

PRESS RELEASE

4 October 2023, for immediate release:

**First Nations Ancestors Returned Home
from the Oxford University Museum of Natural History and Pitt Rivers Museum**

On Wednesday 4 October 2023 the Oxford University Museum of Natural History and the Pitt Rivers Museum held a ceremony to return the remains of eleven ancestors to representatives of the respective communities and the Australian Government.

The Oxford University Museum of Natural History returned six ancestors. Three of these ancestors are being returned to the custodianship of their respective communities, whilst three are being returned under Australian Government stewardship.

The Pitt Rivers Museum returned five ancestors. Two of these are being returned to the custodianship of their respective communities, whilst three are being returned under Australian Government stewardship, so that they can go back to Country from there.

The ceremony was attended by representatives from the Bathurst Local Aboriginal Land Council and the Wiradjuri Community, the Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation, the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council and Gadigal communities, the Ngarrindjeri Community and the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and the Wadawurrung Community, who attended the handover ceremony to receive their ancestors and accompany them home. The Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, the Honourable Stephen Francis Smith, was also in attendance, with the museums being represented by Professor Paul Smith, Director of the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, and Professor Laura Van Broekhoven, Director of the Pitt Rivers Museum.

The 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. Two of the remains were acquired as part of larger acquisitions of medical and anthropological collections from another University department and externally. The remains of four individuals were donated directly to the Museum by individual donors.

The Pitt Rivers Museum is repatriating the remains of five individuals. The remains of these individuals entered the Museum's collection between 1887 and 1917. One was acquired as part of a larger transfer from the Oxford University Department of Comparative Anatomy in 1887. Four were acquired directly from private donors in 1889, 1900 and 1917. The acquiring of ancestral remains was part of the problematic history of archaeology and anthropology that caused much hurt and needs redress.

Australian Minister for the Arts, Tony Burke, said: "Securing the return of First Nations ancestors is some of the most important work a government can do. It brings dignity and respect to ancestors and their communities and is a crucial part of our country's ongoing journey of reconciliation."

Minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney, said: "Returning ancestors to Country is critical to promote healing and justice for First Nations peoples – and is a vital step towards reconciliation and truth-telling. It honours the deep cultural and emotional significance of returning ancestors to their traditional lands and allows communities to carry out their cultural obligations and customs."

Director of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Professor Laura Van Broekhoven, said: "For the Pitt Rivers Museum, ceremonies like these introduce new chapters in our history as a museum. We want to thank

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for their leadership in this process; we are pleased that the ancestors are finally able to return home. We are grateful to join this Indigenous-led process that works towards healing."

---ENDS---

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 700,000 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

The 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