Minutes of the Annual General Meeting and Group Committee Meeting of the

FORENSIC ARCHAEOLOGY SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP (FASIG)

Canada Water Library, Surrey Quays Road, London, SE16 7AR

17th July 2019

Present: Laura Evis (OCM); Karl Harrison (Chair); Alastair Vannan (OCM); Alexandria Young (Secretary)

Apologies for Absence: Caroline Sims (OCM); Kerry Wiggins

1 Welcome and Opening Remarks

Karl Harrison welcomed the attendees to the AGM of the Forensic Archaeology Special Interest Group of the Chartered Institute of Archaeologists.

2 Chair's Report

The Chair of the group was introduced and gave an overview of their aims for the group as the new Chair. The report introduced the topics of quality control at crime scenes and the impact of the recent House of Lords Science and Technology Subcommittee report into forensic science.

3 FASIG Membership Numbers and Finances

According to CIfA, FASIG has 512 members but it is not clear how many of those are active/inactive or the types of members (e.g. student, professional, academic). The committee would like to have a better idea of the types of members so that they can better communicate with members and plan events that are of interest and useful to members. Likewise, the committee would like to update and increase the number of members.

CIfA allocated FASIG £750 for the group's 2019 budget. To date, the group's remaining budget is £624.80.

4 Group Committee Nominations

Caroline's second term as an Ordinary Committee Member came to an end and could not re-stand for the position.

The positions of Treasurer and Ordinary Committee Member (x4) were available for election. However, no nominations were received for these positions so they remain open.

5 Current Status of Forensic Archaeology

Undergraduate archaeology courses at U.K. universities are seeing varied student numbers, with noticeable decreases in forensic courses and increases in more archaeology focused courses. At the postgraduate level, forensic archaeology courses appear to be becoming "watered-down" due to greater optionality. There appears to be a trend for forensic archaeology to be offered as a singular module within forensic anthropology/osteology programmes rather than as a separate degree. Potential factors discussed by the group as causing this decrease in forensic archaeology programmes may be the following: the influence of North American anthropological texts; lack of forensic archaeologists actively engaging with universities and/or publishing reference literature; student demand/interest areas; and/or employment options.

The committee discussed concern over the employment prospect information offered to students by universities when advertising their courses as "forensic" and asked how can the SIG help in guiding university courses to include modern practice/skill requirements. Universities appear to lack knowledge of the day-to-day of casework as a forensic archaeologist, including topics like contract law. Commercial work for forensic archaeologists in the U.K. is largely contract based; individual companies/providers are contracted to deal with cases within a specified geographic area. Potentially the SIG could aid universities, students, academics and professional by offering skills maps, training literature, and CPD courses to assist. The SIG will achieve this through collaboration with CIfA and reaching out to other societies that are of interest to forensic archaeology students and practitioners, such as the Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences (CSoFS). The Chair will reach out to CSoFS. The committee noted that the introduction of training materials/skills maps/CPD courses could aid all SIG members, including members of the expert panel. Expert panel members have different skill-sets that could be presented in training materials/skills maps/CPD courses and provide the expert panel with opportunities to be more active with the SIG. Alastair V. (OCM) plans to contact expert panel members for their assistance in the development of 'skill maps' covering various sub-specialisms within forensic archaeology.

6 Recent Events in Forensic Science

The Chair recently presented to the House of Lords Science and Technology Subcommittee regarding the impact of ISO 17020 to forensic archaeologists and scene examination. The Chair discussed that ISO 17020 may cause issues for small-scale providers of forensic archaeology due to associated costs of meeting ISO 17020. The Forensic Regulator stated that the forensic archaeology Standards and Guidance (S&G) document is sufficient to cover forensic archaeology practice in England and Wales, and that they believe providers were not required to be ISO 17020 compliant. However, this decision was based on the S&G document created in 2014 and proposed to be updated in 2016 (not completed). The SIG committee highlighted that the S&G document does not cover many aspects of forensic archaeological practice, particularly in relation to crime scene management.

The Chair had also asked the Forensic Regulator if U.K. police had been informed that forensic archaeologists are exempt from ISO 17020, but the Forensic Regulator has been unresponsive to this point. Ideally, absolute confirmation from the Forensic Regulator that forensic archaeologists are exempt is needed. The committee discussed if the Forensic Regulator is placing the authority in the expert panel to update the S&G and competence of forensic archaeologists. This raised the question: how do expert panel members prove their competence? There is the potential for competence to be loss over time. The SIG could provide retraining and

tests of competence. Also, forensic archaeology providers working outside of the U.K. will undoubtedly need to eventually be ISO 17020 compliant.

As part of the SIG's three year plan, the S&G document needs to updated with the aid of the expert panel to include all aspects of forensic archaeological practice, as well as guidance on how to become ISO 17020 compliant.

7 Direction for FASIG

Unfortunately, no non-committee members attended the meeting so the committee was unable to ask SIG members what they wished to 'get out of' the SIG and the types of events (e.g. workshops, CPD) they want to attend. The committee hopes that through re-engaging with the membership and establishing better channels of communication we will be able to determine what members want from the SIG.

The committee were unsure of the extent to which all members of the expert panel were still involved in contract/professional practice. This is further emphasised by the lack of communication from the expert panel with the SIG. The committee will be requesting to receive the minutes from future expert panel meetings.

The expert panel is presented as a place where casework is discussed, however, the expert panel members are not the only SIG members who are forensic archaeologists with casework. The committee discussed the possibility of creating small forums where casework could be discussed with forensic archaeologists at different levels of proven competence, rather than large open forums.

A second group committee meeting is proposed for December 2019 and it will be open to SIG members. The committee hopes to continue to develop the three year strategic meeting plan at that meeting.

8 CIfA 2020 *Promoting our profession and our professionalism*

The Chair will be co-organising the SIG's seminar session for the conference and will submit the session proposal. The committee has proposed to host a problem-solving seminar related to forensic archaeological practice that uses case studies. During the seminar, there would be an open discussion with attendees to gauge what they want from the group.

The committee noted the high costs associated with attending the conference, even for presenters, especially for field archaeologists and students. To assist with this, the committee discussed the potential introduction of 'CIfA FASIG' sponsored sessions that could be paid for from the SIG's budget. The SIG will discuss this further with CIfA for approval.

9 Any Other Business

None.

Meeting closed.