

The Bridge Hotel

(The Harvester)

It occupies a strategic site by the bridge and a building appears there on early maps. The absence of this building to be enumerated in Wheatley in either the 1911 or 1921 census is confirmed by the 1910 Revaluation map which shows nothing east of The Plough as being in Wheatley at that time. However, it is found in the Chilworth division of Great Milton in the 1911 census with Ernest Pollard, a retired farmer, living here at Wheatley Bridge House, noted as having formerly been Brooks Cottage, and 'next door' in enumerator sequence to Turnpike Cottage. In 1921, it is found in the census of the Chilworth division of Lewknor, with Rossen Caldwell, housekeeper, living at Wheatley Bridge House with three visitors, and was enumerated after Sworford Farm. So, the site was in the parish of Chilworth until a boundary reorganisation in 1954 when it came into Wheatley. Nevertheless, this report deals with its early history.

There is a date of 1729 above the window facing the street which suggests, at least, that this cottage might have been either Tollgate Cottage or Turnpike Cottage, identified from the 1911 and 1921 Chilworth census records. Another photo of the elevation facing west, which has an almost-identical bow window might show the front of a second cottage. There is no listing on this property.

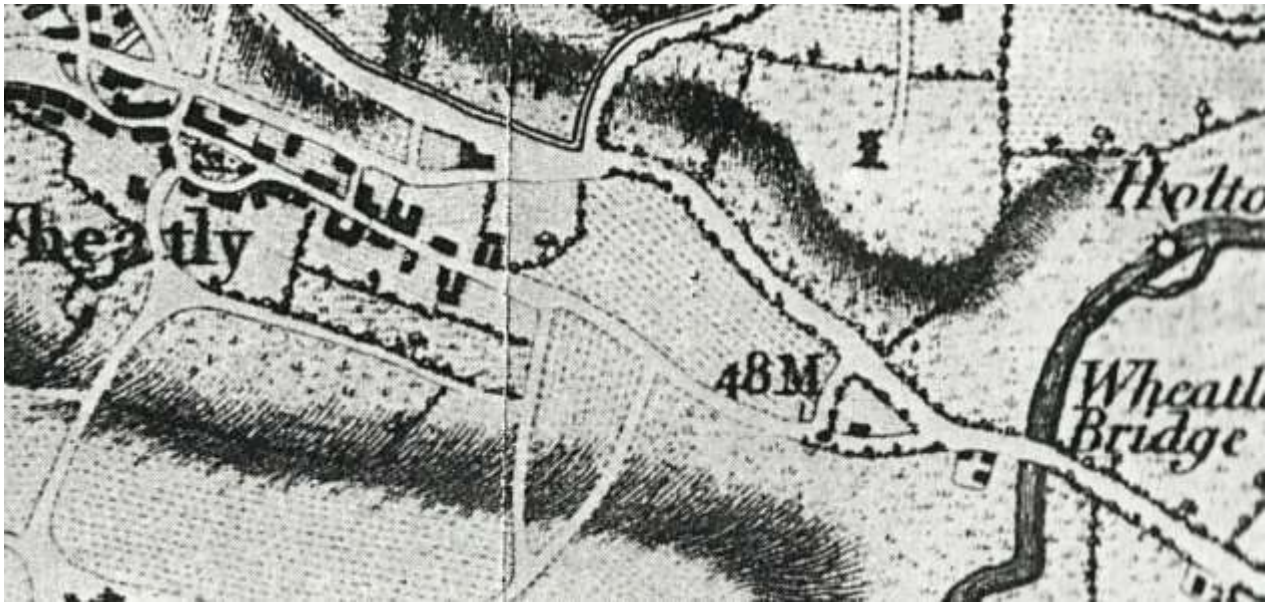


The 1729 date comes relatively soon after The Stokenchurch Turnpike was set up in 1718 and the trust was responsible for the road from Stokenchurch through Oxford to Woodstock. The road originally took the Old London Road across Shotover. This was replaced in 1788 by the present route to Oxford via Headington. The 1797 map, below, shows three buildings in the current location of the Harvester. There is no doubt that this was the location from which tolls were collected, and that these two cottages were built for this purpose.



The county was always responsible for the bridge itself, so it was toll free, but the road in Wheatley leading to it was under the control of the turnpike trust, so was subject to a toll.

1797 map extract



Apparently, when the bridge was re-built in 1804, the ‘gate’ was moved to the far side of the bridge with Mr Parsons paying £86 11s. 0d., being half of the cost of the new turnpike house, with the county paying the other half. Later maps are less helpful – the 1872 has a slight suggestion of a building the far side of the bridge but this might be any of the existing buildings.

We do not know when Wheatley Bridge House, referred to in the 1911 and 1921 censuses was built, nor when it came into the possession of the Holton Park Estate. But the photos below suggest that this was a much later addition, long after the two cottages. So, it is clear, from all the above, that the conversion to an hotel had not yet taken place.

In 1913, it was auctioned as Lot 8 by the Holton Park Estate, with no mention of the two cottages, but it did not sell. It was then let to Ernest Pollard for £42 p.a.. It is understood that Alexander Crundale sold off the estate in lots, two years after buying the whole thing from Ethel Biscoe, but no papers on his ownership have survived.

Lot 8 Auction particulars in 1913

Lot 8
(Coloured Title on Plan No. 1).
IN THE PARISHES OF HOLTON AND CHILWORTH.
One mile from Wheatley Station (G.W.R.).

The Charming Riverside Residence
with extensive GARDENS and PADDOCKS,
known as
“WHEATLEY BRIDGE HOUSE”
the whole extending to
13 a. 2 r. 24 p.
WITH VALUABLE FISHING RIGHTS IN THE RIVER THAME.
Made up as under

SCHEDULE.

No. OF PLANS	DESCRIPTION.	STATE.	EXTENT.
			A. R. P.
15	Bridge House (Chilworth Parish)	Buildings, etc.	0 0 8
14	Bridge Meadow do.	Pasture	0 3 34
17	Bridge Meadow do.	Pasture	4 3 38
19	Bridge Meadow do.	Pasture	5 0 0
21	Chair Bed do.	Outs	0 0 26
20	Drubbe do.	Double	0 1 10
16	Drubbe do.	Double	0 0 29
28	Island do.	Pasture	0 0 54
2	Garden (Holton Parish)	Garden	0 0 35
3	Paddock do.	Pasture	0 3 32
3	Paddock do.	Pasture	0 0 13
4	Paddock do.	Pasture	0 0 16
5	Garden do.	Garden	0 0 16
	Total		A. 13 2 34

THE HOUSE, of Brick and Tile construction, contains SITTING ROOM, DINING ROOM, TWO KITCHENS, DAIRY, THREE BEDROOMS, and BOX ROOM.
In the Paddocks are an Open Cow Shed and Loose Box, Nag Stable, and in the Garden an Open Shed and Room over.
The GARDENS are nicely laid out with LAWNS, and the KITCHEN GARDEN is most productive.
The above is in the occupation of Mr. Ernest Pollard, a yearly Michaelmas tenant, at the moderate ANNUAL RENT of **£42. 0s. 0d.** *825/100000*

OUTGOINGS

TITHE RENT CHARGE:	Appertioned Sum.	Average 1913
HOLTON	9s. 4d.	6s. 11d.
CHILWORTH—		
VICARIAL	£1. 0s. 4d.	15s. 3d.
LAY IMPROPRIATOR	£2. 6s. 10d.	£1. 15s. 0d.

The Property is subject to Land Tax.
The Timber is valued at £20. 8s. 0d.

But Pollard was the proprietor, as shown below.



Another photo suggests that this was of a modest size.



And it appears that some of the bedroom accommodation was in converted railway carriages



Neither of the above photos nor the photo of the verandah (below) suggest other than that this was an entirely separate building to the two toll cottages.



The two cottages appear to form part of the early-1920s Bridge Hotel, photo below, and the current Harvester restaurant while all evidence of Wheatley Bridge House is missing from any photos other than those shown above, and has long-since disappeared. There is a question as to whether the 1729 date is genuine or not and also whether the two bay windows would have been built as such at that time. But bay windows had long been a feature of residential buildings, so there is no reason why not.



According to her great-great grandson, Fanny Cordelia (nee Mutton) was a Hotel Manageress of a few different Hotels including the Bridge Hotel, Wheatley in 1926. She had married Joseph Henry Pleming in 1889; at some point they separated and Fanny took up with Arthur John Foster and they lived as man & wife for some years although never actually married. Fanny was the proprietress when the Bridge Hotel filed for bankruptcy in 1926. Also, according to the same informant, his grandmother's aunt & uncle, Lily & Walter Balding, lived in a wooden hut on the river at Wheatley.



So the ownership trail is 'lost' for several more decades. During the Second World War, when American servicemen were at the Military Hospital, it was well used by visiting relatives as it was the nearest hotel.

G.R. Nixey owned the hotel in 1966. He tried different ideas to attract customers including a caravan site. At one time, he decorated it in the Spanish style and Spanish girls served behind the bar.