

Scottish Stone Liaison Group

NEWSLETTER

Indigenous Materials Project Team

Issue No. 9 Winter 2004

Sourcing indigenous materials

Blairingone

See [Newsletter No. 7](#)

It is understood that Block Stone Ltd, seeking to open a new dimensional stone quarry at Blairingone, near Dollar, is to appeal against the decision of Perth & Kinross Council to reject the initial application.

An open cast coal quarry fairly close to the village may well have been a factor that influenced the views of the local community but equating the operational practices of a dimensional stone quarry with that of an open cast coal operation is similar to comparing night and day.

We will report in due course on the outcome of this appeal.

Slate

The analysis of the 40m cores taken from the Khartoum Quarry in Ballachulish are awaited with interest but it is obvious, from a cursory glance at the cores, that some of the material split well (providing a very smooth sample) whilst other areas of the cores were less than willing to split in any shape or form.

It is, however, a matter of record that the Ballachulish Community Council has only approved the extraction and the coring exercises. In due course the Community Council, already having received a confidential copy of the initial findings, will receive a copy of the latest analysis being undertaken by the University of Paisley.

Glasgow project

The Project (outlined in the Stone Industry Project Team [Newsletter No. 8](#)) was officially launched on the 19th November and it captured the interests of BBC TV *Reporting Scotland* with the story trailed on radio on *Good Morning Scotland*

Centre of excellence

From the outset the SSLG has supported the development of a *Centre of Excellence* and has lent it support to the Fyvie Castle Project but during the summer, some genuine concerns emerged about the structure and assumptions of

story, filmed on radio on Good Morning Scotland and then at lunch time BBC TV Scottish News.

The SSLG Chief Executive, Alan McKinney, was interviewed for the news bulletin as were two trainees employed by Hunter & Clark, Glasgow. Both trainees expressed their interest in their trade and the value of the work they were doing.

During the next few days the office received at least five calls from young people wishing to be given the opportunity to gain entry to the craft of stonemasonry and the office was also aware that the CITB-ConstructionSkills received a number of other enquiries.

This clearly demonstrates that there is NO LACK OF INTEREST IN THE STONEMASONRY CRAFT – BUT THERE IS A LACK OF EMPLOYERS WILLING TO OFFER SUCH TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES.

One of the main aspect of the *Glasgow Project* is to determine the reasons why more employers do not re-invest in the skills of their industry.

emerged about the structure and assumptions of the initial paper prepared by Price WaterhouseCooper.

On the 12th August a meeting was held in the offices of the National Trust for Scotland when this paper was discussed. It is understood that the document has subsequently been revised and should now be strengthened by addressing the constructive and genuine concerns expressed at the meeting.

The SSLG has actively supported the vision behind the concept. Scotland needs a centre of excellence to address the skills required for the conservation world.

The North East of Scotland, with the exception of the stonemasonry training at Elgin, needs a centre more responsive to the needs of this industry.

County mineral maps

This is a brief update as there has been no real movement on this matter but efforts are being made to encourage the Planning Department of the Scottish Executive to spend part of its annual budget of ?150,000 on a pilot study based on one Scottish county.

The challenge facing all local authority Planning Officers is how they can possibly to ensure, without the necessary detailed information, indigenous material resources are not lost due to inappropriate planning.

The lack of information, currently available to their counterparts in England, must be a matter of concern to everyone – not least those seeking to ensure the appropriate materials are available for the repair and maintenance of Scotland’s built heritage!

Further media coverage

For about six months the SSLG had been attempting to interest the BBC TV farming programme, *Landward*, in the idea that what might be under the ground could be of more value to farmers than that which they can grow above the ground.

With Brian Binnie, of Denfind Quarries, having secured some limited financial assistance to open up an old quarry the idea grew with the TV producers expanding this out to include sandstone and slate.

Filming was undertaken in Edinburgh, Ballachulish and Angus and the programme screened on the 31st October (the date was purely coincidental).

The feed back to date has been positive although for one NSI member, looking to purchase a TV at an outlet where some 40 TVs were tuned to the *Landward* programme, it was perhaps a bit of an overkill – even for an enthusiast!!

Coverage in the *Times*

Stone quarries

On the 26th October the *Times* carried a significant piece about the SSLG with both Mr Andrew McMillan, British Geological Survey, and Mr Alan McKinney, the SSLG Chief Executive, being interviewed and photographed.

It was not clear at the outset if this was for a 'Scottish page' in the *Times* but it became apparent, when the SSLG Chief Executive received an email from someone whom he has not seen for some thirty years and who now works in Norfolk, that it was indeed UK coverage that was achieved.

The difficulties that surround the possible opening of a dimensional stone quarry are both apparent and, initially, understandable. The perception of the general public is coloured by the manner in which both the aggregate and the open-cast coal industries operate. In reality, apart from all seeking to secure materials from the ground, nothing could more different.

Dimensional stone producers wish to retain the integrity of the stone block that they ease from the ground. The introduction of great force, such as blasting, would only result in fracturing the block and lead to hairline cracks throughout the entire block leaving it absolutely useless. The additional traffic generated by such quarries is also far, far less than that of these other commercial industries and therefore the impact can be minimal.

The above problems are daunting enough but then there is the issue of flora and fauna that may well have inhabited abandoned quarries. It is interesting to note how nature can reclaim what was an industrial site and one can only speculate as to what would happen if a quarry were to be reopened and fresh stone extracted. What would happen in the fullness of time? Nature would simply once again reclaim the site!

The *Scotsman* (23rd Nov) highlighted the problems when it was identified that 200 great crested newts had inhabited a redundant quarry. The paper reported that efforts were being made to reopen it but to date the newts have won!

Scotland had, at one time, some 1000 stone quarries but these have closed, been used as landfill or even given over to the aggregate industry. So the challenge for this generation is how will it secure materials maintain to our built heritage?

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