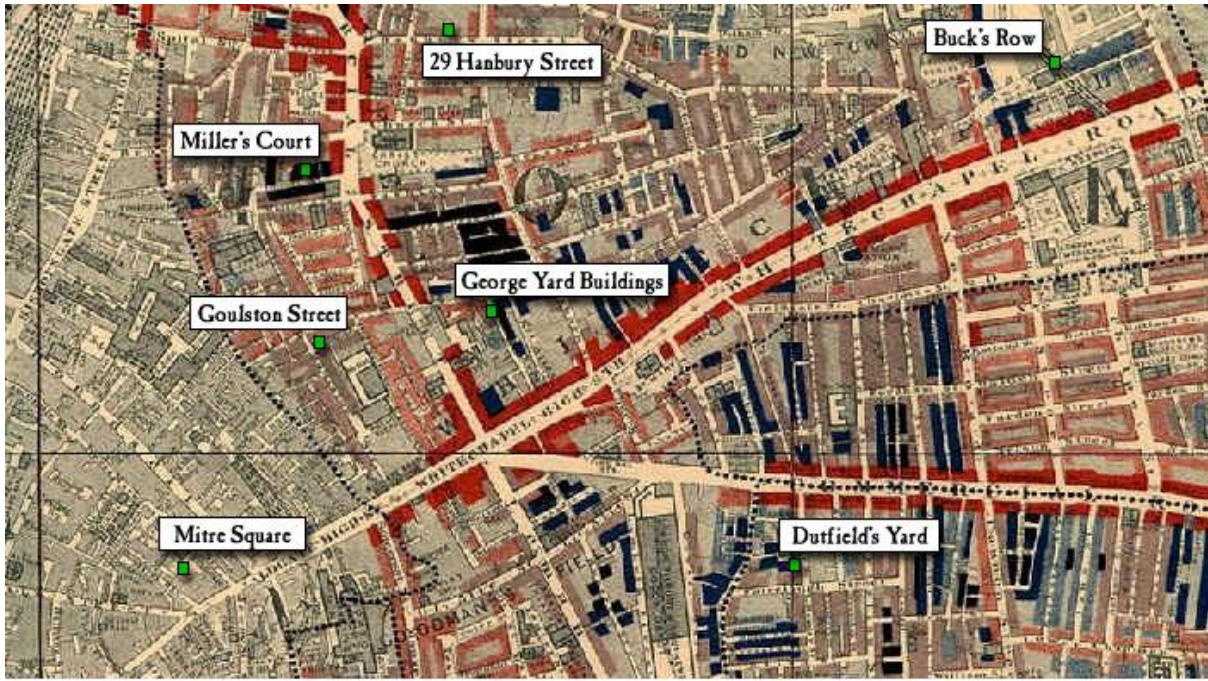


# Whitechapel, c.1870-c.1900: crime, policing and the inner city.



The Streets are coloured according to the general condition of the inhabitants, as under --

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <span style="color: #C00000;">■</span> Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings | <span style="color: #000000;">■</span> Lower class. Vicious, semi-criminal.  |
| <span style="color: #FF0000;">■</span> Middle-class. Well-to-do.                  | <span style="color: #800000;">■</span> Mixed. Some comfortable, others poor. |
| <span style="color: #FFA500;">■</span> Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy.   |  |

A combination of colours -- as dark blue and black, or pink and red -- indicates that the street contains a fair proportion of each of the classes represented by the respective colours.

Booth's Poverty map, 1888, showing the location of the five Ripper murders and of the Eddowes apron / "Juwes" message (Goulston Street).

# The local context of Whitechapel.

## Generally:

- Whitechapel, in the East-End of London, was one of its poorest districts;
- 30,000 people lived there (although 176,000 lived in the bigger police Whitechapel H-Division area).

## Poverty, work and housing:

- **Mixed population:**
  - Although Whitechapel was marked by poverty, there were businesses and richer inhabitants as well. As a generalisation they lived and traded along the larger roads such as Whitechapel Road and Commercial Road.
- **Pollution and poor sanitation:**
  - London suffered from terrible pollution from coal and gas fumes and industries ( e.g. the London Smog was a soot-laden fog that severely restricted visibility and caused death from impeded respiration / breathing);
  - Sewerage was poor and healthy drinking water unreliable, both causing diseases such as typhus and cholera.
- **Bad housing:**
  - **Overcrowded housing:**
    - Much of Whitechapel contained slum housing (also known as "rookeries");
    - Houses were divided into several apartments sometimes with 30 people in each house;
    - In 1881, Whitechapel's 30,709 people lived in 4,069 houses - on average 7.5 in each;
    - Whitechapel's population density was 189 per acre compared to 45 in London as a whole.
  - **Homelessness:**
    - There were "lodging houses" / "doss houses" where homeless people could sleep in 8-hour shifts:
      - Terrible unhygienic conditions including heat, rats and shared beds (dirty, unhygienic bedding, etc.);
      - 200 lodging houses catering for 8,000 people.
  - **Key example: Flower and Dean Street:**
    - 1871 census: 902 lodgers in 31 doss houses.
    - 1871 Board of Works Report: 38 houses, 143 rooms, 298 people including evidence of overcrowding and buildings in dilapidated condition.
    - Narrow yards, dilapidated houses, very cramped rooms, poor sewerage.
    - Terrible reputation for prostitution, thieves and violent crime.
    - (Modern police profiling of the crimes suggest that, along with two of his victims, the Ripper probably lived on Flower and Dean Street.
  - **Model housing – the Peabody Estate:**
    - Artisan's Dwellings Act, 1875, encouraged slum clearance.
    - 1881, George Peabody funded slum clearance and the creation of 286 flats in the Peabody Estate.
    - Rents were from 3 to 6 shillings for 1 and 3-room flats respectively (average labourer income was 22 shillings).
  - **Subsequent improvements:**

- The Houses of the Working Classes Act, 1890 sought to replace slums. The Public Health Amendment Act, 1890 aimed to improve sewerage and rubbish collection.
  - In-part the Acts were prompted by the Jack the Ripper murders and the resulting attention on poverty and squalor in Whitechapel.
- **Work:**
  - Much of the work in Whitechapel was casual or sweated labour:
    - **Casual labour** – such as in the docks or in construction – meant that workers were employed a day at a time: no job or income security;
    - **Sweated labour** meant work in cramped, dusty and unhealthy “sweatshops” for low wages in “sweated trades”, e.g. tailoring, dress and shoe making.
- **The Workhouse:**
  - Workhouses were set up in the early C.19<sup>th</sup> to offer food and shelter to those who were too poor to survive in the general community;
  - Inmates included the poor, old, sick, disabled, orphans, and unmarried mothers and their child(ren);
  - Conditions were deliberately made worse than those of labourers to keep costs down and to dissuade people from using them;
  - There was a stigma (social disgrace) about using the Workhouse. As a rule, people avoided going to the workhouse as long as possible but then found it hard to leave;
  - Inmate experience:
    - Families – men, women and children – separated and forbidden from communicating;
    - Inmates wore a uniform; were expected to do tough manual labour; received monotonous food; enjoyed little or no privacy including sleeping in soulless dormitories.
  - Vagrants – who stayed only one or two nights – were considered lazy and a bad influence, and were kept separately.
- **Orphanages:**
  - In 1870 Dr Thomas Barnardo set up his first orphanage.
  - By 1905, there were 100 Barnardo homes caring for 8,500 orphans.

## **Immigration and revolutionary politics:**

- **Irish immigration:**
  - Irish immigration expanded rapidly from the 1840s;
  - The Irish community was frequently engaged in low-skill manual labour such as being “navvies” on roads and railways or as dockers;
  - Hostility to the Irish:
    - The Irish had a reputation for drunkenness and violence;
    - The Irish terrorist group, the Fenians, were involved in a series of incidents from the 1860s to the 1880s and gained for the Irish a further reputation as violent fanatics.
- **Eastern European Jewish immigration.**
  - Massive Jewish immigration from Russia to Whitechapel occurred in the 1880s.
  - Hostility to the Jewish immigrants:
    - The Jewish immigrants had a reputation for being a separate un-British, unintegrated community. This was based on physical looks, clothing, language, religion, culture and the fact that they tended to live in their own separate communities;
    - Jewish immigrants were unpopular for their business success and business practices such as running sweatshops, paying low wages and, therefore, being able to undercut British businesses;
    - The Jews were also unpopular due to their supposed link to radical socialist and anarchist political groups.
- **Revolutionary political groups:**
  - Anarchism.
    - Anarchists wanted a revolution in which all laws and authority would be swept away. They committed a number of political assassinations in Europe and America in the late C.19<sup>th</sup>;
    - There was concern that anarchist groups might commit crimes in Britain.
  - Socialism.
    - Socialists wanted to bring down the existing capitalist system;
    - There was evidence of growing working-class support – led by parties such as the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) - which the authorities saw as dangerous;
    - There were some links between socialist groups and the Jewish community.

## Crime:

- **Generally, and associated policing problems:**
  - Whitechapel had a terrible reputation for high levels of crime (much of it linked to levels of poverty and unemployment);
  - Crime was made easier, and policing more difficult, by the maze of badly lit alleyways and courtyards with multiple entrances and exits;
  - Immigrant cultural and language barriers, plus prejudice against immigrants, added to policing problems;
  - Some areas, such as Ewer Street, were so dangerous that the police wouldn't go there.
- **Prostitution:**
  - In 1888 there were around 1,200 prostitutes in Whitechapel;
  - The poorest prostitutes tended to work on the streets making them vulnerable to assault and rape;
  - Other prostitutes worked in brothels (62 in Whitechapel in 1888) where they were safer but more easily exploited by pimps;
  - Attitudes to prostitutes were generally very unsympathetic.
- **Alcohol:**
  - There were numerous pubs, etc. in Whitechapel and drink – often to escape terrible lives – was common: there were numerous alcoholics;
  - There were (are) strong links between alcohol and violence.
- **Protection rackets and gang crime:**
  - Gangs, such as the Bessarabian Tigers and the Odessians, and gang-crime were common;
  - Many gangs organised protection rackets where businesses were intimidated into paying gangs for protection or, if they wouldn't pay, being smashed up.
- **Links to immigration:**
  - There was significant prejudice against immigrant groups. This frequently, as in the Ripper murders, led to press (e.g. *Illustrated Police News*) and public pressure on the police to focus their attention on immigrants as suspected criminals (e.g. Leather Apron / John Pizer);
  - Irish immigrants had a reputation for drunkenness and violent crime including terrorism (Fenian link);
  - Jewish immigrants had a reputation for gangs, immoral practices, and radical political links (Anarchism and Socialism).

## **Policing.**

### **Outside London:**

- Britain did not have a single national police force: in 1900 Britain had 47,000 police officers in 243 separate forces;
- These forces were mostly controlled by local watch committees.

### **The Metropolitan Police:**

- The Metropolitan Police – which covered the London area – was the biggest and most important force;
- Led by the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police who reported directly to the Home Secretary (a senior government politician);
- In 1885 there were 13,319 police officers in the Metropolitan police to deal with five million people in London;
- The Metropolitan Police was split into 20 Divisions known by a letter of the alphabet.

### **Criminal Investigation Department (CID):**

- The Metropolitan Police also had a detective force, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) with 294 detectives in 1883;
- The CID was set up in 1878 by Howard Vincent after the 'Trial of the Detectives' (1877) which exposed corruption in the previous detective force.

### **Commissioner Charles Warren:**

- Charles Warren, a former army general, was appointed Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in 1886;
- He gained a bad reputation for using the army to boost police numbers and for using vigorous policing methods against working-class political demonstrations (such as "Bloody Sunday" against socialist protestors in Trafalgar Square in 1886);
- Warren had very bad relations with the Home Secretary, Henry Matthews, and, after the failure of the Ripper investigation in 1888, was forced to resign;
- Warren wrote to the press to blame much of the failure of the Ripper investigation on weak political leadership.

### **Typical recruits:**

- Typical recruits were young working-class men of good, honest character (more important than intelligence);
- They were often from the countryside (recruits were bigger and healthier);
- The job was decently paid, secure, had promotion opportunities and led to a pension after 30-years' service.

### **The "Beat":**

- Regular on-foot patrol by each police officer around a set area of Whitechapel;
- Police had a truncheon, handcuffs, a whistle, a lamp, and their note book;
- Constables kept records in their beat diaries and regularly met and discussed events with their sergeant;

- Focus on observation, stopping and questioning and chasing and apprehending suspected criminals.

## **The police force in Whitechapel:**

### **Whitechapel: H-Division:**

- Whitechapel was the H-Division of the Metropolitan Police;
- It was run by a Superintendent, a Chief Inspector, 27 Inspectors, 37 Sergeants and around 500 Constables;
- There were 15 CID detectives attached to the Whitechapel H-Division;
- This force was responsible for policing 176,000 people among the poorest areas of London;
- There was a police to population ratio of 1:300 in Whitechapel compared to 1:390 for the whole of London (but there was far more crime in Whitechapel).

### **Whitechapel crime and associated policing problems:**

- Whitechapel had a terrible reputation for high levels of crime (much of it linked to levels of poverty and unemployment);
- Crime was made easier, and policing more difficult, by the maze of badly lit alleyways and courtyards with multiple entrances and exits;
- Immigrant cultural and language barriers, plus prejudice against immigrants, added to policing problems.
- Some areas, such as Ewer Street, were so dangerous that the police wouldn't go there;
- Particular problems included prostitution, alcohol-linked violent crime, and gang crime and protection rackets (see above).



## Investigative policing in Whitechapel: the Ripper murders.

### The Jack the Ripper murders:

- 31 August, 1888: Mary Ann "Polly" Nicholas – Buck's Row, Whitechapel
- 8 September, 1888: Annie Chapman – 29 Hanbury Street, Whitechapel
- 30 September, 1888: Elizabeth Stride – Dutfield's Yard, Berners Street, Whitechapel
- 30 September, 1888: Catherine Eddowes - Mitre Square, Aldgate, City of London
- 9 November, 1888: Mary Kelly – 13 Miller's Court, Dorset Street, Whitechapel

### The police investigation:

- **People:**
  - H-Division police officers and detectives
  - Assisted by CID Inspector Frederick Abberline
- **Methods:**
  - *Post-mortum* and coroners evidence:
    - *Post mortum*: Dr Rees Llewellyn stated that cuts suggested murderer had some knowledge of anatomy and possibly of dissection.
    - Coroner Dr Wynne Baxter agreed that murderer had anatomical knowledge and that "no mere slaughterer of animals could have carried out these operations".
    - The police focussed on more medically qualified persons for a time.
    - Subsequent *post mortums* contradicted the earlier judgement about the Ripper's anatomical skills so the police questioned 76 butchers and slaughtermen.
  - Follow up leads from journalists:
    - Press identified murderer as "Leather Apron", a local Jewish man called John Pizer. Police arrested him but he had alibis for the murder dates / times.
    - Press created or sent 300 letters to the police. Some of them appeared more convincing and the police created posters to try to follow up their evidence.
  - Witnesses:
    - Eye-witnesses were critical for crime detection until more forensic techniques were developed at the end of the C.19<sup>th</sup> and during the C.20<sup>th</sup>;
    - The Police Code identified "careful observation" as the method for police carefully to collect evidence at the crime scene.
  - Other methods:
    - Posters and 80,000 handbills (leaflets).
    - House-to-house searches.
    - Questioning 2000 lodging house residents.
    - Police in disguise.
    - Bloodhounds – did not get anywhere.

## Problems faced by the police:

- The police and the media.
  - 300 letters and postcards sent to police or newspapers by men claiming to be the murderer. Most famously, "Dear Boss" (first using the name Jack the Ripper);
  - Hostility from the press including rubbishing police leadership, officers and methods by respectable (*The Times*) and popular (e.g. *Illustrated Police News*) newspapers.
- Police rivalry:
  - Argument that the police forces didn't cooperate:
    - Key fact: Catherine Eddowes was murdered in the City of London, in the City of London Police area, not that of the Metropolitan Police.
    - Clue found in Goulston Street, Whitechapel. A piece of Eddowes apron, smeared with blood and faeces (human waste) underneath a message reading "The Juwes are not the men that will not be blamed for nothing."
    - Commissioner Warren ordered the message to be washed off the wall.
    - It is claimed that he did this because he didn't want the useful evidence to help the City of London Police and lead to their capture of the murderer.
  - BUT, counter-argument:
    - Warren argued that he feared that the message would lead to anti-Jewish riots and attacks.
    - AND evidence of cooperation between Metropolitan Police and Thames River Police regarding questioning of dockers and evidence of cooperation between H-Division and other Met divisions regarding searches of opium dens.
- Whitechapel Vigilance Committee:
  - George Lusk, a local builder, believed that the police were not doing enough and set up his vigilance committee including two private detectives;
  - Lusk's Committee sent the police unreliable evidence which then needed to be checked by the police; Lusk also received hoax letters (e.g. "From Hell" letter - including human kidney) which the police, again, needed to investigate.
- Reliance on witnesses:
  - The lack of forensic techniques (see below) meant that the police were forced to rely on eye-witnesses.
  - Eye-witness evidence was generally lacking and, where available, vague, for example, George Hutchinson's statement regarding the man he thought he saw Kelly just before her murder, and Matthew Parker's vague identification of a man in the vicinity.
- Lack of forensic techniques:
  - Fingerprinting: only used after 1900.

- Blood and DNA: DNA evidence only used from late C.20<sup>th</sup>. Scientists could not tell difference between human and animal blood, let alone blood groups.
- Photography:
  - No central record of photographs of criminals. Bertillon System of systematic photography and measurements of criminals only adopted 1894.
  - Crime-scene photography just developing.
- Communications:
  - Police could only summon help through whistle.
  - H-Division only had a telephone line of Metropolitan Police headquarters in 1901 and an exchange in their police station in 1907.
  - H-Division introduced bicycles in 1909 (Kent in 1896).

## Follow-up sources: poverty, housing, the workhouse, etc.

### Official records:

- **The Census.** The census was taken every 10 years (1871, 1881, etc.) It is an official government document which is designed to record details about the whole of Britain's population. Forms were sent to each address, help was provided where needed and there were punishments for inaccurate or incomplete information. The census records every address (including workhouses and lodging houses) and the names, ages, relationship (husband, wife, son, daughter, etc.) and employment of every person. The records can give evidence of, for example, overcrowding.
- **Board of Works Reports.** The Board of Works was the government department which was responsible for the condition of the buildings. Its reports contain detailed factual / objective evidence. Sometimes the evidence was used to implement slum demolition.
- **Workhouse records, e.g. Whitechapel Workhouse, South Grove.**  
Would have kept records about inmates, staff and the buildings:
  - Inmates: name, age, place of birth, occupation, relationship to other inmates, start and duration of stay. From this we can find out the numbers and typical characteristics of inmates and how numbers fluctuated.
  - Staff: names, jobs, etc. From this we can see the kind of support given to inmates and the ratio of inmates to staff.
  - Buildings: details of buildings, rooms – dormitories, refectory, infirmary, separate men / women / children accommodation. Also evidence of expenditure on repairs, etc.
  - Miscellaneous: there may be inventories of beds, cupboards, other furniture and evidence of expenditure on and types of food, etc.

### Other records:

- **Booth's Poverty Map, 1889.** Charles Booth was a social reformer who wanted to collect evidence about London's population to help put pressure on the government to make improvements. Booth employed 80 investigators who followed police officers on their beat to collect detailed evidence. Booth's maps are based on detailed records and evidence and he and his helpers had some expertise in identifying poverty, etc. His map, however, is not official, was designed to put pressure for government action, and suggests an outsider's prejudice with phrases such as "Lower class. Vicious, semi-criminal".
- **The press.** Press reports – particularly from higher-class publications like *The Times* - may contain comprehensive, objective, accurate and typical evidence. On the other hand, particularly in more popular journals such as the *Illustrated Police News* and the *East End Observer*, there is a tendency to sensationalise and exaggerate to get attention and increase sales. The information may be good: you need to corroborate and test it against your own knowledge. Also consider what is the purpose of the article.
- **Novels.** Novels may contain comprehensive, objective, accurate and typical evidence BUT there is a tendency to sensationalise and exaggerate to get attention and increase sales. The information may be good: you need to corroborate and test it against your own knowledge. Also consider what is the purpose of the book. Famous novels dealing with poverty in Whitechapel include *Tales of Mean Streets* by Arthur Morrison (1894) and *The People of the Abyss* by Jack London (1903).
- **Drawings and photographs.** Students tend to be suspicious of drawings and trustful of photographs BUT both may be accurate or misleading. Drawings may or may not be accurate but photographs also may be staged or give a misleading (partial or untypical) view. Both tend to reflect the purpose of the artist or photographer or the person who commissioned the image. The image may be good: you need to corroborate and test it against your own knowledge. Consider what is the purpose of the  
the photograph or drawing.

## Follow-up sources: crime and policing, etc.

### Policing records:

- **Home Office police records.** The Home Office was overall responsible for policing in Britain and received records from each force about the numbers of officers, crimes, arrests, charges, cautions, etc. in their area. There was some inconsistency in these records as different forces had different approaches to, for example, drunks and beggars.
- **Home Office Metropolitan Police records.** As the Metropolitan Police was directly responsible to the Home Secretary and was Britain's capital, the Home Office records were more detailed. They were broken down by Division.
- **Metropolitan Police records.** The Metropolitan Police kept detailed records about crimes, criminals and investigations as well as about police manpower, etc.
- **Criminal Investigation Department (CID)** also kept detailed records about their own investigations, crimes and criminals.
- **Whitechapel H-Division records.** H-Division also kept records about police officers, crimes, etc.
- **Police officers' beat diaries.** These contain the records of what the officer saw and did on his beat.
- **The Police Code.** This manual, written by Howard Vincent, head of the CID, gave instructions and guidance to police officers on how to question suspects and collect evidence.
- **Police officer's unofficial memoirs.** Some police officers, such as James Bent and Richard Jervis, wrote accounts of their careers which include details about their own experience. These may be typical and accurate but may also be unusual and / or exaggerated. They would need to be checked against other evidence.

### Crime – court records:

- **The Central Criminal Court, "The Old Bailey" court records.** There are thousands of London court cases - available on-line – from the Central Criminal Court, "The Old Bailey". These contains transcripts of the trial including names of accused and victims, charges, witness / police evidence, verdicts and sentences. It is possible to add search terms such as "Whitechapel", "gang", etc. Of course, these records only refer to crimes where someone was arrested and charged.
- Additionally, see police records, above.
- Additionally, see press records, below.

### Unofficial:

- **The press.** Press reports – particularly from higher-class publications like The Times - may contain comprehensive, objective, accurate and typical evidence. On the other hand, particularly in more popular journals such as the *Illustrated Police News* and the *East End Observer*, there is a tendency to sensationalise and exaggerate to get attention and increase sales. The information may be good: you need to corroborate and test it against your own knowledge. Also consider what is the purpose of the article.