

## Wheatley's Roads

1. In Roman and Saxon times a hamlet lay near to a STRAET heading NE from London to Worcester / Wales. Its earliest names were Watele and Watelega. Oxiord appeared as part of the later Saxon BURG system of defence against the Danes, commanding a river crossing and junction. At Wheatley FORD or BRIDGE a detour from the old STRAET allowed traffic to Oxford, via Shotover, a drovers green-road led off this and still climbs Bullsdown.
2. The STRAET (intersected by another smaller STRAET, Ladder Hill, and a HOLLOW WAY, between The Baldons and Holton, once linking the area with the major Roman STRAET between Bicester / Alchester and Dorchester via Beckley, Headington and Cowley works) was one of five main Royal Roads in the later Middle Ages. Upkeep was up to local parishes, roadside hermits and overseers. It was an act of Christianity to leave money in wills for bridges; Christ's-Fer(ry) was the anonymous patron saint of humble ferrymen.
3. Robbers marauded. We have records of travellers attacked in fifteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Around 1660 a young highwayman bluffed and robbed a Government army pay waggon of a fortune - £4000; in 1739 Charles Wesley was robbed at gunpoint. Elizabeth Tudor was the first to take her huge tumbril-like coach over the Shotover route. Waggoneers, troops in the Civil War and thousands of others also used it. Antony Wood spoke in 1661 of "stagecoaches" (needing a 'stage' or 'station' where horses could be changed after every 6-10 miles). The bodies of two Archbishops of Canterbury (Juxon and Laud) were met 'towards Wheatley', and carried by six- and four- horse hearses up Old Road over Shotover in the summer of 1663. In 1669 "was the first day that the flying coach went from Oxon to London in one day...with six men inside" This was a University coach service for spring and summer costing 12s one way. Nevertheless, the roads were still medieval.
4. A Turnpike/Tollgate trust took over the Stokenchurch-Tetsworth-Wheatley-Begbroke Woodstock road in 1719. In 1774 the Back St in Wheatley was made fit for carriages and the Eastgate and Plough area made good. In 1789 the new road from the Forest Hill road through the edge of Shotover estate at the head of the lake to Headington, was built. This is now the A40M. Shotover declined. In 1791 the Bridge area was straightened out to its present route.
5. Public Coaches ran up to the 1860s but the railway was decimating the coach service as cars later decimated rail and bus. Brunel planned and passed on the building of the MidWestern line through Wheatley (Wycombe, Risborough, Thame, Oxford). Investment meant they could pay for huge earthworks by the river and tunnelling under Shotover. They also kept 'guard', 'coach', 'carriage', 'station' and numerous multi-skilled personnel from stagecoach days. A 7' gauge track was laid here 1862-4; in 1872 it was replaced with a 4'8" standard gauge and new type rails; in 1968 the last goods train passed through.

London Road (Plough to Kings Arms) was constructed in 1926 as an employment project.