

Book review

Building Scotland: Celebrating Scotland's Traditional Building Materials

Moses Jenkins (ed.). Historical Scotland, Edinburgh, UK, 2010, ISBN 978-0-85976-710-1, £25.00, 208 pp.

This book, edited by Moses Jenkins of Historic Scotland, with contributions from 13 other authors and including a foreword by Alex Salmond, presents a unique overview of Scotland's traditional building materials, including stone, timber, iron, clay and thatch. This literary celebration of Scotland's building heritage is supported by a number of excellent colour photographs taken by Sam Sills.

The materials are presented in 14 chapters, each written by an expert in the particular field. As a result there is a great deal of variation in presentation style and technical depth between subjects; this could have been resolved with some further editing. The chapter on stone, by Ingval Maxwell, is subdivided into useful sub-sections, including use of materials, properties and applications; many other chapters, however, are presented as one continuous essay, making them less accessible for those seeking simply to dip into the contents.

For readers not particularly familiar with the geography and geology of Scotland, the book lacks a map to indicate site locations. As each chapter cites various examples across the country, in support of the discussion, this lack of any map is a serious oversight for this reader.

The general quality and variety of photographs is a major attraction of this book. However, the work would also greatly benefit from inclusion of more

line drawings and other illustrations, as used effectively in the chapter on glass, to support discussions. The scope of the book is at times greater than simply buildings, including examples of timber bridges and stone field walls.

The lack of detail of the subject is somewhat frustrating. Some further information on timber species in common usage or details on the variation and extent of earth building would add greatly without detriment to the accessible style of this work. The book is non-technical in nature and generally provides little detail for those seeking further practical information for conservation or other building works. However, each chapter comes with a short list of useful references for the reader seeking additional detail. The materials presented are not specific to Scotland and so the work also provides a useful resource for broader study of traditional materials elsewhere in the UK and further afield.

The book lacks a concluding chapter to draw the individual chapters together in a contemporary context. The authors do not always link traditional use with modern buildings, although the chapters on timber and stone are notable exceptions. Overall one is left wondering what the future is for traditional building materials in twenty-first century Scotland.

For readers seeking a general and illustrated introduction to traditional building materials in Scotland, and elsewhere in the UK, this book can be recommended.

Pete Walker