

# Honouring the Ancient Dead

ensuring respect for ancient pagan remains

## Policy on Consultation on Human Remains of British Provenance

The following points are laid down as an agreed policy of Honouring the Ancient Dead, the implementation of which is understood to be a key part of the organisation's remit.

*HAD defines human remains as bones, ash, or any part of what was once a living human being, including hominin ancestors not classified as Homo sapiens with whom Pagans may feel an ancestral connection.*

### 1. Who Should be Consulted

1.1 Human remains found or stored in a particular area should be treated primarily as the antecedents of the current residents of that area. Therefore, the proper care and management of human remains found, or now retained within a museum, in any location are the collective responsibility of all that area's modern residents. No one group or individual has any special claim to guardianship of them. However, some groups will inevitably have a greater interest in certain types of remains.

1.2 All interested communities should have an opportunity to be consulted when decisions are taken regarding the management of human remains, whether in archives or collections, or recently excavated. This should be seen as a positive process, facilitating a connection with the people who lived there before them, and through this enabling people to become more involved with local heritage and collections.

1.3 Interested communities may include faith groups active in the local/regional/national areas, plus heritage and culture related community groups, academics and scientists, and general representatives of the local population.

### 2. The Input of Pagans

2.1 Of all faith groups, Pagans probably give the greatest importance to respecting the antecedents of modern residents, their duty of care being heightened by the importance of reverence for heritage and ancestry fundamental to their religious practice. It is therefore most important that local Pagan communities are included in any consultation on human remains.

2.2 Many Pagans feel an affinity in particular for British human remains from the pre-Christian era, together with associated artefacts and burial sites. However, Pagans honour all their ancestors, whenever they lived and whatever their faith or lack of it. Pagans should therefore be included in consultation processes for recent remains and those of all Christian

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era, Jewish or other faiths, as well as pre-Christian remains. Although other faith communities may wish to exclude Pagans for religious reasons, this is not a reason for museums or other involved organisations to exclude them from consultations.

2.3 Irrespective of where an individual lived in the past, or their possibly migratory nature, many Pagans consider most important the place of an ancestor's interment. It is at the burial place that the strongest connection is felt with the dead person's spirit; as such, Pagans local to that place hold a duty of care for their remains.

### **3. The Practicalities of Consultation**

3.1 All human remains should have statements of significance drawn up and published. These should be accessible by all interested parties, both as part of the decision-making process and in order to meet the DCMS Guidance.

3.2 HAD should be involved in consultation, with other parties, in decisions about excavation, retention, storage, display and, in appropriate cases, reburial of human remains. Consultation need not be a laborious, time-consuming process, especially once consultation networks are set up.

3.3 Local, regional or national consultation should be carried out according to the agreed significance of the remains. Local consultation is essential in all cases. Where appropriate, however, it should be extended to the regional or national, such as where specific expertise is required or a broader interest is evident.

3.4 HAD will work towards a broader consultation process involving archaeological units, museums and all interested community groups around decisions to excavate and retain human remains. It is no longer acceptable that decisions to excavate and retain human remains are taken independently by archaeologists, without taking into account the sensitivities of other communities.

### **4. The Role of HAD**

4.1 Nearly all areas have active Pagan communities, but they are often excluded from mainstream public consultations and from local Councils of Faith and other interfaith bodies. For this reason, they should be approached through HAD, who will make the appropriate contacts and forge connections.

4.2 HAD is willing to act as a consultee in all cases of local significance, either where nominated by the local Pagan community, or contacted directly by organisers of any consultation. In this case, HAD will notify the local Pagan community, seek their approval and involve them in the process if possible.

4.3 HAD expects to be consulted directly for all cases of regional or national significance, using its own resource of theologians and contacts throughout the British Pagan faith community to ensure decisions are supported. Decisions made will be disseminated through the Pagan faith community through HAD's website and other public media.

Dated : March 2007

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