Scottish Stone Liaison Group

NEWSLETTER

Natural Stone Institute

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Introducing The Natural Stone Institute

"The subject of Material is clearly the foundation of architecture." William Morris (1892).

From small beginnings.....

In 1997 a meeting on *Quarrying and the Built Environment* was held at Murchison House the headquarters of the British Geological Survey in Scotland. At the end of the meeting Geoffrey Hutton of Hutton + Rostron received enthusiastic endorsement of a ninety strong audience for the establishment of a Natural Stone Institute aimed at fostering research and training in all aspects of winning and use of natural building stone.

Geoffrey was the principal author the report commissioned by Historic Scotland entitled *A Future for Stone in Scotland* which was reviewed by the Scottish Stone Liaison Group (SSLG). The SSLG was initiated in 1995 by Ingval Maxwell of Historic Scotland. This organisation was officially launched in May 2000 by Rhona Brankin (then Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport). The strength of the SSLG lies in its multi-organisational membership that has played an important part in developing the SSLG Business Plan to take forward a wide range of initiatives to support the stone industry in Scotland.

The development of the Natural Stone Institute is one of the principal objectives of the SSLG. During the past few months a small Working

We look to you for support of this venture with the expectation that from a base of expertise in Scotland, the NSI in partnership with other organisations may extend its activities to the rest of the UK and beyond.

Our vision for the NSI is that it will facilitate research and training, publish and disseminate papers and act as an advice centre, both physical and virtual. It will also have a vital role in promoting to the public our stone-built heritage and the use of stone in new buildings via events, publications and school projects. The aim is to attract its membership from a wide range of professionals including architects, geologists, materials scientists, stone masons and builders, quarry managers and planners.

For all of these activities the NSI will need dedicated voluntary officers, a base with salaried staff and the necessary infrastructure including premises, facilities for a library, IT equipment, workshop/laboratory and meeting rooms. Financing the venture is of course the top priority and part of the SSLG's remit will be to seek funding from appropriate agencies. But we are also looking to those who are willing to pledge their support to make our vision of a dynamic Institute that will ultimately encourage best practice in the use of natural stone become a reality. An accompanying letter explains how you can help in this way.

During the past few months a small Working Party has been addressing the objectives of the NSI, its Constitution and future programme. The time has come to seek a membership, raise funds and formally launch the NSI. We plan to hold the Inaugural Meeting the NSI on the evening of 19th September in Stirling following the 'Stone in The City' event. There will be a keynote address followed by a Business Meeting at which the Constitution will be presented and officers nominated to form an interim Council.

Are you ready for the challenge?

Andrew McMillan *Convener NSI*

SSLG web site goes live

The address of the new SSLG web site is www.sslg.co.uk. The site will be updated on a monthly basis. The "What's On" listing page is available to others to broadcast information on their activities and events - contact the SSLG office for further details.

Launch of the NSI

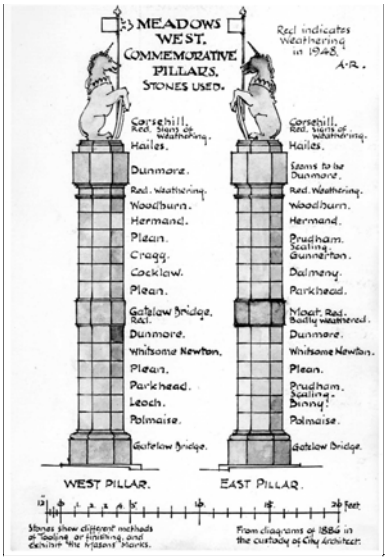
This is to be held in conjunction with the 'Stone in the City' event in Stirling on the 19th September. Further details will be included in the next edition of this Newsletter.

NSI's research rôle

An essential part of the work of NSI is to promote research. Right from the beginning it is clear that NSI can do two valuable things. First, it can provide a forum to bring research workers together, initially within Scotland and progressively with wider ambitions. Researchers are not always gregarious individuals (although some are!) but research is an activity which needs interchange and discussion and benefits hugely from informal links between people working in the same territory --- especially if different people bring different professional backgrounds to bear on a single problem. Scotland has a strong base, with a history of excellent academic and technical work on stone, but researchers are geographically dispersed and work is perhaps at present rather sporadic. Some alignment of our individual efforts will bring great benefits. There is no doubt that collaboration between different researchers and different institutions combined with the sponsorship of NSI will greatly improve the chances of attracting research funding. As a first step, Dr Maureen Young of the Masonry Conservation Research Group at Robert Gordon University and I have agreed to set up a register of research activities and funding opportunities on the SSLG website.

Second, NSI can lead the process of defining research needs. Research on stone may be driven by scientific or academic curiosity, but it makes a lot of sense to involve 'users of research' at every stage to identify the problems which really require investigation, where technical advances will bring clear benefits, and also to make sure that research results do not remain unexploited. Researchers usually have a good instinct for the scientific issues but often need a lot of help picking important problems and then passing results back to practitioners or indeed to entrepreneurs. We plan to start an NSI-led process of defining 'research needs' over the coming months.

Research on stone building, conservation and treatment is active in many parts of the world. Even more important perhaps is that research on durability of building materials and durable design is gathering pace in many countries. Much of this is driven (defensively) by the immense task of maintaining and repairing buildings, highways and bridges the world around, especially the concrete infrastructure. But it is also driven (positively) by the desire for sustainable and resource-efficient construction. The science which underpins durability in stone building and in other kinds of



These pillars were erected in Edinburgh in 1886. The stones were sourced from many quarries that were active at the time. Effectively, the pillars are a long-term weathering experiment and useful practical data can be derived on the relative durability of the stone types and the effect of differential weathering on adjacent stones. Crown copyright: RCAHMS

'inorganic' construction is more or less common to all: most deterioration is mediated by the movement of water within structures, coupled often with slow chemical processes which in turn ultimately produce mechanical damage. It is important that our work on stone does not proceed in isolation from this other work.

As an example, I was earlier this month at a meeting in Amsterdam to start work on an EU-funded project to define methods of measuring the liquid moisture transfer properties of building materials. This is quite generic and applies to all porous inorganic materials such as stone. Institutions from six European countries and Israel are participating, several of whom have already worked extensively on moisture transfer and durability in building stones.

NSI's rôle is then to ensure that information flows inwards from research activities worldwide; and that there is an outward flow from research promoted by NSI itself. I and other members of the Project Team would be delighted to hear from all readers who would like to contribute to this process.

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