WHY ARE A MUSEUM AND AN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE BRINGING ANCESTORS HOME?



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

The Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford has agreed to return 39 pieces of human remains belonging to Naga communities in north-east India. The remains include parts of skulls, a finger and skin with hair. They were collected by British colonial administrators and kept in the museum for nearly a century. Naga representatives say the remains should never have been treated as museum objects and that their return is about memory, respect and giving ancestors a proper resting place. The negotiations began in 2020 and involved representatives from different Naga tribes, community groups and museum staff. The museum has also reviewed its wider collection of more than 6,500 Naga objects, many of which were collected during British rule. A handover ceremony is expected in Oxford before the remains are taken to Nagaland for a traditional ceremony.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

Colonialism changed not only who controlled land and governments, but also what happened to people's bodies, objects and traditions. This story shows how communities are challenging the way museums collected and displayed material from colonised peoples. Returning the remains is an attempt to repair some of that harm and give families control over their own history.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“Why do the Naga communities believe the remains should be returned?”

Source: The Guardian

https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2026/sep/10/nagaland-colonialism-ethnography-ethics-oxford-pitt-rivers-museum-return-human-remains