

Postscript: memorable moments from the annals of CAA

Paul Reilly

(IBM UK Laboratories Limited, Hursley, UK)

40.1. Introduction

The thoughts and comments recorded here were made in the opening plenary session of CAA93 as part of the retiring Chairman's presentation. The serious message of the presentation is given in the accompanying paper in this volume "A management consultant's view of the present state of CAA, and some thoughts on its possible future". The style of presentation was deliberately chosen to help set the tone of the meeting as stimulating, varied, informal and fun, and the address was illustrated by my own original cartoons, penned in idle moments during the more boring papers of previous CAAs, and reproduced here. What follows constituted the fun part. I know my friends and colleagues mentioned below will respond with good-natured humour. They should also recognise that they not only lend academic knowledge and learning to their audience, but they also impart a welcome personality to the conference.

40.2. The published Proceedings

Computer Applications in Archaeology (CAA) is an association of people, individuals with their own unique views and modes of expression. The characters of most of these people do not come through clearly in the published Proceedings (in fact some presenters regretfully do not publish at all, and their input and influence on future directions of research and development therefore goes unrecorded).

One reason for non-publication might be unhappy memories. The publishers of the CAA proceedings between 1974 and 1986 were clearly influenced by the Cold War and the world of espionage, and were determined to stop CAA's priceless ideas falling into the hands of the enemy (especially archaeologists working in the field). They therefore cunningly used a specially formulated glue in the bindings, which caused the Proceedings to self-destruct after five pages had been turned. Paradoxically, the publishers were clearly also strong supporters of the Greens, as is attested by their strenuous efforts to keep the toner used in the reproduction process to an absolute minimum. This style of publishing was unfortunately adhered to for over 10 years. I have been reassured that our Proceedings since 1987 have been published according to much more stringent quality criteria. The Proceedings are clearly vitally important for sharing our deliberations with a wider archaeological audience.

40.3. "Critical incidents" at CAA

I would now like to share a few famous moments from the annals and folklore of CAA, where individuals and events have had a profound effect on participants. This selection has been assembled with the aid of a few CAA friends accessible by electronic mail on Internet. Each of these sub-

jects was asked to give their best and worst memories of CAA meetings. The reasoning behind the question was that any especially vivid recollections, or "critical incidents", might act as homing beacons to issues that CAA members regard as important. Permit me to share with you a few of these "critical incidents" at CAA gatherings.

40.3.1. The importance of food and drink!

One particular response recurred with surprising frequency: "cold Kentucky Fried Chicken" (Fig. 40.1). It seems that Colonel Sanders in his white suit and hat ruffled quite a few CAA feathers one chilly lunchtime in Birmingham! It is clear that sustenance is a serious business for CAA members. All respondents brought the subject up, and responses ranged from unrepeatably comments about coffee to rave reviews of the food and Gammel Dansk which was experienced by happy day-trippers to some Megalithic tombs in Jutland! Gary Lock's sugar levels were apparently still fluctuating wildly some time after CAA85 when he wrote his final line (about food) in his review of the London conference for the *Archaeological Computing Newsletter* (Lock 1985, p. 15)!



Figure 40.1: Cold Kentucky Fried Chicken at Birmingham.

40.3.2. Styles of presentation, feedback and criticism

The feedback presenters receive is quite different from that given to published authors, and the degree of feedback and interaction achieved is in part influenced by the style of presentation, visual aids used, etc., and the rapport established with the audience. Obscure forms of presentation should be avoided (Fig. 40.2), and speakers should bear in mind that the audience will have a high proportion of research stu-

dents and hopefully some field archaeologists, who may not be highly versed in some of the more advanced forms of computing science or mathematics. More rigorous presentation of the arguments can be (and will expected to be) made in the published paper.

The interactive form of presentation has consequences for the final shape of the Proceedings, which are supposed to incorporate modifications suggested by feedback and criticism. For the last twenty years of CAA this important "character" ingredient has been invisible in our published papers. Perhaps questions and answers taken at the sessions should be recorded, edited, and subsequently published.

On the occasion of the twenty-first meeting, I think we should be allowed to reveal a little more about the people behind the academic debate, and a few comments are offered below.



Figure 40.2: The importance of clear exposition.

40.3.3. LERNIE

The enigmatic LERNIE (a Learning Experiential Research Needs Integrating Evaluator for archaeo-scientific investigation) fascinated and, I suspect, perplexed many of our members for over a decade. LERNIE was just a twinkle in the eye of our dear friend Leo Biek in 1974, at the second CAA, when he laid out a vision of what computer technology might enable archaeologists to achieve (Biek 1974). Since then CAA has watched as he gradually extended his repertoire to include a remarkable number of presentation technologies which are now integrated into a single environment. LERNIE finally came of age in 1988. In that year Leo Biek stated, in what he claimed was his last published paper (Biek 1988), that in his view information technology had developed sufficiently for him to be able to abandon the constraints imposed by trying to articulate ideas in a written form. At the 1988 meeting Leo Biek shared his opinions, in the context of the totality of his digitised data and the totality of his immense non-digitised experience, with the aid of a multimedia roadshow (Fig. 40.3). However, we haven't got to LERNIE XXIII yet, so this may not be the last we have heard from Leo.

Veterans of CAA were the guinea-pigs who, unbeknown to themselves, performed the alpha-testing on these LERNIE prototypes. Unless I have a particularly weak constitution, I must record that some of these prototypes were none too



Figure 40.3: Leo Biek and LERNIE.

gentle on the typical human nervous system. In particular, I well remember an infamous lecture, in London, where Leo tried to mesmerise the audience using stereoscopic projections. I don't think the exercise was entirely successful. This was, I think, due largely to a number of fatally flawed assumptions made by our distinguished colleague. First, he mistakenly assumed that CAA members, like chameleons, had independent control of each eye, and he projected his pairs of pictures onto orthogonally arranged screens! This could probably have been accommodated had it not been for a second, but much more serious, miscalculation: he assumed his audience shared his own remarkable constitution, patience and fortitude. Alas, this was not so, and a not insignificant proportion of his audience was unusually distracted, not to say vexed, by low sugar levels caused by the prolonged delay to their lunch!

40.3.4. The importance of providing reliable visual aids equipment

Speakers (especially novice speakers) in the early days were expected to gain platform credibility by displaying their ability to cope with projectors which either did not fully work, or which chewed up slides or scattered them around the lecture room (Fig. 404). It must be emphasized to organisers that the availability of reliable slide projectors, OHPs and

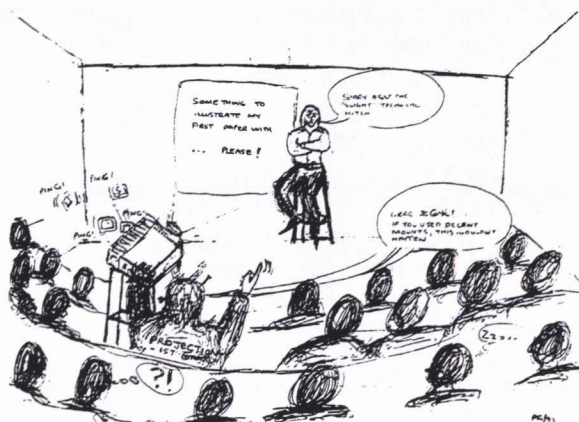


Figure 40.4: The importance of reliable visual aids equipment.

video equipment, together with a supporting team of technicians to replace any faulty items without delay, is as essential item for any conference.

40.3.5. Danish bogs and spearheads

Another masterpiece of entertainment was produced by Jens Andresen from Denmark, who attempted to convert the basement of the Mathematics Building in Birmingham into an Omnimax theatre. This was quite a coup, considering the experiences with slide projectors to which speakers in the early days had become accustomed. Accordingly, being a forward thinker and planner, Jens had brought his own equipment from Denmark to project his large format (5" x 4") slides. He then proceeded to project beautiful, huge and pin-sharp images onto the walls, as the screens were not large enough by far. Picture our heroic speaker dwarfed by giant socketed spearheads (Fig. 40.5). At one stage, he seemingly stepped into the Iron Age landscapes he was trying to describe. The illusion was so powerful that one could almost hear the squelching of his boots in the Danish bog, and smell the organic ooze that he appeared to be tramping through, as he paced back and forth across the platform from one end of the picture to the other. Unfortunately, Jens had miscalculated the number of slides he could present in the time allocated to him. His mode of expression became more and more incoherent, yet simultaneously more "colourful", as he rushed back and forth across the platform as the seconds on the clock ticked by. Even so, nearly all the audience stayed and caught later trains, rather

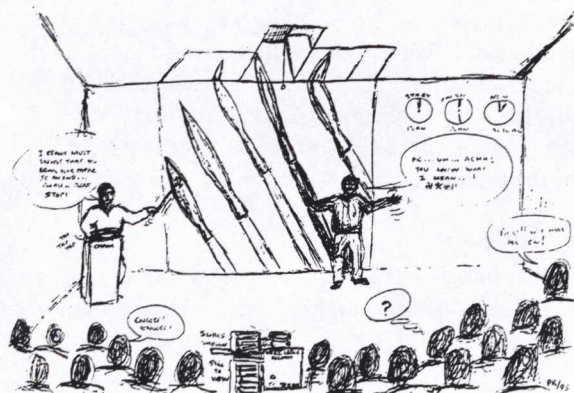


Figure 40.5: Danish bogs and spearheads.

than miss any part of such a passionate and captivating performance.

40.3.6. The Southampton Dinner transport incident

Then there was the saga of the CAA90 Conference Dinner at Southampton. The reception, meal and disco aboard the Blue Funnel boat which took participants down the Solent and across to the Isle of White and back was very enjoyable, even if it was impossible to escape one's best friends. Unfortunately, on arrival back at Ocean Village in the early hours of the morning, the windswept harbour was devoid of



Figure 40.6: The Southampton Dinner transport incident.

any trace whatsoever of the coaches booked to return people to their lodgings. A lynching was avoided only because everyone's fingers were too cold to fasten a noose for the hanging (Fig. 40.6)! In the end a dejected Sebastian Raatz risked the conference float and ferried everyone home in a taxi (except those who gave up waiting, and tramped back the 2 miles). The coach firm were very apologetic and the conference kitty was restored.

40.3.7. Aarhus and innovations

The conference CAA92 in Aarhus was ably organised by Torsten Madsen (Fig. 40.7). A touch of spice was introduced by awarding prizes for the best papers in a number of undisclosed, but light-hearted categories. Members were also treated to an "alternative" prize-giving ceremony at the conference banquet. Kazumasa Ozawa's presentation was

CAPTION!
 "WHY DID I AGREE TO ORGANISE THIS BASTARD CONFERENCE AGAIN?!"
 WHY DID I NOT AGREE TO ORGANISE THIS CONFERENCE?
 Q: What is a and how do the numbers relate?
 A: "Pass"

ORGANISE A CONFERENCE - INVE MONEY AT THE HAIRDRESSER!
 "I DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO DO DURING EASTER"
 "WHEN I SIT LIKE THIS, IT LOOKS AS IF I'M ACTUALLY THINKING"



Måske skulle man prøve en pint øl med øl?

Elephant Train, Elephant Beer



Figure 40.7: Torsten Madsen, organiser of CAA92.

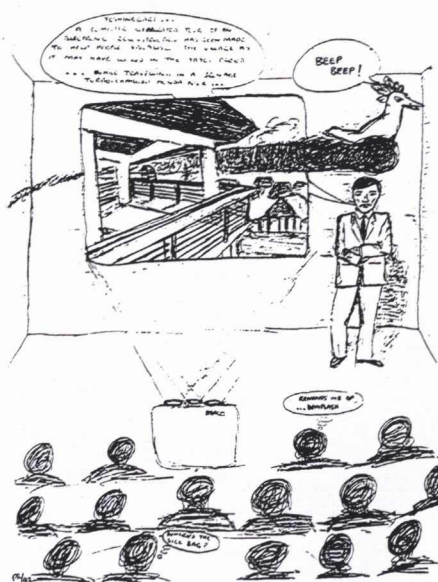


Figure 40.8: Kazumasa Ozawa and Yoshinogari, a computer-generated tour of an electronic reconstruction.

strongly influenced by the School of Biek and richly deserved its special commendation for totally disorientating the audience. This surrogate tour of a computerised reconstruction of Yoshinogari could only be described as breath-taking. The hapless tourists on this particular trip were subjected to enormous G-forces as they accelerated around the sharply curving route of the tour (Fig. 40.8).

Also at Aarhus there was a memorable archaeological tour of Jutland, a magnificent Conference Dinner at Moesgard (the quality of food and drink at which no delegate could fault), and an amusing film of Danish Prehistory, somehow filmed in rare colour during the Nazi occupation in 1942.

40.3.8. CAA93 and Stoke-on-Trent

The organisers of CAA93, John Wilcock, Mike Fletcher and Dick Spicer, wished to build on the successful experience of archaeological trips in Denmark, and organised a restful and gastronomic tour of the Derbyshire Peak District before the formal paper sessions. One evening there

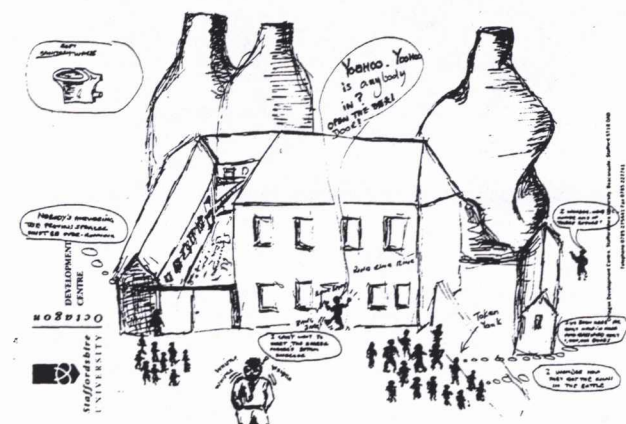


Figure 40.9: Waiting to see the saggar maker's bottom knocker at the Gladstone Pottery Museum.

was an archaeological extravaganza tour of the Potteries, including a visit to the Gladstone Pottery Museum (Fig. 40.9), where we were able to see blunging, pots being thrown, slip moulding, transfer printing and pottery flower decoration, and the stacking of pots in saggars in the bottle oven ready for firing. We were also introduced to such esoteric terms as saggar maker's bottom knocker, blunger and clammins, and were entertained by the collection of loos. There followed a visit to the City of Stoke-on-Trent Museum, preceded by a welcoming address by the Lord Mayor of Stoke-on-Trent, Councillor Alan Jones. Following this, delegates were able to wander, glass in hand, around the new archaeological gallery, the world-famous pottery galleries and the social history gallery. An innovation during the conference was an archaeological image processing competition organised by Mike Fletcher and Dick Spicer, highly successful, very well received, and reported elsewhere in these Proceedings. Another very worthwhile innovation was the regular series of *ad hoc* sessions where any speaker, and particularly students, could give a brief address on a topic which perhaps was not sufficiently developed for formulation into a formal paper.

The Conference Dinner consisted of a selection of local dishes, including Staffordshire Oatcakes, Roast Beef and Yorkshire Pudding, and Bakewell Pudding. This was followed by an "archaeological" quiz.

40.4. Conclusion

CAA has a long and rich history. It embodies many people, and their diverse views. CAA should not be regarded as an elitist academic organisation, since it is open to all interested parties, who in turn may influence the future development of the association. These proceedings present a snapshot of our discipline in 1993, and they reflect some of our achievements and aspirations. The written text contains much of value, but the most valuable resource, often disguised, is the character, personality and expertise of the people who formulated the words.

Bibliography

- BIEK, L. 1974 "Progress with LERNIE". In Wilcock, J. D. & S. Laflin (eds) *Computer Applications in Archaeology 1974*, pp. 59-63. University of Birmingham, Birmingham.
- BIEK, L. 1988 "Is this a Record? Judgment on Domesday: the first year in archaeo-archiving", in Rahtz, S. P. Q. (ed.), *Computer and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology 1988*, pp. 543-550. BAR International Series 446, Oxford.
- LOCK, G. R. 1985 "Review of the 1985 Computer Applications in Archaeology conference", *Archaeological Computing Newsletter* 3: 13-15.

Paul Reilly
 IBM UK Laboratories Limited,
 Hursley,
 UK