

**Chief Constable Michael Baxter,
Cumbria Police HQ
Carleton Hall
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**27 Donnini Court,
South Beach Road,
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7 April 2003.

Dear Chief Constable,

As an ex police officer who believes that fingerprinting still has much to offer in crime prevention and detection I am extremely concerned about the current split in the profession over the Shirley McKie 'identification'.

As her father I also have a very important emotional involvement having seen my daughter brought to the edge of suicide by so called 'experts'.

For the past 6 years I have researched the technical, philosophical and political issues affecting fingerprinting and have spoken at home and abroad.

I am writing to enquire if the National Fingerprint Board has any plans to address the current controversies?

My current reading of the situation is that a great deal of time and effort is being wasted by the rival experts seeking to prove or disprove that the SCRO were right or wrong in the Shirley McKie 'identification'.

In my opinion this is not an issue but a diversion from the debate that should be taking place.

'How do we stop errors taking place and if they do what action should be taken?'

The SCRO experts have already been conclusively proved wrong in the Scottish courts, by the independent international experts brought in by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, in the HMCI's official report on his 2000 Inspection of SCRO and by the international fingerprint community.

In addition these same experts have been proved wrong in their identification of the related 'Marion Ross' print used to convict David Asbury of murder. His conviction has now been quashed because of 'unreliable fingerprint evidence'.

Two mistakes in one case still not admitted by SCRO and many of the UK fingerprint organisations are still in denial.

The current controversy has been raging for six years and other appeals, like the Alan McNamara case in Greater Manchester, are unlikely to do other than fan the flames.

I would argue that for the National Fingerprint Board to become involved in arguing the rights or wrongs of individual cases smacks of 'fiddling while Rome burns'.

The underlying issues about integrity, openness and accountability are not going to go away and no matter what you do you are unlikely to satisfy the various protagonists.

In respect of conflict resolution I believe that your Board should facilitate procedures that have the dual aims of ensuring:

- That mistakes are openly admitted.
- That national/international agreements are in place to deal with disputed fingerprints.

Closely aligned to this I see clearly defined national standards, good practice, and quality assurance procedures as essential elements.

It also appears that the National Council for Forensic Practitioners has an important role to play.

On a personal level I must say that I do not believe that fingerprinting will ever be universally accepted as a Forensic Science while the Police Service continues to exert such overwhelming influence over the profession.

Time is long overdue for Fingerprinting to join the other forensic sciences within the 'Forensic Science Service'.

This said I am willing to contribute to any constructive debate on these issues.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of help.

Yours sincerely,

Iain A J McKie