

St Peter's Church, Welford-on-Avon: a history

St Peter's has stood above the Avon crossing at Welford for more than eight hundred years. Its round-pillared nave and carved south doorway date from the later twelfth century, its chancel from about 1330–40 and the top of its tower from the fifteenth century. Around that core, nine centuries of parishioners have added, stripped out, burned, rebuilt and argued.

This essay tells that story from the papers of the Welford and Weston Local History Society, checked against the church's listing, the Victoria County History and the bell and war memorial records. The archive is unusually rich for a village church. It holds C. J. Woodward's 1907 study with drawings of the church around 1850, the churchwardens' accounts from 1617, two histories of the rectors, the bell-founders' letters, and a run of appeal letters from the twentieth century.

Where the sources disagree, the essay says so. Church guides have a way of repeating each other, and several of St Peter's best-loved stories turn out to be traditions rather than facts. Archive references such as 26/10 are the Society's own folder and item numbers.

Origins: Deerhurst, St Denis and the Norman church

Welford's church began as an outpost of a monastery forty miles away. In 1059, the local histories say, Sweyn, Earl of Gloucester, gave Welford to the Saxon priory of Deerhurst on the Severn below Tewkesbury. Deerhurst had become a cell of the great abbey of St Denis near Paris, so for the next three centuries the parish answered, in the end, to French monks (47/68, 47/685).

The Victoria County History confirms the outline. It records that at Domesday the abbey of St Denis held 15 hides in Welford as part of the possessions of Deerhurst, which had been given to the abbey in 1059 ([VCH Warwickshire, vol. 5](#)). Woodward printed the Domesday entry in full in 1907. Its Latin lists the abbey's Gloucestershire vills, with "Welleford xv hid" among them (26/10).

The church guides add one more claim: that monks from Deerhurst built a small church on the site, and that the bowl of the font is all that survives of it (47/68, 47/685). P. Deakin's 2003 notes say the bowl was found during digging in the churchyard early in the twentieth century (26/14). The experts are less sure. Both the 1967 listing and the VCH date the bowl to the thirteenth century (13/02, 02/06). In 1948 the diocesan surveyor, H. Stratton Davis, wrote that the central shaft was "the original 13th Century pillar", with seventeenth-century balusters replacing the four lost corner columns (02/07). A Saxon font is a good story, but the written evidence favours a medieval one.

The twelfth-century church

The oldest standing work belongs to the later twelfth century. The VCH dates the nave, the narrow aisles and the lowest stage of the tower to the mid to late 1100s (02/06). Woodward's architect friend J. A. Cossins reached the same view in 1907. He called the church "of late

Norman or transitional foundation", built when masons were "hovering in the balance between round and pointed" arches (26/10).

Inside, each arcade has just two wide round arches on a single cylindrical pillar. The pillars carry scalloped capitals, the clearest dating clue in the building. Cossins thought two arches looked "sprawling" in so small a nave and wished the designer had used three. He also found the plan full of simple proportions: the nave twice as long as it is wide, and the width of nave and aisles split in fifths (26/10).



FIG. 3.—CAPITAL OF PILLAR.

The VCH notes that the south arcade is slightly earlier than the north, judging by the bases, and that one arch has a carved human-head stop (02/06). Two twelfth-century doorways survive. The south doorway has an outer arch of undercut chevron ornament in yellow stone, which Cossins called "extremely effective". The north doorway is a plain round arch, walled up since 1866 but still visible outside (26/10, 02/06).



FIG. 4.— NORTH DOOR : NOW WALLED UP.

The church guides give the Norman building the tidy dates 1100 to 1170, and say it was built in the reign of Henry I (26/14, 47/685). Those dates are not in the VCH or the listing, which point to the second half of the century. The guides do agree with the experts on the order of building. The tower arch, pointed and plain, was the last part of the first church, and the old chancel arch matched it until 1866.

The current Historic England list entry, revised since the 1967 list, gives a different emphasis. Search summaries of it date the nave and lowest stage of the tower to about 1330–40, with the middle stage of the tower early thirteenth century ([Historic England, list entry 1382823](#)). The page itself could not be opened for this essay, so that reading needs checking. Every other source, including the 1967 list, puts the arcades in the twelfth century.

The medieval church: monks, kings and a tower for the ford

For most of the Middle Ages Welford's rector was appointed by its distant monastic owners, and often by the Crown when England was at war with France. The 1971 booklet published for the oak Rectors' Board names Baldwin, Prior of Deerhurst, as the first known rector in 1065 (19/02). In 1190 the prior installed Ralph de Welford, who fought the priory for thirteen years over 600 acres of land. The case was serious enough for the Bishop of Worcester to raise it in Rome. Ralph lost, and the author thought the priors kept the living in their own hands afterwards (19/02).

Later rectors were often busy men elsewhere. William Rufus (1273) was also a prebendary of Westbury-on-Trym and Hereford. Nicholas de Clare (1283) was clerk to Queen Eleanor, wife of Edward I. Master Walter le Stoke (1308) was trusted by the Bishop of Worcester to sort out the affairs of Alcester Priory (19/02). Much of the parish work would have been done by chaplains. In 1291 the church was valued at £15 ([VCH](#)).

Building in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries

The fabric grew in stages. Early in the thirteenth century a second stage was added to the tower, with two lancet windows on each face. The VCH reads this as the first bell chamber (02/06). Cossins guessed it was capped by a low pyramid roof inside a plain parapet (26/10).

The chancel was rebuilt and much enlarged in about 1330–40 (02/06). It is nearly twice as long as it is wide, and Cossins thought it "a good feature of the church, well proportioned" (26/10). Its south windows have flowing tracery of that date. Inside are a sedilia made from a window sill, a small piscina with an ogee arch, and a large recess in the east wall, probably an aumbry (26/10, 02/06).

The church guides tell this differently. They credit Benedictine monks from Tewkesbury with rebuilding the chancel in 1336 (47/685). The dates fit the building, but the patron does not. In the 1330s Welford still belonged to Deerhurst. Tewkesbury did not gain it until the next century, so the builders of the chancel are not known.

War with France, plague and Tewkesbury

Because Deerhurst was French property, the Crown seized it whenever England and France were at war. From 1321 the rectors were presented by the king (19/02). In 1364 Robert Jones of Beckford was rector for just three months before John Power replaced him. The booklet links this to the Black Death. The great plague was 1348–49, but a second outbreak struck in 1361–62, so the guess is reasonable (19/02).

The guides say Henry VI gave Welford to his new foundation of Eton College and that it later passed to Tewkesbury Abbey (47/685). Britain Express gives the grant to Eton as 1447 and the transfer to Tewkesbury as 1467, under Edward IV ([Britain Express](#)). From then on Tewkesbury monks served the parish. One of them, Walter Williams, priest and rector, was buried in the nave. His worn slab still lies to the right of the centre aisle, with the outline of a lost brass (47/685).

Even his date is disputed. Woodward copied the inscription as 1484. Cossins read 1454, and the VCH typescript gives 1488 (26/10, 02/06). The difference lies in a few strokes of worn Roman numerals.

The fifteenth-century remodelling

The biggest medieval change came in the fifteenth century. The aisle walls were raised and given battlements, pinnacles and almost flat lead roofs in place of the old lean-tos. Large square-headed windows replaced the small Norman ones, and buttresses were added (26/10). The tower was heightened with a belfry stage of two-light windows, a parapet and corner pinnacles. The VCH suggests the tall tower was meant as a landmark and beacon for the ford (02/06).

One south aisle window has carved head-stops of a king and a queen. Local tradition, repeated in every guide and in a 1975 newspaper report, names them Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou (13/25). The VCH typescript describes the queen as wearing a headdress in the style of Philippa, Edward III's queen (02/06). That style belongs to the mid-fourteenth century. It may mean the heads are older than the window, or that the royal names are a later guess.

A small bellcote for the sanctus bell still sits on the east gable of the nave (47/685). The parish chest also survives. The guides date it to about 1250, while the VCH calls it a plain fourteenth-century chest (47/685, 02/06). Fragments of late fourteenth or early fifteenth-century glass now fill the south-east chancel window. They were gathered from other windows and re-leaded there in 1936 (26/14, 02/06).

The lychgate

The oak lychgate at the churchyard entrance is Welford's most painted building. It is a two-bay, shed-like gate whose roof ridge runs across the path, on low stone walls, under a red-tiled roof (14/11, 02/06). The 1967 listing dates it to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century (13/02). Cossins and a 1930s newspaper both called it fifteenth-century work, judging by its great curved braces (26/10, 14/11).



Other dates float about. Deakin called it thirteenth-century, the guides say "the end of the 1300s", and the 1966 appeal letter spoke of a feature "well known for over six hundred years" (26/14, 47/68, 09/05). The gate had two openings, and Woodward recorded that the wider one was used only at funerals. The coffin rested under the roof while the procession waited for the rector to meet it. The village pound and stocks stood a little to the west (26/10).

Bells for Crécy?

Welford's best-known tradition is that its bells rang for the English victory at Crécy in 1346 (47/68, 13/25). E. A. Harper, a Welford ringer, suggested the tower may have been raised around then to hold at least four bells (24/04). No document supports the story. The 2009 guide itself calls it a tradition, and the oldest bells anyone recorded were cast in 1721 (47/685). Deakin's version has Richard III winning the battle, which shows how loosely the tale has been handed down (26/14).

The last medieval glimpses are of a parish that expected attention. In 1497, at the request of the inhabitants, the Bishop of Worcester made a special visitation for a fee of four marks (26/10). In about 1531 a writer recorded that Tewkesbury monks "served Welneford" in the chantry and the school, "where four boyes be taught" (26/14).

Reformation to Georgian times: rectors, wardens and bells

The Reformation reached Welford quickly and left it with a run of colourful rectors. Tewkesbury Abbey was dissolved in 1539. The VCH typescript says the advowson went to the Bishop of Gloucester in 1541, to Sir Ralph Sadleir in 1547, and back to the see in 1552, before passing to the lords of the manor (02/06). The manor itself was sold in 1552–53 to

William Willington of Barcheston for £834 14s 3d. It came through his daughter to the Grevilles of Milcote, and later to the Sackvilles, Earls and Dukes of Dorset (20/02, 26/10).

The rectors' histories describe a parish still full of Tewkesbury monks. Richard Quene, another monk, was deprived under Mary Tudor for marrying. The field called Quiney's Leys is said to be named after him (19/02). The monk John Woode married in 1562 and was buried in Welford in 1581. Philip Jones, rector from 1581, is said to have sailed round the world with Drake as his chaplain on the *Golden Hind*. He denounced the landowners who had grown rich on monastic land, and started a school in the house now called Box Tree Cottage in Church Lane (19/02, 47/70). The Drake story comes only from these booklets and has not been checked against Drake's own records.

Registers, plate and flood

The parish registers begin in 1561. Their first entry is the marriage of Gregory Caning and Ann Holtom on 8 June that year (26/10). The church still owns an Elizabethan silver communion cup and cover of 1576, now kept in the treasury at Gloucester Cathedral (47/685). With them are two pewter chalices of George III's time and an older pewter paten. The pewter expert H. J. L. J. Massie told Woodward that the chalice bowls were cast in two halves and joined down the middle, which he found remarkable (26/10).



FIG. 5.—SACRAMENTAL VESSELS.

"On the 4th (2 feet 6 inches)

The register also holds a famous memorandum on the Avon flood of July 1588. The water rose a yard an hour from eight in the morning until four. It came into the parsonage, filled the fish-pool, carried a girl a quarter of a mile on a haycock, and broke both ends of Stratford

bridge (02/04, 26/10). The copies disagree on the day: one typescript says 13 July, while Woodward and others give 18 July.

The churchwardens' accounts, 1617–1763

The churchwardens' accounts survive for 29 years between 1617 and 1763, and they show a parish constantly mending its church (17/01). In 1617 the wardens paid for a new church door, shingling and "three hundred tenpenny nayles", and a man came from the bishop "to see the decay of the church". In 1628 the mason Barnabie Trimnell and the carpenter Phillip Clough rebuilt the steeple.

The bells needed constant care. A bell was recast in 1622, for £4 4s 9d plus metal, and the wheels were rebuilt in 1624. More recasting was paid for in 1678–79 (01/100–109). The ringers were paid every year on Gunpowder Plot day, and for royal occasions: Queen Mary's funeral in 1695, Anne's accession in 1702 and George II's coronation in 1727 (17/01).

The accounts also show the church as the parish's welfare office. From the 1640s the wardens gave small sums to travellers with passes. They included people "out of Ireland", shipwrecked seamen, fire victims and, in 1685, "a poore man and child ransomed from the turks". In 1740 they paid bounties on 70 hedgehogs, 45 adders and 70½ dozen sparrows (17/01).

Civil War and Restoration

The Civil War split Welford's living. The royalist rector, Dr Jenkin Bowen, was removed by Parliament in 1646 as a "delinquent". In his place came John Trapp, the Puritan scholar and vicar of Weston, whose Bible commentaries are still in print (03/38, 19/02). Bowen and his agent kept collecting the tithes and told the parishioners not to pay Trapp. Parliament's Committee for Plundered Ministers summoned them in 1646 and threatened to arrest the parishioners who held back (03/38).

Bowen returned in 1660 and signed the Act of Uniformity declaration in 1662 (03/38). In thanks for his restoration he gave the parish a turret clock. It was kept by the parish clerk under an agreement of 1663, and by William Wilks of Wolverton from 1777, and it ran until the fire of 1884 (01/100–109, 26/10).

Squarsons and the ring of 1721

The eighteenth century belonged to Edward Astley, rector from 1712 for over fifty years. The 1971 booklet calls him a magistrate and agriculturalist, "a squarson of the best type" (19/02). When he arrived the rectory was ruinous. Diocesan commissioners found ten of its fifteen bays beyond repair, and in 1715 the bishop ordered him to spend £200 rebuilding it (19/31).

In 1721 the wardens took the old bells to Stratford, where Richard Sanders of Bromsgrove cast a new ring of six for £48. The parish paid for ale when the bells came down and when they were "fetched home" (01/100–109). The tenor weighed about 10 hundredweight and read: "That all may come and none may stay at home, I ring to sermon with a lusty bome" (26/10). In 1796 John Rudhall of Gloucester recast the second bell for £12 9s 6d (01/100–109).

Other memorials of the age survive. Richard Rawlings, by his will of 1727, left £3 a year for a master to teach eight poor boys to read and write. His tablet on the chancel wall asks the rich "to increase its Fund and to respect his Grave" (26/10). Joseph Greene, rector from 1771, kept unusually careful registers (19/02). John Hunt (1790–1820) saw the parish through enclosure, which the rectors' history dates to about 1794–1813 (19/45).

Holy Trinity or St Peter?

One puzzle runs through the Georgian sources. Ecton's *Thesaurus* of 1763 and Rudder's county history of 1779 give the dedication as the Holy Trinity, and Cossins headed his 1907 notes "Holy St. Trinity Church" (26/10). The Diocesan Registrar told Woodward he knew of no re-dedication. The name St Peter on the Ordnance Survey map came from the rector, James Davenport (26/10). St Peter is now universal, and the 1924 east window and the 1960 tenor bell both carry his name.

The Victorian church: restoration and fire

The nineteenth century gave St Peter's its present interior, first by a restoration in 1866–67 and then by a fire that gutted the tower in 1884. Two rectors, father and son, spanned the whole period. Charles Davenport, headmaster of Stratford Grammar School and vicar of Stratford, held Welford from 1820 to 1865. His son James was his curate from 1847 and rector from 1865 until his death in 1904 (26/10, 19/02).

The church in about 1850

C. J. Woodward knew the church as a boy, and his brother J. M. Woodward drew the church around 1850. The drawings, printed in Woodward's 1907 paper, are the only pictures of the church before restoration (26/10).



FIG. 1.

The interior was dominated by a "brilliantly painted" Royal Arms above a narrow chancel arch, with boards of the Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments on either side. The nave was filled with high square pews, allotted to the houses of the parish, with a few benches for labourers and the poor. From inside a pew a worshipper could see only the arms and the rector in his tall pulpit (26/10).

One pew, the "lordship pew", belonged to Lord Sackville's tenants and caused endless trouble. The Vincents and the Gunns from the mill fought over it, each shutting the other out. At last the rector took the door off. Old Vincent then sat across the opening with his legs stretched out, so everyone else had to climb over them (26/10).

Two galleries stood at the west end, reached by a stair near the north door. The schoolchildren sat in the north aisle gallery. The singers and the village band sat in the west gallery, with a bassoon, fiddle, clarinet and two flutes. Mr Strong the grocer led the singing, announcing each psalm as "old fashion" or "new fashion". The Methodists came to church in

the morning, and their preacher, the shoemaker Henry Hopkins, sang with the rest. They stopped coming when James Davenport started a Sunday school (26/10).



FIG. 2.

Outside, the drawing shows a half-timbered south porch and a yew growing out of the angle of the tower. The aisles still had their battlements and pinnacles, and there was a small dormer at the south-west corner of the nave. A second porch, with seats, stood at the north door, which the rector used (26/10).

The restoration of 1866–67

James Davenport was an early Tractarian. He restored frequent Holy Communion and wanted a church fit for it (19/02). The diocese granted a faculty in 1866 for the restoration and for services in the schoolroom while work went on (02/01). The cost, about £1,200, was paid by the patroness, Elizabeth, Countess De La Warr (26/10).

The Stratford Herald later explained who did what. Sir Gilbert Scott was the architect, but his plans were "too elaborate" for the Countess. They were cut back by the builder, John Whateley of Redditch, under the supervision of T. T. Allen of Stratford. Work ran from spring 1866 and the church reopened on 23 January 1867 (26/10, quoting the Herald of 19 December 1884).

The changes were sweeping. Both galleries went, with their stair. The north door was blocked and its porch removed. The box pews were replaced in the nave by the present benches, and the chancel lost its high pews. The narrow chancel arch, the Royal Arms and the boards were removed and a new, wider arch built. The south porch was rebuilt in stone, a vestry was added north of the chancel, and the yew was cut out of the tower. The aisle battlements and pinnacles were taken down (26/10, 47/685).

Not everyone admired the result. Cossins called the new chancel arch "very poor and amateurish" and the roofs, pulpit and pews "modern and uninteresting". He suspected many old grave slabs had been thrown out "when the spoliation of the building was perpetrated" (26/10). He was writing for the Birmingham Archaeological Society in 1907, when the Victorian restorers were out of fashion.

At some point the whole outside was covered in yellowish "Staffordshire cement". Cossins found it depressing and wished it away (26/10). No one recorded when it went on. Deakin says 1860, and a 1975 newspaper says about 1890 (26/14, 13/25).

The fire of December 1884

On the night of Friday 12 December 1884 the ringers went up the tower to oil the bells, though the rector had told them to do it by daylight. They struck matches, and one probably fell into the loose rush matting on the floor (01/100–109, quoting *John Bull*). The fire smouldered all night. At about half past six on Saturday morning it burst out, fanned by a strong wind, with flames shooting from the belfry windows (01/100–109, quoting *Bell News*).

Davenport sent a mounted messenger to Stratford for the fire brigade, but it did not arrive until nearly eight. By then the three oak floors and the lead roof had collapsed into the church, the lead "running about the floor in streams". The villagers had already carried the pews, stalls, pulpit and communion table out into the churchyard. Men stood on the aisle roofs pouring water where burning timber had fallen. They saved the body of the church, but the tower was left as "four bare walls, open to the sky" (01/100–109). Harper's notes credit a Mr Hawkins with saving the church (24/04).

Five of the six bells of 1721 were smashed, and Bowen's 1660 clock was destroyed. "Ah, Mister!" one old man told the Herald. "We shall never hear such bells as them again" (01/100–109). Local ringers have always disputed the blame put on their predecessors (24/04). Later sources sometimes date the fire to 1888, and one appeal leaflet confused it with the 1866 restoration, but the newspapers fix it firmly in December 1884 (02/10, 19/02).

Recovery was fast. Job Stanley of Broom rebuilt the inside of the tower with a new roof and belfry, and restored the tracery and pinnacles. The VCH gives the cost as £520 (02/06). James Barwell of Birmingham recast the bells from the old metal as a new ring of six, and Frederick Harrison of Wellesbourne made a new clock. The church reopened on St Peter's Day 1885. Davenport wrote that the bells were "much better than they were before", and easier to ring (01/100–109).

James Davenport died in 1904 after 57 years at Welford as curate and rector. A stained-glass window in the south wall of the chancel, behind the screen, remembers him. A faculty for a memorial window in the chancel was granted in 1905 (26/14, 02/01).

The twentieth century: memorials, bells and a new lychgate

In the twentieth century the parish spent its money on remembering: a memorial window, a war memorial screen, new bells named after benefactors and a lychgate rebuilt timber for

timber. Two long incumbencies covered most of it. Arthur James Davis was rector from 1904 to 1947, and Karl Ashbolt Gray from 1948 to 1971 (19/02).

The 1920s: window, screen and organ

Davis was a farming parson, a district councillor and "a shrewd judge in the cattle markets of the Midlands". During his time the inside of the church "was much beautified" (19/02). The east window was given in memory of his elder son, who died in an accident while an Oxford undergraduate. A faculty of 1923 names him as Basil A. Forbes Davis (01/100–109, 19/02).

The window was installed in 1924. It is a modern Jesse window, filled with figures tied to the church's history: St Peter, St Denis of Paris and St Ivo among them (47/685). St Denis is a reminder of the French abbey that owned Welford for three centuries. The guides name the artist as Geoffrey Webb and point to his trademark, a small spider's web, in the lower right corner (47/685, 26/14). A few archive notes name his brother Christopher Webb instead, so the signature is worth checking in the glass.

The chancel was refitted at the same time with carved oak choir stalls and a pipe organ by Henry Hewins of Stratford (47/685). Then came the screen. It was carved by Joseph Northcott of Beaworthy in Devon as a copy of a Benedictine screen, to replace a fifteenth-century one taken out a century or two after it was made (47/685). Pickford found Northcott recorded as coming "to erect Screen" in 1926 (01/100–109). Geograph's photographs call it the "1920 war memorial chancel screen", but that date is not in the archive.

The screen is the parish war memorial. A stone tablet on the chancel arch dedicates it to "the men from this parish who gave their lives in the Great War 1914–1918", and as "a thankoffering for deliverance from our enemies" ([War Memorials Online](#)). It names nineteen men, from W. Basson to W. Wilson. Their stories are told in the companion essay, [Welford-on-Avon in the First World War](#). Pickford also records an earlier oak screen of 1915 given in memory of Harper Holtham and family (01/100–109).

In 1929 lightning struck the tower. The north-east pinnacle and part of the parapet fell through the nave roof, and the cement render cracked (26/14). Two years later Welford moved from Gloucestershire into Warwickshire, but the parish stayed in the Diocese of Gloucester, as it still does (19/02, 47/685). The Tithe Act of 1936 forced the sale of much of the glebe. The 1971 booklet called Davis "the last, for good or ill, of the notable agrarian rectors of Welford" (19/02).

Renewal after the Second World War

In November 1948 the Welford and Weston branch of the British Legion asked the rector for a memorial to the village's Second World War dead. It suggested a tablet like the one already in the church for the first war (56/03). A second stone tablet now stands beside the screen ([War Memorials Online](#)).

Karl Gray's first big task was repair. The diocesan surveyor, H. Stratton Davis, reported in 1948, and an appeal of December 1949 asked every household for help with a £1,650 bill (02/07, 02/09). In 1949–51 Booth and Son of Banbury cleaned the outside walls and exposed the stone quoins. They re-plastered the church with what the notes call the "original recipe" of sand, tallow and sawdust, and laid Hornton stone floors in the aisles (02/11). On 12

September 1953 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, came to Welford for a wedding and was photographed at the church door with the rector, wardens and vergers (49/06, 49/07).



The bells of 1960 and 1980

By 1957 the wooden bell frame was worn out and the bells fell silent (47/685). Taylor's of Loughborough inspected them and were blunt: Barwell's ring were "dreadful bells and no tone in them" (01/100–109). The parish raised about £1,600, and early in 1960 the bells went to Loughborough (24/04). Taylor's recast them as a new ring of six in a cast-iron frame, with room left for two more.



The Archdeacon of Cheltenham rededicated them on Michaelmas Eve, 28 September 1960 (18/01). The bell that is now the seventh carries the old boast "Richard Sanders made us all", followed by "John Taylor recast us all" (01/100–109). The fourth reads "Rudhall once recast me". The tenor, at 9 cwt 3 qr 1 lb, bears the words "Thou art Peter and on this rock I will build my church". The first peal on the new bells, 5,040 changes of Minor, was rung on 12 November 1960 (01/100–109).

Twenty years later the empty pits were filled. Victor and Patricia Gilbert gave two trebles, Constance and Rose, in memory of Constance Marion Howlett and Rose Wigmore (06/19). On 23 November 1980 the Dean of Gloucester dedicated them, together with a screen given in memory of Gwen Petit Rushton (06/19). Welford now has a ring of eight, which Taylor's records give in G sharp and the church guide in A flat, the same note (01/100–109, 47/685).



The lychgate rebuilt

In the mid-1960s the lychgate was found to be unsafe and taken down. In August 1966 the rector and wardens appealed for £1,200 to rebuild it and to fence a churchyard extension (09/05). The extension ended more than fifty years of argument about where Welford should bury its dead. A parishioner had finally given the land (09/05, 02/01).

The gate had been photographed and drawn before it came down. The plan was "an exact replica", using the original materials where possible (09/05). The church guide adds that the

new timbers came from slow-growing trees about 300 years old, chosen for strength and freedom from shakes (47/685). The back of the 1960 bell photograph notes "Old Lych Gate – Rebuilt in 1969" (41/29). Gifts were still coming in a year later. In July 1970 A. W. G. Newbery of Church End sent £50 as a tribute to Mrs Gray's efforts to protect the village's "Rural Beauty" (19/58).



The rest of Gray's time was busy too. The organ was rebuilt by Nicholson's of Worcester in 1969 for £1,400. The churchyards were levelled and the clock restored by John Smith of Derby in 1970–71 (02/11). On 8 August 1971 Gray dedicated an oak board listing the rectors

since 1065. It was lettered by the calligrapher John Bowler and given by Miss Constance Howlett, whose name is also on the treble bell (19/02). Gray retired through ill-health that month.

Stripping the cement, 1975

In 1975, European Architectural Heritage Year, the church council set out to give St Peter's back its "1340s look" (13/25). A tower pinnacle had been found dangerous at the five-yearly inspection. The honorary architect, Winston Walker, a parishioner, took the chance to strip the cement render, which he called "quite alien to this village". The tower repairs cost £3,500 (13/25).



Welford Church after restoration in 1975

The same year a hundred new kneelers were dedicated. Some thirty-five parishioners worked them, from materials given in memory of Ivy Burke, who died in 1973 (47/685). A window in the choir vestry arch, of 1974, remembers Gwen Rushton (26/14). The old rectory was sold in 1979 and a new one built (47/70).

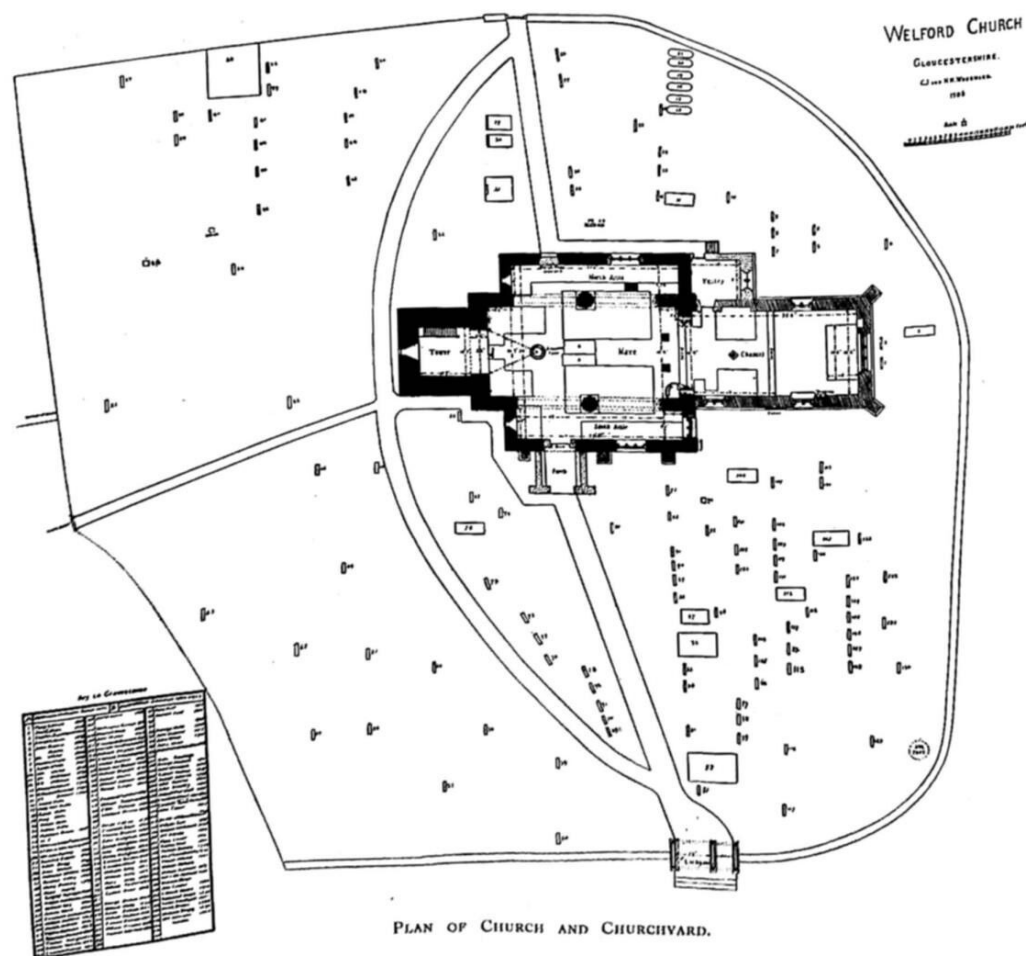
The church today

St Peter's is now a Grade I listed building, first listed on 5 April 1967 ([Historic England, 1382823](#)). The lychgate and churchyard wall are listed separately at Grade II, and so are several chest tombs and the Bruton and Newland monument south of the porch ([British Listed Buildings](#)). Since 2006 the church has been part of the Benefice of Quinton and Welford with Weston, still in the Diocese of Gloucester (47/68).



The work has not stopped. In 2009 the cracking Victorian plaster ceiling of the nave was lined with boarding, so the old ceiling could stay in view without falling on the congregation (47/685). In April 2016 the clock was given an automatic winder. Its plaque thanks Roger Timms, whose grandfather Jesse Radbourne rang the bells in the 1950s (01/100–109).

Woodward hoped his 1907 plan of the church and churchyard would "have some record of the graves as they are now". He and his nephew H. M. Woodward mapped 133 stones, and a tracing was put in the church chest (26/10). Like much of the archive, it records a building that has kept changing while looking, from the lane, much as it always has.



Key dates

Date	Event	Source
1059	Welford given to Deerhurst Priory, a cell of St Denis, Paris (tradition names Earl Sweyn as donor)	47/68; VCH
1086	Domesday: St Denis holds 15 hides in Welford	26/10
Later 12th century	Nave, aisles, arcades, doorways and lowest stage of tower built	02/06
1190	Ralph de Welford rector; 13-year land dispute with Deerhurst	19/02
13th century	Font; second stage of tower	02/06, 02/07
1291	Church valued at £15	VCH
c.1330–40	Chancel rebuilt and enlarged	02/06
1346	Bells said to ring for Crécy (tradition only)	47/68
15th century	Aisle walls raised, new windows, tower heightened, lychgate built	02/06, 13/02
1447 and	Welford granted to Eton, then to Tewkesbury Abbey	Britain

1467		Express
1484	Rector Walter Williams buried in the nave	26/10
1561	Registers begin	26/10
1576	Silver communion cup and cover	47/685
1588	Great Avon flood recorded in the register	02/04
1628	Steeple rebuilt by Barnabie Trimnell and Phillip Clough	17/01
1646–1660	Dr Jenkin Bowen ousted for John Trapp, then restored	03/38
1660	Bowen gives the turret clock	26/10
1721	Ring of six cast by Richard Sanders at Stratford	01/100–109
1796	Second bell recast by John Rudhall	01/100–109
1866–67	Restoration under Sir G. G. Scott; galleries and box pews removed	26/10
13 Dec 1884	Fire guts the tower; five bells broken, clock destroyed	01/100–109
1885	Tower rebuilt; bells recast by James Barwell; reopened St Peter's Day	01/100–109
1924	East window in memory of Basil Davis	47/685
1926	Northcott's war memorial screen erected	01/100–109
1929	Lightning strikes the tower	26/14
1931	Welford moves to Warwickshire, stays in Gloucester diocese	19/02
1949–51	Repairs by Stratton Davis & Yates and Booth & Son	02/11
28 Sep 1960	Six bells recast by Taylor's rededicated	18/01
1966–69	Lychgate taken down and rebuilt as a replica	09/05, 41/29
1971	Rectors' Board dedicated	19/02
1975	Tower repaired, cement render stripped; new kneelers	13/25, 47/685
23 Nov 1980	Two trebles and a memorial screen dedicated	06/19
2006	Benefice of Quinton and Welford with Weston formed	47/68
2009	Nave ceiling lined	47/685

Sources

Welford and Weston Local History Society archive (folder/item numbers as used in the text; scans in the project's Claude 1000 folder):

- 26/10: C. J. Woodward, "Notes on Welford Church, Gloucestershire", 13 March 1907, with J. A. Cossins's architectural description, the 1807 terrier, list of rectors, churchyard plan and figures.
- 02/01: Gloucestershire Record Office catalogue of the parish records (P 353), 1971. 02/04: the 1588 flood memorandum. 02/06: typescript of the VCH parish entry. 02/07: Stratton Davis letter on the font, 1948. 02/09: repair appeal, December 1949. 02/10: restoration appeal, November 1993. 02/11: list of church works 1948–1971.
- 01/100–109: Chris Pickford, survey of Welford bells and clock (draft, 2018), quoting the churchwardens' accounts and the 1884–85 press reports. 24/04: E. A. Harper, "The Bells", talk notes, 1999. 18/01: order of service for the rededication of the bells, 1960. 06/19: order of service, 23 November 1980.

- 17/01: churchwardens' accounts 1617–1763 (typed transcript). 03/38: Committee for Plundered Ministers and diocesan notes, 1646–1679. 19/31: rectory dilapidations 1713–1715. 20/02: notebook digest of Welford's ecclesiastical history.
- 19/02: "The Rectors of Welford-on-Avon", booklet for the Rectors' Board, 1971. 19/45: "Rectors of Welford", manuscript, about 1970. 47/70: Gilda Gray, "Rectors Past and Present", 1996, revised to 2006.
- 47/68: "The Parish Church of St Peter: A Brief History", guide, May 2006. 47/685: "Notes on St Peter's Church", guide, revised November 2009. 26/14: P. Deakin, "Historical Notes", 2003.
- 13/02: 1952/1967 statutory list for Welford-on-Avon. 13/25: Evesham Journal, 16 January 1975. 09/05: churchyard extension and lychgate appeal, August 1966. 14/11: newspaper cutting on the lychgate, before 1939. 19/58: Newbery letter, 15 July 1970. 56/03: British Legion letters, 1948. 49/06–07: photograph and parish magazine, 1953.
- Pictures: 26/10 (Woodward's figures and plan), 16/02, 41/29, 16/39, 14/11, 49/06, 49/08, 49/09, 47/68.

Online records

- [Historic England, Church of St Peter, list entry 1382823](#). This page could not be opened here; its dating was read from search summaries and should be checked.
- [Victoria County History, Warwickshire vol. 5 \(1949\), Welford-on-Avon, pp. 189–193](#), read through the archive typescript (02/06) and search summaries.
- [War Memorials Online, St Peter's screen, ref. 85925](#), and [IWM War Memorials Register 38544](#): the screen's inscription and names, as cited in the First World War essay.
- [Britain Express, St Peter's Church, Welford on Avon](#): the Eton and Tewkesbury grants of 1447 and 1467.
- [Welford-on-Avon in the First World War](#), the companion essay in this project, for the men named on the screen.
- Modern photographs: [the lych gate](#) by Philip Halling, and [St Peter's Church from the south](#) by David P Howard, both on Geograph under CC BY-SA 2.0. They are linked rather than shown because this workspace cannot download them.