

## **Body exhumed in 1979 murder probe**

Police investigating the murder of a woman in Southampton 30 years ago have exhumed the body of a male suspect.

Officers carried out the exhumation at Kingston Cemetery in Portsmouth to obtain "further DNA evidence".

The body of Teresa De Simone, 22, was found in her car at the pub where she worked part-time in December 1979. She had been raped and strangled.

Sean Hodgson, 57, of County Durham, spent 27 years in jail for the murder before his conviction was quashed.

Det Ch Insp Phil McTavish said the latest suspect had at one stage been in custody on unrelated matters but took his own life in 1988.

Miss de Simone's mother, Mary Sedotti, 77, said the death of the suspect meant her daughter's death would remain a mystery.

"We didn't think they would find anybody, not after 30 years," she said.

"It'll be nice to know that they have got the right person at last, at the end."

Mr McTavish added: "Although we will not confirm the suspect's identity, we can tell you he was a young man at the time, and he did not come from Southampton.

"He did not feature in the original murder investigation of 1979.

"We have established that this suspect was one of seven men who made admissions."

Police said the suspect made the admissions 18 months after Mr Hodgson was jailed and appeared to have no previous link to Miss De Simone.

## 'Rest in peace'

The BBC has learned that the crucial breakthrough in the investigation came when scientists found that the DNA profile of the likely killer - obtained from semen found on the victim - partially matched a DNA profile on the national database.

Scientists put the name of this database profile to police who discovered that it was a sibling of a possible suspect.

But because he was dead, a sample was taken from another sibling - who was not on the database - to help confirm the match in a process called familial searching.

Tests could take up to six weeks to complete.

Mr McTavish said: "We have very strong scientific and evidential support for this exhumation.

"However, only DNA testing can confirm or refute our suspicions."

Mrs Sedotti added: "I'll be glad when it's the end, when it's all finished and there'll be closure to this case.

"Finally, she can rest in peace."

She said her daughter was a "happy girl, but shy".

Miss De Simone's step father, Michael Sedotti, added: "She was a very private sort of person.

"She had to know you very well before she opened up and that was very, very hard for her."

Miss De Simone's partially-clothed body was found in the back seat of her Ford Escort in a car park beneath the Tom Tackle pub, where she worked part-time. She was also employed with the gas board.

Mr Hodgson confessed at the time of the original inquiry to killing Miss De Simone but pleaded not guilty at his 1982 trial at Winchester Crown Court, where his defence team described him as a pathological liar.

He was released in March after DNA from the scene was re-examined and proved not to be from him.

Mr Hodgson's lawyer Julian Young said his client had been very ill in a respite home and had not commented on developments.

He said: "I did not know seven people made admissions.

"I would like to ask why Mr Hodgson's legal team or the Court of Appeal was not informed. It would have been highly relevant evidence."

Hampshire Constabulary said this was only the second time a suspect in a historic murder inquiry had been exhumed.

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