

CONFIDENTIAL



**HOME OFFICE
POLICE ACT 1964**

THE YORKSHIRE RIPPER CASE

**REVIEW OF THE
POLICE INVESTIGATION OF THE CASE
BY LAWRENCE BYFORD, Esq., CBE., QPM.,
HER MAJESTY'S
INSPECTOR OF CONSTABULARY**

Presented to the Secretary of State for the Home Department

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Report to the Right Honourable William Whitelaw, C.H., M.C., M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department, on the Review of the Police Investigation of the Yorkshire Ripper Case

PART I — INTRODUCTION

The Scope of the Review

1. On 26th May 1981 I was appointed by you, pursuant to Section 38 (3) of the Police Act 1964, to review the police investigation into the Yorkshire Ripper Case. In particular, I was asked to report any lessons which might be learned from my review of the case and which should be made known to police forces generally. I now submit my report.

2. In conducting this review I have had the invaluable assistance of the special team of senior officers which was appointed to advise on the investigation in November 1980. The team comprised:—

- (i) L E Emment, Esq., Deputy Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police.
- (ii) A K Sloan, Esq., National Co-ordinator of Regional Crime Squads in England and Wales. (Latterly Deputy Chief Constable of Lincolnshire)
- (iii) D H Gerty, Esq., Assistant Chief Constable, West Midlands Police.
- (iv) R Harvey, Esq., Commander, Metropolitan Police and Assistant (Crime and Kindred Matters) to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary.
- (v) S S Kind, Esq., Director of the Home Office Central Research Establishment, Aldermaston.

3. The first phase of my review related to the actual police investigation into the case. This necessitated visits and interviews in several police districts including West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, Humberside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Durham and Northumbria. At the outset it was essential to identify the many criticisms levelled at the police in what was undoubtedly the largest-scale police investigation ever conducted in this country. Some of these criticisms were of apparent weaknesses in the police investigation and were voiced during the trial of the man convicted of the Ripper murders and attempted murders, Peter William Sutcliffe. Other criticisms came from newspapers and television programmes, Members of Parliament, local Councillors and members of the general public. Some of the immediate relatives of murder victims, especially those killed towards the end of this series of callous crimes, together with some surviving victims, were also critical of the police. I have endeavoured to take all of these criticisms into account both whilst conducting the review and equally when framing that part of the report relating to the lessons to be learned.

4. I was especially mindful of the need to allow any person with a legitimate interest in the case to contact me, or a senior member of my team, to comment personally about any aspect of the case giving rise to criticism. In particular I made contact with all the immediate relatives of murder victims and interviewed personally all those who wished to see me. All surviving victims of the attempted murders have also been similarly contacted. In addition, in answering Parliamentary Questions on 5th June and 9th July this year, you pointed out that I would be willing to receive evidence from interested parties and my official address was quoted in Hansard for that purpose. The opportunity has been given, therefore, to enable any person to contact me since the start of this inquiry and I have given full consideration to the views they have expressed. Without exception, those interviewed have been appreciative of the opportunity it gave for voicing their misgivings about the conduct of the case and this was especially true of the relatives of the murder victims.

5. During the course of the inquiry we have examined a wide variety of original documents completed in connection with Sutcliffe's crimes and have interviewed police officers of all ranks who were involved in the investigations in the several police areas. I also thought fit to issue an invitation, through the West Yorkshire Metropolitan Police Force Orders, to any police officer who wished to comment about the investigation of the crimes to come and see me. I have had access to a comprehensive file of press cuttings covering the many aspects of the case and have also

been able to view the recordings of all programmes broadcast by the British television service in connection with the range of Ripper crimes.

6. In producing my report I have, therefore, been able to take account of virtually all the range of opinion, both within and without the Police Service and of public and private documents and records produced in connection with these crimes. As you will see, later in the report, the critical analysis of the case has revealed some major errors of judgement, especially at senior management level. Mistakes were also made from time to time by officers of lower rank. In fairness these errors must be viewed against a backcloth of professional pressures which were unprecedented in the annals of crime investigation in this country in modern times. For over five years many police officers, of all ranks, were dedicated to detecting the crimes in the Ripper series and there is little doubt that the incessant demands arising from the investigation made serious inroads into family life and often the general health of the officers concerned. The analysis of the case has also revealed, very clearly, the lessons to be learned for the future by the police in this country. Hopefully these lessons will be promulgated throughout the Service as soon as possible and will then be included in the guide-lines to be followed in future especially in the series type of serious crime investigation.

Peter William Sutcliffe

7. During 1969 an otherwise unremarkable young man named Peter William Sutcliffe came to the notice of the police on two occasions in connection with incidents involving prostitutes. Sutcliffe, who at that time was 23 years of age, was a native of Shipley, West Yorkshire and lived there with his parents. He was not notably abnormal, although he had gained a reputation for a rather macabre sense of humour whilst employed as a grave digger at Bingley. During his late teens he developed an unhealthy interest in prostitutes and spent a great deal of time, often in the company of his friend Trevor Birdsall, watching them soliciting on the streets of Leeds and Bradford. There is no evidence that he used the services of prostitutes at that stage although it is clear that he was fascinated by them and spent a considerable amount of time acting as a kind of voyeur. It is apparent that at some point during 1969, Sutcliffe's interest in prostitutes attained a new dimension with a desire on his part to inflict physical injury upon them. Although the police files on two incidents involving Sutcliffe during that year were destroyed some time ago as part of a perfectly legitimate "weeding" process there is no doubt that on one occasion Sutcliffe attacked a prostitute in Bradford with a cosh consisting of a large stone inside a man's sock. He had left Birdsall in his car before the incident and told him about what had happened when he returned. Surprisingly he was not charged with any offence. During the same year Sutcliffe was arrested in a prostitute area in Bradford whilst in possession of a hammer. He was not suspected by the police of having the hammer for the purpose of inflicting violence to the person and the meagre police records remaining show that he was subsequently charged with "going equipped for stealing". At the time of these attacks Sutcliffe was courting Sonia Szurma whom he was to marry in 1974.

8. Between 1969 and the start of the known Ripper crimes in 1975, there is a curious and unexplained lull in Sutcliffe's criminal activities and there is the possibility that he carried out other attacks on prostitutes and unaccompanied women during that period. I should perhaps say here that I have given considerable thought to the extent of my responsibility in this review of the Ripper Case having regard to the opportunity it has given to interview Sutcliffe and his associates and in particular, Birdsall. I came to the conclusion that consideration of any other crimes which might have been committed by Sutcliffe and any of his associates was a matter for the West Yorkshire Metropolitan Police and the other police forces where such crimes might have been committed. I believe that it is sufficient for me to add that, in the light of the evidence adduced during the review, we feel it is highly improbable that the crimes in respect of which Sutcliffe has been charged and convicted are the only ones attributable to him. This feeling is reinforced by examining the details of a number of assaults on women since 1969 which, in some ways, clearly fall into the established pattern of Sutcliffe's overall modus-operandi. I hasten to add that I feel sure that the senior police officers in the areas concerned are also mindful of this possibility but, in order to ensure full account is taken of all the information available, I have arranged for an effective liaison to take place.

9. Whatever activity Sutcliffe did or did not engage in between 1969 and 1975, in the latter year he is known to have embarked on a campaign of murderous attacks on prostitutes and unaccompanied women in the West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester Police areas which was to

gain him the title "The Yorkshire Ripper". It was also to bring into international focus the unprecedented police activity, press and other news media interest which arose from our most remarkable crime investigation this century. To the female population in Northern cities, especially in West Yorkshire, the successive murders and serious assaults, over a period of five years, obviously prompted great fear and apprehension which were not to be alleviated until Sutcliffe was arrested in Sheffield on 2nd January, 1981.

10. Part II of my report, which follows, covers the principal events in the protracted Ripper Case, and is not intended to highlight any of the criticisms or limitations in the police investigation. These are dealt with under Part III and to some extent serve as a backcloth to the "Lessons for the Future" as detailed in Part IV.