

382. The decision to mount major lines of inquiry within a police investigation of a serious crime is clearly a case for proper planning, assessment of impact, reporting and control and can probably best be dealt with by delegating the function to a competent officer once the decision has been taken to go ahead. The abrupt curtailment of an agreed line of inquiry such as the "Tracking Inquiry" (at a time when Sutcliffe had not been seen) clearly reflects that at the time the decision was taken to go ahead, senior officers had little confidence that there was a worthwhile prospect of success. Had this not been the case the inquiry must have been continued until all 53,000 vehicles had been seen.

383. The final important aspect affecting command and control of the inquiry is that there were notable failures to make proper arrangements for the welfare of the officers who were involved. The two most telling examples involve both of the jointly mounted £5 note inquiries. In Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the first £5 note inquiry, for example, the Greater Manchester officers who were involved travelled daily from the Greater Manchester area to West Yorkshire where they worked a 12 hour day on the inquiry. This daily travelling commitment during the winter must have had some influence on the attitudes of the officers who were involved. The evidence which is available suggests that commitment can be maintained, even in conditions of some hardship, for a relatively short period when the prospects of success are considered to be high. The longer an inquiry continues, however, the more important matters of welfare become in the eyes of those who are involved so that, in the absence of proper welfare arrangements, neutral feelings may degenerate to active dissatisfaction and hostility. The situation was only slightly improved when the all important interviews with the 241 people in the second £5 note inquiry were started. During this inquiry the officers from Greater Manchester were accommodated in lodgings in Wakefield which were not up to the usual standard and were also required to provide their own evening meals. Given the importance of the inquiry, even as recognised at the time and without the benefit of hindsight (that one of the 241 people had been the initial recipient of the Jordan £5 note), nothing should have been spared to ensure that it was successful. All senior detectives have to contemplate that the strength of their efforts is that of the weakest link in their organisation so that a whole inquiry may be jeopardised by the lack of ability and unhelpful attitude of a single detective involved in it. Although the second £5 note inquiry can be said to have failed more because of the failure of the Millgarth Incident Room to record Sutcliffe's previous involvement in the case than for any other cause, the attitudes of the officers who interviewed him, particularly when some previous connection was discovered, were not sufficiently positive to result in a much deeper probe and possibly his arrest. There were, of course, a number of factors (including the letter and tape publicity) which undoubtedly affected the attitudes of officers engaged in the investigation, but the occasional lack of attention to welfare may well have added to the general malaise at important times.

384. The inevitable conclusion about the command and control of the overall operation is that at the individual level the vast majority of officers involved in the Ripper investigation worked diligently and conscientiously to detect the crimes. Relatives of some of the victims have commented on this outstanding commitment and said how determined the officers dealing with their particular case were to bring the criminal to justice as quickly as possible. What was lacking was not individual application, some of which led to illness and domestic disharmony, but the management capacity which would have ensured that the workload was distributed so as to capitalise on the individual skills of as many officers as possible and so that no inquiry was attempted in the absence of the resources which would have enabled it to be brought to a conclusion within a satisfactory timescale. This judgement, however, needs to be viewed in line with the unprecedented nature of the protracted Ripper investigation as illustrated, for example, by the schedule of manpower commitment by the West Yorkshire Metropolitan Police alone at fig. 19 and the statistics of inquiry involvement within West Yorkshire and the North East of England at fig. 20. Even in the light of such statistical information there are clearly lessons for the future in the spheres of command, control and resource allocation and I will refer to these in Part IV of my report.

(b) Sutcliffe's Immediate Associates

(i) Trevor Birdsall

385. During the trial of Peter William Sutcliffe the witness who probably attracted the greatest attention from the media and others was Trevor Birdsall so much so that I have decided that the facts surrounding Birdsall warrant a separate heading in this part of my report.

FIGURE 19
MANPOWER DEPLOYMENT TO RIPPER CRIMES IN WEST YORKSHIRE

<i>Case</i>	<i>Period</i>		<i>Approximate Total Hours</i>
McCANN	30 October 1975	— 2 January 1976	53,399
JACKSON	20 January 1976	— 6 February 1977	64,009
RICHARDSON	6 February 1977	— 23 April 1977	94,783
ATKINSON	23 April 1977	— 10 July 1977	96,028
MACDONALD	26 June 1977	— 1 August 1977	77,199
LONG	10 July 1977	— 1 October 1977	72,204
JORDAN (£5 note)	1 October 1977	— 31 December 1977	27,215
MOORE	14 December 1977	— 31 January 1978	6,741
PEARSON	21 January 1978	— 17 May 1978	11,582
RYTKA	31 January 1978	— 18 March 1979	197,407
WHITAKER	5 April 1979	— 3 September 1979	97,161
LEACH & HILL	3 September 1979	— 21 November 1980	223,761
Total:			1,021,489

DEPLOYMENT OF INDEPENDENT UNITS

TASK FORCE	750,900
PROSTITUTE OBSERVATIONS	227,396
VISUAL DISPLAY UNIT (CROSS AREA SIGHTING INQUIRY)	130,348
LEEDS INCIDENT ROOM (Separate since Rytka)	106,762
Grand Total:	2,236,895

N.B. The crimes listed in Figs 19 and 20 exclude seven of those with which Sutcliffe was ultimately charged, for which statistics are not readily available.

FIGURE 20
INQUIRY STATISTICS FOR RIPPER CRIMES IN WEST YORKSHIRE

	<i>Persons Seen (‘B’ Refs)</i>	<i>House to House Enquiries</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Cars</i>
McCANN	3,297	5,058	2,880	538	3,490
JACKSON	6,393	3,720	5,226	830	3,509
RICHARDSON	46,615	4,385	4,400	1,611	99,502
ATKINSON	5,325	2,356	3,915	2,161	1,924
MACDONALD	10,698	2,994	5,979	3,804	10,305
LONG	6,316	638	1,914	911	7,000
MOORE	1,478	103	839	149	404
RYTKA	56,079	1,800	21,268	7,938	16,542
PEARSON	3,995	511	966	331	1,155
WHITAKER	45,044	2,269	11,426	4,509	5,011
			34,729 *	700 *	
LEACH	58,729	2,214	36,207	4,505	8,106
HILL	3,000 •	1,100	750	700	500
TOTALS:	246,969	27,148	130,499	28,687	157,448

• An additional 8,740 ‘B’ references with 5,605 completed actions awaited checking and filing when this table was prepared.

* Actions and statements in the North Eastern inquiry based on the Sunderland Major Incident Room.

386. In the period 1966 to 1972 Birdsall was a close friend of Sutcliffe and frequently accompanied him on visits to public houses in the West Yorkshire area. In his evidence at the trial Birdsall said that they had both spent time watching prostitutes soliciting in Leeds and Bradford and that he suspected that, whilst they were out together in 1969, Sutcliffe had assaulted a prostitute with a stone in a sock. He also suspected that after he had driven him to Halifax one evening in 1975, Sutcliffe had attacked another woman named Olive Smelt. Birdsall saw later the press report of the attack on Smelt and at the time this had set him wondering as to whether or not Sutcliffe had been responsible.

387. Although Birdsall was suspicious of his friend he kept this to himself until the autumn of 1980 when he discussed the matter with Gloria Conroy, with whom he was then living, having separated from his wife. Conroy, possibly motivated by thoughts of the very large reward which was then being offered for information leading to the arrest of the Ripper, persuaded Birdsall to tell the police of his suspicions, first by anonymous letter and subsequently by a visit to the police station.

388. To my mind, Birdsall's involvement in the case raised two important questions which this review needed to cover. First, was Birdsall's involvement as innocent as he suggested or was he an accomplice in Sutcliffe's crimes? Second, why did the anonymous letter and Birdsall's subsequent visit to Bradford Police Station not lead to Sutcliffe's arrest before January 1981? So far as the first question is concerned it is pertinent to say that Birdsall, who is now 33 years of age, first met Sutcliffe in 1966 when he was 18 and Sutcliffe was 20. For the next six years the two men saw each other frequently and went drinking together travelling initially in a Reliant three wheeled motor car and then in a Mini saloon, both owned by Birdsall and, subsequently, in one of Sutcliffe's cars. Birdsall recalled that in 1968 whilst they were out in his Reliant car Sutcliffe left the vehicle in Backend Road, Bradford to speak to a woman. On his return to the car Sutcliffe said that he had been "comforting her". The incident involving the "stone-in-sock" occurred in 1970 when the two men were travelling through the Clayton area of Bradford in Birdsall's Mini saloon. Birdsall remained in the car whilst this incident took place and did not see the assault which Sutcliffe subsequently admitted to him. Birdsall also accompanied Sutcliffe to Halifax on the evening of his attack on Olive Smelt although there is no suggestion that he either participated in the attack or was aware of it at the time.

389. It might be thought that when Birdsall saw the newspaper report of the attack on Olive Smelt soon after the incident his suspicions ought to have been sufficiently aroused for him to have contacted the police. Birdsall has since said that he "found it hard to believe that he, as a friend of mine, could be the man the police were looking for." Birdsall maintained this attitude even when he became aware that Sutcliffe had been interviewed in connection with the £5 note inquiry and he has stated that he was subsequently relieved when the "Sunderland" tape recording was broadcast in June 1979 indicating that the Ripper had a "Geordie" accent, which, of course, meant that he could discount Sutcliffe.

390. After Birdsall's marriage in 1972 the two men did not go out together as frequently as before although they sometimes went out with their wives or in the company of other people.

391. Birdsall's suspicions about Sutcliffe apparently did not come to the fore until he saw reports of the murder of Jacqueline Hill on the 17th November 1980. He had earlier been out with Sutcliffe in the Rover 3.5 saloon which Sutcliffe had acquired in June 1979 and he linked this vehicle with press reports of a "dark squarish saloon car" which had been seen in Alma Road near to the scene of the Hill murder at the material time. Birdsall subsequently saw Olive Smelt giving a television interview about the attack upon her in Halifax back in 1975 and his suspicions of Sutcliffe became even stronger. He used the "freephone" to play over the recording of the "Sunderland" tape in an unsuccessful attempt to link Sutcliffe with the voice but then, after discussing the matter with his girlfriend, he wrote an anonymous letter to the police. Gloria Conroy persuaded him that the contents of his letter were insufficient to convince the police that the information was genuine and she prompted him to visit the police station. This he did and subsequently he was required to give evidence at Sutcliffe's trial.

392. With the exception of Birdsall's tenuous involvement in the "stone-in-the-sock" case and the assault on Olive Smelt no evidence has been adduced to link him with any of Sutcliffe's other

crimes. Sutcliffe has not implicated Birdsall in his voluntary statement and, perhaps more significantly, none of the surviving victims of Sutcliffe's admitted or suspected assaults has mentioned the presence of a second man. Equally, whilst footprints have been found at some of the murder scenes they have not indicated the presence of more than one person apart from the victim. Sutcliffe was alone when he was arrested with the Sheffield prostitute Olivia Rievers and on the basis of my review of the case I have concluded that it is most unlikely that Birdsall was involved as an accomplice in any of the crimes. He might be criticised for his failure to have made known to the police his suspicions about the Olive Smelt case, particularly in the light of the series of crimes which then followed. His claim to have been misled by the "Sunderland" tape recording is, however, difficult to criticise in the light of the effect which the recording had even on those who were professionally dedicated to the arrest of the Ripper.

393. On Tuesday 25th November 1980, arising from his suspicions following the murder of Jacqueline Hill, Birdsall wrote the following anonymous letter to the Ripper Incident Room in Leeds:—

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to inform you that I have every good reason to believe I now the man you are looking for in the "Ripper Case".

It is an incident which happened within the last 5 years. I cannot give any date or place or any details without myself been known to the ripper or you if this is the man.

It is only until recently that something came to my notice, and now a lot of things fit in to place.

I can only tell you one to two things which fit for example, this man has had dealings with prostitutes and always had a thing about them. Also he is a long distance lorry driver, collecting engineering items etc. I am quiet sure if you check up on dates etc., you may find something His name and address is

Peter SUTCLIFFE
5 GARDEN LANE
HEATON, BRADFORD

(CLARKS TRANS.
(SHIPLEY.

The original letter is reproduced at fig. 21.

394. When the letter arrived it was one of many, the majority of which were anonymous, that were being received by the police in consequence of an appeal for information in connection with the Hill murder and following the enhanced reward offered by the Police Authority and the local newspapers. Such letters were opened by a team of officers who took special precautions, by wearing gloves, to preserve any possible evidence which might become available should one of the letters prove to be from the author of the "Sunderland" letters and tape. Detective Sergeant Boot received Birdsall's letter on Wednesday 26th November 1980 and marked it "Action to trace/interview Sutcliffe." He then initialled and dated this note and marked the letter "Priority No. 1." All letters were given a priority code on the following scale:—

1. Easy actions containing good detail (e.g. name and address supplied).
2. More difficult actions requiring further inquiries (e.g. christian name only with possibly a street name).
3. General comments only (e.g. "I think the Ripper is a farmer").
4. No interest — irrelevant or cranky.

395. Birdsall's letter was then directed to the table in the Incident Room where information relating to the murder of Jacqueline Hill was being dealt with. It was received by Policewoman Bainbridge who subsequently prepared an action form for Sutcliffe to be traced and interviewed. The form was then passed to the Index Clerk, Policewoman Neave, whose job it was to create a new nominal index card for the subject of the action form and to ascertain whether any previous nominal index cards existed in the same name. Policewoman Neave created a new nominal index card and found that Sutcliffe had three previous index cards on which references relating to the

FIGURE 21

ANONYMOUS LETTER FROM TREVOR BIRDSALL

Action to trace ²⁵⁻¹¹⁻⁸⁰ _{inter view}
Sutcliffe ^{11/25/80}

To Whom it may concern

I am writing to inform you that I have very good reason to believe I now the man you are looking for in the "RIPPER CASE".

It is an incident which happened within the last 5 years. I cannot give any date or place or any details without myself been known to the ripper or you if this is the man.

It is only until recently that something came to my notice, and now a lot of things fit in to place.

I can only tell you one or two things which fit for example, this man as had dealings with prostitutes, and always had a thing about them. Also he is a long distance lorry driver, collecting engineering items etc. I am quite sure if you check up on dates etc. you may find something.

HIS name and address is
PETER SUTCLIFFE { CLARKES TRANS.
5, GARDEN LANE. { SHIPLEY
HEATON, BRADFORD.

“Cross” and “Triple Area Sightings” were recorded. Policewoman Neave summarised the contents of the index cards on the newly created action form. These functions were completed during the period between 29th November and 9th December 1980. As has already been mentioned there was at that time a considerable backlog of work within the Incident Room so that the delay in dealing with these papers was not unusual in relation to the new information reaching the operatives there.

396. Once Policewoman Neave had completed the indexing process she placed the action in a wire filing basket so that the previous papers which related to the references transferred from the index cards could be copied and attached to the action before it was sent to the outside inquiry team. For some inexplicable reason the action remained in the filing basket and was still there when Sutcliffe was arrested in Sheffield on the 2nd January 1981. Such a lengthy delay was not typical of this aspect of the work of the Incident Room. It may have resulted from the fact that papers relating to “Cross Area Sightings” (all of which bore a “7S” reference) were filed in a separate room at the other end of the main corridor to the Incident Room. At the time, only a few members of staff were aware of this sub-division of the filing system and it was, in fact, referred to infrequently. Persons seeking “7S” papers would need to leave the Incident Room, walk the length of a corridor, unlock a filing system with which they were not familiar, locate the relevant papers and then return to the Incident Room to copy them and, finally, return the papers to the “7S” file. Because of this unfamiliar procedure it would seem such work naturally gravitated to the bottom of the filing basket.

397. The delay was indicative of the general malaise within the Incident Room system at that time which resulted in Sutcliffe being at liberty for more than a month when he might conceivably have been in custody. Fortunately this limitation did not result in any further murderous assaults being committed by Sutcliffe before his arrest in Sheffield in January 1981.

398. After Birdsall had explained to Gloria Conroy what he had written in his anonymous letter she quickly decided that the information was not sufficiently conclusive to result in prompt police action. Apparently still interested in the prospects of the reward she persuaded Birdsall to visit the Western Area Headquarters of the West Yorkshire Police at Bradford. Birdsall and Conroy went there together at 10.10 p.m. on Wednesday 26th November 1980. On arrival at the inquiry desk they were seen by Policewoman Nicholson who ascertained that they wished to give information in connection with the Ripper crimes. Needless to say, this was a common occurrence and indeed at that time Policewoman Nicholson was already dealing with another person wishing to give information concerning the Ripper case. She therefore asked Police Constable Butler, a recent recruit to the Police Service, to deal with Birdsall and Conroy. He interviewed them both and noticed they had been drinking. Subsequently Constable Butler made the following record in his official notebook:—

“On Friday the 16th August 1975 Mr. Birdsall was out with Mr. Sutcliffe in his car, blue Ford with white roof, at Halifax at approximately between 11.00 p.m. and 12.00 p.m. on Boothtown Road, when we stopped when we saw a woman by herself walking down. Mr. Sutcliffe got out of the car and followed her and returned 20 minutes later. He seemed to have changed his manner. He then dropped Mr. Birdsall home and said that he was going back home.”

399. At no time during his visit to the Police Station did Birdsall mention that he had written an anonymous letter the previous day. Because of Constable Butler’s relative inexperience, Policewoman Nicholson compiled the report form for him giving details of his interview with Birdsall and Conroy. Constable Butler then signed the report which included the information from his pocket book and submitted it to his supervisory officer, Sergeant Walsh.

400. The report was transmitted to the Incident Room in Millgarth Police Station where it was read by Constable Summers who, by coincidence, had earlier been responsible for supervising Constable Butler’s work during the first few weeks of his service. It is clear that Constable Summers read the report which should then have been passed to a senior officer for further instructions.

401. Following Sutcliffe’s arrest an internal inquiry in the force was mounted in an endeavour to

trace the report, but without success. It is likely that the report has been misfiled but whatever the reason for its loss it is a further indication of the overall lack of efficiency within the Incident Room.

402. Although the exact date on which Constable Summers saw Constable Butler's report has not been established there are good grounds for concluding that the report was received in the Incident Room by the 4th December 1980. Had it been seen by a senior police officer it is reasonable to assume that he would have realised the significance of the date, "Friday 16th August 1975", referred to in the report, as being directly connected with the attack on Olive Smelt, which by that time had been classified as the second crime in the Ripper series. This in turn might conceivably have led to Sutcliffe's arrest one month before it actually occurred although it would not, of course, have prevented any of the violent crimes admitted by him.

403. In essence, the failure to take advantage of Birdsall's anonymous letter and his visit to the Police Station was yet again a stark illustration of the progressive decline in the overall efficiency of the Major Incident Room.