

Care and Treatment of Human Remains Policy

Name of museum: Hastings Museum & Art Gallery

Name of governing body: Hastings Borough Council

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: March 2019

Policy review procedure: This policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.

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1. Introduction

Hastings Museum & Art Gallery is a community museum that aims to inspire people and connect communities. The museum aims to inform and inspire people's interest in the cultural and natural heritage of Hastings, and address relevant contemporary issues by:

- Collecting, preserving and interpreting material evidence of the past
- Enriching people's lives and creating a sense of place and identity
- Stimulating creativity, inspiration and enjoyment
- Engaging with the widest possible audience.

The museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its vision and aims. Human remains have a unique status within museum collections. In many cases they have a personal, cultural, symbolic, spiritual or religious significance to individuals or groups. This places a special responsibility on those museums that hold them.

This policy has been developed using the recommendations of the *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museum Collections*, (DCMS, 2005) and the *Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England* (CoE/EH, 2017) with particular reference being given to the treatment, respect and reverence given to human remains. Due regard has also been given to Museums Association's *Code of Ethics* which requires museums to, 'deal sensitively and promptly with requests for repatriation both within the UK and from abroad' (Museums Association *Code of Ethics* 2015, 2.7).

2. Principles

We treat human remains with the utmost respect and dignity underpinned by the following principles:

- All matters relating to human remains will be over-seen by appropriate staff
- Human remains will only be handled by appropriate staff
- Human remains will be packaged and stored to maximise their well-being
- Human remains will only be acquired in line with our collections development policy and ethical considerations
- Human remains will not be used in any way that would upset museum users.

3. Human Remains Definition

Hastings Museum & Art Gallery uses the definition of human remains given in the *Guidance for the Care of Human remains in Museum Collections* (DCMS, 2005).

The term human remains is used to mean the bodies, parts of bodies and cremated remains, of once living people from the species *Homo sapiens*, defined as individuals who fall within the range of anatomical forms known today and in the recent past. This includes osteological material, whole or part skeletons, individual bones or fragments of bone and teeth, soft tissue including organs and skin, embryos and slide preparations of human tissue.

In line with The Human Tissue Act 2004, the definition does not include hair and nails, although it is acknowledged that some cultural communities do give these a sacred importance. Human remains may also include any of the above that may have been modified in some way by human skill and/or may be physically bound with other non-human materials to form an artefact composed of several materials. Another, but much smaller, category of material included within this definition is that of artworks composed of human bodily fluids and soft tissue.

Where it is known that cultural communities give hair and nails sacred importance, this material will be treated in the same way as human remains according to the above definition and as outlined below.

4. Current Scope of Human Remains in the collections

The museum holds human remains by virtue of the historic collections it cares for, for the purposes of research, public and specialist education and the better understanding of humanity. Human remains have been identified in the following areas:

4.1 British Archaeology

The archaeological material is almost exclusively from Sussex, and includes known human skeletal material (unmodified) from the prehistoric through to the medieval period. The majority of our human remains are dated to the medieval period.

4.1 International Archaeology

The ancient Egyptian mummified remains are around 3000 years old.

4.3 World Cultures

The human remains in the world cultures collection are all modified in some way and are dated between the 18th and 19th centuries.

5. Acquisition of human remains

In accordance with the collections development policy the museum only expects to acquire human remains by transfer from another institution, donation, or excavation in Hastings and surrounding area. The transfer of human remains from excavations will be conducted in accordance with legal requirements and published professional standards of archaeological investigation. The museum does not expect to acquire human remains that are less than 100 years old which are subject to additional constraints under The Human Tissue Act 2004.

6. Loans

Loan requests by museums, university or comparable academic institutions for human remains will be considered by the Museum and Cultural Development Manager and approved by the Museum Committee. The loan of human remains will only be considered for display, research or teaching purposes. The museum will ensure that the borrowing institution satisfies the legal, ethical and practical considerations set out in the DCMS (2005) *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* and provides written assurances. We will also ensure that these considerations are followed when we borrow

human remains from other institutions. All requests for the loan of human remains will be subject to the terms of the museum's loans policy.

7. Access

7.1 Research

All requests for research, including sampling and analysis, must be made by completing a Human Remains Research Request form (Appendix B). Students must provide a letter with a reference from their Tutor/Lecturer along with the completed request form. All requests will be considered on a case by case basis.

Where research access is granted, all researchers will be made aware of the museums and their own ethical obligations with regard to human remains. They will receive appropriate guidance in handling human remains from a curator.

The museum will seek external academic advice prior to approving any request for sampling and analysis. Such consultation may increase the time before a decision can be made. A complete record of the material analysed, the outcome of the analysis, and the resulting research must be lodged with the museum.

7.2 Exhibition and display

Where human remains form part of an exhibition they will be displayed in a culturally and contextually appropriate, sensitive and informative manner and will always be accompanied by explanatory and contextual interpretation.

Human remains will only be referred to as a proper name where the proper name of an individual is known, or the name of a cultural group or archaeological site is to be used e.g. Lindow Man. The display of artefacts containing modified remains from the ethnography collection is acceptable and is in no way a breach of any known ethics.

7.3 Images

No images of human remains will be available online or will be used for marketing purposes. Images of human remains for research and educational use may be requested in writing from the museum and will be subject to approval by the Museum and Cultural Development Manager.

8. Collections management

The museum will store human remains professionally and respectfully. Premises will be secure, clean and free of vermin and the storage environment will be stable and regularly monitored. Handling will be kept to a minimum and conservation standard gloves will be worn. Where conservation is necessary, treatments will follow the principle of minimum intervention and be as reversible as possible.

8.1 Storage

The museum will store human remains in controlled conditions in a defined area. Storage is actively managed and monitored and meets appropriate standards of security, access management and environment. Objects found associated with

human remains are stored with other objects by site, period and culture, also in appropriate conditions. Documentation, remedial or preventative conservation and physical access procedures will be carried out according to the appropriate professional standards and museum policy.

8.2 Conservation

The integrity of human remains is important in many belief systems and is also crucial to future research and study. The principle of minimum intervention and reversibility should always be applied, avoiding treatments that will contaminate or damage human remains. Bone should always be kept clean and dry. Any intrusive conservation work will be carried out in accordance with strict protocols and only undertaken when absolutely necessary.

9. Repatriation, reburial and deaccession

Human remains must be deaccessioned responsibly, with reference to the legal, ethical and professional principles and procedures set out in the DCMS (2005) guidelines and in accordance with museum's collections policies. Claims for repatriation or reburial will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Procedural guidance outlined in the DCMS (2005) guidance may be used when considering cases.

All requests for repatriation, reburial and deaccession must be submitted in writing to the Museum and Cultural Development Manager. For any claim to be considered, the claimant will need to establish a sound evidential base for their claim. The museum will seek external advice and where appropriate will form an advisory panel of experts to provide additional expertise on a case-by-case basis.

The museum recognises that the human remains it retains might have cultural and spiritual value to many different groups. The beliefs and values of any one group will be considered in balance with other beliefs and values relating to the remains, and equal respect will be given to all beliefs and values. Human remains have important potential for research to add to our understanding of our shared past and important potential also for public access, understanding and enjoyment. This is a view held by the majority of people in society and it will be a significant factor to consider in any request for repatriation, reburial and deaccession.

The Museum and Cultural Development Manager is responsible for making recommendations to the Museum Committee on repatriation, reburial and de-accession. Final approval for transfer from the museum's possession will be subject to the museum's collections policies and confirmation by the Cabinet of Hastings Borough Council.

Appendix A

References

Church of England and English Heritage (2005) 'Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England'

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/human-remains-excavated-from-christian-burial-grounds-in-england/>

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2005) 'Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums'

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/DCMS%20Guide.pdf>

Honouring the Ancient Dead

www.honour.org.uk

Human Tissue Authority (2004) 'Human Tissue Act'

<https://www.hta.gov.uk/policies/human-tissue-act-2004>

ICOM (2006) 'Code of Ethics for Museums'

<http://archives.icom.museum/ethics.html>

Museums Association (2015) 'Code of Ethics for Museums'

<http://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics>

Museum Ethnographers Group (1994) 'Professional guidelines concerning the Storage, Display, Interpretation and Return of Human Remains in Ethnographical Collections in United Kingdom Museums', *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 6: 22-24 and online (as 'MEG Guidelines on Management of Human Remains) at:

www.museumethnographersgroup.org.uk

Appendix B

Human Remains Research Request Form



To make a research request to access the human remains in our collection please complete this form and send it to museum@hastings.gov.uk with the subject: Human Remains Research Request

Students must provide a letter of reference from their Tutor/Lecturer along with a completed Research Request Form.

For a MS Word copy of this form please email the museum.

Project Name
Research Objective
Research Methodology

Dates of Research
Research Results
Name of researcher
Contact details (address, telephone number and email address)
Research institution/Employer/Funder
I agree to provide the museum with one hard copy and one digital copy of the research results and outputs
Signature
Date