



Human Remains Policy

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

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: April 2025

Date of which this policy is due for review: April 2028

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy provides a basis for the ethical treatment of human remains in the collections of the Horniman, based on our duty of care and respect for human dignity as well as legislation and guidance. It covers the display of human remains to the public online and onsite, care of human remains in the Horniman's collection, and access to human remains and associated information for research and other purposes.

1.2 The Horniman through this policy acknowledges the UN declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to self-identify based on their historical, familial, and cultural continuity with a given region and a strong link to their lands. It recognises the need for flexibility and diversity in identifying rather than defining communities. We will not use communities of origin as a one size fits all term, but instead will adopt Indigenous, source, and/or descent communities throughout in recognition of the diverse ways in which communities represented in our collection self-identify and connect to their ancestors.

1.3 The policy responds to DCMS Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums 2005 and the Human Tissue Act 2004. It equally aspires to centre social and reparative justice, in response to historic and ongoing colonial injustices and decades of activism by Indigenous, source, and/or descent communities, and the Horniman's own commitment to decolonisation. The policy considers consent of the deceased where known, as well as the wishes of Indigenous, source, and/or descent communities.

1.4 The Horniman recognises that human remains, as once-living people or parts of living people, and belongings made from or incorporating human remains have a personal, cultural, symbolic, spiritual or religious significance to Indigenous, source, and/or descent communities, countries, and communities of association.

1.5 We are committed to working proactively with Indigenous, source, and/or descent communities (including those of wider association), countries, other museum professionals and interested groups to ensure that all sacred, culturally, and religiously sensitive belongings and entities are cared for and treated respectfully. We are also committed to considering the care and treatment of human remains alongside the wishes of the dead and their living communities where known and relevant. We recognise that what constitutes respect and care is culturally and

community specific and should be approached on a case-by-case basis.

1.6 We recognise that historically, some human remains were obtained through imbalanced power structures, conditions of colonial occupation, unacceptable circumstances including through force or duress, or to support racial determinism and the ideology of the superiority of certain human races over others. We understand that the retention of human remains is experienced by some communities as an ongoing hurt or injustice and a disregard to their spiritual and religious beliefs. We are committed to working with Indigenous, source and descent communities, countries, other museum professionals and interested groups, to develop greater transparency about the histories of the collections, enable access to this information, and support claims for restitution.

2. Relationship to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation

2.1 The Human Remains policy sits alongside the:

- Restitution and Repatriation Policy, which sets out how requests for the return of human remains to countries or Indigenous, source, and descent communities will be addressed and managed by the Horniman.
- Collections Development Policy, which sets out criteria for collections acquisition, rationalisation and disposal.
- Corporate Plan, which sets out the Horniman's mission, values and priorities.

3. Human Remains Definition

3.1 The Horniman adopts, with minor modifications, the definition of human remains 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 from the body of a living person 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.

4. Human remains in the Horniman's collection

4.1 There are approximately 406 documented human remains represented in the Horniman's collections of Natural Sciences, Anthropology and Musical Instruments. These include samples of hair and tissue, mummified bodies, skeletal remains (mainly skulls), cultural belongings and musical instruments made from or incorporating human remains. They include human remains from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, Oceania, and unprovenanced remains of unknown location.

5. Public inventory of collections

5.1 We make public details of our holdings of human remains through publishing lists on our website, in accordance with HTA and DCMS guidance. The human remains are listed by continent. They include human skeletal remains as well as hair, teeth and nails, and modified artefacts that include human remains. Human remains whose provenance has not been recorded are also included in these lists.

5.2 For the full listings of human remains in the Horniman collection see:
<https://www.horniman.ac.uk/explore-the-collections/about-the-collections/human-remains/>

6. Consultation and decision-making

6.1 We are committed to decision-making around the care, display and access to human remains that is informed first and foremost by Indigenous, source, and/or descent communities. In certain circumstances, such as in the inability to identify source or descendant community, we recognise we may need to consult with communities of association who are defined by a common interest relating to the future of certain human remains in the Horniman's care and may be relied upon as appropriate representatives due to their interest, expertise, and sensibilities. This is in addition to the wider community of practice, scientists, academics, Horniman staff, audiences and other stakeholders.

6.2 When appropriate, 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 Indigenous, source, and descent communities as well as the Horniman and its audiences, and the needs of these different communities.

7. Legislation and Guidance relating to the Care of Human Remains

7.1 The Horniman follows the current versions of relevant 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).
- ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums (2013).
- 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.
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Regulations.
- Museum Ethnographers' Group (MEG) Guidelines on Management of Human Remains.
- UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007.

7.2 To respond to expectations and needs of communities, this policy draws on published guidance from community and organisational task forces, including:

- The American Anthropological Association's report from the Commission for the Ethical Treatment of Human Remains (TCETHR) (2024)
- The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Afrikan Reparations (APPG-AR) 'Laying Ancestors to Rest' policy brief (2025)
- Smithsonian Human Remains Task Force.

7.3 This policy is also informed by a review of human remains policies from UK and international museums, including: University of Oxford Museums, University of Cambridge Museums, The Manchester Museum, National Museums Liverpool, Science Museum Group, Natural History Museum, Royal Pavilion and Museums, The Hunterian Museum, The National Museum of Scotland, National Museum of Australia, The Smithsonian Institution, The Penn Museum, and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

8. Acquisitions

8.1 The Horniman does not intend to acquire any further human remains of any age.

9. De-accessions

9.1 The Horniman 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.

9.2 Human remains will be de-accessioned with reference to relevant communities' beliefs, the legal, ethical and professional principles and procedures set out in the DCMS Guidance, and in accordance with the Horniman's Collections 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.

10. Requests for Return

10.1 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 Indigenous, source, and/or descent communities. The Horniman's Restitution and Repatriation policy outlines the legal frameworks and procedures by which communities and the Horniman can build a relationship to work towards the possible return of human remains.

10.2 The Horniman's Restitution and Repatriation policy, with detailed breakdown of procedures, can be found here: <https://www.horniman.ac.uk/about-the-horniman/plans-policies-reporting/>

11. Storage, Conservation and Collection Management

11.1 Human remains will be stored and cared for in a respectful and culturally appropriate way wherever possible. The wishes of the dead and their living descendants or cultural communities, or relevant faith organisations, will be taken into consideration where known. 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.

11.2 The Horniman 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.

11.3 Handling should be avoided unless absolutely necessary or when it would support Indigenous, source, and descent communities' spiritual rituals and religious practices. Handling, when necessary, should be conducted with respect and in accordance with relevant communities' cultural, spiritual, and religious beliefs. Museum staff will always wear gloves when handling human remains. If Indigenous, source or descent communities wish to handle human remains, the Horniman will provide them with any relevant information on possible, suspected or recorded historic treatment that may have left harmful residues, and with gloves and hand-washing facilities if desired.

11.4 Where remedial conservation is required, the principle of minimum intervention, reversibility/retreatability, and respect of human dignity will always be applied. The technical details of remedial treatment work will be recorded on the museum database.

12. Display

12.1 The Horniman does not display human remains where the relevant community's wishes around public display are not known or prohibit public display. This is in line with Indigenous, source, and descent communities' guidelines including The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Afrikan Reparations (APPG-AR) 'Laying Ancestors to Rest' policy brief (2025), growing international ethical codes as outlined by the International Council of Museums code of ethics for Natural History Museums, and UK and international museum practice guidelines.

13. Loans

13.1 Human remains will generally not be lent to other institutions for display and/or research, unless in exceptional circumstances where the context is community-led and/or for their benefit, or the loan is felt to contribute significantly to the improved care of those human remains. Borrowers would need to meet the cultural, spiritual, and religious requirements of the community in question, as well as the legal, ethical, and practical considerations set out in the DCMS Guidance and Human Tissue Act legislation. Borrowers must also adhere to the guidance laid out in this and other relevant Horniman policies and procedures.

14. Transport

14.1 The Horniman will create and maintain records of the transport of human remains using its collections management procedures, enabling traceability of individual items.

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

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

15. Access, Research and Public Engagement

15.1 The Horniman will provide conditional access to human remains for academic research. Research requests will be assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Horniman's commitment to responsible care of human remains, and informed, whenever possible or appropriate, by wishes of the dead when known or reasonably inferred and advice from relevant Indigenous, source, and/or descent communities in countries of origin and diaspora on the potential benefit or harm of the research methodologies and outcomes. If approved, research should be conducted in line with DCMS Guidance, the Horniman's Access to Human Remains Procedure, and other relevant policies and procedures.

15.2 Access to human remains in storage is generally allowed only to Indigenous, source, and descent communities, or their approved agents with specific permission under agreed supervisory arrangements, and to authorised staff.

15.3 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 guidance.

15.4 The Horniman is committed to providing open digital access to information on all its collections, including human remains. We publish data relating to human remains in our care online on our website for transparency. Where human remains are of a particularly cultural, spiritual, and religious sensitive nature, information will be restricted in accordance with relevant communities' beliefs. No images of human remains will be published publicly and access to these images will generally be allowed only to Indigenous, source, and/or descent communities, or their approved agents, to authorised staff and to researchers conducting approved academic research.

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

15.6 Members of the public, including teachers and students, will be forewarned when discussions of human remains are being included in public engagement activities. Discussions will always include what is meant by dignified and respectful treatment of human remains.

16. Images and Filming

16.1 Photography or filming of human remains will be conditionally permitted for approved collection management, documentation or research purposes. Where possible, communities will be consulted or involved, or their consent sought. Proposals for the photography or filming of remains and their publication will be subject to approval by the Horniman, following consideration of communities' consent, and relevant legal, regulatory, ethical and other issues.

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

16.3 It is assumed that human remains on public display will be photographed by visitors. In certain circumstances visitors may be requested not to photograph human remains.

17. Enquiries

17.1 General enquiries relating to human remains should be addressed to the Enquiry email (enquiry@horniman.ac.uk) in the first instance.

17.2 Enquiries relating to return should follow the procedures set out in the Horniman's Restitution and Repatriation Policy.