

Human Remains

The British Museum collection ranges across millennia and attests to the diversity of human cultural achievement. Human remains in various contexts and forms constitute an important part of this collection: from Lindow Man, an ancient Briton who may have been ritually murdered, his body then deposited in a Cheshire bog, to the ancient Egyptian mummies, consistently voted the Museum's most popular exhibits. The success of the current British Museum 3D film *Mummy: the Inside Story* demonstrates the public's abiding interest in past lives, and deaths.

The study of human remains provides one of the most direct and insightful sources of information on different cultural approaches to death, burial practices and belief systems, including ideas about the afterlife. The worldwide context of the British Museum provides an opportunity to look at the diversity of human ideas about death and the body across cultures of vastly different times and places, as also demonstrated by the Museum's *Living and Dying* Gallery, opened in 2003, which investigates these themes through the material culture of societies across the world.

In addition to furthering the public understanding of other cultures, human remains in museum collections also help advance important research in fields such as the history of disease, changing epidemiological patterns, forensics and genetics. Challenging theories about human evolution are being developed from the study of human remains in museum collections such as, for example, the likelihood that there is no genetic basis for modern concepts of race.

There are of course special considerations in the case of more recent human remains, and the balance of benefit in such cases may be harder to strike. Mindful of this, the British Museum participated in the DCMS Working Group on Human Remains between 2001 and 2003 and thereby contributed to the recommendations of the group. As a result of the Working Group recommendations the DCMS have published a consultation document 'The Care of Historic Human Remains' to which we have submitted a response.

The British Museum welcomes the opportunity presented by the DCMS to engage in the necessary process of furthering the debate regarding the care of historic human remains. We fully support the desire to reach a consensus amongst interested parties regarding the future framework within which we will all operate.
