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MRes Thesis.*

***Towards a multidisciplinary practice for human remains: the  
conservation, collection, and display of human remains and objects  
made from them. ©***

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## **Abstract**

*Towards a multidisciplinary practice for human remains: the conservation, collection, and display of human remains and objects made from them.*

This research discussion examines the breadth and complexity of a unique strand of museum collections, artefacts that often cross boundaries of classification, being defined as both material culture and human remains. It explores some of the controversial methods in which collections of human remains were amassed as well as the decision-making processes involved in exhibiting them. The care, collection and display of human remains is shown to involve a wide spectrum of disciplines and stakeholders, including minority religious organisations, local communities, indigenous groups, anthropologists, archaeologists and museums.

Inspired by my work within the conservation department of Norfolk Archaeology and Museums Service, specifically the conservation treatment and preparation of a ceremonial Tibetan apron constructed from human bone, the role that conservators can play in the treatment of human remains is investigated. My research reveals that in order to fulfil policies and guidelines, which tend to adopt the culturally defined, cover-all stance of ‘respect’ as the method of treatment for all human remains, a multidisciplinary practice is vital. Within this discussion I argue that a multidisciplinary practice allows for an inclusive, progressive and pluralistic approach to the treatment of human remains.

## Preface

This research project was conducted on a part-time basis over a period of two years whilst working for Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, initially in the position of Conservation Technician and later as Assistant Conservation Officer. Previously my background had focused on archaeology, specifically excavation, illustration and exhibition.

My interest in my chosen research topic began when a colleague and I conducted a condition assessment of an object held by the Norfolk Regimental Museum, destined to go on display in Norwich Castle Museum's proposed decorative arts gallery in late 2008. The object in question was the Tibetan ceremonial apron made from human bone, which features prominently in this thesis. During the conservation treatment of this object I began researching not only the object's story but the many issues that surrounded it, especially those relating to the object's material composition.

In 2001 I graduated with a BA(Hons) in Archaeology, Anthropology and History of Art from the University of East Anglia. I chose to return to the University to conduct my research, as my previous studies had given me a great appreciation for multidisciplinary evaluation and analysis. The conspicuous absence of literature relating to the the treatment of human remains, particularly conservation related literature, was one of the factors that persuaded me to pursue my research within the formal academic environment, as it appeared I could make a valuable contribution to the debate. The majority of this research project was conducted within libraries and on the internet. Many of the references I examined while researching my thesis were works by non-museum professionals such as the pagan association Honouring the Ancient Dead, The Astru Folk Assembly and members of the public who had contributed to online forums which were debating some of the issues surrounding the exhibition of human remains. A great deal of my research was also spent looking at museum collections. In some circumstances this meant examining databases, in others, looking through boxes of human bones in large bulk archaeology storage facilities.

Although I have, at times, been quite shocked by the poor treatment of human remains, I

strongly believe that they hold an important and valuable place in the the study of the past, and that with proper interpretation and thoughtful presentation, they should be allowed to be on public display. My aim whilst writing this thesis was to remain as objective as possible, although I am aware that my role as a museum professional potentially limits such intentions.

This research thesis is not a technical or statistical analysis of human remains and objects made from them. The purpose of my research is to offer up matters for discussion with the aim of moving the debate forward, towards a point where new considerations can be made and standards can be improved. I aim to show the importance of multidisciplinary practice and cross-disciplinary awareness. For example, my exploration into the history of human remains collection, and some of the issues relating to their display, is intended to show the breadth and complexities of the related debates and the importance of all involved, whether archaeologist, anthropologist or conservator, being aware of such debates. What I offer in my chapter on the conservation of human remains and objects made from them is a suggested method of greater fulfilment of policy by implementing a more respectful treatment of such material.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

This research project was inspired by my work within the conservation department of Norfolk Archaeology and Museums Service, specifically the conservation treatment and preparation of a ceremonial Tibetan bone apron, for display in Norwich Castle Museum's *Art of Living* gallery in 2008. Prior to this treatment I conducted investigations into the origin, use, and the methods and materials used in the construction of the apron. Whilst researching this fascinating artefact I became aware that it presented a series of ethical considerations beyond those of standard conservation treatment, particularly because the apron is constructed from human bone.

During this preliminary investigation I found that there was a limited body of literature relating to the dilemmas surrounding the history, collection, storage and display of human remains. The majority of existing works focused on scientific analysis or debates about repatriation or reburial occurring in the US or Australia; few related to the treatment of human remains in the UK and even fewer addressed the topic of conservation. What I did find was a plethora of different policies relating to the treatment of human remains. What these policies defined as human remains often differed and many institutions seemed to be publishing their own guidelines and codes of conduct. The issues discussed in these documents relate to complex and extremely varied material. The resulting policies and guidelines often avoid forming concise conclusions, tending to adopt the culturally defined, cover-all stance of 'respect' as the method of treatment for all human remains.

The intention of this research discussion is to highlight the breadth and complexity of a unique strand of museum collections, artefacts that often cross boundaries of classification, being defined as both material culture and human remains. Although this discussion will not be able to address all the issues surrounding human remains, it will explore how some collections of human remains were amassed, and how the care and collection of human remains involves a wide spectrum of disciplines and stakeholders, including minority religious organisations, local communities,

indigenous groups, anthropologists, archaeologists and of course, museums.

My perspective on the treatment of human remains is greatly informed by my work in a museum environment, specifically that of conservation, and therefore I shall be exploring some of the decision-making processes and issues involved in the display of Egyptian mummies, European bog bodies and the Tibetan bone apron which inspired this investigation. I shall also be discussing the role of the conservator in the treatment of human remains. This will involve an exploration into the discipline's potential to assist in the fulfilment of policy aims and guidelines, but it will also highlight that conservation has often been kept at a distance in debates surrounding the treatment of human remains.

This research project aims to show that, to address any of the ethical, historical and cultural dilemmas involved in the collection, retention, display, and particularly the conservation, of human remains and objects constructed from them, those involved must be informed from a variety of perspectives and disciplines.

The primary methodology behind this research project is based on synthesis and critique of current literature and museum practice. Although there is a limited body of work relating to the subject in question, by critically examining past exhibitions, specific museum collections, and archaeologically excavated human remains, I hope to construct an expansive investigation that goes beyond the regularly cited examples. The choice of which examples to focus on or include often constituted the most problematic aspect of the writing process. The constraints of time and scale meant that some issues that I intended to address during the research period of this project, had to be discarded. For example, the historical and contemporary struggles of Australian aborigines to claim ancestral remains are not extensively addressed in this thesis. Such choices were not simply influenced by the availability of source material but rather by my desire to explore how different disciplines had reacted to such material. This led to my focus on Native American issues, over those

of Australian aborigines, as the disciplines of conservation and osteoarchaeology in particular are more integrated within the archaeological and museological practices of The United States.

This thesis does not claim to directly answer the many questions surrounding human remains collections but it is an attempt at providing a useful and progressive approach to these issues, as well as giving examples of how policies and varied opinions could be addressed and enacted. I hope that this research project serves to contribute to the many debates surrounding human remains, but I would also hope to encourage conservation professionals to involve themselves in the debate, in ways they had not previously considered, for the benefit of all involved.

## Chapter 1. **The history of human remains collecting.**

### **Introduction**

When discussing the collection, display and treatment of human remains, the chequered history of such practices can never be ignored. Human remains activities permeate contested cultural, chronological and ethical areas, making the debate somewhat diffuse and therefore difficult to examine as a cohesive subject. The various stakeholders who have entered the debate have generally done so armed with strong opinions and arguments that connect the past and the future in engaging ways. Those that arm their arguments with tales of past practices can paint an emotive and at times disturbing picture of crimes against cultures both living and dead. The first section of this chapter will explore the beginnings of human remains collections.

One inescapable dimension is that of the science of racial difference, a discipline that spurred the feverish collecting of the 19th century and functioned as both justification and fuel for many of the atrocities that were conducted. Many theories have been developed to explain the human remains collecting practices of the past, some of which will be touched upon here such as the extinction narrative, which portrayed the collecting of human remains of indigenous Americans and Australians as the last chance to collect evidence of disappearing peoples.

The history of the treatment of human remains collection has had a cultural, political and economic impact on both colonial and indigenous society and continues to influence policy and the designation of what is often defined as cultural property. Its impact can also be felt in the development and analysis of identity. This is often most stark when those seeking to construct or re-claim their identity are subjected indigenous peoples like the Australian aborigines or Native Americans, but other minority groups also seek identity from human remains such as modern pagans, druids and white interest groups. At the core of many of these arguments and interests is the perception of chronology, a theme that runs throughout the whole of this discussion as it relates to

an individual's or group's relationship to the remains of the dead.

### **The science of racial difference**

The science of comparative anatomy emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century. The pioneers of this new discipline were Dutch anatomist and artist Petrus Camper, English surgeon-anatomist John Hunter and German Professor of Medicine, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Camper noticed that artistic representations of Africans depicted them as black Europeans when he had observed that there were underlying differences in cranial form and structure. Though he was not the first to observe cranial distinctions, Camper was the first to develop and employ a systematic quantitative methodology to distinguish between cranial types. He is also responsible for developing what may have been the first tool of craniometry, a device which held skulls in a specific position so as to facilitate their measurement. Using the measurement of facial angles to discern the degree of facial slope of the cranium, Camper arranged humans and animals on a hierarchical scale (Figure 1).

When in addition to the skull of a Negro, I had procured one of a Calmuck, and had placed that of an ape contiguous to them both, I observed that a line drawn along the forehead and upper lip indicated this difference in national physiognomy; and also pointed out the degree of similarity between a Negro and the ape. By sketching some of these features upon a horizontal plane, I obtained the lines which mark the countenance, with their different angles. When I made these lines to incline forwards, I obtained the face of an antique, backwards, of a Negro; still more backwards, the line marks the ape, a dog, a snipe etc.

This discovery formed the basis of my edifice (Camper 1794:9, quoted in Fforde 2004:11).

By the mid-nineteenth century this methodology had become the 'most frequent means of explaining the gradation of the species' (Haller 1971:11). Camper's writings remained creationist in

perspective, ignoring contemporary theories that black people were the product of white people interbreeding with ‘ourangs and pongos’ (Camper 1794:32, in Fforde 2004:11) or that racial differences were stages of development from monster to man. Camper, in a very forward thinking manner, deemed environmental factors to be the primary reason for God to have constructed racial differences.

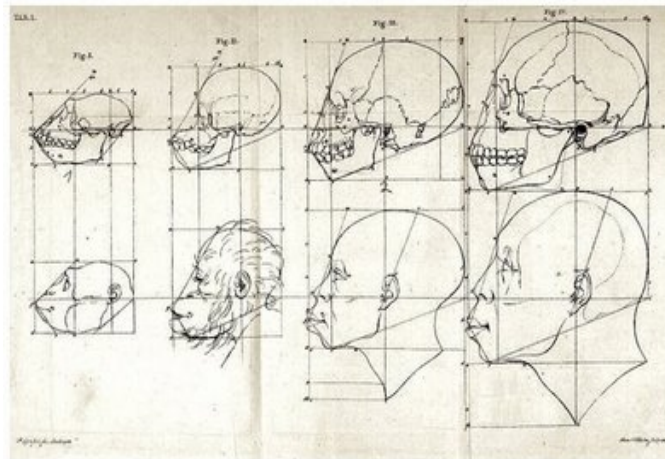


Figure 1. Illustration of facial angles from Petrus Camper's 1792 *Über den natürlichen Unterschied der Gesichtszüge*. ([http://www.historyofphrenology.org.uk/other\\_physiogs.htm](http://www.historyofphrenology.org.uk/other_physiogs.htm)).

To facilitate his research, Camper arranged public dissections in Amsterdam and began to collect skulls and human remains from across the world - Europe, Africa, China and as far afield as Madagascar. He also acquired an African human foetus and the skins of Italians, Moors and a Dutch woman to use in his lectures and studies. The colouring of the African foetus was significant to his ideas as he noted the colour of the skin was not black, an observation that highlighted his monogenism argument that humanity was all part of one genus.

Collections of European human remains were relatively common during Camper's time, collected for exotic or novelty value, often part of cabinets of curiosity or the so-called 'Wunderkammer'. The scarcity of non European remains is highlighted by the fact that even though he was writing and making anatomical comments about the Chinese, he had seen only one living Chinese person and had only one Chinese skull (Stocking 1968: 29). Camper's collection was

greatly surpassed in scale by his British contemporary, John Hunter. Hunter's collection, which included crania from the Caribbean, Africa, New Zealand and Australia (including one from Tasmania), was eventually bought by the British Government in 1799. In 1806 the collection was moved to what is now the Royal College of Surgeons of England where a museum was built to accommodate it. This museum was the core of the College collections, which by the end of the nineteenth century contained the largest anthropological collection of human remains in Britain.

The first collection that aimed to encompass the entire racial spectrum was gathered in the 'Golgotha' at the University of Göttingen. This collection was started by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in 1770 and contained over eighty skulls. Blumenbach's taxonomy was based on different races emerging from a common primordial stock, with white being the 'original' skin colour and all others being a denigration or divergence from white Caucasoid.

Around the end of the eighteenth century, when these scientific or institutionalised collections of human remains began to emerge, debates surrounding racial divergence, as observed through the study of human remains, were fixated on monogenism vs polygenism. Whereas researchers like Camper believed in a monogenist view, many believed in polygenism, arguing that race differences were too great to have been produced by environmental factors and that, as separate species, the races must have been created already adapted to their specific habitats. Such views were exemplified by the work of physician Charles White, who became famous for his discovery that the 'Negro forearm' was longer, in relation to the upper arm, than that of the European (1799: 134, cited in Fforde 2004:16). White's work was essentially based on the premise that the white European was the most removed from 'brute creation' being 'the most beautiful of the human race'. Works such as those by White, Blumenbach and Camper may have had differing theoretical stances, but they were all clear in their assertion that, whether separate species or not, white Europeans reigned supreme.

The polygenist view portrayed the black races as a species that would soon die out without help from the white races; this help was predominantly provided through slavery, a condition that was viewed as naturally suiting them. South Carolina physician Josiah Nott, a slave owner who lectured on the subject of ‘Niggerology’ (Gould 1981: 69), was a particularly enthusiastic advocate of the use of polygenism as a scientific rationale for slavery.

Nott was making use of the data collected by Samuel Morton, who by the 1830s had calculated the brain capacity of the skulls in his collection at the Pennsylvania Medical College. Morton aimed to collect as many skulls as possible, accumulating thousands of examples from across the world via a network of friends and associates. Morton's collection was most certainly the largest collection of anthropological human remains in the world at the time. Morton decided on a hierarchical scale, with Caucasians at the top and the Australian aborigine at the bottom. As brain size was mistakenly agreed to be an indication of intelligence, Morton’s cranial capacity research was widely accepted and proved extremely useful to those who benefited from scientific proof of black inferiority, for justifying slavery.

Morton was an advocate of phrenology, a pseudoscience developed in the later years of the eighteenth century by Franz Gall and popularized by Johann Spurzheim. The theory behind phrenology was that the brain was made up of a set of separate organs, the contours of which would alter the size and form of the skull, which could be interpreted to determine mental character. Phrenology was a populist science that became quite prolific during the early nineteenth century with ‘twenty-nine phrenology societies in Britain alone by 1836’ (Cooter 1984: 88). This pseudoscience utilised both human remains and a great many replicated skulls and casts, many of which are still held in modern institutions. Norwich Castle Museum has a collection of such material that is regularly used by the museum's education department and interpretation team. The collection includes casts of people with disabilities labelled simply as ‘Idiot girl’ or ‘Idiot boy’ (Fig.



2) or another known as ‘Callender, a Hydrocephalic Patient’(Fig 3). The museum, a former prison, also houses a collection of casts taken from the criminally executed dead as well as a phrenologically marked out skull and several casts such as the ‘Cunning Debtor’ and ‘Celebrated Buffoon at Vienna’ connected to Johann Spurzheim. Phrenology developed a certain notoriety early on, as many of the specimens chosen for study came from individuals deemed to have deviant personalities or physical disorders. This meant that amongst the great and the good, the famous and the intellectual, the criminal and the mentally ill also featured heavily in such collections.



Figure 2. A cast of the head of an Idiot boy. Figure 3. Callender, a Hydrocephalic patient (photographs courtesy of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service).

Phrenology provided another market for human remains from across the world particularly because it often relied on the physical presence of the ‘head’ for assessment. This market spread further than institutions of learning to institutions of medicine, in particular those treating mental illness. Additionally phrenology proved to be more accessible than previous analytical methodologies and allowed amateurs to partake in the study and collection of phrenological specimens with publications such as Stackpool E.O’Dell’s (1899) *Heads and How to Read Them* proving very popular.

Phrenology turned out to be a short-lived phenomenon and became increasingly marginalised by the scientific community by the mid-nineteenth century. The collections gathered

by phrenologists of course remained and were often readily acquired by anatomy institutions, private collectors and those interested in anthropological study. By the mid-nineteenth century, interested parties had amassed huge collections of human remains from around the globe for scientific study, pseudoscience or curiosity. In Britain, there were extensive collections in the anatomy departments of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh; in the Royal College of Surgeons of England; in the British Museum (Natural History); and in the Army Medical College at Fort Pitt, as well as various private collections.

The study of human diversity via skeletal remains had developed at a rapid pace during the first half of the nineteenth century but in 1859 the publication of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution increased the desire to study human remains even further. To Darwin the 'primitive' races were not the degenerate offshoots of the Caucasians or separate species, but rather humans on a different step of the evolutionary ladder. This view kept many non-European peoples in a subordinate position and accentuated the idea that they were, due to natural selection, likely to become extinct due to competition with other races. This was deemed as being the process that had occurred in Tasmania and was continuing to occur in central Australia, New Zealand and other colonised countries. Darwinism freed physical anthropologists from the Creationist mode of thought and allowed polygenists to assimilate the 'survival of the fittest' into their racist models of innate inferiority. It also gave another new reason to collect human remains: the search for evidence of human evolution had begun, a search that started with the perceived lower races.

The late nineteenth century saw the arrival in the UK of human soft tissue from Australia. Human brains were being analysed at Cambridge University in order to prove the stunted intellectual development of the Aboriginal population. The aims of such research was not to prove what was already an accepted fact, the inferiority of these indigenous people, but to examine how this inferiority was biologically manifest. Cambridge University's Dr W.L.H Duckworth was one of

many scholars to assert that the specimens he studied belonged to what he described as ‘full-bloods’ who would show the ‘pure’ characteristics of their race. One group prized for its ‘purity’ was also a group of people who were widely accepted to be the most primitive of all, the Tasmanians. The high value of Tasmanian human remains was also due to their scarcity as by the 1880s they had become classified as extinct. Though many aboriginal peoples saw themselves as Tasmanian long after this date, the colonial scientific community did not consider them as aboriginal to Tasmania, a debate that continues to haunt repatriation discussions today.

This period saw an increase in the scale and nature of collecting. New taxonomies were developing such as the ‘cephalic index’ which measured the ratio between the breadth of the skull and its length (Figure 4). These new systems also proved problematic as they did not always provide the desired result. If a skull's cephalic index was less than 75 it was termed long-headed or ‘dolichocephalic’; if over 80 it was round headed or ‘brachycephalic’, if between 75 and 80, it was intermediary or ‘mesocephalic’ (Stepan 1982: 97). This measurement was developed by Swedish anatomist Anders Retzius in 1844, who theorised that long-headed, more advanced Aryan dolichocephals were replacing round-headed, primitive brachycephals.

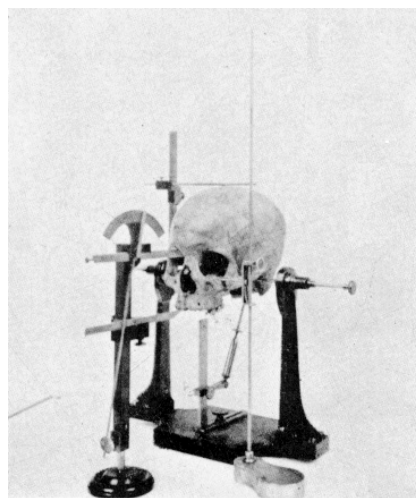


Figure 4. Device for calculating ‘cephalic index’ (from <http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Craniometry>).

Retzius had to alter his theories swiftly after discovering that many Nordic and Teutonic peoples shared the 'primitive' round heads of Africans and Australian aborigines. This was solved by simply adding another measurement, that of the elongation of the back of the skull. This example of data manipulation to reaffirm racial hierarchy was typical of the studies of the period and led to a graphic lack of standardisation in measurements and inconsistent and fickle systems of analysis.

The tenuous nature of such studies did not go unnoticed and during the latter half of the nineteenth century, racial science was discussed under a broader set of definitions with an onus on producing 'average' human types. This average, an attempt by physical anthropologists to deal with the 'confusing blend of modern races' (Topinard 1890: 442 cited in Stocking 1968: 58), was generally seen as only possible by increasing the quantity of specimens for study. This change was the result of the 'metric torrent' where the mass of measurements and physical anthropological research had weakened the 'fundamental underpinnings of the scientific conceptualisation of human difference' (Stocking 1968:163) as 'it could no longer be accepted with confidence that race was an empirical reality or that head form was an accurate indicator of human difference' (Fforde 2004:35). The search for 'human types' circumvented this issue by relegating the 'pure' races to extinction or ancient history and instead focusing on the average, and a belief that modern peoples held the key to understanding those of the past.

The early twentieth century saw a growing dissatisfaction with race science, its methodology and in some cases its ethics. It also saw tighter controls from the state being asserted on the study and collection of human remains. In 1911 'The First Universal Races Congress' was held at the University of London, where a thousand people from 50 nations convened to counter and critique the work of the eugenics movement. Among the prominent scientists and scholars in attendance were Americans W.E.B. DuBois and Franz Boas. Gustav Spiller, one of the Congress's founders wrote that 'We are then under the necessity of concluding that an impartial investigator would be

inclined to look upon the various important peoples of the world as, to all intents and purposes, essentially equal in intellect, enterprise, morality and physique' (1911:156).

In 1913 the Australian government introduced a proclamation prohibiting export of Aboriginal anthropological specimens. The birth of recognizable modern anthropology was also occurring at this time. Anthropologists such as Franz Boas were conducting research that asked different questions of quantitative data and published works that greatly impacted the debates surrounding the science of racial difference. In the early 1900s Boas conducted a study of head form on behalf of the United States Immigration Commission, stating that 'the old idea of absolute stability of human types must...evidently be given up, and with it the belief of the hereditary superiority of certain types over other' (Boas 1911:218 cited in Stocking 1974: 206).

The work of Franz Boas epitomised a desire by some scholars in the USA and UK to counter the growing socio-political ideologies of Nazi Germany. The lead up to World War Two served to consolidate anthropological opinion by aiming to discredit Nazi propaganda and racial doctrine. Writers such as Firth (1938:21) proposed that 'purity of race is a concept of political propaganda, not a scientific description of human groups today'. Post war, the impact of anthropological thought in the USA and UK was apparent in the 1950 UNESCO 'Statement by Experts on Race Problems', an effort to form an academic consensus on the issue. This statement propounded a monogenist view that 'mankind is one', justified by the absence of scientific proof that there was any innate hierarchy of the human species, intellectually or morally. Not only was the use of human remains to answer such questions deemed to provide no useful information but the questions being asked by the study of them were also becoming viewed as irrelevant. This meant that many collections of human remains were largely surplus to requirement.

Nevertheless, in many forms the science of racial difference continued well into the 1960s. Papers such as Coon's *The Origin of Races* (1962) still proposed many of the misconceived racist

assumptions, including the idea that cranial capacity related to intelligence. Unlike at the beginning of the century, the ideas scholars such as Coon were publishing were open to vigorous debate and highly criticised.

The relevance of these discussions continues today, not only because they continue to haunt the disciplines they influenced, such as anthropology and archaeology, but because many of these early theories are still referred to or causally noted as scientific proof in literature and on the internet by groups wishing to portray different ethnicities as inferior or distinct from their own race. White supremacists groups like the ‘Romanian National Vanguard’ claim that ‘Caucasoids are civilization builders, Mongoloids are civilization maintainers and Negroids are civilization destroyers’ and that ‘They [Negroids] have the smallest cranial size and lesser brain convolutions out of all human races’ (Romanian National Vanguard [online]). In modern times the now controversial and defunct data collected by past proponents of the science of racial difference has been used not only by racists but also by the minority groups most affected by the collecting of human remains and race science. Later in this discussion I shall look at how the ‘horrors of the past’ narrative of past atrocities has been used effectively and emotively by many contemporary stakeholders in the human remains debate to make powerful political statements. I shall also be discussing some of the issues facing the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, which still holds a collection of human remains and material related to the science of racial difference.

### **Human remains in the USA**

In subsequent sections this discussion will look at how the UK has recently seen a plethora of new and reassessed human remains policies being developed by different institutions. These policies have been greatly informed by those of the United States and Australia where human remains are a political and cultural issue that has been vigorously debated, contended and enacted.

Though Native Americans are not the only peoples campaigning to have their dead returned to them, their successes and failures provide an opportunity to view the repatriation debate from many angles. In the United States the repatriation debate is in no way based entirely on the return and reburial of human remains. Rather it is based on the ownership and control of cultural property in its entirety, an increasingly common dilemma in the world of heritage. Woven throughout the debate is the involvement of the institutions of the state such as government, organised religion, academic institutions and museums. The degree of influence the state has had on the practice of the science of racial difference and human remains collecting varies case by case and country by country but often exemplifies the institutionalised historical injustices that have cast such heavy shadows on the human remains debate. In certain incarnations race science, endorsed and at times conducted by the state, functioned as a tool for supporting regimes and controlling assets such as land and property. The portrayal of indigenous people as scientifically inferior or on the verge of extinction provided excuses for claiming land and in certain instances people's freedom.

Dr Samuel Morton established the "Vanishing Red Man" theory, which was embraced by government policy makers as "scientific justification" for relocating Indian tribes, taking tribal land, and conducting genocide (Trope & Echo-Hawk 2000:126).

As discussed previously, the science of racial difference relied on the collection and analysis of indigenous remains. In some instances these remains were bought or traded but they were also stolen, coerced or taken with bloody force under state sanction. In the 1800s, for example, after the battles between Native American tribes and the U.S army (such as the massacre at Sand Creek, Colorado 1884, where Cheyenne were slaughtered by U.S cavalry, led by a Methodist minister) the dead were decapitated by order of the surgeon general of the army, for 'Indian Crania Study'

(Mihesuah 2000: 2).

The twentieth century brought archaeological excavation, which introduced new systems of state sanctioned acquisition of human remains. The motives for the collection of human remains were changing, from previous endeavours to understand racial difference, to a desire to understand past peoples and cultures. Seemingly a more humanitarian and universal desire, archaeology and anthropology as disciplines appeared to be conducted for the good of mankind being both harmless and altruistic, and in the USA, archaeologists considered Native American remains ‘public property and artifacts for study, display, and cultural investment’ (Echo-Hawk 2000: 133). Early researchers collecting human remains to conduct the science of racial difference were often acutely aware that they were doing so in opposition to Native people.<sup>1</sup> Archaeologists and anthropologists excavating the indigenous dead to learn about the past appeared to have made several assumptions, as ‘after little apparent initial resistance, archaeology erroneously assumed a general indigenous acquiescence. The past quarter century has demonstrated just how wrong archaeology has been’ (Zimmerman 2000:295).

Historically, legal protections for the dead did not take into account unique mortuary practices such as a scaffold, canoe, or tree burials. The criminal laws that prohibited grave robbing and mutilation of the dead, and the statutes in most states that ‘guarantee that all persons – including paupers, indigents, prisoners, strangers, and other unclaimed dead – are entitled to a decent burial’ (Trope and Echo-Hawk 2000:125) failed entirely to protect the Native American dead. Trope & Echo-Hawk (2000: 127) quote Franz Boas lamenting, ‘it is most unpleasant work to steal bones from graves, but what is the use, someone has to do it’.

Recently American Indians have used the tools of the state to respond to the practices of

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<sup>1</sup> In front of anguished villagers, the founder of the Smithsonian's division of physical anthropology, Czechoslovakian Ales Hrdlicka, who led an expedition to Larson Bay in Alaska around 1900, dug up and left with the remains of a man who had died of influenza, despite protests from the dead man's grandchildren (Mihesuah 2000: 2).



archaeologists, anthropologists and museums. They formed organisations to protect their dead from the interference of archaeologists and anthropologists and return them to what they believe to be their rightful resting places. These organisations have entered into discussion with archaeologists, physical anthropologists, lawyers, museums, and forest service military representatives in an effort to find common ground. In particular they have been active in the development of law and policy that recognises their religious beliefs and rights. Over the last twenty years it would certainly appear that the state is listening to Native American voices, and handing back both power and control over their heritage and their dead. This turn around in the state's considerations may be little more than the appearance of care and compassion with the state simply providing a scapegoat in the form of archaeologists and a sacrificial lamb in the form of museums.

Efforts to form laws, policies and amendments have been complicated by concepts such as ownership, cultural affiliation, chronological connection, scientific value, academic freedom and religious beliefs. Although recently enacted laws relating to repatriation have not so far caused the cultural disaster predicted by many academics, many of the arguments continue today. It is also possible that the judgement of repatriation will only be able to be conducted comprehensively by future generations of academics and Native American descendants.

In 1990 the most significant piece of legislation connected to the repatriation debate in the USA was passed, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act or NAGPRA. In a landmark step NAGPRA meant that for the first time globally, an indigenous people were legally declared rightful owners of their ancestral remains. NAGPRA prevents the removal and sale of all Native American human remains, funerary and sacred objects and those of cultural patrimony found on federal, Native American and Hawaiian lands.

At present there are approximately one million American Indian remains in public and

private institutions; this number does not include the myriad collections held by private landowners, nor does it include the remains that have been shipped to Europe, Japan, and other places (Mihsuah 2000: 2).

Under this law the excavation, intentional or otherwise, of Native remains or culturally affiliated objects from federal lands can only be conducted with consultation or supervision of the relevant indigenous organization. If such material is discovered accidentally, as in the infamous case of Kennewick Man, the federal land manager is legally required to inform the relevant organisations immediately by telephone and then by written confirmation.

NAGPRA is in a great many ways a highly successful and effective tool in the implementation of what could be defined as cultural justice, but from a different view point it can be seen to be in conflict with other accepted codes of practice. For example, in 1972 a UNESCO conference defined significant universal heritage objects based on the belief that ‘the deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all nations of the world’ (The World Heritage Convention 1972 [online]). NAGPRA was vigorously opposed by the majority of state-funded institutions in the USA, including The Smithsonian Institution, the American Association of Museums, and the Society for American Archaeology who managed to stop the legislation from passing when it first entered Congress. NAGPRA legally required federally funded museums and organisations to prepare inventories of all the human remains in their collections as well as culturally significant items, which were then presented to indigenous groups for evaluation and possible repatriation. The proposed inventories were to be completed within five years of the act passing, but in many cases this has not been possible. Grants were to be made available for already underfunded museums and institutions to conduct this cataloguing but Congress failed to appropriate this funding in 1991.

Worryingly for these museums and institutions, NAGPRA provides for the secretary of the interior to assess civil penalties against museums that do not comply with NAGPRA, a pressure that added to the institution's concerns about the legislation.

Some Native Americans are critical that the laws apply only to federal lands and entities that receive federal funding, and most contentiously of all, 'the laws do not provide for the reinterment of ancient, unclaimed or unidentified remains' (Riding In 2000:112). The majority of criticisms made by Native American interest groups are very practical, such as the fear that NAGPRA presents a soft option, an absence of strict and enforceable legislation for burial protection laws, which in some states may send a message that grave looting can resume without fear of arrest, prosecution, or punishment, but some criticisms can be viewed as superfluous as they simply attempt to restrict the number of voices heard on either side of the debate. For example James Riding In (2000:115) states that 'Imperial archaeologists have had substantial levels of support from real and pretend Indians....Usually found working in museums, universities, and government agencies, some of these individuals claim heritage complete with a Cherokee princess, but they embrace the secular views and values of Western science'. Oppositionally, William Bass stated: 'From the viewpoint of a skeletal biologist [reburial] is similar to burning the books in our libraries' (quoted in McGowan and LaRoche 1996:112). Campaigners such as James Riding In have used the atrocities of the practices of the past, particularly those of race science, as a narrative to portray archaeologists to the public as grave diggers and repressive imperialists conducting a 'spiritual holocaust' (Riding In 2000:109). Archaeologist's have 'found themselves backed into defensive positions, often having to explain the basic tenets of archaeological inquiry as well as the differences between professional archaeologists, avocational archaeologists, museum curators, hobbyists, collectors, looters, pothunters, and antiquities dealers to legislators and journalists, all usually in five minutes or less. Archaeologists generally have not fared well in these situations, much to the delight of activists

(Mallouf 2000:68).

Academics and researchers such as James C. L Chatters, one of the first researchers to examine Kennewick Man, and Clement W. Meighan say that repatriation is often based on weak affiliations, or none at all:

Museum materials five thousand years old are claimed by people who imagine themselves to be somehow related to the collections in question, but such a belief has no basis in evidence and is mysticism. Indeed, it is not unlikely that Indians who have acquired such collections for reburial are venerating the bones of alien groups and traditional enemies rather than distant relatives (Meighan 2000:193).

Some have argued that Native American interest groups want to make archaeology a crime, a perspective exacerbated by comments made by individuals such as Christopher Quayle, an attorney for the Three Affiliated Tribes, who stated that ‘It is conceivable that some time in the not-so-distant future there won't be a single Indian Skeleton in any museum in the country. We're going to put them out of business’ (cited in Meighan 2000:192). There is a continued and justifiable fear amongst those who study human remains that a great amount of information is being both lost and possibly destroyed, an issue that many think will also become a problem for the indigenous community, who will be most affected by the loss of data.<sup>2</sup>

NAGPRA can be argued to be a placation. As legislation it reduces indigenous concerns, which have a history of injustice, down to a matter of heritage, a problem for museums and archaeologists as, crucially, NAGPRA fails to address the destruction or excavation of Native American remains or artefacts by those outside the heritage sector:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In particular relation to research into genetic illness which requires samples of human material.

<sup>3</sup> In Texas more than 95 percent of land is privately owned and not subject to federal or state antiquities laws including NAGPRA.

In their quest to win the emotionally and politically heated issue of repatriation, Native Americans have ignored the much larger, insidious problem of site looting. The remarkable apathy characteristically shown by Native Americans towards looters and pothunters has long perplexed archaeologists – particularly those who have dedicated the better part of their careers to preserving Native American sites, including cemeteries. Attempts by archaeologists to promote anti-looting activism among Native Americans have failed. Ironically, those archaeologists who have alone carried out the brunt of the battle against looting through the decades suddenly found themselves targeted as “looters” by Native Americans during the 1980s (Mallouf 2000:67).

In this comment Mallouf firmly places a proportion of the blame on to Native American campaigners who have targeted concerned archaeologists rather than looters and pothunters, but he also notes that archaeologists are in part at fault by recognising a double standard long practised by archaeologists in their dealings with collectors, pot hunters and site looters. ‘In effect, the archaeological community has advanced a kind of contradictory “advocacy” in dealing with hardcore looters – on the one hand using only gentle persuasion to discourage their activities, while on the other hand soliciting whatever tidbits of information the looters are willing to part with concerning their “finds”’ (2000:66). In a vein similar to debates in the UK relating to metal detecting, archaeologists are often so enthusiastic for information and the prevention of data loss that they are willing to use make use of material not excavated in an archaeological context.

Goldstein and Kintigh (2000:186) note that ‘Americans tend to divide the country's history into two parts – Indian history and European history, and Indian history is often not considered the good or interesting part of the past’. This inequality cannot be blamed on either the archaeologists

or Native American interest groups as it is part of a far wider social phenomenon. If an element of unity can be created between Native American concerns and archaeological interests, both sides could come to view each other as natural and effective allies. Both have expressed that they feel they lack governmental support and public understanding of their motives. Meighan (2000:194) believes that if 'archaeology belongs to Indians [it] removes it from the heritage of all the citizens and makes it less likely that the public will be interested in supporting activities not seen to be in the broad public interest', whereas James Riding In (2000:108) argues that future generations will judge modern archaeologists as continuing a 'legacy of scientific body snatching within the realm of oppression'. As it stands, NAGPRA can be viewed in a positive light by both sides of the argument. Not only has the legislation satisfied a large proportion of Native American campaigners, it has, as pointed out by Zimmerman (2000:297), allowed those who 'were sympathetic to Indian demands but felt compelled to speak forcibly in defence of archaeology to give in honourably'. He also notes that collections that have been ignored for decades may finally be analysed, forced by the necessity of undertaking a NAGPRA inventory.

In American society, one characteristic of the twentieth century and beyond has been the proportionately sudden erosion of the power and influence of organized religion<sup>4</sup>. This merging of political and religious beliefs has been characterized by Robert Bellah (1967) as the new 'civil religion', a blending of theological concepts into an unspecific religion that endorses and affirms the state. The beliefs of the civil religion are a narrative construction that borrows from mythological American history. In civil religion bureaucrats take on the role of priest, 'presiding over their forests, national monuments, and irrigation projects with the care and paranoia that formerly characterised village priests and New England ministers. But their perspective is wholly secular' (Deloria 2000: 175). The attitude of the federal agencies towards Indian remains, an

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<sup>4</sup> Even the growing evangelical and fundamental 1st movements are deemed as being on the fringe or as divergent fragmentations of christianity by the dominant civil religion.

attitude supported and applauded by museum directors and archaeologists, has been that they are resources, comparable in most respects to timber, oil, and water, belonging to the federal agency on whose land they were found.

Native Americans have had to go through Congress in recent years to be allowed to practice legally some aspects of their religious beliefs, such as the imbibing of peyote and the use of some animal remains in sacred rituals. Native American interest groups have argued that if small elements of their religious panoply have to be governed or endorsed by the state, then attempts to have more complex aspects recognised or restituted would be a herculean task. Core to the Western justice system is the demand for evidence, and since the attitude of federal employees and social scientists is that there is no evidence that human beings have any relationship to the departed once bodily functions cease, in their view, any belief or experience relating to the dead or to spirits of the dead is wholly superstition. Civil religion thus ‘denies the possibility or importance of the afterlife and limits human responsibilities to tangible things that we can touch’ (Deloria 2000:176).

One of the results is a socio-cultural quest within America to discover a religious experience, one that can no longer be obtained from mainline Christian denominations. Asian religions, astrology, new forms of old European religions such as paganism, witchcraft and devil worship, even self-help techniques have offered American society religious fulfilment. One of the religions that Americans have seized upon is that of the American Indians. The main attraction of Native American religion may be its distance from institutions of modern mass society. This distance can have consequences for Native Americans as it could be seen to place their beliefs in the realm of New Age, being informal, hobbyist and worst of all unimportant.

The prehistoric remains of Kennewick Man have come to represent reburial issues in the USA and have been the subject of vigorous debate and legal action. Kennewick Man has also highlighted, for all parties involved, the impact NAGPRA has had on such disputes. Claims of

affiliation to these ancient remains have not just been made by Native Americans, they have also been made by white non-indigenous groups. These groups, often described as modern pagans, have become an increasing presence in discussions relating to human remains and archaeology in the UK and have impacted on current policy in some of the country's largest museums. They have been greatly encouraged and informed by the actions of indigenous peoples in the USA whose arguments they have utilised at times quite effectively.

The USA has a history of popularised stories and theories connecting European history to that of the America<sup>5</sup>. These ideas highlight the concept of geopiety, that is, 'the sense of country as one's native home, the sense that one had sprung out of its soil and was nurtured by it; the belief that one's ancestors since time immemorial were born in it' (Parkhill 1997: 98)<sup>6</sup>. It can be argued that the recovery of archaeological human remains can be intimately linked to a sense of belonging, heritage, ownership, and identity. In the United States the 1996 discovery of Kennewick Man initially came to represent the clash between two opposing cultural perspectives relating to human remains, those of indigenous peoples, and the culture of science and academia. As the debate over Kennewick Man entered the law courts and the popular press, the skeletal remains became much more than a site of two conflicting binary opposites when a third party, the 'Asatru Folk Assembly' (AFA), a religious group located outside of Nevada City, California, entered the debate<sup>7</sup>. The AFA is an organisation that works to revive pre-Christian Celtic, Nordic, and Germanic traditions within the United States.

Kennewick Man is a well preserved 9,000 year old skeleton found on the shoreline of the Columbia River, Kennewick, Washington. As the land where the remains were found was under the jurisdiction of the state, specifically the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the discovery was

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5 For example folklorist Charles G. Leland proposed a connection between Native American myths and Norse Mythology in his 1884 'Algonquin Legends'.

6 A concept originally developed by Tuan, Y. (1976:11-12).

7 The AFA, led by Stephen McNallen, filed a suit with the District court of Portland on October 24, 1996, to stop the implementation of NAGPRA and the placing of Kennewick Man into Native American custody. They also filed a separate suit in order to gain the rights to have DNA testing conducted on the remains.



reported to a local tribal group as legally required by NAGPRA. Following a visit from the coroner the skeleton was examined by archaeologist James Chatters who deemed it to be unlike those typically found in native America, in age and in physical characteristics (Figure 5).

These differences greatly emphasised both its scientific importance and cultural impact. One description in particular accentuated the impact of the find more than any other, the skeleton displayed what Chatters described as ‘Caucasoid’ characteristics. For the media, this became Kennewick Man’s most glamorous appeal, making the cover of *TIME* magazine. Preston (1997: 73) interviewed James Chatters, who stated:

I've been looking around for someone who matches this Kennewick gentleman, looking for weeks and weeks for people on the street, thinking, ‘This one's got a little bit here, that one a little bit there.’ And then, one evening, I turned on the TV and there was Patrick Stewart – Captain Picard of Star Trek, and I said, ‘My God, there he is! Kennewick Man!’



Figure 5. The face of Kennewick Man, as reconstructed by Jim Chatters and Thomas McClelland (from Chatters 2001:1).

Many have insisted that the term ‘Caucasoid’ to begin with was an enormous mistake on Chatter's part with some scholars openly criticising the language used from the very beginning of

the Kennewick debate: 'To call it "Caucasoid" is to connote aspects of ancestry, not simply morphology; it directly suggests that America was settled by Europeans and that those now called "Native Americans" are actually less "native" than they think' (Marks 1998:1). This Caucasoid characteristic, in combination with the skeleton's age, caused more than just the scientific community to contest the skeleton's position under the remit of NAGPRA. The public, in particular the AFA, were also interested. Stephen McNallan, in the spring 1997 edition of *Runestone*, the quarterly publication of the AFA, argues that 'Caucasian proportioned people may have inhabited the American west...the lore of Nevada and California is full of stories about tall, red haired mummies that don't resemble Native Americans in the slightest....Kennewick Man is kin. He represents a branch of our people, a limb of the family tree that grew through America's back door long before our own forebears ever dreamed of sailing the Atlantic....Someday it will be acknowledged that a Caucasoid people did in fact arrive in the Americas thousands of years ago'(quoted in Crawford 2000:215). This statement is a controversial narrative on the origins of the USA. It is certainly something that could be deemed as inflammatory or impactive by Native American groups and educators. It is also a statement presented as fact with little or no support.

Crawford (2000:212) suggests that Kennewick Man allows for the creation of a fictitious 'Authentic Indian' of non-Native American lore, a creation that cuts contemporary Native Americans off from their heritage, and grants the appropriation of Native identity by non-Natives. The ultimate goal of this appropriation is the desire for geopiety. Groups such as the AFA in the USA are attempting to make connections between themselves and the ancient past, but Crawford believes that to do this is to disavow existing Native peoples from their position as the authentic Native American, constructing instead a new authentic white Indian. This appropriation has apparently been made possible by the archaeological and academic community's interpretation of Kennewick Man as Caucasian, an interpretation made without consideration of the impact such an

attribution could have.<sup>8</sup>

Within the Western archaeological community, ancient remains are generally viewed and portrayed as everyone's ancestor. In the case of Kennewick Man, this is contradicted by the primary area of scientific study being an attempt to determine the remains racial origin. Such endeavours involve the use of canonical and morphometric analysis which allow for easy association with the skeletal measurements of the race sciences discussed earlier. They also remind us that the view that archaeology and anthropology and their associated sciences are conducted for the good of mankind is born from European Enlightenment methodology, where the dissection and investigation of the body was portrayed as a key with which humanity could discover the species evolutionary script. Studies of human remains through osteology and bioarchaeology in particular, with their implications for understanding issues such as disease and genetic disorders, are often portrayed as the tools to unlock knowledge that will universally serve and improve humanity.

We didn't go digging for this man. He fell out – he was actually a volunteer. I think it would be wrong to stick him back in the ground without waiting to hear the story he has to tell. We need to look at these things as [human] beings, not as one race or another. The message this man brings to us is one of unification: there may be some commonality in our past that will bring us together (Chatters, quoted in Preston 1997:78).

The quest to study human remains, in order to reveal human origins, can be seen as exemplifying a power division, one where those with privileged expertise and scientific methodologies speak with greater authority on Native origins than Native peoples themselves. Many Native Americans (Riding In 2000: 110) are candid regarding their non-belief in the value of archaeological research

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<sup>8</sup> The term Caucasian arguably carries less cultural implications within scientific taxonomy. The nomenclature of human remains will be discussed subsequently.

as pertinent to questions of origin. This sentiment is intensified when dealing with human remains as Native peoples have methods of constructing cultural identity that are not reliant on DNA analysis and radiocarbon dating.

As will also be shown later in relation to the Avebury bones or Lindow Man in the UK, the ancient past allows enough distance for the potential formation of an idealised and or fictionalised ancestor, an appetizing simulacrum that fits a romanticised, and at times mystical image of past peoples. For Crawford, contemporary Native Americans fail to satisfy American culture, which ‘living in its urban, post modern world, needs to fulfil its fantasies’ (Crawford 2000: 222). The remains of Kennewick Man provide a marvellous solution to this as the ‘Authentic Indians’, like Caucasian Kennewick Man, are in fact white.

With Kennewick Man the mystical ‘Indian’ who will impart the wisdom necessary to restore one's relationship with the land, to achieve a sense of Place, comes one step closer: ‘The Indian is in fact one of us! We are the ‘Authentic Indian’ (Crawford 2000:222).

Kennewick Man, when viewed from this perspective becomes, for the modern, non-Native, urban member of a civil religion, a white Westerner, a crucial, mythological and even spiritual link with one's own ‘inner Indian’ or in the case of the Avebury bones, ‘inner Druid’.

The appropriation of Native status from indigenous Americans did not start with Kennewick Man. As Euroamerican settlers began crossing the Appalachian chain, ‘settlers found mile after mile of disorder: thick forests, flowing rivers, daunting Indian opposition – and numerous mysterious, artificial mounds’ (Hinsley 2000:39). Within these mounds excavators discovered great quantities of human remains and associated artefacts.<sup>9</sup> Despite a plethora of ideas over the identity of these

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Jefferson described the excavation of one of these mounds in 1784. He cut a deep wide trench, discovered layered bones and stones and estimated a total burial of possibly one thousand persons over time. He closely examined the skull and the jawbone of a child, commented on the relative states of osteological decay, and mused upon the

‘moundbuilders’, most investigators agreed that the ancient inhabitants of America had originated elsewhere – probably Asia. As with Kennewick Man, the moundbuilders placed contemporary Native Americans in a dislocated position. Characterised predominantly by stories of war and battle, the mythological moundbuilders were both popularised and romanticised. Robert Silverburg (1968:82 cited in Hinsley 2000:40) noted in his classic study of moundbuilder theories that what ‘delighted the public most keenly was the stirring depiction of a great empire dragged down to destruction by hordes of barbarians’, the barbarians being the contemporary Native Americans, who could now be framed as invader.

Geopietry allows us to see the potential for academics, religious groups, and the media to engrave an identity narrative into the history of the land by constructing predated chronological presences such as Kennewick Man, or removing or diluting indigenous origins, just as early academics did when they described the moundbuilders. Both narrative constructions distance Native claims of origin and ownership. For Crawford (2000:226) the body, in the form of human remains, can become our link with the land, granting legitimacy and authenticity. The plans of the AFA to memorialise the site where Kennewick Man was found, to honour the memory of someone they consider to be a revered ancestor, exemplify this. Most significantly, it is the force of prehistoric narrative, such as Kennewick Man or the moundbuilder’s that grants the most primal meaning to places. Prehistory allows speculative narrative, mythological and potentially pristine history and belonging.

Foucault (1977:26) and others have argued that ‘the body is invested with relations of power and domination [and that] the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive and a subjected body’. Crawford (2000:229) argues that Kennewick Man is valued and coveted by those fighting for the right to control the reading of his body as text, because he is both a ‘subjected and a productive body’, a mechanism of colonial capitalism that has the power to signify the relationship of such a mound to the living Indians of the region (Foner 1944:118 in Hinsley 2000:39).

contemporary Western world. The narrative, or text, written by academics is often defined as ‘knowledge’, which is deemed to be objective, rational and scientific, but is still a flexible construct open to interpretation and capable of supporting an agenda. It appears that the more emotive or culturally relevant the narrative, the more likely it is to enter or win over the public consciousness. For decades academics have been constructors of authoritative narrative, whereas more recently the stories of indigenous struggles, spirituality, and rightful ownership have garnered more attention and more importantly, sympathy.

Some writers have argued that what is needed within academia is a shift in thought process, in particular, a reduction of ‘Eurocentrism’. This would involve a process of examining the cultural values of the dominant group, so members can learn to ‘other’ themselves and their own culture. Sully (2007:222) believes that this could be achieved if the dominant group could ‘de-power’ itself, allowing for the ‘emergence of a new discourse, one that is not confined solely by Western reference points’.

Zimmerman (2000:295) sees the action of power equalisation within the reburial debate as being an example of classic syncretism – ‘a coalescence or reconciliation of differing beliefs’. Syncretism occurs when a dominant belief system imposes on a less powerful group. This theoretically results in an amalgamation of some form, where each group can feel some comfort about ‘sacrificing some basic principles or if not sacrificing them, at least couching them in terms acceptable to the other’. Zimmerman (2000:295) believes archaeologists should ‘replace oppositional with dialogical models where cultural differences are explored and where interpretations are negotiated rather than declared’.

In relation to Kennewick Man, Crawford (2000:230) believes that, though we must re-evaluate the way in which we read and interpret the remains, they should not be seen as merely a text, ‘scribbled over with the graffiti of culturally relative narratives, none of which have any truth

or grounding in reality'. The agenda to rebalance power in interpretation comes with the notion of cultural relativity, where the socio-cultural construction of everything can lead to a cultural impasse. Haraway (quoted in Crawford 2000: 231) states that the alternative to relativism 'is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics, and shared conversations in epistemology....It is exactly in the politics and epistemology of partial perspectives that the possibility of sustained, rational, objective inquiry rests'. This is a challenge to the epic claims of Western scientific research which tends to be monolithic and meditated, instead offering an alternative that allows for the complex and the contradictory, as Crawford states, a view 'from nowhere, from simplicity' as opposed to a 'view from above' (Crawford 2000:231). The object of inquiry must therefore be viewed as an active agent rather than as a static resource, which is an unequal relationship that shuts down the dialectic. The object of study must be granted his or her own subjectivity, semiotic sovereignty and the chance to provide their own notions of history, time, space, and ancestry.

Zimmerman (2000:296), believes syncretism will be accelerated by the development and implementation of reburial and repatriation laws, highlighting the development of the World Archaeology Congress code of ethics, which was drafted with, and in part by, indigenous people. Previous codes, written just by archaeologists, have described an archaeological view of ethical obligations rather than those of the individuals they are studying. Though this code represents a shift in power, the shift may not be as syncretic as Zimmerman believes<sup>10</sup>. In 2005 the WAC, which describes the treatment of human remains as a 'human rights issue', supported an amendment to NAGPRA which alters the definition of Native American, decided on during the Kennewick Man legal dispute (Zimmerman and Lippert 2005:1). This re-definition could swing the argument

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10 Though this could be argued to be part of the syncretism process, as Zimmerman himself notes, syncretism, for both sides of the debate, involves a process of "re-mythologising," that is, making their belief systems seem as if it is not exactly what it earlier seemed to be. For example, to maintain the notion that the discipline was speaking with one voice, no new views from archaeologists favouring reburial have appeared in mainstream literature until very recently, but the re-mythologising process was nonetheless operating to make the profession *seem* more reasonable' (Zimmerman 2000:297).

dramatically in favour of Native American campaign groups re-igniting the disputes of both academics and the AFA.

Kennewick Man provides an opportunity to re-examine the ways in which interested parties interpret human remains, the questions we ask and the narratives we construct. Academic interpretation has the potential to impact greatly upon a group's geopiety. The connection that a group or individual experiences, to a particular space they inhabit can have significant consequences for cultural identity, both spiritually and psychologically, as well as an impact in political, economic, and academic terms.

### **Human remains in the UK**

Within the UK, a working group has been set up to examine the current legal status of human remains within the collections of publicly funded Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom, and make recommendations for proposals which might form the basis of a consultative document. But such issues are not only controversial in indigenous contexts: the reburial issue is now on the agenda in Britain. The treatment of the dead differs considerably across the world, nationally and locally. Socio-cultural values, religious beliefs and legislation all impact on the methods and motives behind the collection, display and excavation of the dead. In 1991, the annual meeting of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) identified a need to develop and implement policy for the the excavation of human remains, in order to standardise and improve related archaeological activity in the UK. This session was inspired primarily by a questionnaire that was disseminated to archaeological units, museums and university research departments in 1990 by the IFA. Out of the 44 responses, 26% of archaeology units had excavated more than one cemetery site per year over the preceding ten years, and 40% of those had excavated over 100 inhumations. Over 80% had done excavations for 'rescue' purposes only, involving land planning for quarrying, new houses and



roads, and church alterations – at the request of local councils, developers, and the church (Roberts 2009:17).<sup>11</sup> In 27 cases, reburial had occurred because the site contained Christian burials though less than 50% of these had been at the request of the church. The policies resulting from these initial discussions were slow to form, especially in comparison to those being developed overseas. As early as 1989, the 1<sup>st</sup> World Archaeological Congress held in South Dakota, USA, had already drawn up what is known as the Vermillion Accord on Human Remains, which was widely adopted internationally and by the World Archaeological Congress Council in 1990. This agreement focused on the concept of respect for human remains, whatever their race, religion, age or location. It stressed the need for dialogue between archaeologists, indigenous peoples and local communities as well as addressing the discussion of the disposal of human remains via a process of negotiation with interested parties. The Vermillion Accord, which was shortly followed by the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) outline of ethical principles for studying human remains in 1991, were symptomatic of growing awareness of the treatment of human remains and concern voiced by various stakeholders, in particular Native American and Aboriginal Australian groups. The WAC has continued to explore the issues involved in both the human remains debate and the levels of guidance available to those dealing with such material. In 2006 the WAC introduced the Tamaki Makaurau Accord on the Display of Human Remains and Sacred Objects. This paper expands the Vermillion Accord on which it is based by stating that the display of human remains and other related objects deemed sacred to communities should be ‘culturally appropriate’.

In July 2000, a joint declaration was made between the UK and Australia to increase repatriation efforts. In May 2001 the Working Group of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on human remains was set up. They were tasked with examining collections of human remains housed in state-funded institutions within the UK, in order to develop legislation. The

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to acknowledge that in the UK the primary reason for the excavation of the dead is due to the land use of the construction and building industry rather than archaeological pursuits.

guidance published by the working groups (following the later recommendations from the Human Tissue act of 2004) moved to legislate to enable nine national museums to move and potentially repatriate human remains from their collections. In 2006 the DCMS published a package of guidance for display, research, and teaching practices relating to human remains, including a legal framework. The working groups, the legislation and guidance is almost entirely focused on the treatment of indigenous remains, predominantly as a response to the requests of repatriation coming mainly from the USA, Australia and New Zealand. The Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums summarises that:

In the United Kingdom, there is a long tradition of excavating historic and prehistoric human remains, normally skeletons, studying them and including them in museum collections and displays. Human remains have also been kept as specimens in medical teaching collections and museums. Many of these are now hundreds of years old. Traditionally in the United Kingdom human remains are treated with respect. No particular sacred or symbolic importance is associated with the remains themselves, except in the case of direct descendants, the remains of major historical figures, or as the focus of collective memorial, such as war dead. (DCMS 2006:8)

In an attempt to see the scale of human remains held within heritage institutions in the UK, ‘A Scoping Survey of Historical Human Remains in English Museums’ was conducted on behalf of the DCMS Working Group on Human Remains in 2003. The aim of the survey, based on 132 respondents, was to map the broad scope of human remains held in museums, even if they held only small quantities<sup>12</sup>. The survey suggests that at least 61,000 were held by the 132 respondents with

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12 Out of 159 eligible respondents, 148 responses were received, of which 132 held human remains of some description.

over 30 having more than 500 human remains<sup>13</sup>. Over three-quarters of the total respondents held items derived from archaeological excavation in the UK. Many of these institutions have chosen to develop their own human remains policies. These policies are often very focused on material deemed to be sensitive, such as material from certain indigenous cultures. In the USA, NAGPRA caused many museums to look at collections they had ignored for years, or that lay neglected in stores or archives. This has been one of the most significant results of the global human remains debate. In 2005, English Heritage, in conjunction with the Church of England Archbishops' Council, The Cathedral's Fabric Commission for England (CFCE) and the Council for the Care of Churches (CCC), published a document called *Guidance for best practice for the treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England*. The document is concerned with burials from Christian contexts dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries AD in England and aims to address legal issues, theology, costs, responsibilities and ethics relating to human remains and their excavation.

In 2008, the British Museum published a 107-page catalogue of human remains in its collections, dating from prehistory to modern times. One of the most interesting aspects of this catalogue is the breadth of material, not just chronologically or geographically, but the form of some of the material. The list of human remains includes obvious examples such as skeletal or mummified bodies and body parts and cremated remains, but also contains objects such as: Tibetan trumpets made from human bone, jewellery from Papua New Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo made from teeth, bone or hair, lockets containing human hair, reliquaries, shrunken heads, pointing sticks and a burial package made from bark containing a dead baby from Australia, and a Coptic gold earring attached to an ear lobe. The list does not miss any possible instance. With much of the listed material, it is questionable whether or not they even are human remains. Many objects are listed with question marks, such as 'Knife made of quartz, wood, gum; wrapped with skin

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<sup>13</sup> The survey did not ask the respondents to classify the remains.

(human?) and cord'. The list includes any object that has material that once came from a human being, e.g hair, teeth, skin without distinction between objects that were constructed using material gathered from a human being who very well might have been alive. Such a list may have been a simple task to create. Accessing the museum's base data may have allowed a researcher to simply subset all the human remains, objects made from them or material gathered from them, but I would imagine that a substantial amount of time, and therefore resources, was spent on this endeavour, a factor that has implications for institutions with fewer resources who may wish to repeat such an inventory for their own collection.

Many people care a great deal about the treatment of human remains. This is most acutely apparent when the whereabouts of loved ones' bodies are called into question or when it is discovered that remains have not been treated properly, although there are poignant examples of conflicting views on how this is achieved. A bitter controversy between bereaved families followed the discovery of the sunken British trawler *The Gaul* (Brooks and Rumsey 2007:344). Some relatives wished the fishermen's bodies to lie undisturbed while others thought it more respectful to recover and bury the remains. Similar emotions were aroused by the organ retention scandal, centred on Alder Hey Hospital, Merseyside. A major review of the law on the removal, retention and use of human organs and tissues from both the living and the dead followed (Department of Health 2003). These changes are now impacting on museological practice in the form of the 2004 Human Tissue Act which draws into focus issues of consent as well as diversifying the range of material characterised as human remains. Concerns can also relate to historical instances; for example, out of respect and with the inclusion of the modern maritime community, one of the 92 skeletons recovered from Henry VIII's sunk flagship *Mary Rose* was interred with full ceremony at Portsmouth Cathedral including a Requiem for those who lost their lives. However, 'removing the bodies from their marine grave remains a contentious issue locally' (Brooks and Rumsey 2007:344).

In October 2008, Bill Bowder reported a story, for the Church Times in the UK, about the attempts made by Paul Davies, reburial officer for the Council of British Druid Orders (CoBDO), to have the remains that were excavated from a site near the stone circles at Stonehenge and Avebury, Wiltshire, reburied. One skeleton in particular, who has been named 'Charlie', is of a two- to three-year-old child discovered carefully laid on a chalk ridge and covered with clean rubble, and has become a focal point for the request (Figure 6). On the English Heritage website, Dr Sebastian Payne, Chief Scientist at English Heritage, said: 'This request raises sensitive and important issues about religious beliefs surrounding human remains, and the value of these remains in telling us about our shared past. It is likely to set a precedent for treating other similar requests. We need to consult widely to decide on the best way forward'.



Figure 6. The skeletal remains of 'Charlie' on display at the Alexander Keiller museum (Photograph published on the English Heritage website).

It is possible that claims made by British citizens for the reburial of archaeological human remains are also indicators of geopiety and the construction of identity. Such disputes may also highlight an unbalance endemic to the formation and control of knowledge of the past. The body of Charlie, like that of Kennewick Man, may very well be a canvas for a semiotic and pragmatic text to be written upon. The claims made by the Council of British Druid Orders may again show, as previously discussed with the AFA's appropriation of Kennewick Man, the cultural construction of

the body as contributing to the creation of geopiety.

It can be argued that the desires of Western modern white culture, to be attached to the past is both far reaching and consumptive in its appropriation. Some groups, such as the AFA in the USA, want to prove ancestral links to the ancient past, whereas in the UK, affiliation is more often presumed without the need of evidence. There are a plethora of organisations in the UK that could be described as the equivalent of the AFA<sup>14</sup>. Many of these groups describe themselves as Pagan and the affiliation they propound is most commonly a religious one<sup>15</sup>. The concerns raised by these groups, in relation to human remains, echo those of indigenous campaigners rather than groups such as the AFA. Some of these Pagan organisations have become highly influential, impacting museums, archaeology and policy. Campaigners from these groups are often articulate, considerate and eager to open dialogue. Many other commentators believe that by taking the claims of Pagan groups into consideration, in policy making and the treatment of human remains, archaeologists and museum professionals are giving a voice to a minority who utilise archaeological evidence to haphazardly construct an ancient past, and a connection to it. In fact, even some Pagans completely disregard the reburial issue. Nick Ford (2009) for example, of the group Pagans for Archaeology, states ‘I see no necessity at all of according the right to treatment of ancient human remains that demonstrates this assumption that the remains of the long-dead are inherently worthy of the kind of romantic veneration advocated by HAD (Honouring the Ancient Dead)...Has anyone ever heard of a patient suing a hospital for custody of an amputated limb, or a dentist for an extracted tooth?’.

Some indigenous people, in the USA for example, can be seen as battling to have their voices heard after a history of subjugation, oppression, and what has often been described as state sanctioned body snatching. Similar, emotive, indigenist perspectives are also vocalised by some of

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14 For example, The Association for Polytheistic Tradition, The Druid Network, The Mistletoe Foundation, The Order of the Yew, Stonehenge Reconciliation committee, the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids and many more.

15 Other common titles include, pantheism, polytheism, polymorphism, animism, Heathenry, Druidry, Unitarianism, and Wicca or witchcraft.

the reburial campaigners in the UK:

Every day in Britain, sacred Druid sites are surveyed and excavated, with associated finds being catalogued and stored for the archaeological record. Many of these sites include the sacred burials of our ancestors. Their places of rest are opened during the excavation, their bones removed and placed in museums for the voyeur to gaze upon, or stored in cardboard boxes in archaeological archives...As far as archaeologists are concerned, there are no cultural implications to stop them from their work. As far as Druids are concerned, guardians and ancestors still reside at ceremonial sites such as Avebury and the West Kennet Long Barrow...I believe we, as Druids, should be saying “Stop this now. These actions are disrespectful to our ancestors. These excavations are digging the heart out of Druidic culture and belief”. When archaeologists desecrate a site through excavation and steal our ancestors and their guardians, they are killing me as well as our heritage. It is a theft. I am left wounded. My identity as a Druid is stolen and damaged beyond repair. My heart cries. We should assert our authority as the physical guardians of esoteric lore. We should reclaim our past (Paul Davies 1997:12-13).

The concerns of groups such as The Council of British Druid Orders (cBDO), are unarguably having an impact on heritage discussions, but there appears to be rather clear division between discussions taking place in cultural institutions and those whose remit is based on more quantitative research. Unlike English Heritage, The British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology (BABA0) responded to cBDO’s request for the reburial of the Avebury bones by highlighting the way in which they interpreted the data surrounding the body. BABA0, noted that the cBDO's key argument for reburial is genetic relationship, a claim they support through

conformity with the DCMA guidance, stating that ‘modern research on mtDNA from the University of Oxford clearly proves an unbroken genetic link between people today indigenous to Europe and our long dead...Women therefore carry our ancestral line from our deep past and into the future...Until this research is disproved I will assume that members of the Council, like all people indigenous to Europe, have a “close genetic” claim for reburial as stated in the DCMS Guidance. We all have a close and unbroken cultural and spiritual relationship with the human remains of our ancestors’ (Cited in Schutkowski 2009: 1). This is seen by BABAO as a set of assumptions used to justify the use of the term ‘ancestor’ for the Avebury human remains, which rely on what BABAO deem to be a fundamental misunderstanding of the mtDNA evidence. BABAO’s reply is that the detection of mtDNA lineages that share genetic material with extant people in Britain does not constitute proof that the Avebury remains are part of an ‘unbroken link from the Bronze Age to the present day. Rather, they show that a particular genetic make-up is shared among several million humans’ (Schutkowski 2009:2). If DNA evidence shows that the concept of indigenism in the UK is a fallacy, then affiliation can only be made to ancient peoples via religious beliefs or connection to a shared space. The AFA would certainly agree. They desire genetic testing to be conducted on the remains of Kennewick Man in order to prove that he is not related to modern Native Americans rather than attempting to directly connect him to Europeans.

In many ways, the question arises, who has the right to interpret human remains? Some would argue only those who have earned the right through dedicated study and proven research. Zimmerman (2000:301) points out that among ‘the major complaints about archaeology is that it has benefited only itself and its practitioners’. As discussed previously, archaeologists and anthropologists have long been the intellectual possessors and controllers of excavated human remains in both the US and the UK. This power balance is not simply being argued by indigenous groups but also by Pagan campaigners who believe archaeologists only concern themselves with the



dominant Christian beliefs. In HAD's feedback on the UK DCMS Guidance for the Care of Human Remains, for instance, the group criticises the lack of inclusion of Pagan concerns. The document argues that Pagan beliefs need to be recognised in the formation of policy:

The Pagan community's sensitivities towards British human remains must now be heard if bodies are to avoid charges of religious discrimination. While indigenous peoples' attitudes towards ancestry and heritage are now accepted (if seldom comprehended) by those dealing with human remains, British Pagan beliefs continue to be questioned or dismissed. This lack of acceptance is evident in the guidance, where there is no language sensitive to Pagan spiritual and religious concerns. Consultation is needed in order to address and amend this problem (Official HAD response to DCMS Guidance for Care of Human Remains).

The CoBDO and HAD have an opinion on the treatment of human remains and their own agenda for interpretation but they, unlike Native Americans, can be said to have little or nothing to offer in the way of new knowledge<sup>16</sup>. What they do manage is to push the archaeological community into facing the issues of the treatment of the dead. After all, 'today there are hundreds, if not thousands, of researchers who are mining sites, often without reference to all the potential stakeholders involved, to answer purely academic - and often very insignificant - questions' (Fagan: 2007: 2).

The 2005 English Heritage publication 'Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England' gives a clear set of rules and ethical considerations based on a religious perspective<sup>17</sup>. If Christian concerns are to be listened to, then

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16 It is also important to note that groups such as 'Pagans for archaeology' are against reburial and deem memory and study to be the best way of respecting the ancient dead. They express on their website <http://archaeopagans.blogspot.com/> that it is 'difficult to know which group of contemporary Pagans should receive remains for reburial, since we do not have cultural continuity with pagans of the past'.

17 The movement of human remains within consecrated land is subject to a Bishop's Faculty. When human remains are encountered in unconsecrated land, a Home Office licence is required if the remains are to be disturbed. This is the case even if the remains are remaining within the curtilage, or are to be moved and replaced in the same location.

surely Pagan ones must also be heard, especially when the remains in question come from Pagan burials. Jenkins (2009) sees this as the dilemma that most impacts cultural institutions, who must recognise religious freedom in order to avoid claims of discrimination.

I have spent considerable time researching the interaction between Pagan claims and the museum sector. I have spoken with many in the sector who think the demands for burial or respect are ridiculous - but I found that many of these critics feel unable to speak out (Jenkins 2009).

Although they are often the most vocal proponents of reburial in the UK, pagan groups are not the only people concerned with the treatment of archaeologically excavated remains. In March 2008, for example, over 200 people attended the reburial and funeral of an unknown teenage girl who died 700 years ago near Rochester, north Kent. The extensive public consultation called for by English Heritage has been conducted and is currently being assessed. A recent development has been a statement posted on the English Heritage website, by Rollo Maughling of the Council of British Druid Orders, who wishes to distance the organisation from the statements made by Paul Davis in the English Heritage consultation documents. Consultation and public surveying has been conducted, by a few organisations, on the reburial of human remains in the UK. Cambridgeshire Archaeology Historic Environment Record, who manage a large collection of human skeletal remains, have been involved in five requests for reburial since 1994, and a further two requests for treatment of human remains that go beyond the standard requirements for archaeological archiving<sup>18</sup>. One re-interment resulted from these requests. After a decision was made to withdraw a display of locally excavated human remains, as part of an outreach event, the organisation suffered

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18 1,200 individuals, HSR – teeth, bones, ash and other forms of which 65% are “Christian” burials. Several assemblages are deemed of national significance.

criticism from visitors who had expected to see the skeletons. Cambridgeshire Archaeology Historic Environment Record decided to distribute a questionnaire at public events, and local museums throughout the summer of 2004. Over four months they gathered 220 responses. The outcome of this survey was that:

80% of respondents felt that HSR (human skeletal remains) should not be reburied or that reburial should only happen when archaeologists said there were no further scientific or research uses for them. There were similar levels of support for displaying HSR in museums and at archaeological events. This is a vote of confidence in the professionals, with the public trusting us to do the right thing with human remains, such as research, study and appropriate presentation. Of the options that took control away from archaeologists, support for immediate and total reburial was minimal, and although support for reburial at the request of the local community was marked, it is still a minority view (Carroll 2005).

The results of this survey are interesting for several reasons. Though they deliberately avoided directing the questionnaire at heritage professionals or organisations, the questionnaire was primarily accessible to those who have an active interest in archaeology or museums. This appears to be particularly evident in the overwhelming authority given to archaeologists, to decide on the appropriate treatment of human remains. Though the subjectivity of such a survey is recognised by the organisation, who call for a broader public survey to be conducted, it could be argued that it is the emotive narratives and arguments for religious freedom that cause the human remains discussion to become a debate, an element missing from the questionnaire. Though the survey showed that 85% of people asked knew that human remains were kept post excavation, it is possible

opinions to the survey may have differed if individuals had seen how many of these remains were stored.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See chapter 3 for discussion of the collections management and storage of human remains.

## Chapter 2. The dead on display

### Introduction

Museums have a long tradition of displaying the dead. Since the enlightenment, scientific, ethnographic, medical, and archaeological exhibits of bodies and body parts became commonplace in many cultural and academic institutions. Initially the majority of these collections were acquired as parts of systematic biology collections, for research into racial diversity or for medical investigation. Putting human remains on display was rarely the primary goal. However, many of these institutions found that public displays of such material fascinated audiences, in both the academic communities and with the public at large. Many of these displays, once constructed, went unchanged for decades before the voices of concerned groups and individuals were heard. In 1991 the National Museum of Natural History, Washington, removed Native American human remains from public display, as a consequence of the founding of the National Museum of the American Indian Act (NMAI) and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The physical anthropology exhibits of human remains in the Natural History Museum, Vienna, were also removed from display in 1996, partly over concerns over their links with Nazi racist ideology.<sup>20</sup>

Within museums, a distinction has generally been present between remains deemed archaeological and those seen as anthropological. Anthropological specimens have been the primary focus for debates surrounding the treatment of human remains. The concerns of indigenous people, existing living ancestors and dubious methods of collection have polarised this debate and resulted in the development of policy and legislation. Few anthropological human remains are on display in British museums, though many are held in storage. Within anthropology and bio-anthropology, the ethics of the scientific analysis of human remains have been questioned internally by those within the disciplines, and externally by the people they study or those people's ancestors. The subject's

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<sup>20</sup> The gallery reopened in 2001 with a focus on human evolution, but also on questions related to physical anthropology, such as paleopathology, the history of the department's collections, recent research in the field, and the history of the discipline. The exhibit contains a fraction of the human remains present previously.

history of race science has also exacerbated the need for anthropologists and bio-anthropologists to examine the ways they interact with human remains. Ethics can be argued as being part of the epistemological make-up of anthropological inquiry which has a core remit to explore and understand cultural difference.

Since anthropology itself is the incarnation of cultural encounter, the development of a code of ethics in the discipline is a must; its formation, however, presents a very complex problem because ethical differences between cultural groups need to be taken into consideration (Alfonso and Powell 2007:5).

In relation to the ethical treatment of human remains, archaeology is a relative newcomer. Archaeology is seen as dealing primarily with people considered to be in the past. Whereas anthropology can be seen as having an active 'other' who's activity alerts us to their consideration, archaeology's object of study is usually a passive and easily objectified 'other'. Concerns for the treatment of archaeological remains, which by far make up the majority of those held and displayed by museums in the UK, have been based on contemporary religious beliefs, such as those of the Church of England or modern Pagan organisations. As noted earlier, the DCMS Human Remains Working group focused on remains from overseas and the issues of repatriation and reburial. These concerns have been taken very seriously by many museum professionals and heritage organisations, sparking new debates, policy and regulation. Such reflection has pushed forward the question, should human remains be displayed?

The appeal of the dead on display may feel like something confined to history, Victoriana or beyond, but the desire to see the dead is a very contemporary fascination. In 2007, for example, the *Body worlds* road show arrived at the Museum of Science and Industry Manchester. *Body worlds* is

a travelling exhibition of posed human remains preserved by a process called plastination, where water and fats present in the body are replaced with curable polymers. The exhibition is the brain child of Gunther von Hagens, who developed the process of plastination in the 1970s at the University of Heidelberg. It was subject to both criticism in the press, and consternation among museum professionals. *Body worlds* has been seen by over 25 million visitors worldwide. In 2002, Channel 4 even broadcast a live autopsy, conducted by the mastermind behind the *Body worlds* exhibition, Gunther Von Hagens.

Modern western society is arguably more distant from the realities of death than it has been at any other period in history. Bodies tend to be dealt with by professionals and behind closed institutional doors rather than by families or communities. A curiosity about mortality and a desire to see the dead seems to be a part of modern Western culture. The sensations of disgust, repulsion and horror may also be attached to such curiosity. On the surface, displays of the dead, such as *Body worlds*, appear to differ considerably from those within museums. The brightly coloured plastinated bodies in *Body worlds* are deliberately posed in active contemporary stances, fresh and only possible via the wonders of modern science, in contrast to the skeletal, cremated or mummified remains shown in regular museum displays. The most significant difference between the two may be that, unlike the vast majority of those displayed in museums, bodies displayed in *Body worlds* were given with apparent express consent.

The previous discussions have focused on the the debates surrounding repatriation and reburial. In this section I will be examining some of the human remains that cross the boundaries of classification, those human remains that seem to be treated as objects rather than bodies.

When we display dead bodies, we treat them in the same way as things. We put them into a particular context, with restricted information that is carefully chosen to interpret the dead

body for our own contingent purposes. In this way, we turn bodies into objects, ‘things’ to be used for our needs, for the purposes of the still living. But of course they are, or were, persons (Alberti, Bienkowski, Chapman & Drew 2009:137).

The first part of this discussion will deal with one of archaeology and museology’s most iconic fixtures, the ancient Egyptian mummy. These human remains show how the acquisition and display of human remains is not always based solely on the desire to further scientific study or educate, but also to entertain. Later, the discussion will turn towards what are commonly known as bog bodies, where the concepts of consent will be dealt with. Lastly the discussion will focus on human remains that have been transformed by human hands into objects that are often defined as art. This will be done with particular reference to a Tibetan ceremonial apron constructed from carved human bone.

Some of the following discussions will focus on the recent developments occurring at the university-owned Manchester Museum relating to human remains. The museum, it can be argued, is at the forefront of human remains policy development in the UK and its staff have published several papers, as well as hosting related conferences. The museum has had recent exhibitions of human remains, such as Lindow Man, but has also made headlines by covering Egyptian mummies in reaction to public comments. The museum has also been a practical advocate of the consultation process, not only with local communities but with pagan organisations such as HAD (Honouring the Ancient Dead). It is possible that the issues that have been, and continue to be, addressed by Manchester Museum have the potential to impact on other museums.

## **Mummies**

Encountered in many, if not most large museums, mummies are an exhibit that many visitors eagerly expect. These remains are often approached with boundless curiosity, anticipation, intrigue,



mystery and at times horror. Rarely do visitors consider, particularly in the privileged Western world, that the Egyptian mummy is often the first dead body they will see, on childhood museum visits or school trips. Nor will many consider that this first encounter is with a dead body from Africa. The lure of the museum for many visitors is closely connected to this experience. The mystery, exoticism and otherness of museum artifacts is exemplified by these human remains, perceived as being collected by daring explorers from the distant depths of time and geography.

It is easy to argue that even though ancient Egyptian artefacts certainly constitute the most popular archaeological material, the public's knowledge and understanding of such material is often both skewed and misinformed. In many ways this can be seen as a historical issue, but it is also an issue perpetuated and constructed by the institutions that display such material. For example, museums generally fail to imbue a sense of chronology in their exhibits. Ancient Egypt is often portrayed and perceived as being a static civilization obsessed with death, where a vast chronology is condensed and simplified. Museum time lines often start at around 4000-3000BC with predynastic material. Almost all end or break before 641 AD and the Arab conquest (MacDonald 2003:97). This chronological division 'easily confirm visitors' perceptions of a complete separation between past and present in Egypt and allows 'potentially contradictory images of past glory and present barbarity to coexist' (Motawi and Merriman 2000:11, cited in MacDonald 2003:98). Such extrapolation is just one of the characteristics of Egyptian exhibitions that distances us from the individuals who are on display. Ancient Egyptian material, particularly mummies, is not just encountered in the isolation of the museum experience, they are also part of popular culture. The understanding and perception of these human remains has been formed by mythologies created in romantic literature, films, comic books and visitor attractions. The construction of the iconic mummy is a tale of the beginnings of archaeology and museology and how they entered the public consciousness.

Mummified human remains certainly form the most recognisable and iconic of all Egyptian antiquities and have fascinated the Western world for several generations. The earliest displays of Egyptian material were ‘put together for entertainment purposes’ (Moser 2006:61). Valued for their shock value rather than as objects of study, such early displays were presented with very little information. The presentation and interpretation of this material varied over time but retained certain characteristics that still exist in modern displays.

An examination of the museum’s [the British Museum] Egyptian collection makes it clear that the types of items possessed communicated particular ideas about ancient Egypt. Amulets, scarabs, mummies, and figures of animal gods from the 1759 installation conveyed an image of ancient Egypt as a source of “wondrous curiosities”; the sarcophagi and large statues of animal gods from the 1808 installation suggested that ancient Egyptians were creators of “colossal monstrosities”; the figures of rulers and wall paintings in the 1823 installation defined Egyptian art as “monumental masterpieces”; the shoes, bricks, and toiletries of the 1837 display rendered Egypt as a repository of “accessible oddities”; and finally, the augmentation and combination of all of these types of objects in the 1854 installation ensured that Egyptian antiquities were perceived as “historical documents” (Moser 2006:220)

Mummies, whether whole or fragmentary, functioned, during the 19th century, as objects of curiosity, discovery and gifts. They toured the United States in carnivals and circuses. ‘The idea of mummies as objects is an old one...they have been used as fertilizer, fuel, medicine, made into paper and even paint’ (Day 2006:25). The unwrapping of mummies, often in the guise of scientific investigation, was a regular source of entertainment, of public spectacle, social gatherings and even

parties. They were valuable commodities, sold and resold, even replicated as forgeries to feed a hungry market. Egyptian mummies also featured in the race science theories and collections discussed previously, where, as civilization builders, they were thought of as closer to Europeans than Africans.

The quantity of mummies taken from Egypt for display, curiosity, study and even medicine is astonishing. Collection was fuelled by the view held by many of those who witnessed the emergence of Egyptology ‘that to know ancient Egypt, one needed to gain control of as many artefacts as possible’ (Colla 2007:10). Many of these mummies are housed in museums, either on display or in storage, but unlike many other collections of human remains, there has been little desire or request for repatriation from Egyptian authorities. Requests have been made for the return of other antiquities. In 2007, for example, Egyptian antiquities officials requested the permanent return of many objects that were deemed to be on loan across the world (famous examples being Nefertiti’s bust from the Altes Museum in Germany and the Rosetta Stone from the British Museum) for the 2010 opening of the Atun Museum in Meniya and the 2012 opening of a new Grand Egyptian Museum being built near the pyramids at Giza, respectively. Historically, any discussions of re-patronage, particularly in relation to the colonial archaeology of Egypt, had tended to focus on legitimising the retention of antiquities for their conservation (Colla 2007:12). Occasionally comments have arisen on the treatment of mummified remains, for example Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s plea for mummies to be removed from public display but not necessarily returned to Egypt. This arose in the early 1970s, due to unsuitable behaviour by some visitors to the hall of the royal mummies at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The gallery was closed by President Anwar Sadat and reopened after ‘assuring a dignified and safe presentation of the bodily remains of the ancient rulers of Egypt’ (Babraj 2001:19).

To understand the display of Egyptian mummies and the place they hold in the public

consciousness we must be aware of the long history of mythologising that has transformed these human remains into iconic objects of voyeurism. Jasmine Day uses an analysis of the popular ‘mummy curse’ mythology to view the ways in which, as described previously in relation to Kennewick Man, the ancient body can be used as a text for the construction of new meanings.

Pre-classic curse legends challenged the Western imperial domination of Egypt, including archaeological exploitation, but coexisted with mummy romances in which domination was sanctioned. Mummies were portrayed either as helpless victims of modern grave robbing or as alluring female spirits willing to be dominated by men. Classic films found ways to combine the exciting curse motif with the message of romance: Egypt belongs to the West and all Westerners have the right to participate vicariously in archaeology. The principal way was to convert mummies from victims into villains by overloading them with signs of pollution and evil (Day 2006:8).

Egyptian art was entrenched in the evolutionary strata of Western art (Duncan 1995:27). The Egyptian Sculpture Room in the British Museum, for example, was, unlike the ‘wonderous curiosities’ of the mummy gallery, a ‘national space...an arrangement that attests to the cultural refinement of the English nation and to the reach of the British Empire’(Colla 2007:5). In contradiction to this view, Egyptian material was simultaneously viewed as exotic and alien with the mummy being ‘the orientalist prop *par excellence*’ (Montserrat 1997:180). The status of exotic curio was highlighted by the portrayal of the Egyptians as obsessed with death which fed an emotional response rather than an aesthetic one. Words such as ‘Grotesque’ and ‘Monstrous’ were commonly used to describe a variety of material such as mummies or hybrid animal human figures that both delighted and repulsed the viewing public. Objects, without any contextualization

reinforced the image of Egypt as a place of myth, bizarre rituals, morbidity and biblical abhorrence. Ancient Egypt was simplified, accessible and open to anyone's interpretation. Such freedom and ensuing fantasy placed the subject firmly in the realms of escapism and almost certainly fed the flames of Egyptomania.

So what meanings surround contemporary displays of Egyptian mummies? MacDonald (2003:98) notes that only in the last decade have museums attempted to integrate Nubian material into the Egyptian context in an attempt to widen the view of African archaeology.<sup>21</sup> The location of Egypt as African seems to be a difficulty for some to come to terms with, seemingly as a result of our colonial past. It is possible that the wealth, variety, familiarity, and complexity of Egyptian antiquities is so powerful that the need for contextualisation has fallen by the wayside but it is arguable that it is the public's relationship with the subject, often informed by the colonial era, that allows the pervasive lack of intellectual scrutiny. Initial displays at the British Museum gave great freedom of interpretation and allowed the myth and magic of ancient Egypt to be quickly assimilated into popular culture. The more information that is accrued on the subject the less 'magical' it becomes. Horkheimer and Adorno are seen by Colla (2007:4) as presenting the museum display as one of 'domination and control' where the antiquities are under the 'power of their civilized gaze'. Colla notes that this is not the relationship cited by travellers and museum-goers who describe their experience of viewing Egyptian antiquities as one of 'familiarity and closeness'. Contrary to the views of Adorno and Horkheimer, they emphasised experiences of 'awe, marvel, even humility'. It is this relationship that has characterised the exhibits of ancient Egyptian antiquities.

White western Europeans are, perhaps, looking for their roots among the earliest examples of recorded history, and are anxious to identify with a potent and attractive Ancient Egypt. If

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21 MacDonald cites The Horniman Museum London and The Brooklyn Museum's 'Egypt in Africa' display.

that Egypt is located in Africa, or even modern Egypt, they become visitors rather than inheritors. (MacDonald 2003:99)

Only recently has the moral appropriateness, as opposed to matters of taste and decency, of the display of Egyptian mummies been a matter for debate. With such a strong tradition of displaying mummies, it is surprising that their display has rarely been questioned. In fact many museums are criticised if they don't have them within their collections. So much so, that museums will often make as much of a show of as possible their sometimes meagre collections, simply for the draw such remains have on visitors.

In Russell Chamberlin's popular book *Loot* the chapter on the looting of Egyptian antiquities opens with a description of the pre-redevelopment exhibit of mummies at Norwich Castle Museum.<sup>22</sup> Though his description of the display is now an essentially moot point, there is a particular issue that he brings up which is highly relevant to this discussion:

A medical examination of the latter [mummy and sarcophagus] shows that it is the corpse of a woman, although the coffin itself belonged to a man. No further information is available on either mummy, nor does the museum have any record of how it acquired them (Chamberlin 2003: 26).

This mummy and sarcophagus have since been redisplayed and are often cited as visitor's favourite exhibits. Within the more recently opened adjacent Anglo-Saxon and Viking gallery, where a board for comment cards has been placed, the comments are often entirely directed to the mummies. Comments such as 'Get more mummies' or 'the mummies are the best bit' commonly occur.

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<sup>22</sup> One of the mummies was given to the museum by King George V in 1931, the other was a donation made by J. Morrison, London in 1827.

Jasmine Day relates similar experiences in her research:

Visitors' comments indicate widespread ignorance of current bans upon exporting mummies from Egypt...Demands that curators 'get more mummies' reflect a consumer mentality and a neo-imperialistic assumption that we may help ourselves to the material heritage of other countries. Yet museums are also culpable; labels seldom explain the circumstances under which mummies are obtained....This is demonstrated by visitors' uncertainty as to why some mummies are fragmented (the actual reasons being damage by tomb robbers or souveniring by collectors)' (Day 2006:131).

The display of material with as vague a provenance as the mummy and sarcophagus in Norwich Castle Museum, is a conscious decision made by many museums. Museums are visitor attractions and mummies attract visitors. Though more information relating to the subject of mummification accompanies the mummy in Norwich Castle Museum, and the mummy is exhibited with a large graphic showing investigative x-radiography, these efforts can be seen as an attempt to rectify the fact that little is known about the mummified individual.

Features such as the x-ray can also be seen as part of the objectification process. The use of science as an investigative tool continues to be a primary method of interpretation within museums, particularly for human remains. Science functions as a panacea for many of the issues involved with the display of the dead as it is bound up with connotations of objectivity and progress. Scientific objectivity allows displays to appear to be without interpretive bias and grants us permission to become voyeurs of often intimate details under the premise of education. Progress, which is characterised by the 'wonders of what is possible' in scientific investigations of human remains, often clouds the potentially invasive aspects of such research. CAT scans, MRI, x-radiography,

DNA testing, endoscopy, and chemical analysis probe the most intimate details of a body's remains including dental health, disease and intestinal contents. Investigations of this kind have now become so standard that experts now specialise in subjects such as Paleo-imaging or Archaeoparasitology, the study of ancient parasitism (Reinhard 1998:372). They are conducted, not only out of curiosity but for their altruistic potential to better mankind by helping us understand modern pathology or genetic disorders. Such details are thought to bring us closer to the remains, to empathise with their illnesses, infestations or disorders. Such scrutiny could also be viewed simply as a less destructive version of the rather salacious mummy unwrapping, considered by many to be relegated to history.

The second mummy that appears in the rather tomb-like gallery once again highlights why mummies are the exception to the rule. This mummy consists of a disarticulated head and a well posed hand rather than an entire body, which is in fact a fabrication. Though the accompanying text panel does refer to the body's incompleteness, it is not explicit. Those institutions or individuals that did not possess a complete mummy often constructed the remaining pieces to give the illusion of a whole. Such mild deception is not uncommon or a recent construction, and is again a choice made by those placing the bodies on display. It could be argued that such constructions are simply contextualising, and that the display of, for example, a disarticulated head on a shelf would be distasteful. In early displays of Egyptian material, fragments of mummified remains, such as heads, hands, and feet, were often displayed in quantity but on the peripherals of major exhibitions, being 'deemed inferior to whole mummies, so their quantity alone may have been intended to impress the visitor...ubiquity caused mummies to be regarded as objects [which] was compounded by their fragmentation' (Day 2006:24). An example of such objectification can be seen at the recently redisplayed King's Lynn Museum. The museum exhibits a very small collection of Egyptian material, which has little relevance to the region or the museum's primary displays, but serves to highlight the process of souvenir collection. Within this collection is an object labelled 'Arm of a



mummy'. Another object is simply called 'Piece of ancient Egyptian skull'. The handleless arm has the appearance of a foot-long dried vanilla pod and without the label would be virtually impossible to identify by the average visitor. Though arguably interesting as a curious item to bring home from travels abroad, the arm tells the viewer nothing about mummification, the individual to whom the arm belonged, or even its provenance, other than it being Egyptian. The piece of skull, though easily identified as the front of a human skull, including the eye sockets and cheek bones, is even less informative. This material is on display almost out of a seemingly intangible but obligatory remit for museums to have at least some Egyptian material in their exhibits. The study of ancient Egyptians features in the National Curriculum at Key Stage 2 which may have prompted museums to display any Egyptian material they have, in order to fulfil educational, or in some cases, funding requisites. It appears that Egyptian artifacts, particularly mummies, are synonymous with museums. Without information on the mummified individuals on display, it is difficult for visitors to identify with the remains, or to necessarily recognise that the remains of a person are being exhibited rather than simply an object.

It can be argued that it is not just cold curiosity that motivates the display of real human remains, especially when some form of replication or facsimile could be produced. Whether horror, sympathy or self reflection, it is emotional reaction that is often behind the display of many human remains, as well as being the force that opposes it. In both 2001 and 2005, Claire Rumsey conducted an experiment to gauge the responses of a group of students to a pig's heart, trotter and skin, a plait of human hair, wisdom teeth in a small glass presentation box and false teeth. Many found the material bearing closest resemblance to flesh, the trotter and skin, as most repulsive. Some were reluctant to touch the human hair, though many found the wisdom tooth to be endearing and reminiscent of teeth kept during childhood for the tooth fairy. Interestingly it was the only man-made object, the set of false teeth, that was viewed with repulsion by all.

One student explicitly made the connection between this intimate, internal – but disquieting – artefact and old age and decay, remembering the sight of a grandparent’s false teeth (Brooks & Rumsey 2006:345).

The experience of viewing the dead, is, in modern Western society, usually an unpleasant, stressful and upsetting experience. Within the culturally defined protective embrace of the museum showcase, this reaction is reduced and at times even dissolved completely. A balance is often called for when displaying human remains. The desire for a curator or designer to create interest or empathy must be measured against the feeling of repulsion, mortality or even horror that can occur in such an encounter. Those placing the dead on display are ‘often aware that they are presenting something that is generally unseen, and unsettling, which has the power to generate crowds, controversy – and income’ (Brooks and Rumsey 2006:279).

Mary Douglas’ (1984:2) examination of the boundaries of the acceptable, in terms of purity and impurity, can be used to help us understand how, by placing a body on display in a museum, the act of displaying the dead becomes admissible. To view and display a dead body can be seen as an ‘anomaly’ in the order of cultural understanding. This ‘anomaly’ is potentially ‘polluting’ but it is ‘purified’ by the Western perception of a museum as a sacred space where it is both ‘sanitised’ and ‘sanctified’. Taboos associated with dead bodies are overcome in this conceptual framework, which enables objectification so that the experience of viewing becomes culturally acceptable, even desirable.

In the process of this research project I have asked many individuals what they think of human remains being on display. Many have had strong opinions either way but few it appears, had considered Egyptian mummies within the discussion and when they did, they thought of them with

almost mystical reverence or childlike enthusiasm. Whilst discussing the experiment, Brooks and Rumsey make reference to Scheper-Hughes' observation that bodies are both 'objects and semi-magical symbolic representations' (quoted in Brooks & Rumsey 2007:345). The experiment carried out by Rumsey gives an insight into the reactions caused by the display of Egyptian mummies. The students in the experiment were most disturbed by the material that could be related to flesh. The presence of flesh on mummies reminds us that they were once living people. When dry and cleaned bones from archaeological excavations are displayed, they often seem far removed from the bodies that they have come from, depicting a skeletal 'other' that has its own set of associations. One particular characteristic of some mummified remains is the presence of a face. Such 'personality' is one of the reasons these remains lend themselves so well to fiction and horror stories. Few have looked at Egyptian mummies and not thought of them 'coming to life'.

In Western culture mummies are liminal bodies which are troublingly difficult to locate. They are dead at the same time as seemingly eerily alive: do they inhabit a world of the living or the dead? The mummy defies the most significant physical transition that the human body makes. From a living person to a corpse, and the investment of the mummy with an erotic potential is an acknowledgement of that defiance: the mummy can be an object or agent of desire in the same way as a living person (Montserrat 1998:171).

When Rumsey and Brooks' students were shown the wisdom tooth, presented in the glass presentation box, they reacted more positively than to the material without such shielding. Mummies in modern museum displays are most often twice boxed, in the remnants of a sarcophagus and within a museum showcase. These barriers have both a physical and symbolic purpose. They serve to increase the 'sanctity' of the museum as a space, therefore increasing its

ability to ‘purify’ the ‘polluting’ remains. Brooks and Rumsey (2006:279) believe that the ‘violent reaction aroused by the London *Body worlds* exhibition may have been due to the fact that the bodies were on open display and not in a traditional museum space and so did not benefit from its culturally “cleansing” protection<sup>23</sup>. The appearance of the plastinated bodies may also be an issue: their very life-likeness, and glistening fleshiness makes them ambiguous – part object, part human remains’. Unlike the the plastinated bodies exhibited in *Body worlds*, Egyptian mummies have another characteristic that functions to ‘cleanse’ and ‘sanctify’, that of chronology, or antiquity. Rumsey’s research found that people felt less strongly about bodies from the distant past. Respondents to her 2001 survey clearly distinguished between the acceptability of displaying prehistoric human remains versus twentieth century remains, dry bones as opposed to flesh and adults as opposed to babies. As discussed earlier, the presentation of Egyptian material as exotic, mysterious and ‘other’, a view through a colonial lens which distances us from relating too closely to the remains. Unlike the student who was reminded of their grandparent’s teeth in a jar, for example, few of us can make actual personal associations to mummified remains. It is the trick of the Western museum, which uses temporal, chronological or geographical distance to justify objectification, to sanitise with display cases, glass specimen jars, conserved and preserved remains and most importantly, the intention to educate.

The English-speaking world’s relationship with Egyptian mummies is complex and has been constructed over several generations. One element of this relationship is that of naming. The general process of describing human remains on display is a difficult task. Certain terms suggest a scientific and detached stance, such as specimen, preparation, corpse, or remains, which is the term chosen for this discussion. The Department of Health’s *Human Bodies, Human Choices* report into the collections of human remains held by British hospitals found that there ‘was no agreement on the

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<sup>23</sup> The only theft recorded from the *Body worlds* exhibition was that of a foetus from an unlocked display case (Brooks and Rumsey 351:2007).

most suitable collective term for human organs and tissue' (2003:10). Many displayed remains have found themselves being given nicknames such as 'Soapman', a preserved body from Philadelphia, or Lindow Man, who is known by some as 'Pete Marsh', or 'Charlie', the prehistoric child from Avebury discussed earlier. Famously, one naturally mummified Late Predynastic (5350 B.P.) Egyptian man on display in the British Museum is often referred to as 'Ginger' due to the colour of the mummy's skin, though others point to the colour of the body's remaining strands of curled hair<sup>24</sup>. Some view the attribution of a nickname as a positive occurrence which deals with the problematic lack of distinction between person and object, not only as can it be seen as affectionate, but because it renders the 'alien dead body familiar and safe and draws it within the circuit of the living by making it less of the "other"' (Brooks and Rumsey 2007:268). The practice of giving nicknames to human remains is also common during archaeological excavation and is argued by some (Kirk and Start 1999:201) to recognise the individuality of the remains and promote a respectful approach. The naming of mummies, in particular, is a complex story. Initially, the enormous quantity of remains gathered, the methods of acquisition and the ignorance of those collecting or receiving them, meant that few mummies were attributed their correct names. Whether correctly named or not, as they became parts of permanent displays within museums, exhibitions, side shows or carnivals, they often developed a degree of both fame and individuality. The names given to mummies were rarely the remain's original names; they were often arbitrary or simply sounded Egyptian. As with the mummy described earlier from Norwich Castle Museum, many remains have been presented in non related sarcophagi or with unrelated funerary material, often adding to confused identification. Historically, the social standing of the remains tended to affect the chances of a mummy preserving a sense of individuality or being given a name, whether fictional or not.

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<sup>24</sup> Brooks and Rumsey (2007:268) note that this is explained on the British Museum website in 2000. This no longer seems to be the case, though the mummy does appear if the word 'ginger' is used to search the website.

The [mummies] have a problematic status, being both objects and people at the same time. The imperialist desire to control the colonised body by creating an imposed taxonomy upon it, in this case the museum: but mummies do not submit willingly to this control. Simultaneously people and objects, they can simultaneously be reified and personalised (Montserrat 1997:172).

The naming of mummies and the construction of mummy biography has the potential to call into question some human remains policies. For instance, Manchester Museum's human remains policy states that 'Human remains will only be referred to by a proper name'. Khary, one of the mummies covered up by Manchester Museum has been given his name because it features on the mummy's sarcophagus. A previous curator of the collection has remarked, in personal communication, that the mummy belongs to the Ptolemaic period (332-30 BC) whereas the coffin is dated to the New Kingdom (1550-1070 BC) meaning that they bear no correlation.

Constructing a biography for or attributing a name to a mummy can be seen as feeding another facet of the public's relationship with mummies, that is, that they represent archaeology at its most exciting. Encased in layers of secrecy and protection, from the tomb to the sarcophagi and wrappings, they signify discovery, mystery and in some circumstances, treasure.

It is the fable of the Archaeologist as Hero – one of the basic narrative forms through which archaeological finds are brought to the public, in varying degrees of elaboration and detail. As an adventure story with a moral, it legitimises the exploration of hidden places and sanctions the removal of long hidden antiquities (Silberman:1995:251).

In Jasmine Day's exploration of the curse mythology, she remarks on a power shift occurring in around 1900, when specialists' control of Egyptology became increasingly exclusive and Egypt's antiquities export laws were policed more effectively: 'popular culture expressed a collective frustration that ancient Egypt was no longer literally within the lay person's grasp...Later though, as the public began to identify with archaeologists, the idea of mummies as their victims interfered with vicarious participation in their fabulous discoveries – so the evil mummy was born' (Day 2006:19). As shown in the previous section of this discussion, the balance of power has historically weighed towards those who can most legitimately construct interpretive narratives, with authority, such as archaeologists, scientists, and museums. The hegemony of archaeology and the museum has long gone unquestioned but when it is, it can cause strong reactions and polarise opinion.

In 1975, Manchester University Medical School conducted a televised unwrapping of 'Mummy 1770'. All that was known for certain about this particular mummy was that it had been given to Manchester Museum in 1896, possibly by Sir Flinders Petrie. Thirty-three years later, in 2008, the unwrapped mummy of Asru, and the partially wrapped mummy known as Khary, and a child mummy on loan from Stonyhurst College, which are on display in Manchester Museum's Egyptian gallery, were covered up with cloths (Figure 7). The museum stated that the covering was carried out in order that the human remains be treated with respect and to keep the bodies on display in line with the Manchester Museum Human Remains policy.<sup>25</sup>

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25 This decision was taken by the Manchester Museum and University Human Remains Panel, not by individual curators.



Figure 7. Covered mummy in Manchester Museum's Egyptian gallery (Exell 2008:1).

Many institutions have developed their own human remains policies, in line with the guidance produced by the DCMS. Manchester Museum's policy states that it 'goes beyond the recommendations of the DCMS guidelines and that there is a good reason for this'. The policy outlines that the DCMS guidelines fail to address the 'growing interest in the fate of human remains among many communities. What are valued as human remains in many communities go beyond the strict scientific definition contained in the DCMS guidelines and we believe that any consultation should be extended to include those alternative views'. This consultation process is one of the factors that distinguishes Manchester's policy from others. The Museum intends to 'involve, as far as is achievable, all interested groups in the consultation process, including the growing migrant and refugee communities'. The Museum's policy includes a very broad and less scientific definition of human remains than most policies. Manchester's definition includes bodies, and parts of bodies, of once living people, most commonly *Homo sapiens*, but recognises that 'some communities feel a local connection to other ancestors not classified by scientists as *Homo sapiens*'. The policy includes all osteological material (including teeth and fragments of skeletal material), ashes, soft tissue (including organs and skin), blood, hair, embryos and slide preparations of human tissue. It



also includes modified human remains and artifacts containing human material.

Different sources suggest that the covering of the mummies at Manchester Museum was instigated by different incidents. Some claim that opinions left on comment cards questioned the methods and dignity of the displays, other sources state that the concerns came from museum staff and still others point to a set of public consultations, specifically, consultation with Pagan groups. Though the decision to cover the mummies has been partially reversed (one of the mummies remains covered except for its head, hands and feet), reactions to the act provide interesting results with implications for the future of human remains display.<sup>26</sup>

Egyptologist Birgit Schoer sent a global message to the members of Yale's Egyptologists' Electronic Forum (EEF) attracting the attention of her colleagues on the considerable pressures Manchester Museum was facing from various groups - including the active British neo-pagans - to make mummies less "visible or accessible to the general public". To the point that the management decided - we were informed by her message - to cover entirely mummies prior to a planned public consultation "to find out what people think about the display of human remains...". Mrs. Schoer raised in her message a number of key issues against this decision including the notion of respect/disrespect towards mummies and the culture they represent. Her belief, which is also that of many persons, being that "the fact that a mummy is on display does NOT automatically signify disrespect for the culture it represents" or that "covering mummies or removing them from display IN ITSELF does nothing to improve our respect for the ancient culture (Vartavan 2008: 1).

The decision to cover the mummies sent waves across both the academic and museum community,

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26 'As public feedback showed that this is not the most appropriate long-term solution, we are trying out a range of different approaches to gauge public opinion.' Museum Director Nick Merriman, quoted in The Manchester Evening News 24.7.08

as well as being overwhelmingly derided by both visitors and the press. George Mutter, a professor at Harvard medical school in the U.S, told the *Daily Mail* that: ‘For decades the Manchester Museum has been a leader in the scientific study of human mummies. The decision to hide the mummies from view is a step backwards. In the interest of inclusiveness, the museum has become a playground for those who do not understand the subject at hand, nor respect the interests of scientists and public alike’ (Narain 2008:1). Public forums, such as the popular blog *Egypt at the Manchester Museum*, were filled with responses that included anger, confusion and suspicion. Responses such as ‘The problem is that those proposing these ridiculous policies make judgements based on their own limited abilities and assume that the majority of the public are as thick as themselves’, ‘How are the next generation going to be inspired and interested in in Egyptology (and history in general), if the items that excite them are hidden from view?’, ‘The museum response to complaints is pure Monty Python, they have now covered them from head to foot rendering the exhibition a non-exhibition. It is hilarious’ and ‘Is it because they are in such bad condition that it is embarrassing to have them uncovered?’ (Egypt at the Manchester Museum 2008:1 [online]).

The pagan organisation being referred to is the previously discussed HAD (Honouring the Ancient Dead). HAD claims that covering mummies is not on their agenda, which is simply to encourage the respectful treatment of ancient remains. The organisation has greatly appreciated its involvement with the Museum’s Human Remains Panel, stating that:

The final human remains policy was published after an extensive consultation with many affected parties including representation from HAD. The policy clearly defines its aims and the reasoning behind them with a number of strongly worded promises to act in an open and respectful manner. As such this moves the boundaries of what is possible from a HR [human remains] policy (Costelloe 2008).

It could be argued that this statement implies that the group intends to exert a similar influence on other policies around the country, but few policies include such emphasis on consultation. The time and resources spent on such a process are probably beyond institutions without national status or university funding.

As Manchester Museum states that the covering of the mummies was due to the implementation of their human remains policy, then the question must be asked, which part of the policy would call for such actions. One of the core identifiable issues involved is that of nakedness. This was apparently one of the regular comments made by members of the public. The mummies in question had been either entirely or partially unwrapped in the 19th century. Covering these bodies can be seen to satisfy a desire to display human remains with respect and dignity. The Museum's policy states that 'where human remains form part of an exhibition, either long or short term, they will be displayed in a culturally appropriate, sensitive and informative manner and always accompanied by explanatory and contextual interpretation'. Rather than being a simple case of decency, the arguments for covering the mummies are primarily focused on the part of the policy that mentions cultural appropriateness. Nick Merriman, in an interview with the *Guardian* (23.5.2008), said that 'the unwrapping, the interference and the fact that the mummies were no longer being displayed as found, was the crucial factor'. This point of view is very much in line with that of HAD, who strive to have ancient remains treated as their deposition or interment intended.

In the case of ancient Egyptians, a great deal of devoted research has been conducted so that we may understand the purpose and relevance of the preparation and placement of their dead. It has been said that the desires of ancient Egyptians to gain immortality justifies their display and preservation in museums, which are claimed to fulfil this desire. This idea is a simplification of Egyptian religious beliefs that ignores the complexity of both their concept of the afterlife and their

material culture.

During pharaonic times in Egypt, mummification, as well as funerary scenes decorated on coffins, served to protect the deceased during the perilous journey through the underworld on the way toward obtaining eternal life (Phillips and Roundhill 2007: 269).

It seems obvious that however we display mummies, we will not be recreating the cultural context in which they were found, or truly respecting ancient beliefs. If one accepts that the concept, expression, and methodology of respect is culturally bound, then we are at least free to take steps towards a form of compromise. Manchester Museum's human remains policy remarks on an issue that is closely associated with displays of bodies taken from their resting place, that of associated grave goods. The policy aims to respect cultural attitudes towards the location of grave goods. This idea has not been put into practice yet and is subject to review, as the Museum's human remains are currently 'separate from other items in dedicated areas within the Museum', but this is an idea echoed by many within both archaeology and museums.

The Ancient Egyptians believed that preservation of both their physical and spiritual selves was necessary to ensure life after death. They did not discard any body part during mummification because they believed that it could be used to cast spells against the dead person. It would seem reasonable for museums to accommodate the expressed concern of Ancient Egyptians, that the remains of an individual are kept together (Townley 2000:26).

If we can accept that we cannot simultaneously display the ancient dead and satisfy their funerary practices or beliefs, then we must validate the process by making it as functional as

possible. The aim must be to display mummies in the most informative way possible. This means exploring the issues as well as the material when we display the dead. For example, exhibitions could explore the checkered history of the treatment of mummified remains, a recent history which is often as fascinating as the antiquities on display. Although graphics panels, sensitive lighting and signage cannot replace the trappings of a mummy's original interment, a measured and thoughtful acknowledgment of what is being displayed is certainly progressive. Bristol's City Museum, which has recently opened its redesigned Egyptian gallery, has chosen not to display its unwrapped mummies, preferring to keep them in storage. It has also devoted an area of the exhibit to the issues involved in displaying the dead as well as unwrapping mummies. Respect for the individuals on display can also influence an institution's respect for the sensibilities of visiting audiences. The Petrie Museum's 2001 touring exhibition *Ancient Egypt: Digging for Dreams* displayed mummies in covered cases allowing visitors to actively choose whether they wanted to view them. Manchester Museum's human remains policy is to be reviewed in 2010. A comparison between the first document and the newly amended one will no doubt be influenced by the public reaction to the covering of the mummies.

### **Bog Bodies**

Around the same time that the mummies at Manchester Museum were being covered, the institution was exhibiting its third temporary display of a bog body known as Lindow Man<sup>27</sup>. The exhibition, which was called *Lindow Man: A Bog Body Mystery* (April 2008 to March 2009), aimed to be ground breaking, respectful, innovative and most importantly, inclusive. The curation and interpretation of the exhibit was to typify Manchester Museum's emphasis on consultation,

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27 The previous 1991 exhibition of Lindow man provided record visitor numbers for Manchester Museum. In 1984 peat worker Andy Mould found his second human remains (the first being the head of a woman found in 1983) at Lindow Moss, Cheshire. The remains were of an adult man, of around 25, whom radiocarbon dates suggest died between A.D 20 and A.D 90. The remains were preserved in anaerobic conditions high in humic acid. The body showed signs of dying a violent death.

community involvement and respectful treatment of human remains. Previous exhibitions held in national museums, which focused on human remains, have had similar intentions. For example, *London Bodies: The Changing Shape of London from Prehistoric Times to the Present day* (October 1998 to February 1999) at the Museum of London, was focused on the local community and explored the ways Londoners' bodies have changed from prehistory to the present. On a smaller scale, The Petrie Museum's experimental *Digging for Dreams* (March to September 2001) touring exhibition, empowered the visitor, allowing them to choose whether to view the mummies on display. Both of these exhibitions could be said to have avoided controversy by remaining within the codes and conventions of museum practice. In contrast, the *Body worlds* exhibition, which was discussed earlier, defied traditional interpretive techniques and courted much controversy.

The design, interpretation and formation of displays such as these, can give us an insight into the concerns, intentions, views and motivations of those producing exhibitions, as well as the ways they view their audiences. This is certainly so in the case of *Lindow Man: a Bog Body Mystery*. In line with their previously discussed human remains policy, Manchester Museum conducted an extensive consultation program, including a freely available report on the process, decision making and considerations that went into the exhibition. The report, by Bryan Sitch, covers a meeting held at the museum on the 10th of February 2007, where archaeologists, museum curators, community representatives, members of local archaeological societies and pagans gathered to discuss the coming presentation of Lindow Man to the public. In the introduction the report swiftly sets the tone of the workshop by deconstructing the endemic hegemony of the museum/object relationship:

The museum accepts that it does not hold a monopoly on the interpretation of the objects it puts on display and that there is no one single authoritative voice which speaks through the

displays. This reflects changes in the theory of knowledge or epistemology and in approaches to exhibition both within the museum profession as a whole and within Manchester Museum (Sitch 2007:1).

The consultation gathered individuals with potentially conflicting arguments in order to form a lively debate. In particular this meant including pagan groups who ‘have often been dismissed by the archaeological community’ (Sitch 2007:2). In fact the report could be argued to be slightly biased toward the stance of pagan groups. It sets out that ‘Archaeologists have tended to treat human remains as objects because of a materialist/dualist world view which arose during the 18th century Enlightenment. Put simply there is a separation between spirit and matter’ (Sitch 2007:2). Many archaeologists would strongly disagree with this argument. Spiritual beliefs and archaeological practice are not mutually exclusive and most academics of the humanities have encountered, or are aware of the spiritual concerns of those they study, a facet which may even have led them to the discipline. Some academics and scientists would argue that special interest groups such as HAD are not, and should not, be given any special treatment or involvement in decision-making processes relating to ancient remains. Published in the *Museums Journal*, a month before the Manchester Museum’s meeting, Smith and Martin from BBAO state:

The claims that there is now increasing engagement of museums with groups representing modern pagan faiths is grossly exaggerated. We suspect that most museums recognise that modern pagans claims to special status with regard to prehistoric or archaeological remains are bogus. The contradictory assertion that pagans are excluded by museums is equally unfounded (Smith and May 2007:18).

Manchester Museum's consultation report certainly shows that pagan perspectives were being taken into account in this instance. In fact 12 out of the 36 attendees were pagans, by far the largest representation after those actively involved with the museum. The meeting's claim to include the community only seems to involve the attendance of 5 community representatives.<sup>28</sup>

Although opposing views were predicted, the meeting came to several amicable conclusions as to what should be included in the exhibition, both intellectually and physically. There was an agreement that the exhibition should explore alternative points of view and that Lindow Man should be used to create a link between people nowadays and those who lived 2000 years ago. An emphasis on the spiritual was also called for. Lindow Man was to be referred to as a 'him' rather than an 'it'. The museum was to explore whether it could 'create a shrine near the Lindow Man exhibition where people could make offerings to the ancestors, of which Lindow Man is a representative but not make offerings *to* Lindow Man' (Sitch 2007:4). The meeting was in agreement that, like the exhibition by the Petrie Museum, people should be able to choose whether or not to view the body of Lindow Man. One concern was that of repatriation from the British Museum back to Manchester Museum where the body could be closer to Lindow Moss, where he was discovered. The site of Lindow Moss was also to be a focus with full size images and audio to create a sense of place, or possibly a sense of geopiety?

The report concludes with a preparatory design brief which outlines a physical description of how the exhibition should be constructed. Lindow Man was to be displayed in relative isolation, towards the end of the gallery with no interpretation so as not to allow any descriptive viewpoint to dominate. The body was to be placed in a round case to exemplify his 'organic pre-industrial character' (Sitch 2007:9). A corridor was also to be provided so that people could avoid viewing the body and a room or 'Chill Zone' was to be at the end of the gallery so visitors could 'sit and think about what they had seen and perhaps to consider their own mortality' (Sitch 2007:9). The

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<sup>28</sup> The report does not detail the sections of the community represented or how diverse this representation is.



interpretation of Lindow Man was also seen as an opportunity to examine wider issues such as sustainability and climate change, 'ethnic diversity, regional identity and even terrorism' (Sitch 2007:9). This last point may seem to be utterly erroneous but apparently the possible sacrifice of Lindow Man could give us an insight into the 'mind-set of a suicide bomber' (Sitch 2007:8).

The resulting exhibition gained mixed reactions. Eight months after the exhibition closed, the museum was still receiving comments and up to a 1000 visits a month to the exhibition's web page. Some comments wish to congratulate the museum on its emotive and innovative display, but others felt dissatisfied and even angry. The main cause of complaint was not the fact that the exhibition contained human remains but rather the concepts that seemed to have developed during the consultation meeting. Many, including Jonathan Schofield, believed that the museum had taken a 'dangerous step' by giving a voice to people who have 'no right whatsoever to speak for the corpse' (Schofield 2008:1). The people who were speaking for the corpse, within the gallery, were individuals from the community who, via a mixture of audio recordings and related material culture, were describing what Lindow Man meant to them. These included Susan Chadwick, a pupil at Lindow high school at the time of the discovery. Her story was that of nostalgia for the 1980s and included memorabilia from the pop group *Bros* and a *Care Bear* soft toy. Another of the voices was that of Emma Restall Orr, a Druid Priest from HAD who had been involved in the consultation meetings. The inclusion of such material was the result of the exhibition's modus operandi to examine what Lindow Man means to us today. Criticism cited against the exhibition included the lack of both information and interpretation. The body, in its sanctuary-like isolation, was viewed by some as simply being hidden away. The exhibition brief was adamant that the public be aware of how little we know about Lindow Man and how many different interpretations there are. One of the greatest sources of praise for the exhibition came from the pagan community who felt that they had been both respected and included. Druid Priest Emma Restall Orr described her experience of the

gallery:

At first glance the whole exhibition area seems strangely bare, and what is there seems strangely irrelevant. The corridors are low lit, sparse in their contents, with a few cases containing items carefully chosen as expressions of each narrator's story, his or her connection to Lindow Man - scientific, social and religious - relating their involvement in his story of when and how he was disinterred, studied, and put on display. On the MDF boards are key quotations from interviews with these narrators. In large archlever files are the full transcripts of the interviews, together with a wealth of related information. There are books to refer to, to flick through, some chosen by the narrators to express or support their perspective. The rough dark boards add to the sense of the whole exhibition being half completed, or even half conceived. It would be easy to feel that it gave a profound impression of a lack of respect. On that first visit, filled with uncertainty, having been through the first two corridors, moving into the third the glass case in which he lies was suddenly before me. His mutilated half body, deep brown, his foot at an angle, his blank expression is like that of a man utterly broken. I was overwhelmed. This was not the sickened rage I had felt at his display in the British Museum, where his case was one amongst many in the Iron Age gallery, his body little more than another artefact of the era. What flooded through me here was a rage drenched in grief (Restall Orr 2008:1).

Any controversy and criticism that became attached to the exhibition could be argued to be caused by the removal of the purifying power of the culturally defined and recognisable museum space. The remains on display at the *London Bodies* exhibition, for example, were placed in cases like transparent coffins, enclosed and labelled using conventional museum methods. The inclusion

of modern pop cultural material and the dilution of the expert voice at Manchester Museum can be said to have created an anomaly, rather than the accepted sacred space. The far reaching aims of the exhibition, to create a respectful and emotive gallery space, may have been lost on some visitors as the amalgam presented appeared to be quite confusing. The Lindow Man gallery was intent on laying bare the process of exhibition construction. This led to the use of unpainted or non-fabric covered MDF being used to create shelving units (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Shelving constructed from bare MDF in *Lindow Man: A bog body mystery* (Manchester Museum website).

The intention of this seems to have been lost on many visitors who thought the exhibition looked unfinished. Publicity for the exhibition featured images of objects such as the *Care Bear* (Figure 9), with the tag line ‘What is Lindow Man’s connection with a *Care Bear*?’.



Figure 9. The *Care Bear* that featured in both the exhibition and the exhibition's publicity (The Manchester Museum website).

This was partially because the museum chose not to publish images of the body of Lindow Man out of respect but this caused many a visitor to ask the question back to the museum. One visitor to the exhibition emailed the museum to say:

How can you hold a 'responsibility to treat human remains with respect and dignity' yet show an image of a *Care Bear* underneath the heading 'Lindow Man'? It conveys the wrong message completely! (Lindow Man at the Manchester Blog 2009 [online])

The previous 1991 exhibition of Lindow Man at Manchester Museum appeared to be universally praised. This would lead one to suspect that recreating a similar exhibition would be a relatively easy task. Bog bodies encompass a plethora of exciting and fascinating topics which have enthralled the public for decades. These human remains are also incredibly complex, making both interpretation and presentation very challenging. Manchester Museum's intention to highlight how little we know about bog bodies such as Lindow Man can be seen as a slight misnomer. Whilst it is true that, as archaeological evidence goes, there are some limitations to our knowledge base, a great deal of research continues to be conducted.

One aspect of their complexity is the method of their deaths. Almost all bog bodies show signs of horrific violence.<sup>29</sup>

He [Lindow Man] was found naked apart from a band of fox fur, around his upper left arm. The sequence of events leading up to his death have been debated but the evidence points to a vicious blow to his back, during which his rib was fractured, followed by two blows to the skull causing a depression fracture strong enough to crack one of his molars and drive splinters of bone into the brain. By this stage, he was probably unconscious, as he was garrotted with a tight cord made of animal sinew, and his throat was finally slit (Giles 2006:4).

The theme of murder permeates the existence of bog bodies. One of the limits to archaeological research is that when they are discovered, they are most often thought to be victims of modern murder and are subject to forensic pathology, which hinders early archaeological investigation.<sup>30</sup> From gibbeting, death heads and anatomy theatres, there has been a long history of displaying and exhibiting the perpetrators of crime. Executed criminals, particularly, have often been portrayed as giving up their rights to dignity after death. This does not stop relatives, however distant, from caring about the treatment of the individuals remains. For example, the remains of William Corder, executed for the murder of Maria Marten in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, were displayed at the Royal College of Surgeons. These remains were recently claimed by Linda Nessington, a distant relative, who stated that ‘to have his body on display was horrible and very undignified’ (quoted in Brooks and Rumsey

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29 A common phenomenon of bog bodies is that of dismemberment, partial or complete. Selective parts seem to be chosen for deposition. In the case of Worsley man, also at Manchester Museum, only his head was found. The remains of Oldcroghan Man appear to show that only the upper torso and arms were interred. To date, in Ireland, 15 dismembered heads have been recorded, each found in isolation.

30 Police initially thought the body of Lindow Man to be that of local woman Malika Reyn-Bardt. When they confronted her husband, who was the prime suspect, he admitted to her murder and burial in the bog at the rear of their bungalow.

2007:345). The remains have since been cremated.



Figure 10. The Praying Man on display at the *Body worlds* exhibition (Photograph by S. Noblett).

As an apparent victim, it is natural to question how appropriate it is to display Lindow Man. One aspect of *Body worlds*, which separates it from the fore-mentioned exhibitions, is the issue of consent. *Body worlds* places a great deal of stress on the fact that the bodies being displayed are donations from the individuals themselves. Though there has been some dispute over this, no evidence has been conclusively produced to state otherwise.<sup>31</sup> *Body worlds* even contained a shrine to the donors with a plastinated body holding its own heart (Figure 10). The display of archaeological remains can never be done with the consent of the individual being displayed. In the majority of cases, where bodies are excavated from burial grounds or removed from tombs, we are aware of the intended resting place of the dead individual, or at least we know the location of deposition intended by those who placed the remains there.

Even expressly asking for one's body not to be displayed after death, does not necessarily mean that it won't. The Hunterian Museum, London, exhibits the 8ft 2in skeletal remains of Charles

<sup>31</sup> In 2002, a shipment of 56 corpses on their way from Siberia to Dr von Hagens was stopped by court action. He has been accused of receiving bodies of Kyrgyz and Chinese prisoners but he has always denied knowing the exact origins of the corpses. In early 2010, Dr von Hagens started selling plastinated body parts. Though it is only legal to sell certain organs or body parts to Doctors, teaching establishments and universities, many body parts are not restricted for sale. Issues of consent have been raised over this inclusion of foetuses and babies, which under the Human Tissue Act, would not be allowed to be displayed in the UK since 2004.

Byrne, who was known as the Irish giant. Charles, who died at the age of twenty-two in 1783, is said to have made a dying wish to have been buried at sea off the Irish coast, so that his body could be neither dissected nor put on display, as he had been ‘displayed’ in life. British anatomist John Hunter apparently bribed the undertaker and both dissected and placed the body on display, where it remains. Requests continue to be made for the burial of Charles’ remains with one campaigner, himself 6ft 6in, contacting the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission.



(Figure 11). Bespoke shoe that belonged to Charles Byrne (photograph courtesy of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service).

I have personally witnessed the story of Charles Byrne being eloquently described through the use of one of his shoes which is part of the Carrow House Costume and Textile Study Centre’s collection in Norwich. The enormous shoe allows, when combined with relevant interpretation, the viewer to understand the physical size of Charles Byrne and his story, without the need for his remains to be viewed (Figure 11). The desire to see the skeleton of Charles Byrne is probably not an educational one. As non-medical laypersons, what we are satisfying as voyeurs, is our curiosity, and possibly a morbid one at that.

Bog bodies hold a particular fascination for audiences for a number of reasons, but what draws us to view their violently murdered, naked bodies, is not necessarily a desire to learn.

[Are there] details of the past too intimate to display? A display can show the disease which

affected an individual, what food they ate, that they had head lice, worms or syphilis, a third nipple or any other deformity. Does it make a difference whether that individual is anonymous? Do we need to know these things to display them? (Tarlow quoted in Alberti, Bienkowski, Chapman and Drew 2009:133).

The bog body known as Oldcrogham Man, whose body is on display in the National Museum of Ireland, shows visible signs of torture. As well as being both disembowelled and dismembered, both of his nipples had been sliced off and left to hang by flaps. Two withies were also found 'pushed through holes in his upper arms, possibly whilst he was still alive (to pinion his arms back) but more probably to stake him into the bog' (Giles 2006:5). If we were to consider a contemporary victim of such extreme violence, the idea of placing said victim on public display would be unthinkable. Though there are many readings of this type of violent death, most agree that the deposition of bog bodies was a sacrificial act carried out by a community rather than an individual.<sup>32</sup> Without even this basic level of interpretation, the solemnity and severity of these deaths becomes little more than spectacles of morbidity. Manchester Museum's decision to place Lindow Man in isolation, without nearby interpretation, out of respectfulness and to avoid bias, meant that visitors could easily avoid, intentionally or otherwise, the realities of his death. On the other hand, Manchester Museum's exhibition explored the emotions and thoughts of modern individuals to Lindow Man, an angle not previously explored by any other exhibit of bog bodies, which have tended to stick to conventions.

These conventions, similarly to the previous discussion of mummies, have had a tendency to construct the bodies displayed as objects. The appearance of bog bodies from the outset is a

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<sup>32</sup> Other theories include punishment for crimes of honour or banishment, with the bog representing a liminal place between the living and the dead. Others have read the injuries inflicted on the bodies as the practice of a form of divination. The generally well fed, often manicured appearance of many of the bodies found suggests they could also have been high status captives or hostages.



construction. Their hardened glossy skin is the result of their conservation, often via soaking in polyethylene glycol (PEG) 400 and then freeze drying, a process very similar to the conservation of waterlogged wood, which has a similar appearance once conserved.



Figure 12. Lindow Man at Manchester Museum, on loan from the British Museum (The University of Manchester website).

Attention is often drawn to certain aspects of the bodies with the use of lighting, carefully placed mirrors or magnified images on graphics. These aspects tend to be quite gruesome, such as Lindow Man's slit throat or the noose around the neck of Tollund Man. The frugal trappings of these bodies such as Lindow Man's fox fur arm band or Oldcroghan Man's armlet are also shown in excruciating detail with repairs, construction or stitching emphasised in order to increase a sense of temporality, or a life lived.

Displays generally focus on the time of discovery rather than deposition by reconstructing elements of the bogs where the bodies were found in at the time of excavation. The bodies are often placed in or with textured materials, mimicking peat, with images of bleak landscapes often accompany them (Figure 12). Such contemporary views of the landscape often fail to convey the landscape of the Iron Age, an environment of everyday habitation. Though the use of a round case

was posited for Lindow Man at Manchester Museum, eventually a conventional square one had to suffice (most probably due to costs and environmental controls). Cases are generally quite low to allow children and wheelchair users to comfortably view the remains. This arguably places the viewer in the position of discoverer, archaeologist, certainly voyeur or possibly even depositor.

Science tends to serve as the primary source of information in the displays of bog bodies, delving into the most intimate details of the bodies existence. The details are as thorough as forensic investigations would have been, had these individuals indeed been victims of modern murder. Unlike modern victims, these individuals details are public property, exhibited on graphics panels or repeatedly described by experts in audio recordings played throughout galleries. Their last meal, illnesses, disease, tattoos, even the condition of their finger nails and substances applied to their hair are all examined. With the exception of the exhibit at Manchester Museum, science remains the grand narrative in exhibiting these remains. Rather than being questioned as intrusive or even salacious, science is portrayed as a facilitator, allowing us to get as close as possible to the bodies, to empathise and sympathise.

Within exhibitions, science also serves to help explain the incredible state of preservation in which many bog bodies are found. Such preservation tends to leave the remains with features that make them more identifiable as human bodies, in comparison with skeletal remains. As discussed in the previous section, Brooks and Rumsey (2006: 345) noted that individuals tend to react more to material that is closest to human flesh. Some have argued that we have a 'morbid attraction' (Wholley 2001:275) to such material, particularly those that have soft tissues.



Figure 13. Preserved specimens on display at the Kunstammer in St.Petersburg (Photograph by H. Vartanian).

Museums such as the Kunstammer in St.Petersburg, Russia thrive on the exhibiting of anatomically deficient human remains, body parts and foetuses but when the body of Otzi the Iceman was discovered in Austria, the decision to display him was impacted by commentators who were particularly concerned by the presence of flesh (Figure 13). Hans Rotter, a theologian and priest from Innsbruck University, stated that ‘the fact that the Iceman from Haulabjoch is so well preserved and his human features are so visible does call for a certain piety’ (quoted in Fowler 2000:163). The existence of flesh seems to increase not only our reaction to human remains but possibly their significance. This is exemplified by bog bodies, where flesh is almost the entirety of what remains.

His [Tollund Man’s] face wore a gentle expression – the eyes lightly closed, the lips softly pursed, as if in silent prayer (Figure 14). It was as though the dead man’s soul had for a moment returned from another world, through the gate in the western sky (Glob 1965:21).



Figure 14. The image of Tollund Man, on display at the Silkeborg Museum in Denmark, described by P.V. Glob (Glob 1965:65).

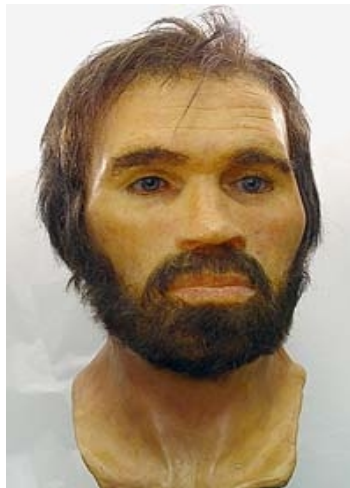


Figure 15. Facial reconstruction of Lindow Man created by RN-DS Partnership.

Like the some of the mummies discussed previously, many bog bodies have the remains of their face visible. The power of such a relatable feature is highlighted by the current fascination with facial reconstruction (Figure 16). If time and circumstance has resulted in a body not having a face to look upon, or in the case of Lindow Man, one that is distorted, then science can amend: ‘It is the identification of the corpses as specific individuals that is the most shocking of all.’<sup>33</sup> A face is

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<sup>33</sup> The company that reconstructed Lindow Man’s face, RN-DS Partnership, noted that ‘as the skull was inaccessible for casting, an exact replica was created from a series of radiographs. Once the replica had been created, it was possible to carry out the reconstruction technique. Unlike many of the other reconstructions, Lindow Man still had much of the soft tissue remaining (albeit grossly distorted by the peat), so it was possible to incorporate these into the finished

personal and individual in a way that other body parts are not' (Vermeeren 2000:45). The excitement brought about by seeing the face of the dead is not a new phenomenon in antiquities. Montserrat notes, whilst discussing the discovery of Roman period mummies from Fayum, Egypt with affixed portraits of the deceased, that 'what really seems to have excited late 19<sup>th</sup> century viewers were the vivid portrayals of the subjects, which seemed to bring people of the past back to life, embodied in living, breathing flesh'(1997:173). It is arguable that the desire to look at the dead, face to face, calls into question the way in which we identify with not only with these individuals but the methods in which we construct our own identity, reality and our sense of self.

It may well be that we do not instantly question the potential fetishising or scrutinising voyeuristic gaze that is placed on human remains because they are presented in a space with predefined cultural parameters, a space that grants permission through a construction that relies on a degree of objectification, often by utilizing tools such as scientific inquiry. However much we interpret, reconstruct or contemporise them, bodies on display remain 'other'. In fact these processes can be viewed as promoting this position. The cultural practices that lead to the deposition of these remains may distance us, seem unusual or bizarre, but this does not create the permission to observe them, only a drive. What initially 'others' them is their ancientness. Just like Kennewick Man and the Avebury bones, ancientness allows a plurality of readings to be constructed around the body, not only of the world from which they originated but also how they fit into the world they inhabit now:

Biographising the ancient body is a sexual act because it is essentially scopophilic or voyeuristic: that is, it involves a pleasurable looking at an object unaware of the watcher, who in this case is separated by time. One could go further and say that it is a pornographic act because it is based on a powerful viewer and a powerless viewed (Montserrat 1997:171).

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reconstruction as accurately as possible' (RN-DS Partnership [online]).

As Manchester Museum's consultation report suggests, 'Lindow Man could have had multiple lives. We should engage the public imagination and create a forum to relate to him. Maybe we should have creative writing activity. Juxtapose stories, was he a Druid prince or a Roman captive?' (Sitch:2007:4).

### **Tibetan bone apron**

In 2008 the conservation department of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, of which I am a member, started remedial work on objects about to enter Norwich Castle Museum's new Decorative arts gallery, *The Arts of Living*, which opened on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2009. One of the more unusual objects, which I was tasked with preparing for display, was described as a 'Tibetan bone apron (Figure 16), believed to be constructed from the bones of deceased lamas'. As part of the conservation department's standard practice, I undertook some preparatory research as neither I nor any member of the department had worked on one of these objects. I found this research particularly interesting, not just because this was a significant object of decorative art, or because it had been looted, but because it was constructed from human remains. It was this activity that sparked my interest in the debates surrounding the display and treatment of human remains and objects made from them.

The object seemed to stimulate a variety of reactions. Many who viewed it, without knowing it was made from human bone, thought it was beautiful but were soon turned against it calling it 'grizzly', 'upsetting' and 'horrible' once they discovered what material it was constructed from. Others had the opposite reaction, greeting the object with a lack of interest until they discovered it was made of human bone. In many way the human remains that formed the apron were disguised, allowing an unprejudiced reaction, something that never occurs with a mummy or bog body. It is

this mix of emotional and intellectual reactions that has spurred my investigation towards a discussion of display ethics and the display of the dead. It is rare for one object to be able to produce reactions as diverse as morbid fascination, surprise, aesthetic beauty and repulsion.

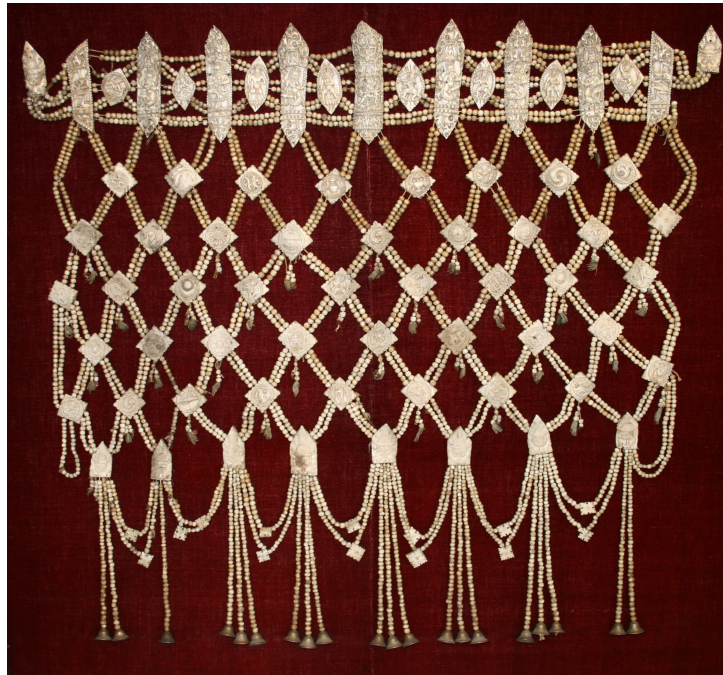


Figure 16. Tibetan bone apron before treatment and display in Norwich Castle Museum (photograph by J. Clark).

The apron had been gifted to the Norfolk Regimental Museum in 1962 by British officer Arthur Hadow. Lt. Col Hadow had previously ‘acquired’ the apron after the capture of the fort at Gyantse, Tibet, in 1903. The history of the apron is fairly well documented as letters written by Arthur Hadow to his mother describe its acquisition and its intended destination.

We did not find much worth having at first but, presently, in a dark corner, I discovered what appeared to be a cupboard with two doors sealed up. I was not long in getting this open! It was pitch dark inside but the first thing I touched rattled, it being hung from the ceiling and I recognised it as being a Lamas apron made of human bones and beautifully carved. Knowing this to be of some value I seized on it at once. Like everything else it was



black with dirt and it is rather a gruesome object but the carving on the larger pieces of bone is quite splendid (Hadow 1904).

Plunder had long been an incentive for soldiers on campaign but the division of such wealth was generally weighted towards those in high rank. This meant, as in the case of the acquisition of the bone apron, a degree of skulduggery was required if lower ranking individuals intended to loot. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ethnographic material or curios became desirable for both individual collectors and institutions, with the later half of the century seeing material being gathered by the military specifically for museums. In one of his letters home Hadow remarks that:

Everything which appeared worth having was taken and after some things had been set aside for the British Museum the remainder was divided amongst the officers. Three small images fell to my share of no particular value beyond curiosities. After all this loot had been divided anyone was allowed to go into the fort and take whatever they liked (there being practically nothing left). However, I happened to hear of a certain room which was rather hard to find and which I fancied might have been overlooked (Hadow 1904).

Material gathered in this fashion had come to play an increasingly significant part in the process of ‘othering’ Oriental and African societies and was epitomized by the new professional status of exploration and both the expansion and creation of ethnographic departments in museums and universities. After the chaos of the recent war in South Africa and the activities of both the British army and merchants in India, looting was becoming viewed as morally questionable by critics within museums and the military.<sup>34</sup>By this time though, looting had become a firmly

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<sup>34</sup> For example, incidents in India, such as the 1877-1878 campaign against the Jowaki Afridis, where troops had looted and burned several houses, saw the loss of a number of innocent lives and was deemed to be an embarrassment to the British Government.



institutionalised practice which was ‘symptomatic of the British imperial state’s desire for artefacts with which to provide information about exotic societies’ (Carrington 2003:82). The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the opening up of Tibet to the West, which was already hungry for both information on, and the material culture of, the Orient. Tibet had tantalised the West before but its material culture in particular had not been subject to the obsessive taxonomy that characterised the period. Buddhist material was the most highly desired because it was so poorly represented in British libraries and museums.

The early twentieth century saw the Younghusband campaign, of which Arthur Hadow was a part, advance as far as Lhasa, the Tibetan capital<sup>35</sup>. The history of this campaign is still being investigated; as whilst official reports denied looting and other improper behaviour, the Indian press reported widespread defilement of holy sites and religious buildings, and the Chinese and Russian authorities made use of the incursion for propaganda purposes. During this time it became useful for the British authorities to portray the Tibetans, particularly the monks, as practicing a corrupted and degenerated form of Buddhism, a portrayal helped by descriptions of rituals relating to death and the use of objects made from human remains. This granted some ethical protection to the British army who often usurped religious sites for tactical reasons or for supplies.

The attitudes to Tibet were indicative of the wider concerns of the late Victorian Christian crusade against ‘heathen’ practices in India and elsewhere. Deep rooted Christian prejudice surfaced during the Tibet mission and was later exemplified in publications like Waddell’s *Lhasa and its Mysteries* and Landon’s *Lhasa* in which monks ‘live idly on the labour of the laity’ who are seen as existing in a state of perpetual ignorance and filth (Chamberlin 2003:94).

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35 Lieutenant Colonel Sir Francis Edward Younghusband (1863-1942) was a British Army officer and explorer who led the 1904 British expedition to Tibet, during which a massacre of Tibetan soldiers occurred. Younghusband held positions including British commissioner to Tibet and President of the Royal Geographical Society.

Earlier encounters placed Tibet and its material culture in a comparatively anomalous position. Unlike the ‘noble savages’ being encountered at the time, descriptions of Tibet highlighted parallels with the West, particularly Catholicism. Even the use of human remains was seen as bearing a resemblance to the reliquaries of the Catholic church, though this form of Catholicism was thought to be tainted by the devil. A perception of the Tibetans as being simultaneously holy and unholy fuelled the many contrasting readings of their society and material culture, often generating myths which entered Western popular culture. The exoticism of *thangkas* (Tibetan paintings) showing images of skeletons and naked goddesses with garlands of severed heads, silver rimmed skull cups and aprons constructed from intricately carved human bones fed stories of enchanters, lost kingdoms and blood magic (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Detail of the bone apron showing image of a ‘Chitipati’ skeleton dancing on corpses (photograph by J. Clark).

Viewed through the lens of Orientalism, Tibet has appeared in several incarnations.<sup>36</sup> Studied

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36 Orientalism being ‘the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line.’ (Said 1995:73).

and exclaimed as a source of wondrous curiosities and exotic religious iconography, material from Tibet has been treated in a similar manner to that of the previously discussed ancient Egyptians, being portrayed as timeless and obsessed with death. Its more recent incarnation has been as works of art. McGown (2006: 98) describes three exhibitions within the United States, all of which occurred in 2003, which focused almost entirely on the aesthetics of Tibetan religious material.<sup>37</sup> This transformation from symbolic to aesthetic, the full analysis of which is beyond this discussion, has not just impacted material from Tibet, it has been undertaken with material defined as ethnographic from all over the world. In this instance the transformation of material culture into object of art must focus on material that is in some ways even more problematic than usual, that is, human remains as art. This categorisation has the potential not only to dilute national identity and meanings but it also has the power to remove the sacred status of an artefact. The bone apron I prepared for display may well epitomise this as within *The Art Of Living* it is classified as, and has become, decorative art. Its ‘otherness’ is firmly established by the a banner under which it sits, titled *The Exotic*. I would also argue that the transformation of human remains into art distinctly positions them as property, an issue that the policy, institutions and even the law sometimes struggle to reconcile.

Bone aprons were one of six items worn by the lama during important tantric ceremonies. The wearing of these items symbolized one’s own death and ‘the necessary release of one’s attachment to the human physical body in order to effectively pursue enlightenment’ (Marsh 1998:1). Based on the ornaments associated with the wrathful *heruka* deities, each of the items represents one of the Six Paramitas or six Perfections. The tiara stands for Generosity (*Skt. Dana*), the armlets represent Morality (*shila*), the bracelets are for Patience (*kshanti*), the anklets, for energy of action (*virya*), the chest piece stands for wisdom (*prajna*), and the apron, for meditation

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<sup>37</sup> *Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure*, at The Art Institute of Chicago (April to August 2003). *Circle of Bliss* at Los Angeles County Museum (October 2003 to January 2004). *Tibet: Treasures from the Roof of the World* at the The Bowers Museum (October 2003 to September 2004).

(*dhyana*). All of these objects are usually constructed from bone, though not always human. Yak bone was most commonly used, with human bone forming the more important or larger pieces. The acquisition of human bone for the construction of objects was not unusual in Tibet and was still a common practice during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century (the estimated period when the apron was constructed). Other examples of objects made from human bone include trumpets made from femurs and bowls and cups made from skulls. The source of these remains appears to differ case by case and according to different researchers, who are often speculating. Some point to the use of the bodies of criminals who have been executed. Others say that the bones of children are used as they retain the most power, particularly, orphaned children. Some simply refer to the bones being gathered from charnal grounds, sacred land where bodies were ritually disposed of in what is known as sky burial. As McGown (2006:90) explains:

In the *Naro Dakini* example, an ideal skull-cup would be from a violently murdered or executed individual or an illegitimate child, aged seven or eight years, who was born from an incestuous union. The least desirable skull is from someone who died of natural old age. The skulls of a venerable lama or pious laymen were often embellished and furnished with a decorative tripod and cover and then placed on an altar as the vessel for the 'inner offerings' of animals and humans.

In 1999 a 'ritual bone apron' went up for auction at Christie's. The lot, described as 'a belt set with nine oblong plaques suspending a network of double-stranded beads joined by square plaques at the intersections, all carved with deities, auspicious symbols and stylised floral designs, the bottom rung carved with lion masks joined by festoons' sold for \$9,200 (Christie's 1999 [online]). The catalogue omitted that the bones were probably human. One would imagine that the

sale of human remains would cause controversy. One might also assume that the display of human remains, especially those that could very well be from a child, would also be questioned.

As a generalisation, the Western eye views human remains as ‘anomalies’. A series of connotations and preconceptions constructs them as ‘polluting’ and dangerous, even when they are reduced to iconography. For example, skeletal imagery is a common signifier of malice, potential harm, mortality or contamination. Material with such a potent power to ‘pollute’ must be controlled. Art can be viewed as a method of controlling such polluting material by mitigating the ‘force of moral condemnation’ (Douglas 1975:109). As established earlier, the containment of human remains in the culturally constructed conventions of the museum space, can purify this anomaly, but as ‘art’ human remains may be being displayed in order to cause an aesthetic or emotive reaction which cannot always be achieved under such confines. The transformation of human remains into works of art can be seen has the height of objectification. But what if the remains have already been objectified by their physical transformation into another form, one that may not even be recognisable as human remains? Is the bone apron in the decorative arts gallery, its form bearing no resemblance to a human body, as much a set of human remains as the skeleton on display in the Natural history gallery?

The UK Museum Ethnographers Group defines human remains ‘as including both prehistoric and historic biological specimens as well as artefacts’ (1994:22). The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2005) definition excludes hair and nails but includes ‘osteological material (whole or part skeletons, individual bones or fragments of bone and teeth), soft tissues including organs and skin, embryos and slide preparation of human tissue’. The Human Tissue Authority (HTA), which was charged by the Department of Health to license the display of certain categories of bodies in museums, uses the phrase ‘relevant material’ (2006:7) as a catch-all term but excludes hair, nails and blood. Remains which have been altered in form, such as crematory ‘slag’

in burial urns and Egyptian mummies ground to a powder for pigment or medicine, are therefore attributed the same status as a complete body. The British Museum recently returned some human ashes, gathered from cremation fire and preserved as an amulet, to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre in Australia, which highlighted that though transformed they were still significant as human remains (Brooks and Rumsey 2007:346). On the other hand, a court in Mannheim, Germany recently ruled that the preserved bodies featured in the *Body worlds* exhibition were legally ‘things’ and not human bodies. As previously discussed in relation to bog bodies, many policies and debates surrounding human remains focus on the idea of consent. Consent is core to the licensing provided by the Human Tissue Authority (2009) and is a legal necessity in the collection, display and retention of modern human tissue. One aspect not explicitly covered by the fore-mentioned policies is that of ownership. Legally British museums cannot ‘own’ human remains, they can only retain legal custody of them (Bienkowski 2009:3). This begs the question: does the Tibetan bone apron, like the rest of the objects on display in the decorative arts gallery (excluding those on loan), belong to Norwich Castle Museum?

The DCMS guidelines, which exclude hair, wouldn’t cover the nine kilograms of human hair from Auschwitz on display in the US Holocaust museum but few could witness such material and not instantly humanise or empathise with it. Defining and categorising what is and isn’t an object is potentially as semantic and subjective as defining what is or isn’t art. The appropriateness of displaying and potential objectification of material, such as the hair from Auschwitz, involves a great deal of consideration and curatorial decision making. It is arguable that such material does not belong in a museum setting, being more suited to a memorial or even a grave. Such debates call into question not only the display of the dead but the entire purpose and definition of museums as institutions:

The Hunterian Museum and *Body worlds* can also be compared in their presentation of human foetuses. In *Body worlds* these are accorded a different treatment to the rest of the human remains. Lying on pillows of black velvet may be an attempt to acknowledge their humanity or some respect to the unborn child, but what it does is to turn them into art objects, each with their own spotlight much as jewellery is on show in art museums, or even high-class jewellers. Compare this to the outright medical display of the Hunterian, where the body as medical specimen elucidates a far greater understanding of development within the womb (Alberti, Bienkowski, Chapman and Drew 2007:143).

One of the previously mentioned confines included in the construction of a 'purifying' space such as the museum is the concept of respect. The definition and implementation of respect has, in recent times, become embedded in exhibitions involving human remains throughout the majority of Western museums. This 'respect' has not only encompassed the material on display but also those visiting the exhibits. For example, visitors to *London Bodies* were greeted by a large sign informing them of what they were about to see. Children were not allowed unaccompanied by an adult and school groups had to ensure parental permission before visiting. Warning signs were not used for the *Body worlds* exhibition, where children under six were admitted free and no permission was needed.

By its very nature, the idea of insisting, or creating policies that demand that art be 'respectful' could be deemed as both contradictory and a form of censorship. A good example of such a dilemma may be Marcus Harvey's portrait of Myra Hindley, made from multiple copies of children's handprints. This art work sparked fierce debate on the concept of respect and its place in the art world. It can also be seen as highlighting the possible responsibilities exhibitors have to the treatment of the dead and the concerns of the living. The depiction of death and the dead body has

been integral to the history of Western art, and the practice of using body parts for casts in a tradition linking anatomy, art and medicine goes back hundreds of years. Modern artists continue such practices, at times utilising actual human remains or material of human origin. Examples of such works include Christine Borlands' 1997 *From Life*, a reconstruction of the skeleton of an Asian woman whom Borland purchased by mail order, or Marc Quinn's 1991 sculpture *Self*, a cast of his own head made from his own frozen blood, which he remakes every five years. Though a fruitful examination of such works is beyond the remit of this discussion, which aims to focus on the heritage sector, it is important to be reminded that the display of human remains extends far beyond museums or the remit of educators, including both classical and contemporary art. It is also important to recognise how our perception and justification of the display of human remains is strongly influenced by context. Art critic Bruce James (2000:32) gives an insightful description of his experiences of the use of human remains in art:

On two occasions I've found myself in the position of a curator of the dead. The first of these was in 1978, when, as a fledgling artist, I staged an overambitious, politically-themed exhibition in a hole-in-the-wall gallery in bohemian Darlinghurst. Among the many bloated and technically ill-resolved offerings was something I described in my photocopied catalogue as a fetish object. Positioned by means of Araldite atop a crudely cruciform shape, draped in orange chiffon - this was Oxford Street - was a human skull that I had salvaged from my days as flatmate to a medical student. The lower jaw of the skull, I remember, was hinged for movement, but I araldited that down as well. It was my Araldite period, come to think of it. Using the cranium as a canvas, I decorated the bony surface with a multitude of faux-Indigenous dots, filched, I suspect, from the Western Desert dot paintings that were then only just making inroads into the Australian consciousness. Thus, not only did I abuse



the unknown dead, but I stole and misapplied a system of culturally embargoed markings.

The Human Tissue Authority's codes of practice (2009) would be relevant to each of these modern examples as it is concerned with material from persons who died after the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1906 and follows the Human Tissue Act (2004) which made consent and licensing statutory requirements for the collecting and or display of human remains, from either dead or living individuals. The non-statutory guidance issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2005), which focuses on human remains older than 100 years, aims to encourage good practice, justification for display and signage to prepare visitors for an encounter with human remains (DCMS 2005:20). These guidelines are tentative and at times quite vague, for example, asking for displays to 'encourage reflection' (DCMS 2005:20). Their unifying and possibly vaguest remit is the promotion of 'respect'. Works of art can pose a particular problem for these guidelines as they may very well have been created to produce a particular reaction, one that does not have respect at its core.

These guidelines do act as a prompt, possibly encouraging displays of human remains to involve a sense of purpose. The Tibetan use of human remains to construct objects does not appear to be part of the Western perception of the country's material culture. It is also reasonable to argue that the display of Tibetan material culture has been assimilated into the world of decorative art, being contextualised as aesthetic rather than sacred. McGowen (2006:6) describes a catalogue entry for *Naro Dakini* in the American exhibition *Desire and Devotion: Art from India, Nepal, and Tibet*, which reads:

In this rather loosely painted *thangka*, Naro Dakini stands on a lotus in the militant pose (*pratyālidha*), trampling two personifications of obstacles. Of red complexion, she is naked

except for her ornaments and garland of severed heads. While holding a chopper with her right hand, she tilts the skull cup with the left to drink the blood. Her magic staff rests horizontally across her shoulder. Surrounded by an oval, flame-fringed aureole, she stands against the six-cornered (*shatkona*) diagram (*yantra*) of two superimposed triangles, also flame fringed. Curiously, however, the goddess, with her lotus base, is placed slightly off centre.

Like the description of the bone apron sold by the auction house Christie's, there is no mention of the intent or purpose of what is described. Instead the exotic orientalist facets of the painting are emphasised by the use of words such as 'lotus', 'militant', 'red', 'naked', 'blood', 'magic', 'flame', 'goddess'. The catalogue also focuses on the decorative aspects of the *thangka* comparing it with similar previously exhibited *thangkas*. The painting's rarity is also propounded rather than its religious significance. Such descriptions firmly establish the work in an art-historical context, divorcing it from its role in Tibetan culture and 'reducing their distinct cultural specificities into Western qualitative and quantitative measurements, which makes each piece comparable, a necessity for making judgments on value' (McGown 2006:6).

This painting, just like the bone apron I conserved, can be argued as being an exotic 'anomaly' that is sanitised, 'purified' and controlled by both Western art-historical discourse and its placement within the culturally accepted confines of the museum. Museums have to make choices as to the use, portrayal, and function of objects within their collections. This choice can be reduced to, 'that of a mortuary, a morgue for dead objects and that of a place of lively communication where objects continue to live, fulfilling some function' (Mensch 1992:1). There is an inevitability that when an object is placed on display and or interpreted as part of a grand narrative, in a gallery or as part of an exhibition, that its original purpose, function, or meanings, will undertake a process of

either obsolescence or transformation. The bone apron, which sits in a gallery entitled *The Exotic*, in Norwich Castle Museum's *The Art of Living* gallery, is no longer viewed as human remains or even as the object of its intended purpose. It is instead an object in flux, transformed first during construction and transformed again during display. It, like the painting, is re-contextualised to suit Western voyeurism rather than religious function. The bone apron's previous custodian, The Norfolk Regimental Museum, did not have it on display, though they did loan it to an exhibition on souvenirs at Great Yarmouth's Time and Tide Museum a year before its display in the Castle Museum. It could be said that, as part of the Regimental Museum's collection, the apron was again contextualised differently, in this instance as documentation of the British campaigns in Tibet, therefore embodying not only the looting of religious artefacts but also a significant piece of local history. In this context, the object's part in the process of Orientalism is arguably more transparent than when viewed almost entirely as an aesthetic object, therefore encouraging more reflection, but in this undisplayed and uninterpreted existence, it could also be said to have been part of the 'morgue', being 'historisch blutleer' (Badura cited in Mensch 1992:3). In the next section I shall investigate how, via the process of conservation and preparation for display, I contributed to the objectification and re-contextualisation of the bone apron.

## Chapter 3. Conservation: Preserving the dead for the living

### Introduction

Although attitudes to dead bodies vary according to many factors, their source is especially significant. Their age and location determines which professional group will take custody of the remains, and which communities may identify with them (Alberti, Bienkowski, Chapman & Drew: 2007:133).

For many museums, collections of human remains often exist as awkward, cumbersome and unused assemblages. Collections may have been gathered for purposes now deemed controversial, and other remains may have been transformed, defying traditional categorisation by being both object and human remains. The appropriate treatment, storage and display of human remains can be confusing and involve a wide spectrum of perspectives, opinions and levels of concern. Who should the custodians of these remains be? If institutions intend to keep and collect them, how should they be cared for? Several guidelines have been produced which discuss the treatment of human remains, particularly those categorised as ethnographic, but they do little to address the every day practicalities faced by institutions that house these remains. Are smaller institutions capable of instigating the measures taken by large and often better funded museums, and how should they prioritise them?

Through an examination of the issues involved in the care and treatment of human remains, I argue for the need to adjust old and often ingrained trends that exist within museums, where specialists regularly work in isolation, and where defined roles limit what is achieved by reducing flexible approaches to solving some of the problems relating to museum's most controversial collections, human remains. One of the aims of this discussion is to highlight the active role

conservation and collections management staff could play in both the practicalities and decision-making processes involved in the treatment and display of human remains and objects made from them. I will argue that conservators should not only feed information into other disciplines but they should also make themselves aware of the work and developments occurring in those disciplines.

A primary focus in conservation training is ethical decision making, a facet which few other heritage studies or social sciences could claim as part of their tutelage. For the conservator, the choice of whether or not to intervene, in the often natural deterioration of an object, is a matter for great consideration. The principles of modern conservation are formed around the concept of minimal intervention, as the history of conservation practice is informed by past mistakes and irreparable damage being done to artefacts that may have survived had they not been ‘conserved’. The discipline is driven by the desire to create reversible and long lasting methods of preserving cultural heritage for further generations. This motive can be seen as at odds with the majority of cultural ideologies when transferred to the treatment of human remains which are usually deemed to be ‘artefacts’ that were deliberately laid to rest.

This chapter will initially focus on the remedial and preventive conservation of human remains. Remedial work requires a great deal of consideration as even the most minimal intervention can alter an object<sup>38</sup>. Such consideration is even more vital when the object in question is culturally sensitive. This section will also look at the collections management issues involved with the storage of human remains, including the implementation of preventive conservation.<sup>39</sup> This includes a brief discussion of the dilemmas faced by institutions that hold redundant collections of human remains, in this case those held at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, where a collections management issue blossomed into a fascinating collections paradox. Alternative methods of caring

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<sup>38</sup> **Remedial** conservation, as defined by the International Council of Museums Committee for Conservation (ICOM CC), includes, all actions directly applied to an item or a group of items aimed at arresting current damaging processes or reinforcing their structure. These actions are only carried out when the items are in such a fragile condition or deteriorating at such a rate, that they could be lost in a relatively short time. These actions sometimes modify the appearance of the items.

for human remains will be discussed, with an examination of some of the ways conservation has adapted to, or included, indigenous perspectives, concerns and beliefs. This will also involve an examination of some of the current debates relating to consultation, access and the control of knowledge.

When a conservator is presented with most artefacts in the process of deterioration, there is a library of case studies to refer to which describe the observed process of the materials degradation, the products that could be best used to treat the artifact, and most importantly, thoughts on the ethical issues involved in such processes. This is not the case when it comes to human remains or objects made from them. Only recently have conservation authors started to address the issues of human remains, and even more recently, from a perspective that deals with more than the material properties.

Little attention is given to human bone in the conservation field, and there is even less to be found about future laboratory or curatorial concerns. There are three references that deal with bone treatments involving adhesives and/or consolidants; these are intended specifically for a conservation audience and presuppose the use of interventive solutions to preservation problems (Cassman and Odegaard 2004:272).

This may have been simply because conservators have rarely been included in the treatment of human remains. It may be because human remains are usually retained as evidence rather than

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**39 Preventive** conservation, as defined by the International Council of Museums Committee for Conservation (ICOM CC), includes, all measures and actions aimed at avoiding and minimizing future deterioration or loss. They are carried out within the context or on the surroundings of an item, but more often a group of items, whatever their age and condition. These measures and actions are indirect – they do not interfere with the materials and structures of the items. They do not modify their appearance. Examples of preventive conservation are appropriate measures and actions for registration, storage, handling, packing and transportation, security, environmental management, emergency planning, education of staff, public awareness, legal compliance.

aesthetic form. Or it may be that human remains are not generally conserved. Another reason may be that those who work with human remains, such as archaeologists, physical or forensic anthropologists and osteoarchaeologists, see the conservator as having little to offer in terms of expertise. Finally the discussion will explore this discrepancy and look toward a possible future for the treatment and care of human remains, a future of multi-disciplinary communication, pluralism and inclusion. I will also argue that such multidisciplinary activity is the best way in which to fulfil the core remit of human remains policies, respect.

### **Caring for the dead**

It must become part of Man's common consciousness that human remains, despite their age and civilizational affiliation, demand dignified treatment regardless of how important they are to science. This awareness should determine our ethical behaviour. It is part of the duties of a modern museum holding in its collection objects of this type (Babraj 2001:19).

In a museum context, the conservator has the most intimate contact with artefacts. The processes of assessment, installation, treatment and storage, often involves handling, mechanical intervention and close inspection via microscopy or x-radiography. Conservators also have the potential to cause physical change to material they treat, aesthetically and structurally. Remedial work in particular always comes with some degree of risk for an object, so the choice to conduct it is always done with great deliberation. Such consideration is usually informed by literature, not only aimed at preserving the physical integrity of an object, but the ethical considerations relating to the preservation of authenticity and aesthetics. These can often be complex issues demanding a degree of compromise and an onus on the much debated attempt to make every alteration as reversible as

possible. In the case of human remains, this literature is scarce, a fact I became aware of when I began preparations for my work on the Tibetan bone apron discussed in the previous chapter.

My initial inspection, to assess the condition of the bone apron, showed it to be in generally good condition, considering it had not been stored in an ideal environment; it had been relegated to an unconverted prison cell block, the only object storage space afforded to the Regimental Museum. It became apparent that, as an object constructed from human remains, I should familiarise myself with some of the ethical guidelines that related to such material. My first course of action was to see if this object was, or could be, classified as human remains and whether or not Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS) had a human remains policy. Although NMAS had a policy for the acquisition and disposal of human remains, it had no individual policy of its own for the care of human remains. In the UK, bespoke policies tend to be within the remit of national museums or smaller museums with particularly large collections of human remains. As for the apron's classification, as discussed earlier in the previous chapter, it depended on the guidelines or policy.

My research confirmed that the apron was almost certainly made from human bone and that it was of cultural significance, being what could be described in Western terms as sacred. The 1995 *United Kingdom Institute of Conservation Rules of Practice 1.1.7*. states, in relation to human remains and material of religious significance, that, 'Each member must show respect for human remains and cultural property which have a ritual or religious significance. He/she should be cognisant of any special requirement, whether legal or social, of such material'. It also states that, 'No aspect of cultural property should be altered nor should material be removed from it without justification'. The last part of this statement is a useful guideline, but one that could be argued as already being core to modern conservation, which vocally promotes minimal intervention.

As an object that embodies several ethical dilemmas, the Tibetan bone apron involved a degree of research and preparation, only afforded to very significant or complex objects and with



the support of senior staff. Whilst cognisant of the substance of the apron's construction, and after researching its ritual significance, I was left primarily with the dilemma of how to treat an object from a very different culture, with respect.

The conservation of Tibetan objects is particularly complex as the originating community is currently being threatened in, or removed from, their homeland. The conservation of such objects could be seen as helping preserve the physical heritage of a people who are physically and socially or culturally threatened. This assumption, however, is problematic as it suggests that the material and social culture of such diasporic communities is not continually developing. This is of course not true. Therefore the challenges for museums that hold collections from living cultures are increasing (Hall: 2002:1).

Being an artefact which comes from a country of not only great political turmoil but also full of Western cultural misconceptions, I thought it prescient to make contact with someone who may be able to give me of a Tibetan point of view. Consultation advocates Klesert and Powell (2007:203) see such interactions as serving to de-objectify human remains, 'allowing archaeologists to see them more as actual deceased people'.

The curator of the Norfolk Regimental Museum had in the past been contacted by a local Buddhist organisation that worked with The Norwich School to set up school trips and support programmes with Diskit Monastery in Ladakh, India.<sup>40</sup> My contact, with a representative of the Diskit Monastery, was an interesting encounter, primarily because I found myself being the resource rather than the seeker of information. I was told little more than I already knew about the apron and my contact's opinion was that the apron was probably better cared for in the UK than it would have been in Tibet, had it survived the country's turmoil. The main topic of conversation was what advice

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<sup>40</sup> Diskit Gumpa is the largest Buddhist monastery in Ladakh. It runs an organisation known as the *Tibet Support Group* which aims to teach English language and science to children in Tibet. It is this organisation that is supported by the Norwich School.

I could give for the care of material held by the monastery in Ladakh. Though it was difficult to give more than rudimentary advice, it struck me that what I was describing was the care of museum objects, not the care of functional religious artefacts, which is what my contact was describing. I was also aware that on the same day, the primary concern related to the the bone apron in the museum was a discussion with the curator of the decorative arts gallery and the display team, about the colour of the fabric of the padded board on which I was to mount the apron. Though standard practice, this concern, a purely aesthetic one, highlighted again that the readings and meanings of the bone apron, like all museum objects, exists in a state of flux. In this case, the apron transformed from object of religious function to historical document, to object of decorative art.

The bone apron had been treated previously by a freelance conservator, who had cleaned it for a temporary display in the early 1990s. Although this treatment had been poorly documented, inspection of the apron under the microscope revealed that it had been vigorously cleaned using a glass bristled brush, fragments of which were left in the crevices of the carved bone, which is visible on a photograph on a banner hung above it in the gallery (the image was taken before the object was prepared for display). Reading Arthur Hadow's description of the apron when he found it, as being 'black with dirt', served to accentuate even more the part conservators play in the transformation of the meaning of objects. The previous cleaning appears to have mainly involved the removal of the remaining 'dirt', which could be argued to have been part of the object's story, most likely being the buildup from years of exposure to incense and the hands of those performing the related rituals. It also highlights the dilemma of whether or not it is really possible to 'respect' the cultural significance or 'sacredness' of religious objects when the intention is to either displace or redefine the object.

The conservation process results in the selection of effects or cultural values in the

conserved object. As a consequence, certain values will be retained, enhanced, or added to, whilst others will be diminished, altered, or removed...The primary focus of Western conservation, in preserving the physical fabric of objects and information about them, potentially isolates objects from the traditions and people that gave object meaning, such as the living culture of descendants of originating communities (Sully 2007:41-42).

The concept of 'respect' as a cover-all term for the proper treatment of human remains can be seen, from a certain perspective, as a way of avoiding the complexities of the debate. In its most general form, respect can simply mean behaving in a culturally accepted way. To respect human remains from a different culture surely must demand a dialectic shift, alternative methodologies and cross-cultural awareness.

The treatment of British remains in British institutions would perhaps be viewed as a much less problematic exercise, especially if those remains are hundreds of years old. For the majority this is true. Most collections of human remains held by museums in the UK cause no controversy and attract very little attention. This could be argued to be because the treatment of human remains, particularly skeletal remains is 'one of archaeology's dirty little secrets' (Fagan 2007:3).

The treatment of human remains, by archaeologists, physical anthropologists and museum staff, has often in the past been cavalier. With the exception of remains identified as particular individuals, or considered to be of great scientific or cultural importance, vast quantities of remains, usually excavated from archaeological sites, exist in boxes and store rooms across the country unused and uncared for. Arguably kept for future research, physical archive or analysis, the collection of skeletal remains is ingrained, normalised and standard practice within archaeology. It is also rarely questioned, and when it is, it is often answered defensively with academic authority. The role of the conservator in the treatment of human remains, which often constitute non-

decorative and rarely displayed material, has generally been reduced to monitoring the environment of storage spaces or occasionally providing specifications for storage units, though rarely for human remains specifically.

There is growing recognition of the rich social and personal context of even seemingly utilitarian objects. As a result, less tangible aspects of objects, such as the lingering perfume in an empty bottle or the unique representation of this perfume on a favourite garment, are beginning to be appreciated. If we interpret everyday objects in such subjective and personal ways, then we can neither depersonalise human remains nor deny the importance of their intangible qualities (Townley: 2000:26).

Such lack of involvement would lead one to consider that maybe archaeologists and physical anthropologists, who continue to be the custodians of most human remains, were cognisant of, or trained in, preservation issues. This is not the case. Within the educational programmes of both these disciplines there is 'scant mention of preservation topics' [which is reflected in] 'the often uncared for or overcrowded conditions of osteological collections' (Cassman and Odegaard 2004:272).

A good example of standard practice for many institution's storage of archaeological human remains would be the NMAS (Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service) 'Superstores' in the grounds of the Gressenhall Museum of rural life. This large, purpose built, environmentally controlled store, holds a variety of collections from over thirteen different museums and heritage sites. It is also the storage location for the region's archaeological archives, particularly those excavated by the NAU (Norfolk Archaeological Unit). These archives include large quantities of ceramics, building materials, tiles and human skeletal remains. The majority of these remains can

be defined as bulk archaeology (Figure 19). They generally relate to past publications and site reports but many of the boxes of remains would be very difficult to identify by anyone not directly involved with the related sites. Some boxes contain several individual's remains. Some boxes are simply marked in felt pen 'HSR' meaning 'human skeletal remains', 'leprosy' or 'skull'. All are stored in cardboard boxes known as 'skelly boxes', usually loose, without appropriate packing materials (Figures 19-22). Over the last few years a collections management programme has attempted to rectify the lack of documentation attached to each box. It has enforced a numbering system for all material entering the store and in 'the case of bulk archaeology, where time, resources and inclination do not permit the recording of individual items we resort to documenting the boxes that are in storage' (Warren 2005:2) rather than the contents. Though these recent measures afford greater awareness of the material housed in the store, and allow for better curation and therefore access to the material, they do little to preserve or care for the remains. They certainly do little to promote 'respect'.



Figure 18. Bulk archaeology stored in the Gressenhall superstores (photograph by J. Clark).



Figure 19. 'Skelly box', labelled with only a site location and the word 'leprosy' (photograph by J. Clark).



Figure 20. A skull packed in a 'skelly box' lined with newspaper (photograph by J. Clark).



Figure 21. The remains of several individuals jumbled together. They show signs of post-excavation deterioration (photograph by J. Clark).



Figure 22. A skull and various other skeletal remains packed in a plastic bag from *Boots* the chemist (photograph by J. Clark).

It is difficult to ascertain how the general public would perceive the storage of some human remains. In some instances they would probably express the same horror as many museum professionals do when they encounter badly stored remains. On the whole it appears to be a matter seldom considered. When such matters are publicised they tend to provoke at least some reaction. Recently, an episode of Channel 4's *Time Team* followed an excavation in the grounds of the Royal Hospital in Gosport with Cranfield University, Bedfordshire. The excavation included the skeletal remains of twenty-nine individuals from unmarked graves dating to around 1755 which were examined by physical anthropologists. Portsmouth newspaper *The News* reported the public reaction:

Many people complained to *The News* because the 29 bodies are laid out on tables at the University of Cranfield waiting to be reburied. Now Caroline Dinenage, MP for Gosport, has been promised by the university and Defence Estates (DE) Historic Environment team, that a date for a proper navy reburial for all the remains will be given to her next week. The university and DE will work together to organise the reburials and the university will pay for them. Mrs Dinenage said she is pleased the matter will finally be resolved: "It's got to be

done as quickly as possible. This programme was filmed last summer. These bodies have been left unburied for over a year. They do have to carry this out in as respectful a way as possible. These are very old bodies but they are human remains and they need to be respected in the way that they deserve” (*The News* 2004 [online]).

It is interesting that the stark image of excavated remains laid out on tables would cause such a response. When human remains are shown in museums on television they tend to be either in display cases or being carefully examined by professionals, often scientists, wearing gloves and laboratory coats, in environments that could be described as medical. As discussed in the previous chapter, science often acts as a purifying and controlling panacea for the disturbance and examination of human remains, although in the case of this *Time Team* episode, such scientific justifications were obviously not universally accepted.

How the general public would react to boxes of crumbling, jumbled bones, in card boxes lined with ever increasing bone dust, would of course depend on the individual. I would doubt that many people would describe such conditions as respectful. The scale of such collections may change some people’s reaction, as would giving the remains a biography. Whilst they exist anonymously in storage, they form part of a museum’s collection and therefore may be viewed as artefacts or as information, sanctioned by their place within a culturally defined space. Give the remains a name, a story or even a personality, as groups such as HAD (Honouring the ancient dead) regularly do, then sympathy or concern may more readily arise.

BABAO (British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology) acknowledges the value and importance of proper curation of human skeletal collections from archaeological contexts, as well as those from former anatomical collections. Correct

storage in appropriate facilities is crucial to the success of ongoing and future research involving such collections. In recent years growing numbers of human skeletal remains have been excavated in the UK, largely in relation to development-led archaeological projects. The results of these excavations have placed increased pressure on curating institutions to provide adequate storage facilities (BABA0 2007 [online]).

The argument for the retention of human remains is primarily based on research potential. Constant shifts and developments in science and technology have dramatically increased the types and quantity of information that can be gathered from human remains. What we can discover now from a fragment of human bone or tooth is dramatically different from only a few years previously. If we are to justify collections of human remains for research then preservation of such material for future analysis relies on the material being both stabilized and in as ideal condition/storage as possible.

Human remains, in particular skeletal material, have traditionally been thought of as robust and deterioration resistant. This idea has been challenged by recent studies by conservators. Though research on the deterioration of bone held in storage has been scarce, recent reports have highlighted how some of the most common and destructive damage caused to archaeological human remains, such as bone element losses, fractures and surface erosion, can be dramatically reduced simply by improving storage. Bone is not only vulnerable to physical damage from bad storage it is also influenced by fluctuations in relative humidity and temperature which, through the processes of absorption and evaporation, can change the size and shape of bone, which leads to cracking, splitting and warping. Temperature and humidity also affect the chances of biological deterioration, caused by living organisms, such as bacteria, insects/pests, protozoa and mould. These effects often go unnoticed until damage has been caused. Few archaeologists are aware of the cumulative effects



of daylight on bone, which causes both a bleaching and weakening, or of chemical deterioration, from reactions to pollutants or contaminants which can result in fading, bleaching, discolouring and salt migration, which can all be catalysed by fluctuating temperatures and humidities.

The deterioration processes are most dramatic during excavation, many forms of deterioration continue after institutionalization. The causes may change between burial, excavation, and museum but decay continues, and as responsible stewards, we must take responsibility for monitoring and improving conditions for institutionalized human remains. Stewardship is not a one time event but is the on going careful and responsible management of something important (Cassman and Odegaard 2007:32).

It is a sad reality that too few archaeological excavations have the resources to employ a conservator. Not only can this impact on the retrieval condition of human remains, it can also affect the condition assessment of remains before they are placed in storage. Most archaeological units, whether private, public or university funded, have small finds, particularly metal work, sent for x-radiography by conservation staff. This process at least allows for a quick assessment of the material's condition and packing, post excavation. This is not the case with archaeologically excavated human remains, which might only be examined by a conservator if the excavation was deemed worthy of specialist attention.

For conservators, the notion of condition assessment is core to both ethical and practical processes. For archaeological human remains there has been no standardised method of condition assessment. Condition categories in the past have often been reduced to 'poor', 'fair' and 'good'. With preservation on the whole absent from archaeological, physical or forensic anthropological

training, and condition definition generally dependent on the often limited differing guidelines found within each of these discipline's codes of practice, it would seem logical for conservators to take an active role in the process. As previously discussed, many, if not all human remains policies define best practice as one of respect. Good storage goes at least some of the way towards respectful storage. It is also one of the primary focuses of preventive conservation. It is this elusive requisite that I believe can be facilitated by a multidisciplinary endeavour, one that includes conservation staff.

In the UK it is relatively rare for remedial conservation to be carried out on human remains excavated from archaeological sites. The practices of reconstruction, consolidation and casting, are far more commonly undertaken in the USA, where physical anthropologists tend to conduct such work. Remedial, or invasive, conservation of human remains is most commonly conducted at the point of excavation in order to recover the remains as completely as possible. This is often done via the application of coatings, consolidants and adhesives (Figure 23). These are sometimes applied post excavation to reconstruct or strengthen broken or friable bone.



Figure 23. Skeletal remains crudely adhered together using unknown adhesive (photograph by J. Clark).

Without a solid understanding of material science, these applications can have a detrimental rather than preservative effect. One of the most invasive interventions is that of cleaning, which is, in all cases, an irreversible act. Cleaning is often considered to be a commonplace and unspecialised activity; it is also rarely documented properly. When documentation is requested it is often wrongly interpreted simply as an attempt to preserve surrounding information, when in actuality conservators often want to know how cleaning was conducted.

Processes that have been used in the past with human bone include soaking in warm water, immersing and brushing with soap and water, wiping with cotton dipped in acetone, and using a variety of mechanical techniques involving knitting needles, grapefruit knives, toothbrushes, dental probes, pins and ultrasonic cleaners. Documentation enables us to understand what was removed and, perhaps what cleaning may have added in the form of residues and surface markings (Cassman and Odegaard 2007:78).

Invasive treatments and cleaning have been proven to have a detrimental impact on DNA retrieval in particular. Millard (cited in Roberts 2009:90) notes that ‘these treatments are often chosen by archaeologists, not conservators’. Choosing when to intervene or which/how much adhesive or consolidant to use should be based on a balance between scientific potential of the remains and the preservation of the material. This decision making process is one best conducted from a multidisciplinary position, where archaeologist, conservator and osteological specialists confer.

The study of human remains has become a key tool in the examination of ancient lives, with bioarchaeological and osteological approaches growing in popularity, not only as a method of investigation but as a subject for graduate and postgraduate study. Research into the health, diseases, diet, living environment, work and conflicts of ancient peoples, increasingly rely on

human remains as a primary source of evidence.

Often diseases and stresses manifest as unique pathological lesions or anomalies on the bone. Osteomyelitis, periosteal manifestations of localized and systemic infections, and tubular lesions, for example are among the external indicators of these diseases and stresses. Often, their presence and effect on the bone are subtle and tenuously preserved and can be easily overlooked, mishandled, or damaged during excavation, conservation, and subsequent study (McGowan and LaRoche 1996:116).

Such research and methods of inquiry continue to evolve but bad storage, invasive treatments, handling, uninformed excavation techniques and lack of documentation all have the potential to reduce the research value of human remains, the core argument for their retention.

There was a time when it was sufficient to lift an entire skeleton in a block of earth or to coat it with glycol and other chemicals before excavating the individual bones so they could be handled in the laboratory and then stored away in “stabilized” condition. Such careful work, however praiseworthy, misses the fundamental point, which is that any archaeological conservation has to be indefinite, not just for a few years but for perpetuity (Fagan 2007:4).

The remains held at the NMAS superstore are in no way an example of terrible storage, but they do represent inadequate packing and overcrowding. This is a collection that continues to grow as it is the eventual home of the archaeological archives of an active archaeology unit. Section 1.4 of the 2007 *Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service Acquisition and Disposal Policy* states that ‘The museum recognises its responsibility, in acquiring material, to ensure adequate conservation,

documentation and proper use of such material and takes into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as inadequate staffing, storage and conservation resources'. The report also states that, for guidance on the treatment of human remains it follows the DCMS *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums*, which states that 'Any preventative and remedial conservation should be carried out or supervised by an accredited conservator, trained and experienced in caring for biological materials and overseen by an osteologist'. It also states that an 'access policy' should be made available so that staff and the public are aware of who and how human remains can be accessed. A 'research register' should also be implemented to record the use and study intentions of viewed remains.

The skeletal material present within the stores was not packed by conservation staff as part of a preventive conservation programme, nor were osteologists consulted. There is no more space for new archives of archaeological material unless drastic de-accessioning and disposal is conducted, therefore adequate storage cannot be provided. Also, the service does not currently have an access policy that directly refers to human remains. It is apparent that, with the resources available, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, like many other institutions, cannot entirely fulfil these policy statements. It may be that the policies relating to human remains are unrealistic and unachievable within current resource systems and collections prioritisation.

Even many large museums do not have specific policies for human remains; instead, their treatment is no different than any other museum artefact...However, human remains deserve a different status and are due greater respect and consideration. A more thorough and devoted collection policy will answer basic questions – for instance, who has access, where, to what, why, how, and under what circumstances (Cassman, Odegaard and Powell 2007:25)

Failure to reach the standards laid out in many human remains policies, including the guidance produced by the DCMS, occurs throughout the UK, particularly as many smaller institutions have limited access to specialist expertise, adequate storage facilities (with environmental controls for example) or internal support/prioritisation. Often such failures are due to a lack of resources, financial, spacial and in terms of personnel. Many institutions are unlikely to invest in what could be defined as ‘invisible’ projects. ‘Invisible’ projects occur behind the scenes and are generally only witnessed by staff, researchers or students. They include issues such as storage, pest management or packaging. Such activities tend not to generate income in the short term or lend themselves to sponsoring or funding/grants organisations, which favour attachment to projects seen by the public such as exhibitions and displays.

Institutions will still claim to follow human remains policy and guidelines, even if they cannot or are not fulfilling them, because it is almost a necessity to do so, in order to satisfy Museum Accreditation, funding organisations and governing bodies and trustees such as the MLA (Museums Libraries & Archives). Such policies show an institution’s commitment to ethical treatment but do not necessarily mean any change in practice. The policies are neither statutory nor enforced, though they may refer to acts that set legal requirements, such as the Human Tissue Act. Unless an institution is under review, for example those pursuing accreditation, low standards in collections care could feasibly go unnoticed for considerable lengths of time.



Figures 24-26. Mummified and skeletal remains showing damage which has occurred due to inadequate and negligent storage (photograph 24 by J. Clark, photographs 25 and 26 by Dr. C. Riggs).



Figures 27-28. Specialist conservation packing greatly reduces further deterioration and improves access, identification and documentation (Fig 27 photograph by Dr. C. Riggs. Fig 28 photograph by A.H. Peters).

Instances when human remains are treated badly, not because of a lack of resources but by the negligence of staff, can be shocking, especially when such neglect is shown to be a simple lack of care (Figures 24-26). When damage from neglect has occurred, it is usually irreversible but adequate, thoughtful treatment can limit any further damage from occurring (Figures 27-28). Such damage can be prevented by conservation staff if they are more involved in the care of human

remains; for example, appropriate gloves could be provided and the best ways in which to handle human remains could be taught, such as using two hands, never placing fingers in eye sockets of skulls, cradling the mandible of the lower jaw to avoid the dislodging of teeth, and the use of bean bags to steady skulls that are being examined or moved. Without the presence or influence of conservation staff, such practices are rare within British museums. In contrast, in the US, handling human remains with bare hands is no longer standard practice in museums, out of concern for the ‘occupational safety for handlers...respect for the remains, [and] prevention of contamination for future analyses’ (Cassman and Odegaard 2007:52).

For a variety of reasons, collections of human remains are sometimes deemed redundant and issues of disposal arise. Lack of use or documentation, provenance or context, issues of space or collections being badly damaged, can all lead to the desire for institutions to dispose of human remains. For remains excavated in the UK, reburial is usually the preferred method of disposal.

While reburial may be regarded as proper in some circumstances, it does hold problems.

Reburial can only take place in a formal place of burial, if done under license, but these areas are pressed for space dealing with burial of the dead today. Cremation is not a realistic option, and it may have been abhorrent to some populations in the past (Roberts 2009: 220).

The first chapter of this dissertation focused on the history of the collection of human remains for the study of human diversity, or the science of racial difference. Such collections were relatively common and in some circumstances quite large. As the science for which these remains were collected has been supplanted by new forms of physical anthropology, to which, in most cases, these collections serve little purpose, they often exist as redundant and unused. For institutions that house collections such as these, the dilemma arises, what should be done with these collections?



This was a collections management problem faced by the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. Between 1915 and 1964, the museum had contained a large physical anthropology collection. This collection was almost entirely made up of human remains gathered from various Dutch colonies and collected mainly after the establishment of the Colonial Institute in 1915. In 2000, after thirty-three years spent at the University of Amsterdam's Museum Vrolick, the collection was returned from semi-permanent loan back to the Tropenmuseum. One of the reasons for this was that the Vrolick believed that the remains no longer held any scientific value. During this time the museum had evolved and was no longer involved with physical anthropology, instead focusing on ethnographic material relating to contemporary daily life. The last legacy of the physical anthropologists, a semi-permanent display called *Man and Nature*, which still represented the museum's early colonial discourse, was replaced in 1995 by an exhibit called *Man and Environment*. When the Tropenmuseum found itself again custodian of material gathered and curated generations ago, it was in a quandary as to what to do with it. The museum's first action was to conduct an inventory of the human remains. They expanded this inventory to include all the human remains in the museum. They decided to include objects made from human remains and all related material such as anthropological photographs, field notes and archival sources.

Times had changed, the institutional, ethical and legal context of the collection had become increasingly vibrant and challenging. Restitution claims from First Peoples and First Nations in North America, aborigines in Australia or Maori in New Zealand, resonated in museums around the world...many questions were raised concerning the nature of scientific research into human remains of indigenous peoples under colonial regimes (Duuren 2008:7).

Some material had been withheld from the original loan to the Vrolick as it was deemed to

be still relevant to the collection as a whole, as evidence of activities such as infant skull adornment, head hunting or ancestor worship. Significantly, all the unadorned human remains were loaned, a testament again to the transformation of human remains into objects of aesthetic or cultural appreciation.

A skull from Dutch New Guinea was deemed ethnographic and considered to be of cultural historical value if it was decorated with strips of palm leaf or showed signs of damage inflicted by a club at the temple, while it was anthropological if it was free of either blemish or adornment (Duuran 2007:50).

What was most surprising about the material returned from the Vrolick was how recently some of the remains had been collected. Any preconception that race science and bone collecting was a relic of colonial or pre-colonial activity was shown to be a fallacy, as collecting had continued well into the 1960s. None of the remains, including the photographs, were personalised, with only locations and dates giving clues as to individual identities. In this manner they were more closely akin to archaeological remains, existing simply as quantitative evidence or data. One exception was the remains of a 'Little Indian Spirit', an early 19<sup>th</sup> century foetus from Suriname, clothed as a curiosity, in a headdress, shoes and jewellery that once belonged to the collection of Amsterdam's Artis Zoo. In many ways this 'curio' placed a certain focus on the thousands of anonymous body parts, and the dozens of portraits of people taken with measuring apparatus.

The reduction of people and human remains into pure data, for the analysis of racial difference, can be seen as contributing to the view of the 'other' as different, inferior, dehumanised and objectified. It is significant that the museum chose to include the anthropological photograph collection in their inventory of human remains. Some of the images also show the process of

collecting human remains. One image, taken in 1909, shows a Papua man clutching a brace of skulls to sell, another shows the excavations of remains in Calama, Northern Chile in 1933. The majority are of individuals photographed, often naked (as requested by physical anthropologists), standing facing forward and then facing to the side. The power of these images of 'exotic' tribal people standing next to measuring apparatus is quite haunting and exemplifies not only the obvious power imbalance in play but the 'othering' process in action. There is something quite shocking about the process still being conducted as recently as the 1960s.

In an attempt to care for this material the museum has essentially started to give the material a biography:

We are looking for a better home or final resting place for these human remains because they no longer have any significance for us as an ethnographic museum. Yet by attempting to define a policy in this respect, we give the human remains a new significance in our museum as remnants of past encounters we must revive in order to find adequate solutions for the items concerned (Gilroy cited in Duuran: 2008:9).

Staff at the Tropenmuseum have been investigating the collection as well as conducting an inventory. The process of physical anthropology, its discourse, methodology and aims are being rediscovered, not as a functional science but as an historical and cultural phenomenon that is little understood. This paradigm shift typifies the change in attitudes towards human remains over the last thirty years. Current anthropology is no longer concerned whether a skull is dolichocephalic or brachycephalic; it is the skull's context, provenance and biography that interests. Why was it collected, by whom and to whom did it belong? Not only is the material tangible evidence of people, whose remains were either bought, stolen, taken by force or excavated, it is also evidence of

expedition, epistemology, ideology, Western colonial practice and cross-cultural encounters.

Today's human remains, recent historical remains, archaeological remains and remains that were collected together with cultural artefacts on expeditions, require different approaches and have different momentum. Besides, it is important to develop our understanding of the value of the collection as a whole, including the photographs, documents and plaster casts, and their position in the history of physical anthropology and colonial practice (Duuran 2008:55).

The museum was left with two main options, preservation or de-accession. To preserve would mean providing resources such as storage space, packing and curation, for material that arguably exists, not as objects of study, but as passive evidence. To de-accession means either to destroy the material by burying or cremating it, donating it to institutions that would destroy it for academic purposes such as dissection, DNA analysis or practice, or donating it to another museum. The other option would be to repatriate it.

Unlike in the UK, it is legally possible to own human remains in the Netherlands. This makes any decision made by the Tropenmuseum more of an ethical dilemma than a legal one. Lack of conservation throughout the material's time in storage had removed some options. It would be unlikely that any other museum would want remains that were broken, discoloured or damaged and with little or no provenance. To bury or cremate the remains would be ethically problematic and potentially involve Western religious connotations. With almost all the corresponding information about the remains devoted to measurements and skeletal observations there is little chance of repatriation and so far none of the remains have been contested, though the idea of consultation with source communities is being explored<sup>41</sup>. Many of the remains that could be considered to have

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41 A small collection of remains, donated to the museum between 1951 and 1959, were those of soldiers fighting under

ethnographic significance are in the process of being reassessed, as are the remains categorised as archaeological. In many ways it is the processes being undertaken, rather than the material being discussed, that makes the dilemma faced by the Tropenmuseum so fascinating. The re-biographising of the remains and the construction of new meanings for material deemed redundant, highlights the constant metamorphosis of museum collections. The museum has shown that it can be the accumulation and acquisition process that is as significant as the material collected, and that often simple, practical activities such as collections care, storage concerns and inventory can reignite collections, removing them from the 'morgue' and bringing them to life. It also demonstrates that the process of repatriation cannot and should not always focus on the remains themselves, but rather address epistemological, historical and possibly hegemonic concerns. The debate continues within the museum as to how to move ahead.

### **Alternative conservation**

Conservation is a complex and continual process that involves determining what heritage is, how it is cared for, how it is used, by whom, and for whom. Conservation as a developing social practice is not only concerned with definitions of best practice, but in continually reassessing the applicability of new approaches to changed circumstances... Conservation is a process of understanding and managing change rather than merely an arresting process; it is a means of recreating material cultural heritage that seeks to retain, reveal and enhance what people value about the material past and sustain those values for future generations... objects are conserved because they are valued for the effect they have on people (Sully 2007:39).

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Japanese colours during the Second World War. They are intended for repatriation and possible DNA analysis, with the aim of allowing possible descendants to trace them.

Action from indigenous groups, the development of legislation and policy as well as growing debates relating to cultural hegemony, ownership and control have meant that many museums and cultural institutions have had to adapt to new ways of thinking and come up with alternative ways of operating. The discipline of conservation has arguably been slow in adapting to paradigmatic and cultural shifts, tending to focus on technical progress and scientific achievement. This is beginning to change as some conservators and institutions are challenging old methodology and traditional practice, for example, recognising that what may scientifically be the best way of preserving material may not always be the most appropriate. Many are acting in response to criticism from indigenous groups or campaigners who believe that the control and treatment of their ancestors' material culture and remains should at the very least be conducted via a process of consultation.

Traditionally museums have placed restrictions on access to their collections, whether placing them in display cases, locking them in safes, placing them in storage or enforcing the use of gloves. The requests of indigenous peoples and concerned minority groups often go against the professional norms that are constructed within a museum, and conservators often have the potential to facilitate such alternative needs. Democratising and allowing access to collections has become the central agenda of modern museology, at times to the detriment of the collections. In many museums across the world education departments, museum guides and interpreters make extensive use of handling collections and supervise close contact with collections.

In my view, museums are not about stories or objects; they are about the people who use them, researchers, students, children, families, scholars, schools, community (Stradeski: 2009:28).

With the primary endeavour of modern museums being education, motives for improved access to collections are usually noble and understandable. In the UK, the MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council), which administers government funding to regional museums via a programme called Renaissance in the Regions, does so in order to ‘ensure that collections are relevant and accessible to the communities they serve’ and ‘provide opportunities for learning of all kinds’(Renaissance in the Regions, East of England, [online]). Improved access increases the popularity of museums and broadens their appeal. From a conservation point of view, these aims are both necessary and honourable, especially as without an interested public and education system there would be little work within the world of heritage. The problem with access to museum collections is that it undeniably endangers collections. Dr Ellen McAdam (2009:46), Manager for Culture and Sport Glasgow, argues that the future of modern museum storage is unavoidably one of access. Glasgow museum’s open storage facility offers ‘personal interaction with museum objects’, giving a glimpse of an alternative future for museums. The decision to ‘make it possible for members of the public to order objects from store for viewing as easily as readers order books in a reference library’ has, though, demanded that there is the ‘exception of culturally sensitive artefacts’ (McAdams 2009:46).

The concerns many museum staff have with access can also be seen as a failing of those of us working within the conservation and collections management system to facilitate such requests or innovate new methods of access. Access is generally restricted to objects for obvious reasons such as security, handling and breakage. Conservators can find themselves acting as gatekeepers, with power to restrict access on the grounds of vulnerability or the potential endangering of museum material, but rarely would they have the authority to claim material is culturally sensitive. Restriction to access is generally enforced under the banner of professionalism. Allowing material, such as human bone, to be laid out on a table covered in newspaper would be unprofessional for a

conservator and would therefore cause them to restrict or govern the methods in which the bone was viewed, that is as long as they were aware that the viewing was occurring. Often within museums the most vulnerable material is only accessible via the presence and or preparation of a conservator. This position of stewardship is a recent construction and one that has been scrutinised very little, particularly as the integrity or safety of museum material often appears to be unquestionable.

The requests made by some indigenous groups, to museums, have the potential to challenge standard conservation practice and the methodologies of modern museums thinking. These requests can involve handling, participation in ceremonies, transportation and of course repatriation. The concept of preservation is itself a deeply Western ideology, one informed by a history of reliquary, perpetuity nostalgia and enlightenment doctrine:

There is not a single item in Zuni culture which is used for religious or ceremonial purposes which is meant to be preserved in perpetuity. All are gifts to the Gods which are meant to disintegrate back into the earth to do their work (Clavir 1992:8).

Many cultural products are specifically constructed to decay, an idea which also includes human remains.

The Museum of New Mexico is a good example of alternative conservation in practice. It has a room dedicated to the stewardship of culturally sensitive objects and human remains. This space is designed to house material, including human remains, that was not or is yet to be returned via the implementation of NAGPRA. The room has some very specific features:

- It is like a traditional pueblo storage room in that the person who enters must cross a threshold, the shelves are open and there is access to fresh air as some of the material is



considered to be living and therefore needs to breath.

- Blinds can be pulled down over the shelves so that not all material is on show at any one time. This avoids offence to people from different groups who may see material from a culture other than their own. This is a compromise that allows the room to be used to house more than one group's material.
- The material is arranged by culture. Within each group, it is arranged in a certain order, and sometimes piled, on the advice of the consultants. The consultants also suggested interleaving piled objects with paper or cloth bags, as they do at home.
- The room is sealed off from the rest of the collection, so material can be 'fed' or 'smudged' as required.<sup>42</sup>

This room represents a compromise of curatorship and conservation, all entwined in a respectful and sympathetic system. Its seclusion allows for organic devotions such as corn meal to be placed with museum material without risk of insect infestation in the rest of the collection. The paper or cloth bags can be exchanged for acid free or unbleached alternatives and though few conservators would appreciate the piling of museum objects, careful monitoring can at least alert custodians of any damage being inflicted. This room is an excellent example of what can be described as 'indigenous conservation' in its simplest form and was made possible by consultation and negotiation. Such negotiation even goes so far as that the corn meal brought to 'feed' certain pieces of the collection is first frozen by conservators before being brought into the room in order to limit the chances of insect infestation.

The implementation of indigenous conservation would appear to be an obvious solution to the complexities and cultural sensitivities that surround human remains and objects of cultural significance and could, in some instances, be an alternative to reburial or repatriation. Indigenous

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<sup>42</sup> Some material that is deemed to be alive requires not just air but also nourishment. Smudging tends to involve the application or presence of ash and or smoke as part of a ritual ceremony.

conservation could be defined as letting those individuals who are either culturally or genetically closest to the material act as the guardians and preservers of said material.

The search for alternative methods and practice within conservation is arguably an under researched and seldom implemented endeavour. This means that there are only a few, oft cited examples of such practices. Initially indigenous conservation meant training individuals from indigenous groups in conservation treatment, both remedial and preventive, but it has become apparent that this also means the imparting of ethics and codes of conduct that have been developed in an almost entirely Eurocentric vacuum. Conservation as a discipline is, in many ways, a form of control. Sully (2007:222) is asking for the 'decolonisation' of conservation. He argues that the discipline has existed since its infancy as an 'ideological accompaniment of colonial power' (Sully 2007:28). The discipline can be seen to balance power in favour of expertise and qualification. It promotes Western ideals of preservation and concern for knowledge heritage, a balance that is exacerbated by the discipline's colonial heritage. For indigenous conservation to address cultural concerns indigenous people have to be able not only to learn conservation techniques and methodology but to have an influence on them. Conservation, like anthropology and archaeology, has a tendency to disregard the metaphysical in its mission to gather information. Unlike anthropology and archaeology, it has rarely reflected on the impact of positivist agendas. Conservation can be viewed as a powerful method of decontextualisation. By focusing on the material, the scientific, even the external (such as packaging, environment etc), the concerns of conservation distances material from its original context, which serves to 'mitigate taboos and desanctifies and nullifies the talismanic properties of remains' (McGown and LaRoche 1996:110).

Sully (2007:222) sees the challenge here as the development of decision-making processes that 'do not privilege the insider'. The role of conservation professionals should be that of 'facilitator, listener, and resource for the community, to provide information about the process; to

participate in an informed debate; and to provide tools that can be used to achieve the desired outcomes of the participants'. For example, some cultural and religious views demand that certain material is handled only by men, when the relevant conservator or curator may be a woman. The contents of some Native American medicine bundles are intended to be handled only by those who have undertaken certain rituals, and Navaho museum staff-members need to know in advance if they are to be exposed to objects associated with the dead, including archaeological objects.

Conservators also have the potential to alter the way associated artefacts or mortuary material is stored. Traditionally, such material is often separated from stored human remains<sup>43</sup>. For example, metal objects may be housed in particularly low relative humidity environments in order to prevent corrosion, or objects may be placed in a safe if they are particularly valuable, whilst the related human remains may be stored as bulk archaeology or with other material that needs to be kept in a steady balanced environment. Some associated artefacts are often over-looked, both as sources of information and as the personal effects of the deceased, which in many ways could be considered an extension of the body. For example, with textiles, 'we learn from the types of materials, the forms of the garments, the age of the garments, the technology, and use wear. Even the wrinkles and creases have a story to tell' (Peters, Cassman and Gustafsson 2007:130). Conservators, equipped with adequate funding, and with the knowledge to innovate new methods of storage, can often address such issues, for example, by constructing bespoke packaging that allows vulnerable material to be stored safely with other materials that have contrasting needs.

When the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, Washington, gained the funds to conserve and redisplay one of its most popular exhibits, a mummy and coffin, conservators Phillips and Roundhill (2007:269) undertook an innovative programme of conservation and display.

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43 A frequent exception to this practice is the storage and display of cremation urns, which usually have the remains bagged up and placed back into the urn. Related artefacts found with or within these urns are still likely to be stored separately.

44 The Burke Museum is the court-ordered neutral repository of the remains of Kennewick Man. It has no Native American remains on display and rarely displays human remains of any kind.

The Ptolemaic Period (2250-1980 BP) mummy and Twenty-first Dynasty (2909-2839 BP) coffin had been acquired in 1902, and although they no related to the museum's mission statement, which focuses on collections from the Pacific Rim, 'the outpouring of community care, support, and continued interest', by those who had visited the mummy (whom locals have nicknamed 'Nellie') and coffin for decades, resulted in the museum deciding to keep and properly care for them; it is interesting to note that such community interest highlights how heritage material from different cultures gets assimilated into local identity and history. The new display had to address several complex factors, such as, environmental conditions, and contextual issues. For nearly ninety years the coffin and mummy had been displayed together, though they had no factual connection to each other. This was not simply viewed as an interpretive or curatorial issue, being that the internal decoration of the coffin would be hidden if the mummy was placed inside, or because misleading stylistic, customary or artistic connections could be made instead, the consideration was deemed to be a spiritual one:

Although the deceased has been dead for more than two thousand years and has already suffered the indignity of being removed from her burial context, displayed, studied, and handled, would it be proper to continue this trend? Should this mummy be forced to rest in the coffin of another individual whose name is clearly painted inside? Are the prayers and incarnations depicted all over the coffin the correct ones for this deceased? From the perspective of the deceased, whose spirit may well be still conscious of the present (most religions imply this), are we honouring the dead by continuing to display this way? (Phillips and Roundhill 2007: 270)

The conservators' solution to this dilemma was to keep the mummy and coffin in close

proximity, as they shared acquisition source and cultural context, but also to keep them in separate spaces to prevent misinterpretation and to provide the best possible environmental conditions for each of the highly vulnerable materials. Whilst it was decided by curators that the decorated coffin should be viewed from all sides, the mummy was to be afforded a private space within the display case where it could be accessed on occasion for study or conservation monitoring. This decision was based on the belief that the mummy was ‘not primarily an art object, but human remains’ and that even though it had ‘a gilded mask and painted cartonnage panels that were of artistic significance...the museum is not interested in parading the mummy for those with morbid fascinations but as a fine example of Egyptian funerary art and as representative of the beliefs of a past civilization’ (Phillips and Roundhill 2007:271). The resulting display case, designed with the assistance of the Getty Conservation Institute, had a large, environmentally controlled, UV-filtered glass top section, which housed the coffin and lid; the lid which floats on supports above the coffin to reveal the internal decoration (Figure 29). Within the base of the display case ‘the mummy is respectfully placed in a discrete, nearly flush drawer [which] can be pulled out and locked in place for display’ (Phillips and Roundhill 2007:272). The mummy is encased within a polyethylene bag with oxygen scavengers, in order to provide an anoxic environment, preventing linen deterioration and insect damage. ‘Visitors and researchers can view the mummy through a glass covering on the top of the drawer. When not on display the drawer is kept closed and locked’ (Phillips and Roundhill 2007:272).

This was an expensive enterprise and one that few museums could afford for just one mummy and coffin. Whether it succeeds in constructing a ‘respectful’ treatment of the dead is open to debate, but it certainly shows an attempt to sensitively address issues, such as the treatment and display of the dead and the problems of displaying disassociated Egyptian mummies and coffins. It certainly represents an example of conservators and museum staff seeking alternative methods of

practice.



Figure 29. The innovative case constructed for the mummy and coffin at the Burke Museum (from the Burke Blog).

### **Towards a multidisciplinary practice**

The stereotype of the conservator in archaeology is of someone who mends pots, lifts skeletons in one piece, stabilizes waterlogged artefacts, or achieves miracles of restoration. In fact, conservation encompasses a much broader field than just the care of objects. It has become a multidisciplinary endeavour that encompasses unexcavated sites, excavations, artefacts – and the dead (Fagan 2007:1).

Throughout this discussion several different disciplines have been referenced and examined. The treatment of human remains has been shown to be relevant to archaeology, anthropology, physical anthropology, osteoarchaeology and museology, but rarely has there been a dialogue on the subject between these disciplines and that of conservation. For my part, as a vocational member of the discipline of conservation, a position from which I have been arguing, I find this lack of communication frustrating. I believe that a multidisciplinary approach to the treatment of human

remains could go some way towards more respectful and informed methods of dealing with the dead.

This multidisciplinary approach is one that must be tackled by all involved and particularly by the discipline of conservation, which I would argue should ready itself for an expanded role, one of greater communication, cross-cultural awareness and fluidity of approach. The lack of involvement by conservators in issues relating to human remains was questioned by Cassman and Odegaard (2004:272) when they found themselves involved with the treatment of Kennewick Man in the US. They asked whether a lack of participation reflected 'that the material is outside the conservator's expertise' or whether conservators were 'not equipped to work in multidisciplinary teams' or whether it is that conservator's colleagues 'do not understand how we can actively contribute'.

The editor of *Studies in Conservation* recently noted (Saunders 2007:1) that the publication was almost entirely centred around the technical and scientific aspects of conservation. This is not just an editorial issue as the publication is an assemblage of papers sent in by those working in the field of conservation. This heavy slant towards studies on the treatments of objects and scientific discovery and utilisation is not necessarily surprising to most within the discipline but it is something that may be of concern.<sup>45</sup>

'Conservation is a young discipline. In the last century it has been struggling to define its own identity in response to the rapid changes which have shaped the modern world. In the face of these sometimes profound changes conservators may suffer from a crisis of confidence (Pye and Sully 2007:19).

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<sup>45</sup> Change can be seen to be happening: the ICON Conference 2010 has far more papers on the future of conservation and its role in a modern world than any previous conference. The balance is still weighted towards object treatment and science, which is of course core to the subject's development.

The bias towards papers that deal with scientific or technical methodology is not confined to *Studies in Conservation*; it is reflected in the demographic of the profession. Scientific achievement has arguably led to a systematic approach to the treatment of collections, one that has increased formalisation, elitism and decontextualisation. Such activities arguably serve to isolate the discipline and also serve to rationalise its activities, which are generally viewed as progressive, objective and specialised.

Expertise in material science should of course be part of the interdisciplinary dialogue on the treatment of human remains. Knowing the ageing properties of adhesives and consolidants, the reactive properties of storage containers, environmental conditions and the properties of preserved flesh, can all contribute to a more ‘respectful’ treatment of human remains by at least fulfilling our claim to be the carers and stewards of retained material.

But the depiction of conservation as a science is highly dependent on the perspective of the viewer or on the particular matter being discussed. In relation to human remains, conservation has often been viewed as not being scientific enough, even though it (particularly archaeological conservation) is informed by forensics (Boddington, Garland and Janaway 1987:3). With many conservators entering the discipline from an arts background, conservation can be portrayed as concerned almost entirely with aesthetics and physical integrity rather than context or the gathering of associated information. Instances where aesthetics are involved in the treatment of human remains are relatively rare and are generally conducted for the purposes of display.

Egyptian mummified remains, which constitute the most frequently displayed human remains, exemplify the exception. They are often subject to regular conservation monitoring or cleaning and there are many conservation papers written about their preservation. This is primarily because mummies have become objects that are not only viewed through a ‘scophilic’ (Montserrat 1997:171) gaze but because they are often subject to the most frequent use and



exposure. For some institutions, such as The British Museum or the Pitt Rivers Museum, other deliberately preserved remains such as Jivaro shrunken heads or Mundurucu trophy heads may also fit into this aesthetic category.

One such head (Mundurucu) required cleaning and repair for exhibition. Initially superficial dust was removed with a soft brush and low powered vacuum cleaner. The hair was then cleaned using saw dust soaked in white spirit...the skin on the face was extremely taut and in one or two areas, around the jaw, had split...in the past the largest split had been filled rather crudely with a mixture of shellac and calcium carbonate which was then heavily over painted. The earlier filler and pigment were removed, and replaced with polyfiller to protect the edges of the split and to improve the appearance of the face. It was painted to match the surrounding skin using Cryla acrylic paint (Rae 1996:34).

The conservation of the bone apron, or even the regular reattachment of a flap of skin on the British Museum's mummy known as 'Ginger,' may be obvious roles for a conservator. Of course the presentation and display of well-preserved individuals such as Otzi the Iceman, Tollund Man or the Inka Maiden, require the expertise of conservation scientists. Excluding such spectacular and incredibly rare examples, museums, universities and even medical facilities all over the world house human remains that do not involve a concern over their aesthetic appearance. In these instances the conservator should have a different role from that of aesthetically focused remedial work. As advocates for proper care and the sustained integrity of cultural property, conservators have the potential to impact not only the research value of retained collections but also the diplomatic relations involved with such collections. When discussing the treatment of human remains, for example, conservators may have to make themselves guardians of a different type:

To serve up the physical aspects of the skeletal material as a sacrificial offering without careful consideration of both the spiritual concerns and the scientific consequences of sectioning bone for sampling and analysis can be naive and unconscionable. Earlier in this century, Howard Carter and his team demonstrated little regard for human skeletal material as the bones of Tutankhamen were shattered and fractured in the pursuit and extrication of treasure. Similarly, modern scientists can be seen as the new treasure seekers, cutting human bone in the quest for scientific gold - DNA (McGowan and LaRoche 1996:117).

The implementation of reburial legislation may initially seem to make a conservator's role redundant within US archaeology, but, as noted in the first chapter, many Native American tribes wish to know more about their ancestors and are willing to let researchers take temporary custody of their people's remains. This is usually done under the agreement that the remains will be treated respectfully. But in the US, bones continue to be wrapped in newspaper, adhered or consolidated with materials such as shellac, Duco Cement™, Elmer's Glue™, hot glue or polystyrene. Even 'plastic tent windows dissolved in acetone and acrylic floor polish' (Johnson 1994:223) have been used without understanding the ramifications of these applications.

For physical anthropologists and archaeologists in the US, the time frame and methodology of excavation has changed dramatically since NAGPRA was enacted. Excavations often have to be supervised by indigenous representatives or under the condition that any study, measurements, or analysis is done in situ rather than in laboratory conditions. Conservators have a wealth of experience and literature relating to excavating material without causing damage, they are aware of the most preservation-friendly tools and materials, and they are used to setting up and managing temporary on-site laboratory conditions. They also have experience transporting, cleaning and

packing delicate material, whilst simultaneously allaying the fears or concerns of clients or lenders:

New York City's descendant community was outraged that skeletal material from the African Burial Ground was wrapped in newspaper and stored in cardboard boxes in a closet. (Literally, there were skeletons in a closet.) The introduction of acid-free paper, appropriate storage cabinets, and environmental controls at least partially allayed these concerns and communicated a degree of respect that the remains deserved, in addition to conforming to sound conservation practices (McGowan and LaRoche 1996:116).

One of the primary areas of discussion within conservation is ethics. These codes of behaviour are arguably unmatched in scale and rigidity within the humanities. Conservators are expected to research alternative methods of treatment, the history and intended use of the material they are to work with as well as open a dialogue with curators or clients as to the levels of compromise or intervention that might occur, whilst respecting sacred, ritualistic, contextual and aesthetic integrity, but this awareness does not necessarily include the cultural implications of such endeavours. Ethics are, by their very nature, an ethnocentric set of regulations which depend on the cultural sensitivities of the time. This is an issue where the conservator could learn from modern anthropological thinking, which serves to 'culturally critique' (Marcus and Fischer 1986:1) its own practice, allowing conservation to 'challenge the power relations involved in existing approaches to managing the past' (Sully 2007:223).

No current area of conservation training prepares conservators to 'work in multidisciplinary teams with anthropologists and professionals in related scientific disciplines' (Cassman and Odegaard 2004:273); even work conducted on excavation sites is clearly delineated. In the UK, the discipline's professional body ICON (The Institute of Conservation), which assesses conservators

for recognised accreditation, does not require that any philosophical or cross-cultural awareness is present in the candidate and considers only the ethical treatment of objects rather than any cultures. It would appear that to ‘respect’ culturally sensitive material such as human remains, a background that involves anthropological or archaeological training would provide a very different contextual approach to conservation practice. Physical anthropological or osteological knowledge would also be of benefit, though very few conservation courses include any training programmes that deal specifically with human remains. Not only would such training encourage a culturally reflective methodology and awareness, it would also serve to inform conservators as to why and which remains may be of particular cultural sensitivity.

It is understandable why such training has been limited. As mentioned previously, it has almost universally been archaeologists and physical anthropologists who have traditionally been the stewards of human remains not on display.

It is easy to blame, for instance, the archaeological community or museum curators, for not recognising the skills and knowledge of conservators, for treating them as technical support or simply the cleaners of delicate objects but it is the responsibility of the conservation community to highlight a sense of purpose and to extend its borders from the laboratory to the epistemological and beyond into the development of policy and cross-culture inclusion. If any fault was to be made it would be with funding organisations and research councils that consistently favour scientific progression (conservation is generally considered as part of the arts and humanities though it is largely taught as a science and predominantly based on scientific research) rather than that of the humanities (Sloggett 2008:171).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For example, the *The Australian Research Council's* 2006-2007 Report indicated that the sciences received \$34,080,767, while the humanities and creative arts received \$7,011,872. This result is seen by Sloggett (2008:172) as being the result of cultural research being ‘poorly articulated, with few powerful spokespersons’.

To position the discipline in a situation where it is involved in debates surrounding human remains it is useful to examine how it has located itself, or been located, within institutions or academia.

Conservation has often been viewed as adversarial. As mentioned in the previous section, a gate-keeping role can be performed where the conservator restricts access or acts as defender of material, at times hindering use or even study, especially if such activities put the material at risk. This view of the conservator, as putting objects before people, is a common conception and one that has implications for the treatment of human remains that are housed in less than ideal circumstances or subject to low standards of handling. Once this role of barrier or critic has been created, it can lead to the conservator being excluded from both dialogue and activities.

The role of technical specialist is possibly the most common role to which the conservator is relegated. As facilitator, problem solver or simply as a pair of steady hands, this role is arguably the path of least resistance. The conservator in this role is usually achieving goals set by others, more often in the isolation of the laboratory than as part of a team.

Lastly, the role of contributing colleague can be undertaken. This involves a move towards multidisciplinary activity and balanced collaboration. This position could simply be an advisory or teaching position where techniques or ethical considerations are passed on to others through a reciprocal dialogue. Either way, such activity has potential for a long term impact as it serves to inform and develop all involved.

Such activity can be seen at the Museum of New Mexico, described in the previous section. It is also the stance taken by Cassman and Odegaard when they became involved with the treatment of Kennewick Man after plaintiffs in the associated court battle argued that the government had failed to ensure the safety of the remains, which had been initially kept in a cardboard box. Their involvement started in November 1998 when the remains were moved from a U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers property in east Washington to the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture at the University of Washington in Seattle. The conservator's experience allowed them to provide condition reports that would satisfy all involved, at very short notice, for 340 fragments of bone in under twelve hours. The development of a quick and easy to complete condition report stopped the conservators from becoming a hindrance, or adversarial, as they theoretically could have insisted on traditional, time-consuming reports. They also managed to construct specialist packing which was sturdy enough to facilitate a private Native American religious ceremony, held in a car park, and a public AFA (Asatru Folk Assembly) 'sunrise' ceremony, without endangering the remains. In 1999 they worked with a physical anthropologist to construct long-term storage for the remains. Such collaboration was vital as the physical anthropologist 'identified and positioned the fragments anatomically in the boxes' (Cassman and Odegaard 2007:122) whilst the conservators selected appropriate materials and methods of containment. Between them they also developed a system of labelling each of the bone fragments that would neither harm, impact data collection or offend either Native American groups or the Asatru.<sup>47</sup> The conservators also assisted with reconstruction of the remains.

ParafilmM® (a stretchy plastic film used in chemistry laboratories to cover beakers to reduce evaporation or avoid contamination) was used. This was used to stabilize and unit several fragments. Though gluing had been suggested by several team members, [Cassman and Odegaard] felt a less invasive and reversible technique using ParafilmM would be more respectful of the integrity of the remains, and to some of the Native Americans observers who objected to the introduction of invasive materials or adhesives (Cassman and Odegaard 2004:277).

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<sup>47</sup> They applied small, acid free, laser-printed labels using a thin layer of Rhoplex AC-33 (acrylic emulsion) adhesive, which could be easily removed mechanically.

Such an approach is a stark contrast to Dr Chatter's use of household Elmer's Glue-All™ when reconstructing Kennewick Man's skull for the infamous 'Captain Jean-Luc Picard' facial reconstruction. Whilst the conservators provided the materials for construction and assisted in handling, they worked with physical anthropologists who had to be confident of their measurements and methodology as the evidence gathered from reconstruction would be scrutinized, not only by fascinated academics, but also a court of law.

In April 2000, when a team was put together to implement DNA sampling of the remains, in order to ascertain Kennewick Man's cultural affiliation, the conservators found themselves working as part a multidisciplinary team.<sup>48</sup>

Not everyone involved had worked with a conservator before, and those that had often commented on negative experiences, citing instances when, in their view, conservators had tended to put up 'road blocks' (Cassman and Odegaard 2004: 276).

The two conservators found that they functioned well as part of an interdisciplinary team and managed to provide both practical and ethical input throughout the endeavour. They also found that some of the simplest conservation methods had a great impact for all concerned. For example, they replaced metal dental tools with less damaging wooden probes for testing soil or bone hardness and replaced the electrical saw, used for sampling, for a more controlled hand-held jeweller's saw. They also passed on methods of object handling and ways of reducing vibrations from transport. Such changes served to ensure the safety of the remains, pleasing concerned stakeholders and still allowing the experts to gather the samples they required. During this work they learned a great deal

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48 The core team put together by the federal court of Oregon included three representatives from the Department of the Interior (archaeologist, public relations specialist and lawyer), two lawyers from the Department of Justice, three anthropologists, four archaeologist/curators from the Burke Museum, three physical anthropologists, two DNA specialists, representatives from five different Native American tribes, representatives of Asatru, and two conservators.

about physical anthropology and Native American religion and customs, knowledge that continues to impact the way in which they operate today.

Such multidisciplinary activity, in relation to human remains, is rare. Cassman and Odegaard concluded that the reason for this lack of collaboration was not simply because conservators were deemed to be lacking in expertise relating to human remains, but rather that those who regularly worked with human remains had little understanding of what conservators actually do or how they could help.

Most of the physical anthropologists and archaeologists seemed surprised, at first, by our presence, but in the end they understood our function and were grateful for the support (Cassman and Odegaard 2004:278)

This lack of awareness, of the potential interdisciplinary value of conservation, is argued by some to be a problem that is endemic within the discipline. Some have gone so far as to argue that there is a crisis in conservation. This crisis involves a lack of understanding about the role and function of conservators that runs from the cultural sector all the way up to government funding and policy bodies such as the DCMS. The effect of this crisis includes the closing of educational departments, reduced funding for the few that still exist and reductions in the number, staffing and resources of conservation departments within public institutions<sup>49</sup>. Such reductions and closures will impact the ability of institutions to care for our heritage and will potentially become visible to the public through the lowering of access, standards and quality of presentation. In the long run, not only will it be ‘difficult to find professionals with enough training to care for the more celebrated examples of our culture, but the first hit will be the small-scale, more individual parts of our heritage – everyday

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<sup>49</sup> Examples include; the temporary closure of the University of Durham’s MA course in Archaeological Conservation, the closure of the Textile Conservation Centre at the University of Southampton and the V&A’s decision to reduce its joint funding for the conservation course it runs with the Royal College of Art, which comes into effect in 2011.



treasures - such as objects in local museums and private possessions' (Jones and Holden 2008:49).

Conservation's future mission should be to expand and develop its dialogue, not only with the concerns of other cultures but with other disciplines. Conservation is a discipline that often 'feels under threat or without support from either government or the institutions it is attached to' (Jones & Holden 2008:41-42). It is often a behind-the-scenes activity only viewed by the public, and many other museum professionals, as part of guided tours where the transformation of objects rather than the preservation of museum material is highlighted. The insular and specialised nature of conservation activities can leave those within the discipline focused solely on developing material science, when it is arguably the activities of other disciplines that they should be learning about. Such expansion is necessary to fulfil ethical guidelines that demand that conservators 'must show respect for human remains and cultural property which have a ritual or religious significance. He/she should be cognisant of any special requirement, whether legal or social, of such material'.

## Conclusion

A collaborative and multidisciplinary approach informed, as much as possible, my treatment of the Tibetan bone apron. With the support of my colleagues it was possible for me to research beyond standard practices. During its treatment I was able to keep the curators and display team up-to-date with developments, including the potential dilemmas facing its designation as human remains. During the apron's preparation for display, another piece of the apron was discovered in storage. This extra section was potentially a dislocated piece of the apron or another part of the ritual panoply to which the apron belonged, such as an armband. Collaborative discussion led to the inclusion of this piece within the apron's display case to prevent separation. The conservation treatment also revealed script to be present on the back of one of the carved plaques (Figure 30). This script was most likely numbering, used in construction to place the many and varied pieces in the correct order. It was decided that this script would also be shown in the exhibition (Figure 31). As the script was on the reverse of the plaque, which showed trabecular bone (the internal spongy section which shows evidence of blood vessels etc), the object's composition is accentuated, which I hope sparks debate by the museum-going audience. The section of the gallery in which the apron is displayed also highlights the limit of my influence. I continue to be uncomfortable with the deliberate isolation of the non-European material and the heading 'The Exotic' which I believe serves to focus the colonial gaze through which the object is viewed (Figures 32-33).



Figure 30. Tibetan script revealed during the conservation process (photograph by J. Clark).



Figure 31. Detached section on display with the bone apron (photography by J. Clark).



Figure 32. The heading above the non-European section of the gallery (photography by J. Clark).

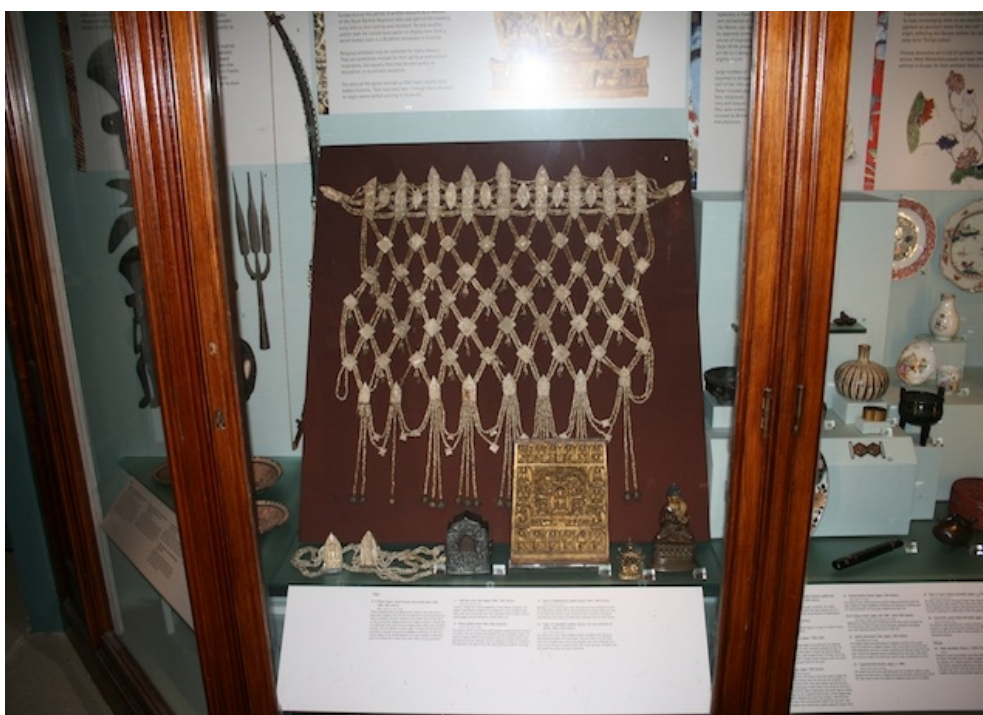


Figure 33. The bone apron on display next to African and Japanese artefacts, in *The Arts of Living* gallery in Norwich Castle Museum (photography by J. Clark).

There is a growing focus on the treatment of human remains within museums across the globe. In Peru, indigenous cultural organisations such as the Yachay Wasi have been campaigning for the removal of Inka mummies from museum attractions. The national assembly in Paris recently voted to return sixteen Maori heads back to New Zealand. Egyptian mummified human remains are no longer permitted to travel internationally. Indigenous groups in Argentina and Chile are, like those in the USA, Africa, Australia and New Zealand before them, demanding the return of ancestral remains from museums. Within the UK, local communities and pagan organisations have been ‘more inclined to question the appropriateness of excavation, scientific investigation, and retention for further study’ (Pye 2001:171) than ever before. Advances in genetics and DNA analysis may also serve to further connect people with their ancient ancestors in new and surprising ways. With the future of museums appearing to be one based on openness, public access and plurality of audience, the issues discussed in this work seem unlikely to simply go away. Public interest in human remains has never seemed to wane. Exhibitions of human remains continue to evolve, but displaying the dead, whether mummified, plastinated or skeletal, is still a proven method of producing a blockbuster exhibition.

Policies such as NAGPRA and the Vermillion Accord have forced some museums to address human remains issues in ways extolled and criticised in equal measure. In the UK, new laws have been passed, such as the 2004 Human Tissue Act, in reaction to public moral panics about the treatment of the dead, but policies and guidelines aimed at addressing the concerns and dilemmas surrounding human remains within museums have been non-statutory, academic rather than practical, and reliant on culturally defined concepts such as respect. Whether international or national, global or local, legislation, policy and guidelines have greatly impacted concepts of ownership, cultural sensitivity and the ethical treatment of human remains. For many institutions, new ways of communicating and displaying human remains have, and will have to be, developed as

opposing groups, academic and cultural, enter into dialogues not previously experienced.

This discussion has aimed to highlight the complexity and variety of issues surrounding the treatment of human remains. The treatment of human remains spans different academic disciplines, scientific endeavours, indigenous beliefs, historical injustices and governmental policy. A multidisciplinary approach would be the most effective way of addressing these issues. Such an approach poses new challenges to disciplines and questions the ways in which they operate and are perceived. For archaeology and anthropology such challenges are not new but for conservation these challenges may be necessary for the discipline's survival. They may also become a necessity if we truly intend to treat our dead with respect.

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