

## Scottish Stone Liaison Group

# NEWSLETTER

## Indigenous Materials Project Team

Issue No. 3 Spring 2002

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### Scottish Slate - Back on track

Within ten months of its launch (May 2001) the SSLG, following negotiations with the Glencoe and Ballachulish Community Council, anticipated securing fresh samples of Scottish slate - the first since 1955 - from a test extraction in the Ballachulish area.

A company within the industry, having the necessary experience and skills, was identified and agreed to assist with this programme and the necessary funding was then secured from three funding bodies. In addition negotiations with the holders of the mineral rights, the landowners, SEPA and SNH were satisfactorily concluded and it was anticipated that the work would be undertaken in late February/early March 2001.

#### **Outbreak of Foot and Mouth**

Then, with the outbreak of Foot & Mouth Disease (FMD), everything came to a juddering halt.

All planning was immediately "put on hold" until the situation was resolved and only now, after the loss of twelve months or more (but at least that was all that was lost) is it possible to consider moving forward on this issue.

With the FMD outbreak now declared over, the SSLG sought to develop its test programme only to be advised by the company committed to

In December 2001 Mr A McKinney, SSLG Chief Executive, attended a meeting of the Glencoe & Ballachulish Community Council to ensure that its members were kept abreast with all developments.

The outcome of the meeting, whilst the previously stated reservations were tabled and acknowledged, was positive with the agreement of January 2001 remaining as the basis for the advancement of the test extraction programme.

However the SSLG, having effectively had its test extraction programme seriously delayed, is seeking to get its planning "back on track" and is now "opening another front".

Having based its activities on the research undertaken by Historic Scotland, detailed in its Technical Advice Note 21 entitled "Scottish Slate Quarries", the SSLG is now developing the test programme to include the slate deposits in the Foudland area which lies between Huntly and Inverurie.

Again, operating on the basis of complete openness the SSLG has been in communication with the local Community Council, Councillors, MSP, MP, SEPA and SNH and the mineral rights and land owner. Permission has been secured

to be advised by the company committed to assisting in this respect that it is not in a position to do so before June 2002. Whilst obviously disappointed with this delay, the SSLG is appreciative of this continued support and has expressed its hope that an earlier date might be identified.

The consequences of the disruption to the 2001 test programme has resulted in the need for the Group to renegotiate with the funding organisations, ensure that it kept everyone, and all organisations, informed of the "developments" - or the lack of them - and, in general, has resulted in additional work which it would rather have avoided.

and land owner. Permission has been secured from the mineral rights and land owner to enable this test extraction to be processed. In March/April, when the Chief Executive is in the area, there will be the opportunity for all interested organisations to meet and discuss all related matters.

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## "Set(t) in Stone"

Addressing the main elements of the Hutton + Rostron Report, entitled "A Future for Stone in Scotland", the SSLG is, in conjunction with a number of organisations, developing a series of Seminars entitled "Set(t) in Stone".

These seminars, directed towards specific audiences both in private practice and Local Authorities, will be held around the country in an effort to both minimise travel time and maximise attendance.

The draft programme, effectively providing an outline of the services that will be on offer from the Natural Stone Institute, is seeking to develop the knowledge and understanding of the natural materials and to do so in a way as to encourage their use in new build projects.

In the development of the programme, consultations have been held with stone producers, those that build in stone, the British Geological Survey and the Building Research Establishment (both of which can provide the detailed material information) and, last but not least, address the needs of the conservation field.

It is also proposed that these seminars will address the main finding of SCOTS (Society of Chief Officers of Transport in Scotland) in dealing with Natural Stone Surfacing in streetscape projects. Not only the correct use of the material according to the perceived traffic but also the care and maintenance thereafter.

The seminars, from the original concept, have now developed to full day events and will include a buffet lunch.

As can perhaps be imagined it will be necessary to introduce a charge for these events and the programme will be developed over the next few months with additional information being provided in the next Newsletter.

Direct mailing, to all architects and local authorities, will also be undertaken to promote the events.

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## Natural Stone Show - London

The SSLG, during meetings with a number of Scottish stone producers last year, had sought to develop the idea of a Scottish Stone Stand at the

Despite not actually having a stand, the SSLG leaflets and presence was carried by the Historic Scotland stand. The SSLG Chief Executive Alan

develop the idea of a Scottish Stone Stand at the above show that was held in London on 5-7 March.

It has been proposed that Scottish producers could gather under the SSLG banner and promote the indigenous industry but, although interest was expressed, the timescale prevented progressing this matter for this show. However the idea remains something to be achieved.

Scottish stand. The SSLG Chief Executive, Alan McKinney, attended the show on the 5th March and reports that some important contacts were made.

Mr I Maxwell, Director TCRE, Historic Scotland, delivered a lecture on "The Conservation and Restoration Use of Stone" as part of a programme entitled "Conservation & restoration Focus" on the opening day of the show.

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## Scottish Parliament Building

It is a great pity that the construction of this building is being caught up in political and contractual disputes that, it could be argued could have been avoided. However like its design or like it not this building will be the window to the world for the new democratic process here in Scotland and as such provides the ideal opportunity to display Scottish skills and materials.

The collapse of the company that had been awarded the first element of the cladding package was not a surprise to those who researched the structure of the company, but the ramifications of this "little difficulty" appears still to be rumbling on.

The SSLG has long argues that it was necessary for sufficient lead time to be built into the contracts as indigenous material producers require to "gear up" to meet these contracts.

### Investment in the Scottish industry

However it is now apparent that despite some Scottish producers either having made the financial investments or are about to make such a financial commitment the material contract packages are still (at the time of writing) being delayed.

Financial investment requires to be based upon sound information and good business projections and the current delays to the tender process are certainly placing such plans "on hold".

### Jobs

One such Scottish firm is prepared to invest some £2m and create an additional 40 jobs in a rural area but is still dangling awaiting the resolution of the contract situation.

It is recognised that within the overall cost of the new Parliament building some £2m is neither here nor there but to a small firm in a rural area this is a significant investment with a significant potential.

Delaying making the necessary decisions, and not deferring the opening date of the building, will only lead to the time difficulties outlined above. The threat to the investment and the potential jobs is another matter altogether.

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