

Welford-on-Avon · Chapel Street, by the Maypole

The Shakespeare Inn

A beerhouse with a bakehouse: two centuries of "the Shake", the families who kept it, and the village that drank and bought its bread there.

Drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive (folder references in grey). A companion to the essays on the Bell Inn, the Four Alls and working lives in Welford.



The Shakespeare Inn, Chapel Street, in July 1992. The two-storey front with its bow windows and lean-to porch, and the lower range to the left under its own roof, with the hanging sign on its post. Figure 53 of the draft Conservation Area Study. 15/08

Every English village of any size had a pub that the gentry did not use. In Welford it was the Shakespeare. A woman who grew up in the village put the social map plainly: "the villagers went to the Shakespeare, the more upmarket went to the Bell and I don't know who went to the Four Alls" 49/21. The Bell stood at the crossroads with its auction room, its court leet and its Georgian respectability. The Four Alls kept the toll gate at Binton Bridges and later turned to boating, carnivals and caravans. The Shakespeare stood on the south side of Chapel Street, a few yards from the Maypole. It was where the pea pickers

drank, where the bread was baked, and where, for most of the twentieth century, one family kept the bar, the bakehouse and the village's stories.

This essay gathers what the Society's archive says about the building and the people who kept it. That is more than might be expected for a small village beerhouse. There are census entries from 1841 onwards, trade directories, a parish council minute, a run of oral histories, three newspaper profiles from the 1970s and 1980s, the listing descriptions, and a scatter of photographs. It is also less than a historian would want. There are no deeds, no licensing records and no brewery papers. The earliest part of the story rests on one local writer's memory, and some of the most quoted stories contradict each other. Those gaps and conflicts are set out at the end.

The building on Chapel StreetThe fabric, its date and its neighbours

The Shakespeare is not an old timber-framed cottage of the kind that fills the rest of Chapel Street. It is a brick house of two storeys, painted white at the front. The statutory list, in its 1967 form, describes it as an "early C19 brick building" with three lattice casement windows upstairs, a central moulded wooden doorcase with a six-panel door, a frieze and dentil cornice, and "identical segmental bow windows either side on ground floor", under a corbelled brick cornice and an old tile roof 13/02, 30/07. It was listed Grade II on 5 April 1967, in the group formed by all the listed buildings on the south side of Chapel Street. The provisional list of about 1960 had already noted it in almost the same words, but gave it "3 sash windows" on the first floor rather than lattice casements 13/03. Either the windows were changed in the 1960s or one of the two surveyors described them loosely.

The modern list entry, reproduced in the Society's typescript, revises the date and adds the plan. It calls the building a "Public house. Late C18 or early C19. Brick, painted to front; tile roof with brick end stacks. L-plan". It describes a symmetrical front of three windows, a top dentilled brick cornice, a "C20 lean-to porch", bow windows with four-light small-paned casements on the ground floor, and segmental-headed windows above with three-light leaded casements flanking a two-light one, with a rear outshut 47/54. The typist managed to write "first isted 1967", one of several slips in that typescript.

The local tradition goes further back. An anonymous writer who compiled notes on Welford houses, numbering them as they went, described house number 35, "The Shakespere", as "a typical Georgian building of the middle 1700s". The writer added: "I dont know anything of its history, nor the date it became an Inn, as I dont think it was built for that purpose" 10/05. So the sources run from the middle of the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth.

The 1992 Conservation Area Study simply repeated the list description, adding that the front was then colour-washed rather than whitewashed 15/08.

The photographs show what the descriptions leave out. The building is really two parts. The 1992 view shows the taller, symmetrical brick house with its bow windows, and to its left a lower, plainer range under a separate roof, with the inn sign on a post in front of it 15/08. An Edwardian photograph of the same corner, discussed below, shows that lower range as a separate shop with a baker's fascia 46/06. The listing's "L-plan" and "rear outshut" suggest more ranges behind, and the oral histories speak of a yard, "the 'Shake' yard", with the bakery across it 31/06.

The neighbours matter too, because they explain a good deal about the inn's trade. The Shakespeare stood in the busiest corner of the old village. A talk on Welford at the time of the 1901 census described the area around the Maypole as "the second centre of Village life", with "two grocer's shops, the Post Office, the blacksmiths shop and the Shakespeare inn" 46/37–95. The smithy of the Matthews family was next door. In 1881 the enumerator went straight from the Shakespeare Tavern to James Matthews, blacksmith 48/06. In 1901 Thomas Matthews, blacksmith, was at schedule 88 and the "Tavern" at 89 48/08. In 1911 Archie Matthews, shoeing and general smith, was noted as living "between Shakespeare Inn & Maypole Stores, so likely at The Forge" 33/48. The 1911 enumerator's summary book walks along Chapel Street "past Wynns Cottages, the grocer's shop, the smithy, the Shakespeare Inn and the Shakespeare Stores", and the grocer, Mr Harris, had named his shop after the pub 48/09. Later the smithy became a builder's yard, and a butcher's shop opened next door. The village survey of about 1960 lists, in order along the south side, "Mr P. F. Clarke, The Forge, Builder's workshops", "Mr Errington, Butcher", and "Shakespeare Inn & house" 20/06. The Post Office was for a time in Devon House, "the third eastward of the Shakespeare on the South side of the street" 50/40, 44/01–41. Across the road stood the old house called The Scullards, "in Chapel Street opposite the Shakespeare Public House" 53/46.

The inn took its identity from the Maypole as much as from its own name. When the landlords of the 1970s advertised in the parish magazine, their slogan was simply "The Shakespeare Inn (The Pub by the Maypole)" 03/141, 03/142. A walker who came through in 1973 noted "a tall red, white and blue striped maypole, used for morris dancing. The Shakespeare Inn and village shop are close by" 13/27.

Weaver, schoolmaster and a death in the schoolroomLate eighteenth century

If the building is Georgian, what was it before it was a pub? One answer comes from Gilda Gray, the rector's wife, whose notes on Welford history underlie

much of the Society's work. In a typescript on the village schools, written in the early 1980s, she described a "Petty School in Welford – circa 1805":

Kept by one, William Ingram, a master weaver, whose house stood where the new bungalow built by Mrs Will Clarke, at the entrance to Pool Close, now stands. His weaving sheds and the school were housed at what is now the Shakespeare Inn.

Gilda Gray, typescript on Welford schools, early 1980s · 17/07

The same typescript tells the story that made Ingram remembered. John Sandford, son of the carrier, was a pupil. "One day, the boy was very troublesome, and William Ingram, who was a cripple, caught him by the scruff of his neck and put him on a wall peg. He turned round a few minutes later to find the boy dead." Ingram was tried at Warwick Assizes and found guilty of manslaughter. His family left the village, but returned after their father's death 17/07.

Gray had told the story before, in the parish magazine of January 1957, and that version differs in two ways that matter here. It dates the tragedy to "the 1790's". It also places the school somewhere else: it "most probably stood on the piece of ground now cultivated by Mr. George Freeman—north of Pool Close". In that telling Ingram was "a skilful weaver, his wife Mary travelled a wide district selling fine linen", and William "stayed at home, superintended the primitive weaving machines and kept school". He was "sent to prison—but he must have returned to Welford, for his death is recorded in the register in 1809" 05/02. D. Ray's history of education in Welford, written in the mid-1970s, quotes the 1957 version, with the school north of Pool Close 10/31.

So the claim that the Shakespeare began as Ingram's weaving sheds and schoolroom appears only in Gray's later typescript. It may reflect something she learned after 1957, or it may be a tidying-up of a story whose site had been forgotten. The two locations are not far apart, since Pool Close opens off Chapel Street close to the Maypole. Nothing else in the archive connects the inn building with weaving. The weaving itself is real enough. The 1841 census counts a weaver and a linen weaver in the village 48/01, and a 1849 survey of levels for village drainage measured falls "from bottom of ditch near May Pole to the same near Ingrams pig sty" 19/52. The Ingram name survived in the village too. H. M. Woodward collected from Mrs Beecher in 1907 a memory of the 1840s, of "an old man named Ingram who used to attend church", bald except for long hair at the back which he tied in a knot over his crown, and the children's rhyme: "Old man Ingram shall never be forgot / As long as he ties his hair in a knot" 21/22–66.

A beerhouse without a name. 1830–1880

The house-notes writer was clear about how the inn began: "when it became an Inn it was only a beer house and there was no name listed for it only the propr[ietor]" 10/05. That fits the national picture. After the Beer Act of 1830 any householder could sell beer on payment of an excise fee, without a magistrates' licence. Thousands of small beerhouses opened in cottages and workshops, and directories listed their keepers as "beer retailers" rather than under the name of a house. A full licence, which allowed the sale of wine and spirits, was a different and more valuable thing. The Bell was a fully licensed inn. The Four Alls was advertised in 1866 as "a full licensed roadside country inn" 30/03. The Shakespeare, as the directories show, was still a beer retailer's house as late as 1914.

This makes the early keepers hard to pin down, because a beer retailer can be listed without any address. The 1841 census, the first to name everyone, shows Mary Parker keeping the Bell, and the summary of that census notes that "Elizabeth Day was a second publican". She was 50, living in Welford with William Day, 17, and a young Elizabeth Day, 4, with two lodgers or servants 48/01. Where her house stood is not recorded. In 1851 the enumerator, Henry Hopkins, noted innkeepers at the Bell, the Boat and the Four Alls, and at schedule 75 a William Smith, 33, agricultural labourer, whose occupation the transcriber reads, with doubt, as "& Beerhouse keeper" 14/12. The Post Office Directory of Gloucestershire for 1856, and another directory of about the same date covering the villages round Chipping Campden, list two Welford beer retailers, John Harris and Richard Lloyd, beside Thomas Matthews at the Bell and Mrs Lucy Mills at the Four Alls 48/13-16. A Robert Berwick, farmer and carrier at Cress Farm, kept another beerhouse, the Holly Bush, where an old lady remembered a rack by the door for customers' long churchwarden pipes and quarrels when someone took the wrong one 10/01.

Any one of these could have been the Shakespeare's forerunner. The house-notes writer chose John Harris: "In 1850 it appears to have been kept by a John Harris and he employed Joseph Harris who is listed as a baker, to bake the bread for him as there was a bakehouse with the Inn and it was a condition that the Innkeeper baked bread and sold it. It was part of the living" 10/05. The writer gives no source, but the date suggests a directory, perhaps the 1856 Post Office Directory or one of the 1850s directories the Society copied. The 1851 census does show a John Harris, 56, gardener of one and a half acres, with sons Joseph, 19, and John, 16 14/12. Whether this is the beer retailer cannot be told from the census alone. A Joseph Harris, "baker & grocer (employing 1 man)", aged 64, was living next door but four to the Shakespeare in 1881 48/06.

The claim that baking was a condition of the tenancy is the earliest statement of what became the Shakespeare's defining trait. For more than a century the pub and the bakehouse went together. Every landlord named in the census from 1891 to 1911 is described as a baker as well as an innkeeper, and the last landlord of the Basson family was remembered as "the last Baker at the Shakespere" 48/07, 48/08, 48/10, 10/05.

The next name in the house notes is Joseph Allcock: "in 1870 it says that Joseph Allcock beer house and Shop keeper" 10/05. The 1871 census cannot confirm it, because several pages of the Welford enumeration are missing from the Society's copy 48/05.

The Shakespeare Tavern 1881–1896

The name first appears in the census of 1881. On the eighth page of the Welford enumeration, after the Post Office of William M. Harris, sub-postmaster and grocer, and three cottages, the enumerator wrote "Shakespeare Tavern" in the address column against schedule 44. The household was Joseph Allcock, head, a widower of about 36, "Beer Retailer & Boot & Shoe Maker", born at Epwell in Oxfordshire. With him on census night were two visitors, Jane Bird, 29, married, also from Epwell, and Sarah Cox, a widow of about 29 from Warwickshire 48/06. The next schedule was James Matthews, blacksmith.

48/07. Whether George was Elizabeth's grandson or other kin is not shown, but the coincidence of surname and district is suggestive.

George Whitehead is the first keeper of the Shakespeare whose part in village life is recorded. Welford's first parish council was elected in December 1894. When H. M. Woodward made notes from its minute books in 1940, he recorded that "Mr G.D. Whitehead's name appears as a Member of the Council Ap. 16th 1896. He was Landlord of the Shakespeare Inn" 18/13. The list of councillors from 1894 to 1925 has "G. O. [for G. D.] Whitehead, Ap 1896" 19/25. A publican on the parish council in the 1890s was not unusual, but it is a sign that the Shakespeare's landlord counted for something.

Whitehead's tenancy ended badly, if a story told seventy years later can be trusted. In 1973, when Charlie Sabin and his wife Clara celebrated their golden wedding, the newspaper reported his memory of the change of landlords. "The previous landlord of the Shakespeare had lost his tenancy after about 400 pea-pickers from all over the district celebrated too hard and broke every window in the pub. Charlie blamed the beer" 13/14. The Society's own interview notes with Mr Sabin say the same: "Went to Shakespeare public house about 1900 — all windows broke by pea pickers, running horses sold in Chapel St." A fuller copy explains that the pea pickers "used to be on piece work at rate of 1/- for a 40 lb net", and that they were "also horse dealers & the horses were run up & down Chapel Street for show & sale" 08/06, 08/07.

This is the first glimpse of the pub's customers. Market gardening had transformed Welford in the late nineteenth century. Peas, beans, asparagus and fruit went by carrier's cart to Birmingham, and the picking brought in large gangs of seasonal workers, many of them travellers who also traded horses. The Bell had its farmers and auctions. The Shakespeare, by the Maypole and the Chapel Street cottages, had the pickers. The note in the archive that "the pea-pickers' riot must date from before about 1905" and "isn't recorded anywhere else in these folders" remains true 13/14. It would be worth looking for in the Stratford Herald, which the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust holds complete from 1860.

The Sabins and the bread roundc.1896–c.1905

The next family came, like the Whiteheads, from Kington. Henry Sabin was born there in 1856, the son of Thomas, a labourer, and Hannah. On 19 December 1881 he married Mary Susan Burborough, a butcher's daughter from Kington eight years younger than himself. In 1891 the family was at Hampton Lucy, where Henry was a gardener 46/15–36. Their son Charlie told the newspaper in 1973 that he was born in a pub at Hampton Lucy, that his parents

moved to a shop in Wellesbourne, and that they took over the Shakespeare at Welford when he was six 13/14.

Charlie was ten at the census of 1901, so he was six in about 1896 or 1897. The record agrees. Kelly's Directory of Gloucestershire for 1897 lists "Sabin Henry, beer retailer" among the Welford traders 46/98, 48/19–20. Whitehead had been elected to the council in April 1896. The change of tenancy can therefore be placed in 1896 or early 1897. The interview notes' "about 1900" is a round figure.

Spennell's Almanack and Directory for 1900 lists "Sabin W., Shakespeare Inn", the first time a directory gives the house its name 46/99. The initial is probably a mistake for Henry, or it may record the eldest son. The 1901 census gives the household in full. At schedule 89, "Tavern", next to the blacksmith, were Henry Sabin, 45, innkeeper and baker on his own account, born at Kington; Mary S., 38, his wife, also from Kington; William J., 17, baker (bread maker), worker; May, 12; Charles, 10; Gertrude, 6, all born at Hampton Lucy; and Mary, 3, and James, 1, born at Welford 48/08. The birthplaces fix the move to Welford between Gertrude's birth in about 1895 and Mary's in about 1898. The census summary for that year counts three inns in Welford: "the Tavern, the 'Four Alls' and Henry Sabin's inn-and-bakery" 48/08. The phrase is the transcriber's, but it catches the Sabin business exactly.

The bakery was not a sideline. William, at 17, was a full-time bread maker. The Society's 1901 talk says that "the Sabins would deliver bread using a cart they kept behind the bakery to surrounding areas, travelling as far as Chipping Campden" 46/37–95. The interview notes confirm it: "Mr Sabin's father also made bread at the Shakespeare & the round extended as far as Chipping Campden. Mr S. helped — horse drawn van & in bakehouse" 08/07. Chipping Campden is about nine miles from Welford by road. A daily round of that length meant an early start in the bakehouse and a horse and van on the road for much of the day.

The interviewee in the Society's notes is called only "Mr Sabin". One copy gives his birth year as 1898 and the other as 1890; 1890 fits his leaving school at 14 in 1904 08/06, 08/07. He was almost certainly Charlie. His memories went on from the pub to market gardening: the "convict land", rented in four strips by four partners, where he claimed he could grow five crops of radishes in a year; Quiney's Leys, cleared by First World War prisoners for a recreation ground that was never made; and planting fruit trees there on his return from the war in 1919 08/06, 08/07. At school he met Clara Smith, whose father worked at the mill. They lost touch, met again at a whist drive and married within six months, at St Peter's in 1923. They lived at Chestnut Cottage in Church Lane, where Clara had been born, and Charlie worked in the coal business and in market

gardening 13/14, 46/37–95. In 1952 a Mrs Loddy, or Walker, drew portraits of three old Welford characters for a London exhibition, and Charlie Sabin was one of them 47/80–90.

The Sabins did not keep the pub for long. By 1911 Henry Sabin, 55, was a jobbing gardener living at schedule 40, the house next door to the inn, with eight people in six rooms. His wife Mary Susan had borne eleven children, of whom nine were living 48/10. Kelly's directory of 1914 lists "Sabin Henry, jun., market gardener", and gives "Henry Sabin, jun." as sexton of the parish church 48/21–22. Henry senior died in 1916, aged 60 46/37–95, 46/15–36. The family stayed close. The 1950 list of people in Welford has "Mr James Sabin" and "Mr & Mrs Joe Sabin" in Chapel Street, immediately after "Mr & Mrs Roland Basson" and "Mrs Basson sen." 01/56, and Sabins sat on the Flower Show committee and played in the village's Home Guard and cricket photographs into the 1950s 55/10.

Sam Basson.1905–1932

The family that kept the Shakespeare longest came from Long Marston, a few miles south of Welford across the old county boundary. In 1901 there were already three Basson households in Welford, all market gardeners. Henry Basson, 66, born at Holwell in Oxfordshire, lived with his wife Sarah A., 70. In Church Street were John Basson, 33, and Henry Basson, 32, both born at Long Marston, with their young families 48/08. Henry the younger had been born in 1869 and married Rose Anna Johnson of Grafton in 1891. In 1891 he was a groom at Hunt Hall 46/15–36. His children in 1901 were Frank, 8, William, 7, Roland, 2, and Percy, 1. The enumerator first wrote "Roland" against the seven-year-old and struck it out 48/08.

Samuel Basson is not in the 1901 census for Welford. By 1911 he was at the Shakespeare. Schedule 41, "Shakespeare Inn, Public House", is Samuel Basson, head, 65, "Baker and Inn keeper", an employer working at home, born at Long Marston, Gloucestershire. His wife was Matilda Mary Basson, 38, born at Alcester. They had been married fifteen years and recorded children "None". The house had six rooms 48/09, 48/10. The 1914 directory gives "Basson Samuel, beer retailer". Even then, in Kelly's eyes, the Shakespeare was still a beerhouse, while the Bell was an "inn" and the Four Alls a "P.H." 48/21–22.

Roland Basson later called Sam his uncle 13/16. Sam was about 23 years older than Roland's father Henry, born 1869, so he may have been a great-uncle, a brother of the older Henry Basson from Holwell, rather than an uncle in the strict sense. The archive does not settle the relationship.

Sam baked as the Sabins had. The Society's quiz evening of 1972 recorded the memory of Mr Harris, the old postman, that "there was a bakehouse at the

'Shakespeare' started by Sam Basson [?]. You could take your turkey or your bread and be charged one penny for the cooking" 24/01. The house-notes writer said, "the first I remember was Mr Sam Basson, and then his nephew Mr Roland Basson they both baked bread there and would also bake cakes and pies etc for the villagers for a small payment" 10/05. The bakehouse was certainly older than Sam, since Whitehead and the Sabins had both been bakers there. What Sam may have started was the custom of baking the villagers' own dishes in the inn's oven for a penny.

Bread was a crowded trade in Edwardian Welford. The 1911 summary of Chapel Street counts four bakers on that one street: Basson at the inn, Hincok in the cottage next door, Rogers at the grocer's shop, and Johnson's son 48/09, 48/10. By 1914 the directory lists Edwin Caleb Griffin, baker 48/21–22, and an undated photograph in the archive shows his shop.



E. C. Griffin's bakery and the house next to it, about 1910–14. The fascia on the lower range reads "E. C. GRIFFIN / BAKER AND CONFECTIONER". The taller brick house to its right has a central door with a hood or sign bracket, a window either side and a small board on the wall above the right-hand window. The photograph has no caption. Its layout matches the 1992 view of the Shakespeare, with the lower range to the left, and the archive's catalogue suggests that the taller house is the inn. 46/06

The photograph is worth looking at closely. The catalogue entry is careful: the building beside Griffin's shop "may be the Shakespeare Inn", but "the identification is not confirmed, because the photograph has no caption and the inn's sign and plaque cannot be read" 46/06. Comparing it with the 1992 photograph makes the identification likely. Both show a taller symmetrical brick house of two storeys with a central door, and to its left a lower range of two storeys under its own roof, with two windows above and a shop window below. If this is right, then Griffin's bakery was in the lower range of the Shakespeare's own building, the cottage where Hincok the baker lived in 1911. The windows of the main house had not yet been made into bows, and the porch had not been built. The lower range also explains the yard. When Roland Basson's day came, a later memoir placed the bakery "across the 'Shake' yard" 31/06.

Sam Basson's years at the inn spanned the First World War. Three of Henry Basson's sons served. Roland, the youngest soldier from the village, joined the Royal Engineers in 1915 and served until 1919, and he entered Cologne with the first British troops after the German collapse 13/18. In the summer of 1917 Jim Matthews, the blacksmith's son from next door to the inn, wrote home from France that he had gone for a stroll on a Sunday night and "who should I meet but Roland Basson & he was going to see Frank (his brother) so I saw him too" 43/02-84. The typed list of Welford's dead of 1914-18 begins with the name "William Basson" 22/08. He was very probably Frank and Roland's brother, the seven-year-old William of the 1901 census, though the archive has no papers for him.

Sam's tenure is the hardest to measure. The newspaper report of Roland's retirement in 1973 said that "Mr Basson's Uncle Sam was landlord almost as many years before him", meaning almost forty-one years 13/16. The other 1973 report, as summarised in the archive, says Sam "had run it for about 40 years", which "puts the family's tenure back to the early 1890s" 13/18. That cannot be right. Whitehead was the landlord in 1891 and 1896, the Sabins in 1897 and 1901, and Sam does not appear in Welford until the census of 1911. He took over at some date between 1901 and 1911, and if he handed over in 1932 he kept the inn for between twenty-one and thirty-one years. Family memory seems to have stretched Sam's time, perhaps by merging him with the Basson family's longer presence in the village.

When Sam handed over, Roland was 34. Sam, if the census age is right, was about 86. The 1950 list of residents has "Mrs Basson sen." living with Roland and his wife 01/56. She could have been Sam's widow Matilda, who would then have been in her late seventies, or Roland's mother Rose, though Roland's father Henry was still alive (he died in 1962) and would be expected to appear with her 46/15-36. The list does not say.

Roland and Ciss Basson 1932–1973

Roland Basson kept the Shakespeare for forty-one years, and his tenure is by far the best recorded. Three cuttings from his retirement in 1973, a wartime memoir, an oral history by his niece, and a dozen passing references give a picture of the man and the pub. Even allowing for the generosity of retirement profiles, it is a warm one.

He took over in 1932, the year pencilled beside the second paragraph of one cutting 13/18. His first day was memorable. He recalled "about 200 pea pickers crowding in from the fields". The pickers were still the Shakespeare's seasonal trade, as they had been in Whitehead's day 13/18. With the pub came the bakery: "When he became licensee the village bakery went with the business. It meant getting up at 4 a m and delivering the loaves with the help of his brother Cyril" 13/16. The Evesham Journal added that the two brothers made up the next day's dough after the pub closed at 11 p.m. The most he ever charged for a quartern loaf was 2½d. Beer had been 3d a pint and whisky 6d a nip in his early years, against 13p and 16 to 20p in 1973 13/18.

Mrs G. E. Edgington, who came to Welford in 1940 with her husband, wrote the fullest description of the pub in Roland's day in a memoir for the fiftieth anniversary of VE Day, very probably in 1995:

I first met Roland Basson, the jovial, lovable, twinkling-eyed landlord of the Shakespeare Inn, where all the local colourful characters, who were history in themselves, would meet to talk over their pints and pipes and discuss how they would put the world to rights. Across the "Shake" yard was the bakery, which is still there. Roland's brother, Cyril, would bake the bread and deliver it in very large baskets from his pony and trap, still warm and delicious. At Christmas, Cyril would, for anyone lucky enough to have one, roast their goose or turkey in the ovens. It is still done to this day.

Mrs G. E. Edgington, memoir of wartime Welford, c.1995 · 31/06

Next door was the butcher's, where "the ladies would queue with their ration books to purchase their allowance of meat" 31/06. The Maypole and the yards round it, she wrote, "were the centre of a hive of industry". Frank Edginton, talking to the Society about the village's shops, listed among them "several bakers in the village — one at the Shakespeare and also Grafton Stores" 37/01–04.

The pony appears in another story. The Herald recorded that Roland "still argues about the day his pony bolted and landed up in Jack Adkins' hedge. ... There are those who say they were both in the Four Alls bar celebrating. But

Roly denies it hotly" 13/16. "Both" here seems to mean Roland and Cyril on the bread round.

The best-known Shakespeare story concerns the Maypole outside its door:

In the snug they say that Roly keeps the warmest fire in all Welford burning at his hearth. That once he and Farmer Tony Collins buried a cart axle under the Maypole to support a tall story told at the Shakespeare Inn. It was 1936, the year the village Maypole was struck by lightning, and they had told a visiting research student that a thunderbolt had hit it. He went and dug up the cart axle and sent it off to a museum. Afterwards, someone told the student.

Stratford Herald, 2 November 1973 · 13/16

The lightning was real. The Maypole was struck on Tuesday 24 September 1935, not in 1936, and the Herald reported it three days later 01/76, 47/925. The story of the cart axle appears only in this cutting. It shows the snug at the Shakespeare as a place where stories were told for an audience, and where a credulous outsider could be taken in.



Raising the Maypole, 1896. The green outside the Shakespeare, a few months before the Sabins took the inn. The archive's notes name John Basson, one of the Long Marston family of market gardeners, beside the village shoemaker in his white apron and James Matthews, the blacksmith from next door to the inn, who made the weathervane. 16/52–53

In the Second World War Roland was in his forties. He and his brothers joined the Home Guard. The 1941 photographs of the Welford unit name C. Basson in the second row and P. Basson in the front row, with the commanding officer,

Captain W. Dingley 36/36, 36/37. A later key to one of the photographs names "Rolland Basson" as sixth in the back row, "Cyril Basson" and "Percy Basson" 36/41, 11/49–52, though the label on the photograph itself puts R. Fiander in that place 36/36.



Welford Home Guard, 1941. The label names C. [Cyril] Basson in the middle row and P. [Percy] Basson in the front row; a later key also names Roland Basson in the back row, where the label has R. Fiander. Captain Walter Dingley sits in the centre. 36/36, 36/41

After the war the Shakespeare's forecourt became the village's meeting point. The British Legion branch's coach outings set out from it. In 1950 members were "asked to assemble outside the Shakespeare Inn at 8 a.m." for a day trip to Windsor and London, paid for by the branch president, R. S. Wimbush. In 1951, for the Festival of Britain, "the coaches will pick up outside the Shakespeare Inn at 7.30 a.m." 56/05, 56/06. About seventy went each time. Percy Basson sat on the Legion committee and laid the wreath for the ex-servicemen of 1914–18 on Remembrance Sunday 56/01, 56/08. Roland was on the committee of the post-war Flower Show 55/10.

The pub was also a home. Mary Green, née Weatherhead, lived at South View near the Maypole from 1940 to 1962. In 2018 she told the Society:

The Shakespeare Inn for many many years was run by my Uncle Roland Basson, which I used to go to in Chapel Street a lot. I loved it because I could go behind the bar to do the washing up but also listen to the fascinating stories of the elderly telling me everything that went on in the past years.

Mary Green, interviewed by Brad Plimmer, 25 May 2018 · 48/45

A Herald feature of 2013 on the diamond wedding of Bert and Peggy Jackson recorded that Peggy's "family ran the Shakespeare Inn for over 50 years". Bert first saw her at a near-empty dance at the Memorial Hall in about 1950–51, and she was later chosen as carnival queen at the village fête 52/72. Her maiden name is not given. The fifty years would fit the Basson tenure counted from Sam's arrival to Roland's retirement.

The Shakespeare was the regulars' pub, not the visitors'. One of the village's last old characters, Chad Johnson, evicted from the workhouse cottages in 1933, lived for over twenty years as a lodger with Bert Hawkins and his wife, "going to the Shake for a drink sometimes", until his death in 1953 47/80–90. That passing remark is one of the earliest uses in the archive of the nickname "the Shake". The Evesham Journal cutting of 1973 is annotated in the Society's hand "The Bassons at the 'Shake'" 13/18, and an index of Gilda Gray's papers lists a file headed "The Bassons of 'The Shake' — 1973" 19/21.

Roland's wife was called Ciss, or Cissie. In 1973 she was 72. She had been a member of the Women's Institute for forty years, a manager of the Welford school for fifteen and a member of the over-sixties' club 13/16. A photograph of the W.I. committee taken in 1963 at the Grafton Court Hotel, on the retirement of Mrs Buttler as president, names her as "Mrs Basson (the Shakespeare)" 16/12. In 1972 the British Legion gave Roland and Ciss a gold award for more than forty years of selling Remembrance poppies 13/16, 13/18. As the youngest soldier from the village in the First World War, Roland had been chosen to unveil the war memorial in the parish church 13/16.



The Welford W.I. committee, 1963. At the Grafton Court Hotel for the retirement of Mrs Buttler as president. The names on the back, left to right, begin "Mrs R. Harris, Mrs Rimmer, Mrs Basson (the Shakespeare)", so Ciss Basson is very probably third from the left. Mrs Buttler receives the bouquet from Mrs Wilson. 16/12

The bakery outlived the war but not the 1960s, or so one source says. The Evesham Journal reported that the bakery shut when sliced bread reached the village, although many villagers missed it, and that at Christmas the oven had cooked the village's turkeys and cakes 13/18. Mrs Edgington, writing in about 1995, said that the bakery was "still there" and that roasting the Christmas birds was "still done to this day" 31/06. The house-notes writer called Roland "the last Baker at the Shakespeare" 10/05. Perhaps the building and the Christmas custom survived after the daily bread had stopped. The archive does not give a date for the last loaf.

The village changed round the pub in Roland's later years. The survey of about 1960 counts new bungalows on every road out of the village, council estates at Headland Rise, Headland Close and Millers Close, and caravan sites by the river 20/06. The Bassons' own family spread into the new houses. In 1960 Cyril and Mrs Basson had a smallholding, and a Mr Basson was at Roseleigh 20/06.

By 1987 there were Bassons in Binton Road, Headland Road and Millers Close 30/05. A Mr Whitfield lived in a new bungalow called Norema 20/06.

Roland retired at the end of October 1973, aged 75. The Herald headlined its piece "Roly (75) hands down his pub". He and Ciss handed over to their daughter Joy and son-in-law John Whitfield, "to keep it in the family", and the two couples swapped homes. The Bassons moved into the Whitfields' bungalow in Headland Road 13/16. John Whitfield was giving up work as a sales representative to enter the trade. The Evesham Journal reported that "the brewery and the new licensees intended to keep the pub an old-fashioned country inn" 13/18. The brewery is not named. "It will be nice to settle down and be quiet for a bit," said Ciss 13/16. On his seventieth birthday the regulars had given Roland a large toilet roll, with something written on every sheet, "but nobody will say what" 13/16.

After the Bassons 1973–2013

The family succession did not last. By June 1977 the parish magazine for the Silver Jubilee carried an advertisement for "The Shakespeare Inn (The Pub by the Maypole), Welford-on-Avon. Cold snacks and sandwiches always available. Jeff and Midge Mudway. Tel. Welford 443" 03/141, 03/142. Welford telephone numbers still had three digits. The Whitfields had therefore left within four years, though the archive does not say when or why.

The next keepers stayed longer. Mike and Jan Shaw were the tenants from about the spring of 1981. In October 1988 the Observer reported that they had been tenants for seven and a half years 24/12. The electoral register for 1987–88 lists Michael H. and Janis M. Shaw at the Shakespeare Inn, Chapel Street 30/05. The pub's garden was their pride. In 1988 they were the England regional winners of the Benson and Hedges UK Pub Garden competition, missing the national prize by one point. They had spent about £2,500 on the garden that year. They held a party for the regulars, at which the author and garden designer Roddy Llewellyn, one of the judges, presented a cheque for £450 and a plaque. The Shaws said they would spend the money on a holiday 24/12.

The Shaws also offered the pub to the History Society. In 1984 the Society had bought, by members' subscription, an old map of Welford dated 1884, and it had to decide where to hang it. The committee minutes record the debate:

A third suggestion was The Shakespeare Inn, which was thought to be safer, as it would be attended at all times outside closing hours, when the Inn is very safely locked up. The character of the interior of the Inn was also thought by many to be a very suitable background for the map.

Welford and Weston Local History Society minutes, 1984 · 37/01-04

Mike Shaw offered a donation towards the cost of a case if the map went in the Shakespeare. There was some doubt whether the space in the pub was large enough. At the general meeting the members voted, eight for the Shakespeare and twelve for the Memorial Hall, and the map went to the hall, to hang by the door where the dartboard had been. Charlie Howell made an oak case for the cost of materials 37/01-04. Even so, the minutes are the only description in the archive of the inside of the pub. The Society thought its interior had "character", which in 1984 probably meant beams, an open fire and old furniture rather than a modern refit.

The same minutes record a planning dispute next door. In 1984 the Parish Council objected to a development on the plot at the corner of High Street and Chapel Street, called the Maypole Development. The Society supported the objection, but was told it would be built anyway. By November 1984 the plot was for sale again 37/01-04. Meanwhile the Maypole Stores and the butcher next door kept the corner busy.

By the 1990s the conservation officers were photographing the pub as part of the village scene. The draft Conservation Area Study of July 1992 included it as figure 53 15/08. A set of colour snapshots of the village taken in 1999 includes the Shakespeare, with its name in gold letters along the front and a pictorial sign on a post at the corner 16/34.



"THE SHAKESPEARE", 1999.

From a set of colour prints of village houses taken that year. The lettering along the front and the pictorial sign on its post are just legible. 16/34

The nickname stuck. In 2010 a district councillor's newsletter, announcing a raffle of knitted dolls for a children's hospice in Coventry, said there were "two for sale at The Shake in Welford in a Christmas raffle" 47/94. On Monday 4 June 2012, for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the parish held a village street

party "in front of The Shakespeare". Tables were set out along Chapel Street, there was a hog roast, plant, book and cake stalls, and a Pimm's bar "along with the obliging Staff of The Shake to serve you", with the profits going to the Alzheimer's Café in Alcester. A loyal toast was followed by the dedication of a new Jubilee seat 53/43. In the summer of 2013 the same councillor's news sheet ended: "It is great to see the Shake open again with food tel 750030 see you there" 36/44. The archive's summary guessed that this was a pub in Clifford Chambers. But the councillor represented Welford as well as Clifford, the 2010 newsletter had used "The Shake" for Welford's pub, and the number is in the 750 range used by other Welford entries of the period. It is more likely that the Shakespeare had been closed for a time and reopened in 2013. That is where the archive's story of the pub ends.

What the Shakespeare was

Taken together, the sources describe a pub that was always more than a pub. Before it had a name it was a beerhouse in a Georgian house, perhaps once a weaver's workshop, kept by a man or woman whose name went into the directory as a beer retailer. Its keeper made shoes or grew vegetables as well. From at least the 1850s, and certainly from 1891 to the 1960s, it was also the village bakery. The keeper's licence came with a bakehouse, and in local memory with a duty to bake and sell bread. Whitehead was an "innkeeper and baker". The Sabins sent a horse and van as far as Chipping Campden. Sam Basson baked the villagers' Christmas birds for a penny. Roland and Cyril Basson got up at four to bake and made up the dough after closing time.

The Shakespeare's trade followed the village's economy. In the late nineteenth century its customers were the farm labourers of Chapel Street and the pea pickers and horse dealers who came for the market-garden harvest, and its windows paid for their celebrations at least once. The smith worked next door, the grocer took the pub's name for his shop, and the Post Office was three doors away. In the twentieth century it was the meeting place of the village's old men. Mrs Edgington called them "local colourful characters, who were history in themselves", and Mary Green listened to them from behind the bar. It was the starting point for the British Legion's outings and the place where a tall story about the Maypole could be told to a visiting student. Later it competed for prizes with its garden, and in 2012 the village held its street party at its door.

It was also, for most of the century, a family business. The Bassons came to Welford from Long Marston as market gardeners in the 1890s. Sam Basson was keeping the inn by 1911, and his kinsman Roland took over in 1932. Roland's daughter and son-in-law kept it after him. Roland's brothers baked, served in the Home Guard and laid the Legion's wreaths, his wife sat on the W.I. committee and the school managers, and his niece washed glasses in the bar.

When the Herald wrote that the family had run the pub for over fifty years, it was close to the truth. When the Evesham Journal suggested that they had run it since the early 1890s, it was not.

The archive is strongest on the twentieth century and weakest on the beginning. A visit to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the county record offices for licensing registers, brewery records and the Herald's reports would probably settle when the house became a beerhouse, who John Harris and Richard Lloyd were, why it was called the Shakespeare, when it received a full licence, and when its bakery finally closed. The open questions are listed below.

Keepers of the Shakespeare

Every name the sources give, in date order. A date means the year a record names that person, not the start or end of their time at the inn. Entries before 1881 are not certainly the Shakespeare.

Year	Name and role	Source
c.1790s–1805	William Ingram, master weaver and schoolmaster; his weaving sheds and school said to be "at what is now the Shakespeare Inn" (another version puts the school north of Pool Close)	17/07; 05/02, 10/31
1841	Elizabeth Day, 50, publican (house not named)	48/01
1850	John Harris, beerhouse keeper, with Joseph Harris as baker (house notes; source not given)	10/05
1851	William Smith, 33, agricultural labourer and beerhouse keeper [?] (house not named)	14/12
1856	John Harris and Richard Lloyd, beer retailers (houses not named)	48/13–16
1870	Joseph Allcock, beerhouse and shopkeeper (house notes)	10/05
1881	Joseph Allcock, widower, c.36, beer retailer and boot and shoe maker, b. Epwell, Oxon; "Shakespeare Tavern"	48/06

Year	Name and role	Source
1891	George D. Whitehead, 32, innkeeper and baker, b. Kineton; wife Annie, son George E.; "Shakespeare Tavern"	48/07
1896	G. D. Whitehead, landlord, elected to the parish council (April); loses tenancy after the pea pickers' riot (later memory)	18/13, 19/25; 13/14
1897	Henry Sabin, beer retailer (Kelly)	46/98, 48/19–20
1900	"W. Sabin, Shakespeare Inn" (Spennell)	46/99
1901	Henry Sabin, 45, innkeeper and baker, b. Kineton; wife Mary Susan; son William J., 17, baker; "Tavern"	48/08
1911	Samuel Basson, 65, baker and innkeeper, b. Long Marston; wife Matilda Mary, 38, b. Alcester (Henry Sabin now a gardener next door)	48/09, 48/10
1914	Samuel Basson, beer retailer (Kelly)	48/21–22
1932	Roland Basson takes over from his "Uncle Sam"; baker with his brother Cyril	13/16, 13/18
1950	Mr and Mrs Roland Basson and "Mrs Basson sen.", Chapel Street	01/56
1963	"Mrs Basson (the Shakespeare)" on the W.I. committee	16/12
1973	Roland and Ciss Basson retire (October); Joy and John Whitfield, daughter and son-in-law, take over	13/16, 13/18
1977	Jeff and Midge Mudway	03/141, 03/142
c.1981–1988	Mike (Michael H.) and Jan (Janis M.) Shaw, tenants; pub garden prize 1988	24/12, 30/05, 37/01–04

Year	Name and role	Source
2010–2013	"The Shake": raffle 2010; Jubilee street party 2012; "open again with food" 2013 (keepers not named)	47/94, 53/43, 36/44

Gaps and conflicting sources

Gaps in the archive

- **No deeds, licences or brewery papers.** Nothing in the archive shows who owned the building, when it first sold beer, when it gained a full licence, or which brewery supplied or owned it. The 1973 cutting mentions "the brewery" without naming it. Licensing registers for the Campden petty sessional division (Gloucestershire, before 1931) and for Stratford (after 1931) would be the place to look.
- **The origin of the name.** No source says why or when the house was called the Shakespeare. The name first appears in the 1881 census, as "Shakespeare Tavern", and first in a directory in 1900.
- **Before 1881.** The beer retailers of 1841 (Elizabeth Day), 1851 (William Smith [?]) and 1856 (John Harris, Richard Lloyd) are not tied to any house. The house-notes writer's statements about John Harris (1850) and Joseph Allcock (1870) give no source. The 1861 copy lacks schedules 77 to 82 and the 1871 copy lacks schedules 48–55 and 77–91, either of which might have included the house 48/04, 48/05.
- **When Sam Basson arrived and left.** He is absent from Welford in 1901 and present in 1911; nothing narrows the date. Nor is there a record of his death, or of whether he lived to see Roland take over.
- **The Whitfields' departure.** Joy and John Whitfield took over in late 1973, but the Mudways were advertising by June 1977. The archive does not say when or why the change came.
- **After 1988.** The archive names no keeper after the Shaws.
- **Pictures.** The archive has no photograph captioned as the Shakespeare before 1992. The Edwardian view of Griffin's bakery (46/06) is probably the inn but is uncaptioned. The newspaper photographs of the Bassons behind the bar in 1973 (13/16, 13/18) and of the Shaws in 1988 (24/12) are in copyright and are not reproduced here.

Conflicting sources

- **The date of the building.** The house notes say "middle 1700s" 10/05; the 1960 and 1967 lists "early C19" 13/03, 13/02; the modern list "late C18 or early C19" 47/54.
- **The windows.** The 1960 provisional list gives "3 sash windows" upstairs 13/03, the 1967 list "3 lattice casement windows" 13/02. Either the windows were changed or one description is loose.
- **Ingram's school.** Gilda Gray's 1957 article places it north of Pool Close in the 1790s 05/02; her later typescript places the school and weaving sheds at the Shakespeare, "circa 1805" 17/07. The later version also says the family left and returned after his death; the earlier says Ingram himself returned and died in Welford in 1809.
- **How long Sam Basson kept the inn.** The 1973 cuttings say about forty years 13/16, 13/18, but Whitehead was there in 1891–96 and the Sabins in 1897–1901, and Sam first appears in 1911. He cannot have kept it for more than about thirty years, and the archive's own summary of 13/18, which takes the family back to the early 1890s, should not be followed.
- **Who started the bakehouse.** The 1972 quiz credits Sam Basson [?] 24/01; the house notes say there was a bakehouse with the inn by 1850 10/05, and the census shows Whitehead and Sabin baking there in 1891 and 1901.
- **When the bakery closed.** The Evesham Journal (1973) says it shut when sliced bread arrived 13/18; Mrs Edgington (c.1995) says the bakery was still there and Christmas roasting was "still done to this day" 31/06.
- **When the Sabins arrived.** The interview notes say "about 1900" 08/06, 08/07. Charlie's age at arrival (six), the 1897 directory and the birthplaces of his younger sisters put it in 1896–97.
- **Mr Sabin's birth year.** 1898 in one copy of the interview notes, 1890 in the other 08/06, 08/07. The census (Charles, 10, in 1901) supports 1890–91.
- **Charlie Sabin's birthplace.** He said he was born in a pub at Hampton Lucy 13/14, but in 1891 his father was recorded there as a gardener 46/15–36.
- **"W. Sabin" in 1900.** Spennell's directory gives W. Sabin as keeper 46/99; the 1897 directory and the 1901 census give Henry. W. may be a misprint, or the eldest son William.

- **The Maypole lightning.** The Herald (1973) places the cart-axle hoax in 1936, "the year the village Maypole was struck by lightning" 13/16. The strike was on 24 September 1935 01/76, 47/925.
- **Roland Basson in the Home Guard.** One key names "Rolland Basson" sixth in the back row of the 1941 photograph 36/41, 11/49–52; the label on the photograph names R. Fiander there 36/36.
- **The surname.** The Evesham Journal caption of 1973 prints "Busson" 13/18, and a 1940s Legion report has "Mrs H. Bisson" 56/01; both are Basson.
- **The map vote.** The Society's minutes record 8 votes for the Shakespeare and 12 for the Memorial Hall; a summary elsewhere in the same file gives the result as 12–8 to the hall, which is the same result 37/01–04.
- **"The Shake" in 2013.** The archive's summary of the councillor's news sheet takes the reopened "Shake" to be in Clifford Chambers 36/44. The 2010 newsletter uses the name for Welford's pub 47/94, and the reopening is more likely to be the Shakespeare's.
- **The "Stags Head".** A mounted photocopy in the archive is captioned "The Stags Head now The Shakespeare Inn?", with the question mark added in pen 53/04. The photograph shows a thatched, close-studded timber-framed inn on a corner, with a Flowers Ales sign. The Shakespeare is a brick building with a tiled roof, and no other source mentions a Stags Head in Welford. The caption is almost certainly wrong, and the photograph is probably of another village's inn.



Not the Shakespeare. The "Stags Head", a thatched timber-framed inn selling Flowers ales, captioned in the archive "now The Shakespeare Inn?". Its building does not match the Shakespeare's brick front. 53/04

Sources used

- Building and listing: 13/02 (1967 list), 13/03 (c.1960 provisional list), 30/07, 47/1–66 item 47/54 (modern list text), 10/32 and 30/06 (1983 Society review), 15/08 (1992 Conservation Area Study, fig 53), 10/01–08 item 10/05 (house notes, "The Shakespere"), 10/01 (Holly Bush beerhouse).
- Ingram: 17/07, 05/02, 10/31, 21/22–66 (21/40), 19/52.
- Censuses: 48/01 (1841), 14/12 (1851), 48/04 (1861), 48/05 (1871), 48/06 (1881), 48/07 (1891), 48/08 (1901), 48/09–12 and 33/48 (1911).
- Directories: 48/13–16 (1856 and c.1856), 46/98 and 48/19–20 (Kelly 1897), 46/99 (Spennell 1900), 48/21–22 (Kelly 1914).
- Parish council: 18/13, 19/25.
- Sabins: 08/06–07 (interview), 13/14 (golden wedding, 1973), 46/15–36 (family notes), 46/37–95 (1901 talk), 47/80–90, 01/56, 55/10.

- Bassons: 13/16 (Herald, 2 Nov 1973), 13/18 (Evesham Journal, 18 Oct 1973), 31/06 (Edgington memoir), 48/45 (Mary Green interview, 2018), 52/72 (Jackson diamond wedding, 2013), 24/01 (1972 quiz), 22/08 and 43/02–84 (First World War), 36/36–37, 36/41, 11/49–52 (Home Guard), 56/01, 56/05–06, 56/08 (British Legion), 16/12 (W.I. 1963), 16/52–53 (1896 Maypole), 19/21, 20/06, 30/05.
- Later years: 03/141–142 (1977), 24/12 (1988), 30/05 (1987–88 register), 37/01–04 (Society minutes, 1984), 16/34 (1999 photos), 47/94 (2010), 53/43 (2012), 36/44 (2013).
- Setting and customers: 46/06 (Griffin photograph), 49/21, 50/40, 53/46, 13/27, 37/01–04 (Frank Edginton), 01/76 and 47/925 (Maypole lightning), 53/04 (Stags Head photograph).