



UNSOLVED CASE

THE BUNNY AND THE SCHOOLGIRL

THE MURDER OF EVE STRATFORD AND LYNNE WEEDON — A GLAMOROUS PLAYBOY BUNNY AND A SCHOOLGIRL BECAME GRUESOMELY LINKED WHEN IT WAS DISCOVERED THEY SHARED THE SAME KILLER

WORDS OLIVER PFEIFFER

Young, attractive and ambitious, Eve Stratford was known as 'Bunny Ava' when she joined London's prestigious Playboy Club on Park Lane in 1973. During her two years employment as a lunchtime cocktail Bunny she was considered a good worker – always polite, punctual and dedicated to her profession.

"Everybody liked her, she was a lovely, friendly girl who just came to work and did her job," remembers Erin Morris, the former Bunny Mother who had hired the then 19-year-old Stratford and managed her employment at Playboy. "She was well spoken, professional and had a good work ethic. She never rang up to say she couldn't make it to work and if she wanted time off she would always give plenty of notice."

During the mid-1960s and 1970s the Playboy Club was one of the most popular celebrity hubs in London and as a result the stars were literally in Stratford's eyes. But she had aspirations to become famous herself.

In 1975, having already tested, but been rejected for America's coveted *Playboy* magazine, she grasped the opportunity to pose nude for British rival *Mayfair* instead. Stratford became 'Miss March' and was introduced as 'Eva von Bork' – 'the most classic blonde'. The subsequent explicit photos were accompanied by equally explicit text, that supposedly claimed she liked to be dominated in bed, "kept

in her place", but that she didn't like to be "whipped or tied up or things like that".

A CHILLING PRECURSOR

When the published photographs were drawn to the attention of Playboy, Eve Stratford was promptly called into their offices and put on three months suspension. Playboy strictly forbade any of their bunnies from posing for any of their rival publications.

"She wasn't upset, she understood what she'd done and why it had to happen," continues Erin Morris. "She told me she'd done it because she wanted to get into modelling. I said she could come back to work when the suspension was over, however she anticipated this would be her step up the ladder, therefore she wouldn't need to come back. She wasn't just going to wait on tables – she wanted to do something with her life."

Stratford had acquired an agent and her next modelling assignment was posing for nude pin-up photographs for a South African magazine. Consequently she also modelled for a crime-fiction book cover, where she had to look terrified as a knife was thrust against her throat. It was to be an unintentionally distasteful precursor for things to come.

It wasn't long before Stratford began to tell friends that she was receiving mysterious phone calls where the caller had hung up without speaking, and later of a man loitering about and following her in the streets.

TUESDAY 18 MARCH 1975

The aspiring model had lunch with her photographic agent in Camden before heading to Bayswater to meet with a publisher. Following the meeting Stratford purchased some dried flowers at Whiteleys shopping centre, then took the train home to Leyton and arrived at Leyton Underground station at 3.45pm. As she left the station to walk the three quarters of a mile to her flat in Lyndhurst Drive, it began to rain.

At 4.10pm Stratford arrived alone at her upstairs rented flat and took off her wet clothes in her bedroom. But she wouldn't be alone for long. At 4.30pm a neighbour from downstairs overheard Stratford conversing calmly to a man. Around 5.15pm the same neighbour heard a loud thump that sounded like a chair toppling over and footsteps walking down the stairs and onto the street. Then the phone began to ring, but remained unanswered.

Ten minutes later at 5.25pm Stratford's live-in boyfriend Tony Priest, a forklift truck driver and part-time singer in a band, arrived at the flat along with a fellow tenant. They found Stratford face down on the bedroom floor beside her mattress and the now blood-splattered flowers she'd purchased. She was wearing a pink bra and matching panties under a blue negligee, which was open at the front. Her arms had been tied behind her back using a stocking and the belt of a dressing gown. A second nylon stocking was tied around one of her ankles. Her throat had been so savagely

CLUE WEAPON

Despite a search no murder weapon is ever found however, following a post-mortem, it is speculated that a heavy walling or lump hammer was used.

CLUE CRIMES LINKED

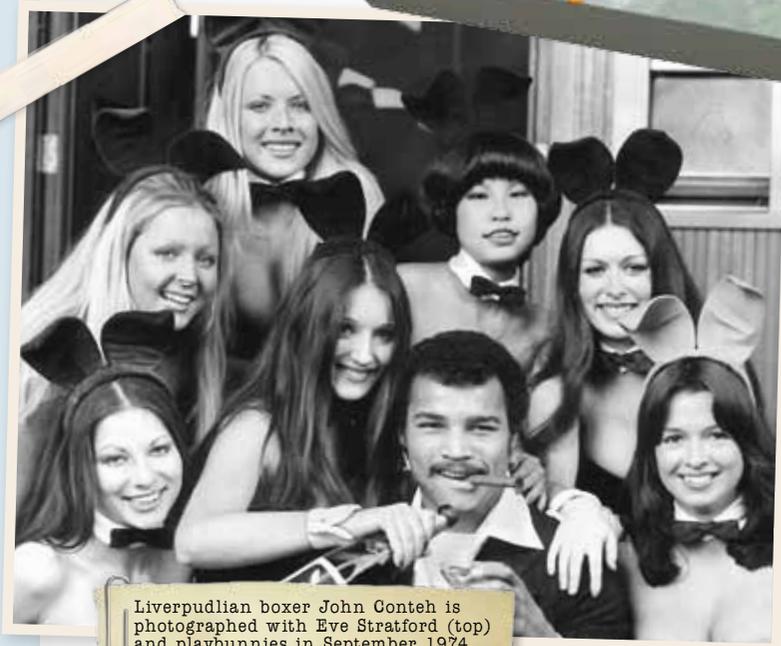
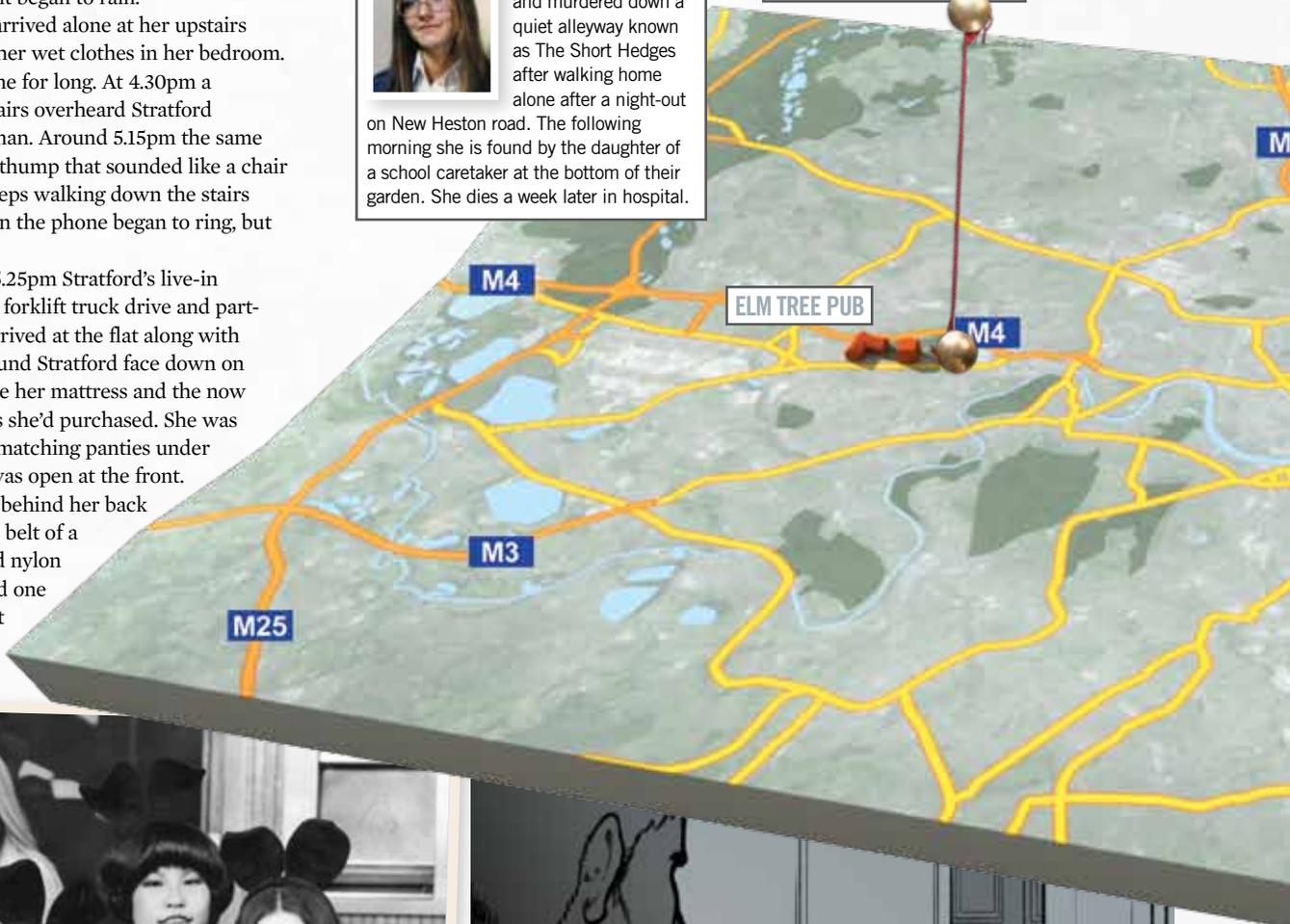
In 2006 an investigation into unsolved crimes in the London region leads to the comparison of DNA matter from both the murders of Stratford and Weedon. These confirm that they shared the same killer.

VICTIM LYNNE WEEDON



Schoolgirl Lynne Weedon is attacked and murdered down a quiet alleyway known as The Short Hedges after walking home alone after a night-out on New Heston road. The following morning she is found by the daughter of a school caretaker at the bottom of their garden. She dies a week later in hospital.

3 SEPTEMBER 1975



Liverpudlian boxer John Conteh is photographed with Eve Stratford (top) and playbunnies in September 1974



ABOVE Suspect Peter Sutcliffe was known to use a blunt instrument for some of his murders

LONDON KILLING SPREE

THOUGH THE THREE WOMEN WERE KILLED IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF LONDON, EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THEY SHARED THE SAME MURDERER

VICTIM **LYNDA FARROW**



Pregnant croupier Lynda Farrow murdered at home. She had been brutally battered and stabbed. Mirroring the style of Eve

Stratford's murder there was an attempt to sever her head with a serrated knife, which is later found in the kitchen.

CLUE **SIGNATURE**

Though no DNA was ever recovered, the MO of Lynda Farrow's murder is similar to Eve Stratford's – particularly the (attempted) severing of the head.

19 JANUARY 1979

WITNESS

A couple of schoolgirls who were passing by Farrow's home heard a sudden shriek before seeing the front door abruptly slammed shut. Later another witness said they saw a man running up Whitehall Road.

CLUE **FOOTPRINTS**

Police later found footprints leading to the front door in the snow; the imprints come from size seven wellington boots.

CLUE **IDENTITY**

A witness describes the running man as being in his 30s, around five feet nine, dark curly Afro type hair, with sideburns to the bottom of his ears and deep-set eyes.

PLAYBOY CLUB LONDON

18 MARCH 1975

VICTIM **EVE STRATFORD**



Playboy Bunny Eve Stratford is found dead at home by her boyfriend Tony Priest and another tenant. Her arms are tied behind her back using

a stocking and the belt of a dressing gown. A second nylon stocking is tied around one of her ankles. Her head is almost completely severed. There was no sign of a break-in.

WITNESS

Witnesses reported seeing Stratford walking until the last 100 yards of her journey home.

M25

“ HER THROAT HAD BEEN SO SAVAGELY SLASHED THAT HER HEAD WAS ALMOST COMPLETELY SEVERED. ”



slashed that her head was almost completely severed.

Although there were no obvious signs of a struggle, it later became apparent that the killer had silenced Stratford by covering her mouth as he slit her throat eight to a dozen times. It was confirmed by a post-mortem that Stratford had had sex that afternoon, but it was undetermined whether this was consensual or rape. There was no evidence of sexual assault or any sign of a break-in or struggle. Police were able to track Stratford's journey through witnesses who reported seeing her up until the last 100 yards before her home.

"We were all in a state of shock," recalls Erin Morris. "I remember one of the saddest things was the night her father arrived back from work from South Africa. We sent a car to the airport to pick him up and take him to the club, as he wanted to speak to somebody in charge. He was crying. He couldn't understand what had happened and why. He said Eve was so happy working at Playboy. I remember we were all upset for him – it was awful. He'd only spoken to his daughter about four nights before and naturally he was absolutely devastated."

The former Bunny Mother considers the context of the crime in relation to the era. "A lot of people didn't lock their houses in those days. She might have had a lot of things in her hand and walked in the door and didn't lock it," she reflects. "Someone might have been watching. I think she just closed the door and didn't do the bolt and that's when her attacker came in."

Erin Morris, (whose maiden name is Stratton) also remembers an incident before the murder, where a mix up with names resulted in her receiving a present that was meant for the late Playboy Bunny, who might have had a mysterious admirer.

"I remember it was Valentine's Day, which was a month before the murder and a red rose was sent to the Playboy Club. It looked like it was for 'E. Stratton' so it was sent up to my office," Erin Morris reveals. "When I looked at it I said 'no this is for Eve Stratford: Stratford wasn't spelt correctly,

but it was for her. I remember when I gave them to her she sort of knew who they were from, however I never asked her. So in retrospect the similarity between our names was quite frightening."

WEDNESDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 1975

In the London Borough of Hounslow, six months after the murder of Eve Stratford, 16-year-old schoolgirl Lynne Weedon was walking home from an evening out with friends. Accompanied by two of those friends, she left The Elm Tree pub in New Heston road at 10.30pm. At 11.10pm the group separated at a junction and Weedon took her usual short cut down a quiet alleyway known as The Short Hedges, which led to her parent's home on Lampton Avenue. Five minutes later, halfway down the darkened path, she was attacked – her skull was smashed from behind using a blunt instrument.

Weedon's blue jeans and underwear were then removed as she lay in the dirt, leaving her naked from the waist down. As she lay there dying she was sexually molested; however her attacker suddenly panicked when he heard a person walking down the alleyway. Fearing he would be seen, the killer threw his victim over a wired fence, which boarded an electricity substation and left her for dead.

At 7.30am the following morning, Weedon's slumped, unconscious body was found by the teenage daughter of a school caretaker at the bottom of their garden, which connected to the substation. Tragically Weedon died a week later in West Middlesex Hospital from a brain haemorrhage.

Despite a thorough search by police, the murder weapon was never recovered and there were no witnesses.

“ WEEDON'S BLUE JEANS AND UNDERWEAR WERE REMOVED AS SHE LAY IN THE DIRT, LEAVING HER NAKED FROM THE WAIST ”

ABOVE LEFT The home of Bunny Girl Even Stratford and the scene of her horrific murder.

ABOVE An unknown visitor with some grass decorations for Eve, 21 March 1975. The police tried to trace the man in this photo but to no avail



ABOVE Could Farrow have averted death if she had simply closed the door behind her?



ABOVE A size seven boot imprint was found in the snow - the same size as the Ripper's

THE INVESTIGATION

DESPITE LINKING THE TWO MURDERS OVER 30 YEARS LATER, POLICE ARE STILL NO CLOSER TO THE KILLER

The murders of Eve Stratford and Lynne Weedon would be gruesomely connected 32 years later in 2006, as a result of breakthrough DNA testing, which confirmed they shared the same killer.

Original enquires by Metropolitan Police into the Playboy Bunny's murder quickly ruled out Stratford's boyfriend Tony Priest as the perpetrator, he later voluntarily sampled his DNA, which cleared him completely.

Focus turned to the explicit *Mayfair* article, which had a potential readership of over 400,000 monthly subscribers. Perhaps the highly suggestive prose had teased the murderer into committing the crime. *Mayfair* features editor David Brenner, who wrote the words, revealed that he had in fact conducted the interview with Stratford over the phone and therefore he hadn't actually met her face-to-face. However the police had a difficult time believing Brenner had never met Stratford in the flesh.

Also under suspicion was the photographer Peter Pugh-Cook, who had captured the nude photos for both the South African magazine and for the crime cover that infamously, pre-determined Stratford's untimely death with the knife to her throat. It was revealed that the art director, Ken Simms, had taken a liking to Stratford during the photo-shoot and had asked for her phone number.

However Stratford had refused and later wrote his number down in her diary instead. Consequently Simms was held overnight and questioned by police.

Investigators then looked into who became acquainted with Stratford at Playboy. Abdul Khawaja, (nick-named 'Little Abdul' by staff) was a well known and liked Lebanese club member who visited Playboy every day for lunch and enjoyed socialising with the bunnies, particularly Bunny Ava. As a result he was high on police's suspect list.

Detective Superintendent (DI) John McFadzean, who led the investigation, later said: "Three men from different walks of life and parts of London confessed to the murder. Such confessions were easily proved to be false... An admission of strangulation when death is caused by stabbing speaks for itself."

Detectives from Leyton CID in East London spent a year on the investigation before they wound down inquiries and put their paperwork into storage. Despite a thorough search, no murder weapon was ever recovered from Lynne Weedon's murder scene, however a post-mortem speculated it most likely would have been a heavy walling or lump hammer. Police examined hundreds of criminal records of convicted sex offenders and interviewed them, but this yielded no suspects either.

Then there was the aforementioned DNA

breakthrough. In 2006, a Murder Review Group, (named Operation Stealth, headed by the Metropolitan Police squad) was formulated to review long unsolved homicides in the city. Fortuitously both Stratford and Weedon's forensic evidence from the corresponding murder scenes had been retained; therefore, using familial DNA tests as an investigative tool, the police compared the results and discovered that their killers both shared the same genetic fingerprints. Those unique genetic fingerprints cleared both the late Abdul Khawaja (via DNA acquired from his son) and *Mayfair* editor David Brenner.

On 23 April 2015, 40 years since their murders were committed, police issued a fresh appeal with a £40,000 reward for any information regarding the linked murders. The appeal was broadcast on Britain's long-running BBC ONE *Crimewatch* programme.

Investigating officer Detective Chief Inspector Noel McHugh said: "I firmly believe there is someone out there who has information about who carried out these murders. It's inconceivable [this killer] has kept the perfect secret for 40 years."

He speculated that the killer must have let slip some details regarding the crime, perhaps to a friend, partner or even a cellmate. Police consider that the murderer would now most likely be in his sixties or seventies.

THE YORKSHIRE RIPPER CONNECTION

COULD CONVICTED SERIAL KILLER PETER SUTCLIFFE BE BEHIND THE MURDERS?

Police may have struggled to find a suspect for the killings of Eve Stratford, Lynne Weedon and Lynda Farrow, but retired police Intelligence Officer Chris Clark, along with investigative journalist Tim Tate, conducted their own investigations into those crimes. Along with a series of other unsolved murders across the country, they have put across a very convincing case in their book *Yorkshire Ripper: The Secret Murders*.

Chillingly, Clark reveals that a pre-convicted Peter Sutcliffe (aka The Yorkshire Ripper) was actually in the vicinity just days before Stratford was slaughtered. He also surmises that Sutcliffe had an accessible route to the Playboy Bunny's home from where he was staying in Alperton in the North Central London Borough of Brent. Sutcliffe was in the area for the wedding of his sister-in-law, which was four days after Stratford was murdered.

Tellingly Stratford's murder bore the same crime signature as some of Sutcliffe's confirmed future killings. But due specifically to the drastically different modus operandi of Stratford's murder, London police never linked the Yorkshire Ripper at the time. There was also the assumption by West Yorkshire police that the Ripper solely targeted prostitutes and that he only operated within the Yorkshire and Lancashire areas.

The ex-copper also emphasises how the force never considered the notion that The Ripper may have consciously varied his MO between attacks to ward off suspicion. Revealingly the murder six months later of Lynne Weedon, (which as we've learnt, would be linked by forensics to Stratford's demise) did bare the Ripper's notorious MO – the smashing of the skull from behind and the removal of the lower parts of his victim's clothing.

Clark reveals that Sutcliffe was in London during the week of Weedon's killing too, stopping off at a home in North London before flying out of Heathrow – just four miles from the murder. In addition, in an mirror of Stratford's killing, Sutcliffe slashed Irene Richardson's throat during her savage murder in 1977, which the ex-copper says in *Yorkshire Ripper: The Secret Murders*, bore wounds "identical to the savage cuts inflicted on Eve Stratford." There was also a startling similarity with the unsolved murder of Patsy Morris in Hounslow in 1980, in which her wrists had been tied behind her back using a stocking.

Strangely, following his conviction, the Ripper's insistence that his crimes weren't sexually motivated attacks, distanced him from any suspicion from other unsolved crimes across the nation. Clark believes it was a cunning ploy by Sutcliffe to convince psychoanalysts that he was insane and thus avoid subsequent jail incarceration.

"Peter Sutcliffe read 'nuddy books' of the Mayfair and Penthouse variety and kept a load in his [lorry] cab," Clark tells *Real Crime*. "He also kept a photograph in his wallet of his future sister-in-law clad in her underwear."

Clark also closely analysed the police reports concerning

the former Playboy Bunny murder and drew his own conclusions. "The police stated that she had been involved in some sexual activity, but there was no semen found in her underwear [however there were some found] on the dressing gown cord and on the scarf binding her wrists," reveals Clark.

"It is my conclusion that Eve was firstly garroted into unconsciousness before her throat was cut hiding the evidence. The pathologist obviously found evidence of asphyxiation and concluded a hand clamped over her mouth was the cause."

We already know that there was an unsuccessful attempt to sever the head of Lynda Farrow during her murder and Clark adds "it is entirely conceivable that [Peter Sutcliffe] was in London when Lynda Farrow was murdered [as well]." He also discloses that the description from a witness that described a man running in the area bore an uncannily resemblance to the Yorkshire Ripper.



Serial killer Peter Sutcliffe has never admitted to the killings and is already serving a life term



ABOVE Farrow's daughters disturbed the killer at the scene of the crime, but were too late

“ THE DESCRIPTION HAD A FAMILIARITY ABOUT IT TO A STRING OF OTHER MURDERS ”

LYNDA FARROW MURDER

On the afternoon of 19 January 1979, almost four years and five miles away from Eve Stratford's murder, Lynda Farrow, a pregnant 29 year old was finishing her shift at the International Sporting Club. At 2.40pm the mother-of-two arrived alone at her home on Whitehall Road, Woodford Green, East London. She heard the phone ringing and dashed inside, making the fatal mistake of leaving her front door ajar. Moments later a sudden shriek was heard by schoolgirls who were passing by, before the door was slammed shut.

Due to a lunchtime snowstorm, school had closed early and Lynda's daughters arrived home 20 minutes later. As a result of the girls repeatedly knocking at the door, the killer abandoned his attack. With no response to their calls the girls peered through the letterbox. To their horror they saw their mother face down in a pool of blood in the hallway. Farrow had been brutally battered and stabbed to death, however she hadn't been sexually assaulted. In an eerie shadow of Eve Stratford's murder, an attempt had been made to sever her



Crimewatch offered a £20,000 reward for Lynda's murderer

head using a serrated knife.

Police found footprints leading to the front door in the snow, the imprints came from size seven wellington boots. Although there was no DNA evidence, the modus operandi was familiar and police haven't ruled out a connection that the killer was behind Eve Stratford and thus Lynne Weedon's murder too.

A witness was later said to have seen a man running up Whitehall Road. The description had a familiarity about it to a string of other murders committed across the country.

THE AFTERMATH

WHY WON'T POLICE CONSIDER PETER SUTCLIFFE A PRIME SUSPECT?

With apparently no further suspects, Chris Clark's recent claims that the Yorkshire Ripper could be behind the murders of Eve Stratford, Lynne Weedon and Lynda Farrow, (along with a slew of other unsolved murders) would appear to be a persuasive lead, particularly when attention is drawn to his whereabouts during these crimes, and the descriptions by witnesses that all resembled the Ripper.

A simple DNA comparison from the murder cases to that of the now incarcerated Sutcliffe should prove once and for all whether he was culpable, however this is when enquires become decidedly complex and politically provocative.

Sutcliffe is a non-secretor – someone who doesn't secrete their blood type into their saliva or semen. Police currently only hold mouth swab and hair in their national databases, therefore a new full blood sample would have to be obtained from Sutcliffe to compare with the sample's of his alleged victims. In order to do this a Court Order would be required.

“I believe they have sufficient prime facia evidence and similar fact evidence to link Sutcliffe as a suspect and to start the process from there,” claims Clark.

However, as Clark reveals, during Sutcliffe's decade-long killing spree, West Yorkshire Police unknowingly had The Ripper in for questioning on at least nine separate occasions and every time he was inevitably released without any further enquires and able to walk free, and thus commit further crimes.

Following Sutcliffe's conviction, Assistant Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police Colin Sampson conducted an internal enquiry into the alleged failure of his force during the Yorkshire Ripper investigation.

In addition, a separate investigation by Lawrence Byford, (ordered by Home Secretary at the time William Whitelaw) looked into the incompetence of West Yorkshire Police in taking so long to apprehend Sutcliffe. Yet as Clark reveals in his book, the findings of these reports were ultimately undisclosed and kept away from public scrutiny.

Tellingly, the Byford Report concluded that Peter Sutcliffe was probably responsible for numerous attacks on other women between 1969 and 1980 and in other parts of the country. Therefore could Stratford, Weedon and Farrow be amongst those others targeted by the Yorkshire Ripper?

Due to the subsequent suppression of these findings Sutcliffe wasn't charged for any further offences and many unsolved cases have been buried. Clark claims that the information has been suppressed in order to spare embarrassment to West Yorkshire Police. Obviously this doesn't help the surviving families and friends of Stratford, Weedon and Farrow, along with the loved ones of the other suspected Ripper victims.