

# Human Remains Policy

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## 1. Introduction and Purpose

- 1.1. As Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) holds and expects to continue acquiring human remains from various periods, we will follow:
  - The 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005 (hereafter referred to as 'DCMS guidance').
  - MA Code of Ethics 2015.
  - Guidance for Best Practice for Treatment of Human Remains Excavated from Christian Burial Grounds in England (CofE/ EH 2005)
  - Human Bones From Archaeological Sites (EH 2004)
- 1.2 In line with this guidance, NMS considers that human remains should be treated with respect and dignity and with high standards of care.
- 1.3 NMS acknowledges that human remains hold a unique status in their collections and that there are special responsibilities placed on those who acquire and display them.
- 1.4 This policy should be read alongside the *NMS Collections Management Strategy and Requirements for Deposition of Fieldwork and Excavation Archives* with Norfolk Museums Service
- 1.5 As NMS does not currently hold, or wish to display, human remains of less than 100 years old, it is not currently licenced under the Human Tissue Act 2004.
- 1.6 All NMS activities involving human remains will be managed in accordance with this Policy. This includes, but is not limited to, displays and exhibitions, acquisitions, disposals, loans, conservation, storage, access and educational use and use of images.

## Definition

"Human remains" will be defined in this policy as follows:

Bodies and parts of bodies of once living people which include:

- Osteological material (whole or part skeletons, individual bones or fragments of bone and teeth)
- Soft tissue including organs and skin; slide preparations of human tissue.
- Human remains that have been modified in some way through human skill and/ or that are physically bound up with non-human material.
- Artworks composed of human bodily fluids or soft tissue.

## **2. ACQUISITIONS, LOANS, DE-ACCESSIONING AND CLAIMS FOR RETURN**

### **2.1 Acquisitions**

- 2.1.1 NMS will acquire human remains where they are of potential research value or potential to continue to make an important contribution to future knowledge.
- 2.1.2 NMS will only acquire remains where it is satisfied that provenance has been as clearly established as possible and that there is no suspicion of them having been acquired or subsequently transferred illicitly.
- 2.1.3 Where human remains are deposited with NMS as part of archaeological archives, a copy of the Licence for the Removal of Human Remains must be included as part of a documentary archive of an excavation.

### **2.2 Loans out**

- 2.2.1 When considering a request for a loan, NMS will take account of the sensitivity of the human remains.
- 2.2.2 Before authorising any loan of human remains to other institutions, NMS will seek the assurance of the borrower that it is able to satisfy the legal, ethical and practical considerations set out in the DCMS guidance.
- 2.2.3 NMS will consider lending remains to other institutions for purposes that will include display or research, provided such activities are in line with all legal and regulatory requirements and subject to its usual conditions of loan. This will include condition reports summarising the state of material before it is loaned.

### **2.3 De-accessioning**

- 2.3.1 NMS may de-accession human remains in its collections for a number of reasons including where there are health and safety problems relating to the remains; where there are irresolvable difficulties associated with the storage requirements; or to transfer them to another collection where they will be more productively utilised or relate preferentially to that institution's collecting policy.
- 2.3.2 Before de-accessioning human remains, NMS will try to establish whether genealogical or cultural descendants exist who might wish to make a claim for return or reburial.
- 2.3.3 Requests for return or burial of remains in our collections will be considered on their merits with reference to the criteria laid out in the DCMS guidance and the ethical framework in that guidance (see section 2.4).

2.3.4 Unstratified or unprovenanced remains and those remains where it is deemed that there is unlikely to any further significant discoveries from additional research will be reburied in a burial ground.

## **2.4 Claims for return**

2.4.1 NMS will adopt procedural guidance laid out in Part 3 of the DCMS guidance.

## **3. STORAGE, CONSERVATION AND COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT**

### **3.1 Storage**

3.1.1 Human remains in NMS collections will be stored in secure storage areas and in appropriate conditions consistent with DCMS guidance.

3.1.2 In line with NMS Requirements for Deposition of Fieldwork and Excavation Archives, NMS will only accept human remains that have been separated from other types of material. Bones and cremated fragments from different bodies must not be allowed to intermingle (unless in excavation and post excavation it was impossible to separate individuals).

3.1.3 NMS will generally store human remains in designated areas within its stores with restricted and monitored access. The remains should be housed in stores not routinely accessed by the public.

### **3.2 Conservation**

3.2.1 Human remains will only be handled by NMS staff and designated volunteers who have had appropriate training to avoid damage and to make sure remains are handled with care and respect.

3.2.2 Care will be taken when handling material from more than one person to avoid mixing unmarked material.

3.2.3 Any new damage or loss must be reported to the Head of Conservation and relevant curator.

3.2.4 NMS will endeavour to store human remains in an environment suitable to the material. Where possible, the environment will be monitored as required to address any conservation issues. Skeletal remains will not be stored in areas where humidity rises to above 85%.

3.2.5 Artefacts associated with human remains (e.g. grave goods) may be stored separately if more appropriate for the material.

- 3.2.6 No food or drink is permitted in NMS storage areas and regular pest monitoring and cleaning will be undertaken.
- 3.2.7 In line with DCMS guidance, the principle of minimum intervention and reversibility will be applied in conservation treatment of human remains.

### **3.3 Collections Management**

- 3.3.1 All human remains are documented on Modes, the NMS Collections Management System.
- 3.3.2 Each skeleton or specimen will have its own packaging clearly labelled.
- 3.3.3 Teaching collections and material on display should be individually marked as they are at risk of becoming separated from their labelled packaging.

## **4. PUBLIC DISPLAY AND USE OF IMAGES**

### **4.1 Display**

- 4.1.1 NMS considers that there is a strong educational value and high level of public interest in displays featuring human remains and currently include human remains in its displays.
- 4.1.2 The display of remains in certain contexts can provide opportunities for learning about and understanding past lives, cultures, beliefs and practices. Careful thought will always be given to the reasons for and context in which remains are displayed.
- 4.1.3 The potential sensitivities of both source communities and potential audiences must be actively considered when human remains – and artefacts incorporating human remains or tissues – are used for display.
- 4.1.4 Consideration will also be given to how to prepare visitors to view remains in NMS exhibitions and permanent displays, and to warn those who may not wish to see them.
- 4.1.5 In line with the DCMS guidance, NMS will display remains so as to avoid people coming across them unawares.
- 4.1.6 Human remains that have been identified as particularly sensitive will not normally be displayed or made available for display, though requests may be considered in exceptional cases.

## **4.2 Use of Images**

- 4.2.1 Images of human remains in NMS collections used in press and on digital media (including NMS websites and social media) will be accompanied by appropriate information and interpretation.
- 4.2.2 Use of images will be respectful of the nature of the material.
- 4.2.3 NMS will not normally allow its human remains to be photographed or filmed for external media purposes. However, the relevant Curator will consider requests with the Senior Curator (Norwich only) and Collections Development Manager, who will consult with the Head of NMS if necessary.

## **5 ACCESS AND EDUCATIONAL USE**

### **5.1 Handling Collections**

- 5.1.1 NMS Learning teams have access to un-accessioned handling collection of human remains which they endeavour to make available to school teachers and students in directed sessions.
- 5.1.2 These collections comprise a small number of osteological specimens.
- 5.1.3 Overall responsibility for this collection rests with one member of Learning staff to ensure procedures are followed.

### **5.2 Storage of Handling Collections**

- 5.2.1 When not in use, handling collections are stored securely away from public areas.
- 5.2.2 Human remains in the handling collection are stored in conditions to reduce deterioration and are regularly condition checked.

### **5.3 Use of Handling Collections**

- 5.3.1 Expertise: Handling collections shall only be overseen by members of staff who have been trained in proper handling and care of this type of material.
- 5.3.2 Ethics: The human remains will not be used during any activity which could be construed as disrespectful.
- 5.3.3 All participants will be informed of the contents of the collection prior to viewing.
- 5.3.4 Handling: the collection will always be handled using appropriate protection such as nitrile gloves.
- 5.3.5 Risk: A risk assessment should be completed when using the collection with groups in any NMS museum.

## **6 RESEARCH**

- 6.1 Anyone wishing to use human remains in NMS collections for research purposes, including requests for supply of samples, must give details of the reason and method of research in writing.
- 6.2 Applications will be considered by the relevant Curator and will be presented at NMS Collections Committee who will be guided by the DCMS guidance in making their decision.
- 6.3 Access to remains will be provided under close supervision.

## **7. CONTACTS**

- Head of Norfolk Museums, Shirehall, Market Avenue, Norwich NR1 3JQ.
- Enquiries can be sent to the Collections Management Department at: [collections.management@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:collections.management@norfolk.gov.uk).