

## THE MAIN ROADS THROUGH WHEATLEY

This exhibit, summarizes what we have discovered, so far of the history of the main roads through Wheatley - the road from London to Oxford and that from London to Worcester which branches off the Oxford road at Wheatley. Though the Worcester road has followed its present route, apart from some very minor diversions, for probably a thousand years, the Oxford road has changed its course several times during the past two centuries.

### MAIN ROADS BEFORE 1774

For at least a hundred years before 1774 the main road from London approached Wheatley from the south east over Wheatley Bridge and has veered slightly to the south of the present London Road, passing behind the present "Plough" public house. There it divided.

The left hand branch, the Oxford road, ran westwards across the fields to join what is now Roman Road and then along Crown Road, High Street, Littleworth Road, Old Road and over the top of Shotover Hill to Oxford. Its route is followed by modern roads except for the length between the "Plough" and Roman Road mentioned above, and the 200 yards or so west of the Manor House, which ran between numbers 10 and 12 High Street and behind the houses in the present Littleworth Road before coming out onto Littleworth Road where the Lower School entrance is now.

The right hand branch, the road to Worcester via Islip, ran northwards for a short distance and then along the line of Old London Road and London Road and the B4027 towards Islip.

At that time what is now the A40 between the B4027 Islip turn and the next Forest Hill turn did not exist.

This road system can be seen on the Thomas Jefferys's map of Oxfordshire (Scale 1 inch to 1 miles), which was surveyed in 1766-7 and published in 1769.

### 1774 : THE FIRST WHEATLEY BYPASS

By 1774 the High Street, with its open brook had become so inconvenient to the increasing through traffic between London and Oxford that it was decided to carry out "the turning of the road so as to avoid the town of Wheatley" as the Turnpike Trust's Minute Book describes it.

From its former route across the fields from the "Plough" along Roman Road and through the centre of the village, the Oxford road was diverted so as to run "from the Plough Alehouse up the present Turnpike Road" - that is, the Worcester road - "as far as the King's Arms Alehouse and from thence along the present Highway at the back of the Town of Wheatley" - that is, the present Church Road - "and cross the corner of the Common or Waste to the Turnpike Road going up the hill." - that is, rejoining its old route on Littleworth Road. This diversion necessitated the construction of a new length of road from the west end of Church Road, where it joins Kiln Lane, to the place where the Lower School entrance is now - in other words across "the corner of the Common or Waste". Thus the road network at the west end of the village assumed its present form.

At the end of 1774, the three handed signpost which had until then stood at the former main road junction at the "Plough" indicating the way to London, Oxford and Worcester was moved to the new main road junction at the "King's Arms", and from then onwards the old Oxford road, from the "Plough" to Roman Road gradually fell into disuse. It no longer exists.

### 1789-90 • AVOIDING SHOTOVER HILL

Shot over Hill was a menace to travellers. It was infested, with highwaymen, and the steep slopes at both the Wheatley and the Oxford ends were hard work going up and dangerous going down. There were many coach and wagon accidents, some fatal.

There was already a minor road from Oxford up Headington Hill to Headington village, and a lane from there to Forest Hill on the Islip and Worcester road (see Jefferys map), and in 1789 it was decided that this route should be straightened and widened, and a new road built from a point on Forest Hill Lane just on the Oxford side of Forest Hill to a point on the Worcester road near the gate to Shotover House, thus bypassing Forest Hill. This route could then be used by Oxford traffic to avoid Shotover.

By 1790 these alterations had been made: the present line of the A40 between Headington and the Islip turn had become the main Oxford road, and the junction of the Oxford and Worcester roads had moved to its present

position. The old road still exists, but it is unsurfaced across the top of Shotover, and is hence little used as a through route to Oxford.

#### 1791. : THE 'PLOUGH' DIVERSION

---

Ever since the changes of 1774-, the "Plough" had been standing at a rightangled bend in the main road, and in 1791 a new length of road about 60 yards long was built to cut off the bend, it also bypassed the "Plough", so this was later rebuilt on the now road in its present position. The old road has since fallen into disuse, though its course is still visible.

The road system after the 1791 change can be seen on the adjacent extract from Bryant's map of Oxfordshire (Scale 19" to 1 mile), which was surveyed in 1823 and published in 1824.

#### 1925-6 THE 'PLOUGH' TO THE 'KING'S ARMS

No road improvements were needed in the 19th century because of the rise of the railways and the consequent falling off in road traffic, but by the 1920s the advent of the motor car with its higher speeds meant that main roads needed widening and straightening. The Oxfordshire section of the Oxford to London road was reconstructed under a Government scheme to relieve unemployment, and although most of the length through Wheatley was just widened on its old alignment, a completely new length of road was built across farmland between the; "King's Arms" and the "Plough" to bypass the length now known as Old London Road.

A photograph shows the opening ceremony, which was performed at the "King's Arms" end on the afternoon of Monday, 4th October, 1926.

#### 1962-4 : THE MODERN WHEATLEY BYPASS

---

By the 1950s the Oxford-Load on road was again inadequate for the traffic using it, and there were many accidents along its length. The section from Oxford to the Islip turn was converted to a dual carriageway on more or less its old line during 1955-6, but this form of improvement would have been impractical through Wheatley because of frontage development, particularly along the length of road built in 1925-6, and because by then Wheatley Bridge was recognised as having some historic and architectural merit and being worthy of preservation. A dual carriageway bypass was therefore built during 1962-4, finally taking the main road right out of the village.