

### **PART III — THE POLICE INVESTIGATION**

85. My review of the case has substantiated some of the criticisms which have already been levelled against the police for having failed to arrest Sutcliffe earlier. Other important limitations in the various aspects of the police investigation have also been identified during the review. I will now deal with these in turn before commenting on two well-known personalities in the case, namely Trevor Birdsall, Sutcliffe's friend and Sonia Sutcliffe, his wife. Finally, within this part of the report I will deal with the events immediately preceding and following Sutcliffe's arrest which also led to a great deal of criticism especially in relation to possible offences of contempt by both the police and the media.

#### **(a) LIMITATIONS**

##### **(i) The Major Incident Room**

86. As will be seen in various parts of my report many of the limitations in the Ripper Investigation stemmed from the failings of the Major Incident Room and therefore I consider it advisable to give a brief background to homicide investigations and how they are undertaken with the co-ordinated assistance of the Incident Room, before I deal with the actual limitations found.

87. The average police detection rate for crimes of homicide is in excess of 90%. In 1979, for instance, of the 629 cases which occurred in England and Wales, 587 (93%) were detected by the police. In contrast of 252,288 cases of burglary in a dwelling which occurred during the same year only 74,256 were detected, equal to 29%. Whilst it is the case that two-thirds of all homicides are committed within a domestic or social situation which allows the person responsible to be identified with relative ease, murder is not intrinsically a much easier crime to detect than many others, including burglary in dwellings. The difference in the overall detection rate reflects not only the likely public response to the crime but also the disproportionate scale to which senior police officers are prepared to allocate resources to homicide cases in comparison with other crimes. Homicide, and murder in particular, is regarded as the gravest of anti-social crimes so that the allocation of a very high level of police resource to its detection is seen both inside and outside the Police Service as fully justified. Within the Police Service there is also the factor that undetected homicides clearly touch the reputation of a particular force and of its senior detectives in a unique way so that detection of murder is a very important matter of local prestige.

88. The realities of the world we live in preclude the deployment of manpower to minor crimes on the same scale as is currently deployed to murder inquiries. There are simply far too many crimes to be dealt with. In 1979, for instance, more than 2¼ million crimes were recorded by the police of which a mere 629 (.026%) were in the homicide category.

89. The purpose of this comparison of homicides with other crimes is to show that, because of the scale of resources applied to them, they can overload the ordinary arrangements for the gathering, collating, evaluating, indexing and filing of evidence. In a routine case of house burglary a single detective may have responsibility for the complete inquiry. In the earliest stage of the inquiry he will probably have the assistance of a Scenes of Crime Officer, and may, subsequently, gain help from Fingerprint and Forensic specialists. He will usually be responsible for all his own inquiries, for the interrogation of any suspects and, if he is successful, for collating the available evidence and presenting it to his senior officers for consideration and eventual disposal. In a homicide inquiry where 100 officers might be deployed at an early stage it would clearly be impossible for any senior investigating officer to keep control over such a widespread and diverse operation as part of his own mental process. There is an immediately recognisable requirement for an effective administrative support system capable of monitoring the work of the inquiry as a whole and, more particularly, of pointing the investigating officer to significant elements of the evidence, or conclusions which could be drawn from it, of which he might not otherwise be aware.

90. This need is catered for by what is now commonly referred to as a Major Incident Room, a facility which was pioneered in the Metropolitan Police area which, until the second World War, was the only police force in the country to have very wide and continuing experience of homicide inquiries. Although other major cities had their share of homicides, the police forces associated with them were relatively small by comparison and certainly did not acquire the expertise common to the Metropolitan Police. When a provincial force called for assistance a detective superintendent and a detective sergeant were sent, the superintendent to take charge of the

investigation in liaison with a local officer and the detective sergeant to set up a Major Incident Room to service the inquiry. Because of the relative proximity of Scotland Yard this service was used more frequently by forces in the Home Counties and the South East of England and not surprisingly therefore, the greatest degree of standardisation of Major Incident Room procedure is to be found in the South East where Metropolitan influence was the strongest.

91. Following the amalgamation and re-organisation of police forces in England and Wales in 1967 and 1974 each of the 41 provincial forces which subsequently remained had sufficient resources and experience to meet the needs of any ordinary murder inquiry so that dependence upon the assistance of Scotland Yard became a thing of the past. Even in the isolated examples which have occurred where local resources appeared unlikely to satisfy the needs of an individual inquiry, the prestige of individual police forces has, more often than not, made Chief Constables reluctant to ask for the assistance of the Metropolitan Police. On the rare occasions when assistance has been provided (as it was in the "Black Panther" case) arrangements for command and control of the multi-force inquiry have been far from satisfactory.

92. One of the unfortunate results of locally controlled murder inquiries has been that the common Major Incident Room system which resulted from the participation of Scotland Yard in local force investigations has been lost. There now exist a number of different systems in England and Wales, few of which are capable of being interfaced. This factor had a considerable adverse influence on the Ripper Inquiry and I will refer to it again later.

93. A Major Incident Room may be defined as, "Those administrative procedures used to handle all information coming to notice in a major police investigation." The purpose of the "Room" is to provide the senior investigating officer with an accurate record of all police inquiries made in connection with the crime and the results obtained from them. The records are intended to show the state of the inquiry and how much work in the form of outstanding actions remains to be done at any time. They are also required to enable any police officer making an inquiry to establish whether any person, vehicle or other factor has previously come to notice in the investigation and to provide investigating officers with a ready means of acquiring all the knowledge which the system contains about his inquiry subjects. A Major Incident Room is also intended to serve a much more positive purpose in that its records are kept so as to highlight people, vehicles or other facts which have become subject to inquiry as a result of different lines of investigation so that such records are capable of pinpointing suspects to whom the investigating officer can direct special attention. Finally, the "Room" should act as a point of historical reference so that, in a long running inquiry, officers joining the investigation team can have easy reference to major policy decisions taken at earlier stages of the inquiry.

94. To meet these varied requirements a number of facilities are required. The Major Incident Room is a unit of police organisation which can in fact be established anywhere. If suitable police accommodation is not available forces frequently make use of rented accommodation near to the murder scene. All that is required is a room with desks, chairs, telephones, and the administrative facilities of an ordinary busy office. Within this basic framework the following functions have to be provided:

- (a) *Senior investigating officer.* This is the officer in charge of the inquiry who is responsible for the control of the operation, the direction of the inquiry and the maintenance of the Incident Room service.
- (b) *Action allocators.* This is a middle management position usually filled by detective inspectors whose task is to initiate inquiries under the general direction of the senior investigating officer. The action allocator is responsible for the preparation of action forms or documents serving a similar purpose which are issued to members of outside inquiry teams.
- (c) *Outside inquiry teams.* These are detectives undertaking actual inquiries. Usually in the rank of detective sergeant and detective constable, they receive action forms from the action allocator and visit action subjects at their homes or places of work. Their results are shown on completed action forms and in statements of evidence both of which are returned to the Major Incident Room. Completed action sheets are returned to the action allocator who either accepts that the action is complete or issues

further actions for additional inquiries to be made. Statements of evidence go to statement readers.

- (d) *Statement readers* are a group of middle management detectives whose task is to read all incoming statements of evidence and to identify the important information contained in them. Such information is brought to the notice of the senior investigating officer.
- (e) *Telephone operators*. Policewomen are frequently used for this work which involves the acceptance of telephone information from the general public in response to police appeals. The information is recorded and passed to the action allocator for a decision about further action which may be required.
- (f) *Indexing clerks*. All action sheets, statements, telephone messages and other information received at the Major Incident Room are indexed under a variety of separate reference systems and papers are filed under these references. The most important indexes are normally those in which the names of people and the registered numbers and descriptions of vehicles are recorded.

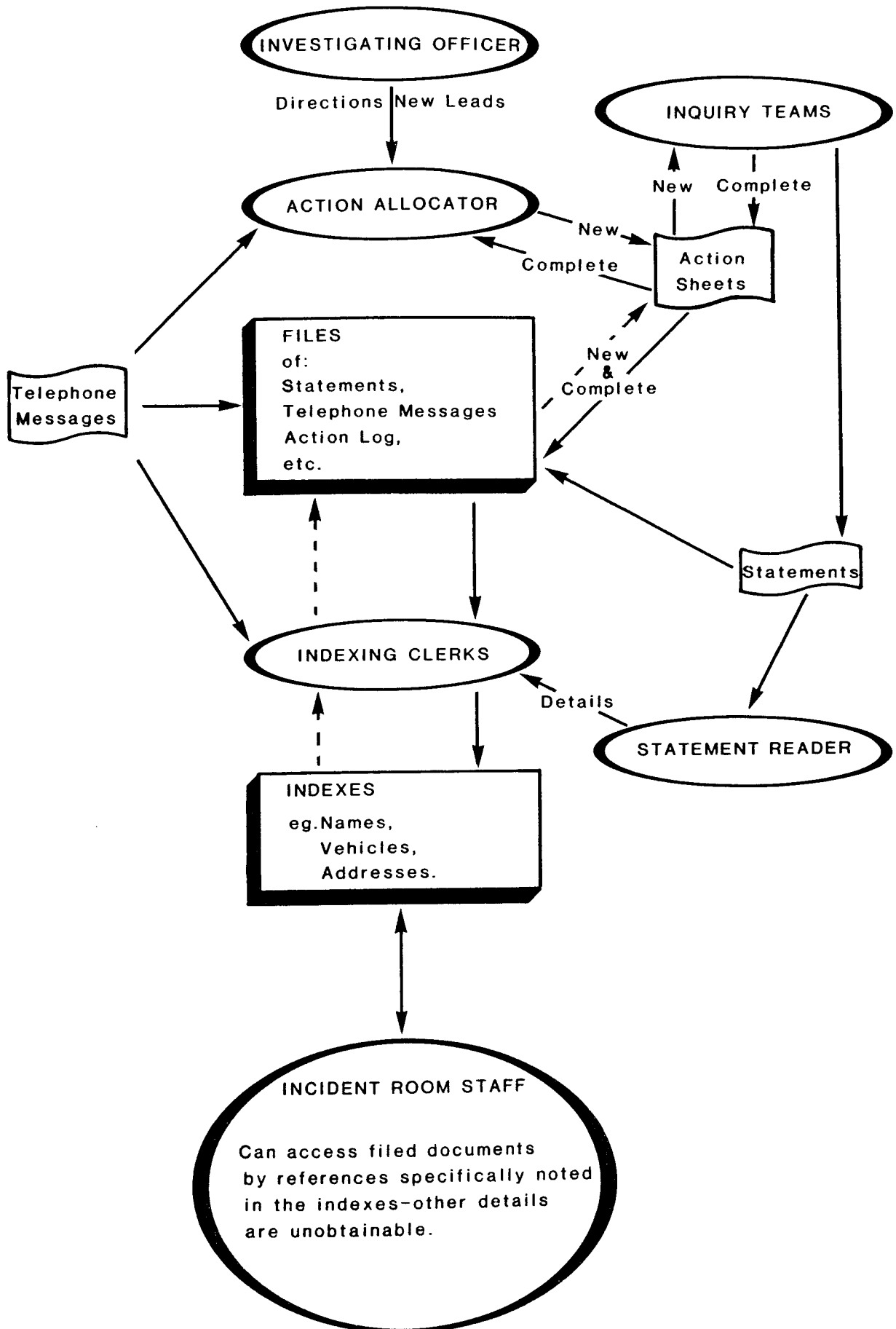
This basic organisational structure is illustrated in diagrammatic form at fig. 3.

95. The operation of the system is perhaps best explained by the use of a short practical example: "Early yesterday morning the body of Valerie Brown, a 20 year old student nurse, was found on the sports field of a leisure centre in an urban area. She had been sexually assaulted and subsequently strangled." (A sexually motivated murder is used as an example because such crimes are usually difficult to investigate). In this particular type of case, following or perhaps concurrently with the examination of the scene of crime and the subsequent removal of the body for examination, several lines of inquiry would immediately be put in hand. A Major Incident Room would be set up and the first actions would usually involve the dead girl's parents, friends and associates. Her mother, for example, would be interviewed and a statement would be taken from her so as to provide the investigating officer with as broad a picture of the deceased's background as is possible. When this statement arrives at the Major Incident Room a nominal index card would be completed giving details of the girl's mother and cross-referenced with the statement index. The statement would then be read and would almost inevitably produce a number of actions. For instance, if the dead girl had, over the years, had several boy friends who were named in her mother's statement actions would be raised for each one of them to be seen separately to see whether they could give useful information.

96. Before the actions were issued they would be checked against the nominal index to see whether the subjects had previously been recorded. If not, new nominal index cards would be completed. On the return of the completed actions, the accompanying statements would be read, undoubtedly raising further actions for the inquiry team. The statement reference would be recorded on the nominal index card in each case. At the same time as these elementary background inquiries were being made, separate teams of officers would be conducting house to house inquiries which might generate information about vehicles or people seen in the area at the time of the murder. If the information gained was sufficiently positive to allow identification of some person or some vehicle, actions would be raised to have the person seen or vehicle traced and either implicated in or eliminated from the inquiry. Where the available information did not provide an identification, for instance, where there was only a description of a person seen in the area, an action would be raised for the description to be circulated within the Police Service and possibly through the media as being that of a person wanted for elimination. Many other lines of inquiry would be running simultaneously, for instance, inquiries amongst taxi-drivers, at dry cleaners or laundries in respect of unusual or unidentified patrons. The results of all these inquiries would be channelled through the Major Incident Room where relevant information would be indexed so that investigating officers might have easy access to it thereafter. Officers completing the nominal index cards would be responsible for bringing to the investigating officer's attention any individual who was recorded for more than one reason.

97. Accordingly, a person who had been seen near to the scene of the crime but had, on interview, been able to satisfy the officers about his presence in the vicinity might also come into the system on the separate route that he was a former associate of the dead girl or that his description fitted

**FIGURE 3**  
**BASIC ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF INCIDENT ROOM**



that of a person seen with the girl before her death or that he was the owner of a vehicle seen elsewhere in suspicious circumstances or that he had a previous criminal conviction which was relevant to the inquiry.

98. It goes without saying that in a protracted murder inquiry the number of names in the nominal index, the number of completed, pending and unallocated actions, the number of statements of evidence, of letters from members of the public, of reports of telephone conversations with members of the public or of visits of members of the public to police stations is very high indeed.

99. One problem for senior investigating officers is that in many murder inquiries (two thirds of which, as I have already described, are of domestic origin) the services of a Major Incident Room are not required because the murderer is detected very quickly. If, however, a senior investigating officer decided not to establish a Major Incident Room and the investigation failed to live up to its earlier expectations and became protracted, a very difficult problem would then arise since there would already be a backlog of information to be dealt with at the same time as the developing inquiry might be producing extensive additional information. The difficulties of resolving this problem are such that the majority of senior investigators set up a Major Incident Room immediately in every case of murder in the knowledge that the operation can quickly be stopped should it prove unnecessary.

100. The conventional Major Incident Room systems of all 43 police forces in England and Wales currently depend upon manual card indexes. Computer based experimental systems are in the course of development and will be referred to elsewhere in this report. (An example of a computerised system is shown in fig. 4). At the time when the Yorkshire Ripper inquiry opened in 1975, however, no one in this country had any experience of a computer based Major Incident system and although computerisation of Major Incident Room indexes was offered to the Chief Constable of the West Yorkshire Metropolitan Police by the Police Scientific Development Branch in 1977 his decision to reject that offer is now believed to have been correct in the light of the untested system available at the time.

101. The West Yorkshire Police Major Incident Room procedure is well documented and has been used successfully in connection with the many murders which have occurred within the force area since it was drawn up in 1974. The system is, however, an amalgam of the independent systems previously used in the West Riding of Yorkshire and the cities of Leeds and Bradford before these three forces were incorporated into the present force. It was thus almost inevitable that the investigation of murders which occurred in the formerly independent parts of the force area after 1974 would be dealt with largely in accordance with the policies and methods of the former forces. For example, the first two murders in the Ripper series (McCann and Jackson) occurred in Leeds within the area formerly policed by the Leeds City Force. The senior investigating officer was the former head of the Leeds City C.I.D., and the majority of his detectives were accustomed to the city method of operation. It is now clear that the investigation of these early murders was conducted on the basis of a Leeds City dominated system so that when offences occurred later in other parts of the force area problems of compatibility arose.

102. The Major Incident Room system which was applied to the majority of crimes in the Ripper series is a complex one which, in comparison with the systems in use elsewhere, is fairly sophisticated. It consists of:

- (a) A daily log in which is recorded in chronological sequence all significant events, information and decisions which are taken in connection with the inquiry.
- (b) An action system in which all information coming in to the Major Incident Room from whatever source is examined to see whether any additional action is required. If such action is required, an initial or further action is written on an action form by the action allocator or a clerk working for him. The action form (see example at fig. 5) has a number of different coloured copies, one of which goes to the master file, one to the outside inquiry team leader and one to the officer who is actually going to undertake the inquiry. Before the action form goes to the inquiry officer it is searched against the nominal and, if necessary, vehicle indexes to see whether there are any previous references to the person who is to be seen in the action. Previous references are endorsed on the action form which then goes to the previous papers clerk who extracts the

**FIGURE 4**  
**COMPUTERISED INCIDENT ROOM**

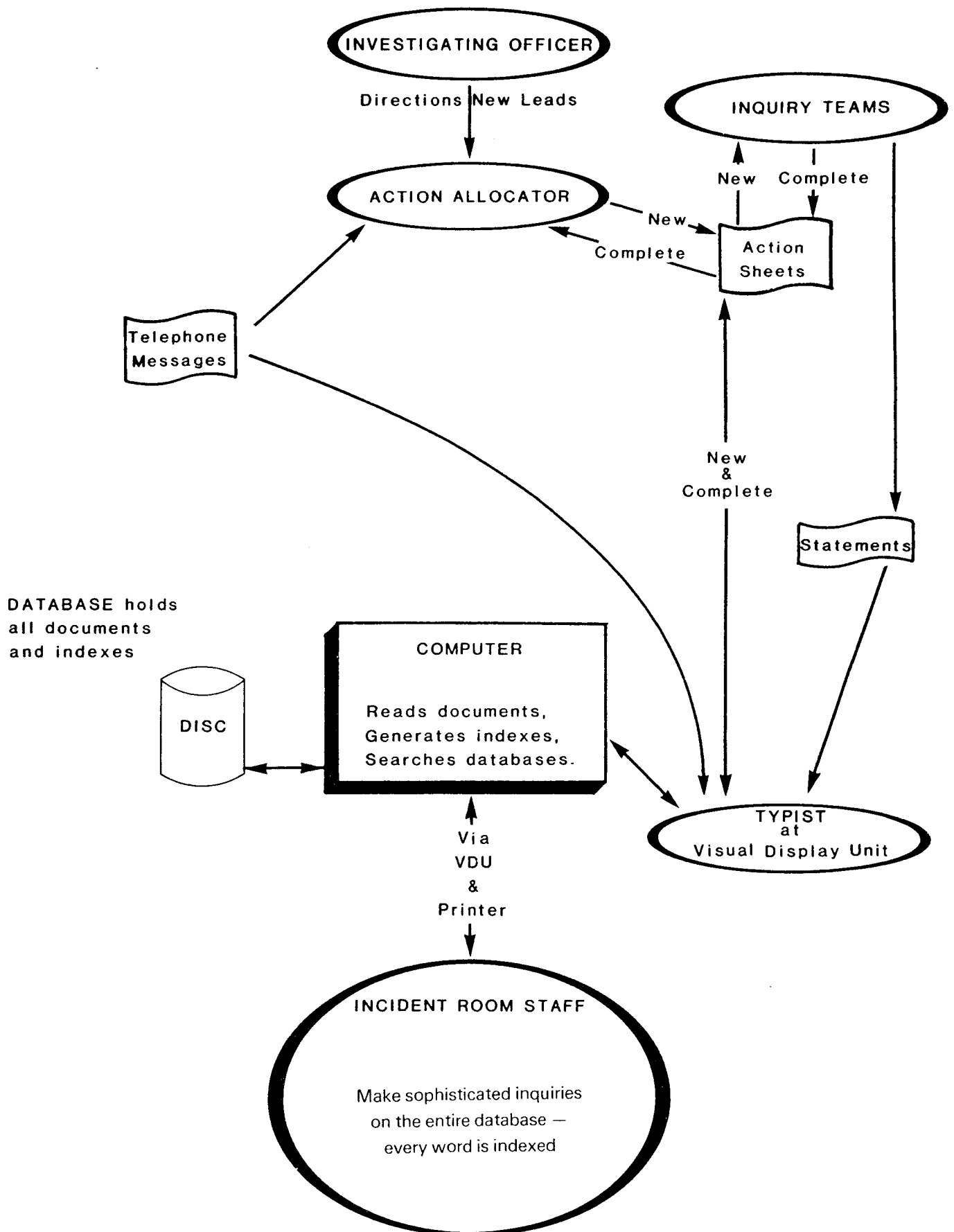


FIGURE 5

MAJOR INCIDENT ACTION FORM

64.

WEST YORKSHIRE METROPOLITAN POLICE

MAJOR CRIME INVESTIGATION-ACTION FORM

(This pad must not be separated until allocated an Action Number by the Major Incident Room staff)

11/1538/2  
ACTION No.:

PASSED TO:

ORIGIN OF INFORMATION: (Name, address and telephone number, where applicable)

FOR USE IN THE INCIDENT ROOM ONLY.

ANON LETTER

SUBJECT MATTER: Suggests:

Peter SUTCLIFFE  
5, Garden Lane  
Heaton, B'fd.

11/18/4029/2

3/10  
see 7/5/128

7/1/3377  
part. in case.  
- h/w neg.  
but officer interviewing NOT  
329 case  
PP/9

OFFICER RECEIVING: KAB 5760 Date: 27<sup>th</sup>/80 Time:

RESULT OF ENQUIRY: (Continue overleaf if necessary)

Date: INQUIRING OFFICER:

REMARKS / INSTRUCTIONS FROM TEAM LEADER:

REMARKS / INSTRUCTIONS FROM OFFICER i/c INVESTIGATION:

papers to which the references on the form refer, photocopies them and staples the copies to the form before returning the originals to the filing system. The action then goes, via an outside inquiry team leader, to the officer or officers who are to deal with it. Once the action has been completed the results are endorsed on the action form which is returned to the Incident Room together with any statements or other evidence required by the action. After the completion of an action, the form is checked against the nominal index and new index cards are made out for people and vehicles where necessary.

- (c) An index and filing system which is intended to allow previous papers to be identified and recovered with ease. The principal system of reference is as follows:
- (i) An 'A' reference is allocated to every statement of evidence taken in connection with the inquiry. Consecutive numbers are used so that the nominal index card of the person who makes the 50th statement to be recorded during the course of the inquiry will bear the reference 'A'50.
  - (ii) A 'B' reference is allocated to each action where a person is to be seen by the police. Once again consecutive numbers are used so that the 81st person seen by the police during an inquiry would have 'B'81 recorded on his nominal index card. A person who, having been interviewed and accorded a 'B' reference, subsequently makes a statement of evidence is then recorded additionally as an 'A' reference with the appropriate consecutive number.
  - (iii) Motor vehicles which come to notice during the inquiry are, in addition to identification by index number, allocated a 'C' reference and consecutive number. Following experience during the Ripper inquiry (which will be referred to later) this system has been abandoned in the force.
  - (iv) The 'D' reference system is intended to accommodate a variety of independent lines of inquiry involving groups of people or subjects who are to be seen in connection with actions based on occupation or some other factor. In West Yorkshire, for example, anonymous letters and inquiries in connection with them are consecutively numbered under 'D'10 whilst inquiries amongst taxi-drivers are numbered under the reference 'D'63. A long list of standard 'D' references is contained in West Yorkshire's major crime investigation handbook and this system is used to ensure continuity in that a 'D'63 reference will always refer to a taxi-driver whatever murder investigation is involved.
  - (v) The final reference used in the West Yorkshire system is the 'E' reference which is used for the filing of questionnaire forms which may be issued to officers conducting a particular line of inquiry where the accent is on the rapid gathering of information which can be stated briefly. Completed questionnaire forms are given an 'E' reference with a consecutive number and an index card bearing this reference is completed for the person who supplies the information.

103. This was the basic system which was available to the West Yorkshire Metropolitan Police when they commenced to investigate the crimes in the Ripper series. Before going on to describe the problems which were experienced in the use of the system it is fair to say that, despite the extensive use of Incident Room procedures in very many major crime inquiries, the Police Service had, until the beginning of the Ripper series, no experience of dealing with a linked series of 13 murders and 7 attempted murders over a six year time span. Such experience as was available, including that gained during the "Black Panther" series which will be referred to later, indicated that a system which worked well in the investigation of a single crime could not be guaranteed to be similarly effective when applied to a long series of similar crimes.

104. Indeed, when the West Yorkshire Major Incident Room system was applied to the Ripper series the following problems were encountered:

- (a) Although in the earlier murders in the series the 'C' reference system was used for motor vehicles, it was abandoned when the records of the first six cases were amalgamated and resulted in the system becoming far too complicated to search. After the seventh murder, namely Rytka in 1978, vehicles were indexed and filed only under their registration numbers. The result was that there was a combined vehicle index