

**Harry Cox's article on the Whitechapel Murders,
Thomson's Weekly News 1 December 1906
(one of a series of articles of his reminiscences)**

**THE TRUTH ABOUT THE WHITECHAPEL MYSTERIES.
TOLD BY HARRY COX,**

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Specially written for "Thomson's Weekly News."

It is only upon certain conditions that I have agreed to deal with the great Whitechapel crimes of fifteen years ago. Much has been written regarding the identity of the man who planned and successfully carried out the outrage. Many writers gifted with a vivid imagination have drawn pictures for the public of the criminal whom the police suspected. All have been woefully wrong. In not a single case has one succeeded in discovering the persons [sic] who while the trail of blood lay thick and hot was looked upon as a man not unlikely to be connected with the crimes.

It is my intention to relate several of my experiences while keeping this fellow under observation. I may give a theory as to the cause of the crimes, but on no account can I enter into the theories of my brother officers or indicate whether or not the last has been heard of the crimes.

There are those who claim that the perpetrator was well known to the police; that at the present moment he is incarcerated in one of His Majesty's penal settlements. Others hold that he was known to have jumped over London Bridge or Blackfriars Bridge; while a third party claims that he is the inmate of a private lunatic asylum. These theories I have no hesitation in dispelling at once.

I can well remember the sensation which the first of the horrible crimes caused among those whose duty it was to investigate the untoward happenings of the East End.

The murder of Martha Turner was an amazing puzzle to each of us. Never in the course of our experience had such a case occurred. It was clearly no ordinary East End crime. Most of the bodies which are found at the riverside or in the dark squalid streets bear the marks of struggles or of blows given in anger.

But this one bore neither. It appeared rather that the woman had been quietly throttled to death, and after death mutilated in the most horrible fashion. There were almost

Forty Wounds on the Body.

Nine were in the throat, seventeen in the breast, and the others in the lower parts of the body.

The woman was well known to the police, and it was a comparatively easy matter to find out the companions she had visited in the early part of the night.

The movements of all were traced and the fact established beyond doubt that none of them had been responsible for her death.

One of the suspected persons was a soldier, but he had no difficulty in proving his innocence.

There was not a clue to help us in our work, and we were stumbling along very much in the dark, when suddenly we were startled by the news of another crime of a similar nature.

It was committed in Buck's Row, a dead-and-alive street in Whitechapel made up of warehouses and slum dwellings. The murder was discovered by a young constable named John Neil. On the morning of Friday, Aug. 31, of the year 1888, he was patrolling his beat when a young man obviously labouring under great excitement rushed up to him and said - "Ere, mister, there's been a terrible murder down at Mullin's stable."

"A murder!" said the policeman. "Are you sure?"

"Sure! Why look 'ere," spoke the young fellow, pointing to the knee of his trousers. "I was that 'urried to get to my work, 'avin slept in, that I fell over 'er afore I knew where I was. At first I thought it was a drunk woman, but in bendin' down to rouse 'er I put my 'and on my knee and was 'orrified to find it all red with blood. Swelp me, mister, it did give me such a fright."

The body was moved to the mortuary at the instigation of Dr Henry Llewellyn, who was brought to the scene of the outrage by the constable. An examination speedily proved that here again was a crime the elucidation of which would be baffling in the extreme.

The woman had been mutilated beyond description, but everything pointed to the work having been done not in anger, but in a quiet, methodical manner. There was a dwelling-house adjoining the gateway, beside which the body had been found, and in it a woman and her son and daughter had been sitting at the time the murder must have taken place. All stated emphatically that although the night was quiet they

Heard Never a Sound

outside the house.

The news of the murder soon spread, and before long many amateur detectives were connecting it with the murder of Martha Turner, and advancing strange theories as to the murders.

Many believe several of them to this day, especially one to the effect that the murders were committed by some mad medical specialist, and the bodies conveyed in his own conveyance to the East End. An absurd piece of nonsense!

In nearly every case the murders were committed on the actual spot where the bodies were found, or very close to it.

We proved beyond doubt that the second victim met her unknown murderer near the scene of the crime, and was discovered dead about two hours afterwards.

The woman was an inmate of a common lodging-house who was forced to spend her last night on the street because she had not the few coppers necessary for her "doss."

She was seen in Whitechapel at nearly three o'clock on the Friday morning. At that time she was standing alone at the corner of Osborne Street.

A story got abroad that the body had been dragged along the roadway, but this is easily seen to be utter fiction when the evidence of Dr Llewellyn at the inquest is glanced at. He stated clearly - "There were no marks of any struggle or blood as if the body had been dragged."

When the full details of the crime were gathered it speedily became apparent to us that we had no ordinary cut-throat assassin to deal with. The man was evidently a mono-maniac, and one who

possessed certain anatomical knowledge.

The greatest terror reigned among women of the lowest class. Many of them came to implore me to safeguard them, and stated that they were terrified to stir beyond their lodgings at nightfall.

Each of them fixed upon a certain man as the perpetrator, and it was due to the remarkable manner in which their stories agreed that an arrest was made.

Not a scrap of evidence could be proved against the suspect, however, and he was dismissed.

About a week after the second murder another occurred. The scene of the tragedy was Hanbury Street, and the victim was another fallen woman named Annie Chapman.

The greatest sensation of all, however, occurred on the last day of the month, when two of the ghastly crimes were committed.

One took place in Berner Street, the other in Mitre Square, the victims being Elizabeth Watts and Catherine Eddowes respectively.

The next and the final crime of the series did not take place till the 9th of November, when Mary Kelly was done to death in Dorset Street, and this leads me to point out a fact which, of course, could scarcely be grasped at the time of the murders, and which up till the present time has been pointed out by none.

That is, that the mysterious criminal had a carefully-thought-out system under which he carried out the outrages. The first crime took place on August 6, the second on the last day of the month. The third occurred in the beginning of the following month, this time two days later, and the fourth and fifth were once again on the last day of the month. The final murder was again on the opening days of the month.

This, as I say, seems to point to the murderer having a system, but it also considerably strengthens the theory that the man was a sailor, and timed his murders so that he could board his vessel just as it was on the point of sailing.

We had many people under observation while the murders were being perpetrated, but it was not until the discovery of the body of Mary Kelly had been made that we seemed

To Get Upon the Trail.

Certain investigations made by several of our cleverest detectives made it apparent to us that a man living in the East End of London was not unlikely to have been connected with the crimes.

To understand the reason we must first of all understand the motive of the Whitechapel crimes. The motive was, there can be not the slightest doubt, revenge. Not merely revenge on the few poor unfortunate victims of the knife, but revenge on womankind. It was not a lust for blood, as many people have imagined.

The murderer was a misogynist, who at some time or another had been wronged by a woman. And the fact that his victims were of the lowest class proves, I think, that he was not, as has been stated, an educated man who had suddenly gone mad. He belonged to their own class.

Had he been wronged by a woman occupying a higher stage in society the murders would in all

probability have taken place in the West End, the victims have been members of the fashionable demi-monde.

The man we suspected was about five feet six inches in height, with short, black, curly hair, and he had a habit of taking late walks abroad. He occupied several shops in the East End, but from time to time he became insane, and was forced to spend a portion of his time in an asylum in Surrey.

While the Whitechapel murders were being perpetrated his place of business was in a certain street, and after the last murder I was on duty in this street for nearly three months.

There were several other officers with me, and I think there can be no harm in stating that the opinion of most of them was that the man they were watching had something to do with the crimes. You can imagine that never once did we allow him to quit our sight. The least slip and another brutal crime might have been perpetrated under our very noses. It was not easy to forget that already one of them had taken place at the very moment when one of our smartest colleagues was passing the top of the dimly-lit street.

The Jews in the street soon became

Aware of Our Presence.

It was impossible for us to hide ourselves. They became suddenly alarmed, panic-stricken, and I can tell you that at nights we ran a considerable risk. We carried our lives in our hands so to speak, and at last we had to partly take the alarmed inhabitants into our confidence, and so throw them off the scent. We told them we were factory inspectors looking for tailors and capmakers who employed boys and girls under age, and pointing out the evils accruing from the sweaters' system asked them to co-operate with us in destroying it.

They readily promised so to do, although we knew well that they had no intention of helping us. Every man was as bad as another. Day after day we used to sit and chat with them, drinking their coffee, smoking their excellent cigarettes, and partaking of Kosher rum. Before many weeks had passed we were quite friendly with them, and knew that we could carry out our observations unmolested. I am sure they never once suspected that we were police detectives on the trail of the mysterious murderer, otherwise they would not have discussed the crimes with us as openly as they did.

We had the use of a house opposite the shop of the man we suspected, and, disguised, of course, we frequently stepped across in the role of customers.

Every newspaper loudly demanded that we should arouse from our slumber, and the public had lashed themselves into a state of fury and fear. The terror soon spread to the provinces too. Whenever a small crime was committed it was asserted that the Ripper had shifted his ground, and warning letters were received by many a terror-stricken woman. The latter were of course the work of cruel practical jokers. The fact, by the way, that the murderer

Never Shifted His Ground

rather inclines one to the belief that he was a mad, poverty-stricken inhabitant of some slum in the East End.

I shall never forget one occasion when I had to shadow our man during one of his late walks. As I watched him from the house opposite one night, it suddenly struck me that there was a wilder look

than usual on his evil countenance, and I felt that something was about to happen. When darkness set in I saw him come forth from the door of his little shop and glance furtively around to see if he were being watched. I allowed him to get right out of the street before I left the house, and then I set off after him. I followed him to Lehman Street, and there I saw him enter a shop which I knew was the abode of a number of criminals well known to the police.

He did not stay long. For about a quarter of an hour I hung about keeping my eye on the door, and at last I was rewarded by seeing him emerging alone.

He made his way down to St George's in the East End, and there to my astonishment I saw him stop and speak to a drunken woman.

I crouched in a doorway and held my breath. Was he going to throw himself right into my waiting arms? He passed on after a moment or two, and on I slunk after him.

As I passed the woman she laughed and shouted something after me, which, however, I did not catch.

My man was evidently of opinion that he might be followed at every minute. Now and again he turned his head and glanced over his shoulder, and consequently I had the greatest difficulty in keeping behind him.

I had to work my way along, now with my back to the wall, now pausing and making little runs for a sheltering doorway. Not far from where the model lodging-house stands he met another woman, and for a considerable distance he walked along with her.

Just as I was beginning to prepare myself for a terrible ordeal, however, he pushed her away from him and set off at a rapid pace.

In the end he brought me, tired, weary, and nerve-strung,

Back to the Street He Had Left,

where he disappeared into his own house.

Next morning I beheld him busy as usual. It is indeed very strange that as soon as this madman was put under observation the mysterious crimes ceased, and that very soon he removed from his usual haunts and gave up his nightly prowls. He was never arrested, for the reason that not the slightest scrap of evidence could be found to connect him with the crimes.

Long after the public had ceased to talk about the murders we continued to investigate them.

We had no clues to go upon, but every point suggested by the imagination was seized upon and worked bare. There was not a criminal in London capable of committing the crimes but was looked up and shadowed.

The mystery is as much a mystery as it was fifteen years ago. It is all very well for amateur detectives to fix the crime upon this or that suspect, and advance theories in the public press to prove his guilt. They are working upon surmise, nothing more.

The mystery can never be cleared up until someone comes forward and himself proves conclusively that he was the bloodthirsty demon who terrorised the country, or unless he returns to his crimes and

is caught red-handed. He is still alive then? you ask. I do not know. For all I know he may be dead. I have personally no evidence either way.

NEXT WEEK:-

Mysterious Thefts of Horses and Carts in London City.