

## PROFILE

### Ian Thomas

Ian, our new president, was born and brought up in Mansfield Woodhouse, Nottinghamshire, where two generations earlier his grandfather had worked the Parliament Quarry, on Vale Road (in the 1840's the quarry was one of a number which supplied stone to rebuild the Houses of Parliament after a major fire). In 1957, his family moved to Aberystwyth (where great grandfather had sailed ships laden with lead ore). So geology was in the family blood. Ian's interest in geology stemmed from a fascination for industrial history of the lead mines in Wales that he explored as a school boy.

He read geology, biology, physics and geography at University of Swansea, graduating in geology in 1968 (having also taken a course in cartography).

For four years he worked at the Institute of Geological Sciences (later to become BGS) in Exhibition Road, London – advising British and foreign governments and industry, on a portfolio of refractory, ceramic, carbonate and strontium minerals worldwide. Had BGS decided to move out to Keyworth at that stage, he would probably have still been working for them. Instead, in 1972 he joined Derbyshire County Council's Strategic Planning Division to work on minerals policies for Britain's largest mineral producing county.

The following year, he set up the first Regional Aggregates Working Party (RAWP) (i.e. for the East Midlands) and continues as its Technical Secretary. In 1979 he became the Convenor of the RAWP Secretaries for England and Wales, which again he continues under contract to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. He also became involved in adult education, teaching applied geology in various Derbyshire centres.

In the 1980s, he promoted the idea of the National Stone Centre (NSC) and gradually gained seconded time from the County Council to this end, becoming the Centre's full time Director in late 1988. The Centre opened to the public in 1990, and now attracts hundreds of school groups and thousands of family visitors. In 1989, he was also appointed to BGS's first Programme Board.

Two thirds of the work at the Stone Centre is unrelated to visitors. It includes the design of interpretative panels for leading quarry companies in Britain, collecting and publishing data on minerals planning, and advisory services relating to Earth Science education for English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales.

Much of Ian's work is now involved with developing national policies for both the English and Welsh governments for balancing the need to provide for aggregates with the need to protect the environment. In the last few years, the NSC has been more involved in Wales, including assessing the scope for a Welsh Stone Centre.



At the Stone Centre, Ian is able to combine his passions for the history of quarrying, geology and design. Ten years ago, nineteen members of the Thomas family staged an art and design exhibition ranging from Jaguar car designs to apples made from applewood, and Ian still undertakes freelance design work.

Apart from involvement in various local and national committees, covering the arts, tourism, regeneration of Wirksworth, mining history and building stone, Ian has just completed a two-year term as chairman of ESTA (Earth Science Teachers' Association). In 2002 he chaired the Standing Joint Committee on Natural Stones, a group linking key professional and government organisations concerned with building stones.

During this period, he became concerned that ESTA was focused on catering for those teaching the few thousand school students studying geology per se. Not adequately addressed were the needs of the 8-10 million pupils being taught a more limited amount of Earth Science (often poorly), through mainstream National Curriculum science. As a result, a small group approached the main professional institutions concerned with chemistry, physics, biology and science teaching, successfully engaging them in the Joint Earth Science Education Initiative which Ian now Chairs – readers should visit [www.jesei.org](http://www.jesei.org) to see some of the results.