

Prints case investigator to head inquiry

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THE man who conducted the investigation into the Shirley McKie fingerprint case in Scotland will head the inquiry into the Metropolitan Police's handling of the collapsed cases against the royal butlers.

Senior Scotland Yard detectives hope that Bill Taylor, a Scot and former chief inspector of constabulary in Scotland, will clear the force of any fundamental wrongdoing leading to Paul Burrell and Harold Brown walking free from court.

The legal cases against Mr Burrell and Mr Brown are estimated to have cost (pounds) 2m and ended in one of the biggest legal fiascos in years.

Mr Taylor, a former Blairgowrie High School pupil with more than 30 years of service with the Met, has investigated a number of high- profile police issues in both Scotland and England and will examine in detail the actions of police who believed their cases against Mr Burrell and Mr Brown were sound.

After the intervention of the Queen in the Burrell case, when at the eleventh hour she recalled her conversation with the former servant over his retention of some of Princess Diana's items for "safe keeping", the trial collapsed.

Mr Brown's case collapsed this week after prosecutors believed that if the Queen trusted Mr Burrell, and Mr Burrell had authorised the disposal of the golden dhow he was accused of stealing, then Mr Brown had a defence to theft.

There is concern that the Metropolitan Police has acted too deferentially to members of the royal family during its investigations.

In February, 2002, although officially retired, Mr Taylor investigated the fingerprint bureau of the Scottish Criminal Record Office following public concern over the Shirley McKie case.

Constable McKie had been charged with perjury after it was alleged that she visited a crime scene to which she had been refused entry.

An important element in the case against her was evidence provided by SCRO that the mark of a fingerprint found at the crime scene matched her fingerprints.