



# ReConference 2018

PAPERS AND SUMMARIES

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# The Power of Writing – A Word from the Editor

*Crtomir Lorencic – Harald the Smith (EU)*

If you are reading this, then we have managed to publish the proceedings of the 2nd ReConference, held at the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen, on 2.-4. of November 2018. *(Finally.)* It also means that you are the sort of person who bothers to read forewords and introductions. *(Thank you.)* There might have been many challenges and delays in making both the conference and this publication happen. Now the ordeal is over, which means that we can do it all over again – armed with another set of experiences.

The ReConference was opened on a Friday afternoon with the questions: “Who are we? What do we do? How do we do it? And... Why?” These dangerous inquiries set the main theme of the event, which will be well reflected in the in the following articles.

Nevertheless, I would like to point out another question: “Why do we need a regular journal on living history/re-enactment?”

## A Call for a Publication

One of my greater surprises at the ReConference was a speech given by Martin Nielsen, from Alibier, on the development within the Nordic LARP scene, and the role that meta conversations and publishing an annual journal played in that development. That is when I fully realised just how

far behind we have fallen, when it comes to establishing conceptual frameworks for our work. It also confirmed that dedicating some time to making this happen was the right thing to do.

Without a publication, an event like the ReConference is not much more than a cabal of specialists sitting in an ornate hall, reminiscing about the past and dreaming about the future. Writing down our thoughts and publishing them in an accessible form – letting others take up, criticise and build upon these notions – this is what shapes the future of a movement.

Therefore we desperately need a regular publication dedicated to living history and re-enactment. For a regular publication is the final realisation of the basic aim of the ReConference – asking the dangerous questions of: What is that we are doing? And Why?

## Challenges

No matter how necessary a step towards the loss of innocence within this movement, creating a journal is not all about good intentions and dreamy idealism.

How does one describe the possibility of creating a completely new journal, free from the constraints of past work and traditions? “Liberating” and “terrifying” are two words that spring to mind. A lot of questions suddenly need to be answered. How academic should the articles be? What is the style we are going for? My wish was to make this as open as possible, in the hopes of publishing those voices which usually remain silent. Therefore the requirements for the articles were quite loosely defined and writing in a style aimed at a varied audience was encouraged.

While the authors who ended up submitting a paper do cover quite a wide range of experiences, the majority still comes from the part of the living history/re-enactment community connected with academia, museum- and heritage work. This was somewhat expected, since this is the part of our community, which is already accustomed to writing down their thoughts. While the published articles are nevertheless far from academic, I hope that in the future we can expand the range of voices represented. Just as I would like to see the ReConference expand to cover more areas and time periods, so would I like to see a multitude of voices published.

I would like to see more opinions from fanatic amateurs and I would like them to exchange arguments with the museum professionals. I would like to see the different interest groups exchange words over their conflicts and find common ground in the process. I would like to hear the voices of bronze age and stone age living history, and I would like to hear them alongside those who re-enact the atrocities of the 30 Years War, the Napoleonic Wars, the American Civil War and the World Wars. What are their motivations? What is the objective of their work? How do they see themselves? What do they have in common and in what ways do the approaches to recreating the different time periods differ? For living history/re-enactment is not a monolith, but a conglomerate of interests, goals approaches and backgrounds.

### **It will not be easy...**

Some might be afraid to write when there is no established language. The terms 'living history' and 're-enactment' remain ill-defined and disputable. We often find it alarmingly hard to define exactly what we are doing. Yet that is precisely why we need to write, for a common vocabulary can only be created through communication. Therefore you can be pleased to know that the first three articles, written by Åkesson, Malcolm-Davies and Scanapieco, all touch upon these issues.

Similarly, some are afraid to publish because they are afraid of being criticised, or offending somebody. Again, it is exactly by writing down our thoughts, by opening our arguments to constructive criticism – by showing that we have notions worth uttering, while knowing that they are open to debate – that is how we grow develop and move forward as a community. More than ever, we need a world where we can disagree and still get along. After all, it is the sharing and criticising of thoughts that put the first manned plane in the air in 1903, gave us the first commercial flight only a decade later, and even put a man on the Moon in 1969.

In other words, writing an article is not about being infallible, but about presenting an argument – accepting that our, and our readers', knowledge and opinions are subject to development. Mistakes are an inevitable part of this process.

## The Result

With all that said, what do the contents of this collection of articles hold for you?

It opens up with an introduction by Rickard Åkesson, presenting the challenges within living history/re-enactment that motivated Hands on History to organise the 2nd ReConference. After that, Jane Malcom-Davies delves into the difficulties of trying to find a simple definition of re-enactment, proposing that we should focus on the different motivations on the part of the re-enactors themselves. Next Luciana Scanapieco looks at the Brazilian living history/re-enactment scene from perspective of both a museologist and re-enactor, analysing the objectives of a museum, while assessing the value and possible pitfalls of living history/re-enactment in a museum setting.

Darrin Cox presents his experience with doing Viking living history displays in US public schools, pointing out the important role of the observer within living history. The theme of education and immersion is continued by Thit Birk Petersen, who presents the experience of The Medieval Centre (DK), in creating a late medieval town environment with the aid of re-enactment groups and an army of volunteers.

Emma Boast gives an excursion on craft heritage, contributing an article on needle-binding and its relation to living history/re-enactment, as well as its role in the broader narrative of craft revival.

Then the theme turns digital for the last three articles. First Eugene Leonov explains the concept of computational history and how Big Data models can be used in developing content for living history, re-enactment and heritage tourism. Then Rachel Lee and Louise Schelde Frederiksen share some of their valuable marketing experience, as well as a short guide to social media for museums and re-enactors. Lastly Henrik Summanen, a digital heritage specialist and multi-period re-enactor, finishes with a vision where the museums of the future become meeting points within a networked society, connecting academia, artefacts and amateur specialists.

One question that you might keep asking is, whether this publication has been a success. I certainly ask myself that every time I look at it.



The following 9 articles all bring valuable views, arguments and experiences to the debate. I have enjoyed reading their drafts and seeing them develop into what is now presented to you. I hope that you will likewise be affected by the final versions. The success of this endeavour will be revealed by its public reception, yet as long as the following articles move others to also voice their thoughts, then I would consider the mission of this publication accomplished.

Bon appétit!

*Crtomir Lorencic*  
*Lofoten, August 2019*



## The need for a Re-conference

*Rickard Åkesson – Hands on History (NO)*

Re-enactment has its own history stretching back for thousands of years. Several ancient cultures were re-enacting historical events related to their identity. Perhaps the most renowned example would be the Ancient Roman habit of re-enacting historic battles in the colosseum. Nevertheless re-enactment/living history as we know it today is a rather new phenomenon and many of its pioneers are still active today. The same young movement has also expanded and diversified rapidly, involving new participants, research and platforms. In just 2-3 decades, it went from a small community where the main challenges were communication between groups, access to information and availability of materials, to a global phenomenon where most of that is available to anyone playing with their smartphone during lunch break. The Internet and Social Media changed the state of affairs completely, as suddenly both good and bad information were able to spread like wildfire. *Could the resulting growth have been too wild? Is it time for the movement to assess itself and move towards maturity?*

The Hands on History team was invited to take part in the very first ReConference, held in Moscow in March 2017. We were contributing with talks regarding our philosophy as a newly started business in the cultural heritage field, and shared our ideas regarding concept development for re-enactment events. Ratobor, the company behind the first re-conference, has been working with re-enactment through festivals, events, educational programs and other productions on a massive scale for many years. Their expertise is unique, and their contribution to the re-enactment scene has



had an impact both in Russia and abroad. Most of all, seeing their work has shown that there is a lot of potential left untapped.

## Designing a Forum

After the event, it was clear that such a forum was a much needed contribution to the re-enactment scene. Therefore on the plane, heading back to Scandinavia, we began writing the first draft for the ReConference 2018. That first program was a list of topics that we wanted to cover, as well as potential speakers whose ideas and mindset we wanted to include. It was a long list.

The topics collected on that list could roughly be divided into three categories: '**key terms**', '**collaboration**' and '**development**'.

There was a pressing need for a **common vocabulary**. The basic terms, like re-enactor, re-enactment and living history are used by all of us all the time, but do we agree about what they actually mean and what they stand for?

The topic of **collaboration** included different re-enactment epochs and their similarities, different countries and communities, amateurs and professionals, museums and volunteers. Building those bridges can only be beneficial for everybody involved.

The last category was **development**. This is an organic, ongoing process, but we were (and still are) eager to speed it up. How can re-enactment be conducted in different ways? More often than not, the same historical markets and festivals tend to be repeated over and over again, together with the same costumes, the same people and the same programme. The lack of ambition and new ideas makes us sometimes wonder why people actually bother.

The format and setting were just as pressing as the topics. We had to engage in the discussion on a meta level. Other seminars and workshops might have addressed similar topics, but focused on a specific aspect of the movement. We wanted to think bigger and get closer to understanding what we are doing, who is doing it, and maybe most importantly: **why?**

This is an opinionated movement and it is not hard to get people involved in discussions. We just needed the right type of forum for sharing ideas and best practice. In the past, digital platforms such as Facebook and forum boards have been tried, but they all had their shortcomings. Instead we needed a physical meeting, held “out of season” and in a more academic setting. An open platform where those with a genuine interest in re-enactment/ living history could meet on common terms. This was no small endeavour, for we tried to capture the complex and varied nature of living history/ re-enactment by including and balancing the various interest groups, such as: academics, museum workers, hobbyists and professionals. It was clear that we had to leave our costumes at home and meet on neutral ground. Hence the opinions of the participants could be judged based on their arguments, rather than their background or level of authenticity.

We set the location in Copenhagen, to make it more accessible compared to Hands on History’s base in Trondheim. A collaboration with the local re-enactment group Ulfhednir made it easier to set it all up. This also opened up the possibility of working together with the National Museum of Denmark, which ended up facilitating the conference. We mainly used social media to market the ReConference, and we quickly sold out. Those who showed up to this forum were a mix of re-enactors, museum employees, LARPerS and representatives from academia, media, film production, tourism and event agencies. While the general feedback was positive, the majority of participants were Viking re-enactors due to Hands on History’s background, but we aim to expand this at future events.

So we had a concept and a sold out event, which shows that we were not the only ones who believed that there is a need for discussion. Now something has to be said about the topics and questions which provided the basis for discussion.

## **A Lack of Definitions**

Before continuing, it must be mentioned that our experience mainly is based on the Viking re-enactment scene. We have limited knowledge when it comes to other epochs, but once we step back to assess the movement from the outside, the key challenges appear to be almost the same regardless of the costumes involved being prehistoric or recent.

To start with, we find it hard to describe exactly what we are doing. It is much easier to end up describing what we are not doing. It is not LARP, it is not cosplay, we are not wearing fancy dress etc. LARPer have been much better at establishing their terms, and people in general know what LARP is. Combat re-enactment, as in re-enacting the Battle of Waterloo or Gettysburg, can be defined and explained easily enough, but how do we approach more general depictions of past life? Where does re-enactment end and living history begin? When we use the term re-enactment for living history we confuse not only ourselves, but the people we are talking to as well. So defining living history in a simple way was one of the main goals of the ReConference.

The terms 'experimental archaeology', 're-enactment' and 'living history' are thrown around in a close to random manner, while often being used to create some form of status. Experimental archaeology sounds much more serious and prestigious than living history. There seems to be a struggle to be taken seriously – a need to prove oneself. How can that be obtained? The level of dedication is of course very important, and most people involved in the scene are eager to position themselves in relation to others. Different groups have different interests and authenticity (however that is defined) may not always be their primary focus. As a result, we end up with a wide spectrum of activities, but still calling it the same (i.e. re-enactment).

This leads us to the complicated topic of collaborating with museums. Finding and engaging re-enactors as a museum employee with no deeper understanding of the re-enactment scene is not easy. One of the results is that different museums may have very different approaches to re-enactors. Some key challenges can be identified and they tend to revolve around communication. What is the museum looking for and what can the re-enactors offer? This dialogue is often kept far too short, or completely left out. The competence of the re-enactors must be better communicated. This relates to dissemination skills, historical and archaeological knowledge, and level of authenticity. Expectations and results are important to both parties. Lastly, there is the question of payment. Payment must be discussed at an early stage, but the payment doesn't have to be monetary.

Another challenge in the re-enactment scene is stagnation. It leads to people either dropping out or losing their passion for quality. Within a growing field which relies heavily on volunteers and amateurs, this can

create great setbacks. Events have to keep developing in order to keep the participants engaged. This cannot be stressed enough. There is a strong need for more diversity and new sub-genres. There are so many other ways to do re-enactment besides, for example, medieval fairs and Viking markets. All too often, event organizers seem to be playing a game of copy-paste, just doing what everybody else is doing, with occasional minor variation on the theme. Why not start from scratch and do something unique? Narrow the focus to something more specific, which would get more engagement from both the public and the participants.

Although some questions like the ones above are general, there is great need to discuss specific aspects and details of re-enactment, while staying on a conceptual level. What is good and what is bad dissemination? How can it be developed in a way that makes it more professional and effective? To actually give the public a correct and genuine experience, sharing some new knowledge with them, while also keeping it fun and memorable. There is a lot in that field that can be improved through discussion and sharing of practices. Most re-enactors are not "professionals", but do this in their spare time. To discuss dissemination with those who are not re-enactors or living history performers themselves, like professionals in teaching, theatre and storytelling, could add a lot of new knowledge, elevating the re-enactment scene as a whole.

At such an occasion it is also interesting for the re-enactors to reflect on what they do. Why do people do it? What are the main motivations and agendas? What do they get out of it, and how do they develop as humans when getting engaged in the re-enactment community? Just asking these questions and making the participants reflect upon their own motivations has a value. It is obvious that the re-enactment community is much more than just learning and teaching history.

Another goal of the conference was to increase the credibility of the movement. To contribute to a development where people engaged in re-enactment, as well as outsiders, consider re-enactment in a more serious way. There is a lot of knowledge in the re-enactment community, and when going into details, there are plenty of experts among the enthusiasts, which often know more about very narrow topics than the professional scholars. This goes not only for the material finds, but also the intangible culture and different ways of dissemination. It could be that this scares museum staff,

to be outmanoeuvred by those "alien amateurs". We are aware that there is a big variety when comparing different countries, but the collaboration between museums and re-enactors could always be improved, and there is a lot to learn from each other.

This sums up the background for the Re-conference.

## After the Re-conference – The Debate Continues

At the close of the conference, a survey was conducted, which confirmed the need for such events. The survey consisted of 20 basic statements regarding re-enactment, living history, authenticity, dissemination and audience. Kahoot was used, and all the participants could use their cell-phones to join and agree or disagree to the statements shown on the screen. The conclusion was that the participants at the conference didn't agree – at all. When evaluating every single question, there were at least 10% of participants who disagree with the general opinion. On many statements, the room was split evenly in half. Without going into detailed statistical analyses, some general tendencies could be detected:

Statements like *"Re-enactment and Living History activities are subjective and should be regarded as interpretations"* and *"Reconstruction and authenticity is always influenced by modern fashion and modern beauty ideals"*, were agreed upon by most. Being in character (first-person interpretation), seems to be more connected to re-enactment and not so much to living history. Regarding motivation, *the search for something real and genuine* seems central. But, once again, there was no unanimous conclusion. The need for an audience is also an important topic, where about 75 % thought that the audience is an essential element of re-enactment.

The different views on re-enactment and living history are reflected in the diverse motivations of the participants. In order to delve into that, the second part two of the survey was a questionnaire form, where the participants could elaborate more around six questions, one of them being the motivation behind getting engaged in re-enactment and living history. The answers covered a wide spectrum:

Academic motivations, like an interest in history, understanding of ancient cultures, dissemination and spreading of knowledge, were common.

Several participants got engaged due to social motivations like meeting those like-minded, being part of a community, escaping the modern world in favour of simple living, being someone else and finding one's identity. Into these we can tie the general interest in fun and parties.

Other motivations mentioned included interests in weapons, combat and martial arts, mysticism, as well as carrying on and rediscovering lost crafts.

The last question asked about how sharing of knowledge could be improved. Many mentioned the need to publish research and experiments, in the form of blogs, social media and magazines. Nevertheless the need for forums where we can meet in real life came out on top. This means cross-disciplinary events where re-enactors from different epochs and academia can come together, sharing experiences and research and having meta discussions. Therefore we need to focusing on the subject, exploring possibilities and creating a common language.

***In other words, there is a need for a new re-conference.***



# Not the what but the why: Redefining re-enactment through motivation

Jane Malcolm-Davies – Centre for Textile Research,  
University of Copenhagen (DK) & The Tudor Tailor (UK)

## Introduction

Historical re-enactments have a long pedigree as amateur activities and professional presentations forming a wide spectrum of events in a variety of environments (Anderson 1982, 291; Hunt 2004, 387; Thierer 2010, 6, Konzack 2017, 37). “The trouble with discussing re-enactment as a unified entity is that it is anything but” (Hartford 2016, 1). Re-enactments range from scientifically controlled archaeological experiments to themed private parties. Some attempts at classification have put boundaries around different types of events and suggested definitions of them. Such literature stretches back to the early 20th century, when “living history” (an ill-defined catch-all term) first emerged as a genre in the context of open-air museums and swiftly spread to become a leisure activity as well as a profession. Even before that, activities featuring the recreation of specific historic events (such as battle re-enactments) and craft demonstrations (such as culturally specific handiwork), were produced, often with the intention of communicating with an audience. Precise and agreed terminology to describe and define the range of activities under these various broad headings is still lacking.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London inspired Artur Hazelius in his efforts to preserve the traditions of rural Sweden (Aldridge 1989). His work included tableaux of costumed mannequins evoking folk life at the

Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia (United States) in 1876 (Anderson 1984, 5). Later international exhibitions such as the Paris Exposition of 1878, which Hazelius also attended, featured reconstructions of “exotic” villages, complete with imported indigenous peoples (Greenhalgh 1989, 91). This further inspired Hazelius, who collected buildings from all over Sweden and reconstructed them at Skansen in Stockholm. There were no daily costumed activities when it first opened on 11 October 1891 (Anderson 1984, 19; Rehnberg 1957, 7; Perrin 1975, 11) - not 1881 as some sources suggest (Leon and Piatt 1989, 65). Although Hazelius’ aim was to demonstrate how people lived and worked in the past in different regions of Sweden (Baehrendtz et al. 1982, 177), the permanent costumed demonstrators did not arrive until 1898. They performed traditional music and dance as well as herding reindeer and demonstrating customs appropriate to the different cultural groups represented at the museum (Alexander 1968, 271; Anderson 1984, 19; Robertshaw 1990, 30).

While this vogue for costumed crafts demonstrations established itself at historic sites in Europe (Leon and Piatt, 1989, 67), the popularity of battle re-enactments as commemorative events led to the appearance of costumed people at North American historic sites as long ago as 1865 (Anderson 1984, 135-172; Anderson 1985, 130-175). There is a more recent phenomenon of “historicist hooliganism” in the United Kingdom (Hewison 1987, 83) and elsewhere in Europe. Re-enactment organisations such as The Sealed Knot Society appeared from 1959 (Anon 1989, 81) and in the late 1980s and the 1990s, they proved a “cost-effective resource” for organisations, such as Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments) and English Heritage, under commercial pressure to draw crowds and boost revenue at historic sites (Carr 1989, 303; Griffin and Giles 1994, 331).

An oft-quoted definition of re-enactment ignores both its revivalist and commercial origins by describing it as “enjoyable recreational activity that is also a learning experience” in clear distinction from its use “to interpret material culture more effectively” (Anderson 1982, 291 & 305). Some commentators suggest living history is strictly the depiction of everyday life in heritage sites by professionals (for example, Allison 2016, 1), while others use the term to distinguish between what hobby re-enactors do on and off the battlefield (for example, Hart 2007, 112). Carrying out domestic chores, tending livestock, undertaking craftwork or mercantile activity may be part of a re-enactment event’s “living history” encampment as opposed



to the main military action. But increasingly, re-enactment organisations form around other interests with less emphasis on military activities (for example, Voergaard *Levende Historie* 2019). A 21st century trend is for re-enactment events to be built around themed historical markets or fairs (Aune Nilsen 2015; Halewood & Hannam 2001, 573-574), which do not fit into the domestic living history mould. The traders who appear in historic dress offer goods for sale to each other and to the public. This further blurs the distinction between the re-enactors' role as a professional or amateur. The term living history has also been used to identify "second-person" immersive experiences provided for the paying public (Magelssen 2006, 291) such as the Iron Age family "holidays" at Sagnlandet Lejre (Denmark), "live in programs" at Connor Prairie in Indiana (United States) and the demanding "hiking with Vikings" expeditions in Norway (Brædder et al. 2017, 178-181; Allison 2016, 6; Walsh 2018).

Living history can therefore be regarded as a sub-category of re-enactment or vice versa. It has been used to denote professional versus amateur activities and distinguish between superficial and immersive experiences. These attempts at encapsulating living history and re-enactment comprise too many conflicting variables to function as useful definitions. "Re-enactment" has been simplified to the recreation of an historical event or a specific historical period (Petersson 2010, 75; Kobiałka 2014, 316; Aune Nilsen 2015, 6). However, this overlooks the range of complex variables which bring a reenactment into being. These variables include the motivation of the re-enactors, their role in the environment where the re-enactment takes place including the absence or presence of an audience, and the re-enactors' relationship with it.

This paper addresses re-enactment as a leisure pursuit which may or may not take place at a public heritage site and with or without an educational mission. It does not discuss professional costumed interpretation, which has been the subject of descriptive work (for example, Jackson and Kidd 2008), small-scale studies (for example, Tzibazi 2009) and rigorous empirical investigations (Malcolm-Davies 2004; Tinworth 2008; Van Dijk et al. 2012). Nor does it consider live action role-playing (LARPing) projects which is of growing interest to academics and authors (Mochocki 2018; Kamm & Becker 2016; Stark 2012).

## Methodologies

Much published work on re-enactment proves to be opinion rather than observation based on carefully collected data. Some critical comments reveal themselves to be specifically about television programmes which attempt to recreate life in the past as a form of reality show rather than re-enactment as a leisure pursuit (Agnew 2004; Cook 2004). In fact, many commentaries lump all kinds of different activities under the heading of re-enactment and therefore do not provide useful conclusions for any of them (for example, Tivers 2002). Some commentators have had close involvement with re-enactment either as a heritage site manager (for example, Fortier, 1995), as an experienced participant (for example, Decker 2010) or as a new participant observer (for example, Hartford 2016; Daugbjerg 2014; Stark 2012; Crang 1998). Others have studied it at arms length as anthropologists (for example, Hart 2007), archaeologists (for example, Kobińska 2014), ethnographers (for example, Turner 1990), geographers (for example, Tivers 2002), historians (for example, Smith 2001) and sociologists (for example, Decker 2010). Each has drawn on relatively simplistic definitions of re-enactment which fail to fully capture the complex variety of activities it encompasses. A more nuanced view of re-enactment may be achieved by focusing on one of these variables, namely the motivations of the participants, rather than the activities they undertake.

## Motivations

Re-enactors' motivations have been described (usually without supporting data) as escapism and a search for entertainment (in a complex and intriguing game); the need to belong to a group (sometimes summarised as an opportunity to go camping and get drunk with friends); personal education and/or an interest in educating others; commemorative (an affirmation of cultural identity or political outlook); and an opportunity to step outside everyday existence through "a fascinating window on a world [the participants] know from books and photographs but have never participated in as an experienced reality" (Fortier 1995, 169; Turner 1990, 130).

Over the years, the pursuit of personal pleasure as a motivation has been emphasised often with implied or clearly stated criticism (Thierer 2010, 15). One re-enactment organisation's president estimated that half his

society's membership prioritised personal recreation (Bigley 1991, 14). Volunteers at Kentwell Hall in Suffolk (United Kingdom) and members of the English Civil War Society have been described as taking part for their own enjoyment (Crang 1996, 417). The Society for Creative Anachronism's (SCA) members please themselves and each other in their reconstruction of aspects of pre-17th century life (Thierer 2010, 17-18; Decker 2010, 274). Likewise, members of the LARP community are largely concerned with enjoying themselves despite the enormous effort and investment which goes into organising the events (Stark 2012).

A recent empirical survey of 170 German re-enactors serves to illustrate the diversity of primary motivations for participation. An interest in experimentation about life in the past was identified as very important by the largest group in the survey (51 per cent) and a desire to roleplay as not important at all by 23 per cent of responders (Samida and Liburkina 2014, 194, figure 3). A study of 216 re-enactors in the United States revealed there is a gender dimension to motivations for wearing reconstructed historic dress, which is a central element of re-enactment whichever type of activity is underway (Miller 1998, 45-46). This suggests there is more work to be done to reveal the nuances of motivation among re-enactors.

There are definitions of re-enactment which see it as "a form of ludic carnival" (Pawleta 2010, 2011; Kobiałka 2014, 325). Frequent references to drink and the promise of casual sex have appeared in re-enactors' own descriptions of their events (Peachey 1987, 14; McSween 1987, 20). Research into "renaissance faires" in the United States provides examples of how re-enactment becomes an escape into a fantasy world (Rubin 2012). "Individuals may join living history and historical re-enactment groups because they believe that such groups will provide them with authentic experiences that cannot be found in modern society" (Handler 1987, 339; Decker 2010, 281). This has been characterised as "emotional journeying" (Reynolds 1999, 134; Hartford 2016). In the late 20th century, re-enactment was often described as providing "an identity niche for people who do not find fulfilment in their daily life" (Fortier 1989, 7). There are some re-enactors for whom this escape into the past was total. A group in Scotland, The Clan, exemplified re-enactors who created romantic personae for themselves using intuition rather than research. They drew "on a mish-mash of influences and beliefs which include mysticism, symbolism, a quasi-oriental search for inner peace, the martial arts and the power of fantasy" (Sykes 1989, 14).

Re-enactors have been dismissed as “hobbyists” who rarely know “enough history to be able to place the events they are re-enacting into the larger historical context” (Thierer 2010, 14-15; Thompson 2004, 293). But, as the genre has matured, deeper gratifications have emerged in the literature. Some re-enactors set great store by the accuracy with which they recreate the everyday life and the culture of the past: for some, striving for verisimilitude is the whole point (Daugbjerg 2014; Smith 2001, 36; Crang 1998, 421). The term “authenticity” has been widely adopted to suggest a calibration of this and some research has shown how such “authenticity” is negotiated among re-enactors (Brædder et al. 2017; Decker 2010). This personal achievement in “getting it right” extends beyond the superficial to include informal education, often in the form of experiential learning (Brewer 2010, 81). This level engagement has been described as a form of “serious leisure” (Hunt 2004; Kalshoven 2012; Mittelstaedt, 1995). The number of texts consulted and the precision with which extant artefacts are studied have been cited as evidence of the depth and breadth of knowledge among some re-enactors (Crang 1996, 419): “These people are serious amateur historians, and seriously specialised” (Norman 1993, 15). Such participants have been dubbed “hardcore” re-enactors (Thierer 2010, 16) who “tend to be obsessed with material authenticity” (Aune Nilsen 2015, 31).

Commentators frequently draw a distinction between the “professional archaeological milieu” and “amateurs” (for example, Hartford 2016, 1; Pawleta 2010, 13) but, increasingly, there is a crossover between those with training in history, archaeology or related fields and those who belong to and take an active part in re-enactments. Their combined amateur and professional seriousness aims at taking them beyond looking and behaving correctly for the period but toward revelatory experiences through total immersion in the past: “The aspirations of reenactors are fundamentally ‘holistic’ in that they pursue moments of bodily and temporal resonance that go beyond rational learning about history and embrace broader ‘sensescapes’” (Classen and Howes 2006; Daugbjerg 2014, 726). Their ambition is to recreate life “as it ‘really was’ and to establish, for themselves or for an audience, a connection between past and present” (Brædder et al. 2017, 171). They seek an authentic, subjective experience “that would feel and not just look real” (Handler, 1987, 338). Memories of moments when re-enactors felt their experience was “real” are fondly held (Turner 1990, 126; Crang 1996, 424) and have been described as “touching the past” (Auslander 2013) or “transcending time” (Brædder et al. 2017, 183).

As a result, for some re-enactors, the presence of spectators at their events acts as a brake on such magical moments: “It was the public who seemed anachronistic” (Crang 1996, 426). Some re-enactors stress that they are more interested in being historical than in meeting visitors who may prove a distraction to the way of life in which they are trying to participate (Tivers 2002, 193). Others find personal gratification in interaction with the visiting public: “I like to show people how the past might have look [sic]. I like to speak with them. This is what historical reenactment is really about for me” (Kobiałka 2014, 325). Re-enactors’ resources now include tips on visitor interaction for “the legions of hobbyists who have taken to working with historic sites for special events and weekend programming” (Roth 1998, 11). Some re-enactment organisations have an explicit educational purpose such as changing people’s perceptions about an historical period or the misappropriation of the past (for example, Regia Anglorum 2019; Lloyd 2018).

The origins of re-enactment are usually traced to activities which were explicitly for spectators (Thompson 2004, 34). This tradition has continued because most re-enactment organisations sought out suitable historic environments in which to pursue their hobby and visitors came with those territory. However, this has not been as harmonious an arrangement as it might. Religious leaders and national heritage agencies such as the National Park Service in the United States have condemned battle re-enactments because they treat war too lightly (Wightman 1988; Bigley 1991, 16). The value of demonstrating blank loads and bloodless battles, scaled down cannon and campsites, and manoeuvres by a squad rather than a regiment is dubious: “If this is all the spectators see, without being exposed to a broader historical context during the presentation... such ‘best efforts’ trivialise the original experience as much as they explain it” (Fortier, 1989, 18).

Other dangers are that the participants are so wrapped up in their own experience that the visitors receive short shrift (Hicks 1994, 35; Bigley 1991,16) or that participants will fantasise for their own enjoyment and entertain “without the encumbrance of historical accuracy” (Fortier 1995, 169). But fault does not lie solely with the re-enactors. Academics are deeply concerned with the pictorial reconstruction of sites but show almost total indifference to the content of re-enactment programmes, even though the latter reaches a far larger public (Sansom 1996, 120). “Often [amateur re-enactment groups] taking part in events are left to devise the presentation themselves with little curatorial control, usually because of a lack of

finance and manpower [sic]" (Hicks 1994, 35). Another reason for this may be that special events often fall under the aegis of marketing departments, and, being ephemeral, are difficult to control: "They want the medium to be colourful, entertaining, uncontroversial, not too demanding, but with no awkward dull moments. They have trouble understanding why they should pay for authenticity when most people wouldn't know the difference" (Fortier 1989, 4). Ensuring visitors understand the premise or "alibi" for the re-enactors' presence – in publicity material, handouts on site and through the re-enactors' explanations – is another key issue (Aune Nilsen 2015, 32; Deakin 1986, 15). Otherwise, the anachronistic appearance of Romans at an 11th century castle, Vikings in a Bronze Age site or Napoleonic soldiers where none ever were may be "counter educative" (Hewison 1987, 101; Fowler 1989, 57-63; Walsh 1992, 102; Sansom 1996, 126). A first rule of re-enactment event planning is "to match the time period of the unit to the primary period of your site" (Deakin, 1986, 14-15).

Some progressive projects tried to come to terms with re-enactors' perceived shortcomings as informal educators of the visiting public by providing a framework within which their participation is directed: "While the committee welcomed all who wished to participate, they determined that attendance at... training sessions would be mandatory. This sort of 'quality control' helped ensure against walk-on participants who had detracted from... programmes at other parks" (Spencer Pritchard 1991, 51). Meadow Farm Museum in Virginia (United States) introduced Saturday morning orientation sessions for re-enactors in advance of events to tackle problems as diverse as inappropriate use of innuendo and the need to clean up afterwards (Hanson 1993, 80). Fundamentals were stated such as "wilful misrepresentation of characters or events is wrong, that using the medium to grind personal or ideological axes is wrong, that consumptive use of antiques is wrong, that replicas should be clearly identified" (Fortier 1989, 14). The Admiral Nimitz Museum in Texas (United States) worked closely with the World War II Reenactment Society to adapt their spectacular but somewhat stereotyped presentation *Tora, tora, tora* for inclusion in a programme of events about significant battles of the Second World War. Specific changes included a shift in the commentary from the technology of war to its social context (Bigley 1991, 15).

Despite these laudable attempts to corral re-enactors, there is still a mismatch between the re-enactors' goal of learning from and about the past

through personal experience and the needs of heritage sites to communicate existing research and its interpretation to visitors. Re-enactors who undertake “serious leisure” want the space and time to do so without the obligation of serving a public in which they have no interest. Heritage sites need the re-enactors for whom the chance to share their knowledge and insight is a source of self-fulfilment. Assumptions about the value of re-enactments at heritage sites abound: for example, “Having the re-enactors on site made visits more interesting and hence increased business” (Tivers 2002, 195). There is very little empirical research to support these assertions or which demonstrates the educational value of re-enactments at heritage sites. English Heritage’s evaluation of its events was limited to each one’s success in attracting additional publicity, visitors and income – no educational benefit was assessed (Griffin and Giles 1994, 332). It may even be the case that re-enactors distract visitors from the regular interpretive material on offer. A visitor study at Caerphilly Castle in Wales conducted interviews with 173 visitors when there was no event at the castle and 80 during costumed events. Results showed that although 80 per cent of visitors who attended the special events agreed that costumed interpreters had enhanced their visit and that they had learnt something, fewer of them used the permanent interpretive displays than on days when there was no event (Light 1996).

## Conclusion

An explicit acknowledgement that there is a crucial difference between re-enactors who undertake activities in reconstructed clothing for their own fulfilment and those who see their mission as enlightening others. The re-enactment community comprises different groups with different aims and aspirations. Even within a single re-enactment organisation there is a spectrum of engagement with the activities undertaken. To state that re-enactors are not necessarily prioritising communication with an audience is not criticism, it is useful delineation both for re-enactors and the heritage sites which host them. It would be helpful to develop a classification with which heritage sites can identify those groups or individuals with a visitor-centred focus and others which could be engaged in other ways such as contributing to collaborative research and experimental archaeology. “Professional historians are usually cynical about the value of reenactments as a means of understanding the past” (Smith 2001, 36)

but increasingly, the expertise of re-enactors is being recognised for the great potential it offers (Hartford 2016, 2; Johnson 2015; Skarmintzos 2014, 101). There is a variety of fruitful ways for re-enactors to share their knowledge – interpreting the past for visitors is only one of them.

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# A critical view on the past: Some thoughts on the bias and pros of Living History and the Brazilian scenario

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## Intro:

Brasília, capital of Brazil. Who would imagine that this iconic, modern city, declared World Heritage by UNESCO because of its 20th century modernist urbanism, would host a historical medieval battle club? It was at Rosa de Ferro Society in 2017 that I, a historian and museologist, started training sword fighting and was introduced to the world of living history and re-enactment.

It was due to this recent approach that some questions came up, and I saw at the ReConference event, held in Copenhagen, at the National Museum of Denmark in November 2018, an opportunity to discuss about the potentialities and problems of living history actions according to history, museology and re-enactment. Also, it could be an opportunity to present the living history scenario in Brazil nowadays, and how it is connected to our museums. This is just a summary of the initial thoughts on the subject, and not a result of some prior research or thesis, and therefore cannot be taken as academic research, although there are many points that deserve further study.

I am working with the classification of “living history” developed by Jay Anderson (1984) in his book *Time Machines: The world of living history*, which differentiates the actions that are carried out in museums, from the ones



Figure 1: *Battle of the Nations. Barcelona, Spain, 2017.*

done independently, which he classifies as “re-enactment”. He also mentions “experimental archaeology” as a third type, but it will not be included in this presentation, for it would require deeper knowledge of the matter.

## 1. Bias

During my few years within re-enactment, I have noticed some points that may be seen as “problems”.

The first of all is that many re-enactors are viewed with prejudice, and/or are mistaken for cosplayers or live action role players (who are more interested in fantasy and fiction and not very interested in historical accuracy). That makes it hard for the re-enactors to be taken seriously.

As in any area, one finds both good and bad work, and certain actions can contribute to this prejudice. Some re-enactors cling to historical sources without a proper analysis or putting them into context. Some take paintings, sculptures, illuminated manuscripts as a true source of how people lived, and dressed, without understanding the complexity of the representations in art. Also, history is sometimes re-enacted for segregationist, racist or fascist purposes.



Regarding the living history as a sport, international associations intend to make it the most historical accurate as possible, at the same time it adapts rules of combat and equipment. Although it is done to assure the safety of the sport, some may view it as an authenticity inaccuracy, and therefore, not historical.

### ***1.1. Problems of re-enactment from a historian's perspective***

When we look at re-enactment from an academic historical point of view, we may say that **re-enactment is not scientific**. It cannot be a reliable field of study to historical research, since it does not follow the historical academic method. Furthermore, **(academic) history should be critic**, and provide a critical view of the past. Not only to be critical about the veracity of the sources, but also to question the past. That could not be achieved by re-enactors, whose mainly intentions are to represent a certain portion of the past, and not to debate over it.

That leads us to another fact: **Some reenactors intend to show the "truth"**, but "truth" is an abstract concept, which historians have been debating over for years. The prevailing understanding is given by the "nominalists" like Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Duby, Kosellek. They argue that the truth does not exist objectively and universally (i.e. outside the subject), but instead, it is created by the subject, and depends directly on the subject's position. Or, in other terms, there is not ONE truth, but only different interpretations of the past.

### ***1.2. Problems of Living History in Museums***

Nowadays there is a wide range of museums working with living history, whether they may be considered open air museums, living museums, or traditional museums with living history activities. Nevertheless, besides their general great work, it is valid to highlight some issues.

The problem of "**showing the truth**" is present in some museums as well. With a long-standing tradition of disseminating scientific knowledge, museums might lead the visitors to think that the descriptions given on the informative material are the one and only truth about the subject presented, and not the point of view and conclusions of the curators. So it is important to make clear that knowledge is not given, but built, after

hard research work, and that there might be other ways of interpreting the cultural heritage and subjects.

On the other hand, **museums should not merely display objects. They should stimulate a critical view from the visitors, by making them constantly question what they see on display.** By this we mean that presenting a museological object by using living history as the only exhibition design solution is not necessarily associated with fulfilling the function of museums, which is to promote a critical perception of the presented subject. Therefore, living history **alone** is not enough.

In the words of Ramos:

*“Knowing the past in a critical way means, above all, living the present time as change, as something that was not, that is being and that can be different. The museum gets educational substance by showing historically grounded relations between current and former objects, because there is a relation between what has happened, what is happening, and what can happen in the future”.*

*(Ramos 2004. Free translation)*

To Ramos, if there is not a historically reasoned problem, which could lead to the production of critical knowledge, the visit to a museum becomes a mechanical action.

According to former director of Museu Paulista/USP, Mr. Meneses, who published some insights about Living Museums:

*“The visitor able of ‘stepping back into the past’ is therefore incompatible with the knowledge, since the distances are annulled in a process of banalization and pseudo-familiarization, that transforms the past into the same substance as the present, only with differences, for it is about a former present. (...) This procedure is profoundly anti-pedagogical, because it imprisons us in the present, and, unable of making us comprehend the alterity, it transforms this present into the only thermometer capable of measuring everything”.*

*(Meneses 1994, p.35. Free translation)*

To him, it would be more interesting to explain why people lived in a certain way, instead of just showing it.

We should add an understanding: **Museums are not a reproduction.**

According to Meneses:

*“The museum is not a way to reproduce the world and life. However, this confusion usually happens. The museum is not a way to transport the living life, the everyday pulse of life in its own flux (...) to a specific and concentrated space, it is instead a way of representing (re-presenting) the world, the men, the things, the relations.”*

*(Meneses 2002, p.23. Free translation).*

Lastly, when trying to use living history in museums, we might hear a complaint: *“Living history may privilege one narrative instead of another”*. Well, we must make clear that **museums in general are indeed fields of dispute and are not neutrals**. The point of view presented in an exhibition is the product of an institutional choice. Therefore, one or more narratives will be privileged instead of others. This said, once the choice and purpose of the narrative presented are clear to the visitor, living history could be used as an exhibition solution.

## 2. Pros

All those criticisms mentioned above lose their weight in the discussion if we stick to the purpose of each action.

We cannot criticize living history for not doing something which it is not meant to do. Neither can we assume that there is only one single way of performing living history. There are meanders, tonalities, that make living history a fertile field for several areas.

So, let's take a look at the ICOM's definition of MUSEUM:

*“A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which **acquires, conserves, re-searches, communicates and exhibits** the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”*

*(ICOM 2017)*

There are many ways to communicate and exhibit: books, seminars, exhibitions, online gadgets... **then why not living history?**

### 2.1. The potentialities of living history:

Given the option, why would a museum **choose** to use living history? What would its potentialities be?

Answer: **Museums should Thrill!**

By moving the visitors with emotion, they can **connect** with them. The same way that movies, games, books have a bigger appeal to the public, so it is with living history.

Once connected, it is possible to **communicate** with the public. A museum without the participation of the visitors – the active receiver – cannot satisfactorily communicate. Therefore, according to the definition of communication in linguistics, there is no communication, and so it is not a museum.

“The visitors are the receiver of the museums and the musealized cultural heritage, they bring with them a participation in the curatorial process, for they are the actors of the communication that occurs within the museum” (Paes 2016, p.15. Free translation)

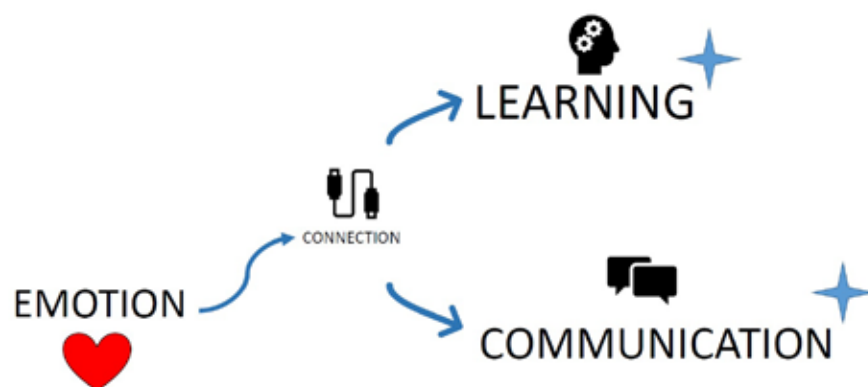


Figure 2. Relation between emotions, learning and communication.

Emotions also help **to improve learning development**. According to neuroeducation, whose most prominent author is Francisco Mora, we can only learn what we love (Menárguez 2017).

Simon Ward, a senior practitioner educational psychologist and consultant for the Cambridge Learning Journey, in a series of videos available on the Cambridge Learning Journey webpage, defends the view that there is no aspect of learning that does not involve emotions, and positive emotions allow people to broaden their minds, make connections and be more creative. (Cambridge 2018)

## **2.2. Partnership museum – re-enactors**

Not only do I believe that museums could work with living history, I also believe in a partnership between re-enactors and museums, for both could benefit from it. Museums could take advantage by adding a playful attraction to its actions, for example, with available personnel, which would lead to an increasing number of visitors. On the other hand, by collaborating with museums, re-enactors could be in an environment whose collections are studied at the source, which means a trustworthy historical source. They would also have a place to carry out their activities. Besides, it could legitimize their actions.

However, those involved in this partnership should just be aware not to incur in A) actions disconnected from the educational project of the institution or from the collection, which would lead to leisure only; B) Actions done by third parties, without the participation of the museum staff.

In Brazil it would be interesting to encourage such actions in museums, since it would attract more people, bringing more visitors to get in touch with other activities museums develop. It could also help in raising awareness of the importance of museums to society, and thus perhaps getting more people engaged in supporting culture. Good living history practices in museums could improve the disclosure of our own history, which is still so unknown to us (many people know more about Vikings than about Lampião – a bandit leader of the Brazilian Northeast region, or about the Guararapes Battle, in which the defenders of the Portuguese Empire fought against the Dutch invasion in our territory).

At the end of this article you may find a list of current Brazilian living history practices, as museums activities, re-enactment groups and events, HEMA and HMB clubs, as well as academic research on the subject.

## Conclusion

Although living history practices have been criticised throughout the years, and been a target of prejudice, they have a potential greater than being merely a visual and leisure resource.

By presenting a subject in an interesting way, living history is capable of connecting with people through emotion, enabling good communication and broadening the learning ability of the visiting public.

Such actions should be encouraged, for they may be a good solution to museums aiming to increase its number of visitors, while offering a more qualified experience.

Last but not least, performing these actions together with established – or about to be created – re-enactment groups increases the engagement of the community to its museums, thus generating a sense of belonging and cooperation in the community.

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Figure 3. Parque Histórico do Carambeí.



Figure 4. "Vila Viking", a Viking Re-enactment Village.

## Annex 1 – List of living history actions in Brazil

### 1. Living history in museums and historical farms (theatrical acts mostly):

- Sarau Imperial (Petrópolis – RJ). *Brazilian Imperial Period, 1822 – 1889*.
- Hotel Fazenda Florença (Conservatória – RJ). *19th Century slave-based farm*.

- Fazenda São Luis da Boa Sorte (Vassouras – RJ). 19th Century slave-based farm.
- Museu Vivo na Cidade (Salvador – BA). Not related to a specific museum, but it does performances in many historical sites and museums, re-enacting scenes which took place in Salvador, from the discovery of Brazil (1500) to the Republican period.
- Parque Histórico do Carambeí (Carambeí – PR). Immigration Village, 1930's

## **2. Re-enactment groups, especially Viking and Middle Ages:**

- Alaisiagae (SP)
- Antigas Serpentes (RJ)
- Capivaras do Trovão (RS)
- Escudo dos Vales (SP)
- Haglaz (RJ)
- Hednir Clan (SP)
- Hvit Bull (PR)
- Myrrox (RJ)
- Nýr Vindr (SP)
- Ordo Draconis Belli (SP)
- Clã Skjaldborg (PR)
- Velho Musgo (SP)
- Vila Viking (SP)

## **3. Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA) and Historical Medieval Battles (HMB):**

- AEEA Stahlfechter (SP)
- Aesir (ES)
- Armizare Esgrima Histórica (RJ)
- Casa Vieira Turaine (RJ)
- Companhia da Espada de Prata (SP)
- Companhia Vermelha (SP)
- Falcão Negro (SP)





Figure 5. HMBIA Team Brazil at the Battle of the Nations Tournament. Rome, Italy, 2018.



Figure 6. "Old Norse" Re-enactment fair.

- GEMM - Grupo de Estudos Militares Medievais (RJ)
- Historical Medieval Battles International Association (HMBIA) - Team Brazil
- Karlbrüder Esgrima Histórica (SP)
- Lâminas das Gerais (MG)
- Lobos de Guerra (SP)
- Núcleo de Estudo de Esgrima Histórica e Arquearia Tradicional (BA)
- Ordem do Grifo de Fogo (PR)
- Ordem do Leão Branco (SP)
- Ordem Do Teixo (PR)
- Praeliator (RS)
- Sala de armas Círculo de Ferro (SC)
- SCAM (SC)
- Scherma-Fechten Londrina (PR)
- Sociedade Rosa de Ferro (DF)
- Universitatis Ludus (RS)

#### 4. History themed fairs and/or private parties:

- Old Norse (SP) [Image 13 – “Old Norse” Reenactment fair. SP]
- Parque Histórico do Carambeí – Feira Medieval (PR)
- Taberna Folk (SP)
- Torneio Anno Domini (MG)

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# All About the Audience

Darrin Cox – West Liberty University (US)

The title of this piece, “All About the Audience,” is not only reflective of the Viking appreciation for alliteration, but also a plea that the audience be considered the core of successful re-enactment and living history, regardless of era. The panel upon which I was privileged to sit, *Advocating Re-Enactment and Living History as Dissemination Methods*, tried in part to lobby for the myriad of ways hands-on history is beneficial to the groups associated with such activities. Ultimately, in order for this hobby, profession, or way of life (whichever viewpoint you bring to the process) to continue or grow, we must find ways to demonstrate the value of re-enactment and living history to our audiences because it is through their support that we are able to keep doing what we love.

Although I have been a Viking re-enactor for over two decades, in recent years my participation in living history has changed. I now prepare a number of West Liberty University student volunteers every year to help me conduct what I call the *Viking Living History Project (VLHP)*. The VLHP is a traveling Viking encampment that usually engages in demonstrations within the K-12 school system<sup>1</sup> here in the United States of America, but we also visit other sites, such as college campuses, festivals, and libraries. Since the majority of my volunteers major in various education preparation programs, they do have some training in how to best educate an audience.

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1 K-12 covers public schooling from kindergarden to the 12th grade



*Vikings at the school gymnasium.*



*Immersion is contextual.*

Regardless of how living history intersects with your life, one of the things that has become clear to me over the past few years of managing the VLHP is that the most positive responses I have received, from both students and adults alike, come from demonstrations that are tailored to meet the interest levels of the audience. To reiterate a point I made on the panel, immersion is contextual. Even though we often set up on a gymnasium floor, the students still believed we were actual Vikings and some of the teachers asked if we were like the Amish, living a lifestyle based on the technologies of the past.

What this means is that many of our younger attendees need only window dressing to transport them into the Viking Age. Some may only want to get their feet wet in the shallow end of the pool and have a great time simply wading. It is up to you to meet them where they want to be. It is your job to give the audience what they need, especially since the audience is so crucial to the continued success of our community. Even though older, sophisticated audiences are capable of much more, most might only make it into the pool midway. Yet this still could be an immersive experience for them. It is up to the audience to judge their level of comfort and depth of interest. It is only on the rarest occasions that someone will dive into the deep end of the pool seeking out the greater depths that we have to offer; that will meet us where we are. And that is OK. Cater to their individual level of interest. Don't berate them with evidence of historical authenticity if all they want is a general understanding of the period or if they are simply eager to meet "the real" Leif Erikson. If they want to go deeper into the material, their questions will lead you there alongside them. Suddenly, you might have a new member for your group because you were willing to swim alongside them rather than trying to drag them to where the waters were above their head and their feet cannot touch.

Thus, my personal experiences affirm Dr. Jane Malcolm-Davies presentation findings from ReConference, which suggested that the best re-enactment experience for the audience is one where the re-enactor is able to shift from

first, to second, to third person interpretation depending upon what they need at the moment. While this may prove difficult for some, in my experience this has been the key to both the enjoyment and education of visitors who have come to partake in our projection of the past into the present. Although somewhat cynical of perspective, positive interaction with the audience is a means to an end, the end being a flourishing and healthy re-enactment community where event organizers keep inviting us back and we turn their visitors into our new members.

## Evidence of Impact Matters

This is why academic studies on the efficacy of educational methods are so important to our cause. There is a growing body of scholarship that treats the effectiveness of hands on history in education. As a means of short hand to provide you with the trends in recent scholarship, I will simply direct you once again to one of our fellow presenters at ReConference 2018, Dr. Malcolm-Davies. In her award winning article *Borrowed Robes: The Educational Value of Costumed Interpretation at Historic Sites*, Dr. Malcolm-Davies provides an overview of some of the major concerns of using living history at sites who perceive education as one of their primary foci. I believe that it is significant that she notes the number of times and places where audiences prior to her own study demonstrated a preference for the activities and interaction living history provides. (2-3) More importantly, not only did people want hands on history, they felt like they were getting something out of it, too. Audience members usually believed living history contributed to their overall enjoyment, whether it was a sense of immersion or educational value. (4-5) Conversely, she concluded that “costumed interpreters are providing a sense of the past but not enough learning.” (8) The silver lining here is that educational success was possible so long as institutions made a significant enough investment for training and support of said interpreters. (9) Essentially, living history interpretations were beneficial to heritage sites if they were adequately funded and fully invested in the process.

My research adds to this evidence, showing just how impactful living history can be in connecting viewer entertainment with education. Although only in the nascent stage of analysis, it needs to be pointed out that there are some key differences between my research and Malcolm-Davies'. She focuses on mapping how visitors' priorities for attending living history events, such

as having fun, value for their money, and learning, correlates with their perception of the contributions of living history after their visit. My study simply relies on viewers own impressions of how much they learned and how fun it was. Constructing my questionnaire in this way permits me to sidestep any negative perceptions regarding unmet expectations. For instance, my research has little to do with whether or not the visitor “got their money’s worth” since those I study are participating in a free enrichment program through the local school system. My concerns are more oriented towards growth in learning.

Although the free program is open to all, questionnaires are only given to those in 3rd grade or above since these children have a better capacity to understand what is being asked of them. The survey contains straightforward questions about what they feel their level of knowledge is before the program and what they feel their growth of knowledge is afterwards. The questionnaire uses a Likert scale that presents 1 as being none, 2 as a little, 3 as a moderate amount, 4 as a good deal, and 5 as a great deal of knowledge or growth. Likewise, they are asked if the presentation is useful as an educational tool, how useful, if it is enjoyable, and how much they enjoyed it (again employing the 1-5 scale to measure value when applicable). A similar survey is presented to the in-service teachers who also attend the demonstrations in order to measure their perceptions of the value of living history in an educational setting.

The results thus far clearly indicate that living history is not only an enjoyable, immersive experience for the children, but they felt like they learned a great deal from it as well. Students gauged their own prior knowledge of the Viking world at a 2.49 average. Afterwards, their response averaged a 4.08 indicating that they believed they had experienced significant learning about medieval Scandinavians. Out of the 666 responses, 94% of the students found living history to be a useful tool in imparting specific knowledge, ranking it at just under a 3.87. Similarly, 97% of the students said that they enjoyed the experience, ranking it on average as an impressive 4.36.

What is perhaps even more striking is that the in-service teachers had an even more positive response to living history as an educational tool. One hundred percent of the 28 teachers who participated said that living history provided content growth for their students, ranking it at 4.11. Every single



*Living history in the classroom.*

one of the teachers also said that they would recommend living history as an educational tool to others since it did such a good job at reinforcing the state of West Virginia's curriculum standards and objectives that they are required to follow. Remarkably, 100% of the teachers also said that *their* content knowledge grew a significant amount with an average response of 4.19 in terms of growth. While a more thorough analysis of this ongoing research project is needed, it is very telling that experts in education also found living history to be very beneficial as an educational tool.

Lhistorists need to arm themselves with knowledge such as this when making arrangements with organizers of living history events. For the professional re-enactor who expects to get paid for their services, research is a powerful tool in negotiations. My research demonstrates the substantial relationship between enjoyment and learning in a hands on history environment that could lead to a paying job. For more casual hobbyists who are largely doing it for fun, Malcolm-Davies findings, as well as my own results, should at the very least help to open doors with event organizers (and keep them open). This way, we can continue to have access to the wonderful weekend getaways we seek. For academics such as myself, this research provides justification for further study into the impact and utilization of this unique instructional methodology.

## Stronger Together

More to the point, as a history professor, it should be easy to see why the audience is so important to me, but it also reveals a potential bias in my perspective. Setting aside my love for teaching, making sure that those in my classroom grasp difficult historical concepts is literally how I feed my family. These same students then evaluate me. These evaluations, in turn, become a part of the process to determine whether or not I have a job. Thus, I could be overinflating the importance of the audience to you through its importance to my livelihood. However, no matter what your connection to living history and re-enactment, the audience is perhaps the biggest determinant in relation to having the means, materials, locations, and new memberships for continued participation in these historical endeavors.

Successful interaction with the audience is everybody's business, from the casual hobbyist to the hardcore Lhistorist who spends a week in the woods with only their wits and their handmade Viking kit. For instance, it is easy to see why the audience matters to museums and special interest sites. As much as we might hate to admit it, money is what ultimately propels the re-enactment scene and a significant amount of money comes from the spectators and non-participatory attendees. Viking markets and museum demonstrations are driven by general attendance, more so than ever before due to shrinking government funding for arts and culture. That is not to say that museums and heritage sites are not also places that strive to educate. However, enhancing the experience for the visitor is one of the primary motivators as to why event organizers host re-enactments and living history. So long as museums believe there is value in re-enactments, then they will continue to support living history. While Viking markets and museums are not necessary for re-enactments, as the sponsors of many of our events their concerns loom large in the re-enactor's world.

Likewise, medieval movies and serial television shows need viewers and DVD collectors. If these historical endeavors are not profit engines, then support for them would slowly go away (unless you know of silent, black and white movies that are still being regularly produced). While we may spend hundreds if not thousands of dollars on our gear, this market largely exists because of the popularity of the genre with the wider world. If museums, markets, and movies were to close their proverbial doors to us, what do you think would happen to the merchants and materials we rely on



to spend a weekend “playing Viking?” At the very least the market would significantly shrink, driving away artisans who could no longer make a living due to the dying revenue stream. This, in turn, would severely restrict the variety and quality of materials for those of us who are willing to participate no matter what the public might want.

Assuming that you engage in re-enactment with at least a modicum of concern for accuracy, living history may better be called a lifestyle than a hobby or profession, simply due to the amount of time, effort, and money that you have to put into it. Even then, it is almost impossible for one person to master all of the crafts and skills necessary to have a truly immersive historical experience. The time it takes to grow and process your own flax for linen, dig and process the ore and charcoal for blacksmithing, or even construct your own earthen and turf longhouse is immense when taken together. It is for this reason that specialization of labor began in early civilizations in the first place. Yet this does not even account for the crafting of all these base components into the vibrant and beautiful artistry of conspicuous consumption that we have all come to love about the Viking world. If, on the other hand, you can make all the accoutrements yourself, congratulations! You are a unicorn. I say this because you must be a mystical, fantastical beast since you somehow magically have the time, skill, money, and materials necessary to stand alone as a re-enactor.

The only exception to this would be if you are willing to give up your modern life, find a community of like-minded artisans, purchase a piece of land large enough to support said community, and live outside the world as we know it becoming, in effect, a hermit taking refuge in the past. However, if the level of immersion you need to fulfill your desire to experience the past is less than this, then you are going to need to play nice with the people that museums and heritage sites must cater to in order to survive. They host re-enactments because they perceive a benefit to their clientele and to make money. In order to continue our relationship with them, we must prove that our services are of value to their aims.



## Best practice – a tale of struggles and a happy ending

Thit Birk Petersen – Middelaldercentret (DK)

Middelaldercentret (The Medieval Centre) in Nykøbing F., Denmark has always been working with volunteers as part of the interpretation. The volunteers have always played a big and important part in making the small reconstructed medieval town come alive.

We know how to work with our volunteers, how to educate them to help them meet the requirements that we put up in an attempt for us to reach our goal and mission – to show our guest the best possible picture of how a medieval town in the middle ages might have looked like (we are well-aware that it always only can be a qualified guess and that it is ever changing).

But now a new type inhabitants of Sundkøbing (the name of our small town) has begun to appear – The Re-enactor! We have several times worked with different groups, on a one-on-one basis for a specific event or a market, but we have not been visited by single groups who by themselves approach us. This has started to happen and we are very happy about this – and it all began in 2016.

### A new beginning – how a 25th year celebration can change things

In 2016 The Medieval Centre celebrated its 25th years anniversary with a big event that gathered over 200 re-enactors from all over Europe. We knew



Illustration 1: Sundkøbing full of life. Photo: The Medieval Re-enactment group Alba Societas.

that a lot of groups wanted to visit us but never had been able to or knew how to get in touch with us to arrange a stay. We teamed up with the Polish 'Project XIV' and the person in charge from their side was Lady Malina, who is also known for her very skilled work as a seamstress of medieval period clothing. Project XIV has a huge network and they managed to spread out the invitation to a lot of groups – and only to groups that they knew could meet our standards.

We are known for having very high standards when it comes to authenticity – maybe also a reason why many groups have stayed away. This was not something we were going to change for the event. This meant no make-up, no rubber soles on shoes, no glasses, no fabrics out of period and no patterns outside the period of 1395-1415, since that is the time-frame of our work. We always focus on a specific year 610 years before the present date. Which means that in 2016, the year was 1406.

The groups wrote an application and we picked out those that fitted the demands and helped others meet our requirements with a few alternations. When the time arose and the groups arrived, they all did their best to meet our wishes – although I have never seen so many posh people in my small town! How come that every re-enactor wants to be a noble, a knight or a fine lady? I prefer to get down and dirty and be able to work – and we all know that in the middle ages, as now, most people were common people just trying to get food on the table. *Anyway, that was a side track, but think about it next time you make a new dress.*

The event in 2016 was not the example of best practice I wanted to show – although it was a really well curated event, featuring a very good

collaboration with re-enactors and very well carried out. It was merely the beginning of the example.

It turned out that the re-enactors loved our place. They could use it, live in the houses, cook there, pretend to be set right back into 1406 and pretend to be in the middle ages (if you can look away from the tourists – but after 17:00 they had it all to themselves). It turned out that we could fill a gap in the wet dreams of medieval re-enactors – to actually “live” in the middle ages 24/7, to re-enact all the time, make role-plays and scenarios.

So e-mails kept ticking into our inbox from groups who had attended the event and now wanted to come back.

## A new challenge

A new challenge occurred, something that we had not thought of – the difficulties in communicating our requirements to the new groups who wanted to visit and stay at The Medieval Centre.

A good example of how good communication, smiles and co-operation between an attraction/museum and a group of re-enactors, can evolve into something great is the process we have had together with the Polish group ‘Project Volk’. They were one of the first groups to get in touch after the event. In the beginning, we were a bit hesitant to welcome them back. One thing is a big event where our tourists are aware of the many different nationalities and the variations in costume, another thing is the everyday season.

We spent a lot of time educating our volunteers. To be a volunteer at The Medieval Centre you have to get in touch with our volunteers manager, talk to her, write an application form and participate in a course that takes two weekends (one with theory and one all geared up in medieval dress but under supervision). How could we make sure that foreign groups would be able to live up to the same standard when we did not have the chance to educate them?

It was a risk, but it could turn into a win-win as they really wanted to come, they promised to behave and they could fill a gap in our low season where we have very few volunteers. We decided to go for it.



*The shoe maker and chairman of Project Volk, Kamil Szpronceł, working on a shoe.*

I believe that the first visit was a tough one for both sides. They could not live up to our standards and they were a bit messy in the modern common area, causing much irritation to our employees. But through conversations between us and the group, most problems were solved.

They have now visited the centre 3 years in a row and it is a pleasure to have them. They work hard on projects we provide – making fences, wattle and daub, chopping wood and other tasks that need to be done. At the same time they provide very good interpretation to our visitors. They participate in the daily program as squires for the tournament, walk the big wheels of the trebuchets and much more. They are very skilled craftsmen, who are keen on showing their work to our guests, as they inhabit the houses throughout the day, making the town come alive.

It has turned out to be a win-win for both sides – they get to live the medieval dream and we get our town inhabited for a week in the low season.

## **A tale of the beautiful swan**

For a few years now, we have been visited by 'Iloinen Joutsen' – The Merry Swans, a Finnish group who re-enact the middle ages.

They are all very skilled craftsmen and -women, and a true treat to work with from a curator's point of view. As our co-operation has evolved over



Illustration 3 & 4: Iloinen Joutsen – ‘The Merry Swans’  
doing what they do best – textiles!

the years, they have come to consider The Medieval Centre their summer home and we consider them very valuable interpreters. They possess great knowledge of woodwork, medieval food (which they love to share), and best of all – textile! They are very skilled textile workers and they know everything there is to know about textile production.

Last year, we decided to have a theme focusing on textile production from sheep to dress and we invited them to collaborate with our own volunteer textile guild. They planned most of what was going to happen, while we just provided them with the material, a Danish speaking interpreter, some volunteers for a fashion show and *ét voila*: a weekend full of textile interpretation was happening.

It is a joy to work together with such professional people, who possess such passion, who are so friendly, and who involve our volunteers and tourists in their interpretation. Lastly, they also bring new knowledge to us. This is a tendency we also see in our volunteers – they become knowledgeable in a subject to a point where they can bring new knowledge to the interpretation we do at the centre. We have academic staff (me), but I do not know everything, neither do I pretend to or try to. Therefore having volunteers and visiting re-enactors sharing their knowledge with us and the tourists is wonderful.

A note must be made again: we do not pay volunteers or re-enactors to do a certain job or participate in an event. We can sometimes cover some of the travel costs, so that they don’t have any expenses coming to The Medieval Centre, but we do not pay a salary.

## Company of Saynt George – creme de la crème

The size and volume of the groups which we work with varies a lot, from small groups of 4-5 people to big groups like 'Company of Saynt George' that can muster around 80-100 people.

We have had the pleasure of working with the Company on more than one occasion and it is a very disciplined organisation – also one of the oldest medieval re-enactment groups in Europe. They have a very professional take on everything and when we invited them to come to The Medieval Centre in 2018, they planned most of the stay themselves.

The Company of Saynt George usually portrays a Burgundian army unit, but this time they brought all their craftsmen to make Sundkøbing come alive like a real small town in the middle ages. They brought shoe makers, printers, potters, seamstresses, carpenters, bow makers, candle makers and many more. Even though it was the laymen they brought, and not the soldiers, a few weapons were needed for guarding at night etc. The Company always re-enacts 24/7 and at night they have guards guarding the camp or town.

I was in charge of getting the permits for weapons import into Denmark. This is an example of bad practice – but not from the side of the re-enactors, merely the Danish police. Danish law is strict when it comes to the import of weapons. The police do not quite understand re-enactment or replica weapons. A week before the event, and few days before most of the Company members would set off on their travel towards us, the police suddenly wanted consents and permissions to contact the police in the country of the re-enactors in order to make the permits. I had to act fast and so did the re-enactors. I made the consent forms and send them off and the re-enactors responded very fast! That was an example of a group that is well organised and within a short time can gather the information needed.

*But a note to you: if coming to Denmark with weapons – contact the police well in advance!*

I have rarely worked with such a professional organisation as The Company of Saynt George. They had every meal planned, all of the daily tasks



*Illustration 5: Same location as illustration 1, but another time period! The Company of Saynt George is usually re-enacting the period between 1460 and 1480. Middelaldercentret is in the beginning of the 1400. We decided to meet around 1450-60 for a week.*

scheduled and it was a pleasure to walk around and listen to them talk to our guests. They understood that between 10:00-17:00 their main task was to educate and entertain our paying guests. This is important to me, as my job is to make sure our guests have a good time and get their value for money. After closing hour they can enjoy themselves as they see fit. For the most they kept the town open and worked on their projects.

One night they arranged a proper medieval market – and for a while it was just like being back in the middle ages; only medieval people as far as the eye could see. That was a great experience for all involved.

The Company was also very good at including our volunteers. We have a lot of active volunteers who spent a week, a weekend or a few days as medieval persons at Middelaldercentret. Our volunteers are very eager to learn new skills and meet new people, so they were invited into the

community and participated in the workshops, learned new crafts and helped in the kitchen. Sometimes when we are visited by large groups, our volunteers can feel a bit lost as the groups take up a lot of space. Our volunteers are very important to us, as they are an important part of the interpretation. It was a joy to see both parts work so well together and new friendships form.

To me as a curator, it was the example of a very well executed event from our side and from Company of Saynt George's side. All aspects of the event were discussed beforehand and we all knew what the goal was. We had the upper-hand in everything and it was a smooth co-operation.



## Best practice – will we reach the end?

Best practice depends on the place, the people and the course. For us we have come up with a model that functions. It is still in its beginning and we are constantly changing elements to make the experience the best possible for us, for the re-enactors, for our volunteers and for our guests.

It is somewhat new to us to work with bigger groups of re-enactors and we need to adapt to this new type of interpreters. Some are very skilled craftsmen or interpreters or both, some are here for the social part, but quickly learn that the social part is much more fun, if you also involve the guests while working on a project, and some would just like to be on a holiday, not taking notice of the guests. The latter are not welcome at our place, unless they are willing to change into one of the other groups. Luckily, most are and with some conversations, some guidelines and a firm leader, everything usually works out well for all sides.

Other groups keep asking to come visit us and we welcome anyone who is ready to play by our rules. As new groups come, there will always be start up issues and we will always have to keep an eye out for stuff we do not want in the town – smartphones for example. This is a general problem that is only getting worse and I would love suggestions on how to solve it! Because I will not have medieval people taking pictures during opening hours with their phones – it ruins the illusion for everyone. It is difficult to explain to a complaining tourist why we say we are authentic, when they have just seen a medieval woman take a selfie – the position of a selfie-taker is very easily recognised even at a distance.

Re-enactors are a very good interpretative tool, with most of the groups being very skilled and professional. It is often a treat to work with them and I do wish that more groups take interpretation into their game, as it enhances the experience for both guests and themselves.



## Nalbinding: Protecting an endangered heritage craft for the future.

Emma Boast - York Archaeological Trust & Nidavellnir (UK)

*‘When we craft, not only do we keep a skill alive, but we interact with the past and develop an understanding of how our ancestors survived’.*

Imagine the scene, a modern day wool show and a historic nalbinder, the specialist stood in Viking clothing; nalbinded items on display. Everything is accessible and the scene is set ready to draw people in to engage with Nalbinding as a heritage craft. The show opens; to begin with the atmosphere seemed filled with a sense of intrigue, people walking past with a quizzical look on their face thinking ‘what is this?’ This thought appeared to spin around the table for most of the first day, with polite smiles and glances being given. The traders and public alike seemed confused, they were interested in the setting and spectacle but there were common remarks that kept reappearing, ‘what on earth are you doing?’ people would say, someone very forcibly stating ‘wow, what is the point of you doing that?’ as they walked on by. Fair enough questions and easily explained, but these reactions got me thinking. I purposefully wanted to see how the modern-day wool community and the general public reacted to Nalbinding; and it was fascinating to experience people’s responses.

Many times over this weekend I explained the historical and archaeological applications of *nale*, *nal* or *naal-binding*; and had brilliant discussions with very advanced wool and fibre workers about spinning and fibre making



*Tightly stitched mittens made by the author.*

in the past. As constructive as these discussions were people struggled to see the relevance of this craft in the modern world. So, on the second day rather than explaining everything I sat giving demonstrations, actually creating an item in front of people and that really seemed to draw people in. People slowly started to gather around the table and you could see they were warming to the idea of this “weird craft” becoming more accessible. The ‘what on earth is that?’ turned into an ‘ah okay, so how do I do that?’ which was exactly the question I wanted people to start asking right at the beginning! The historical knowledge, the “what and why” was certainly very important and gave authority for the context I was putting across, but it was not as important as the “how” are you doing that? I could have stood there and taught with all the information and enthusiasm in the world, but if I could not physical show them or talk them through the actual stitches then I would have failed to engage them in understanding this craft. When people “see” the action and the process taking place and then immerse themselves in the knowledge, there is more of a chance for the physical craft to be retained and shared. That, more than anything seemed to spark

a fire within the modern wool crafters and public alike and that was what I was there to do, to ignite that spark and inspire them to give this heritage craft a try.

## The Home of Nalbinding

Within the UK, Nalbinding has been undertaken as part of Anglo Saxon and Viking period living history displays since at least the 1970s. These in turn have meant that those individuals who have learnt the craft in a hobby-type setting, have then taught it to people within a relatively isolated audience. The living history portrayal of this craft is also very variable; it depends very much on the individual crafter and their nalbinding skill level, as to what stitches and techniques are taught and retained. People's teaching ability and understanding of the craft is also varied within this setting so these are aspects to be considered when starting to learn. As a way of introducing a new craft to a complete novice it is a great platform. It is a very easy way to keep a craft going by mimicking an existing crafter within a re-enactment and living history setting. However, with changing group dynamics and shifts in people's interests not everyone wants to learn to refine the craft of nalbinding.

This over time means the techniques can get distorted into a slightly different form, where the finished product becomes more important rather than the technique of how you got there. An example of this in recent years has been the need to keep the tension in the stitches quite loose, so the finished textile almost mimics modern crotchet. This type of finish is perfectly suitable for beginners learning to nalbind so you can see the development of the stitches. However, from archaeological examples of these finished items; like mittens, socks and hats we can see the tension is tight, the stitches interlock and a solid textile is produced. The basics exist, it's just the confidence and patience to see the craft through to the finished item needs to be encouraged more within this setting.

When constantly immersed in historical interpretation or living history it is very easy to forget that not everyone is coming from the same understanding or foundation as yourself. Most of the time as a heritage interpreter you are busy deciding what level of immersion you are going to be in on a daily basis. Is your character going to start the day as a full force 10th century persona,

with a textile and nalbinding setup, or are you going to be yourself in a costume but with added “Viking facts”? Of course a lot of this is dependent on the environment you are set within. To a member of the public experiencing your interaction with them, it is either going to come across very personal; which a very talented heritage interpreter can do with ease or it may come across as a passing interaction on the way to something else, which means your influence on the public is minimal. Every individual member of the public is also going to perceive and understand historical interpretation in a slightly different manner; people are going to react to the way you look, the way you talk and carry yourself. All of this is true for a heritage crafter as well. The public are going to get more of an immersive experience from a nalbinder who is actively crafting, but also has the people skills, awareness and historical knowledge to field any questions that an inquisitive mind may generate, whether you are in character or not.

One thing a member of the public won't necessarily think about is why are YOU taking part in an immersive Viking experience. Why are you a Viking? Why do you want to spend 140 hours making a nalbinded hat? Is it for your own personal enjoyment as a hobby, or are you there to earn a living? Earning a living from being a professional heritage interpreter or crafts person is a relatively recent concept. It still surprises the public, even though there are many individuals working in heritage and living history, who are now second or third generation specialists in this field. It appears that the issue is there isn't a big enough public platform to vocalise heritage interpretation and heritage crafters. In the UK over the last 10 years this has started to be addressed with organisations such as 'The Heritage Craft Association' who are trying to save and nurture these skills and the crafters that have them. However, one place a member of the public is likely to come into contact with a heritage crafter, is at a heritage centre or museum and these places can only do so much to support and facilitate the growth of heritage crafts.

The responsibility for developing crafts is ultimately on the heritage crafter themselves. There seems to be a constant need of having to publicly justify “why” heritage interpretation and skills across all levels of interaction are valuable to modern society, but one way to break that deadlock is getting people to engage in heritage crafts and physically interact with the past. The engagement in a craft such as nalbinding not only gives people practical skills but also gets them thinking about a historical time period, which in itself

can be a very beneficial and reflective process. In recent years the psychological effects of crafting have also shown to greatly aid an individual's mental health and increase well-being. Taking all these different facets of heritage and interaction into consideration, it just goes to show how important it is to keep heritage crafts alive by increasing awareness and supporting fellow nalbinders who exist in the world of heritage.

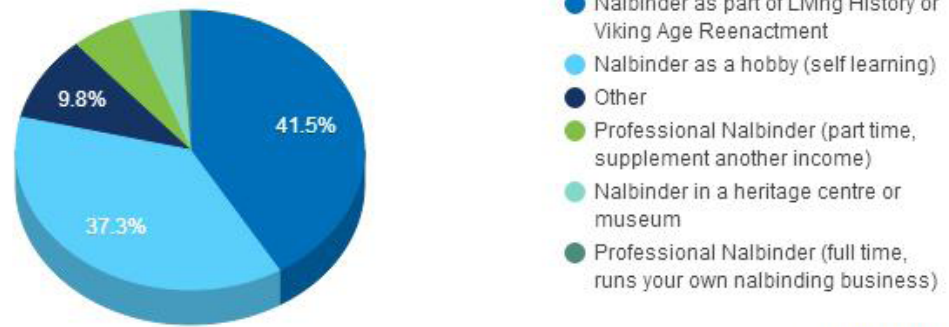
## Where does that leave this craft now?

Trying to assess whose undertaking nalbinding and in what form is something that's not been considered before. From a recent poll on nalbinding carried out in the UK, 200 people submitted responses (See Figure 1). This poll was done to measure the state of nalbinding as a heritage craft in the UK and determine what kind of groups, audiences and interactions this craft was most prevalent in. There appeared to be 5 main groups that this craft was being utilised in.

There were 41% of individuals who stated they did nalbinding as part of a re-enactment group or in a living history setting. It's clear to see that this traditionally has been the home of this heritage craft, where small groups of passionate people have demonstrated and shared this skill, not only to new re-enactors but also to members of the public. This group's contribution to nalbinding needs to be recognised, the commitment for it to be taught has ultimately sustained the craft up to this point and that is due to the dedication of passionate re-enactors and living historians.

There were 37% of people who stated they had given nalbinding a go by themselves and were self-taught. Whether they had learnt from online source material, books or kits, these individuals are engaging with the craft from a different starting place.

Within the heritage and museum industry in the UK surprisingly only 5% of individuals said they undertook nalbinding within their heritage setting as part of their job. In many cases it appears that someone had taught them from the heritage centre and the skill had been learnt and developed from there to use in an existing heritage experience.



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*Results from the UK Nalbinding poll.*

Looking at the results from a craftsmanship perspective there were 6% of individuals who stated they considered themselves to be professional nalbinders, but who only did it part-time to supplement another income, as a home-craft enterprise. A very small 1% of individuals stated that they are pursuing nalbinding as a full-time crafting role; this is a very difficult category to develop and survive within as a heritage crafter; as you very much rely on the support of the hobbyist nalbinders and those within the re-enactment and living history community who need nalbinded items to wear for heritage portrayals. There were a further 10% of individuals who stated that they did nalbinding in an “other” form, whether that be teaching or working generally in historical fibre, this is certainly a category that could be investigated further to determine how people are using nalbinding in different forms.

The results from this poll show that there are groups where nalbinding can continue to be taught as a heritage craft, and that there is certainly scope for development. The re-enactment and living history community are the first group of individuals who need to be encouraged and supported to keep this craft going. One way that this can be done is through direct engagement within re-enactment groups and offering of talks, workshops, lectures to focus on specific aspects of nalbinding; but to also broaden their knowledge of this particular skill by offering different cultural developments of the craft. Nalbinding within this group most certainly needs to be nurtured further. If this poll was run again to a wider audience, I would expect the majority of individuals practicing this craft would still come from this significant group.

The interesting area for scope and development of nalbinding as a heritage craft is very much within the hobbyist and self-learning category. There are always going to be those individuals who have an interest in crafting or wool craft that are intrigued by a different form of historical ‘knitting’. It is

this group that modern knitters, crochet and fibre workers would fall into. There are modern guilds and support networks for those that weave, spin and dye fibres. However, there needs to be an attempt to bridge the gap and provide accessibility, knowledge and guidance as these individuals could shape the form nalbinding takes in the modern world.

Surprisingly only a small amount of individuals seemed to come from the heritage and museum sector, so may not represent the full potential from this group in the poll. Heritage interpreters tend to engage on a one-to-one basis or with large groups of individuals. It is important to impress on heritage centres the need to allow interpreters the opportunity to demonstrate a heritage craft. Other ways these centres could assist in safeguarding and promoting nalbinding as a heritage craft would be to offer areas that could be used to teach the craft, or engage with individuals that do teach nalbinding to promote it to a more public audience. Even within a museum or heritage environment the long historical time span that 'nalbinding' as an ancient craft has, means that workshops could be focused around different cultural aspects of nalbinding; for example, Roman and Egyptian Coptic stitch nalbinding through to 13th century medieval period nalbinding. There is a "Nalbinding Narrative" that could be used by heritage centres to engage with those who learn from actively involving themselves in an immersive environment.

What this brief assessment has shown is there is a community around nalbinding already, it is small but it exists and there are audiences that are yet to be engaged with it fully. What has also been demonstrated is that it is certainly worth while attempting a more comprehensive survey regarding this heritage craft, to answer some of the questions that the first set of results and discussions have generated.

For many years, Nalbinding has been seen as craft on the periphery, with limited examples surviving from the archaeological record and a general disinterest in the length of time needed to create items. People have overlooked it as a craft and dismissed its validity within a historic setting, but no longer. Nalbinding is a heritage craft that will continue to grow and develop through those dedicated individuals who seek to make the old ways relevant in present day.





# Computational History: When the Big Data Has a Story to Tell

Eugene Leonov – MSD Global Innovation Center (CZ)

## Introduction

During the last decades, many sources of historical and archaeological data have passed through “digitalization” and now they have databases accessible via the Internet. These come in various formats, well-structured or not, using different natural languages.

These large datasets bring with them the need for robust processing methods. In order to make this possible, we need to introduce a framework which provides smooth access to all possible sources. It should be easy to use and be open for new datasets, which will appear inevitably.

## What is Computational History?

Computational History is a discipline which uses a data-driven approach for historical studies and applications. The “Time Explorer” project is an example of Computational History. It is built on a framework for generic access to historical/archaeological datasets, and uses following terms: Big Data, Natural Language Processing, Graph Theory.

In the very essence, we have a storage of facts and relations among them. Each fact describes an atomic piece of data, for example: a person’s date of

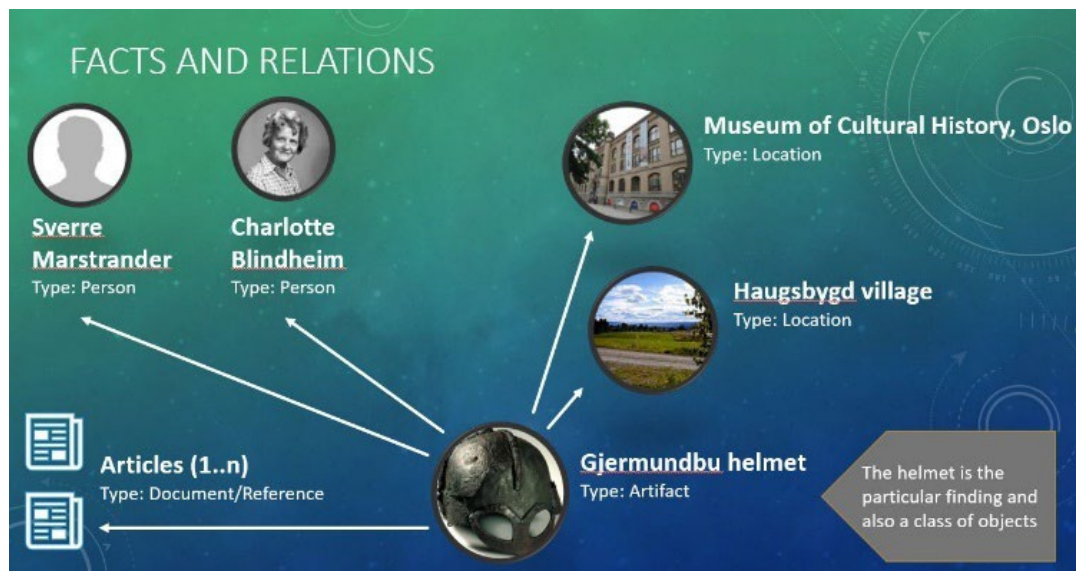


Figure 1. Facts and Relations.

birth. These facts are related to each other, and the possible number of relations is unlimited. These facts and relations can be accessed by a software application directly from the main storage or indirectly via data adapters.

Let's demonstrate this principle with the following example.

In Figure 1 we can see a helmet found at Gjermundbu which is presented as a fact (i.e. it exists). This fact has type "Artefact", meaning "created by people". There are articles describing aspects of this finding. We can also consider them as facts. These facts are related with the fact describing the helmet. Also, there are persons who found the helmet, who wrote articles etc. All of them are facts (literally, "a person performed a known action with the object") and they have their own relations. The same can be said for locations. For example, "Haugsbysgd village" where the helmet was found and "Museum of Cultural History in Oslo" where it is located nowadays.

The principles of this data storage are similar to a knowledge base. However, there is a significant difference. A "regular" knowledge base operates with triplets  $\langle \text{entity1}, \text{relation}, \text{entity2} \rangle$ . Therefore we need several triplets to represent a piece of knowledge. For example:

ENTITY 1	RELATION	ENTITY 2
Gjermundbu helmet	Has type	Helmet
Gjermundbu helmet	Was found where	Haugsbygd village
Haugsbygd village	Has type	Location
Location	Has attribute	Latitude
Location	Has attribute	Longitude
Gjermundbu helmet	Described in	Article 1
Article 1	Has type	Article
Article	Has attribute	Author
Article	Has attribute	Publication Date

Table 1. Example of some triplets for the Gjermundbu helmet

The list in Table 1 is incomplete and can be prolonged. The advantage of the generic triplet representation is convenience and agility because anything in the world can be described by it. However, the main disadvantage is its bad performance during the analysis of this data, such as when we try to request information like “show me all people who were related with Gjermundbu helmet and published their articles in the last five years”. The execution of this query requires connecting many triplets because the reasoner (a mechanism which performs reasoning) needs to understand what is “helmet”, “article”, “person”, “date” and so on.

In contrast, the framework of “Time Explorer” uses predefined types of fact. To illustrate this principle, Table 2 describes the same information as Table 1, but now presented in the form of “packed triplets”.

FACT	RELATION	FACT
Gjermundbu helmet Type: Artifact Belongs to culture: ... Created by: ...	Was found where	Haugsbygd village Type: Location Coordinates: Latitude, Longitude
Gjermundbu helmet	Described in	Article 1 Type: Article/ Source of Knowledge Author: ... Date of Publication: ...

Table 2. “Packed triplets” in “Time Explorer” project.

The number of types of relations is also limited and known. For example, it is impossible that a person was described by a helmet or a village, while the opposite is possible. This reduction of possible relations and directions of the relations helps to improve processing performance significantly.

### ***The Nature of Historical Data***

**Historical data is by its very nature incomplete, contradictory and erroneous.** So let us take a look at each of these traits:

An example of incompleteness would be missing data points in a sequence. A framework which performs historical data processing should support a statistical mechanism which covers these gaps.

YEAR	1200 AD	1340 AD	1500 AD	1600 AD
Population	20 000	40 000	Unknown	200 000

Table 3. Population of a city depending on the year.

Contradictions often emerge when we have different data sources describing the same event. For example, source #1 depicts casualties of 100 men; source #2 – 200 men. Whom to believe? A functioning framework should support such contradictions and store all versions of facts.

Describing historical data as erroneous assumes that said data may contain, and in fact probably does contain errors. Therefore all reasoning should be recalculated when the dataset is corrected by new data. For example, we assumed that a historical person was born in 912 AD, but new data has proven that he was born in 910 AD. This change in data may affect other pieces of information and reasoning related to it. Such a state resembles a mathematical equation which shows different outputs depending on the arguments given.

### ***Sources of Data***

Having described the nature of the data, how do we gather this data? There are three main principles we should follow.

We need to:

- 1. Use existing sources of data.**
- 2. Apply natural language processing.**
- 3. Eliminate manual input.**

There are many available existing sources of data such as databases, museum catalogues and public open knowledge bases. Wikipedia would be an example of a well-structured, publicly available, source about historical persons (at least as far as basic information is concerned). It also contains information about locations around the world with coordinates as well as the Open Street Map project.

Some facts and relations can be extracted from scientific articles using Natural Language processing mechanisms, which are mature nowadays. While some degree of error may be inevitable, the advantages of the method make it worthwhile. The most perspective benefit of the method is the massive, robust analysis of large text corpora in different languages: English, Chinese, Spanish and so on. This allows all extracted facts to be placed in united storage and used cumulatively for analysis as never before.

At the same time, the amount of data, which needs to be collected and processed, is so huge that manual input makes no sense. It should be used for error fixing only.

## **User Value of the Computational History Approach**

The main advantage of Computational History is that all facts, collected from different sources, are “distilled”, intertwined via relations and placed in a desktop environment. A specialist can then use layouts and filters in order to produce a dataset which suits his interests.

For example, an expert designed a study to investigate the topic: ‘How was this particular type of helmet used across Europe (geographically and from the time frame perspective)?’ This question may be interesting for a scientist who tries to prove a hypothesis, or for re-enactor who is collecting information about a set of equipment which he is going to create. That



Figure 2. Free Dive application.



Figure 3. Part of a window of the Look Around Me application.

expert can use the search mechanism which will find the earliest and the latest mention of this helmet across all facts in the system. Also, it can find and put on the map all known places where this helmet type participated (archaeological sites, museums, burial grounds, battles and so on). Each of these facts is in turn related to a source of knowledge. The specialist may then decide whether to use a particular fact or not. (Some facts might get excluded from the selected dataset if they are deemed not reliable enough.)

Once that is done, the expert may use the comparison mechanism in order to figure out what analogues this helmet has for a given place and time frame, which helps him to exclude anachronisms.

### ***Applications based on the Framework***

Many software applications can be created based on historical datasets empowered by the framework. They can be arranged for different users, both casual and scientific. Within the “Time Explorer” project there are currently two up and running applications: “Free Dive” and “Look Around Me”.

*Free Dive*<sup>1</sup> is web-based application (fig. 2), aimed at the scientist looking for hidden dependencies within historical data. Sometimes these can become visible when we put entities on a geographic map and choose appropriate layouts. In the current version, two layouts are available: “People” and “Settlements”. A user can choose any date and see the world overlaid with data, applicable for this time point and geographic coordinates, based on

1 <http://timeexplorer.info/FreeDive/Index>

our best knowledge of it. More layouts may be added: Artefact Tracking, Diseases (epidemics and outbreaks), Geniuses (bright people), Religions etc.

The application named *Look Around Me<sup>2</sup>* is designed for casual users who like to travel. They can check any place in the world (or their current position), to figure out what happened in that place in the past. The application uses the given coordinates to collect historical data and give the best answer. The current version of the application shows historical persons only. In the future, it will show a complex profile of a place with battles, artefacts, famous events etc.

More applications may be built upon the proposed framework:

*Search.* A user can type any term and receive facts which are related to it. Expanding the fact set, a user can explore the historical data set as deep as it is required.

*Simultaneous Processes.* The application puts requested data on a Gantt chart to see, for example, what events happened in different parts of the world in a given moment or what states coexisted in the same period.

*Person Profiling.* Using a fuzzy-logic<sup>3</sup> mathematical apparatus to find similarities among historical figures by their behaviour and life. For example: find persons who acted in a similar way.

*Dynamic Maps.* Tracking the movements of entities and placing them on a map. Examples: map of World War II, migration of tribes.

*Historical Adventures.* A possible new approach to tourism. A traveller follows historical routes or ancient roads receiving relevant information via smartphone, which depends on his/her geolocation. Examples: Appian way in Italy, ancient Roman roads, adventures based on historical events with gamification.

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2 <https://look-around.me/>

3 Fuzzy Logic is a type of logic, which is built around the concept of partial truth. This means that instead of dealing only with 'true' and 'false' statements, it operates with a multitude of values covering the range between these two extremes of completely true and completely false.

## Applying Computation History Model to Historical Adventures

Nowadays people use mobile devices everywhere: not only for their business, but also for leisure and educational activities. Geospatial applications such as Google Maps and its analogues are used globally and provide the user not only with a map, but information about routes, restaurants, landmarks and much more. This experience in combination with the Computational History approach enables us to build new software applications which enhance and improve the user experience of visitors to historical landmark sites.

**An Example of a Problem:** Some of the historical landmarks are undeservedly bypassed by tourists because of their bad condition. A castle may have a great story to tell but today it is just a pile of stones. Obviously, the castle is not interesting for tourists. The same goes for a burial ground or excavation site. Many amazing finds were discovered at that place, but they aren't visible to ordinary people.

The problem can be solved by the above mentioned combined approach. We can use the knowledge base of facts and relations to access information relevant to the place, accessing it through the 'Look Around Me' application.

Another possibly lucrative application for the datasets and geospatial technologies would be building history-based adventures for tourists.

As an example, let us take the Appian Way near Rome. On both sides of the road, there are many ruins and catacombs. An adventure can be created as a new application or playable module for a host application installed on a mobile device. It guides a tourist in the real world, shows him interesting facts and maybe guides him through a role-play set in that historical context. For instance, a tourist can take the role of Roman noble who is traveling from Rome to Naples on an important mission, riding on a donkey and accompanied by his slave companion. He meets non-playable characters (NPCs) who give him information, quests, virtual items and so on. They "live" in real world locations such the ruins of an estate (in this game there is a research-based depiction of this estate, showing how it may have looked like before it fell into disuse). For example, we can settle a veteran of Gaulish War on this estate to tell our tourist about this page of Rome history. By adding



enough interesting and convincing stories, we can turn a series of ruins into a whole treasure hunt for historical facts.

Let's stress that the tourist is physically moving in the real world and simultaneously playing this game using his mobile device. Some events happen when he physically reached a particular location. Our goal in this game is to show him the world of Ancient Rome, let him make a step aside from the road, for example, following a runaway donkey, to see the hidden sacred site (which nowadays might be just another ruin, which tourists typically just skip, because it is not interesting without a plot and story). The framework and software which helps to create such scenarios could make a great difference in how we treat and present less popular historical sites, turning ruins into actual attractions.

## Conclusions

In this article the term "Computational History" was introduced as a set of technologies widely used in other areas such as biology or chemistry. This approach and software frameworks build upon it helps experts (scientists, re-enactors, historians) to get ultimate access to data in a way where all facts and relations among them are proven by sources of knowledge. Several applications were described, addressing both the scientific community and casual users, such as tourists. Lastly, an innovative way to build guided tours/adventures around the historical landmarks was described.



# PR and Marketing Strategies for Re-enactors and Museums

Rachel Lee – Northan Viking Silver, Ltd. (UK)

Louise Schelde Frederiksen – G-uld.dk (DK)

**PR and social media are a big part of everyday life. Not only for the museums but also for the groups or individuals that interact with re-enactment. Social media is the new kid on the block and sometimes it can be hard to navigate the many options and “secret language” used in the different platforms. This article gives a short introduction to the basics of marketing and how to be professional in the use of digital platforms.**

*Rachel Lee:*

Many of you will have been involved in creating or setting up events in one way or another, so I am sure you will have an understanding of the basics of PR and Marketing. It is not rocket science, it's actually quite simple, but getting it wrong can be the difference between success and failure of a project or an event. I have spent most of my life working in PR and Marketing, and I want to share some of my tips on how to create a strong strategy for your event or project.

A little of my background: I studied theatre and the performing arts in London and through various pathways ended up in the Advertising Industry, a very exciting, dynamic and creative area in 1980s London. I then jumped into Public Relations and Marketing and latterly became a Fundraising Event Manager organising many different events including

large charity auctions, mass sponsored events and rock concerts at the Royal Albert Hall. I have had a long a varied career, and the leading edge that I always had, was an inventive, creative imagination and an innate ability to bring my wild ideas to life, a throwback possibly to my theatrical beginnings.

## Here are 5 key elements that make a strong PR and Marketing strategy

### ***A cool idea***

Ideas cost nothing, so they say. This is true, so be as inventive as you can. How you wrap up that idea and sell it, will be the difference between success and failure. Be adventurous as you can, yet realistic at the same time. Trying to find something that makes your idea stand out from the crowd is key, so always be prepared to look at the project from all angles. Don't be afraid to follow trends, just make your proposition look different. But remember although ideas cost nothing, they don't sell themselves!

### ***Know your audience***

You can have the best idea/event in the world, but if no one knows about it, or comes to your event, or buys your product – you are not going to succeed. Make sure you strongly identify your audience. They are your target and your success depend on your engagement with that audience. So many people make the mistake of thinking they have a great idea but have targeted completely the wrong audience or use the wrong medium to attract them. So the idea might be great, but the people don't come, so it is measured as a failure. Make sure your target audience will love what you are doing, make sure you engage them in the right way, then you are halfway there.

### ***The telling of the story***

Make sure that you communicate what you are doing in an exciting and engaging way. If you are telling the same story, year on year, then try and find a new spin on the 'old tale'. Never assume that people will come, even if they came last time, otherwise you might experience audience fatigue as they choose to go elsewhere. You must always make your proposition the most exciting, how could the audience go anywhere else?

### ***Choose the right method of communication for your audience***

We are so fortunate right now to have so many exciting ways to communicate with a target audience. Never before have so many pathways been open to engage, but be sure to pick the correct path. Do not rely on the most current technology as it may not be the most efficient way of communicating. It is important to consider all options, and some of the more traditional routes may be more successful. It comes down to knowledge of your target audience and what will make them engage most successfully. Be open-minded about what might work and be prepared to try different avenues.

### ***Measure your success***

As you develop your project, decide what are going to be your measures of success. This will help you to analyse the strength and weaknesses of the project, which you can utilise as you move onto your next one. This will always strengthen your subsequent propositions. It could be the number of attendees to an event, or participants for an event? It could be the media attention or mentions your project has in the media? It could be financial income? Decide what success looks like to you and that will be your measure. This will help with the planning for the project.

So when you sit down to plan your next project and are thinking about how you are going to make it fly. Just give attention to the above 5 elements to see that you have addressed the basics.

## **PR and Marketing for the Re-enactment Scene**

For those of us gathered at the conference, we are mostly interested in re-enactment events. Looking at re-enactment or living history events we tend to be marketing both to participants and engaging a public audience. There may be a different story to attract a different audience so be aware of the subtleties and be prepared to differentiate.

I would say that with these specialist events, we must always try to be creative and imaginative. As marketers we should not get lazy and we should constantly be trying to find new and exciting ways to attract our audience. Do not get complacent and be on your guard for re-enactment

fatigue, both for re-enactors, and the public who may go to the same event every year. It is important to keep things fresh and to communicate that to your audience.

For me personally, looking at our re-enactment scene, I am really keen to explore ways we can immerse the public more fully in what we are doing. Mostly the events that I attend the audience are invited in and passively observe us. Sometimes it feels a bit like we are exhibits in a zoo. We re-enactors can be passive too, we can be too involved in what we are doing to interact with the public.

Last year I was lucky to work with the organisers of a large-scale event here in Denmark, celebrating a key landmark in the history of their re-enactment event. With 'blue sky, money no object thinking' we explored many exciting ideas about how to actively engage the audience and invest them in what was happening at the event, especially with the warrior battles. Ideas like: A large bridge structure over the battlefield for the audience to look down on the action. Giving a different perspective? The ability to learn more about individual characters who were going to take part in the battle? By using up to the moment technology, using QR codes as the audience moved around the battle camps, they could learn more about the fictional characters involved in the battle and therefore invest in their story. How about choosing a side? By identifying yourself with one of the battle sides, winning or losing becomes a matter of life or death, like the historical period being portrayed? This would dramatically enhance their understanding of what was at stake during that particular time in history. This is used successfully by English Heritage at the Battle of Hastings.

So as your ideas evolve, think about how they might be extended, how you might be able to involve the most up to date technology and therefore connect with the audience more.

The nature of how we market and communicate our ideas to the audience has never been so exciting. Social media is proving to be a vital tool in the marketers arsenal, it is getting hugely positive results, and it is growing. Louise Schelde Frederiksen will now write about tools and thoughts to utilise around social media as it is an extremely powerful medium and her area of expertise. Whilst social media gets all the attention, don't forget TV, radio and print media are all still valid, immediate and important.



Louise



Rachel

So be creative, be adventurous, plan well and keep that audience in your sights. Choose the right communication tools that resonate with your audience and you will be well on your way to success!

*Louise Schelde Frederiksen:*

As Rachel said in the start of the text, this is not rocket science. A lot of people today use social media – both as a private person and for work. PR through social media is now not only a thing for the PR professionals, but for everyone.

While everyone can have a go at PR, it is a good idea to give yourself the task of making the best of it. There are so many roads to take and so many ways to succeed in this field. But that is perhaps why it can be a bit hard to navigate, or to see which path to follow. Also to be good at this field, you have to be creative, be innovative, and maybe just have a natural talent for it. I am not an expert myself, but I have played and work with the different media as a re-enactor, in my museum life, in my own firm and my private life. I'll try to give you some pointers and examples that have worked for me in the past or that I think work well in the different social media. I'll try to give some do's and don'ts and guidelines that could help you to pick the right strategy from the get-go.



One happy meal at Moesgaard viking moot.

Picture by Jim Lyngvild.

Most museums and brands have an active plan or strategy for PR. As a re-enactor you could do the same! Try to make your way of communicating and telling your story professional by making an overall plan of how you would like to share text, pictures and information about you or your group/hobby.

Make the ground work and think about:

- Who is your audience and how can you connect with them?
- What is your message? What is the purpose of the project or the post? Do you want to sell tickets to an event? Or do you want to show something special to a certain type of people?
- Know the media that you are using - they all have different focus and can help you reach the right people/group/audience.

## So why do we use and love social media?

There are many answers to this question – shopping, inspiration, to work, to network, to share, to follow, to sell, to brag... And all of those reasons are why these media are just right for the re-enactor or museums to showcase their many stories and communities. People show off their work, their brand or their hobby with the intent to sell more, to educate, to inspire and to have a strong connection to others who feel the same. Social media are often based on pictures and the visual effect is that the feed is easy to “read”. The pictures give a clear and effective focus, and can create a clear impression of a brand, museum or person. Therefore it is also very important to choose the right photo to showcase what you want to show.

If I were to give some ideas on how to use pictures in the “right” way it would be as follows:



*This is the 1600 century group Freie Rostocker Fahnlein and all of their official pictures have watermarks.*

- Be very selective and show a handful of great shots, instead of all 600 pictures from an event. 1 epic picture is better than 100 OK ones!
- Use new and fresh pictures – not old ones with people who are not working or re-enacting any more. The re-enactment scene changes and so do the details such as dress/equipment. These evolve and therefore it is better to use new pictures to show the greatness of the event/the group/you.

- What captures the interest of the audience also changes. One year it is the warriors – the next it is children or food. So have an eye out for that is the current trend!
- Keep in mind that these pictures are on the internet forever!
- Use watermarks on your pictures. You sometimes hear that pictures get used without the knowledge of the photographer. The watermark helps keep your picture secure so that it is not used without your knowledge.

## What is the content of the SoMe (Social Media) channels:

### **Facebook**

A social network with family, friends, colleagues, work relations and subculture friends. There are many different types of users for Facebook. In the re-enactment community you can find some active people that use Facebook in their “own way” - a way that you might be able to connect with.

There is the Facebook Viking that shows two lives, but with the same content. The modern house, the car, the children, the craft, the food... This type of Viking can really showcase your living history event/museum by telling all their friends and family what a great time they had in their Viking holiday.





*The pie picture is from a 2009 blogpost from [www.haandkraft.com](http://www.haandkraft.com) which has been pinned over 25.000 times, and the blogpost has been read by 450 people in the last week (75.780 in total since the blogpost aired).*

Then there is the Viking with a camera – he shows the Viking life, the museum, the event, etc., with a ton of pictures. This guy might have the perfect shot for the poster of this years Viking market – so take a look through all 600 pictures and have a great dialogue with him about permission to use the pictures.

Then there is the Viking with a social media plan – he or she likes to show both the personal side and the community, and often with a great focus on details, authenticity and educating other.

### ***Instagram***

A network based on pictures and subcultures where you can find a connection to whoever/whatever you fancy.

This is a very happy place with lots of beautiful pictures and so many ways of expressing your story. It is an active medium and you need to feed your profile with content to make your profile worth following. Here hashtags are important and a way to tap into different groups and communities.

### ***Pinterest***

A way to collect pictures for inspiration, links to texts and blogs, and also a way to find primary sources of archaeological artefacts.

This medium is the pin board of inspiration and dreams! It is everlasting – once you have a hit picture it can go far!



*Me filming for a danish tv-show about Vikings in Jutland. We used Youtube for both promoting and after the show had aired.*

## **YouTube**

A media for small or longer films, vlogs, podcasts, music and much much more. Once again you can connect with “your people”.

This video platform feels like the new big thing in storytelling. Some of the other media also have video and live pictures, but YouTube can really give a big fan base. For an example: video podcasting is the big thing in the knitting community. Maybe we re-enactors should try it out? We or museums could reach an audience through podcasts about crafts, historical cooking, sword fighting, visiting events or showing historical artefacts.

So let's go live and show the world how fun it is do living history/re-enactment!

A conclusion to this is that there are many ways to enter and use social media. If you can combine the “old” type of media, such as newspapers or TV, that is great – and you can get their attention through the different platforms like Facebook and Instagram. If you are inventive and observant about the way people and brands use social media, you can up the game for your museum or your hobby. As a re-enactor you can use a strategy to get connected to others with the same hobby, you can show yourself to events, you can educate an audience, and you can sell tickets or products.

***Either way, you should think about social media and PR, and start using them!***



# A networked and hands on cultural history scene?

Henrik Summanen – Återskapat & Swedish National Heritage Board (SE)

The public cultural heritage sector and the living history scene have more in common than is normally admitted. Working with development management and also being a long time (and multi-period) re-enactor I have several ideas about where we will go from here and how the public cultural heritage sector together with the living history scene would benefit from a network-based cultural heritage cycle of exchanging ideas, work and knowledge.

## Who am I?

Since I have lots of opinions about both the traditional heritage sector and the world of re-enactment, it may be in place to give a short introduction to who I am. It may shed some light on why I accommodate these views.

I started my general interest in historical times as a LARPer in the early 90s. I organised several events, was a part of starting the Swedish LARP fanzine *Fëa Livia* and wrote the book *Saga mot verklighet* about organising LARPs in 1998. In the late 90s, I started to turn my interest to the side of recreating the material culture of the historical past, and at the same time I started to study archaeology. After a year in archaeological field work, I became project manager for a web project at the Swedish Museum of National

Antiquities, called Historical Worlds. One of the outcomes of this project was a website and a discussion board (not active any more) that during the early 00s, before social media like Facebook, was the Swedish go-to-place for living history and re-enactment. I worked for six years at the museum and tried to connect the knowledge of re-enactors with the work and aim of museum employees, although not very successfully.

In 2006 I started to work in the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, and since 2010 I hold a position at the Swedish National Heritage Board – working mostly with digitisation. I am a member of the European Commission's Expert Group on Digital Cultural Heritage (DCHÉ), a member of the Swedish National Library Advisory Board and a member of the Swedish University Computer Network governing board. Aside from that, I am an expert on archaeological leather, working close to the large excavations in Stockholm, with both documentation and reconstructions. One can say that I have a rather broad view of the Swedish Heritage scene.

On the living history side I am a member of the international 15th century group 'Company of St George', a member of 'Uplands Regemente 1808' - representing the Swedish Napoleonic army, a member of the German WW2 re-enactment group 'Die Panzergrenadiere', and a co-organizer of the 14th century international event 'Battle of Visby'. I also do 17th century. Since 2015 me and my wife Sofia Berg are hosting the Swedish living history podcast 'Återskapat', running in more than 60 episodes by now, and we recently released the first episode of the English language version of the podcast, called 'Recreated History'.

## On re-enactment and living history

From my point of view, the re-enactment movement seems to be a part of the same wave as many other subcultural expressions related to globalization and self-fulfilment emerging in the 90s. When people have most of their other needs on safe ground – no need to work more than full time to get the resources needed for food and living – they want to focus on themselves and their most wanted desires; black metal fans travel the world on small gigs to see their favourite bands, and they are in contact with other fans through social media. The same thing happens with sci-fi fans or LARPerS – and re-enactors. So from a rather small starting point in the 90s, with local

groups trying to find information about research and events abroad, we now have huge international societies with hundreds of members, doing most of their preparation work before an event over email and social media. The events themselves are comparatively short, but are in many ways the opposite to the digital social media: no smartphones, no internet, no normal work – instead we see lots of hard labour, campfire talks and wood chopping.

This transformation in how we meet other people, and connect to our friends, is very well documented and changes the fundamentals of the society. We no longer meet in person having a board meeting with our society, but most of our contacts with our soul mates are set on the internet, in a virtual context. Of course also the cultural heritage sector is affected. In my normal daywork as a management coordinator at the Swedish National Heritage Board, the unit of Digitisation of Archives, Libraries and Museums, I see this every day. My impression is that most of our old GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) institutions are trying their best to meet their audiences in this new transformed world, but they are probably doing most of this wrong when they are trying to use traditional methods in a new paradigm. As the museums are fumbling in the dark, we see other actors appearing from the shadows, taking possession of the leftover spots. This is what normally happens when parts of the balance in society is changed, causing a kind of evolutionary rush where everybody is running trying to keep pace with the quick changes. This goes for the whole society, and all organisations, but I have seen the inside of the cultural heritage sector – maybe the most important area of interest for re-enactors.

These are some observations I have made that seem to make sense in this context. Most of the re-enactment organisations are already there, but the traditional institutions seem in most cases to be left behind. Parts of these ideas is also what I normally talk about when I make presentations in my normal day job, directed towards museum and archive directors and employees.

## **Be active on other platforms than your own**

The analogue paradigm states that information is carried by an object – like a book, a DVD or a vinyl record. This means that information can be stored

in houses to be made available for the public, and this is the reason to build museums, archives and libraries – all of them doing their part in society. This is the way things has been like since the late medieval times when the book printing method was invented, and the 20th century society was in many ways the accomplished analogue way of living, with a very well worked out system of distributing information – as long as it is still on a physical carrier. We all know what happened then. As soon as digital information got connected to the telecom-world the Internet was born, and with that we also very soon had Facebook, Wikipedia and Google.

How can institutions with several hundred years of tradition adapt to a completely new paradigm in a few decades? Well – obviously they can't. Instead they are doing what they are told in their instructions to do, and that they have always done: They are distributing information from a huge house in the middle of a town – and if you want that information you need to visit their building, or (in best case) their website. If you want to discuss anything regarding their area of responsibility, you need to go to their building (or, in the best case, to their website). This is not a durable solution and they will probably change their way of operating in the next few decades, but in the meantime we will probably see some experimenting. One of these will be that the employees will stop sitting and waiting for people to come visit them in their buildings, and instead they will try to communicate on other platforms. It will start with a small presence in social networks where they will market their websites, exhibitions and experts, but (as we can see with i.e. the Swedish museum Livrustkammaren) they will soon be more of a part of the general interest group that constitutes the subcultural network. We will see more and more GLAM-institutions operating as a part of these subcultures, and with the employees as part of, and maybe in some cases a driving part in the centre of the network. This is a new way for the heritage institutions to fill their role in our society – and the main component is that they stop waiting for the audience to come to them and that they start thinking of themselves instead as a part of a network where the main meeting place is situated on another media platform than the institutions themselves – like Facebook or Twitter.

One of these subcultural networks is the re-enactment community. People who are genuinely interested in original items, their interpretations, and all the metadata – they should be the bulls eye for any cultural history

museum. And – borrowing a wikipedia philosophy – a huge base of fanatics in a very narrow subject, like Viking age shoes from Haithabu, is in all respects more powerful and informed than any Viking age expert holding a position in a museum, even though she or he may have a direct access to the actual objects. These two groups need each other, and would probably benefit a lot from connecting.

## Enthusiasts are central networks for museums

Since Manuel Castells published his ideas about the network society, it has become more and more obvious that he has a point. When communications are faster at the same time as the amount of information is growing massively, we don't have the time to make informed choices. The normal strategy for both institutions and business companies is to encircle themselves with networks of people they trust. These networks are increasingly powerful, and as Castells has predicted in his book on *The Rise of the Network Society*, the most important people will be either in the centre of a network, or on the border to another network. If we would consider the academical institutions within the GLAM-sector as just another network, all these go-between individuals would be re-enactors with an academical degree in the relevant subject. We already have several of these, and I could mention a number just in the Swedish cultural heritage sector. At the moment, re-enactors from Swedish History Museums and Swedish National Heritage Board are engaged in both an exhibition at the Medieval Museum of Stockholm and another exhibition at the Royal Armouries. And not only involved as experts or consultants, but as conceptual designers and project managers. Earlier re-enactors on prominent positions have been involved in exhibitions for the Swedish Museum of Military history and The Museum of National Antiquities, just to mention a few.

It is not only about re-enactors having a huge knowledge of the material past, but also – and maybe foremost – that they have huge networks and well paved channels for finding the one person to ask in a particular question, or ways to get a quick answer on a tricky question. These new subcultural networks of trust are gold, and would be gold to use for the museums. Not only – as is sadly the case normally – to use re-enactors as a method to make the past more hands on and visual.

## Real objects are a museum's USP

We are entering a world where the digital comes first. It really does not matter what you think about it or if you like it or not – the world is changing at a quick pace and sooner or later, things that are not online will be more or less non-existent for the normal target group of any museum. This also means that the area of action for the cultural heritage institutions is likely to move over from the physical world (i.e. museum buildings with exhibitions), to a more internet-based, multi-faceted arena. If this is true, we need to see what a museum is, if it is not the building and not the exhibition?

I have been contemplating this for a while and all I can get out of this is that in the future a museum IS the collection, and also – maybe even more importantly – the knowledge about the objects in its collection. So the real objects could be pointed out as the museum USP – Unique Selling Point. Without them, and the knowledge about them – a museum would be nothing more than a theme-park. Therefore I predict that the museum will focus more and more on the real objects, and not on films, virtual games, audio guides, websites etc. I also predict that they need to do more work on combining the interest of the collections with the networks that they could target. So a combination of re-enactors knowledge about real objects, strong networks and a new way of identifying the museum task in society would be to make exhibitions together with re-enactors or other kinds of enthusiasts.

We probably must also combine this with another feature from Castells' network society theory: the event bias – telling us that the future will keep more in constructions that are not as time stable as today's institutions. Everything will be looked upon as events; companies, venues, happenings and exhibitions. Very short term exhibitions made by a particular subcultural group of enthusiasts would fit this theory of the future society very well. If we're to shorten the time period when an exhibition can be visited, we would also create a shortage. And with a lack of possibilities to see an object for real, the possible amounts of visitors would increase.

Maybe not all of this will happen. But it would be strange if not one of these predictions about how GLAM-institutions can work with the re-enactment scene would come true. We can already see these things happening around us, albeit on a small scale.





RE-CONFERENCE 2018