

Date: 2nd March 2022

Time: 7.30 pm

Location: Online Zoom Webinar

How to register: The zoom registration link can be found in the members area and members with email will also have been sent the link. Once registered members will be sent the zoom invite directly.

Title: The Human Remains Project

Speaker: Dr Ruth Nugent , UKRI Future Leader's Fellow: The Human Remains Project, University of Liverpool



Blurb: *"The Coffin was full of pickle...pungent...resembling a strong solution of nitre...I have his Beard w[hi]ch the Archdeacon gave me leave to take".* Anonymous eighteenth-century visitor of Duke Humphrey's Coffin at St Albans' Abbey, England.



Duke Humphrey's coffin 'pickle' at St Albans Abbey represents one of many 'ancient' tombs opened and collections of human bones displayed in churches in the 18th and 19th century for an early type of 'scientific' investigation and 'dark tourism'. Some decried it as disrespectful; others saw a new (Protestant) method of 'archaeology' emerging. However, this phenomenon was not new. Remains of saints, clergy, royalty, and cultural icons have been examined to both verify and venerate them since at least the 7th century in Britain's churches, and this continued on a regular basis until the late 19th/early 20th century.

Throughout this period, charnel collections of human bones created from pragmatic exhumations had cycles of being presented in churches, and tomb 'treasures' and historic human remains continued to be displayed in churches centuries even after the end of saints' cults in the 1530s-40s.

Today, there is extensive public and media interest in Britain's church charnel displays as well as saints' bones in cathedrals; royal exhumations; and demands to exhume or investigate the graves of iconic individuals from history, such as the Princes in the Tower, King Harold, and William Shakespeare. Forthcoming HS2 construction will also involve unprecedented exhumation of thousands of skeletons from church contexts.

This talk will explore the latest findings from the UKRI FLF programme of research "The Human Remains: Digital Library of British Mortuary Science and Investigation" led by Dr Ruth Nugent (University of Liverpool) which is exploring each of these aspects as part of Britain's long and complex history of exhuming and examining the 'ancient' dead.

