



A sharp tool makes the stone seem softer. Chisels were kept sharp on variously named stones: grindstones or *greseurs*, whetters for whetting, and 'rubber stones for sharpening of the tools'. The masons were paid a generous allowance to keep their tools re-steeped. Wherever many masons worked together there was a blacksmith to mend the broken tools and sharpen the others, over and over again. This job was called battering; it cost a farthing to batter an axe. A mason looked after his smaller tools carefully in any case, because if he lost his job he took them with him. The temper of the steel chisel could be judged by the golden colour near the edge—a sharp one, says the Irish mason Seamus Murphy, had a 'Grandfather's temper.' Iron smelting and forging were growing more efficient at this time, because of new techniques learnt from Syria; this meant not only better weapons but better tools. Masons thought of their tools as weapons anyway. In due course the blacksmith would also have to make the iron rods and dowels which pinned together the slender upright parts of the cross, its spire and its smaller pinnacles. This ironwork might be partly visible, or completely concealed like the wrought-iron reinforcement hidden in the spire of Salisbury Cathedral. The smith would probably temper the iron in boiling tallow to give it a longer rust-free life.

The men above are using the mason's hammer (left) and the hammer axe (right)—tools so essential that they were widely and proudly used as symbols of the mason's craft. The mason's axe had two vertical cutting edges. The claw-chisel on the ground was toothed for the task of gently and evenly reducing the rough surface of the stone to a smooth flat finish.

On some jobs, freemasons were paid piece-work rates—twelve shillings for 120 blocks of stone for example, which meant dressing three or four blocks in a day at the least. Very skilled men were paid more than the others, but not a great deal more. Journeymen, paid (as the name implies) by the day, usually got a slightly higher daily rate at harvest-time when they might otherwise have been tempted away to the fields; on the other hand, in winter, when darkness shortened the working day, they often had to work five days for four days' pay. By old custom, men working the Eleanor Cross for the King, like workmen, were paid for one holiday out of every two; but if bad weather stopped work, they were not paid at all. Apprentices were worth about half as much as adult skilled masons; women, when employed at all, got even less—about a penny a day. In the following century, the newly-formed masons' guilds attempted to raise wages and restrict entry to the craft, while by its formal regulation of wages Parliament was more concerned to keep them below a maximum than to raise them. But later in the century, when labour had become scarce after the Black Death had killed two-thirds of the population, such attempts by Parliament proved ineffective; the masons had no difficulty in defying them. It is striking that the familiar tug-of-war between powerful market forces and those attempting to order the economy already existed seven hundred years ago.

One mason is squaring-up the rough-hewn block while the other is working on one of the shields with the Queen's heraldic bearings. Later, when this stone was finally in position on the finished Cross, it would be painted in its correct heraldic colours. The Queen's estate helped to pay for the crosses, and it has been suggested that Castilian masons may have worked on the smaller crosses, though others think Crundale designed them all. Certainly the Queen's Castilian background may still be sensed today in the intricate, delicate and finely-controlled decoration of the most exquisite of the three remaining Eleanor Crosses, the one at Geddington in Northamptonshire. The triangular form of its shaft, its slender aspiring delicacy, and the masterly positioning of the three statues of the Queen, are quite remarkable. The statues, like those on the Northampton Cross, have softened and their details have been smoothed away by the effects of time. Even so, the graceful lines of the gestures and the flowing drapery are still easy to discern; and where the detail has worn away, our imagination restores it in the way we would choose. The London sculptors probably used the same soft, yellowish alabaster, which was easy to work but did not withstand the weather well; harder stone took longer to cut and made the work much more expensive.



Alexander of Abingdon, the imager or sculptor who carved the Charing Cross statues, probably worked with the help of a drawing by the master mason Richard of Crundale from the portrait on the seal of Queen Eleanor. The beautiful effigy of the Queen on her tomb in Westminster Abbey, made by the goldsmith William Torel, was being modelled and cast at about the same time as these stone figures were carved, and because Richard Crundale designed both the cross and also the marble tomb on which the effigy lies, the sculptors must have known exactly how Torel's work was developing. So the Eleanor Cross sculptures were not startlingly unusual in style, rather the perfect flowering of an already fully developed plant.

Until about this time, an ordinary mason had to know how to carve everything from windows and arches to statues. These were often, like the carved capitals of Wells, part of the building structure, and therefore built-in as well as carved; integral, not added later as decoration. But the figures of Queen Eleanor stood free of the surrounding masonry. And by now men were just beginning to concentrate on one thing; to specialize. The mason who specialised in carving figures became the imager or *imaginator*. This development had both good and bad effects; as one man learnt to do something better than anyone else, the others forgot that they had been able to do it at all, and gradually a distinction appeared between artist and craftsman. Ever since, they have seemed and felt like different people. This is a pity.