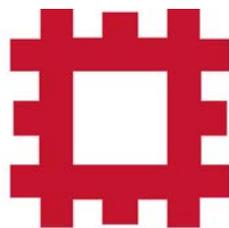


# Research into Issues Surrounding Human Bones in Museums

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Prepared for



ENGLISH HERITAGE

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# 1. Objectives & Research Approach

The objectives for the research are to establish whether there is:

- Support for archaeological exhibits in museums including human bones
- Support for the retention of archaeologically important human bones in museums used for future research

In order to gain a representative sample of the general public, questions were placed on an omnibus survey run by ICM Research\*.

- Nationally representative sample of 1,004 GB adults aged 18+ were interviewed via the telephone (CATI)
- ...delivering a **sample of 864 adults aged 18+ in England.**
- Fieldwork: 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> June 2009

All results contained within this report are based upon respondents in England only. Data tables provided to complement this report detail responses for each of England and GB.

## \* **ICM**

- ICM is one of the most respected names in opinion polling. 30 years of experience in this area is testament to the reliability of ICM polls and their ability to give a real insight into the issues of the day.
- ICM received the Market Research Society's Silver Medal for work to improve the accuracy of the polls; methods which made ICM the most accurate pollster for a decade; now copied by others operating in this field.
- ICM is a founder member of the British Polling Council, and abides by its rules.
- Full methodological details are appended

## 2. Findings

An important contextual point for this report relates to **religion**. Among respondents in England, 72% of those who were happy to share this information belong to a religion, with 43% of the population stating that their religion was important to them:

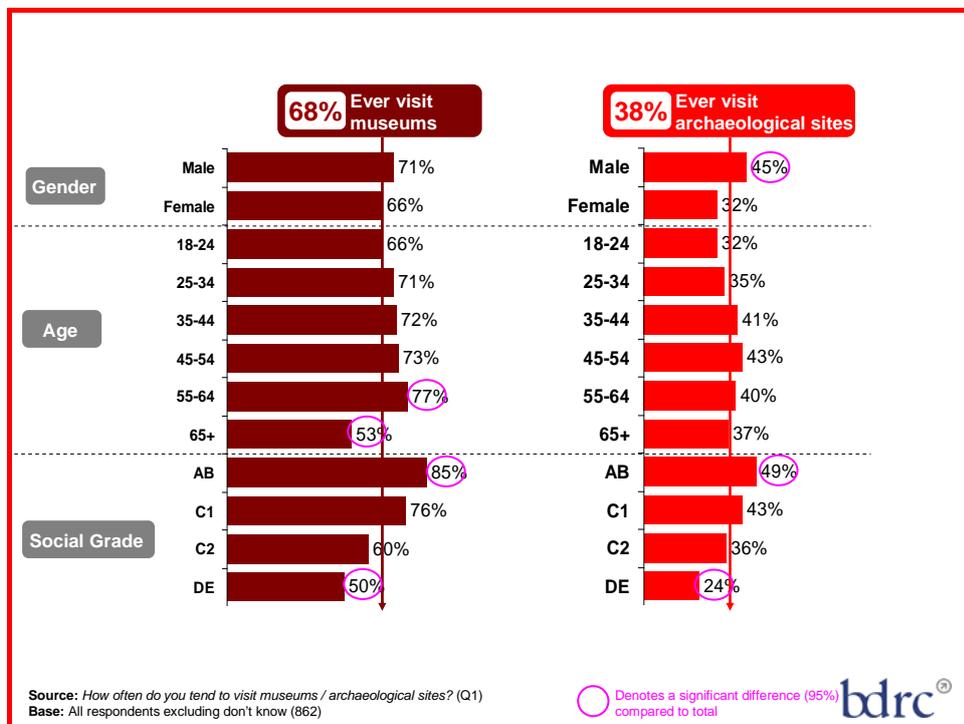
- 88% were Christian (63% of these stating their religion was important to them);
- 2% were Muslim;
- 2% were Hindu;
- 2% Pagan;
- 1% were Sikh;
- Less than 0.5% were Humanist;
- 5% belonged to another religion.

There are strong correlations between religion and other demographics, most notably age and social grade. Those aged 65 or over and from lower social grades (C2DE) are more likely to also belong to a religion. This has important implications throughout this report – correlation between findings and age, social grade and religion does not necessarily imply a causal relationship.

**(a) Visits to Museums and Archaeological Sites**

Two thirds (68%) of adults aged 18+ ever visit museums. However, there are some variations across sub groups. Those classified ABC1 visit museums more frequently, 85% of ABs ever visiting a museum. There are also some variations by age with the under 25s and over 65s less likely to visit a museum than those aged 26-64. Those aged 55-64 are significantly more likely than the average to visit museums. Overall the majority (80%) of those that visit museums do so once or twice a year or less.

Visits to archaeological sites are lower than museums with 38% ever visiting. However, similarly to museums, ABC1s are more likely to visit archaeological sites than C2DEs with 49% of ABs ever visiting an archaeological site. Age appears to be less of a factor for archaeological sites compared to museums; however, there is a gender bias with 45% of males ever visiting an archaeological site compared to 32% females.



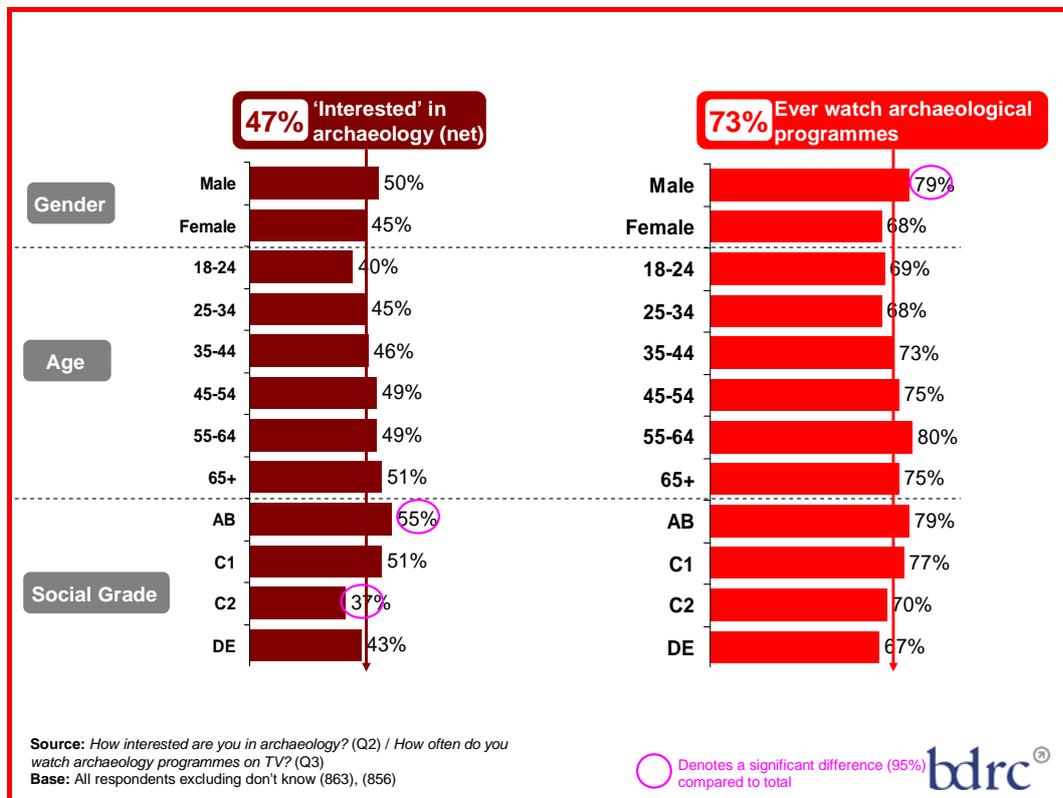
Religion is also correlated with visits to both museums and archaeological sites. Those who belong to a religion are significantly less likely to visit museums than those that do not belong to a religion (75% no religion vs. 66% belong to religion ever visiting museums) and significantly less likely to visit archaeological sites (49% no religion vs. 35% belong to religion ever visiting archaeological sites). However, we cannot assume that religion has a direct causal impact upon likelihood to visit museums. Those from lower social grades and aged 65 or over are also more likely to have a religion – from other research within the sector (such as the Taking Part Survey) we know that these are the key drivers of participation in museum and heritage visiting.

**(b) Interest in Archaeology**

Just under half (47%) have some interest in archaeology, with only 9% overall stating that they are ‘very’ interested in archaeology. There are no statistically significant differences between any two specific age groups although interest does appear to increase with age. Interest does significantly increase with social grade with 55% of ABs ‘interested’ compared to 47% of the population; however, the interest of this group is tepid with only 10% of this group ‘very’ interested. Indeed the proportion of those ‘very’ interested is relatively stable across all groups.

Unsurprisingly those that have an interest in archaeology are more likely to visit museums and archaeological sites, and are more frequent visitors to both.

Overall 73% watch archaeological programmes on television. Viewing is significantly more pronounced amongst males than females with 79% ever watching archaeological programmes (68% of females). Moreover 1 in 3 (33%) males watch archaeological programmes on television at least once a month. Those 35+ years are also more likely to watch archaeological television programmes than those younger (<34 years 68% vs. 35+ 75%). However, there are little differences in frequency of viewing across age groups.



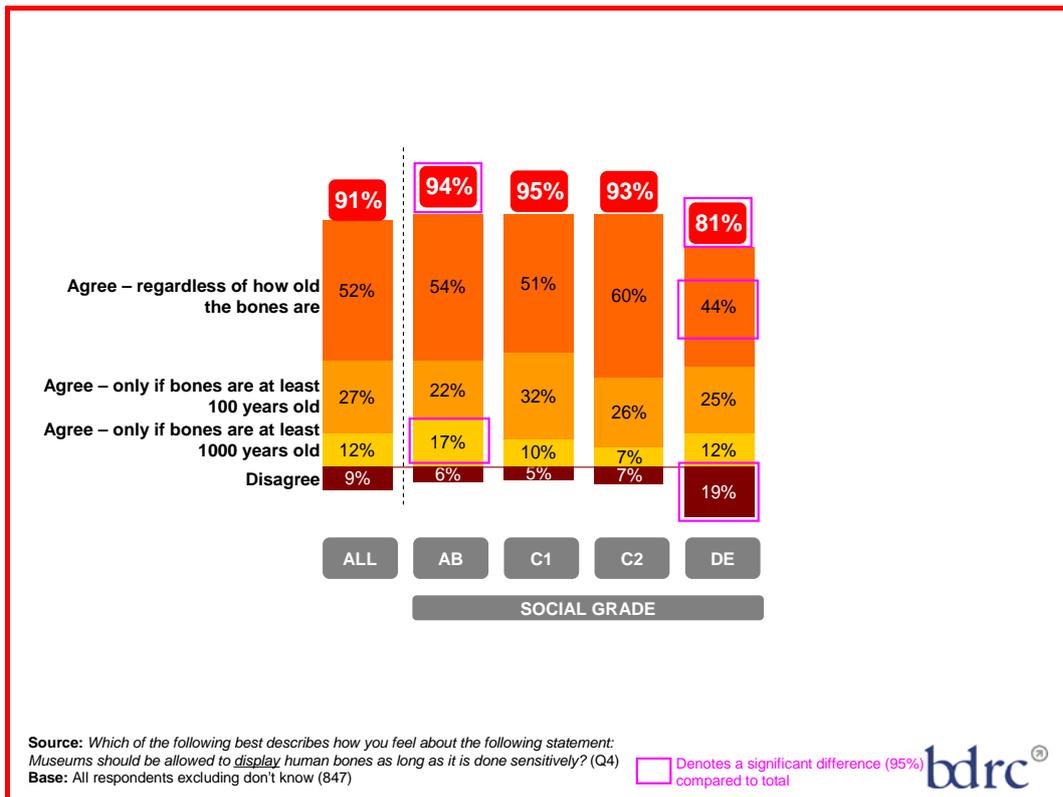
**(c) Displaying Human Bones in Museums**

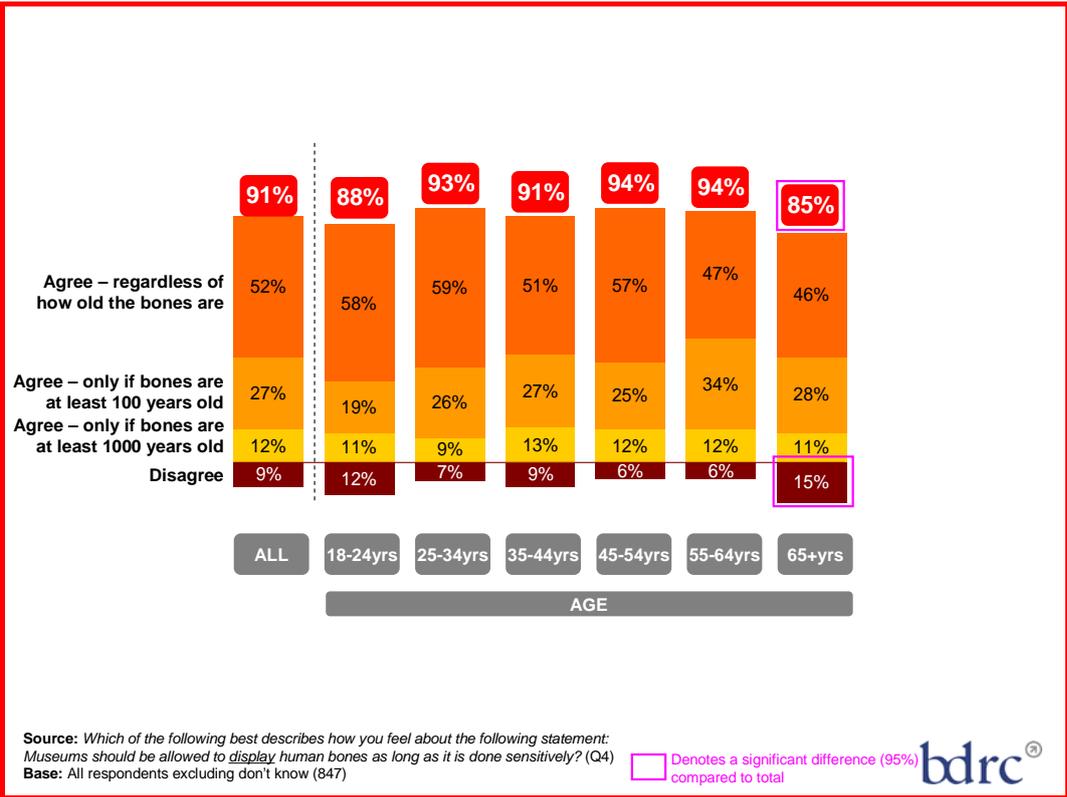
Overall the majority (91%) ‘agree’, albeit at differing levels, that museums should be allowed to display human bones. Half (52%) of respondents say this should be the case regardless of how old the bones are. A further 27% agree but the bones should be at least 100 years old and 12% 1000 years old.

Despite the strongest overall level of agreement from those classified AB (94%), this group also has the highest proportion, albeit minimal, of those agreeing but on the basis that the bones are over 1000 years old (17%).

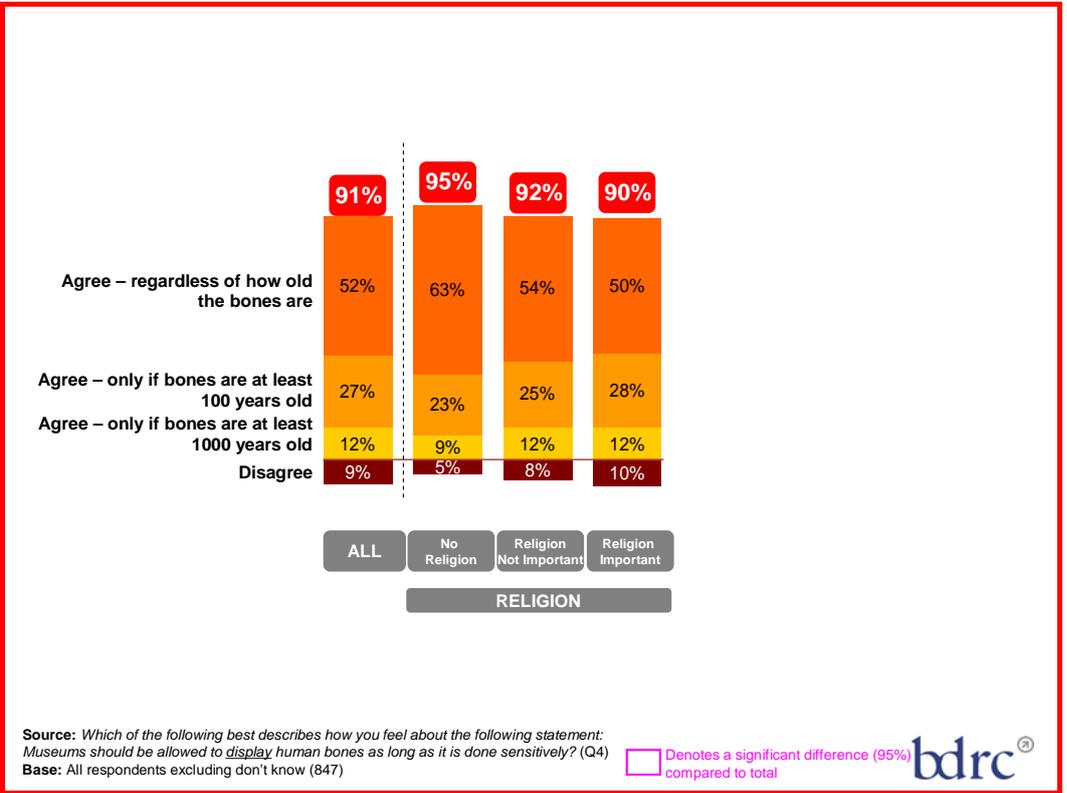
Overall only 9% oppose displaying human bones in museums with the only significant variations to this among:

- 65+ years (15%)
- Social grade DE (19%)

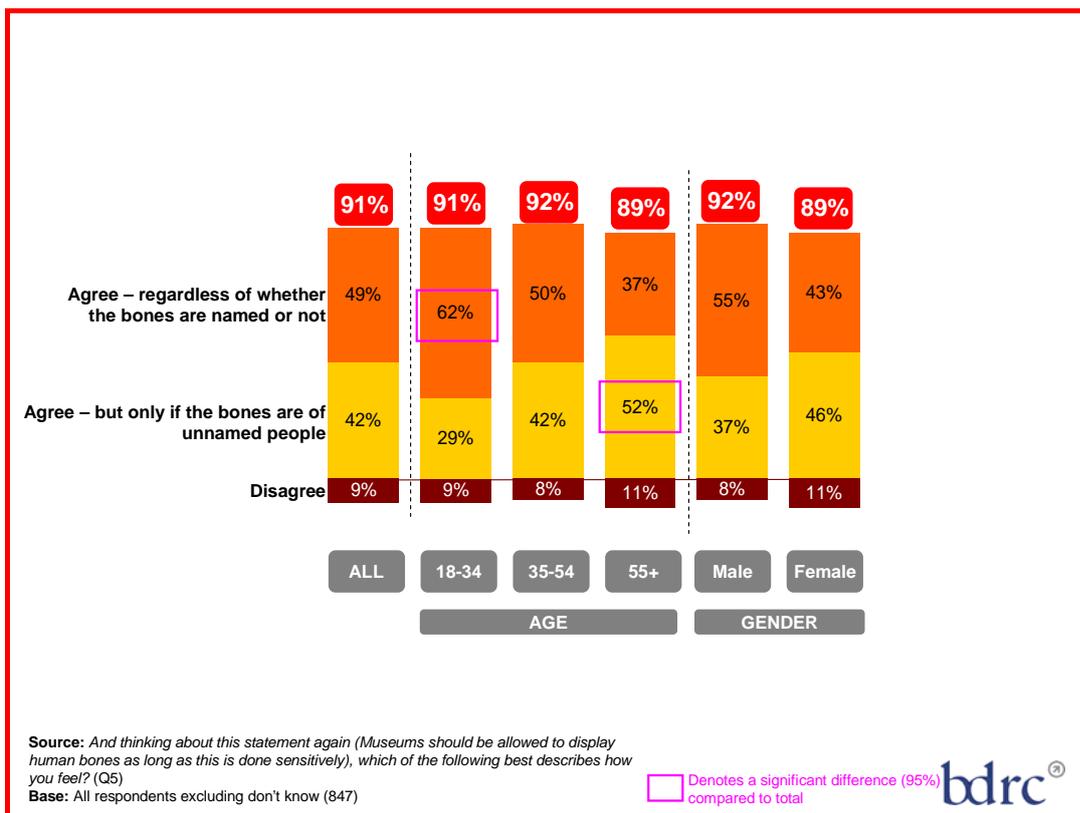


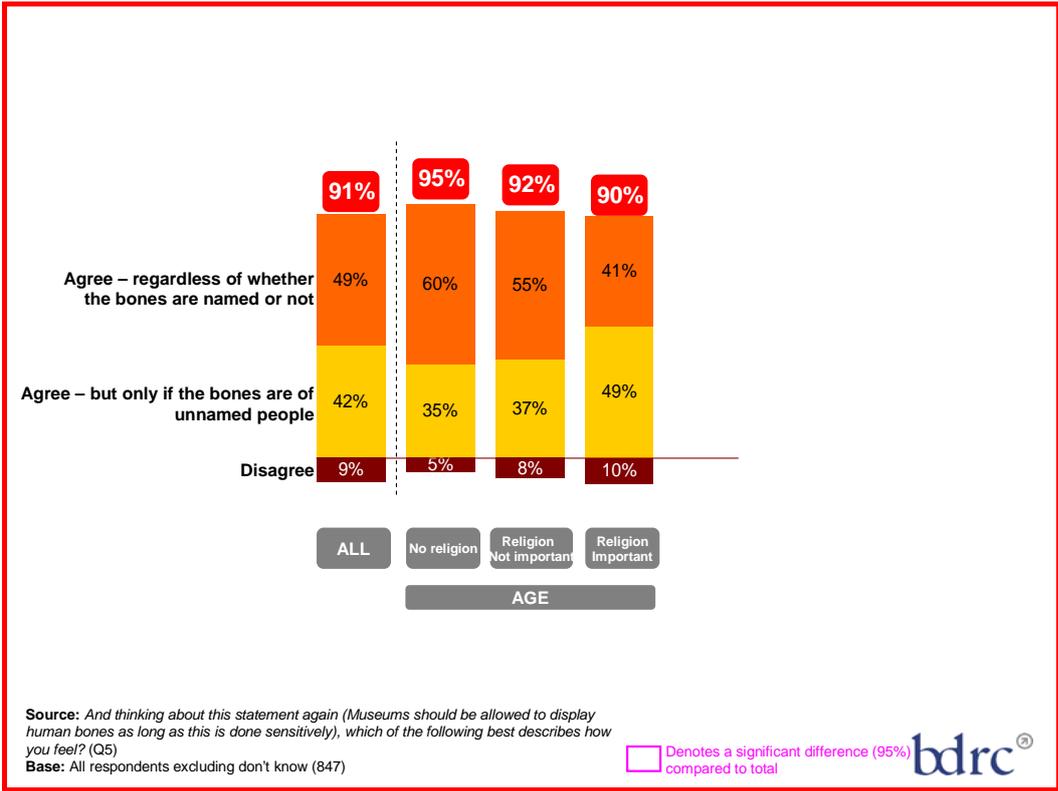


There are some, albeit not statistically significant, differences in opposition between those that belong to a religion and those that do not. Those that do not belong to a religion are less likely to oppose the display of human bones (5%) than those that do belong to a religion and consider their religion 'important' (10%).

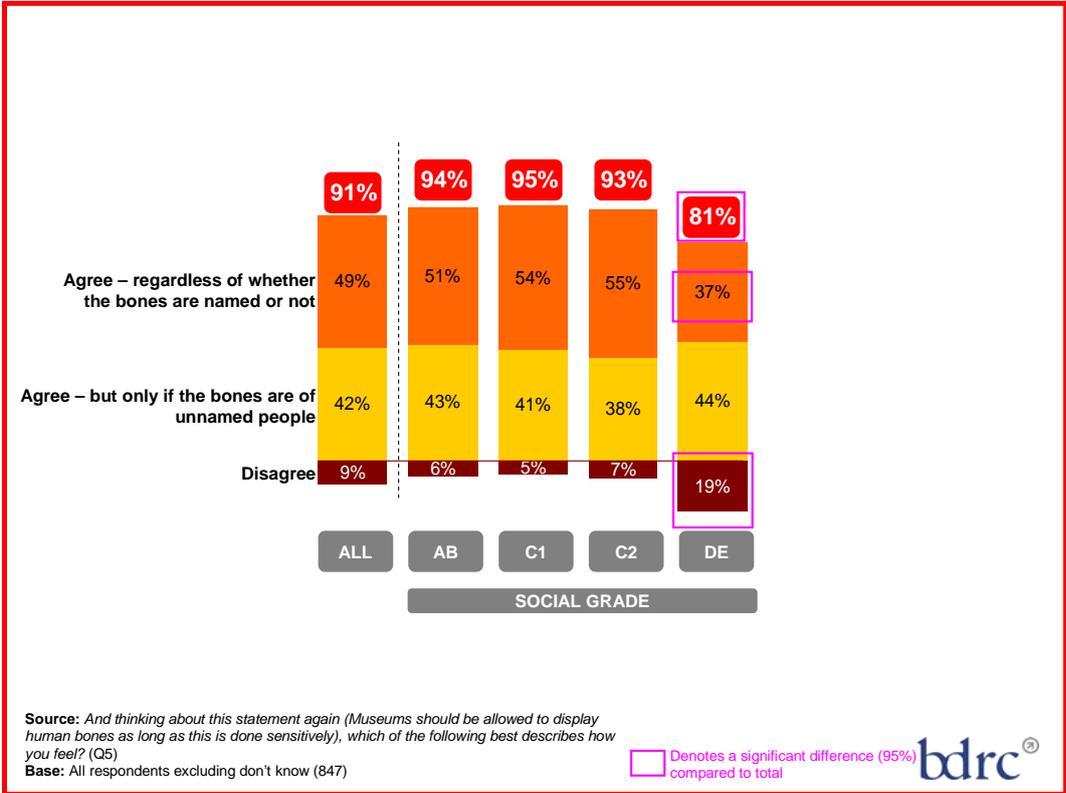


Only around half of the population (49%) are happy regardless of whether the bones are of named people or not. This opinion is mixed across age groups with 62% of those aged 18-34 agreeing regardless of whether the bones are named or not compared with only 37% for those aged over 55. Males (55%) are also happier than females (43%) regardless of whether the bones are of named people. Those who do not belong to a religion are more likely to agree to bones being displayed regardless of whether they are named (60%) than those who belong to a religion and consider it 'important' (41%).



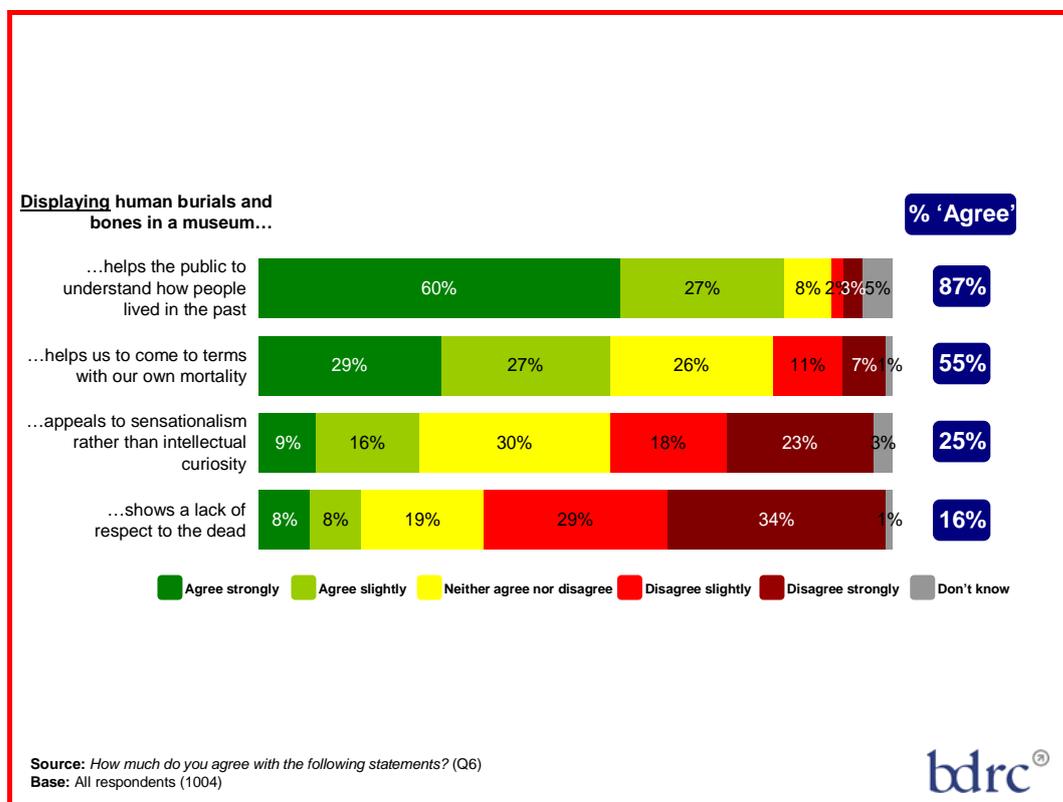


Those from a DE social background are least likely to agree that museums should be allowed to display human bones, with only 37% agreeing regardless of whether the bones are named or not.



Displaying human burials and bones is considered by most to 'help the public understand how people have lived in the past' (87% agree with statement). This is particularly prominent amongst those with social grade AB (94%). Fewer agree that 'displaying human burials and bones in a museum helps us to come to terms with our own mortality' (55%), although disagreement remains at low levels.

1 in 5 (25%) agree that displaying human burials and bones in a museum 'appeals to sensationalism rather than intellectual curiosity' but only 16% agree that 'displaying human burials and bones in a museum shows a lack of respect for the dead'. Almost two-thirds (62%) disagree with this statement.

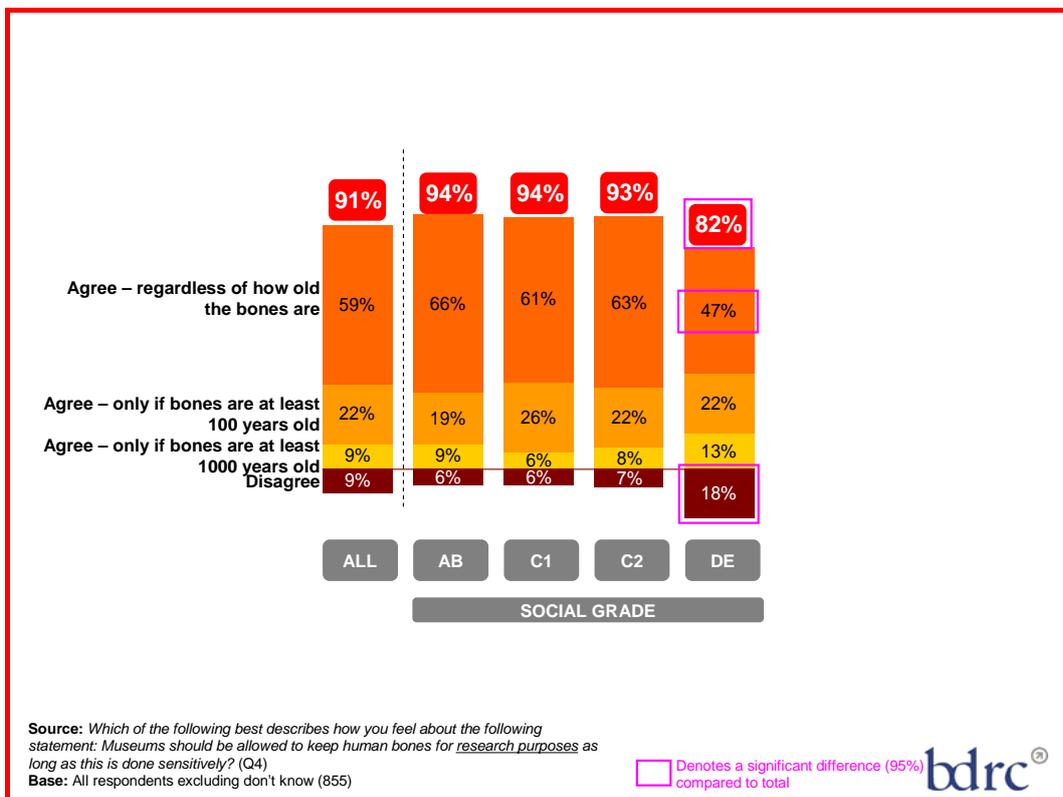


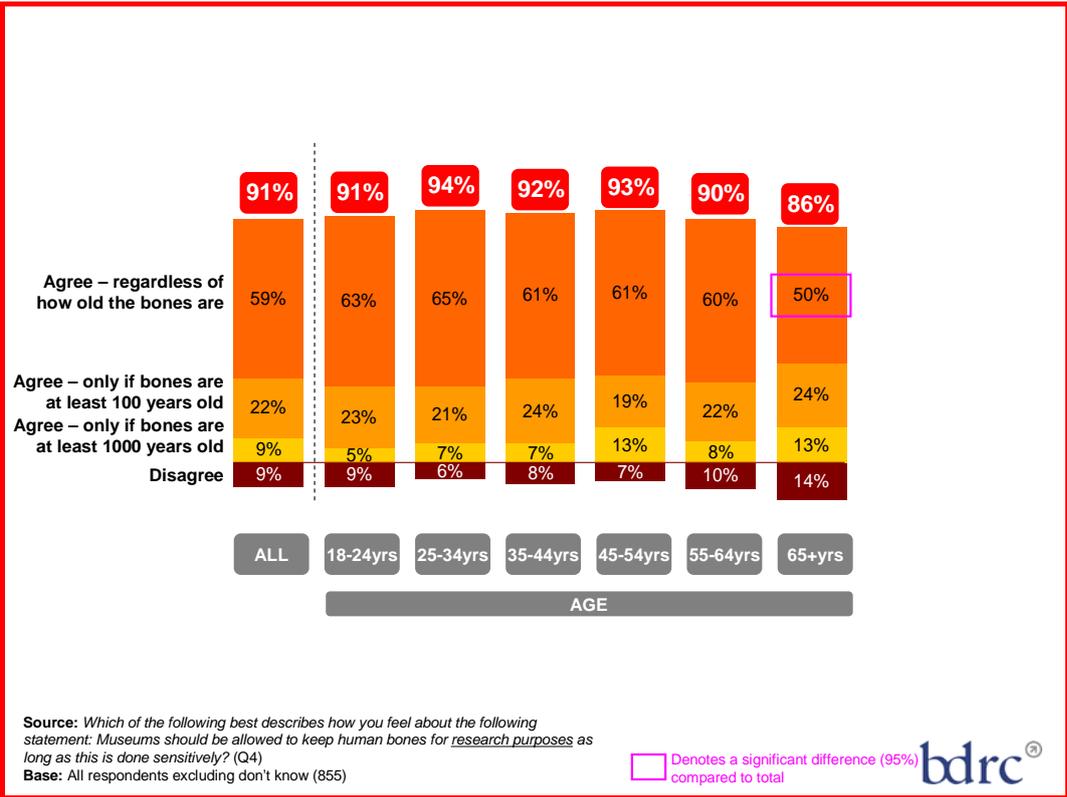
**(d) Keeping Human Bones in Museums for Research Purposes**

As well as the display of human bones in museums, the majority (91%) also agree that museums should be allowed to keep human bones for research purposes. More than half (59%) agree that this should be the case regardless of how old the bones are. A further 22% agree on the basis that the bones are over 100 years old and 9% if they are over 1,000 years old.

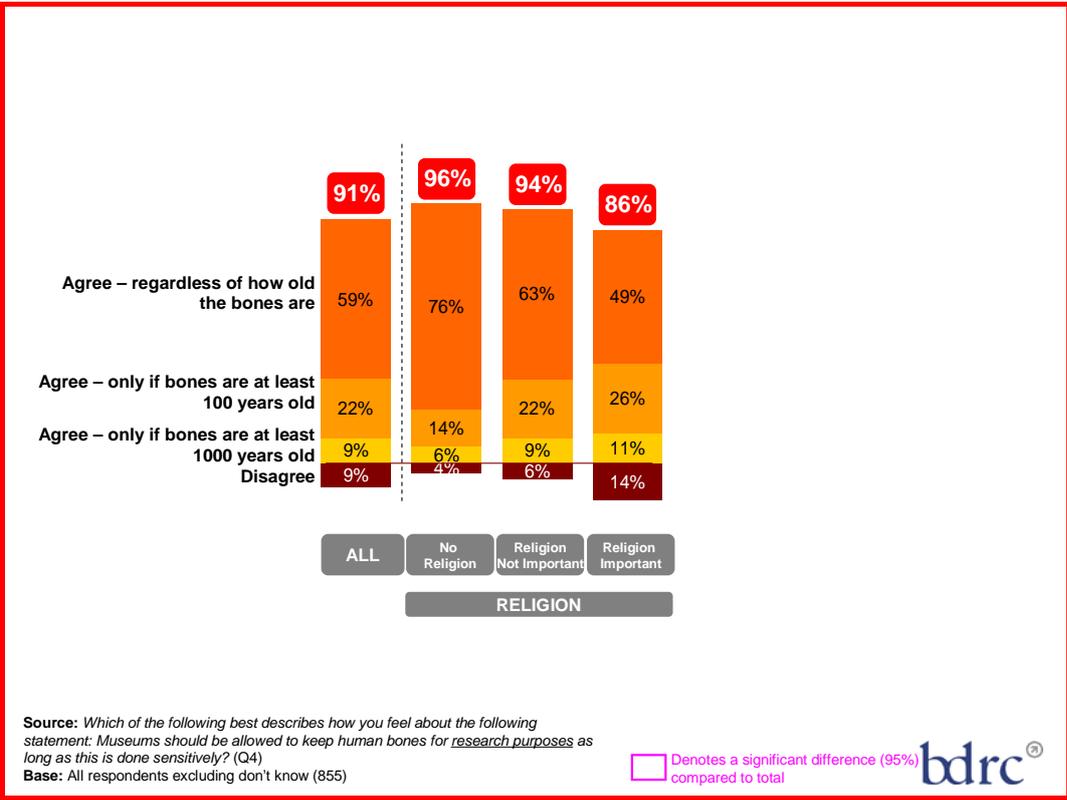
A significantly higher than average proportion of those from social grades DE oppose the use of human bones for research purposes (18%, average 9%).

Those from older age groups are also more likely to oppose the use of human bones for research purposes, with 10% of those aged 55-64 years and 14% of those 65 years or over disagreeing that museums should be allowed to keep human bones for research purposes.



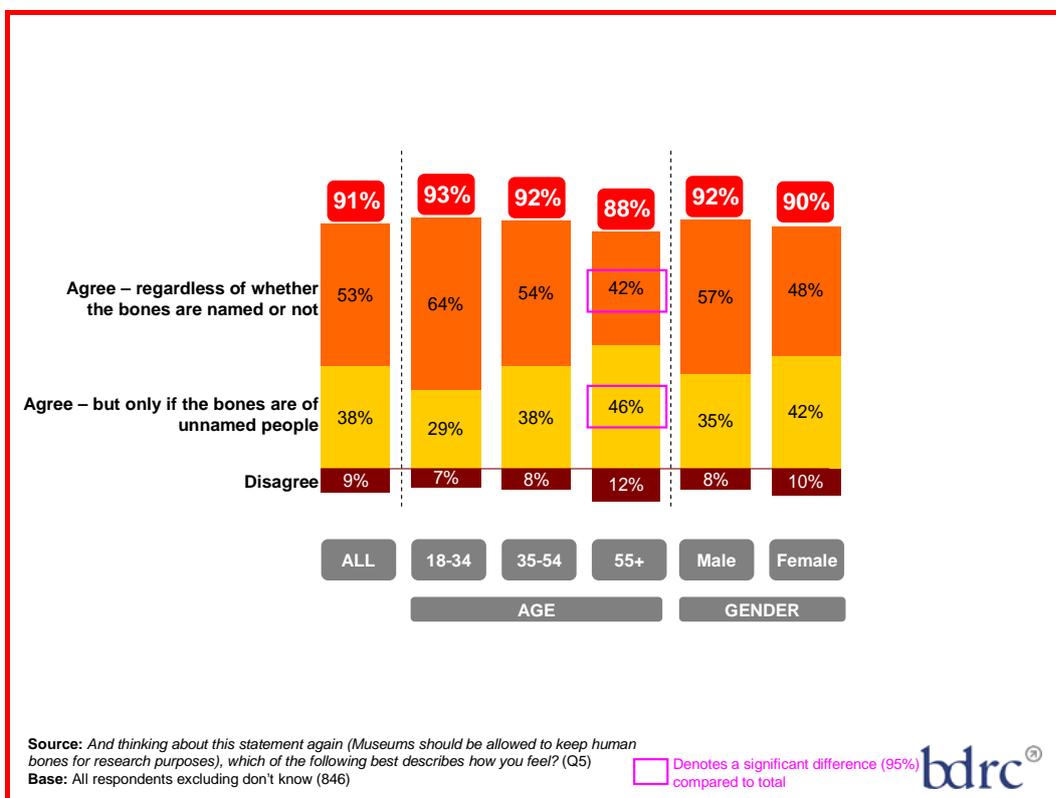


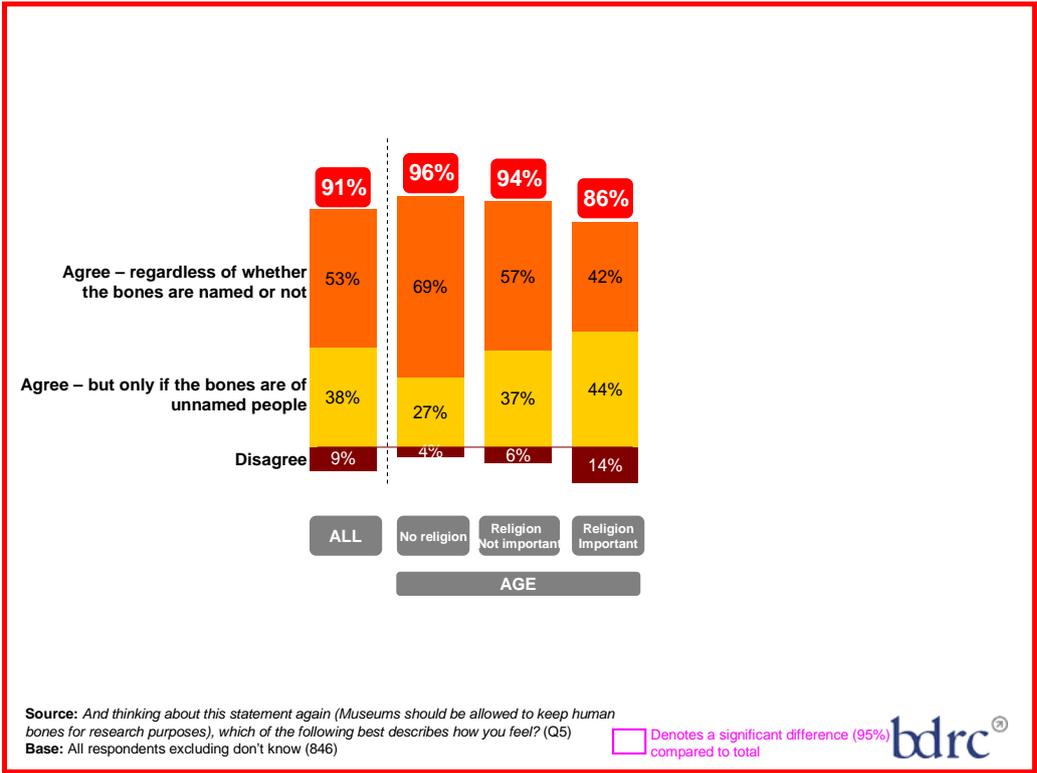
As with the display of human bones, there are some indicative differences in attitudes towards the use of human bones for research purposes in terms of religion. 4% of those with no religion opposed the use of human bones for research compared with 14% among those who belong to a religion which is important to them.



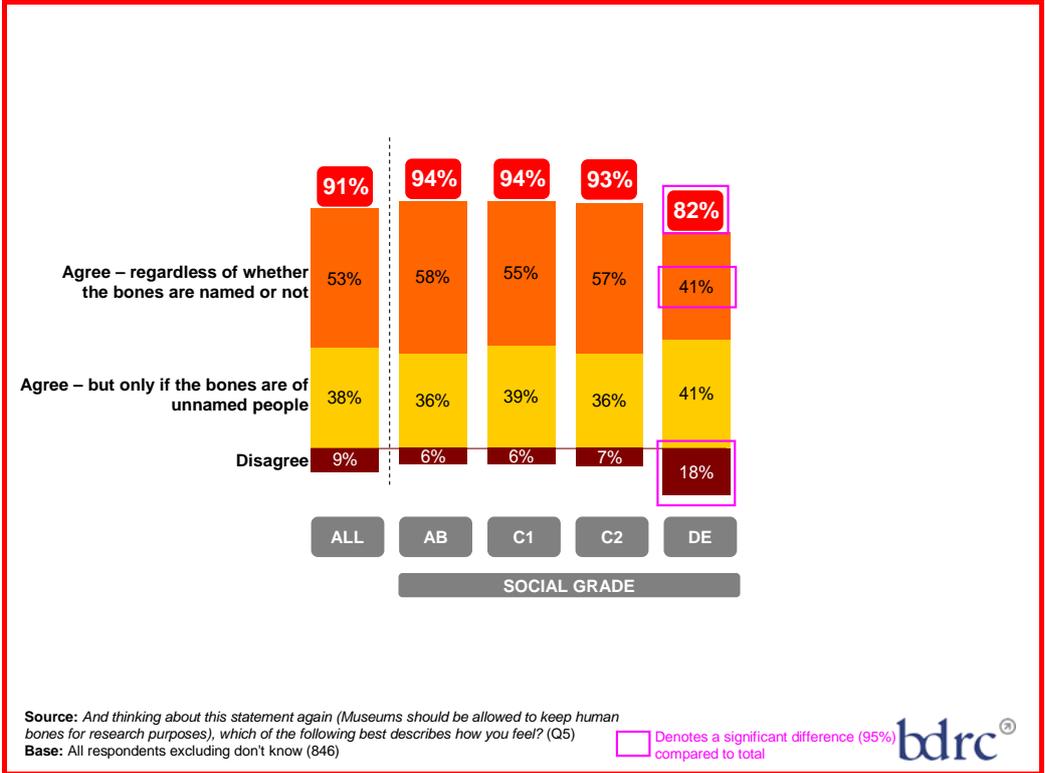
Just over half (53%) of the population agree regardless of whether the bones are of named people or not, whereas 38% agree on the basis that the bones are of unnamed people.

Again there is some variation in terms of age with 64% of 18-34s, 54% of 35-54s and 42% of those aged 55+ agreeing regardless of whether the bones are of named people. Females (48%) are also less likely to agree regardless of whether bones are of named people than males (57%). Those who don't belong to a religion are also more likely to agree regardless of whether the bones are named or not (69%), than those who belong to a religion which is considered important to them (42%).

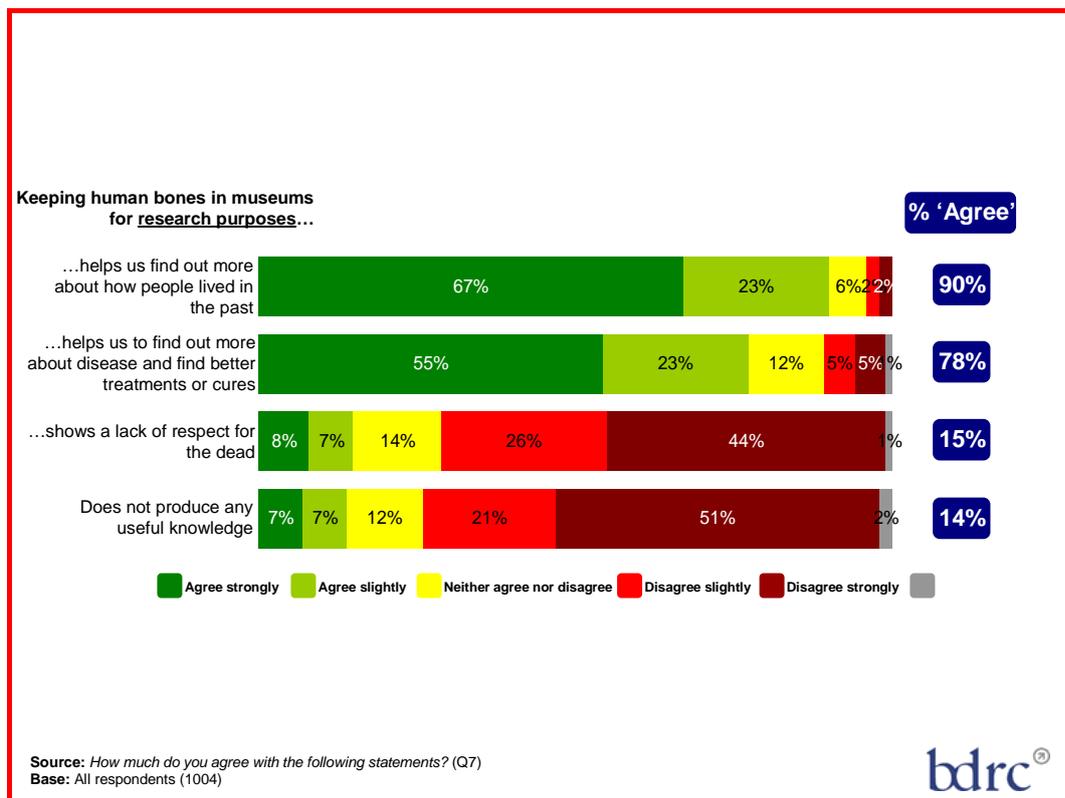




Again, as with displaying human bones in museums, those from social grades DE are most opposed to the use of human bones for research purposes. Only 41% of this segment agree that human bones should be allowed to keep human bones for research purposes regardless of whether the bones are named compared with 53% of the population as a whole.



Overall the majority (90%) agree that keeping human bones in museums for research purposes 'helps us to find out more about how people lived in the past', particularly among those categorised AB (95%) and those 45 – 64 years (95%). Most (78%) also agree that keeping human bones for research purposes 'helps us to find out more about disease and find better treatments or cures', with over half agreeing strongly (55%). Only a minority agree with the statements 'shows a lack of respect to the dead' and 'does not produce any useful knowledge' (15%, 14% respectively), with high levels of disagreement with both of these statements.



### 3. Summary

The vast majority of the England adult population support museums that wish to display and keep human bones for research purposes, although around 1 in 10 people do not support this.

Many are unconcerned about the age of the bones used in displays and for research purposes, and bones being at least 100 years old satisfies the vast majority. However, there is greater concern about the use of bones of people who can be identified by name.

Overall, the public is more comfortable with using human bones for research purposes than displays in museums.

The most significant differences in attitudes towards human bones occur by social grade, age and religion. Lower social grades, those aged 65 or over and those for whom religion is important tend to be more concerned about displaying human bones and using them for research.

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## APPENDIX – SAMPLING & METHODOLOGY

A Nationally representative sample of n=1,000 adults aged 18+ in GB is interviewed on each telephone omnibus. Respondents are recruited via a process of Random Digit Dialling (RDD) with quotas set on age, sex and region (see appendices IV. for actual quotas). The data is post weighted to the profile of all adults aged 18+ (including non telephone owning households) using 8 key demographic variables: age, sex, region, social class, household tenure, work status, number of cars in the household and whether or not respondent has taken a foreign holiday in the last 3 years (see appendices IV. for actual weights). Targets for the weighted data are derived from the National Readership survey, a random probability survey comprising 34,000 random face-to-face interviews conducted annually. Omnibus interviews are conducted via a CATI (Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing) system from our wholly owned call centres where we have over 300 CATI stations.

## APPENDIX – QUESTIONNAIRE

**INTRODUCTION:** We are interested to hear what you think about archaeology and human bones. In particular, how human bones from archaeological digs are displayed in museums and used in research.

**Q1.** Firstly, how often do you tend to visit.....?

*Statements: rotate*

1. Museums
2. Archaeological sites

*Scale:*

1. Never
2. Less than once a year
3. Once or twice a year
4. 3-4 times a year
5. 5-11 times a year
6. At least once a month,
7. At least once a week
8. Don't know

**Q2.** How interested are you in archaeology?

*Read out – single code*

1. Very interested,
2. Fairly interested
3. Not very interested
4. Not at all interested
5. Don't know

**Q3.**How often do you watch archaeology programmes on TV?

*Read out – single code*

1. Never
2. Less than once a year
3. Once or twice a year
4. 3-4 times a year
5. 5-11 times a year
6. At least once a month,
7. At least once a week
8. Don't know

**Q4.**Which of the following best describes how you feel about the following:

*Statements: - rotate*

1. Museums should be allowed to display human bones as long as this is done sensitively.
2. Museums should be allowed to keep human bones for research purposes as long as this is done sensitively.

Scale:

1. Agree – regardless of how old the bones are
2. Agree – but only if the bones are at least 100 years old
3. Agree – but only if the bones are at least 1000 years old
4. Disagree – they should not be allowed to

ASK STATEMENT 1 IF ANY AGREE AT Q4 CODE 1

ASK STATEMENT 2 IF ANY AGREE AT Q4 CODE 2

**Q5.** And thinking about these statements again, which of the following best describes how you feel about these statements?

*Statements: - rotate*

1. Museums should be allowed to display human bones as long as this is done sensitively.
2. Museums should be allowed to keep human bones for research purposes as long as this is done sensitively.

*Scale:*

1. Agree – regardless of whether the bones are of named people or not,
2. Agree – but only if the bones are of unnamed people
3. Don't know

**Q6.** How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
Displaying human burials and bones in a museum....

*Statements: rotate*

1. helps the public to understand how people lived in the past.
2. shows a lack of respect to the dead.
3. helps us to come to terms with our own mortality.
4. appeals to sensationalism rather than intellectual curiosity.

*Scale*

1. Agree strongly
2. Agree slightly
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree slightly
5. Disagree strongly
6. Don't know

**Q7.**How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Keeping human bones in museums for research purposes.....:

*Statements: rotate*

1. helps us to find out more about how people lived in the past.
2. shows a lack of respect to the dead.
3. helps us to find out more about disease and find better treatments or cures.
4. does not produce any useful knowledge.

*Scale:*

1. Agree strongly
2. Agree slightly
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree slightly
5. Disagree strongly
6. Don't know

Demographics:

Which religion do you yourself belong to?

- Christian
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Sikh
- Jewish
- Humanist
- Pagan
- Other
- None

**ASK ALL NOT CODING NONE**

Would you describe your religion as... **READ OUT. SINGLE CODE**

- Very important
- Fairly important
- Not very important
- Not at all important
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

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