**School of History, Archaeology and Religion, Cardiff University**

**Policy for the Care, Treatment and Storage of Archaeological Human Remains**

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**i. Introduction**

The School of History, Archaeology and Religion, Cardiff University, has developed a formal policy with regards to the appropriate care and treatment of archaeological human remains and has similarly set aside storage space specifically for human remains in the final bank of shelves in the ground floor storage room.

The School’s human remains store is not yet fully aligned with accepted practice. Yet the School is firmly committed to the ethical handling of Human Remains, acknowledging limitations and constantly endeavouring to improve. Consequently, a set of guidelines specifically describing best-practice storage and record-keeping is attached, in hopes of producing outcomes which are both realistic and ethical. These guidelines will be used in concert with pre-existing guidelines for working with human remains.

**ii. Laws, Standards and Guidelines**

The School has adopted the relevant guidelines in line with the published recommendations of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, DCMS, 2005), the joint recommendations of the Church of England and Historic England (Guidance for the Best Practice for the treatment of Human Remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England, second edition, 2017), as well as the Guidelines on Management of Human Remains (1991) as adopted by the Museum Ethnographer Group (MEG) and the Human Rights Act (1998) and Human Tissue Act (2004). Examples from major museums and universities were also consulted in the development of this policy and also contain key ethical principles of the Vermillion Accord on Human Remains (<http://worldarch.org/code-of-ethics/>), adopted by the World Archaeological Congress in 1989, which are as follows:

* Respect for the mortal remains of the dead shall be accorded to all, irrespective of origin, race, religion, nationality, custom and tradition.
* Respect for the wishes of the dead concerning disposition shall be accorded whenever possible, reasonable and lawful, when they are known or can be reasonably inferred.
* Respect for the wishes of the local community and of relatives or guardians of the dead shall be accorded whenever possible, reasonable and lawful.
* Respect for the scientific research value of skeletal, mummified and other human remains (including fossil hominids) shall be accorded when such value is demonstrated to exist.
* Agreement on the disposition of fossil, skeletal, mummified and other remains shall be reached by negotiation on the basis of mutual respect for the legitimate concerns of communities for the proper disposition of their ancestors, as well as the legitimate concerns of science and education.
* The express recognition that the concerns of various ethnic groups, as well as those of science are legitimate and to be respected, will permit acceptable agreements to be reached and honored.

In view of the recent revival of public interest in the ethical issues surrounding ancient human remains and repatriation, it is advised that this policy should be subject to periodic review every four years (as is the British Association of Biological Anthropologists and Osteoarchaeologists Code of Ethics, 2010) to ensure that it meets the needs for practitioners and is in line with the current accepted published guidelines. An appropriate member of the School staff will be assigned responsibility for the maintenance and review of this policy with formal approval resting with the chair of the School Ethics Committee.

**iii. Definition of “Human Remains”**

1. The term “Human Remains” is generally, though not exclusively, understood to mean the “*bodies, and 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 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”* (DCMS, 2005)*.* The remains of other hominids who are the predecessors of *Homo sapiens sapiens* shall not be defined as “Human Remains”. Similarly, the remains of hominids that are closely related to humans, but are contemporary (e.g. chimpanzees) will also not be referred to as “Human Remains”.
2. For the purpose of these guidelines, “Human Remains” are defined as any and all full or partial human skeletons and/or teeth and/or pathology samples. Also included are associated grave goods, if their remaining with the body is a religious or cultural requirement, as is required by the DCMS Guidelines.
3. Worked human remains are also classified as “Human Remains”, as defined by the Museum Ethnographers Group. In accordance with the Human Tissue Act (2004), nails and hair are not included in the term “Human Remains”, whether they were retrieved or worked before or after death.
4. Artefacts from sites where human remains may be, but which have no identifiable fragments of those remains, will be treated as artefacts and not as “Human Remains”. Mineralized bone fragments shall likewise not be treated as “Human Remains”, despite the possibility of microscopic traces of human remains.

**iv. Definition of Ethical Storage of Human Remains**

Cardiff University cannot own human remains, but as the temporary keepers, burden is placed upon us to ethically house all human remains. Not only while working with human remains, but also while designing the store and placing the remains in storage, we must be mindful that these are the remains of people who once lived and who deserve to be respected in death. This respect must include not only the storage and physical treatment of the remains, but should extend to images and related grave goods, among other elements not strictly addressed in these guidelines.

**v. Repatriation and de-accessioning**

It should also be noted that this policy is not intended to address the legislative and/or ethical issues surrounding human remains less than 100 years in provenance which may be, or come to be, in the custody of the School. In this case, treatment of such remains is dictated directly by the legislative procedure outlined in the Human Tissue Act (2004).

Guardianship shall be established as part of accepting human remains for storage and shall be documented both in the stores and as part of the University’s accessioning process. As Cardiff University acts as the temporary custodian of human remains, any requests for repatriation shall be passed on to the guardian of said human remains.

For the same reason, Cardiff University will not de-accession any human remains; at the end of the storage tenure, they will be returned to their guardian.

**vi. Naming Conventions**

Most institutes producing best practice guidelines specifically address naming conventions, an area which has raised ethical issues in recent years. While it is understood that giving human remains friendly or casual names may add to perceptions of human-ness, resulting in more mindful treatment and attitudes, doing so can be perceived as disrespectful to the individual whose remains are being worked with.

Cardiff University recognizes the psychological value in naming human remains, but the official policy is that human remains should not be named unless absolutely necessary. If naming is required for any reason, it should be neutral, or using the site code and find number.

**vii. Storage, Conservation and Assemblage Management (Record-keeping policy)**

In order to maintain retrievable information about the human remains held in storage, a bound notebook will be maintained by the shelves set aside for human remains. In that notebook, the following information will be entered for every separate collection of human remains and associated artefacts: site and context number, contact name, official guardian, shelf number for storage, number of boxes and number of individuals and any other pertinent notes.

Staff or students seeking to store archaeological human remains at the School storage facilities are required to provide a statement with details outlining their permission to excavate, export and/or sample the material in question on the school ethics form. This statement should also contain any and all information regarding post-conservation arrangements including information on reburial, repatriation and place of deposit. In addition, researchers and/or staff intending to carry out research involving archaeological human remains at the School are first required to complete and submit an ethics approval form outlining the type and quantity of material intended for research, as well as any specific ethical considerations regarding the material in question.

The use of human skeletal material for teaching and research purposes means that some and/or parts thereof of the human remains assemblage under the care of the School are stored in areas outside of the main ground floor store for ease of access. In addition, inter-school research has also led to the short-term loan of archaeological human skeletal material from the School to relevant specialist schools, for example the Cardiff University School of Dentistry. In such cases security and access to these human remains is monitored by appropriate members of staff.

**viii. Types of Human Remains curated by the School**

The School may hold a number of human skeletal assemblages ranging in provenance, size and form. These assemblages may consist of both cremated and unburnt skeletal material derived from a variety of burial contexts and representing both adult and non-adult individuals. An inventory of all human remains currently stored at the School will be constantly updated and stored in the human remains store. This list will be updated as and when is necessary as part of the periodic review of this policy.

**ix. Conclusion and Final Policy Statement**

This policy has been developed in acknowledgement of the unique status that all human remains occupy in curated archaeological assemblages and collections as the physical remains of once-living people. The retention of archaeological human remains for research and teaching purposes is recognized by the School as being of great importance to the furtherance of knowledge of the past as well as being of wider scientific potential for public benefit. Simultaneously, the School endeavors to ensure that any and all research involving archaeological human remains in its custody will be treated with due consideration of the complex ethical issues surrounding the use of human remains in research as well as an awareness of and sensitivity to communities who are genealogically descendent from the human remains under study. With this in mind students who may be given the opportunity to study archaeological human remains under the School custody will be suitably briefed on the relevant ethical issues regarding research involving human remains. The School seeks to use replacement copies of human material for teaching whenever possible and practical and if teaching or research activities require the use of human remains, students and staff will be given the opportunity to opt out of working with this material.

Cardiff University recognizes that the presence of human remains is a sensitive subject for many individuals who may need to enter the store-room. For security reasons, no signs shall be posted externally that explicitly note the presence of human remains and no signs shall be posted when human remains are being examined or moved. There will be a sign on the end of the back (?) of the shelves, identifying them as being reserved solely for human remains.

The room shall be designated an amber zone with limited access and signposted as such. Human remains shall always be covered when being moved to or from the store room.

It is the overall aim of this policy to ensure that all archaeological human remains in the custody of the School are treated with the utmost respect and care and to ensure preservation of the osteoarchaeological record to the highest achievable standards in keeping with Cardiff University’s mission to “pursue research, learning and teaching of international distinction and impact”.

**Research Ethics Committee, SHARE**

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