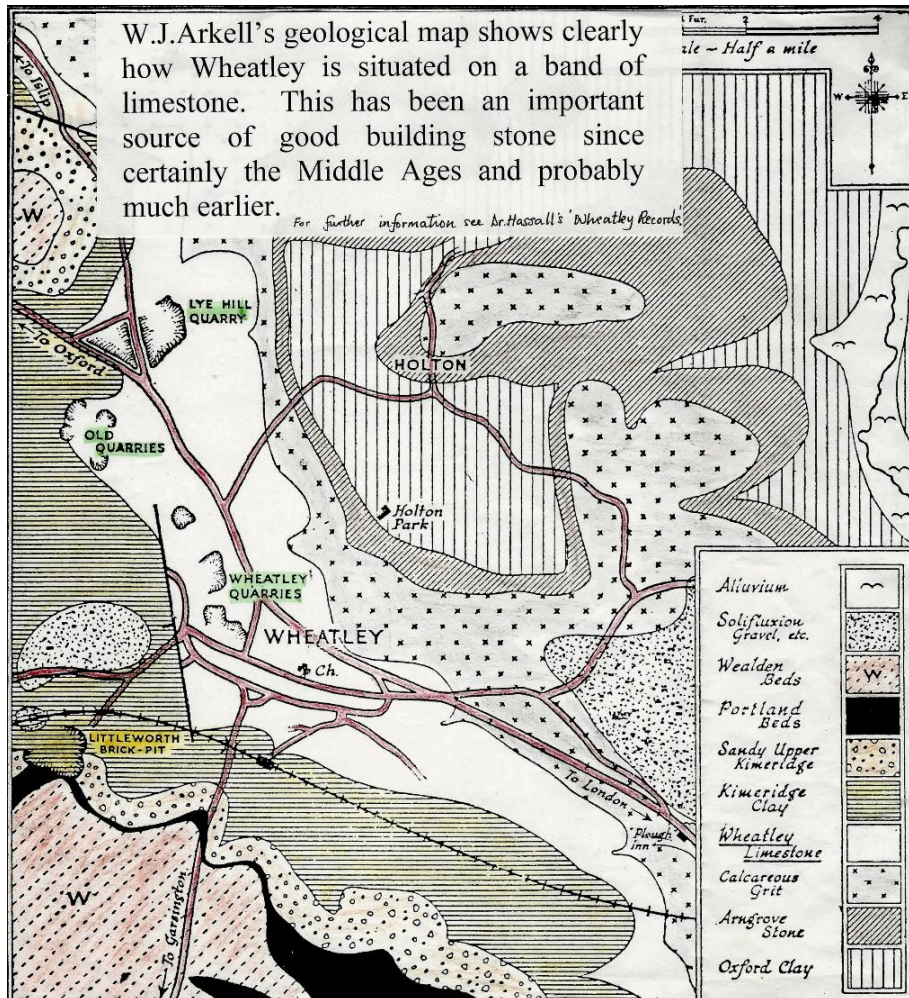
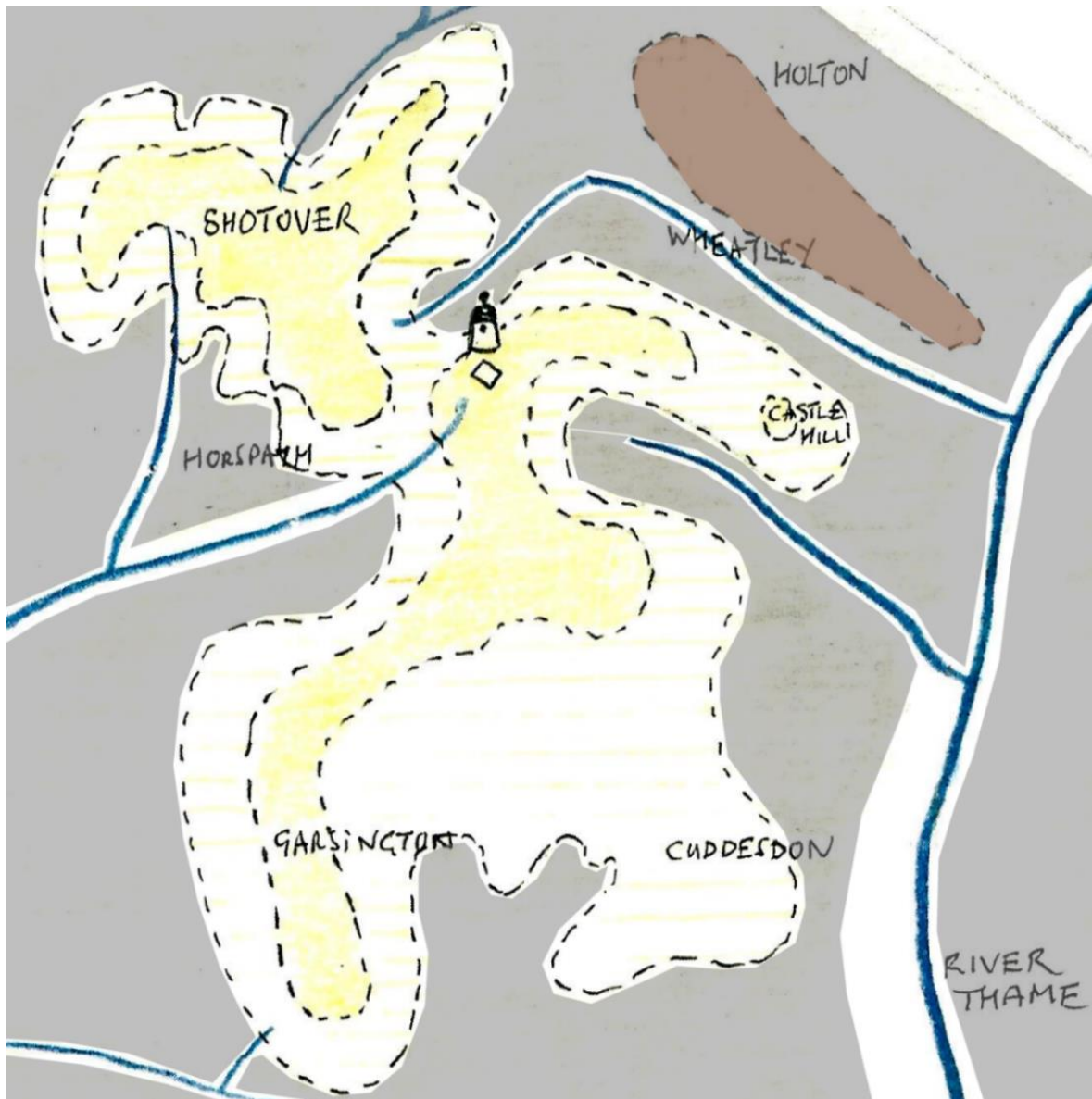


## 2742 Wheatley limestone history

The geological map below shows the outcrop of Wheatley limestone and the locations of the pits, including the substantial Lye Hill quarry in Forest Hill, as well as the occurrence of Kimmeridge clay. These pits were within the area of the royal forest of Shotover so, consequentially, royal licenses to quarry were required.



The next Figure is an extract from Jack Turner's simplified sketch map of the local geology, also showing the Windmill. The light-yellow shaded areas designate Shotover iron sands; the grey shaded areas are Kimmeridge clay and sands; the brick-coloured shading designates the Wheatley limestone area; and the white areas are superficial deposits including gravel and quartzite cobbles.



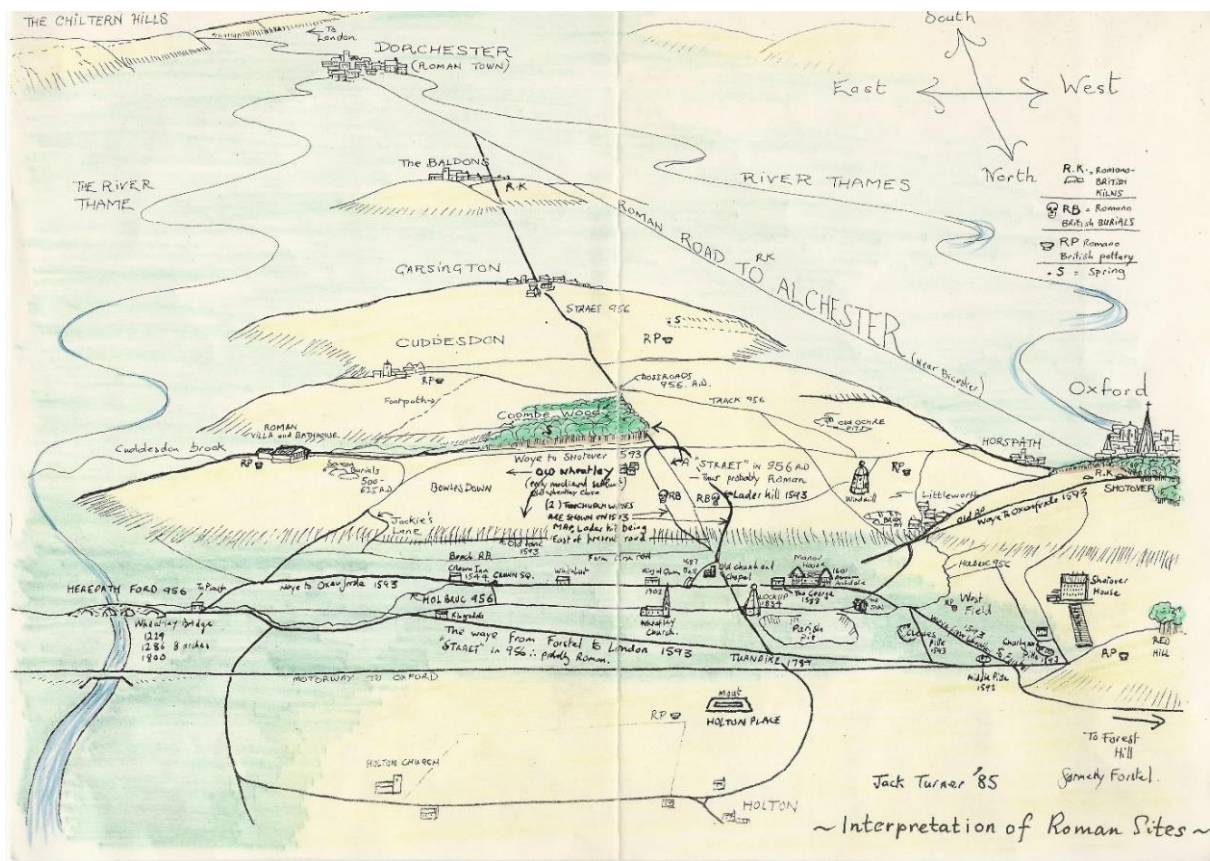
The brick-coloured outcrop is of a Corallian limestone formed from compacted broken shell and coral fragments. As such it has no veins so can be freely carved in all its planes. It was used from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century for buildings in Oxford, Abingdon Abbey, Cuddesdon, Wallingford and Windsor Castles, being carried to site mainly on carts. John Peggi of Wheatley supplied stone to fill 116 carts. In about April 1365, 5,718 ft of 'Whatele' stone was bought from Nicholas Harald for Windsor Castle at 2½d. per foot. 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 involved, so it is perhaps no surprise that we find the same stone being used for his new foundation, New College, from 1379.

Lye Hill quarry had this limestone to a depth of 50 ft, elsewhere it was less. In Westfield, the stone was excavated from pits in the ground, these being still evident as depressions in the ground level. It is estimated that the Church Road quarry had a depth of some 25ft and could have held 100,000 cu. metres of stone, some 200,000 tons.

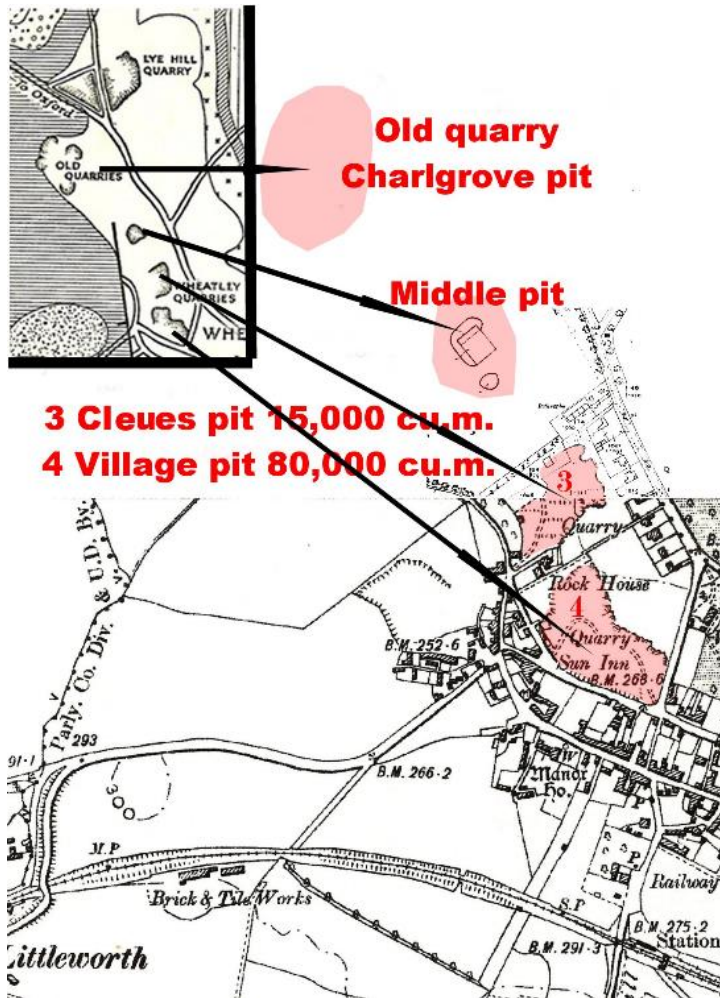
The earliest quarry at Wheatley to be named in the records was called Charlgrove. It is not to be confused with the famous field of a similar name (Chalgrove) where John Hampden was

mortally wounded in the Civil War and which was used later as an aerodrome during the Second World War. Charlgrove in Wheatley lies on the edge of Wheatley's Westfield, near the boundary of Shotover Park on the south side of the A40 road from London to Oxford. It is opposite the turning to Forest Hill and Islip where a modern quarry, Lye Hill, was worked for lime more recently. It is not, as has been suggested, under the long pond in Shotover House, which appears anyway to be outside of the geological boundary for this stone.

The exact position of Charlgrove is marked on an All Souls College map of 1593. This map shows that some of these depressions, a little further east, were, in Queen Elizabeth I's reign, called Glovers pit and Cleues pit. The future Queen would have passed near them when she was taken in 1554, on a stormy day when the wind was so rough that her captors had to hold down her dress, from the Tower of London to Woodstock Palace, via Richmond Palace, Windsor, West Wycombe and Rycote; and later when she came in triumph to be welcomed as queen in Oxford in 1566, as referred to on page 7. A map, prepared by Jack Turner, shows Cleues Pit, adjacent to the 'waye' from Wheatley to Forest Hill, but not Glovers pit.



The sequence of the opening of these quarries is not known but it probably developed from west to east ending up at the village pit. Below is a representation of these with an estimate of the volume of stone which may have come out of two of these.



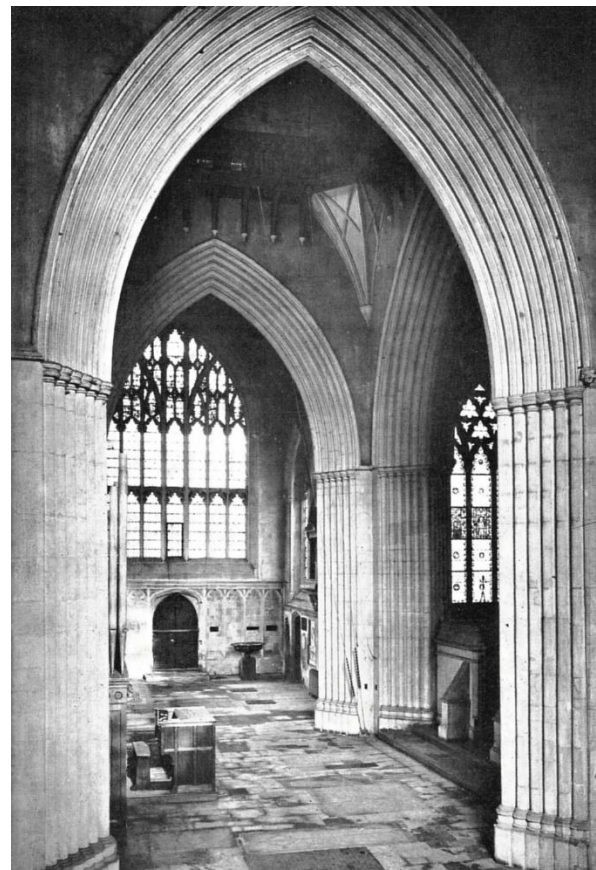
Topographical records were rare before the middle of the thirteenth century, but by then the quarry was certainly in existence with plentiful references to Wheatley stone, and its contribution to the parish becoming one of the ten richest in Oxfordshire by 1334. It was used for the repair of Harpesford bridge over the Thames in 1286, and for Merton College chapel in 1278 and 1290.

Merton College Chapel

It was also used for the Oxford Dominicans in 1303-4, for the Augustinians in 1316 and for the Franciscans in 1364.

In the thirteenth century, Wheatley stone merchants such as Hugh Griffin, and Nicholas and Thomas Prat were active within a ten-mile radius of the quarry and their activity suggests that many of the landless tenants, whose names are recorded as living at Wheatley in 1280, may have earned their living in this trade. Indeed, the stone went further afield and was used for Wallingford Castle in 1353 and 1395. Also, in 1358, William Pollard and Nicholas Harald were instructed to forcibly recruit quarrymen and other labourers for the royal quarry. In 1362 William Cok of Wheatley and Nicholas Harald were described as masters and wardens of the quarry when they were empowered between 1344 and 1369 to take masons to dig and cut stones for Windsor Castle, transport it there by land and water, and bring objectors for imprisonment.

Apart from Windsor, Wheatley stone was used in Cuddesdon church in 1375-6,



Abingdon Abbey in 1383-1384; Queens College chapel in 1378-9 (this was destroyed at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century); Exeter College library in 1383 (this was destroyed in 1708); New College in 1386 (the bell-tower was built from Headington stone in 1396); Magdalen College in 1474 and Christ Church in 1525. The stone for Abingdon was transported by river from Sandford and the Abbey bought half an acre of quarry in 1375-6 from William Eustace, a representative of an important old Wheatley family who had been imprisoned in 1362 on account of a debt of £31 owed to a London pepperer.

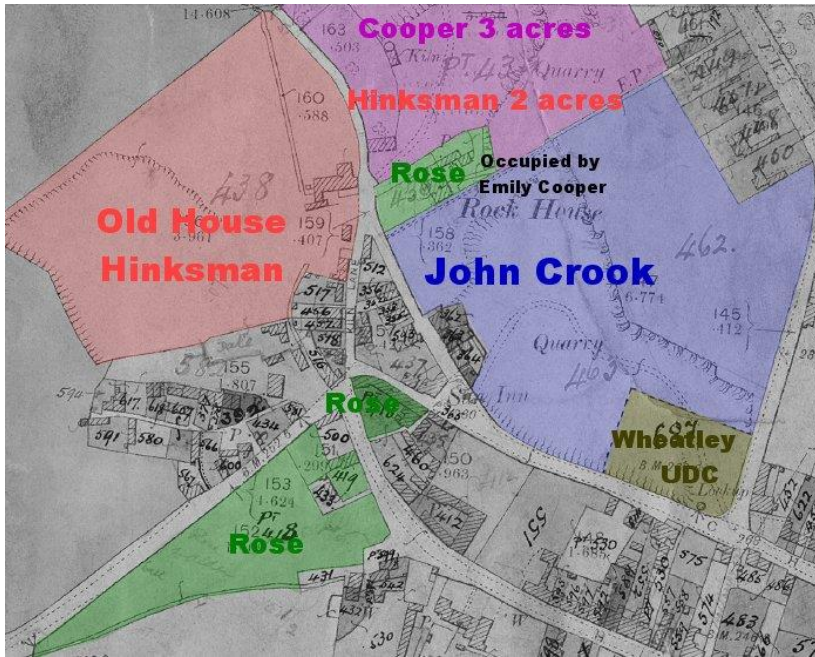
Headington stone, which was more plentiful and closer to the centre of Oxford, progressively took over from Wheatley as the source of building material for Oxford colleges from 1396, with this used for New College bell-tower, as noted above. It is recorded as being used at All Souls College between 1438 and 1443; the Divinity School in about the same period; Magdalen College from 1469; Christ Church in the 1520s; and many more. Wheatley's loss of this significant business almost certainly contributed to its decline in wealth by 1524, as discussed on page 6. Headington quarry still covered 90 acres in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite this, Robert and William Robinson repaired Wheatley bridge in 1690 using local stone. Robert was a freemason and owner of the Bell Inn. However, in 1814, Headington stone was preferred for the Bishop Moss School at Wheatley because it was cheaper.

After 1525, there appears to have been a very long gap (during which many Wheatley houses were probably constructed from its quarries) before St Mary's Church was built in 1856. Doubt about the use of Wheatley stone for the church has already been expressed on page 26. The external stonework, which is very soft, may well have come from any local quarry, but the internal pillars, which are much harder, almost certainly came from elsewhere. However, while there were no relevant references in Elton's journal to the source of stone for the 1856 building works, there are several references in 1867 for the stone for the spire which appears to have been sourced locally. The Church is shown below.



The quarries were still in use as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but by this time the stone was mostly used for road-making. In 1910, the Cleues pit quarry was owned by the Cooper family, and the 'village pit' quarry by John Crook, as the 1910 map below shows. Rock House, built in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, divides these two quarries, and it not known why this survived rather than being demolished to link the two quarries. Perhaps the Cooper family lived there?



The parish pit or village pit, shown c. 1900, shown at the end, was all that was left after the excavation of a major limestone quarry, which had provided some high-quality stone for many Wheatley buildings and elsewhere as mentioned earlier. As a pit, it was then used for all sorts of unsavoury purposes, including badger-baiting and bull-baiting. Cock-fighting appears to have taken place within inns or houses. For example, on 2 April 1808, the Oxford

Journal had advertised ‘A Main of Cocks will be fought at the Crown Inn, Wheatley, on Thursday and Friday, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> April, between the Gentlemen of Oxfordshire and the Gentlemen of Berkshire’.

In 1813 it was just described as a ‘Stone Pit’ with no owner. In 1852, it was owned by the Surveyors of Highways and in 1910 by Wheatley Urban District Council. As confirmed in the Parish Council Minute Book, this was literally a rubbish pit which had been let out to Bullington Rural District Council for 10 years in 1938. They used it for the dumping of refuse to the delight of the local rats (who would scurry away when it came to incineration time). Detailed information, Table 4.1, from the Parish Council Minute book from January 1942 to October 1950, shows the progress of the change from pit to recreation ground. Reports in the Minutes that levelling was complete by 1947 were premature. It is now a village recreation ground. Its unevenness is probably down to the very rough and ready way that it was created. It was finally levelled in the late 1940s and has been used as a playground since 1950. Viewed from beyond the row of trees, you will see the original depth of the quarry, and the cliff-face created by the stone extraction.

