



## Human Remains Policy

**Name of governing body:** Horniman Public Museum and Public Park Trust

**Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:** March 2021

**Date of which this policy is due for review:** March 2024

### 1. Introduction

**1.1** This policy outlines the approach of the Horniman Museum and Gardens to the care, preservation, management and development of the human remains in the collection of the Horniman in response to both the DCMS Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums 2005 and the Human Tissue Act 2004. It covers the display of human remains to the public, access to the Horniman collection for research and other purposes, and how requests for the return of human remains to countries or communities of origin will be addressed and managed by the Horniman.

**1.2** The Horniman Museum and Gardens recognises that human remains have a unique status within museum collections as once living people or parts of living people, and must be cared for and treated in a sensitive and respectful way. We recognise the value of human remains and their potential to make a contribution to the public good, through research, learning and display and the sensitivities that surround this. We also acknowledge that human remains have a personal, cultural, symbolic, spiritual or religious significance to individuals, communities of origin and other groups which places a special responsibility on the museums that hold them.

**1.3** Whilst there continues to be widespread popular and scientific support for the holding of human remains in museums, we recognise that certain human remains and artefacts made from or incorporating human remains are especially culturally sensitive. We also recognise that historically, some human remains were obtained in unacceptable circumstances including through force or duress, or were acquired for displays exemplifying what is now seen as scientific racism. We are committed to researching the histories of the human remains collections and being transparent about them.

**1.4** The Horniman is committed to working co-operatively with communities of origin, other museum professionals and interested groups, to ensure that all culturally-sensitive items are cared for and used appropriately, and that the value and use of human remains are considered alongside the wishes of descendants and cultural custodians where relevant.

### 2. Human Remains Definition

The Horniman Museum and Gardens adopts, with minor modifications, the definition of human remains as set out by the DCMS Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, 2005. Human remains are the bodies and parts of bodies, of

once living people from the species *Homo sapiens*. They include bones, teeth, skin and other organs, embryos, body fluids and slide preparations of human tissue. They also include any of the above that may have been modified in some way by human skill and/or may be physically bound up with other non-human materials to form an artefact composed of several materials. This can also include the bodily material from living people. The Human Tissue Act does not include hair and nails in its formal definition of 'human remains', however, these are included in the Horniman's inventory of human remains due to their cultural and spiritual significance for some communities.

### **3. Human remains in the Horniman Museum's collection**

There are approximately 323 documented human remains represented in the Horniman's Natural History, Anthropology and Musical Instrument collection. These include samples of hair and tissue, mummified bodies, skeletal remains (mainly skulls), artefacts and musical instruments made from or incorporating human remains.

### **4. Inventory of collections**

The Horniman Museum and Gardens holds human remains for the purposes of research, display and learning, and believes in being open about the contents of the collection. The Horniman is continuously improving the documentation of our human remains which are listed on an internal searchable collection management system. We will continue to work towards researching, maintaining and publishing full details of our holdings in accordance with DCMS guidance, by the end of March 2022.

### **5. Consultation and decision-making**

**5.1** We are committed to decision-making around the future of human remains informed first and foremost by communities of origin. In certain circumstances, such as in the absence of living descendants, we recognise we may need to consult with scientists, academics, Horniman Staff, audiences and other stakeholders.

**5.2** We will make recommendations to the Horniman's Acquisition and Disposal Committee and Board of Trustees based on ethical judgment, professional best practice, cultural views on what constitutes respectful treatment, measurable benefits to the Horniman and its audiences, and the needs of different communities.

### **6. Legislation and Guidance relating to the Care of Human Remains**

The Horniman Museum and Gardens follows the current versions of the legal and professional guidelines, including:

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

Museums Association Code of Ethics (2016) and the Archives and Records Association (UK and Ireland) Code of ethics (2018).

Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England published by The Church of England and English Heritage (CoE/EH 2017).

The Human Tissue Act, 2004.

The Human Tissue Authority's Codes and Standards, 2017.

The Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act, 2003 and other legislation relevant to

acquisition.

## **7. Acquisitions**

**7.1** The Horniman may in certain circumstances consider acquiring responsibly and ethically further human remains, whether modified or unmodified (for example, Commissioned Artworks), that are relevant to our mission. Decisions about acquisition will be based on consultation with appropriate communities and other interested parties to consider the value that acquisitions would bring to the Horniman and its stakeholders.

**7.2** We will not acquire human remains where there is any suspicion of illicit trade, and will only acquire human remains post-dating 2004 where valid written consent by the Human Tissue Authority for storage and public display has been granted. In the case of historical remains, every effort will be made to ensure that provenance has been established as clearly as possible.

**7.3** Any proposal for the acquisition of human remains less than 100 years old will be subject to the legislation set out in the Human Tissue Act 2004 and guidance from the Human Tissue Authority.

## **8. De-accessions**

**8.1** The Horniman Museum and Gardens may on occasion de-accession human remains either to transfer them to another more appropriate collection or institution with an appropriate human remains policy, or in response to approved claims for restitution and repatriation submitted in accordance with the Horniman's policies and procedures for the consideration of claims.

**8.2** Human remains will be de-accessioned responsibly, with reference to the legal, ethical and professional principles and procedures set out in the DCMS Guidelines and in accordance with the Horniman's Collection Development and Restitution and Repatriation Policies. This will include establishing whether descendants may wish to make a claim for the return or burial of remains as appropriate.

**8.3** Any de-accessions will be subject to final approval from the Horniman's Board of Trustees.

## **9. Requests for Return**

**9.1** We are committed to openness and transparency regarding claims for restitution and repatriation of human remains and will be proactive in discussing the possible repatriation of relevant human remains with contemporary communities of origin.

**9.2** Claims will be considered and determined on a case by case basis following dialogue and consultation with claimants, potential claimants and stakeholders in accordance with DCMS guidance and the Horniman's Restitution and Repatriation Policy (endorsed March 2021).

**9.3** We will treat all requests sensitively and with respect. We will discuss requests for the repatriation of human remains with contemporary communities of origin and stakeholder groups, and evaluate individual cases with rigour and respect for communities, seeking external expertise when considering requests as needed.

**9.4** Claims for return will be respectfully considered and subject to final approval from the Horniman's Board of Trustees.

## **10. Storage, Conservation and Collection Management**

**10.1** The Horniman Museum and Gardens aims to store and display human remains, whether on loan or part of the permanent collection, in an actively managed and monitored environment that minimises their rate of deterioration.

**10.2** Human remains will be stored in a respectful and culturally appropriate way wherever possible. This may mean, for example, restricting access to certain items, where unrestricted access may cause offence to descendants. Wherever practical, human remains will be stored separately from other items, and where this is not possible, in covered, clearly labelled boxes or similar containers. Access to human remains will be allowed only to authorised staff and visitors following the Access Policy for Human Remains.

**10.3** Handling should be avoided unless absolutely necessary and gloves must be worn when handling.

**10.4** Where conservation is required, the principle of minimum intervention and reversibility will always be applied.

## **11. Display**

**11.1** The Horniman Museum and Gardens will continue to display certain kinds of human remains for the purpose of learning, following careful consideration of the reasons for, and circumstances surrounding the reasons for display, including consultation with communities of origin as applicable.

**11.2** The Horniman recognises the importance of exhibiting human remains in an appropriate intellectual and social context alongside accompanying explanatory and contextual information. Displays containing human remains will continue to be actively reviewed in line with DCMS guidelines and Human Tissue Act legislation.

**11.3** Consideration will be given to how best to inform visitors of the presence of human remains on display. Wherever possible, consultation will take place to ensure human remains are displayed suitably and acceptably.

## **12. Loans**

**12.1** The Horniman Museum and Gardens will lend human remains to other institutions for display and/or research, provided that the borrowing institution meets the legal, ethical and practical considerations set out in the DCMS's Code of Practice and Human Tissue Act legislation. Borrowers must adhere to the guidance laid out in this and other relevant Horniman policies and procedures.

**12.2** The Horniman will also ensure that these considerations are followed when borrowing human remains from other institutions.

## **13. Transport**

**13.1** The Horniman Museum and Gardens will create and maintain records of the

transport of human remains using its collections management procedures, enabling traceability of individual items.

**13.2** Human remains will be packed and transported with due regard to dignity and respect.

**13.3** The arrangements for packing and transport of human remains will be based on an individual assessment of the condition of the item and risks arising from transport.

#### **14. Access, Research and Learning**

**14.1** The Horniman Museum and Gardens will provide access to the human remains for academic research, learning and engagement in line with DCMS guidance, and as outlined in its Access to Human Remains and other relevant policies and procedures.

**14.2** Access to human remains in storage is allowed only to authorised staff and visitors with specific permission under agreed supervisory arrangements. All access to stored human remains will be monitored and logged.

**14.3** Public access will not be allowed to any human remains where the outcome of a claim for return to a community of origin is pending or where cultural sensitivities prevent them from being viewed. Determination of the latter will be done through consultation with communities of origin.

**14.4** Visitors and researchers are reminded of their ethical obligations and will be expected to follow the relevant principles of this and other Horniman policies and procedures and the DCMS Code of Practice.

**14.5** Requests for the study of human remains, particularly those identified as sensitive, or requests involving innovative procedures or sampling, will be considered on a case by case basis.

**14.6** The results of any research investigation will be deposited with the Horniman and made available in the public domain.

**14.7** Members of the public, including teachers and students, will be forewarned of any human remains being included in a session. Participants in a session will be told what is meant by dignified and respectful treatment of human remains.

#### **15. Images and Filming**

**15.1** Photography or filming of human remains that are not on display will be permitted for approved collection management, documentation or research, learning and engagement purposes. Proposals for the photography or filming of remains will be subject to approval by the Horniman, following consideration of relevant legal, regulatory, ethical and other issues.

**15.2** Where there are known cultural objections to the photography or filming of specific human remains, the Horniman will respect this sensitivity.

**15.3** It is assumed that human remains placed on public display will be

photographed by visitors. Staff will be mindful of this when developing new displays and creating and using images of human remains. In certain circumstances visitors may be requested not to photograph human remains.

#### **16. Policy Authorisation and Contacts**

General enquiries relating to human remains should be addressed to the relevant Keeper/ Curator in the first instance. The principal contact for requests for return is the Chief Executive.

#### **Acknowledgements**

This policy draws upon best practice in the published policies of other UK museums holding human remains including University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, The Manchester Museum, National Museums Liverpool, Science Museum Group, Natural History Museum and Royal Pavilion and Museums.