

EOS LONDON WORKSHOP SUMMARY

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For its third meeting the Ecologies of Stone network arranged a workshop in London on April 29-30, 2024. The workshop marked a shift in scale for the group. Whereas the Larvik workshop in September, 2023, focused on geological engineering and landscape architecture around natural stone quarrying, the London workshop focused on craftsmanship, structural engineering and building design. The group developed a much deeper understanding of natural stone as a structural building element, not least through the introduction to a number of historic and modern buildings in London and Stamford, England as well as experimental designs, yet to be realized. Like earlier meetings the network was able to share their different expertise within fields ranging from architecture over engineering, masonry, landscaping, geology and quarrying to anthropology.

Visit to the offices and workshop of Stone Masonry Company, Stamford, England

The first day was spent with a tour of the workshop of Stone Masonry Company. Here creative director of the company and Network Group member, Pierre Bidaud introduced us to the philosophy and practice of the company. The process of carving, cutting and crafting stone into staircases, beams, columns and vaulted ceilings were showcased to the group. In close collaboration with others like the architects at Groupwork and Webb Yates Engineers, the Stone Masonry Company has lately gone from developing relatively small and very expensive architectural installations, to large prestigious buildings with an exoskeleton of post tensioned massive stone. The hope for the company is now to “democratize” stone as a building element, and the network group was asked to comment on the latest experiments and products at the workshop, from a geological, engineering

Lastly Pierre showed us around the nearby town center of Stamford. Being the earliest listed urban structure in the United Kingdom, the town center showcased an impressive selection of historic stone buildings, collectively proving how strong and

proud, the local culture for quarrying and using limestone and slate as building stone has been for thousands of years.

Urban Geology walk with Geologist Ruth Siddall in central London

Tuesday morning Geologist Ruth Siddall led an urban geology tour from the former Royal Exchange to Saint Paul's Cathedral. Along the way, paving and building stones were traced back to their geological origin giving new dimensions to both modern and historic architecture of central London. While the architect often chooses a material for its technical and aesthetic qualities, Ruth made it apparent that natural stones just as well can be chosen for their symbolic or narrative qualities. One type of Portland stone may be chosen for its link to the Roman ruins under the city, another for its inherent Britishness or for its selection of fossils, linking the architecture to a prehistoric past; The red and beige limestones facade of No.1 Poultry, (James Stirling, 1997) has caused myths and debate on postmodern symbolism; In Guildhall Yard, (Giles and Richard Gilbert Scott), the varied composition of stone types in both pavings and facades, pays tribute to the architecture lost in the great fires and bombardments of London, from 1666 to 1945.

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Visiting 15 Clerkenwell Close and the studio of Groupwork.

Tuesday afternoon Groupwork welcomed the Network to a tour of their architectural studio in 15 Clerkenwell Close. The building has been acclaimed for its impressive exoskeleton, designed in collaboration with Webb Yates Engineers, with its Norman limestone used both as a uniquely recognizable, key structural element. The building is thereby expressing a highly modern and unique system of facade elements, while allowing contextual references to historic neighbouring buildings and nature to peak through the massive structures. While looking at models and mockups, the network also had a chance to further discuss the development of massive stone architecture, exemplified with the design of bridges, apartment blocks and the mass production of natural stone bricks.

Networking event at the London Showroom of Stone Masonry Company

Tuesday evening was spent at a network meeting in the Showroom of Stone Masonry Company, in Farringdon, London. Here the group interacted with a large group of researchers and practitioners within the building industry, either interested or already involved with massive stone building. Network leader Jonathan Foote welcomed with presenting the idea behind the network and overall aims with the workshops, seminars and ongoing research projects within the group. This was followed up by presentations by Pierre Bidaud on the work of promoting natural stone constructions within Stone Masonry Company and Stone Collective, as well as short presentations by geologists Björn Schouenborg, and Tom Heldal on research into natural stone heritage in architecture and quarrying. The presentations gave a lot interest and discussion on the topics and projects and gave the network many new contacts for potential future collaborations.



Eos Futures meeting

The London workshop was wrapped up by a meeting, where the status of the EoS projects and future workshop in Mallorca, in the fall of 2024, were discussed. The network expressed an interest in spending much of the workshop in the Marés stone quarries, to engage with the cultural landscape and onsite discussion on the architectural and ecological potentials for them.

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