



John Hartnell served aboard HMS *Erebus*, commanded by Sir John Franklin. According to his grave marker, on Beechey Island, Hartnell died on 4 January 1846, at the age of 25.

In 1852, an expedition sent to find Franklin and his men arrived at Beechey Island. Commanded by Edward A. Inglefield, the crew of the *Isabel* included a physician, Dr. Peter Sutherland. Inglefield published a journal reporting their findings.

A century later, Dr. Owen Beattie (from the University of Alberta) and his group of scientists arrived at Beechey Island to examine what may have happened to the three men whose lives ended on the tiny speck of land in the Canadian Arctic. What they found was very surprising.

Not only was Dr. Beattie stunned to see Hartnell's incredibly well-preserved (and mummified) remains through the melting ice, he was even more surprised to see that Hartnell's body had already been autopsied. Who would have done that? Was it Dr. Sutherland? Inglefield's journal does not record that he, or any member of his team, exhumed the bodies buried on Beechey Island.

Beattie and his team also noticed that John Hartnell's right eye seemed damaged (an issue beyond the sinking-into-the-sockets impact that would have occurred from prior thawing). Did that also happen when his remains were exhumed (in whole or in part) by Inglefield and Sutherland?

No one knows for sure exactly what happened during the 1852 expedition since Inglefield's published notes seem to be incomplete. Professor Beattie looked further and found an unpublished letter which Inglefield had sent to Rear-Admiral Francis Beaufort.

Inglefield's letter states that he and his men worked only by moonlight. Unable to fully see Hartnell's remains, Inglefield said he touched the body and determined that Hartnell had died of a "wasting illness."

Although Inglefield talks about digging down to the coffins, during the night time, more-recent scholars disbelieve that he could have reached the remains without first spending hours and hours digging through the frozen ground.

Setting aside who did what to the mummy - before Owen Beattie's examination - we know that when Beattie and his team removed Hartnell's cap, they saw a great deal of hair. They were able to use Hartnell's hair to conclude that his body contained large amounts of lead at the time of his death.

Credits:

Image of John Hartnell's mummified remains, online courtesy University of Alberta and the Government of Canada.

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