

You will often find Christian and even pre-Christian burials in and around our churches and cathedrals.

We can help you understand what to do if you find human remains.



meaning that the bones of a skeleton are in the same relative position to the burial.

Human remains principles

Human remains have a special position in ecclesiastical and secular law.

The basic principles are that:

- You should always treat human remains with dignity and respect
- You should not disturb burials without a good reason (e.g properly authorised development)
- Human remains and the archaeological evidence around them are important sources of scientific information
- You should give particular weight to the feelings and views of living family members
- You should make decisions in the interest of the public and in an accountable way

Important:

If you discover or think you will discover articulated human remains during your project, then include a competent professional archaeologist with experience in church archaeology on your team.

Disarticulated bones (other than charnel deposits) can be carefully collected by general contractors for reburial.

Contact your [Diocesan Advisory Committee](#) or [Fabric Advisory Committee](#) for help.

Human remains and permissions

Churches

You need a faculty before disturbing articulated human remains.

But you do not need an exhumation licence from the Ministry of Justice, unless the human remains are found outside the area where the legal effects of consecration apply (e.g. if a churchyard has been cut back by development).

If you need planning permission for your project, then the local authority may attach conditions about the archaeological treatment of human remains.

Contact your Diocesan Advisory Committee for advice

Cathedrals

You need approval under the Care of Cathedrals Measure 2011 for works affecting human remains in or under the cathedral or within its precinct.

For work involving the disturbance or destruction of human remains, apply to the [Cathedral's Fabric Commission for England](#).

For more minor works, apply to [your Fabric Advisory Committee](#).

You no longer need an exhumation licence from the Ministry of Justice, provided that you have already obtained approval under the Measure.

Important: You need [Scheduled Monument Consent](#) for works affecting a scheduled monument in a churchyard or cathedral precinct.

Get more help

From scientific to ethical and legal issues

[Download our guidance for the treatment of human remains](#)

Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Burials in England

[Get advice on the technical issues](#)

Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists

[Get detailed advice on dealing with church and cathedral archaeology](#)

Contact us

[Contact one of our officers for help](#)

Also of interest



What is the role of a cathedral archaeologist?



Archaeology

[Get advice on dealing with archaeology during your project](#)



Churchyard structures



New burials and memorials

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