

Down with Petticoat Government

The Women's Institute, the Mothers' Union and the other groups through which the women of Welford and Weston organised themselves, raised money, ran the village's celebrations and, in 1949, got themselves elected to the parish council.

Drawn from the Welford and Weston Local History Society archive (folder references in grey). The archive holds no minute book, register or programme of any Welford women's organisation. What survives is scattered: two short histories of the Women's Institute written by Gilda Gray in 1974–75, one set of WI accounts from 1994, a handful of photographs, and dozens of passing mentions in parish magazines, newspaper cuttings, fête accounts and other societies' minutes. This essay pieces those together and says where the record runs out. A list of gaps and conflicting sources is at the end.

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Welford Women's Institute at tea in the Memorial Hall, 1950. The print in folder 16/09 is uncaptioned and its own catalogue note guesses "late 1950s to 1960s", but it is the same scene, taken a moment apart, as the upper photograph on the sheet labelled "Welford WI 1950" 16/26, and the Society's photograph index pairs 16/09 with "Welford WI 1950 ... Memorial hall" 16/00. The tall windows and the stage are those of the hall opened in 1923.

Before the Institute to 1914

For most of Welford's recorded history its women appear in the archive one at a time, and almost always as somebody's wife, widow, daughter or servant. They turn up in the churchwardens' accounts as the recipients of a gown and petticoat paid for by the parish, in wills as legatees, and in the censuses as what the enumerators chose to call them. The 1851 census for the village, which the Society tabulated, lists fieldwomen and glovers among the wives and daughters of labourers, and four schoolmistresses teaching forty-four scholars 14/12, 01/49. That is work, not organisation. Nowhere in the Victorian material is there a mothers' meeting, a clothing club, a Dorcas society or a girls' friendly society of the kind that many English parishes ran under the rector's wife; if Welford had any of these, they left no papers that reached the Society.

The nearest thing to a Victorian women's network that the archive allows us to see is the church itself. Miss Ann White, who came to the village from Childswickham with her mother in 1889 (the date her obituary gives; the deed and the 1891 census suggest 1891) and lived in The Nest in Frog Lane, taught in the Sunday school "when Mr Davenport was rector" alongside Miss Olive Hancox, sang in the choral society and acted in "the village's first dramatic society". When St Peter's needed coconut matting for its aisles, the obituary says, "Miss White earned the money by blackberrying!" 01/90-99. She will reappear in this story as the first secretary of the Women's Institute, and, through the scrapbook she gave to the Society, as the reason we know anything about Welford's women in the First World War.

Two other pre-war threads lead nowhere local. The national campaign for women's votes is present in the archive only at second hand: a 1980s local-history journal reproduces a postcard of a suffragette march through Stratford-upon-Avon in about 1913 03/01-19, and one of the scrapbook cuttings quotes Marie Corelli's anti-suffrage preface, with its warning that "a few political termagants" might make the whole sex "lose caste in the eyes of the lords of creation" 23/82-83. No Welford name is attached to either side. And a letter of 1994 from Miss Phyllis Eastgate, then 96, who spent childhood summers in the village between about 1905 and 1914, recalls that "about 1912" she heard "village women talking to each other about the wonderful new idea - the Women's Institute, bringing 'fresh life, new ideas within their ken, and ending their isolation'" 36/01. It is a lovely memory, but the date cannot be right as it stands: the first Women's Institute in Britain was founded at Llanfairpwll on Anglesey in 1915, and the movement reached English villages from 1916. Either Miss Eastgate heard talk of the Canadian institutes that inspired the British ones, or, more likely, eighty years had folded two memories together. Welford would not have an institute of its own for another dozen years.

The Needlework Guild August 1914

The first organised body of Welford women that the archive records was formed nine days after Britain declared war on Germany. A newspaper cutting pasted into Miss White's scrapbook, now Folder 23, reads:

A meeting of women of Welford and Weston was held on August 13th, in the Men's Club. It was decided to form a Needlework

Guild, to work for our Local Red Cross Hospital at Norton and Campden. Miss Bruce, of Norton Hall, has undertaken to have the Hospital fully equipped for 50 men in a fortnight, if required by the War Office. The call for help was therefore urgent.

"The Guild of Needlework", newspaper cutting, August 1914 23/97-107

The organisation was quick and practical. So that the two villages' work did not overlap with anyone else's, "Miss Davis asked Miss Bruce if she could accept one outfit for each man from Welford and Weston", and on that basis the women undertook "50 shirts, 50 jackets, 50 pairs of socks and various small things". The sewing was done "by workers at home, and senior and junior working parties", and "Mrs. Davis wishes to thank all for the splendid way in which they have come forward to help". The finished garments were to be exhibited in the Gymnasium on Thursday 3 September, from half past five until seven, "after which a meeting of Guild members will be held to discuss the next object for which the Guild shall work". Mrs Davis was the wife of the rector, the Rev. A. J. Davis; the Miss Davis who negotiated with Norton Hall was presumably of the same household, though the cutting does not say so.

A second, slightly later report in the same scrapbook, under the heading "Welford-on-Avon" and printed beside the news of Lance-Corporal Fred Farley's death at Gallipoli in August 1915, looks back on the same effort: "At the commencement of hostilities the ladies organised sewing meetings and seniors and juniors worked with a will. For the Norton Hall Hospital gifts 'sets' were undertaken and made in accordance with regulation instructions. Before despatching the garments they were exhibited in the Gymnasium and gave evidence that great pains had been taken and good work done. Others have worked equally well and despatched their goods to other centres." 23/97-107

That is all the archive says about the Needlework Guild. It does not record whether the Guild continued after the first consignment, who its members were, or what "the next object" turned out to be. But the pattern it sets is one that recurs for the next eighty years: the rector's wife at the head, a committee of women who knew how to run a meeting, a public display of the work, and a call on the whole village. One further echo of women's war work survives from 1915. The joint flower show of Welford, Weston, Binton and Long Marston was abandoned that year "owing to the war", and of its £20 balance £5 5s was given to the Red Cross Society 13/13.

When the village came to lay the foundation stone of its war memorial hall on 11 October 1923, the visiting preacher, the Rev. V. D. Siddons of Evesham, reminded the crowd that recreation “had its proper place in life, not only for men, but for women also. When thinking of the men who had made the sacrifice let them not forget the women who had sacrificed at home, not a few of whom had died of broken hearts.” 23/91–96 It is the only sentence in the archive’s considerable First World War material that speaks of the village’s women as a body.

“Taking the lead in all good things” c. 1919 to 1924

After the Armistice the women of Welford moved from war work to village life, and one undated cutting of the early 1920s says so outright. Under the heading “Choral Society Re-started” it laments that “the dulness and monotony of village life during the winter and long evenings are proverbial”, that the pre-war choral society had been silenced by “this sad calamity”, and then reports:

A desire for a revival of this admirable accomplishment took possession of the ladies, who seem to be taking the lead in all good things pertaining to village life, and a meeting was held at the Barn, at which it was decided to re-commence the Choral Society, and a management committee was formed, Mrs. A. J. Davis being elected president.

Newspaper cutting, early 1920s 23/91–96

The same cutting mentions a folk and morris dancing class “ably conducted by Miss Leah Hanman, of Stratford-on-Avon”, held in the Barn, while “the Ex-service Men’s Association ... is also about to supply the other side of the good things by ‘killing the fatted calf’”. The division of labour is plain enough: the men had their association and their club, and the women had begun to run the village’s cultural life.

The women’s organising skill is most visible in the effort to pay for the Memorial Hall. The project had been bitterly contested, as Gilda Gray later remembered (“deep were the wounds in the fight for it!”), and the long-running Memorial Hall essay in this series covers the quarrel. When the hall was finished, Mrs Davis, the rector’s wife, was invited to open it in December 1923. The opening report survives only as a half-hidden strip in the scrapbook, but enough can be read to show her thanking the villagers for “the

honour they had conferred" on her, and the summary of the page notes a £20 donation in memory of her son Basil, killed earlier that year 23/97-107.

The following spring the women held a sale and social in the new hall to clear the building debt. The report lists the stalls and their holders with the care such reports always took:

A competition stall was attended to by Mrs. Winsor and Miss James; provision, Mrs. Bryan, Mrs. Birch, and Mrs. C. Parris; refreshment, Mrs. Palk and Mrs. Lawrance; new articles, Mrs. Mainwaring; rummage, ladies' department, Mrs. Basson, Mrs. Knowles, Mrs. A. Davis, Miss W. Wright, Mrs. W. Haynes; rummage, gent's department, Mrs. Nelder and Miss O. Hancox; toys, etc., Mrs. A. J. Davis, Miss White, Miss Smith, and Miss Cook; flower girl, Nancy Blundell.

"Bazaar and Social", 1924 23/91-96

Every stall-holder is a woman. The sale raised £30, which, against liabilities of £768 2s 1d and earlier receipts of £722 4s 11d plus £15 promised, left a balance of just 17s 2d. "The Building Committee have therefore practically discharged their obligations", the rector told the meeting. The evening social was "under the supervision of Mrs. Basson, of The Orchard". Several of these names, Mrs Davis, Miss White, Mrs Mainwaring, Miss Hancox and Mrs Basson, will appear again within a few months as the founders and first officers of the Women's Institute.

The Institute is founded 1924

Everything the archive knows about the founding of the Welford Women's Institute comes from a two-part article that Gilda Gray wrote for the village newsletter to mark its fiftieth anniversary. Someone has pencilled "Dec. 1974" and "Mrs Gray on W.I." on the first part and "Jan 1975" on the second 03/04, 03/05 in 03/01-19. Mrs Gray did not join until 1948, so for the early years she was relying on what older members told her, and she says as much ("the treasurer was, I believe, Mrs. Mainwaring"). But hers is the only account there is.

She begins with the village as it was in 1924. Welford was still in Gloucestershire, "in the primitive, neglectful Rural District of Marston Sicca", with Campden as the administrative centre. Grammar-school children went by train from Milcote. About six residents owned motor cars; the rector had a motor-bike and

sidecar; Wilson Matthews had just started a village bus. The Milcote estate was being sold, and the county council had bought fields for smallholdings "for the returned village war heroes". There were men "who had returned injured in health in such a way that, though they lived for almost another 50 years, were never really well again". And:

The women of Welford were, primarily, home-makers, hardworking, many worked long hours in their market gardens, the pride and joy of Welford. They sent wonderful produce to the Midland markets. Also they let rooms to summer visitors. Sometimes, as many as a hundred visitors stayed in Welford – the idyllic village.

Gilda Gray, "W.I. – Fifty Years Old, Part I", December 1974 03/04

Part 2 tells how the Institute came about:

By 1924 the Women's Institute had been established in the county for a few years. Welford was an ideal village for one. Miss Margery Miles, J.P. came from Gloucester and inaugurated it. Mrs. A. J. Davis was the first president. Dear old Miss White was the first secretary and the treasurer was, I believe, Mrs. Mainwaring. Some of the founder members of the W.I. are still with us.

Can you imagine what W.I. meant to the hardworking country woman in those days? An evening, perhaps two, a month when she was going to something new, a meeting where all women were on an equal footing, where new ideas were talked of, and the old skills of housewifery raised from drudgery to the level of high art and craft! It was revolutionary and the W.I. thrived.

Gilda Gray, "W.I. – Fifty Years Old, Part 2", January 1975 03/05

Because Welford was then in Gloucestershire, the new institute must have been affiliated to the Gloucestershire Federation, which explains why its founder came from Gloucester. The parish was transferred to Warwickshire in the early 1930s (the archive gives both 1931 and about 1933), and from then on the institute belonged to the Warwickshire Federation of Women's Institutes, whose forms and competitions it was using by 1951 and whose emblem heads its accounts in 1994 55/01-03, 05/07.

The earliest contemporary record of the Institute is a line in the parish council's minutes. Herbert Woodward's 1940 notes of the council minute books record that on 15 July 1925, with the rector, the Rev. A. J. Davis, in the chair, the council considered the village

green: "Fees for letting. Application by Women's Institute." 18/14 So by the summer of 1925 the Institute existed and wanted to use the green, which was what Gray's date implies. The 1994 accounts, which record the costs of a "70th Birthday Party" on one side and a "75th Birthday Party" on the other, are consistent with 1924 only if "70th" is the correct figure, which it surely is 05/07.

Gray calls it "Welford W.I." throughout. Every contemporary source that gives the name in full, from 1937 onwards, calls it the Welford and Weston Women's Institute 54/02, 61/01-09, 60/05, 05/07. The two parishes shared a rector, a parish magazine and a memorial hall, and the Institute evidently drew members from both from the start; the 1950 photograph key below identifies three of the women as "Weston-on-Avon" 16/26, and one of its longest-serving presidents lived at Weston Sands.

Floats, posies and toy rabbits the 1930s

Gray covers the inter-war years in a sentence: "In its quiet way it built up morale in the depressed thirties." The archive adds detail, though almost none of it comes from the Institute's own papers. It comes instead from the minute book and press cuttings of the committee that ran the annual village fête in aid of the playing field, and here the WI women are everywhere.

The fête committee's minute book for 1936-39 shows that when it met at The Retreat on 5 May 1937, four of the ten people present were women: Miss M. Basson, Mrs Butler, Mrs Mainwaring and Mrs Webb 57/01. When the procession was discussed, "Mrs Webb stated she had the matter before the W.I. It was suggested members of the Dramatic Society & the W.I. should meet to discuss this." By then Mrs Ralph Webb of Welford House had succeeded Mrs Davis as president of the Institute. The 1937 fête accounts record, among the raffle takings, "Per Mrs Webb: Bag & Doll £1 3s 6d; W.I. Table Cloth 18s 0d", the cloth presumably made by members 57/01.

The fête itself, on August Bank Holiday Monday 1937 in Long Meadow, was opened by the local MP and Minister of Agriculture, W. S. Morrison. Two reports survive and they describe the Institute's gift to Mrs Morrison differently. One says that "Mrs. Webb asked Mrs. Morrison to accept a posy culled from many of the gardens belonging to members of the Welford and Weston Women's Institute"; the other that "a beautiful large bowl of assorted flowers was presented to Mrs. Morrison by Mrs. R. M.

Webb (president of the Welford and Weston Women's Institute)" 54/02. Either way it was the members' gardens that supplied it. The same reports describe the Institute's floats in the procession from the Maypole to the field:

The Women's Institute must be congratulated on their entries, which were novel and artistic. One, "The Flower Garden," was true to type. Within a floral bower were clustered the Misses Edith Coldicott, Rose Blundell, Millie Booth, Maggie Pratt, Joan Tracey, Joan Weatherhead, and Master Geoffrey Lively. "The Wedding Party" was the second tableau, with Peggy Buttler as bride, Brian Jakeman as bridegroom, Peggy Basson and Dorothy Harris as bridesmaids, Michael Neasom as page, and Bernard Harris as the parson. A third vehicle portrayed the Pied Piper, with Jean Rymill in the title rôle.

Fête report, August 1937 54/02

The children on the floats were the members' own: Peggy Buttler was presumably the daughter of Mrs F. Buttler, who ran the produce stall that year and in 1938 and 1939 and would later lead the Institute for nineteen years. Mrs V. E. Mainwaring ran the fancy-needlework and rummage stall each year; Mrs Webb ran the surprise stall in 1937 with Miss O. Hancox and the goldfish and the spinning wheel in 1938. In 1939 Mrs F. Buttler and helpers decorated a float called "Mrs. Buggins' Washing Day", and the procession was led by Miss B. Buttler, "Lady on a White Horse" 54/02. The fête committee of 1939 included Mrs Buttler, Mrs Mainwaring, Miss M. G. Basson and Miss G. D. Serjeantson alongside its male officers. A float in 1939 was decorated by "Welford-on-Avon Rangers", the senior section of the Girl Guides, the only pre-war trace of guiding in the village that the archive holds.

Mrs Mainwaring's gift for catering runs through the decade. When the new maypole was dedicated in May 1927, "all the children of the village were entertained to tea in the Memorial Hall, and their needs were well supplied by Mrs. Mainwaring and a willing staff of helpers" 01/77 in 01/75-89. When its successor was dedicated on Empire Day 1938, subscribers and schoolchildren took tea in the hall and "the catering was carried out by Mrs. Mainwaring and the ladies' committee" 01/48-101. Neither report names the Institute, but Mrs Mainwaring was its first treasurer, and the "ladies' committee" is the sort of body the Institute supplied. The Empire Day Queen that year was twelve-year-old Jean Rimell, the same

“Jean Rymill” who had played the Pied Piper on the Institute’s float the summer before.

The decade ended with a royal visit. On 13 December 1938 the Duke of Kent, touring the Midlands as Vice-Patron of the National Council of Social Service, took tea at the Memorial Theatre in Stratford, where “an exhibition of women’s handicraft arranged by the Women’s Institute” was on show, and then drove to Welford to see the dramatic society perform in the Memorial Hall. The press report says that among his purchases at the exhibition were “two lovely little toy rabbits, beautifully made by Women’s Institute members, which, he told his private secretary ... he would take for the little prince and princess”, and another cutting credits “the County Federation of Women’s Institutes” with “no small part” in the exhibition’s success 11/19, 62/01. The exhibition was a county affair and no Welford maker is named, but it shows the movement the Welford women belonged to at its most public.

The Second World War 1939 to 1945

For the war years, again, there is only Gray’s summary, and it is brief:

It bore great burdens in the second World War – evacuees, food preservation, make do and mend, grow for Victory, all revolved round W.I. Mrs. Ralph Webb of Welford House had succeeded Mrs. Davis as president and directly after the War Mrs. Frank Buttler, affectionately known as Auntie Tot, became the president, and she remained so for 19 years.

Gilda Gray, January 1975 03/05

No WI document from the war survives in the archive: no jam-centre accounts, no evacuee billeting lists, no record of the national Produce Guild or the canning schemes in which most village institutes took part. The archive’s wartime collection, Folder 36, was assembled for the fiftieth anniversary of VE Day in 1995, partly in answer to a letter of 1978 in which Mrs Gray urged the History Society to record “eye-witness stories, ‘hilarious some of them’” while the people who could tell them were still alive. In that letter she mentions that her own war work, in Somerset before she came to Welford, had been “billeting and general social work amongst aliens and adult evacuees” 08/01–19.

What Folder 36 and its neighbours do record is women’s war work outside any organisation. An unsigned account of wartime food

remembers that “the girls from the towns came as Land Army girls to work on the land”, that the playing field and allotments were ploughed, and that “Miss James, who lived in Frog Lane, did this as a living and supplied the hotels that remained open in Stratford. She had a store shed stacked from floor to ceiling with bottles and jars which was always a wonder to see.” 36/14 Miss M. O. James of The Nook had set up a fruit-bottling company and, her obituary says, “was at her work up till the last” 13/15. Millie Bott remembered feeding Land Army girls at Briar Cottage in Chapel Street, including Jose Gould, who lodged with the Botts: “They all came in starving hungry after working on the land and despite the rationing I coped with the meals.” 36/10 Land Girls were housed at Solamo in Bird’s Lane, which was commandeered as a hostel, and at Weston House, which its owner had meant to leave to the village as a cottage hospital 10/32–56, 47/80–90.



British Red Cross Society Home Nursing certificate of Rose Amy Booth, June 1940. With her St John Ambulance first-aid certificate of March 1939 and her re-examination of March 1940, both from courses at Stratford Technical School, it is the archive’s only individual record of a Welford woman training for wartime nursing 01/53–55.

One Welford woman’s preparation for war survives in her own certificates. Rose Amy Booth qualified in “First Aid to the Injured” with the St John Ambulance Association at Stratford in March 1939, passed her re-examination in March 1940, and on 18 June 1940, the week France fell, passed the British Red Cross Society’s examination in Home Nursing 01/53, 01/54, 01/55. The Booths were the family of Virginia Cottage in the High Street, whose papers came to the Society in quantity, and it seems likely that these certificates came with them, though the folder does not say so.

“Bulging at the seams” 1945 to 1950

Gilda Gray came to Welford in January 1948, when her husband, the Rev. Karl Ashnolt Gray, was instituted as rector; he served until August 1971 47/67, 19/02. She joined the Institute the following month, and her description of what she found is the most vivid sentence in her history:

When I joined the Welford Institute in February 1948 it was bulging at the seams, a membership of over one hundred.

Gilda Gray, January 1975 03/05

A hundred members, in two villages whose combined population was then perhaps seven or eight hundred, means that a large share of the adult women belonged. The Institute was also, in these years, a theatre circuit. The minutes of the revived dramatic society record that on 1 April 1947 “a play was to be chosen for the Women’s Institute meeting in May, the same play to be acted at Long Marston W.I. on May 1st”; Mrs Churchill, Miss J. Rimell, Mr Collins and Mrs Churchill (sic) were to choose it for Mr Swinnock to produce. In August 1947 the society thanked “the Welford and Weston Women’s Institute” for a donation of £4 and accepted “an invitation from Clifford Chambers W.I. to present the play in that village”, though a similar invitation from Salford Priors had to be declined “owing to transport difficulties”. When new members joined, Mr Swinnock suggested that the experienced actors take the three-act plays and the newcomers “begin with 1 act plays suitable for W.I. etc.” 61/01–09 The one-act play performed at an institute meeting was a staple of village entertainment, and the drama festivals the Welford players entered in the early 1950s were dominated by institute teams: Solihull W.I., Shirley W.I., Wootton Waven W.I., Henley-in-Arden W.I. (with an “A” and a “B” team), Hockley Heath W.I. and Lapworth W.I. all appear on the programmes 62/01.



The same 1950 Women's Institute tea from another angle, the lower photograph on the sheet labelled "Welford WI 1950". A handwritten key names, on the right-hand side, Gladys Hancox, Mrs Gould, Mrs Garner and Mrs Taylor; opposite them Mrs Roberts, Mrs Roles, Mrs Hancox, and three Weston-on-Avon members, Mrs Treadwell, Mrs Colicutt and Mrs Bennett; and on the left Mrs Basson, Marion Marshall, Sylvia Hancox, Audrey Sabin and Edna Sabin. The key ends "Produced by Joan Stone" 16/26.

The two photographs of the 1950 tea are the only pictures the archive has of the Institute at one of its own gatherings. The occasion is not recorded, but a large tea in the Memorial Hall in winter (the women are in coats and the windows are dark) fits the birthday parties and Christmas parties that the Institute held every year; the 1975 report below mentions "the usual party held in the Village Hall". The names on the key are the village's old families, Hancox, Gould, Garner, Sabin, Basson, Marshall, with Weston women among them, and three generations seem to be present.

Down with Petticoat Government 1949 to 1972

What happened next is the part of her history that Gilda Gray most wanted to tell:

The Institute was conscious that there were crying needs in the village; sanitation, housing, refuse collection, mains water, mains drainage, electricity for Weston - and in no time at all W.I. were launching two women as prospective Parish Councillors, Mrs. Ethel Roberts and myself. I well remember the first election with its banners 'Down with Petticoat Government'! But we were elected and all the twenty three years I served as a parish councillor I knew the W.I. was backing me, and gradually these much needed amenities, and others, came.

Gilda Gray, January 1975 03/05

The election was that of 1949. A handwritten list of the parish councillors for each three-yearly election from 1949 to 1964 shows a council of five in 1949: H. Setten (chairman), W. Swinnock, Wilson Matthews, Mrs Ethel Roberts and Mrs Karl Gray 19/06. The list of councillors for 1894 to 1925 contains no woman at all 19/25, and the archive has no list for 1926 to 1948, so it cannot confirm that these two were the first women ever to sit on Welford's parish council. Gray's account, and the banners, suggest that they were.

Who carried the banners, and how seriously they were meant, the archive does not say. But the Institute did not wait long to use its new voice. A cutting from the Herald's Welford column, from about 1950-51, reports a meeting of the parish council at which "a memorandum was read from the Women's Institute complaining of the open sewer in the meadows leading to Weston and the Clerk was instructed to bring the matter to the notice of the R.D.C." Mrs G. Gray and Mrs E. Roberts were among those present 13/15.

WELFORD-ON-AVON

WELFORD-ON-AVON

PARISH COUNCIL. — At a meeting of the Parish Council last week it was reported that the iron railings around the chestnut tree on the Maypole Green had been removed and the seat repaired. Action had been taken concerning foot-path obstructions. A memorandum was read from the Women's Institute complaining of the open sewer in the meadows leading to Weston and the Clerk was instructed to bring the matter to the notice of the R.D.C. It was decided to ask the R.D.C. to take over and maintain the seats in the Headland-road, as the Parish Council was not empowered to do so. Present were: Mr. W. J. Matthews (chairman), Mrs. G. Gray, Mrs. E. Roberts, Messrs. H. C. Setten, W. E. Swinnock and R. E. Wright (Clerk).

DEATH OF MISS M. O. JAMES. — The death occurred suddenly last week of Miss M. O. James, who had lived in Welford for the past 25 years at "The Nook." Miss James had established a fruit bottling company and was at her work up till the last. She took an active interest in the village especially in the parish church, of which she was a regular attendant. The funeral service at the parish church on Friday was followed by cremation at Birmingham.

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The Women's Institute complains about the open sewer, c. 1950–51. The same column reports the death of Miss M. O. James of The Nook, whose fruit-bottling business had supplied Stratford hotels during the war. The cutting is undated; the presence of both women councillors places it after the 1949 election 13/15.

Mrs Roberts sat until 1955. Mrs Gray stayed on every council the list records, became chairman in 1956 and was still chairman in 1964, when the council grew to seven members 19/06. She was still chairman in the 1960s when the rotten 1938 maypole had to be

taken down, and it was she who “promised to make inquiries regarding a new pole, either timber or metal” 01/75 in 01/75–89. Her twenty-three years ran from 1949 to about 1972, when she left the village after her husband’s retirement. The amenities she listed did come: the Society was told in 1998 that Welford had had “no water supply until 1968 & no electricity until 1930” 38/01–03, and the improvements in drainage, housing and refuse collection are traced in the parish council essay in this series. How much of that was owed to the Institute’s backing cannot be measured from the archive, but Mrs Gray was in no doubt.

She was an unusual woman for a rector’s wife of her time: a councillor, a chairman, a local historian who wrote on the Reformation, on witchcraft, on schools and on the Roman roads, and in 1970 one of the founders of the Local History Society itself. At its founding committee she proposed the subscription of ten shillings, seconded by Miss Ray 37/01–04. Much of what the Society later collected about Welford came through her.

One small puzzle attaches to the other councillor. Gray calls her Mrs Ethel Roberts. The cutting gives “Mrs. E. Roberts”, and the folder’s note suggests she was the wife of E. C. Roberts of Manor Farm, who was vice-chairman of the fête committee in 1939. In January 1972 the parish magazine recorded the death at Brighton of a Mrs Elsie Roberts, who had come to Welford with her husband forty years before and “took an active part in the life of the village, particularly in the Church and the Women’s Institute movement” 19/51. Whether Ethel and Elsie were the same woman, or two Mrs Roberts active in the same Institute, the archive does not settle.

Festival and Coronation 1951 to 1953

The minute book of the committee that organised Welford and Weston’s celebrations for the Festival of Britain in 1951 and the Coronation in 1953 gives the clearest picture of how many organisations the two villages had, and how many of them were women’s. At its first meeting in January 1951 the committee compiled a list of village bodies to be invited to send representatives 55/01–03:

ORGANISATION	NOTES
British Legion	No women’s section listed for Welford
Weston Parochial Church	
School	The headmistress
Chapel	(1) the Society Steward; (2) the

ORGANISATION	NOTES
	Women's Fellowship
Church	(1) Parochial Church Council; (2) the Working Party
Conservative Association; Young Conservatives	
Dramatic Society; Flower Show Committee; Memorial Hall	
Mothers' Union	Written "Mother's Union"
National Farmers' Union; Parish Council	
Bowling Club; Football Club	
Women's Institute	
Youth Club Management Committee	

Four of the sixteen bodies were women's organisations, one for each of the village's religious and secular communities: the Institute, the Church of England's Mothers' Union, the Church's working party, and the Methodist chapel's Women's Fellowship.

The Institute's contribution to the Festival year was a museum. The minutes record that "Mrs Buttler stated that Mrs H. Harris had very kindly consented to the old Post Office being used for the purpose of the W.I. Museum", and the printed Festival leaflet announced: "Throughout the Festival: Women's Institute. — On view at the Old Post Office, a collection of things of interest illustrating life in Welford in bygone days." 55/01-03, 55/11, 01/83 It is, as far as the archive shows, the first time anyone gathered Welford's history for public display, nineteen years before the Local History Society was founded. When the Society did form in 1970, "Miss Ray kindly agreed to lend the W.I. collection of exhibits" for its first public meeting, and at that meeting on 6 March 1970 "the collection of photographs made by the W.I. was circulated and roused much interest" 37/01-04. It is likely, though not stated, that the 1970 "collection of exhibits" descended from the 1951 museum.

Other women took on other jobs. Mrs Lait, wife of the committee's chief benefactor, "submitted the Warwickshire County Federation of Women's Institutes entrance form for the villages 'Gay Gardens' Competition", and the committee agreed that the whole village should be entered; Miss M. Basson sat on the advertising sub-committee and arranged folk-dance evenings after the children's maypole dancing. When the Festival ended £1 16s 10½d in deficit, Mr Lait gave a guinea and the Church Council, the Women's Institute, the Youth Club and the Young Conservatives gave four shillings each 55/01-03.

The Festival's river carnival was the work of the Young Conservatives, and its organiser was the same Jean Rimell who had been Empire Day Queen in 1938 and the Institute's Pied Piper in 1937. Her account of it in the Conservative magazine *Right*, "River Carnival began with only £7 and a Motto", records that when the branch asked a nearby army camp for a landing stage it was told: "Sorry, we can't do anything for a Political Organisation." 52/082 The folder's own summary guesses that the article is "Women's Institute-related", but it is not: the branch is the Young Conservatives, and the carnival queen was congratulated by John Profumo, MP.

For the Coronation in 1953 the same committee, again chaired by the rector, planned a bonfire and celebrations on Welford Hill. Mrs Gray undertook "to collect the names of people requiring transport to Welford Hill, and ... Mrs Roberts would endeavour to arrange this", and the chairman "undertook to arrange a meeting of representatives of the Church, Chapel and Women's Institute" to discuss choirs 55/01-03. The Institute, in other words, had a choir, or enough singers to be asked. The Coronation fund's cash book records collections brought in by Mrs Buttler 03/06 in 03/01-19.

The Mothers' Union 1950s to 1980

The Mothers' Union, the Church of England's society for married women, founded by Mary Sumner in 1876, was the Institute's ecclesiastical counterpart. It was organised by parish branches grouped into deaneries and dioceses, and because Welford lay in the diocese of Gloucester until the 1970s, its branch belonged to the Campden Deanery. Unlike the Institute, it was explicitly religious and, until the 1970s, restricted to women married in church whose marriages had not ended in divorce.

The archive knows the Welford branch only through the notices it placed in the joint parish magazine of St Peter's, Welford and All Saints', Weston. There is no founding date, no list of members, no record of who was enrolling member, and nothing on the branch banner except the fact that it had one. But the notices, spread across twenty-five years of surviving magazines, show a steady monthly round, and they are worth setting out because they are all there is.

The earliest is in the magazine for October 1953: a service in church on 7 October with the Vicar of Alderminster as preacher, a workers' conference at Gloucester on the 16th, intercessions on the

21st, and on 4 November “a meeting in the Rectory: Questions and answers” 49/07. That pattern, a corporate communion, a monthly meeting at the Rectory with a speaker, and an afternoon of intercessions in church, repeats in almost every issue. In February 1956 there was a film in the Memorial Hall, “all are welcome”, a quiet afternoon at Saintbury, the Deanery Festival at Campden on Lady Day, transferred to 10 April, and the Mothers’ Union Festival at Gloucester Cathedral on 16 May 13/21. In January 1957 members were asked to see “the enrolling member” for details of the New Year party 05/02. In March 1959 Mrs Sherwood spoke at the Rectory, and there was a competition for the best emergency “boiled bag” 11/14; in September 1959 there was a corporate communion at ten on Michaelmas morning “followed by meeting and coffee in Rectory” 18/34.

The 1960 magazines show the branch looking outward. In February the meeting at the Rectory took as its subject “Church Schools”, the branch was invited to join the Aston-sub-Edge branch for its March meeting, tickets for the Gloucester School of Prayer were to be had from “your E.M.”, and a copy of a book recommended by a Miss Treanor, *They came to a village*, was placed in the church library. In November the Rev. Norman Shepherd of Weston Subedge spoke at the Rectory, members were told of the Overseas Sale at Mary Sumner House, the society’s London headquarters, on 8 and 9 November, and of the “Invalid Members’ Broadcast” on St Luke’s Day 01/90–99. Meetings at the Rectory under Mr and Mrs Gray were the rule throughout the 1950s and 1960s, which makes it likely that Mrs Gray was closely involved, but no source names the enrolling member.

The August 1967 magazine announces a meeting of the Campden Deanery committee at Red Hill House cottage and asks members to “pray for” Mrs T. B. Worth of Clifford Chambers, the new Presiding Member 01/85 in 01/75–89. In June 1971 the branch was told that the deanery would not go to the Diocesan Festival in the cathedral that year but in 1972, and was urged to attend the missionary festival at Campden instead, “with their special interest in the church overseas”. In October 1971, with the parish between rectors, Father Hammond offered to take the monthly corporate communion “on our usual first Thursday in the month” 19/34, 19/48.

St. Peter's Welford on Avon

and

All Saint's, Weston on Avon

Vol. XXIII No. 13

JANUARY 1972

Price 2½p

Rector

Churchwardens:

WELFORD: Miss H. S. Hopkins, Arden Croft, Cranhill, Bidford-on-Avon, Alcester. Mr. W. Hawkins, Erica, Barton Road, Welford-on-Avon.

WESTON: Mr. R. B. Bluck, Weston Farm. Mr. G. Morris, Chapel Street.

Verger:

Mr. G. Morris, Chapel Street (Weston)

MOTHER'S UNION

Sunday, February 6th. Corporate Communion at 9 a.m.

Thursday, February 17th. Once again Clifford Chambers have kindly asked us to join them in their monthly meeting. It will be at Clifford Rectory at 2.30 p.m. The speaker will be Mrs. Scott.

FEBRUARY SERVICES

WELFORD

9.00 a.m. and 6.30 p.m.

WESTON

10.45 a.m. until further notice on the last Sunday in the month.

FUNERAL

31st December James Leonard Gould.

HOLY MATRIMONY

15th January Charles Frederick Mawle and Rebecca Anne Pollett.

Feb. (9 a.m.)	a.m.	p.m. (6.30 p.m.)
13th	D. Biggart, H. Bastow	R. Harris, C. J. Jones
20th	A. Marshall, H. Maddoms	W. Hands, H. Bastow
27th	J. A. Knott, W. Walker	H. Garret, R. Andrew
March 5th	H. Burke, D. Biggart	C. J. Jones, R. Harris

MRS. ELSIE ROBERTS

Many parishioners will have heard with regret of the death of Mrs. Elsie Roberts at Brighton on 18th December, where she had been taken from Stratford Hospital to convalesce, following a short illness. In recent years she had not been able to get about the village but after Mr. and Mrs. Roberts made their home in Welford 40 years ago, the latter took an active part in the life of the village, particularly in the Church and the Women's Institute movement. Mrs. Roberts was a member of the Parochial Church Council for a number of years, and served as Secretary for about six years. She was a member of The Church Working party from the time of its formation, joining with others who throughout the year made articles to sell at the Summer Fetes and Christmas sales, and was also a member of the Mothers' Union.

Mr. D. Roberts and his daughters hope to arrange for a memorial service to be held at Welford Church in the near future.

FOR YOUR DIARY

It is proposed to hold the Summer Fete on Saturday, July 1st.

The parish magazine, early 1972. Left, the Mothers' Union notices: a corporate communion and a joint meeting with the Clifford Chambers branch at Clifford Rectory. Right, the obituary of Mrs Elsie Roberts, a member of the Women's Institute, the Mothers' Union, the

Parochial Church Council and the Church Working Party. The masthead reads January 1972 though the notices are for February; the folder is catalogued as February 19/51.

The early 1970s brought the branch closer to Clifford Chambers, which was being joined to Welford and Weston under one incumbent. In early 1972 the Welford members were invited to the Clifford Chambers monthly meeting at Clifford Rectory, "once again", with Mrs Scott as speaker, and a joint service with Clifford Chambers was planned 19/50, 19/51. When the parish held its Christmas Fair in December 1971, "teas were organised and served by Mrs. H. Day and members of the Mothers' Union" 19/50.

The fullest account of the branch in action is the report of the Campden Deanery Festival, which Welford hosted in July 1972:

On a cool, grey evening early in July, the bells of St. Peter's rang out to welcome Mothers' Union members, who travelled from villages all over the Campden Deanery to Welford. The special occasion was the Deanery Festival, held this year in the evening in the hope that more young members would be free to attend. By 7.0 p.m. the church was full and the Service began with the Rector leading to the chancel a procession of visiting Clergy, followed by five Mothers' Union members each carrying the Banner of her Branch.

Parish magazine, August 1972, report signed "J.R." 18/06

The Rev. Michael Bennett, Rector of Swindon, preached on "the changing concepts of the Virgin Mary throughout the ages". Mr Biggart and Mr Maddams, "husbands of Welford members", acted as ushers with the churchwardens; Jack Marshall's team rang the bells again as the congregation walked to the village school, where "small tables laid out with a tempting selection of savoury and sweet refreshments awaited us. Posy bowls of summer flowers and a large pedestal arrangement gave a welcoming and colourful picture on a dismal evening. Coffee and tea were served to the tables by Welford members, giving them an opportunity to get round and meet individual branches." The Diocesan Secretary, Mrs Joyce Hardwidge, attended, and Mrs White, the Deanery Presiding Member, thanked her. The branch's AGM was held at Little House on 19 July.

The same issue carried, in its diocesan insert, the Bishop of Gloucester's notes on the report of the Bishop of Willesden's commission on the Mothers' Union, which had divided six to three in favour of admitting women who had remarried after divorce.

Bishop Basil Guy thought the majority's position "frankly absurd": if the society admitted such women, "the ordinary man in the street will in fact conclude that the Mothers' Union has abandoned its teaching about the permanence of marriage" 18/06. Nothing in the archive records how the Welford members received his view; the national society eventually opened its membership in 1974.

In December 1972 the branch launched something new: "A Prayer Group has now been formed in Welford, sponsored by the Mothers' Union. The Group will normally meet in Welford Church at 3.00 p.m. on the second Wednesday in each month. All are welcome." The same notice invited members to "the Carol Service of the Womens' Fellowship at the Welford Methodist Chapel" on 13 December, and hoped the Methodist women would come to St Peter's in return 02/15-25.



WELFORD AND WESTON-ON-AVON PARISH MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 1972

Co

ver of the parish magazine for December 1972, the issue that announced the Mothers' Union prayer group and the invitation to the Methodist Women's Fellowship carol service. The etching of the church and the Old Rectory was used on the cover for many years; this was the last issue in the old style 02/15-25.

The later notices are fewer. The Silver Jubilee issue of June 1977 lists the parish prayer group, a corporate communion, the Deanery Festival at Honeybourne on 21 June "transport to be arranged", and a luncheon on 19 June at Church House, "admission by tickets only" 03/141, 03/142. A magazine page of 1975 or 1980 reports the Deanery Festival at Weston Subedge on 13 May, at which "Mrs. P. Harris, Diocesan President, read the first lesson and Mrs. Powell, Deanery President, the second", and the address was given by the Bishop of Tewkesbury; the Welford branch's June diary included a prayer group at Clifford and the monthly meeting at the Rectory 60/02. After that the Mothers' Union disappears from the archive.

A note in the February 1964 magazine, perhaps written by the rector, gives the branch's own idea of itself: "Mothers' Union is, primarily, a way of life, a personal commitment to establish a Christian home in which God and His Church are given a rightful place. A Mothers' Union member promises to do this when she becomes a member and this entails, inevitably, personal service to the community, and it is better that time should be given to the worship of God ... and to loving service in the parish than attending meetings, if a choice has to be made because of shortage of time." 60/05

Chapel women and working parties

The Methodist chapel in Chapel Street had its own women's organisation, the Women's Fellowship, but the archive mentions it only twice: in the 1951 list of village bodies, and in the 1972 invitation to its carol service 55/01-03, 02/15-25. The essays on religion and on the chapel in this series show that the chapel's own records in the archive are thin, and the Fellowship's are absent altogether. Its members' names, its meetings and the date of its founding are unknown.

The Church Working Party is a little better recorded. It was listed separately from the Mothers' Union in 1951, and Elsie Roberts's obituary says she "was a member of The Church Working party from the time of its formation, joining with others who throughout the year made articles to sell at the Summer Fetes and Christmas sales" 19/51. The accounts of the church garden party in July 1967 show the "Working party stall" taking £33 15s, more than any other stall except the bottle stall 01/85 in 01/75-89. The phrase "working party" goes back to the senior and junior working parties of the Needlework Guild in 1914, and the idea, women sewing together for a cause and selling the result, is older still.

Elsie Roberts's obituary is also a reminder that the same women belonged to several of these bodies at once. She was in the Church, the Women's Institute, the Parochial Church Council (as its secretary for about six years), the Working Party and the Mothers' Union. Ciss Basson of the Shakespeare Inn was, in 1973, "40 years a member of the Women's Institute, a Welford school manager for 15 years and a member of the over-sixties' club", and she and her husband had been awarded a gold medal by the British Legion for selling poppies for forty years 13/16. Mrs Buttler was president of the Institute and a school manager. The organisations were distinct, and the Institute was deliberately non-sectarian, but the people running them overlapped.

One absence is worth recording. In 1954 the press report of a British Legion drum-head service at Bidford listed the branches taking part: "Bidford-on-Avon, Salford Priors, Salford Priors women's section, Stratford-on-Avon, Stratford-on-Avon women's section, Welford and Weston, and Alcester women's section" 56/09. Welford and Weston paraded without a women's section. The archive's Legion papers nowhere mention one, and it is a fair inference that the branch never had one, though the record is not complete enough to be sure.

Auntie Tot's Institute 1945 to 1963

Mrs Frank Buttler, "affectionately known as Auntie Tot", presided over the Institute for nineteen years from "directly after the War" until 1963 03/05. She and her husband farmed at Weston Sands, and Frank Buttler was a churchwarden at Weston 01/56, 01/90-99. She had run the produce stall at the pre-war fêtes; in 1951 she arranged the Institute's Festival museum; in 1953 she collected for the Coronation fund. In May 1958 she crowned the May Queen. A Birmingham newspaper photograph of that year shows eleven-year-old Margaret Sabin "being crowned by Mrs. Butler, president of the local section of the Women's Institute and one of the local school managers" 01/78 in 01/75-89.

In the 1950s and 1960s the Institute was a fixture of the Memorial Hall's bookings. An undated pre-decimal scale of hall charges sets a flat rate per letting of £1 5s for "Women's Institute and British Legion (Bingo only)", against £1 10s for parties and dances and 10s for the Girl Guides 60/045. The Institute owned equipment that other bodies borrowed: the church garden parties of 1967 and 1969 both paid five shillings for the hire of the W.I.'s trestle tables, and

the 1971 Shrove Tuesday social thanked "the W.I. for allowing us to use their crockery" 01/85, 13/01, 19/34.



The Welford W.I. Committee at the retirement of Mrs Buttler as president, Grafton Court Hotel, 1963. From the note on the back, left to right: Mrs R. Harris, Mrs Rimmer, Mrs Basson ("the Shakespeare"), Mrs Cook (behind), Mrs Buttler, Mrs Churchill, Mrs Mansfield, Mrs Wilson (presenting the bouquet), Mrs Freeman, Mrs Rose, Mrs Gozeley [?] and Miss Wheat [?]. The spelling "Buttler" is the note's; other sources spell it Butler 16/12.

The photograph of her retirement is the best image of the Institute in the archive. Twelve women of the committee stand in a line in a curtained room of the Grafton Court Hotel, in their best early-sixties dresses, pearls and handbags, while Mrs Wilson hands Mrs Buttler a bouquet of white chrysanthemums. Several of the names are familiar from other folders: Mrs Basson of the Shakespeare Inn, whose husband Roly kept it for forty-one years; Mrs Churchill, whose family acted in the dramatic society; Mrs Mansfield, who would later bring her "Black and White Minstrels" from Lower Quinton to entertain the Over Sixties; Miss Wheat, later a member of the History Society's committee. Who succeeded Mrs Buttler as president in 1963 is not recorded.

Fifty years old 1970 to 1978

The Institute's activity in the 1970s is recorded in the reports it sent to the parish magazine, and in its dealings with the new Local History Society. The two kinds of source show an organisation still well attended and busy, with a turnover of presidents.

In January 1974 the Herald photographed three boys planting the last ten of Welford's sixty trees for "Plant a Tree in '73" along Headland Road. The trees had been donated by Mrs Coltman, Miss Rushton, the Welford Conservatives, the Women's Institute, the Welford Young Wives, the dramatic society, the Welford Over 60s and the pre-school playgroup 13/09. Of the eight donors, four were women or women's groups.

A year later, in the same months that Gilda Gray's fiftieth-anniversary history appeared, the Institute reported on its January meeting:

In welcoming the members to the January meeting, the President, Mrs. Coverley, wished everyone present a Happy New Year. Before the business commenced three new members, Mrs. Adams, Miss Eastwood and Mrs. Spooner, were presented with their membership cards. Arrangements were finalised for the Buffet Supper to be held on 29th January, 1975, and transport details were given. After discussion it was decided to hold a fund raising effort in the autumn, on the same lines as the Fair held on the Apple Green last year. ... The speaker for the evening was Mr. Baker, the Beadle and Town Crier of Stratford upon Avon. ... The Buffet Supper at Temple Grafton Hotel was a great success and made a welcome change to the usual party held in the Village Hall. Everyone was able to relax, not having the thought of washing up and clearing away tables, etc. For the March meeting there will be a talk on Jewellery. Visitors will be most welcome.

"Welford and Weston W.I. Report", parish magazine, early 1975 60/05

Miss Deverson proposed the vote of thanks; Mrs Pearce and Mrs Hoarpsen (as printed) were tea hostesses; the raffle was won by Mrs Lively. The same page carries a notice from the Welford Young Wives and one for the Infant Welfare clinic, "the advice of a doctor

and Health Visitor is free to mothers and babies”, so that a single page of the 1975 magazine shows three generations of women’s organisation side by side.

The Silver Jubilee magazine of June 1977 reports that “the President, Mrs. Harvey, welcomed members of [the W.I. from] Temple Grafton to the May meeting. Arrangements were made to hold Presidents’ Night on the 12th and to give the Old People’s tea on Wednesday. A quiz and competition were arranged and coffee was served by Mrs. James, and Mrs. Hartnell gave the vote of thanks.” The month’s diary lists the June meeting for Tuesday the 14th at 7.30, with the title “Make it Spanish” 03/142. The old people’s tea is the kind of service the Institute had given since the 1920s, and the exchange visit with Temple Grafton was a regular part of institute life across the county.

The Institute’s largest project of the decade is known only from the History Society’s minutes, because the thing itself is not in the archive. In April 1977 the Society’s committee noted that “the Domesday Book, now at the Town Hall, Warwick, might form the basis for a talk at a General Meeting. The W.I. might be approached to allow copies to be taken by the Society.” In June, “Domesday Book would be back in Welford at the next W.I. meeting. Mrs Hackett would contact W.I. with a view to the possibility of copies being made”; in August, Miss Hackett was to “approach W.I. again concerning the possibility of borrowing & perhaps photocopying it” 37/01–04. At the Society’s AGM on 10 March 1978, Miss Deverson gave the talk:

The business meeting concluded, Miss Deverson gave a most interesting talk on the Domesday Book of Welford & district compiled by the W.I. This was a modern project of great value to Warwickshire records, covering as it did farming, wild life, landscape, the use & conservation of land & many other aspects of life. The book itself is a great credit to those who contributed to it & is quite beautiful.

History Society minutes, 10 March 1978 37/01–04

This was a village survey of the kind the National Federation of Women’s Institutes encouraged from its 1926 and 1969 mandates on planning and countryside conservation, which a 1970s rural-affairs digest in the archive describes as “tree surveys, footpath mapping, Domesday-style land-use surveys and booklets” 08/01–19. Welford’s volume evidently went to Warwick as part of a county collection and came back. Whether the Society ever got its copies is

not recorded, and the archive does not contain the book or any copy of it. It would be the most substantial record the Institute ever made, and its present whereabouts are worth finding.

The Institute and the Society kept up a friendly relationship. In 1970 the Society agreed “that the W.I. should be notified of the Christina Hole meeting”, on folklore, at a charge of two shillings 37/01-04; in 1987 it adopted “the same system of ordering and paying for coffee at the door that the W.I. use” 38/01-03; for an open evening in about 1990-91 it borrowed “the W.I. table tops”, and thanked “the W.I. for the loan of their trestle table tops” 38/01-03.

Young Wives and Welford Wives 1973 to 2003

The newest women’s group in the archive, and the one that lasts longest in its records, began as the Welford Young Wives. Young Wives groups were formed in many parishes in the 1950s and 1960s for women too young, or too busy with small children, to feel at home in the Institute or the Mothers’ Union. Welford’s first appears among the tree donors of 1973 13/09. In early 1975 Ann Bladen wrote to the parish magazine: “Many thanks to Mrs. Kathleen Bird and her Committee for the splendid Buffet Dance held on the 17th January. I am sure all members will agree with me that it was a great success, and an enjoyable time was had by all who attended.” 60/05 Kathleen Bird also acted with the dramatic society, playing in *Outside Edge* in 1987 61/07-09.

By June 1977 the group had dropped “Young”: the Jubilee diary lists “Welford Wives — Cookery demonstration” 03/141, 03/142. Twenty years later Phyllis Eastgate, writing to a Welford friend in 1997, thanked her for a letter “all about Welford”, including “the Luncheon Club, Welford Wives, & Yoga” 36/02.

The Wives’ most lasting work is still standing at the entrances to the village. For the Queen’s Golden Jubilee in 2002 the History Society and Welford Wives jointly commissioned new village nameplates from Nuneaton Signs. Peter Deakin of Calthorpe Cottage, Boat Lane, handled the correspondence for the Society, and Mrs Lorna Smith represented Welford Wives; copies of every letter went to her. The two bodies told the county traffic group that

they were “of one mind in requiring the signs to reflect” the village’s name, and they asked for a credit plate on the back of each sign reading:

THESE SIGNS WERE ERECTED JOINTLY BY THE WELFORD WIVES AND THE WELFORD AND WESTON HISTORY SOCIETY AS THEIR CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE QUEEN’S GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS.

P. Deakin to Warwickshire County Council, 2002 28/01

Every bill was split exactly in half. On 28 February 2003 the makers’ statement of £828.38 was settled with “two cheques, one in the sum of £414.19, drawn on Welford Wives account, and the other in a similar sum, drawn on Welford History Society account”; the erection invoice was paid with two cheques of £67.50, and a final account with two of £79.32. The last letter is signed jointly, “Lorna Smith, Welford Wives” and “David Wilshaw, Welford History Society” 28/01, 27/01–09. Mrs Smith and Mr Deakin were to “head up the removal of the existing signs and erection of the new signs, hopefully assisted by other members of both organisations”. In all, each organisation paid £561.01.

One more group of the same kind appears once. A magazine page of 1975 or 1980 carries a notice from “St. Helen’s Wives”, thanking everyone who supported their coffee evening on 30 April, which raised £52 “to be divided between Action Unlimited and Group Funds”, and describing a lunch for a former member, Judy Garrett, who had moved to Church Stretton 60/02. St Helen’s is the church of Clifford Chambers, which by then shared the parish magazine with Welford and Weston, and it is almost certainly that village’s group rather than Welford’s.

The other clubs women ran

Several other village organisations were mixed in membership but run, on the evidence of the archive, mostly by women.

The Welford Over 60s club was founded by Mr and Mrs E. Bolton, who were guests of honour at its Christmas dinner in December 1971, by which time they had moved to Ashby-de-la-Zouch 19/51. A photograph of the club’s Christmas party in 1970 names Mrs R. Barron, Mrs E. Smith, Mrs Gould and Mrs Banner of Weston, and Mrs Jack Smith among the members, along with several men 03/01–19. A newsletter page of the 1970s prints verse tributes to the

club's four officers ("She's patient, tireless, firm but kind / With a diplomatic turn of mind") and records a membership of seventy-three 03/03. In 1991 Mrs Sullivan asked the hall committee whether the floor was safe for "the Over 60s", and Jean Stone hoped part of a bequest might go to the club and so to the hall; in 2002 Jean Stone, "organiser of Welford Over 60s Club", planted a Jubilee tree on the Green, donated by the club 60/06, 24/24. Vera Wells wrote its reports for the parish news in the 1980s or 1990s 63/07.

The Welford and Weston Luncheon Club met in the Church Rooms in 1991, with Ann Berrow giving notice of its meetings, and was still going in 1997 60/06, 36/02. The Infant Welfare clinic, held in the village with a doctor and health visitor, is in the magazines from 1957 to 1977, by which time it had become a "Mother & Toddler Group/Clinic" 05/02, 60/05, 03/142. The 1st Welford-on-Avon Brownie Pack re-formed in January 1972 "after several years", meeting at the School Hall on Thursdays, with a Tawny Owl wanted (applications to Anne Wheeler, Woodbine Cottage, Duck Lane) 19/50; by 1977 the Brownies and Guides met on Saturdays and took part in the Jubilee parade of uniformed organisations 03/142.

And there was one visiting women's group that deserves a footnote for what it says about Welford's reputation. In August 1934 the Birmingham Weekly Post sent a motoring correspondent over the route of a coach outing to the North Cotswolds planned for "the members of the Women's Guild" among its readers: "Already they are talking about it ... In 'bus, and tram, and cafe you may overhear scraps of conversation." The route went through Binton to Welford, which the writer praised as off the beaten track and as having been "the prettiest village in Gloucestershire" until its recent transfer to Warwickshire 13/22. Welford's own women had spent the previous decade letting rooms to visitors of exactly this kind.

The last years in the archive 1994 to 1999

The only financial record of the Institute in the archive is its statement for the year ending 31 October 1994, on the printed form of the Warwickshire Federation with the WI emblem at its head 05/07 in 05/03-09. It shows an institute smaller than the one Mrs Gray joined, but still lively:

ITEM	£	NOTES
Subscriptions	498.80	43 members at £11.60
Receipts at meetings	537.03	Visitors, refreshments, a book stall, raffles and £287

ITEM	£	NOTES
		from the 70th birthday party
Sales of publications	173.80	<i>Home & Country</i> , the county newsletter, diaries and calendars, all sold at cost
Fund-raising	282.70	Christmas coffee morning £56.50, cake stall £121, plant stall £105.20
Members' outings	661.50	Paid in and paid out again
Prize in the Memorial Hall draw	25.00	
Meeting expenses	801.14	Hall hire £165, speakers and demonstrations £210.50, birthday party £299.16
To County and National Federations	305.30	Affiliation fee, national quota £177.85, county quota £113.95
Bursary to Denman College	50.00	The WI's residential college
Donations	77.00	County Federation room £50, "SOS Donate a Tree" £5, and £16 for two members' funerals
Balance	385.21	Up from £322.93

Forty-three members, a birthday party, speakers at every meeting, an essay cup, outings, a bursary for a member to attend Denman, and contributions to the wider movement through the Associated Country Women of the World and the federation raffles: in its seventieth year the Institute was doing what institutes everywhere did. The form is unsigned by the treasurer, president and auditor, so the officers of 1994 are unknown.

The last appearance of the Institute in the archive is a pair of photograph albums. At a History Society committee meeting in 1998, "Mrs R Hale raised the subject of 2 photo albums she had received for safe keeping from the W.I. & which covered the village about the years 1969-70's". Miss Joyce Skinner, the Society's film-maker, examined them, and they were made into a video. On 29 May 1998 "Mrs Sue Wilshaw opened the meeting by welcoming all members, & members of the W.I. & guests, to the evening of a Video show made up from a W.I. album loaned to Miss Joyce Skinner"; it was shown "on two television sets at once so everyone could see". The Society agreed that the parish magazine should mention "that photo's are from W.I. and that W.I. members would be most welcome" 38/01-03. In the same year the Society moved a speaker's date because Mr Richardson "was speaking that month to the W.I.", so the Institute was still meeting in 1998. The albums themselves went back; the archive holds neither them nor, apparently, the video.

From there the archive is silent about the Institute. Welford Wives were still active in 2003. Whether the Welford and Weston Women's Institute reached its eightieth birthday in 2004, and whether it still meets, are questions the Society's folders cannot answer.

Looking back across the eighty years the archive covers, the women's organisations of Welford did four kinds of work. They made things: shirts for the Norton Hall hospital, tablecloths for the fête raffle, cakes for every stall. They raised money: for the Memorial Hall, the playing field, the Coronation, the village signs. They kept the village's social life going: the teas, the parties, the floats, the plays, the outings, the old people's tea. And on at least one occasion they changed the government of the parish. Gilda Gray, who did more than anyone to record this history, put the point simply. The Institute, she wrote, was "a meeting where all women were on an equal footing, where new ideas were talked of", and "it was revolutionary".

A chronology

DATE	EVENT	SOURCE
1851	Census lists fieldwomen, glovers and four schoolmistresses in Welford	14/12, 01/49
c. 1912	Phyllis Eastgate later recalls village women discussing "the new idea – the Women's Institute" (date too early)	36/01
13 Aug 1914	Women of Welford and Weston form a Needlework Guild for the Norton Hall Red Cross hospital	23/97–107
3 Sep 1914	Guild's 50 shirts, 50 jackets and 50 pairs of socks exhibited in the Gymnasium	23/97–107
1915	Joint flower show abandoned; £5 5s of balance to the Red Cross	13/13
Early 1920s	Choral Society restarted by "the ladies", Mrs A. J. Davis president	23/91–96
Dec 1923	Memorial Hall opened by Mrs Davis, the rector's wife	23/97–107
1924	Bazaar and social, all stalls run by women, clears the hall debt to 17s 2d	23/91–96
1924	Welford W.I. inaugurated by Miss Margery Miles, J.P.; Mrs Davis president, Miss White secretary, probably Mrs Mainwaring treasurer	03/05
15 Jul 1925	Parish council considers application by the W.I. about letting fees on the village green	18/14
May 1927	Maypole dedication tea by Mrs Mainwaring and helpers	01/77
Aug 1937	Fête: WI floats; Mrs R. M. Webb, WI president, presents flowers from members' gardens	54/02, 57/01

DATE	EVENT	SOURCE
May 1938	Empire Day maypole tea by Mrs Mainwaring and “the ladies’ committee”	01/48–101
13 Dec 1938	Duke of Kent sees the Warwickshire WI handicraft exhibition, then a play at Welford	11/19, 62/01
1939–40	Rose Amy Booth qualifies in first aid and Red Cross home nursing	01/53–55
1939–45	WI work for evacuees, food preservation, “grow for Victory”; Land Girls at Solamo and Weston House	03/05, 36/10, 36/14
c. 1945	Mrs Frank Buttler (“Auntie Tot”) becomes president	03/05
1947	WI meetings and other institutes supply audiences for the dramatic society; WI donates £4	61/01–09
Feb 1948	Gilda Gray joins; membership “over one hundred”	03/05
1949	WI candidates Mrs Ethel Roberts and Mrs Karl Gray elected to the parish council against “Down with Petticoat Government” banners	03/05, 19/06
1950	WI tea in the Memorial Hall photographed	16/09, 16/26
c. 1950–51	WI memorandum to the parish council about the open sewer towards Weston	13/15
1951	Festival of Britain: W.I. Museum at the Old Post Office; Women’s Fellowship, Working Party and Mothers’ Union listed as village bodies	55/01–03
1953	Coronation: WI singers to join Church and Chapel choirs; earliest Mothers’ Union notice in the archive (October)	55/01–03, 49/07
1956	Mrs Gray becomes chairman of the parish council	19/06
May 1958	Mrs Butler, WI president, crowns May Queen Margaret Sabin	01/78
1963	Mrs Buttler retires as president; committee photographed at the Grafton Court Hotel	16/12
Mar 1970	New History Society borrows the W.I. collection of exhibits and photographs	37/01–04
Jul 1972	Campden Deanery Mothers’ Union Festival held at Welford	18/06
Dec 1972	MU prayer group formed; Methodist Women’s Fellowship carol service	02/15–25
1973	WI and Welford Young Wives among donors of the Headland Road trees	13/09
Dec 1974 – Jan 1975	Gilda Gray’s “W.I. – Fifty Years Old”; Mrs Coverley president	03/04–05, 60/05
1977	Mrs Harvey president; “Welford Wives” cookery demonstration; WI Domesday Book of Welford at Warwick	03/142, 37/01–04
10 Mar 1978	Miss Deverson’s talk on the WI Domesday Book to the History Society	37/01–04
1975 or 1980	Last Mothers’ Union notice in the archive	60/02
1994	WI 70th birthday party; 43 members	05/07

DATE	EVENT	SOURCE
May 1998	Video of the WI photograph albums shown to the History Society and WI members	38/01-03
2002-03	Welford Wives and the History Society share the cost of the Jubilee village signs	28/01, 27/01-09

Gaps and conflicting sources

WHAT THE ARCHIVE DOES NOT HOLD

- **No records of the Women's Institute itself.** There are no minute books, membership registers, programmes, competition results or correspondence. The Society's 1979 catalogue lists an "Envelope 19 — Village Activities" containing a "W.I." file 19/21, but its contents are not among the scans. The Institute's two photograph albums of about 1969-75 were lent in 1998 and returned 38/01-03.
- **The WI Domesday Book of Welford** (1977) is known only from the Society's minutes. Neither the book nor any copy is in the archive 37/01-04. Warwickshire County Record Office or the Warwickshire Federation of WIs may know where it went.
- **The founding of the Institute** rests on Gilda Gray's account, written fifty years later by someone who joined in 1948. The founding meeting, its date and the first members are not documented.
- **The Institute in the Second World War** is covered by one sentence of Gray's. No wartime WI document survives in the archive.
- **The Mothers' Union branch** has no surviving records: no founding date, no enrolling members named, no membership figures, no banner description. Everything comes from magazine notices between 1953 and about 1980, and the archive holds only scattered issues.
- **The Methodist Women's Fellowship** is mentioned twice (1951, 1972) and nothing else is known.
- **No Victorian or Edwardian women's organisations** (mothers' meetings, clothing clubs, Girls' Friendly Society) appear, and there is no evidence of local suffrage activity on either side.
- **Women on the parish council.** The archive has councillor lists for 1894-1925 (no women) and 1949-64, but none for 1926-48, so it cannot confirm that Mrs Roberts and Mrs Gray were the first women elected, though Gray's account implies it.
- **WI presidents** are known for 1924 (Mrs A. J. Davis), by 1937 (Mrs R. M. Webb), c. 1945-63 (Mrs F. Buttler), 1975 (Mrs Coverley) and 1977 (Mrs Harvey). The succession in 1963-75 and after 1977 is unknown.
- **No women's section of the British Legion** appears for Welford and Weston; the 1954 parade list suggests there was none 56/09.
- **After 1998** the archive does not say whether the Institute continued. Welford Wives were active in 2003.

CONFLICTS AND CORRECTIONS

- **Founding year.** Gray's fiftieth-anniversary articles (Dec 1974 / Jan 1975) give 1924. The 1994 accounts call the birthday party the "70th" on the receipts side and the

“75th” on the payments side; 70th fits 1924 05/07. The parish council minute of 15 July 1925 confirms the Institute existed by then 18/14. Phyllis Eastgate’s memory of WI talk “about 1912” predates the British movement 36/01.

- **Name.** Gray writes “Welford W.I.” and “the Welford Institute”; every contemporary source from 1937 to 1994 gives “Welford and Weston Women’s Institute”. A 1958 newspaper calls it “the local section of the Women’s Institute” 01/78.
- **Buttler or Butler.** The 1963 photograph note, the fête reports and the 1951 minutes write Buttler; the 1937 minute book and the 1958 newspaper write Butler. Gray’s “19 years ... directly after the War” to 1963 implies 1944 or 1945.
- **Ethel or Elsie Roberts.** Gray names her fellow councillor Mrs Ethel Roberts; the 1972 obituary of a WI member is for Mrs Elsie Roberts, wife of D. Roberts 19/51; the cutting gives only “Mrs E. Roberts” 13/15. They may or may not be the same person.
- **Who chaired the council.** The cutting of c. 1950–51 names W. J. Matthews as chairman, with H. C. Setten present 13/15, but the councillor list shows Setten as chairman from 1949 to 1955 19/06. Matthews may have been chairing a single meeting, or the list may be wrong.
- **The 1950 tea photograph.** The catalogue note for 16/09 dates it “late 1950s to 1960s”; it is the same scene as the upper photograph on 16/26, labelled “Welford WI 1950”, and the Society’s index places it in the Memorial Hall in 1950 16/00, 16/09, 16/26.
- **The 1937 flowers.** One report says Mrs Webb gave Mrs Morrison “a posy”, the other “a beautiful large bowl of assorted flowers” 54/02.
- **The river carnival article.** The summary of 52/082 suggests it is WI-related. It is from the Conservative magazine *Right* and the branch is the Young Conservatives 52/082, 55/01–03.
- **June 1977 magazine.** The two transcriptions of the same Jubilee issue disagree: the MU luncheon was given by “Mr and Mrs Inett” 03/141 or “Mr. and Mrs. Lambert” 03/142, and the Wives’ cookery demonstration is put on Wednesday 1st at 7.30 or Thursday 2nd at 8.00. The original scan would settle both.
- **19/51 date.** The scanned page’s masthead reads “January 1972” but its notices are for February; the folder is catalogued as February 1972.
- **60/02 date.** The weekdays given (Wednesday 30 April, Thursday 8 May, Sunday 1 June, Tuesday 3 June) fit both 1975 and 1980.
- **Miss White’s arrival.** Her obituary says 1889; the Nest deed and 1891 census suggest 1891 (see the Priors Lee essay).

SOURCES USED

- Gilda Gray, “W.I. – Fifty Years Old”, Parts 1 and 2, village newsletter, Dec 1974 and Jan 1975 — 03/04, 03/05 (in 03/01–19)
- Miss White’s scrapbook: Needlework Guild 1914, war work, choral society, Memorial Hall stone-laying, opening and bazaar — 23/91–96, 23/97–107
- Parish council: Woodward’s notes of minute books — 18/14; councillors 1894–1925 — 19/25; councillors 1949–64 — 19/06; Herald column c. 1950–51 — 13/15
- Fêtes and celebrations: fête minute book 1936–39 — 57/01; fête reports 1937–39 — 54/02; maypole 1927, 1958, 1967 — 01/75–89; Empire Day

1938 — 01/48–101; Festival and Coronation committee 1951–55 — 55/01–03, 55/11; Coronation fund — 03/06

- Royal visit 1938 — 11/19, 62/01; dramatic society minutes and scrapbook — 61/01–09, 62/01
- Wartime — 01/53, 01/54, 01/55, 08/01–19 (Gray letter 1978), 10/32–56, 36/10, 36/14, 47/80–90
- Photographs — 16/00 (index), 16/09, 16/12, 16/26
- Parish magazines with Mothers' Union and other notices — 49/07 (1953), 13/21 (1956), 05/02 (1957), 11/14 and 18/34 (1959), 01/90–99 (1960), 60/05 (1964, 1975), 01/85 (1967), 13/01 (1969), 19/34, 19/48 (1971), 19/50, 19/51, 18/06, 02/15–25 (1972), 03/141, 03/142 (1977), 60/02 (1975 or 1980)
- Obituaries and profiles — 01/90–99 (Miss Ann White), 13/16 (Ciss Basson), 19/51 (Elsie Roberts), 13/15 (Miss M. O. James)
- History Society minutes — 37/01–04 (1970–78), 38/01–03 (1987–99); catalogue — 19/21
- WI accounts 1994 — 05/07 (in 05/03–09); hall charges — 60/045; tree planting 1973 — 13/09
- Welford Wives and village signs — 28/01, 27/01–09; letters of Phyllis Eastgate — 36/01, 36/02
- Over 60s and other clubs — 03/01–19, 03/03, 19/51, 24/24, 60/06, 63/07; British Legion — 56/09; Young Conservatives — 52/082; Women's Guild trip 1934 — 13/22