

A DEBATE

'Whistleblowing' – the Moral Dimension

In 2000 when **Allan Bayle**, an experienced and respected fingerprint expert at New Scotland Yard, went online and condemned the **SCRO** identification of **Shirley McKie** he was threatened with discipline and eventually forced from his job. Despite the Yard's much vaunted policy supporting '**whistleblowers**' when push came to shove Allan was expendable.

In March of 2002 after my presentation to the **Fingerprint Society Annual Conference** in Cardiff I was approached by a number of experts who told me that although they supported Shirley and believed the SCRO to be wrong it was more than their jobs were worth to speak out. Naturally I respected their confidences but as the years have passed I have become more and more concerned that '**whistleblowers**' are not welcome in the **Scottish Fingerprint Service** or anywhere else in the UK for that matter despite public pronouncements to the contrary. I have often wondered how such a culture could be changed.

In May this year I voiced the fears of some experts that the development of the new Scottish Fingerprint Service was in danger of being dominated by SCRO philosophy and culture:

'In January 2000 when 14 fingerprint experts from Lothian and Borders Police openly signed a letter to the Minister for Justice asking for an enquiry into the SCRO and justice for Shirley McKie they performed an act of integrity, courage and honesty.'

Unfortunately like many whistleblowers before them few of their careers subsequently prospered. This was an act of self interest, arrogance and weakness by a police management bent on protecting the system and themselves with no regard for truth or justice.'

*The fact was and remains that the vast majority of Scottish fingerprint experts exhibit all the qualities shown by the '**Lothian and Border's 14**'. They are honest people working to maintain an efficient and effective fingerprint service for the police, courts and general public. They are intent on ensuring that the new **Scottish Fingerprint Service** is, unlike the SCRO, open and accountable.'*

<http://shirleymckie.com/documents/TheScottishFingerprintService.pdf>

This week the following e-mail from American expert Pat Wertheim brought the whole issue of '**whistleblowing**' to the fore again.

*'In his lecture on ethics, **Dave Grieve** gives an example to consider, something like this: You are a fingerprint examiner with a police department in Scotland. You have seen the fingerprints in the Marion Ross murder case and you know the SCRO made at least two erroneous identifications. You have an ethical responsibility to your chosen profession to speak out and make every effort to correct the harm that has been done. But if you do that, you will lose your job and your career and have to start over. You have an ethical responsibility to your wife and two young children to provide food, shelter, and clothing to them. If you lose your job and have to start over, you will not be able to provide for your family.'*

What do you do? Which ethical responsibilities dominate?

I admire (those) who do speak out. I pity those who do not. I, for one, would rather live under a bridge and eat worms -- and take my family with me -- than stay quiet and let a terrible wrong be done that I might have helped stop. I do not understand the people who remain silent in the face of an enemy, nor do I understand how they retain even a shred of self respect.'

Is this how other experts see it? Throughout the past 8 years I have been aware of police officers and experts who have stood up to be counted even at personal risk to themselves and their careers. There have been many others while privately willing to lend their support were afraid to risk the fate suffered by **Allan Bayle** and the '**Lothian and Border's 14**'. The reality is that if only a few experts within Scotland stood up to be counted then I believe the whole controversy about the SCRO errors could finally be settled, public confidence could be restored and a public enquiry instituted to ensure that this never happens again.

Is this a realistic goal? justiceforshirley@btinternet.com