

# ARCHITECTURE, PHOTOGRAMMETRY AND THOUGHTS ON A FRIDAY

July 11, 2014 James Dixon Buildings, Commercial Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2014, Illustration archaeological services, Archaeology, Digital Photography, interdisciplinary, London, photogrammetry, random thoughts, Theory

My day-to-day work in the Planning Services section of [MOLA](#) involves assessing planning proposals at various stages of development to ascertain whether, and to what degree, they would impact on existing heritage. However, on Wednesday though about twenty of my colleagues and I were able to leave our desks for a couple of hours and spend some time getting inspired by a talk on the 'new photogrammetry' and wondering how best we can fit this into our daily work.



The talk was by [Giorgio Verdiani](#) from the Department of Architecture at the University of Florence who I invited to MOLA after meeting him and hearing about his and his colleagues' and students' amazing work with digital recording at a conference in Florence in June. I won't bore with the technical details of the talk here (click on the link above for loads of info and images). Instead, I want to mention a few points that the talk has kept me thinking about right up to and through this Day of Archaeology.

Perhaps the most poignant stems from new photogrammetry being quick, using almost any camera and reliant on the user knowing exactly how to get the best digital data from their camera in the field. For this kind of rapid photogrammetry to be adopted widely in archaeology necessitates us to have good skills with a manual camera. Depth of field, shutter speed, the framing of a shot, getting all of these right is key to recording the data you need. Over the last ten years or so, archaeology has become reliant on point-and-shoot digital photography to the point that that basic knowledge is not really part of the average archaeologist's repertoire. Many new staff will have never even used a manual camera. In this instance, early adoption of digital cameras might have inadvertently increased the gap between us and the new technology. I think there's a need for us to re-learn how to take good photos, sooner rather than later!

The second thing that struck me is the level of theoretical thinking behind photographic recording (or survey in general), sometimes forgotten in the details and data processing. Any survey taken from

multiple points, whether with a camera, total station, drone etc., is an attempt to create structure from motion. Although the thing being surveyed and the record itself are generally static, neither can exist or be fully understood without movement. I think we can easily apply this notion to all thinking and looking in archaeology especially as we have the luxury of more than three dimensions to observe with and from. It sometimes feels a little as if we are too quick to take away our postcard image, our interpretation that fits our expectations, when maybe we need to spend a bit more time looking from multiple perspectives and using the overlaps to create 'models' instead.

Lastly (and quickly, sorry...) having an architect from Florence talking to archaeologists in London is an unequivocally good thing. I've rarely had an interdisciplinary conversation that hasn't left all involved with new knowledge, new connections and inspiration to do new things, or old things in different ways. Of course, many of us provide particular, distinctly archaeological services, but we can still do that at the end of much more nuanced, exiting, collaborative processes, so don't stop trying to find new ways to think about things. Every so often it'll result in having a beer with a group of Italian architects by a canal, discussing future collaborations.

Anyway, that's what's going through my mind on Day of Archaeology. Can you tell I'm going on holiday tomorrow?

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