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("or has brin brin brin brin brin brin bischeding sodi brin the following sodi buff sodi monch monch monch monch than deep sodi cart form ces sodi



Lucio Fontana: "Concetto spaziale". 1967. ('Buchi' dans acrylique bleu sur toile. Cm. 106 x 118)

Détail de la déchirure vue de l'arrière du tables

H, J. Plenderleith, 1943

Preservation of Museum objects in War-Time

British Standards Institution Main General Terms and Definitions

## EN 15898:2019 (E/F/D)

3.2.7 damage

3.2.7 altération dégradation désordre pathologie détérioration dommage

## non-beneficial alteration

Note 1 to entry: Although damage is non-beneficial to the object, it may sometimes be considered as broadening significance, e.g. traces of war on an object.

Note 2 to entry: According to the context, the French terms "dégradation" and "déterioration" can also be used to describe a complete worsening of condition, possibly intentional.

Note 1 à l'article : Bien que les altérations ne Anmerkung 1 zum Begriff: Obwohl ein "Schaden" soient pas bénéfiques au bien, elles peuvent für das Objekt nicht förderlich ist, kann er parfois être considérées comme contribuant à manchmal als Erweiterung der Bedeutung angeenrichir l'intérêt patrimonial, par exemple : des sehen werden, z. B. Kriegsspuren an einem Objekt. traces laissées par la guerre.

modification de l'état non bénéfique

Note 2 à l'article : Selon le contexte, les termes français « dégradation » et « détérioration » peuvent également être utilisés pour décrire une aggravation complète de l'état, qui peut être intentionnelle.

NATURE

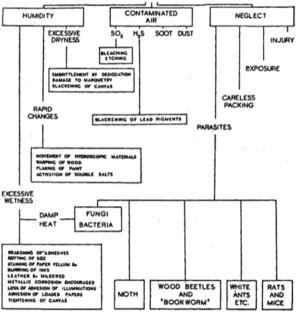
JULY 24, 1943, Vol. 152

# PRESERVATION OF MUSEUM **OBJECTS IN WAR-TIME**

By DR. H. J. PLENDERLEITH Research Laboratory, British Musaum

THE care of the national treasures in museums any time, but particularly so in war-time. Whatever the nature and size of the collection, modern warfare presents the curator with a two-fold problem, involving, first of all, measures to circumvent the immediate disaster of bombing and, secondly, measures to prevent the gradual deterioration which is so often the accompaniment of prolonged storage. Early in the War of 1914-18, as the staffs of

## museums became depleted, it seemed likely that CAUSES OF DAMAGE TO MUSEUM OBJECTS



museum specimens might suffer more from the lack of expert attention than from high explosives, aerial warfare being at this time in its infancy. But in the summer of 1915 the first bombs fell in London. Sir Frederick Kenyon<sup>1</sup>, who was then director of the British Museum, has described the Herculean task that had to be faced in evacuating a large proportion of the collections to a new Post Office section of the London underground tube railway system, which had been hurriedly prepared to receive them and where they were to remain for almost two years. It seemed that little damage resulted from this double removal, but nevertheless in 1919 the Trustees thought it advisable to invite the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research to make a scientific examination of the collections and give advice and assistance in regard to the restoration and preservation of objects. Dr. Alexander Scott undertook this investigation on behalf of the Department; a small temporary laboratory was equipped at the British Museum and a considerable amount of introductory experi-

\* Substance of Friday evening discourse at the Royal Institution on May 21.

Anmerkung 2 zum Begriff: Abhängig vom Zusammenhang können die französischen Begriffe "dé-

gradation" und "déterioration" auch für die Be-

schreibung einer kompletten - gegebenenfalls

beabsichtigten - Verschlechterung des Erhal-

tungszustands verwendet werden.

unvorteilhafte Veränderung

mental work carried out, the practical applications of which were embodied in three reports<sup>2</sup>, which had a wide circulation.

Dr. Scott's method was to study the causes and symptoms of instability and to work out methods of treatment which "could be regarded as safe if applied with ordinary care and discretion". There were to be no secret processes. Help was to be freely afforded to 1 and galleries is a very great responsibility at all who had the care of precious objects of antiquity and works of art. It was thus possible to obtain a wide experience in dealing with museum objects and materials of all kinds and to obtain an insight into the technical requirements of museums and picture galleries. This was essential because stability is, after all, a relative term and conservation only begins to have practical significance when the condi-tions under which things are to be conserved are clearly defined.

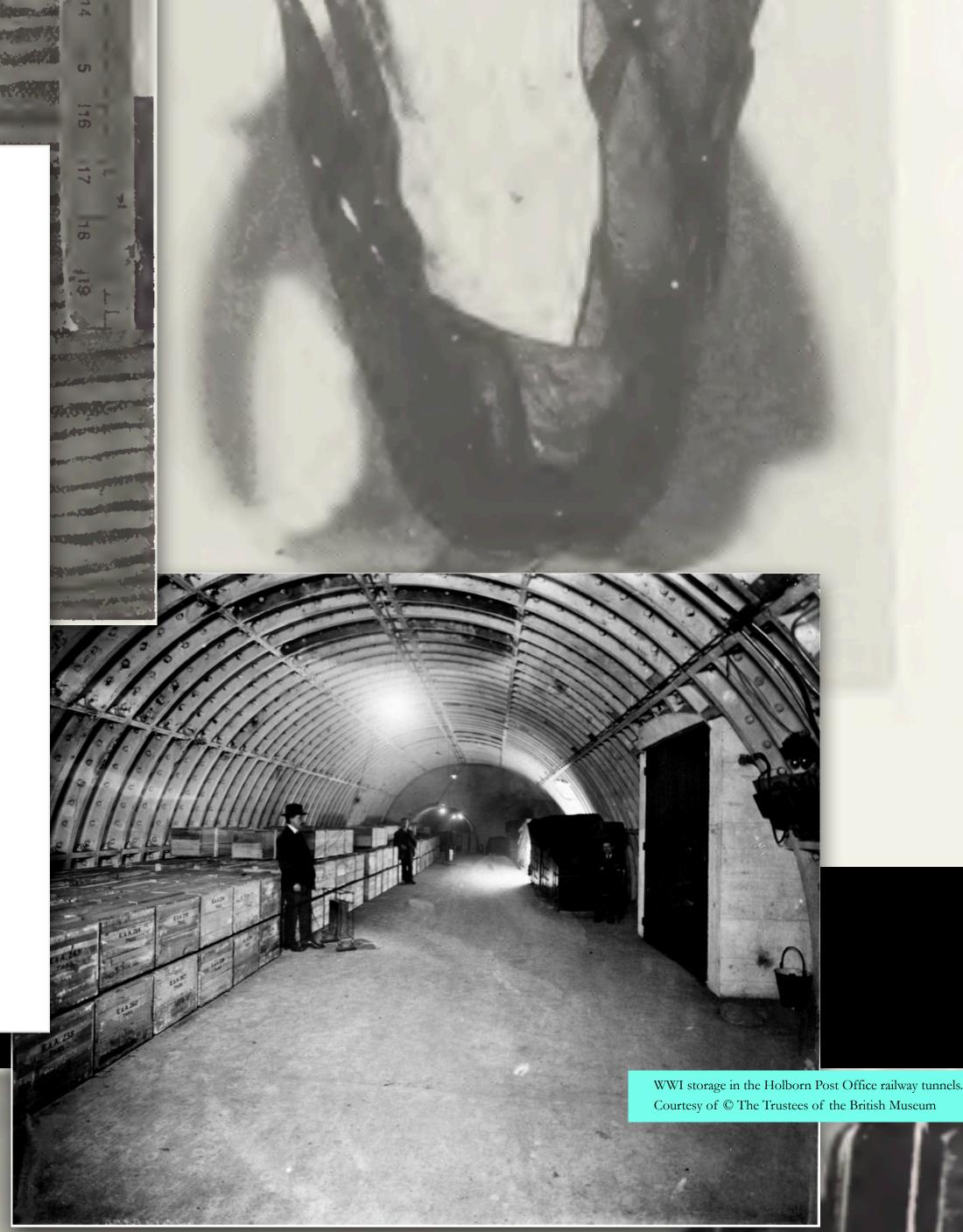
The new outlook was welcomed almost universally in the museum world at home and abroad. The traditional distrust of science gradually disappeared and with it many outworn conventions of technique which had proved to be stumbling-blocks to progress. There was active support in Great Britain from the Museums Association<sup>3</sup>. The next few years were marked by the extension of the laboratory idea abroad, and the League of Nations4 organized a series of conferences for the special study of problems affecting the preservation of works of art and of antiquities. Individual workers made valuable contributions, and specialized laboratories (notably the Fogg Art Museum Laboratory<sup>5</sup>, Cambridge, Mass., and National Gallery Laboratory, London) did much to enrich the common fund of technical knowledge which was ready to hand and had merely to be mobilized and assorted in preparation for a second world war.

Early in 1939, at the instance of the Standing Commission for Museums and Galleries, a committee was convened representing the national museums, picture galleries and libraries under the chairmanship of the director of the British Museum, Sir John Forsdyke. This committee considered at great length many aspects of the preservation of museum objects in war-time, and the findings were incorporated in a handbook entitled "A.R.P. in Museums, ."6. This booklet was timely in its appearance and of great service in helping curators all over the country to mature plans for the protection of their collections in advance of the approaching catastrophe of the autumn.

It is no easy matter to make adequate preparations for the safety of a collection of museum objects, because there are so many divergencies of type. There are endless variations of material, structure, age and stability. Some objects are by nature perishable; others become so from a variety of causes. Before it is possible to work out satisfactory methods of protection, the relative frailty of objects must be studied, the symptoms of decay recognized, and some knowledge is also required of the varying conditions under which deterioration is aggravated or arrested--precisely the line of research inaugurated by Dr. Scott at the British Museum twenty years

The main causes of decay are fortunately few in number and can be conveniently summarized (see accompanying table). It may be stated on simplest analysis that decay arises either from internal causes (for example, the presence of crystalline salts in the pores of stone) or from causes which are

©1943 Nature Publishing Group



3.2.8 3.2.8 3.2.8 détérioration Abbau deterioration dégradation Verfall décomposition Zerfall délabrement modification non intentionnelle de l'état qui unintentional alteration that reduces signifiunbeabsichtigte Veränderung, die Bedeuréduit l'intérêt patrimonial et/ou la stabilité tung und/oder Stabilität mindert cance and/or stability Note 1 to entry: This term can also refer to the Note 1 à l'article : Ce terme peut également se Anmerkung 1 zum Begriff: Dieser Begriff kann sich auch auf den Vorgang selbst beziehen. rapporter au processus lui-même. process itself. Anmerkung 2 zum Begriff: Abbau ist gradueller Note 2 to entry: Degradation is gradual deteriora-Note 2 à l'article : La dégradation est une détérioration graduelle. 22

EN 15898:2019 (E/F/D)

# 3.5.10 repair

actions applied to an object or part of it to recover its functionality and/or its appearance

Note 1 to entry: Repair is a conservation action only if it respects significance and is based on evi-

## 3.5.11 emergency response

decisions and actions taken in the context of an emergency, planned or not

3.6 Planning and documentation terms

3.6.1

collection management

3.5.10 réparation

actions entreprises sur un bien ou une partie de celui-ci afin de lui restituer sa fonctionnalité et/ou son aspect

Note 1 à l'article : La réparation est une action de conservation-restauration uniquement si elle respecte l'intérêt patrimonial et si elle est fondée sur des preuves.

3.5.11

mesures d'urgence

décisions et mesures prises dans le contexte d'une urgence, planifiée ou non

3.6 Termes relatifs à la programmation et à la documentation

3.6.1 gestion de collection

3.6 Begriffe zur Planung und Dokumentation

3.6.1

ss than 100 years old) the ink with the human remains public benefit to the world illection; or the Cultural Continuity and the Cultural Importance of the human remains demonstrated by the community making the claim outweights the public benefit to the world community of retaining the human remains in the Collection.

5.17 The Trustees' consideration of claims will be open and transparent. The claim

of all the principles set out in

as equitable as possible.

writing to the Deputy Director at the British Museum. The request should set out claim clearly and gives as much information and supporting evidence as possible about the human remains claimed, the individual or community submitting the claim and the reasons with the claimants with regard to the claim and the criteria against which the claim will be

Tea bowl, Raku-type clay with Black Raku glaze; gold lacquer repairs.

Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution.

6.6 After a decision has been made, the Trustees' minutes will record how the decision was reached. The claimants will be informed of the decision in writing and at the same time the decision will be published on the Museum's Website.

6.7 If a decision is taken to transfer the human remains claimed, the Deputy Director will begin discussions with the claimants as to when and how the transfer will take place.

7.1 This Policy shall be published on the Museum's Website.

 $7.2\,$   $\,$  The Deputy Director will report to the Trustees annually on the implementation and efficacy of this Policy.

This Policy will be reviewed from time to time and at least once every five years. In the event that significant changes to the Policy are made, every reasonable effort will be made to notify stakeholders, including the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

This Policy was approved by the Trustees of the British Museum on  $6^{\rm th}$  October 2006 and will be reviewed no later than 2011.

# Omani jewellery British Museum collection, A Qur'an case necklace (hirz) with coral and glass bottle stopper

amulets. Courtesy of © The Trustees of the British Museum

Sammlungsmanagement Sammlungsverwaltung

strategies, processes and procedures relating to a collection's development, information, access and care

Note 1 to entry: This includes acquisition/disposal, accessioning, cataloguing, documentation, security, collection care, etc.

Note 2 to entry: It is assumed that institutions normally have strategies and policies in order to implement collection management.

stratégies, processus et procédures en relation avec le développement, la documentation, l'accès et l'entretien d'une collection

l'article : Cela Note 1 à l'acquisition/cession, l'enregistrement, le catalogage, la documentation, la sûreté, le suivi de la collection, etc.

Note 2 à l'article : Il est supposé que les institutions ont normalement des stratégies et des politiques établies afin de mettre en œuvre la Strategien, Arbeitsabläufe und Verfahren, die sich auf Bestandsaufbau, Erschließung, Zugänglichkeit und Pflege einer Sammlung beziehen

Anmerkung 1 zum Begriff: Dies beinhaltet Erwerbung/Abgabe, Akzessionierung, Katalogisierung, Dokumentation, Sicherheit, Sammlungspflege

Anmerkung 2 zum Begriff: Es wird davon ausgegangen, dass Institutionen normalerweise über Strategien und Richtlinien für Sammlungs6.2 The Deputy Director will be the single point of contact for claimants and othe d parties throughout the process. All enquiries should be submitted to him/her

6.3 The Deputy Director will formally acknowledge the claim in writing. The acknowledgement will indicate how long it is likely to take to process the claim. The Deputy Director will also explain who will be consulted, and on what matters? The time taken will in part depend on the quantity and quality of the information submitted with the claim, and on the timing of Trustee meetings, which take place at intervals of approximately three months.

6.4 Each claim will considered by the Trustees. At their first meeting the Trustees will consider the information available. They may be able to make a decision based on that information. Alternatively they may request further advice from independent advisers, or further consultation with the claimants or other interested external parties (such as the national government or the diplomatic representatives of the country in which the claimants normally reside).

6.5 If the claim is not determined at the time of its initial consideration by the Trustee. the dossier of the case will be made publicly available giving an opportunity for all with an interest to comment. Any advice requested by the Trustees or comments made to them will also be made available publicly. In particular, an open and ongoing dialogue will take place

Owners Submission to the Board of Trustees of the British Museum

Claim for the Repatriation of two Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains

The Torres Strait Islander Traditional

31 May 2011

s to outline the claim and its context. The letter and the submitted

ion of Human remains from the Torres Strait

34

ceived a claim for the deaccession and repatriation from the stral remains (human skulls), from the Torres Strait Repatriation et Minister's Office of the Australian Government. The Torres Strait ralia and Papua New Guinea. Seventeen islands in the Torres Strait nineteen separate communities. The islands are administered by from the islands of Nagir and Mer. nich the Trustees will consider a claim, as detailed in the British

is (2006) (i.e. that the Trustees will normally only consider a claim r of human remains , when it is made through the relevant national ection 5.12.1). trail remains from overseas institutions, Torres Strait Island peoples tive Title Bodies Corporate, and the Torres Strait Repatriation luced a report based on community consultation carried out in e Nagir and Mer communities support the return of the two skulls. In the context of this claim, the communities are represented by ko Stephen, and Co-chair Mr Lui Ned David. The claim is endorsed the Office for the Arts within the Department of the Prime trailan High Commission in London.

s from the TSRWG in September 2010 and in May 2011 to discuss urther background). The Museum's policy, the role of the and timescale were outlined at both meetings.

the delegation were also visiting the Natural History Museum, tritation of the remains of a baby took place) and the Museum of Cambridge. The NHM Trustees have now agreed to repatriate 138 trait Islands (March 2011).

Torres Strait Islander claim for the return of two diving skulls (2011-2012) include the two skulls which are subject to the claim:

Oc,89+.96, decorated human skull of from the island of Nagir, collected by Alfred Cort Haddon (British marine biologist, anthropologist) in 1888 Oc,89+.97, decorated human skull from the Island of Mer, collected by Haddon in 1889 nd the following objects:
(x,99+1.82, dugong charm with fibulae, from the island of Moa, collected by Haddon in 1888
c,~2489, full ength crocodile mask with human jawbones inside, from the island of Mabulag,
ollected by missionary Rev Samuel Macfarlane in the 1870s

Following discussion around the distinction made between human remains, and objects with a human component, the delegation concluded they would not claim the latter two remains.

The two skulls were collected during A.C. Haddon's first field research visit to the Torres Strait The two skins were children and a state of the state of t addon as stated a young man who had died at the end of 1887. Haddon purchased this skull in st 1888 while on the island of Nagir. This type of skull is known as a *poda kuik*, and was used

The second skull is one of five purchased by Haddon on Mer in 1889. Haddon describes 'one or two' of these skulls being decorated for him. This type of skull was known as a lamar marik. The skull which is now in the Museum was used to demonstrate for Haddon the exact method of divination as carried out on Mer (see Appendix Two for Haddon's accounts of collecting the skulls registered as

skulls were then presented back to the immediate kin at a funeral coremony which took place a few months following death. Skulls were presented in specially made baskets, and were then kept in the family home or a clan repository. They were periodically accessed for the purposes of divination.

assion human remains that are a registered part of the collection only under the terms of the Human Tissue Act 2004. The *British Museum Policy on Human Remains* (2006) details how the Trustees will consider any claim and the criteria that they will use in assessing that claim.

The procedure and criteria have been used by the Trustees on two previous occasions to consider alim to deaccession two Tasmanian ceremation ash bundles (repatriated 2006) and M n remains from New Zealand (nine of sixteen items claimed were returned in 2008)

cess for the consideration of this claim will follow that used with the two previous claims (Tasmania, New Zealand) considered by the Tr Firstly, two independent reports need to be commissioned, to establish the cultural and scientific

We would like to suggest approaching the following experts to compile these reports:

Professor Richard Davis, of the University of Western Australia, an anthropologist who has carried out fieldwork in the Torres Strait Islands and has a particular interest in ritual and sorcery Professor Simon Hillson of University College London, a bioarchaeologist who specialises in skulls and

The reports and the dossier of information will be sent to the Torres Strait representatives and the comment and respond. This information will then be presented to the Trustees for them to come to

Some time may be needed for the completion of the independent reports, and for the claimants to respond. As such, it is not likely that the claim will be discussed by the Trustees until 2012.

At the May 2011 meeting, the representatives asked if they could present directly to the Museum's The Long Journey Home', which they would like to form part of the dossier. In the film, Ned David explains that in exchanging human remains with collectors in the nineteenth century, Torres Strait slands people did not envisage that the remains would leave the islands and never return. Elders from the main islands state the importance of the remains being repatriated to the spiritual

associated with Alfred Cort Haddon. The earliest items were acquired by the Museum in the 1830s, and we continue to add to the collection.

In 2009, the Museum signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Museum of Australia. This agreement supports a five-year research programme on Australian and Torres Strait Island material culture. A major loan is planned to support a jointy curated exhibition in Canberra in 2012/3, to be followed by an exhibition here in 2014. These exhibitions will include Torres Strait

Appendix One

Background to the claim n 2001 a delegation from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission visited Britain to articipate in the consultation carried out with the DCMS Working Group on Human Remains (the esults of which were published in 2003 as the Palmer Report). A meeting between Prime Ministers Tony Blair and John Howard in 2000, in which they had agreed to a 'coordinated and long-term approach' to facilitating repatriation of human remains to Australia, contributed to the stablishment of the DCMS Working Group. The 2001 delegation took the opportunity to visit elevant British institutions, including the British Museum, to state the importance of repatriating Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Island human remains, for the reconciliation between the people and institutions of Australia and Britain. A claim specifically listing the remains in our collections was not made at that time.

In September 2010 we were visited by a delegation from the islands, accompanied by Australian

Mr Sereoko Stephen: Chair of the Registered Native Title Body Corporate for Ugar Island, Chair of the Torres Strait Repatriation Working Group. Mr Stephen has ancestral links to the

island of Mer.

Mr Ned David: Chair of the Registered Native Title Body Corporate for the Central Islands,
Co-chair of the Torres Strait Repatriation Working Group. Mr David has ancestral links to representative for Boigu on the Torres Strait Repatriation Working Group
Mr Kapua Gutchen: Deputy Chairman of the Erub Island Council

Ms Stacey Campton: Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Culture Branch, Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts Mr David Bloir: Assistant Director, International Repatriation Branch, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Australian High Commission Executive Officers: Alessandra Pretto, Namali Mackay, Vivien

Each delegate spoke on the issue of repatriation, and it was made clear that the Torres Strait Island

The meeting was also an opportunity to highlight the collaborative work currently taking place around our Australian collections, and to emphasise that we are very pleased to establish and maintain relationships around a variety of projects with communities in the Torres Strait Islands. A second meeting was requested at the British Museum for May this year. This meeting was

A section lineting was requised at the british make and of sereako Stephen, and Alessandra Pretto. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Torres Straft Islands human remains collections at the Museum, and to clarify which items would be part of a planned repatriation claim. Having agreed that the two skulls from Nagir and Mer would be requested, there was discussion around the details of these

Discussion then turned to the process of submitting a claim. It was explained that the Museum's Trustees make the decision based on information provided to them by the claimants, curators, and independent scholars commissioned to write reports on the cultural and scientific importance of the remains. It was noted that the delegation may wish to make suggestions or comments in relation to the person selected to write the report on the former.

Concern was expressed by the delegation that some information they may wish to provide as part of making their case should remain private and not be published on the Museum's website in the Human Remains pages, due to issues of cultural sensitivity. Assurances were made that due attention would be given to these considerations before publishing material on the web.

Appendix Two

The following excerpts from published works by Alfred Cort Haddon record the actual collection of

Oc,89+.96, decorated human skull of from the island of Nagir, collected in 1888 The following excerpt is Haddon's description of the preparation of skull, his funeral

Haddon, A.C. (1893). The secular and ceremonial dances of Torres Straits. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

NAGIR (Mount Ernest).

The dead were either placed on a framework supported by posts, or buried. Food, a occount vessel full of water and possibly a bamboo tobacco pipe would be hung on to the costs in the former case or placed upon the grave if buried. There was always a fire.

gilsh name was 'Look here!' and on the platform, kak, it was either wrapped up in a at or it was laid upon a mat and covered with leaves of the cocopalm. When decomposition of set in the skull was removed and buried in "hard ground so that smell he go." All e relatives scarched for food. The skull was made 'flash' (i.e. decorated) and put into basket. The body might be buried immediately after death if the skull was not required, was often the case for old people; but if young people died the skull would be preserved

August 18th, 1888, a few days after my arrival in Torres Straits, I visited Nagir, in this islands Dr. Coppinger had obtained two decorated skulls ) on the occasion H. M. S. 'Alert' was surveying in these waters six years previously. Rememblis fact I thought I would also endeavour to get one. My inquiries, aided by a

Provenance information the skulls on the islands of Nagir and Mer

ceremony, and the collection of the skull.

been twice performed, a single dancer the mari appeared. He came alone and last of all, the had loose pieces of wood attached to his legs (?) which clattered as he jumped about. At the same time a big feast was made, but in addition to the yams, sweet potatoes, occo-muts, hannans and so forth of the old fashioned feasts this one was augmented by "four bags of flour, one case of gin and one case of schnaps". The decorated skull of was placed on a mat in the midst of the feasters. The father and brother prepared food for the other Mariget and put it in front of the skull; these latter in their turn made food ready for the father and brother or the deceased and placed it in a similar position, but only two bottless of spirits were placed along with the food. Then "all got dammed drunk all night; if woman sleep wake him (i. e. her) up — no make row (i. e. noise, or quarrel)."

(cf. Figure on the Zeological Collections made in the Indo-Pacific Ocean during the Voyage of S. Alder Sist "9". Bittish Massum, Natural History, 1884, pp. 5-47, ps. 1, 2, Report on Melanesia up OLDFILD TROMAS. "These skulls are placed on the graves where the bodies of their origins was the not are surrounded with idols, models of snakes, etc. which are supposed to guard the dead.

n twice performed, a single dancer the mari appeared. He came alone and last of all

hen died, make, his uncle, and (""), his foster brothe

Oc,89+.97, decorated human skull from the island of Mer, collected in 1889

skull shown in the sketch is stated by Haddon to be in the British Museum, and he refers to Plate XXVIII in this volume which shows a photograph of the skull.

Haddon, A.C. (1908). Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, Vol. 6, Sociology, Magic and Religion of the Eastern Islanders. Cambridge: University Press.

The British Museum Board

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2011 at the British Museum

2. Torres Strait human remains claim

2.1 Lissant Bolton presented the background to a claim received through the Australian Prime Minister's Office from the Torres Strait Repatriation Working Group for the de-accession and repatriation from the Museum's collection of two ancestral remains

2.2. The Trustees approved the preparation of a dossier of information for submission to the Board at a later date to inform the decision on repatriation. The Board decided not to agree to a request to meet representatives of the claimant at this stage.

Sent: 27 September 2011 16:43

To: Andrew Burnett

Cc: Ned David (ndavi148@eq.edu.au); Stacey Campton; Barbara Poliness
Subject: British Museum claim (SEC=UNCLASSIFIED)

Timportance\* Hinch

Dear Andrew,

Thank you for the information from the Board of Trustees' meeting on its consideration of the Torres Strait Islander claim. Please find below the communities considered response in relation to the Board's request for additional

Question (b): The Australian Government [or claimant groups] have never made a claim based on genealogical link but rather 'cultural community of origin']. The Torres Strait Repatriation Working Group was given the mandate to carry out the advocacy stage of the process and this was reaffirmed through a formal resolution at a recent meeting held on Badu Island (24-26 June 2011). The Australian Government officially acknowledges and endorses the Nagir and Mer Island communities as being the appropriate claimant groups to seek the return of the

Yours sincerely,

Claim for repatriation of two Torres Straits Islander Ancestral Remains

I can report that at their meeting on 30 June the Trustees' made an initial consideration of your claim for the return

3. As we discussed to be the likely outcome of this initial conversation, they have not yet reached a decision.

ressor Simon Hillson of University College, London for the second. I hope you feel content with these choices – if you

a) Your understanding of late 19th century mortuary ritual as practised in Nagir and Mer as it relates to these remains: b) The genealogical links between the individuals whose remains are the subject of your claim and the relevant Torres

Dr Richard Davis

Anthropology and Sociology, University of Western Australia 12 December, 2011

The relevant extract from the minutes of the Trustees' initia consideration

30 June 2011

Subsequent correspondence on points arising from 2.6 27 September 2011

2.7

7. They confirm that it is not likely that they will be in a position to make a decision quickly. It will probably take most fit year or exceive the independent reports and so they are unlikely to be able to make a decision before 2012 (the irst meeting of 2012 is in March). They appreciate that this may seem a long delay and ask you for your understanding.

. They confirmed that you will have the opportunity to see all of the material in which they will base their decision, nd to comment on it before the meeting.

inally, we discussed the placing of material on the BM website. I can confirm that we will not intend to do so until

about a month before the decision-making meeting, and that I will consult with you before placing any material on the vebsite that will be available publicly.

Andrew Burnett

Dr Richard Davis's report

12 December 2011

2.8.1

Perth, Australia

Report on the Significance of Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains

Email: richard.davis@uwa.edu.au

not present, or not as important, at the time they were we not received a Christian burial, secondly, they are out-ree not anyplace where their descendants can easily and fourthy, that in repatriating human remains Islanders intially may form new social relationships, with the British

ship between repatriation and decolonisation, there is that can be said to inaugurate a process of Islander Strait, but the replacement in 1965 of the *Queensland* nd Protection Act 1939 (Old) with the Aboriginal and s Act 1965 (Qld) can be said to be one of the more irs Act 1965 (Qld) can be said to be one of the more story. The older Act gave the State government enormous it's Indigenous peoples, including in Torres Strait. Its substantive space for Torres Strait Islanders to developentity concerns. Struggles over self-government, land and recultural heritage have been important components of nders have engaged in a sustained and difficult debate it their relationships to material culture objects and human in the 10th content and the content of the content in the 19th century and stored in European collections livert 1997) and Yahoo Group Pages. Where these on material culture I have observed a range of opinions, o Australia, to keeping them where they are with the host cess to Islanders. Where discussions have touched on y ever observed the single desire of return.

trait Islander Ancestral Remains – Richard Davis

The keeping of ancestors skulls for any reason is no longer practised by Islanders. The exact mortuary rituals surrounding the separation and preparation of skulls are also no longer extant. However, in contemporary mortuary rituals it is possible to see a similar structure to the older mortuary rituals, albeit taking place over a number of years rather than months. Contemporary mortuary rituals also have imilar concerns about the successful shepherding and transformation of the spirit of

The fact that skulls are no longer kept by Islanders means that they are no longer traded or exchanged. As obvious as this seems it hides an important point. Skulls divinatory qualities once mediated relationships between the living and the dead, and when they were traded or exchanged they also mediated relationships between the trade and exchange partners. While skull-divination plays no part in contemporary Islander relationships with their deceased, the skulls of ancestors still have the require to mediate hotteren living poods. (Further the buttern living poods.) have the power to mediate between living people (such as between Islanders, Museum staff and Australian government officials) and between local organisations tions (such as between the Torres Strait Islander Repatriation Working Group, the British Museum and Australian Commonwealth Government)

As my recounting of a trip to view the skull of Maigi on Saibai Island indicates, the skulls of ancestors are of great importance to contemporary Islanders. They are social entities that compel descendants to reconsider their relationships to them in an era where Islanders are achieving autonomy and ownership of those things that were taken from them; the right to govern themselves, the right to be treated with as the owners of lands and seas and the right to be recognised as the custodians of the owners of lands and seas and the right to be recognised as the custodians of their own heritage and research knowledge. The making of the claim for the two skulls is not just a means to the end of returning the remains of ancestors, it is the very process of that autonomy and ownership. Exchanging and trading skulls may once have been a way of forming relationships to others but to contemporary Islanders the presence of the skulls of kindred in overseas collections are a demeaning reminder of the evolutionarily informed social hierarchies and cultural imperialisms that once permeated their lives. Islanders would no doubt regard their return as a gesture of respect and recognition of equality on the part of the British Museum towards all Torres Strait Islanders.

Cultural Significance of Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains - Richard Davis

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Cultural Significance of Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains - Richard Davis

The Trustees may find it helpful to note the following points:

Museum's policy (paragraph 5.12.1);

the claim is endorsed by the relevant national government, in accordance with the

TSI and the Australian government, including one on 24 November 2011 attended by Karen

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2.8.2

Report on the Significance of Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains

The Trustees are invited to consider further the request of the Torres Straits Islanders for the transfer of two human skulls and decide whether or not they wish to accede to the request.

As with previous cases, there is no recommendation by the Executive for or against the request. This is because Trustees have unique fiduciary responsibilities in relation to the collection

At the Board meeting on Thursday 22 March 2012 consideration was given to the request by the Torres Straits Islanders, endorsed by the government of Australia, for the return of two human skulls originating in the Torres Straits Islanders. The briefing note for that discussion is appended (Appendix A). The Board discussion was based on a careful consideration of the dossier of material which had previously also been sent to the claimants and published on the web.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/about\_us/news\_and\_press/statements/human\_remains/repatr iation to torres strait.aspx

At the meeting the Board decided it did not feel in a position to make a determination, and asked if mortuary process and use, but no helpful information has been forthcoming.

A meeting of representatives of the Torres Straits Islanders and the Australian Government with some Trustees was held on 8 October. A note of the meeting is attached (Appendix B).

### Appendix A: Briefing note for Trustees' meeting on 22 March 2012

he Trustees are asked to decide whether or not to repatriate two human skulls from the collection to the Torres Straits Islanders (TSI).

The power to repatriate human tissue from the collection was given to the Trustees by section 47 Human Tissue Act 2004, and they have published their Human Remains Policy, having regard to

It is suggested that the two main issues for the Trustees to determine relate to:

ortuary Disposal" (Policy: paragraphs 5.11; 5.13.1); and if applicable "The Public Benefit Test" (Policy: paragraph 5.16).

In relation to Mortuary Disposal, the question is: should the changes that took place to the skulls be considered as part of the mortuary process or do they amount to modifications into 'objects' that were not part of the process for the laying to rest of human remains in the specific context of the culture of the TSI? If, in the view of the Trustees, the skulls were modified into 'objects' unintende for mortuary disposal, they would fall out with the policy and so not be eligible for repatriation.

If, on the other hand, the changes were part of the mortuary process, then the second question arises: does the cultural significance of the human remains demonstrated by the TSI in making the claim outweigh the public benefit to the world community of retaining the human remains in the

To aid the decision, the following documents are attached (the 'dossier'):

The TSI claim, dated 31 May 2011, and the DVD subsequently supplied by them; . The Australian government's endorsement of this claim;

10 February 2012

Torres Straits;

## Appendix B: Note of Meeting to discuss Torres Strait Human Remains Claim 08.10.12

Cultural Significance of Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains - Richard Davis

Australian delegation: Stacey Campton, Assistant Secretary of the Indigenous Culture Branch for the Australian Government (SC), Ned David, representing the Torres Strait Island claimants (ND), Richard Lane, previous Director of Science at NHM and independent adviser to delegation (RL), Alessandra Pretto, Executive Officer, Australian High Commission (AP)

British Museum delegation: Liz Forgan, Deputy Chair of Board of Trustees (LE), Clive Gamble in Museum derigation: Liz Progan, Deputy chain of Board of Trustees (Er), Cine Gambie tee (CG), Antony Gormley, Trustee (AG), Bonnie Greer, Deputy Chair of Board of Trustee na Kennedy, Trustee (HK), Jonathan Williams, Director of Collections (JW), Sam Stewart,

JW welcomed the delegation, and especially ND representing the Torres Strait Island

would be open and frank so as to avoid making the process adversarial.

 ND requested that advice the Board had sought from qualified academics in the field of archaeology and anthropology, Prof Simon Hillson and Dr Richard Davis be shared with the TSI claimants. JW gave copies of the reports to ND during the meeting and advised all present that the reports had already been published on the BM website

The group discussed the current claim for the repatriation of two Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains. ND stated that all possible avenues for providing additional information ND explained the process that would take place were the remains to be repatriated. There

would be a private ceremony followed by a public ceremony, after which the remains would be taken back to Torres Strait. roup explored the question of whether the remains have become artefacts through the ss of decoration and exactly what meaning the process of decoration holds for the Strait Islands

3. Statement: Human remains from the Torres

The Torres Strait Islanders have been notified of the Board's decision

The Museum has an important collection from the Torres Strait Islands. The quired by the Museum in the 1830s and the Mus

4. The briefing note on the skulls provided for the Trustees' meeting on 30 June 2011 by N McKinney including two Bioarchaeological Reports by D Antoine (BM);

5. Note of TSI, Australian Government and British Museum meeting on 6 May 2011;

6. The relevant extract from the minutes of the Trustees' initial consideration on 30 June 2011;

7. Subsequent correspondence on points arising from 6;

8. Two independent reports on the bioarchaeological and cultural significance of the skulls commissioned from Professor Simon Hillison of University College London and Dr Richard Davis of the University of Western Australia;

9. The relevant extract from the minutes of the Trustees' meetings on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2006 and 17 April 2008, at which the two previous claims were determined;

10. Note of TSI, Australian Government and British Museum meeting on 24 November 2011;

11. The relevant extract of the minutes from the meeting of the Trustees of the Natural History Museum on 22 February 2011, when they considered a similar claim from the Torres Straits Islanders;

12. The comments on the dossier (1-11) which was sent to the Torres Straits Islanders. The claimants were invited to submit any further information they would like the Trustees to consider, but have declined.

The dossier has also been posted on the Museum's website, but no comments have been received.

people of Torres Strait. The group also explored the question of whether the remains were originally sold or traded and how this might affect the perception of them as artefacts.

The group discussed the importance of the knowledge and understanding available to a universal audience through the cultural property/artefacts being part of the BM's collection.

The group discussed how the absence of the cultural property/artefacts from the Torres Strait Islands impacts on the current community and whether or not a mortuary process had been interrupted by the remains leaving the Torres Strait Islands.

The group discussed possible future cultural and scientific exchanges between the BM and Torres Strait. RL explained the current relationship between the NHM and Torres Strait Island communities. continues to add to the collection. In 2009, the Museum signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Museum of Australia. This agreement supports a five-year research programme on Australian and Torres Strait Island material culture. A loan is planned to support a jointly curated exhibition at the British Museum in 2015 and then Canberra in 2015/16. These exhibitions will include Torres Strait Island material. continues to add to the collection. In 2009, the Museum signed a Memorandum

Torres Strait. RL explained the current relationship between the NHM and Torres Strait Island communities.

HK assured the group that the repatriation claim will be given full consideration by the Trustees. All Trustees reminded the Australian delegation the decision to return any property held by the BM required a degree of public accountability to meet the judiciary responsibility of maintaining the BMs collections for future generations.

SC made the comment that there needs to be a distinction between the BMs collections containing human remains and cultural property and this terminology needs to be clearly stated in all communications.

JW reminded the group that the Trustees would take a decision on the claim according to the published criteria set out in the British Museum Policy on Human Remains at their next Board meeting on 22 November 2012.

Statement: Human remains from the Torres Strait Islands

December 2012

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Briefing note for Trustees'

meeting on 22 March 2012

claim on 8 October 2012

and note of the meeting to discuss the Torres Strait human remains





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