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Spy last seen alive eight days before body was found in bag

MI6 officer Gareth Williams was seen on 15 August, according to police, who say they are still not sure his death was murder

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The dead British intelligence officer Gareth Williams was last seen alive eight days before his body was found stuffed in a bag at his flat, police have said.

A confirmed sighting of the 30-year-old was made on 15 August in London, officers said as they continued to investigate his suspicious death.

Meanwhile, Williams' family last night hit out at rumours that suggested the dead man was involved in risky sexual practices. In a statement, they said speculation linking the secret service employee to a male escort and bondage equipment had been "very distressing".

The mathematics genius, who was on secondment to MI6, was found dead in a sports holdall in the bath of his government flat on Monday. As police continued to investigate whether the GCHQ codes expert lived a secret double life, his family paid tribute to the murdered spy.

They said: "Gareth was a generous, loving son, brother, and friend, and he was a very private person.

"He was a great athlete, and loved cycling and music.

"His loss has devastated us and we would ask that anyone with information to come forward and assist the police inquiry."

A Scotland Yard spokesman said: "We can confirm that Mr Williams was in London from Wednesday 11 August, and what officers believe is the last confirmed sighting of him still alive in London was on Sunday 15 August."

Police turned their focus to Williams' private life as they attempt to account for his death.

The 30-year-old was days from completing a one-year secondment to the headquarters of the Secret Intelligence Service, MI6, in Vauxhall, London.

He was due to return to a rented flat in Cheltenham where Government Communications Headquarters, GCHQ, is based.

It is understood Williams also worked for the US National Security Agency and made regular trips to Washington DC and Fort Meade, near Baltimore.

The mystery over his final hours deepened after a postmortem examination failed to identify a cause of death.

Further tests will determine if the cycling fanatic was asphyxiated or poisoned, as well as if drugs or alcohol were present in his system.

A pathologist found Williams was not stabbed or shot and there were no obvious signs of strangulation.

Police refused to categorise the death as a murder, despite the bizarre circumstances, and say he may have died innocently.

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