



---

COMPETITION SUCCESS

Most members will know by now that the joint effort of the History Group and the Environment Group in the Local History Competition organised by the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council and the Oxford Journal earned the Wheatley Society exhibit fourth place, a certificate and a cheque for fifty pounds. The exhibition was staged in Oxford Town Hall from April 18th to 20th and attracted 25 entries from all parts of Oxfordshire. John Jackson writes :

The judges had a most unenviable task as the standard of exhibit was very high, and in placing the entry of Continuity and Change in Wheatley High Street fourth, they commended it for the obvious research, the simple graphic and audio-visual display and the accompanying catalogue.

The competition rules limited the space the exhibits could occupy. In the allotted space was displayed, by means of drawings, photographs and documents, a history of houses on both sides of the High Street. The display was augmented by a slide show with a commentary. The work of the two groups dovetailed most effectively. This was borne out by the many comments of the visitors who expressed pleasure at being able to read of, see and hear about the old and the new alongside one another. \*

Most of the entries had a fascinating story to tell - one, second prize winners Tackley, a remarkable account of a voyage which ended in tragedy off the coast of Tasmania - which they told with both imagination and inventiveness within the confines of the allotted space. The total amount of research which had been needed was colossal, but this only demonstrates the richness of our heritage.

The exhibition was very well attended and there was a considerable number of visitors from the village who came to see our display. The stand was manned by members of the Society throughout the three days of the exhibition.

To have been placed fourth in such company is a considerable achievement and reflects great credit on all concerned.

Those who missed the competition at Oxford Town Hall will have another opportunity to see the Society's exhibit at the Wheatley Festival Societies' Fair (see below).

POSITIVE RESPONSES

One thing to emerge from the Local History Competition is that

there is a great deal of interest in Wheatley's past, and there must be many ordinary people who would like to help to bring it to light. All sorts of talents are needed and you do not have to be a trained historian in order to make a contribution. You could help with a group project or perhaps pursue your own line of research, with advice given as necessary. Why not contact Margaret Rosenthal (tel. 2631) to see what the possibilities are ?

Another positive proposal is an expansion of the Society's publishing ventures. Much of the material collected for the competition could well be published in some form and there is scope for further development in this area. The Society already publishes Walkabouts, calendars, notelets, etc., but what is needed is ideas and practical help. If you have experience of publishing at any level and/or would like to join in developing new publishing projects, please contact Gilbert Littlehales (tel. 2331).

#### WHEATLEY FESTIVAL

Festival time is upon us again and, as in previous years, the Society will be making a substantial contribution to the proceedings :

Societies' Fair (Sat. 24 May, 10-12 in the Primary School).

The Society's prize-winning local history exhibit will be amongst the items on display.

Treasure Hunt (Sat. 24 May, starting at 11 in the Primary School playground). Open to all children who know Wheatley.

Poems and Pints (Sat. 24 May at 8.30 in the garden of the "Sun". Admission free). Our successful Drama Group in action again, this time on the theme of 'Pleasure'.

Children's Sports (Mon. 26 May, 3-30 in the Church Road rec.). All manner of sporting competitions, with a number of traditional games as a bonus.

We hope that all of these events will be well patronised, but it would also be very welcome if members could lend a hand with any of the numerous jobs involved in running activities of this sort, particularly at the Children's Sports (holding a tape, rounding up competitors, etc.) and in setting up the local history exhibit from 8.00 on the Friday evening. No need to make arrangements : just turn up and offer to help.

#### WHAT ELSE IS IN STORE ?

On Wednesday 14 May (8.00, Merry Bells), Stephen Ware, a local vet., will be talking about his experiences looking after animals, under a familiar-sounding title : 'All Creatures Small and Great'.

Then, on Tuesday 3 June (8.00, Merry Bells Coffee Room), Len Barnes, who bears the title of County Footpaths Project Officer, will be talking about Circular Walks in Oxfordshire, appropriately in a month which includes National Footpaths Week, and as its

contribution to that week, the Society will be organising a circular walk on Saturday 21 June (details later).

The annual Garden Party will be returning to Ambrose Farm, the scene of successful evenings in previous years, by kind invitation of Mrs Bayliss, and will be held on Saturday 5 July at 8.00.

Another popular annual event is the Car Rally, this year to be held on Sunday 15 July, starting from the Merry Bells Car Park at 10.50 a.m.

A month later, a Walkabout in Oxford will be held, following the pattern set in recent years, starting at 2.50 on Sunday 17 August from the Martyrs' Memorial.

On Tuesday 29 July (8.00, United Reformed Church), it is hoped to be able to feature a film and talk about the Cheshire Mummers' Play (subject to confirmation).

Two outings are projected for the next few months, one to the Viking exhibition at the British Museum, provisionally on Saturday 12 July, and the other to Chedworth Roman Villa and/or Snowhill Manor, provisionally on Sunday 10 August. For details, contact any member of the Committee nearer the time.

#### A QUICK LOOK BACK

Martin Timms's illustrated talk on North Sea oil in March gave an interesting insight into the achievements and problems of a vital part of our economy.

In April, over twenty members invaded the skittle alley at the Isis at Iffley Lock and spent an enjoyable evening hurling wooden cannon-balls down the alley. The repeated success of some members suggested a misspent youth.

The May Day celebrations this year went very well, thanks to the weather, the organisation and the large turn-out. The Society fulfilled a vital function by providing coffee for the revellers, in addition to John Drake as high-priest.

#### THE FUTURE OF WHEATLEY'S SCHOOLS

The County Council's proposal to reorganise the primary and secondary schools within the village and to make important changes in the use of the existing facilities is currently arousing much interest in the village. There was a large attendance of residents at the May meeting of the Parish Council, and both a Parish Meeting and a Public Meeting under the auspices of the County Council will be held. In view of the wide range of views held by its members, the Wheatley Society itself is not expressing any collective opinion, though it is hoped that, as individuals, members will make their own contribution to the public debate in the light of their personal convictions. The Parish Clerk has copies of the Working Party's report for consultation.

## . . . AND THE FUTURE OF WHEATLEY'S WINDMILL

If you have been up by the windmill recently, you will have noticed the progress made in restoring the fabric of the tower. The Windmill Society, whose aims are wholeheartedly supported by the Wheatley Society, are in need of volunteer labour to enable them to make a Great Leap Forward. Saturday/Sunday 28-29 June is to be a Volunteer Working Weekend and any members with energy and goodwill to spare are invited to put them at the disposal of the Windmill Society.

### HOW THINGS MIGHT HAVE BEEN

During the early years of Queen Victoria's reign, building railways became something of a mania. Companies were formed to build lines from anywhere to everywhere, capital was raised and in some cases the lines actually got built. The old Fairford line, now dismantled, was a good example of what tended to happen. The company's aim was to build a line connecting Oxford and Cheltenham, but the money ran out when the track had only reached as far as Fairford, and there it had to end.

While working in the County Archives recently, Roger Hall came across a set of plans drawn up in 1852 for a railway line from Oxford to London, passing through Wheatley (but of course before the Oxford-Princes Risborough line was constructed in 1864). The company, the London and Mid-western Railway, wanted to build a station in North Oxford, where Leckford Road now is, and the line would then have cut its way towards Wheatley across Westfield.

It ran alongside Westfield Road, across the quarry (now Templar's Close) and the parish pits (Church Road rec.), then behind the cottages on Church Road. Where the Primary School gateway now stands (neither the Primary School nor St Mary's church had been built in 1852), the line turned south-east across Church Road at an oblique angle to continue across Friday Lane, then cut through the Crown's yard (behind the Doctor's House) and made its way down to the river. There is no indication on the plan of a station in Wheatley, though no doubt this must have been intended at some stage.

If the line had been built, it would have involved the demolition of a certain amount of property, though the village was obviously much less built up then than it is now. The "area of interest" marked on the plan, showing land affected by the scheme, covered a great deal of Church Road and some of the eastern end of High Street.

It is interesting to surmise how the village would look today if this particular railway line had cut through Wheatley north of the High Street rather than the later line constructed south of it.