

### Position

Wheatley lies six miles east of Oxford, in a small valley at right angles to the river Thame. The village stretches from near the bridge over the Thame, 186 feet above sea level, to a hill on the South West, an outlier of Shotover, rising to 400 feet.

### Meaning of name.

The name Wheatley is derived from the old English "hwaete-leah". The modern spelling is due to the influence of the word "wheat", but the old English "hwaete" has nothing to do with wheat. It means "sharp or bold" used with reference to moral or mental boldness, "ley" is from the old English "leah", a clearing or open space. It refers to land from which forest has been cleared, as distinct from "fold" which has always been open. So perhaps we may take Wheatley to mean "the clearing inhabited by a bold and active people J" (Oxfordshire place names" by H. Alexander, published 1912)

### Ancient British Times,

There are no remains of Ancient British dwellings, but the bridle-path from Horspath on the crest of the hill past Wheatley Mill is believed by some to be of British origin.

There are also traces in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Ancient British influence. (See description of cemetery on page 2).

### Roman Period.

There are several -Roman villas in the neighbourhood, of which the principal one was unearthed in 1845. These Roman villas can best be described as large country houses with farms attached, each forming a self-contained settlement. The example of Wheatley was a luxurious mansion, probably burnt after the retreat of the Romans from Britain.

The remains consist principally of parts of the hypocaust and bath. The former had a plaster floor laid on solid flat tiles, on uniform and regularly disposed pillars, one foot ten inches high also made of flat tiles, and about 16 to 18 inches distant from each other. In the Praefurnium on the west the slaves kept alight the fires, from which the heated air was led by flues, through the hypocaust, into the rooms above. On the south west is a furnace with a cistern above, and a drain which probably took the hot water into the bath on the south east. The villa after being examined, and nothing remains to be seen today.

(Archaeological Journal 1946, Vol.2)

Mr. Gale of Nuneham Courtenay has a number of Roman coins picked up vicinity of the Rectory Farm, Wheatley, chiefly near the New Bam in the vicinity of the site of the Roman villa. Among these are the following:

Gallienus	A.D. 260 - 268
Tetricus	267 - 274
Constantius	305 - 306
Constantine the Great	306 - 337
Constans	337 - 350
Constantius 2	350 - 361
Valentinian	364 - 375
Valens	375 - 378

Mr. Brown of 'Windmills', Wheatley, contributes the following notes on the Roman remains found near his house:- "When in 1913 the garden of Windmills was being made, a good deal of excavation was needed to the depth of nine or ten feet. In the course of this work, some fragments of Roman pottery were dug up which were taken to the Ashmolean Museum and recognised as belonging to the period 100 B.C. to 100 A.D. In order to preserve them, they were cemented into the wall close to the place where they were found. It is inferred that a Roman Villa at one time stood on this spot."

From Mrs. Hancock.

In 1933 excavation during the building of Mr. Hancock's house at the top of Ladder Hill, discloses a large stone coffin, at a depth of 3'6". Professor Leeds of the Ashmolean Museum inspected the find and he and several students spent an afternoon unearthing and moving it. The lid, fractured in one place, was carefully removed and the skeleton within was taken out piece by piece. The whole coffin and contents were given to the museum, which made the following report. It is of non-local Golitic stone, and though undecorated is carefully shaped with a slightly gabled lid. No grave-goods accompanied the interment, but the site and the orientation as well as evidence from the skeletal remains, serve to corroborate its ascription to the Roman period."

### Anglo Saxon Period

The Saxon cemetery was brought to light by workmen, digging out stone which hindered steam-ploughing operations.

Notes of the graves opened were made by Mr. H Gale from January 29th 1883 to April 11th 1884, when the work was taken over by the authorities of the Ashmolean Museum. Forty-six graves were opened; the special points of interest seem to be as follows

The cemetery was of comparatively late date and belonged to a rather poor community. The date might be fixed somewhere after the taking of the Four Towns, A.D.571.

None of the bodies were cremated which was an earlier custom, but some lay in a crouching position which points to the survival of an earlier race (see page 1). The majority of the bodies lay on their backs. Only two or three bodies faced East, which perhaps shows some Christian influence, but it is, on the whole, the cemetery of a pagan community. With regard to the survival, or influence of an earlier race, we must add "a patera of dark grey ware ..... wheel-made and certainly of Romano- British fabric in grave 8".

In grave 27 was found a portion of a pin of bronze wire formed with a large loop at the upper-end and a swan-neck bend just below. It is a type not uncommon in this country, in the late Celtic period and later.

In the same grave, were found two small Roman coins, one of Constans and one of Constantius II, and, probably in grave 14, a large silver pin, 5 ¼ inches long, with a disc-shaped head gilt and decorated. The upper end of the shaft was decorated and flattened at the sides to admit of a perforation through which was passed a large ring of silver wire, the ends of which were fastened together by a sliding knot. (See Collection in Ashmolean Museum, Room No.1 Caso 19, Anglo Saxon Collection).

Mr. Thurlow Leeds says of this pin that "It appears to be unique amongst Anglo-Saxon relics both in point of style and in form".

The ring round the disc-head, clearly a Celtic type developed later in Ireland. "The richer relics in grave 14 point to its having been the "grave of some petty local magnate". The large saucer brooches belong to a group of brooches first made in Kent. "Nor," writes Mr. Leeds, "are other Kentish signs lacking" Of the buckles discovered one from grave 15, is a well-known Kentish type and almost certainly of Kentish fabric, while the iron example from grave 14 with its triple riveted triangular backplate can be closely paralleled from Jutish cemeteries.

(From a paper read by Hr. B. Thurlow Leeds before the Society of Antiquaries, December 14th, 1916. A copy of this paper was lent to Wheatley W.I. by Mr. Gale).

### 12th Century

A castle was built during the reign of King Stephen (1135-1154) near the site of the Roman villa and Saxon cemetery, on what is still called Castle Hill. Nothing remains of the building, but the late Revd. C. H. Tomlinson believed that the pump at Bowls down (Bulldown) Farm drew water from the old castle well. This is one of the so-called "Castra Adulterina" which sprang up all over the country during the weak rule of Stephen. They were practically robber castles and their owners cruelly oppressed their neighbours, rich and poor. Henry II at once set about their destruction, and by order of the council of Bermondsey, a large number were razed to the ground. Probably the Wheatley castle was then destroyed, after very few years of existence.

(From the notes of the late Rev. 3.H. Tomlinson, formerly Fellow and Tutor of Worcester College, Oxford and reference from "Castles of England" by M. B. d'Auvergne, 1907)

### 13th Century

During the 15th Century Wheatley was part of the property of the Abbey of Abingdon. In 1274 Mathew de Watele was a tenant under the Great House at Abingdon (i.e. the Abbey) who held it direct from the King. In 1279 Watele (Wheatley) is described as a hamlet of Codesdon (Cuddesdon) and the Abbot of Abingdon held 810 acres.

(From notes taken by Rev. M. F. Bell at the Bodleian Library)

Mr. Bell adds another note, undated, but probably of the same period, that a certain Henry de Watele paid for his grazing rights by service, three weeks at a time, to the King's Forester at Setters (Shotover) and paid, besides, eight pence at the Bolendom (Bullington) Court at the inspection of frank pledges.

### 15<sup>th</sup> Century Victoria County History of Oxfordshire

In 1480 we hear of isolated cases of Lollards at Wheatley - They were not of the peasant class, but artisans.