

# The Ipswich Serial Killings

## *The Fibre Evidence*

**Ray PALMER**

*Consultant Forensic Scientist  
The Forensic Science Service*

# Circumstances

Over a 10 day period just before Christmas 2006 the naked bodies of 5 women were found at various locations on the outskirts of the town of Ipswich in the county of Suffolk, England.

All had died due to asphyxiation

All were active prostitutes

All were habitual drug users

The case attracted massive media interest during the investigation and subsequent trial



Image NASA  
© 2008 Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky  
© 2008 Europa Technologies  
© 2008 Tele Atlas

Pointer: 51°46'35.86" N 0°56'13.28" E elev: 16 m Streaming: 100% Eye all: 32534 km



# Tania Nicole



ed missing 30/10/06  
on 8/12/06



Copdock Mill, Belstead Brook





Reported Missing 15/11/06  
Found on 02/12/06



**Belstead Brook, Hintlesham**

Approximate Location Of  
Body Found On 2/12/06

**Gemma**



Approximate Location Of  
Body Found on 8/12/06

**Tania**



Image Number  
RL-2006-2942-0003

# Circumstances of deposition

had been immersed in fast flowing water

technology suggested deposition around the time they went missing, i.e.;

via NICOL ~ 5 weeks immersion

Gamma ADAMS – 2 weeks immersion

had been naked

hair fibre recovery attempted from bodies

however, Hair (badly contaminated) recovered and preserved





and missing 3/12/06  
found on 10/12/06



Nacton



# Annette NICHOLLS



Reported missing on 5/12/06



# Paula OENKLE



Reported missing 10/12/06



Paula CLENNELL found in Woods, Felixstow Road, Levington, 12/12/06





# By chance, a second discovery... Annette NICHOLLS



# Location of Paula CLENNEL & Annette NICHOLLS



# Circumstances of deposition

Based on time of death estimates and entomological examination, all three women had been exposed to a significant combination of wind and rainfall;

Anneli Alderton ~ 7days

Annette NICHOLS ~ 4 days

Paula CLENELL ~ 2 days

All were naked

Bodies wet when taped

Hair washed during PM examination and washings retained



# Tom STEPHENS arrested 18/12/08



- Associated with all victims
- No alibi
- Talked to media
- Fitted psychological profile

# **The 'D' Word provides a breakthrough....**

**Male DNA profile found common to all 3 of victims deposited on land.**

**DNA does NOT match Tom STEPHENS!**

**National DNA database provides a 'hit'**

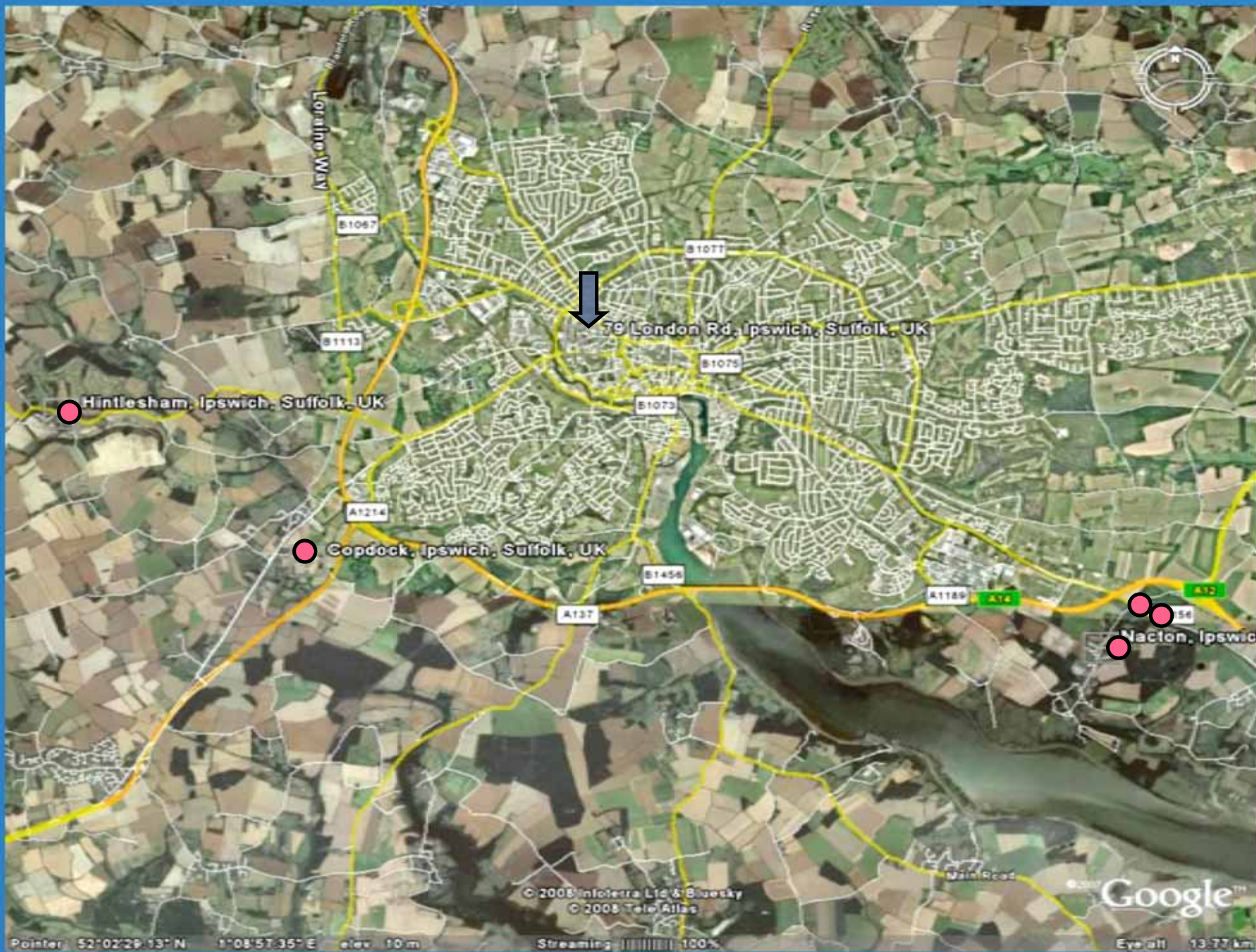
# Steve WRIGHT arrested on 15/12/08



- Previous conviction for theft
- No history of violent crime
- Recently moved to red light area
- Gave 'no comment' interview



# Deposition Sites



# Examination Strategy

Survey tapings/ debris



Catalogue



Identify collectives



Prioritise 'unusual'



Common to other women?



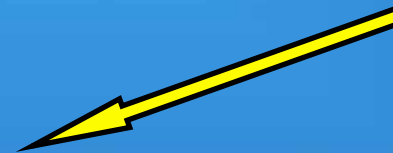
Identify/ Analyse/ Confirm



Intelligence



Search of Suspects environment

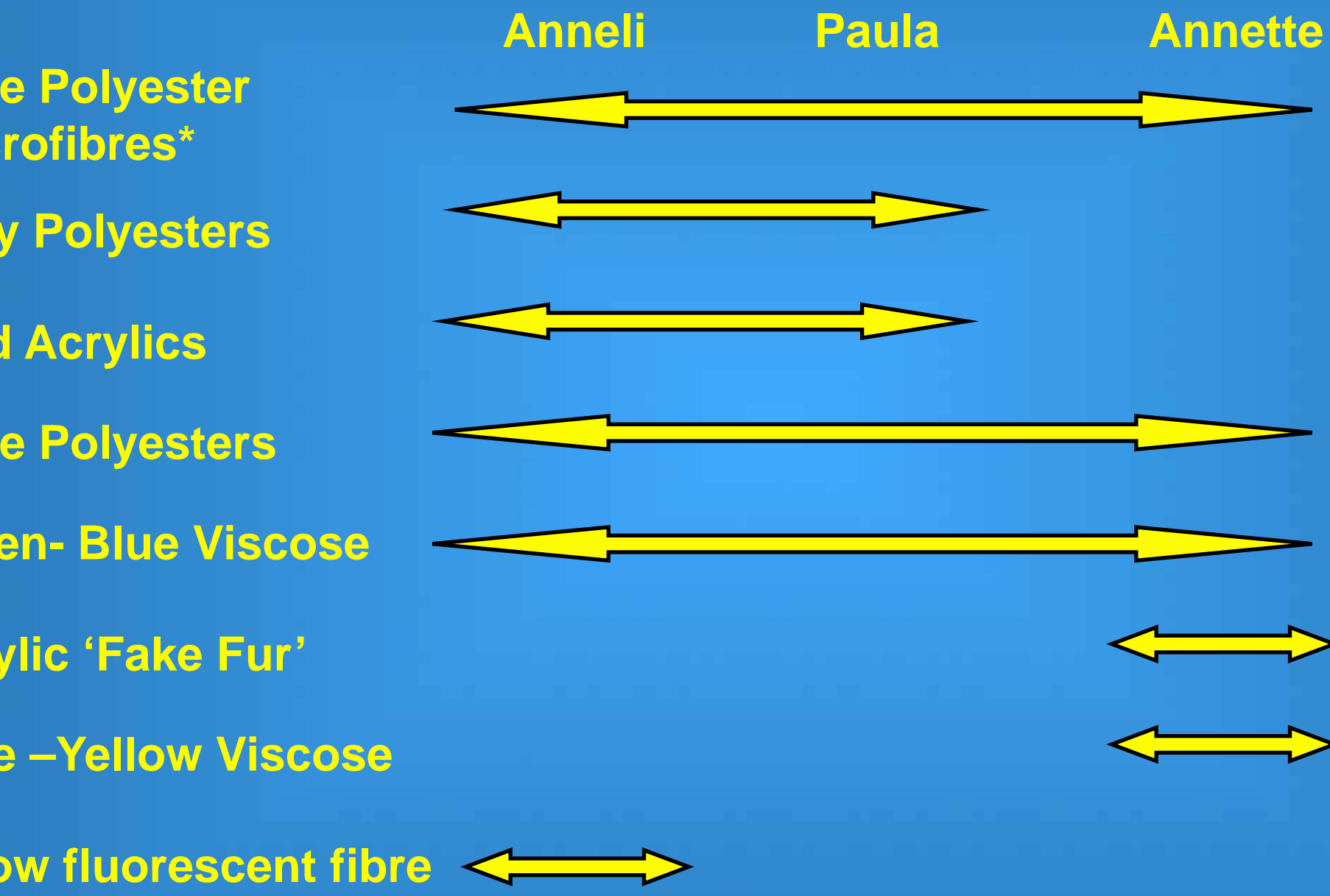


# Examination Strategy

Little if any expectation of finding material on  
Tania NICOL and Gemma ADAMS

Prioritise examination of items relating  
to the 3 women found in the woods





# Microfibres - Intelligence

*As said the source item may be;*

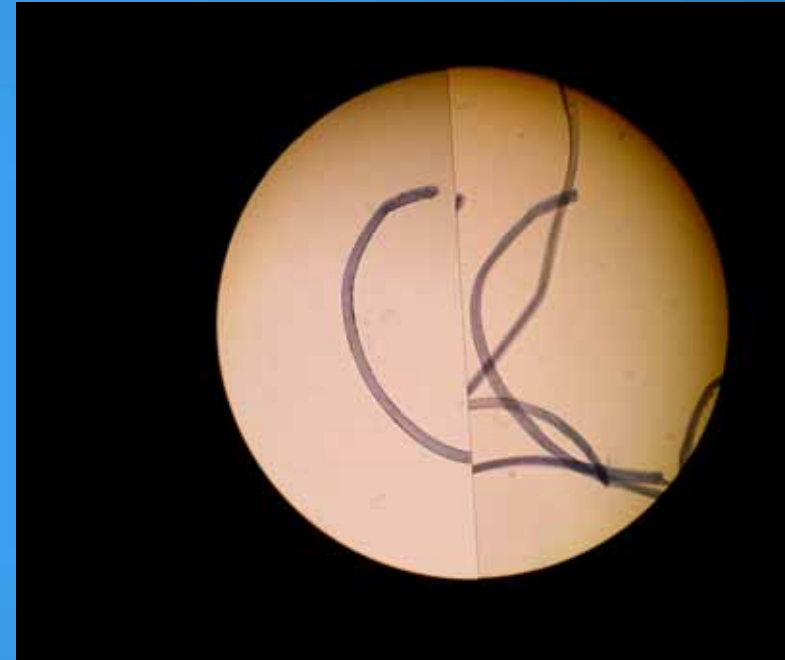
Dark blue/ grey/ black

Jacket, Coat, 'Sportswear'

Fake suede, shoes

"Peach Skin" texture

Labelled 'Polyester' and /or 'microfibre'



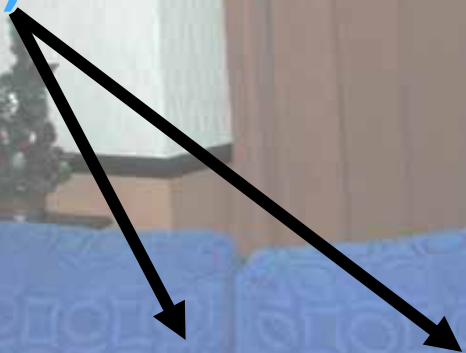
Ford Mondeo - BO51 CKC  
Exhibit SFC/104



# Examination of Steve WRIGHT's Sofa



Many red acrylic fibres  
(some in form of tufts)





# Red Acrylic Fibres

- Many single red acrylic fibres and tufts on sofa
- Tufts contained other fibre types such as wool
- Single fibres only in car, distributed mainly on parcel shelf and back seat

*?Suggest item is a blanket, 'throw' or travel rug?*



**No collectives found in Tom STEPHEN'S car matching those on women !**

# The Exhibit Screen

**Hundreds of items seized in Police Storage**

**Decision taken to screen items seized from both suspect's homes**

**Screen criteria based on fibre collectives common to WRIGHT and dead women**

**Used FSS mobile lab equipped with microscopes**

**Any item not excluded, submitted to lab for further examination**

# Results of Exhibit Screen – Steve WRIGHT



**'Wengen' Coat**



*Grey Polyesters*

**Reflective Jacket**



*Yellow Fluorescent Polyester*

**'Umbro' Tracksuit bottoms**



*Blue Polyester*



**As a consequence of the fibre screen....**



**Blood stains matching Paula CLENELL & Annette NICHOLLS**

# Microfibre Source

A further search of Steve WRIGHT's house reveals the source.....



**'Tesco' Tracksuit Bottoms**

# Microfibre Source

*We said it may be;*

Dark blue/ grey/ black

Jacket, Coat, 'Sportswear'

Fake suede, shoes

"Peach Skin" texture

Labelled 'Polyester' and /or 'microfibre'

*It was...*

✓ Dark Blue

✓ Tracksuit bottoms

X

✓

✓

\* Matching top sold separately

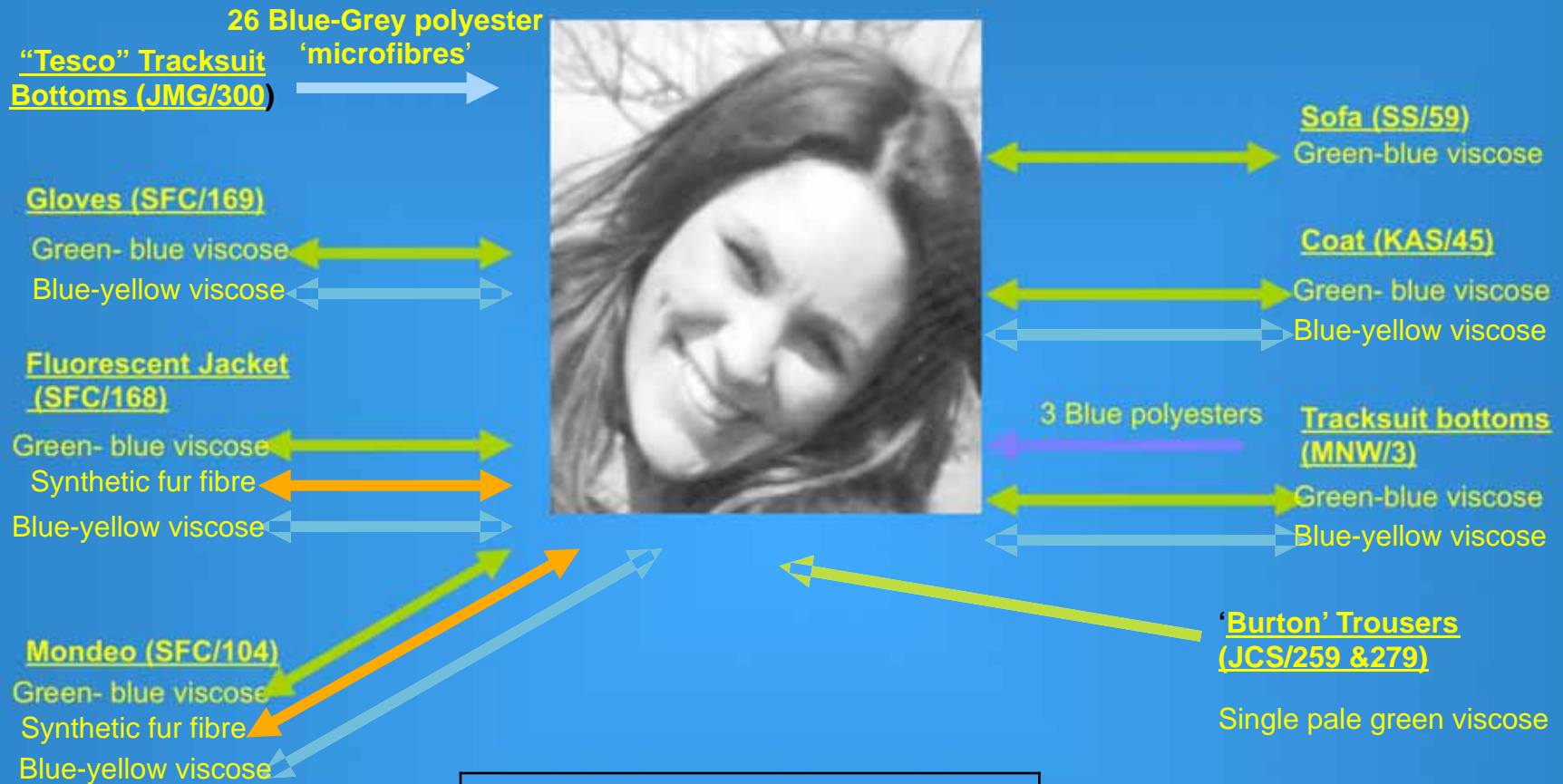
# Anneli ALDERTON



11 Blue- Grey Polyester Microfibres
7 Variable Grey Polyester fibres
1 Pale Brown Polyester fibre
8 Blue Polyester fibres
2 Fluorescent Polyester fibres
2 Red Acrylic fibres
1 Green -Blue Viscose fibre
1 Purple -Blue Cotton fibre



# Annette NICHOLLS



- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 26 Blue –Grey Polyester Microfibres | → |
| 3 Blue Polyester fibres             | → |
| 26 Blue –Yellow Viscose fibres      | → |
| 3 Green-Blue Viscose fibres         | → |
| 1 Pale Green Viscose fibre          | → |
| 1 Synthetic (Acrylic) fur fibre     | → |

# Paula CLENNELL



- 36 Blue –Grey Polyester Microfibres
- 3 Variable –Grey Polyester fibres
- 4 Green- Blue Viscose fibres
- 3 Blue Polyester fibres
- 1 Red Acrylic fibre
- 1 Purple –Blue cotton fibre

# Tania NICOL & Gemma ADAMS

Decision taken to search hair from both women



# Tania NICOL

## Fluorescent Jacket(SFC/168)

Variable Blue polyester



## Tracksuit Bottoms (MNW/3)

Variable blue polyester



Green polyester fibres



Green cotton fibre



Single carpet fibre



Mondeo (SFC/104)

1 Blue-Grey polyester  
'microfibre'



"Tesco" Tracksuit  
Bottoms (JMG/300)

1 Black Nylon fibre

1 Blue- Grey Polyester Microfibre

10 Variable Blue Polyester fibres (2 types)

9 Green Polyester fibres

1 Green Cotton fibre



# Gemma ADAMS

## Coat (KAS/45)

Red acrylic



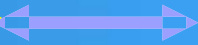
## Fluorescent Jacket (SFC/168)

Variable blue polyester



## Tracksuit Bottoms (MNW/3)

Variable blue polyester



Red acrylic



## Mondeo (SFC/104)

Red acrylic



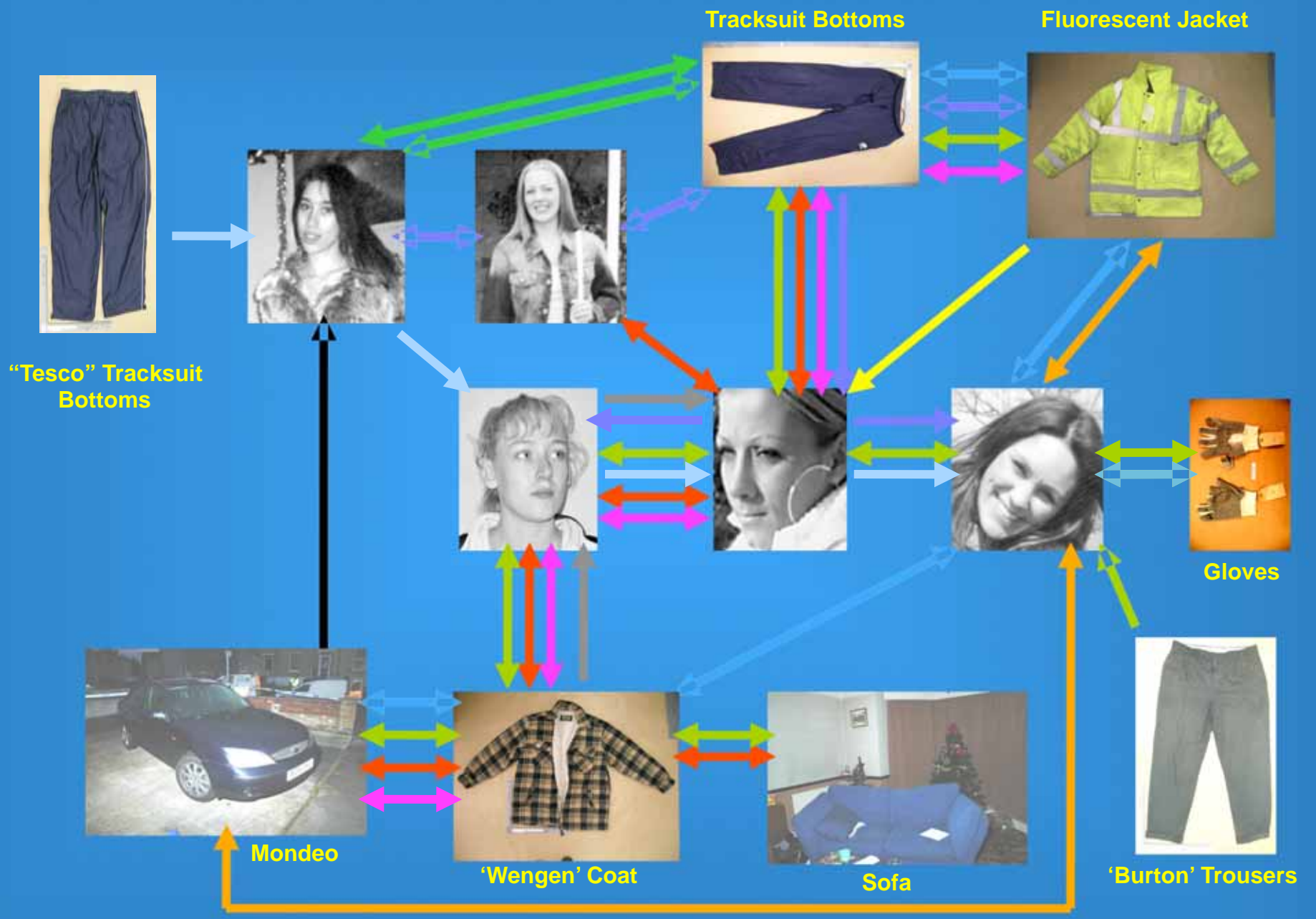
## Sofa (SS/59)

Red acrylic



1 Red Acrylic

13 Variable Blue Polyesters (3 types)



# Results of Exhibit Screen – Tom STEPHENS



**No sources for collectives found on women from Tom STEPHEN'S clothing!**

**No physical evidence to link to crime**

**Released**

**None of the women's clothing was found**

**Sources for the unassigned collectives never found.**



# Interpretation Issues – Target Fibre Studies

Target fibre studies – chances of finding a number of fibre collectives common to the 5 women and Steve WRIGHT

Beyond coincidence !

Despite Tom STEPHENS' admission of regular contact, no physical evidence found to support this

Another example of the results of target fibre studies being verified in casework!

# Interpretation Issues – Transfer & Persistence

**Fibre persistence studies in hair**

**Non retentive nature of skin**

**All women deposited on land had bathed/ showered shortly before last seen.**

**Exposure to significant combination of wind and rain**

**Retention of fibres after prolonged immersion in running water**

**Bodies wet when taped – recovery efficiency reduced**

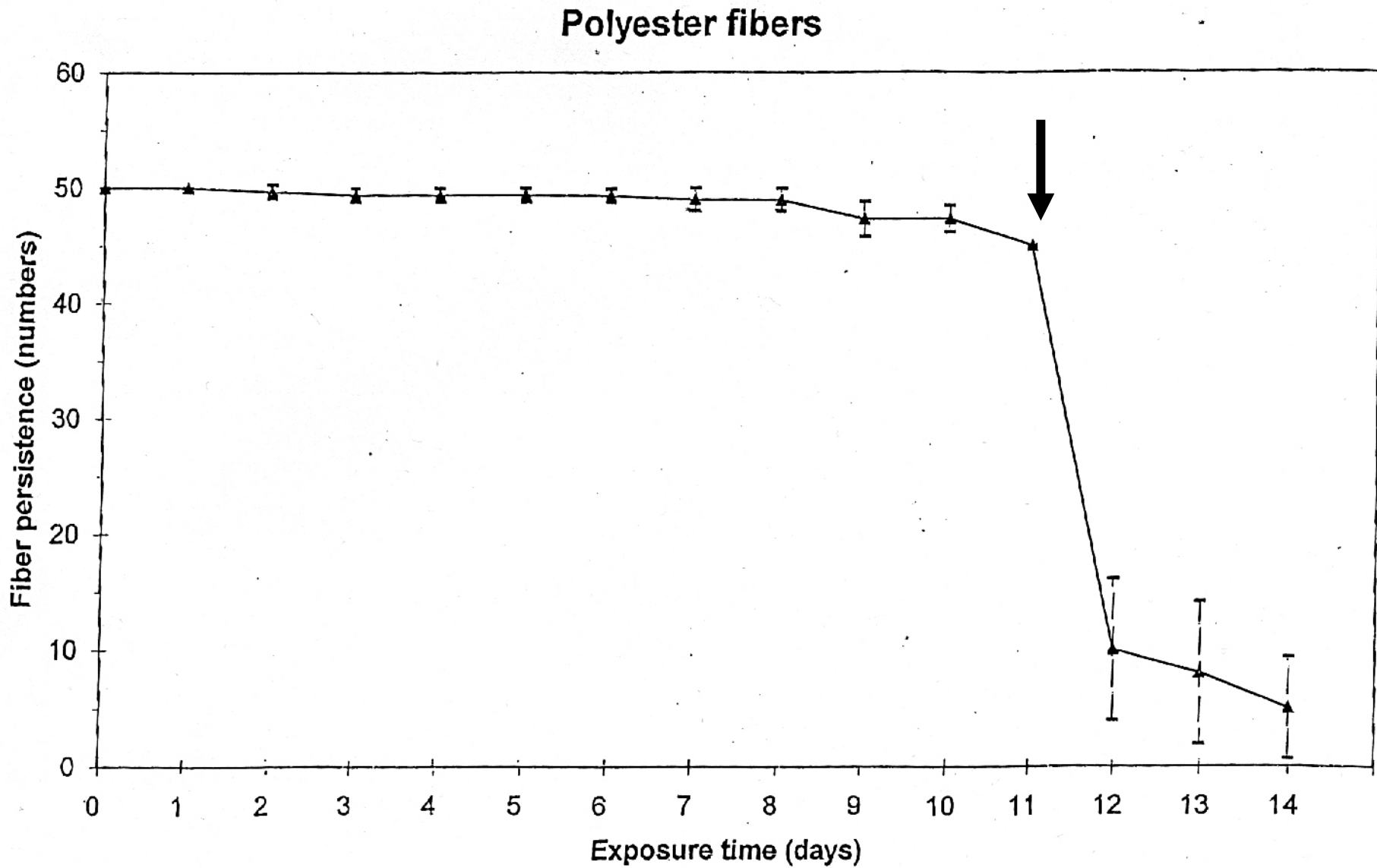
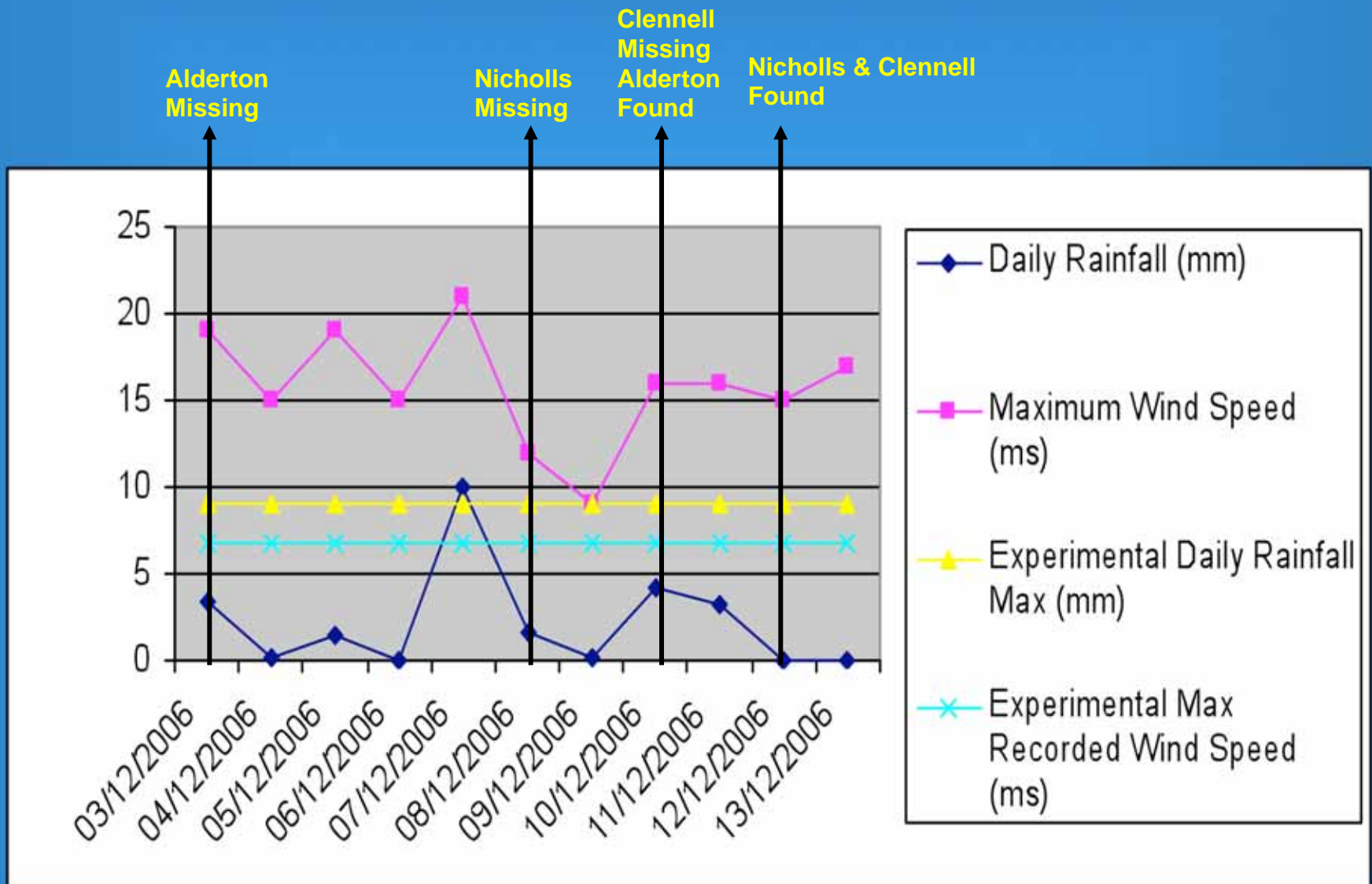


Figure 7: Fiber decay curve showing one-standard-deviation limits

# Interpretation Issues - Climatic Conditions





# Interpretational Issues – Transfer & Persistence

*Suggests recovered fibres are remnants/ proportion of those originally transferred*

**Findings suggest a primary transfer with skin**

*Suggestive of contact with victims on or around time of deposition*



The Judge said;

*“Drugs and prostitution meant they were at risk, but neither drugs nor prostitution killed them. You did.”*

*“This was a targeted campaign of murder, it is right you should spend your whole life in prison”*

# Lessons Learned

# Case Management

Get a good team..





**Keep the team as small as possible**

**Keep them together for the duration of the case**

**Regular communication/ updates/ progress/ file documentation**

**Exchange results/ information with others working on the case**

**Ensure results and intelligence is rapidly communicated to Police investigative team (*and vice versa..!*)**

**Fibre Recovery**  
*(Never surrender!!!!)*

# Recovery from badly contaminated hair



2kg of debris removed

# Recovery from Hair (cont.)



**Adaptation of Palynological Recovery Technique**

# Recovery from mail (cont.)





# Debris/ Tape Searching

- **1400 tapings**
- **High proportion had to be searched several times !**
- **Pressure to meet prosecution team deadlines**
- **Look for ways to accelerate process**

# Automated Fibre Finder

- Decision to 'field test' and evaluate
- Initially run in parallel with experienced examiner
- If good accordance – hope for some 'quick wins' identifying targets
- In its present form the system did not meet the high standards of speed, accuracy and reliability of an experienced examiner.

Its use therefore abandoned....

# The Trial





# Everyone is watching and listening...

Ipswich killings trial - East Anglian Daily Times - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back Forward Stop Refresh Home Search Favorites

Address <http://www.eadt.co.uk/content/ipswichkillings/live02-05.aspx> Go Links

12:01 Mr Wright then returns to a topic dealt with yesterday regarding the impact rain and wind would have on the retention of fibres on the skin.

**12:02** Mr palmer tells jurors the skin is a non-retentive surface which does not retain fibres easily. If someone washed it would remove the fibres from the skin, he said. He tells the court in his opinion this means the fibres found on the naked bodies of the women have been transferred at the point of deposition.

**11:59** The court is told it does not mean these women would have been in contact with Wright's home.

**11:58** Mr Wright asks what the chances would be of a random match of having three women found each with a permutation of the fibres as they appear on the charts which match a permutation of fibres taken from the garments and items relating to the home of Wright? He replies: "It would not occur by chance."

**11:55** Mr Palmer tells the court the chances of the fibres coming from someone other than Wright or his home environment would be "infinitesimally small"

**11:49** Mr Wright explains to the jury that there is not one non-ubiquitous fibre being found on the body but many. He asks Mr Palmer the chances of that arising at random and is told it is "highly unlikely".

**11:47** Mr Palmer tells the court that the chance of finding more colour combinations is even smaller.

**11:46** He reiterates that the chances of finding these fibres by chance is extremely small.

**11:45** He is asked to explain this to the court and says that it means a fibre that is relatively common, such as fibres found on jeans and white cottons.

Internet

start Microsoft PowerPoint ... ts805(REV) - Microsof... Inbox - Microsoft Out... 9 Internet Explorer 14:40

No escaping the 'D' word.....!



STUDIO



IPSWICH



# **Cases Not Faces?**

*(The human element)*

Working in our labs its easy to forget!!!!





*In memory of Tania, Gemma, Anneli, Annette, Paula*

