

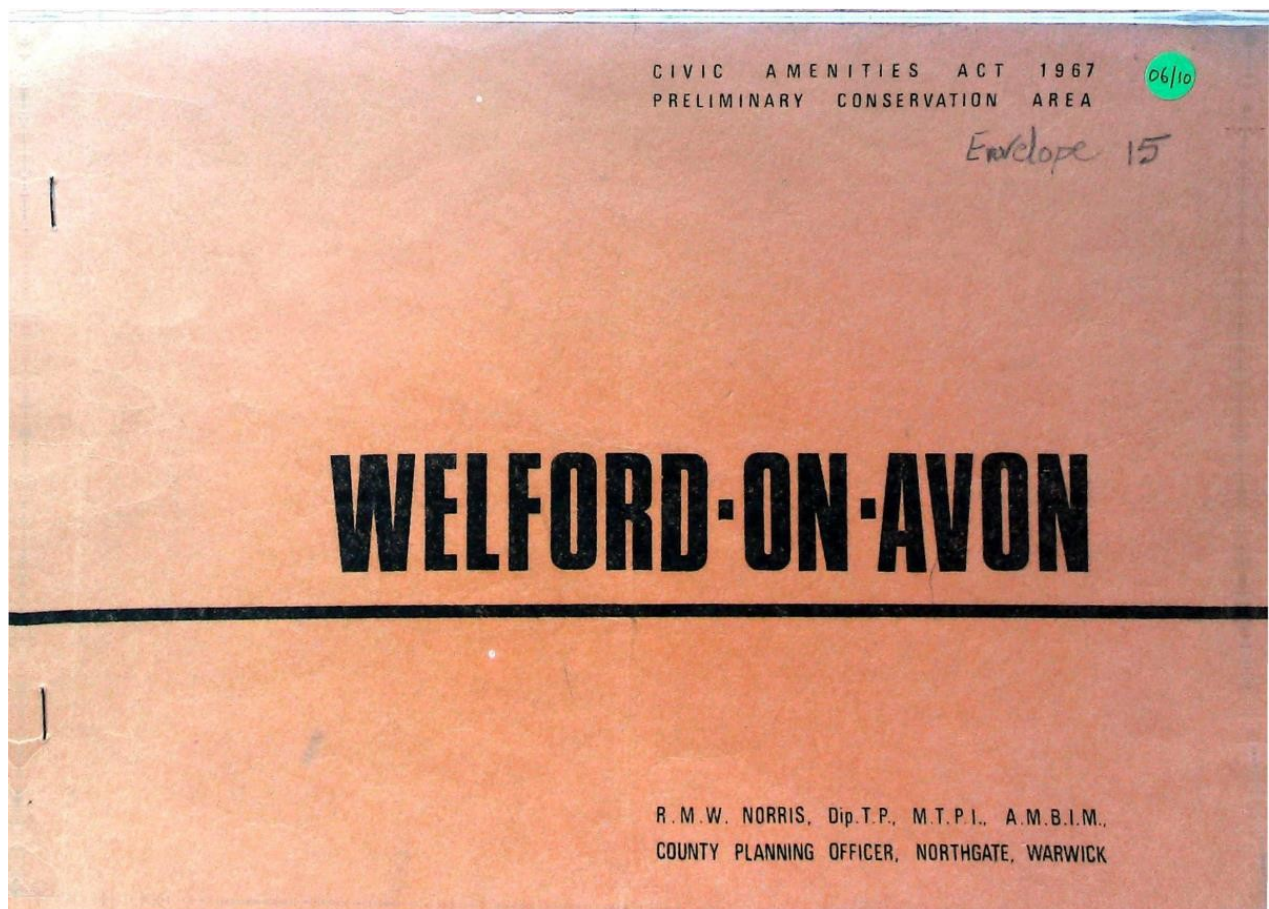
The Welford-on-Avon Conservation Area

An essay drawn from the Welford & Weston Local History Society archive.

Introduction

Welford-on-Avon has been a Conservation Area since 1969. That puts it in the first generation of Conservation Areas, designated within two years of the Civic Amenities Act 1967, which first allowed councils to protect whole places rather than single buildings. A District Council information sheet of April 1998 gives the dates plainly: the area "was originally designated in 1969 and revised, with alterations to the boundaries, in 1993" (47/667). Between those two dates lie the most important documents in this essay: the County Planning Officer's preliminary report of about 1968 to 1970 (06/10), and the much fuller Conservation Area Study written for Stratford-on-Avon District Council in July 1992 by Alan Smith and Partners with Clent Landscape Design (15/08).

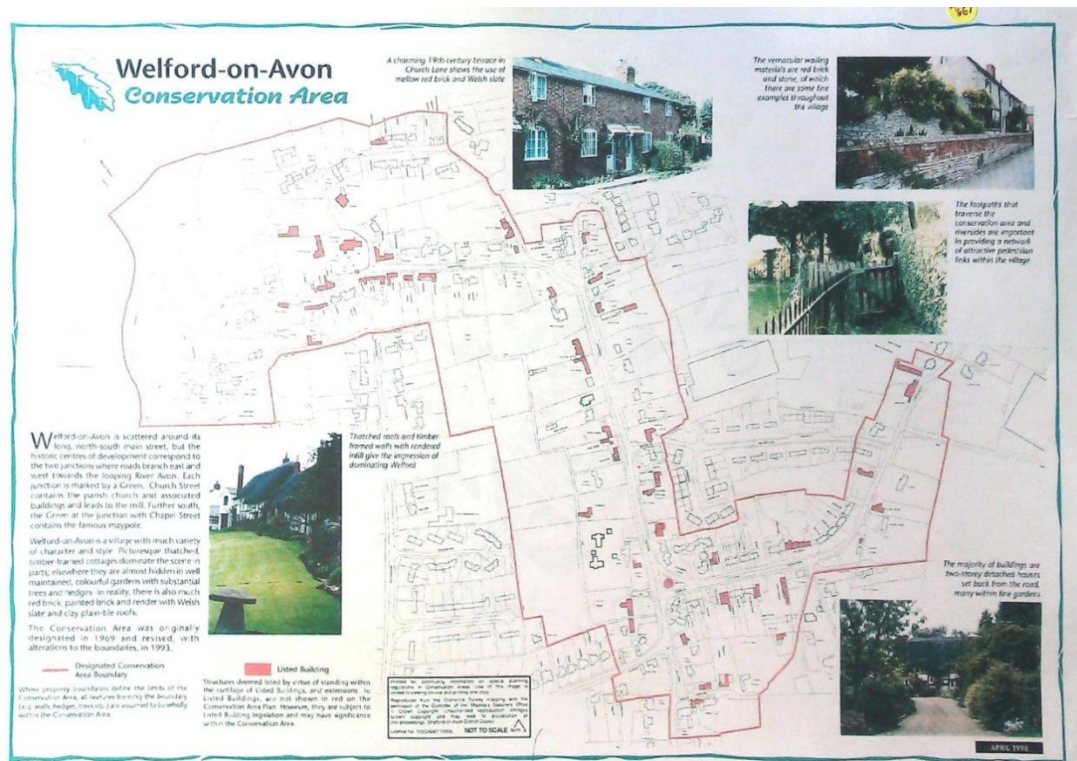
The statutory definition has not changed since 1967. A Conservation Area is "an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance" (06/10; 15/08, para 1.1). The words matter. Listing protects a building; designation protects a character. It covers the spaces between buildings, the hedges and verges, the trees, the walls and gates, the views out to the river and the way the village sits in its fields. Both the 1969 and the 1992 reports stress the same point in almost the same words: the emphasis is on "control rather than prevention, to allow the area to remain alive and prosperous" (06/10, p.1; 15/08, para 1.2).



The cover of Warwickshire County Council's report "Civic Amenities Act 1967: Preliminary Conservation Area, Welford-on-Avon", issued by R. M. W. Norris, County Planning Officer. It is undated, but it names the Minister of Housing and Local Government, a post abolished in October 1970. The ink note "Envelope 15" shows it was filed with the Parish Council papers (06/10).

What the designation protects is a long, loose village. Welford lies four miles east-south-east of Stratford, inside a loop of the Avon that wraps it on the north, west and east. Its spine is the High Street, running north to south from Binton Bridges. Two lanes branch off it towards the river: Church Street and Boat Lane to the west, past St Peter's Church to the old corn mill, weir and lock; and Chapel Street and Duck Lane to the east, past the Maypole Green to Manor Farm and the water's edge (15/08, section 1). The 1998 sheet summed this up as two greens at two junctions: "Each junction is marked by a Green. Church Street contains the parish church and associated buildings and leads to the mill. Further south, the Green at the junction with Chapel Street contains the famous maypole" (47/667).

The numbers give a sense of scale. In 1962 the county counted 54 listed buildings in the parish (06/09; 19/44). By September 1981 the conservation map showed 67 (37/01–04). The 1992 study found "some sixty-five individual listed buildings, in addition to the Maypole and Lychgate which are also listed", with two more just outside the boundary, and roughly eighty unlisted buildings inside it, "many of them making a useful contribution" (15/08, section 1). About forty of the buildings are timber framed and thatched. Pevsner's one-line verdict is quoted in the study: "a village of pretty houses, many thatched with plenty of space around."



"Welford-on-Avon Conservation Area", the District Council's information sheet of April 1998. The red line is the designated boundary and the solid red blocks are listed buildings. The text records designation in 1969 and revision in 1993 (47/667).

The Conservation Area is also a story about the village's own people. The Welford and Weston Local History Society was founded on 12 December 1969, in the same year as designation (37/01-04). Within a few years its members were reading planning maps at their meetings, writing to the Parish Council about the listed-building schedule, and objecting to developments "in the centre of the village, a conservation area, surrounded by listed buildings" (37/01-04, 23 March 1984). The archive that this essay draws on is in part the record of that watchfulness.

The essay follows the order a visitor might take. It begins with the setting: the river, the gravel terrace the village stands on, and the approaches. It then traces how the village grew around several separate centres, and the materials its builders used. Three sections walk the area itself: the High Street with the Bell and the Maypole; Church Street, Church Lane and St Peter's; and Boat Lane, the mill and the riverside, with Chapel Street to the east. It then turns to the trees, hedges and open spaces, to the listed buildings, and to the pressures and planning battles that have shaped the area since the 1960s. References in brackets are to the Society's archive by folder and item, so that 15/08 is Folder 15, item 08.

The setting: river, terrace and approaches

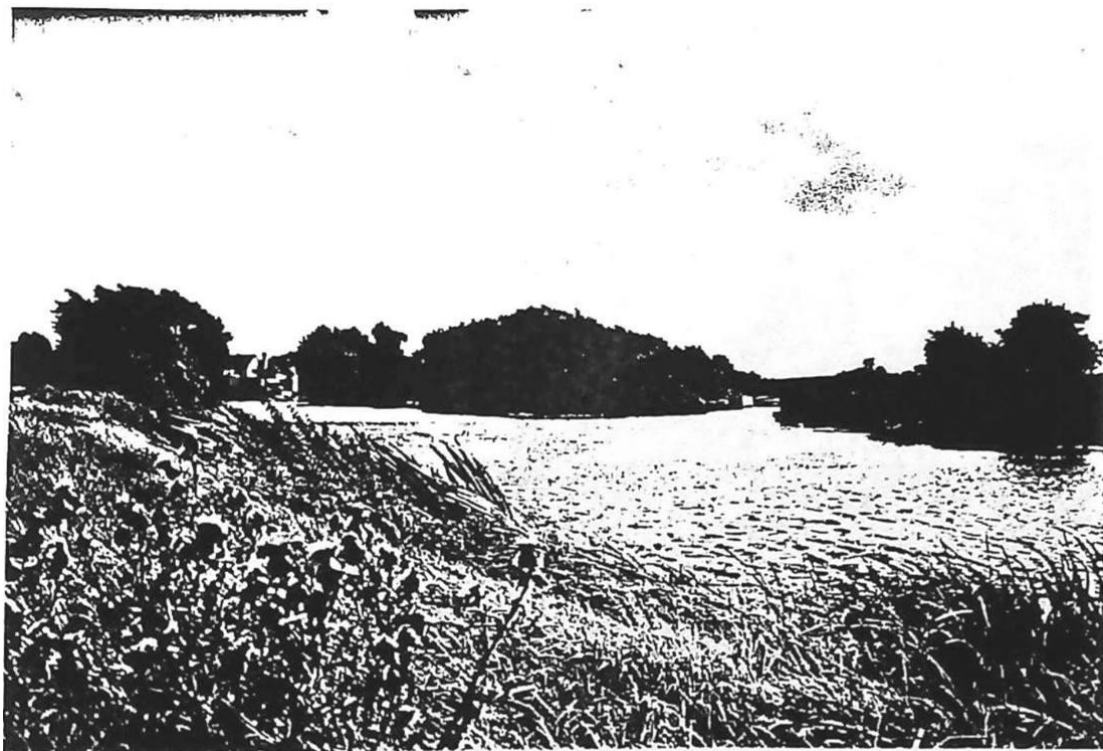
The Conservation Area cannot be understood apart from the river. The 1992 study describes the geography in three sentences: the village "occupies a wide, flat area of land beside the river Avon. It is enclosed by gently rising land to the south, and a loop of the river to the north, west and east. It is surrounded by a landscape of mixed agriculture" (15/08, para 4.1). The landscape plan in the same report marks the river meadows west of the church as an

"area of outstanding landscape beauty", with pasture, small paddocks and hedgerows forming "a buffer between farmland and residential areas", and rising ground towards Welford Hill, Binton Hill and Weston Hill closing the views.

The ground beneath

The Society's own talk on geology explains why the village is where it is (10/29). Welford stands on Jurassic rocks laid down in a warm, shallow sea some 200 million years ago: blue Lias clay, and the grey Lias limestone that was quarried at Binton. During the Ice Age the old river system was dammed into a great lake, and as it drained south-westwards the present Avon took shape. Alternating cold and warm periods left five gravel terraces along the valley. Welford stands mainly on terrace No. 2, with Nos. 4 and 5 nearby; the gravels have yielded hippopotamus bones from a warm phase about 120,000 years ago and later mammoth, woolly rhinoceros and reindeer. The light, dry terrace soils drew settlers from the Stone Age onwards and made the valley "a corridor of movement". The talk concludes that Welford probably became a true village in Saxon times.

The geology shows in the buildings. The grey Lias appears as plinths and wall bases under timber-framed cottages along the High Street, and as whole walls at Manor Farmhouse, "blue lias coursed rubble", and in the lower storey of Waterside Cottage (15/08, Appendix A, refs 19, 28, 37, 38). The study notes that "the vernacular walling materials are red brick and stone, of which there are some fine examples throughout the village" (15/08, para 4.2).



"The weir and river banks with their indigenous riverside vegetation": the Avon at Welford, one of the wildlife habitats named in the 1992 Conservation Area Study (15/08, fig. 31).

The river

The Avon has given the village both its beauty and its hazards. The parish register records the great flood of July 1588, when the water came "a yard and a half" into the mill house, "unthatched the mill", and carried a girl from Grafton a quarter of a mile on a haycock (02/01–12). The Society's talk on the river (52/09) traces the long struggle to make it navigable, from Richard Beauchamp's ambitions in the fifteenth century to the ruinous Welford lock of 1873 and the restoration of the Upper Avon navigation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The William A. Cadbury Lock at Welford was built in May and June 1971 (06/18), and the Parish Council's riverside field at Cress Hill, bought in 1960, was described by the County Land Agent in 1972 as "unique in Warwickshire having frontage to the River Avon which is now navigable" (06/12). The County's Upper Avon Policy Plan of the same year judged Welford too "fragile" for a boating centre and proposed one at Binton Bridges instead (06/18).

The approaches

The 1992 study devotes a page to each road into the village, because the approaches set the scene for the Conservation Area (15/08, para 4.1).

- **From the south, Long Marston Road**, the road "gently drops into the village from Welford Hill" between grass verges and tall native hedges with ash trees. At the Weston junction "the rural character of the road disappears abruptly", replaced by the neat front gardens of modern housing.
- **From the north, Binton Road**, the road crosses the Avon by Binton Bridges. Riverside willows, poplars, ash and sycamore and "bankside vegetation of rushes, reeds and wild flowers" enhance it, but "the poorly screened caravan site, modern road bridge and churned up verges spoil it".
- **From the east, Clifford Chambers Road**, the road crosses flat arable land of large fields and neat hedges.
- **From the west, Barton Road**, the road runs through "piece-meal housing development, caravan parks, small agricultural holdings, orchard remnants, poplar windbreaks, market gardens" and has lost its traditional hedges, though from near the Braggington turning it "affords good views of the village".

Binton Bridges are themselves part of the story. A ford preceded a narrow packhorse bridge first recorded in the thirteenth century; William Silvester replaced it with small stone bridges in 1783, charging an unofficial shilling toll; and the twelve arches of today were widened and strengthened in 1980 at a cost of £25,000 (52/09). When the County proposed further widening for 1985–86, the District Council's planners objected that it "would bring extra traffic through Welford, which is a conservation area", and Councillor Percy Wheeler argued that "the longer the narrow bridge remained as it was the less the chance of heavier traffic using it" (52/09; 01/38–46). The Conservation Area, in other words, was already being used to defend the setting as well as the buildings.



St Peter's Church from Mill Lane. The 1992 study calls the tower "the chief" landmark in a village that has few; the top of the maypole and a handful of great trees are the others (15/08, fig. 17).

From a distance, the study says, the village "gives the appearance of having fairly good tree cover and seems to sit comfortably into the surrounding landscape patchwork of fields, woods and linking hedgerows". Its landmarks are few: the church tower, the top of the maypole, and trees such as "the sycamore in the graveyard, the copper beech in the grounds of Welford House, the lombardy poplars fronting Tudor Vale and the poplars behind the Barn House" (15/08, para 4.1).

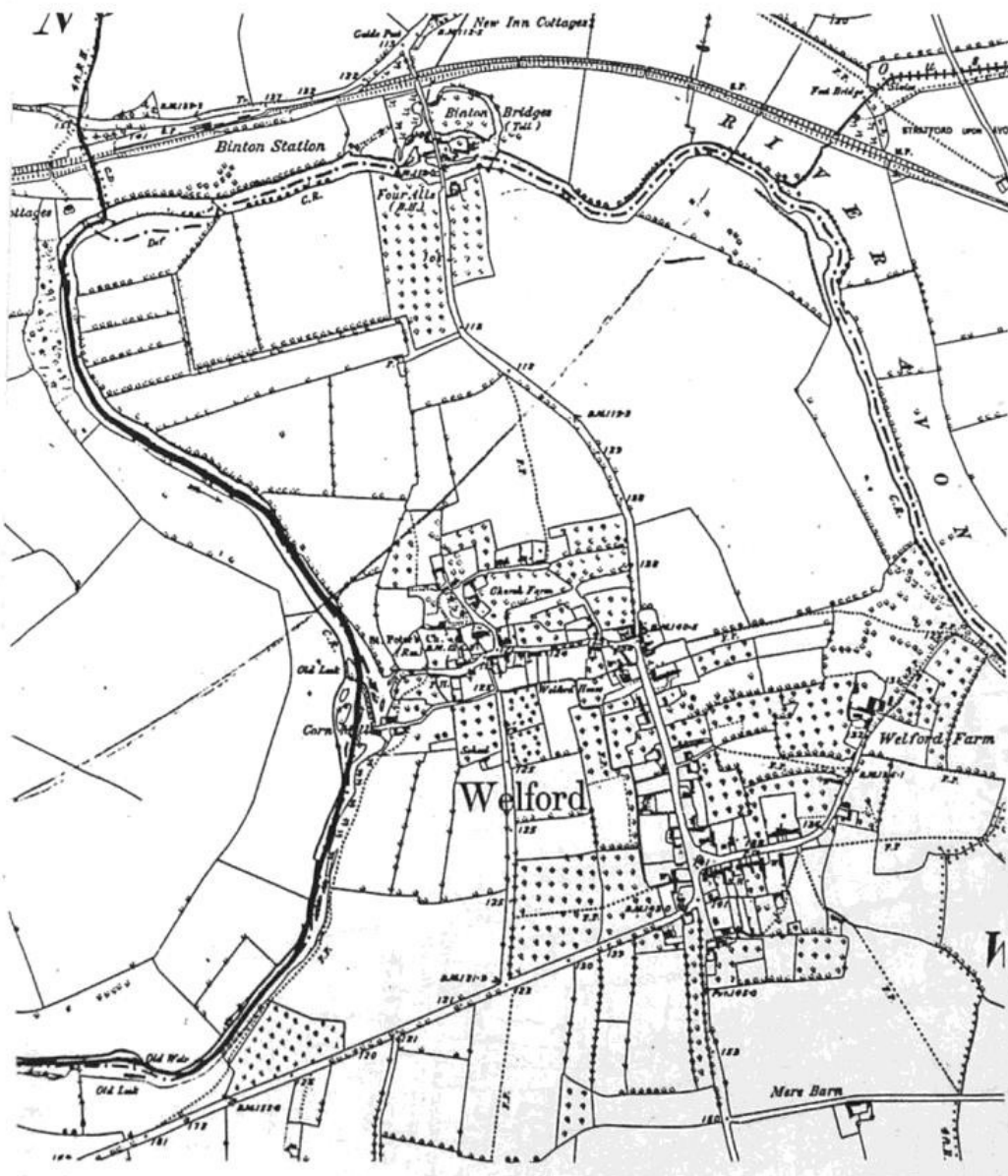
How the village grew

The 1992 study's most useful insight is that Welford has no single centre. It "has developed over time around several separate nuclei, and along the High Street itself, rather than a single village centre. This has given it an evenly spread nature, which in parts is a little 'sub-urban'" (15/08, section 2). The Conservation Area boundary that resulted is not a neat circle round a green but a long, lobed shape, which the 1998 sheet draws as "two lobes joined by the spine of the main street" (47/667).

Saxon and medieval Welford

The study repeats the traditional account of the village's origins: it was "first founded by the monks of the Saxon priory of Deerhurst, near Tewkesbury, a cell of the Abbey of St. Denis, Paris", and it "remained in the county of Gloucestershire" until the twentieth century (15/08, section 2). Domesday Book in 1086 lists Welleford among the Deerhurst lands of St Denis, with meadow, woodland and four mills; Gilda Gray, the rector's wife in the 1950s, left a note placing one of them at the site of the later Welford Mill (52/09). A tithe of 1419 records "a charge for two watermills 20s" (52/09).

The church was the first nucleus. The 1992 study says the first church on the site was built in 1069 and that only the font bowl survives from it, though the statutory list calls the bowl thirteenth century and the main fabric twelfth century, with a fourteenth-century chancel (15/08, section 2 and ref 1; 13/02). Around the church gathered the Church Farm group, the rectory and, on the river, the corn mill. The study calls this "the original heart of the old village" and notes that although the area "is now largely residential" it "retains much of its original character".



The 1884 Ordnance Survey extract reproduced in the 1992 study. "By the time of the 1884 Ordnance Survey the pattern of the village is well established" (15/08, section 2).

Several centres

The study's settlement analysis identifies seven building groups: the Church Group; Post Office Green; the Riverside Mill Group; Manor Farm; the Maypole Green Group; the Chapel Street Group; and the Weston Road and Retreat Group (15/08, plan, p.12). Its "Historical Growth" plan reduces these to a sequence:

1. **The original nucleus** around the church, with the former Church Farm group and the corn mill on the river.
2. **An 18th and 19th century nucleus** at the north end of the High Street, where "an informal green forms one nucleus, now defined by a pub, post-office and a variety of dwellings".

3. **The Maypole nucleus** towards the south end of the High Street, where Chapel Street leads east.
4. **The former Welford Farm nucleus**, now Manor Farm, at the east end of Chapel Street, with the Wynns and Flower Cottage group nearby.
5. **"Spasmodic infill" along the High Street**, joining these centres together.
6. **Twentieth-century infill and expansion**, mostly behind and beyond the old streets.



"Settlement Analysis: Historical Growth", from the 1992 study. Its labels include "original nucleus", "former Church Farm group", "18/19th C nucleus", "Maypole nucleus", "former Welford Farm nucleus, now Manor Farm" and "20th century expansion" (15/08, p.12).

Enclosure and the nineteenth century

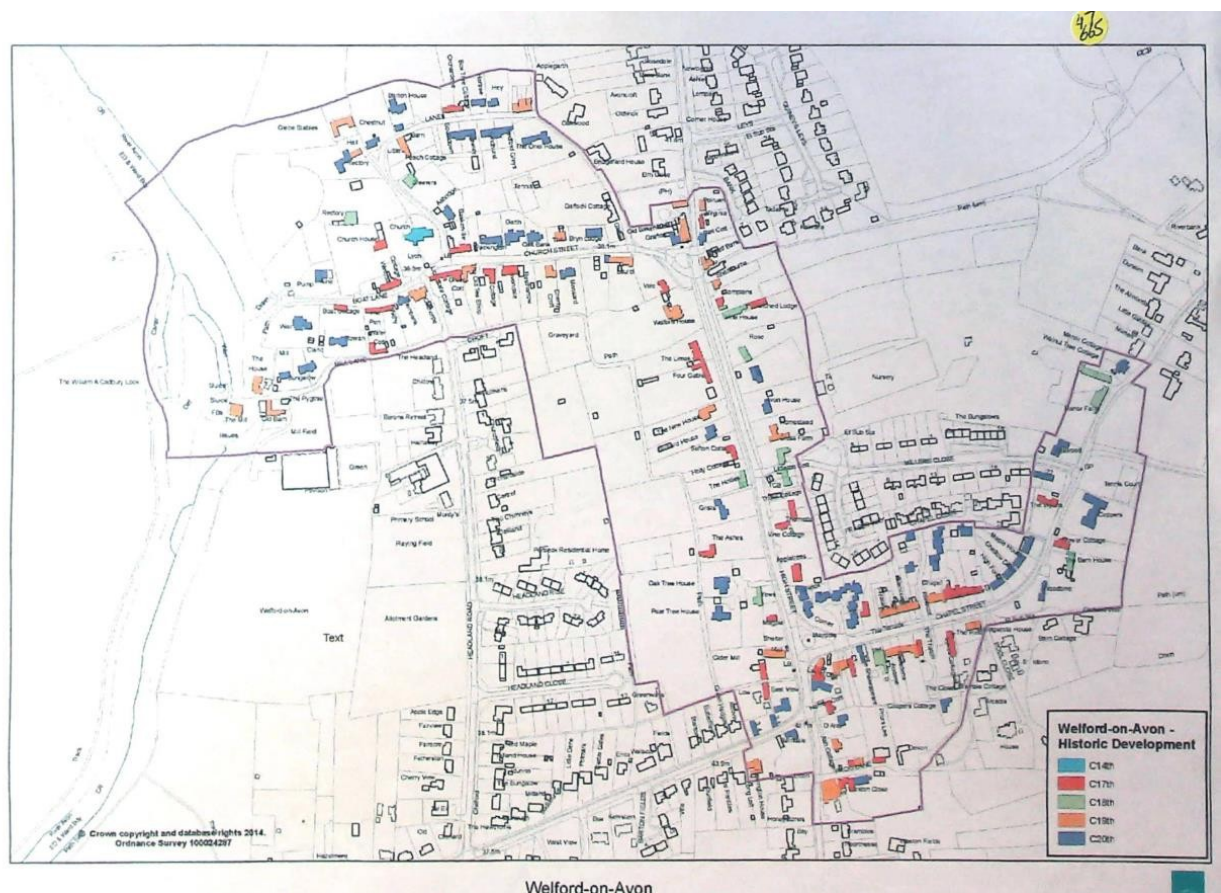
The 1802 enclosure award fixed the roads and field boundaries that still frame the village. Its typed abstract names old enclosures such as Harris's Close, Little Meadow and "The Moor", much of the land belonging to the Duke of Dorset, and it records the "Kings Arms Public House" that became the Bell (01/70). The study sums up what followed: "The history of Welford since the 18th century has been one of continuous infill intensification and ribbon expansion north and south along the main road" (15/08, section 2).

The late nineteenth century brought brick. George Wright, who came to the village in June 1894, wrote in 1915 that only one new house had been built in his first year, against 33 by

1915. He disliked their red brick. Fruit growing and market gardening were the main trades, with cherries and plums as specialities; commuters were moving in, rents were rising beyond farm labourers' reach, and the village was turning "suburban" (15/10). The Victorian brick terraces in Chapel Street and Church Lane, The Orchard in Church Street (dated 1897) and Sherbourne Cottage on the High Street (dated 1891) belong to this phase (15/08, Appendix A, refs 102, 110, 119, 128–129).

The twentieth century

The largest change came after 1945. In 1962 the county reported that the parish population had grown from 664 in 1931 and 787 in 1951 to about 1,000, and that some 90 of its 340 dwellings had been built since 1951, mostly bungalows on Barton Road, Headland Road and Binton Road (19/44; 06/09). A house-by-house survey of about 1960 to 1964 counted 302 houses, 89 bungalows and 108 caravans, and recorded council estates at Headland Rise, Headland Close and Millers Close, with 30 more houses "in process of building" at Quiney's Leys (20/06). The study notes that new roads, "Headland Road and Millers Close have allowed continuing 20th century expansion", but concludes: "For the most part recent developments have had little effect on the quality of the main village core" (15/08, section 2).



"Welford-on-Avon: Historic Development", a District Council map of 2014. Buildings are coloured by century of origin: the church alone in pale blue for the fourteenth century, seventeenth-century buildings in red concentrated along Church Street, Boat Lane and Chapel Street, and twentieth-century estates outside the conservation area line (47/665).

The 2014 map makes the pattern visible at a glance. The red of the seventeenth century clusters tightly along Church Street, Boat Lane and Chapel Street; the green of the eighteenth century is sparse, "barely half a dozen buildings across the whole village"; the nineteenth-century orange infills Chapel Street and the High Street; and the twentieth century fills everything else, including some old plots within the historic core (47/665). It is a map of exactly the places the Conservation Area was drawn to protect.

Materials and building traditions

The Conservation Area's character rests on a small palette of materials used over three centuries: oak framing, wattle or brick infill, thatch, grey Lias, red brick, plain clay tiles and Welsh slate. The 1992 study puts it neatly: "Thatched roofs and timber framed walls with rendered infilling give the impression of dominating Welford. In reality there is also much red brick, painted brick and render" (15/08, para 3.3). Both halves of that sentence matter.

Timber frame and thatch

Read straight through, the statutory list describes "a timber-framed, thatched village that has kept an unusual amount of its seventeenth-century fabric" (47/1–66). Forty-five of its sixty-six entries are given a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century origin and twenty-six are thatched. The recurring formula is almost monotonous: "House. C17 with later alterations. Timber-frame with painted brick infill on rubble plinth; steeply pitched thatched roof with brick end stacks." Almost all are a single storey with attics, of two or three bays, with the framing still exposed at the back where nobody ever refronted it.

The 1992 study counted about forty timber-framed and thatched buildings in the Conservation Area, "either two storeys or single storey with attics". The rest, about a hundred, "vary enormously but for the most part are two storey with simple double pitched roofs". Dormers are few and mostly gabled; windows are "predominantly white painted multipane casements with some original leaded casements"; bay windows are rare and porches restrained (15/08, para 3.2).



Nos 1 to 3 Chapel Street and Cleve Cottage, "a range of four cottages, C17, timber framed faced in plaster, continuous thatched roof, one storey and attic" (Conservation Area Study, July 1992, Building Ref 26; 15/08, p.4).

The best surviving framing is decorative as well as structural. Tudor Vale on the High Street, sixteenth century in origin, has "close set studding to lower storey, geometrical framing to upper storey, carved scroll work" on its north gable; Four Gables has small gabled cross-wings at either end; Jasmine Cottage on the High Street is two seventeenth-century cottages at right angles to the road, now one house (15/08, Appendix A, refs 38, 39, 41). Where infill has been opened up, the old panels are wattle and daub; elsewhere they were replaced in brick nogging, as at Virginia Cottage and Hornby Cottage (refs 32, 49).

Thatch needs renewing every generation, and the archive keeps a record of the craft. A Birmingham Post photograph of the 1970s shows David Rimell of Binton dressing new straw with a wooden leggett around an eyebrow dormer on Vine Cottage (13/19). Six instant prints of August 1980 follow the rethatching of Tenpenny in Boat Lane from the old worn roof, through the bare rafters, to the finished ridge with the church tower behind (24/30).

Lias and brick

Stone was used where it was strongest. Several of the High Street houses stand on a "lias plinth", and Manor Farmhouse at the end of Chapel Street is built entirely of "blue lias coursed rubble" (15/08, Appendix A, refs 28, 37, 38, 49, 52). An architect who examined the old mill thought its gable of "unusually large square blocks of coursed masonry" might be sixteenth century (52/09).

Brick arrived in the eighteenth century and became the main material in the nineteenth. Cleavers in Church Lane, "a good mid C18 house of pleasant red brick" in Flemish bond with stone quoins and keystones, is the only Grade II* house and, as the list summary puts it, "the one house in the village built to be looked at" (15/08, ref 14; 47/1–66). Daffodil Cottage has a C18 brick south front over a timber frame; The Hollies is early nineteenth-century red brick of three storeys under Welsh slate; and the Shakespeare Inn in Chapel Street is "early C19 brick" with a moulded doorcase and dentil cornice (refs 5, 24, 55).

By the 1990s the roofs told the same mixed story. "Apart from thatch there are equal amounts of plain tile and Welsh slate roofing. There are some unusual early interlocking clay tiles as well as modern interlocking concrete tiles" (15/08, para 3.3). The 1998 sheet chose to illustrate this with "a charming 19th-century terrace in Church Lane" showing "the use of mellow red brick and Welsh slate" (47/667).

Walls, gates and paving

The study extends the idea of material to the ground and boundaries. The walls are red brick and stone, but "some old walls have been unsympathetically repaired using inappropriate materials". Other boundaries are low Victorian cast-iron railings, timber picket fences, timber bollards with chains and many period gates, and "the use of traditional, timber five-bar gates on many driveways and field entrances contributes to its rural appearance". Tarmac dominates the surfaces, but stone sett kerbs survive in places, with "stone flag paving to some of the cottages on Church Street, Boat Lane, fronting Flower Cottage, outside Manor Farm, and the stone sett footway outside Mill Farm" (15/08, para 4.2).

Restoration and over-restoration

The compilers of the statutory list were not uncritical. Their introduction to Welford calls it "an extremely pretty and well-known village" but adds that "it is now residential in character and a large number of cottages have been somewhat over-restored" (13/02). The 1992 study repeated the charge: Welford "in parts is a little over-restored" (15/08, section 1).



A timber-framed cottage stripped to its frame and props during restoration, probably in the 1980s. The archive links this run of photographs (16/14–17) to the restoration of Glebe Cottage by C. Padbury & Son, whose van appears in 16/17.

The tension between keeping a building alive and keeping it authentic runs through all the conservation documents. The 1992 study answered it in its general introduction: "Few buildings exist now in the form in which they were originally conceived. Conservation allows for change as well as preservation", provided new work follows "fundamental architectural principles of scale and the proper arrangement of materials and spaces and show respect for their neighbours" (15/08, para 1.3).

The High Street, the Bell and the Maypole

The High Street is the spine of the Conservation Area, and the 1992 study treats it as a sequence of discoveries. "Detached houses and cottages sit amidst trees, hedges and gardens. Many remain hidden until one approaches the driveways and this creates pleasant surprises as each building is revealed" (15/08, para 3.1). The county's first report had already picked out the same quality: "the strong linear hedgerows interspersed with trees provide an important linking feature and should be maintained and replaced wherever necessary", while "terminal features" at either end gave "a strong feeling of identity within the old village" (06/10, p.3).

Arrival at the north end

Coming in from Binton Bridges, the High Street "gradually dissolves into fairly low key development". The 1992 consultants thought the outbuildings at the back of the Bell and the villa called Polruan made "a significant contribution to the sense of enclosure and arrival", and recommended extending the boundary to take them in. This was the only extension they proposed, and the boundary was duly revised in 1993 (15/08, para 5.2; 47/667).

Just south of that point the High Street meets Church Street at Post Office Green, "a small but attractive patch of green space" with "its gnarled pear tree". The study disliked its "untidy grouping of signs, notice board, litter bin and modern concrete seat", but thought the Post Office and pub on the north side "complete the idyllic village scene" (15/08, paras 3.1, 4.2).

The Bell

The Bell stands on the corner of the High Street and Binton Road. It was formerly the King's Arms: the 1802 enclosure award names the "Kings Arms Public House" (01/70), and notes in the archive record its purchase by Badson in 1785 for £475 and its use for the court leet and the vestry (11/15). It was the village's auction room. Sales were held there from 1815 to 1863 and again in 1935 and 1940 (11/30), and the Society's 1983 list notes it as the place where "auctions, Court Leet and village meetings were held" (10/32). Landlords recorded in the directories include M. Parker in 1850 and James Buckingham in 1878 (11/20). The present building is plainer than its history: the 1992 study describes it as "C19, public house, brick, slate roof, two storey" and lists it, with its outbuildings, as a building of group value rather than a listed one (15/08, refs 114–115).

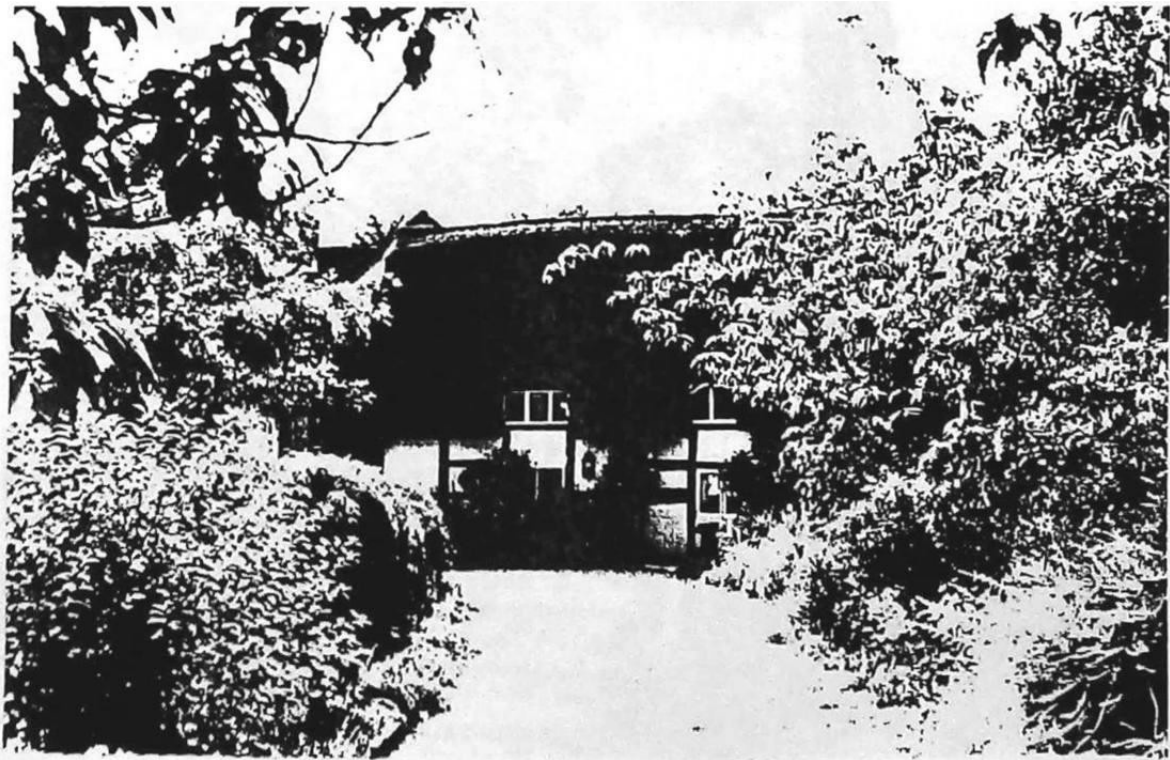


The Bell Inn, High Street, in the 1992 Conservation Area Study (15/08, fig. 72). The study describes it as nineteenth-century brick under a slate roof, forming a group with the Old Bakehouse and the Post Office.

Houses along the street

South of the Bell the street is lined with the cottages that give the area its name for thatch and timber. The listed run includes Hornby Cottage, with a cedar in its garden that the study singles out for the future; Apple Trees, formerly Maycott; Vine House with its timber-framed barn; Compton House and Jasmine Cottage on lias plinths; Tudor Vale; The Limes; Four Gables; Magpie Cottage; Cider Mill Cottage; Low Thatch; Thorn Cottage; Virginia Cottage; Sefton Cottage; The Hollies Cottage; The Ashes; and The Hollies (15/08, Appendix A, refs 32–55). The 1967 list grouped several of them as small ensembles, such as Apple Trees, Vine and Thorn Cottages, The Limes with Four Gables, and Sefton Cottage with The Hollies (13/02).

The houses have their own histories in the archive. Virginia Cottage, a seventeenth-century timber frame with red brick nogging, thatch and a lias plinth, was bought by Sarah Rosetta Matthews in December 1910 for £300 and stayed in her family until 1984 (15/08, ref 49; 47/1–66; 45/01–51). Sefton Cottage, where the Playing Field Trust held its first meeting in November 1934, was the home of the Boraston sisters and was sold for £1,775 in August 1940 (60/01; 11/30). The Hollies was where James Mills ran local industries, needle-making among them (10/32).



Low Thatch, High Street: "C17 square timber framed cottage with attached barn, thatched roof, one storey plus attic". The study uses it to illustrate how High Street houses "remain hidden until one approaches the driveways" (15/08, fig. 11 and ref 44).

Not everything on the street is old, and the study is frank about it. Bell Cottage, Avon House, Chesleys and Homestead are twentieth-century; Badsey and Lyttleton Cottages are a twentieth-century conversion of nineteenth-century farm buildings; Sherbourne Cottage is dated 1891 (15/08, refs 117–124). The Memorial Hall near the south end, opened in December 1923 after a long village dispute over its site, is recorded as "C20, detached, painted render, brick, interlocking tile roof, one storey" (15/08, ref 156; 23/91–100).

The Maypole Green

At the junction with Chapel Street the High Street widens into the main village green, the heart of the southern lobe of the Conservation Area. It "holds the Maypole and fine horse chestnut tree", but "the space itself is perhaps defined more by roads trees and hedges than by buildings" (15/08, para 3.1). The maypole stands "on a raised well-kept lawn" with "a superb specimen horse chestnut with surrounding tree seat" (para 4.2).



"The raising of Welford-on-Avon's maypole in 1896." The typed caption names the man in the white apron as the village shoemaker for 60 years and superintendent of the Wesleyan Sunday School, Mr John Basson beside him, and "the man with arms raised holding the weathervane" as Mr James Matthews, the village blacksmith, who made it (16/52).

The Maypole is listed in its own right. Its listing records "a C20 pole on an earlier platform of uncertain date, 13.5m across, with a running-fox weathervane" and the belief "that this site has been continually used for a maypole since C14 or earlier" (47/1–66). The 1992 study gives its height as 70 feet and calls it "modern" but says it "still dominates this area" (15/08, section 2). The archive records its long succession of poles: a storm on 25 March 1895 brought one down, and the replacement was raised in 1896 (15/10; 16/52); lightning struck it on 24 September 1935 (01/76; 47/925); a pole of 1938 was later cut down by eleven feet (24/23); another went up in 1967 (01/84–85); and Severn Lamb supplied the pole of 2003 (24/27). The horse chestnut beside it was planted in December 1935 (20/01; 20/16).



The Maypole Green in 1992. The study praised the green and its chestnut but criticised "an unfortunate choice of bollards", suggesting "cast iron or timber would be more appropriate" (15/08, fig. 21).

The green was also the area's main disappointment. The consultants thought it "a pity that the recent development at Montagues Corner does [not] take the opportunity to turn this into a positive architectural space", and recommended "altering the road layout to lessen the effect of a traffic roundabout and increasing the amount of pedestrian space" (15/08, paras 3.1, 6.2). The Local History Society had already objected in 1984 to plans for houses "on the corner of High Street and Chapel Street, North side of Chapel Street", finding them "in advance of building line", with "too many houses" and the "back of houses facing road" (37/01–04).

The Green's small furniture was itself recorded as part of the character: the bear and ragged staff figure, a Rural Community Council award; the post box opposite the maypole; and the old red telephone kiosk (15/08, para 4.2 and Appendix C). South of the green, "the High Street is terminated by The Retreat, which although slightly incongruous does the job admirably" (para 3.1).

Church Street, Church Lane and St Peter's

If the Maypole Green is the social heart of the Conservation Area, the churchyard is its architectural heart. The 1992 study, which found most of Welford's best buildings "largely isolated from their neighbours", made one exception: "the area around the churchyard where they make a very picturesque scene" (15/08, para 3.1). The county had said the same twenty years earlier: "Around the Church, scale and sensitivity in development should be priorities and the special character of this area must be maintained" (06/10, p.3). On the 1969 map the church is the one "prominent feature", ringed with important trees.

St Peter's Church

The church is the only Grade I building in the parish (47/1–66). The statutory description runs from a twelfth-century origin, with a Norman south doorway and Norman arcades of two bays, through a mid-fourteenth-century chancel and a west tower heightened in the fifteenth century, to the restoration by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1866–67. Inside are a thirteenth-century font bowl, an early seventeenth-century pulpit and late medieval glass in the south chancel window (13/02; 15/08, ref 1). The fuller list entry adds a slab indented for the brass of a fifteenth-century priest, a war-memorial chancel screen of about 1920, and on a buttress the graffito "I R 1673" (47/1–66).



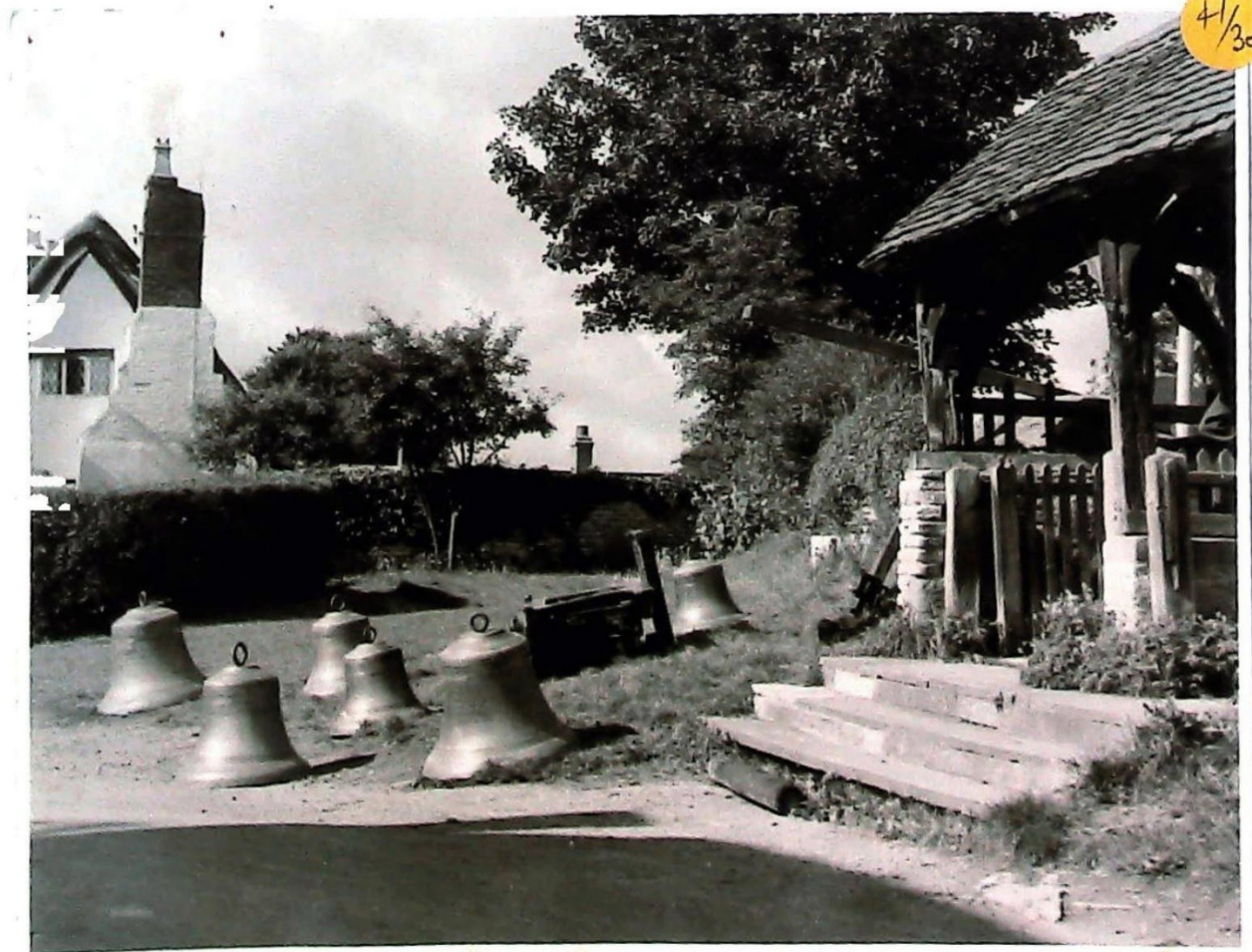
St Peter's Church in 1992. The study describes it sitting "pleasantly in a space defined by landscape, Church House and timber framed cottages" (15/08, fig. 2).

The church's outward appearance has changed more than once in living memory. In 1884 a fire damaged it, and press reports of the fire survive with the bell and clock accounts

(01/100–109). The yellow roughcast described in the list was applied about 1890; in January 1975, at the start of European Architectural Heritage Year, the church council planned to strip the cement plaster and return St Peter's to "its 1340 appearance", after tower repairs costing £3,500 prompted by a dangerous pinnacle (13/25). The six bells were taken down for recasting in 1960 (41/29–30; 02/01–12).

The lych gate

The lych gate is one of the two listed structures that are not buildings, and the most famous single feature of the area. Artists painted it repeatedly in the 1890s (15/10). The 1992 study calls it "reputedly the oldest in England dating from the 14th century", but adds the essential qualification: "now rebuilt" (15/08, section 2). The list dates the original to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, with "open curved shaped braces" (13/02).



The old lych gate in 1960, with St Peter's bells lifted out for recasting. The pencilled note on the back reads "Old Lych Gate – Rebuilt in 1969" (41/30).

The gate was declared unsafe and taken down in the 1960s. An appeal from the Rectory in August 1966, signed by the Rector, K. A. Gray, and the churchwardens, explained that it had

been "photographed and drawn" first so that "an exact replica" could be built, reusing original materials where possible. The letter called it "this Welford feature, well known for over six hundred years". The appeal, which also paid for a churchyard extension, aimed at about £1,200 (09/05; 09/09). The current list entry is candid: the lych gate is "a c1970 reproduction of a C15 original", and the churchyard wall, with its Victorian wall post box, was added to the listing in 1967 (47/1–66). In the 1992 study the rebuilt gate still "frames views, and a simple bench at the site of the village stocks completes the scene" (15/08, para 3.1).

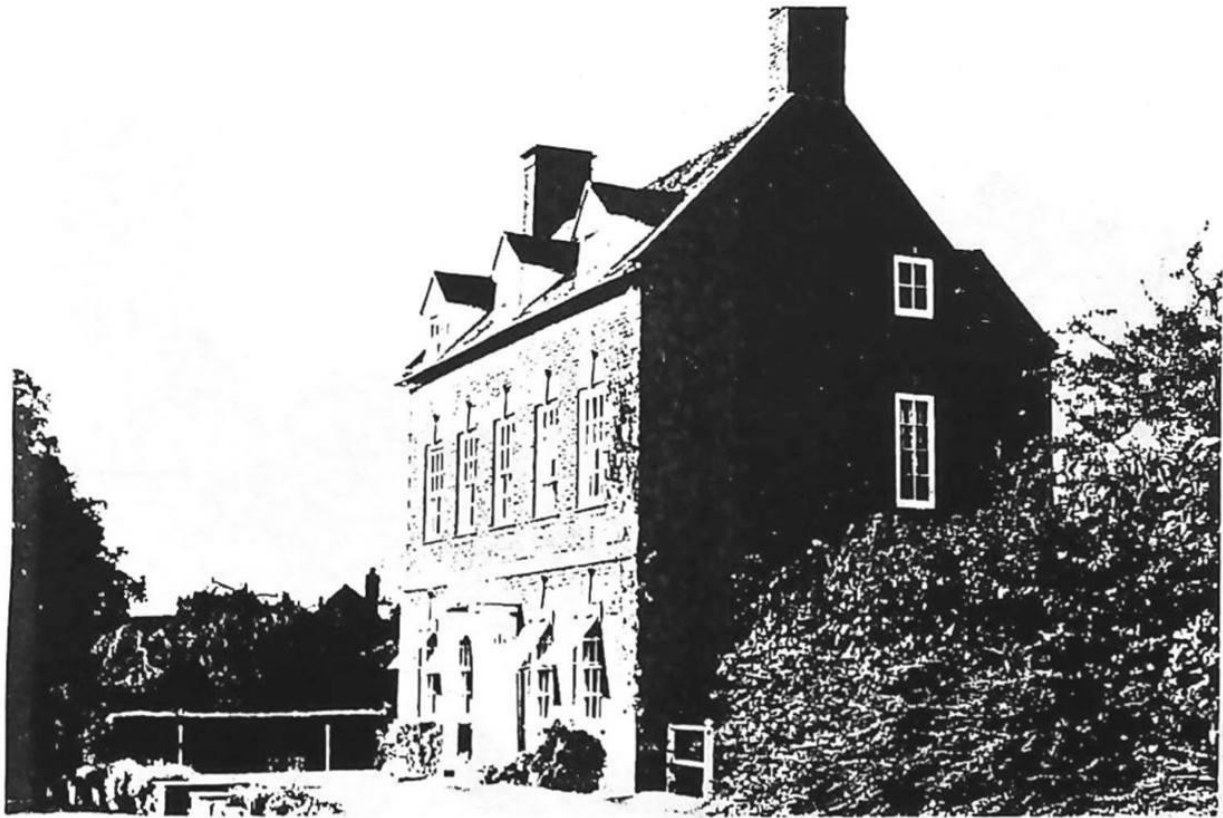
Church Street

Church Street runs east from the church to Post Office Green. Close to the church it "contains much finer timber framed and thatched buildings which are extremely delightful and lead pleasantly to the Churchyard" (15/08, para 3.1). The listed cottages include Lychgate Cottage and Church View, Green Bank, The Rosary, Laburnum Cottage, Baskerville Cottage, Daffodil Cottage, Glebe Cottage, Bridges Cottage, and the row of Cherry Croft, Avondale and Restharrow (refs 4–11, 46, 53, 64). Daffodil Cottage carries a painted board reading ANCIENT LIGHTS, a private claim to a right of daylight that is now a listed feature (47/1–66). Glebe Cottage was described by the Society in 1983 as "one of the oldest in the village" and "originally a priest's house" (10/32).

Further east the street changes. Its eastern end "comprises a group of dwellings each of which makes no architectural reference to its neighbour", though "in common with most of Welford they all have well maintained colourful gardens which help give some consistency" (15/08, para 3.1). Here are The Orchard, dated 1897, Laurel House with its clipped yews, and several twentieth-century bungalows (refs 99–105).

Church Lane

Church Lane runs north around the churchyard. The 1992 study describes "a further group dominated by Cleavers, an outstanding mid-Georgian brick house, grade II* listed", with the Old and New Rectories, Chestnut Cottage, Glebe Stables (converted to a house), Little House and "the pink and white north wing of Cleavers", an area "notable for its variety" (15/08, para 3.1). The Rectory is an eighteenth-century house with "good pedimented doorcase with fanlight"; Church House, "circa 1684–94", shows its timber frame on the east gable but was refaced in modern brick on the south (refs 12, 13).



Cleavers, Church Lane, the only Grade II house in the parish: "good mid C18 house of pleasant red brick with small flemish bond, long and short chamfered stone quoins", with five sash windows and three gabled dormers (15/08, fig. 8 and ref 14).*

Further east, Church Lane holds "another group of contrasting dwellings". The thatched pair of Drakes Cottage (formerly Orchard Dene) and Box Tree Cottage sits among post-war semi-detached houses, and on the north side "a charming 19th century terrace of four cottages" completes the street (15/08, para 3.1). That terrace, Wayside, Jasmine, Melbrook and Pathway Cottages, is not listed; the study classes it as a group of "terraced dwellings, brick, slate roof, two storey" of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century (ref 110). Yet it was the terrace chosen to illustrate the Conservation Area on the 1998 information sheet (47/667).



The terrace of four cottages on the north side of Church Lane (15/08, fig. 9). The 1998 sheet used it to show "the use of mellow red brick and Welsh slate" (47/667).

At the east end of the lane, "lying well back, are three substantial 20th century detached dwellings which continue the spirit of individuality". The study kept them outside the boundary, along with "the two modern dwellings at the east end" (15/08, paras 3.1, 5.2).

Boat Lane, the mill and the river, and Chapel Street

The two lanes that lead off the High Street to the river frame the Conservation Area on either side. Boat Lane and Mill Lane, to the west, lead from the church to the weir and the old corn mill. Chapel Street and Duck Lane, to the east, lead from the Maypole Green past the densest run of old cottages in the village to Manor Farm.

Boat Lane

Westwards from the church, "Boat Lane, contains some fine typical cottages with well tended small decorative foregardens" (15/08, para 3.1). Its listed buildings are Tenpenny, Wincote and The Cottage on the north side, and Boat Cottage and the pair called The Owl Pen and Withy on the south (refs 2, 3, 6, 7, 63). The 1967 list grouped all of them with the church, the lych gate and the listed buildings of Church Street (13/02).

Tenpenny is the smallest and the most curious. The list describes "a very small timber frame dwelling previously an outhouse with thatched roof and modern brick chimney", and later notes that it was built "By Overseers of the Poor" (13/02; 47/1–66). The Society's 1983

review adds that it was built in 1702 "for 2 old men" (10/32). In its garden stands one of the old water pumps that the 1992 study counted among the area's artifacts (15/08, fig. 30 and Appendix C).



Tenpenny Cottage, Boat Lane, with the church tower behind. The study chose this view to illustrate "the area around the churchyard, with its picturesque thatched cottages and well kept cottage gardens which have largely retained their old charm" (15/08, fig. 34).

The unlisted houses of Boat Lane were judged worth keeping too. Calthorpe Cottage is "important to street scape" and Fernbank is a nineteenth-century painted brick house; both, with The Weir House and Nine Gables, appear in the schedule of buildings of group and townscape value (15/08, refs 86–91). The wide grass verges of Boat Lane are named among "the traditional spaces of the village", with staddle stones on the verge (paras 4.2, 4.3). The lane's end was less happy: it "ends dissappointingly at a pumping station with rather poor fencing", and the study asked for the chain-link fence to be replaced (paras 3.1, 4.3).

The mill and the weir

A footpath leads south from Boat Lane to the end of Mill Lane, where "Welford Mill, now converted to a dwelling", the Mill House and the former farm buildings "create a small interesting group" (15/08, para 3.1). The mill was among the Domesday four, and a mill stood here when the 1588 flood unthatched it (52/09; 02/01–12). The building most people remember was described in 1810 as "All that NEW erected water Corn Mill", able to grind "nearly one hundred bags of corn per day". Tom Hawkins took it in 1895 and worked it until 1939; it ran until 1958, two undershot wheels 17 feet 6 inches across driving the stones, a kibbling machine and, through a shaft, a saw bench and a cider press (52/09).

After 1958 the mill stood derelict. The county's first conservation report singled out "the area adjacent to the old Corn Mill" for "a general tidying up" and "additional planting to screen

caravans and unsightly development" (06/10, p.3), and its 1969 map hatched it as the one "area for improvement". Conversion to a private house was approved by 1972, and the work was done in 1973, so complete that "it was a complete rebuild because the mill was largely demolished" (06/11; 52/09). The Society's 1983 review marked the Corn Mill "Delete? Now converted to a dwelling house" (10/32).



The river by the weir and lock. "This section of the river is extremely attractive, the lock the weir, the river and its banks combine with nature to create a fascinating environment" (15/08, fig. 6).

The water meadow between the rectory and the river is, for the 1992 consultants, the best thing in the Conservation Area: "An outstanding attribute of the village is the water meadow between the rectory and the river, with its superb views reminiscent of Constable, the river, the old mill buildings the weir with the locks beyond the willows, water lillies and reeds along the river banks, and the village church and old rectory, framed with fine mature trees" (15/08, para 4.3). It is also one of the three wildlife habitats the study names (para 4.2).

Getting to it has always been the problem. In 1972 E. C. Fisher of the Weir House wrote to the Herald that "there is no public footpath to the weir" on the definitive map, and that the parish "did nothing" while the mill was "derelict and disgustingly untidy" (06/11). Twenty years later the study still found that river access "is awkward on the west side and non-existent on the east", by a footpath that "veers southwards across a caravan park, taking a rather tortuous route" (15/08, paras 3.1, 6.2). Mill Lane itself, with the listed Mill Cottage on its north side, "is largely undeveloped and offers a view of the church"; the Mill Farm

caravan site to its south was kept inside the boundary because "control is desirable" (paras 3.1, 5.2).

Chapel Street and Duck Lane

East of the Maypole, "the north side of Chapel Street is the most densely developed area of Welford" (15/08, para 3.1). Two Victorian brick terraces of four, Nos 2–5 and 6–9, lead to the Wesleyan Chapel and its adjoining house, "and then a splendid thatched timber framed terraced group of cottages", the range of Nos 1–3 and Cleve Cottage. Opposite, "Sykes Cottages on the south side, set at right angles to the street form an equally fine group". The 2014 historic-development map shows this frontage as the densest run of seventeenth-century building in the village (47/665).



Nos 1 to 4 Sykes's Cottages, Chapel Street, "range of four two storey cottages set at right angles to road, the northernmost cottage having been rebuilt in colour washed brick" (15/08, fig. 52 and ref 22).

The listed buildings here include No. 9 (The Thatch), seventeenth century with an eighteenth-century brick addition and an ogee-shaped sash; the Shakespeare Inn, early nineteenth-century brick with a dentil cornice and bow windows; The Scullards, formerly Old Manor Cottage; and Cooper's Cottage (15/08, refs 23–26, 73). Among the unlisted buildings the study recorded the Wesleyan Chapel, Colin Smith's butcher's shop, and The Old Forge, "C19, detached, dwelling, painted brick, thatch roof" (refs 130, 142–143), the successor to a smithy whose site and smiths the archive sources still argue over.



The Wesleyan Chapel, Chapel Street: "C19, semi-detached, chapel, brick, plain tile roof, one storey" (15/08, fig. 76 and ref 130).

Further east "the character becomes more open". Flower Cottage and The Wynns, "probably C17 but very much restored" and half roofed in stone slates, are the highlights; Woodbine Cottage has a gravelled parking area the study praised as hoggin "used to good effect" (15/08, paras 3.1, 4.2; refs 20, 21, 27). Chapel Street becomes Duck Lane, and "the Manor Farm group at the edge of the road gives a genuine rural aspect". Manor Farmhouse is "C18 house of blue lias coursed rubble" (ref 28). Opposite it are "the remnants of an orchard with an interesting set of steps and gate".

The last stretch to the river is weaker. The study found it "rather 'sub-urban'", with twentieth-century bungalows, and thought the listed Waterside Cottage and The Cottage "somewhat overwhelmed by their surroundings". It considered extending the boundary to take them in and decided against it, "because they are already protected through listing and their setting is very ordinary" (paras 3.1, 5.2). The Cottage carries a Birmingham Insurance Co. fire plate between its upper windows (47/1–66). At the end of Duck Lane, Pear Tree Close has "an interesting 'Arts and Crafts' feel, but the river itself is unfortunately hidden by close boarded fencing" (para 3.1).

Frog Lane, which the first report included with Chapel Street, holds three more listed groups: Weston Close, a seventeenth-century core with brick additions; The Nest and Tymss Cottage; and Prior's Lee Cottage (refs 29–31). Cottages like these may be the "old thatched cottages to the south of High Street" that the county found "in poor condition" around 1969, urging "every effort" for "the early restoration of these" (06/10, p.3).

Trees, hedges, gardens and open spaces

In Welford the green things do as much work as the buildings. "In many places gardens, hedges and trees overtake the buildings completely in creating the village ambience", the 1992 study observed; elsewhere "fine buildings of immense charm nestle in greenery making small set-pieces" (15/08, para 3.1). The 1998 sheet put it more simply: the old cottages "are almost hidden in well maintained, colourful gardens with substantial trees and hedges" (47/667). This is why the Conservation Area includes so much ground with no buildings on it at all. On the 1998 map the north-western arm of the boundary encloses the glebe and the riverside land with almost no buildings on it, which shows that the designation was protecting setting and landscape, not just fabric (47/667).

The open spaces

The 1992 study names three public open spaces inside the area. The churchyard is "a most attractive open space", "enclosed by a fine stone wall" with "a splendid lychgate" and "some notable views in amongst its interesting old tombstones". The Maypole Green is "the focal point of the village". Post Office Green, with its gnarled pear tree, is small but valued (15/08, para 4.2). The study adds a fourth kind of space, less formal but just as important: "the wide verges to Boat Lane" and "the remaining small paddocks with their associated hedges and hedgerow trees which lie within the village", which "provide a landscape buffer to large blocks of development" (para 4.3).

The village's recreation grounds lie outside the boundary: the recreation ground by the school, the Bowls Club behind it, and Synder Meadow sports ground on Binton Road (15/08, para 4.2). Their history belongs to a different essay, but it shows the same instinct at work. The Playing Field Trust, founded in 1934, bought the Cress Hill field by the old lock in 1960 and about eight acres of Synder Meadow in March 1984 for £18,000 (60/01; 06/12).

Trees

Appendix B of the 1992 study is a schedule of 205 trees and tree groups, from single cherries and plums in cottage gardens to riverside stands of willow, alder and ash, with Tree Preservation Orders marked on the plan (15/08, Appendix B). The text picks out the specimens that matter most:

- **Great trees:** the horse chestnuts on the Maypole Green and at the gates of the new rectory, the larch at the old rectory gates, and the copper beech in the grounds of Welford House.
- **Trees for the future:** the cedars at Hornby Cottage and Sefton Cottage, the beech by Homestead, a group of three oaks, and the monkey puzzle behind Laurel House.
- **Small trees that matter for scale:** a purple plum, and "the clipped yews in the hedge fronting Laurel House".
- **Screens:** the trees on the corner of Chapel Street and the High Street "which help screen the new development".

Old fruit trees are given a paragraph of their own. They "appear at first sight to be insignificant as specimens" but "are attractive during blossom and harvest time and are reminders of the past rural community. Many are interesting varieties no longer grown

commercially" (15/08, para 4.2). In 1915 George Wright had named fruit growing and market gardening as the village's main trades, with cherries and plums as specialities (15/10), and until after the war the cider press at the mill served farmers from "orchards all around Welford" (52/09).



The old orchard opposite Manor Farm "with its unusual flight of stone steps and ornamental entrance gate" (15/08, fig. 25). The steps and gate are one of the seven features listed in Appendix C as "important to the Conservation Area".

The study had one clear villain among the trees: "There has been a tendency to plant rows of fast growing Lleylandii, which is a species out of character with the the traditional English rural scene. The planting of more appropriate species should be encouraged" (15/08, para 4.2). It wanted the Leylandii screen round the Mill Farm caravan site gradually replaced "by a tall native hedgerow and trees" (para 4.3).

Hedges, footpaths and wildlife

The first county report had made hedges its main theme for the High Street: "the strong linear hedgerows interspersed with trees provide an important linking feature and should be maintained and replaced wherever necessary" (06/10, p.3). The 1992 study extends the point to the footpaths. They "provide attractive pedestrian links within the village, most are flanked by old diverse hedgerows with interesting ground flora", allow "occasional glimpses of fine views of surrounding countryside", and "where old hedges flank the paths they should be retained" (15/08, para 4.3). It named three wildlife habitats: the water meadow between the rectory and the river, the weir and river banks, and "the native hedgerows lining the footpaths in and around the village" (para 4.2).

The smaller soft features are listed too, because together they make the scene: "climbing plants covering walls and fences", "traditional cottage garden flowers", "grass banks and verges" and hedges (15/08, para 4.2). The study's summary of the qualities worth keeping begins with "the pleasing appearance of well kept gardens which front onto the lanes and roads, particularly valuable are those which have a 'cottage garden' style of planting", and ends with "the tree cover which provides very pleasing overhead planes of greenery" (para 4.3).

Caring for the landscape

The archive shows villagers acting on these ideas. In 1972 the County Land Agent proposed paths, oak plank seats and tree planting of oak, Norway maple, silver birch and willow on the Parish Council's Cress Hill field for "Plant a Tree Year" in 1973; a councillor's pencil added "& Sycamore" (06/12). By the riverside, the Spencer family's osier bed, which once supplied basket makers, became the village's Millennium site (52/09). A cutting about a "Welford Project", probably the same site, reports bird boxes, visiting kingfishers and herons, and a June 2000 survey of more than 130 species of plants; in November 2001 it won first prize in the Warwickshire Rural Community Council's Village Ventures competition, having raised about £25,800 from the parish, the district, the National Lottery and the village (52/09; 24/29).

The listed buildings

Listing and designation are different tools, and Welford has relied on both. Listing protects a named building, inside and out, by national decision; designation protects the character of an area by local decision. The 1992 study found that the existing Conservation Area "includes all but two of the listed buildings in the area", and treated the listed buildings as its backbone (15/08, para 5.1).

How the list grew

The statutory list for Welford was built up in several campaigns. A typescript of the current list in the archive gives a "first listed" date for almost every entry, and they cluster as follows (47/1–66):

Year first listed	Items	Examples
1952	19	Tenpenny, Wincote, Boat Cottage, Daffodil Cottage, Cleavers, The Old Rectory, Tudor Vale, Four Gables, The Wynns
1967	9	St Peter's Church, the lych gate and churchyard wall, the Maypole, Low Thatch, The Limes, the Shakespeare
1972	28	Church House, Drakes Cottage, Virginia Cottage, Sefton Cottage, The Hollies, Manor Farmhouse, Watermill Cottage
1987–88	2	The barn north of Manor Farmhouse, Cooper's Cottage
1997	4	The K6 telephone kiosk, The Old Forge, a churchyard monument

The older list of 1952 and 1967 survives in the archive as pages 160–178 of the county typescript, list no. 2396 (13/02). It used the old gradings: the church was Grade B, Cleavers Grade II*, and the rest Grade II, with groups marked for their value together. In 1962 the county reported 54 listed buildings in the parish, "28 Grade II and 26 Grade III" (19/44). By September 1981 the conservation map showed 67, and the Society's members were asked "to be observant & report on any changes they see taking place now, or recently, in buildings or other features of the village" (37/01–04).

The Society's review of 1983

On 17 December 1983 the Local History Society sent the Parish Council its own review of the list. Its secretary, S. J. Wilshaw, wrote that "the 1960 list should be updated" and asked the council to forward the Society's additions "with a request for a further survey". The letter is revealing about motive: "some buildings, not necessarily of architectural or historic interest, have been added in order to protect the character of the village" (10/32).

The review runs to about eighty entries, street by street. About twenty-three have no map number and are probably the Society's proposed additions, among them Glebe Cottage, the Bell Inn, Workhouse Row, Cress Farm House, Virginia Cottage and the Forge. The notes are a small history of the village: Tenpenny "built in 1702 by the overseers of the poor for 2 old men"; Glebe Cottage "originally a priest's house"; the Bell, where "auctions, Court Leet and village meetings were held"; Workhouse Row, "three dilapidated cottages" that were once a workhouse; the Cress Farm barn, where "strolling players" were "known to have performed"; and The Hollies, where James Mills ran industries including needle-making (10/32). Virginia

Cottage, Cress Farmhouse and Glebe Cottage already appear in the 1992 schedule as listed buildings (15/08, refs 46, 48, 49), and The Old Forge followed in 1997 (47/1–66).

The 1992 schedule

Appendix A of the 1992 study is the fullest inventory of the Conservation Area ever made. It is in three sections. Section 1 lists the listed buildings by map reference, from the church (ref 1) to Cooper's Cottage (ref 73), quoting the list descriptions in italics. Section 2 lists "buildings of group and townscape value", refs 80 to 160: unlisted buildings that the consultants judged to contribute to the area, from the converted mill and the weir and lock to Victorian terraces, the Wesleyan Chapel, the Bell and the Memorial Hall. Section 3 covers other buildings (15/08, Appendix A).

The second section is the more interesting today, because it records the ordinary fabric that listing ignores. It includes buildings of every date: The Orchard (1897), Sherbourne Cottage (1891), The Headland (dated 1911, considered but left outside), interwar and post-war houses, and even an "Unidentified Building (Former Public Lavatories?)" on the High Street (refs 102, 119, 125). Its descriptions are brief, "C19, detached dwelling, brick, slate roof, two storey", but together they map what the study meant by character.

Features and artifacts

Appendix C adds seven features "important to the Conservation Area": the Maypole; the bear and ragged staff figure on the Maypole Green; the post box opposite; the water pump in the garden of Tenpenny; the orchard gate opposite Manor Farm; the staddle stones near the Rectory; and the lych gate (15/08, Appendix C). The main text adds the old red telephone kiosk, a second pump behind Welford House, and the farm troughs outside Mill Farm (para 4.2). The kiosk, a K6 by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott beside Thorn Cottage, was listed in 1997 (47/1–66).

Curiosities of the list

The list descriptions repay close reading. Binton Bridge is listed, "in existence from the C13, rebuilt c1783 by William Silvester, the southern part rebuilt 1804–9 by William Hunt". Watermill Cottage in Mill Lane is joined to a wing "believed to be blacksmith's shop". The barn north of Manor Farmhouse has a plaque to Ethel Roberts, who died in 1982 (47/1–66). And a later reader of the typescript corrected the Cleavers entry, which describes a left return "attached to Pear Tree Cottage", with the note "Peach !!!": the neighbour is Peach Tree Cottage (47/1–66). Small errors like this are a reminder that the list is a working document, and that local knowledge has always been part of keeping it right.

Change and pressure

The Conservation Area was a response to pressure, and the archive shows where the pressure came from. Its story from the 1960s to the 1990s is one of new houses, caravans, traffic, overhead wires and suburban habits, met by planning reports, council letters and, increasingly, the village's own objections.

Bungalows and caravans, 1962–1964

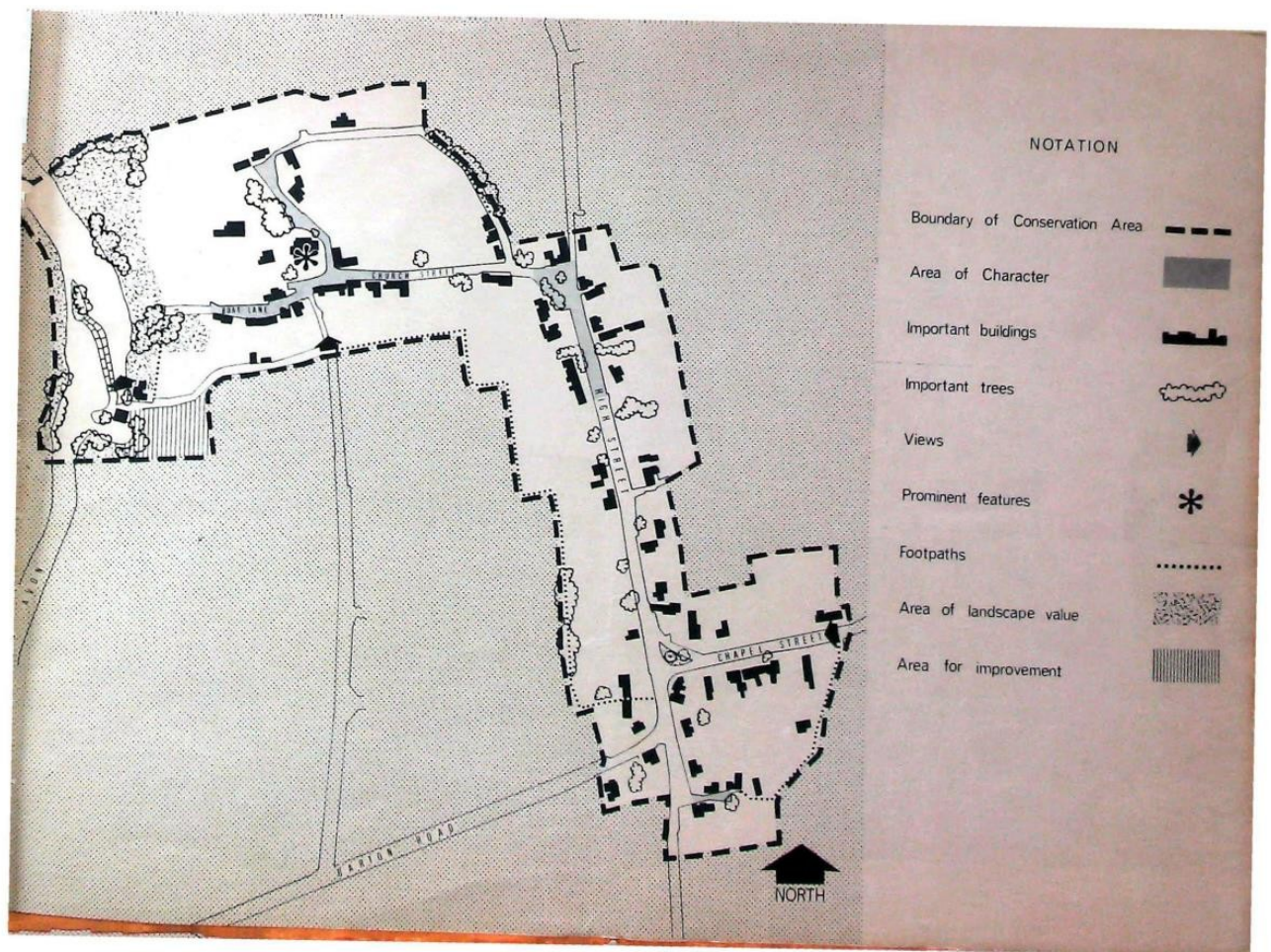
The first clear warning came from the Parish Council. In 1962 it complained to the county about "the number and design of new homes in Welford", and on 2 April 1962 representatives of the County Plans Sub-Committee, the Rural District Council and the Parish Council inspected the new bungalows together. They found cramped plots, too many bungalows, roofs far too flat, ribbon development, and no main drainage: every new house used a septic tank (19/44; 06/09). About 50 acres of applications had already been refused.

The county's answer was a written policy rather than a fixed plan. It meant "severe restriction" until main drainage arrived; special care in the old streets, which were coloured yellow on the policy plan; development within a "green line" judged on its merits, with preference for local needs; and outside the line, new houses only for agriculture (19/44). A later hand has written across the top of one copy: "Welford Village Development policies grew out of this" (06/09). The yellow streets of 1962 are, in effect, the first draft of the Conservation Area of 1969.

Caravans were the other worry. A house survey of about 1960, with totals for September 1964, counted 108 caravans on five sites, with 166 licensed, against 302 houses and 89 bungalows. A letter on Rectory notepaper used the figures to object to yet another site, arguing that caravans already made up a quarter of the village's dwellings (20/06). The Mill Farm caravan park, next to the old corn mill, became a fixed concern of every later report: the 1969 report wanted it screened, and the 1992 study kept it inside the boundary because "control is desirable" (06/10; 15/08, para 5.2).

Designation, 1969

The preliminary report set the tone for what designation would mean. "Outline" applications "will not normally be entertained and detailed drawings will be immediately required"; the authority would "look for a very high standard of design", with regard "to its site, surroundings and neighbouring buildings including the colour and textures of materials"; and "any design which does not measure up to an acceptable standard will be refused planning permission" (06/10, p.1). It also called for street furniture "of good design" and promised that "strict control of advertising will be continued" (p.3).



The fold-out map of the preliminary Conservation Area, about 1969. The heavy dashed line is the boundary; the notation also marks areas of character, important buildings and trees, views, footpaths, the riverside "area of landscape value" and, hatched, an "area for improvement" by the old corn mill (06/10).

The proposed area took in Boat Lane, Church Lane and Church Street, the High Street, Chapel Street "eastwards to Chapel Row" and Frog Lane, "together with an area of landscape value alongside the Avon" (06/10, p.3). The report was offered "primarily as a basis for discussion" with the Rural District Council, with "a more detailed examination" to follow. That fuller examination did not come for more than twenty years.

Defending the area, 1970s and 1980s

Once designated, the Conservation Area became an argument that villagers and councils could use. The Parish Council's handlist at Warwick includes a file headed "Establishment of a Conservation Area in Welford on Avon", alongside papers on tree planting, the bus shelter and "the Bell Inn road layout" (50/41). The Society's minutes show its members watching closely. In March 1984 its committee met specially to consider plans for houses on the corner of the High Street and Chapel Street. It found the second scheme better than the first, but still "over development", and concluded that "as this site is in the centre of the village, a

conservation area, surrounded by listed buildings we felt that this development was totally unsuitable" (37/01–04).

In 1988 a proposal to replace The Willows on Long Marston Road with four houses drew 138 letters of objection after the Parish Council wrote to every household, and the District Council refused it in November 1988. The same cuttings record the other side of the argument: Bill Muirhead wrote that the village needed starter homes on Millers Close to keep young families and the school (01/26–27). Traffic was fought in the same terms. When the county planned to widen Binton Bridges in 1985–86, the District Council objected that it "would bring extra traffic through Welford, which is a conservation area" (52/09; 01/38–46).

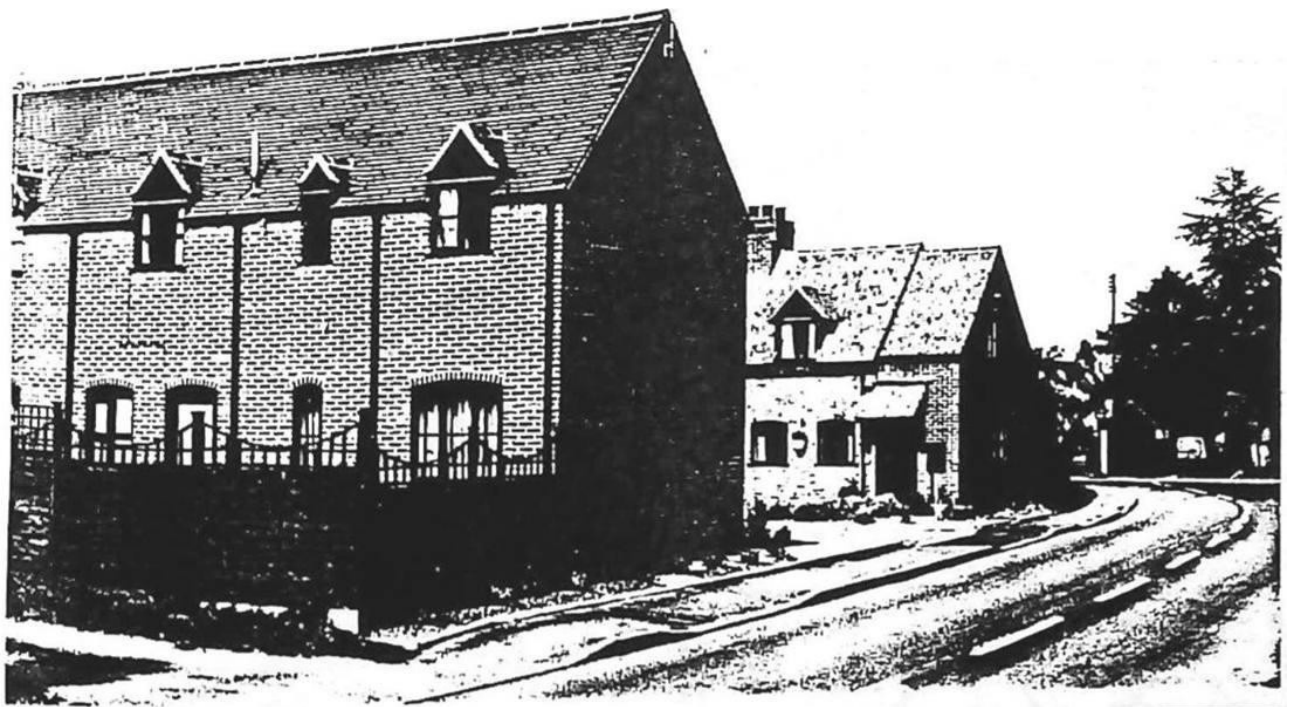
The 1992 review and the 1993 boundary

In 1990 Stratford-on-Avon District Council began "a complete review of existing and potentially new conservation areas" (15/08, para 1.5). The Welford study of July 1992 judged that the existing area "appears to be working reasonably well at present, and covers all of the important areas within the village. The alterations proposed are therefore of a modest nature" (para 5.1).



"Proposed Conservation Area", Stratford-on-Avon District Council, drawn by Alan Smith and Partners, Chartered Architects, August 1992, at 1:2500 (15/09).

It went round the boundary section by section. The north-west rightly covered "the key section of the river including the weir and lock, and the water meadows". Mill Lane formed "a natural boundary", and The Headland (dated 1911) and the largely suburban Headland Road were left out. The western edge followed a footpath that "protects the setting of the High Street buildings", and the eastern edge took in the High Street gardens but excluded the twentieth-century estates. At the north end, the Bell's outbuildings and Polruan were to be added. At the south end, Barton Croft was kept in because it gives "a sense of arrival and village scale" and protects the setting of Low Thatch and Cider Mill House, though the study admitted it was "perhaps a little severe" (15/08, para 5.2). One page of this draft is marked in pencil "This page amended in final report", so the details may have changed before adoption (15/08, p.37). The revised boundary took effect in 1993 (47/667).



Barton Croft, Barton Road, "two pairs semi-detached, dwellings, brick, plain tile roof, two storey, part refurbishment and part new building". The study kept it inside the boundary to protect "a sense of arrival and village scale" (15/08, fig. 40 and ref 154).

The study's list of detractors is a catalogue of late twentieth-century village life: suburban frontages; concrete bollards and modern seats, signs, planters and litter bins; overhead wires; Leylandii screens; the caravan site; the chain-link fence at the Boat Lane pumping station; and poor river access. Its recommendations followed directly: screen recent developments such as Frasers Way, Barton Croft, Montagues Corner and the corner of Millers Close; replace modern street furniture; replant native hedgerows on the approaches; landscape the caravan site; remove overhead wires; replace the pumping-station fence; redesign the Maypole area; and improve the footpaths to the river (15/08, paras 4.3, 6.2). The draft Local Plan's two housing sites, H.Welf 1 and H.Welf 2, both lay outside the area and "should have little effect on it" (para 6.1).

The archive shows some of these ideas being taken up. A supplier's catalogue of 2001 in the archive prices cast-iron bollards and traditional cast signs "suitable for conservation areas" (28/01), exactly the kind of replacement the study had asked for. By 2014 a District Council map, probably prepared for a later appraisal, was colouring every historic building in the village by century, with the conservation area line drawn through it (47/665).

Conclusion: what the Conservation Area protects

The Welford-on-Avon Conservation Area protects a pattern rather than a picture. Its best-known images, the thatched cottages, the lych gate and the maypole, are the parts that photograph well. What the documents in the archive describe is something larger and less obvious: a long village strung along a main street, with two lanes running down to a looping river, two greens at the junctions, a church and mill at one end and a farm at the other, and between them a texture of gardens, hedges, verges, orchards, paddocks and footpaths that holds the buildings together.

The three main documents agree on this to a remarkable degree. The county's preliminary report of about 1969 identified the church group, the High Street hedgerows and "terminal features", the old thatched cottages, and the riverside "area of landscape value" (06/10). The 1992 study, more than twenty years later, found the same qualities and the same weaknesses: the churchyard group at its best, the water meadow "reminiscent of Constable", the Maypole Green pleasant but spoilt by traffic and bollards, the riverside hard to reach, the old mill site still in need of screening (15/08). The 1998 information sheet reduced it to a single paragraph about two greens, two junctions and a village "of much variety of character and style" (47/667).

That variety is the key. The 1992 consultants concluded that "Welford is perhaps more noted for its variety than consistency of building form and this complements its picturesque character" (15/08, para 3.2). A Conservation Area that tried to freeze Welford in one period would have to deny most of its history. The seventeenth-century cottages share their streets with a Georgian brick house, Victorian terraces, a Wesleyan chapel, an inn of nineteenth-century brick, a Memorial Hall of the 1920s and post-war houses, and the study counted most of them as contributing to the scene. Even the over-restoration that the list's compilers regretted is now part of the record.

What the designation has done is change the questions that are asked of new work. Since 1969, new building inside the area has needed full drawings, a high standard of design and respect for "the colour and textures of materials" (06/10). It has given the Parish Council, the District Council and the Local History Society a common language in which to object to over-development, to traffic, to Leylandii and to concrete bollards. And it has extended attention beyond the listed buildings to the ordinary ones, the brick terraces and the converted barns, that make up most of what a visitor sees.

The archive also shows the limits of designation. It could not stop the post-war estates, which simply lay outside the line, and it was not designed to. It did not, by itself, reopen the path to the weir or remove the overhead wires; the 1992 study was still asking for both. Its effectiveness depended on people: on planning officers who wrote careful reports, on councillors who refused unsuitable schemes, and on the members of a Local History Society

founded the same year as the Conservation Area, who learned to read a listing map and to write to the Parish Council about it.

The statutory definition speaks of character and appearance "which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". The 1992 study ended on the same note of cautious confidence: the boundary extension, "continued appropriate care and maintenance of its buildings and landscape, together with the development control machinery should be sufficient to maintain its character and environmental quality for years to come" (15/08, para 6.3). More than thirty years later, the documents in this archive are part of that care. They record what the village looked like, why it was thought worth protecting, and who did the protecting, so that the next generation can see the Conservation Area not as a line on a map but as the long work of a community.

Sources

All references are to the Welford & Weston Local History Society archive, by folder and item. Figure numbers are those of the 1992 Conservation Area Study (15/08).