

## Mugabe demands return of freedom fighters' skulls

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 15 August 2015 12:18 -

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**Jan Raath** Harare 10:39AM, August 14 2015

President Mugabe has accused British museums of displaying the skulls of beheaded Zimbabwean freedom fighters and demanded their return, setting off a new row with the country's former colonial masters.

In a speech to mark "Heroes' Day" this week, Mr Mugabe said that in the 1896-97 uprising by the Matabele and Mashona people, the chieftains were "decapitated by the colonial occupying force . . . then dispatched to England to signify British victory over and subjugation of the local population".

He claimed that the skulls were exhibited in British museums. "Surely, keeping decapitated heads as war trophies in this day and age, in a national history museum must rank among the highest forms of racist moral decadence, sadism and human insensitivity," he said.

The state-run press took up Mr Mugabe's campaign against the British "barbarians". The *Herald* newspaper even compared the alleged exhibition of skulls with the killing of Cecil the lion last month.

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Whether the skulls exist, however, is yet to be established. The British Museum said it did not have human skulls matching Mr Mugabe's description, nor "any other human skulls from Zimbabwe" in its collection.

A spokesman for the Natural History Museum said it did have human remains from Africa from that period but its pathology department was unaware of any request relating to Zimbabwe.

"The Natural History Museum has a policy of considering requests for return of human remains to their places of origin, under the provisions of Section 47 of the Human Tissue Act 2004," the spokesman said. "The museum engages in discussions with governments and communities who wish to make a claim for return of remains."

Officials said there were no exhibits of any Zimbabwean body parts on display in any of London's museums.

Historians also question the version of events presented by Mr Mugabe, noting that there was no record of decapitations in that conflict. Professor Terence Ranger, the doyen of Zimbabwe's early colonial history and a friend of Mr Mugabe, had established that there was talk of one possible decapitation in the two-year rebellion.

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A chief in the east of the country had hidden from officers of Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Police.

"They had to dynamite him out," said a historian who asked not to be named. "As soon as they captured him, he was subjected to a summary court martial, found guilty and shot. There was talk that one of the troopers had cut off his head and taken it back to England but Ranger said there was never anything to back it up."

Most of the leaders of the rebellion were given courts martial, found guilty and shot or hanged, and then buried in the yard of the prison, he said. "It's a bit of an exaggerated idea to suggest that British officials routinely beheaded people. It's just not credible.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/africa/article4527157.ece>