

## The Meeting held 10th April 1999

As appears to be the case whenever the Club has a speaker on the topic of the Diary of Jack the Ripper, by the time **Mike Barrett** took the stage at 8pm the audience was double its normal size and totalled some 70 people. Among those eager to finally learn the truth of Mike's involvement were **William Beadle, Stewart Evans, Don Rumbelow, Martin Fido, Bob Hinton, Shirley Harrison, Pam Ball, Andy and Sue Parlour, Jeremy Beadle and Robert Smith**. We welcomed the return to the Club of one of its founding Committee members, **Nigel Bartley**, a visiting Member from Ireland, **Marjorie Barton**, and **Caroline Morris, Karoline Leach and Peter Birchwood**, who have been heavily embroiled in debate on the Web's Casebook: Jack the Ripper.



Michael Barrett

Mike Barrett had been invited to the Club to give his account of how the forgery was carried out, an offer he accepted with relish. "I'm going to kill the Diary", he promised. It's fair to say that only a small number expected to hear Mike offer definite proof of how it was done; the rest wanted to see for themselves how unlikely it was that he was capable. Most people had only read about Mike and his claims; now was a chance to judge for themselves.

**Keith Skinner** started by explaining that, although armed with a series of questions designed to keep the script to a chronological sequence, he had torn them up as a result of Mike's revelations at the previous day's Grey House lunch (see pg 2). He then continued with an overview of Mike's involvement, starting with the often-forgotten fact that James Maybrick had only become a Ripper suspect because of Mike's bringing the Diary to **Doreen Montgomery's** attention in March 1992. Since 1994 Barrett had been trying to prove to the world that he had forged the document, and this, said Keith, was his first chance to do so in the public arena.

Mike revealed his literary history, interviewing the likes of **Kenneth Williams** and **Bonnie Langford** for a Liverpool magazine. Bored by the repetition, he wanted to "write himself out of interviewing". He decided to write the confession of Jack the Ripper, claiming he did so in 11 days. He dictated, with ex-wife Anne writing.

The mention of Anne caused Mike to blurt out that she had emotionally blackmailed him over their daughter Caroline. He followed this by reiterating that he suffered from kidney failure, commenting that this was the only correct thing in Shirley Harrison's book. As the evening went on, Mike began to fire off on tangents more frequently, and Keith found it harder to guide the conversation along the intended route. Getting back to the actual writing of the Diary, Keith finally extracted the point that Mike had purchased a red Victorian diary before contacting Doreen Montgomery, and this appeared on Anne's bank statement. When Doreen requested a meeting to view the document, however, he realised the diary was too small, so bought a larger black ledger, along with a brass compass, as one lot from the Liverpool auctioneers Outhwaite and Co.

Mike had told various people during the course of the day that he had the lot receipt in his pocket and would produce it during the talk, along with the actual pen that had been used. This would be, all agreed, the end of the Diary. When the moment came, however, nothing was forthcoming from Mike. Did he have the receipt? Yes. Would he produce it? No.

Mike claimed producing the ink needed was easy; he simply added sugar. He was 99% certain that James Maybrick was the Ripper, and set out to write the Diary on his behalf. Mike said his spelling was bad - this was reflected in the Diary. He used *Tales of Liverpool* as a source. The two Manchester murders hinted at in the Diary were invented by Mike. He claimed that after purchasing the ledger he had noticed a manufacturer's label dated 1912, which he removed.



If this all sounds muddled and confused, I apologise. This is how the evening went. Keith struggled to keep the discussion going in a logical and understandable way, but it seemed that Mike was content to relate his thoughts as soon as they came into his head - relevant or not. Even on points that could help his cause, Mike seemed oblivious to the need for solid proof. Keith had to virtually drag out of him that remains of photographs had been found in the creases of the Diary, confirming that it had been used as an photo album at some stage - a fact agreed by Robert Smith, who, along with Shirley Harrison, was the victim of constant disparaging asides from Mike. Even the inexplicable discovery of a volume of obscure poetry in his house containing the line "O Costly Intercourse of Death" was treated by Mike as not worth mentioning until Keith prompted him two or three times.

One defining moment came when Club member **Dave Russell** challenged Mike on his claim that he'd used nibs bought from the Medici Art Gallery. Dave said he had worked for the London branch of the company who closed it down in 1982. Mike's immediate reply was that Dave was lying. One guest slipped downstairs to phone Directory Enquiries, only to be told that no such shop existed.

While most members of the audience felt that Mike's performance, rambling and incoherent, confirmed their suspicions that he did not possess the cunning to have forged the Diary, to those who had spent the best part of two days with him it was a bewildering change of character. During Friday and the early part of Saturday, Mike had spent plenty of time with the likes of **Andy Aliffe, Coral Kelly, Eduardo Zinna, Dave McCleave, Paul Daniel** and myself, most of whom felt that while they weren't totally convinced that he'd written the Diary, his arguments were lucid and structured. He was confident and assured, fielding all questions good-naturedly and giving straightforward answers. Why the change?

Several people have mentioned the complete lack of any proof to back up Mike's claims, and during the 24 hours leading up to the talk he assured us that he had the lot receipt, sometimes patting his jacket pocket to add to the effect. I heard it said on the night that if Mike had written evidence of his literacy why didn't he produce samples for examination? While I don't know why he didn't, I do believe him on this point. On one of the frequent escorts back to his hotel room just before the talk began he showed me recent examples of his work. While nothing too exceptional, some degree of ability was obvious. Mike explained that he had penned the two extracts in one short sitting. He also showed me the newspaper report of his acquittal of having threatened to kill Anne. It struck me that everyone will remember the accusation long after the actual verdict has been forgotten, as this is the sort of thing expected of Mike these days. But while showing copies of these items, along with the auction receipt, would undoubtedly help his cause, once the interview was underway Mike seemed all too content to rely on his memory - which proved to be a bad move. It meant he was unable to give any believable answers, too often replying "simple" or "check for yourself" when challenged by Keith to prove something.

The following morning Andy Aliffe asked Mike why he hadn't produced the all-important auction receipt when Keith had set up the opportunity. His reply was that there were so many people present he was extremely nervous, and was terrified of being arrested if proof were produced of his involvement in the forgery. He assured Andy he would post a copy of the receipt once he'd returned to Liverpool. This is yet to arrive.



Did Mike Barrett write *The Diary of Jack the Ripper*? Until the proof reputedly held by Mike - the auction ticket - is produced, it's difficult to believe so. It's been suggested that while Mike may not be telling the truth, he believes he is. Though some left the meeting content that their suspicions were correct, that Mike is too confused and unfocused to be capable of committing such a complex forgery, and most agreeing that it was an opportunity wasted, nobody could deny that he has been terribly affected by his part in the Diary story - whatever that may be.

Adam Wood

Photographs courtesy of Eduardo Zinna