British Geological Survey
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

Applied geoscience for our changing Earth

PRESS RELEASE

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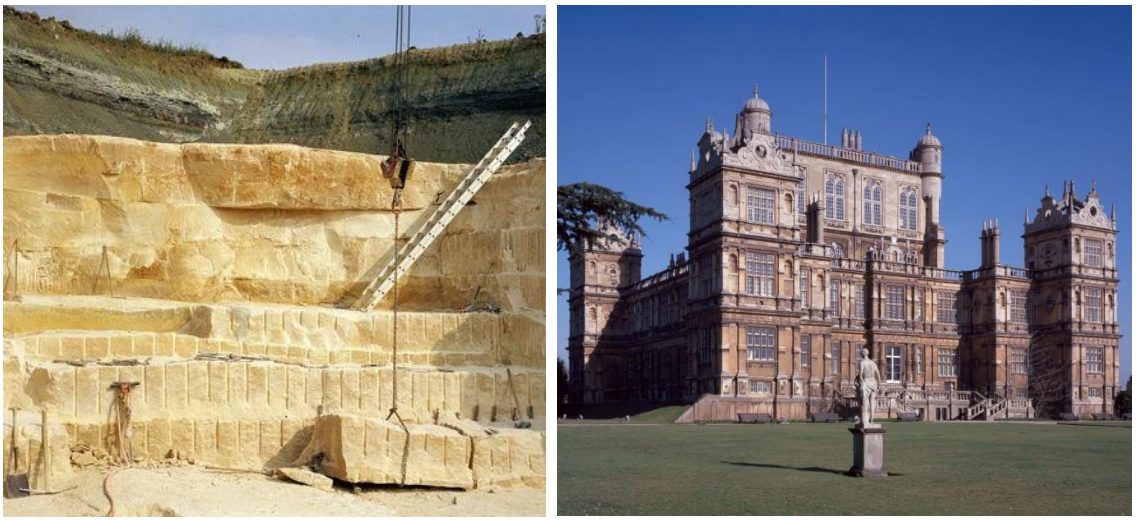
Building a future for stone

Historic buildings in Britain are increasingly at risk from damage due to the effects of climate change and a lack of suitable building stone for conservation, repair and new build. The work of the British Geological Survey (BGS) on building stones will be the focus of the symposium 'Building a future for stone' in London on 1st Oct 2009. This coincides with the decision to transfer, on long-term loan, the UK building stone collection from the Natural History Museum to the BGS headquarters in Nottingham.

Think of a famous building and the chances are it will be made of stone. The character of our built environment owes much to the use of local stone. This helps to create a unique sense of place that reflects the variability of UK geology.



Ancaster stone (left) from Ancaster, Lincolnshire was used to build Wollaton Hall, Nottingham (right)

Behind every stone building there is a quarry. In the past, these quarries were literally a stone's throw from the buildings. Modern construction has largely replaced traditional stone building and most of these historic quarries no longer operate. The renewed popularity of stone and the need to conserve and restore our built heritage has led to a resurgence of some parts of the stone industry. Matching the stone used in historic buildings can be a problem as the original quarry may be closed, buried or even built upon. This is where the work of the BGS can help.

The UK Building and Decorative Stone Collection, currently housed at the Natural History Museum, contains many of the building stones, used in historic buildings.

It represents a unique snapshot of Britain's once great stone industry. The collection contains two and a half thousand samples of building stone and dates from the inception of the BGS in 1835 up until the early 1970's. Acquisition of building stones was continued by the BGS at its new location in Nottingham. The transfer, on long-term loan, of the collection will consolidate the existing building stones into one invaluable resource of approximately 20,000 samples that will help those working to conserve and restore our stone-built heritage.

David Smith, Petrology Curator at the Natural History Museum, said: "The Building and Decorative Stone Collection is an incredibly valuable resource for the stone industry. It records the changing trends and diverse use of dimension stone over the past 150 years, but perhaps more importantly, its strength and importance lies in the wide variety of UK and European rocks, the sources of which are no longer available."

"Our decision to loan the UK collection to the BGS comes at a time when there are national initiatives to bring together information about stone, its historical use and details of reference collections from many sources. We hope the collection will be actively used and will compliment the Survey's modern collection of samples from active quarries in providing a comprehensive reference to assist building conservators and architects in their decision making. We have spent many years data-basing this sizeable collection to a modern standard and it will feed straight into the National Stone Database."

"Whilst the BGS will become the focus for UK stone, the Natural History Museum will retain the reference collection of non-UK Building and Decorative Stones. It is the intention that the historical link between our two organisations will be mirrored in a website that keeps the collection together in a virtual environment."

The symposium Building a future for stone will focus on the building stones work of the BGS. This will take place at the Geological Society in Burlington House, London on the 1st October 2009. This meeting will address current issues of building and roofing stone in the UK. It is aimed at planners, architects, stone producers, heritage conservation professionals and all those with a professional interest in stone.

Improving the accessibility of the collection through a National Stone Database is a key development that will enable information on stone and stone buildings throughout the UK to be freely accessible via the BGS website (www.bgs.ac.uk). This database will be greatly enhanced by the transfer of the UK collection from the Natural History Museum. This database fits closely with the Strategic Stone Study which brings together English Heritage, the BGS, local geologists and historic building experts from every county in England. The aim is to identify the most important building stones used in England as well as representative buildings and historic quarries. A similar study in Scotland is being carried out by the Scottish Stone Liaison Group.

Ends

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Notes for Editors

For further information on the BGS symposium 'Building a future for stone':

www.bgs.ac.uk/mineralsuk/whatsnew.html#stone

The British Geological Survey

The British Geological Survey (BGS), a component body of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), is the nation's principal supplier of objective, impartial and up-to-date geological expertise and information for decision making for governmental, commercial and individual users. The BGS maintains and develops the nation's understanding of its geology to improve policy making, enhance national wealth and reduce risk. It also collaborates with the national and international scientific community in carrying out research in strategic areas, including energy and natural resources, our vulnerability to environmental change and hazards, and our general knowledge of the Earth system. More about the BGS can be found at www.bgs.ac.uk.

The Natural History Museum

The Natural History Museum is a world-leading research centre. In the new Darwin Centre, visitors can discover the collections and watch scientists as they prepare, mount and study some of the Museum's millions of insect and plant specimens to understand the major threats facing our planet today. Through its collections and scientific expertise, the Museum is helping to conserve the extraordinary richness and diversity of the natural world with groundbreaking projects in 68 countries. The Mineralogy Department is one of six science departments at the Natural History Museum. Its scientists study the properties and relationships of minerals, rocks and meteorites in order to understand natural processes including pollutant dispersion, the formation of valuable natural resources, the tectonic processes which have shaped the Earth and the processes which gave rise to the planets as the solar system formed. More about the Natural History Museum can be found at www.nhm.ac.uk.