

The Telegraph – 29th December 2010

Joanna Yeates murder: how the inquiry will develop

As police continue to investigate the murder of landscape architect Joanna Yeates, former detective Mark Williams-Thomas explains how the inquiry is likely to progress.



Criminologist and former detective Mark Williams-Thomas talks about where the Joanna Yeates murder inquiry will focus now. Photo: PA

By Laura Roberts

Miss Yeates's body was found on Christmas Day three miles from her home in Bristol after being missing for eight days. Detectives investigating the murder of the 25 year-old will be looking at forensic evidence, CCTV footage and continuing to talk to witnesses in their hunt for the killer.

Mr Williams-Thomas said: "The key for the police now is the two locations - where she lived and where the body was found. They will have found as much information as they can from places such as the shops she visited and the pub that she drank at through CCTV and talking to people.

"The focus forensically is these two places. At the location the body was found they will be looking for transfer of fibres or DNA in her clothes. They would look to see if there are car or footprint marks. These may have been clearer in the snow.

"Toxicology reports on the body will show whether any drugs or alcohol were used to subdue her and they will be looking for signs of struggle on her body. That will show how she was strangled. Obviously they will be searching for anybody who was in the area at the time."

Miss Yeates's body was found frozen through - a fact which will help forensic experts because it slows down the rate of decay.

Mr Williams-Thomas said: "The body will be in pretty much the condition that it was in when it was dumped."

Turning to Miss Yeates's flat in the Clifton area of Bristol police are expected to focus on how she got home on December 17 and the circumstances under which she left.

Mr Williams-Thomas said: "The key to the flat is that she either went back home or someone went back to the flat with her property. It is more likely that she went back home."

The front door of the property will prove the focus for most of the forensic investigation.

Mr Williams-Thomas said: "Every contact leaves a trace so they will be looking for that in the front door. The only way in and out of the property is through that so if the killer opened it, banged it, forced it - there will be traces that can be lifted."

The front door is being removed today to be taken to a forensic laboratory for intensive light testing.

Information released revealed that the landlord saw Miss Yeates leaving the flat on Friday night with two other people.

Mr Williams-Thomas said: "I would be very confident saying that whoever killed her she knew. There's no sense that she was pulled off the street by a stranger."

He added: "To dump the body so close suggests someone who either lives in the area or knows the locality well. It suggests that the killer might have been panicked."

There are two obvious routes from Miss Yeates's flat to the spot in Failand where she was found - over Clifton Suspension Bridge or over another bridge further down.

Both bridges have CCTV footage - however, if Miss Yeates's body was taken by car it will take police teams days of scouring footage and sending car indexes to the DVLA to eliminate vehicles.

There will also be an investigation into online contact that Miss Yeates's may have had on Facebook or Twitter or by email.

Mr Williams-Thomas said: "The police will now have to build up a picture of her life over the last two or three years. Very few offences are stranger offences. If they can find that link back they may then find the offender."