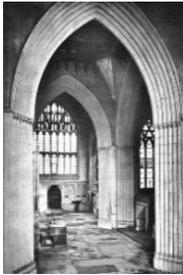


# Wheatley Greater Heritage Trail

A 3-mile walk tracing the industrial background to Wheatley's successes and its locational importance.

Its earliest wealth came from stone quarrying for Oxford Colleges, such as Merton's chapel in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

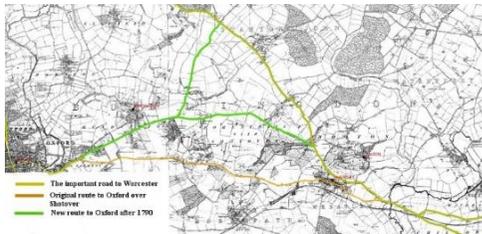


## Brickworks

Taken from the 1881 map



On the route to Oxford



GREATER HERITAGE TRAIL

Wheatley  
VILLAGE ARCHIVE

## Wheatley's history in a 3-mile walk

Wheatley developed as a limestone quarrying centre from the 14th century supplying high quality stone for Windsor Castle and many of the Oxford colleges. This resulted in Wheatley being one of Oxfordshire's wealthiest villages in 1334 according to recently published evidence.

As well as having this outcrop, Wheatley also sat on two seams of Kimmeridge clay which resulted in brickworks in the village for nearly two hundred years from 1742 to 1939.

It was also on an important cross-country route between London and Worcester where the route crossed the river Thame, initially by a ford just east of Wheatley, and later by a bridge. A traveller wanting to go to Oxford took a spur along Wheatley's curved High Street and then over Shotover Plain. Later this was part of the old Oxford to London turnpike road. There is evidence of 16<sup>th</sup> century occupation of the inns along this route and several buildings have been researched showing evidence of a make-over in the first part of the 17th century. The original track went over Shotover Hill, but in 1790 this was changed along Wheatley's London Road (before the A40), and connected with the current A40 west of Wheatley.

Wheatley boasted several inns and other trades including wheelwrights, maltsters and smiths who served this traffic. The influence of this historical past on the current village underlies this tour.

### Start the walk from the forecourt of The Merry Bells

1. Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and aside from agriculture, Wheatley's local industry was quarrying and brick-making. It seems that the workers were prone to drunkenness! To counter this, in 1888 Mrs Sarah Dorothy Miller of Shotover House provided **The Merry Bells** as a temperance hotel. In 1970 it became Wheatley's Village Hall.

Turn left along the High Street and find the first 2 houses on this side of the street

2. **Nos 95 & 97** were built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By 1876 they formed a shop kept by Joshua Harris, who sold millinery, grocery, ironmongery and medicines. In 1971, the gradual conversion to dwellings began. (Note the shop window on No. 97.)



3. **Nos 101 and 103** are an attractive pair of white-painted 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings. 101 High Street was built on one of the strips owned by All Souls College, Oxford, a prominent landowner in the village in the 1590s.

4. **No. 107** is the earlier Post Office (1926-2017), before it transferred adjacent to the Merry Bells, replacing Barclays Bank which had closed. There is still a (now redundant) letter-box in its front wall.



5. **Cromwell House**, opposite and behind the railings, is one of the houses once used for tanning and drying hides. It was sold in 1849 for private housing. Oak panelling in one room is said to have come from Holton House where Cromwell was in attendance when his daughter, Bridget, was married to Henry Ireton on 15 June 1646.

6. **The United Reformed Church**, just beyond this, was once a tanning barn but was converted to a church in 1841 to 1843. In front of it, to the east, was a cottage which was demolished and rebuilt in 1898 as the Sunday School.

7. **Friday Lane**, the turning to the left, was also once one of All Soul's strips.

8. **Crown Square** was the centre of the tanning business starting with the slaughter of cattle from markets held at 'The Crown Inn' until 1909. The hides would have been lice-ridden, and this was



probably the reason for the local name of Louse Hill for the site of the old thatched dwellings on the raised south side, now replaced in the 1960s by more modern housing. During the tanning process, the hides were washed using water from the stream which ran behind the High Street houses, many of which were also used for the tanning business.

9. **Nos. 113 & 115 High Street**, on the corner of Friday Lane, were originally part of 'The Chequers Inn' which closed in the 1920s.

10. **College Farm**, set back and at an angle was re-built c.1768.

**Crown Road, and further on Roman Road, were part of the old road from London to Oxford. Walk on 130 yards to an old stone building with a central archway...**

11. **'The Crown Hotel'** was a coaching inn, dating from 1544, but was not a change-over-of-horses point which was at the Swan in Tetsworth, some 11-12 miles from Oxford. Instead 'heavy' horses may well have been loaned from here to pull coaches up Shotover Hill. In the 1790s the coaching route was altered and, as 'The Crown Inn' was then no longer on this route, a 'tap' bar was built on Church Road (Back Lane) for customers. **Another 180 yards further on is...**

A longer walk exploring Wheatley's industrial past

12. **Ambrose Farm**, which was the subject of a recent OBR (Oxfordshire Buildings Record) report, was probably built in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century as a three-unit house parallel to Crown Road. It had a detached kitchen to the rear which in 1776 was linked to the main house. At the same time, a two-storey chamber block with twin gables was added to the north.



There are apotropaic marian marks on a bressumer beam that were used to date it. There was a major phase of alterations in the 1920s.



**Passing the bottom of Jackies Lane on the right, you come into Roman Road, completely mis-named!**

13. **5 Roman Road** was also researched by OBR and it was concluded that an earlier house had had a major makeover in the early 17<sup>C</sup>, when its walls were raised in height, floors inserted, chimneystacks built and staircases added, all to provide additional accommodation.

**Walk up Jackies Lane to where the pavement ends, which is where the railway line crossed. If you have the time, walk up to the farm at the top of the hill, through the farmyard and onto the ridge, the site of a Roman farm. A coin from emperor Constantine's reign, 306-307, was found in the 1980s.**

14. There was a possible Saxon deserted village with 'Old Wheatley Close' shown on the All Souls map of 1590. Graves were also found at the top of the hill, typical of such a settlement. Ridge and furrow is found in the lower fields.

15. **Rectory House**. Walking back along Crown Road and passing the back of Wayside, is a barn with an indistinct datestone of 1720. Set back from the road is this grand house, which has been dated to 1630 by tree dating technology, and was originally the farmhouse for the main farm in Wheatley. A new farmhouse up the hill to replace it was built in 1962, now Castle Hill Farm.

**The Roman Catholic church** now occupies this barn.

16. **Mulberry Court** is another old dwelling and this had a barn with an identical datestone.

**Back in Crown Square, leave the square to the left into Farm Close Lane**

17. **6 Farm Close Lane** was the subject of another OBR study. The deeds and much of the detail of the original house clearly support it having been built in 17<sup>C</sup>. The apotropaic burn marks and window catches and stays, similar to those found at Ambrose Farm, suggest that it might date from the first half of that century, fitting in with one of the 'golden ages' of farming.



**Stile Cottage** should also be noted.

**Walk back into the High Street. Opposite to the left you will see:**

18. **Cinnamons** was previously 'The White Hart', re-built after a fire soon after 1822 and finally closed in 1999. It is now an Indian restaurant. The building to the left was the club room, where the Wheatley Morris men used to meet. Later it was a Chinese takeaway before being converted in 2019 to housing.

**Turn left and walk to the corner of Bell Lane.**

19. **'The Bell Inn'**. Notice the bells on the plaque on the house wall, the deeds of this old inn date from 1612. It remained an inn until 1854, when William Chillingworth became the owner as a result of a loan default by the licensee. He rebuilt the Bell Lane frontage in brick as this was then fashionable. In 1911, it was a butcher's shop, later a betting shop.

20. All the properties in Bell Lane are 18<sup>C</sup>. Up a path to the right of 9 Bell Lane was the infant school, established in 1840 and closed in the early 1970s. The ochre painted house was where the bier was kept, we shall see the site of the old chapel shortly. 17 Bell Lane was the home of the Cullum family who had a building business with a yard adjacent.



**Going into the top of the Memorial Garden, a Chapel of Ease stood near this top gate until 1795 when a new building, dedicated to St. Swithin, but known locally as St. Mary's, replaced it on the same site. Burials were permitted here in the early 19<sup>C</sup>, and a few of the original 430 graves can be found in the grass. However Wheatley wanted its own parish and the chapelry of Wheatley separated from Cuddesdon parish in 1854. A new church took the chapel's name on its completion in Back Lane (later Church Road) in 1857.**

21. A memorial to the fallen in WW1 was erected near the High Street entrance in 1921. This deteriorated over the years and was replaced in the 1970s with another memorial cross donated by Magdalen College.

22. **'The King & Queen'** can be seen on the left as one emerges onto High Street. Parts of this can traced back to the 1500s, although we do not know its name then. It was certainly named 'The William and Mary' after their joint reign (1689-1702). The chimneys and other features are original. **Now walk up the alley to Church Road.**

23. **St. Mary's Church** steeple can be seen from the car park. The site in Church Road (originally Back Lane) was acquired for a parish church in 1849. The new church, designed by the architect G. E. Street was completed in 1857. The spire was added in 1868 by Holland of Thame. The bell tower has a Russian bell, gifted by Corpus Christi College, Oxford in 1921/2. The church is Grade II listed.

24. From Church Road, you can witness the evidence of the period of agricultural decline in the period from 1830 after the Napoleonic Wars. One of the ways this was manifested was in the break-up, triggered by an adverse court case in 1820, of that part of the Whalley Smythe Gardiner manorial estate which was between Church Road and London Road.

**A terrace of cottages** faces you. This was built in the late 1840s on one of the multiple holdings which made up this estate.

25. **The National School**, built in 1858, is to the right of the cottages, also built on this estate. The school buildings were later converted to houses when this, by then the Primary School, moved to Littleworth Road in 1982. Beyond was the school playground, now also housing.



**Go to the junction with Holloway Road to the left and look up to the next junction to Morland House, the village surgery. This was once the vicarage, built, on the prospective vicar's insistence, in the early 1850s. This was before he would agree to take up this position in Wheatley with the Bishop describing it as 'the most difficult village'. Nearer the bottom is a building which once was the fire station, now used by the Scouts. Crossing Holloway Road, you come to a very distinctive building...**

26. **Lock-up or round house** is very evident across Holloway Road. Following a spate of political rioting across the country, this distinctive limestone building was built by the Overseers in 1834 as an overnight 'keep' for agricultural rioters before being taken to the Oxford courts. It is a Grade II listed building. Quarrying started here in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Once quarrying ceased, the area became the Parish Pit and was also used for bull and badger baiting until stopped by the constables in the 19<sup>C</sup>. The pit was then used for burning household refuse until partway through the Second World War. After the war, it was filled in and became a recreation ground in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

27. **30 Church Road** is on the other side of the road. This used to be the Granary Church, acquired in 1928 by the Plymouth Brethren. Its religious use ceased c. 2003.

**Cross the road again and note from the entrance to Templars' Close the depth to which the quarry had been excavated.**

28. **The Sun's** first known landlord was in 1788. It was built for the workers in the brick business with houses in Westfield Road.

29. **Old House** further down Westfield Road was built in the late 18<sup>C</sup> for the Cooper family who had a brick kiln here by 1742. They used the local Kimmeridge clay to make their bricks which are found in many of the Wheatley properties. The brickworks here closed in the 1890s, moving to Littleworth where there was a similar seam of clay.

30. **Westfield** is the field at the end of the lane, where you will see a depression with a farm building in it. This was one of the quarry pits used for stone for Windsor Castle and some of the Oxford colleges which contributed to Wheatley's early wealth as a result of its position on a band of limestone. The furthest-away pit was in the Royal Shotover Forest which, being then part of the royal hunting resource, needed permission from the king in order to be quarried.

**Retrace your steps and walk to the left of the New Club into Blenheim to see early (late 18C) 'affordable housing'. The animal pound was sited in the open area.**

31. Emerging onto Littleworth Road, you see the site of the village green, now modern housing. Coaches passed over the Village Green on their way to Shotover Hill and Oxford. The High Street frontage of this green, which you will see later, has similar houses.

32. Take the lane to the mobile home park, crossing the route of the old railway line. Just past the telegraph pole, look down into the excavation of the Kimmeridge clay for the later brickworks. **The Howe Trust** land, towards the top on the left, resulted from a charity land swap which took place in the 1870s. This 30-acre parcel of land includes allotments at the top of the hill.

33. **Wheatley Windmill** is at the top where you join Windmill Lane. First mention of a windmill was in 1671, but there were two here then! In 1857, a Mr Cripps acquired the current mill and took out a mortgage on which he defaulted a few years later. It was re-mortgaged with another lender and he also defaulted on this with the result that he had written off half the cost! Milling stopped at Cripps' mill in 1914 when ochre was milled (milling of grain had ceased earlier.) Soon after, the mill became derelict until 1976 when restoration started and was initially complete in 2017. It is one of only 7 restored mills in Oxfordshire.

34. **Post Mill House**, site of the other mill, burned down in 1875.

**Walk left down the lane to join Ladder Hill, remembering that burials took place in Cuddesdon until 1850s, quite a climb!**

35. **Windmill House**, formerly Windmills, was built in 1913 in an Indian style for a retired judge from the British Indian judiciary. The former entrance gateway can be seen on the corner with Ladder Hill.

36. **42-46 Ladder Hill** are the oldest houses on this steep hill, dating from c. 1910,



37. **The Station-Master's house**, shown in the photo, stood where are now 25-29, Ladder Hill

38. **Green Hedges**. This was built in the 1930s.



39. **Kelham Hall Drive** was named after a well-known railway engine which frequented the line nearby. **Kimber Close**, which runs off it along the line of the old railway, was named after the last station master.



40. **The Railway Station** and line which opened in 1864 and closed in 1963, was where the land is now set down on the right. The railway bridge was where the streetlight now stands.



41. **The Sidings** was developed on the site of the Railway Hotel, built soon after the railway came and demolished in 2018.



42. **Wheatley House** was built in the 1890s.

43. **Holloway Road** was widened in the 1970s with 13ft taken off the building on the right to provide pavements.

44. **48 High Street**. Once thatched, in 1847 this cottage became the Post and Telegraph Office run by Mr Lovelock. Barclays Bank took over the premises in about 1926; the PO moved to 107 High Street in 1926, and then adjacent to the Merry Bells in 2017. After the bank had moved, the frontage on the High Street was used as a general store, changing hands several times and trading as Phipps, Yeats, and finally Martins newsagents, closing in 2000 after the owner was held up at gunpoint. It is now a private house.



45. **44 High Street** was built in the 19th century, when it was the 'The Railway Inn'. Later it was re-named 'The Sandpiper' and then 'The Common Room'. The building is now a private house.



46. **Mitcheldene** dates from 1648. In 1818, it was acquired for an endowed school under the will of the Bishop of Oxford (Charles Moss), and it remained a school until 1858. The girls were taught in the main house and the boys in an older building in the garden behind. The building reverted to housing, staying in the same family until the mid-1990s.

47. **'The George'** was a packhorse inn (for transportation of goods) in the 16th century, being on the old coaching route, with a few rooms to let. Note the angle of the wall opposite to make it easier for the coaches to swing into the yard. After coaches had been re-routed along the current London Road it closed as an inn. About 1830, it was converted into three tenements and remained so until 1959 when it became two homes.

*Painting acknowledged to Vic Churchley*

48. **Manor House**. Originally this late 16th century house consisted of the middle of the central part of the current house, separated for the usual fire precaution reasons from the kitchen in the right wing. It was never occupied by the well-endowed owners. The 1601 datestone refers to a later extension. In 1864 the house was divided into four cottages. Conversion to single owner-occupation had taken place by 1939. It is a Grade II listed building.



49. **No. 11 High Street** is believed to have been built in 1770; this property traded as two shops, one being used by Mitchell of Mitcheldene. By 1900, this shop was run by the Dungey family as a general store 'always open up to midnight'. The other shop belonged to Joseph Frampton who was a farmer, cooper and quarryman and who owned the quarry pits where the recreation ground and Templars Close now stand. He sold wooden buckets and other such items and was one of the last to wear a smock for which Wheatley was well-known.

50. **4 High Street**. The south façade of this was changed from stone to brick in 1847 using bricks from the Kiln Lane quarry in Flemish-bond style. At the same time the roof was re-tiled with slate.

51. **This High Street corner of Wheatley** was a butchery business in the 18th and 19th centuries carried on by the Rose family. William Rose 'baconman and grocer' bought the property in 1751. There was a slaughter house on the site from 1809 to 1938, and cattle were pastured on the Green awaiting slaughter. The Rose family lived opposite in Jessamine Cottage. Ernest Alden took over the business in 1911 and it closed in 1938. **Needing refreshment now? Visit the local traders in the village or return to the starting point at The Merry Bells.**



The archive room in the Merry Bells is normally open every Thursday 2-5pm and the last Saturday of the month 10am-Noon.

The website is always open at <https://www.wheatleyarchive.org.uk/> and contact details can be found on this.

*This leaflet first published in 2021*

