

CFI Fellows and Alumni Newsletter

Issue 1

November 2011

Hello, and welcome to the first Cranfield Forensic Institute Fellows and Alumni Group newsletter!

For the past five years Cranfield University has produced masters graduates in specialist areas of Forensic Science. These graduates have gone on to work across the globe in a variety of roles, and it is hoped that through the use of this newsletter and an annual event we can keep all alumni informed of developments within the department and look at some of the interesting experiences that previous students have had since graduating.

In this first issue we hear from recent graduate Claire Dennis on her time working with the UN in The Hague and Dr Anna Williams talks about the new F3 facility at Cranfield. We also have an update from Dr Andrew Shortland on the remains recovered from HASLAR and Dr Karl Harrison will be discussing the current changes taking places within Forensic Archaeology.

Forensic Science Society Accreditation

It was with great pleasure that earlier this year the five current Forensic Science Masters at Cranfield were accredited by the Forensic Science Society. During the accreditation process members of the Society reviewed the programmes and facilities at Cranfield, and were particularly impressed with several areas including the availability of equipment, the extensive collection of firearms and explosive devices, and the courtroom skills training.

Save the Date!

We're pleased to announce that the first CFI fellows and alumni Christmas dinner will be taking place on Thursday 15th December. The dinner is open to all staff, fellows and alumni of the Cranfield Forensic Institute as well as husbands, wives and partners. Tickets will be approximately £30 a head for staff, fellows and alumni and slightly more for significant others. More information to follow soon!

Missing Someone?

There are still several alumni members that we haven't been able to get in touch with yet, particularly in the years of 2006 to 2008. Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to any alumni who may not have received it, and if you are an old student and haven't got in touch yet, drop me an email at v.martin@cranfield.ac.uk with your details to stay in touch and up to date with news in the department.

Claire Dennis (MSc Forensic Archaeology and Anthropology 2010/11) is currently undertaking an internship with the UN following her masters. We asked Claire a few questions about her experiences so far

1) Where is it you're currently working?

I am currently working as an intern for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) in The Hague, The Netherlands. The STL is an international court set up to try the people accused of carrying out an attack on the 14th of February 2005 which killed 23 people, including the former prime minister of Lebanon, Rafiq Hariri, and injured many others. As well as all the legal work that is required there is also an investigations department under the Office of the Prosecutor and more specifically, a forensic department, where I currently work.

2) What do you get up to on a day-to-day basis?

There is a lot to be done in preparation for court and the work I do is varied and challenging. It ranges from writing reports, reviewing photos of exhibits and a number of other tasks. I get to use my forensic knowledge as well as learn from international experts, so it is a great place to learn!

3) What have you enjoyed most after your time at the UN?

I enjoy that it's a challenge and that I feel like I am doing something that helps the department. Although I am only an intern, the work I do is important and it is great to be able to contribute to such an interesting and important case.

4) As an unpaid intern, would you recommend internships for recent graduates?

Absolutely. Although it is tough and I hate being slowly and steadily more in debt, the experience is great. It helps you professionally develop in an interesting environment and provides more opportunities for the future. My only advice is to make sure it is an internship that is worth the increasing debt but after that, enjoy it, work hard and learn all you can!

5) What do you hope to do after your internship?

I'll definitely be looking for more work in this arena; either within the STL or anywhere else in the world. I am hoping to build on what I have started here but I never know what might happen next!

6) How has studying at Cranfield helped you prepare for working for the UN?

I feel more prepared for work than I did after my undergraduate degree (Forensic Science BSc at Nottingham Trent) and the practical experience in the IEC module in particular has given me more confidence in using those skills. Even if I am not using it every day, my knowledge is wide ranging thanks to the diversity of modules available at Cranfield so I feel able to help my department if an unexpected situation arose.

The New Forensic Fieldwork Facility at Cranfield Forensic Institute

Dr Anna Williams

Dr Anna Williams proudly launched the new Forensic Fieldwork Facility in February 2011. It is a purpose-built outdoor laboratory, specifically for detailed taphonomic research of animal cadavers for CFI staff, students and collaborators.

Understanding the processes of animal decomposition and taphonomy, and factors that influence decomposition rate, is particularly important for forensic investigations, and especially for determination of the time since death, or the time since burial. Facilities like this one can help investigators locate clandestine graves, and accurately determine the sequence of events before deposition, as well as helping to identify the individual.



Karl Harrison at the Forensic Fieldwork Facility during filming of "Tony Robinson's Superstitions"

The site has been authorised by DEFRA for the Use of Animal By-Products for Research Purposes. Currently, it is for the use of animal analogues (mainly pigs) only at the moment, but there is the intention in the long-term, to perhaps use human cadavers.

The Forensic Fieldwork Facility at Shrivensham is one of only two existing animal taphonomy research facilities in the UK. There are no human taphonomy facilities, like the world-famous Body Farm (University of Tennessee, USA), in the UK at the moment.

Since its inception, the F3 Facility has been the location of several research projects, undertaken by Forensic MSc students, as well as for several upcoming television programs. Tony Robinson examined some porcine cadavers for his new series 'Tony Robinson's Superstitions', and BBC3's 'Ask A Stupid Question' answered the question 'How long would it take for my body to decompose?' with help from another porcine volunteer.

The F3 Facility is available for research into any aspect of animal decomposition, taphonomy, soil analysis, environmental impacts, search and location and excavation of burials. Ambient weather conditions are monitored constantly. Dr Anna Williams and the staff at CFI are very interested in collaboration with researchers with similar research interests, and the F3 Facility is available for research projects. Please contact Anna at a.williams@cranfield.ac.uk.

For more information, a news and events blog and for a booking form, please go to <http://www.cranfield.ac.uk/cds/cfi/forensicfield.html>

Farewell to HASLAR

Dr Andrew Shortland

Many of you will remember, hopefully fondly, the excavation that we have conducted over the years at Royal Hospital HASLAR, in Gosport, Hants. Our work there started in 2006 and for the following four years we dug largely in the burial ground at the rear of the Hospital with the aim of determining its extent and characterising the types of burial found. Many of the students on the MSc in Forensic Archaeology and Anthropology took part in the excavation, firstly as volunteers and then as part of the Practical Archaeological Excavation module. A total of nearly fifty skeletons were lifted for further study as part of two ongoing PhDs by Catherine Sinnott, and Ceri Boston.

I am pleased to be able to tell you that in May this year all the individuals in the study were reburied in the Paddock area of the burial ground very close to where they were first buried. The local vicar held a small burial ceremony and a Royal Marine bugler played the Last Post. This was followed by a formal memorial service held the following day, where about sixty dignitaries, old members of the hospital and Cranfield students and staff attended, ending with a rousing rendition of one of my favourite hymns, *Eternal Father, strong to save*, a hymn forever connected with the Royal Navy and sailors in general. A permanent memorial now marks the burial ground in the Paddock for the first time in over a century, giving witness to those who lie there.



Dignitaries at the memorial service, including: Surgeon Rear Admiral Lionel Jarvis, (Medical Director General of the Royal Navy), Surgeon Captain David Brown, (Commanding Officer, Institute of Naval Medicine) and Commander Dmitry Bognachev (Naval attaché for the Russian Federation).



Not quite so dignified? The usual suspects: Peter Masters, Martin Brown (MOD DE) and myself.

As some of you will remember, the HASLAR excavation attracted a good deal of positive publicity. Two television programmes were produced on it: a *Time Team Special: Nelson's Hospital*, which featured our excavation in detail, and *Back from the Dead: Nelson's Navy*, which showed the osteological work of both Catherine and Ceri.

I have very fond memories of the excavations at HASLAR. The work was extremely valuable in giving us a very good idea of the burials in both number and archaeology. There were some very interesting finds: the individual with terrible, multiple trauma caused perhaps by a fall from the rigging; the sailor with the abolitionist medal; the craniotomies, the list goes on. I hope it was as happy and rewarding a time for the students involved as it was for the staff.

Our excavations continue with work last year at Lydiard Tregoes, another hospital, this time from World War II. There may also be possibilities of excavations further afield, so keep in touch if you are interested in taking part.

Scene Notes 2011

Dr Karl Harrison

It would seem there is little evidence for the supposedly ancient, supposedly Chinese curse 'may you live in interesting times', whose legacy in print doesn't seem to go back any further than the American Society of International Law Proceedings in 1939. That said it has certainly been applicable to British forensic science this year. December 2010 saw the government's announcement that the Forensic Science Service was to close, and the following 12 months has been full of news, concern and uncertainty.

The effect on the pointy end of the industry has been variable; scene examination has continued, and police forces have continued to call on archaeological support. Some have opted for 'in-house' solutions; more and more have Crime Scene Examiners with an archaeological, or even forensic archaeological background. This has to be a good thing where skills are being noted and developed, but there remains a disconcerting level of DIY forensic archaeology – always a risk when the tools of a trade appear very simple.

This year's casework has encompassed media headliners such as Joanna Yeates and Becky Godden-Edwards, but it has also seen the recovery of victims who have attracted less attention; Mujib Hakim in Watford and Heironim Jachimowicz in Borehamwood, as well as the negative searches and the recovery of unidentified remains. It is striking given how focused forensic archaeology is on major crime how few of these incidents come to national media attention, and how unpredictable are those that capture the media spotlight.

2011 has seen the formalisation of two groups dedicated to forensic archaeology, which I hope will provide a stable platform for the development of the discipline and those who practice it. Following the collapse of the Council for the Registration of Forensic Practitioners (CRFP) in 2009, practicing forensic archaeologists have worked hard to establish a new organisation to support their work in the examination of domestic crime scenes. We succeeded in attracting Home Office support, and have now been adopted as a closed expert panel into the Institution for Archaeology (IfA). Our link with the IfA not only serves to establish our work as a professional activity within the greater ambit of general archaeology, but it also makes it incumbent on us to provide outreach and to develop the future generation of forensic archaeologists. As such, we have established a Special Interest Group in forensic archaeology (www.archaeologists.new/groups/forensic), which we envisage will provide a general platform for talks and discussions on forensic archaeology, but will also offer career progression for those hoping to make a profession out of this work. It costs a very manageable ten pounds and I'd like to take this opportunity to recommend it to all of you!