

Scottish Stone Liaison Group

NEWSLETTER

Indigenous Materials Project Team

Issue No. 2 Summer 2001

Scottish Slate - Progress? - "Slow but steady"

Basis upon which this pursuit is founded

The Indigenous Materials Project Group has been progressing the important issue of Scottish slate production and accepts that developing this plan, in consultation with various organisations that have either direct or peripheral interests in this issue, takes time and patience.

However all such bodies require to be "on side" and it is essential that the questions they raise are addressed, pursued and resolved. By such progression the Team seeks to clear the hurdles that will enable a test extraction of new Scottish slate to be achieved.

The Group is looking to build on the research undertaken by Historic Scotland - namely:

1. The effects on Scotland's built heritage of there being no Scottish slate produced (Historic Scotland research report entitled "*Scottish Slate - the potential for use*") and
2. The possible sources of new Scottish slate (detailed in Historic Scotland's Technical Advice Note No. 21 entitled "*Scottish Slate Quarries*")

In addition to the progress detailed in the Spring edition and the agreement with the local

Financial resources

Of course the greatest question is the one of funding necessary to finance the extraction exercise. However, at the time of writing, this too has been virtually secured and the SSLG acknowledges the support of the three organisations that have agreed (some in principle at this time) to fund this exercise.

With the agreements of the Ballachulish Community Council, the holder of the mineral rights and the landowner now all in place it appears that the major difficulties have been resolved. It is hoped that this extraction exercise will now be undertaken in late October - before the onset of the winter.

However there is still one major issue that could influence this date and that is the ongoing Foot and Mouth restrictions. The effects of restrictions elsewhere in the UK have had an influence on this planning.

Nevertheless the Group is seeking to ensure that every "i" is dotted and every "t" is crossed to allow the test to proceed as soon as it is considered appropriate to do so.

Should the test prove successful, the serious work will begin. The development of the proposal

dition and the agreement with the local Ballachulish Community Council enabling a test extraction to be undertaken, SEPA and Forest Enterprise have been involved in the consultation "loop" with matters now moving towards a satisfactory conclusion.

work will begin. The development of the proposal, the attempt to assess the potential demand for Scottish slate, addressing the concerns of the Ballachulish Community Council, undertaking the environmental assessments etc would all be designed to produce a package that would be directed towards "encouraging" a developer to take this project forward in conjunction with the local community.

The new Scottish Parliament Building

Setting aside the concerns regarding the costs of the building and the debate regarding the use of granite as opposed to sandstone within the heart of Edinburgh, the SSLG has campaigned for indigenous materials to be used for the construction of this flagship building.

The fact that Kemnay granite is being used is very encouraging as the SSLG, aware that the "conservation" market alone will not sustain the indigenous stone producers, is seeking to encourage owners, specifiers and architects to consider the use of stone in new build projects.

Through such activity and broadening the base of the indigenous material producers the SSLG believes that it will be possible to secure supplies of the necessary and appropriate materials for the repair and maintenance of Scotland's built heritage.

As part of this campaign, this Newsletter is mailed to all Scottish architectural practices as well as Planning officers and Chief Executives of all local councils as well as to some 1,500 others on a fairly extensive list.

Caithness flagstone

With no Scottish slate in production the Scottish Stone Liaison Group campaigned to have Caithness Flagstone considered as a substituted for the slate requirement in this major building.

Last year the SSLG offices forwarded copies of test analysis on Caithness flagstone to the architect asking that it be considered as an alternative. It is encouraging to hear that those quarries producing this very durable material have been invited to tender for work on this prestigious building.

Such a building is going to become a showcase of what Scotland is capable of producing and it is therefore very important that indigenous materials are used at every opportunity.

Obviously costs are important but there are times when other issues come into the equation and it is contended that this is one such occasion.

"Final Word ?" on the new Scottish Parliament building

"The granite gives to new things some of the dignity of age as it gives to old things the freshness of youth" (un-attributed)

Perhaps the above quote might be considered applicable when the new Parliament building is finally occupied.

Developments

Having previously visited Kemnay and Creetown granite quarries, the SSLG Chief Executive, Alan McKinney, is continuing his "familiarisation" visits and earlier this month, was in Caithness to meet

Feedback

Following the issue of the first Newsletter there has been very positive "feedback" with the new publication being welcomed and interesting comments received.

with material producers (alphabetically listed) - Caithness Slate Products, Caithness Stone Industries, and A & D Sutherland. On his return journey he visited Moray Stone Cutters in Elgin.

Reports indicate that the meetings were positive with innovative ideas emerging.

In addition to the normal Caithness products (flagstones, floor tiles etc) both Caithness Stone Industries and Caithness Slate Products produce a Caithness roofing "slate" .

Caithness Slate Products, the "new kid on the block" was only formed in October 2000 and now employs some fourteen people.

It is this expansion and expression of confidence that the SSLG is seeking to encourage and would welcome more "good news" stories for publication in future editions of the Newsletter.

Whilst in the area Mr McKinney also visited Mr Jack Green who was recently awarded the MBE. The 86 year old, considered by others in the industry as a "legend in his own life time", still produces hand made "slates", and other products, at his Halkirk quarry.

Such comment is invited as we seek to develop the Newsletter - if you have a view then we are only an email, fax, stamp or telephone call away.

Diary piece

A postscript from the Summer holidays

Following a visit to Mont-Saint-Michel, in Normandy, the Chief Executive went to the public library in nearby Avranches to view the old vellum manuscripts which had been taken there for safe-keeping.

There, within a humidity and light controlled environment, these 10th century illuminated books, laboriously hand written, could be viewed and admired. However their "ownership" is not in doubt as some enthusiastic 20th century librarian had stamped them -

"Bibliotheque Avranches"

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