

OXFORDSHIRE ODYSSEY
WHEATLEY, by an OXFORD MAIL STAFF REPORTER
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The village of Wheatley lies some six miles east of Oxford and is built on terraces descending from the High Wycombe road into a hollow immediately to the south. Leaving the high road the visitor descends steeply towards the two main streets of the village running parallel with it.

To view the village as a whole he must climb the hill beyond the hollow up to Garsington road and from the summit he can look back at the terraced village facing him.

It has several old buildings, notable among them being the manor house, dating back to Jacobean times, and a cottage said to have been given by Cromwell as a wedding present to his daughter.

There is also the "old round house" where you may see the "stocks," still well preserved, and "Wayside" once visited, it is believed, by Dr Johnson.

No longer an inn, but once prosperous and hospitable, is "The Crown," which Mr F Cullum, aged 83 and one of the oldest men in the village, remembers the days when it could stable 60 horses.

One of Wheatley's most active residents is Mr William Tombs, who has been connected with local government in Wheatley for 35 years and whose championship of the Parish Council has been interrupted only once in the past 14 years.

I found him shovelling coal from a railway wagon in the station yard. He told me he had no need to work, but if there was work to be done he believed in doing it.

THE SAME STORY

I asked him what changes the war had wrought in Wheatley, and his comment was "People are not putting the same level of energy into these first years of peace as they did in the seven years of war."

Here again is the echo of that cry which we heard at Bampton and at Eynsham - that people today are lazy.

There cannot be anything congenital about this laziness, for these are the same folk that won the war.

What is it then? What stimulus is lacking? Are the old people right in their criticism of the young?

Where is a spokesman for the defence of youth? The Rev. F. L. Wheeler, Vicar of Wheatley, told me he did not find it easy to arouse the enthusiasm of the young for collective effort of any kind, or to persuade boys to subordinate their individual preferences to the interests of the team. (Note the T.U.C. succeeds where the Vicar has failed?)

A large proportion of Wheatley's inhabitants are employed by Morris Motors and the

Pressed Steel Company. A small timber industry occupies a few, and until the beginning of the war, there was a brickyard employing some 40 people.

This was taken over by the Ministry of Supply for storage purposes and now employs only about a dozen workers as watch men.

Of course housing is Wheatley's chief problem, as it is everywhere else. During the period between the two wars 61 council houses were built in the parish. For the next five years Bullingdon R.D.C. plans 25 more houses. So far two are almost completed and two more are expected to be finished by the New Year.

Incidentally, in Blenheim Lane, Wheatley, where the chairman of the Parish Council was born, more children were brought up during his childhood, he tells me, than there are now living in all 61 council houses together.

Mr Tombs calculates that the present average number of occupants per house in Wheatley is seven people in three houses.

"People live so much longer these days," he observed, "that there are more old folk living alone."

Wheatley was reckoned the healthiest village in the country, he added, until recent statistics awarded the record to a village in Yorkshire."

GOOD PROGRESS, BUT -

Mr Tombs feels that progress in Wheatley has been, for a village, very good. For many years Wheatley has had its own electric light, water and sewerage.

He emphasised, however, that there was room for improvement, remarking with his usual candour that senior local authorities would be well advised to consult parish councils fully before making plans.

Though the "Merry Bells" built in 1887 as a temperance hotel by Mrs Miller, of Shotover House, now serves as a community centre for concerts, dinners and other communal activities, it has generally to be hired for these occasions and is not within the financial reach of every gathering.

There is at present a good football ground in the village but it is understood that part of it at least will be required as a site for the new school to be built for the Oxfordshire Education Committee.

However, the Parish Council is confident that when the details of the scheme are fully known, Major Miller, the owner of the site, will do all he can to help the village to find another ground.

The new school is to be a secondary school to serve Wheatley and the surrounding districts.

At present there are two schools (ages 7 - 14) and an infant school. A new junior school is also projected.

There are plans for the future. For the present Wheatley's needs are a good village hall and for more and better houses.

And if villages which are no longer predominantly agricultural owing to the proximity of industrial Oxford, are to preserve their sense of community, they must acquire those amenities which the industrial worker enjoys.

This fate is still distant from Wheatley, but there is little time to be lost.