



Society of Antiquaries  
of **Scotland**

# THE RHIND LECTURES **2021**

## **Untimely Ends**

*PROFESSOR JOHN HUNTER OBE BA PhD FSA FSAScot MCIfA FCSFS*



**Free and open to all – registration required**  
Attend in person at the NMS Auditorium  
or attend online

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Please visit  
[www.socantscot.org/event/rhind-lectures-2021](http://www.socantscot.org/event/rhind-lectures-2021)  
to see details and register

*With thanks to AOC Archaeology Group  
sponsor of the Rhind Lectures 2021*

**AOC**  
Archaeology  
Group 

# THE RHIND LECTURES 2021

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## Untimely Ends

**Professor John Hunter OBE BA PhD FSA FSAScot MCIfA FCSFS**

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Archaeologists have always been fond of the dead. Their study enables us to learn about past societies and gives us free rein to air views and theories about what happened, what people believed in, and how the dead were disposed of and commemorated. It takes place at arm's length from reality.

The past is a distant place, and the main artefact of death (the individual) is anonymous. Experience of working with police forces throughout the UK and overseas, locating and excavating clandestine burials, can offer more cynical views of archaeological process and interpretation. There are some interesting *comparanda* when it comes to excavating murder victims, applying archaeological techniques to formal exhumations, analysing media perceptions, and locating markers in the landscape. It is difficult to believe that abuse, drugs warfare, marital disharmony and genocide could be so archaeologically absorbing, but they can be.

It would seem that we tend to think about the past in a different manner to the way we think about the present. This series of lectures will try and link the past and the present in an unusual way.

**Professor John Hunter OBE BA PhD FSA FSAScot MCIfA FCSFS**

John was appointed Professor of Archaeology and Ancient History at the University of Birmingham in 1996. As well as undertaking archaeological research and survey in Scottish islands for over 35 years, he developed forensic archaeology in 1988 and has worked with police forces in the UK and overseas ever since. He has written over a dozen academic books, including three on forensics. His most recent publications, *Ritual in Bronze Age Grave Goods* and *The Small Isles*, on historic landscapes, appeared in 2013 and 2016 respectively. His current interests concern island landscapes, social change and diaspora. He was awarded an OBE for services to scholarship.

Due to the nature of this series of Rhind lectures, some of the content may be upsetting to some viewers. There will be clear warnings if graphic images are to be shown on screen, and these will not be recorded or shown during the live broadcast.

For more information, visit:

**[www.socantscot.org/event/rhind-lectures-2021](http://www.socantscot.org/event/rhind-lectures-2021)**

Tickets are free and popular, so early registration is advisable.

## Friday 22 October

### 6pm **Mission impossible**

The series commences with a brief retrospect on the role of the archaeologist and the achievement of professional respectability in a diverse forensic community. It considers police culture, historic murders involving burial, different disposal characteristics and the divergence of forensic archaeology from its conventional parent subject – particularly with regards to evidence type, narrative, dissemination and links between forensic science and archaeological science. Case studies involving bodies in cellars, gardens and woodland demonstrate a range of archaeological issues and solutions. Thought is given as to how the investigation of the present can stimulate a more evocative view of the past.

**Followed by a drinks reception.**

## Saturday 23 October

### 11am **I am arresting you because your ears are too big**

Archaeological techniques need to be adapted to respond to different scenarios; examples include those from both Russia and Scotland. The main thrust, however, explores the perception of the criminal in current media and some uneasy parallels with the theory of Lombrosian anthropometrics in the late 19th/early 20th centuries. Key to this movement were several Scots who believed that criminals could be recognised by physical and facial features. Their theories are mapped against the osteological studies of groups of prehistoric burials.

### 2pm **X marks the spot**

Locating old or 'cold case' burials introduces problems with landscape change and collective memory, both of which are considered in relation to survey work carried out in the Western Isles. Examples of relocating 'cold case' graves are given, especially with neonates and how some criminals like to mark their victims' graves. The burial of material for later recovery (drugs, firearms etc.) presents parallels with ancient hoards where concealment also involved the intention to recover (*animus revertendi*). Were treasure hoards marked and, if so, how? This session examines the data from Scottish hoards, from Skail to Galloway, and the shortcomings of early reporting and recovery.

### 3.30pm **'Burials tell us more about the living than the dead': discuss**

The focus of this session moves to memorials, funerary ritual and commemoration, and considers modern ritual with a discussion of decay and associated factors of forensic recovery. Emphasis, however, is on those occasions when formal exhumation is required as part of criminal enquiry. Here practical archaeological problems, logistics and public interest need to be carefully balanced. Case studies include that of a distinguished nineteenth-century Cardinal whose exhumation transpired to be both unusual and embarrassing.

**Sunday 24 October**

**2pm Experimenting with people**

The growing volume of cold cases where unresolved crime took place has generated interest in 'body farms', where levels of human decay are assessed in relation to context and elapsed time. Discussion considers buried environments that offer conditions that can both accelerate or contain decay, and also the effects of animal scavenging and surface scatter. In the UK, pigs have been used as human analogues, and much research has been conducted using various geophysical techniques to detect buried human remains at different stages of decay. The session concludes with an overview of the developing role of archaeological techniques in fire investigation.

**3.30pm Mass graves and ethics**

Archaeologists began to be deployed in mass graves in Europe in the 1990s, notably in the Balkans excavating victims of the Srebrenica massacre. There are significant ethical issues involved; does excavation undertaken forensically to gather data for convictions differ in method and character from excavation for humanitarian repatriation? Can there be minimum standards? How do archaeologists operate effectively in situations where their input is constrained by political agencies? The methodology of one particular excavation is outlined; it draws together the victims and the landscape where they lived and considers some archaeological analogies.

***Followed by a live Question and Answer session.***

For more information and to register, visit:

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***All times are GMT.***

The RHIND LECTURES, a series of six lectures delivered annually on a subject pertaining to history or archaeology, by eminent authorities on the subject, have been given since 1876. They commemorate Alexander Henry Rhind of Sibster (1833-63) who left a bequest to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland to endow the lectures which perpetuate his name.

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