

Bolton Library and Museum Services

Human Remains Policy



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1. Introduction

The purpose of the Policy is to outline the standards expected in relation to the care of Human Remains whilst working for Bolton Council Library & Museums Service. The Policy applies to all Library & Museum staff, including those with temporary contracts, students and agency workers when working in Bolton Council premises and when working on behalf of the Council

This policy is necessary in order to ensure adherence to the following:

- The Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) 2005 publication “Guidance for the care of Human remains in Museums”
- The Human Tissue Act of 2004
- The revised (2004) ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums
- The Museums Association’s Code of Ethics.

The Council considers the care of human remains to be of significant importance. Disregarding this policy could have serious reputational and legal implications.

2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to lay out professional standards concerning the collection, care, and use of human remains held as part of the Service’s collection. The vast majority of these human remains are part of the archaeology collection, particularly a small collection of ancient Egyptian mummies. These are used for interpretative display and academic research.

The policy draws heavily upon policies prepared by other institutions (particularly those of the British Museum and the Manchester Museum) and upon the following major guidance documents:

- The Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) 2005 publication “Guidance for the care of Human remains in Museums”
- The Human Tissue Act of 2004
- The revised (2004) ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums
- The Museums Association’s Code of Ethics.

Where there are any issues in complying with this policy they must be discussed with the line manager, and reasonable steps taken to respond sensitively to concerns with revisions made and approved where necessary.

3. Terminology and Definitions

Staff: Refers to any person working in the Council on any form of contract. It also includes people who are on Council premises providing a service, either paid or voluntary.

The Service: Bolton Library and Museum Services, including Bolton Libraries, Bolton Museum, Bolton Aquarium, Bolton Archives and Local Studies

The Council: Bolton Council

Collections Management Team: Will be considered quorate when including a member of the Senior Management Team (Team Leader or higher) and two members of the Museum, Archive or Aquarium teams (Museum Access Officers). *See section 4 of this policy.*

Restitution: The process by which material is returned to an individual or a community

Repatriation: The process by which material is returned to a nation or state at the request of a government.

3.1 Definition of Human Remains

For the purposes of this policy, 'human' refers solely to the species Homo-Sapiens. 'Remains' includes:

- Osteological material (i.e. skeletal, in whole or part)
- Soft tissue (organs, skin, etc., wet or dry preparations)
- Slide preparations of the above
- Artefacts made wholly or largely from the above
- Fossils and sub fossils
- Hair and nails. N.B. Although not directly included in some guidelines (because it is not possible to reproduce DNA from such material), the Bolton Library & Museum policy includes hair and nails because of their sacred status amongst some cultures.

3.2 Definition of Associated Objects

Associated objects, sacred artefacts or grave goods do not come under the terms of this policy. However, if there are concerns about associated objects, an effort will be made to undertake appropriate consultation and to react to any findings in a culturally sensitive manner.

Refer to "Collections Development Policy" for more detail regarding associated material, and associated issues regarding repatriation and restitution.

4 The Collections Management Team

The Collections Management Team is made up of the Team Leader Museum Access and Museums Access Officers who have responsibility for curation, conservation, and documentation of collections. This team is responsible for applying the Human Remains policy within Bolton Library & Museum Services. The

team is also responsible for keeping up to date with national developments in the care of human remains and amending this policy as necessary.

In addition, for matters of particular controversy or where further expert guidance is required, the Team will refer for guidance from the Human Remains Panel of the Manchester Museum.

5 Duties and Responsibilities of Individuals and Groups

It is the responsibility of individual employees, students and managers to ensure compliance with the standards set out in this Policy.

6 Policy Implementation

Service Managers

The Service Managers are responsible for raising with staff any concerns relating to the policy and implementing/monitoring action plans produced by Team Managers in response to incident reports associated with lack of compliance with this policy by staff within their area of responsibility.

Service Managers/Senior Staff

Team managers are responsible for ensuring all their staff adhere to this policy.

All Staff

All staff are responsible for complying with this policy.

7 Guidelines Applicable to Staff (Main Policy content)

7.1 Consent and Respect

Under the Human Tissue Act 2004, consent to use human tissue for regulated activities is only required by (English) law with regard to human remains of individuals who have died within the last 100 years. As Bolton Library & Museum Services have resolved not to hold remains of less than 100 years old (and will not collect any), it is under no legal obligation to seek consent from any outside group or individual (including the Human Tissue Authority) concerning the use of the collection.

All human remains in the care of Bolton Library & Museum Services will be treated with the same high level of care and respect, irrespective of their age or origin. If required, special arrangements will be made to ensure that their storage, care and display are culturally acceptable and respectful of the interests of originating communities. If there is any concern over the ethical treatment of a set of remains, the Collections Management Team will consult widely.

Should any culturally sensitive human remains be identified within the Bolton Museum collections, the Collections Management Team will actively contact the appropriate cultural representatives and inform them of the presence of the remains and seek their advice.

7.2 Documentation

Bolton Library & Museum Services completed the documentation of human remains in our care in 2010 and a full list will be made publicly available via our website by March 2021. Until this time, requests to see full object records relating to human remains should be submitted in writing to the Collections Management Team.

7.3 Research, Learning & Teaching

All applications for research will be dealt with by the Collections Management Team, in consultation with any relevant parties and acting within the boundaries set by Bolton Library & Museum Services Research Policy.

Bolton Library & Museum Services reserve the right to decline any application for use of human remains for research, teaching and learning. The organisation also holds the right to halt any ongoing research should the conditions of this policy be breached. In both cases, a full written explanation of the reasons will be provided.

Any sampling of human remains must meet all legal and ethical criteria set out in the Bolton Library & Museum Services' Research Policy. Samples taken and used but that are not destroyed in the process of the scientific procedure must be returned to Bolton Library & Museum Services within six months. Returned samples, along with detached micro-remains, will be individually labelled in relation to the accession number and recorded with any relevant prior scientific analyses. They will be stored safely together and these samples will be offered prior to any further interventive sampling taking place.

Please refer to Bolton Library & Museum Services' Research Policy for more detail.

7.4 Acquisition

Bolton Library & Museum Services do not seek to collect human remains and will not acquire any remains which are less than 100 years old. Material aged more than 100 years will only be acquired in exceptional circumstances and in full and open consultation with appropriate communities.

Please refer to Bolton Library & Museum Services' Development Policy for more detail.

7.5 Loans

Loans in and out of the museum of human remains for display or research purposes are permitted. This is subject to the approval of the Collections Management Team, based upon consideration of legal, ethical and practical issues.

7.6 Exhibition & Display

Bolton Library & Museum Services may display, or put on loan, human remains from the permanent collection.

All such displays will always be designed so that the remains are accompanied by an explanatory interpretation that places them in an historic context. Display of human remains for aesthetic or artistic purposes alone will not be permitted.

Research will be carried out to ensure that the display of each set of human remains is shown in a culturally sensitive manner.

Where human remains are displayed in the museum, there will be a notice outside or at the entrance to each relevant display space alerting visitors to the presence of human remains.

To minimise the risk of contamination between them, human remains will always be displayed distinctly separate to one another.

Human remains will only be referred to by a proper name where the proper name of an individual is known. More usually, the name of a cultural or historical group or archaeological site is to be used. For example, Lindow Man.

The above will be enforced by the Senior Management Team of Bolton Library & Museum Services.

Photographs and casts of modern human remains must be accompanied by documents proving that the appropriate consent has been obtained and that the ethical treatment of the human remains took place during their use.

7.7 Storage

All human remains will be stored together to a conservation-approved standard within a clearly designated part of the Museum store, separate to that of other non-human material where storage space permits.

Human remains storage spaces will be clearly labeled on the shelves, cupboards or other units where the human remains are stored.

7.8 Handling

All human remains will be handled in a conservation-approved manner. Protective PPE will be worn at all times to minimise any risk to staff, researchers or the public and also to prevent contamination of the ancient remains.

No two individually boxed sets of human remains will be handled simultaneously. Only when one is stored away can the other be unboxed. This is to prevent cross-contamination between sets of human remains. Gloves worn to handle one individual set of human remains will be discarded before handling another.

Signs explaining Human Remains Handling Procedures will be displayed alongside accessible PPE in spaces where human remains are stored.

7.9 Conservation & Labelling

No interventive conservation procedures shall be applied to human remains other than dry brushing and vacuuming to remove dust. Preventive conservation including environmental monitoring and control and freezing, in case of pest attack, can be applied.

Labelling of human remains will follow DCMS guidelines. Each set of human remains will be individually boxed and the boxes will be marked with the accession numbers and a brief description. Where necessary, tie on labels shall be attached to the human remains themselves. With regard to skeletal remains, in order to minimise the risk of loss or dissociation, identifying numbers can be marked on the bones in waterproof ink.

7.10 Repatriation, Reburial & De-accession

Claims for repatriation, reburial and de-accession will be determined on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the Collections Management Team, based upon proper consideration of all relevant legal and ethical issues.

All requests for de-accessioning, repatriation and reburial must be submitted in writing to the Head of Bolton Library & Museum Services. Final approval for transfer from the Service's possession is subject to confirmation by the Executive Committee of Bolton Council.

7.11 Images

In principle, the same criteria applied to the exhibition and display of human remains will also be applied when using images of human remains.

Requests for images of human remains held by Bolton Museum & Archive Service may be requested in writing from the Museum and will be subject to approval by the Collections Management Team. Any images of human remains used in Museum publications, including the internet, will also be subject to approval by the team.

All requests for use of images of human remains, including photography or filming within the Museum, should be made using a Filming and Photography Request Form and submitted to the Collections Management Team for approval.

7.12 Complaints

Any complaints relating to the care of human remains under Bolton Museums' jurisdiction must follow the complaints procedure.

Complaints should be submitted through the Council's official complaints procedure: <https://www.bolton.gov.uk/complaints/making-complaint>

8 Monitoring and Review

- Managers are responsible for monitoring compliance with this policy. Hand hygiene audits include elements of compliance against uniform policy standards.
- The Policy will be subject to regular review, usually every 3 years or sooner in line with any new guidance that may be published.

9 References

Department for Culture Media and Sport, *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums 2005*: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-the-care-of-human-remains-in-museums>

UK Government, *Human Tissue Act 2004*: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/30/contents>

International Council of Museums, *Code of Ethics 2004*: <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf>

Museums Association, *Code of Ethics 2016*: <https://archive-media.museumsassociation.org/20012016-code-of-ethics-single-page.pdf>