



EUAN MACPHERSON

# THE TRIAL OF JACK THE RIPPER

UPDATED  
EDITION

THE CASE OF  
WILLIAM BURY  
(1859–89)

## ABOUT THE BOOK

A shocking and brutal murder had taken place in the city in February that year, and the words 'Jack Ripper is at the back of this door' were found written in chalk on a door at the scene of the crime. When he was arrested, the accused, William Bury, admitted that he was 'afraid he would be arrested as Jack the Ripper'.

The police investigation uncovered some disturbing details. William Bury was a small dark-haired man who was known to have been violent towards women. He had been born and brought up in the Midlands but had moved to the East End of London in the late autumn of 1887. On 20 January 1889, he and his wife travelled by boat to Dundee. This meant that he had arrived in London before the start of the Jack the Ripper murders and had left around the same time that they ceased. Could this be coincidence, people wondered. Could it also be a coincidence that the murder in Dundee carried all the hallmarks of a 'ripper' murder?

In the month before the trial, the local newspapers in Dundee began to run sensational stories linking the accused with the notorious Whitechapel murders. When the trial opened to a packed courtroom, many in the public gallery were wondering if the man standing in the dock was none other than Jack the Ripper himself.

In this sensational and ground-breaking book, Euan Macpherson presents the evidence that the long arm of the

law really did catch up with Jack the Ripper ... in a dingy basement flat in Dundee in the cold winter months of early 1889.

# CONTENTS

Cover  
About the Book  
Title Page  
A Note on the Sources  
A Note on the Quotes  
Acknowledgements  
Foreword to the 2018 Edition  
Author's Note  
Introduction  
Prologue

## PART I DUNDEE, 1889

- 1 - A Quiet Sunday Evening
- 2 - The Discovery of the Body
- 3 - 'Jack Ripper is at the Back of this Door'
- 4 - The Prisoner
- 5 - 'Don't Ill-Use the Poor Girl'
- 6 - 43 Union Street, Dundee
- 7 - 'Jack the Ripper is Quiet, Now'
- 8 - A Woman Screaming
- 9 - The Trial Begins
- 10 - The Case for the Defence
- 11 - The Sentence of Death

## PART II LONDON, 1888

- 12 - Polly Nichols
- 13 - Annie Chapman
- 14 - Elizabeth Stride
- 15 - Catherine Eddowes
- 16 - Jekyll, Hyde and Jack the Ripper
- 17 - Mary Jane Kelly
- 18 - The Modus Operandi
- 19 - Burke, Hare and Jack the Ripper

20 - The Hangman

21 - The Evidence against William Bury

22 - William Bury's Statements in the Custody of Dundee Police

23 - The Burial of the Truth

Epilogue

Appendix I

Appendix II

About the Author

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# **THE TRIAL OF JACK THE RIPPER**

THE CASE OF WILLIAM BURY (1859–89)

Euan Macpherson



EDINBURGH AND LONDON

## A NOTE ON THE SOURCES

The National Archives of Scotland in Edinburgh contains a transcript of the trial of William Bury and the case papers including correspondence about the case. The case itself was covered in detail by the *Dundee Advertiser* and by the *Dundee Courier*. Of the two newspapers, The *Dundee Advertiser's* coverage of the case was the more exhaustive and can be examined on microfilm in the Central Library, Dundee. The two weekly newspapers *The Weekly News* and *The People's Journal* are also worth consulting (copies are kept in the Central Library, Dundee). Dundee City Archives contain the police records from 1889. Other sources I have consulted include *The Dundee Yearbook 1889* and *The Dictionary of National Biography*.

For information about the Jack the Ripper murders in London, I have mainly used reports published in *The Times* in 1888. Where there has been some doubt over the names of particular individuals, I have used the names as given in *The Jack the Ripper A-Z* by Paul Begg, Martin Fido and Keith Skinner.

Meanwhile, readers wishing to conduct their investigation into the Bury case should visit the National Archives of Scotland in Edinburgh where they will find the case papers (JC26/1889/15), the Justiciary transcript (JC36/3) and the Precognition of the trial (AD/89/160). A visit to The Local Studies Department of Central Library, Dundee, is also recommended.



## A NOTE ON THE QUOTES

Most of the quotes are coming from the same sources. All quotes relating to the arrest and trial of William Bury have come either from the *Dundee Advertiser*, 12 February to 25 April 1889, the *Dundee Courier*, 12 February to 25 April, or from the transcript of the trial which is held in the National Archives of Scotland. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes relating to the crimes of Jack the Ripper have come from *The Times*, 1 September to 12 November 1888.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to offer my warmest thanks to Margaret Drummond, who encouraged me to return to this project after an absence of 17 years. I must also thank Richard and Molly Whittington-Egan for their advice, interest and encouragement. Sergeant William McFarlane (Retd) of Tayside Police spent a long time discussing the case with me and showed me around Tayside Police Museum. He was kind enough to leaf through Dundee City Police records from 1889 and came up with a lot of information about the police officers who investigated the case.

Thanks also to Ken Bruce LLB, Dr John Drummond, Alan Hay, Iain Flett (Dundee City Archives), Neil Millar and Tessa Spencer (National Archives of Scotland), Andrew Stewart (Clerk of the Faculty of Advocates), Mike Weir MP and the Local Studies staff at Central Library, Dundee.

Lastly, I would also like to thank Professor Dame Sue Black of the University of Dundee whose expertise gave me a much clearer insight into Ellen Bury's injuries and what actually happened in Dundee in February, 1889.

## FOREWORD TO THE 2018 EDITION

We can never know if William Bury and Jack the Ripper were one and the same, but Euan MacPherson's painstaking and logical account lends a great deal of credibility to the possibility. Bury was certainly a troubled man who led a difficult life and the timing of his move from London to Dundee and the manner of his crime, render him a very reasonable suspect. Bury was only twenty-nine when his own life ceased at the end of a gallows rope, following his conviction by a jury of fifteen members of the Dundee public for the murder of his wife. If there is such a thing as an 'ordinary' murder, then this was not one. His motives were unclear, his behaviour after her death was bizarre and his aggravated assault on her remains was unprecedented and extremely difficult for the populace of the small city of Dundee to try to comprehend.

Despite his heinous crime, Dundonians did not approve of the death penalty and William's hanging was carried out in privacy for fear of protests and rioting in the streets of the city. Early in the morning of 24 April 1889, his lifeless body was cut down from the gallows and transported to my department where the pre-eminent first Cox Professor of Anatomy (Professor Andrew Melville Paterson) taught human anatomy to his curious and diligent medical students. William Bury's body would have been of great interest to them and highly prized. He was a young specimen for their dissection and his manner of death would likely have led to great debate as the tissues of his neck were dissected layer by anatomical layer, eventually uncovering the classical

hangman's fracture seen in his second cervical vertebra. The drop had been executed masterfully by his hangman and death would have been swift. William's body was unique for the Dundee University Anatomy Department as Bury was the last prisoner to be executed in the city.

Following his dissection, the vertebrae from his neck were retained, macerated to remove all the soft tissues, mounted and displayed in the University's anatomical museum for over 100 years as a curiosity often asked to be viewed. Today these bones reside in my office, a corporeal and tangible reminder of a gruesome murder and a story that gripped the small Scottish city of Dundee just as ferociously as did the murders in Whitechapel so very long ago.

I have had the pleasure of reading all the courtroom records of William Bury's trial, and this book, written so enthusiastically by Euan MacPherson, is as honest and true to the facts as they were heard by Lord Young in the Dundee courtroom on Thursday 28 March 1889. There is no embellishment, no flights of fancy, just the facts as they were presented on that day in a calm and logical manner. This makes the comparison between Bury and the Ripper so utterly compelling.

William Bury pleaded not guilty to the murder of his wife, yet he offered no strong defence and so it is to the credit of his defence advocate, William Hay QC that the jury were temporarily conflicted and were instructed to return to the jury room for further debate before they issued their final verdict. In Scotland three options are available to a jury – guilty, not guilty and the third verdict, which Sir Walter Scott called 'Scotland's bastard verdict' – not proven.

The jury of fifteen Dundee men were conflicted over the medical evidence and so we chose to represent it to Dundee Sheriff court on Saturday 3 February 2018 as part of the anniversary celebrations for the Cox Chair of anatomy in its 130th year. Lord Hugh Matthews presided on the bench and Mr Alex Prentice QC mentored the law students from

Dundee University's Mooting Society as they led the Crown's case against William Bury. Ms Dorothy Bain QC mentored the law students from Aberdeen University's Mooting Society as they presented the case for Bury's defence. Dr John Clark was the forensic pathologist called by the Crown and Dr Richard Shepherd by the Defence. Mr Michael Thain stood in as William Bury. The atmosphere in Court room number 1 at Dundee Sheriff Court was no less tense than it had been 130 years before and the jury, selected from the Dundee public, conducted itself with all due solemnity and professionalism as they attended to their duty.

This time, the Defence raised sufficient doubt in the minds of the jury and William Bury was able to walk out of the courtroom a free man. Who knows how Bury's life may have unfolded but if Euan MacPherson's theory is correct, and he was Jack the Ripper, then it is highly likely that Bury's compulsion would have revisited and his relationship with the judiciary would have been replayed in some other courtroom either in this land or overseas in another.

Professor Dame Sue Black

Director of the Centre for Anatomy and Human Identification  
University of Dundee  
February 2018



William Bury's neck bone: the break (caused by the hangman's rope) is clearly visible. Photo courtesy of Dr Caroline Erolin, Centre for Anatomy and Human Identification, University of Dundee.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

For decades, the rumour circulated in Dundee that Jack the Ripper had been hanged in the city and that he was such a brazen killer that he played cards with his friends on the box into which he had packed the body.

In 1988, writing for *The Scots Magazine*, I investigated the case and published an article about it (see *The Scots Magazine*, January, 1988).

My article in *The Scots Magazine* came to the attention of Paul Begg, Martin Fido and Keith Skinner who were compiling *The Jack the Ripper A to Z* (Headline, 1991). For the first time, William Bury was listed as a suspect and I was credited as the researcher. This was how the story of William Bury came into the public domain.

A story can be passed down through the generations by word of mouth in good faith but distortions inevitably creep in. It does not help when files which were held about the case were closed for one hundred years. This book is an attempt to recreate the case using contemporary evidence and files which were not available to me when I first wrote a short article for *The Scots Magazine* in January, 1988.

*E.M.*

# INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH IT IS now 117 years since the Whitechapel Killer ripped the life from his five pathetic victims, when I was born a mere 36 years had elapsed since the commission of the crimes. And it is possible, probable even, that he, Jack the Ripper, was still alive. But then, after reading Euan Macpherson's conclusions, I thought maybe not!

Ever since I paid, at the age of 11, my first visit to Whitechapel – just in time to catch the fading shades of horror in the eyes of ageing East Enders who had actually witnessed the awful events of 1888 – I have watched for the past 70 years as the long procession of suspects has been – literally – booked.

Although there had been a 32-page, threepenny pamphlet, *The Whitechapel Horrors, Being an Authentic Account of the Jack the Ripper Murders*, published by the Daisy Bank Printing and Publishing Company of Manchester in the 1920s, its author, Tom Robinson, an old-style Fleet Street journalist, beyond reporting that a policeman who had been on the beat at the time always believed that the Ripper was a foreign sailor, hazards no guess as to the identity of the killer.

It all began in earnest – the guessing-game, that is – with Leonard Matters's book, *The Mystery of Jack the Ripper*, which was published in 1929, and his accused was the surely fictitious Dr Stanley.

After that, there was a break until 1937, when a pre-Paperback Revolution paperback, *Jack the Ripper, or, When London Walked in Terror*, issued from the none-too-



impressive pen of Edwin T. Woodhall, a retired London detective who, despite introducing George Chapman, aka Severin Klosowski, as one whom 'many believe to have been none other than Jack the Ripper himself', supported Matters's now generally discredited Dr Stanley nomination. A couple of years later, in 1939, William Stewart brought out *Jack the Ripper: A New Theory*, which put Jill the Ripper, a sadistic midwife, in the dock.

A further 20 years were to elapse before Donald McCormick perpetrated a fantasy titled *The Identity of Jack the Ripper*, in which a totally bogus Russian dubbed Dr Alexander Pedachenko was paraded as the indisputable Ripper.

Considerably more plausible – although in my view not guilty – was the suspect brought forward in Tom Cullen's *Autumn of Terror: Jack the Ripper, His Crimes and Times* (1968): Montague John Druitt, barrister and schoolmaster. The involvement of the Royal Family, in the dubious shape of the Duke of Clarence, aided and abetted by the royal physician, Sir William Gull, was heralded in 1976 by Stephen Knight's *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*. This is an answer to the riddle which has been widely – though in my opinion wrongly – accepted.

And in 1994 that doughty researcher and professional explorer of myths, the late Melvin Harris, finally declared his belief that Robert D'Onston Stephenson was the culprit. The previous year had seen the absurd nomination of the Liverpool cotton broker James Maybrick as the East End slaughterman, in *The Diary of Jack the Ripper* narrative by Shirley Harrison. I consider Maybrick to be as unlikely a suspect as that other Liverpudlian, the wife-killer James Kelly, who was James Tully's choice for the Ripper in *The Secret Prisoner* 1167.

Stewart Evans and Paul Gainey submitted their own candidate for the bloodstained laurels in *The Lodger: The Arrest and Escape of Jack the Ripper* (1995). He was an

American herbalist and medical mountebank, Dr Francis J. Tumblety. So meticulously is their prosecution case fashioned that one hesitates before, eventually, declining to convict. That same year Bruce Paley offered up Joseph Barnett, Mary Jane Kelly's lover, as the guilty party.

Then there is Walter Sickert, indicted first by Jean Overton Fuller in 1990, and again, with a fanfare of brass trumpets, in 2002 by Patricia Cornwell in her somewhat over-confidently titled *Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper - Case Closed*, wherein, incidentally, she contrives never to so much as mention the work of her predecessor in that particular field. Not that it really matters, for neither of them succeeds in making the libel stick.

The foregoing is just a selection of some of the more rationally, or at any rate less *irrationally* based suspects, out of upwards of a hundred widely and indeed wildly nominated candidates.

There is to my mind absolutely no doubt that Mr Macpherson's nominee is deserving of our fullest attention. The 29-year-old Englishman whom he would bring to the bar of justice is a miscreant and murderer by the name of William Henry Bury. This is not strictly Bury's first committal. He was summoned with a case to answer by Mr Macpherson in his article 'Jack the Ripper in Dundee' in the *Scots Magazine* back in January 1988; and thereafter by William Beadle, in his *Jack the Ripper: Anatomy of a Myth* (1995); and by Stewart Evans in an article, 'The Ripper's Nemesis', in the magazine *Rippermania* in January 1997. And there can be no gainsaying that in a great many aspects his circumstances do fit in most satisfyingly with those which could well have applied to Jack the Ripper.

Admittedly, though, it does require a conscious effort of will for those of us who have grown long-toothed in the service of Ripperology, and accustomed to the picture of the dark, wraith-like slayer shadow flitting murderously through the East End night, to readjust to the novel visualisation of a

solid, bearded figure set against an alien Caledonian background. Even so . . .

If Jack the Ripper had in fact exhibited surgical skill, this would, Mr Macpherson agrees, have put paid to Bury as a viable suspect, for there is no rhyme or reason, no evidence, to support the notion that he was so endowed. But, equally, there is no secure *evidence* – merely conflicting *opinion* – that ‘Jack the Whitechapel knife’ wielded it with a practised anatomist’s or a surgeon’s touch.

Even supposing that you are not prepared to accept – that you resist – the idea of William Henry Bury as the veritable Ripper, Mr Macpherson’s book is still of prime value as the first complete account of the misdeeds, investigation, trial and ultimate fate of a man who shows himself a classic practitioner of homicide in the best Victorian tradition.

Did Mr Hangman Berry, in dispatching his phonetic namesake in Dundee at 8 a.m. on that April morning in 1889, really, as legend has it, ‘polish off’ Saucy Jack? It is for each reader of Mr Macpherson’s strongly argued prosecution case to reach his or her verdict. He has certainly given me reason, if not to quit, at least to shift uneasily in my seat on the bloodied fence.

*Richard Whittington-Egan*

# PROLOGUE

THE WHITECHAPEL MURDERS of 1888 must go down as one of the most puzzling whodunnits in criminal history. More than 100 years on, with any number of suspects having been put under the microscope, we seem no nearer to finding the killer than we ever were. But amidst the profusion of theories for the Jack the Ripper murders, the simplest and most likely solution is the one which has been most consistently overlooked.

The problem for theorists is the sudden cessation of the murders in November 1888. What happened to make this notorious serial killer stop? It is not in the nature of serial killers to stop unless they get caught. But Jack the Ripper was never caught . . . So what could have happened to make him stop?

The simplest and most overlooked answer is that he did not stop. Instead, he moved out of the City of London and continued his gruesome career elsewhere. If we are going to look for him, therefore, we need to look for a man who was living in the East End of London in the autumn of 1888 and who also committed Ripper-style murders elsewhere.

Such a man does, in fact, exist. His name was William Henry Bury and this is his story.

## *Part One*

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DUNDEE, 1889

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## A QUIET SUNDAY EVENING

### THE PRINCES STREET MURDER TRIAL.



THE ACCUSED.

SIXTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD LIEUTENANT JAMES PARR was the senior officer on duty at the Central Police Office, Dundee, on Sunday, 10 February 1889. Born in Ireland in 1826, he had started out as a weaver before joining Dundee Burgh Police in 1850. The police may have been his second choice but this former failed weaver had shown a natural aptitude for a career in

crime detection and had steadily risen through the ranks till, in 1881, he became 2nd Lieutenant.

At 6.50 p.m., a short, bearded man walked into the police station and asked Parr for a private interview. The man was 5 ft 3H in. in height and was under ten stone in weight. When he took his hat off, he revealed a head of dark hair. But he would not look Parr in the eye as he spoke.

On duty with Lieutenant Parr was Constable William McKay, who was the acting bar officer. Parr left McKay in charge of the police station and took the man into a private room but did not offer him a seat. The man, who still had not given Parr his name, began to make his statement. He said that he and his wife had been drinking heavily on the night of 4 February 1889. By late evening, he was so overcome with liquor that he did not know what time he had gone to bed.

As the man continued, his statement became more and more bizarre. The next morning, he said, he had awoken at about 10 a.m. and was surprised that his wife was not in bed with him. On looking around the apartment, he saw her lying on the floor. He called to her but got no response. Getting up and going over to her, he was startled to find that she was lying dead on the floor with a rope around her neck.

The man did not attempt to summon a doctor. Instead, after looking at the body for a minute or two, he was seized with a mad impulse: lifting a large knife that lay nearby, he plunged it several times into the woman's abdomen. Some time after this, he said he became afraid that he would be arrested as Jack the Ripper. In his panic, he concealed the body in a large box.

Parr thought the man appeared quite sober, 'considering the character of his communication'. Still, the lieutenant asked the man if he had been drinking lately.

The man said he had and added that he had been staying in the house since his wife's death but had become so



uneasy about the matter that he could not get peace of mind until he reported it. At this point, Parr asked the man for his name and address. The man gave his name as William Henry Bury and his address as the basement apartment at 113 Princes Street.

Parr now decided to take Mr Bury upstairs to the Detective Department, where Lieutenant David Lamb, Chief of the Detective Department at City of Dundee Police, and Detective Peter Campbell were on duty. Lamb was 50 years old and had progressed smoothly through the ranks, having joined Dundee Burgh Police Force as a constable on 2 April 1864. He had recently been awarded the sum of £1 sterling for displaying 'zeal and intelligence' in the conduct of theft cases.

Parr introduced Bury to Lamb by saying that he had a wonderful story to tell. Parr then remained present while Bury repeated his story but, this time, there were subtle differences. Bury made no mention of Jack the Ripper to Lieutenant Lamb and also said that he stabbed his wife's body only once.

Lamb asked Bury some questions 'with the view of ascertaining if he was in his sound and sober senses or under a delusion'. Bury's whole manner led Lamb to form the opinion that he was 'quite sane and collected and sober'. Lamb immediately told Parr to detain Bury downstairs while he 'went to see as to the truth of the statement'. Bury was visibly surprised when Lamb said this, as if he had expected the detective to accept his story without investigation.

Parr took Bury back downstairs to the Orderly Room, where he was searched. A small pocketknife was found in his possession. Parr then remained with Bury until 9 p.m., when he was relieved from duty. William Bury had not been charged with anything at this point and had not been arrested, either. But he was clearly not free to go. In Lamb's written statement, he said that he gave instructions for Parr

to take William Bury downstairs 'in charge', whatever that might legally mean. It certainly seems to mean that a policeman was going to remain with Bury and would prevent him leaving the police station if he attempted to do so until Lieutenant Lamb returned.

When Lieutenant James Parr walked out of the Central Police Office on that quiet Sunday night, he had handed over the investigation to Lieutenant David Lamb and, as far as we can tell, took no further part in it himself. But Parr had already missed a golden opportunity to ask William Bury what he meant when he said he was afraid he would be arrested as Jack the Ripper. Moreover, if Bury had not expected to be arrested, it is logical to assume that he would not have seen the need to prepare a defence. Therefore, an opportunity to get Bury talking about Jack the Ripper when his cover story was not fully formed in his mind had just been lost.

However, neither Parr nor Lamb had any reason to connect William Bury with the Jack the Ripper murders at this stage. In fact, they did not even know for sure that a murder had been committed. Furthermore, neither Parr nor Lamb had had – for obvious reasons – any involvement in the Jack the Ripper murders. Neither of them knew the modus operandi of Jack the Ripper. Therefore, when Lamb did discover the body, he was not to know that the modus operandi of the killer was indeed very similar.

On Tuesday, 12 February 1889, the *Dundee Advertiser* concluded its report of the incident as follows:

In the course of further conversation he [i.e. Bury] made a remark about Jack the Ripper but the Lieutenant did not understand what Bury meant and did not wish at that stage to inquire.

But the *Dundee Courier's* version of this incident was more blunt:

When they were alone the man, who appeared much excited, said he was 'Jack the Ripper' or 'a Jack the Ripper' or something to that effect.

Parr himself had said to journalists that Bury had said he was afraid he would be arrested as Jack the Ripper but Parr does not seem to have written down Bury's statement and so this should not be regarded as an exact quote. However, it begs the question: why was Bury afraid he would be arrested as Jack the Ripper?

It seems that Parr had not taken Bury completely seriously. Describing the interview between Parr and Bury, the *Dundee Courier* commented on 25 April 1889:

The statement was of so horrible a nature, and the stranger's manner was so confused and excited, that the officer was at first somewhat incredulous, supposing that the man had become mentally deranged by stories of Jack the Ripper.

It could be argued that Parr's questioning of Bury was shockingly inadequate but Parr was questioning William Bury before the discovery of the body. It would later become clear that there were parallels with the Whitechapel murders but this was not obvious to Parr. To put it in a nutshell - the likelihood of Jack the Ripper turning up in Dundee and walking into a police station muttering oblique confessions would have seemed a bit of a long shot. It was simply not on Parr's mind that the infamous Whitechapel murderer might have wandered into the Central Police Office in Dundee on a cold Sunday evening in February.

Bury had finished his story by taking a key from his pocket and, handing it to David Lamb, had said, 'There's the key of the door and you will easily find the box with the body in it.