

= Joseph Merrick =

Joseph Carey Merrick (5 August 1862 ? 11 April 1890) , sometimes named incorrectly as John Merrick , was an English man with severe deformities who was exhibited as a human curiosity named the Elephant Man . He became well known in London society after he went to live at the London Hospital . Merrick was born in Leicester , and began to develop abnormally during the first few years of his life . His skin appeared thick and lumpy , he developed enlarged lips , and a bony lump grew on his forehead . One of his arms and both of his feet became enlarged and at some point during his childhood he fell and damaged his hip , resulting in permanent lameness . When he was 11 , his mother died from bronchopneumonia , and his father soon remarried . Merrick left school at the age of 13 and had difficulty finding employment . Rejected by his father and stepmother , he left home . In late 1879 , Merrick , aged 17 , entered the Leicester Union Workhouse .

In 1884 , after four years in the workhouse , Merrick contacted a showman named Sam Torr and proposed that Torr should exhibit him . Torr agreed and arranged for a group of men to manage Merrick , whom they named the Elephant Man . After touring the East Midlands , Merrick travelled to London to be exhibited in a penny gaff shop on Whitechapel Road which was rented by showman Tom Norman . Norman 's shop , directly across the street from the London Hospital , was visited by a surgeon named Frederick Treves , who invited Merrick to be examined and photographed . Soon after Merrick 's visits to the hospital , Tom Norman 's shop was closed by the police , and Merrick 's managers sent him to tour in Europe .

In Belgium , Merrick was robbed by his road manager and abandoned in Brussels . He eventually made his way back to London ; unable to communicate , he was found by the police to have Dr. Treves 's card on him . Treves came and took Merrick back to the London Hospital . Although his condition was incurable , Merrick was allowed to stay at the hospital for the remainder of his life . Treves visited him daily , and the pair developed quite a close friendship . Merrick also received visits from the wealthy ladies and gentlemen of London society , including Alexandra , Princess of Wales .

Aged 27 , Merrick died on 11 April 1890 . The official cause of death was asphyxia , although Treves , who dissected the body , said that Merrick had died of a dislocated neck . He believed that Merrick , who had to sleep sitting up because of the weight of his head , had been attempting to sleep lying down to " be like other people " .

The exact cause of Merrick 's deformities is unclear . The dominant theory throughout much of the 20th century was that Merrick suffered from neurofibromatosis type I. In 1986 , a new theory emerged that he had Proteus syndrome . In 2001 , it was proposed that Merrick had suffered from a combination of neurofibromatosis type I and Proteus syndrome . DNA tests conducted on his hair and bones have proven inconclusive .

In 1979 , Bernard Pomerance 's play about Merrick called The Elephant Man debuted , and David Lynch 's film , also called The Elephant Man , was released the following year . In late 2014 and early 2015 , Bradley Cooper starred in a Broadway revival of The Elephant Man , directed by Scott Ellis .

= = Early life and family = =

Joseph Carey Merrick was born 5 August 1862 at 50 Lee Street in Leicester , to Joseph Rockley Merrick and his wife Mary Jane (née Potterton) . Joseph Rockley Merrick (c . 1838 ? 1897) was the son of London @-@ born weaver Barnabas Merrick (c . 1791 ? 1856) who moved to Leicester during the 1820s or 1830s , and his third wife Sarah Rockley . Mary Jane Potterton (c . 1837 ? 1873) had been born at Evington , Leicestershire , her father being William Potterton , who was described as an agricultural labourer in the 1851 census of Thurmaston , Leicestershire . She is said to have had some form of physical disability and as a young woman worked as a domestic servant in Leicester before marrying Joseph Rockley Merrick , then a brougham driver , in 1861 .

The following year , Joseph Carey Merrick was born , apparently healthy , and had no outward

symptoms of any disorder for the first few years of his life . Named after his father , he was given the middle name Carey by his mother , a Baptist , after the preacher William Carey . The Merricks had three more children , John Thomas (born 21 April 1864 , died of smallpox 24 July of the same year) , William Arthur (born January 1866) who died of scarlet fever on 21 December 1870 aged four and Marion Eliza (born 28 September 1867) , who was born with physical disabilities and died of myelitis and " seizures " in 1891 . When writing of Joseph in his book *The Elephant Man : A Study in Human Dignity* , Ashley Montagu states that " John Thomas [sic] Merrick was born on 21 April 1864 " . Montagu believed Treves 's statement in his book *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* that Merrick 's first name was John , not Joseph , and confused him with his younger brother .

A pamphlet titled " *The Autobiography of Joseph Carey Merrick* " , produced c . 1884 to accompany his exhibition , states that he started to display symptoms at approximately five years of age , with " thick lumpy skin ... like that of an elephant , and almost the same colour " . According to a 1930 article in the *Illustrated Leicester Chronicle* , he began to develop swellings on his lips at the age of 21 months , followed by a bony lump on his forehead and a loosening and roughening of the skin . As he grew , a noticeable difference between the size of his left and right arms appeared and both his feet became significantly enlarged . The Merrick family explained his symptoms as the result of Mary 's being knocked over and frightened by a fairground elephant while she was pregnant with Joseph . The concept of maternal impression ? that the emotional experiences of pregnant women could have lasting physical effect on their unborn children ? was still common in 19th century Britain . Merrick held this belief about the cause of his affliction for his entire life .

In addition to his deformities , at some point during his childhood , Merrick suffered a fall and damaged his left hip . This injury became infected and left him permanently lame . Although affected by his physical deformities , Merrick attended school and enjoyed a close relationship with his mother . She was a Sunday school teacher , and his father worked as an engine driver at a cotton factory , as well as running a haberdashery business . On 19 May 1873 , less than three years after the death of her youngest son William , Mary Jane Merrick died from bronchopneumonia . Joseph Rockley Merrick moved with his two children to live with Mrs. Emma Wood Antill , a widow with children of her own . They married on 3 December 1874 .

= = Employment and the workhouse = =

Merrick left school aged 13 , which was usual for the time . His home @-@ life was now " a perfect misery " , and neither his father nor his stepmother demonstrated affection towards him . He ran away " two or three " times , but was brought back by his father each time . At 13 , he found work rolling cigars in a factory , but after three years , his right hand deformity had worsened and he no longer had the dexterity required for the job . Now unemployed , he spent his days wandering the streets , looking for work and avoiding his stepmother 's taunts .

Merrick was becoming a greater financial burden on his family and eventually , his father secured him a hawker 's licence which enabled him to earn money selling items from the haberdashery shop , door to door . This endeavour was unsuccessful , since Merrick 's facial deformities rendered his speech increasingly unintelligible and prospective customers reacted with horror to his physical appearance . Housewives refused to open doors for him and now people not only stared at him but began to follow him out of curiosity . Merrick failed to make enough money as a hawker to support himself . On returning home one day in 1877 , he was severely beaten by his father and he left home for good .

Merrick was now homeless on the streets of Leicester . His uncle , a barber named Charles Merrick , heard of his nephew 's situation , sought him out and offered him accommodation in his home . Merrick continued to hawk around Leicester for the next two years but his efforts to earn a living met with little more success than before . Eventually , his disfigurement drew such negative attention from members of the public that the Commissioners for Hackney Carriages withdrew his licence when it came up for renewal . With young children to provide for , Charles could no longer afford to support his nephew . In late December 1879 , now 17 years old , Merrick entered the Leicester

Union Workhouse .

Merrick became one of 928 residents in the workhouse . The group was segregated by age and gender , and therefore Merrick was housed with the other men between 16 and 60 . On 22 March 1880 , only 12 weeks after entering , Merrick signed himself out of the workhouse and spent two days looking for work . With no more success than before , he found himself with no option but to return to the workhouse . This time he stayed for four years . Around 1882 , Merrick underwent surgery on his face . The protrusion from his mouth had grown to 8 ? 9 inches and severely inhibited his speech and made it difficult to eat . He was operated on at the Leicester Infirmary and had a large part of the mass removed .

= = Life as a curiosity = =

Merrick concluded that his only escape from the workhouse might be through the world of human novelty exhibitions . He knew of a Leicester music hall comedian and proprietor named Sam Torr . Merrick wrote to Torr , who came and visited him at the workhouse . Torr decided that he could make money exhibiting Merrick ; although , to retain Merrick 's novelty , he would have to be a travelling exhibit . To this end , he organised a group of managers for Merrick : music hall proprietor J. Ellis , travelling showman George Hitchcock , and fair owner Sam Roper . On 3 August 1884 , Merrick departed the workhouse to start his new career .

The showmen named Merrick the Elephant Man , and advertised him as " Half @-@ a @-@ Man and Half @-@ an @-@ Elephant " . They showed him around the East Midlands , including in Leicester and Nottingham , before moving him on to London for the winter season . George Hitchcock contacted an acquaintance , showman Tom Norman , who ran penny gaff shops in London 's East End exhibiting human curiosities . Without a meeting , Norman agreed to take over Merrick 's management and in November , Hitchcock travelled with Merrick to London .

When Tom Norman first saw Merrick , he was dismayed by the extent of his deformities , fearing his appearance might be too horrific to be a successful novelty . Nevertheless , he exhibited Merrick in the back of an empty shop on Whitechapel Road . Merrick had an iron bed with a curtain drawn around to afford him some privacy . Norman observed Merrick asleep one morning and learned that he always slept sitting up , with his legs drawn up and his head resting on his knees . His enlarged head was too heavy to allow him to sleep lying down and , as Merrick put it , he would risk " waking with a broken neck " . Norman decorated the shop with posters that had been created by Hitchcock , depicting a monstrous half @-@ man , half @-@ elephant . A pamphlet titled " The Autobiography of Joseph Carey Merrick " was created , outlining Merrick 's life to date . This biography , whether written by Merrick or not , provided a generally accurate account of his life . It contained an incorrect date of birth but , throughout his life , Merrick was vague about when he was born .

Norman gathered an audience by standing outside the shop and drawing a crowd through his showman patter . He would then lead his onlookers into the shop , explaining that the Elephant Man was " not here to frighten you but to enlighten you . " Drawing aside the curtain , he allowed the onlookers ? often visibly horrified ? to observe Merrick up close , while describing the circumstances leading to his present condition , including his mother 's alleged accident with an elephant .

The Elephant Man exhibit was moderately successful , and made money primarily from the sales of the autobiographical pamphlet . Merrick was able to put his share of the profits aside , hoping to earn enough to one day buy a home of his own . The shop on Whitechapel Road was directly across the road from the London Hospital , an excellent location , as medical students and doctors visited the shop , curious to see Merrick . One visitor was a young house surgeon named Reginald Tuckett . Like his colleagues , Tuckett was intrigued by the Elephant Man 's deformities and told his senior colleague Frederick Treves .

Frederick Treves first met Merrick that November at a private viewing , before Norman opened the shop for the day . Treves later recalled in his 1923 *Reminiscences* that Merrick was " the most disgusting specimen of humanity that I had ever seen ... at no time had I met with such a degraded or perverted version of a human being as this lone figure displayed . " The viewing lasted no more than 15 minutes after which Treves returned to work . Later that day , he sent Tuckett back to the

shop to ask if Merrick might be willing to come to the hospital for an examination . Norman and Merrick agreed . To enable him to travel the short distance without drawing undue attention , Merrick wore a costume consisting of an oversized black cloak and a brown cap with a burlap sack that covered his face , and rode in a cab hired by Treves .

At the hospital , Treves examined Merrick , observing that he was " shy , confused , not a little frightened , and evidently much cowed . " At this point , Treves assumed that the Elephant Man was an " imbecile " . He measured Merrick 's head circumference at the large size of 36 inches (91 cm) , his right wrist at 12 inches (30 cm) and one of his fingers at 5 inches (13 cm) in circumference . He noted that his skin was covered in papillomata (warty growths) , the largest of which exuded an unpleasant smell . The subcutaneous tissue appeared to be weakened and caused a loosening of the skin , which in some areas hung away from the body . There were bone deformities in the right arm , both legs , and , most conspicuously , in the large skull . Despite the corrective surgery to his mouth in 1882 , Merrick 's speech remained barely intelligible . His left arm and hand were not large and were not deformed . His penis and scrotum were normal . Apart from his deformities and the lameness in his hip , Treves concluded that Merrick appeared to be in good general health . Norman later recalled that Merrick went to the hospital for examination " two or three " times and during one of their meetings , Treves gave Merrick his calling card . On one of the visits , Treves had photographs taken , and he provided Merrick with a set of copies which were later added to his autobiographical pamphlet . On 2 December , Treves presented Merrick at a meeting of the Pathological Society of London in Bloomsbury . Eventually , Merrick told Norman that he no longer wanted to be examined at the hospital . According to Norman , he said he was " stripped naked and felt like an animal in a cattle market . "

During this time in Victorian Britain , tastes were changing in regard to freak show exhibitions like the Elephant Man . Shows like Norman 's were a cause for public concern , both on the grounds of decency and due to the disruption caused by crowds gathering outside them . Not long after Merrick 's last examination with Frederick Treves , the police closed down Norman 's shop on Whitechapel Road , and Merrick 's Leicester managers withdrew him from Norman 's care . In 1885 , Merrick went on the road with Sam Roper 's travelling fair . He befriended two other performers , " Roper 's Midgets " ? Bertram Dooley and Harry Bramley ? who on occasion defended Merrick from public harassment .

= = Europe = =

The dampening of public enthusiasm for freak shows and human oddities continued and the police and magistrates became increasingly vigilant in closing shows down . Merrick remained a horrifying spectacle for his viewers and Roper grew nervous about the negative attention the Elephant Man drew from local authorities . Merrick 's group of managers decided that he should go on tour in Continental Europe , with the hope that authorities there would be more lenient . Merrick 's management was assumed by an unknown man (possibly named Ferrari) and they left for the Continent . The Elephant Man was no more successful there than in Britain , and similar action was taken by authorities to move him out of their jurisdictions . In Brussels , Merrick was deserted by this new manager , who stole Merrick 's £ 50 (2015 equivalent £ 4 @, @ 900) savings . Abandoned , Merrick made his way by train to Ostend , where he attempted to board a ferry for Dover but was refused passage . He travelled to Antwerp and was able to board a ship bound for Harwich in Essex . From there , he travelled by train to London and arrived at Liverpool Street station .

Merrick arrived at Liverpool Street Station on 24 June 1886 , safely back in his own country , but with nowhere to go . He was not eligible to enter a workhouse in London for more than one night and would be accepted only by Leicester Union , where he was a permanent resident . Leicester was still 98 miles (158 km) away . He approached strangers for help , but his speech was unintelligible and appearance repugnant . He drew a crowd of curious onlookers until a policeman helped him into an empty waiting room , where he huddled in a corner , exhausted . Unable to make himself understood , his only identifying possession was Frederick Treves 's card . The police contacted Treves , who went to the station . Recognising Merrick , Treves took him in a hansom cab

to the London Hospital . Merrick was admitted for bronchitis , washed , fed and put to bed in a small isolation room in the hospital 's attic .

= = London Hospital = =

With Merrick admitted into the hospital , Treves now had time to conduct a more thorough examination . He discovered that Merrick 's physical condition had deteriorated over the previous two years and that he had become quite crippled by his deformities . Treves also suspected that Merrick now suffered from a heart condition and that he had only a few years left to live . Merrick 's general health improved over the next five months under the care of the hospital staff . Although some nurses were initially upset by his appearance , they overcame this and cared for him . The problem of his unpleasant odour was mitigated through frequent bathing and Treves gradually developed an understanding of Merrick 's speech . A new set of photographs was taken . The question of Merrick 's long @-@ term care had to be addressed . Francis Carr Gomm , the chairman of the hospital committee , had supported Treves in his decision to admit Merrick , but by November , long @-@ term plans needed to be made . The London Hospital was not equipped or staffed to provide care for the incurable , which Merrick clearly was .

Carr Gomm contacted other institutions and hospitals more suited to caring for chronic cases , but none would accept Merrick . Gomm wrote a letter to The Times , printed on 4 December , outlining Merrick 's case and asking readers for suggestions . The public response ? in letters and donations ? was significant , and the situation was even covered by the British Medical Journal . With the financial backing of the many donors , Gomm was able to make a convincing case to the committee for keeping Merrick in the hospital . It was decided that he would be allowed to stay there for the remainder of his life . He was moved from the attic to two rooms in the basement adjacent to a small courtyard . The rooms were adapted and furnished to suit Merrick , with a specially constructed bed and ? at Treves 's instruction ? no mirrors .

Merrick settled into his new life at the London Hospital . Treves visited him daily and spent a couple of hours with him every Sunday . Now that Merrick had found someone who understood his speech , he was delighted to carry on long conversations with the doctor . Treves and Merrick built a friendly relationship , although Merrick never completely confided in him . He told Treves that he was an only child , and Treves had the impression that Merrick 's mother , whose picture Merrick always carried with him , had abandoned him as a baby . Merrick was also reluctant to talk about his exhibition days , although he expressed gratitude towards his former managers . It did not take Treves long to realise that , contrary to his initial impressions , Merrick was not intellectually impaired .

Treves observed that Merrick was very sensitive and showed his emotions easily . At times Merrick was bored and lonely , and demonstrated signs of depression . He had spent his entire adult life segregated from women , first in the workhouse and then as an exhibit . The women he met were either disgusted or frightened by his appearance . His opinions about women were derived from his memories of his mother and what he read in books . Treves decided that Merrick would like to be introduced to a woman and it would help him feel normal . The doctor arranged for a friend of his named Mrs. Leila Maturin , " a young and pretty widow " , to visit Merrick . She agreed and with fair warning about his appearance , she went to his rooms for an introduction . The meeting was short , as Merrick quickly became overcome with emotion . He later told Treves that Maturin had been the first woman ever to smile at him , the first to shake his hand . She kept in contact with him and a letter written by Merrick to her , thanking her for the gift of a book and a brace of grouse (a pair of birds) , is the only surviving letter written by Merrick . This first experience of meeting a woman , though brief , instilled in Merrick a new sense of self @-@ confidence . He met other women during his life at the hospital , and appeared taken with them all . Treves believed that Merrick 's hope was to go to live at an institution for the blind , where he might meet a woman who could not see his deformities .

Merrick wanted to know about the " real world " , and questioned Treves on a number of topics . One day he expressed a desire to see inside what he considered a " real " house and Treves obliged , taking him to visit his Wimpole Street townhouse and meet his wife . At the hospital Merrick

filled his days with reading and constructing models of buildings out of card . He entertained visits from Treves and his house surgeons . He rose each day in the afternoon and would leave his rooms to walk in the small adjacent courtyard , after dark .

As a result of Carr Gomm 's letters to The Times , Merrick 's case attracted the notice of London 's high society . One person who took a keen interest was actress Madge Kendal . Although she probably never met him in person , she was responsible for raising funds and public sympathy for Merrick . She sent him photographs of herself and employed a basket weaver to go to his rooms and teach him the craft . Other ladies and gentlemen of high society did visit him however , bringing gifts of photographs and books . He reciprocated with letters and hand made gifts of card models and baskets . Merrick enjoyed these visits and became confident enough to converse with people who passed his windows . A young man , Charles Taylor , the son of the engineer responsible for modifying Merrick 's rooms , spent time with him , sometimes playing the violin . Occasionally , he grew bold enough to leave his small living quarters and would explore the hospital . When he was discovered , he was always hurried back to his quarters by the nurses , who feared that he might frighten the patients .

On 21 May 1887 , two new buildings were completed at the hospital and the Prince and Princess of Wales came to open them officially . Princess Alexandra wished to meet the Elephant Man , so after a tour of the hospital , the royal party went to his rooms for an introduction . The princess shook Merrick 's hand and sat with him , an experience that left him overjoyed . She gave him a signed photograph of herself , which became a prized possession , and she sent him a Christmas card each year .

On at least one occasion , Merrick was able to fulfill a long @-@ held desire to visit the theatre . Treves , with the help of Madge Kendal , arranged for him to attend the Christmas pantomime at the Theatre Royal , Drury Lane . Treves sat with some nurses , concealed in Baroness Burdett @-@ Coutts 's private box . According to Treves , Merrick was " awed " and " enthralled " . " The spectacle left him speechless , so that if he were spoken to he took no heed . " For weeks following the show Merrick talked about the pantomime , reliving the story as if it had been real .

= = Last years = =

On three occasions Merrick left the hospital and London on holiday , spending a few weeks at a time in the countryside . Through elaborate arrangements that allowed Merrick to board a train unseen and have an entire carriage to himself , he travelled to Northamptonshire to stay at Fawsley Hall , the estate of Lady Knightley . He stayed at the gamekeeper 's cottage and spent the days walking in the estate 's woods , collecting wild flowers . He befriended a young farm labourer who later recalled Merrick as an interesting and well @-@ educated man . Treves called this " the one supreme holiday of [Merrick 's] life " , although in fact there were three such trips .

Merrick 's condition gradually deteriorated during his four years at the London Hospital . He required a great deal of care from the nursing staff and spent much of his time in bed , or sitting in his quarters , with diminishing energy . His facial deformities continued to grow and his head became even more enlarged . He died on 11 April 1890 , at the age of 27 . At around three o 'clock in the afternoon , Treves 's house surgeon visited Merrick and found him lying dead across his bed . His body was formally identified by his uncle , Charles Merrick . An inquest was held on 15 April by Wynne Edwin Baxter , who had come to notoriety conducting inquests for the Whitechapel murders of 1888 .

Merrick 's death was ruled accidental and the certified cause of death was asphyxia , caused by the weight of his head as he lay down . Treves , who performed an autopsy on the body , said that Merrick had died of a dislocated neck . Knowing that Merrick had always slept sitting upright out of necessity , Treves came to the conclusion that Merrick must have " made the experiment " , attempting to sleep lying down " like other people " .

Treves dissected Merrick 's body and took plaster casts of his head and limbs . He took skin samples , which were later lost during the Second World War , and mounted his skeleton , which remains in the pathology collection at the Royal London Hospital . Although the skeleton has never

been on public display , there is a small museum dedicated to his life , housing some of his personal effects .

= = Medical condition = =

Ever since Joseph Merrick 's days as a novelty exhibit on Whitechapel Road , his condition has been a source of curiosity for medical professionals . His appearance at the meeting of the Pathological Society of London in 1884 drew interest from the doctors present , but none of the answers nor the attention that Treves had hoped for . The case received only a brief mention in the British Medical Journal , and the Lancet declined to mention it at all . Four months later , in 1885 , Treves brought the case before the meeting for a second time . By then , Tom Norman 's shop on Whitechapel Road had been closed , and the Elephant Man had moved on . Without Merrick , Treves made do with the photographs he had taken during his examinations . One of the doctors present at the meeting was Henry Radcliffe Crocker , a dermatologist who was an authority on skin diseases . After hearing Treves 's description of Merrick , and viewing the photographs , Crocker proposed that Merrick 's condition might be a combination of dermatolysis , pachydermatocele and an unnamed bone deformity , all caused by changes in the nervous system . Crocker wrote about Merrick 's case in his 1888 book Diseases of the Skin : their Description , Pathology , Diagnosis and Treatment .

In 1909 , dermatologist Frederick Parkes Weber wrote an article about von Recklinghausen disease (now known as neurofibromatosis type I) in the British Journal of Dermatology . He gave Merrick as an example of the disease , which German pathologist Friedrich Daniel von Recklinghausen had described in 1882 . Symptoms of this genetic disorder include tumours of the nervous tissue and bones , and small warty growths on the skin . One characteristic of neurofibromatosis is the presence of light brown pigmentation on the skin called café au lait spots . These were never observed on Merrick 's body . Neurofibromatosis type I was the accepted diagnosis through most of the 20th century , although other suggestions included Maffucci syndrome and polyostotic fibrous dysplasia (Albright 's disease) .

In a 1986 article in the British Medical Journal , Michael Cohen and J.A.R. Tibbles put forward the theory that Merrick had suffered from Proteus syndrome , a congenital disorder identified by Cohen in 1979 . They cited Merrick 's lack of reported café au lait spots and the absence of any histological proof that he had suffered from neurofibromatosis type I. Unlike neurofibromatosis , Proteus syndrome affects tissue other than nerves , and it is a sporadic disorder rather than a genetically transmitted disease . Cohen and Tibbles said that Merrick showed the following signs of Proteus syndrome : " macrocephaly ; hyperostosis of the large skull ; hypertrophy of long bones ; and thickened skin and subcutaneous tissues , particularly of the hands and feet , including plantar hyperplasia , lipomas , and other unspecified subcutaneous masses . "

In a letter to Biologist in June 2001 , British teacher and Chartered Biologist Paul Spiring , speculated that Merrick might have suffered from a combination of neurofibromatosis type I and Proteus syndrome . This hypothesis was reported by Robert Matthews , a correspondent for The Sunday Telegraph . The possibility that Merrick had both conditions formed the basis for a 2003 documentary film entitled The Curse of The Elephant Man that was produced for the Discovery Health Channel by Natural History New Zealand . During 2002 , genealogical research for the film led to a BBC appeal to trace Merrick 's maternal family line . In response to the appeal , a Leicester resident named Pat Selby was discovered to be the granddaughter of Merrick 's uncle George Potterton . A research team took DNA samples from Selby in an unsuccessful attempt to diagnose Merrick 's condition . During 2003 , the filmmakers commissioned further diagnostic tests using DNA that was extracted from Merrick 's hair and bone . However , the results of these tests proved inconclusive and therefore the precise cause of Merrick 's medical condition remains unknown .

= = Legacy = =

In 1923 , Frederick Treves published a volume entitled The Elephant Man and Other

Reminiscences , in which he detailed what he knew of Merrick 's life and their personal interactions . This account is the source of much of what is known about Merrick , but there were several inaccuracies in the book . Merrick never completely confided in Treves about his early life , so these details were consequently sketchy in Treves 's Reminiscences . A more mysterious error is that of Merrick 's first name . Treves , in his earlier journal articles as well as his book , insisted on calling him John Merrick . The reason for this is unclear ; Merrick clearly signed his name as " Joseph " in the examples of his handwriting that remain . In the handwritten manuscript for *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* , Treves began his account by writing " Joseph " and then crossed it out and replaced it with " John " . Whatever the reason for the error , it is one that persisted throughout much of the 20th century ; later biographers who based their work on Treves 's book have continued the error .

Treves 's depiction of Tom Norman , the showman who had exhibited Merrick , was that of a cruel drunk who had ruthlessly exploited his charge . In a letter to the *World 's Fair* newspaper , and later in his own memoirs , Norman denied this characterisation and said that he provided his show attractions with a way of earning a living , and that at the London Hospital , Merrick was still on display , but with no control over how or when he was viewed . According to Nadja Durbach , author of *The Spectacle of Deformity : Freak Shows and Modern British Culture* , Norman 's view gives an insight into the Victorian freak show 's function as a means of survival for poor people with deformities , as well as the attitude of medical professionals of the time . Durbach cautions that both Treves 's and Norman 's memoirs must be understood as " narrative reconstructions ... that reflect personal and professional prejudices and cater to the demands and expectations of their very different audiences " .

In 1971 , anthropologist Ashley Montagu published *The Elephant Man : A Study in Human Dignity* which drew on Treves 's book and explored Merrick 's character . Montagu reprinted Treves 's account alongside various others such as Carr Gomm 's letter to the *Times* and the report on Merrick 's inquest . He pointed out inconsistencies between the accounts and sometimes disputed Treves 's version of events ; he noted , for example , that while Treves claimed Merrick knew nothing of his mother 's appearance , Carr Gomm refers to Merrick carrying a painting of his mother with him , and he criticised Treves 's assumption that Merrick 's mother was " worthless and inhuman " . However , Montagu also perpetuated some of the errors in Treves 's work , including his use of the name " John " rather than " Joseph " .

Between 1979 and 1982 , Merrick 's life story became the basis of several works of dramatic art ; these were based on the accounts of Treves and Montagu . In 1979 , a Tony Award @-@ winning play , *The Elephant Man* , by American playwright Bernard Pomerance was staged . The character based on Merrick was played by Philip Anglim , and later by David Bowie and Mark Hamill . In 1980 , a film also titled *The Elephant Man* , directed by David Lynch , was released ; it received eight Academy Award nominations . Merrick was played by John Hurt and Frederick Treves by Anthony Hopkins . In 1982 , US television network ABC broadcast an adaptation of Pomerance 's play , starring Anglim . Merrick also appears in two episodes of the second season of the BBC historical crime drama *Ripper Street* , portrayed by actor Joseph Drake .

In 1980 , Michael Howell and Peter Ford published *The True History of the Elephant Man* , presenting the fruits of their detailed archival research . Howell and Ford brought to light a large amount of new information about Merrick . In addition to proving that his name was Joseph , not John , they were able to describe in more detail his life story . They refuted some of the inaccuracies in Treves 's account , showing that Merrick 's mother did not abandon him , and that Merrick deliberately chose to exhibit himself to make a living .