

## Scottish Stone Liaison Group

# NEWSLETTER

## Indigenous Materials Project Team

Issue No. 1 Spring 2001

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### Scottish slate - an URGENT NEED!

The Scottish Stone Project Team, one of three Project Teams operating within the SSLG, has reviewed the indigenous material needs of Scotland's built heritage and resolved that the immediate priority is the re-introduction of Scottish slate production. With the last Scottish slate quarry closing around 1955 there is now a serious shortage of such slate for the maintenance of Scottish slated roofs in conservation areas.

The need for Scottish slated roofs in such areas can only be met by the vandalising other Scottish slated roofs outwith such conservation areas. Such slate is removed from buildings many of which are then left open to the elements further eroding Scotland's built heritage.

The slate is then re-dressed and this leads to a loss of approximately 40% of the material so it is necessary to strip two buildings to meet the needs of one. Such vandalism is simply unacceptable and the SSLG is determined to arrest this destruction of Scotland's built heritage.

Obviously the Project Team recognises that the slate for Scottish slated buildings did not all originate from one Scottish source but takes the view that it is better to use a Scottish slate from a new Scottish source than to import replacement

Whilst conservation needs are the immediate priority it is perhaps worth reflecting that buildings just outside conservation areas today are likely to be the conservation areas of tomorrow! Ultimately we will all be judged by future generations on how our heritage is maintained today.

But the SSLG has long recognised that addressing the needs of the 'conservation world' alone is a precarious position to adopt as it results in higher unit costs and a narrow market base for the producer who would be vulnerable should there be any reduction in conservation spending. For these reasons the Group has been actively involved in campaigning for the use of stone in new build projects - particularly the new Parliament building where it argued for the use of Scottish granite and Caithness flagstone to be used as the cladding materials. (Footnote - Lord James Douglas-Hamilton MSP has already raised the question of Scottish slate production in the Scottish Parliament).

new Scottish source than to import replacement materials from Wales, Spain or even China.

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## Scottish slate - the possible demand?

One of the concerns of the Ballachulish Community Council, and also the Planning Department of the Highland Council, Inverness, is the likely demand for Scottish slate as this would determine the size of any proposed operation. In an effort to address these concerns a questionnaire has been developed by the Project Team. CoSLA agreed to distribute this to the Heads of all Local Government Planning Departments.

As part of the 'wider field' approach being adopted by the Team the covering letter seeks information on how the Planning Departments deal with building matters in the areas immediately surrounding these conservation areas as the latter should not be permitted to become 'conservation islands' surrounded by inappropriate buildings built with inappropriate materials.

In an effort to further define the slating needs, the Team is developing, in conjunction with the University of Dundee, a programme of visual analysis that would actively engage students currently attending courses in Planning at a number of Universities.

Whilst calculations and projections can be undertaken the Project Team wishes to base its production requirements estimates on the widest possible sampling and by doing so provide factual information on both the slate and the market in a manner which would attract commercial interests.

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## Scottish slate - progress to date

Following the joint Historic Scotland / Scottish Stone Liaison Group conference entitled 'Traditional Roofing', where there was unanimous support for the re-introduction of Scottish slate production, some progress has been made on this important issue.

In the last four months the activities of the Project Team, primarily based upon the Historic Scotland publications -Technical Advice Note (TAN) No. 21 entitled 'Scottish Slate Quarries' and a research Report entitled 'Scottish Slate - the potential for use', have focused on the development of these Reports with a view to securing new Scottish slate production.

The former publication identifies the locations and details the quality of Scotland's slate reserves with the latter clearly outlining the long term consequences of the loss of production of indigenous slate.

Using these publications as the starting point

Following a meeting with the Ballachulish Community Council in January, at which a number of points were raised, the Project Team requires, amongst other matters, to establish the possible demand for Scottish slate (determining the annual production).

At the same time, the Community Council, recognising the need to determine the quality of the slate available, has permitted an extraction exercise to go ahead but it is stressed, both here and in communications, that this does not mean that the Community Council will, at this stage, support the opening or re-opening of slate quarrying immediately in the area of the Ballachulish village.

The date for such an extraction exercise had not been finalised before the current precautions undertaken due to the foot and mouth crisis and it is therefore unlikely to be completed until these precautions are withdrawn. However the exercise, when it is undertaken, will assist in determining

Using these publications as the starting point, meetings have been held with the appropriate organisations in an effort to open up the debate on slate extraction. It is recognised by the SSLG that there will serious concerns within the 'slate belts' but the Project Team is seeking to address these concerns in a most constructive manner.

When it is undertaken, will assist in determining the quality of the slate and the potential of the resource. Both the Local Councillor and the Convener to the Community Council are being advised of the progress being made on these outstanding issues.

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## Contact with conservation bodies

It is recognised that the SSLG is to a large extent 'the new kid on the block' with many organisations involved in conservation projects. However, in an attempt to both address that aspect and also learn from the experience of others, a programme of 'outreach' has been undertaken.

Already meetings have been held with the Directors of the Cockburn Association, The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (Scotland), the Scottish Civic Trust, the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Edinburgh World Heritage Trust and this programme will continue in the coming months.

The purpose of these meetings is to advise on the issue that the SSLG is addressing and to understand the material problems that such organisations are confronting.

However with the development of the Newsletters it will be possible to ensure that information regarding the SSLG is circulated to all interested parties. As mentioned above, the SSLG has also offered to include any information and data on its '[What's on](#)' pages of its WEB site ([www.sslg.co.uk](http://www.sslg.co.uk)).

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## Two events:- "Stone in the City" and the Launch of the NSI

Please read both the Industry and the Natural Stone Institute Newsletter for information about these events both of which will be held in Stirling on the 19th September.

## SSLG web page

The SSLG Web Page ([www.sslg.co.uk](http://www.sslg.co.uk)) is updated on a monthly basis and its '[What's on](#)' page is available to others to broadcast their activities and events - simply contact the SSLG offices at the address below.

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