



**British
Geological
Survey**

Britain's building heritage

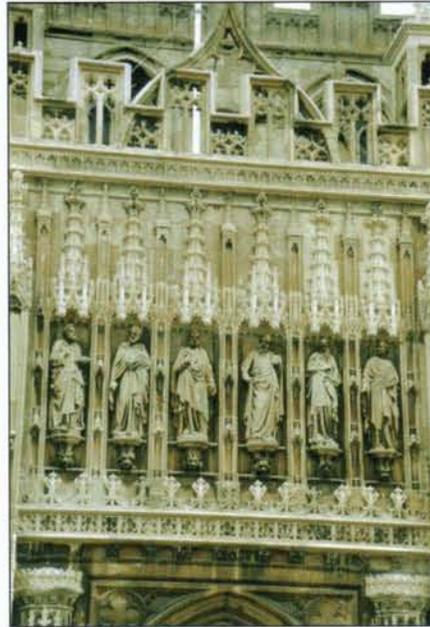
Graham Lott

Keyworth

The history of the Britain is very well reflected in its fine heritage of stone monuments and buildings. These range from the mysterious stone circles of pre-historic times through Roman villas and fortifications; Norman castles and cathedrals; grand Elizabethan houses; Cotswolds wool towns; Victorian civic buildings, factories and their associated vernacular housing developments to the stone cladding of modern-day office blocks.

There are few areas in the country where such stone structures do not occur. Today we, as a community, have become increasingly aware of this stone heritage, in particular through a growing interest in the built and natural environment and as a result of the work of organisations such as English Heritage and the National Trust.

Britain is fortunate in having a very varied geological succession from which, over many centuries, a large number of stones suitable for both building and decorative use have been produced. From the BGS archives we know that over 1000 different building and decorative stones have been quarried and used in Britain. Stones of almost every colour of the



Gloucester Cathedral constructed in Bath (Painswick) Stone.

spectrum are or were available including red, yellow and brown sandstones; purple, green, grey and black slates; yellow, white, red and black limestones; black flints; pink and grey granites.

Most of these stones, because of their bulk, were not transported far from their local area until the development of the canal and railway systems in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. By the late 19th century with the success of the Victorian industrialists and entrepreneurs, the demand for stone, for building both their factories and housing for their workforces, expanded enormously. Quarrying became a major area of employment nationally.



Woodhouse Eaves showing the use of Swithland Slates.

Stone

The BGS, from its inception in 1835, was concerned with the documentation of these activities. One of its first commissions (in 1839) was to advise on the selection of stone for the 'new' Houses of Parliament. This work resulted in the first national survey of Britain's building stone quarries and the construction, from Anston Stone (Magnesian Limestone), of the present Houses of Parliament.

To the geologist such quarries are a primary source of information. The geological maps and memoirs produced by the Survey contain an unparalleled collection of data from such sources which the BGS has continued to update to the present day. This archive has proved to be an increasingly valuable resource today because our building heritage is under constant threat from the effects of pollution and the ravages of time. If we are to continue to enjoy our stone heritage then its conservation, using the correct materials, is essential.

The BGS is able to provide information from its archives and ongoing field surveys regarding the source and composition of most of the Britain's building stones. Where the original quarry source is lost, perhaps because the beds were worked out or, more commonly, because subsequent urban development has covered the site, it is usually possible to suggest an alternative, matching stone source within the UK.

The BGS provides a national centre for professional advice and information on the geology of natural stone for the building industry, conservationists and the general public interested in Britain's building heritage.