

## Personal Recollections of Wilfrid Sheldon and Sheldon family

Wheatley in the 1890's was very much more restricted than today. In the west it finished at "Blenheim" and Kiln Lane and in the east at Crown Road, few houses beyond the "Crown". Opposite "Wayside" stood a large stone barn with farmyard behind it and another barn stood in front of "Ambrose" farmhouse. Only one house beyond that and then "Muddy Lane" which was almost impossible to use in the winter months.

The timing of the summer holiday varied with the state of the harvest. If it was an early harvest we might break up in July; if a late one then not until August.

Much of the corn harvest was still cut by hand so whole families would move into the cornfield. Father would cut the corn, Mother would make bands and tie up the sheaves. The children would glean in the fields as they were cleared. The work they did was paid for at so much an acre, so that a family working together could earn more than the usual weekly wage. But at the end of the century many of the farms were using a mechanical reaper and only on small farms and holdings was the corn reaped by hand. Still talking about corn, I can remember clearly as a schoolboy seeing Cripps Windmill working - a very pleasant sight.

We were by no means a cut-off village (1890's) being on the route from London to Oxford, we had many interesting visitors. I remember German bands, dancing bears, sword swallowers - what a thrill that was when he measured his sword against his body before putting it in his mouth. There were also fire eaters who blew flames out of their mouths and I also remember one group of men on stilts walking through the village. There were frequent organ grinders with monkeys and the cheerful piano organs.

In Wheatley, the family which appears to have served the village for the longest time, is Sheldon. The first reference to them as smiths appears in the Constable's Accounts for Oct. 23<sup>rd</sup> 1778 when it is recorded 'Paid Thomas Sheldon for Iron Work for the Westfield gate - £0 2s 3d'.

Thomas (b. 1776), maybe his son, was a blacksmith, as was his son Charles (1829-1910). His mother was a cook for the vicar of Wheatley. They lived in the Crown Tap for a while, and Charles was also a publican. By 1900 he had moved to The Old Forge House in the High Street, with the forge at the top of the garden in Church Road. Thomas Brazell (1846-1926) took over in 1907 and then his son lived there until his death in 1951.

Wilfrid (shown in Margaret Axford's book as Wilfred Sheldon) was born in 1885 and remembers going with his parents to a party held on the Vicarage field to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee and, 10 years later, remembers receiving a Diamond Jubilee commemorative mug. At different times, a Church Warden, and Secretary of the Village Produce Association. When he was forced, through ill health, to give up his role in the VPA in 1970, signalling the end of the VPA, this role was taken over by Margaret Axford