

An easy circular walk around, the older parts of the village describing some of its places of interest and history. It is arranged to begin at the public car park in Church Road (50 yards west of the Church) but can be joined at any point in the centre of the village.

Turn left out of the car park and. walk west along Church Road past the crossroads.

1. THE ROUND HOUSE AND THE PARISH PIT

This was built in 1834 as the village lock-up. At that time the village was a quarrying and. coaching town with many inns and. taverns and. was notorious for drunkenness. The Constable locked drunks in here overnight before sending them to court in Oxford. In spite of its unusual design it was the work of a local stonemason, one of the Cooper family mentioned below.

The recreation ground behind is in one of the quarries known as the Parish Pit. It was used for bull-baiting. At the annual Wheatley Feast (in the autumn) the bull was first led round the village with a garland around its neck. Bull-baiting ceased in 1824 after appeals from the vicar of Holton.

Granary Hall, a few yards along the road on the left, is a chapel but was once the Manor granary.

At the Sun Inn bear right into Westfield Road.

2. THE SUN

This is an 18th century inn. It is strategically placed at the junction of the old road to Oxford over Shotover Hill (left) and the old London to Worcester Road (right), which originally ran via Islip and Enstone, avoiding the marshy Thames valley.

Continue along Westfield Road to the next junction.

3. THE OLD HOUSE, QUARRYING AND BRICKMAKING

On the left is The Old House, a Queen Anne house once the home of the Cooper family who owned the local quarries and brickworks.

The hillside on the right is an outcrop of Corallian limestone and was extensively quarried from the mediaeval period until the late 19th century. The stone was used widely in this area and many of the older Oxford colleges are built of it (eg Magdalen, Merton and Christchurch). It was even exported as far as Windsor Castle.

The brickworks were behind the house in what is now part of its large garden. The local red bricks and tiles were produced here from at least the 18th century. A new brickworks was opened at Littleworth in 1892 and closed in 1939. Cooper's also owned lime kilns which supplied Oxford gasworks. The remains can be seen up the lane on the right.

Turn sharp left down Kiln Lane. Turn right at the end and then into the forecourt of the New Club.

4. THE NEW CLUB AND BIENHEIM LANE

The New Club was the Red Lion until 1947, an inn built on a site where clay tobacco pipes were once made. (Discarded ones are often dug up in old gardens in the village.)

Blenheim Lane to the left of the Club was once part of the Manorial wastes. With the rise of the coaching trade the village expanded rapidly, and in 1721 the Vestry granted temporary permission for 18 cottages to be built here to relieve a housing shortage. There have been cottages there ever since.

Walk up Blenheim Lane. Then retrace your steps to the first turning on the right. At the end turn left into

Littleworth Road and then right into the High Street. Continue down the road to the small triangle of grass on the right.

5. THE GREEN AND THE MANOR HOUSE

This is all that remains of the village green. Most of what was left in 1813 was allocated to a private landowner by the Enclosure Commissioners.

Wheatley became a distinct manor within the estates of Abingdon Abbey around the end of the 11th century. The present house is basically late 16th century, when the growth of traffic on the Worcester road gave rise to Wheatley's earliest period of prosperity and major expansion. It was substantially altered by the Archdale family in 1601 when the east wing was added (which still bears this date). The house has changed hands many times and by 1851 it was derelict and a new owner converted it into cottages. It is now the home of the Hassall family, who restored it in 1939-40.

6. THE OLD PARSONAGE, THE GEORGE, THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE AND THE CREST

Almost opposite the Manor a few yards down the road is a fine group of old buildings. The Old Parsonage was occupied by a curate in the middle of the 19th century. (Moreland House in London Road was the vicarage.) The George (now the Old Inn House) was a packhorse inn dating from before 1548. The outline of the archway into the stable yard can still be seen. The next house (now Micheldene) was the school until the mid-19th century and then became a dairy. The next house, the Crest, has an old fire mark for the Royal Exchange Insurance Company on the wall above the front door.

7. THE HIGH STREET

From this point there is a good, view down the street through the earliest part of the village. Some of the houses date from the 16th century, and many from the 18th and early 19th centuries, Wheatley's second period of prosperity.

Almost all are built of local stone or brick, with local clay tiles on their roofs (although thatch was once common).

The village began as a straggle of houses, taverns and inns along this street, then the main Worcester road. Traffic to

Oxford was insignificant by comparison until the late 18th century. It followed a valley whose limestone slopes provided good foundations, building stone, wells, and plenty of passing trade. A stream ran down the street until 1858, when it was covered over and the road widened.

Go on down the High Street to the King and Queen.

8. THE KING AND QUEEN AND THE OLD BURIAL GROUND

To the left is a fine example of a Tudor Inn. Notice the original chimneys and stone window frames.

A few yards further on to the right, the war memorial stands in the Old Burial Ground. Wheatley was part of the parish of Cuddesdon until 1854, but had its own chapel by 1427. In 1785 the old building on this site was demolished to make way for a small cheaply built church. When Wheatley became a parish the Bishop insisted on a better building in spite of opposition from the vestry.

Turn right down the narrow alley beyond the next house, and left at the end.

9. BELL LANE

The gate on the right leads to the old infants school built in 1858. It is now used by the playgroup and the post-war building by the scouts.

The lane was named after the Bell Inn mentioned in 1703, which may have been on a site where a bell was cast for the chapel. The location of the inn is uncertain, but it was probably the building on the right hand corner of the High Street.

Turn right into the High Street and continue as far as the shops.

10. THE WHITE HART

The inn facing the shops was built in the early 19th century to replace the old White Hart, an Elizabethan inn opposite the end of Bell Lane demolished about 1827. It had been well-known for its good food, as were many of the inns in Wheatley throughout the coaching era.

Turn right at the far end of the shops. At the end of the alley turn left towards the footpath beneath the poplars and walk down it to the metalled road between the cottages.

11. FARM CLOSE LANE

This has been a road since Mediaeval times, and used to continue as a footpath to the railway station.

The backs of houses in the High Street can be seen.

Turn left at the end of the lane into Grown Square.

12. CROWN SQUARE

The main road ran through the square. The cottages on the corner of Friday Lane were the Chequers Inn until the beginning of this century. The Crown Inn was the large stone building up Crown Road on the left. In its heyday it was a stage coach inn with capacious stables, and even a cattle market was held here until 1909. The inn closed in 1939.

Turn left into the High Street.

13. THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

The Church on the left was converted, from a tannery in 1841. The smaller building was built as the Sunday-school in 1895, and is now the church hall.

Continue up the High Street to the Merry Bells.

14. THE MERRY BELLS

This was built in 1888 by Mrs Miller of Shotover Park as a temperance hotel 'with clubrooms for men and boys' - a more positive approach to drunkenness than the Round House! It soon began to evolve into a community centre with evening classes etc. This it remains, and is now run by a special trust.

Climb the steps between the Merry Bells and the Bank and walk through the yard to Church Road.

15. CHURCH ROAD

The High Street was narrow and congested, crowded between the houses and the stream, and by the early 18th century Church Road had become a bypass behind the back gardens of the village. It was originally called the Backside, but the Victorians preferred a more elegant name. Those inns that could open rear entrances (eg. The White Hart and The King and Queen). The Crown Inn also opened a tap room (now the Doctor's House, 100 yards down the road to the right). The scout hut on the right was a blacksmith's shop.

Church Road was itself bypassed by the New Turnpike in 1789 (now London Road), avoiding Shotover Hill.

Wheatley's prosperity then began to decline. There is now a third bypass and the proposed "X40" road and its links could prove to be a fourth.

16. ST MARY'S CHURCH, PRIMARY SCHOOL AND THE STOCKS

The parish Church opposite was consecrated in 1857. It was designed by Edmund Street, best known for the Law Courts in London's Strand, who was diocesan architect. It cost £3,500, mostly raised by the vicar in small donations from university men.

A few yards to the left is the primary school. The old building was opened at the same time as the infants school and is almost certainly Street's work.

The old village stocks have now been erected just behind the wall, in the school playground.

The car park is on the left past the school.