

Session Proposal

European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) 12th Annual Meeting

Krakow, Poland

19th to 24th September 2006

Organizer: Dr John Carman, Dr Stephanie Koerner

Discussant: Tim Darvill

Theme:

Archaeology in the Modern World: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

Session Title:

The Unquiet Past: Cultural Heritage and the Uncertain Social Geography of Risks of Exposure to Ecological Hazards and Political Violence.

Abstract:

This session aims to go behind current models of ‘globalisation’ and ‘multiculturalism’ that so often obscure the complexities involved in our engagement with the category of ‘cultural heritage’. In a world bedevilled by the contingencies of social geographies undergoing radical change and diversely experienced threats – to variability of human lifeways and interactions, to the ‘sustainability’ of life itself, cultural heritage is often perceived as something we can ‘hold onto’ as a permanent, fixed point in an environment of ever more threatening change. Accordingly, the ways in which we make sense of the past become a significant factor in the way in which we construct and envisage futures.

Most recently questions are being raised as to whether strongly relativising notions of ‘alternative realities’ and the ‘new cosmopolitanism’ are likely to offer much help to archaeologists working in situations in which it is open to question whether any of the arguments concerning the past should be excluded from consideration. Truths are not contested across mutually exclusive worlds: rather, different things matter to people living in the same world. Wars too are not fought over different worlds, but over conflicting experiences of what matters most in the single world that rivals inhabit. One of the most difficult issues that is therefore posed for research into the conflicting dynamics of ‘cultural heritages’ and the changing social geography of risks of exposure to ecological hazards and political violence may be that a ‘common world’ is not something we can come to recognize, as though it has always been here. If there is going to be one, a common world is something we have to build together.

This session aims to examine the possibilities for the construction of a ‘common world’ out of diverse pasts and the impediments to doing so.

Contact details:

Dr John Carman

Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity, University of Birmingham, UK

Email: J.Carman@bham.ac.uk

Dr Stephanie Koerner

School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, University of Manchester, UK

Email: Stephanie.Koerner@man.ac.uk

Tim Darvill

School of Conservation Sciences, University of Bournemouth