

EDMUND JOHN JAMES REID (1846-1917)

Detective and balloonist

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Two recent TV events have reminded us of Edmund Reid, a London detective born in Canterbury. One was the series *Ripper Street*, based on Edmund's unsuccessful attempts to catch Jack the Ripper. The other was the news that the identity of the Ripper has, according to some, been proven through use of DNA tests - he was apparently the known suspect Aaron Kosminski, a Polish immigrant with psychiatric problems.

The life of Edmund Reid¹ started in Canterbury, Beer Cart Lane above the Pickford's store to be precise, at 12.15 am on 21 March 1846. We know the time as it is stated on his birth certificate². Herein lies the first oddity of his life, as times of day are required on birth certificates only for cases of multiple births - primarily for inheritance purposes - and there is no evidence for any Reid siblings born that day³. A second oddity is that Edmund achieved some fame for the thing he totally failed to do - as Detective for the Whitechapel area in 1888⁴, his prime challenge was to bring Jack the Ripper to justice⁵. A third surprising feature of his life is that, alongside the challenge of being a senior detective in the Met, he found time to excel in the new sports of ballooning and parachuting⁶. His 23 ascents from Crystal Palace and Alexandra Palace included a jump from 1000 ft and won him a gold medal. Unsurprisingly, Edmund took a keen interest in parachute design. To test his new parachute design theory, Edmund attached an experimental parachute to a mouse which he then threw from a high building. The animal landed intact and duly walked off with its parachute in tow.



Edmund Reid aged 50 years (Police Gazette)

¹ see *The Man who Hunted Jack the Ripper* by Nicholas Connell and Stewart P Evans (Rupert Books, 1999)

² registered as Edmund John James REID, father Jonathan REID railway clerk, mother Martha Elizabeth Olivia REID, formerly DRIVER

³ several possibilities arise - the Registrar official did not understand the rules; the official wrote in the time as it was close to midnight; there was a twin but it died shortly after birth; etc

⁴ his superior, Sir Charles WARREN, Chief Commissioner, also had local connections - he retired to Westbere

⁵ Reid joined the Metropolitan Police in 1872 aged 26; his height of 5ft 6ins would normally have disbarred him but the Met had a staff shortage

⁶ Whitstable Times 26 April 1913

Edmund retired in February 1896 aged 49 years, having served 23 years 28 days in the Met. During this period he had earned 50 awards and commendations. He moved to Herne, and became landlord of the Upper Red Lion pub.



Upper Red Lion in Herne - now a private house

He left the pub in 1898, perhaps because his wife Emily⁷ was showing growing signs of dementia. She died in August 1900 after a period in the local asylum. Edmund moved on to nearby Hampton-on-Sea. For 16 years he thrived, giving interviews about his police career and parachuting exploits⁸, carrying out private detective work, writing sarcastic letters to local papers, engaging in disputes with the Council, and generally enjoying his minor celebrity status. Several picture postcards⁹ showed Edmund with his dog and seaside Hampton home in Eddington Gardens.



Edmund aged 66 years - Hampton Inn in the distance

⁷ Edmund and Emily married in 1868

⁸ see for example Lloyds Weekly 4 February 1912

⁹ several posed Reid post cards were produced by Fred C Palmer

Unfortunately, the sea was undermining the street, and one by one the properties collapsed. Edmund had to leave his home, which he'd named 'Reid's Ranch', in 1916. It included a small kiosk where he sold lemonade and postcards, and had paintings of cannons along its wall, intended to deter any German invasion of Britain. All that remains is a few stones covered by each incoming tide. An odd local memorial is the information board in the car park by the Hampton Inn. This shows an enlarged photo of Edmund, together with an image of him standing in front of the Hampton Inn. What it fails to mention is his name - an enigmatic memorial to a very unusual man¹⁰.



Hampton-on-Sea in 1910



Edmund in retirement

¹⁰ Edmund died in 1917 and was buried in Herne cemetery - children of Edmund and Emma were Elizabeth (b 1873) and Harold Edmund J (b 1882)



Modern sign board by Hampton Inn car park



view across the bay from Hampton Inn - poles in the sea mark lost Hampton houses