Response to Bill Beadle: Revisiting the Maybrick Diary

Caz Morris

The intention of this response is to address a number of the individual arguments within Bill’s readable and interesting two-part article. There will be no attempt to make a case for authenticity, or to suggest when the document may have been created.

Billy Graham
Bill asserts that Billy Graham made the ‘eye popping’ claim that his grandmother was Florie Maybrick. According to Keith Skinner, it was in fact Paul Feldman’s suggestion, which hardened into a belief, and Graham was caught up in the speculation and dynamics of Feldman’s interpretation. (1)

The Ink
If, as Bill suggests, the ink experts thus far ‘appear to be marginally in favour of the ink having been manufactured after 1889’, this would have been apparent from a study of the results of the various examinations since 1992. But was anything found in the ink that would not have been available to an ink chemist experimenting prior to 1889 and jealously guarding his recipes from his many rivals?

Dr David Baxendale (1992) claimed that the ink contained nigrosine, which no subsequent analysis has confirmed. Furthermore, he wrongly asserted that nigrosine was not around in Victorian times, when it was in fact in general use in writing inks by the 1870s.

Rod McNeil, working for Kenneth Rendell’s team in the US (1993), made the only attempt to establish scientifically when ink met paper. His methods, however, were unrepeatable and considered unreliable, prompting him to modify his conclusion twice, initially to thirty years either side of 1921, depending on the document’s storage conditions, and finally to a vague and unhelpful ‘prior to 1970’.

Analysis For Industry (1994) were commissioned by Melvin Harris to test his theory, based on where Mike Barrett claimed the ink was obtained, that it contained a modern preservative: chloroacetamide. Despite a positive indication, AFI’s result was not repeated by the University of Leeds, who reached the opposite conclusion. In any event, chloroacetamide had been used in preparations since the 1850s and the date of its first introduction to ink remains unknown.

No other examiner has positively identified any feature of the ink that is inconsistent with a late 1880s date. While that in no way swings the forensic pendulum in favour of an ink manufactured before 1889, it remains firmly in ‘undecided’ territory.

Writing Style
Bill observes that the style of writing ‘appears to be more in tune with the twentieth century than the nineteenth’, invoking the ghost of Dickens to make his point. It might have been more appropriate to compare the style with any one of the many ordinary souls who kept personal journals in the late 1880s, a full twenty years and more after Charles had been creating his great literature, including the quotes Bill chose to expose the diary as a fish out of water, which were taken from Our Mutual Friend, penned in the mid-1860s.
Is it reasonable for Bill to expect a journal from the late 1880s to be ‘more in keeping with this, over elaborate style of writing’ dating from twenty years earlier? Is it accurate to claim that throughout the diary can be found ‘words and phrases more common in the late twentieth century’? One of the quotes selected from *Our Mutual Friend* is ‘Wheresoever the strong tide met with an impediment, his gaze paused for an instant’. The diary begins in mid-sentence with: ‘…what they have in store for them they would stop this instant’. But are these words really more in keeping with the 1980s than the 1880s? The diarist even makes the same use of ‘instant’ here. Would the late twentieth century equivalent not look more like: ‘[If they knew] what’s in store for them they’d stop right now’? Who in a modern diary would write: ‘Okay then, I’ve made my mind up’? Throughout the text, our diarist consistently avoids modern contractions such as ‘isn’t’, ‘doesn’t’ and ‘can’t’, and evidently favours longwinded constructions like: ‘That will convince them that it is the truth I tell’ over ‘That’ll show them I’m telling the truth’.

**Killer Profile**

Bill is unaware of any serial killer who had begun offending at the age James Maybrick was in 1888 (ie age fifty). He also describes James as an ‘alleged’ drug user and a ‘successful businessman who yearned for a knighthood’, as opposed to an ‘anti-social misfit frustrated in a menial occupation’. The historical record puts it beyond reasonable doubt that James was a chronic user and abuser of a number of toxic substances including arsenic and strychnine. But how successful a businessman does the record prove him to have been, and what is the evidence that he yearned for a knighthood? The usual argument is that this yearning is only apparent in the diary itself and no evidence exists beyond its pages that Sir James (as he was referred to in the recollections of a former houseguest (2)) ever aspired to becoming Sir Jim in reality.

Moreover, there is a documented case of a gay psychiatric nurse called Mark Papazian, who planned a spree of murders and kept a diary to record his progress. Papazian scoured Hampstead Heath for homosexual men to encounter and befriend, in his quest to be a serial killer. He committed what is believed to be his first murder in 2005 at the ripe old age of fifty, and recorded the event in his diary. The trial judge stated that the diary made it clear this murder was “as premeditated as it can get” and he had no doubt that “if you had not been apprehended, you would have carried out further murders”. (3)

One quote from Papazian’s diary reads: ‘There was a struggle. He had some fight left in him, so I brought him to the ground. He made a noise but I covered his mouth. He tried to beat me, so I cut his throat.’

The diary included plans to murder another homosexual he met and it was clear that he planned a series of murders. (4)

Bill goes on to point out that David Canter, Professor of Criminology at Liverpool University, has observed that James Maybrick’s Aigburth residence in 1888 challenges the tendency of serial killers to offend close to home. However, this ignores the fact that Canter was also impressed by the way the diarist places Sir Jim in temporary lodgings in Middlesex Street, right at the heart of ripper operations, thus fitting in neatly with Canter’s theories of geographical profiling. Fortunately for the diarist, the real James was known to be a frequent visitor to London. Contrary to Bill’s assertion that he had no known connection with the East End, the evidence suggests at least one very real and
abiding one, in the form of Sarah Robertson from Stepney, who called herself Mrs Maybrick and was James’s mistress for years before he met and married Florie; remained close to him right up until his death, having followed him around the country (and possibly accompanied him across the Atlantic); gave birth to five of his babies, and ended up somewhere in Liverpool, readily admitting to his brothers that a bill in James’s name, which was some months overdue by the time he died, was for dresses made up for her, and that he had given her jewels as security for money she had loaned this supposedly successful businessman. (5)

The remorse shown at the end of the diary may well be, as Bill argues, ‘an alien concept’ for serial killers except when they can gain something from it. But remorse shown is not the same as remorse felt, particularly when the killer in question is meant to be expressing that remorse while planning to leave a record of it for others to find and read. This in itself might suggest that Sir Jim was indeed hoping to gain something from it. A closer look at that final page, dated the third day of May 1889, and the final chapter in the life of the real James Maybrick, who died on May 11th, may provide a reason for a false show of remorse on the diarist’s part.

Bill states that there is no evidence before May 10th that the real James could have seriously imagined he was dying. But could he not have been anticipating an early death by the end of December 1888, when Florie wrote to her mother, reporting that James had torn up his will in a fury, proposing to leave her as little as possible? (6) In the January of 1889 he met Valentine Blake and acquired a new supply of arsenic: "almost enough to poison a regiment", Blake warned him. (7) At the end of April 1889, four days after making the mean-spirited will he had previously threatened Florie with, and twelve days before he died, James wrote to his brother Michael, saying that he was ‘quite willing’ for the authorities to 'hold a post mortem', from which 'future generations may profit', because none of his doctors could make out what was the matter with him. (8)

At her trial for James’s murder, Florie famously testified that he had asked her to put some of his powder in the bottle of meat juice later found to contain arsenic. There was also still enough arsenic around the house, found among Florie’s possessions, to poison that proverbial regiment. So what was James expecting to happen, if she had dosed him as requested and all his remaining arsenic was found after his death, as it surely would be, along with his written suggestion that they perform a post mortem on him when he was ‘stretched out cold’? Was the real James setting Florie up to be accused of his murder? Or was he simply too ill and too self-absorbed to care what impact his own actions that year would have on her? Either way, they could hardly have been calculated to be more damaging to his beloved Bunny.

The Whore Master
How much can the historical record be expected to help with affairs of the heart? Who, apart from the parties directly involved, could pinpoint the beginning of an adulterous relationship, which tends not to be broadcast for obvious reasons? Bill describes it as a ‘glaringly obvious problem’ that Florie’s dalliance with Alf Brierley ‘did not get going’ until the ripper murders, supposedly motivated by the cheated husband’s jealousy, had come to an end. The record is evidently able to pinpoint ‘the first glimmer of affection’ starting to appear between the pair to ‘around the time of Mary Kelly’s murder’. Is this really how a love affair with a married woman would have begun and been conducted in the 1880s, in full public view? Would it not be more realistic to conclude that by November 1888, Florie and Alf were growing careless, by allowing their mutual feelings to be apparent to those in their company? And by the time of the Grand National, in March 1889, they were displaying their feelings flagrantly.
Is the diarist ‘consistent in his references to the “whore master” throughout’, as Bill suggests? He
concedes that the diarist had his sights on at least two love rivals at different points in time, by
referring to the following entry: ‘The bitch, the whore is not satisfied with one whore master, she
now has eyes on another.’ Bill identifies this new beau as Brierley, which presumably rules him out
as the diarist’s suspect for the man Florie had arranged to meet in town in early 1888.

In any case, Brierley was elected a member of the Liverpool Cricket Club in April 1881, with James
Maybrick following suit four years later, in April 1885 (9), allowing for Florie and Alf to have met
socially and gradually built up their relationship to the point in 1888 when they began to be less
discreet.

It is on record that Florie was an unfaithful wife. The couple had not been sleeping together since
1887. There was also the dinner party incident, related by James’s business colleague, John
Aunspaugh, when Florie said to her brother-in-law Edwin, in her husband’s hearing: “If I had met
you first things might have been different”. James apparently reacted by dropping his knife,
clenching his fist and flushing ‘the colour of fire’. A fellow diner later confided to Aunspaugh:
“Why, Edwin and Mrs James have been sweet on each other for quite a while”. (10) A remarkable
discretion on the young wife’s part and the wounded pride of her much older husband would
have given the diarist plenty of fuel for all his dark suspicions concerning what the ‘whore’ was
going up to and with whom, from at least as far back as marital relations began to sour. When was
proof ever required to convince a jealous husband of his wife’s guilt, or to turn a suspicious mind to
violence?

Invoking the spirit of Charles Dickens once more, by way of an interesting parallel, some scholars
maintain that Nelly Ternan, who was young enough to be his daughter and had a secret relationship
with him spanning many years, never became his lover but was merely a platonic companion. (11)
The historical record is ill-equipped to deal effectively with such questions. A bracelet meant for
Nelly, but delivered to Charles’s wife Catherine by mistake, led the married couple to separate. If
the evidence of actual intimacy between Charles and Nelly is absent from the record, would this
have rendered his wife’s suspicions and jealousy any less real or reasonable?

**The Poste House**

This reference continues to cause a few leaps of faith concerning which watering hole the diarist
had in mind. Is there an unwritten rule that Victorian diarists would avoid using nicknames for
public houses, or generic terms like ‘post house’, or would not start either with capital letters, or
could not make a spelling mistake whereby ‘post haste’ might be rendered ‘poste haste’ (as it is in
the diary) and ‘Post House’ by extension would be rendered ‘Poste House’? Once again, is it not a
bit much to expect the historical record to list every pub nickname ever used in casual
conversation? There is a perfectly good place of refreshment, which in 1888 was officially called
the Post Office Tavern, and it is situated in School Lane, within sight of Church Alley, where the
real James spent his childhood. Whitechapel Liverpool, where Florie is meant to have arranged that
fateful meeting with a man who was not her husband is virtually round the corner, while Central
Station, where James would have caught his evening train home to Aigburth, is a brief stroll away.
Anyone missing their train would have had ample time for a swift half or two before heading off to
catch the next.

When asked in the modern day centre of Liverpool where the post house might be (with no spelling
clues, given that Poste House is identical to post house in conversation), two local men, one a publican himself (12) and the other a pub frequenter and local history enthusiast (13), independently and without hesitation thought of the aforementioned tavern in School Lane [officially known as the Old Post Office Hotel since the 1890s, and referred to as “the HQ” by a regular customer in 2004] and not the tiny Poste House in Cumberland Street.

Incidentally, according to the Boddington Pub Company, writing in September 1992 regarding the Poste House in Cumberland Street:

*As far as we are aware the premises were known as the Post House in 1937 when the property was included in the omnibus conveyance to form Higsons Brewery Ltd from the three companies - Dania Higsons, J Sykes & Co and Joseph Jones. (14)*

**Sibling Rivalry**

Bill sees the references in the diary to Michael Maybrick’s rhyming verse skills as ‘direct evidence of a mistake’ arising from an understandable but false assumption that he wrote the lyrics in addition to the music for his popular songs. The diarist was well aware that Michael was a composer: ‘Michael is well, he writes a merry tune’. But there is not a single reference to him writing any song lyrics, either in a professional or amateur capacity. The argument is therefore reduced to whether or not the real Michael would have tried his hand at poetry at some point in his life, and could have shown his brother some of his efforts. Since they shared a home as schoolchildren, the opportunity was there from the age the brothers first learned to read and write. It would not have taken much for Michael to shine in the funny little rhyme department when compared with the diarist.

**Mitre Square**

The diarist is entitled to record anything the real killer could have experienced personally or read in the newspapers. The only apparent reference in the diary to the marks made by the killer’s knife on the Mitre Square victim’s cheeks was: ‘left my mark’. There is no mention of ‘two halves of the letter “M” for “Maybrick” carved on Cathy’s cheeks to taunt the police’, as Bill graphically describes. The argument continues in the same vein, suggesting that the idea of the killer ‘examining the contents of boxes and carving his initials on the victim’s face’ when someone could enter the square at any moment ‘sounds as if an imaginative novel has accidentally wandered into the pages of non-fiction’.

But is this imaginative stuff of novels to be found within the pages of the diary itself, or has it wandered in from elsewhere? Does the diarist claim to have wasted his limited ripping time examining boxes or carving initials? None of the items described by the diarist required examination if they were either mentioned in the newspapers or could have belonged to the killer himself, who might at least be expected to know what started out in his own pockets, even if it ended up as crime scene evidence.

It is not explained what ‘my mark’ refers to or where it was supposedly left. But there is no doubt that the real killer spared the time to have a go at the eyes and the face of Catherine Eddowes, just as he spared the time to cut her throat, remove organs and mutilate other parts of her body. He was not obliged to perform any of these irrational acts and yet he did so, in a situation where he could have been surprised at any time. Bill asks how a killer with no medical knowledge would have recognised a kidney among his spoils before the inquest was held. The question is easily answered
by anyone who has bought one from a butcher ‘for supper’. There is very little difference in appearance between the human and animal varieties.

FM on the Wall?
Here are two myths for the price of one. Firstly, there is no evidence that the initials FM, supposedly daubed with the killer’s bloody finger on Mary Kelly’s wall, are anything other than a photographic effect. Secondly, the ‘interesting claim’, which Bill attributes to the diarist, that Maybrick scrawled FM for Florence Maybrick on the wall, is to be found nowhere outside of the imagination of a couple of theorists, and certainly not within the pages of the diary itself:

An initial here and an initial there
will tell of the whoring mother...

...Left it in front for all eyes to see.

What and where these initials are meant to be, and what ‘it’ was that was left in ‘front’ (underlined twice in the diary for special emphasis), is left to the individual imagination. But there is no reference at all in the text to F or M, whether separate or placed together, either on the wall behind Mary, from the photographer’s viewpoint, or indeed anywhere else in that room.

No Heart
The diarist thrives on repetition and word play. ‘No heart’ appears immediately after his plea for forgiveness for ‘the deeds I committed on Kelly’ (the one and only time a victim is referred to by name). Not satisfied with writing it once, the diarist writes: no heart no heart... Is this, as Bill argues, all about atonement and nothing to do with Mary’s absent heart? Could it not be a mawkish play on words, a double meaning of ‘heartless’: one in the literal sense, the other signifying a cruel lack of feeling? The diarist regrets he didn’t take anything back with him for supper this time. But could the killer not have thrown the heart on the fire or disposed of it on leaving Miller’s Court?

It is no secret that Sir Jim is meant to have read about his ‘latest’ before recording his thoughts on the murder of Mary Kelly. Anything that has been wiped from his memory, or jumbled up in his over-medicated mind, in the wake of his most monstrous crime to date, can be put back or straightened out by what the papers say. Or can it? If he expects eye witnesses to the grim scene to fill in the gaps in his own recollection of how he left it, he is going to be misled. If he assumes he is being reliably informed that the breasts were found on the table, he will naturally conclude that he must have put them there, even though, as he later recalls, he did think of ‘leaving them by the whores feet’. But do killers forget such major details of their own crimes? The notorious cannibal Albert Fish apparently did. After abducting and murdering little Grace Budd, and with parts of her body still there with him, Fish could not remember ‘what it had been. He felt it must have been a boy. Yes, a boy; that was it’. (15)

Modern Influences?
The argument that the diary contains echoes of the Eight Little Whores poem, which has not been found in anything published prior to 1959, has very little substance when examined more closely. Counting rhymes have been around for centuries, and the diarist counts up from one, not down from eight:

One whore in heaven,
two whores side by side,
three whores all have died...

This has more in common with the extremely popular and topical (at the supposed time of the diary entry) Three Little Maids from School:

One little maid is a bride, Yum-Yum
Two little maids in attendance come
Three little maids is the total sum. (16)

If the diarist was influenced, as Bill also suggests, by the infamous hoax tape from the Yorkshire Ripper case, it begs the question why, considering the tape was discredited in 1981 when Peter Sutcliffe was convicted.

A Golden Rule
Problems cannot be created, or made to disappear, by ignoring, imagining or changing what is in the diary. For any textual argument to be valid it has to be based, first and foremost, on what can be found within the pages of the document itself. Individual interpretations of actual words, phrases and entries are a different matter. Within the laws of physics and the human condition, subjective interpretations and expectations may differ widely without one necessarily invalidating or taking precedence over another. The human condition, however, lays down its own rules, one of which demands that a serial killer is allowed to be at least as susceptible as the next man to human error and weakness, from imperfect recall, misapprehension and wishful thinking to fantasy, trickery, self-delusion and even lousy poetry. Why would anyone seeking to portray the Whitechapel Murderer be expected to conjure up Memory Man, Johnny Upright or a second Charles Dickens, in preference to the deeply flawed individual known as Jack the Ripper?

Acknowledgements, footnotes and internet sources:
1 Courtesy of Keith Skinner
2 Florence Aunspaugh: Trevor L. Christie Collection, Wyoming University
3 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4817544.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4817544.stm)
4 [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/m...6/ai_n16172179](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/m...6/ai_n16172179)
5 Bernard Ryan: The Poisoned Life of Mrs Maybrick, p 89
6 Trevor L. Christie: Etched in Arsenic, p 49
7 Ibid, p 216
8 HO 144/1639/A50678
9 Liverpool Cricket Club Records, courtesy of Christopher Jones, author of The Maybrick A to Z
10 Florence Aunspaugh, op cit
11 Kathryn Hughes, historian: Radio Times, 14 June 2008
12 Publican of Rigby’s, Dale St Liverpool, talking to Robert Smith in 1997
13 Anthony Carroll, talking to Caz Morris in 2004
14 Letter from Boddingtons to Sally Evemy, Shirley Harrison’s researcher: extract courtesy of Keith Skinner
15 Mel Heimer: The Cannibal, p 24
16 From Gilbert & Sullivan’s Mikado, which enjoyed a revival between June and September 1888