

## **Transport & Communications**

Chinnor's location on the Icknield Way or Ridgway is likely to have been important to the village's development. The two names are almost synonymous although it seems that, today, the Icknield Way is the track between Thetford in Norfolk and Ivinghoe Beacon on Dunstable Downs, and the Ridgeway is that from Ivinghoe to Avebury in Wiltshire. The tracks follow an uncannily straight line along much of their length, following several major and minor roads with Chinnor sitting almost midway.

All the indications are that these tracks have been used for moving people and animals since antiquity, as a cross country link running from Anglia towards the south west. Avebury is not too far from Stonehenge so this all implies a link with other ancient trackways. You almost wonder whether this might have influenced the powers that be in their choice of the line of the, now abandoned, East-West expressway!

Chinnor's position means that it may never have been as remote as many (even most) other rural communities before the arrival of the railways. At least until 1872, when the Princes Risborough to Watlington railway was opened, there was obviously no motor transport, so any movement would have been by foot, by horse or by horse & carriage. It is reasonable to expect that when they did travel most ordinary people back then walked. Thame and Princes Risborough are each about 5 miles away so were at least a 1 – 1 ½ hour walk each way: High Wycombe and Aylesbury are over twice as far and Oxford might as well be in another country.

It is clear from old photos that, in those days, roads were no more than tracks and would have been unpredictable in bad weather. Until the arrival of the car, the road to Thame followed the track, the original Burgidge Way, down Springfield Gardens and across the fields via Emmington and Towersey. The Thame Road that exists today is a relatively modern creation.

The arrival of the railway in 1872 would have opened up the village somewhat, but according to some records (Lost Railways of the Chilterns: Leslie Oppitz; Countryside Books, Newbury) it wasn't particularly well used until the mid-1880s. The railway was then taken over by GWR and a number of intermediate "halts" were opened: things then picked up. The railway was closed to passenger service in 1957 as part of the railway "rationalisation" but kept open to bring in coal to the cement works until the latter's closure in the 1990s. I do, however, remember as a child in the early parts of the 50's travelling from Chinnor via Risborough to High Wycombe by train to visit my grandmother: effectively a whole day trip just to go into High Wycombe! The railway to Princes Risborough has now been reopened as a heritage line and, once again, it has a potential future providing a scheduled passenger service.

Roads in and around the village have been improved dramatically over the years to cope with increased vehicle usage but traffic density in the village is now a major issue.

It doesn't seem too many years ago that the heavy traffic of the day used to pass through narrow villages along the route of the A40: imagine the equivalent of 50 ton artics thundering through places like Tetsworth or Postcombe. In the 1950s and 60s heavy vehicle collisions with buildings weren't uncommon in places like West Wycombe!

Until relatively very recent times, bus services to, and through, Chinnor have been almost non-existent : as recently as the 1980s there were only 1 or 2 buses per day to and from High Wycombe. In the past 10 -15 years services have improved dramatically. Like Thame, Chinnor sits in the little bulge of Oxfordshire that projects into Bucks and this proximity to the county boundary has meant that many of our bus services are Buckinghamshire services that, through inter-county negotiation, have been extended into our part of Oxfordshire. At some points in time Chinnor's relationship with Princes Risborough was, in reality, closer and more beneficial to the village than the relationship with Thame. We still rely on the railway station at Risborough for trains to London.

Older people remember the winter of 1947/8 as being harsh but, generally, it is accepted that 1962/3 was the worst and coldest in living memory. During the 1962/3 winter, Chinnor was totally cut off for several days by deep snowdrifts on all the access roads to the delight of schoolkids who were normally bussed out of the village: the drifts on the Thame Road alone were upwards of 3m high. Although snow has been less of a problem in recent decades, we are seeing an increasing amount of flooding on all of our access roads (except perhaps that via Bledlow Ridge!).

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