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## 15.2 Jack the Ripper

No one knows who Jack the Ripper was. And no one knows for certain what motivated him (Abrahamsen, 1992). But he was, in a macabre way, a man for his times. The turmoil of the Industrial Revolution in Britain upset the standard social order, generating new ambitions, conflicts, and frustrations. Urbanization, crowding, and change led to anomie and the creation of the alienated loner. Harsh and inhumane conditions, an indifference toward children, and a savage lifestyle all conspired to create an environment conducive to violence and sexual deviance. It is not surprising the psychological and social infrastructures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century produced the first modern serial killer (Leyton, 1986).

Many of the rookeries in Victorian London were demolished during a series of social reforms. But the slums of Whitechapel and Spitalfields survived and predictably endured an influx of criminals displaced by the city's urban renewal (see Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984; Tobias, 1967, 1972a, 1972b). The late 1800s saw almost a million people dwelling in the slums east of Aldgate Pump; 4,000 houses in Whitechapel alone were condemned one year as uninhabitable, though little was done about it at the time (Rumbelow, 1988). Liquid sewage filled the cellars of houses and people kept their windows – those not yet broken – shut because of the stench from outside. Many families, often up to nine people, lived in one room. Incest was common in these crowded conditions, even among children as young as 10.

East End youths often died before the age of five. It would not be unusual for a mother to send her young children into the streets until after midnight, while she engaged in the business of prostitution to make sufficient money to feed them. Children fell off their seats at school from exhaustion or cried from the pain of chronic starvation. Yet these unfortunates at least had a home. Many others slept on the streets, in dustbins, under stairways or bridges. Those who managed to scrape together enough money could rent a room in a lodging house; these buildings held 8,500 nightly in Whitechapel. Within these doss houses, flea-infested wallpaper hung in strips and stairway handrails were missing, long ago burnt for firewood. If you could not afford a straw mattress, two pence bought you the privilege of leaning against a rope to sleep (Rumbelow, 1977).

Women's work included scrubbing, sweatshop tailoring, hop picking, and sack or matchbox making – all with a complete lack of safety standards. Wages for 17 hours of backbreaking labor were 10 pence, less the cost of materials. Prostitution was a viable alternative, paying anywhere from a loaf of stale bread to three pence. It was estimated that one woman in 16 engaged in this trade, for a total of 1,200 prostitutes in Whitechapel and 80,000 in London (Rumbelow, 1988). The environment in the slums of London was such that Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw commented, after the second of the Ripper killings, that perhaps “the murderer was a social reformer who wanted to draw attention to social conditions in the East End” (Wilson, 1960, p. 60).

Little is known about Jack the Ripper beyond his handiwork. The first canonical murder took place on a bank holiday, Friday, August 31, 1888, in Buck's Row (see Figure 15.5). The victim

was Polly (Mary Ann) Nichols, a 42-year-old alcoholic with gray hair and five missing front teeth. She had five children from a broken marriage. The Ripper cut her throat from ear to ear, back to the vertebrae, and sliced open her abdomen from pelvis to stomach. The autopsy found she also sustained stab wounds to the vagina (Howells & Skinner, 1987).

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# THE PENNY

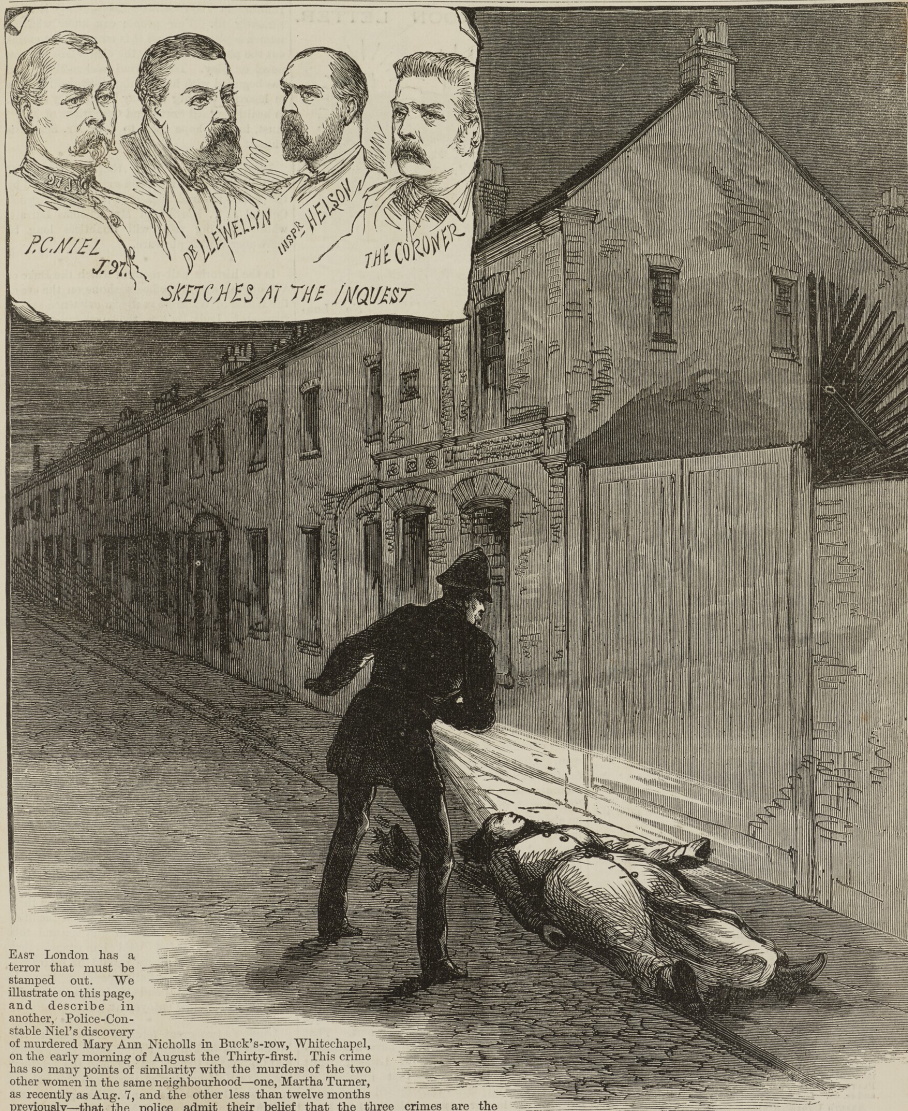
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## ILLUSTRATED PAPER

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East London has a terror that must be stamped out. We illustrate on this page, and describe in another, Police-Constable Niel's discovery of murdered Mary Ann Nicholls in Buck's-row, Whitechapel, on the early morning of August the Thirty-first. This crime has so many points of similarity with the murders of the two other women in the same neighbourhood—one, Martha Turner, as recently as Aug. 7, and the other less than twelve months previously—that the police admit their belief that the three crimes are the work of one individual. All three women were of the same class, and each of them was so poor that robbery could have formed no motive for the crime. The three murders were committed within a distance of 200 yards of each other.

THE WHITECHAPEL MYSTERY.

Figure 15.5. Discovery of Body of Polly Nichols in Buck's Row.

The next killing took place on Saturday, September 8, 1888, in a yard at No. 29 Hanbury Street. Annie Chapman was 45 years of age, stout, pugnacious, and missing two of her front teeth. An alcoholic, she was separated from her husband and two children, one of them a cripple. She was found with her neck cut so deeply it appeared as if an attempt had been made to take off her head. Her abdomen was laid open and her intestines placed on her shoulder. Parts of her vagina and bladder had been removed.

On Sunday, September 30, 1888, a double murder occurred. The Ripper first attacked Elizabeth Stride in a courtyard next to the International Working Men's Educational Club on Berner Street. Stride was a 45-year-old alcoholic missing her front teeth and the roof of her mouth. She bore nine children and claimed her husband and two offspring had perished in a steamboat disaster. The Ripper cut her throat, severing the windpipe. The mutilation was minimal as he was interrupted by a carriage entering the courtyard.

Within the hour, a second body was discovered in Mitre Square in the City of London. Catherine Eddowes, 43 years old, was, like her fellow victims, an alcoholic with a broken marriage. She carried all her worldly possessions in her pockets. Her throat was deeply cut, and her abdomen laid open from breast downward, the entrails "flung in a heap about her neck." Her ear was almost cut off and a kidney taken, the latter allegedly later mailed to the authorities.

Part of Eddowes' blood-stained apron was cut away by her killer. This segment was later found in the passageway to a staircase for the Wentworth Model Dwellings, No. 108-119 Goulston Street. Located just south of Wentworth Street, the new flats were a third of a mile and a 10-minute walk from the murder scene in Mitre Square. It appeared the bloodied cloth had been used to wipe clean a knife. The following graffito was written in chalk on the black brick wall above the apron piece (Rumbelow, 1988):

The Juwes are not  
The men that  
Will be  
Blamed for nothing

The final and most horrific murder occurred in 13 Miller's Court, on Friday, November 9, 1888. Mary Kelly, 24 years of age, was already a widow with alcohol problems. A bizarre sight greeted those who discovered her body. Her head and left arm were almost severed, her breasts and nose cut off, thighs and forehead skinned, entrails wrenched away, and her body parts piled on the bedside table. Jack the Ripper had all the time he needed to satiate his bizarre desires in Miller's Court. While debate continues on whether he was responsible for other prostitute murders that occurred around this time, most investigators believe he stopped, for whatever reason, after the mutilation of Kelly (Wilson & Odell, 1987).

In 1988, the FBI prepared a criminal personality profile for the Jack the Ripper murders (Begg, Fido, & Skinner, 1991; Douglas & Olshaker, 1995; "The secret identity of Jack the Ripper," 1988). After an analysis of the crime scenes, police and autopsy reports, photographs, victimology, and area demographics, the following key crime scene elements were identified:

- blitz attacks and lust murders;

- high degree of psychopathology exhibited at the crime scenes;
- no evidence of sexual assault;
- possible manual strangulation;
- postmortem mutilation and organ removal, but no torture;
- elaboration of ritual;
- victims selected on the basis of accessibility;
- all the crimes happened on a Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, in the early morning hours; and
- unreported attacks might have occurred.

With the caution that profiling deals in probabilities and generalities, not certainties, the FBI report suggests Jack the Ripper:

- was a white male, 28-36 years of age;
- was of average intelligence, lucky not clever;
- was single, never married, and had difficulty in interacting with people in general and women in particular;
- was nocturnal and not accountable to anyone;
- blended in with his surroundings;
- appeared disheveled and had poor personal hygiene;
- was personally inadequate, with a low self-image and diminished emotional responses;
- was a quiet loner, withdrawn and asocial;
- was of lower social class;
- lived or worked in Whitechapel and committed the crimes close to his home;
- had a menial job with little or no interaction with the public;
- was employed Monday to Friday, possibly as a butcher, mortician's helper, medical examiner's assistant, or hospital attendant (the proximity of London Hospital was noted in the profile);
- was the product of a broken home and lacked consistent care and stable adult role models as a child;
- was raised by a dominant female figure who drank heavily, consorted with different men, and physically, possibly sexually abused him;
- set fires and abused animals as a child;
- hated, feared, and was intimidated by women;
- internalized his anger;
- was mentally disturbed and sexually inadequate, with much generalized rage directed against women;
- desired power, control, and dominance;
- behaved erratically;
- engaged in sexually motivated attacks to neuter his victims;
- drank in local pubs prior to the murders;
- hunted nightly and was observed walking all over Whitechapel during the early morning hours;
- did not have medical knowledge or surgical expertise;
- was probably interviewed by the police at some point;



- did not write any of the “Jack the Ripper” letters and would not have publicly challenged the police; and
- did not commit suicide after the murders stopped.

The geographic concentration of the Ripper crimes has long made their “topography” of interest to researchers (Fido, 1987). The murders all occurred within a mile of each other and the total hunting area was just over half a square mile in size. Figure 15.6 shows the five murder sites numbered in chronological order, and the Goulston Street graffito marked by a “J” in a purple square. In 1998, a geographic profile was produced for the Jack the Ripper case based on the murder sites. Figure 15.7<sup>1</sup> shows the peak area of the geoprofile, focused on the locale around Flower and Dean Street and Thrawl Street.

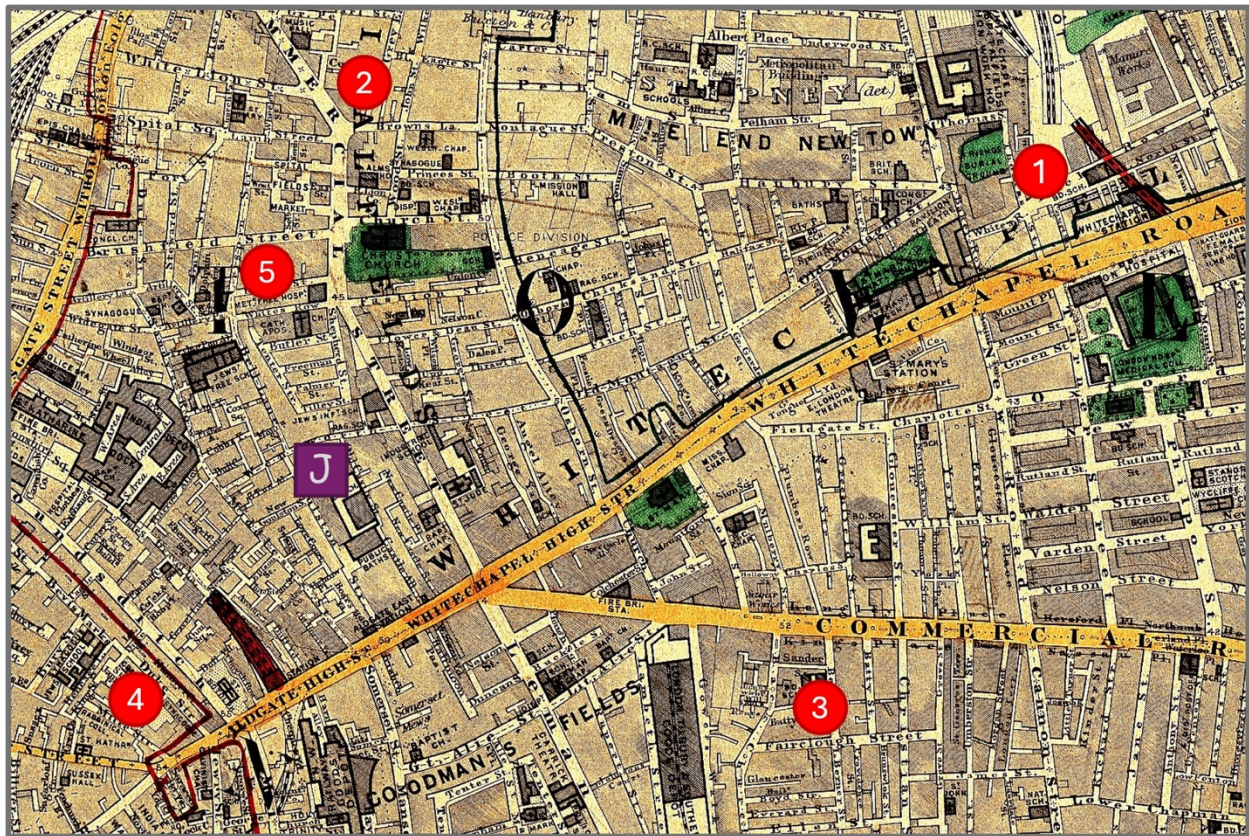


Figure 15.6. Jack the Ripper Murder Sites.

<sup>1</sup> The contemporaneous map used as background in Figures 15.6, 15.7, and 15.8 is from the Geography and Map Division of the U.S. Library of Congress. The Dorset Street photograph in Figure 15.9 was taken in 1902, 14 years after Mary Kelly’s murder in 1888.



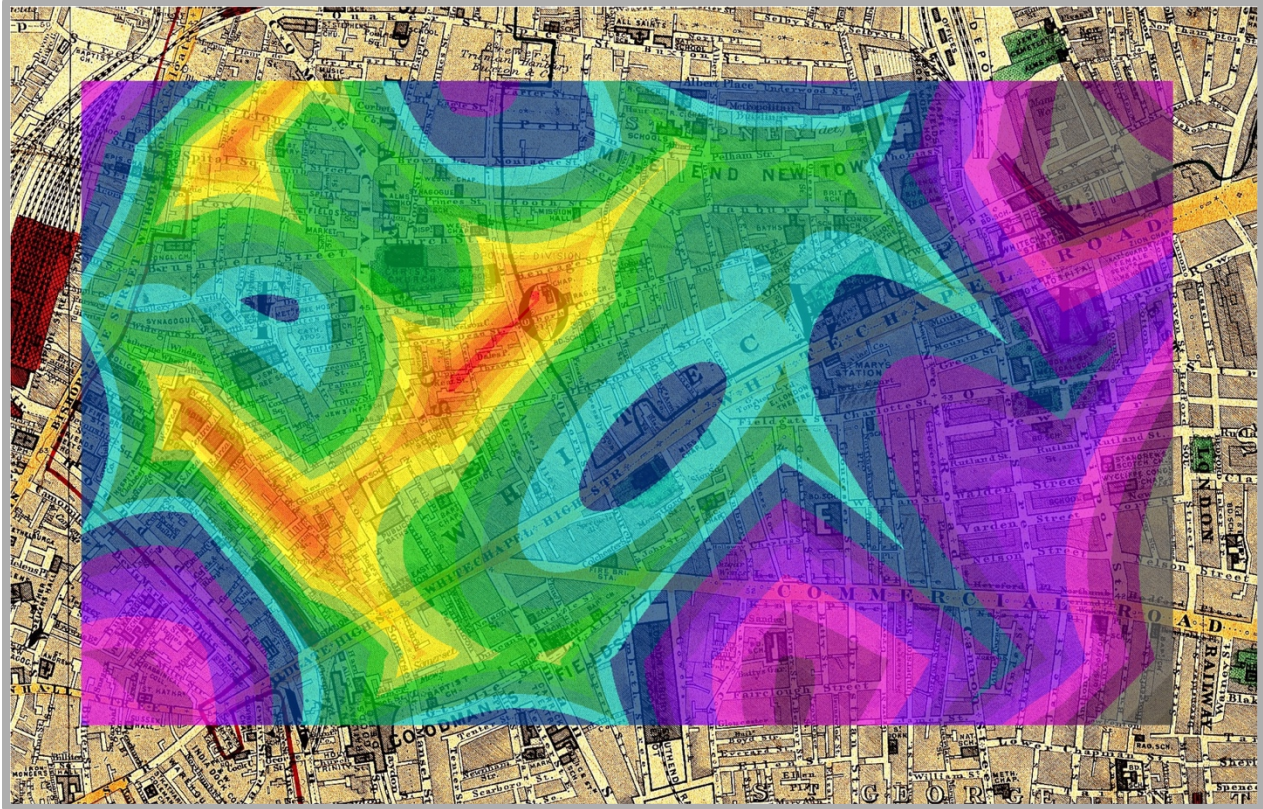


Figure 15.7. Jack the Ripper GeoProfile.



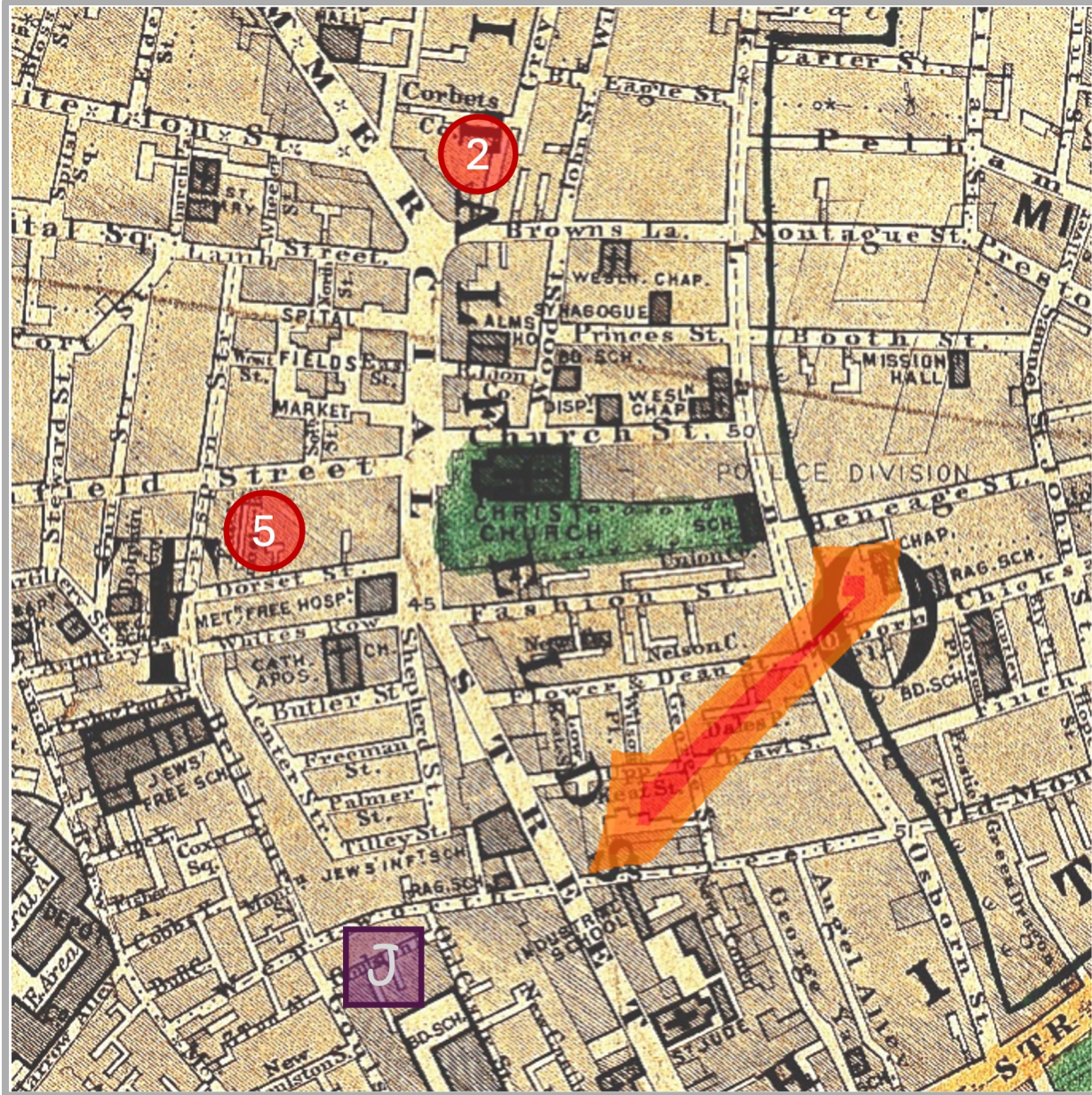


Figure 15.8. Jack the Ripper Geoprofile (peak 1%).

Flower and Dean Street and Thrawl Street no longer exist as they did in the Victorian era because of the heavy bombing London's East End suffered during World War II. Back in 1888, the two streets lay between Commercial Street to the west and Brick Lane to the east, north of Whitechapel Road. Several doss houses were located here during the Whitechapel murders. Dorset Street, the vice-ridden neighborhood social reformers called the "wicked quarter-mile," lay less than two blocks to the north along Commercial Street (Figure 15.9; Begg, Fido, & Skinner, 1991). This notorious rookery may have played an important role in the Ripper mystery.





Figure 15.9. Dorset Street, 1902.

Additional evidence supports the results of the geographic profile. All the victims lived within a couple of hundred yards of each other in the Thrawl, Flower and Dean, Dorset, and Church Street doss houses off Commercial Street (Fido, 1987; Underwood, 1987):

- Polly Nichols formerly resided at 18 Thrawl Street; just before her death she was evicted and moved into the White House at 56 Flower and Dean Street, a doss house for both men and women.
- Annie Chapman's primary residence was Crossingham's Common Lodging House at 35 Dorset Street.
- Elizabeth Stride occasionally lived in a common lodging house at No. 32 Flower and Dean Street and reportedly was there the night of her murder.
- Catherine Eddowes usually stayed in Cooney's Lodging House at No. 55 Flower and Dean Street and slept there two nights before her murder.
- Kelly lived and died in McCarthy's Rents at 13 Miller's Court, off Dorset Street (it was actually the back room of 26 Dorset Street, situated across the road from Crossingham's Common Lodging House). She previously resided in George Street, between "Flowery Dean" and Thrawl Street. The night of her murder, Kelly was seen picking up a man on Commercial Street between Thrawl Street and Flower and Dean Street.

These residences were suspiciously close to each other, covering less than 1.5% of the killer's total hunting area. It is difficult to assess the significance of this finding as there was a concentration of slum lodging houses in the locale and most Spitalfields Parish prostitutes lived here at one time or another. These women were also highly transient.

The Ten Bells Pub (now the Jack the Ripper Public House) was frequented by all the Ripper's victims. Located on Church Street and Commercial Street, it was two blocks north of Flower and Dean Street, across from Spitalfields Market. Possibly Whitechapel Road and Commercial Street/Road were routes regularly traveled by the murderer.

The location of the Goulston Street graffito, between Mitre Square and Flower and Dean Street, is on the path home the Ripper would have most likely taken if he lived in the infamous "wicked quarter-mile." At the time, some police officers theorized the Ripper's route led to the vicinity of Flower and Dean Street, prompting a belief this should be the epicenter of their manhunt (Fido, 1987).

While the geographic profile for the Whitechapel murders is interesting and has supporting evidence, we cannot assess its accuracy. The killer's address, like his identity, remains unknown. In 1992, claims were made that the diary of Jack the Ripper had been found (Harrison, 1993). Such a discovery would finally solve the world's most famous mystery though perhaps leave the world a less colorful place. However, forensic tests soon discredited the diary – which was actually a scrapbook (Butts, 1994).

It appears a veritable cottage industry has now developed around efforts to identify Jack the Ripper. Books and documentaries regularly claim to have "solved" the case; for example, *Jack the Ripper – Case Solved*, *Jack the Ripper Unmasked*, *Jack the Ripper: Finally Revealed*, *Jack the Ripper – Case Closed*, *Naming Jack the Ripper*, and so on. Of course, these books all identify different suspects, and all lack solid evidence. Then, in 2019, two biochemists in England claimed to have identified Jack the Ripper through DNA analysis. Their article was published in the *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, the official publication of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (Louhelainen & Miller, 2019). Not surprisingly, this claim received international attention, and many concluded the mystery had finally been solved. But they would be wrong.

Louhelainen and Miller's mitochondrial DNA analysis linking Aaron Kosminski, a well-known Ripper suspect, to an old shawl allegedly taken from the murder scene of Catherine Eddowes in Mitre Square suffers from several critical issues, including problematic assumptions, mistaken interpretations, and flawed conclusions – the same errors typically seen in other criminal investigative failures (Rossmo, 2020b; Rossmo & Pollock, 2019).

The major problems undermining the assumptions in the mtDNA analysis include:

- Murder-shawl connection. The shawl has no reliable provenance. Readers are asked to imagine that Acting Sergeant Amos Simpson, who was from the Met,<sup>2</sup> a different police force, somehow left his beat, went into the City of London (where the murder occurred),

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<sup>2</sup> The London Metropolitan Police (often referred to as the Met) is responsible for policing Greater London, excluding for historical reasons the square mile of the City of London. Its detective department is known as Scotland Yard from the location of their original headquarters. Four of the five Ripper murders – Eddowes was the one exception – occurred in the Met's jurisdiction, making them the lead investigating agency in the case.



and stole evidence from the murder scene of one of the most notorious cases in England's history. Even more amazing would be the City of London Police officers, including Assistant Commissioner Sir Henry Smith who rushed to the scene, allowing an outsider to take the shawl. Furthermore, Scotland Yard's Black Museum dated the shawl to the early 1900s, years after the Ripper crimes ended.

- Victim-shawl connection. No one saw Eddowes wearing a shawl and it was not listed in the police log when she was arrested a few hours before her murder. A destitute and homeless woman would not have owned expensive clothing. The alternative argument, that the shawl was the Ripper's, is even more bizarre. Why would the killer wear an item of women's clothing? Why would he carelessly leave it at the crime scene in contrast to the lack of evidence at the other murder sites? Moreover, Louhelainen and Miller's DNA report fails to mention the error rates for their stain analysis or the impact of over a century of contamination.
- Shawl-suspect connection. The relevant mtDNA was allegedly from semen stains. Yet the Ripper attacks were not typical sex crimes and no sperm was recovered from any of his murder scenes. As for the suspect, no one knows who the original Kosminski suspect was, let alone who his relatives and descendants are. He is not referenced in extant police files, and his only mention, in a note written in 1894, fails to list a given name, age, or address. Any attempt to link this surname to a specific individual is sheer speculation. Needless to say, tracing his genealogy is not possible; if we do not know who he is, then we certainly do not know who his relatives or descendants are. Finally, why was only a single Ripper suspect (out of many) selected for mtDNA comparison? Given all the other equally likely (or dubious) candidates, it is rather incredulous this effort hit the nail on the head the first time around.

Predictably, all this led to a publishing deal for Russell Edwards, the owner of the shawl in question.

The cover of the book *Naming Jack the Ripper* proclaims: "New crime scene evidence. A stunning forensic breakthrough. The killer revealed." In truth, this is more of a spectacular forensic failure. The reported examination suffers from many of the same problems and mistakes commonly seen in wrongful convictions. The aura and language of science was used to mask problematic assumptions and spurious inferences. The results of the mtDNA analysis completely depend upon the strength of the connections between the shawl and the murder scene, the shawl and Eddowes, and the shawl and Kosminski. The probabilities for each of these links are so attenuated that the mtDNA random match figure reported by Louhelainen and Miller is almost irrelevant. (Rossmo, 2020b, p. 333)

Geneticists responded strongly and negatively to this work. Turi King of the University of Leicester noted, "The suspect couldn't have passed on his mitochondrial DNA, as he was a man... How did this ever get past review!?... Unpublishable!" (Killgrove, 2019). Genetics expert Adam Rutherford was equally critical of the popular media coverage:

This is terrible science and terrible history ... It doesn't warrant discussion in the press, let alone in an academic journal. Nonsense like this paper and a gullible media does nothing but foment scientific and historical illiteracy built upon the grotesque romanticization of the brutal murders of five women. (Killgrove, 2019)

In 2020, Felice Bedford wrote a response for the *Journal of Forensic Science*, eviscerating the DNA analysis and effectively driving a nail into the coffin of this misbegotten theory. The publisher and editor of the journal eventually conducted an investigation into the complaints, releasing their results in an Expression of Concern (August 2024). They were unable to come to any determination because the authors, Louhelainen and Miller, claimed their research data were not available due to instrument failure and “other [unspecified] complications.” The mystery remains unsolved.

While we do not know who Jack the Ripper was, we do know what he looks like (well, not really, but....). Back in the 1990s, the National Crime Faculty, the center of offender profiling in the UK, was located at Bramshill House in the Hampshire countryside west of London. The manor was built in the early 1600s and was complete with a number of interesting historical artifacts. One of these items was a walking stick hung on the wall of the drawing room in a wooden case. It has a small metal collar with an inscription noting the cane was a retirement gift for Chief Inspector Frederick Abberline, the officer in charge of the Metropolitan Police investigation of the Whitechapel murders:

PRESENTED  
TO  
INSP. ABBERLINE  
*as a mark of esteem*  
*by 7 officers*  
*engaged with him*  
*in the Whitechapel*  
*murders*  
*of 1888*

Carved into the top of the walking stick, just above the metal collar, is a cowled figure (see Figure 15.10). According to police legend, this is the face of Jack the Ripper who, allegedly, was known to the investigators but could not be arrested for some unknown reason. The Bramshill mansion is allegedly one of the most haunted buildings in England, with all manner of ghosts walking its halls. Perhaps Jack is one of them.





Figure 15.10. Inspector Abberline Walking Stick.