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London Pavement Geology: no longer just a building stone resource for Londoners

I have had a long-standing interest in building materials. This really began when I came under the influence of Eric Robinson whilst I was a PhD student at UCL in the early 1990s. Subsequently my career as a geologist took me in the direction of Classical archaeology, initially tasked with cataloguing the stone collection at the American School of Classical Studies, Athens (ASCSA) and then working on building materials on the archaeological site at Ancient Corinth. However, throughout that time, I have always kept a weather-eye out for British building stones and learned to identify them. I never really knew what to do with all this data and there was little encouragement within my academic department to pursue this activity. I used my knowledge for building stone tours and started writing building stone guides for London. This is how Dave Wallis found me. Dave had been looking at ways to update Eric’s walking tour guidebooks of London and had been thinking about this for a number of years, during which time, technology evolved. His ideas for a book turned into a CD-ROM and eventually a website. He had the ideas for a platform and I had the data. It was a perfect match and London Pavement Geology came into being. We both decided to focus on London initially, as the vast bulk of my data and observations were in London. The website was set up in 2015 and a smart-phone App version came on the scene in August 2016. We now have close to 2000 locations for Greater London. We had always hoped to expand the website to cover the whole of the United Kingdom, and indeed this was a stipulation of one of our key funders, the Geologists’ Association. The web-version of ‘London’ Pavement Geology went UK wide at the beginning of 2018. The whole idea of London Pavement Geology is about stones that can be seen for the pavement, i.e. from walking around the built environment (and not necessarily paving stones). It started out as an outreach programme to increase interest in building stones, and to be honest, as an archive for the data I had collected myself. However, it has since become much more than that. In London the website has been used by the Survey of London and English Heritage as a resource for building and restoration materials. It has been used to record information for building stone town trails (for example data in Saffron Walden, Essex has been added by A-Level geology students from the local school). The project has also taken on a life of its own on social media, with close to 3000 followers, World-wide on Twitter (@pavementgeology).

There has always been a strong North Welsh connection to this project. Dave lives in Deganwy and although now based in London, I am from Caernarfon. Our web and app developers, Livetech are based in Llandudno. We currently have around 150 data points for Wales, the majority of these are in Caernarfon, for rather obvious reasons. We would love to see more information added for Wales and would like to invite members of the Welsh Stone Forum to add data to further populate the website.

How to use the website to add building stone locations

At present the UK wide database can only be accessed via the website (and not the App, which takes submissions for the Greater London area only).

A building stone location can be submitted using the ‘Submit Location’ web form, accessed from the main menu of the website. Each location represent a single stone, therefore if you have a building which uses two types of stone, then that would mean two locations for that building. Fill in the data in the boxes – information is self-explanatory (and a bluffer’s guide is also available) and use the drag and drop pin to select the location on the map. As discussed above, we keep the data as simple as possible, but if you wish to add further information, such as a reference or other source, then we can do that too – just add the text or hyper link to the ‘Location of Geological Feature’ box. I would also encourage contributors to name the person responsible for the stone identification. You can then add up to four photographs of the buildings and details of the stonework.
The main rule is that this is geology that can be seen from the pavement or footpath, so it is about the exteriors of buildings (though we do include data on stone used inside shopping malls). For the sake of personal privacy, we do not include data on private houses or other private establishments, although exceptions are made if the homeowner gives explicit permission to be included or the outer wall of a private house is directly on a public street (with no intervening garden).

If you have a batch of data to submit, please feel free to contact me directly (email below) and I can send you an electronic spreadsheet which you can use to enter data for multiple locations.

The website and information about downloading the App can be found at http://londonpavementgeology.co.uk

Figures

Above (Fig. 1); a screen-shot of the data points for Caernarfon. Pins are colour coded to represent rock types (igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic) or a spectacular fossil location. Clicking on a pin brings up building-specific information on the stones used (below Fig. 2).
Fig. 3. The main menu page of the London Pavement Geology website. Locations can be accessed via the ‘Geosites’ tab at the left and locations can be submitted via the ‘Submit Location’ tab (circled).