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WALLIS, Robert J and BLAIN, Jenny

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## **Paper for: Public Archaeology**

### **From Respect to Reburial: Negotiating pagan interest in prehistoric human remains in Britain, through the Avebury Consultation**

Robert J. Wallis, Richmond University: [Robert.Wallis@richmond.ac.uk](mailto:Robert.Wallis@richmond.ac.uk)

Jenny Blain, Sheffield Hallam University: [j.blain@shu.ac.uk](mailto:j.blain@shu.ac.uk)

#### **Abstract:**

The recent Avebury Consultation on reburial has drawn considerable public and professional attention to the issue of pagan calls for respect towards the care of human remains. Our work has pointed to the importance of archaeologists and others engaging seriously and respectfully with pagans as significant stakeholders in our heritage. The Avebury Reburial Consultation suggests this dialogue is increasing in strength, but we identify problems in the process. We focus here on approaches to the prehistoric dead and worldviews enabling communication from which calls or 'claims' for the reburial of prehistoric pagan human remains, versus their retention for scientific study, are articulated; frameworks for assessing and adjudicating such 'claims'; and implications for the interest groups concerned. We argue that room must be made for philosophical debate and the emotional and spiritual views of pagans, in order to improve dialogue, develop common ground, and enable participatory decision-making and situational pragmatism.

#### **Keywords:**

Pagans, Avebury, Reburial, Respect, Consultation, Situational Pragmatism

#### **Joint Curriculum Vitae:**

Dr Robert J. Wallis is Associate Professor of Visual Culture and Director of the MA in Art History at Richmond University, London, and a Visiting Research Fellow in Archaeology at the University of Southampton. His research interests consider indigenous and prehistoric art in shamanistic/animic communities, and the representation of the past in the present by contemporary pagans and neo-shamans. He has authored *Shamans / neo-Shamans: Ecstasy, Alternative Archaeologies and Contemporary Pagans* (Routledge 2003), co-authored the *Historical Dictionary of Shamanism* (Scarecrow Press 2007) and co-edited *A Permeability of Boundaries: New Approaches to the Archaeology of Art, Religion and Folklore* (Oxford BAR 2001) and, most recently, *Antiquaries and Archaists: The Past in the Past, the Past in the Present* (Spire Press 2009). Dr Jenny Blain is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Sheffield Hallam University where she leads the MRes in Social Sciences. Her research interests include culture and identities; heritage policy and 'sacred site' user practices; shamanism and paganisms; and constructions of history, archaeology and 'the past in the present'. She has authored *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic: Ecstasy and Neo-shamanism in North European Paganism* (Routledge 2002), co-authored *Think Twice! Sociology looks at Current Issues* (Simon and Schuster/Prentice Hall 2005, 1998), and co-edited *Researching Paganisms* (Altamira 2004). Wallis and Blain have co-directed the Sacred Sites Project since 2000 and collaborated on numerous publications including *Sacred Sites, Contested Rites/Rights: Pagan Engagements with Archaeological Monuments* (Sussex Academic Press 2007).

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## Introduction

Pagans take the past, and the past in the present, seriously. Our *Sacred Sites, Contested Rites/Rights: Contemporary Pagan Engagements with the Past* project is interested in how pagans approach archaeological monuments and associated archaeology in the discursive formation of individual and group identities, and the implications of this for such interest groups as archaeologists, anthropologists and heritage managers. We have argued from the outset of the project, a decade ago, that pagan engagements with the past have clear relevance for these interest groups and that heritage managers in particular should engage proactively with pagans and take their perspectives seriously. This relevance is evidenced in that a number of key archaeological sites are now described in heritage literature and signage as ‘sacred sites’; that field archaeologists in the recent excavations as part of the large-scale Stonehenge Riverside Project had to engage with Druids and other pagans with more than a passing interest in their work; and that Druid ritual is now a part of tradition at Avebury, with tourists coming to expect to see ceremonies, postcards capitalizing on this phenomenon, and ritual occasions advertised in the Red Lion pub. The material culture of ritual is also of interest, as tea lights, incense sticks, foliage and other ‘ritual offerings’, often viewed as ‘ritual litter’, must be cleared up by someone – and may cause site damage, such as the scorch marks from thoughtlessly placed candles in West Kennet long barrow<sup>1</sup>; these items are also of interest as ‘evidence’ in their own right of changing and developing spiritual practices in today’s world. We have addressed various instances and implications of such in detail elsewhere (e.g. Blain & Wallis, 2004, 2006; 2008a; Wallis & Blain, 2009; Wallis, 2000, 2002; 2003; Letcher, Blain and Wallis, 2009; for an overview of our project and the theoretical dimensions of analysis see Blain & Wallis 2009, and for details of sites in particular our jointly-authored book, Blain & Wallis 2007). In this paper we present current findings on a topic that we have come to focus on increasingly – pagan calls for respect for and the reburial of prehistoric human remains in Britain. Recently, perhaps more significantly than in any other instance of pagan engagements with the past, this issue has garnered serious attention from archaeologists because calls for reburial have arrived at an important juncture.

This paper will outline pagan calls for respect and reburial, then focus on the Avebury Consultation instigated by the National Trust and English Heritage after a pagan request in 2006 for the reburial of certain high-profile remains held at the Alexander Keiller Museum in Avebury. In this consultation process, transparency, consultation and respect have been claimed and indeed may have been evident, yet analysis of the discourse and framing of this consultation indicates that the default position was one of scientific value and of the axiomatic authority of archaeologists; there was little room for collaboration or strategy for dealing with the emotional and spiritual views of pagans or facilitating philosophical debate. We outline the contrasting processes in development in other museum contexts, discuss ontological and epistemological groundings of opposed discourse and implications for practice, and conclude with suggestions for improved dialogue, participatory decision-making and situational pragmatism.

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of such material culture elsewhere, see: Finn, 1997.

### **‘My heart cries’: calls for respect**

Paganisms are diverse, but in general pagans perceive a world which is ‘sacred’, or for those that eschew the dualism of sacred/secular, a world in which humans are deeply connected to ‘nature’ rather than separate from it. Many Pagans focus their engagements with the sacred in natural settings such as woods, moors and parks, and this extends to archaeological sites in the landscape, from the well-known such as Stonehenge and Avebury stone circles and related sites, in Wiltshire, to the Thornborough henges in Yorkshire and Nine Ladies stone circle on Stanton Moor in the Peak District of Derbyshire, and the very many small circles or other ritual sites that dot the countryside across Britain. In pagan discourse, ‘nature’ is often ‘sacred’, and this is manifest in a wide variety of spirits, gods, goddesses, ancestors and non-human-persons which, it is perceived, can be connected with in these settings. Increasingly, pagans are identifying as polytheists and animists, approaching the world relationally, and engaging in negotiation with certain non-human persons. Ritual and celebration offers a process of re-enchantment, where late modern Western society is seen to have objectified, scientised and disenchanting the world. Drawing on the historic and archaeological past, pagans find evidence for past pagan (that is, polytheist or animist) practices and beliefs, and these connect them ‘spiritually’ to ‘ancestors’<sup>2</sup>. Both site welfare and ancestor welfare, for some pagans, become important issues. Perceived connections to the land and ancestors instil in these pagans a responsibility to speak and act for the pagan ancestors of Britain whose material remains lie in the landscape, are kept in museum and university archives, or are on display to the public in museums. In this sense, pagan interests in sites and ancestors resonate with Rowlands and Butler’s general contention that ‘monuments, museums and memorials are inseparable from debates about nostalgia and authenticity, and growing desires for a sense of origins’ (Rowlands & Butler, 2007: 2).

A passionate interest in human origins, prehistory and pagan ‘ancestors’ unites many pagans and archaeologists. For archaeologists, much knowledge comes from the scientific analysis of excavated human remains; archaeology would not be archaeology without this analysis and the notion of reburial signals the loss and destruction of heritage (e.g. Payne, 2007: 46). The excavation of human remains is, for many archaeologists, in itself a respectful process: one only has to be on site when human remains are discovered to get a sense of the emotions raised by the find, to see the careful attention given to the remains. As Sayer points out, ‘[t]he need for respect has been enshrined in the law since 1857 and reinforced with the publication of the Guidance for best practice. Theoretically, excavation is a “meticulous” process, and could be seen as intrinsically respectful’ (Sayer, 2009: 201-2; also Williams & Williams, 2007: 47-63; Leahy, 2009: 10).<sup>3</sup>

For many pagans, however, the excavation process is problematic. We have discussed at length (e.g. Wallis & Blain, 2004, 2007) how the Druid Paul Davies, writing in the late 1990s with possibly the earliest published expression of pagan interest in this area, viewed excavation and storage – as a desecration of ‘places of rest’ and museum

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<sup>2</sup> How ‘ancestors’ are constituted is discursive. Only for a very few pagans are ancestors mobilised as part of racist arguments, despite critics focussing on this aspect when discussing pagan interests in reburial (e.g. Hole, 2008; Moshenska, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> The position on the reburial of Christian human remains is set out in Mays, 2005.

exhibition as pandering to voyeuristic taste. He expressed this dramatically and emotively, as a direct blow to Druid sensibility:

When archaeologists desecrate a site through excavation and steal our ancestors and their guardians, they are killing me as well as our heritage. It is a theft. I am left wounded. My identity as a Druid is stolen and damaged beyond repair. My heart cries. We should assert our authority as the physical guardians of esoteric lore. We should reclaim our past (Davies, 1997: 12-13).

Other pagans have voiced related concerns. In 2004 the Druid priestess Emma Restall Orr established 'Honouring the Ancient Dead', an organization which is not exclusively pagan in membership but aims to 'ensure respect for ancient pagan remains' through 'clear interactions between archaeologists, historians, landowners, site caretakers, museums and collectors...and the pagan community' (personal communication<sup>4</sup>). The aims of HAD to promote dialogue and respect resulted in collaboration with the Manchester Museum, University of Manchester and the Museums Association in a conference entitled 'Respect for Ancient British Human Remains: Philosophy and Practice' in November 2006, bringing archaeological and museum professionals and pagans further into dialogue (e.g. Bienkowski, 2006; Restall Orr & Bienkowski, 2006; Restall Orr, 2006; Wallis & Blain, 2006). A further conference organized by HAD, entitled 'The Care of Ancient Human Remains' was held at the New Walk Museum, Leicester, in October 2009<sup>5</sup>. Restall Orr states, more specifically:

The purpose of this interaction is clear and positive communication that will inspire a broader and deeper understanding of the sanctity of all artefacts (notably those connected with ritual, sacrifice, burial and human remains) sourced from the Pagan eras of the British Isles. HAD will be seeking assurances that there will be communication and consultation on matters relating to such artefacts and remains (Restall Orr, personal communication).

There is, then, a clear expression among some pagans – Druids and others<sup>6</sup> – that prehistoric human remains should be respected. While archaeologists might respond that the excavation, analysis and storage of such remains are conducted in ways that are intrinsically respectful, it is the nature of 'respect' that these pagans may contest. For Davies, for instance, excavation is disrespectful in the first instance, akin to grave-robbing. For Restall Orr the situation is more complex: the connection made between human remains and landscape by those interring the dead is one that should not be broken and efforts should be made to repair the disconnection. This leads to our discussion of the reburial issue.

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<sup>4</sup> See also the HAD website: <http://www.honour.org.uk>

<sup>5</sup> The papers are available online at: <http://www.honour.org.uk/node/300>.

<sup>6</sup> While Druids tend to be cited as key voices, a wide variety of pagans are interested in the treatment of ancient pagan human remains and it is important to recognise this diversity of interest rather than focus on the loudest voices. See, for example, our discussion of protest at Priory Park, Southend-on-Sea, where an Anglo-Saxon princely burial has been threatened by road development (Blain & Wallis, 2007).

### **‘Return to the earth’: calls for reburial**

In addition to pagan voices asking for prehistoric British human remains to be treated with respect, there have been certain calls, principally from Druids, for the reburial of these remains. We have (e.g. Blain & Wallis, 2007) described calls from the earlier ‘consultations’ over Stonehenge Management Plans: in 2000, Philip Shallcrass, Chief of the British Druid Order, informed a National Trust representative that reburial ‘is a live issue amongst the pagan community and...likely to become increasingly so’ (Shallcrass, personal communication). In a follow-up letter to the National Trust and English Heritage in 2001, he asked:

whether it would be possible to re-bury the ancestral remains after a suitable period of study, preferably within the Stonehenge area. The latter seems important since our ancestors clearly didn’t select their burial places at random and I felt they should be returned to the earth as close to the original grave sites as possible’ (Shallcrass, personal communication)

In 2004, the *Western Daily Press* (Bristol) reported that ‘Druid leaders’ had ‘called for the creation of a sacred site at Stonehenge for the re-burial of human remains’ (unearthed during the implementation of the Stonehenge Management Plan). Specifically, ‘[t]hey want a parcel of land near the site to be set aside as a ceremonial shrine for the Pagan and Druid communities’<sup>7</sup>. The government scrapped the Management Plan in late 2007 (see comments including by ourselves in *British Archaeology* 99 [Blain & Wallis, 2008b]), but pagan interests in reburial at Stonehenge were reinvigorated during excavations by the Stonehenge Riverside Project of prehistoric cremations from Aubrey Hole 7 in the Summer of 2008. The activist tactics of these pagans have distanced archaeologists (e.g. Pitts, 2010) and there is as yet no consultation process; possibly the authorities were waiting for the outcome of the ‘test case’ Avebury consultation, discussed in detail below<sup>8</sup>.

Pagan calls for reburial have emerged elsewhere, too. In 2006, Chris Warwick, a retired engineer from Swansea, and a Druid, drew attention to the site of Paviland Cove on the Gower Peninsula of Wales where the ‘Red Lady’ was interred. These remains were excavated in the first half of the nineteenth century by the Reverend William Buckland and were held at the University of Oxford but are currently on loan to the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff for the exhibition ‘Origins: In Search of Early Wales. Buckland assumed the red colouring indicated a female, probably Roman burial but the remains are now known to be those of a young man, dated to 26,000 years ago. Warwick stated: ‘We have formed a little group called Dead to

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7 “Druid community calls for a new shrine at Stonehenge.” *Western Daily Press*, 2 March 2004. Available online:

<http://www.stonepages.com/news/archives/000610.html>.

<sup>8</sup> The pagan protest at the time of the excavation can be viewed on *YouTube* at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfZO0rAfEZg&feature=related>. Information on the call for reburial can be gleaned from the interview in January 2009 with the campaigner King Arthur Pendragon on *YouTube* at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLPxNRkRsbg>.

Rights, to work for the return of remains to the sites they were buried in and hopefully have them reburied there with due ceremony'<sup>9</sup>.

Warwick's claims gained little attention beyond a brief airing in the national press, but pagans have thought carefully about how reburial might operate. HAD makes a number of proposals intended to be useful for personnel dealing with human remains in museums, including 'guidance' on handling and display and a 'rite of committal of human remains'. Moshenska points out that 'subjecting human remains to contemporary Pagan rituals likely to be alien to their own beliefs is insensitive, disrespectful and unethical' (Moshenska 2009: 819); but scientific investigation must be seen not as more objective but as equally problematic. In any case, the HAD ritual takes care to specify how much is 'not known' of either the persons committed or their theology and ritual<sup>10</sup>. It is not assumed that pagans know 'appropriate ritual' any better than anyone else:

[T]here is no sense of reaching for some authentic ancient rite, or even some ritual that is close to what would have been done in the past. The connection to the dead, to the ancestors, is what is important. Nor is this some special relationship with the ancient dead that Pagans claim: it is simply a religious obligation, integral to Pagan reverence for nature, for spirit, for life (past, present, future) (Restall Orr, personal communication).

To date, the reburial issue has entered the heritage agenda not only in England and Wales, but also the Irish Republic. Calls for reburial here are part of wider protest over the construction of the twice-tolled M3 motorway through the archaeologically sensitive Gabhra (Skryne) Valley in County Meath, which includes the Hill of Tara (see Wallis, 2009). At sites near Tara, there were claims that archaeological practice was ethically compromised, with, allegedly, pre-dawn excavations of a burial ground so as to avoid confrontation with protesters. As a result, the claim goes, human remains were poorly recorded and even lost, and if such is the case, the issue of respectful treatment of remains is begging. In their press release, the *Save Tara* campaign states:

Tara Campaigners worldwide are supporting a petition to the Irish Government calling on them to re-inter the remains of individuals whose graves have been desecrated by the ongoing construction of the M3. Campaigners demand that the ancient remains be reburied in a dignified manner and as closely as possible to the ceremonial layout of the original graveyards. .<sup>11</sup>

Following discussion of the Tara issue in a controversial plenary at the Sixth World Archaeological Congress in Dublin in 2008, the World Archaeological Congress stated, perhaps controversially for such a prominent association of professional archaeologists (though with a significant indigenous membership), in a press release:

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<sup>9</sup> See the BBC news website:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/south\\_west/5372598.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/south_west/5372598.stm).

<sup>10</sup> See: <http://www.honour.org.uk/node/32>.

<sup>11</sup> See: [http://www.savetara.com/statements/072108\\_bodies.html](http://www.savetara.com/statements/072108_bodies.html). For further information, see the websites of the *Save Tara* campaign <http://www.savetara.com> and *Sacred Ireland* <http://www.sacredireland.org/>.

Recognising that the reburial of ancient remains in Ireland is subject to the provisions of the National Monuments Act and the agreement of the National Museum of Ireland, the World Archaeological Congress also draws attention to the Vermillion Accord on human remains and suggests that any human remains excavated from the cultural landscape of Tara should be re-interred with due respect as close as possible to their original locations, as this is where these people would have wished to be buried<sup>12</sup>.

The Sacred Sites project will be watching the situation at Tara with interest, cognizant of the implications for reburial elsewhere in the Ireland, Britain and Europe.

### **The Avebury Consultation**

Let us return to southern England, to the discourses and practices surrounding the Avebury Consultation. In 2008-9, the British reburial issue reached an important juncture at Avebury, with the aforementioned Druid Paul Davies taking his campaign forward. As ‘Reburial Officer’ of the Council of British Druid Orders (CoBDO), Davies submitted a letter to the National Trust and English Heritage (received 24 June 2006), calling for the reburial of certain prehistoric human remains from the Avebury region held by the Alexander Keiller Museum, in particular the child known as ‘Charlie’ (excavated by Harold Grey in the early twentieth century from the southern ditch of Avebury henge), which has been on and off display in the museum for some years. Davies collected signatures from visitors at Avebury calling for reburial and organised a small protest at the Alexander Keiller museum in January 2007<sup>13</sup>, which caught the attention of the local press (Kerton, 2007). A document entitled ‘Guidance and Request for the Reburial of Druid Ancestral Remains at Avebury’ authored by CoBDO was submitted to heritage organizations and the CoBDO West website has an online (undated) document entitled ‘Reburial Officer Statement’ outlining the Order’s standpoint on reburial<sup>14</sup>.

On receipt of the letter, the National Trust and English Heritage did not dismiss the claims outright. Dr David Thackray, Head of Archaeology for the National Trust and Dr Sebastian Payne, Chief Scientist of English Heritage were charged to respond and they held seven meetings with CoBDO in 2007 and 2008. Thackray and Payne published a draft report outlining the consultation process, stating their response to the claims and asking for public comment before any decision is made: ‘[A]s there were other interested parties, the reports produced would be put out for consultation in order to allow others to comment and put forward further evidence before any recommendations were made (Thackray & Payne, 2008)’. Furthermore,

As this request raises wider and sensitive issues, and the way in which it is resolved will set precedents, as Avebury is a World Heritage Site, and as the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) has recently issued Guidance

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<sup>12</sup> See the WAC website:

<http://www.worldarchaeologicalcongress.org/component/content/article/63-press-releases/333-wac-6-media-releases>.

<sup>13</sup> See: [http://www.english-](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/upload/pdf/Appendix_3_CoBDO_Petition.pdf?1270285434)

[heritage.org.uk/upload/pdf/Appendix\\_3\\_CoBDO\\_Petition.pdf?1270285434](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/upload/pdf/Appendix_3_CoBDO_Petition.pdf?1270285434).

<sup>14</sup> See the CoBDO West website: [www.CoBDOWest.org/reburial1.html](http://www.CoBDOWest.org/reburial1.html).

for the Care of Human Remains in Museums which included recommendations for responding to requests for [sic.] return of human remains, EH and the NT decided to follow this guidance in responding to this request<sup>15</sup>.

The period for submissions ended 15 February 2009, having been extended from the end of January due to public interest. The final report and recommendation was expected 'early 2009' according to the National Trust website, then postponed until the Spring Equinox, and finally released in April 2010. The process of consultation raises important issues regarding the reburial of prehistoric human remains, particularly as the Avebury situation is being seen as a 'test case'.

Let us say at once that, of the options put forward, the report found for keeping the remains in the museum: an outcome which (to us) was pre-framed in the procedure of the consultation.

The formal guidance towards best practice on the curation of human remains emerged in the late 1990s when Historic Scotland produced guidelines for respectful treatment in 1997, and in England and Wales a working group was set up in 2002 to examine issues of human remains within museum collections and make recommendations for proposals 'which might form the basis of a consultative document'.<sup>16</sup> Pressures for these guidelines had arisen from indigenous communities elsewhere, but also from museum personnel and archaeologists themselves, and from Christian organisations within Britain (though specific to the status of Christian-era burials; see Mays, 2005). This led to the key DCMS (Department of Culture, Media and Sport) publications, *Report of the Working Group on Human Remains* (2003) and *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* (2005).

Aware of these DCMS documents, CoBDO decided to follow this guidance, focusing their attention on genealogy and claiming a genetic link between modern people and prehistoric people in the Avebury region, in an attempt to evidence their claims for reburial<sup>17</sup>.

The human remains of Charlie and the Kennet Avenue ancestors are everyone's family and belong to us all. Modern research on mtDNA from the University of Oxford clearly proves an unbroken genetic link between people today indigenous to Europe and our long dead...[M]embers of the Council, like all people indigenous to Europe, have a 'close genetic' claim for reburial as stated in the DCMS Guidance (ibid: 26). We all have a close and unbroken cultural and spiritual relationship with the human remains of our ancestors. It is time to remember who we are – the ancestors reborn. This genealogical claim therefore informs and underpins the main points of our request for reburial that are based upon ethics and belief<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Thackray and Payne, Letter of invitation to comment: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.19821>.

<sup>16</sup> From a 'Call for Contributions' from the 'Working Group on Human Remains', on the email list *Britarch*, 14 September 2001.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that their claims were for British and European connections in general and not for 'Druid' or pagan groups alone.

<sup>18</sup> See the CoBDO West website: <http://www.CoBDOWest.org/reburial.html>.

How ancestors are constituted is, of course, highly variable from one community to another, and a subject for analysis within anthropology, sociology and indeed archaeology; discursive practices of ‘ancestors’ both enable and constrain multiple ‘claims’, and within DCMS practices or guidelines how ‘close’ an ancestral link there needs to be is as yet untested. Perhaps in response to CoBDO’s attention to DCMS guidelines, Thackray and Payne also opted to follow this guidance and in their draft report stated that:

Human remains have a unique status within museum collections, and should always be treated with respect... These are sensitive issues with wide implications. To date, these new guidelines are untested and their scope goes beyond the individual case we will be considering at Avebury, with implications for museums across the country<sup>19</sup>.

Thackray added that CoBDO’s claim would indeed ‘be assessed under Department for Culture Media and Sport’s (DCMS) guidelines’<sup>20</sup>. Wording here seems to carefully choose ‘respect’ in response to pagan claims to the contrary, to indicate that respect is integral to the process of excavating and storing human remains, and the language makes it clear that the DCMS guidelines will be followed. The draft report goes on to counter the Druids’ claim in the following way: ‘we take the view that this is not a direct and close genealogical link in the sense meant in the DCMS Guidance’. Further, taking account of DCMS guidelines regarding claims for cultural continuity, Thackray and Payne state: ‘Mr Davies and CoBDO make no claim for continuity of belief, customs and language between them and the human remains’, and:

English Heritage and The National Trust recognise that CoBDO’s associations with the Avebury landscape, to them a sacred landscape and a place of special pilgrimage, and their feelings for their prehistoric ancestors, deserve respect and sympathetic consideration. However these sites, landscapes and human remains have cultural and spiritual significance to many others as well (Thackray & Payne, 2008).

Section 8 of the report states Thackray and Payne’s position on the importance of human remains in research, citing ‘the scientific, educational and historical value of the remains’, and they include comments to this effect from Dr Ros Cleal, Curator at the Alexander Keiller Museum, Dr Alasdair Whittle, Distinguished Research Professor at the University of Cardiff, and Dr Mike Parker-Pearson, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield (Thackray & Payne, 2008).

Responding to the draft report, the Museums Association commended:

EH and NT for the prompt and sensitive manner in which they have dealt with this claim. In accordance with the MA’s Code of Ethics they have developed a relationship with the British Council of Druid Orders (CoBDO) based on mutual respect and understanding. We hope that EH and NT will continue to nurture a

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<sup>19</sup> See BBC News, 22 February 2007: ‘Druids Request Re-burial of Bones’, available online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/wiltshire/6385675.stm>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

constructive relationship with the CoBDO regardless of the outcome of this case and involve them as part of any relevant future public consultation... We commend EH and NT's use of the DCMS guidance, which although more regularly used in overseas claims was written to apply to requests from UK and non-UK based groups and material. They have paid appropriate attention to their procedural responsibilities and gathered detailed evidence under the recommended criteria... EH and NT have followed a robust and comprehensive ethical decision-making process... [W]e are satisfied that this will set an appropriate precedent for other museums to follow... We hope that Avebury museum will use this opportunity to review the continued retention and display of the human remains in their care<sup>21</sup>.

Engaging in a consultation process, especially one which is transparent, is a positive development. The claim was countered in terms of the DCMS guidelines because CoBDO postulated a genetic link, a link which is no more significant than for any other interest group (and not a 'special relationship' as Hole [2008: 43] asserts). As CoBDO did not claim a continuing link of belief, customs or language, for which there is also provision in the DCMS guidelines, their claim was not addressed in this regard. So, although the report is sensitive to the Druids' emotional attachment it does not take this into account over any other individual's or group's emotional interest. There is room for emotional responses in the consultation process, with the responses at least being heard, but there is no methodology for using them as evidence in themselves or for moving this aspect to a level which involves negotiation<sup>22</sup>.

Essentially, the arguments presented by Thackray and Payne stem from a discourse of the scientific approach as axiomatic. This is reflected in the BABAO (British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology) submission to the consultation in which the Druids' belief that 'bones are people' is dismissed as a 'philosophically untenable position' (Schutkowski, 2009: 2) – without argument to this effect. Indeed, it would be interesting to see how a religious argument from CoBDO, rather than a genetic one, would stand up, given that Druidic religious claims are as authentic and valid as those of any other religion. In this regard, Davies' argument is also based on Druid traditions regarding initiatory connections to landscape and ancestors, as well as the idea that 'putting things back is as important as taking things away' (Davies, personal communication). Apparently feeling confident after the consultation process and while waiting for the final decision on the Avebury remains to be made, Davies expanded his remit and made a formal request for the 'reburial of 50 ancestors taken from West Kennet Long Barrow to the Duckworth Laboratory [the Leverhulme Centre for Human Evolutionary Studies] at the University of Cambridge', 'nine ancestors from Stonehenge', as well as the 'Wookey Witch', the remains of an allegedly 1,000 year-old Anglo-Saxon witch found in the Wookey Hole Caves and now displayed at Wells and Mendip Museum (Davies, personal communication).

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<sup>21</sup> See: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/17777>.

<sup>22</sup> This is a point also made by HAD in their press release on the Avebury Consultation. See the HAD website: <http://www.honour.org.uk/node/283>; also Restall Orr, 2009: 1-2.

### Negotiating multiple voices

Certain interest groups might question how seriously these claims should be taken at all, summed up by the comment that ‘so much time should never have been spent pandering to these people in the first place’.<sup>23</sup> The wider picture of public opinion is diverse: a survey by Cambridgeshire Archaeology reported that 70% of respondents believe that skeletons should be reburied (Booth, 2009: 2-3); the British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology, in contrast, suggests that ‘opinion polls undertaken with museum visitors... demonstrate huge public interest in and support for the display of human remains’ (Schutkowski, 2009: 2). Dr Josh Pollard, Reader in Archaeology at the University of Bristol stated that he thought reburial of the Avebury remains:

a very, very bad idea and it’s entirely unnecessary, entirely unwarranted... I think it could set a very dangerous precedent, one in which we would find a situation where all prehistoric human remains held in museums, held in other collections across the United Kingdom, have to be reburied’.<sup>24</sup>

A discussion about CoBDO’s reburial claim was started on the World Archaeological Congress email list after one contributor drew attention to an article in the Daily Mail describing ‘militant druids’.<sup>25</sup> Another contributor described the Druids as ‘fruitloops’ and voices of agreement from others questioned the authenticity of modern Druidry and its links to the prehistoric past. While most participants used these derogatory terms, others found them inappropriate, with some noting that ‘neo-Druids’ and ‘archaeologists’ had the same antiquity of 200-300 years and indeed shared some history. Others still, pointed out that archaeologists should be cautious when asserting their claims to the past, drawing analogies with the ways indigenous groups were treated by some archaeologists until quite recently. This debate had surfaced before, in relationship to contested sacred spaces and ‘heritage’, as for instance in an earlier letter to *British Archaeology*:

‘Pagan mysticism’ may have ‘no place in serious archaeology’ (Letters, September) but pagans (like every other interest group) certainly have a role to play in the management of the archaeological resource. As a community heritage officer for a local authority, I work on many heritage and archaeology-related projects. There are as many outlooks, prejudices and hidden agendas as there are groups, but all are passionate about their heritage and committed to working for the benefit of the archaeology. They all have something of value to bring to the table and all deserve the common courtesy of respecting their views – even if we do not agree with them (Olding, 2004).

Historically, indeed, reburial is not necessarily contrary to the interests of archaeologists. The case of the reburial of human remains from the Gokstad and Oseberg ship burials in Norway, in the first half of the twentieth century (Arwill-

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Palaeodave’, Wed 21 January 2009, posting to the *RichardDawkins.net* forum on the consultation.

<sup>24</sup> Reported in the *Gazette & Herald*, Tue 27 January 2009.

<sup>25</sup> See the *Daily Mail*, Sat 17 January 2009.

Nordbladh, 2002<sup>26</sup>), the reburial of an early Saxon woman in the Woodford Valley near Stonehenge by Wessex Archaeology (McKinley, 2003: 7-18), the reburial in 2007 of the remains of four individuals, including those of Bronze Age date, from the collection of the Highworth Historical Society in Wiltshire (Mansell, 2007), and recent reburial of Iron Age and Romano-British remains in East Yorkshire (Fletcher 2009), all mark instances of archaeologically legitimated reburial in north-west Europe. At the time of writing, Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service has been in consultation with Mike Fletcher, part of HAD's administrative team, about the reburial of human remains held in its collection that are of no scientific value<sup>27</sup>. This example was featured in a remarkably well-balanced *Newsnight* item on pagan calls for reburial – reiterating how pagan engagements with the past are not only increasingly receiving public attention, but that some of this attention is serious<sup>28</sup>. Rowlands and Butler (2007: 1-2) suggest, drawing on Holtorf (2006), that 'destruction and loss are not the opposite of heritage but rather constitutive of it', and that as a result the historical metanarrative of heritage preservation in the heritage ethos is now fading; increasingly there is the view that 'we are no longer convinced that preservation is a good thing', or more accurately, that preservation is not the default position.

Archaeologists and other heritage professionals do not, of course, speak with one voice, nor should they be expected to. In turn, pagan politics, Druid politics particularly, are complex. Far from all pagans are interested in reburial or even archaeological sites; some pagans are scientists and archaeologists themselves, for whom reburial contradicts ongoing scientific study on human remains. The diversity of paganism means that how these diverse voices are negotiated presents a real challenge for heritage managers. As an example of the complexities of Druid politics, a second group calling itself 'CoBDO' claims that it is the real or 'official' CoBDO, and asserts that it does not support the calls for reburial in the same terms as the group for which Davies speaks as Reburial Officer<sup>29</sup>. This group has made its own submission to the reburial consultation, as reported on their website. They propose, for examples, that 'replicas of said remains can be produced for museum display purposes, and/or latest techniques in 3D imaging. After all everyone knows what a skeleton looks like'. The organisation endorses scientific examination, followed by reburial, 'in a way which ensures that the remains are still available for future examination' commenting 'this is the real option for those in favour of reburial, as the ultimate and preferred end process to scientific investigation'<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, these remains were recently re-excavated and displayed in the Summer of 2009 at the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo.

<sup>27</sup> That is, human remains of unknown provenance and deemed of no scientific value by the museum (contra Moshenska 2009: 817).

<sup>28</sup> *Newsnight*, BBC2, 'Pagans call for reburial of ancient bones to respect dead' (Monday 22 February 2010), available online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/8530281.stm>.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/8530281.stm>.

<sup>29</sup> See:

[http://www.gazetteandherald.co.uk/mostpopular.var.1164290.mostviewed.druids\\_call\\_for\\_burial.php](http://www.gazetteandherald.co.uk/mostpopular.var.1164290.mostviewed.druids_call_for_burial.php).

<sup>30</sup> See:

[http://www.CoBDO.org.uk/html/reburial\\_statement.html](http://www.CoBDO.org.uk/html/reburial_statement.html).

Other vocal Druids, well-known in the press, presented views and moods of their communities. Rollo Maughfling, Archdruid of Stonehenge and Glastonbury proposed that '[b]eyond all the other philosophical, scientific and religious arguments, in the end it comes down to something called common human decency'. Arthur Pendragon agreed: 'These are human remains – you wouldn't dig your grandmother up from a churchyard'<sup>31</sup>. In general, then, many Druids feel that while excavation and scientific analysis are important procedures for understanding the past and that such knowledge informs the ongoing discursive construction of contemporary Druid identities, human remains are a special category, deserving of respect, with reburial after archaeological research as the preferred option.

Not all pagans take this view, of course. Yvonne Aburrow (2006) has formed the group 'Pagans for Archaeology' which argues against reburial, 'so that the memory of the ancestors can be perpetuated and rescued from oblivion, and the remains can be studied scientifically for the benefit of everyone', pointing to how respect can be offered in other ways<sup>32</sup>: respect should mean memory, which involves recovering the stories of past people.<sup>33</sup> As a compromise to reburial, Aburrow suggests the use of 'keeping places' where remains can be kept respectfully, without reburial, but with access provided for both pagan ritual and archaeological analysis (Aburrow, 2004). Economic implications would be of some concern here though, as Aburrow herself acknowledges. This group appears to suggest that reburial should never be an option, positioning itself from the call for automatic reburial, and also distancing itself from the 'case by case' suggestions of HAD.

The Avebury Consultation therefore gave scope for expression of a wide range of views, with implications for negotiation over reburial more generally. We turn now to our own position regarding the consultation itself and what we felt to be problematic or lacking in the process.

### **Sacred Sites Project submission**

Our submission to the consultation (Blain, 2009<sup>34</sup>) included a critique of the form of response and the discourse and worldview from which the terms of the consultation were derived. We found that the balance of the presented material developed a case for the importance of the material for scientific research and that in general this was sensitive, respectful and appropriate; notably, of the contributors to the draft report, Whittle emphasised limited or non-destructive sampling, sensitive handling and treatment, and dissemination of knowledge gained to a general public, not only the academic community. However, while public presentation of the Avebury skeletal material was discussed and educative value of this mentioned, a firm case for this

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See also Aburrow's Wiki:

<http://pagantheologies.pbwiki.com/Finding+a+compromise>.

<sup>33</sup> See *Pagans for Archaeology* on Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=16336348284>; also the Pagans for Archaeology Blog at: <http://archaeopagans.blogspot.com/> and Pagans for Archaeology Yahoo group discussion list at

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/archaeopagans/>.

<sup>34</sup> Online at: [http://www.sacredsites.org.uk/news/Avebury\\_response.html](http://www.sacredsites.org.uk/news/Avebury_response.html).

appeared to be assumed rather than made. The Draft Report - rightly, we said - set aside the 'evidence' from both the CoBDO petition and museum visitor questionnaire, as interesting but not conducted using methodologies enabling assessment of their material. To be considered as quantitative evidence these would require information on target populations and how representative these are; as qualitative, an analytical and theorised presentation including contextualisation of the comments and detailing of the discussions.

The positions of the National Trust and English Heritage, and of the various groups of Druids, however, required consideration. Our response criticised NT and EH, in five ways:

- 1) for asking leading and ambiguous questions,
- 2) for using academic authority and the scientific method as an axiomatic position to argue for the value of the retention and study of human remains,
- 3) for assuming before consultation that this position is universally accepted and
- 4) for thereby taking a top-down approach in which knowledge is assumed rather than other perspectives sought, and
- 5) for offering no common ground outside DCMS guidelines for negotiation (a problem instigated by the originating group of Druids themselves as they chose to focus on the guidelines of the DCMS regarding genealogy).

We will explore these issues in turn, before focusing on point five and thinking through how to proceed with regard to future reburial claims if these are presented: and then turn to how some others received the consultation, and a somewhat different approach adopted by The Manchester Museum in a subsequent consultation.

Social scientific survey practice suggests that asking leading and ambiguous questions in a survey-type process invalidates numerical data acquisition in social science research (see e.g. Fowler [1995], or any other basic text on questionnaire design). Certain questions made a statement about views or beliefs apparently held by the National Trust and English Heritage, and asked the respondent if they agree. Literally read, this asks the respondent if they agree that the National Trust and English Heritage holds these views. This is presumably intended to ask the respondent whether she/he or their group also holds these views, but the questions are ambiguous. There is also an issue of an authority-claim and hence, questions which lead the respondent towards patterned answers. The questions are therefore problematic and data from them should be treated with suspicion. We also take issue with the 'objectivity' presumed in the scientific standpoint: the argument for retention of the remains for scientific analysis is presented as axiomatic or 'common sense', which is discursively problematic. Further, the documentation implicitly assumes that this position is universally accepted, before the consultation has even been performed. This top-down approach therefore assumes knowledge while simultaneously claiming to seek other ways of knowing.

The consultation also forces the language of 'claims', emotively positioning the Druids as claimants without recognizing that the National Trust and English Heritage, as stewards of the past rather than owners, are equally claimants themselves. Basing the consultation process on the DCMS guidelines was agreed to by the parties

concerned; but reliance on the guidelines introduces and indeed depends upon the concept of ‘claim’, which framed the process discursively by only permitting certain kinds of statements to be introduced and evaluated. Foucauldian analysis indicates that a framing discourse (a set of statements, terms, concepts which position the problematic within large, explanatory world-views) while permitting some issues or questions to be addressed, excludes others from consideration - precisely what happened here.

The guidelines deal with repatriation requests, and with ways to adjudicate whether a ‘claim’ is made by a group with connections to the remains, and whether these connections should be seen as legitimate. The DCMS guidelines indicate connections as involving genealogical descent, cultural community of origin including continuity of belief, customs or language, and country of origin. In adhering exclusively to the DCMS guidance, focusing on genetic affiliation to the prehistoric human remains (as CoBDO itself did), the counter-claim is presented that the Druid group has ‘no more claim’ than anyone else in terms of biology or continuity (a point the CoBDO group itself also makes). Such directing of attention to a very specific issue and hence away from the wider points of community consultation and of the different worldviews, including views about ‘ancestors’ and ‘death’ that arguably form a part of multicultural Britain today, left little common ground on which consultation could be performed.

Furthermore, while the CoBDO group may be no more related to the Avebury child than any other dweller in these isles, they are equally no less so, and what was omitted here is an attempt to take on a worldview that could be seen as (and may be conceptualised by the druid group as being) closer to that of these ‘ancestors’ with whom CoBDO allies themselves, than today’s neat, modernist separation of life from death. In the consultation documents there was no independent presentation of perspectives in which bones are ‘living’, which one might otherwise (or in contexts elsewhere) expect to find. The point here is that CoBDO, in order to make a ‘claim’, needs to demonstrate a connection which could not, according to the framing discourse, be substantiated or evidenced. Druid ‘emotional’ claims and archaeologists’ scientific claims are clearly not commensurable; for consultation and dialogue to be effective, the different positions need to be accepted on equally valid terms.

The use of the term ‘culture’ in the context of the ‘claim’ connects to the problematisation of this term in anthropology/archaeology and within transitional and shifting communities of today. A series of critiques and reworkings of the concept of ‘culture’, moving from the idea of a neat, bounded system of symbols and artefacts to something more ‘fuzzy’, flexible and fluid, has emerged (e.g. Fox & King, 2002) which jettisons the concept as *explanation* while, retaining it as a non-deterministic and suitable term for sets of practices, meanings, structures which are fluid and contested. As such, the Avebury human remains, like the megaliths, form part of the ‘cultural’ as well as physical landscape of today’s Avebury, for visitors, residents, and spiritual pilgrims alike. The stones and remains are part of folklore and story, in changing narrations that are influenced both by archaeological investigation and by spiritual and personal acquaintance. ‘Culture’ clearly needs some rethinking in these contexts.

The spiritual or religious significance of the remains to CoBDO is articulated in their request. This indicates a worldview which relates remains (and grave goods) to landscape. There is nothing to demonstrate that this type of approach would have been shared by the people of the Kennet Avenue and Windmill Hill remains; nevertheless it is an attempt to explore concepts of personhood and environmental connections that differ from widely held worldviews and may be in part informed by perceptions of 'indigenous' philosophies elsewhere. Moshenska (2009: 818) interprets this sort of conception of the ancient dead as 'an amorphous group of ancestors onto whom an idealised perspective, firmly grounded in the present, can be projected', but this is a simplistic and unfair reading. Druidry as a religion, or perhaps better an association of spiritualities for today today, has its own historical roots and its own particular ancestry. A largely animist spiritual philosophy, combined with an idea that death represents a very gradual removal of 'people' from the physical world, leads to a view of bones or cremated remains as 'people' who are still within that world.

Mainstream approaches in England would see issues of respect for the dead as something that matters to the living. (Interestingly, in Scotland a 'right of sepulchre' pertains to the dead themselves). Not all Druids share CoBDO's awareness of the 'personhood' of human remains, and not all pagans hold animist views. Nevertheless, increasing numbers do, interactions with 'living landscapes' (e.g. Wallis & Blain, 2003) shape dimensions of pagan understandings of self and other, and these worldviews are part of the multivocality of contemporary British spirituality. The CoBDO focus on the Avebury child arises from the proximity of group members to the area and detailed knowledge of the landscape, from visiting, walking and processing in the avenue and henge, meditating, celebrating, and developing ways of knowing the landscape and its inhabitants that are 'other' than the scientific or systematic investigation and theory construction of archaeology. This knowledge is local and specific.

There has been some tendency within mainstream institutions to discount pagan and other 'alternative' belief systems and standpoints, often with ridicule. Moshenska (2009: 819) argues that 'we should continue to privilege viewpoints based on knowledge over those based on imagination'; that is, scientific knowledge should be privileged over pagan 'imagination'. Hole agrees, calling on people to oppose reburial at Avebury 'in order to preserve world heritage and increase knowledge, rather than to legitimise pseudo-scientific beliefs and inadvertently assist the far right' (Hole, 2008: 43)<sup>35</sup>. But science offers only one way of knowing the past and there are others that are equally valid and sophisticated and cannot be written off simply as racist. (Space in this paper prevents us detailing multiple discursive constructions of 'ancestors' within the pagan communities, but these issues are in part addressed by Blain, 2002, and Blain and Wallis, 2007; with more nuanced presentations of the problems posed by associations or assumptions of racism and paganism in Blain 2006, Gallagher 2006.) The Avebury consultation however indicates that EH and the NT regard pagan standpoints with at least some respect, and this bodes well for future negotiations around the reburial issue.

Other pagan groups and individuals, though, may equally have local and specific connections with the Avebury remains, through being part of the local community for

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<sup>35</sup> See also the Letters page of *British Archaeology* 105 (March/April): 10.

periods of time varying between a few months and a lifetime. They do not all call for reburial. The CoBDO call cannot be representative of either local or national/international paganism, simply because paganisms are so very varied in their characteristics and in the worldviews shared by adherents<sup>36</sup>. The issue of respect for ancestors, all ancestors, those ancestors of others or of ourselves, and of ancestors in a social and cultural sense and not only a physical sense, is one that many pagans share, and that furthermore is inherent in principles of pagan traditions. The statement by CoBDO that the remains are 'living' is a forceful statement in keeping with pagan and animist understandings, to be seen as a position on a continuum, not simply dismissed as 'irrational' or as a 'philosophically untenable position' without offering counter-argument (Schutkowski, 2009). From this point, two issues emerge as important: both the 'personhood' of the one placed in the ground, or the 'sacredness' of (or power in) bones, and the 'community' in terms of relationship with landscape and other beings (including physical beings and non-human 'spirits'), and in relationship with other 'ancestors'. From a more 'insider' approach, a position we adopt as both academics (an archaeologist [Wallis] and an anthropologist [Blain]) and spiritual practitioners, these may be seen as degrees of desecration versus respect, and disruption of community.

In light of this discussion, the DCMS procedure was problematic. It allowed for 'claims' but not for philosophy. Where all parties hold some (genetic, cultural) relationship to the human remains at issue, the DCMS framework, designed for a different ('indigenous') context, seems unwieldy and may encourage the development of fixed positions rather than negotiation. The presented material, though, was interesting because of its juxtaposing of expressions of interest, both spiritual and scientific, of those who perceived themselves to be closely associated with the local landscape and the associated human remains.

The position of the Sacred Sites project on the reburial of the Avebury material was that for the foreseeable future, the skeletal material (and their grave goods) should be retained in the museum, but not necessarily on public display: we recommended that their presentation should be carefully negotiated with regard to (the diversity of) spiritual views, how 'respect' is constituted and human remains are conceptualised by different religious and secular traditions. The DCMS guidelines are what people currently have to work within, but they were not intended to address and do not provide for Druid and wider pagan interests. Room, however, can be made for negotiation: the guidelines are not set in stone but should be dynamic in relation to changing circumstances. We agreed with the position of HAD:

[B]eing forced to use the Guidance has put CoBDO in a no-win situation. If a British group such as CoBDO had been able to talk of their significant 'interest' as one of several stakeholders in the future of the remains, instead of needing to justify an exclusive 'claim', the relevance and value of their input could have been heard. HAD asserts that *use of the current DCMS Guidance is inapplicable for human remains of British provenance*, and to use the Guidance as a basis for decision making in this case *invalidates any decisions made*. HAD recommends that the DCMS, together with EH and the NT, develop a process for inclusion of

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<sup>36</sup> This point is also made by HAD: see the HAD website: <http://www.honour.org.uk/node/283>; also Restall Orr 2009: 1-2.

Pagan and other community groups in decision-making and programming around these (and other) human remains<sup>37</sup>.

We argue that further study involving methodologically sound attempts to investigate and theorise views within the general public (including both pagans and archaeologists) should inform further negotiations. Such research might facilitate sensitive and respectful ways to present and otherwise engage with the material (Pagan interactions with the remains and associated artefacts are not only, indeed not mostly, those of formal ‘rituals’). Discussions of presentation and respectful treatment should continue between the interested parties not in the discourse of ‘claims’ but of ‘expressions of interest’ (also iterated in the HAD submission). In a situation where all – or none – have direct connections to the remains, decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis and with sensitive accommodations to the interests of others, living and dead.

### **Further consultations and the approach of The Manchester Museum**

A partial contrast is afforded by a new consultation set up by The Manchester Museum<sup>38</sup>. In fairness it must be emphasised that the contrast can only be partial: this relates to unprovenanced remains (for which a full list is provided) whereas the Avebury issue concerns high-profile, often well-provenanced material. The Museum makes this clear, saying:

There is a sub-set of the human remains collection, comprising some 370 items likely to be of British or European origin, for which there is either no information on provenance, or provenance is only to country or county level. For a substantial minority there is also no data recording when or how they entered the collection. None of these remains constitute a complete skeleton and a substantial number are miscellaneous fragments currently unidentifiable as a specific bone<sup>39</sup>.

In the Manchester Museum consultation document, opinions and ideas are invited in three areas, retention, transfer and reburial, the key questions being:

Should these remains be retained within the Manchester Museum?

Should these remains be transferred to another museum or institution?

Should these remains be reburied?

If choosing retention or transferral, respondents were asked to suggest ‘realistic and practical proposals for their future use’, and in the case of transferral suggestions for specific institutions. Regarding reburial, respondents had scope to explain why they

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<sup>37</sup> See the HAD website: <http://www.honour.org.uk/node/283>; also Restall Orr, 2009: 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> See their website at: <http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/aboutus/ourpractice/humanremains/>.

<sup>39</sup> See the museum’s policy on human remains: <http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/collection/humanremains/fileuploadmax10mb,120796,en.pdf>.

considered reburial the best option, and whether remains should be accessible for future examination after reburial, again with reasons. Further they were asked for favoured locations for reburial, whether Manchester or near the place of origin if identified, and finally ‘If the original place of burial cannot be identified, where should they be reburied?’<sup>40</sup>

While as indicated the comparison can be only partial, the framing of the questions does not force a pre-selected 'option' but enable participants to express views without the narrow discourse of 'claims' adjudication, which is why we have included it here. Furthermore, the Manchester preamble, short as it is, makes plain that there is room for differing worldviews, all of which are valid. The preamble states that:

The Museum wishes to consult widely with all interested parties on the future of this poorly- or un-provenanced material. We want to be satisfied that it continues to justify Museum resources spent on its curation because its retention has a clear public benefit for research or public engagement, or that it would be better used by being transferred to another institution, or that there is no justification in its retention and that reburial is a more suitable option<sup>41</sup>.

Part of the framing of this exercise indicates how the British reburial issue may differ from those of repatriation claims, stating:

A more broadly based decision-making process now needs to be put in place for human remains without modern genealogical and cultural descendants, which sees human remains found or stored in a particular area as the collective responsibility of all that area's modern residents<sup>42</sup>.

This is perhaps the point of greatest divergence from the Avebury reliance on DCMS guidelines, and one that may have considerable impact in the communities of practice and belief (archaeological as well as spiritual) as further developments arise.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has focused on pagan approaches to the prehistoric dead and worldviews enabling communication from which ‘emotional’ calls for reburial are made which speak of ancestral connection, kinship, knowledge and ‘woundedness’; and the frameworks for assessing and adjudicating such ‘claims’ as presented through the Avebury Reburial Consultation. As said at the outset, the National Trust and English Heritage recommendations regarding the call for reburial at Avebury were presented in April 2010., and as expected (given that Druids have no greater claim than any other interest group) were in favour of retention, with some scope to permit Druids’ access to the remains for ritual ‘where reasonable’ (i.e. based on

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<sup>40</sup> Consultation on the future of poorly- and un-provenanced human remains in The Manchester Museum, available online: [http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/medialibrary/documents/unprovenanced\\_human\\_remains\\_consultation.pdf](http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/medialibrary/documents/unprovenanced_human_remains_consultation.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> See the museum’s policy on human remains: <http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/collection/humanremains/fileuploadmax10mb,120796,en.pdf>.

archaeologists'/heritage managers' permission). The case is of course not necessarily yet 'closed'. CoBDO might still make this into a test case of a different sort at the High Court and then The Hague, under the Human Rights Act, although it seems unlikely that this would be successful. We are interested, now, in how negotiation can move forward.

The evidence we have discussed indicates a clash of world views between broadly those bringing a 'subjective' religious and emotive argument and those taking an 'objective' scientific standpoint. With the Avebury Consultation process, transparency, consultation and respect were evident, but problematically the default position was one of scientific value and of the axiomatic authority of archaeologists; there was no room for collaboration and no strategy for dealing sensitively with emotional and spiritual views or philosophical debate. Issues arising are not only over implementation of guidelines, but of discursive framing, authority, and of how differences in worldview and interpretation can be acknowledged (see also Bienkowski & Chapman 2009). This has implications for how the decision-makers at issue engage with their publics. Sayer suggests that:

Neo-pagans may not be a single homogenous group and they cannot make the same social justice claims as Indigenous peoples. While they cannot reasonably demand repatriation, they are entitled to ask for respect to their attitude to the dead. British burial archaeology is not in crisis, but it does need to continue a constructive contextual dialogue with both the legislators and all religious interest groups within the UK (Sayer, 2009: 204).

We argue that while dialogue is crucial, this is not enough. It would be unfortunate to see dialogue facilitated and performed purely as a public relations exercise, as a placatory gesture, without room for negotiation. Examples from public archaeology elsewhere, for example, the redisplay of Lindow Man at the Manchester Museum (between April 2008 and April 2009) (Sitch, 2007) and the Quseir al-Qadim project in Egypt conducted by the University of Southampton (Moser et al, 2002), offer guidance on how inclusivity can be made integral to the consultation and decision-making process. Furthermore, the Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) Burra Charter (1999) for the conservation of places of cultural significance offers the following useful guidance:

The Charter recognises the need to involve people in the decision-making process, particularly those that have strong associations with a place. These might be as patrons of the corner store, as workers in a factory or as community guardians of places of special value, whether of indigenous or European origin<sup>43</sup>.

A route by which dialogue can progress involves a process in which pagans (and of course others) are recognized as serious stake-holders in the past, working with heritage managers as partners in decision-making – a process of participatory decision-making. In short, we think there is room for compromise (on both 'sides') and that common ground can be established (see also Beck & Chrisomalis, 2008; Booth, 2009). For this to happen, though it seems essential that the Avebury case does

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<sup>43</sup> See: <http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html>.

not become a 'test case', and that its findings are not seen as providing comprehensive guidelines for dealing with future reburial cases. Rather, it should become a step forward, a stage in the process of creating communication. Our hope is that the Avebury Consultation will demonstrate that a case-by-case approach is preferable, a situational pragmatism wherein local sensitivities can be embraced.

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