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***Secrets of the Dead* Recounts
the Story of the Craven Street Bones in
“Ben Franklin’s Bones”
airing Wednesday, January 28 at 10 p.m. on PBS**

When the skeletal remains of an estimated 28 people were discovered in the basement of the one-time London residence of Benjamin Franklin, people speculated that the Founding Father might have had a much darker side.

What had taken place in this elegant Georgian town house located in the heart of London at 36 Craven Street? Who was responsible for this hideaway of bones? Had the work of a serial killer been unearthed?

Secrets of the Dead investigates the mystery of ***Ben Franklin’s Bones***, airing nationally Wednesday, January 28, 2015 from 10-11 pm ET on PBS (check local listings).

In December 1997, 36 Craven Street was undergoing extensive renovation to transform it into the Benjamin Franklin Museum. While digging in the basement, a builder turned up a grisly

discovery – a pit filled with human bones, including those of several infants – which prompted a call to the police.

“I would say in my 30 years in the police service, this is the first private address I have been to where there have been bones found actually concealed in the property,” says retired Detective Inspector Jim O’Connell, Metropolitan Police Service New Scotland Yard. “I thought, ‘I need to get some expert advice here...’ We called on a local coroner to come and give us some assistance.”

An investigation by Dr. Paul Knapman, retired coroner for the City of Westminster, revealed that the bones were more than a century old. But a more precise dating of the bones was needed to pinpoint when they were stashed – and thus determine who had been occupying 36 Craven Street, since many others besides Franklin lived in the townhouse over the years.

Tests conducted by Professor Simon Hillson, University College London, a specialist in the biology and history of human remains, uncovered findings that proved pivotal in dating the bones to the mid-1700s – surprisingly, the time when Franklin occupied Craven Street.

Aside from Franklin, a young doctor named William Hewson also lived at Craven Street. But Hewson was no ordinary physician. He came to London to study at the anatomy school of William and John Hunter.

By 1771, he had made a name for himself as an anatomist, was a fellow of the Royal Society, married Polly Stevenson, daughter of the woman who owned 36 Craven Street, and had become a good friend of Franklin. And in 1772, Hewson established a thriving, though some might contend gruesome, business to support his family.

Is the discovery of the pit of bones connected to Hewson’s activities at Craven Street? What was the significance of the cut marks across the skulls, dissection marks on the bones, fragments from an exotic Green Sea Turtle and other animals, and the presence of mercury?

What was Hewson’s relationship with the Resurrectionists (grave robbers/body snatchers) in London’s criminal underworld?

Medical historians suspect that Franklin was aware of the bodies in his basement, but did he know the extent of what was going on and why?

Secrets of the Dead: Ben Franklin’s Bones is a production of Icon Films and THIRTEEN Productions LLC for WNET. Narrator is Jay O. Sanders. Director is Kate Thomas-Couth. Executive producers for Icon Films are Owen Gay and Harry Marshall. Executive in charge for WNET is Stephen Segaller. Executive producer for WNET is Steve Burns. Coordinating producer for WNET is Stephanie Carter.

This program is among the full-length episodes that will be available for viewing after broadcast on ***Secrets of the Dead Online*** ([pbs.org/secrets](https://www.pbs.org/secrets)). Along with the extensive online video catalog, the series website provides resources for educators with lesson plans for middle

school and high school teachers. As one of PBS' ongoing limited primetime series, ***Secrets of the Dead*** is a perennial favorite among viewers, routinely ranking among the 10 most-watched series on public television. Currently in its 14th season, ***Secrets of the Dead*** continues its unique brand of archaeological sleuthing employing advances in investigative techniques, forensic science and historical scholarship to offer new evidence about forgotten mysteries. ***Secrets of the Dead*** has received 10 CINE Golden Eagle Awards and six Emmy nominations, among numerous other awards.

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