The Ipswich Serial Killings
The Fibre Evidence

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

Belstead Brook, Hintlesham
Circumstances of deposition

Each had been immersed in fast flowing water

Analytology suggested deposition around the time they went missing, i.e.;
  - Mia NICOL ~ 5 weeks immersion
  - Donna ADAMS – 2 weeks immersion

Each naked

Fibre recovery attempted from bodies

However, Hair (badly contaminated) recovered and preserved
Annette NICHOLLS

Reported missing on 5/12/06
Reported missing 10/12/06
Paula CLENNELL found in woods, Felixstow Road, Levington, 12/12/06
By chance, a second discovery... Annette NICOLLS
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 ~ 7 days
Annette NICHOLS ~ 4 days
Paula CLENNELL ~ 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 19/12/08

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

Survey tapings/debris

Catalogue

Identify collectives

Prioritise ‘unusual’

Common to other women?

Identify/ Analyse/ Confirm

Search of Suspects environment

Intelligence
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
Anneli ALDERTON, Paula CLENNELL, Annette NICHOLAS

- Polyester
- Microfibres*
- Acrylics
- Polyesters
- Blue Viscose
- ‘Fake Fur’
- Yellow Viscose
- Yellow fluorescent fibre
Microfibres - Intelligence

The said the source item may be:

- Dark blue, grey, black
- Jacket, Coat, ‘Sportswear’
- Fake suede, shoes
- “Peach Skin” texture
- Labelled ‘Polyester’ and/or ‘microfibre’
Examination of Steve WRIGHT's Car

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 CLENNELL & Annette NICHOLLS
A further search of Steve WRIGHT’s house reveals the source.....

‘Tesco’ Tracksuit Bottoms
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Microfibre Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>We said it may be:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark blue/ grey/ black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacket, Coat, ‘Sportswear’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fake suede, shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Peach Skin” texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labelled ‘Polyester’ and /or ‘microfibre’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>It was...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Dark Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Tracksuit bottoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Matching top sold separately
Paula CLENNELL

36 Blue-Grey polyester 'microfibres'

"Tesco" Tracksuit Bottoms (JMG/300)
- Green-blue viscose

Gloves (SFC/169)
- Green-blue viscose

Fluorescent Jacket (SFC/168)
- Green-blue viscose
- Purple blue cotton

Mondeo (SFC/104)
- Red acrylics
- Green-blue viscose
- Purple blue cotton

Sofa (SS/59)
- Green-blue viscose
- Red Acrylic

Coat (KAS/45)
- Green-blue viscose
- Red Acrylic
- Purple blue cotton

Tracksuit Bottoms (MNW/3)
- Green-blue viscose
- Red Acrylic
- Purple blue cotton

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
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

Mondeo (SFC/104)
- Single carpet fibre
- 1 Blue-Grey polyester 'microfibre'

“Tesco” Tracksuit Bottoms (JMG/300)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Black Nylon fibre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Blue- Grey Polyester Microfibre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Variable Blue Polyester fibres (2 types)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Green Polyester fibres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Green Cotton fibre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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)
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

- Daily Rainfall (mm)
- Maximum Wind Speed (ms)
- Experimental Daily Rainfall Max (mm)
- Experimental Max Recorded Wind Speed (ms)
Findings suggest a primary transfer with skin. Suggestive of contact with victims on or around time of deposition.

*Suggests recovered fibres are remnants/proportion of those originally transferred*
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
Adaptation of Palynological Recovery Technique
Recovery from hair (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...

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.
No escaping the 'D' word........
Cases Not Faces?
(The human element)
Working in our lab it's easy to forget......
In memory of Tania, Gemma, Anneli, Annette, Paula