

York 2005 BMSS Conference

York is a lovely campus built around a (suspiciously green) pond giving the venue a peaceful and relaxed feel which sums up the BMSS meeting. Some might disagree here with being woken up at 3am every morning by the chattering ducks.

I spent the first part of the morning pretty nervous as I listened to the Maccoll Lecture by Bonner Denton talking about ion detection in mass and ion mobility spectrometers. So I appreciated the timetabling of having the next generation session immediately following this. Anneka made a very reassuring chair offering a calming and supportive influence over us. The standard of the talks was very high with some of my co-speakers appearing very comfortable on the podium. Brendan Pideaux was a deserved winner with his work using imaging matrix assisted laser desorption/ionisation. I found the audience to be very friendly not only in the lecture theatre but on the social scene too.

One of the benefits of taking part in conferences such as this gives us the chance to listen to talks on subjects we do not normally think twice about. I had a fleeting interest in ICP-MS a while ago which never materialised so took the opportunity to sit in on the inorganic/speciation session to realise the scope of this technique and was interested by the use in proteomics and toxin detection.

Programming of events on day 2 was a little frustrating with two of the sessions I was interested in clashing. That said I enjoyed what I saw in the biological mass spectrometry and proteomics session. Lars Konermann, the keynote speaker gave an interesting talk offering a different tactic to H/D exchange. The development of his **gadget** for pulsed deuteration of his electrosprayed sample for resolving intermediate folding stages of proteins and protein complexes opens a new door for studying structural dynamics. I spent the rest of the day looking for, and failing to talk to him about his work. In the same session I found myself not only enjoying but understanding Nick Polfers' talk on structural elucidation of gas-phase molecules by infra-red photodissociation spectroscopy.

The Plenary talks by David Clemmer and Graham Cooks were very inspirational. What can be achieved by refusing to stop at what seem to be the limits of our current technology is remarkable. David Clemmer aroused more than an ounce of envy when he listed the on-site facilities available to him. At an informal chat later he rubbed more salt into the wound by telling us how in the space of four months his group had an instrument designed, built and collecting preliminary data. He also admitted to being just a tad controversial with his 30ft IMSⁿ approach, but if the theory works..... In a similar vein Graham Cooks makes us use our imagination by utilising anything as a source for ions which can only be described as extremely cool! Some of which we'd like to replicate in our lab.

The finale of the conference proved to be an informative history lesson, although so much information was thrown at us I would have benefited from a mass spectrometry family tree in front of me. I'm always amazed by the advances made decades ago, from

elemental / isotopic analysis to use in organic chemistry and how manufacturers (much like today) spring from collaborations within academia. Ed Houghton was well qualified to talk further on this subject with his work in biological GC-MS. He spoke about how the study on insect pheromones on-going since the 1970's to MS use in drug surveillance in sport today has developed in parallel with the instrumentation.

I shouldn't forget the manufacturers / suppliers. It's always good to catch up with faces I've got to know over the years. Having a session for them to talk about their developing technologies is make life so much easier for the rest of us as it's all to hand. I confess that this time I did cut down on the number of prize draws I entered to avoid being on too many mailing lists.

All in all I can safely say I had a great time and not much in the way of liver damage either!!