

# THE STONES OF WINDSOR CASTLE

## Contributed By A South Oxfordshire Village

**WINDSOR CASTLE dominates the landscape of the Thames Valley. The stately oaks in the park are natural miracles, but the castle is a pile of stones hewed by masons six centuries ago. The kings who ordered the building of the castle have joined the cavalcade of history, but the humbler tale of the masons is harder to tell and the disused quarries are choked with weeds.**

One of the places whence the stone was brought was Wheatley, a village six miles east of Oxford on what was once one of the chief roads of England, that from London to Worcester. There is no doubt of the fact, for the details are recorded in the royal building accounts for 1344 when John Peggi of Wheatley supplied stone enough to fill 116 carts each taking 30 trips. From then until 1369 at least ten consignments of over 900 ft. of stone each passed between Wheatley and Windsor, and of these two were of over 4,000 and one of over 9,000 ft. William of Wykeham was the greatest executive concerned, and accordingly we find the same stone being sent a shorter journey, too, for his new foundation of New College, which lay the other side of Shotover Forest.

No stone has been quarried in Wheatley for a generation, but the village is scarred where men have nibbled at the outcrop of stone on which (and of which) the old houses are built. This outcrop was created, when England was under the sea, by the growth of coral reefs, and the vegetation which it supports contrasts with that of the neighbouring Oxford clay, dry-stone walls supplanting quickset hedges on the lighter soil.

### UNWELCOME ORDERS

Roadside taverns and wheelwrights' shops joined with the quarries to make the village thrive, but not all the orders

for stone were welcome, A cardinal praised its quality," and as early as the thirteenth century the village had supplied stone to build the earliest colleges in Oxford, but forced labour was needed to supply stone for Windsor Castle, as it was required three centuries later to shift timber from Shotover Forest hard by for the Royal Navy,

The Lord of the Manor held his soil by doing guard duty at Windsor Castle, and so he may well have had friends there, but in 1362, when William Cok and Nicholas Harald were made masters and wardens of the quarry, they were instructed by the Crown to take men to dig the stones and to imprison the recalcitrant in the castle they were supposed to be erecting.

The quarry which produced most at Wheatley during the fourteenth century was called "Chalgrove." This lay at the western tip of the parish, adjoining the forest, and has nothing to do with the famous field where John Hampden was mortally wounded by the Cavaliers. The spot is now marked by some grassy depressions, and the name is marked on a map of the parish made in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, which belongs to All Souls College. The name has not been marked on any printed map or on any map made in the last three-and-a-half centuries, but a few old men still mind the name. The hole whence much of the castle was extracted is almost obliterated, but the name was old already when the castle was young.

For it is the name of a landmark ; mentioned in a charter given by a Saxon king. This charter will be one thousand years old in 1956, and its ■ anniversary will be marked by the publication of a volume by the Oxfordshire Record Society. Indeed, the block which illustrates this article is ' being lent to help illustrate the volume