



University Library and Collections Human Remains Policy

[Policies - Durham University](#)

Introduction

small collections of human remains. There are also small amounts of human remains within the and Special Collections.

These collections are a most important resource for teaching and research, both to the University and to visiting scholars from around the world. Wherever possible and appropriate, the collections are also made widely accessible to members of the public by means of display, through educational programmes and through loans to other collections and via the web.

The collections include human remains, whether unmodified or turned by human skill into artefacts or parts of artefacts. These include samples of hair and tissue, mummified bodies, skeletal remains, and artefacts made from or incorporating human remains.

Whether modified or unmodified, these human remains are of considerable significance for the understanding of biological processes, of disease and its history, of diet and population movements over time.

Human remains and artefacts made from or incorporating human remains also illustrate the variety

conditions likely to engender respectful treatment. Wherever possible, the remains of each individual will be stored in a separate storage box (or osteological storage box if appropriate) or container.

Where human remains require conservation, the principle of minimum intervention and reversibility will always be applied, avoiding treatments that will contaminate or damage human remains.

The request of any member of staff not to participate in any work directly involving the handling of human remains will be respected.

Display

The DCMS Guidance cites the finding of visitor surveys that the vast majority of museum visitors

3D images or prints can be used to minimise access and handling of remains, avoid public exhibition of the original remains, and can be used for teaching and for public events, however ULC staff will consider context and permission to establish whether they should be used in this context.

Imaging and 3D printing will not be considered a substitute for the original remains, but imaging can be used prior to destructive analysis as part of record keeping.

Compliance

It shall be the responsibility of the Head of Museums, Galleries and Exhibitions to ensure compliance with this Policy in consultation with the relevant staff members.

Claims in the return of human remains

As the Guidance observes, it is unquestionable that human remains had in the past, and continue to have, a key role in museum research and practice, and have the potential to make major contributions to the furtherance of knowledge. It is equally clear that certain remains were obtained in ways that would now be deemed unacceptable and that some individuals and communities wish to see the return of those remains or to gain some control over their future.

While Durham University generally presumes that its collections should remain intact for the benefit of present and future generations throughout the world, it will on a case-by-case basis give serious consideration to repatriating human remains that were buried or were intended for burial¹, if

(a) they are less than 100 years old and a claim for their return is being made by a genealogical descendant; or

(b) they are less than 300 years old, and

the claim is normally made by a source community which displays a cultural continuity with the remains in question, *and*

the claim is made through a national government, national agency, or equivalent, *and*

where, after taking any relevant independent advice on questions which the University formulates as needing an answer to help it make a decision, it is in its view likely that the cultural and religious importance of the human remains to the community making the claim outweighs any other public benefit.

Durham University regards objects made from human remains that have been modified for a nails) as falling into a different category from human remains that were intended for burial, and so is unlikely to agree to any claim for their repatriation.

Durham University considers that claims are unlikely to be successful for any remains over 300 years old, and are highly unlikely to be considered for remains over 500 years old, except where a very close geographical, religious and cultural link can be demonstrated.

Durham University will normally only consider a claim for repatriation from a community if it has been

For any claim to be considered, the claimant would have to establish a sound evidential base for a prima facie claim.

Procedure for making a claim

Durham University wishes to be open and transparent with regard to approaches from claimants wishing to see the return of human remains to communities of origin, and will try to ensure throughout the process that its actions are consultative and that negotiations are as equitable as possible.