

Welford-on-Avon Playing Field: A History

Introduction

Welford-on-Avon waited fifty years for a playing field of its own. The village sports ground, Synder Meadow, about 8 acres off the Binton Road, was bought by the Parish Council in 1984 for £18,000. It was paid for partly with a bank loan and partly with a fund that villagers had been saving through summer fêtes since 1934.

Welford in fact has two playing fields, and they have different owners. Synder Meadow belongs to the Parish Council and is run by Welford-on-Avon Sports Club for football and cricket. The smaller field by the primary school on Headland Road is part of the school site under Warwickshire County Council. Villagers have used it since 1962 under a licence, and that licence became a public dispute in 2024.

This history follows both fields. It draws mainly on the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive, especially the minute book of the Welford-on-Avon Trust Fund (folder 60/01), with current details from the Parish Council and County Council websites.

Before the playing field

Synderham Meadow

The name Synder Meadow is old. Samuel Rudder's *New History of Gloucestershire* (1779) records that Thomas Mills gave £3 a year to the poor and 3s 4d a year for the parish highways, "both which sums are charged on a meadow called Synderham" (archive 17/11). That was a rent-charge on privately owned land, not a sale of the land. A question in Parliament in 1908 heard that the charge had not been paid since 1874 and was "now irrecoverable" (17/07).

The 1807 glebe terrier of Welford Rectory mentions both a Synderham Meadow and a Synderham furlong, with the note "Cinder now" (08/01–19, 12/08). It places them beside the river near the parsonage, Meadow Lane and the mill pond.

The first attempt: Quiney's Leys, around 1920

The first real attempt at a village recreation ground came after the First World War. Oral-history notes say German prisoners of war cleared part of Quiney's Leys "supposedly for playing fields and recreation ground", which "in the event never took place" (08/01–19).

Newspaper cuttings explain what went wrong (23/91–96). The war-memorial committee wanted a hall and a playing field. When the 9-acre glebe field Coyney's (Quiney's) Leys came up for auction, Mr Marks bought the whole field for £500. He had an arrangement with Mr L. Stanley, who wanted most of it, under which four acres would go to the village. Rumours that the whole field had been bought for the village caused bad feeling, and Marks withdrew. The

four acres never went to the village. Stanley turned the land into market garden and orchard, and Quiney's Leys is now a housing street.



"The Proposed Memorial Hall. Scheme Abandoned": the report of the Quiney's Leys dispute, with Alfred Dingley's letter beside it (archive 23/91-96, page 6).

The fête fund and the search for a field, 1934–1939

The effort that finally paid for a field began at two public meetings in the Memorial Hall on 15 February and 10 May 1934. They adopted a scheme by H. M. Woodward under which fête profits would go only to purposes "of permanent value to the Village". The main purpose was "the acquisition of land for a playing field for children, and riverside or other land for the purposes of pleasure grounds or recreation grounds" (60/01).

Seven trustees were appointed:

- Capt. Walter Leslie Dingley (chairman)
- Hotham Mills Woodward (treasurer)
- Arthur Thomas Hargrave Montague
- Edgar Mills Davis
- Vincent Edward Mainwaring
- Herbert Charles Setten
- Miss Cathleen May Evelyn Boraston

The trust deed required that at least 75% of the money go towards land. Up to 25% could go to the church, the Methodist chapel, the Memorial Hall and the hospitals fund. One clause later mattered a great deal: no property could pass to the Parish Council without a public meeting's consent (57/06, 60/03). The body was called the Welford-on-Avon Trust Fund, but villagers and newspapers also called it the Village Trust or the Playing Fields Trust Fund.

The fêtes were held on August Bank Holiday, mostly in Long Meadow, which A. T. H. Montague lent on strict terms. Attractions included horse sports, a baby show, bowling for a live pig and "Madame Zaza" the palmist. The fund reached about £320 by 1937 and £488 by 1939 (54/02, 60/01).



"Welford Fête 1932, No. 5": a decorated float in the procession, two years before the fête began raising money for a playing field (archive 16/55).

Finding land proved harder than raising money. The minute book lists the sites the trustees tried:

- **Keyter Close** was rejected in 1934.
- **Land behind Cross Farm**, a little over two acres, was refused by its owner again and again between 1934 and 1937.
- **Fool's Close** had no approach road.
- **Land owned by Mr Bluck** could not be had.
- **A site owned by Mrs Meinhardt** reached an agreed price of £300 in 1938, but the deal fell through in 1939.

On 11 March 1937 the trustees were told that "the Cinder Meadow may be in the market shortly" (60/01). They did not buy it, and the same meadow would become the village sports ground almost fifty years later.

In March 1938 a general meeting voted 27 to 1 to let the trustees fund the Parish Council to buy and equip a field, which would make it eligible for 25% and 10% grants from the County and Rural District Councils. In 1938 the Parish Council was reported to be negotiating for land, and the 1939 fête hoped to buy a 5½-acre site. Then in December 1939 the minutes record that "owing to the war all grants had been suspended."

War, near misses and the school field, 1940–1983

The fund was put into War Savings Certificates and Defence Bonds, and in 1942 the trustees decided to call no more public meetings until the war was over. It kept growing slowly: £678 by 1945, £865 by the mid-1950s, £1,152 by 1970 and £2,663 by 1982 (60/01).

The search started again after the war. In February 1948 a public meeting heard the Parish Council chairman report on talks to buy "two fields for the purpose of a playing field", and asked the trustees to join in (58/07). That deal also failed. In the mid-1950s the Parish Council pressed the trustees for a public meeting. There Capt. Dingley explained that a suitable site at the right price was hard to find, especially since an earlier meeting had ruled out compulsory purchase (57/15).

In 1956 the Warwickshire Playing Fields Association advised that, to get the most grant, the field should belong to the Parish Council. That same year the Parish Council judged a site offered by a Mr Richards "suitable in situation and extent". A plot in the Knap was accepted at £400 in 1956 and then dropped. The trustees were also offered the Shorthouse allotments for £100. They withdrew after allotment holders threatened to petition the Ministry of Agriculture (57/15, 60/01).

The school field, 1957–1962

In 1940 Herbert Stephen Shorthouse had given about 5¼ acres of Churchfield Close on Headland Road as allotments for the village. The deed allowed a roadway to fields to the west if they ever became "a village recreation ground or school playing field" (59/01).

In December 1957 the Rural District Council took 1.5 acres of those allotments for Welford's primary school, and work on the playing field began in 1961. In 1962 the Parish Council agreed a licence with the Education Committee so that all village children could use the field out of school hours. A later Parish Council chairman called it one of the few school fields in the county, "if not the only", open to the public in this way (59/10). The trust's minute book says the sale was on condition that the school field also serve the village's children (60/01). In 1971 the trust gave £100 towards playground equipment on it (57/03).

Cress Hill, 1960

In 1959 Cress Hill, a riverside field, was reported to be wanted "for a commercial enterprise". The Parish Council chairman, Mrs Gilda Gray, asked the trustees to pay for it. Gloucestershire County Council sold it to the Parish Council for £100, and completion was fixed for 24 May 1960. The trust paid £107 18s including fees, plus £72 0s 10d for fencing in 1961 (57/02).

Cress Hill was bought "to preserve it for the village in its natural state", as a riverside pleasure ground and not as a sports pitch. The Parish Council still owns it, under Land Registry title WK370627. In 2012 it was dedicated for recreation in perpetuity through Fields in Trust ([Neighbourhood Plan](#)).

Thirty quiet years

By 1968 the chairman admitted at a public meeting that the trust had not achieved its main purpose. It registered with the Charity Commission under the 1960 Charities Act and was reporting to the Commission by 1972 (58/05). In 1982 it gave £200 to the Memorial Hall for frost repairs (58/02). Attempts to wind it up were voted down in 1981 and 1982.

Cinder Meadow becomes the village sports ground, 1984 to today

The breakthrough came in early 1984. The trust's annual meeting on 26 March 1984 heard Richard Webb, chairman of the Parish Council, report that the Council was "in the process of exchanging contracts for the purchase of 8 acres of land for £18,000 — the site being at the Meadows, the old football field." D. Wilshaw proposed, and C. Dudley seconded, that the trust's money go to the purchase. It was agreed unanimously with no discussion (60/01).

The Parish Council told villagers in the *Parish News* (58/09):

For the very first time in the records of the Parish Council we have our own Sports Ground of approx. 8 acres at Cinder Meadow off the Binton Road. The field is approached by turning down the accommodation road which leads to the boating station. The Welford Football Club are already playing their league games there... It is open to the whole village.

Webb's chairman's letter said the field would be called "after its old name of Cinder Meadow". A sub-committee under councillor Bruce Organ would run it. The deal had been checked by the District auditors and an independent lawyer, and the trust's money would help pay off the Council's bank loan.

On 8 January 1985 the trust was closed and £3,142.30 was paid into the Parish Council's playing field account. R. E. Wright had served the fund from 1934 as starter, fête secretary, trustees' secretary, trustee and treasurer. He signed off with the words "Fund at Peace at last. Deo gratias!" The Parish Clerk, Mrs J. Williams, replied that a football team and a cricket team had already been formed, "very keen to make 'Cinders Meadow' a place for the whole village to enjoy" (60/01).

In 1985 a Sports Ground committee was set up to raise funds and coordinate the clubs. A hard-standing car park and an improved entrance were built with credit from Smiths Construction (60/06). By 1996 a body called the Synder Meadow Trust and Management Committee was looking after the ground. That year it received the last £85.34 of the old Welford Tennis Club (63/03, 63/10).

Who owns it now

The Neighbourhood Development Plan (2017) describes Synder Meadow as "the village sports ground owned by Welford-on-Avon Parish Council", "maintained and run by Welford-on-Avon Sports Club". It is protected as Local Green Space LGS7 ([NDP](#)). The Sports Club is registered charity 1123230, set up to provide "sporting and recreation facilities for all people in and around Welford on Avon" ([Charity Commission](#)). The football and cricket clubs both play there today ([football](#), [cricket](#)).

The school field dispute, 2024–2025

The Headland Road field had a different fate. The 1962 arrangement was only ever a six-month heads of licence. No formal agreement followed, and public use carried on informally for more than sixty years ([Parish Council](#)).

On 24 May 2024 the school governors locked the gate, citing safeguarding guidance. The Parish Council's letter to residents states that the field "is owned by Warwickshire County Council, not the school" ([letter](#)). In October 2024 the County Council gave six months' notice to end the 1962 licence ([WCC](#)).

On 20 May 2025 the Parish Council accepted an interim licence that allows weekend access in term time for children under 12. In June 2025 both councils agreed in principle to explore a land exchange. The owner of the neighbouring field would give land so that the school and the Parish Council could each have an area of their own ([June 2025 update](#)). The most recent update found online is from June 2025, so the outcome is not yet confirmed.

Ownership timeline

This table shows who owned or controlled each field, oldest first. Archive references are folder/item numbers.

Date	Land	Owner or holder	What happened	Source
by 1779	Synderham Meadow	A private owner, not named	Charged with Thomas Mills's £3 a year for the poor and 3s 4d for the highways	17/11
1807	Synderham Meadow and furlong	The furlong was Rectory glebe; the meadow was a neighbouring holding	Glebe terrier notes "Cinder now"	08/01–19
1874–1908	Synderham Meadow	Owner not named	Mills charge unpaid after 1874; declared irrecoverable in 1908	17/07
about 1920	Quiney's Leys (9 acres, glebe)	Sold by the Rectory at auction to Mr Marks for £500, then to L. Stanley	Planned village playing field abandoned; became market garden	23/91–96, 08/01–19
1934	(no land)	Welford-on-Avon Trust Fund	Set up to buy a children's playing field	60/01, 60/03
1937	Cinder Meadow	Owner not named	Trustees told it "may be	60/01

			in the market shortly"; not bought		
1940	Churchfield Close, Headland Road (about 5¼ acres)	H. S. Shorthouse settled it on trustees	Allotments charity	59/01	
Dec 1957	1.5 acres of the Shorthouse allotments	Rural District Council (one source says Warwickshire County Council)	Bought for the primary school playing field	59/10, 60/01	
1960	Cress Hill	Gloucestershire County Council sold it to the Parish Council for £100	Paid for by the trust; kept as natural riverside open space	57/02	
1962	School field	Education authority; Parish Council licensee	Licence for village children's use out of school hours	59/10	
1984	Cinder (Synder) Meadow, about 8 acres	Bought by Welford-on- Avon Parish Council for £18,000 from a seller not named	Village sports ground	60/01, 58/09	
Jan 1985	(no land)	Trust Fund closed	£3,142.30 transferred towards the Synder Meadow purchase	60/01	
1996	Synder Meadow	Parish Council; managed by the Synder Meadow Trust and Management Committee	Tennis club's last funds donated	63/03	
2017	Synder Meadow	Parish Council; run by Welford-on-Avon Sports Club	Designated Local Green Space	NDP	
2024– 2025	School field	Warwickshire County Council	1962 licence ended; interim licence; land exchange under discussion	WCC	

Where sources disagree or ownership is unclear

- **Who sold Synder Meadow in 1984.** No paper in the archive names the seller. The HM Land Registry title for the field would show it and is the next thing to check.
- **Whether Synderham is the same land.** The 1807 terrier puts Synderham Meadow by the parsonage, Meadow Lane and the mill pond. The 1984 notice reaches Cinder Meadow from the Binton Road, down the track to the boating station. A path from Boat Lane also leads to it today. The name has clearly come down from Synderham, but no document proves that the boundaries are the same.
- **The spelling.** The sources use Synderham, Cinder, Cinders, Synder and "the Meadows". In 1984 the Parish Council used "Cinder Meadow", and by 1996 "Synder Meadow" was in use.
- **Who bought the school land in 1957.** The Parish Council chairman's letter says the Rural District Council (59/10). The trust's minute book says Warwickshire County Council (60/01). Today it is part of the County Council's school site.

- **The size of Cress Hill.** The trust's papers call it about five acres. The 2017 Neighbourhood Plan says about one hectare, roughly 2½ acres.
- **The date of the Quiney's Leys sale.** The cuttings are undated. The war-memorial meeting was in 1918 and the sale took place on a 26 March before the Memorial Hall was finished, so about 1920 is likely but not proven.
- **Whether a fête was held after 1939.** The 1984 trust notice said no fête had been held since 1939. The Local History Society corrected it: a Flower Show and Fête was held at Manor Farm every year from 1943 to 1955. Its proceeds went to other village causes, not to the trust (58/09).
- **The Synder Meadow Trust.** It appears only in 1996, and the archive does not say whether it owned anything or simply managed the ground for the Parish Council.

Sources

Welford and Weston Local History Society archive (folder/item):

- 60/01: Welford-on-Avon Trust Fund (Fête Committee) minute book, 1934–1985
- 60/03, 57/06: the 1934 trust agreement
- 57/01, 54/02: fête minutes and programmes, 1936–1939
- 57/02, 58/06: Cress Hill purchase and fencing, 1959–1961
- 57/03, 57/04: trust deed quoted, and the playground grant, 1970–1971
- 57/15: public meeting and playing-field correspondence, about 1954–1956
- 58/02–58/09: trust accounts, the 1948 Parish Council letter, and the 1984 winding-up notices
- 59/01, 59/10: the Shorthouse allotments deed (1940) and the school field history
- 08/01–19, 12/08: 1807 glebe terrier and oral-history notes on Quiney's Leys
- 17/07, 17/11: Thomas Mills charity on Synderham Meadow
- 23/91–96: newspaper cuttings on the Memorial Hall and Quiney's Leys
- 60/06, 63/03, 63/10: sports ground committee (1985) and the Synder Meadow Trust (1996)
- 15/08: Conservation Area Study (1992)

Online:

- [Welford-on-Avon Neighbourhood Development Plan, 2017](#)
- [Charity Commission: Welford Sports Club, 1123230](#)
- [Parish Council letter to residents, 2 June 2024](#)
- [Warwickshire County Council update, October 2024](#)
- [Parish Council: playing field background, summer 2025](#)
- [Parish Council: playing field update, June 2025](#)
- [Welford Football Club](#) and [Cricket Club](#)