# How Wearside Jack's hoax prolonged the Yorkshire Ripper murders



In the case of one of Britain's most notorious serial killers, misdirection by a single individual changed the course of an extensive police investigation, revealing the profound challenges faced by law enforcement during the hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper. The saga revolves around John Humble, a man later dubbed "Wearside Jack,” whose actions in the late 1970s not only delayed justice but led to the tragic murders of three more women.

Retired police chief Chris Gregg, who played a crucial role in the eventual identification of Humble, recounted the harrowing tale of the hoaxer’s impact on the Yorkshire Ripper investigation nearly two decades later. The Yorkshire Ripper, infamously linked to the Victorian killer Jack the Ripper, terrorised northern England between 1975 and 1980, claiming the lives of at least 13 women. The investigation intensified after Peter Sutcliffe was arrested in 1981, but it was initially derailed by Humble’s false confessions.

Humble sent police a two-minute tape and several letters, claiming to be the Ripper and steering investigators toward Sunderland — his home town. Instead of leading them to the actual killer, these hoaxes diverted resources and attention, enabling Sutcliffe to commit further crimes. Tragically, Barbara Leach, Marguerite Walls, and Jacqueline Hill lost their lives during this time, with investigators believing they could have apprehended Sutcliffe sooner had it not been for Humble’s deceit.

Finally brought to justice in 2006 following advances in forensic science, Humble's downfall began when officers linked his DNA to a saliva sample found on one of the hoax letters. Using unyielding determination, Gregg managed to uncover this critical piece of evidence. Initially, when interviewed, Humble attempted to evade incrimination, showing only compliance through nods. However, it would be the revelation of DNA evidence that forced his confession. In a haunting twist, during subsequent recordings, he read aloud a transcript of his original taunting tape, leading investigator Gregg to describe the moment as "incredible."

The culture of mistrust and chaos created by Humble's fabrications cannot be understated. By feeding false information into an already tense situation, he epitomised the type of individual whose selfish actions can have devastating ramifications on public safety. The gravity of his crime, perverting the course of justice, resulted in an eight-year prison sentence, a punishment deemed appropriate given the implications of his actions. The court recognised Humble's hoaxes as among the most serious acts of hindering justice, profoundly affecting not just the investigation but the victims and their families.

In reflecting on the investigation, Gregg lamented the toll of Humble's actions, stating, "Those last three Ripper victims may not have died had it not been for Humble." His determination to pursue Humble uncovering the sealed evidence was, as he described, one of the defining moments of his career. Had it not been for his dedication and the eventual breakthroughs in forensic techniques, Humble's secret might have remained buried forever, perpetuating a cycle of pain and loss for unsuspecting victims.

Ultimately, the case of John Humble reminds us of the complexities inherent in criminal investigations and the potential for individual actions to influence broader societal outcomes. As the world absorbed the ghastly reality of Sutcliffe’s crimes, it was the deceit of one man that prolonged the nightmare, highlighting not only the investigative flaws of the era but also the resilience of those who tirelessly sought the truth amidst a web of lies.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14770661/How-Yorkshire-Ripper-hoaxer-derailed-serial-killer-investigation-tried-hide-voice-finally-snared.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/4594808.stm)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14770661/How-Yorkshire-Ripper-hoaxer-derailed-serial-killer-investigation-tried-hide-voice-finally-snared.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wearside_Jack), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/11/13/wearside-jack-hoaxer-hoodwinked-police-helped-yorkshire-ripper/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/mar/21/ukcrime), [[6]](https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/4825820.stm)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14770661/How-Yorkshire-Ripper-hoaxer-derailed-serial-killer-investigation-tried-hide-voice-finally-snared.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-49406231)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/mar/21/ukcrime), [[4]](https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/4594808.stm)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14770661/How-Yorkshire-Ripper-hoaxer-derailed-serial-killer-investigation-tried-hide-voice-finally-snared.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wearside_Jack> - John Samuel Humble, known as Wearside Jack, was a British man who, in 1978 and 1979, sent hoax letters and a tape to police, falsely claiming to be the Yorkshire Ripper. His actions misled investigators, diverting resources away from the real killer, Peter Sutcliffe, and potentially delaying his arrest. In 2006, DNA evidence linked Humble to the hoaxes, leading to his conviction for perverting the course of justice. He was sentenced to eight years in prison and died in 2019.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/mar/21/ukcrime> - In March 2006, John Humble, known as Wearside Jack, was sentenced to eight years in prison for perverting the course of justice. His hoaxes, including letters and a tape claiming to be the Yorkshire Ripper, misled police and diverted resources, potentially allowing Sutcliffe to murder three more women. The judge stated that the hoaxes were among the most serious acts of perverting justice.
4. <https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/4594808.stm> - John Humble, known as Wearside Jack, was sentenced to eight years in prison after admitting to sending hoax letters and a tape to police during the Yorkshire Ripper investigation. His actions misled detectives, diverting resources away from the real killer, Peter Sutcliffe. Humble's hoaxes were considered among the most serious acts of perverting the course of justice.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/11/13/wearside-jack-hoaxer-hoodwinked-police-helped-yorkshire-ripper/> - John Humble, known as Wearside Jack, deceived police into believing the Yorkshire Ripper was from Sunderland. His hoaxes, including letters and a tape, misled investigators and diverted resources away from the real killer, Peter Sutcliffe. Despite women who survived Sutcliffe's attacks stating he sounded local, Humble's actions prolonged the investigation and allowed Sutcliffe to continue his crimes.
6. <https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/4825820.stm> - John Humble, known as Wearside Jack, was revealed to be a heavy-drinking loner who taunted detectives during the hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper. Despite his menacing image, he was a solitary figure who spent his days drinking heavily and being ridiculed by local children. His hoaxes misled police and diverted resources away from the real killer, Peter Sutcliffe.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-49406231> - John Humble, known as Wearside Jack, who hoaxed detectives by claiming to be the Yorkshire Ripper, died on 30 July 2019. His hoaxes in the late 1970s misled police and diverted resources away from the real killer, Peter Sutcliffe. Humble was unmasked and sentenced to eight years in jail in 2006 after admitting perverting the course of justice.