

Dear Lord Chancellor

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF HUMAN REMAINS**

On 1 November you wrote about the archaeological investigation of human remains to Andrew Miller MP, Chair of the Science and Technology Committee for the House of Commons. You noted that you had received no formal representations against the implementation of the current licensing scheme, and that professional archaeologists had advised that the arrangements had given rise to no particular difficulties.

We wish to inform you that, to the contrary, these arrangements have caused deep and widespread concern. They are seen by many in the UK archaeology and heritage professions as unacceptable, and we believe they are not in the public or national interest.

We believe that the new licence conditions imposed since 2008 were adopted without proper consultation, and without appropriate consideration of the consequences of such a dramatic change. If such conditions continue to be applied, Britain risks losing its leading role in archaeological science, a decline that will be observed closely by an already mystified international scholarly community.

The excavation and study of human remains is highly regulated by professional ethics, and overseen by publicly agreed guidelines. This is a cultural practice not unique to this country, and one that has been much examined around the world. Your current requirement that all archaeologically excavated human remains should be reburied, whether after a standard period of two years or a further special extension, is contrary to fundamental principles of archaeological and scientific research and of museum practice.

Particularly for periods before written records, human remains are among the most important forms of evidence about our past. Archaeologists have been excavating and curating such remains for centuries, and they continue to be studied as scientific techniques develop and questions change. Such research can never be "completed". It contributes to the story of our past and the public's understanding of the lives of the people who came before us; it helps put our own lives into perspective. Surveys show that 90% of the public approve of the curation of ancient human remains in museums: archaeologists do not undertake research in a vacuum but consult regularly with the public, study museum feedback and involve the public in fieldwork.

We wish to return to the simple, well-tried system practised up to 2008, which permitted the retention, study, curation and display of excavated remains as appropriate.

Yours sincerely

**Professor Mike Parker Pearson FSA FSAScot MIFA**, Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield

**Mr Mike Pitts FSA MIFA**, Editor of British Archaeology, Director of Digging Deeper Ltd

**Dr Duncan Sayer**, School of Forensic & Investigative Science, University of Central Lancashire

**Professor Ian Armit FSA FSAScot**, Department of Archaeological, Geographical & Environmental Sciences, University of Bradford

**Professor David Austin FSA FRHistS**, Chair of Archaeology, University of Wales Trinity St David

**Professor Graeme Barker FBA FSA MIFA**, Disney Professor of Archaeology, University of Cambridge

**Professor Martin Bell FBA FSA**, Head of Department of Archaeology, University of Reading

**Professor Richard Bradley FBA Fil Dr h.c. (Lund) FSA Hon FSAScot MIFA**, Department of Archaeology, University of Reading

**Professor Martin Carver FSA**, Editor of Antiquity, Professor Emeritus of Archaeology, University of York

**Professor Andrew Chamberlain**, Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield

**Professor Bob Chapman FSA**, Department of Archaeology, University of Reading

**Professor Jim Crow FSA FSAScot**, Head of Archaeology, School of History, Classics & Archaeology, Edinburgh University

**Sir Barry Cunliffe CBE FBA**, Emeritus Professor of European Archaeology, University of Oxford

**Professor Timothy Darvill OBE FSA MIFA**, School of Applied Sciences, Bournemouth University

**Professor Keith Dobney**, Sixth Century Professor of Human Palaeoecology, University of Aberdeen

**Professor Stephen T. Driscoll FSA FSAScot**, Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow

**Professor Richard P. Evershed FRS FRSC**, Director of Bristol Biogeochemistry Research Centre, University of Bristol

**Professor Andrew Fleming**, Emeritus Professor of Archaeology, University of Wales

**Professor Mike Fulford CBE FBA FSA**, Department of Archaeology, University of Reading

**Professor Clive Gamble FBA FSA MIFA**, Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London

**Professor Roberta Gilchrist FBA FSA MIFA**, Department of Archaeology, University of Reading

**Professor Chris Gosden FBA**, Chair of European Archaeology, University of Oxford

**Professor John Gowlett FSA FRAI**, School of Archaeology, Classics & Egyptology, University of Liverpool

**Professor Helena Hamerow**, Head of School of Archaeology, University of Oxford

**Professor Anthony Harding FBA FSA**, Department of Archaeology, University of Exeter

**Professor Colin Haselgrove FBA FSA FSAScot**, Head of School of Archaeology & Ancient History, University of Leicester

**Professor Ian Haynes**, Chair of Archaeology, Newcastle University

**Professor Julian Henderson FSA**, Department of Archaeology, University of Nottingham

**Professor Carl Heron**, Head of Archaeological, Geographical & Environmental Sciences, University of Bradford

**Professor Simon Hillson**, UCL Institute of Archaeology, London

**Professor Mark Horton FSA**, Department of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Bristol

**Professor John Hunter MIFA FSA FFSSoc**, Emeritus Professor of Ancient History & Archaeology, University of Birmingham

**Professor Martin Jones FSA**, George Pitt-Rivers Professor of Archaeological Science, University of Cambridge

**Professor David Mattingly FBA FSA**, Department of Archaeology, University of Leicester

**Professor Martin Millett FBA FSA**, Laurence Professor of Classical Archaeology, University of Cambridge

**Professor Charlotte A. Roberts FSA**, Department of Archaeology, University of Durham

**Professor Chris Scarre FSA**, Head of Department of Archaeology, University of Durham

**Professor Stephen Shennan FBA FSA**, Director of the UCL Institute of Archaeology, London

**Professor Chris Stringer FRS FSA**, Department of Palaeontology, The Natural History Museum

**Professor Geoffrey Wainwright MBE FSA**, former Chief Archaeologist, English Heritage

**Professor Alasdair Whittle FBA**, Distinguished Research Professor in Archaeology, Cardiff University

**Professor Howard Williams FSA**, Department of History & Archaeology, University of Chester