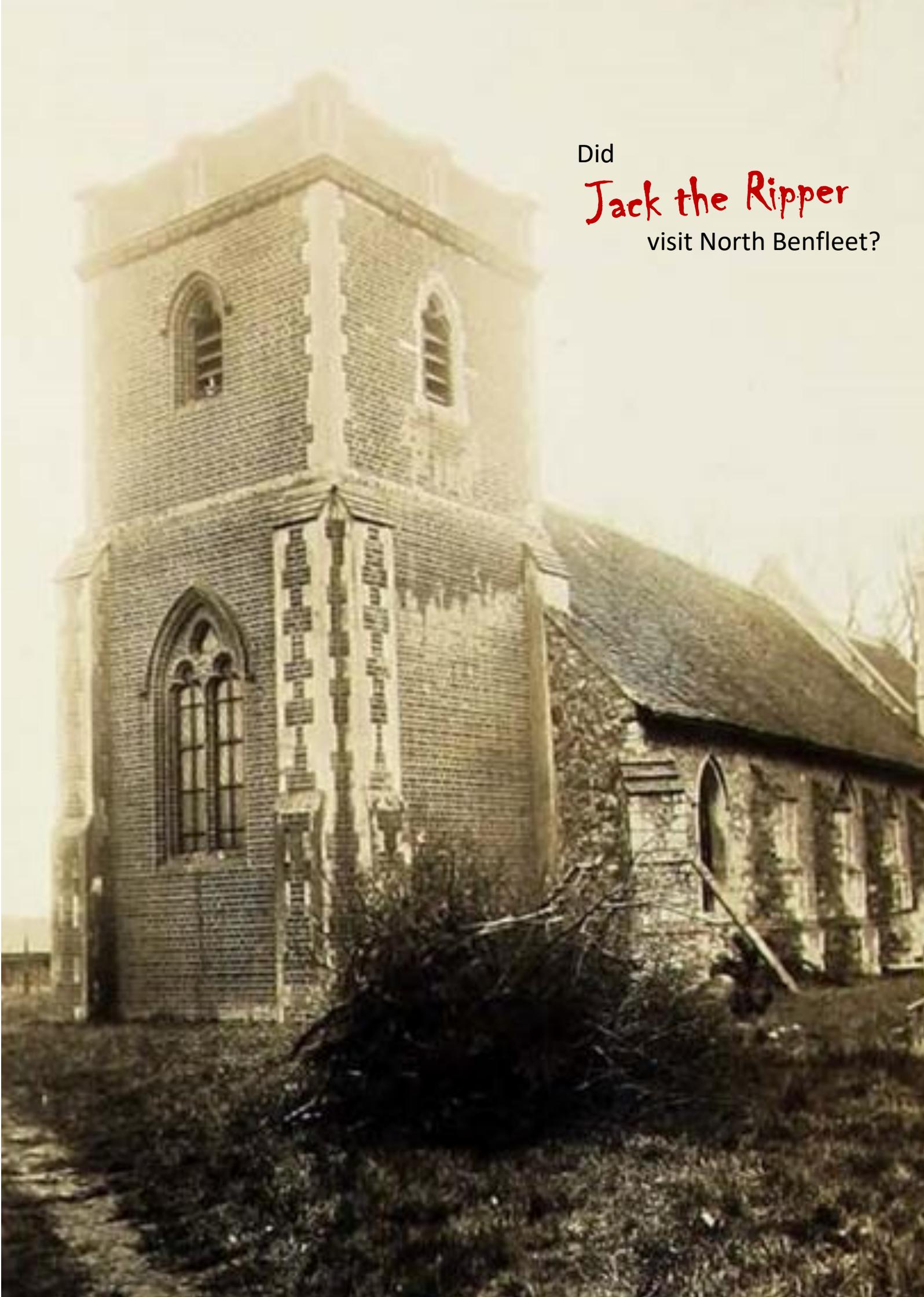


Did

**Jack the Ripper**

visit North Benfleet?



During 1888 Whitechapel became the scene for the horrific murders of at least five women at the hands of a serial killer that became known as Jack the Ripper.

At the time the East End of London was a sea of poverty in the richest, and most powerful empire the World has ever seen.



On 31<sup>st</sup> August 1888 the mutilated body of Mary Ann Nichols was found in Bucks Row. On 8 September Annie Chapman's body was found in a backyard in Hanbury Street. She had also been mutilated.

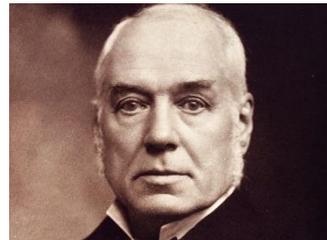
The 30 September saw, what is now known as, 'The Double Event'. Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes were both killed. It appears that the killer was disturbed whilst with his first victim and then moved on to find another.

The last of the canonical five victims was discovered on the morning of 9 November 1888 in a room in 13 Millers Court, Dorset Street. Mary Jane Kelly had been so badly mutilated she was unrecognisable.

Two years before the Whitechapel Murders Dr John Williams was appointed as a physician to the Royal Family. John had been born in Carmarthenshire, Wales on 6 November 1840.

John was going to study for a career in the church but went to Glasgow in 1857 and studied mathematics. On returning to Wales two years later he became an apprentice to a surgeon in Swansea, as well as to apothecaries (what we would think of as chemists today).

In 1861 John went to London where he studied medicine at University College Hospital and was a prize-winning student. He became a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons (MRCS), a Bachelor of Medicine (MB) and a Doctor of Medicine (MD). He returned to Wales to work as a GP in Swansea.

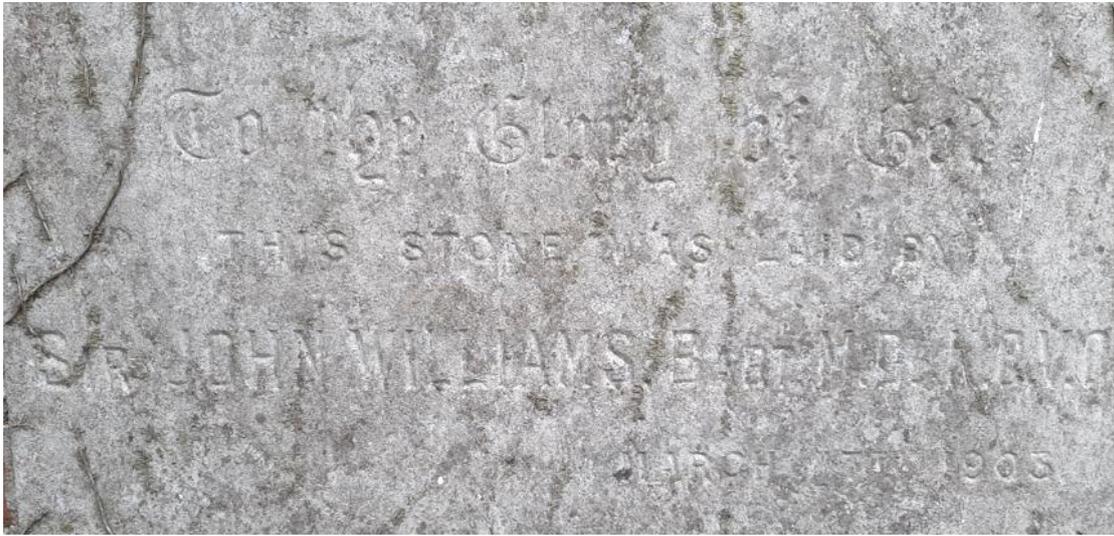


During 1872 John married Mary Ann Hughes and the couple would eventually move to London. Williams became the President of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. He went on to become a well-respected physician and house surgeon in University Hospital London, as well as a teacher.

In 1894 Queen Victoria had made John 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet to the City of London.

In 1902 John Williams was knighted and he retired in 1903 and moved back to Wales.

It was during 1903 that Sir John Williams visited All Saint's Church in North Benfleet and laid a stone in the new tower that had been added to the church. With the churchyard, and the tower, recently being tidied and cleared the stone is now visible.



Sir John died in 1926, surviving his wife by 15 years. He had become a great benefactor to the National Library of Wales, donating books, manuscripts, maps and arts depicting Welsh life.

Fast forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and a relative of Dr Williams started researching his illustrious ancestor.

Tony Williams had discovered some of the doctors' possessions. Amongst these items was a letter written by Sir John stating that he would be in Whitechapel on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 1888, the day Annie Chapman was killed.

Tony then made the journey to the National Library of Wales to carry on his research and view more of the doctor's belongings. Several diaries were found, but those for the year of 1888 had been removed.

There was also a knife and some slides containing 'animal tissue', which aren't really surprising for a doctor.

A log was found from 1885. In it Williams had made a record of an abortion he'd carried out on one 'Mary Anne Nicholls' (Anne rather than Ann). A record was discovered of a payment of £18 being made to a 'J. Williams' in 1885 by the Whitechapel Workhouse.

Abortion wouldn't become legalised for another 80 years.

'Uncle Jack', a book detailing the accusations against Sir John Williams was written by Tony Williams and published in 2005. The author claimed that the doctor was having an affair with Mary Jane Kelly, but there is almost nothing to substantiate this claim.

The motive is given as a medical one. The doctor was mutilating these women to gain samples of their uteri. His wife appears to have been infertile and he was looking for an explanation, and possibly a cure. The couple remained childless.

Though some of the evidence is intriguing a lot of it can easily be disregarded, but not enough that the doctor can be completely removed as a suspect. We know he had medical knowledge and that he was in Whitechapel at the time of one of the murders.

So, did Jack the Ripper visit North Benfleet? Probably not, but we can't quite be sure.