



London 1849: A Victorian Murder Story

By Michael Alpert

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London 1849: the city is filthy, plagued, criminal and filling up with refugees from the Irish Famine and the revolutionary wars on the continent...but it is on the brink of reform as stations are built, rioters pardoned and the Great Exhibition planned. The heaving city is the backdrop for the most sensational crime and trial of the decade: the Manning murder case. Throughout the sticky summer the people of London obsessed over the fate of a dominant mysterious woman and her weak husband as the full detail of their slaughter of her lover unfolded. *London 1849* follows the murder, trial and execution of the couple, interweaving the scene that was London at the time: crime, noise, cholera, overpacked slums, prostitution, law and order, prisons, fashion, shopping, finance, transport, Marx and Dickens.

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Editorial Review

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As the author notes in his introduction, this is not the first book about the 1849 murder of a well-to-do man by his former lover and her husband. But it is, as he says, the first to use the case "as a background to a picture of life in London" at the time. This is true crime the way Dickens might have written it. Beginning one chapter by describing the murderers' bodies (after they were hanged), Alpert soon segues into a discussion of the medical system in England in the mid-1800s; similarly, speculation about what the murderers might have served their victim for supper turns into a review of what London's various classes ate and the availability of food. In fascinating detail, Alpert puts the murder in its historical and social contexts, making the crime one small element of a larger picture. Although it is at times slightly overwritten (too many variants of "the fatal Thursday"), the book is endlessly illuminating and should be recommended to readers of true crime and Victorian history. *David Pitt*

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From the Back Cover

Maria and Frederick Manning came from Taunton to live in the London district of Bermondsey in 1849. They murdered Maria's lover, Patrick O'Connor, for his money. They fled, were captured, tried and hanged at Horsemonger Lane Prison, Southwark, before a roaring crowd.

1849 London was a sprawling and overcrowded city. Its streets varied from the wildly fashionable to the fetid, rife with crime, disease and prostitution. Foul water, filth-choked sewers and cholera killed thousands. The city was jammed with carts, cabs, omnibuses and new railways, yet Londoners continued to find new ways to educate and entertain themselves.

Michael Alpert has used the full records of the trial and the police files of the case, together with contemporary journalism and fiction, to recreate ordinary people's day-to-day London life in 1849.

About the Author

Michael Alpert taught history at the University of Westminster.

Users Review

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Dorothy Pearce:

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