

# Human Remains

RAMM cares for a small collection of human remains in the World Cultures, Antiquities and Natural Sciences collections. All human remains exceed 100 years of age.

RAMM's Collections Development Policy and the Human Remains appendix set out RAMM's attitude towards acquisition of new material, storage and repatriation of human remains. New human remains are acquired only in exceptional circumstances. This page focuses on human remains within the World Cultures collection.

## Human Remains in the World Cultures collection

Many remains in the World Cultures collection are poorly documented. They were often acquired during the 19th century by British colonials who viewed the remains of indigenous people as scientific curios but who acquired them through purchase, excavation, land acquisition, theft and other unethical activity. Their attitudes greatly differ to those we hold today.

In 2014, the Designation Development Fund enabled research into three over-modelled skulls (Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu) and their donors. Details of this work can be found in RAMM's [research blog](#).

## A list of human remains in the World Cultures collection

- Skull, AN82 – Donated 11 Feb 1867 by ?HU Janson. Originally presented to RAMM as a skull from NW Coast, USA. Identified by Jerome Cybulski, Curator of Physical Anthropology at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, as probably of Pacific region origin, and definitely not from the NW Coast of N. America. Analysis in 1997 strongly indicated a Pacific provenance; suggesting Australian Aborigine or a Tasmanian Aborigine. Further work is needed. No documentation exists.
- Skull, AN84 – Donated 18 May 1869 by Major General Benjamin D'Urban. South Africa (British Kaffraria). Male. Accession record, "Amakosa Kaffir starved in the famine of 1857 when 25,000 perished found near King William's Town on the Yellow Wood River. 5 front teeth missing."

- ▶ Skull, AN85 and cranium fragment, AN206 – Donated 3 Sept 1873 by JC Bowring. Lower Egypt. Accession record, “Skull of ancient Egyptian. From Col. Campbell’s tomb near the Great Sphinx, Lower Egypt, probably.”
- ▶ Skull, AN209 – Donated 31 Mar 1884 by EJH Culverwell. Waaifontein, near Murraysburg, South Africa. Accession records, “Skull of bushman found at Waaifontein in the district of Murraysburg, South Africa, 1 Aug 1883.”
- ▶ Skull, 74/1927 -Donated 20 Oct 1927 by Mrs MM Harte. South Africa (Pondoland). No data. Collected by Mr. CMA Bruce.
- ▶ Skull, 45/1929 – Donated 20 Oct 1929 by Mrs Flament. Central or East Africa. Shores of Lake Tanganyika, border of Tanzania and Zaire. Accessions record, “Dug up on shores of Lake Tanganyika in 1915.”
- ▶ Lower jaw, 91/132/45 – Donated 11 Oct 1932 by HFG Woods. Rock tombs of Mount Carmel, USA, “Found during blasting operations”.  
Skull, 91/1932/47 – Donated 11 Oct 1932 by HFG Woods. Benin. “Skull (Homo Sapiens) West African.” No other data.
- ▶ Modified skull, 91/1932/47 – Donated 1935 by A Riley. Fly River, Papua New Guinea. Over-modelled crania decorated with organic fibres. Seeds and wood plug in eye sockets. Vegetable fibre fringe and wood or shell section in nasal cavity. Acquired from donor’s uncle, an LMS missionary called Ellis Baxter Riley who published a book in 1925 called ‘Among Papuan head-hunters’. EB Riley worked in PNG, acquired this skull through purchase. On display.
- ▶ Modified skull, 59/1939 – Donated 17 June 1939 by Lieutenant HJR Gould. SW Malekula, Tomman Island, Vanuatu (New Hebrides). Over-modelled skull. Acquired by donor whilst serving in the Royal Australian Navy. HMAS Melbourne in 1914 was in Pacific waters. On display.
- ▶ Modified skull – Accession number and donor unknown. Papua New Guinea. Over-modelled skull. Crania partly covered with mud and organic fibres with exposed front.
- ▶ Lower jaw – Accession number and donor unknown. Papua New Guinea.

## Return of human remains

RAMM remains proactive in returning human remains since its first act in returning human remains to New Zealand in 1996. It continues to acknowledge that many of these remains hold no value to science, and recognises that holding remains in its collections is a practice deeply offensive to originating communities. Where possible, human remains should return to their place of origin for the purpose of reburial.

Human remains are stored respectfully until such a time when they can be returned. Historically, human remains were labelled in black ink and scientifically categorised like

any other animal species. A hand written label was also secured. Such labels are now kept in small archival sleeves. For the purpose of return, archival information is completely removed so that the remains are released from their status as scientific specimens or ethnographic artefacts, to be removed from the museum context to become once again the remains of an individual, a human being.

## List of repatriated human remains

- ▶ War feather box containing human bones, E1653 – Donated 14 Oct 1877 by Fred W Reed. Taken from a cave at Panmure, near Auckland. New Zealand. Repatriated via New Zealand High Commission, London, 13 Aug 1996.
- ▶ Skull, no number. New Zealand. Transferred to RAMM from Weston-Super-Mare museum in 1993. Repatriated via New Zealand High Commission, London, 13 Aug 1996
- ▶ Skull, AN81 – donated in 18 Aug 1866 by Gregory Bradley. Ahousaht Nation, west coast of Vancouver Island, Canada. Northwest Coast of North America. Repatriated via Jerome S Cybulski of the Canada Museum of Civilization, Quebec, to Chief Earl Maquinna George, hereditary chief of the Ahousaht Nation in 1997.
- ▶ Cranium AN90, rib AN91, right humerus M480 – donated 14 Nov 1877 by Frank W Reed. “Right and left humeri, ulna, femur, tibia and 3 ribs. Panmure, near Auckland. New Zealand. Found in a cave apparently these bones belonged to a woman.” Repatriated via New Zealand High Commission, London, 2005.
- ▶ Skulls, AN88 and AN89 – donated 27 Nov 1876 by W Dixon. Near Adelaide, South Australia. “Two skulls of Australians from near Adelaide South Australia. Walter Dixon Esq.” Repatriated 2006.
- ▶ Skull, AN86 and AN87 – donated 10 Jan 1874 by Peter Orlando Hutchinson. “From a native burial ground 300 miles below the junction of the River Darling with Murray in 1852” South Australia. Female crania, Wt.13 ounces. Male crania Wt. 24.5 ounces. Repatriated 2009.

Enquiries regarding human remains held by RAMM should be directed to Tony Eccles, Curator of Ethnography.

