Spontaneous Human Combustion

by Dirk Gillabel, 2017

The following is an analysis of the characteristics present in Spontaneous Human Combustion (SHC) cases, followed by a theory that might explain this strange phenomenon.

Intro

Although SHC is a rare phenomenon, these cases are usually well documented, because a person died in unseal circumstances, what makes people pay attention to anomalous nature of the combustion, and sometimes an investigation is launched.

People in past centuries were well familiar with fire and its consequences. They knew that a SHC was something completely different, but they were at a loss to explain it.

It is important to look at the details because they show that SHC is a phenomenon that does not fit the characteristics of a normal fire. Debunkers of SHC are often not even aware of these details. They certainly cannot explain the few rare cases of SHC that have been witnessed or in which the victim survived.

I have also assembled individual cases of spontaneous human combustion. You can find them by going to last chapter.

Chapters:

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Efforts to Explain SHC

Spontaneous Human Combustion is a rare phenomenon, but it has been happening throughout the ages. People noticed that it was quite different from a normal fire, but were always at a loss to what the cause of the combustion might have been. They tried to explain it based on what they understood about normal fire. However, none of these explanations really matches up with all the characteristics of the phenomenon.

In past centuries, it was generally believed that SHC was due to the saturation of the body with alcohol, as they noticed that a lot of SHC victims were heavy alcoholics. “The bodies of some few drinkers have been so thoroughly steeped in spirit, as literally to take fire and consume to ashes. It is said that no case of this spontaneous combustion has ever occurred, except among hard drinkers, and it is altogether probable that in every such case, an inflammable air has exhaled from the lungs or skin, or both, and has been kindled by the too near approach of a lighted taper, or some ignited substance” (American Temperance Society, 1829, p45)

Of course, this is not possible. The alcohol in the body cannot set a person on fire.

Some chemists looked for flammable chemicals in the human body. In 2000 a German chemist John Emsley found that human feces contains both phosphate and diphosphane. He thought that in incredibly rare cases, diphosphane levels could build up in a person overtime and if it were to encounter oxygen in the body, could ignite a pocket of methane and phosphate causing a person to burst into flames from the inside out. I guess he didn't understand that a human body is composed of more than 75% of water.

But scientists keep on looking for chemical causes. Brian J. Ford, a British biologist, thinks that it is acetone that makes the body burn. Acetone is a highly flammable substance that is used by the body to break down fat. Ford conducted an experiment in which he created scale models of humans out of pork tissue, marinated them in acetone and clothed them before igniting the models which,

“Burned to ash within half an hour.”. Ford went on to describe, “The remains- a pile of smoking cinders with protruding limbs- were exactly like the photographs of human victims.”. I guess he failed to notice that a living human is not soaked in acetone! Not to mention the 75% water content.

Pork meat is popular with SHC debunkers...

Their most popular theory nowadays is the so-called wick effect. The theory is that an external ignition source burns through the victim’s clothes and skin very quickly, releasing fat which is then reabsorbed into the surrounding clothing creating a source of continual combustion that continues until the fuel is burned up, similar to the way in which the string down the center of a candle absorbs wax and keeps the flame alive. In a well-intention attempt to replicate the wick effect in 1998, scientists at the California Criminalistics Institute wrapped a dead pig in a blanket, lit it on fire and left it to burn. The end result was a corpse similar to SHC remains, but that was only after several hours of smoldering. Other attempts to replicate the wick effect in pigs, however, have failed. SHC victims have burned in less time than 20 minutes, in contrast to the many hours of smoldering required to the turn pig to powder. Also, SHC victim were not rolled up in big blankets to begin with, and some SHC victims had their cloths not burned.

They always forget to look at the details.

The problem with scientist and debunkers of SHC is that they don't investigate the many cases of SHC. They presume that the body caught fire by an external source, such as a cigarette, or an active fireplace that caused the clothing of the person to catch fire.

If that would be the case, the person would immediately try to get up, out of bed, or out of the chair, run around frantically, trying to extinguish the flames, either by hand, or by running to the water faucet. When you look to the many cases of SHC, only in a few cases did the person get up and moved around before succumbing to the combustion. All the other ones stayed where they were, in their bed, or in their chair; they didn't move an inch. Something else took place, so quick that they couldn't even react.

If scientists would read and analyze the many SHC cases, they would find that there are strange characteristics present in these cases, that show that there was no external flame that set the body on fire. All too often, the fireplace or the candles were not burning, and a burning cigarette was ruled as unlikely by firefighters because of the very strange pattern of the fire.

It has been noted many times that the combustion took place from within the body. It was a combustion process that was different from a normal fire, a process that was sudden, quick and devastating, which was limited to the body,

and it also left strange effects in its immediate environment.

Let's have a look at these strange characteristics that show up with SHC.

The Strange Characteristics of SHC

Reduction of the Skeleton to Ashes

It is important to understand that with SHC the entire body gets consumed by the combustion process, except, in certain cases, some parts of limbs or a couple of vertebrae, or a small piece of the skull. Sometimes the surviving foot or limb is not burned, and it still has its shoe and sock, also not burned. If it had been a normal fire, these would have been gone up in flames too.

What makes SHC different from an ordinary fire is that overall there are no bones left. Everything is reduced to ashes. In a crematorium where they use a high temperate (1,500°F to 1,900°F; or 800°C to 1000°C) to incinerate the body. However, all the bones are still left after the cremation, because bones just don't burn up that easily, not even in a crematorium. The crematorium uses a special machine to grind up the bones afterwards, and the powder then get mixed with the ashes. To reduce bones into ashes it requires a much higher temperature. Also, consider that most some SHC lasted only a very short time, even less than 20 minutes.

What process can reduce an entire human body (remember more than 75% water) and the entire skeleton (minus some small parts) into ash in a short time?

From Partial to Complete Combustion

Most of the time, an entire human body is reduced to ashes, sometimes a foot, or an arm is still intact, not burned. Sometimes the combustion is not entire, and the remains of organs are still visible, although carbonized.

In some rare cases SHC can be very small and localized. A firefighter saw a blue flame coming out of the body of a victim (Robert Francis Bailey). He was able to put it out. A professor saw a flame coming out of his leg (see James Overton), which he immediately put out. Some internal process started a combustion process but was not able to spread through the body.

However the emerging combustion process can engulf the entire person at once. Jeannie Saffin, for example, was seen instantly and completely on fire.

It seems that some internal combustion can start at a particular place and be

limited to that place, or it can spread gradually (in the few cases where the person stood up and moved around), or it can encompass the entire body at once (most cases where the person never got up).

In 1841 the Royal College of Surgeons of England published a summary of SHC cases with some of their unusual characteristics. Already at that time it was well-known that SHC had some variation to its combustion process but thorough combustion with some parts of the body not combusted was a sure sign of the strange nature of SHC. Here is a list of the degree of combustion that was gathered from a number of cases. If we would make a list of modern cases it would be very similar. In the list, each line corresponds to a case where there was a complete combustion of the body except some parts:

Complete combustion and reduction to ashes.

Except a portion of the skull and the bones of the fingers.

Except the skull, a part of the face and three fingers.

Except a thigh and a leg remained intact.

Except some bones.

Except the skull and fingertips.

Except a large part of the head and four members.

Except a part of the head and extremities. Carbonaceous skeleton.

Except for a few bones that crumbled into dust, a hand and a foot.

Except some bones which turned to dust.

Except the skull and a part of the skin of the neck wrapped in a tissue.

Except the right leg dressed with its bottom and the shoe.

Except some parts of the body.

Burning of the skin of the right arm and thigh.

Unspecified combustion but very advanced.

Only the hand and thigh altered.

Finger of the left hand alone affected.

Burning of the core muscles, buttocks and upper limbs.

Almost complete combustion.

Nothing burned outside the body

I already mentioned that in 1841 the Royal College of Surgeons of England published a summary of SHC cases with some of their unusual characteristics. They already knew that in SHC cases virtually nothing had burned or gone up into flames around the charred or carbonized body. One of the items they mentioned was writing paper lying next to the victim's completely burned up body, and this writing paper was unburned.

It is a most interesting anomaly with the SHC phenomenon: the sharp confinement of the combustion process. The body got consumed, but not anything that was in contact with the body, like a mattress or chair went up into flames. They do show signs of being blackened or roasted by a radiant heat, or by another type of radiation, but they did not burn in a normal way.

It has been observed many times that objects directly in contact with the body, or at very short distance from the body are only scorched or partially burned. If the body of the victim, and his/her clothes were burning in a normal way, anything around that is flammable would immediately catch fire. However, nothing around the body caught fire. Furthermore, why did a foot or an arm not burn at all, not even the sock or shoe on it?

Although the combustion process inside the body must be very intense, because of the reduction of bones into ashes, and the very short time period, the 'fire' does not spread through the room, apartment or house. Even a newspaper next to the person, in one of the SHC cases, did not catch fire.

It is clear that the combustion process is not a normal fire, that it is limited to the body of the person, and that the scorching of nearby objects is due to a type of radiation coming from the combustion process itself.

Burning from Inside Out

In many cases of SHC there was no external fire or flame present, no burning candles, no active fireplace, no cigarette. The body of the victim started to combust by itself. This combustion is very different from ordinary fire, as nearby highly flammable objects, such as bed sheets or newspapers, did not catch fire.

The combustion process must be a very high temperature, because in most cases the entire skeleton was reduced to ashes. Yet everything around did not catch

fire. It doesn't take much to put a curtain on fire.

It is obvious that the body burns from the inside out, but this cannot be a normal fire, simply because the human body is, after all, composed of three quarters of water.

A normal fire is the rapid oxidation of a material in the exothermic chemical process of combustion, releasing heat, light, and various reaction products. An oxidizer must be present, which is usually the oxygen in the air. Then a chain reaction must take place, by which the released energy will create further oxidation, and thus the fire sustains itself.

The combustion process in SHC is different. From the strange characteristics we can deduce that it starts inside the body and usually causes a very rapid chain reaction throughout the entire body.

In the case of Jeannie Saffin, her father saw a bright flash upon which he turned to his daughter who was engulfed in flames. This rare case where the spontaneous combustion was witnessed, shows that some very intense energy, causing the bright flash of light, caused instantaneous burning of the entire person. Her father also saw flames coming from Jeannie's mouth and said she was "roaring like a dragon" although no burns were found in Jeannie's mouth.

This shows that this phenomenon is not a gradual burning of normal fire. We are dealing with an intense energy that instantaneous sets a person on fire, with the understanding that this fire is of a different nature.

Something of a very intense nature takes places that is able to transform the human body into a highly flammable object, instantaneously.

In 1841, a publication by the Royal College of Surgeons of England contained an article summarizing characteristics of SHC based on previous cases studies. It mentions that "The flame that occurs in spontaneous combustion is light blue, motionless; **it is useless to pour water on it, at times it even seems to animate the fire; so that combustion does not stop until the body parts have been reduced to charcoal or ashes.**" This is an interesting statement that shows clearly that the flames are not from an ordinary fire, but moreover that water seems to fuel the 'fire'. This fits very well in the theory of M. Sue Benford (below) who theorizes that the SHC is fueled by a nuclear process that splits the cell water in the very flammable hydrogen radical (or hydrogen atom), and the hydroxyl radical. The latter is the most reactive radical known to chemistry.

Flames Coming out of the Body

In some rare cases, witnesses saw the human combustion process in action, and they saw flames that were not the normal flames one would expect if somebodies clothes would catch fire.

The1841 publication just mentioned also states "The flame that occurs in spontaneous combustion is light blue, motionless." This was based on investigated cases, so these SHC cases must have been witnessed by other people.

In the case of Robert Francis Bailey, people on the street saw flickering blue flames through the upper window where Bailey was, and when the firefighter entered, he saw a blue flame coming out of a gash in his body: "It was a blue flame. The flame was actually coming from the body itself. From inside the body. He was burning literally from the inside out. And it was definitely under pressure." None of Bailey's cloths were burned. It took three fire extinguishers to put out the flames!

James Overton mentions a case (1835) of a professor who had a very small spontaneous combustion on his leg, out of which he saw a flame emerging: "Directing his eyes at this moment to the suffering part, he distinctly saw a light flame of the extent at its base of a ten cent piece of coin, with a surface approaching to convexity, somewhat flattened at the top, and having a complexion which nearest resembles that of pure quicksilver."

It is even more remarkable when people saw flames coming out of the mouth of the SHC victim.

In a curious witnessed account of Jeannie Saffin, her father "saw flames coming from Jeannie’s mouth and said she was “roaring like a dragon” although no burns were found in Jeannie’s mouth."

A rudimentary account from 1717: "That a Polish Gentleman, in the Time of the Queen Bona Sforza, having drank two Dishes of a Liquor called Brandy-Wine, vomited Flames, and was burnt by them."

I found a newspaper article in The Jeffersonian (Stroudsburg, Pa.), February 28, 1867, Front Page, that talks about the death of man, with severely burned mouth and nose. Considering the SHC can sometimes be very localized and very limited in its effects, this case might well be an example of a small and incomplete SHC:

Spontaneous Human Combustion.

By Telegraph by the Tribune. Indianapolis, Feb. 16.

> A well authenticated case of spontaneous combustion occurred in Columbus, 40 miles south of this city, yesterday morning. Andrew Nolte, a German, very intemperate in his habits, was found dead in his shop, his lips entirely burned away, leaving a ghastly hole, his tongue charred to a crisp. I His nose was also burned, as if by fire coming out of his nostrils, and his clothes were still burning when found. No other part of the body save the air passages was burned. Physicians who examined the body pronounce it a clear case of spontaneous combustion. It is supposed that the fire was communicated by at tempting to light cigar.

The Oily Soot

A fire will always create soot, but in SHC cases they often mention that the soot was very different from what one would normally expect from an ordinary fire. People in the past (with historical cases) were well familiar with fires, and modern day firefighters are well-trained in observation. It is not unusual that they remark that the soot covering walls, ceiling and draperies is of a strange oily quality.

Keep in mind that in SHC cases, only the body burned.

In the case of an unnamed woman mentioned in the Acts of Copenhagen (18th century), a 'humid soot' that covered the room.

In the case of George Mott, "A greasy coating covered every horizontal surface."

In the case of Marie Jeanne Antoinette Bally: "...the floor was covered with a black soot." (nothing burned in the room except her body)

In the case of Mary Clues: "I was in the room about two hours after the mischief was discovered. I observed that the walls and every thing in the room were coloured black..."

The ashes of the combusted person are sometimes said to be greasy and oily.

In the historic case of Countess Cornelia Bandi, an unusual yellow fluid was noticed too, and a thick kind of fluid glue on the floor: "...that from the lower Part of the Windows trickled down a greasy, loathsome, yellowish Liquor and thereabout they smelled like a Stink, without knowing of what; and saw the Soot fly around. It was remarkable, that the Floor of the Chamber was so thick smear'd with a gluish Moisture, that it could not be taken off; and the Stink spread more and more through the other Chambers."

Radiation Effects

Usually, attention is paid only to the victim, but in some cases people noticed some strange things around the remains, that seem to be the result of some type of radiation.

George Mott is an interesting case, as a few anomalies really stood out. The water had evaporated from the toilet. Strangely, inside the refrigerator they found that "Not only the butter, but the plastic butter dish itself had melted. There was an unopened packet of hot-dogs that appear to have been boiled in the wrapping." The plastic of the TV had also melted. Remember the fire was limited to only the victim. It seems that some type of radiation penetrated the fridge and effected the butter and plastic, and also the plastic of the TV. These items were not next to the victim but at a certain distance away.

Waymon P. Wood burned up inside his car: "Plastic fittings had melted, and the windshield glass had bubbled, but all fire damage was confined to the front seat." Only the body had burned, nothing else.

In the Countess Cornelia Bandi case: "Two Candles in Candlesticks upon a table stood Upright; the-Cotton was left in both, but the Tallow was gone and vanished." (tallow, or animal fat was used to make candles). Again, only the body was burned up, but something evaporated the tallow. Is it significant that tallow is of organic origin, like the butter and hotdogs in the Mott case? A type of radiation that acts on organic tissue? Or was it just very intense heat?

There is another case, in 1765, where "The candles in her room had burnt to their ends, and the wicks were still remaining entire in the candlesticks." As the wicks were left intact, the candles were rather evaporated than burned to their ends as was thought.

In the Mary Hardy Reeser case, "Electrical wall outlets and plugs above a four-foot level had melted...But closer to the floor on those same walls, similar electric materials were intact. Extreme heat had cracked a mirror ten feet from the burnt chair, and melted two pink candles about twelve feet from it." As only the body burned, and nothing else in the apartment, how can plastic and candles melt at such a distance. If it was extreme heat, then many other objects would have been affected. In the Mott case we had melted plastic of the TV, and here we have melted plastic outlets and plugs. What have candles and plastics (and hot-dogs) in common? They are all made of organic compounds. Plastic is an organic polymer.

Flash of Light

SHC are rarely witnessed, so we are missing crucial information of the initial bursting into combustion. In the Jeannie Saffin case, her father first saw a bright flash of light, turned, and saw his daughter completely on fire.

Although it is just a single case, it is worth mentioning, because it shows the flash of light shows that an instant high energy burst took place.

The Cause and Nature of SHC

Throughout the ages, ordinary people, investigators, authorities and scientists have all tried to find a logical explanation, but have all failed to come up with something that makes sense. Based on the strange characteristics of SHC we mentioned in the above. We now can safely say that the origin lies in a sudden high intensity energy source coming from inside the body. The fact that for many centuries, nobody could come up with a plausible explanation, and that even in our scientifically advanced 21th century there is still nothing that would account for what really takes place during a SHC and the unusual effects on materials around the victim's body, shows us that we really have to look beyond conventional explanations, because a combustion process involving normal fire is not involved.

As a fire or combustion is a release of energy that creates a chain reaction, what else could liberate energy inside a human body, and create a chain reaction that would overcome the hindrance of the non-flammability of the 75% water content of the human body? It must be pretty intense, something that can split water into its components, because water consists of two highly flammable elements when separated: oxygen and hydrogen.

The following is the most interesting explanation for SHC that can explain most if not all the strange characteristics of SHC.

Biological Nuclear Reactions

For a lot of people it is difficult to understand that SHC might be caused by a nuclear process. We are all familiar with ordinary fire, and chemical reactions, but not with nuclear reactions that take place inside molecules, or inside atoms. When you hear about nuclear reactions, you probably think of nuclear explosion, as in atom bombs, or a nuclear power plant. However nuclear reactions, that is, the exchange of energy inside and between atoms, and interactions between subatomic particles, take place all the time. In normal circumstances all these processes are balanced.

Nuclear reactions are linked to transmutation of one element into another. A

radioactive element sends out radiation from its nucleus by which it slowly converts itself to another element(s). Nuclear transmutation can also be done artificially.

Although not accepted by main stream science, nuclear transmutation also happens in biological organisms. Corentin Louis Kervran (1901–1983), a French scientist, has studied and written about biological transmutation. He found that organisms can transmute potassium into calcium by nuclear fusion. The process by which this happens is not known. Nature obviously does not need extremely high temperatures and pressures to accomplish this. Mainstream scientists say that this would violate basic physical laws. What they don't understand is that they still don't know all the physical laws. Every year new discoveries are being made. Orthodox scientists tend to not investigate matters that contradict their self-established theories.

Nature doesn't care about their theories. In his book Biological Transmutation Kervran shows that the human body also transmutes certain elements. He writes that

...in animals there is certainly a link between

a. sodium and potassium;

b. potassium and oxygen;

c. hyper-thermy and the increase of the ratio K/Na;

d. the ability of the body to excrete potassium without any intake.

In humans: In the United States (1953), Bass showed that human beings whose temperature increased had a parallel increase of K in the perspiration. The excrement, furthermore, contained a much larger amount of potassium than was ingested through diet.

The body is also able to produce magnesium, phosphorus and calcium out of other elements.

All this implies a cold process of nuclear transmutation, completely different then that of the extremely violent atomic fusion of fission. Without going any further into it, potassium seem to play an important role in biological nuclear transformations.

This leads us to an explanation of Spontaneous Human Combustion:

Idiopathic Thermogenesis

The possibility of biological nuclear transmutation, and that potassium plays an important role in it, leads us to a particular nuclear process that could be the cause of SHC.

M. Sue Benford, a registered nurse, health care researcher, and Executive Director of a non-profit biomedical organization in Ohio, wrote an article about SHC, called Idiopathic Thermogenesis. In this article she gives her ideas about how an organic body could combust by nuclear chain reaction, caused by a strong chemical imbalance in the body.

It is well-known that many SHC victims were heavy alcoholics, and/or had physical impairments. Benford says that these conditions, over time, cause a lot of stress on the body, and produce a large amount of free radicals. Free radicals by themselves are destructive to the body, but they can also play an important role to facilitate a particular nuclear reaction when conditions are right.

Benford's conclusion of the involvement of nuclear reactions are based on many studies of gamma radiation of the human body. The human body is not just a collection of organic materials and chemical reactions, it also emits and absorbs radiation. During bioenergetic healing treatments, gamma radiation around the body fluctuates, and Benford suggests that this is due to increased gamma ray absorption by the person, resulting in the activation of specific cellular and molecular processes that are beneficial to the body. In other words, the human body absorbs gamma radiation in an effort to re-balance and heal itself. When cells in the body have become incoherent, are under stress or are dysfunctional, they increase their absorption of gamma radiation. This gamma radiation absorption is a self-regulating mechanism of the body.

Most of this gamma radiation absorption is done by cell water, because water is the most abundant substance of the human body. At the same time the radiation causes one of the oxygen-hydrogen bonds in the water to split, leaving a single electron on the hydrogen and one on the oxygen, thus creating two radicals: a hydrogen radical (or hydrogen atom), and the hydroxyl radical. The latter is the most reactive radical known to chemistry.

As we have mentioned before, most SHC victim were alcoholics or had a physical infirmity, and one can expect that their bodyies were loaded with free radicals. The body tries to heal itself by absorbing more gamma radiation than usual, and this create even more free radicals by splitting the cell water. This way their bodies get really loaded with a lot of free radicals. Free radicals are involved in combustion reactions, and they also tend to create chain reactions.

Benford says that there are two ways that free radicals can react. The typical reaction is for the unpaired electron to pair itself with another electron. However, an electron can also react, and annihilate itself, with its anti-matter counterpart, a positron. Positrons can come from the natural occurring radioactive potassium

K40. K40 decays in Argon40 via emissions of positrons. K40 decays fast and produces a lot of positrons. These positron emissions, if clustered in and around intracellular free radical electrons within cell water could, theoretically, produce highly energized annihilation events.

Another nuclear reaction can take place at the same time. K40 can also affect deuterium oxide (also called heavy water, deuterium oxide is a form of water that contains a larger than normal amount of the hydrogen isotope deuterium, rather than the common hydrogen-1 isotope that makes up most of the hydrogen in normal water.) Deuterium oxide is rare, but when disintegrated releases a proton and neutron. The bulk of deuterium is found in fat deposits. Fat is far richer in carbon and hydrogen than any of the other primary foodstuffs. The combustibility of fat is due to its high hydrogen content that burns invisibly and generates tremendous temperatures. In SHC, the torso area is predominantly consumed, and this may be explained by the fact that the liver fat is found to contain two to three times as much deuterium as that of other fat depots.

So we have a kind of nuclear explosion by which positrons are released and annihilate themselves with the electrons of free radicals, and a decay of deuterium oxide which produces radiation of protons and neutrons. This would explain certain strange effects found in the immediate surroundings of the SHC victim, which show signs of being hit by some type of intense radiation.

But not all alcoholics or impaired people start to combust, so there must be another factor involved that starts the nuclear reactions. Benford states that the unpaired electrons of the free radicals makes them more attracted to a magnetic field, and the majority of documented SHC events have occurred during times of increased geomagnetic flux in the vicinity of the victim.

The nuclear reactions on the subatomic level might be a little arcane to most readers, but it would explain a lot of characteristics of SHC. As these nuclear reactions take place inside biological cells, this would explain why the clothing of some SHC victims were not burned, although their body was reduced to ashes.

Links to SHC cases

In the following pages I have put text in **bold** to emphasize characteristics that are typical for the spontaneous human combustion phenomenon.

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Spontaneous Human Combustion: Historical Cases

Historical cases of spontaneous human combustion, with some reviews and analysis in old documents.

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Italy, 1600's

From Philosophical Transactions, 1668:

An Extract, by Mr. Paul Rolli, F.R.S. of an Italian Treatise, written by the Reverend Joseph Bianchini, a Prebend in the City of Verona; upon the Death of the Countess Cornelia Zangari & Bandi, of Cesena. To which are subjoined Accounts of the Death of Jo. Hitchell, who was burned to Death by Lightning; and of Grace Pitt at Ipswich, whose Body was consumed to a Coal."

This article appeared in the Philosophical Transactions, No. 476, April, May, June, and July 1745, London, England. Pgs. 447-461.

Cefina, April 4. 1731- Read June 20, 1745.
The **Countess Cornelia Bandi**, in the 62d Year of her Age, was all Day as well as she used to be; but at Night was observed, when at Supper, dull and heavy. She retired, was put to Bed, where she passed three Hours and more in familiar Discourses with her Maid, and in some Prayers; at last, falling asleep, the Door was shut. In the Morning, the Maid, taking notice that her Mistress did not awake at the usual Hour, went into the Bed-chamber, and called her; but not being answer'd, doubting of some ill Accident, open'd the Window, and saw the Corpse of her Mistress in this deplorable Condition.
Four Feet Distance from the Bed there was a Heap of Ashes, **two Legs untouched**, from the Foot to the Knee, **with their Stockings on**; between them was the Lady's head; whose Brains, Half of the Backpart of the Scull, and the whole Chin, were burnt to Ashes; amongst which were found **three Fingers** blacken'd. **All the rest was Ashes**, which had this particular Quality, that they left in the Hand, when taken up, a greasy and stinking Moisture.
The air in the Room also observed cumbered with Soot floating in it: A small Oil-Lamp on the Floor was cover'd with Ashes, but no oil in it. Two Candles in Candlesticks upon a table stood Upright; **the-Cotton was left in both, but the Tallow was gone and vanished**. Somewhat of Moisture was about the Feet of the Candlesticks. The Bed receiv'd no Damage; the Blankets and Sheets were only raised on one Side, as when a Person rises up from it, or goes in: The whole Furniture, as well as the Bed, was spread over with moist and ash colour Soot, which had penetrated into the Chest-of-drawers, even to foul the Linnens: Nay the Soot was also gone into a neighbouring Kitchen, and hung on the Walls, Movables, aid Utensils of it. From the Pantry a Piece of Bread cover'd with that Soot, and brown black, was given to several Dogs, all which refuse to eat it. In the Room above it was moreover taken notice, that from the lower Part of the Windows trickled down a greasy, loathsome, **yellowish Liquor and thereabout they smelled like a Stink**, without knowing of what ; and saw the Soot fly around.
It was remarkable, **that the Floor of the Chamber was so thick smear'd with a gluish Moisture, that it could not be taken off**; and the Stink spread more and more through the other Chambers.
It is impossible, that, by any Accident, the Lamp should have caused such a Conflagration.
There is no Room to suppose any supernatural Cause.
The likeliest cause then is a Flash of Lightning; which, according to the most common Opinion, being but a sulphurous and nitrous Exhalation from the Earth, having been kindled in the Air, did penetrate either thro' the Chimney, or thro' the Chinks of the Windows, and did the Operation. All the above mentioned Effects prove the Assertion; for those remaining foul Particles are the grossest Parts of the Fulmen, either burnt to Ashes, or thickened into a viscous bituminous Matter. Hence no Wonder the Dogs would not eat of the Bread, because of the Bitterness of the Soot, and Stink of the Sulphur that lodged on it. The impalpable Ashes of the Lady's Corpse are also a Demonstration; for nothing but a Fulmen could produce such an Effect.

They say that there was not any Noise; but maybe there was, and they heard it not, being in a found Sleep: Besides, there have been seen Lightnings and Fulmina without Noise; as one may very often observe.
THIS is the whole Narration; after which I think proper to place what is said in the Preface relating to it.

In the Acta Medicia & Philsophica Hafnienfia, published by the celebrated Thomas Bartolin, 1673.
Vol. II. page 211. n. 118. one may see such another Accident related in these very Words.
"A poor Woman at Paris used to drink Spirit of Wine plentifully for the Space of three Years, for as to take nothing else. Her Body contracted such a combustible Disposition, that one Night she, lying down on a Straw-Couch, was all burned to Ashes and Smoke, **except the Scull, and the Extremities of her Fingers**."
John Henry Cohausen relates this Fact in a Book printed at Amsterdam 1717, intituled, Lumen novum Phosphoris accensum; and in the fifth Part, p. 92. relates also, "That a Polish Gentleman, in the Time of the Queen Bona Sforza, having drank two Dishes of a Liquor called Brandy-Wine, vomited Flames, and was burnt by them."
Source: Philosophical transactions, giving some accompt of the present undertakings, studies and labors of the ingenious in many considerable parts of the world , Volume 43, Issues 475-477 edited by John Martyn ((Londres)), James Allestry ((Londres)), Henry Oldenburg (Published: London : printed by T. N. for John Martyn ... and James Allestry, printers to the Royal-Society, 1668

England, 1700's

An Account of a Woman accidentally burnt to death at Coventry.

By B. Wilmier, Surgeon, at Coventry. In a Letter to Mr. William Sharpe.

From the Philosophical Transactions

S I R, THE following case, which has lately engaged the attention of every one in this part of the world, appears to me so very extraordinary, that I was determined to give you a minute account of its circumstances; which will be the more agreeable to you, as you may depend upon the truth of every thing that I shall relate to you concerning it.

Mary Clues, of Gosford-street, in this city, aged 52 years, was of an indifferent character, and much addicted to drinking. Since the death of Her husband, which happened about a year and a half ago, her propensity to this vice increased to such a degree, that, as I have been informed by several of her neighbours, she has drank the quantity of four half pints of rum, undiluted with any other liquor, in a day. This practice was so familiar to her, that scarce a day has passed this last twelvemonth, but she has swallowed from half a pint to a quart of rum or aniseed

water. Her health gradually declined; and, from being a jolly, well-looking woman, she grew thinner, her complexion altered, and her skin became dry. About the beginning of February last, she was attacked with the jaundice, and took to her bed. Though she was now so helpless, as hardly to be able to do any thing for herself, she continued her old custom of dram-drinking, and generally smoked a pipe every night. No one lived with her in the house. Her neighbours used, in the day, frequently to come in, to see after her ; and in the night, commonly, though not always, a person sat up with her; to whom she has often cried out, that she saw the devil in some part of the room, who was come to take her away.

Her bedroom was next the street, on the ground floor, the walls of which were plastered, and the floor made of bricks. The chimney is small, and there was a grate in it, which, from its size, could contain but a very small quantity of fire. Her bed-head stood parallel to, and at the distance of about three feet from the chimney. The bed's head was close to the wall. On the other fide the bed, opposite the chimney, was a window opening to the street. One curtain only belonged to the bed, which was hung on the side next the window, to prevent the light being troublesome. She was accustumed to lie upon her side, close to the edge of the bedhead, next the fire; and on Sunday morning, March the 1st, tumbled upon the floor, where her helpless slate obliged her to lie some time, till Mary Hpllyer, her next neighbour, came accidentally to see her. With some difficulty she got her into bed. The same night, though she was advised to it, she refused to have anyone to sit up with her ; and, at half past eleven, one Brooks, who was an occasional attendant, left her as well as usual, locked up her door, and went home. He had placed two bits of coal quite backward upon the fire in the grate, and put a small rush-light in a candlestick which was set in a chair, near the head of the bed but not on the side where the curtain was. At half after five the next morning, a smoke was observed to come out of the window in the street; and, upon breaking open the door, some flames were perceived in the room, which, with five or fix buckets of water, were easily extinguished. Betwixt the bed and fire-place lay the remains of Mrs. Clues. **The legs and one thigh were untouched**. Except these parts, **there were not the least remains** of any skin, muscles, or viscera. **The bones of the skull, thorax, spine, and the upper extremities were completely calcined**, and covered with a whitish efflorescence. The skull lay near the head of the bed, the legs toward the bottom, and the spine in a curved direction, so that she appeared to have been burnt on her right side, with her back next the grate. The right femur was separated from the acetabulum of the ischium; the left was also separated, and broken off about three inches below the great trochanter. The connection of the sacrum with the ossa innominata, and the inferior vertebrae of the loins were destroyed. The intervening ligaments kept the vertebrae of the loins, back, and neck together, and the skull was still resting upon the atlas. When the flames were extinguished, it appeared that **very little damage had been done to the furniture of the room**, and that the side of the bed next the fire had suffered most. The bedhead was superficially burnt, but **the feather bed, sheets, blankets, etc. were not destroyed**. **The curtain on the other side of the bed was untouched, and a**

deal door, near the bed, not in the least injured. I was in the room about two hours after the mischief was discovered. I observed that **the walls and every thing in the room were coloured black** : there was a very disagreeable vapor; but **I did not observe, that anything was much burnt, except Mrs. Clues**; whose remains I saw in the state I have just described. I took away one of the bones (the remains of the sacrum) which you have inclosed with this letter. The only way that I can account for it, is, by supposing that she again tumbled out of bed on Monday morning, and that her shirt was set fire to, either by the candle from the chair, or a coal falling from the grate ; that her solids and fluids were rendered inflammable, by the immense quantity of spirituous liquors she had drank, and that when she was set fire to, she was probably soon reduced to ashes, for the room suffered very little. B. WlLMER. Coventry-, April 9, 1772.

Source: The Annual Register: Or a View of the History, Politics and Literature, for the year 1775., published in London, 1776 ; appeared originally on *The Philosophical Transactions*, Vol. LXIV, Part II, 1774 London, England. Pgs. 340-343.

Two cases in the 1700's

...He remarks that some facts of this kind were known at an early period; and that (among other writings on the subject) M. René Moreau, (a physician of Paris) published a letter in 1644, in which he speaks of a flame that issued from the stomach of a woman, who died at Lyons; which flame he considers to be of the same nature as the ignis lambeus, of which Virgil speaks, in the second book of the Eneid, line 683:

Ecce levis summo de vertice visus Iuli fundere lumen apex, tactuque innoxia mollis lambere flamma comas et circum tempora pasci.

From the instances which he gives of human combustion, we shall select those which we have not already detailed.
In the month of February, 1779, Mary Ann Jauffret, the widow of a man named Gravier, a shoe-maker, at Aix, in Provence, was burnt to death in her chamber. She was sixty years of age, very fat, inclined to drink, and very sensible to cold. A surgeon of that place, named Roccus, was commissioned to make a report of the miserable remains of the unfortunate creature; **he found only a mass of ashes; and the bones were calcined to such a degree, as to be reduced to powder on the slightest pressure. The skull, one hand, and one foot, had partly escaped the action of the fire.** At the distance of two steps from these remains, was **the supper-table untouched**, and under the table a stove; the grate of which, being partially burnt away by long usage, presented a large opening; this stove had contained fire. A chair which was near, had the seat and front of the legs burned; and with this exception, **there was no other appearance of fire, either in the chimney, or in the room itself.** All the rest

of the furniture was in its usual state; so that with the exception of the chair (which seemed, however, to have been burnt seperately), no combustible matter appeared to have contributed to the prompt incineration of the body, which had been effected in about seven or eight hours.
On the 10th of December, 1799, M. Neveux, an "officer de santé," at Paris, reported that he went with a commissary of police, to the house of a man named Bias; and that he there saw the remains of a human body;--that of the wife of Bias. **The whole trunk appeared a mass of charcoal**, rending forth a painfully disagreeable odour. The breast-bone and the muscles of the abdomen appeared to be more affected than the rest. Of the four extremities, **only one foot remained of the natural appearance.** The head, which was still attached to the trunk, was bloated and puffed up. **Only a chair and a table, near the body, were found burnt.** The neighbours declared they had heard this woman working and talking **only two hours before**.
M. Valentin. a surgeon, informed M. Foderé, that when he was at Caen, in Normandy, in 1780 or 1781, an unmarried lady, more than sixty years of age (distinguished by a fondness for strong liquors, and a fancy for petting animals)was consumed in her apartment, at some distance from the fire, which was very small. People flocked in crowds to the house, which exhaled an odour of burnt fat. They found **only the skull and the two feet together with a small quantity of ashes.** These remains were lying on the floor, which was a little burned.

Source: The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction: Containing original essays, Volume 32 edited by Thomas Byerly, John Timbs, page 277 -278

An analysis from 1841

The following is a publication from 1841. It shows that spontaneous human combustion was well known at that time, and that some people had already investigated many cases and had found unusual characteristics that showed up in most cases.

Source: Thèse présentée et publiquement soutenue à la Faculté de médecine de Montpellier, le 1er février 1841 by Royal College of Surgeons of England, page 32

{original French text at the end of this chapter)

On spontaneous combustion

I will not discuss here the various theories that have been issued on spontaneous combustion; I only deal with this issue in respect of forensic medicine: this question studied in this way is even more interesting, an ignorant doctor could lead innocent people to the scaffold, or at least expose them to undergo a

judgment, as has already been done. Nowadays the authors agree more or less that the use of alcoholic beverages is a predisposing cause of spontaneous combustion, especially for people in whom the abuse of these liqueurs produced polysarcia [=excess fat]; However, it was noticed that in a few rare cases spontaneous combustion happened in slender subjects. Women are more likely than men to spontaneous combustion, which is explained by women have more soft tissues, and that they are more probe to the accumulation of gases, and that women take it to a habit to be more passionate than men. This accident happens more often in older people than younger, which is explained further because young people have other passions that outweigh that of spirits. **The flame that occurs in spontaneous combustion is light blue, motionless; it is useless to pour water on it, at times it even seems to animate the fire; so that combustion does not stop until the body parts have been reduced to charcoal or ashes.** Rarely all parts are destroyed; part of the extremities often remain, sometimes also vertebrae; but the soft parts are often completely burned. **When the body is completely consumed, the amount of ash is so small, that it is not in proportion to the volume of the body.** In general, furniture around the body, and sometimes even the clothes that covered the body, are not damaged; but they are covered with a layer of **wet and greasy soot**, and in the apartment one can smell a very foul empyreumatic odor. The spontaneous combustion occurs most often during the winter. I also thought to borrow the table from the dictionary in 15 volumes of M. Alph. Devergie, which gives the most important cases of spontaneous combustion.

This is the table accompanying the article:

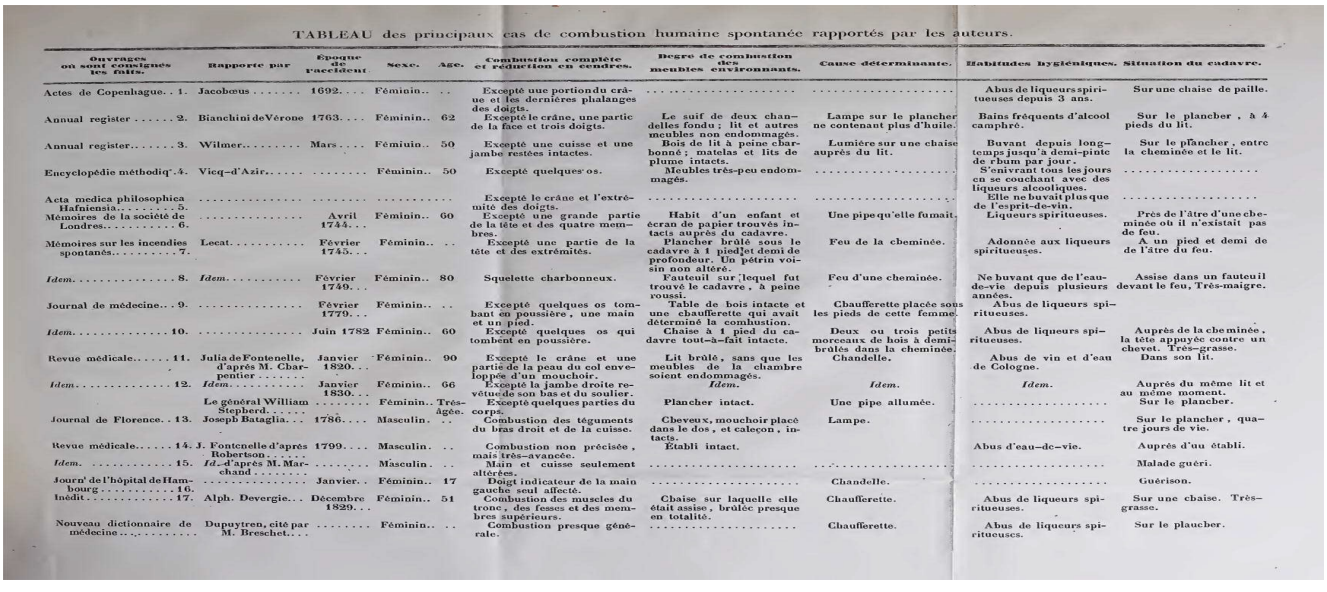

TABLEAU des principaux cas de combustion humaine spontanée rapportés par les auteurs.

Ouvrages où sont consignés les faits.	Rapporté par	Époque de l'accident	Sexe.	Âge.	Combustion complète et réduction en cendres.	Degré de combustion des meubles environnants.	Cause déterminante.	Habitudes hygiéniques.	Situation du cadavre.
Actes de Copenhague. . 1.	Jacobœus	1692. . . .	Féminin..	..	Excepté une portion du crâne et les dernières phalanges des doigts.	. . . . .	. . . . .	Abus de liqueurs spiritueuses depuis 3 ans.	Sur une chaise de paille.
Annual register . . . . . 2.	Bianchini de Vérone	1763. . . .	Féminin..	62	Excepté le crâne, une partie de la face et trois doigts.	Le suif de deux chandelles fondu ; lit et autres meubles non endommagés.	Lampe sur le plancher ne contenant plus d'huile.	Bains fréquents d'alcool camphré.	Sur le plancher, à 4 pieds du lit.
Annual register. . . . . 3.	Wilmer.	Mars	Féminin..	50	Excepté une cuisse et une jambe restées intactes.	Bois de lit à peine charbonné ; matelas et lits de plume intacts.	Lumière sur une chaise auprès du lit.	Buvant depuis longtemps jusqu'à demi-pinte de rhum par jour.	Sur le plancher, entre la cheminée et le lit.
Encyclopédie méthodiq'.4.	Vicq-d'Azir.	. . . . .	Féminin..	50	Excepté quelques os.	Meubles très-peu endommagés.	. . . . .	S'enivrant tous les jours en se couchant avec des liqueurs alcooliques.	. . . . .
Acta medica philosophica Hafniensia. . . . . 5.	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	Excepté le crâne et l'extrémité des doigts.	. . . . .	. . . . .	Elle ne buvait plus que de l'esprit-de-vin.	. . . . .
Mémoires de la société de Londres. . . . . 6.	. . . . .	Avril 1744. . .	Féminin..	60	Excepté une grande partie de la tête et des quatre membres.	Habit d'un enfant et écran de papier trouvés intacts auprès du cadavre.	Une pipe qu'elle fumait.	Liqueurs spiritueuses.	Près de l'âtre d'une cheminée où il n'existait pas de feu.
Mémoires sur les incendies spontanés. . . . . 7.	Lecat.	Février 1745. . .	Féminin..	..	Excepté une partie de la tête et des extrémités.	Plancher brûlé sous le cadavre à 1 pied et demi de profondeur. Un pétrin voisin non altéré.	Feu de la cheminée.	Adonnée aux liqueurs spiritueuses.	A un pied et demi de de l'âtre du feu.
Idem. . . . . 8.	*Idem*.	Février 1749. . .	Féminin..	80	Squelette charbonneux.	Fauteuil sur lequel fut trouvé le cadavre, à peine roussi.	Feu d'une cheminée.	Ne buvant que de l'eau-de-vie depuis plusieurs années.	Assise dans un fauteuil devant le feu, Très-maigre.
Journal de médecine. . . 9.	. . . . .	Février 1779. . .	Féminin..	..	Excepté quelques os tombant en poussière, une main et un pied.	Table de bois intacte et une chaufferette qui avait déterminé la combustion.	Chaufferette placée sous les pieds de cette femme.	Abus de liqueurs spiritueuses.	
Idem. . . . . 10.	. . . . .	Juin 1782	Féminin..	60	Excepté quelques os qui tombent en poussière.	Chaise à 1 pied du cadavre tout-à-fait intacte.	Deux ou trois petits morceaux de bois à demi-brûlés dans la cheminée.	Abus de liqueurs spiritueuses.	Auprès de la cheminée, la tête appuyée contre un chevet. Très-grasse.
Revue médicale. . . . . 11.	Julia de Fontenelle, d'après M. Charpentier	Janvier 1820. . .	Féminin..	90	Excepté le crâne et une partie de la peau du col enveloppée d'un mouchoir.	Lit brûlé, sans que les meubles de la chambre soient endommagés.	Chandelle.	Abus de vin et d'eau de Cologne.	Dans son lit.
Idem. . . . . 12.	*Idem*.	Janvier 1830. . .	Féminin..	66	Excepté la jambe droite revêtue de son bas et du soulier.	*Idem*.	*Idem*.	*Idem*.	Auprès du même lit et au même moment.
	Le général William Stepherd.	. . . . .	Féminin..	Très-âgée.	Excepté quelques parties du corps.	Plancher intact.	Une pipe allumée.	. . . . .	Sur le plancher.
Journal de Florence. . . 13.	Joseph Bataglia. . .	1786. . . .	Masculin. .	..	Combustion des téguments du bras droit et de la cuisse.	Cheveux, mouchoir placé dans le dos, et caleçon, intacts.	Lampe.	. . . . .	Sur le plancher, quatre jours de vie.
Revue médicale. . . . . 14.	J. Fontenelle d'après Robertson.	1799. . . .	Masculin. .	..	Combustion non précisée, mais très-avancée.	Établi intact.		Abus d'eau-de-vie.	Auprès d'un établi.
Idem. . . . . 15.	*Id.* d'après M. Marchand	. . . . .	Masculin. .	..	Main et cuisse seulement altérées.	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	Malade guéri.
Journ' de l'hôpital de Hambourg . . . . . 16.	. . . . .	Janvier. .	Féminin..	17	Doigt indicateur de la main gauche seul affecté.	. . . . .	Chandelle.	. . . . .	Guérison.
Inédit. . . . . 17.	Alph. Devergie. . .	Décembre 1829. . .	Féminin..	51	Combustion des muscles du tronc, des fesses et des membres supérieurs.	Chaise sur laquelle elle était assise, brûlée presque en totalité.	Chaufferette.	Abus de liqueurs spiritueuses.	Sur une chaise. Très-grasse.
Nouveau dictionnaire de médecine.	Dupuytren, cité par M. Breschet. . .	. . . . .	Féminin..	..	Combustion presque générale.	. . . . .	Chaufferette.	Abus de liqueurs spiritueuses.	Sur le plancher.

Sixth and seventh column of the above page:

Complete combustion and reduction to ashes.

The degree of combustion of the surrounding furniture

Except a portion of the skull and the bones of the fingers.

Except the skull, a part of the face and three fingers.

Except a thigh and a leg remained intact.

Except some bones.

Except the skull and fingertips.

Except a large part of the head and four members.

Except a part of the head and extremities. Carbonaceous skeleton.

Except for a few bones that crumbled into dust, a hand and a foot.

Except some bones which turned to dust.

Except the skull and a part of the skin of the neck wrapped in a tissue.

Except the right leg dressed with its bottom and the shoe.

Except some parts of the body.

Burning of the skin of the right arm and thigh.

Unspecified combustion but very advanced.

Only the hand and thigh altered.

Tallow of two candles melted; bed and other furniture undamaged.

Wood bed barely charred; mattresses and feather beds intact.

Very slightly damaged furniture.

Garment of a child and writing paper found intact next to the corpse.

Floor visible under the body at 1 foot and a half deep. A nearby bread board was not affected.

Chair on which the body was found, was barely singed.

Intact wooden table and a little heater was blamed for the combustion.

Chair that was 1 foot from the corpse was intact.

Bed was affected but the furniture in the room was undamaged.

Idem.

Floor intact.

Hair, handkerchief placed on the back, and shorts, were intact.

Furniture intact.

Chair on which she was sitting, was almost completely burned.

Finger of the left hand alone affected.

Burning of the core muscles, buttocks and upper limbs.

Almost complete combustion.

Some cases mentioned in The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, 1836

On Spontaneous Combustion — From an Essay Read at the Last Annual Meeting of the Med. Society of Tennessee JAMES OVERTON, M.D. Boston Med Surg J 1835 (in The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, Volumes 13-14, 1836)

In 1725, the wife of a man by the name of Millet perished as the victim of spontaneous combustion, in the city of Rheims, in France. Her remains were found in the kitchen, at the distance of a foot or foot and a half from the chimney. **Some portions of the bones of the head, of the extremities, and some the dorsal vertebrae, had alone escaped entire incineration.** Millet owned or possessed a maid servant, who was young, and remarkable for her extraordinary beauty; and disreputable and alarming suspicions were soon started against him. Millet was subjected to all the rigors of a criminal prosecution, and finally convicted and condemned to be execution for the murder of his wife. He took an appeal from this decision, and, arraigned before a more enlightened tribunal, the case was ascertained to be one of "spontaneous combustion," and Millet consequently escaped at once from the horrors of the scaffold and the odium of having been the murderer of his own wife.

There is reported in a Leipsic journal, the history of a female, fifty years of age, very much addicted to the intemperate use of spirituous liquors, and who never went to bed except in a state of intoxication from this intemperance. She was found in the morning reduced to ashes.
The bones of the two femurs, only, and some other small portions of the skeleton, had not been subjected to total incineration.

In the "Acts of Copenhagen," another medical journal, there is published the case of a woman, who made immoderate use of alcoholic liquors and took but little nourishment, having gone to sleep lit her chair after her usual potation. She was found entirely burnt up, **with the exception of the bones of the cranium, and the terminal phalanges of the fingers.** In 1765, a noble lady of France, sixty years of age, and who was in the frequent habit of bathing her whole body in

camphorated spirit of wine, was found burnt up, at a distance from her bed, from which it seemed that she had been driven by the heat and suffering attendant upon the accident. It was demonstrated that the fire in her apartment had had no agency in the production of her death. The candles in her room had burnt to their ends, and the wicks were still remaining entire in the candlesticks.

The room where this spontaneous combustion had occurred was filled with **a humid soot**, of the color of ashes; it had penetrated the texture of her curtains, and stained her bed linen.

Source: The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, Volumes 13-14, page 22-23

The following is the original French text of Thèse présentée et publiquement soutenue à la Faculté de médecine de Montpellier, le 1er février 1841 by Royal College of Surgeons of England, page 32

De la combustion spontanée

Je ne discuterai pas ici les différentes théories qui ont été émises sur la combustion spontanée ; je traiterai seulement cette question sous le rapport de la médecine légale : cette question , étudiée de cette manière , est d'autant plus intéressante, qu'un médecin ignorant pourrait conduire à l'échafaud des personnes innocentes, ou tout au moins les exposer à subir un jugement, comme cela s'est déjà présenté. Les auteurs sont aujourd'hui à peu près d'accord que l'usage des boissons alcooliques est une cause prédisposante de la combustion spontanée, surtout pour les personnes chez lesquelles l'abus de ces liqueurs a produit ta polysarcie ; cependant on a reconnu quelques cas rares , il est vrai , de combustion spontanée chez des sujets maigres. Les femmes sont plus exposées que les hommes aux combustions spontanées, ce qui s'explique assez parce que les femmes ont les tissus plus lâches et plus propres aux accumulations gazeuses, et que, lorsque les femmes prennent une habitude, elles s'y livrent avec beaucoup plus de passion que les hommes. Cet accident arrive plus souvent chez les personnes âgées que chez les jeunes, ce qui s'explique encore parce que les jeunes personnes ont d'autres passions qui l'emportent sur celle des boissons spiritueuses. La flamme qui se produit dans les combustions spontanées est légère , bleuâtre, immobile; l'eau que l'on jette dessus est inutile pour l'éteindre, elle semble même quelquefois l'animer ; de sorte que la combustion ne s'arrête guère que lorsque les parties sont charbonnées ou réduites en cendres. Rarement toutes les parties sont détruites; il reste presque toujours une partie des extrémités, quelquefois des vertèbres; mais les parties molles sont souvent entièrement brûlées. Lorsque le corps est complètement consumé, la quantité de cendre est si petite, qu'elle n'est nullement en proportion avec le volume du corps. Ordinairement les meubles qui environnent le cadavre, et même quelquefois les vêtements qui le recouvraient, ne sont pas endommagés; mais il se

dépose à leur surface une couche de suie humide et grasse, et, dans l'appartement, on respire une odeur empyreumatique très-fétide. Les combustions spontanées ont lieu le plus souvent pendant l'hiver. J'ai cru devoir emprunter au dictionnaire en 15 volumes le tableau de M. Alph. Devergie, dans lequel sont cités les principaux cas de combustions spontanées.

Spontaneous Human Combustion: Combustion of the Entire Body: 19th Century Cases

Cases of human spontaneous combustion in the 19th century in which the entire body was consumed by the fire.

Philadelphia, 1800's, Marie Jeanne Antoinette Bally

Scotland, 1888, A.M.

****

Philadelphia, 1800's

Marie Jeanne Antoinette Bally

"We propose to refer only to such cases of spontaneous combustion as have been reported at a comparatively recent date, and by men of standing and authority. The first which we quote is reported by M. Devergie. A washerwoman named Marie Jeanne Antoinette Bally, fifty years of age, and of intemperate, habits, returned to her lodging one evening in December in a state of drunkenness. Her room was not more than ten feet long by six to seven feet wide, and was lighted by two little windows from a corridor. The only furniture consisted of a chair, a chest in the corner, and muslin window curtains. (Italics his). There was no bed. The next morning at eight o'clock, the neighbors, perceiving a strong smell of smoke, entered her room, and there found the unfortunate woman upon the floor almost completely burned, with her feet turned toward the chimney place in which, **however, there was no fire**. Under one of her arms there was still a portion of the chair upon which she had been seated, and underneath her an earthen pot such as is used by the poor to hold a few coals to warm their feet. The chair was almost entirely burned, **the floor was covered with a black soot**, and an exposed beam in the wall of the room was charred upon the surface. The chest, however, was untouched, as were also the muslin curtains, which were only three feet distant from the body. The body was sent to the Morgue, and examined by direction of the judicial authorities. The body was lean; the face and hair, the anterior portion of the neck and upper part of the shoulders

were not injured. The skin and muscles of the back were, however, thoroughly burnt, as were also the sides and anterior portion of the trunk. The anus and vulva escaped. Nothing was left of the upper extremities but the bones; there was, however, a portion of the chemise in each armpit still intact. The upper portion of the lower limbs was also burnt. The stockings were entire.'

Source: Wharton, Francis & Still6, Moreton. A Treatise on Medical Jurisprudence, 2nd & Revised Edition, Philadelphia, Kay & Brother, 1860, page 764

Scotland, 1888:

CASE OF SO-CALLED "SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION."!

By J. MACKENZIE BOOTH, M.A., M.D., C.M. Aberd.,

Physician to the Aberdeen General Dispensary, and Lecturer on Disease of the Ear and Larynx in the University of Aberdeen.

I WAS lately called to a case which vividly recalled the old tales of spontaneous combustion, and more especially an article that I had read on that subject by our late President, Professor Ogston. The term "spontaneous combustion" has been applied to two conditions : first, spontaneous ignitability, and, secondly, increased combustibility; and I need hardly say that it is to the second category- that the present case belongs. As Dr. Ogston remarks on these cases, **the subjects were all found dead, their bodies, their clothes, and the articles in their neighbourhood being partially or entirely destroyed by fire, the only remarkable thing about them being that the bodies were burnt and charred out of all proportion to the neighbouring objects, and to an extent which seems incapable of being accounted for by the heat of the burning clothes and objects in the vicinity.**

On the morning of Sunday, February 19th, I was sent for to examine the remains of a man, A. M., aged 65, which were found in a hayloft off Constitution Street. This man, a pensioner, of notoriously intemperate habits, had been seen at 9 o'clock the night before to enter the stable below in an intoxicated condition, and he asked the lad and girl who saw him to shut the stable door after him, which they did. They then heard him ascend the ladder leading to the loft above, and afterwards saw the skylight of the loft lighted, and later still the light put out. Between 8 and 9 o'clock next morning the wife of the proprietor of the stable, living near by happening to look out of the window, observed smoke issuing from a hole in the roof of the loft. She informed her husband of the fact, and he, on entering the stable, was horrified to see through a hole in the loft floor the remains of the old soldier perched on the joists above, and leaning against the wall. The police were at once communicated with, and I was sent for to attest the

accident. On arriving I ascended to the loft, and found the charred remains of a man reclining against the stone wall, and kept only by one of the joists and the burnt remnant of the flooring under him from falling through into the stable beneath. What struck me especially at first sight was the fact that, **notwithstanding the presence of abundant combustible material around, such as hay and wood, the main effects of combustion; were limited to the corpse, and only a small piece of the adjacent flooring and the woodwork immediately above the man's head had suffered**. Several of the slates had fallen in over the corpse, making a small hole in the roof above it, and a small piece of the flooring had fallen through immediately round him into the stable below, leaving the hole through which he had been first seen. **The body was almost a cinder, yet retaining the form of the fate and figure so well, that those who had known him in life could readily recognise him**. **Both hands and the right foot had been burnt off** and had fallen through the floor among the ashes into the stables below, and the charred and calcined ends of the right radius and ulna, the left humerus, and the right tibia and fibula were exposed to view. The hair and scalp were burnt off the forehead, exposing the bare and calcined skull. The tissues of the face were represented by a greasy cinder retaining the cast of the features, and the incinerated moustache still gave the wonted military expression to the old soldier. The soft tissues were almost entirely consumed, more especially on the posterior surface of the body, where the clothes were destroyed, and the posterior surfaces of the femora, innominate bones, and ribs exposed to view. This was doubtless in a measure caused by the falling of the slates on the body, and a more perfect cinder would have been found had we arrived earlier on the scene. Part of the trousers on the anterior aspect of the legs that had escaped the impact of the slates was still represented in cinder.

Regarding the condition of the internal organs, I regretted much having been denied the opportunity of investigating their condition, as wishing to have a photograph taken of the remains prevented me at the time, and on my return from other work later on I found that the whole had been removed. The bearers told me that **the whole body had collapsed when they tried to remove it** en masse. From the comfortably recumbent attitude of the body it was evident that there had been no death struggle, and that, obfuscated by the whisky within and the smoke without, the man had expired without suffering, the body burning away quietly all the time.

So much for the condition of the corpse. **The strange fact remains that while round about in close proximity were dry woodwork and hay, loose and in bundles, these had escaped, and the body of the man was thoroughly incinerated.** The exceeding stillness of the night (for it was remarked by the policeman on the beat that there was not a breath of wind) would only in part account for the facts.

Source: British Medical Journal, 1888, Vol. 1, page 841-842

Spontaneous Human Combustion: Combustion of the Entire Body: 20th Century Cases

Cases of human spontaneous combustion in the 20th century in which the entire body was consumed by the fire.

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Florida, 1951:

The Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser case

Mrs. Mary Hardy Reeser, an agreeable, motherly widow of 67, was living in St. Petersburg, Florida, to be near her son, Dr. Richard Reeser. On the evening of July 1, 1951, she had remained in her son's home with one of her grandchildren while the rest of the family went to the beach. When they returned, they found that Mrs. Reeser had already left for her own apartment. The younger Mrs. Reeser drove to her mother-in-law's to see if everything was all right. According to her testimony, there was nothing in Mrs. Reeser's appearance or demeanor to cause any alarm. Dr. Reeser visited his mother later that evening. She was mildly depressed over the fact that she had not heard from two friends who were supposed to rent an apartment for her in anticipation of a return trip to Columbia, PA, formerly her hometown. His mother told him that she wished to retire early and would take two sleeping pills to ensure a good night's rest. Dr. Reeser left at about 8:30 PM and returned to his home. The last person to see Mrs. Reeser alive was her landlady, Mrs. Pansy M. Carpenter, who lived in another apartment in the four-unit building (the two units between them were unoccupied). Mrs. Carpenter saw Mrs. Reeser briefly at about 9 PM. She was wearing her nightgown, a housecoat, and black satin slippers and was lounging in a comfortable chair smoking a cigarette. The bed covers had been turned back. Mrs. Reeser's last night was a typical summer night in Florida: the sky was overcast with occasional flashes of heat lightning in the distance. When Mrs. Carpenter woke up Monday morning at 5AM, she noticed a slight odor of smoke but was not alarmed, since she attributed the smell to a water pump in the garage that had been overheating lately. She got up, turned off the pump, and settled back into bed. When she got

up an hour later to collect her newspaper outside, she no longer smelled any smoke. At 8AM a telegram arrived for Mrs. Reeser. Mrs. Carpenter signed the receipt and went to her tenant's apartment to bring her the telegram. The doorknob, when she placed her hand on it, was hot. Alarmed, she stepped back and shouted for help. Two painters working across the street ran over. One of them opened the door; as he entered, he felt a blast of hot air. Thinking of rescuing Mrs. Reeser, he frantically looked around but saw no signs of her. The bed was empty. There was some smoke, but the only fire was a small flame on a wooden beam, over a partition separating the living room and kitchenette.

The firemen arrived, put out the small flame with a hand pump. and tore away part of the partition. When Assistant Fire Chief S. O. Griffith began his inspection of the premises, he could not believe his eyes. In the middle of the floor there was a charred area roughly **four feet in diameter**, inside of which he found a number of blackened chair springs and the ghastly remains of a human body, consisting of a charred liver attached to a piece of the spine, a shrunken skull, one foot still wearing a black satin slipper, and a small pile of ashes. Coroner Edward T. Silk arrived to examine the body and survey the apartment. Although deeply puzzled, he decided the death was accidental and authorized the removal of the remains. The scooped-up ashes, the tiny shrunken head, and the slipper-encased foot were taken by ambulance to a local hospital.

An area near the front window in one corner of the room, measuring about four feet by five feet, was incinerated, the carpet melted down to the cement floor. Centered in that area were the remains of Mary's large cushioned chair, burned down to the springs, and, beneath that was a blackened mass that was unrecognizable at first, then shocking and spine-chilling. There was a small mound of seared debris, mostly indistinguishable **except for Mary's left foot** at the end of it, the black slipper nearby. Closer examination revealed some of her vertebrae with burned liver attached to them and a rounded mass the size of a baseball that was assumed to be her shrunken skull. The investigators were astounded. How did a 175-pound woman come to be reduced to less than ten pounds overnight inside her own mostly undamaged apartment? Only the upper part of the walls of the room showed a line of smoke and oily soot and the upper portions of the drapes were thick with soot. Electrical wall outlets and plugs above a four-foot level had melted, which had caused a fuse to blow and, in turn, caused an electric clock to stop at 4:20. But closer to the floor on those same walls, similar electric materials were intact. Extreme heat had cracked a mirror ten feet from the burnt chair and melted two pink candles about twelve feet front it. Part of a cigarette lighter was pulled from the rubble. Only two legs of an end table next to the chair remained, and the lamp that had been on top of it was badly damaged. Certainly, the fact that the walls and the floor of the apartment building were concrete would have had much to do with the fire not spreading. thick with soot. **Electrical wall outlets and plugs above a four-foot level had melted, which had caused a fuse to blow and, in turn, caused an electric clock to stop at 4:20. But closer to the floor on those same walls, similar**

electric materials were intact. Extreme heat had cracked a mirror ten feet from the burnt chair, and melted two pink candles about twelve feet from it. Part of a cigarette lighter was pulled from the rubble. Only two legs of an end table next to the chair remained, and the lamp that had been on top of it was badly damaged. Certainly, the fact that the walls and the floor of the apartment building were concrete would have had much to do with the fire not spreading. **Much of the remainder of the apartment looked undisturbed.** The sheets on a sofa bed were turned down neatly, as if ready for someone to retire. The clock still worked when it was plugged into another outlet. **A stack of newspapers near the damaged area showed no signs of being scorched.** Perhaps strangest of all was that **intact left foot**, burned off to about four inches above the ankle, the black satin slipper next to it.

When the coroner, Edward T. Silk, looked over the remains and scrutinized the apartment, he felt the death was accidental and ordered the charred fragments, ashes, and severed foot be taken by ambulance to the hospital. St. Petersburg Police Chief J. R. Reichert, who had witnessed many fires, flatly stated: "This is the most unusual case I've seen during my almost twenty-five years of police work in the city of St. Petersburg."

Dr. Krogman went on to dispute the idea that the rounded mass some had identified as Mrs. Reeser's shrunken skull was actually her skull. "In fact," he said in describing other cases lie had seen, "the opposite has been true. The skulls have exploded into hundreds of pieces or been abnormally swollen." He added, "The head is not left complete in ordinary burning cases. Certainly it does NOT shrivel or symmetrically reduce to a smaller size. In presence of heat sufficient to destroy soft tissues, the skull would literally explode in many pieces. I have never known any exception to this rule." Dr. Krogman went on to dispute the idea that the rounded mass some had identified as Mrs. Reeser's shrunken skull was actually her skull. "In fact," he said in describing other cases he had seen, "the opposite has been true. The skulls have exploded into hundreds of pieces or been abnormally swollen." He added, "The head is not left complete in ordinary burning cases. Certainly it does NOT shrivel or symmetrically reduce to a smaller size. In presence of heat sufficient to destroy soft tissues, the skull would literally explode in many pieces. I have never known any exception to this rule."

Pennsylvania, 1964:

Helen Conway

Mrs. Helen Conway, a 51 year old widow live in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, at 527 Argyll road. On the evening of November 7, 1964, Mrs. Conway was babysitting two grandchildren. Her daughter and son-in-law went out for the evening and they were going to pick the children up sometime on Sunday. That Sunday

morning, Conway's granddaughter, Stephanie, was watching cartoons on the first floor. Mrs. Conway was an invalid and used a bell to call for help. She asked Stephanie to bring her up a book of matches. The child brought them to her and then went back down to watch TV at around 8.30am.

Mrs. Conway's next door neighbor was going to church and saw a glow at the window. She ran over to the house and Stephanie answered the door. Because the heat was so intense, the neighbor could not make it to the top of the stairs and she called the fire department. When the firemen arrived the fire was out. The heat was still there. The doorknob was red hot, the door was hot and when they opened the door, the smoke that hit them was hot.

In the corner they found the remains of Mrs. Conway. There was smoke coming from the chair but there were no flames. Her upper torso was consumed to ash and rubble. Her left arm was burned right down to the bone so that a bracelet could be seen dangling from her wrist bones.

All that was left of her were her legs from the knee-down. There were blisters on her **toes and legs but they weren't burned**. When examined and two of the blisters were broken on her leg, fluid did not come out but they were wet. This means she was alive at the time of the fire.

The fire was **so intense** that there was suspicion initially that foul play was involved because it seemed that accelerants must have been present to fuel this intense fire, but accelerants were ever found at the scene.

In contrast to the body, **only minor damage was apparent in the room.** The telephone, sitting on a nearby table, had started **to melt**, though **nothing else on her end table had been damaged**. Her pack of cigarettes, on the same table, about three feet away, was undamaged.

In the adjoining bedroom there was nothing that had been affected and her sheets were white and spotless. However, on a dresser there was a bizarre juxtaposition. **The plastic on the television set had begun to melt down. Next to the television set was a little doll dressed in a mesh that is highly flammable, but it was untouched.**

Volunteer fireman Robert Meslin stated: "The amazing part of the incident in my opinion is the time element." Meslin went on to say that the grand-daughter made the fire alarm call within "three minutes" of leaving Helen Conway's house. That meant Mrs Conway was alive at 8:42 AM and the firemen arrived to find her remains at 8:48 AM – taking **only 6 minutes**. The time between the start of the fire and the arrival of fireman was at the most 20 minutes. A normal fire would take seven hours to burn a body.

(taken from different sources)

Pennsylvania, 1966:

Dr. John Irving Bentley

From 1925-1953 John Irving Bentley had worked as a family physician in Coudersport, Pennsylvania. He had suffered a fractured hip in 1947 which affected his mobility and had caused him to be infirm in his senior years. Dr. Bentley remained in Coudersport where he was friendly with many residents which he had served as physician to before his retirement.

On December 4, 1966, ninety-two year old John Irving Bentley received visitors who left at around 9 pm that evening. The following morning, Don Gosnell, meter reader with the North Penn Gas Company arrived at Dr. Bentley's two-story home on Main Street and let himself in, as usual due to the ninety-two year old's immobility.

When he entered the house, he went into the basement to read the meter. He saw a pile of ash on the floor as well as a hole in the ceiling, circled by glowing embers.

Concerned, he set off to search for Dr. Bentley. Don Gosnell noticed **a light blue smoke** and a strange smell which was "somewhat sweet, like starting up a new oil-burning system.".

Don Gosnell found the upstairs bedroom filled with smoke. and in the bathroom he discovered the doctor's remains.

As he progressed to the bathroom, he encountered a scene of horror and intrigue. A brown, but not charred, **lower leg joint** and slipper-clad foot rested next to a hole, about 2' by 4', burned through the linoleum-covered foot. Dr. Bentley's walker was tipped against the bathtub, in which the victim's partially burned bathrobe could be seen. No other parts of his body were visible.

Dr. Bentley's ashes had fallen through this hole and into the basement. Shaken, Gosnell ran to the North Penn Gas office, just a block away, to alert his co-workers. The local fire department was summoned, as were Potter County Deputy Coroner John Dec and a local mortician, Richard Lindhome.

Nothing in the room suffered any damage except the floor beneath him and the ceiling above him. **Paint on the adjacent bathtub was blackened, but not blistered. Even more odd was the fact that the rubber tips of Dr. Bentley's walker did not melt, even though it was positioned directly over his burning body.**

After nine months of investigation, West Galway coroner Dr Ciaran McLoughlin, a 25-year veteran in the field, reluctantly put forth the following statement: "This

fire was thoroughly investigated and I'm left with the conclusion that this fits into the category of spontaneous human combustion, for which there is no adequate explanation."

The fire which consumed Dr. Bentley is estimated to have burned at 2,500 degrees Fahrenheit, a common element of supposed cases of spontaneous human combustion.

(taken from different sources)

New York, 1986

George Mott

George Mott had been a fireman in Crown Point NY for thirty years. Mott had retired and had been hospitalized for lung problems and had returned home. Since his illness his nightly routine had changed. He kept track of medications and learned to use an oxygen enrichment machine.

Kendall Mott (Son): After he got out of the hospital they gave it to him so that when he was lying down it would make it easier for him to breath. The air would go into his nose so he could breathe clean air during the night.

The events of the evening of March 25th, 1986, has been cause for much speculation. Georges son Kendall had checked in on his father every night since his father's return from the hospital. Because he had to work late on march 25th, Kendall wasn't able to make his regular visit.

The next evening he went to his father's house directly after work. He reached for the door handle and it was warm. He automatically knew something was wrong and when he opened the door it was warm inside the house. There was a burnt smell, like a metallic smell. The whole house was black and it was like walking into a dungeon. Kendall called his name a couple of times and when he came across him could see right away that he was dead.

When the fire department arrived, they found a scene unlike any other they had ever confronted. Bob Purdy-Fire Dept: I've seen a lot of fires and seen quite a few fatalities where people were burned, but I've never seen anything like this. The man was laying in bed and he had just **disintegrated**. You can see the v in the bed where he rendered down and right down through the floor. **And the house didn't catch on fire**.

All that was left of hid body was the lower right leg down from the kneecap, and a piece of his skull cap. The house itself was unburned, and there were some

strange things around.

The firefighters discovered a **greasy coating** covering every horizontal surface. **The water had evaporated from the toilet** and the tub was ringed with soot as though someone had taken a bath in black paint. When investigators opened the refrigerator, they found a surreal scene. **Not only the butter, but the plastic butter dish itself had melted. There was an unopened packet of hotdogs that appear to have been boiled in the wrapping. The TV had melted, but much of the bedding was undamaged. Nearby, a box of wooden matches was still intact. And air was still pumping through George's face mask.**

They looked for accelerants. They looked at gas and electric and they looked at fuel. There was nothing. In the Mott living room, several of the interior walls were covered with cedar shingles. They also pointed to a v pattern on the wall surrounding an electrical outlet. They theorized that an electrical arc leapt from an outlet and started George Mott on fire. Mott then stumbled to his bed and died engulfed in flames. However, Chief Bob Purdy and his investigators didn't believe that is what had happened. Where they showed the v shape pattern was underneath a window where the curtains had caught fire and then dropped to the floor and then burned back up again. That is what that V pattern was from. It wasn't Purdy's men took apart the wall. Fire damage had come from the room's interior, not from within the outlet. They looked at all aspects. They looked at homicide, suicide and all the aspects of how this could happen and nothing added up.

Source: Ablaze! by Larry Arnold

South Carolina, 1953"

Waymon P. Wood

Waymon P. Wood, age 50, was found "crisped black" in the front seat of his closed car on March 1, 1953, near Greenville, South Carolina, USA. Wood's car - described as a "1951 Nash" - was parked on the side of Bypass 291 near Greenville, and other motorists reported seeing smoke rising from it... and then the car started, rolled several hundred feet along the highway, and then plunged down a ravine, turning over twice.

Firemen and police arrived soon after; the vehicle was "soaked by fire extinguishers," then opened. **Plastic fittings had melted**, and **the windshield glass had bubbled**, **but all fire damage was confined to the front seat**. The gasoline tank was intact; there was no clue to the cause of the fire. Suicide was suggested, but no gas fumes had been detected at the scene. An hour before his

death, Wood had been talking with friends and appeared cheerful.

Source: Mysterious Fires and Lights, by Vincent H. Gaddis, page 193

Spontaneous Human Combustion: Combustion of the Entire Body: 21st Century Cases

Cases of spontaneous human combustion in the 21st century in which the entire body was consumed by the fire.

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Oklahoma, 2013:

Sheriff Says Spontaneous Human Combustion Killed Local Man

Sheriff Ron Lockhart says his office is investigating whether a Sequoyah County, Okla., man died after spontaneously bursting into flames. "This is a case that I've never seen before," Lockhart said. The sheriff said 65-year-old Danny Vanzandt's death might be a rare case of spontaneous human combustion. Lockhart said he knows that suggestion might seem far-fetched, but he believes the evidence backs up his claim. Emergency crews responded to Bawkin Road in Sequoyah County about 10:50 a.m. Monday (Feb. 18) after a neighbor told police she saw smoke coming from next door, Lockhart said. Vanzandt's brother, Aaron, tells 5NEWS he and his stepson found the body around 11 a.m. and called 911. "The body was burned and it was incinerated," said Lockhart. Fire crews on the scene discovered a badly burned man dead in the kitchen, Lockhart said. Asked if he was serious that this might be a case of spontaneous human combustion, the sheriff said he is serious, adding no items or furniture around the body were burned. **There was no other fire damage to the house** and no signs of a struggle, Lockhart said. "I think there's only about 200 cases worldwide," said Lockhart. Family members said they noticed the back window of the man's pickup truck was busted out. The body of the man was sent to the medical examiner's office in Tulsa, Lockhart said. Authorities are still investigating the incident.

Lockhart said Vanzandt was an alcoholic and an avid smoker. “If you read about spontaneous human combustion, that’s what we have here,” Lockhart said. 5NEWS conducted a recorded five-minute interview with Lockhart in which the sheriff explains why he believes spontaneous human combustion is to blame for Vanzandt’s bizarre death. When asked whether the man could have accidentally killed himself by another cause, such as dropping a cigarette onto himself, Lockhart said the body was burned in such a way as to make it inconsistent with such accidents. Vanzandt’s brother said the family has not finalized funeral arrangements yet.

Source: 5News, 02.18.2013

Same case from another source:

Okla. puzzle: Possible death by spontaneous combustion Michael Winter, USA

Medical examiner will determine how a 65-year-old man burned to death **without any other structural damage to the home except the floor where he lay**. Story Highlights Man's **body was incinerated except for his head, hands and feet** He may have burned for 10 hours Sheriff said he was an alcoholic and a smoker Oklahoma authorities say it may be two months before they determine whether a 65-year-old man's mysterious death was the result of spontaneous combustion or some other cause. Family members said they found the burned remains of 65-year-old Danny VanZandt on Monday morning in his home near Muldrow, in eastern Oklahoma, near the Arkansas border. His body was incinerated except for his head, hands and feet. The only structural damage was to the kitchen floor where VanZandt lay, said Sequoyah County Sheriff Ron Lockhart. "This house is intact. **There is a stove and ice box within 3 feet from where the body's burning and the handles are not melted**," he told The Tulsa World. "You could pour gasoline on somebody and he wouldn't be as badly incinerated." Homicide has been ruled out because there was no evidence of foul play. VanZandt was an alcoholic and a smoker, the sheriff told KFSM-TV. A lighter was found nearby, but there was no evidence of any accelerant on the body. VanZandt may have burned for 10 hours, Lockart said. "We wasn't saying the guy just busted into flames," he told KFSM. He said perhaps VanZandt lighted a cigarette "and catches himself on fire, sucks the flames down his throat, and falls down." Burn marks were found in his windpipe, indicating he inhaled smoke and carbon monoxide. Lockart, a former arson investigator, said the way the body burned was inconsistent with a lighted cigarette being dropped. "This is a case that I've never seen before," Lockhart said. "I think there's only about 200 cases worldwide and I'm not saying that this has happened, I'm just saying that we haven't ruled it out." The state medical examiner is conducting additional toxicology tests. Spontaneous human combustion is a rare and controversial phenomenon. In September 2011, a coroner in Ireland ruled that a 76-year-old man's death in December 2010 was the result of spontaneous human

combustion.

Source: USA Today, 02.21.2013

Ireland, 2011:

Michael Faherty

Man died by spontaneous combustion

An Irish pensioner found burnt to death at his home died from spontaneous human combustion, an inquest has concluded. The West Galway coroner, Ciaran McLoughlin, said there was no other adequate explanation for the death of Michael Faherty, 76, also known as Micheal O Fatharta. He said it was the first time in his 25 years as a coroner that he had returned such a verdict. A police crime scene investigator and a senior fire officer told the inquest in Galway they could not explain how Mr Faherty burnt to death. Both said they had not come across such a set of circumstances before. The assistant chief fire officer, Gerry O'Malley, said fire officers were satisfied that an open fire in Mr Faherty's fireplace had not been the cause of the blaze. No trace of an accelerant was found at the scene, and there was no sign that anyone else had entered or left the house in Ballybane, Galway city. The inquest heard that a smoke alarm in the home of Faherty's neighbour Tom Mannion had gone off about 3am on December 22 last year. Mr Mannion said he went outside and saw heavy smoke coming from Mr Faherty's house. He banged on the front door but got no response, and then banged on the door of another neighbour. Police and the fire brigade arrived quickly at the scene. Officer Gerard O'Callaghan said he went to the house after the fire had been extinguished and found Mr Faherty lying on his back in a sitting room, with his head closest to the fireplace. **The rest of the house had sustained only smoke damage**. Mr O'Callaghan told the coroner that the only damage was to Mr Faherty's remains, the floor under him and the ceiling above. The inquest heard that fire officers had been unable to determine the cause or the origin of the fire. The state pathologist, Professor Grace Callagy, noted in her post-mortem findings that Mr Faherty had type 2 diabetes and hypertension, but concluded he had not died from heart failure. His body had been extensively burnt and, because of the extensive damage to the organs, it was not possible to determine the cause of death. The coroner said: "This fire was thoroughly investigated and I'm left with the conclusion that this fits into the category of spontaneous human combustion, for which there is no adequate explanation."

Source: The Sydney Morning Herald (Australia), 09.26.2011

India, 2013:

We didn’t start the fire

By Dhamini Ratnam

Rahul’s mother Rajeswari attempted suicide because her neighbours had begun to suggest that her baby was possessed Gladwin Emmanuel A 2.5-month-old infant has caught fire 'spontaneously' four times. Mirror goes to Chennai to track the story. Fitted with tubes in a bed at the paediatric intensive care unit of Kilpauk Medical College Hospital in Chennai, two and a half-month-old K Rahul kicks his legs in the air, and turns his head away from the flashing cameras. He doesn't seem interested in all the attention he is receiving from reporters and curious onlookers, who've come to meet the boy who caught fire — reportedly — on his own. Nearly everyone in the general ward, where Rahul has been admitted since August 8, is talking in hushed tones about the burn marks on his head, chest and thighs. The doctors have termed it a "rarest of rare condition". Since admission, he has been under 24-hour observation by a team of four doctors from the burns, skin, psychiatric and paediatric departments. He will be here for at least another week. Which is just as well — spontaneous human combustion (SCH) is a highly contested phenomenon. On one side are believers who set store by the word 'spontaneous,' assuming that the human body can go up in flames in a rapid, inexplicable manner. There are 200 such cases reported across the world in the past three centuries. On the other side are rationalists, who point out that there is always an external cause that leads to the fire, because it is scientifically impossible for the human body to self-combust. In the middle of this debate is Rahul's Dalit family of daily wage workers who have little money left to pay for the infant's treatment, and are facing double discrimination by family and neighbours on account of the unfortunate events. The boy's story Rahul was born in Nedimozhiyanur in Viluppuram - the hometown of his mother 23-year-old Rajeshwari - on May 22. On the ninth day of his birth, Rahul 'went up in flames' the first time. Rajeswari says she heard his cries and ran into the house, where she saw the cotton cloth covering his abdomen, on fire. She put out the flames and called an ambulance, which took him to the Mundiyampakkam government medical college hospital. After a week, his burns healed and he was discharged. A few days later, his stomach, thighs and legs suffered 'spontaneous' burns. This time, Rahul's father, 26-year-old P Karna was home. He rushed him to the primary health care centre, where he was treated with burn medicine, silver sulphadiazine. Their thatched roof hut was also partially damaged in the fire. The neighbours called the fire department, and the fire tender from Tindivanam was rushed to the spot. Chief fireman P Jayabalan, who received the call at 1.30 pm on June 29, says, "The house was partially damaged. We were told then that a child had burst into flames." After spending a fortnight at the government hospital, the trio went to Karna's home in Kumalampattu, Viluppuram district. Here Karna and Rajeshwari live with his parents, younger brother, sister and their two-year-old daughter, Narmada. After Rahul burned a third time on July 31,

Karna's parents refused to let the child live with them. So, the trio shifted into a relative's house near Pondicherry. In the first week of August, Rahul caught fire again. He was taken to the Jawaharlal Institute of Post Graduate Medical Education in Pondicherry. With modern science 'failing', his parents took him to a Kali temple in Brahmadesam, where they stayed for a few days. District officials arranged for Rahul's treatment in Kilpauk Hospital, where he was admitted 10 days ago. The mystery of why Since admission, Rahul has already undergone a battery of tests: an X-ray, an ultrasound of his skull, blood analysis for toxic substances, a radiological examination, sweat test, metabolic screening of urine and blood, renal and liver function tests, electrocardiography, skeletal survey, genetic test, molecular study, and abdomen, neurography and tandem mass spectrometry. Luckily, his organs and bones are not damaged, and results have led doctors to conclude that Rahul has not suffered any child abuse. Dr R Narayana Babu, head of the paediatrics department, who is treating Rahul says with characteristic medical caution, "We don't have too much information or textbook details about spontaneous human combustion. There is no treatment for this condition." The condition 'This condition', however, is itself under the scanner. One of the theories put forward by Dr Babu is that the child produced combustible gases that led to his spontaneous burning up. On Thursday, they conducted a test to see if the child was producing combustible gases. "No feasible amount of methane or ethanol gas emission from Rahul's body has been found," Dr Babu says. President of the Federation of Rationalist Associations of India Narendra Nayak explains why. Gases like methane are produced in the gastro intestinal tract due to the breakdown of cellulose, the Mangalore-based professor of biochemistry points out. However, a child being breast-fed is unlikely to have any in his diet, since cellulose comes from plants. Even if a combustible gas from the body gets ignited, the burns wouldn't be surface wounds, argues Nayak. He has seen at least a dozen cases of SCH and each was found to be caused by an external spark. "Chemicals that burn 'spontaneously' are readily available. For example, potassium permanganate and glycerine mixed in the right proportion can burst into flames, as can metallic sodium when it comes in contact with air." Treating Rahul Rahul's doctors say he must be kept away from sunlight and other heat-producing environments, like the kitchen, stay hydrated and wear natural clothing. Dr V Jayaraman, former chief of plastic surgery of Kilpauk Medical College Hospital has asked Karna to move to Chennai. "The child should be in an air-conditioned room and luckily there are people who are willing to help the family." Karna adds that the Viluppuram district collector V Sampath has assured the family that he will allot a house under J Jayalalithaa's government's solar-power housing scheme meant for the underprivileged. Yet, the parents feel helpless. "We've been running from hospitals to temples in a bid to save our child," says Karna, who hasn't been to work in the last three months, has pledged his wife's jewellery and borrowed from money lenders to sustain his family. "All the officials are grilling us as if it is we who have committed some crime," adds Rajeswari.

Source: MumbaiMirror, 08.18.2013

Germany, 2015

German woman fights for life after 'spontaneously combusting' while sitting on a park bench

It must have been terrible scenes that took place on Monday evening at about 6.45 pm on a playground in Schwarzental. People who walked by had seen a woman on a bench suddenly burn up in flames.

Details on the case were announced by the Flensburg Attorney General Ulrike Stahlmann-Liebelt on Tuesday afternoon. According to him, the victim is a woman from Mauritius who has been living in Flensburg for some time. She was in her mid-40s, and in now in a critical condition. She will continue to be treated at the special burn injuries clinic in Lübeck, says Stahlmann-Liebelt.

The prosecution continues to investigate in all directions - even if they are now more likely to assume a "suicide". Several residents had watched the incident on Monday night. A man reacted with the presence of mind, took off his jacket and struck down the flames. Others immediately made an emergency call. The rescue center sent an ambulance to the site. The police arrived with a large contingent. With life-threatening injuries, the woman was first brought to the emergency room of the Diako in Flensburg. On Monday evening she was then transferred to Lübeck to a special clinic. Eyewitnesses had reported that no screams had been heard. One woman mentioned that shortly before the fire, two men were seen in the playground, who quickly disappeared. Because of this statement, the prosecutor's office is still investigating furtehr.

Source: Flensburger Tageblatt, November 03, 2015

England 2017

Man dies after bursting into flames in unexplained circumstances in London street

A pensioner has died of his injuries after bursting into flames in unexplained circumstances in a London street. Police are appealing for information on the blaze that killed 70-year-old John Nolan, a retired construction worker originally from Ireland. Emergency services were called to reports of a “man ablaze” near his home in Haringey on 17 September.

Horrified members of the public tried to put the fire out and alerted police but the flames were not extinguished until firefighters arrived on the scene. Mr Nolan was taken to a specialist hospital by air ambulance but died of severe burns, with an inquest due to open in March. The London Fire Brigade investigated the cause of the fire but found no evidence of an “accelerant” that would have spread the flames.

Police have now taken charge of the investigation but have made no arrests, with Mr Nolan’s death being treated as unexplained. The investigating officer, PC

Damien Ait-Amer, said: "We have spoken with a number of witnesses who saw Mr Nolan ablaze, but we have yet to establish how the fire started.

"Mr Nolan was a well-liked member of the community and none of our enquiries so far have indicated that he had been involved in a dispute of any sort. "Nor does any account given by witnesses suggest that he had been in contact with another person at the time of the fire."

Source: The Independent, December 15, 2017

Spontaneous Human Combustion: Partial Burns

Cases of spontaneous human combustion in which the person had only partial burns and survived.

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An intense flame on a man's leg:

On Spontaneous Combustion

From an Essay Read at the Last Annual Meeting of the Med. Society of Tennessee JAMES OVERTON, M.D. Boston Med Surg J 1835 (in The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, Volumes 13-14, 1836)

An instance of what has been esteemed partial spontaneous combustion, has recently occurred in the city, of Nashville—it has given origin to the character of this essay—and as its phenomena as detailed by tile subject of it, and its effects as exhibited to the observation of others after its subsidence, are corroborative of the truth of the history just given, we deem it worthy of record, and to he submitted to your present contemplation, in connection with cases of a like character which have occurred at a distance from us.
The subject of the following observation is a gentleman about thirty-five years of age, middle size, light hair, hazel eyes, sanguineo-lymphatic temperament, of habits entirely temperate in the use of stimulating drinks of any kind, fermented or alcoholic, with a constitution considerably enfeebled from long and zealous devotion to the sedentary and exhausting labor of scientific investigation. In early life he was very subject to derangements in the stomach and bowels ; and at the present time suffers frequently from different modifications of these maladies, as costiveness, occasional diarrhea, acidity of the stomach, heart-burn, &c. &c., with their usual train of sympathetic affections, involving parts of the organism at a distance from the primary seats of disease into a participation of their suffering.

At the time of the occurrence of the accident, he was afflicted with acidity of the stomach, and by an unusual and irritating quantity of the matter of urea in tile secretion kidneys; for the relief of which, he was in the habitual use of aperients, ant-acids, &c.

Mr. H., Professor of Mathematics in the University of Nashville, was engaged as usual in his recitation room, in attendance upon the morning exercises of his class, till 11 o'clock in the forenoon. He then buttoned his surtoot coat close around him, and walked briskly thus clothed to his residence, a distance of about three-fourths of a mile, taking exercise enough to produce a glow low of warmth on the surface of his body, without inducing fatigue, but feeling at the same time his usual acidity of the stomach for which he resolved to take some soda as a remedy within a short time. Having arrived at his lodging, he pulled off his over-coat and kindled a fire, by placing a few pieces of dry wood on three burning coals which he found in the fire-place, of the magnitude of two inch cubes each; and immediately left the fire, and retired to a remote part of the room and made his observation, on the weight and temperature of the atmosphere as indicated by the barometer and thermometer, which were suspended in that situation. He then took the dew-point by the thermometer. These operations, together with the registration of their results, occupied about thirty minutes. This having been accomplished, he went immediately into the open air, made observations of the hygrometer, and was beginning his observations upon the velocity and direction of the winds. He had been engaged in this latter process about ten immures, his body all the while sheltered from the direct impression of the wind, when **he felt a pain** as, if produced by the pulling of a hair, on the left leg, and which amounted in degree to a strong sensation. Upon applying his hand to the spot pained, the sensation suddenly increased, till it amounted in intensity to a feeling resembling the continued sting of a wasp or hornet. He then began to slap the part by repeated strokes with the open hand, during which time the pain continued to increase in intensity, so that he was forced to cry out from the severity of his suffering. Directing his eyes at this moment to the suffering part, **he distinctly saw a light flame** of the extent at its base of a ten cent piece of coin, with a surface approaching to convexity, somewhat flattened at the top, and having a complexion which nearest resembles that of pure quicksilver. Of the accuracy in this latter feature in the appearance of the flame, Mr. H. is very confident, notwithstanding the unfavorable circumstances amidst which the observation must have been made. As soon as he perceived the flame, he applied over it both his hands open, united at their edges, and closely impacted upon and around the burning surface. These means were employed by Mr. H. for the purpose of extinguishing the flame by the exclusion of the contact of the atmosphere, which he knew was necessary to the continuance of every combustion. The result was in conformity with the design, for the flame immediately went out. As soon as the flame was extinguished, the pain began to abate in intensity, but still continued, and gave the sensation usually the effect of a slight application of heat or fire to the body, which induced him to seize his pantaloons with one of his hands and to pinch them up to a conical form over the injured part of the leg, thereby to remove them from any contact with the skin

below. This operation was continued for a minute or two, with a design of extinguishing any combustion that be present in the substance of his apparel, but which was not visible at the time. At the beginning of the accident, the sensation of injury was confined to a spot of small diameter, and in its progress the pain was still restricted to this spot, increasing in intensity and depth to a considerable extent, but without much if any enlargement of the surface which it occupied at the beginning. A warmth was felt to a considerable distance around the spot primarily affected, but the sensation did not by any means amount to the degree of the feeling of pain. This latter sensation was almost, if not entirely, confined to the narrow limits which bounded the seat of the first attack, and this sensation was no otherwise modified during the progress of the accident, than by its increasing intensity and deeper penetration into the muscles of the limb, which at its greatest degree seemed to sink an inch or more into the substance of the leg. Believing the combustion to have been extinguished by by means just noticed, and the pain having greatly subsided, leaving only the feeling usually the effect of a slight burn, he untied and pulled up his pantaloons and drawers, for the purpose of ascertaining the condition of the part that had been the seat of his suffering. He found a surface on the outer and upper part of his left leg, reaching front the femoral end of the fibula in an oblique direction, towards the upper portion of the grastrochnemii muscles, about **three fourths of all inch in width, and three inches in length**, denuded of the scarfskin, and **this membrane gathered into a roll at the lower edge of the abraded surface**. The injury resembled very exactly in appearance an abrasion of the skin of like extent and depth, often the effect of slight mechanical violence, except that the **surface of it was extremely dry**, and bad a complexion more livid than that of wounds of a similar extent produced by the action of mechanical causes.

The condition of the pantaloons and drawers was next carefully inspected. The left leg of **the drawers**, at a point exactly corresponding with the part of the leg which had suffered injury, and at a point accurately correspondent, to the abraded surface, **were burnt entirely through their substance**. **They were not in the slightest degree scorched beyond this limit, the combustion appearing to have stopped abruptly**, without the least injury to any portion of the drawers which had not been totally consumed by its action. The pantaloons were not burnt at all. But their inner surface opposite to and in contact with the burnt portion of the drawers, was slightly tinged by a thin frostwork of a dark yellow bile. The material of this color, however, did not penetrate the texture of the pantaloons, which were made of broadcloth, but seemed to rest exclusively upon the extremities of the fibres of wool which were the materials of its fabric. The coloring matter was entirely scraped off with the edge of a penknife, without cutting the woolly fibres, after which there remained upon the garment no perceptible trace of the combustion, with which they had been in contact. The pantaloons may be said, with entire propriety, to have suffered no injury of any kind from the accident. The drawers, which were composed of a mixture of silk and wool, were made tight and close at the ankle, and tied with tape over a pair of thick woolen socks, in such manner as to prevent even the admission of air to the leg through their inferior opening. Considering the injury not to be of a

serious character, Mr. H. bestowed upon its treatment no particular care or attention, but pursued his usual avocations within doors and in the open air, which was very cold, until the evening of the succeeding day. At this time the wound became inflamed and painful, and was dressed with a salve, into the composition of which the rosin of turpentine entered in considerable proportion. This treatment was continued for four or five days, during which time the wound presented tile usual aspect of a burn from ordinary causes, except in its greater depth and more tardy progress towards cicatrization, which did not take place till after thirty-two days from the date of the infliction of the injury. The part of the ulcer which healed last, was the point of the inception and intensity of the pain at the time of attack, and which point was evidently the seat of deeper injury than any other portion of the wounded surface.

About the fifth day of the accident, a physician was requested to take charge of the treatment, and the remedies employed were such chiefly as are usual in the treatment of burns from other causes, except that twice a week, the surface of the ulcer was sprinkled over with calomel, and a dressing of simple cerate applied above it. In the space between the wound and the groin there was a considerable soreness of the integuments to the touch, which continued during the greatest violence of the effects of the accident, and then gradually subsided. The cicatrix is at this time, March 24th, entire ; **but its surface is unusually scabrous, and has a much more livid aspect than that of similar scars left after the infliction of burns from common causes. The dermis seems to have been less perfectly regenerated than is usual from burns** produced by ordinary means, and the circulation through the part is manifestly impeded, **apparently in consequence of atony of its vessels, to an extent far beyond anything of a similar nature to be observed after common burns.** Since the wound has healed the health of the patient has been as perfect as usual, and while the wound continued open, his ordinary occupations were interrupted by a week's confinement only to his chamber. The accident occurred on the fifth of January of the present year, the day intensely cold and the thermometer standing at only eight degrees above zero, sky clear and calm and the barometrical of the atmosphere being 29.248. Such is the history of the case of partial spontaneous combustion, which has recently occurred in this city. The facts have been stated as nearly as practicable in the words of the sufferer himself, and are consequently entitled to all the credit attributable to any statement of a similar character, which is or can be supplied by the annals of the profusion. The character of the accident bears a striking similitude to the case of partial spontaneous combustion already noticed, and may hence, to future investigators, contribute not unimportant aid in the discussion or the subject which is the object of this essay.

[Some of Dr. O.'s remarks on the causes of spontaneous combustion, will be given in a future number.]

Source: The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, Volumes 13-14, page 25-28

Baby catches on fire three times:

Mystery Baby: 3-Month-Old Boy Catches Fire; What is Spontaneous Human Combustion?

The mystery surrounding a two-and-half-month-old boy, who caught fire as many as four times since he was born, is expected to be unraveled when the test results are out on Monday. Rahul, a native of Tindivanam, Tamil Nadu was admitted to Kilpauk Medical College and Hospital on Thursday for burns reportedly caused by a rare medical phenomenon known as Spontaneous Human Combustion (SHC) wherein a person catches fire due to emission of inflammable substances through the body. A series of tests, including sweat, urine and blood have been done to ascertain the cause of the fire and find out if his body contains any inflammable substances. The doctors are also exploring all possibilities including abuse. "The body burns spontaneously due to combustible gases emitting from the patient's body, without any external source of ignition," Dr R Narayana Babu, head of the paediatrics department, Kilpauk Medical College, told Deccan Chronical. "Clothes and other things nearby that are inflammable may also catch fire."

"An episode may or may not recur. It's like any other burn injury, with the likelihood of scars and secondary infections. Plastic surgery is also expected to be done. The relatives or parents have to always keep an eye on the baby. Matchsticks, crackers or anything that can catch fire should not be kept near him," he added.

Source: International Business Times, 08.12.2013

Spontaneous Human Combustion: Witnessed by Others

Cases of spontaneous human combustion witnessed by other people.

Chicago, 1982

London, 2017, John Nolan

The Jeannie Saffin case, 1982

Robert Francis Bailey, London, 1967

Kingston-upon-Hull, England, 2017

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The following two cases are unusual as these involve a person that combusted into flames while walking in a street. The first one involved a woman in Chicago in 1982

Combustion Death in Chicago Similar to Local Women's

by Jane Meinhardt and Mitch Lubitz

The spectre of spontaneous human combustion - a theory in the bizarre deaths of two St. Petersburg women years ago — is being investigated after a Chicago woman burst into flames and burned to death on a sidewalk there Thursday.
A witness to the macabre death told Chicago police and fire officials that he was sitting in his parked car about a block away from the woman. He looked up and saw her standing ablaze on the sidewalk. There was no vehicle or other persons near the woman.
The woman was completely burned, Chicago police said. Only a few scraps of her blouse and a singed purse remained. The death occurred about 6 a.m. when the temperature was in the low 70's.
Sgt. George Owen, of the Brighton Park violent crimes unit, said it is unknown if the woman was carrying anything flammable. However, preliminary investigation found no signs or smells of an accelerant that might explain the rapid progress of the flames.
The scorched condition of the woman's body made it difficult for police to determine her age. Owen said she appeared to be middle-aged "due to her gold dental work." He described her as "quite slight" in stature.
"She was not a heavy woman," Owen said. "The detectives said her body looked like that of a young child's. She appears to be a very young girl except for the gold dental work which you don't normally see on children."
No one actually saw the woman until she was engulfed in flames, but Owen said police believe she was black because of one spot on the body that was unburned.
Baffled detectives are awaiting the results of an autopsy on the woman today and have received an inquiry from a university researcher about the possibility of spontaneous human combustion...

Source: The Evening Independent (St. Petersburg, Florida), Aug 6, 1982, page 11

The next day, in an article in the Ellensburg Daily Record, Aug 7, 1982, page 5, it was said that the witness had "noticed the woman walking across the street. When he looked at her a second time, she was aflame."

Cook county medical Examiner said didn't believe in spontaneous human combustion (mentioned in The Bryan Times - Aug 5, 1982, page 13). The Ellensburg Daily wrote that he ruled that the victim was dead 12 hours earlier,

doused with accelerant and set on fire. Police dismissed the witness' testimony.

Who would murder a person, drag her onto a street and set the body on fire her, while there are people around? Not to mention that a witness saw her walking across the street. It wouldn't be the first time that coroner's and officials make the facts fit with what they believe might have happened.

Man dies after bursting into flames in unexplained circumstances in London street

A pensioner has died of his injuries after bursting into flames in unexplained circumstances in a London street.

Police are appealing for information on the blaze that killed 70-year-old John Nolan, a retired construction worker originally from Ireland.

Emergency services were called to reports of a “man ablaze” near his home in Haringey on 17 September.

Horrified members of the public tried to put the fire out and alerted police but the flames were not extinguished until firefighters arrived on the scene.

Mr. Nolan was taken to a specialist hospital by air ambulance but died of severe burns, with an inquest due to open in March.

The London Fire Brigade investigated the cause of the fire but found no evidence of an “accelerant” that would have spread the flames.

Police have now taken charge of the investigation but have made no arrests, with Mr. Nolan’s death being treated as unexplained.

The investigating officer, PC Damien Ait-Amer, said: “We have spoken with a number of witnesses who saw Mr. Nolan ablaze, but we have yet to establish how the fire started.

“Mr Nolan was a well-liked member of the community and none of our enquiries so far have indicated that he had been involved in a dispute of any sort.

“Nor does any account given by witnesses suggest that he had been in contact with another person at the time of the fire.”

Source: The Independent (United Kingdom), Friday 15 December 2017

The Jeannie Saffin case

Jeannie Saffin of London, England was 61 years of age but had the mental capabilities of a six year old and lived with her 82-year-old father, Jack Saffin. On September 15, 1982, Jeannie Saffin was in the kitchen, when Jack noticed a **bright flash** out of the corner of his eye. Turning to Jeannie to ask if she had seen it as well as, Jack Saffin noticed his daughter was **on fire**, sitting perfectly still with her hands in her lap.

In an effort to save Jeannie's life, her father disfigured his own hands while pulling her to the kitchen sink. Putting out the flames surrounding Jeannie, her father began calling for his son-in-law Donald to help, screaming "Jeannie's burning!" Donald stated that he ran into the kitchen seeing Jeannie with roaring flames around her face and abdomen while contacting EMS.

In the reports from the incident, Jeannie's injuries were listed as facial burns as well as burns to the chest, neck, shoulders, left arm, abdomen, thighs and left buttock along with both sides of both hands. Some of these were full thickness burns in which the skin is destroyed down to fat tissue. Jeannie's face afterward was described as horribly disfigured. **Don Carrol claims he saw flames coming from Jeannie's mouth and said she was "roaring like a dragon" although no burns were found in Jeannie's mouth.**

It was too late. Jeannie went into a coma and died eight days later.

P.C. Marsden from the Edmonton Police Station, in a report to the coroner's office, stated that no cause for the flames had been found. This report also states that the chair and walls of the kitchen were undamaged by fire and smoke, that the closest source of ignition (a gas stove) was at least 5 feet away and that Jeannie was still burning when he got to the residence. He helped put out the flames with a towel.

Jeannie Saffin's official cause of death was recorded by coroner, Dr. John Burton, as "broncho-pneumonia due to burns", reportedly due only to the fact that when Jeannie's family attempted to explain the spontaneous combustion they had witnessed, he replied "No such thing.".

Source: compiled from different sources

Robert Francis Bailey

Robert Francis Bailey, a homeless man, was inside an abandoned home at 49 Auckland Street in Lambeth, South London. At 5:21am on 13 September 1967, an unnamed member of a group of female office workers phoned the London Fire Brigade. While waiting for their bus to work, they had noticed flickering blue

flames visible through an upper window of 49 Auckland Street, Lambeth, London. They presumed it was burning gas. When the fire department arrived at 5:24am they discovered the burning body of Robert Francis Bailey, a local homeless alcoholic.

One of the responding firefighters reported, "When I got in through the window I found the body of a tramp named Bailey laying at the bottom of the stairs leading up to the second floor. He was lying partly on his left side. There was a four-inch (102 mm) slit in his abdomen from which was issuing, at force, a blue flame. The flame was beginning to burn the wooden stairs. We extinguished the flames by playing a hose into the abdominal cavity. Bailey was alive when he started burning. He must have been in terrible pain. His teeth were sunk into the mahogany newel post of the staircase. I had to prise his jaws apart to release the body. The fire was coming from within the abdomen of his body. […] There's no doubt whatsoever, that fire began inside the body. That's the only place it could have begun, inside that body."

Baily had been **conscious as he burned to death** and there was evidence to suggest he had been convulsing in agony as the fire consumed him. He had bitten into the post on the stairs which was made of solid mahogany and his teeth were embedded so deeply into the wood that his mouth had to be pried open by the fire department in order to remove his body.

The firefighter described what he had witnessed, "**There was about a four inch slit in his stomach and the flame was emanating from that four inch slit like a blow torch. It was a blue flame. The flame was actually coming from the body itself. From inside the body. He was burning literally from the inside out. And it was definitely under pressure.** And it was impinging on the timber flooring below the body, so much so that the heat from the flame was charred into the woodwork.".

The only fire damage in the house was on the floor, directly below where the body had been burning. Aside from the abdomen where the fire had originated, Robert Francis Bailey's **clothes were intact and unaffected by the fire**. The fire department put out the flames almost immediately, originally believing Bailey may still have been alive. **The job required the use of several fire extinguishers and was incredibly difficult.** Robert Francis Bailey's original cause of death was determined to be "asphyxia due to inhalation of fire fumes" but after reviewing the case further his death was deemed to have been due to "unknown causes".

Source: compiled from different sources

Kingston-upon-Hull, England

In the following case the police was not treating the death as suspicious. The place is Kingston-upon-Hull, a city in the East Riding of Yorkshire, England.

'I felt sheer panic and rushed to help': Dad's desperate efforts to save man on fire in Hull street

Emergency services were called to Thanet Road just after 8pm on Wednesday night

A father-of-four has told of his dramatic rescue attempt to save a man on fire in an east Hull street. Emergency services were called to Thanet Road at 8.08pm on Wednesday night following reports of a man on fire. Despite their efforts they were unable to save the man, who died at the scene. Daniel Lingwood, 32, was at his home in the street when he looked out of his porch window to see flames across the road. Thinking his van was on fire, Mr Lingwood rushed outside but, to his shock and horror, realised the blaze had engulfed a man.

Speaking of the tragedy, Mr Lingwood said: "I felt sheer panic and just rushed over to help. "Some other people were already there, but it just felt like the whole street was in a panic.

"There were some women going round to get buckets of water to chuck over him, but I have done first aid before and I knew that would be bad for his skin, so me and another bloke tried to roll him on the ground to put the fire out. "Then we started doing compressions on him until the ambulance arrived."

Emergency services were called to Thanet Road, near the junction with Tedworth Road, just after 8pm on Wednesday night. Mr Lingwood, a Hull City Council worker, says what has happened has left him traumatised.

"I just keep seeing his face," he said. "I couldn't go to work today. I keep thinking about what happened." Residents in Thanet Road have also spoken of their shock.

One woman, who asked not to be named, said: "It is so sad to think this has happened down our street. "There are a lot of kids that live down here and I just hope none of them saw it all." Another woman, who lives opposite the house where the man was, said: "I was actually visiting my friend up the road but I am just so glad I wasn't in as my 12-year-old son's bedroom looks directly over where it happened." A single police car remains at the scene in Thanet Road on Thursday. Humberside Police say they are continuing with their investigations and are appealing for anyone who witnessed the incident to contact them.

Detective Superintendent Dave Wood said: "We were called to reports of a man who was on fire on 27 December 2017 on Thanet Road in Hull just after 8pm. "The ambulance and the fire service were already in attendance at the scene. The man had suffered serious burns in the isolated incident. He was given emergency treatment but he sadly died. "No one else was injured, and we are not looking for

anyone else in connection with this. "We are currently investigating the circumstances surrounding this incident." Witnesses are urged to call police on 101 quoting log 480 of December 27.

Source: Hull Daily Mail, England, December 28, 2017

Follow-up article by the same newspaper;

Tragic man who died after being seen on fire in Hull street named

The 60-year-old man died just two days after Christmas at the scene on Thanet Road, East Hull

A man who died after he was seen on fire in a Hull street has been named after an inquest into his death was opened. Alan Edward Graystone was seen on fire by residents of Thanet Road, east Hull on December 27. Despite the efforts of the emergency services who were called to the scene at around 8.08pm, Mr Graystone died at the scene. The road was cordoned off for almost three hours after the tragedy.

Humberside Police said they were not treating the death as suspicious.

An inquest into the 60-year-old's death was opened on January 2 and has been adjourned for a date to be set, according to Hull Coroner's Court. This will determine how Mr Graystone died and will establish a cause of death.

Source: Hull Daily Mail, England, January 2, 2018

Spontaneous Human Combustion: More than one person at the same time

Unusual case of spontaneous human combustion in which more than one person was involved.

Guérigny, France, 1821

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Guérigny, France, 1821:

An account has been lately read to the Society above named, of what the narrator — Dr. Charpentier, physician to the royal forces of the marine, at Guérigny, near Nevers, — considers to have been instances of spontaneous combustion of the human body. We shall give the history in detail, because there are some circumstances in it that seem very forcibly to favour the inference above mentioned; whilst the occurrence of the phenomenon in two persons at the same time, on the contrary, furnishes grounds for a strong suspicion that the

combustion arose from an external source.

On the 15th of January, 1820, at ten o'clock in the evening, several neighbours of Mrs. P—, of Nevers, perceived a peculiar odour, which they thought similar to that of broiled animal matter and burning wool, only more disagreeable and nauseous. They saw neither smoke nor vapour issue from any of the adjacent houses; and at last, agreeing amongst themselves that this odour was produced by the burning of the remains of an old Carmelite nun, who had died in the neighbourhood that day, they retired to bed without making any further inquiries. On the 13th, in the morning, a woman, living near the place, who had a second key to the door of the house, because she was in the habit of going there daily to assist the servant in attending on her mistress, opened the door to go and perform her ordinary duties. On entering the room, a dense vapour issued out, accompanied with an insupportable stench that almost suffocated her. She retreated from the house, crying out in the most violent manner for help. The neighbours came about her; and, after waiting a few moments to let the vapour escape, they proceeded to examine the state of the room. They found neither Mrs. P— nor her servant. At first they saw no appearance of dead bodies, but they immediately recognized that Mrs. F.'s bed was entirely burned. Its different parts, however, preserved their form; but, on the slightest touch, it all sunk away, and the bedstead, pallaisse, mattress, feather-bed, sheets, blankets, and curtains, were reduced to a cinder. Before they stirred these cinders they examined the fire-place, in which they found no wood, nor any charcoal, in combustion: the fire had not been covered, and it had probably gone out for want of wood. A candlestick stood in the fireplace, and another, on the ground, in the middle of the room; there was no candle in either of them. On proceeding to examine the ashes, or remains of the combustion, there was found, in front of the spot which had been occupied by the bed, **the extremity of a leg covered by a stocking, with a shoe on the foot, and which was recognized to be part of the right leg of the servant. It was the only portion of the body of this woman that had not been reduced to ashes. The cranium of the mistress, devoid of the scalp, which had been burned, was found in a situation corresponding with that in which the head would be as the woman lay in bed. This was the only portion of her body that had not been utterly destroyed by combustion, excepting a small fragment of the neck, or rather the skin of the neck that had been enveloped in a red kerchief, which had probably served as a cravat, and of which there were yet some remains immediately attached to the preserved portion of the neck.** The Servant's bed, which was very near to that of the mistress, was untouched, as well as the table, chairs, and other furniture of the room, excepting a wooden clock, hung up against the wall beside the bed, that, having preserved its form, fell into ashes on the first movement. . .Although the room had no ceiling, the beams and rafters, which were very near to the top of the bed, were not burned, but they were black and felt very hot. All the things about the room, especially such as were close to the bed, were extremely humid; which was owing, without doubt, to condensation of the dense vapours with which the room was filled on

being first entered. As there were no other persons in the house than these two women, and the accident not having been discovered until the ensuing morning, no one can possibly know the cause of it.

Source: The Medical and Physical Journal, London, 1821, page 348-349