

Fingerprint find in decade-old double murder probe

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A decade old US double murder probe has received a new breakthrough following investigations by a University of Leicester forensic scientist at Northamptonshire Police.

Dr John Bond, Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Leicester Forensic Research Centre and Scientific Support Manager at Northamptonshire Police, revealed today that he found fingerprints on bullet shell casings fired at the crime scene in 1999.

The casings had been brought to Dr Bond by US detective Christopher King in a bid to shed new light on the investigation.

Detective King, of Kingsland Police Department, Georgia, is the lead investigator working on a 'cold case' - a double homicide - which has gone unsolved for a number of years. The suspect(s) in this case entered a downtown business in the early afternoon on 12/01/1999, shot and killed the two employees and stole a small amount of cash. Four fired shell casings ejected from the suspect's pistol were recovered at the scene and have been processed for latent fingerprints using traditional methods of dusting and fuming with negative results.

Dr Bond's work at the University of Leicester and Northamptonshire Police in developing latent prints on fired casings came to the attention of the US police and it was decided to have the casings tested.

Dr Bond and colleagues from the Department of Chemistry at the

University of Leicester are investigating a new technique to identify fingerprints on metal casing- including bullets and bombs. The breakthrough in crime detection could lead to hundreds of cold cases being reopened. The method enables scientists to 'visualise fingerprints' even after the print itself has been removed. They conducted a study into the way fingerprints can corrode metal surfaces. The technique can enhance – after firing– a fingerprint that has been deposited on a small calibre metal cartridge case before it is fired.

Dr Bond examined all four shell casings using the new technique and on three of the four found fingerprint ridges and on one of the three found ridge detail that the Detective King thought might provide an identification.

Detective King said: "The results are surprising but to say that I am pleased would be an underestimate. I think they could definitely help eliminate suspects. I feel very optimistic. These results are better than I had expected and better than I hoped for.

"Imagine someone in your family being murdered and not being able to bring them to justice. If we can bring closure to their families that would mean a lot to them".

Dr Bond added: "When we saw the shell casings we were not optimistic as the calibre was smaller than we had worked with to date (7.65mm), which meant the contact area between a finger and the casing would be small because of the tight radius of the casings.

"This is the first 'live' case we have looked at where we have found points of identification on the enhanced fingerprint. Even if there is not enough points of identification to identify the offender, it might help to eliminate suspects.

"We are currently taking about one call a day - mainly from the US – interested in our technique and Detective King thought there would literally be thousands of potential cases in the US alone where this technique might help."

Source: University of Leicester

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