

INTRODUCTION

The present church of St Mary the Virgin was only completed in 1857, but there are records of a place of worship in Wheatley as early as the fifteenth century. This early chapel was a small and humble building, situated on the site now known as the Memorial Gardens or Old Burial Ground, which lies to the south of the High Street. This was never a parish church but was a chapelry dependent on Cuddesdon, and the village had to wait until 1750 for the chapel to be consecrated for all ceremonies. Even then the clergyman had only the status of curate and was usually non-resident while Cuddesdon, two miles uphill, remained the mother church.

In 1784 Thomas Sims, a native of Wheatley who had made a fortune in Gibraltar, planned to provide a 'proper and commodious place of worship'. But disputes between those who thought the proposed new building would be too expensive to maintain, resulted in a smaller building which was put up at a cost of £2,485 5s 6d and consecrated in July 1795. It was a simple Georgian building, dedicated, as is the present church, to St Mary the Virgin.

In the nineteenth century Wheatley people were regarded as a degraded set: this was partly due to poverty and partly to the lack of a squire or resident parson. Samuel Wilberforce, the energetic and reforming Bishop of Oxford, resolved to make the parish independent of Cuddesdon and to appoint a vigorous young clergyman, Edward Elton, to become the first Vicar. During the first ten years of his incumbency he built a Vicarage (now Morland House Surgery, on the corner of London Road and Holloway), a new church, and a school. The money for the new church was raised entirely by Mr Elton's own efforts, and the church we see today was consecrated on June 10th 1857.

This collection of Church Records is divided into eight sections:

1. The Chapelry at Wheatley and the relationship with the Parish of Cuddesdon.
2. The Church of 1795
3. Rev. Edward Elton and the Parish Church of 1857
4. The churchyard survey provided by the Oxfordshire Family History in 2003, which records all of the memorial inscriptions, with photographs. (Computer printouts are available for a small fee)
5. Vicars, Curates, Church Wardens and other Church Personalities. (NB more information may be found in the separate 'PEOPLE' files)
6. The Bells
7. The Memorial Gardens and the War Memorial
8. Wheatley Church Records and other documents.