

The Old Well House

A carrier's farmyard, a new villa called The Retreat, a man who tried everything, a producer who ran half the village from his front room, and a house that changed its name late in life.

Drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive (folder references in grey). Where the archive is silent or contradicts itself, the text says so; the last section lists the gaps.

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The Retreat, 1992. Fig. 12 of the Welford-on-Avon Conservation Area Study, which said that “south from the maypole the High Street is terminated by The Retreat”. The veranda and the timber-framed gables match the 1927 sale particulars. The white building on the far left is Weston Close, the old farmhouse that once went with it. 15/08 fig. 12

Which house? Names and false trails

The Old Well House is the name this house carries today. For nearly all of its recorded life it was called something else. Only one document in the Society’s archive uses the new name at all. That is the script of an illustrated talk, “Welford in the Early Years of the New (20th) Century”, given by two members called Sue and Paul, probably in the 2000s. Describing the 1901 map, the talk says that “Barton Road only had two houses, and The Retreat, now the Old Well House was the last house at the south end of the High Street.” Later, at slide 64, it repeats the point: “the most southerly house in the village in 1901 was The Retreat, now known as The Old Well House.” 46/37–95

That sentence is the key to everything else. Searching the archive for “Old Well House” finds almost nothing, but searching for “The Retreat” finds a house with a long and busy history. It turns up in census returns, trade directories, sale particulars, minute books, parish magazines, electoral registers, a footpath survey and a conservation study. The history of the Old Well House is really the history of The Retreat, and that is how this essay tells it.

Two false trails need clearing away first, because anyone searching the archive for a “Well House” will meet them.

The first is in the 1911 census. The enumerator’s summary book, as transcribed, lists a “Well House” on the High Street, a private house occupied by Mr Sealy, between Rose Cottage and The Limes. 48/09 This is not our house. The 1901 census puts John H. Sealy and his wife Elizabeth at *Vine* House. 48/08 Kelly’s Directory of 1914 lists “Sealy John Henry, Vine house”. 48/21 The 1915 Book of Gossip places the Sealeys “at a house called Vine House ... in the High Street, on the East side of it, and near its northern end”. 21/09 The 1911 “Well House” is almost certainly a misreading of “Vine House” in faded handwriting. It also stood at the wrong end of the street. The Retreat appears elsewhere in the same 1911 book under its own name.

The second false trail is a newspaper column pasted into one of the Society’s scrapbooks. It describes a spring discovered in 1680 and a tenement “called the ‘Well House’” built beside it, which was a ruin by the late nineteenth century. 23/82–83 That spring is the Balmoore spa at Ilmington, near Lark Stoke, and it has nothing to do with Welford.

With those out of the way, the house in this essay is clear. It stands at the far south end of the High Street, where the street turns into the Long Marston road. Older villagers knew that road as Bird Lane. The house is a large detached villa of about 1902, with rendered walls, brick and mock timber framing, and a plain tile roof. Next to it is an old timber-framed farmhouse now called Weston Close, and the two have been tied together from the start.

Bird Lane The road before the house

The house is defined by its road, so the road comes first. South of the Maypole the High Street runs straight on to Long Marston, and the last stretch inside the village was long called Bird Lane or Birds Lane. The 1800 inclosure award, which laid out Welford’s modern roads, describes it as a public carriage road forty feet wide: “Long Marston Road. Leading out of Welford at Birds Lane, thence in a straight line to Meere Farm at Marston Old Gate.” 20/04; 47/98 So Birds Lane already had a name in 1800. It was the existing village end of the road, and the commissioners straightened the road beyond it.

Local writers believed the road was much older. Gilda Gray and others in the Society suggested that the Binton road, the High Street and “Bird Lane to Long Marston were tracks built up over marshy ground”. In their view these were old causeways leading to Meon Hill and to a settlement on Welford Hill. 10/26; 34/01-04 That is a guess, not a finding, but it shows how the village saw this road. It was an ancient way south, not just a back lane.

Bird Lane also had its folklore. Woodward’s collection of anecdotes from 1906-07 records that Spot Loggin, “a former rector of Long Marston ... said to be a skilled blacksmith and a rather eccentric character”, haunted it: “His ghost is said to drive a trap along Bird Lane at midnight.” 21/33 in 21/22-66 A much later memoir by Councillor Barnes says that Charlie Garner, the village roadman, planted the hedge along “the Long Marston road which was then called Bird Lane”. It adds that during the war villagers draped muslin over that hedge at night “to catch the birds roosting to have bird pie the next day”. 47/90 That story may explain the name. The lane may always have been where birds roosted and were caught. No source in the archive says so, though, and the name could just as easily come from a family called Bird.



The Long

Marston road, the old Bird Lane, from the south. The 1992 study notes that at the junction with the road from Weston “the rural character of the road disappears abruptly”, giving way to the neat front gardens of the newer houses. The Retreat stood where the road enters the old village. 15/08 fig. 18

The Ordnance Survey six-inch map of 1903 shows the scene a year or so after the house was built. The High Street runs south from the church end past orchards dotted with tree symbols, crosses Chapel Street at the Maypole, and becomes the road to Long Marston and Mere Barn. At the bottom of the built-up area there is a small cluster of buildings, and then open fields. 46/14 The talk in folder 46 counted the houses on the 1901 map: “no buildings at all between the Bell and the Four Alls”, one house on Headland Road, two on Barton Road, and The Retreat as the last house south. 46/37–95



Welford on the six-inch Ordnance Survey map, 1903 edition (detail, enlarged). The High Street runs down the centre. Where it leaves the village at the bottom, heading for Mere Barn and Long Marston, is Bird Lane, the site of The Retreat. The house is too small at this scale to identify with confidence. 46/14

The carrier's farm Before 1899

The Retreat was not built on empty ground. The house next to it, now called Weston Close, was a farmhouse. One of the Society's house histories, a series of numbered notes on village buildings

written by an unnamed local author, calls it "a farm house ... similar in style" to Four Gables, dating it to "late 1500s or early 1600s". 11/10 The 1992 conservation study agrees in substance: "the nucleus is probably C17 and has exposed timber frame, but there are brick additions on either side." 15/08 Its last farming family was the Perks family, and the house note gives the most important single fact for the site of our house:

The farm Barn stables cowsheds etc where on the ground where the house called The Retreat now stands.

House note no. 28, "Rest-a-While now Weston Close" 11/10

So The Retreat stands on the site of a farmyard. Its outbuildings, the stable, saddle room and coal place in the yard described in 1927, may even have been built on the old barn footings. That is a guess; no plan survives that would show it.

The census lets us follow Robert Perks over thirty years, though his age and birthplace shift from one count to the next. In 1861 he is "carrier and market gardener", born at Alcester, about 42. 48/04 In 1881 he is a "Farmer & Market Gardener of 12 acres employing 1 man & 1 boy". This time his birthplace is given as Cleeve in Worcestershire. His wife Harriet was born in Welford, and a son, William H. Perks, worked as a gardener. Their next-door neighbour was the old carpenter Thomas Hornby. 48/06 In 1891 Robert is 70, a market gardener, again said to be born at Alcester, living with Harriet and their son William. 48/07 Kelly's 1897 directory lists "Perks Robert, market gardener". 46/98 The house note says he died at the farmhouse in 1899 and that an old directory called him a "carrier to Stratford and Evesham. Mon, Wed & Fri." 11/10

Twelve acres was a smallholding. Its real business was carrying, and the archive has a vivid memory of what that meant. Roland Harris, the postmaster's son, remembered that in the 1880s Welford's fruit and vegetables went to Birmingham market "by Mr. Perks the carter". With one assistant he would load the van in the evening and set off with two horses. They went by Henley-in-Arden, where they changed horses and rested, and reached Birmingham in time for the market opening at six. 07/09; 13/32 Another version, in Harris's own notes, has "a Mr Perks & his assistants" loading up at about 6 p.m., "with 2 horses, one pulling at the front, & one at the back", and choosing the route "to avoid paying the Bridge Toll twice". 11/21 A parish history of 1938 tells the same story without naming him. It says the growers stopped at the Bird-in-Hand at

Henley until after midnight, so their outward and return journeys fell within one toll day. 54/105

So before The Retreat existed, this corner of Bird Lane was a working yard. Horses were stabled and carts were loaded there, and the Monday, Wednesday and Friday runs set out from it. It is worth remembering when we reach the villa's later occupants, who came to Welford for exactly the opposite reason: rest.

The 1938 parish history mentions one more puzzle. Among "the oldest farms" it lists "the one now known as Poland's [?] Villa next to the Retreat", "what the old people used to call Fitzjer [?] Corner", which "has been much altered of late years but contains some enormous old beams". 54/105 Both names are uncertain readings of a hurried hand. A farmhouse with enormous beams next to The Retreat can only be the Perks farmhouse, then called Rest Awhile. The "Villa" and "Corner" names do not appear anywhere else in the archive.

A new house called The Retreat About 1902

Robert Perks died in 1899, and within three years a new house stood in his farmyard. The only account of how it got there comes from the Book of Gossip, a private notebook begun in 1915 by an educated churchwarden from an old Welford family. In it he wrote candid portraits of his neighbours. 21/01-21 Writing of Frank and Hilda Windsor, he says that after their marriage they lived "at places like Malvern, Leamington and Kenilworth ... till in 1902 they invested what money they had left in some property in Welford which included a new house called 'The Retreat'." 21/05

Three things in that sentence matter. The Windsors bought a *property*, not just a house. The property *included* The Retreat, which suggests it also included something else. And the house was *new* in 1902. The writer does not say who built it, whether the Windsors commissioned it or bought it from a builder, or what it cost. The archive has no deed, no building plan and no builder's bill for it.

What else did the property include? The best evidence comes later. In 1914 the Windsors were living at Rest-a-While, the old farmhouse next door. 48/21 In 1927 The Retreat, Rest Awhile and a small cottage called The Nook were offered for sale together, with the owner living at Rest Awhile. 11/30 The simplest reading is that the Windsors' 1902 purchase was the whole former Perks holding:

the old farmhouse and its cottage, plus the new house built on the farmyard. That is an inference, but it fits every later document.

The date also needs a word of caution. The talk in folder 46 places The Retreat on “the 1901 map” as the most southerly house in the village. 46/37–95 If that map really showed the house in 1901, the house was a little older than “new in 1902” suggests. However, the map the Society used was probably the 1903 edition of the six-inch sheet, and its survey date is not recorded in the archive. 46/14 The 1901 census was taken in March of that year, and the Society’s research notes on Frank Windsor put him in Handsworth then. 46/32 in 46/15–36 So the house was built in 1901 or 1902, and the Windsors were its first known occupants.

The name was not unusual. “The Retreat” was a popular name for villas at the time, especially for houses built by people retiring from town life. In Welford it was exactly right. The Windsors had come from Liverpool, Birmingham and the spa towns to a fruit-growing village five miles from Stratford, looking for a quiet life on what money they had left. The name tells us what the house was for.

Frank and Hilda Windsor 1902 to about 1919

Few houses in a village archive have a first owner described as vividly as this. The Book of Gossip gives the Windsors a full page, and it is worth quoting at length, because it is the only description of daily life at The Retreat that survives from before the First World War.

Frank Robert Windsor is a smart little man of about 45 years of age. He stands about 5 ft 3 in in height and is upright and well built. His hair is sandy in colour, close curled, and rather scanty on the forehead, and he has a sandy moustache.

Book of Gossip, 1915 21/05

The writer says Frank was “a native of Cheshire but his business life was spent in Liverpool”, and that he had “retired from business through ill health”. The writer suspected that the ill health was a pretext and that Frank had retired on marrying, “being under the impression that his wife was well off.” Hilda had expected to inherit an income. In the writer’s view, her father’s will had in fact divided the capital among all his children once the last daughter married, and she blamed “a brother-in-law” for robbing her. “At any rate, Mrs Windsor says ‘it was an awful blow to Frank’.”

Then comes the passage that makes The Retreat almost a character in its own right:

Since then Frank has been trying to make money in a great variety of ways, by running a boarding house, by poultry farming, by photography, by wood carving, by bee-keeping, by canary breeding, by fruit growing and now they are trying dog breeding. I do not think that any one of these experiments has been really a financial success, and some have certainly been costly failures. The losses, however, have been borne by an old Aunt of Mrs Windsor's, but the profits, if or when there are any, would be Frank's.

Book of Gossip, 1915 21/05

It is easy to picture the house and its grounds during those years. A boarding house with five bedrooms. Fowl houses and pigeon houses in the yard, which the 1927 particulars still mention. Hives in the orchard. A darkroom somewhere. Canaries, then dogs. The orchard behind the house, with a frontage of 135 feet in 1927, would have served the fruit-growing. None of this is itemised in any source. It is a reading of the gossip against the later sale description, but the fit is close. The talk in folder 46, using a correspondent whose name it does not give, repeats that the Windsors "started a number of different businesses during their stay in Welford", including "breeding dogs and running a boarding house". 46/37-95

The diarist's verdict on Frank is harsh. He calls him "rather selfish and rather mean ... jealous, irritable and weak", a man who "likes to play a prominent part in the village affairs, but has not personality enough to 'take' a front place". When things went his way, though, he was "pleasant company, being quick witted and almost perfect in his manners", and "he plays bridge very well." Hilda gets a gentler portrait. She was "a tall fine woman" with "a worried look", "generous, impulsive and affectionate", with good taste in furniture, ornaments and dress, and "a happy-go-lucky sort of housekeeper". The diarist's small domestic details survive from the Windsors' table at The Retreat: no salt in the potatoes, meat overcooked or undercooked, cream on the turn, tea poured before it had stood. And "Frank ... sometimes raves and storms at her and hints at suicide because there is no pepper in the stewed mushrooms. She takes it all meekly enough and puts too much pepper in next time." 21/05

The Retreat also features in the gossip about another household. Mr Laurence of Devon House, a commercial traveller, "carries his hotel manners into private houses. He will come into my house or

Windsor's and arrange our guests for us and tell us where to sit." 21/06 So The Retreat was one of the houses where Welford's newer middle-class residents gathered for bridge and supper. And Hilda had an old link to another incomer family: Kate Mainwaring, wife of the Birmingham estate agent who built villas near Binton Bridge, had been at school with "Mrs Windsor (who was then Hilda Corfield) at, I believe, the Girls High School in B'ham." 21/07

The Society's research notes add family history the diarist did not know, and in places they disagree with him. They give Frank Robert Windsor as born in the first quarter of 1873 at Northwood, Shropshire, the son of Edward, a farmer, and Ellen. He was in Bronington near Ellesmere in 1881 and was a soap manufacturer at Handsworth, Staffordshire, with one servant, in 1901. He married Marion Hilda Corfield in 1901, perhaps at Ormskirk, and died in 1950 at Whitchurch, Shropshire. 46/32 in 46/15–36 The talk built on those notes says he married Hilda in 1900 and that "the Windsors left Welford after the First World War". 46/37–95 So Frank was not from Cheshire, though Northwood and Bronington are both close to its border. He was not a retired Liverpool businessman either, unless the Liverpool years came before Handsworth. The archive cannot settle this.

The house in the 1911 census Schedule 53

The 1911 census is the only time the house appears in a household schedule filled in by its occupier. The enumerator's route went from the Chapel Street end, out to Pools Close, Arcadia, The Rise and Devon House, and "back through Holly Dene, The Retreat, The Poplars and Cedar Hill". 48/09 In the summary book, schedule 53 is "The Retreat / The Poplars", a private house, occupier "Windsor", one male and one female, two persons. The modern transcriber notes "Private means". 48/09 The paired names are puzzling. Kelly's 1914 directory gives The Poplars as a separate house occupied by Alfred Edward Winnett Paine. 48/21 It may be that the enumerator first wrote one name, corrected it, and the transcriber kept both.

The householder's own schedule is clearer:

NAME	RELATION	AGE	DETAILS	BORN
Frank Robt. Windsor	Head	38	Married; private means	"Shepshed [?], Mydelland [?]" (reading uncertain)
Marion Hilda	Wife	42	Married 10 years;	Birmingham, Edgbaston

NAME	RELATION	AGE	DETAILS	BORN
Windsor			children "None"	

Schedule 53, 1911 census, transcribed in 48/10. Rooms: "Nine". Signed by Frank Robt. Windsor.

Several things stand out. There were no servants, and no boarders on census night, so whatever the boarding-house scheme had been, it was not running in April 1911. Hilda was four years older than Frank. That fits the diarist's guess that she was the last of her father's daughters to marry, and that her marriage triggered the division of the estate. The birthplace is an enigma. The research notes say Northwood, Shropshire. The transcriber read something like "Shepshed", which is in Leicestershire, against a county that might be read as a mangled "Shropshire". Without the original page we cannot tell.

The room count is the most useful entry. Census rules counted living rooms and bedrooms and the kitchen, but not the scullery, landing, bathroom or closets. The 1927 sale particulars give The Retreat a dining room, a morning room or study, a drawing room, a kitchen and five bedrooms. That makes exactly nine rooms. 11/30 So in 1911 the Windsors were living in The Retreat itself, not the farmhouse next door, and the house had the same layout in 1911 as it did sixteen years later.

Moving next door 1914

Kelly's Directory of Gloucestershire for 1914 lists thirteen private residents in Welford. Two of them settle a question the census raises.

Robotham Arthur Fredk. The Retreat

...

Windsor Frank Robert, Rest-a-While

Kelly's Directory of Gloucestershire, 1914, p. 362 48/21

Between April 1911 and the directory's compilation, probably in 1913, the Windsors moved out of The Retreat and into the old farmhouse next door, which they called Rest-a-While. A new occupant, Arthur Frederick Robotham, moved into the villa. The house note on Weston Close confirms it independently: "This house was called Rest-a-While when Mr & Mrs Winsor lived there." 11/10

Why would a couple leave a nine-room villa for a smaller old cottage? The Book of Gossip offers a motive without saying so directly. The Windsors were short of money, and most of their schemes lost it. Letting The Retreat to a tenant and living in the cheaper house next door would have brought in a steady rent. It is the same thing Mrs Laurence did at Devon House, "taking boarders in the summer" to help her husband through his difficulties. 21/06 This explanation is an inference. No lease or rent book for The Retreat survives.

Arthur Frederick Robotham is a complete blank. He appears once in the whole archive, in this directory entry. He is not in the 1911 census for Welford, the Book of Gossip does not mention him, and no later record names him. We do not know how long he stayed, what he did, or whether he had a family. He is the first of several tenants about whom the archive knows only a name.

The 1915 Book of Gossip still describes the Windsors as Welford residents, then trying dog breeding. The talk in folder 46 says they "left Welford after the First World War". 46/37-95 Did they sell up when they left, or keep the property and let it? That is unknown. The 1927 sale was by an owner then living at Rest Awhile, and that owner is not named. It could have been a Windsor, but it could just as well have been a buyer from the early 1920s.

Mr Shorthouse presides 1922

The next occupant appears in a newspaper report pasted into the Society's scrapbook of cuttings on the Memorial Hall controversy. In the summer of 1922 a public meeting was held in the schoolroom to hear the report of the Hospital Maintenance Committee, the village scheme that paid into the Stratford hospital so that local people could be treated there.

There was a fair attendance, over which Mr. Shorthouse, of "The Retreat," presided. The Chairman of the committee (the Rev. A. J. Davis) presented the report, which showed that during the twelve months ended May 31, 1922, £133 7s. 7d. had been collected in the parishes of Welford-on-Avon and Weston-on-Avon by the five appointed collectors.

Newspaper report, 1922 23/91-96

This is almost certainly Herbert Stephen Shorthouse, one of the more generous incomers of the interwar village. In 1940 he gave Welford the Shorthouse Bidston allotments, about five acres of

Churchfield Close settled on trustees for allotments, part of which later became the school playing field. The 1940 deed calls him "of 'Solano', Welford-on-Avon, Company Director". 59/01 By then he had moved from The Retreat to a house he had built for himself. Sources give this house two names. A Society note calls it Solamo (Solano) "in Bird's Lane ... commandeered during the war" as a hostel for Land Girls, and a handwritten addition says, "THIS WAS MR HERBERT SHORTHOUSE." 10/48 in 10/32-56 Councillor Barnes calls it Weston House, built by Charlie Garner for "Mr Storehouse, a man who made surgical instruments", at a cost of about £1,000, intended as a future cottage hospital, but "used by land girls in the war and then sold." 47/90 A 1987 letter to the Herald also remembers "the late Mr Shorthouse ... a great benefactor", who "built Weston House for his own use, designed in such a way that it could be converted easily into a cottage hospital". 01/01-385

A man who chaired the hospital meeting in 1922 and later built a house meant to become a cottage hospital clearly had one cause at heart. His later house stood in Bird Lane too. In the 1950 house-by-house list, the entry after "Mr & Mrs Swinnock - 'The Retreat'" on the Long Marston road is the "W.L.A. Hostel (Mrs Wyman, Warden)", the Women's Land Army hostel in Shorthouse's old house. 01/56 So Shorthouse seems to have rented The Retreat while he looked for a site, then built nearby. When and how he moved is not recorded.

There is one loose end. A "Weston House" already existed on the High Street in 1911, occupied by Cleveland Bury Green. 48/09; 48/10 Either Shorthouse's house reused an old name, or Barnes and the 1987 letter-writer confused two buildings. The c.1960 survey lists a "Mr Richards, Weston House" on the east side of Bird Lane. 20/06 That supports the idea that by then Weston House meant Shorthouse's building near The Retreat.

The house for sale, 1927 31 March 1927

The best description of The Retreat comes from an auction that failed. The Society member who compiled the notebook of sale particulars, in which every Welford sale notice found at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust record office was copied by hand, transcribed it in full. 11/30 On 31 March 1927 Kibler Morgan offered "Residential Properties at Welford on Avon" at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham. That venue alone shows who the expected buyers were. Lot 1 was The Retreat:

A highly desirable Freehold Country residence in the charming old world village of Welford on Avon, handy for the River, Church and Post Office, 4½ miles from Stratford on Avon and within 1½ miles of Milcote (GWR) and Binton (LMS) stations.

Sale particulars, 31 March 1927 11/30 p. 33

The particulars then describe the house room by room. It was "well built of Brick with stucco and Timber facings & tiled roof". Inside was a veranda; an entrance hall with a tiled floor; a dining room of 17 by 18 feet "including large bay with door to Verandah"; a morning room or study, 14 feet by 12 feet 5 inches; a drawing room, 16 feet 10 inches by 15 feet; a kitchen "having fitted cupboards"; a scullery with sink, hot and cold taps and copper; a cupboard under the stairs; and, unusually, a bathroom with WC and wash basin on the ground floor. Upstairs were five bedrooms, measuring 15'4" × 12'8", 11'9" × 11'6", 11'9" × 12'3", 14'3" × 12'3" and 17' × 15'3". There was a "Good water supply". 11/30 pp. 33-34

Outside, "in enclosed yard with double entrance doors from road", were a "substantially erected brick & tiled two stall Stable and Saddle Room with loft over", a "Garage for Two cars with wash", a men's closet and coal place, "also pigeon & fowl houses." In front was "an enclosed flower garden, in rear a capital Orchard with frontage to the road of 135 feet or thereabouts, also a Kitchen garden well stocked with Fruit Trees, the total area being about 1¼ acres." 11/30 p. 34

Read against the 1992 photograph, the description fits closely. The veranda with its arched openings runs across the ground floor; the dining room's large bay is probably the deep window at the right, under the gable; and the "Timber facings" are the black-and-white gables. The two-stall stable and the garage for two cars, side by side in 1927, show a house caught between the horse age and the motor age. The pigeon and fowl houses are probably what was left of the Windsors' poultry farming.

Lot 1a was "two genuine old brick, tiled and half timbered Cottages known as Rest Awhile and The Nook, adjoining lot 1". Rest Awhile was "now in occupation of the owner". It had a passage hall, sitting room, "Dining Room with inglenook & bacon cupboard", living room, porch to a paved yard and pleasure garden, a dairy or kitchen, "oak staircase leading to landing and three Bedrooms", and outside a brick closet and a "timber & corrugated iron Workshop". The Nook had a glazed vestibule, living room, scullery and two bedrooms, and was "now let to Miss Bixby upon a yearly

tenancy which expires 25th March 1927." Lots 1 and 1a were to be offered together first. 11/30 pp. 34–35

The sale did not go through. The compiler read the pencilled figures on the notice as an opening bid of £1,000 for the two lots together and "withdrawn at £1750". Offered separately, The Retreat drew "No bid", and the cottages reached £500 or £510 before being "withdrawn £1050". The compiler concluded: "No Sale took place." 11/30 p. 35 Since the auction failed, the owner presumably kept the property and let the house. Within a few years it had the tenant whose name became bound up with it.

WHERE THE WATER CAME FROM

The 1927 particulars say only "Good water supply" for The Retreat. Other Welford houses in the same notebook show what that usually meant before mains water. Gorse Hey in Church Lane, sold in 1926, had "an excellent water supply from a Well which is conveyed to a 200 gallon storage tank by force pump on the kitchen sink, also a good soft water supply". The Ashes, sold in 1935, drew from "a hard-water Well outside augmented by large soft-water tanks". 11/30 The Retreat almost certainly had a well too, and a house with its own well would have advertised it. Whether that well is the origin of the name "Old Well House" is a guess the archive cannot confirm.

William Swinnock's Retreat About 1933 to 1956

For more than twenty years The Retreat was the home of William Ewes Swinnock. Of all its occupants he did most to make the house known in the village. His full name is given once, in the dramatic society's rules, which make "Mr. William Ewes Swinnock of 'The Retreat', Welford on Avon" a trustee of its savings. 61/01–09 His occupation is given once, as a witness to the 1952 Memorial Hall trustee deed: "W.E. Swinnock, The Retreat, Welford-on-Avon, Civil Servant." 60/04 The archive does not say where he came from, when he was born, what branch of the civil service he worked in, or Mrs Swinnock's first name. His name was misspelt so often (Sinnock, W. S. Swinnock, W. M. Swinnock, and a "T. Swinnock" that is probably a misreading of his own signature) that the Society's modern transcribers have had to keep checking that these are all one man. 56/01; 58/01–09; 62/01

He was a tenant. The 1937 sale particulars say plainly that The Retreat was "Let to Mr W. E. Swinnock on an annual Lady Day tenancy at the rent of £70 per annum, tenant paying the rates." 11/30 p. 41 When the tenancy began is not recorded. The Herald

reporter who met him in December 1938 said he had been the dramatic society's producer "for the last five years", which puts him in the village by about 1933. 07/07; 62/01 By November 1934 he was established enough to be asked to serve as the new village trust's secretary, and the minute book's first page is headed "Secretary - The Retreat, Welford-on-Avon." 60/01

From then on The Retreat became one of the village's meeting places. Over the next five years village committees met there more often than in any private house except the Rectory and Whitegates, Captain Dingley's home.

DATE	MEETING AT THE RETREAT	SOURCE
29 Dec 1934	Trustees of the Welford-on-Avon Trust Fund, Capt. Dingley in the chair; £194 4s 11d handed over from the first fête	60/01
Jan 1935 (planned)	Trustees to meet "at 'The Retreat' at 7 p.m." before each annual meeting in the Memorial Hall	60/01
29 Jan 1937	Dramatic society meeting "at Mr. Swinnock's house"; a fund-raising concert turned down	61/01-09
6 Apr 1937	Fête committee, Capt. W. L. Dingley in the chair	57/01
21 Apr 1937	Fête committee	57/01
5 May 1937	Fête committee; R. E. Wright elected secretary and Swinnock takes the chair	57/01
20 Sep 1937	Dramatic society, "at The Retreat (by kind permission of Mr. Swinnock)"	61/01-09

The list is surely incomplete, because most minutes do not record where meetings were held. Still, it shows that in the mid-1930s the front rooms described in 1927, the 17-by-18-foot dining room with its bay and the drawing room, were used for village business. The house built for a retired couple had become a committee room.

Fêtes, tennis and a playing field 1934 to 1956

Swinnock's biggest civic role was as secretary of the Welford-on-Avon Trust Fund, a charity he served from its founding until his

death. Two public meetings in the Memorial Hall in 1934 adopted Hotham Woodward's scheme to put village fête profits into a fund for permanent purposes, above all "the acquisition of land for a children's playing field." 60/01 The Memorandum of Agreement of 14 November 1934, between the fête committee and the seven trustees, was signed for the committee by "Walter L. Dingley (Chairman) and W. E. Swinnock (Secretary)." 06/14 The trustees then agreed "that the office of Secretary to the Trustees might be held by a person who was not a Trustee", and asked "Mr W. Swinnock to act as Secretary". 60/01

The fête committee's printed notepaper carried three addresses: "Chairman: W. E. SWINNOCK, 'The Retreat' ... Treasurer: H. M. WOODWARD, 'The Hollies' ... Secretary: R. E. WRIGHT, 'The Homestead'". 57/02; 57/06-15; 58/01-09 For the late 1930s, letters about the fête went to The Retreat. The fêtes themselves were big events: a procession from the Maypole Green, fancy dress, decorated lorries, bowling for a live pig, "Madame Zaza" the mystic, and a dance in the Memorial Hall until two in the morning. The Rt Hon. W. S. Morrison, Minister of Agriculture and the local MP, opened the 1937 fête. Mrs West of Alscot Park opened the 1938 one, and the film star Betty Balfour the 1939 one. Throughout, the committee was "W. E. Swinnock (chairman), R. E. Wright (secretary) and H. M. Woodward (treasurer)". 54/02 The fête committee minute book of 1937-40 is largely in his hand, signed "W. Swinnock" after each meeting. It records him ordering 200 coconuts, promising a leg of mutton for a competition, finding a dance organiser, arranging deck chairs, borrowing the Grafton village hall chairs, and undertaking "to obtain some suitable wasp-dest[royer]." 57/01

The Retreat's letterhead also appears on tennis club stationery. An undated sheet names "Capt. W. L. DINGLEY, 'Whitegates'" as chairman, "H. M. WOODWARD, 'The Hollies'" as treasurer and "W. SWINNOCK, 'The Retreat'" as secretary. 63/09 The modern transcriber noticed that the 1937 tennis secretary was in fact R. E. Wright, and suggested the sheet belongs to a post-war revival. The club history mentions a brief stay in 1936-38 on "Mr Serjeantson's field in Birds Lane" at £1 a year, just along the road from The Retreat. 63/03

The playing field took fifty years. The trustees looked at site after site: Keyter Close, land behind Cross Farm, Fool's Close, the Cinder Meadow, Mrs Meinhardt's land. Then the war froze the grants. 60/01 In 1948 the Parish Council's clerk wrote to "W. E. Sinnock,

Esq., Secretary to the Welford-on-Avon Trust Fund, The Retreat, Welford” about two fields the council hoped to buy. 58/01-09 Swinnock was by then also a parish councillor. He sat on the councils elected in 1949 and 1952 under H. C. Setten’s chairmanship, alongside Wilson Matthews, Mrs Ethel Roberts, Mrs Gilda Gray and G. Edginton. 19/06; 19/07 A council report of about 1950-51 lists him among those present when the council dealt with the railings round the Maypole chestnut, obstructed footpaths, and the Women’s Institute’s complaint about an open sewer towards Weston. 13/15 He also sat on the committee of the British Legion branch formed after the Second World War, 56/01 and was a teller at the 1951 Festival of Britain meetings. 55/01-03

He did not see the field bought. On 29 June 1956 the trustees met at Whitegates, and “in the absence, through illness, of Mr W. E. Swinnock, secretary to the trustees, Mr R. E. Wright was asked to undertake the duties of acting honorary secretary”, with a letter of good wishes for “a good recovery.” At their next meeting, on 22 February 1957, “Alderman Dingley spoke of the regret felt at the passing of Mr W. E. Swinnock, who had been honorary secretary to the trustees since the formation of the Trust. The trustees observed a few moments’ silence.” A letter of appreciation went to Mrs Swinnock. 60/01 The Trust Fund carried on for another twenty-eight years. It was wound up in January 1985, when £3,142 30p went to the Parish Council towards eight acres at the Cinder Meadow. Its last secretary added a note in the minute book: “Fund at Peace at last. Deo gratias!” 60/01

The producer’s house The dramatic society

Swinnock was best known as a producer. Welford’s Amateur Dramatic Society, founded in 1928, had won a merit award in 1929 and the county Gold Star in 1931. 61/01-09; 62/01 Swinnock took it over in about 1933 and ran it for the rest of his life, apart from the war years. Its business was often done at his house. The minutes of February 1937 record a meeting “held at Mr. Swinnock’s house on Jan. 29th”, and in September 1937 a meeting was “arranged for Monday Sept 20th at 8 p.m. at The Retreat (by kind permission of Mr. Swinnock).” 61/01-09 Under the 1938 rules, the society’s savings were held by Mabel Basson of The Orchard and William Ewes Swinnock of The Retreat. 61/01-09

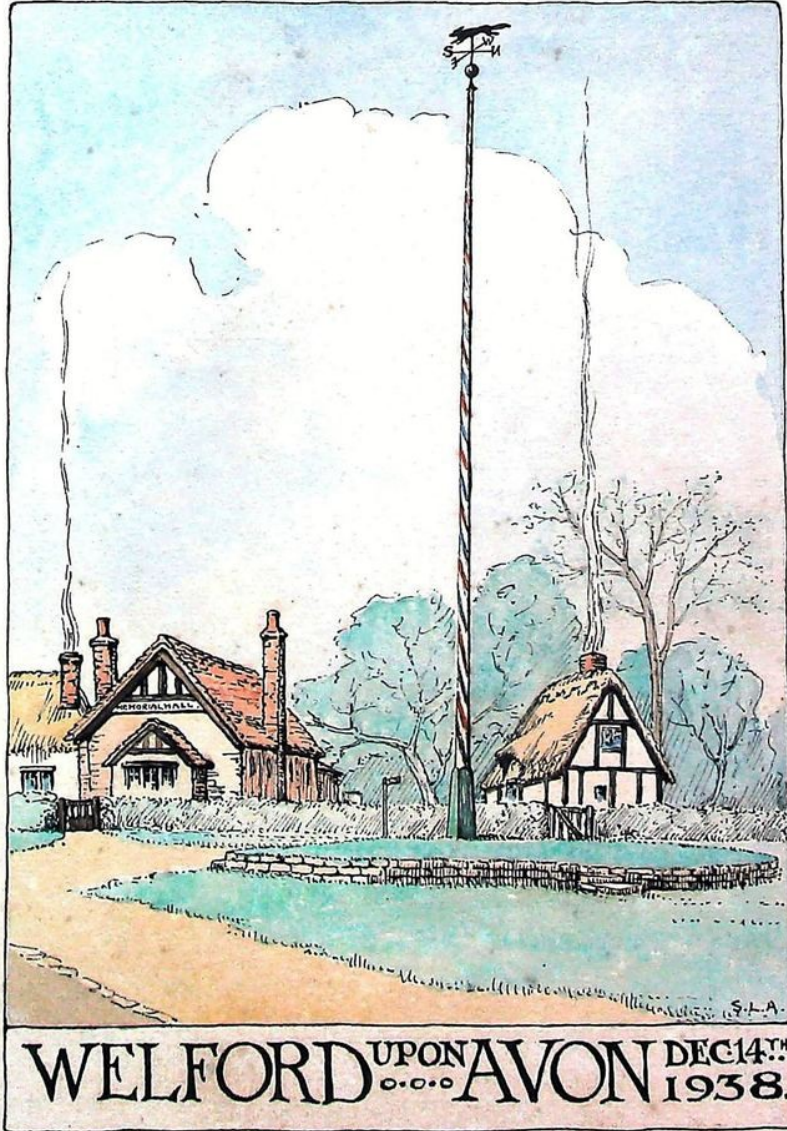
The high point came in December 1938, when the Duke of Kent, on a tour of Warwickshire village projects, came to the Memorial Hall hut to watch the society perform Lionel Hale’s Joan of Arc play *She*

Passed Through Lorraine. The Herald's reporter went back a week later and talked to the producer in an interval:

The producer for the last five years has been Mr W. E. Swinnock, a resident of the village, who has put his whole energies into this amateur theatrical cause. ... Mr Swinnock, besides producing the play, had designed and supervised the construction by the society members of all the scenery. In addition to this, on the night of the show he was stage manager, sound effects, prompter, electrician and a few other things that I can't remember.

Stratford-upon-Avon Herald, 23 December 1938 07/07; 62/01

PROGRAMME OF THE PLAY:



WELFORD ^{UPON} AVON DEC 14TH 1938.

George

The programme presented to the Duke of Kent, painted by S. L. A. (Selina "Lena" Atkin of Boat Cottage) and signed by the Duke "George" at the foot. It shows the Memorial Hall and the Maypole. The play it announces was produced by W. E. Swinnock of The Retreat. Sources date the visit to 7, 13 or 14 December 1938; see the notes. 62/01 p. 87 (PDF p. 200)

After the war it was Swinnock who brought the society back. At the first meeting since 1939, on 24 September 1946 at The Hollies, "it was suggested by Mr. Swinnock that the members might wish to wind up the old Society and start afresh". The members preferred to carry on with the old funds. 61/03 in 61/01-09 The society's

scrapbook then shows him producing play after play, usually two a year, from the first post-war production in 1946 to at least *Love in a Mist* in January 1955. The productions include *Yellow Sands*, *If Four Walls Told*, *Barnett's Folly*, *George and Margaret*, *The Housemaster*, *I Have Been Here Before*, *Quiet Week End*, *The Barton Mystery* and *Rookery Nook*. Reviewers praised "the slickness of the dialogue" and the way he "made good use of his tiny, but well-equipped" stage. 62/01 A modern history of the society calls him "their highly regarded producer, Mr W. E. Swinnock". 61/09 in 61/01-09

So for about twenty years The Retreat was where Welford's plays were planned. Scripts were sent for, casts chosen, and scenery designed by the man who then built it with the members. None of the scenery survives, and no photograph in the archive shows Swinnock himself. But the house's link with the stage outlived him, as later sections show.

Sold with its cottages, 1937 2 July 1937

Ten years after the failed auction, the property was offered again and this time it sold. On 2 July 1937 Edwards, Son & Bigwood held an auction at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham, of "Freehold & Leasehold Investment Properties, total area 2a. 0r. 5p. or thereabouts." Welford was Lot 1, and it was now offered to investors rather than residents:

Attractive Freehold Property comprising the well-built Detached Residence known as The Retreat having a frontage of about 85 yards to Marston Road, & comprising of three Reception Rooms, five Bed Rooms, Bathroom, W.C., Kitchen & Scullery. Outside coalhouse, Garage & Stabling, good Garden & Orchard. Let to Mr W. E. Swinnock on an annual Lady Day tenancy at the rent of £70 per annum, tenant paying the rates.

Sale particulars, 2 July 1937 11/30 p. 41

Rest Awhile and The Nook went in the same lot, "both let to good tenants on annual and quarterly tenancies of £50 and £25 per annum respectively". There was also a wayleave of 4s a year for "the electric cables & poles", which shows mains electricity had reached this end of the village by 1937. The total income was £145 4s 0d a year. "A newspaper cutting attached states that the whole of this lot was sold for £2,100." The other two lots in the sale were Birmingham properties. 11/30 p. 41

The two sales together tell a small story. In 1927 the owner lived next door, the house was described in loving detail, and nobody bid. By 1937 all three houses were let, the description had shrunk to a list, and the group sold for £350 more than the 1927 reserve. The buyer is not named. The compiler's index notes beside the 1937 Rest Awhile entry "(of Weston Rose)", which might identify the buyer or a later name, but it appears nowhere else. 11/30 index The house did not change hands in the village's eyes. Swinnock stayed on as tenant, and in the address lists it remained his Retreat.

The 1937 frontage, "about 85 yards to Marston Road", also fixes which way the house faced. The particulars describe it as on the Marston road, though the 1992 study calls it "The Retreat, High Street". 15/08 The house sat at the turn, so it belonged to both.

War and after 1939 to 1956

The archive says little about The Retreat during the Second World War. The fête committee stopped meeting. The Trust's money went into War Savings Certificates and Defence Bonds. In March 1942 the trustees agreed "that in view of war conditions no further public meetings be called during the war." 60/01 The dramatic society did not perform between 1939 and 1946. 61/01-09 Next door, as noted above, Herbert Shorthouse's house was "commandeered" as a hostel for the Women's Land Army. 10/48 So for those years this end of Bird Lane was full of young women working on the farms around Welford. The memory of muslin over the Bird Lane hedge to catch birds for pie also belongs to these years. 47/90

The Society's "People in Welford 1950" notebook gives the next clear view. On the Long Marston road it lists, in order: "Mr & Mrs Swinnock - 'The Retreat'", with "guests" added in the margin, then the "W.L.A. Hostel (Mrs Wyman, Warden)", then Mr and Mrs Edgar Davies. 01/56 The marginal note is short, but the likeliest meaning is that the Swinnocks were taking paying guests in 1950. If so, the house was back to one of its first uses. Frank Windsor had tried running it as a boarding house before 1915, and Gilda Gray recalled that by the 1920s Welford's women were letting rooms to "as many as a hundred visitors" in a summer. 03/04 The "Weston Fields & The Retreat Group" of houses that the 1992 study mapped was already taking shape: a Victorian villa, an old farmhouse, a cottage and a wartime hostel standing together where the village met the fields.

William Swinnock fell ill in 1956 and was dead by February 1957. 60/01 The archive does not record where he died or where he was buried. Mrs Swinnock was still alive in 1957, but no later source mentions her. By the spring of 1959, The Retreat had a new household.

Neighbours at the corner Rest Awhile, The Nook and Weston Close

Before following The Retreat into the 1960s, it is worth looking at its two companions, which were sold with it in 1927 and 1937 and stand beside it in the 1992 photograph.



Weston Close, formerly Rest Awhile, in 1992: the Perks farmhouse, “probably C17” with brick additions on either side, listed Grade II. The overhead wires crossing it were one of the study’s complaints. 15/08 fig. 42

Rest Awhile, the old Perks farmhouse, was the Windsors’ home by 1914 and the owner’s home in 1927. Its list of rooms in 1927, with an inglenook, a bacon cupboard, a dairy and an oak staircase, describes a farmhouse that had become a cottage residence. By 1937 it was let at £50 a year. 11/30 The house note says it was later

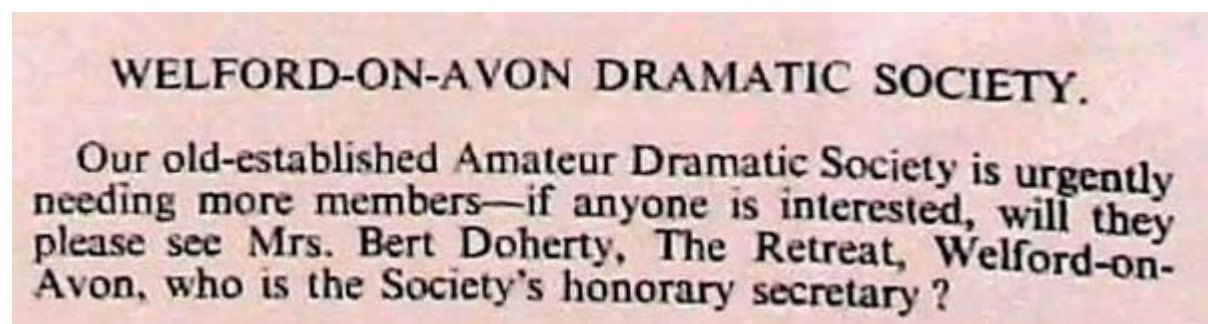
renamed by “Mr Doherty when he lived there ... because the name Weston Close was mentioned in the deeds”, a field name from before the inclosure. The note also says the deeds “go back only to the early 19th century, but ... among them is a letter relating to a Soldier who was killed in the Crimea War.” 11/10 That letter is not in the archive. It is one of the more tantalising gaps in the story.

The Nook was the small cottage, let to a Miss Bixby on a yearly tenancy that ended on Lady Day 1927. 11/30 Its best-documented occupant was Miss M. O. James. An undated village news cutting of about 1950–51 records her death after twenty-five years at “The Nook”, during which she had founded a fruit-bottling company and “worked there until the end”. 13/15 Twenty-five years before 1950 is about 1925, so Miss James was probably one of the “good tenants” of the 1937 sale. She lived next door to The Retreat throughout the Swinnock years. The project’s earlier notes record that Miss James lived at The Nook in the Rest Awhile pair, not at Priors Lee further up Frog Lane.

The three buildings shared a corner and, at times, an owner. They also shared a path. The footpath described below ran from Bird Lane “by ‘The Retreat’” into Frog Lane, behind the old farmhouse.

The Dohertys 1950s to 1980s

The family that followed the Swinnocks already lived next door. In 1950 “Mr & Mrs Doherty” are listed in Frog Lane, in the run of houses that includes Weston Close. 01/56 The house note says Mr Doherty lived at Rest Awhile and renamed it Weston Close. 11/10 Then, in the parish magazine for March 1959:



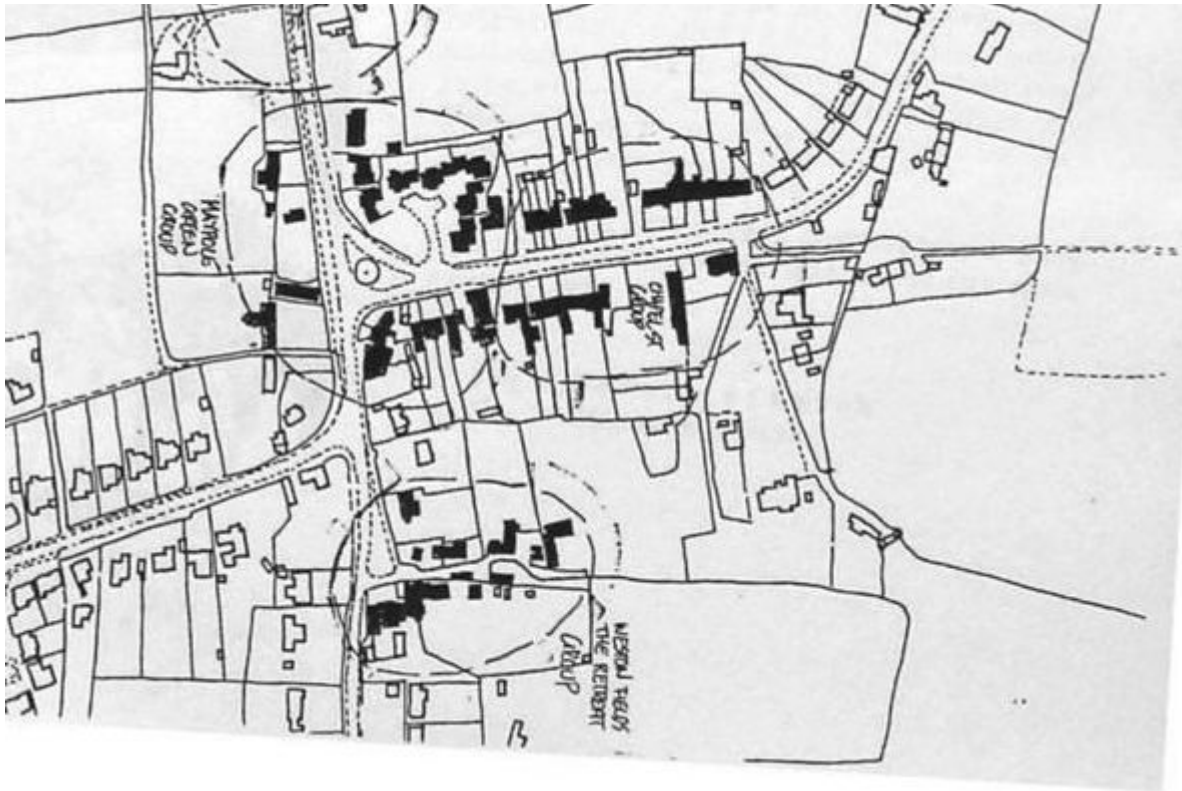
Parish magazine, March 1959. “Our old-established Amateur Dramatic Society is urgently needing more members—if anyone is interested, will they please see Mrs. Bert Doherty, The Retreat, Welford-on-Avon, who is the Society’s honorary secretary?” 11/14

So within about two years of Swinnock’s death, The Retreat was the Dohertys’ house, and the dramatic society’s correspondence was still coming to it. Bert Doherty had been one of Swinnock’s actors.

He played Sergeant Henry Brown in *The Man from the Ministry* in April 1953 and produced the society's 1954 Agatha Christie mystery. 24/14; 61/01-09; 62/01 Mrs Doherty kept a hoop-la stall at the flower show, and a Miss D. Doherty gave pony rides. 54/01 Mr Doherty represented the Conservative Association on the 1951 Festival committee and proposed a border of flowers round the Maypole Green wall. 55/01-03 The archive does not say whether the Dohertys bought The Retreat or rented it, or whether they also kept Weston Close.

The house survey of about 1960, "Houses in Welford about 1960", lists the east side of Bird Lane as "Mr Day", then "Mr Doherty — 4 — planning permission", then two Solcote houses, then another four plots with planning permission, then "Mr Richards, Weston House". 20/06 The figure 4 means the Dohertys held planning permission for four new dwellings. In context these were most likely on The Retreat's orchard, the 135-foot frontage of fruit trees described in 1927. This was the start of the suburban change that the 1992 study would describe on this road.

One of those new houses seems to have been for the family. The 1987 electoral register lists Patrick J. M. Doherty and James F. W. Doherty at "Weston Fields", Long Marston Road, a few entries below The Retreat. 30/05 The 1992 study lists "Weston Fields. Dwelling" as Map Ref 150, immediately before The Retreat at Map Ref 151, and names the cluster on its plan "Weston Fields & The Retreat Group". 15/08 In 2012 a Mr Patrick Doherty was among the residents honoured at the Diamond Jubilee for having lived in Welford or Weston throughout the Queen's reign. 50/02



Settlement Analysis: Building Groups”, 1992 (detail). The circled cluster at the bottom, where the High Street becomes the Long Marston road, is labelled “Weston Fields & The Retreat Group”. 15/08

The footpath by The Retreat 1961 and 1968

The house also appears in a rights-of-way record. Warwickshire County Council’s 1961 Definitive Statement of public paths describes footpath SD 28a as running “From the Welford-on-Avon-Long Marston road, 75 yards south of Welford Post Office, eastwards for 100 yards, turning north-eastwards to SD28”. It was a padded track two feet wide. 12/03 The Society’s copy has a pencilled query, “? Saw Pit Close”. When the parish reviewed its paths under the Countryside Act 1968, it recommended keeping SD 28a with a fuller description:

Entrance from Bird’s Lane (Long Marston Road) by “The Retreat”, through Frog Lane wicket gate opposite Priors Lee (not to be locked), along path to Devon Cottage to another wicket gate (also not to be locked), through Sawpit Close by step-stile to Pool Close and Chapel Street. Padded track 2 ft. wide.

Welford-on-Avon footpath schedule, 1968 12/03

So in 1968 The Retreat was the landmark used to mark where a public path left the road. It is also one of the few places in the

archive where the name Bird's Lane is officially paired with Long Marston Road. The path ran past the house, through the old Perks land behind Weston Close, across Frog Lane, and through the old field names Sawpit Close and Pool Close to Chapel Street. It was a back way into the village that may be older than the house.

Mrs Cope 1970s and 1980s

The last occupant of The Retreat that the archive names is Mrs Constance K. Cope. She first appears in September 1972, paying a 50p subscription to the Welford and Weston Local History Society. She renewed it almost every year until at least January 1986, by then at £2 for two years at once. In January 1975 the treasurer wrote her down as "Mrs Cope (Retreat)". 12/07; 27/01-09 So the house that had once hosted the village's committees was now home to one of the members of the society whose archive this essay draws on.

In December 1974 the parish newsletter, on the same page as Gilda Gray's history of the Women's Institute, carried a short notice:

COFFEE MORNING AT 'THE RETREAT' — A total of £218 was raised for Weston Church. Raffle winners were: Mrs. Barnes (mugs); Mrs. D. Day (silver tray); Mr. & Mrs. Appleton (meat); Mrs. J. Spencer (modern picture); Mrs. Fitzsimmons (Mrs. Cope's picture). Our very grateful thanks go to Mrs. Cope and her helpers.

Parish newsletter, about December 1974 03/04 in 03/01-19

"Mrs. Cope's picture" among the raffle prizes suggests she painted, though that is the only hint. £218 was a large sum for a coffee morning in 1974, and it suggests the house still had rooms big enough for a crowd. The 1987-88 electoral register lists her alone at The Retreat, Long Marston Road. 30/05 Nothing in the archive says when she arrived, when she left, or whether she owned the house.

"Slightly incongruous" The 1992 Conservation Area Study

In July 1992 Alan Smith and Partners prepared a draft Conservation Area Study of Welford for Stratford-on-Avon District Council. It is the only document in the archive that looks at The Retreat as architecture, and its verdict is grudging:

South from the maypole the High Street is terminated by The Retreat, which although slightly incongruous does the job admirably, see fig 12.

Welford-on-Avon Conservation Area Study, July 1992 15/08

The schedule is drier: “Map Ref 151 (see fig 12) – The Retreat, High Street. C20, detached, dwelling, painted render and brick and mock framing, plain tile roof, two storey.” 15/08 Next to it, Map Ref 29 is “Weston Close, Frog Lane ... Grade II. The nucleus is probably C17 ... (see figs 12 & 42)”. The fact that fig. 12 is cited for both buildings confirms that the old farmhouse is the white building at the left of the photograph.

“Incongruous” is fair, by the study’s standards. Welford’s character, it says, comes from its forty or so timber-framed and thatched buildings and from detached houses that “sit amidst trees, hedges and gardens” and “remain hidden until one approaches”. The Retreat is the opposite: a large, symmetrical, mock-Tudor villa set where it closes the view down the whole High Street. It is the kind of house George Wright, the headmaster, had in mind in 1915 when he complained that the village’s thirty-three new houses were “built for the most part of the inevitable red brick, which is not beautiful” and had made Welford “quite suburban”. 25/07; 46/37–95 Yet the study’s authors also saw that a street needs an end, and that this house gives it one. “Does the job admirably” is the closest the archive comes to praise for The Retreat.

The study treated The Retreat as a neutral building: neither listed nor singled out as a problem. Its recommendations for this end of the village concerned overhead wires, like the ones crossing Weston Close in fig. 42, and screening new development. 15/08 The 2014 “Historic Development” map in the archive colours buildings by century of construction. The list of names transcribed from it does not mention The Retreat or the Old Well House, so the archive cannot confirm how the district council recorded the house that year. 47/665

The Old Well House After 1992

At some point after Mrs Cope, and after the 1992 study, which still calls it The Retreat, the house was renamed the Old Well House. The only witness is the folder 46 talk, which uses the new name as already familiar. 46/37–95 That talk mentions an earlier talk “last September” on James Matthews and the inquiries of Councillor

Barnes, and the Society's catalogue dates it to the 2000s. So the change probably happened in the 1990s or 2000s. The archive gives no exact date, no owner who made the change, and no reason.

Why "Old Well"? The most natural explanation is that a well was found or restored in the grounds: the old farmyard well of the Perks holding, or the well that gave the house its "Good water supply" in 1927. Wells were common in Welford. Sale particulars of the 1920s to 1950s mention them repeatedly, along with pumps, soft-water tanks and force pumps on kitchen sinks. 11/30 The 1992 study's list of village artefacts includes a water pump. 15/08 But no document in the archive mentions a well at The Retreat. The explanation is plausible, but it is not evidence.

The renaming also explains why the house has been hard to trace. A search under its present name finds one sentence. A search under its old name finds a century of village life: the carrier's yard, the Windsors' failed schemes, a hospital chairman, ten years of fête committees, twenty years of plays, a coffee morning for Weston church, and a planner's judgement that it was incongruous but useful. Like the farmhouse next door, which became Weston Close after a field name in its deeds, the Old Well House took a name that looks backwards. In both cases the new name hides the history that the old name shows.

What the house tells us A villa at the edge

The Old Well House is not old by Welford's standards. Forty-five of the sixty-six buildings on the statutory list are sixteenth or seventeenth century, and twenty-six are thatched. 47/1-66 The Retreat is a twentieth-century house with mock timber framing, and it has never been listed. Its history is worth telling because of where it stands and who lived in it.

It stands at an edge, both physically and socially. Until the 1920s it was literally the last house before the fields. It was built on a farmyard, the stables and cowsheds of a family who had carted Welford's fruit to Birmingham by night. It was built by and for a new kind of resident: people of "private means", as the 1911 census put it, who came from Birmingham, Liverpool and the spa towns for a rural retreat and then looked for ways to make it pay. The Book of Gossip shows how they were seen. The old Welford family that kept the notebook watched the newcomers with a mixture of amusement

and disdain, and recorded their marriages, quarrels, money troubles and bridge.

Twenty years later the same house was home to a man who did a great deal to hold the village together. A civil servant and tenant, William Swinnock ran the fêtes, kept the Trust's books, sat on the parish council and the Legion committee, and produced the plays that brought a royal visitor to the Memorial Hall hut. His successors at The Retreat kept up the link: Mrs Doherty as dramatic society secretary, and Mrs Cope with her coffee mornings and Local History Society subscriptions. The 1960s planning permission for houses on its orchard, and later the renaming, show the village changing around it as Wright had predicted in 1915.

The archive's record of the house is mostly incidental. It is an address on a letterhead, a line in a directory, a place where a meeting was held, a landmark for a footpath. It holds no deeds, no plans, no photograph earlier than 1992, and no portrait of any occupant. Pieced together, the incidental mentions still make a full history of an ordinary large house in an English village through the twentieth century.

Gaps and conflicting sources

WHAT THE ARCHIVE DOES NOT HAVE

- No deeds, conveyances or building plans for The Retreat. The builder, the cost and the exact date of building are unknown. The Book of Gossip's "new house" in 1902 is the only dating evidence. 21/05
- No photograph earlier than 1992. The only image of the house is fig. 12 of the Conservation Area Study. 15/08 The 1903 OS map is too small in scale to show it clearly. 46/14
- The owner who lived at Rest Awhile and offered the property in 1927 is not named, and neither is the buyer in 1937. It is not known who owned The Retreat between the Windsors and the Dohertys. 11/30
- Arthur Frederick Robotham (1914) appears only in Kelly's directory. 48/21 Nothing else is known of him.
- William Ewes Swinnock's origins, the start of his tenancy, his place of burial and Mrs Swinnock's first name are all unrecorded.
- Whether the Dohertys owned or rented The Retreat, and when they moved there, is not recorded. The c.1960 planning permission for four houses is described only as "4 — planning permission", with no site named. Placing it on The Retreat's orchard is an inference. 20/06
- Mrs Constance K. Cope's dates of arrival and departure are unknown. The archive names no occupant after 1987.
- No document gives the date of, or reason for, the change of name to the Old Well House. No document mentions a well at the house.

- The Crimean War letter said to be among the Weston Close deeds is not in the archive. 11/10

WHERE THE SOURCES DISAGREE

- **Date of the house.** The folder 46 talk places The Retreat on “the 1901 map”. The Book of Gossip calls it new in 1902, and the Windsor research notes put Frank in Handsworth in 1901. The map was probably the 1903 edition. 46/37–95; 21/05; 46/15–36
- **Frank Windsor’s origins.** “A native of Cheshire” whose business life was in Liverpool (Book of Gossip). Born at Northwood, Shropshire, in 1873, a soap manufacturer at Handsworth in 1901 (Society notes). Birthplace read as “Shepshed [?], Mydelland [?]” in the 1911 schedule. Married in 1900 (talk), 1901 (notes), or about 1901 (“married 10 yrs” in 1911). 21/05; 46/15–36; 48/10; 46/37–95
- **“Well House” in 1911.** The 1911 summary-book transcription has a “Well House” occupied by Mr Sealy. The 1901 census, Kelly’s 1914 and the Book of Gossip all put the Sealys at Vine House, so this is almost certainly a misreading and not this house. 48/09; 48/08; 48/21; 21/09
- **“The Retreat / The Poplars”.** The 1911 summary book pairs the two names for schedule 53, but Kelly’s 1914 treats The Poplars as a separate house. 48/09; 48/21
- **Robert Perks’s age and birthplace** vary between censuses: about 42 in 1861, about 60 in 1881, 70 in 1891; born at Alcester (1861, 1891) or Cleeve, Worcestershire (1881). 48/04; 48/06; 48/07
- **Weston House.** Barnes and a 1987 letter say Shorthouse built Weston House. The 1940 deed gives his address as “Solano”, and a Society note calls his house Solamo. A Weston House already existed in 1911 under C. B. Green. 47/90; 01/01–385; 59/01; 10/48; 48/10
- **The royal visit.** The Rural Community Council’s invitation and an advance notice give Wednesday 7 December 1938. The scrapbook catalogue gives 13 December. The painted programme is dated 14 December. 62/01
- **Swinnock’s initials** appear as W. E., W. S., W. M. and (in minute signatures) T. The full name in the dramatic society rules, William Ewes Swinnock, settles it. 61/01–09; 62/01; 57/01
- **Tennis letterhead.** The sheet naming Swinnock of The Retreat as tennis club secretary is undated and conflicts with R. E. Wright being secretary in 1937. It is probably post-war. 63/09
- **Readings in the 1938 parish history** (“Poland’s [?] Villa”, “Fitzjer [?] Corner”) are uncertain and not found elsewhere. 54/105

SOURCES USED

- 46/37–95 Society talk "Welford in the Early Years of the New (20th) Century" (identifies The Retreat as the Old Well House); 46/15–36 research notes (Frank Robert Windsor, 46/32)
- 21/01–21 The Welford Book of Gossip, 1915 (Windsors 21/05, Laurences 21/06, Mainwarings 21/07, Sealeys 21/09)
- 11/10 house note no. 28, Rest-a-While now Weston Close; 11/21, 07/09, 13/32 Roland Harris on Perks the carrier; 54/105 parish history, 1938
- Census: 48/04 (1861), 48/06 (1881), 48/07 (1891), 48/08 (1901), 48/09 and 48/10 (1911); directories 46/98 (1897), 48/21 (1914)
- 11/30 sale particulars notebook, 1815–1956 (The Retreat, Rest Awhile, The Nook: 31 March 1927 and 2 July 1937; Gorse Hey and The Ashes for wells)
- 23/91–96 newspaper report, Hospital meeting 1922; 59/01 Shorthouse deed 1940; 10/32–56 (10/48); 47/90 Barnes news sheet; 01/01–385 Herald letters c.1987
- 60/01 Trust Fund minute book 1934–85; 06/14 and 60/03 memorandum of agreement 1934; 57/01, 57/02, 57/06–15, 58/01–09 fête committee and trust papers; 54/02 fêtes 1937–39; 63/03, 63/09 tennis club
- 61/01–09 dramatic society minute books and histories; 62/01 scrapbook 1937–70 (royal programme p. 200); 07/07 Herald report 1938; 24/14 programme 1953
- 19/06, 19/07 parish councillors 1949–64; 13/15 village news c.1950–51; 56/01 British Legion; 55/01–03 Festival of Britain committee; 60/04 Memorial Hall deeds (1952 witness)
- 01/56 People in Welford 1950; 20/06 Houses in Welford about 1960; 11/14 parish magazine March 1959; 54/01 flower show; 50/02 Diamond Jubilee list 2012
- 12/03 Stratford Public Paths Statement 1961 and 1968 review; 20/04, 47/98 inclosure award; 10/26, 34/01–04 early roads; 21/22–66 Woodward anecdotes (Spot Loggin)
- 12/07, 27/01–09 Local History Society cash book; 03/01–19 parish newsletter c.1974; 30/05 electoral register 1987–88
- 15/08 Conservation Area Study, July 1992 (figs. 12, 18, 42; building-groups plan; Map Refs 29, 150, 151); 46/14 OS six-inch map, 1903; 47/1–66 statutory list; 47/665 historic development map, 2014; 25/07 G. Wright, 1915
- Set aside: 23/82–83 (a "Well House" at Ilmington spa, not Welford)