

# WHERE THE RIPPER PROWLED

*The Victorian-era slasher proves to be a great tourist draw*

BY CLAIRE BUSHEY || PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID COOK

It was darker than it should have been for the hour and latitude. It was only 7:30 p.m., but the clouds had flattened the sky, leaving only a band of sun at the horizon, turning London gloomy and, as usual, threatening rain.

The tourists had been instructed to meet near the Tower of London. With its own grim history of torture and execution, it seemed a fitting starting point for the two-hour walking tour through the City and East End. Tonight, as on

every night, some 40 or 50 people with a taste for blood would stalk the trail of Jack the Ripper.

The man leading tonight's party was Donald Rumbelow. He stood at the center of the crowd and encouraged those who couldn't hear to move forward.

"If you can't get through, treat this like a British Museum tour: Get your elbows out," he said.

Rumbelow, bespectacled and bulldog-like,



Donald Rumbelow leads walking tours through the part of London once terrorized by Jack the Ripper.

wore a flat cap and toted a wheeled suitcase filled with copies of his book, "The Complete Jack the Ripper." He is an authority on the subject. When Johnny Depp was filming "From Hell," Rumbelow showed him the sights. ("My daughter was incandescent with rage when she discovered it," he said.) His voice is like his name, deep and rumbling, a voice made for telling stories people want to hear.

The Ripper is the most popular tour run by London Walks. It's so popular, in fact, that the company's Web site warns against being duped by copycats; in the past impostors have redirected confused tourists looking for Rumbelow's tour.

The Ripper's body count is not as high as one might expect for such a famous

serial killer. There is some dispute over the number of victims, but the walking tour covers the "canonical five" murdered during the Autumn of Terror in 1888. It is not the number of killings that earned Jack his choke-hold on the public's imagination, but their grisliness.

The tour started at the Tower because it marks the line between the oldest part of the city – known as the One Square Mile, or simply the City, which is today the main financial sector – and the rest of London. The demarcation plays an important part in the Ripper's story, because the two areas were patrolled by separate police forces, which, at best, tried to ignore each other's existence. That intransigence hampered the investigation when the killer began

murdering on both sides of the line.

Rumbelow led his listeners into the rapidly emptying City. Few old structures remain in the district thanks to World War II German bombs, which damaged or destroyed a million homes in London.

But St. Botolph's Aldgate survived. Better known as the prostitutes' church, the working girls used to circle it nightly, looking for customers along the main thoroughfare it sat beside.

Of the many inaccuracies in the Jack the Ripper films, among the most entrenched is the glamorous portrayal of good-looking prostitutes, Rumbelow said. The films show them in taverns, dancing on tables in high heels, singing "isn't life good, isn't life great, isn't it



Several dozen people with a fascination for spilled blood gather every night to take the Ripper tour.

