



D19 An Ancient Case of Spontaneous Human Combustion - Or Not!

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain a greater understanding for the need to carry out full and quantitative research supported by peer review and not allow those in authority to determine outcomes of a given case; and they will also learn that only the person making the examination, in full receipt of all the facts, can make a determination as to the origin and cause of a fatal fire.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by helping in the understanding of the importance of carrying out a thorough investigation and research into any given case regardless of what they are told by those in authority and that it is the Reporting Officer that will ultimately be responsible for the information contained in any report submitted to the Courts and not necessarily laboratory directors. Therefore, full, accurate, comprehensive, and unbiased reports are essential; and stimulating discussion between fire investigators and scientific staff on the subject of Spontaneous Human Combustion and does it actually exist as a scientific phenomenon?

This paper will discuss an ancient case of Spontaneous Human Combustion (SHC) occurring in rural England in 1613. In Southern England the Puritan faith had a grip on all aspects of local life. These priests preached repentance from sin, a Puritan faith, and compassion for other people. However, the obvious misery of so many people living in squalor and poverty seemed to be lost on them. During a particularly harsh period in the small town of Christchurch a fire occurred which resulted in the death of a local peasant. Despite witnesses to the incident, those in authority chose to listen to the local priest and as such, down through the ages the case was published in various articles as a case of Spontaneous Human Combustion. As the years passed the story became more embellished and accepted into local folklore. Extensive research has been carried out in relation to the incident and the structure in which the incident took place. Research has also explored how local superstitions can influence incidents of this nature. The reader will gain an understanding that not all published cases of "Spontaneous Human Combustion" are as they seem and that facts can be made to fit the case. This paper will discuss how ancient rights, superstitions and the views of those in power on the day have the ability to sway public opinion and change outcomes in order to suit their own needs. It will also demonstrate that simply constructed buildings of the day were no match for the natural elements. The conclusion of this case demonstrates that, with research, even the most simplistic of SHC cases can have an alternative ending and with due diligence and good research skills the writer can find better evidence to support a more scientific conclusion. Therefore, at the end of this presentation the reader has to be asked was this really a case of Spontaneous Human Combustion and does Spontaneous Human Combustion actually exist?

Fire, Ancient, SHC