

Appendix B - Human Remains Policy 2026-30

1. Introduction

The Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery (RAMM, 'the museum') acts within the legal framework of the Human Tissue Act 2004. The museum does not knowingly hold human remains under 100 years old and does not need licence under the Human Tissue Act 2004.

We are actively and ethically resolving any cases where human remains are poorly provenanced or lacking documentation that can prove they are more than 100 years old.

In our treatment and use of human remains we will be guided by:

- ▶ *Code of Ethics for Museums* (MA, 2008), plus any subsequent revisions
- ▶ *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* (DCMS, June 2005)
- ▶ *Science and the Dead: a guideline for the destructive sampling of archaeological human remains for scientific analysis* (Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Burials in England, 2013)
- ▶ *Guidance for Best Practice for Treatment of Human Remains Excavated from Christian Burial Grounds in England, second edition* (Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Burials in England, 2017)
- ▶ *Standards in Museum Care of Archaeological Collections* (MGC, 1992)
- ▶ *The role of the Human Osteologist in an Archaeological Fieldwork Project* (Historic England 2018)
- ▶ *Statement on burial law and archaeology* (Ministry of Justice, April 2008)

2. Definition of human remains

We will use the definition of human remains as outlined in DCMS guidelines:

"...bodies, and parts of bodies, of once living people from the species *Homo sapiens*...This includes osteological material (whole or part skeletons, individual bones or fragments of bone or teeth), soft tissue including organs and skin, embryos and slide preparations of human tissue."

We will extend the definition to include hair, nails and funerary ashes.

3. Inventory of holdings

We have identified human remains within the collecting areas of Antiquities, Costume and Textiles, Fine Art, Natural Sciences and World Cultures.

4. Acquisition

If human remains are discovered in local archaeological contexts RAMM may take this material into its care. The finds must be of exceptional importance or shed significant light on a community's heritage. RAMM will only acquire this material if there is an accompanying copy of the associated paperwork, required according to current UK law. Acquisition of human remains within other disciplines will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

5. Use and storage of human remains

RAMM conveys intellectual access through display and interpretation. We will follow DCMS guidelines when considering acceptable and ethical use of human remains.

Human remains are appropriately cared for and discreetly kept in the museum store. Remains are stored separately from other materials and access to the material is restricted.

6. Research, access and information

RAMM provides information about the collections in line with its Access Statement (2025). Some holdings are included on RAMM's collections website rammcollections.org.uk. Information not published online is available on request, and in person visits to view the collections can also be arranged. Please email ramm.enquiries@exeter.gov.uk and you will be put in contact with the most appropriate member of staff.

RAMM will consider all requests for access to human remains by researchers and community groups at museum Collections Team meetings. We will also consider applications for sampling and analysis of human remains in order to answer research questions.

RAMM has worked with legitimate source community representatives and government officials to try to ascertain provenance for remains in the World Cultures collection. Good documentation has allowed RAMM to return remains to

Australia, New Zealand and Canada. A [list of human remains](#) in the World Culture collection, and those that have been returned, is available online.

7. Exhibition and display

Where human remains form part of an exhibition, we will display them in a culturally sensitive, appropriate and informative manner which will be accompanied by explanatory and contextual information.

8. Images

All images of human remains in the museum and on the museum's website will be in context with appropriate interpretation. Records on Collections Explorer where images include human remains will display a 'sensitive content' warning when returned in search results.

All requests for use of images or filming of human remains should be made to the responsible curator.

9. Deaccession, repatriation and reburial

The museum's governing body, acting on the advice of the museum's professional staff, may take a decision to deaccession human remains. This may be to return them to a country or people of origin, transfer to another museum or arrange reburial.

Claims for repatriation and reburial will be considered on a case by case basis, within the museum's legal position and taking into account all ethical implications.

Requests for repatriation will be considered in line with Appendix C of RAMM's Collections Development Policy.

RAMM will follow guidelines issued by Historic England and the Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Burials in England when considering reburial.

Prior to making a formal request for deaccession, repatriation and reburial, RAMM encourages individuals, cultural groups, museums and government departments to enter informal conversations with the Collections Team. Please email ramm.enquiries@exeter.gov.uk.

Formal requests should be sent to:

Dr Julien Parsons
Collections & Content Manager
Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery
Queen Street
Exeter
EX4 3RX

julien.parsons@exeter.gov.uk

The contact information may be updated from time to time as appropriate.

RAMM will work with the claimant to clarify the nature and scope of the request and to gather as much information as possible relating to the claim. A full written report will be presented to Exeter City Council Executive Committee, advising Members of the factors involved in making a decision.

The final decision will be made by Exeter City Council as the governing body and minuted. Claimants will be given a full explanation of the decision and will be given time to respond.