

# Villagers stopped in their tracks

ACTORS in a village play are learning to lay railway tracks and perform a Morris dance.

The lessons are being provided to give an authentic look to a story which is based on first-hand accounts of life in Wheatley around 1870.

Playwright Mr Mick Jones turned to the village records to create a storyline inspired by the National Theatre's *Lark Rise to Candleford*.

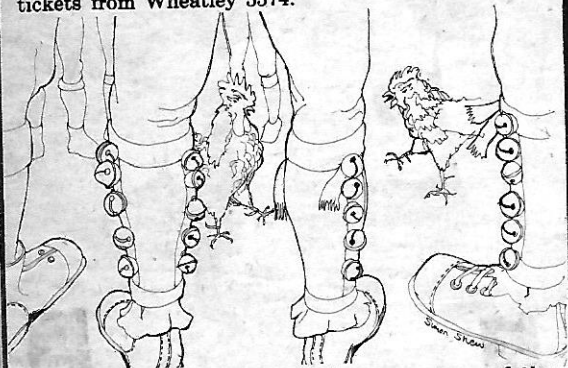
About 100 villagers will be involved in presenting it at Wheatley Polytechnic in May as part of the Wheatley Festival.

Mr Jones spent more than a year combing local documents. His main source was the diary of the vicar, the Rev. Edward Elton, who was appointed to put right what Bishop Wilberforce of Oxford called "one of the worst parishes in the diocese."

The play — performed among an unseated audience in promenade style, involving them in the action — follows a last fling against the clerical reformer by William Juggins, a notorious cockfighter and entertainer of pugilists. The vicar manoeuvred him from power in the church.

His tactic for saving the population of just over 1,000 involved night schools for the navvies who brought the railway to a village with nine pubs inherited from its days as a coaching stop. But local legend has them carrying buckets of gin slung from yokes from a nearby pub to their camp.

The production will include a ten-piece band for performances on May 28 and 29, and Mr Davis said the organisers were appealing to local businesses to help with a budget of between £500 and £1,000. Details and tickets from Wheatley 3374.



**COCKFIGHT** by Simon Shew — one of the illustrations done by local artists to promote Wheatley's play.