

## The Haddon Dixon Collection: A Submission to Trinity Legacies Review Working Group

Ciarán Walsh, Principal Investigator, the Haddon Dixon Repatriation Project. November 7, 2022.

### Introduction

This submission is intended to supplement evidence presented in "A discussion document prepared by community representatives and associated researchers for the Office of the Provost, TCD" (Coyne et al., 2021 / Appendix 1), which the Haddon-Dixon Repatriation Project sent to the Office of the Provost on February 23, 2021.

The evidence submitted addresses six key questions raised in a letter from the Anatomy Museum Steering Committee to me (as correspondent for the Haddon-Dixon Repatriation Project) on August 19, 2022 (see Appendix 2). This letter is treated herein as a formal response to the Repatriation Project's discussion document in advance of a meeting between the Repatriation Project and the Provost scheduled for September 1, 2022.

The Anatomy Museum Steering Committee summarised its position as follows:

Based on the information that we have gathered and in accordance with NMI policies on human remains, Anatomy Act legislation, and the strict controls in place by the Medical Council for the care and disposition of Anatomical remains, the school is not in a position to support a request for deaccession of the crania and transfer to the possession of private individuals or historical interest groups.

The substantive paragraph shaping this summary reads as follows:

Due to age, contemporary interpretation of the 1832 Anatomy Act (soon to be replaced by The Human Tissue Act) places the crania under the authority of the National Museum of Ireland (NMI), rather than the Inspector of Anatomy. In that context, decisions related to disposition, further research, transfer, burial, or display rest with NMI in conjunction with other statutory bodies such as National Monuments Service, the latter being responsible for issues related to historical burial grounds. For reference I have attached a link to the [Human Remains Policy of NMI](#) which includes their approach to de-accession of human remains.

Both these paragraphs raise important questions that members of the Board of Trinity College, University of Dublin, might consider when making a decision on the petition submitted by the people of Inishbofin seeking the immediate return for burial of the remains of their ancestors.

The questions are:

- Q 1. Do the crania come under the authority of the National Museum of Ireland?
- Q 2. Does the Medical Council have a role in the care and disposition of human remains stolen on Inishbofin in 1890?

- Q 3. Does the National Monuments Service — as the agency with responsibility for issues related to historical burial grounds — have a role?
- Q 4. Is “deaccession” the correct term?
- Q 5. Does the repatriation of Māori remains provide a precedent?
- Q 6. Is the phrase “private individuals or historical interest groups” an accurate description of the Haddon-Dixon Repatriation Project?

The following outlines (briefly) the evidence collected in relation to each of these questions.

### **Q 1. Do the crania come under the authority of the National Museum of Ireland?**

Eamon Ó Cuiv TD asked Catherine Martin TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, to make a statement on the matter and the Minister [replied](#) November 24, 2022 as follows:

I recognise that there is a growing awareness internationally and among the public of the need to address the spoliation, looting and illicit trade of cultural heritage objects, as well as the restitution of same.

In relation to the specifics of the question, however, the material mentioned is held in Dublin University Trinity College. My Department has no role in the governance of the University. It is also noted that the exhumation of the remains was in the 19th century, therefore predating the 1922 Monuments Act, and as a result falls outside of the remit of the National Museum of Ireland.

Catherine Martin TD,  
Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Nov 24, 2022.

### **Q 2 Does the care and disposition of human remains stolen from Inishbofin in 1890 fall within the remit of the Medical Council?**

I wrote to the Medical Council in January 2021 with a “query for the Anatomy Inspector relating to the retention and display of historical collections of human remains: specifically anthropological specimens that were stolen from burial grounds in the west of Ireland in 1890, the theft of which is a matter of public record.” I inquired whether the current guidelines – in the absence of legislation – specify that archaeological remains over 100 years old may be retained and displayed.” (Appendix 3).

The Medical Council Replied on March 15, 2021, stating that

it would appear that this request does not fall within the remit of Anatomical Examination or the role of the Inspector of Anatomy and so we are unable to provide legal advice in relation to this.”

Education and Training, Medical Council.

### Q 3 Does the National Monuments Service have a role?

Only if the burial of the remains were to take place within St Colman's monastery, which is a national monument.

However, the Repatriation Project proposed that burial take place in the community burial ground adjacent to the monastery, which is not a national monument.

Work on clearing any legal requirements relating to burial was well advanced in February 2021 and the Repatriation Project reported to the Provost that:

The process of securing County Council and, where necessary, National Monument Service permission is well underway and will be finalised before the repatriation process commences.

Coyne et al. 2021, 8.

and

The burial grounds attached to St. Colman’s Monastery on Inishbofin and Teampall Breacan are still in use and the interment will be carried out in liaison with Galway County Council and the National Monuments Service.

Coyne et al. 2021, 8.

That work was put on hold in February 2021, when the Old Anatomy Museum Working Group informed the Repatriation Project that “the possibility of de-accession is being considered carefully” under guidance from the National Museum of Ireland. The Working Group had, accordingly, organised a full osteoarchaeological study and dating.

### Q 4 Is “de-accession” the correct term?

De-accession is a technical used by museum managers to describe the disposal of some objects in a collection to fund the acquisition of new objects.

The "[National Museum of Ireland – Human Remains Policy](#)" makes a clear distinction between de-accession and repatriation in relation to Acquisition Policy and Disposals Policy for collections of archaeological human remains.

The policy defines "Archaeological" by reference to the National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014, which state:

the expression “archaeological object” means any chattel ... which by reason of the archaeological interest attaching thereto or of its association with any Irish historical event or person has a value substantially greater than its intrinsic (including artistic) value, and the said expression includes ancient human and animal remains and does not include treasure trove in which the rights of the State have not been waived.

[National Monuments Acts 1930.](#)

The act was amended in [1994](#) to define archaeological objects to include treasure trove.

The National Museum of Ireland policy document makes an unambiguous distinction between human remains that are considered archaeological and small collections in other non-archaeological categories. The policy states that:

1. De-accession of human remains applies to Irish archaeological human remains
2. Repatriation applies to human remains in non-archaeological collections and is covered by [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP 2007, 61/295), which states that “Indigenous peoples have ... the right to the repatriation of their human remains.”

That raises the issue of ethnicity and whether the repatriation of Māori remains in 2009 provides a precedent for the return and burial of the Inishbofin remains?

#### Q5 Does the repatriation of Māori remains provide a precedent?

The Haddon Dixon Collection constitutes a small part of the Anthropological Collection held in Old Anatomy ([see Hussain et al. 2022](#)) and the Repatriation Project provided comprehensive evidence of provenance (Coyne et al. 2021, 3-6) which clearly linked the theft of Irish skulls to a wider study of ethnicity (ethnology) and human variation (anthropology). This was explicitly stated in the manifesto Haddon and Cunningham ([1892](#)) presented at the Royal Irish Academy and the Anthropological institute in 1891. They coined the phrase “ethnic islands” to describe their field of study:

Then again, we have in Ireland certain very old colonies. These ethnical islands, if we may so term them, require to be very carefully studied, and will no doubt afford valuable information concerning the persistence or otherwise of racial characters.

[Haddon and Cunningham 1892, 36.](#)

Archaeology provided corroborative evidence of ethnicity by way of the acquisition of aboriginal human remains from mediaeval monasteries. Haddon cited Wilde as follows:

These graveyards of the Aran Isles are regarded by Sir W. E. Wilde, the distinguished Irish antiquary, as 'very early,' and the crania derived from them 'as very ancient skulls.'

[Haddon 1891, 761.](#)

Archaeology (antiquities) was one of four classes of evidence collected by Haddon and Browne in the inaugural ethnographic survey of the Aran Islands in 1892. They stated that "An ethnographical study of a people would be incomplete without a reference to its archaeology" ([Haddon and Browne 1891, 821](#)) and stated that one of the objects of their ethnographic survey was to determine "to what race or races the Aranites belong" (*ibid.*, 826). Their ancestral remains may have been stolen from archaeological sites but the nature of the study was ethnological and anthropological.

In this context, Haddon contributed the Haddon Dixon collection to an anthropological collection that included the Māori remains, which, in terms of the National Museum of Ireland's policy, meets the definition of a non-archaeological collection of human remains. As such, the repatriation of Māori remains in 2009 constitutes a precedent that activates the right to repatriation enacted by the Irish Government's adoption of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The question of ethnicity in an Irish context goes to the core of the colonial legacies debate. Whyte (1999, 10) argued that TCD was determined to demonstrate "a firm commitment to the Union" in the face of the threat posed by home rule in the 1890s. O'Sullivan (2015, 145) compiled a record of Cunningham's anti-home rule activism and concluded that he used his lab work to bolster opposition to home rule. I have argued that Cunningham's programme of ethnographic surveys gave practical effect to the anthropological theory that the United Kingdom was a synthesis of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon elements which, territorially speaking, consisted of a Celtic periphery and an Anglo-Saxon-core centred on London (see Lubbock 1887, 418-422; Walsh 2021, 78). I have also argued that Unionist anthropologists contended that this was the natural consequence of a necessary process of civilisation by conquest and assimilation (Walsh 2021, 78; 2022). For instance, Cunningham (1903, 163-7; O'Sullivan 2015, 145) told the Unionist Alliance that

the uneducated and unassimilated “Irishman” as “excitable, emotional, superstitious, and I am sorry to say, in some cases a dangerous member of society”.

In summary, the evidence supports an argument that the form of Anglo-Irish anthropology Cunningham and Browne practiced in TCD between 1891 and 1903 was not Irish, but something the ‘Anglo’ did to the ‘Irish’ in the service of Empire. The human remains in the Haddon Dixon Collection, like the Māori remains repatriated in 2009, embody the colonial nature of Anglo-Irish anthropology.

Thus, the conversation shifts to the community of origin and the practicalities of return for burial.

**Q 6 Is the phrase “private individuals or historical interest groups” an accurate description of the Haddon-Dixon Repatriation Project?**

Marie Coyne, founder and director of Inishbofin Heritage Museum, initiated the repatriation claim in 2015 when she asked independent curator Ciarán Walsh (the author of this document) to assist in securing the return for burial of the remains of islanders held in TCD. He had just commenced his doctoral research in the Old Anatomy Museum under the joint supervision of the School of Medicine TCD and the Dept of Anthropology at Maynooth University. Walsh became an associate of the School of Medicine and his thesis on the skull measuring business in TCD was adjudged to have achieved the standard of *summa cum laude* when defended in 2020. In 2019, Coyne and Walsh were joined by Pegi Vail, an anthropologist at New York University whose grandmother came from Inishbofin and who had experience of repatriation projects in the US.

When Provost Patrick Prendergast announced a policy for decolonising the campus, Coyne, Walsh and Vail co-signed a letter proposing that the repatriation of the Haddon Dixon Collection would be a good start. The Provost agreed and the Haddon Dixon Repatriation Project was constituted as a collective of community-of-origin representatives, academic researchers, a poet and a curator. The proposal submitted in

February 2021 was scrupulous with regard to the evidence presented and this provided a platform “for a positive and creative engagement between the communities we represent and the University of Dublin, Trinity College.”

To finish, the repatriation claim originated in the Inishbofin Heritage Museum and, as such, differs little in essence from the claim lodged by *Te Papa* (Museum of New Zealand) in 2009. Furthermore, the unanimity of the petition submitted is evidence that the claim is not the work of individuals, but the expressed will of the community of origin.

## Conclusion

According to evidence collected and using the National Museum of Ireland's policy on Human remains as a guide, there is no legislative basis for the position outlined by the Old Anatomy Working Group in its letter of August 19, 2022. On the other hand, there is sufficient evidence to argue that the claim for the repatriation of the Haddon Dixon collection — issues of ethnicity notwithstanding — meets the criterion of collections of human remains that are not archaeological in origin. In this context, the repatriation of Māori remains in 2009 sets a practical precedent for the immediate return for burial of the Inishbofin remains.

End

**Appendix 1** (PDF attachment).

Coyne et al. 2021. "A discussion document prepared by community representatives and associated researchers for the Office of the Provost, TCD."

**Appendix 2** (PDF attachment).

The Anatomy Museum Steering Committee to Walsh, August 19, 2022 (PDF attachment).

**Appendix 3** (PDF attachment).

Correspondence with the Medical Council, January 2021.

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## Appendices

- Appendix 1      A discussion document prepared by community representatives and associated researchers for the Office of the Provost, TCD. 22 February 2021.
- Appendix 2      Letter from Anatomy Museum Steering Group, 19 August 2022.
- Appendix 3      Email from Education and Training Medical Council regarding Guidelines on the retention and display of human remains, 15 March 2021.

**the Haddon-Dixon**



**repatriation project**

Leona Coady,  
Chief of Staff and Director of the Office of the Provost,  
Trinity College Dublin,  
The University of Dublin,  
Dublin 2.

February 22, 2021.

Dear Leona,

We welcome the declaration by the Provost, the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, and the Head of the School of Medicine that they “fully support the idea that any crania held by Trinity College that can be identified as coming from Inishbofin should be returned.”

We look forward to working with the Provost’s Office to achieve this with the required level of care and sensitivity and we have set out a number of discussion points in the attached document, which we believe will address those concerns.

To begin, we propose that Trinity College enlarge the discussion to include the full Haddon & Dixon Collection, which, as stated in our initial letter, contains 24 crania acquired from burial grounds in the west of Ireland: Inishbofin, the Aran Islands, and St Finian’s Glen in County Kerry. We believe that all the crania were acquired in the same way as those on Inishbofin and we provide evidence of provenance to support this proposal.

With regard to the process of repatriation, we propose a number of measures that will ensure that it meets the exacting ethical standards in place in the School of Medicine Donor Programme and the protocols developed for the repatriation of Maori remains in 2009.

We also recognise that the repatriation process provides an ideal teaching tool for scholars, researchers, and museum curators who are grappling with these issues on an international level, and we believe that by working together we can set an ethical benchmark for the practical resolution of some of those issues.

We believe that the repatriation of the Haddon & Dixon Collection provides a multidisciplinary platform for community engagement, similar to a programme that TCD supported in 2012 during a national tour of an exhibition of photographs from the Anthropological Laboratory in TCD, which operated in the west of Ireland between 1892 and 1900.

We also address learning opportunities that will arise from the repatriation of the Haddon & Dixon Collection, including opportunities for further scholarship and research related to DNA and radiocarbon dating analysis of the crania

In short, we see this as wonderful opportunity for a positive and creative engagement between the communities we represent and the University of Dublin, Trinity College.

To conclude, we applaud the stated goal of decolonising the curriculum and the campus and we look forward to making a small but significant contribution to that process.

Yours faithfully,

Marie Coyne	Inishbofin Heritage Museum.
Dr Pegi Vail	NYU, anthropologist, filmmaker, and community representative Inishbofin.
Pádraig Ó Direáin	community representative, Inis Mór, Árann.
Máirtín Ó Conceanainn	community representative, Inis Mór, Árann.
Niamh Cotter	anthropologist, geographer, and community representative, Inis Mór, Árann.
Deirdre Casey	<i>Comhlacht Forbartha an Gleanna</i> (St Finian's / the Glen).
Pat O'Leary	<i>Comhlacht Forbartha an Gleanna</i> , (St Finian's / the Glen).
Dessy Cronin	<i>Coiste Forbartha na Sceilge</i> , community representative, Ballinskelligs.
Susan Walsh	arts and community education manager, Waterville.
Cathy Galvin	poet and journalist.
Dr Ciarán Walsh	curator and anthropologist.

# the Haddon-Dixon



# repatriation project

A discussion document prepared by community representatives and associated researchers for the Office of the Provost, TCD.

22 | 02 | 2021

## Introduction

We have prepared the following document in response to the Provost's invitation to enter discussions with TCD on practical aspects of the return for burial of crania that A. C. Haddon and A. F. Dixon acquired in burial grounds in the west of Ireland in 1890 and donated to the Anthropological Museum established by D. J. Cunningham in the Dept of Anatomy TCD. These include 13 crania the theft of which Haddon recorded in detail.

'We' are voluntary team of community representatives, curators, artists and anthropologists who have come together to engage with the office of the Provost on behalf of three communities in the west of Ireland. We are:

Marie Coyne	Inishbofin Heritage Museum.
Dr Pegi Vail	NYU, anthropologist, filmmaker, and community representative Inishbofin.
Pádraig Ó Direáin	community representative, Inis Mór, Árann.
Máirtín Ó Conceanainn	community representative, Inis Mór, Árann.
Niamh Cotter	anthropologist, geographer, and community representative, Inis Mór, Árann.
Deirdre Casey	<i>Comhlacht Forbartha an Gleanna</i> (St Finian's / the Glen).
Pat O'Leary	<i>Comhlacht Forbartha an Gleanna</i> , (St Finian's / the Glen).
Dessy Cronin	<i>Coiste Forbartha na Sceilge</i> , community representative, Ballinskelligs.
Susan Walsh	arts and community education manager, Waterville.
Cathy Galvin	poet and journalist.
Dr Ciarán Walsh	curator and anthropologist.

We set out below a number of discussion points, which we believe will address concerns - ethical and practical – relating to the process of repatriation. We also believe that this process provides significant opportunities for scholarship, research, and creative engagement on an international level and propose that they should form part of our discussion.

We proceed on the basis that TCD has accepted that stolen crania should be returned, subject to conditions. Inishbofin was referred to in this context, but these crania form part of a larger collection that Haddon and Dixon assembled in July and August 1890. We present evidence on provenance that suggests that they may have acquired the full collection in circumstances similar to Inishbofin, that is they removed the crania from community burial grounds without consent. We propose therefore that the discussion be extended to include the full Haddon & Dixon Collection and we present our case for return and burial accordingly.

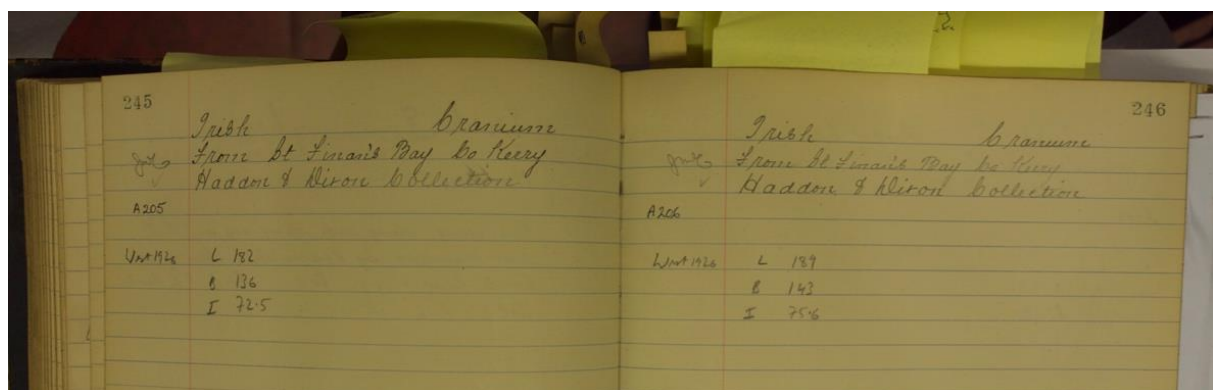
### Haddon & Dixon Collection

The collection comprises twenty-four (24) crania identified as having been taken from the following burial grounds:

- St Colman’s Monastery, Inishbofin, County Galway (13 crania).
- The Seven Churches, Inis Mór, Árann (1 cranium).
- St Finian's Church, Ballinskelligs, Co Kerry (10 crania).

The crania are currently held in the Anthropological Collection, among 47 skulls in the Anatomy Museum as listed in [The Academic and Artistic Collections](#). The crania are listed in the catalogue of the *Anthropological Laboratory, Trinity College Dublin* as follows:

Inishbofin	A190-A203	(pp. 230 – 243)
Aran	A204	(p. 244)
St Finian’s Bay	A205-A214	(pp. 245 – 254)



Sample page from the catalogue of the Anthropological Laboratory, Trinity College Dublin

## Provenance

Haddon recorded in his journal the removal – under cover of darkness – of thirteen crania from St Colman's Monastery on Inishbofin on Wednesday July 16, 1890:

He [Edward Allies] told me of an old ruined church where there were some skulls & we arranged with Dixon a plan of action. We all went ashore together that night & he provided us with a sack & later in the dark, took us close to the church. The coast being clear Dixon & I climbed over the gate & went down the enclosure which is practically a large graveyard, on our way we disturbed several cattle. We stumbled along & entered the church tumbling over the stones which are placed over the graves, in the corner we saw in the dim light the skulls in a recess in the wall. There must have been 40 or more, all broken, most useless but on (overhanging) them we found a dozen which were worth carrying away & only one however had the face bones. Whilst we were thus engaged we heard 2 men slowly walking & talking in the road & like Brer Fox - we 'lay low' & like the Tar Baby "kept on saying nothing." When the coast was clear we put our spoils in the sack & cautiously made our way back to the road, then it did not matter who saw us. We returned to the Allies' house. Dixon kept the bag & then Poole went off to the gig with us. The 2 sailors wanted to take the bag for Dixon but he wouldn't let them & when asked what was in it replied "poteen." So without any further trouble we got our skulls aboard & there we packed them in Dixon's portmanteau & locked it, no one on the steamer, except our two selves, having any idea that there were 12 human skulls in the steamer & they shan't know either.

Haddon. 1890. MS of journal, Haddon Papers, Folder 22, Cambridge.

Haddon illustrated his journal with a sketch of the skulls in situ, which is related to a photograph of the same scene.



*A first generation print of Haddon's photograph of the crania in St Colman's Monastery (Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, P.48124.ACH2, Cambridge) and a detail of the corresponding page of his journal.*

Haddon did not record the removal of the skulls from the Aran Islands and St Finian's, more commonly known as Keel Church, the Glen. He did record that Haddon and Dixon carried out a survey of archaeological sites in the Aran Islands between July 30 and August 7, 1890. He also recorded that they surveyed fishing grounds around Skellig Island – off the shore of the Glen – on August 18 and Haddon's final entry in his journal is that they had a lovely quiet day on August 19. William Spotswood

Green, graduate of TCD and director of the survey, reported that they spent August trawling off the coast of Kerry. Given that the collection is attributed to Haddon and Dixon, it seems reasonable to conclude that they landed in St Finian's Bay and removed the skulls from the Glen during this period.

Further evidence of provenance can be found in the Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Haddon wrote two craniological studies of the skulls in the collection. He read a paper on the Aran Islands into the record of the Academy in December 1892 and followed up with a paper on Inishbofin in November 1893. He dealt with the provenance of the crania in each paper. With regard to Inishbofin, he stated that "The thirteen crania from the island of Inishbofin, Co. Galway, herein described, form part of a collection of Irish crania that I gave to the Anthropological Museum of Trinity College, Dublin, in 1890." ([Haddon 1893, 311](#)). With regard to Aran, he stated that he measured a cranium taken from "Aranmore which I have presented to the Anthropological Museum in Trinity College," later clarifying that this cranium came "From Teampull Breacan, Aara Mór or Great Aran Isle." ([Haddon 1891, 761](#)). Teampall Breacan is known locally as the Seven Churches.

Ten days after Haddon presented his craniological study of the Aran Islands, Rev Dr Samuel Haughton wrote to Prof D. J. Cunningham, Professor of Anatomy TCD, informing him that "The Provost and Senior Fellows have directed me to convey to Professor Haddon their best thanks for his valuable gift of twenty & more Irish Crania." (Haughton to Cunningham, Haddon Papers, Folder 3058, Cambridge).

Haddon based himself in Cambridge from 1893 onwards and never completed his series of craniological studies, hence the absence of any recorded provenance for the St Finian's component of the Haddon & Dixon Collection; other than the listing in the catalogue of the *Anthropological Laboratory, Trinity College Dublin* and a label identifying the crania as having been collected by Haddon and Dixon in "Finan's Bay, Co. Kerry."



*The Haddon & Dixon Collection in 2019*



With regard to local history and folklore, nothing has survived in the folklore or history of the communities in Inishbofin, Aran, and the Glen. That is not to say that the removal of the crania was not noticed. Charles R. Browne, who acted for Prof Cunningham in the field, recorded his effort to acquire more skulls when he undertook an ethnographic survey in Inishbofin in 1893. He reported that:

In addition to the observations made on the living subject, the measurements of a series of crania, the first ever put on record from this island, were obtained at St. Colman's Church, in Knock townland. As they could not be removed at the time of my first visit, I was forced to measure them on the spot, and, as it turned out afterwards, it was well that this precaution had been taken, as, on revisiting the place some time after, in the hope of being able to obtain some of them, I found that they had all disappeared, having in the meantime been removed to some place of concealment.

[Browne 1893, 334.](#)

Clearly, the island community were determined to prevent a repeat of Haddon and Dixon's raid three years earlier. This – perhaps – explains Haddon's observation that "At few places have the people been more truculent than on this interesting island." Either way, Browne's account reveals the violence that was a feature of the provenance of the 'specimens' that comprise the Anthropological Collection.

That violence raised ethical questions at the time. The scandalous collecting practices of d'Alberty in Papua in 1884, agents of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia in 1885, and Loria in Oro Bay, Papua in 1890 forced Haddon to claim in 1897 that he had "collected skulls and other objects in New Guinea; but I paid for everything I obtained" and he added that "it is quite possible to collect without robbing ..." (Haddon in MacGregor 1897, 97; O'Hanlon & Welsch 2000, 86).

Haddon understood that his own "robbing" in Inishbofin was highly unethical, although the "quite" suggests some evocation and the Haddon Papers in Cambridge contain notes relating to the collection of other skulls in the west of Ireland. In 1891, Ernest W. L. Holt informed Haddon that

I found a great skull place in Sligo last Sunday, behind the abbey; It is an old square tower, round inside, and is full of bones and skulls. We could not bring any away as we had no cloaks or anything and the place is in the middle of a town, but we may do some business when we land the nobleman again.

Holt to Haddon. 1891. Haddon papers. Folder 3058. Cambridge.

Holt, who replaced Haddon as chief scientific officer on the survey of fishing grounds, makes it clear that the removal of skulls from monasteries was as regular as it was illicit.

The custom of accumulating skeletal remains – skulls in particular – in mediaeval monasteries was, according to Niamh NicGhabhann, a feature of the daily management of overcrowded burial grounds in the nineteenth century. Writing in *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, 16 ([Autumn, 2017](#)), NicGhabhann quoted Isaac Weld’s description of “bones and skulls ... heaped up in the angle formed by the transept and the nave the church” in Muckross Abbey in 1807. By the end of the century, according to NicGhabhann, changes in the management of mediaeval burial sites and religious practices had eliminated “unruly burials”.

However, local communities held on to burial rights at sites that were being reclassified as antiquarian sites of interest and Holt’s description of the tower behind Sligo Abbey indicates that old graves were still being cleared for new burials. That practice continued for some time. Pat O’Leary recalls folklore relating to the practice of placing skulls in storage around the altar St. Finian’s Monastery in the Glen, thereby providing the opportunity for Haddon and Dixon to acquire specimens for the anthropological collection in TCD in 1890.



*St Finian’s Monastery, The Glen.*

## The Case for Repatriation

[The Academic and Artistic Collections](#) catalogue contains the following description of the repatriation of Maori remains:

At the end of 2009, 3 Maori mummified heads and a full skeleton from this collection were returned to the National Museum of New Zealand to honour the Maori wish to return these remains to their homeland and eventually to direct descendants, where possible. This gesture

embodies the ethical paradigm shift in the approach to studying anatomy introduced in the 20th century.

This makes the case for the repatriation of the Haddon & Dixon Collection.

Furthermore, as stated in our original submission, the Haddon & Dixon crania were acquired for an anthropological collection that ceased to be of any relevance to anatomical studies in 1903, when Prof Cunningham left TCD and the eugenicist laboratory he founded with Francis Galton ceased operation.

Finally, retaining the integrity of the anthropological collection – the ‘skull passage’ is one of the most evocative spaces in Dublin – can be easily achieved by replacing the Haddon & Dixon Collection with the plaster casts that Haddon made of John Grattan’s collection of Irish skulls from archaeological sites, also held in ‘Old’ Anatomy. This is a very interesting collection and could be used to illustrate the progression from ethnology to scientific racism without being snagged by ethical issues raised by campaigns to decolonise colonial-era collections.

### **Managing Repatriation**

We are very aware that

- (a) we are dealing with human remains taken from community burial grounds and
- (b) that public engagement with such acts of historical violation has increased since the work of [Irish ‘Headhunters’](#) associated with the Irish Ethnographic Survey entered the public domain in 2012, thanks to the support of the Manuscript Library TCD for an exhibition of photographs from a photographic archive compiled by Charles R. Browne.

As stated in the introduction, our proposals address concerns - ethical and practical – relating to the process of repatriation. With regard to care and sensitivity, we have put in place a team of community representatives, curators, anthropologist, educators, and artists who are ready to engage with TCD to make sure that the return and burial of these remains meets the highest ethical standards, as exemplified by the Donor Programme in TCD School of Medical and the repatriation of Maori remains in 2009.

Accordingly, we propose:

- 1 That the remains be removed from the display cabinets in ‘Old’ Anatomy and put in coffins,

in the presence of representatives from each community – as happened with the Maori remains in 2009.

2 That an undertaker transports the coffins to a location where they can be passed into the care of each community.

- with regard to Inishbofin, we propose Cleggan, where fleets of boats traditionally accompany the remains of islanders being brought home for burial.
- with regard to Aran, we propose Ros a Mhíl.
- with regard to St Finian's, we propose the Sacred Heart Church, Keel, The Glen.

Members of the project team will secure and prepare a burial place in St Colman's Monastery, the Seven Churches, and St. Finian's.

The process of securing County Council and, where necessary, National Monument Service permission is well underway and will be finalised before the repatriation process commences.

Keel Graveyard (St. Finian's) is a closed burial ground, but Deirdre Casey and Pat O'Leary of *Comhlacht Forbartha an Gleanna*, have secured the cooperation of Kerry County Council Graves Department, which will oversee the burial in a respectful way. The county archaeologist will oversee the process of interment.

The burial grounds attached to St. Colman's Monastery on Inishbofin and Teampall Breacan are still in use and the interment will be carried out in liaison with Galway County Council and the National Monuments Service.

3 That a ceremony be held at each burial and that a memorial stone/plaque be erected at each site, the text of which will be agreed with TCD.

4 That the entire process be documented. There are many aspects of this project that lend themselves to a range of documentation and story-telling approaches. The following paragraphs outline some of the ideas that have been discussed to date.

Inishbofin Heritage Museum is currently undergoing redevelopment, but Marie Coyne will curate a permanent display when the new museum is opened. Marie is very familiar with the rituals of laying out the dead and the digging of graves in the ground of St Colman’s Monastery and the burial of the Haddon-Dixon crania will be organised accordingly. Pegi Vail and Cathy Galvin, whose grandparents emigrated from Inishbofin, Rosmuc, and Mason’s Island, are keenly aware of the link between ancestry and place that is embodied in these crania and carried in the genetic material that they contain. Their work in film making, poetry and storytelling (Galvin with [The Word Factory](#) and the Word Factory and Vail as a founding member and curator for the [Moth](#)) open all sorts of avenues for storytelling across a range of platforms. Cathy Galvin is working on a commemorative poem and will curate the publication of an anthology of essays about the project. Pegi Vail is planning a film.

On the Aran Islands, Máirtín Ó Conceanainn remembers being measured as a child, possibly by members of the Harvard Study. The prospect of the burial of the Haddon-Dixon cranium in Teampall Breacan has wakened interest in the tradition of *caoineadh* / keening that would have accompanied the original burial. Niamh Cotter, an anthropologist and geographer whose home overlooks Teampall Breacan, will research this aspect of the project. Padraig Dirrane presented an [exhibition](#) of photographs from the albums of Charles R. Browne as part of a TCD-supported public engagement programme in 2012. The current project will build upon that experience.



*Padraig Ó Tuaraisg opening the exhibition of photographs by Charles R Browne (TCD) on Inis Mór in 2012. The Haddon-Dixon skulls are visible in the cyanotype (blueprint) on the left of the photo above. Padraig Dirrane and Ciarán Walsh curated the exhibition as part of a national public engagement programme that TCD supported in partnership with other agencies.*



Pat O’Leary recalls the practice of placing skulls around the altar in Keel Church, the Glen and Dessy Cronin describes a ritual involving the bones of a saint at Killabounia, a nearby monastic site. Both of these sites are linked to the offshore monastic settlement of Skellig Michael, reflecting the wealth of archaeology in this district as well as adding to our understanding of why old bones still matter. Deirdre Casey and her colleagues in *Comhlacht Forbartha an Gleanna* are alive to the potential for a project like this to become a focus for community development and Susan Walsh’s experience in arts and community education will support that.

As stated, these are some of the ideas that we have discussed and they indicate that the repatriation of the Haddon & Dixon Collection has enormous potential for public engagement, the foundation for which was laid over a decade ago when TCD supported exhibitions of photography by John Millington Synge and Charles R. Browne as platforms for public engagement projects in the districts that Haddon and Dixon visited in 1890, followed by Browne on an annual basis between 1892 and 1900.

On a more traditional or intra-mural basis, Haddon’s career in Ireland is undergoing a radical reassessment as a result of Ciarán Walsh’s doctoral research into his involvement in the skull-measuring business in Ireland, research that was carried out in association with TCD SOM.

There are a number of related projects in development and these have the potential to revitalise historical links between Dublin University, Trinity College and Cambridge University in the area of anthropology. It is too early to discuss these projects in detail, but they will feed into the international movement to decolonise of public discourses and spaces by concentrating on Haddon’s pioneering work as an avowed anti-racist and anti-imperialist.

That brings two other areas of advanced research and scholarship into focus. The first is a combination of forensic archaeology, anthropology and, in the context of diaspora studies, genealogy. The second is the rapidly moving area of decolonisation studies. We treat both of these as separate opportunities for learning from the repatriation of the Haddon & Dixon Collection.

### **Learning from the repatriation**

International experience of repatriation programmes has shown that they serve as opportunities for

learning at many levels. Indeed, learning from the increasing repatriation initiatives is becoming an important avenue in academic engagement. Reflecting this growing interest are current titles in review for publication, such as “Repatriation as Pedagogy: Lessons for Anthropology” by Jane Anderson and Sonya L. Atalay, who argue that repatriation “opens new futures in previously under-considered ways, especially our obligations, responsibilities and relationships in research”.

## **DNA / Carbon Dating**

Craniologists attempted to trace racial origins and track ancient migration-routes by using the cephalic index as a bodily marker of geographic origin and distribution. It was an imperfect method – many would say a pseudo-science – and it lacked both the precision and credibility that characterise the level of DNA profiling made possible by the mapping of the human genome, which, incidentally, formally commenced a century after Haddon and Dixon assembled their collection of skulls in the hope that it would help physical anthropologists unravel the racial origins of the ‘native’ Irish.

Many people of Inishbofin, Aran and the Glen have had their DNA profiled and this project represents an opportunity to correlate the DNA profiles of the crania with that of the contemporary population, either resident in these locations or living abroad as descendants of emigrants.

Depending on the condition of the crania, including the potential degradation of genetic materials over time, aDNA (ancient DNA) and radiocarbon dating analysis may additionally help scholars and community members in placing the crania historically, potentially revealing mitochondrial (mtDNA) and Y chromosome data.

## **Racism**

Craniology started as an attempt to rationalise human diversity in terms of migration and adaption before becoming an instrument of scientific racism, eugenics, and industrialised genocide. That has become the unfortunate legacy of the Anthropological Museum: the mute testimony of display cabinets full of skulls “ranged out like blue jugs in a cabin of Connacht” according to John Millington Synge (1958, 147-8). We say “unfortunate” because Daniel J. Cunningham and Alfred Cort Haddon – the main actors in the consortium that established the Anthropological Laboratory, Museum, and

Ethnographic Survey – were avowed anti-racists, even if they disagreed on the issue of imperialism in an Irish context.

This project can turn the study of race and racism in an historical context into a platform to confront racism in a contemporary context, an objective that is consistent with TCD's efforts to decolonise its curriculum and its campus.

### **Some Conclusions**

This project, as we see it, is about making a positive contribution to your efforts to show leadership in decolonising public spaces and combatting racism in contemporary Ireland.

The prospect of the return and burial of the 24 crania in the Haddon & Dixon Collection has triggered a creative response in our communities that has the potential to transform this into a multi-dimensional act of public engagement in a cause that truly matters.

To end, we thank you for the opportunity to develop these ideas and we look to discussing them with you.





# Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath Trinity College Dublin

Ollscoil Átha Cliath | The University of Dublin

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2022

Dear Ciaran,

The Anatomy Museum steering group met to consider your request for a copy of the osteoarchaeological report on the crania found on Inishbofin. We have been advised by the College Solicitor that as the author has copyright on the images and content, we do not have the authority to provide these to you. However, we have obtained the author's permission to provide you with the abstract, introduction, limited methods, an exemplar from the catalogue, discussion, and conclusion. These are for reference purposes only and should not, nor should any extract, be shared, reproduced, or distributed in any form to anyone but yourself without the permission of the author.

We have also received a report on the C14 carbon dating performed by the <sup>14</sup>CHRONO Centre Queens University Belfast, which is an NMI accredited lab. The procedure has dated the specimen to between AD 1509 and 1660 with a median probability of 1563. Your note of 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022 refers to other specimens associated with Kerry (St Finian's) and the Aran Islands. As you stated in your proposal to Provost Prendergast in February of 2021, "*Haddon did not record the removal of the skulls from the Aran Islands and St Finian's, more commonly known as Keel Church, the Glen. He did record that Haddon and Dixon carried out a survey of archaeological sites in the Aran Islands between July 30 and August 7, 1890. He also recorded that they surveyed fishing grounds around Skellig Island – off the shore of the Glen – on August 18 and Haddon's final entry in his journal is that they had a lovely quiet day on August 19.*"

Despite Haddon's detailed records, we have no evidence indicating the manner in which the crania from Kerry and Aran Islands were retrieved so cannot comment further on that. Due to age, contemporary interpretation of the 1832 Anatomy Act (soon to be replaced by The Human Tissue Act) places the crania under the authority of the National Museum of Ireland (NMI), rather than the Inspector of Anatomy. In that context, decisions related to disposition, further research, transfer, burial, or display rest with NMI in conjunction with other statutory bodies such as National Monuments Service, the latter being responsible for issues related to historical burial grounds. For reference I have attached [a link to the Human Remains Policy of NMI](#) which includes their approach to de-accession of human remains. As per the NMI policy "applications for research on remains from known individuals will be assessed to ensure that the rights of related people or descendants are not infringed."

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## Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath Trinity College Dublin

Ollscoil Átha Cliath | The University of Dublin

The Inishbofin crania were initially found above ground, in the nave of a ruined church. They had been exposed to the elements for many years and were quite deteriorated by 1889. The research we commissioned and funded includes a review of archival material, an independent osteoarchaeological report, comparison with historical records, liaison with NMI, and C14 dating. The resulting findings do not indicate any genealogical link to living individuals or related peoples, hence the crania are from unknown individuals. Indeed, we cannot even assume they are of Irish origin.

If the crania had remained in situ they would likely have disintegrated by now. Deterioration has been much reduced by secure housing and protective wrapping, along with ongoing improvements in our storage conditions. The crania are not on public display, handling is minimal and only undertaken by qualified technical and curatorial personnel. The infrastructure of the School of Medicine, including the Old Anatomy Museum is regularly reviewed by the Inspector of Anatomy to ensure appropriate governance, security, and conditions. The reports of these inspections are publicly available on [the Irish Medical Council's website](#).

It has been decided not to undertake further DNA testing at this time. This decision was taken under the guidance of NMI having regard to the fragility of the crania, to avoid further destructive sampling but also because of the absence of a specific reference population and the likelihood of a low yield even using modern micro-sampling techniques. We will keep this under review.

Based on the information that we have gathered and in accordance with NMI policies on human remains, Anatomy Act legislation, and the strict controls in place by the Medical Council for the care and disposition of Anatomical remains, the school is not in a position to support a request for deaccession of the crania and transfer to the possession of private individuals or historical interest groups.

**An tOllamh Michael Gill MD FTCD MRCPsych**

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**Dr. Alex McKee**

*Riarthóir na Scoile*

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Thank you for your interest in this collection. I hope the expertise acquired by the school in relation to the matter reassures you and your associates that our investigations have been thorough and independently conducted. We will revert to NMI for further guidance and update you if there is any change. I understand you are meeting with the Provost in the near future. I will forward a copy of this letter to her office.

Best Wishes,



Prof Martina Hennessy – Chair Old Anatomy Steering Committee.



Prof Michael Gill – Head of School of Medicine. Old Anatomy Steering Committee Member.



Siobhan Ward – Chief Technical Officer. Old Anatomy Museum. Old Anatomy Steering Committee Member



Curator – Old Anatomy Museum. Old Anatomy Steering Committee



Ciarán Walsh &lt;curator.ie@gmail.com&gt;

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**RE: [EXTERNAL]Inspector of Anatomy - Guidelines on the retention and display of human remains**

1 message

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**Education Training** <educationandtraining@mcirl.ie>  
To: "curator.ie@gmail.com" <curator.ie@gmail.com>

15 March 2021 at 10:50

Dear Dr Walsh

Thank you for your email. Unfortunately we are unable to assist you with your query.

The Medical Council is the licensing authority for the practise of Anatomy in the State, in accordance with the Anatomy Act 1832. The role of the Inspector of Anatomy includes:

- a. Advising the Council on the granting of licences to practice Anatomy in the State
- b. Inspecting places in the State where Anatomy is carried on
- c. Making returns to Council under and in accordance with the Anatomy Act 1832
- d. Advising the Council on the information sought by or to be provided to the Minister regarding the Council's functions under the Anatomy Act 1832
- e. Advising the Council on the teaching of Anatomy by any bodies approved under Section 88 (2) (a) (i) (II) and/or Section 89 (3) (a) (ii) of the Act.

Following consideration of your query, it would appear that this request does not fall within the remit of Anatomical Examination or the role of the Inspector of Anatomy and so we are unable to provide legal advice in relation to this.

Regards

Education and Training

Medical Council

**From:** Ciarán Walsh <curator.ie@gmail.com>**Sent:** Tuesday 12 January 2021 10:25**To:** [info@mcirl.ie](mailto:info@mcirl.ie)**Subject:** [EXTERNAL]Inspector of Anatomy - Guidelines on the retention and display of human remains

Hi Medical Council,

I have a query for the Anatomy Inspector relating to the retention and display of historical collections of human remains: specifically anthropological specimens that were stolen from burial grounds in the west of Ireland in 1890, the theft of which is a matter of public record.

These remains are currently held as an anthropological component of a larger collection of historical medical artifacts / remains.

As I understand it, the current deadlines – in the absence of legislation – specify that archaeological remains over 100 years old may be retained and displayed.

My query is this, does this cover human remains that were stolen from community burial grounds for use in a study of the origins of the Irish race?

Regards

Dr Ciarán Walsh

[www.curator.ie](http://www.curator.ie)



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