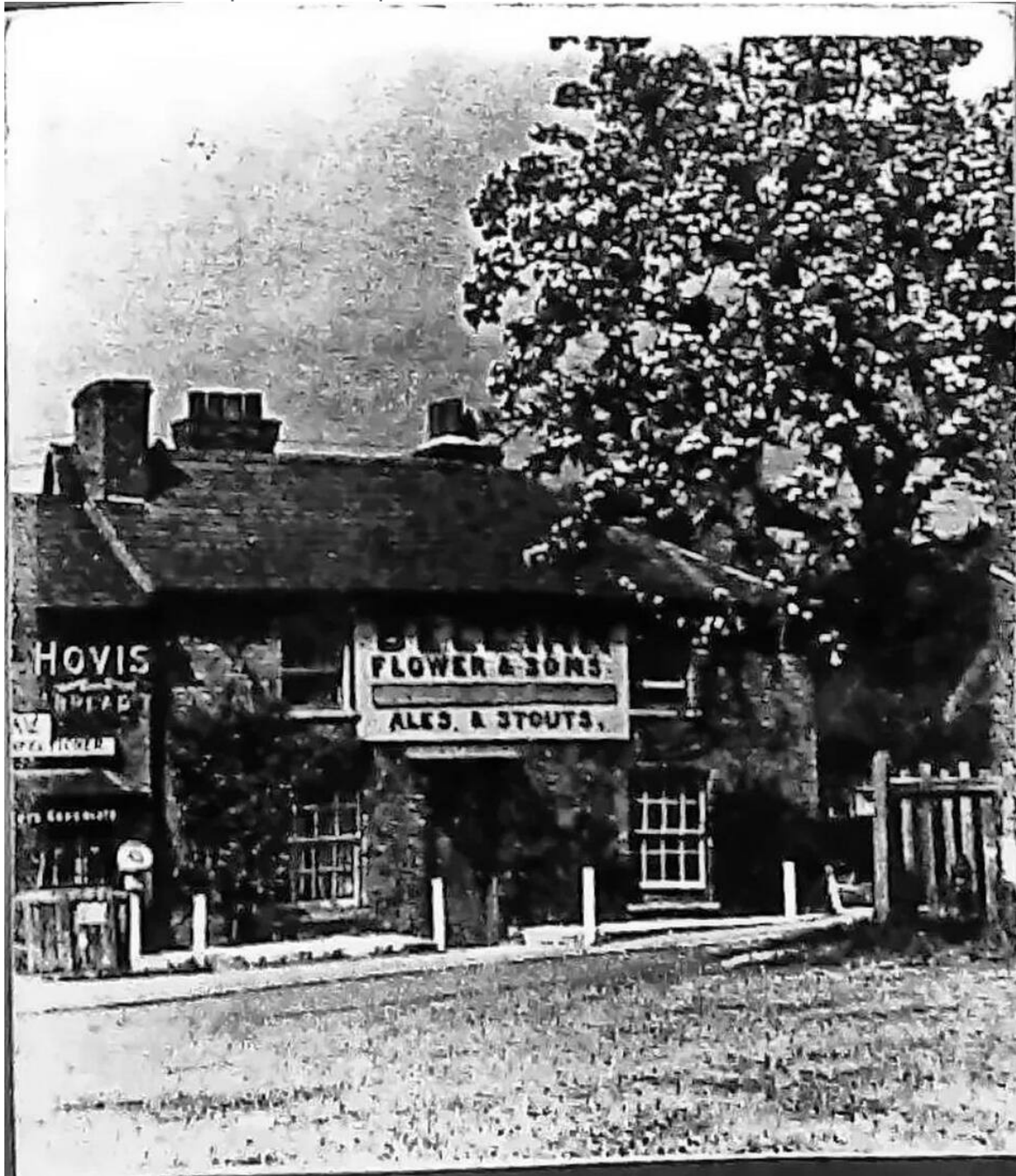


WELFORD-ON-AVON · THE CORNER OF HIGH STREET AND  
CHURCH STREET

## The Bell Inn

*Quinton's house, the King's Arms, the Bell: four centuries of the village's meeting room and the people who kept it.*

Drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive (folder references in grey), checked against census returns, trade directories and published pub records.



The Bell Inn, 1947. The board across the front reads "Flower & Sons, Ales & Stouts": the inn was then a tied house of the Stratford brewery. The Hovis sign on the left belongs to the little shop next door. Album print 53/24

Every English village of any size had an inn that was more than an inn. It was where the squire's agent collected the rents, where the parish officers met when the church was too cold or too sacred for business, where land was auctioned, where the club held its annual dinner, and where strangers asked the way. In Welford-on-Avon that house has stood for about four hundred years at the elbow of the village street, where the High Street bends towards the church and the river and the road runs off north to Binton Bridges. It has had at least three names. For most of the last two centuries it has been the Bell.

This essay follows the Bell through the papers the Welford and Weston Local History Society has collected since 1969: deeds and sale bills, the parish enclosure award, a commonplace book kept by a churchwarden in the 1930s, census returns, directories, photographs and the minutes of the Society itself. Those papers are patchy. They say a great deal about some decades and almost nothing about others, and in places they disagree. Where they do, the disagreement is set out rather than smoothed over, because the gaps are part of the story of how a village remembers its own pub.

## Quinton's house and the King's Armsc. 1600 to 1802

The Society's members dated the Bell to “about 1600”. When Mr Kirk showed his slides of the village houses to a general meeting on 22 January 1971, with a commentary by Mrs Gray, the list ran: “30. The Bell Inn — formerly the King's Arms. About 1600” 37/01–04. Mrs Gilda Gray, the rector's wife, wrote the fullest account in her house histories of around 1970. She thought “much of the present building dates from the end of the 16 hundreds”, that it had been considerably enlarged at the end of the eighteenth century, and that “the many alterations in this century have made identification very confusing” 21/57. The Society's 1983 list of buildings worth protecting put it more cautiously still: “C17? Auctions, Court Leet, village meetings used to be held here” 10/32, 30/06.

The earliest name the archive records is not an inn name at all. A page of handwritten research notes, apparently jottings for a talk, says the Bell was “formerly the Kings Arms ... originally Quinton's house”, and that a field called Quinton's Close was still mentioned in 1813 11/15. Quinton is a local surname as well as the name of the villages a few miles south, so the house seems to have been known first by a family who lived in it, before it was known by a sign.

The same notes carry the first transaction. In 1785 Richard Badson bought the inn from the Moseley family for £475. The reading of the name is not certain; it could be "Noseley". A pew in the parish church had belonged to the property, but the Moseleys had already sold it to Thomas Welch, the miller. The Badsons were people of weight in Welford. A W. Badson was churchwarden in 1796, when John Rudhall of Gloucester recast the second bell of St Peter's and the wardens' names were cast into it 01/100-109, and William Badson was one of the larger contributors to the costs of the parish enclosure a few years later.

That enclosure gives the inn its first appearance in an official record. The Welford Enclosure Act was passed in 1800 and the commissioners' award made in 1802. Among the new public carriage roads, forty feet wide, it set out "Bridges Road - Leading from Kings Arms Public House, thence in or near present track to Binton Bridges" 01/70. That road is the present Binton Road, and the inn still stands at its foot. A later village history explains the geography: the narrow stretch of road between the Bell and the cottage opposite was "the ancient manor-road from the village", and the wide road beyond was new in 1800 54/105.

Here the first disagreement in the sources appears. A two-page typescript called "Some Old Houses and Old Folks", written by someone who knew the village in the 1930s, says: "The Bell was once (in 1800) called The Horse Head, and the Commissioners under the Enclosure Act held their meetings there" 19/26. The award itself, two years later, calls the house the King's Arms. Either the inn changed its sign twice in quick succession or, more likely, the writer's memory or source was wrong about the name and right about the meetings. The archive offers no second mention of a Horse Head in Welford.

## The village's front parlour 1800 to 1863

By 1814 the house was the Bell. A sale bill copied into the Society's files advertises an auction "at Mrs Bromleys at the Bell Inn in Welford in the County of Gloucester" on Wednesday 17 August 1814, between four and six in the afternoon 11/20. Three lots were offered: an orchard of about an acre and a half near the church with a malthouse occupied by Mr Sisam, a barn and stable occupied by Mr Edkins, and the standing fruit crop "with the aftermath", the second crop of grass after mowing. Viewing was through James Mills of Welford. Mrs Bromley is the first keeper of the inn the archive names. A John Bromley had paid Rudhall £12 9s 6d for

recasting the church bell in 1796 01/100–109; whether he was her husband, and whether the inn's new name had anything to do with that bell, the papers do not say.

The year of that sale bill was also the year of the village's great feast. When Welford celebrated the peace after Napoleon's abdication, the villagers burnt an effigy of “Boney” made by Mr Mills in Nathaniel Moore's orchard. Then, as H. M. Woodward recorded the story, “Tables were set out in the High Street, from the Maypole to the Bell Inn, and each of the principal houses in the village provided meat and drink for one table.” The church bells were rung to tell the householders when to put their puddings in to boil, and again when to take them out 01/90–99, 10/01–08. The Bell was one end of the village's dining table.

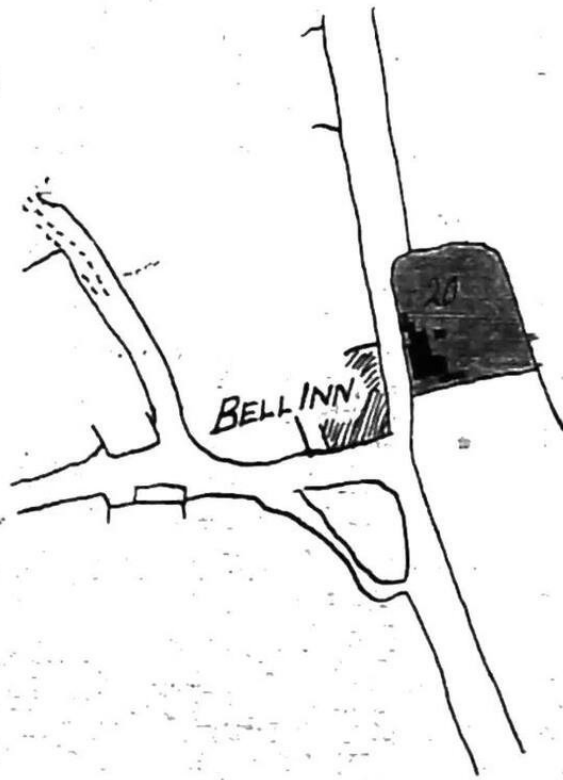
For the next half-century it was the village's public room in a more formal sense. Mrs Gray wrote that in the early nineteenth century “all the parish meetings that had been formerly held in the church, as the only large meeting place in the village, were transferred to the inn — we find the Rent Audit of the Lord of the Manor was held there — the Court Leet, the Vestry meetings, the Overseers of the Poor used it regularly, as did the tax collectors” 21/57. The 11/15 notes add that the Duke of Dorset's agent met his tenants there for the rent audits, and that farmers met there to arrange shared harvesting. The Dukes of Dorset, the Sackville family, were lords of the manor of Welford, and Lord Sackville's land still bordered the inn's garden at the end of the century. The “Old Houses” typescript adds that the Easter vestry meetings were held at the Bell after adjourning from the church 19/26.

The clearest proof of the Bell's role is a research notebook in which a Society member summarised every Welford sale notice in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust records. Its early entries are almost all auctions at the Bell 11/30. On 2 June 1815 William Hemmings sold John Need's farmhouse and closes there. George Mann of Stratford held sale after sale at the inn: a cordwainer's house in 1846, sold for £27 to Thomas Shurvington, who signed with his mark; a blacksmith's shop and two houses in 1847; the toll bridges, wharf, fishery and islands at Binton Bridges in April 1849; a former butcher's shop in 1853; seven cottages in 1855; and houses near the church, each with “a commodious pew” attached, in 1862 and 1863. W. Barnacle sold a malthouse there in 1848.

Some of the bills record the bidding, and they let us glimpse the room on an auction night. At the Binton Bridges sale in 1849, Mr E. Parker and Mr Mills pushed each other up five pounds at a time

until Mr Stanley came in at £155, and Mr Stanley took the lot at £200. In 1853 only five people attended, three of them bidding, and the property was withdrawn at £147 against a reserve of £175. After 1863 the venue shifts. The bigger sales moved to the Red Horse and the Golden Lion in Stratford, and later to the Town Hall. The Bell still had its occasions: the Baylies estate auction of 4 May 1892 25/08, The Ashes in October 1935, and Sefton Cottage in August 1940 11/30.

Mrs Gray dated the change precisely: "After the school was opened in 1863 — it seemed to lose its importance as the centre of village affairs" 21/57. Even then the Bell had a "village room". When the Rev. James Davenport, rector from 1865, wanted to build a church Sunday school, he began by calling parishioners to a meeting "in the village room at the Bell Inn". The Wesleyans, who already had their own Sunday school in Chapel Street, took offence and stopped attending the parish church, opening a rift between chapel and church that the writer called "the tragedy of it all" 17/07.



*Tracing from Plan annexed to Declaration of Mrs Sarah Ann Rogers dated 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1894. and marked "A".*

T

he Bell Inn on a plan of 1894. A tracing from the plan attached to Sarah Ann Rogers's declaration of 3 July 1894. The shaded plot 20 across the road is Virginia Cottage; the Bell is hatched at the corner. 45/26

## The innkeepers of early Victorian Welford 1841 to 1861

The census returns give the first close look at who lived in the inn. On census night in June 1841 the Bell was kept by Mary Parker, publican, entered as 50. Adult ages were rounded down to the nearest five that year, so she was somewhere between 50 and 54. With her were a six-year-old, Ann Copeland, and John Hodgkins, 68, entered as a brewer, presumably brewing the house's own ale 48/01. Ten years later Mary Parker was still there, now a widow of 53, innkeeper, born in Welford itself. A granddaughter, Catherine, aged 13, and a 22-year-old lodger named John Hodgkins shared the house 14/12. White's directory of 1850 has her too, as "M. Parker,

Vct, Bell Inn" 11/20. The ages do not quite fit: 53 in 1851 means born around 1798, which would make her about 43 in 1841, not 50. Census ages were often loose. What matters is that a widow born in the village kept its principal inn for at least ten years.

In the Post Office Directory of 1856 the Bell is in the hands of Thomas Matthews 48/13, and the 1859 Bristol directory repeats his name 48/14-16. The published Gloucestershire pub lists also begin their roll of Welford Bell licensees with "T. Matthews, 1856". By the census of April 1861 he had gone. The Bell was kept by William Perkins, innkeeper, 30, born at Wellesbourne, with his wife Mary, 28, from Oxfordshire, two small sons, Sidney and William, and a twelve-year-old servant girl, Emma Hobbins from Clifford Chambers 48/04. The 1861 enumerator listed three inns in Welford: the Four Alls at Binton Bridges, the Bell, and the Bear, the old riverside house that later became the Boat.

The Bell's reputation was always a cut above the Boat. Mrs Gray called it "always a better class of inn than the Boat with considerable stabling" 21/57. The Boat was the bargemen's house, where prize fights were arranged and the fighters slipped across the river into Warwickshire when the police came 19/26, 21/22-66. But the Bell had its rough nights too. The Stratford Herald of 8 November 1861 reported that on the evening of 31 October Mr Alcock, who kept a beer-house in Welford, decided to change his beverage, "resorted to the Bell and banged (the bell) so loud that he got rather uproarious". He began showing off athletic feats with a companion, who tripped him, "and laid the son of Crispin low, and unfortunately with a broken leg". Mr Matthews of Epwell, the bone-setter, was sent for 08/20-29. "Son of Crispin" means shoemaker, so Alcock was a cobbler as well as a beer-seller.

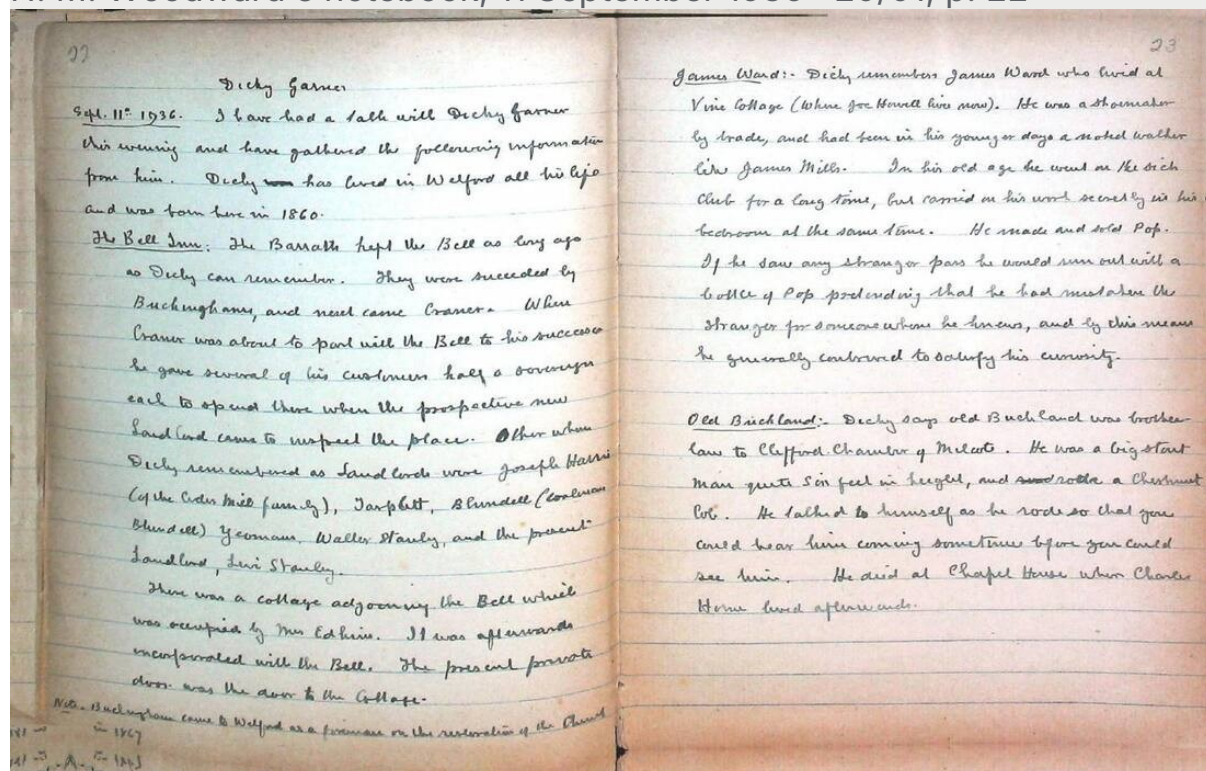
## Dicky Garner's landlords 1860s to 1890s

The richest single account of the Bell's keepers is a page in the commonplace book of H. M. Woodward, a churchwarden who moved to Welford in 1902 and spent the 1930s collecting the memories of the oldest villagers 20/01. On 11 September 1936 he sat down with Dicky Garner, born in Welford in 1860, and wrote:

*The Bell Inn: The Barratts kept the Bell as long ago as Dicky can remember. They were succeeded by Buckinghams, and next came Craner. When Craner was about to part with the Bell to his successor he gave several of his customers half a sovereign each to spend there when the prospective new landlord came to inspect the*

place. Other whom Dicky remembered as landlords were Joseph Harris (of the Cider Mill family), Tarplett, Blundell (Coalman Blundell), Yeomans, Walter Stanley, and the present landlord, Levi Stanley.

H. M. Woodward's notebook, 11 September 1936 · 20/01, p. 22



Woodward's notes of his talk with Dicky Garner, 1936. The Bell Inn paragraph is on the left-hand page, with the note at the foot that Buckingham came to Welford as a foreman on the restoration of the church in 1867. 20/01, pp. 22-23

Craner's trick is the best story in the archive about the Bell. A landlord selling his tenancy wanted the house to look busy when the incoming man came to look it over, so he paid his regulars to fill the bar. It shows that the tenancy was a thing of value, to be bought and sold, and that a full bar was what a buyer looked for.

The written records confirm most of Dicky's names and fill in some he missed. The Barratts were a Welford family of tradesmen. In 1853 a Thomas Barrett occupied a house on the main street that had been a butcher's shop and was then a painter's and glazier's 11/30. Fred Barratt, born in Welford around 1850 and another of Woodward's informants, was the son of a plumber and decorator 20/01. If the Barratts kept the Bell in the early 1860s, that would fit Dicky's earliest memories and the gap after William Perkins in 1861, but the archive has no census or directory entry naming them there.

Woodward added a note at the foot of the page: "Buckingham came to Welford as a foreman on the restoration of the Church in 1867." That was the restoration of St Peter's under Sir George Gilbert Scott, paid for by Countess De La Warr 46/98. White's directory of 1878 lists "James Buckingham vict and Butcher Bell Inn" 11/20, so the builder's foreman had stayed on, married into the trade or bought the tenancy, and combined it with butchering. Running a second business from an inn was normal. The Shakespeare in Chapel Street was also the village bakery, and its landlord Roly Basson was still baking at four in the morning in the 1930s 13/16, 13/18.

The 1881 census names a landlord Dicky did not mention. Frederick Evans, 40, licensed victualler, born in Leamington, kept the Bell with his wife Elizabeth and their children, the elder born in Lichfield and the younger in Leamington 48/06. The family had moved about, as many licensees did. Craner, too, was a Welford surname in 1881, and he may have come either side of Evans 48/06. Joseph Harris belonged to the family who had held the cider mill since the eighteenth century 13/36. Tarplett is not otherwise recorded in the archive.

"Coalman Blundell" was Joseph Blundell, the coal merchant. The published Gloucestershire licensing lists give Joseph Blundell as landlord of the Bell in 1885. In the 1901 census he was living at Baskerville in Back Lane, aged 61, a coal merchant, and in 1911 he was a 71-year-old coal dealer in the High Street 46/37-95, 48/11. The licence was a stage in a longer working life, not a career.

Samuel Yeomans is the next certain name. In the 1891 census he was the innkeeper and also a builder employing men, aged 36, born at Ratley, with his wife Alice from Kenilworth and three children born at Tiddington 48/07. A year later, when the Baylies trustees sold their Welford land at the Bell on 4 May 1892, Lot 1 was "a Piece of Garden Land, near the Bell Inn, and known as "The Bell Garden,"" of over an acre, planted with fruit trees and "now in the occupation of Mr. Yeomans" 25/08. The Bell's own garden was apparently not the inn's freehold; the landlord rented it from a neighbour.

Those years also bring the first clear evidence of who owned the house. According to the licensing returns published on the Gloucestershire Pubs website, in 1891 the Bell was an alehouse owned by William Turner of the Caudlewell Brewery, Shipston-on-Stour. By 1903 it belonged to Flower & Sons of Stratford-upon-

Avon, which had taken over Turner's brewery in the 1890s. Flower's "Ales & Stouts" board was still across its front in 1947.

The same years saw the house grow. Dicky remembered that a cottage next to the Bell had been occupied by Mrs Edkins and "was afterwards incorporated with the Bell. The present private door was the door to the Cottage" 20/01. An Edkins family lived in the village throughout the century; Mr Edkins had rented the barn in the 1814 sale.

## The Stanleys 1897 to 1939 and after

From the late 1890s the Bell was kept by one family for over forty years. Kelly's Directory of 1897 lists "Stanley William Lennard, Bell inn" 46/98, 48/19-20, and Spennell's directory of 1900 still has a Stanley at the Bell Inn 46/99. The family came from Lower Quinton. The Society's 2000s talk on Welford in 1901 says Levi Stanley's father William later became a beer retailer running the College Arms in Lower Quinton, and it was there that Levi was living in 1901 46/37-95. The pub lists then give Walter Stanley in 1902 and 1903 and Levi Stanley from 1906.

Dicky Garner remembered Walter Stanley and Levi Stanley as two landlords. The Society's research card on the family treats them as one man, "Walter Levi Stanley", born at Quinton in 1874, a footman in 1891, at the College Arms in 1901, married on 11 October 1903 at Welford to Mary Smith, and dying on 6 August 1939 "while living at the Bell" 46/15-36. That seems the better reading: one man who was registered as Walter and known as Levi, and who signed his own census form "Levi Stanley". The card names his father as William Baldwin Stanley, a shoemaker, where the talk makes him a beer retailer. Both may be true at different times.

The 1911 census schedule, filled in by Levi himself, shows a small household in a large house. Levi Stanley, 37, licensed victualler; Mary, 31, "assisting in business", born at Cropthorne in Worcestershire; their daughter Olive Mary, 4, born at Welford; and a cousin, Harry Gibbs, 45, a widower from Lower Swell, working as groom and hostler. The Bell had eleven rooms, more than any other house in that run of the census except the Rectory 48/11. The enumerator's summary book lists it simply as "Bell Inn, Public House, Mr Stanley", between Virginia Cottage and Mr Griffin's baker's shop 48/09.

Visitors noticed the Stanleys. In about 1906 J. H. Garrett, headmaster of Bristol Grammar School, came up the Avon by boat and walked through the village for his book *The Idyllic Avon*:

*Beyond the church and past some quaint cottages, and we soon come to The Bell Inn, which rises in modest height at the corner where we turn out of the High Street towards the river. But "The Bell" on this occasion has no rooms to let and can only provide us with a simple, substantial tea with bacon and eggs, which we are glad to take as a supplement to our trifling luncheon, before seeking lodgings elsewhere.*

J. H. Garrett, *The Idyllic Avon* (1906), p. 202 · 11/33

Welford had become a summer resort, Garrett explained, with perhaps fifty visitors lodging in its cottages in August, and the Bell was full. A customer remembered the Stanleys as a "goodlooking hostess and a corpulent host" 46/37–95.



"By the Bell Inn", 1900s. A real-photo postcard, probably by W. A. Smith. The album caption places it by the Bell, presumably the taller building on the right. The long thatched cottage on the left fits Virginia Cottage, across the narrow stretch of the old manor road. Album print 53/23

Levi Stanley was a village figure, not just a publican. He sat on the parish council, and in October 1920 he was present when the council took up the "Dangerous Corner at Bell Inn", the sharp bend outside his own front door. In January 1921 the council asked the Automobile Association to put up a warning sign 18/14. The corner remained a problem for forty years. The parish council's files at the county record office include a 1962 file on "Improvements to the road layout at the Bell Inn" 50/41, and a 1992 photograph shows roadworks and a "No footway for 100 yds" sign in front of it.

The Bell was also a place where village politics went on outside the minutes. Around 1920, when a committee was trying to buy part of a field at auction for the village and its war memorial hall, a row broke out over who had promised what. At a public meeting Mr W. Matthews said he had been "present at a meeting held at the Bell inn on the night previous to the sale", with Mr T. Hawkins and Mr Stanley. Mr Stanley backed him up. When Hawkins challenged Stanley to repeat the disparaging remarks that had caused the trouble, the newspaper reported, "Mr. Stanley: I decline to do so" 23/91-96.

Memories from the same years show how the Bell fitted into the village calendar. Mr Lively, born in 1899, remembered that the Welford Wakes were held on the land "down towards the Bell Inn" early in the century, and that the Cirencester Benefit Society, a members' sick club, held its annual dinner at the Bell, in the inn yard 08/01-19. When the bowling club opened its first green in 1933 its only building was a tin hut, "so members went to the Bell Inn for refreshments" 13/41. The auctioneers still came: Hutchings & Deer sold The Ashes there in October 1935, and Walker Barnard & Son sold Sefton Cottage there on 16 August 1940 11/30.

Levi Stanley died on 6 August 1939, still living at the Bell, and left £753 9s 7d to his wife. Mary Stanley lived until 1952 46/15-36. The archive does not say who held the licence after him.

## The Bell at war 1939 to 1945

The best-loved story of the Bell comes from a sheaf of typed wartime memories the Society collected:

*One day Sgt. Cranch was marching the Home Guard down the High Street. He did not shout "right wheel" as he went around the Bell Inn and all the men marched straight into the Bell through the*

*front door. I am sure they then “halted” even though they had not been told.*

Unsigned memory · 36/33

The geography makes the joke work. A column marching up the High Street has to turn at the Bell to follow the road round, and the inn's front door faces straight down the street. The archive also holds the Home Guard's group photograph, with all twenty-six men named. Sergeant Cranch sits sixth from the left in the front row, beside the officer 36/36. In 2013 the photograph was reprinted on the front of a district councillor's news sheet, above a notice for the Welford Street Fair and the line “PLEASE SUPPORT BY THE BELL INN” 36/44.



The Welford-on-Avon Home Guard, about 1941. Sergeant Cranch, who forgot to call “right wheel” at the Bell, is sixth from the left in the front row, next to the officer. 36/36

## A post-war country pub 1945 to the 1990s

The 1947 photograph at the top of this essay is the first clear picture of the building. It shows a two-storey house under a dark tiled roof with three chimney stacks, small-paned windows either side of a central door, the Flower & Sons board across the front, and white-painted posts along the verge, a leftover of wartime blackout markings. To the left is a shop with an enamel Hovis sign 53/24. The shop next door appears in several memories. One former resident recalled “Mrs Barnes's tiny shop next to the Bell,

which she searched by candlelight”; another remembered a grocery next to the Bell Inn; later it was the post office and shop run by Miss Taylor 49/21, 48/45–64, 52/02.

The same correspondent made a social distinction that runs right through the Bell's history: villagers drank at the Shakespeare, and the “more upmarket” at the Bell 49/21. A century earlier Mrs Gray's sources had made the same comparison between the Bell and the Boat.

Welford itself had changed counties. Until 1931 the village was in Gloucestershire, which is why the 1814 sale bill places the Bell “in the County of Gloucester”. The 1931 boundary changes moved it into Warwickshire 45/47. That is why its licensing history is still kept among Gloucestershire's pub records.

The village grew fast after the war. A house-by-house survey of about 1960 lists the Bell Inn as “business premises”, notes planning permission for two new dwellings on Bell land, and records a separate “Bell Inn Car Park” 20/06. In January 1988 the owner of Tudor Vale told the Society that “the Bell car park used to be in front of Tudor Vale” 38/01–03. Tudor Vale is one of two cottages “near the Bell Inn” sold in 1887 to Charles Timms, a Stratford licensed victualler, and the Bell's neighbours were often described simply by reference to it 01/72, 05/03–09. Letters to Virginia Cottage were addressed “Op[posite] The Bell Inn”, and its 1934 deed describes it as “near The Bell Inn” 45/31, 45/47.

The Society kept an eye on the Bell's setting. In 1971 and 1972, when the old cider mill was to be redeveloped, the committee tried to save its machinery and asked the parish and county councils whether it could be re-erected “on the green before the Bell Inn” 37/01–04. In 1983 it put the Bell on its list of buildings that ought to be protected, at Grade III 10/32. The 1987 register of electors shows Graham S. and Rowena J. Webb living at the Bell Inn, Binton Road 30/05. The Society held a committee meeting there in 1995 and suggested in 1999 that “places like the Bell” might like to be included in its millennium walks booklet 38/01–03.



The Bell from the north, 1992. Figure 10 of the district council's conservation area study, showing the inn and its outbuildings at the bend of the road, with roadworks in front. 15/08

## What kind of building is it?

The Bell's age is the most uncertain part of its history. The Society's members, the pub's own publicity and the tourist guides all call it a seventeenth-century inn. But the professional surveyors who wrote the Welford-on-Avon Conservation Area Study for Stratford District Council in July 1992 described it plainly as "The Bell Inn, High Street. C19, public house, brick, slate roof, two storey", and its outbuildings at the rear as "C19, brick, slate roof, two storey" 15/08. They recommended moving the conservation area boundary to take in those outbuildings and the neighbouring villa, Polruan, because together they "make a significant contribution to the sense of enclosure and arrival" at the north end of the village.

The Bell does not appear on the National Heritage List for England; searches for a Welford listing found Bell Inns in Shipston-on-Stour and elsewhere, but not this one. The 1960 provisional list seems not to have included it either, which would explain why the Society added it as a proposal in 1983 10/32.

The two views can probably be reconciled. A house first recorded as Quinton's, enlarged at the end of the eighteenth century, extended into Mrs Edkins's cottage in the later nineteenth, and refronted or reroofed in brick and slate by a Victorian brewery would look nineteenth-century from the street while keeping older timbers

inside. Mrs Gray had already warned that twentieth-century alterations “made identification very confusing”. Only a look at the roof and the walls would settle it, and the archive does not contain one.

## Shakespeare at the Bell?

The modern Bell has a story the archive never mentions. Tourist leaflets and the pub's own pages say that Shakespeare drank at the Bell with Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson, caught a chill walking home to Stratford in the rain, and died of it. The tale grows from one sentence written about fifty years after Shakespeare's death by John Ward, vicar of Stratford: “Shakespear, Drayton, and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting, and it seems, drank too hard, for Shakespear died of a feavour there contracted.” Ward does not say where the meeting was. Welford's claim to it is a piece of modern local tradition. None of the Society's papers, which go back to the parish registers of the sixteenth century, connect Shakespeare with the inn.

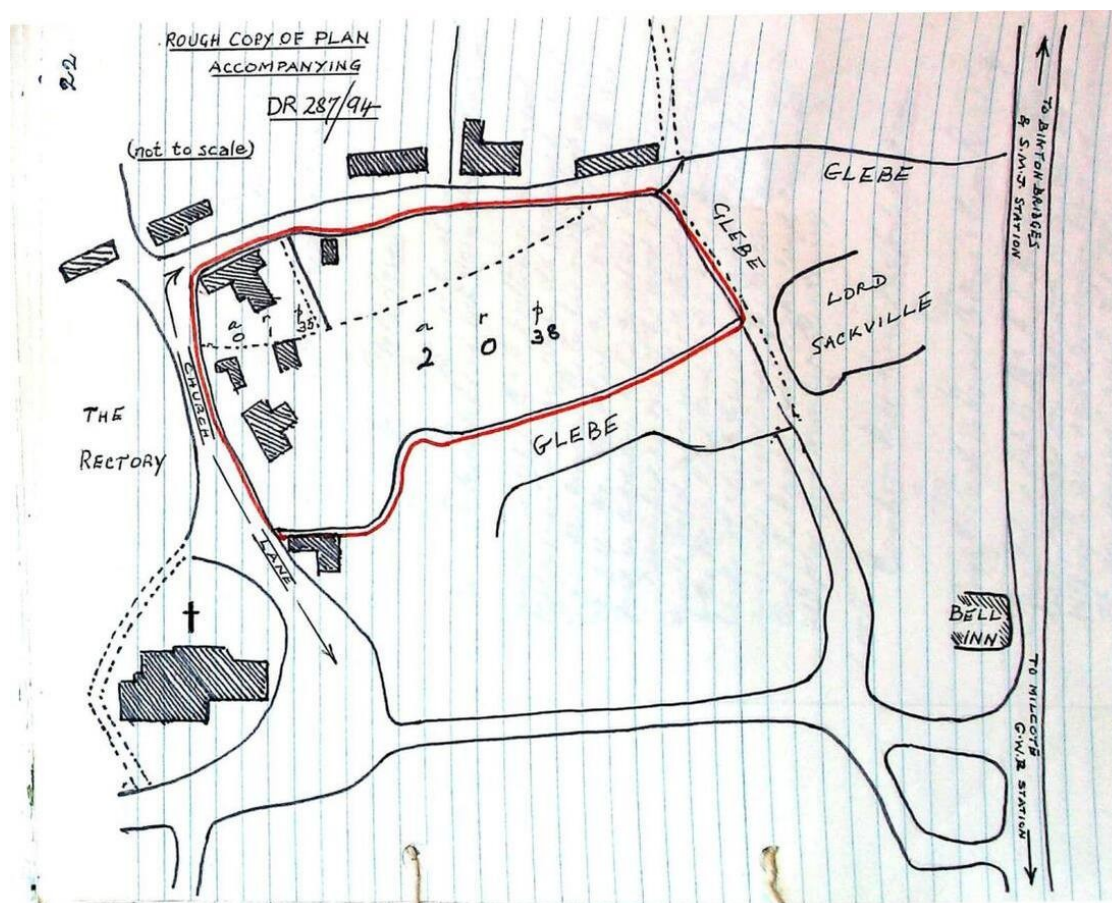
The real Bell of the early 2000s earned a more ordinary fame. Under Colin and Teresa Ombler it was named Warwickshire Dining Pub of the Year in the *Good Pub Guide 2011*, and the Stratford Herald later reported the same county title for the fifth time in ten years. Later directory entries give Tony Gardner and Rita Faccenda as contacts. CAMRA's current entry describes “an old country pub with real fires in the winter and a large patio garden for the summer”. These recent decades are outside the Society's archive and are given here from those published sources only.

## Four hundred years at the corner

Taken together, the papers show the Bell in three roles. Until the 1860s it was the village's civic building, where the manor court sat, the vestry met, the poor rate was settled, and freeholds were auctioned. From the 1860s to the Second World War it was a family business in a growing village, sold on from tenant to tenant, run alongside butchering, building and coal dealing, filled with lodgers in August and with sick-club members at their annual dinner. After the war it became what most village inns became: a country pub for visitors and residents alike, judged by its food.

The people who kept it are mostly known only from a line in a census or directory. Mrs Bromley in 1814; Mary Parker, a Welford-born widow, in the 1840s; Thomas Matthews; William Perkins and

his young family; the Barratts; James Buckingham, the church-restoration foreman turned victualler and butcher; Craner and his half-sovereigns; Frederick Evans from Leamington; Joseph Harris of the cider mill; Tarplett; Joseph Blundell the coalman; Samuel Yeomans the builder; and then the Stanleys of Lower Quinton, who kept it for more than forty years. Most of them stayed a few years and moved on. The house stayed where it was, at the bend in the road where Sergeant Cranch's men marched in through the front door.



The Bell on a 1920 sale plan. A Society member's rough copy of the plan for the sale of Church Farm House, May 1920. The Bell stands by the main road at right, between Lord Sackville's land and the roads to Binton Bridges and Milcote station. 11/30, p. 22

## Keepers of the Bell

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 tenancy.

| YEAR | KEEPER                                                                                               | SOURCE |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 1785 | Richard Badson buys the King's Arms from the Moseley family for £475 (owner, not necessarily keeper) | 11/15  |
| 1802 | "Kings Arms Public House" named in the enclosure award                                               | 01/70  |

| YEAR        | KEEPER                                                                  | SOURCE                    |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1814        | Mrs Bromley                                                             | 11/20                     |
| 1841        | Mary Parker, publican, about 50                                         | 48/01                     |
| 1850–51     | Mary Parker, widow, innkeeper, born Welford                             | 11/20, 14/12              |
| 1856–59     | Thomas Matthews                                                         | 48/13–16                  |
| 1861        | William Perkins, innkeeper, 30, born Wellesbourne                       | 48/04                     |
| 1860s       | The Barratts (from memory)                                              | 20/01                     |
| 1867–78     | James Buckingham, victualler and butcher                                | 20/01, 11/20              |
| 1870s?      | Craner (from memory)                                                    | 20/01                     |
| 1881        | Frederick Evans, licensed victualler, 40, born Leamington               | 48/06                     |
| 1880s?      | Joseph Harris of the cider mill family; Tarplett (from memory)          | 20/01                     |
| 1885        | Joseph Blundell, “Coalman Blundell”                                     | 20/01; pub lists          |
| 1891–92     | Samuel Yeomans, innkeeper and builder, 36, born Ratley                  | 48/07, 25/08              |
| 1897–1900   | William Lennard Stanley                                                 | 46/98, 46/99              |
| 1902–03     | Walter Stanley                                                          | 20/01; pub lists          |
| 1906–39     | (Walter) Levi Stanley, with Mary Stanley; Levi died at the Bell in 1939 | 48/11, 46/15–36           |
| 1987        | Graham S. and Rowena J. Webb resident                                   | 30/05                     |
| c.2000–2019 | Colin and Teresa Ombler                                                 | Good Pub Guide; pub lists |

## WHERE THE SOURCES DISAGREE

- **The old name.** The 1802 enclosure award and the Society's notes call the inn the King's Arms; the typescript “Some Old Houses and Old Folks” says it was the Horse Head in 1800. The award is the stronger source. 01/70, 11/15, 19/26
- **The building's date.** The Society's members said “about 1600” or the late seventeenth century; the 1992 conservation study called it nineteenth-century brick and slate. 37/01–04, 21/57, 15/08
- **Walter and Levi Stanley.** Dicky Garner remembered two landlords; the Society's research card makes them one man, Walter Levi Stanley. 20/01, 46/15–36
- **Mary Parker's age.** 50 in 1841 (rounded down) but 53 in 1851. 48/01, 14/12
- **The 1814 feast.** One copy dates the Bonaparte bonfire to “the Peace” of 1815; Woodward's own heading places it in 1814. 01/90–99, 20/01
- **The 1785 seller.** The surname in the handwritten notes can be read as Moseley or Noseley. 11/15

## ARCHIVE ITEMS USED

- 01/70 Welford Enclosure Award, 1802 (typed abstract) · 01/72 and 05/03–09 Tudor Vale deed, 1887 · 01/90–99 and 10/01–08 the 1814 peace feast · 01/100–109 church bells and Rudhall's 1796 receipt
- 08/01–19 Mr Lively's memories · 08/20–29 Stratford Herald cuttings, “Brawl at the Bell”, 1861
- 10/32 and 30/06 Society's listed-buildings review, 1983

- 11/15 research notes on the Boat and Bell · 11/20 "The Bell Inn" note and 1814 sale bill · 11/30 sale particulars 1815–1956 · 11/33 J. H. Garrett, *The Idyllic Avon* (1906)
- 13/16, 13/18 the Shakespeare Inn and Roly Basson, 1973 · 13/41 bowls club history · 14/12 1851 census
- 15/08 Welford-on-Avon Conservation Area Study, 1992 · 17/07 Gilda Gray, "Schools in Welford" · 18/14 parish council minutes · 19/26 "Some Old Houses and Old Folks"
- 20/01 H. M. Woodward's commonplace book, 1932–43 · 20/06 house survey, about 1960 · 21/22–66 Woodward's anecdotes and Gilda Gray's house histories
- 23/91–96 memorial hall dispute, about 1920 · 25/08 Baylies estate sale, 1892
- 30/05 register of electors, 1987–88 · 36/33, 36/36, 36/44 the Home Guard · 37/01–04 and 38/01–03 Society minutes
- 45/26, 45/31, 45/47 Virginia Cottage papers · 46/15–36 1901 people notes · 46/37–95 talk on Welford in 1901 · 46/98 Kelly's 1897 · 46/99 Spennell's 1900
- 48/01 1841 census · 48/04 1861 census · 48/06 1881 census · 48/07 1891 census · 48/09 and 48/11 1911 census · 48/13–22 trade directories 1856–1914
- 49/21, 48/45–64, 52/02 residents' memories · 50/41 parish council records list · 53/23, 53/24 album photographs · 54/105 village history

## PUBLISHED SOURCES

- [Gloucestershire Pubs: Bell Inn, Welford on Avon](#) (licensee list, 1891 and 1903 ownership). The page could not be opened from here; its details are taken from search summaries.
- [CAMRA WhatPub: Bell Inn, Welford-on-Avon](#)
- [Coventry Telegraph: Welford pub lands Good Pub Guide award](#) and [Stratford Herald: Awards ring in changes for Bell's](#)
- [Visit Warwickshire: places with a story to tell](#) (the Shakespeare tradition)
- [Francis Frith: The Bell Inn, c.1960](#) (photograph)
- [Welford-on-Avon village business directory: The Bell Inn](#)