

AHRC ICT Methods Network Student Bursary Awards

AHC-UK (Association for History and Computing UK) Conference

Distributed Ignorance and the Unthinking Machine: The Challenges of Teaching History and Computing

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CONFERENCE REPORT

Paul Waring, University of Manchester

I am currently in the first year of a PhD in Computer Science at the University of Manchester. My research involves looking at the way in which events (e.g. a particular battle) are reported, particularly in historical narratives, and whether links can be created between different events which have some degree of commonality - for example two events which occur at the same place but at different times. I also have a keen interest in history in general (particularly Classical Athens and the Roman Republic), and I recently completed an MA in Ancient World Studies at the University of Manchester, during which I presented some research into applying techniques from computer science to areas of historical and archaeological research.

Attending the AHC-UK conference allowed me to meet with other people in the field of History and Computing, particularly from other areas of the country, which I could not have done otherwise. This networking opportunity was the most important aspect of the day for me, as conferences are often the only occasion where a significant number of people from the same discipline but different areas get together in the same physical location.

In terms of my research, whilst most of the papers were not directly related to my current work, they all offered potential avenues for the future. Jone Garmendia's presentation on 'search strategies and challenges' was of particular interest, as the ways in which people organise and find data (which clearly differ from person to person, as demonstrated by the number of ways in which users can query the National Archives website) ties into my research. The networking which took place during the breaks also provided an excellent opportunity to talk about my current line of research and, perhaps most importantly, allowed me to try and explain my work to people who are aware of the general area but are not experts in the very specific field which I am working in, and I found that this was a good way of focusing and clarifying my ideas.

In addition to networking with other people within the general field of history and computing, I was also able to get involved with the association during the AGM, to the point where I got elected onto the committee. As a result, I will hopefully be able to contribute more to the AHC-UK and help ensure that the 2008 conference is as much of a success as this one was.