

DEFINITIONS FOR HONOURING THE ANCIENT DEAD (HAD)

PROMOTING RESPECT & DIGNITY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE
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Acknowledging how important vocabulary is in the framing of our thoughts and the recognition of assumptions in any discussion, the following presents some key words used when talking about the respectful treatment of ancestral 'human remains'. By providing clarity with regard to the definitions used by HAD, the purpose of this document is to move beyond the oppositional debate based on the misunderstanding of terms, and towards the recognition of solutions attainable through an approach involving a more inclusive cultural contribution.

HAD asserts that:

- As human beings we have a duty of care towards every other human person.
- The ancestral dead retain their personhood as integral and influencing members of the community.
- Personhood entails the need for respectful interaction.

| RESPECT | |
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| DICTIONARY DEFINITION | 'A feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements.' <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> |
| DISCUSSION | With few exceptions, those with an interest in the ancestors declare their interaction with them to be respectful. What we understand by respect, however, differs according to what we are interacting with: within secular and dualist culture, respect for a living human being is expressed differently from respect for an object. |
| HAD PERSPECTIVE | Cultures with integrated animist metaphysics, based on nature or ancestor worship, perceive the physical evidence of ancestors as human beings who are still active (influencing) members of the community, who require respect based on that understanding. |
| HAD DEFINITION | Interaction is respectful when all unnecessary harm is avoided. |
| IMPLICATIONS | Implications: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A person is never an object, is not scientific material, and so can never be owned.• Personhood persists, even beyond the time of living descendants.• It is possible to interact respectfully with a person even where consent is not attainable.• A caring community assures a respectful place of rest for the dead. Harmful action: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Harm is understood as the diminution, degradation or devaluation, of someone or something in a way that causes suffering. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harm can be measured spiritually, socially, emotionally, physically or scientifically. <p>Respectful interaction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The funereal intent of that ancestor is acknowledged and, as far as is possible, not contravened. The ancestor is not separated from the land that he/she has been a part of for centuries or millennia. The ancestor's physicality is allowed to decay naturally, completing the process of dissolution into the environment, instead of being separated and isolated from nature. <p>Disrespectful interaction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ancestor's physicality is damaged, stored or displayed as if he/she were a non-senescent person. |
| DIGNITY | |
| DICTIONARY DEFINITION | 'The state or quality of being worthy of honour or respect.' <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> |
| DISCUSSION | <p>There are many definitions of dignity. Some, like the one above, lean towards nobility, loftiness and grandeur. Many, again like the one above, are rather circular – referring to honourability and respectability.</p> <p>Alternative definitions relating to esteem or worth contain sentiments upholding concepts such as decency, modesty, delicacy, feelings and sensibilities.</p> |
| HAD PERSPECTIVE | <p>HAD believes that the sentiment of second definition should be given greater prominence when considering the situation of ancestors in the British Isles.</p> <p>Two principles should apply when considering upholding dignity for humans:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The right to dignity should not be confused by evidence of rank The right to dignity should be a persistent human right – for all of that person's existence <p>In other words, the right to be treated with dignity applies to all, and includes the dead – named or nameless. Time or status should not diminish or dilute this right. It applies to ancient as well as recently deceased persons equally.</p> <p>The only waiver to this principle can come from living consent.</p> |

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| | As it is not possible ever to gain the consent of the deceased, HAD's remit for the ancient dead arises as result. HAD's aim is to restore, or prevent the removal of, dignity to ancestors. |
| IMPLICATIONS | <p>Never display ancestors, in any form. Storage should endeavour to encompass dignity too by following best practice standards.</p> <p>Practical application of this principle gives rise to HAD's critique of any situation in conflict with it. For example, UNESCO was founded after the Second World War in part to uphold the dignity of humanity. According to HAD's perspective, the inclusion of an ancestor in the display at Stonehenge (a UNESCO world heritage site) is a breach of that person's persisting right to dignity and is, therefore, a fundamental breach of UNESCO's founding principles.</p> <p>Constitution of UNESCO, adopted London on 16 November 1945; reconfirmed every year since, <i>extract</i>: 'The Government of the States Parties to this Constitution on behalf of their peoples declare:...That the great and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect or men. That the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern'.</p> |
| HUMAN REMAINS | |
| DICTIONARY DEFINITION | <p>The word 'remains' used in the term 'human remains' implies a particular worldview. Remains are 'the parts left over after other parts have been removed, used, or destroyed; historical or archaeological relics; a person's body after death'. <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i></p> <p>(See notes below for the DCMS definition of human remains.)</p> |
| DISCUSSION | A worldview which states that the mind, spirit or soul leaves the body at death, whether it is destroyed or resides elsewhere, will inevitably perceive the physical body as empty. Because mind, spirit or soul tend to be considered as the valuable essence of a human life, what remains after death has no value except for that which may be accrued from their use by the living. |
| HAD PERSPECTIVE | Regardless of how much of the ancestor's life is still evident, the individual's personhood remains intact. |
| HAD ALTERNATIVE WORDS | <p>The principal alternative word should simply be ancestor.</p> <p>Where it is necessary to emphasise the bodily aspect of that ancestors, HAD suggests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancestral body • Physical evidence or trace of an ancestor • Tangible, evident, bodily or physical aspects of being |
| IMPLICATIONS | Interactions with the ancestors must be respectful. |

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| NOTE | In the DCMS <i>Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums</i> (2005), human remains are defined as 'bodies, and parts of bodies, of once living people from the species <i>Homo sapiens</i> '. While in itself this phrase does not imply the objectification of the physical evidence, HAD feels that use of the word 'remains' does. |
| ANCESTORS | |
| DICTIONARY DEFINITION | 'A person, typically one more remote than a grandparent, from whom one is descended.' <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> |
| DISCUSSION | The term ancestor usually implies a demonstrable blood connection and therefore is limited by the extent of possible proof. The ancestors, considered more generally, are objectified for academic study. (See note on the DCMS below.) |
| HAD PERSPECTIVE | Current society has been formed by the existence of the ancestors, and continues to be influenced by those ancestors, albeit differently from the way in which living members of the community do so. Furthermore, the ancestors with whom we share the environment, the landscape of home, and the mundane and spiritual experience of being human are as important as the ancestors of our bloodline. |
| IMPLICATIONS | No proven genetic or cultural connection is required in order to express a valid interest in ancestors interred in the local landscape of a community, of a person's home environment or their sacred temples. |
| REBURIAL | |
| DISCUSSION | The reburial of human remains is often equated with the destruction or permanent loss of a material object that has potential scientific value. Another term often used with reference to reburial is 'disposal', again connoting an irrecoverable discarding of the physical matter. It is often assumed that reburial is the default position demanded by HAD. |
| HAD ALTERNATIVE WORDS | Return |
| HAD PERSPECTIVE | <p>It is important to remember the ancestors. By remembering them, we are acknowledging their ongoing presence and influence within a community. When we fail to remember them, we separate ourselves from the lessons of the past and compromise the integrity of a community.</p> <p>Ancestors should not be exhumed unless circumstances necessitate it, for example, where the place of burial is being destroyed by development. However, what is 'necessary' should be decided by consultation. Where exhumation has been agreed as necessary or is unavoidable, there is a validity in studying the tangible evidence and, in doing so, bringing the ancestor's story back into the living memory of a community. This does not justify retention of the ancestor's physicality.</p> |

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| | <p>The individual ancestor has the right to be returned to a state of rest. Although it may not be possible to reproduce the burial circumstances exactly, the following are critical elements to be considered when decisions are made: the ancestor's original funereal intent, the physical connection with the land within which they were found, and the feelings of the living community of that landscape.</p> <p>Recognising that it is not always possible, HAD asserts that the best outcome in most cases is for the ancestor to be returned to the earth through reburial. Without this return, the natural decay of tangible evidence is prevented, and the ancestor's reconnection with nature's cycle of death and rebirth is denied.</p> |
| IMPLICATIONS | <p>Respectful Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consultation with the local community and other interested parties, in line with the <i>HAD Consultation Policy</i>.• Where reburial is an option, the <i>HAD Reburial Handbook</i> provides guidance.• The use of mausolea instead of museum boxes for temporary location of ancestors, in line with the <i>HAD Guide for the Housing of Ancestors</i> (in process).• The presentation of ancestral stories in line with the <i>HAD Guidance for the Display of Ancestors in Museums</i>. |

Glossary Terms from the DCMS *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums (2005)*

Human remains: In this guidance the term human remains is used to mean 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 osteological material (whole or part skeletons, individual bones or fragments of bone and teeth), soft tissue including organs and skin, embryos and slide preparations of human tissue.

In line with The Human Tissue Act 2004, the definition does not include hair and nails, although it is acknowledged that some cultural communities do give these a sacred importance. Human remains also include any of the above that may 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.

Another, but much smaller, category of material included within this definition is that of artworks composed of human bodily fluids and soft tissue. For human remains under 100 years old as defined in the Human Tissue Act, see Part 1 Legal Framework.

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Genealogical descendants: People who can trace direct genealogical descent to ancient human remains.

Cultural community: A group who identifies themselves as a community and would normally be expected to have a shared geographical location, shared cultural or spiritual and religious beliefs and shared language; or to share some of these facets.

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