

THE FINGERPRINT INQUIRY SCOTLAND
WITNESS STATEMENT OF FIONA MCBRIDE

(i) NAME AND PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. My name is Fiona McBride. In 1997 my job title was Fingerprint Officer. I worked at the Scottish Criminal Records Office (SCRO), Police Headquarters, 173 Pitt Street, Glasgow.

(ii) CAREER

2. I joined the SCRO in October 1984 as a trainee. In January 1990 I became a Fingerprint Officer. On 3rd August 2000 I was suspended. I resumed working at SCRO in May 2002. I was dismissed in May 2007. The Employment Tribunal has now found that I was unfairly dismissed. The SPSA is not appealing against that finding; they are only appealing against my re-instatement. I do not comment on the circumstances of my dismissal or related matters in this statement as this is currently the subject of litigation. In 1997 my job title was Fingerprint Officer.
3. In order to qualify as a Fingerprint Officer I had to undertake training for five years. The training involved spending time in various departments of SCRO carrying out various activities so that I could fully understand how the SCRO carried out its work. This also enabled me to learn about fingerprints and their various characteristics and how to be a Fingerprint Officer. As an example I spent time working on "rough classifications" that is to say the system in place to classify marks according to ridge patterns. I also spent time working on ten print forms, learning about the classification, searching and examination of ten print forms. I spent time in the Suspects section where I was given ten prints and scene of crime marks and learned how to compare them. Naturally much time was spent learning how to compare marks to prints. It was an intensive and robust process. It

involved gaining practical experience of all aspects of the work of a Fingerprint Officer.

4. I also had to pass many examinations set by the SCRO. The examinations had a number of parts. I had to carry out a comparison between a mark and ten prints. I had to carry out a search against the databases and produce a result. I had to write an essay. I had to prepare a joint report for court. I also had to prepare a book of productions for court. I had to mark up an enlargement. This is not an exhaustive list and I passed all of my examinations.

(iii) WORKING PRACTICES IN 1997

Competency testing as at 1997

5. Until 1997 I was competency tested each year. I may have been tested more often than that. In reality I was being constantly tested. This was because a significant amount of my work was checked by virtue of the procedures in place in SCRO. As an example, if I was to identify a mark as belonging to a suspect then as a matter of course that mark would be checked by at least three other fingerprint experts, in line with the procedures applicable at that time.
6. Our work was subject to random "dip testing". This involved checking fingerprint experts' work without them knowing about it. This was organised as part of the quality assurance regime. Alan Dunbar, who was in charge of quality assurance at SCRO, would be able to explain how it worked. I think my work was subject to the "dip testing" regime.

Training as at 1997

7. I would attend training whenever possible. As regards the period up to 1997 Alan Dunbar would be better placed to explain the training regime.

8. In the period up to 1997 there was a formal regular training regime and less formal training (which was in addition to the structured training schedule). Training courses did take place. As an example Robert Mackenzie held a two day course called "Demystifying palms". I was also trained on any new equipment or technologies such as the AFR, that is to say the Automatic Fingerprint Recognition system and its various updates.
9. Informal training took place on a day to day basis. If there was a difficult or interesting mark then we would discuss it. More experienced fingerprint experts would discuss marks with less experienced experts on a regular basis, and *vice versa*, as every mark is unique and everyone's opinion is valid. As I have explained work was regularly checked and this led to ongoing training of staff.
10. We would keep ourselves up to date by discussing articles of interest. Copies of these would be passed round the office and kept in a folder. In later years at Pacific Quay they might be placed up on boards. If any of us found something interesting we would discuss it with each other. Contacts from other fingerprint bureaux would also send us information of interest. This would be discussed.
11. We would also occasionally invite guest speakers. As an example Mr. Arie Zeelenberg came to speak once. I thought the content of his seminar was poor. Mr. Steve Meagher from the United States and Mr. Dale Clegg from Australia also came to speak to us.
12. I did not go on many external courses. Normally there were not enough funds to send staff on all of the external courses requested. A few people would go to fingerprint conferences. Some staff would pay to go themselves.

13. The general view in SCRO was that our experts were very well trained and that there was some benefit in external training. The view was that the standard of our bureau was second to none which was supported by the comments of other bureaux staff from England and elsewhere. The Evett and Williams study suggested that this was the case. Other fingerprint bureaux would adopt our processes.

14. I attended an experiment organised by Terry Kent at the Police Scientific Development Board of England and Wales along with two colleagues from SCRO, Mark Mulroney and Stephen Begg. The objective was to test digital imaging systems. There were lots of fingerprint experts there from across Great Britain. We were all given hundreds of photographs of marks. We were then to mark characteristics on the photographs. The SCRO group was one of the last groups to finish. Some groups of experts finished much earlier. This was something that we remarked upon. We noted that we would not dismiss marks as quickly as some other groups. We were taught to look at marks that were extremely difficult and not just dismiss them as fragmentary and insufficient. This may be why we took longer than some other bureaux. We were used to taking a long time over complex marks in order to see if an elimination or identification was possible.

15. The position has changed. There is now more outside training. Professional development reviews and more formal training have been introduced.

- (iv) PROCEDURES FOR FINGERPRINT WORK IN 1997**
16. I deal first with the procedures in general. I then deal with procedures for "ordinary cases". I then explain the procedures for "Special Cases".

Procedures in general

17. Changes to procedures were communicated by memoranda and by supervisors. We would have to sign each memorandum to confirm that we had read it. A staff meeting would take place and any major changes would be discussed and comment sought. Any old memoranda or papers that were superseded by the new memorandum were shredded. A folder was kept with all memoranda for reference. Alan Dunbar would be able to provide more detail.
18. Now there is a book of procedures and there are several copies available in the office. I do not know at what point these books were introduced. I cannot remember if there was a book of procedures or instructions apart from the folder of memoranda in 1997. I would have had a personal copy of any procedures important to my work.

The substantive examination

19. I now discuss the examination of the marks. The first issue is whether the mark is "sufficient". In this context the question is whether the mark is clear enough to assess. As an example a mark may have been damaged in some way, meaning that it is difficult or impossible to examine. It was not my practice to dismiss marks as insufficient unless there was good reason to do so. It can be difficult to assess marks; however it is preferable to spend the necessary time on comparing a mark to see if it can be identified or kept for future comparison work.
20. Having decided that a mark was sufficient I would start to check if the mark was made by a particular person, which basically involved looking at the ten print forms and the mark in question to see if there was a match.
21. The work required concentration. If I was interrupted I would start again at the beginning. I would use a linen glass and occasionally the

comparator. However my view was that the correct way to approach matters was to use the linen glass as the primary mechanism for viewing the mark. The comparator would enable you to look at discrete parts of the mark. However if you are looking at a discrete part of a mark you are not looking at the whole mark. You risk looking at matters out of context. I would not sign for an identification unless I had used a linen glass. I cannot say that there was a set time for examining a mark. Each mark could take a different amount of time. In Glasgow the normal procedure was to use the linen glass. However other fingerprint bureaux placed some more reliance on the comparator.

22. If the mark was unclear I would sometimes ask for a photographic enlargement. This was preferable to the comparator as the comparator would sometimes obscure characteristics due to the lighting process. A photographic enlargement would be of better quality.
23. I would look for groups of common characteristics. I would be looking at the prints and the marks at the same time. I would not mark up the prints or the mark unless I had identified or eliminated the mark. I would not generally take notes about the mark.
24. Sometimes the work involved using the AFR (Automatic Fingerprint Recognition) system which was introduced in 1990. That would suggest potential matches for a mark or ten prints from the database. If the AFR came up with a match I would then get the relevant ten prints and mark and carry out a comparison under the linen glass. I would not rely on the AFR system's results.

Outcomes of examinations and number of experts required

25. There were a number of outcomes of examinations. I now explain the principal outcomes.

