

JACK THE RIPPER

No one knows who Jack the Ripper was. And no one knows for certain what motivated him. 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 the creation of the alienated loner. Harsh and inhumane conditions, an indifference towards 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 nineteenth century produced the first modern serial killer.

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. The late 1800's saw almost a million people dwelling in the slums east of Aldgate Pump; 4,000 houses in Whitechapel alone one year were condemned as uninhabitable, though little was done about it for years. Liquid sewage filled the cellars of houses and people kept their windows – those not yet broken – shut because of the stench from outside. The majority of families, often up to nine people, lived in one room. Incest was common in these crowded conditions, even amongst children as young as ten.

Many East End youth died before they were 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. Often 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 or in dustbins, under stairways, or bridges. Those who managed to scrape together enough money could rent a room in a lodging house, and such 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 a place along a rope to lean against and sleep.

Women's work included scrubbing, sweatshop tailoring, hop picking, and sack or matchbox making, all with a complete lack of safety standards. Seventeen hours of backbreaking labor paid 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 sixteen engaged in this trade, for a total of 1,200 prostitutes in Whitechapel and 80,000 in London. 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."

Little is known about Jack the Ripper beyond his handiwork. The first canonical murder took place on Bank Holiday, Friday, August 31, 1888, in Buck's Row. The victim was Polly Nichols, a 42-year-old alcoholic with grey 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 next killing took place in a yard at No. 29 Hanbury Street, on Saturday, September 8, 1888. Annie Chapman was 45 years of age, stout, aggressive, 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.

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, but claimed her husband and two offspring had perished in a steamboat disaster. The Ripper had 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, 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 downwards, the entrails "flung in a heap about her neck." Her ear was almost cut off and a kidney taken. The latter was later mailed to the authorities.

The final and most horrific murder occurred in 13 Miller's Court, on Friday, November 9, 1888. Mary Kelly, only 20 years of age and three-months pregnant, 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. Even though there were other prostitute murders following these, most investigators believe Jack the Ripper stopped his killings, for whatever reason, after the mutilation of Mary Kelly.

The removal of internal organs from at least three of the victims led to proposals that their killer possessed anatomical or surgical knowledge. Letters from a writer or writers purporting to be the murderer were received by media outlets and Scotland Yard. The "From Hell" letter, received by George Lusk of the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee, included half of a preserved human kidney, supposedly from one of the victims. The text of the letter is as follows:

From hell

Mr Lusk

Sor

I send you half the Kidne I took from one women prasarved it for you tother piece I fried and ate it was very nise. I may send you the bloody knif that took it out if you only wate a whil longer

signed

Catch me when you Can Mishter Lusk

The concentration of the killings at the weekend, and within a few streets of each other, has indicated to many that the Ripper was employed during the week and lived locally. Others have

thought the killer was an educated upper-class man, possibly a doctor or an aristocrat, who ventured into Whitechapel from a more well-to-do area; such theories draw on cultural perceptions such as fear of the medical profession, distrust of modern science, or the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Suspects proposed years after the murders include virtually anyone remotely connected to the case by contemporary documents, as well as many famous names, who were never considered in the police investigation. More than likely, the identity of Jack the Ripper will be a mystery forever. In 1996 *BBC Magazine* voted Jack the Ripper as “the worst Briton in history.”

In 1988 the FBI prepared a criminal personality profile for the Jack the Ripper murders. 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
- had poor personal hygiene and appeared disheveled
- 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 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
- 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
- did not write any of the “Jack the Ripper” letters, and would not have publicly challenged the police
- did not commit suicide after the murders stopped

The murders were all within a mile of each other, and the total hunting area was just over half a square mile in size. All the victims resided within a couple of hundred yards of each other in the Thrawl, Flower and Dean, Dorset, and Church Street doss houses off Commercial Street.

Part of Eddowes' blood-stained apron was cut away by her killer, and the missing 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 one-third of a mile away and a 10-minute walk from Mitre Square where Eddowes was murdered. It appeared the bloodied apron piece was used to wipe clean a knife. The following graffito was written in chalk above on the black brick wall:

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

While the geographic profile for the Whitechapel murders is interesting and has some supporting evidence, we cannot assess its accuracy. The killer's address, like his identity, remains unknown. In 1992 it was claimed the diary of Jack the Ripper had been found. Such a discovery would finally solve the world's most famous mystery, but perhaps leave the world a less colorful place. Forensic tests discredited the diary, leaving the puzzle still intact.

Source: Rossmo, D. K. (2000). *Geographic Profiling*. Boca Raton, FL : CRC Press.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why has Jack the Ripper case fascinated society for so many years?
2. Some have theorized that the "repressed" Victorian society of England caused Jack the Ripper to snap. What do you think?
3. Are people fascinated by murder and murderers? If so, why?