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Footsteps of the Ripper

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Footsteps of the Ripper

I have followed the trail of Jack the Ripper through the very streets where he lurked.

While on leave recently from the university, I spent several months in London researching crime in England, and was able to visit the sites of the Ripper murders and other places associated with the Ripper.

Jack the Ripper committed his horrific crimes within a period of 71 days, from late August to early November 1888.

During those 10 weeks he murdered five women — each a down and out, part-time prostitute with an alcohol problem. All but one of the victims were slain outdoors; only the last, and most ghastly, murder was committed inside, in the victim's lodgings.

All five Ripper killings were in the ancient parish of Whitechapel or its surrounding vicinity. Four of the murders were committed outside London in adjoining Middlesex County; only one of the murders, the fourth, actually was committed within the city limits of London.

The five Ripper victims were:

- Mary Ann (Polly) Nichols, 43, found dead by the side of the road on Buck's Row (now Durward Street) on Aug. 31.

- Annie May (Dark Annie) Chapman, 47, found dead in the back yard of a residence at 29 Hanbury St. on Sept. 8.

- Elizabeth (Long Liz) Stride, 42, found dead inside a walled courtyard off Berner Street (now Henriques Street) Sept. 30.

- Catherine Eddowes, 46, found dead less than an hour later that same Sept. 30, in Mitre Square in the City of London, less than a mile from where Stride had been found.

- Marie Jeanette (Black Mary) Kelly, 25, the only victim slain indoors, in her rented room at 13

Miller's Court (since demolished), off Dorset Street (now Duval Street), on Nov. 9.

The Ripper murders were committed late at night or in the early morning hours. The killing weapon was a knife with a thin, extra-sharp blade about six inches long and a sharp point. All the victims' throats were slit, and most of the victims were mutilated in the abdominal area and slashed in the face. Jack the Ripper had violently grabbed each victim by the throat and throttled her into unconsciousness before using the knife.

The victims were almost certainly killed where they were found. No witnesses heard or saw the murders. The stealthy killer was able to approach and kill his victims and escape through the streets of Whitechapel, completely unseen and undetected. Jack the Ripper was never caught or even identified by English police.

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In England there are no official plaques or historical markers that make reference to Jack the Ripper. Nonetheless, the Ripper is big business there and an



Gene Wilkes

important part of the tourist trade. There are even several escorted Jack the Ripper walking tours, which take visitors around the Whitechapel area where the murders occurred; I went on two of them myself. I also took many walks on my own until I had thoroughly familiarized myself with Whitechapel and its surroundings.

The Ripper murder sites are located within a rather small area. Walking briskly, I was on several occasions able to visit all five murder sites within less than one hour. It was thrilling! Here I was, an Athenian, prowling the haunts of the Ripper and walking in the steps of his victims. I even had time to visit The Ten Bells, a pub once patronized by several Ripper victims.

Remodeled this century, The Ten Bells is a watering hole for persons interested in the Ripper. Inside, its walls are covered with posters and articles about him.

One cold wet London night, after completing a spooky walk through the dark streets of Whitechapel, I warmed myself with a glass of brandy at The Ten Bells, soon to change its name to The Jack the Ripper!

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LIPSTICK



I can't remember when I first started wearing lipstick, but I bet my mother suggested it. I was always the last to notice what the other girls were doing.

When I was in graduate school, I heard some students talking about a '50s party they attended the night before.

"All the girls were wearing that red lipstick," one of them said.

I was wearing bright red lipstick at the time. It was my first clue that the style had changed.

I moved to California, got a teaching job, and wore lipstick every day to work. I stopped wearing it on the weekends I spent with hippie friends. In the early 80s, I fell in love with a man who cherished fuzzy legs and no makeup, so I sank into my natural state.

Recently I visited my hometown. I bought one tube of pale lipstick so I wouldn't feel out of place when I went to church with my parents.

One day my mother invited me to lunch with some of her friends. I let her dress me in a camel-hair suit and a brown paisley blouse with a bow tied at the neck. I put on some lipstick before we left the house. It was odd to see the imprint of my lips on a piece of tissue.

Mamma's friends were women in their 70s, familiar to me since my childhood. But I knew them more inti-

mately from my mother's stories: one's husband neglected his insurance, so she had to go to work after he died. Another sank into so deep a coma after childbirth that her husband ordered her coffin — then she shocked the nurse by asking for a bedpan. One's young daughter had gone for years without eating a single thing but pancakes.

They talked as we ate pork and corn and okra and cherry cobbler from the buffet. I felt a drowsy interest.

How startled I was when, one by one, the women started reapplying their lipstick. They pulled tubes and compacts out of their pocket-books and snapped them open. They could take the top off a tube of lipstick with one hand.

One spread the color on her mouth; another pressed her lips together and a third looked in a mirror and rolled her lips back to check for smears on her teeth.

All the while they were telling about the maid who didn't know how to read and the violets that wouldn't bloom.

At that moment they seemed as exotic to me as those tribal people who stretch out their lips for beauty.

The writer is a local woman who doesn't want to embarrass her Mama. Kisses compliments of Christelle.



The abandoned Board School on Durward Street today, as photographed from the exact spot where the Ripper's first victim, Mary Nichols, was found.

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