

WELFORD-ON-AVON · MAYPOLE GREEN, HIGH STREET

The Welford Maypole

How a Gloucestershire village kept a pole on its green through storms, lightning, rot and repainting, and what the records can and cannot say about its age.

Drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive (folder references in grey), checked against the listing record, the Victoria County History and other published sources.

Ask anyone in Welford-on-Avon how old the maypole is and you will get a large number. The 1951 Festival of Britain leaflet said a maypole stood in the village "when Columbus discovered America". The listing record says the site is "believed" to have been used for a maypole "since C14 or earlier". A parish programme of 2012 called the present pole "one of a continuous line of Maypoles since 1492". Welford sold itself as "the Maypole Village", and the pole on the green at the junction of the High Street, Chapel Street and Binton Road is still the first thing a visitor sees.

The village archive tells a story that is both shorter and more interesting than the legend. Its papers follow the pole through at least seven lives between the 1860s and today. One pole blew down in 1895 and another in 1923. One was struck by lightning in 1935 and another rotted in the ground in the 1960s. The present pole is metal, raised in 1967 with money from a donor who asked not to be named. Each time, the village paid for a new pole by subscription, held a ceremony, and argued about who should pay to paint it. This essay follows that record and then goes back to test the older claims.

BEFORE 1814 Legend, Shakespeare and a misread book

Three dates recur in the village's own accounts of the pole's age: the fourteenth century, 1492 and "Shakespeare's day". None of them comes with a document that can be checked.

The fourteenth-century date first appears in the archive as the opinion of George Wright, schoolmaster at Welford around 1900. In 1935 the local historian H. M. Woodward,

writing as "H.M.W." in the *Evesham Journal*, said Wright believed "a succession of maypoles had existed here since the fourteenth century, but I do not know on what evidence this opinion was founded" 20/16; 01/76. The phrase passed into the 1967 listing text, where it is still hedged with "believed" 13/02; 47/48.

The 1492 date has a clearer trail, and it leads back to a mistake. In his handwritten memoir of 1915 Wright wrote that "there is a record in Halliwell's Book of Days of a Maypole standing at Welford in 1492, so that this famous year may be credited with the Discovery of America, the Creation of the Barony of Willoughby de Broke, and a record of the existence of a Welford Maypole" 25/07 p.4; 15/10. There is no such book. *The Book of Days* (1862–64) was compiled by Robert Chambers, and the passage it contains about Welford gives no date at all. Wright seems to have run together two authors and supplied a year. Once printed in his memoir, the 1492 date travelled: into the 1951 leaflet's Columbus line, the 1953 magazine cover caption, the 1954 *Sunday Mercury* article ("There's been a maypole at Welford since 1492 says Halliwell in his 'Book of Days'") and the 2012 Jubilee programme 01/83; 24/23; 50/04; 53/43.

The real Chambers passage is quoted in several archive papers, and it is the oldest description of the pole the archive holds:

The fifth vol. of Halliwell's folio edition of Shakespeare has a curious coloured frontispiece of a maypole painted in continuous vertical stripes of white, red and blue, which stands in the centre of the village of Welford in Gloucestershire, about five miles from Stratford-on-Avon. It may be a legitimate successor of one standing there when the bard himself visited the village. It is of great height, and is planted in the centre of a raised mound to which there is an ascent by three stone steps.

Chambers, *The Book of Days*, as quoted by H. M. Woodward in 1935 and in an undated Society note 01/76; 19/27

So in the 1850s, when James Orchard Halliwell's great folio Shakespeare was coming out, Welford had a tall pole on a raised mound with three stone steps, painted in red, white and blue. The stone platform with steps at three points survives under the present pole and is part of what is listed 47/48. The Shakespeare link is offered as a possibility ("it may be"), and Welford's position four miles from Stratford made it an easy thing to say. The 1926 appeal leaflet put it carefully: "According to a tradition which is not without some evidence to support it, Welford was noted for its Maypole in Shakespeare's day" 25/05. By 1927 the Mayor of Stratford was telling the crowd that "local records proved that the Welford maypole was in existence in the days of Shakespeare" 01/77. No such record has turned up in the archive.

The Civil War story belongs to the same family. In 1991 a senior villager, Mrs Clarke, said her mother used to tell how the maypole "had to be taken down and hidden" under Cromwell 11/44. Parliament did order maypoles taken down in 1644, and they came back in large numbers after the Restoration of 1660; Woodward ended his 1935 notes with the great Strand maypole of 1661 and Pope's lines on it. A Welford pole may well have shared that history, as the 1927 speech assumed, but the story was passed down by word of mouth and is not a record.

The fairest summary is the one an unnamed Society member wrote, probably in the 1930s: "There is little or no documentary evidence of the antiquity of Welford Maypole prior to the early days of last century, but local tradition insists that the village has had a long succession of Maypoles from pre-reformation times" 19/27.

1814 Plum puddings and Bonaparte's effigy

The first event in which the pole definitely took part was the village's celebration of Napoleon's abdication in April 1814. Woodward had it from Mrs Rebecca Hopkins, born at The Hollies in 1812, who lived into her ninety-ninth year and

passed on what her father James Mills and her elder sister had told her 19/27; 20/01 p.17.

The celebrations were held early in May. An ox was roasted, the principal houses each set out a table in the High Street, and James Mills presided at one of them. The church bells were rung when the plum puddings went into the copper and again when they came out. After a thanksgiving service taken by the Rector, John Hunt, a stuffed effigy of Bonaparte, standing in for Guy Fawkes, was paraded with a sheet-iron devil behind it and burnt in Moore's Orchard. For the occasion the maypole was repainted 20/01 p.17.

A second account, in an 1872 magazine called *Home Pictures*, described the same celebrations and placed the maypole on the green "near the site of the old cross" 01/76; 11/44. That cross is a lost piece of the green's history. When Thomas William Massey was thrown from his trap and killed on Maypole Green one night before Christmas 1907, the coroner's jury asked for the built-up soil on the green to be levelled to the road. In doing the work in 1908, the Rural District Council's men removed "the last remains of the old Market Cross" 18/14; 01/88. Woodward added in 1935 that the last stone had been buried when telephone cables were laid about two years earlier. The maypole and the cross had stood together on the same patch of ground, which was the village's market place as well as its playground.

1860S–1895 The Victorian poles

Victorian Welford had poles that were put up, came down and were put up again, though the archive only glimpses them. Fred Barratt, who grew up in the village and later lived at Tanworth-in-Arden, remembered Robert Fisher Tomes, the naturalist and geologist who farmed Welford Hill in 1860–67. "When the village may-pole was re-erected", Tomes set a compass on a table in the street so the weathervane could be fixed true 20/01 p.32. In 1935 the *Stratford Herald* added that Frank Ball's father had positioned poles at Welford in 1879 and 1896 47/925. Three

poles in about thirty years suggests the timbers did not last long.

The 1879 pole fell in the great storm of March 1895. George Wright described it in 1915:

A cyclone would properly describe it, and during the time it lasted it was unsafe out-of-doors owing to the portions of houses in the shape of roof debris that were flying about. ... On one farm alone upwards of 120 elm trees were levelled. ... The Maypole, that had stood many storms was blown down, and this was looked upon as a local calamity, and portions of the old pole were secured, and afterwards fashioned into various mementos of the occurrence.

George Wright, "Reminiscences Looking backward", 1915 25/07 p.4

Wright dates the storm "Sunday March 25. 1895", but 25 March 1895 fell on a Monday, so either the day or the date is a slip. The mementos are a sign of how people felt about the pole. A medal "with the Maypole on it" turned up under the floorboards of a cottage in the 1950s, and the Society heard about it in 1988 38/01-03.

1896-1923 Cleveland Green's pole

The replacement owed most to one man. Wright says it was "erected in the ensuing year, chiefly by the efforts of Mr Cleveland Green who was indefatigable in collecting subscriptions". Green lived at Welford House. The new parish council, set up under the 1894 Local Government Act, gave him permission on 2 January 1896 "to erect [a] Maypole on the Village Green, to stock up the hedge, fence with iron hurdles and to plant same with shrubs and flowers" 01/88; 18/13.



The raising of Welford's maypole in 1896. A typed caption names the village shoemaker in the white apron, Mr John Basson on his right, and the blacksmith James Matthews holding up the weathervane he had made. 16/52-16/53

The photograph of the raising is the oldest picture of the pole in the archive. It shows the whole village out, the pole half up on its ropes, and the blacksmith James Matthews lifting the vane he had forged. His family's smithy would make the ironwork for the next pole too. Ball's father did the erecting 47/925; 01/87. A photograph by Alice Marcon taken in 1898, now in the Historic England Archive, shows the same pole two years later ([Historic England, OP01837](#)).

The council minutes then record a long, unglamorous effort to keep the pole up. The fencing was varnished in July 1898. In October six iron bands were ordered "placed round Welford Maypole and the hedge grubbed up". In July 1900 Mr J. J. Hancox was told to "stop cracks in the Maypole and paint iron hoops round same". In 1903 Mr J. Hawkins junior was given the key of the enclosure, which by then was railed

in. In January 1906 the clerk asked for estimates for painting, but in April he reported that the pole would have to come down to be painted, "and it was therefore decided not to have it done". Levi Stanley of the Bell tried again in 1912 with a motion that the council pay for painting, and the matter was put off pending an estimate 01/88; 18/13-14. After that the minutes say nothing more about painting.



"Street view with Maypole, Welford-on-Avon." A W. A. Smith photograph of about 1900-20, looking down the main street. The telegraph pole beside the maypole would cause the parish council trouble in 1926. 46/09

The pole stood about 60 feet above the ground 01/76, and it was the village's meeting place. Wright wrote in 1915 that it was "a landmark, and a rendezvous for many occasions; not the least among which may be cited the Meets of the Warwickshire Hounds". The hunt met there for decades; the 1938 report still mentions meets at the maypole 01/73. At the Society's oral history panel of 1972 Mr Harris remembered maypole dancing as a boy, and recalled that when he was postman the occupant of a cottage by the pole

let down a basket on a string for him to put the letters in 24/01. In 1977 another panel described the green behind its railings in less romantic terms, as "a rubbish tip surrounded by iron railings" 37/01-04.

The pole found its way into village verse. A comic lament for a departing maid, kept with papers from the First World War years, imagines the weathercock itself wanting to follow her:

*I think the weather-cock that swings
Upon the Maypole high
Will crow some day and flap his wings
And after her will fly.*

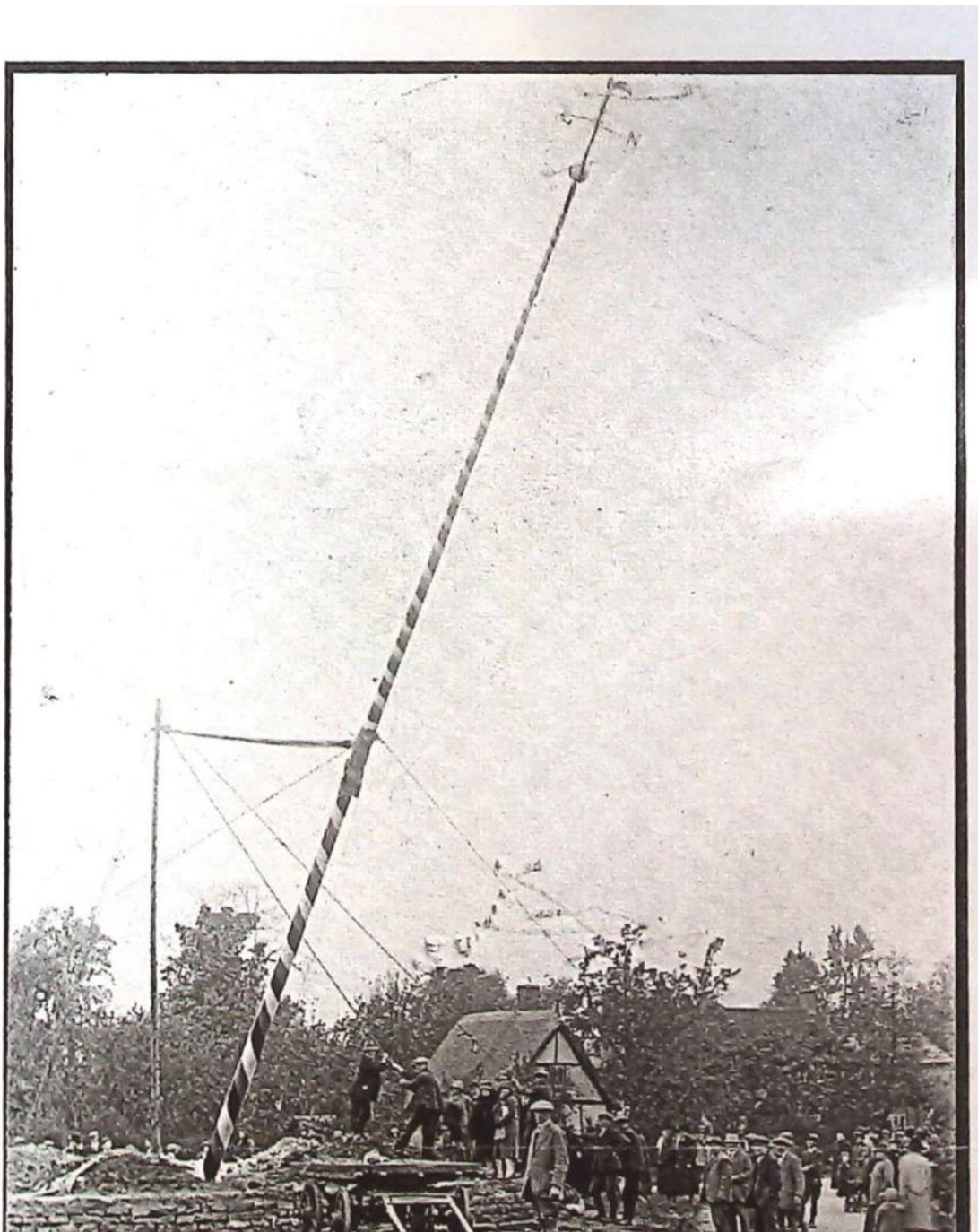
Verse on Louisa Bennett, Aunt Rebecca's maid 21/01-21

1923-1927 Blown down, and the 1927 pole

Cleveland Green's pole lasted twenty-seven years. It was blown down in November 1923 01/87; 25/05. For eighteen months nothing happened, partly because the parish council itself had lapsed between 1922 and 1925 18/14. In July 1925 the revived council called a public meeting "to discuss the questions of the erection of a new Maypole and the walling in of the enclosure". In January 1926 a parish meeting agreed to open a subscription list for a new pole inside "a low stone wall about 2 ft. high in place of the present spiked iron railings" 01/88.

The committee printed an appeal leaflet. Its chairman was the Rector, the Rev. A. J. Davis; the treasurer was E. R. Thompson, clerk to the parish council; and the secretary was H. M. Woodward of The Hollies. Tom Hawkins of the mill, Levi Stanley of the Bell, A. T. Montague of the shop, Alfred Davis and G. K. Haynes completed it. They asked for about £100 to put up a pole "which shall, if possible, equal the old one in height; and which shall be surrounded by a green large enough to permit of the revival of the old Maypole dances" 25/05.

One obstacle was the Post Office's telegraph pole on the green, visible in the old photographs. The council asked for it to be moved. The engineers agreed in March 1926, provided the council paid £13. The council asked the Rural District Council to lean on them, which failed, and then asked whether it could be done for nothing. The minute book extracts end there, in June 1926 01/88. The 1991 village magazine says the Post Office "finally undertook to do" it 11/44.



rd Maypole – erected by Mr Frank Ball 1927." The photograph as reprinted in County

"Welfo

Councillor Peter Barnes's newsletter, October 2010. A gin pole and guy ropes lift the pole off a farm wagon, and the butt of an older pole lies at bottom right. 47/92-47/93

The committee's signed record, written in May 1927, gives the particulars. The new pole was 59 ft 9 in long, "specially obtained from Norway by Messrs Price Walker & Co. of Gloucester". Sam Bryan of Welford painted it; A. A. Matthews, blacksmith, made the weathercock and ironwork; and it was "erected on May 2nd 1927 by Mr A. Ball of Stratford-on-Avon whose father had erected the former pole". Walter Gould built a stone wall around the mound "for the first time", using stone from the Hidcote quarries 01/87. About six feet of the pole went into the ground, so it stood a little lower than the 1896 pole had 01/76; 01/80.

The celebration waited until the new wall and green were finished. It was held on Empire Day, Tuesday 24 May 1927, and the *Stratford Herald* gave it a column and a half 01/77. The school's headmistress, Miss Bixby, organised a procession from the school headed by the village band. The May Queen and her attendants rode in a farm wagon led by a "farmer's boy" in a smock made by an old villager more than a hundred years before. Behind came Robin Hood and his merry men, Maid Marian, hobby horses and clowns. A herald, Philip Hillier, read a proclamation "where the maypole once more lifts its head, and happy children twine its silken strands". The children danced ribbon dances and jigs, Sam Bennett of Ilmington brought his morris troupe, and the folk dance class ended the evening in the Memorial Hall.



The May Queen & her Escort. Opening of New Maypole. Welford-on-Avon." Postcard of the 1927 procession, with the farmer's boy in his smock and a clown in a chequered suit. 01/79

The dedication was performed by E. R. Thompson, who was that year Mayor of Stratford as well as the committee's treasurer. He told the crowd that an old lady had said to him, "You will like it; it is painted lovely", and then turned to the Empire and to "Home, Sweet Home". The prize for the most original fancy dress went to Miss J. Lively, who came as a maypole 01/77. The next year the Amateur Dramatic Society was sewing dresses for "a Masque for the Maypole Celebrations on Empire Day" 61/01, so the Empire Day revival seems to have become a habit for a while.

Two later accounts get the date wrong. The 1991 magazine article calls 2 May "Empire Day", and a 2011 newsletter says the 1927 pole was hoisted on Empire Day. The contemporary record keeps the two days apart: the pole went up on 2 May and was celebrated on 24 May 11/44; 47/91; 01/77; 01/87.

24 SEPTEMBER 1935 "The fallen giant after the storm"

The 1927 pole lasted only eight years. At about half past six on the evening of Tuesday 24 September 1935, during a

heavy thunderstorm, lightning struck it. The pole "snapped off near the ground and fell across the road", into Chapel Street, "the top crashing into a plum tree". The flash bored a hole deep in the ground near the foot and chipped the new stone wall 01/76; 20/16; 47/925.



"The fallen giant after the storm." The *Evesham Journal* photograph of 28 September 1935. 01/76; 20/16

The *Evesham Journal* reported the strike in a light tone. One letter from the weather vane was found in a garden. "The shilling which was placed in the copper dome was quickly found", and the weathercock "finished in an amusing position, as though it were roosting in the plum tree!" A new pole would cost about £20, and the paper understood that it would be paid for by public subscription. The same Saturday's paper carried Woodward's notes on the pole's history, written as "H.M.W.", which are the source for much of this essay's first section 20/16.

The *Stratford Herald* of Friday 27 September had no picture of the wreck, so it reprinted a photograph of the 1927 erection instead. It called this "the third maypole to be overthrown at Welford within less than 60 years", and noted

that "the late Mr. A. A. Matthews" had made the ball and vane, so the blacksmith had died by then. It ended: "Welford people do not mean to let the grass grow under their feet, for already there is a movement on foot to raise funds for a new pole" 47/925.

WELFORD MAYPOLE STRUCK BY LIGHTNING



THE ERECTION CEREMONY, MAY 2, 1927

During the heavy thunderstorm on Tuesday evening the famous Maypole at Welford-on-Avon was struck by lightning and brought to the ground. Fortunately it fell in Chapel-street without causing further damage. The pole and the vane were smashed, the last-named being thrown a considerable distance.

This is the third maypole to be overthrown at Welford within less than 60 years. The last was blown down in November, 1923, a new one being erected in 1927 by Mr. Frank Ball. Mr. Ball's father was responsible for positioning previous poles in 1879 and 1896.

The pole just laid low was imported from Norway, and was 59ft. 9in. in height. The ball and vane surmounting it were the work of

the late Mr. A. A. Matthews, while Mr. S. J. Bryan was responsible for the painting. At the time of the erection a new stone wall from the Hidcote quarries was built by Mr. Walter Gould.

It is believed that a maypole stood at Welford in the fourteenth century, and certainly since the restoration to the throne of Charles II. Of course, there must have been many occasions on which the pole has been brought down, and delay doubtless occurred in the erection of a new one.

On this occasion, at least, Welford people do not mean to let the grass grow under their feet, for already there is a movement on foot to raise funds for a new pole.

Stratford-upon-Avon Herald, 27 September 1935. The photograph is of the 1927 erection ceremony, with children in cloche hats on the new green. 47/925

The green did not stay bare. In December 1935 a horse chestnut was planted there to mark the Silver Jubilee of George V. The archive gives three versions of who planted it.

The *Evesham Journal* of 14 December 1935 says Mrs Woodward, "the oldest inhabitant of the village", aged 93, planted it with the Rector presiding 20/01 p.15. A photograph of October 1938 is inscribed on the back as showing the tree planted by Edith Watson. The 1991 magazine says Mrs Watson of Manor Farm planted it in November 1936 in memory of her son Norman 47/91; 11/44. Two plantings are possible if the first tree failed. In 2002 a family brought the receipt for the chestnut to the Society's Jubilee exhibition, which may one day settle the question 24/22. The tree grew into the large chestnut beside the pole in later photographs, and in 1986 the Society worried that it was "unwell" 38/01-03.

24 MAY 1938 "Welford is Welford once more"

The new pole took two and a half years. Levi Stanley, his wife and daughter collected "a large portion of the money required" 01/73. On 16 May 1938 Woodward, now secretary again, sent a printed letter to subscribers: enough had been raised for the pole to be raised for Empire Day, Tuesday 24 May, with Councillor E. P. Ray, Deputy Mayor of Stratford, at 3 p.m., dancing by the children, and refreshments in the Memorial Hall 01/86.

The newspaper report, headed "Welford's fine new Maypole", opened with a quotation from a member of the Parriss family of Maypole House: "Welford is not Welford without a maypole" 01/73. The new pole was nearly 70 feet high, "probably the highest now in England", and spirally painted in red, white and blue by Mr Bryan. The big change was underground. Frank Ball of Ball Brothers, Stratford, designed and made a strong steel base, "hinged so that the pole can be lowered for repainting, etc., which means that poles will not henceforth rot in the ground". The council's old problem from 1906, that the pole had to come down to be painted, had an engineering answer.

The vane changed too. "For the first time the maypole now has a fox to point the way of the wind, a reminder of hunting associations and of the fact that meets are still held at

Welford maypole." It was given by Mr Saunders of Moseley, who had a country house at Welford. The running fox has been on top of the pole ever since and is named in the listing 01/73; 47/48. Tom Hawkins chaired the committee, with Woodward, H. D. and C. E. Parriss, Levi Stanley, A. T. Montague, Eric and D. R. Roberts and the Rector. Mr Ray unfurled a Union Jack and dedicated the pole "in the name of the freemen and freewomen of Welford to the joy, leisure and happiness of the children of the village", the brass band played the National Anthem, and several hundred people watched the May Queen crowned 01/73.

The 1938 report says the lightning had struck "in 1934", after the old pole had "stood for seven years only". The contemporary 1935 reports are dated and should be preferred 01/73; 20/16; 47/925.



A new pole on its carriage in the lane. One of a set of undated photographs by A. C. Andrews of Offenham, kept by Alec Bryan. Its companions show the pole being raised under a cockerel vane with direction arms. The cars and clothes suggest the late 1930s to 1950s, but the cockerel does not match the 1938 fox, so which pole this is remains open. 25/10–25/13

1938–1960S The pole at the centre of things

For the next quarter-century the 1938 pole was the fixed point of village life, and the archive's papers from these years refer to it constantly. On VE Day in 1945 there were street parties round the Maypole and a dance at night 31/06. In 1948 ex-servicemen fell in at the Maypole for their church parade, and the coaches to the British Legion dinner left from there 56/02. The shop next to it was the Maypole Stores, the tea room was the Maypole Café, where

committees met in the 1950s, and there was even a Maypole Hatchery selling "Maypole Chicks" 11/14; 55/01. The Amateur Dramatic Society limited its membership to people living within two and a half miles of the Maypole 61/01-09. The local history society's outings were still leaving from it in the 1970s 37/01-04.

Painting remained the hard job. The hinge meant the pole could come down, but it still took about ten men to lower it 50/201. The 1951 Festival of Britain leaflet chose as its only picture of the preparations "the Maypole being repainted by village craftsmen", lying on trestles in a yard 01/83; 13/06. The same leaflet introduced the village as "the Maypole Village" and listed maypole dancing and the crowning of the May Queen on 26 May and maypole dancing again on 28 July 01/83. In 1953 the Coronation committee arranged a short service on Maypole Green, a maypole dancing display by the primary school, and floodlighting for the pole in the evening, at a cost of £18 10s. for "electrical equipment and decorations at the Maypole" 55/01-03; 03/01-19.



"The Maypole being repainted by village craftsmen." Photograph by David Roberts in the Festival of Britain leaflet, 1951. 13/06; 01/83

A colour magazine cover of May 1953 shows the pole at its brightest, in red, white and blue spirals, with children dancing the ribbons and cars parked round the green. Its caption gives the best description of the 1938 pole. It was Norwegian pine, 80 feet long and 65 feet high when erected, and "it used to be the highest Maypole in England, but it had to be cut down by 11 ft. due to a crack in base". It was "painted and dressed by 74 year old Mr. S. Bryan and his son" 24/23. Sam Bryan had painted the 1927 pole too. His son Alec told a *Sunday Mercury* reporter in 1954 that he painted and maintained both the Welford pole and the one at Offenham. "Fame at last!" he said. "They say there are only five permanent maypoles in England now and I look after two of them" 50/04. The number was hearsay, but the job

was real; the Bryans looked after Welford's poles for about forty years.



May Day in Coronation Year. Magazine cover, May 1953, photograph by F. W. Callaby, with the pasted caption describing the pole. 24/23

The May Queen ceremonies in these years were run by the school and the Women's Institute. A Birmingham paper of 1958 shows eleven-year-old Margaret Sabin being crowned by Mrs Butler, the WI president, while children danced round the pole 01/78. A set of undated photographs from about the same time shows the procession crossing the green, the Rector and a woman in a sun hat crowning the Queen on a draped dais, and the ribbons fanning out from a pole flying the Union flag 01/82, 01/821-823.



Crowni
ng the May Queen, 1958. From the *Birmingham* paper's report of Margaret Sabin's crowning
by Mrs Butler of the WI. 01/78

1960S–1967 Rot, and an anonymous gift

Despite the hinged base, the 1938 pole rotted. An undated cutting from the early 1960s reports it "taken down and found to be rotting in several places". The chairman of the parish council, Mrs Gray, with Wilfred Hawkins, T. Holman and the clerk R. Wright, examined it in Alec Bryan's yard. Cutting out the bad patches would leave "about 20 feet or less which would mean something of a stump compared with 65 or 70 feet". They agreed that "with its traditions dating back several centuries Welford-on-Avon should continue to have a worthy maypole", and Mrs Gray promised to enquire about a new pole, "either timber or metal". The paper added that ninety-year-old Henry Basson and other village veterans had seen four new maypoles in their lifetimes 01/75. A Henry Basson aged 32 appears in the 1901 census, which would put the cutting near 1959–60.



elford Maypole taken down." Undated cutting, pencilled "1960s". 01/75

The parish chose metal, and someone paid for it. On Saturday 24 June 1967 the new pole was put into position under the direction of Mr R. Corah, the parish councillor who oversaw its purchase, and Alec Bryan, who "with much patience and care has once again prepared the tabernacle, repaired the weather vane and painted the new pole". The parish magazine wondered how "this new aluminium one" would behave, after years of men man-handling 60 to 70 foot wooden poles, but "the placing in position went without a hitch". Many "native Welfordians" turned out on a dark, damp morning, and a brass plate was to be fixed to the base "expressing the gratitude of the village to the anonymous

donor". The school's maypole dancing followed on 1 July 01/85.

The donor's name is in the archive. On the back of a snapshot of the steel tabernacle being bolted together, someone wrote: "Mr Jefferson of Welford House made the gift anonymously. This for HISTORY" 01/84. Brad Plimmer enjoyed revealing this in his 2010 talk: the identity, he said, "in true Dan Brown fashion can be found hidden in the Archives" 01/80. Welford House was Cleveland Green's home, so the house that paid for the 1896 pole also paid for the 1967 one.

The sources do not agree on the metal. The magazine says aluminium, the photograph says steel, and the plaque, according to Plimmer, gives the height as 65 feet 01/84; 01/85; 01/80. Later sources usually say aluminium. Wikipedia and some guides say the wooden pole was replaced with aluminium "following a lightning strike", which runs the 1935 lightning and the 1960s rot into one event; the archive shows two separate failures and a wooden pole in between.

The listing date raises a small puzzle. The maypole was listed Grade II on 5 April 1967, ten weeks before the metal pole went up, as a "tall modern painted maypole with weathervane, set on small village green", listed "on account of historical associations" 13/02; 47/48. The listing protects the site and its platform more than any particular pole. The current entry, amended in 2000, describes the stone platform about 13.5 m across with steps at three points and a "painted maypole set in iron housing" with a running-fox vane ([list entry 1382856](#)). Maypole Green is also a registered village green, number VG.48 in the Warwickshire register.

1967–TODAY Keeping it upright

A metal pole does not rot, but it still needs painting, and the village went on finding that hard. An undated cutting, pencilled "1987?", explains that for years villagers had wanted the pole redecorated. The Royal Engineers at Long

Marston could not help, and a firm wanted £200 just to take it down. So the parish councillor David Noakes, a lecturer in electrical engineering at Birmingham University, organised it himself with scaffolding, ropes, blocks and pulleys. Hundreds watched, and applauded as it came to rest on its supports. PC Geoff Hands stopped the traffic, and the pole went to Stewart Bryant's yard to be painted. "I'm told it is much easier to put up than take down", said Mr Noakes 29/17. Miss J. Skinner filmed it, and her video of the maypole "being taken down, painted and put back up" was one of the Society's most popular evenings in 1987-88 38/01-03.



Mr Noakes (pointing on the pole) supervises the operation.

"Right a bit, left a bit and down she comes." David Noakes (pointing) supervises the lowering of the pole for repainting, about 1987. 29/17

The next lowering came sixteen years later. The weather vane was badly damaged in storms in October 2002, and the parish council set out to raise £5,000. On Thursday 27 March 2003 the 60 ft pole was taken down "for the first time

in 16 years" and carried on a lorry to Severn Lamb of Alcester to be repaired and repainted 24/27. An album of thirty-three snapshots records a similar job: a mobile crane lifting the pole out of its socket, a Studley haulier's lorry, and the fox vane on a stand in a factory workshop 41/11. Another photograph shows the pole wrapped from base to top in scaffolding 41/09. Both are undated.

PAGE 2

Maypole set for fresh look

WELFORD'S 60ft maypole was taken down for the first time in 16 years yesterday (Thursday) and transported to Alcester for a make-over.

Its weather vein was badly damaged in last October's heavy storms so Welford Parish Council set about raising £5,000 to repair it.

The historic maypole will also be treated to a splash of fresh paint as part of its facelift, being carried out by Alcester-based Severn Lamb, and is expected to return to its former glory in the village in three weeks.



● Pole position - Welford's 60ft maypole is uprooted from its spot in the village for a make-over. 13.03.047nc.

"Maypole set for fresh look." *Stratford Standard*, 28 March 2003. 24/27

The pole stayed the place where the village gathered for royal occasions. After the Golden Jubilee thanksgiving at the Maypole in June 2002, so many people came on to the Society's exhibition that the hall stayed open until half past seven 24/22. In 2010 Brad Plimmer gave the Society a talk on the pole's history, comparing its fortunes to the wives of Henry VIII: "Died, beheaded, survived and so on" 01/80. That autumn and the next summer Peter Barnes ran the story as a serial in his councillor's newsletter, promising "next month the work will be complete" 47/92-47/93; 47/91. For the Diamond Jubilee in 2012 the school danced round the pole

on 23 May, and the street party programme on 4 June included "9.00pm Illuminate the Maypole! Carry on dancing!" 53/43.

Today's pole stands at about 65 feet, which is about 20 metres, and is often described as one of the tallest in England. It is still painted in the spiral stripes Chambers saw, now red and white, and still topped by the fox of 1938. A 2009 photograph by Philip Halling shows it on its walled mound beside the chestnut ([Geograph, CC BY-SA 2.0](#)).



"WOA.76. The Maypole. Welford on Avon." A tinted postcard of the 1950s or 1960s showing the stepped platform and the stone wall of 1927. 52/68

What the pole tells us

The documented history of the Welford maypole runs from 1814 and is detailed from 1896. Within it, the pattern repeats. A pole fails through weather or rot. The village calls a meeting, prints an appeal and raises money from its own people, helped by one or two richer residents: Cleveland Green in 1896, the Stanleys in 1938, Mr Jefferson in 1967. The same few families do the practical work across generations. The Balls of Stratford raised poles in 1879,

1896 and 1927 and made the hinged base of 1938. The Matthews smithy made the vanes of 1896 and 1927. The Bryans painted from 1927 to the 1960s. Then there is a ceremony, often on a patriotic date, with children dancing, a May Queen and a speech.

The long legend is part of that history too. Each committee justified its appeal with the pole's antiquity, and each one stretched it a little further, from Chambers's cautious "may be" to "local records proved" in 1927 and Columbus in 1951. The documents cannot show that a maypole stood on the green in 1492 or in Shakespeare's time. They do show that by the 1850s Welford had a remarkable pole on an old stepped mound beside its market cross. They also show that the village has spent a great deal of money and effort, more than once a generation, to keep a pole standing there ever since.

The succession of poles

POLE	HOW IT WENT UP	HOW IT ENDED	SOURCES
Before 1814	Unknown; repainted for the peace celebrations of May 1814. Described in the 1850s as striped red, white and blue on a mound with three stone steps.	Unknown	19/27; 20/01; 01/76
1860s	Re-erected while R. F. Tomes farmed Welford Hill (1860–67); he fixed the vane by compass.	Unknown	20/01 p.32
1879	Positioned by Frank Ball's father.	Blown down in the storm of 25 March 1895	47/925; 25/07
1896	Raised by Ball's father; subscription led by Cleveland Green; vane by James Matthews. About 60 ft above ground.	Blown down, November 1923	01/88; 16/52; 01/87
2 May 1927	Norwegian timber, 59 ft 9 in, raised by Frank Ball; vane by A. A. Matthews; painted by Sam Bryan; Hidcote stone wall. Dedicated 24 May.	Struck by lightning, 24 September 1935	01/87; 01/77; 47/925
24 May 1938	Norwegian pine, nearly 70 ft, on Frank Ball's hinged steel base; fox vane given by Mr Saunders. Later	Found rotting, early 1960s	01/73; 24/23; 01/75

POLE	HOW IT WENT UP	HOW IT ENDED	SOURCES
	cut down by 11 ft.		
24 June 1967	Metal (aluminium or steel), about 65 ft, gift of Mr Jefferson of Welford House; erected under R. Corah and Alec Bryan.	Still standing; lowered for repainting about 1987 and 2003	01/84; 01/85; 29/17; 24/27

Notes on the sources

WHERE THE SOURCES DISAGREE

- The 1492 date rests on George Wright's 1915 reference to "Halliwell's Book of Days". The Book of Days is by Robert Chambers, and its Welford passage gives no date 25/07; 19/27; 50/04.
- The 1895 storm is dated "Sunday March 25" by Wright, but 25 March 1895 was a Monday 25/07.
- The lightning strike was on Tuesday 24 September 1935 according to both newspapers of that week; the 1938 report says 1934 20/16; 47/925; 01/73.
- The 1927 pole went up on 2 May and was dedicated on Empire Day, 24 May. Later accounts merge the two 01/87; 01/77; 11/44; 47/91.
- The chestnut on the green is credited to Mrs Woodward in December 1935, to Edith Watson, and to Mrs Watson in November 1936 20/01; 47/91; 11/44.
- The 1967 pole is aluminium in the parish magazine and steel on the back of the photograph 01/85; 01/84.
- Heights vary with the source and with whether the buried part is counted: 60 ft (1896), 59 ft 9 in overall (1927), "nearly 70 ft" and later 80 ft long, 65 ft high, cut by 11 ft (1938), 60 ft or 65 ft (1967 pole).
- The undated photographs at 25/10–25/13 show a cockerel vane with direction arms, and the "1987?" on 29/17 is a pencilled guess.

ARCHIVE ITEMS USED

01/73 (1938 report); 01/75–88 (maypole papers: 1960s cutting, 1935 *Evesham Journal*, 1927 *Stratford Herald*, 1958 cutting, 1927 postcard, 2010 talk script, 1950s photographs, 1951 leaflet, 1967 photograph and parish magazine, 1938 letter, 1927 committee record, parish council minutes 1896–1926); 03/01–19 and 55/01–03 (Festival and Coronation committees); 11/14; 11/44 (village magazine, July 1991); 13/02 and 47/48 (listings); 13/06 (1951 leaflet); 15/08 (1992 conservation study); 15/10 and 25/07 (George Wright, 1915); 16/52–53 (1896 photograph); 18/13–14 (parish council digests); 19/27; 20/01 and 20/16 (H. M. Woodward's notebook and cuttings); 21/01–21; 24/01 (1972 panel); 24/22; 24/23 (1953 cover); 24/27 (2003); 25/05 (1926 appeal); 25/10–13; 29/17; 31/06; 37/01–04 and 38/01–03 (Society minutes); 41/09; 41/11; 46/09; 47/91–93 and 47/925; 50/04 (*Sunday Mercury*, 1954); 50/201; 52/68; 52/75; 53/43 (2012 programme); 56/02; 61/01–09.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

- Historic England list entry 1382856, The Maypole, Welford-on-Avon, Grade II, listed 5 April 1967, amended 19 June 2000, via [British Listed Buildings](#).
- "Parishes: Welford-on-Avon", *A History of the County of Warwick*, vol. 5 (1949), on the parish's transfer from Gloucestershire to Warwickshire in 1931, via [British History Online](#).
- Warwickshire Commons Commissioners' decision letters, Maypole Green, register unit VG.48 ([commonsreregistration.org.uk](#)).
- Robert Chambers, *The Book of Days* (1862–64), entry quoted in the archive as above.
- Alice Marcon, photograph of the maypole on the village green, 1898, [Historic England Archive OP01837](#).
- Philip Halling, "The maypole on Maypole Green", 2009, [Geograph](#), CC BY-SA 2.0.
- "Welford-on-Avon", [Wikipedia](#), for the common claim that an aluminium pole replaced a lightning-struck wooden one.
- English Folk Dance and Song Society, ["Maypoles"](#), which gives the pole as seventy feet.