

Professor Norman Palmer
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Dear Sir

Please find enclosed a submission for the working group on human remains. This submission is divided into three parts

1. Biographical Note
2. Parameters of Research
3. Main Conclusions of Research

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Una O'Neill

1. Biographical Note

Una O'Neill,

1990	MA (Hons.) University of Auckland, New Zealand, 1990
1990 – 1991	Assistant Social History Curator, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton, New Zealand.
1992	Commonwealth Institute, London
1993	PhD Candidate, City University, London Supervisor Professor Patrick Boylan.
1997 – July 2001	Suspension of studies for Maternity leave.
To date	Writing up with submission date March 2002 Working title 'Museums and Requests for the Return of Human Remains: Interpretations of Cultural Diversity.'

2. Parameters of Research

- Sample of three museums. Museums of the Royal College of Surgeons, Liverpool Museum and Pitt Rivers Museum.
- All have historical collections of human remains and all have had requests for the return of human remains.
- How have these museums managed requests for the return of human remains and why have they reacted to the requests in the way they have?

3. Main Conclusions of Research

- Human remains in museums have become increasingly prominent in the late 20th century. As a result, attitudes towards human remains within the international context and the English context for museums have changed. This is evident within the institutional framework for museums and professional framework for museums.
- Human remains are part of the founding collections of the Museums of the Royal College of Surgeons, the Liverpool Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum and as such they form part of the founding principles of each institution. All these museums therefore have a historical loyalty to collections of human remains and a particular perception of their authority over these collections.
- Over time and as part of larger collections human remains have been subjected to the institutional momentum of each museum. Until challenged by requests for return, human remains have been treated in the same way as other objects in each museum in accordance with established museological practice.
- Shifts in the attitudes towards human remains of both the international and national frameworks for museums in England have contributed to the

development of a new series of ideological obligations for museums. While philosophically potent, these have a limited impact on the resolutions of requests for the return of human remains.

- The actual obligations of museums are much less comprehensive than the ideological obligations of museums and museums have been able to retain autonomy over their collections including human remains.
- The approach of museums to the resolution of requests for the return of human remains is nevertheless complicated and evidence suggests that museums have experienced a sense of isolation while attempting to manage requests.
- The future of museums and collections of human remains depends on the reconciliation between the sympathies for return of human remains and the ability of museums to return human remains. When these are reconciled dialogue for the return of human remains is possible in museum terms. What is needed to achieve this is;
 1. The full and proper analysis of collections of human remains and the location of such within entire collections and the development of individual institutions.
 2. The full disclosure and advertisement of holdings of human remains by museums in receipt of public funds. This could be seen as a necessary starting point for dialogue and debate.
 3. The development of a workable definition of 'cultural property' that relates to historical collections and a workable interpretation of the 'no property' rule in human material for museums.
 4. Professional agreement on the usefulness and validity of maintaining human remains in museums. This could lead to the development of professional agencies as mediators for disputes and conduits for information.
 5. Recognition that the maintenance of collections of human remains in museums is valid. Professional need to define and defend a perception of validity for the future preservation of objects and the necessary development of dialogue between museums and the communities to which they have an obligation.
 6. Ultimately human remains could be maintained in historical collections with full disclosure, debate and museological justification or returned to requesting groups for discretionary use. The established procedure of deaccessioning could be developed and used as a cheaper alternative to legal action.