

## Scottish Stone Liaison Group

# NEWSLETTER

## Stone Industry Project Team

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### Training

The SSLG, in its previous research, confirmed that there are just over 300 stone mason in Scotland and it is a matter of serious concern that the current intake of trainees, when discounting the general trainee drop out rate of approximately 20% and general attrition within the industry, hardly meets the needs of the industry as the older stone masons retire.

With Scotland's stone built heritage requiring greater attention, underlined by the tragic accident in Edinburgh, there is a growing realisation that the appropriate masonry skills are not only essential but becoming crucial.

The [Scottish Lime Centre Trust](#) is currently developing a new S/NVQ covering conservation, repair and maintenance of traditional masonry buildings (actual title to be resolved). This is an interesting development and supported by the SSLG.

### Centre of Excellence

The SSLG is currently represented on the Steering Group that is seeking to establish a "Centre of Excellence" for a range of craft skills. Stone masonry, slating, plastering, painting, metal working, carpentry etc are some of the skills that the Centre proposes to address.

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### Glasgow

On the 25th February the SSLG held a meeting in the offices of the [Scottish Civic Trust](#) to which all Glasgow conservation bodies and organisations were invited. The City of Glasgow Council was also represented.

As has been demonstrated on the training front

It therefore follows, as these original stone sources are not available, that Glasgow's built heritage is now being repaired with stones that originate elsewhere and may or may not be appropriate. The question being asked by the SSLG is "What research has been done to ensure that the most appropriate stones have

As has been demonstrated on the training front, there is a concern that an insufficient number of stonemasons are being trained within the greater Glasgow area and this will ultimately lead to major difficulties in the not too distant future.

However, in order to quantify the future skills needed it is necessary, first of all, to undertake a "health check" of Glasgow's built heritage. Only by knowing the extent of the problem is it possible to plan for the future.

The issues that such a check would cover include:

- the identification of replacement stone for indenting and general repairs,
- the extent of the use of "plastic repairs", coupled with the anticipated failure of such repairs (this can be apparent within a matter of a few years but ultimately failing within 10/15 years), and
- the long term effect of stone cleaning which, generally, results in damage to the original stone necessitating additional repairs.

The importance of the correct identification of appropriate stone for repairs (see [Indigenous Materials Newsletter](#)) has already been made but, reading Judith Lawson's "Building Stones of Glasgow", the sources of much of the original building stones for much of old Glasgow are simply not available.

Problems surround the opening of quarries but one adjacent to Queen Street station, or along the Great Western Road, Byres Road or Dumbarton Road or anywhere else within the City is something beyond that which could realistically be achieved.

ensure that the most appropriate stones have been identified?"

The case being made is that it would be an advantage if the authorities and decision makers had a "finger print" of all the major buildings in Glasgow and this information held in perpetuity to enable the identification of replacement stones to be made.

The issue of the "plastic repairs", and their ultimate failure, is one that is moving up the agenda as the Scottish Executive examines the consequences of falling masonry and other building materials.

With tourism being a major earner, some 87% of the visitors to Glasgow visit a historic building, it is absolutely crucial that these buildings – indeed all buildings – are maintained in the most appropriate manner. [Historic Scotland](#) has a FREE publication entitled "[Caring For your Home](#)" and it highlights what should be self apparent.

Everyone, including institutions and other bodies that own properties, have to be held accountable for their buildings and undertake the necessary repairs to keep them "wind and water tight".

From the meeting on the 25th February the SSLG is developing a paper that will be submitted as a basis for a funding bid to "finger print" the buildings of Glasgow.

Only by knowing the health of the buildings will it be possible to calculate the masonry skills that will be required to ensure that this generation maintains Glasgow's built heritage in a manner in which everyone can take pride.

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## National Planning Policy Guidelines

The SSLG has submitted comments to the review of [NPPG 4 \(Land for Mineral Working\)](#) and supported this by forwarding a copy of the research that had been undertaken on [NPPG 18](#) paragraph 20 (see [Indigenous Material Newsletter No. 6](#)).

**Recap:** the SSLG had sought to establish how the Councils were addressing the above paragraph which states. "*Traditional building*

Such a claim can be highlighted by examples where, even within conservation areas "*high quality of replica block has mainly been conceded to*". Irrespective of the quality of that "replica block" (read "reconstituted stone") one has to ask the question, "Is this how Scotland's built heritage is to be maintained?"

Another example: It appears that Spanish slate is an acceptable replacement for a Scottish West

*materials and methods of construction are generally robust and can be widely promoted on the basis that historic buildings normally have a life span well in excess of modern buildings. For this, and in order to ensure that works involving the maintenance and repair of historic buildings and streetscapes can be carried out in a sympathetic manner, appropriate sources of traditional building materials should be identified."*

The current position is that the following are the ONLY Councils NOT to respond – Dumfries & Galloway, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire with only a partial response from North Lanarkshire referring the matter back to the Director of Planning. – who has of course ignored two letters.

Unless local authorities are aware of the sources of the stone that constructed their built heritage (most likely within less than a mile) then it is likely their built heritage may be repaired with an entirely inappropriate material.

Coast slate but this is "based on a visual comparison of the examples of these slates in terms of colour, texture, and thickness".

"Visual comparison" ignores one of the most important issues when considering replacement slate, namely that of water absorption, and this raises another issue; The SSLG is aware that some old Scottish slates – currently tested and found to have a water absorption rating of 0.2% are being removed to be replaced with a new imported slate that has a water absorption rating of 0.7% ([University of Paisley](#) – Dr Joan Walsh).

Decisions on the built heritage cannot be left to the vagaries of any official, material supplier, architect or mason and certainly should not be taken in such a cavalier manner. Over the years universities, institutions and consultants have been paid considerable sums of money to undertake research on a host of issues and all too often their reports are then left on shelves gathering dust.

What a waste of time, intellectual effort and money!

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## County mineral maps

Following up on [NPPG 18](#) para.20 the research shows that during the run up to the creation of the new devolved system of government within the UK the DETR was moving to undertake a review of the minerals of England. The [British Geological Survey](#) has now produced "County Mineral Maps" for England with Wales now seeking to catch up.

With such detail available it is possible for English planning departments to accurately address issues relating to mineral reserves. Unfortunately, such a resource is not available to Scottish local authority planning departments.

Without this information how can Scottish officials ensure that decisions they take do not sterilise some vital mineral resource?

The SSLG is currently pursuing this matter with the Scottish Executive.

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