

# JACK THE RIPPER

*Unraveling the Whitechapel Murders*

STEVEN DE RYCKE

**Copyright © 2025 Steven De Rycke**

**Design and layout: Steven De Rycke**

**Cover design: [www.bravenewbooks.nl](http://www.bravenewbooks.nl)**

The author has taken great care to ensure the content of this book is as accurate and complete as possible.

However, he accepts no responsibility for any errors or interpretations arising from its use.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission from the author. Quoting is permitted for reviews, studies, and other academic purposes, provided the source is clearly acknowledged.

**About the Author**

Steven De Rycke (b. 1975) is a leading officer with the Belgian Federal Police and has a strong interest in history, criminology, and forensic sciences. He has spent many years studying the Jack the Ripper case, analyzing contemporary literature, medical reports, and official investigation documents. In this book, he offers a clear and accessible perspective on one of the most fascinating and enduring murder cases in history.

# CONTENTS

|                                                                                |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Introduction                                                                   | 5   |
| Chapter 1: Whitechapel and London's East End in the<br>Late Nineteenth Century | 11  |
| Chapter 2: Forensic Investigation in the Late Victorian Era                    | 22  |
| Chapter 3: The Official Victims – The Canonical Five                           | 33  |
| ❖ Mary Ann Nichols                                                             | 37  |
| ❖ Annie Chapman                                                                | 45  |
| ❖ Elizabeth Stride                                                             | 54  |
| ❖ Catherine Eddowes                                                            | 62  |
| ❖ Mary Jane Kelly                                                              | 74  |
| Chapter 4: Other Possible Victims                                              | 90  |
| Chapter 5: The Investigators and Police Officials                              | 112 |
| Chapter 6: The Ripper Letters                                                  | 134 |
| Chapter 7: The Main Suspects                                                   | 157 |
| Chapter 8: Other Theories                                                      | 199 |
| Aftermath                                                                      | 222 |
| Acknowledgements                                                               | 237 |
| Bibliography and Sources                                                       | 239 |

## INTRODUCTION

For more than one hundred and thirty-five years, various theories and differing opinions about the identity of the Whitechapel murderer have captivated the world. Although in recent years more and more theories have appeared claiming that his true identity is known, to this day there is no conclusive evidence. No one has ever been able to confirm with certainty the identity of one of the most notorious serial killers to have ever walked the earth: Jack the Ripper. Just as with the Zodiac Killer — an unidentified serial murderer active in the United States in the 1960s and infamous for his coded letters to the press — the perpetrator has never been identified, and nowhere is there a reliable account in which anyone unequivocally claims to know who the man was who held London's East End in his grip in the second half of 1888, in the heart of the Victorian era.

Jack the Ripper was certainly not the first true serial killer. Yet the fascination surrounding his figure remains exceptionally strong. Why, then, are there so many theories? And why has so much been written about him? The explanation likely lies in the fact that a great deal of speculation, mystery, and myth surrounds him (think of the classic image of him in a long coat, with a doctor's bag and a top hat), but also that he was one of the first serial killers around whom there was such extensive media attention — and that the media of the time also played a very important role in the investigation and in the prevailing mindset. Whether the media played a good or positive role in that is open to question.

Jack the Ripper is also regarded as one of the most infamous serial killers ever, even though there are murderers known to have made far more victims than the five for which he is officially held responsible. Consider Henry Lee Lucas — an American serial killer active in the 1970s and 1980s, who, together with his accomplice Ottis Toole, was held

responsible for hundreds of murders. Another notorious serial killer, Ted Bundy, was active in the 1970s in several American states. He was convicted for the murder of thirty women, but the actual number of victims is likely higher.

Another reason why Jack the Ripper is so infamous is the horror with which the victims were mutilated. Especially the murder of Mary Jane Kelly is, to this day, one of the most gruesome killings committed in living memory. The manner in which she was mutilated could only have sprung from a diseased mind. More on that later.

After the last murder officially attributed to the Ripper — that of Mary Jane Kelly, on 9 November 1888 in Miller's Court — speculation, which had already been rampant during the investigation, only increased. Countless theories arose, some more persuasive than others. Never before had there been so much mystery surrounding a serial killer. And as is often the case with unknown perpetrators, a fertile breeding ground quickly emerged for the most absurd suppositions.

The image many people have of Jack the Ripper is that of a mysterious figure, dressed as a gentleman, in a long dark coat, a top hat, and carrying a bag full of knives and surgical instruments. The setting: narrow alleys, misty streets lit by gas lamps, carriages rattling through the night, large families sharing a single loaf of bread, prostitutes selling their bodies to survive, and policemen — the typical “bobbies” — who, with their whistle with its distinctive and recognizable sound, just as was used in the First World War when going “over the top<sup>1</sup>,” alert the neighborhood and their colleagues after a new gruesome discovery. But that image is often driven by fantasy or by what one wants to believe, and it does not always correspond to the facts.

Depending on the theory, the image of the perpetrator also changes: from deranged doctor to rejected lover, from vengeful father to deranged prince or sadistic actor. And that is only the tip of the iceberg. There are theories in which Jack the Ripper was a woman, or disguised himself as a woman in order to come into contact with his victims more easily. Some authors even suggest that Jack the Ripper

---

<sup>1</sup> This was a typical order during the First World War, where soldiers — often at the whistle signal of their officer — had to climb out of the safety of the trenches (thus “over the top”) and advance on foot, often in formation, into no man's land toward the enemy lines.

never existed, but was the invention of several people who conspired together. Others believe that the murders stopped because the Ripper moved to the United States. It is clear: the true identity of Jack the Ripper will likely always remain the subject of debate, and it is precisely that fact which keeps the mystery alive.

Just like with the Loch Ness monster, many secretly hope that the mystery will never be solved, because it leaves room for speculation, debate and curiosity — and, to be honest, keeps the “Ripper business” alive. And by that we mean not only the abundance of literature, but also the role of the media, even then. For during the murders the press played a leading role in fueling fear and magnifying the mystery. It used the Whitechapel murders to set the public — the poor in particular, who were fed up with poverty and inequality — against the authorities and the police, who were seen as an extension of power.

The press enjoyed sending the police, and Scotland Yard in particular, down the wrong path. In addition, letters poured in from people claiming to have committed the murders. Hundreds of letters reached the police, one more absurd than the other. Most turned out, afterwards, to be fake. Many sent letters simply for their own morbid pleasure; some came from journalists who wanted to feed the story further. For that reason I approach testimonies and so-called confessions with a healthy dose of skepticism.

The influence of the press on the Ripper file was enormous. Public opinion was to some extent manipulated and increasingly began to resemble a form of demagoguery, with the press as the instrument shaping public opinion. It was, after all, a time of great social pressure. In the chapter “Whitechapel and London’s East End in the Late Nineteenth Century” I return to this at length. It is important that the reader of this book gains a clear picture of the social context and living conditions at the time, because these are essential to understanding the story of Jack the Ripper. Only then can one grasp why some theories appear more credible than others, and how the media influenced the course of the investigation. The limited resources and investigative techniques of the Victorian era are also discussed. In our own time, with all modern forensic techniques, the Ripper would in all likelihood never have gotten away with his terrible deeds.

Anyone who thinks this book will solve the mystery will be disappointed. I do not claim anywhere to know with certainty who Jack the Ripper was. Yet over the years, in which this case has continued to

fascinate me, I have developed my own view on it. I have my personal most plausible suspect, if I may put it that way, and also my own theories, formed on the basis of years of reading, studying, thinking and weighing. My opinion has often changed over the years, under the influence of new insights or documentation, but that does not mean that I do not take my current conclusions seriously.

I am writing this book because I want to offer an accessible introduction to those who know nothing or little about Jack the Ripper. I do not consider myself a professional “Ripperologist”, but the figure of Jack the Ripper has fascinated me since 1988, when I first saw a miniseries about Jack the Ripper in which the well-known British actor Michael Caine played the leading role. This miniseries was released on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the events. Since then, the subject has never let me go. Although I do not call myself a criminological expert, I do dare say that I know what I am talking about, and that I can convey my knowledge clearly to others. That knowledge is of course limited to what I have discovered and concluded up to now, and it continues to evolve.

As stated, this book is an introduction. But I also believe that my current view of the possible identity of Jack the Ripper is a valuable and sufficiently substantiated one, even though the problem with Ripper theories is that they are seldom based on hard evidence and often remain speculative. It is, after all, not that difficult to first choose a potential suspect and then make the facts “fit” in order to prove your point and your theory.

In the Victorian era, people did not have the means at their disposal that we have now. So much is clear. Forensic science was in its infancy. From fingerprints to DNA analysis: it scarcely existed, if at all. Investigative methods were often questionable and based on rumors or rewards. As we sometimes see in old Westerns, in the late Victorian era money was also frequently offered to anyone who came forward with valuable tips.



In the case of the Ripper, countless “witnesses” suddenly appeared who hoped to escape poverty with an attractive reward.

A true expert, criminologist or historian who has immersed themselves in this case for years will probably read nothing new in my book. I realize that. But I secretly hope that my angle may still set something in motion.

Perhaps it will even make an expert doubt earlier conclusions. In recent years, many new theories and (whether reliable or not) pieces of evidence have surfaced. Forensic science has made a huge leap, not to mention the impact of AI, and as a result some avenues can now be investigated much more thoroughly. Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that it is difficult to apply those methods to a case more than 125 years old.

I hope this book helps the reader to better understand the events surrounding the Jack the Ripper murders, and to arrive at a well-founded opinion of their own. Whether the reader shares my conclusions, I will probably never know. However, I am curious about his or her feedback. But I share my insights based on everything I have read, studied, investigated and learned so far. I base myself on reliable sources, on historical work and internet research — not on films, however well-made they sometimes are. For fiction may be captivating; I prefer to stick to the facts.

Who was Jack the Ripper (without naming a name)? Where does that name come from? Why did he become so infamous? Which theories about his identity exist? And why do I believe what I believe? These are the questions I hope to answer in this book.

This book is structured in eight chapters. First I provide a picture of life in the (late) Victorian era, then of forensic investigation and the way it was conducted in the same period. After that, I deal with the facts in chronological order, possibly supplemented with my personal reflections. I give an overview of the victims officially regarded as “Ripper victims” — the so-called canonical five — but also of other murders that may be connected to the case. I then discuss the main suspects and theories, the police officials involved, the investigation and the letters attributed to the Ripper. At the very end I conclude with my personal conclusions.

In conclusion of this introduction, I would like to say that it is an honor for me to be able to share my knowledge — or rather: my experience — with the reader. If, in this way, I manage to captivate someone with the story of Jack the Ripper, then my goal has been achieved. That is why I do not consider this book a scientific study or piece of research. My opinion is not necessarily the correct one. It is not my intention to convince the reader of my rightness, but to make him or her think about the reasoning behind my conclusions. Especially for those who have heard of Jack the Ripper but do not really know the story yet, I hope this book can be a valuable introduction. Hence the title: “Jack the Ripper – Unraveling the Whitechapel Murders.”

## CHAPTER I

### WHITECHAPEL AND LONDON'S EAST END IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

To truly understand the case of Jack the Ripper, one must first understand Whitechapel as it was in his time. For this reason, I take you back to London in the late Victorian era.

In 1888, London's East End — and particularly the district of Whitechapel — formed the backdrop for one of the most infamous murder cases in modern history. This district, located just east of the wealthier City of London, was an area marked by appalling social misery, overcrowding, and inequality. While the heart of the British Empire flourished in splendor and grandeur, thousands of people lived only a few kilometers away in conditions of structural poverty, chronic unemployment, and constant insecurity. The circumstances in which they lived created the perfect breeding ground for fear, violence, and distrust — and for the emergence of the figure who would become known as Jack the Ripper.

#### *The royal family*

In 1888, Queen Victoria had already been on the throne for fifty-one years. Great Britain ruled the largest empire in the world, but the gap between rich and poor was immense. While the royal court basked in luxury and opulence, thousands of Londoners lived in misery.

The royal family barely concerned itself with the problems of the East End. Whitechapel lay only a few kilometers from Buckingham Palace, yet the distance in experience and priority was insurmountable. Nevertheless, Queen Victoria (1819–1901) followed the Ripper murders with great concern and expressed strong indignation about the appalling living conditions in the East End. She urged her ministers, among other things, to close the most notorious lodging houses or shelters, which she

regarded as breeding grounds of crime and immorality. Her involvement took an unpleasant turn when rumors began to circulate that her grandson, Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence, had been mentioned as a possible suspect in the Ripper case (see also Chapter 7: The Principal Suspects). In 1888, Victoria also wrote letters to her government with urgent appeals for greater determination, better policing, and structural reforms in London's deprived districts. Her intervention, though limited, showed that the murders were felt even in the highest circles of the Empire.

### *Living conditions*

Whitechapel had one of the highest population densities in Europe. In some streets, more than three hundred people lived on a single acre. Entire families shared one room, often without windows, running water, or sanitation. The district was a magnet for immigrants, particularly Irish laborers and Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe, which led to tension, social fragmentation, and strain on an already weak infrastructure.

The standard of living was extremely low. Garbage, slaughterhouse waste, and human excrement literally covered the streets. Housing was unsafe and unhealthy; many homes were nothing more than dilapidated slums lacking any form of comfort. A laborer earned on average between fifteen and twenty shillings a week — not enough to support a family. Women, the elderly, and unskilled workers often earned even less. Their wages barely covered rent and food. Many supplemented their income through street trading, rag-picking, or sewing. Those who lost their jobs had only two options: begging or entering the workhouse. The latter provided shelter and food but imposed a prison-like regime centered on labor and humiliation. One in three children did not live to see their fifth birthday. Epidemics were rampant. Poor nutrition, polluted water sources, and lack of medical care made Whitechapel one of the unhealthiest places in the country. Those who could not afford a doctor simply died at home, quietly and without any official record. In 1888, infant mortality in London's East End was a tragic and everyday

reality. The causes were numerous and often intertwined: overcrowded and poorly ventilated housing, contaminated drinking water,

inadequate hygiene, and lack of medical attention for the poorest classes. Many families lived in damp, windowless rooms without sanitation, allowing infectious diseases such as measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough, diphtheria, and tuberculosis to spread rapidly. Babies and young children were especially vulnerable to diarrhea, pneumonia, and malnutrition, leading to an alarmingly high death rate during the early years of life. Medical care was often unaffordable, and hospitals were out of reach for most working-class families. Moreover, distrust toward official institutions meant that many sought help for their sick children only as a last resort. Infant mortality was not only seen as tragic but also as inevitable in poor districts such as Whitechapel — a harsh reality that left deep scars on the society of late Victorian London. For many, survival meant searching day after day for a place to sleep and something to eat. Cheap lodging houses, or *doss houses*, offered for a few pence a bed, or even just a wooden bench with a rope.

### *Lodging houses*

These so-called common lodging houses in London emerged at the end of the eighteenth century but truly expanded during the nineteenth century, when the city was confronted with an unprecedented population boom. Owing to the Industrial Revolution, thousands of laborers, migrants, and impoverished people moved to the capital in search of work and a better life. In an attempt to bring the situation under control, the Common Lodging Houses Act was introduced in 1851. This act granted the London police the authority to register and inspect lodging houses. Regulations were established concerning ventilation, bedding, and the separation of men and women. However, supervision remained weak, and many landlords — often with a criminal background — circumvented the rules or turned a blind eye to what occurred inside their premises.

Some of Jack the Ripper's victims stayed in such houses. The conditions were deplorable, but the alternative — sleeping on the streets — was worse. The common lodging houses were under police supervision, had to be licensed, change their bedding weekly, remain open daily, and keep

men and women separate unless married. In practice, these rules were often ignored, particularly when the landlords — frequently ex-convicts

or men operating on the edge of the law — sought to maximize their income. In many houses, “double beds” were rented without questions being asked, which led to widespread immorality.

A letter to the *Daily Telegraph* in September 1888 described Thrawl Street, where Wilmott’s Lodging House was located, as a violent neighborhood full of thieves and prostitutes, where even police officers were reluctant to go. Within the small area between Baker’s Row, Middlesex Street, and Whitechapel Road, there were no fewer than 146 lodging houses, providing more than 6,000 beds. Mary Nichols and Annie Chapman, two of the victims, had been expelled from such houses shortly before their deaths for lack of money. Three victims had even stayed in the same lodging house in Flower and Dean Street, a street known as “the blackest of the black.”

Philanthropist Hugh Edward Hoare described life in such a lodging house in 1886: a “deputy” sat at the entrance collecting bed fees while people gathered around a fire in a bare kitchen with wooden benches. Although the atmosphere sometimes seemed friendly, violence was never far away. One notorious incident involved a woman stabbing the manager of her lodging house in the face.

The moral reformers of the time, such as Henrietta Barnett and organizations like the National Vigilance Association, campaigned for the closure of these lodging houses. A petition signed by 4,000 women was delivered to Queen Victoria. According to the police, Whitechapel had 233 lodging houses accommodating 8,530 residents and an estimated 1,200 prostitutes. A major reform followed in 1890 with the Housing of the Working Classes Act. Responsibility for oversight was transferred to the London County Council (LCC), which imposed stricter standards and gradually began closing the worst houses.

It would still take several decades for the system to disappear completely. Only during the twentieth century, and especially after the Second World War, did the number of lodging houses decline drastically. With the rise of social housing, a higher standard of living, and increasing public pressure on the authorities, most of these houses were either closed or converted into regulated hostels or shelters.

There was never an explicit legal ban on lodging houses, but their disappearance was the result of continuous reform, stricter regulation, and structural social change. Today, they survive only in modernized form — for example, as night shelters for the homeless, assisted housing for vulnerable groups, or low-cost hostels. In all these modern forms, clear standards now exist for safety, hygiene, and supervision, in stark contrast to the chaotic and dehumanizing conditions of the lodging houses of London in 1888.

### *Prostitution*

Prostitution was widespread in Whitechapel. Some women worked full-time as sex workers, while others did it occasionally to survive. For many women in Whitechapel, prostitution was a bitter necessity. It offered a minimal chance of securing shelter or a warm meal. It is estimated that in 1888 more than 1,200 prostitutes were active in the district, although the work was often irregular and dangerous. Many engaged in it sporadically, as a temporary means of survival. The police kept lists of known prostitutes, but the line between sex workers and destitute women with occasional clients was extremely thin. Several of the Ripper's victims fell into the latter category.

In 1885, Parliament passed the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which raised the age of sexual consent from thirteen to sixteen and criminalized male homosexuality. An interesting incident related to the latter was the Cleveland Street Scandal. This scandal broke out in 1889, a year after the Jack the Ripper murders, when police discovered a male brothel in Cleveland Street (in the west of London). The case caused a major uproar because several prominent members of the British elite were said to have engaged in sexual relations with underage boys working there as prostitutes. Although it was never officially confirmed, Prince Albert Victor (again) was implicitly mentioned in rumors and smear campaigns as a possible visitor to the brothel. There is no concrete evidence that he was involved, and historians regard the allegations as speculative, likely fueled by homophobia, class tensions, and the press's appetite for scandal. The Cleveland Street Scandal nevertheless remained in the collective memory as a symbol of hypocrisy and moral decay at the top of society

and contributed to the later suspicions surrounding Albert Victor in connection with the Ripper affair.

This Criminal Law Amendment also aimed to clamp down more firmly on prostitution. Yet police intervention remained limited. Sir Charles Warren, head of the Metropolitan Police, considered it more efficient to control prostitution than to suppress it. Officers were rarely deployed to monitor brothels, and arrests only occurred when complaints were made or evidence was available. Prostitution itself was not illegal — only “soliciting” was, which was difficult to prove in court. The case of Elizabeth Cass, a milliner wrongly arrested for prostitution, provoked public outrage and made officers more cautious. As a result, street prostitution flourished in 1888 — just as Jack the Ripper struck.

The shock that followed the Ripper murders breathed new life into existing puritan movements and so-called charitable organizations, some of them questionable, whose motives were often debated. Groups such as the National Vigilance Association and the Salvation Army actively campaigned against prostitution. They established shelters for women, advocated stricter legislation, and sought to remove women from the streets by offering them alternatives — sometimes paternalistic, sometimes genuinely compassionate.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, more and more women gained access to paid employment in factories, the service sector, and later in administrative work. The emergence of typists, shop assistants, and nurses provided women with legitimate sources of income. As a result, prostitution gradually ceased to be the “last resort,” especially for young, single women.

### *Jewish Immigrants and Antisemitism*

Another important factor in the social dynamics of Whitechapel was the massive influx of Jewish immigrants. Driven by persecution and oppression in the Russian Empire, tens of thousands of Jews fled westward. Many intended to continue to America but ended up settling in London. By 1911, more than 100,000 Jews lived in Great Britain, the majority of them in Whitechapel, Spitalfields, and St George’s. These districts became densely populated Jewish ghettos with synagogues,



*yeshivas*<sup>2</sup>, and community associations. Although the established Jewish community initially supported the newcomers — for example through interest-free loans — a social and cultural divide soon emerged.

The newcomers spoke Yiddish, dressed differently, and introduced ideas such as socialism, Zionism, and trade unionism. Thus, Duffield's Yard — the site of Elizabeth Stride's murder (see Chapter III) — was not only a grim alley in an overcrowded district but also a symbol of the early labor movement that emerged in Whitechapel amid poverty, immigration, and social unrest. In and around Duffield's Yard, trade unions, workers' associations, and socialist groups held meetings. It was there that the first forms of collective action took shape against the miserable working conditions and exploitation in the East End's factories. For many workers, Duffield's Yard became a place of resistance, solidarity, and hope. The nearby anarchist clubs, such as the International Workers Educational Club in Berner Street (later Henriques Street), further strengthened this climate of radical ideas.

The Jewish presence also played a role in the public debate surrounding the Ripper. Many residents believed that the killer was Jewish, a suspicion fueled by Assistant Commissioner Sir Robert Anderson's claim that the culprit was a "low-born Polish Jew." This led to tension and distrust within the community. These tensions reached their peak after the murder of Catherine Eddowes, the second victim of what became known as the "Double Event," on the night of 30 September 1888. Eddowes was found horribly mutilated at Mitre Square, just outside Whitechapel, in the area of the City of London. Remarkably, a piece of her bloodstained apron was discovered in Goulston Street, on the border between the City and Whitechapel, near a passage leading to the Wentworth Dwellings, a block of flats mainly inhabited by Jewish families. Above this spot, on a wall in the passage, a cryptic chalk message had been written.

The message caused great concern within the police, who feared that leaving it visible might provoke antisemitic riots and acts of revenge in Whitechapel. Ultimately, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police,

---

<sup>2</sup> *Yeshiva* (plural: *yeshivas*): a Jewish religious school dedicated to the study of the Torah and the Talmud.

Sir Charles Warren, decided to have the writing erased before sunrise, without first taking a photograph. That decision remains controversial to this day: some view it as an act of prudence, while others see it as the destruction of potentially vital evidence. More on this will be discussed later in the chapter devoted to the victims.

### *The media and their influence*

The media played a crucial role in shaping the public image of Jack the Ripper. While quality newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Telegraph* reported the facts accurately and with restraint, the sensationalist press, particularly *The Star*, went much further. *The Star* was the first newspaper to publish the name “Jack the Ripper,” giving the murderer an almost mythical status. The Central News Agency — more a news distribution office than a newspaper — played a key role in this, as it was responsible for circulating the infamous “Dear Boss letter.”

Whereas *The Times* was more conservative and authoritative, and *The Telegraph* liberal and nationally distributed, *The Star* was sensationalist and therefore more popular among the lower classes.

*The Star* was a London evening paper founded in 1888, only a few months before the first murder attributed to Jack the Ripper. The paper played a decisive role in fueling the public hysteria surrounding the murders. It was also *The Star* that first printed the name “Jack the Ripper,” taken from the infamous “Dear Boss letter” that had reached its offices through the Central News Agency. With its sensational tone, explicit reporting, and tendency to exaggerate rumors and theories, the paper contributed significantly to the mystery and panic that swept through the East End. Sales soared as the murders continued, leading critics to accuse the paper of exploitation — or even complicity in spreading misinformation. *The Star* remained in circulation until 1960, when it merged with *The Evening News*.

### *Social unrest*

On 13 November 1887, a violent confrontation took place in Trafalgar Square between thousands of demonstrators and an overwhelming force of police and soldiers. This clash later became known as Bloody Sunday. The protest had been organized by socialists, trade unions,

and Irish nationalists to oppose mass unemployment, social inequality, and British policy in Ireland.

The broader political and social climate clearly contributed to the unrest: class struggle, Irish nationalism, and deep social frustration created an explosive atmosphere in which the gap between the lower classes and the ruling powers seemed unbridgeable. The authorities, led by Sir Charles Warren — the same man later involved in the Jack the Ripper investigation — banned the demonstration, but thousands ignored the prohibition.

What followed was a brutal assault: more than 1,500 police officers and soldiers broke up the crowd with batons and bayonets, resulting in at least two deaths, hundreds of injuries, and over two hundred arrests. Images of wounded demonstrators — including women and well-known figures such as George Bernard Shaw and William Morris — sparked a wave of public outrage and starkly revealed the deep social tensions that characterized late Victorian London.

### *Police*

The police operated within this tense environment. In 1888, most of London, including Whitechapel, fell under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Police, founded in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel and, in 1888, led by Commissioner Sir Charles Warren. This police service — the first of its kind in Europe — was divided into divisions, each covering a specific district. These divisions were often understaffed, under pressure, and frequently subject to criticism. Whitechapel was part of the H Division.

At the edge of the Metropolitan Police's territory, however, lay the City of London Police, which covered only a small, central area of about one square mile. The boundary between the two forces ran straight through Whitechapel, causing legal and operational complications during the Ripper investigation. Each district had its own powers, administration, and hierarchy, which sometimes made cooperation difficult.

Police officers — known as *constables* or *bobbies* — had, since the 1860s, worn the iconic rounded uniform consisting of a dark blue woolen tunic with silver buttons and a tall helmet (the *custodian helmet*), introduced in

1863 and widely adopted by the Metropolitan Police by 1888 (though City Police officers wore a different variant). They were not armed with firearms but carried a wooden truncheon and a whistle, which they used to summon assistance. Patrols were conducted on foot, along fixed routes and schedules, requiring each officer to reach specific checkpoints in his district at designated times — a system designed to ensure punctuality and accountability.

Within the Metropolitan Police existed a strict hierarchy, with ranks such as *constable*, *sergeant*, *inspector*, *chief inspector*, *superintendent*, and above them, *commissioner* and *assistant commissioner*. The *Criminal Investigation Department* (CID) had only been operational since 1878 and consisted of plainclothes detectives conducting criminal investigations, such as the inquiry into Jack the Ripper. The CID had to process thousands of tips, letters, and rumors without the benefit of modern investigative tools. Frustration, confusion, and public pressure dictated the pace of the investigation. The officials involved and their roles in the Ripper inquiry are discussed further in Chapter 5: *The Investigators and Police Officials*.

In 1888, the Criminal Investigation Department of the Metropolitan Police was still in a relatively early stage of development. The CID then counted roughly 300 members in total, spread across the Metropolitan Police district of London. These members included *detective inspectors*, *detective sergeants*, and *plain clothes constables* (detectives in civilian attire). Although this number covered the entire London area, the H Division likely had only about ten to twelve CID detectives at its disposal, meaning there was approximately one detective for every 6,300 inhabitants in Whitechapel. The district's population was estimated at around 76,000 at the time, illustrating how limited the investigative capacity was in an area plagued by serious crime and social disarray.

The CID had been established as a separate branch within the Metropolitan Police, replacing the discredited *Detective Branch*, which had been marred by corruption scandals. The structure of the CID in 1888 was centralized, headed by a *Director of CID* — initially James Monro until June 1888, then Robert Anderson — with inspectors, sergeants, and detectives distributed among the 21 police divisions. Detectives were mainly responsible for investigating serious crimes.

The organization was centrally directed but operated locally, with CID members often working alongside uniformed officers. In exceptional cases, such as the Jack the Ripper investigation, CID detectives from other divisions or directly from headquarters were brought in. The CID reported directly to *Scotland Yard*, the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police, which acted as the central command center for London policing and also oversaw specialized branches such as the CID and, later, the *Special Branch*.

*Scotland Yard* was originally located on Great Scotland Yard, a street near Whitehall in Westminster. The name “Scotland Yard” comes from the public entrance to the building on that street, where citizens could report crimes or provide information. Within the broader policing landscape of the United Kingdom, the Metropolitan Police was responsible for law enforcement throughout Greater London, except for the City of London, which maintained its own separate force.

In 1890, the Metropolitan Police moved from Great Scotland Yard to a new building on the Victoria Embankment. From then on, it became known as *New Scotland Yard*. The name remained the recognized brand of the London police headquarters, despite later relocations.

In summary, Whitechapel in 1888 was a melting pot of misery, crime, hope, and despair. In that context, not only a series of gruesome murders but also a legend was born. Jack the Ripper was not merely an individual but also a reflection of his time and environment — a product of chaos, neglect, and systemic failure. The East End of London was already in social crisis in the years before Jack the Ripper appeared. The mix of poverty, xenophobia, radicalization, and what the public perceived as government failure created an explosive situation. In that volatile environment, it was only a matter of time before fear, anger, and media hysteria surrounding a figure like Jack the Ripper would shake the entire social fabric. The story of this district was, therefore, one of struggle, survival, and forgotten lives — the very lives most deeply affected when the Ripper’s knife struck.

## CHAPTER II

### FORENSIC INVESTIGATION IN THE LATE VICTORIAN ERA

In the second half of the 19th century, criminal investigation slowly began to evolve from a mainly intuitive approach to a more systematic, scientific method. When speaking about the origins and further development and evolution of forensic investigation, we cannot ignore one of the key figures of this forensic revolution, namely the French police official Alphonse Bertillon (1853–1914). He is widely regarded as one of the founders of modern criminology. His influence on the development of identification methods and crime scene analysis was particularly great, although his work in 1888 was still virtually unknown or unused in Great Britain, which sharply illustrates the limitations of the investigation into the Jack the Ripper murders.

#### *Photobook*

In the era in which Jack the Ripper lived, the idea that criminals could be recognized by outward characteristics was still strongly present. An influential example of this was the photobook and the series of sketches of criminal “types” developed within the context of “criminology” *avant la lettre*, especially under the influence of figures such as Cesare Lombroso in Italy and the aforementioned Alphonse Bertillon in France.

Lombroso, an Italian physician and anthropologist, believed that criminality was partly innate and that criminals could be recognized by physical features, a theory he called “atavism.” He argued that criminals represented a regression to a more primitive human type. His books were richly illustrated with drawings and photographs of skulls, faces, and profiles which, according to him, revealed certain criminal tendencies.

These criminal types were often categorized based on face shape (square, elongated, broad forehead), jaw structure (prominent lower jaw), ear shape, eye set, and even things like a slanted nose or an asymmetrical face. For example, pickpockets were thought to have small, nervous faces, while murderers showed broad jaws and deep eye sockets. Origin, gender, and social class also played an implicit or explicit role in this stereotyping. People of foreign or Jewish origin were often suspected on the basis of outward features and deviation from the “Anglo-Saxon ideal.” This is a clear example of a late Victorian form of ethnic profiling and seems unthinkable in our current society. But in the era of Jack the Ripper this was (unfortunately) quite normal.

### *Bertillonage*

In France, Alphonse Bertillon designed his “signalement anthropométrique” or Bertillonage, a system that combined photographs (front and profile) with exact body measurements. In addition to this system, portrait books were compiled in which mugshots and sketches of various kinds of criminals were collected, intended for use by police and judicial authorities. These books served both as a means of recognition and to reinforce the notion that criminality could be objectively identified.

Although this practice is outdated and scientifically disputed, it provides a unique insight into the mental world of justice and the police around 1888, in which appearance was still considered a reliable indicator of moral and behavioral deviance. In the Jack the Ripper investigation, this approach was therefore indirectly reflected in the attempts to draw up an offender profile on the basis of physical observations, behavior patterns, and social prejudices.

Bertillon developed in the early 1880s the system of “Bertillonage,” a method by which suspects were identified on the basis of precise bodily measurements (such as head circumference, arm and leg length) and external features (such as scars, ear shapes, or eye color). He combined this with precise descriptions and standardized identification photographs (the so-called “mugshots”), taken in frontal and profile

view under identical conditions. Although revolutionary, this system was only adopted internationally later.

In London in 1888, the police did not yet have a comparable registration system, which meant that suspects were often recognized only by name or vague description, leading to confusion, wrongful arrests, and uncontrollable rumors.

Another forward-looking innovation by Bertillon was the use of forensic photography and crime scene documentation. He advocated measuring, photographing, and mapping crime scenes carefully — including the position of the victim. His method made it possible to reconstruct later how a crime had unfolded. In the Jack the Ripper investigation this did not happen: no photographs were taken of the murder sites, victims were quickly removed, and traces were rarely secured. Each crime scene was handled hastily, partly under public pressure and out of fear of social unrest. As a result, potentially important clues were lost.

As for forensic investigation, in 1888 the London police had only autopsies, witness statements, and observation reports at their disposal. Fingerprints were not yet used — they were only introduced at Scotland Yard from 1901 — and neither blood group analysis nor DNA traces existed. Traces such as hairs, fibers, mud, or even handwritten letters were generally not examined systematically.

### *Autopsies*

Although post-mortem examinations were carried out by experienced physicians such as Dr. Rees Llewellyn and Dr. George Phillips, these were limited to medical observations and simple determinations of time and cause of death, without modern laboratory analysis. Investigations proceeded slowly, witnesses were often interviewed informally, and interrogations were rarely fully recorded.

In London in 1888, autopsies — or post-mortem examinations — were performed according to the medical standards of the time, which were becoming more refined, but had not yet reached the level of modern forensic medicine. Yet, in the second half of the 19th century, the distinction between external and internal autopsies was already



known, and both forms were applied in the investigation into the victims of Jack the Ripper.

An external autopsy consisted of a visual inspection of the outside of the body. External injuries, signs of violence, lesions, any bleeding, bruises, strangulation marks, the condition of the clothing, and other visible features were recorded. This type of examination often took place on the spot or in the mortuary and was considered the first step in investigating the cause of death.

An internal autopsy went further and involved opening the body to inspect the organs. The coroner or physician examined the condition of the heart, lungs, and stomach contents (for example, to determine the time of death), the uterus in female victims, and in the case of the Ripper victims also whether organs were missing (such as the uterus or kidney). Internal autopsies were usually performed in a local mortuary or a hospital room with limited equipment. In Whitechapel there were several mortuaries, such as the one on Old Montague Street, where Mary Ann Nichols was taken, or Golden Lane, where Catherine Eddowes was examined.

The person overseeing the entire process was the coroner — a function with deep historical roots in the British legal system. In 1888, the coroner was a jurist (sometimes with medical knowledge) responsible for investigating unnatural deaths. The coroner led the judicial inquiry, the so-called inquest, in which a jury was convened to decide on the cause of death. The coroner conducted witness examinations, had autopsies performed by a physician (usually a local district doctor), and presented the medical and factual data to the jury. In the case of the Ripper murders, Dr. Wynne Edwin Baxter and Dr. Roderick Macdonald, among others, were active coroners who coordinated the investigation.

Although autopsies in 1888 were thus carried out both externally and internally, there was still no standardization, no modern trace analysis, and no preservation of DNA material. Nevertheless, these examinations formed the backbone of the murder investigation, and much information about the nature of the Ripper murders — such as the sequence of cuts or the absence of certain organs — has been preserved solely thanks to these autopsies.