

WHEN I die — I've decided — I won't have flowers at my funeral. You can give donations instead.

Then my family can pass the money on to the Eynsham History Group and they can use it to produce a little book about the village.

If they make half as good a job of it as the Wheatley Society have of Roman and Saxon Wheatley: A History And A Walker's Guide by John Fox, I shall rest easy in my grave.

The money for that undertaking came from the John Jackson Memorial Fund. John — who used to have the job of reading my effusions when he was a proof-reader for the Oxford Mail — was for many years a pillar of the Wheatley Society.

Bequest

So when he died in 1983 his family decided to share the donations made in his memory between the Society and the Heart Foundation.

Sue O'Connor, who succeeded John as chairman, tells me the members were a bit daunted by the bequest. They felt it placed a tremendous responsibility on them to produce something worthy of John's memory.

But once they buckled down to the task they found it very rewarding. And now they've produced the guide they've realised it is even more rewarding than they thought.

If they manage to sell all the copies, then they will have the money to invest in another publication or project in John's memory.

I'm sure they will. Not only is the booklet most attractively put together, John Fox, the author — a teacher at Cherwell School and a keen

amateur archaeologist and historian — writes in a most engaging way.

I mustn't steal his thunder. But here is an extract from his description of Wheatley's Roman villa.

"Children must have played around the stone, tile-roofed building and under its half-timber verandahs. Irish wolfhounds padded in and out of doors. Funerals went out from here to the edge of the state at Ladder Hill, away from the floodlands and near to the road.

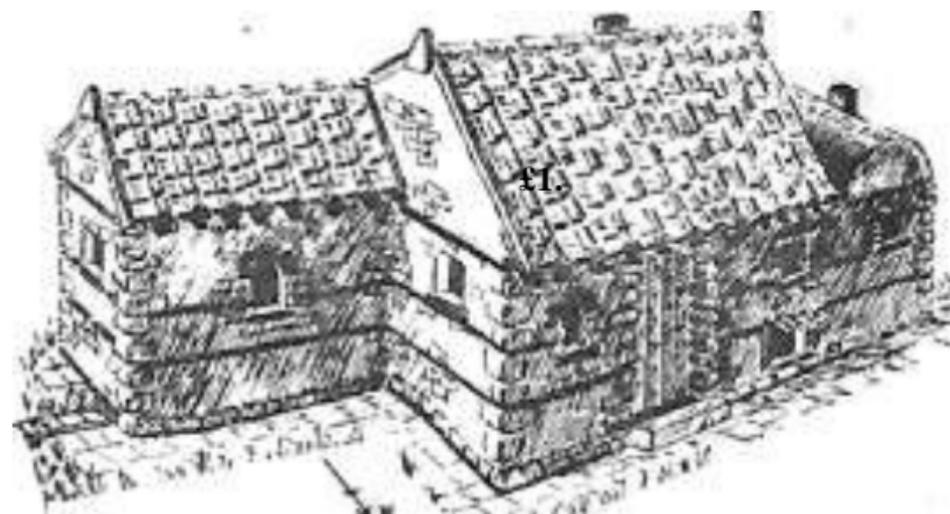
Surplus

"Oxen pulled the plough over land producing grain to feed a population thought to be greater than that of 1066. The surplus went to the central government.

"At table meat was served from wild boar, red deer, brown bear and the estate's own longhorn cattle. Greyhounds shared with wolfhounds the reward scraps after a day's chase. They must also have licked the spillings of Britain's famous beer from the dining floor mosaic.

"Night was a time for bolts and bars. Wildcat, bear and boar stalked the untamed land .. Looking out at dusk a neighbour's smoke spiral at Cuddesdon or the light of his rubbish fires would soften an isolation hard for us to imagine on a 20th century evening as electricity lights up roads, houses and cars wherever the walker looks".

Roman and Saxon Wheatley is available from Laveil's the Newsagents and the George Gallery in Wheatley and Blackwell's in Oxford, and is astonishingly good value at



An artist's impression of the Roman bathhouse, the remains of which were excavated

near Wheatley in 1845. From Roman and Saxon Wheatley by John Fox.

