

The Finds Group at 30: celebrating the past, reviewing the present, planning the future

Report by Kayt Hawkins MCI^fA (1416) on behalf of the Finds Group committee, with thanks to all the FG members.

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On 25 September 2019 the Finds Group held its annual AGM event, celebrating 30 years of advocacy within archaeology for finds work, standards, guidelines, training and more.

The theme of the day was part reflective, looking back at the founding of the group, its original objectives, the frustrations and successes. It was also about recognising where we as group are now, in terms of membership, remit and aspirations. Looking forward, the major concerns of our members and the future direction of the Finds Group were all up for discussion.



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After a retrospective by our first Chairperson, Andrew (Bones) Jones, Duncan Brown took us back to 1989 and the first meeting of the Finds Group, with the founding committee comprising A Jones, V Bryant, D Hurst, Duncan Brown, Mike Heyworth, Alan Saville and D Tweedle. As early as 1991 we saw the publication of *Guidelines for Finds Work*, followed by the draft *Standard and Guidance for Finds Work* in 1998, which was finally ratified (after resistance in some quarters) in 2000. Many of the initial aims identified in the 1991 document are worryingly still relevant and these were highlighted throughout the day in the various papers.

One of the original committee members also featured in Jane Evans's paper 'Take 3 Girls', which followed the careers of three women who started in finds work in or around 1989. Of the three, only one is still working in finds, and the reasons behind this provoked much discussion concerning the effect of maternity leave, child-care commitments, mental health and the relatively narrow experience base of specialists in affecting career progression. The impact current working practices are having on the ability of new specialists to actually 'specialise' as opposed to the growing trend of the 'generalist specialist' also figured prominently in discussions throughout the day.

The lack of training was and still is a major concern for the Finds Group members and one of the top factors listed by members as a threat to finds work in the recent survey. Both the 'survey of specialists' (Aitchinson 2017) and our own survey (presented by Kayt Hawkins) highlighted the ageing demographic of finds specialists; with an average age of 47 and many planning on retiring within the next 10 years, the profession is facing a serious crisis. Looking

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forward, a wide range of training topics were requested by the members, both artefact- and ecofact-specific, and on broad themes such as freelance working. The Finds Group will also take on board the preference for use of alternative formats in providing these, particularly online resources such as training videos and podcasts.

Continuing the forward-looking theme, we explored new techniques and approaches to analysing and interpreting finds and environmental material and conservation approaches: Pete Guest discussing approaches to Roman coin studies, Sue Harrington's research into textile preservation on artefacts, Julie Dunne on organic residue analysis, Emily V Johnson explaining advances in zooarchaeological techniques and Imogen Wood's paper covering analytical studies in prehistoric pottery. The variety evident in the subject matters reflects the broad nature of the Finds Group and highlights one reason for its continued success as a Special Interest Group. Membership in those first years was less than 100; currently we have 839 members listed on the ClfA database. The Finds Group does not represent any particular specialism; rather it aims to provide an 'umbrella' group for the myriad of specialist interest groups that exist, providing a single point of contact for these many groups to ClfA. It aims to promote standards and best practice for all specialists, and the last section of the day saw Louise Rayner, our current Chair, giving an update on the Finds Reporting Standards Toolkit, the development of which came directly from the recommendations made by the *Review of the Standard of Reporting on Archaeological Artefacts in England*

(Cattermole 2017). The next stage of this project will see the creation of a specialist tool kit, available via the ClfA website alongside the Archive Selection Toolkit.

The day was a great success, a fitting celebration of 30 years of hard work by many people who have given their time voluntarily to help provide training and opportunities and promote the role of specialists within the archaeological sector. There are still many issues facing finds specialists, but the Finds Group is ready to take on the next 30 years.

Aitchinson, K, 2017 *Survey of Archaeological Specialists*, Landward Research doi.org/10.5284/1043769

Cattermole, A., 2017 *Review of the standard of archaeological artefact reporting in England*, Historic England www.archaeologists.net/publications/reports

Finds study now, and a view to the future



- The nature of our work
- Training and careers
- Local/regional expertise
- Suitably qualified specialists
- Standards and guidelines
- Backlogs
- The finds demographic

Slide from Jane Evans's talk



Celebrating 30 years of the Finds Group. Some of the group members at the event. Credit: Kayt Hawkins