Once upon a time, these heads and limbs existed in order to express and embody the needs and impulses of an individual human life. They were the vehicles of different biographies and they compelled singular attention, they proclaimed 'I am I'. Even when they were first dead, at the moment of their sacrifice or atrocity, their bodies and their limbs manifested biography and conserved vestiges of personal identity: they were corpses. But when a corpse becomes a bog body, the personal identity drops away; the bog body does not proclaim 'I am I'; instead it says something like 'I am it' or 'I am you'. Like the work of art, the bog body asks to be contemplated; it eludes the biographical and enters the realm of the aesthetic. (Heaney 1999: 4)

The matter of the bog

Bog bodies are the most recognisable faces of prehistoric peoples from northern Europe, giving them international stature. Their preserved remains are the result of a unique natural phenomenon that provides archaeologists with unparalleled insights into the lives and deaths of people from the past. Aspects of appearance, dress, disease and trauma can be examined in ways that are simply not possible for the majority of skeletonised and cremated human remains from prehistory. This book will argue that there is no more powerful archaeological lens through which to view not just daily life in later prehistory but also conflict, customs, beliefs and relations with the environment. Through a synthesis of new discoveries and novel analytical techniques deployed on existing remains, alongside original archival, folkloric and landscape research, it will present the most up-to-date study of these remains. It will also challenge a number of conceptual boundaries that have circumscribed and limited bog body studies for too long, particularly the division between well-preserved and more skeletonised bog remains, and the opposition between 'pragmatic' and 'ritualised' violence used to interpret their deaths. The methodological framework used here is also groundbreaking: adopting what I will call an 'after-life cycle' approach, starting from when we encounter them...
in the bog. This is an attempt to be more honest about the fact that the work of archaeology is always situated *in* the present, leading the reader through the archaeological process: the work of making sense of these remains, from discovery through conservation to analysis, interpretation and display. While other studies have touched on these themes, no other volume has adopted this unique stance and structure, which allows us to continually scrutinise how the reception of those remains shape our interpretations.

I have taken this approach because bog bodies *matter*, quite literally, in their stubborn resurfacing into our world, making the past present to us in ways that both touch and appal our humanity. Finally then, this study is distinguished by its deeply historiographic approach: showing how and why our attitudes to bodies as well as artefacts from the moss and the mire have changed over time. For we are at the threshold of a very different relationship with the places in which they are found. Once seen as marginal, unproductive and stagnant, the bog now offers a vital part of our response to climate change and the global crisis in biodiversity. The book thus probes when and why we relegated the bog to the brink of society, and to what ends, seeking to learn from our prehistoric counterparts how we might re-establish a new relationship with both moss and mire, enriched by the archaeology that comes from their depths.

Seamus Heaney’s opening address for the 1996 exhibition ‘Face to Face with Your Past’, at Silkeborg Museum in Denmark (cited at the start of this chapter) thus provides not just the title but the starting point for the three main objectives of this research. First, to explore the lives and deaths of people found in the bogs of north-western Europe, and the meanings of these places in the past. Second, to re-examine the processes, both practical and philosophical, through which they have been preserved to become cultural as well as archaeological icons. Finally, to critically consider why these human remains, above all others, have come to capture the northern European imagination – for better or worse – in ways that prompt us to re-examine both our own humanity and our mortality.

Only archaeology can achieve this, because as a discipline it crosses the territories of forensics, environmental analysis, social and landscape history and material culture studies. Its blindness to the boundaries of prehistory and history, of matter *and* text and its willingness to foray into folklore and journalism as much as ethnography, invigorates the evidence upon which archaeologists can draw. From peat cutting or farmer’s mantlepiece to conservation laboratory, archive shelf and museum store, this book will trace that journey into the public light of the gallery and on into the images and ideas about the dead that can inspire or disturb – what Heaney (1999: 4) deems their unique ‘riddling power’.

The subjects of this book are thus the well-preserved human remains that are collectively known as ‘bog bodies’ (Glob [1969] 1971), described by rectors, surgeons, antiquarians and diarists, from the 1600s onwards (van der Sanden 1996: 39), but undoubtedly disturbed and examined for as long as people have been cutting into the bog. Iron Age people themselves may well have been the first curators of such remains, given that examples from the Mesolithic, Neolithic
and Bronze Age have been recovered, as have numerous examples from the medieval and historic periods. Bogs are generally found in cool, northern climates but stretch from Greece to Russia, including one of the largest extant areas in the Siberian lowlands (van der Sanden 1996: 21). North America too has its bogs, focused around the Hudson Bay lowlands and Mackenzie River basin. Blanket bogs cover large areas of upland, as for example in the Flow Country of Scotland or the Pennines. Swamp peatlands can be found in Southeast Asia and the largest tropical peatland was recently discovered under the forests of the Congo Basin in 2017 (Dargie et al. 2017). However, the scope of this book will focus on the later Bronze Age to late Iron Age/Roman period, c.1200 BC–AD 400, when we see a swell in dated interments in bogs across Ireland and Britain, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Poland and the Netherlands (Turner and Briggs 1986: tab. 19; van der Sanden 1996: fig. 92). It is these latter countries that will form the basis of research here.

As argued above, this study is not only timely but pressing. Peatlands represent the world’s largest natural terrestrial carbon store (Page et al. 2011; IUCN 2019), with a crucial role to play in carbon sequestration as a way of combating climate change (Strack 2008; Joosten 2010). Since the destruction of such wetlands (particularly from the nineteenth century onwards) have been identified as a major factor in carbon release (Immirzi et al. 1992), the cessation of extraction and active bog regeneration is now a key global policy priority (Limpens et al. 2008; Keddy et al. 2009; Cris et al. 2014). While they might not be thought of as particularly biodiverse, bogs shelter highly adapted, unique fauna and flora (see Chapter 4), and they also assist in flood and fire prevention while enhancing local water quality (IUCN 2019). We often underestimate the volume of lost peat, which once fuelled cities in the UK such as York and Norwich, as well as periods of major experimentation for peat bath spa treatments, paper making, litter for animal bedding, chemical extraction and market gardening (Rotherham 2009). It is the latter use that has survived longest but pressures to avoid further release of carbon have seen a northern European pressure to move away from peat use in the horticultural industry. Cutting for fuel in Ireland, the Highlands and the Islands of Scotland as well as countries such as Norway is likely to require a sensitive balance of local rites and risks against these global priorities (see Crawford 2018). Tensions around even small-scale commercial extraction versus repurposing or restoration now abound, seen in recent planning applications, appeals and conservation objections on both Chat Moss and Lindow Moss in northern Britain. In October 2018, Bord na Móna (Ireland’s quasi-state peat extraction company) announced that seventeen of its sixty-two active bogs would cease milling peat for commercial sale immediately, with the rest scheduled for closure by 2025, to mixed response (Carroll 2018; RTÉ 2018). More active restoration projects have been funded in the UK (H.M. Government 2018: 45), Denmark (Danish Ministry for the Environment 2011) and Germany (NABU 2018), led in part through the International Peatland Conservation Fund and ‘EU LIFE’ initiatives (Andersen 2017), such as the ‘peat restore’ programme pioneered in Germany, Poland and
the Baltic states (NABU 2018) and the 'Moors for the Future Partnership' (2015) on the Pennine's upland blanket bogs.

This historically significant shift in our relationship with the peat bog is of great importance for the climate and it offers protection for the surviving prehistoric archaeology still buried in its depths, yet its impact on discoveries from the bog will be felt. In van der Sanden's (1996: figs 86 and 88) masterful study, he selectively charts historical patterns of bog body recovery with demonstrable spikes in Ireland and Britain from the 1800s onwards but particularly from the 1950s to 1990s. In Ireland, there was a sudden surge from the new millennium onwards but this has now slowed again (Kelly 2013). New discoveries are still being made in some peatlands (e.g. Bauerochse et al. 2018), whereas areas such as the Netherlands ceased peat production some time ago, leading to fewer discoveries (van Beek et al. 2015). This general decline in discovery is likely to be matched across northern Europe for a number of reasons. Drainage of the wetlands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries disturbed remains that had been hidden since their interment, but few were kept or curated. It was the nineteenth century that saw the rise of more popular antiquarianism and a specific interest in human remains (especially crania) as indicators of racial history (Morse 2005; Trigger 2006). This led to the wider reporting and curation of bog bodies, or at least fragments from them. War-time pressure on indigenous fuel production, the provision of animal bedding or litter and the post-Second World War urge to drain and improve surviving wetlands for farming were coupled with the commercial extraction of peat, and both were assisted by mechanised milling, tilling and drainage. Again, this led to an increase in discoveries during the early to middle part of the twentieth century, but the legislation regarding both the reporting and ownership of such remains and associated artefacts, as well as any financial rewards, varied greatly from country to country. In the UK, from the 1950s onwards, archaeology gathered force as both an academic discipline and an exciting area of amateur interest. Post-war rural and urban regeneration programmes enhanced the unveiling of ancient sites, supporting the growth of museums and their collections as well as archaeology's prominence in the media (Aitchison 2011). Indeed, the BBC's first-ever commissioned archaeology series, Buried Treasure (Clack and Brittain 2007), featured an initial programme on archaeology as a form of 'big science' before episode two, 'The Peat Bog Murder Mystery of Tollund Man' (BBC 1954 – trumping Stonehenge, which fell to episode three). Starring the clipped tones of Glyn Daniel and Mortimer Wheeler, it brought the phenomenon of the well-preserved bog mummy to the British public long before the translation of P. V. Glob's 1965 book into English (Glob [1969] 1971) and also introduced rival interpretations (including theories of sacrifice as part of fertility rites or the celebration of martial victories) to the general public. During the 1980s, the reformation of the planning process, the emergence of developer-funded archaeology and the reform of treasure legislation in many northern European countries has generally resulted in more rigorous reporting of bog finds. Yet as peat cutting slows, fewer finds will be made. The golden era of discovery is probably over, unless
regeneration schemes accidentally disturb buried remains as part of re-wetting or re-planting schemes.

Instead, we are moving into a rather different era of ‘cold case’ bog body research, where known examples and their rather neglected samples lingering in laboratory refrigerators and stores have new potential. Scientific advances, including enhanced accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) dating methods, light stable isotope analysis and ancient DNA (aDNA) analysis, material culture studies and non-invasive scanning methods, as well as forensic expertise, have all been brought to bear on bog bodies. In Denmark, new programmes of analysis on Tollund Man (Fischer 2012), Grauballe Man (Asingh and Lynnerup 2007; Asingh 2009), the prehistoric textile collections in the National Museum of Copenhagen (e.g. Frei et al. 2009), as well as isotope studies (e.g. Frei et al. 2017) have yielded new information about some of the world’s most iconic bog bodies. ‘Paper’ bog body research is also yielding dividends; archive work in Sweden (Fredengren 2015; Karlsson 2019) has been complemented by in-depth studies in Scotland (Cowie et al. 2011) and folklore work in Lithuania (Kama 2016). Meanwhile, reflections on curatorial practice and policy (Joy 2009; Jenkins 2011), exhibition design (Mulhall and Briggs 2007; Giles 2009) alongside cultural studies of the meaning of these remains (e.g. Sanders 2009; Ravn 2010) have widened the remit of bog body studies. This makes it a rich and timely moment to reset that agenda.

Defining bogs and bog bodies

The term ‘bog bodies’ is a translation of ‘Moorleiche’, a concept first defined by Johanna Mestorf in her 1871 catalogue of twelve sets of well-preserved remains from Ireland, Denmark and Germany (van der Sanden 1996: 49). The once-lauded but now deeply problematised survey by Dieck in 1965 was supplanted for the UK and Ireland by publications such as Turner and Briggs (1986) and van der Sanden (1996), who included a wide variety of remains, skeletal and well-preserved, from blanket bogs and raised mires as well as fenlands. In common with those catalogues, this book argues for a reconceptualisation of the bog body: to bring within our discursive orbit not just the ‘paper’ bodies known through archival research and desiccated or shrivelled body parts that have not benefitted from conservation treatment, but skeletal remains such as those from Sweden (Bergerbrant et al. 2013) and Denmark (Ravn 2011). Due to an accident of temperature or hydrology, they may not be mummified in the same way as their most iconic counterparts yet there is nonetheless an intent to bury or inter these remains in a similar locale (Fredengren 2018). This study also argues that our contextualisation of these bog bodies must embrace other wet contexts – the mere, the lake, the spring and watering hollow, even the damp ditches of enclosures – if we are to properly understand the reasons behind the association of human remains and bodies of water in later prehistory. Finally, it will resituate the apparently horrific violence meted out to many bog bodies within wider evidence for violence in the Iron Age.
and Roman world. The book follows Redfern’s (2016: 4) use of World Heritage Organisation definitions to draw wherever possible, a distinction between violence and trauma; the former implies the intentional use of physical force (threatened or actual) against another human, with the high likelihood of causing injury, harm, death or deprivation. Trauma, meanwhile, may arise from accident as much as human incident, and where there is doubt over the cause of injury, this will be raised and discussed. The book will go on to argue that it is ourselves, as archaeologists, who have tended to elevate these bog figures above their dryland counterparts, as victims of ‘overkill’. In fact, recidivism as well as selective display and deposition is seen at many Iron Age and early Roman sites. The book will argue that this is in part because we have unduly focused upon one reductive yet popular explanation, heavily influenced by the iconic study of Glob ([1969] 1971): ritual sacrifice. In fact, many of these deaths should remain as ‘open verdicts’, certainly in terms of the motivations behind such deaths. Following Joy (2009), it will propose a variety of possibilities relating to different case studies, including accidental death, formal burial and suicide while restating obvious cases of violence within the anthropology of bellicosity and the performance of power in small-scale societies. As such, the division between apparently ‘pragmatic’ and more ‘ritualised’ explanations of bog body violence will become blurred. Instead, the notion of the generative affect of violent performance will be critically discussed within the notion of both a ‘sacrificial’ and a ‘destructive’ economy (after Fontijn 2020). It will also critically consider how these practices might have been shaped and transformed anew by the Roman Empire, in those countries facing conquest and occupation, as well as those on the edge of this colonial ‘ripple effect’.

The book will also think differently about the bog, too often seen as a marginal place or cultural backwater, with pejorative associations. Their ecology might be restricted but the environmental and archaeological evidence suggests that such peatlands were wet clots of life: seething with rather strange inhabitants, fuelling both household needs and spiritual beliefs, endowed with the power of appearing to hold death in stasis. In sum, the book seeks to humanise but contextualise the dead who come from its depths, setting them back within the wider martial character of later prehistoric society, and it will ultimately champion both these places and these human remains not just as of international archaeological significance but as extraordinary loci for the human imagination.

The afterlife of the bog body

The book takes a rather different approach to prior studies. It does not attempt the masterly synthesis of an international catalogue (e.g. van der Sanden 1996), or report in detail on a single, iconic example (e.g. Stead et al. 1986; Asingh and Lynnerup 2007; Joy 2009; Fischer 2012), although Chapter 7 will present in brief the results of a new programme of analysis on Worsley Man – the bog ‘head’ from Manchester Museum. Nor does it adopt a single interpretive lens (Ross and Robins
1989), conceptual framework (such as sacrifice, Aldhouse-Green 2002) or trope (such as forensic discovery and examination, Aldhouse-Green 2016). Instead, the book’s value lies in taking an afterlife approach to the discovery, conservation, analysis, interpretation and display of bog bodies. While the ‘biographical’ turn pioneered by Kopytoff (1986) has been criticised in relation to object studies (see Gosden and Marshall 1999; Hahn and Weiss 2013; Fontijn 2020), I argue that a form of this approach is apposite for the archaeology of human remains because it situates the reader appropriately within both the ‘life’ or rather the ‘afterlife’ of these bog bodies, as they manifest themselves to us in the present.

The book thus starts with how they come to us: beginning in Chapter 2 with the discovery of these well-preserved remains, arguing that their reception must be contextualised within attitudes of the day. The antiquarians of the 1600s and 1700s who marvelled at the preservation of flesh and hair were shaped by ideologies of saintly preservation, where the state of a corpse embodied something of its spiritual purity. Others were excited by the processes that led to this well-preserved state of being as well as the artefacts found nearby, torn between biblical and scientific explanation. This differs palpably from nineteenth-century discoveries where ideas about racial origin and population movement drove the selective retention and study of remains (as we shall see with Ashton Man). In some countries, such as Denmark, nationalist agendas sought to ‘name’ them as historically attested royal or political figures. Yet the nature of these discoveries almost always resulted in a parallel local narrative of a folkloric ‘lost’ figure – a well-renowned drunkard, ne’er do well or lost maidservant, whose mysterious disappearance might finally be resolved. By the 1950s–1980s, the first thought that often sprang to mind from Britain to Denmark was that these were more recent murder victims. Treated first and foremost as police cases, using the nascent but burgeoning suite of forensic techniques, these methods would ultimately transform not just the discipline but the very metaphors through which it was conceptualised. Meanwhile, the discovery of human remains in the borderlands of Ireland had much starker contemporary parallels with those ‘disappeared’ as part of the sectarian violence known euphemistically as the ‘Troubles’ (dating from the 1970s–1990s), giving these bog bodies quite a different societal weight. As the final chapter will discuss, Heaney’s skill in making the bog bodies ‘speak back’ to current fears – Nobel Prize notwithstanding – was not without criticism. The call for reburial of some of these remains in the twenty-first century, particularly in the UK, has shaken archaeological presumptions: some professionals have themselves questioned their rights to curate these remains (discussed later in Chapter 8). Chapter 2 thus shows how sociopolitical, cultural and religious beliefs have shaped the recovery and fate of those remains: whether they were kept, reburied, defiled or curated.

Chapter 3 then considers the next step on their ‘afterlife’, as they enter the archaeological archive or laboratory. It introduces the concept of the aura of the bog body as a key quality of their special status in the archaeological world, and draws in particular on ideas from Moshenska (2006) and Sanders (2009) on the disquieting effect of remains that appear to defy time. Yet it faces head-on the conundrum
that as soon as these bodies are exhumed, time ‘starts’ again, altering not merely appearance but scientific value. It conducts a historical review of the methods, processes and recipes used to defer their ultimate decay, highlighting best practice as well as the practical problems that curators face in both laboratory and gallery. The chapter’s main thrust, however, is to situate this task within the wider debates in conservation philosophy. It will evaluate how the initial preservation ethic of managed decay (preserving an object’s ‘pastness’ and ‘age-value’, Holtorf 2017 – concepts that will be critically discussed) butted up against the more vigorous and interventionist strategies to replicate the effects of the bog and keep time at bay. It discusses not only how scientific progress shaped these curatorial policies but how cultural attitudes to well-preserved human remains also created ideological quandaries for museum experts. Through the example of Tolland Man (among others) it will consider whether the ‘sleight of hand’ performed through museum conservation is deceptive: altering the authenticity of the object. Yet through curatorial testimonies, it will ultimately defend their practice as a form of care that should be more robustly foregrounded in exhibition narratives.

Chapter 4 mimics the archaeological process to ask where and why they were placed in the peat, through a cultural and environmental ‘crossing’ of the bog landscape. It describes different kinds of peatlands and their peculiar and restricted ecology, evoking the changes in climate, precipitation and landscape management that characterised later prehistory. It will evidence the growth of bogs during this era, and consider how these communities might have navigated its quaking surface. The chapter will consider the risks they faced, not just physically but through the supernatural phenomenon that might have been thought to dwell there. Using historic archives and folklore, it will bring this perceived animacy of the bog to life through accounts of ‘bog bursts’ and boggarts. It will use this to conjure the notion of the bog as a place where this and other worlds might touch: a ‘thin’ place, a place of safekeeping but also a threshold or portal, where the sacred might be revealed. The negative meanings attached to this by the Christian Church, as well as the dangers increasingly faced by working in the bog, will help explain the pejorative attitudes that became common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These will be situated with the landscape politics of the day: the discourse of ‘improvement’ and contest over peat itself, heralding the slow disappearance of this valuable environment. Yet by considering its hidden wealth – its plant and animal life, its craft materials and fuel and its role in the psychogeography of later prehistoric people – it will try to see these landscapes differently. Having examined why and how people crossed into the bog, and what they took from it, the next chapter turns to what was given back.

Chapter 5 considers the range of both ‘exquisite’ and ‘everyday’ things interred in mosses across northern Europe, from wagons, chariotry and horse gear, weapons and cauldrons, to agricultural tools, foodstuffs, cloth and jewellery, even hair. Having conjured the range of depositions made, it will then consider how we interpret these acts: were they gifts with supernatural beings, gods or deities? The bog may have been seen as a threshold where exchanges had to be made or merely the
Introduction

‘right’ place to leave things. These open up to us the character of these people, the issues and themes that consumed them and the skills and achievements embodied in the things given to, or kept by, the bog. It seeks to understand the moral logic of these acts, their concepts of value and the purpose of sacrificial exchange. Yet the chapter also argues (in common with Fontijn 2020) that in some ways it was in the act of giving up that things achieved their true value in a shifting and threatening world. Finally, it will end with the phenomenon of the wooden bog figures, to bridge discussions of the artefactual and corporeal, dissolving some of the conceptual boundaries between people and things.

Chapter 6 looks death directly in the face, through the forensic evidence of bog body trauma and violence, examining how a variety of different individuals lived, before they met their ‘violent ends’. It will tease out evidence from both surviving skeletal elements and flesh, hair, teeth and nails, pre-mortem injury, disease and diet, to address questions of origin, life history and mobility. Recent discoveries in Ireland and new scientific analysis undertaken particularly in Denmark have challenged our understanding of how and why some individuals ended up in the bog, rethinking how these communities dealt with difficult or dangerous death through this powerful locale. The chapter engages critically with the notion that some of these figures were selected on the basis either of disfigurement or disability, as if ‘marked’ out as some kind of natural victim or scapegoat. It goes on to evaluate recent ideas by Fredengren (2018) on the notion of ‘slow violence’ meted out to marginal figures that might lead successfully to their final fate as suitable sacrifices. Yet it will contrast this notion with evidence that other bog bodies were robust, well-fed and well-treated individuals, considering how these individuals came to be singled out for death. This idea must be situated within evidence from other later Bronze Age, Iron Age and early Roman sites, using mortality data and wider understanding of later prehistoric society to think critically about the boundaries of such communities and the motivations that might lead to exile or execution, particularly at times of societal stress or crises.

Its starting point is thus not the texts of the classical authors, although these will be critically considered in passing. The risk is that in evoking the shocking levels of violence seen in these remains we create a contemporary exoticising and othering of these ‘populations of the north’ (Webster 1999). Instead, it will use ethnographic and historical approaches to conflict, to examine how bellicosity, injury, torture and killing were used as tropes of power in small-scale agricultural communities, and it will confront both the politics and poetics of that violence, through a consideration of the affect of taking life in very specific ways. By contrasting the evidence from well-known to new examples, it will situate these wounds and modes of death within the wider evidence for violence in the middle to late Bronze Age, Iron Age and importantly, early Roman communities. Both place and performance, weaponry and wounds will be brought into sharp focus, to show that the reasons behind these deaths were numerous. Accidental drowning, suicide, mugging and murder, execution of captives, blood debt and revenge, punishment for betrayal and crime, as well as a critical approach to sacrifice, will all
be considered. The chapter will point in particular to the violent ‘boundary’ work that went on to define and defend a community (Sharples 2010), as well as the performative stages of violence that might precede death itself (Giles 2012). It studies not only how these individuals died but what they might have considered a ‘good death’ to rethink how people conceptualised sacrifice, especially where death may not have been seen as the end of life, but a threshold into the agency of the ancestral or the divine. It will feature some of the evidence for this post-mortem agency, as both curated relics, unsettling corpses and vivid memories for those caught up in such deaths.

Chapter 7 brings these ideas to bear upon the ‘cold case’ study of Manchester Museum’s own ‘bog head’: Worsley Man. From first-hand eyewitness accounts and newspaper reports of its discovery, to a discussion of his rather robust conservation, current care and curatorial history, it will present the full biography of this ‘bog head’. This will include results of a new dating programme, non-invasive imaging and forensic examination of the trauma associated with the head. Worsley Man will be situated within the turbulent and dangerous world of the conquest of the north and the to and fro of troops on the ground. The chapter will return to the comments of the classical authors in this light, to think both about their perspective on indigenous violence that their army, with its novel forms of combat and punishment, wrought. It will end with a critical review of how Worsley Man has been displayed since the 1980s, noting how he became a strange exile: confined back into the museum's store, during Lindow Man's latest return to the north in a 2008–9 exhibition. As the peculiar case of Lancashire and Cheshire shows, these discoveries led to a feeling both of responsibility and even ownership, the long-term consequences of which became apparent as these remains moved into museological care. In seeking to understand why northern British bog bodies seem to inspire such strong feelings, the chapter will contextualise these tensions not just within the politics of cultural capital but the north-west phenomenon of the ‘screaming skull’ and the folklore associated with ‘caring for’ and respecting the ancient dead.

Worsley Man will thus act as an interpretive bridge to the penultimate Chapter 8 on ‘disquieting exhibits’: an examination of how bog bodies are displayed across northern Europe. Moving between archival records of past exhibitions and contemporary displays, enlivened by curatorial interview, the chapter examines the narrative tropes, contextual scene-setting and artefactual relations, as well as modes of display employed in what might be deemed ‘difficult’ or ‘dark’ heritage (Sather-Wagstaff 2011; Stone et al. 2018). Building on previous work (Giles 2009; Joy 2009) it engages critically with the notion that there has been a curatorial ‘loss of confidence’ and overt concern with marginal viewpoints (Jenkins 2011) in the display of human remains particularly in the UK (see Williams and Giles 2016). It argues that with bog bodies this is particularly acute due to the ethics of displaying violent death, often ‘sanctified’ through the trope of sacrifice. It will then analyse the curious fascination for facial reconstruction that has obsessed bog body studies (Prag and Neave 1999), asking why this further act of bringing us ‘face to
face’ with the past is felt necessary for well-preserved remains. Finally, it will highlight examples of museological innovation across northern Europe that manage to both appal and enchant: connecting visitors with the humanity of these remains while not diminishing the violence they have witnessed.

The conclusion of this book, Chapter 9, returns to the ‘riddling power’ of the bog body and its unnerving and moving sway over our imagination, navigating its resonant power in bringing difficult truths to light. Ultimately, it will argue that alongside more formal burials, these remains should be foregrounded as ways of encouraging debates over violence, mortality and the human story – encouraging both public and professionals to ‘talk more of the dead’ (Büster et al. 2018).

**Conclusion**

Drawing this introduction to a close, it should be clear to the reader that the central topic of this book is death, often at the end of a blade or garotte, and what people do with the remains of the dead, both in the past and in the present. It seeks to avoid judging those communities while, hopefully, bringing to the fore something of the shock that we surely should feel in understanding the violence dealt out to these individuals. Yet in telling their stories, and trying to understand the seemingly warped logic of these worlds, the book needs also to touch on very stuff of life. It seeks to understand violence as a strategy of control, negotiation and exchange, which is inevitably bound up with beliefs around identity, power and the enduring theme of fertility. Importantly, it does not diminish the variety of evidence, nor the difference in motivations, that might have led people to those moments – it tries to keep that interpretive door open. To do so, as I have argued, requires a post-biographical approach to the remains that takes us from the moment of discovery, through analysis and interpretation, to display and the creative legacy they leave imprinted upon our imagination. To that end, let us begin, by turning the pages of one of the very first written accounts of a British ‘bog body’.