



Institute of
Archaeologists of
Ireland

Code of Conduct for the Treatment of Human Remains

**in the context of an
archaeological excavation**

First edition – May 2006

The Code of Professional Conduct has been adopted by the Board of the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland as the standard by which all members should achieve and adhere to. The Code was ratified by the membership at the membership at the Annual General Meeting in Spring 2006.

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NB. This code is to be used in conjunction with the previously published ‘*The Treatment of Human Remains: Technical Paper for Archaeologists*’ (IAPA 1999 and subsequent updates), which deals with the practicalities of excavating human remains. The ethics of excavating human remains is not discussed in the Codes of Conduct as it is assumed that these issues will have been dealt with before the excavation stage is reached and that excavation only occurs where there is no other option. The codes of conduct deal only with the on-site and post-excavation of human remains and it must be emphasised that human remains must be treated with the utmost respect at all times.

1. Objectives

1.1 The objectives of the Archaeological Treatment of Human Remains, are;

- (a) to archaeologically investigate, document and interpret the Human Remains at a given site,
- (b) to ascertain the character, condition and extent of any Human Remains proposed for excavation,

- (c) to establish a record and archive of the Human Remains excavated,
- (d) to ensure that the Human Remains from an excavated site are properly recovered, analysed, curated and appropriately available for deposition at a designated or agreed repository.
- (e) to report and publish the results.

1.2 The Code described here should be read in conjunction with the IAI Code of Conduct for Archaeological Excavation.

2. Scope of Works

2.1 The archaeological works to be carried out in relation to the Archaeological Treatment of Human Remains are as follows;

- (a) Project Planning
- (b) Archaeological recovery and on-site care of Human Remains
- (c) Curation and processing of Human Remains
- (d) Analysis of Human Remains
- (e) Creation of Archive

3. Project Planning

3.1 The Archaeological Treatment of Human Remains for a given archaeological commission or project requires careful and considered project planning. This planning shall involve the following:

- (a) Project Familiarisation
- (b) Project Design
- (c) Liaison Framework
- (d) Project Preparation

3.1 As part of the **Project Familiarisation** for a given archaeological commission or project, consideration should be given to the potential for Human Remains to be discovered. Where Human Remains have already been identified, particular attention should be given to the nature and extent of burials anticipated, and the soil conditions that would affect on-site preservation qualities. The advice of an Osteoarchaeologist will be required as part of any Project Familiarisation.

3.2 Provisions for the care, storage, and analysis of Human Remains shall be described as part of the **Project Design** for a given archaeological commission or project where these are

anticipated. Particular attention should be given to any specific provisions anticipated.

3.3 A **Liaison Framework** shall be established as part of a given archaeological commission or project and shall define the overall reporting and consultation procedures for a given commission or project. When an Osteoarchaeologist has been appointed as part of the Project Team, their role shall be defined within the Liaison Framework. This document should outline the reporting structures and procedures between each party, in the event of;

- (a) any storage or other resource requirements not previously identified;
- (b) archaeological material being put at risk;
- (c) any other.

3.3 Where necessary, Discovery Reports (see Section 6.2) should be submitted as part of this Framework.

3.4 In order to ensure the secure and efficient processing of Human Remains during a large-scale archaeological commission or project, such as an Archaeological Excavation, it is essential that **Project Preparations** are

made for all on-site requirements, including;

- (a) qualified and experienced personnel appropriately skilled or trained in the excavation of human remains;
- (b) recording equipment;
- (c) temporary storage facilities for the remains, for their initial care and curation;
- (d) off-site facilities should be considered for large-scale excavations with longer term storage needs;
- (e) sufficient supplies of materials recommended by the appointed Osteoarchaeologist for the care and storage of Human Remains are available during the course of the project.

4. Archaeological Recovery and On-Site Care of Human Remains

4.1 The Archaeological Excavation shall be carried-out in accordance with the Project Design, and in particular the agreed Methodology. Any changes to the agreed Methodology shall be communicated under the Liaison Framework.

4.2 Human Remains are most vulnerable to damage at the point of recovery. To reduce the risk of damage during excavation the following fieldwork procedures shall be applied;

- (a) access to the Area of Operation should be kept to a minimum in order to reduce the impact of compression forces;
- (b) the Area of Operation, or part thereof, be appropriately protected from the weather - consideration should be given to the use of temporary shelters from weather conditions;
- (c) measures should be taken to protect the Area of Operation where it is to be left unattended for any length of time.

4.3 The technical treatment, recording and recovery of human remains shall be carried-out in accordance with the *Treatment of Human Remains: Technical Paper for Archaeologists* (1999, and subsequent updates), which has been adopted by the Institute, or any future guidelines for the treatment of archaeological objects from time to time adopted by the Institute.

- 4.4 Registration;
- (a) maintain a register of human remains, documenting details of completeness and preservation;
 - (b) a Discovery Report should be compiled and submitted as part of the Liaison Framework for human remains of special interest or in particular need of conservation/stabilisation (see Section 6.2).
- 4.5 The on-site care and storage of human remains shall be carried-out in accordance with the *Treatment of Human Remains: Technical Paper for Archaeologists* (1999, and subsequent updates), which has been adopted by the Institute, or any future guidelines for the treatment of archaeological objects from time to time adopted by the Institute. In particular;
- (a) secure storage facilities should be available on-site for the immediate storage and processing of Human Remains;
 - (b) off-site storage facilities should be made available where there is any doubt as to the security of the on-site facilities.
- 5. Post-Excavation Analysis**
- 5.1 The appointed Osteoarchaeologist should supply a Human Remains Analysis Assessment, to include the following;
- (a) required level of analysis;
 - (b) recommended additional levels of analysis;
 - (c) proposed time schedule;
 - (d) costs
- 5.2 The Human Remains Analysis Assessment should inform the overall Post-Excavation Design for the project.
- 5.3 The detailed Human Remains Analysis should be await the completion of the on-site phase of works. On completion of the Human Remains Analysis, the Osteoarchaeologist shall provide a Human Remains Analysis Report, describing the results of the analysis. Recommendations may also be made as to the long-term storage requirements of the Human Remains.
- 6. Reporting**
- 6.1 Unless already done so, the appropriate authorities should be notified of the discovery of human remains.

Otherwise, the commission or project may involve some or all of the following types of reporting;

- (a) Discovery Reports
- (b) Human Remains Analysis Assessment
- (c) Human Remains Analysis Report

6.2 **Discovery Reports** are appropriate where finds or features of particular significance are discovered. For example, a rare form of human burial, or a significant burial in urgent need of conservation/stabilisation. Include photographs of the initial discovery and the subsequent recovery. The context of the find should be described.

6.3 In the case of large-scale projects, and immediately following the completion of on-site works, a **Human Remains Analysis Assessment** shall be supplied by the Osteoarchaeologist. The Human Remains Analysis Assessment should inform the Post-Excavation Statement that will be included in any Preliminary Report for the overall commission or project. The Post-Excavation Statement shall also outline the progress of the processing of the Human Remains.

6.4 A **Human Remains Analysis Report** shall be provided by the commissioned Osteoarchaeologist on completion of the work. This may form an appendix to the overall Excavation Report, or a supplementary report.

7. Creation of Archive

7.1 The Human Remains Archive should contain all the data gathered during the course of the fieldwork and must be ordered, indexed and internally consistent. It must contain the following;

- (a) Burial Register;
- (b) illustrations and photographs;
- (c) Discovery Reports;
- (d) Human Remains Analysis Assessment;
- (e) Human Remains Analysis Report;
- (f) associated Specialist Analysis Report(s).

8. Long-Term Storage Facilities

8.1 As soon as is practically possible, the Human Remains retrieved during an Archaeological Excavation should be transferred to long-term storage facilities, pending their transfer to a designated or agreed repository. These storage facilities should be;

(a) secure and dedicated;

(b) climate controlled;

(c) regularly monitored.

8.2 If, for any reason, conditions are found to be unsuitable an alternative store should be sought.