Novichok poisoning: Did Skripal attackers use Charlie Rowley’s fl...  
Novichok poisoning: Did Skripal attackers use Charlie Rowley's flat as a safe house?

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Police found the source of the Novichok poisoning in Charlie Rowley's flat in Amesbury

The assassins who tried to kill Sergei Skripal earlier this year, may have used Charlie Rowley’s empty flat to prepare for the hit, experts now believe. Counter-terror police, investigating the Novichok poisoning in Wiltshire, have now traced the source of the nerve agent to a glass bottle recovered from Mr Rowley’s home in Amesbury. (https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/07/13/police-find-source-novichok-poisoning-victims-house/)

Detectives are urgently working to establish how the glass bottle came to be in the flat, and whether the Novichok it contains comes from the same batch used in the attack on the former Russian agent and his daughter, Yulia on March 4.

Initially it was thought Mr Rowley, 45, and Ms Sturgess, 44, had been contaminated when they picked up the container after finding it hidden under a bush in a park in the centre of Salisbury on the afternoon of Friday 30 June.

But experts now believe that is unlikely given the length of time it took the couple to fall ill, with Ms Sturgess not taken to hospital until the following morning and Mr Rowley admitted more than eight hours later. (https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/07/14/salisburys-fears-continue-police-admit-could-novichok/)

Instead, one key theory now being explored, is that the couple found the bottle in the apartment, after it was left there when Skripal’s would be assassins used it as a safe house while they prepared the attack.

The property, which sits on a new development on the edge of Amesbury, was only recently completed and would have still been part building site in March.

Mr Rowley, who is the first tenant in the property, only moved in a matter of weeks ago and was still unpacking and settling in according to family members.

Philip Ingram, a former intelligence and security officer, who has studied chemical warfare, said it was possible the would-be assassins had used the vacant building to prepare for the attack and had left the glass bottle when they departed.

He said: “Whoever carried out the hit on the Skripals would have spent time planning everything down to the last detail. A team of four to six people would have carried out a ‘pattern of life’ study in order to understand Sergei Skripal’s movements.

“They would have needed somewhere close by to get into their protective clothing and unwrap the Novichok. This was a new estate which would not have had residents at the time so it would have been a good place to avoid prying eyes while they made their final preparations.

“In the event that they were using the flat as a safe house, then they would have left behind something that was unfortunate discovered by Ms Sturgess and Mr Rowley when he moved in.”

While the main source of the contamination has now been located, police have warned there could be more traces of Novichok at other locations around Wiltshire.

Several key sites, including Mr Rowley’s Amesbury address and Ms Sturgess’s flat in Salisbury remain in sealed off and police have warned that the cordons would remain in place for some considerable time.

Mr Rowley’s condition continues to improve in hospital, but Ms Sturgess – a mother of three – died the day after being exposed to Novichok. Sergei and Yulia Skripal were poisoned in March.