

**THE FINGERPRINT INQUIRY SCOTLAND**  
**WITNESS STATEMENT OF CHARLES STEWART**

**(i) NAME AND PERSONAL INFORMATION**

1. My name is Charles Douglas Stewart. I worked at the Scottish Criminal Records Office (SCRO), Police Headquarters, 173 Pitt Street, Glasgow from 1970 until 2000 approximately, then and Pacific Quay, Glasgow until 2007.
  
2. I joined the SCRO in November 1970 as a trainee. In 1977 I qualified as a fingerprint expert. In 1997 my job title was Principal Fingerprint Officer. That remained my job title until I left the SCRO by agreement on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007.

**(ii) CAREER UNTIL 1997**

**Apprenticeship**

3. In order to qualify as a fingerprint expert I had to undertake training for seven years. At that time the Glasgow Fingerprint Bureau trained potential fingerprint experts for Scotland, other parts of Great Britain and elsewhere.
  
4. During those seven years I was taught how fingerprints were left, why they were used and the value of fingerprints. I was taught how to recognise and analyse fingerprints. I learnt how scene of crime officers found and recorded fingerprints. I was also taught how the surface on which a print was left could affect the way in which a fingerprint expert would analyse it. I was taught about palm recognition, classification of prints, searching the various databases of marks and ten prints in the bureau, and how to compare marks to ten print forms. The training was both practical and theoretical. I was also taught about how the SCRO operated. I learnt about the various clerical and administrative functions in the bureau.

5. At each stage of the training I had to demonstrate that I had mastered the necessary skills before moving onto the next stage. The experts would consider how much progress a trainee had made and would assess whether the trainee was ready to move onto the next stage.
6. Part of my training was about the preparation of evidence for court once it had been requested by the PF. This included the production of evidence books and statements and, latterly, joint reports. I was taught the style of evidence presentation expected of me in the witness box.
7. The majority of my training was monitored by senior experts within the department. They would spend considerable time explaining the theory of fingerprint comparison and identification, and helping me with the practical implementation of that theory. Learning was encouraged, very much as a hands on experience, where I would attempt a comparison and discuss my conclusion with my peers.
8. During those seven years I had to sit various examinations. At the end of the seven years I had to pass the final examinations. These examinations were both practical and oral. These were set by the bureau. There was no external source for training in those days. Once I had passed the exams in 1977 I qualified as a fingerprint expert. This meant I could appear in court as an expert and sign for identifications.

### **Changes to apprenticeships**

9. At some time after my qualification the apprenticeship period was lowered to five years. A National Training Centre had been set up in Durham. By the mid nineteen eighties people were sent to Durham to sit the final expert exams. There were no college courses applicable to finger print experts. This reflected the small size of the profession. There were around two hundred and fifty fingerprint experts in Britain, and around fifty in Scotland.

**Career after qualification**

10. Once I had qualified I continued to gain experience. Every day you learned something new and took it on board and this improved my ability as an expert. The more comparisons carried out, the more experience you gained. My progress was continually monitored and, when it was considered appropriate, advice was given on improving my application in practice of the theory I had learned.
- 10A. My line manager would regularly discuss my work with me. The procedures in the SCRO meant that my work was constantly checked and rechecked. Work would be allocated to me in line with my experience. As an example, when I first started I would be given easier marks to compare to prints. However as I progressed I would be given harder marks to compare against prints.
- 10B. My giving evidence in court was progressed from the starting point of preparing and giving evidence in summary cases for a period of time, after which my performance and ability was reviewed. I was then allowed to give evidence under solemn procedures. After a further period and considerable review of my court ability I was then allowed to prepare evidence in the most serious of cases, for example rape, murder, fire-raising etc.

**Position in 1997**

11. In 1997 I was in charge of a team of fingerprint experts which dealt with all cases related to a specific geographic area. As team leader I had to ensure that the workload was carried out. I also had to ensure that my team was carrying out work to the requisite quality. I was responsible for trainees allocated to my team. I had to allocate and monitor their work, and explain the theory they were putting into practice during the comparison process.

- 11A. I would continue to carry out first examinations of cases reviewed which were then checked by other experts so that we had continual peer review of our ability, accuracy and reliability. I would also check the work of other experts as part of a peer review of their work.
- 11B. The splitting of my work load between first and second checking was, I considered (as did management), an essential for maintaining my comparison competence.
12. I would, as required by senior management, give talks and presentations on fingerprint matters to various bodies. This included PF's, Police Officers during their training, the Crown Office and others.

### **(iii) TESTING AND TRAINING OF FINGERPRINT EXPERTS**

#### **Competency testing as at 1997**

13. In the early 1990s SCRO set up its own competence tests for fingerprint experts. I knew from taking the test that it was a difficult test, at the time I did not know how it equated to tests being used in other fingerprint Bureaux. The senior management reviewed the commercially available competency tests but concluded that they were of no value, and carried on with their own test.
14. The SCRO tests were eventually dropped, at, I think, sometime in the late 1990s. The FBI assessed our competency test and considered that it was a test of excellence. They explained that it was far too rigorous to be a test of competence. Accordingly tests were procured from a commercial supplier.
- 14A. These commercial tests were not a great challenge and were only a basic assessment of limited competence. At this time the other fingerprint bureaux in Scotland were expected to implement the use of; firstly the SCRO competency test and subsequently, the commercial

one. Regrettably, I believe that these bureaux did not consider that a competency test was required.

15. As well as competency testing, all experts within SCRO had their work second checked by their peers which, at the end of the day, is a greater test of competence than any other test. As well as the second checking, any identified marks were always checked by three other experts after the initial identification was made.

#### **Changes in competency testing after 1997**

16. After 1997 a more formal regime of checking and audit was introduced. This covered both substantive accuracy and also compliance with office procedures. Work carried out by fingerprint experts was "dip sampled". This was all part of the implementation of 'quality' procedures as the bureau strived for ISO accreditation.

#### **Training as at 1997**

17. We were trained in new technology as and when it was introduced. Any new technologies and techniques were disseminated. The SCRO were the first bureau in the United Kingdom to introduce the Automatic Fingerprint Recognition System (AFR).
18. I was given training on the AFR system, unfortunately the trainers from the company who provided the system were not very well versed, or experienced in the system, and we had to learn more by trial and error. Various experts in SCRO were subsequently used to train other British experts in the AFR system.
- 18A. Whenever there was a change in scene of crime techniques or law relating to our area of expertise, we were trained. We were expected to maintain our knowledge of anything relating to fingerprint identification and, where required, training would be supplied to us.

19. Much of the training and development was “on the job” training. The line manager would allocate more difficult work as an expert progressed and developed. Each expert was subject to supervision and each expert’s work was regularly checked. Any problems or variations were discussed openly as part of the learning process.
- 19A. Trainees and experts were expected to learn from their peers and adopt what they considered to be the best of the working practices that they had learned from each other.
20. Fingerprint experts were encouraged to read about latest developments. The SCRO had a library. New books and Home Office publications would be made available. There was a regular flow of updating material made available.
21. Some fingerprint experts would attend conferences, for example Fingerprint Society conferences. These were invaluable, not only for the formal presentations but also for the informal interaction and discussions with other fingerprint experts. I would learn a great deal in informal discussions. When I had the opportunity to attend conferences, I frequently learned more from informal discussions with working experts than from the formal presentations during the conference.
22. Attendance at Fingerprint Society conferences were paid for by the individual experts. By the mid 1990s one expert would be funded to go by the SCRO. However we would split the funding across all the experts going. As a result we would all share the cost of going. Whether or not you could go would then depend on your own family and economic circumstances. Those who could not go missed out, not only on the formal conference proceedings but also on informal discussions.

