

Beyond Belief - Comment

Sunday Herald 27 March 2005 - Readers Views

Bureau's good work

Your article "Scottish Print Bureau still cannot be trusted" contains some seriously misleading assertions which require correction (News, March 20).

Allan Bayle claims that fingerprint evidence submitted by the SCRO (Scottish Criminal Records Office) is not up to standard. The national standard- previously required for court purposes was that there should be at least 16 points of similarity between prints. This standard is now being replaced by a non-numeric standard so that finger print evidence can be used in court as long as the expert is willing to speak to their identification. .

During the period of transition, SCRO have been told to supply the court with their findings even if they do not find 16 points of similarity. Therefore there will have been many cases submitted to court below the 16-point standard. This has nothing to do with poor work. To present it as such is to misrepresent the process.

Allan Bayle also says experts at other Scottish bureaux do not have any confidence in SCRO. He gives no examples. In July 2000, the Lord Advocate instructed all SCRO identifications be checked by experts from three other bureaux, one of which was Fife Constabulary. These checks lasted for 13 months during which time the identifications of SCRO were found to be 100% accurate. All bureaux staff in Scotland are subject to the same competency test.

The most recent HMIC [Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary] report is merely the latest in a series of inquiries into the work of SCRO in the wake of the McKie case. These reports have found room for improvement in the systems employed by SCRO but have found no evidence relating to incompetent or malicious identification.

Kathleen Ryall

Unison Scotland

Iain

Sorry I haven't got back to you before now. I have now had a chance to look at your observations on the HMCI report, and they are excellent. There is nothing I can add, except to say that your comments are very fair, and the report stinks of a complete cover up. In reading your observations it struck me that instead of fighting against you and Shirley and covering up errors, the 'Authorities' could have done so much better by acknowledging their shortcomings, apologising, providing compensation, and using your background and knowledge to make major improvements to the service, and to raise the service to the world class standard they currently pretend to be.

JB

Let's see . . . Say you are the head of the SCRO and four of your fingerprint "experts" make the worst error in the history of fingerprinting in the entire United Kingdom -- not just once, but TWICE in the same case (Shirley McKie, David Asbury). An official government enquiry concludes that not only did they make the mistakes, but that they were aware the identifications were erroneous when they testified to them. The official enquiry report ends with the recommendation that the four be charged with perjury.

Okay, you are the head of the SCRO. So what do you do?

Well, you create a special quality control unit to make sure it doesn't happen again and you staff that special unit with three of the four who made the mistake and perjured themselves by testifying to it. Their new job is to verify the identifications of all the rest of the experts at SCRO.

BRILLIANT!!

KL

To paraphrase one of the Nazi's high command "A lie told often enough becomes the truth". It seems that we have here a classic validation of that statement.

BC

The sore is still festering. If SCRO and the authorities think that keeping quiet is the best policy. They are either stupid or just as incompetent as the experts who made the original errors. This is not going away. The result of all this dishonesty is affecting experts in Scotland, and the fingerprint community all over the world. It gives ammunition to the anti-fingerprint community. All because SCRO couldn't have the decency to say "sorry we have made a mistake". If this had been a doctor and he had made several mistakes, he would have been brought before the British Medical Council and sacked. It beggars belief when you see this little excuse by a spokeswoman from SCRO; 'They are vastly experienced and valued members of staff employed in a variety of fingerprint expert duties in the Glasgow bureau'. So much for justice!

KS

During the nearly two weeks waiting to testify in this case, I engaged in conversation with the court house personnel. In one conversation with a fine gentleman who had generously informed me of various bargain areas about Glasgow, he leaned toward me and stated he wished both and me well since he was delighted that someone was finally standing up to SCRO. "They are a bunch of arrogant xxxxxxxx," the man said.

During recesses I stood outside High Court within earshot of three of the four SCRO examiners in the great outdoor smoking section. I did not mean to eavesdrop but these individuals were not soft spoken in their comments about the opposing American

cowboys. One word describes the recurring tone and attitudes expressed in the steady stream of insults, and that is arrogant.

SCRO training methods were heavily criticized after the initial inquiry, yet one aspect of training appears to be most effective then as well as now. How well an examiner can compare and individualize fingerprints seems a lower priority than acquiring the arrogance SCRO appears to demand. Obviously, this disdain for truth and justice starts at the top, and seems to be supported throughout. The action of placing the incompetent in a position to ensure that incompetence will remain is just one more example. A wise old man told me years ago that a thin line separates confidence from arrogance. Some, he said, knew they weren't really any good but bluffed with false bravado. Others, sadly, hadn't a clue, but just like being bullies.

SM