

# Woven Structural Formwork

*Mission Leader: Dr Julie Soden (University of Ulster)*

*Mission Partners: Professor Remo Pedreschi (University of Edinburgh), Professor Pete Walker and Dr Martin Ansell (University of Bath)*

## About this Case Study

The main objectives of the cross-disciplinary team were focused on the use of textile in construction, including:

- 1) use as the key load-bearing element within permanent fabric formworks;
- 2) reinforced natural fibre systems for building components;
- 3) applications of geo-textiles in large-scale infrastructure.

The objectives were discussed and developed with expert contributions and during a series of one or two-day meetings led to a dynamic exchange of knowledge and ideas. The team met with key experts in the various fields, Prof Mark West, C.A.S.T. University of Manitoba, Mercedes Alcock (product innovation team) at the Composites Innovation Centre, Winnipeg and Dr Richard Brachman of the Geo-Engineering Centre, Queens University Kingston. Visits were also made to the Alternative Village, University of Manitoba and Red River College, Manitoba. Discussions considered the need for enhanced structural performance through the emergence of new textile assemblages, improvement of disaster area infrastructure and how concrete, hemp-lime and other in-fill materials inform the process (and design) of construction, both practically and conceptually.

## Fast Facts

- Using fabric formwork enables structurally efficient, custom shaped and aesthetically appealing concrete members to be formed.
- Lightweight textile formwork is suitable for concrete.
- Dewatering of fresh concrete during casting improves strength and durability of hardened material.
- Geotextiles suffer from elongation, buckling and rupture when stressed in buried containment infrastructure.
- A high performing Geotextile reduces amount of aggregate required.

## About this Mission

The main objective of the mission was to discuss and assess the potential benefits for developing new, advanced textiles for formwork systems with a variety of in-fill materials, to improve construction efficiency and structural performance and durability. Building components such as columns, beams, vaults, panel products, natural fibre composites and moulded architectures were studied as exemplars of good practice. The mission team learned of their achievement and attributes in terms of fabrication, economy of process and structural performance and how these could be further enhanced using advanced textiles. Following the visit to the Geo-engineering Centre at Queens University Kingston, the improved design of buried geo-composite and geo-textile containment materials emerged as a focus applicable to the mission.

A two-day engagement with Prof Mark West and his team from the CAST Centre and architecture colleagues enabled a hands-on exchange with the mission team. Issues discussed included identifying the key characteristics and properties of a range of textile reinforcements, natural fibre performance, selection and variation of in-fill materials, impact

**“From reinforced wall structures and conceptual formwork to new containment infrastructure, weaving is a key technology enabling new solutions to be realised for the built environment”**



of formwork and geotextile required in the build process, and finally the design approach. Responding to requirements for material efficiency, improved integral strength and adapting established formwork techniques to produce larger scale span structures, new ideas for in-filled formwork through the use of load-bearing textile reinforcement evolved.

The mission team presented their individual research expertise (3D woven and load-bearing textile design, the properties and analysis of natural fibre composites, processes and methods in formwork concrete and sustainable building practices using straw-bale) with specific relevance to the mission topic. Discussions with the Composites Innovation Centre focused on test procedures for natural fibres and with the mission's textile focus, concentrated on the textile supply chain and material sourcing in North America, economical ways to improve the structural performance of non-woven natural fibre mats and the development of natural fibre composite products for dwellings.

The team also met with Dr Richard Brachman and Prof. Ian Moore from the Geo-engineering Centre at Queens University Kingston, who highlighted the performance shortcomings in geo-composite materials for underground containment structures that result in subsequent economic problems. The potential in an improved textile geo-composite solution was realised. The visit included a tour of the buried infrastructure test laboratory.

## Benefits/Impacts of the Mission

The LimesNet funding was critical to bring the cross-disciplinary group of experts together. Approaching the topic from a materials (design) perspective generated debate about the use of 'ubiquitous' commercially available materials, the issues regarding the introduction of new materials and processes to the construction industry and the need to understand the client user group. Allied discussions revolved around the anthropology of dwellings, producing structures for the varied terrain and climatic conditions, and inhabitant behaviour. Other discussions brought in an interest of digital 'tagging' building materials and systems to record their design, construction and history.

There is a significant impact on non-research groups and a definite benefit to a wide range of inhabitants for the development of these new formwork materials, particularly in disaster relief areas, areas prone to flood, building on reclaimed land etc.

## Outputs

- Mark West invited to attend the next fabric formwork workshop at the University of Edinburgh, along with the other members of the mission.
- Prototypes developed at Ulster (patent pending) to be used in trials at University of Edinburgh and University of Bath.
- Invited to submit collaborative research paper at Geotechnical Engineering Conference, Montreal, Canada 2013.
- Contact with Red River College will lead to proposals for some collaborative study projects.
- Potential contribution to new composite product for Alternative Village.
- Attracted a number of interested Industrial parties.

## Follow up activities

- New directions in formwork design, geo-composite and reinforcing fibre structures for either feasibility study or full grant proposal status.
- The funding strategy to target collaborative AHRC / EPSRC initiatives with strategies to collaborate with International partners.
- Develop both short-term speculative research projects (with specific manufactured outcomes).
- Develop cross-discipline practical workshops for students to escalate the ideas and raise overall profile of the materials.
- Apply for funding an International PhD in a formwork related topic.
- Collaborative conference papers are planned once prototype and workshop outputs are complete.
- Continue to seek additional committed industrial and NGO humanitarian partners.

[www.limesnet.org](http://www.limesnet.org).

If you have any queries, comments or ideas about any aspect of LimesNet, please email [limesnet@bath.ac.uk](mailto:limesnet@bath.ac.uk), or contact:

Pete Walker  
Principal Investigator  
Dept of Architecture & Civil Engineering  
University of Bath  
BA2 7AY

Tel: 01225 386646  
Email: [P.Walker@bath.ac.uk](mailto:P.Walker@bath.ac.uk)

Eloise Spark  
Network Co-ordinator  
Research Development Support Office  
University of Bath  
BA2 7AY

Tel: 01225 386477  
Email: [E.Spark@bath.ac.uk](mailto:E.Spark@bath.ac.uk)

# The Potential of Advanced Textiles for Fabric Formwork

Artist Name: Julie Brennan  
Output Number: 3 of 3  
Output Title: The Potential of  
Advanced Textiles for Fabric Formwork  
Main Publication: Journal paper  
Year: Pending -2013

This journal paper discusses the development of fabric formwork from a textile perspective, where the adoption of more sophisticated textile construction proposes the manufacture of new types of flexible and embedded fabric formworks for potential use in the construction Industry. These include fibre systems for reinforcing building components, containment structures arranged with open cavities to accept in-fill and layered geo-textiles. In-filled with concrete, aggregate or earth, tailored performance characteristics built-into the textile design can enhance the overall properties of formwork elements. The developments provide key pointers for the progression of the discipline and automation of the process.

The journal paper describes the collaborative outcomes of an International research mission funded by EPSRC to Canada in 2012. Entitled ' Woven Structural Formwork'. The author led a multidiscipline team of experts to engage with International leaders in the Fabric Formwork field with the objective of developing advanced woven textiles for use as new structural formwork containment and reinforcement systems to improve construction efficiency, structural performance and durability. A driving force was to minimise the use of supporting timber frameworks and to provide innovative and sustainable solutions for the built environment in the UK as well as resettlement dwellings for displaced persons in areas of natural disaster.

Limes Net – Low Impact Materials and Innovative Engineering Solutions for the Built Environment is an EPSRC funded International Network led by the University of Bath aimed at developing novel and interdisciplinary research activities in the future development of low carbon construction materials and technologies in ground and structural engineering.

The journal is pending publication in Aug 2013.

This mission case study can be found here:

[http://limesnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/IMF003\\_finalLimesnetCase-study\\_Soden.pdf](http://limesnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/IMF003_finalLimesnetCase-study_Soden.pdf)

The main Limesnet website: <Http://www.limesnet.org>

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# Dissemination: Journal, Case Study and Research Workshops

The journal paper is due to be published in the Institute of Civil Engineering Journal of Construction Materials in Aug 2013 as a special Limesnet issue.

The cross discipline mission team included Prof Pete Walker, BRE Trust Chair in Innovative Construction Materials at University of Bath, Prof Remo Pedreschi, Professor of Architectural Technology at University of Edinburgh and Dr Martin Ansell, Reader in Materials at University of Bath. In engagement with Prof Mark West, the primary global expert in the formwork field, the team visited the Centre for Architectural Structures and Technology (CAST) Centre at University of Manitoba, Canada, the Composites Innovation Centre, Winnipeg Canada, The Alternative (sustainable building) Village, Manitoba and the Geotechnical Engineering Centre at Queens University Kingston, Canada.

The mission and subsequent outputs were endorsed and published by EPSRC and the Limes-net board. Further dissemination took place in May, June and July 2012 through 3 day interactive research workshops at Bath Innovation Centre, the Formwork Workshop at Edinburgh University, The Limes Net Conference (Bath, 200+ delegates), and through published case study (see below). The work also generated secondary and tertiary impact through substantial membership of the Limes Net Network, via the website ([www.limesnet.org](http://www.limesnet.org)), the limes Net Wiki and in electronic form.

## Mission Case Study:

**LimesNet International Mission Fund: IMP003 - CASE STUDY**

### Woven Structural Formwork

Mission Leader: Dr Julie Rubin (University of Ulster)  
Mission Partners: Professor Remo Pedreschi (University of Edinburgh), Professor Pete Walker and Dr Martin Ansell (University of Bath)

**About this Case Study**

The main objectives of the cross-disciplinary team were focused on the use of textile (woven) formwork, including:

- 1) Use as the key load-bearing element within permanent fabric formwork.
- 2) Improved repeat form systems for building components.
- 3) Applications of geo-textiles in large-scale infrastructure.

The objectives were discussed and developed with expert contributions and during a series of one-on-one meetings, led by a dynamic exchange of knowledge and ideas. The team met with key experts in the various fields: Prof Mark West, U.S.A.E. University of Manitoba, Minnesota (local product innovation team at the Composites Innovation Centre, Winnipeg) and Dr Richard Bushman of the Geo-engineering Centre, Queen's University Kingston. Visits were also made to the Alternative Village, University of Manitoba and Fall River College, Manitoba. Discussions considered the need for enhanced structural performance through the emergence of new textile technologies, improvement of standard infrastructure and how concrete, hemp fibre and other in-fill materials, inform the process (and weight) of construction, both practically and conceptually.

**About this Mission**

The main objective of the mission was to discuss and explore the potential benefits for developing new, reinforced fabric formwork systems with a variety of in-fill materials, to improve construction efficiency and structural performance and durability. Building components such as columns, beams, walls, panel products, re-use fibre composites and modular structures were studied as examples of joint practice. The mission team formed of their attachment and attention to terms of fabrication, economy of process and structural performance and how these could be further enhanced using advanced textiles. Following the visit to the Geo-engineering Centre at Queen's University Kingston, the proposed design of buried geo-composite and geo-textile containment materials emerged as a focus applicable to the mission.

A five-day engagement with Prof Mark West and his team from the CAST Centre and architectural colleagues enabled a hands-on exchange with the mission team. Issues discussed included identifying the key characteristics and properties of a range of textile formwork systems, including fibre performance, selection and variation of materials, fit and fastenings.

**"From reinforced wall structures and conceptual formwork to new containment infrastructure, weaving is a key technology enabling new solutions to be realised for the built environment"**

**Fast Facts**

- Using fabric formwork enables structurally efficient, custom shaped and aesthetically appealing concrete members to be formed.
- Lightweight textile formwork is suitable for concrete.
- Deaerating of fresh concrete during casting improves strength and durability of hardened material.
- Geotextiles buffer from elongation, buckling and rupture when stressed in buried containment infrastructure.
- A high performing Geotextile reduces amount of aggregate required.

**Benefits/Impacts of the Mission**

The LimesNet funding was critical to bring the cross-disciplinary group of experts together. Approaching the topic from a materials design perspective, generated debate about the use of ultra-thin, commercially available materials, the issues regarding the introduction of new materials and processes to the construction industry and the need to understand the client user group. Aired discussions revolved around the architecture of design, producing structures for the varied terrain and climatic conditions, and practical formwork. Other discussions brought in an interest of digital 'tagging' building materials and systems to record their design, construction and history.

**Follow up activities**

- New directions in formwork design, geo-composites and reinforcing fibre structures for other heavily-studied or full grant personal study.
- The leading strategy to target collaborative AERC / EPSRC initiatives with strategies to collaborate with industrial partners.
- Develop both short term speculative research projects (with specific manufacturing outputs) for students to explore the ideas and assess overall profile of the material.
- Apply for funding an international PhD in a formwork related topic.
- Collaborative construction projects are planned (with prototype and workshop outputs are complete).
- Continue to seek additional committed industrial and R&D funders/partners.

[www.limesnet.org](http://www.limesnet.org)

**Key Team and Contacts:**

<b>Julie Rubin</b> Principal Investigator Dept of Architecture & Civil Engineering University of Bath BA2 9PY Tel: 01225 386466 Email: J.Rubin@Bath.ac.uk	<b>Mark West</b> Network Co-ordinator Research Development Support Office University of Bath BA2 9AY Tel: 01225 386477 Email: E.Swan@Bath.ac.uk
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This partnership received financial support from the LimesNet network, funded by an EPSRC funded research award of developing new and producing manufacturing products in the built environment of low temperature of low temperature construction materials and systems for the built environment. For further information, please refer to [www.limesnet.org](http://www.limesnet.org).

All the funded Limesnet missions can be found here:

<http://limesnet.org/research-and-scope/international-mission-fund/library/>

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## Research Workshops:

**Workshop 3: Geo-Materials**

The programme included nine presentations, including three from LimesNet mission team demonstrating a wide variety of uses for geo-materials in construction, from new forms for railway ballast to seismic support for rammed earth buildings. Stimulating programme by Andrew Heath (University of Bath), Dr John Provis (University of Melbourne), Dr Julie Shi and Professor William Power (University of Southampton). General comments and key 1 included:

- Need to understand different soils in global context, therefore appropriate of use geo-material for that soil.
- Cost price analysis to prove competitiveness.
- Problem of salination, especially within historic built environment.
- Increasing use in UK of geo-polymers.
- More appropriate use of on-site or off-site production
- Limited research funding in geo-materials such geo-polymers.

Themes forming the agenda of the open-space workshop on geo-materials were:

Alkalis Activated Materials as low carbon binders	Improved textile reinforcements	Low density geomaterials
Carbon sequestration in earth building foundations	LCA for low carbon building materials	Real life durability requirements
Geo-materials in architecture	Low energy construction unit manufacture	Design based methodologies
Reusing sludge as a building material	Foundations using too much concrete	Bugs, bacteria bugs

**LimesNet Research Conference 2012**

**Workshop 1: Advanced Composites and Nano-Materials**

Presentations were delivered by representatives from industry, academia and not-for-profit organisations, across a wide range of themes relating to advanced composites and nano-materials in construction. The programme included 12 presentations, including three from LimesNet mission teams. These include notable presentations by Dr Mariela de Miguel (Technische Universitat Delft), Lincoln Tsing (from Royal HaskoningDHV/Intracore), and Dr Mark Evernden and Dr Antony Darby (both University of Bath). Comments and key points raised in the workshop presentations and discussions on day 1 included:

- Lack of understanding about the impact damage on FRP and coatings, including both physical and environmental (in particular for marine and wet applications).
- Concerns about a lack of understanding about how mortars and coatings react to surfaces, especially on timber and heritage surfaces, as these are more complex to model.
- Nano-coatings are often seen as the 'answer' for everything, but more work is required to understand their use, whether this is single or multi-functional.

Themes forming the agenda of the open-space workshop on advanced composites and nano-materials were as follows:


Self-healing materials, and durability	Health monitoring	Multi-functional coatings for facades
What are the best applications for Nano-Materials?	Structural reliability and material characterisation	Composites for fabric formwork
All in one coatings	Reliable methods of joining pultruded FRP sections	Construction uses for graphene
Composites for impact	Heat resistant adhesives for bonding FRP to timber	What are the barriers to market penetration?
Do we need to know anything more about FRP strengthening?	Compatibility, materials, and the environment	Nano materials in FRP
Stiff natural fibre composites	Insulation materials	Composites in ground engineering

**Summary of workshop:**

Discussions on self-healing materials and durability identified a need to develop benchmarking based on burning of existing FRP materials and structures. Construction sector should consider lessons learnt from the off-shore industry, including ground surface in middle soil regions and thermal cycling effect of environment on durability, degradation of material on structural performance, scope for self-healing coatings.

The fire protection of FRPs for both strengthening and as structural systems was identified in discussions, as was the potential for the use of fabric technology to lead the use of fabric formwork developments. Related factors included resistance against stiffness and strength degradation, potential use of protective surface or coating, and the use of mortars for strengthening with fibres. Moving forward key research objectives were identified: coatings or mortars, fire resistance requirements, fabric formwork opportunities, potential for use of nano-scale additives, and understand mortar resistance to fire as replacement for adhesives.

Discussion in the workshop also covered broader barriers to market penetration. Key challenges highlighted need to convince contractors to use composites, develop culture of 'learn by doing', define role, and improve design a realistic cost penetration, specify accurately life cycle costs, and further design guidance for use of composites. Contracts should change to highlight and acknowledge the benefits of composites in construction. Define life-cycle costs, health monitoring can develop a cost model for life cycle evaluation.



- Mission team formwork trials at Bath and Edinburgh May-July 2012
- Workshop weaving trials at Ulster 28 May- 12 June 2012
- University Edinburgh formwork workshop – 6-15 June 2012
- Limesnet Conference –10-13 July 2012, Bath

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Year: Pending -2013

## Research context: Advanced Textile formwork

The mission researchers investigated where improvements to the fabric formwork process could be readily identified through the introduction of advanced or specifically tailored textile reinforcement.

Learning how current formworks are utilised for construction and identifying the 'ideal' formwork material characteristics would help establish a specification for future materials. The team investigated textile constructions produced at UU and debated their potential for advanced structural formwork particularly for more challenging constructions like vaults, curvatures and rapid deployment wall systems. The impact of In-fill materials such as concrete, aggregate, earth and rubble were considered as were their use for Geo-textile buried infrastructure and containment. Reportage, dissemination, future research collaborations, and workshops were a key feature of the project.



The mission findings - Advantages of textile systems:

- Improved structural performance with specific 'load' zones could be achieved by designing a robust multiple layer or cavity construction that increases compressive strength and prevents racking.
- Robust fabric resists against high tension forces of in-fill, aggregate and the hydro-static pressure of concrete during installation. It aims to provide increased resistance to uneven in-fill settling.
- The textile cavity product provides a predominantly timber-free, free-standing solution which eliminates the reliance on substantial timber frameworks and sacrificial timber during installation.
- Textile structures offer potential for scaffold and gabion structures for flood prone areas with seasonal floods and natural disasters.
- Breathable wall performance through fibre choice can be achieved.
- Compatible coating agents/ lime renders improve fire resistance and guard against insect invasion and fungal growth.
- Easily transportable to inhospitable terrain and particularly suited for economies where natural disaster has eliminated all vegetation.

A very large collaborative EPSRC Limesnet research proposal was submitted to the Ground and Engineering Research call in Oct 2011 (led by Univ. Bath) of which the author was a co-investigator entitled 'Intelligent Concrete: Fabric formwork for Lower Impact Construction'. The proposal was recommended for resubmission with a smaller focus at a later date.

## Mission and workshop Evidence

Centre for Architectural Structures and Technology (CAST Centre), University of Manitoba, Canada – Prof Mark West  
Composites Innovation Centre, Winnipeg, Canada - Mercedes Alcock (product development)  
The Alternative sustainable Village, University of Manitoba, Canada  
Geoengineering Centre, Queens University Kingston - Dr Richard Brachman



## Factual Information

This project was funded by EPSRC through the Low Impact Materials and Innovative Engineering Solutions for the Built Environment (Limesnet) Network, PI Prof Pete Walker, University of Bath, Nov 2011-Sept2012, International Mission Funding, £8,000.

Progressive 'formwork-specific' textile prototypes were designed to simultaneously minimise the use of timber, utilize sustainable in-fill (earth, hemp-lime) and produce efficient forms with lower environmental impact within one system. Their unique characteristics are described in a recent GB Patent application awaiting examination (PCT/GB2012/0528513, Nov 2012)

Soden has also secured Invest Northern Ireland 'Proof of Principle' Funding in conjunction with UU Office of Innovation (2012).

Please note author Soden is now using her married name (Brennan) and outputs on the UIR will be found under Brennan.