

Ripperologist

October / November 2017 No. 158

“We seldom hear anything about the Whitechapel Murderer now.”

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October, the month when nothing happened

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Editorial

Case Closed?

ADAM WOOD Executive Editor

As I write this, news has broken that imprisoned serial killer Levi Bellfield has been linked with the 1996 murders of Lin Russell and her daughter Megan, and the attack on elder daughter, Josie, who miraculously survived. Bellfield had been sentenced to a life behind bars in February 2008 for killing Marsha McDonnell and Amelie Delagrang and the attempted murder of Kate Sheedy. Two years later he was charged and convicted of the abduction, rape and murder of schoolgirl Milly Dowler, and since then has been linked with numerous other unsolved attacks dating from 1990.

That Bellfield has been suspected as being the murderer of Lin and Megan Russell might perhaps not be unusual, were it not for the fact that Michael Stone had already been tried and convicted of the crimes, firstly in 1998 and then at a retrial in 2001. With no forensic evidence against him, Stone's conviction relied upon the claim of a fellow inmate, who said that while Stone was on remand he had confessed to the killings, something he has constantly denied.

That Michael Stone has since his incarceration complained about the reliance on such a dubious assertion, it's somewhat ironic that his lawyers have now claimed that Levi Bellfield has admitted killing Lin and Megan Russell.

Bellfield has, predictably, denied confessing all to a supposed fellow prisoner at HM Prison Wakefield, but thrown into the mix is a statement made by a witness who saw a man driving at speed from the scene of the Russell murders, the description of whom seems more like Levi Bellfield than Michael Stone.

It will certainly be interesting to see how things unfold in the coming weeks.

The attribution of murders and other crimes to prisoners already behind bars for previous offences is of course nothing new, but I wonder how far the police and courts would have gone with assigning murders to Jack the Ripper, had he been caught.

As each case was investigated on its own merit, the Whitechapel murderer would probably have been convicted of just one killing, with the other crimes left on his file as "suspected".

But just how victims would have been included? No doubt the police would have returned to the convicted Ripper when investigating unsolved cases such as the Torso murders of 1887, but would they have been happy to add to the "suspected" list in order to remove the "unsolved" tag from these cases?

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Adam Wood

EDITORS

Gareth Williams
Eduardo Zinna

EDITOR-AT-LARGE

Jonathan Menges

REVIEWS EDITOR

Paul Begg

COLUMNISTS

Nina and Howard Brown
David Green

ARTWORK

Adam Wood

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We welcome well-researched articles on any aspect of the Whitechapel murders, the East End or the Victorian era in general.

A Nun's Letter

By JOE CHETCUTI

First of all, I would like to thank fellow Ripperologist Mike Hawley. He has kindly given me the green light to share with the readers of this article some of the documentation concerning Ripper suspect Francis Tumblety which was discovered earlier this year in Missouri. These documents pertain to the probate court records involving Tumblety's estate.

One of the documents being featured today has yet to appear on any internet message board. Nor will it be found in Mike Hawley's upcoming book *Jack the Ripper Suspect Francis Tumblety*. Ripperologist readers are getting the scoop on this one. We will take a look at a letter that was written shortly before Tumblety's death by the Superioress of St. John's Hospital in St. Louis. She mailed it to Tumblety's New York banker, Henry Clews. The letter will be shown in its entirety at the end of this article.



Henry Clews.

Until this year, much of what has been known about Tumblety's death at St. John's Hospital has come from 1903 St. Louis news reports. For Ripperologists delving into Tumblety's final days, those journalistic accounts have been a pivotal source of information. For instance, when the story is told of how Tumblety broke his nose in a fall three days prior to his death, everybody follows closely the newspaper report of how this frail old man left his hospital room, went for a walk all by himself, got tired, sat on the front steps of the hospital and collapsed, causing himself a bad facial injury.¹

Tumblety's reluctance to talk with the medical staff was also noted in the 1903 newspapers:

(While at St. John's Hospital) Dr. Tumblety refused absolutely to tell about his life or relatives.²

According to the newspaper reports, this dying man didn't want any of his family members to know what was happening to him. The journalists made the point that the attending doctors and nurses were left in the dark by this reticent patient. But, fortunately, some Ripperologists have now seen the actual probate court testimony of the medical staff at St. John's Hospital. This information will help us to determine if those 1903 news stories should indeed be believed. So let's hear more about how discreet this Ripper suspect really was during his hospice days and let's find out the truth about his facial injury.

Having read all 925 pages of the probate court testimony, I can honestly say something about that old tale of how Tumblety went for a solo walk which ended in a nose-breaking fall. It is very likely that this event never

1 On 29 May 1903, the day after Tumblety's death, both the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* and the *St. Louis Republic* reported on this story.

2 *The Newark Advocate* of Ohio was one of many newspapers that printed this line on 30 May 1903.

happened. Tumblety did indeed break his nose because of a fall, but this fall did not occur after a long walk. He collapsed in his hospital room and caused his own trauma because he was trying to sleep while standing up. An attorney at the probate court brought forth a line of questioning that showed how Tumblety refused to sleep in his bed. This odd situation eventually ended with him falling to the floor after he intentionally fell asleep on his feet. The sworn statements from members of the hospital staff revealed that Tumblety fell during the night time and the attending physician declared that the incident occurred on or about Monday 25 May.

As for Tumblety being a secretive man in his final weeks of life, the testimony of witnesses confirmed that was true when it pertained to his refusal to speak about his family. But members of the hospital staff also testified that he was forthcoming about other subjects. He spoke about his travels and his money. In conversation with the hospital's chaplain, he often spoke of religious matters. (Tumblety did not speak much to the Superioress, but he held forth with the clergyman.) He was also cooperative in his conversations with his attorney and doctors. Although he looked weird and shabby, he spoke in an understandable manner, and he proved to be capable of sending a business letter to Henry Clews for the purpose of withdrawing some money from his New York bank account. He sent the letter of request from the hospital and the funds were promptly mailed to him in St. Louis.

There was one St. John's Hospital employee, a man named J. H. Ziegler, to whom Tumblety really opened up. Ziegler took the witness stand on 20 June 1905. At the time of his testimony, he had achieved the professional title of Doctor. In May 1903, at the time of his frequent conversations with Tumblety at St. John's Hospital, Ziegler was still a male nurse, but was progressing toward his goal of becoming a doctor. Tumblety noticed this and took the nurse under his wing. Here is some of Ziegler's testimony:

Q: Now you say you saw this Dr. Tumblety every day from about the second of May to the day of his death, the 28th of May?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: And during that entire time did he talk to you about his travels?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Now what particular thing about his travels did he mention?

A: He told me he had traveled a good deal.

Q: How about medicine, you say that was the other theme of your conversation?



A: Yes sir.

Q: What did he say about medicine?

A: Well, he once brought up the subject to put me in an office, and people were coming in from the country to see me, and he wanted me to diagnose the case, and asked me how I would do it, and what questions I would ask the patients. I went to work and told him how I would go about it, and whenever I would make a mistake he would correct me on it and tell me how I should do it.

Q: That is, he intended to put you in an office in the country?

A: No; he placed me there in testing me, or asking me questions how I would do it.

Q: He imagined that you were in some country office?

A: Yes sir.

Q: And he was a patient coming in to see you?

A: No, he was quizzing me, as patients (were) coming in.

Q: He made himself the patient for the time being?

A: No.

Q: What did he do?

A: He was the same as a professor to me; he was quizzing me.

Q: He was the professor then?

A: Yes sir; asking me questions.

Q: Were those questions that required any medical knowledge, or were they simply questions founded on common sense and experience?

A: They required medical knowledge, or he could not talk about them.

Q: What were those questions, if you can recollect?

A: He asked me first, what I would do.

Q: Told you the first thing to do would be to feel the pulse, and listen to the heart, and look at the tongue, and take the temperature?

A: No sir.

Q: And asked questions as that, did he?

A: No; he asked what I would do.

Q: Then what happened?

A: Well, I would tell him first I would take the temperature; then I would take the pulse; then I would go to work and ask them what was the trouble, any pain, and where it was located, and make an examination of the heart and chest.

Q: And did he agree with that method of diagnosing?

A: Yes sir.

Q: Now, you said he made some suggestions to you; what were those suggestions?

A: He told me never to let the patient tell me his troubles before I asked him; always to ask the question first before the patient had time to tell me.

Q: That was founded on a great deal of thought. Why was the reason of that?

A: He says I would be the doctor, and they were the patients. I should find out from the patient myself.

Q: You should find out by asking them questions, or looking at them?

A: Yes sir.

Q: Now, what else, if you recall, in regard to medicine?

A: He talked about surgery.

Q: What did he talk about in regard to surgery?

A: He asked me what operations I had seen.

Q: Did he talk about major or minor operations?

A: Both.

Q: Which one of the major operations?

A: He would ask about an amputation; if I had seen any amputations, and I told him I had.

Q: He talked about tying up the arteries, did he?

A: Yes sir.

Q: And sewing up the flesh, over the wound?

A: Yes sir.

Q: What particular thing about that did he say?

A: He asked me if I had seen them, and how I would do one, and I told him.

Q: What else about medicine?

A: Well, he talked about drugs.

Q: What about drugs?

A: Different doses of drugs.

Q: What do you mean by "different dosages"?

A: The amount you would give a patient.

Q: Did he talk about compounding of medicines?

A: A little.

Q: How often did you see this old person, on an average?

A: Oh, I judge ten or fifteen times a day.

Q: You didn't drop in there to see him this ten or fifteen times a day because he had promised to make you a beneficiary in his will, did you?

A: No sir.

Ziegler's statements give us an idea of what it was like to have been a patient in Tumblety's medical office. It appeared that Tumblety's plan of action was to get the jump on his patients by launching a series of questions to them before they could recite their symptoms. A medical appointment with this man would in a way seem like a chess match. But the most important aspect of Ziegler's testimony was the part that I have emphasised in bold. Let's get into this.

One of the knocks against Tumblety's candidacy of having been Jack the Ripper was the perception that he was merely a herb doctor with no surgical knowledge. Of course some would say that the Ripper didn't have much surgical knowledge to begin with, but that has always been open for debate. Tim Riordan summed it up sufficiently by writing "Over the years, Tumblety's medicine never required surgical or even anatomical knowledge. If the Whitechapel murderer displayed such knowledge, he was not 'Dr.' Tumblety."³

Riordan's comment was generally accepted for years. But now a significant turnaround has occurred. Here we have a legitimate physician, Dr. J. H. Ziegler, testifying that he carried on serious conversations with Tumblety on

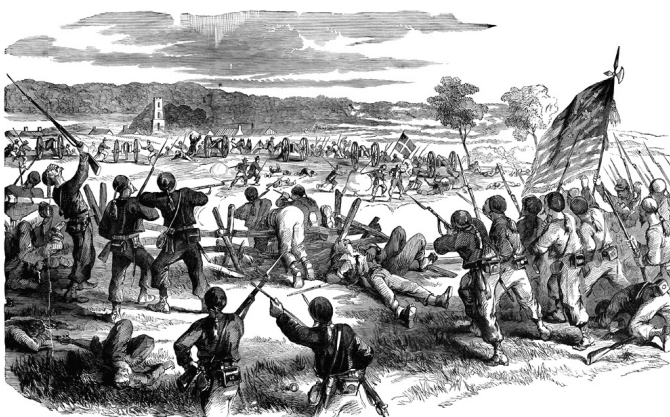
3 *Prince of Quacks*, page 177.

surgical procedures and Tumblety completely held his own on the topic. Tumblety even came across as initiating the talk. Major operations, minor operations, amputations, tying of arteries, and sewing of flesh were subjects of conversation between Tumblety and Ziegler on various occasions. Nothing could be read in Ziegler's testimony that indicated Tumblety had verbally bluffed his way through these surgical discussions.

It is a bit of a challenge to pinpoint exactly where and when Tumblety gained enough surgical knowledge to sufficiently pass as a medical tutor to Ziegler. If I had to guess, I'd consider the September 1862 period when Tumblety took his business to Frederick, Maryland. Shortly before he arrived there, the fierce Civil War Battle of Antietam had raged on nearby and there were plenty of amputations and surgical procedures going on. Tumblety was known to have tried to pass himself off as a surgeon in General McClellan's staff during that time. If some rudimentary knowledge about the amputation of limbs could be obtained by a novice, his experience in Frederick could certainly have provided the educational setting in a blunt way. The Battle of Antietam was a terrible conflict that saw many soldiers from both sides being carted into the city of Frederick. The battle took place on 17 September 1862 and the city remained a swarm of medical activity well into the autumn. These two quotes taken from a respected Civil War web site express it well:

By September 30, there were already more than 2,321 patients in Frederick's make-shift hospital wards. In addition to the temporary hospital wards, two tent hospitals were set up on the outskirts of the city. In these hospitals and camps 62 surgeons, 15 medical cadets, 22 hospital stewards, 539 nurses and 127 cooks were on duty. In addition to the 2,300+ patients received in hospitals downtown, the camp hospitals received 3,032 patients.

(In the streets of Frederick) The bandaged head, the empty sleeve, and the stump of a leg, told a tale louder than words could speak.(4)



The Battle of Antietam.

Tumblety's time in Frederick, Maryland, would have been his best opportunity to graphically view and learn about surgical amputations. He spent over five months in that place and the experience would have left a lasting impression on him.

Ziegler and Sister Mary Teresa, the Superioress of the hospital, both testified in St. Louis on the same day. During interesting exchanges with the questioning attorney, they each confirmed that a fire once ignited in Tumblety's hospital room. The sister declared in her testimony that the flames were started by Tumblety and another document showed that the hospital wanted his estate to reimburse the cost of the damages. While the nun struggled with her eccentric patient during May 1903, she had compassion. The depth of her caring attitude shone nicely in her letter to Henry Clews:

St. Louis, Mo., May 24th 1903

Mr. Henry Clews.

Respected Sir;

You will pardon me for taking the liberty of writing to you, but we have a patient by the name of Dr. Tumblety who claims he knows you. He came to us in a very sad plight and the most abject-looking individual and I was more than astonished when I had a little conversation with him that he could possibly get so low down. With a great deal of diplomacy I got him to take a bath and get on some class clothes and implored of him to let us send for a suit of clothes, he had some money, about \$167 and he gave it to me to put in the safe for him but the last money you sent him he carried on his person and wanders out on the street corners and I was afraid somebody would knock him down and take it from him.

Now what I want to say is this, according to his own statement he has means and we are afraid to say anything to him about it as he may suspect that we want him to will some to us. Of course, we as a religious body and have a great many calls upon our charity, would make good use of all we could get but we don't want to influence any one unless disposed to give voluntarily. The poor doctor has only a very short time to live and we know absolutely nothing about him or if he has relatives and he will not tell us anything about himself and therefore I thought if you would write to him and ask him to settle his affairs so that I would know what to do with him when he does die. He is fully aware of his approaching death and says he will have to fix things up, but thinks that perhaps in a day or two he may feel better but that is not likely as it is Bright's Disease, his poor heart is nearly played out, poor man I feel so sorry for him so lonely and old among strangers, of course

he has all the attention we can possibly give him but he is so peculiar that we cannot make him as comfortable as we could a more tractable person. Pardon me for writing at such length but really I do not know what to do and I would be so grateful for any information or advice you could give me.

I am with great respect,

Sincerely,

Sister Mary Teresa

INTERNET SOURCES

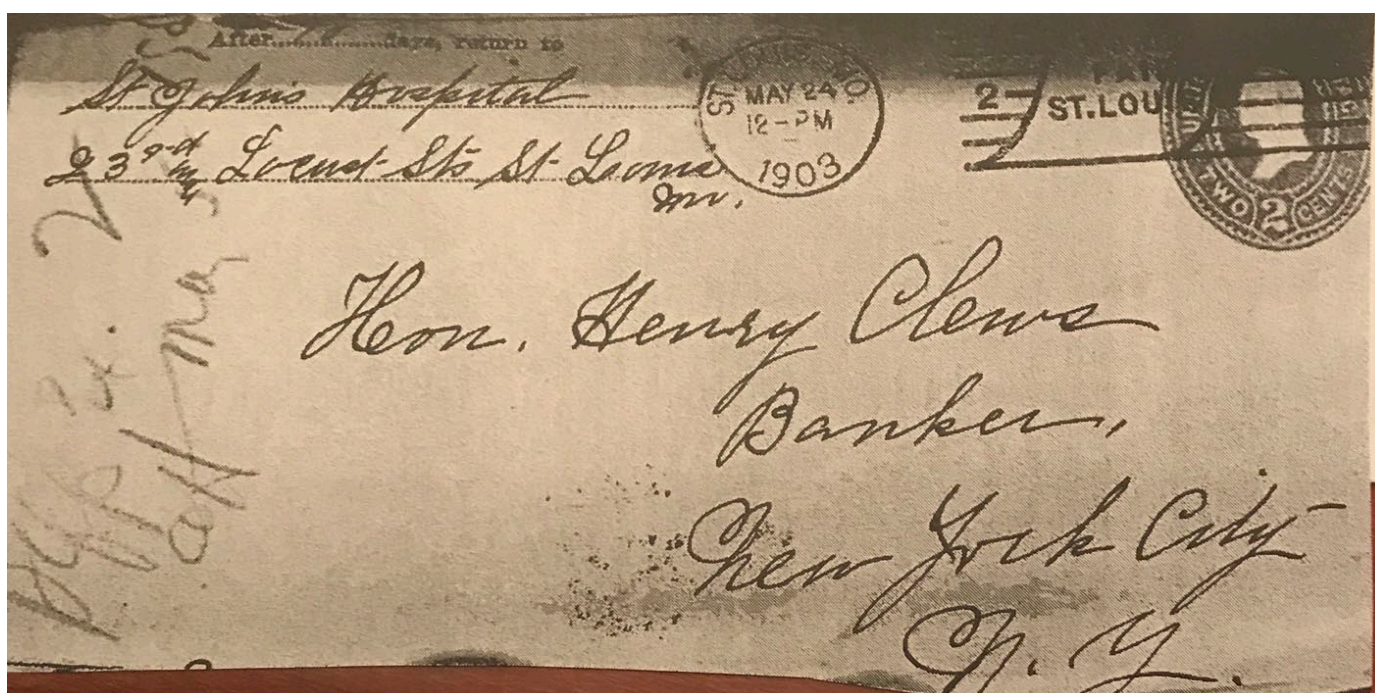
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Clews; etc.usf.edu/clipart/11400/11454/Antietam_11454.htm; civilwarmed.org

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JOE CHETCUTI has contributed his articles to Ripper journals for over twelve years. He is a retired hospital worker who resides in northern California.



The envelope mailed to Henry Clews by Sister Mary Teresa.

WRITE FOR RIPPEROLOGIST!

We welcome well-researched articles on any aspect of the Jack the Ripper case, London's East End or associated subjects.

Please send your submissions to contact@ripperologist.biz

October 1888

The Month Where Nothing Happened

By KARL COPPACK

One the most curious elements about the canonical five Whitechapel murders of 1888 lies in the relatively small timeframe in which they occurred. The series of events may still be the greatest whodunit in the history of British crime, but it is also fascinating that they came and went with such ferocity. There were just 71 days between the murders of Polly Nichols in Bucks Row and Mary Kelly in Miller's Court, Dorset Street.

And yet during that brief period there were five whole weeks where nothing happened – from the murderer's perspective at least. There were no Ripper killings (that we know of) in October 1888 and if P.C. Alfred Long is to be believed, at some time between 2.20am and 2.55am on Sunday 30th September 1888, the murderer performed his final acknowledged deed by dropping a piece of Catherine Eddowes' apron into a doorway in Goulston Street. Then there was nothing. Unless you believe he wrote letters to the police, public and press.

It would be 39 days before he announced his presence again.

Of course, there was a three week break between the events of Hanbury Street and Berner Street, but five weeks seem a particularly long time given that he performed his first two killings just a week apart. What could this mean? Was his need to kill and harvest internal organs temporarily sated, or was he stopped from practising his hobby due to other factors?

Serial killers often leave gaps between their crimes. Fred West put nine years between his 11th and 12th murders, while Dennis Rader, the BTK killer, went eight

years without adding to his grim total, but to leave such a gap in such a short spurt is surely unusual.

This was certainly noted at the time. On the last day of October, the *Daily News* reported:

The Central News is informed that Dr Forbes Winslow and other leading authorities on mental disorders are still of opinion that the murders in Whitechapel were committed by a homicidal lunatic, notwithstanding that an opinion to the contrary has been expressed by one lunacy specialist whose views were sought by the police authorities. Dr Forbes Winslow believes that that the murderer has lately been in a "lucid interval." In that condition he would be comparatively rational, and also forgetful of what he had one. As soon as this passes off he will resume his terrible work.

The idea of a 'lucid interval' is an interesting one. Had some sort of calm descended over him following the 'double event'? Did the proximity of police near Mitre Square and the discovery of the apron (his first and only real mistake, though it went unpunished) give him a reminder of his own mortality? Was he even capable of having such thoughts?

The first question supposes the existence of a conscience. Did he know that what he was doing was wrong? This may seem an obvious question at first glance, but given that he was under a compulsion to carry out the attacks there may well have been a certain amount of inner turmoil. Perhaps there was some level of disgust at his deeds, yet the draw was too much for him to ignore. Were those intervening weeks an attempt to stop? For the consequences they could bring him as much as to those

of his prey?

I don't think so, though there can be a feigned disgust afterwards. There's an interesting section in the statement given to police by Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper, following his capture in 1981, in which he speaks about his perception of a difference between killing prostitutes and non-prostitutes. When discussing the murder of Irene Richardson in 1977, he says:

By this time, after Richardson, killing prostitutes became an obsession with me and I couldn't stop myself.

He later added, 'It was like a drug.'

This is an attempt at an explanation and a rather pathetic call for sympathy, though he expresses none at all for the victim. He seems to be arguing that he had no choice. However, contrast that with his feelings following the death of 16-year-old Jayne MacDonald five months later:

When I saw in the papers that MacDonald was so young and not a prostitute I felt like someone inhuman and I realised that it was a devil driving me against my will and that I was a beast. When the Ripper came up in conversation at work or in a pub I was able to detach my mind from the fact that it was me they were talking about and I was able to discuss it normally. This amazed me at times that I was able to do this.

The implication is clear. To his mind one victim deserved it, the other did not. 'A devil driving me against my will.' That's an interesting choice of words. 'Against my will'. If his 1888 counterpart felt the same way, it would suggest that, to himself at least, he was losing a battle. If that is the case, it may explain the time off in between murders.

Though this is a possibility, I think this unlikely. Empathy isn't high on the agenda for violent serial killers.

It is also interesting to note that Sutcliffe was able to speak of the murders as if they belonged to someone else. Did the Whitechapel killer do the same? Did he stay quiet in October because he was rational enough to see the danger of capture? Presumably he had friends or acquaintances who discussed the case with him and he too found it possible to stay detached. There are certainly no reports of a man breaking down in tears at the mere mention of one of the canonical five.

It's hard to say, of course, but it seems unlikely that he simply stopped due to regret for those he slayed. Self-interest always comes first for such people.

And yet stop he did. Temporarily in October and permanently after the Kelly murder. Some have suggested that the reason he abandoned his project following the Miller's Court atrocity due to a sense of completion, of

realising that there was nowhere else for him to go now that he had all but emptied one unfortunate completely. Others argue that Miller's Court was his 'masterpiece' and that, once complete, he had no itch to scratch, but I for one have never been convinced that he would stop simply because there was nowhere new to go. True, every killing – with the exception of Liz Stride – saw a progression of violence and evisceration, but it seems unlikely that conscience or satisfaction would make him want to end what Sutcliffe called 'the mission'. Compulsive behaviour does not stop for such trivialities. No, he must have remained silent for another reason.



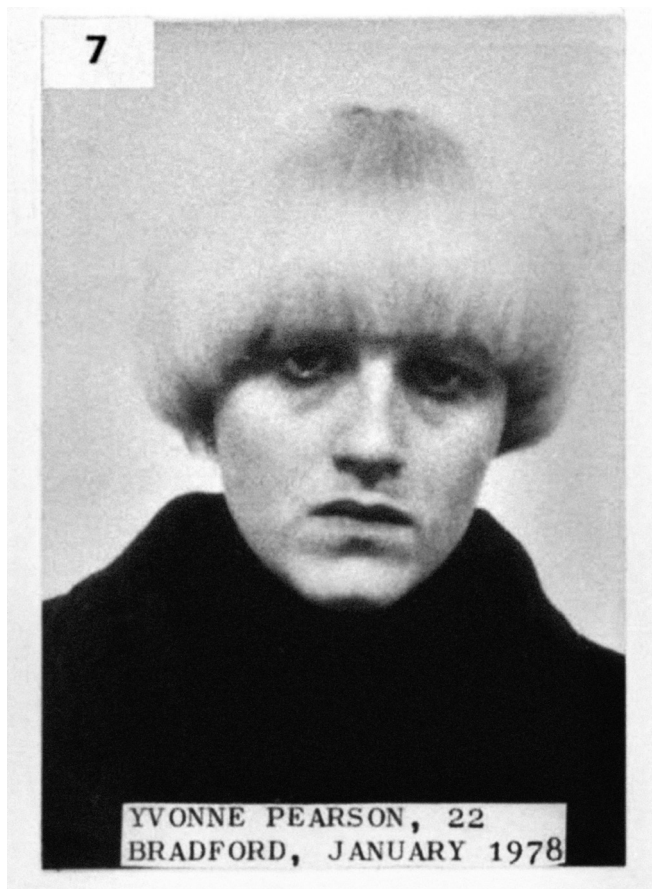
The biggest indication of a mind at work lies in the change of modus operandi. When he struck again in November he abandoned his normal practice of killing outdoors – in streets, stable yards and squares – and chose an indoor setting for the first and only time.

Again, this is all speculation, but that does suggest a reactive strategy to the changes around the district. Maybe it was just impossible to carry on using his usual method. Presumably, he rested after he'd satisfied his needs in Mitre Square and let at least some time pass before striking again, but once he was ready things had changed outside. The 'double event' saw a huge increase in police on the streets and house-to-house enquiries were exhaustive. Add to this the vigilante groups who doubled their efforts to keep the streets safe following the double murders and there's sufficient reason to see why he would choose an

extended cooling-off period.

There is another element in play – that of availability. Again, nearly a century later in his confession statement, Sutcliffe provides an example of opportunity being the dominant factor rather than an overwhelming need to kill. Here, he talks about the murder of Yvonne Pearson in January 1978 and how, at the time, he had no real intention of committing murder until she appeared.

On reflection it was a very fateful moment for her, me just slowing down as she came along. She stepped straight up to the car as I stopped and tapped on the window. She asked me if I wanted business. This was one time when I was genuinely going home as it happened but I still had a hammer in the car on the floor.



It's wise to take some of his statement with a pinch of salt. At this stage of his arrest he was happy, even relieved, to confess but he was also keen to plead not guilty on the grounds of diminished responsibility and thus make himself seem less answerable for his actions. A later statement is more revealing and equally tragic:

It was a sequence of events. I was simply on my way home from work at the time. As I was proceeding along Lumb Lane, a car backed out into the road. He obviously hadn't looked where he was going and I had to stop suddenly. She came straight round the same corner the car had reversed from.

She tapped on the window and opened the door. It was

a complete surprise to me because I wasn't looking for a prostitute at all. She said, 'Are you' - you know, having business or something. I asked her where she sprung from because it happened so suddenly. She said, 'It's good timing, or you can put it down to fate.' Unfortunately for her, I thought this was my direct signal.

I had a hammer on the car floor, and she said very little after that. I took her to where she wanted to go and after I killed her I apologised. I said I was sorry and she could get up, and that she would be all right. She didn't and I realise it was meant to be.

For all his other murders bar the first and Yvonne Pearson, Sutcliffe speaks of deliberately going out to kill. If anything, the casual nature of Yvonne's murder makes him more despicable. The banality of evil.

The same could be said of 'Jack'. He found Polly, drunk as a Lord, on or near Whitechapel Road; there were few people around when he spoke to Annie, and Catherine was near to a pitch-black square. There is no indication to say that he stalked them first. There was opportunity aplenty and though we'll never know if he set out each night to kill, it would be a very rare night if he were not presented with a potential victim.

So, if he was more wary of being caught in October had he kept up his usual technique, he must have been delighted when he learned that Mary Kelly had a room of her own and thus that he would have some privacy to work in.

So maybe the Whitechapel murderer's obsession had run its course after Mitre Square and he would be happy to end his activities, but his encounter with Mary was just too good an opportunity to give up. 'You can put it down to fate,' sadly for both Mary and Yvonne.

This would suggest a 'Well, since I'm here' laissez-faire approach rather than that of a simmering hatred which builds and builds until it's sated by another attack. I say this because the three weeks between Annie Chapman and Elizabeth Stride's murder seem to have increased his need for maniacal evisceration and degradation of a corpse. His mood come 30th September seems more ferocious than it did at the start of the month. He didn't leave many clues, but the fact that he needed – and I emphasise that word – to kill again so soon after his (for him) disappointing visit to Berners St suggests an overwhelming agitation on his part. He wasn't satisfied with a simple throat cutting. He wanted more, *needed* more. That could be the need to eviscerate or a fascination with internal organs or, as has been suggested by some, a killing to order spree to sell on fresh body parts. It is, in any case, noteworthy that the relatively 'clean' murder of Stride was followed by a savage outbreak (including slashes to the face for the first time)

on Eddowes. Does this mean that, following three weeks of inactivity, the devil in him was not only awoken but given a fuller and much more violent voice? If Mary Kelly's murder is anything to go by, the longer the gap the more vicious the attack – ever the hallmark of the progressive serial killer.

Of course, it should be said that there was a world of difference in the Nichols and Chapman cases, despite there being only one week between them. Polly had her abdomen cut open, while Annie was torn apart. That represents the biggest escalation in the smallest timeframe, assuming he had sufficient time to do as he pleased in the back yard of 29 Hanbury Street and wasn't interrupted. However, he didn't cut Annie's face though it would have been the work of a moment to do so. He experimented with Catherine Eddowes' cheeks by cutting small 'V' shapes beneath the eyes and then went to the extreme for Mary Kelly. Was that due to a building of violent pressure between 30th September and 9th November? Was that time spent wondering what he could do next or allowing a fresh interest and compulsion to develop? We'll never know for sure.

If his blood was boiling after three weeks, what must it have been like after five?

And yet he did nothing.

Though the man himself lay low, the case itself was at its busiest. The day following the Berners Street and Mitre Square murders saw the *Daily News* print the 'Dear Boss' letter, Thomas Coram finding a knife in the Whitechapel Road, the *Financial News* and the Lord Mayor offering rewards for the killer's capture, the arrival of the 'Saucy Jacky' postcard and a drunken Michael Kidney turning up drunk at Leaman Street police station demanding justice and abusing the police. That was all in one day. By the end of that week the Whitehall body was discovered and Matthew Packer of Berner Street was talking of selling grapes to the Berner Street murderer and victim. Despite Packer probably being a fantasist or at least keen to enjoy his time in the limelight, it's easy to see why the Ripper chose to keep quiet. Or was he? Did he indulge in some self-promotion of his own?

On 16th October George Lusk received his gruesome package, and if that was the work of the murderer it suggests that he enjoyed taunting the public as much as carrying out the murders. There are several reasons why the letter may be genuine, not least because he doesn't sign it with the usual 'Jack the Ripper' motif or open with 'Dear Boss' as many hoax letters did at the time. The author did not find it necessary to embellish his missive to that degree, presumably because he sent along a kidney with it as proof of his authenticity. Whether it was Catherine's or not is another matter.

Though the weeks passed without a new murder,

there was little to suggest that the horrors were at an end. The press continued to speak of new and gruesome correspondence and threw suspicions out wherever possible. When not engaging in their fearful prose, they took the police to task at every available opportunity. On 20th October, the *East London Observer* stated:

The history of the week has been little more than a repetition of previous weeks - a series of false alarms, false arrests, fruitless theories, and useless house to house visitations on the part of the police.

The newspaper added:

That so many murders should have been committed with impunity; that very nearly a year should have elapsed since the first "unfortunate" fell a victim to the destroyer's hand; and that the murderer should still remain undiscovered, is a condition of things - taking into consideration the vastly increased efficiency of the police force - absolutely without a parallel in this country. Williams, the Welsh lawyer's clerk, who, about a century ago, went about stabbing indiscriminately at women in the public streets, was speedily caught; John Williams, better known as "the Marr murderer" of Ratcliff, was caught within a comparatively short time after the commission of his fifth crime, and even Burke, of Edinburgh, only managed to dispatch his third victim before the law had its iron hand round his throat.

Of course, we know now that the police were not especially incompetent; they were simply incapable of laying their hands on a man who disappeared into thin air and, without a new murder with which to incriminate himself, they were unsure how to proceed. I mean, how do you catch a man red-handed when he seems to have stopped killing?

Those empty five weeks will always be a mystery and, though it's highly plausible that Whitechapel and Spitalfields were simply too hot to lure him onto the streets, we'll never know for sure. A friend tells me of a theory that he may have somehow injured himself in the darkness of Mitre Square – which would explain why he cut off a part of the apron (to stem a cut?) which he had never done before – while another simply suggests that he may have been ill. Could a head cold have saved a life or two? Stranger things have happened.

One thing is for sure though. The devil was still in him despite his silence and his encounter with Mary Kelly, less than a quarter of a mile from his last appearance in Goulston Street, told the Victorian world that it could not rest just yet.



KARL COPPACK is the author of the ten-part series *Ten Weeks In Whitechapel: A New Way of Telling the Story*, recorded for podcast release by Rippercast.

Connective Tissue

Belle Elmore, H.H. Crippen and the Death of Charlotte Bell

By JONATHAN MENGES

"If my son had wanted to rid himself of his wife, he, with his superior education and knowledge of medicine, would have employed some means to put her out of the way without exciting suspicion." – Myron Crippen, father of H.H. Crippen¹

On the morning of the 23rd of November 1910, Hawley Harvey Crippen, an American homeopathic eye and ear doctor and patent medicine chemist, was executed for the murder of his second wife, Cora Crippen, also known by her stage name 'Belle Elmore'. The sensational elements of the case: the denudation of her skin from her bones, the burial of a mass of flesh and organs in the cellar of their home, and the attempt to escape from justice accompanied by his lover Ethel Le Neve who was disguised as a boy, makes for one of most infamous cases in the annals of crime. The Crown's chief piece of forensic evidence that helped to convict Crippen was one piece of flesh that bore an old scar.

Dr. Augustus Pepper described the scar found in the cellar as running from just below the navel to the top of the pubic region in an almost straight line measuring between 4½ inches and, allowing for contraction, 5½ inches long. It was wider at the bottom than at its top, which he explained is commonly found in a scar left by an operation on a female rather than a male. Pepper stated that this type of scar is most similar to those resulting from the removal of pelvic organs such as the uterus or the ovaries, or both.² Dr. Bernard Spilsbury, Divisional Surgeon Thomas Marshall and Dr. William Wilcox all gave a similar opinion in identifying this scar.

However Dr. Gilbert Turnball, the Director of the Pathological Institute at the London Hospital, testifying for the defense, disagreed. Although he admitted to having never performed a surgical operation, the reasoning behind his contrary opinion was that the inward fold of the "scar" was inconsistent with how a surgeon, British or American, would have sewn up a wound. The way that the scar appeared to Turnball, with its edges folded inwards,

suggested to him the healing of a wound caused by an accident, not an operation. And since any marks left by stitches were no longer visible on this old scar, he gave the opinion that it might not be a scar at all, but simply a fold in the skin.³ If Turnball is right to doubt that an experienced surgeon sewed up the wound, and all of the Crown's expert witnesses - Doctors Spilsbury, Pepper, Marshall and Wilcox - are correct that it is Cora Crippen's scar from an old operation, then is it possible that H.H. Crippen performed the surgery on Cora himself?

There is nothing to suggest that the police investigation ever attempted to track down the doctor who performed a surgical operation on Cora Crippen's abdomen, and there is nothing in the trial transcripts where any witnesses to Cora having a scar explain how she received it. Crippen himself identifies the type of operation that left Cora with the scar and that the procedure took place after their marriage, but he does not say who gave it to her:

My wife had a scar on the lower part of the abdomen, from the pubic bone upwards, towards the navel, in the middle line. It was from an operation for ovariectomy, that was done about twelve years ago, I believe, shortly before we came to England for the first time.⁴

1 *Los Angeles Herald*, 1910, July 16, 'Blames French Woman For Death of Son's Wife'.

2 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.2, 04 September 2017), October 1910, trial of CRIPPEN, Hawley Harvey (48, dentist) (t19101011-74).

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.



The description Crippen gives of his wife's ovariectomy operation is somewhat clinical, and for good reason. He had experience in this type of surgery. In *The Medical Advance: A Monthly Magazine of Homeopathic Medicine* published in Detroit in 1884, Phil Porter MD contributed an article entitled 'Ovariectomy - Recovery', in which he identifies Crippen as assisting him in the removal of a large ovarian cyst from one of his patients.⁵ Testifying at his own trial, Crippen confirmed that he worked with Dr. Porter.

I came over to England in 1883, and attended various hospitals to see the operations, and returned to the States, and was assistant for three or four months to Dr. Porter, of Detroit. After that I went to New York and took a degree in special eye and ear work at the Ophthalmic Hospital. This would be in 1885.⁶

He also stated in his testimony that "I went through a theoretical course of surgery. I have never gone through a practical course of surgery, and I have never performed a post-mortem examination in my life."⁷ Unfortunately he

was not asked to clarify this statement as to whether he had performed any surgeries at all, and what he meant exactly by a "post-mortem examination" when the issue at hand was the destroyed remains of Cora in his cellar. But it is apparent that Crippen is attempting to minimize his surgical experience.

As is well known, Crippen was a homeopathic doctor, not an allopath. Today homeopathy is largely equated with "quack" medicine, but during Crippen's time this was not wholly true. Homeopathic colleges, which became widely popular in the United States in the mid to late 19th century, were not all that different from conventional medical colleges in their teaching curriculum. Indeed, many homeopathic doctors of the time were former allopaths, converts to the homeopathic theory of similarity in finding cures for illnesses. But many homeopathic practitioners possessed some odd beliefs on how the human body functioned, and Crippen was one of them.

One of these was the belief that all of the organs in the human body are so closely related that what appears to be a malady affecting only one, such as the ear, could be caused by a hidden illness in another, like the uterus. An examination of his published medical papers suggests that Crippen focused on the idea that problems of the eye and ear were symptoms of a diseased reproductive organ, which caused damage to the sympathetic nervous system. One of his articles, entitled "On the Relation of Diseases of the Ear to Abnormal conditions of the Female Generative Organs", he emphasizes this symbiosis: "[It's] necessary to keep steadfastly in view that the relationships, direct and indirect, between the female generative organs and the ear, is fundamentally the same kind as those between other parts of the body, and that, having found a functional or a pathological indication of sympathetic perversion, the cause must be removed before the effect will cease."⁸ He goes on to relate to his readers several case studies of women who would visit Crippen complaining of an earache only for him to diagnose an anteflexion of the uterus and send them over to Dr. Porter to operate, with Crippen as his assistant. Another article by Crippen during this time was titled "The Relation of Eye Strain to some of the Nervous Reflexes of Childhood". It was not presented

5 Porter, H.D., Phil 'Ovariectomy-Recovery', *The Medical Advance*, Vol 14, 1884.

6 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 7.2, 04 September 2017), October 1910, trial of CRIPPEN, Hawley Harvey (48, dentist) (t19101011-74).

7 Ibid.

8 Crippen, H.H. 'On the Relation of Diseases of the Ear to Abnormal conditions of the Female Generative Organs', *Homoeopathic Journal of Obstetrics and Diseases of Women and Children*, Vol 8, 1886.

as a paper on ophthalmology, but rather one of obstetrics and gynecology.⁹

As Crippen stated in his testimony above, after leaving Dr. Porter in 1885 he moved to New York City to continue his homeopathic studies. It was here that he met his first wife, an Irish immigrant named Charlotte Jane Bell.

According to her brother, Charlotte was training as a nurse at the Hahnemann Hospital on Park Avenue, a homeopathic hospital, when she first met Crippen. He began working there as an intern immediately upon his arrival from Detroit.¹⁰ It appears that they were a couple by the time Charlotte graduated from nursing school later that same year, and although they remained living in New York City, Crippen and Charlotte returned to Detroit to be married at the home of Dr. Porter on 13 December, 1887.



James Dart

act as a support group for homeopathic doctors, since, as homeopathy grew, their field of medicine was under an increasing amount of attacks from the American Medical Association. In Salt Lake City, the society called itself 'The Knights of the Small Doses' and its President was one J.M. Dart.

James Monroe Dart was a Civil War veteran who enlisted as a private and quickly rose through the ranks so that by the Battle of Gettysburg he led Company E of the 134th New York Infantry as its Captain. After the war he found work at a lime and cement company before enrolling in the New York Homeopathic Medical College in 1870 and graduating from that college the following year.¹² When J.M. Dart, now "Doctor" Dart, moved west to Salt Lake City in 1885 he resided at 535 Second Street, and when Crippen arrived four years later, he and Charlotte moved into a house at 565 First Street, one block South from Dr. Dart. It is here in the 1891 City Directory that Crippen lists himself as an "Eye and Ear Surgeon", a strange occupation for someone who later claims to have only a theoretical knowledge of surgery. It would be suggested by those who knew Crippen in Salt Lake City that he had another source



Charlotte Bell, the first Mrs Crippen

Press reports indicated that Crippen had trouble with the law, which may account for his frequent address changes around New York City,¹¹ and by 1889 Crippen and Charlotte had relocated across the country, to California. It was in San Diego that Charlotte gave birth to their son, Otto. The couple did not stay for long, as soon they would move again to Salt Lake City, Utah.

By the 1890s, Homeopathic medicine's popularity in the United States had spread to such an extent that nearly every major city and state had well-established Homeopathic Societies, so everywhere that Crippen settled he could quickly meet up with like-minded practitioners. These societies would hold meetings, publish journals and

9 Crippen, M.D., H.H. 'The Relation of Eye Strain to Some of the Nervous Reflexes of Childhood' *Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Paedology-Address of the Utah Homeopathic Medical Association 1892.*

10 *The Post-Standard*, Syracuse, NY 1910, July 16 'First Bride of Hunted Dentist Died Strangely'.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *The Roxbury Times*, 1925, January 10. Obituary of James Monroe Dart.

of income which have led some modern day researchers to speculate whether he was an abortionist.¹³ Nevertheless, Dr. Dart and Dr. Crippen would associate closely during these few years in Salt Lake City, practicing homeopathic medicine, speaking at conferences and publishing in journals. Eventually Crippen would be named Secretary of the Utah Homeopathic Society, with Dr. Dart as its President. In 1895 Dr. Dart would be found liable in a civil suit for fraudulently cooking the books in the sale of shares of cattle stock.¹⁴

Crippen continued to appear in Homeopathic Medical Journals during his time in Salt Lake City. He begins another article, titled "The Insanity of Pregnancy", with the line "It is often disheartening in a post-mortem examination to fail in finding changes in the nerve tissues or cells by which we may trace the course of the disease."¹⁵ Here again we have Crippen claiming expertise, this time in post-mortem examinations, which in his testimony at trial he denied ever having performed. He goes on in this article to describe various forms of "insanity" occurring in women just after childbirth, and how its cause can be directly traced to an "irritation" in the female's genitals that has damaged the sympathetic nervous system. As far as treatment of women suffering from insanity after childbirth, Crippen recommended that they be cured at home, watched over by a medical attendant "skilled in the philosophy of the mind, in the anatomy and physiology of the nervous system, and in medical science in general" rather than be sent to a hospital or asylum. As we will soon see, it was later reported that Charlotte Bell Crippen died shortly after childbirth, and at their home.

In a review of a book about the treatment of female insanity published in the *American Homeopathic Journal of Gynecology*, Crippen criticizes the author's prescriptions, writing "In his own experience, that he finds it necessary give hyoscyamin in small doses, as "one-twentieth" of a grain would produce alarming symptoms of a collapse."¹⁶ Hyoscyamin is the drug that would later be administered to Cora Crippen, possibly killing her.

Charlotte Jane Bell Crippen died at their home on January 24, 1892 at the age of 33. A small death notice ran in the *Salt Lake Tribune* on January 25th:

CRIPPEN- On January 24th, Charlotte J., beloved wife of Dr. H.H. Crippen. Funeral from residence 565 South First Street at 10 o'clock a.m., Tuesday.

The real cause of Charlotte's death remains a mystery, but there are enough facts to raise suspicions. The attending physician at her death was none other than his colleague Dr. Dart, who lists the cause of her death as "apoplexy", i.e. a stroke, as a result of "Paralysis of the Sympathetic". This is ironic considering Crippen wrote so many homeopathic

articles on the condition and homeopaths believe that the root cause of Sympathetic nervous system paralysis lie in the female reproductive organs. In his article "Diseases of Women as a Cause of Insanity" he states his learned opinion that young women who seek a higher education by reading books or attending school are more susceptible to severe mental derangement, caused by nerve damage to their genitals, since they spend a lot of their time sitting in chairs studying. Here he points directly at ovarian or uterine diseases as the root cause of a females "absurdity" and suggests "properly directed treatment" as its cure.¹⁷

On Charlotte's burial register at Mount Olivet Cemetery, Dr. Dart is again listed as the attending physician, cause of death 'apoplexy'. However a notice placed in the *Southern Journal of Homeopathy* (Vol IX Feb 1892) carried a death notice stating she died of heart disease.

*

Dr. H. H. Crippen, Salt Lake City, mourns the death of his wife, which sad event occurred January 24, from heart disease. His many friends in the profession will sympathize deeply with Dr. Crippen in his bereavement.

Death notice placed in the Southern Journal of Homeopathy, February 1892

It was nineteen years after Charlotte's death, as newspapers all over the world reported on the hunt for H.H. Crippen, that the press learned that his first wife had died under mysterious circumstances.

The New York Times of July 16, 1910 reported that she died of a stroke during childbirth and that the "neighbors were suspicious". At this time there are no records indicating Charlotte was pregnant and died during or shortly after childbirth. *The Los Angeles Herald Sun* of July 17, 1910 repeats this cause of death and further reports that the police authorities in London were investigating Charlotte Bell's death. This report also states that Crippen had told acquaintances that his wife's death meant that he inherited a large sum of money and that he was leaving Salt Lake City to claim it.

13 *Salt Lake Semi-Weekly Tribune*, 1910 July 15 'Former Salt Lake man thought Wife -Murderer'; Conversation between John Burton and the author.

14 *Barse Live Stock Co. vs Range V.C. Co., Reports of Cases Decided in the Supreme Court of the State of Utah*, Vol 16, 1898.

15 Crippen, M.D., H.H. 'The Insanity of Pregnancy' *Homeopathic Journal of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Pediatrics*, Vol 11, 1889.

16 Crippen, M.D., H.H. 'New Publications' *American Homeopathic Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, January 1885.

17 Crippen, M.D., H.H. "Diseases of Women as a Cause of Insanity" *American Homeopathic Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* Vol 1, 1885.

One of the most interesting accounts of Charlotte Bell Crippen's death, if true, comes from an interview with William Tanner, who claimed to have been a neighbor of the Crippens. Mr. Tanner said:

In 1892 my wife and I lived in a cottage in Salt Lake City near the corner of Sixth South and Second West streets. Immediately adjoining our cottage was another house which was occupied by a family named Crippen. He posed as a dentist, but was also studying medicine and surgery.

He was commonly known as 'Dr.' Crippen throughout the neighborhood, however, but because of his quiet and at times almost insulting demeanor he was very unpopular in the neighborhood. As a matter of fact we all grew to feel that he did not want any acquaintances with any one in the locality. On one occasion my wife and another neighbor were sitting in the Crippen home talking when Mrs. Crippen chanced to glance out of the window and saw him coming home. Visibly agitated she implored my wife and the other woman friend to leave at once, saying that 'Hawley will be very angry if he finds you here.'

On the following morning she apologized but stated that she had no choice in the matter and could not bear the trouble that were to arise if she were found by her husband to be 'neighborin' with those in the vicinity.

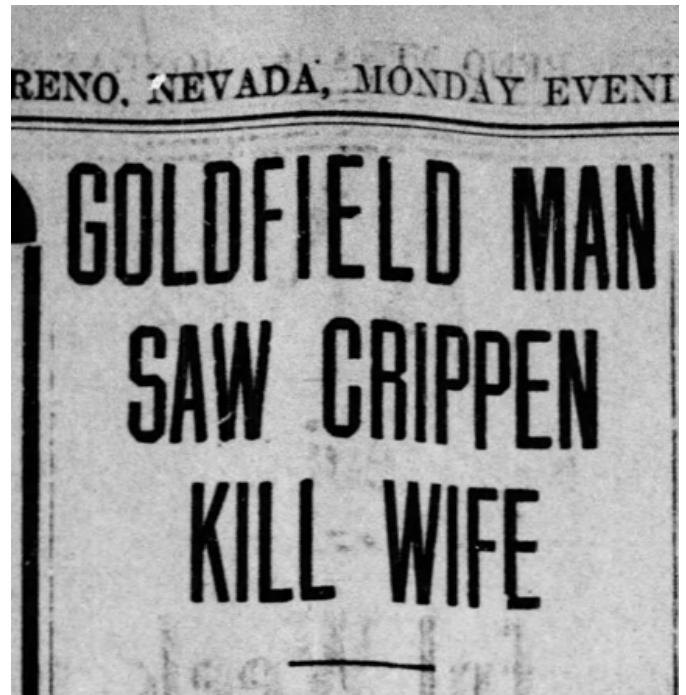
Naturally this aroused our suspicions. We all noted various things that seemed more or less strange at different times and gradually the impression grew that Mrs. Crippen was being maltreated by her husband. One of the women in the neighborhood asked Mrs. Crippen point blank one day if she felt safe with him and Mrs. Crippen replied that, while her husband forced her to act as a subject for some of his experiments, she felt assured he would never willingly harm her.

One night early in the spring of 1902 my wife and I had just finished dinner and I had gone into the front room, when my wife shrieked out that Crippen had just thrown a heavy book at his wife and struck her in the back of the neck. I asked her how she knew and she said she had seen Crippen throw the book, and through the adjoining side window of the Crippen home had seen Mrs. Crippen stagger back into sight and fall to the floor with both hands upraised to her head.

Tanner then claimed that the following day the Crippen's son, Otto, came to their house and asked his wife to go over to the Crippen home, as his mother was "sick". When she arrived Charlotte was dead, and that "a big dark bruise, nearly the size of a butter chip, was apparent just at the base of the brain." He continued, "Mrs. Crippen had been ill for many months and Crippen in his capacity of physician signed the death warrant." He concluded by describing Crippen as "a worthless ne'er do well" and felt that "she

[Charlotte] had gone to a well earned rest - instead of being brutally deprived of life".¹⁸

Although the section quoted above misstates the year of Charlotte's death as 1902, Tanner gives the correct year of 1892 later in the interview.



Headline of the Reno Gazette Journal, 16th January 1911

If this account is true (there is a William Tanner, laborer, listed in the 1892 Salt Lake City directory as living at 676 13th Street) then it is entirely possible the 'paralysis of the sympathetic' and subsequent stroke was brought about by a severe blow to the back of the head and neck. But there are a couple of problems with his account. As we have seen, it was Dr. J.M. Dart who signed her death warrant, not Crippen. And the address listed in the 1892 City Directory is not adjacent to the Crippen home, but several blocks away, although he may have moved.

William Tanner's interview does contain an accusation against Crippen that had appeared elsewhere, and by Charlotte's own brother:

W.E. Bell of Winfield, L.I., brother of the first Mrs. Crippen who died in Salt Lake, declares that his sister was killed by the physician in one of his many operations upon her. In letters written to her family in 1891, Mrs. Crippen said her husband had operated upon her several times, against her protests, and she feared he would kill her in one of them. She told the family that if she should die as a result of one of these many operations, it would be the fault of her husband. Though the death of Mrs. Crippen was suspicious in

¹⁸ *Reno Evening Gazette* 'Goldfield man saw Crippen kill wife' 1911, January 16.

some particulars, there was not sufficient grounds upon which to prosecute her husband. The cause of her death was given as apoplexy and paralysis.¹⁹

In another account, Charlotte's brother is quoted as saying:

Charlotte wrote to me that her husband was taking advantage of his medical and surgical knowledge and was compelling her to undergo operations by the knife. She had undergone she said, two dangerous operations. Her husband, she wrote, was then playing the part of an optician as well as a dentist, although he was really neither. Meanwhile, I should say, they had one little son born the first year of their marriage. I was furious when I got these letters, Mr Bell went on, and it was in my mind to go West and kill this man who was maltreating my sister. But I restrained myself. Then came the worst letter of all. Charlotte wrote something to this effect: 'My husband is about to force me to the knife again, and I feel that this will be the last time. I want my relatives to know that if I die it will be his fault.' She did die under the third operation and I went to Salt Lake, but when I got there Dr Crippen had vanished, taking with him his boy. I never heard of him from that day until this week when I learned that his second wife had been slain. I sent the letter from Charlotte to my brother, D.H. Bell, who lives in Dublin, Ireland, soon after her death, and he probably still has it.

The article continues: "Cable dispatches from abroad proved this to be true. One message announced that D.H. Bell and the Irish Police had started an inquiry into the death of Charlotte Jane Bell."²⁰

Did Charlotte die from a blow to the head or on an operating table in her home? Or of natural causes? We will probably never know.

It is also not known at present what ever became of these supposed police investigations into the death of Charlotte Bell Crippen. Perhaps the passage of nineteen years made it impossible to determine exactly what happened to her. The authorities could have come to the conclusion that those who claimed to have evidence against Crippen in the death of his first wife were either motivated by a personal grudge (Charlotte's brother) or had memories tainted by the massive newspaper coverage of Cora Crippen's demise (Tanner).

Crippen had enough knowledge and expertise to perform medical procedures on women, targeting the area of the uterus, in order to treat 'paralysis of the sympathetic' as he saw it, at its origin. Indeed, he believed in and practiced

a type of medicine that encouraged such operations. If it is true that Crippen performed surgical experiments on Charlotte, perhaps killing her in the process, than it is equally possible that he did so on Cora, leaving behind the very scar that led to his downfall.

Paraphrasing Oscar Wilde: To lose one wife may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness.



Seldom-seen photograph of a bearded Dr. H. H. Crippen

19 *Salt Lake Herald Republican* 'A Salt Lake Murder' 1910, July 23.

20 *The Post-Standard*, Syracuse, NY 'First Bride of Hunted Dentist Died Strangely' 1910, July 16.



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JONATHAN MENGES is a true crime researcher currently residing in Topeka, Kansas. He is also the creator and host of the podcast 'Rippercast: Your Podcast on Jack the Ripper and the Whitechapel Murders' which can be found at casebook.org/podcast.

Chicago May Duignan, the Queen of Crooks

By Madeleine Keane

The opening of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago was by far the largest exhibition the world had ever seen, and it put the noisy, bustling midwestern city on the map. The Fair and the job prospects that came with it lured scads of people to the city. One such transplant was May Duignan, a tall, high-spirited Irishwoman. Her exploits in Chicago would become so notorious that by the time she left she was known by the moniker Chicago May.

May Duignan was born Mary Anne Duignan on December 26, 1871, in the village of Edenmore, County Longford in Ireland. May was the eldest of five children, and she and her family, like many Irish at the time, lived in abject poverty. She was described as having a splendid head of red-gold hair and "a beauty with great wit, charm, and intelligence, which she used to her advantage and the disadvantage of others."¹

By the end of the nineteenth century, half of all children born in Ireland would eventually emigrate. Most of the emigrants were women, and 90 percent of these women were single.² May was destined to become one of those women as well. In 1890 May ran away from home on the very night her mother gave birth to her youngest sibling, with her father's savings of 60 pounds in her pocket. It was, according to May, "The first time I stole anything in my life... He could afford to lose it, and I needed it. He ought to have agreed with me when I hinted about emigrating and handed me the money with his blessing. It wasn't my fault I was born."³

After landing in New York City, May made her way to Nebraska to live with an uncle and his family on his ranch. It was there that she met Albert "Dal" Churchill, a member of the Dalton gang. It was love at first sight and May and

Dal ran away to marry in Salt Lake City, Utah. When Dal rode with the Daltons, May would stay at the home of one of the gang member's sisters in Chicago. She and Dal had been married only a year when he was killed in a train robbery near Phoenix, Arizona. May claimed that he was lynched by the townspeople.

After Dal's death, May was left to fend for herself. She began her journey into a life of crime, becoming a con artist, prostitute, blackmailer and thief. She expanded her career in other cities such as Detroit, San Francisco, Milwaukee and New York City. May was especially proud of her prowess as a badger - a con woman who would pose as a prostitute so that she might rob her prospective clients. May became quite notorious for her activities in New York City's Tenderloin of 1896; one contemporaneous report says about her "She was famous for her method of biting stones out of men's scarf-pins while she amorously pretended to bury her face against their chests."⁴

May was involved in the infamous Dora Clark affair of 1896, which involved author Stephen Crane and corrupt New York City cop Charles Becker. While out late one night, Crane came upon a young police officer acting on Becker's orders and arresting a prostitute named Dora for soliciting, despite there being no evidence of it. Incensed, Crane went to morning court to testify on the girl's behalf.

1 MacConnell, Sean. "Co. Longford's Mary Ann became 'Chicago May' in turbulent life of crime." *Irish Times*, August 9, 1999.

2 O'Faolain, Nuala. *The Story of Chicago May*. New York: Penguin Group, 2005. pp. 16-18.

3 Sharpe, May Churchill. *Chicago May, Her Story*. London: Samson Low, Marston & Co, Ltd., 1928. p. 11.

4 O'Faolain, p. 78.

May testified for Becker, claiming that “Dora had offered her twenty-five dollars to tell a lie that she, May, could not but tell the truth – she personally had seen Dora soliciting... and that Stephen Crane was often seen in the company of prostitutes.”⁵ May’s testimony fell apart, though, when she was asked about her occupation. She stated that she was a typist, but during cross-examination it was determined that she knew nothing about the occupation. The case against Dora was dismissed, but Becker later appealed. May was to appear in the appeal as well, but instead got into a brawl outside the courtroom with another prostitute whose testimony was to support Crane’s.

In 1897 May got a part as a Salvation Army Girl in the musical *Belle of New York*, and it was here that she caught the eye of a young man by the name of Jim Sharpe, whose mother owned a successful metal-shelving business. The two were married in 1899, after May had been arrested and hauled off to jail for stealing a minister’s wallet. Sharp immediately went to the D.A.’s office. “James Montgomery Sharpe, the son of a well-to-do family, went to the D.A. and told him that he would marry me and take me out of the life I was living if I was released. I had known Sharpe as a man-about-town, a regular fellow, dashing and handsome. He was always decent and liberal with me when we had parties, but that was as far as it went. I was released all right, so I had to carry put my part of the bargain.”⁶

Jim suffered from mental illness and had a drinking problem, and was considered the black sheep of his family. “Jim was a bad egg, and I wasn’t the one to reform him,” May wrote.⁷ The marriage quickly soured, and most of it was as a result of Jim’s erratic behavior. His crimes included forging his mother’s name on checks and twice attempting to kill his brother.⁸ May was involved in one of Jim’s misdeeds; she helped him cheat Christmas gifts from a store where the Sharpes had credit. After a year, though, May left. Jim fought in the Spanish-American War and was declared missing, but May believed him to be dead.

May joined the chorus of *Belle of New York* again, but this time with the traveling company, and headed off to London. Soon she was up to her old tricks. It was here that she met Eddie Guerin, a fellow Irish-American gangster from Chicago. Guerin, May writes, “was a gang-burglar and safe-cracker, at the head of his branch of the criminal profession.”⁹ Soon Eddie moved into an apartment in Bloomsbury with May and her maid, Emily Skinner, close to the Hotel de Provence. Eddie met up two other American safebreakers, Dutch Gus and Kid McManus, to plan and execute a heist. Dutch Gus had a particular location in mind: the American Express Office in Paris. May was brought into the plan as well and the gang headed for Paris in April 1901. They cased out the bank for three

weeks while finalizing the details of the heist. The three men caught the attention of the Sûreté, but despite this, the robbery went on as planned. It was May who hid in the bank office and let the men in after closing so that they could execute their plan. The gang got away with \$6,000.00 and split it three ways equally. Both Guerin and Dutch Gus were arrested before they left France, while Kid McManus was able to escape to Italy. May herself was left with her share of the loot and she remembered throwing the envelope containing it into the bay as the train left the station.



A mugshot of Eddie Guerin from 1900

5 O’Faolain, p. 76.

6 O’Faolain, p. 99.

7 O’Faolain, p. 103.

8 Jim first attempted to poison his brother’s coffee, but was foiled by the cook. Jim next waited for his brother to return home, intending to shoot him, but the brother had missed the ferry from Manhattan. O’Faolain, p. 103.

9 O’Faolain, p. 116.

While Dutch Gus and Guerin awaited trial in prison, May returned to Paris to help her beloved Eddie any way she could. She went to the American Consul with the story that Guerin was her brother to see what assistance they could offer, but was arrested for receiving stolen money. All three of them were tried and found guilty. Eddie and Dutch Gus were sentenced to Devil's Island for life, while May was sentenced to five years' hard labor, which she would serve in the Montpellier Prison.

May was amnestied four years later by the French president and returned to England. Eddie, who was languishing in prison on Devil's Island and in the midst of plotting his own escape, later said in his autobiography that May used her feminine wiles to convince the prison doctor into securing an early release for her. Once she set foot in London, May began to work in earnest with some of her old associates, including casino owner Pat Sheedy in Cairo, to raise money to aid Guerin's escape.

May also embarked on an affair with a fellow con man and thief known as Baby Thompson. She insists in her autobiography that she had broken things off with Eddie during their stay in Paris. After a brief visit with her family in Ireland, May returned to London. Eddie Guerin, having escaped from Devil's Island, awaited her there. What happened next is from May's account: "Eddie Guerin, by a newspaper, lured me to Dan McCarthy's place... He was jealous of Baby Thompson, with whom I was living, and would not give me up. I was so afraid of the man I became his slave, until I could make my escape... He sent my maid, Skinner, for my clothes... I was too afraid to yell for help, and it was against crook code to squeal."¹⁰ May claimed that she was a virtual prisoner, and with Emily Skinner's help Guerin spirited her off to Aix-la-Chapelle. May was terrified for her life; at one point Guerin threatened to shoot her, but relented when she reminded him that she had raised money for his escape from Devil's Island.¹¹

May eventually returned to London when Eddie took off for Milan. Guerin threatened to disfigure May so that she would not be attractive to other men. In 1906 she left London for South America, where she later discovered that Eddie had been captured by the British police and was awaiting extradition to France. May denied any involvement in his capture, but author Nuala O'Faolain believes that May tipped off the police concerning Eddie's whereabouts.

May soon traveled to Rio de Janeiro where she met Sir Sidney Hamilton Gore, the British consul-general in Argentina. He was enamored with May, and invited her to accompany him as a guest to a ball aboard the *SS Charleston*. May and Sidney then passed the days drinking in local bars, and he declared his intention to marry her.

"But I told him to wait," May says, "both for his sake and mine. In time, we could have lived down everything."¹² Sidney took May home. That would be the last time she saw him alive. Later that evening, Sidney took his own life with a gunshot to the head. May's rejection of his proposal was whispered to be the reason behind his suicide.¹³

Guerin wasn't done with May yet, though. He befriended another American thief in prison, Charley Smith, which led to Guerin hiring Smith to disfigure May. Guerin's plan backfired, however, because as soon as Charley encountered May he fell head over heels for her. May seems to have had deep feelings for him as well, affectionately referring to him as the D'Artagnan of crooks. The two spent an idyllic few months in London before Guerin was released and returned there to wreak his vengeance on the couple. Things finally came to a head in late 1906, when "Guerin and Chicago May met in London, and Guerin received a bullet wound that nearly proved mortal. The woman treated the affair lightly, while the man with her, then known as 'Smith', declared doggedly: 'I was the one who fired the shot.'"¹⁴ May and Smith were arrested immediately and charged with the attempted murder of Eddie Guerin. The two were found guilty and Charley was sentenced to life in prison, with the provision that should he be released early, he would be deported to the United States. May received a sentence of fifteen years in prison, after which she, too, would be deported to the United States.



May and Charley Smith on trial

May served her term at Aylesbury jail where, as she states in her memoirs, she struck up a friendship with Lady Countess Constance Markievicz, who had been jailed for her part in the 1916 Easter Rising. In 1917, May was released from prison and immediately deported to the United States. May made an honest effort to go straight,

10 Sharpe, pp. 285-286.

11 O'Faolain, p. 179.

12 O'Faolain, pp. 184-186.

13 "Tragedies in Wake of 'Chicago May.'" *The Des Moines Register*, November 18, 1906.

14 "'Chicago May' Case Attended by Jurist of American Court." *The Washington Times*, July 27, 1907.



May's mugshot when she was arrested in Detroit in 1926

but soon she was back to her old ways, and was in and out of jail in several cities. In Detroit she was picked up on an immigration violation in 1926, but she was so ill that she was confined to the hospital in the Detroit House of Correction. News of her imprisonment reached social reformer August Vollmer; the rumor was that Etta Place, the girlfriend of the infamous Sundance Kid, had been arrested in Detroit. Despite the confusion, though, as soon as Vollmer met May he was determined to help her. He persuaded May to write her autobiography, titled *Chicago May: Her Story*. Published in 1928, the book was not the success that Vollmer and May had anticipated.

In 1929, however, things looked a little brighter for May. Charley Smith, who had been released from prison in England after twenty years, had returned to the United States. He had been serving a prison term in California when he and May reconnected after her brief engagement to much younger con man Lucas Netley. May persuaded

August Vollmer to help Charley to go straight and live an honest life, and May and Charley made plans to be married. May, however, who had been battling illness on and off throughout the last few years, was hospitalized in Philadelphia with what O'Faolain conjectures to be a "gynecological problem." Charley sat at her bedside, tenderly caring for her during her last days. Sadly, their plans for a lovely life together didn't come to fruition. May died during an operation on what was supposed to have been her wedding day. She was buried in an unmarked grave in Philadelphia.

May was a woman who was determined to be mistress of her own fate, an idea that, in her time, was considered almost preposterous. May had no one else to depend on but herself, and while her life was no doubt exciting, it was a lonely one, too. Yet despite her solitary life, May was able to experience the joys and heartaches that everyone else does, and perhaps that's what makes her story so beguiling today.

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MADELEINE KEANE graduated from Oakland University and lives in the Detroit area. She is currently working on her first novel.

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From the Casebook of a Murder House Detective

A Richmond Horror Story and Husband Murder at Battersea

By JAN BONDESON

A RICHMOND HORROR STORY, 1879

In 1879, two semi-detached small cottages in Park Road, Richmond, were owned by a certain Mrs Ives. This old lady herself lived at No. 1 Vine Cottages, as she called it, and rented the other cottage to Mrs Julia Thomas, a 60-year-old former schoolteacher who had been twice widowed. After the death of her second husband in 1873, this rather eccentric and pernickety old lady had moved into No. 2 Vine Cottages, a two-storey semi-detached villa built in grey stone with gardens at the front and back. The difficulties of the Victorian postman, with all these 'Rows', 'Terraces' and 'Cottages' in every road, was further aggravated by the fact that before Mrs Ives had moved in, the two houses had been known at No. 1 and No. 2 Mayfield Cottages, and the names were used interchangeably. The area around Park Road was not heavily populated at the time, although Vine Cottages were close to a public house called The Hole in the Wall.

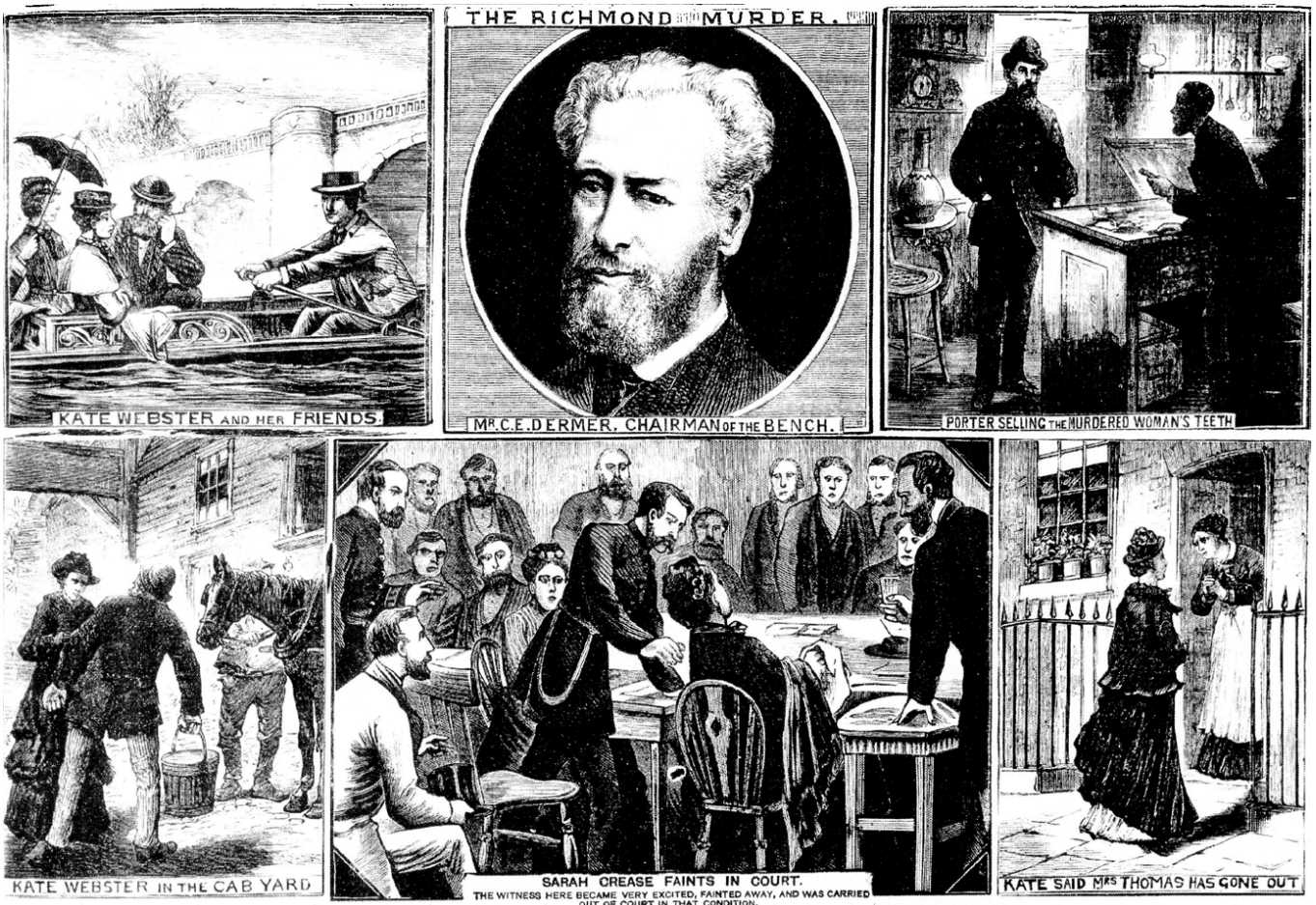
Mrs Thomas' short temper and high demands of cleanliness meant that her servants usually did not remain at No. 2 Vine Cottages for very long. In late January 1879, she employed yet another general servant, the 30-year-old Irishwoman Kate Webster. This strong, brutal-looking woman brought a good reference with her, forged by a friend of hers. She was fortunate that Mrs Thomas did not know about her background, since not only did she have a long history of drunkenness and dishonesty, she had also been imprisoned for theft, and given birth to a son born out of wedlock.

It did not take long before mistress and servant were at serious loggerheads at No. 2 Vine Cottages. The pernickety Mrs Thomas scolded Kate for her incompetence, sloth and lack of cleanliness, and the sturdy, hard-faced Irishwoman more than once answered her back. Mrs Thomas made

sure that Kate's term of employment would end by the last day of February. But still, as the weeks went by, the relationship between mistress and servant kept deteriorating. The nervous Mrs Thomas was becoming fearful that Kate would injure or murder her. When Kate asked to be allowed to remain in the house until March 2, Mrs Thomas did not dare to refuse her this favour.



*Kate Webster and the Richmond murder house,
from the Penny Illustrated Paper, July 5 1879.*



Portraits in connection with the murder of Mrs Thomas, from the Illustrated Police News, May 17 1879.

On March 2, there was an angry quarrel between Mrs Thomas and Kate, after the latter had returned to No. 2 Vine Cottages quite drunk. Kate, who had a vocabulary that would have graced a Billingsgate fishwife, damned and blasted her employer with a hearty goodwill. A respectable, religious former schoolmistress like Mrs Thomas is unlikely to have heard such horrid words from a woman before. The shaken old lady went to church, and several people saw that she looked very worried and upset, although they did not inquire what was the matter,

In spite of the terrible scene earlier in the day, Mrs Thomas, whose instinct of self-preservation appears to have been quite defective, returned to No. 2 Vine Cottages. Kate was waiting for her there, with murder in mind. Mrs Thomas tried to take refuge in her bedroom, but Kate followed her upstairs. She seized hold of her employer and flung her headlong down the stairs. Mrs Thomas landed with a heavy thud, and Kate seized her by the throat and throttled her to death. The Irish virago then dragged the limp body of her mistress into the kitchen, where she made use of a saw, a chopper and a knife to dismember it. She lit a roaring fire underneath the large kitchen copper, and as soon as the water boiled, she loaded various body parts into it. This was hot work, and Kate had to go to The

Hole in the Wall pub to refresh herself at regular intervals, leaving what remained of her mistress boiling in the copper.

With admirable coolness, Kate Webster cleaned the murder house and the kitchen. She put the bones and some flaps of skin in a wooden box and a Gladstone bag. She answered the door to visitors and delivery boys, and seemed to be her regular truculent self. There is even a – hopefully apocryphal – story that Kate went round the neighbourhood offering two tubs of lard for sale, declaring them to be the best drippings; this was the residue left by her recent ‘cooking’ in the kitchen copper. With the help of a singularly unsuspecting boy, she managed to throw the box and the Gladstone bag into Thames. The box and its contents did not sink like she had expected, but was found washed up in shallow water next to the riverbank the very next day. It was spotted and recovered by a coal porter driving his cart past the Barnes Railway Bridge. After the discovery had been reported to the police, the remains were examined by a doctor, who found that they consisted of the trunk (minus entrails) and legs (minus one foot) of a woman. Around the same time, a human foot and ankle were found in Twickenham. Crucially, the incompetent doctor who examined these body parts

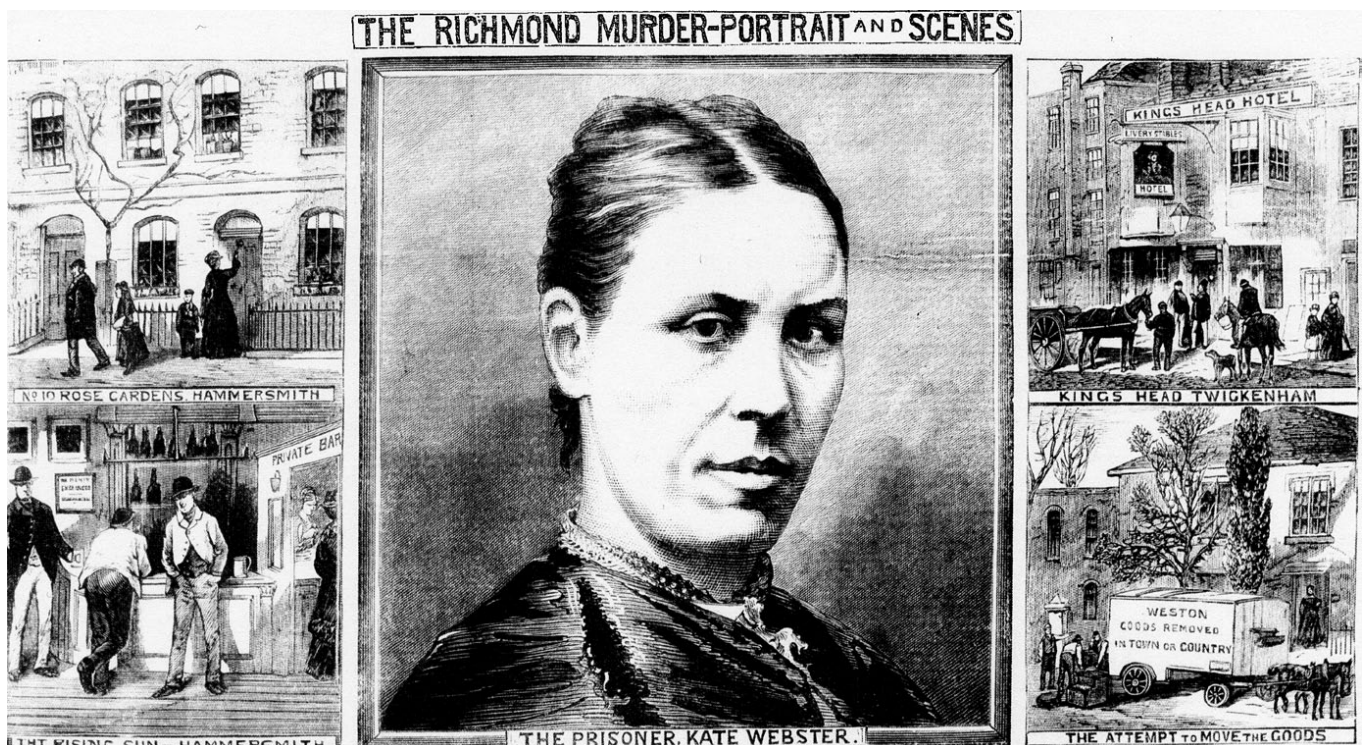
erroneously attributed them to a young woman with dark hair, and nobody thought of old Mrs Thomas. The newspapers dubbed the unexplained murder the Barnes Mystery, and speculated that the body might have been used for dissection by some medical students.

Kate Webster stole everything valuable in the murder house, but before escaping to Ireland, she also wanted to sell the furniture. Passing herself off as Mrs Thomas, she contacted a former publican named John Church, who agreed to buy it. But when Church came to No. 2 Vine Cottages, he was spotted by Mrs Ives. She told him that since Mrs Thomas was in arrears with her rent, her furniture was not going anywhere. From her description of the original householder, it became clear to Church that the woman who had passed herself off as Mrs Thomas was in fact her servant Kate Webster. When he went through the clothes in the delivery van, he found a letter addressed to the real Mrs Thomas. The police were called in and searched No. 2 Vine Cottages. They discovered bloodstains, burnt finger-bones in the hearth, and fatty deposits behind the copper, as well as a letter left by Kate Webster giving her home address in Ireland. They immediately put out a 'wanted' notice giving a description of Kate and her son. She was arrested at her uncle's farm at Killanne near Enniscorthy, and taken back to Richmond via Holyhead.

The murder of Mrs Thomas caused a great sensation in London: when the news broke, many people travelled to Richmond to look at the murder house. Kate Webster

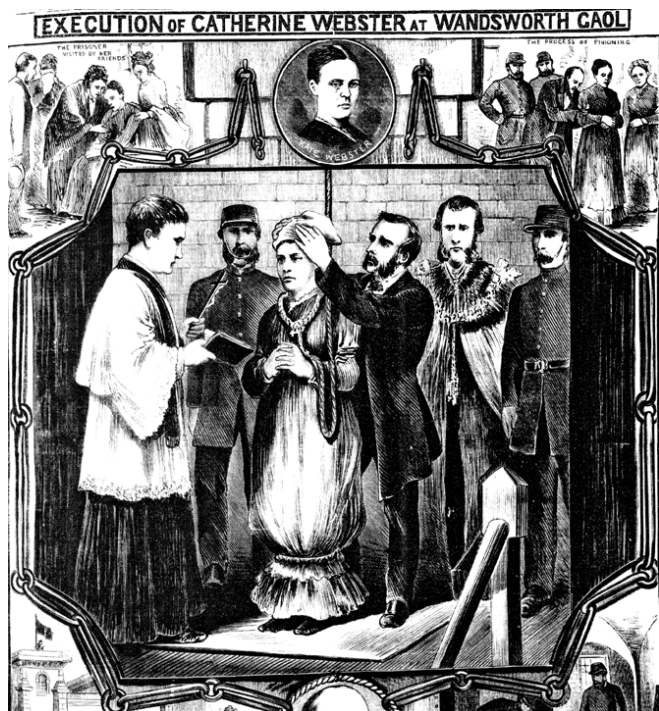
went on trial at the Old Bailey on 2 July 1879, before Mr Justice Denman. The prosecution was led by the Solicitor General, Sir Hardinge Giffard, and Kate was defended by the prominent London barrister Warner Sleight. Over the course of six days, the court heard a succession of witnesses piecing together the story of how Mrs Thomas had met her death. Kate attempted to implicate the publican Church and her former neighbour Porter, but both men had solid alibis and were cleared of any involvement in the murder. Kate's defence counsel sought to emphasise the circumstantial nature of the evidence and highlighted his client's great devotion to her son as a reason why she could not have been capable of the murder. A particularly damning piece of evidence came from a woman who told the court that Kate had visited her a week before the murder and had said that she was going to Birmingham to sell some property, jewellery and a house that her aunt had left her. The jury interpreted this as a sign that Kate had premeditated the murder, and convicted her after deliberating for about an hour and a quarter.

Hoping to avoid the death penalty, Kate pleaded that she was pregnant. Eventually the Clerk of Assize suggested using the archaic mechanism of a jury of matrons, constituted from a selection of the women attending the court, to rule upon the question of whether Kate was 'quick with child'; it turned out that she was not, and accordingly she was sentenced to death. Kate Webster was hanged at Wandsworth Prison on July 29 1879, and buried in an unmarked grave in one of the prison's exercise yards. The old crime writer Guy Logan had a journalist



Kate Webster, from the Illustrated Police News, May 3 1879. The bottom right panel depicts the attempt to steal Mrs Thomas' furniture from the murder house.

colleague who was once imprisoned at old Wandsworth gaol for the non-payment of rates. When he complained that his cell was particularly uncomfortable and spooky, the warder exclaimed "Why, you ought to be honoured, you did! Blow me if they ain't been and given you Kate Webster's condemned cell!" There has been speculation among aficionados of South London ghosts that the "Grey Lady of Wandsworth", a ghost still haunting Wandsworth Prison, is the apparition of Kate Webster.



The execution of Kate Webster, from the Illustrated Police News, August 2 1879.

Trial, Sentence & Execution of KATE WEBSTER

For the Murder of Mrs. Thomas, at Richmond.

Behold a wretched woman dying,
Condemned to death for murder, see,
Kate Webster, now in wretched agony,
"Till end the fatal harness mystery.
The Jury they have found her guilty,
Mr. Thomas, you from there on high,
Behold your murderer now hanging,
You'll be revenged—his condemnation
is due.

"No done, and I my death am waiting,
Kate Webster cries, why was I born,
To bear such wrongs against me wrong,
For me it kills each heart with scorn
As look ye look they were suffering,
My fearful death I dare could see,
The hangman I shall be holding,
And meet a doom of infamy.

Can ever a wretch see hope for mercy,
With ever woman so vile as we,
I hope that God above will pardon,
And forgive when I'm in glory,
Take warning by a wretched creature,
Who now in sorrow her death does wait,
While tears are streaming down every
feature.

No one will pity my wretched fate,
I thought I never should be discovered,
This fearful crime I could conceal,
But when the box it was discovered,
My murderer's murder it did reveal,
What caused how my heart was aching,
That boy Peter the death did see,
From guilt and death I now am shrinking,
In a murderer's grave I must lay.

Farewell to all, my child, I must say,
For me the totema bell will toll,
Oh, wretch to child I had good reason,
May God have mercy on my soul,
Oh, millions dear, while you in heaven,
Your pity pray and pardon give,
And may I hope to be forgiven,
When on earth I no longer live.

A broadside hawked in the streets on the day of Kate Webster's execution.

The day after the execution, an auction of the property of Mrs Thomas was held at the murder house. John Church, the publican, managed to obtain the furniture after all,

along with numerous other personal effects including her pocket-watch and the knife with which Mrs Thomas had been dismembered. The copper in which the body of Mrs Thomas had been boiled was sold for five shillings, and a woman bought the chopper that had been used with such gusto for two shillings. Other visitors contented themselves with taking small pebbles and twigs from the garden as souvenirs. Since nobody would live there, the murder house remained unoccupied until 1897. But when the 'ghost-hunter' Elliott O'Donnell corresponded with the lady who had gone to live at No. 2 Vine Cottages in 1897, she assured him that there had been no ghostly manifestations, although the servants had been reluctant to work at such a notorious murder house. Guy Logan was always keen to point out that he had more than once passed the pretty little murder cottage in what was now Park Road. He even wrote that "The majority of houses which have been the scenes of murder seem ever after to be under a cloud, and to shudder, as it were, from the public gaze, but this cannot be said of the neat and pretty little villa at Richmond, which was the locale of Kate Webster's horrid crime. I have passed it many times in the course of years, and anything less like the popular conception of a 'murder house' it would be hard to imagine." Elliott O'Donnell, who edited the *Trial of Kate Webster* in the Notable British Trials series, did not share Guy Logan's murder house detective skills, since the careless ghost-hunter reproduced an alleged 'contemporary print' that clearly does *not* depict the murder house at what is today No. 9 Park Road. This valuable and well-kept house is in good repair and looks very much like it had done at the time of the horrible events back in 1879.

The horrible details of the brutal murder of Mrs Thomas caused an immediate sensation and were widely reported in the press. Such was Kate Webster's notoriety that within only a few weeks of her arrest, and well before she had gone to trial, Madame Tussaud's created a wax effigy of her and put it on display for those who wished to see the 'Richmond Murderess'. When a friendly aunt took Guy Logan to Madame Tussaud's, he shocked her by demanding an immediate descent to the Chamber of Horrors. As Guy himself later expressed it, "My depraved interest in the models of the notorious criminals was such, I have been told, that it was with difficulty I was persuaded to return to the 'central transept', where the waxen Kings, Queens, and other celebrities held court. I could not be induced to come away from Kate Webster, whose image I regarded with fascinated horror. There, in front of me and as large as life, was the waxen counterfeit of the dread woman whose crime had caused such a stir, and who looked capable, in my youthful imagination, of boiling half a dozen mistresses in as many choppers." There was also a popular song about the Richmond Murderess:

The terrible crime at Richmond at last,
On Catherine Webster now has been cast,
Tried and found guilty she is sentenced to die.
From the strong hand of justice she cannot fly.

She has tried all excuses but of no avail,
About this and murder she's told many tales,
She has tried to throw blame on others as well,
But with all her cunning at last she has fell.



No. 2 Vine Cottages [today No. 9 Park Road], Richmond, where Kate Webster murdered Martha Thomas in 1879.

It is quite uncommon that women commit murder with dismemberment, but the fierce, coarse-looking Kate Webster was not particularly feminine. Elliott O'Donnell described her as "not merely savage, savage and shocking ... but the grimmest of grim personalities, a character so uniquely sinister and barbaric as to be hardly human". Her appearance and behaviour were seen as key signs of her inherently criminal nature. Her callous lying in court, and attempt to 'frame' Church and Porter also caused revulsion. Many Victorians who came to gawp at her statue at Madame Tussaud's viewed Kate Webster as the ultimate murderess: strong, ugly and brutal, and capable of every crime. The anti-Irish sentiments of the time were also fuelled by her crime; the demonisation of Kate Webster was a part of the public perception of the Irish as innately criminal.

So, the *flesh* of Mrs Thomas was boiled in the copper, and her *bones* were dumped in the Thames. But what about

her *head*? Well, the story goes that in 1952, the celebrated naturalist Sir David Attenborough bought a house situated between Vine Cottages and the Hole in the Wall pub. The old pub closed in 2007 and fell into dereliction but was bought by Attenborough in 2009 to be redeveloped. On 22 October 2010, workmen carrying out excavation work at the rear of the old pub discovered the skull of a woman. It had been buried underneath foundations that had been in place for at least 40 years, on the site of the pub's stables. It was immediately speculated that the skull was the missing head of Julia Thomas, and the coroner asked the Richmond police to carry out an investigation into the identity and circumstances of death of the skull's owner. Carbon dating indicated that it was dated between 1650 and 1880, but it had been deposited on top of a layer of Victorian tiles. The skull had fracture marks consistent with Kate Webster's account of throwing Mrs Thomas down the stairs, and it was found to have low collagen levels, consistent with it being boiled. It entirely lacked teeth, something that is of importance, since we know that Kate Webster stole Mrs Thomas' 'snappers' which contained a gold plate, to have them sold. In July 2011, the coroner concluded that the skull was indeed that of Mrs Thomas, and it was decently buried. Although the evidence for the skull's authenticity is far from conclusive, one can almost see the brutal Kate Webster exclaiming 'Begorra! Good riddance to yer!' and giving the head of Mrs Thomas a mighty kick, sending it into the hole she had dug in the rear yard of the pub.

This is an edited extract from Jan Bondeson's Murder Houses of South London (Troubador Publishing, Leicester 2015).

HUSBAND MURDER IN BATTERSEA, 1896

In 1888, the year of Jack the Ripper, the house decorator Mr Thomas Preston held the lease of the terraced house at No. 10 Stanmer Street, Battersea. Since it was larger than the other houses in the street, with double doors opening to the yard behind the house, Mr Preston and his wife thought it prudent to let two first floor rooms to a lodger. In 1888, that lodger was a certain Mr John "Taffy" Dennison, aged 65 and a native of Wales, of no occupation, The Prestons were concerned that Dennison invited a number of young boys, some of them little better than guttersnipes, up to his rooms. At these strange concertos, a barrel-organ was badly played, and the boys sang hymns as well as they could. There was no such thing as a paedophile in 1888, but nevertheless the Prestons thought their lodger a most sinister cove. But Taffy assured them that he was just practicing with his band of juvenile musicians, who were splendid little athletes, and showed evidence of great talent.

But Taffy Dennison's passion for recruiting singing boys

went to extremes. He put an advertisement into several newspapers, saying "Boys (respectable) wanted, to sing a little. Not over 14. Wages 10s to 12s. a week. Write or call ...". He received many replies from various foolish or impecunious people who had young boys to spare, and after some tuition at No. 10 Stanmer Street, Taffy took his troupe of musicians on tour to Margate, Ramsgate, Canterbury and Dover. The boys sang and grinded a barrel-organ, holding a sign saying "We are orphans, and get our living by our music." The Welsh Fagin stood a safe distance away, wringing his hands with glee as the kind people of Canterbury filled the begging-bowl of his little accomplices. At Dover Castle, the band made another bravura performance, singing to the soldiers of the garrison. The tour went on to Portsmouth, Hyde and Tunbridge Wells: the bandmaster regularly sent backward or recalcitrant boys back home, and received new recruits to replace them. Although the boys could make 30 shillings in an afternoon, they each received only threepence in pocket-money per week. But after Taffy had returned to London with his band, a number of angry mothers confronted him, claiming that he had abducted their sons for his despicable begging charades. As cool as a cucumber, the veteran child exploiter refused to give them a penny, since they boys had joined him from their free will, but this turned out to be a bad business decision on his part, since the mothers went to the police and the newspapers.

'Charge of Kidnapping Boys!' exclaimed the *Morning Post* of May 7 1888, and many other newspapers followed suit. The mothers and stepmothers of the exploited 'singing boys' had joined forces to make sure that the Welsh Fagin was put behind bars, and taken out a summons against him at the Westminster Police Court. Some of them provided evidence, real or spurious, that their sons had been forcibly abducted from home. Taffy had a reasonably strong case that the boys had joined him with the goodwill of their families, but unwisely he had failed to destroy a diary that exposed the full extent of his dishonesty. For several months, he had travelled the south coast with his stable of singing boys, who were paid a very low salary, whereas their master filled his boots with the money donated for the benefit of these alleged 'orphans'. The last we hear from John 'Taffy' Dennison is that he was carted off to prison, to face further prosecution for imposture and child abduction.



'Cor Blimey!' I can hear the readers exclaim. 'We were expecting murder houses, with plenty of blood and gore, and all we get is a 'child abduction house'!' But before you tear this issue of the *Ripperologist* into little pieces, read on about the *next* lodgers at No. 10 Stanmer Street. The respectable Prestons were of course much put out by the Dennison scandal, and particularly that their own name



10, STANMER-STREET, BATTERSEA.

*The Stanmer Street murder house,
from Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper, April 12 1896.*

and address had been published in the newspapers as the headquarters of the Welsh Fagin. They must have feared that it would be an uphill struggle to get another lodger for the two empty first-floor rooms vacated by the alleged child abductor, but as soon as they were advertised, the 33-year-old Mr Frederick St John moved in right away, with his wife Alice. Another native of Wales, Haverfordwest to be exact, he had just moved to London, and did not know about the recent notoriety of No. 10 Stanmer Street. The recipient of a generous allowance, as the result of a legacy, he did no work at all. An odd-looking little cove with a large bowler hat and a bushy moustache, he drank much more than was good for him. Mrs Alice St John, a tall and sturdy woman, shared this predicament.

The respectable Prestons once more worried about their lodgers, since Frederick St John was seldom seen sober. He often quarrelled angrily with his wife, and these arguments sometimes ended in blows. But the drunken and rowdy behaviour of the lodgers did not result in their eviction from No. 10 Stanmer Street, since they were both perfectly lucid when sober, and paid their rent with commendable regularity. The 1891 Census lists the occupants of No. 10 Stanmer Street as Thomas and Catherine Preston, their four children, the permanent lodgers Frederick and Alice St John, aged 36 and 40 respectively, and two young labouring men.



FREDERICK CHAS. ST. JOHN.



MRS. ALICE ST. JOHN.

*Mr and Mrs St John,
from the Penny Illustrated Paper, April 18 1896.*

In March and April 1896, Frederick St John drank harder than ever. He could empty ten bottles of whisky in a week, and spent much of his time lying in bed. In the evening of April 9, the Prestons heard their lodgers quarrel angrily. Mrs St John had the habit of clapping her hands when she was trying to get some point across to her sottish husband. The following morning, Alice St John came knocking at the Prestons' bedroom, exclaiming "Teddy is dead!" This was the name she used to call her husband. Believing that Mr St John had developed the DTs, Mr Preston went to investigate, but he found the lodger lying dead in his bed, with his face and head much bruised and swollen. Mrs St John seemed much upset, exclaiming "Oh, my poor Teddy! I wish he was alive!" She was herself very drunk and dishevelled. Dr W.H. Kempster was called, and his verdict was that since the head of the deceased had been battered almost to a pulp, and since his body was bruised all over, this clearly had to be a case of murder. The unfortunate Welsh dipsomaniac's head had taken such punishment that it was almost twice its normal size.

Alice St John was duly arrested and charged with the murder of her husband. The coroner's inquest, led by Mr W. Schroeder at Battersea, returned a verdict of wilful murder against her. This was largely due to the post-mortem evidence, which showed that Frederick St John had been strangled to death with considerable force, since the hyoid bone was fractured. It was rightly concluded that such an injury could not be the result of a fall, or of suicide. Alice St John did not make a good impression at the inquest. A newspaper reporter described her as a tall, strong, unwholesome-looking woman, with a yellowish, pallid complexion. A newspaper sketch of her fully corroborated this unflattering impression.

On trial for murdering her husband at the Old Bailey on June 10 1896, before Mr Justice Hawkins, Alice St John was in a difficult position. There had been no other person in their rooms at No. 10 Stanmer Street when her husband

was killed, and the medical evidence favoured wilful murder, and tending to rule out suicide or accident. But in court, the Prestons gave evidence that was very much in favour of the accused woman: Frederick St John had always been a very mean-spirited, violent-tempered man, who had treated his wife cruelly when he was drunk. He could consume three bottles of whisky in a day, and had several times been in hospital with delirium tremens. In contrast, Alice St John had always been very kind to her worthless husband, they said. She came from a refined background, and could speak several languages. The night Frederick St John had died, the Prestons had heard him cry out "Alice! Whisky! Whisky, Alice!" and then a sound resembling a loud clapping of hands. Mr E.W. John, a solicitor practicing at Tenby, identified himself as the brother of the deceased, who had adopted the prefix 'St' to his name sixteen years earlier. Frederick St John had lacked both occupation and profession, and led a very intemperate life. Importantly, Mr John testified that Alice St John would not in any way benefit from her husband's death, since his income would cease upon his death, and since his life was not insured. Although the stalwart Dr Kempster repeated his damning evidence



*Mrs St John is arrested, and the murder house
at No. 10 Stanmer Street, from the Illustrated Police Budget.*

without hesitation or contradiction, the prosecution was

in considerable difficulties. In cross-examination, the helpful Thomas Preston had added considerably to his evidence at the coroner's inquest: Frederick St John had been "a perfect brute" and "a madman when in drink", and he had often spoken of committing suicide. Even the normally severe Mr Justice Hawkins was clearly affected by this description of the deceased, since in his summing up, he recommended the jury not to overlook Frederick St John's violence and brutality towards his wife, over a period of many years. If they were satisfied that the prisoner had accidentally caused her husband's injuries while protecting herself from his assault on her, then she was entitled to an acquittal.

Without hesitation, the jury acquitted Alice St John, and she walked free from the Old Bailey. Whether the outcome of the trial had been different if the original charge had been one of manslaughter is difficult to tell, but it is certain that Mrs St John was a very lucky woman, in that even the prosecutors themselves obviously did not appreciate how very damning the medical evidence against her really was. The conspiracy theorist might speculate that some relation of Frederick St John had designs on his private income: disappointed by the sottish Welshman's reluctance to die, he had arranged for Mrs St John to murder him, and to disguise his death at an attack of the DTs. When this scam did not work, he bribed the Prestons to perjure themselves at the Old Bailey, with complete success, and the conspirators lived happily ever after. Such a scenario is less than likely, however, and most probably it was just a domestic dispute gone wrong, with the tall, strong Alice St John strangling her little Teddy to death with her large, powerful hands, as his feet were drumming spasmodically against the bedpost.

But we must spare a thought for the Prestons, who had been so very unlucky with their lodgers at No. 10 Stanmer Street. If they once more advertised their rooms to let, surely they must have added 'Welsh People need not Apply', since the respectability of their neat terraced house had been so badly let down at the hands of natives of that Principality. Or perhaps the Prestons allowed the two first-floor rooms at No. 10 to remain empty, like some weird Battersea bluebeard's chamber, sometimes haunted by the sound of a ghostly barrel-organ, and the squalling of unschooled voices, at other times by the outcry "Alice! Whisky, Alice!" followed by a horrible gurgling sound. As George R. Sims rightly put it, London's hidden mysteries are sometimes its most gruesome ones, and these horrors are still all around us, if we bother to unearth them.

This is an edited extract from Jan Bondeson's Murder Houses of South London (Troubador Publishing, Leicester 2015).



JAN BONDESON is a senior lecturer and consultant rheumatologist at Cardiff University. He is the author of *Rivals of the Ripper*, *Murder Houses of London*, *The London Monster*, *The Great Pretenders*, *Blood on the Snow* and other true crime books, as well as the bestselling *Buried Alive*.



No. 10 Stanmer Street, Battersea, where Frederick St John was killed in 1896.

Dragnet!

An American Actor out to apprehend the Ripper while Dressed in Women's Clothes (Part Two)

By NINA and HOWARD BROWN

In the previous issue of *Ripperologist*, we read how Irish-born thespian John T. Sullivan described the build up to the decision he and his fellow actors arrived upon... that an armed Sullivan dress in female attire and go about Whitechapel in search of the Ripper.

Coincidentally, and shortly after Sullivan decided to do just that, Det. Sergeant Louis Robinson got into an altercation while all dolled up. Apparently, the Metropolitan Police had also decided to go this route. When they decided is unknown, but an educated guess would be after the Double Event of September 30th.

13 years later, in Bavaria, a successful apprehension of a 25-year-old railway foreman named Ludwig Graf, who had stabbed numerous women (one report claims 18) was attributable to two detectives dressed as young women.

Among the elements of the Whitechapel murders which we consider unique, or 'firsts', in the annals of recorded crime/police history, the utilization of police personnel dressed in drag would be among them.

With no further ado, the second part of Mr. Sullivan's article follows.



IN SKIRTS AND WIG

At 7 o'clock in the morning I was at the shop of Madame Auguste, a sister of the late Sir Augustus Harris. She was the best costumer in London and had furnished me many dresses for the parts I had played. She entered into the plan enthusiastically, fixing me up with a hat, waist, and

THE SEARCH FOR "JACK THE RIPPER."

STABBING A POLICE OFFICER.

LONDON, TUESDAY.

At the Middlesex Sessions today James Phillips and William Jarvis were indicted for maliciously wounding Detective Sergeant Robinson, and also for maliciously wounding Henry Doncaster. The prisoners pleaded not guilty. Sergeant Robinson was on duty on the 9th inst, with Detective Mather and a friend named Doncaster, in Phoenix Place, Clerkenwell. Robinson was watching a man supposed to be "Jack the Ripper," and had disguised himself in female attire. He concealed himself behind a cab in a yard, when the prisoners, who were in the employ of Mr. Kite, cab proprietor, came up and commenced an altercation. Robinson told them he was a police officer. Contradictory evidence was given as to whether Jarvis or the officer struck the first blow. Robinson was stabbed in the forehead, and Doncaster was also assaulted. Both prisoners bore good characters. Phillips was acquitted, and Jarvis was convicted, but recommended to mercy. He was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

skirt. C. H. Fox, a noted perruquier of King street, Covent Garden, got up a wig for me at short notice. By 5 o'clock in the afternoon I was duly rigged out and looked like a healthy country girl. I had a slit made on the right side of my skirt that opened on a leather holster, which was to hold the revolver, a hammerless Smith & Wesson, which I had brought from America.

Meantime, while I was contriving the costume, the boys were arranging for a permit for my appearance and permission to carry firearms. Warren, the chief of police, thought a great deal of the scheme, but considered that there was great risk attached to it. He willingly gave the permit for my costume so far as the police authorities were concerned but absolutely refused the permit to carry arms.

Nothing daunted, I went down to Scotland Yard and told my story to Marshall, one of the most famous detectives in England. He assured me that the permit to pass police lines would also include a defensive weapon and told me to go ahead.

ON A PERILOUS MISSION

It was the night of October 2nd, 1888 that I left the Globe theater where I was playing and started on my perilous but extremely fascinating undertaking. It was 10:30 PM and King and Elliott, fellow Americans whom I have mentioned, were with me. I was fully equipped. My revolver I could feel pressing against my thigh at every step. I reached through the slit I had made to my dress and found the revolver ready to use. It was arranged on a swivel by which I could turn it in any direction and shoot through my skirt in such fashion as I pleased and at a moment's notice.

I cannot quite describe my sensations. I was all excitement through holding myself down and displaying no trepidation.

I knew the great risk I ran. I was to become a target. I was going out to be killed- unless I should prove quicker with my revolver than the 'Ripper' was with his knife, and his awful certainty with that weapon were indisputable.

START FOR THE SLUMS

Well, at the Globe theater we entered a 'bus, went through the Strand into Fleet street, to Ludgate Hill, through St. Paul's churchyard, into Whitechapel. At Commercial road we alighted and then began our quest. We entered a couple of pubs near Spitalfield market, went into the women's bar and mingled with the many habitues of the crowded groggery. I attracted some attention from the women but the men paid no attention to me. Out into the street again over through the market and then into the slums and mews of the wickedest part of London.

To be sure, my friends, dressed as sailors and rolling along drunkenly as if they were tars just given shore leave and out for a holiday, followed me closely. But they were always twenty or more yards behind me and I kept my hand on my revolver and thought of the 'Ripper' and his

swift work.

I was plain country hussy, not over particular as to neatness and willing to drink with any of the hardened male debauchees whom I met. I made my second stop at a pub called 'The Twin Anchors'. I pretended to be considerably under the influence of liquor. I called to the men to come and drink with me. They did so, without comment.

They were meanly dressed and dirty but they made no effort of affront. My two watchful trailers halted and put in the time bantering two women of the streets.

FAILED TO FIND TROUBLE

After I got my drink and found that nobody had any indignities or insults to offer, I reeled along the purlieus of ignorance, filth and vice, working my way through the Whitechapel district.

But I want to say now, and I remarked it with astonishment at the time, that not once during the entire fortnight which I gave to this work was I offered insult, or even accosted, by the best or the worst of these debauched denizens of that horribly dirty and most vicious and uncontrolled district.

The sights I saw would disgust a satyr. The drunkenness, the wantonness, the vileness, the foul language and utter depravity of the Whitechapel district are things I will never forget.

Whitechapel, you know, has no counterpart in any other country. This great, populous home of the debauched is a perfect labyrinth of twisting alleyways, queer-shaped courts, blind passages and all sorts of odd nooks and corners.

It is easy to get lost there and one might wander for days without encountering a familiar locality to guide him back to his starting point.

'MID SCENES OF SQUALOR

In these courts and narrow passages, thousands of hucksters and peddlers back their wagons at night. In many places these vehicles are so closely packed together that it takes ten minutes to wind among them for the space of a square.

The entire district is at night a perfectly safe harbor for thieves, cut-throats and all manner of social outcasts.

The masses of depraved and debauched humanity I saw beneath those wagons were pictures of vileness that so impressed me that they remain as vividly in my mind today as that first night when, with my false hair tousled like that of the most drab, my face smudged with soot

and my hand ever pressing the pistol inside my dress, I wandered through the mazes of that great, dark area of filth and drunkenness and the mystery of sudden, horrible and totally inexplicable death.

I soon grew sick of the sights I saw and, but for the overpowering interest of the quest and my keen desire to meet and see and conquer this bloody fiend who kept the thousand silly tongues of Whitechapel wagging, I should have given up the undertaking after the first two hours. But, as it was, my determination increased each moment- and I will tell you that I had some thrilling moments too.

FOLLOWED BY FRIENDS

My friends, dressed as roosting sailors and playing the parts with great effect, were always within forty or fifty of me, but they could not keep me every moment in sight. There were sharp angles to turn, and I must turn them, else be detected in my masquerade. I realized how easy it would be, unless I proceeded with unusual caution, to be struck down from behind, from overhead, maybe, or by some dark imp springing from out the gloom beneath one of the wagons that crowded the courts.

The women of the district were full of gossip and all sorts of wild guesses concerning the mysterious murderer. It was pretty generally agreed, however, that the fiend was a man called 'Leather Apron', who had suddenly appeared at various times to several women and given them awful frights. No definite description could be had of him, beyond the statement that he wore a leather apron reaching from his chin to his knees. The fact that he had been seen in various parts of the district on the same night gave strength to the theory that he was the 'Ripper', and you may wager that I kept especially keen watch for anything that looked like leather.

Well, we worked hard, we three Americans. Every night after my work at the theater, I put on my slum togs, my friends did the same, and we started on our zig-zag saunterings through Whitechapel. It was hard work, for we seldom left the field of our efforts before dawn began to send its murky white shafts down among the sleeping, bleary-eyed, carousing denizens.

VERY LITTLE DOING

My only adventure during the entire campaign was on the tenth night of my vigil. It was about 3 o'clock in the morning and I was greatly fatigued, and, I presume, showed my weariness in my walk. I had disheveled the hair at the back of my wig, and, as I wandered carelessly along, I must have been about the most dejected looking figure abroad.

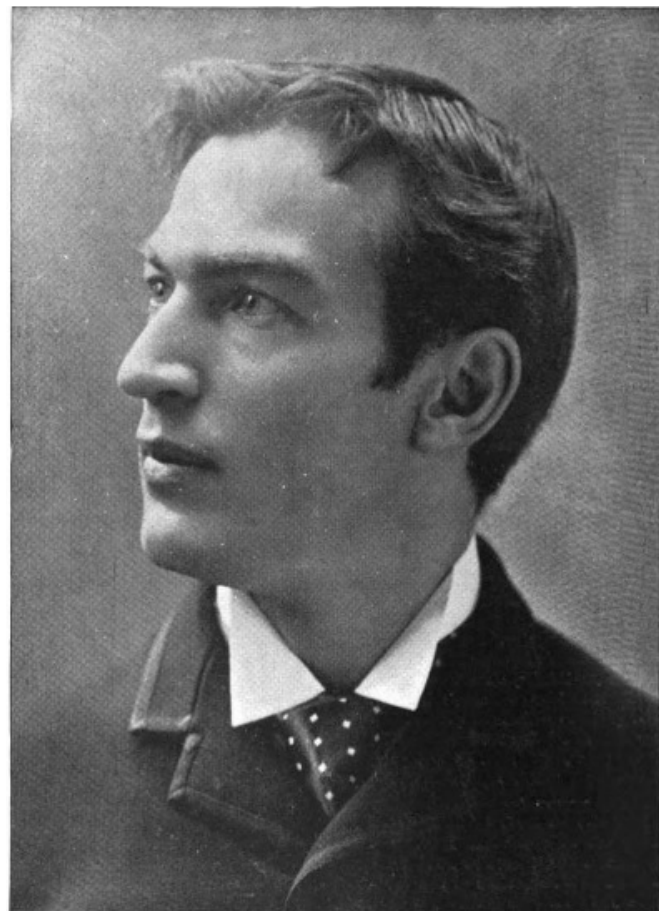
I had just turned a sharp corner into Dorset street, near the spot where one of the murders had been committed, when suddenly I felt, rather than saw, a man close beside me. He appeared so swiftly and so silently that I could not form the slightest idea of where he had come from. It really seemed to me that he had sprung out of the earth.

A cold chill went over me as I got the revolver firmly in my grasp, ready to fire into the body of my enemy at a second's warning. I saw a man of apparently 45 years glancing up at me with a peculiar look in his eyes- a wild demented look.

He had a stubbly reddish beard on his chin and below that a leather apron extending down to his knees.

This, then, was 'Leather Apron'. Would he grasp me by my head and passing a quick hand beneath my chin, cut my throat as the throats of others had been cut? I had not much time at my disposal- in fact, the whole thing was over in a flash.

But I did a good deal of thinking during that fateful moment. Then I made a sudden grab at his shoulder with my disengaged hand, but he was too quick for me. He gave me another wild stare, turned suddenly and was off like a shot, running noiselessly but swiftly.



MR. J. T. SULLIVAN, ACTOR.

AN EXCITING FOOT RACE

I ran after him, and my two friends seeing this, ran after me. We could not overtake the man, but we notified Scotland Yard and by great luck more than anything else, 'Leather Apron' was apprehended and the newspapers were full of it, all claiming that the 'Ripper' had been caught.

But it wasn't the 'Ripper' at all. I went down to the court next morning and identified him as the man I had encountered in Dorset street, but it was shown that he was an eccentric but harmless employees in a harness shop in Fleet street and that his only object in stealing about at night was to frighten women and see them run.

After two weeks of this sleuthing, my physician told me that I would have to give it up. The continuous excitement- or, more properly, suspense- together with the unavoidable loss of sleep, was wearing on me and would soon lay me on my back, he said, so I gave up the cause. But I will never forget that experience.

One significant fact, however, marked my connection with the case. I commenced my search two days after the murder of the woman 'Hippity Lip Annie', which occurred September 30th. Other murders, preceding this one, had been committed at intervals of only a few days. No murders were committed during the period of our sleuthing. Other murders followed close upon the conclusion of our vigil. My deduction was that the 'Ripper' knew of our movements and I believe that to this day.

SOLUTION OF FAMOUS MYSTERY

As to the identity of 'Jack The Ripper', both the man and his habitat are known. But, mind you, it is only in the last three months that this fact has come out. At the time of which I write London was divided in its opinions. Some thought the work was that of a frenzied sailor- a butcher on one of the cattle transports, who had taken this form of revenge upon those poor outcasts for a fancied wrong. Others held that it was a physician who had suffered in the same way. The latter surmise was correct. It was a physician, a reputable man in London, a perfect Jekyll and Hyde. He had developed a homicidal mania and had been confined in a private sanitarium in a suburb of London. How he escaped was a mystery but Scotland Yard knows the man today. He is an exile from his country. He lives at Buenos Aires in the Argentine republic and there being no law of extradition between that nation and England, he is entirely safe there. I have this on the best authority, although this is the first time the facts have been given to the public.

'Jack The Ripper' has not been in evidence since 'Dr. E___' left England. I need hardly say that he is under close surveillance in the Argentine capital, so that there will be no repetition of his offense.

- JOHN T. SULLIVAN -



NINA and HOWARD BROWN are the proprietors of JTRforums.com.

A FORENSIC FORUM

BY ROBIN ODELL

A FORENSIC FORUM aims to bring together accounts of the development of forensic disciplines forged over several decades.

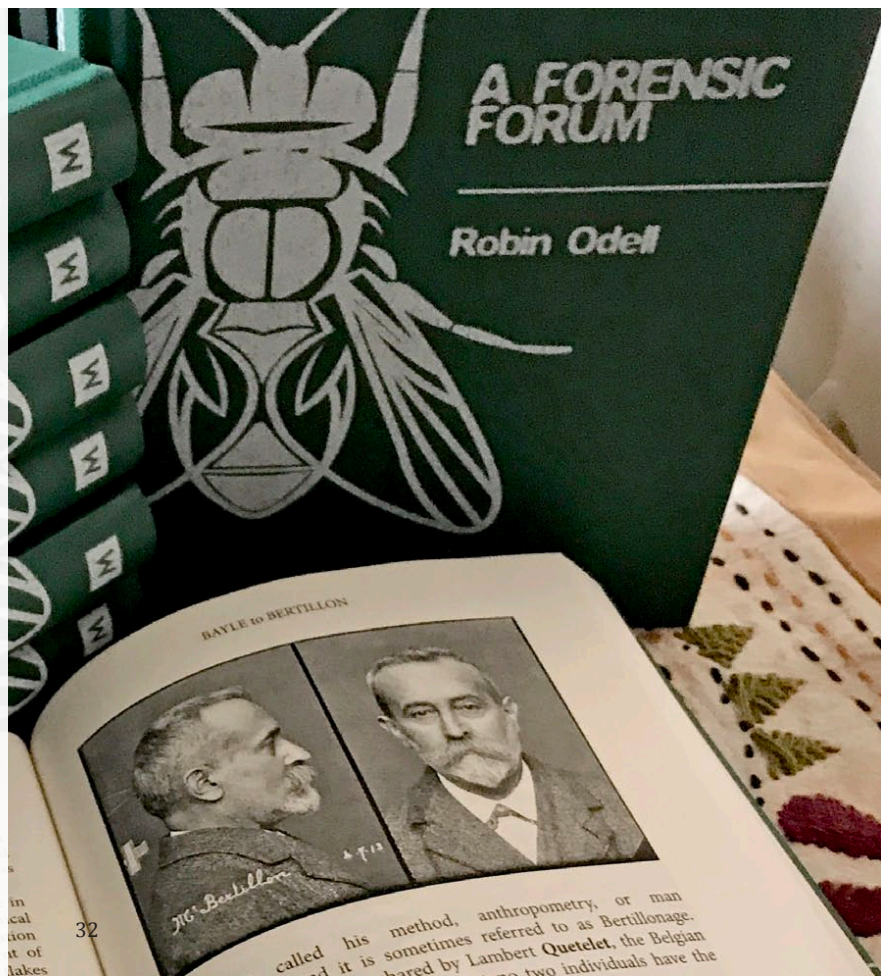
Its purpose is to pay tribute to those pioneers and innovators who left an indelible stamp on the advances which made possible modern science-based criminal investigation. Theirs was a collective genius which created a civilising force serving knowledge, understanding and justice.

They deserve to be recognised and honoured for their achievements.

PART ONE features eight forensic essays on Forensic Medicine, Chemistry, Ballistics, Odontology, Entomology, Anthropology, Botany and Psychiatry.

PART TWO comprises over 100 biographies of these forensic pioneers, set out in A-Z form and cross-referenced.

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Victorian Fiction

Let Loose

By MARY CHOLMONDELEY

Edited with an introduction by Eduardo Zinna

INTRODUCTION

On the face of it, the author of our Victorian Fiction offering for this issue, Mary Cholmondoley, led a life where nothing remarkable happened; a life of selfless service, filial duty, tea parties, literary salons, visits to country houses and short trips to London and the Continent. Like E F Benson, Rhoda Broughton, L T Meade and other contemporary writers, she was the child of a clergyman. Her father, the Reverend Richard Hugh Cholmondeley, was the Rector of Hodnet, in Shropshire, as his father, his maternal grandfather and his great grandfather had been before him. Both he and his wife, Emily Beaumont, belonged to the privileged classes; the Reverend was related to the Marquis of Cholmondeley. Wealth, however, did not come with their social status.

Mary, the third of the Reverend and his wife's eight children and the oldest of their five daughters, was born at the Hodnet Rectory on 8 June 1859.

The Cholmondeley sisters were educated by a governess at home, tutored further by their father, reportedly a kind, spirited and open-minded man, and looked after by a crusty but devoted nanny who provided them with the affection their stern, unbending and sickly mother was unable to offer them. Soon after the birth of her last child, she was stricken with paralysis. Although her daughter Mary suffered from chronic, debilitating asthma which plagued her throughout her life, she was soon obliged to take over the running of the household from her mother and to assist her father in his parochial duties. Still, she had other aspirations.

'And yet what a pleasure and interest it would be to me in life to write books,' she wrote in her journal. 'I must strike out a line of some kind, and if I do not marry (for at best that is hardly likely, as I possess neither beauty nor charms) I should want some definite occupation, besides the home duties...'



By the age of 18 Mary had completed a novel that she soon destroyed. Yet she continued to write – and publish short stories here and there – until in 1887 the *Temple Bar* magazine accepted her novel *The Danvers Jewels* for serialisation. Obviously inspired by Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, *The Danvers Jewels* is a fast-moving thriller featuring, besides the priceless jewels of the title, an Indian Army Colonel who doubles as a fallible narrator, a

British heir, an American thief, a country house, a daring theft, a femme fatale and a railway accident. The novel was successful enough to warrant a sequel, *Sir Charles Danvers*, in 1889, and to furnish its author with an identity of sorts. It was not uncommon at the time for short stories, and even novels, to appear uncredited. So it was with *The Danvers Jewels*, whose author remained anonymous. In issue 88 of *Temple Bar*, published in April 1890, our present Victorian Fiction offering, *Let Loose*, appeared as 'By the Author of "The Danvers Jewels"'.

Mary's next novel, *Diana Tempest*, a murder story featuring a villainous father, would be the first work published under her name – again in *Temple Bar* – and would represent a significant increase in payment. It was also an immediate success, justifying every penny Mary was paid.

Mary's next novel was her crowning achievement. *Red Pottidge*, which was published on 24 October 1899, was not serialised, because Mary felt that, 'to be fairly judged, the story must be read as a whole'. It was a runaway bestseller in both Britain and America. All the melodramatic elements of Mary's best work were present – a suicide pact between a woman's husband and her lover, accidental deaths under a train and in an icy lake, the parallel lives of two women friends – as well as a denunciation of the condition of women in Victorian society – all written in an elegant, sardonic style. It is ironic that the daughter of a clergyman whom she described as a delightful companion should have fashioned a major villain in the person of the unsympathetic clergyman Mr Gresley – who was indeed a portrait of everything that her

father was not. In *Red Pottidge*, the narrow-minded and opinionated Mr Gresley burns his sister's manuscript, for which she has been promised £1,000, because it reminds him of the detestable atheist George Eliot. The novel's criticism of religious cant elicited condemnation by name from the pulpit – which the author apparently took very much on its stride.

Mary Cholmondeley continued to write and published several more books, including three more full-length novels, *Moth and Rust* (1902), *Prisoners* (1906) and *Notwithstanding* (1913), two collections of short stories, *The Lowest Rung* (1908) and *The Romance of his Life* (1921)), and the family memoir *Under One Roof* (1918). None of them, however, achieved the success of her previous work. As she had predicted, she never married. Since it appears that in fact she refused at least one attractive offer of marriage, she may not have eschewed marriage because of a lack of opportunities but because of a lack of proper opportunities. In 1921 her health, already poor, began to deteriorate further. She died on 15 July 1925, at the age of sixty-six.

There's not much I'd like to add about the present short story, *Let Loose*. It is exceedingly well written, it is atmospheric, it is laced with deadpan humour and it has an ending you won't expect. It may or may not freeze the blood in your veins. Depends on you. But at least it will make you feel a bit uncomfortable. A word of warning before I go. Like all Victorian prose, *Let Loose* requires a little effort, at least at the beginning, before the plot gets on its way. Stay with it. It's well worth it.

Let Loose

By MARY CHOLMONDELEY

*The dead abide with us! Though stark and cold
Earth seems to grip them, they are with us still.*

Some years ago I took up architecture, and made a tour through Holland, studying the buildings of that interesting country. I was not then aware that it is not enough to take up art. Art must take you up, too. I never doubted but that my passing enthusiasm for her would be returned. When I discovered that she was a stern mistress, who did not immediately respond to my attentions, I naturally transferred them to another shrine. There are other things in the world besides art. I am now a landscape gardener.

But at the time of which I write I was engaged in a

violent flirtation with architecture. I had one companion on this expedition, who has since become one of the leading architects of the day. He was a thin, determined-looking man with a screwed-up face and heavy jaw, slow of speech, and absorbed in his work to a degree which I quickly found tiresome. He was possessed of a certain quiet power of overcoming obstacles which I have rarely seen equalled. He has since become my brother-in-law, so I ought to know; for my parents did not like him much and opposed the marriage, and my sister did not like him at all, and refused him over and over again; but, nevertheless, he eventually married her.

I have thought since that one of his reasons for choosing

me as his travelling companion on this occasion was because he was getting up steam for what he subsequently termed 'an alliance with my family', but the idea never entered my head at the time. A more careless man as to dress I have rarely met, and yet, in all the heat of July in Holland, I noticed that he never appeared without a high, starched collar, which had not even fashion to commend it at that time.

I often chaffed him about his splendid collars, and asked him why he wore them, but without eliciting any response. One evening, as we were walking back to our lodgings in Middeburg, I attacked him for about the thirtieth time on the subject.

'Why on earth do you wear them?' I said.

'You have, I believe, asked me that question many times,' he replied, in his slow, precise utterance; 'but always on occasions when I was occupied. I am now at leisure, and I will tell you.'

And he did.

I have put down what he said, as nearly in his own words as I can remember them.

Ten years ago, I was asked to read a paper on English Frescoes at the Institute of British Architects. I was determined to make the paper as good as I could, down to the slightest details, and I consulted many books on the subject, and studied every fresco I could find. My father, who had been an architect, had left me, at his death, all his papers and note-books on the subject of architecture. I searched them diligently, and found in one of them a slight unfinished sketch of nearly fifty years ago that specially interested me. Underneath was noted, in his clear, small hand: *Frescoed east wall of crypt. Parish Church. Wet Waste-on-the-Wolds, Yorkshire (via Pickering).*

The sketch had such a fascination for me that I decided to go there and see the fresco for myself. I had only a very vague idea as to where Wet Waste-on-the-Wolds was, but I was ambitious for the success of my paper; it was hot in London, and I set off on my long journey not without a certain degree of pleasure, with my dog Brian, a large nondescript brindled creature, as my only companion.

I reached Pickering, in Yorkshire, in the course of the afternoon, and then began a series of experiments on local lines which ended, after several hours, in my finding myself deposited at a little out-of-the-world station within nine or ten miles of Wet Waste. As no conveyance of any kind was to be had, I shouldered my portmanteau, and set out on a long white road that stretched away into the distance over the bare, treeless wold. I must have walked for several hours, over a waste of moorland patched with heather, when a doctor passed me, and gave me a lift to within a mile of my destination. The mile was a long one,

and it was quite dark by the time I saw the feeble glimmer of lights in front of me, and found that I had reached Wet Waste. I had considerable difficulty in getting any one to take me in; but at last I persuaded the owner of the public-house to give me a bed, and, quite tired out, I got into it as soon as possible, for fear he should change his mind, and fell asleep to the sound of a little stream below my window.

I was up early next morning, and inquired directly after breakfast the way to the clergyman's house, which I found was close at hand. At Wet Waste everything was close at hand. The whole village seemed composed of a straggling row of one-storeyed grey stone houses, the same colour as the stone walls that separated the few fields enclosed from the surrounding waste, and as the little bridges over the beck that ran down one side of the grey wide street. Everything was grey. The church, the low tower of which I could see at a little distance, seemed to have been built of the same stone; so was the parsonage when I came up to it, accompanied on my way by a mob of rough, uncouth children, who eyed me and Brian with half-defiant curiosity.



The clergyman was at home, and after a short delay I was admitted. Leaving Brian in charge of my drawing materials, I followed the servant into a low panelled room, in which, at a latticed window, a very old man was sitting. The morning light fell on his white head bent low over a litter of papers and books.

'Mr- er-?' he said, looking up slowly, with one finger keeping his place in a book.

'Blake.'

'Blake,' he repeated after me, and was silent.

I told him that I was an architect; that I had come to study a fresco in the crypt of his church, and asked for the keys.

'The crypt,' he said, pushing up his spectacles and peering hard at me. 'The crypt has been closed for thirty

years. Ever since-' and he stopped short.

'I should be much obliged for the keys,' I said again. He shook his head.

'No,' he said. 'No one goes in there now.'

'It is a pity,' I remarked, 'for I have come a long way with that one object'; and I told him about the paper I had been asked to read, and the trouble I was taking with it.

He became interested. 'Ah!' he said, laying down his pen, and removing his finger from the page before him, 'I can understand that. I also was young once, and fired with ambition. The lines have fallen to me in somewhat lonely places, and for forty years I have held the cure of souls in this place, where, truly, I have seen but little of the world, though I myself may be not unknown in the paths of literature. Possibly you may have read a pamphlet, written by myself, on the Syrian version of the Three Authentic Epistles of Ignatius?'

'Sir,' I said, 'I am ashamed to confess that I have not time to read even the most celebrated books. My one object in life is my art. *Ars longa, vita brevis*, you know.'

'You are right, my son,' said the old man, evidently disappointed, but looking at me kindly. 'There are diversities of gifts, and if the Lord has entrusted you with a talent, look to it. Lay it not up in a napkin.'

I said I would not do so if he would lend me the keys of the crypt. He seemed startled by my recurrence to the subject and looked undecided.

'Why not?' he murmured to himself. 'The youth appears a good youth. And superstition! What is it but distrust in God!'

He got up slowly, and taking a large bunch of keys out of his pocket, opened with one of them an oak cupboard in the corner of the room.

'They should be here,' he muttered, peering in; 'but the dust of many years deceives the eye. See, my son, if among these parchments there be two keys; one of iron and very large, and the other steel, and of a long thin appearance.'

I went eagerly to help him, and presently found in a back drawer two keys tied together, which he recognised at once.

'Those are they,' he said. 'The long one opens the first door at the bottom of the steps which go down against the outside wall of the church hard by the sword graven in the wall. The second opens (but it is hard of opening and of shutting) the iron door within the passage leading to the crypt itself. My son, is it necessary to your treatise that you should enter this crypt?'

I replied that it was absolutely necessary.

'Then take them,' he said, 'and in the evening you will bring them to me again.'

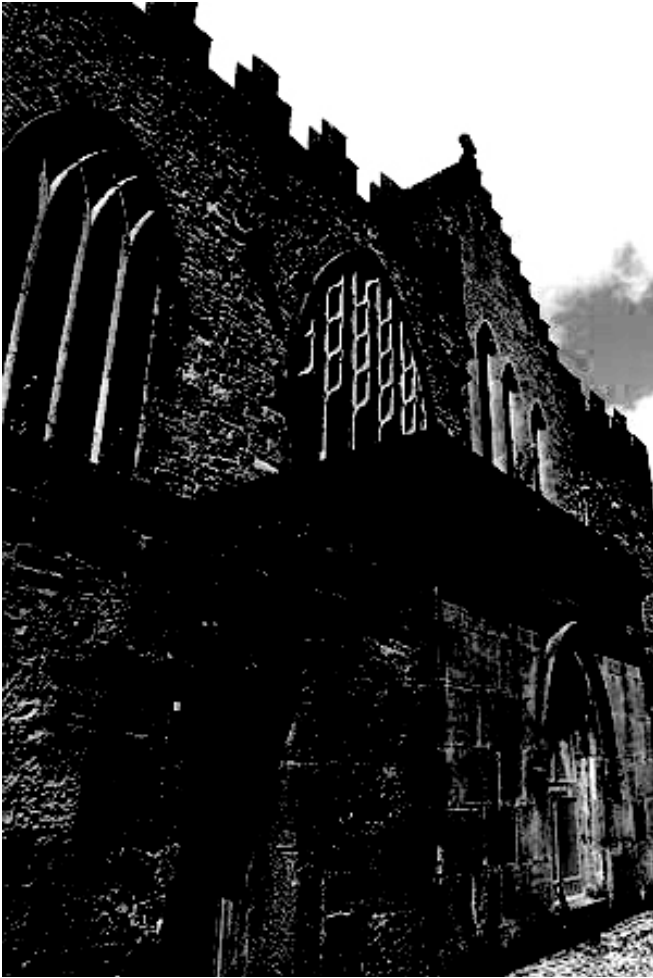
I said I might want to go several days running, and asked if he would not allow me to keep them till I had finished my work; but on that point he was firm.

'Likewise,' he added, 'be careful that you lock the first door at the foot of the steps before you unlock the second, and lock the second also while you are within. Furthermore, when you come out lock the iron inner door as well as the wooden one.'

I promised I would do so, and, after thanking him, hurried away, delighted at my success in obtaining the keys. Finding Brian and my sketching materials waiting for me in the porch, I eluded the vigilance of my escort of children by taking the narrow private path between the parsonage and the church which was close at hand, standing in a quadrangle of ancient yews.

The church itself was interesting, and I noticed that it must have arisen out of the ruins of a previous building, judging from the number of fragments of stone caps and arches, bearing traces of very early carving, now built into the walls. There were incised crosses, too, in some places, and one especially caught my attention, being flanked by a large sword. It was in trying to get a nearer look at this that I stumbled, and, looking down, saw at my feet a flight of narrow stone steps green with moss and mildew. Evidently this was the entrance to the crypt. I at once descended the steps, taking care of my footing, for they were damp and slippery in the extreme. Brian accompanied me, as nothing would induce him to remain behind. By the time I had reached the bottom of the stairs, I found myself almost in darkness, and I had to strike a light before I could find the keyhole and the proper key to fit into it. The door, which was of wood, opened inwards fairly easily, although an accumulation of mould and rubbish on the ground outside showed it had not been used for many years. Having got through it, which was not altogether an easy matter, as nothing would induce it to open more than about eighteen inches, I carefully locked it behind me, although I should have preferred to leave it open, as there is to some minds an unpleasant feeling in being locked in anywhere, in case of a sudden exit seeming advisable.

I kept my candle alight with some difficulty and after groping my way down a low and of course exceedingly dank passage, came to another door. A toad was squatting against it, who looked as if he had been sitting there about a hundred years. As I lowered the candle to the floor, he gazed at the light with unblinking eyes, and then retreated slowly into a crevice in the wall, leaving against the door a small cavity in the dry mud which had gradually silted up round his person. I noticed that this door was of iron, and had a long bolt, which, however, was broken. Without delay, I fitted the second key into the lock, and pushing the door open after considerable difficulty, I felt the cold breath of the crypt upon my face. I must own I experienced



a momentary regret at locking the second door again as soon as I was well inside, but I felt it my duty to do so. Then, leaving the key in the lock, I seized my candle and looked round. I was standing in a low vaulted chamber with groined roof, cut out of the solid rock. It was difficult to see where the crypt ended, as further light thrown on any point only showed other rough archways or openings, cut in the rock, which had probably served at one time for family vaults. A peculiarity of the Wet Waste crypt, which I had not noticed in other places of that description, was the tasteful arrangement of skulls and bones which were packed about four feet high on either side. The skulls were symmetrically built up to within a few inches of the top of the low archway on my left, and the shin bones were arranged in the same manner on my right. *But the fresco!* I looked round for it in vain. Perceiving at the further end of the crypt a very low and very massive archway, the entrance to which was not filled up with bones, I passed under it, and found myself in a second smaller chamber. Holding my candle above my head, the first object its light fell upon was -- the fresco, and at a glance I saw that it was unique. Setting down some of my things with a trembling hand on a rough stone shelf hard by, which had evidently been a credence table, I examined the work more closely. It was a reredos over what had probably been the altar at

the time the priests were proscribed. The fresco belonged to the earliest part of the fifteenth century, and was so perfectly preserved that I could almost trace the limits of each day's work in the plaster, as the artist had dashed it on and smoothed it out with his trowel. The subject was the Ascension, gloriously treated. I can hardly describe my elation as I stood and looked at it, and reflected that this magnificent specimen of English fresco painting would be made known to the world by myself. Recollecting myself at last, I opened my sketching bag, and, lighting all the candles I had brought with me, set to work.

Brian walked about near me, and though I was not otherwise than glad of his company in my rather lonely position, I wished several times I had left him behind. He seemed restless, and even the sight of so many bones appeared to exercise no soothing effect upon him. At last, however, after repeated commands, he lay down, watchful but motionless, on the stone floor.

I must have worked for several hours, and I was pausing to rest my eyes and hands, when I noticed for the first time the intense stillness that surrounded me. No sound from *me* reached the outer world. The church clock which had clanged out so loud and ponderously as I went down the steps, had not since sent the faintest whisper of its iron tongue down to me below. All was silent as the grave. This *was* the grave. Those who had come here had indeed gone down into silence. I repeated the words to myself, or rather they repeated themselves to me.

Gone down into silence.

I was awakened from my reverie by a faint sound. I sat still and listened. Bats occasionally frequent vaults and underground places.

The sound continued, a faint, stealthy, rather unpleasant sound. I do not know what kinds of sounds bats make, whether pleasant or otherwise. Suddenly there was a noise as of something falling, a momentary pause and then - an almost imperceptible but distant jangle as of a key.

I had left the key in the lock after I had turned it, and I now regretted having done so. I got up, took one of the candles, and went back into the larger crypt - for though I trust I am not so effeminate as to be rendered nervous by hearing a noise for which I cannot instantly account, still, on occasions of this kind, I must honestly say I should prefer that they did not occur. As I came towards the iron door, there was another distinct (I had almost said hurried) sound. The impression on my mind was one of great haste. When I reached the door, and held the candle near the lock to take out the key, I perceived that the other one, which hung by a short string to its fellow, was vibrating slightly. I should have preferred not to find it vibrating, as there seemed no occasion for such a course;

but I put them both into my pocket, and turned to go back to my work. As I turned, I saw on the ground what had occasioned the louder noise I had heard, namely, a skull which had evidently just slipped from its place on the top of one of the walls of bones, and had rolled almost to my feet. There, disclosing a few more inches of the top of an archway behind, was the place from which it had been dislodged. I stooped to pick it up, but fearing to displace any more skulls by meddling with the pile, and not liking to gather up its scattered teeth, I let it lie, and went back to my work, in which I was soon so completely absorbed that I was only roused at last by my candles beginning to burn low and go out one after another.



Then, with a sigh of regret, for I had not nearly finished, I turned to go. Poor Brian, who had never quite reconciled himself to the place, was beside himself with delight. As I opened the iron door he pushed past me, and a moment later I heard him whining and scratching, and I had almost added, beating, against the wooden one. I locked the iron door, and hurried down the passage as quickly as I could, and almost before I had got the other one ajar there seemed to be a rush past me into the open air, and Brian was bounding up the steps and out of sight. As I stopped to take out the key, I felt quite deserted and left behind. When I came out once more into the sunlight, there was a vague sensation all about me in the air of exultant freedom.

It was already late in the afternoon, and after I had sauntered back to the parsonage to give up the keys, I persuaded the people of the public-house to let me join in the family meal, which was spread out in the kitchen. The inhabitants of Wet Waste were primitive people, with the frank, unabashed manner that flourishes still in lonely places, especially in the wilds of Yorkshire; but I had no idea that in these days of penny posts and cheap newspapers such entire ignorance of the outer world

could have existed in any corner, however remote, of Great Britain.

When I took one of the neighbour's children on my knee - a pretty little girl with the palest aureole of flaxen hair I had ever seen - and began to draw pictures for her of the birds and beasts of other countries, I was instantly surrounded by a crowd of children, and even grown-up people, while others came to their doorways and looked on from a distance, calling to each other in the strident unknown tongue which I have since discovered goes by the name of 'Broad Yorkshire'.

The following morning, as I came out of my room, I perceived that something was amiss in the village. A buzz of voices reached me as I passed the bar, and in the next house I could hear through the open window a high-pitched wail of lamentation.

The woman who brought me my breakfast was in tears, and in answer to my questions, told me that the neighbour's child, the little girl whom I had taken on my knee the evening before, had died in the night.

I felt sorry for the general grief that the little creature's death seemed to arouse, and the uncontrolled wailing of the poor mother took my appetite away.

I hurried off early to my work, calling on my way for the keys, and with Brian for my companion descended once more into the crypt, and drew and measured with an absorption that gave me no time that day to listen for sounds real or fancied. Brian, too, on this occasion seemed quite content, and slept peacefully beside me on the stone floor. When I had worked as long as I could, I put away my books with regret that even then I had not quite finished, as I had hoped to do. It would be necessary come again for a short time on the morrow. When I returned the keys late that afternoon, the old clergyman met me at the door, and asked me to come in and have tea with him.

'And has the work prospered?' he asked, as we sat down in the long, low room, into which I had just been ushered, and where he seemed to live entirely.

I told him it had, and showed it to him.

'You have seen the original, of course?' I said.

'Once,' he replied, gazing fixedly at it. He evidently did not care to be communicative, so I turned the conversation to the age of the church.

'All here is old,' he said. 'When I was young, forty years ago, and came here because I had no means of mine own, and was much moved marry at that time, I felt oppressed that all was so old; and that this place was so far removed from the world, for which I had at times longing grievous to be borne; but I had chosen my lot, and with it I was forced be content. My son, marry not in youth, for love, which truly in that season is a mighty power, turns away

the heart from study, and young children break the back of ambition. Neither marry in middle life, when woman is seen to be but a woman and her talk a weariness, so you will not be burdened with a wife in your old age.'

I had my own views on the subject of marriage, for I am of opinion that a well-chosen companion of domestic tastes and docile and devote temperament may be of material assistance to a professional man. But my opinions once formulated, it is not of moment to me to discuss them with others, so I changed the subject, and asked if the neighbouring villages were as antiquated as Wet Waste.

'Yes, all about here is old,' he repeated. 'The paved road leading to Dyke Fens is an ancient pack road, made even in the time of the Romans. Dyke Fens, which is very near here, a matter of but four or five miles, is likewise old, and forgotten by the world. The Reformation never reached it. It stopped here. And at Dyke Fens they still have a priest and a bell, and bow down before the saints. It is a damnable heresy, and weekly I expound it as such to my people, showing them true doctrines; and I have heard that this same priest has so far yielded himself to the Evil One that he has preached against me as withholding gospel truths from my flock; but I take no heed of it, neither of his pamphlet touching the Clementine Homilies, in which he vainly contradicts that which I have plainly set forth and proven beyond doubt, concerning the word *Asaph*.'

The old man was fairly off on his favourite subject, and it was some time before I could get away. As it was, he followed me to the door, and I only escaped because the old clerk hobbled up at that moment, and claimed his attention.

The following morning I went for the keys for the third and last time. I had decided to leave early the next day. I was tired of Wet Waste, and a certain gloom seemed to my fancy to be gathering over the place. There was a sensation of trouble in the air, as if, although the day was bright and clear, a storm were coming.

This morning, to my astonishment, the keys were refused to me when I asked for them. I did not, however, take the refusal as final - I make it a rule never to take a refusal as final - and after a short delay I was shown into the room where, as usual, the clergyman was sitting, or rather, on this occasion, was walking up and down.

'My son,' he said with vehemence, 'I know wherefore you have come, but it is of no avail. I cannot lend the keys again.'

I replied that, on the contrary, I hoped he would give them to me at once.

'It is impossible,' he repeated. 'I did wrong, exceeding wrong. I will never part with them again.'

'Why not?'

He hesitated, and then said slowly:

'The old clerk, Abraham Kelly, died last night.' He paused, and then went on: 'The doctor has just been here to tell me of that which is a mystery to him. I do not wish the people of the place to know it, and only to me he has mentioned it, but he has discovered plainly on the throat of the old man, and also, but more faintly on the child's, marks as of strangulation. None but he has observed it, and he is at a loss how to account for it. I, alas! can account for it but in one way, but in one way!'

I did not see what all this had to do with the crypt, but to humour the old man, I asked what that way was.

'It is a long story, and, haply, to a stranger it may appear but foolishness, but I will even tell it; for I perceive that unless I furnish a reason for withholding the keys, you will not cease to entreat me for them.

'I told you at first when you inquired of me concerning the crypt, that it had been closed these thirty years, and so it was. Thirty years ago a certain Sir Roger Despard departed this life, even the Lord of the manor of Wet Waste and Dyke Fens, the last of his family, which is now, thank the Lord, extinct. He was a man of a vile life, neither fearing God nor regarding man, nor having compassion on innocence, and the Lord appeared to have given him over to the tormentors even in this world, for he suffered many things of his vices, more especially from drunkenness, in which seasons, and they were many, he was as one possessed by seven devils, being an abomination to his household and a root of bitterness to all, both high and low.

'And, at last, the cup of his iniquity being full to the brim, he came to die, and I went to exhort him on his death-bed; for I heard that terror had come upon him, and that evil imaginations encompassed him so thick on every side, that few of them that were with him could abide in his presence. But when I saw him I perceived that there was no place of repentance left for him, and he scoffed at me and my superstition, even as he lay dying, and swore there was no God and no angel, and all were damned even as he was. And the next day, towards evening, the pains of death came upon him, and he raved the more exceedingly, inasmuch as he said he was being strangled by the Evil One. Now on his table was his hunting knife, and with his last strength he crept and laid hold upon it, no man withstanding him, and swore a great oath that if he went down to burn in hell, he would leave one of his hands behind on earth, and that it would never rest until it had drawn blood from the throat of another and strangled him, even as he himself was being strangled. And he cut off his own right hand at the wrist, and no man dared go near him to stop him, and the blood went through the floor, even down to the ceiling of the room below, and thereupon he died.

'And they called me in the night, and told me of his oath, and I counselled that no man should speak of it, and I took the dead hand, which none had ventured to touch, and I laid it beside him in his coffin; for I thought it better he should take it with him, so that he might have it, if haply some day after much tribulation he should perchance be moved to stretch forth his hands towards God. But the story got spread about, and the people were affrighted, so, when he came to be buried in the place of his fathers, he being the last of his family, and the crypt likewise full, I had it closed, and kept the keys myself, and suffered no man to enter therein anymore; for truly he was a man of an evil life, and the devil is not yet wholly overcome, nor cast chained into the lake of fire. So in time the story died out, for in thirty years much is forgotten. And when you came and asked me for the keys, I was at the first minded to withhold them; but I thought it was a vain superstition, and I perceived that you do but ask a second time for what is first refused; so I let you have them, seeing it was not an idle curiosity, but a desire to improve the talent committed to you, that led you to require them.'

The old man stopped, and I remained silent, wondering what would be the best way to get them just once more.

'Surely, sir,' I said at last, 'one so cultivated and deeply read as yourself cannot be biased by an idle superstition.'

'I trust not,' he replied, 'and yet - it is a strange thing that since the crypt was opened two people have died, and the mark is plain upon the throat of the old man and visible on the young child. No blood was drawn, but the second time the grip was stronger than the first. The third time, perchance -'

'Superstition such as that,' I said with authority, 'is an entire want of faith in God. You once said so yourself.'

I took a high moral tone which is often efficacious with conscientious, humble-minded people.

He agreed, and accused himself of not having faith as a grain of mustard seed; but even when I had got him so far as that, I had a severe struggle for the keys. It was only when I finally explained to him that if any malign influence had been let loose the first day, at any rate, it was out now for good or evil, and no further going or coming of mine could make any difference, that I finally gained my point. I was young, and he was old; and, being much shaken by what had occurred, he gave way at last, and I wrested the keys from him.

I will not deny that I went down the steps that day with a vague, indefinable repugnance, which was only accentuated by the closing of the two doors behind me. I remembered then, for the first time, the faint jangling of the key and other sounds which I had noticed the first day, and how one of the skulls had fallen. I went to the place where it still lay. I have already said these walls of

skulls were built up so high as to be within a few inches of the top of the low archways that led into more distant portions of the vault. The displacement of the skull in question had left a small hole just large enough for me to put my hand through. I noticed for the first time, over the archway above it, a carved coat-of-arms, and the name, now almost obliterated, of Despard. This, no doubt, was the Despard vault. I could not resist moving a few more skulls and looking in, holding my candle as near the aperture as I could. The vault was full. Piled high, one upon another, were old coffins, and remnants of coffins, and strewn bones. I attribute my present determination to be cremated to the painful impression produced on me by this spectacle. The coffin nearest the archway alone was intact, save for a large crack across the lid. I could not get a ray from my candle to fall on the brass plates, but I felt no doubt this was the coffin of the wicked Sir Roger. I put back the skulls, including the one which had rolled down, and carefully finished my work. I was not there much more than an hour, but I was glad to get away.

If I could have left Wet Waste at once I should have done so, for I had a totally unreasonable longing to leave the place; but I found that only one train stopped during the day at the station from which I had come, and that it would not be possible to be in time for it that day.

Accordingly I submitted to the inevitable, and wandered about with Brian for the remainder of the afternoon and until late in the evening, sketching and smoking. The day was oppressively hot, and even after the sun had set across the burnt stretches of the wolds, it seemed to grow very little cooler. Not a breath stirred. In the evening, when I was tired of loitering in the lanes, I went up to my own room, and after contemplating afresh my finished study of the fresco, I suddenly set to work to write the part of my paper bearing upon it. As a rule, I write with difficulty, but that evening words came to me with winged speed, and with them a hovering impression that I must make haste, that I was much pressed for time. I wrote and wrote, until my candles guttered out and left me trying to finish by the moonlight, which, until I endeavoured to write by it, seemed as clear as day.

I had to put away my MS, and, feeling it was too early to go to bed, for the church clock was just counting out ten, I sat down by the open window and leaned out to try and catch a breath of air. It was a night of exceptional beauty; and as I looked out my nervous haste and hurry of mind were allayed. The moon, a perfect circle, was - if so poetic an expression be permissible - as it were, sailing across a calm sky. Every detail of the little village was as clearly illuminated by its beams as if it were broad day; so, also, was the adjacent church with its primeval yews, while even the wolds beyond were dimly indicated, as if through

tracing paper.

I sat a long time leaning against the window-sill. The heat was still intense. I am not, as a rule, easily elated or readily cast down; but as I sat that night in the lonely village on the moors, with Brian's head against my knee, how, or why, I know not, a great depression gradually came upon me.

My mind went back to the crypt and the countless dead who had been laid there. The sight of the goal to which all human life, and strength, and beauty, travel in the end, had not affected me at the time, but now the very air about me seemed heavy with death.

What was the good, I asked myself, of working and toiling, and grinding down my heart and youth in the mill of long and strenuous effort, seeing that in the grave folly and talent, idleness and labour lie together, and are alike forgotten? Labour seemed to stretch before me till my heart ached to think of it, to stretch before me even to the end of life, and then came, as the recompense of my labour -- the grave. Even if I succeeded, if, after wearing my life threadbare with toll, I succeeded, what remained to me in the end? The grave. A little sooner, while the hands and eyes were still strong to labour, or a little later, when all power and vision had been taken from them; sooner or later only - the grave.

I do not apologise for the excessively morbid tenor of these reflections, as I hold that they were caused by the lunar effects which I have endeavoured to transcribe. The moon in its various quarterings has always exerted a marked influence on what I may call the sub-dominant, namely, the poetic side of my nature.

I roused myself at last, when the moon came to look in upon me where I sat, and, leaving the window open, I pulled myself together and went to bed.

I fell asleep almost immediately, but I do not fancy I could have been asleep very long when I was wakened by Brian. He was growling in a low, muffled tone, as he sometimes did in his sleep, when his nose was buried in his rug. I called out to him to shut up; and as he did not do so, turned in bed to find my match box or something to throw at him. The moonlight was still in the room, and as I looked at him I saw him raise his head and evidently wake up. I admonished him, and was just on the point of falling asleep when he began to growl again in a low, savage manner that waked me most effectually. Presently he shook himself and got up, and began prowling about the room. I sat up in bed and called to him, but he paid no attention. Suddenly I saw him stop short in the moonlight; he showed his teeth, and crouched down, his eyes following something in the air. I looked at him in horror. Was he going mad? His eyes were glaring, and his head moved slightly as if he

were following the rapid movements of an enemy. Then, with a furious snarl, he suddenly sprang from the ground, and rushed in great leaps across the room towards me, dashing himself against the furniture, his eyes rolling, snatching and tearing wildly in the air with his teeth. I saw he had gone mad. I leaped out of bed, and rushing at him, caught him by the throat. The moon had gone behind a cloud; but in the darkness I felt him turn upon me, felt him rise up, and his teeth close in my throat. I was being strangled. With all the strength of despair, I kept my grip of his neck, and, dragging him across the room, tried to crush in his head against the iron rail of my bedstead. It was my only chance. I felt the blood running down my neck. I was suffocating. After one moment of frightful struggle, I beat his head against the bar and heard his skull give way. I felt him give one strong shudder, a groan, and then I fainted away.



When I came to myself I was lying on the floor, surrounded by the people of the house, my reddened hands still clutching Brian's throat. Someone was holding a candle towards me, and the draught from the window made it flare and waver. I looked at Brian. He was stone dead. The blood from his battered head was trickling slowly over my hands. His great jaw was fixed in something that - in the uncertain light - I could not see.

They turned the light a little.

'Oh, God!' I shrieked. 'There! Look! Look!'

'He's off his head,' said someone, and I fainted again.

I was ill for about a fortnight without regaining consciousness, a waste of time of which even now I

cannot think without poignant regret. When I did recover consciousness, I found I was being carefully nursed by the old clergyman and the people of the house. I have often heard the unkindness of the world in general inveighed against, but for my part I can honestly say that I have received many more kindnesses than I have time to repay. Country people especially are remarkably attentive to strangers in illness.

I could not rest until I had seen the doctor who attended me, and had received his assurance that I should be equal to reading my paper on the appointed day. This pressing anxiety removed, I told him of what I had seen before I fainted the second time. He listened attentively, and then assured me, in a manner that was intended to be soothing, that I was suffering from an hallucination, due, no doubt, to the shock of my dog's sudden madness.

'Did you see the dog after it was dead?' I asked. He said he did. The whole jaw was covered with blood and foam; the teeth certainly seemed convulsively fixed, but the case being evidently one of extraordinarily virulent hydrophobia, owing to the intense heat, he had had the body buried immediately.

My companion stopped speaking as we reached our lodgings, and went upstairs. Then, lighting a candle, he slowly turned down his collar.

'You see I have the marks still,' he said, 'but I have no fear of dying of hydrophobia. I am told such peculiar scars could not have been made by the teeth of a dog. If you look closely you see the pressure of the five fingers. That is the reason why I wear high collars.'

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Reviews

Included in this issue:

Jack the Ripper FAQ, Jack The Ripper: Truth, Lies, and Conspiracy, Trial of Israel Lipski and more

May I take this opportunity to wish all *Ripperologist's* readers a happy Christmas, and let's hope 2018 brings some great Ripper reading, loads of discoveries, and that all your wishes come true.

Paul Begg

JACK THE RIPPER FAQ: ALL THAT'S LEFT TO KNOW ABOUT THE INFAMOUS SERIAL KILLER (FAQ SERIES)

Dave Thompson

Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 2017

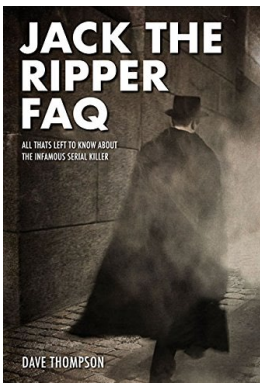
www.applausebooks.com

softcover

299pp; illus; appendices; biblio; index

ISBN:9781495063084

\$19.99



As you know, FAQ is an acronym for 'Frequently Asked Questions' and *Jack the Ripper FAQ* is the latest addition to a FAQ series that covers a range of subjects from the beat combo AC/DC to the television programme *The X-Files*. I hadn't previously encountered the series, so I was curious to find out about the concept and

how Jack the Ripper slotted into it. But let me say right at the start that I didn't have high expectations. The author, David Thompson, is described as 'a pop culture historian' with a number of biographies of people like David Bowie, Kurt Cobain and Robert Plant to his credit, as well some books about TV series like *Dr Who* and *The Twilight Zone*. This didn't seem to qualify him to write a book about Jack the Ripper, and these days the subject is such a minefield for the unwary that I expected Mr Thompson to innocently make so many faux pas it would be embarrassing. He didn't, and I'm happy to report that apart from a smattering of errors, he has produced what I think is probably one of the most entertaining overviews of the subject I've seen for a long time.

David Thompson doesn't have any new information or insights to offer, but he didn't set out to offer any.

Instead, he tells the traditional story of the murders, but incorporates lots of diversions from the usual narrative, and he does this in bit-sized chunks, so the read is easy, interesting and different. In other words, this is an ideal book for anyone new to the subject. made for an interesting read.

As said, Thompson makes a few mistakes, but they're not big ones: he calls Henry Smith the acting commissioner of the Metropolitan Police (instead of the City Police), and repeats the canard - if it is a canard - that Thomas Cutbush was the nephew of the Met's very own Superintendent Cutbush. Curiously, his account of Kosminski doesn't mention the Swanson marginalia, possibly the single most important piece of information pertaining to the identity of Jack the Ripper since Dan Farson stumbled across the Macnaghten memoranda in the late 1950s. Instead, Thompson diverts to discuss Hyam Hyams and then briefly returns to the topic to mention the DNA found on a shawl supposed to have come from the Eddowes crime scene. Thompson also asserts that Ostrog's "homicidal mania" was probably a product of Macnaghten's "wishful thinking", which it could have been, but for which there is no evidence.

But it's evident that Thompson has done his research. He's read the books, probably recoiled a bit at some of the nonsense on the message boards, and has a good grasp of the subject. *Jack the Ripper FAQ* is a pleasure to read, Thompson's writing style being chatty but packing in a lot of information. As said, it's a great overview, but the downside is that we have a lot of overviews and you probably already have one on your bookshelf. Whether or not you need or want another is open to question, and even Amazon's price of £15 may be a little too rich for some people. That said, it packs in the information and anyone reading this book will come away feeling that

they've been informed.

THE DIARY OF JACK THE RIPPER: 25 YEARS OF MYSTERY - RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION

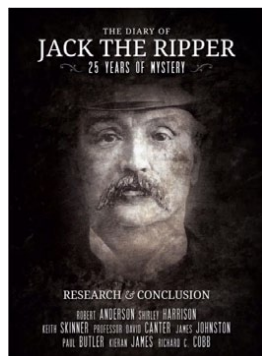
London: Secret Chamber Publishing, 2017

softcover

127pp; illus in colour; some articles have notes and sources

ISBN: 978-1-9998538-0-8

£14.99



Twenty-five years ago a man named Mike Barrett walked into the office of a London literary agent with the so-called Maybrick diary. It would become one of the most hotly debated artefacts in Ripper history, and some would argue one of the most divisive. A diary retrospective held at a Jack the Ripper conference in Liverpool

in September 2017 featured the contributors to this book, which seems to be a last-minute compilation published to capitalise on the event. It's a pity that the book feels rushed because it's a worthwhile volume and a little forethought, effort and time could have produced a more professional publication, especially as the cover price for 130 pages is hefty.

The list of contributors promises more than the book delivers. Four of the contributions are little more than a couple of pages and Keith Skinner's contribution was Mike Barrett's research notes. Since many people will buy the book just to get sight of these, he is to be thanked for making them available, but it was disappointing not to find an article, maybe a personal account of his motivations for a quarter-century of diary investigating.

The book opens with a lamentably brief introduction from Shirley Harrison. Mike Barrett had been advised by a publisher to take the diary to a literary agent and he had taken it to Doreen Montgomery of the Rupert Crew Agency. Among Doreen's clients was Shirley Harrison, a writer whose journalist's nose for a good story made her a good choice to undertake some preliminary investigations into the diary. Later in the book, Richard Cobb writes that Shirley 'said she had been considering writing a book about the infamous Florence Maybrick murder trial of 1889.' The conspiracy nuts would have made a mountain out of this if it was true - how fortuitous that Barrett should have contacted the only literary agency in the country that had an author on its books who was thinking about writing about Maybrick! It wasn't my understanding of how Shirley became involved, and just to make sure I asked her if it was true. It wasn't. Nevertheless, as Shirley relates, on

that day she was asked to take a look at the diary, she was plunged into a strange new world of inks and paper and ESDA tests and strange folk called Ripperologists.

Ten chapters follow Shirley's introduction, some equally short, such as James Johnston's thumb portraits of the Maybricks, and less than two pages by Paul Butler about the watch. Professor David Canter has contributed another short chapter, an interesting and thought-provoking walk-through of various scenarios according to whether James Maybrick wrote the diary or not.

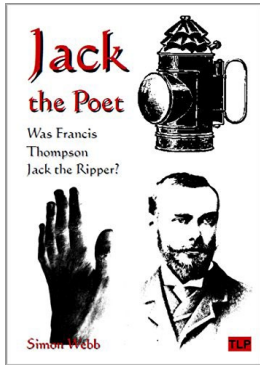
Kieran James provides a very good piece about the trial of Florence Maybrick and how it led to the creation of the court of criminal appeal. Whilst not detracting from the value of the piece, it has the look and feel of a thesis or paper for an academic journal, complete with an abstract and academic citation styling, all of which seemed a little out of place with the rest of the book. The other longish chapter is James Edward Johnston's overview of the diary story, which is good, succinct, and provided lots of extracts from other sources (for some reason highlighted in blue). Both are good and will be interesting to the general readers, but probably won't offer anything new to the seasoned diarist. Richard Cobb looks at some of the questions surrounding whether the "diary" is authentic or not. It's a little superficial, but this was probably intentional and wisely so, it being easy to find oneself embroiled in almost incomprehensible arguments. The best article is probably Robert Anderson's overview of the scientific analysis of the diary's ink and paper, which provided some new information and insights.

Where this book really scores is the reproduction of Mike Barrett's research notes (complete with Keith Skinner's pencilled notes and Causeway Resources stamp), Albert Johnson's notes, and the reports by Turgoose and Wilde of their scientific analyses of the watch. The publisher of this book really deserves to be congratulated for having brought these into the public domain.

As said, this book has the look and feel of being thrown together at the last minute, and this is emphasised by an insufficient margin leaving the text to run into the gutter, making the book difficult to read without cracking the spine. This would perhaps be forgivable if the cover price was half what it is. However, there are colour illustrations, the reproduction of many of these being excellent, and there's nothing wrong with the occasional mixed collection of essays and original source materials. In fact, sometimes this is the only way that such material can easily be made available. The publication of the source materials are what makes this book really worthwhile for the serious researcher.

JACK THE POET: WAS FRANCIS THOMPSON JACK THE RIPPER?

Simon Webb
The Langley Press, 2017
tinyurl.com/lpdirect
ebook
51pp; biblio
ASIN: B076LYV7NT
£2.26



Francis Thompson was a mixed-up young man who took himself off to London to pursue a writing career and quickly became homeless, penniless and addicted to laudanum. For a while, he was cared for by a young prostitute, and in 1888 he was again 'rescued', this time by Wilfrid Meynell, who edited a magazine called *Merrie England*,

in which he published Thompson's work. Thompson, who died in 1907, won high praise for his poetry, particularly among Catholics, and although still recognised as a poet and prose writer of distinction, his popularity has generally faded.

Francis Thompson has been linked to the Ripper for almost half a century. In 1968, in his biography, *Strange Harp, Strange Symphony*, John Walsh pointed out that the destitute Thompson could have been questioned by the police about the Ripper murders in 1888. In 1988, the Texas-based forensic pathologist, Joseph Rupp, suggested in the journal *Criminologist* that Thompson was the Ripper. Since the early 1990s, Richard Patterson has been making the same case, but his arguments made no real impact until they were solidified in his book *Jack the Ripper: The Works of Francis Thompson* in 2016.

This "book" runs to 56 pages, which isn't so much a book as an essay, but Simon Webb writes well, with clarity, and provides a well-balanced account. For example, Webb acknowledges that 'Nothing in Thompson's writings adds up to a frank admission of his being Jack the Ripper' and 'there is nothing to connect Thompson directly to the crimes', and Webb goes on to point out there is 'no record of his having committed violent crimes, and people who knew him remarked on his gentleness, placidity and even indolence.' Thompson was also physically weak, whilst the Ripper needed to be 'physically strong'. But Webb admits that there are real Jekyll and Hyde characters people may have seen only one side of Thompson's personality.

It has been suggested that Thompson may have been the man seen by George Hutchinson and also the 'poor devil-driven poet' referred to by R. Thurston Hopkins in

his book *Life and Death at the Old Bailey*. Webb doesn't accept either, I think correctly. Hutchinson was too smartly dressed to have been Thompson, and even if liberally financed by Wilfrid Meynell, he almost certainly wouldn't have invested in the heavy gold watch-chain spoken of by Hutchinson. As for the poet mentioned by Hopkins, Webb highlights the many dissimilarities between the two men and that Hopkins' description better fits Ernest Dowson.

Simon Webb doesn't reach a hard conclusion, although I thought he probably dismisses Thompson as a plausible candidate for the Ripper, but gives enough information for the reader to decide for himself. The book strips away a good deal of the detail that fills Patterson's book, much of which, though interesting and adding colour, was probably extraneous. Cut down to its bare bones, the argument as presented here gives the basics for anyone who wants a ready guide to the case for and against Thompson. The 'book' is, therefore, a good buy and, I must say, an enjoyable read.

RIPPEROLOGIST (VOLUMES I & II)

Stephen Bloom
Independently published, 2017
softcover
158pp; large size 21x0.9x29.7cm; illus; biblio; index
ISBN:978-1549980497
£4.65

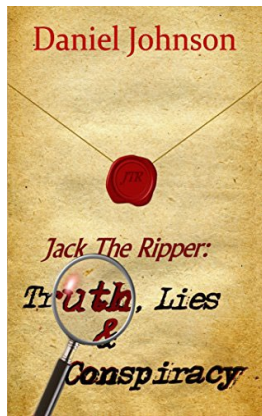


This book has no connection whatsoever with *Ripperologist*. The author claims that it is a 'new look' at Jack the Ripper 'using modern day evidence, photographs and maps', but it's hard to find Stephen Bloom looking at anything new. And to be honest, I'm not sure what sort of new look could be achieved using 'modern day evidence, photographs and maps', and I don't think Stephen Bloom does either. They're just words to help sell an otherwise undistinguished book; they look good if read quickly and you don't think about them too much.

Bloom takes a standard look at each of the murders in volume one, then looks at the suspects in volume two. He concludes that nobody will ever know who Jack the Ripper was. There are lots of illustrations, but some are poorly reproduced. The bibliography is abysmal, consisting of fifteen items, only two of the named books (Rumbelow and Sugden) being noted authorities, non-suspect titles. I don't like being negative about this book. Stephen Bloom is probably an enthusiast who wanted to write a book about the murders and give his thoughts and opinions.

JACK THE RIPPER: TRUTH, LIES, AND CONSPIRACY

Daniel Johnson
 Self-published, 2017
 Softcover & ebook
 ISBN:1976559863
 Softcover £19.50 & ebook £5.70



Daniel Johnson describes himself as 'a firebrand in a new generation of writers intent on setting the world alight and breaking down the barriers of language and ideas,' whatever that means, and he explains in his introduction that he was inspired to write *Jack the Ripper: Truth, Lies, and Conspiracy* because books about the Ripper are 'riddled with

misinformation and mythology' and he wanted to return to the original source documents and original witness statements, and not 'stick to the script and toe the party line with these untruths.'

Which is highly commendable, but what party does Johnson think is responsible for spreading 'these untruths', and what 'party-line' is he refusing to toe, and who has toed it? Johnson doesn't say, probably because he's writing nonsense, but he almost makes it the *raison d'être* for his book, which makes you wonder how well-read he is on the subject. Returning to the original sources has been done before. Quite often. In fact, authors have been returning to the original sources since they were made public forty odd years ago, and they have tortured every shade of meaning from the witness testimony. So has Johnson read the books that came before him? It's difficult to tell. He doesn't mention, or only mentions in passing, Cullen, Evans, Evans & Gainey (Tumblety isn't mentioned at all), Farson, Matters, Odell, Rumbelow, or, notably, Sugden.

It may be that Johnson got his daft ideas from Trevor Marriott (who he describes as 'the acclaimed crime writer' - I hope you weren't swallowing a mouthful of tea or coffee when you read that!), for he echoes Marriott's drivel that there is a 'cartel' that's keeping Ripper material secret. Johnson refers to this Ripperological inner-sanctum as 'the gatekeepers of the Ripperology world' who jealously guard material, which he hopes in future they'll share without having to be asked nicely. I wonder who these 'gatekeepers' are, what material Johnson supposes they're not sharing, and why he naively imagines anyone should share it at all; research consumes time, energy and money, so I don't know why anyone should expect the fruits of that labour to be made available gratis. What is truly

remarkable, of course, is that you only have to look at Casebook and Forums to see researchers sharing their discoveries, so it's a bit difficult to know what Johnson's on about.

Johnson is frequently critical of Ripperology, describing it as a 'willy-waving boys club of theories and suspects and finger-pointing', and criticises Ripperologists for various sins, ranging from referring to the victims as 'tarts', 'whores', and similar - I also deplore this, but, with one notable exception, I'm not aware of any Ripperologist over-using these terms - to being unaware that Jack the Ripper was a serial killer. Yes, he really wrote that: 'But to my eye, with my qualifications in psychology and criminology and a lifelong study of the criminal mind, the most affronting thing is the sheer inability of commentators and theorists to acknowledge that the Ripper was a serial killer, and that he behaved as such.'

Johnson's book has quite a few errors, like misspelling Macnaghten 'MacNaughten' throughout, but they are mostly small and probably not worth mentioning, but he had written fewer than thirty words of this book before he was complaining that 'innumerable' Ripper books were 'riddled with misinformation' and declaring himself sick of the 'same tired canards, the same theories and the same myths'. However, he writes: 'And I know there will be certain Ripperologists who will be going through my book line by line to check the facts are right, not because they necessarily care about the victims, but because they're too keen to give an approving nod when the "canon" is correct or sneer with a jabbing finger if I made a mistake.' Now, criticising the work of other people but trying to deflect criticism of one's own by describing it as sneering and finger-jabbing is nasty, but apparently trying to link it to not caring about Jack the Ripper's victims comes across as slimy.

Johnson's errors are mostly small: he says that John Pizer successfully sued 'for false arrest and slander'. He seems to think that Thomas Bulling and Charles Moore worked alongside the journalist Best at *The Star*. He calls the non-canonical victims 'apocryphal victims'; I know what he means, but the word isn't appropriate. He says *Only a Violet...*, which Mary Kelly was heard singing on the night she died, was 'an Irish folk song'. I thought it was composed in 1881 by Will H Fox. And he writes, 'On 6 January 2014, several thick folders full of previously classified Special Branch documents relating to the Ripper case were destroyed, "coincidentally" at the very time as Ripper historian Trevor Marriott was fighting a legal battle for their release to the public.' There were no folders thick with documents, the Special Branch ledgers of which Johnson writes did not relate to the Ripper case,

they had been made available to bona fide researchers, they had been passed to the National Archives, where they were dismissed as of no historical interest (a conclusion which I think was wrong, but nevertheless the Special Branch did offer the ledgers for preservation), they were not destroyed at the time Trevor Marriott was engaged in his legal wrangle, and Trevor Marriott is not a historian, a profession he has given every indication of despising.

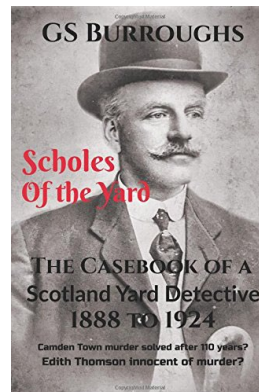
Daniel Johnson has a theory. It isn't original. It's that Joseph Barnett was the murderer and that it was not Mary Kelly's body that was found in Room 13. He thinks she lived on as 'Louisa', the woman recorded as being Barnett's wife. The weakness in the theory, of course, is that Barnett would have been a prime suspect - husbands and lovers always are - and therefore the police presumably grilled him till he sizzled, and then evidently eliminated him from their inquiries. As for Louisa being Mary Kelly, the Barnetts lived in the same general area for decades after the murders. There is no evidence to suggest that anyone thought Louisa was Mary. Daniel Johnson writes 'all I say to you is this - carry on believing it's Mary Jane Kelly lying on the bed if it makes the story in your head play out better, but do not call yourself a Ripperologist, or even an academic, unless you can provide cogent arguments, backed up by legitimate evidence, to disprove my own argument.' I hope Mr Johnson is well-intentioned, but when he writes things like this he comes across as opinionated, angry and naïve: the onus is on Johnson to prove his argument, it's not up to me, or you, or anyone else to 'disprove' it, and I suspect that readers who are unpersuaded by Mr Johnson's argument will balk at being told they're not entitled to continue to call themselves a Ripperologist, or, for some reason, an academic.

Johnson argues his case cogently enough, but, as said, it covers familiar ground without adding anything substantially new. It's a tough book to like, largely because Johnson comes across as arrogant, opinionated, and not well-read on the subject. He is at turns pleading that he isn't saying "Jack the Ripper has been found" as Martin Fido did, but at others he's demanding that you prove him wrong or don't call yourself a Ripperologist.

SCHOLES OF THE YARD: THE CASEBOOK OF A SCOTLAND YARD DETECTIVE 1888 TO 1924

G S Burroughs
B-Division Books, 2017
www.gsburroughs.com
softcover & Kindle ebook
295pp; illus;
ISBN:978-1527214311
softcover £8.99 & ebook £3.99

Alfred Ernest Scholes was born at Ollerenshaw Wood,



Derby (the author of this book says Whaley Bridge), on 31 December 1864, and he joined the Metropolitan Police on 27 February 1888. According to his police records, he 'performed ordinary duty' at CO (Central Office) until assigned a permanent patrol on D Division on 6 January 1896, and was soon promoted to CID, enjoying

a steady promotion through the ranks until he retired as Detective Inspector on 14 July 1913. He then worked as a detective for the Port of London Authority, and it was in that capacity that he took possession of Edith Thompson's love letters which sent her so horrifyingly to the gallows. Scholes published his reminiscences, 'My Thirty Years With the CID' in the *World's Pictorial News* in 1924, and he left a large volume of press cuttings.

The reminiscences and press cuttings form the basis of Mr Burroughs' book, which starts with a fairly lengthy chapter about the Whitechapel murders. No matter what rank a copper achieved or how illustrious the career he enjoyed, if they were pounding the East End pavements that autumn of 1888 then they wanted to have some contact with Jack the Ripper. Scholes was no exception. He had no connection with the murders, apart from being one of the large number of policemen drafted into the East End to augment the local divisions, and he patrolled Mile End Road (or parts thereof), but in later years he exaggeratedly recalled that on the night of the Lord Mayor's Show (when Mary Kelly was murdered in Dorset Street) 'Jack the Ripper committed two of his murders in the very street where I was...'

Scholes certainly enjoyed a career that brought him into contact with many of the most notable crimes and criminals of the day, Eddie Guerin, 'Chicago May', Mrs Pearcey, Milsom and Fowler, the murder of Emily Dimmock in Camden Town (which a few years back was the subject of an exhibition of paintings by Walter Sickert), and Edith Thompson and Frederick Bywaters.

The trouble with this book, like so many police biographies, is the paucity of information about Scholes himself. Like the vast majority of people, he hasn't left many insights into his life. There's no account of how he perceived the world around him. The biography therefore become little more than a series of essays about the crimes he investigated and the criminals with whom he came into contact, and that's what Mr Burroughs has written, punctuated here and there with Scholes' own, generally brief comments. Of course, there's nothing wrong with

that, except that you probably already know about most of the cases.

Inspector Scholes had a good police career, an interesting one, and I'm glad it's commemorated by Mr Burroughs' book, but the book borders on being family history rather than history or biography proper, and whilst Burroughs does his best to give colour to Scholes' world, that can be surprisingly difficult to achieve - biography is not easy to write! I think the book would have been immeasurably improved if Mr Burroughs had included the *World's Pictorial News* articles verbatim, and included any newspaper reports which included personal comments and observations by Scholes himself. Mr Burroughs also says that he tried to find a professional publisher and was unsuccessful, which I can understand, although with some re-jigging and the benefit of an experienced editor and proofreading (and possibly a quick fact check), I'm sure it would have found a home and still could.

Overall, Scholes played no part in the Ripper investigation, apart from being in the East End at the time, and the Ripper crimes didn't merit a lengthy chapter, if, indeed, they merited more than a passing mention. The book is otherwise rightly called a 'casebook', because that is what it is, an account of some of the cases with which Scholes had a connection. Mr Burroughs' family will rightly appreciate it.

IN THE OLD EAST END: MEMOIRS OF AN EAST END DETECTIVE

Benjamin Leeson
2017

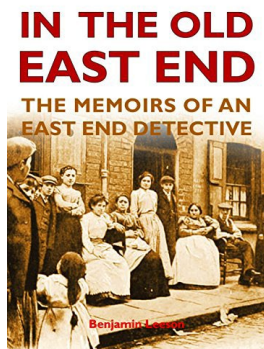
First Published As: *Lost London*. London: Stanley Paul and Co, 1934

Kindle ebook

112pp;

ASIN: B074NBF8Q5

£0.99



Benjamin Leeson joined the Metropolitan Police in 1891 and spent his career in H Division, until invalided out after he was shot at the Siege of Sidney Street. He was one of the policemen who responded to calls following the discovery of the body of Frances Coles in Swallows Gardens and his memoirs, *Lost London*, are

interesting for their descriptions of the East End in the very late 19th and first decades of the 20th centuries. Although he wasn't a policeman when the Ripper murders were committed, he offered thoughts about who the murderer might have been, '...amongst the police who were most concerned in the case there was a general feeling that a

certain doctor, known to me, could have thrown quite a lot of light on the subject.'

Lost London is hard to find these days - a quick internet check produced only one copy - it was in the catalogue of specialist book dealer Loretta Lay, and the asking price reflects its rarity. The difficulty of obtaining a copy of *Lost London* makes this ebook a sensible and extraordinarily well-priced purchase, but be warned, this book is abridged and edited. I don't know why the publisher did this as it diminishes the value of the ebook, but for 99p, you can't really complain.

TRIAL OF ISRAEL LIPSKI (NOTABLE BRITISH TRIALS NO.84)

M.W. Oldridge

London: Mango Books, 2017

www.mangobooks.co.uk

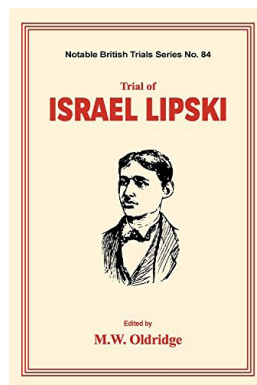
First Published:

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211pp; illus; sources; appendices; index

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hardcover £20 & ebook £7.99



I was sitting in a long-gone 'greasy spoon' café on Whitechapel Road, not too far from the London Hospital. The heavens had opened moments before, driving me to seek shelter in the café's steamy interior, where I ordered a mug of tea and settled into a seat by the window. There was a crack of thunder, the sky grew blacker

and rain began hammering the window. It was clear that I was going to be in there for a while, so I hefted my bag to my lap and took out the two books I'd recently bought. One was a paperback about Steinnie Morrison, the other was about Israel Lipski. I was aware that 'Lipski' had been shouted by a man attacking a woman who may have been Elizabeth Stride, but otherwise I didn't then know much about either case. Both were East End-based, however, and therefore of interest, and both have fascinated me ever since.

A few years later, I had the good fortune to visit Richard Whittington-Egan. On a shelf in his study, there was a full run of the Notable British Trials. The collection was a source of obvious pride, unsurprisingly given the difficulty in collecting pristine editions of an excess of eighty books, especially in those pre-internet bookseller days. There, I noticed, was a copy of *Trial of Steinnie Morrison*, which Richard allowed me to take down from the shelf. At the time it felt like I was handling a Shakespeare first folio or a Gutenberg Bible.

The Notable British Trials was and is a justly famous series of books and some of the finest historians of crime contributed one or more and sometimes several volumes to the series. Among them William Roughead, W. Teignmouth Shore, F. Tennyson Jesse, H.B. Irving, Elliott O'Donnell, H.L. Adam, Filson Young, and H. Montgomery Hyde. The books are collector's items, some commanding quite high prices. The series ran for 54-years, and it has been a little over that length of time since *Trial of August Sangret*, the so-called Wigwam Murderer, brought the series to an end in 1959. That it ran for over half a century and is held in such high regard half a century later is a testimony to how highly respected this series is, and hopefully makes it clear why this relaunch, authorised by the original publisher, is a coup for fledgling publisher Mango Books, and, more importantly, a significant event in true crime publishing. In fact, when you hold this book in your hands you are holding a little bit of history.

It is a mystery to me that Israel Lipski was never the subject for a book in the original series of Notable British Trials, but I can't think of a more fitting one for the series re-launch. Lipski was born in 1865, his real name was Israel Lobulsk, and he was one of the thousands of East European immigrants who had settled in London's East End. On 28 June 1887, a young woman named Miriam Angel was found dead in a room at 16 Batty Street, and underneath her bed the police found Lipski. Miriam Angel had been forced to drink nitric acid, and there were acid burns inside Lipski's mouth. He was charged with murder but protested his innocence and his trial became something of a cause celebre as press and public became divided in their opinion about his guilt. The controversy became greater still after Lipski was convicted and sentenced to death. William Thomas Stead, the formidable campaigning editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* took up Lipski's case and the Home Secretary, Henry Matthews, was petitioned to grant a reprieve. Fortunately for Matthews, before he had to announce his decision, Lipski confessed. He was hanged on 21 August 1887.

But was his confession the real deal? Was Lipski really guilty? The case has never been satisfactorily resolved, nor is it ever likely to be, but here you can read the full evidence as it was presented in court, and, assisted by M.W. Oldridge's masterful introduction, reach your own conclusion. Oldridge, better known as Mark Ripper, is an excellent writer and a steady, impeccably unbiased commentator, and ideally suited to join the illustrious past contributors to the series.

The book begins with an informative essay giving the history of the Notable British Trials series. This is followed by a cast of characters and when they gave evidence in

court. Then Oldridge provides a fully sourced and footnoted overview of the Lipski case. The introduction was always the high-spot of the Notable British Trials, often providing insights and information not given elsewhere. It was in his introduction to *Trial of George Chapman*, for example, that H.L. Adam claimed that following Chapman's arrest, Inspector Abberline had said to the arresting officer, George Godley, 'You've caught Jack the Ripper at last'. Since Godley assisted in the preparation of the introduction, it is to be assumed that he was Adam's authority for the remark. Oldridge has no such inside information, of course, but his introduction is nevertheless insightful. Then comes the transcript of the trial, concluding with several appendices, and a full index.

And the book has been reproduced to look like the original series, with red boards and the classic cream wrap-around jacket. If you happen to have a set of the NBT, *Trial of Israel Lipski* will fit right in. This is a book that can't be too highly recommended.

MOB TOWN: A HISTORY OF CRIME AND DISORDER IN THE EAST END

John Bennett

London: Yale University Press, 2017

www.yalebooks.co.uk

First Published:

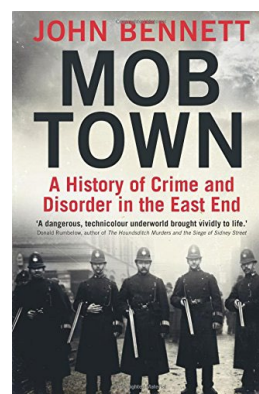
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hardcover £20; ebook £14.81

Unabridged Audio CD: Tantor Media, Inc; £20



The most recent addition to John Bennett's impressive catalogue of East End histories arrives – as did one of his previous books, *Jack the Ripper: The Forgotten Victims*, written with Paul Begg – under the aegis of the Yale University Press. This is not to say that *Mob Town* sits untouchably within the usual genre confines of academic literature. Indeed, it seemed to this reviewer that it had a less overtly academic outlook than Bennett's *Jack the Ripper: The Making of the Myth*, which was a serious cultural analysis, and less even than *Krayology*, which was a feat of archival research. *Mob Town* subverts the expectations established by the connotations associated with its publisher and provides, instead, an accessible and enjoyable tour through the East End's violent, disobedient and sometimes radical past. Along the way, it sneaks its serious observations in with subtlety, cleverly camouflaged within the entertainment.

Among the familiar sights along the way, we witness (of course) the Ratcliff Highway murders, the brutalities of the Ripper, the Siege of Sidney Street, the Battle of Cable Street, and the doubtful glamour of the Krays, but many of the most exciting moments of shock, horror, amusement and inspiration occur in less well-known avenues. The case of Brilliant Chang is one of these, unknown to me before I read this book. A Limehouse restaurateur, drug-dealer and denizen of the demi-monde, his fascinating story, compellingly told by Bennett, exemplifies the uncertainties which took hold of British society during the inter-war years, as questions of race and gender interacted with changing ideas of personal freedom and novel cultural influences to undermine the casual assumptions of the past. This is the best feature of the book. From witches to weavers and from Bangladesh to Bethnal Green, we see how the East End's criminal-disorderly history acts as a microcosmic expression of social and political forces at large.

I confess to having read this book whilst simultaneously listening to the audio-book version, narrated by Michael Page. Bennett's naturalistic writing style seems to have lent itself readily to the requirements of audio performance, and the performance itself is a generally pleasing one (although one suspects that the pronunciation of the surname of PC Walter Choate of Houndsditch Murders fame as if it were the opposite of 'inchoate' must be an error).

Thoroughly recommended in either format.

Reviewed by Mark Ripper

THE MILE END MURDER: THE CASE CONAN DOYLE COULDN'T SOLVE

Sinclair McKay

London: Aurum Press Ltd, 2017

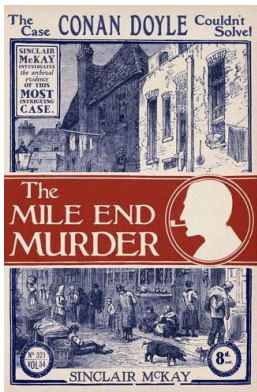
www.quartoknows.com

hardcover & ebook

320pp; illus; notes; index

ISBN:976-1781316436

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No public execution in recent years had drawn such a vast crowd. It was the morning of Monday, 19 November 1860, and twenty thousand people had gathered outside Newgate gaol to watch James Mullins mount the gallows. Mullins had consistently protested his innocence of the crime for which he was about to die, and unlike many before him, he

made no last-minute confession. Mullins drew from deep within himself the courage to walk erect and unaided to the gallows, where he spoke some words and handed over a letter in which he declared himself innocent and a victim of perjury, then he stood upon the drop, and after the usual preliminaries, he fell into eternity.

James Mullins is a fascinating character in his own right. An early recruit into the fledgling police force, he had gone undercover in Ireland to investigate a group of Irish Nationalists but had been rumbled and narrowly escaped with his life. Back in Britain he incurred disfavour and was demoted, then suffered an injury, and to survive he'd turned to petty crime, and convicted of a theft he was sentenced to six years in Dartmoor prison. On his release, he'd found employment doing odd jobs for a Mrs Emsley in the East End of London.

Twice-widowed and childless, 70-year-old Mary Emsley lived alone at 9 Grove Road, Stepney, a large, three-storey terraced house with a small front garden and a large rear one. She was not in the least reclusive but would be seen out and about almost daily on some business or other, and she received a string of visitors at home during the day, albeit few called socially. But after dark she was rarely seen abroad and hardly ever received anyone at her home, probably very sensibly, because she was extremely wealthy and lived in a less than salubrious area. But one evening in August 1860, she let somebody into her house and that person caved in her skull, leaving her corpse to be found, the maggots writhing among the blood and gore of her shattered head, on the top landing.

The police would have normally drawn up a list of people who knew Mary Emsley and isolated those who might have wanted to kill her, but in this case it would have been a matter of finding somebody on that list who didn't want to kill her. Mary Emsley was wealthy, mean, and grasping. She was a landlady with hundreds of poor tenants, and she evicted anyone who was more than a week late with the rent. This was harsh, although probably wise, but Emsley incurred wrath because she apparently found pleasure in doing it. She even seemed to delight in the abuse and occasional threats directed at her as she walked through the streets. She was not a loved person.

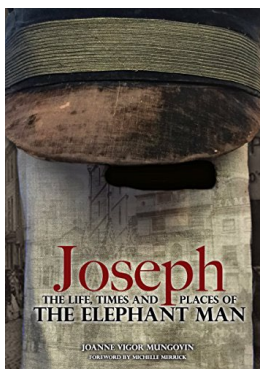
But it was abundantly clear that nobody had broken into Mrs Emsley's house. Instead, she had let them in, and from this it was deduced that her murderer was somebody she knew, trusted, and who probably had a good reason to have called on her after dark. Mullins was one such person, but the evidence against him was laughable, or it would have been if the consequences weren't so dire. He had drawn the attention of the police to a shed where he said he'd seen Walter Emm, one of Emsley's rent

collectors, leave a parcel. In the parcel the police found some items belonging to Mrs Emsley and a cheque made out to her, then a policeman noticed that the parcel had been tied with string that was the same as the sort Mullins used to lace up his boots. On searching Mullins' home, they found a hammer, which they quickly concluded had been used to smash Mrs Emsley's skull. There was no blood on it, but such niceties soon mattered little as the tide of feeling went against Mullins, even to the extent that the jury at the Old Bailey ignored the recommendations of the judge, who cast considerable doubt on the evidence, and returned a verdict of guilty.

In an article, "The Debatable Case of Mrs Emsley", in the May 1901 issue of the *Strand Magazine*, Arthur Conan Doyle reviewed the case again Mullins and concluded that it highlighted the need for English law to introduce a verdict similar to that of the Scottish 'not proven'. Whether or not Sherlock Holmes' creator set out to solve the murder of Mrs Emsley is perhaps open to question, but Sinclair McKay thinks Mullins was innocent and suggests his own suspect. It would be churlish to name his suspect here and spoil the pleasure of the build-up to the revelation, although it probably wouldn't detract from the real joy of the highly readable and well-researched account of death in the mid-19th century East End. He conjures up a wonderfully vivid picture of the sights, sounds, and, unfortunately, the smells of this world of poverty, terrorism, police work, and the looming shadow of the workhouse. High recommended.

JOSEPH: THE LIFE, TIMES AND PLACES OF THE ELEPHANT MAN

Joanne Vigor Mungovin
 London: Mango Books, 2017
 www.mangobooks.co.uk
 First Published: London: Mango Books, 2016
 softcover
 235pp; illus; appendices; biblio; index
 ISBN:191127323X
 £12.50



Joseph Carey Merrick, the "Elephant Man", is one of the most famous characters of the East End, even though he was born and spent much of his life in Leicester. From about the age of five, he began to exhibit the abnormalities which would horribly disfigure him. These were explained within his family as being the result of his mother being frightened by a fairground elephant when she was carrying him. After he left Leicester, Joseph

exhibited himself as a freak, appearing in a penny gaff in Whitechapel, where he was seen by Dr Frederick Treves of the Whitechapel Hospital. Joseph afterwards travelled abroad, until his manager absconded with Joseph's life savings. Somehow Joseph got back to England, where a policeman helped him, finding Dr Treves' visiting card and contacting him. Treves thereafter took care of Joseph, who spent the rest of his life at the London Hospital.

Once Joanne Vigor Mungovin gets to the meat of her subject she provides a solidly readable account of the life of Joseph Merrick, looking, as the title of the book states, his times and the places with which he is associated. It is almost impossible to imagine how Merrick and people like him coped and cope with a life which, through no personal fault, denied them even the most basic things, even to be able to walk down a street without inducing horror. Merrick's story is at once tragic and inspiring, and it's a story Mungovin tells very well, her love and enthusiasm for her subject carrying the reader along.

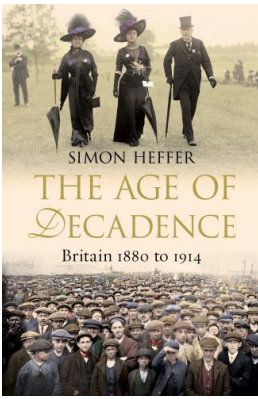
Mungovin has an eye for detail and her research appears to have left no stone unturned. She offers many corrections to earlier accounts of Merrick and provides notes and sources throughout. Of the four appendices, one is the man's own short account of his life, "The Autobiography of Joseph Carey Merrick".

When I read the hardcover version of this book I wondered why Mungovin thought it necessary to take Merrick's history back to his great-great-great-grandfather, Barnabus Merrick, who was born in the last decade of the 1600s, and to do this pretty much before the reader has been told a word about Joseph himself. Reading the book again hasn't changed my opinion that that degree of detail is what appendices were invented for. That said, this is the most exhaustively researched book about Merrick and an absolute necessity for anyone interested in the "Elephant Man".

THE AGE OF DECADENCE: BRITAIN 1880 TO 1914

Simon Heffer
 London: Random House Books, 2017
 www.penguin.co.uk
 hardcover & ebook
 897pp; illus; biblio; notes; index
 ISBN:1847947425
 hardcover £30 & ebook £14.99

The dead body of Edward Stanley Gibbons was wrapped in a carpet and taken to his nephew's flat in Oxford Street from the Savoy Hotel, where he had died in flagrante with his mistress. Gibbons is regarded as the father of philately (stamp collecting) and was the founder of the internationally famous stamp dealers that still bears his name. When he wasn't sticking in his album



the 1847 Post Office Mauritius or the 1855 Swedish Three Skilling Banco with the yellow colour error, he was collecting wives. Five of them in all. Four died young, two died from liver complaints which could have been associated with poisoning, and Gibbons had been trained as a pharmacist - I know what you're thinking, and others

have thought the same. It's a story I'd never come across before and is one of the many entertaining diversions that journalist Simon Heffer relates in this magnificent book.

Lilacs in full bloom, bosky woods, slumberous streams, the church clock stuck at ten to three, the reassuring sound of leather on willow coming from the village green, and honey for tea - did people ever wistfully look back on Britain in the thirty years before World War One as "a powerful, contented, orderly and thriving country"? This rosy-hued vision of those pre-war decades isn't what they were like at all. They were "the most socially divisive and disruptive period since the rise of Chartism in the 1830s." As anyone who has studied the political and social climate at the time of Jack the Ripper knows only too well, it was a time of extreme social unrest and scary change, when the lids were removed from innumerable cans of worms.

Simon Heffer begins this magnificent survey of the late Victorian and Edwardian years by looking at Britain as he believes it is popularly imagined, then he reveals the tensions bubbling below - Irish nationalism, terrorism, anarchists, rampant poverty, widespread prostitution, fears of human trafficking, the growing militancy of the Suffrage movement, the rise of the sensationalist press, unionisation, strikes, the birth and rise of the Labour Party, and the decline and fall of the aristocratic belief that they had a right to wealth and privilege. And the ruling class continues to live in opulence, largely oblivious to what was going on around them, not seeing the chasm opening before them.

Heffer begins in 1880 and the second administration of William Gladstone and ends on the brink of WWI in 1914. The title of the book comes from the louche world of the ruling class, perhaps in some ways typified by the scandal surrounding the homosexual brothel in Cleveland Street and the behind-the-scenes efforts of the establishment to rescue its upper-class customers from public exposure and the embarrassment of court appearances. These people were either blinkered to the changes going on around them, or, when aware of them, sought to halt their progress. I seem to recall that Sir Basil Thompson, the

one-time Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police whose reputation suffered when he was seen in Hyde Park with a prostitute's hand down his trousers (her wonderful name was Thelma de Lava; does anyone know what happened to her?), once observed that Britain was perched on the brink of revolution and that only the distraction of a major war could avert it. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand provided that distraction, and I assume there were some in power who therefore welcomed it. The War, though, was a revolution in its own way, and a far from a bloodless one, for the Britain that emerged from the conflict had changed forever.

With hindsight, of course, these decades can be seen as the rise or ascent of the "lower orders". Workers had been taking industrial action since the beginning of the century, although it was often in response to industrialisation, like the now largely forgotten Swing Riots of the 1830s protesting against agricultural mechanisation, or strikes by the tin-plate workers in the Black Country, notably Wolverhampton, where Catherine Eddowes' dad was sent to prison for a couple of months for being the ringleader of early strike, probably taking his family to London as a consequence.

But Heffer isn't wholly concerned with the big political and social issues. In this weighty, near-900 page muscle-building book, he has his eye on the small things as well, such as the beginning of the Football League, the opening of Selfridges department store, Stanley Gibbons's multiple wives and the rumour of having murdered them., and the theories of the father of finger-printing, Francis Galton, about creating a master race - he called it eugenics and among its supporters was Winston Churchill (much to his credit, G.K. Chesterton, the creator of Father Brown, was opposed to it).

Sometimes Mr Heffer relies a little too heavily on received opinion. Annie Besant's leadership of the 1887 strike by the Bryant and May's match girls' has been repeated so often that it's as accepted a part of history as the Battle of Hastings having been fought in 1066, but it so happens that I read Mr Heffer's book at the same time as I was doing some research into the match girls' strike and re-reading Louise Raw's excellent *Striking A Light* (2009). I was therefore struck more forcibly than might otherwise have been the case by Heffer's portrayal of the redoubtable Annie Besant as the leader of the strike, when one of Ms Raw's research achievements was her discovery that Besant was something of a johnny-come-lately, only taking up the match workers' cause when approached by the strikers themselves. Whilst Besant's role cannot be underestimated, it has been somewhat overestimated, and as has the role of so many of the middle-class voices

speaking on behalf of the ill-educated and inarticulate majority. But a book like this, looking at such a broad sweep of things happening, cannot be authoritative about everything.

This book covers much of the same period as Sir David Ensor's excellent *England 1870-1914* in the Oxford History of England (copies of which can be obtained for £0.01!) and its replacement *A New England? Peace and War 1886-1918* by G.R. Searle and Bobbi Searle (which I haven't read). As already indicated, it's a huge book, well-written, easy to read, and very entertaining. Simon Heffer, a journalist with a distinct leaning to the right, is perhaps a little more sympathetic and understanding of the difficulties the decaying upper classes faced when trying to recognise the problems ahead. He appeared on the BBC Television programme *Meet the Author* (www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b09918b7/meet-the-author-simon-heffer).

VICTORIOUS CENTURY: THE UNITED KINGDOM, 1800-1906 (THE PENGUIN HISTORY OF BRITAIN)

David Cannadine

London: Allen Lane, 2017

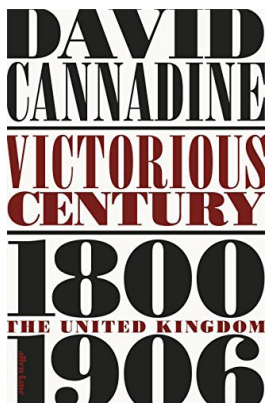
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hardcover & ebook

624pp; illus; note on further reading; index

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The Penguin History of Britain is challenging the authoritative and very well respected Oxford History of Britain and New Oxford History of Britain, and David Cannadine's contribution to the series is a solid and stolid, well-researched, and well-written (if occasionally long-winded and hefty going; there were places where he really needed to shorten his

paragraphs!) overview of a century that saw more change than could have been imagined in any preceding century. Many histories of the 19th century begin in 1815, following the end of the Napoleonic War, or in 1837, with the ascension of Queen Victoria, but Cannadine begins in 1800. It's a good place to start. On July 2 Parliament passed the Union with Ireland Act creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. It seemed the best way to prevent a rebellion in Ireland, but hardly anyone really wanted it and Irish problems would dominate much of the forthcoming century. It also allows Cannadine to briefly look at Britain's handling of the Napoleonic War (1803-14), from which Britain emerged the wealthiest

and most politically dominant nation in the world.

Cannadine concludes in 1906 with Henry Campbell-Bannerman's landslide Liberal victory, the Conservatives, under Arthur Balfour, suffering one of their worst ever defeats. As an aside, not mentioned in the book, but it was also the year of several geographic disturbances: much of Naples was destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, an earthquake devastated San Francisco, and a typhoon with a following tsunami hit Hong Kong. Thousands died.

The middle of the century was marked by The Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace. Properly called the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, Britain and its Empire occupied half the exhibit space and the events was a wonderful, flamboyantly gaudy, hugely popular celebration of Britain's greatness. Yet as the century progressed the concerns grew about how much longer Britain could hold on to its position of power. In particular, the health, strength, and education of its people was falling behind that of other European and world countries, the economic power of countries like Germany and the United States was growing, the Empire was showing early signs of crumbling - the crisis of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 perhaps heralding what was to come.

By 1880 the downhill slide was apparent and, of course, this is where Simon Heffer's *The Age of Decadence* (reviewed above) gives a broader coverage of events that was possible for Cannadine., and as the 20th century dawned it was clear that Britain's future was going to be different. The Boer War was a humiliation, the failings of the British army and especially its leaders starkly revealed.

To discuss a century in a book of just over 500 pages (sans bibliography and index) is not an easy task and the author often doesn't have the space to more than say this happened and then that and then something else, so Cannadine's book is a bit of a gallop through the decades, pausing here and there to take a closer look at the passing scenery.

Jack the Ripper is mentioned twice, and I mean 'mentioned'. Blink and you'll have missed them. But at least he features, rightly, among the events of the late 1880s that mark out that decade as one that pretty much gave birth to so much of the change that marked the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In the grand scheme of things, Jack the Ripper is a minor footnote, if even that, but he does have a historical importance and to understand that it is necessary to understand his place in the unfolding events of the late Victorian period. Sir David Cannadine has written a cracking book providing an overview of the 19th century. It's a long book, Cannadine's writing style

sometimes hindering easy reading, but overall this is not too demanding. Like Simon Heffer's book, it's expensive; buy them both and you won't have much pocket money left for riotous living, or even a curry and a pint or two, but it'll be money very well spent and with the nights drawing in and the cold beginning to bite, this is just the stuff to read indoors in the warm.

THE LEGEND OF SPRING-HEELED JACK: VICTORIAN URBAN FOLKLORE AND POPULAR CULTURES

Karl Bell

Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2017

www.boydellandbrewer.com

First Published: Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2012

softcover & ebook

262pp; biblio; index

ISBN: 978-1-78327-191-7

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It was 8:45 p.m. on 20 February 1838. It was dark, and the violent ringing of the bell outside the lonely cottage was insistent. 18-year-old Jane Alsop to the front door of her family home in what was then the small village of Old Ford in the East End. A man swathed in shadows identified himself as a policeman and said urgently,

“For God’s sake bring me a light, for we have caught Spring-heeled Jack here in the lane.” Jane quickly returned into the house and came back with a lighted candle, which the man took from her, revealing himself more clearly as he did so. His eyes were red and blazed like balls of fire, and as she stared at him with alarm he vomited blue and white flames into her face, and ripped at her dress with talon-like steel claws, scratching her skin and tearing her hair from her scalp. She screamed, loudly and continuously, struggling to free herself from his grip, until her sister rushed to her assistance and the creature bounded off into the night, leaving Jane terrified and in pain from her injuries.

This wasn’t the first appearance of Spring-heeled Jack.

In 1824, a creature bearing striking similarities to Spring-heeled Jack and called the “Hammersmith Monster”, or sometimes just the “Monster” was reported in the newspapers, and in 1828, the “Ghost”, described as “an unearthly-like being, standing about seven feet” was reported as active in Montrose. Men chased the creature, but he always escaped, his swiftness being attributed to “spring-heels”. The newspaper report attributed the “Ghost” to two local “gentlemen of distinction” who were playing a prank, apparently to win a large wager.

Newspapers almost a decade later continued to attribute sightings of Spring-heeled Jack in Amersham, Uxbridge, Iver, Greenwich and Lewisham, to an aristocrat. Jack variously appeared dressed in armour, or as a bull or bear, or mysterious cloaked figures with talons and who vomited fire. In almost every case he was able to perform prodigious leaps.

Spring-heeled Jack and Jack the Ripper have a lot in common. Jack the Ripper was a “ghost”; unseen, uncatchable, and, most frightening of all, motiveless, and his victims, drawn from the hapless outcasts of Victorian society, were left ripped open and horribly mutilated as if killed by some other-world wild animal. Jack was a new type of killer at a time when society was facing new and unsettling social changes, from unionisation of labour to women’s’ suffrage, all with a locus in the netherworld of the East End. In some respects, Jack embodied all those fears in a “human” form, the zeitgeist of the late Victorian period. It’s hardly surprising, though not as fully explored as perhaps it should be, that Jack the Ripper simultaneously existed as both a reality and a figure of folklore, quickly joining other folklorish and horror creations of the period, such as Sweeney Todd, the “London Monster”, Dracula, and, of course, Spring-heeled Jack.

Dr Bell makes it very clear in his introduction that his book does not give much attention to what Spring-heeled Jack actually was, or who he actually was. Strangely, the story of Spring-heeled Jack doesn’t appear to have been researched in any great depth, most of the reported sightings being too unspecific to be capable of much, if any, further research, but no work appears to have been done even when there seems sufficient information - as in the case of Jane Alsop. As far as I am aware, it hasn’t even been established that this lady actually existed (although I feel pretty sure that she did). Bell, instead, looks at the cultural context of Spring-heeled Jack’s appearances, arguing that Spring-heeled Jack was the zeitgeist of his particular period, encapsulating the fears and uncertainties of living in the new industrialised urban centres. As Dr Bell says, “... Spring-heeled Jack’s legend had no geographical centre, and was formulated less at the site of the ‘event’ than in the more diffused imagined community fostered by a developing nineteenth-century print culture.” In other words, unlike “Jack the Ripper,” who is focused on the East End of London, “Spring-heeled Jack” appeared across the country and was more quickly and completely assimilated into urban myth and folklore.

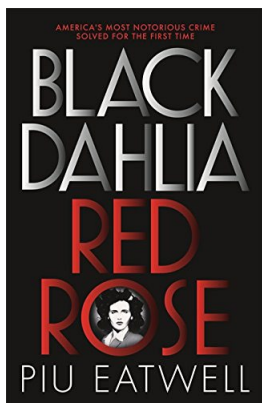
This book could prove disappointing if you want the historical facts about Spring-heeled Jack and you’ll probably have to know rather more about the legends than Dr Bell provided in the reasonably long but excellently

researched account at the beginning of the book. I must also confess that in parts it's very heavy going. It's an academic book, as twenty-three pages of bibliography indicate, and it uses the academic-speak - "Although wholly original, Spring-heeled Jack's originality was located in the gestalt derived from his opulent cultural compilation" - but it's an interesting and valuable book. Some will know of what I speak, having heard Dr Bell speak at a Jack the Ripper conference earlier this year. Having read and admired his book when it was published in hardback, I was sorry not to have been able to hear him speak but would like to express my appreciation to Robert Anderson for bringing the softcover edition to my attention in time for review.

(Also see Jacob Middleton's *Spirits of an Industrial Age: Ghost Impersonation, Spring-heeled Jack, and Victorian Society*. For a collection of press transcripts, John Matthews' *The Mystery of Spring-Heeled Jack*. An early book about Spring-heeled Jack in which an attempt was made to identify the aristocrat responsible for at least some of the scares is Peter Haining's *The Legend and Bizarre Crimes of Spring-heeled Jack* from 1977 - I bought it new, which is a very depressing thought.)

BLACK DAHLIA, RED ROSE: AMERICA'S MOST NOTORIOUS CRIME SOLVED FOR THE FIRST TIME

Piu Eatwell
 London: Coronet, 2017
 www.hodder.co.uk
 hardcover & ebook
 350pp; illus; notes; biblio; index
 ISBN: 9761473666320
 hardcover £20, ebook £9.99



As readers of *Ripperologist* surely know, people often confess to murders they did not commit. Or investigators think someone's behaviour is a bit 'off', maybe because they show too much interest in the crime, and for no other reason, and lacking any real evidence, they suddenly become possible suspects. The bigger the crime, the greater the number of people

who communicate their solutions to law enforcement or flat out confess to having done it. If it's a really major case garnering nationwide attention, then the police will receive hundreds of such communications from the public and the problem is complicated further when the killer is known to have communicated with the press or the police. When this type of case remains unsolved for years, desperate investigators will often take a closer look at some of these oddballs who are sending in their solutions

or confessions to see if anyone stands out. This is exactly what happened in the 'Black Dahlia' case - the murder of Elizabeth Short in Los Angeles in 1947. The oddball was a man named Leslie Dillon.

Piu Eatwell sets out in *Black Dahlia, Red Rose* to prove that Dillon was the murderer of Elizabeth Short, but she is hampered by the same problem that faced investigators when they arrested him nearly 70 years ago: there is zero direct evidence against him, and the circumstantial evidence is so questionable that they had to let him go. We will have to do the same.

The story of Leslie Dillon's involvement in the Black Dahlia investigation is well known to those who follow the case, but to briefly summarise: two years after the murder of Elizabeth Short, Dillon, an aspiring crime writer living in Florida, read an article in a pulp true crime magazine about the Dahlia case written by Dr Paul De River, the Los Angeles Police Department's resident sex offender expert. Dillon wrote to De River claiming to have met in a man named Jeff Connors in San Francisco whom he believed could have been Short's murderer.

During an exchange of correspondence with Dillon, De River, whose own theory was that the murderer would eventually contact him or the police (which he already had), became convinced that Connors did not exist and that Leslie Dillon was the real killer. De River then lured Dillon to Las Vegas by promising to hire him as his assistant, and from there they went to Los Angeles, where De River and a member of LAPD's 'gangster squad' held Dillon handcuffed to a radiator in a motel room and for several days interrogated him.

Dillon managed to slip a note pleading for help and an attorney out of the motel room window, which was miraculously found by a member of the press, thereby exposing the entire kidnap incident and causing embarrassment to the LAPD. So to save face with the press and the public, the LAPD had no choice but to arrest Dillon for the murder of Elizabeth Short. But within a matter of hours the real Jeff Connors was located in San Francisco, provided an alibi, and Leslie Dillon was eventually released.

De River and the 'gangster squad' detective had not involved the LAPD homicide detectives, who had charge of the investigation, and Piu Eatwell argues that this was because the latter were suspected of attempting to cover-up the involvement in the murder of Short of a nightclub owner named Mark Hansen, who knew the LAPD had ties to the mob. She then goes further and claims that Hansen had told Leslie Dillon to kill Short.

There isn't space and this isn't the place to discuss the complexities of the Black Dahlia investigation and its

many characters. Suffice it to say that part of the evidence that Eatwell uses to support the theory that Dillon was the murderer relies on statements Dillon supposedly made to De River under secret interrogation 'that only the killer would have known', and eyewitness testimony given two years after the fact. Motel owners and residents interviewed by the gangster squad after Dillon's arrest vaguely placed someone who might have looked like Dillon, and another who may have been Elizabeth Short, at a Los Angeles area motel at some point prior to her death. The exact month is uncertain. Rather remarkably these same witnesses also claim, two years later, that one of the motel rooms was so covered in blood and gore that a gruesome murder must have taken place inside of it. Why these witnesses to Elizabeth Short being at their motel, at the same time as the discovery of a very bloody room, didn't immediately contact the police is anyone's guess.

And there is a problem with the credentials of Dr De River, who was quickly fired by the LAPD and is described in most accounts as a charlatan. Eatwell doesn't address his credibility, even though his daughter, Jacque Daniel, felt compelled to write the book *The Curse of the Black Dahlia* in an attempt to redeem his character.

Eatwell also mentions that the killer apparently carved two letters into Elizabeth Short's body, one of them being a 'D' for Dillon, but she offers no relevance for the second, a 'F' or 'E'. Of all the photos I've seen of Short's corpse, I have never seen the letters she refers to, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're not there.

Leslie Dillon provided analibi with supporting witnesses that placed him in San Francisco rather than Los Angeles during the period of the Black Dahlia's disappearance and death. They may not be the most reliable witnesses, but they were apparently good enough to convince the LAPD that Dillon was innocent - an oddball, but innocent.

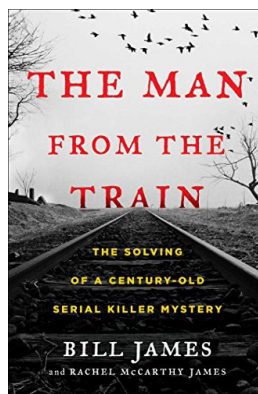
Authors who propose suspects for the murder of the Black Dahlia all seem to have to put some of the facts and a pinch of plausibility aside in order to attempt to convince their readers that they have solved the case. Eatwell's book is recommended if you would like a course on the Leslie Dillon suspect theory, which is nothing new as he was a contemporary suspect, but to this reviewer, *Black Dahlia, Red Rose* advances the case no further than any of the many other Black Dahlia suspect books. So, expect to see additional 'Black Dahlia Solved' books, some perhaps more convincing than Eatwell's, in the years to come.

Review by Jonathan Menges

THE MAN FROM THE TRAIN

Bill James and Rachel McCarthy James
London: Simon & Schuster, 2017

www.simonandschuster.co.uk
hardcover and ebook
480pp;
ISBN: 978-1476796253
hardcover £22, ebook £9.99



The father-daughter team of Bill James and Rachel McCarthy James set out to research every incident in which an axe-wielding maniac in the United States between the years 1898 and 1912 wiped out an entire family. It might surprise you to know that they found dozens of such cases totalling well over 100 victims. Forty of them are chronicled in their new book, *The Man From the Train*, a page-turner and probably the best true crime book I've read this year.

The years falling between the infamous American crime epochs of Old West outlaws in the 1880s and the explosion of prohibition gangsters and depression era bank robbers of the 1920s and 30s could be considered the Age of the Axe Murderer. And on the axe murdering timeline about a third of the way between the 1892 slayings of Andrew and Abby Borden in Fall River, Massachusetts and the serial killing spree by the New Orleans Axeman in 1918 and 1919, lies an incident in the small town of Villisca, Iowa. Second only to the Lizzie Borden case, the murder in Villisca of the Moore family and their two young female houseguests, Ina and Lena Stillinger, is the most well-known single case of unsolved axe murder in American history. It's the United States' Hinertkaifeck. While the James's are not the first to suggest that the Villisca axe murders could be linked to other similar murders during the same time period, their treatment is the most thorough I've read to date.

In looking at the Villisca case and finding other, nearly identical murders in the same geographical region, all linked by train tracks, a pattern began to emerge to the authors. They noticed the same signature and modus operandi, concepts unknown to the police in the early years of the 20th century, being repeated time and time again. Some, but not all, of the signature and M.O. that the authors use to connect these dozens of crimes are:

1. The killer targeted homes within a short walk from the train tracks just outside of small towns where there was no local police force.
2. He waited until the early morning hours just after midnight to strike, often hiding in a barn.
3. The families he picked to kill more time than not had a prepubescent female as one of its members.

4. He would borrow an axe either from the house itself or from a neighbouring house and leave the axe behind after washing it clean of blood.

5. The axe was often left next to the young girl victim.

6. He would only use the blunt end of the axe, never the sharp end.

7. He would pull the curtains or use other material to cover the windows and lock all of the doors, or jamb them shut, prior to leaving.

8. He would find an oil lamp, remove its chimney, and place it in some conspicuous place inside the crime scene (a calling card that I found very interesting).

9. He would cover up the heads of all of his victims.

10. He would murder everyone while they slept and leave them in their beds, except the young girl, whom he would often move and leave posed.

11. He would never commit robbery.

12. He would leave the house through a back window, return to the train track (in some cases bloodhounds traced his movements back to the train) and strike in another town after a routine 'cooling-off' period and like-distance away from his prior attack.

The sheer repetition of the above factors in case after case drill into the reader a sense that the authors really are on to something, and as the list axe murders grows longer they are able to confidently show that their killer, dubbed the 'man from the train', operated in different parts of the United States seasonally. That he began his spree along the eastern seaboard moving north to south and back north again, depending on the time of the year, and then shifted his operations along an east to west route, all locations being connected by the train.

This book covers so many cases, not all of which the authors pin on their 'man from the train', and they explain to the reader why a particular mass murder is not the work of their guy. If an innocent person was accused of one of the murders, which was often the case (and did happen in the Villisca murders) the authors do their best to defend the person's innocence. Many of the murders involved white family victims in Southern locales where African-Americans resided close by working as sharecroppers. So there are a handful of cases involving lynch mobs murdering innocent black men. These horrific 'mob justice' crimes are also discussed in detail. A very disturbing window into Jim Crow America.

Bill and Rachel McCarthy James eventually name their 'man from the train', but not before taking the reader on their grizzly investigation, and for me that was just fine. Anyone else would have produced such a gut-wrenchingly violent and depressing story that one couldn't possibly

want to read it, but these authors have written a lively story that is lightened by some humor and come across as so likeable, their research so exhaustive and convincing, that *The Man From the Train* is a great addition to anyone's library of True Crime.

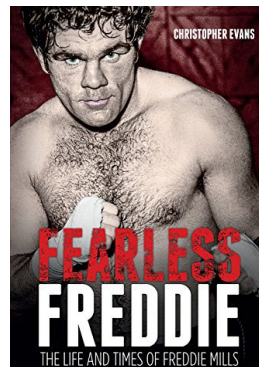
Review by Jonathan Menges

**FEARLESS FREDDIE:
THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FREDDIE MILLS**

Chris Evans
Worthing, Sussex: Pitch Publishing Ltd, 2017
www.pitchpublishing.co.uk
hardcover & ebook
256pp; illus (some graphic)
ISBN:9781785312823
hardback £17.99, ebook £9.99

**THE SECRET LIFE OF FREDDIE MILLS:
NATIONAL HERO. BOXING CHAMPION.
SERIAL KILLER.**

Michael Litchfield
London: John Blake, 2017
www.johnblakbooks.com
softcover & ebook
262pp; illus
ISBN:9781786064455
softcover £7.99, ebook £4.99



the secret life of
**FREDDIE
MILLS**
NATIONAL HERO
BOXING CHAMPION
SERIAL KILLER



In 1948 Freddie Mills won the world light heavyweight boxing championship and he held the title until 1950. He belonged to the slugger school of boxing, hitting hard, taking punishment, and making no attempt at finesse, but winning the championship at a time when Britain had few sporting champions brightened the post-war gloom and won the heart of the nation. A likeable character, Mills found a new career as a television celebrity and walk-on parts in movies, but on 24 July 1965, he was found shot dead in the back seat of his car, a rifle he'd borrowed from a friend was between his knees. Fifty years later it's probable that you have never heard of Freddie

Mills, but if you have, it's likely to be as a suspected serial killer.

Freddie Mills was a tough guy. He'd begun his boxing career taking on all-comers in a fairground boxing booth. As a professional boxer he took punishment. It seemed

inconceivable that he could have killed himself, and it was very soon suggested that the angle of the bullet was inconsistent with suicide and that shooting himself in the right eye seemed an unlikely place for a suicide to choose. Rumours also began to circulate that Mills was in debt to gangsters, that the Krays planned to kill him, that he was being pressurised by Chinese Triad members moving in on his nightclub business, or that he was about to be exposed for having homosexual relationships with Reggie Kray and a popular singer named Michael Holliday. But the most persistent rumour is that he was suspected of being "Jack the Stripper", the serial killer responsible for the murder of at least eight prostitutes in 1964-5.

The idea that Mills was the "Stripper" is categorically dismissed by almost everyone who has researched the case. Numerous writers had advanced theories about the death of Freddie Mills. In *Fighters* (2004), James Morton alleges that Mills' business partner, Andy Ho, wanted Mills out of the club and had approached the Krays. Ronnie spoke to a friend, hardman Robert "Battles" Rozzi, who had a friendly word with Mills. Five days later Mills was dead. Ronnie Kray apparently told Rozzi that Mills' death was nothing to do with him, and Rozzi believed him. Morton believes that the threat from the Krays added to marital worries, debilitating headaches, other problems caused by the punishment he'd taken in the ring, and depression had combined to push Mills over the edge.

Michael Litchfield's *The Secret Life of Freddie Mills* is pretty much an account of the Stripper murders, concluding that Mills was the murderer. In reaching this conclusion he's pretty much out there on his own. According to Nipper Read, "I said then as I do now, with as much force as I can, that Freddie Mills was never, in any way, involved in this [The Stripper] investigation."

Dick Kirby, in his account of the Stripper murders, *Laid Bare*, is equally emphatic, "There is absolutely nothing, not one shred of evidence, to connect Mills with any of the murders and he was never considered a suspect by any of the enquiry team." And Robin Jarossi, in his recent *The Hunt for the 60s Ripper* (reviewed in *Ripperologist* 157), writes of Mills, "As for evidence of involvement in the Nudes Murders, even circumstantial, there is not a jot. the assertion is so devoid of facts it cannot even qualify as a conspiracy theory."

As for Mills' death, Litchfield claims that Mills wanted to die but didn't have the bottle to do it himself, so he asked Ron and Reg Kray, visitors to his nightclub, to find someone who'd do the job for him and he paid them £500. They gave the job to twenty-four-year-old James Moody, who would come to a sticky end on 1 June 1993 when he was gunned down by an unknown assailant in a pub in

Hackney. After the death of Moody - who was the subject of a book by Wensley Clarkson, *Moody: The Life and Crimes of Britain's Most Notorious Hitman* (2004), now something of a collectors' item - there was a lot of speculation linking him to a number of unsolved murders, but none, as far as I know, suggested that he'd killed Freddie Mills. Moody was an underworld "face", but very little is known about him, so he's a good choice if you're looking for someone on whom to hang a murder. As Frankie Fraser said, "Once he was dead he was blamed for just about anything which had happened up and down the country that hadn't been cleared up."

Overall, Litchfield's account, full of first-hand conversations that took place decades ago and inside knowledge, didn't persuade me. The book had no notes, no sources, no bibliography, and most frustratingly, no index, and it didn't read like a serious account. To be honest, I found it cheap tabloid gossipy tackiness.

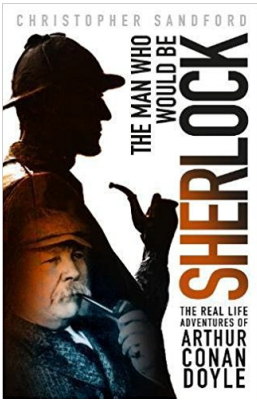
Christopher Evans' far superior book has some graphic photographs of Mills' body but is otherwise almost exclusively about Mills' boxing career from his days as a fairground boxer to his suicide. He dismisses all the rumours, briefly, perhaps too briefly, including what appears to be the most probable explanation that the years of punishment Mills had taken in the ring, coupled with depression over some failed business ventures, were eventually too much.

Freddie Mills' boxing career was over before I was born. He was someone I saw on television or who turned up in the occasional movie - I remember him best in *Carry on Constable* - and in those days when we had just two channels, people on TV were special. How he died, suicide or murder, probably doesn't matter anymore, just the memory of him winning that belt - you can watch it on youtube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIA3n19z2Hc

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE SHERLOCK: THE REAL LIFE ADVENTURES OF ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Christopher Sandford
Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2017
www.thehistorypress.co.uk
hardcover & ebook
316pp; illus; sources & notes; biblio; index
ISBN:978 0 7509 6592 7
hardcover £20 & ebook £8.54

Elizabeth Davy had a short and unhappy life. She was approaching her sixteenth birthday when she began a relationship with an older man and became pregnant. She celebrated her birthday and the couple speedily got married, Elizabeth giving birth to her baby two months later. From the beginning of her married life,



Elizabeth suffered violence at the hands of her husband, and after one sadistic thrashing she even complained to the police, who simply cautioned the husband and dismissed the case. Elizabeth's husband also repeatedly threatened to poison Elizabeth, and one day in January 1878, having taken out a £1,000 insurance policy on her life, that's exactly what he

did. His name was Eugene Chantrelle and he was teaching French at a private school in Edinburgh called Newington Academy. He was hanged at the city's Calton Prison on 31 May 1878.

Elizabeth's premature death was a terrible tragedy, but indirectly gave us two of literature's most enduring characters. Eugene Chantrelle is said by many to have been the origin for Mr Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Apparently, Stevenson knew Chantrelle, who was suspected of having committed other murders, and attended every day of his trial. The other character is Sherlock Holmes. The link is tenuous, the lonely, seven-year-old Arthur Conan Doyle was among Chantrelle's pupils at Newington Academy, and whilst nothing about Chantrelle is recognisable in the personality of Holmes, Christopher Sandford points out that the 'cruelly abused young woman was the starting point for many Sherlock Holmes' adventures.' In fact, in *The Man Who Would Be Sherlock*, Sandford draws attention to the similarities between Chantrelle's crime and the poisonings solved by Holmes in his first literary excursion, *A Study In Scarlet*.

Perhaps more importantly, Sandford notes, 'Although Conan Doyle plays only a walk-on part in the Chantrelle affair, it sets the scene for several of his later criminal investigations,' because, as we know, Doyle did not confine himself to detective work in the literary sphere, he undertook some investigations of his own, notably the cases of George Edalji and Oscar Slater, both of which reveal Doyle as a very determined man who could not often be deterred from a course of action once he'd decided on it. The point of all this is that it is generally accepted that Dr Joseph Bell was the foundation upon which Conan Doyle based the deductive abilities of Sherlock Holmes, but according to Sandford, Dr Bell wrote to Doyle saying, "You are yourself Sherlock Holmes and well you know it." Sandford goes on to lend weight to this assertion by referring a great many crimes that Doyle investigated, in many cases actually solving them.

Doyle's own investigations seem to have left him with a pretty low opinion of the police, as the character of the "lean, ferret-like man, furtive and sly-looking", Inspector G Lestrade of Scotland Yard, "the best of a bad lot" (although Inspector Tobias Gregson, the best known of only a handful of policemen to feature in the Holmes canon, was described as "the smartest of the Scotland Yarders"), which probably stems from the disgraceful police incompetence he unearthed when reviewing the case against Adolph Beck (twice mistaken for another man and convicted and imprisoned for thefts he did not commit).

Sandford's book looks to be solidly researched and more revealing about aspects of Conan Doyle's life than the couple of other biographies of Doyle's life I've read, and Doyle walks out of Sandford's pages as a rather likeable man (although I do find it difficult to balance this likeability with the quite unlikable person portrayed in *The Strange Case of Dr Doyle: A Journey into Madness and Mayhem* by Daniel and Eugene Friedman. They, of course, argue that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was Jack the Ripper, a theory which Sandford says "belongs in fairyland" (although Sandford doesn't name the Friedmans or their book, so he may not have specifically been referring to their theory and evidence for it).

One thing that does need to be mentioned, Sandford says that in November 1888, Dr Joseph Bell and Conan Doyle reviewed such evidence as there was in the Jack the Ripper case, and each wrote down on a sheet of notepaper the name of the man they thought was the killer. Sometime later the envelope in which the papers had been placed was opened. Both men had written down the same name – James Kenneth Stephen. There are a few stories about Doyle's thoughts about the Ripper and some can be hard to pin down or lack corroboration, such as Nigel Morland's claim that Doyle had told him Jack was someone 'somewhere in the upper stratum'. I wrote to Mr Sandford and asked what his source was for the story, and he very kindly replied. He wasn't sure of his source, but thought it was Diane Madsen's *The Conan Doyle Notes: The Secret of Jack the Ripper*, and in an afterword to that novel Madsen does indeed claim the Bell story is factual. As far as I know, however, the story originates in a much less embellished form with Irving Wallace's *The Fabulous Originals* (1955) – Wallace's version mentions 'a friend' rather than Doyle by name, and he doesn't say who the suspect was. It's worrying when one stumbles across unsourced stories like this that other anecdotes are similarly unfounded, but I appreciated Mr Sandford's reply and overall I found *The Man Who Would Be Sherlock* entertaining and at times compulsive reading.

FATAL EVIDENCE: PROFESSOR ALFRED SWAINE TAYLOR & THE DAWN OF FORENSIC SCIENCE

Helen Barrell

Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword History, 2017

www.pen-and-sword.co.uk

helenbarrell.co.uk

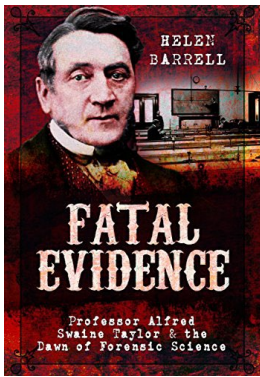
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231pp; illus; biblio; notes; index

ISBN:1473883415

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The judge, Sir Frederick Pollock, who was 76-years-old, settled into his seat at the Old Bailey and prepared to preside over the trial of an insignificant little man in his 50s named Dr Thomas Smethurst. The date was 15 August 1859, and Dr Smethurst stood accused of having murdered his young wife, Isabella, at their home

in Richmond. She had become seriously ill and a doctor suspected that she was being poisoned, and Smethurst was the chief suspect. He was arrested following her death and samples of her vomit and stools were sent for examination by Professor Alfred Swaine Taylor (1806-1880) at Guy's Hospital. He detected traces of arsenic in Isabella's vomit and testified to that effect in court, with the result that Dr Smethurst was found guilty and sentenced to death.

But Dr Taylor was wrong.

Taylor, called by some "the father of forensic science", had inadvertently introduced arsenic in the test sample by employing an arsenic-tainted chemical reagent. He was man enough to admit to his error, but his career and reputation never really recovered. Worse, trust in forensic science was almost destroyed and it took over half a century for public confidence to be restored. This was a great shame, both for forensic science and Professor Taylor, whose reputation as one of the leading toxicologists of his day was otherwise without a blemish and who had done much to assist the progress of forensic medicine, authoring the acclaimed *Manual of Medical Jurisprudence*.

The Smethurst case was a cause celebre in its day but is almost forgotten today, although I am pleased to say that it was included in the Notable British Trials (in 1931) and has an entry in *The A-Z of Victorian Crime*. There's also a book, *Smethurst's Luck* (2013). Now, Helen Barrell has written a biography of Professor Alfred Swaine Taylor, and very good it is too.

Taylor is probably best remembered for the Smethurst

case, to which Barrell devotes ten page, but he was also famous for his participation in numerous other trials, notably that of William Palmer, The Rugeley Poisoner. Such was his fame that Charles Dickens visited his laboratory, and he was the inspiration for R Austin Freeman's fictional forensic detective Dr Thorndyke (whose complete works are available as an ebook in Delphi Classics for £2).

Helen Barrell combines a biography of Alfred Swaine Taylor with a history of the early years of forensics in a thoroughly readable and informative book.

Excellent stuff.

A FORENSIC FORUM

Robin Odell

London: Mango Books, 2017

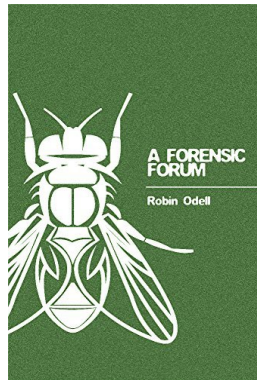
www.mangobooks.co.uk

hardcover

191pp; illus; biblio; index

ISBN:1911273116

£15.00



Once upon a time, policemen did not describe their work in any detail. Even as recently as the 1940s and 50s, when we still had 'super-star' detectives like Robert Fabian, there was a mystique about police work. It was reasonably believed that if criminals knew the techniques the police used to catch them, such as identifying them from

their fingerprints, the criminals would take precautions to defeat detection, such as wearing gloves. This inclination towards secrecy, which survives to this day, is why early police autobiographies are generally uninformative and often dull and repetitive recitations of the various criminals brought to justice, with very little description of precisely how this was achieved.

It was a hopeless dream. People were and are fascinated by detective work and it was inevitable that every detail of how policemen go about doing what they do would be eventually be portrayed in every medium possible, albeit not necessarily very accurately. The television series *CSI* popularised forensics, but the *CSI* team arriving at the crime scene in their day clothes was a far cry from the reality of investigators clad from head to foot in disposable jump-suits, hats, and gloves, to prevent contaminating the crime scene. Nevertheless, *CSI* probably deterred some criminals from committing crimes by showing what the boffins can do with epithelials and such like.

Forensics is the "what dun it" rather than the "who dun it" side of criminal investigation and *A Forensic Forum*

is a short, easily understandable, and very entertaining history, along with thumbnail biographies of its pioneers. Robin Odell, perhaps best known as the author of *Jack the Ripper in Fact and Fiction*, one of the four most important Ripper books published up to the 1980s, has written extensively about true crime and particularly forensics, which has been an interest since he trained as a laboratory technician. Normally, a book by Robin Odell would be something to shout about, but this little volume slipped under my radar. It shouldn't have done. It merits a little louder shouting than usual.

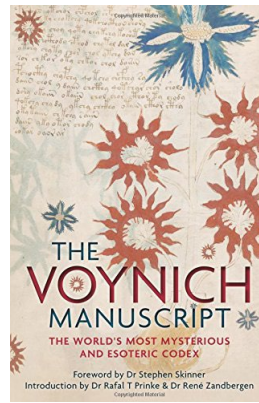
This is a smashing little volume. Obviously well-written and entertaining – name something written by Robin Odell that isn't! - it's in two parts, each occupying about half of the book. The first part is a collection of eight essays about different aspects of forensics: medicine, chemistry, ballistics, odontology, entomology, anthropology, botany, and psychiatry. The second part consists of 100 very useful thumbnail biographies of leading figures in the history of forensics. And whilst it's the content that matters, the design of this book is also excellent: it is small, the dimensions are about the same as a paperback novel, and instead of having a dust jacket, it has dark green boards on which is printed in white the book details and a huge picture of a blow-fly. This gives the book the look and feel of a text-book, which is pretty much what it is.

When I began reading this book I wrote on my notepad, 'this book is written by Robin Odell, which is probably the only justification one needs for buying it.' I don't really see any reason to alter that.

THE VOYNICH MANUSCRIPT: THE WORLD'S MOST MYSTERIOUS AND ESOTERIC CODEX

Foreword by Dr Stephen Skinner
Introduction by Dr Rafal T Prinke & Dr Rene Zandbergen
London: Watkins Publishing, 2017
www.watkinsmedia.org
www.voynich.nu
hardcover
288pp; illus in colour throughout; index
ISBN:1786780771
£19.99

On 20 September 1870, the troops of King Victor Emmanuel II entered Rome in the final stages of the unification of Italy. Among the early acts of the new Italian government was the confiscation of the library of the Collegio Romano (Roman College). However, many of its most prized manuscripts and books were taken by the faculty members, including Petrus Beckx, the rector of the university, into whose possession a mysterious manuscript passed. It was old, illustrated, and written in a language nobody could understand. c.1912 the Collegio



Romano needed to raise money and discreetly sold some of its holdings and a rare book dealer named Wilfrid Voynich acquired 30 manuscripts, including the unreadable book.

Wilfrid Voynich, whose real name was Michal Habdank-Wojnicz and who belonged to a noble Polish family, had been forced to flee Eastern Europe,

arriving at London docks aboard a fruit boat on 5 October 1890. He had nothing but an introduction to Stepniak, the revolutionary who had assassinated the head of the Russian secret police in St Petersburg in 1878, and Voynich was active in the revolutionary movement until Stepniak was killed by a train in Chiswick in 1895. It was then that Voynich devoted himself to dealing in rare books, which he did very successfully until his death on 19 March 1930.

The strange manuscript now generally known as the Voynich Manuscript passed to his wife, Ethel, who in turn bequeathed it to a friend, Ann Mill. She, in turn, sold it in 1961 to Hans P Kraus, another rare book dealer, who bought the manuscript for \$24,500 and spent the rest of his life trying to sell it for as much as \$160,000. He didn't find a buyer and in 1968 he donated it to the Beinecke Rare Book and MS Library at Yale University (beinecke.library.yale.edu), where it is kept safe and is catalogued as MS 408.

The history of this mysterious book before it passed into Voynich's hands is patchy. It is written on medium quality calf skin and originally it probably had wooden covers, but at some point these had been replaced by covers of goat's skin. Scientific testing shows that it was written between 1404 and 1438. The ink used for the drawings and text was also of medium quality. The language used is completely unknown and has defied all attempts to decipher it. In addition, there are a few words written in Latin scattered throughout the ms, but it is not known whether they were part of the original text or added later. There was also a name, 'Jacob à Tepenece', but that is now unreadable, who lived from 1575 until 1622 and was the personal doctor to the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf II. One story is that Rudolf owned the ms before Tepenece, although the evidence for this is slight.

It's not until we get to a Prague alchemist named Georg Baresch that we are on anything like a firm footing. In 1639, he wrote to a Jesuit scholar named Athanasius Kircher for assistance in deciphering the book, and Baresch's letter is the first known independent reference to the ms. From Baresch the manuscript went to a friend, Jan Marek Marci,

and on 19 August 1665, Marci sent the book to Kircher, a letter that accompanied the book and bearing that date being preserved with the ms. It is this letter that ascribed one-time ownership to Rudolf II. Marci had been told this by a Dr Raphael, a tutor of the King of Bohemia, Ferdinand III, who believed the author to be Roger Bacon (who lived from c.1220-c.1292, too early to have had anything to do with the Voynich manuscript).

What happened to the manuscript between being sent to Kircher and passing into the ownership of the Collegio Romano is unknown.

And there you have it: a manuscript dating from the first quarter of the 1400s, apparently about science as it was understood at the time, containing goodness knows what 'secret' knowledge, and we can't read a word of it.

This book reproduces in full colour every page of the manuscript, which is as lovely to look at as it is intriguing, but I'm afraid the quality isn't good enough to look at each page in the sort of detail you'd probably like to. It may be that this Watkins were pre-empted by Yale University Press's publication last November of a fully authorised edition using a new set of photographs. Nevertheless, for less than £20, this is a good introduction.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE PRINCES IN THE TOWER: MURDER, MYSTERY AND MYTH

Matthew Lewis

Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2017

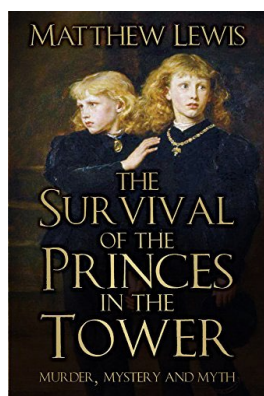
www.thehistorypress.co.uk

hardcover & ebook

256pp; illus in colour; biblio; index

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Reading a book at the end of a day's labours was not something a bricklayer often did. But that's what the chief bricklayer in the employ of Sir Thomas Moyle did, and it piqued Sir Thomas's curiosity to such an extent that one day he plucked the book from the workman's hands. He looked at the book in astonishment. The

bricklayer, who was working on Sir Thomas's new home, Eastwell Place, in Kent, was not only reading a book, but the book was in Latin, suggesting that the bricklayer had received the sort of education that was not customary among tradesmen. Sir Thomas asked the man how he'd come by his learning, and the man told him an astonishing story.

One of the classic historical mysteries is the fate of the Princes in the Tower. King Edward IV had two sons, Edward and Richard, who were 12 and 9 years old when their father died in 1483. Their care and welfare had been entrusted to their uncle, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who housed them in comfortable apartments in the Tower of London, and preparations of sorts were made for Edward's coronation. But Richard seized the throne for himself, becoming the reviled, crookbacked villain Richard III of Shakespeare's play notoriety. The young princes were never seen again, their fate has never been resolved, and it is commonly assumed that they were murdered on Richard's orders, although other candidates have been suggested, among them Henry VII and Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham. But even at the time of their disappearance it was rumoured that they were not dead, and two young men, Lambert Simnell in 1487 and Perkin Warbeck in 1491, even claimed to be Richard, the younger of the two boys.

Most books about the Princes in the Tower assume that the young boys were murdered and debate who gave the order, but Matthew Lewis persuasively argues that no order was given. It seems that nobody had a compelling reason to kill the princes and nobody made an effort to profit from pointing a finger of guilt or claiming responsibility. That the evidence doesn't really fit anyone is the rock from which Matthew Lewis proceeds to examine the various survival theories and possibilities, and it to Lewis' credit that he follows where the evidence leads, keeping speculation to a minimum and allowing himself to do so only when the absence or the ambiguity of the sources leaves little choice.

That bricklayer's story? Well, he claimed that when a youngster he'd been summoned into the presence of King Richard III, who revealed that the lad was his son. His existence was a secret, but depending on the outcome of a forthcoming battle (Bosworth), he would either become King of England or he would have to live forever in obscurity.

The story seems highly improbable, but the bricklayer's tale may have been misunderstood or become corrupted with re-telling, and he may not have been the son of Richard III but the young Prince Richard, one of the Princes in the Tower. It's just one of the possibilities Lewis examines in this engagingly-written and highly recommended book.

All reviews by Paul Begg except "Mob Town", "Black Dahlia, Red Rose" and "Man From The Train".

Fiction Reviews

By DAVID GREEN

Included in this issue:

Jill, Whitechapel Nights, Jack the Ripper: Live and Uncut and more

JILL

N. Joy

2017

Kindle Edition

ISBN 978-1-9997358-0-7

£4.49



Nickie Joy's debut novel asks the question: What if Jack the Ripper was a Jill? Her book is loosely based on the life of Mary Pearcey, although she appears not to have read Sarah Beth Hopton's recently-published biography of Pearcey. As a result, *Jill* is full of myths, gossip, and unsupported notions, but as a piece of fiction, as a work of

literary imagination, Nickie Joy has produced something ferociously nasty and very entertaining.

It follows Mary from her birth in Kent to her childhood home in Maroon Street in Mile End to her first job as a scullery maid at Kenwood House in Hampstead. The realities of Victorian domestic and urban life are richly portrayed, and the author captures well the development of Mary's macabre and amoral personality. She becomes pregnant by a relative of the 4th Earl of Mansfield, and is taken to the East End for an abortion. The doctor probes her 'with a bony index finger curling like a worm that has been decapitated'. The operation is botched, leaving Mary unable to have children.

The abortion is described in grim, maniacal detail – very much a warning of things to come. Forced to leave Kenwood House and find work in a textile mill, Mary eventually makes the acquaintance of a medical student named William Pearcey, whose family owns a butcher's shop. Together, Mary and William begin luring drunken men back to the shop, where they are suffocated before being eviscerated and chopped up. These 'butcher shop

dissections' as they are called go on for page after page after page in sickening, repulsive detail. The autumn of 1888 is fast approaching: Mary has made friends with the ill-fated Hogg family, and she is about to venture out into the streets of Whitechapel as a midwife-disguised killing machine...

In places, the stench of death and atrocity can be overpowering. The violence is relentless, the depravity all-pervasive. Yet it is a mark of her gifts as an author that Nickie Joy's novel remains engaging and thrilling, forcing you to confront the nature of human evil even as you want to turn away in disgust.

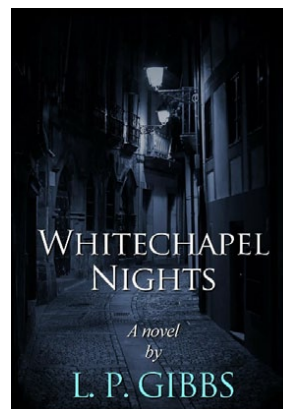
WHITECHAPEL NIGHTS

L.P. Gibbs

PublishNation, 2017

Kindle Edition, 167pp

£0.99



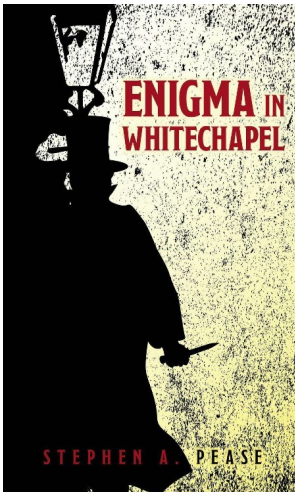
To make ends meet, Thomas and Florrie Hibbert from South Tottenham rent out their spare room to Gordon Swift, a brewery agent from Liverpool. Swift, who is evasive about his business in London, stays out all night, returning to his lodgings in the small hours carrying his black bag. It is 1888 and Swift's arrival at the Hibbert residence coincides with the first murders in the Whitechapel series.

This scenario comes straight out of *The Lodger* by Marie Belloc Lowndes, and the two books share other similarities – they are both studies of dread and suspicion; they both modulate terror through the lens of female intuition. *Whitechapel Nights* is complicated, though, by a murder in 1886 in the Rue des Jardins in Paris, which opens and closes the novel and frames the action in London. Are all

these murders connected? Is the same man responsible? As the story develops, we gradually come to realise that innocence and guilt are shifting categories, and that people are never quite who you think they are, their actions forever open to re-interpretation and contextualisation. This short novel begins as a straightforward crime story but ends up investigating the stability of reality and the slipperiness of life itself with its freight of lies and half-truths, bluffs and subterfuges. A smart work, written with verve and feeling.

ENIGMA IN WHITECHAPEL

Stephen A Pease
FriesenBooks, 2017
Kindle Edition, 167pp
£2.99



Stephen Pease is a former detective constable with thirty-four years service in the Toronto Police. In his retirement, while researching his family history, he discovered that his ancestors lived in Tower Hamlets during the time of the Jack the Ripper murders. From these materials he has crafted his first novel, an historical crime adventure story which transplants the

terrors of the East End to the fresh air and wide open spaces of Canada.

It is 1890. Dockyard worker Henry Bruce and his family eke out a modest living in Stepney. Henry's single vice is betting on the dogs. Soon he finds himself in debt to a band of extortionist loan sharks known as the Tower Gang. Their most frightening member is Leather Gloves aka Tony Drummond aka (we learn) Jack the Ripper. When Henry's efforts to repay the debt are met with menaces, he decides to uproot the family and flee to Toronto. His last action in England is to tip off Melville Macnaghten about the identity of Jack the Ripper, resulting in the break-up of the Tower Gang and the arrest of Leather Gloves.

The author seems almost relieved when his characters finally step ashore in Nova Scotia. The landscapes have a clearer, sharper focus and somehow the writing seems more relaxed and assured.

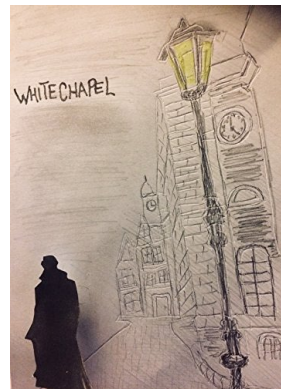
Unfortunately for Henry, the Tower Gang are hot on his trail. Not only is Leather Gloves in pursuit, but at least two other former Tower Gang members are in on the chase – namely, the vicious Magumba brothers from Africa (themselves Jack the Ripper suspects) who practise

voodoo and ritual murder.

In essence, what we have here is a familiar and perhaps rather contrived pursuit novel. It's capably done, with several twists and turns, but it can take years to hone the craft of writing credible suspense/thriller fiction, and Stephen Pease is just starting out. The details of the Ripper murders are slightly scrambled by the author, and you wonder at the inability of the Toronto police to apprehend the distinctive Magumba brothers. Still, this is an enjoyable story, well worth a look.

WHITECHAPEL

Michelle Matthews-Means
2017
Kindle Edition, 44pp
£2.99



Walter Sickert enters Seweryn Kłosowski's barber shop on Cable Street. In return for a free haircut, he offers to paint Kłosowski a grotesque picture. "I have a fascination for morbidity," says the artist. "Murder seems to be my forte." Shortly afterwards he calls at Cable Street with his easel and brushes and starts

painting Kłosowski standing in front of the window in his room above the shop. The result is a study in shadows and *contre-jour* lighting set against dark reddened walls – *Jack the Ripper's Bedroom*.

Alias Ludwig Schloski. A wife in Poland. A trunk with knives. A lady jar containing strips of thigh skin cut from Mary Jane Kelly – the myths and the untruths about George Chapman never cease. Michelle Matthews-Means presents a sort of street view of several East London characters – Joe Barnett, Aaron Kosminski, Inspector Abberline, Walter Sickert and Jack the Ripper – who gather around George Chapman and his barbershop. Written as a prose poem in run-on couplets, it captures something of the cheerless glamour of Sickert's Camden Town murder paintings, while delving into the mind of Kłosowski-the-Ripper.

HIM

Ernie Lee
Aim-Hi Publishing, 2017
Kindle Edition, 457pp
£3.80

The Servant Girl Annihilator is the name sometimes given to the serial killer who committed eight unsolved murders in the city of Austin, Texas, between 1884 and 1885. One of the suspects was a Malay cook known as



Maurice, who left Austin shortly after the last murder; three years later, he turned up in London just as the Jack the Ripper murders were beginning...

Ernie Lee, an award-winning author and poet from Texas, has written a thrilling novel about the Malay cook suspect. It's a picaresque work that promises marvels and horrors and delivers them

in abundance. It's easily one of the best Ripper novels of the last few years.

It turns out that Maurice is not Malay at all; he belongs to the Moken people, a nomadic, seafaring race dwelling off the west coast of Burma. Maurice is portrayed as the privileged son of a spice merchant, living in a grand house and waited on by servants, who learns to speak English from a British governess. His best friend – his only friend – is Mawken, an incredibly secretive and mysterious feral boy who lives in a makeshift camp in the forest surrounding Maurice's home. Maurice hopes for a respectable career in trade and commerce; Mawken is adept at trapping and slaughtering muntjacs for food. In time, Maurice allows Mawken to share his bed.

The terms of this novel are set in the traumatic childhood experiences of the two boys. When pirates invade King's Island and slay both Maurice and Mawken's parents, the youths flee the island and make their way by ferryboat across the bay to Mergui. Thus begins a series of exciting, colourful, dramatic adventures as the boys grow to manhood and make their way in the world. They board a triple-masted schooner sailing out of Rangoon for New Orleans, but a storm forces them into the Gulf of Mexico where they are shipwrecked off the coast of Texas near Galveston. Across the low, swampy marshland lies Austin, with its bars, gambling halls, and servant girls...

Mawken keeps out of sight for long periods during the story, but he is always present as a background influence, acting as Maurice's protector, saviour, and avenger. It won't spoil your enjoyment of the story to know that Maurice isn't the Austin Axe Murderer or the Whitechapel Ripper. Mawken is the culprit, of course, with his love of kitchen knives, hatchets and axes.

Him is an intelligent novel about friendship and loyalty, jealousy, hate and sexual love, and the ties that bind people together. Ernie Lee has woven together adventure, tragedy, history and myth, to create an intensely powerful work of fiction. The novel is full of danger and excitement in faraway exotic locations, and riddled with dark

supernatural forces from Southeast Asian folk mythology – the Oily Man, the Pontianak, the vampiric Pananggalan. Ernie Lee brings a poet's sensitivity to acts of the most appalling cruelty across three continents. A wonderful book, highly recommended.

HUNT THE RIPPER

Lexy Timms
2017
Kindle Edition, 268pp
£2.43



Last issue I raved about *Track the Ripper*, the first volume in Lexy Timms's trilogy of Ripper-themed paranormal murder mystery novels (the RIP series). I've now found time to read the second volume, *Hunt the Ripper*, and I am going to rave again.

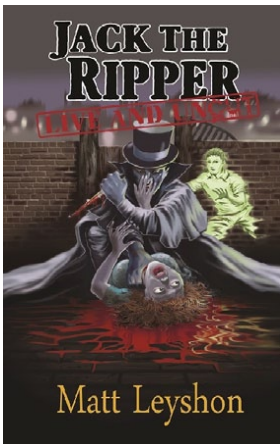
It's 30 September 2017. We're back in Lexy Timms's off-kilter alternate East Edge. Chief Inspector Frank Abberline has just been made lead investigator in the Ripper enquiry, but he feels powerless and frightened. He's witnessed terrible scenes in a brothel as a creature half way between a man and a beast gnawed off its own morphing hand/paw to evade capture. The Double Event is looming, the denizens of Whitechurch are agitating for police action, and in a basement morgue the sinister Dr Llewellyn feeds on the blood of his autopsy patients.

Supernatural entities, wolfmen, the burgundy and gold wagons of a freak circus rolling into town, the misshapen Rhinoceros Man, a virus called Green Stare that turns the eyes a sickly verdigris before blinding the patients completely, and Jack the Ripper tearing and clawing his way through the city... Lexy Timms has created a whole universe of pain and terror, populated by dark monsters out of nightmare. It's a noir erotic thriller, bold and imaginative, sensual and strange. It injects new life – and new death – into the Ripper story. And the rumours are that the author is expanding the trilogy into a five book series.

JACK THE RIPPER: LIVE AND UNCUT

Matt Leyshon
2017
Kindle Edition, 446pp
ASIN: B077679QDF
£6.11

In a sense, all fiction about Jack the Ripper involves



a journey back in time. But one of the virtues of *Jack the Ripper: Live and Uncut* is that author Matt Leyshon has taken the familiar time machine idea and done something special with it, fashioning a story that is fresh and exciting, dangerous and full of dark thrills.

Chicago-based investigative journalist Carl Axford is recruited by a clandestine organisation known as Limbo. They are a crime investigation bureau using time travel technology to solve cold cases. Agents are projected back in Time in an incorporeal state that allows them to witness historical crimes in situ without being observed themselves. For his first assignment, Axford is given perhaps the most famous cold case of them all – the Jack the Ripper murders.

Ironically, the time travel machinery used by Limbo seems rather antiquated, consisting of wearable ‘tin can’ communication devices that transmit text messages between the past and the present, and a dome-shaped Epoch Projector that wobbles like a jelly when it is switched on and shoots agents out of a chimney into the air. But I liked it! After considerable prep work and briefing, Axford finally arrives outside the Ten Bells in the early evening of 29 August 1888.

Matt Leyshon’s sense of period and place is convincing. Life in the East End is portrayed as short and brutish, beset with violence. Axford’s bodiless presence allows him immense freedom to explore in intimate detail the lives of the victims and the suspects. He is a sort of flâneur, detached from the East End throng rather than a participant: he stands over Mary Kelly and watches as she sleeps in Miller’s Court; he steps unseen into George Chapman’s dingy barber shop. Most horribly, he eavesdrops in a very creepy and macabre manner on the actual homicides. Axford has a list of possible suspects and as the novel progresses he whittles them down. But of course, things aren’t always what they seem. Axford discovers that another agent (operating in Interactive Mode) has already been sent into Whitechapel with a very different mission agenda – to conceal or obfuscate the identity of the Ripper rather than to solve the mystery. To make the cold case colder. What is going on?

Jack the Ripper: Live and Uncut can be enjoyed simply as a crime adventure yarn set in Victorian London, but the originality and the consistent ingenuity of the storytelling make this a deeply rewarding and sublime book on many levels. Time travel is integral to the plot, and the novel

intelligently explores the ramifications of this technology on the Ripper mystery. Appropriately, in an era of fake news, the author presents a multi-veiled tale full of deceits and forged documents and cryptic games. The book is filled with engaging characters whose passions drive them to acts of great evil and bravery, sacrifice and love. To survive they must not only battle their own demons, they must fight each other and face up to the ceaselessly hostile world of Jack the Ripper’s London.

Matt Leyshon has crafted an exciting thriller that combines 21st century time travel with the Jack the Ripper mystery. Impressively, it doesn’t just delve into the dark tenements and courtyards of Victorian London’s East End – it offers a moving story about loss and human evil that spans the centuries. *Jack the Ripper: Live and Uncut* is a cut above most Jack the Ripper crime and horror fiction.



IN THE NEXT ISSUE we review Sam Gafford’s *Whitechapel*, plus all the latest Ripper fiction.



A CONVERSATION WITH MATT LEYSHON

Matt Leyshon’s debut novel, *Jack the Ripper: Live and Uncut*, came out a few days ago (see review above). We caught up with the author and asked him a few questions about his book and Ripper studies in general. Interview conducted by email on 24 November 2017.

Q1. First off, can you tell us something about yourself and your background?

I was born and raised in Australia, where I lived for 32 years. I moved to Tampa, Florida in the US and have lived here since. I had an early affinity with the Jack the Ripper case and have been interested in it since my teens.

Q2. Have you always wanted to be a writer, or is it something that has crept up on you in recent years?

I was told by my first grade teacher to “write more stories” so you could say it started there. I guess she was fond of my tale of visiting a haunted house and eating chicken sandwiches. Throughout my life I have loved writing, harbouring an early ambition to be a journalist, and have received steady encouragement to write.

I’ve written a lot of poetry and made one other incredibly unsuccessful attempt at a novel before.

The catalyst for doing something serious about it came after I completed an online tutorial about writing conducted by James Patterson. It was the kick in the rear I needed! I realised that there were no excuses, a writer always finds time to write and that got me going on this

book. There was also priceless knowledge to be gained from somebody so successful.



Q3. Your debut novel, *Jack the Ripper: Live and Uncut*, came out a few days ago. How's it been received so far?

So far so good. I have provided various people with pre release drafts to read, encompassing a variety of demographics. I sent it to people who love reading thrillers, but know very little about Jack, and then to people with a lot more knowledge on the subject. The reviews have been extremely positive thus far and that is why I am now going to fight through the submission jungle to try and land an agent to represent it. I wanted feedback on writing style as well as the Ripper related details and I think the book fared very well on both counts.

Q4. In essence, your novel explores time travel technology and how it might be used to send agents back into the past to solve cold cases, in this instance the Whitechapel murders. I suppose some readers might label it a science fiction adventure tale, but how do you characterize the story? Is it horror, urban fantasy, crime mystery, or what?

It's a difficult one to pigeonhole, that's for sure. If I were to describe it, I would say it's a thriller/suspense, wrapped around historical events with sci-fi and horror elements mixed in. I recently described the story to somebody as a braid. It is all interwoven to form one story.

Q5. Can you remember what the inspiration was for this story, or what first prompted you to write it?

That's an easy one. After completing Patterson's Masterclass he held a competition. Authors needed to submit a hook, brief description and sample chapter for a story they wanted to write. The winner won the opportunity to write their novel with James Patterson. This book was one of three submission ideas I had put together. I had to narrow my entry down to one though. I made the decision to not send this one in for two reasons. One; Patterson does not typically have non-fiction events or real people in his stories and two; I wanted this one for me. If I didn't win I would start immediately.

I already began researching this book and was the happiest man in the world when I found out I didn't win Patterson's competition and that I could begin writing the book I really wanted to write.

Q6. Your protagonist, Carl Axford, is an investigative journalist. He has a Case Room in his apartment where he does all his research. He seems a little obsessive and meticulous. What are you like as a researcher?

How did you approach researching this book?

I guess Axford and I have a lot in common. He's the lucky one though, I wish I had a Case Room like his. I can't be in a meeting for more than 15 minutes without putting something on a whiteboard. In essence I had all of the content of a Case Room piled onto a desk.

There was definitely a lot of research that went into this. Months, over a year's worth in fact. One thing I also learned was that you could not trust one source alone. You can't blame a bad source if it was the only source you considered truth.

The research varied from purchasing many books to buying and downloading maps, watching movies and TV series (mostly for atmospheric reasons) to seeing YouTube clips of buskers singing in Hulme Hall. You can get information from the strangest sources sometimes but one thing that was consistent was the generosity of people I contacted. It helped and meant a lot.

Q7. I'm guessing you've visited Whitechapel and the crime scenes, or what's left of them. Did you draw anything meaningful from the experience?

I actually haven't been to the murder sites, partially for the reason you mentioned. They are not exactly the same in the present day. Unfortunately having the funds to visit London was not possible in my position, so I had to make up for that with extensive research. Having said this I have had two people who had read my book assume I was from

the London area, which I took as a compliment for the detail and the research behind it.

I have visited Chicago, a city that features in the story, on five occasions. Despite my knowledge of the area, including one location from the book that I have been to twice, the part of the story that takes place in Chicago would have been 90% research.

Of course I want to visit the East End, especially the murder sites, but I didn't see it as a show stopper for the book if I had researched the 1888 version of it well enough. There is no way I could have written this 20 years ago.....thank you internet!!!

Q8. Where does a Ripperologist stand when they pick up this book? Does knowing too much or too little take away from the enjoyment of it?

Finding balance was one of the hardest things. I wanted to offer something to Ripperologists that was enjoyable and not frustrating to read. Ripper fiction does not always represent Jack or Whitechapel 1888 very well and I feel an injustice in that. At the same time I wanted new readers to be able to learn about the mystery, thus raising a more mainstream awareness of the case so it wasn't just a name in history to them. These intentions were also combined with a desire to not have either demographic feel they had an advantage when reading. One reviewer did state that despite all we know there is nothing predictable about the book, which was great.

What was equally satisfying were two readers that know only of Jack the Ripper and nothing further: both said they would not have bought my book, but both gave it 5 stars because it was a story that excited them. They both also wanted to learn more about Jack the Ripper and conduct their own research. That is terrific feedback to receive.

All things considered I would have to say that the more you know about the mystery the more you will enjoy it.

Q9. Your novel revels in anagrams and secret messages, faked documents and false identities. Where does this love of intrigue and subterfuge come from?

Many places. I love stories or movies that contain riddles or puzzles along the way toward solving a greater mystery. Whether it is a Robert Langdon book, or an old Sherlock Holmes mystery (with Rathbone of course), I really enjoy being in a story where a question is posed to you and it is in your head while you keep up with what's going on. Sometimes I also like when a twist or reveal is easy enough to pick but the reward is in the details. Ben Elton's Dead Famous was a great example of that or most Agatha Christie mysteries.

Besides, Ripperologists know a lot of what is coming. I felt the need to include some extra questions to ponder otherwise this reads out like a textbook. Some of those items to ponder do involve familiar aspects of the mystery and I hope they appreciate that.

Q10. Without giving too much away, your novel identifies a well-known suspect as Jack the Ripper. Does this reflect your own view as to who the killer might be?

To be honest, no it doesn't. I had considered putting in an author's note at the end of the book saying so. While my suspect is well known if anything my research convinced me it was not this person. This suspect and theory did however fit in a way that provided a good yarn. I wanted to produce a story that would educate newcomers to the Jack the Ripper mystery and for veteran readers provide a telling of the Ripper folklore that would be entertaining but not frustrating due to inaccuracies. Obviously some liberties needed to be taken in the name of a fictional narrative and my suspect is one of them. I think most people who would be considered experts on the subject are also usually non-committal towards a single suspect. That was the inspiration for this. The only way to truly know is to have been there, to have a front row seat, so I decided to give Carl Axford that chance.

I think the theory in this will raise some eyebrows but I don't see an engaged debate regarding its validity.

Q11. Are you thinking of writing further stories involving the Limbo time travel bureau? What other mysteries or cold cases can you see them investigating? If not, what's next for you as a writer?

As a part of building a decent submission for agents and publishers, I have already outlined my second book involving these ideas. I am extremely excited about this one and am looking forward to getting stuck into it. I also want to take the ideas involving the fictional part of this (Limbo, Axford, investigation through time travel) and expand on them. I think the scope is there to really go places, no pun intended, and have a lot of fun with some of the concepts.

History has presented a lot of famous cold cases or unexplained events. It is a well that can be drawn from many times. Won't say too much about it but what I will say is that when I read the outline back it was like music to my ears.



DAVID GREEN lives in Hampshire, England, where he works as a freelance book indexer. He is currently writing (very slowly) a book about the murder of schoolboy Percy Searle in Hampshire in 1888.



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