

PRESS RELEASE

10 November 2022, for immediate release:

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestors Returned Home
from the Pitt Rivers Museum and Oxford University Museum of Natural History**

On Wednesday 9 November 2022 the Pitt Rivers Museum and Oxford University Museum of Natural History held a ceremony to return the remains of eighteen ancestors to representatives of the Australian Government and the First Nations People of the South East.

One ancestor from Lake Hawdon or Guichen Bay, South Australia, has been returned to the custodianship of the South East First Nations; and seventeen other ancestors will return to Australia under the stewardship of the Australian Government, while further research is undertaken to determine their traditional First Nations custodians.

The ceremony was attended by the Australian Acting High Commissioner, **Lynette Wood**; the First Secretary Economic at the Australian High Commission, **Nick Williams**; and Assistant Director for Indigenous Repatriation for the Office for the Arts, **Wendy Dalitz**. Representing the sovereign and cultural interests of the First Nations People of the South East was Emerging Elder **Robyn Campbell**, Chief Executive Officer of Burrandies Aboriginal Corporation. The museums were represented by **Professor Richard Ovenden OBE**, Head of Gardens, Libraries and Museums, University of Oxford; **Professor Laura Van Broekhoven**, Director of the Pitt Rivers Museum; and **Professor Paul Smith**, Director of Oxford University Museum of Natural History.

The Pitt Rivers Museum is repatriating the remains of twelve individuals and one associated cultural object. Seven of the remains were acquired in the 19th century: five were part of the 1884 Pitt Rivers founding collection; and two were transferred from other University departments in 1886. The remains of three individuals were donated in 1900 as part of a larger acquisition, and the remains of one individual were acquired in 1921 as a single donation. The remains of one individual with an associated object were purchased from a prominent collector of Australian material in 1926.

Oxford University Museum of Natural History is repatriating the remains of six individuals. All of the remains were acquired by the Museum in the 19th century as the University Museum, as it was then known, became a concentration of material culture collections. Four of the remains were acquired as part of larger acquisitions of medical, anatomical and anthropological teaching and research collections from other University departments and colleges and externally. The remains of two individuals were donated directly to the Museum from individual donors.

Australian Minister for the Arts, Tony Burke, said: ‘More than 1,660 ancestors have now been repatriated from overseas collecting institutions and private holders to date – and while this is a significant effort contributing to healing and justice for First Nations communities, we remain committed to supporting future returns, as part of our ongoing journey of reconciliation.’

Minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney, said: ‘It is in the return of ancestors that dignity can be recognised and respected. It restores their rightful place as Elders, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters and acknowledges the unbreakable bond of customary obligation and traditional practices between the living, the land and the dead.’

Director of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Professor Laura Van Broekhoven, said: ‘For institutions like ours, that are so deeply rooted in coloniality, events such as this begin a new chapter of museum history, joining an Indigenous-led process that works towards healing. We are grateful to Australia’s

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for their leadership in this process and happy that their ancestors are finally able to return home.'

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CONTACT DETAILS & PRESS IMAGES

Louise Hancock, Marketing & Press Officer, Pitt Rivers Museum
louise.hancock@prm.ox.ac.uk / 01865 613017 / 07553 433635

NOTES TO EDITORS

For more information on Indigenous Repatriation, visit:

www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/cultural-heritage/indigenous-repatriation

The Pitt Rivers Museum is one of the leading museums of anthropology, ethnography and archaeology in the world. Established in 1884, it now has over 500,000 items in its collections and is in the top 100 most visited museums in the UK, welcoming over 480,000 visitors in 2019. The Museum was shortlisted for the Art Fund Museum of the Year 2019 for its creative programmes of reinvention and reinterpretation, which show a much-loved Victorian space challenging perceptions and demonstrating the vital role museums can play in contemporary society.

Open: Mondays, 12:00-17:00
Tuesday-Sunday, 10:00-17:00
Admission: Free

www.prm..ox.ac.uk

Oxford University Museum of Natural History was established in 1860 to draw together scientific studies from across the University of Oxford. Today, the award-winning Museum continues to be a place of scientific research, collecting and fieldwork, and plays host to a programme of events, exhibitions and activities for the public and school students of all ages.

Highlights in the collections include the world's first scientifically described dinosaur – *Megalosaurus bucklandii* – and the world-famous Oxford Dodo, the only soft tissue remains of the extinct dodo.

Open: Monday-Sunday, 10:00-17:00
Admission: Free

www.oumnh.ox.ac.uk