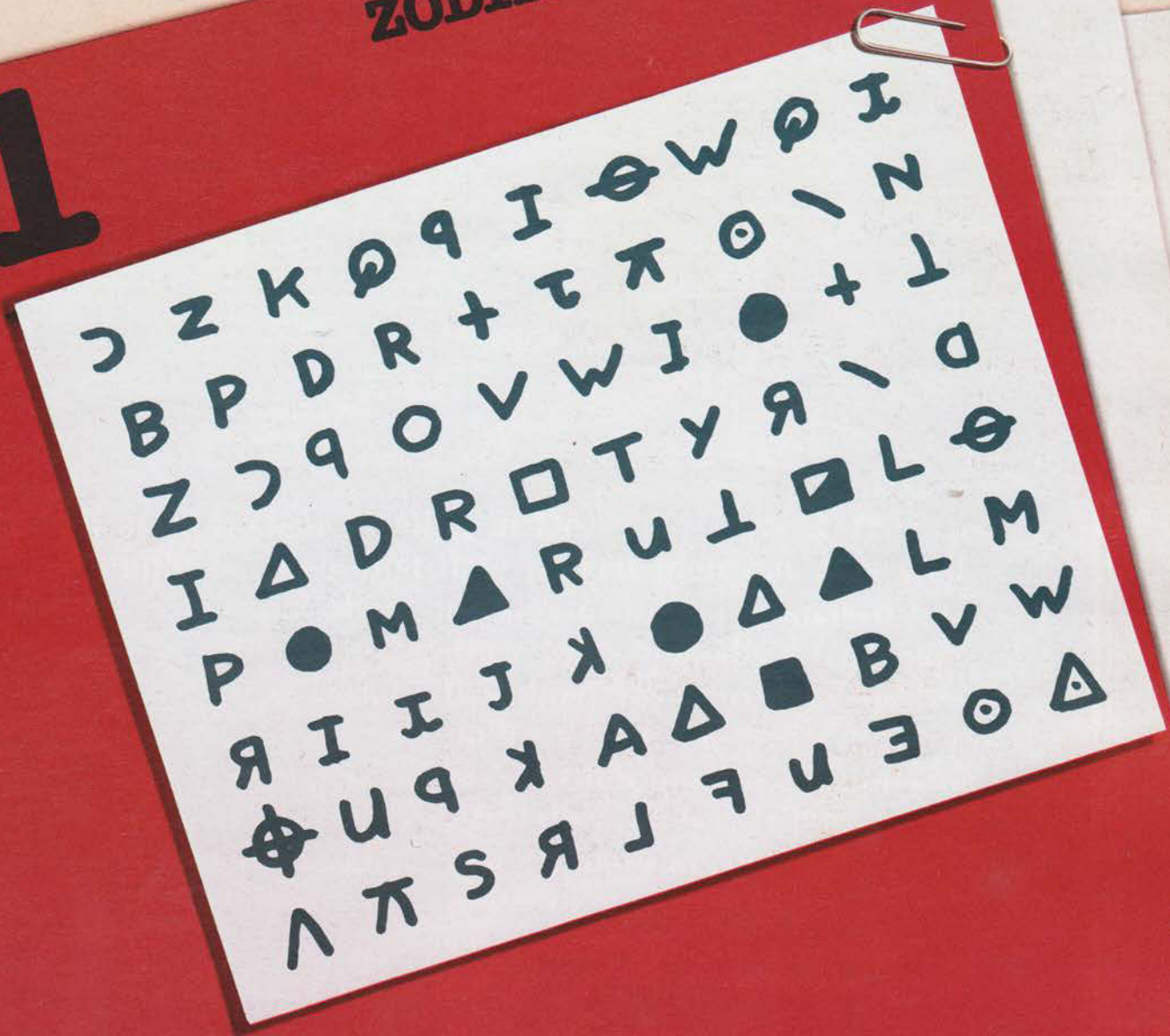


# UNSOLVED

## ZODIAC MURDERS

# 41



# THE ZODIAC KILLER

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# UNSOLVED

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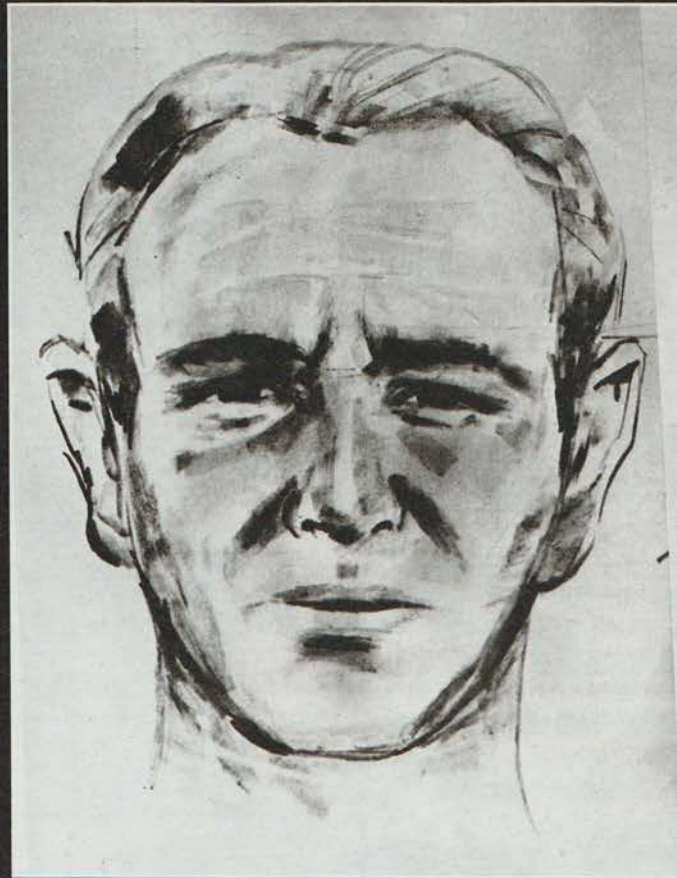
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## NEXT WEEK

On the night of 17 January 1981, about two hundred black youngsters attended a birthday party at 439 New Cross Road in Deptford, south London. Around 5.30 the following morning, with sixty to eighty people remaining and the party still going strong, a fire ripped through the house. When firemen searched the ruins, they found nine bodies; four more young people died in hospital and others carry permanent scars. In the ensuing investigation, and in the newspapers, various theories were put forward to explain this appalling tragedy, some of them suggesting that it was a case of racially motivated arson. The stormy inquest in April revealed a lack of conclusive evidence as to how the fire was started and an open verdict was returned. Subsequent inquiries have taken the police as far as the USA, but there is still no explanation for the 'New Cross Party Blaze'. Next week STEPHEN COOK reconstructs the sequence of events surrounding it and seeks some plausible answers.



# THE ZODIAC KILLER



**O**n a cold, clear evening in December 1968 a teenage couple on their first date parked their car at a well-known lovers' spot above a reservoir in San Francisco Bay, California. Within minutes they were both dead from gunshot wounds in an apparently motiveless murder – the first known crime of an insane killer who terrorised California with random murders for the next ten months. In mocking letters and telephone calls boasting of his crimes to the police, he called himself 'Zodiac'; a letter in code using astrological symbols gave a chilling account of the pleasure he got from killing people – 'collecting slaves for my afterlife'. Yet despite the evidence of cartridge cases, fingerprints, descriptions, voice-identifications and handwriting, the police have never caught 'Zodiac'. *COLIN WILSON* tells the story of the maniac murderer from San Francisco

**Sooner or later, this hunter of human beings would probably experience the urge to kill again**

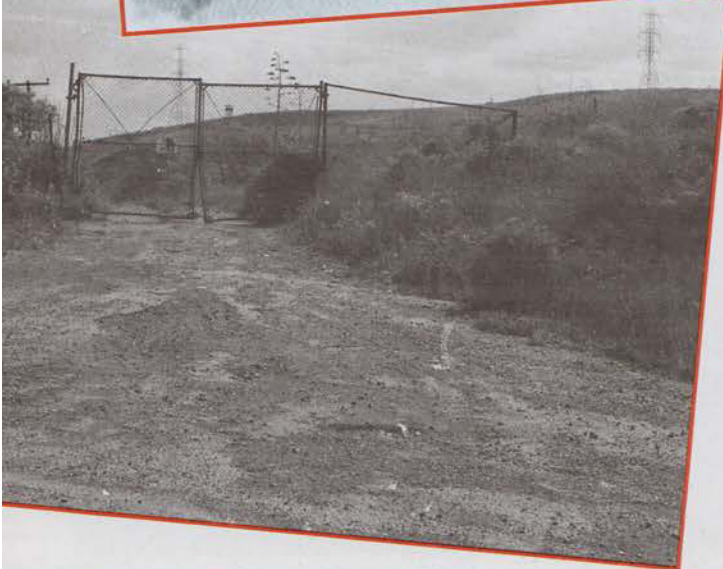
*Right: David Farraday (top) and Bettilou Jensen, the teenagers murdered in their car on the evening of 20 December 1968. They were the first known victims of the killer who became known as Zodiac, though claims he made later that he had murdered eight people led police to wonder whether student Cheri Jo Bates, found stabbed and with her throat cut in autumn 1968, was in fact his first victim. Below right: the parking spot near a pump-house overlooking the Lake Herman reservoir in San Francisco (below) where David and Bettilou were shot dead*

IT was the perfect night for young lovers: calm, moonlit and cold enough outside for the inside of the estate car to seem the most delightful place in the world. David Farraday and Bettilou Jensen were out on their first date on the night of 20 December 1968. They had spent most of the evening at the high school Christmas concert in nearby Vallejo, a small town about 20 miles (30 kilometres) north-east of San Francisco, California. Now, at 11.15pm, they had just parked near a concrete pump-house above Lake Herman reservoir. The heater blew warm air, the radio played pop music, and the seventeen-year-old boy and sixteen-year-old girl began to get better acquainted.

Suddenly, a man appeared at the window, and David Farraday found himself looking straight down the barrel of a gun. As the youth opened the door and started to climb out, the gun exploded. David Farraday fell dead instantly with a bullet wound behind his left ear. Bettilou flung open her own door and began to run. In the moonlight, it was impossible for the gunman to miss her; five shots ploughed into her back and she collapsed 75 yards (68 metres) from the car.

Only a few minutes later, another car drove past the pump-house. The woman driver saw the two bodies clearly in the headlights, but she did not stop; on the contrary, she put her foot down on the accelerator and drove fast towards the next town, Benicia, about 6 miles (9 kilometres) away, where she was going to meet her children from the Saturday evening cinema. A few miles further along the road she





saw, with relief, the red, flashing light of an oncoming police car. Within minutes, two deputy sheriffs and a detective sergeant were on their way to the pump-house on the Vallejo-Benicia road.

The young couple were both dead, and the warmth of their bodies told Detective Sergeant Leslie Lundblad that they had died recently. But beyond that there seemed to be no clues. David Farraday's wallet was intact in his pocket. Bettilou Jensen lay exactly as she had fallen, and her clothing was undisturbed. This, however, did not entirely rule out sex as a motive — it was conceivable that the killer had been disturbed by the passing car and taken refuge temporarily behind his victims' car until it had gone. The woman driver had, it turned out, shown very good sense in not stopping to investigate.

There were two more possible explanations. The most obvious was jealousy. David Farraday was a good-looking young man; Bettilou was a pretty girl. Perhaps some rejected lover had followed them as they drove towards the lovers' lane. The other possibility was rather more disturbing: that the killer was not a rejected lover, merely a reject — and a man who hated *all* lovers.

Lundblad's investigations soon disposed of the jealousy theory. David and Bettilou were ordinary high-school students. Both had good scholastic records and David was a scout and a fine athlete. Neither had any 'secret life' to investigate. It became clear to Lundblad that the two victims must have been chosen at random. Their killer had probably been hiding near the pump-house — a well-known resort for young lovers — waiting, like a hunter, for someone to arrive. It seemed probable that he had parked his car out of sight and sat in it until David's estate car had arrived. Even that was only a guess; the ground was frozen too hard to show tyre tracks. Only one thing seemed clear: sooner or later, this hunter of human beings would probably experience the urge to kill again.

Six months passed and David Farraday and Bettilou Jensen became just two more statistics in California's huge file of unsolved crimes. It looked as though their murders were an isolated incident until, shortly before midnight on 4 July 1969, another young couple parked their car in Blue Rock Springs Park, Vallejo, only 2 miles (3 kilometres) from the place where David and Bettilou had died. The car, a brown Ford Corvair, belonged to the girl, 22-year-old Darlene Elizabeth Ferrin, a Vallejo waitress and mother of a young child. With her was nineteen-year-old Michael Renault Mageau, who worked for his father, a Vallejo businessman.

Soon after the couple drove into the car park, another car came and parked beside them. They were not particularly disturbed at this: there were various other cars in the park, the nearest of which contained several people. In any case, this second car soon went away, leaving them in peace. Ten minutes passed, and suddenly the same car returned, this time parking on the other side of the Corvair. A blinding beam of light, like a searchlight, shone through the window on the passenger side, which made the couple think that it was a police patrol car. A man opened the door and came over towards them. Suddenly there was an

explosion of gunfire. Two shots struck Darlene Ferrin as she sat at the wheel; another ploughed into Michael Mageau's neck and went up into his mouth, causing him to scream with agony. Then the man turned and walked back to his own car. He paused and fired another four shots, then drove away, backing out so fast that he left a smell of burning rubber behind him.

Michael Mageau, still conscious, saw him drive away. By this time he was lying on the ground beside the car, trying to reach the nearest other car in the park. But before he succeeded, this car also drove away: the occupants were obviously anxious not to get involved. Michael Mageau lost consciousness.

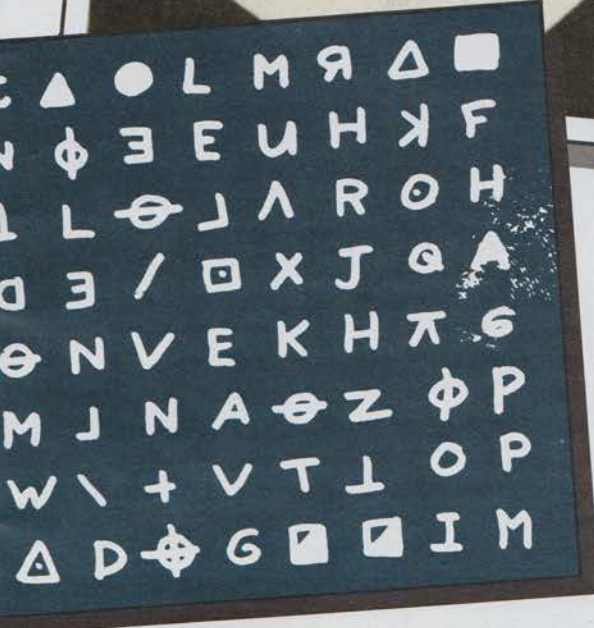
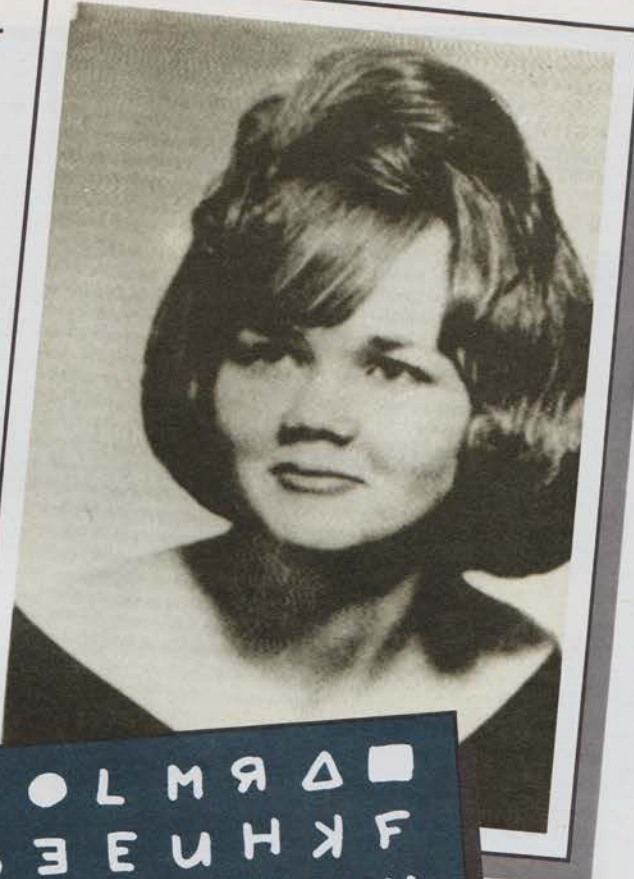
At four minutes past midnight, the switchboard operator at the Vallejo Police Headquarters received a call. A man's voice told her, 'I want to report a double murder. If you go one mile east on Columbus Parkway to a public park, you will find the kids in a brown car. They are shot with a 9mm Luger. I also killed those kids last year. Goodbye.' Then the line went dead.

When the police patrol car arrived at Blue Rock Springs

Above right: Darlene Ferrin, a 22-year-old waitress who was shot dead by Zodiac in July 1969 while out with her boyfriend Michael Mageau. Mageau survived and was able to give evidence to the police. He described his attacker as having light brown hair and wearing spectacles. Other witnesses in the car park where the two were shot corroborated some of the details, including the information that the killer drove a brown car. Zodiac, quickly irritated by the lack of publicity given to the case, sent letters to three major newspapers on 1 August 1969, each containing a letter and a fragment of code that revealed some knowledge of astrological symbols (right). He signed the letters with a cross inside a circle — the sign of the zodiac, which gave him his name. The code defeated the cipher experts at the nearby Mare Island Naval Yard, but was eventually cracked (below) by a schoolteacher and his wife. Zodiac's promise that the code contained a clue to his identity proved false



I L I K E K I L L I N G P E O P L  
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 3 4 4 3 3 3  
 E B E C A U S E I + I S S O M U C  
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 H F U N I + I S M O R E F U N T H  
 M J Y Λ U I > Δ ϕ T ⊥ N Q Y ϕ ● ϕ



**It was the signature on the letters – the circle with a cross inside it – that provided the killer with his nickname. The sign is the astrological symbol for the zodiac**

Park, the officers discovered that the caller had been mistaken about one detail: it was not a double murder. Michael Mageau was still alive, although the bullet that had passed through his tongue prevented him from speaking. Darlene Ferrin was dead.

Michael Mageau slowly recovered. When he could speak, he was able to describe his assailant as a stocky, round-faced man, about 5 feet 8 inches (1.72 metres) tall, with light brown wavy or curly hair. His age was around thirty. The gun he had used was not the same one as in the previous case; this one was a 9mm whereas the other was a .22. But the Solano County Sheriff's Department had little doubt that the caller was telling the truth when he admitted to killing David Farraday and Bettilou Jensen. And Lundblad now knew that his worst apprehensions were confirmed. The killer's motive was not robbery, rape, or jealousy. This was simply a 'nut', a homicidal maniac who killed at random.

Again, there were no clues. Even the discovery that the killer had used a public telephone booth in a garage 2 miles (3 kilometres) from the murder scene failed to provide a lead. The garage had been closed at the time, so no one had seen the caller. The likeliest inference was that the killer was an inhabitant of Vallejo, or was at least familiar with the town, and knew where the garage was and that it would be closed. And since Vallejo was a small town, that seemed a promising lead. Surely somebody would recognise Michael Mageau's description of the stocky, wavy-haired man who drove a brown car, probably a Ford?

But it seemed that no one did. And four weeks after the 4 July murder, the killer himself apparently became impatient with the police's lack of progress and decided to liven up the investigation. On the morning of 1 August 1969 the editor of the *Vallejo Times-Herald* received a crudely scrawled letter, signed with a circle containing a cross, which looked ominously like the telescopic sight of a rifle. The letter-writer described himself as the man who had shot both couples, giving details that made it clear that he knew more about the murders than had been made public. For example, he gave precise details of the type of bullets that had killed Darlene Ferrin. He also mentioned the clothing worn by Bettilou Jensen, evidence that he had taken a close look at her body before fleeing from the scene.

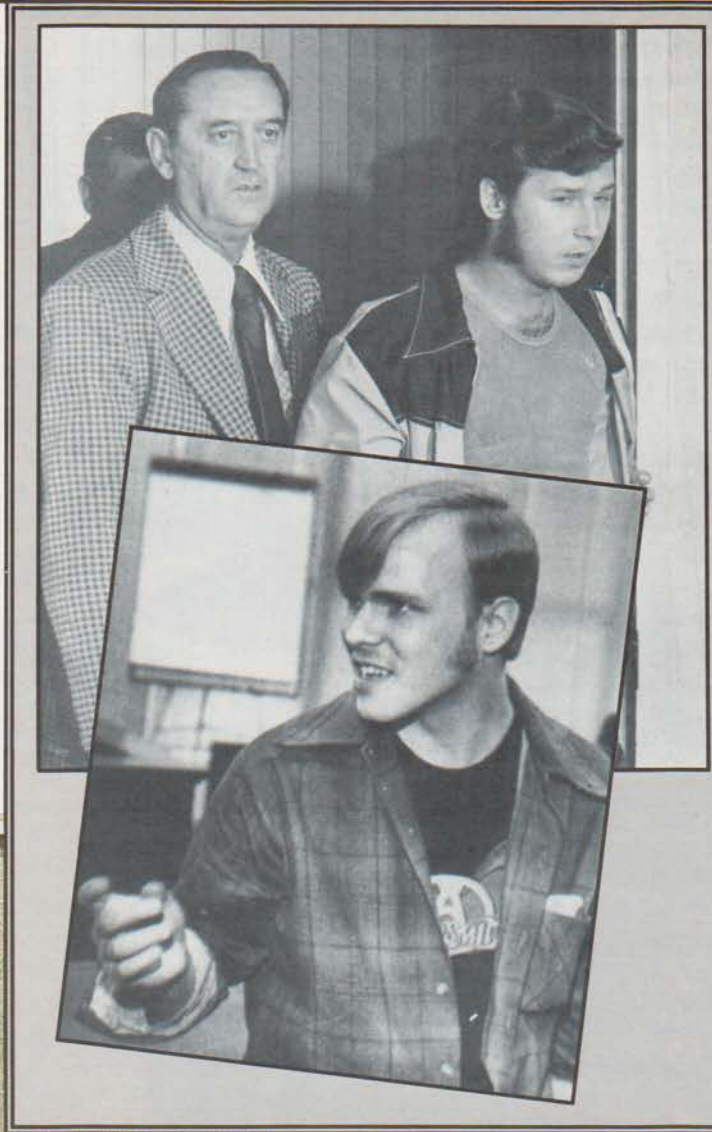
The letter contained an enclosure – a third of a sheet of paper, covered with a strange cipher. What had happened to the other two thirds? The answer soon came. They were enclosed in two more letters, sent simultaneously to the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *San Francisco Examiner*. The letters to all three newspapers were identical; the code was not. But the letter-writer explained that if the three fragments of the ciphered message were decoded and joined together, they would reveal his identity.

It was the signature on the letters – the circle with a cross inside it – that provided the killer with his nickname. The sign is the astrological symbol for the zodiac, the circle of twelve heavenly constellations. From then on, the newspapers called the killer 'Zodiac'. All three letters contained the same threat: that if they were not published that same



**'I will cruse around killing people  
who are alone until Sun night or  
until I kill a dozen people'**

*Below: policemen from two counties in the San Francisco Bay area compare notes in their search for Zodiac. A pile of 'Wanted' posters lies on the table, while behind the officers is the first, crude Identikit picture of the killer. The sign of the zodiac, with which the killer signed his letters to the newspapers and police, is drawn on the top left corner of the blackboard*

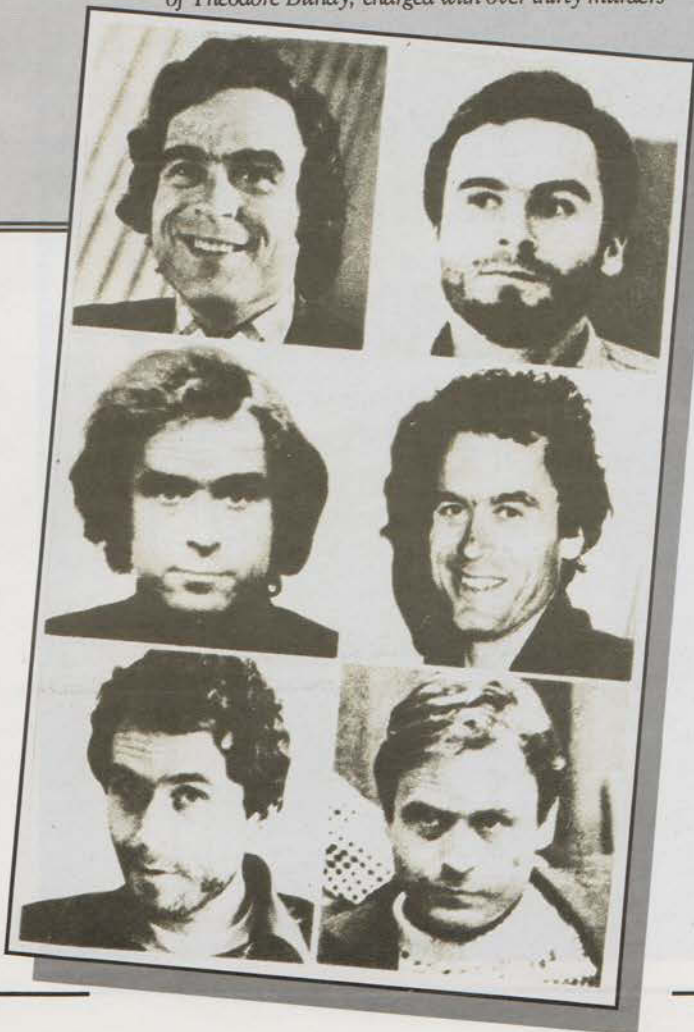


## Murderers on the move

Since the Zodiac murders in the late Sixties the USA has been plagued with a new type of criminal: the 'serial killer'. This, according to a US Justice Department report of January 1984, is someone who has killed at least ten people. During the Seventies there were at least seventeen such murderers and of this number nine have committed more than twenty murders each. According to *The New York Times* of 21 January 1984, 'Law enforcement officials say there have been isolated examples of such criminals in the past, including Jack the Ripper. . . . But after a study of homicide reports spanning the past few decades, the officials assert that history offers nothing to compare with the spate of such murders in the United States since the beginning of the Seventies.'

Why did it take so long for this to dawn on the Justice Department? The answer is that most 'serial killers' roam the country, often moving on quickly after committing murders in a particular area. Lack of cooperation between records departments in different states means

*Above left: killer Danny McCrary under arrest in 1972. Left: Steven Judy, who claimed to have raped and killed more women than he could remember. Below: six faces of Theodore Bundy, charged with over thirty murders*



that police may be quite unaware that a killer is traveling across the US leaving a trail of bodies behind him. In April 1979, 22-year-old Steven Judy was arrested in Indiana, charged with raping and murdering a young woman and killing her two children. Before his execution he told his stepmother that he had travelled around the country and had raped and killed more women than he could remember.

In the early Seventies the McCrary family — three men and two women — wandered from Florida to California, abducting waitresses and shop assistants whom they raped and murdered; their arrest in 1972 led the police to investigate 22 such crimes. Theodore Bundy, a plausible young law student, roamed the country and is believed to have killed more than thirty young girls. The 'freeway killers' of the Seventies specialised in murdering young men and dumping their bodies on roads; William Bonin was eventually charged with some of these killings, but another thirty or so are still unsolved. In 1983, George Stano admitted to having killed 31 girls in Florida alone. Patrick Kearney killed eighteen young men in California in 1980. And Henry Lee Lucas claimed that he and a partner killed a total of two hundred women and children in the Seventies.

'Something's going on out there,' said Robert Heck of the US Justice Department, 'It's an epidemic.' He estimates that 4000 Americans a year — at least half of them under the age of eighteen — are murdered by 'serial killers'; their bodies are dumped on hillsides or at the side of deserted roads and are never identified. Now the epidemic has been recognised, the solution may be brought nearer by computerisation of records departments of different counties and states, which will permit closer cooperation between police departments.

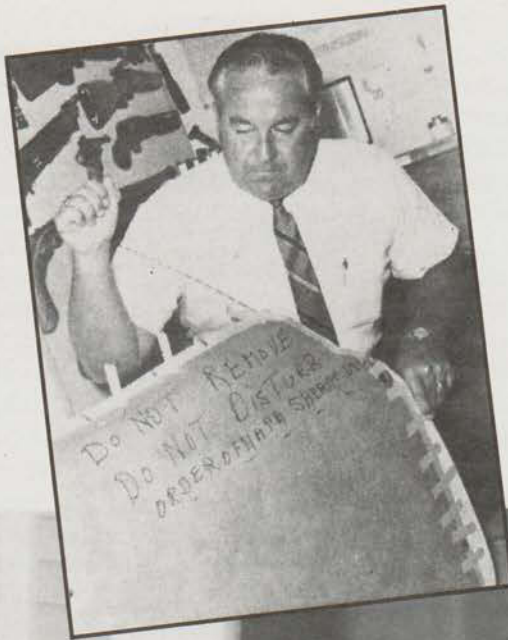
day, 1 August, the writer would 'go on a rampage': 'This will last the whole weekend and I will cruise around killing people who are alone until Sun night or until I kill a dozen people.'

The letters were published — but not in their entirety. Certain details were withheld, including the murder threats. Most major murder cases provoke false confessions from the mentally ill; by withholding part of the letters, the police had a useful method of distinguishing between a harmless crank (who would not be able to say what was missing) and the real killer, if they were to make an arrest.

All three newspapers published the complete text of the cryptogram, together with a request that the letter-writer should provide more proof of his identity. Zodiac responded promptly, sending the *San Francisco Examiner* a letter beginning: 'This is Zodiac speaking', in which he gave more details of the crimes. But he provided no further clue to his identity.

Public attention now centred on the cryptogram. It was sent to naval code experts at the nearby Mare Island Naval Yard, but they failed to crack it. Amateur cryptanalysts all over the state experienced the same lack of success. But one

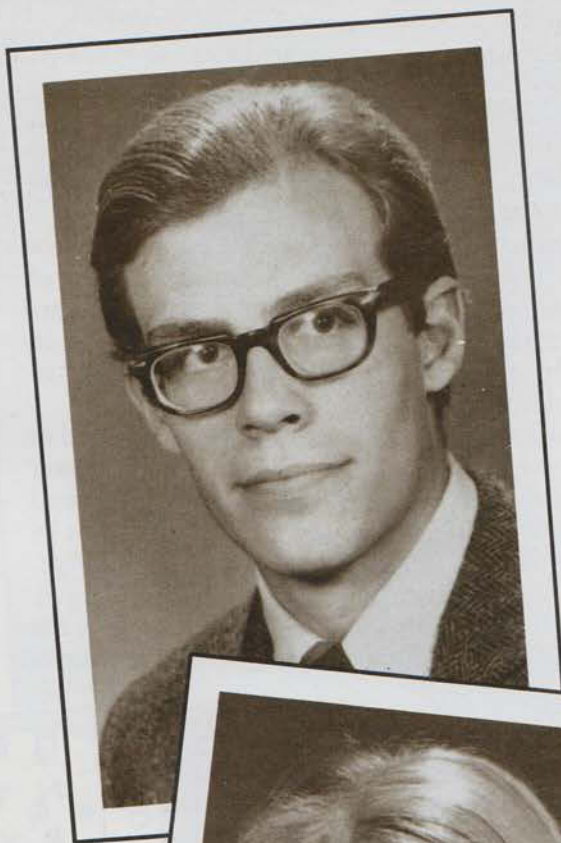
# THE ZODIAC KILLER



man — a schoolteacher named Donald Harden, who lived in Salinas, California — had the inspired idea of looking for groups of signs that might fit the word 'kill', on the grounds that this word would be used more than once. When he had found the suspected group of signs, he began the long, slow business of working out other letters that might be associated with it — for example, endings like '-ing' or '-ed'. It took Harden and his wife ten hours to decode most of the letter. It read:

I like killing people because it is so much fun it is more fun than killing wild game in the forest because man is the most dangerous animal of all to kill something gives me the most thrilling experience it is even better than getting your rock off with a girl the best part of it is when I die I will be reborn in paradise and





*Above: Bryan Hartnell and Cecilia Shepard, tied up and stabbed while picnicking on the shores of Lake Berryessa, California. Hartnell survived and was able to give police a description of the hooded killer's appearance and voice. Cecilia Shepard died without regaining consciousness. Left: the telephone booth in Napa used by Zodiac to inform the police of his crime. The receiver bore three fingerprints, but they did not correspond with any in the state criminal records. Above left: police with the door panel of Hartnell's car, on which the killer had written the dates and times of his attacks*

all I have killed will become my slaves I will not give you my name because you will try to slow down or stop my collecting slaves for my afterlife. . .

The decoding was made more complicated by the fact that the cryptogram was full of spelling errors (such as 'forrest' for forest and 'sloi' for slow), and it ended in an incomprehensible jumble: 'ebeori st me thh piti.'

But the threatened massacre (the 'rampage') did not materialise. Perhaps Zodiac was satisfied with the partial publication of his letter, or perhaps he never had any intention of going on a murder rampage on a weekend when every police officer in California would be looking for him. The threat was simply to cause the maximum amount of panic.

The public offered more than a thousand tips, and every one was checked by the police. Yet ten weeks after the murder of Darlene Ferrin, they were still apparently no closer to solving the crimes. The long, blazing hot summer drew to a close. On the afternoon of Saturday 27 September, two students from Pacific Union College, a Seventh Day Adventist institution above Napa Valley, went out for a picnic on the shores of Lake Berryessa, about 13 miles (20 kilometres) north of Vallejo. Bryan Hartnell was twenty years old, and Cecilia Shepard was 22. They had just finished eating at about 4.30pm when they heard a noise behind them. From the shadow of a tree, a hooded figure stepped out. On the part of the hood covering the figure's chest was a zodiac sign, drawn in white. The short, pudgy figure advanced towards them, a gun in one hand and a knife in the other.

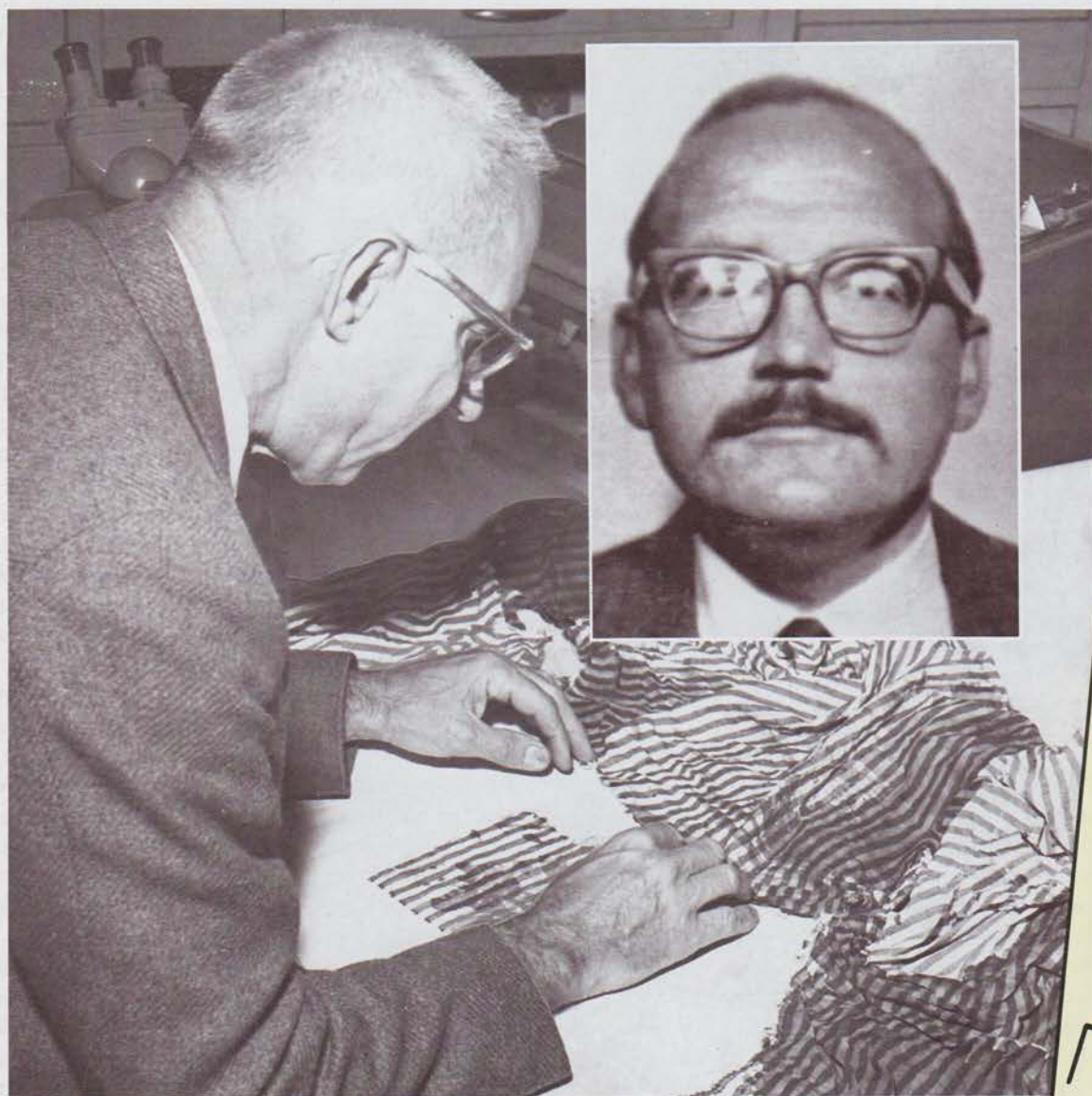
In a gruff voice, the man asked Hartnell for money, and the young man said he was welcome to the small amount he had on him. The hooded man then declared that he was an escapee from Deer Lodge State Prison in Montana, where he had killed a guard, and said that he needed to take their white sports car so that he could get to Mexico. Then he produced a length of plastic clothes-line and proceeded to tie them both up. As he tied Hartnell's hands, the young man was able to see through the eye-slits in the hood that their assailant wore glasses and had brown hair. When he had tied both victims by the wrists and ankles, the man announced: 'I'm going to have to stab you people.' Hartnell replied, 'I'm chicken. Please stab me first - I couldn't bear to see her stabbed.' 'I'll do just that,' said the man, and plunged the knife again and again into Hartnell's back. Sick and dizzy with pain, Hartnell then watched the man attack Cecilia. This, obviously, was what the killer had been looking forward to. After the first stab he went into a frenzy, driving the knife again and again into her back. Then he turned her over and stabbed her repeatedly in the stomach. When he had finished, he went over to their car, took out a black felt-tipped pen and wrote on the passenger door. Then he left.

Fighting off unconsciousness, Bryan Hartnell managed to struggle over to Cecilia and undo her wrist bonds with his teeth. It made no difference; she was too weak to move. But fortunately help was already on the way. A fisherman on the lake had heard their screams and had seen the two

Right: the corner of Washington Street and Cherry Street in San Francisco where taxi-driver Paul Stine (below, inset) was shot in the back of the head in October 1969 by a customer who stole his takings. Police regarded it as a straightforward armed robbery until the following week when a newspaper received a letter from Zodiac claiming to be the murderer. To prove it, he enclosed a piece of bloodstained shirt that exactly matched the torn shirt found on Stine's body (below). Below right: a new cryptogram, sent with a second letter to the same newspaper a month later, which Zodiac enclosed with another piece of Stine's shirt as proof of his identity. No translation of the cipher has been released to the public

bodies lying on the shore. He rowed straight to the headquarters of the park ranger and within half an hour Ranger William White was kneeling by the two victims, who both looked close to death. They had just been rushed off to hospital when the Napa police arrived. They, however, had not been summoned by the fisherman or the ranger. They had been alerted by an anonymous telephone call, a man with a gruff voice telling them: 'I want to report a murder. No, a double murder. They are two miles north of park headquarters. They were in a white Volkswagen Karmann Ghia. I'm the one that did it.' There was no click to end the call; the man had apparently left the telephone to dangle off the hook.

Bryan Hartnell and Cecilia Shepard arrived at hospital in Napa; neither was able to speak. Cecilia died two days later without recovering from her coma; Bryan Hartnell recovered slowly, and was later able to describe their attacker. But by then the police already knew they were dealing with Zodiac. They found his sign on the passenger door of the sports car. He had also written two dates, 20 December and 4 July, the dates of the first two attacks; and a time, 4.30, the time of





the third attack.

Only six blocks from the police headquarters in Napa, the police found the public telephone from which Zodiac had made the call; the telephone receiver was still hanging off the hook. Technicians found three fingerprints on it, but this clue also led nowhere. The killer's prints were not on police records in California; apparently he had no criminal record in the state. A check with Montana's Deer Lodge State Prison revealed what the police already took for granted: the killer's talk about escaping and killing a guard there was pure fantasy.

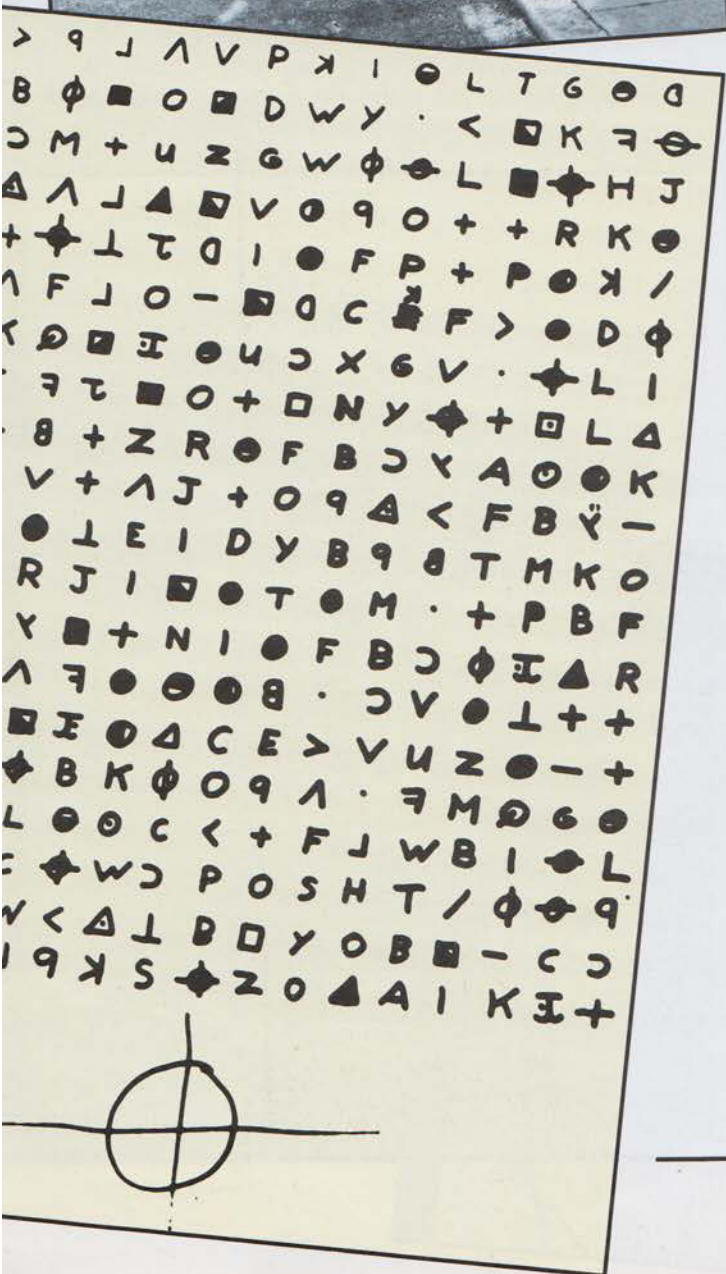
Two weeks later, on the evening of 11 October 1969, a student and part-time taxi-driver named Paul Stine picked up a passenger near the Fairmont Hotel on Nob Hill in San Francisco; he was a stocky man with brown hair and horn-rimmed glasses. A quarter of an hour later, two youths standing at the intersection of Washington Street and Cherry Street heard the sound of a gunshot. It came from a yellow cab that had pulled in to the kerb. As they watched, a man got out of the back seat, and leaned through the window into the front of the cab. There was a tearing noise, then the man began wiping the cab with a piece of cloth. Suddenly aware that he was being watched, he left the cab and began to walk rapidly along the street towards the great open space called the Presidio.

The youths alerted the police, who were at the spot within minutes. Paul Stine was slumped forward over the wheel of the cab. The 29-year-old student of San Francisco State College was dead, shot in the back of the head. The motive was robbery — his wallet was missing and so was the cash from previous fares. The tearing noise the witnesses had heard had been Stine's shirt, which the killer had used to wipe the cab, presumably to eliminate fingerprints.

It looked like a typical armed robbery, the kind that often occurs in San Francisco on a Saturday night. The only unusual feature about this particular crime was its sheer ruthlessness — the driver had been killed when he could just as easily have been left alive. It was not until the following Tuesday that the police realised that they had come close to catching Zodiac. The *San Francisco Chronicle* received a letter that began: 'This is Zodiac speaking. I am the murderer of the taxi driver over by Washington and Maple Street last night. To prove this here is a bloodstained piece of his shirt. I am the same man who did in the people in the south bay area. The S.F. [San Francisco] police could have caught me last night if they had tried. . .'

The letter went on to jeer at the police for not making a thorough search of the Presidio, and commented on how much the killer detested the sound of the police motor cycles. It continued: 'Schoolchildren make nice targets. I think I shall wipe out a school bus some morning. Just shoot out the tyres and then pick off all the kiddies as they come bouncing out.'

The letter was signed with the mark of the Zodiac. By that time, a check on the bullet that had killed Stine showed that it came from the same .22 that had killed the first two victims ten months before. There could be no doubt that the letter was genuine. The bloodstained piece



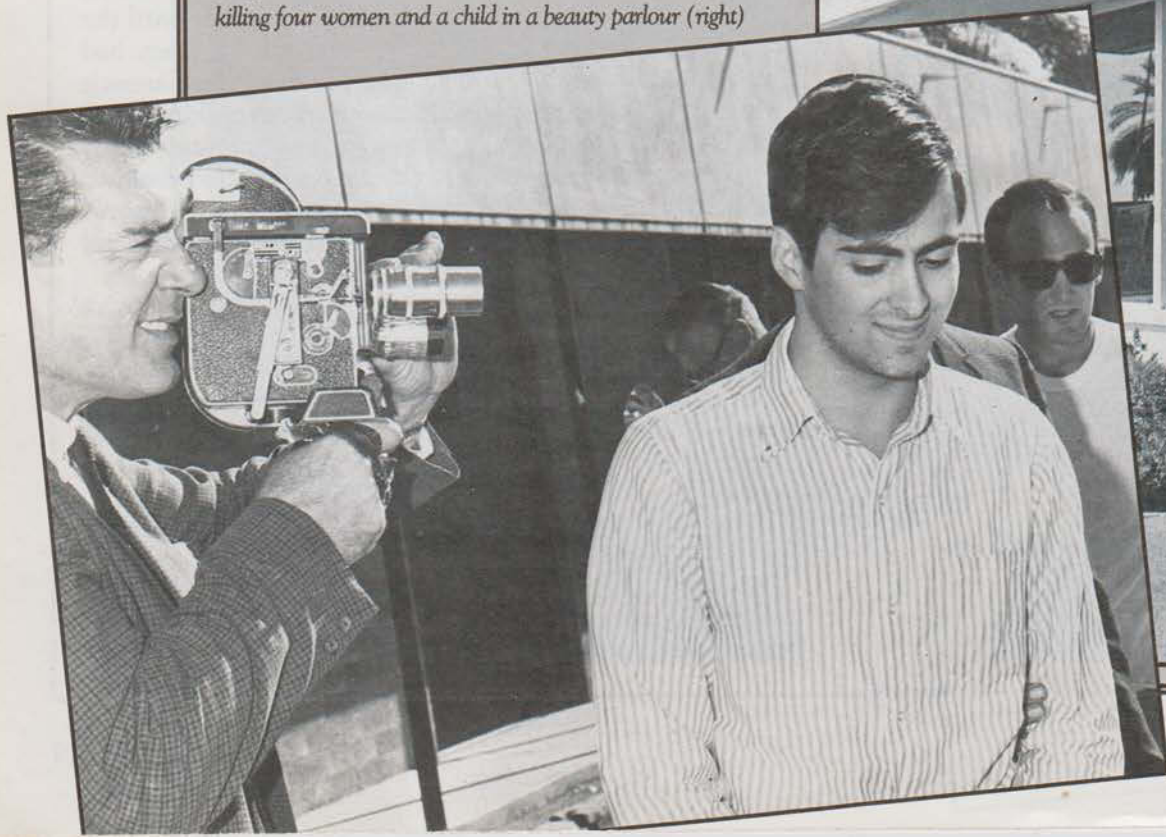
## Slaying for fame



Above: David Berkowitz, 'Son of Sam', arrested in 1977. Below: Robert Smith after his arrest in 1966 for killing four women and a child in a beauty parlour (right)

The majority of mass murderers are anxious to keep their crimes secret, because discovery will point the police in their direction. But there is a type of murderer who craves publicity, who longs to send shock waves of panic throughout the community. The sadistic German killer Peter Kürten, executed in 1931, loved to join the crowds who gathered around the bodies of his victims — many of whom were children — and listen to their expressions of horror. Jack the Ripper's letters to the police and to the Central News Agency in London show the same mentality. Such an attitude reveals a craving for fame and notoriety. In 1966 an eighteen-year-old student, Robert Smith, walked into a beauty parlour in Mesa, Arizona, made five women and two children lie on the floor and then shot them all in the back of the head. He told the police, 'I wanted to become known, to get myself a name.' Zodiac is an example of this rare type of criminal.

Another was the mass murderer known as the Axe Man of New Orleans, who killed nine people, mostly Italian grocers, in 1918 and 1919. The Axe Man's usual method was to chisel out a panel in the back doors to people's homes, and attack his victims as they lay asleep in bed. In March 1919 he wrote to the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, writing his address as 'Hell', and declaring that he was a demon. He said that on the following Tuesday he intended to pay a visit to New



Orleans to look for victims, but that he would bypass all houses in which jazz music was being played. That Tuesday evening the whole of New Orleans rocked to the sound of jazz. The Axe Man failed to appear, and his identity was never discovered.

Another mass murderer whose crimes bear a curious resemblance to those of Zodiac is David Berkowitz, better known as 'Son of Sam', an insane killer who terrorised New York for thirteen months in the mid Seventies. Like Zodiac, 'Son of Sam' walked up to cars and fired at random, often choosing courting couples. Caught purely by chance in August 1977 when a policeman came to stick a parking ticket on his car while he was committing his sixth murder, Berkowitz proved to be 'a mouse of a man' — plump, smiling, very polite, a boring nonentity. Like Zodiac, Berkowitz also liked to write letters to the police, using phrases like, 'I love to hunt. Prowling the streets looking for fair game — tasty meat. The women of Queens are prettiest of all. . . .' Berkowitz was intensely shy and probably a virgin; his crimes were a way of asserting his masculinity. Although judged sane (and sentenced to 365 years in jail), Berkowitz was undoubtedly mentally retarded. In view of the soft-voiced caller who identified himself as 'Sam' on Jim Dunbar's show, it may be more than coincidence that Berkowitz decided to call himself 'Son of Sam': was the Zodiac killer of the late Sixties his hero?



of cloth was from the tail of a shirt, and it fitted the torn shirt left on Paul Stine.

Was the killer serious about shooting children from a school bus? Probably not — he had never, so far, taken any real risk; he liked to kill stealthily, then run away. But the threat could certainly not be ignored. Armed deputies started to ride on all school buses, not only in San Francisco but in all the surrounding towns. Drivers were instructed not, on any account, to stop even if shots were fired; they were to drive on at top speed, sounding the horn and flashing the lights.

But all these precautions proved unnecessary. The murder of Paul Stine was the last officially recorded crime of the Zodiac killer. The murderer may well have felt that the hunt was getting too close; the police by now had good descriptions of him, and had issued 'Wanted' notices showing a man with a crew-cut and horn-rimmed glasses. Police from Napa to San Francisco were permanently on the alert; and there was a noticeable drop in the number of courting couples using lovers' lanes at night. The team hunting Zodiac now believed they were getting close, and that it would only be a matter of time before their net snared the man whose fingerprints matched those found on the telephone. But this optimism proved to be unfounded.

Zodiac had decided to stop killing, but his craving for publicity was unsated. In the early hours of 21 October, ten days after the murder of Paul Stine, the switchboard operator of the Oakland Police Department heard a gruff voice saying, 'This is Zodiac'. He went on to make a number of remarks that later convinced police that he was the man who had so far killed five people. What he really wanted, said the caller, was to give himself up. He would do that on condition that he was represented by a famous lawyer — preferably F. Lee Bailey or Melvin Belli, both well-known lawyers at the time. He would also, he said, like to speak on a famous television talk-show that went out on breakfast television.

The requests sounded absurd, but the Zodiac squad decided that it was worth a try. They immediately contacted Melvin Belli, who had an office in San Francisco, and asked if he would be willing to try to help them trap Zodiac. He agreed without hesitation. Then they asked the chat-show host, Jim Dunbar, if he would reserve space for a telephone call on his show at 6.45 that morning. The police then got in touch with the only three people who had heard Zodiac's voice: victim Bryan Hartnell and the two switchboard operators who had taken Zodiac's calls.

When the show went on the air at 6.45am, silver-haired Melvin Belli was sitting beside the presenter Jim Dunbar. Dunbar told his audience that they were hoping for a call from the Zodiac killer, and asked them to keep the telephone lines clear. The audience cooperated. Those who saw the opening moments of the show rang their friends to tell them what was happening and, as a result, the show reached a record audience for that time of day in the San Francisco Bay area.

Almost an hour went by, while Belli and Dunbar discussed the murders. Then, at 7.41am, a soft, boyish voice



**The letter seemed to indicate that the writer's mental state was deteriorating – there was a note of desperation that sounded genuine**

*Right: a Napa detective shows an Identikit picture of the Zodiac killer to students in September 1969. Below right: the poster issued by the San Francisco Police Department in October 1969 using an improved Identikit on the left and a further amended version on the right. Below, far right: an extract from one of Zodiac's letters, referring to his second cryptogram (page 819) and offering a tantalising clue to his identity. Below: Jim Dunbar (left), host of a television chat show, waits with lawyer Melvin Belli for Zodiac to ring in to the programme on 21 October 1969. Belli finally persuaded the caller who claimed to be Zodiac to meet him at an arranged place, but he failed to turn up*





came on the line. He rang off immediately, but rang back five minutes later. This time he identified himself as Zodiac, but said he preferred to be called Sam. In the studio, Bryan Hartnell and the two switchboard operators shook their heads. Unless Zodiac had been deliberately lowering his voice when they heard him, this call was a hoax.

Sam rang off and rang back fifteen separate times. He stated that he had been suffering from headaches 'since I killed that kid last December', and he frequently groaned with pain, explaining, 'it is the headache speaking'. Belli tried twice to persuade Sam to give himself up, without success. But finally, with the broadcast sound cut off so that the television audience could not hear, Belli persuaded the caller to meet him in front of a shop in Daly City, south of San Francisco.

Predictably perhaps, the mysterious caller failed to arrive. Members of the Zodiac squad hidden at various points near the shop told themselves in consolation that they did not believe the caller was Zodiac anyway. Yet that conclusion is by no means as obvious as it looks. If the caller was a hoaxer, then it would seem logical to expect that the real Zodiac would lose no time in denouncing him. Nothing of the sort happened. And when, that Christmas, the lawyer Melvin Belli received a letter from a man who called himself Zodiac, it began 'Dear Melvin', as if he and Belli were old acquaintances. To confirm his identity, the writer enclosed another piece of Paul Stine's bloodstained shirt. Handwriting experts confirmed that this letter bore strong resemblances to the earlier ones. The letter seemed to indicate that the writer's mental state was deteriorating. The spelling was worse than usual, and there was a note of desperation that sounded genuine: 'The one thing I ask of you is this, please help me. I cannot reach out for help because of this thing in me won't let me. I am finding it extremely difficult to hold it in check and I am afraid I will lose control and take my ninth and possibly tenth victim. Please help me I am drowning. . .'

The claim that he had killed eight people, not five, led to frenzied activity in the San Francisco Police Department, where records were checked and re-checked for other possible Zodiac murders that had gone unrecognised. The only unsolved case that seemed to fit Zodiac's pattern was the murder of an eighteen-year-old student, Cheri Jo Bates, who had been found dead in her car in the college car park with her throat slashed. If she was a Zodiac victim, then

# WANTED

SAN FRANCISCO POLICE DEPARTMENT

-69      WANTED FOR MURDER      OCTOBER 18, 1969

ORIGINAL DRAWING

AMENDED DRAWING

Supplementing our Bulletin 87-69 of October 13, 1969. Additional information developed the above amended drawing of murder suspect known as "ZODIAC".

WMA, 35-45 Years, approximately 5'6", Heavy Build, Short Brown Hair, possibly Red Tint, Wears Glasses. Armed with 9 MM Automatic.

Available for comparison: Slugs, Casings, Latents, Handwriting.

**ANY INFORMATION:**  
Inspectors Armstrong & Toschi  
Homicide Detail  
CASE NO. 696314

THOMAS J. CAHILL  
CHIEF OF POLICE

This is the Zodiac speaking  
By the way have you cracked  
the last cipher I sent you?  
My name is \_\_\_\_\_

A E N ⊕ ⊗ K ⊗ M ⊕ J N A M

This is the Zodiac speak.  
 I though you would need a  
 good laugh before you  
 hear the bad news and I  
 you wont get the news for a while yet. **Can't**  
 PS could you print this new cipher- **do a**  
 on your front page? **thing.**  
 I get awfully lonely **with**  
 when I am ignored, **it!**  
 so lonely I would **do my thing!!!!**  
 do my thing!!!!

Des July Aug  
 Sept Oct = 7

This is the  
 up to the e  
 killed 7 p  
 rather ang  
 for their t

Selections from Zodiac's written communications to the police and various newspapers. Above: in November 1969 the killer claims seven victims. Above right: Zodiac's response to police insistence that he had killed only five people, not seven. Right: details of a threatened bomb attack, with Zodiac's 'score' at the bottom: 'Zodiac = 10; San Francisco Police Department = 0.' Below right: a letter received by the Los Angeles Times in March 1971 — the last sentence reveals the killer's pathological need for publicity. Below: a handwriting expert compares letters claiming to be from Zodiac

she predated all the others, and it seemed odd that Zodiac had not taken the opportunity to boast about this crime at some time, as he had done about the others. If Cheri Jo Bates was the first victim and Zodiac was counting the two men who had recovered, that would explain the 'eight' mentioned in his letter.

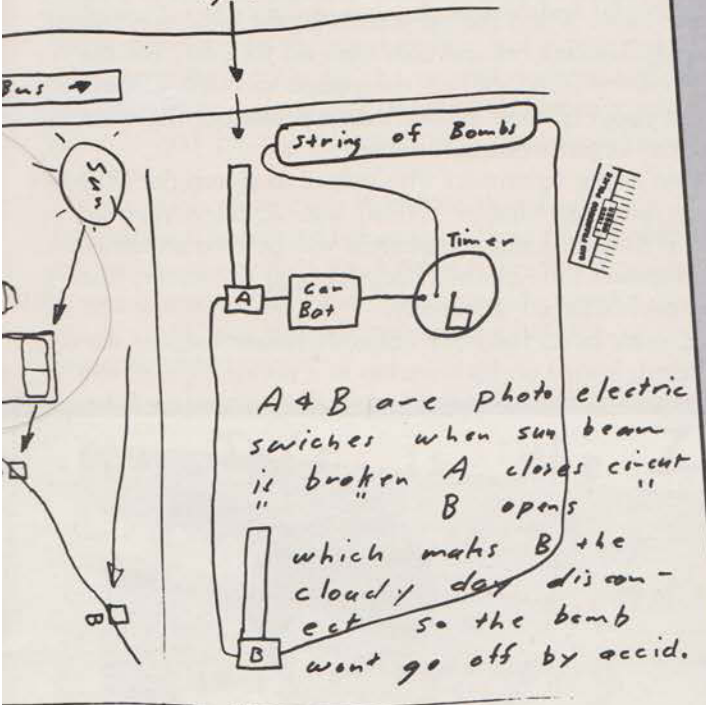
One big problem for the police was that hoaxers and mentally disturbed people were jumping on the Zodiac bandwagon; some of these showed a disturbing note of sadism. In one letter, the writer threatened to torture his victims before he killed them by tying them over anhill to watch them squirm or driving splinters under their nails. In some cases, the writers snipped out letters or words from newspapers and glued them to postcards. One read: 'The pace isn't any slower! In fact it's just one big thirteenth. Some of them fought. It was horrible.' But police were able to dismiss most of these; the real Zodiac usually went to some trouble to prove his identity. On 16 March 1971 the Los Angeles Times received a Zodiac letter, postmarked from Pleasanton, near Los Angeles, in which the murderer taunted the police for being unable to catch him. This letter included the figure '17+' — an attempt to imply that the death toll was rising.

Three years passed. In January 1974 Zodiac was still hungering for attention; a letter postmarked San Francisco hinted that the number of his victims had now reached 37; it added that he would 'do something nasty' if the letter was not publicised. Internal evidence suggested that this time the letter was genuine — and there were others, too, which



Zodiac speaking  
 of Oct I have  
 ple. I have grown  
 with the police  
 lying about me.

the new bomb is set up like  
 sun light in early morning



PS I hope you have fun trying  
 to figure out who I killed  
 ⊕ = 10 SFPD = 0

river-side activity, but  
 are only finding the  
 ones, there are a hell  
 a lot more down there.  
 the reason that I'm writing  
 the Times is this, they  
 and have me on the back pages  
 some of the others.  
 EFT - C  
 ⊕ - 17+

appeared to be authentic communications from the killer. The 1974 letter is, in its way, as significant as any of the crimes themselves. What it reveals is a man whose deepest craving is for attention; he clamours for it like a badly behaved child. This point was noted by one of the USA's top psychiatrists, Dr Laurence Freedman, who commented, 'He kills senselessly because he is deeply frustrated. And he hates himself because he is an anonymous nonentity. When he is caught he will turn out to be a mouse, a murderous mouse.' He added that he was convinced that Zodiac was insane.

Freedman's psychological portrait of Zodiac is based on the crimes themselves which, studied closely, reveal a certain pattern. The first element is a complete lack of courage. It appears that Zodiac ordered David Farraday out of the car, then started to shoot almost immediately, as if afraid he himself might be attacked. He approached the car containing Michael Mageau and Darlene Ferrin and began to shoot immediately; then he jumped into his own car and drove off so fast that he burnt the rubber of his tyres.

It is also significant that two of his male victims survived. In the case of Bryan Hartnell, it is obvious that the killer's real interest was in his friend Cecilia Shepard, who was a beautiful girl. He stabbed Hartnell only in the back. But when he began to stab Cecilia he lost control, stabbing her repeatedly in the back then turning her over and stabbing her another 23 times in the stomach. In all probability, this violence brought him some kind of sexual satisfaction, but there was no evidence of rape or attempted rape in the case of any of his three female victims. This seemed to suggest a man who was repressed and inhibited in his relations with women.

The case of the taxi-driver Paul Stine again illustrates the same combination of nervousness and extreme caution. It took place at a late hour on a foggy night, and he ordered the driver to pull up in a deserted street. The motive was robbery, but he was not willing to risk simply holding him up and taking his money; he preferred to guard against being identified by shooting his victim in the back of the head. When he realised he was being watched, he fled instantly. The next day, his courage restored, he wrote the police a jeering note and enclosed a fragment of his victim's bloodstained shirt.

As significant as the killer's cowardice is his craving for attention. After the first double murder, he drove off hastily, perhaps alarmed by the headlights of the oncoming car whose driver noticed the bodies only minutes after they had been shot. He made no attempt to contact the police or to publicise the murders. Yet immediately after shooting Michael Mageau and Darlene Ferrin, he rushed to the nearest telephone to inform the police of what he had done. And it was after this shooting that he wrote the letters to three newspapers, including one in code, and threatened to go on a murder rampage and kill twelve people. By then he was convinced he had got away with it and wanted to boast, to defy authority, to make people cringe. He was no longer an 'anonymous nonentity'. He would force the world to pay attention.

If, in fact, the telephone caller to the Jim Dunbar show

## Return of Zodiac?



Above: Paul Avery, who studied the Zodiac case

In February 1971 Sheriff Earl Randol of Napa County found it necessary to assure newsmen that the Zodiac killer was not at work again. The newsmen were far from convinced. Paul Avery, a *San Francisco Chronicle* journalist who had been studying the crimes for three years, told his readers that there was a good chance that two more cases were the work of the same man.

On the morning of 25 February 1971 twenty-year-old Sharon Wilson, a student of Humboldt State College in Arcata, California, drove off to relax on the nearby Mad River beach. When she failed to return, fellow students alerted the police. Sharon's car was found abandoned on a remote dirt road; her spectacles and lipstick were found on the edge of the river. On the same day, 200 miles (300 kilometres) south in 'Zodiac country', another twenty-year-old college student, Lynda Kanes, stopped her car on a hilltop road to look at the view. When the car was found the radio was still playing. Lynda's bra and coat were on the seat, but the girl had vanished. When the police in Napa County heard about Sharon Wilson's disappearance, the word 'Zodiac' began to be mentioned.

One of the volunteers who helped to search the Mad River area for Sharon Wilson was eighteen-year-old Philip Kohler, a dairy worker; it was he who stumbled on Sharon's fully-clothed body lying in the water. She had been stabbed repeatedly.

A week later, the body of Lynda Kanes was also discovered, buried under branches in a ravine close to the

Right: Inspector Dave Toschi of the San Francisco Police Department, who was in charge of the Zodiac case. Far right: a letter from Zodiac to the San Francisco Chronicle, in which he derides Toschi for not being good enough to catch him. This time he does not give his total number of murders, but invites the public to guess at it. The letter was received on 25 April 1978, eight and a half years after the last murder that the police definitely attributed to Zodiac. Interest in the case continues to run high: a book on it, called simply *Zodiac*, by Robert Graysmith, was published in the USA in 1984



spot where her car had been found. It was not far from the place where Zodiac had killed Cecilia Shepard eighteen months before. Footprints of 'a very big man' were found in the area.

One puzzle in the case was why Lynda had chosen to drive to her work as a waitress in a country club over Howard Mountain Road when there was a much more direct route. Friends told the police that she disliked a 57-year-old woodcutter, Walter Boyd Williams, whose house she had to pass on the more direct road. In Williams' home police found bloodstained clothing; he was arrested and charged with Lynda's murder.

Police in Humboldt County had also been finding out about Philip Kohler, the youth who had discovered Sharon's body; it turned out that he had spent some time in the state asylum after molesting girls. When Kohler was taken in for questioning, another college girl went to the police and told them that two days before Sharon had vanished Kohler had attempted to rape her at knifepoint on the very spot where her car had been found. The friend identified Kohler in a police line-up, and he was charged with Sharon Wilson's murder.

So in both these cases the scare that Zodiac was at work again was defused before it had had time to cause too much panic. And Paul Avery, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter who had first started the rumour, was one of those who publicly expressed relief that he had been mistaken.

was Zodiac – and the later letter to Melvin Belli makes this highly probable – then this episode is rather ironic. The 'anonymous nonentity' had caused shock waves all over California; he had had the satisfaction of knowing that hundreds of people were trying to puzzle out his cryptogram – it must have felt rather like being a best-selling author. He had certainly achieved a kind of fame. The murder of the taxi-driver brought him yet more publicity, and after the threat of an attack on a school bus, he was the most talked-about man in the USA. When he rang the San Francisco Police Department on 21 October, he undoubtedly wanted to appear on Jim Dunbar's show. The fact that the caller to the show had a 'boyish voice' is no proof that he was not Zodiac. Various other people described Zodiac as having a gruff voice, but any man can lower his voice to make it sound gruff – in fact, this is the easiest way of disguising the voice. And if 'Sam' was not Zodiac, then who was he? One thing that seems fairly certain is that if Zodiac had changed his mind about ringing through to the programme and a hoaxer had taken his place, Zodiac would have lost no time in denouncing the phoney; his sense of publicity would have guaranteed that.

Yet all this fame was ultimately self-defeating since, though he could walk along a street and think, 'I am famous', nobody knew him – he was still an anonymous nonentity. He could address the famous lawyer as 'Dear Melvin' – but he did not dare to sign his own name. He tried to keep the excitement alive with more letters, hinting at more killings, but he was crying wolf too often and the newspapers eventually relegated him to the back page.

This is the Zodiac speaking I  
am back with you. Tell herb caen  
I am here, I have always been here.  
That city pig toshi is good - but  
I am ~~but~~ smarter and better he  
will get tired then leave me  
alone. I am waiting for a good  
movie about me. who will play  
me. I am now in control of all  
things.

Yours truly :

⊕ - guess



Above: one of the final Identikit pictures issued of Zodiac; a similar one showing him without spectacles appears on page 809

The only way of keeping the excitement alive would be to commit more murders, but next time he might be caught. Besides, being a temporary 'celebrity' had released some of the frustration that had turned him into a killer. As it was, the police had come dangerously close, with an accurate description of him and three fingerprints. So the 'murderous mouse' – unless he has since been arrested and jailed for another crime, perhaps in another state where he was not recognised – has presumably lapsed back into obscurity, telling himself that at least he had made the world sit up and take notice of him. Other police theories are that he is in hospital or has died. The Zodiac killings could be used to illustrate one of Freud's most disturbing assertions: that if a child only had the power, it would destroy the world.

There is one more speculation. In his first letter, Zodiac asserted that the decoding of the cipher message would reveal his identity. It did not do so. The logical assumption is that the killer never meant to reveal his identity, but intended the claim to act as bait and cause widespread effort to crack the code. Yet one thing that may strike anyone who looks at the first few lines of the cipher message is that Zodiac sometimes used the letter 'Z' to signify an 'E'. Might the killer have, in fact, hidden his own name in the message, and could the solution to the case now lie in the hands of another cryptanalyst?

## The Ripper syndrome

Few writers on the Zodiac case have been able to resist the temptation to compare the killer to the unknown maniac who killed five prostitutes in the East End of London in 1888 and who wrote jeering letters to the newspapers signed 'Jack the Ripper'. Partly because the Ripper was never caught and partly because of the horrific nature of his crimes – he was the first 'sex maniac' in our modern sense of the word – the case still excites as much interest as it did almost a century ago. But most writers on the case add that, with the use of up-to-date police methods, a modern Jack the Ripper would infallibly be caught.

Does the evidence bear out this claim? The answer, regrettably, is no. San Francisco police had an accurate physical description of Zodiac, as well as three of his fingerprints. More than a decade after the murders, his identity still remains a mystery. So does that of the sex maniac known as the Moonlight Murderer of Texarkana, Texas, who killed five people in 1946. So does that of the Texas Strangler, who murdered and mutilated twelve women, and abducted two others whose bodies were never found, between 1968 and 1971. The victims included barmaids, a schoolteacher and a go-go dancer, and the motive in all cases seems to have been rape, although in one case the strangler left a note saying, 'Got wrong one – sorry'. In mid 1984, the Los Angeles slasher, who murdered at least eight tramps in the slums of Los Angeles, was still uncaught; he always slit his victims' throats, and the ferocity of the crimes

indicated a sexual motive.

Although he was finally caught, Peter Sutcliffe, the 'Yorkshire Ripper', provides another case in point. Sutcliffe knocked his victims unconscious with a hammer blow, then mutilated them with a knife. Between October 1975 and November 1980 he killed thirteen women in the north of England. A massive police operation, which included elaborate checks on all cars seen more than once in red light districts, failed to catch Sutcliffe although he was interviewed nine times. He was finally caught by accident, when police found him sitting in a car with a prostitute and discovered that the car had false number plates. A hammer and knife found nearby finally revealed him as the mass murderer. If Sutcliffe had not made the mistake of using false number plates, he might still be at large.

After the Yorkshire Ripper hunt, it was generally agreed that the police's main problem was poor co-ordination of the vast body of evidence and that if a computer had been used efficiently Sutcliffe would probably have been caught a great deal sooner. In the USA, a similar insight is dawning on authorities searching for 'serial killers' who travel from state to state selecting victims at random. In San Francisco, centre of the search for Zodiac, the introduction in 1984 of a fingerprint computer, which can check fingerprints against those of known criminals in seconds, has led to an astonishing increase in the number of crimes solved. Since Zodiac's prints are still on the San Francisco police file, it is conceivable that even at this late date his crimes may yet be solved.

*continued from back page*

ground. By the time the King's followers reached him, he was dead, either from the fall or from the stab wound in his left side. A few days later his treacherous younger brother — who had ordered the attack — had ascended the throne to begin his disastrous reign.

Edward was originally buried at Wareham, but a year after his death his remains were transferred to an elaborate shrine at Shaftesbury Abbey. Edward, a supporter of the monastic system, was considered a martyr and ordained a saint. The richly worked tomb was a popular place of pilgrimage throughout the Middle Ages, until it was destroyed by King Henry VIII's order at the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536.

In the late Twenties a religiously-minded archaeologist, J. Wilson Claridge, began excavations at Shaftesbury, and on 2 January 1931 he discovered a lead casket buried on the site of the old Abbey Church. It was 21 inches (53 centimetres) long, 11 inches (28 centimetres) wide, and 9 inches (23 centimetres) deep, and when opened proved to contain various bones. The remains had been carefully laid out in the box, with the longer bones to one side, smaller fragments at the bottom, and part of a skull on top. Undoubtedly the care taken over their preservation meant that they were the

**Below: the relics of the grave found by Wilson Claridge in the shrine of Shaftesbury Abbey in January 1931**

bones of some important personage: but of whom, exactly?

An account of the intriguing find was published in *The Times* and this attracted the attention of Mr Stowell, who contacted Mr Claridge, and travelled down to see him at the Shaftesbury excavations. As soon as he saw the bones, Stowell's experienced eye spotted one remarkable fact: they had suffered a considerable number of 'greenstick' fractures, splintered breakages which only occur in the pliable bones of the young. With Claridge's permission Stowell removed them to the British Museum's Department of Anthropology, where they were reinforced with synthetic resin. Then Stowell took them to his laboratory, and there began the long delayed 'post mortem'.

He began by measuring the long bones of the arms and legs. Making allowances for scalp and heel-pad thicknesses, and taking into consideration other characteristics, he was able to say that the subject had been between 5 feet 6 inches (1.67 metres) and 5 feet 8 inches (1.72 metres) in height.

Then he began the process of 'sexing' the skeleton remains. There are several methods of doing this: the shape of various parts of the skull provide data, while the pelvis, the sacrum — the wedge of bone at the base of the spine — and the femur or thigh bone are important. There are also 'mathematical' methods involving measuring the heads or thick ends of the humerus or femur.

At the end of his first deliberations, Stowell was satisfied that he was dealing with a young man who had met a particularly violent end.

FRANK SMYTH





# INSIDE INFORMATION

## Identification — I

'Murder will out, certain, it will not fail.' Thus wrote Geoffrey Chaucer in the fourteenth century, and certainly murder does have a tendency to be revealed for what it is even after a passage of years. Perhaps the most extreme example of this came in 1931, when Thomas E. A. Stowell, MD, FRCS, a distinguished forensic pathologist working from St Thomas' Hospital, London, identified a little pile of battered bones as those of Edward of England, Saxon king and martyr — and showed how the monarch had been murdered over three hundred years before Chaucer was born.

Very little is known about Edward, except that he was born around 963, the son of King Edgar, and took over the throne of southern England — the north was ruled by King Oswald — when his father died in 975. But he was to reign only until 978; on 18 March that year, while approaching Corfe Castle in Dorset to visit his younger half-brother Aethelred (later to become known as King Aethelred the Unready), his party was ambushed. A monk who had been in his entourage at the time, and who wrote a *Life of Saint Oswald* in about the year 1000, included in the book a succinct account of what occurred.

Translated from the Latin, the 'eye-witness report' reads: 'Soldiers therefore were holding him [the King] one drew him to the right towards himself as though to give him a kiss [of welcome] another seized his left hand violently and

wounded him, but he cried as loud as he could, "What are you doing, breaking my . . . arm?" and he fell from his horse and died.'

A fair reconstruction would seem to be that two mounted soldiers approached the King, one on his left, the other on his right. The man on the right put his hand on the King's left shoulder and drew him over for the kiss of peace, at the same time grasping Edward's right arm — his sword arm — and twisting it. Simultaneously the other seized his left hand and stabbed him. The King would have been pressed backwards across the high cantle of the saddle, and then presumably the animal panicked and bolted, throwing him to the

**Below: a portrait of Edward, the son and heir of Edgar, taken from a coin. Bottom: the casket in which the remains of Edward were hidden by nuns during the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century**

