

Part 2

Museums in the UK holding Tasmanian Aboriginal remains - their human remains repatriation policies and responses to TAC repatriation requests

33. Our experience with each of those museums in the United Kingdom which hold Tasmanian Aboriginal remains is outlined below. These experiences have led us to conclude that we have no confidence that any legislation which gives a discretion would result in the repatriation of Aboriginal remains from the major museums to their community of origin.

1. The British Museum

34. The British Museum has 2 bags made of animal skin which contain cremation ash. These are believed to be the only two such bags to still exist. The museum's catalogue names George Augustus Robinson as their collector and also gives the name of the Aboriginal owner of one bag. Robinson's Tasmanian journals document the Aboriginal practice of making and wearing such bags containing cremation ashes of close family. His journals also recount the last days and death of the named owner, during which time he asked her to give him a human bone which she wore as well as the skin bag as a talisman against her pain.

35. The Museum operates under the British Museum Act 1963.

36. Director Robert Anderson's letter to us of 28 July 1994 reiterated what Dr Ball, Keeper of Palaeontology, had told our delegate in 1985:

'As you will know from your representatives' earlier visit to this Museum, our collections are held under Act of Parliament which does not permit us to deaccession them: nor would we want to do so, since we are an international museum and resource devoted to preserving mankind's cultural heritage....we treat [human remains] which especially great care, do not display them where we know this would be inappropriate, and make them available only to accredited scholars.'

37. Administrator Geoffrey House, Curator Mike O'Halloran and Public Relations Officer Andrew Hamilton told our visiting delegation in 1997 that the Museum would not repatriate, and was bound by the British Museum Act 1963 adding that the British Museum did not want to set a precedent for repatriations. [5 November 1997. L Lowery, J James & C Spotswood: Report of Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Repatriation Delegation to UK & Europe. Nov 1997.TAC]

38. In response to our latest letter of request for these remains (August 2001), referring to the Prime Ministers commitment to return remains and the setting up of the Working Group, Director Robert Anderson wrote: *'The objectives for the group include, as you mention: "to consider the desirability and possible form of legislative changes in this area". The British Museum is presently not at liberty to return the human remains in our collection....We would be pleased to consider scope for collaborating with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre in ways that are open to us in the future.'* (1 November 2001)

2. British Museum, Natural History

40. The Natural History Museum of the British Museum, London holds 1 skeleton; at least 9 skulls; a fragment of another skull; 'imperfect mandibles' (lower jaw bones) and 7 teeth.

41. The Museum operates under the British Museum Act 1963.

42. In summary, the pivotal concern for this museum in considering any repatriations or disposal is not ultimately the legal constraints, since there are opportunities within the existing Act for repatriations to be made if the conditions set by the Museum are met. A crucial consideration in assessing claims for return is the perceived scientific value of the material. Tasmanian Aboriginal remains are perceived to be of great scientific value. They will only be returned if they are conserved according to the museums directions and still available to scientists.

43. The only repatriation option the Museum will entertain is the transfer of remains from a British Museum to a corresponding institution in Australia. The primary obligation as expressed by the Museum is to the international scientific community, not to the Aboriginal community from which the remains have come.

44. The Museum's Policy on disposal is explained in the Museum's memorandum to the House of Commons Enquiry into Cultural Property 2000. All emphases - underlining - are ours.

The Museums policy has two strands:

There are specific legal constraints on disposal of objects from the collection, coupled with a strong presumption by the Museum against disposal. [Natural History Museum memorandum 296:15]

1. 'specific legal constraints'

45. The British Museums Act prevents any de-accessioning of objects, except under some conditions:

The Museum's position on disposal of objects in the collection is defined by the terms of the British Museum Act 1963, paragraph 5, which gives precise and limited conditions under which disposal is permitted. The Act states:

5.- (1) The Trustees of British Museum may sell, exchange, give away or otherwise dispose of any object vested in them and comprised in their collections if:

(a) the object is a duplicate of another such object, or

(a) the object appears to the Trustees to have been made not earlier than the year 1850, and substantially consists of printed matter of which a copy made by photography or a process akin to photography is held by Trustees, or

(a) in the opinion of the Trustees the object is unfit to be retained in the collection of the Museum and can be disposed of without detriment to the interests of students:

(a) Provided that where an object has become vested in the Trustees by virtue of a gift or bequest the powers conferred by this subsection shall not be exercisable as respects that object in a manner inconsistent with any condition attached to the gift or bequest.

(2) The Trustees may destroy or otherwise dispose of any object vested in them and comprised in their collection if satisfied that it has become useless for the purposes of the Museum by reason of damage, physical deterioration, or infestation by destructive organism. [296:16]

46. We have argued in our submission to the House of Commons Cultural Property Enquiry and elsewhere that sub-section (a) could allow duplicate objects to replace originally artefacts, if the Trustees so wished. [Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre memorandum 369: 43-45]

47. We there also argued that subsection (c) could allow the Trustees to deem human remains to be materials '*unfit to be retained*' on moral and ethical grounds. [Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre memorandum 369: 38-42; & cf Greenfield: 1989:113-5] Pitt Rivers Museum showed the way in such a shift of attitude when they returned skeletal material to Aborigines in 1991 because it was not '*properly held by this museum*'. [The Pitt Rivers Museum *A Souvenir Guide to the Collections*. 1993. p28]

48. But subsection (c) adds the further prescription that '*unfit*' objects '*can only be disposed of without detriment to the interests of students.*'

2. 'a strong presumption against disposal'

49. The Museum's policy on disposal also allows objects to be gifted or transferred to other suitable institutions:

'...Section 6 of the Museums and Galleries Act 1992 permits the Trustees to dispose of an object, by way of sale, gift or exchange, to the other national institutions listed in Schedule 5 to the Act (see Appendix 10) "[of Curatorial Policies and Collections Management Procedures 1998]"
However, there is a strong presumption against disposal of specimens, other than by transfer as gift or in exchange to another suitable institution (that is, not restricted to those listed in the 1992 Act), or by destructive investigation for research purposes.' (Curatorial Policies and Collection Management Procedures 1998 paragraph 5.4.1)

'The Museum will assess all material considered for disposal in terms of its scientific, historical and cultural importance, the needs of both present and future users; and legal and ethical issues as they relate to that material.' Curatorial Policies and Collection Management Procedures 1998 paragraph 5.4.4) [Natural History Museum memorandum 296:17]

50. The Museum replied to the TAC in August 1986:

'In considering your previous request for the Aboriginal remains to be transferred permanently to Tasmania, the Board of Trustees made it clear that it is right and proper, from its point of view, for the human skeletons to remain in this Museum. It follows that the Board would not approve a 'permanent loan' or any other form of transfer. The Board expressed no wish to put your request to Parliament for consideration, or to suggest to Parliament changes to its present responsibilities and duties in the British Museum Act, 1963 which would permit a release of the skeletons without legal hindrance.' (R Saunders, Secretary)

51. Yet they are entitled to destroy the remains in the name of research - '*by destructive investigation for research purposes*'.

Scientific, historical and cultural importance of the remains:

52. In March 1990 Tasmanian Aboriginal delegate Mr Michael Mansell spoke with John

Peate, the then Acting Director, and Chris Stringer, Department of Palaeontology. Repatriation was again refused. At this time Mr Mansell was given a document, titled 'The Natural History Museum, London. Policy on Aboriginal Collections', which states:

'2. *The Museum is at present constrained by the The British Museum Act of 1963, which prevents it from disposing of items in its collections. However, it supports moves to change this legislation to widen its powers of disposal.*

3. *If the Museum were to have such wider powers, it would consider sympathetically claims to repatriate human items from its collection, in cases where they possessed no scientific value.*

4. *The Museum emphasizes that most, but not all, of the human items currently in its collection, are of great scientific value.*

53. On a previous visit to the Museum in September 1985, TAC delegate Mr Mansell met with Dr Ball, The Keeper of Palaeontology. Dr Ball gave Mr Mansell a document entitled 'Tasmanian Aboriginals' which described Tasmanian remains in the collection, and stated:

'All of the specimens were legally and properly acquired, and as the property of the Museum are vested in the Museum's Trustees, who are not empowered under the British Museum Act of 1963 to dispose of them. Moreover, the race of pure-blooded Tasmanian aboriginals is now extinct, and so this small amount of skeletal material is an important reference source for physical anthropologists throughout the world. Thus the Museum sees it as its duty to secure and conserve them, and to make them available to visiting scientists.

54. In August 1994, the Museum replied to TAC's letter of July 1994:

'I regret to inform you that by the terms of the British Museum Act under which we operate, we are not able to pass on or otherwise dispose of material from our collections, and thus we are not able to accede to your request.' (Dr L Cocks, Keeper of Palaeontology)

55. In December 1997 Dr Cocks again refused repatriation with reference to the Museum Act in a meeting with Alex Comfort of the Australian High Commission on behalf of our delegates who had visited London a few weeks earlier but had been unable to secure a meeting with the Natural History Museum. Cocks said some research had been done on the remains.

[L Lowery, J James & C Spotswood: Report of Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Repatriation Delegation to UK & Europe. TAC. Nov 1997]

The Natural History Museum can and will repatriate, if its conditions are met:

56. That the Museum is able to repatriate if it so wishes is clearly demonstrated by the Museum's press announcement in May 2000, that *'The British Museum of Natural History announced yesterday it might return some Aboriginal human remains if they were properly conserved and accessible to scientists.'* [The Advocate newspaper, 20 May 2000]

57. However such repatriation is conditional upon guaranteed continued access to the remains. The press announcement continued: *'We would want to make sure that they would remain available as an international scientific resource, and be properly conserved and looked after, and be accessible to scientists''* said [Museum Director Neil Chalmers]. "We

feel we have an obligation to the international scientific community to retain the ability to study them and that is very important to us'. [The Advocate newspaper, 20 May 2000]

58. The Museum's perspective on its collection of human remains and the function of that collection is outlined in its Memorandum to the House of Commons Enquiry into Cultural Property March 2000:

'...research on human remains. ...enables investigation of human origins and evolution, and explains variations in form over time and by geographical area... Human skeletal material is essential evidence if we are to gain fuller understanding of particular societies at certain times in our past. At one end of the time scale, the research is related to palaeontological research on our hominid ancestors: at the other, research is complementary to forensic anthropology and medical osteology.' [Natural History Museum memorandum 298:25,26]

'The Museum is firmly convinced that there is continuing scientific value in such a collection, and that it should continue to be the focus of active research. However, the Museum also recognizes that the discourse on human remains in museums is framed more widely than scientific research, in terms of cultural property. The Museum agrees that there is a need to work with institutions and organisations in those countries where there is community demand for the return of human remains from collections, and demands for a role for indigenous peoples in determining the use of remains in museums. The aim of such collaboration is to provide better information on what the Museum does, to learn from the experience of others in this context, and to develop mutually acceptable solutions in areas where there are conflicting views.' [Natural History Museum memorandum 298:29]

'Paragraphs 15-17 above discuss the barriers to return: the Museum is however willing to discuss alternatives to return with appropriate institutions and organisations. In particular we are willing to discuss: the development of information resources; systems of care for remains in the museum; and access for non-scientists to the remains. We are also willing to discuss other issues as they may be raised by others.' [Natural History Museum memorandum 298:32]

59. The Museum's response 28 August 2001 to our most recent repatriation request again cites the British Museum Act *'which only allows material to be removed from the Museum's collections in very specific circumstances, which do not apply in the case of these remains.*

However, one issue that is being addressed by the Working Group is, as you note, the introduction of enabling legislation over human remains. A change of law could allow the Museum to consider requests for return to countries of origin and we would be willing to discuss the matter with you should such a change take place.' (Paul Henderson)

3. **Royal College of Surgeons, Odontological Museum** has three skulls (A54.2; A54.22; Paget's 2085); and the **Historical Collection** has seven bones and mandibles and a slide of hair and skin of Truganini.

60. Published records show that Tasmanian Aboriginal remains originally held by the Royal College of Surgeons in its various collections comprised at least: three skeletons; thirty six skulls; one, possibly two, preserved heads; seven teeth; seven mandibles; and various individual bones.

61. The College operates as a private museum.

62. From 1986 onwards we have received differing and even conflicting information from College staff about Tasmanian remains in their collections.

63. *'The College did have some Tasmanian Aboriginal remains but it was all destroyed in 1941 when the College was bombed... the osteological remains were so badly burnt ...they could not be identified...'*

'I can assure you that, had the skeletal remains been in the College your request would have received the most careful consideration.' (Letter to TAC from E. Allen, Qvist Curator, Royal College of Surgeons Hunterian Museum, 27 May 1986.

64. In March 1990 Professor Craig Duncan and Elizabeth Allen advised our visiting delegates that the Odontological Museum had about 50 Aboriginal skulls, and no remains on loan elsewhere. The College's power of disposal is limited by terms of trust eg 'for purpose of scientific study'. [TAC File note. M Mansell. 16 March 1990]

65. The Odontological Museum's letter of reply to us of 19 July 1994 confirmed they held 2 skulls from Tasmania, adding that *'The skull is certainly not of a Tasmanian and the cranium is of unknown provenance.'*

66. The Museum informed us in the same letter of their newly developed policy, under which our repatriation request was refused.

'The following policy regarding the release of human material has recently been agreed by the governing body (that is the Council) of the Royal College of Surgeons: So far as human material derived from named individuals is concerned, the Museums will consider requests for its return received from close relatives sympathetically, provided that (i) they can furnish legal evidence of the relationship, (ii) the wishes of the named individual are not contravened and (iii) provided that return does not involve contravention of any relevant British or international regulation. Any decision to return such material can be taken only after due consideration by the Council of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

As you can see none of our extant Tasmanian remains fall into this category so I am afraid that we cannot agree to your request.' [Caroline Grigson, Assistant Conservator]

67. At a meeting with our delegates in 1997, College representatives Stella Mason, Keeper of the Collections, Jan Pickering and Craig Duncan acknowledged the same two skulls were of Tasmanian Aborigines and invaluable to scientific research on traditional diet before white contact. Our delegates were shown one of the skulls, the jaw of which had been cut into as part of dental research and told it was over 1000 years old. [L Lowery, J James & C Spotswood: Report of Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Repatriation Delegation to UK & Europe. TAC. Nov 1997]

68. Royal College of Surgeons, Heritage Department wrote to TAC in July 1998) that *'Members [of the Heritage Committee] were impressed by the arguments put forward in your paper and were sympathetic to the concerns of the T.A.C. They felt that current College policy was still sufficient to cover all the human material in the collections. However they agreed that the matter should be regularly reviewed.'*

The letter repeated the same policy as Grigson's letter of 1994

69. In July 2001 we received advice from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that the Royal College of Surgeons and some other private institutions are willing to proceed with repatriation. *'They will wish to know whether the delegation will be in a position to negotiate specific terms for such issues as fate of remains on return (eg for disposal, collection, scientific access etc)'* [Australian High Commission fax 2 August 2001] ??

70. From this document we learned for the first time that the College's Historical Collection holds seven Tasmanian Aboriginal bones 'decorated for ritual use', and a slide with skin and hair of Truganini.

71. The College's faxed letter of October 2001 expressed great willingness to cooperate fully with our two requests in our letter of September 2001 for an inventory of any possible Tasmanian remains and for any further information about two missing skulls. There was no reference at all in the letter to our two other requests for the remains to be repatriated, and for forensic data on three skulls which we could have analysed by physical anthropologists in Australia to resolve uncertainty about the skulls' provenance. (Simon Chaplin, Senior Curator)

4. Oxford University

72. Oxford University advised TAC's delegate in 1985 in a phone conversation that any Tasmanian Aboriginal human remains they may have once had had been transferred to the British Museum [TAC File note 10 Sept 1985. M Mansell]. The TAC wrote to the University in 1985 and 1986, seeking to confirm this.

73. In 1994 we wrote twice to the Departments of Human and Comparative Anatomy requesting the repatriation of 4 Tasmanian Aboriginal skulls which research indicated were held in the Department's collections, and information about any Tasmanian remains in the collections.

74. We received no reply to any of our letters to the University.

75. Information from researchers in recent years has confirmed that the 4 Tasmanian skulls are currently held in both the Oxford University Museum of Natural History (1 skull) and the Oxford University Institute of Biological Anthropology (3 skulls).

76. We have no information on the Oxford University's policy on deaccessioning human remains from its museums and institutes. However we note that Oxford University Council endorsed the recommendation by the Pitt Rivers Museum Committee that Aboriginal human remains in Pitt Rivers Museum be repatriated to Australia in 1991. [House of Commons Enquiry into Cultural Property. Pitt Rivers Museum memorandum. 353:9]

4.1 Oxford University Museum of Natural History 1 skull

77. In 1997, through the intervention of the Australian High Commission who arranged the meeting, our delegates were able to meet with Dr Tom Kemp and Dr Chris Norris at the Museum of Natural History. They were shown a skull and given a report titled 'Report on OUM 17713: Skull of Tasmanian Aborigine' which compiles documentation for the skull

provenancing it to Tasmania. [L Lowery, J James & C Spotswood: Report of Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Repatriation Delegation to UK & Europe. TAC. Nov 1997]

A repatriation claim for this skull is being prepared.

4.2 Oxford University Institute of Biological Anthropology 3 skulls

78. We have learnt that a researcher had sighted and identified 3 Tasmanian skulls in the Biochemistry Lab of the Institute in June 1993. A student from an outside university was coming to take measurements of their temporal lobes. These were 3 of the skulls formerly in the Department of Human Anatomy.

A repatriation claim for these skulls is being prepared.

4.3 Oxford University Department of Human Anatomy & Genetics - possibly 1 skull

79. Pitt Rivers Museum returned remains to Australian Aborigines in 1991 and have since repeatedly told us there are no Aboriginal remains in the museum. However in 1997 Chris Goodsen, then Acting Director of Pitt Rivers, told our delegates that skull AUS 80 1021, said to have been collected by Captain James Cook, is still on loan from the Oxford University Department of Human Anatomy to Pitt Rivers Museum. Goodsen said it is still not known whether this skull is that of a Tasmanian or a Maori and that requests should be directed to the Department of Human Anatomy. [L Lowery, J James & C Spotswood: Report of Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Repatriation Delegation to UK & Europe. TAC. Nov 1997]

80. In October 2001 we wrote to the Department of Anatomy asking for all data from any research on the skull which we can have analysed by physical anthropologists in Australia to resolve uncertainty about the skulls' provenance. To date we have had no response to this letter either.

**5. Cambridge University Department of Biological Anthropology,
Duckworth Collection** 4 skulls

81. The University operates under the Cambridge University Trust.

82. In 1990, Dr Jim Garlich, the retiring head of Biological Anthropology met with TAC delegates. Garlich advised that the Australian Aboriginal remains numbered '*about 100 individuals*' (including Tasmanian remains) and that the Department's policy is 'that the collection will not be retained where it can be shown that the remains were "*illegitimately or illegally*" obtained. [The Department] would support efforts of "*close kin*" seeking to recover remains of known, named individuals.' [M Mansell: Human Remains Trip journal May/June 1990 TAC.7&8 June 1990]

83. Dr Garlich acknowledged that little research had been done on the Aboriginal collection recently. [M Mansell: Human Remains Trip journal May/June 1990 TAC. 7 & 8 June 1990]

84. '*...the Duckworth Collection [is] an international resource.... kept solely as a resource*

for scientific research. The Duckworth Laboratory is not part of a Museum...The material is available to bona fide research workers to carry out osteological-based research into human and non-human primate evolution and variation. [R A Foley: The Duckworth Osteological Collection at The University of Cambridge, in *World Archaeological Bulletin* 1992 No 6:54,56]

85. In response to the TAC's letter of request(11 July 1994) the University's Department of Anatomy (Professor Lund,19 July 1994) advised that all anthropological remains in the department had been transferred to the Department of Biological Anthropology, and referred us to Dr RA Foley, Director of the Duckworth Collections.

86. TAC wrote to Dr Foley in October 1994 to request Tasmanian Aboriginal remains and full details of all Tasmanian Aboriginal material in their collection. We have not had yet any response.

87. In 1999 the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA), an Australian Aboriginal organisation researching Aboriginal material in British institutions on behalf of Aboriginal communities, reported that the head of the Cambridge Biological Anthropology department had refused researchers access to the Department's records. (Lyndon Ormond-Parker, fax, 11 March 1999)

6. National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh 1 skull

88. The Museum operates under the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985.

89. Dr Mark Shaw, Keeper of Natural History, told TAC delegate visiting the Museum in 1990 that seven Aboriginal skulls including one from Tasmania were kept in the Natural History section of the Museum with the birds and mammals. Shaw told our delegate that the Tasmanian material was an '*irreplaceable*' part of the collection because Tasmanian Aborigines are '*extinct*'. He was not able to give an example of the value to the museum of having the remains. [M Mansell: Human Remains Trip journal May/June 1990 TAC.14 June 1990]

90. In response to our letters of request of July and August 1994, the Museum replied:

'The Act of Parliament under which we operate does not permit the National Museums to deaccession material of cultural or scientific importance; nor would we wish to do so since this museum is an international resource preserving material from every part of the globe.'

The Museum undertook to not display the skull and to make it available 'only to accredited scholars. (9 December 1994. Mark Jones, Director)

91. In reply we objected to any use of the remains of our ancestors for research; 'this practice is very offensive to us', and asked what considerations had influenced their refusal.

National Museums replied:

'We believe that information derived from material of this kind may be of real importance to humanity in the future and that this is one of the reasons why it should be preserved.' (10 February 1995. Mark Jones, Director)

Museums possibly holding Tasmanian Aboriginal remains:

7. University College, London University

92. We have yet to contact the **University College, London** about the possibility of them still having a sample of mummified scalp which was taken in the early 1960s from a head preserved in whiskey in a bottle in the Dublin University collections. Our delegates repatriated the head to Tasmania in 1991.

8. Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin

93. We intend also to confirm with **Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin** whether there are Tasmanian remains still in their collections of Aboriginal remains.

94. We thank you for the opportunity today to present our submission. We would welcome the opportunity to put our case to you in person if that would be helpful.

Michael Mansell
Legal Manager

7 December 2001

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Attachment A

Repatriating Tasmanian skeletal remains, 1970s - 1997

Repatriating human remains from Tasmania and Australia

The TAC's campaign for the return of ancestral skeletal material began in the 1970s. Much public pressure was brought to bear on the state government. The *Tasmanian Museum Act 1950* was amended in 1974 and 1976 to allow Trukanini's skeleton to be returned from the Tasmanian Museum where it had been since 1878. Attention then turned to the infamous Crowther collection, made up of three skeletons and 34 skulls dug up early this century from the cemetery at Oyster Cove. The TAC took legal action against the Tasmanian Museum, which, although unsuccessful, brought national and international influence to bear on the Tasmanian government. Late in December 1982 the government agreed to legislate to return the Crowther collection to the Aboriginal community.

The Museums (Aboriginal Remains) Act 1984 was passed by the state parliament in November 1984 to allow the handing over of all Tasmanian Aboriginal remains held in the two Tasmanian museums. By 1986 most Aboriginal skeletal remains held in Tasmanian museums were handed to the TAC on the community's behalf. Both museums later returned items of skeletal remains found in their collections in 1988 and 1993.

Australian museums followed suit. The Museum of Victoria, National Museum of Australia and South Australian Museum returned Aboriginal remains to Tasmania between 1986 and 1989.

Australian museums continue to return skeletal material to Tasmania as it is brought to their attention. In 1996 the National Museum returned skeletal items still in their collections, and the South Australia Museum and the Museum of Victoria each returned a lock of hair.

Repatriating human remains from the UK

The TAC then took its campaign overseas. After extensive lobbying between 1985 and 1991 our delegates succeeded in having remains returned to Tasmania and Australia. Meetings were held with some European museums to determine the extent of their collections and gauge their attitudes; however the campaign focused on the UK, and the return of skeletal remains only was the issue.

In 1991 Pitt Rivers Museum in England returned 5 skulls and the penis of a warrior pickled in a jar, all Australian. Edinburgh University returned its complete collection of 300 skulls and 4 skeletons; 11 of the skulls were Tasmanian. As well, in 1991, the Peterborough and Bradford museums (UK) returned their complete collections of Australian skeletal remains, one skull each. The Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin returned a preserved head to Tasmania but kept the rest of their collection. Edinburgh University returned 3 Tasmanian hair samples in 1997.

Repatriating human remains from Europe and Australasia

In 1997 Stockholm Museum in Sweden and Auckland Museum in New Zealand each returned one skull to TAC delegates.

No other remains have been repatriated to Tasmania by any other groups.

Attachment B

Tasmanian Aborigines

Tasmania is an island to the south of Australia. Currently it has a population of less than half a million, of whom roughly 5000 are Aborigines. When the British landed in Tasmania in 1803 an estimated 4000 Aborigines were living here.

From 1803 all Tasmania became a killing field. In 1829 the colonial government contracted George Augustus Robinson to round up the remaining Aborigines. On his travels he noted *'There is not a boat harbour along the whole line of coast but what numbers of the unfortunate natives have been shot; their bones are to be seen strewed on the ground'*.

Robinson imprisoned a couple of hundred people in camps, first at Wybalenna on Flinders Island and finally at Oyster Cove, in the south of mainland Tasmania. By 1860 only 15 of the imprisoned tribal people were left alive, and all in those camps were dead by 1876.

About a dozen Aboriginal women escaped the camps. Most of these had been captured to work for British sealers living in tiny enclaves in the Furneaux island group off the north east tip of Tasmania. There they established a cohesive and self-sufficient family based community from whom most of today's Aboriginal population descend. Two other Aboriginal women, one of them the sole survivor of Oyster Cove, married European men on the Tasmanian mainland; their families complete our community.

European collectors' acquisition of Tasmanian Aboriginal human remains

Much of the Tasmanian human remains and cultural property material in Britain comes from the private collection of George Augustus Robinson. After his death, Barnard Davis acquired the material, now widely dispersed in British museums.

Robinson persuaded Aborigines to give him the bones of their dead relatives which they carried as talismans against sickness and death. One instance was on 1 June 1838: *"[When viewing the corpse of a woman who had died that morning] I asked G Robinson [Kolebuner] for an underjaw of a native which hung suspended to his throat. He appeared reluctant to part with it and said it belonged to his wife Agnes [Mealettarner] and he would ask her consent ... I spoke to her myself. She replied 'what am I to do when I am monartyer [sick]?' I said, 'never mind, it is no use in such cases'."* The Royal College of Surgeons, London, has in recent months revealed for the first time that seven such talismans which published research had reported destroyed with other material during World War 2 are in fact still held in their collections.

Furthermore, as the people died in the camps, Robinson, who had been given the title 'Protector of the Aborigines', cut up their bodies to give to his friends, military officers and representatives of the Crown. To give a few examples of his activities: Robinson reports that on his first meeting with Governor and Lady Franklin at Wybalenna in January 1838 they *"... solicited me for curiosities, also the skull of an aboriginal'."* The Governor's secretary Captain Maconochie also asked him for a skull. The day after Mitaluraparitja died of pneumonia in February 1838 at Wybalenna, the surgeon cut off his head for Robinson to have it *"masticated"* and sent to Maconochie. Robinson later *"retained"* the cranium of Pintawtawaw who died in August 1838 and sent it to Lady Franklin in February 1839.

The National History Museum also retains one of only two full skeletons of tribal Tasmanian Aborigines known to still exist. These skeletons were among five 'obtained' from the Curator of Hobart Museum between 1870 and 1875. These skeletons, one of them whose name is known, were dug up from the graveyard at Wybalenna. The Tasmanian museums in Hobart and Launceston were both well stocked with Aboriginal remains from Wybalenna and Oyster Cove, comprising a large collection of remains dug up from the burial ground at Oyster Cove by the prestigious Dr Crowther (who later became Premier of Tasmania).

Robinson was only one of many collectors who preyed upon the people and despoiled both their habitats and their burial places. In all cases, Tasmanian materials were acquired either by coercing vulnerable and oppressed people, or by theft and looting of the dead, these behaviours deemed justified by the overriding 'right' of conquest. The only difference between those circumstances and the Holocaust situation is the nature of the materials plundered, and the type of value they were perceived to have (ie 'scientific' rather than monetary).