THE REAL
MARY KELLY

Wynne Weston-Davies trained at St Mary's Hospital Medical School, University of London, now Imperial College School of Medicine. He studied anatomy in preparation for his Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons (FRCS) and was a Demonstrator in Anatomy at St Mary's Hospital Medical School where he taught the dissection of the human body. He then worked as a surgeon at the Westminster Hospital, Charing Cross Hospital, Barts and the Guildford and Godalming group hospitals.

THE REAL MARY KELLY

WYNNE WESTON-DAVIES



echo



Echo Publishing
12 Northumberland Street, South Melbourne
Victoria 3205 Australia
www.echopublishing.com.au

Part of the Bonnier Publishing Group
www.bonnierpublishing.com

Copyright © Wynne Weston-Davies, 2015
All rights reserved. Echo Publishing thank you for buying an authorised edition of this book. In doing so, you are supporting writers and enabling Echo Publishing to publish more books and foster new talent. Thank you for complying with copyright laws by not using any part of this book without our prior written permission, including reproducing, storing in a retrieval system, transmitting in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or distributing.

First published 2015 by Blink Publishing
This edition published 2016 by Echo Publishing

Printed in Australia at Griffin Press.
Only wood grown from sustainable regrowth forests is used in the manufacture of paper found in this book.

Book design by Blink Publishing

ISBN: 9781760403072

Every reasonable effort has been made to trace copyright holders of material reproduced in this book, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publishers would be glad to hear from them.

Twitter/Instagram: @echo_publishing
Facebook: facebook.com/echopublishingAU

To

Elizabeth Weston Davies

my great aunt, who until recently had no known grave
and whose fate was unknown to her family for 130 years.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many knowledgeable and extremely helpful librarians and archivists that have assisted me in the research for this book. They are the unsung heroes of our nation's history, preserving it and making it accessible to successive generations. In particular I wish to thank Anne Wheeldon of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, Malcolm Barr-Hamilton of Tower Hamlets Council, and Catherine Richards of the Powys Archives.

The staff of the National Archives, the London Metropolitan Archives, the British Library, The National Newspaper Library formerly in Colindale but now closed whilst the collection is moved to new premises in Boston Spa, West Yorkshire, the Archives of the London Borough of Camden, the Durham County Archives, The Suffolk County Archives, the Buckinghamshire County Studies Centre, the Gloucestershire Public Libraries and the *Archives Départmentales des Côtes d'Armor,* France, have all been unfailingly helpful.

I owe most of my thanks to the encouragement and tolerance of my wife, Julia, who has put up with long hours of what should by rights have been shared time, during which I was immured in my study working on the book or out doing research in the streets of London, or in one of the many archives.

The intrusion into our joint leisure time over the course of five years should have been intolerable but instead she uncomplainingly supported me, sustained me with endless cups of tea and coffee, and proof read countless drafts of the manuscript as the book evolved. My children Jessica and Edward similarly had to put up with less of my company when they were at home for weekends than they deserved but nevertheless gave me unstinting support. To my cousin Jill Nicholls and her son John Tindle I owe thanks for their recollections of Jill's father Ted and his association with Sickert. My brother-in-law Richard Malone and his wife Susan advised me about American vocabulary and usage. Others who have helped with general encouragement and constructive criticism include the late Rosemary Petty of Dallas, Texas, my brother Peter Weston-Davies who was able to confirm many details of family history, his wife Dorinda, and Frances Williams.

To Sara George, herself a noted author of books such as the brilliant *The Journal of Mrs Pepys,* I owe a debt of gratitude for help and constructive criticism in crafting the early structure of the book. Kate Summerscale, the author of the best-selling *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher* was an inspiration and gave me her encouragement, practical support and research suggestions in numerous emails. I am extremely grateful to Keith Skinner, one of the world's leading authorities on the Whitechapel murders and co-author of the most authoritative reference book on the subject, *The Complete Jack the Ripper A to Z*, for his encouragement and for introducing me to his, and now my, agent Robert Smith.

John Julius Norwich kindly confirmed my belief that his grandfather, the eminent surgeon Sir Alfred Cooper, far from being responsible for mutilating Walter Sickert and turning him into a woman-hating monster as other authors have suggested, was ever held in high esteem by the artist for his skill and compassion.

To Professor Harold Ellis CBE, perhaps the greatest teacher of anatomy and surgery of the 20th century and a foremost medical historian, I also owe huge thanks. Not only through his truly inspirational teaching did he launch me and countless others on their medical and surgical careers but his endorsement of my theories regarding the anatomical knowledge of the Ripper gave me the confidence to complete the book. Dr Raymond Prudo, formerly Professor of Psychiatry at McMaster University, Toronto, Canada, gave me

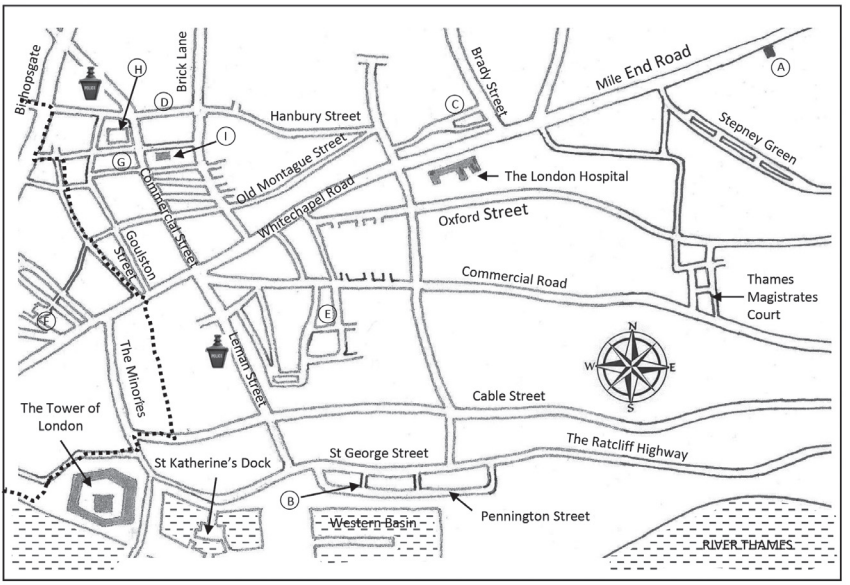
expert advice about the possible psychopathology of Francis Craig. Robert Radley, a noted forensic handwriting expert, kindly gave me his opinion on the very small amount of Francis Craig's handwriting known to exist. Personal communications from Professor Alun Evans of the Department of Epidemiology, Queens University, Belfast gave me further insights into the life of E T Craig. Robert David Pool kindly sent me information about his ancestor Sergeant David Pool of the Metropolitan Police who was murdered in mysterious circumstances in France in 1901. Christine Williams, a solicitor and expert in family law, advised me on aspects of divorce law relating to Francis Craig's petition and affidavit.

Finally I would like to thank my agent Robert Smith, himself one of the country's leading experts on the Whitechapel murders, who proved himself to be an excellent mentor and professional colleague and my publishers at Blink, Clare Tillyer, Acquisitions and Rights Director and my editor Joel Simons who helped to make the process of publication a much easier and pleasanter experience than it might otherwise have been.

Contents

	Acknowledgements	6
CHAPTER ONE	The Mystery	13
CHAPTER TWO	Mary or Marie?	19
CHAPTER THREE	Elizabeth	29
CHAPTER FOUR	The Phrenologist's Son	37
CHAPTER FIVE	Marriage	51
CHAPTER SIX	The Trail Goes Cold	61
CHAPTER SEVEN	The Breakthrough	67
CHAPTER EIGHT	Rehearsal	73
CHAPTER NINE	Polly	85
CHAPTER TEN	Annie	91
CHAPTER ELEVEN	Jack Introduces Himself	105
CHAPTER TWELVE	The Double Event	115
CHAPTER THIRTEEN	From Hell	125
CHAPTER FOURTEEN	The Pressure Mounts	141
CHAPTER FIFTEEN	Hue and Cry	153
CHAPTER SIXTEEN	Oh Murder!	161
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN	The Horror in Room 13	167
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN	The Aftermath	173
CHAPTER NINETEEN	The Last Act	185
CHAPTER TWENTY	Where's Jack?	195
CHAPTER TWENTY ONE	Encore?	215
CHAPTER TWENTY TWO	The Last Day	219
CHAPTER TWENTY THREE	Swansong	225
	Epilogue	231
	Bibliography	233
	Endnotes	241
	Index	268

The East End in 1888. Spitalfields is centred on Commercial Street with the notorious Flower and Dean and Thrawl Streets running between it and Brick Lane. Whitechapel lies in the centre and, to the south, the area around the docks is Wapping. The two H division police stations at Commercial Street and Leman Streets are within a few hundred yards of three of the murder sites. Francis's lodgings at 306 Mile End Road were about a mile and a half from the most distant site, Mitre Square, where Catherine Eddowes met her death.



KEY

A 306 Mile End Road where Francis Craig lodged from 1886 until a few months after the murders.

B Breezer's Hill, Elizabeth's home from late 1885 or early 1886 until the end of that year.

C Bucks Row (Polly Nichols, d. 31st August 1888).

D 29 Hanbury Street (Annie Chapman, d. 8th September, 1888).

E Dutfield's Yard, Berner Street (Elizabeth Stride, d. 30th September, 1888)

F Mitre Square (Catherine Eddowes, d. 30th September, 1888)

G Miller's Court, Dorset Street (Elizabeth Weston Craig a.k.a. Mary Jane Kelly, d. 9th November, 1888)

H Spitalfields market

I Christ Church, Spitalfields

The homicidal impulse may have developed from a revengeful or brooding condition of the mind … the murderer in external appearance is quite likely to be a quiet inoffensive looking man, probably middle-aged and neatly and respectably dressed.

Report to the Metropolitan Police by Mr. Thomas Bond FRCS,
Surgeon and Lecturer in Forensic Medicine to the Westminster Hospital, London.
10th November 1888

CHAPTER ONE

The Mystery

At some time in either late 1885 or early 1886 a young woman arrived in the East End of London.[1] She arrived suddenly and anonymously, and people wondered what such an attractive woman – who was apparently used to living comfortably and riding out in carriages – was doing in the worst stews of the London docks. When she left it again, some two and a half years later, it would be in her coffin and still no-one was any the wiser as to who she was or what had brought her there. Despite that, when her brutally murdered body was found in a squalid room in Spitalfields on the morning of 9th November 1888, she became overnight one of the best-known and most tragic characters in British criminal history. She became famous not because of who she was but because of who had killed her. His name, until now, has also remained a mystery but her murderer's *nom de guerre* is as well-known as any in history. It was Jack the Ripper.

The crowds that turned out for his victim's funeral on 19th November brought the streets of East London to a standstill. Her coffin, carried in a glass-sided hearse behind two black-plumed horses, bore the name Marie Jeanette Kelly but few people then or now believed that that was her real name.

Marie Jeanette, or Mary Jane as most people knew her, took her real identity to her grave in Leytonstone Catholic cemetery. The arc light of the world's press, the investigative powers of the greatest police force in the world and the intense scrutiny of hundreds of writers and criminologists since have never succeeded in penetrating the false persona that a frightened young woman carefully encased herself in 127 years ago.

Her first residence after she came to the East End was in the house of a character famous in the mythology of Jack the Ripper, who until recently has always been known as 'Mrs. Buki'. The first written appearance of Mrs. Buki was in *The Star* on 12th November 1888.[2] *The Star*, which had been founded less than a year before, had already become by far the highest circulation newspaper in Britain. After the news of Mary Jane's murder burst upon the world on 9th November, the newspaper sent one of its reporters into the streets of Wapping in an attempt to shed some light on her shadowy background. Other newspapers and the Press Association did the same but the anonymous newshound from *The Star* succeeded in uncovering more detail than any of the others, possibly because his employer's bulging purse was capable of loosening more tongues.

He reported that the woman, who had previously been employed at an up-market house of ill-repute near Knightsbridge, had 'suddenly drifted into the East-end'. Although the words 'suddenly' and 'drifted' don't belong naturally together, it was clear that most people who knew her believed that Mary Jane had left her previous haunts in something of a hurry – taking refuge in the anonymity of the poorest and most crowded part of the capital – but from who or what she was fleeing remained, like the girl herself, a mystery.

The Star reporter went on to say that Mrs. Buki resided somewhere off St. George's Street, the polite name for the westernmost end of the notorious thoroughfare otherwise known as the Ratcliffe Highway. The Highway, as most locals knew it, was a long road running parallel to the River Thames, skirting the complex of docks that started just downstream of the Tower of London.[3] It ran to the north of the high dockyard walls, many of which are still standing although the docks they once protected have almost all passed into history. In 1886, when Mary Jane arrived on the scene, the Highway consisted largely of chandlers' shops, public houses, opium dens and brothels, all catering to the

constantly changing population of seamen whilst their ships were berthed in what was then the largest port in the world. Mrs. Buki apparently ran an enterprise of the last kind and the newcomer, who was, by all accounts, younger and prettier than most of the women who plied their trade around the streets of Wapping, soon became part of her household.

She did not, it seems, stay long with Mrs. Buki and within a matter of weeks moved to a nearby establishment run by a Mrs. Mary McCarthy[4]. Her house was on the corner of Breezer's Hill and Pennington Street, facing the 14ft wall which formed the boundary of the huge and malodorous Western Basin of the London Docks. Even by the standards of the docks it was an unattractive place but no doubt, being close to the dockyard gates, it had the advantage of being one of the first premises of its kind that sailors came across on their first run ashore after a long voyage.

It is from the time of her arrival with Mrs. McCarthy that a clearer picture of the mysterious newcomer emerges. Many of the details are based on the investigations conducted by *The Star* reporter and published on 12th November. They are recollections of events that happened up to three years earlier drawn from a number of different sources and, not surprisingly, the particulars vary according to whom the reporter was talking to. The most voluble was Mrs. Elizabeth Phoenix, who claimed to be Mrs. McCarthy's sister. She had presented herself at Leman Street police station on the evening of the previous day, two days after the hideously mutilated body of a young woman had been discovered in Miller's Court, Spitalfields and the day before the inquest was due to open at Shoreditch town hall[5]. She told the police that she believed that the victim might have been the same young woman who had lodged with her sister in Pennington Street between two and three years previously. Very soon it was established that she was correct and it was probably a policeman from Leman Street who tipped off *The Star*'s reporter in return, no doubt, for a small consideration.

It was by the time she had moved from Mrs. Buki's that the mystery woman had begun using the name Mary Jane Kelly, despite the fact that she had initially told Mrs. McCarthy that she was Welsh[6]. There is nothing surprising in her choice of name. It has been estimated that in 1880 between 70 and 80 percent of the prostitutes in London were Irish, the result like so much other

Irish emigration, of the successive famines that had swept the country since the potato blight had first appeared in 1845[7]. Because of this the word Kelly was frequently used as a synonym for a prostitute and many 'unfortunates', as lower class prostitutes were known, used it whenever they needed an alias.

The stranger soon changed her story to one that sat better with her adopted name, saying that she was in fact Irish, having been born in Limerick, and taken to Wales as a baby when her father sought employment in the iron industry[8]. Few people appear to have been taken in by this however. An unnamed woman who knew her later, when she was lodging at a doss house in Thrawl Street, stated categorically that she was Welsh and that she spoke the language fluently. It is yet another of the enduring riddles that surround the girl who called herself Mary Jane Kelly; if she was actually Welsh why would she have wanted to appear to be Irish? Welsh or Irish however, most people agreed that she was better educated than other girls of her sort and, according to Mrs. McCarthy, she was 'no mean artist'.

Mrs. McCarthy and her sister were puzzled and fascinated by the new arrival. She was a different class of girl from the raddled dockyard prostitutes they were used to. She claimed to have worked in an upmarket brothel run by a Frenchwoman in the West End before coming to Wapping and, shortly before she arrived, to have been taken to France by a gentleman who they assumed was one of her clients[9]. It was incomprehensible to them why a woman who boasted of having lived the life of a lady and of riding around Knightsbridge in a carriage should have exchanged that life for the noisome, dangerous streets of the East End.

The identity of Mrs. McCarthy is well established (although, at the time and until recent research established her true name, she has usually been referred to as Mrs. Carthy or Carty), but that of Mrs. Buki remained a mystery for more than a century. Through a recent brilliant piece of Internet detective work by husband and wife team, Neal and Jenni Sheldon, it is now known that she was in fact a Dutch widow by the name of Boekü, a word for which the nearest English pronunciation is Buki or Bookie[10].At the time that Mary Jane knew her, she lived with a man called Johannes Morganstern, a skinner in the fur trade, who occupied 79 Pennington Street, next door to Mrs. McCarthy's.

The cause of her leaving Mrs Boekü's was most likely to have been arrears of rent, although drink may also have played a part for Mary Jane, who according to Mrs. Phoenix was, 'one of the most decent and nicest girls you could meet' when sober, became a veritable fury on the occasions when she had one too many. Moving next door did not, apparently, enable her to escape her debts and Mary Jane travelled one day to visit the French lady in the company of Mrs. Boekü, to collect a box containing expensive gowns that she had left there. The fact that her former landlady bothered to accompany her troublesome ex-lodger all the way across town strongly suggests that she didn't trust her out of her sight, and since no-one in the East End ever subsequently saw Mary Jane attired in such finery, it may reasonably be assumed that no sooner had she retrieved the gowns than she was made to hand them over in lieu of the missing rent. It is this report and a similar one by a Press Association reporter quoted in the *Echo* on the same day that are the only independent corroborations of the story that she later told her lover Joe Barnett, of having once worked in a 'gay house'* in the West End.

Breezer's Hill is little changed in appearance today from when Mary Jane knew it. It is a narrow cobbled alleyway which slopes down from the Highway to Pennington Street, overshadowed by tall, red-brick warehouses. Although today the warehouses have been gutted and converted into offices and smart loft conversions it is easy enough to imagine what it might have looked like on a winter's night in 1886 when the few gaslights barely penetrated the swirling fog rolling in from the river. If Mary Jane really had been used to the stuccoed mansions of Knightsbridge – and her visit with Mrs. Boekü suggests that she was – then the greasy cobblestones and soot-stained brickwork of Breezer's Hill must have made a dismal contrast.

Mary Jane stayed at Breezer's Hill during most of 1886, leaving, according to Mrs. Phoenix, towards the end of that year. Exactly what prompted her to move from the comparative comfort of Mrs. McCarthy's is not known but Joe later spoke of an older man, who he assumed to be her father, coming looking for her at about that time[11]. When she got wind of it Mary Jane laid low for a few days and later took her leave of Breezer's Hill. There then followed a

**A heterosexual brothel in the 19th century.*

gap of about four or five months during which her whereabouts are unknown. Both Mrs. McCarthy and, later, Joe Barnett said that it was during this period that she lived with one of her regular clients, a builder's plasterer called Joseph Flemming, in Bethnal Green. Joe also said that she told him that after she returned from France she had lived for a time with a man called 'Morganstone' near the Stepney gasworks[12]. Mrs. Phoenix herself has recently been identified as Elizabeth Felix, who in 1888 was living with a man calling himself Adrianus Felix, but who, it is now known, was actually Adrianus Morganstern, the brother of Mrs. Boekü's consort Johannes. In the East End of London in those days people frequently went under a variety of names, usually to avoid creditors, a fact that makes teasing out the details of their lives a difficult task for later historians. To complicate matters still further a third brother, Maran Morganstern, also lived near the Stepney gasworks so it might have been either brother with whom Mary Jane lodged before or after her time in Breezer's Hill. What seems certain is that Mrs. McCarthy, Mrs. Phoenix, Mrs. Boekü and the Morganstern brothers all knew each other and helped the young woman who called herself Mary Jane during the period after she first came to the East End, before she disappeared again and the last, dark chapter of her life began.

CHAPTER TWO

Mary or Marie?

No known pictures of Mary Jane in life survive. A few fanciful artists' impressions of her were later published in the illustrated newspapers but these differ so wildly that it is clear that their originators had no first hand idea of what she actually looked like. Those that did know her, such as Mrs. Phoenix and Chief Inspector Walter Dew – who encountered her when he was a young policeman on the beat in Whitechapel – described her as attractive and about 5ft 7in in height, quite tall for a woman in those days. Inspector Dew used the word 'buxom' to describe her, although Mrs. Phoenix preferred 'stout'[13]. She had blue eyes and thick hair which, when let down, reached to her waist. It was probably dark in colour although the fact that she was later known by a variety of nicknames including 'Fair Emma' and 'Ginger' suggests that she may have been in the habit of changing it from time to time. She took pride in her appearance and Dew said that she never appeared in public except in a spotlessly laundered apron although, unlike most of the unfortunates, she rarely wore a hat.

If she did live with Joseph Flemming it appears to have been a short-lived relationship because on Good Friday, 8th April 1887, she was in a public house in Spitalfields and there she encountered Joe Barnett. They were immediately

attracted to each other and on their second meeting the following day they decided to live together. She told him much the same story that she had told Mrs. McCarthy and her sister, although she said to Joe that she preferred to be called Marie Jeanette in the French fashion rather than plain Mary Jane. She was proud of having worked in a French establishment and she made no secret of that part of her life. She also boasted to Joe about having travelled to France with a gentleman shortly before her arrival in the East End.

Joe was an amiable but feckless man in his early 30s. He had been a fish porter in Billingsgate market until around the time he met Mary Jane, but had lost his licence for some unspecified misdemeanour and now did casual labouring jobs around the various markets when he could get them. They were a well-suited pair, both warm-hearted and generous although not above occasional violent spats when one of them, usually Mary Jane, had had too much to drink.

She told Joe a story that she had not, it seems, imparted to her companions during the Breezer's Hill days or to anyone other than Joe since that time. Her real name, she told him, was Davies on account of her having once been married to a young Welsh miner of that name who had been killed in an explosion two or three years after their wedding. It would turn out later that it was not the first time she had used the story of being a widow. In due course her death certificate would carry both the names Kelly and Davies.

The couple drifted like most of their kind from one common lodging house to another, always within the 'wicked half mile' of Spitalfields, moving on when their arrears of rent led to eviction. Eventually, in the early spring of 1888, they moved into 13 Miller's Court at a rent of four shillings and sixpence a week.

Miller's Court was a foetid cul-de-sac opening off Dorset Street which, like its companions Thrawl Street and the oddly misnamed Flower and Dean Street, was the heart of the most wretched part of the area. Clustered around Spitalfields market they were densely packed with common lodging houses, invariably known to their inhabitants as doss houses, where rooms were let out by the night for a few pennies[14]. At the bottom end of the scale three or four pence would buy a night in a bed shared with a stranger where the sheets were changed, at most, once a week and the ticking on the pillows was greasy and filthy because pillowcases were an unknown luxury. Boots were generally not

taken off before getting in to bed for to do so risked having an eminently pawnable commodity stolen in the night.

Unless paid for in advance, rooms had to be vacated by 8am in the morning. There was little temptation to linger after that time as the additional facilities consisted only of an outside privy shared with 50 or more others and a so-called kitchen with a bare table and a few chairs where residents could make themselves a mug of tea, in the unlikely event that they possessed any. It was better than actually sleeping on the pavement but only marginally so.

The residents of the doss houses were mainly casual male labourers in the docks and the various markets, and women who were collectively known as unfortunates. An unfortunate was a woman, usually in her 40s or 50s who, generally through alcoholism, had lost whatever position in society that she had ever occupied and had descended to eking out an existence through a mixture of prostitution, hawking or taking in washing.

Many unfortunates had once been respectably married women before drink took its toll and they were thrown out by their families. Once on the streets of Spitalfields and Whitechapel they became part of a huge drifting population of many thousands, largely unknown or forgotten by the rest of Victorian society. They operated at the very edge of human existence, their only possessions being what they carried beneath their layers of grubby clothes and consisting mostly of broken fragments of comb, shards of mirror, pawn tickets and a little tea or sugar in screws of blue paper. Apart from needing her doss money, an unfortunate's main requirement was the few pence needed to purchase a tot of rum to go into a glass of hot water. A woman who was prepared to go with a man into one of the dark, stinking back alleys or a dimly lit court and stand braced against a wall, back to the customer, ragged skirts hitched up above her waist, could make enough in a day to secure a bed of sorts for the night and, if she was lucky, keep herself mercifully drunk for the rest of the time.

It was a wretched, painful existence and in winter many unfortunates literally starved or froze to death in the gutter. Despite, or maybe because of, their shared privations they were a surprisingly cheerful lot, sticking together through thick and thin, sharing what little they had and gathering, when they could afford it, to sing and make merry in the many public houses which surrounded

the markets. There were occasional disagreements to be sure, and short-lived fights over trifles such as a piece of soap were not uncommon, but mostly the unfortunates and their feckless male companions rubbed along in cheerful shared poverty.

To most of those that knew her in the East End it was apparent that Mary Jane sprang from a different, more privileged background. A number of newspapers, particularly those aimed at the popular end of the market, were fascinated by the possibility that her antecedents were socially above those amongst whom she found herself at the end of her life. The *Western Mail* quoted Joe Barnett as saying that her parents were well off and on 17th November the *Graphic* said, 'Lastly, we would remark … that the woman Kelly did not belong to the "gutter class". She was a woman of respectable parentage and superior breeding, who had gradually sunk into the state of degradation in which she was existing when she met her terrible death.'

Despite this, Mary Jane identified with her fellow unfortunates and made friends with a few, although none claimed to know her well. As long as Joe was in work she did not need to earn her living on the streets and he was fiercely opposed to her doing so. But prostitution was a way of life for her, whether it was in a grand house in Knightsbridge or the back alleys of Whitechapel, and when money was tight, which was most of the time, she willingly resorted to it. It seemed to give her what she most valued in life: independence from being reliant on others. Her relative youth and good looks ensured that when she went out on the streets she had no shortage of customers.

Number 13 was a small ground floor room with a door that opened directly into the arched passageway that connected the court with Dorset Street. Two irregularly sized windows looked out onto the yard and the room itself contained only a wooden-framed bed, two small tables and two chairs. The only concession to luxury was a framed print of a popular sentimental picture, *The Fisherman's Widow*, hanging above the small fireplace[15]. The door closed with a spring lock but the only key had been lost and Joe and Mary Jane were in the habit of putting a hand through a window pane – that had been broken in one of their periodic fights – and opening the catch that way[16]. Usually a man's coat hung over the broken window to act as a curtain and keep out the draught.

Almost everything that is known about Mary Jane Kelly comes from Joe Barnett's testimony at the inquest and from interviews that a few of her close companions gave to newspaper reporters in the days following it. The problem is that much of it is contradictory even when the same person is being quoted. For instance, according to the court transcript, at the inquest Joe said that she had six brothers and a sister who all lived at home and another brother serving with the 2nd Battalion of the Scots Guards. The next day's *Telegraph* reported him as saying that she had six brothers in London and *The Times* reported him as saying that she had six brothers and sisters in Wales. With this amount of confusion it is no wonder that attempts to pin down the family of Mary Jane Kelly have proved so elusive.

There are clever details, however, sufficiently interesting and yet slightly unlikely – why seven siblings rather than, say, three? – as to be compelling to subsequent researchers. What was a son of an allegedly Irish family resident in Wales doing in the Scots Guards? The Guards regiments have always been fiercely proud of recruiting in their own territories, the Grenadiers in Nottinghamshire, the Coldstream in Northumberland and Durham, and the Scots north of the border. The Welsh Guards did not yet exist, not being founded until 1915, but there were several Irish infantry regiments and surely a man by the name of Kelly would have found himself more at home in a predominantly Catholic unit than a Presbyterian one?

Then there is the question of his nickname. Mary Jane told Joe that he was known to his army comrades as 'Johnto'[17]. Johnto however is a well-known Welsh diminutive of 'John'. More properly it is 'Ianto' since the letter J does not exist in Welsh, but it is often rendered as Johnto in families that speak both Welsh and English. It seems an odd choice for Scottish soldiers to bestow upon a man called Henry.

Joe and Marie Jeanette, as he always called her, moved into 13 Miller's Court in about March or April of 1888. At first it seems they were able to pay the four shillings and sixpence a week that the room cost but then work began to dry up for Joe who, having lost his Billingsgate fish porter's licence, was doing casual labouring jobs around the other markets and hawking fruit around the streets when all else failed. Soon they began to fall behind with the rent and by early November they were thirty shillings in arrears.

If Joe had been in a secure job no doubt they would have been able to muddle through, but as the nights began to draw in and the already wet summer gave way to a chilly autumn Mary Jane's soft heart got the better of her. Twice Joe came home in the early hours to find that she had allowed another unfortunate to doss down in the small room overnight. It led to a number of explosive rows and when Mary Jane started to talk of going back on the streets in order to obtain money to pay off the rent arrears it became almost too much for Joe. The final straw came when his headstrong partner decided to offer a home to Mrs. Maria Harvey, another unfortunate who had finally been thrown out by her husband.

Joe did the decent thing; instead of throwing Mary Jane out as Mrs. Harvey's husband had done, on 1st November he moved out himself, leaving the room to Mary Jane and arranging to call round from time to time to give her whatever money he had to spare. It must have been heart-breaking for him; he was obviously very fond of the strange Welsh-Irish girl with her stories of Paris and life as a high-class courtesan in the West End, places that were as foreign to Joe as the headwaters of the Amazon.

A few snippets that she told to her other acquaintances also came out at the inquest and many more were reported in the profusion of newspaper accounts after the event. In particular *The Daily Telegraph* reported that she 'was believed to be the wife of a man from whom she is separated' and her friend Julia Venturney, who lived opposite her in Miller's Court, also said that she had confided that her husband was still alive. If indeed she did have a living husband, one can see why she might have chosen to tell the man she was actually living with a different story.

With the present-day advantage of computers and digitised records, a family of the alleged size and composition of Mary Jane's living in Wales between the 1860s and 1880s should be easily identifiable – particularly given that the first names of at least three of them were known – but despite the most intensive search at the time and for more than 120 years since, no family remotely resembling it has ever shown up. Following the Miller's Court murder the police also made extensive enquiries with their colleagues in Ireland, which was then still part of Great Britain, with similarly negative results. Despite saturation press

coverage at the time, no member of Mary Jane Kelly's family ever came forward and none were present at her funeral. Nor can any trace of a likely marriage of a Mary Kelly to a man called Davies be found, or of the death in a mining accident of someone of that name and age at around the right time. In fact, surprising as it may seem, there are no plausible Mary Jane Kellys of the right age or of the background she gave recorded in the England and Wales censuses throughout the relevant part of the 19th century. The only possible conclusion is that Mary Jane Kelly never existed and that whoever the mysterious woman was, she was going under a false name and that, of course, throws considerable doubt on the rest of her story.

The only thing that Mary Jane never made a secret about was her profession. She was evidently proud of her past life as a prostitute and boasted of having worked in an upper-class brothel run by a French woman. At the inquest Joe Barnett said, 'She was in a gay house in the West End, but in what part she did not say. A gentleman came there to her and asked her if she would like to go to France[18].' The coroner then asked if she had gone, to which Joe replied, 'Yes; but she did not remain long. She said she did not like the part, but whether it was the part or purpose I cannot say. She was not there more than a fortnight, and she returned to England, and went to the Ratcliffe-highway.'

It is a slightly curious way of putting it but Joe was an uneducated man who was recounting some half-remembered detail from a conversation about events that took place anything up to two years before. By 'part' he could have meant the place or, possibly, the party, meaning the person she went with. What he meant by 'the purpose' is harder to explain. On the face of it, whoever she went with, the purpose would presumably have been to visit an exciting foreign city and have a good time. If, on the other hand, she meant that the purpose was to cement a relationship that she mistakenly thought was casual or temporary into a more permanent arrangement, it is easier to understand. Joe is known to have had a speech impediment and this may account for the lack of clarity in this and other parts of his testimony[19].

The coroner specifically asked Joe if he had heard Mary Jane saying that she was afraid of anyone, clearly attempting to discover if she could have known her killer. His answer was reported in slightly different ways in various papers over

the next few days but *The Star* for one reported him as saying, 'Yes, she used to get me to bring her the evening papers and see if there was another murder but beyond that she was not afraid of anyone that I know of.' Some people have taken that to mean that Mary Jane was illiterate and that Joe had to read the papers to her but that doesn't tally with Mrs. McCarthy's opinion of her being well-educated or with her landlord's assertion that she received letters from Ireland on one or more occasions.

How he would have known that they were from Ireland is dubious since, at that time, Ireland was still part of Britain, postage stamps were identical throughout the kingdom and postmarks were often blurred and illegible. Julia Venturney said that she had often heard her friend singing Irish songs but that would not necessarily signify anything since sentimental Irish ballads were immensely popular in the music halls of the time and there was also the possibility that Julia would not have been able to distinguish between Welsh and Irish songs. The song that she was heard singing on the night of her death has since been reported by many as being an Irish song but 'A Violet Plucked from Mother's Grave' was in fact an English music hall song written by Will H. Fox for the Mohawk Minstrels.

There is also some doubt about her age. Joe Barnett said that she had told him that she was 25 but whether that was when they first met or at the time of her death is unknown. Her death certificate says 'about 25 years' but her body was so badly mutilated that in pre-X-ray days it would have been impossible to tell her age to within five or more years either side of this and it is probable that they took this estimate from Joe. Almost all prostitutes habitually deducted as many years from their ages as they thought they could get away with because youth brought with it a premium in the flesh trade. The reporter of a New York newspaper, the *Syracuse Herald*, who appears to have done a particularly thorough job of interviewing the inhabitants of Dorset Street on the day after the murder, quoted her landlord, John McCarthy, as saying that Mary Jane 'looked about 30'.

While many of the British newspapers took their copy from the press agencies, from police statements which were frequently contradictory or from jobbing reporters who seem to have plagiarised each other's work unblushingly,

their brothers from America appear on the whole to have done a much more professional job. With the exception of *The Star*'s reporter and the one from the Press Association, few of the British reporters seem to have actually interviewed the people who knew Mary Jane personally. As a result there are many glaring differences between the reports on either side of the Atlantic in the days following the events in Miller's Court.

Although it may now seem surprising, readers of newspapers in the United States were often able to read about the unfolding events in Whitechapel some hours in advance of their cousins in Britain. Whereas the American reporters sent their copy directly to their offices in New York, Chicago or Philadelphia by means of the electric telegraph, the readers in Birmingham, Exeter or Norwich had to rely on the physical delivery of newspapers by rail from London which meant that they were often 12 to 24 hours behind Americans in reading the latest sensational news from the East End.

Amongst the differences in the first hours after the murder in Miller's Court was that of the victim's name. Most of the American papers reported it as Lizzie Fisher, although they added that she was known to her friends as Mary Jane[20]. Many of them, including the *New York World* on 10th November, said that she was, 'tall, not bad looking, with a dark complexion and generally wearing an old black velvet jacket…' *The Boston Globe*, amongst others, reported that she had been in service and that she was a married woman who had been deserted by her husband on account of her dissolute ways[21]. The *Washington Evening Star* agreed with the reporter from the *Syracuse Herald* in quoting people that knew her who said that she looked about 30 when she had arrived in Dorset Street about eight months previously in marked contrast to Joe Barnett's assertion that she was 25. As the late Philip Sugden, one of the most authoritative and painstaking of Ripper historians pointed out in his book, *The Complete History of Jack the Ripper*, most of the early police estimates of the ages of the victims were markedly less than they turned out to be once they had been identified.

A poignant little piece which gives a glimpse of the day-to-day life of Mary Jane and her fellow unfortunates is the interview with her neighbour Elizabeth Prater – who lived in the room above hers – which was published in *The Star* on 10th November, the day following the murder. The interview makes it very

clear that Elizabeth Prater was also an unfortunate who earned her living in the same way as Mary Jane.

She told the reporter, whose own comments were added in parentheses:

> 'She was tall and pretty, and as fair as a lily. I saw her go out in the shell* this afternoon, but the last time I saw her alive was about 9pm on Thursday night. I stood down at the bottom of the entry, and she came down. We stood talking a bit, thinking what we were going to do, and then she went one way and I went another. I went to see if I could see anybody. (Mrs. Prater adds with frankness) She had got her hat and jacket on, but I had not. I haven't got a hat or a jacket. We stood talking a bit about what we were going to do, and then I said, "Good night, old dear," and she said, "Good might, my pretty." She always called me that. That was the last I saw of her. (Then Mrs. Prater breaks down, and commences to sob violently) I'm a woman myself and I've got to sleep in that place tonight right over where it happened.'

It is a moving little passage that resonates with sincerity. Elizabeth Prater was 45 and had struggled to bring up a family of her own children and her stepchildren before she was widowed for the second time and sank into the abyss of alcohol and destitution. The heart-rending little detail of her not possessing a hat or jacket in which to face the cold, wet November night and the nice touch of her addressing a woman 15 years her junior as 'Old dear' and in turn being called 'My pretty' by Mary Jane who, one imagines, had all the advantages of youth over the other woman brings their voices echoing back through the years.

The enigma of Mary Jane lingers on. Was she Welsh or was she Irish? Was she 25 or older? Was her name Kelly or Davies? Both names are on her death certificate and the only thing that can be said with any degree of certainty is that her name was not Mary Jane Kelly or even Marie Jeanette Kelly. But if she was not who she said she was, who was she? And why was she so keen to keep her real identity hidden?

**A temporary open coffin used to transport bodies to the mortuary.*