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Report from the Frontline
A review of the 5th biennial Fields of Conflict Conference held in Ghent,
Belgium, 17th – 19th October 2008

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It is a little over eight years since the first 'Fields of Conflict' conference held in the field of Conflict Archaeology (for a review see Carman 2001). That relatively short time has seen the discipline develop a range of methodological approaches and techniques to become fully established as a legitimate line of academic enquiry. A sense of this rapid maturity can be gained when one considers that there are now frequent and regular sessions at major international conferences, an established annual *Journal of Conflict Archaeology* (since 2005) and newly available postgraduate courses in the subject. The continuation of the discipline-specific conference also provides an indicator as to the acceptance of the field into the research consciousness (see Freeman & Pollard 2001 and Scott *et al.* 2007 for the publications resulting from the first three conferences). Accordingly, a review of the most recent conference should provide a useful evaluation of the current state of enquiry at this stage in the development of Conflict Archaeology.

The first session of the conference opened with the acknowledgment that the overarching descriptive terminology for the discipline is now accepted as 'Conflict Archaeology', displacing the previously interchangeable terms of either 'Conflict', 'Combat' or 'Battlefield' Archaeology. This was followed by a group of nine presentations that focused upon the now sub-discipline of Battlefield Archaeology, all except one of which considered sites from the post-medieval period onwards. These predominantly adopted the methodological model developed at the site of the battle of the Little Bighorn (Scott *et al.* 1989) and exhibited the same explicitly processual theoretical base in the plotting of artefact scatters in order to establish the development of a battle. Michael Bletzer had applied this to the site of a Peasant's War battle in sixteenth-century Germany and André Schürger to the seventeenth-century Battle of Lützen, whilst Doug Scott considered the differences in the distribution patterns of 'set-piece' and 'guerilla' battlefields. Of particular note here

was the introduction of speakers from Hungary, who went some way to breaking away from the traditionally Anglophone nature of the field. The day ended with a chance for discussion and saw the recognition that the legacy of the Little Bighorn work was apparent, with this established methodology now having the potential to be used on smaller scale engagements.

Day two commenced with a trip to Oudenaarde, a little way outside of Ghent, and the majestic city hall provided a beautiful setting for the morning. The presentations began with an introduction to the 1708 battle of Oudenaarde, the site of which would be visited later in the day, and was followed by a short session based around the issues of contested space and identities and the memorialisation of conflict. These more conceptual perspectives on conflict included papers on the reuse of coin crests as a form of resistance in the occupied Channel Islands and ideas on 'Dark Tourism' in relation to Scottish Battlefields. This offered an immediate distinction from the previous day's methodology-orientated presentations, with the diversity and scope of research evident within Conflict Archaeology coming to the fore. Discussion here centred upon the nature of commemoration, especially in relation to how and why certain aspects of conflict in the past are memorialised and remembered whilst others are not. The afternoon visit to the battlefield of Oudenaarde was a welcome chance for the participants to stretch their legs a little, as well as providing a slightly less formal atmosphere for introductions and acquaintances to be made.

The third day of presentations saw an opening session dedicated to the wider landscapes of conflict and, apart from Larry Babit's work on the American Civil War landscape of the Roanoke River Basin, there was a discernable emphasis on conflict in Western Europe. Peter Masters demonstrated the potential of geophysics in locating First World War trench systems, whilst Martin Brown argued that Great War archaeology needs to consider these trenches in a wider landscape context. Phil Murgatroyd's paper on the GRID project on Manzikert in Turkey deserves particular mention for the new perspectives it brought to the field, as well as the amount of discussion and debate that this stimulated.

Following these, the final afternoon of the conference focused upon new approaches within the field. Charles Haecker presented a paper on the clash between 'Western'

methods of war and Native Americans in sixteenth-century New Mexico, where the arid conditions of the desert have allowed comparison of preserved metal technology with the native Stone Age technology. A concern with weaponry was continued by Glenn Foard, who demonstrated the importance of studying battlefields from the phase of conflict in between the Wars of the Roses and the English Civil War. Little is known about the development and spread of firearm technology during this period and the fragility of these battlefields as archaeological resources was highlighted. Further papers presented by Richard Burt considered twentieth-century conflict damage in the form of bomb craters at Pointe du Hoc in Normandy and buildings damaged during the bombing of London. Preservation was advocated in order for commemoration and memorialisation to occur, something that certainly encouraged much debate as to the value and management of this aspect of the study of conflict.

The final act of the conference (on the academic side of things) involved a panel discussion on the future of Conflict Archaeology. This actually resulted in a consideration of the future of the conference itself, rather than a debate about the nature of the field, but still went some way to highlighting the issues in the discipline at present. Particular focus was placed on the lack of prehistoric studies at the conference and indeed, it was noticeable that only four papers considered aspects of conflict on sites dating to pre-1500AD and none were related to conflict in the pre-Roman world. Studies of prehistoric warfare do seem to exist outside of the discipline of Conflict Archaeology (e.g. Parker Pearson & Thorpe 2005) rather than within it and the issue of how to integrate the practitioners from other disciplines, as well as how Conflict Archaeology should relate to these, was discussed.

The question of standardisation and codification of the discipline was also raised; the point being made that a 'code' creates professional standards and thus wider recognition. Who would put this together or how this would be regulated was not considered however. An important issue that was put forward, although not explored in depth, was concerned with the lack of assimilation between methodologies on sites of conflict from different periods. There was an evident concern with commemoration and remembrance in the papers presented on twentieth-century conflict, yet earlier period studies were more focused upon methodology and data. Wider theories on past violence and warfare did not figure in these studies at all, and

neither did the theoretical base for the methodologies applied. The suggestion was therefore made that a possible division is opening up within the field, yet the question of how to integrate all of these things into a multidisciplinary research agenda was perhaps left for the future.

Overall, the conference can be seen to have provided an excellent marking post for the current state of Conflict Archaeology, although there was no great advancement in terms of method or, in particular, theoretical input to the field. One can hope that the intervening two-year period until the next conference will see this development occur.

The conference as a whole seemed to be well received by the participants and thanks must go to the joint organisers, John and Patricia Carman and the Ename Centre, for putting everything together and ensuring the general smooth running of the weekend.

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