

IMA 2002 Edinburgh: Looking back and looking forward

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The 18th General Meeting of the International Mineralogical Association, held in Edinburgh from 1st to 6th of September, has been and gone, so this is the moment to look back and ask whether it was all worthwhile, and to look forward with some comments about the future of IMA. IMA has very little money of its own, and no paid staff, so the responsibility for its meetings, including the financial risks, falls on the Min Soc of the host country. The 2002 meeting was organized jointly by the Mineralogical Society of Great Britain and Ireland (through its permanent staff and by representatives of its various special interest groups) and by a group based in Edinburgh. I must say that I found that this shared approach worked extremely well. It meant a truly huge amount of work for the permanent staff of the Min Soc, Adrian Lloyd-Lawrence (he and I exchanged hundreds of emails many of them concerned with policy matters carrying substantial financial implications), Russell Rajendra (whose main task of getting in the money from delegates from 44 different countries I did not envy at all) and Kevin Murphy (who among other things had the daunting task of editing and producing the very substantial abstract volume to a very tight time schedule). We all dealt with huge numbers of emails. Mineralogists are salt-of-the-Earth but following instructions is clearly not one of their strengths and the activation energy for sending a query as an email was obviously considerably less than for finding and *reading* the 2nd circular! Adrian and Liz Loeffler constructed a striking website which ultimately provided all registrants with a pdf version of the 'Programme with Abstracts' well before the meeting and I thought Liz's electronic registration forms were a model of clarity. It wasn't the Min Soc's fault that the electronic transfer of money failed so often.

In Edinburgh, Simon Harley, Ben Harte (Geology and Geophysics), Brian Jackson (Royal Museum of Scotland) and Jeff Harris (Geology, Glasgow) gave a great deal of their time to meeting logistics and social and field excursion matters. Martin Dove, Kathryn Goodenough, Simon Harley, Ben Harte, Stuart Haszeldine, Stephen Hillier, Brian Jackson, Simon Kelley, Clive Rice, Eva Valsami-Jones and Frances Wall, representing the Min Soc special interest groups made up the programme committee. The Natural History Museum very kindly provided a nice room, and a reception, for what was the most important planning meeting, in April, when the programme was finally set. A large number of mineralogists from many countries acted as session convenors, many of them developing suggestions which came from the Commissions and Working Groups of the IMA, and ultimately my email distribution list of all those who contributed to the running of the meeting included over a hundred names. Fourteen Edinburgh postgrads acted as cheery and efficient helpers during the meeting, and several Edinburgh colleagues helped with field trips. Because of unpredicted demand Norman Butcher ran a bus tour on three evenings to sites representing the scientific history of Edinburgh relevant to mineralogy. Brian Jackson used the resources of the Royal museum of Scotland to provide displays in the conference centre, not only of lovely minerals but of Edinburgh mineralogical memorabilia, including one of William Nicol's original home-made prisms, which we must all covet! *To all the many people who helped with the meeting, heartfelt thanks!*

In the end 798 delegates registered, of whom 86 were 'accompanying', we shared a half-day session with the European High Pressure Research Group, who happened to be meeting in Edinburgh at the same time, and our own student helpers were able to attend some of the scientific sessions, so that altogether 892 people took part. As you can see from my histogram, although the meeting certainly lived up to its 'international' aspirations, nearly 80% of registrants came from a quarter of the countries represented. The meeting was held in the expensive Edinburgh International Conference Centre, rather than using much cheaper University lecture halls, a decision taken by Min Soc Council almost six years ago. I had some doubts about this choice at the time, as did the Council of the IMA, which has a tradition of making meetings as cheap as possible, but with hindsight I think we were right to go for the very comfortable and state-of-the-art EICC. As the histogram shows, most of the delegates came from countries which are not truly hard up, and if IMA is to be a meeting of choice, from all the competing meetings that there are, it has to be attractive and memorable for mineralogists from the 'big' national communities first and foremost. Several of our distinguished North American guests commented on how pleasant

the EICC was, and it was certainly more relaxing and homely than the vast venues that EUG and AGU have to use. The EICC staff were efficient and helpful, and although not perfect, it seems there were fewer problems with electronic data projection (Powerpoint) than there often are. The cost of the centralized system was about £20 000 for the week, a budget item which simply didn't exist when we first booked the conference centre. Our main disappointment was with the high cost and poor quality of the food provided. In the end the caterers were subsidized by your Min Soc, because their contract meant that we made up any shortfall below what was with hindsight an unattainable level of sales. Make a mental note: should you find yourself organizing a meeting in Edinburgh, there are plenty of cheap and pleasant eateries close to EICC and delegates will vote with their feet.

The finances of the meeting were a real trial, and even as I write it is still not clear whether we shall have broken even, mainly because of unresolved issues over VAT. 74% of delegates registered for the end-March deadline which gave them reduced-rate registration. Of the remainder a number opted for paying the daily rate and 'cherry-picking' the meeting for the sessions of interest to them. It was disappointing, but perhaps understandable, that many UK participants took this route, and that little more than 10% of UK Min Soc membership attended at all. Of those who did, more than half were responsible for some aspect of the organization!

We made the meeting accessible to delegates from less developed countries through a bursary scheme, supported by the Mineralogical Society of America, Mineralogical Association of Canada, Società Italiana di Mineralogia e Petrologia, Mineralogical Society of Japan, Geological Society of Australia, Statoil, and by our own Min Soc. Some 70 delegates, about half from the FSU, had their registration fee waived under this scheme. The Société Française de Minéralogie et de Cristallographie and Deutsche Mineralogische Gesellschaft had schemes for disadvantaged workers in their own countries. We received a certain amount of criticism for not offering a 'student' registration rate, but I think this is misguided as in many countries postgrads can get meeting money and we would have ended up subsidizing the well-to-do. This involvement of world Min Socs in supporting the meeting was a new departure for IMA and something which to me seems important. IMA *belongs* to the international mineralogical community and exists to foster collaboration at all levels and between all countries. The support of the bigger Min Socs shows their commitment to this ideal, and we are very grateful for their support.

The scientific programme, based on eight parallel sessions each day and two extended poster sessions, was very full (too full, I was told, for some delegates) but no-one has to go to everything and for delegates who have travelled long distances only a full programme is acceptable. The plenary lectures, two in succession on most days, were universally excellent and the published versions made a very good special issue of *Journal of Mineral Sciences – Mineralogical Magazine* to which I hope students, among others, can be directed for an overview of modern mineralogy. A number of experienced participants commented on the high standard of the science in general, and this was pleasing because IMA has to accommodate delegates from out of the mainstream who may not have attended a big international meeting before. The very word 'international' carries particular clout in many developing countries and such meetings may be the only ones for which potential delegates can obtain funding.

IMA in the future

I stumbled into my IMA role. The question of the UK hosting the IMA general meeting in 2002 was mooted some time before I took my turn as Min Soc President from 1994-96. At a Council meeting someone said, 'Edinburgh's a nice place, lets have it there', and as a result I now find myself President of the IMA until its next General Meeting in Kobe, Japan in 2006. To be frank, back in 96 I knew very little about IMA. It seemed to burst into life every four years and hold a good meeting in an interesting venue, but in between did little, except sometimes to produce classification schemes that caused controversy and were often ignored. Its Commission on New Minerals and Mineral Names did an important and worthwhile job, but most of its other commissions seemed not to impinge on me as a practising mineralogist. In fact the word 'Commission' had an off-putting authoritarian ring, in some contrast to the informal air of our

own national meetings and highly successful international meetings such as the Goldschmidt geochemistry conferences and the Experimental Mineralogy and Petrology Group meetings.

Mineralogy is a robust and secure branch of Earth sciences which serves mankind in such a range of ways that its future is not in doubt. But it needs an international forum because for historical reasons going back to the 19th century a network of stand-alone national mineralogical societies developed, many with their own journals. This did not happen in the comparatively youthful field of geochemistry. In my view IMA needs to make its meetings as popular among Earth scientists as the relatively unbureaucratic Goldschmidt meetings undoubtedly are, while maintaining its rather special *international* role. Quite a large number of delegates, many from the developing world, came and shook my hand at the end of the Edinburgh meeting and thanked me (and implicitly all those who had helped in the enterprise) for an event they had clearly thoroughly enjoyed and from which they had gained greatly. This role is worth preserving. IMA has to be more active in promoting exchanges and information between the Min Socs of the world (whose subscriptions support it) and it needs to be more visible in the intervals between General Meetings. IMA has an elaborate and top-heavy constitution which locks it into a four-year cycle for even the simplest of changes, hardly the style of a dynamic outfit in the IT age. The outgoing President, Tony Naldrett, and the IMA Council, introduced changes in the constitution in Edinburgh which should help to ensure that in future its Commissions are more proactive and outward looking than they have been, and that changes can be made more rapidly.

We have also taken steps to ensure that IMA comes more into the public eye in the intervals between general meetings. We have proposed running 5 sessions at the joint EUG/EGS/AGU meeting in Nice in 2003 and 11 sessions at the 32nd IGC in Florence in 2004. The possibility of collaborating with other organizations in 2005 is being pursued. I personally find the distinction that has developed historically between mineralogy and geochemistry artificial and not a little damaging to both branches. We are running a competition (200 US\$ prize) for the design of an IMA logo (visit the IMA website at www.dst.unipi.it/ima for details). At the moment I am emerging from a period of convalescence, which of necessity followed the Edinburgh meeting, and I am indulging in the delights of research at ANU in Canberra. However, with the dynamic efforts of Maryse Ohnenstetter, our new IMA Secretary from CRPG, Nancy, France, and a determined Council, I think you will see changes in the role and impact of IMA in the next few years.

Number of registrants by country in which they work

