

Thirsk and District Museum Society

Care of Human Remains Policy

1. This document sets out the Thirsk Museum Society's policy relating to the care of human remains in its collection, and the guidelines within which the Museum will make decisions about the treatment of human remains in its care.

Thirsk Museum is committed to the appropriate use of human remains and tissues on display and in research.

The Museum considers that human remains have a unique status within its collection and as such should be treated with respect and receive a high standard of care.

The Museum also recognises that there are particular sensitivities surrounding the display, documentation and storage of remains. As such the Museum follows the recommendations in the 2005 Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in the treatment of remains in its care.

The Museum follows the definition of "Human Remains", in the DCMS guidance. That is, human remains are understood to refer to the bodies and parts of people, including osteological material (whole or part of skeletons, individual bones or fragments of bones and teeth), soft tissue including organs and skin, embryos and slide preparations of human tissue.

The definition does not include hair or nails obtained from a living person, in line with the Human Tissue Act 2004. Human remains also include any of the above that may have been modified in some way by human skills and/or may be physically bound up with other non-human materials.

The Museum policy will be reviewed periodically, and may be revised to reflect changes in the DCMS guidance, or legal and regulatory environment, including compliance with the Human Tissue Authority (HTA) regime.

2. Treatment of remains in the museum.

2.1 Display

The Museum recognises the high level of interest and educational value, in the human remains held within its collection. The Museum remains committed to the usefulness of exhibiting human remains, and objects incorporating human remains, in an appropriate and sensitive manner. Such displays will be in line with the DCMS guidelines and HTA legislation.

The sensitivities of the source community and potential audiences will be actively considered when displaying human remains and artefacts incorporating human remains. The Museum

has provided a notice at the entrance of the Reynolds Room to provide early warning to visitors that human remains are on display within.

2.2 Loans

The Museum will loan remains to other institutions for research and display purposes when the proposed activities are in line with the Museums policies and all relevant legal and regulatory requirements.

2.3 Acquisitions and de-accession

The Museum will continue to acquire remains if it feels that it furthers its educational goals, and the remains are from the local area. Any proposal for the acquisition of human remains, human tissues, or artefacts containing these, will be considered in line with the code of practice resulting from the 2004 Human Tissue Act. The Museum does not collect contemporary material. In the case of historical remains, every attempt will be made to ensure that provenance has been established as clearly as possible. The Museum will not acquire material if there is any suspicion that it has been illicitly acquired.

Before de-accessioning human remains the Museum will first seek to establish whether there are any other museums or genealogical or cultural communities who might wish to make a claim for the return or burial of the remains. If the remains are to be disposed of, they will be disposed of safely and respectfully in accordance with the Human Tissue Act 2004 and, in the case of burials from Christian context, Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England, produced by the Church of England and English Heritage 2005.

Any requests for return or reparation or burial will be considered by the Board of Trustees on a case by case basis and with reference to the ethical framework laid out in the DCMS guidance.

2.4 Documentation and storage

Human remains in the Thirsk Museum collection will be stored and managed in appropriate conditions, consistent to their special status and in keeping with good practice.

2.5 Research

Thirsk Museum believes that the retention and maintenance of human remains are important because of the contribution they can make to the furtherance of knowledge. The Museum will provide access to their stores to students and researchers by appointment and under supervision. Requests for access by researchers or for the taking of samples will be considered initially by the Management Committee who will then consult the Board of Trustees on a case by case basis.