

Scottish Stone Liaison Group

NEWSLETTER

Indigenous Materials Project Team

Issue No. 10 Spring 2005

Glasgow project

Further to the information contained in the previous Newsletters (Nos. 7, 8 & 9), readers are advised that the necessary financial support has been secured from Scottish Enterprise – Glasgow, the City of Glasgow Council and the National Heritage Training Group with the CITB-ConstructionSkills supplying support in kind to undertake the “Glasgow Project”.

Following the above agreements, the established Project Management Team delegated the tendering process to a small group and five organisations were contacted to determine their interest. Four subsequently submitted tenders and a short list was drawn up and, following presentations and interviews, British Geological Survey was awarded the contract with the final report on the Project being due in summer '06.

Recap (extract from [Newsletter No.8](#)) *In order to determine the number of stonemasons required to ensure the appropriate maintenance of Glasgow's built heritage for future years the SSLG considers that it is first necessary to determine the skill level of the current workforce, assess the “health” of that built heritage to determine the skills that will be required in the future and then, and only then, is it possible to determine if there are sufficient stonemasons with*

To progress the “health issue” the SSLG subsequently sought permission from property owners to have their buildings included in the Project with in excess of 100 building owners indicating their preparedness to enable a simple coring exercise be undertaken on their properties. As can be imagined, this list includes a variety of properties and the next phase of the Project will include a visual assessment of these properties to determine the final list of buildings that will be involved in the Project.

It is necessary in selecting buildings, to ensure they reflect the range of stones used in Glasgow and so provide a greater understanding of the manner in which they have performed over the years.

The skills side of the equation is being pursued by the CITB-ConstructionSkills with every registered stone masonry company being visited to assess the skills and age of the current workforce. As can be imagined, even if this exercise were to determine that there were currently sufficient stonemasons, there would be an immediate crisis if they were all aged 60 years and over!

Currently, across the skills workforce, there is much talk about a “skills shortage” or “skills crisis”

the necessary skills to meet that need.

but, without the detailed information that is being gathered by this Project, namely the skills and age of each operative, these claims cannot be quantified.

Slate

The two 40m cores secured last summer from the Khartoum Quarry, Ballachulish have now been analysed by the University of Paisley with the report being delivered in February '05. The SSLG Chief Executive has already been in touch with the Ballachulish Community Council Convener asking for the opportunity to meet and address the Community Council. The meeting is planned (5th April), at the time of writing this Newsletter, and reports will be included in the next edition.

As was underlined in the previous Newsletter, the SSLG had permission from the Community Council to enable the cores to be extracted and the meeting, on the 5th April, will be advised of the results of the research undertaken by the University of Paisley.



York – an English stone forum?

Following the creation of the Scottish Stone Liaison Group and subsequently a similar Welsh body, a meeting was held in York (15th–17th March 05) to discuss the possibility of an English Stone Forum being formed. (The NSI Stand was on display for the three days and copies of the *Building with Scottish Stone* were distributed to all delegates - see the NSI Newsletter for more information).

The agenda also included a number of site visits with one to York Minster (thankfully with lift access to the eastern spires – which was quite a view in itself) and others to other churches and quarries. On 16th March the SSLG Chief Executive outlined to the Conference the manner in which the SSLG was structured, its Board, Associate Members and Observers stressing that it was within the structure that the strength of the SSLG lay.

On the final day (17th March) the meeting concluded that an English Stone Forum was a good idea. The SSLG Board, meeting on the 24th March, agreed to maintain close association with the English Stone Forum to assist in the

Stone quarries

Whilst the SSLG has made every effort to promote the opening of new or old dimensional stone quarries, it also recognises past changes to the market place. The upsurge in building with brick, as opposed to dimensional stone, has resulted in a number of dimensional stone quarries either changing their production to provide aggregates or simply to cease operation all together.

Scotland's built environment needs both types of quarries, both dimensional stone and aggregate, to ensure that the appropriate materials are available. However, with fewer dimensional stone quarries currently operating, the public's perception of quarrying is often influenced by that of the aggregate industry that has, over the years, been seeking to address the concerns of those who live near such operations.

It follows that the public does tend to equate dimensional stone extraction with that of the aggregate and other large commercial interests when, in fact, they are quite different.

The dimensional stone industry takes stone from

the English Stone Forum and to assist in the development of this kindred body.

However, it is recognised that the translation of good intentions into reality can often be a different matter but this is the challenge now facing the Conference organisers.

The dimensional stone industry takes stone from the ground but it does so in a manner that seeks to limit the damage to the actual block of stone. It therefore seeks to “ease” the stone out of the ground as opposed to using greater force.

Prince’s Foundation

Having previously expressed concern that courses run by the Prince’s Foundation were rather *London centric* the SSLG Chief Executive was invited to address a seminar on the 18th January – again in London.

Alan McKinney took the opportunity to address “*The Challenge for Building Trades*” highlighting the efforts being made by the SSLG to address the material needs of Scotland’s built heritage.

While talking about sandstone, in a city built of limestone and brick, could be considered a challenge, Alan McKinney suggested it was no more so than the challenge faced by the Mayor of London (Ken Livingston) when he came to Edinburgh to speak about congestion charging. Sauce, goose and gander were words that sprang to mind.

Arndean Quarry, Blairingone - Appeal

The rejection of the Planning Application by Block Stone Ltd to open a sandstone quarry at Blairingone has resulted in the company lodging an appeal. This appeal was heard in Dollar on the week beginning the 7th February but at the time of writing the outcome has not been announced.

The SSLG has supported this planning application and was prepared, if required, to appear at the Appeal to stress the importance of securing new supplies of indigenous stone – particularly from the central belt of Scotland.

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