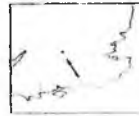


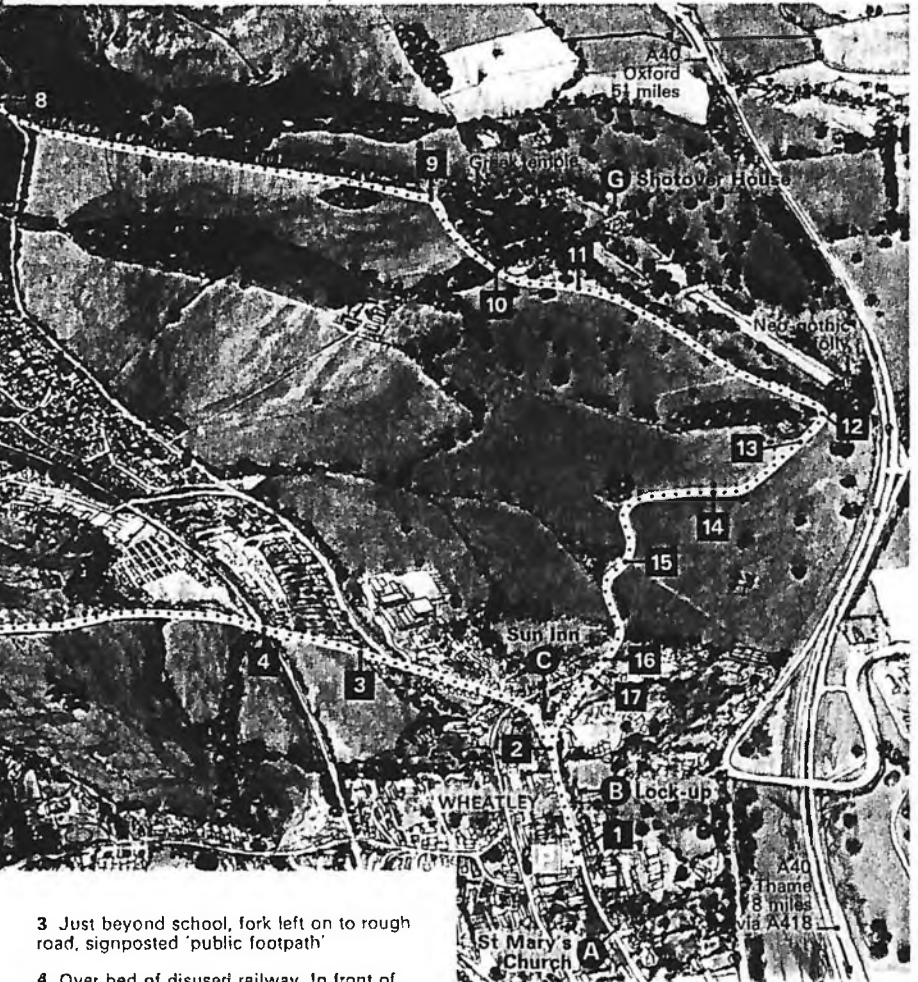
Wheatley



TWO CENTURIES AGO WHEATLEY LAY UPON A busy highway and had an evil reputation for highwaymen and rowdyism. The coming of the railways and the death of the coaching era left it to become the tranquil village it is now. This walk passes a relic of more turbulent times in

the form of an old lock-up. It also visits a high common, with wide views. Some of the paths may be muddy after rain.

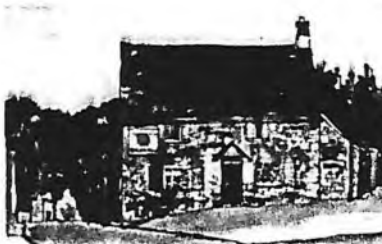
CAR PARK Church Road, Wheatley. Also parking in a lay-by on the far side of the A40 almost opposite Point 12.



JOHN ROSS



1 Turn left out of car park (church to right), over cross roads and past lock-up



2 Keep left of Sun Inn. Bear left down hill, then along Littleworth Road

3 Just beyond school, fork left on to rough road, signposted 'public footpath'

4 Over bed of disused railway. In front of yard gates, bear left up hill between fences, crossing two stiles

5 Over stile at top of hill and turn right along road, past windmill. Join tarmac road signposted 'Horspath'

6 Just before houses on right, opposite letter box, turn right up unmade road

7 At T-junction, turn right

8 At next T-junction turn right for 100 yds, then left through gates between lodges and up avenue. [For Shotover Plain and Horspath Common, turn left at T-junction for ¼ mile, then left at signpost 'riding track'. Retrace steps]

9 At end of avenue, bear right down hill

10 Pass barn on left, and at once keep right at fork

11 At T-junction turn right along drive

12 About 30 yds before main road, turn right. Where drive bends right to house, keep straight on through field gate and to left of fence

13 Where fence bends right with hedge, continue straight ahead over meadow

14 Bear slightly right, passing to left of copse, to grassy track, where turn left

15 Where track bends left up hill to road, straight on, beside hedge and trees

16 Over stile by field gate and along lane



17 Keep left at fork. At Sun Inn rejoin outward route back to car park

A St Mary's Church

This fine neo-Gothic church was built by the Victorian architect George Edmund Street, and consecrated in 1857. Street, best known for designing the Law Courts in London's Strand, laid out all his churches to the same basic pattern: each has only one altar, visible from all parts of the church; a rich east end; and plenty of west light illuminating the nave.

B Lock-up

Early in the 19th century, at the time when Wheatley was a quarrying town and full of coaching inns, disorder was rife and a lock-up became necessary. In 1834 this curious stone pyramid was built in Church Road for the purpose. In the padlocked interior are kept the old stocks.

The pyramid was a fashionable shape in the 18th century for a mausoleum, or family tomb. This fact may have led to the humble village lock-up being attributed to Sir Christopher Wren or Sir John Vanbrugh; but in fact it was built by a local mason named Cooper, more than a century after their time.

Beside the lock-up once stood the parish cock-fighting and bull-baiting pit, which has now vanished.

C Sun Inn

This 18th-century coaching inn still retains much of its original fabric. In the coaching era of the 18th and early 19th centuries the main London to Oxford road ran straight through the village of Wheatley. Originally the coaches ran along Crown Road; but they were later diverted along Church Road, after which the Sun Inn was opened to cater for the coach traffic.



NEO-GOTHIC FOLLY IN THE GROUNDS OF SHOTOVER HOUSE

E Shotover Plain

Shotover Plain, nearly 600 ft above sea level, was once part of a royal hunting forest that embraced Headington, Wheatley and Horspath. A tradition says that the last wild boar in England was killed in Shotover Forest. Possibly linked with this is the story of John Copcot, an undergraduate of Queen's College, Oxford in the 15th century, who is supposed to have slain a wild boar on Shotover Hill by stuffing a copy of Aristotle's philosophical works down its throat.

In 1660 Shotover ceased to be a royal forest, after being devastated during the Civil War. Cromwell had planted his artillery on the hilltop to bombard the Royalists in Headington. Further ravaging was due to the keeper of the forest at that time, Sir Timothy Tyrrell, who is said to have sold the royal timber for his own profit.

The broad track over the plain is the course of the old coach road to London. Regarded as one of the most dilapidated main highways in Britain, its reputation was made worse by the prevalence of highwaymen, one of whom John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, encountered. The plain was busiest between 1669 – when for the first time a 'flying coach' from London reached Oxford in one day – and 1775, when the new turnpike road over Headington Hill to the north was opened and began to take away its traffic.

F Horspath Common

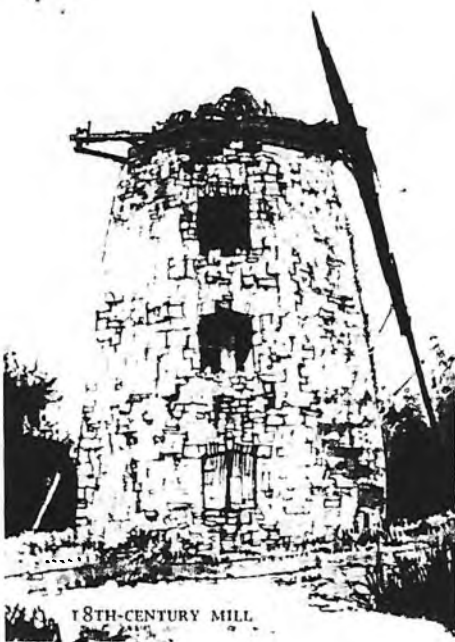
The name 'Horspath' refers to a bridleway for pack ponies, dating back to Saxon times, which ran up from the village of Horspath to the road over Shotover Plain. The present bridleway between Points 7 and 8 on the walk may be part of the old horse path. Horspath Common lies on the south-facing slopes

of Shotover Hill, and can be reached by making a detour to the left at Point 8. The common, which belongs to the Oxford Preservation Trust and Oxford University, consists of high heathland criss-crossed by many paths, and there are magnificent views over the Thames Valley to the Berkshire Downs and beyond.

G Shotover House

In the Middle Ages, Shotover House was the home of the forest's keeper or bailiff. It was altered several times during the 16th and 17th centuries, and completely rebuilt in its present Classical form by Sir James Tyrrell early in the 18th century. The wings were added in 1854.

In the grounds of the house are a Greek temple, for which the landscape gardener William Kent (1684-1748) may have been responsible, and a neo-gothic folly which stands at the end of the long ornamental lake, visible between Points 11 and 12. The house is not normally open to the public.



18TH-CENTURY MILL

D Mill

The mill on the crest of the ridge was built in the 18th century on the site of a medieval mill. It was in use until 1915, and is now being restored.



GREEK TEMPLE AT SHOTOVER HOUSE