

Why twin memorials grace Wheatley now



IT LOOKED like quite a problem for the village of Wheatley. The war memorial was falling

down; repairs were going to be very expensive — almost as expensive, perhaps, as a new memorial.

But, I am pleased to say, a solution has been found — and a decidedly unusual solution, too. The village has “borrowed” a memorial.

It arrived courtesy of Magdalen College a few weeks'

ago and now stands a few yards away from the old memorial in the burial ground off the High Street.

The names of the villagers who died in the two world wars still have to be added to the new memorial. Once this has been done, the old one will be pulled down and its name tablets transferred to the parish church.

The operation of getting the new memorial has been carried out by carried out by the Wheatley of the British Legion and its chairman Lt. Col. J.

L. Ashton, and has been a long and complicated business.

It began some five years ago when the parish council took over the village's old burial ground from the parochial church council.

Mr Peter Audley-Miller, the parish council chairman, tells me it was decided to smarten up the ground and turn it into a memorial garden.

A snag came, however, when workmen inspected the war memorial. It was found to be in a dangerous condition.

Very costly

The matter was discussed by the council and it became obvious that restoring the memorial was going to be very costly; perhaps even impossible, since the council was not allowed by law to spend ratepayers' money on such projects.

But then luck intervened. Mr Audley-Miller was talking one day to the President of Magdalen College

“The President told me that quite by chance the college had a war memorial in its mason's yard,” Mr Audley-Miller says.

This memorial had stood in the St John's quadrangle of the college where it had been unveiled by the Prince of Wales (later the Duke of Windsor) in 1921.

During the second war, the memorial and the paving stones from the quadrangle had been removed because of the danger from bombing and had never been returned.

The college was asked if it would give the memorial to Wheatley. It took two or three years, but eventually the authorities agreed the village could have it on permanent loan.

Mr R. W. Latham, the college land agent, tells me it was considered especially

appropriate that the memorial should go to Wheatley since Magdalen has strong connections with the village through its considerable land holding

There is also the added link that early parts the college were built from stone quarried in the Wheatley area.

Once the village had obtained the memorial, the problem arose of how to get permission from the church authorities to put it up in the burial ground. By this time, Col. Ashton had ‘become the prime mover of the scheme.’

He sought advice from the diocesan Registrar and was told a Faculty Would be needed before work could begin.

This might have been a simple formality — except that there were objections to the plan: two women thought that putting the memorial in the centre of the burial ground would desecrate their Ancestors' graves.

A hearing of the Consistory Court had to be held in the village and this took place last April. “We won the case quite easily,” Col. Ashton says, “thanks to support from the whole Village.”

After permission had been given, he contacted Axtell and Perry, the Oxford stonemasons, who carried out the installation. Apart from a slight shortening of the cross's stem and the removal of one tier of steps, the memorial was not altered.

Since the stone is too soft to have names engraved directly on it, slate plaques are being carved and these will later be added to the memorial. It is expected that this work will be completed by the end of the summer.

The old memorial will then be demolished — affording a new entrance into the burial ground, of memorial garden as it will then be — and the new memorial dedicated at a special service.

When the project was first discussed, the total cost was put at £700; now, however, it is estimated at almost twice that.

The Wheatley branch of the British Legion has promised £500, and there is hope of a contribution from the Legion headquarters. The rest of the money will come from private pockets.

It might sound expensive; but the village's gratitude to its war Victims is something which can't be measured

How pleasant it is, when

war memorials all over the country are falling into ruin, to see one village at least prepared to do something about it.

But Wheatley's project — which is probably unique, according to Mr Audley-Miller — does more than merely honour the dead: it preserves the memorial garden for present and future generations.

Now that the memorial has been sited in the centre of the garden, it will be very difficult indeed to move it. Which could be jolly useful, should any local authority ever decide that the old burial ground might make a good car-park; . . .

Thanks for the memory

I MIGHT have known that my old friend Tom Hilsdon, of 14 Beauchamp Lane, Cowley, would know the answer to the little poser set the other day by Mick Pacey.

Mick, of 16 Courtland Road, Iffley, asked whether any of my readers could name the street which contained in the 20s eight pubs, three schools, three places of worship, six butchers' shops, five grocers, plus 60 other shops, including a pawnshop, a saddler's and a firework maker.

Tom reckons this can only possibly be Cowley Road.

“I recall the pubs and the butchers' shops and others he mentions,” Tom says. “So here goes

“First, the pub and the publicans: names like Fidler King, Jiggy Cartwright, Harry Bennett, Tom Bond and the Gerkin family come readily to mind.

“The butchers: the Hatts, father and son, Harpers, Rednapps, Debrons and Eastmans were the known names.

The pawnbroker was Mr White, father of the owner of White Brothers, at the corner of James Street, and the saddler's name was Pargetter.

“The schools were run by the Cowley Fathers, of Marston Street, who charged a small sum of money for each term; the small school by the crossing was known as the British School Room.

“One cannot leave the Palace without mentioning the Palace Cinema, formerly the Empire musical hall.

Names like Albany Ward, Rerror King, Bert Denny and Bobby Bull are not easily forgotten. “Good days these; but, alas, for the likes of Mick and myself, I'm afraid the best days are gone.”