

## 2749 Wheatley Population history from 1520-1921

In 1520, the population of Wheatley was around 200 people. By 1612 it had grown to 279, living on Wheatley Street (High St), 166 in 43 properties on the north side, 113 in 32 properties on the south side. In 1759 an incumbent estimated the population at not less than 800, living in about 140 houses, but the 1801 census gives a more conservative figure of 685.

In 1841 the population was 1021; in 1851 it had been 1,037 with 44 recorded paupers. This was the highest level of paupers in any of the Wheatley censuses, although these were not always recorded. In 1871, the population was 1,040 and 1,039 in 1881, but then it fell to 920 in 1891, 872 in 1901, 966 in 1911 and 932 in 1921. Some of the decrease in the late 1800s was due to emigration, easing the surplus of agricultural labourers in particular.

In the 1871 census, there were some 450 names which had their trades recorded, including paupers and unemployed, these making up some 9%. In 1881, the equivalent number was some 426, but now only 5.6% were shown as unemployed, see below.

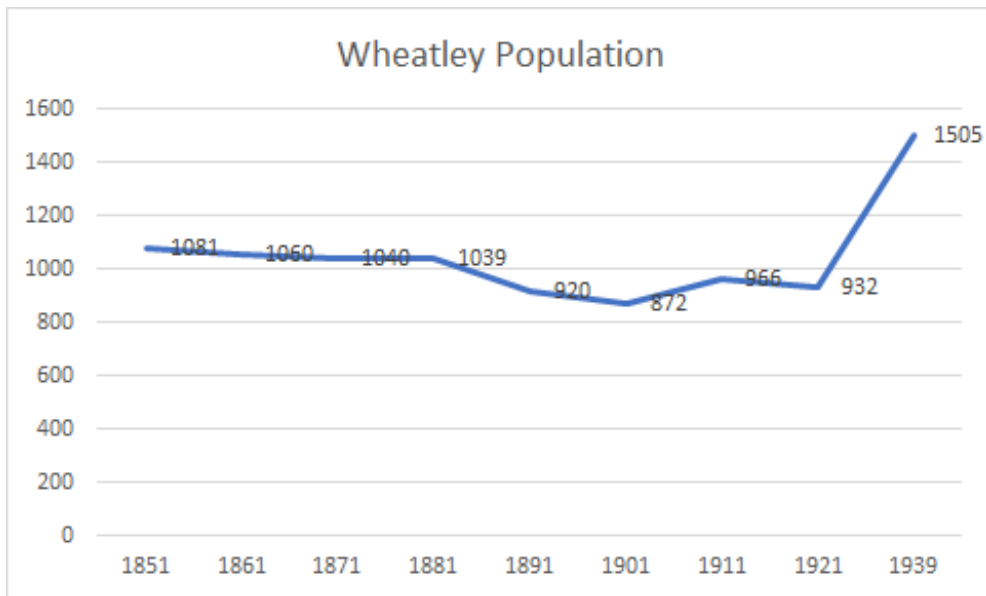
Agriculture remained the dominant occupation throughout the 19th century in Wheatley, with domestic service still very significant. Employment on the railway, and in ochre extraction, were minimal. The true numbers involved in brick-making were probably hidden under the tag of general labouring. The range of trades suggested a self-contained village. Paupers (and unemployed if shown separately) were 44 in 1851, 4.3% of the population; 42 in 1871, 3.6% of the total population and 9.3% of the total 'trades' recorded; 24 unemployed in 1881, 2.4% of the total population and 5.5% of the trades recorded. None of the figures were at an alarming level, but clearly 1851 was the peak for pauperism, but things may have been worse in 1841? The reduction, due to emigration after 1871 had made the village more content according to Wilfrid Sheldon who said that it had 'everything necessary for a separate community' and a 'more prosperous look' than a purely agricultural village. Was ever such a thing as a 'purely agricultural village'? Each community would have needed to be self-sufficient, and Wheatley certainly was, with a mixed economy not reliant on any particular sector. It had its own doctor, sports field, police constable, and infant and elementary schools with some 200 pupils. Elton's continuing doubts about the social health of the village would have been no different in any other 'open' village at the time, taking into account the long farming recession after the Napoleonic Wars; the evidence of poverty from the introduction of a new Poor Law in 1834 in the aftermath of this recession; and the steps taken to diffuse population growth through managed emigration. That there was some poverty in Wheatley is shown by the many references by Elton in his diary to a soup kitchen. The Poor Laws fell into disuse by the beginning of the 20th century with the introduction of welfare reforms after the Liberals came to power in 1906, with a state pension for the over 70s introduced in 1909.

The 1280 people in the census included 362 in Horspath (not included in previous censuses) so the net Wheatley figure was 918. Population had increased from 872 in 1901 to 966 in 1911 but dropped to 918 in 1921. However, based on the occupation of these in 1911, the enumerator seems to have missed four houses at the east end of High Street. It is unlikely that these were all empty and unrecorded. With the number of people occupying these in 1911, a total of 14, a possible revised total of 932 in 247 living units in 1921.

In an analysis reported in the Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette on 1 February 1924, Wheatley was reported as having one of the lowest number of rooms per dwelling at 4.88, but the other places detailed were larger towns with more larger houses, so not surprising. Probably for a similar reason, it had the lowest, so less favourable, reported rooms per person at 1.29. In the county, there were 1.1 females for each male, slightly up from 1911 perhaps due to male deaths in the war. Fifty council houses had been built by 1929 to house the newcomers in a first and model 'Tudorbethan' Local Authority housing scheme along the London Road.

The 1939 register shows 1505 people. More building down Roman Road and towards Littleworth was in progress in the mid-1950s when the population was 1,532.

Graph of population 1841 to 1939



Analysis of trades 1871-1921

	1921	1911	1901	1891	1881	1871
Domestic staff including laundresses	42	64	64	52	63	28
Shops and post and pubs	50	62	51	46	30	36
Farming	63	56	79	117	166	136
General labourers including engine drivers	27	46	48	30	16	71
Building etc trades	40	38	33	30	31	27
Railway staff	16	14	12	17	13	12
Market Gardeners	12	15	11	4	0	0
Brick business	11	14	13	5	6	6
Saw mills (1901 and 1891 may include others elsewhere)	11	14	5	2	0	0
Carters and carmen	1	14	9	7	3	12
School	12	11	9	10	6	5
Medical	7	7	6	1	2	1
Dressmakers	2	5	4	9	8	22
Shoemakers and menders	4	3	8	9	11	15
Religion	3	3	2	3	2	2
Other	69	43	15	27	45	36
TOTAL excludes retired, own means and students	370	409	369	369	402	409
Paupers & unemployed		nk	nk	nk	24	42
		409	369	369	426	451