

The History of the Church

There are records of a place of worship as early as the 15th Century on the site now known as The Memorial Gardens or The Old Burial Ground. We know that a Georgian building was consecrated in July 1795 which replaced an earlier chapel. It was dedicated to St Mary the Virgin.

The Reverend Edward Elton came to the village in 1849 and set about the task of rebuilding the parish. During the first ten years of his incumbency he built the present church, the former primary school and the former vicarage, now known as Morland House. The money for the church was raised entirely by Mr Elton's own efforts. He wrote "I alone was responsible, the money, in all about £3,500, was raised mostly in small sums. I believe I wrote about 5,000 letters - the balance, £500, I myself paid."

St Mary's Church, on the new site, was designed by G. E. Street, who was diocesan architect. It was completed in 1857 and on the 10th June Mr Elton noted in his diary "Great day for Wheatley, tolerably fine and pleasant, Church consecrated, 2 Bishops present and large company. Dined in the field, collected £83 - 1 - 3d."

Although St Mary's Church has only stood on the present site since 1857 we would like to think that with your help it will stand well into the next millennium.

**The spire is an important feature on the skyline of Wheatley.
Its very existence is threatened by decay.
Every effort needs to be made to repair the stonework NOW.**

St Mary's Church Spire

The spire together with the tower was built in 1868 with stone from Headington Quarry. This stone, while of a pleasant grey brown colour, is quite soft and porous when used as dressed stone, and therefore is less resistant to decay than other faced stone, such as Bath stone. The main cause for this decay is water, along with chemical pollution. Once this happens decay to the main stonework is very rapid.

Although the stonework at St Mary's has been deteriorating over a considerable period, the degree of decay has only recently become apparent. This deterioration has accelerated over the last few years, and if this is not dealt with as a matter of urgency, then there will be major structural problems with the tower. A closer inspection of the tower shows that structural deterioration has already taken place.