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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Keynote Closing Address for EAC12: The Worldwide State of Experimental Archaeology and the Agenda for the Future

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Linda Hurcombe and Peter Inker gave the closing talk at EAC12 amazing conference. They did it in the same way as at the conference: Peter was online in the United States and Linda was online in the United Kingdom. The conversations between the two of them have been running throughout the live conference. They have both talked about the need to do things differently

in a world where there is climate change to think about. The new format has been both a challenge and a chance for new opportunities.

> “I think EXARC has really set a new idea of what you can do and it is not one that I've seen done in any other field, let alone in archaeology. I just commend them for having the vision to do it this way and to give us this set of experiences, with the help of so much organization and support behind the scenes.

Linda: The conference was originally planned to be held physically in Exeter as a celebration of both the work of EXARC over 20 years and also 20 years of our masters programme in Experimental Archaeology at Exeter. Though the conference has become rather different, it is still a memorable celebration. To start off there were some broad overviews of this global online conference. There were 133 papers and more than 1,300 participants from 72 countries registered for the conference. Most of these are based in Europe and North America, but there are growing numbers from elsewhere: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Ghana, India, Israel, Japan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tanzania, and Turkey and more. On the average of the days up until 1st April 2021, there have been about 7,500 views per day of the presentations, which is an amazing achievement. One question is just how much a conference like this is going to result in different ways of doing things. Do online conferences have a more lasting legacy? It will be very interesting to see in the coming weeks, months, and even years, what happens to the material put together for this conference, which is an astonishing resource with detail, variation, common themes, and setting agendas for what comes next.

Peter: EAC12 really was a spectacular conference. Coming into the conference we did not know how it was going to unfold. We were working in a new virtual environment and in a new format. Ultimately, it’s been a massive success. The number of papers that we had the opportunity to hear over the course of the past couple of days has been astounding – far more than the average conference. The fact that we can also revisit them is a game changer. At a normal face-to-face conference, we are often unable to hear all the papers we want. Here we can go back and hear everything. It bakes-in longevity, meaning that we can re-watch papers and keep them live in our everyday research and work. The engagement with the conference was enhanced by the lively Discord chat, with over 12 channels hosting special interest groups. It was a terrific place for people to connect and chat with people from 72 countries and every continent. That is impressive, and something that is not usual for even the biggest of conferences. With regard to the papers, there were a couple of areas that were really important. There was an overwhelming number of experimental papers, highlighting both machine and physical experimentation that complemented each other. Alongside these there were other important themes such as social responsibility, and pedagogy, as well as my particular interest in the sensory aspects of archaeology.

Linda: We set some themes down in the opening section and within this roller coaster of time zones, we started off with Pascale Barnes as EXARC chair and Richard Osgood and Eline Schotsmans papers. Those papers picked up the themes of new ways of doing a conference, meeting UN sustainability goals and flagging some of the future and current benefits of EXARC membership. Richard Osgood raised mental wellbeing and mental health and the way in which practical engagement can help, a point made in several other papers later on. The way experimental work can enable subjects to link together was very evident in Eline Schotsmans' paper, where there are mutual benefits between archaeology and forensics, and also showed that experiments can test methods. She mentioned checks for cadaver dogs so that their effectiveness at identifying bodies could be tested - 'aroma testing' that used sensory experiences in a different way. This past year has seen the death of Professor John Coles, who wrote the key books on experimental archaeology, so it was very appropriate to start the whole conference with the hour sponsored by the Prehistoric Society in his memory. It focussed on John's interests and, in keeping with his desire to help early career researchers, we had wonderful papers from Olga Palacios, Lauren Pitchford and Johnny Crockett. Many others at the conference were also presenting papers for the first time. EXARC has proved to be an excellent and very supportive forum for doing this which is commendable. People have talked about how well organized it has been. There have been people in the background working magic on all of the technology and the different channels for discussion. As well as using technology to get around some of the present day problems of not being able to meet and travel in the normal way, we have papers featuring 3D modelling and other high-tech approaches such as recording and research tools.

> *Superb session chairing - I'm really blown away by EAC12 - it's just stunning. I think it's a model for the future of conferences, and EXARCs work on EAC12 shows other more massive organisations SAA, EAA, etc -this is how you do it. I'd say a superb looking swan with a lot of frantic paddling underwater.*
>
> Aidan O'Sullivan

Peter: The EXARC conference has been able to show how relevant experimenting with ancient technologies and behaviours can be made to the modern world. This is especially the case with sustainability, for instance how working with ancient technologies can develop sustainable tools for today as with Dzwiza's paper. How does the research we do play into broader sustainability? This speaks to worldwide conference as a place where we can talk about different projects and how the interplay can benefit us all. Comis' paper exploring the application of the Singapore Statement for Research Integrity reinforced the importance of including ethics in our experiments, reminding us that they have to be made relevant by placing them within the ethical and moral framework of the modern world.

Linda: Yes – the interplay of relevance to modern concerns is a development that we can take further. As always, EXARC has got plans to do just that. Next year's conference, in Butser, is going to look at sustainability issues, but there will be a way to pick up some of those important points. To pick out more of these themes both Bill Schindler's paper on modern nutrition and looking at different ways of dealing with the problems in our food and supply chains, and Naomi Sykes and Sean Doherty dealing with perception of animals and using invasive species to open up debates on 'alien' versus 'native' in the modern world. These show that what we take for granted may not have long roots, and we can re-think some aspects. The perception of crafts also need re-thinking. There is a privileging - certainly in a lot of the western world - of intellectual work above work with the hands, which is wrong. You do not leave your head behind when you work with your hands. You actually, do your best work when you put them both together. One of the things that I think has not been mentioned as a theme, but is one of the themes that I really want to address here, is the idea of working with craftspeople and traditional crafts as often these are dwindling or are being resurrected. This is a key part of saving those crafts and the intimate knowledge of the environment for the future and possibly giving the people who are trying to keep those crafts alive, a better way of earning a living in the modern world. Just as we save various species because we recognize that once they are gone it is a loss to everybody on the planet, this is also the case with some of the craft work and the way in which it connects people with local or suitable wood/building traditions, plant management and animals, both for exploitation as food and also for crafts. There is a holistic sustainability agenda and a way of marshalling the resources of EXARC to take this agenda forward into the wider world.

> *Thank you EXARC for an amazing conference. And the wonderful experience continues - so many videos still to see and links to follow and new friends all over the world to connect with. Thank you so much for your brilliant organisation - a truly global conference.*
>
> Sue Heaser

Peter: Hands-on craft experience was shown to be a valuable teaching arena, especially for kinaesthetic learners. We saw some interesting papers, from Hodgkiss, Nicolay, and Panachuk, all of whom used real-world craft experiences as teachable moments, unplanned opportunities for effortless learning. This has moved archaeology outside the academic arena, making it relevant to working tradesmen and women. More broadly it has also connected archaeology to the general public who can begin to understand the past and appreciate why humans behaved in the way they did. This point was accentuated by Osgoods' wounded warrior paper', that emphasised the benefits of getting people involved in handling, working, and manufacturing objects. It enabled them to develop their own personal skills and an understanding of archaeology, as well as broader sustainability practices. This was echoed

in Schindler's paper that focused on the modern relevance of identifying our food sources and the appropriate ways of processing food. His paper also spoke to the sensory nature of the past, touching on taste as an aspect of the past. This was also visible in the papers of Stull on cheese making, Verberg's paper on beer and Mariani's paper on Iron Age drink. They all raise the question of whether and how we can develop a notion of what the sensory environment was for people in the past.

Linda: Let's not forget the paper on cider as well. Because that often gets forgotten.

Peter: I also was excited by a couple of papers that spoke to other sensory aspects, such as vision. Pitchford's use of 3D virtual renders to examine lighting levels in caves was fascinating, as was the use of digital technology in Unhammer's paper on 4D recording strategies, which has a direct relevance and application to archaeology, archaeological recording and the replication of experimentation.

Linda: Needham also talked about light and the way in which that played out on some of the things that he was discussing. Further to the theme of light, there were many papers that addressed colour and sometimes the transformation of colour by fire. There were papers on quartz and ochres changed by fire, and also ostrich eggshells transformed into rainbow colours due to heating.

Peter: It is fascinating that we're beginning to engage with the experiential nature of archaeology through experiment, for instance the experiential nature of time as a component of an event, like manufacturing or building. Romeo Pitone's paper on acoustic soundscapes developed this, using computers in a new way to both create a reconstruction, and use that to understand how variations in the structures affect the way sound is reflected and perceived. These new ways of using computers hold an exciting future for reconstructive and experimental archaeology.

Linda: Claire Walton's paper also mentioned that when they rebuild the new version of their Neolithic house at Butser, they are going to put up a board with several alternatives, just to show that this is not a fixed 'one and only' interpretation, but one choice from multiple possibilities. Kate Shear's paper on giving shared authority to the visitor to engage them, was also about multiple possibilities. Just adding a question, 'what would you put in?' – to furnish her virtual roundhouse - and then having that discussion as part of visitor engagement, was a really powerful way of going forward.

> *All I can say is that I am totally speechless for the amount of work, in silence, you and your team did! You created an extraordinary resource for everyone in our field- It will long last! It will take me weeks to go through all of it. I am honoured to be part of an*

association that has this incredible output and outstanding quality! Be very proud! I mean it!

Anita Radini

Peter: This again emphasises the relevancy of Walton's paper, juxtaposing reality against visitors' concepts, comparing fixed versions of the past with the experimental nature of research, multiple concepts and testing. She indicated that these are not only compatible, but they are actually complementary.

Linda: There are certainly things that we have seen visually that are a really good example of the phenomenon of synaesthesia, where stimulating one sense triggers connecting responses in the other senses. You see food on screen and your mouth starts watering, or you have a sense that you are there and that must taste or smell good. Just playing on those virtual connections is something that I have been really interested in and bringing 'yes, do touch!' into a lot more of the traditional museum spectrum as well.

Peter: It seems this is the way forward. We have an audience who are asking to be part of the museum. The popularity of TV programmes about archaeology, such as Time Team in the 1990s and even as far back as 'living in the past' in the 1970s, proved there is a genuine appetite among the public to engage with museums and be a part of the process.

Linda: Yes, having that dialogue out front, rather than pretending that we know all the answers is important.

Peter: This speaks to the ethics of archaeology. We have to be honest about what we're doing and be forthright in terms of what we do know, what we don't know, what is supposition or theory.

Linda: Throughout the conference there are papers on standard archaeological categories of materials, but these are extending our thinking so not just pottery but a wider sense of clay; stone as tools and ornaments; and a wide range of organic materials from plants and animals, with crosscutting themes such as textiles, with bark cloth as a great addition. Many of these papers are coming as crossovers, where the loom weights in clay reveal something about the textiles that are not often found, wear-traces are complexes of manufacturing use and post-depositional traces; there are not just stone and metal tools but also bone, antler and shell ones. Some experiments (e.g. extracting quartz and copper ore) deal with the methods of extracting raw materials using fire but not simply as how these materials were exploited, but also documenting what kinds of evidence these activities would leave behind and identifying the characteristics which would allow archaeologists to more easily recognise these practices. This is about improving techniques of discovery and recording, showing us

what we might be missing and training up archaeological eyes and specialists to identify these landscape features as a first step to better protect them.

> *This has been a spectacularly well organized conference, and everyone who helped organize it should feel very proud of themselves. The use of pre-recorded videos, and integrating discord as a way for attendees to interact with each other went above and beyond. I hope anyone else who attended can learn from this for any of their own events.*
>
> Megan Bystricky

Peter: The really interesting point here is the holistic approach - one that is not too narrowly focused on a specific area of technology or reconstruction. To understand that each one of those artefacts is part of an assemblage of material, part of a broader constellation of assemblages within a community and part of changing societal behaviour. So instead of isolating these objects we also step back and realize that everything is connected as part of broader human behaviour.

Linda: Yes. These ideas are going to be captured now in this set of videos, but it is also going to be part of a memorable snapshot moment in history caused by the pandemic and the changes made. We are not going to go back to what we were doing before so it is timely to have this diaspora of different ideas and different perspectives. Collectively these use experiments to take archaeology and the study of the past in a new direction and change some of the ways in which we try and communicate the results of our research.

Peter: That's a wonderful way to encapsulate the entirety of this conference. We have a recorded snapshot in time, one that we would not have had, had this been a physical conference. So let's really look positively at this experience. It could be a model for future conferences, even outside pandemics wherein the ability to bring everyone together, from every single continent to have a conversation, is a milestone.

Linda: It is. I think we have moved on: EXARC has had its 20th birthday, and has come of age. It grew in Europe, but has gone out into the wider world. The present situation has shown that we need practical engagement and face-to-face contact: they have been missed. The practically engaging visits to Archaeological Open-Air Museums will be treasured all the more when they reopen. Though travel is a source of pollution, it is also a source of inspiration. The ways in which you can travel physically may never be as frequent as they were a year or two ago, but on the other hand, I think we still need them and I think we will value them all the more, because they are a bit rarer. The hybrid world of travelling from your armchair via the computer screen will also have benefits. I am very conscious that air travel is expensive. Some of the people presenting papers in this conference could not have done so if they also had to pay airfares and hotel bills. The help of grants like The Wenner-Gren, for promoting those

keynote papers from different areas of the world, bringing together a worldwide community of experimental archaeologists is again, something that I think standouts at this conference.

Peter: Absolutely, I don't think I could have said it better.

> *This day was - is - amazing. I have been watching incredible, surprising, fascinating experiments and presentations all day long, and there are so many more to come! I never expected anything like this. So many cool ideas, so many great minds, so much learned. Thank you for making this conference!*
>
> Kirsten Dzwiza

Linda: Well, we should probably bring things to a close?

Peter: I think we should, I think we have kept everyone long enough...

Linda: If anybody would like to come to Exeter at some point in the future, having met online we know we would love to welcome you and meet you in person. I would also like to say at this final point that this has never been tried before. I don't know of any other conference which has decided to deal with multiple time zones and take people on a global tour - and compromise their ability to sleep for several days – we had a field of volunteers making the technological wizardry work and channelling the discussions into stimulating debates. I think EXARC has really set a new idea of what you can do and it is not one that I've seen done in any other field, let alone in archaeology. I just commend them for having the vision to do it this way and to give us this set of experiences, with the help of so much organization and support behind the scenes. I would like to thank everybody who has been a volunteer or an organizer helping with all aspects, including all of the captioning which is another huge benefit of doing it this way, with a phenomenal amount of work from the EXARC body and secretariat. I think the whole organization is to be thanked profoundly for doing things in a new way and having the vision to see that as a possibility. Taking that agenda forward into the next conference is going to be the next challenge to meet.

Peter: Absolutely. I think the success of this conference is going to be hard to match. So, yes, we will have to rise to that challenge.

Linda: I just want to say how much we have enjoyed things and I have also really enjoyed the conversations Peter and I have had throughout the conference where we have been batting these ideas around. Welcome all of you to this online world, but also let's take the agendas raised here into the next EXARC conference to be held physically in Butser, but also with tentacles wrapping itself around the world, and, by looking at sustainability and the modern issues that can be explored, make experimental archaeology relevant to the present.

Peter: The success of this conference is going to be hard to match. EXARC will need to rise to that challenge. Relevancy is really the point here. By keeping EXARC relevant and getting more people involved. This conference has really shown genuine possibilities for the future and is something we can really build on. Thank you, Linda, thank you University of Exeter and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for making this possible, and to everyone who participated or helped make it happen. Thank you all.

Link(s)

Program and abstracts

Playlist on EXARC Youtube Channel

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