

FROM THE GUEST EDITORS

The 19th International Radiocarbon Conference was held at Keble College, in Oxford, between the 3rd–7th of April 2006. Some 289 attendees from 36 countries gave 118 oral presentations and 156 posters.

We were fortunate in receiving significant funding and support from a number of sources, which we would like to acknowledge here. From the start, we aimed to plan a conference that comprised a significant archaeological element. The Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit (ORAU) is housed within the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art (RLAHA), and specializes in archaeological applications of radiocarbon. This emphasis was reflected in a very large number of archaeology-related sessions, from periods spanning the Paleolithic to the Medieval, and we are pleased to say that this breadth has been mirrored in the archaeological papers published here.

In this light, we are very grateful indeed to the British Academy for providing funding for the meeting through their Worldwide Congress grants scheme. Alex Bayliss organized bursaries funded by English Heritage to enable British archaeologists to attend the conference, for which we were very thankful.

We received tremendous support from our co-organizers Fiona Brock and Diane Baker, who worked exceptionally hard to make sure everyone was registered, accommodated, and happy. We would like particularly to acknowledge the conference sponsors: the British Academy, as already mentioned; High Voltage Engineering Europe BV; the National Electrostatics Corporation; English Heritage; and the Natural Environment Research Council. We are also grateful to the staff of Keble College, particularly the Hall staff, for providing such fabulous food and looking after everyone so well. The atmosphere in Hall for dinner, especially the conference dinner, was superb. Thanks too to the staff, D.Phil and MSc students from the RLAHA who greatly assisted in the day-to-day running of the conference, particularly on the field trips to Blenheim Palace, Hook Norton, and Broughton Castle. We thank Professors Mark Pollard (RLAHA) and Christopher Gosden (Institute of Archaeology, Oxford) for their strong support of the meeting.

We are extremely grateful to Professor Lord Renfrew of Caimsthorn for his erudite keynote opening address to the conference, held in the wonderful surroundings of the Oxford Museum of Natural History, and to Martin Suter, Bernd Kromer, and Konrad Hughen for their keynote addresses later in the meeting. Thanks are also due to the session organizers listed on the previous page for their work in making the conference a success.

Of course, a conference would not be a conference without attendees, presentations, and papers, and we were thrilled with the number, variety, and scope. Looking back a year or so later it seems to us that the highlights of the program were undoubtedly those sessions concerned with the calibration of the radiocarbon record, particularly the period before 26,000 years ago, and the decipherment of the climatic and environmental signals which characterize that record. Much of the data reported at the meeting (including Beck et al., Hughen et al., and Fairbanks et al.) showed much better agreement than had previously been seen and this points to the fact that the complete radiocarbon calibration cannot be far away, with the wonderful implications of this for so many scholars asking fascinating but intractable questions in various fields. Attendees of the conference business meeting voted to recommend compilation of a standard “calibration” data set as far back as possible (about 50–55 kyr BP) by the IntCal Working Group. Due to the rapid progress in ^{14}C calibration data sets, the Radiocarbon community also expressed a need for frequent updates to the IntCal curve beyond the end of the tree rings at 12.4 kyr as well as a full update when the floating tree-ring extension from Germany and Switzerland (Friedrich et al.) is firmly linked to the existing chronology.

In general, one is continually struck by the diverse nature of contributions to these meetings, reflecting the wide, and ever-widening, applicability of ^{14}C in understanding our world; present, past and future.

The papers in these proceedings benefited from the great assistance of our session organizers and the numerous reviewers involved in reading and, in many cases suggesting improvements to, the papers. We are most grateful to Mark McClure for his organization, editing assistance, and untiring work on the production of this volume.

We hope you enjoy reading the papers and, whilst you do so, look forward to meeting again in the very different surroundings of Hawaii, where the 20th conference will convene in May 2009.

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