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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Conference Review: 6th Experimental Archaeology Conference, York 2012

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Established in 2006 with a workshop at UCL London, the Experimental Archaeology Conference is an annual event aiming to bring together experimental practitioners from Europe and afield. Since 2006 it has been held at a variety of locations in England and Scotland, with twelve to fifteen papers presented each year over two days, in addition to demonstrations and posters.



The standard of papers was generally high, with the majority of scientific experimental papers showing highly developed methodologies and rigorous control of experimentation. As this conference showed, experimental archaeology is a vibrant discipline with the ability to contribute to a wide range of archaeological debates.

The 6th Experimental Conference, 6-7th January 2012, York

This year's conference was hosted by the Archaeology Department of York at the King's Manor, a beautiful medieval building just outside the historic city walls. The facilities provided were excellent and the city itself was a stunning place filled with museums and places of interest. Whilst the conference usually attracts attendees from academic, commercial, public and museum contexts, this year's papers were dominated by scientific experiments, with only three out of twelve papers utilising other approaches.

The standard of papers was generally high, with the majority of scientific experimental papers showing highly developed methodologies and rigorous control of experimentation. Of particular interest was Hoare and Gowlett's paper on the use of frequency dependant magnetic susceptibility to differentiate between natural and anthropogenic burning, as they presented evidence that this was not possible, contradicting previously published analyses. Other papers of

note included Spiteri's work on recreating residues on prehistoric cooking pots which argued that vegetable residues were unlikely to survive even if extensively used, and Chu and Thompson's innovative abrasion of lithics within an annular flume to demonstrate no macro- or micro-scopic difference between the abrasion of bedded or free-moving flints in fluvial systems.

Whilst it was pleasing to see commercial archaeologists among those attending the conference, most attendees were academics and as a result the two final papers by Fillery-Travis and Wood raising the issues of defining who we consider to be experimental archaeologists and how we measure the impact and engagement with our discipline respectively, produced limited debate. The presence of more attendees from public engagement, museums and craft contexts would have brought wider perspectives and facilitated a more constructive discussion.

Advertisement of the conference had been limited, resulting in fewer than fifty attendees present and perhaps contributing to the limited variety in the papers. Whilst Ian Dennis presented a paper with Mulville and Sharples showing the value of physically engaging with objects and their production, his work alone took a more experiential approach, and there were no papers from people working in archaeological open-air museums, as demonstrators or craftspeople.

Despite these aspects, the conference itself was one of the best I have attended. The atmosphere was one of open-minded and enthusiastic inquiry, with papers debated and friendships made both in the conference and over the evening dinners. As this conference showed, experimental archaeology is a vibrant discipline with the ability to contribute to a wide range of archaeological debates. It is hoped that those papers reporting scientific work will be published as a special addition of the Springer journal *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences* in December 2012, and that we will see a 7th Conference, possibly in Cardiff, before January 2013. This conference is not limited to the British contributors and represents a fantastic opportunity for practitioners to communicate their work to a wider audience and I recommend anyone, whether reconstruction, experiential or strictly scientific in methodology, to consider submitting an abstract at the next call for papers.

Link(s)

[A new web presence for the Experimental Archaeology Conference](#)

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