

ROOFING SPANISH SLATE HISTORY

Slate is over 300 million years old...

Taken from a sedimentary rock composed of clay and ash, it can be best described as a fine-grained, foliated metamorphic rock that is composed of minute mica flakes.

Natural Slate has been used throughout the history of civilization. In the ancient world, slate was used as an aid for communication systems for hieroglyphic script and text and secondly as a building material.



The Romans used slate for the roofs on their houses as well as for raw materials for their administrative and military buildings. In areas where the material was accessible, it was used as a construction itself without any transformation.

Using slate as an important construction material started during the Middle Ages. The first organised quarrying of Natural slate dates back to the 12th century, in France and later in countries with cool, wet climates such as Germany, England and Ireland. From the 13th century, you could get good quality regular slate which created an interest with builders and architects.



In Spain, slate from Madrid Area was used in the 16th century under the order of King Philip II. After he visited Europe and saw the French and German Castles, he decided to cover the roofs of emblematic buildings in the Madrid Area.



In the mid 19th century, the opening of railways had an important effect on the industry which reached its peak at the beginning of the 20th century. It was in the early 1900's when industrial mining of slate began in Spain. In the 1950's, this activity began really to expand.

Since then, new companies have been created and consolidated, important investment has been made in factories and machineries, new exploitations have been opened and adequate comercial channels have been established. All those improvements have permitted the high production and sales figures to make Spain the worldwide leader in a few years.



Most of the quarries are opencast. Only few Spanish companies produce Natural Slate in mines. Even if today, the production is made by brand new heavy machinery with the latest extraction methods, the way of extraction still very similar. The aim is to pull off large unaltered blocks of productive slate, which are then taken to the factories to be splitted.

Nowaday, Spain is the number one slate producer of Natural Roofing Slate in the world, with an Export volume exceeding 80% of slate extracted in Galicia and Castilla y León. The slate sector is one of the most important in the Northwest region of Spain. The volume of business in the area gives jobs directly to more than 3,500 people and indirectly to 12,000 people.

