



# **Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery**

## **CARE OF HUMAN REMAINS POLICY**

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### May 2022

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# 1 Introduction

Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery is a public museum that has a duty to care for important parts of the heritage of the area. The collection now totals c. 200,000 items, amassed over nearly 130 years. The management of this collection, and additions to it in line with PMAG Collection Development Policy, is a prime function of the service. It is both an opportunity and a responsibility.

Our mission:

To work hand in hand with others to preserve, shape and celebrate the heritage of Peterborough and its people, creating opportunities and experiences that remind people of what makes the city so special.

Collecting the heritage of the Peterborough area helps create:

- A focus of knowledge and understanding for the areas development and achievements,
- Therefore, a focus for pride, a sense of place and community identity for the people living in the Peterborough area,
- An education resource for all ages
- An attraction for tourists.

The Heritage service enriches lives by inspiring people and communities to engage with and learn about the past through our unique venues and collections and by preserving and safeguarding our heritage for the future.

Human remains have a unique status within museum collections. They have the potential to make a contribution to the public good, through research, teaching and, in appropriate cases, display. In many instances, they also have a personal, cultural, symbolic, spiritual or religious significance to individuals and, or, groups. This places a special responsibility on those museums that hold them.

Whilst there is widespread popular and scientific support for the holding of human remains in museums, it is recognised that historically, some human remains were obtained in circumstances that may not meet current best practice. At the same time, PMAG recognises that certain human remains are now regarded with specific cultural sensitivity. In response to this, the research and display value of human remains will be considered alongside the wishes of genealogical descendants and cultural custodians where relevant.

## 2 Human Remains Definition

PMAG uses the definition of Human Remains as given in the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, (DCMS, 2005):

“-the bodies, and the parts of bodies 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 the 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 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, included within this definition is that of artworks composed of human bodily fluids and soft tissue.”

PMAG follows the Human Tissue Act, (HT Act, 2004) definition of “Relevant Material”,

“Relevant material

1. In this Act, “relevant material” means material, other than gametes, which consists of or includes human cells.
2. In this Act, references to relevant material from a human body do not include—
  - a. embryos outside the human body, or
  - b. hair and nail from the body of a living person.”

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

### 3 Guidance and Legislation

This policy has been developed using the recommendations of the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, (DCMS, 2005), Guidance for the Best Practice for the Treatment of Human Remains Excavated from Christian Burial Grounds in England, (APABE, 2017), Spectrum 5.0, (CT, 2017), Standards and Guidance in the Care of Archaeological Collections, (SMA, 2020), the British Association of Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology Code of Practice, (BABAO, 2019), and the Museums Association Code of Ethics for Museums, (MA, 2016).

Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery will follow the legal frameworks as set out in the Human Tissue Act, (HTA, 2004), the Human Tissue Authority Code of Practice and Standards, (HTA, 2017), the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act, 2003, and other legislation relevant to acquisition.

### 4 Inventory of Collection

PMAG holds over 500 human remains within its collections and will continue to compile and maintain an inventory in accordance with the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, (DCMS, 2005). Human remains retained in the PMAG collections have been acquired almost exclusively through archaeological intervention within the East of England, and includes human skeletal material from the prehistoric through to the early medieval period.

#### 4.1 Statement of Intention

At the time of writing, an inventory of the Human Remains within PMAG collections can be requested by contacting the museum at [museum@peterboroughlimited.co.uk](mailto:museum@peterboroughlimited.co.uk). It is the intention of PMAG to make this inventory freely and publicly accessible via the PMAG website by the date of this documents renewal.

## 5 Acquisition

PMAG will acquire human remains responsibly and ethically in accordance with our Collections Development Policy and Human Remains Policy.

Acquisitions of human remains will be made if the museum is satisfied that the remains can be held in a lawful manner, that provenance has been clearly established, that there is no suspicion of illicit trade, and where the acquisition of the remains offers a potential value to the museum or the wider scientific community.

As stated within the PMAG Collections Development Policy, PMAG does not rule out the acquisition of human remains under 100 years old. 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.

PMAG will only acquire human remains post-dating 2004, where valid written consent for storage and public display has been granted by the deceased and only after proper consideration by the governing body of the museum and where appropriate under the consultation of expert advice.

## 6 De-accessioning

PMAG will ensure that the de-accessioning of human remains is conducted responsibly, with reference to the legal, ethical and professional principles and procedures set out in the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums (DCMS, 2005) and in accordance with the PMAG Collections Development Policy.

The decision to dispose of human remains from the collections will be taken by the museum management in conjunction with the governing body, only after full consideration. Expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities. The views of others served by the museum will also be sought.

### 6.1 Claims for Return or Reburial of Human Remains

Requests for the return, reburial, location or treatment of particular human remains will be resolved by the museum on a case by case basis and in accordance with our Collections Development Policy. Consideration will be given to the cultural and religious values of the claimant groups; the strength of their relationship to the remains; the cultural, spiritual and religious significance of the remains; the scientific, educational and historical importance of the material; and the treatment of the remains, now, in the past and their treatment should they be returned.

PMAG accepts that requests for the return, reburial, location or treatment of human remains may be made by genealogical descendants, cultural communities, religious or spiritual communities and nations. As guardians of the human remains within the PMAG collection, it is the responsibility of the Museum and the governing body to make decisions over the future of these human remains. When dealing with requests for the return, reburial, location or treatment of human remains, PMAG will endeavour to do so by engaging in constructive, open, equitable and transparent dialogue.

All claims for the return, reburial, location or treatment of human remains will be clearly and openly recorded and communicated.

## 7 Loans

PMAG may consider the loan of human remains for display, research or educational purposes.

To safeguard the human remains retained by PMAG, the loan of human remains will only be considered where the proposed loan is in accordance with PMAG policies, and where the borrowing institution can satisfy the legal, ethical, moral and practical considerations raised in the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums (DCMS, 2005) and other relevant guidance and legislation noted in this document.

PMAG will ensure that these considerations and standards are followed when requesting loans from other institutions.

## 8 Storage, Conservation and Collections Management

PMAG will ensure that human remains are retained in accordance with the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, (DCMS, 2005), and good museum practice.

Human remains retained by the museum, will be stored in a manner that is actively managed and monitored. Storage of human remains will meet the appropriate standards of security, access management and environment. The views of members of staff who do not wish to participate in any work directly involving the handling of human remains will be respected.

The areas where human remains are stored will be kept clean, secure and checked regularly for pests, damage, leaks and other potential threats. Appropriate health and safety regulations will be complied with and measures implemented.

Access to the human remains will be given to authorised staff and visitors with specific permissions under agreed supervisory arrangements. All acquisitions of human remains from archaeological intervention will be required to meet the standards as set out in PMAG Archaeological Archive Standards. The acquisition and storage of human remains from non-archaeological sources will be considered on a case by case basis and where relevant with expert advice will be sought to ensure compliance with accepted standards.

### 8.1 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.

Any preventative or remedial conservation of human remains, will be carried out by or supervised by an accredited conservator, trained and experienced in caring for biological materials and overseen by an osteologist, as per the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, (DCMS, 2005).

### 8.2 Collections Management

PMAG will follow all relevant guidance when managing the human remains retained by the museum. The guidance of peers and independent specialist bodies will be consulted where appropriate,

particularly where a request for the destructive sampling of human remains have been made. PMAG will follow the collections management standards as outlined in the Standards and Guidance in the Care of Archaeological Collections, (SMA, 2020), and all relevant guidance and accepted standards.

- Human remains will be stored in secure locations with controlled access.
- Human remains retained by PMAG will be under the responsibility of the Collections Manager.
- Where appropriate, descendants will be consulted on the management, care and use of human remains.
- PMAG will ensure that ethics and policy documents are publicly accessible and by request an inventory of human remains retained by PMAG will be provided.
- A research register will be maintained, where research is conducted in relation to human remains retained by PMAG.
- PMAG is an ACE accredited institution and will ensure that Spectrum standards are met.
- The human remains retained by PMAG will be audited annually, in whole or part, with at least one whole audit conducted bi-annually.
- Access for research will be transparently managed using a research request process and associated conditions and policies.
- PMAG recognises that human remains are a finite resource with which to understand past individuals, communities and diseases. Prior to destructive sampling, PMAG will ensure that the human remains to be sampled are recorded to a high level. Repeated sampling for the same research question will be avoided. A Memorandum of Understanding document will be required for samples being undertaken in external laboratories.
- PMAG will require that the unique identifiers for each of the genomic bank submissions by any laboratory undertaking sampling are shared with the museum.
- Collections data and images considered sensitive, including unique identifiers provided by laboratories will be subject to an ethical review and potential access restrictions.

## 9 Public Display

A survey undertaken by Historic England showed that the curation, research and display of archaeological human remains is expected and supported by the public. PMAG will ensure that human remains are only used for display where valid and robust justification for the display can be made. PMAG will consider human remains for public display for the purpose of educating medical practitioners, to educate people in science and history, to explain burial practices, to bring people into physical contact with people from the past, and to encourage reflection.

PMAG will ensure that any human remains displayed provide a material contribution to the interpretations aims and that the contribution provided by the remains could not be made equally effectively through other means. Where human remains are displayed sufficient explanatory materials will be provided to give context and interpretation, as per the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, (DCMS, 2005).

## 10 Use, Access, Research and Education

Staff, researchers and visitors will be reminded of their ethical obligations and will be expected to follow the conditions and policies as outlined in the Research Request Form, Human Remains Research Request Form and Destructive Sampling of Human Remains Research Request Form. Staff, researchers



and visitors will be expected to also follow the relevant principles of this policy and the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, (DCMS, 2005).

No images or other media of human remains will be made available online or used in marketing or social media by PMAG. Images and other media of human remains for research and education purposes may be considered upon request and the completion of and subject to the relevant documentation and PMAG policies.

PMAG recognises the contribution of destructive or intrusive sampling on our understanding of past individuals, communities and diseases. All requests for sampling will be considered on a case by case basis and where appropriate with the consultation of relevant subject specialists.

Access to human remains retained by PMAG will be given to authorised staff and visitors with specific permissions under agreed supervisory arrangements. Access for research will be transparently managed using a research request process and associated conditions and policies.

Public engagement and education activities that involve human remains will provide visitors/students with a choice not to view human remains. The beliefs and wishes of individuals will be respected by PMAG. Where possible handling/demonstration activities will be undertaken with the use of casts or replicas to reduce damage and avoid the risk of theft.

Permission for the photography of human remains for research, educational and general museum use will be clearly reasoned and transparently documented. Where appropriate the views of cultural communities and genealogical descendants will be considered where known.

## **Acknowledgements**

This policy has been compiled using the guidance outlined in section 3, and draws upon best practice in the published policies of other UK museums holding human remains and the guidance of relevant subject specialist networks and UK and EU organisations.

## Resources

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

Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Burials in England (2017) Guidance for Best Practice for the Treatment of Human Remains Excavated from Christian Burial Grounds in England. APABE.

Collections Trust (2017) Spectrum 5.0. CT.

Society for Museum Archaeology (2020) Standards and Guidance in the Care of Archaeological Collections. SMA.

Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Burials in England (2013) Science and the Dead: A guideline for the destructive sampling of archaeological human remains for scientific analysis. APABE

British Association of Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology (2019) Code of Practice. BABAO.

Museums Association (2016) Code of Ethics for Museums, MA.

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