

Biometrics and Forensics Ethics Group announces new chair

Mark Watson-Gandy has been named as the new chair of the Biometrics and Forensics Ethics Group.

Professor Mark Watson-Gandy is a practising barrister, author and company chairman.

Mark is experienced in advising government having been a former junior counsel to the crown.

Mark has considerable experience of chairing committees. Since 2014 he has been chair of Mental Health First Aid England, a community interest company launched under the Department of Health: National Institute of Mental Health in England (NIMHE) as part of a national approach to improving public mental health. Mark also chairs the Disciplinary Appeals Committee of the Institute of Financial Accountants and is Head of Professional Standards for the Institute of Certified Bookkeepers, a statutory supervisory body.

The author of several legal text books Mark is also a special lecturer at Cass Business School, a visiting professor at the University of Westminster and a member of court at the University of Essex.

Mark takes over from Christopher Hughes, OBE who has been the BFEG Chair since 2009.

As chair, Mark will provide leadership and support, working with the BFEG committee members and the secretariat to ensure provision of impartial, balanced, objective advice and guidance to ministers within the remit of the BFEG.

Mark Watson-Gandy said:

I am thrilled to join the Biometrics and Forensics Ethics Group as its chair and to have the chance to work with such an amazing and inspirational team. This is an enormously exciting time to join the group and – particularly in the area of big data – there are some challenging issues that need to be wrestled with.

Mark Watson Gandy took up his appointment on 27 September 2019.

Environmental checks around Grenfell Tower show no increased risk to health

The first stage of environmental checks around Grenfell Tower show that there is no increased risk to health from the aftermath of the fire.

The levels of chemicals found in the Grenfell area are consistent with those generally found in London.

The checks were carried out by independent specialists and have been verified by experts on the independent Science Advisory Group.

The process for carrying out the checks was agreed by all members of the Science Advisory Group.

Professor Anna Stec, who originally suggested testing around the site, is a former member of the Group who provided advice to the group on fire toxicity.

Sir Patrick Vallance, Government Chief Scientific Adviser and Chairman of the Science Advisory Group said:

Following a review of the technical documents by the Science Advisory Group, they have agreed that the approach taken was scientifically rigorous and met the agreed specification.

The Group has confidence in the results from Stage 1, which will inform the Stage 2 investigation.

To provide further reassurance to the community, a second stage of testing will also be carried out. The Stage 1 results do not show levels requiring any change to the investigation strategy.

Anyone in the Grenfell community who remains concerned about their health should contact their GP, who is best placed to assess individual needs and consider the most appropriate treatment.

More information can also be found about the enhanced health checks that are available. The government has provided £50 million funding to provide additional health services to the community to support this work.

Health checks are also available at various clinics in North Kensington via community provider, Enhance, who can be reached on 020 3434 2500.

What we did in Stage 1

The aim of Stage 1 was to collect background information, including thorough research, a site walkover and samples from selected public areas.

Investigators took 93 samples from 21 areas within a 1km radius of the Tower, including the Grenfell Tower site. The areas were decided with the community's help to identify where debris from the fire had been found, together with scientific data from the Met Office about the smoke plume from the fire.

What the tests found

Most substances tested are at levels expected in London.

The substances found in the soil are unlikely to be present as a unique result of the fire and most would be present in the environment despite the fire.

There are no obvious patterns in the spread or levels of the substances found – if substances were present in the soil because of the fire, we would expect to see much higher levels closer to the Tower and spreading outwards, but the checks did not find this.

Where some substances are at higher levels, this does not mean they necessarily present a risk to health – the levels are consistent with those in other urban areas. Findings at these levels do not require action, but we will continue to investigate them in a second stage of testing.

The results from Stage 1 will help us to agree where to test and what to test for in the next stage. Stage 2, which involves further sampling, will proceed as planned so we can provide further reassurance to the community.

Burial of 13 WW1 soldiers brings closure to crowdfunded archaeological project

A burial service on Thursday 10 October brought closure to a crowdfunded archaeological project that discovered 110 previously missing soldiers. Thirteen of those found, all from Commonwealth nations including the UK, were buried side by side at a ceremony at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) Wytschaete Military Cemetery, near Ypres, Belgium.

Father Patrick O'Driscoll conducting the service.

The service, conducted by Father Patrick O'Driscoll, Chaplain to the 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, was supported by present-day serving Fusiliers from the Regiment who formed the bearer parties and a

firing party. The casualties were interred in three coffins, with three CWGC headstones marking their collective final resting places. Two coffins each contained one unknown soldier with a third containing the partial remains of 11 unknown individuals. In keeping with burial tradition, the casualties were interred together, ensuring that those who served and died together, are buried and commemorated together.

Father O'Driscoll, Chaplain to the 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, said:

We come together today to remember and thank these men for their great sacrifice in fighting and dying together as one. Even though we do not know their names, we remember their humanity and courage and that even in the hell of battle they were there for each other even to death. So in prayer and celebration we place these men together in this consecrated and special ground, so that they rest in peace and we learn and make sure humanity endures in its fullness.

The funeral service was organised by the Ministry of Defence's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), known as the 'MOD War Detectives', who also try to make an identification when British remains are found. Due to the heavy nature of the fighting in this area during the war, it has not been possible to identify the individuals by name on this occasion. However, at least two individuals are believed to be British, one of whom was wearing dentures manufactured in the UK.

The WW1 Soldiers are placed in their final resting place.

Rosie Barron, from the JCCC, said:

It has been a privilege to organise this service today alongside The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. Although these men were not identifiable, their sacrifice will not be forgotten. They have now been given the burial service they deserve and will rest alongside their comrades in perpetuity.

The service formed one of the final chapters to the 'Dig Hill 80' project that discovered their remains in 2018. The project led a 1.1 hectare crowdfunded archaeological excavation, which took place at the former site of Hill 80 in Wyttschaete, that had been allocated for future housing development. The project excavated 550 metres of trenches and 430 bomb craters, recovering 110 soldiers including British, French, German and South African. Dig Hill 80 was highly publicised at the time, attracting international media attention and celebrity patronage from comedian Al Murray and support from military historian, Dan Snow.

Hill 80, in the village of Wytschaete, was formerly the site of a windmill before the First World War, it became an entrenched German gun position following the village's capture in 1914. The location afforded observational advantage to the Germans as it overlooked the town of Ypres and formed part of the Messines Ridge. The site remained in German hands until the Battle of Messines in June 1917 when it was recaptured. In 1918, Hill 80 was again taken by the Germans during the Battle of the Lys, before finally returning to Allied hands in September 1918.

Dig Hill 80 Head Archaeologist Simon Verdegem said:

It is now about a year since the investigation into the soldiers of Hill 80 was completed. Thanks to massive international support from individuals and organisations, enough money was raised through crowdfunding to make a detailed excavation possible. The aim was not only to excavate the trenches but also to recover the soldiers. Now, the British and German soldiers will finally be given a definitive and dignified resting place along with their comrades. I dare to believe that it gives them peace, knowing that people from all over the world have joined forces to recover their mortal remains. In my opinion, this can count as a symbol of peace and reconciliation.

The graves will now be marked by headstones provided by the CWGC, who will care for their final resting place in perpetuity.

Victoria Wallace, Director General CWGC said

It is always moving and a real privilege to attend reburials. And it's a credit to the team who excavated Hill 80 that they have recovered these men at last, who will now be laid to rest with former comrades, and cared for in perpetuity by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. It is sad that the men cannot be identified individually, but they will never be forgotten, by their nation, or by the people of Flanders who always show such respect for our war dead.

The German soldiers discovered on Hill 80 will be laid to rest on Friday 11 October at the German war cemetery in Langemark.

[Welcoming the adoption of the new](#)

package of socio-economic reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina



The Embassy of the United States, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Bosnia and Herzegovina welcome the adoption of the new package of socio-economic reforms, by the two entity governments, at their parallel sessions today. It is vital that governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina proceed with implementation of reforms to improve the lives of its citizens.

Today's adoption of reform commitments by the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska governments is a positive step towards this goal. These include steps to improve the business environment and stimulate growth and competitiveness; to depoliticise state-owned enterprises; to reform the healthcare system; and to provide better opportunities for youth, women and other vulnerable groups. We welcome the fact that the Entities coordinated amongst themselves this important step.

Finally, we call for government formation, in keeping with Bosnia and Herzegovina's established obligations, at all levels, so this important work can continue.

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Life Sciences and UK's future role: Sir John Bell delivers MHRA annual

Lecture

This was the key message from Professor Sir John Bell, Regius Professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford, as he delivered the 14th Annual Lecture of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) at the King's Fund in London, last night.

In a lecture titled 'The future of Life Sciences: Keeping the UK at the forefront of medical and scientific excellence', Sir John gave us his perspective on the Life Sciences industry here in the UK.

Speaking to an audience of over 200 healthcare leaders from the Life Sciences community, Sir John set out how he would like to see the UK establish three new Life Science industries: genomics, digital health and early diagnosis. These new industries will come with their own regulatory challenges but will be critical to the UK continuing to lead in the field of Life Sciences.

In this time of change for the UK, Sir John addressed the crucial role the MHRA will play in shaping the UK's Life Sciences Strategy. He told the audience that the MHRA has a unique opportunity to challenge the status quo in regulation and play a leading role in a Life Science strategy driven by academia, industry, government and the NHS.

Sir John Bell said:

"Innovation in regulation fundamentally underpins the entire sector and is vital for economic growth.

"As the largest and most innovative regulator in Europe, the MHRA is crucial to the UK's strategy."

The agency's interim Chief Executive Dr June Raine, who chaired the event, said:

"This lecture is a landmark in our regulatory evolution with the real potential to help the MHRA shape the UK's ground-breaking Life Sciences Strategy. "With all parts of the life sciences eco-system working together, we can tackle some of the most significant healthcare challenges facing the world today.

"The challenge is to develop an ambitious strategy which builds on the UK's unique assets of basic science, real world evidence and innovative regulation; a strategy which will enable innovative products to reach patients safely and much more quickly."

The lecture was followed by a Q&A session and panel discussion involving Sir John Bell, Dr June Raine, Dr Janet Valentine, CPRD Director, Jonathan Mogford, Policy Director, John Quinn, Transformation Director and Dr Christian Schneider, NIBSC Director.

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Notes to Editor

1. The MHRA Annual Lecture is the Agency's annual event bringing together more than 200 senior domestic and international leaders from medicine, government, industry, academia, third sector and world health institutions. This year's event took place on 9 October at the King's Fund, in London.
2. Each year the lecture is delivered by internationally renowned experts to bring their perspective on topics of global importance. This year, [Professor Sir John Bell, Regius Professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford](#) delivered a lecture titled "The future of life sciences: Keeping the UK at the forefront of medical and scientific excellence". His lecture follows those by [Sir Harpal Kumar, in 2018](<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/we-need-to-think-differently-on-cancer-to-save-even-more-lives-says-sir-harpal-kumar-at-mhra-annual-lecture>), [Dr Jeremy Farrar, Wellcome Trust, in 2017](#), [Dr Margaret Chan, World Health Organisation, in 2016](#).
3. [National Institute for Biological Standards and Control \(NIBSC\)](#) is a world leader in assuring the quality of biological medicines through product testing, developing standards and reference materials and carrying out applied research. NIBSC is a centre of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency which also includes the Clinical Practice Research Datalink (CPRD).
4. [CPRD](#) is a Centre of the MHRA and jointly supported by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). CPRD provides access to anonymised UK health data for public health research.