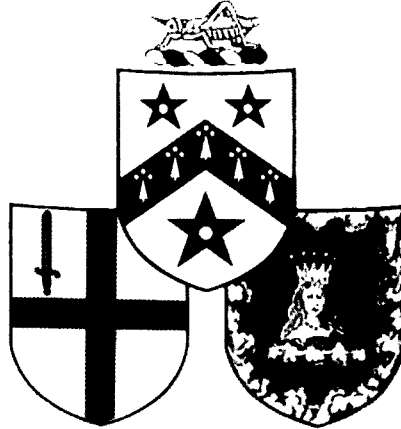


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**RUMOUR, DISEASE AND THE
MADNESS OF CROWDS**

Three lectures given by

PROFESSOR JOHN M.PICK
Gresham Professor of Rhetoric

FIRST SERIES

1665, The Great Pestilence of London
1848, The Chartists' Revolution in London
1888, Jack the Ripper

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GRESHAM COLLEGE

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1665, The Great Pestilence of London

The topic that I have chosen for the series this year is a topic which is in a sense the antithesis of rhetoric in that it is an examination of how rumour works and how particularly rumour works in times of great crisis in the capital. Today I am going to talk about what happened, and particularly what rumours occurred and how rumour operated, at the time of the Great Plague in the year 1665.

The first thing to say about rumour is that it is not by any means a simple entity, how governments react to rumour is itself also very interesting, how they try to counteract it and counteract its effects is interesting, and how they anticipate it and fear it even before it has occurred is also a fascination. Because the first interesting thing to say about the Great Plague, when rumours began to reach these shores in September 1664 that the Plague had once again broken out on the main land of Europe and particularly in Holland, the government of the city of London and other elements of government tried very hard to avoid the rumour machine taking off. They issued for a long time no kind of public edict as to how people should conduct themselves even if they were visiting Holland, they placed no ostensible restrictions upon the traders who were going over regularly to deal with cities where the plague was rumoured to be raging and in the early stages of the plague, when it was obvious that it had reached London and was already beginning to cause deaths dramatically and hideously in 1665, they tried to fudge the figures as governments will and didn't tell people the causes of the multiplying deaths. Early on, around the beginning of that fatal year in 1665, when they posted notices of the deaths which were recorded in the official bills of mortuary, it is interesting to see that they didn't choose to use any term which might let people think that the plague had already arrived in London. So for a time rumour was silent, certainly in the autumn of 1664 there was no panic in London and the rumours were discussed quite gently. There had been, of course, frequent outbreaks of the plague before, and it was of great interest to people to observe how the plague was dealt with in other cities, but there was no civic action here. Very little about it seems to have agitated people and they didn't think, even after it was begun to be suspected that it might be in London, that there was anything to worry about.

But one of the difficulties of trying to suppress the power of rumour and trying to assuage public opinion is that when public opinion suddenly decides that there is a problem the panic will be very great and very sudden and rumour will be more violent and its effects more cathartic - and that is indeed what happened. In the Spring, as the actual, later recorded, deaths from the plague were growing, it became obvious that certain parts of the town, particularly to the West and on the high ground of Hampstead, Highgate, St Giles etc, there were already deaths from the plague and that a number of households were affected and that it was, moreover, a form of the plague which seemed to be extremely contagious (in that in the very earliest stages of the disease several members of the same household would go down from it including their servants and the people who lived elsewhere in the same building). As soon as this became known, panic set in, and because the government of the city had tried to keep everything under

wraps of course that panic was great and it was ill-informed. Now that is another interesting connection that we will pick up in our series, the connection between rumour and actual information. The relationship is not obvious and rumours exist sometimes on perfect truth, people may tell each other secretly the truth. Sometimes rumours exist on lies and suppositions, and this was what was dangerous about the great plague of 1665, they exist on supposition because, of course, they didn't know what form the plague took, they didn't know the means of infection, they didn't know how it could be brought to London nor why it was here.

We are dealing with a society which though it had men of great learning and great scientific vision (own Thomas Gresham after all was not long dead) the majority of people still basically believed in witchcraft and were inclined to look for all kinds of supernatural and even extra-terrestrial causes for any new phenomenon. At the beginning of the plague year, when they first began to worry about what was happening, rumours began to abound as to where it came from. The first fascinating account of the plague was actually written by a Mr William Boghurst who was himself somewhat trained as a physician but who was basically a writer and observer. He claimed that basically the plague was carried in the air and that he noted, as a good scientist should, that the characteristics of the areas that had the plague where that they were all on high ground. He therefore assumed that it came down like some kind of rain from heaven and he noted that people very sensibly, as a protection against the plague, had used a form of early umbrella that you put above your head as you went out into the street. But Boghurst also noticed that there were probably supernatural portents and basically the plague, and this was another difficulty of the rumour-mongers of the time, had a moral foundation. People were as interested in trying to find out what the motives were of God for visiting this plague upon the city as they were in trying to find out its actual physical or medical causes. A lot of people assumed it had causes that were supernatural; a lot of people assumed it had causes in the will of God, that the city was being punished for its recent debauchery. Remember it is only five years since the King had been restored to the throne at the end of the civil war, and the restoration of the monarchy had included the restoration of a number of practices that were thought of, by a lot of people, as being decadent and somewhat continental. Gaming houses, theatres and the like, and these visitations of plagues, and particularly this major plague, was seen by many people who were not necessarily of the puritan persuasion as being straightforward punishment for falling into such decadent ways.

Another characteristic we might notice of the way the rumour machine works in times of great tragedy, when we have massive illnesses, infections, diseases, plagues or whatever, is that we are apt to claim, even in the 20th century, that there is a moral or supernatural cause. This is what Mr Boghurst says, he assumes that God's anger with the decadent London must have been visible in all the signs and portents in the city and he says:

“The year in which the plague hath raged so much no great alteration or change appeared in any element or vegetable or animal, besides the body of man, except only the season of the year and the winds, the spring being continual dry for six or seven

months together, there being no rain at all but a little sprinkling shower or two about the later end of April which caused such a pitiful crop of hay in the spring. In the autumn there was, however, a pretty good crop but all other things kept their common integrity and all sorts of fruits as apples, pears, cherries, plums, grapes, melons, cucumbers, cabbage, mulberries, raspberries, strawberries; all roots of parsnips, carrots, turnips, all flowers and all medieval simples and so were as plentiful, large, fair and wholesome as ever, and all grain as plentiful and good as ever. All kine, cattle, horses, sheep, swine, dogs, were as healthful, strong in labour, and as wholesome to eat as ever, as in any other year”

Little did he know. “Though many peddling writers have undertaken to find fault with all these things” he says, he notices that, in the previous Autumn, there had been a curious visitation of flies and insects upon the city, so that any hanging string, be it ever so short, was soon covered and blackened by these portents. The insects were telling us the year before that there was going to be a plague - though in fact there was probably another reason for the insects.

So people looked and the rumours then began, and allied to the feeling that there might be a moral reason for the plague coming was the feeling that a number of people had (as rumours began, in the spring of that year, to grow in London) that the plague was going to sweep right through the city. Rumours naturally began that it was a visitation from God. There was one famous character who ran about in the nude, shouting it's a judgement, must have been a delight to meet. And there were other people who believed that because of the righteous life they had led they would be saved as in other recorded miracles. That too, of course, proved to be untrue and caused the other great observer of the plague, Daniel Defoe, a great deal of reflection.

Daniel Defoe's book, the *Journal of the Plague Year*, is a fascinating book. It is rambling, it contradicts itself on certain points, it is sometimes very odd in its observation. For example, at one stage in the book, he speculates, though it was not known at the time, that the meat that was slaughtered and kept on open display in the city and was then sold freely in the butchers' shops might have been the cause of quite a lot of the infection being carried. He speculates on that. Yet elsewhere, as so often in the book, he is anxious not to give way to ordinary rumour. He says that some people have given out the rumour that it is the meat which is passing on the infection, even though yesterday at Smithfield three people dropped down dead while buying meat. This mustn't give us cause to think that it actually is the meat which is causing the infection as the dead had plainly been infected elsewhere. It is a book that I think is an astonishing piece of scientific journalism, because although he records the rumour and the madness of the crowds, the extraordinary behaviour of people once the panic set in, and he records quite dispassionately the extraordinary quack doctors who came to town, the weird remedies that were offered, he is constantly checking rumour and rumour of rumour against likelihood. He has a good scientific mind in that he constantly says, “It was said everywhere this was so, but I do not necessarily believe it, I don't think that is true”. So we must be grateful to Defoe, for so much, but certainly for the recording, dispassionately better than anyone else, of the actual events in London in that year.

Once the rumours were unleashed, they grew dramatically and large numbers of people decided to leave town and go. But go where? Even if you were a rich man in the City, in 1665, it is not very likely that you had a very easy port of call elsewhere. Some people were lucky. Defoe himself had relatives living thirty, forty miles away in the country and thought that he might leave and go there with his servant, but his servant squashed that by leaving first. But few people did leave, because the majority of the citizens of London had come back recently into the city, the population had swelled from being under 200,000 to being nearly twice that much, because with the Restoration, the restoral of the Court and the old practice of London exercising all its powers as the capital, the population had swollen, and almost everybody had come back into London. Prices had been low and property pretty easy to get and most people had brought all their families into what was by far the wealthiest part of the kingdom and so the practice, which had begun to grow before the civil war and which was to grow again in the 18th century, of having a country house, or of having families which spread out and bought various other houses, was not a luxury enjoyed in 1665. It was quite impossible for a number of people to think of anywhere to go. Nevertheless some people simply took to the roads, and it is fascinating that quite early on in the development of the plague, the rumour that the plague was in London, though quiet within the capital itself, was already heard in the surrounding towns, which were were barricaded against anybody coming through them from London, well before people in London had realised the extent of their plight.

In effect the people in the surrounding towns and villages and along the turnpike roads, had already determined to isolate London and to keep the plague within London, to which it had been brought, so when people started to travel they found that effectively they were barred. The turnpike roads had stops on them, towns would not permit people to come through from London, even though they carried with them, for a long time, certificates testifying that they were in good health. What the Mayor suggested here in the capital was that if you wished to leave town, in those early weeks of the year, you called in at his office and got a certificate, certifying the fact that you and your family were in good health. But no one knew about the incubation period of the disease, they didn't know who had got it, and they imagined that the signs, the dreadful blotches and swellings that appeared when the disease was evident, followed hard on the infection, but of course there was a much longer infection period of several weeks as we shall see a little later. But the Mayor's office actually solemnly gave out certificates of health to the people who had not got the later signs of the disease and they carried these proudly with them as they went off, with their carts and their belongings and their servants, and disappeared with such money as they could gather (because a good deal of the ordinary banking trading of the city had stopped) out into the country. It must have been a terrifying decision to make. You'll have to realise that probably more than in any other age, London to them was virtually the entirety of England and beyond the walls of the City of London was barbarism itself. There were no theatres, no gaming houses and none of the life of the Court once you got as far north as barbarous St Albans, for example.

So a number of people left, others had decided to protect themselves from the plague by not going out of their houses (ironic in view of what later occurred, when it became compulsory not to go out). But in the first month of the year a number of households, as Defoe wryly observes, decided that they would avoid catching the plague by sending their servants to get the meat and bring it in, or sending the younger members of their families, in some rather horrible cases, out into the streets to buy the vegetables and to walk along the untreated sewage in the gutters and the like and then to come back into the house and achieve perfect security for the actual householder by preparing the food and serving it to them. Well of course families naturally became infected. The plague spread, from the high ground in the West it spread gradually through the city itself. The weekly bills of death began to mount, and it was as Defoe observed "a particularly dry summer", the conditions, in other words, for the passing on of the disease became greater and greater and the city now started to react. The first reaction of the government, as too often in times of great strain, was to cut out the arts and entertainment and this is what happened, and it happens still. "The public showed that they would bear their share in the new hard tidings" says Defoe. "The very Court which was then gay and luxurious, put on a face of just concern for the public danger, all the plays and interludes, which after the manor of the French Court had been set up and began to increase among us, were forbidden to be acted, the gaming tables, the public dancing rooms and music houses which had multiplied and began to debauch the manners of the people, were shut up and suppressed, and the Jack Puddings, merry Andrews, puppet shows, rope dancers and such like doings, which had bewitched the poor common people, shut up their shops, finding indeed no trade for the minds of the people were agitated with other things and a kind of sadness and horror at these things sat upon the countenances even of the common people, death was before their eyes and everybody began to think of their graves, not of merrith and diversions".

So London began to shut up and the city, in the form of the Lord Mayor and the Aldermen, decided that they must take what we would perhaps now call martial control and in effect issued a number of edicts in May and June, which gradually pulled the city under their control and which gave stern though unspecified penalties for anybody who tried to evade that control. First of all there were new controls put for the first time (some weeks even months after the plague had begun to rage) upon the bringing in and taking out of goods from the city. The trade in the river was halted and merchant ships coming in from overseas were required to unload some distance from the land as if they were a danger to us. More seriously within the city itself, the system was set up in the markets of the bread stones, or large bowls, which were, in some cases, made out of beaten copper or tin, in some cases roughly hewn from stone, into which vinegar was put. You put your money in there and received the goods from the shop keeper so that the money didn't pass on the infection, the vinegar was a cure. The houses themselves, and this is the most terrifying thought, in which the plague was found to be were shut up, nailed across the door and the inhabitants were not permitted to go forth, that is the inhabitants of the house entire, the whole family. More over, the City appointed night and day watchmen; all able-bodied and responsible people were forced by a kind of military service to become watchmen. A dreadful cross was nailed across the door of those houses which were found to contain the plague and the watchmen kept a 24 hour

watch on the house, to make sure that the infected people or the people who were looking after the infected inside did not escape into the street. They tried to shut the plague up in various dwellings.

Such things were only partially successful, if at all, and caused great horror. The edict caused a further great exit of people from the city, some of whom actually had the plague or had people with them who had the plague, and who smuggled out relatives and dear ones who were ill, and hence the plague did indeed spread to a number of surrounding towns and hamlets. But within the City itself, the watchmen were not a properly constituted or recruited police force and there were many attacks upon the watchmen. Defoe goes so far as to say that there were five thousand probably who were attacked, often by people who were deranged by the disease, or sometimes by people who more cold bloodedly simply wished to get out of their houses, which were virtually living graves because it was very hard not to catch the disease from anybody who had it within a shut up house. So watchmen were appointed and a dreadful system of bringing out the dead by night and burying them in mass graves was instituted. A number of those graves, mass pits which were dug by the remaining healthy people, the watchmen and the buryers of the various parishes and wards, have, because they were sacred ground, become the elegant squares of London. In the 18th century houses were built around them because they were still consecrated ground and it would not be proper to build houses on them. So many of the pleasant squares that you enjoy with their 18th or early 19th century facades all round are in fact the locations of mass burials, including our own Northampton Square, near the University.

So the carts trundled the streets by night, calling for the dead who were brought out and tipped into the recently dug mass graves and then covered over. Defoe records, in a rather chilling passage, going to watch one of these night ceremonies. Observing it coolly and dispassionately as he does, it is a horrifying prophecy of later horrors with which we are familiar in our own century. So rumour now began 'to abound', in Defoe's words, "unreason being a willingness to believe almost anything about the plague and its causes and a willingness to believe almost anything about cures". As Defoe says, on almost every street corner notices appeared of doctors, amazing people with 'cures' which had apparently been successful in overseas plagues, cures which ranged from various things that you sniffed and horrifying methods of blood letting to a good deal of straightforward magic. One peddled potion for example 'which is a sure fire security against the plague' was that you simply wrote the word abracadabra, in its magic formulation, on the step outside your door and then you became perfectly safe and poor people bought that! Almost everybody of course when they did venture forth, carried with them various forms of medicine and particularly various forms of smelling salts, liquids which could counteract the plague. There was a very strong belief that the smell of the plague was the plague itself and that to inhale the smells associated with the plague was to inhale the actual disease itself. One doctor pointed out that he could get rid of the plague entirely if victims of the plague would come and breath through a tube onto a bowl of water and then the scum which was the plague in his breath would settle on the top of the water and would be skimmed off and he would be cured.

The actual medical knowledge was very slight and there had been mercifully not too many occasions when living doctors had had to try and find out about it. There were curious habits such as Defoe's habit of taking with him a handkerchief stuffed with vinegar and every time he came near the smell of the plague he put it in his mouth and put another one over his nose! There were some people who carried specially made bowls, containing water and appropriate salts, with cloths over them and as soon as they came near the plague they held the bowl and threw the cloth over their heads so they inhaled purer air and purer and sweeter smelling things.

Rumours of a more ancient kind began to circulate. Portents were almost nightly seen over the city. Defoe records coming across crowds of people who had, in defiance of the curfew regulations, come out of their homes and had stood in the streets looking up and had there seen signs. Sometimes a finger pointing from the sky at London, sometimes a kind of flying dragon, flying dragons were always being seen over England, and sometimes mysterious birds, which came in flocks with their eerie cries, centering over a house which was about to be infected by the plague. But Defoe records with wonderful accuracy going to join some of these crowds and saying that "I couldn't see anything". He also records a very interesting phenomenon: if you go against the popular rumour, when everybody is telling you what is the cause of this, and that you say 'no it is not' they will become very angry with you. You are destroying not just their present belief but their foundation for hope, you are moreover setting yourself up as a superior to the deity in daring to question whether a large finger was indeed pointing towards London... Defoe seemed thus to be defying God and was called a blasphemer by the crowds who all had convinced themselves that they could indeed see it. Statues moved in London, again a phenomenon which is not uncommon. In addition various figures were seen. There was one figure just off Fleet Street that was nightly seen, people gathered and looked up this passage way and a figure in the form of a preacher, rather solemnly garbed, (one might think a puritan figure) came down the passage way and apparently stopped, harangued the crowds silently in ghostly form and then of the chime of ten o' clock disappeared. It couldn't have been to get a last drink because the pubs then were closed at nine o' clock in the evening and later in the summer were largely closed altogether. Incidentally those many people who tell you that our licensing hours began to be horrifying only in the first World War are wrong, they were already difficult then.

Those plans that the city had made to deal with the plague, and the rumours which had accompanied them, were plainly not however sufficient. Defoe was critical of the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs. They had made until mid-summer, he said, none of these regulations sensible. Above all else they had had no measures for the relief of the poor, the citizens had no public magazines or store houses for corn or meal for the sustenance of the poor, which if they had provided themselves with, as in such cases as done abroad, many miserable families, which were then reduced to the utmost distress, would have been relieved and in that a better manner than is now done. Of the stock of the city's money he observed tartly, "I will say but this, it did not much diminish"

Now the rumours were almost, you might say, overtaken by events, as one got to mid summer, because by then, as figures show, the disease was swelling and showing its results in the most horrifying way. The burials and those which were accredited to the plague are recorded for July and then for August and then for September where it reached its peak - all warm and unusually rain free months. Of course by this time the population of the city was much reduced, probably to less than a quarter of the figure at which it had started at the beginning of the year. The streets were empty and ghostly, the boarded up houses, where there had been the plague, alongside houses and commercial houses which had been completely shut up as trade had moved elsewhere or had shut down for the duration. In the middle of all this, the great problem remained, getting food. Just as the people from outside London became worried about people from London passing through their towns so, of course, they had less and less reason to wish to take their produce into London, the meat, or the vegetables or the fruit or whatever to sell; first of all there were far fewer buyers than before, so a market ring began to be set up in towns around London where new markets grew. Even so it was a great risk to come into the capital with produce even if people were willing to at any rate douse their money in vinegar before they gave it to you. So it became quite a problem actually to get enough to eat, although as Defoe observes, the Lord Mayor and his authorities did maintain all the common ovens throughout the period, and there was a curious rumour that went around which added weight to the view that it was London that was being punished. The rumour was circulated, Defoe says, throughout England, that the people who came into London, the travellers, the sales people, the farmers and the like, who came in to do trade, were nowhere affected and he comments that the hagglers and such people who went to and from London with provisions were said to be untouched. He goes on to say he doesn't think it is true and he cites one or two examples that he has heard of people who were ill, but he is uncertain. There is a nice scientific voice here because he is worried that some of the travellers might have been made ill, one or two might even have died of the plague, but he keeps a nice scientific balance.

“If this were true it was an evident contradiction of that report which was afterwards spread all over England but which as I've said I cannot confirm of my own knowledge, namely that the market people, carrying provisions to the city, never got the infection nor carried it back into the country, both of which I've been assured was false, but I cannot know the truth of any of this matter”, he says. He is absolutely determined not to take the rumours either way, and so that view can't be ever known but it does seem there were deaths outside. For example in the same year in Windsor there were 103 deaths of the plague, in Brentford nearly 400, in Kingston 122, in Waltham Abbey 23, in Uxbridge 117, in Hertford 90, and so on. So the plague, though not quite as virulent as here in the capital, most certainly spread and almost certainly some of the travellers did indeed get it. He summarises at the end of his account why the plague might have been visited upon London. He says one of the reasons was that our country had ceased to be strict with respect to its citizens and particularly with respect to the poor. Then he says another reason might simply have been that it was in the very nature of man, once the disease had come, to want to spread it and that this was a kind of divine demonstration of the fallibility, weakness and wickedness of men. That the Lord, in other words, might have given the plague to a few people and observed whether we

sensibly contained it or whether we wished to spread it. Others have placed the blame, he says, purely on infection. That, of course, is the view to which he finally comes, that there is a scientific cause if you like and not an ethereal one. But as the autumn came on and the rains came and it became very cold, the plague began to cease. The deaths began to decline and when the frosts of winter set in a third great phase of rumour-mongering began. The first problem, if you like, was the counter rumour, the government trying to stop the rumour happening. The second, all those people leaving London as they panicked, as they saw things in the sky and so on, was the effect of rumour unchecked, rumour that had been released from its straight jacket and which had no counter-balancing communications system, there were no newspapers, we might think it odd that we look at it this way, to tell the truth. There was then the third phase, and a kind of over-optimism, because as rumours spread abroad of the growth of the plague so they spread abroad equally rapidly of the decline, and families began to think it was safe to return to London.

In the autumn and early winter families returned to London, sometimes prematurely, and often went back into houses in which the plague had been. Now they thought that getting rid of the plague was fairly simple. First of all you had to air the house, open all the doors and windows for a while and then, rather curiously, let off a blast of gunpowder to expel the air. Not unnaturally, as Defoe observed, a number of people weren't very clever at this and blew the roofs off their houses that they had left for the summer, but even more sadly, and not at all comically, a number of people coming back to infected houses in the capital caught the plague again and so there was a second minor panic in the autumn. Rather interestingly, Defoe uses a lovely word as he talks of this, he says that in that early winter as the plague flickered into life again, there were several little hurries, a lovely word for a flurry of a rumour, little hurries about the town, and the hurries included the rumour that the plague was by ordinance of the deity to be a sort of annual affair. One or two of the preachers would rampage about the streets, telling people that it was the judgement of the deities of one sort or another, returned and started doing it again, saying this time it was going to be every five years, or it was going to be if they opened the theatres again, or if they opened the gaming houses again or whatever, and other hurries that went around the town were of course that now those people who had survived the plague would never once again be sick, that was another rumour.

So, as Defoe observes not without malice, the physicians had a rather bad time of it, because, having proved that they couldn't actually cure the plague, though they'd had a brief period of success in the early summer, they had, in general, been disregarded as the summer had worn on when it became evident they couldn't do very much, and a number of them had left town. Now people began to believe, as the plague disappeared at the end of that fateful summer, that they had nothing to fear from disease at all and therefore no reason to go once more to a physician.

But at all events it passed, rumour settled down and by the spring of the following year the plague had more or less passed. The Mayoralty, as ever, changed. A new Mayor came in, Matt Turnbull, who unfortunately had rather to bear all the brunt of the

accusations and counter-accusations that fly about after tragedy. Because one rumour has had its way with tragedy then, of course, people become vindictive and accusatory about the causes. So Mayor Turnbull had to stand and be accountable for all the mistakes made by his predecessor and the City governors in not looking after the City well enough the spring before. Indeed as a final thought, that Mayor must be surely one of the least lucky in our City's history, because that summer the Great Fire of London broke out.

1848, The Chartists' Revolution in London

I should like to talk about the way events moved at a time of great political turmoil in the 19th century: a particular point in the Chartists' revolution at which it almost became a real revolution and the effect that it had in London in the year of 1848, and a species of rumour which I think nowadays scarcely exists. The political rumours which precede real or feared revolutions nowadays, we might say, are contained by the activities of the pollster, those expert techniques by which percentages of opinions are discovered and are investigated, out in the streets, by organisations such as Gallup and Mori.

That has rather stilled the political rumour in our time, and we have to remember that the time of which we are speaking, the years when the young Queen Victoria had come to the throne, there were not only few newspapers, certainly very few newspapers for the majority of unprivileged citizens, but there were no PR techniques, none of those techniques for manipulating opinion or for recording it with which we have become familiar. So it is hard to put ourselves back into a situation where rumour could be as rife as it was in the late 30s and early 40s when the Chartist movement was gathering strength and when people very seriously feared that the experience of the French revolution would be replicated here dramatically in London. We are talking of the time of the young Queen Victoria, and because we usually look back on Victoria's reign from the point of view of Victoria as an older lady, the last years of her reign when she certainly reigned serene over a more or less united kingdom, we tend to forget what were the circumstances attending when she first came to the throne. She ascended the throne in 1837, upon the death of William IV, as a young woman. She ascended a throne that was, by no means, highly regarded throughout the Kingdom. We have to remember what risks she ran. When she first came to the throne she was certainly promoted by the newspapers in the capital as being a dignified and valuable new monarch, but nevertheless had there been an opinion poll technique at the time it seems quite reasonable to assume that a lot of people would have wished her elsewhere and would have wished the monarchy dead. Republican sentiment was very strong.

She was, in addition to being unpopular, at considerable personal risk much of the time. When she went out, as had been the case with previous monarchs, she went relatively unguarded. She followed those techniques which we should nowadays call walkabouts, quite naturally and easily, but she was exposed to considerable personal danger. She was on one occasion, quite late in her reign, actually struck in the face by somebody whom she met in public, and at least three times in the early years there were quite serious attempts made upon her life. The first attempt was made three years after she ascended the throne in 1840 by a pot boy of 17, Edward Oxford, who tried to kill her with a shotgun. Two years later in May 1842, as she was driving in an open carriage, unguarded, down Constitutional Hill, John Francis fired at her with a gun. There was some dispute whether the gun was loaded, he certainly pointed it at her and certainly she feared it was and there was great consternation. In the same year, John Bean, who was in matter of fact a hunchback, also fired at her in a public place as she was walking

around amongst her subjects. He was, for a time not, apprehended and the result was that everybody in London who might have been described as a hunchback was hounded. Rumour worked against the imagined criminal. Shortly after that, for the first time, a bill came in which protected the life of the Sovereign and prescribed remedies, including being publicly whipped not more than three times, if you actually fired at the Queen. So one mustn't think, when we are talking about the Chartist revolution and about their apparent attempt to take over London, about a stable and secure London, the kind of London we might be describing at the end of the 19th century, we are talking about an edgy London that is by no means secure in the reign of the new Queen and a London in which it is not uncommon for attempts to be made upon the sovereign's life.

Indeed, one of the rumours circulating about the Chartists in the early days was that they intended to get rid of the Queen, to get rid of the monarchy and to declare a republic, a kind of socialist republic in England. At all events the Chartists then must be considered in context.

Now what was the context of the Chartist? Most people, of course, will know the history: the Queen ascended the throne at a time when the Reform Bill of 1832 was having its first effect. The Queen ascended the throne moreover at a time when most people of influence thought that democracy had probably gone far enough and that giving the vote to a limited number of male persons was quite sufficient. One of the reasons Victoria herself was viewed with some anxiety was that plainly she was a woman. Women did not have the vote; it was man against woman. At all events, a year after she ascended the throne, once again one of the more revolutionary members in the newly created House brought in the question of universal manhood suffrage. The question was raised in Parliament in 1832 by Mr Duncan, and Mr Duncan and members of Parliament who believed in it, found at the end of the debate that he was joined by only nineteen other members. Twenty people only voted for universal male suffrage. After that vote, six of those people met with representatives of the Working Mens' Association and drew up a charter, ostensibly for wider male suffrage, which had six main points - universal male suffrage, vote by ballot (which didn't come in Britain until 1872) annual parliaments, the abolition of the property qualification for Members of Parliament (remember that most people were there because they owned land or belonged to families who did) members to be paid so that not only the rich could be Members of Parliament, and equal electoral districts. You will know that there was a massive concentration of electoral divisions upon the South of England and upon the university towns and certain other areas and this didn't correspond at all to the distribution of the population at that phase of the industrial revolution. When these were drawn up, they were handed to the man who was to become a first secretary of the association with the famous phrase, 'There Lovett is your charter', hence the Chartists. Ostensibly a working mens movement designed to find universal male suffrage, but all kinds of additional, some of them highly revolutionary, attributes came to be added to what they wanted and then they divided themselves up, as such revolutionary movements will, into those who believed in using moral force, intellectual argument, the moral force Chartists and those who believed in physical force, the physical force Chartists.

They were led collectively by a fiery Irishman, called Fergus O'Connor, who eventually made it into the House. It is amazing how many revolutionary movements are led by people with these attributes, a fine orator, an upstanding man, and as one of his contemporaries said, Irish to the core. Fergus O'Connor led the Chartists and he led their campaign. Considering the lack of history of a revolutionary working campaign in Britain, it's astonishing how many modern techniques he and they developed; the mass meeting, the mass petition, they had several of those, culminating in their very biggest at the end, the poster campaign, leafleting, picketing, it was all there in the Chartist movement as they sought to impose their views and to argue their views upon mass meetings, largely in London and the big industrial towns. They used the technique of the 'sit-in' which we thought we developed in the 1950s when we were under-graduates at university, but not at all, we were only reinventing an old tradition. The Chartists moved in all the major industrial cities and adopted 'sit-ins' of all kinds. In Edinburgh, as early as 1839, and only a year after the formation of the Chartist movement here in London, they took possession of a public platform which was actually there to promote the ministry, and ejected the Lord Provost from the meeting. Those of you who know anything about the dignity of the Lord Provost will realise the enormity of it! Sometimes they moved in large bodies - remember there was no law then prohibiting that kind of procession or march or demonstration - sometimes they occupied town squares. O'Connor's assistant Vincent, for example, led a mob of a thousand in to the centre of Devises, of all places, and occupied it. Nothing, I repeat, is new. In May 1839 what was by then called the National Chartist Convention at Birmingham, called for a month's general strike, in which all labour would be withdrawn by all the working men who were in support of their new movement. They called it a 'sacred duty' to strike. A sacred month was to be held.

Here in London, things of course moved to a terrifying stage. A bank was occupied in the City by a group of Chartists who came in and sat down on the floor and prevented financial business for a period, and 500 Chartists went from Smithfield here one summer's day, (11 August 1839) walked down these streets and occupied St Paul's! Meanwhile, on the same day, colleagues in Manchester occupied the cathedral and ejected a bishop who had gathered to speak upon the text, we are told, "the meek shall inherit the earth". The movement gathered to itself many of the skills in communication and image building which we think belonged to a later and more sophisticated age, and did it largely through trial and error, word of mouth and catch-as-catch-can techniques because nobody had told them how to do it.

A surprising amount of radical publication developed. The free press of the Chartist movement is a fascinating study: the *Northern Star* for example, which was actually owned and run by Fergus O'Connor, the *London Dispatch*, the *Edinburgh New Scotsman*, the *Newcastle Northern Literature* and the *Birmingham Journal*. So the movement grew. It was encouraged by the seditious press; it was enormously frowned upon by the establishment press. Rumour was rife; the rumour by the end of 1839 was abroad in every city in the land that the Chartists were by one means or other going to take over, that this was not a political movement but it was revolution, that they were going to not just sit in cathedrals but occupy them, not just go into banks and sit down

but take them over. Rumour grew on both sides; one of the characteristics of political rumour is how it feeds upon opposites. Rumours grew amongst the various parts of the establishment about the power of the chartists. There were rumours, for example, that they were importing troops to help them, that they were bringing over secret battalions of people from the continent - which makes a change from the rumour, which was circulated incidentally by the Bishop of Durham in 1800 who thought that the number of French ballet dancers in the country meant that the French were trying to weaken our national will! But the rumour was there, the Chartists were supposedly importing French and mid-European crack battalions of troops ready for the day when they would take over, and of course the authorities began to react. A number of the leaders of the Chartists were arrested at demonstrations; there were many ugly clashes between the forces of authority and Chartist groups (mobs to the establishment, revolutionary heroes to the people who were not of the establishment), and of course there were, as in Peterloo, occasions when there were disasters, deaths and the like, and there were a number of imprisonments more or less without trial. Henry Vincent was imprisoned in Newport in Monmouthshire. It was he who had led the thousand people into Devizes and he had gone on doing it around the country, a kind of revolutionary who was skilled at agitating and developing the anger of different groups. Eventually he was arrested and put in jail, but no sooner than was he in jail in Newport than another mob was formed to come and release him! 20,000 people stormed the jail, and they were, in some cases, armed. In all cases they had weapons, but in some cases they were armed with guns and the Mayor, Mr Phillips, met them as they stormed into the town with a detachment from the 45th Foot Regiment and a battle ensued in the streets of Newport in which there were fifty wounded and ten people killed. A number of the leaders of that insurrection were transported for life, and in the next two years there were a total of 380 leaders of the Chartist movement who were arrested, some of them conceivably not very dangerous at all - they were moral force Chartists rather than physical force Chartists, but they were taken and imprisoned. The fear was that they were not only going to take over authority, they were going to depose the Queen and change entirely, the nature of a good deal more than mere voting.

By 1842, a petition signed ostensibly by more than 3 million people, was presented to the House calling for the Chartist aims to be realised and by the mid-1840s there were 40,000 official Chartists at least registered by their organisation. And now public opinion (certainly outside the city of London) began to swing to some of the Chartists' aims. Fergus O'Connor was actually elected Member of Parliament for Nottingham and, as a Chartist MP having been a revolutionary, was regarded by the establishment with that kind of fear that some people might have if (let us say) Mr Scargill were unexpectedly made Prime Minister overnight. This figure who had been thought of essentially as an opposer and revolutionary was suddenly here legitimately in the centre of London and speaking in the House. That was in 1847.

Demonstrations then reached a crescendo, and in 1848 the entirety of Europe was shattered by the French Revolution, the reaction ranging from joy to great sorrow, the feeling of bliss was that dawn to be alive for some, others feeling that it was the end of any kind of civilisation, but it was catastrophic for rumour because O'Connor was now

seen as the head of an organisation which was going to almost certainly take over every organ of state and was going to destroy everything from the monarchy to the city and banking system and even to questions like the ownership of property! It became widely believed that the Chartists were now in collusion with the military and that when the moment came the army could no longer be relied upon to be loyal to the Queen and would join them in the revolutionary movement which would yield the final overthrow.

So we come to the heart of the story. In that year of the French revolution, 1848, the Chartists planned a great public demonstration. It was going to be held on 10 April and it was going to reach its climax with half a million people gathering on Kennington Common, very roughly where the Oval cricket ground is, but much bigger of course. They were going to present the ultimate petition which showed that a majority of people in the country were in favour of their revolutionary reforms, the reform of parliament and so on, and it was widely rumoured that they were going on that day to either kill or capture the Queen and her court and to take over the country. That was the rumour and the rumours, it's interesting to notice, were not squashed by the press. Parts of the free press certainly lent a good deal of credence to the view that this was more than a lot of people walking on different routes through the streets and gathering together and making, what we now simply call, a mass demonstration. The views held that this was a more dramatic and total event was promulgated in *The Times* and the *Telegraph* as well as in some parts of the Free Press. Though, looking back on it you will find in the various parts of the so called free radical press different views as to what the great gathering on Kennington Common was for. At all events, the financial establishment of the city, the governments of the City of London, the Queen and her court and parliament itself were all riddled with rumour and the most extraordinary preparations were taken here in the City to put down or to attempt to contain what many thought was its overthrow. First (as we saw last week with the Great Plague, when the special watchmen were hired) all right-thinking people were hired to be special constables. In the City, three weeks before the event, 170,000 special constables were sworn in to repel these terrible Chartists. In all the main thoroughfares the troops were scattered throughout the houses which they occupied by main force with a view to the main thoroughfare. Various forms of pill box were built around some of the key parts of London. (At least one of the little pieces of street furniture in Trafalgar Square is designed with a slit for a gun to come out of). But troops were put into houses, guarding the streets and certainly the main thoroughfares of London. It becomes even more incredible. As panic mounted 2,000 stands of arms were issued to members of the general post office, none of whom I imagine had any kind of training with firearms, and who surely had it come to a battle would have created mayhem in their own ranks, but 2,000 stands of arms were distributed to the G.P.O. and to the members of the Royal Exchange here and to the Bank. The admiralty was garrisoned by a body of young marines. Some of the embassies had specialist soldiers brought from their own countries. The French embassy, for example, had got some of its rather bedraggled and discredited troops brought over here to guard it! The Tower guns were once again mounted. River traffic was, as in the time of the plague, stopped. All shipping in the river was put into the hands of the police. Checkpoints were set up at the entries to the City, these were mounted by police and special constables who sat in special dug outs waiting for people

to come in their revolutionary garb as expected. The Bank of England was sandbagged to a height of 10 feet. Quite what that was supposed to do I really don't know. I should have thought that was helpful in the case of a flood but they sandbagged it at all events, and traffic was, by rule of the Lord Mayor, suspended within the City. In effect, the City moved into conditions of curfew. The Duke of Wellington was brought from behind his desk to be in charge and mastermind operations as the day approached. The defence of the realm was put in his hands and, being the Duke of Wellington, he made the most thorough preparations.

On the great day as it dawned, with parts for the radical press screaming that this indeed was revolution and urging the people coming in from all over Britain for this great event to bring their arms with them to fight the establishment. On that morning the Duke of Wellington led 2,600 Household troops at dawn onto Kennington Common and there they took up position. From other regiments in the line, co-ordinated by the Duke, another 1,700 troops arrived making a total of more than 4,000 armed troops waiting there on the Common for the rioters to arrive, and as you can imagine it was fair to say that curfewed London, its traffic suspended, watched over by these thousands of armed soldiers and guards, awaited in suspense. The Queen was secretly hidden away, so the newspapers played fair then (as they have done on some subsequent occasions) in not telling their readers where the Queen was, though they speculated pretty widely that the previous attempts on her life were nothing compared with what was now almost certainly going to happen. Bullion was removed out of the City because it was felt that the people coming in would certainly have the power to dynamite their way in to the reserves and the vaults and steal Britain's store of gold and precious metal and coinage, and all of this was masterminded by the Duke of Wellington. And so London waited.

Now the rumours about the preparations that the establishment was making multiplied, as is the way of rumour, fifty times in passing to the waiting Chartists. If they, the establishment, feared the power of this group, then of course that fear was paralleled by the rumours that moved through the waiting Chartists. The Chartist groups began to gather and, were already cowed by certain rumours they had heard that the tower guns were actually in position waiting for them in the main streets to blast them as they walked towards the common, by the rumour that there were 30,000 armed men waiting to greet them once they got to Kennington Common and the rumour that the British army and the Duke of Wellington's troops, the Household cavalry, had been added to by a number of foreign regiments who the Chartists feared were all waiting for them and were going to cut them to pieces. Amongst the leaders of the largest group of Chartists who were waiting to start their march towards the Common, an argument broke out as to what they should do about the overwhelming force which was reputedly put up against them. Some, the moral force Chartists believed that there was nothing for it but to simply disarm and to walk into this as martyrs, or as heroes, and to try to persuade by moral force the observing people of the justice of the Chartist cause. Others were more aggressively inclined and argued that the groups should walk towards Kennington Common with their guns ready cocked, ready for the inevitable gun battles that were going to be fought that day in London's streets. Certainly (because rumour had a more

powerful hold on their side that did proper planning I suppose) they were pretty ill prepared for what followed.

Quite a large number of people, estimates varied, came from their houses simply to watch and gradually the few thousand people that had gathered to form the march towards Kennington Common, far fewer than the half million or so that had been confidently expected and forecast, those groups were joined by onlookers, some of them being fairly scornful about the way in which the Chartists had prepared themselves. So the genuine workers with the genuine grievance who had genuinely come to urge their case, were joined by a lot of people who were just in it for the war and the fun and who looked forward to joining in what ever mayhem was expected to follow. Quarrels broke out in all the Chartist ranks about how they should proceed and eventually they proceeded by dribs and drabs through the streets and the assembly on the common was fairly small. Estimates varied but nobody suggests that there were more than 20,000 people there who were not actually in the military line. So when it finally happened, two groups terrified of each other finally met; the four thousand odd armed troops glared over at the six or seven thousand half armed rioters and demonstrators, they glared at each other finally over a distance of about half a mile and then both sides put their guns down. Nothing much happened. A few speeches were made on the Common. Some public debate took place as Chartists from the ranks stood up and spoke against their leaders. The Duke of Wellington's troops observed this in reasonable silence and after a while, and to some derision, the Chartists began to separate and go their separate ways. And London, after a few hours, relaxed. The restrictions on the river were cautiously lifted, the sand bags the following week were taken away from the Bank of England, the troops who sternly occupied the houses on the main streets leading to the Common sheepishly packed up their guns and perhaps apologised to the householders and left. There were (to go back to the word that we had last week) a few flurries. There was a rumour in the mid-week following that this had been but a feint, a trick, and actually the real armies of the Chartists were going to move in and take over London about a week later. There were some rumours that it had all been an extraordinarily elaborately conceived hoax, but of course it had been no such thing. The moment when rumour had built up the great confrontation between the establishment and Chartistism in fact collapsed in to something that by all accounts was very nearly farcial. Then rumour (as it will) began to work the other way. The figures of the actual troops that Wellington had brought were quoted quite confidently as being very much lower than they actually were. So one rumour about was that the Duke of Wellington with 'twenty good men' had seen them all off, and there was no doubting his great bravery and moral determination. Another rumour said that there were barely 'five hundred Chartists' there and they had easily been destroyed and that their leaders had been humiliated by the stern presence and resolute action of the residing authorities. There were a few rumours that there had indeed actually been a skirmish and a battle.

Another popular rumour throughout history is that something very serious happened but that the authorities are 'hushing it up'. Sometimes there is cause for such rumours. Certainly the newspapers in the following weeks speculated that there had indeed been a battle with many killed but the authorities felt that it was best to hush it up, and to keep

it quiet, and that the great battle of Kennington Common was not 'in the general interest'. In the event all these rumours gave way to a reasonable and accurate account of what had occurred which is that the fear on both sides was greater than the power that either of them yielded.

The Queen returned, no doubt with some relief, to her public duties and the following year her husband Prince Albert proposed what was the greatest exhibition that London saw in the 19th and indeed for most of the 20th century, the Great Exhibition of 1851. That was planned almost at once and in part planned, we have to remember, as a demonstration of the unity of the British people, as well as the unity of the Empire and the unity of purpose of all people upon the earth. We might notice with our modern communications in which one way or another were involved in the thirty years or so that it took to build the Barbican, that it took them about 18 months to mount the Great Exhibition, and this is the fascinating thing that in spite of the fears and alarms of the 1848 revolution that never happened, when the Great Exhibition was opened at the beginning of the summer of 1851, half a million people entirely unchecked for firearms, for bombs or for anything else, moved on to the grass of Hyde Park to welcome the Queen who had come to open it. She, just a little under three years after she had expected to be shot and had expected revolution to end the monarchy forever, (and indeed remember she had three times been shot at in public), walked through half a million people, unchecked by any security, through Hyde Park and stood on the podium there amongst this great crowd and opened the Great Exhibition. If nothing else it was a considerable show of bravery, but rarely I think in our history, when rumour has pretended that there is going to be such a change has stability and order and public confidence been restored so quickly. The Queen found her favour with the public increasing, O'Connor as many of you will know, eventually died insane in a lunatic asylum, which perhaps brings us finally to the topic of next weeks third lecture, when I intend to talk about the other end of Queen Victoria's reign when London was shattered by rumour of a virulent and dark kind - the rumour being that a member of the Royal Family and a lunatic was responsible for Jack the Rippers murders. I'll tell you one version of the truth about it, if I may, next week.

1888, Jack the Ripper

Today we turn to the topic which is of particular interest to people, the rumours and panic that gripped London in the autumn of 1888 at the time of what popularly became known as the Jack the Ripper murders. We shall have talk about these grisly events and actually speculate as to how the murders were committed and what significance they had, but we shall also be talking a little about the way in which rumour operated at that time, and as you will see it is remarkably similar to the way rumour always does operate at the time when great crimes are being perpetrated and the people fear there may be more.

The first thing to say about the London of 1888, almost a century ago, when the Ripper murders took such a terrifying hold on the imagination of people, not just in London, but throughout Britain and elsewhere, is that in a curious sense the events were anticipated and relished. You might almost say that the mood of the times was such that had the Ripper murders not taken place it would almost have been necessary to invent them. If one thinks of the way in which the popular literature from Dickens through to the writings of Henry Irving's manager Bram Stoker, the way in which the popular imagination played upon death, upon bodies being dissected by various forms of fiend, the way in which London fog was used in novel after novel to disguise horrifying, unexpected and apparently random murders, the way in which the atmosphere created by the literature and the stage at the time created an atmosphere of brooding suspense about the streets of London, then it was almost inevitable that when the murders took place they would instantly achieve an almost literary status. The rather unsavoury truth about them is that when you look at the contemporary writings about the Ripper murders, and look at the way in which people reacted, you will see that pretty plainly in certain senses they were much enjoyed. People obviously enjoyed writing about the events of that autumn and in a curious way they wrote about them in a way that was almost fictional. In a sense that kind of horrifying, shocking writing, is repeated in the newspaper accounts of the Ripper murders of that autumn.

Well what kind of London did they take place in, first of all? As we saw last week Queen Victoria's position was very uncertain for a long time after she came to the throne, and one has to remember, and it is going to be important in exposing the Ripper murders, that the Queen was particularly fearful of Catholic associations and of socialism, as well as the acts of anarchists. In her private letters these three bogies crop up again and again and, as we shall see, each fear had its part to play in the Royal Family's reaction and involvement in the acts around the Ripper murders. It was a city therefore which was by no means at political peace and that is important. It was a city where the parliament was under massive pressure, the parliament of Lord Salisbury, for all kinds of continuous reform and the increasing agitation of the Chartists and Socialists were a matter of great anxiety and the fear that we noticed in the Chartists' uprising in 1848 was everywhere transmitted to the streets - that is people were frightened of all kinds of public gatherings and were apt to read into almost all events the danger of revolution. That as we shall see in a moment is important. London was at

the time, undeniably somewhat like it is portrayed in the films which have been made about the period, it was indeed fog ridden. It is an interesting point that the street lighting system in 1888 continued all day, they didn't turn the street lights off in large parts of London; street lighting is again an important factor in building up the picture of the Ripper murders, and the fog indeed was everywhere and the autumn of 1888 was a particularly damp, foggy and melancholy autumn.

The area in which the Ripper murders took place, roughly speaking, Whitechapel and the East End of London, around that area from Finsbury Square over to the far end of the Mile End Road effectively, that area was at the time riddled with dark alleyways, which had no lighting at all. In his book published in 1879, a decade before the Ripper murders, Charles Dickens Junior actually describes Whitechapel, as a frightening 'rabbit warren' of a district. So already it was felt that the area itself was a particularly menacing, dark and insalubrious part of the Capital. Prince Albert and his various committees were transforming the centre of the City, and what we know as the central systems of Trafalgar Square, Leicester Square, and the whole environs of the Palace and Westminster were in the process of being rebuilt and reshaped by the Victorians. But just away from the centre, and most particularly once you move eastwards of the City, London was still an overcrowded, dark and threatening place. The communication system, had changed dramatically since the time when Defoe was able to announce (of the great plague) that we had 'of course' no newspapers in those days. There were many newspapers in London in 1888 and when the Ripper murders took place news of them travelled extremely fast, so spoken rumour now went side by side with, and as complementary to, a very rapid transmission through extra editions of the daily morning presses, when the murders took place with extra information about the killings. And the press was as lurid as some of the press is today. The descriptions of the murders are quite horrifying to read even now. The other thing that strikes one as one reads the press of 1888 and 1889, as they talk about the murders and speculate about the possible identity or nature of the murderer, is how very free they are with information which we would now think only the police ought to have had. They circulated and published the evidence of witnesses who described in great detail the sort of people they saw near the scenes of the murders (you would think this would be a wonderful giveaway to suspects who would just have to disguise themselves not to look like that!). They also more or less printed verbatim, what the police were doing, so if the Ripper really were a highly intelligent and dangerous and wily criminal as one strain of popular rumour suggested he was, then he had only to read the morning newspapers to be told more or less when to strike next. The last murder, actually took place on the day of the Lord Mayor's Show. The morning newspapers had very helpfully published a complete deposition of the police for that day in the capital, including the information of course that the police had been withdrawn from the East End in order to come and helpfully police the Lord Mayor's Show here in the centre. So in fact if it had mattered very much to the murderer, he would have known that he had a comparatively easy run on that particular evening.

So in the autumn of 1888 in the dark fog ridden City, with the minds of the people, through their drama, popular songs and literature, very much upon death, vampires and

deranged surgeons, the murders took place. Many books about the Jack the Ripper murders seem to follow popular rumour and describe very many more victims of the murderer than in fact was the case. For a long time indeed, once the epithet 'Jack the Ripper' had been invented (it wasn't invented until the time of the second murder, it was picked up from a piece of writing that was sent to the police possibly by a crank who identified himself as Jack the Ripper and he was taken up by the popular press as a name; the actual 'Jack the Ripper' as you will see never called himself this), the press continued through 1889 to ascribe almost every murder, some done at a considerable distance from London, to 'Jack the Ripper'. Some books of course claim that there were 20, 30, 40 victims of this killer. Now as we shall see that is very unlikely and the files of Scotland Yard which have now been seen by researchers, and which are due to be open to the public in about four years time, suggest very strongly that that was not the case and for good reason, as we shall see. Indeed the man from Scotland Yard, McNaughton, who was in charge of the later stages of the 'Ripper' enquiry says quite emphatically in those notes that there were five victims and 'five victims only' of so called 'Jack the Ripper'.

The image of 'Jack the Ripper' which gradually built up in the popular imagination is something like this. (The amazing thing is how accurate it was, as you will see, in many cases). First of all there was from the time of the second murder, the murder of Annie Chapman, an insistent rumour that somehow the Royal Family were connected with it. Sensational books have been published, claiming that almost everybody, (even Queen Victoria) was the murderer! I have to announce straight away that it is absolutely impossible. She wasn't in London on the occasion of the last murder. The second rumour is that Jack became popularly known in the East End as 'old leather apron', and this was taken, in the first instance, from the fact that somebody who had that title was in fact arrested and grilled in suspicion of being Jack the Ripper. Now this chap, who was a butcher as it happens, was known as 'old leather apron' but the term persisted and they continued to call 'Jack the Ripper' 'leather apron'. There was also a persistent rumour, which was built up by several sightings of each of the last killings including the two which were done on the same night, that Jack carried a doctor's bag, one of those large square doctors bag's, with, it was popularly rumoured, surgical instruments within it. Of course the rumour also began increasingly to suggest that the killer, as the mutilations of three of the victims at any rate gave evidence, was somebody who had surgical training, or was indeed a surgeon or somebody who at any rate knew a good deal more about the insides of a human torso than most of us do.

Popularly then supposed to be a surgeon and various descriptions were issued of people seen near the crimes. Now one figure that appears pretty often and will as you see be rather important to us, a figure of 5'11" usually wearing a red handkerchief, carrying a black doctor's bag and wearing some kind of smock or overcoat which gave a rather shapeless form to somebody who was fairly slim and fairly tall. Several of the descriptions suggest that the person had a moustache or moustache and small beard. There are more than four hundred descriptions of people who believe that they saw figures near the murders and that figure goes fairly constantly through all. Now that, and the final rumour which followed the Ripper murders, that the Ripper has in fact

been apprehended and was dying in an insane asylum, are pretty close to the truth. But in one important aspect it would seem that popular rumour and popular speculation about the nature of 'Jack the Ripper' got it wrong. Popular mythology has it that the murders were the more terrifying because they were carried out at random because, so popular rumour had it, street walkers, casuals, unfortunates, in Victorian parlance, who walked the streets of the East End were at risk from an apparently unmotivated random, entirely bloodthirsty killer who would emerge out of a fog, smother the victim and carry out the dastardly deed and the random nature of the attack was balanced by the fact the person was supposed to have extraordinary skill, because the characteristic of each of the killings was that they were carried out, apparently, very rapidly indeed. In the first case, for example, two policeman crossed the very spot where the first victim was found within 20 or 25 minutes of the victim being discovered. Now I really don't want to go into the gory details but it would take quite a long time to capture, smother and kill, cut the throat and then mutilate the body in the way it was found. The others were even more desperate. On the night when two murders took place, in each case there would appear to have been people crossing minutes before or even a minute before the bodies were found. So it was generally thought that the killer was not only random but he walked alone and killed at random because perhaps he had some kind of deranged 'down' on whores as one of the letters which the police received said. He was also possessed with an almost fiendish cunning and dexterity in killing and mutilating people because the other extraordinary thing was - except in the last case, the case of Kelly - no sound was heard. Kelly was heard screaming for help and crying murder - in the other cases the mysterious thing was there wasn't a sound to be heard from somebody who was obviously undergoing the most hateful attack upon them.

So mythology suggested that this person was demented and so on, but mythology in that respect got it wrong, and what I am going to say is quite close, though in one or two important respects it differs from the kind of comments which have been fairly commonly made about the 'Jack the Ripper' murders over the last fifteen years, particularly since the BBC investigated these crimes for a programme in 1973 about the killings. They were not, first of all, random. Four of the five victims knew each other very well, and for a reason which I'll explain. The fifth victim, Eddowes, who was killed apparently without connection to the other four, was in fact killed, it is reasonable to suppose, because the killer thought that she was Kelly. She lived in common law with somebody called Kelly, and often adopted the name and since, as we shall see, the murders were in fact planned and planned for a good reason, the murderers had obviously made enquiries among the common lodging houses of East London and had assumed that Eddowes was, in fact, the Kelly they were after. But she was not, so the poor unfortunate woman was killed in vain. And the reason that there is the gap in time between the third and fourth murders and the fifth is that for a time the killer thought the task was complete, and then realised that he had got the wrong Kelly, and so went out on the day of the Lord Mayors Show and finished the job and killed the last victim, who was the right Kelly. So they were not random in fact, but the public was not to know that, and nor were they executed by one killer but by three, possibly four people, including, and this is the explanation of why the bodies were apparently dispatched with such speed and without noise. The killings probably were carried out in a coach, which

enabled one of the four (almost certainly a coachman called John Nettly) to deposit the victims on the pavement or, in the case of Mary Kelly, in Mitre Square which had a certain symbolic importance, which I will come onto. So we are not dealing here with the deranged random lunatic acts of the doctor of a popular mythology, but we are dealing with a deliberate act. It is amazing in other ways how near popular rumour got to it, because the Royal Family were certainly involved - and I'll explain how in a moment and the description 'Leather Apron' is one of the ways by which you could in popular argot describe Freemasons, and almost certainly it was an act of people who were certainly demented but who were, in at least two cases, eminent Freemasons. Popular rumour had it also that the police had bungled it, but that they were somehow involved. Well, they were involved; involved in shielding some evidence from the public and most particularly in the case of the third victim when the chalked message 'the Jews are not the men who will be blamed for nothing', which had been chalked on the wall above the murdered Catherine Eddowes, was hosed off before it was photographed by the police photographers, or otherwise accurately recorded, on the actual orders of the Chief Commissioner of Scotland Yard, who was also an eminent Freemason. The reason is not that they feared a Jewish uprising, or an uprising rather against the Jewish population of that area, which is the reason put around at the time, it was because the Jews appear in Freemasons law as being in fact three killers; it has a Masonic significance which the Chief Commissioner quite rightly realised would be understood by other Masons, and it was for that reason that it was hosed off. So popular rumour was pretty nearly there but popular rumour couldn't perhaps guess at what seems to be the truth. What I am now going to outline is generally to be found, although in one or two respects I differ from him, in Stephen Knight's most recent book on 'Jack the Ripper' which was called *Jack the Ripper, The Final Solution*.

Stephen Knight is also the author of a fairly mild exposé of the ramifications of Freemasonry, which is hardly sensational as its title promises, and because he became interested in some of the acts of Freemasonry in the 19th century, he went on to look at the crimes of 'Jack the Ripper'. His book, though hardly scholarly, is certainly long and certainly detailed, and in most respects I think it gets pretty near the truth. And the truth is something like this: the Duke of Clarence, popularly known as Prince Eddie, the son of Edward the VII, a wayward lad, much devoted to his mother, the Princess Alexander, was introduced early in his teenage years to the young painter Walter Sickert. He used to visit Sickert in his studios which were in Cleveland Street, which is still there and runs parallel to the Tottenham Court Road. In those studios Prince Eddie was given a certain amount of tuition in the arts, but also introduced to Sickert's bohemian world. He was also introduced to the woman who became, unbeknown to his Royal Family, his wife. Her name was Annie Elizabeth Crook, and, an important point, she was a Catholic. So after she had born Prince Eddie an illegitimate son, they went through a Catholic wedding ceremony. This is beyond dispute. The papers still exist, and the child was registered as having been born in the Marylebone work house. Now the witness at the wedding was somebody who had worked as a waitress with Annie Elizabeth Crook and her name was Marie Kelly. When Prince Eddie set up a flat at 6 Cleveland Street for his wife, she became the nanny, or live in housekeeper and pledged to keep it secret. This was a secret marriage and the child also was secret. Sickert, of

course, remained a friend of the couple, and was placed in that rather unfortunate position of knowing something secret about somebody in the Royal Family, who was probably going to get into trouble. And into trouble he got. The Royal Family discovered, by what means is not known, that this marriage had been contracted by one of their wayward members and the marriage was obviously pretty rapidly broken up. The premises were, not to put to fine a point on it, apparently raided in the Spring of 1888, and Annie Elizabeth Crook was taken away and was admitted (and it is in the evidence too) to Guys Hospital for treatment by the physician-in-ordinary to the Queen, Richard Gull, an eminent Freemason and prominent surgeon.

The baby was smuggled out by Marie Kelly, and for a time she looked after the girl in hiding and then eventually got the baby back to Sickert. Sickert looked after the young girl for a while and eventually took a strong paternal interest and took the child around with him; much later in life he became her companion. Eddie used to leave the Royal Palaces (here we are adding together some probabilities rather than talking about an absolute fact) in the proper coach and change coaches by arrangement in the various coaching yards, particularly in one owned by a family called Evans, who ran a kind of coach supply business (the family now lives in Wanstead). He used to switch into an ordinary coach that was driven by John Nettly, whom I have mentioned already. So his wife was taken away and in effect incarcerated in hospitals and then spent various periods in asylums, I'm afraid. The Prince himself was put under pretty strict Royal guard, brought back into the Royal Family and not allowed out again. Annie died 32 years after this, insane, and the child grew up relatively unscathed although the events around her were fairly terrible.

Once she'd returned the little girl to Sicket, who of course new her parentage, (though long denied it is now accepted it happened), Mary Kelly seems to have drifted down hill very rapidly. Not unnaturally she found it very difficult to get any other job, she had no reference from what she had been doing secretly. The one person who could have helped her was trapped in the palace; she seems to have drifted into a form of casual labour and prostitution, in the East End. There in the East End she shared lodgings, intermittently, with three other girls who were more or less involved, Elizabeth Stride, known as long Liz, Annie Chapman and Mary Anne Nichols.

As the autumn of 1888 loomed, the four of them began to wonder whether they couldn't capitalise upon their knowledge, and so, though evidence of this does not exist, they seemed to have tried to blackmail the people who had been involved in covering up the Royal family's disgrace. They tried, it would seem, to blackmail Salisbury, the Prime Minister, the Prince of Wales, and probably, though this is not known, the Chief Commissioner of Scotland Yard. In other words they suggested that they had this information and that they wanted money to keep quiet. What processes took place then, we do not know, but for many other reasons, it seems reasonable that the general decision was taken (Salisbury was also Freemason) somewhere within a Masonic meeting or a meeting between Freemasons, to say we really must do something to keep this quiet. One isn't suggesting the Masons decided to kill the girls, but unfortunately one of the people listening to these suggestions that these people must be silenced by

some means or other was indeed the physician-in-ordinary whom I have mentioned, Sir Richard Gull. He was, though it wasn't apparent at the time, plainly fairly demented. He was also tall and strong and anxious at all costs to preserve the Royal Family against the encroachment of the dreaded Catholicism or any kind of popular outcry which would certainly follow the revelations of the four girls. He seems to have satisfied himself of what they were saying was true, but he already knew it because he had been treating Prince Eddies wife, and he therefore seems to have decided to kill them, and the murders and mutilations were, according to Philip Wright, carried out according to the ritual which is described in some parts of the Masonic services. Philip Wright suggests that, I do not know whether it is true or not.

They were certainly carried out by, in part at any rate, a surgeon. Sickert plainly was involved. It is not clear whether he was the third person in the coach. His son, who was still talking about this or started talking about this in the seventies, came to the conclusion that his father probably had been involved. Certainly Sickert had always claimed throughout his life to know all about the Ripper murders and indeed many of his paintings contain cryptic and other clues as to the nature of the murders themselves. Particularly this is true of the pictures of the murder in Camden Town, which contain a painting which is a pretty near likeness of the actual grisly scene of the death of Mary Anne Kelly in her own room and in her own bed. So, at all events, it would seem that with Nettly driving a coach, which the family living in Wanstead later claimed was burned and destroyed for obvious reasons, they set forth into the East End to find out the location of the women who had written the letters threatening blackmail and to dispatch them. They were looking for four of them, (there were four signatories apparently to the blackmail letters, although they no longer exist), and they decided to do it by means which themselves are very much of the time by spreading a reign of terror and by leaving various inexplicable but symbolic statements around the bodies when they killed and mutilated them. As I say they went out to kill four but by chance they were told that Mary Evans (popularly known as Kelly) was in fact their fourth victim, they got that wrong, so they didn't move onto Kelly until afterwards. They would appear to have gone out in one of the coaches hired by Nettly for the purpose, and they would appear to lured the victim into the coach, do their work there and then deposited the victim in a temporarily unused bit of a street, and on one or two of the occasions dressed the victim up to look rather like a sacrifice with coins, brass rings and so on around the feet of one and of course that statement which was a part of the ritual that 'the Jew is not the man who will be blamed for nothing' on the wall above Eddowes, whom they thought was the last.

Now who was the third man in the carriage? It would seem pretty certain about Nettly. Nettly has been thoroughly researched, he indeed existed, he indeed was a coachman. When they had finished the murders, he made two attempts, both reported in the press, to kill the daughter when she was walking about London, though the significance of the fact that her assailant was the same person on each occasion wasn't obvious at that time, it was just that she had the bad luck to be run over by the same coach twice! He eventually seems to have been killed himself by his own coach rather mysteriously

running over him, and his coach horse kicking him to death. Whether that was an arranged death or not we shall never know, but that happened in 1893.

Gull certainly was involved, he signed the insane certificate for Prince Eddie's wife, he left certain papers which indicated that he was about this work, and considered it his higher duty, in a deranged way, to kill. He does appear to have had a fake burial, in 1890, when his death was announced and a coffin full of stones lowered into the ground. He himself seems to have died in an asylum, as popular rumour suggested 'Jack the Ripper' did, and indeed his grave (which is photographed and is in Mr Wrights book) is wide enough to have contained two coffins, and it is popularly supposed that when he actually did die the actual body was put beneath the headstone which had already been erected to his memory.

But the third person? Well now, Sickert, who, towards the end of his life, confessed most of this to his son, who has kept it as a terrible secret until about the seventies, told this story about the coach, about Nettly and Gull, but suggested that the third person involved was in fact the Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan police, another prominent Freemason, Sir Robert Anderson. That is what Sickert suggested. And indeed there certainly is evidence that the police knew what was going on. As I say they got rid of one or two pieces of evidence or in the case of the last murder they didn't allow the forensic scientists and the detectives into the room with the body for four hours after it had been first discovered and so vital time and evidence was lost there too. There is every evidence that Anderson was involved and in the know, but could he have been the third person? Is it actually credible? It's possible that Sickert himself was passing on the blame to somebody else simply to distract the attention of people from the obvious suspect of the third person - himself. You remember the person who was most frequently seen near the killings: 5'11", the smock, the red handkerchief and the doctor's black bag. Sickert's son began to have some worries about his father, when he 'discovered' a doctor's bag in Sickert's possession, and discovered that it contained knives, one of them, believe it or not, actually was bloodstained! Sickert in later life, certainly obsessively returned to the subject of the Ripper murderers. He painted them. According to companions he would walk about for hours pretending to be the Ripper murderer. He talked compulsively about gloomy facets of the murders themselves. He actually had a red handkerchief to which he ascribed extraordinary significance and twisted it compulsively (according to his later companions) in his hands for the later part of his life. It was his most extraordinary habit that he was to carry that handkerchief with him everywhere. He was paid £500 by Lord Salisbury for a painting for which you would expect to get £3. Hush money, perhaps? So it is possible, and certainly Mr Wright in his book goes pretty much all the way towards saying, that Sickert was involved in the murders, possibly not as a direct participant but certainly as an observer, and he certainly knew all about them and he certainly may have been there.

I don't know whether he was the third person. It seems to me pretty reasonable now to say the police knew that it was Gull and that is why they stopped investigating the matter, once he was declared insane two years afterwards. The fake burial had taken place and he was put into an asylum, but the difficult thing about that was that Sickert

was not a senior Freemason, and the obligation for silence was less in his case. But the obligation to silence was placed very heavily upon the senior Freemasons in the know, it would seem, but Sickert was not one and therefore it is interesting to speculate that indeed there may have been somebody else in the coach, and who? Well, Sickert in the 80s was a member of Sir Henry Irving's Company at the Lyceum. There he had learnt to be a master of disguise. He used to challenge his friends to come to the theatre and see if they could spot him in the crowd scenes made up with different movements, different faces and so on. So he had at least one more of the characteristics of the Ripper, in that the Ripper probably moved around (or the Rippers, as we have now seen) in disguise. But it is interesting to look at all the other people it may have been. What about Sir Henry Irving himself? - it was speculated, interestingly. He spent the summer and early autumn of 1888 in Paris day-after-day at the morgue, investigating the anatomy of murdered victims. He came back, he had been running *Faustus* for two and a half years, and he changed the programme to the surprise of his company to play *Macbeth*. Coming to rehearsals with a different knife every day and on his 5'11" frame carrying his usual long coat and of course he played *Macbeth* with the moustache and small straggly beard of the Ripper. In the words of Mrs Aria, his last companion after he had left Ellen Terry, he too was obsessed with murder and the Ripper murders. He would talk compulsively about the killings. He too had the actors fiendish delight in that kind of extraordinary death. His manager was Bram Stoker, the author of *Dracula*. It is extraordinary isn't it to realise that he chose to actually walk onto the stage every night at the time of the Ripper murders holding a great bloodstained knife, and saying to 1,500 people, "I have done the deed"!

Now it is highly unlikely that it was Henry Irving. I offer it only because it is at any rate almost as plausible as other solutions. Who the third/fourth people were we don't exactly know, but it does seem to me at any rate likely that they were of the same kind of rank of society in the Freemasonry brotherhood as Sir Richard Gull himself. The masonry is very important here. Mitre Square, in which Kelly was finally deposited, is one of the central homes of Freemasonry, Gull's own Lodge met there sometimes, and Henry Irving was a Freemason and was also passing into the higher ranks of Freemasonry at the time. He used to, as his companions said, leave the theatre every night in an agitated state; he could have done it, but not very likely there isn't a shred of evidence apart from the highly circumstantial stuff I have offered, to suggest that it was him, but equally the case against Sickert must remain forever at any rate doubted. The case against Gull is pretty near certain.

By instinct the rumour machine was very close to being right. First of all rumour and speculation and investigation by the police ran into each other; the police relied heavily on rumour and as each new rumour came people were arrested. Around 160 people were arrested and detained overnight for questioning, that autumn in London, entirely because they fitted some rumoured picture. The hysteria became so intense that a woman crossing Westminster Bridge said that a man 'smiled at her' in such a way that she was convinced that he was the Ripper, and he was promptly arrested, poor chap! 160 people, that is the rumour machine and the investigation; they both nearly got it right. The Royal engagement, the Royal marriage (the secret one), 'Leather Apron', the

police being partly involved, they very nearly got it. It was the random element that they got wrong. They didn't quite make the connection and realise that the victims were linked and the killings were ritual. On the streets themselves what do people remember? First of all, rather oddly, there were more people on the streets than usual, in particular it attracted people out. That worked for Henry Irving's business at the Lyceum. He did very well that autumn. But the streets were full of people took to going down into the East End. One newspaper report at the time said Sir Richard Gull has been seen in the East End quite frequently at the time of the murders, 'doubtless he is there to certify insane the killer when he is caught'. What people finally remember is that in spite of the number of people on the streets, the terrible quiet of the time, because people were listening for what never actually came, which was the cry for help. Person after person who comments on the streets of London in that extraordinary autumn speaks of the silence of the streets as people walked on them waiting fearfully for the next outrage and if I'm any where near the truth in suggesting that they were actually committed in a carriage, of course, poor devils, they were looking the wrong way at the time.

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