

# Ideas for creating good displays

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## The purpose of this guide:

On any LHE, at any show, there are a huge variety of displays and a wealth of knowledge that could fascinate the public for hours if they only stopped and talked to us, but the problem is that so often they don't. Sometimes they walk straight past, sometimes they stop and look and then move on, and sometimes they ask stupid questions. It's the golden moments when they stop and really engage with a display that make it all worthwhile though, so anything we can do to make this happen more often has got to be worth a go.

Over the last couple of years I've been trying to pay attention to what it is about popular displays that makes them successful. The subject of a display and the kind of public we get at a show will make a difference, but if you think marketing and advertising, think what would make you walk into a shop or stop at a market stall, there has to be lessons we can learn.

I have put together a collection of photos of displays which all, for one reason or another, have something about them that I think helped to achieve this.

*Thanks to Rich Price, Helen Mallalieu, Alison Offer, Paul Assheton and Sarah Halliday for the majority of the photos and if I've accidentally picked up some from other photographers, I hope they will forgive me.*

# Attracting public



Public attract public so the longer we can keep them on the LHE, the busier and more interesting we look, and the more people will come in to see what's going on.

## Welcoming

I like these two photos because it's clear to even the most hesitant members of the public that this is a display you can engage with.



Smiling, eye contact, announcing what you're doing or asking the public if they'd like to have a look at xyz as they walk past all seem to help give them confidence to stop and talk.

## Activity

A lot of public are shy, they don't know what to say and aren't sure of the etiquette so they keep moving. If you're doing something that they can stand and watch for a bit, they sometimes build up the confidence to ask a question.



## Sounds and smells

I think these really help to set the scene, make it feel real and help to lure people in.



## Interactive

People like being able to have a go at things and for families with kids this will probably make their day.

If they can take what they've made home with them, even better.



The absence of a rope line also seems to help encourage them to take a closer look.



Even if they can't make something, having objects to feel and handle make for a more engaging display.

It keeps them at your display longer too, thus attracting more public.



The sounds of craftsmen at work, people chopping wood, playing music or chatting in character all add to the ambience.



Authentic smells - nice or nasty, both are effective.



# Layout

## Tidy displays



It sounds boring, but a tidy display just looks more professional and appealing than an untidy one.



It helps make it easier for the public to see at first glance what it's about too.

## Arrangement of items

I like the way these displays are laid out. They are arranged attractively and there are lots of different items, all with a common theme, which will encourage the public to come and take a closer look.



This also makes it easy for the public to think of an opening question e.g. "What's that for?"



These kind of displays look best when complimented by someone doing/making something next to them to add interest and draw the public over.

## Tidy people

Having your own tent for your display is ideal, but understandably not always possible.



These pictures show communal wic shelters – each has created a space towards the back of each tent where people can take a break, but this is partly shielded from view by the people doing displays at the front edge of the tents. This means that the public don't think the people at the back are being rude and ignoring them, plus those taking a break are less likely to be disturbed by the public asking them questions.



# Themes

**N.B.** The Regia LHE does not usually have an overarching context i.e. it's not representing a village or military camp, so each tent can usually choose its own theme.

## Comprehensive displays

Displays with a range of items on a theme tend to look more interesting than single objects or unrelated collections of items. They do not necessarily have to be realistic scenes from a thousand years ago e.g. you could have a display with a range of foods eaten by poor and rich people to talk about the differences.

### Wide range of items

This leechcraft display included a variety of herbs, tools and cures which made it particularly eye catching.



### Museum style display

This display included warp weighted and tablet weaving looms, samples of clothing, cloth, braid, dye stuffs and naalbinding. It's probably not a combination you would have seen in real life, but it made for an interesting, in depth display that gave a complete picture on textiles.

### Positioning

Only a small amount of equipment was needed for this fire lighting display, but the tinder box contained a range of items for show and tell. Positioned next to a cooking display or wood chopping area it adds interest to these displays and vice versa.



### Backdrop

Nets, ropes and boat kit make a picturesque backdrop for a sail-making display. Even if a real Viking wouldn't have arranged himself quite so artistically, it looks more attractive than a realistic display.



## Tableaux displays

Alternatively, by adding some context, you can make your display portray a realistic snapshot of daily life.

This works particularly well if you are busy making or doing something, or if you need to leave your display for extended periods, as it continues to make an attractive scene even when you're not there.

### Context

Various games taking place inside a tavern surrounded by people eating, drinking and laughing. Even if you're not talking to the public, you're still making a realistic and interesting tableau that has that 'it must have been just like this' feel.



### Setting the scene

Apples, grain and firewood aren't particularly interesting in themselves but put together you have a farmer selling his surplus at market and can talk about all sorts of agricultural and economical matters.



### Stand alone displays

A huntsman's tent with bow and arrows, animal skins, bone and antler. It works well as a display, even when unmanned and roped off, as there's a clear theme and the public can tell the story for themselves.



## Added extras

Little touches like a midden at the edge of the wic, a broom in the corner, a washing line or bunches of herbs drying from the roof are great for adding realism.



# Easier said than done?



All this might seem obvious, but the greatest difficulty in creating comprehensive, eye catching displays is often fitting it all in the car. However, there are various tricks which mean you don't necessarily have to spend a fortune on kit or need a van to put it all in.

## Faking it

If you can't win, cheat. These 'cheeses' were rounds of wood and the sacks had false bottoms. The public never noticed.



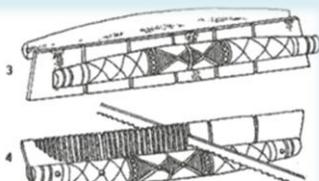
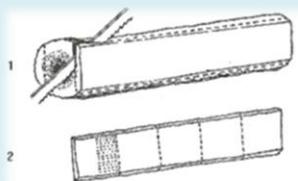
## Making the most of a small display



Multiple items often look more interesting than single items even if you just have several copies of the same thing. Laying them out neatly at the very front of a tent in full view can make them stand out more.



If your display involves making something, having examples of each stage of the process can make it more interesting as well as making it easier to explain.



## Working together

Dozens of people combined their displays for the port theme to create a whole LHE that had that 'it must have been just like this' feel and it made a huge difference. However, it also works on a smaller scale:



If you set up your display next to someone else who has a display on a similar theme, it can help bring both displays to life. Below there is mail making next to an armoury and net making set up next to a fishing boat.



Alternatively, if there are other people with similar display items you could pool your resources to make one large display. It will have a bigger impact than two small displays and also make it easier to take breaks during the day.



Furs and skins donated by several members.



A multi-group armoury for all warriors' kit.

# Working without a rope line

## Keeping control

If you've got a display that involves riskier items e.g. weapons or tools, pooling your stuff with someone else to create a single display with two people to keep an eye on it can make life simpler.



If you're worried about people walking off with small display items, you could always try sewing the more valuable/pocketable ones to the tablecloth.

## Safety

Taking away the rope line makes for a more welcoming display, but it does mean you have to be more careful about supervising it well enough so that you can keep control even when you're swamped by public. The way you arrange your display can have a big effect on how easy this is. This page contains some tips that I've picked up from various people over the course of last season.

## Minimising trip hazards

Putting large objects at the bottom of guy ropes helps stop people tripping over them.



You can also paint the tops of your tent pegs authentic colours to help make them more visible.

## Keeping the public out of your tent

A line of items on the floor, such as shields, or a row of benches or a table across the front of your tent seem to discourage most of the public from coming into your tent whilst still making your display appear open and welcoming.



If you bring extra rope and stakes, you can always rope off your display when you're short-staffed.

You could also keep a part of your tent/wic permanently roped off to keep the public away from fires/sharps/inauthentic things, but have the interactive part of your display unroped.



I hope you have found this collection of photos and ideas useful. If you have any more tips or good photos please let me know ([lhec@regia.org](mailto:lhec@regia.org)) and we can keep adding to it as we go along. Thanks ☺