

Siege Barrister shot dead by police had been taking anti-depressants

By DAN BOFFEY and CHRISTOPHER LEAKE



Barrister Mark Saunders had been taking anti-depressant drugs for several months, it has been revealed

The wealthy barrister shot dead by police marksmen at his luxury home had been taking anti-depressant drugs for several months.

Friends of Mark Saunders, 32, who was killed by at least five bullet wounds, have revealed that he had been on prescription drugs for depression and had behaved "erratically" when drinking alcohol, as he did on the day he died.

Those close to the £150,000-a-year Oxford graduate and his grieving widow, fellow barrister Elizabeth Clarke, 40, disclosed that they became concerned at Mr Saunders's odd behaviour after drinking during a recent stag party.

The friends said the cocktail of anti-depressants and alcohol, which he consumed at a pub near his home in Chelsea, West London, last Tuesday, may explain his bizarre actions.

After firing his shotgun at neighbours from the window of his £2.2million flat, Mr Saunders repeatedly shot at police during a five-hour siege.

Doctors advise those on anti-depressants not to mix them with alcohol, as this can impair their mental abilities.

Mr Saunders, a former part-time Territorial Army soldier who had trained with SAS instructors, was shot in the brain, heart, liver and lower body, a pathologist's report revealed.

An investigation is being carried out by the Independent Police Complaints Commission.



Elizabeth Clarke, 40, sobs in the street last Tuesday while her husband exchanges fire with armed police

His mother, Rosemary, at her £2million home in Cheshire, yesterday declined to talk about any medical treatment her son had been receiving, but said: "His death is such a complete waste.

"To me he will remain my little boy, even though he was a grown man. We now hope the investigation will be thorough, but it will not bring him back. Nothing will."

Mrs Saunders and her husband, Rodney, a 64-year-old quantity surveyor, have questioned the use of lethal force and why their "talented and sociable" son had to die in a barrage of police bullets.

A neighbour of the dead lawyer ? who acted in high-profile divorce cases, including that of gameshow host Chris Tarrant ? said last night: "We don't believe Mr Saunders had to die. The police should have sent for his parents to talk him out of there alive."

Police last night defended their actions, claiming armed officers had no choice but to shoot Mr Saunders after hours of negotiations broke down.

A senior police source said: "He shot at police officers at 5pm, 9pm and again at 9.30pm.

"We tried everything possible to contain and negotiate with him but this was a real threat with real bullets.

"He was shooting at police officers and members of the public. We never wanted to shoot him."

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The drawing room in Chelsea, west London, where Mark Saunders was shot dead

Mr Saunders was shot by officers from the Met's CO19 unit and Royal and Diplomatic Protection Squad. Nine have been taken off armed duties.

Commander Ali Dizaei, in overall charge, has been embroiled in controversy in the past when he was suspended for two years after corruption allegations, although he was cleared of all charges in 2003.

Neighbours spoke last night of their shock at the actions of "mild-mannered" Mr Saunders.

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Point of impact: A bullet hole in one of the windows of the flat (left), Exclusive residence: The £2million flat in Markham Square

One 48-year-old mother of two said: "It was very clear that he was drunk; he was shouting indiscriminately and hurling abuse at anyone he saw.

"I heard a series of loud bangs and the next thing I knew he was lying on the pavement with officers trying to keep him alive."

