Jack the Ripper terrorized London in 1888, killing at least five women and mutilating their bodies in an unusual manner, indicating that the killer...
Internal politics at the Metropolitan Police and the detrimental impact of organisational dysfunction on the 1888 Jack the Ripper investigation

Paul Bleakley

Abstract

The investigation into the Whitechapel murders of 1888 was perhaps the greatest challenge faced by the London Metropolitan Police throughout its history. Failing to catch the culprit – arguably the first modern serial killer – was not purely due to the actions of the heavily mythologised ‘Jack the Ripper’; instead, the investigation was hindered by the internal politics that existed within both the force itself and its relationship with the Home Office. A prolonged feud between Police Commissioner Charles Warren and Assistant Commissioner James Monro led to a crisis of leadership within the organisation that inevitably trickled down to affect the morale and functioning of the investigation team. Monro’s resignation resulted in a vacuum of leadership at the CID, undoubtedly contributing to a lack of direction and mistakes being made by investigating officers. The Metropolitan Police were essentially a dysfunctional organisation that were incapable of forming a united front in order to catch the individual responsible for at least five brutal murders. Research highlights several critical issues that would have – in hindsight – improved the chances of a successful investigation; these include managerial relations, the absence of key figures at critical moments of the investigation and poor decision-making leading to the destruction of evidence.

Full Text:

PDF

Refbacks

There are currently no refbacks.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License.

ISSN: 2309-091X

had a substantial knowledge of human anatomy. The culprit was never captured—or even identified—and Jack the Ripper remains one of England’s, and the world’s, most infamous criminals. All five killings attributed to Jack the Ripper took place within a mile of each other, in or near the Whitechapel district of London’s East End, from August 7 to September 10, 1888. Several other murders occurring around that time period have also been investigated a The name ‘Jack the Ripper’ does not elicit the reaction of animosity which the majority of serial killers provoke, rather it elicits fascination and intrigue. His immortalisation in Madame Tussauds and the London Dungeon is a testament to this and points to a perverse, albeit indirect, celebration of his grisly deeds. The police and the media’s willingness to believe the murders were committed by a foreigner was reflected by the East London Observer (15 September 1888) and the police in their willingness to lend great emphasis to the testimony of Mrs Long, who, although having only seen the back of the man who was last seen with the second Whitechapel victim Annie Chapman. The police investigation into the Jack the Ripper crimes was ultimately a failure since they didn’t catch the murderer. In fairness to the Victorian detectives their hunt was hampered by a lack of many of the modern investigative techniques available to modern police forces. However, it cannot be denied that the police hunting the killer did make several fundamental mistakes.