CHAPTER TWO

What the Kitchen Hid

"'Ware that there mound by the yard-gate, Mr. Jasper."
"I see it. What is it?"
"Lime."
"What you call quick-lime?"
"Ay! . . . quick enough to eat your boots. With a little handy stirring, quick enough to eat your bones."

—The Mystery of Edwin Drood

On Friday, 17 August 1849, Constables Henry Barnes and James Burton of the K and M Divisions of the Metropolitan Police decided to return to 3 Minver Place, Bermondsey. The house was in a row of new two-story villas in the middle of Weston Street, near the southwest corner of the intersection with Guy Street.

Their earlier search had been fruitless, and now Barnes suggested to Burton the necessity of digging up the garden. This cannot have been a pleasant prospect, digging about in the ground of a plague-stricken neighborhood. Months later crusty Thomas Carlyle was to pay reluctant tribute to the "Cholera Doctors, hired to dive into black dens of infection and despair, . . . rushing about all day from lane to lane, with their life in their hand."

The officers dug in the garden but found nothing to arouse their suspicion. They then agreed that the house deserved another inspection. Burton had obtained a key from the landlord and opened the front door. As one entered from the street, the front parlor was at the right of the passage; two kitchens were beneath the parlor. After looking around on the ground
floor, the two men went downstairs to the basement level. Having found nothing of interest in the front kitchen, they walked into the back kitchen, which had a view to the garden through an iron-barred window. Barnes had noticed when they had been at the house previously that the back kitchen appeared remarkably clean and neat, and that the flagstones with which it was paved had been recently and very carefully rubbed white with hearthstone. The constable looked at the flagstones more closely now and observed something that had escaped his eye before—there was a damp mark between the edges of two of the stones. He pulled a clasp knife out of his pocket and, opening it to test the spot, he found it very soft.

The two stones were thick and heavy, measuring together about five feet across. Barnes told Burton he would not be satisfied until the two stones were taken up, and Burton borrowed a shovel, a crowbar, and a boathook from some laborers. Barnes wielded the crowbar and Burton assisted him with the boathook, and the flagstones yielded. There was a bed of mortar underneath, and earth. The soil was wet, resembling as Barnes later testified, "made earth," such as would be used to fill in the foundation of a house, a combination of lime-core and clay. The mortar was carefully spread across the entire bottom surface of the flags. Barnes remarked that the stones could not have been laid by a mason, who would have applied the mortar only around the edges. The men exchanged a brief glance and decided to remove the soil.

They found the earth beneath the layer of mortar very loose, and on digging to the depth of twelve inches, they found a linen rag about the size of two hands. Barnes put the rag to his nose and recognized the smell of death. Continuing to dig, they saw something white and thought at first it was another piece of rag. Barnes shook it and found that it was a human toe.

"We've found him," he said. Burton immediately ran off for the station to summon assistance, leaving Barnes to the grim disinterment. Tearing further into the loose ground, Barnes uncovered the man's loins, and when assistance arrived the whole body was unearthed. The corpse was lying naked upon the belly, with head pointed down, and the legs were drawn
back and tied against the thighs with a strong cord of the thickness of a clothesline. The body was completely imbedded in quicklime.

While the corpse still lay in its kitchen grave, Samuel Lockwood, a nonpracticing surgeon who happened to be in the neighborhood, arrived with a newspaper reporter at his heels. From the very outset this was to be a case where the press would never be left far behind.

Lockwood was afraid of injury being done to the head and himself disengaged it from the earth. He felt an extensive fracture on the upper part of the skull toward the back, so large that he could introduce two fingers into it; the scalp was cut through. The surgeon remembered the placard he had seen announcing that the missing man had worn false teeth. Raising the head carefully, he pulled out a full set of dentures, which he washed and gave to the summoning officer, Mr. Slow, one of the representatives of the law who were now crowding the kitchen. Shortly thereafter the body was raised and moved into the front kitchen, where Lockwood assisted George Odling, a police surgeon of the M division, in a preliminary medical inspection.

A two-inch coat of lime clung to the body, which was quite blue, decomposing and excoriated. Lockwood found another fracture at the back of the head, extending to the right side. Odling having called his attention to a small protuberance over the right eye, Lockwood felt it through the unbroken skin and found that it was hard and moveable. He cut down upon it and found it to be a large slug. The bullet had made an aperture in the skull directly in the middle over the right eye above the frontal bone. The slug was about an inch under the skin. No further examination of the body was made at the time; a more careful study was deferred until a postmortem could be arranged.

While the doctors were examining the body in the front kitchen, the police searched the house for the weapons but had no success. The reporter left the officials to their duties and was soon engrossed in his own speculations. He looked out through the bars of the kitchen window into the garden. The window had neither shutter nor blind, and at the end of the garden was
the landlord Coleman's timber yard, with a saw pit close to the wall of No. 3. The saw pit was so close to the window, the reporter thought, that motions of any person in the kitchen could be observed by daytime, and the sound and light of a nocturnal interment could hardly have escaped the attention of neighbors.

When the inspection was over and the police were ready to leave, their task was clear before them. The victim was undoubtedly the missing Patrick O'Connor, and they must track and apprehend the pair of murderers who had fled from their lodgings at 3 Minver Place after burying him. The police were searching for Frederick George Manning and his wife, Marie.