October 2011: II OpenArch meeting in Borger (NL)

Opening by Hein Klompmaker & Evert van Ginkel

Hein tells it is a pleasure to introduce Evert van Ginkel. He has one disadvantage: he is an archaeologist but further on he is a very nice person. He will be the chairman during the day.

Evert tells he is a self-employed archaeologist working for the general public: "The roots of my small business lie in the year 1965. In primary school I came in contact with a history book named "The story the hunebed told". Subconsciously I remembered and became a storyteller myself. I was always telling stories and writing stories down. I always continued with storytelling. I think I can say that I am the prime Dutch archaeological storyteller; I have written over 50 books on archaeology and made a lot of exhibitions. This will make me the perfect chairman of the day. At least the organization thought so. Well, actually, I am not that ideal.

First I am an archaeologist, while archaeologists are fine people there are some negative characteristics. I for instance am very conservative, old-fashioned, self-centred, selfish, headstrong, highly critical, criticaster.

I don't even believe my own stories to be true, which is philosophically right because nothing you write about the past can be true in itself. If it isn't plain fantasy then it is an educated guess. My guess is all your guesses will be replaced by new guesses in the coming 10, 20 or 50 years. That doesn't keep me from writing them down and earn money by telling lies to the general public.

So when I read about new ways of reaching the public. I start unconvinced. I have got reasons for that. For instance: the social media. I am on LinkedIn, but that's pure vanity because I Google myself every two to three days just to see how famous I am. Then I saw there was an Evert van Ginkel who was not me on LinkedIn. I told him we can't have that. So I logged in, I picked up my password, it is always the same." Evert tells the audience his password en says the audience can freely plunder his bank account. "Among us Evert van Ginkels I was the new Evert van Ginkel. Thus I decided to never ask anyone to be my LinkedIn-friend but only to accept invitations. Why? Because that's a free popularity poll. As stated, it is pure vanity that I am on LinkedIn. I never write any messages, I never start any discussions, I just gather in the invitations. Sometimes I don't know the person who invites me so I keep him hanging for a couple of days or weeks and I accept them anyhow because it is another nudge on my gun.

Then Twitter, take twitter. I have twittered one time, that was two years ago, in this same place: BorgerMeetings. I was chairman then. Twitter was new and the question was if I wanted to twitter. I said: "well why not if you set it up, I could tell you something and you could twitter it down." So we had some tweets. A year ago I was asked if my twitter should be shut down because I never twitter anymore, so I replied please do. I'm not bothered by twitter anymore. Facebook, you probably guessed, but I'm not on Facebook. I'm not on Hyves, or any social media. Why is that? I guess I'm just too plain old and not just old but also conservative as I already told you. And I'm not convinced of the effect of the medium but I will come to that later.

Then there is the technical question, take the QR-codes that will play another role today. Yesterday I visited an opening of an exhibition; it was all centred on QR-codes. During the opening the alderman had his tablet pc and when he scanned an audio fragment about an old medieval sword should start. Not all to my surprise he tried to scan the QR-code and it didn't work the first time. It did work the second time. Then three archaeologists were asked to scan the QR-codes, after a few tries the third archaeologist succeeded. Here is my phone, I cannot scan QR-codes but I can text, I just learned this a few months ago.

Then again I'm not sure about the public. I never was but it is pure intuition, I don't have proof, but neither do you have proof of the opposite, that the public which is interested in new media or social media for obtaining information is not exactly the same public that is interested in archaeology and it is not to say that these two don't grow together but for the time being, I'm not convinced.

I always make the comparison to two salesmen who are send down by a firm in birdseed, two salesmen go to Africa to try tend explore the market for birdseed and after two weeks in the jungle, they send a telegram to their employer, one says there are great opportunities here, no one sell birdseed yet, so we can take the market. The second one sends a telegram; there is no chance for success here, since nobody is interested in keeping birds here. I am always on the side of the second salesman. I don't think the public for something and I always wait till the contrary has been proven.

Enough about my critical views because here is the good news, I am conservative but I'm not rigid. At least I don't think I'm rigid, some of you will be convinced otherwise. I can't really afford to be rigid, because I am archaeologist but I am also a businessman, I don't only have to be critical, which I am and will remain, but I also have to be curious, I have to be interested. It interests me, I don't say I have to accept it and it is not to say that I don't believe that what we discuss now will be totally different from what we will discuss in 5-6 years. Whereas the story, the content, will remain; we will still be able to read the learning book of my school, but know at this moment I have to be interested and you're interested anyway otherwise you wouldn't be here. So I think if you convince me today, you might have a brilliant future, because if you can convince me, you can convince nearly everyone, at least in Holland. You will obtain a new public with new media, and hole in the old public, like me and my readers, whoever they may be, we don't really know. So I invite you to tell your stories today and I will come in later today smiling as usual and making some comments about that. "