

Historical accuracy of the film from hell essay sample

[Society](#)



“ From Hell” is a look at the cross-section of a thoroughly rotten society, corrupted from the top down. The Ripper murders cut through layers of social class designed to insulate the sinners from the results of their sins.”

THE HISTORICAL MERITS OF THE FILM FROM HELL

During 10 weeks in autumn 1888, Jack the Ripper murdered five prostitutes in the Whitechapel area of London – all within one mile of each other. The murders were linked because of the horrific way in which the bodies were mutilated. It has been said that Jack the Ripper is the most famous serial killer ever, even though he has killed as few as five people. The question of who the killer was mystifies us today as much as it did the London Police in 1888.

The latest film to tackle the story of Jack the Ripper is From Hell, directed by Albert Hughes and Allen Hughes. The movie’s name is taken from the actual return address used by the Ripper in one of his letters taunting the police (see Supplement, last page).

From Hell focuses on Inspector Frederick Abberline’s (played by Johnny Depp) obsession with solving the Ripper murders. The movie delves into the shadowy connections of both the royal family and freemasonry, speculating on the murderer’s identity. It also vividly portrays the poverty of 1880s’ London and the social rift, long established between the classes.

The historical merits of the film From Hell will be examined by looking at the general known facts about the case; the accuracy of the film, whether the

film is fair, biased, one-sided, or propagandistic; and lastly, the social climate of the late 19th century in Victorian England.

WHAT THE MOVIE STATES HAPPENED

The movie chooses the popular Royal Conspiracy theory connecting the Ripper's victims to a royal scandal. The scandal centers on Prince "Eddy" Albert Victor, the grandson of Queen Victoria and the heir-apparent to the throne of England. The prince had an affair with Annie Crook, a prostitute. When Annie became pregnant with his baby, they secretly married in a Catholic church. This secret wedding was witnessed by five of her prostitute friends (Polly Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elisabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes, and Mary Kelly). The prince and Annie's child would be a Catholic heir to the throne of Protestant England. This could potentially destroy the royal family. The witnesses to this union had to be silenced in order to cover up the royal family scandal.

The royal family had their physician, Dr. William Gull clean up the prince's mess. Annie is kidnapped and placed into a mental hospital, where she is given a lobotomy. The five prostitutes are gruesomely killed, each one more vicious than the last, according to Masonic ritual.

The Queen was shocked at the brutal nature of the murders so the freemasons had to clean up the Dr. Gull's mess. He was found guilty of murder and given a lobotomy. He was sent to an insane asylum, ironically, just like Annie.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

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The Royal Conspiracy was widely discounted as a possibility. It was, however, the most glamorous version of events. Although it appears as though an "Annie Crook" did in fact exist, there is no evidence that she ever knew any of the Ripper victims, nor that she had an affair with Prince Albert Victor and had his child. There is also no evidence of any lobotomy. All of this first appeared in Stephen Knight's *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*, and no other researcher has ever been able to corroborate his findings.

It should be said that to this day no one, for any certainty, knows who Jack the Ripper is. There are, however, several theories speculating on his occupation and identity.

A well-respected theory as to the Ripper's identity was that he was a doctor. The surgical skills and instruments needed to have performed the grisly dissections to the victims' bodies would suggest this. The murders required considerable anatomical knowledge. No one without experience in anatomical or pathological examinations could have performed such skillful mutilations in so rapid a fashion. This would seem to indicate that the Ripper was a surgeon.

The three most likely suspects considered by the London police at the time, and historians today are: Aaron Kosminski, George Chapman, and Francis Tumblety.

Aaron Kosminski is mentioned as a suspect by three of the Ripper investigators. He was sent to an asylum in 1891 and died there in 1919.

Kosminski lived in the area, was a barber, and does somewhat match the description given by some witnesses.

George Chapman is the suspect preferred by Inspector Abberline. Born Severin Koslowski, Chapman was trained as a surgeon in Poland. He worked as a barber in the East End at the time of the Ripper killings. The Ripper murders stopped when Chapman moved to New York, where another Ripper-type killing occurred. Chapman later returned to London, where he used poison to kill three of his wives from 1897 to 1902. He was then caught, tried and hanged.

Francis Tumblety was arrested for gross indecency and sexual assault during the Whitechapel murders, and was charged with suspicion for the killings on November 12, 1888. He made bail on the 16th and fled across the Atlantic. He was kept under close watch by the alerted New York police, but gave them the slip. He returned to a life of obscurity and died in 1903.

Although, these are the main suspects, there are holes in each theory and there is no concrete proof to prove that any of the suspects was the Ripper. Having said all this, it is still widely regarded that the killer belonged to London's upper class. Inspector Abberline is quoted as saying: " I've given my word to keep my mouth permanently closed about it... I know and my superiors know certain facts... you'd have to look for [the Ripper] not at the bottom of London society at the time but a long way up."

ACCURACY OF THE FILM

In some ways *From Hell* was very true to life, particularly in its recreation of Whitechapel in the late 19th century. The movie was shot on location with the medieval streets of Prague doubling for London. The sets and the costumes looked realistic. The film also portrays the murders and their effects on London accurately.

In others ways, however, the movie takes several liberties that, although may create a more entertaining story, do not necessarily depict the events in a fair, unbiased way.

The biggest liberty was basing the movie on the Royal Conspiracy theory. The film was propagandistic in that it portrays the murders to be connected to the royal family and freemasonry, which as stated earlier was not true. The film also claims that the location of the five victims bodies formed a pentagonal star, which was significant in freemasonry. This was purely fictional. The actual location of the bodies did not indicate any type of pattern.

Other liberties have the film creating a fictitious romance between Inspector Abberline and Mary Kelly, the last prostitute to be killed. In real life, Mary and Inspector Abberline had never met before her murder. The filmmakers probably added the romance to help the movie appeal to a broader audience.

Also, Abberline was not an opium addict. In the film, he uses drugs to induce psychic visions to help him see the victims. This was probably added to the film to show him as an unconventional or eccentric police officer.

To create a slightly happier ending, the movie has Mary Kelly escaping to Ireland. The Ripper unknowingly killed her roommate instead. Her body was so badly disfigured that the police weren't able to notice that the body was Mary Kelly's.

Although there is a very small belief that Mary did survive by switching her clothes with her roommate and escaping. It is more widely believed that she was killed. Her body was identified to be her by her boyfriend. He identified her by her hair and her eyes .

The ending isn't completely uplifting as Abberline and Kelly don't end up ' happily ever after'. In the movie, Kelly escapes to Ireland. Abberline doesn't try and visit her because he believes those involved in the conspiracy would follow him and have her killed the minute they found out she was still alive. He cannot be with her and as a result, the movie ends with him committing suicide by overdosing on opium. In real life, Abberline died an old man at the age of 86 in 1929.

SOCIAL CLIMATE DEPICTED IN THE FILM

From Hell does a great job depicting the social atmosphere surrounding London during the Ripper murders.

The class structure is subtly mentioned, symbolized through grapes. Inspector Abberline notices that one of the victim's bodies had grapes strewn besides her. The significance of this is that grapes are considered to be a luxurious fruit. The lower class citizens of East-end London would not be able to afford it. He determined that the murderer was from a higher-class

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structure than the victims. The Ripper lured the prostitutes by offering them grapes, then killed them.

In the film, no one cared about London's lower class, represented by the five prostitutes. Inspector Abberline's boss said that he didn't care about the murders because all that happened was a bunch of prostitutes were killed, which wasn't necessarily a bad thing. The lower-class are ignored, even when they are being savagely butchered. This shows a tremendously myopic view of life exhibited by London's elite.

Abberline's boss also said that to catch the killer he should focus on minorities, "the scums of England." He was incredulous when Abberline suggested there was a good possibility that the killer was an Englishman. The boss replied that no Englishman in his right mind could have done this. The suspicion of insane Englishmen followed from the common belief that no sane Englishman would commit such brutal crimes. If the murders could not be tied to a foreigner, then the guilty Englishman must be insane.

ACTUAL SOCIAL CLIMATE IN LONDON, 1888

In 1888, London had over 5 million residents. East London had 900,000 inhabitants, while Whitechapel, with a population of 76,000, had 39.2 percent of its citizens on or below the poverty line. Prostitution flourished in the East End as Whitechapel contained over 60 brothels and 1,200 known prostitutes.

The social class structure of London was divided by two areas: West and East London. West London was an affluent, rich area where the upper class resided. East London, on the other hand, was associated with the poor lower class. It had high unemployment and low wages, which brought poverty and homelessness. People lived their lives against a background of poverty, immorality, drunkenness, crime and violence. Robbery and assault were commonplace and the streets were ruled by gangs.

By looking at the sorts of people who were suspected of being Jack the Ripper, one can get a sense of the racial prejudices and class tensions that existed in London in the late 19th century. Reactions to the Ripper murders reflected ingrained prejudices against foreigners, Jews, and between the classes. While many in the West End viewed the crimes as a logical result of the awful living conditions in East London, the reaction of the East End was marked by anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and hostility towards the police, intensifying social divisions between the classes.

From Hell realistically takes the viewer back in time to London during 10 weeks of horror in autumn 1888. The fact that those ten weeks in autumn are still being discussed 115 years later shows that the air of mystery surrounding Jack the Ripper still continues to fascinate us.