



Consultation Policy with regard to Ancestors of British Provenance

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

Terms used in this policy are in line with HAD's *Definitions* document, which should be read prior to this policy or referred to for clarity. In particular, the terms *ancestor* or *ancestral body* are used to denote what are commonly called human remains. These include the bones, ash, or any part of what was once a living human being, including hominin ancestors not classified as *Homo sapiens* with whom individuals may feel an ancient ancestral connection.

1. Who Should be Consulted

- 1.1 The bodily evidence of ancestors found or stored in a particular geographical area should be treated primarily as the antecedents of the current residents of that area. Therefore, the proper care and management of these ancestors are the collective responsibility of all that area's modern residents. No one group or individual has any special claim to guardianship of them. Inevitably, some groups will have a greater interest in certain ancestors than in others.
- 1.2 Consequently, all interested communities should have an opportunity to be consulted when decisions are taken regarding the care and treatment of ancestors, whether in archives or collections, or recently excavated. This should be seen as a positive process, facilitating a connection between current communities and the people who lived there before them, and thereby 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, modern Pagans may accord a particular significance to respecting the antecedents of modern residents, their duty of care being heightened by a reverence for heritage and ancestry that is fundamental to many Pagan religious beliefs and practices. Where local Pagans have shown an interest in exhumed ancestors, it is important that they are included in any consultation process.
- 2.2 Many Pagans feel an affinity in particular for ancestors from pre-Christian Britain, together with associated artefacts and burial sites. However, most Pagans strive to honour all their ancestors, whenever they lived and whatever their faith. Pagan interest may therefore naturally extend to recent ancestors, including those of the Christian era, Jewish or other faiths.
- 2.3 Irrespective of where a person lived, or their possible migrations, many Pagans consider to be most important the place of an ancestor's interment: it is at the burial place that the strongest connection is felt with the ancestor, particularly where they have been interred within that land for many centuries or millennia.

3. The Practicalities of Consultation

- 3.1 All disinterred ancestors should have statements of significance drawn up and published. These should include a recognition of any expressions of interest in that ancestor that are either anticipated or have been received, from all potential sources of interest. The statement should be accessible by all interested parties, both as part of the decision-making process and in order to meet the DCMS Guidance for the Care of Human Remains (2005).
- 3.2 HAD should be involved in consultation, with other parties, in decisions about excavation, retention, storage, display and, in appropriate cases, reburial of ancestors. 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 ancestors. Local consultation is essential in all cases. Where appropriate, however, it should be extended to the regional or national level, such as where specific expertise is required or a broader interest is anticipated or 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 ancestors. It is no longer acceptable that decisions about excavation and retention are taken independently by archaeologists, without taking into account the sensitivities of other communities.

4. The Role of HAD

- 4.1 As a key voice with specialist knowledge of the specific standpoint of religious, spiritual and social sensitivity with respect to the treatment of ancestors, HAD expects to be consulted directly in all cases of regional or national significance. Using its broad network of connections it will ascertain interest in the particular ancestors in question. Given its roots in the Druid community, HAD is able to liaise with Pagans where appropriate.
- 4.2 HAD is willing to act as a consultee, either where nominated by individuals concerned for the ancestors' welfare, or where contacted directly by those organising a particular consultation.
- 4.3 HAD will disseminate information about consultations and decisions made through its website, its network of connections and volunteers, and other public media, as appropriate.

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