

Part A: Carry out a historical enquiry**The 'Jack the Ripper' murders, of 1888 – a failure in detection.**

Between August and November 1888, the country was horrified by the 'Jack the Ripper' murders. The appalling killings of at least five women in the East End of London revealed the inability of the police to detect the killer. You will learn more about these killings in Part B of this book, but here we will just briefly examine the impact of the killings on detection.

How to catch a killer in 1888

Without the use of forensic science, or even fingerprinting, the only way to prove someone had committed a murder was one of the following:

- catch them in the act of murder
- find a witness who had seen the killing
- get the suspect to confess.

In most killings these circumstances do not occur. This problem meant that, try as they might, the police could not catch the killer in the act and – despite arresting a number of suspects – they were never able to bring anyone to trial for the murders.

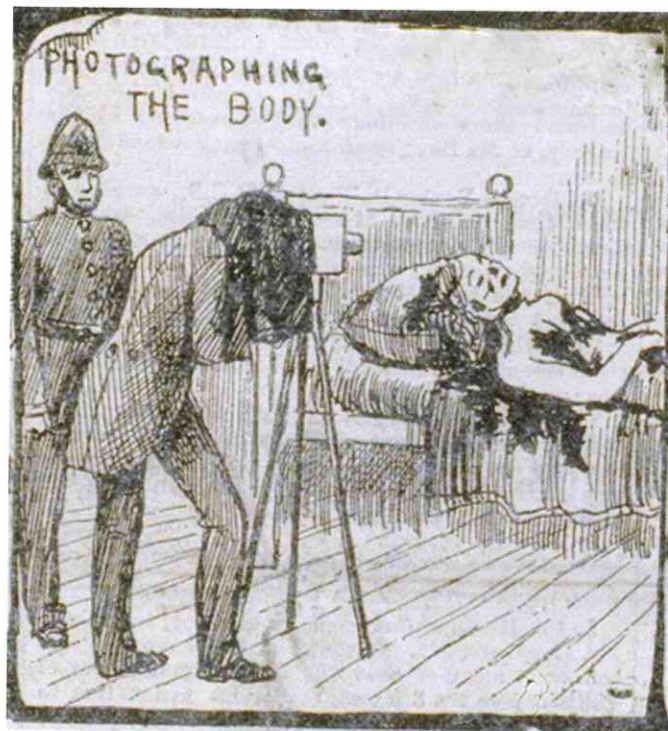
Problems detecting 'Jack the Ripper'

The killings reveal the problems facing police in the 1880s, despite the setting up of the CID in 1878. It was impossible to tell human from animal blood. As a result, in an area where there were many butchers, this meant that traces of blood could not be linked to the killings. Police lacked the technology to decide if a piece of human body posted to a local man was from a Ripper victim. And a piece of possibly important graffiti was removed before it could be photographed.

The use of photography

Despite this, detectives were becoming more skilled in recording crime scenes in 1888. City of London police officers made drawings of the crime scene in the murder of Catherine Eddowes and took many photographs of the victim. They also took photographs of the murdered Mary Kelly, though she was killed in the area policed by the Metropolitan Police. However, she was the only victim who was actually photographed at the scene of the crime, which shows that the importance of recording the crime scene had not been fully understood at the time.

Source B: A rare piece of evidence from *The Illustrated Police News*, showing early detection in action using new technology. This is a drawing recording the photographing of the body of Mary Kelly in November 1888.

**Did you know?**

While photographs had been taken in the 1830s, it was not until 1884 that the use of photographic film meant that a photographer no longer had to carry heavy photographic plates and chemicals around. It was in 1888 – the year of the 'Ripper murders' – that the first Kodak camera went on sale in the USA. This was a new technology that would soon help in the detection of crime.

The use of forensic science in detecting crime

The early detectives struggled to detect crime because they lacked the technology, methods and skills needed to get information from clues left at crime scenes and to link criminals with their crimes. As methods of forensic science developed, crime detection by the new CID became more effective.

The Belper Committee

The Belper Committee was a five-man Home Office committee, which was chaired by Lord Belper. It met in 1900 to compare the usefulness of two new methods of identifying suspects and solving crimes. These new methods were anthropometry and fingerprinting.

Anthropometry

Anthropometry was a system which involved recording the body measurements of a person to confirm the identity of a suspect. It was invented by Alphonse Bertillon in 1880 and started being used by Scotland Yard in 1894. (See pages 56–57 for more information.)

Fingerprints

A fingerprint is an impression of the ridges on a person's finger. By inking a person's finger, these can be recorded on paper and compared with fingerprints left at a crime scene. Since no two fingerprints are the same, this is a valuable way of identifying a person.

In 1897 a Fingerprint Bureau was opened in British-run Calcutta, India. Working in what was called the Calcutta Anthropometric Bureau (later called the Fingerprint Bureau) were Azizul Haque and Hem Chandra Bose. Haque and Bose were Indian fingerprint experts. These two men set up the way of using fingerprints that was eventually named the 'Henry System', after their supervisor, Sir Edward Richard Henry.

Henry gave a demonstration to the Belper Committee, using 7,000 fingerprints. As a result the fingerprint department of New Scotland Yard was set up in 1901. Since then, fingerprint evidence has identified many suspects and helped to solve many crimes.

Forensic science

As scientific knowledge has increased (assisted by new technologies such as more powerful microscopes) experts called 'forensic scientists' have used a wide range of techniques to study crime scenes and link criminals to crimes. These include analysis of plant pollen, fibres of clothing and DNA evidence from such things as hair or skin. In 1987, for the first time in the UK, a criminal was convicted using DNA evidence.

Specially trained experts called Scenes of Crime Officers, or SOCOs, attend crime scenes to record and examine the evidence. The evidence discovered is then used to investigate these crimes. (Today they are often called Crime Scene Investigators, or CSIs.)

Did you know?

Since 1995, a National Automatic Fingerprint Identification System allows every police force in England and Wales to compare records of fingerprints. In the same year, the DNA National Database Library was also set up, to store DNA evidence.

Activity

- Imagine you were a member of the Belper Committee in 1900. Write a report in which you explain why you think it is so necessary to look at new methods of investigating evidence in order to improve crime detection. In your report:
 - explain the problems the CID faced in detecting crimes, mentioning problems of the investigation into 'Jack the Ripper'
 - explain how some new methods are proving helpful (e.g. photography)
 - describe the new fingerprinting system and explain why you think it is worth setting up a fingerprint department at Scotland Yard.

Follow up your enquiry

Carry out your own research into the methods used by SOCOs and forensic scientists. Start with the information on this page and on page 40. Write a report on your findings. How different are these methods compared with detection in 1880?

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