

Scottish Stone Liaison Group

NEWSLETTER

Natural Stone Institute

Issue No. 2 Summer 2001

**No sculptur'd marble here, no pompous lay, No storied urn,
no animated bust; This simple stone directs pale Scotia's way**

When Gordon Benson and his partner Alan Forsyth won the competition to build the Museum of Scotland in 1991, this was the epigraph which ran across the top of their design proposals. A neat way of poeticising the museum's stark walls, but also of linking the Museum to its context - the full inscription is to be found on a memorial stone to the poet Allan Ramsay in Greyfriars churchyard opposite the Museum site.

The Museum is one of very few authentic examples of landmark modernist design to be found in Scotland - made relevant by the real history that has been enthusiastically gathered up by the new structure. Gordon Benson and Alan Forsyth were trained, and later taught, at the Architectural Association in London at a time when some the crucial debates of British architecture were taking place: between post-modernism, anti-historical modernism and high-tech architecture. Their response was the paradoxical principle of "contextual modernism". Generating ideas for the new building included the context of Scottish architecture, where the major figures of Gordon Benson's native Glasgow loomed largest: Alexander "Greek" Thomson, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

"Thomson's great gift was that he could do both individual buildings, and he could do terraces and public monuments which became constituent

But who has the skills to produce this new synthesis of traditional and modern architecture?

While architectural education is improving, apprenticeship - the gradual experience of designing for real - is harder to come by. Gordon Benson believes that this generation of architects is being hampered by the difficulty of gaining all-round experience.

"The tradition and culture of large offices which could support young architects - making the jump from the fantasy of design to some implementable reality - has vanished".

There is also a need for a deeper understanding of the practice of building. In relation to stone, the task is huge - for more fundamental research so that the properties of the material relevant to its performance in use are more fully understood, for more information tailored to the needs of practitioners that explains how stone should be used, for a revival in the craft skills used to win, shape and build it.

Maybe that is why Benson and Forsyth chose not to include the final line of the inscription: "To pour her sorrows o'er her poet's dust."

Professor Gordon Benson AADip, SADG, FRIAS, ARIBA will speak at the inaugural meeting of the NSI at 6.30pm on 10 September 2001 at Stirling

parts of a city - and, indeed, they implied that city. Mackintosh couldn't do that. He pulled off individual masterpieces; but they didn't carry in them the germs of a city. What you're trying to do is coalesce Thomson and Mackintosh. That's got to be the goal. If you can do that in a modern way, in a new way - the poetic ambitions of Mackintosh with the civic skills of someone like Thomson - you've got the beginnings of a new architecture."

NSI at 6.30pm on 19 September 2001 at Stirling Castle.

Inaugural meeting of the Natural Stone Institute

A buffet will be available from 5.30pm in the Queen's Apartments; Meeting commencing 6.30pm, Wednesday 19 September in the Chapel Royal, Stirling Castle.

Outline Programme: Welcome Address: Mr A McMillan; Major Statement: Mr I Maxwell, Director, TCRE Historic Scotland; Main Address: Professor Gordon Benson; Achievements to date: Mr A McMillan; General Discussion.

First things first...

The establishment of a Natural Stone Institute was first proposed in May 2000 at the launch of the Scottish Stone Liaison Group. Since then, the NSI working group has been finalising its statement of aims and objectives and preparing a realistic programme leading to the implementation of these. Work is also progressing on the development of a formal constitution.

Many individuals and organisations offered their support to the fledgling NSI at the SSLG launch, and the working group are keen to keep all interested parties informed of the development work underway. In this spirit of open-ness, listed below are the draft Mission Statement and Objectives of the NSI. If you have any comments on these, please contact Andrew McMillan, Tel. 0131 650 0297 (direct dial) e-mail: aamc@bgs.ac.uk

Mission statement

The aim of the Natural Stone Institute is to provide a better understanding of all aspects of natural stone and its use for public benefit. The Institute will encourage good practice through

While this is the proposed overall aim, in order to make implementation easier and progress more measurable, the following objectives have been proposed for the NSI.

NSI objectives

Objective 1

To establish a sound financial and administrative basis for the development and operation of the activities of the NSI.

Objective 2

To establish Minutes of Agreement with the Scottish Stone Liaison Group, statutory bodies, academic institutions, industry representative bodies and learned societies.

Objective 3

To promote appropriate education and training systems that will meet the needs of specifiers, designers, students, trainees, teachers and the general public.

Objective 4

To promote and co-ordinate research relevant to natural stone within the built environment

- *Education*
- *Training*
- *Research*
- *Technical innovation and*
- *Information co-ordination and dissemination*

natural stone within the built environment.

Objective 5

To establish the NSI as the recognised centre in Scotland for advice and information on all aspects of natural stone.

Quite a tall order all-in-all, but come to the inaugural meeting of the NSI and see how we propose to fit actions to the words.

SSLG web site



The address of the SSLG web site is www.sslg.co.uk. The "News" listing page is available to others to broadcast information on their activities and events - contact the SSLG office for further details.

**Contributions for future editions of this Newsletter should be sent to:
Audrey Dakin, NSI Newsletter Editor, Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1JA
or audrey.dakin@scotland.gov.uk**

**Natural Stone Institute
Room 133, Pentlandfield Business Park, The Bush, Roslin EH25 9RE
Tel: 0131 440 9473 Fax: 0131 440 4032**