
# Twenty five Years of CAA: a Personal View

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## 1 Introduction

It is now twenty-five years since I first organised a meeting on Computer Applications in Archaeology and the situation has changed greatly since that time. That meeting consisted of a small group of pioneers who could see the potential relevance of computers to archaeology and wished to develop these applications. At that time, most archaeologists regarded computers as strange arcane systems, used only by scientists and mathematicians and, being unfamiliar, viewed them with great suspicion and hostility. However the group who gathered then were sufficiently enthusiastic that it seemed reasonable to continue holding such meetings.

## 2 Motive for starting these Conferences

The next year, in a cold and frosty January, a residential weekend conference was held with participants from America, Canada, and Germany as well as from Britain. The papers were collected and published as a separate book of proceedings and I remember this as the first of a long and successful series of international conferences. In January 1974, the aims of the conference were first formulated:

"To bring together archaeologists and computer scientists, to discuss present achievements in this area, and to suggest ideas for the future."

At that time, the first aim, to bring computer people and archaeologists together and get some sort of discussion going, seemed to me to be the outstanding need - my main motive for organising these conferences at all. From my position as a computer scientist, I could see the potential for using computers to aid in the study of archaeology and I set out on a crusade to explain these possibilities to archaeologists. At first, the progress was slow and the majority of delegates were computer scientists and mathematicians with an interest in archaeology. Gradually, as the idea of using computers in archaeology became more widespread, the proportion of archaeologists has increased and so has the number and variety of the applications. The greatest influence on this has been the spread of personal computers and now the arrival of the internet and world-wide-web. Today, every student starting an archaeology course is aware of the many ways in which computers can speed up and assist their work and there is an expectation that computers will be used by some if not all the members of any archaeological team. Even those most resistant to computers are likely to make use of word-processors. Most of these changes have taken place in society as a whole and are not limited to archaeologists or influenced by the CAA conferences. However I like to think that the news may have spread a little further or a little faster among the archaeological community because of the existence of these conferences as a venue for the exchange of news and ideas.

## 3 The Future of the Conference

If you compare the original aims with those in the current constitution, you will notice considerable similarity. However this does not mean that conference has outlived its usefulness now that the original need has been satisfied. The relative importance of each aim and the interpretation placed upon them, has changed with the changing situation. Obviously it is necessary to bring together archaeologists and computer scientists as well as mathematicians (including statisticians), if only to provide speakers and audience for the papers. The aim to give a survey of present (or current) work in the field is also fairly obvious for a conference of this nature.

Aims in current constitution:

1. to bring together archaeologists, mathematicians and computer scientists;
2. to encourage communication between these disciplines;
3. to give a survey of present work in the field;
4. to stimulate discussion and future progress.

The methods to be used to encourage communication and stimulate discussion and future progress may need more careful thought and the precise definition of the field to be covered by such a conference will need to be considered from time to time. I can think of a number of ways in which a conference entitled "Computer Applications in Archaeology" could be viewed, and have suggested three possibilities.

1. A meeting of Archaeologists to discuss archeaological results using computer software.
2. A meeting of writers of software for archaeologists to discuss relevant computing techniques and algorithms.
3. A marketplace where those selling software designed for archaeologists can meet and display their wares.

I hope the conference will be extended to include aspects of all these, as well as others I have not yet considered. I think it would be sad if any one of these became the sole aim of the conference, because I feel that the past success has depended on the breadth of its coverage and I hope the future will be equally successful. These have all been covered to some extent in the present and recent conferences, although they could be given greater emphasis and encouragement.

The first function has been met here in this conference, especially for the landscape archaeology practitioners and I hope this will continue to expand and develop. The third one is to some extent covered by the demonstrations, but it could become a little more obvious. If future organisers wish to invite traders to come and sell software at the conference, this would need to be stated more clearly in the documentation. I think it could be a very useful service included in the conference, but this for others to decide in the future.

The second function is again covered to some extent in this and other recent conferences, but could also become more explicit and deliberate. It would need a deliberate attempt to look at the underlying principles of particular methods - for example some of the ray-tracing techniques published in the SIGGRAPH proceedings could provide a very efficient viewshed analysis in GIS software. Are they used in the present systems? If not, how much advantage in speed would they produce? This would require a workshop-style session which could be held within the conference and might lead to noticeable improvements in the efficiency of the software generally available.

To conclude, we have come a long way in the past twenty-five years. I hope we shall do equally well in the next twenty-five.

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