# The Blackout Murders

## Simon Read

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*Not since the panic-ridden days in 1888, when Jack the Ripper was abroad in the East End, had London known such a reign of terror as that which existed in this war-time February, when, night after night, death—fiendish, revolting and gruesome—came to four unsuspecting women in the heart of the metropolis.*

—Scotland Yard Chief Superintendent
Fred Cherrill

# FEBRUARY 9, 1942

# ONE

A dark, cramped space of stagnant air, the bomb shelter's interior smelled of cold mortar and stale sweat. A stone seat ran the length of one inner wall, while, on the floor, an electric lantern cast a pallid circle of light across the morbid discovery made earlier that morning. The brick-built shelter was one of several on Montague Place, Marylebone—near Regent's Park in Central London—and one of countless similar structures that lined the streets of the capital. It was just shy of nine o'clock, and a harsh winter's sun backlit the city's shattered skyline. Daybreak came hard to London, a metropolis whose landscape had forever been altered by incendiary and high-explosive—but the air-raid sirens had remained silent the night before. The shelter that was the focus of attention was the center one in a grouping of three. Divisional Detective Inspector Leonard Clare of Albany Street Police Station, "D" Division, squinted against the cold. He knelt and stared into the

shelter's entrance. An electrician, one Harold Batchelor, had found the body at 8:40 a.m. as he walked to work. Batchelor's calls for help had summoned Police Constable John Miles at 8:51 a.m. Senior officers were on the scene within four minutes. Batchelor gave his statement to a trench-coated detective. Clare straightened himself and stepped closer to hear what the man said.

"I was with my mate and I was walking through Dorset Street, across into Montague Street, and along Montague on the left-hand side going to Edgware Road," Batchelor said. "In between two of the shelters I saw the top of an electric torch. My mate went toward it and showed me something inside the shelter. I saw the body of a woman lying on her back."

Clare returned his attention to the shelter and the dead woman within. She lay on her back in the gutter, which cut through the shelter's center. Her feet pointed toward Gloucester Place, her right leg slightly raised and resting on an outcropping of brick in one corner of the shelter. She wore a fawn camel-hair coat and a green jumper. The right pocket of her overcoat held a sixpence. Her left leg was lying on the ground with her foot in the entrance. Her head was turned to the left, and her scarf was lying loosely over her face. Her skirt had been hiked up to her thighs. In the dim light, Clare could see the pale skin of the woman's exposed right breast where her white undershirt had been ripped away. Her underwear was stained with blood, as was the top of one stocking. Her gloves had been placed on top of her body, palms facing upward with the fingers pointing toward her face. Her tongue protruded between her teeth, slightly swollen. Lying near the body were a box of Master's safety matches and a tin of Ovaltine tablets. Her wristwatch had stopped at one o'clock, but started ticking again

when Clare removed it from her wrist. A green woolen cap lay across the shelter's threshold. Clare ordered that loose scrapings of mortar both inside and outside the shelter's entrance be collected as evidence. Sergeant Percy Law from the Photograph Branch took pictures of the crime scene.

At 9:10 a.m., Dr. Alexander Baldie—the divisional police surgeon—arrived at the shelter. A police constable turned on a crime-scene lamp at the shelter's entrance, burning away the shadows that clung to the brick interior, allowing Baldie to begin his examination. He observed two superficial pressure abrasions across the neck where some skin had apparently been rubbed off. The skin below the left side of her chin showed bruising, with heavy discoloration around her Adam's apple. Her extremities and head were cold, but the parts of her body still covered by clothing were slightly warm. Rigor mortis was in partial onset, indicating the woman had been dead for no more than several hours.

"The appearances here are consistent with death by manual strangulation," Baldie said to Clare as he climbed out of the shelter. "You'll obviously know more following the autopsy."

Clare nodded and turned his head as someone approached from behind.

"Morning, Inspector."

The voice was that of Detective Chief Superintendent Frederick Cherrill, head of Scotland Yard's Fingerprint Department. For more than two decades he had applied his special trade with vigor, searching for murderers in bloody swirls left on knife handles and straight-edged razors; looking for the identities of killers in powdered smudges lifted from furniture and panes of glass. The thrill of such discoveries never lost its appeal to Cherrill who, despite his senior rank, insisted on working murder scenes himself. He was

Oxford born and bred, and looked the part in his bowler hat. Wisps of silver hair protruded from under the brim, and in situations like this he thrived. Now Clare stepped aside and allowed Cherrill to enter the shelter to conduct his own examination. Crouched on his haunches, the fingerprint man gave the body a cursory glance. It seemed to him the woman had been hurriedly dumped in the shelter after being strangled in the street. Like the police surgeon, Cherrill's attention focused on the dark bruising of the woman's neck. From inside his jacket pocket, he withdrew his magnifying glass and bent low over the woman's throat. He slowly passed the magnifying glass—which he carried with him at all times—over the bruises in a back-and-forth motion.

"Anything?" Clare asked from outside the shelter.

Lost in thought, Cherrill didn't answer immediately. He hoped to find some marking on the neck or a deformity to the bruises that might suggest an irregularity in the fingers of the killer. He found nothing. Still looking intently through his magnifying glass, Cherrill told Clare, "The man who did this is left handed." The bruises indicated as much. The left side of the neck sported one deep purplish bruise, while the opposite side displayed a cluster of discoloration where the remaining four digits had sunk into the flesh, thus indicating the deadly grasp of a left-handed individual. Casting his gaze down the body, he noticed some scratches on the heel of her shoes indicative of a struggle. But aside from the bruising, nothing on the corpse provided Cherrill with any clues. Perhaps some of the woman's possessions now strewn about would yield more helpful information. He ordered a constable to make sure they reached him for analysis that afternoon at the Yard.

Cherrill crawled out of the shelter and straightened himself in the early morning cold. A light snow had fallen the

night before and was now turning to a thin slush beneath his feet. He had joined the Yard's Fingerprint Department in 1920 as a constable and rapidly worked his way up the ranks. He had seen death in all its various forms and experienced human nature at its lowest. The London Blitz had given rise to stirring tales of self-sacrifice and heroism—but it also exacerbated the worst of the city's criminal element. How many murders had he worked since the outbreak of hostilities? Too many—and yet, a certain irony could be found in each one. Take this dead woman for example. How many air raids had she survived? How many nights had she been dragged from the warmth of her bed by the wailing of sirens? She had lived through Hitler's bombs only to be robbed of life by something far more petty.

As Cherrill stood pondering the woman before him, detectives and uniformed constables spread out to knock on doors and question residents. They needed to establish a time of death and identify the victim. She was a slender woman with black hair and high cheekbones—a woman not wholly unattractive. From where Cherrill stood, he could just make out the brown skirt bunched around her thighs. Cherrill's silent reflection was broken by the approach of a constable who identified himself to Clare as Arthur Cyril Williams, a war reserve constable working out of the Marylebone Lane Police Station. Williams reported he had inspected the shelters the night before while walking his beat, but saw nothing unusual.

"I got on duty last night at ten," he said, while Clare scribbled in his notebook. "I'm posted to No. 13 beat, which covers Marylebone Road, Baker Street, York Street, Montague Place and Seymour Place."

Williams said he passed by the bomb shelter at 11:20 p.m.

"I usually look inside these shelters when I pass—and

I did last night. I shined my light up and down, but didn't see anyone in the shelters at all. I think if anyone had been lying on the floor, I would have noticed them. I did not hear anything unusual. It was a very quiet night with very few people about and no moon. It was very dark."

Come nightfall, London sank into a black oblivion. Residents extinguished all light to thwart enemy bombers, at the expense of wreaking some havoc on the ground. The first campaign waged by British women on the home front was one against illumination, stitching countless thousands of yards of dark-colored material into blackout curtains. The dark blue, dark green and black drapes were now ritually drawn across all the windows in the capital by sunset. Light could not be permitted to escape any building. The curtains could not be washed, as this made them more permeable to light. Instead, the government dispensed booklets instructing people to vacuum, shake, brush and iron their curtains to make them more effective. The drill instructor–like shriek of "Put out that light!" became a common sound on the nighttime streets of London, as air-raid precaution wardens roamed neighborhoods in search of blackout violations. It had been that way since the blackout went into effect on August 31, 1939—three days before the morbid voice of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain came over the BBC and told an anxious nation it again braved war with Germany. In the business of keeping things dark, public transit received little leeway. Bus and taxi operators had to cover their headlights in a fashion that allowed only the most minimal amount of light to escape. The result was a lot of distraught drivers standing over the writhing—and sometimes still—figures of the pedestrians they had hit in the middle of the street. Nocturnal London had become an alien world of rumbling shadows and fleeting figures.

"What people there were about were soldiers," Williams told Clare. "Four or five times during the night I was asked where the Church Army Hostel was." Williams waved an arm in some general direction: "It's in Seymour Place, and I directed the person making inquiries on each occasion."

Williams said that just before midnight he was ordered to Baker Street to monitor some shady figures reportedly seen moving in and out of a doorway at No. 114. The surveillance yielded nothing of consequence, and Williams took lunch from 1:15 a.m. to 2:15 a.m.

"I passed by the shelters while patrolling the other side of the street two or three more times during the night," he said. "I didn't hear anything unusual as far as I can remember. There were no vehicles in the street when I passed, and I didn't see a sentry on duty."

Clare closed his notebook, thanked the constable and sent him on his way. The London underworld had made an overt move aboveground, for the blackout provided ideal cover for those who fancied lawless pursuits. It was hard to identify someone passing on the street in black silhouette. Most attention these nights was directed skyward. Firewatchers on the lookout for German incendiaries manned the roofs of factories and other businesses. Fires provided a homing beacon for the Luftwaffe. Blazes, once ignited, had to be put out as soon as possible. ARP wardens hit the streets armed with stirrup pumps ready to battle the slightest spark. Some criminals saw an ideal opportunity in being ARPs. It gave them easy access to bombed homes and office buildings, and the possessions within. Clare shook his head and looked at his watch. It showed 10:15 a.m. as Police Constable Miles—the first officer on the scene—approached. He held something in his gloved hand, a woman's black handbag, wet, torn and empty. Miles said it had been discovered lying on

the pavement on Wyndham Street, not far removed from the murder scene. Whether prints could be lifted from it was questionable, but it was bagged with the dead woman's other possessions. Once back at the Yard, Cherrill would dust everything and compare the prints he lifted with those already on file with the Metropolitan Police Department.

Other than the woman's few scant possessions, the crime scene had yielded no useful information—no bloody fingerprints and no identifiable footprints. Now, as the mortuary wagon approached, Clare hoped the door-to-door questioning would offer some hint as to the previous night's events. At 10:30 a.m., mortician workers removed the body from the shelter, loaded it onto a stretcher and placed it in the back of the wagon. It was promptly taken to the Paddington Mortuary, where the pathologist's blade awaited.

Sir Edward Henry, the future police commissioner, established Scotland Yard's Fingerprint Department in 1901. The following year, Harry Jackson—a small-time burglar—became the first person jailed for a crime based on fingerprint evidence. A jury heard the case at the Old Bailey—London's Central Criminal Court—on September 13, 1902, after Jackson pleaded not guilty to stealing billiard balls from a home in South London. At the crime scene, Jackson left an imprint of his left thumb on a newly painted windowsill. The print had been discovered and photographed by one Detective Sergeant Collins, who searched the Yard's then-small collection of fingerprints taken from known criminals. A match surfaced based on a visual comparison of the print's looping pattern to those prints in the index. Police quickly nabbed Jackson—a forty-one-year-old laborer—who, upon being convicted, received a seven-year prison sentence.

Three years later, on March 27, 1905, Mr. and Mrs. Farrow were attacked and killed in their shop on Deptford High Street in a crime dubbed "The Mask Murders," so named because the killers left masks made of black stockings behind at the scene. Investigators who searched the shop found an empty cashbox with a thumbprint inside. Detectives at the Fingerprint Department inspected the box. They photographed the print and set about the laborious task of going through the Yard's ever-increasing print index, which now boasted eighty thousand sets of finger impressions. Their search, however, proved futile—but a break in the case soon evolved when police, acting on statements from witnesses, arrested two brothers named Albert and Alfred Stratton. Once in custody, their prints were taken and compared to the one found on the cashbox. It was a match with Alfred's right thumb. The brothers' fates were decided. After being convicted of murder at the Old Bailey, the two were sent to the gallows.

Cherrill's work with the Fingerprint Department had made him something of a celebrity with other lawmen and the media of the day. A favorite subject of newspaper photographers, he would purposely situate himself at crime scenes in a location where he could be easily photographed without giving the impression he was posing for the shot. Cherrill read fingerprints with the same casual ease and interest that most people read the morning paper over breakfast. In one instance, he identified a killer based on fingerprint evidence within hours of arriving at a crime scene. The case itself proved unexceptional, but the speed at which it was solved distinguished it from others.

Theodora Greenhill had been killed in the drawing room of her Kensington flat the year before. One of Greenhill's daughters discovered the body stretched across the floor

with a handkerchief placed over the face and a ligature tied around the neck. The daughter had become suspicious and let herself in when no one answered a knock on the flat's door. Upon responding, Detective Chief Inspector William Salisbury quickly deduced that Greenhill had been attacked while penning a letter at her writing desk. He found a piece of paper with the beginnings of a note: "Received from Dr. H. D. Trevor the s . . ." The "s" trailed off the page in a messy line where Greenhill had dragged the pen across the paper as she fell to the floor. Once down and incapacitated from a blow to the head with a beer bottle, she had been choked to death. Although the room showed no signs of a struggle, someone had rummaged through the drawers of Greenhill's desk.

The fact a beer bottle had been used in the assault was easy to ascertain as pieces of broken glass littered the floor and were found in a wastebasket in the flat. Salisbury called for Cherrill and awaited his arrival. When Cherrill arrived with magnifying glass in hand and customary bowler hat on his head, he wasted no time hunting for prints. His expedition through the crime scene proved fruitful, producing a bloody thumbprint on a table near the body and a print under the table. He also collected nearly one hundred pieces of glass from the shattered bottle and found prints on four of them. In Greenhill's bedroom, he found a print on a moneybox that had been pried open and emptied of its contents. Cherrill returned to the drawing room and saw the note with the name "Trevor" on it. Something inside him clicked. He placed a call to the Criminal Records Office and asked that the files on all men using the name Trevor be delivered to Greenhill's flat.

Salisbury raised a skeptical eyebrow as Cherrill took a seat and waited for the documents to be delivered. When

they finally arrived in a thick stack, Cherrill brought his magnifying glass up to his eye and began a methodical comparison between the prints in the files and those found on the pieces of glass, the table and the moneybox. It was not long before Cherrill identified the man Salisbury wanted: Harold Dorian Trevor. At the time of this announcement, the body of Mrs. Greenhill still lay unceremoniously between the two men. Salisbury and his men, acting on Cherrill's advice, tracked Trevor in less than twenty-four hours and arrested him in Wales. With his penchant for wearing a monocle—and aliases such as Lord Reginald Herbert—Trevor was a colorful character whose desire to live a life of luxury without actually working had propelled him to take violent action.

The sixty-two-year-old had visited Mrs. Greenhill to discuss renting her flat. He wrote her a check then slammed a bottle against her head when she sat down to write a receipt. As she lay on the floor dazed and moaning, he choked the life out of her. After being found guilty of murder, he met with the hangman at Wandsworth Prison.

But cases of such simplicity were the exception, not the rule. The case of the woman in the air-raid shelter did not surrender its secrets so quickly. Following the removal of the body, Cherrill promptly returned to the Yard to analyze the items taken from the scene.

The lifting of fingerprints is a delicate task, requiring a gentle touch and a steady hand. In his office, Cherrill dabbed a feather brush into a jar of white powder. Just as each stroke of an artist's brush creates an image where before there was nothing but a blank canvas, so too did Cherrill's brush on the battered surface of the woman's bag. He moved his wrist with rhythmic grace and guided the brush with his fingers. The chemical composition of fingerprint powders can vary,

but they all basically work the same way. Latent fingerprints are created by the natural secretion of sweat and oils from the skin that leave behind an outline of the friction ridges found on one's fingers. A person's fingerprints remain constant from the womb to the grave. Only damage to the skin of the finger can cause alterations to the print. Each print is wholly unique to an individual—even the prints of identical twins differ. When fingerprint powder makes contact with the swirling patterns of grease and oil left by someone's touch, the powder particles adhere to the secretions and render the print visible to the human eye.

Faint white swirls began to take shape like forms materializing in a fog as the powder settled on the bag's black surface. But even as the prints appeared, Cherrill knew a positive latent match did not guarantee a conviction. The murder of one Walter Dinivan in 1936 had established that sour point, and the case remained a source of frustration for Cherrill. Dinivan, a wealthy retiree, had been found murdered in his granddaughter's home in Bournemouth. Such force had been used to bash the man's head in that pieces of his skull were found embedded in his brain. His face revealed a bloody and shattered mess, and marks on his neck suggested someone had tried to strangle him.

There were no signs of struggle in the room where Dinivan had died, but a beer glass rested on its side on a nearby table. The glass was sent to Cherrill, who was able to lift a thumbprint from it. In the meantime, the investigation—headed by the Yard's Detective Chief Inspector Burt—moved forward. Found at the scene and removed as evidence were a woman's curling iron and a paper bag. Inquiries in town soon revealed that a man named Joseph Williams had been seen flashing a lot of cash the day after the murder. Witnesses found such behavior unusual because

Williams—a one-time soldier who served in India and fought for the Empire—had been poverty-stricken. When Burt paid a visit to Williams's house, he found the man living in disgusting squalor. Truculent by nature, Williams told the Yard man, when Burt attempted to question him, to go to hell.

When police checked with Williams a short time later, he agreed to let them look around his house. During the search, Burt's partner found a pile of paper bags—similar to the one found at the crime scene—and removed several as evidence. Burt, meanwhile, asked Williams if he could take a look at his wallet. Williams said yes. It was stuffed near-to-bursting with paper money, the result, Williams said, of a fortunate pick at the local racetrack. Burt promptly confiscated the cash, despite Williams's violent protests. The detectives left and took the evidence back to the Yard. An examination of the bags under ultraviolet light showed them to have a texture identical to the one found at the crime scene. Detectives traced the money taken from Williams to the bank where Dinivan cashed his retirement checks each week. The odd piece of the puzzle was the woman's curling iron found near the body. Burt believed it had been placed at the scene to fool police into thinking the killer was female.

Burt's hunch was born out. Detectives tracked down Williams's ex-wife, who told them that when she lived with Williams years before she used a curling iron just like the one found at Dinivan's place. Convinced he had a suspect, Burt returned to Williams's squalid home to confront him with the evidence. Williams insisted he was innocent. Burt asked Williams to prove it by letting police take his fingerprints. Williams acquiesced, and the prints were immediately rushed to Cherrill for examination. It took less than an hour for Cherrill to match one of the prints to that

found on the glass recovered at the crime scene. Investigators promptly arrested Williams, and the case went to trial.

In October 1939, despite all the evidence presented by the prosecution—including Cherrill's testimony regarding the fingerprint match—a jury found Williams not guilty. The verdict staggered Scotland Yard and was partly attributed to the defendant's incessant cries of innocence during the trial, which was heavily covered by the media. (Following Williams's death in 1951, the *News of the World* ran a story in which it revealed that Williams—on the night of his acquittal—admitted to a reporter he had killed Dinivan.) The thought of it now rankled Cherrill, whose motto had always been "Fingerprints never lie." He studied the bag's surface. He could now see the directional flow of the loops and swirls, and he guided his brush accordingly. Satisfied with his handiwork, he put the brush aside and picked up a camera. He selected a well-defined print and snapped a picture. With a piece of lifting tape, he removed excess powder from the print, being careful not to allow air bubbles to form beneath the tape. He held one end of the tape down with his left hand and rolled it flat over the print with his right, then carefully pulled it away. He applied the tape to a black background, allowing the white print to stand out in contrast. He repeated the process with several other prints.

A set of prints taken from the victim at the mortuary sat on the table in front of him. As rigor mortis had only started to set in, it had not been that difficult a task. Lifting prints from a person as stiff as a board required investigators to straighten the fingers. More often than not, this could be done by pressing down on the middle knuckle. With the woman, however, it had not been necessary—Cherrill simply dusted each finger with black powder and obtained the prints with lifting tape. He stuck each print to

a white index card and marked each finger accordingly, then compared the prints on the bag to the prints taken from the victim.

To the casual observer, fingerprints are complex maps that may or may not lead to an identification. To Cherrill, however, they were familiar landscapes that could get you where you wanted to go if you knew how to read them. There were arches and tented arches, ulnar and radial loops, and whorls. He closed his mind to everything but the dizzying patterns framed within his magnifying glass, which he passed back and forth over the prints taken from the body and those lifted from the bag. He took notes and mapped each intricate pattern. It didn't take long for Cherrill to realize—much to his dismay—that the prints lifted from the bag were those of the deceased. He lifted prints from the other objects found in the shelter. The results were all the same. This, of course, was not entirely a surprise. The cold temperature the previous night meant the killer had probably worn gloves.

Cherrill set his magnifying glass down on the table. He'd had no reason to suspect the case would be easy, for nothing in wartime London proved simple.

A piece of dead flesh—measuring seven inches by six inches—had secured Sir Bernard Spilsbury's reputation. To the British public, his name was synonymous with the morbid, and it all began in 1910 with the tantalizing case of Dr. Crippen, an extraordinary affair for its day, complete with a transatlantic chase and Scotland Yard's first usage of wireless communications.

On July 13 of that year, police summoned Spilsbury, then a young doctor at St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington, to a

house at 39 Hilldrop Crescent in Camden Town near Regent's Park. There, Scotland Yard Chief Inspector Walter Dew escorted him into the basement, where a headless body had been found buried in lime. It was impossible to identify the body's sex. The remains had been wrapped in a pair of men's pajamas, and the organs in the chest and stomach had been removed. The arms and legs also had been severed and discarded. Traces of hyocin—a highly lethal toxin—were found in the body. Dew told Spilsbury that he believed the body was that of Mrs. Cora Crippen, the wife of an American doctor living in London. Dew said Mrs. Crippen's friends had reported her missing a few weeks prior and told police they suspected her husband, Dr. Peter Hawley Harvey Crippen, of foul play. They told detectives that Dr. Crippen had been seen some weeks earlier at a cocktail party with his typist, Ms. Ethel LeNeve, at his side. When friends asked about his wife, Crippen said she had recently died while on a trip to California and had been cremated stateside. The fact LeNeve wore one of Cora Crippen's expensive brooches cast the story in a dubious light.

Dew had interviewed Crippen at the Hilldrop Crescent house a few days after his wife had been reported missing. The doctor told Dew his wife was really alive and living in Chicago with her new lover. He said he was ashamed of his wife's tawdry behavior and had fabricated the story of her death to spare his pride. Dew—who, as a young constable, had been the first officer to respond to the scene of Jack the Ripper's fifth and final victim—doubted the doctor's story. When Dew returned a few days later on July 13 to interview the doctor a second time, he found that Crippen had fled. A search of the house quickly yielded the body in the basement. Dew had promptly contacted St. Mary's Hospital for an available pathologist to come and examine the

remains. On July 16, an arrest warrant for Crippen and LeNeve was issued. The papers went wild with the story and splashed it across their front pages. The media frenzy only intensified when officials learned on July 22 that Crippen and his lover had fled across the Atlantic on a steamship bound for Canada.

Scotland Yard sent a wireless communiqué to all ships sailing to foreign ports, urging captains and their crews to watch for the two fugitives. The captain of the SS *Montrose* had received the wire and promptly responded. On July 14, two passengers—a Mr. Johnson and his sixteen-year-old son—had boarded the *Montrose* in Antwerp. The captain immediately noted that something about the two seemed strange. Although supposedly father and son, they walked the decks hand in hand. The boy spoke with a very high voice and always crossed his legs when he sat down. Scotland Yard received the following wireless message from the *Montrose*'s captain on July 22: "Have strong suspicion that Crippen London Cellar murderer and accomplice are amongst saloon passengers. Moustache shaved off, growing a beard. Accomplice dressed as a boy, voice, manner undoubtedly a girl."

Dew immediately booked passage on a faster ship, raced across the Atlantic and beat Crippen to Montreal by two days. The doctor and his lover were arrested when their ship reached port, promptly shipped back to England and stood trial at the Central Criminal Court for "the murder and mutilation" of Cora Crippen. The trial helped push Spilsbury's name into the national consciousness. Oxford educated, the thirty-three-year-old Spilsbury, a man of little humor and grim disposition, offered testimony crucial to the prosecution's case. Spilsbury had positively identified the remains found in Crippen's basement as Cora

Crippen. That piece of skin—the one measuring seven inches by six inches—made the identification possible. The skin, removed from the lower-front abdomen, had a scar on it. Cora Crippen's sister testified that her sister had a scar on her lower-front abdomen, the result of an operation she'd had to remove her ovaries. The defense argued that the scar was merely a fold in the skin brought on by death. But with microscope, slides and a long explanation on the properties of scars, Spilsbury disproved the defense's theory. The jury listened and convicted Crippen of murder after deliberating for a mere half hour. Authorities released LeNeve from custody after she had been found not guilty of being an accessory after the fact. On November 28, 1910, less than one mile from where he buried his wife, Crippen had his date with the hangman.

Over the next three decades—through his graphic testimony and medical expertise—Spilsbury would be instrumental in sending hundreds of murderers to the gallows. He performed thousands of autopsies, including those of the men his testimony condemned to death. In short order, his name became associated with Britain's most notorious crimes—cases so violent and bizarre, they rivaled the most outrageous works of detective fiction.

At 2:30 p.m. on February 9, Spilsbury took his scalpel to the woman's body found in the air-raid shelter. The corpse lay on a metal gurney with a circular hole drilled between the ankles to drain the blood. Detective Inspector Clare looked on. Externally, she appeared to be a well-nourished woman who, in life, stood about five feet, four inches tall. The postmortem stains on her skin were livid, as were her lips and fingernails. Her pupils were dilated and the whites of her eyes were clouded with blood and marred with hemorrhages. Spilsbury noted tiny hemorrhages in the skin of

her forehead and behind the eyelids. Above her left eyebrow, a superficial abrasion ran about one-half inch in length. Starting at the point of her chin and running along her right jawline was a bruise more than two inches long. Three inches below the jaw were two linear abrasions across the front of the neck. Both abrasions measured about an inch in length and were three-eighths of an inch apart. Two faint abrasions—one of them curved in the shape of a fingernail—scarred the neck about an inch above the two linear marks. There was an abrasion on the right of the neck and an abrasion on the back of the neck, level with the wounds in the front.

The lower part of the victim's right breast was bloodied by a number of small abrasions and a scratch etched into the skin nearly two inches long. Her legs were bruised. Spilsbury photographed the woman's face, then, taking scalpel in hand, he cut her open. The deep surface of her scalp had numerous hemorrhages, and a bruise was evident just above the right temple. Her organs were congested with blood and there were more hemorrhages on the surface of her heart. Her airways were clogged with blood and froth. The force of the grip at her throat was evident in the cricoid cartilage of the larynx, which had been fractured on both sides, with bleeding around the fractures. There were additional hemorrhages in the muscles of the neck and a bruise below the angle of the left jaw. Both sides of the victim's tongue were bruised heavily.

"The tonsils," Spilsbury noted, "were engorged with blood."

A large amount of food—some of which appeared to be beetroot—in an advanced stage of digestion remained in the woman's stomach. Aside from some blood in her vagina, her genitals appeared to be uninjured. Spilsbury put down his

scalpel and turned to Clare. "The cause of death was asphyxia due to strangulation by the hand, based on the abrasions and bruises on the front of her neck," he said. "The distribution of the injuries on the neck suggests they were inflicted by the left hand. There was no spermatozoa in the vagina." Nor was there a motive for the killing or a clue as to the woman's identity.

Technicians developed the picture Spilsbury took later that afternoon. The black-and-white image did nothing to soften the grisly nature of the woman's condition. Clare ordered that copies of it be made and distributed to show residents in the neighborhood where the body had been discovered.

Somebody had to know something.