

Joint FASIG and OsteoSIG Meeting: Cremation Workshop

10 August 2023, 12pm-1pm

Online (Zoom)

Minutes

Present: Sharon Clough (SC, OsteoSIG Chair), Jackie McKinley (OsteoSIG), Robert Janaway (RJ, FASIG Chair), Sabrina Ki (SK, FASIG Secretary), Laura Evis (LE, FASIG Treasurer), Denise Hillier (DH, FASIG), Deborah Ryder (DR, FASIG), Anna Chaussée (AC, FASIG), Richard Morkill (RM, OsteoSIG)

Agenda Point		Action (Initials)
1.	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Round of introductions of each attendee. RM mentions that as a committee member of London Area Group (LAG) he aims to expand London’s understanding of other SIG areas.</p>	
2.	<p>Overview of workshop concept and aim for meeting</p> <p>SC had brought up this workshop idea at an OsteoSIG AGM - cremated remains are not given a big focus in courses but form a large part of an osteologist’s work. There are some forensic day courses that cover this topic; SC is keen not to step on toes but this idea comes out of speaking to recent Master’s graduates.</p> <p>The idea is for a workshop in two halves. The first one would be a virtual session for theory, background etc., talks with slides. The second would be a practical hands-on workshop in a lab with examples, going through material in detail and how to record it, in a way that cannot be done purely via theory.</p> <p>We are still able to use the osteology lab at the University of Reading for the in-person workshop, as previously agreed between Ceri Falys (OsteoSIG Secretary) and Mary Lewis.</p>	

	<p>SC wants to ask FASIG for their thoughts as SC's focus on the workshop would be commercial-related, e.g. reports.</p>	
<p>3.</p>	<p>General discussion about workshop</p> <p>RJ agrees that this is a great idea. RJ had informally talked to colleagues at the University of Bradford, and the response had all been quite enthusiastic.</p> <p>RJ highlighted that the workshop would need some component about how cremated remains in recent fires present a bit differently to archaeological burnt bone. JM agrees and notes that cremation indicates a 'ritual' process. Forensic archaeologists want to understand clearly what happened and when. JM and RJ agree that context around material is vital.</p> <p>JM suggests asking someone from Cranfield University to get involved with the workshop, and wonders if due to forensic topics we need to be working with the British Association for Human Identification (BAHID)/guidelines. DR clarifies that if we did it would be more to do with the Royal Anthropological Institute than BAHID for forensics.</p> <p>RJ notes that those coming from a historical remains background may find it very interesting to see forensic aspects.</p> <p>RM mentions that Alecto Forensics had the archaeological lead during the Grenfell Tower body recovery and identification of burnt bone. RM recalls that Karl Harrison delivered some relevant presentations while at Alecto Forensics. DH notes that Karl is currently at Cranfield University.</p> <p>RM mentions that LAG has an interest in this workshop as they do not have much experience in recovering bone and so would like to know the standard 'next steps' for recording bone if they cannot call in an osteologist.</p>	

	<p>Burnt bone is very common to find so SC suggests we should definitely advertise the workshop to all SIGs and/or ClfA-wide.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Discussion about virtual theory workshop</p> <p>SC suggests a series of short talks with 5min tea breaks in between.</p> <p>LE suggests that a light touch with the forensics might be best as we will not hit what we aim to do within the limited workshop time. There will likely be enough appeal without going deep into casework, and if there is interest in learning more, we could have a subsequent event focused more on forensic approaches (see Point 6).</p> <p>SC envisages the first workshop to cover what we can expect in different time periods, how bone burns, e.g. colouration, fragmentation, etc.</p> <p>JM suggests we could explain how cremated remains are recorded by osteologists, with some light forensic examples to build it in without too much detail. SC would like feedback on whether we plug in forensics as we go or have a whole forensic section. The aim is to maximise training input without overloading attendees with information nor overburdening committee members, as we are all volunteers.</p> <p>JM wonders if we may be going into more than what can be done, as even a rapid overview of burnt bone (without much on actual excavations) could take 2+ hours. SC clarifies that the workshop aims to plug a gap, targeting the most crucial bits that aren't covered by other courses. Following on from that, JM often finds that when reading others' reports, there is a lack of understanding around formation processes, the context around burnt remains and how it affects them, and the terminology is also unclear.</p> <p>AC queries the numbers we aim to attract to the workshops and suggests we could tailor-make the workshop to the number/type of audience. It may be better to have an archaeology-focused course without tacking on</p>	

	<p>some forensics. AC notes that the areas JM has identified as lacking in reports (formation processes, context, terminology) already seem to form clear learning objectives for the workshop. AC also suggests that feedback to this workshop could help structure future forensic-focused workshops.</p> <p>DR mentions that she does not have any fire scene case studies that she would be authorised to use in the workshop. Could it be possible to just do a cremated remains workshop with a caveat that a forensic fire scene would be different? RM mentions in chat that Grenfell is still under investigation so anything said about it would be sub judice.</p> <p>JM asks if we could give forensic case study examples without specifics and leave out unnecessary anecdotal information. RJ agrees, e.g. “typical car fires burn at this kind of temperature and this is what happens to bones” etc.</p> <p>RJ and JM suggest including animal remains in the workshop to show differences.</p> <p>SC suggests we could include report-writing after the practical session if there is time, as it may be too much to cover if we include it in the theory session.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Discussion about in-person practical workshop</p> <p>JM notes that numbers for the practical workshop will need to be limited, as we would be laying out tiny fragments and explaining while walking around tables. SC agrees that we should have 20-25 attendees max, and notes that the practical workshop will be a bit self-limiting by virtue of it being in-person. Making the practical solely osteoarchaeology-focused will further reduce numbers. SC and JM agree that if the workshop is popular we could just use the feedback from the first workshop and rerun it.</p>	

	<p>RJ suggests that if we are oversubscribed for this workshop, the next workshop could be in northern England so we could get a geographical split. SC and RJ agree that Reading is convenient for the first workshop.</p> <p>JM notes that it is likely that people may come to the online session and not the workshop as different people will be interested at different levels. SC suggests that the practical session could be more bone-only in focus.</p> <p>LE confirms with SC that there are cremated remains available to use in the workshop.</p> <p>JM suggests that it could be useful learning if we invited attendees to bring along any cremated remains that have been confusing them.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>Future workshops?</p> <p>RJ agrees there seems to be a focused need to address issues of commercial archaeology-related cremated remains, and this workshop would be very useful. However, if it will be a joint-badge event, RJ is unsure what FASIG might bring to this apart from a risk of defocusing the workshop. RJ and SC agree that we could do a separate forensic-focused workshop as there is a lot of spin-off potential. It might be possible to fit in one hour of forensic contexts in the virtual session but it depends on SC's workshop structure, and in any case we can save it for a later separate session if there is interest/need (LE).</p> <p>JM suggests that a session on different burn patterns in forensic cases and how these arise would be very useful for osteoarchaeological understanding. It would be beneficial to know more about less 'controlled' situations and good to know more about how fire affects the body.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p>Additional points</p>	

RJ and SC believe it would be useful to compile an abbreviated list of literature about burnt bone to 'arm' contract archaeologists with, to prepare them before going on-site.

JM notes that there is lots written about recovery and recording, and forensic recovery of remains would probably be more complex than archaeological recovery. RJ adds that it is also complicated regarding who gets the final say on what is done on-site.

There has also been a recent book published, titled '[Forensic Evaluation of Burnt Remains](#)' edited by Sarah Ellingham, Joe Adserias-Garriga, Sara C. Zapico and Douglas H. Ubelaker (LE, RM).

LE notes that a lot of work for this is falling onto SC - how can FASIG support? FASIG could help with adding in scenarios; if we are badging as a joint event, it would be fair for FASIG to help out when SC is ready with the workshop structure.

The decision about whether the event will be double-badged will be confirmed down the line when the structure is finalised, depending on how much FASIG will end up contributing.

There is also a general preference to avoid using the term 'cremains'.

SC will send around a proposal for agreement and we can then start thinking about dates (unlikely to be in Sep but possibly in autumn term). Volunteers for talks are very welcome. SK will send out minutes of this meeting to members of both committees.

		SC SK
8.	FASIG only: Co-opting Aidan Harte as OCM There is agreement to co-opt Aidan Harte as an OCM from all FASIG committee members either from emails or during this meeting.	