

# Clay Minerals Group Bursary Report – Alastair Marsh (2017)

The 16<sup>th</sup> International Clays Conference (16ICC) began in the beautiful surroundings of the Carmen de los Martires, Granada, on a very balmy Sunday evening in July.

This being my first major conference, I was unsure what to expect. Being the only person currently researching a topic within applied clay science at University of Bath, I was very keen to meet the international clays community – and hopefully get some answers to my burning questions.

Over the next 5 days I felt very privileged to listen to the latest advances in my own field of geopolymers, as well as many talks and posters which had nothing to do with my topic, but which were fascinating nonetheless.

I presented my own research (Alkali activation of kaolinite, montmorillonite and illite for geopolymer-stabilised soil construction materials) on the Thursday morning, in the “Alkali Activation of Clays and Geopolymers” session. Despite my being the first talk of the day at 08:30, there was still a sizeable audience there, and received questions about my experimental design and future work.



By attending talks by people whose research overlapped with that of my own, I picked up valuable references, learnt about novel experimental methods and put my own research in an international context. I was surprised by how many other people were also activating montmorillonites (a similarity to my work), and that I was in a minority in using non-calcined clays. In the many social breaks throughout the week, I spoke to more experienced researchers about their own work. I enjoyed these intellectual exchanges, even though at times I was surprised and frustrated that even senior professors don't know all the answers!

The most valuable resource I gained from the conference was a community of fellow PhD researchers, who also work on geopolymers and soil materials. Between us we shared experimental insights, frustrations and general PhD tips. On the back of conversations we had at 16ICC, we are now planning to host a Europe-wide workshop for doctoral researchers in geopolymers and soil materials, with a focus on industrial and social engagement.



I am very grateful for the support of the Clay Minerals Group in assisting me to attend 16ICC. Without doubt it's been one of the most valuable experiences of my PhD so far.

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