

Anthropology in the World

London, British Museum 8th-10th June 2012

Panel of Forensic anthropology and its global impact on society

Forensic anthropology and its global impact on society

Location Claus Moser

Date and Start Time 09 June, 2012 at 09:30

CONVENOR

Sue Black (University of Dundee) email
Mail All Convenors

SHORT ABSTRACT

Thanks to the almost insatiable public appetite for murder and mysteries, the profile of forensic anthropology has morphed almost beyond recognition in recent years. But what is the truth behind the hype?

LONG ABSTRACT

Forensic anthropology has an extensive global profile thanks to both the factual and fictional portrayal of the discipline. However, the more popular media presentations often misrepresent or inaccurately portray the role of the forensic anthropologist in relation to both criminal investigations and humanitarian operations. This panel will examine the real role that forensic anthropologists have played and continue to play in the criminal investigative processes via interaction with law enforcement agencies and the judiciary both in the UK and overseas. It will then explore the more recent impact of the profession on mass fatality events including natural disasters, terrorist incidents, war crimes and abuses of human rights. The societal impact of the subject will be explored at a local, national and international level and its influence on operational and policy decisions will be considered. The future for this small component of the world of anthropology will be discussed as the discipline stands on the threshold of legislative regulation. Participants will be drawn from different fields of experience and expertise to construct the real history and current profile of forensic anthropology on the global stage.

This panel is closed to new paper proposals.

Papers

Conflicting Expectations: The Forensic Identification of the Missing in Mass Fatality Incidents

Author: Gaille Mackinnon (LGC Forensics) email

SHORT ABSTRACT

Using case studies from Bosnia, the World Trade Center and Haiti, this paper will explore the role of the forensic anthropologist within mass fatality incidents and disasters and consider the complex issues surrounding the needs and expectations of victims' families when juxtaposed with the pragmatic, and sometimes harsh, reality of the scientific process of the identification of human remains.

LONG ABSTRACT

Forensic anthropology and its role in the scientific analysis and identification of human remains has increasingly become one of the dominant methodologies in the investigation of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Mass fatality events caused by natural disasters and terrorist incidents and the subsequent media coverage and indeed public fascination that these attract have also served to place the discipline of forensic anthropology to the forefront of public awareness and imagination.

However, in some quarters and within some cultural and social contexts, this heightened public awareness and fascination encourages a concomitant increase in expectation with regard to the ability of scientific analysis and forensic investigation to identify and return the body of one's loved one. It is often the case that after a mass fatality incident, particularly those that attract global media attention and are seen to initiate and galvanise an immediate international response, the drive to find and identify the missing rapidly builds the expectations of communities, families and individuals. These expectations are often in conflict and cannot ultimately withstand the reality of the length of time that the disaster victim identification process may take.

Using case studies from Bosnia, the World Trade Center and Haiti, this paper will explore the role of the forensic anthropologist within mass fatality disasters and consider the complex issues surrounding the needs and expectations of victims' families when juxtaposed with the pragmatic, sometimes harsh reality, of the scientific process of the identification of human remains.

Forensic Anthropology and the use of Museum Collections

Author: Heather Bonney (Natural History Museum) email

SHORT ABSTRACT

Museum collections of human remains are under increasing demand for research access in addition to dealing with requests for the return of remains to their countries of origin. This paper discusses the Data Collection Project at the Natural History Museum which aims to gather standardised information from its human remains collections.

LONG ABSTRACT

The Natural History Museum in London holds a collection of over 20,000 sets of human remains. A Data Collection Project was initiated in 2008 with the aim of gathering standardised data from the collections,

prioritising those deemed 'at risk', either through return to their country of origin or damage from repeated handling. The museum's collections are of particular use to the forensic anthropology research community as we hold known age and/or sex collections from a range of geographic areas, and a large proportion of remains are of recent origin (19th century onwards).

Data being collected includes measurements, basic demographics, taphonomy, pathology and trauma analysis, microCT and photography. It is hoped that this data will be eventually be placed into a virtual archive, enabling more streamlined access to the museum's collections for researchers and also reducing the handling load on fragile specimens.

The first set of data, gathered from a collection of remains from the Torres Strait Islands, will be presented and the experiences of the data collection and subsequent repatriation processes discussed.

Forensic Anthropology in the search, location, recovery and identification of human remains from the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the Dictatorship that followed (1939-1975)

Authors: Nicholas Marquez-Grant (Cellmark Forensic Services) email

Jimi Jimenez (Aranzadi Society Of Sciences) email

Juan Montero (Universidad de Burgos) email

Fernando Serrulla (Instituto de Medicina Legal de Galicia) email

Susanna Llidó-Torrent email

Carme Coch (Sociedad Ciencias Aranzadi) email

SHORT ABSTRACT

A significant amount of work has been undertaken to locate, recover and identify victims from the Spanish Civil War. This paper provides an overview of mass grave exhumation, the identification and reburial of human remains in Spain, its impact on society and the role of the forensic anthropologist.

LONG ABSTRACT

The last decade has seen a significant amount of work undertaken to locate, recover and identify victims from the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the Dictatorship that followed (1939-1975). This work has run in tandem with public debate and considerable media attention.

A joint effort by relatives, local communities, associations, governments and the tireless participation of scientists including forensic anthropologists has seen the excavation of over 300 clandestine graves and the recovery of the remains of more than 5000 victims. In 2011 alone, 27 mass graves have been excavated and 304 individuals recovered and returned to families.

The increased attention has led to scientists and governments collaborating to create legislations and provide guidelines. Thus, a national protocol was published in 2011 with the aim of ensuring that the right procedures and scientific rigour in benefit of the victims and their families are carried out accordingly.

This paper provides a brief background to the excavation of Mass Graves in Spain, providing information including the number of excavations undertaken and the number of victims recovered per year. The paper also provides an overview of the protocols which are now in place with regard to the search, location, excavation, recovery, identification and reburial of human remains. It also highlights some of the social implications of such work, the involvement of local communities and the role of the forensic anthropologist.

Response and Responsibility: The Power of the Face in Facial Reconstruction

Author: Katherine Beatty (University College Cork) email

SHORT ABSTRACT

A theoretical examination into the seminal nature of the re-presented face in facial reconstructions on the viewer and why this impact is an important societal moment.

LONG ABSTRACT

Facial reconstruction offers forensic and archaeological investigations an insightful opportunity to discover and engage with the countenances of past individuals. Illustrating a theoretical dimension to the practice, this paper examines the commanding presence of the face and its ultimate end in producing a response and therefore a responsibility for the presented Other elicited from a contemporary audience. Facial reconstruction concerns itself with the anatomical re-presentation of an individual; however, theoretically, the phenomena of the face can neither be reduced to components nor parts as it is more than an object. Its multitude of meanings overflow the imaged form and demands us to affirm the Other's past presence. Drawing upon the body of work from twentieth century philosopher Emanuel Levinas, this discussion hopes to explicate the weight of the face and its seminal role in the event of experiencing a facial reconstruction.

The enterprise of facial reconstruction utilizes this beckoning and summons of the face's expressions and imbedded meanings such as identity. Encountering the face of an Other calls the freedom of the viewer to an obligation in protecting the ethical height of the re-constructed individual. However, it is this opportunity's impact upon the contemporary viewer that is vital when considering this moment of encounter. We are consistently in previously attained social relations, often resulting in forgetting the force of the Other's countenance upon us, but with instances such as the beneficial relationship with facial reconstruction we are reminded of these reverberations of being which span temporal and spatial boundaries.

Sex estimation and posterior probabilities: The example of the tibia.

Author: Elena Kranioti (University of Edinburgh) email

SHORT ABSTRACT

Sex estimation from unidentified incomplete skeletal remains is often based on mathematic equations produced by Discriminant Function Analysis of metric data. This paper examines the accuracy and reliability of discriminant functions and the importance of population specific standards in forensic casework.

LONG ABSTRACT

Sex estimation constitutes the cornerstone of positive identification of human remains in the absence of facial tissue and fingerprints as it narrows down the possible matches to 50%. The necessity for population specific standards in sex estimation of unknown skeletal remains has long been acknowledged however the lack of population specific standards in most parts of the world due to political, religious and/or other

restrictions forces forensic anthropology casework to rely on the closest available population standards. What is the extent of error that can be anticipated when using biometric standards from neighbour populations in routine forensic practise? How reliable are the estimates that are brought by the Experts in the courtroom? To explore this question, 3 standard measurements of the tibia -a known dimorphic bone of the human skeleton- from 3 modern South European populations (Spanish, Italian and Greeks) are analysed using Discriminant Function Analysis. Posterior probabilities are calculated to evaluate the reliability of the produced formulae for each population and the pooled sample for each individual case.

The accredited forensic anthropologist

Author: Sue Black (University of Dundee) email

SHORT ABSTRACT

The professional standing of a forensic discipline is critical to the fair operation of a criminal justice system and this includes forensic anthropology.

LONG ABSTRACT

Forensic anthropology is a practitioner science and unlike many academic subjects that are clearly segregated into the two traditional pillars of learning & teaching and research, forensic anthropology is a triumvirate subject where active casework & court room presentation are of equal importance and relevance. In the light of recent European drives, Interpol initiatives and national accreditation templates, there is an appetite to promote cross border competency indicators for all subjects that provide their expert witness testimony to the courts. This paper examines the current situation in professionalization of forensic anthropology and considers how this is likely to evolve in the UK and Europe, thereby shaping the future of the discipline for both existing and trainee practitioners.

Age Estimation in the Living

Author: Lucina Hackman (university of Dundee) email

SHORT ABSTRACT

Demands for age estimation in the living have increased in recent decades as larger numbers of people cross borders. This paper examines the accuracy and reliability of methods commonly used for age estimation in the living when they are applied to a modern population.

LONG ABSTRACT

There is an increasing requirement to undertake age estimation of the living for forensic purposes and the assessment of skeletal age remains one of the key methods available to those undertaking age estimations. The number of age estimations being undertaken for the court, for those who have been accused of a crime or who have fallen victim to a crime is an area where the demand has risen greatly. Each forensic age estimation has personal implications for the individual as well as financial and ultimately

political implications for society at large. The results of the age estimation can mean the difference between access to age appropriate resources including education, accommodation and pensions. For some it may mean the difference between deportation to country of origin or the chance to remain in the UK. Skeletal age estimation relies on techniques which have been appropriated from medical methodologies and which were developed on historical populations. This creates potential conflict with the Law Commission Report as well as introducing methodological error in their application. This presentation examines the accuracy of these methods when applied to age estimation of a modern population and questions whether their use should continue in relation to these populations and the needs of the court.

Virtual Forensic Anthropology

Author: Roos Eisma (University of Dundee) email

SHORT ABSTRACT

In our forensic anthropology practice we are increasingly asked to work with CT scans instead of actual remains. Are our methods and procedures ready for this?

LONG ABSTRACT

In the past decade the resolution and availability of CT scanning has greatly increased. Scanning human remains for further analysis has a number of advantages: contaminated remains (for example as a result of a chemical, biological or nuclear incident) do not need to be handled beyond the initial scan; skeletal elements can be assessed without the need to remove any remaining soft tissue; and data can more easily be transported, over any distance, than the actual remains.

However, our procedures and methods have been developed for dealing with bones, not images.

Procedures to deal with evidence, from first sight to court, need to be explicit and robust. In this paper we will discuss which procedural aspects need to be addressed.

Our anthropological analysis of the remains needs to be accurate and reliable, and stand up in court. In this paper we will discuss some of the problems with translating our methods from real bone to CT scans, what additional research is needed to develop these techniques, and the need for additional skills and training for practitioners.

Craniofacial Identification - forensic applications, efficacy and impact

Authors: Caroline Wilkinson (University of Dundee) email
Christopher Rynn (University of Dundee) email

SHORT ABSTRACT

Forensic applications of craniofacial identification are described, including facial depiction of the dead, craniofacial superimposition, facial image comparison, skull reassembly and skull analysis. The success,

efficacy, accuracy and reliability of the techniques will be discussed along with the implications for forensic investigations.

LONG ABSTRACT

The analysis of skulls and/or faces has been utilised in forensic investigation since the early 20th century.

Many craniofacial techniques are utilised as investigative tools that may lead to identification. The interpretation of craniofacial morphology may be employed to depict the living facial appearance of unknown human remains in order to stimulate recognition; skull fragments may be reassembled in order to aid forensic anthropology or pathology assessment; and craniofacial analysis may estimate ancestry, age and sex or assess signs of trauma or disease.

In addition there are some craniofacial techniques that are legally accepted methods of identification. The comparison of a skull with antemortem facial images of a suspect and the comparison of facial images may be utilised to identify both the living and the dead.

These techniques are described and discussed in relation to accuracy studies, reliability assessments and forensic success, along with the implications for DVI, forensic identification, mass grave analysis and criminal investigation.

More than the skin deep: The use of tattoos in victim identification

Author: Keith Loft (Queensland University of Technology) email

SHORT ABSTRACT

The use of tattoos for cultural, decorative or cosmetic reasons has become common in contemporary society. Tattoos can assist in the identification of the dead. This paper will examine a number of historical cases where tattoo identification has been used and discuss the different meanings of some historical and contemporary tattoos.

LONG ABSTRACT

Police and medical personnel in Australia have recorded tattoo markings from deceased victims for over 140 years. During the 1800's authorities in Australia commenced maintaining records of the outlines of tattoos on convicted criminals along with other descriptive data. In 1902 the South Australia Police alone held more than 30,000 descriptive records, including tattoos, in the Adelaide Detective Office.

The use of tattoos to aid in the identification of deceased people is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1800's coroners and police have used tattoos to help identify the victims of accidents, crimes and disasters. Several cases from the late 1800's through to the present will be examined and discussed.

A number of historical and contemporary tattoos will be described, compared and discussed. Understanding the meanings of tattoos can provide investigators with clues to family, nationality, lifestyle or group affiliations that may assist in giving direction to their inquiries to establish formal identification of the deceased.

An Anthropological Study of War Crimes against Children in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s

Author: Julie Roberts (Cellmark Forensic Services, UK) email

SHORT ABSTRACT

This paper summarises the findings from my doctoral research, an anthropological study of war crimes against children in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s. It considers child and adult deaths and is based on primary forensic data gathered and submitted to ICTY between 1996 and 2000

LONG ABSTRACT

Between 1991 and 1999 war broke out across Former Yugoslavia. Thousands of people are believed to have been killed and many more were internally displaced or forcibly expelled from their countries. In 1993 the United Nations established the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to investigate war crimes allegedly committed in the region. Its work is still ongoing.

This presentation summarises my doctoral research which comprises an anthropological study of the children in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina who were killed as a direct result of war crimes perpetrated during the conflicts of the 1990s. Primary forensic data collected by investigators and scientists on behalf of ICTY between 1996 and 2000 was used to create a single integrated database which allowed the numbers of child deaths, causes of death, demographic profiles of the deceased, and post-mortem treatment of their remains to be analysed in both countries.

The findings from the research are presented within their wider socio-political context and an assessment is made of how closely the forensic evidence supports accounts from other literary sources. Ideas for future research generated by the findings are also considered

Identifying the Missing: Marrying forensic and social anthropology in the investigation of human rights violations in Guatemala and Afghanistan

Authors: Gillian Fowler (University of Lincoln) email

Marco Pérez email

SHORT ABSTRACT

This presentation will compare the contribution that forensic and social anthropology has made to truth seeking in both countries, comparing the work of anthropologists in Guatemala, a post conflict country, and Afghanistan, a country currently at war.

LONG ABSTRACT

The armed conflict in Guatemala raged for 36 years during which 200,000 people were killed or disappeared by a succession of military dictators with many more people being displaced. The armed conflict has been ongoing in Afghanistan for more than three decades and the Afghan population has been subjected to violence and repression committed by a variety of different groups with conflicting beliefs and cultures. The only constant in the lives of the Afghan people has been violence and repression. In this current climate, a group of Afghans are being trained as forensic and social anthropologists and are beginning to investigate human rights violations.

Forensic and social anthropology have played an integral role in the reconciliation process by searching for the truth in Guatemala and Afghanistan. Since 1992, exhumations have taken place all over Guatemala, and over 5,000 victims have been exhumed, identified and then returned to their families for a dignified burial; in Afghanistan it is only just beginning. The advances in DNA technology have made it possible to attempt the identification of mass graves in both countries; however the lack of a formal society during wartime hampers positive identifications being made. The work of the social anthropologist has been paramount to the identification process working to recover individual and collective memories of the events that took place, memorializing the victims and empowering their families, and mourning the loss as a nation.

This panel is closed to new paper proposals.