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The Establishment of IUGS-IFG

In the mid-1990s, Laurance Donnelly began using geological methods to search for the grave of a child who the police suspected had been murdered and buried in a remote location in Europe. This included search strategies that were not conventionally used by the police, but were more common in mineral exploration or geotechnical ground investigations.

By the early 2000s, geologists had assisted the police in the UK to assist with certain types of criminal investigation. However, the police and law enforcement are not conventionally trained in geology, and geologists were not familiar with police and crime scene protocols. There was a huge challenge ahead.

There were few opportunities for forensic geology to grow and advance. At this time the majority of forensic geologists in the world worked in relative isolation. There was no formal international collaboration between fellow forensic geology professionals. Research and teaching was not being conducted in academia. Publications were few and far between and there was little guidance on the practicable applications of forensic geology. The personal development of forensic geologists was limited. The discussion and publication of cases has always been problematic in forensic geology, balancing the need to maintain the confidentiality of ongoing sensitive case work, and at the same time the need to develop the forensic geology profession. There was no incentive or forum for the analysis of case work so that lessons and experiences could be learned.

In March 2002, the author accepted an invitation to give a presentation on The Moors Murders and Forensic Geology, at Westminster Palace, House of Commons, in London, as part of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Earth Sciences. This was followed by a radio interview on the same subject for BBC Radio 4, also held in London. These events attracted much attention from other geologists, the police, media and some politicians. This began to highlight the need for specialist group on forensic geology.

From 2002 to 2005, a plan developed for the establishment of a new forensic geology group (Donnelly, 2005). The search for the last remaining Moors Murder victim was being conducted on of Saddleworth Moor in Northern England provided the opportunity for this new group to be discussed and for its aim and objective to be determined. This was given further incentive by the first forensic geoscience conference held in London (Pye and Croft, 2004). On 22nd November 2006, The Geological Society of London gave permission for a specialist group to be set up, as the Forensic Geoscience Group (FGG). The FGG inaugural meeting was held at the Geological Society of London, Burlington House headquarters on 18th December 2006.

The possibility for the first international working group on forensic geology was considered on 8th and 9th August 2008 during the 5th Annual Business Meeting of the, "IUGS Commission on Geoscience for Environmental Management" (IUGS-GEM), in Oslo, Norway (Donnelly, 2008). This specialist focus group subsequently became established as the, "IUGS-GEM Working Group on Forensic Geology", in Montevideo, Uruguay, on 12th & 13th October 2009. Forensic Geology was one of several workings groups that also included; Dust, Gold and Mercury, Land Subsidence and Groundwater, Climate

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Change Adaptation, Man-Made Strata and Geopollution, Drinking Water, and Geological Hazards and Territorial Sustainability. During the 6th Annual Business Meeting of IUGS-GEM, held on 5th October 2010 in Windhoek, Namibia, the IUGS-GEM Working Group on Forensic Geology was considered for promotion to an IUGS Initiative. IUGS Initiatives are informal, project-oriented activities organized under the Executive Committee with no prescribed structure, considerable freedom of operation, and no time limit on their duration.

The International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS), launched the Initiative on Forensic Geology (IFG) at the 62nd Executive Committee Meeting of the IUGS, which was held at UNESCO headquarters, in Paris, France, on 22nd February 2011 (Donnelly, 2011). The IUGS-IFG inaugural meetings were held in Rome on 18th-19th September 2011 (Figure 1).



Figure 1. IUGS-IFG Committee Inaugural meeting in Rome, 19th September 2011 (Photo: Dr Laurance Donnelly).

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