

# Analysis of Jack the Ripper's Series of Murders 137 Years Later Using Modern Forensic Tools

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The study examines a series of homicides that occurred in London 137 years ago based on a book by Patricia Cornwell, an American forensic lab director. In 2001, the expert conducted a detailed investigation at the original crime scenes and retrieved the case documents related to six victims definitively linked to the perpetrator known as Jack the Ripper

Based on the collected evidence, suspicion arose that the crimes were committed by Walter Sickert, a renowned English painter. The study presents the evidence supporting both personal and material suspicion against him. These findings are compared with milestones in criminalistics and elements of the theoretical pyramid model of criminalistics developed by the authors.

The case analysis demonstrates the importance of the forensic “first strike” in leading to a successful investigation. The lack of meticulous crime scene investigation and immediate evidence collection significantly complicates later investigations, even those conducted decades or centuries afterward. At the same time, DNA analysis, widely used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has proven instrumental in solving historical crimes and identifying unknown perpetrators even after 113 years.

Overall, the retrospective detection attempt conducted 24 years ago, involving the collection and evaluation of evidence using modern forensic tools, can still provide clues and useful data even 137 years later to advance a previously stalled investigation.

**Keywords:** forensic sciences, criminalistics, pyramid model, investigation, DNA analysis, criminalistic milestones

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## Introduction

As part of the Innocence Project in the United States, it has been revealed that more than two hundred convicted felons have been wrongfully imprisoned and are suffering on death row or in prison cells for years, even decades.<sup>3</sup> The recent uncovering of these miscarriages of justice is largely due to modern forensic tools, especially DNA identification, which has been in use worldwide since 1986. Thanks to this technology, it has been discovered that several incriminating materials found at crime scenes (for example on the victim) do not belong to the convicted person. The true perpetrator, the actual offender, could have been someone else.

We may not only feel the weight of wrongful convictions but also the failure to hold the real culprits accountable. (For instance, there may be a sense of something missing.) It is therefore no surprise that some law enforcement professionals and criminologists are determined to solve mysteries and old cases even after years, decades, or even centuries, seeking to uncover the identities of unknown criminals. Among them is Patricia Cornwell who currently resides in New York. For six years, she worked in Virginia at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner among forensic pathologists. In addition to this, she is also well-known worldwide for her work as a crime story writer.

In 2001, during a visit to London, someone planted an idea in her mind: the unsolved case of “Jack the Ripper” who appeared in London’s Whitechapel district in 1888 began to intrigue her. She wondered whether, with the modern forensic tools of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it might be possible to solve these mysterious homicides 113 years later.

She followed through on this thought. With permission from the British government, she, along with a few colleagues, embarked on a comprehensive and thorough 18-month research project, the result of which was her book titled *Portrait of a Killer: Jack the Ripper – Case Closed*.<sup>4</sup>

Our study was inspired by his book which also provided the main facts we examined. However, we developed the ideas further, posed our own forensic questions, and drew our own conclusions which – I must note in advance – do not necessarily align with those of the author in every aspect.

Thus, we formulated our trio of questions:

1. What have been the milestones and established principles in criminalistics over the past 120 years, and how have they influenced the modern-day investigation of the Jack the Ripper case?
2. Are the building blocks of the criminalistic pyramid we modelled useful in examining a specific crime (a series of murders that occurred 137 years ago)?
3. After the factual data uncovered by the American criminalist (which we do not dispute at all, on the contrary, we greatly value the tenacious and thorough work that led to them), can the Jack the Ripper case truly be closed? Can we accurately and without distortion answer the seven fundamental forensic questions in 2025?

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<sup>3</sup> See: <https://innocenceproject.org/all-cases/> Beyond the data of the Innocence Project, see SAVAGE et al. 2007; QUIRK 2007.

<sup>4</sup> CORNWELL 2002.

## The specific criminal cases (the victims)

It is likely that the same perpetrator (known by the nickname Jack the Ripper) had several victims, but the Metropolitan Police at the time definitively linked the following six women, who were working as prostitutes, to him:

1. Chronologically, the first was Martha Tabram, aged 35, killed on 7 August 1888 on Commercial Street in London. She was stabbed 39 times.
2. On 31 August 1888, at Buck's Row, Mary Ann Nichols, a 42-year-old woman with a noticeable number of missing teeth was sent to the afterlife by having her throat slit and being mutilated.
3. On 8 September 1888, at Humgay Street, Annie Chapman, a 47-year-old victim was also killed by having her throat slit and being mutilated.
4. On 30 September 1888, on Berner Street, the killer found his fourth victim. The mutilation of Elizabeth Stride, a 45-year-old Swedish-born woman, was interrupted by the arrival of a carriage, forcing the murderer to flee the scene.
5. It was no surprise that on the same day, 30 September 1888, at Mitre Square, the killer claimed his fifth victim. The 43-year-old Catherine Eddowes, a still-attractive woman with brown eyes (and mother of three children), was subjected to even more brutal violence. Her face, eyelids, nose were slashed to near unrecognizability, her earlobes were cut off, and the killer took her mutilated genitals with him.
6. The grim series concluded on 9 November 1888 in Miller's Court on Dorset Street. The 24-year-old dark-haired Mary Kelly was the last victim. The apparently deranged killer not only mutilated her face but also her breasts, genitals, and heart, taking these body parts from the scene as well.

## The investigating authorities and the environment

The chief investigator, addressed in the Ripper's letters as "Dear Boss", was Metropolitan Police Commissioner Charles Warren. He resigned on 8 November 1888, likely due to pressure from the press and the public, after failing to make significant progress in solving the series of prostitute murders. Another leading investigator was Inspector Frederick Abberline who also could not advance the case.

For some background context, the Metropolitan Police was founded in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel, near the courtyard of Scotland Yard, which served the Scottish king.<sup>5</sup> The uniformed "bobbies" named after Peel, with their modest equipment, did not conduct substantive investigative work. They lacked the necessary expertise, as criminalistics – the science of investigation – was just beginning to emerge in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It was only

<sup>5</sup> For a long time, even the English themselves thought Scotland Yard was a royal court, though it actually referred to the detective service. Just to be sure and make it clear to everyone, the sign now reads "New Scotland Yard" in front of the London law enforcement headquarters.

in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that Hans Gross, the father of criminalistics, wrote his famous summary work.<sup>6</sup>

The specialised detective unit for criminal investigations, the Criminal Investigation Department was only established in 1878. Therefore, it is no surprise that in 1888, there was very little experience available, especially when it came to solving a serious series of murders committed by a clever, depraved perpetrator operating at night.

As such, the lack of preparedness, the conspicuous failure of the police, and the complete absence of suspects (or even coming close to identifying one) were justifiably criticised by the English press.<sup>7</sup> In addition to reputable and factual papers like *The English Review*, *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *Morning Leader*, and *Weekly Dispatch*, satirical and mocking articles, drawings, and photos appeared in the tabloid press, including *Famous Crimes*, *The Illustrated Police News*, *Echo*, and the satirical magazine, *Punch*.

When Martha Tabram was killed, neither the police nor the residents noticed the (later worsening) phenomenon. It was considered an underworld misfortune in a “filthy environment”. The death of the prostitute didn’t even shake her subcultural surroundings – everyone assumed it was a personal conflict. Simply put: it wasn’t taken seriously, and the bloody death of this poor woman didn’t matter to anyone.

### Jack the Ripper’s letters

Between 1888 and 1896, the Metropolitan Police (including the earlier mentioned detectives at Scotland Yard) received around 250 handwritten letters, telegrams, and many drawings made with pencil or paintbrush, all allegedly from Jack the Ripper. Copies of these letters can be found not only in the Public Record, the Corporation of London Record, the West Sussex Record, and the Home Office, but also in the hands of passionate, wealthy, and sharp-eyed art collectors. Patricia Cornwell even purchased an alleged Ripper letter on the open market for \$1,500.

A common phrase used repeatedly in these letters was meant to mock the authorities: “Ha Ha Ha.” The letters and telegrams, with their practiced language and rhetorical flourishes, can still be found and read today, as they have been preserved. Let’s look at a collection of these phrases:

- “Catch me if you can, Ha Ha, Ha
- It’s a jolly nice lark

<sup>6</sup> GROSS 1893, 1914; 1924. The university lecturer, who also worked as an investigating judge and state prosecutor, organised the then-fragmentary practical knowledge of criminalistics into a system in the German language. In his work, which went through four editions, he referred to knowledge in criminal psychology, anthropology, sociology, statistics, methodology, criminal phenomenology, and criminology as well. It was much later that it was first published in English: *Criminal Investigation: A Practical Textbook for Magistrates Police Officers and Lawyers*. (trans. J. C. Adam) Sweet and Maxwell, London, 1924. Gross was also the founder and publisher of the criminal science journal *Archiv für Kriminal-Anthropologie und Kriminalistik*, launched in 1898. As a “Professor des Strafrecht an der Deutschen Universität Prag”, Gross authored the first comprehensive work on criminal psychology. See GROSS 1897. He also wrote the first criminalistics encyclopedia: GROSS 1901.

<sup>7</sup> At the time, a potential suspect with a false lead emerged: a certain Prince Clarence. However, it turned out that the young nobleman was much more of a money-seeking, blackmailing letter-writer than a brutal murderer.

- What a dance I am leading
- Love, Jack the Ripper
- Just to give you a little clue
- I told her I was Jack the Ripper and I took my hat off
- Hold on tight you cunning lot of coppers
- Goodbye for the present from the Ripper and the dodger
- Won't it be nice dear old Boss to have the good ole times once again
- You might remember me if you try and think a little, Ha Ha
- I take great pleasure in giving you my whereabouts for the benefit of the Scotland Yard boys
- The police alias po-lice, think themselves devilish clever
- You donkeys, you double-faced asses
- Be good enough to send a few of your clever policemen down here
- The police pass me close every day, and I shall pass one going to post this
- Ha! Ha!
- You made a mistake if you thought I didn't see you...
- The good old times once again...
- I really wanted to play a little joke on you all but I haven't got enough time left to let you play cat and mouse with me
- A good Joke I played on them
- You made a mistake if you thought I didn't see you...
- The good old times once again...
- I really wanted to play a little joke on you all but I haven't got enough time left to let you play cat and mouse with me
- Au revoir, Boss
- A good Joke I played on them
- I am Jack the Ripper catch me if you can
- I am now going to make my way to Paris and try my little games
- Oh, it was such a jolly job the last one
- Kisses
- I am still at liberty...Ha, ha, ha
- Don't I laugh
- I think I have been very good up to now
- Yours truly, Mathematicus
- What fools the police are
- Dear Boss...I was conversing with two or three of your men last night
- I am very much amused
- I'm considered a very handsome Gentleman
- You see I am still knocking about. Ha.Ha
- You will have a job to catch me
- But they didn't search the one I was in I was looking at the police all the time
- Why I passed a policeman yesterday & he didn't take no notice of me
- The police now reckon my work a practical joke, well well Jacky's a very practical joker ha ha ha

- But they didn't search the one I was in I was looking at the police all the time
- You never caught me and you never will, Ha Ha.”

From the many critical, derogatory, and biting sarcastic remarks, we have italicised the ones that will have further significance later.

(One letter has a suspicious bloodstain, and another shows faint fingerprints.)

## The potential suspect

In 2001, a renowned British detective drew Patricia Cornwell's attention to the historically significant series of murders, (even showed her the crime scenes) and pointed to a potential suspect. Shockingly, this suspect was none other than one of England's still top-famous painters: Walter Richard Sickert whose works are exhibited in the Tate Gallery, the Bristol Museum, the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester, and many others.

The American researcher followed this lead. Her investigation revealed that the “target” was born in Munich to a Danish-German father and a British-Irish mother on 31 May 1860. He was the eldest of six children with four brothers and a sister named Helena. (Interestingly, none of them had children, and several struggled with alcoholism or mental health issues. One brother was fatally run over by a truck as an adult.) His childhood may not have been particularly joyful, as by the age of five, the boy with curly hair and a shy, girlish smile had already undergone three surgeries on his testicles (penis). The exact reason, course, and outcome of these surgeries are unknown, but it is a fact they happened, also it is strongly suspected that he was never able to achieve an erection and may have been forced to urinate through a fistula (an artificial opening) for the rest of his life.

After his teenage years in Germany, by 1881, the now charming and handsome young man, a third-generation artist, had enrolled at the Slade School in London.<sup>8</sup> From 1882, he became a student of the painter James McNeill Whistler. During his lifetime, Sickert became a recognised and celebrated painter, especially after the death of his former master and later friend Whistler in 1903. His works are now featured in numerous galleries, museums, and university collections. Sickert was fluent in German, English, French, Italian, and also taught Latin to his friends. He had knowledge of Danish and Greek, as well as some Spanish and Portuguese.

He was a passionate reader of the press, daily going through at least five or six newspapers. He loved letters, both writing and receiving them, and encouraged his friends to send him detailed and frequent correspondence as he expressed in one of his letters: “Tell me in detail all sorts of things, things that have amused you and how and when and where, and all sorts of gossip about everyone.”

Many around him kept diaries, wrote memoirs, and art historians produced monographs about him. From these, we know that even during his marriages, he maintained several apartments and studios (around twenty in total throughout his artistic career), carefully hiding their locations even from his wives. On occasion, he would disappear for

<sup>8</sup> See his biography in more detail: Britannica 2005: 322.

days or even weeks without any notice, citing “artistic freedom” or “creative inspiration” upon his return. He constantly changed his appearance. When he felt like it, he grew a goatee or a ponytail-style moustache, and at times shaved his head bald. There is also evidence that, out of curiosity, he regularly visited the crime scenes left behind by the serial killer Ripper and the areas of police activity.

He married three times but had no children. His first wife was Ellen Cobden, daughter of a prominent politician, who was 37 years old at the time of their marriage, while Sickert was 25 (they married in 1885). They divorced in 1899. His second wife was Christine Angus, a delicate but sickly young woman whom he chose from among his students. In his final days in 1942 his third partner, the much younger Therese Lessore, stayed by his side.

### In personam evidence and indications of suspicion against the person

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an American investigative team led by Patricia Cornwell attempted to gather all direct and indirect evidence related to the crimes, Jack the Ripper and Walter Sickert. While no significant evidence regarding the former surfaced after 113 years, there are some examples related to the latter, though not exhaustively.

- Several of Sickert’s paintings and drawings were collected during the private investigation, where the recurring theme was striking: a man stabbing a woman with a knife. (In his paintings and drawings, a fully dressed man often assaults a vulnerable woman who is either nude or scantily clad. Any portrayal of beauty, let alone a beautiful woman, was far from his style; he has no such works.)
- In Sickert’s painting *The Camden Town Murder* a man is strangling a woman lying on a bed. In 1907, Emily Dimmock was murdered under similar circumstances in Camden Town about a mile and a half from Sickert’s house.
- Sickert’s sketch *Venetian Studies* strongly reminds the viewer of the second victim, Mary Ann Nichols whose eyes were also open when her body was discovered.
- In Sickert’s painting *Putana a Casa* the woman’s face seems familiar: it resembles Catherine Eddowes, the fifth victim with a blurred (mutilated?) right side of her face.
- Perhaps Sickert’s most famous painting, *Ennui* (*Indifference* or *Boredom*) exists in five copies and can still be viewed today (at Clarence House, Tate Gallery). When closely examined and enlarged, a mysterious figure can be seen in the background of the room interior, approaching a woman.
- In Sickert’s drawing *He Killed His Father in a Fight* the scene is strikingly similar to the location of Mary Kelly’s murder (the sixth victim). For instance, the wooden-framed bed.
- Sickert’s works reveal signs of brutality, aggression, sadism, misogyny, abnormality, mania, and psychopathy in his personality and soul. These traits also match



the profile of a true serial killer, as determined by an FBI profiler consulted by Patricia Cornwell.

- A fingerprint was found on one of the Jack the Ripper letters sent to the Metropolitan Police in 1896.
- A watermark was found on a letter titled “Dear Jimmy”, written by Walter Sickert to a friend (over 200 original letters from Sickert remained to this day). The watermark on the letter matches that of the paper Jack the Ripper used to send letters to the police. Both watermarks were from “A Pirie and Sons” paper used by both Sickert and the Ripper between 1885 and 1887. After 1887, they both switched to “Joynson Superfine” paper (Ripper used it until his last letter in 1896).
- Sickert used the pseudonyms “Mr. Nemo” (Latinised) or “Mr. Nobody” (Anglicised) earlier in his career. The investigation found a telegram sent to the police signed as “Mr. Nobody” which had been crossed out and replaced with “Jack the Ripper”.
- In the Ripper letters, the writer occasionally refers to himself as “No Englishman”, which fits Sickert who was originally German. He once wrote that in his heart, he always remained German. (It’s an interesting fact that one of England’s famous painters was not actually of English origin, though he was bilingual in English.)
- Jack the Ripper frequently used Latin phrases in his letters, sometimes signing them as “Mathematicus”. As mentioned earlier, Walter Sickert was fluent in Latin and half a dozen other languages, including French (he used phrases like “Au revoir, Boss”). He also had a well-known fascination with mathematics.
- Numerous written sources tell us that Walter Sickert, who considered himself very clever (and likely was highly intelligent and versatile), often used the word “fool”. If someone did not meet his standards of intelligence or simply displeased him, he would label them as stupid, imbecilic, or inept. This offensive term, “fool”, frequently appears in the Ripper’s letters (directed at the police), which show psychopathic signs, as was previously highlighted in the discussion of his phrasing.
- The painter often signed or abbreviated his name in his letters as W.R., W.S., R.S., or R.St.w. These abbreviations also appear in several places in Jack the Ripper’s letters.
- A small note from Jack the Ripper, found in a glass bottle washed ashore near Deal and Sandwich on the Dover Strait, a place where Walter Sickert often vacationed.
- Walter Sickert, who often stayed at the Lizard Guest House in Cornwall, England from 1884 onward, doodled in the guestbook. The stick figures he drew are remarkably similar to the childlike drawings found in Jack the Ripper’s letters. (Sickert was also known to correct grammatical errors in previous entries, a habit he maintained even at home.)
- A recurring motive in the Ripper letters is the drawing of daggers and knife blades, which also appear in Sickert’s drawings.



- In his letters to the police, the Ripper frequently referenced horses and horse races, even offering racing tips to investigators. Sickert created several paintings featuring horse races, and all his biographers and researchers note his passion for equestrian sports and his extensive knowledge in the field.
- Around 200 letters from Walter Sickert have survived, as he wrote to friends, wives, galleries, museums, and the Royal Academy of Arts. Due to the recognition of his work during his lifetime, many of these letters were preserved by their English recipients. Similarly, Jack the Ripper's letters are preserved today in original form in the archives of the Metropolitan Police, Scotland Yard, several universities, and even hospitals (pathological institutes). These letters were made available for examination, and human saliva samples were retrieved from the stamps and adhesive strips on the envelopes. When the DNA from the saliva on the stamps and adhesive strips of both letter groups was compared, the laboratory of the Virginia Institute of Forensic Science and Medicine found mitochondrial matches in six cases. In other words, the DNA from the material on the envelopes sent by Walter Sickert matched with 99% certainty the DNA from the material on envelopes sent by Jack the Ripper (Sickert and Ripper's DNA sequences are identical). Walter Sickert's painting smocks were preserved in the Tate Archive, but the American forensic team was unable to recover any usable human material for DNA typing from them.

## Conclusions in light of forensic milestones

In light of all this information, we aim to answer our fundamental questions. First, we will examine the key milestones in forensic science.

In our view, these milestones (with the most renowned experts, researchers, and scientists in the field in parentheses) are:

- a) Fingerprints, introduced between 1900–1910 (Bertillon, Coulier, Herschel, Faulds, Henry, Herschel, Galton, Vucetich) (+ other traces – Balthazard, Goddard, Gross)
- b) Blood and other material traces from 1910 onward (Locard, Gettler, Gonzales, Niceforo, Norris, Ottolenghi, Popp, Reiss, Södermann)
- c) Neutron activation starting in the 1930s–1940s (Jervis, Guinn, Perkons)
- d) DNA typing-identification (Watson-Krick from 1953, Jeffreys from 1986)
- e) Digital data from the 1990s (Casey, Marshall)<sup>9</sup>

Regarding a) Among these, no usable fingerprint or fragment of a fingerprint (such as a footprint, lip print, etc.) was found by the extensive 21<sup>st</sup> century investigation. The one faint fingerprint that appeared on one of the letters was not suitable for identification, and neither were the prints on preserved items (such as his plates, brushes) or the lack thereof. We must add: what could these have been compared to? Unfortunately, no fingerprints

<sup>9</sup> See more details in FENYVESI 2017; FENYVESI et al. 2022.

were taken from the crime scenes. (Even though there were six locations available for such investigation.) Nor do we have a body for comparison, since Walter Sickert specifically requested that he be cremated after his death which was carried out according to his wishes. (Even if his body had been buried, there would be no usable soft tissue or fingerprint samples after 137 years or even after 113 years in 2001.)

Regarding b) Some of Jack the Ripper's letters showed traces that appeared to be blood, but serological tests did not confirm this. No usable material traces were preserved from the crime scenes. No semen (sperm) was mentioned in the reports, nor was any found at the time. Unfortunately, no hair, fibres, skin, metal, textile, or tool traces were recorded either. In other words, let's be clear: none of the on-site investigators preserved any significant material evidence. (One bloody apron fragment from a victim was preserved, but that's all.)

Regarding c) Thus, the neutron activation method was also ruled out since no tool fragments were collected, meaning there was nothing to analyse.

Regarding d) As in cases handled by the Innocence Project, DNA typing proved effective here too. Even after 113 years, persistent and nearly indestructible material traces were found in a "guerrilla" fashion, hidden away. Human saliva residues were found on the adhesive strips of the mailed letter envelopes and on the backs of the postage stamps moistened for sticking. The future still holds hope here, as current scientific directions suggest that from the DNA content of such material traces, it may be possible to determine the gender, age, and perhaps even health conditions of the donor, which could then be compared to what is well-known from biographical works (including those of his sister, Helena), diaries, and monographs about Walter Sickert.

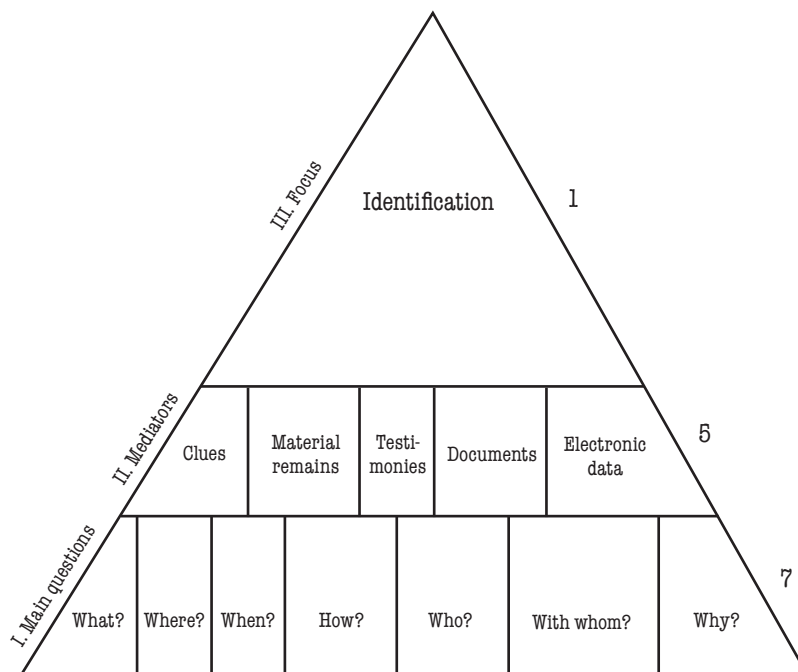
Regarding e) The "star evidence" of today, digital data and methods, has so far yielded no results in the Jack the Ripper case. We cannot retrospectively find data that didn't exist back then (for example, camera footage). There is a film recording of an elderly Walter Sickert in which he appears to be left-handed, even though all close associates mentioned that he painted and wrote with his right hand. American handwriting experts pointed out that many of the Jack the Ripper letters show signs of distorted handwriting, and they discovered traces of left-handed writing as well. However, they did not arrive at a categorical conclusion regarding the handwriting comparison between Sickert and Jack the Ripper.

## Conclusions in light of our forensic pyramid model

When we examine our 751-pyramid model,<sup>10</sup> we see that the unique identification (1), which we focus on in every criminal case, is not entirely fulfilled concerning all the fundamental base questions (7) in this case. The intermediaries or mediators (4) – such as

<sup>10</sup> FENYVESI-ORBÁN 2021.

traces, material remnants, documents, and written testimonies<sup>11</sup> – were the paths through which the investigations conducted by the Americans arrived (Figure 1).



*Figure 1: The 751 model*  
*Source: FENYVESI–ORBÁN 2021: 47*

To the question of What happened? the answer is clear: a series of homicides marked by extreme cruelty took place in London in 1888. To the question of Where? the answer is also clear: the killings occurred in the East End's Whitechapel district, on its dark streets, squares, and courtyards, dimly lit by poor candle lamps. When? Always under the cover of the black night, during the six occurrences mentioned above, under Queen Victoria's reign. Regarding How? the answers are fairly straightforward in essence, except for the fact that to this day, the murder weapon (the knife, dagger, or cutting-stabbing tool) has not been found or identified. We leave the ever-important question pair of Who – With whom? to the end. Let us first answer the Why? According to Patricia Cornwell, the perpetrator was a psychopath who viewed women selling their bodies as enemies, killing them out of anger and revenge as

<sup>11</sup> In the case of Ann Chapman (the second victim), the investigators found a single witness who had seen a fleeting figure of a man near the crime scene. The milkman, who worked nights, could only describe him as about 28 years old, with roughly a three-day stubble on his face, dark hair, and large, curious eyes, like those of a student or office clerk. His whitish clothing, perhaps a coat, resembled that of an engineer, like a mechanic's coat (or jacket). (Author's note: Based on decades of experience in criminalistics and law enforcement, the description of "about 28 years old" seems odd. Witnesses tend to say 25-30 or around 30 rather than such a specific age.)

a form of compensation for his own physical and sexual inadequacies (and suffering). There was never any suspicion of robbery as a motive — no valuables, objects, or money were reported stolen from any of the crime scenes according to the contemporary investigation records. She believes that all the data points to, and her conclusion is, that the painter Walter Sickert was also the killer of these women.

Can we answer our initial question with a “yes”, that we have found the serial killer that Patricia Cornwell and her team identified the perpetrator? Put another way: can the case be closed?

Leaving the reader a few moments to reflect, we will state our own position.

Our answer – contrary to the confidently proclaimed and promoted “Yes” of the American author – is No. Not yet. Our reasoning, which derives from the forensic pyramid model, the basic principles of forensic science, and the theory of proof that we advocate (including its definition),<sup>12</sup> suggests that with modern forensic tools we have “only” managed to prove, and this is no small feat, that the Jack the Ripper letters can be linked to Walter Sickert. If all the letters came from the same hand, then they were authored by the painter. He was the writer of the letters. However, these pieces of evidence, unfortunately, cannot be linked to the commission of the crime itself. Here comes into play the series of forensic principles we have developed,<sup>13</sup> the first of which highlights the seven main factual questions (1), followed by the importance of the “First Strike” (2<sup>nd</sup> principle). According to this principle, botched crime scene examinations – the initial blows – are irreparable, irreversible, and unrepeatable. In other words, the mistakes made in 1888 cannot be corrected or fixed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The data shows that the proper search, retrieval and documentation of relevant traces and material evidence were not carried out, as our third principle states: every crime leaves a trace (3). The crime scene is an open book, but one must know how to read it. The failure to read it and to act with expertise leads, or can lead, to fatal consequences when answering the factual questions. The traces and material remnants found at the scene could have provided relevant, suspect-related information to the police, investigative authorities, and ultimately the court. After all, a police force is only as good as the information it possesses (4), and through this information, the past can be understood (5), which in turn creates the possibility for unique personal identification, fulfilling the practical application of the principle “*natura non facit saltum*” (6).

## Final conclusions

To summarise, we must state that in our view, the Jack the Ripper case cannot yet be closed. No one has been able to “place” the painter Walter Sickert at the crime scenes or connect him through reliable physical or personal evidence to the victims, the specific locations, the timing, the method, or the motivation. There are plenty of personal

<sup>12</sup> See more details on this in TREMMEL 2006; HERKE et al. 2012; BARTKÓ et al. 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Our views on the basic principles of criminalistics have already been published. See more on this from the author FENYVESI 2013.

suspicions and circumstantial evidence (for example potential motivations, a witness statement from someone who saw a figure in the dark, and some descriptions of a fleeting figure), but according to our continental perspective, we do not yet have the perpetrator with certainty and beyond reasonable doubt. Even if the theory is correct, we lack sufficient evidence to declare certainty about the perpetrator (only about the letter writer).

However, there is hope that the continuously and dynamically advancing natural science-based forensic field will expand its toolkit, offering a new chance to uncover the mysterious 19<sup>th</sup>-century serial killer, leading to a certain, doubt-free identification. In any case, the broad, resource-intensive, and highly commendable investigation by the Americans was not in vain. It provided numerous lessons, results, and innovations, not just in this specific case but in the understanding of forensic science as a methodology. We can only encourage similar retrospectives, not just globally but in our own country as well. It is a noble and everlasting task for every forensic expert.

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