

Royal Welford: royal and VIP visits and connections with Welford-on-Avon

Introduction: a small village and its brushes with greatness

Welford-on-Avon has had only two documented royal visits in about a thousand years: the Duke of Kent in December 1938 and the Princess Royal in May 1991. Yet royal and famous names run through its records from the eleventh century to the twenty-first. Kings and abbeyes owned its land, and dukes rang its bells. National celebrations were feasted on its Maypole Green, and a silent-film star, an Archbishop of Canterbury and a run of radio and television names came through its lanes.

This essay brings those links together from the Welford & Weston Local History Society archive, with some checking on the web. It moves in date order. It starts with the Saxon and medieval owners of the manor, many of them kings or men close to kings. It then covers the Grevilles of Milcote at the Tudor court and the Dukes of Dorset as lords of the manor. Next come the coronations and jubilees of 1902 to 1937, the Duke of Kent's visit, the village's own list of "Famous Visitors", and the celebrations and royal visit of Elizabeth II's reign. The two royal visits get the most space, because the archive holds the most about them.

Three cautions apply throughout. First, a village like Welford meets royalty mostly at second hand: through landlords, patrons, newspapers and souvenir programmes rather than handshakes. The essay says plainly which links are documented visits and which are only connections. Second, the archive's own transcriptions sometimes disagree about dates and names. Where they do, the essay gives both readings and says which seems stronger. Third, links that are inferred rather than stated in a source are marked as inferred.

References in the form (11/19) are to the Society's folder and item numbers, as they appear in the scanned PDFs in the Claude 1000 archive. A Sources section at the end lists them, with the web pages used.

The village's own view of all this is captured in one short handwritten sheet, headed "Famous Visitors" and underlined (01/47). It was written by several people over many years, in ink, pencil and ballpoint. It starts with "H.R.H. Duke of Kent" and the 1938 play, and ends, in the 1980s or later, with "H.R.H. Princess Royal" opening affordable homes in Holland Meadow. Between them come an archbishop, a film star, a pantomime dame, a polar explorer and several television faces. That list is a fair map of this essay.

Saxon, medieval and Tudor connections

Welford's first royal connections came through ownership, not visits: a king's earl gave it away, a king's grant sent it to a French abbey, and later kings moved its church between abbeys and a college.

An earl's gift and a king's grant

The archive's church notes say that in 1059 Welford was given by Sweyn, Earl of Gloucester, to the Saxon priory of Deerhurst on the Severn (07/01–11; church guide 47/68). Sweyn was almost certainly Swein Godwinson, eldest son of Earl Godwin and brother of the future King Harold II, who was made an earl over Gloucestershire in 1043 ([Sweyn Godwinson](#)). The archive itself warns that the story of how Deerhurst came to own Welford "is told differently in different sources" (07/01–11). The identification of the earl with Swein Godwinson is inferred.

Deerhurst was a royal place. The Society kept the official guide to Odda's Chapel there (29/04–06). Earl Odda, "a kinsman and friend of Edward the Confessor", built it in memory of his brother Elfric, and Bishop Ealdred dedicated it on 12 April 1056. Its dedication stone calls it a "regia aula", a royal hall. Shortly before his death in 1066, Edward the Confessor split the great Deerhurst estate. The greater part went to the abbey of St Denis near Paris and the rest to his new abbey at Westminster ([VCH Gloucestershire](#)). Welford fell in the St Denis share. Domesday Book in 1086 lists it as one of St Denis's six villis in Deerhurst hundred, assessed at 15 hides (07/01–11, 20/02).



So for nearly three hundred years Welford's tithes and church belonged to a French royal abbey, the burial place of the kings of France. The monks of Deerhurst are said to have built the first church on the present site about 1060 (10/30).

Kings, a college and two stone heads

The Crown stepped in again during the Hundred Years' War. Under the laws against alien priories, no English living could be held by a foreign house, so Welford was taken from

Deerhurst and St Denis and given to Tewkesbury Abbey (07/01–11). The Tewkesbury monks rebuilt the chancel. Later the living was given by the King to Eton College, Henry VI's new foundation of 1440. Henry VI then gave it back to the Abbot of Tewkesbury, and the aisles were rebuilt (07/01–11, 03/21–31).

The church guides say the new aisle windows carry carved stone heads of Henry VI and his queen, Margaret of Anjou (03/21–31). If so, they are the oldest royal portraits in the village. The Society's notes record a caution: the Victoria County History thinks the headdress looks earlier, more like Queen Philippa's time. The identification is a tradition, not a certainty.

Smaller royal traces turn up too. Under King John, the Abbot of Tewkesbury and Robert Foliot, parson of the chapel at Bickmarsh in Welford parish, settled a dispute over its tithes (01/62, 17/12). In 1498 Sir Thomas Cokesey of Weston left "to our Prince Henry VII my best collar", worth £200 and more, so that the King would look kindly on his plan for a chantry priest at Weston (03/21–31). That was a bribe in all but name.

The Grevilles at the Tudor court

The family with the closest Tudor court links lived next door at Milcote, in Weston parish. William Grevel of Campden, the wool merchant, held land of Milcote "from the King in chief by Knight service" when he died in 1401. His son Lewis was the ancestor of the Earls of Warwick (01/01).

Sir Edward Greville of Milcote was at the courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII. A draft talk on Welford's history (18/23) says he fought with Henry at the Battle of the Spurs in 1513 and attended the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520. It also cites John Leland as saying that Greville was with the young Princess Mary, later Mary I, in the Marches of Wales. He was buried at Weston in 1529.

Welford had a man of its own in that story. Alec Bryan's notes (01/03) say that John Wells of Welford was one of Greville's retainers at the Battle of the Spurs, and that in 1539 he owned and lived in the house now called Compton Cottage. Bryan's note adds, correctly, that the battle "was only a cavalry skirmish", but "Henry VIII was there". It is the earliest record in the archive of a Welford villager in a king's company. The claim rests on Bryan's notes alone and has not been checked against a muster roll.

A later Greville, Ludovic, was pressed to death in 1589 for murdering his steward. Local memory turned him into the bogeyman "Wicked Loddy" (13/06). That was the darker side of a court family.

Civil War, Restoration and the Dukes of Dorset

From the seventeenth century to the twentieth, Welford's lords of the manor were a ducal and noble family, the Sackvilles, and their name is still cast on the church's history.

A queen on the road and a rector changed by Cromwell

The Civil War passed close by. A Society paper on Weston (51/01) imagines local people "excited and disturbed" when Queen Henrietta Maria, with 3,000 horse, 30 companies of foot, artillery and baggage, crossed Binton Bridges to Stratford to meet Prince Rupert in 1643. The same paper records the order of 4 December 1644 to blow up the roof of Milcote House with three barrels of powder, so that the royalists could not use it. The queen's route over Binton Bridges is the paper's own reading of the event. It is likely, since that was the crossing from the south-west, but it is inferred.

The war reached the church too. The list of rectors shows Jenkin Bowen put out and John Trapp "appointed by Oliver Cromwell" in his place. Bowen was "restored to the living by Charles II" (01/90–99). Woodward's 1907 account of the church says the clock was "presented to the parish in 1660" by Bowen, "at the time of his restoration to the living after the troublous times associated with the Cromwellian period" (26/10). In effect the clock is a Restoration thank-offering.

The Maypole has a royal story of its own. At the dedication of a new pole on Empire Day 1927, a speaker said maypoles "were pulled down by the Puritans in the time of Cromwell, and afterwards reinstated at the Restoration, in the reign of Charles II", and that Welford's had no doubt shared that fate (01/77, Stratford-upon-Avon Herald, 27 May 1927). The national story is well known, but no Welford record of the pole coming down in the 1650s has turned up. The village's part in it is inferred.

From Earl of Middlesex to Duke of Dorset

The Milcote estate, with the lordship of Welford, was sold to Lionel Cranfield, Lord Treasurer and Earl of Middlesex under James I. The Earl of Middlesex presented a rector to Welford in 1631. When the last Cranfield earl died without children in 1674, the property passed through his sister Frances, Countess of Dorset, to the Sackvilles, "and to a branch of this family, the Sackvilles, the estate still belongs" (01/065, 02/01–12).

The Sackvilles became Dukes of Dorset in 1720, and the dukes were Welford's lords of the manor and patrons of the church through the eighteenth century. They left their mark in bronze. When the old bells were recast at Stratford in 1721 by Richard Sanders, the treble was inscribed "LIONELL DUKE OF DORSET LORD OF THIS MANNOR" (01/100–109, 26/10, 24/04). The bell was melted after the tower fire of 13 December 1884 and a new ring was cast in 1885, so the inscription survives only in the records.

The dukes chose Welford's rectors. In 1765 "the Most Noble Lionel Duke of Dorset" presented John Thomas; in 1771 John Frederick, Duke of Dorset, presented Joseph Greene; and in 1790 the same duke presented John Hunt (02/01–12, 26/10). The 1802 enclosure award gave the Duke of Dorset the largest allotments in the parish, and private roads were set out "for the use and accommodation of the Duke of Dorset" (01/70, 22/12).

A petition to a duke

The most human document of the ducal period is a petition. About 1790, 67 inhabitants of Welford and Weston, with landowners from neighbouring parishes, petitioned John Frederick, Duke of Dorset, about Binton Bridges (13/32). They asked him to press, with the Marquis of Hertford, for a county-funded bridge. They listed the drownings and near misses: the carrier John Boyce swept 200 yards, the butcher William Sale drowned, and Thomas Osborn's team and wain overturned, drowning a horse. The petition failed. The present twelve-arch bridge was built by public subscription in 1804–09.

The Sackvilles in the twentieth century

After the dukedom died out in 1843, the Sackville barons kept the estate and the patronage. Lord Sackville was still patron in 1949, and paid for the chancel when Weston church was restored in 1899 (48/28–38, 51/01). The family's best-known member came to Welford too. A postcard of the 1913 Flower Show is captioned "The Hon. Victoria Sackville-West watching Mr Sam Bennett dance" (16/08). This was almost certainly Vita Sackville-West, then 21, the future writer and gardener of Sissinghurst, whose father was Lord Sackville. The identification is inferred from her name and title. The postcard does not say which figure she is, though someone has marked a blue cross under a woman at the left.



Loyal celebrations, 1902 to 1937

Between 1902 and 1937 Welford met the Crown mainly through celebrations, scrapbooks and the post, and the archive shows how seriously the village took them.

A coronation postponed, 1902

G. Wright's history of the village, written in 1915, remembers that "feasting was the order of the day again at the Coronation of Edward VII, and again at that of his present Majesty" (25/07). The cuttings of June 1902 show what happened when the feast went wrong (23/91–96). Edward VII fell ill with appendicitis two days before his coronation, which was postponed. The committee of "the amalgamated parishes of Welford, Weston, and Milcote" met that Tuesday evening and called off everything planned for the Thursday. As the meat was cooked and the cake made, they decided to share the food out and keep the money for later.

The village had other ideas. Many inhabitants "expressed their wish in an unmistakable manner about Wednesday midnight". As a result, "a spread was made for six o'clock, and a large number sat down in Mr Wyatt's orchard under tents", with cake for the children afterwards. A second, quieter celebration followed in the Rectory grounds for about 130 people. It had a service, a dinner, sports and toasts, but out of respect for the sick king there was no music, dancing or fireworks (23/91–96). Wright adds that the whole village "went nearly mad" over the Relief of Mafeking in 1900 (25/07).

Royal faces in village scrapbooks

Someone in Welford, probably the Society's early collectors, kept scrapbooks of royal cuttings. Folder 23 begins with calendar portraits of Prince Henry and Princess Mary of Wales, "Princess Mary at Aldershot" on her hack Lapwing, and cuttings on her engagement to Viscount Lascelles in 1921 (23/01–11). Later pages carry the full report of her wedding at Westminster Abbey on 28 February 1922, with the balcony photograph of the King, Queen and Queen Alexandra (23/84–90). A local angle explains part of the interest. The Abbey's altar hanging, embroidered with kneeling figures of the King and Queen, was modelled on a medieval piece kept at Chipping Campden, a few miles away (23/84–90). A Gloucester diocesan leaflet in the same folder asks Girls' Friendly Society branches to collect money for purses to be presented to Princess Mary during the First World War (23/27–29). Welford was then in Gloucestershire, so its branch was probably among them, though that is inferred.

The same scrapbooks kept the plans for the Prince of Wales's visit to Stratford on 14 June 1924 (23/54–69). He came from Warwick, was met at Clopton Bridge at 3.15 p.m., received an address at the Town Hall and inspected ex-servicemen, cadets, scouts and guides. Welford people would have gone to town to see him. There is no record that he came to Welford itself.

A message from the King, 1917

One royal message reached a Welford home in grief. When Private James Arthur Matthews of the Gloucestershire Regiment was killed in 1917, his family received the printed card sent to the next of kin. Under the royal arms it reads: "The King commands me to assure you of the true sympathy of His Majesty and The Queen in your sorrow", signed by Lord Derby as

Secretary of State for War (43/63). Thousands of families received the same card. For the Matthews it was still the King's word.

The Silver Jubilee of 1935

The Silver Jubilee of George V on 6 May 1935 produced the village's best-documented row (60/09). A public meeting on 18 February, chaired by the Rector, the Rev. A. J. Davis, agreed on church bells, a service to match St Paul's, a tea and a mug for every child, school sports, a bonfire on Welford Hill and the Welford band. Then it stalled. Six people declined to serve, and the trustees of the old Flower Show fund refused to hand over £8 13s for the children's tea. H. M. Woodward, who had done most of the work, resigned.

On 29 April, a week before the day, Mrs Mainwaring proposed that every committee member and trustee resign together and the celebration be handed to H. C. Setten, S. Bryan and W. E. Swinnock. The meeting agreed unanimously, and Setten took the chair with "unrestricted powers". The new committee raised about £47 and ran a week of events: children's sports and tea, a cinema show, the bonfire, commemorative spoons for infants under three and a Jubilee dance (60/09). Setten and Swinnock reappear three years later as the men who received the Duke of Kent.

The Jubilee's lasting memorial is the horse chestnut on the Maypole Green. The seat round it carries a sign: "This tree was planted in the year 1935 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of their Majesties King George V & Queen Mary" (47/95). The archive holds three accounts of who planted it. A note on the back of an October 1938 photograph says Edith Watson planted it in memory of her son Norman, at a cost of 10s 6d. The Society's own history (20/01 p.15) says Mrs Woodward, aged 93, planted it in December 1935. Brad Plimmer's note suggests both may be true: a bereaved mother paid for the sapling, and the oldest resident planted it at the Jubilee ceremony. That reconciliation is a reconstruction, not established fact.



Two years later the coronation of George VI and Queen Elizabeth was marked too. The Society's 2002 Golden Jubilee exhibition showed a souvenir programme for it (24/22), but no Welford committee papers for 1937 have come to light.

The Duke of Kent comes to the Memorial Hall, December 1938

On a foggy Wednesday in December 1938, Prince George, Duke of Kent, the King's younger brother, spent about twenty minutes in Welford's Memorial Hall watching the village players. It was the first royal visit to the village on record, and the archive holds more about it than about any other event in this essay.

Why a duke came to a village hut

The Duke was Vice-Patron of the National Council of Social Service, which backed the new rural community councils, village halls and playing fields of the 1930s. The Warwickshire Rural Community Council, in its first year, arranged a one-day tour to show him its work (11/19, 42/05). In order, he visited an aircraft factory at Coventry, opened the new village hall at Fillongley, saw the Myton Hamlet cottages near Warwick, opened Barford's King George V playing field, and called at Charles Bettridge's smithy at Wellesbourne. He took tea at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre with Sir Archibald and Lady Flower, came to Welford "to see a village play", and ended at Alcester Town Hall before going on to Himley Hall as the guest of the Earl of Dudley (11/19; RCC journal in 62/01 p.85).

Welford was chosen for its drama. The Welford-on-Avon Amateur Dramatic Society had won a Rural Community Council certificate of merit in 1929 and a gold star for the best performance in the county in 1931 (62/01 p.82). A later account says "it was due to this success that Welford was chosen to showcase its play to Royalty" (61/01–09).



The evening itself

The Evesham Journal's report (11/19) sets the scene. At about 5.15 p.m. "a cheering throng of villagers, young and old, many of them with flags" gathered by "the floodlighted Maypole, Memorial Hall and Magpie Cottage". The floodlighting was done free by the S.W. & S. Electric Power Company. The Duke was received by Mr H. C. Setten, chairman of the Parish Council, and Alderman W. L. Dingley. He asked about the Maypole "and was interested to learn that Welford had had such a landmark from time immemorial". The paper's photograph showed him with Mrs Eric Roberts, captain of the Welford Girl Guides, with Lord Henry Seymour, the Lord Lieutenant, standing behind.

Inside, the hall was decorated in royal blue. The players gave Lionel Hale's *She Passed Through Lorraine*, a play set in a Lorraine farmhouse five years after the death of Joan of Arc. The cast was D. Serjeantson, M. Basson, H. E. Churchill, L. Matthews, V. Matthews, C. Howell, B. Jakeman, R. Wright, I. L. Churchill, A. J. Collins, W. Langston and M. Booth. W. E. Swinnock, the producer, and Miss G. D. Serjeantson, the leading lady, were presented. The Duke said he had thoroughly enjoyed the performance, and he learned that the society put on two productions a year from local talent (11/19). One eulogy says he stayed only for the first half (11/54–55).

The Stratford-upon-Avon Herald's critic, signing "G.Q.J.", came for the repeat performance later that night (62/01 pp.82, 90). His piece is the best picture of the village after a royal visit. "You don't receive the King's brother in your village hall after tea every Wednesday evening." The Maypole was "holding its head so high that it seemed lost among the stars", and children were "still gazing in rapt wonder at the very homely-looking hut that held the village actors". Inside, "three or four bright new garden seats" had been folded against the wall: "Nobody, apparently, was to be allowed to occupy such historic pieces of furniture." Some actors "dry up" now and again, "as their minds went back to the Royal visit".

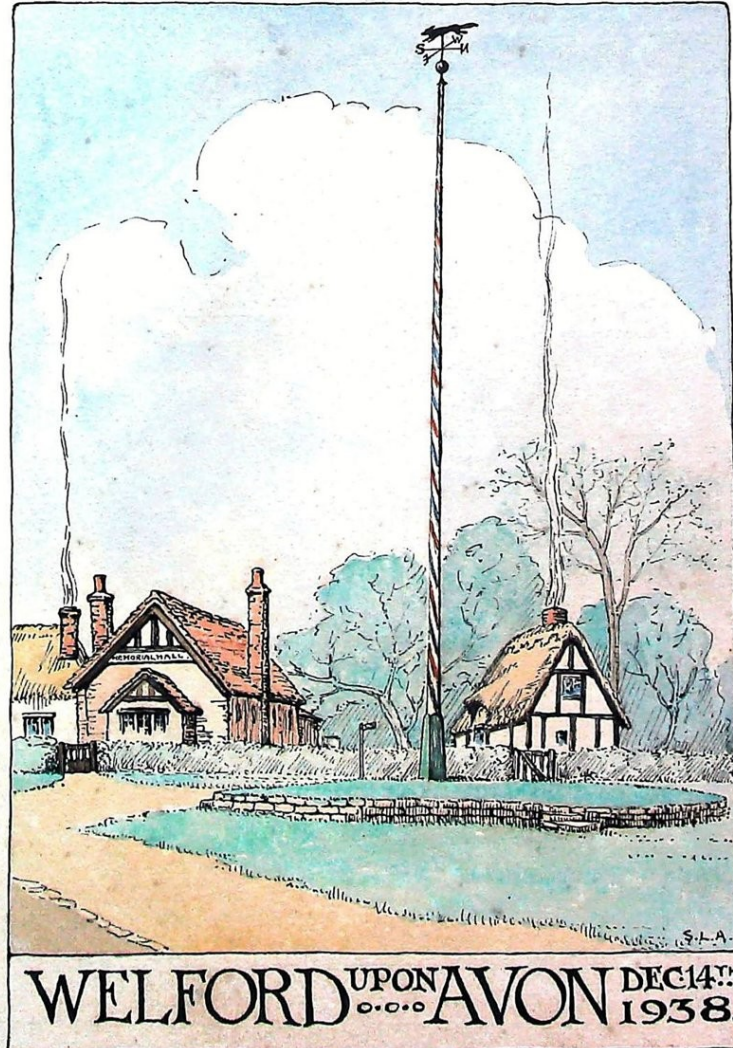
He noted that many of the cast were "true village workers, belonging either to Welford or its small cousin Dorsington", from farm worker to insurance agent. The society ran on a self-imposed limit of £10 per production. Swinnock had designed the scenery and was on the night "stage-manager, sound effects, prompter, electrician, and a few other things". The critic's only complaint was the interval music: modern swing did not suit Joan of Arc.



The programme signed "George"

The treasure of the evening is the programme. Mrs S. L. Atkin of Welford painted a special cover showing the Maypole, the Memorial Hall and half-timbered Magpie Cottage. It is hand-lettered "Programme of the Play" and "Welford upon Avon, Dec. 14th 1938". The Duke autographed it "George" and handed it back to the society (11/19). It stayed in the village: a later history of the society says it could be seen "on the table at the back of the Hall" (61/01–09). H. D. Parriss of Maypole House had postcard copies made, captioned "The programme presented to H.R.H. Duke of Kent" (03/11). An envelope in the society scrapbook warns: "This envelope contains a beautiful program which the Duke of Kent has signed George. Please take care when handling this precious item" (62/01 p.86).

PROGRAMME OF THE PLAY:



WELFORD 0.0.0 UPON AVON DEC 14TH 1938.

Grays

Which day?

The sources give three dates. The printed invitation from the Rural Community Council, dated 30 November 1938, asks guests to the Memorial Hall at 4.45 p.m. on "Wednesday December 7th" (42/05, 24/15). The RCC's own journal says "Wednesday, December 13th", but 13 December 1938 was a Tuesday (62/01 p.85). The programme cover says 14 December, and the Herald of Friday 23 December says "last Wednesday week", which also points to Wednesday 14 December. The weight of evidence favours 14 December. A likely explanation is that the tour was put back a week after the invitations went out, but no letter says so. That is inferred.

Afterwards

The Duke "hoped to pay another visit to the village in the not too distant future" (61/01–09). He never did. He was killed on 25 August 1942 when his Sunderland flying boat crashed at Eagle's Rock in Caithness ([Undiscovered Scotland](#)). The war had already stopped the players. When they revived in 1946 with *Barnet's Folly*, the paper recalled that "in the year before the war it notched its claim to fame when the late Duke of Kent attended a performance" (62/01). In 1950 a "Royal Patronage" note said that "unusually for a village organisation", the society could claim royal patronage (62/01 p.72). Sixty years later, villagers still told the Society about "the Memorial Hall at Welford which the Duke of Kent had visited" (38/01–03, 1998).

Famous visitors: film stars, an archbishop and politicians

Beyond royalty, Welford drew a steady trickle of well-known people, and the village kept count of them on its own handwritten "Famous Visitors" list (01/47).

The village's own list

The sheet is undated and written by several hands. Its entries, with the notes beside them, are:

Visitor	Note on the list (01/47)
H.R.H. Duke of Kent	Attended dramatic performance, Dec 1938, "She passed through Lorraine"
Archbishop of Canterbury (Fisher)	Married his nephew to Nancy Roberts of Cherry Croft, in Welford Church
Betty Balfour	Silent moving pictures
Dorothy Summers	Mrs Mop, ITMA
Marjorie Westbury	(no note)
Margaret Rawlings	Actress (added in pencil)
Dorothy Ward	Pantomime
Wally Herbert	Arctic explorer (added in pencil)
Michael Hart	Producer of "Crossroads" on TV
Tony Hart	Illustrator of children's TV
H.R.H. Princess Royal	Opening affordable homes in Holland Meadow
Robin Ellis	Actor in "Poldark" TV

For most names the list is the only record in the archive. It does not say when they came, or whether they visited, stayed or lived nearby. The sections below cover the ones the archive can say more about.

Betty Balfour opens the fete, 1939

On August Bank Holiday, Monday 7 August 1939, the village fete was opened by Betty Balfour, "the famous film star" (54/02). Balfour had been Britain's biggest silent-screen star of the 1920s, the cockney flower girl of the *Squibs* films, billed as "Britain's Queen of Happiness" ([Betty Balfour](#)). She came as the guest of Mrs E. Watson of Manor Farm, whom she had befriended in Wellington, New Zealand, and the fete was held in Mrs Watson's grounds.

The programme had a procession from the Maypole Green at 2 p.m., the opening at 2.30, Doreen Hodges and her Quinton Imps, a baby show, folk dancing, comic cricket between the Welford Warblers and the Maypole Magpies, bowling for two live pigs and a dance in the Memorial Hall. Miss Balfour judged the procession and gave out the prizes twice, at 2.30 and again at 8.30. She wished everyone a happy day and hoped the promoters would get their 5½ acres of playing field. The Four Shires Advertiser printed two photographs, one of her signing autographs. It was the last fete before the war, which began four weeks later (54/02).

The Mrs Watson of Manor Farm is very likely the Edith Watson who, by the 1938 photograph, paid for the Jubilee chestnut in memory of her son. That link is inferred from the name and the date.

An archbishop at St Peter's, 1953

In 1953 Nancy Roberts of Cherry Croft was married at St Peter's, and the service was taken by Geoffrey Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury, uncle of the bridegroom (01/47). A memoir in the archive by a woman married at St Peter's in 1953, almost certainly the bride herself (inferred), says the reception was in a marquee in the orchard, and that "Mike's uncle – then the Archbishop of Canterbury took the service with Karl Grey the rector" (49/02). There were pictures of the archbishop with the churchwardens. It was the same year Fisher crowned the Queen.

Stage and radio names

Margaret Rawlings, the stage actress, had a family link rather than a visit. A note added in 1950 to the village "Book of Gossip" says that Mrs Mainwaring's niece "is the actress Margaret Rawlings" (21/01–21). Mrs Mainwaring is the woman who, in 1935, proposed handing the Silver Jubilee to Setten's new committee (60/09). The other radio and television names on the list, Dorothy Summers (Mrs Mopp in the wartime comedy ITMA), Marjorie Westbury, the pantomime star Dorothy Ward, Michael and Tony Hart and Robin Ellis, have no other trace in the scans checked for this essay.

Members of Parliament

Politicians came to Welford through its needs. In May 1956 Mrs Jean Williams of Duck Lane wrote to John Profumo, MP for Stratford-on-Avon, "for every housewife and mother in Welford-on-Avon and Weston", demanding mains water. Some villagers were still using buckets as lavatories, "as they no doubt did in Shakespeare's day". Profumo replied on 7 June 1956 that the council had the matter "well in hand" (01/11–12). Mrs Williams passed his letter round with a note hoping he would keep his promise, "perhaps a little reminder at a future date will keep him too!" Piped water did not reach Welford until 1968 (38/01–03).

In 1958 the river carnival was opened by Mrs Anthony Kershaw, wife of the MP for Stroud. Mr Kershaw spoke on Cyprus and passed on good wishes from Profumo, "who was unable to attend" (01/22). Five years later Profumo resigned from Parliament over the scandal that bears his name.

The Elizabethan age: coronation, jubilees and the Princess Royal

In the reign of Elizabeth II, Welford marked every great royal occasion and received its second royal visitor, the Princess Royal, in 1991.

Royal names in a field deed, 1940

The oddest royal document in the archive is a land deed. When H. S. Shorthouse settled Churchfield Close as a charity for allotments on 14 June 1940, the deed set the trust's term by the lives of eighteen members of the royal family (59/01). Its schedule lists George VI, Queen Elizabeth, the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, the Dukes of Gloucester, Kent and Windsor, the Princess Royal and others. This "royal lives" clause was the usual legal device of the time for keeping within the rule against perpetuities. It meant that Welford's allotments were tied, on paper, to the lifespan of the two little princesses.

Bells, a royal visit to Stratford, and the Festival of Britain

The 1951 festival leaflet for Welford boasted that the church bells "were rung for the births of Prince Charles and Princess Anne" (13/06), in 1948 and 1950. On 20 April 1950 George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited Stratford Town Hall (47/72), and the Society kept the Herald's supplement on the visit (24/22). For the Festival of Britain in 1951 the village took the opposite line to 1935. A public meeting voted that the celebration should be "directed towards visitors and not villagers", and the committee's main work was a publicity leaflet (55/01-03).

Coronation Day, 2 June 1953

The Coronation was the village's biggest party of the century, and the committee minute book records it in detail (55/01–03). A public meeting on 7 October 1952, chaired by H. C. Setten, elected a twelve-member committee with the Rector, the Rev. K. A. Gray, in the chair and R. E. Wright as secretary. This time the celebration was explicitly for the villagers.

Two plans fell through. The committee got a quote of about £100 for an ox-roast, but the Ministry of Food would only license a public roasting where an ox had been roasted at one of the century's earlier coronations, and on 6 March 1953 the idea was dropped by six votes to one. The bonfire was moved from Welford Hill to Haas Hill, offered by Fred Bluck, after objections that Long Marston, Quinton and Pebworth would have the better view.

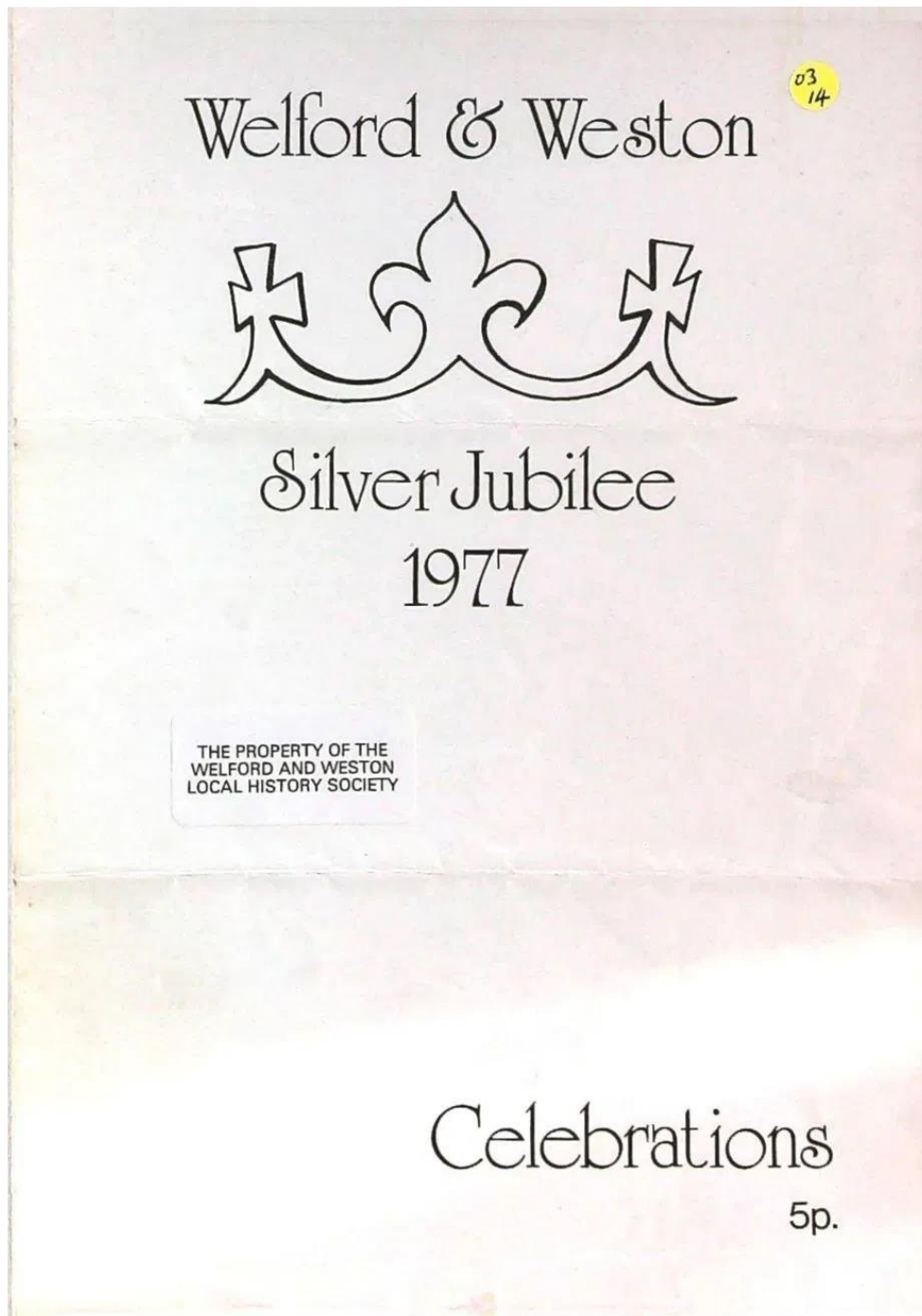
The plan was for dancing on the Maypole Green, a buffet supper for about 600 people, boxes for the sick and aged, a procession led by a "mayor" in borrowed Elizabethan costume, four 18-gallon barrels of beer and a floodlit Maypole. The Herald recorded what happened on the day. There were services at Weston and Welford, and a short service on the Maypole Green with a united choir. Every child was given a Bible, the school children danced round the Maypole, there was tea in the Memorial Hall and dancing on the green to Mr W. Johnson's music. The weather defeated the rest: "the bonfire and fireworks display were postponed" (55/01–03). The fund raised £253 11s 7d. What was left paid for two Coronation seats, one at Weston Turn and one on Cress Hill, in place by May 1955 (55/05).

A telegram from the Queen, 1971

In December 1971 Mrs Jane Higgins of Welford, born at Upper Quinton on 22 December 1871, became the village's first known centenarian, and received the Queen's telegram (13/07). The church bells were rung for her (19/50). Her old neighbour, Doris Toye, wrote of a tiny, fiercely independent woman who lived without gas or electricity, raised her bed on bricks when the floods came, and said, "Worse things happen at sea." The Society listed the telegram as item 13/07 among its royal treasures (24/22).

The Silver Jubilee, 1977

The Silver Jubilee issue of the parish magazine for June 1977 (03/141, 03/142) shows a full week. There was a garden party at the Rectory on Saturday 4 June, an open-air service on the school playground on Sunday, church bells on Monday, a children's party with Jubilee mugs on Jubilee Day, Tuesday 7 June, races, a tug of war, a barbecue and fireworks on the 9th, and a Grand Jubilee Dance on the 11th at £1.50 with supper. The Rector, the Rev. J. David Strong, wrote of "the lead given to our nation by the Queen and Prince Philip". The Society itself gave to the Silver Jubilee Fund (27/01–09).



The Princess Royal opens Holland Meadow, 1991

The second royal visit came 53 years after the first. The Princess Royal, as president of the Rural Housing Trust ([Rural Housing Trust](#)), opened the Holland Meadow affordable housing scheme on Barton Road (29/18). The scheme had ten homes, built by Westbury Partnership Homes for English Villages Housing Association. Young local couples bought them for just over half their market value, so that they could stay in the village.

The newspaper report, by Martyn Stratton and Adrianne Emes, says the Princess drove herself to the site. She met the district and county council chairmen, the chief constable and the parish council chairman, Fraser Pithie, and was introduced to young couples including

Philip and Amanda Taylor and their daughter Claire. "We are really delighted to have such a nice home in the village we want to live in," Amanda said. After Polly and Beth Clifton gave her a posy, she unveiled a plaque and planted a tree. At Welford Primary School, Rebecca Perkins, aged 10, gave her a bouquet, and she watched a maypole dance. She then drove to Stratford to open an extension to the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and asked that the cost of the lunch go to African famine relief (29/18).





The exact date needs care. The Society's minutes say the visit was on 3 May 1991 (38/01–03), but 3 May 1991 was a Friday, and the cutting says she came "on Monday". The photo numbers on the cutting point to May 1991. Monday 29 April or Monday 6 May would fit the cutting; no source settles it. Miss Joyce Skinner filmed the visit, and showed her video to the Society in 1993, along with one of the Princess of Wales's visit to Stratford in February 1992 (38/01–03).

Golden and Diamond Jubilees, 2002 and 2012

For the Golden Jubilee in 2002, the Society and Welford Wives paid for new village name signs showing the Maypole and the river, with a small plate recording the Jubilee (28/01). On

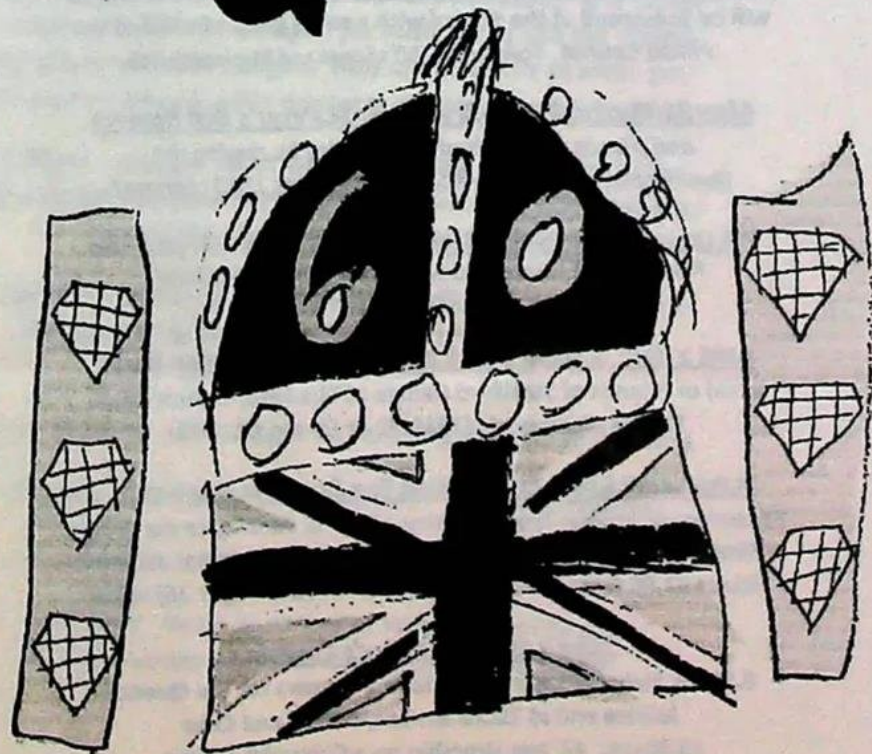
Sunday 9 June 2002 the Society's Golden Jubilee exhibition in the Memorial Hall drew more than 200 visitors. It showed the Duke of Kent's programme, the Coronation papers, Mrs Higgins's telegram and a table of royal souvenirs, most of them from Charles and Diana's wedding in 1981. It closed after a late rush from the Jubilee Thanksgiving at the Maypole (24/22).

The Diamond Jubilee programme of 2012 (53/43) ran from maypole dancing at the school on 23 May to a dedication of a new Jubilee seat. Residents who had been in the village in 1952 were given a small gift by the Parish Council, and St Peter's ringers rang a quarter peal of Surprise Major.

53
43

WELFORD CELEBRATES
THE

Queen's



Diamond
Jubilee

Conclusion: what royalty meant to Welford

Welford's royal story is mostly one of distant owners in its first eight centuries and of loyal celebration in its last one, with two short visits that the village has never forgotten.

For most of its history, kings and great lords shaped Welford without seeing it. An earl gave it to Deerhurst, Edward the Confessor's grant sent it to a French royal abbey, and Henry VI moved its church between Eton and Tewkesbury. The Dukes of Dorset chose its rectors and had their name cast on its treble bell, yet the one document that shows villagers speaking to a duke is a petition about drownings at Binton Bridges, and it failed. Those connections were real, but they ran one way.

The twentieth century changed the direction. Coronations and jubilees became the village's own festivals, run by its own people: the supper in Mr Wyatt's orchard in 1902, the committee coup of 1935, the Bibles and the rained-off bonfire of 1953, the mugs of 1977, the new signs of 2002. The same few names recur: Setten, Swinnock, Wright, Roberts. Each celebration shows a village organising itself, and the Crown gave it the occasion.

The two royal visits fit that pattern. The Duke of Kent came in 1938 because the village players were the best in the county and the Rural Community Council wanted to show off its work. The Princess Royal came in 1991 because the village had built homes so its young people could stay. Both visits honoured something Welford had done for itself. That may be why the watercolour programme signed "George" is still kept with such care, and why Holland Meadow's plaque still stands.

Several questions remain for the Society. The exact dates of both royal visits are uncertain. The archive does not say when most of the "Famous Visitors" came. The figure marked with a cross on the 1913 Flower Show postcard may or may not be Vita Sackville-West. Answers may lie in the Herald's files, the Warwickshire County Record Office, or in more family albums "found in the loft".

Sources

Archive references are to the Welford & Weston Local History Society folders, as scanned in the project's Claude 1000 folder (folder/item). Web pages were checked on 10 October 2026; Wikipedia pages could not be opened from here, so those links rest on search results.

Saxon to Tudor: 07/01–11 (church notes; Deerhurst and St Denis; Tewkesbury and Eton), 10/30, 47/68 (church guide), 20/02, 29/04–06 (Odda's Chapel guide), 01/62 and 17/12 (Bickmarsh under King John), 03/21–31 (Cokesey will 1498; Henry VI heads), 01/01 (Grevel inquisition), 01/03 (Alec Bryan: John Wells), 18/23 (draft talk on the Reformation), 13/06 (Festival leaflet, "Wicked Loddy").

Civil War and the Dukes of Dorset: 51/01 (Weston paper: Henrietta Maria, Milcote), 01/90–99 (rectors, Trapp and Bowen), 26/10 (Woodward 1907: clock, bells, patrons), 01/77 (1927 maypole dedication), 01/065 and 02/01–12 (descent of the manor; patrons), 01/100–109 and 24/04 (bells), 01/70 and 22/12 (enclosure award), 13/32 (Binton Bridges petition), 48/28–38, 16/08 (1913 Flower Show postcard).

1902 to 1937: 25/07 (G. Wright 1915), 23/91–96 (1902 coronation reports), 23/01–11, 23/27–29, 23/84–90 (Princess Mary cuttings), 23/54–69 (Prince of Wales at Stratford 1924),

43/63 (King's message 1917), 60/09 (1935 Jubilee minute book), 47/95 (Jubilee chestnut photograph), 24/22.

Duke of Kent, 1938: 11/19 (Evesham Journal report), 42/05 and 24/15 (invitation), 03/11 (programme postcard), 62/01 pp.72–91 (Dramatic Society scrapbook: Herald 23 Dec 1938, RCC journal, programme), 07/07, 61/01–09, 11/54–55, 38/01–03, 01/47.

Famous visitors: 01/47 ("Famous Visitors" list), 54/02 (1939 fete, Betty Balfour), 49/02 (1953 wedding memoir), 21/01–21 (Book of Gossip), 01/11–12 (Profumo letters 1956), 01/22 (1958 river carnival).

1940 to 2012: 59/01 (Shorthouse deed 1940), 47/72 (Stratford Town Hall royal visits), 55/01–03 and 55/05 (Festival and Coronation committee), 13/07 and 19/50 (Mrs Higgins, 1971), 03/14, 03/141, 03/142, 27/01–09 (1977 Silver Jubilee), 29/18 (Princess Royal, 1991), 38/01–03 (Society minutes), 28/01 (Golden Jubilee signs), 24/22 (2002 exhibition), 53/43 (Diamond Jubilee 2012).

Web:

- [Sweyn Godwinson](#), Wikipedia
- [Victoria County History, Gloucestershire: Deerhurst priory](#)
- [Undiscovered Scotland: Eagle's Rock](#), the Duke of Kent's crash in 1942
- [Betty Balfour](#), Wikipedia
- [Rural Housing Trust history](#), the Princess Royal as president from 1983