

Alistair Cooke's bones stolen by transplant gang



Alistair Cooke died in March 2004

By Alec Russell in Washington

12:01AM GMT 23 Dec 2005

Relatives of Alistair Cooke, the late broadcaster, have spoken of their revulsion after it was found that his bones were cut from his body by a criminal gang and sold for transplant tissue.

New York police said his body was one of dozens chopped up for profit by rogue morticians in Brooklyn.

After presenting BBC radio's Letter from America for more than half a century, Cooke died in March last year of lung cancer, aged 95.

The "body-snatchers", as the New York tabloids call them, surgically carved out his bones the day after he died, said the Daily News.

His remains were then returned to the family for cremation.

Unnamed sources said the bones were sold for more than \$7,000 to two tissue processing companies for use in transplant operations.

"I hope those guys burn in hell for what they did," said David Grossberg, a lawyer for the Cooke family.

It is believed that after being processed his bones could have been used for dental implants or for orthopaedic surgery. But by the time of his death the cancer had spread to his bones.

Cooke's stepdaughter, Holly Rumbold, spoke yesterday of her shock both at the desecration and at the idea of the cancerous bones being passed off as healthy tissue.



"He died in the night and the undertakers collected him," Miss Rumbold told Radio 4's The World at One. "His ashes or what we thought were his ashes were returned the next day. They were scattered in Central Park.

"Who knows, maybe some of the ashes were his - how do you know? It defies the imagination. It's so corrupt and evil.

"I'm most shocked by the violation of the medical ethics that my stepfather's ancient and cancerous bones should have been passed off as healthy tissue to innocent patients in their quest for better health."

His daughter, Susan Kittredge, told the Daily News: "That people in need of healing should have received his body parts considering his age and the fact that he was ill when he died, is as appalling to the family as it is that his remains were violated."

The outrage came to light when police looked through the records of a mortuary they are investigating for serial abuse of bodies.

It was raided this week as part of an investigation into funeral directors, surgeons and businessmen who are alleged to have collaborated in stealing parts from bodies.

Officers found that the person who supposedly authorised the donation did not exist, said the New York Post.

America has an active market in human bone with 400,000 grafts a year.

Cadaveric bones and splinters are used to repair accident damage, to ease deformity and to replace bone destroyed or removed because of cancer.

Human bone is ground for cement in orthopaedic operations and as dental filler.

In Britain, which has bone banks around the country, about 10,000 bone transplants are carried out each year.

In January, a laboratory manager was jailed for stealing bones from a freezer at a hospital in Yorkshire and selling them for £12,000 to two private clinics.

Sponsored