

# WHEATLEY & LITTLEWORTH CHANGES OVER 35+ YEARS

by  
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I moved into Wheatley the day I got married on July 11th 1959. We were the third lot of people to move in and the first on our side of the road. Right hand going up. Our address then was Plot 15 Littleworth. In fact this part of Wheatley village is still known as Littleworth.

When I arrived, Wheatley had a thriving railway, with the line going via Cowley into Oxford Station. It was double-lined so trains could pass and the Station was where Station Road joined Ladder Hill. The Station had two platforms and you crossed over a lowered wooden walkway. The ticket office and Waiting Room were on the left hand side, as was the main entrance. It was a fairly busy line especially in the evenings due to a busy line of freight. Sometimes there were Mini-Car after Mini-Car on bogies being shipped to and from the Cowley works. Lots of men used the railtrack to walk into Cowley for work at Morris, Pressed Steel and John Allens.

It cost 1/6d return to Oxford. I used to walk down to Wheatley with my baby in the pram and dog and they'd just put my pram in the Goods Van. Or later they'd help me with my push chair, dog and son into a carriage. Several Wheatley people worked on the Railway. Two I particularly remember were Dickie Bird and Dickie Cox who later on married Phyllis Smith from Kiln Lane who was the St Mary's Church Organist and also gave piano lessons. Her father who lived to a good age was a Stone-Mason. Phyllis even now very occasionally plays the Church organ as a stand-in.

Unfortunately the railway was axed when Beeching made lots of railways close. What a lot of harm he did. In Littleworth village there were few houses the ones next to Powells yard were there, the Cricketers Arms was there, altered inside though, as is every pub in Wheatley. Where the sheltered accommodation block is (I think its only OAPs now, it did house single families) were three old stone cottages the garden running almost to the road surrounded by a wall. One part of this garden nearest the road was a large clump of gooseberry bushes, these were some of the largest gooseberries I've seen. Then there was a footpath which went through to the lane at the back. Next to the footpath was a large cottage in which Ike Munt lived. Off the lane there was a single level cottage but this was altered and an upper floor added, this cottage has been altered several items since.

Further along the lane a house stood back, where a lady known to everyone as Auntie Smith lived, her garden flowers and vegetables were marvellous and her house backed onto the stream and then the Railway Lines. She rode an old sit-up-and-beg cycle for years until in an accident, whereby she acquired a slightly more modern one. She was still riding the bike in her eighties.

Bridge House was there by the footpath crossing the Railway. It was crossed by a wooden style. Opposite was Mr Powell's workshop and yard. Mr Reg Powell is a wonderful man. He has been a Haulier, Builder, Welder and was almost a Smithy, repairing tractors, trailers, laying concrete, but he has now retired. So if you needed something or some job doing see Reg Powell. He was a Jack of all Trades. He did the Merry Bells car park. Mr Powell, his wife, son and daughter lived up the lane at the side of his workshed in a flat roofed bungalow, but Mrs Powell died some years ago. He must have helped to take up the wooden struts under the rail lines as these and everything else was stacked at his shed. It now houses David Axfords Car Maintenance.

Across from this another Mr Munt lived (still here), at the back of his house there were large cages which housed monkeys. You could walk past this and watch and talk to the monkeys but there was a large sign there reminding us MONKEYS BITE. The other side of Mr Powell's house was the Grass Factory, and all spring and summer lorries trundled through Wheatley with loads of grass which I think was turned into animal feed and chlorophyll products. Next to this was the Skin Factory. Animal waste was transported to Wheatley where it was recycled. Very smelly in the summer with lots of flies. But these both disappeared to be replaced by Rover Spare Parts called Cohen and Windsor packaging then several other things came and went, then a large Do it Yourself place selling sand, cement, bricks etc. But now this seems to have gone.

At the foot of Old Road/Keydale Road was a cycle speedway track which most evenings and weekends gave the youth of Wheatley something to do. Colin Dallimore, Pete Harris and Colin Lockett and lots more local lads gave their all in competition here, but sadly it died out and is now grossly over-grown. Pete Harris did move on for several years to Motor Bike Scrambling which was held on the land across from the Windmill. We could watch the scrambling from

my sitting room window or garden. Now the trees and gorse have grown up too much and it died out.

Barlow Close was Tommy Barlow's smallholding enclosed by a wire fence and metal gate entered from the Littleworth Road. Many the time you'd see Tommy driving his tractor along with his Dad perched on the back. Mrs Barlow (Tommy never married) rosy cheeked standing at her door of her cottage near Blenheim Lane wearing her flowery apron. The cottage by the New Club was once two. But the Bossom family had them made into one. The New Club was very much smaller with coal fires and two rooms on the front plus a small TV room. Now it has a large hall at the rear and storage sheds.

The Manor House outwardly is unchanged but the paper shop was much smaller with the Barclays Bank then opposite the Fish and Chip Shop. Across the High Street, now the Pampered Lady, was Scott- Dows Ironmongery shop a treasure house selling all kitchen ware, paint, wallpaper, paraffin, nails, screws etc. But Mr and Mrs Scott- Dow retired and moved away. Its been the video shop but now its your body and face they look after. Then there was the tiny toiletries D and Printing Shop - Car Hire and Wool next courtesy of the Walde family. Now unfortunately to be an antique shop. Opposite was the Railway Tavern - then it was the Sandpiper - followed by the Common Room. I'm very much against this pub changing, it's part of our heritage, now it's closed permanently and to be a private dwelling - what a shame.

Sam's got made much larger and across the road was also Cricks Butcher later moved to the new shop down the road. The Anthony Nolan Shop was Gosticks Bakery and Grocery Store, farther down the High Street was another Grocery Store where I used to buy my Brooke Bond dividend tea and where you could swap your tea cards from a rack in the store, this is now Student Accommodation.

Moving further down the High Street, left hand side, a Cycle Repair Shop/Shed then a shop which went through several phases being toiletries then a Fashion Shop, for a long time a Travel Agents, now its some Business Concern. Next Was Ted Turner much larger now, then the Merry Bells altered from a small library on the front to large at the rear and the main hall lost its stage where many concerts and event had been held over the years. The joint library became a Council Enquiry Office and the day room for the old folk. Then came Harris Store run by the Eldred Family, selling everything from Grocery, Greengrocery, Paraffin (a separate section at the side of the store). It was a large store, light and airy a long counter each side and wooden floor. I remember buying all my Christmas decorations here first year. It had lots of out buildings, stabling, mattresses etc. Large cellars and floors above. I worked here doing orders, serving, slicing bacon etc. Often sent to the top floor to grind coffee beans for fresh ground coffee. I left here when I became pregnant. I only worked part time.

I was working two mornings a week cleaning at the Vicarage. I loved being there with the Robinsons - Rev and Mrs Peter Timothy and Lucy. A happy time, Lucy loved to get up to my house. I made her a dress with Nursery Rhymes characters on. I even went back after Robert was born until I was pregnant again. Its changed quite a lot inside, the room off the kitchen was the children's room. Rumble room I think they call them today. There was a long lavender hedge that ran the length of the back of the house. A holly tree each side of the front door and I red-cardinalled the front step once a week.

The house where Tilly lives was Mary and Percy Blakes shop originally the Chequers Arms a long cool interior here. Grocery and provisions predominantly. Further along was Mrs M's shop where the Vets is now, such a mixture of tilings she sold but always a paraffin smell. She also sold things like trays of loose buttons.

On Church Road there was Turners toy shop I remember it also sold Frozen Food from a large cabinet in the shop. My kids adored going into here to spend their pocket money. Then top of Friday Lane was Underwoods the Hairdressers which in turn became Mike Vaughton Architect and planning Office. He's now moved on. It was also the Heart of England Building Society till they pruned local branches.

Then of course there was Dodd's Bakery opposite the Primary School it became larger after the closing of Bell Lane School. My son started school at 3 years old at Bell Lane School it was a happy friendly school. Lovely teachers and headmistress with large open fires surrounded by strong guards. The Cubs and Scouts moved here for a while. The garage was next but sadly has been closed for some years now. Used as a workshop area now. The Coop got bigger and went from counter serving to Self Serving. But still a bit tight for comfy shopping.

The new shops in the High Street appeared - a new Bakery, Butchers, Launderette/Dry Cleaners (dry cleaning part

gone), a Bookies and a Grocery Shop that had two or three changes but seems settled now to be called by most people "Arkwrights" open all hours. Then the Estate Agents run by Mary and Percy Blake now supporting also Bradford and Bingley Building Society.

Where Mr Putt had his cobblers shop is now a Barbers Shop, the smallest shop in Wheatley I should think. I missed out Ian James Hairdressers in the new shops but we did later have as it was known "Linda and Avrils" now called "New Image". Hathaways Builders, (name still kept) was opposite the Wheatley telephone exchange now full automatic.

On the corner where the nursing Home is was the Triangle Cafe and shop. Half of the shop did teas and refreshments the other half was a busy grocery shop run by Mrs George a large jolly lady. Across the London Road were the Council Offices where you paid your rates, the Registry Office, Medical Office I had to get my form stamped here for some inoculations I had at the Doctors - Council machinery were all kept in the large yard here too.

Then we had the Cramphorns Garden Centre now Wyvales, Asda originally "Solo" the Harvester which was the Bridge Hotel. We used to go there to play Bingo every week. But like a lot of things it folded. Mrs Tombs was the coal agent at her house in Church Road. Holton School joined up with Wheatley Park and originally most of this site was a large Military Hospital. Many of the huts remained for years and were used as classrooms and Nightschool blocks for teaching.

Wheatley's lovely Church Road School moved to Littleworth Road and became the Primary School with children bussed from the outer villages. On the Littleworth Road the Dallimores opened a Grocery Store a Godsend for our end of the village this became in turn Robinson Store (No relation) changed hands again and disappeared.

Lots of New Estates sprang up: Templars Close, Acre Mead, Kellys Road was a large field opposite me linked up to Acre Mead. Barlows Close, Farm Close Road part of Beech Road, Ambrose Rise, some of London Road, Wheatley has certainly grown. Over 4,000 residents. After years of trying Wheatley got a chemist. The Doctors Surgery once a room in Dr Fleury's house, then a special built place next door took off to Morland House where I worked for years making and mending the children's clothes. This in turn got larger with more building.

I did about 8 weeks at the school kitchens Littleworth Road, so I've been into some interesting places. Then I became a home help for 15 years until Cancer forced me to quit. Now I do for one lady privately. The most fascinating house I ever worked in was Miss Whites "Jessamine Cottage" if ever I won the lottery that's what I'd like to buy - although the builders have been since I was there. Shotover Road has sprouted quite a few new houses one next to Amy Websters looks like a chapel but is apparently owned by an obviously wealthy footballer. Despite his money he's overrun by moles.

A new sewerage plant was built at the top of Old Road a few years ago. The Windmill seems to never get any better despite donations years ago from many Wheatley People and ongoing fund-raising. The Church Spire was repaired, the bells re-cast and re-hung. Wheatley became one-way, part of the High Street and we gained a permanent Parking Lady. The Sun Pub knocked two rooms into one and the Youngs gave up the Gallery Shop.

The alley at the start opposite Don Jones used to have a high beautiful garden I remember Doris Caine lived here. Templars Close wasn't; it was a large green area built into the Pits. Next to Granary Hall was Cromwell Cottage although a bit tumbled down it was a fascinating historical house but this was demolished and a peculiar non-descript property built. Scamp Davis had two houses built the other side of the Granary Hall (Wheatley is changing all the time but I don't know if all for the better.) On Old Road they demolished three old cottages and built three bungalows. Originally the road ran in front of these cottages in a Horse Shoe but Harry Grain built a low posts fence across, this made me very angry, so I walked across his fence deliberately. I've given this up now.

Old Road is still in the Parish of Forest Hill. Last year Mr Chiddington's one bedroom bungalow was demolished, now we have a huge new house in its place. Several houses in Old road and Littleworth Road looked like Nissan Huts but these have all been demolished and proper houses built, but some they built around these and demolished them after. Mrs Eileen Thomas was the last one to be demolished in Littleworth Road.