

New Reconstruction Reveals Abduction was Later than Previously Thought

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Madeleine McCann could have been abducted up to 45 minutes later than thought, after detectives had a “revelation moment” when examining the timeline of the night she disappeared.

The main suspect in the case was previously a man seen by Jane Tanner, one of the McCanns’ friends, carrying a child close to their apartment in the Portuguese resort of Praia da Luz at around 9.15pm. But after successfully tracking down the man, detectives from Scotland Yard have eliminated him from the inquiry, establishing that he was a father carrying his child home from an evening crèche.

It means that Madeleine could have been taken as late as 10pm, moments before Kate McCann checked on her three-year-old daughter and realised she was missing.

The focus of the investigation has switched to a previous suspect who was seen carrying a child around Madeleine’s age towards the beach just before 10pm.

A family from Ireland got such a good look at the man that they were able to produce two e-fit images.

Martin Smith from Drogheda, Co Louth, gave the description to Portuguese police at the time but little was done with the information. In 2008 he met private detectives working for the McCann family and produced an e-fit image.

But the image was never placed into the public domain because it was thought the sighting did not fit into the accepted timeline. Detectives have now said it could be crucial in solving the case and are appealing for help to find the man.

Det Chief Insp Andy Redwood, who is leading the Metropolitan Police investigation, said the realisation that the 9.15pm sighting was not the abductor was a turning point in his team’s work.

He said: “In fact I would say that it was a revelation moment...we are almost certain now that this sighting is not the abductor and very importantly, what it says is that from 9.15pm we are able to allow the clock to move forward and in doing so things that have not been quite as significant, or have received quite the same degree of attention are now at the centre of our focus.”

DCI Redwood said the new timeline meant the focus was now very much on the man seen by the Smith family around 10pm.

He said: “This could be the man who took Madeleine, but very importantly there could be an innocent explanation.

“The e-fits are clear and I ask the public to look very carefully at them and if they know who this person is, please come forward.”

In a special edition of the Crimewatch programme screened last night, the images were broadcast along with a series of other e-fits of potential suspects, police are desperate to locate.

The Met team have identified a number of sightings of suspicious blonde haired men, who were seen hanging around the Ocean Club resort in the days leading up to Madeleine’s disappearance.

One witness saw a fair haired man standing close to the McCanns’ apartment twice, first on April 30 at around 8am and then again on May 2.

On the day of the abduction at around 4pm a witness saw a man hanging around close to where the McCanns were staying and then two hours later another was spotted in the stairwell of the apartment block.

Police have also considered the theory that Madeleine could have been taken after disturbing a burglary in the apartment.

They have discovered a four fold increase in the number of break-ins in the area between January and April that year and have also discovered that a number of bogus charity collectors were operating in the resort at the time.

Witnesses have been able to provide two e-fit images of men who were visiting properties on the pretence of collecting money for orphans around the time of Madeleine’s abduction.

Police are also keen to trace two blonde men who were seen on the balcony of a nearby empty apartment just two doors down from where the McCanns were staying on May 2.

Explaining the significance of these sightings, DCI Redwood said: “Madeleine McCann’s disappearance does, on one reading of the evidence, have the hallmarks of a pre-planned abduction. That would undoubtedly have involved reconnaissance and so we are really keen to understand who these people are.”

Some of the witnesses suggested that the blonde men may have been speaking Dutch or German and as a result last night’s Crimewatch appeal is to be shown in both of those countries.

However there are no plans to screen the appeal in Portugal, where there remains some scepticism about the investigation.

The Scotland Yard investigation was launched in the summer after detectives spent two years reviewing all the evidence collected so far by the Portuguese authorities, British police and private detectives.

Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/madeleinemccann/10378303/Madeleine-McCann-New-reconstruction-reveals-abduction-was-later-than-previously-thought.html>