



## Obituary

# Dr Ian Wilson, 1943–2023

Simon J. Kemp  and Stephen Hillier 



Without a doubt, Ian was one of the legendary geologists and communicators of the industrial minerals world and made long-lasting friendships wherever he went, which seemed to be everywhere! He was also a stalwart of the Clay Minerals Group, for which he served as secretary for a 6 year period during the 1990s. As recently as 2022 he presented at the group's 75th Jubilee meeting at the Natural History Museum, London.

After service in the Army and a short teaching career, Ian studied geology at London University (Kinston College of Technology) for his BSc (1964–1967), followed by geochemical research at the University of Leeds for his MSc (1967–1968) and PhD (1968–1971). After 3 years' service with the Institute of Geological Sciences in London (IGS; now the British Geological Survey, BGS), Ian joined English China Clays (ECC; now Imerys) based in Cornwall. Ian worked at ECC for 28 years in many countries of the world both as a geologist and in establishing new kaolin and ground calcium carbonate operations (Fig. 1). Following the demise of the Imerys geological department in 2001, Ian set up his own consultancy. He stood

out not only because of his expert knowledge, affability, willingness to mentor and, frankly, great company, but also because he was able to professionally disseminate with seeming ease, clarity and in equal high measure both the technical and commercial aspects of any industrial mineral he was working on. Such a skill is crucial to understanding the supply/demand challenges underpinning the industrial minerals business, and, notably, Ian was most generous in his sharing of this knowledge.

In recent years, although his work rate somewhat relaxed, he nevertheless kept active with projects in Mongolia, China, Australia and the USA, contributing articles, and he was a mainstay at IMFORMED's MagForum conferences.

Ian's speciality mineral interests included kaolin, special clays, calcium carbonate, magnesite, talc and barite, and right up until very recently he remained in high demand as a consultant or advisor to many leading players producing and/or developing projects in these fields. Halloysite, driven by a surge in activity around innovative technological applications of this nanotubular clay mineral, was one of Ian's most current passions, and he played a major part in the commercial assessment of many halloysite deposits, such as the Dragon Mine and Halloysite Hills in Utah. Additionally, he enabled and promoted fundamental research on this fascinating clay mineral *via* his unique and comprehensive collections of halloysite samples from all around the world.

Two classic trademarks to Ian's well-received conference presentations were the sheer amount of detail and information imparted, along with a generous, and usually pictorial, acknowledgement to any local assistance, usually complemented by mention of some relevant cultural aspect, be it cuisine, drink, landmark or personality. This naturally made for a highly informative and entertaining talk every time.

Talking of China, one of Ian's great loves was of course travel, along with family, geology, tennis and field hockey (he was still playing at 76! He was President of Cornwall Hockey Association during 2006–2020).

Since his first visit to Cornwall in 1964 Ian loved the south-west of England, and he and his wife, Kate, lived there for 47 years before moving to Hertfordshire in 2020 to be nearer their children (Helen and Richard) and grandchildren.

His professional career at ECC/Imerys saw Ian seconded as General Manager to Brazil for three years (1981–1984) and to Spain for a year as Joint Managing Director of CEDESCA (1984–1985). But during that time and throughout his career as a consultant he inspected mineral deposits and projects in all corners of the Earth (90 countries visited by 2018).

China in particular featured highly on his travel agenda, both under ECC and for many years as an independent consultant. So

**Cite this article:** Kemp SJ, Hillier S. Dr Ian Wilson, 1943–2023. *Clay Minerals*. <https://doi.org/10.1180/clm.2024.22>



**Figure 1.** Ian ‘*in situ*’ (i.e. doing what he enjoyed most), out in the field inspecting industrial mineral deposits surrounded by willing and like-minded colleagues. Ian (third from left), checking out a kaolin deposit, probably in Maoming, Guangdong Province.

much so that he maintained an apartment in Shenzhen to help facilitate his extensive visits around the country – Ian’s traveller’s tales were legendary, as was his knowledge of Chinese mines and minerals.

Ian was due to make a presentation the 2023 MagForum Conference in Baveno, Italy. Although he was desperate to attend, he was unable owing to illness, and sadly died 2 weeks later. Professional to the end, Ian still found time to send in his presentation for the delegates: 120 slides crammed with all you need to know about brucite, huntite and hydromagnesite ... plus

squeezing in an illustrated note praising the famous Lanzhou beef noodle dish of Gansu Province!

Ian’s friendly and expert presence among the global industrial minerals community will be sorely missed. But his legacy of well-researched papers, articles and presentations, and above all our fond memories of him, will live on.

This memoriam for Ian is based largely on a heart-warming piece by his friend of many years, Mike O’Driscoll, publisher of IMFORMED. You can read Mike’s document and see more photos of Ian at <http://imformed.com/dr-ian-wilson-1943-2023/#prettyPhoto>.