

# Mary Jane Kelly

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**Mary Jane Kelly** (c. 1863 – 9 November 1888), also known as Marie Jeanette Kelly, Fair Emma, Ginger and Black Mary, is widely believed to be the fifth and final victim of the notorious unidentified serial killer Jack the Ripper, who killed and mutilated prostitutes in the Whitechapel area of London from late August to early November 1888.<sup>[1]</sup> She was about 25 and living in poverty at the time of her death.<sup>[1]</sup>

Reports of the time estimated her height at 5 feet and 7 inches (1.70 metres).<sup>[1]</sup> Her hair colour is somewhat uncertain although she was nicknamed 'Ginger'. She has been variously reported as being a blonde or redhead. Her reported eye colour was blue. Detective Walter Dew, in his autobiography, claimed to have known Kelly well by sight and described her as "quite attractive" and "a pretty, buxom girl".<sup>[1]</sup> Sir Melville Macnaghten (1853 - 1921) of the Metropolitan Police Service, who never saw her in the flesh, reported that she was known to have "considerable personal attractions" by the standards of the time. She was said to be fluent in the Welsh language.



## The canonical five Jack the Ripper victims

Mary Ann Nichols

Annie Chapman

Elizabeth Stride

Catherine Eddowes

**Mary Jane Kelly**

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## Early life

Compared with other Ripper victims, Mary Kelly's origins are obscure and undocumented, and much of it is possibly embellished. According to Joseph Barnett, the man she had most recently lived with, Mary had told him she was born in Limerick, Ireland — although whether it was the county or the city is not known — around 1863, and her family moved to Wales when she was young.

Barnett reported that Kelly had told him her father was named John Kelly and worked in iron works; his county of employment was reported as being either Caernarfonshire or Carmarthenshire. Barnett recalled Kelly mentioning having six or seven brothers and at least one sister. One brother named Henry Kelly supposedly served in the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards. She once stated to her personal friend Lizzie Albrook that a family member was employed at the London theatrical stage. Her landlord John McCarthy claimed that Kelly received infrequent correspondence from her mother in Ireland as late as 1888. However, Barnett denied this.

Both Barnett and a reported former roommate named Mrs. Carthy claimed that Kelly came from a family of "well to do people". Carthy reported Kelly being "an excellent scholar and an artist of no mean degree".

Around 1879, Kelly was reportedly married to a collier named Davies who was killed two or three

years later in a mine explosion. No researcher has yet been able to trace the accuracy of this statement.

A report of the 1888 London press of Kelly being a mother has led a minority of Ripperologists to suggest the birth of a younger Davies between 1879 and 1882. The story contains several factual errors however, including the claim that she supposedly lived on the second floor. It is likely that news reports initially identifying Lizzie Fisher (or Fraser) as the victim are the source for the rumour. Fisher did live on the second floor and did have a 12 year old son.

Kelly reportedly stayed for a while with a cousin in Cardiff. She is considered to have started her career as a prostitute there. There are no contemporary records of her presence in Cardiff. Kelly herself claimed to have spent much of her stay in an infirmary.

Kelly apparently left Cardiff for London in 1884 and found work in a brothel in the more affluent West End of London. Reportedly, she was invited by a client to France but quickly returned, disliking her life there. Nevertheless she liked to affect the name of "Marie Jeanette" Kelly after this experience.

## Return to London

By some, Kelly had been known as "Fair Emma", although it is not known whether this applied to her hair colour, her skin colour, her beauty, or whatever other qualities that she had. Some newspaper reports claim she was nicknamed "Ginger" after her allegedly ginger-coloured hair (though sources disagree even on this point, thus leaving a large range from ash blonde to dark chestnut). Another paper claimed she was known as "Mary McCarthy", which may have been a mix up with the surname of her landlord at the time of her death. Gravitating toward the poorer East End, she reportedly lived with a man named Morganstone near the Commercial Gas Works in Stepney and later, with a mason's plasterer named Joe Flemming.

When drunk, Kelly would be heard singing Irish songs; in this state, she would often become quarrelsome and even abusive to those around her, which earned her the nickname "*Dark Mary*." Barnett first met Kelly on 8 April 1887. They agreed to live together on their second meeting the following day. In 1888 they both moved into 13 Miller's Court. Barnett worked as a fish porter at Billingsgate Fish Market, but when he fell out of regular employment and tried to earn money as a market porter, Kelly turned to prostitution again. A quarrel ensued over Kelly's sharing of the room with another prostitute, and Barnett left on 30 October, more than a week before her death, while continuing to visit Kelly.

Witnesses gave various descriptions of Kelly's activities in Dorset Street during the late hours of 8 November and the early hours of 9 November:

- Barnett visited Kelly for the last time on 8 November between 19:30 and 19:45. He found her in the company of another woman. The latter might have been either Lizzie Albrook or Maria Harvey, both friends of hers. Barnett left at about 20:00 to return to his current residence and play whist. He continued playing until falling asleep at about 0:30.
- Fellow widow and prostitute Mary Ann Cox reported seeing Kelly returning home in the company of a man at about 23:45. Cox wished Kelly goodnight. Kelly replied back and then started singing the song "A Violet I Plucked from Mother's Grave When a Boy." She was still singing when Cox went searching for customers at midnight.
- Her upstairs neighbour Catherine Picket was disturbed when Kelly resumed singing at about 0:30. She wanted to complain, but her husband convinced her to leave her alone.
- Rain began to fall at about 1:00. At this time Mary Ann Cox returned to her Dorset Street

lodgings to retrieve an umbrella; Mary could still be heard singing.

- A George Hutchinson reported that Kelly met him at about 2:00 and asked him for a loan. He claimed to be broke and later stated that saw Kelly searching for a customer in a "Jewish-looking man". Hutchinson later gave the police an extremely detailed description of the man right down to the colour of his eyelashes. Kelly and the man headed for her room. Hutchinson claimed to have followed them (yet gave no reason for doing so) and reportedly overheard them talking outside her door. Kelly complained of losing her handkerchief. Hutchinson claimed the man gave her a red one of his own.
- Cox returned home again at about 3:00. She reported hearing no sound and seeing no light from Kelly's room. Cox apparently suffered from insomnia that night. She claimed to have heard people moving in and out of the court throughout the night. She thought she heard someone leaving the residence at about 5:45.
- Elizabeth Prater and Sarah Lewis, two neighbours (one who resided directly above Kelly, another adjoining her) reported hearing a faint cry of "*Murder!*" at about approximately 4:00. They did not react because they reported that it was common to hear such cries in the East End.

## Murder

On the morning of 9 November 1888, the day of the annual Lord Mayor's Day celebrations, Kelly's landlord John McCarthy sent his assistant, Thomas Bowyer, to collect the rent. Kelly was several weeks behind on her payments. Bowyer knocked on her door but received no response. He reached through a crack in a window and pushed aside a coat being used as a curtain and peered inside. What he discovered was a horribly mutilated corpse.

Kelly's body was discovered shortly after 10:45 am. Her body was found lying on the bed in the single room where she lived at 13 Miller's Court, off Dorset Street in Spitalfields, London. Neighbours' reports of hearing a solitary scream in the night suggested she may have been killed somewhere around 4:00 am. Reports have it that a woman was heard to shout simply: 'Murder!'

The Manchester Guardian of 10 November 1888 reported that Sgt Edward Badham accompanied Inspector Walter Beck to the site of 13 Miller's Court after they were both notified of the murder of Mary Kelly by a frantic Thomas Bowyer. It is generally accepted that Beck was the first police official to arrive at the Kelly crime scene and Badham is believed to have accompanied him, but there are no official records to confirm Badham being with him.

A woman named Caroline Maxwell claimed to have seen Kelly alive at about 08:30 on the morning after the murder, though she admitted to only meeting her once or twice before; moreover, her description did not match that of those who knew Kelly more closely. Maurice Lewis, a tailor, reported seeing Kelly at about 10:00 that same morning in a pub. Both statements were dismissed by the police since they did not fit the accepted time of death; moreover, they could find no one else to confirm the reports. This contradiction was used as a plot device in the graphic novel *From Hell* (and subsequent movie adaptation) in which someone else is mistaken for Kelly and murdered in her place.

Edward Badham was also on duty at Commercial Street police station on the evening of 12 November 1888. The inquest into the death of Mary Kelly had been completed earlier that day, when around 6 pm, a man named George Hutchinson arrived at the station claiming he had seen Kelly with a man of 'respectable appearance' on the night of her death. Badham took Hutchinson's initial statement that evening.

Dr. Thomas Bond and Dr. George Bagster Phillips examined the body. Her death certificate was registered on 17 November, naming her "Marie Jeanette Kelly otherwise Davies".

## Post-mortem



The police photograph of the murder scene.



The police photograph of the murder scene.



The death certificate for Mary "Jeanette" Kelly

Dr. Thomas Bond, a police surgeon from A Division, was called in on the Mary Kelly murder. His notes read as follows:

*"The body was lying naked in the middle of the bed, the shoulders flat but the axis of the body inclined to the left side of the bed. The head was turned on the left cheek. The left arm was close to the body with the forearm flexed at a right angle and lying across the abdomen. The right arm was slightly abducted from the body and rested on the mattress. The elbow was bent, the forearm supine with the fingers clenched. The legs were wide apart, the left thigh at right angles to the trunk and the right forming an obtuse angle with the pubes. The whole of the surface of the abdomen and thighs was removed and the abdominal cavity emptied of its viscera. The breasts were cut off, the arms mutilated by several jagged wounds and the face hacked beyond recognition of the features. The tissues of the neck were severed all round down to the bone. The viscera were found in various parts viz: the uterus and kidneys with one breast under the head, the other breast by the right foot, the liver between the feet, the intestines by the right side and the spleen by the left side of the body. The flaps removed from the abdomen and thighs were on a table. The bed clothing at the right corner was saturated with blood, and on the floor beneath was a pool of blood covering about two feet square. The wall by the right side of the bed and in a line with the neck was marked by blood which had struck it in a number of separate splashes. The face was gashed in all directions, the nose, cheeks, eyebrows, and ears being partly removed. The lips were blanched and cut by several incisions running obliquely down to the chin. There were also numerous cuts extending irregularly across all the features. The neck was cut through the skin and other tissues right down to the vertebrae, the fifth and sixth being deeply notched. The skin cuts in the front of the neck showed distinct ecchymosis. The air passage was cut at the lower part of the larynx through the cricoid cartilage. Both breasts were more or less removed by circular incisions, the muscle down to the ribs being attached to the breasts. The intercostals between the fourth, fifth, and sixth ribs were cut through and the contents of the thorax visible through the openings. The skin and tissues of the abdomen from the costal arch to the pubes were removed in three large flaps. The right thigh was denuded in front to the bone, the flap of skin, including the external organs of generation, and part of the right buttock. The left thigh was stripped of skin fascia, and muscles as far as the knee. The left calf showed a long gash through skin and tissues to the deep muscles and reaching from the knee to five inches above the ankle. Both arms and forearms had extensive jagged wounds. The right thumb showed a small superficial incision about one inch long, with extravasation of*

*blood in the skin, and there were several abrasions on the back of the hand moreover showing the same condition.*

*On opening the thorax it was found that the right lung was minimally adherent by old firm adhesions. The lower part of the lung was broken and torn away. The left lung was intact. It was adherent at the apex and there were a few adhesions over the side. In the substances of the lung there were several nodules of consolidation.*

*The pericardium was open below and the heart absent. In the abdominal cavity there was some partly digested food of fish and potatoes, and similar food was found in the remains of the stomach attached to the intestines."*

Dr Bond also stated that the knife used was about an inch wide and at least six inches long, but did not believe that the murderer had any medical training or knowledge. In his report he concluded

*In each case the mutilation was inflicted by a person who had no scientific nor anatomical knowledge. In my opinion he does not even possess the technical knowledge of a butcher of horse slaughterer or a person accustomed to cut up dead animals.*

## Funeral

Kelly was buried in a public grave at St Patrick's Roman Catholic Cemetery on Langthorne Road, Leytonstone E11, on 19 November 1888. Her grave was no. 66 in row 66, plot 10.

Her obituary ran as follows:

*The funeral of the murdered woman Kelly has once more been postponed. Deceased was a Catholic, and the man Barnett, with whom she lived, and her landlord, Mr. M. Carthy, desired to see her remains interred with the ritual of her Church. The funeral will, therefore, take place tomorrow [19 Nov] in the Roman Catholic Cemetery at Leytonstone. The hearse will leave the Shoreditch mortuary at half-past twelve.*

*The remains of Mary Janet Kelly, who was murdered on Nov. 9 in Miller's-court, Dorset-street, Spitalfields, were brought yesterday morning from Shoreditch mortuary to the cemetery at Leytonstone, where they were interred.*

*No family member could be found to attend the funeral." (The Daily Telegraph, 19 November 1888, page 3; 20 November 1888, page 3)*

Kelly's grave was reclaimed in the 1950s. John Morrison erected a large, white headstone in 1986, but marked the wrong grave. Morrison's headstone was later removed, and the superintendent re-marked Kelly's grave with a simple memorial in the 1990s.

A small minority of modern authors consider it possible that Kelly was not a victim of the same killer as the other Whitechapel murders. At an assumed age of around 25, she was younger than the other canonical victims, all of whom were in their 40s. The mutilations inflicted on her were far more extensive than those on other victims, but she was also the only one killed in the privacy of a room instead of outdoors. Her murder was separated by five weeks from the previous killings.

Bruce Paley, in *Jack the Ripper: The Simple Truth* (ISBN 0-7472-5218-1) proposed that her lover Joseph Barnett may have been the Ripper.

## Fictional portrayals

Mary Jane Kelly was portrayed by Lysette Anthony in the 1988 TV movie *Jack the Ripper*, and by Heather Graham in the 2002 feature film *From Hell*. She was also portrayed by Edina Ronay in the

1965 film *A Study in Terror*, and by Susan Clark in the 1979 film *Murder by Decree*.

## Further reading

- *The Complete History of Jack the Ripper* by Philip Sugden, ISBN 0-7867-0276-1.

## References

- <sup>1 a b c d</sup> Paul Begg (2006) *Jack the Ripper: The Facts*: 267

## External links

- Casebook: Jack the Ripper
- The Times, 10 November 1888 - Times Archive, TimesOnline

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The former Dorset Street in 2006, with the murder site at left. Viewed from the west, looking towards Christ Church churchyard.

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