



# Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son: The Story of the Yorkshire Ripper

*Gordon Burn*

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It seemed the case of the notorious Yorkshire Ripper was finally closed when Peter Sutcliffe was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1981. But in the early 1980s Gordon Burn spent three years living in Sutcliffe's home town of Bingley, researching his life. A modern classic, **Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son** offers one of the most penetrating and provocative insights into the mind of a murderer ever written.

'A book which will, with some justice, be compared to **In Cold Blood** and **The Executioner's Song**. It's as if Thomas Hardy were also present at the writing of this account of the Yorkshire Ripper.' Norman Mailer

## **Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son: The Story of the Yorkshire Ripper Details**

Date : Published March 4th 2004 by Faber Faber (first published 1984)

ISBN : 9780571222834

Author : Gordon Burn

Format : Paperback 368 pages

Genre : Crime, True Crime, Nonfiction, Mystery, Biography

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# **From Reader Review Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son: The Story of the Yorkshire Ripper for online ebook**

## **Dev Wilcox says**

The book depicts Peter Sutcliffe as what he was 'A crazed killer' however it lacks depth and detail in the murders. The book does not paint enough clarity on Sutcliffe's evil and sadistic nature like the adapted 'Masturbation Underpants' that were seized upon his arrest or the gruesome truthful events on the night of the Ritka murder.

I suggest you read other similar titles to comprehend how disturbingly evil this man was. Roger Cross wrote much better.

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## **Fishface says**

A well-written, almost novelistic treatment of the Yorkshire Ripper case. Compresses many years of investigation and courtroom procedure into a fairly small, space. This one never drags, but if you've already read WICKED BEYOND BELIEF you already know much more than this version of the story can offer.

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## **Kirsten says**

This kind of book isn't to everyone's liking. But if you are interested in the psychology of - or rather the clues allowing you to guess at the psychology of - serial killers / psychopaths etc., then this one is for you!

I find this area fascinating anyway, but Gordon Burn is a very intelligent, sophisticated and careful writer to boot. He manages to convey a sense of pervading menace and darkness in his tone. He also, fundamentally, writes of the people involved in a way that emphasises that they are real people who existed: a tad quiet, had a stroke at 55, belonged to a secret club as a teenager, had a squint, liked hammers etc.

After all, the most spine-tingling, amazing and possibly most important thing that the author points out is that the victims were everyday people, and so was the killer, apparently; until he finally - and utterly randomly - got found out.

A gripping and thought-provoking book that borders on literature.

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## **Dick says**

Having read a few of this authors other books I read this having little knowledge of the case other than it being seemly ever-present on the news as I grew up.

This book presents the facts of the case in a non sensationalist manner but doesn't shy away from the horrific

deeds of Sutcliffe and shows how he was eventually brought to justice.

However it is also a terrifying snapshot of 70's Britain where the police are ineffective, the media are ghoulish ambulance chasers and most horrifically women are very much second class citizens. Burn doesn't draw attention and point fingers but casual misogyny is peppered throughout the book in a way you cannot fail to notice. From the threat of violence within the home, to football fans jeering announcements at matches designed to catch the ripper.

A gripping brilliantly written social document.

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## **Susan says**

This must be one of the most fascinating and unsettling books I have read. Rather than a 'true crime' book, this is a biography of Peter Sutcliffe, looking at his family, childhood and youth, through his adulthood, crimes and imprisonment. The book in no way dehumanizes Sutcliffe's victims, but what it does do is show us the bizarre way that the Yorkshire Ripper was both a savage killer and the man who visited elderly relatives at Christmas; a man who helped his father and brother rearrange furniture and then drove straight to the location where he had hidden a body - who had both a human and an utterly demonic side.

In hindsight, it is easy to spot bizarre and worrying signs in Peter Sutcliffe's early years, but mainly he seemed to be a fairly average person. He did not achieve great things either academically or career wise, drifting through various jobs and marrying his wife after she had a breakdown and in spite of the fact she was seeing another man. Although essentially a loner, this was a person who had parents, siblings, a wife, relations and friends. It is almost inconceivable that he was not arrested earlier, despite being interviewed five times by the police with early indications that tied him to the case (a £5 note found in a victim's handbag that was given in a paypacket to one of a handful of firms, including his; the fact he was fined for hitting a prostitute with a weighted sock before the murders and that he was also arrested lurking behind a hedge with a hammer). Possibly today, with modern computer systems, his name would have been flagged up much sooner. Although this was obviously a huge manhunt, people who knew Sutcliffe, including members of his own family, considered that he could be a possible candidate for the 'Ripper' and certainly at least one of his former friends visited the police to voice concerns.

Mostly though, this really is a book about the true face of evil. It is a sad fact that this man was undetected for so long because he blended in. From a small town, yet anonymous once in his hunting grounds, he did not look or appear threatening. Sadly, many of his victims did not see the attack coming - it is awful to contemplate how this man literally attacked and killed and then appeared so normal to those around him. The author walked a fine line writing this book, but he was fair in his representations of everybody he wrote about. This is an excellent read and I recommend it highly.

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## **Xanthi says**

I found this book engrossing. The author gives you a solid feel for the place he wrote about and the era. This book focuses upon who Sutcliffe was, where he lived, what his family and upbringing were like, his social life etc. It gives an account of his life between the murders. The murders themselves and the trial are touched upon, but it is the Yorkshire Ripper's private life that the author focuses upon. I read this book with some morbid curiosity, I guess, though have to point out in no way is this book sensationalist or tabloid-ish in anyway. Worth reading, alongside "Wicked Beyond Belief".

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## Lisa says

Despite being something of a true crime aficionado, until now I've restricted most of my reading to crimes committed far from my shores – for some reason, while the crimes of our transatlantic cousins are never not disturbing, reading about British killers makes it all a bit more real and grim for me. However, having had my interest piqued by a number of true crime podcasts, I decided it was high time I looked at those closer to home and so chose to start with *Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son* – an excellent book that looks at the life and crimes of Peter Sutcliffe, AKA The Yorkshire Ripper.

Having achieved notoriety in the UK for his brutal slayings of women – predominantly prostitutes, although that distinction mattered less to him as time went on as he widened his net to include any woman that caught his eye – Sutcliffe's modus operandi included attacking from behind with a hammer (yeesh) and then a horrific amount of stabbing. Eventually convicted of murdering 13 women and attempting to murder 7 more, Sutcliffe is serving a life sentence in prison (and thankfully, in this instance life definitely means life, with the High Court confirming in 2010 following an appeal that he will never be released from custody).

*Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son* looks at Sutcliffe's whole life, based on extensive interviews with his family and friends (except for his strange wife, Sonia, who continues to keep her silence). With lots of the anecdotes and conversations reported in the local vernacular, this really enhanced the narrative, making it feel more like a particularly grim fiction, and the cast of 'colourful' characters (the men in particular) that made up Sutcliffe's large family seemed straight out of an even more depressing than usual Ken Loach film. When the only barely decent man in your family is also the one who has spent a large portion of his life living in the fucking woods, you know your family is all kinds of screwed up.

Also looking at the police investigation in to the crimes of The Ripper, which found itself waylaid by believing hoax letters and tapes sent to them and the press, and not bothering to investigate the many tips they received from people in his life believing Sutcliffe was the Ripper, *Somebody's Husband, Somebody's Son* also makes clear how easily he could have got away with it all (as is often the case, it was a traffic related crime that eventually got him caught). Reading all of this true crime, while fascinating, has definitely shaken my confidence in the ability of investigators to catch the perpetrators, and I've quickly come to the conclusion that if I ever got murdered, my mum would crack the case faster than the police.

If you're at all interested in true crime, this really is an excellent entry in the genre – just be prepared to look askance at every bearded lorry-driver you come across afterwards. The same author has also written a book on Rose & Fred West, an even more notorious couple of British killers – on the strength of this book, I'll be hunting that one down soon as I continue my grim odyssey across Britain.

**\*\*Also posted at Cannonball Read 9\*\***

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## Neena says

This book was extremely well-written and informative and without bias either for or against Peter Sutcliffe. We learn about his childhood, his previous jobs, his deep love for his mother and the women in his family, his love for Sonia (and also how dominant and condescending she was towards him and how she was

mentally ill with a real dislike for children despite being a teacher), his love for children and how considerate he would be towards his neighbours ..... but you also learn about his dark side ( how he was a grave-robber as he worked in the graveyard, how he had a fascination with the macabre and was happy to work alone in the mortuary and where he had an obsession with an unpopular wax museum's hidden horror chamber (where ironically, a wax model of Peter Sutcliffe himself now stands), how he took a practical joke against a co-worker too far in a sinister pre-empt to the future murders he would commit and how calculated he could be with his murders.

The book also describes how he was finally arrested and caught by an odd twist of fate and a simple glitch (he'd escaped detection so many times previously) and how he immediately owned up once he was in the interview room (taking the police by surprise) and Sonia's very odd reaction to Peter telling her that he was the Yorkshire Ripper ..... was Peter mentally ill like he claims? Well it seems that even the experts are genuinely divided in opinion on that - read it and see whether you think he is ---- I can guarantee that some of your view on Sutcliffe will change!!

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### **A.r. says**

Fills in a lot of gaps about Peter's Sutcliffe's childhood and early life which are missing from other books about him. Well worth the read, even for those who have read up on the Yorkshire Ripper.

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### **Tania M says**

Strange writing style but no getting away from the horror of this maniacs behaviour

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### **Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says**

The Yorkshire ripper-- yikes!

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### **Brian Hamilton says**

I literally could not put this book down. Although written at a time close to the events, Gordon Burn offers a unique and insightful perspective beyond the lurid sensationalism almost all writing about this case descended to.

The amount of time he spent with the family of Peter Sutcliffe clearly shows through and, whilst neither he nor we can properly gauge and dissect Sutcliffe, he certainly presents a more rounded portrait than the standard bogeyman trope thrown out by lazy journalists and authors.

I suppose, on some level, we do not want to understand this man, for understanding is perhaps the first step on the road to forgiveness. And, in the final analysis, who really wants to give this man the time needed to forgive.

Burn is an excellent author, that speaks in a homely style and offers strong insights without patronising or

alienating the reader.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough, an essential read for anyone with a passing interest in true crime.

Burn is a very underrated author and, disappointingly, any time I browse the true crime section in my local bookstore there is nothing by Burn but reams of filler material about 'hard men' and 'Guv'nor' characters. Shame really as there is a depth of true crime writing out there which is worthy of reading.

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### **Susan Atkin says**

The best book on Sutcliffe in my opinion, and I have read a lot. As a child growing up in Yorkshire I became fascinated by this horrific story. This is the only one that delves in to his childhood in such detail. Very well written and a must read for "fans" of true crime.

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### **Chris Wright says**

As much a book about a community at a specific period of time as about the Yorkshire Ripper. One of the few books to give voice to real people and their opinions are laid out in amazing detail. I would think the book would be an eye-opener for those who never come into contact with the sort of people as the Sutcliffes and their friends.

Doesn't really come to any conclusions about Sutcliffe himself. Was he mad, or bad, or is it irrelevant anyway.

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### **POW! says**

Another true crime masterwork from Gordon Burn. I had read his account of Fred and Rose West, Happy Like Murderers, and was so impressed with his writing and gift of narrative that I had to investigate this. I'm glad I did, although I appreciate that this genre is not for everyone. Incredibly well-written and paced, Burn gives a chilling insight into the mind and motivations of the Yorkshire psychopath.

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