

Learning from the Present to Understand the Past:

Forensic and Archaeological Approaches to Sites of the Holocaust

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Over the last fifteen years, innovative and systematic methodologies have been developed by forensic archaeologists searching for and recovering buried remains. In the investigation of mass graves of recent conflict, forensic archaeology has played a central role. Elsewhere, the value of using forensic archaeological methods in long-term nobody murder investigations/cold case reviews has been recognised. However, forensic archaeology is only a recognised discipline in a handful of countries throughout the world, and the methods and techniques employed by experts in this area have not been widely applied to the investigation of Holocaust killing sites.

This paper will outline the potential for such approaches to be used as part of searches for sites pertaining to this period. It will be shown how a combination of forensic and archaeological methods have been successfully applied at a number of Holocaust sites across Europe in order to locate mass grave sites and other evidence of atrocity. The variety of state-of-the-art techniques and innovative methods now available will be presented and suggestions for future work will be made. In particular, proposals for a central database of Holocaust mass grave sites will be presented. Ethical working practices will also be discussed, given the need to carry out detailed scientific enquiry whilst respecting the sensitive nature of the evidence being sought.

CV:

Dr Caroline Sturdy Colls is a lecturer and researcher specialising in Holocaust and forensic archaeology. Having carried out the first forensic archaeological surveys of Holocaust killing and internment sites in Poland, Serbia, she has developed a methodology that facilitates detailed, scientific analysis of such sites whilst acknowledging for their religious and commemorative importance.