

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Dressed in parkas, gloves and hats, the *FROM HELL* crew prepares for another night's work in the rain and cold. Temperatures will dip into the 30s.

It is mid-July.

"Unbelievably, ridiculously cold weather for summer," comments executive producer Tom Hammel. "Everyone says this is unheard of here. If it had been this cold in London, Jack the Ripper would have stayed home."

Ironically, a mere ten days earlier, when the company was shooting days, the mercury reached a record high of 98 degrees, the hottest temperature recorded in Prague in 139 years.

Weather wasn't the only aspect of the Czech Republic to challenge filmmakers. The city of Prague, it turns out, didn't provide a suitable location to double for London's Whitechapel district, where the bulk of the story takes place.

Says Academy Award®-winning production designer Martin Childs, "Despite its many wonderful old buildings, Prague doesn't much resemble Victorian England. (Neither, he adds, does London, due to the destruction of so much original architecture.)

"We couldn't find anyplace here that resembled Whitechapel from all angles, so we ended up building it in the middle of a field. It became the unexpected highlight of this entire enterprise."

Using hundreds of photos and detailed drawings, Childs designed the 500' x 500' set in about a week. A team of 170 carpenters, painters and craftsmen worked seven days a week to complete construction in twelve weeks. The finishing touch was the creation of streets made from hundreds of centuries-old cobblestones borrowed from local breweries and civic institutions. Some of these stones weighed 150 pounds each.

"We were very lucky that Prague was undergoing a major restoration and digging up many of its streets," says Childs, "because we were able to borrow cobblestones from the city." He jokingly adds, "They're waiting for their return to re-open the streets."

The one touch missing from Czech workmanship was the ability to create authentic-looking English brick, so Childs brought in two British

painters to handle the proper coloring and aging of the set's exterior.

The main structures of Whitechapel seen in the movie include Ten Bells Saloon, Commerce Street and Christ Church, as well as specific sites where the Ripper's victims were found. These were made to appear just as they did in 1888. "We wanted to definitively portray the environment of Whitechapel," says Albert Hughes, "and this set is as close as we could possibly achieve."

The actors were equally inspired, including Depp, who comments, "I was stupefied the first time I walked down these streets. It was incredible. The Hughes brothers are sticklers for details, down to the position of the bodies, the cobblestones, the location of the broken windows. Martin (Childs) did an unbelievable job."

Depp's interest in the Ripper story dates to childhood, when he voraciously read numerous books and articles on the subject. "I was always attracted to things on the darker side, especially when I was young," he says. "I must have some 25 books, maybe more, on the case. There are so many theories, any of them could be correct. It's impossible to know. I've always thought it would make a great movie if very carefully done."

It was, in fact, the Hughes brothers' meticulous approach that enticed him. The directors have been fascinated by the infamous murders since age seven, when they saw a profile of the Ripper in an episode of Leonard Nimoy's "In Search Of." "It was so scary that it has stuck in our heads," says Allen Hughes. "We've since absorbed everything about the case we can – books, movies, documentaries..."

When the Hughes met Depp six years ago to discuss another project, they happened to causally mention they were also developing a film about Jack the Ripper.

Depp told them he was a "Ripper freak" and asked to read the script. Recalls Depp, "I really liked it. I thought it was great. Then suddenly, years later, I get a call from them. 'How would you like to play Abberline?'"

Having been "blown away" by the Hughes' "Menace II Society" and "Dead Presidents," Depp says he was also impressed with the brothers' subject knowledge. "Allen and Albert have a great passion for the material and have done more research than almost any other director I've worked with," he remarks. "I'm very familiar with the story, I know the right questions to ask, and they know the answers."

Says Allen Hughes, “Johnny brings not only his tremendous acting skills to the part, but also his uniquely edgy and mysterious persona. He expresses so many different emotions without saying a word. He’s very aware of nuances and subtexts that no one else picks up on.”

Depp employs an East London Cockney accent for his character to “magnify as much as possible Abberline’s working class aspect. He was actually from Dorset, but it sounds too bizarre to use. It’s a really weird accent.”

Dialogue coach Gerry Grennell says Depp’s Cockney, which he learned in just a few days, is “excellent,” a sentiment echoed by Ian Holm, who says, “Johnny is a superb mimic. His accent is flawless.”

Heather Graham also employs an accent, Irish, which, along with her fiery red hair, will completely surprise audiences, believes executive producer Amy Robinson. “We saw a lot of young actresses for this role, absolutely wonderful actresses who were really interesting,” Robinson says. “But when Heather walked in the room there was something about her that made you want to save her. I think the directors were looking for that in Mary Kelly – someone who was not hardened and made you feel, ‘We’ve got to get this girl out of Whitechapel. We don’t want her to die.’”

“Her red hair looks so beautiful with her skin and blue eyes. Her face is sculpted and she’s grown up. She’s just at a great point right now in her life and her career.”

Agrees Allen Hughes, “We originally wanted an unknown English actress for the role of Mary Kelly, but after meeting with Heather we knew it had to be her. She has a vulnerability and sweetness about her that is irresistible.”

Joining Graham in Whitechapel’s ensemble of “working girls” are esteemed British actresses Lesley Sharp, Susan Lynch and Katrin Cartlidge. Sharp and Cartlidge delivered performances in “Naked,” which Depp describes as “absolutely amazing. These girls can do anything.”

Says Sharp, “Our primary task in this movie was to create a sense of camaraderie among our characters, which has not been difficult because we have so much respect and affection for each other.”

Susan Lynch remarks, “Lesley and Katrin have always been heroes of mine. I think they’re amazing actresses who’ve done some extraordinary work. It is thrilling for me to be part of this ensemble.”

For Katrin Cartlidge, the thrill of working with Johnny Depp was somewhat blunted by their initial encounter. Cartlidge explains, “My first scene with him, I’m lying dead on the ground and he’s leaning down into my face to smell my breath. And I’m thinking, ‘He’s looking at the ugliest thing he’s ever seen. I have a slit throat and entrails over my shoulder, and three flies are walking on my face. This is not the way I wanted to meet Johnny Depp.’”

Blood and gory special effects were an inescapable part of the women’s acting process. Dealing with the gruesome fates that await each of their characters was an uneasy task, given the graphic realism the Hughes brothers were striving for. The make-up and prosthetics were more discomfiting emotionally than physically. “I couldn’t even watch myself in the mirror when the prosthetic was going on,” admits Cartlidge. “It’s frightening.”

Susan Lynch’s character, Liz Stride, is the only Ripper victim known to have initially fended him off, realizing she had fallen into the clutches of a monster. “That was probably the most difficult and emotionally exhaustive scene I have ever done,” says Lynch, who is caught and flung to the ground after a failed attempt to flee. “Even in pretense, the feeling of being helpless and overwhelmed is traumatic. It’s a vicarious feeling of terror. I think Liz suffered the most because she lived long enough to know her fate. She realized in that awful moment that destiny had steered her directly into the path of evil.”

To accurately depict the Ripper’s carnage, the production used prosthetic dummies that were exact in detail to the massacred bodies of the victims. The dummies were designed by Millennium Effects, which earned praise for its work on “Saving Private Ryan.” A team of twelve artists and craftsmen worked meticulously for nine weeks applying hair, teeth, eyes and the required wounds.

The bodies were so startlingly realistic that few of the actresses wanted to view them. Says prosthetic supervisor/designer Steve Painter, “We wanted to push ourselves to the limit of detail to satisfy the Hughes’ brothers desire for accuracy and our own desire for perfection. Actors, too, are inspired by the care and attention that go into the many creative aspects of filmmaking.”

Painter and his team began work months before principal

photography, conducting research at Scotland Yard and poring through reams of background materials. “We managed to get our hands on some extremely rare photos that provided essential detail for our dummies,” says Painter. “We had access to coroner reports that revealed what positions the bodies were found in, as well as the location, size and depth of the incisions, all very minute in detail.”

Silicon body casts of the actresses were measured and molded in Millennium’s London shop, then designed and dressed in exact accordance with the victims’ bodies. “It’s only when you see a body in three-dimensional form, with everything completely accurate in detail, that you get a full account of what the Ripper did. And it’s extremely gruesome,” Painter remarks.

Painter’s team also devised groundbreaking make-up effects for the film. One involved six different directorial cues and a secret chemical trick that opens a victim’s throat before your eyes. The stunt took two hours to prepare and was completed just before dawn.

The graphic depiction of this murder, in satisfying the production’s mandate for realism, was designed to meet historical rather than gratuitous requirements. Insight into the depraved mind of Jack the Ripper is seen through the manner and ferocity of his pathological deeds.

The chief accomplice of the Ripper is a man called Netley, a commoner unwittingly drawn into a horrifying spiral of murder. Seduced and intimidated by the Ripper’s powerful, authoritative manner, he enters an abyss that is described to him as hell itself. Netley is played by Jason Flemyng, who starred with Brad Pitt in Guy Ritchie’s “Snatch.”

Says Flemyng: “In some ways Netley is an unwitting dupe, but his fault lies in not having the courage to put an end to this evil once he realizes how grotesque it is. This is, albeit to a much smaller degree, a dilemma confronting most of us at some point. We have no desire to do wrong, but lack the will to do right.”

Doing “right” by the Ripper’s victims is one of the chief objectives of the filmmakers, who sought to portray them as fully dimensional, if not flawed, characters. When you deal with the underclass of any society, you’re going to see desperate situations that reveal human emotions and frailties,” says Albert Hughes. “You’ll see noble and ignoble attempts to find some sort of satisfaction in the course of their daily grind. These women

personify that.”

A sweeping view of the Whitechapel slum where the ladies live and ply their flesh trade is established in a stunning Steadicam shot that begins atop a 40-foot high crane towering over the set. The crane lowered the operator to the ground, who stepped out and followed Heather Graham’s character through a nighttime mass of downtrodden humanity. “It was amazing that after seven years of development, to actually see the Ten Bells Pub and Christchurch remade to scale,” says Murphy.

Poor weather routinely plagued the Whitechapel set, located in the small village of Orech, and this particular evening was no exception. Heavy rains postponed the shot for several hours before its completion in the early morning. A continuous stream of fake rain from water trucks was also a constant companion. Recreating London required rain, but not fog, according to director of photography Peter Deming.

“Most anytime you see a movie scene of London at night there is the requisite fog, particularly in a mystery or a thriller,” he says. “We’re using mist to create atmosphere, but are avoiding the cliché of fog, as it was unusually clear in London in the fall of 1888.”

Deming wanted as much atmosphere as possible, while still retaining warmth. He shot with anamorphic lenses on Kodak film stock. Prior to production, he researched the lenses in Los Angeles, tracking the performance of each one with specific film stocks over the last five years. Though the anamorphic widescreen system requires more light and gives somewhat less depth, Deming likes its composition, color saturation and complete use of the negative. He diffused and softened the light by placing silk stockings over the rear of the lenses, and gave a completely different feel to the movie’s flashback sequences by shooting them on positive film. In addition to numerous Steadicam and dolly tracking shots, there is an extensive motion control shot marking the passage of time from night to day, as the Ripper and then Abberline are seen standing over the same body, many hours apart.

Along with the Hughes brothers, Deming collaborated with Martin Childs and costume designer Kym Barrett in realizing the look and style of the film. Barrett says the story’s sensibility likens it to a modern mystery thriller. “Although it’s a period piece, this movie is very edgy and hip; it’s not a stuffy Victorian exercise,” she remarks. “It presents an illusory reality

expressed through the skewed perspectives of some very troubled characters. Abberline and Jack the Ripper, in particular, view the world through their severe addictions.”

Barrett gathered research material from library documents and photos, including two rare portfolios of a British photographer who captured life among ordinary working people in the nineteenth century, an unusual compilation in those times. “Photos and literature of that era dealt with the upper class,” she says. “The underprivileged didn’t matter in art and society. They were essentially ignored.”

They were also constricted. The elaborate, stifling clothing of that age was one of the reasons Liz Stride was unable to escape her attacker. Says Barrett: “These women were stigmatized by their unacceptable lifestyle and accompanying mode of dress, then victimized by it because their corsets and tight layered clothes prevented them from fleeing or defending themselves.”

Barrett designed a range of costumes spanning the lavish wardrobe of Queen Victoria to the soiled rags worn by Whitechapel indigents. Mary Kelly, Kate Eddowes, Liz Stride and Dark Annie Chapman own only one dress, accessorized with hats and jewelry. Says Heather Graham, “It was a daily joke among the actresses. ‘Well, what are you going to wear today? Hmm, let’s see ... I guess I’ll wear the only thing I have.’”

Because their characters are so violently victimized, the designer and her staff of fourteen had to make duplicate costumes for each actress. Barrett, who previously worked with a brother directing team (the Wachowskis) on “The Matrix,” prepped in London with renowned costumer John Bright, making, renting or purchasing more than four hundred costumes. She used specific colors, especially red, to enhance the suspenseful, sensual mood of the story.

For Inspector Abberline she designed a basic black suit to represent mourning for his wife, a desire to be inconspicuous, and his general lack of concern for appearances. Conversely, Sir William Gull pays considerable attention to detail, and is meticulously attired and quaffed. The Ripper dresses with great flair, which according to Barrett, he “cultivates as a way to maintain a sense of self in the midst of his sick compulsion.”

A brief glimpse into the domain of Jack the Ripper is revealed in a dolly shot that moves from the foppish Ripper primping in a mirror to a

startling close-up of a painting hanging on the wall. The 1751 piece, William Hogarth's "The Rewards of Cruelty," shows a large room of men salaciously enjoying the view of a supine naked corpse, head in a vice, which has been subjected to grotesque abuse.

That scene was shot at *Castle Hradek*, an hour and a half outside Prague. Hradek is a gothic, middle European structure with dark wood interiors and strange artifacts that reflect the Ripper's eccentric taste. It is one of the movie's six castle locations.

Opocno Castle, site of the first day's filming, is where the story's Queen Victoria and Lord Hallsham discuss "a problem" that sets the story in motion. Built in the tenth century as a Slavonic fort, Opocno was attacked and severely damaged by Hussites in 1425. After changing hands throughout the ensuing centuries, it became the property of Holy Roman Emperor in 1634 and was later bequeathed to the aristocratic Colloredo family. It went through Baroque renovations in the eighteenth century, and is today lavishly furnished with medieval and Asiatic weapons, Renaissance paintings, Bohemian crystal, Venetian glassworks, and a host of animal trophies and furs.

Castle Minisek, a 45-minute drive from Prague, was the production's most versatile and useful location. It housed seven different sets: the offices and residence of Inspector Abberline, the interrogation cell and file room of the Special Branch, the Royal stables of Queen Victoria, Netley's apartment, and a squalid East End residential flat.

Prague Castle, one of central Europe's most popular tourist spots, provided a stunning exterior location (for a fireball explosion at Special Branch headquarters) and two gorgeous interior sets, inside the castle's Strahov Library. Replete with frescoes on the ceiling and lavish décor, Strahov houses thousands of books that are hundreds of years old. The tightly-secured, multi-room facility doubled for Queen Victoria's study at Buckingham Palace, and served as the library where Abberline researches Freemasonry.

"It's a spectacular location," says Martin Childs. "It's a very middle European library we dressed with all kinds of styles and worldly artifacts, sort of hangovers from the British empire. The Queen's study is full of Chinese ornaments."

Castle Doksany, former home to a Jesuit monastery, was used as the

morgue where Abberline inspects the body of the Ripper's first victim, Martha Tabram.

Castle Kacina is considered the most important empire chateau in Bohemia. Built in 1806-1818, the 17-room castle was the home of one of the oldest Czech aristocratic families, the Choteks, whose ancestry traces back to the year 1181. Scenes filmed in the facility's grand rotunda include a momentous meeting of the Freemasons, who initiate the conspiracy that gives rise to Jack the Ripper.

Kacina is located in the town of *Kutna Hora*, home to a legendary church made of human bones. The Victorian architecture of this community provided the appropriate backdrop for a London street scene with Johnny Depp and Heather Graham.

Dozens of teenage schoolgirls wandered by, unaware that heartthrob Depp was among the group of actors and extras gathered in the street. *Kutna Hora* is a frequent locale for Czech film shoots, evidenced by the appearance of a scout team from the movie "The Affair of the Necklace," who traipsed by later in the day.

Prague's *Economic Institute* (which hosted Madeleine Albright at a 1994 summit) serves as the police headquarters of Sir Charles Warren. The 1871 building is a small-scale replica of Versailles that was once, ironically, a Freemason orphanage.

Other principal locations include the *Olsany Graveyard*, where Abberline first meets Mary Kelly and one of the few Czech gravesides that Childs says can double for a Protestant English cemetery; a warehouse at *Spalovna Vysocany*, used for interiors of a London hospital where Abberline visits Dr. Gull; and the landmark *National Museum*, situated atop Wencellas Square, one of the most popular gathering spots in Prague and site of the 1989 Velvet Revolution. The Museum's remarkable interiors serve as the backdrop for a benefit fund-raiser where Abberline first encounters Dr. Gull. The guest of honor? None other than John Merrick, the Elephant Man.

Merrick's appearance is an interesting historical twist based on more than just coincidence, says Albert Hughes. "Merrick lived in a flat that was within walking distance of the murders. He was actually cared for in a hospital down the street. There's some weird connections with him during that time period."

Creating the remarkable figure of the Elephant Man was one of

Millennium Effects most impressive achievements. Their own prosthetic senior technician, Anthony Parker, served as a living canvass for the creation of the grotesquely deformed man. Millennium reviewed volumes of research at London Hospital and was allowed to see Merrick's body casts. The months-in-the-making prosthetics required six hours to apply to Parker's body. "This is the first time audiences will see the Elephant Man in color and in such graphic detail," says Steve Painter. "He is beautifully tied-in with the story, which enriches its sense of history" and reveals that society's obsession for all things strange.

Whitechapel interior sets built at Prague's *Hostivar Stage* include Ten Bell's pub, the hub of the social interaction where Mary Kelly and her friends take comfort from the night air; a Chinese opium den, the deviate sanctuary from reality where Abberline has clairvoyant visions; and Miller's Rents, the cramped and dreary hovel where the ladies often share a single small bed.

It is at Miller's Rents, in unlucky room 13, where the final and most horrifically butchered victim of Jack the Ripper is found. It was the last know act of a madman who unleashed his appetite for destruction on those least able to defend themselves or arouse concern for their well being. Helpless victims deprived of life and, as it turns out, postmortem justice for the unimaginable harms done to them.