



SIMON D WOOD

# The Enigmas of Millers Court

**1. Obfuscate:** To make so confused or opaque as to be difficult to perceive or understand.

**2. Obfuscation:** The activity of obscuring people's understanding, leaving them baffled or bewildered.

My own involvement with the Ripper began in the mid-1970s, when I read in the *London Evening News* a serialization of Stephen Knight's *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*, a melodramatic rendering of events featuring the Duke of Clarence, a secret marriage and an illegitimate child, all wrapped up in a heady brew of royal intrigue and conspiracy. I remember thinking at the time how unlikely it all sounded and, as I had some spare time on my hands, decided to check out the story for myself. Within a matter of two weeks I had the true facts.<sup>1</sup> Knight's story collapsed like a house of cards, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Since then we have endured the Maybrick Diary and Patricia Cornwell's reportedly \$6-million attempt to implicate Walter Sickert. And around it goes. Unable to separate fact from fiction, the public appetite for this stuff remains insatiable. What's the betting that, as I write, a new contender for the mantle of Jack the Ripper, complete with TV docu-drama, is being cooked up to coincide with the 120th anniversary of the crimes?

I have often wondered why we have failed to unearth the identity of Jack the Ripper. Maybe it is because, at the last count, there were 27 contenders, specific and generic, for the mantle. This offers almost infinite permutations of suspect and evidence, though any combination of these is ultimately pointless. No single suspect squares with all the 'clues' and 'descriptions', and one hundred years of investigation, plus

a seemingly endless supply of people claiming some sort of ownership or inside knowledge of the crimes, has resulted in a mystery that has grown out of all proportion to its origins.

Sir Robert Anderson, Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police CID at the time of the Ripper murders, didn't name anyone as the Ripper. But he is quoted in the 1920 *Police Encyclopaedia* as saying: '...there was no doubt whatever as to the identity of the criminal...' Really? In 1894, Sir Melville Macnaghten named Drutt, Kosminski and Ostrog, 'any one of whom would have been more likely [than Thomas Cutbush] to have committed this series of murders'. In marginalia on his copy of Anderson's memoirs, Superintendent Donald Swanson also named Kosminski, whom he believed was Sir Robert's suspect. In 1903, Inspector Frederick George Abberline said: 'I cannot help feeling that [George Chapman] is the man we struggled so hard to capture fifteen years ago,' yet added, 'Scotland Yard is really no wiser on the subject than it was fifteen years ago.' Finally, in 1913, Chief Inspector John George Littlechild wrote of Dr Francis Tumblety as his hot favourite.

There is something very wrong with this picture. Is 'more likely to have committed...' and 'I cannot help feeling that...' really the best these distinguished policemen could come up with? Why can't we look to high-ranking officials at the time of the murders for some sort of consensus? There is a very good reason for this, a reason that is also responsible for our collective failure to identify Jack the Ripper. Put simply, much information and evidence were withheld and we have not been told the truth about certain events.

The circumstances surrounding the murder of the woman we know as Mary Jane Kelly were not all we imagined them to be. What follows neither solves the murder nor identifies the person we think of as Jack the Ripper.

Indeed, it poses more questions than it answers. But I hope it will open up discussion and prompt serious Ripperologists to reappraise events in Millers Court and seek out new areas of research.

We have accepted as fact that the Kelly murder scene was discovered by the Metropolitan Police at 1.30pm on the afternoon of 9 November 1888 as seen in the photograph known as MJK 1.



MJK 1

In 1989 a second photograph, now known as MJK 3, arrived anonymously at Scotland Yard. It shows the murder scene from the opposite side of the bed. Despite its lack of provenance, we have accepted it at face value.



MJK 3

Together, these photographs warrant closer inspection, for they are a treasure trove of information about what really happened in Room 13, Millers Court.

the fireplace and mantelpiece on the end wall. From exterior photographs, I estimated the height of the room to be in the region of 8' 6". Also marked on this drawing are the positions of

than the 5 x 4" format. I therefore assumed that the photographer, who may have been Joseph Martin, a commercial photographer employed by the Metropolitan Police, used either a half-plate or quarter-plate glass negative.<sup>3</sup>

Let's play photographer. On arrival at Millers Court, we face a horizontal subject. We accordingly set up our camera to take MJK 1 in landscape format in order to capture as much as we can of the body, bed and adjacent table.

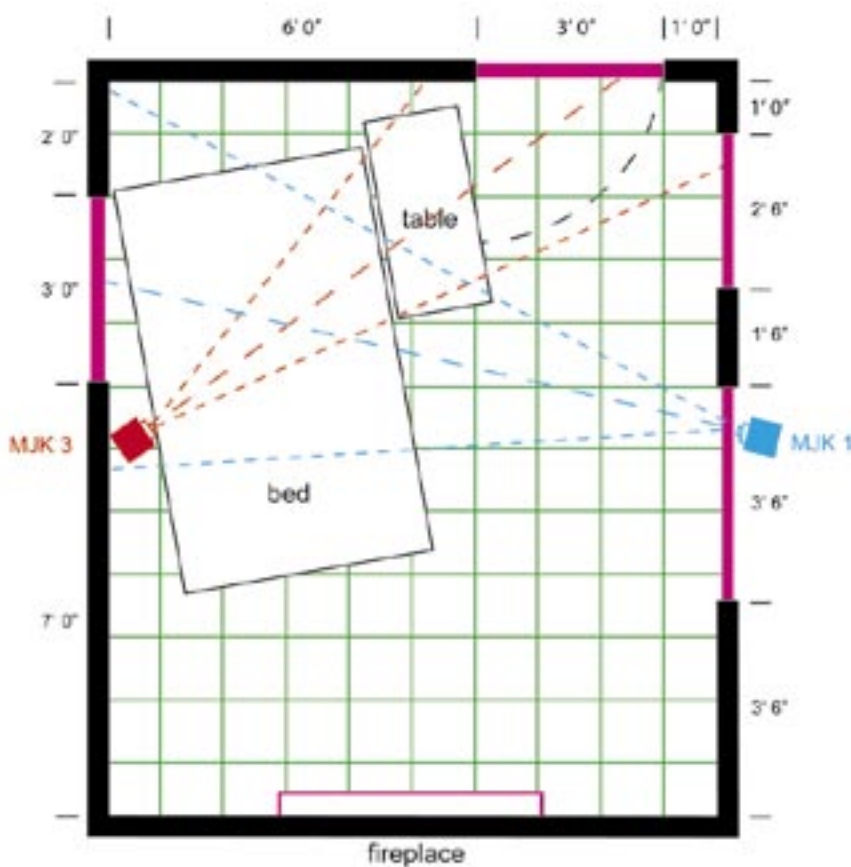


Diagram 1: The two photographs (MJK 1 and MJK 3)  
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MJK 1 Half-plate format

Picture 4 above shows MJK 1 set within a half-plate format that, if the right and left sides were intact, would show us the head and foot of the bed plus the entire adjacent bedside table. Let's now look at MJK 3, which we can reasonably suppose was taken by the same photographer with the same camera. Once again, our subject is horizontal. We accordingly set up our camera in landscape format to capture as much as we can of the body on the bed.

Contemporary newspaper illustrations and floor plans have given the impression that Kelly's room was fairly spacious. In fact, Room 13 was cramped: 12.0' from door to fireplace and 10.0' from windows to partition wall. Dominated by a bed, the room also contained two tables, a chair - maybe two - and a wash-stand. The first thing I set out to do was calculate where the two photographs could have been taken from. I worked on the assumption that they both show the bed in the position seen in MJK 1.

Diagram No. 1 is a scale plan of Room 13. While it is impossible to be exact in the dimensions, I believe the drawing to be sufficiently accurate for the matter in hand. I checked the size of Victorian bricks,<sup>2</sup> averaged the width of the two doors at 3.0ft and took an educated guess at the width of the windows based on calculations from the exterior photograph of Room 13. For convenience, I have centred

the camera for the photographs MJK 1 and MJK 3, together with their angles of view and centre lines.

What the camera shows in MJK 1 and MJK 3 has largely dictated the dimensions of the bed and table on the plan, which I scaled to accommodate both viewpoints. The bed is 6' 6" long by 4' 0" wide - based on occasional double occupancy - and the adjacent bedside table 3' 0" by 1' 6". I have swung the bed 10° away from the partition wall in keeping with its apparent position in MJK 1. This gives a gap of about 11 inches where bedding was rolled up and stuffed between the bed and the partition wall - a position which some believe may have served as the camera location for MJK 3. Next I thought about the size of the camera used.

In 1888 the most widely used glass plate negative sizes were full-plate (13 x 8.5"), half-plate (8.5 x 6.5"), quarter plate (6.5 x 4.25") and 5 x 4". MJK 1's proportions are slightly larger



MJK 1 Half-plate format

Here is MJK 3 set within a half-plate format. If the photograph hadn't been cropped, most of the head and foot of the bed would be visible. Yet, if we take a closer look at MJK 3, it seems that there might be a problem with my theory. How could a photograph meant to capture the whole of the body on the bed have been taken with the camera in the position shown in Diagram No. 1? With the camera hard up against the partition-wall side of

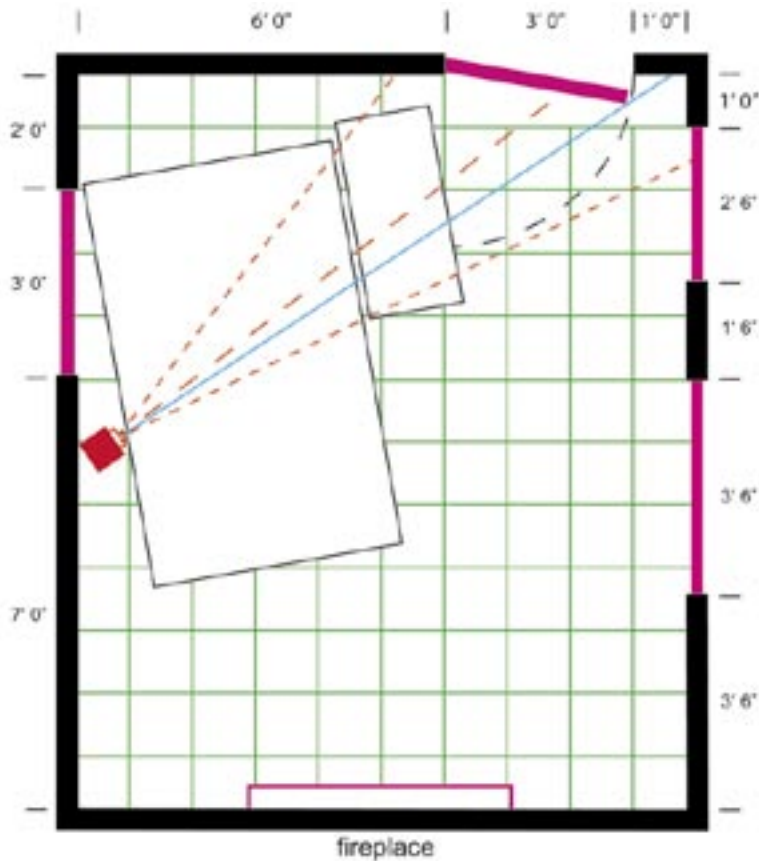


Diagram 2: MJK 3 photograph - strip of light from open door  
© Simon Wood

the photograph more context. But I ditched this notion when MJK 3 revealed evidence to the contrary.

Next, compare the positions of the bedside table in MJK 1 and MJK 3. We know that there were two tables in Room 13: a bedside table and a larger table, probably used for eating, which the police found by the larger of the two windows when entering the room. In MJK 3, the end of the bed is just out of shot to the right of the picture, extending beyond Kelly's raised knee and falling roughly in a line with the top of her foreleg. But in MJK 1 it forms a line with the top of Kelly's thigh, a difference of about a foot. Notice also the difference in height between the tables - on a level with Kelly's left elbow in MJK 1, on or just above the level of her hand in MJK 3.

Let's now turn our attention to the strip of light in MJK 3 purportedly coming through the partially open door to Room 13. Diagram No. 2 represents the alleged angle of view of MJK 3 with the door shown six inches ajar.

Diagram No. 2 shows that the camera that took MJK 3 could not have seen a strip of light coming from

the bed, the picture would require a wide-angle lens of panoramic proportions and would therefore be impossible to take with Victorian photographic equipment. In general, plate cameras with long focal lengths - ie, the distance between the lens and the plate - had fields of view in the region of 60°.

Next, let's look at Kelly's right leg in the foreground of the photograph, seen from the knee to the top of the ankle, a length of about fifteen inches.<sup>4</sup> With the camera in the position shown in Diagram No. 1, how could the photographer capture Kelly's right leg, which would have been hard up against the lens, together with all the background detail? He would have had to move the camera at least a foot further back, but this would have brought it to the other side of the partition wall. How was it done then?

The explanation is simple. If you look closely, you'll see that Kelly's right leg has been painted in afterwards, together with a crudely drawn hand touching something that looks suspiciously like the back of an old plate camera. My first thought was that, as the leg was impossible to capture from this position, these details were painted in later to give

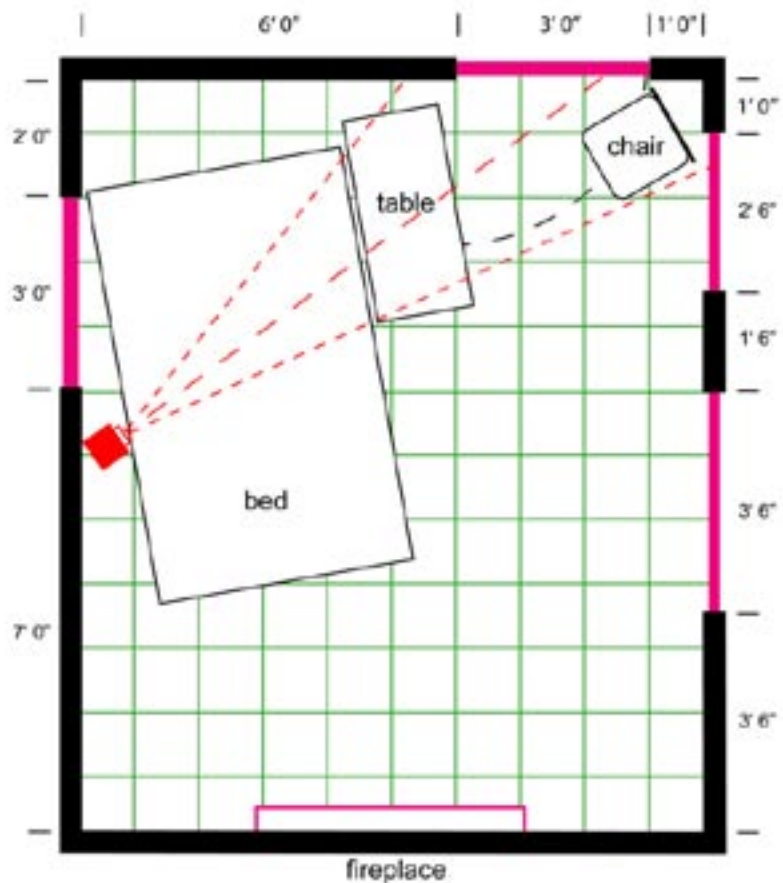


Diagram 3: The chair in MJK 3  
© Simon Wood

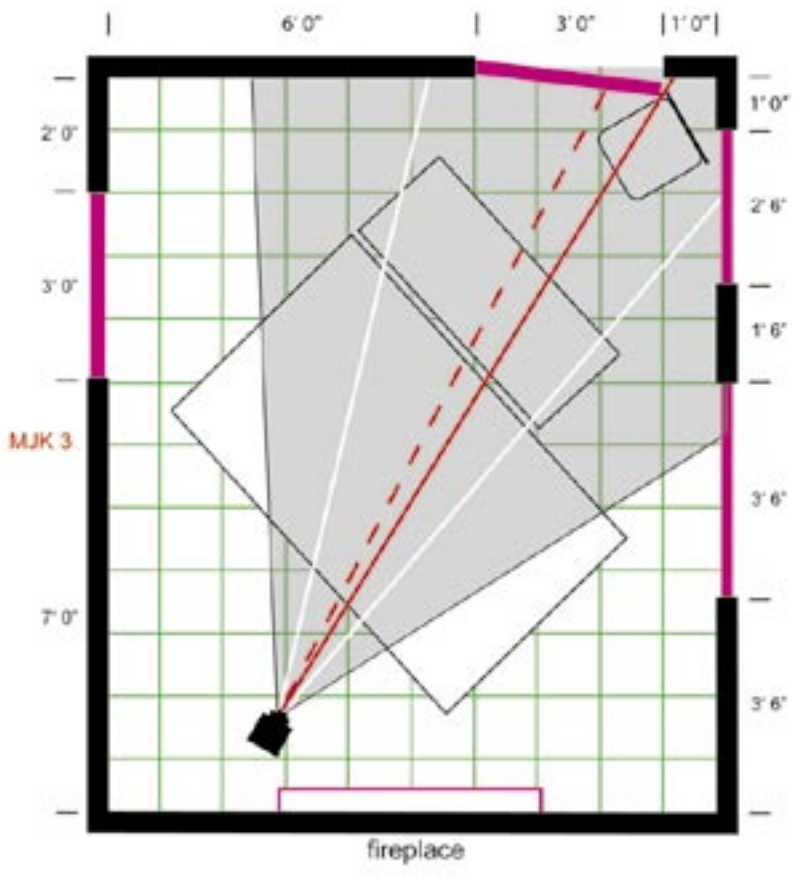


Diagram 4: Position of bed and table in MJK 3 and position of camera  
© Simon Wood

different positions from those shown in MJK 1. Diagram No. 4 shows the actual position of the bed and table in MJK 3.

The bed and table were placed almost diagonally across the room. The field of view in MJK 3 is marked with white lines. The grey area is the camera's 60° field of view. Again, it is impossible to be absolutely accurate, but this position satisfies all the detail seen in MJK 3. I have left the door ajar to show that my earlier argument still holds good. Even from this angle, a strip of light from a partially open door would not be visible to the camera.

If the bed was in the middle of the room when MJK 3 was taken, why was the victim's right leg painted in later? Let's first consider the size of the table in the diagram above (approximately 4.0' long) as we look again at a plan of MJK 1 in Diagram No. 4A.

I think that MJK 1 was taken through the window. This diagram shows the camera outside the window, its 60° field of vision marked in grey with white lines showing the photograph's field of view. The small circle marks the centre of the bed.

between the partially open door and the door frame. If the door, which opened inwards, was ajar, the camera would have seen the leading edge of the door - the view marked by the solid centre line - overlapping the door frame, with daylight illuminating the corner by the smaller of the room's two windows. But in MJK 3 that corner of the room is almost in complete darkness. This means that the door is closed. So, what accounts for the strip of light? We'll soon get to that.

In the meantime, look closely at MJK 3. You'll see an upright wooden chair sitting at an angle across the corner of the room, somewhere between the door and the smaller of the two windows. Diagram No. 3 on the previous page shows the chair in place relative to the bed and table as seen in MJK 1.

I made the chair 16 inches square, though its actual size is immaterial. Diagram No. 3 shows the angle formed by the table and the chair. Note how, from the position of the bed as shown in MJK 1, this angle converges towards the door. Now look again at MJK 3. The angle formed by the table and chair converges in the opposite direction. This means that when MJK 3 was taken the bed and table were in

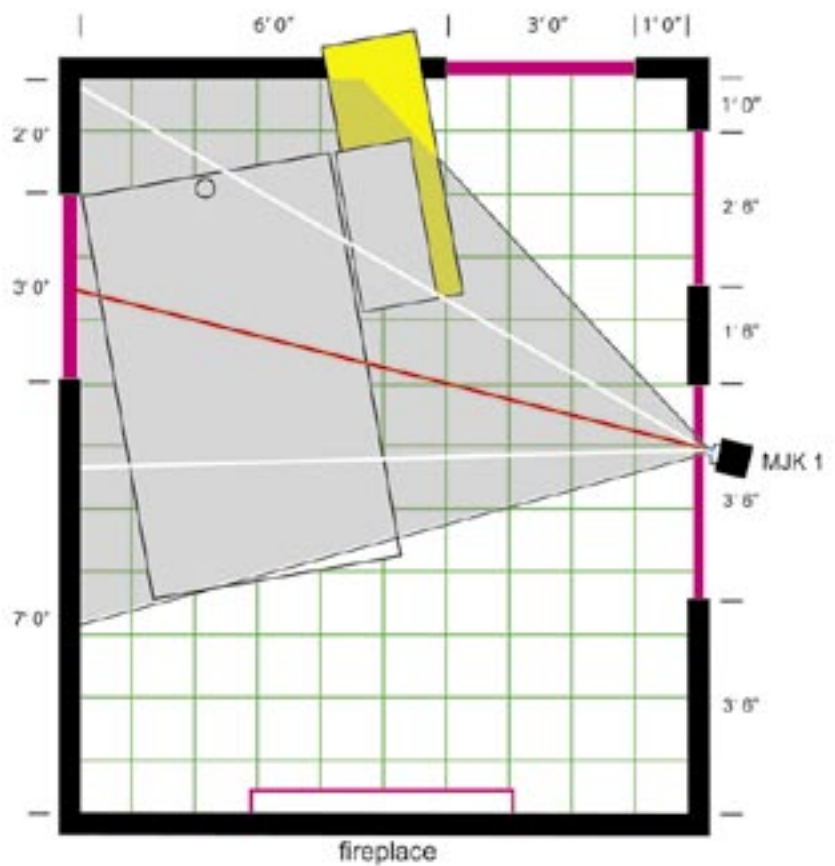


Diagram 4a: MJK 1 - relative table sizes  
© Simon Wood

I don't know the size of Kelly's bedside table. I only know that it was smaller than the table found by the larger of the two windows. In this plan it works out to just over 2.0' long. The rectangle offset behind it is the 4.0' table from the previous diagram at the same scale. With its forward edge set in the same position as the bedside table, it wouldn't fit in the room. Therefore the table in MJK 3 is not the same as in MJK 1.

Let's now return to the strip of light. How can we account for it if the door was closed? The answer is simply that it is not a strip of light. If the door were partially open, a strip of light would run all the way to the floor. But this one stops short of the table. Besides, it's in a different plane from the door, ie, nearer the camera. It's something hanging from the ceiling which has been caught in the bright light source coming from the right of the photograph. I have no great knowledge of the working parts of the human body, but I would suggest that this is an internal organ. Notice how it's almost symmetrical in shape and slightly bulbous at its base and appears stretched in places as though pulled down by its own weight.

As to the bright light in MJK 3, it looks like the curtains on the larger of the room's two windows had been opened and the light source was sunlight. The only problem with this, though, is that at mid-morning, 9 November 1888, the sun was towards the south - while Mary Kelly's windows faced north and her door faced west



MJK 3 Spots of light

- and cloud cover was at 100%. Hardly sufficient illumination to create the hot spots of light seen on (a) the items on the table; (b) the knee, hand and pelvic region; and (c) the internal organ dangling from the ceiling. Neither could it account for the shaft of light cutting across the top left hand corner of the picture.

The white asterisks denote hot spots of light. All of them, including the internal organ hanging from the ceiling, have been illuminated by a bright light source - a flare from which is just visible in the top right corner of the picture - and all of them fall within a small +/- percentage of intensity of each other. What was the light source then? Perhaps an earlier version of the photographic accessory shown below.



Magnesium Ribbon Holder  
Courtesy of Theodore Gray

Picture 11 above shows a 1913 Kodak magnesium ribbon holder. It was used to measure out a pre-determined length of ribbon calculated to generate the amount of light needed to expose film on the basis of the brightness and the rate at which the ribbon burns: about 1 to 2 seconds per inch.

You pull the amount of ribbon required out of the holder, which has a spool inside, and light it. When the flame reaches the tip of the holder, it goes out, automatically timing the exposure. In other words, it is a slow-motion flash bulb that can be moved about while burning to avoid hard shadows. But if the photographer's assistant in MJK 3 did not have access to one of these holders, he could have simply held a length of magnesium ribbon in his hand with little danger of getting burned. Magnesium provided a powerful light source, but its slow burning rate limited its use to static subjects. It was ideal, then, for use in MJK 3, which, in comparison to



Magnesium burning  
Courtesy of Theodore Gray

MJK 1, is well exposed with no harsh shadows.

Let's recap. In MJK 3, the door to Room 13 is closed. A chair stands in the corner preventing the door from opening easily. The bed and table are in the middle of the room. An internal organ dangles from the ceiling. All of this is illuminated by a magnesium-ribbon light source emanating from the right of the photograph. By the time MJK 1 is taken, the bed has been moved, and the larger table, together with its contents, has been substituted for the smaller bedside table. Armed with this information we can start to build up a scenario and timeline.

Alerted to Kelly's murder by her landlord, John McCarthy, and Thomas Bowyer, Inspector Walter Beck arrives at Millers Court shortly after 11.00am, followed by Doctor George Bagster Philips at 11.15am and Inspector Frederick George Abberline at 11.30am. The door and windows to Room 13 are locked. At Doctor Philips's behest - according to Abberline - no attempt is made to break into the room as everyone waits for the bloodhounds to arrive. The *New York Herald* noted on 10 November 1888:

*Not even the reporters were allowed within the police line. It was determined this time to keep the clues from being effaced, tampered with or distorted. Besides, bloodhounds were to be employed, and scent must not be obliterated.*

Everybody cools their heels until 1.30pm when Superintendent Thomas Arnold arrives with news that the bloodhounds aren't coming and instructs McCarthy to break open the door, which he does with a pickaxe. Doctor George Bagster Philips later reported:

On the door being opened it

knocked against a table which was close to the left-hand side of the bedstead, and the bedstead was close against the wooden partition... and by subsequent examination I am sure the body had been removed, after the injury which caused death, from that side of the bedstead which was nearest to the wooden partition previously mentioned. The large quantity of blood under the bedstead, the saturated condition of the palliase, pillow, and sheet at the top corner of the bedstead nearest to the partition leads me to the conclusion that the severance of the right carotid artery, which was the immediate cause of death, was inflicted while the deceased was lying at the right side of the bedstead and her head and neck in the top right-hand corner.

consensus was that when Kelly was killed her bed was in the position shown in MJK 1. And here is where we find evidence that the circumstances surrounding Kelly's death are not what we have imagined them to be. For the past 117 years we have believed that the door and windows of Room 13 were locked and that nobody entered the room until the door was broken open at 1.30pm by McCarthy. But someone has lied to us.

MJK 3 shows the bed in the centre of the room, demonstrating clearly that, at some time between 11.00am and 1.30pm, the police defied Warren's order, entered the room, took a number of photographs - of which I believe MJK 3 is only one - moved Kelly's bed, removed certain items of evidence and rearranged the murder scene. Furthermore, MJK 3 must

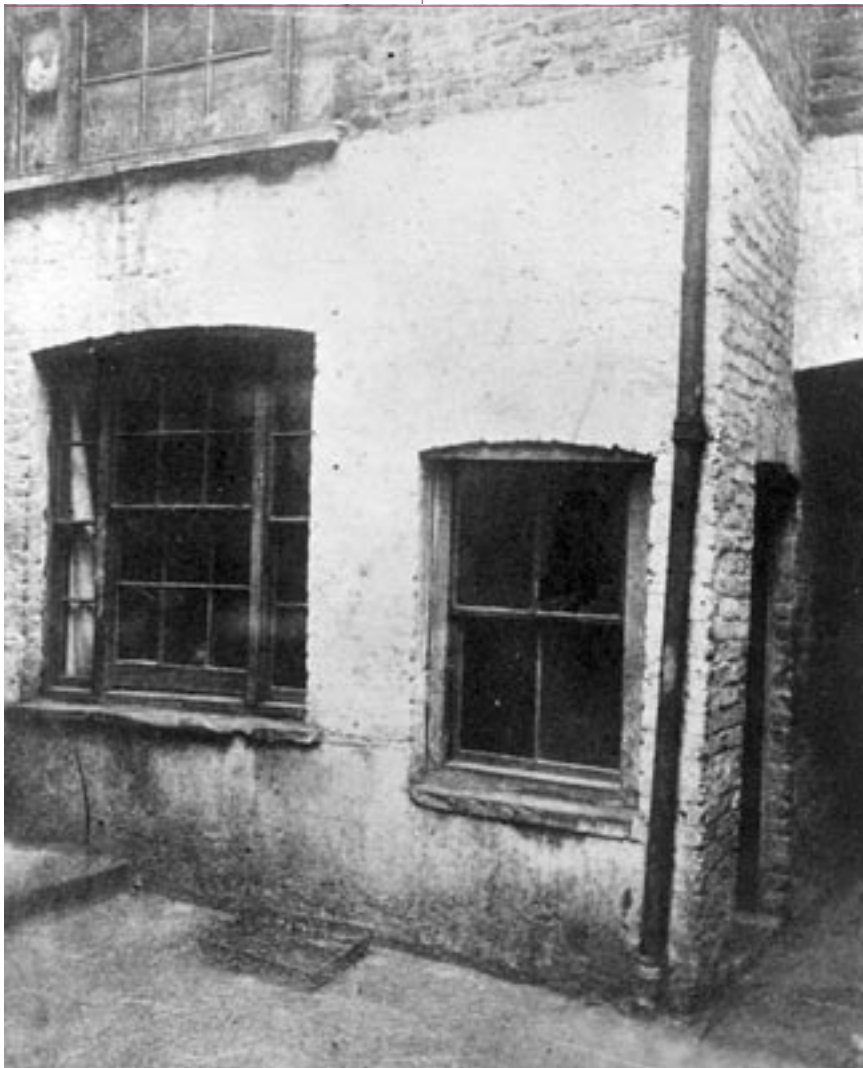
The murderer probably cut Kelly's right carotid artery with the bed in roughly the position shown in MJK 1. He later moved it to the centre of the room to carry out the mutilations. This would have allowed him 360° access to Kelly's body. But he certainly wouldn't have bothered moving it back again into its former position, since an eight or nine-stone dead weight lying on a heavy wooden-framed bed isn't an easy thing to move silently and by oneself. Accordingly, when he left Room 13 the bed would have been in this position. Logic dictates that this is the position in which the bed was discovered and subsequently photographed.

Dr Bagster Philips was in Millers Court from 11.15am when, in his own words, 'I looked through the lower of the broken panes and satisfied myself that the mutilated corpse lying on the bed was not in need of any immediate attention from me,' until 1.30pm, when the door was broken open by McCarthy. This means that Dr Bagster Philips examined Kelly's body in the full knowledge that the room had been entered and the murder scene rearranged.

According to police and press reports, prior to 1.30pm not only was the door to Room 13 locked. So were the windows. We know this because we are told that, after sending a telegram to Police Commissioner Sir Charles Warren, Superintendent Arnold ordered the removal of an entire window in order to gain access to the room.<sup>5</sup> But the police did not remove the window, as the exterior photograph of Room 13 attests.

The brickwork surrounding both window frames is intact, showing no evidence of either window being removed, though their removal would have resulted in fairly extensive damage. Note the broken panes in the smaller window and open curtain in the larger. Perhaps this photograph was taken at some time in the morning, before a window was removed? No. The angled shadow on the brickwork by the far side of door, cast by the brickwork above the alley connecting 26 and 27 Dorset Street, indicates that the sun was in the west when the photograph was taken. Consequently, the photograph was taken in the late afternoon of 9 November, after Mary Jane Kelly's body had been taken away in a coffin, but before 'the windows were boarded up and the door padlocked'.<sup>6</sup>

How did the murderer leave Room 13? Via the door, which he locked



Exterior of Room 13, Millers Court

Dr Bagster Philips was joined by Dr Bond, divisional surgeon of A Division, Dr Gordon Brown, Dr J R Gabé of Mecklenburgh Square, and others. The

have been taken before the door was broken open by McCarthy; otherwise the chair standing just inside the door would not be there.

behind him? In this case, why did he leave a chair positioned just inside the door? You might do that if the door didn't lock and you wanted to prevent its being opened easily from the outside. But the door to Room 13 was locked. Why else would it have to be broken open?

The murderer could just as easily have exited through the larger of the two windows. It would have been easy enough, the sill being only a little over two feet from ground level, and makes a lot more sense than running the risk of being seen locking the door from the outside. If the murderer did exit this way, he would not have been able to re-lock the window from the outside. This means that the police could have easily opened the window. Which is precisely what they must have done. How else could they have got in to take MJK 3? The door was locked. Superintendent Arnold's order to remove an entire window makes no sense except to reinforce in everyone's minds the notion of a 'locked room'.

Let's turn now to Kelly's 'lost' key:

[Inspector Abberline]: 'Barnett informs me that it [the key] has been missing some time, and since it has been lost they have put their hand through the broken window, and moved back the catch. It is quite easy.' This is an interesting remark.

Barnett moved into Mrs Buller's Boarding House on 30 October, the day of his quarrel with Mary Jane Kelly during which two window panes were broken. This event happened before the key went missing. Barnett didn't visit Room 13 again until nine days later, on 8 November. How did he know the key had gone missing, and why, if he wasn't living there, would he say that he and Kelly used to reach through the broken window to slip the bolt? Some say the key had been missing for some time before the fight. If this is true, how did Kelly and Barnett get into the room before the window panes got broken?

[Inspector Abberline]: 'An impression has gone abroad that the murderer took away the key of the room...'

From a practical point of view, it doesn't matter if Kelly's door was locked or bolted. Secure the door, commit the murder, exit through the window. The important thing, then as now, is that everybody thinks the door was locked. But if the door wasn't locked, we have to ask ourselves a question. Why didn't someone reach through the broken window to open

it? Abberline did say that it was 'quite easy.' Simply, because that would have destroyed the illusion of the 'locked room' on which so much of the 'mystery' relied and which, later, the story of the missing key would reinforce. Abberline's vague assertion about the key serves no useful purpose other than to confuse matters by neatly planting in our minds the tantalising possibility of a previous encounter between Kelly and her murderer.

At Kelly's inquest, Abberline told Coroner Roderick Macdonald:

*I subsequently took an inventory of the contents of the room [since missing]. There were traces of a large fire having been kept up in the grate, so much so that it had melted the spout of a kettle off. We have since gone through the ashes in the fireplace; there were remnants of clothing, a portion of a brim of a hat, and a skirt, and it appeared as if a large quantity of women's clothing had been burnt.*

melting may have occurred at an earlier date. But of real interest here is the answer Abberline gave the Coroner regarding the burning of the clothing in the fire:

*I can only imagine that it was to make a light for the man to see what he was doing.*

Instead of something definite, such as 'because the embers were still hot or warm or smouldering, I suspect... etc. etc,' Abberline says, vaguely and without a shred of corroborative evidence, 'I can only imagine... etc. etc,' and in one deft phrase makes the fire an indelible ingredient of the locked room mystery.

The fire has always bothered me. Clothing tends to smoulder. Bundle up a woman's dress and throw it into a small fireplace and it will probably douse the flames. For it to burn it would have to be torn up and fed to the flames in pieces, with some sort of accelerant used to get the fire roaring in the first place. Furthermore, to be hot enough to

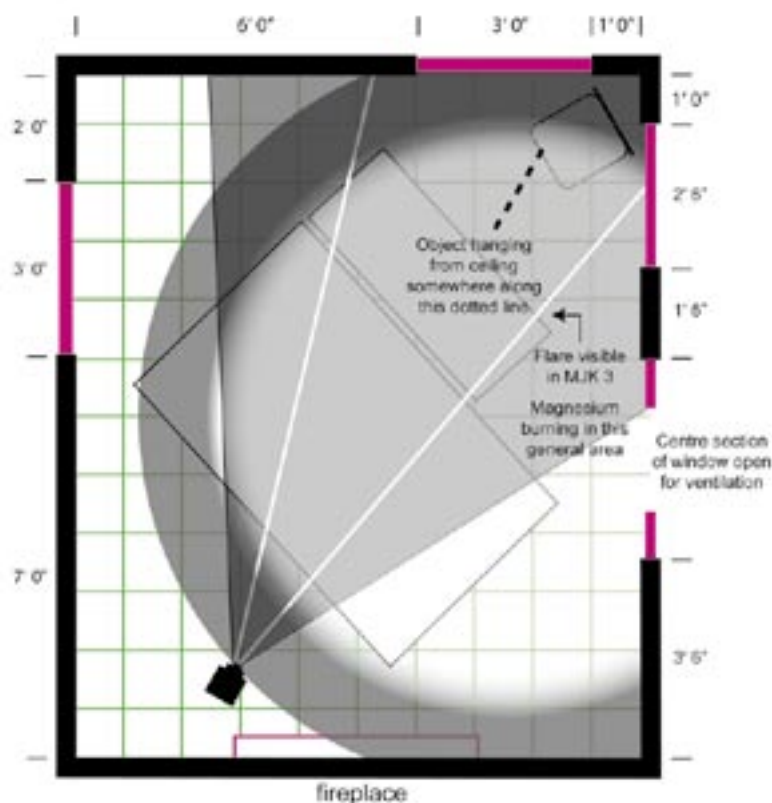


Diagram 5: Position of light sources in MJK 3  
© Simon Wood

As far as I know, we have never been told whether the 'traces of a large fire' were warm, still smouldering or cold, and many people have suggested that the incident of the kettle spout

melt a kettle spout, the fire would have required constant attention. This would have been frustrating for the killer, who wouldn't have wanted to risk setting the room ablaze whilst

busily engaged in murder, heavy furniture moving and mutilation. Can we really imagine a lone killer coping with all this? A fire this hot would also have produced a lot of smoke and ash as the flames eventually subsided and the remnants of clothing smouldered, and some of these ashes would have settled in the room, covering surfaces and contaminating evidence.

Based on MJK 3, Diagram No. 5 shows the general area in which the magnesium ribbon was burned and its circle of light. I have taken the liberty of opening the larger window - but not necessarily the curtains - to provide ventilation.

Theodore Gray, co-founder of Wolfram Research Inc. and Chemical Elements columnist for Popular Science magazine, generously conducted an experiment on my behalf. He burned lengths of magnesium ribbon in a space about half the size and height of Room 13. The space soon filled with smoke. Gray said:

*I think the degree to which the smoke would interfere with a longer exposure would depend mainly on how high the ceiling was. It [the smoke] goes up and stays at the top, so in a high-ceiling room it might stay out of the way.*

*Burning longer lengths [for longer exposures] without some form of ventilation, you could not stay in the room long enough to finish the ribbon burning, and the picture would be seriously impacted by smoke.*

Returning to the possibility that the photographer's assistant in MJK 3 didn't have access to a magnesium ribbon holder, Gray mentioned that:

*Magnesium ribbon is really a very calm material, and puts out surprisingly little heat for the amount of light. It can be burning just an inch or two away from your hand and you feel no heat. When dropped it puts itself out quickly with no danger of catching the rough wood floor on fire.*

[And when burned] *the ribbon puts off a combination of fine smoke which gets in and around everything, and clumps of the same material float around but settle out much more quickly than the fine smoke.*

The photo opposite shows remains of burnt magnesium ribbon, which generally break off and fall to the ground after a few inches have burned.

Abberline's vague statement about the fire providing illumination achieves two things. First, it establishes in

everyone's mind that the murder must have been committed at night. Secondly, the strong possibility that other photographs were taken - since the police certainly wouldn't have broken into the room to take only one - means that further amounts of magnesium were burned in Room 13. So how better to account for any possible questions about contamination of evidence by the residues of burnt magnesium than for Abberline to suggest that they were ashes resulting from 'a large fire' in the grate?

At Kelly's inquest, Sara Lewis testified that, at 2.30am:

*...opposite the lodging-house I saw a man with a wideawake [hat]. There was no one talking to him. He was a stout-looking man, and not very tall. The hat was black. I did not take any notice of his clothes. The man was looking up the court; he seemed to be waiting or looking for some one. Further on there was a man and woman - the latter being in drink.*

Before this, Caroline Maxwell, who stated that she saw Kelly twice between about 8.00 and 8.45am on the morning of 9 November, had been cautioned by the Coroner: 'You must be very careful about your evidence, because it is different to other people's.'

The Whitechapel murders had attracted unprecedented levels of press coverage. The activities of the police were under intense scrutiny, and the official version of events had to remain watertight. Mindful of this, Abberline returned after the inquest to Commercial Street police station, where at 6.00 that evening a truly miraculous event took place. George Hutchinson walked in and testified that he had been in Dorset Street at about 2.30am, when he saw Mary Kelly entering Room 13, Millers Court, in the company of a man bearing an uncanny resemblance to an almost prototypical description of the Ripper, complete with curled



*Burnt magnesium  
Courtesy of Theodore Gray*

moustache and small parcel in hand. At the stroke of Abberline's pen, Sara Lewis's unidentified 'man and woman' became Kelly and the 'Ripper', magically transported to the right place at the right time.

Hutchinson's story supported Abberline's assertion about the 'large fire' in the grate and also neatly demolished Mrs Maxwell's story of seeing Kelly on the morning of the murder, which, officially, took place at between 3.00 and 4.00am. How could she have seen Kelly after she had been dead for several hours? Mrs Maxwell must have confused the dates. Abracadabra! The press swallowed Hutchinson's story and the official version of events remained watertight. But with 'the large fire' in the grate in doubt, it is quite possible that Mrs Maxwell saw Kelly either before or during the murder in Room 13.

Mary Ann Cox, a resident of Millers Court, had the following exchange with the Coroner:

[Coroner] How many men live in the court who work in Spitalfields Market?

[Mary Ann Cox] One. At a quarter-past six I heard a man go down the court. That was too late for the market.

[Coroner] From what house did he go?

[Mary Ann Cox] I don't know.

[Coroner] Did you hear the door bang after him?

[Mary Ann Cox] No.

[Coroner] Then he must have walked up the court and back again?

[Mary Ann Cox] Yes.

[Coroner] It might have been a policeman?

[Mary Ann Cox] It might have been.

On 22 October, two weeks prior to the murder in Room 13, Superintendent Arnold requested the augmentation of H Division by 25 men to ensure that all patrols were filled nightly. He wrote:

*I beg to recommend that the Division be augmented by twenty five Constables for the duty, and any not required for that purpose be employed in specially patrolling neighbourhoods which may be considered more dangerous than others, or where any complaint has been made upon which it is thought necessary a Constable should for a time be placed on a short beat.<sup>7</sup>*

Dorset Street was certainly considered a neighbourhood 'more dangerous than others', and Mary



Ann Cox's testimony suggests that, even without Superintendent Arnold's augmentations, police patrols were a common occurrence. Yet, strangely, no testimony about activity, suspicious or otherwise, was sought from the constables who regularly patrolled Dorset Street and Millers Court. Where were the police throughout the early hours of 9 November?

Missing policemen, a kettle spout melted, lost keys, locked rooms, broken windows, suspect testimony from George Hutchinson three days after the event - plus a hurried inquest at which medical evidence was withheld. All these reek of sleight of hand and the misdirection of an elaborately-staged illusion. The circumstances surrounding Kelly's murder are extremely suspicious and transcend any notion of its being the work of a lone killer reaching some sort of murderous apogee.

The actions of Inspector Abberline in rearranging the murder scene, tampering with photographs and removing pieces of evidence point to an alternative scenario in Room 13. But what could have happened in that dismal room to make him undertake such an elaborate cover-up? What could have been so unthinkably gruesome or politically sensitive that it had to be sanitised and passed off as the fifth Ripper murder? For an answer to this we must again return to MJK3; or rather, to my restored version of MJK3.

But let me offer first a few words of explanation. During my research I used only materials freely available in the public domain. For my copy of MJK3 I went to that most valuable of resources, the Casebook Jack the Ripper ([www.casebook.org](http://www.casebook.org)) for which Stephen Ryder deserves our heartfelt thanks.

In my restored version of MJK3 (see back cover) there is no retouching or trickery and no colour has been added. All I have done is retrieve and restore the colour information within the photograph. The colour is crude, but the results are sufficient for our needs. The image you see is a composite, which was necessary because the two main sections of the photograph required very different levels of adjustment to reveal detail. Only the painted-in leg at the bottom of the picture remains untouched - making it look all the more phoney and out of proportion.

At the top of the photograph, we can see the chair by the door. Visible to the left of the chair is the inside

of the door to Room 13, upon which letters have been daubed in a large semi-circle. Despite my efforts, no amount of adjustment made these letters any more legible, so your guess about what they are is as good as mine. At the centre of the picture can be seen the entrails hanging from the ceiling, and beneath them, on the table, is a knife with a bloodstained handle.



*The murder weapon?*

But it is the centre section of the photograph which is of most interest.



*Objects on the bed*

Look between the victim's thighs. The flat circular object is a china plate with a patterned border, behind which stands a bowl partially obscured by a smaller, lipped, bowl and a bottle laying on its side. Behind this large bowl are three smaller shallow vessels. Atop these, sloping from left to right, a spoon rests in a heart-shaped dish, behind which sits what might be a plume of feathers or a bunch of leaves. And to the right of the photograph, half out of shot, is a round short-necked glass or porcelain container which is possibly for wine, beer or spirits. Also on the china plate is a small lump of unidentifiable matter.

I will leave it to others to discern any possible symbolism in this tableau. But, symbolism aside, why have we never heard about any of this evidence? A bloodstained knife, a plate, five bowls, a spoon in a dish, a bottle and an alcohol container, plus graffiti and hanging entrails. It has all disappeared - vanished - along with

Abberline's inventory of the room.

There are three other pieces of evidence from Room 13 which we can add to our list.

At the inquest, Thomas Bowyer stated:

*There was a curtain. I put my hand through the broken pane and lifted the curtain. I saw two pieces of flesh lying on the table.*

[Coroner]: Where was this table?

[Bowyer]: In front of the bed, close to it.'

This tallies with Dr Thomas Bond's post-mortem report, in which he wrote: 'The flaps removed from the abdomen and thighs were on a table.'

There is a pile of human flesh on the table in MJK 3 but, as I have demonstrated, the contents of the table in MJK 1 are different. Here is the detail of the table from MJK 1, showing the victim's head in the background.

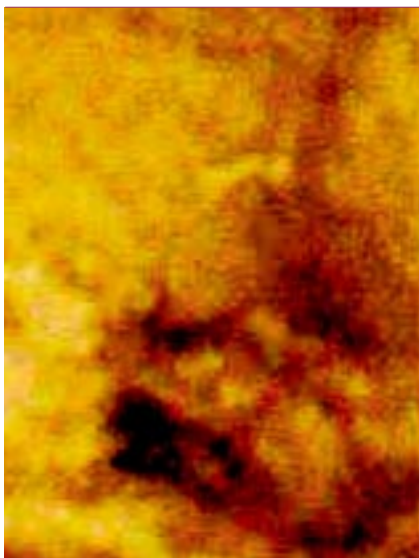
A small box sits on the corner of the table nearest the camera. Behind it, against a pile of unidentifiable detritus, is a small hand mirror. The back of the glass and its handle are clearly visible, and once you know it is there you can easily see it in most published versions of the photograph. Also identifiable on the bedside table, though impossible to see at a glance, is a ring in a trinket box.



*Handmirror on the bedside table*

Doctor Bond's post-mortem report of flesh on the table suggests that, if he was telling the truth, he examined the body as shown in MJK 3. But if this is correct, why didn't he mention the bloodstained knife, which must have been something of a clue? It even matches one of the possible murder weapons he describes in his

10 November report to Sir Robert Anderson. And if he examined the body as shown in MJK 1, why didn't he question the unlikely presence of a small hand mirror amidst the detritus on the bedside table?



Ring in trinket box

The mutilated body, together with all the above paraphernalia complete with hanging entrails, must have been a truly horrifying spectacle. Yet, strangely, Bowyer and McCarthy, the very first people to see the dead body, mentioned none of it. Both men described the body as it appears in MJK 1, which suggests to me that they were coached in the story about rent arrears to provide a plausible trigger for the body's discovery. But somebody over-egged the pudding in its telling. What Whitechapel slum landlord would have allowed a tenant to run up six weeks' rent arrears?

With the doubts about the 'large fire' in the grate pointing to the killing having taken place during the early daylight hours, you must marvel at the astonishing speed with which this crime was committed, discovered, 'investigated', brought to inquest and laid to rest. Ten days from beginning to end. Somebody was impatient to get the affair brushed under the carpet.

On 12 November two MPs, a high-ranking Post Office official and two members of the Royal

Irish Constabulary visited 13 Millers Court.<sup>8</sup> What possible interest could they have had in the murder of a Whitechapel prostitute? Maybe more than we realise.

When dealing with scans of old photographs it's easy to think pixel patterns are letters and symbols. I made this mistake many years ago when I suggested that there might be initials on the partition door in MJK 1 - and look where that led! That said, writing is indeed visible all over the photograph we know as MJK3. Most of it is illegible or nonsensical, probably the result of people writing on the envelope in which the photograph was kept. But at some point an original print was die stamped. In the area below the raised left knee clearly visible concentric circles contain the letters HO. Home Office? Within the circles, and to the left, a notation reads 'SIB8FGA' and, beneath, a second reads: 'pd 2/4'.



The notation on MJK 3

It's not too much of a stretch to interpret the first as 'Secret Irish Branch [Department?] 8 Frederick George Abberline'. He was no stranger to the secret world, having been on 'special service'<sup>9</sup> many times, most notably on 24 January 1885 when he arrested Cunningham, an Irishman, for his part in the bombing of the Tower of London. Cunningham's accomplice, Harry Burton, was arrested on 3 February at lodgings in Prescott Street, off Leman Street, Whitechapel. Believed to be prime movers in a conspiracy hatched in America, the two men were charged with high treason<sup>10</sup> and sentenced to life imprisonment on 25 May 1885.<sup>11</sup> What's interesting is that two other policemen involved with Abberline in the Tower of London bombing also worked on the Whitechapel murders:

Superintendent Thomas Arnold<sup>12</sup> and Sergeant Stephen White, who was 'rewarded and commended by the Home Office' for his actions at the Tower.<sup>13</sup>

The second notation is less certain. It could be 'police department 2 of 4', suggesting that the photograph was number 2 in a set of 4. This doesn't entirely square with the figure 4 clearly visible at the bottom right hand corner of the photograph, but together they suggest that there were at least three other photographs.

Whatever their exact meaning, these notations confirm that Abberline had knowledge of the existence and circumstances of this photograph. Further investigation, however, is required into his connections with the Secret Irish Branch, which at the time was under the immediate control of Detective Chief Inspector Littlechild.

Of course, we have to ask ourselves why, if MJK 3 was so sensitive, it ever surfaced in the first place. I have no definite thoughts on this, but do realise that owing to its lack of provenance many may now decide to dismiss it as evidence. As for me, I believe it to be the genuine article and I'm convinced that its anonymous sender was aware of its evidential value. I could kick myself that it took me 16 years to see what was staring us all in the face.

I have no fully-formed thoughts about the who or the why of what happened in Room 13. It's clear, however, that the original photographs were recognised as evidence of these events, which is why they were cropped and the leg painted in on MJK 3 to make it correspond with MJK 1. The authorities were also content to let events at 13 Millers Court rest squarely upon the shoulders of Jack the Ripper, who had been curiously inactive for the six weeks leading up to the murder and was never heard from again afterwards.

Remember the quotation with which I prefaced this article:

*Obfuscation: The activity of obscuring people's understanding, leaving them baffled or bewildered.*

With all the rumours and disinformation Abberline and others

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in the know continued to encourage well after the event, is there now any reason to wonder at the lack of consensus amongst detectives and high-ranking civil servants of the time? We have all been dazzled, astonished and mystified by the grand illusion of Mary Jane Kelly's murder, supposedly at the hands of the Ripper, and the master conjuror standing at the centre of it all appears to have been Inspector Frederick George Abberline. But MJK 3 blows a big hole in the official Ripper story. The jig is well and truly up for Abberline. All we have to do now is find out how and, more important, why he staged the trick.

I hope that Scotland Yard will make the original photographs available for independent analysis and that the Home Office will release its secret files on the case together with the other photographs and missing evidence from Room 13. Perhaps we will then learn what happened, at some time during October 1888, to the killer of Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Catherine Eddowes and, possibly, Elizabeth Stride, and discover the true identities of the victim in Room 13, the murderer(s) and the woman we know as Mary Jane Kelly.

In closing I would like to leave you with a final thought. If you can't accept that Abberline contrived to cover up the nature of the crime in Millers Court and make it look like a Ripper murder *in extremis* - toning down the crime scene considerably in the process - then consider this. Somebody took MJK 3 before the door to Room 13 was broken open. If it wasn't the police, who was it?

### Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks for the generous and invaluable assistance of Theodore Gray and Charles Shotwell, who may be visited respectively at [www.periodictable.com](http://www.periodictable.com) and [www.shotwellphotography.com](http://www.shotwellphotography.com). I should also like to thank most especially Laura Candelaria for the author's photograph accompanying this article.

### Notes

- 1 For those who are interested, my original research material is indexed at Tower Hamlets Local History Archive: stock number L. 8383, class number 341.
- 2 The Imperial brick of a nominal size of 9.0 x 4.5 x 3.0 inches was widely adopted in 1840.
- 3 The first Metropolitan Police photographer wasn't recruited until 1901. See Metropolitan Police Website ([www.met.police.uk/history/](http://www.met.police.uk/history/))



Simon Wood's restored colour version of MJK 3  
©Simon Wood

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| <p><i>archives.htm</i>).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 My wife, who is roughly the same height as Mary Jane Kelly (5' 8"), kindly volunteered her leg for this measurement.</li> <li>5 <i>Star</i>, 10 November 1888, <i>The Times</i>, 10 November 1888.</li> <li>6 <i>Manchester Guardian</i>, 10 November 1888.</li> <li>7 Home Office file A49301C/10 contains the official response to Arnold's request, which was granted.</li> <li>8 <i>Irish Times</i>, 13 November 1888</li> <li>9 Superintendent Arnold's retirement interview, <i>Eastern Post</i>, 3 November</li> </ol> | <p>1893.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 <i>The Nation</i>, 12 February 1885</li> <li>11 <i>The Journal of John Daniel Thompson</i> (<a href="http://homepage.powerup.com.au/~ajthomps/Journal.htm">http://homepage.powerup.com.au/~ajthomps/Journal.htm</a>).</li> <li>12 Superintendent Arnold's retirement interview, <i>Eastern Post</i>, 3 November 1893.</li> <li>13 <i>News of the World</i>, 14 October 1900.</li> </ol> |
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