

Introduction and History

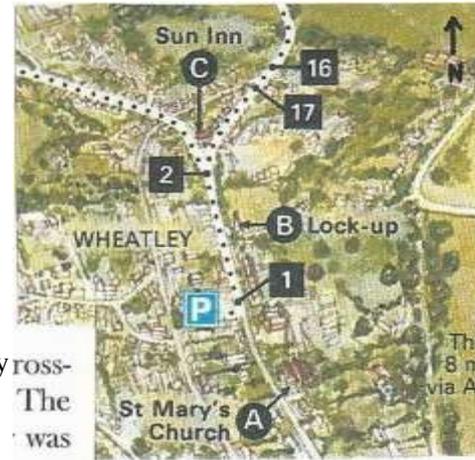
The Round House, Church Road, Wheatley.

Wheatley grew up by the side of an important cross country route, which ignored the existence of Oxford. The point where this route crossed the Thames, Wheatley was formed as an important post on the road from London to South Wales.

Lock-ups sometimes known as 'roundhouses' or 'cages' were used by parish constables until the 1840's, for the detention of drunks and other abusers of the peace. Earlier designs of Lock-ups were often timber, but later models were brick or stone and often circular in shape.

Wheatley's six-faced pyramid lock-up built in 1834, was originally built as a temporary prison, following the proposition of Mr Elderfield, the Constable for the parish at the time, but it was only used as such for six years. The date 1834 is quite certain, as there are details about it in the minute book of vestry, as the body that then ruled the parish was called. In the padlocked interior arc kept the old stocks. Beside the lock-up once stood the parish cock-fighting and bull-baiting pit, which has now vanished.

Early in the 19th Century, at the time when Wheatley was a quarrying town and full of coaching inns, disorder was rife and a lock-up became necessary. Enclosures had brought unemployment and curbed the rights of the poor to fuel and pasture on Commons land, such as that between Littleworth and Shotover. Mechanisation of farming was beginning and rural populations were on the move as town and city industry beckoned and the overall population was also increasing. On nearby Otmoor after 1830, serious agrarian riots and sabotage took place. Unrest spread to Wheatley, with companies of petty constables being brought in to patrol the parish.



The 'round house' or 'keep', was a temporary holding place for those arrested before they were taken before the Justices. It was built out of the parish stone pits where parish 'paupers' earned their living (work fare) by breaking stones for parish roads. In its day it was as much a symbol of class division, social unrest and economic recession, as it was of a village with a drink and petty crime problem.

The pyramid was a fashionable shape in the 18th century for a mausoleum, or family tomb. This fact may have led to the humble village lock-up being attributed to Sir Christopher Wren or Sir John Vanbrugh; but in fact it was built by a local mason named Cooper, more than a century after their time.

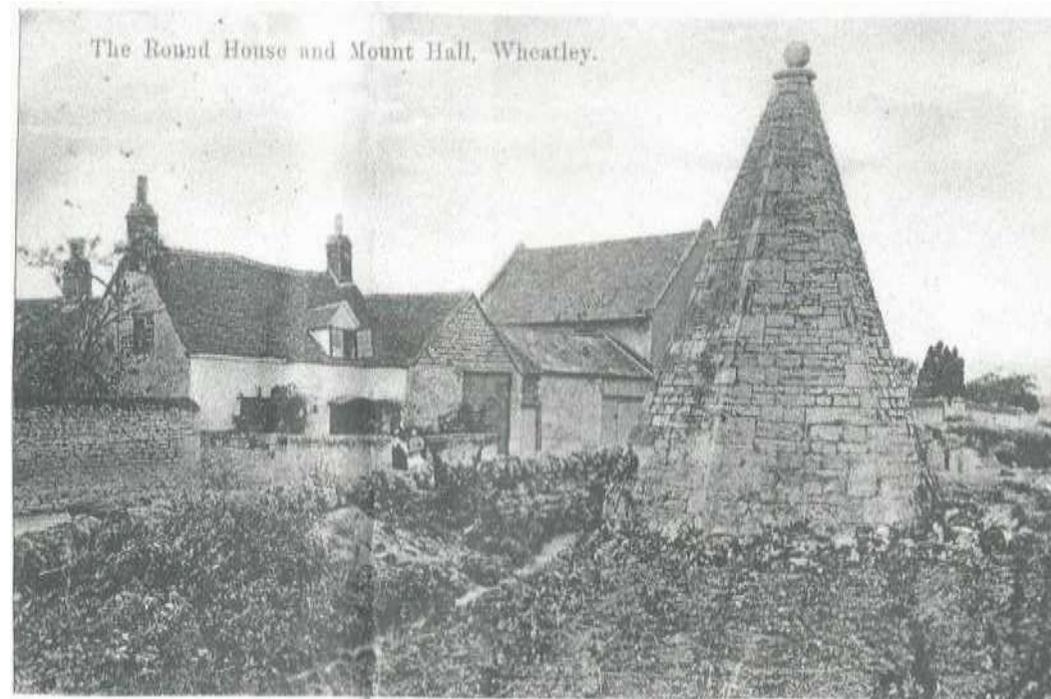


Figure 1 (Late 1800's)

In the background is the picturesque whitewashed Cromwell Cottage, now demolished, but was said to have been originally built for a servant of Cromwell's, from which it got its name.

< Figure 1

The parish pit was used during the war, and after, as a refuse dump, but it was made into a level glass playground for children by the former Bullingdon Rural District Council. The Lock-up was repaired, as children climbing on it were damaging it, so a wall was built around it in 1972 by a local architect; Vaughton Associates. The destruction of the Wheatley Lock-up was proposed about forty years ago for being 'old', although it had been repaired in 1921. The site of (he Lock-up had been used to store the timber for a Mr E Robbins and it was long used to house the tools of council workers, and the old stocks. Today the Lock-up is a grade 2 listed building and is still used to store tools for local council workers, as well as old doors and equipment.