

# Gang of nine go for the authentic touch



**ONE** more heave — and it's there! Just over 100 years ago, this was the scene at Wheatley as navvies toiled to relay the railway line.

So in the interests of authenticity in the village's play about itself, author Mr Mick Jones took his actors to the Great Western Preservation Society at Didcot for lessons.

They got instruction from an expert in the task of relaying track, slewing it into

a narrower gauge just as their Victorian fore-runners did.

A single-track line to link Wheatley with Oxford and Princes Risborough was opened in 1864 — on a broad gauge. Six years later they were wrenching it up and narrowing it by just over 2ft to conform with standard gauge. And the whole stretch between High Wycombe and Oxford was relaid in one frantic week.

"It was exhausting teamwork," said Mr Jones.

"The bald facts of Victorian achievement are usually camouflaging tales of working endeavour."

His play, *Wheatley 1870*, will use about 100 present-day villagers to capture the dramatic life of the community a century ago, with rumbustious navvies and a reforming vicar. It will be performed at the end of May.

**PHOTO:** Tony Moore