

= Manchester Mummy =

Hannah Beswick ( 1688 ? February 1758 ) , of Birchin Bower , Hollinwood , Oldham , Lancashire , was a wealthy woman who had a pathological fear of premature burial . Following her death in 1758 her body was embalmed and kept above ground , to be periodically checked for signs of life .

The method of embalming was not recorded , but it probably involved replacing the blood with a mixture of turpentine and vermilion . The body was then put in an old clock case and stored in the house of Beswick 's family physician , Dr Charles White . Beswick 's apparently eccentric will made her a local celebrity , and visitors were allowed to view her at White 's house .

Beswick 's mummified body was eventually bequeathed to the Museum of the Manchester Natural History Society , where she was put on display and acquired the soubriquet of the Manchester Mummy , or the Mummy of Birchin Bower . The museum 's collection was later transferred to Manchester University , when it was decided , with the permission of the Bishop of Manchester , that Beswick should finally be buried . The ceremony took place at Harpurhey Cemetery on 22 July 1868 , more than 110 years after her death ; the grave is unmarked .

= = Background = =

The mid 18th century saw an upsurge in the public 's fear of being mistakenly buried alive , and much debate about the uncertainty of the signs of death . Various suggestions were made to test for signs of life before burial , ranging from pouring vinegar and pepper into the corpse 's mouth to applying red hot pokers to the feet , or even into the rectum . Writing in 1895 , the physician J. C. Ouseley claimed that as many as 2 000 people were buried prematurely each year in England and Wales , although others estimated the figure to be closer to 800 .

Hannah Beswick was born in 1688 and inherited considerable wealth from her father , John Beswick of Failsworth . Some years before her own death , one of Hannah 's brothers , John , had shown signs of life just as his coffin lid had been about to be closed . A mourner noticed that John 's eyelids appeared to be flickering , and on examination the family physician , Dr Charles White , confirmed that he was still alive . John regained consciousness a few days later , and lived for many more years .

Jessie Dobson , Recorder of the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England , has said that there appear to be many " inaccuracies and contradictions " in accounts of the events following Beswick 's death in 1758 . Many suggest that she left £ 25 000 ( equivalent to about £ 3 million as of 2016 ) to White , a pioneer of obstetrics and one of the founders of the Manchester Royal Infirmary , on the condition that her body was kept above ground , and that periodically she was to be checked for signs of life . Beswick 's will however , dated 25 July 1757 ( less than a year before her death ) , states only that White was to receive £ 100 ( £ 12 000 as of 2016 ) , and that £ 400 ( £ 48 000 as of 2016 ) was to be allocated for funeral expenses . Some accounts have suggested that White was an executor of Beswick 's will and that he received the £ 400 himself , from which he was permitted to keep any surplus after the funeral expenses had been paid . Having Beswick embalmed therefore allowed him to keep the whole amount . Alternatively it has been suggested that White was considerably in debt to Beswick , a debt that would have to be repaid after the funeral , which was avoided by her embalming , but Beswick 's will names Mary Graeme and Esther Robinson as her executors , not White . In 1866 , more than 100 years after her death , the details of Beswick 's will were still being disputed .

= = Embalming = =

There is no mention in Beswick 's 1757 will of her desire to be embalmed . It has been suggested that White had been asked to keep Beswick above ground only until it became obvious that she was actually dead , but that he was unable to resist the temptation to add a mummy to his collection of " wet and dry " exhibits , and so made the decision to embalm her . White had developed a particular interest in anatomy while studying medicine in London and was building up a collection of "

curiosities " , which by the time of his death included the skeleton of Thomas Higgins , a highwayman and sheep @-@ stealer hanged for burglary , as well as Hannah Beswick 's mummy .

The method of embalming used by White is unrecorded , but in 1748 he had studied under the anatomist William Hunter , who had developed an early system of arterial embalming , therefore it is likely that White used the same method . The veins and arteries would have been injected with a mixture of turpentine and vermilion , after which the organs would have been removed from the chest and abdomen and placed in water , to clean them and to reduce their bulk . As much blood as possible would then have been squeezed out of the corpse , and the whole body washed with alcohol . The next stage would have been to replace the organs and to repeat the injection of turpentine and vermilion . The body cavities would then have been filled with a mixture of camphor , nitre and resin , before the body was sewn up and all openings filled with camphor . After a final washing , the body would have been packed into a box containing plaster of Paris , to absorb any moisture , and then probably coated with tar , to preserve it .

= = Display = =

Beswick 's mummified body was initially kept at Ancoats Hall , the home of another Beswick family member , but it was soon moved to a room in Dr White 's home in Sale , Cheshire , where it was stored in an old clock case . Beswick 's apparently eccentric will made her a celebrity ; the author Thomas de Quincey was one of those who went to view her at White 's house . Following White 's death in 1813 , Beswick 's body was bequeathed to a Dr Ollier , on whose death in 1828 it was donated to the Museum of the Manchester Natural History Society , where she became known as the Manchester Mummy , or the Mummy of Birchin Bower . She was displayed in the museum 's entrance hall , next to a Peruvian and an Egyptian mummy , and her relatives were allowed free access to visit her as they wished . She was described by a visitor in 1844 as " one of the most remarkable objects in the museum " . The " cold dark shadow of her mummy hung over Manchester in the middle of the eighteenth century " , according to writer Edith Sitwell .

There are no pictures of Hannah Beswick . One of the few contemporary accounts of her is provided by Philip Wentworth , a local historian :

The body was well preserved but the face was shrivelled and black . The legs and trunks were tightly bound in a strong cloth such as is used for bed ticks [ a stiff kind of mattress cover material ] and the body , which was that of a little old woman , was in a glass coffin @-@ shaped case .

Shortly after the museum 's transfer to Manchester University in 1867 it was decided that as Beswick was " irrevocably and unmistakably dead " , the time had come for her to be buried . But since 1837 UK law had required that a medical examiner issue a certificate of death before a burial could take place ; as Beswick had died in 1758 an appeal had to be made to the Secretary of State , who issued an order for her burial . With the permission of the Bishop of Manchester , Hannah Beswick was interred in an unmarked grave in Harpurhey Cemetery on 22 July 1868 , more than 110 years after her death .

= = Treasure and alleged apparitions = =

Bonnie Prince Charlie entered Manchester at the head of his invading army in 1745 , causing Beswick some apprehension over the safety of her money , which she therefore decided to bury . Shortly before her death she promised to show her relatives where the treasure was hidden , but she did not survive long enough to do so . Her home , Birchin Bower , was converted into workers ' tenements following her death . Several of those living there claimed to have seen a figure dressed in a black silk gown and a white cap , and described it as Hannah Beswick . After gliding across the house 's parlour , the apparition would vanish at one particular flagstone . It is claimed that while digging to fit a new loom , a weaver living there discovered Beswick 's hoard of gold , hidden underneath that same flagstone . Oliphant 's , a Manchester gold dealer , paid the weaver £ 3 10s for each gold piece , the equivalent of almost £ 450 in 2016 .

Birchin Bower was eventually demolished to make way for a Ferranti factory , but sightings of the

apparition were still reported .