

Canterbury Christ Church University provided Oggcamp 2017's venue for free.



Oggcamp 2017

Les Pounder visits the historic city of Canterbury for the latest instalment in the Oggcamp story.



Oggcamp had a humble start, taking place the day after LUG Radio Live in Wolverhampton. It began life as a small event held on the top floor of a hotel, but

interest grew and soon the OSS community formed around the event. The number of attendees grew, which meant hiring out larger venues with better facilities.

Oggcamp is something special: a community-focused unconference that has no affiliations to a technology or business. It was created by those who love Linux and the open source community, and chose to

promote that love via their podcasts. Over the years the organisers have gradually stepped down in order to bring in fresh blood, and 2017 saw a new team assume the responsibility of running a two-day conference.

Oggcamp still draws attendees from around the world, each with their own passion and project that makes up the diverse Linux and free software community. This year we saw a smaller, leaner event helmed by Oggcamp veteran Mark Johnson and Jon "The Nice Guy" Spriggs, himself a veteran of Linux/FLOSS events around the UK. Proceedings were held in Canterbury, in the historic city's Christ Church University's Powell Building.

Oggcamp 2017 may not have the grand market place and open hardware jam seen from previous events. But what it does have is a core team who work hard to meet the needs of the delegates. This isn't an event for the organisers. Instead, it's a service to the community that has grown around this popular event.

We spoke to the organisers Jon and Mark, Oggcamp veteran and podcaster Joe Ressington, and community newcomer and PhD student Rachel Wong to understand what Oggcamp was, and why they had come along. We hope that there won't be such a long break until the next event: Oggcamp is an event that's unique and very much needed in our community.

Jon Spriggs and Mark Johnson

Linux Format: Hi Jon and Mark, thanks for taking the time to talk to us. As we sit here in the lovely Canterbury sunshine, Oggcamp is coming to an end. How was it?

Jon Spriggs (JS): It was really good – we survived it! I went into it thinking that there would be lots of little stressful moments. I don't know if it was either the awesomeness of the attendees or how amazing the crew has been, but generally there have been no “show stopper” issues. The T-shirts arrived late, which was a bit of a concern, but they made it through the doors in the end. If anything, that made the T-shirts more desirable!

LXF: Organising an event like Oggcamp isn't an easy task, is it?

JS: It's fair to say that this year's event took a little longer to spin up than in previous years.

Mark Johnson (MJ): Yeah I suppose so.

JS: So the building that we hoped to use in 2016 – well, that agreement fell through. It was nobody's fault. We were then on the back foot for 2016, which is why last year's Oggcamp didn't happen.

For 2017 we set ourselves a six-month window to get everything in place, and the first task for Oggcamp is always the venue. Once you have this, you can then pick your date. This gives our attendees time to arrange travel and accommodation.

MJ: It also gives us the time that we need to work with speakers and ensure that they haven't been booked already.

JS: We then have flurries of activity, organising the design of the logos for print and the website. Then we have a period of downtime while you wait for the assets to appear, then you get the logo and you have to think about getting the T-shirts printed, which then relies on having the funding to pay for it. So you plan “this bit” and then you wait for something to finish, then you stop. There were periods where you were less busy.

MJ: Yeah it's not a full-time job.

JS: I'm very fortunate in that people know what Oggcamp is. Once you have attendees who want to come and are ready to talk about their



› Organisers Jon Spriggs and Mark Johnson worked hard to bring Oggcamp back for 2017.

subjects, then everything else is just about making it right for them. You're not running a conference for yourself, but rather for those passionate attendees **Linux Form**

LXF: This year you have a rich mix of attendees, including those who are new to Oggcamp.

MJ: My favourite talk of the event was Rachel Wong, who has never given a talk at an unconference. She got up and did a lightning talk. In fact, I would say that this was the best talk of any Oggcamp. This shows that we have an event where people feel comfortable standing up and talking to the attendees. This is the best result that I could've asked for.

JS: I've been to previous Oggcamps as an attendee, and as such you're not looking at the event critically. You're there to enjoy yourself.

However, as an organiser you're constantly looking at the elements that make up your event. Are people happy? Is there something for everyone? In my talk this morning, there was an 11-, maybe 12-year-old girl who came along and was engaged with the subject of the talk. These are the next generation of people who want to work in IT.

MJ: Because we're not a vendor or corporate conference, we see a diversity of speakers who give more than just their scheduled talk. They make an effort to take part in the unconference element of the event.

LXF: Oggcamp is much more than just an unconference started by two podcasts...

JS: Yeah, the communities that surrounded the original podcasts (*Linux Outlaws* and *Ubuntu Podcast*) have a wide range of interests. I wouldn't say that the spirit has changed, but the message has certainly changed significantly over the years.

We're very keen to bring as many different threads and interests here. Ian Hutchinson from IF talked about using the products that they create for digital rights and so on. I can't imagine another conference doing what Oggcamp has achieved.

LXF: If there was one thing about Oggcamp that you could change, what would it be?

MJ: The only thing that I would change this year is that I would have liked to have seen more attendees. However, we had the right number of people for the size of the venue, so it worked out pretty well.

JS: Venues are unique, but they don't make or

MARK JOHNSON ON INTERACTION

“People liked to stand up and talk. This is the best result I could've asked for”

break a conference. While some people said they couldn't come due to the location, I had other who genuinely said to me that this venue is fantastic and wouldn't have come to it if it were anywhere else.

MJ: We have members of the community who live just down the road, and they have travelled across the UK for previous events. So it's great that for 2017 we've been able to bring the event to their doorstep. »



Rachel Wong

» **LXF:** Hi Rachel, thanks for taking the time to speak to us. Please can you tell the readers a little bit about yourself?

Rachel Wong (RW): Hey there, my name's Rachel Wong and I'm a PhD student working in stem cell research, specifically the study of congenital blindness.

LXF: That's quite an impressive area of work. How do you manage to find the time to also be a maker?

RW: It's actually very challenging because a PhD takes up quite a lot of time. There are times where I feel torn, because as I'd like to do more with my PhD but at the same time I have a lot going on with my making and electronics. I do try to set myself some very strict boundaries, and I try to schedule my life so that I can balance the two.

LXF: So how long have you been a "maker"?

RW: I really got into electronics around March/April 2017 and that was due to the Raspberry Pi Zero W. At the Raspberry Pi Birthday Party I saw many great projects using it and I had the chance to talk to the makers about how they achieved it. It also helped that stalls were selling all of the components that you would need to make anything you want!

LXF: Being a maker isn't just about technology. You are also a crafter?

RW: Yes, I have an Etsy shop and before



» Rachel Wong enjoyed her first Oggcamp.

skills thanks to community members supporting me.

LXF: Do you have a background or interest in computer science?

RW: When I was in high school I taught myself some HTML and CSS, and this was mostly behind my mother's back. While she was away working, I would sit down and teach myself, although to be honest I didn't think that it would be much use, until recently!

LXF: So what's your primary

programming language, would you say?

RW: Currently Python, because it's the one that I understand the most. It's also the most-used language for the many projects that have been created by the community, which gives me a rich resource to reference. I can read and understand the code written by others and I know that I can have an idea, search for it and then find an existing "skeleton" project that I can adapt and use to form the basis of my next project.

LXF: So your introduction to Python was via reading the code of others, tweaking it and reusing it?

RW: Yes, there are lots of great tutorials for Python, just as there were for HTML and CSS when I first started to learn those languages.

LXF: So now that you have your new "super powers" of electronics and coding with the Raspberry Pi, you've developed your own wearable projects. Can you tell us more?

RW: I've submitted a proposal to run an exhibition and the plan is that I'll show five complete outfits, with hats, jewellery, umbrella and bag – all of which will have elements of control based upon the Raspberry Pi.

LXF: Was wearable tech a natural avenue for you to explore?

RW: Because I've been selling jewellery and craft products on Etsy, my journey to creating wearables started by making crowns and from there I slowly started to introduce electronics. I then wanted to take the concept of wearables further and so I went online to search for new ideas and to see what other people have come up with. I then realised that it's still a niche group and that I could do more to create new wearable projects.

LXF: So this is your first Oggcamp? How have you found it?

RW: Initially, I felt very intimidated because the first talk was on security, and I didn't know what the speaker was talking about. But after that first talk I was more selective and found other talks that I could relate to and take part in. I also did my first talk, a lightning talk (five-minute presentation, and time for one question) which I didn't prepare for and just did on the spur of the moment!

RACHEL WONG ON SPEAKING UP

"I did my first lightning talk, on the spur of the moment – I didn't prepare for it!"

learning about the Raspberry Pi, electronics and Linux my shop was mainly craft related. But now there are projects involving LEDs, Neopixels and so on that merge craft, and wearable and technology together. In 2016 I took a gap year off to explore what I wanted to do and make and I got into quite a lot of things.

LXF: Being a newcomer to electronics and the Raspberry Pi, how was the learning curve and did you get any support?

RW: Learning the Raspberry Pi was actually pretty easy. I had some help from the great Raspberry Pi community, but I learnt about the Pi Zero W via the news, and as soon as I learnt they were selling out, I quickly bought one. I had to get one as everyone else was doing the same! Ever since then I've been learning new

Joe Ressington

LXF: Hi Joe, thanks for taking the time to talk to us. Please can you tell the readers more about yourself.

Joe Ressington (JR): Hi, I'm Joe Ressington and I'm the host of *Late Night Linux* podcast, and the co-host of *Linux Action News*.

LXF: So how long would you say you've been podcasting for?

JR: I've been podcasting for around four to five years and I started out on *The Mind Tech* podcast which was on the Mindset network, a network which isn't really going anymore.

The podcast was a mix of conspiracy theory-type stuff and technology. I presented the podcast with Gareth Davies, a Mac user and we bonded together over our dislike of Windows. We started the podcast just before the Edward Snowden event and all of the conspiracy theories we had been talking about came true! So we felt vindicated!

LXF: So your area of interest is in security?

JR: No, I would say that I'm more interested in Open Source Software really. Open standards and security work hand in hand. You can't really have proper security without open source or open standards.

LXF: So is Linux a secure operating system? Recently there have been some Linux security issues hitting the headlines: Dirty COW and the Bitcoin malware for Linux, and MulDrop.14 for Raspberry Pi.

JR: You're always going to have Zero day exploits because of code churn, but I like to think that Linux is more secure than Windows or Mac, insofar as someone can find the exploits in Linux and fix them. Whereas you're relying on a closed source company to fix exploits and close back doors. So government agencies may possess back doors into Linux, but hopefully they'll be found and fixed by the community.

LXF: So here we are at Oggcamp 17 in the lovely city of Canterbury, but this isn't your first Oggcamp. How have you seen Oggcamp evolve over the years?

JR: If I remember correctly my first Oggcamp was in 2011, in Farnham and I've only missed one event since then. I've seen the appeal of Oggcamp become more selective. It seems to be less popular than it once was. It's still a good event and the people who attend are really cool, but there are just fewer people here than there have been in previous years and this is a trend that I've noticed.

Maybe this is because there are now more maker events, and when Oggcamp first started

it was the only big event that was happening, whereas now there are a lot more events taking place. I suppose the community has become "fractured" or spread out, but Oggcamp is still a great event and I had a great time this weekend.

LXF: Is there still a desire for Oggcamp?

JR: There's still a desire for Oggcamp – people still want to come. Apart from anything else this is a social event, giving the community a chance to catch up. Granted, it's good to talk online, but Oggcamp gives us the chance to have a drink and a chat face to face.

For me the most important aspect of Oggcamp is the "social track". Sure I can see lots of great talks – in fact I watched a great talk on Open Suse, and then had the chance to talk to the speaker about his project and other interests in the pub afterwards.

LXF: Do you think what makes Oggcamp different to other technology-focused or

JOE RESSINGTON ON MAKER POSITIVITY
"Oggcamp is not about corporate culture, it's basically about enthusiasm"

corporate conferences is that it addresses the community, rather than the technology?

JR: Yeah that's definitely it. Oggcamp is less corporate. Of course, there's some networking going on and people will be learning new skills for their jobs, but at the same time there are talks going on that cover personal projects. You would never see that at a corporate conference because it has no corporate value. Oggcamp is not about corporate culture, it's basically about enthusiasm.

LXF: If you could change one thing about any Oggcamp, either past or present, then what would it be?

JR: The location! So I can take the Tube there



▶ Joe Ressington favours a London venue.

and back and not pay for a hotel! It's all "up in the air" but we may have found a suitable venue in London, which would be great! More people coming would also be great. That said, it's nice

that it's a small event and that you have the time to properly catch up with people.

This year, I think Canterbury put a few people off, especially those coming from the north because it's

quite a journey. The venue, Canterbury Christ Church University has been great, and by offering the event to Oggcamp for free it's saved the organisers thousands of pounds and many weeks of work, which means they can concentrate on the event.

LXF: So what has been your favourite part of Oggcamp 2017?

JR: I think that for me it was the conversation that I had with Martin Wimpress (Ubuntu MATE Project Lead) and Richard Brown (Suse) in the pub last night. We talked about the new packaging format "Snap" and it became quite heated. I think that Snap is one of the biggest developments in Linux in recent years. **LXF**