

**Rockdale City Council
2012 Ron Rathbone Local History Prize**

**‘The Kingsgrove Slasher’:
St. George’s Own Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
1956 – 1959**



David Joseph Scanlon, aka ‘The Kingsgrove Slasher’ ca. 1959

Photo Source: National Library of Australia (n.d.)

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Introduction

‘Highly regarded’; ‘well liked’; ‘very decent type’; ‘mild-mannered’ – hardly the words associated with a criminal causing mass hysteria and terror to dwell in the St. George suburbs of Sydney for over three years. Yet this is exactly what David Joseph Scanlon, a man ‘well liked by everyone’ did in the local St. George area in the late 1950s (‘Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory’ 1959). Scanlon, better known as “The Kingsgrove Slasher”, held a whole region to ransom and had women literally running for cover in the middle of the night.

Fear and Terror Reigns in the Suburbs of Sydney

From 1956 to 1959, Scanlon, then unidentified and known only as ‘The Kingsgrove Slasher’, systematically broke into homes in the middle of the night, and attacked sleeping girls and women by slashing their clothes with knives, scalpels and razor blades – eventually moving on to cut the women’s bodies too. One newspaper article at the time elicits the fear and terror of the general public, by quoting the then Liberal member for George’s River, Mr. D. Cross – ““Thousands of people are becoming alarmed...many are in a state of nervous tension”” (‘Suspected Slasher Seen Twice More’ 1958).

Residents in the St. George area experienced genuine fear and panic, with thousands of homes having their windows barred and doors closed over the hot summer nights of late 1958 and early 1959; a security measure that was unprecedented for the time. By late 1958, the Slasher had attacked up to 25 sleeping women and girls, and the public were taking no chances (ibid). It should not be forgotten that although the Slasher’s general ‘haunt’ was the local St. George area, two of his victims were located as far away as Lavender Bay and Greenwich on the North Shore, and so the Slasher really did have the whole of Sydney on edge (‘Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory’ 1959).

To truly understand how panicked and fearful the residents of Sydney (and in particular, the St. George area) were during the Slasher’s reign, it is necessary to cast one’s mind to a time where doors and windows were not locked during the day or night; a time when Sydney could have been considered to be sleepy – a quaint, suburban sprawl that was just starting to find its feet a decade after the war. Suburbs were considered havens where families could settle and enjoy peace and

quiet. All this changed during the three-year reign of the Kingsgrove Slasher, when the quiet tree-lined streets of the St. George area were sent into 'near-hysteria' through the efforts of one man ('100 Police Wait for "Slasher" to Strike' 1958).

During the period of March 8th 1956 to April 30th 1959, Sydneysiders were 'gripped with fear of a maniac who prowled the city's darkened streets' and in fact, 'some women were too frightened to even leave their homes' (Bouda 1991, no page numbers). One only has to conjure up images such as the following to start to imagine the palpable fear that raged through local residents:

'...the papers carried regular reports of intruders outside windows, cutting fly screens, putting hands through windows, tapping on windows or walls, or skulking in gardens...'

(Hill and Madden 2004, p.158)

The Spread of Crime through the Suburbs

The Slasher's attacks were wide-reaching and certainly not contained to only one area of Sydney. What many people do not realise, owing to the "Kingsgrove" in the case's infamous name, is that the Slasher's efforts were spread across ten Sydney suburbs over a spate of three years, reaching as far as Lavender Bay on the North Shore – possibly owing to the fact that the Slasher and his wife had lived in North Sydney for a few years after getting married and therefore he knew the area well ('Liked Chase, Police Say' 1959). At one point, early on in the Slasher's reign, police believed that the Slasher may have been shifting his operations solely to the North Shore in an effort to deflect some of the intense investigations in the St. George area ('Sydney "Slasher" Attacks Girl, 14' 1956). This was largely proven to be incorrect – the majority of the Slasher's attacks were concentrated in the St. George area.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* provided much detail on the 18 charges which the Slasher (Scanlon) eventually pleaded guilty to. The paper had documented the victim's names in each attack, as well as the dates, and in most cases, the street names and suburbs of where the attacks took place ('Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory' 1959). There were certainly 'clusters' of attacks in localised areas, before the Slasher appeared to move on to a slightly different locality.

The first spate of attacks (mid-late 1956) was centred on the Beverly Hills and Kingsgrove areas (the area today which is largely dominated by the M5 expressway). This cluster of attacks can be seen in the following diagram which the author has used to show just how localised the attacks were, as well as how they were undertaken in such a short timeframe. Each attack has been numbered in chronological order, along with the address, victim's name and the charge that Scanlon was found guilty of (note: special reference has been made on this map to the site of the tennis club Scanlon played at – the significance of this site will be explained further in the "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" section of this report):



Figure 1: Clustered 1956 attacks (Beverly Hills & Kingsgrove)

After these first eight localised attacks, the Slasher shifted his focus slightly and moved his attacks closer to where he resided at the time, Arncliffe. He perpetrated one attack in Undercliffe, but then, a few weeks later, travelled to the North Shore's Lavender Bay and attacked a teenager there. This was then followed only a week later by an attack at Turella. These remaining 1956 attacks are shown

in Figure 2 and Figure 3 (note: attacks during 1958 and 1959 are represented in a different colour – refer map legend at bottom of page):

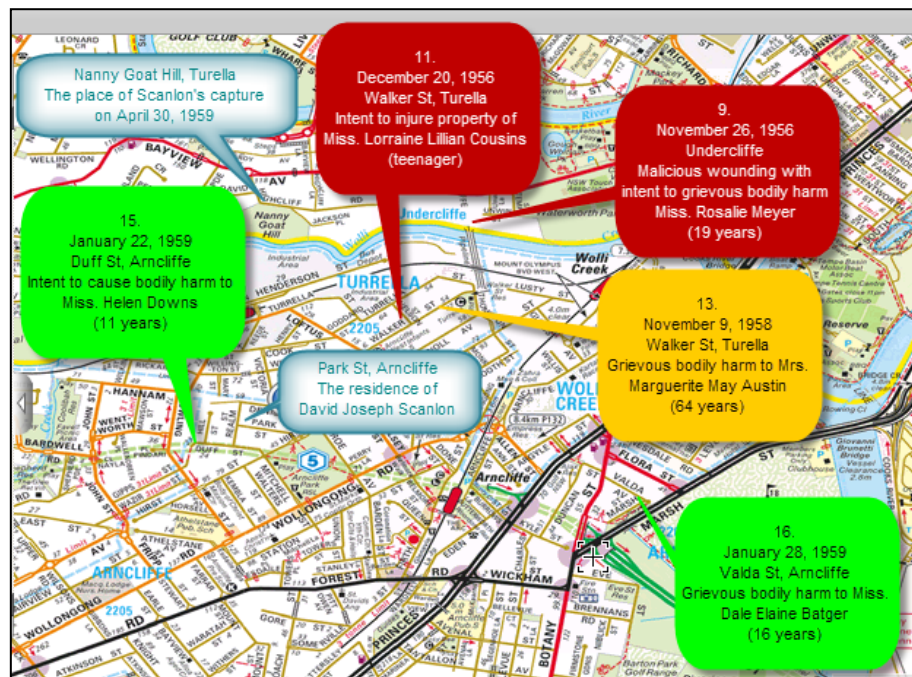


Figure 2: Attacks in the Turella/Arncliffe region (1956-1959)

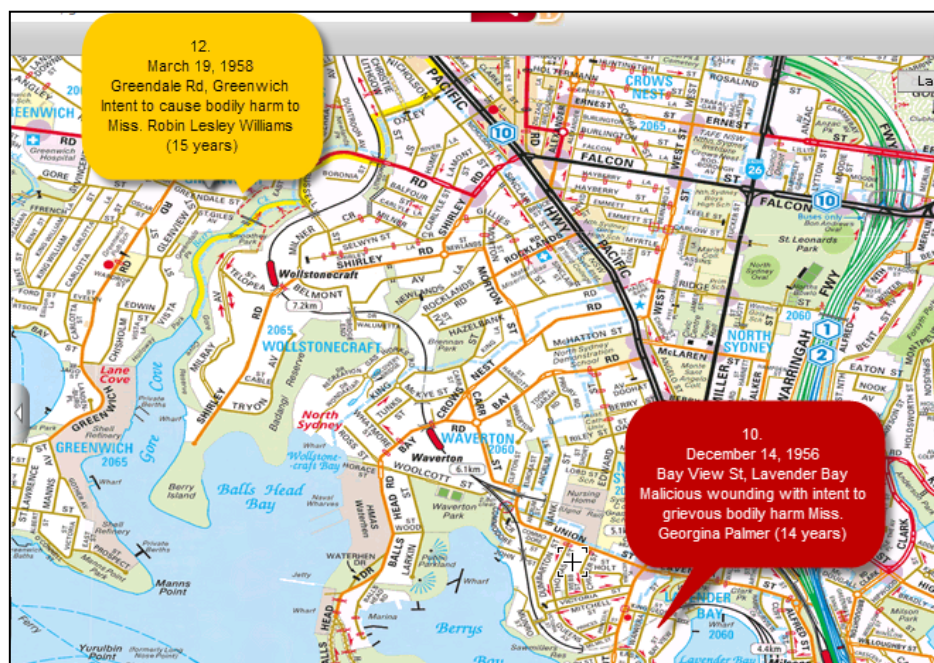


Figure 3: Attacks on Sydney's North Shore (1956 and 1958)

MAP LEGEND:	
Red	= 1956 attacks
Amber	= 1958 attacks
Green	= 1959 attacks

It can be seen through Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3 that there were no known attacks by the Slasher during 1957. His whereabouts during this year have been widely speculated upon, and some, like the then Superintendent M.F. Calman, even suggested that the Slasher may have been in a mental institution during this time ('Day and Night Hunt for Slasher' 1959).

The Slasher's 1958 attacks began in Greenwich (refer Figure 3 – attack number 12). From there, the Slasher moved back closer to his place of residence, and attacked Mrs. Marguerite Austin, a much older woman in Turella (refer Figure 2 – attack 13). After this, there was only one more attack the Slasher was convicted of in 1958, and for this he had travelled to Kyeemagh (refer Figure 4):

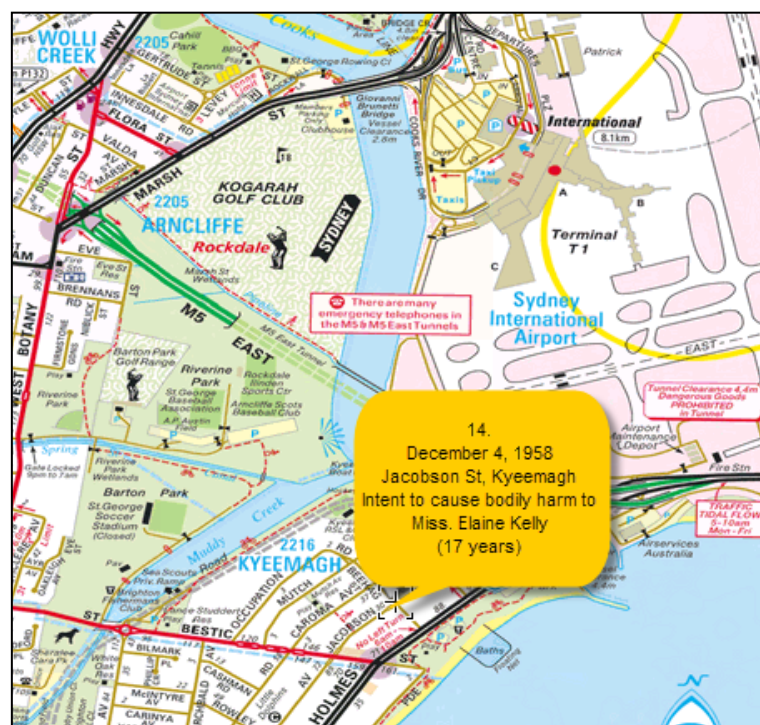


Figure 4: Isolated Kyeemagh attack (1958)

The Slasher's 1959 attacks began early in the year, with the first two attacks taking place in January (refer Figure 2 – attacks 15 and 16). Shortly after, there were two attacks in February, for which the Slasher had moved closer to the Earlwood/Bardwell Park region. These attacks were the Slasher's final and ended a reign of terror which Sydneysiders preferred to forget about (refer Figure 5 below – attacks 17 and 18):

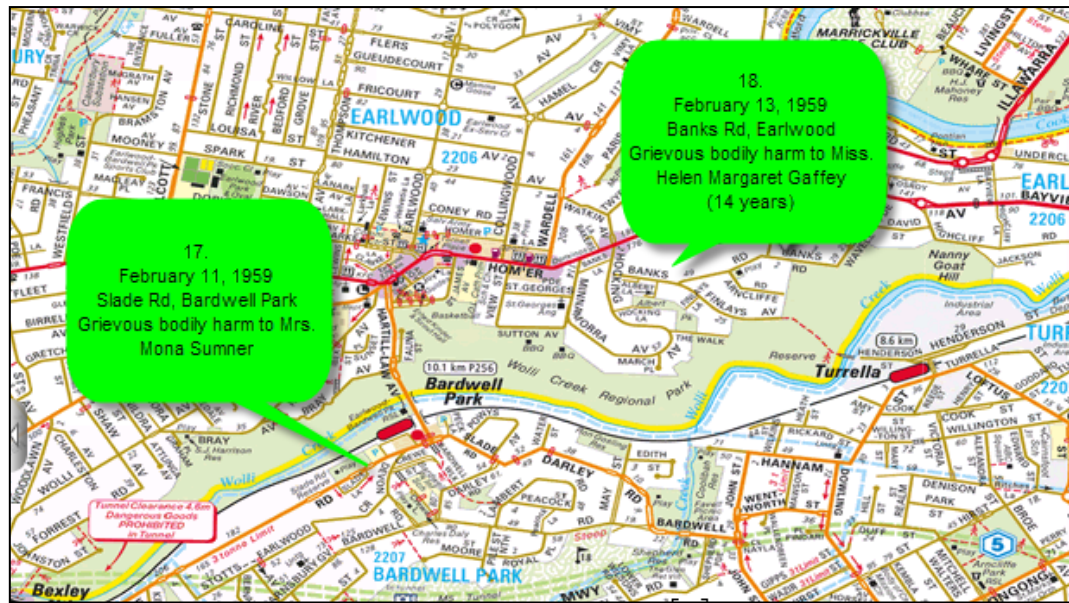


Figure 5: Bardwell Park/Earlowood attacks (1959)

A Window into Crime

What horrible perpetrations was Scanlon actually inflicting on his victims? In each instance, Scanlon would break into his randomly chosen house through a window, before creeping into the female occupant's room (victims ranged in age from 7 – 72, and were often attacked whilst they slept next to their husbands or close to their fathers). Scanlon would proceed to slash the clothing of the women and girls, with sharp instruments such as knives or razors and then, 'vanishing as silently as he had arrived', would escape quickly (Madden 2011). Whilst reports vary of exactly the nature of Scanlon's crimes, the consistent themes are that the attacks were always in the 'darkness of night' (Hill and Madden 2004, p.157) and that attacks were always made in bedrooms whilst victims were sleeping.

Some of the Slasher's early crimes were reported in reasonable detail by the papers of the time. For example, one Melbourne newspaper reported in some detail the attack on Miss. Lorraine Cousins of Arncliffe on the night of the 20th December, 1956. On this night, the Slasher had crept into the household, and snuck into the teenager's room. The family (including the victim) had no idea the Slasher had been in their house until they woke in the morning to find Lorraine's petticoat slip with 'half a dozen slashes down the front' neatly tucked under a blanket at the foot of her bed, as well as a slashed bikini top draped over the bed head ('The slasher's on the prowl again' 1956). Incredibly, Miss. Cousins had managed to sleep through the whole ordeal!

Although most of the Slasher's attacks were relatively harmless and involved slashing items rather than people, it must not be forgotten that some of Scanlon's crimes did eventually become more sinister. According to one Dr. Listwan who was a psychiatrist giving evidence at Scanlon's trial, on three occasions Scanlon "caused bodily harm to his victims" ('Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory' 1959). These physical attacks included cuts, scratches or bruises around the chest area (Hill and Madden 2004). Interestingly, Dr. Listwan also hastens to add that the instances of Scanlon causing physical harm to his victims were only "due to the fact he was panicked". Dr. Listwan is implying that Scanlon's intention was *not* to harm the women and that this was simply an unfortunate by-product of Scanlon feeling as if he was going to be caught ('Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory' 1959). Time and again, sources point to Scanlon's motives coming from the *thrill* of being caught rather than any intention to harm the women and girls.

However, the extent to which Scanlon physically harmed his victims as opposed to terrorising them varies depending on which source is consulted. In personal communications between the author of this report and one local resident of the time, Mr. Graham Davis (son of the then Officer in Charge of Kingsgrove police, Constable Ed Davis), he revealed a slightly different memory of the events to Dr. Listwan. David stated that the Slasher 'never injured any woman' and that although a woman in Bexley 'claimed she had been attacked and showed police marks on her chest', it was later revealed that she had self-inflicted these wounds in an effort to seek revenge on her boyfriend of the time (Davis 2012, pers. comm., 19 April).

Whether the physical abuse was intended by the Slasher or not, one example of it was reported in a Melbourne newspaper in dramatic fashion. The by-line of the article read that the Slasher had 'brutally battered a pretty teenager about the head with a heavy block of wood' ('Sydney "Slasher" Batters Young Girl' 1956). This attack, on Undercliffe teenager Miss. Rosalie Meyer, took place on the 26th November 1956, and it did much to spread fear through Sydney (and indeed Australia). The article remarked that Meyer had 'screamed in terror and pain as blood poured from a deep wound on her forehead'. Imagine the fear gripping the nation as residents read such stories as the following:

'Miss Meyer told police that she suddenly woke and saw the figure of a man standing near her bed. She cried out in fright, "What do you want?" The man swung a heavy piece of wood, striking her a glancing blow on the forehead.'

(*'Sydney "Slasher" Batters Young Girl' 1956*)



Figure 6: Photo of Miss. Rosalie Meyer who was attacked on the 26th November, 1956 (photo source: *'Weeping Girl Tells of Attack by "Growling Man"' 1959*)

Similarly, *The Argus* sensationally reported on one of the Slasher's next victims, Miss. Georgina Palmer, a 14-year-old from Lavender Bay on the North Shore. In the article, Palmer describes how at 4 am she saw a man's silhouette against her bedroom window, and called out for her mother, but not before the Slasher had "'slashed me twice on my left shoulder with something very sharp'". Worryingly, the examining doctor later told that he believed the weapon was "'double-pronged...like a heavy toasting fork'" (*'Sydney "Slasher" Attacks Girl, 14' 1956*).

One of the more unusual Slasher attacks was on Mrs. Mona Sumner of Slade Rd, Bardwell Park, in the early hours of February 11th, 1959. This attack was not unusual in the way it was carried out, but was unusual because of the age of the victim – Mrs. Sumner was well into her sixties, which seemed to confirm that the Slasher was indiscriminate in whom he attacked (old or young; women or girls). Sumner, like many of the Slasher's other victims, had her clothes cut, as well as being left with a 'half-inch cut on her chest' (*'Day and Night Hunt for Slasher' 1959*). Naturally, given her age, Sumner was badly shocked and was left for a long time afterwards as a 'nerve sufferer' (*'Mental Harm' 1959*).



Figure 7: Mrs. Mona Sumner who suffered terribly after her attack (photo source: 'Mental Harm' 1959)

The Slasher's eighteenth and final attack was on one Miss. Helen Gaffey, of Banks St, Earlwood. Helen was 14 at the time, and shockingly, the Slasher attacked her whilst Helen's 7 year-old sister, Susan, slept in the same bedroom. Using a ladder, the Slasher pushed his hand through the bedroom window and, after creeping in, slashed Helen's bedclothes and nightdress ('Public Responds to "Slasher" Appeal; New Plans by Police' 1959). One can only imagine the trauma and distress these young girls went through.



Figure 8: Miss. Helen Gaffey – the Slasher's 18th victim (photo source: 'Yes, the Slasher struck again last night' 1959)

It should not be forgotten that the 18 attacks that the Slasher was officially charged with, may have been just the tip of the iceberg, and there could have indeed been many more attacks which he was never found guilty of. For example, in 1958, one resident of Tebrett St, Rockdale, Mr. Noel McKinnon, fought with a man who was suspected to be the Slasher, when he found him outside the

bedroom of his six-year-old daughter ('Cornered Man "Snarls" at Householder' 1958). At that point in time, the Slasher was already suspected to have attacked more than 20 women and girls, so it is likely that by the time his reign ended in 1959, the number was much higher.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Scanlon was the very definition of a juxtaposition; a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde character who appeared outwardly as one person, yet inwardly acted as another. Kidd (2005, pp.365-366) paints a vivid picture of the public Scanlon as a 'gutless nerd' and even more colourfully,

'a puny, 29-year-old office clerk who, on the surface, looked as though he didn't have enough strength to wipe the dandruff flakes off his collar, let alone hold women down and assault them with a deadly weapon'.

(Kidd 2005, p. 366)

At Scanlon's trial, his Q.C., Mr. Simon Isaacs, in his attempt to paint Scanlon as a mentally unstable client (to thereby reduce his prison sentence), talked much of his client's Jekyll and Hyde existence. Mr. Isaacs, echoing the sentiments of the general public, asked the following in his address to Mr. Justice Macfarlan:

"What sort of individual is this person who lives a 'Jekyll and Hyde' existence?...He is a perfectly respectable and decent sort of citizen during the day, a good husband, liked by his friends and an employee who apparently is well regarded by his employers. Yet he performs these strangely bizarre and sadistic acts at night."

(Isaacs, as quoted in 'Q.C. Urges "Slasher" be Given Chance to Rehabilitate Himself' 1959)

Kidd (2005, p.366) described Scanlon as a 'regular church-goer' who was not in the least suspected by his friends or workmates. This description of Scanlon is supported by an interview conducted by the author of this report; an interview with "John" (real name withheld) who considered himself a friend of Scanlon's at the time of the attacks. "John" had no inkling whatsoever of Scanlon's real identity as the Kingsgrove Slasher, despite his regular Sunday-morning friendly tennis matches with Scanlon at the Morgan Street, Kingsgrove tennis courts. Each Sunday, after a game of tennis,

Scanlon, “John” and the other men that were part of the social tennis group would have a beer together. It was during these social get-togethers that the group would lament over the Slasher’s latest crimes (Scanlon himself joining in with the lamenting), yet little did the men know that the whole time the Slasher was in their presence! When “John” found out who Scanlon really was, he was suitably “disgusted” in his own words (“John” 2012, pers. comm., 26 April).

But no one could have been more surprised as to the real identity of Scanlon, than his young wife who herself was terrified of becoming the Slasher’s next victim. During the period of the Slasher’s reign, Scanlon’s wife believed he was simply staying back late at work (Hill and Madden 2004). In fact, for this very reason, David Scanlon had ‘reassured her that he would protect her from the monster on the loose’ and he took such measures as installing new locks on the doors and windows of their Park St, Arncliffe home to keep her safe whilst he was away (Kidd 2005, p.366). It is little wonder that when Scanlon was finally apprehended and eventually jailed, his wife initiated divorce proceedings to rid herself of that part of her life (“John” 2012, pers. comm., 26 April).

Running from the Law

“I loved the thrill of being pursued with someone hot on my heels”

(Scanlon, as quoted in Bouda 1991, no page numbers)

One consistent theme that appears throughout the Kingsgrove Slasher literature is his elusiveness and how he could have possibly managed to evade the police for three long years. What exactly was making the Slasher so elusive? Police at the time attributed their inability to capture the suspect on his amazing athletic prowess. One example of the Slasher’s athleticism was a story of one local resident of Bexley at the time, Mr. William Sharp, who arrived home to find the Slasher in the act of smashing in one of his bedroom windows. When the Slasher realised he had been caught in the act, he raced to the back fence, jumped easily over it and ran down the stormwater canal before Sharp could even reach him (“Slasher” Scare; Man in Chase’ 1959). It was this athleticism that proved instrumental to Scanlon avoiding the police for as long as he did, yet it also ironically allowed police to narrow the search down to men of strong sporting ability.

Other such accounts at the time are also testament to the Slasher's athleticism. Once the identity of the Slasher was known, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on the multiple athletic awards Scanlon had won, plus his previous membership of the St. George District Amateur Athletic Club ('Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory' 1959). Another more recent article claimed Scanlon was also a member of the 'Botany Harriers', an athletic club that still exists today (now known as the Randwick-Botany Harriers) (Cassidy 2000). According to Graham Davis (son of Constable Ed Davis), Scanlon had claimed that his crimes were a bizarre form of athletic training, in that Scanlon 'used the potential of a police pursuit to drive him to better efforts' (Davis 2012, pers. comm., 19 April). One questions why Scanlon could not have turned to more conventional training methods!

In one of the rare *humorous* stories from the time, a young lady was purported to have attended a St. George Girl's High School dance with a spare pair of flat-heeled shoes so she could "'run away from the Kingsgrove Slasher if he chases me home'" ('Column 8' 1958). It seems the Slasher's running abilities were well known across Sydney! Who knows what athletic heights Scanlon could have reached were it not for his unconventional training techniques!

The Police Cop a Beating

Another reason the Kingsgrove Slasher may have remained elusive for so long, was the apparent lack of resources available to the local police. From 1943 to 1965 (when the Kingsgrove police station was built in its current location, Paterson Avenue), local police operated only from a very basic three metre-square 'call box' on the railway station ramp on Kingsgrove Road (Hill and Madden 2004). Additionally, Kingsgrove police were not issued with their first patrol car until 1957, which means that at the height of the Kingsgrove Slasher's rampage, the police were operating without a formal police station building or patrol car!



Figure 9: Kingsgrove Rd – looking from train station towards Stoney Creek Rd – police call box in centre (photo source: Hill and Madden 2004, p.151)

This correlates with anecdotal evidence from emails received from Graham Davis, who tells of the extensive media coverage of the Kingsgrove Slasher events; namely how the media reported ‘how the police car attached to Kingsgrove didn’t have a radio’ (Davis 2012, pers. comm., 19 April). The very next day after this media expose, a replacement car with a radio was despatched to Kingsgrove, so somewhat amusingly, the Slasher was not all bad news for the area! In fact, some local businessmen were elated by the goings-on – they were pleased by the national attention being drawn to Kingsgrove and the additional trade that went along with that (Hill and Madden 2004). This view was not shared by all – the President of the Kingsgrove Chamber of Commerce, Mr. R. Young, had pushed to have the word ‘Kingsgrove’ removed from all references to the Slasher! (‘Mental Harm’ 1959)

Criticism against the police was certainly rampant during the reign of the Kingsgrove Slasher, as pressure was increasingly mounted on the constabulary to apprehend the perpetrator and to do so quickly (Kidd 2005). One newspaper report from the day was unrelenting in its attack on the police that were working on the Slasher case, describing their ‘futile efforts’, and leading with the front-page headline of ‘An Appalling Record by the Police’ (‘Yes, the Slasher struck again last night’ 1959). The paper called for a ‘new, more imaginative approach’ in order to capture the Slasher, yet it failed to recognise the hopeless under-resourcing the local police endured.

The paper also failed to recognise the immense efforts that the police were actually expending in solving this case – ‘Detective Sergeant Brian Doyle and other detectives from the Criminal Investigation Branch were working around the clock to try to uncover his identity’ (Hurstville City Library, Museum and Gallery Collection 2005). Another source tells of the ‘scores’ of plainclothes and disguised police patrolling the St. George area day and night, as well as the fact that police in stations were constantly manning the phones and taking down messages of reported sightings (‘Police in Disguise: Wide hunt for the “slasher”’ 1959). Moreover, the NSW Police Commissioner at the time, Mr. C.J. Delaney, was working hard in conjunction with all Australian and New Zealand Police Commissioners to obtain any information about known criminals who might fit the Slasher bill (‘Clue to “Slasher” in Prints’ 1958).

Politicians fought back against the criticism; with the Premier at the time, Mr. Cahill, assuring parliament that extra men and cars had been dispatched to the case, and proudly boasting that eight

cars had reached one attack within three minutes (Hill and Madden 2004). The case sparked much interest by politicians – for example the Liberal member for George’s River, Mr. D. Cross, passionately appealed to the Premier, Cahill, to make a “‘maximum effort’” to catch the Slasher (‘Suspected Slasher Seen Twice More’ 1958). Eventually, a reward of £1000 was offered for his capture (Hill and Madden 2004).

Crime Sells: The Role of the Media

Not since the infamous razor slashing attacks in “Razorhurst” (Darlinghurst) of the 1930s, had the media jumped on and sensationalised a story like they did with the Kingsgrove Slasher. It was little wonder that ‘amidst enthusiastic reporting by the media, a state of fear mounted’ (Hill and Madden 2004, p.157). Stories of attacks seemed to become more elaborative and detailed, and in many cases, gory. The media increasingly told of more and more Peeping Toms and ‘noises in the night’, and weapons used by the Slasher (as reported in the media) began to include pieces of timber and bricks, as well as the original razors and scalpels. According to some reports, one woman even suffered a ‘cut mouth, injured eye, bruised face and smashed dentures as well as cuts on the chest’ (ibid). With the passage of time since the attacks, coupled with deliberately false reports at the time, it is difficult to ascertain how much of these gory tales were real and how much was simply a grab for notoriety.

The Slasher story made national news, and the sheer reach of the story goes to show just how the nation’s imagination was captured by such a mystery. Articles about the Slasher began to not only appear in local newspapers, but soon spread to big-name Sydney newspapers, as well as interstate papers such as Melbourne’s *The Age* (eg. ‘Police Name Clerk Wanted “Slasher”’ 1959) and *The Argus* (eg. ‘Sydney “Slasher” Attacks Girl, 14’ 1956). Clearly, the Slasher had put Kingsgrove on the Australian map – but for all the wrong reasons!

Even more astonishingly, the humble suburb of Kingsgrove made international news thanks to the Slasher. In 1959, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* published an article titled ‘Aussies End 4 Year Hunt, Seize Slasher’, in which it detailed the capture of Scanlon as the Slasher. The Slasher was now capturing the world’s attention, mostly owing to his lengthy reign of terror in the seemingly quiet backwater of Sydney, Australia. The Chicago article was certainly not without its own measure of sensationalism

though – claiming that ‘the slasher had fled from hundreds of suburban bedrooms’ – perhaps an exaggeration on the 20-25 known attacks!

The Locals Fight Back

Locals reacted accordingly to the media frenzy, and began to take such actions as restricting their daughters’ evening outings and locking their doors and windows as a matter of course (Hill and Madden 2004). The Slasher was starting to have a real impact on the residents’ daily lives, and they were fed up. One Kingsgrove teenager at the time, Miss. Gloria Ward, told the newspapers that her parents were so worried about her safety that they made her catch a taxi home from the train station after attending her night classes at Technical College (‘Mental Harm’ 1959). Such security measures would have been unheard of in the previously sleepy late-1950s Sydney.

What Sydney (and in particular, the St. George area) was having a hard time overcoming, was the mental and psychological strain the Slasher was placing on them. At the time, Rockdale Alderman R.K. Hislop pointed out that the Slasher had inflicted very little physical damage yet had “‘done a terrific lot of mental harm in this district’” (‘Mental Harm’ 1959). As a result, locals were genuinely starting to feel stressed, worried, and frustrated that they could not go about their everyday lives as they once had. One special investigation by the *Sydney Morning Herald* described the ‘strange, artificial lives now being led by the residents of Sydney’s southern suburbs’. The article pointed to the fact that residents were taking abnormal precautions such as staying at home every night and purchasing guard-dogs to protect their property. Furthermore, milkmen completing their pre-dawn rounds were deliberately rattling their bottles so as not to be mistaken for an intruder, and young men were avoiding wearing tennis outfits – the favoured apparel of the Slasher (‘Under the Spell of the “Slasher”: New hope in the blighted suburbs’ 1959).

Locals soon began to take the law into their own hands, with some residents ‘sleeping with rifles, iron bars, fire extinguishers and bags of flour and pepper for protection’ (Hurstville City Library, Museum and Gallery Collection 2005). A long-term resident of the Kingsgrove area, Mrs. Christine Dryden, concurs with such reports, stating in personal communications with the author of this report that “‘I can remember Dad having a cricket bat in Mum and Dad’s bedroom’” (Dryden 2012, pers. comm., 26 April). Another similar example was of one female resident of the time who had a fire

extinguisher by her bedside. Her sentiments towards the Slasher were certainly unambiguous: “‘I will blind him if he disturbs my household. I would not have pity if he were blinded’” (‘Armed Wait for Attack by “Slasher”’ 1958). This woman was not alone in her fear and loathing of the Slasher; some parents were actually arming their young teenage daughters with weapons – parents such as Mr. Joe Douse of Kyeemagh, who sent his 17-year-old daughter out at night armed with a ‘7 inch knife’ even though she was visiting a friend only 50 yards away (‘Vigilantes Patrol Streets, Search for the “Slasher”’ 1958).

Residents then began to take the fight against the Slasher to a whole new level, when, in 1958, they began to form ‘vigilante committees’ that unofficially patrolled the streets at night (Hurstville City Library, Museum and Gallery Collection 2005). These citizens were often armed and in some cases, had even ‘detained suspicious youths for questioning by police’ (Hill and Madden 2004, p.158). Amazingly, these vigilante groups were not haphazardly formed and run – they were often, as in the case of the Kyeemagh committee, well-organised and well thought out. The Kyeemagh group, which held regular patrols on foot and by car, had actually been formed in part by a local Rockdale Council member, Alderman Keith Hislop, who urged other suburbs in the St. George area to do the same (‘Vigilantes Patrol Streets, Search for the “Slasher”’ 1958).

Despite the highly-organised nature of the vigilante groups, police appealed to the community to leave the law enforcement to the professionals, as the multiple false alarms and hoaxes were doing little to aid the course of justice (Hill and Madden 2004). Instead of encouraging these vigilante groups, police appealed to the public to simply come forward with any information they may have, but one can imagine the suspicion and finger-pointing that was running through the community at the time with appeals such as these from Superintendent Calman:

“‘Somebody in Sydney must know of this man...Anybody with any information whatsoever, even if it is only a slight suspicion about a neighbour or person they believe could be this man, should come forward immediately.’”

(Superintendent Calman, as quoted in ‘Public Responds to “Slasher” Appeal; New Plans by Police’ 1959)

It seems that local residents were not the only ones joining the man-hunt for the Slasher. The case (and potentially the £1000 reward that went along with it!) had intrigued journalists too, who also wanted a piece of the action. One such example is long-term Australian journalist, Steve Dunleavy, who fondly recalls how he joined the hunt for the Slasher and that he was “...determined to catch him single-handedly” (Cassidy 2000, p.80). Dunleavy recalls hiding in a backyard laundry room of a house in Kingsgrove, ready to pounce on the Slasher. Unfortunately for Dunleavy, the night ended in his father playing a practical joke on the young journalist by locking him in the laundry! The hunt for the Slasher certainly didn’t end that night!

The Slasher Unveiled: Motives

Not many clues as to the motives of the Slasher can be found when researching Scanlon’s early life. The *Sydney Morning Herald* did report that he was the youngest in a family of four; he was born in Taree, NSW; and his family had moved to Sydney when he was nine (‘Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory’ 1959). They also reported that he had attended schools at Paddington and Kogarah and had worked for thirteen years as an office clerk for an importing and warehouse company. Christine Dryden, a long-term St. George resident, concurs with these reports, recalling a story at the time that Scanlon was a former student of Kogarah Marist High School and was even in the same class as the man who went on to become Cardinal Gilroy of the Catholic Church (Dryden 2012, pers. comm., 26 April).

In the author’s personal communications with Scanlon’s tennis ‘friend’, “John”, Scanlon is described as always “keeping to himself and being very quiet”, as well as being “very intelligent” and a “very, very good athlete” (“John” 2012, pers. comm., 26 April). Furthermore, in “John’s” own words, Scanlon had “come from a good family” – yet it seems this did little to assuage the monster-like characteristics from emerging. Dr. Listwan, the psychiatrist who testified at Scanlon’s trial, did point to evidence that as a child, Scanlon was ‘highly strung and very excitable’ which may give some clues as to why Scanlon sought the excitement of a chase later in life (‘Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory’ 1959).

One plausible theory as to how Scanlon transformed from a seemingly well-mannered individual to this monster, is that he simply became bored of his banal, ordinary, standard existence. When he

finally was caught, Scanlon confessed to police that he loved the *thrill* of it all and that his motives for committing the crimes were driven by the possibility of an exciting chase: “‘I did all those things so people would chase me’” (Scanlon, as quoted in Kidd 2005, p.367). Scanlon revelled in his feats, and according to psychiatrists of the time, smugly considered himself to be an ‘intelligent mastermind’ (‘Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory’ 1959).

Scanlon also confessed that he ‘loved reading about his latest exploits in the papers the day after’ (Kidd 2005, p.367). Indeed, Scanlon received an ‘almost celebrity-style treatment’ and at his trial, ‘soon developed a macabre following of “fans”’ (Bouda, 1991, no page numbers). This notoriety, excitement and thrill must have seemed extraordinarily appealing to the young office-clerk, with such a world seeming incongruous to his everyday banal life. This excitement may have been just the ticket to break through the boredom of a local area that was considered quiet and undisturbed.

It has often been reported that Scanlon started off his criminal career relatively harmlessly as a ‘peeping tom’, but that he became increasingly daring as he continued to successfully evade the police (Bouda 1991). In one newspaper article, Detective-Sergeant Doyle of the Kingsgrove Police told of how Scanlon had stated that his love for being chased began relatively innocently. Initially, Scanlon threw a paper bag filled with water at a man in a car – this man then proceeded to chase him. Scanlon so enjoyed this chase that he moved on to flicking stones at people who would also chase after him. After enjoying these chases so much, he eventually wanted to come up with a way to sustain the thrill for even longer. In Scanlon’s own words:

“‘Then I got the idea that it would be good to have everyone chasing me and I decided to give them some more serious things so they would have a real reason to chase me. I would have been very disappointed if the police had called off the search.’”

(Scanlon, as quoted by Doyle, in ‘Liked Chase, Police Say’ 1959)

When questioned, Scanlon did present another reason for his attacks other than just the thrill of the chase. Scanlon told police that in 1952 at the age of 22, (seven years before his capture), he had arrived home to the Kingsgrove house he shared with his mother, and had literally tripped over her dead body. It was widely believed that the incident ‘affected him deeply’ (Samuelson and Mason 2008, p.110), although it is unclear how such an incident motivated him to take revenge on innocent

women and girls. One newspaper at the time, the *Daily Mirror*, predicted, before the identity of the Slasher was known, that the perpetrator would be the 'possessor of a pathological hatred of all women' ('Yes, the Slasher struck again last night' 1959). This is unlikely to be entirely true given the deep impact Scanlon's mother's death had on him, plus his seemingly loving relationship with his wife. More likely as the key motive to his crimes was simply the desire for excitement, thrills and chases.

Some experts have argued that Scanlon was motivated to attack women and girls for his own sexual gratification. Psychiatrists at the time of his trial described Scanlon's attacks as "'compulsions of the sadistic and masochistic variety'" and the Defence Counsel at the trial called his own client a "'sex-perversed psycho-neurotic'" (Hill and Madden 2004, p.159). Scanlon himself denied any link between his attacks and sexual satisfaction, claiming that his attacks were mostly motivated by the thrill of the chase. One questions how much of the potentially sexual nature of these crimes were hidden from the public, owing simply to the taboos of the time. St. George resident, Christine Dryden, who was a child at the time of the attacks, recalls her parents shielding her from the full truth –

"...there was a sense of disquiet because we were never told exactly what the Slasher did...did he slash and disfigure? Did he slash through fly screens? Rape and sexual assault were not openly discussed...but we all knew that the man was posing a real threat."

(Dryden 2012, pers. comm., 26 April)

Evidence given by psychiatrists at Scanlon's trial also point to Scanlon having mental disorders ranging from an 'obsessive compulsive character defect' to a 'thought disorder consistent with mild schizophrenic thinking' ('Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory' 1959). It is difficult to say to what extent these alleged mental disorders caused Scanlon to attack, especially given the relative immaturity of the psychology field at the time and its early diagnostic tools. Anecdotal evidence from one Rockdale victim, Mr. Noel McKinnon, suggests the possible insanity of Scanlon who had bared his teeth and growled like a dog during the attack:

"The man is obviously a maniac...He made guttural noises but did not speak. I could see his bared teeth. He then growled like a wild animal. It was an eerie experience."

(Noel McKinnon, as quoted in 'Cornered Man "Snarls" at Householder' 1958)

Catching an Athlete

“I am your man, I am the Kingsgrove Slasher” – those few words ended one of the country’s longest and most extraordinary manhunts.’

(Bouda 1991, no page numbers)

It was famously the uttering of these few words that put an end to Sydney’s fear and terror. In a matter of only a few words of confession, the athlete had finally been caught.

On the night that Scanlon was caught (April 30th 1959), he had already terrorised two Earlwood residents in separate attacks. This time, though, Scanlon was not so lucky. In both instances, the ladies had woken up before Scanlon had a chance to begin the slashing, and in both cases, Scanlon was forced to flee the scene as quickly as he could. On his second attempt to get away, Scanlon ‘virtually ran into the arms of arresting officers at the foot of Nannygoat Hill, near Turella Railway Station’ and the chase for Sydney’s terroriser was officially over (Bouda 1991, no page numbers). Clearly, by this stage of the Slasher’s reign, police resourcing must have improved, as nearly 100 police converged on the area within minutes of Scanlon’s capture (Hill and Madden 2004). Some more recent newspaper articles have embellished the capture story, claiming that Scanlon dramatically dived into a swamp at Turella prior to his capture (‘History on this Day’ 2012) This is an unlikely story given how forthcoming his confession was.



Figure 10: Nannygoat Hill, Turella as it looks in 2012 (author's own photographs)

A few key clues had led to the capture of the Slasher – by December 1958 police had built up enough of a profile of the Slasher to narrow the hunt significantly. They had found fingerprints on the scalpel the Slasher had used in the Kyeemagh attack, and had also narrowed the profile to someone who usually wore athletic/tennis gear such as white shorts, white shirts and sandshoes (Hurstville City Library, Museum and Gallery Collection 2005).

Some fascinating first-hand recollections of the police hunt were provided to the author by Graham Davis, son of Ed Davis, Officer in Charge of the Kingsgrove Police at the time. Graham recalls how in 1957, as a young second-year journalism cadet, he watched with amazement as many a night his father would don 'civvies' and 'at 11pm put our private car...in the driveway of a home in Morgan Street [Kingsgrove]...a driveway with a view to the right and left...and hope Scanlon would be seen' (Davis 2012, pers. comm., 19 April). Graham also remembers how 'Dad would arrive home at dawn to a very relieved Mrs. Davis' (ibid). There is no doubt that the personal efforts of these dedicated policemen were taking a toll on their families too.

Another interesting insight on Scanlon's capture comes from "John" – Scanlon's former social tennis partner ("John" 2012, pers. comm., 26 April). "John" told about one Sunday morning in early 1959 when Scanlon did not turn up for tennis. Being worried about him, one of the men from the tennis group telephoned Scanlon's wife to enquire as to his whereabouts. You can imagine the shockwaves that were felt not only in that tennis club but also the community of Kingsgrove when Scanlon's wife had to reveal to them that it was he who had been the Slasher all along! To say that "John" remembers feeling dumbstruck is an understatement indeed.

After the capture of Scanlon, much recognition was finally enjoyed by Detective-Sergeant Brian Doyle of the Kingsgrove Police, whom had led the search efforts. Doyle has been posthumously described as an 'honest cop, the no-nonsense tough guy who succumbed to no pressure' (Brown 2002). According to long-term resident, Christine Dryden, Doyle was 'lauded as a hero for many years after the event' (Dryden 2012, pers. comm., 26 April). Indeed, for his efforts in capturing the Slasher, Doyle was awarded the Peter Mitchell Trophy in 1959 for outstanding police work (Brown 2002).

Doyle went on to lead a very distinguished career in the Police Force and he even rose to the rank of Assistant Commissioner of the NSW Police (Hill and Madden 2004). The Kingsgrove Slasher case was long held up as an example of policing at its finest (despite the initial attacks on the police at the time) – for example, the 1961 Royal Show even had a special Police exhibition proudly showcasing the ‘long and eventually successful hunt for the “Kingsgrove Slasher”’ (‘Light on crime’ 1961).

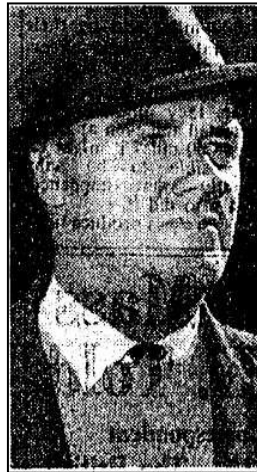


Figure 11: Detective-Sergeant Brian Doyle of the Kingsgrove Police (source: ‘Liked Chase, Police Say’ 1959)

Trial of a Slasher

Scanlon first faced court the day after his capture; with a packed local Kogarah Court the scene of his initial hearing. This hearing, indeed like the entire case, fascinated both media and residents alike, as this newspaper article captures:

‘Pressmen and local residents crowded around Kogarah police station from 8 a.m., waiting for a chance to see Scanlon. Schoolchildren and office-workers joined the crowd at lunch time.’

(‘Police Name Man in Court as “Kingsgrove Slasher”’ 1959)

The full case was then heard in September 1959 at the Central Criminal Court of Sydney – a courtroom that was supposedly packed with interested women and girls. In the innocent era of the late 1950s, at one point in the trial, all women (including the stenographer) were removed from the courtroom owing to the ‘delicate nature’ of some police evidence (Hill and Madden 2004, p.159). No

doubt this case would have caused shock and scandal to the public of Sydney if the full details had been revealed!

In much the same manner and characteristics Scanlon held in his general life (quiet; unassuming; meek), at his full trial he simply 'sat relaxed in the dock with his hands folded' and uttered only one word – "Guilty" – which he pleaded for the eighteen offences he was charged with ('Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory' 1959). He was true to his outwardly calm, unsuspecting (and some may say, boring) nature to the end. At the trial, a spotlight was shone on Scanlon's Jekyll and Hyde character when this outward appearance was juxtaposed with evidence from some of the victims – one female claimed she "woke in darkness feeling blows to the head and hearing a man growling like a dog" (Hurstville City Library, Museum and Gallery Collection 2005). Once again, the public were left scratching their heads as to how someone so unassuming could turn into such a cold-blooded animal. Incredibly, though, when Scanlon was sentenced to a total of 104 years to be served concurrently in jail (final term set at 18 years), many people, including some of his victims, were outraged because they felt his sentence was too severe! (Bouda 1991)

In 1960, Scanlon appealed against Justice Macfarlan's findings at the Court of Criminal Appeal. However, Chief Justice Evatt dismissed the appeal, emphatically stating that "The recurrence of crimes of this type must be prevented with the full vigour and justice of the law" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, as quoted in Bouda 1991, no page numbers). At a time when mental illness was rarely recognised and certainly was taboo, courts preferred to 'lock up' rather than treat and rehabilitate (Hill and Madden 2004). This was despite a strong push by Scanlon's Q.C. at the original trial to encourage rehabilitation, psychiatric treatment and the request to serve the last half of his sentence on a prison farm rather than jail ('Q.C. Urges "Slasher" be Given Chance to Rehabilitate Himself' 1959).

Life on the Inside

One source of information about Scanlon's time 'on the inside' is Cheryl Jorgensen's thesis titled *The Taint*, in which she retells the memoirs of one of Scanlon's fellow Goulbourn Gaol inmates, Ray "Poss" Ide. In the book, Ide talks much about his time competing in prison athletic games against Scanlon – and fondly recalls one of the only times he was able to beat Scanlon in a running race, In

Ide's own words, "I enjoyed beatin' the bloke they called The Kingsgrove Slasher..." (Jorgensen 2008, p.104). The friendly rivalry meant that Ide and Scanlon "finished up pretty good pals" in Ide's own words.

Apart from Scanlon's athletic abilities in jail, little else is known of how he spent his time, nor whether his 'rehabilitation' was successful. As a modern reader looking back at some of the original sources, it is hard to believe that psychiatrists at the time like Dr. Listwan recommended to the court that Scanlon's 'rehabilitation' be undertaken in three parts – psycho-therapy, hormonal treatment "causing temporary sterilisation" and, failing those two treatments working, an operation on his brain to "ease the obsessive compulsive states" ('Kingsgrove Slasher Pleads Guilty; Master Mind Theory' 1959). It's hard to imagine such radical 'treatments' forming any part of a modern-day rehabilitation program!

In personal communications with Scanlon's tennis partner "John", he recalls that during the prison time, one of the "tennis boys" went to visit him in jail. "John" recalls that during this visit, the man questioned Scanlon of his motives, to which Scanlon was still adamant that his only motive was the thrill or buzz of the chase. Specifically, Scanlon admitted to gaining a thrill from waking the victims' sleeping husbands and getting away just in the nick of time ("John" 2012, pers. comm., 26 April). In fact, at the time of his capture, Scanlon was quoted as saying "I got a bigger thrill out of that [husbands chasing after him] than having the police chase me" (Scanlon, as quoted by Det.-Sgt. Doyle in 'Girl's Pyjamas Cut' 1959).

The Slasher Today: Where Is He Now?

Not much is known about Scanlon's life after being released from prison, and in fact, it is unclear whether he is even still alive today. Even the length of time he actually served in jail varies across sources (anywhere from ten to eighteen years) ('History on this Day' 2012; Hurstville City Library, Museum and Gallery Collection 2005; "John" 2012, pers. comm., 26 April). All that is known is that after serving his jail time as a 'model prisoner' ('History on this Day' 2012), he then disappeared into obscurity never to be heard of again (Bouda 1991). In the words of Scanlon's one-time 'friend', "John", once Scanlon was free, "Kingsgrove wouldn't have him" and he was forced to "go bush to Dubbo" ("John" 2012, pers. comm., 26 April).

What is interesting is that somewhere in the vicinity of 2004, newspaper recollections of the Slasher story began to refer to David Joseph Scammony rather than David Joseph Scanlon as he had hitherto been referred to ('Signposts; This Life' 2004). This begs a few questions – at this point in time, did Scanlon change his name by deed poll, or had he requested the newspapers to refer to him differently so that he could turn a new leaf and put the Slasher chapter of his life well and truly behind him? In one of the recent newspaper articles, it is stated that after his time in jail, Scammony/Scanlon was given a new identity ('On this Day' 2008).

No references to the Slasher by any other name were found by the author whilst completing this research paper. In undertaking research for this report, the author also searched the Australian Electoral Roll (AEC) for any mention of either David Joseph Scanlon or David Joseph Scammony, however neither were retrieved in the search. It is uncertain whether Scanlon/Scammony has since passed away (he would be approximately 82 years of age now) or whether he simply is no longer registered on the AEC. Either way, the horror that this man inflicted upon Sydney in the late 1950s will certainly be remembered for a long time to come. Heavy iron bars remaining on the windows of some old Kingsgrove homes are just one of the reminders.

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