

Memories of Tom Hassall who lived at the Manor House in the mid C20.

1. **Recreation in the village pit.** When I was a boy the large sandpit (now filled in) next to the windmill served as Wheatley's beach. Large crowds of picnickers would gather there on hot Sunday afternoons. The other favourite spot was what we at least called 'The Boys Bathing' place. A spot on the Thame with a high bank on the south side reached by the bridleway at the end of the miscalled 'Roman Road'. The north bank was a gently shelving 'beach' usually covered in cowpats which was reached by trespassing on the railway embankment on coming from Wheatley Bridge. Again large crowds gathered there and it's where I learnt to swim. The old parish pit was replaced as a dump in my time by the old clay workings, north of the railway line on Ladder Hill, now Howe Close (1976).
2. **Morris Works and Pressed Steel etc.** The morning and evening flock of factory workers on their bikes commuting to Cowley was an impressive site in my childhood. There were rarely any cars parked anywhere in the streets. During the 50s the Grass Factory at the western end of the Littleworth clay pit and the notorious 'bone factory' at the east were well known companies if not hugely large employers
3. **The London Road (A40).** The main road was a major feature of Wheatley until the building of the new dual carriageway took the traffic away from the village. The Last Chance Coffee Bar at the eastern end, a notorious dive, and the more genteel George's Triangle Cafe where the care home now stand were village institutions.
4. **World War II.** I must show you sometime the memoir 'One woman's war' compiled by my mother, Averil Hassall in which she described life in the village in WWII and working at the military hospital. You could mention the German bomb at Wheatley Bridge.
5. **Builders.** Cullums were the big builders in my youth. They carried out the restoration of The Manor House.
6. **Evening Classes.** My father, as a committed socialist, and interested in further education classes ran WEA classes in the Manor House, first on village history in the lead up to Wheatley Records and later on illuminated manuscripts. My mother continued this tradition with History of Art classes right up to the 1980s.
7. **Grass factory and fire brigade.** The factory, at the entrance to what is now Coopers Close, dried grass into some form of animal feed. Inevitably the factory caught fire on one occasion. This reminds me that the Wheatley Voluntary fire brigade used to be based where the scouts now are near the Lock Up. The volunteers were summoned by a siren so we all also used to rush to the station to see the volunteers arrive, find out where the fire was and if it was close by go to see the fun. It was a very popular entertainment for young and old. I saw the grass factory on fire. The 'bone factory' was notorious for the smell of boiling carcasses which used to waft over the village on the south west wind. It also caught fire and we all noticed the reluctance of the firemen to put it out. When pagers were introduced all the fun went out.
8. **Wheatley development.** I think that you could make more of the conversion of the multitude of village shops to private housing and the general 'Asdafication' the village shopping experience. The Bullingdon Rural District Council wanted development in the village to be concentrated first in the western end and not the east as eventually happened. A compulsory purchase order on the two Breach Fields behind the Manor House was successfully fought by my father and that land was then put in the Green Belt. OPT assisted us in the CPO and on, I think, my father's suggestion offered to buy the site of the Village Green from Mrs Thame. She never responded to this offer and sold the land instead for development. The closing of the railway opened up a lot of land for development.
9. **Lady Spencer-Churchill.** The other carbuncle was the line of electricity pylons which form part of the National Grid and connected to the Didcot Power station, now happily also demolished with the chimney about to go, so that Wittenham Clumps as seen from the Garsington Road no longer have a twentieth century rival.
10. **The drug problem.** It could be argued that this phenomenon is in direct line of succession to Wheatley's notorious drink problem which had previously marked out the village. A former bishop of Oxford is reported to have said at a conference once that there were some villages in the county with a genuine 'spirit of evil abroad'. When challenged to name one, his one word reply was 'Wheatley'!