THE MARY JANE KELLY PROJECT

A desk-based assessment of the identity and burial location of Mary Jane Kelly (d. 1888), St Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery, Leytonstone

Dr Turi King, Mathew Morris, Professor Kevin Schürer and Carl Vivian

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Dr Turi King, Mathew Morris, Professor Kevin Schürer

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Summary

To this day, Mary Jane Kelly, the victim of the Victorian serial killer known as Jack the Ripper, remains a much-discussed but enigmatic figure. Her brutal murder on 9th November, 1888 shocked a nation already profoundly horrified by the spate of ghastly murders that had taken place that year in Whitechapel, in London’s East End. Hundreds of people turned out to pay their respects when she was buried at St Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery in Leytonstone ten days later. Yet, despite her notoriety, there is so little verifiable information known about her, in stark contrast to the Ripper’s other four victims, that some authors have concluded that she was living under an assumed identity, leading to speculation about who she truly was.

In 2015, a new book purported to reveal Kelly’s true identity. The author, Wynne Weston-Davies, claimed that the woman known to everyone as Mary Jane Kelly was living under a pseudonym and was in fact his great-aunt Elizabeth Weston Davies. Subsequently, Dr Turi King of the University of Leicester was approached by the author Patricia Cornwell regarding the putative testing of DNA from the remains of Mary Jane Kelly and matching them against those of Wynne Weston-Davies, with whom she had been in contact.

Following discussions with all parties in early 2016 it was agreed that a desk-based study would be produced by a team of researchers from the University of Leicester to address three key questions: (1) Could the critical requirement of being able to accurately identify Mary Jane Kelly’s remains be achieved in order to carry out DNA testing to determine if there was genetic evidence consistent with a DNA match between Wynne Weston-Davies and the remains of his great-aunt, Elizabeth Weston Davies, the individual putatively buried under the alias Mary Jane Kelly? (2) Where was Mary Jane Kelly buried and could her grave site be accurately located using surviving records? And (3) What was the likely condition and survival of Mary Jane Kelly’s remains, if an exhumation was carried out? All three questions would need to be resolved if an application for exhumation was to be submitted to the Ministry of Justice.

This report is prepared based on information current and available as of February 2017. A site visit to St Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery, Leytonstone was undertaken by the Research Team in May 2016 to examine the burial area and carry out research in the cemetery’s burial records. Additional research examined the case put forward in Wynne Weston-Davies’ book for Kelly being Elizabeth Weston Davies.

The project has concluded that whilst DNA testing of the remains of Mary Jane Kelly would allow for a comparison to be made between those remains and Wynne Weston-Davies, in order to determine if the genetic data is consistent with them being related; at present, much of the case for Mary Jane Kelly and Elizabeth Weston Davies being the same individual is circumstantial or conjectural, with no conclusive evidence that the two are the same person.

Today, Kelly’s modern grave marker likely has little relevance to the real location of her grave, which appears to have been unmarked before the 1980s, and the present marker is positioned in a burial system that has only been in use since the 1940s. No evidence for the original 19th century layout of graves can be seen on the ground but two hypothetical grave areas and a search area of c.85 sq m has been generated by reconstructing the 19th-century burial layout from burial registers and historic maps. However, this area likely contains between 54 and 394 sets of human remains, from a potential 150 to 1,240 named individuals. Genealogical research would take years to trace present-day relatives for these individuals, all of whom would probably have to give their consent to any exhumation. Furthermore, ground conditions in the cemetery do not appear to be favourable for the good preservation of coffin material, and any surviving skeletal remains are likely to also be in poor condition which would affect the likelihood of retrieving any useable DNA for analysis. All said, the number of unknown variables mean that there is still no guarantee that Mary Jane Kelly is buried within the hypothetical search area, and unfortunately, even if she is, it is very likely that her grave has been disturbed or destroyed by more recent grave digging.

As information presently stands, a successful search would require a herculean effort that would likely take...
years of research, would be prohibitively costly and would cause unwarranted disturbance to an unknown number of individuals buried in a cemetery that is still in daily use, with no guarantee of success. As such, it is extremely unlikely that any application for an exhumation licence would be granted.
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The Mary Jane Kelly Project

A desk-based assessment of the identity and burial location of Mary Jane Kelly (d. 1888), St Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery, Leytonstone

Dr Turi King, Mathew Morris, Professor Kevin Schürer and Carl Vivian

University of Leicester

Introduction

Who is Mary Jane Kelly? On 19th November, 1888 large crowds of people gathered in London’s East End to watch a small funeral procession leave Shoreditch Mortuary and make the six-mile journey to St Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery in Leytonstone. So many people turned out that the cortège often struggled to make progress and a large number of police had to be deployed to keep order. But who could elicit such a remarkable outpouring of shared emotion from such a large assembly? Indeed, only ten days previously few would ever have heard of the deceased woman that they had come to pay their respects to. Tragically, Mary Jane Kelly had gained international Notoriety in death because she was the victim of the Victorian serial killer known as ‘Jack the Ripper’ (Figure 1).

The gruesome detail of her demise has been exhaustively examined by numerous authors, including Paley (1995), Eddleston (2001), Begg (2004), Keppel, Weiss, Brown and Welch (2005), and Sugden (2012), and it is not the intention of this report to re-examine her case, although some context will, in places, be necessary. Kelly’s mutilated body was found in a room she leased at 13 Miller’s Court behind 26 Dorset Street, Spitalfields on 9th November, 1888. The carnage caused by the murderer was so gory that the police sought to prevent the spread of wild rumours by suppressing information, and some newspapers showed more reticence to over-sensationalise the horror than they had with previous victims, in case they put readers off or incited panic and mob violence (Curtis 2002). During the ensuing police investigation, Kelly’s body was removed to Shoreditch Mortuary, where a post-mortem was carried out on 10th November, and an inquest was opened and completed at Shoreditch Town Hall on 12th November.

Because of the speed with which the authorities dealt with the case, and their reticence in reporting its details, Mary Jane Kelly remains the most enigmatic of the victims commonly attributed to the Ripper. There is little known about her that can be verified and it is clear from the surviving investigation notes and inquest transcripts that much of the available information is anecdotal, recounted by friends and acquaintances, particularly the testimony of her former partner Joseph Barnett at her inquest, who were all presumably recounting what she had chosen to tell them, whether it was true or not.

Much of the information is contradictory or misquoted, but broad consensus amongst her contemporaries suggests that she preferred to go by Marie Jeanette, in the French fashion, rather than Mary Jane; that she was in her 20s, was 5ft 7in with a fair complexion, ‘buxom’ or of stout build and had blue eyes and long thick hair. Nicknames appear to have included ‘Fair Emma’, ‘Ginger’ and ‘Black Mary’, which all might suggest that she used several aliases and frequently changed her hair colour. She told people she was from Wales, or that she had been born in Ireland but that she had moved to Wales when young; that she was the widow of a Welsh collier called Davis or Davies, a name that appears on her death certificate alongside Kelly, and that she had moved to London in 1884 where she had become a prostitute.

Indeed, the lack of known records for her – no birth certificate or marriage certificate, no trace in the censuses of the 1860s, 70s or 80s, no photographs in life, nor evidence of family or reputed husband, truly no trace of her at all before she arrived in London – is in stark contrast to the other four victims of the Ripper, who are all well documented, and this has led to the suggestion by some that Mary Jane Kelly is an assumed identity. So, who is Mary Jane Kelly?
Figure 1: The front cover of The Illustrated Police News for Saturday, November 17, 1888, detailing events surrounding the discovery of Mary Jane Kelly’s body (reported as the seventh victim at the time but today debate surrounds the true number of victims).
Project Background and Objectives

In summer 2015, it was widely reported in the British media that a new book purported to reveal the real identity of Mary Jane Kelly and her killer (see bibliography for examples of press reports). The author, Wynne Weston-Davies, claimed that the woman known to everyone as Mary Jane Kelly was living under a pseudonym and was in fact his great-aunt Elizabeth Weston Davies. The press reported that Weston-Davies planned to exhume Kelly’s remains so that DNA testing could be carried out, and that the Ministry of Justice had indicated that it would issue an exhumation licence.

In August 2015, Dr Turi King of the University of Leicester was approached by the author Patricia Cornwell regarding the putative testing of DNA from the remains of Mary Jane Kelly and matching them against those of Wynne Weston-Davies, with whom she had been in contact.

The discovery in 2012 of the remains of King Richard III (d. 1485) under a city centre car park in Leicester, and their subsequently successful identification in a multi-disciplinary project led by the University of Leicester had highlighted how a combination of archaeology, osteology, forensics, genetics, genealogy and other scientific techniques could successfully identify anonymous skeletal human remains that were more than 500 years old. Patricia Cornwell hoped that a similar project might successfully identify Mary Jane Kelly’s remains.

During initial discussions, two issues arose:

1. The Ministry of Justice had not, in fact, already agreed to issue an exhumation licence but rather, had acknowledged that they would consider such an application if submitted. Therefore, the claim that Mary Jane Kelly was Wynne Weston-Davies great-aunt would need to be assessed to support any exhumation application.
2. The precise location of Mary Jane Kelly’s grave was unknown. To complete any exhumation application to the Ministry of Justice detailed information on the location would be required, not only for the exhumation of Kelly’s remains, but also to determine if any other remains might be disturbed in the process.

Subsequently, in April 2016 it was agreed with Patricia Cornwell that a desk-based study would be carried out to determine if the grave site could be located.

The study would seek to address the following questions:

1. Could the critical requirement of being able to accurately identify Mary Jane Kelly’s remains be achieved in order to carry out DNA testing to determine if there was genetic evidence consistent with a DNA match between Wynne Weston-Davies and the remains of his great-aunt, Elizabeth Weston Davies, the individual putatively buried under the alias Mary Jane Kelly?
2. Where was Mary Jane Kelly buried and could her grave site be accurately located using surviving records?
3. What was the likely condition and survival of her remains, if an exhumation was carried out?

The Research Team

- Dr Turi King, Reader in Genetics and Archaeology, University of Leicester
- Mathew Morris MA ACIfA, Field Officer for Archaeological Services (ULAS), University of Leicester
- Professor Kevin Schürer, Professor of English Local History, University of Leicester
- Carl Vivian, Video Producer/Photographer, University of Leicester
Methodology

The Chartered Institute of Field Archaeologists (CIfA) defines a desk-based assessment as ‘a programme of study of the historic environment within a specified area or site on land, the inter-tidal zone or underwater that addresses agreed research and/or conservation objectives.’ Its aim is to identify and determine, as far as is reasonably possible from existing records, the nature, extent and significance of any assets within the study area that are likely to be effected by, or have an effect on the agreed Project objectives, in order to inform future strategies of work, research and conservation (CIfA 2014).

The following report has been prepared based on information current and available as of February 2017. The following sources have been consulted as part of the project:

- Cemetery burial records (held at St Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery, Leytonstone).
- Archaeological records (Historic Environment Records for Leytonstone and surrounding area).
- Historic Ordnance Survey and other maps of the area (EDINA Digimap website, National Library of Scotland online map library).
- Geological maps (British Geological Survey website and EDINA Digimap website)
- Other online digital sources (e.g. British History Online, the Archaeological Data Service, Heritage Gateway, British Newspapers Online).
- Other background material (e.g. University of Leicester Library).

A site visit to St Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery, Leytonstone was undertaken by the Research Team on 3rd May, 2016 in order to examine the burial area. Research was carried out in the cemetery’s burial records and a survey of marked graves in the area around Mary Jane Kelly’s modern grave marker was undertaken (Figure 2). Particular attention was paid to the current land use of all parts of the study area and its likely impact on the condition of any buried human remains.

The team is indebted to John Sears, the cemetery superintendent of some 30 years (his father-in-law being the previous superintendent for some 40 years before him), for his advice and support during the project.

Genealogy and suggested DNA analysis

DNA testing of the remains of Mary Jane Kelly would allow for a comparison to be made between those remains and Wynne Weston-Davies in order to determine if the genetic data is consistent with them being related as suggested, and therefore lending support to the theory that these remains are those of Elizabeth Weston Davies.

Elizabeth Weston Davies (b. 1856) is the sister of Weston-Davies’ paternal grandfather, John (b. 1861), and
is therefore Weston-Davies’ great-aunt (Figure 3). Elizabeth, as a female, will not carry a Y chromosome, meaning Y chromosome testing will not be possible in this case. Furthermore, given that the link between Elizabeth and Weston-Davies is not through an all-female line, mitochondrial DNA typing will also not be possible.

Edward Davies = Anne Hurst

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matilda</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Hannah</th>
<th>Elizabeth (b. 1856)</th>
<th>John (b. 1861)</th>
<th>Margaret-Maria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>John (b. 1909)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wynne (b. 1943)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3: Diagram showing the genealogical link between Elizabeth Weston Davies and Wynne Weston-Davies.*

However, in an ideal situation, it would be possible to use forensic techniques or, indeed, analysis of the wider genome, in order to assess whether the results of any DNA testing are consistent with the remains of Mary Jane Kelly being those of Elizabeth Weston Davies.

**Reasoning:**

Individuals will share half their DNA with each parent and, on average, half their DNA with each sibling. Therefore, Elizabeth would be expected to share ~1/2 her DNA with her brother, John (b.1861), ~1/4 with her nephew, John (b.1909), and ~1/8 of her DNA with her great-nephew, Wynne (b.1943). Should any usable DNA remain, assessment of the DNA quality in the remains would guide the decision in terms of best approach to carry out the genetic analysis. Either forensic DNA typing using the newer approaches with a combination of genetic markers, or analysis of the wider genome, of both the remains and of Wynne Weston-Davies would allow comparison between them to determine whether the results are consistent with the two being related.

**Issues to consider regarding recovery of DNA from buried remains:**

There are a number of issues to consider in projects involving the extraction of DNA from ancient remains.

1. **Provenance of the remains.** It is vital in cases such as this, which hinge on a DNA comparison between two individuals to confirm or disprove relatedness, that the provenance of the remains is correct. Without this, a mismatch could be interpreted incorrectly.
2. **DNA degradation.** DNA degrades after death, the rate of degradation being determined by the burial conditions, with DNA becoming ever more damaged and fragmented until there is no useable DNA left to analyse. The state of preservation of the DNA in the remains is not known until it is assayed.
3. **Contamination.** Given the scarce and damaged nature of DNA in ancient remains, contamination with modern DNA (i.e. from the excavators exhuming the remains) is a serious risk which could lead to an incorrect interpretation of the results. Precautions would have to be taken if an exhumation were to take place to keep the risk of modern DNA contamination to a minimum.

**The case for Mary Jane Kelly being Elizabeth Weston Davies**

In 2015, Wynne Weston-Davies published a book, *The Real Mary Kelly* (also published as *Jack the Ripper: A
True Love Story), in which he claimed to know the true identity of both Mary Jane Kelly and Jack the Ripper. What follows is a summary of his conclusions as to their identities as presented to the Project team in December 2015.

Elizabeth Weston Davies was born on 24th July 1856 in Corris, Merionethshire, with the family moving shortly after to Aberangell, Montgomeryshire. Weston-Davies states that his great-aunt moved to London in about 1880 (aged 24) to become a lady’s maid to the Marchioness of Londonderry, but following the death of the 5th Marquess in November 1884 his widow retired back to Wales and Elizabeth left her service, remaining in London and becoming a prostitute. Apparently, her brother John (Welsh ianto) told his son, Weston-Davies’ father John, that he was aware that his sister was a prostitute who came to a ‘bad end’. She had worked in a French brothel in South Kensington run by an Anglo-French madam called Héléine (or Ellen) Macleod until, on 24th December, 1884 she married Francis Spurzheim Craig at Fulham Registry Office. The later divorce petition initiated by Craig states that she gave a false age and a false name, Elizabeth Weston Jones, on the Marriage Certificate.

Craig was the only son of well-known socialist pioneer E.T. Craig, who founded the Co-Operative movement. Weston-Davies states that Craig is well-documented as having suffered from a severe personality disorder. The new couple lived together in Argyle Square in Bloomsbury but Elizabeth left after only four months, in April or May 1885, and Craig spent the next three years employing private detectives to search for her, with little success. Apparently, the divorce petition suggests that she returned to prostitution, again working for Mrs Macleod, but it appears that she left the Bloomsbury/Camden area of London in about August 1885 and moved, Weston-Davies presumes, to the East End to avoid the unwanted attentions of her estranged husband, although there is no evidence to confirm this.

In April 1886, Craig commenced an action for divorce but the papers were never served on Elizabeth, presumably because her whereabouts were unknown. Weston-Davies states that no positive identification of his great-aunt under the names Craig, Davies or Jones after August 1885 has been found after extensive investigation, although there is some evidence from family sources that she remained in contact with her brother John, who lived close to her former home in Argyle Square, for some months after she apparently left the West End. Contact was later lost and no-one in her family ever heard from her again or knew what had become of her, despite extensive attempts to trace her.

It is Weston-Davies’ belief that his grandfather John (Johnto) suspected that Elizabeth was Mary Jane Kelly and passed some information to that effect on to his son John shortly before his death. He also believes that Francis Spurzheim Craig is Jack the Ripper, killing Mary Jane Kelly in a particularly brutal manner because she was his estranged wife; the previous victims being killed as practice or to mask his true target, Elizabeth.

Soon after the last killing, Craig apparently left his lodgings in the East End and returned to live with his parents in Hammersmith. Fifteen years later he cut his own throat with a razor, after a long period of mental instability during which he told friends that he was wanted for murders that he committed whilst under great strain and ‘pressure of nerves’.

In order to make an application to the Ministry of Justice for a licence to exhume Mary Jane Kelly’s remains, the case for Kelly being Elizabeth Weston Davies needs to be compelling, not least because to test the theory by exhuming the remains will almost certainly involve disturbing the remains of other individuals buried in the vicinity. To assess the evidence, a table of comparison (Table 1) based on that supplied by Wynne Weston-Davies (pers. comm. & 2015), is presented. Where possible, references to relevant supporting documents is supplied. However, to date the Research Team has not been able to view all the supporting evidence cited by Weston-Davies as part of this project.
Table 1: Points of comparison between Mary Jane Kelly and Elizabeth Weston Davies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mary Jane Kelly</th>
<th>Elizabeth Weston Davies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age in 1888</td>
<td>‘about 25’ on her death certificate but some newspapers reported that she looked about 30. (4) (8)</td>
<td>31. (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Prostitute. (6) (8)</td>
<td>Lady’s maid, subsequently prostitute. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of work prior to arrival in the East End</td>
<td>West End brothel run by a Frenchwoman, ‘near Kensington’. (6) (8)</td>
<td>South Kensington brothel run by Héleine (or Ellen) Macleod. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of disappearance from the West End</td>
<td>Late 1885. (6) (8)</td>
<td>About August 1885.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of arrival in the East End</td>
<td>Unknown, but probably late 1885 or early 1886. (6) (8)</td>
<td>Unknown, circumstantial evidence suggests that she may have moved to the East End in late 1885.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>Broad consensus amongst her contemporaries suggests that she was 5ft 7in with a fair complexion, ‘buxom’ or of stout build and had blue eyes and long thick hair. Nicknames appear to have included ‘Fair Emma’, ‘Ginger’ and ‘Black Mary’, which all might suggest that frequently changed her hair colour. Post-mortem photos of her body appear to show dark hair but this could be because it is blood stained. (6) (7) (8)</td>
<td>Unknown, although other family members including her brother allegedly had dark hair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Reported to be intelligent and well-spoken. (6) (8)</td>
<td>Remained in school until at least the age of 16.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social background</td>
<td>Newspaper and witness reports suggested that she was from a middle-class background. (6) (8)</td>
<td>Lower middle class (father was a quarry agent at the time of her birth). (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Witness reports state that she had told people that she was Welsh on first arriving in the East End but later changed to saying that she was Irish but had been bought up in Caernarfonshire or Carmarthenshire, Wales. (6) (8)</td>
<td>Welsh father, English mother but born and brought up in Merionethshire and Montgomeryshire, Wales. (1) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Welsh speaker</td>
<td>At least one witness report suggests she spoke Welsh. (8)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habits</td>
<td>Said to drink to excess on occasion and to be voluble and argumentative when drunk. (6) (8)</td>
<td>Described by husband and his friends as a ‘drunken bad wife’. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>According to Joseph Barnett, she had said she had seven brothers and a sister. (6) (8)</td>
<td>Two brothers and four sisters. (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother called Johnto</td>
<td>Henry (nicknamed ‘Johnto’). (6) (8)</td>
<td>John (Johnto or Ianto in Welsh). (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used the name Davies in the East End</td>
<td>Yes. (6) (8)</td>
<td>Unknown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claimed to be a widow</td>
<td>Yes. (6) (8)</td>
<td>Yes (falsely). (2) (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Supporting documents for Mary Jane Kelly and Elizabeth Weston Davies

1. Birth certificate of Elizabeth Weston Davies.
2. Marriage certificate of Francis Spurzheim Craig and Elizabeth Weston Jones.
3. Petition and supporting Affidavit for the divorce of Francis Spurzheim Craig and Elizabeth Weston Craig (née Davies). This apparently includes evidence of the addresses of the Petitioner and his wife at various times following their marriage, evidence of Elizabeth Weston Craig’s occupation and that she worked for Héleine Macleod, the date of her desertion of her husband, and his addresses between April 1886 and March 1889 (National Archives: J 77/354/692).
5. Census returns for 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901 relating to Francis Spurzheim Craig, Elizabeth Weston Davies/Craig (the latter not recorded after 1881) and Héleine Macleod.
7. Post-mortem report on Marie Jeanette Kelly by Mr Thomas Bond and Dr George Bagster Phillips.
8. Numerous contemporary newspaper articles relating to the Whitechapel murders and Marie Jeanette Kelly, with witness accounts of her age, background, appearance and movements before and after her arrival in the East End.

At present, without full review of the evidence cited by Weston-Davies, much of the case for Mary Jane Kelly and Elizabeth Weston Davies being the same individual appears to be circumstantial or conjectural. For instance, there is no evidence that Elizabeth moved to the East End after she left her husband, this is merely surmised.

Indeed, her absence from any records after 1885 is not uncommon. On the one hand, she may have died before the next census in 1891, but census data is also not infallible. It offered a snapshot of the nation on one Sunday every ten years. People in transit or with no fixed abode, or who had no family, establishment or organisation to represent them could easily fall through the cracks, especially if they did not want to be found. Illiteracy, language and dialect, particularly amongst large migratory populations such as those in London’s East End also caused problems for the census enumerators. One common mistake in census returns is the misspelling or misinterpretation of names. For example, Elizabeth’s surname Davies could be spelt as Davis, Davie, Davyes, Davise, Daviss, Daavis etc.; whilst the other name she is known to have used, Jones, could also be written down as Joens, Joans, Jobes, Johns etc. She could also be using a diminutive of Elizabeth: Beth, Bess, Bessie, Betsy, Betty, Libby, Liz, Lizzie to name a few. If Elizabeth stopped using Weston in her name, and was simply living as Elizabeth Davies or Elizabeth Jones she would be very difficult to trace. Davies and Jones are very common surnames, Jones is ranked 2nd most common in Britain in the 1881 census, whilst Davies in ranked 6th (gbnames.publicprofiler.org) and Elizabeth Jones is the 4th most frequently used female name (Vick 2013). Other potential discrepancies between Mary and Elizabeth include, their ages, where they were born and raised, and how many brothers and sisters they had.

However, regardless of whether the evidence as it presently stands is insufficiently compelling to prove that Mary and Elizabeth are the same person, the merit of the case may be insufficient to persuade the Ministry of Justice that it warrants disturbing the remains of other individuals to test the theory. It becomes a moot point whether Mary Jane Kelly and Elizabeth Weston Davies are the same person if the number of other graves that need to be disturbed and/or the number of individuals who would need to be contacted to gain permission to disturb such remains is considered to be too great to allow the granting of a licence (see below).

Exhumation licence applications

Current law relating to the exhumation of human remains in England and Wales is contained in Section 25 of the Burial Act of 1857, which states that it is unlawful to remove any body or the remains of any body,
which have been interred in a place of burial, without licence from the Secretary of State or, in certain circumstances, the Church of England - when the grave in which the deceased is buried is in ground consecrated according to the rites of the Church of England and is to be reburied in consecrated ground (www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/20-21/81/section/25 accessed 19/05/2016). An application for an appropriate licence must be made to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) who will normally require the consent of all the next of kin (Question 7 of the application) – considered to be the spouse or civil partner, children, parents, siblings, grandchildren and grandparents. Emphasis is placed on the applicant tracing and contacting the next of kin of the deceased and anyone with an interest in the grave (i.e. third parties such as the local burial authority, grave owner and/or land owner and other parties).

Significantly, the guidance states: “If there are other human remains in the grave, then the consents of the next of kin for those remains will be required as will the consent of the burial authority to open the grave. A separate form will be required for each set of remains. Where there are a large number of remains within a grave it is unlikely licences will be granted.” – MoJ Application for a licence for the removal of human remains (including cremated remains) in England and Wales, published 2 February 2012 www.gov.uk/government/uploads/systems/uploads/attachment_data/file/326818/application-exhumation-licence.pdf accessed 19/05/2016).

With this in mind, several questions must be considered. An exhumation has the potential to disturb an unknown number of individual burials in proximity to Mary Jane Kelly. Who are they? Beyond identifying a potential location for the grave it must be established how many people are buried in the same communal plot and where in the sequence Kelly is buried (i.e. is she buried beneath other people who will need to be exhumed to access her remains). As it is unlikely that Kelly’s grave location can be precisely located or excavated, the number of individuals buried in adjacent graves must also be taken into consideration, as do people buried in the vicinity post-1947, after the area was reclaimed (see below).

St Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery

Today, St Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery lies to the north of Langthorne Road amidst the suburban sprawl of Leytonstone in the London Borough of Waltham Forest (E11 4HL) (Figure 4 & Figure 5). The cemetery opened in 1861 to cope with the rapid population expansion in Hackney in the mid-19th century. It originally occupied a c.12-acre plot on Unionhouse Lane (now Lanthorne Road), situated in open fields halfway between the villages of Low Leyton (1km to the north-west), Leytonstone (1km to the north-east) and Stratford (1km to the south). The Great Eastern Railway passed close to its north-western edge and Low Leyton Station was just a five-minute walk away to the west, whilst the West Ham Union Workhouse was c.300m down the lane to the south-east.

By the end of the 19th century, the cemetery had been engulfed in the rapid suburban development of these settlements, expanding to c.23 acres (its present size) in the early 20th century to cope with growing demand. Today, over 170,000 people are buried in the cemetery, predominately of Irish, Italian and Polish ancestry, reflecting its Roman Catholic status. To cater for continuing demand, land has since been reclaimed, in the 1940s. Originally by clearing monuments to allow new burials to take place and more recently by raising the ground level in some areas of the cemetery by adding c.2m of soil over old graves (Powell 1973; Mellor & Parson 2011; Ordnance Survey 25” maps – London XII, 1870 edition; London XXXII, 1897 edition; London III.13, 1916 edition; J. Sears pers. comm. May 2016).
Figure 4: The entrance to St Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery, Leytonstone.

Figure 5: The cemetery location.

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The burial of Mary Jane Kelly and likely condition of her remains

Mary Jane Kelly was buried at the cemetery on Monday 19th November, 1888. The following account of the funeral, published in the *London Standard* the following day, provides useful details on the manner of the burial, particularly the nature of the coffin – described as being of ‘polished elm and oak… with metal mounts… the coffin plate was engraved: “Marie Jeanette Kelly, died 9th Nov. 1888, aged 25 years.”

**THE WHITECHAPEL MURDER**

“The remains of Mary Janet Kelly, who was murdered on the 9th of November in Miller’s-court, Dorset-street, Spitalfields, were interred yesterday in the Roman Catholic Cemetery at Leytonstone. The body was enclosed in a polished elm and oak coffin, with metal mounts. On the coffin plate was engraved: “Marie Jeanette Kelly, died 9th Nov. 1888, aged 25 years.” Upon the coffin were two crowns of artificial flowers and a cross made up of heartsease. The coffin was carried in an open cart drawn by two horses, and two coaches followed, from the Shoreditch Mortuary. An enormous crowd of people assembled at an early hour, completely blocking the thoroughfare, and a large number of police were engaged in keeping order. As the coffin appeared, borne on the shoulders of four men, at the principal gate of the church, the crowd was greatly moved. Round the open car in which it was to be placed men and women struggled desperately to touch the coffin. Women with faces streaming with tears cried out “God forgive her” and every man’s heart was bared. The sight was remarkable and the emotion natural and unconstrained. Two mourning coaches followed, one containing three, and the other five persons. Joe Barnett was amongst them, with someone from McCarthy’s, the landlord; and the others were women, who had given evidence at the inquest. After a tremendous struggle, the car, with the coffin fully exposed to view, set out at a very slow pace, all the crowd appearing to move off simultaneously in attendance. The traffic was blocked, and the constables had great difficulty in obtaining free passage for the small procession through the mass of carts and vans and tramcars which blocked the road. The distance from Shoreditch Church to the Cemetery at Leytonstone by road is about six miles, and the route traversed was Hackney-road, Cambridge Heath, Whitechapel-road, and Stratford. The appearance of the roadway throughout the whole journey was remarkable, owing to the hundreds of men and women who escorted the coffin on each side, and who had to keep up a sharp trot in many places. But the crowd rapidly thinned away when, getting into the suburbs, the car and coaches broke into a trot. The cemetery was reached at two o’clock. The Rev. Father Columban, with two acolytes and a cross-bearer, met the body at the door of the little chapel of St Patrick, and the coffin was carried at once to a grave in the north-eastern corner. Barnett and the poor women who had accompanied the funeral knelt on the cold clay by the side of the grave, while the service was read. The coffin was incensed, lowered, and then sprinkled with holy water, and the simple ceremony ended. The floral ornaments were afterwards raised to be placed upon the grave, and the filling up was competed in a few moments, and was watched by a small crowd of people. There was a very large concourse of people outside the gates, who were refused admission until after the funeral was over.”

*(London Standard, Tuesday 20th November 1888, 3)*

Coffins and their fittings do not survive well in earth graves, and there is relatively limited archaeological evidence for late 19th century burials in general as they are infrequently excavated, although funeral catalogues do provide useful typological evidence. By the late 19th century, the most popular form of burial container was the single-break coffin made of polished wood and no longer covered in fabric, as had been the trend in the earlier 19th century. Mass production meant greater consumer choice and a wide variety of designs were readily available to meet individual taste and price. These were typically made of oak or
elm but pitched pine or more exotic woods could be substituted. Coffin furniture could be of lead, copper or brass but by the end of the 18th century mass-produced tinplate fittings (tin-dipped iron, known as ‘silver’ in the trade) was the common choice (Cherryson et al. 2012, 45-80; Mytum 2015, 276-85).

The account of Mary Jane Kelly’s funeral suggests that her coffin was typical of the period, made of polished wood with simple metal fittings, most likely tinplate (reports do not state brass fittings as has been suggested by some authors, but merely metal fittings). Tinplate does not survive well in the ground. The iron content quickly corrodes and expands leaving the coffin plate illegible. Geology beneath the cemetery is sand and gravel overlying clay (BGS OpenGeoscience). Previous exhumations, of burials as recent as the 1950s, have found the ground waterlogged with coffin preservation poor and little or nothing surviving of the deceased inside (J. Sears, cemetery superintendent, pers. comm. May 2016). If this is the case, little is likely to have survived to identify Kelly’s coffin and it is unlikely that her skeletal remains will be well preserved, if they have survived at all.

**Locating Mary Jane Kelly’s grave**

Visit St Patrick’s Catholic Cemetery today and you can find a grave marker commemorating Marie Jeanette Kelly in Plot 10, Row 21/22, c.70m east-north-east of the mortuary chapel close to the south-eastern boundary of the cemetery (TQ 38742 86151) (Figure 6). This is the latest of several modern markers which have commemorated Kelly since the 1980s and its location is likely to have little or no relevance to the real location of her grave. The present marker reads “In Loving Memory of Marie Jeanette Kelly, none but the lonely hearts can knot my sadness, love lives forever”. Problems surrounding the location of the grave stem from the fact that this area of the cemetery was reclaimed in 1947, with earlier grave positions being swept away to make way for new burials. Plot 10, Row 21/22 is the position of the modern marker in the post-1947 numbering system, not the original location of the grave.

![Figure 6: The modern grave marker in plot 10-21/22 commemorating Mary Jane Kelly.](image)

In the cemetery’s archive, entry number 371201 (folio 120) in the Register of Burials for 1887 to 1891 records that Marie Jeanette Kelly (as she was named), aged 25, was buried in plot number 16-67, a ‘Com. [communal] Grave’ having been brought from Shoreditch Mortuary (Figure 7). The ceremony was
performed by Fr. Columban Ellison. Contemporary newspaper accounts, such as the one above, place this in the communal burial area along the south-eastern boundary of the cemetery, north-east of the chapel of rest.

No map of the original 19th-century plot layout appears to survive. However, from studying the burial registers an idea of the plot layout can be ascertained. The plot numbers are in effect a co-ordinate system, indicating, respectively, rows running approximately south-east to north-west (SE-NW) and north-east to south-west (NE-SW). This is illustrated schematically in the diagram below (Figure 8).

With reference to the diagram (Figure 8), the first number represents the SE-NW axis, with plot numbers running from 1 to 20, whilst the second number represents the NE-SW axis, the plot numbers running from 1 to 98. Thus, plot 01-01 would have been somewhere in the north-east corner of the cemetery, and at the other extreme, plot 20-98 would have been by the back entrance to the existing chapel of rest.

![Figure 7: The entry in the burial register for Marie Jeanette Kelly (as she was named), entry number 371201 (folio 120) - arrowed.](image)

The order in which the plots were filled in, at first sight, appears to be somewhat random. What is clear, is that they did not start with plot 01-01 and work all the way through to 20-98 in sequential fashion. Rather, it appears that they opened up a number of plots running along the NE-SW axis simultaneously, moving gradually north-west and south-west as each block of graves was filled in. Given that these were communal plots, with multiple burials in each, then one can see a certain logic to this. Since there were often over five (adult) burials a day in some years during the later 19th century, this would avoid, as far as was possible, having one burial after another within the same plot, which may have been disconcerting for the mourners. Indeed, the registers show that rarely was the same adult plot used twice in succession (children were buried in a different part of the cemetery in large communal plots, often with upwards of 20 burials in each).
In the case of Mary Jane Kelly, plot 16-67 was one of a group of seven plots (16-61 to 16-67) which were being worked together in rotation (Figure 8). It took twenty days to fill these seven plots, following which plots 17-61 to 17-67 were opened up and filled within nineteen days.

Each plot within this section of the cemetery was used multiple times. Kelly was one of six buried in plot 16-67 (from the bottom up these are Thomas McMahon, aged 36; Johanna Regan, aged 28; Elle Callaghan, aged 50; Catherine O’Brian, aged 70; Daniel Lynch, aged 60; and lastly Kelly). However, the number of burials within each plot varied: plot 16-66, for example, was used just four times; while plot 15-65 was used seven times. There is no obvious apparent reason why some were used more and others less. It may have been linked to the depth they could dig, water-logging in plots, or the number of burials that took place in coffins rather than shrouds.

What is perhaps slightly unusual about Mary Jane Kelly is that she was buried in the same plot as the previous person to be buried (Daniel Lynch). That said, the previous burial was two days earlier, on Saturday 17th November – there being no burials on Sundays. Curiously, although they must have dug open some if not all of plots 17-61 to 17-67 prior to Kelly’s burial, since plots 17-61 and 17-62 were both used on 14th November (five days before Kelly was buried), and plots 17-63 and 17-64 were both first used on the day following Kelly’s burial (20th November), it was decided to bury her in 16-67. This meant that plot 16-67 could be filled in and sealed off immediately after her burial rather than leaving it open, as in the case of the newly dug grave plots in row 17 which would remain open for some days to come. Given the notoriety of the burial, the cemetery may have, and with good reason, wanted to fill in and cover over the grave as soon as possible.

In the absence of a map of the original 19th-century plot layout, the exact location of plot 16-67 is impossible to determine, since it is not known precisely (a) where the digging of plots began and finished along each of the two axes, nor, (b) if the size of the plots was evenly distributed. Thus, only an approximation of the location of 16-67 can be made.

Burial registers show that there were 1,960 grave plots in the original 19th century communal burial area in which Mary Jane Kelly was buried (i.e. 98 rows each containing 20 plots), with row 1 to the north-east and row 98 to the south-west as explained above. Official regulations accompanying the Burial Laws amendment act of 1880, required that ‘grave spaces for persons above twelve years of age be nine feet (2.74m) long and four feet (1.22m) wide’ – this being the space taken up by the coffin and enough additional space around the burial to separate it from neighbouring grave spaces (Cunningham & Cunningham 1881, 355). This allows us to calculate a hypothetical burial area 882 ft long (NE-SW) and 80 ft wide (SE-NW), or 268.83m by 24.38m.

However, cartographic evidence from the late 19th century (25" Ordnance Survey maps of 1870 and 1897), and surviving 19th-century features within the present cemetery layout (i.e. family plots dating to the late 19th century which still mark the north-western edge of the communal burial area), show a maximum nominal burial area of c.280m by c.19m (Figure 9) – an area both longer and narrower than official regulations dictate. This would suggest that the grave plots were much narrower than the required 4ft,

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Figure 8: Schematic diagram showing how the burial plots were laid out.
closer in reality to 3ft (0.91m) in width, otherwise a row of 20 graves would not physically fit into the available space. This allows us to generate a possible location on the SE-NW axis.

Mary Jane Kelly was buried in plot 16, which is, therefore, theoretically between 14.56 and 15.47m north-west of the cemetery’s boundary (assuming an even plot width of 3ft or 0.91m). However, a line of mature trees inside the modern cemetery boundary (probably a historic hedge line predating the cemetery), the fact that the boundary itself is not straight, and the possibility of graves not being of uniform width and spacing, adds a degree of uncertainty to the precise start of the burial row and the position of individual plots within the row. It is therefore felt that a minimum error of ±1 grave plot must be employed in all calculations (i.e. an area taking in the grave and its eight immediate neighbours, nine plots in all). Taking this into account, this means that plot 16 could be anywhere between 13.65m and 16.38m north-west of the boundary.

Resolving the grave’s location on the NE-SW axis is more problematic. On the ground, the maximum available length of the burial area is longer than the hypothetical length of 98 rows of 9ft (2.74m) graves by at least c.11m (c.280m rather than c.269m), and at its northern end, where the rows start, the boundary tapers making it impossible to establish precisely where row 1 should begin. Working backwards from row 98 in the south-west has better possibilities, as maps suggest that this end of the burial area was more squared. In theory, row 67 should be thirty-one rows or, assuming each row is the regulation length, between 84.94m and 87.68m from the south-western end of the burial area. Again, because of the imprecision in locating the south-western end of the burial area, and not knowing the spacing between each row, a minimum error of ±1 grave must be added, meaning row 67 could be anywhere between 82.2m and 90.42m north-east of the boundary. Using these calculations, a hypothetical search area of 22.44 sq m (8.22m x 2.73m) can be proposed (Grave Area 1 - Figure 9).

However, this assumes that each grave plot is the regulation length. As it has already been established that the plots are much narrower than the required 4ft, their length cannot be taken for granted either, and it is possible that the graves are much shorter. Further complicating the calculations is the fact that grave plots appear to have been dug en masse, possibly as long trenches one plot wide and seven rows long (as discussed above). This makes it impossible to know how much space was used for, and between, each grave row.

Still, it is safe to assume that at a minimum, a grave must be long enough to accommodate the coffin being buried in it, and that in a communal burial area such as this a grave must be large enough to accommodate a variety of coffin lengths. By the late 19th century, adult-sized coffins came in stock measurements. Using the coffin choice in the catalogue of Ingall, Parsons, Clive & Co. (est. 1888), one of the leading coffin manufacturers of the period, it can be established that stock sizes ranged from 5ft up to 6½ft in length (Mytum 2015, table 12). Therefore, the grave (at a minimum) must be 6½ft or 1.98m long. Recalculating the grave position on the NE-SW axis, using these figures establishes a grave plot between 61.38m and 63.36m from the south-western end of the burial area, or between 59.4m and 65.34m with the added error of ±1 grave (Grave Area 2 – 16.22 sq m, 5.94m x 2.73m, Figure 9).
Neither area overlaps the other, and herein lies the problem with these calculations. There are too many variables which cannot be reliably accounted for – including the size of individual grave plots, the spacing between each plot, the starting point of each row and so on. Thus, it is impossible to know which calculation provides the more accurate grave location, if either. Instead, what these areas do represent are the minimum and maximum dimensions of a hypothetical search area, which encompasses both areas as well as the space between them. With the added error of ±1 grave, this calculates to a search area 31.02m long and 2.73m wide (84.68 sq m) – it should be noted that the present grave marker does not lie within this area, although it is nearby (Figure 9).

If either of the two grave areas is targeted as the likely location of Mary Jane Kelly’s final resting place, one would most likely have to excavate an area encompassing a minimum of 9 grave plots (depending on their size and position in relation to the search area). If both areas are targeted, this would amount to 18 grave plots. However, it is more likely that the entire search area will need to be investigated, an area encompassing anywhere up to 48 grave plots. Examining an area this size is the only way of possibly locating Kelly’s remains.

Therefore, because of this uncertainty, one might have to exhume anything between 45 and 240 sets of remains from the 19th-century burial layout in order to find Mary Jane Kelly (assuming an average of 5 individuals per grave spread across a search range of 9 to 48 grave plots). This of course, depends on how far down it is decided to dig. Whilst Kelly appears to have been buried at the top of her grave, being the last person of six interred in it, it is likely that many of the burials in these plots would have over time collapsed down on top of each other as coffins rotted. As such, it is impossible to give a precise figure to the number of burials that might need exhuming. As already noted, the number of individuals buried within each plot is not constant, so the exact number will vary according to which plots the search area happens to centre on,
which can only be determined retrospectively.

To further complicate matters, the cemetery started reusing this communal grave area following the Second World War. The rows of headstones and plots that can be seen today relate to this 1947 reorganisation. However, it is impossible to say with any precision how the 1940s layout relates to the original 19th century layout. It may have followed the same layout, but equally it may not have. This problem is compounded by the fact that a revised numbering system was used after the reorganisation. Although the new layout uses broadly the same axes as the old, the numbering is reversed so that plot 01-01 today is located by the back entrance to the chapel or rest with numbers increasing as they go north-east and south-east. Hence, why the modern grave marker commemorating Mary Jane Kelly is in plot 10-22 in the post-1947 numbering system.

Further confusion arises from the fact that these grave markers have been ‘tidied-up’ in recent years to improve access for grass cutting, and it is no longer known if they accurately represent grave locations (John Sears pers. comm. May 2016). Earthworks in the communal grave area, showing where ground has settled into graves, appear to relate to 20th-century plots and not the underlying 19th-century layout, but without digging a sample trench, and therefore disturbing remains, it is impossible to determine the extent to which the two systems overlay and/or overlap one another, or the extent to which the post-1947 graves have dug through the 19th-century graves.

Today, ground in this part of the cemetery is raised some c.0.4-0.6m above the adjacent path and 19th-century family plots to the north-west. As no records appear to exist for what happened when the area was reclaimed in 1947, it is unclear whether this is built-up soil from 19th-century grave digging, soil imported during the 1947 groundworks, or the build-up of soil from 20th-century grave digging, or a combination of the three. It is also unknown whether groundwork in 1947 simply cleared grave markers to make way for new burials or whether a programme of disinterment of older graves also took place.

What is known is that each of the 20th-century plots appears to contain between one and three burials in a mixture of family and communal graves. So, if we assume a similar number of 20th-century plots exist in the grave/search area, there could be between 9 and 144 individuals buried in the late 1940s and 1950s, on top of the potential 45 to 250 individuals buried in the 19th century. This means it might be necessary to exhume anywhere between 54 and 394 individuals, any of whom could be Mary Jane Kelly.

It is also impossible to determine, without excavation, the extent to which the newer 20th-century graves dig down into the earlier 19th-century ones, potentially disturbing and/or destroying earlier burials. In this context, it is important to remember that Kelly was buried at the top of her grave. With five individuals below her, it is unlikely that the top of her coffin was more than a few feet (c.0.6m) below ground level, the grave probably being close to 12-14ft (3.66-4.27m) deep to accommodate the six burials with enough room at the top to securely backfill it. As each of the 20th-century graves is likely to be at least 6-8ft (1.83-2.44m) deep, to accommodate up to three burials, it is very likely that Kelly’s grave has been disturbed or destroyed by more recent grave digging.

These calculations assume that, at a minimum, Plot 16-67 might be in the centre of either Grave Area 1 or Grave Area 2 (encompassing rows 15 through 17 on the SE-NW axis and rows 66 through 68 on the NE-SW axis – Figure 10a), but equally, depending on the margin of error, it could lie anywhere on the periphery (Figure 10b-e). This expands the range of plots with the potential to be in the search area to rows 14 through 18 on the SE-NW axis and rows 65 through 69 on the NE-SW axis, a total of 25 graves containing a varying, and therefore unknown, number of individuals. If both grave areas are looked at, this potential doubles to 50 graves; and if the entire search area is investigated (hypothetically encompassing rows 14 through 18 on the SE-NW axis and rows 52 through 82 on the NE-SW axis if the minimum grave size is used), the search could impact on anywhere up to 155 grave plots.
Because plot 16-67 cannot be precisely located, it is impossible to determine in advance who the other 53 to 393 individuals may be. One could make a reasonable estimation if one assumes that plot 16-67 is in fact in the centre of the hypothetical area to be examined, but given the lack of any certainty as to how this area relates to the 19th and 20th-century grave plots, it means that these 53 to 393 sets of remains could potentially be those of some 149 to 1,239 named individuals in the burial records. Given that all these 149-1,239 individuals were buried either in the 1880s/early 1890s or the late 1940s/1950s it probably would be possible to trace current-day relatives for most. Yet such a large-scale exercise would most likely take years of genealogical research, they would all probably have to give their consent to any exhumation, and all being said, there is still no guarantee that Mary Jane Kelly is buried in this hypothetical search area.

This calculation also assumes that plot 16-67 falls completely within the grave/search area. If it lies on the periphery, partially outside the search area numbers increase to a potential 95 to 543 individuals who might potentially be disturbed, who could be any of 293 to 1,847 named individuals. It is, therefore, extremely doubtful that an application to exhume human remains in this area of the cemetery would be successful.

**Summary of results**

In short:

- If sufficient DNA were available, testing of the remains of Mary Jane Kelly would allow for a comparison to be made between those remains and Wynne Weston-Davies in order to determine if the genetic data is consistent with them being related as suggested.
- There is no compelling evidence that Mary Jane Kelly and Elizabeth West Davies are the same individual.
Ground conditions in the cemetery do not appear to be favourable for the good preservation of coffin material or human remains. Any skeletal remains that survive are likely to be in poor condition which will affect the DNA quality.

Most coffin plates will likely be of tinplate and will no longer be legible.

It is impossible to accurately locate Mary Jane Kelly’s grave (plot 16-67) using surviving cemetery records.

Hypothetical grave areas can be generated by reconstructing the 19th-century burial layout from burial registers and historic Ordnance Survey mapping. These move and change in size, depending on the dimensions of the grave plot used in the calculation.

The modern grave marker does not lie within any of the search areas.

The search area could contain anywhere between 45 and 240 sets of remains from the 19th-century burial layout.

Between 9 and 44 additional burials relating to the 20th-century burial layout may be present in the search area.

In total, between 54 and 394 individuals may be buried in the search area, of whom Mary Jane Kelly may be one.

The other 53 to 393 sets of remains could potentially be those of some 149 to 1,239 named individuals.

It is very likely that Mary Jane Kelly’s grave has been disturbed or destroyed by later grave digging.

Genealogical research could take years to trace present-day relatives for the 149 to 1,239 potential individuals, all of whom would have to give their consent to any exhumation.

All said, there is still no guarantee that Mary Jane Kelly is buried in the search area.

**Conclusion**

Today, with modern documentation and advances in forensic science, particularly the use of DNA, it can be hoped that successful identification of the unknown recently deceased is a relatively straightforward process. But how easy is it to identify the ancient dead? Mary Jane Kelly, the subject of this project, only died a little under 130 years ago. One might assume, therefore, that identifying her remains would be simple. Her burial is almost within living memory and extensive archives of genealogical information, census data, burial records, coroners’ reports, newspaper articles, oral histories, even photographs all exist from her time; material that could be invaluable to any forensic analysis. Yet even with this wealth of information at our fingertips, as this research has concluded, being able to get the written record and any archaeological evidence to correspond in order to convincingly identify her remains, something which is critical for the DNA analysis, is likely to be an impossible task.

As information presently stands, a successful search would require a herculean effort that would likely take years of research, would be prohibitively costly and would cause unwarranted disturbance to an unknown number of individuals buried in a cemetery that is still in daily use, with no guarantee of success. As such, it is extremely unlikely that any application for an exhumation licence would be granted. The simple fact is, successfully naming someone in the historical record only happens in the most exceptional of cases. Most human remains found during excavations remain stubbornly, and forever, anonymous and this must also be the fate of Mary Jane Kelly.
**Addendum – February 2017**

Subsequent to Version 1 of this report being written in May 2016, a ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey was carried out in the cemetery in June 2016. This was undertaken independent of the project by Sandberg LLP for Mr Mason Cardiff, who commissioned the work and has kindly supplied a copy of the results to the Research Team (Sandberg LLP 2016). A summary is provided below:

The GPR survey examined an c.8m square with the modern grave marker for Marie Jeanette Kelly at its centre. Whilst this does not alter the findings of the Project’s research, which has concluded that the grave marker is wrongly positioned, its results provide a useful insight into the level of disturbance in this area of the cemetery.

The maximum GPR signal penetration achieved below ground was about 1.6-1.7m, and the survey detected reflection patterns consistent with graves and burials (i.e. reflection hyperbolas from caskets and areas of multiple reflections indicative of ground disturbed by previous excavation), mostly in a depth range of 0.5-1.5m below the ground. In plan, these areas of disturbance are rectilinear and appear to form four rows of graves which are comparable with the post-1947 cemetery layout (i.e. they appear to match up with extant headstones). No evidence for earlier 19th-century graves can be identified.

What is clear from the survey, is that from present ground level down to 1-1.5m, soil is extensively disturbed by graves dug post-1947. It is currently unknown if deeper portions of earlier graves survive below this zone of disturbance. In theory, original 19th century graves should extend much deeper than 1.5m and a GPR survey with deeper signal penetration might be able to detect them, but this could be moot. Mary Jane Kelly was the last of six burials to be interred in her grave plot. The top of her coffin, therefore, may be as shallow as c.0.5-0.6m below the ground, putting her remains in the zone of post-1947 disturbance as revealed by the survey. If this survey data is consistent across the communal burial area, it supports the conclusion of the Research Team that it is unlikely that her remains survive intact, and that in all probability they have been entirely destroyed.

**Report history**

Version 1 of this report was completed by the research team in May 2016 and submitted to Patricia Cornwwell in June 2016. Subsequently, the University of Leicester, with Patricia Cornwwell’s permission, has made the report available to the public. This is Version 2, completed by the research team in February 2017. Changes in Version 2 are the inclusion of more detailed background material and the re-ordering of the report structure to provide more context for the general reader, and expanded discussion on the location of Mary Jane Kelly’s grave. Otherwise, the research results and the conclusions of the project remain the same.
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