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NEWS

Two human skulls returned to remote Pacific island after decades on display in Bristol

The skulls were taken in what would now be illegal pillaging of graves for remains



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By [Adam Postans](#)

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Santa Catalina (Image: Google)

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Two Native American human skulls dug up and given to Bristol Museum nearly a century ago by a Victorian adventurer and archaeologist from the city have been handed back to their US tribe.

The prehistoric remains, along with other grave goods, were excavated on the tiny Pacific island of Santa Catalina, off the California coast, by Alfred Hutchins.

He donated them to the museum in 1920 after returning home to retire after several decades in America at the end of the 19th century.

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They will be flown 5,500 miles back to their homeland, which has a population of just 4,000 — the first time remains of any of the tribe's ancient ancestors have been returned from abroad.

Former Bristol University visiting researcher, filmmaker and anthropologist Dr Teri Brewer started researching the remains in 2011, which led to an international collaboration between curators, archaeologists and descendants to piece together their story.

They discovered that Hutchins left Bristol for the western US in the 1860s seeking his fortune.

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From left to right: Bristol culture director Jon Finch, Tiat society director Cindi Alvitre, Pimu Catalina Island archaeology project co-director Desiree Martinez and curator of the Fowler Museum at UCLA Dr Wendy Teeter at the repatriation ceremony at Bristol (Image: Copyright Unknown)

He became a keen amateur archaeologist and photographer, taking part in what would now be illegal pillaging of graves for skeletal remains in former Native American villages, between 1890 and 1905.

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After amassing a collection of artefacts, he returned to Bristol but lost his son, Lt Avalon Hutchins, named after Santa Catalina's main settlement, in the First World War before giving his finds from the island, where his son was born, to the museum, most likely as a tribute to him.

A 'constant state of mourning' for Native Americans

Tongva descendant and archaeologist Desiree Martinez said: "This is the first international repatriation of Tongva ancestors that we have achieved.

"As Native Americans, we are in a constant state of mourning knowing that our ancestors' graves have been disturbed and their remains and burial goods removed to sit on museum shelves, all over the world, to be 'studied'.

"Today we are joyful that we can bring our ancestors back to the US and rebury them in their homelands.

"We are grateful that the Bristol City Museum and Gallery has been gracious enough to work [Privacy](#) ke this possible."



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his excavations or brought the skulls to England if he had realised there were living descendants who would have been distressed.

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“On his behalf, I will say he was a typical Victorian and an avid collector of all sorts of specimens, geology and artefacts, as well as these human remains, and he did what others of his ilk were also doing, possibly thinking he was ‘saving items for posterity’.

“I am sure Bristol Museum has looked after them well. I am delighted they are going home, and will pray for their souls.”

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kizhbro

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Sorry to say you have been duped. Neither Alvitre nor Martinez are Native American heritage, they are Mexican here is a list of verified impostors <https://gabrielenoindians.net/impostors.html> tongva not even an ancestral tribe. They are a self-proclaimed group started by alvitre around 1992-1994. Here is a compilation of ethnographic research going back to the 1800's indicating the Kij, Kit'c, Kizh, Kitcherenos as the Ancestral tribe of the area <https://gabrielenoindians.net/ewExternalFiles/KizhnotTongva.pdf> Lastly, a 7 month independent research was conducted on the term tongva. The term was chosen with the intent of establishing a casino <https://gabrielenoindians.net/ewExternalFiles/EvolutionoftheTongvatribalname.pdf> The actual research contains nearly 1,100 pages of documents and interviews. Please be advise neither alvitre nor Martinez wish to be interviewed, they adamantly declined.

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