

HUMAN REMAINS POLICY

Revision	Revision Date	Owner	Reference	Comment
00 - New	September 2015	Registrar	COL-POL-031-01	New policy to meet legal and ethical standards, and to respond to changes in corporate policy
01	January 2020	Head of Collection Services	COL – POL – 031-001	Rewrite to reflect collections department structure & up to date standards
02	September 2025	Head of Collection Services		Review to ensure upto date

1. Introduction

The Royal Armouries (the Museum) is committed to adhering to all national and international statutes of law and acting in a moral, ethical and due diligent manner relating to Human Remains.

The Museum adopts the definition of human remains as set out in the Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums (DCMS 2005 & clarification on definition 2008):

The bodies and parts of bodies, of once living people from the species Homo sapiens (defined as individuals who fall within the range of anatomical forms known today and in the recent past). This includes osseous material (whole or part skeletons, individual bones or fragments of bones or teeth), soft tissue including organs and skin, embryos and slide preparations of human tissue.

Human remains also includes any of the above that have been modified in some way by human skill and / or may be physically bound-up with other non-human materials to form an artefact composed of several materials.

2. Legal Framework

The Museum will adhere to all national and international statutes of law, including specifically, but not exclusively the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Human Tissue Act 2004.

The Museum acknowledges that under English and Welsh law there is no recognised concept of property in human remains, only custody (see DCMS Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums, 2005).

3. Due Diligence

The Museum will exercise due diligence in all aspects associated with the collection and its management of those collections. The Museum will not acquire or borrow any object unless it is satisfied that the object has not been acquired, or exported from its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws, and will reject any objects that have been illicitly traded.

The Museum expects others to work to similar standards and will make every effort to lend to and borrow from organisations who operate ethically and / or have an ethical loans policy.

4. Ethical standards and guidance

The Museum is committed to carrying out all its activities ethically and morally (see Royal Armouries' *Ethics Policy*), adhering to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Code of Ethics and the Museums Association (MA) Code of Ethics, whilst acknowledging that the ethical issues raised by human remains within museums are complex.

The Museum's Board of Trustees, acting on the advice of the museum's professional staff may take a decision to return human remains to a country or people of origin (unless covered by the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005). The Museum will take such decisions on a case-by-case basis; within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance (refer to Restitution and Repatriation Policy).

5. Managing Human Remains

If the Museum holds or intends to acquire human remains from any period, it will follow procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums', issued by DCMS in 2005, for both acquisition and disposal.

Any acquisition of Human Remains less than 100 years old is subject to the Human Tissue Act 2004 and the Museum will take guidance from the Human Tissue Authority before acquisition.

As a national museum listed in section 47 of the Human Tissue Act (2004) the Museum is granted the power to legally deaccession human remains where they are those of a person reasonably believed to have died less than 1000 years before the date that section 47 came into force. If the Museum wishes to deaccession human remains it will be proactive in establishing whether any genealogical or cultural descendants might exist. The Museum will fulfil any legal, religious or civil requirement relating to exhumation licences and ensure any disposal is carried out safely and respectfully in accordance with the Human Tissue Act (2004).

Human remains will be stored separately wherever possible and in the storage, display, conservation and care of human remains, the wishes of the genealogical descendants or cultural communities, and relevant faith organisations will be sought where possible and taken into consideration where known. Any physical examination or handling of human remains will be undertaken sensitively and respectfully.

The Museum may publicly display human remains. In that event, due consideration will be given to the appositeness of their inclusion as well as the method and context within which they are displayed. Human remains that are subject to any claim will not normally be displayed.

Research requests will be considered through our standard research access procedures ensuring that any researchers will be mindful of their legal and ethical obligations.

6. Audit and Review

This document will be reviewed from time to time, but at least every five years, and specifically following updates in corporate policy and plan, legislation and international conventions.

This document will be reviewed by a panel of collections staff and agreed by the Director of Collections.

7. Risk Management

The associated risk of non-compliance with this policy is:

Impact of non-compliance: High

Likelihood of non-compliance: Low

8. Effective date

This policy is effective from date of signing:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Bell', is written over a horizontal dotted line.

Director of Collections, Learning and Research
Date: