

RAMM Collections Development Policy 2014-2019

Appendix A

Human Remains Policy

1. Introduction

The Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery (RAMM, 'the museum') acts within the legal framework of the Human Tissue Act 2004. As the museum holds human remains under 100 years old, it will obtain the necessary licence under the Human Tissue Act 2004.

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 2006)
- *Guidance for Best Practice for Treatment of Human Remains Excavated from Christian Burial Grounds in England* (Church of England/English Heritage, January 2005)
- *Standards in Museum Care of Archaeological Collections* (MGC, 1992)
- Centre for Archaeology Guidelines, Human bones from archaeological sites (English Heritage, 2002)
- 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, Natural History and Ethnography.

4. Acquisition

The museum will retain its current holdings of human remains. If human remains are discovered in local archaeological contexts RAMM may acquire this material for its collection. 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.

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 for human remains.

Human remains are appropriately cared for and discreetly kept in the museum store. Where possible, remains are stored separately from other materials. Access to the material is restricted.

6. Research and access

RAMM will consider applications for access to archaeological human remains by community groups. We will also consider applications for sampling and analysis of archaeological human remains in order to answer research questions.

Requests for access to human remains will be considered by the museum's Human Remains Working Group.

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.

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 return human remains to a country or people of origin.

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. We will follow DCMS guidelines for the procedure in considering a claim for repatriation. All requests for deaccession, repatriation and reburial must be made in writing to the responsible curator, who will consult with the Senior Collections Officer in the first instance.

We 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 Scrutiny 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.

10. Note on human remains in the Ethnography collection at RAMM

In recent years, the Ethnography department at the museum has worked with legitimate source community representatives and government officials in trying to ascertain provenance for the remains in the department's care. Good documentation has allowed RAMM to return remains to Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

Detailed documentation is not available for all remains held and, notwithstanding the provisions in section 8 (above), at the time of preparing the current policy there are no plans to return remains in the period 2014-2019.

A list of human remains in RAMM's ethnography collection can be found on the museum's World Cultures website: <http://www.rammworldculturesonline.org.uk/research/human-remains/Documents/> Legitimate source community representatives are welcome to contact RAMM with their enquiries.