

Honouring The Ancient Dead
Ensuring Respect for Ancient Pagan Remains

Reburial Handbook



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Introduction

Purpose of this Handbook

This handbook is intended to be a source of information and suggestions that we hope will be helpful to anyone intending to rebury human remains. Its primary audience is archaeologists and museum professionals who have made the decision to rebury, or are thinking about reburying, but need practical information on how to go about it. As such, this handbook picks up where other guides, such as the Museums Association Disposal Toolkit, stop in their advice. In particular, it provides advice on ways of minimising the costs of reburial and gives contact information for undertakers and burial grounds willing to support reburial projects. The focus of this handbook is on reburial and, necessarily, omits detailed discussion of alternative treatments of ancient human remains that may be covered elsewhere.

HAD recognises the financial and other challenges facing museums at the current time. However, we believe that it is precisely at this time that, through initiatives such as reburial of ancient remains, museums can gain significantly by demonstrating engagement with local communities.

HAD's Position

Honouring the Ancient Dead supports the reburial¹ of ancient human remains whenever this is possible. HAD advocates consultation about ancient human remains, where the voices of all interested parties are heard and decision-making is developed as a collective process, balancing scientific interests with religious, spiritual and social interests in all cases. The primary consideration for HAD is always the respectful treatment of the deceased's remains. HAD wishes to promote dignity for the person involved, who should be treated with the same, natural, honours given to any 21st century relative. Transition from museum 'material' to a welcomed returnee within the community is central to the whole process.

HAD's Foundation and Aims

Honouring the Ancient Dead is a British network organisation set up to ensure respect for ancient pagan² human remains and related artefacts. HAD was established in May 2004, initially in response to negotiations following the Public Enquiry into proposed road developments at Stonehenge, Wiltshire.

HAD's main aim is to be a rational voice for those Pagan groups and individuals who are concerned about the care of ancient human remains in Britain, ensuring inclusion in any consultation and decision-making processes. Key areas of interest are how archaeologists, museums and government departments care for ancient human remains, through exhumation,

¹ 'Reburial' – may relate to the reinstatement of inhumations, cremations and other methods of original committal of the dead.

² The term pagan is used in two ways throughout this document. With a capital 'P', as Pagan, the term refers to the modern religious and spiritual traditions in Britain and around the world; with a small 'p', as pagan, the term refers to the general religious and social culture of our pre-Christian ancestors

study, storage and display, with a parallel focus on issues of repatriation (within Britain) and reburial.

The full text of HAD [Statement of Intention](http://www.honour.org.uk/node/5) may be found at <http://www.honour.org.uk/node/5>

Whom HAD Represents

HAD is fundamentally inspired by and rooted within the modern British Pagan community and its many spiritual, religious and philosophical perspectives. As such a diverse community, however, it is difficult for any organisation to claim that it represents Paganism. Addressing this issue, HAD does not represent a membership of individuals or groups for whom it speaks and to whom it is then accountable. Instead HAD is representative of British Paganisms. It achieves this through its structure: its Council, its advisors, its volunteers and its ability to access and listen to the many networks of Pagans whom it consults. It is the weaving of all these voices that gives HAD its clear strong voice.

For full information on HAD's Council and Advisors refer to [The Organisation of HAD](http://www.honour.org.uk/node/12) at <http://www.honour.org.uk/node/12>

Structure of this Handbook

Chapter 1 – Strategies for Reburial : provides some thoughts on the challenges of moving to the decision to rebury. Consultation, suitable locations, costs and financing, communication and publicity, are some of the issues considered. The reader should understand that HAD advocates reburial in general and that this stance is reflected throughout this document.

Chapter 2 – Reburial Process : gives an overview of the main stages in a reburial project. Individual reburial project plans may be developed to suit specific timescales and local circumstances using this as a template framework.

Chapter 3 – How to Rebury – Practicalities : elaborates the outline process by providing practical guidance on where and how to source all the elements for a successful reburial event.

The Appendices contain useful supplementary reference material, such as HAD's recommended rite for committal and an account of an inspirational reburial at Highworth, Wiltshire together with the first directories of participating burial grounds and funeral directors. We should emphasise that this rite is non-denominational, recognising the lack of knowledge of the intentions and religious beliefs of the deceased, and that alternative non-denominational services could also be used to good effect.

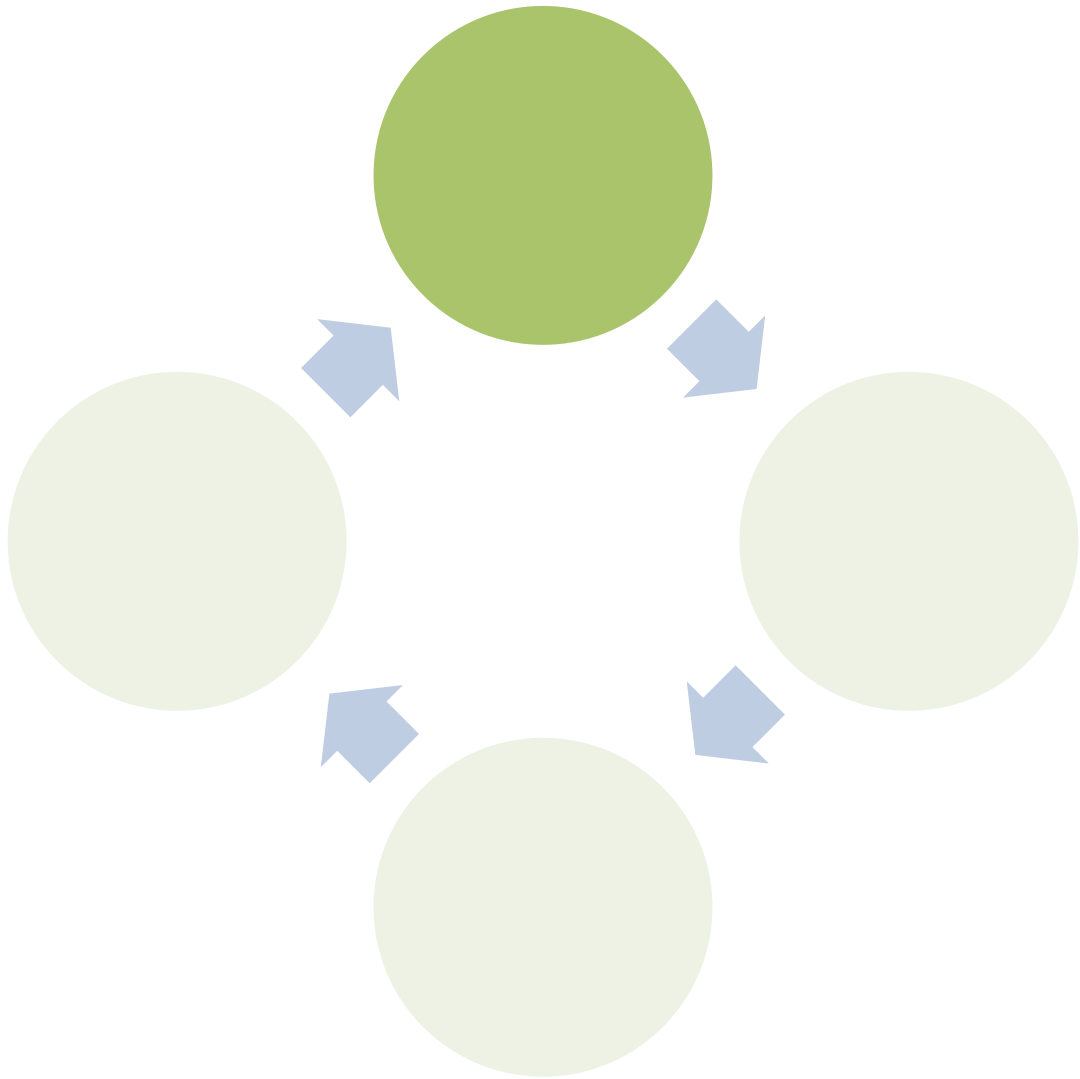
Using this Handbook

We hope that you find this handbook useful. It has been designed to be easily updatable with latest best practice, contacts and general guidance; with the aim of being periodically revised and reissued.

Please send your comments and experiences to us and we will ensure they are considered for inclusion within future releases.

Reburial, once started, should be viewed as a positive cycle that can be repeated by each organisation, as circumstances require.

Chapter 1



Strategies for Reburial

Strategies for Reburial

This section is intended to help museums that are considering disposal of portions of their human remains collection, to get started. Each museum will need to comply with, or formulate, its own policies and guidelines for disposal. What follows are some prompts that may be used to seed the thinking process, breaking the inertia and preparing for the reburial itself.

Human Remains in Your Care

Prompts

1. Are there human remains in your organisation's custody, in store, or elsewhere, that you don't know anything about?
2. Is there documentation about these remains? Has it been published?
3. Were they excavated before good records became standard practice?
4. Is there any record of the remains being used within your organisation or elsewhere, e.g. for scientific research, publication, display, education, community events or other purposes?
5. If so, when were they last used? If not, does this indicate they could be candidates for disposal? What are the reasons for justifying the retention of the remains?
6. Is there any funding in place for the remains to be studied or used, or any funding anticipated in the future, or plans seek further funding?
7. If the remains have little or no contextual documentation, is it still reasonable to assert a use for them?
8. Where there is no scientific, display, educational (etc.) use, are you aware of the value placed on the remains? What do you feel is the value of the remains?
9. Do the public/relevant institutions know about the human remains collection in your care?
10. Have you made this collection accessible to a wide range of audiences, e.g. through an online collections database?

Policies in Place

11. What does your organisation's Disposal Policy say about human remains?
12. Does the organisation have a policy of retaining all human remains? If so, is it written into a formally adopted policy or is it the assertion of management? Having a formally documented policy is preferable because it can be readily consulted and revised as necessary.

Actions

- ❖ Document a formal Disposal Policy if none exists. The Museums Association or Collections Trust can assist with this. (*HAD can help with examples from its database of museums' policies if requested.*)

- ❖ Arrange to meet with those who will make decisions about what happens to human remains, putting together the information you have amassed so far, e.g.:
 - what remains are in store,
 - documentation,
 - history of use.
- ❖ Questions to ask before moving to disposal:
 - Why do we have these remains?
 - What is known about the wishes/intentions of the donor?
 - What is the intention of retention?
 - Is there funding to engage with them?
 - Are there interested parties who could potentially wish to engage with them?
 - Can a proposal be put together for using them?
 - If I am not the expert, who can I ask?
 - How do the human remains fit into research agendas e.g. at the county, regional or national level?
 - Alternatively - If they are to be disposed, have we met all the criteria in our Disposal Policy?

Interested Parties

If disposal is agreed to be the way forward, it will be important to consider different views and experiences of the value of human remains through broad consideration of all perspectives. There are likely to be many viewpoints to be balanced.

It is widely recognised that different perspectives add value to human remains, enriching what a museum contributes to its society, community, heritage of place and people.

Human remains are important to people for different reasons. In order for an organisation to be fully participating in, positively contributing to and engaging with its community, beliefs based in scientific, social and spiritual must be seen as equally valid.

Consultation is, therefore, a key part of the process. How should this be approached? First, find out who is interested in human remains, for example:

- ❖ museum staff,
- ❖ museum visitors (especially if any remains are or have been on display)
- ❖ scientists and academics,
- ❖ religious groups (especially if the religion of the remains is known, e.g. Christian, Pagan³, interfaith, overseas – if so, contact information will be required here),
- ❖ local councillors or the local parish council where the excavation took place,
- ❖ anyone who currently uses, or has an interest in, the land where the excavation took place e.g. schools, walkers' groups, farmers, land owners, golf clubs, angling clubs,

³ HAD can assist with this

- ❖ local university undergraduate / post graduate students for museums / history / anthropology / etc,
- ❖ historical societies and other specialist interest groups.

Check if there are any pre-made decisions, i.e. where anyone involved in the decision making process has already made up their mind, and the consultation information will be dismissed or interpreted in a biased way. Think about your own position in this regard. Talk about it with your colleagues.

Have a think about possible options for the remains, getting help where needed. If reburial is one of those options, continue with the consultation process.

For further ideas on this, and what follows, refer to HAD's Consultation document <http://www.honour.org.uk/node/39>

Consultation Process

Arrange an initial date for presentations by those who can talk about the remains, inviting all who are interested, allowing them to engage with them in whatever way is deemed appropriate, ensuring there is care and respect for the remains at all times. Ideally your consultation meeting should be chaired by an independent who is unbiased, and not by museum staff.

In open discussion at this meeting, decide upon the questions to be asked in a consultation document to be sent out more widely.

Send out the consultation document as widely as you can, using those interested and their community networks, giving a deadline for responses and, in as far as it is possible, committing to a date by which decisions to be made. Consider also trying to involve 'non – interested' parties, such as museum visitors who may not have a specific interest in human remains until asked.

When consultation papers are returned, collate the information, ideally allowing another one or two on your team to do the same, independently of each other.

Arrange a date to present findings to those who attended the initial meeting, and allow responses to be voiced and heard, clearly writing down the important points, so the consultation group are aware that you have done so.

Explore the process needed for each suggestion to be put into action, getting help where needed. If reburial is one of those suggestions, the rest of this document will help.

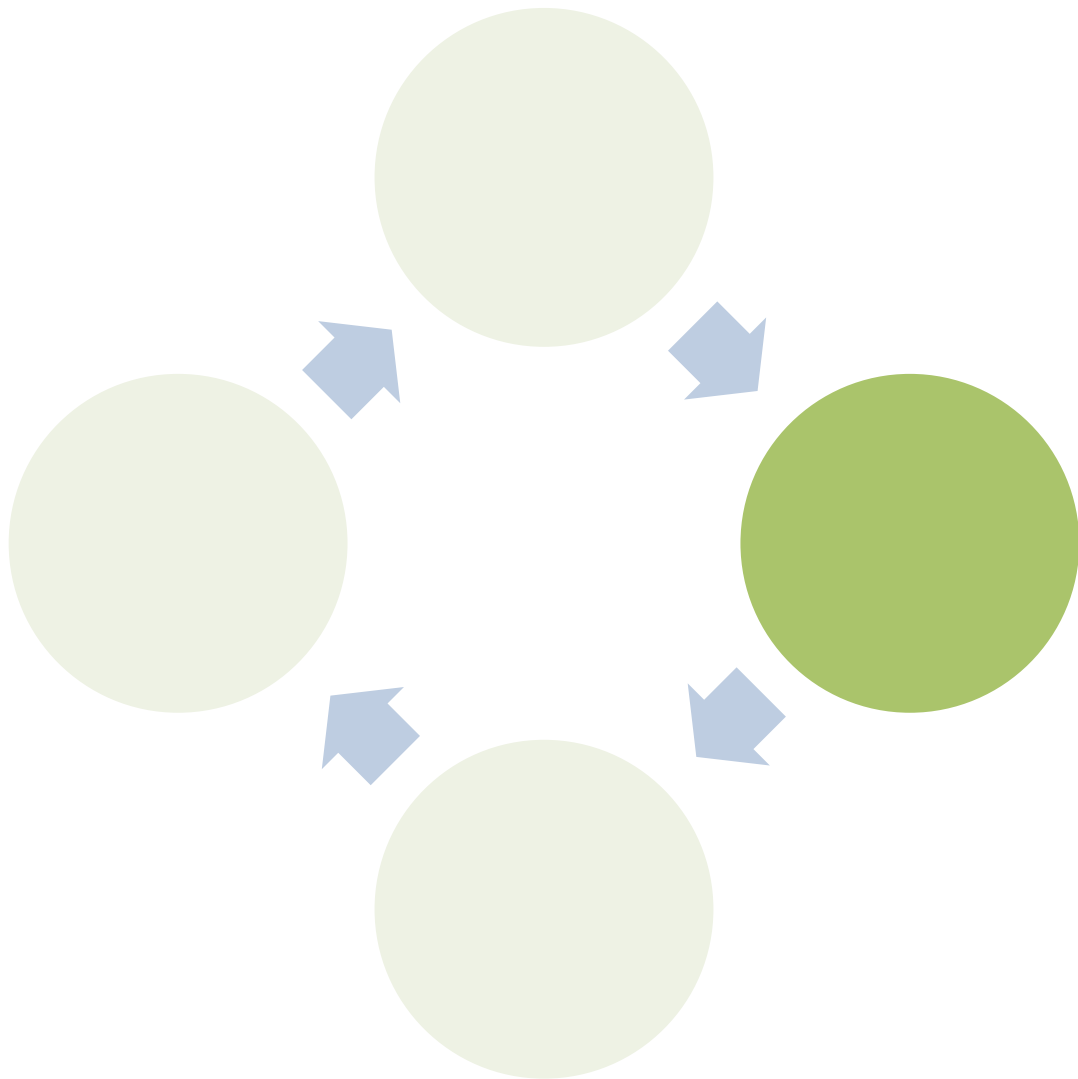
What obstacles stand in the way of each suggestion? What solutions can you find? Get help where needed from more than one source, ensuring the solutions contain objectivity and are flexible, e.g. from colleagues, the Museums Association, or HAD. Funding is likely to be a

major consideration if reburial is to be the way forward. The Practicalities section of this document contains suggestions to help with this.

Arrange a meeting with those who ultimately are responsible for custody of the human remains, laying out your findings and the suggestions made through the consultation. At the meeting hear all the options, carefully note the final decision and document in accordance with your Disposal Policy. Then prepare a plan to implement the decision, together with the appropriate governance bodies and reporting process that will be essential in ensuring the agreed plan of action is fulfilled and carried out in accordance with the wishes of all involved, or at least a consensus. Scheduling regular progress meetings (either virtual or physical) with minutes will create the necessary audit trail for future reference and lessons learned, and to keep all stakeholders informed. HAD would be delighted to be involved in this stage and/or take feedback from reburial projects for future updates to this handbook for the benefit of all.

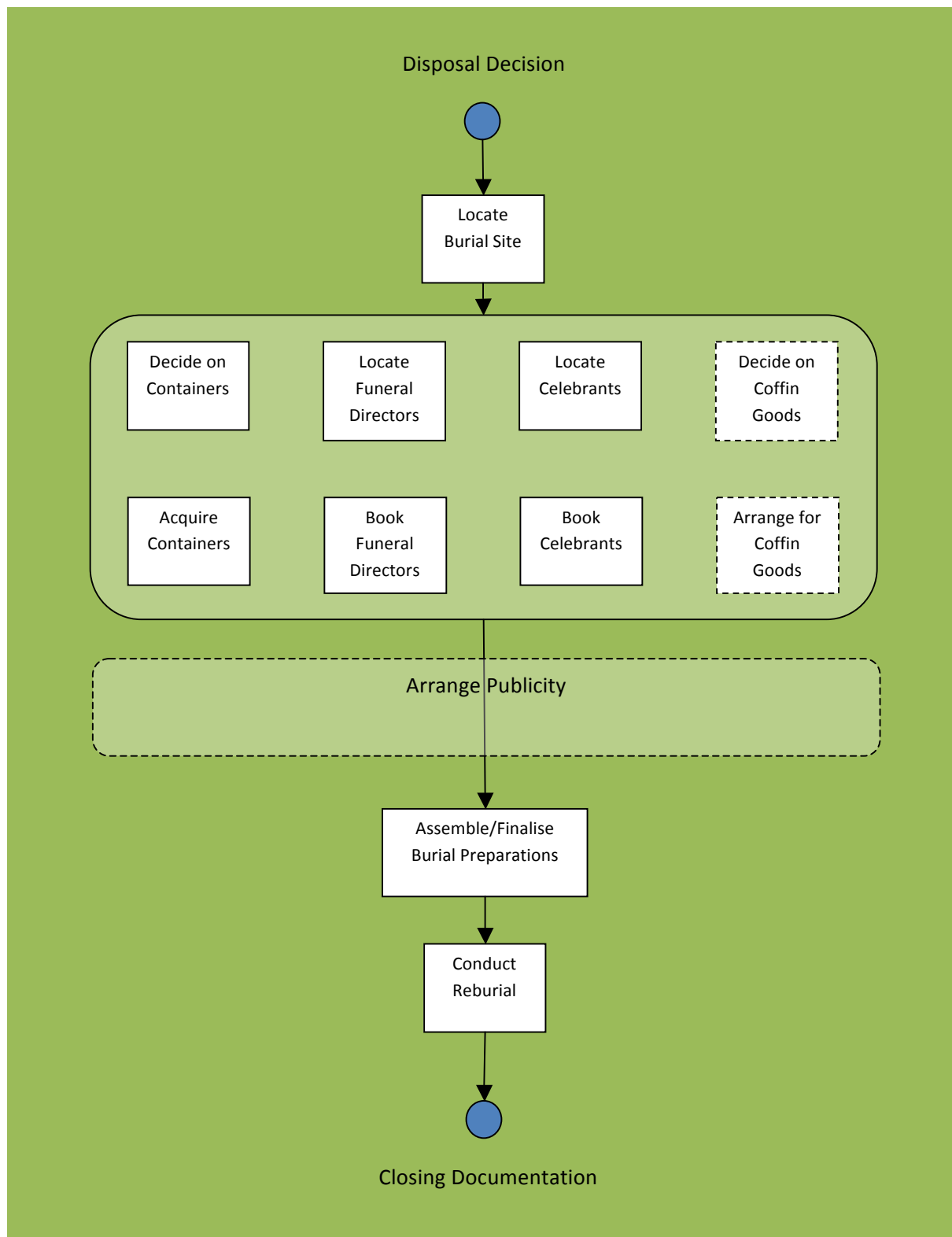
Note: HAD assumes that the decision making body will vary in each case but, in the case of most museums with an established Disposal Policy, this is likely to be some form of governing disposals committee. Where this is the case, often the institution's governing body will have the final say, not museum staff. As a consequence, they need to be brought on board too. For example, a director may go through a consultation process and decide on reburial, but this may be blocked by the governing body. If there is a Disposal Policy, this usually makes clear if a decision to dispose/rebury is delegated or needs to be signed off by a governing body. Also, realistically, not all consultations will reach consensus. It may be that disagreement has to be accepted, as long as decisions are taken in good faith and there has been an opportunity to air and understand all views.

Chapter 2



Reburial Process

Reburial Process



The decision to rebury will have been made prior to this process. The next steps will usually be to locate a suitable burial site, as this affects most of the other decisions and arrangements

to be made, and without which the reburial cannot go ahead. Burial containers also need to be decided upon.

Once the reburial site has been identified the majority of the practical arrangements can be initiated i.e. arrangements for containers to put the remains in, whether to involve a funeral director and which one, what type of ceremony and celebrants would be appropriate, and whether coffin goods should be considered. These can broadly be progressed all in parallel. Timings will vary depending on local service providers' availability.

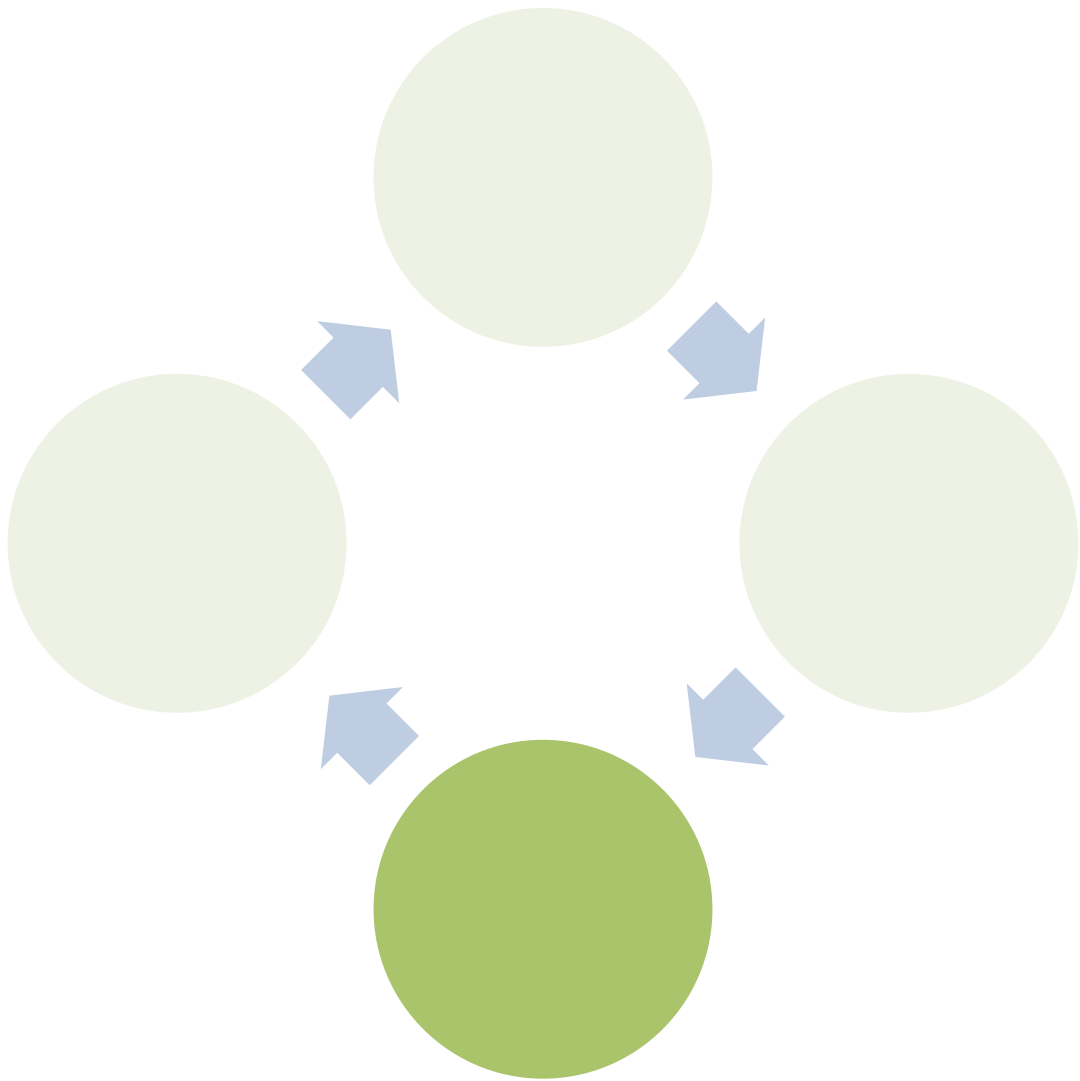
Publicity is something that may, or may not, be desirable. Hence, like the coffin goods step, this is shown in dotted outline to indicate optionality.

The penultimate step is to bring together all the arrangements and ensure everything is in place for a successful reburial event on the chosen day.

The final event is the reburial itself, which is followed by formally closing the process by filing any necessary records within the disposing institution e.g. updating museum collection records and noting observations on the whole process with the aim of feeding back any improvement suggestions from lessons learned. In many cases records will have been updated before reburial i.e. the remains will have been formally deaccessioned in order to allow them to be reburied.

The following section expands upon this outline process by discussing the practicalities in each of these steps.

Chapter 3



Reburial Practicalities

How To Rebury : Step-by-Step Practicalities

Finding a Burial Site

This should be the first thing to be considered as the choice will probably affect some of the other decisions to be made.

Burial Grounds

Look at the possibility of a natural burial ground for the reburial. A good natural burial ground may be willing to provide a grave plot free of charge (FOC) in return for the publicity surrounding the reburial. They may need to charge for grave digging (interment) costs, unless their grave digger is also willing to give his time FOC, or forego his labour costs and simply charge for fuel.

Refer to Appendix C for a list of participating burial grounds. We anticipate this list will grow in time.

HAD advises against using a cemetery that has been consecrated by any particular religious tradition for the reburial of human remains of pagan provenance.

Cemeteries

If a natural burial ground does not seem appropriate (geographically, or it is not the disposing organisation's preferred route), consider the local authority cemetery. It is possible that grave space might be donated FOC here too, though grave digging (interment) may need to be paid for.

*The Association of
Natural Burial
Grounds / The
Natural Death Centre*

www.anbg.co.uk

office@anbg.co.uk

T. 0871 288 2098

*This organisation can
advise as to the local
natural burial
ground.*

Containers

The next thing to consider is what the remains will be placed in. This may be affected by the choice of burial site. If using a local authority cemetery, there will be very few restrictions on containers. A natural burial ground is likely to have regulations that need to be followed, for example, only allowing containers that will safely and quickly biodegrade. In any case, we would advise environmentally friendly containers of some sort, in order to add to the ethical focus of the reburial process.

Consider whether individuals' bones might be placed in separate containers (e.g. bags made of natural fibres) and then placed into a larger container (e.g. biodegradable coffin). Consider how many coffins (or boxes) will be needed. If necessary, would it be appropriate to separate remains into eras (e.g. Neolithic, Saxon, Medieval)? You may then end up with a number of 'boxes' each holding various separate 'bags' holding the remains of individuals⁴.

⁴ HAD views this as acceptable where a lack of provenance means separation could be just as difficult.

Looking at sourcing these containers, consider the following possibilities:

- ❖ local WI groups may be willing to get involved, creating natural fibre containers for individual's bones to be placed together (where known)
- ❖ local Pagan, re-enactment or historical societies may be interested in getting involved, either to create the bags or the boxes
- ❖ local schools may be interested too.

To confer more traditional dignity, consider using coffins or caskets:

- ❖ Ecoffins are likely to donate coffins FOC in return for publicity. This company provide willow, bamboo and other natural fibre coffins, in any size. Infant size coffins may be appropriate for small numbers of bones, or even cremated remains caskets would not look inappropriate. They could advise. They are an ethical company importing products from ethical sources (fairtrade/co-ops/etc). <http://www.ecoffins.co.uk> or tel : 01795 830688
- ❖ Environmental Coffins, in Olney (Bucks), make English willow and cardboard coffins. They may be willing to donate coffins, caskets, or the like, as appropriate. <http://www.environmentalcoffins.com> or tel : 01234 714240
- ❖ Greenfield Creations can supply cardboard coffins <http://www.greenfieldcreations.co.uk>
- ❖ A coffin company could also provide natural fibre bags. These would be in a heavy duty calico (or the like) - heavier than necessary for dry remains.
- ❖ Your local funeral director (see below) would also be able to advise.

If you do need to pay for the products, you should budget for around £25 for a cremated remains urn in beautiful card, or £35 for a willow or bamboo cremated remains urn. Infant sized coffin in willow or card start at around £30. A full sized coffin should be no more than £120 (plain cardboard) or £320 (willow).

Funeral Directors

Look at local funeral directors and ask if they too would be willing to be involved FOC in return for publicity.

Try independent funeral directors first. If you cannot find an independent, local Co-operative funeral directors are often flexible and should be keen to express the ethical foundation of their organisation by helping with community projects. A good funeral director will advise as to the cemetery or burial ground and liaise for you if necessary with everyone involved in the funeral.

When dealing with a funeral director, make sure they are aware of what you would need.

- ❖ It should be possible for all containers to be delivered to the museum for your own staff to lay out, so the funeral director need not be involved in that part of the process.
- ❖ If you have full sized coffins, a hearse would provide the necessary dignity of transport, but a full sized coffin is not likely to be required.
- ❖ Given that all containers would most likely be easily transported in ordinary cars, a funeral director may still like to be involved (FOC) in order to help with carrying to the graveside and lowering into the grave.
- ❖ If the traditional dignity of a funeral is considered unnecessary here, and this may be the case if a natural burial ground were used, the lowering could be done by museum staff in

association with natural burial ground staff or grave diggers. In which case, if a funeral director cannot be found FOC it would not be necessary to use one.

Refer to Appendix D for a list of participating funeral directors.

Celebrant

Consider the celebrant for the funeral. The options are:

- ❖ a civil celebrant http://www.iocf.org.uk/cf_celebs.htm will provide the structure or the entirety of the service, without any spiritual components;
- ❖ an interfaith celebrant <http://www.interfaithfoundation.org/content/find-minister> will provide a layer of spirituality without basing that in any one faith.

An option is also to ask a number of different religious representatives to come, including a local Christian celebrant and a local Pagan celebrant, both of these adding to a funeral service that may perhaps be co-ordinated by a civil celebrant. Prayers can then be made in different ways for those who are buried.

For HAD's recommended Ritual of Committal see Appendix A or download from www.honour.org.uk/node/32

Alternatively, you may feel that, as guardians of the remains on behalf of the public, museum staff could get involved in the reburial ceremony. The important point is to fulfil the role. Furthermore, the archaeological team who undertook the exhumation in the first place, if they are still accessible, may like to be involved: the disinterring of human remains is often a life-changing experience and the reburial of the remains may be an important part of their work, emotionally as well as practically. The important point is to ensure the ceremony is done with a respect that is recognisable to those of all beliefs, or none.

Memorial Plaques

Monument or memorial plaques are the next consideration. If you are using a natural burial ground, make sure you ask what style of memorials is allowed at the site and whether anything could be done FOC or at cost. If they use a mason or engraver, it would be worth asking if you might talk with them direct to ascertain if they would like to be involved and reduce their costs.

If you are using a local authority cemetery, a headstone would be appropriate. Contact a local monumental mason and ask if they would be willing to provide a stone FOC (or at cost) in return for publicity. Some independent funeral directors also work as monumental masons.

Find out all that you need to know about memorials before making a decision as to where the remains will be buried.

Coffin Goods

Consider what else might be placed in the coffins. This may require careful review of the excavation documentation, and an understanding of what information is known about the original burial. Were there grave goods found and exhumed with the remains? What is known about these goods? Can any of these be reburied with the individuals? Reburial of the original grave goods may not be possible for many reasons, but this does not mean that items of similar form and purpose could not be used.

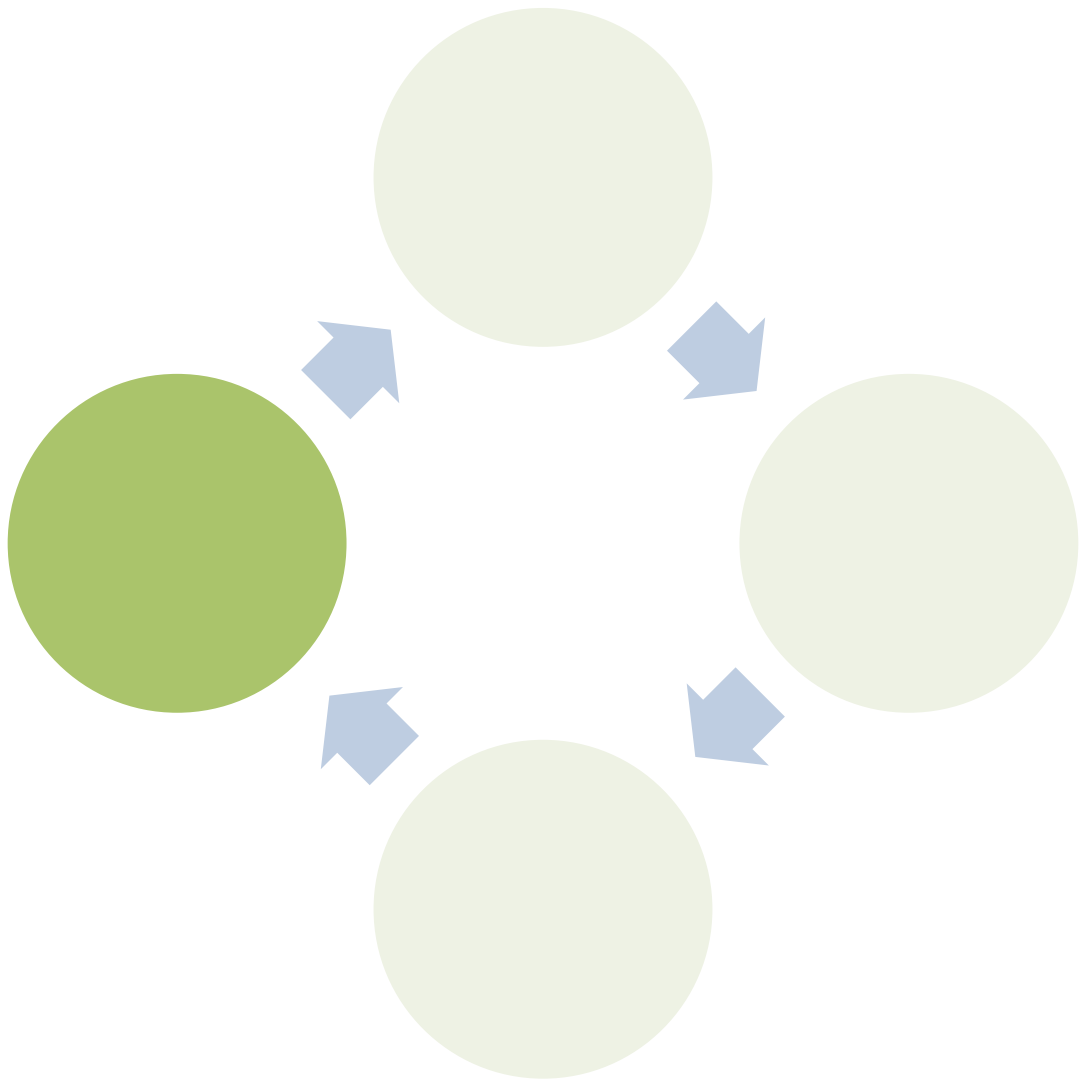
This may be something that local historical or re-enactment societies may be keen to be involved with, recreating goods perhaps using contemporary technologies. Such organisations are usually not only interested in such projects but the craftsmen benefit from any associated publicity. Local schools may be interested, contributing if an opportunity were possible. We would advise simplicity, but also emphasise the importance of providing the opportunity for the wider community to be involved.

Publicity

Consider publicity for the reburial. The advantages are that with media coverage, particularly if it is local media (newspapers, magazines and radio), you are likely to have local businesses willing to give their services free of charge. It is hard to advertise funeral services, and some beautiful photographs and editorial is always sought after by local companies. This will reduce your costs radically.

We would advise that there be no publicity prior to the event, all journalists being appraised on the day, and invited to attend to take photographs.

Appendices



Appendix A : Recommittal Rite

A Committal Rite for the Reburial of Human Remains

The following abstract has been written by members of the Council of theologians at Honouring the Ancient Dead (HAD).

Originally commissioned by Leicester Arts and Museums Service, it is now published for use by any museum or other heritage organisation considering or arranging for the reburial of human remains. Its purpose is to offer inspiration and guidance that would be appropriate to perform at the recommittal of human remains of ancient and pagan provenance within the British Isles.

The celebrant begins by honouring the spirits of place.

This can be a simple acknowledgement of those present in the environment of the place of reinterment. The spirits of place would include elements of the landscape, the flora and fauna, the sun, wind and clouds, together with the ancestors: those who had lived in that place before.

The purpose of the ritual is stated.

A simple declaration of what the ceremony intends to do is then said: ‘We are gathered here, at (location) on this day (the date) for the reinterment of these ancestors of this land.’

The not-knowing is acknowledged.

It is stated honestly that those performing the rite do not know what the original rites would have been, and thus what is done now is not intended to be a recreation of past religious ritual.

It is acknowledged that those performing the rite do not know how the person(s) being reinterred were regarded by their community, and thus the rite does not intend to reaffirm or dismiss any such regard.

The location is acknowledged.

Where the reburial is near the original place of interment but the landscape has radically changed, or where the origin is not known, these issues are acknowledged aloud in as much practical or poetic detail as is deemed appropriate.

The intention is declared.

The purpose of the rite is clearly stated as an attempt at respectful interaction with the deceased and their community. In Pagan terms, there is the hope of reconnecting the chain of being, the web of meaning, that returns the person to the context in which they were placed when their human life ended. Restoring a balance within the spiritual community of humans and spirits of nature, we are honouring the relationship between the individual and their gods, their landscape, their community and their descendants.

The disconnection is acknowledged.

The reason why the remains were originally excavated is stated, whether this was through scientific questing, housing or road developments, or whatever may have been the cause. Where possible, it can be stressed that this disruption was caused by modern human need.

The ancestors are honoured.

Because there can be little certainty (or none) as to the status of the individuals who are being reinterred, the focus of honour is upon the community of ancestors more generally. For example, ‘We acknowledge the life of this individual, as (sister, mother, lover, brother, father, child - whatever seems appropriate), honouring their part in the flow of life, in their unknown and unknowable being, their stories and histories, and their own ancestors’.

The interment is done.

The remains are placed into the grave plot, with symbolic goods / images or replacements of the original grave goods, with red ochre and earth from the site of the original interment if relevant and possible.

Offerings are made.

Because we do not know who the individuals were, we are not necessarily honouring the one reburied specifically. The offerings made are an acknowledgement of that person being a part of the history of the land and our people, and it is this flow of life that is clearly honoured.

An appropriate offering may be the simple pouring of a libation of mead, ale, wine, or whatever might seem apt to the place and time of the person’s life, this cup or horn being passed amongst those who are present at the rite. The value of using mead at the reburial of ancient remains is amplified by the understanding of it as the oldest alcohol found within Britain, and one still commonly used within modern Paganism.

Flowers, herbs, a hunk of bread, salt and honey, may also be simple but poignant offerings.

Offerings are also made in the form of words spoken aloud. A prayer may be made to the ancestors that this individual may find their peace. It may seem appropriate for a story to be told (something that is known of the person’s life or times). Music and song may be

appropriate, with voice, instruments or drums. Poetry written by writers from an appropriate or the modern era may also be used here.

Thanksgiving

Thanks are given to all who have attended the rite, in spirit and in body, and all those who have made it possible for the reinterment to take place.

If there is to be any memorialisation, this may then be acknowledged and blessed, with thanks given to those who have made and presented it.

Appendix B : Highworth Reburial

Reproduced from www.honour.org.uk/node/255

The case in the small town Highworth in Wiltshire is an interesting one, and worth exploring.

The skeletal remains of at least four individuals were reburied at Highworth Cemetery on 21 June 2007. Two of these ancestors are Bronze Age partial skeletons, around 4000 years old, that were found during building work at Wrde Hill in Highworth in September 1977. Both were in a crouched position, with hands across the chest. Excavation was haphazard: no formal dig was carried out, local amateurs and enthusiasts working on the site, sometimes late into the night in order to accommodate the builders who asserted severe pressure. Partly damaged by the diggers, the remains, including a skull, pelvic and other bones, were taken



into the care of Highworth Historical Society, and have been kept by members of the Society over the years. It appears that the whole of Wrde Hill may have been built on an old burial site as more remains were found close by, the bones going to the Devizes Museum and possibly to Swindon Bath Road Museum (records are not clear).

The full Romano-British skeleton, locally known as Yorik, was exhumed from a garden in the town in 1965 when the householders were burying their pet dog. When the bones emerged the police were informed, but were not interested. Local amateur archaeologist, Mike Collins, exhumed the remains, together with Mike Stone, curator of Chippenham Museum, with the help of Chris Chandler who was then senior archaeologist for Wiltshire. However, nobody seemed to want the remains, which stayed in the care of the householders until they moved house, when Yorik was passed to the Historical Society. Never accessioned to a museum, Yorik has been on display a number of times over the years, at festivals and local exhibitions.



The other remains reburied on 21 June were found in a medieval enclosure ditch at Haresfield locally, in the late 1970s. These, also excavated by Mike Collins, have been dated as late medieval. As some of the bones are thought to be human, the Historical Society felt they would take no chances and treat them as if they were.



Indeed, it was only when members of the Historical Society attended a course on storing and archiving artefacts that they felt they really ought to do something about these remains. They sought expert advice from a local Records and Archaeological Service. Following the Human Tissue Act and the publication of the DCMS Code of Practice, the Society understood they would not be able to provide these ancestors with what was now required.

In part they were misinformed, believing that elements of the HTA legislation applied to these remains; HAD is aware of a good number of museums and other small heritage organisations that are equally confused.

Misinformed or not, however, the Highworth Historical Society discussed the issue and came to an agreement that all the human remains in their care should be reburied. Highworth has no museum. If it had, and could have afforded the adaptations to keep them, the reburial may not have happened - particularly of Yorik. However, speaking to Jo Clark, the Society's secretary, I got the impression that her inclination was towards reburial. This was 'the honourable and decent thing to do', the 'correct' thing, she said, choosing her words carefully in order to find that which most accurately expressed her inner moral voice. 'The Society decided that it would be appropriate if the remains were re-interred in the area in which they were originally lain to rest ... We believe this is a fitting end for these men who probably lived and worked in or around Highworth many centuries ago.'

The important issue here was that the society was under no pressure from anyone to retain the remains. They felt it was entirely their choice. In their opinion, the bones had been contaminated by too many hands to be of any scientific value. Local museums were not interested. Reburial was the natural decision in order to ensure there was decency and respect.

The remains were reburied at the town's local authority cemetery, land with beautiful views of the Wiltshire countryside, not consecrated by the Church. The short nondenominational ceremony was conducted by an elder of the United Reformed Church using beautiful non-religious words that honoured the lives of these ancestors, acknowledging them still to be a part of the Highworth community. They were treated as people, or 'persons' in the philosophical sense, not objects. Wrapped in locally produced woollen cloth and laid in three environmentally-



sound willow baskets, the remains were buried in one plot, beside an ancient trackway in an older part of the cemetery not currently used for burial. A headstone marks the grave with an inscription that describes those buried, ending with a quote by Christina Rossetti, 'Together all, yet each alone'. With the remains were buried some locally sourced mead, honey and a bread roll, as 'sustenance for the journey'. Each has a 2007 copper coin from the Royal Mint and leaves from seven plants sacred in the Druid tradition: vervain, henbane, primrose, pulsatilla, clover, mistletoe and wolf's bane (monkshood). Every effort had been made to ensure there was a profound sense of respect. Indeed, in many ways, the burial felt not dissimilar to that of someone who had recently died. There were tears on the cheeks of some who had gathered.



Many museums worry about the price of deaccession and interment, using this as another deterrent to the process of reburial. In this case the funeral director did not charge for the event at all, nor did the local authority charge for the grave space. The gravedigger's fees were cut by two thirds to £100. The monumental masons donated the

headstone, the minister charged no fee, and the flowers came from the local Floral Art Society. Indeed, the total cost, including the baskets, a little oasis for the flower arrangements, was no more than £210.

What are the lessons for HAD when it explores the possibilities of reburial with archaeologists and museums?

In one sense, this case is not typical, since the remains were held by an autonomous local society, rather than by an archaeological field unit or a museum. In other senses, however, there are significant lessons. Highworth powerfully demonstrates the strength of local feeling towards reburial of human remains, especially those with no demonstrable scientific value. It also shows that reburial need not be an expensive process: other parts of the local community in Highworth, including the local authority, became inspired by the idea of reburial and willingly provided practical assistance at no or considerably reduced cost. This is surely the

key inspiration not only for HAD but for all museums and heritage organisations considering reburial: if the local community is involved in the decision-making process and the practical arrangements for reburial, then the value of reburial, even (or especially) of much loved local remains, is broadly crucially understood, and will be much inspired by local support.

Emma Restall Orr, June 2007



Appendix C : Burial Grounds

The following burial grounds have agreed to participate in this handbook. Please contact HAD if your burial ground would like to be included.

Contact	Firm	Address	Telephone	Email	Web
Chris Neave	Brightwater Green Burial Ground	Brightwater Landscapes Ltd, The Garden House, Saxby, Market Rasen, Lincoln LN8 2DQ	01673 878820 07831 263177 07778 464043	info@brightwatergreenburial.co.uk	www.brightwatergreenburial.co.uk
Fran Hall	Chiltern Woodland Burial Ground	Potkiln Lane, Jordans, Beaconsfield, Bucks, HP9 2XB	01494 872158 07866 596234	fran@woodlandburialparks.co.uk	www.woodlandburialparks.co.uk
Colin McAteer	Green Coffins Ireland Ltd	The Green Graveyard Company Ltd	353749152712 0861 722955	colin@greengraveyard.com	colin@greengraveyard.com
Joanna Vassie	Meadow Graves	Dorset	01935 891245	jovassie@btinternet.com	www.highergroundmeadow.co.uk

Appendix D : Funeral Directors

The following funeral directors have agreed to participate in this handbook. Please contact HAD if your firm would like to be included.

Contact	Firm	Address	Telephone	Email	Web
Lynn Withey	Co-operative Funeralcare	Highworth	01793 764664	highworth.funeral@midcounties.coop	
Steven J Tapper, MSc	Tapper Funeral Service	32/34 Parkstone Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 2PG	01202 673164 01202 339099 07768 894693	steven.tapper@tapperfuneralservice.co.uk	