, Long Marston and Binton that still carry the village's traffic, and along which its twentieth-century houses were built.

Between those two fixed points, the traffic changed completely. In the eighteenth century it was farm teams, packhorses, a carrier and the Duke's coal cart. In the nineteenth it was carriers to Stratford, Evesham and Birmingham, market carts timed by the tollgates, and traps coming home from market at night. Between the wars it became bicycles, half a dozen cars, a village bus and a haulier's lorries. After 1945 it became the commuter's car and the school run. The roads hardly moved. What moved was who used them, how fast, and how many.

Each change produced its own danger and its own response. The river drowned carriers and butchers and, in 1947, a woman driving home. The Maypole Green threw a man from his trap and lost its market cross as a result. The corner by the Bell was dangerous enough in 1920 to call for an AA sign, and the junction at Barton Road was a worry in 1975. What changed most over the centuries was what the village wanted from its roads. Until the 1930s it wanted them better: a free bridge, a wider lane, a road made up to the station. By the 1970s it wanted them to stay as they were. The narrow bridge, the cunning corners and the quiet side-lanes had become things to protect. Welford had never been on the way to anywhere, and by the end of the century most of its people wanted to keep it that way.

Gaps and conflicting sources

WHERE THE SOURCES DISAGREE

- **The date of the petition.** Deverson gives “about 1790” 07/01–11; the early-1980s article “New look for ‘Silvester’s Bridge”” gives 1807 01/38–46. The petition calls one landowner the Marquis of Hertford, a title first created in 1793, so 1790 is either a little early or the title has been modernised in copying. 1807 would be after the 1804 agreement, which would make the petition’s request for a county bridge hard to explain.
- **When the bridge was rebuilt.** Deverson says 1806–09 07/01–11; the 1980s article says the subscription paid for work between 1804 and 1809 01/38–46; the documents in the river talk show an agreement in August 1804 and work from September 1804 to 1808 52/09.
- **The toll.** Silvester’s toll of 1783 is given as a shilling 07/01–11; the later toll was 6d for a carriage 07/01–11, 01/38–46. These may simply be different periods.
- **Who owned the bridge in 1893.** Harry Sutton and Deverson say the toll belonged to the Four Alls under a Birmingham proprietor named Davis 01/38–46, 07/01–11. The 1893 account says the bridge was bought that morning from Dutton & Hudson of Warwick 31/12. The 1866 sale names Mrs Lucy Mills in occupation 07/01–11. The chain of ownership from Hunt, Bayliss and Tommes in 1804 to 1893 is not traced anywhere in the archive.
- **The cost of freeing the bridge.** The 1893 account gives £700: £250 from each county council and £200 raised locally 31/12. Sutton in 1938 and Deverson give “between £700 and £800” from a subscription and “a grant from the County Council”, in the singular 01/38–46, 07/01–11. The contemporary account is the more reliable.
- **The year of the photograph and the subscription.** The “Free for Ever” photograph is dated 1892 in one reprint, and one cutting says the subscription was raised in 1892 01/38–46. The ceremony itself was on 26 April 1893 01/38–46, 07/01–11.
- **The gate-post relic.** The 1893 account says the key was to be kept in an oak box made from a gate-post 31/12. Later sources describe a holder for the 1884 25-inch map made from a piece of gate post 07/01–11, 01/38–46. There may have been two relics.
- **“Dr Green” and Cleveland Green.** One cutting says Dr Green, then Mayor of Stratford, attended the 1893 dinner 01/38–46; the 1893 account leaves the key with “Mr Green” 31/12; Cleveland Green of Welford House was a steward and later owned the first car 01/38–46, 13/01. Whether these are one, two or three people is not clear.
- **The date of the enclosure award.** It is given as 1800, as 1801 (a pencil note in the copy of the award) and as 1802 20/04, 47/98, 01/48–101. The usual explanation would be an act in one year and an award in a later one, but the archive does not say.
- **The ancient ford.** By the mill 09/06, at Binton Bridges 10/26, or at the bottom of Boat Lane 10/28, 01/35. The claims of a British tribal ford and a Roman quay at the mill have no support elsewhere in the archive.
- **The toll-avoidance stories.** Joseph Hancox’s midnight wait at the Bird in Hand concerned the turnpike gates on the Birmingham road 20/01. Deverson ties Perks’s overnight route via Henley to paying the Binton toll only once 07/01–11, which would only make sense if he did not return the same way. The two stories may have been run together in memory.
- **Whose lorry took the produce.** One account says Wilson Matthews’, the other “Mr Wilson’s” 08/05, 08/07.

- **The Welford carrier Marshall.** His first name is given as Winifred in one source and Wilfred in the other 09/08, 09/13–17. It is possible that one of the names belongs to his wife.
- **Carriers in 1851.** The census occupation summary counts one carrier, while Samuel and William Head are both named as carriers 01/48–101. One may have been a carrier's assistant or living outside the township.
- **The widening.** Deverson's account dates the £25,000 widening to 1980; the newspaper report is undated but from the early 1980s; and a separate cutting of about 1984 describes a larger county scheme for 1985–86 07/01–11, 01/38–46. These are probably two stages, the first carried out and the second opposed.
- **"Turnpike" on the Gibbs plan.** A note on the sale plan calls the road a turnpike 52/52–57, but nothing else in the archive suggests a turnpike trust at Binton. It was a private toll bridge.
- **The county transfer.** Most sources give 1931 for Welford's move from Gloucestershire to Warwickshire; one note gives about 1933.
- **The age of the bridge.** The 1980s article says there has been a bridge here since the thirteenth century and that Charles II "probably" crossed it in his flight from Worcester 01/38–46. Deverson begins with a packhorse bridge of the early 1600s 07/01–11. Neither the earlier date nor the Charles II story is supported by any document in the archive.

WHAT THE ARCHIVE DOES NOT HOLD

- **Turnpikes.** No turnpike road ever ran through Welford, and the archive has nothing on the Stratford–Evesham turnpike north of the river beyond the tollgates in Hancox's story.
- **The surveyors' accounts.** The highway accounts of 1726–38 and the 1837 return are at the Gloucestershire Record Office. The archive has only the catalogue entries.
- **Council minutes after 1926.** Woodward's digest stops being useful in the mid-1920s. The years in which motor traffic arrived are covered only by scattered cuttings and memories.
- **Buses.** There are no timetables, operators' names or route records for the village bus, from Wilson Matthews's venture of the 1920s onwards.
- **Traffic counts and accidents.** There are no traffic counts and no accident figures, only individual accidents and the county's 1975 statement that there had been no injury accidents at the Barton Road junction.
- **The railways' closure.** Nothing records when Binton and Milcote stations closed or how the village responded.
- **Street lighting, surfacing and pavements.** There is no record of when the village roads were first tarred, when pavements were laid, or when street lights came.
- **Road names.** A note on how the village road names changed, from Mrs Ethel Roberts's papers, is mentioned in the Society's minutes but appears to be lost 37/01–04.
- **The outcome of the 1980s widening dispute.** No cutting records what the county finally decided.
- **The 1899 "maining" request.** The archive does not say whether the road to Milcote station was taken over as a main road.

MAIN SOURCES

- 07/01–11 — Miss Deverson, history of Binton Bridges (the Society's first publication), with sessions records, the petition and the 1866 sale
- 52/09 — the Society's illustrated talk on the river, with the 1802 indictment, 1804 agreements, building account and the 1947 flood report
- 31/12 — "The Freeing of Binton Bridges", account of April 1893 reprinted in *Parish News*
- 01/38–46 — newspaper cuttings on the bridge, 1938–c.1984, including the *Evesham Journal* interview with Harry Sutton (16 April 1938)
- 52/35, 52/52–57 — Georgian drawing of the crossing; Edward Gibbs's sale plan and postcards
- 09/06, 10/26, 10/28, 10/30, 01/35, 01/58 — notes on early routes, fords, charters and place-names
- 17/02, 02/01–12, 06/20 — constables' accounts 1694–1735; record office catalogue of surveyors' accounts and charities
- 20/04, 47/98, 18/15 — enclosure award and H. M. Woodward's 1938 notes on its roads
- 20/01, 11/25 — H. M. Woodward's notes on Joseph Hancox; C. J. Woodward's recollections
- 01/48–101, 11/01–13, 10/01–08, 09/08, 09/13–17 — censuses, directories and notes on carriers
- 18/13, 18/14, 18/21 — H. M. Woodward's digest of Parish Council minutes, 1894–1926, and related papers
- 03/01–19, 13/01, 01/14, 08/04, 08/05, 08/07, 59/01 — memories of the 1920s; the Matthews forge and garage; Wilshaw
- 11/33, 13/23, 15/12 — J. H. Garrett, *The Idyllic Avon* (1906); an early motoring guide; a 1938 river ramble
- 19/44, 06/17, 24/11, 01/52 — 1962 county planning note; *Birmingham Post* 1972; *Herald* 1975; letter of c.1987
- 37/01–04, 15/08, 28/01 — Society minutes 1977–86; Conservation Area Study 1992; Golden Jubilee village signs 2002–03
- 46/14 and folders 16 and 53 — the 1903 six-inch map and the photographs and postcards reproduced here