

The 'Shirley McKie Case': Damaging Internet Debate

While **some** of the contributors supporting SCRO in the ongoing internet debate might think themselves extremely clever as they seek to defend the indefensible and denigrate experts of proven competence and honesty the fact is that their undignified and negative debate is seriously damaging fingerprints.

I am not naive enough to believe that their ramblings will influence the majority of experts who are capable of evaluating the evidence before them. The real danger lies in the ammunition they are providing for critics of fingerprinting by their lies, innuendo, flippancy and self justification.

Far from serving the profession they continue to undermine it in the eyes of critics and the public in general and are causing untold damage.

I doubt if there has ever been such an unedifying public debate among 'experts' who would claim to be forensic scientists. The rest of the sciences must be looking on in amazement as the profession appears to seek to tear itself apart.

That a serious debate is required to bring clarity to the purposely created confusion is undeniable. Unfortunately the present one does not fulfil that function. Why should experts contribute to a debate where their opinions are ignored and they are subjected to personal attack without a shred of evidence?

I am not arguing against debate or SCRO having a voice in that debate but believe that the only way forward is for informed, intelligent and courteous discussion among professionals in an appropriate less emotionally charged forum.

The fingerprint profession itself is in the dock and certain experts appear intent on destroying the profession in the pursuit of their own narrow self interest.

It is a fact that more and more experts are being challenged in our courts and are often found wanting. Only last week two expert witnesses in England were grilled on the Shirley McKie and other contentious cases and the veracity of their evidence was lost among a welter of accusation much of it provided from the ongoing debate. The line, *'well of course fingerprint evidence is only a matter of opinion'*, had a very familiar ring to it. We cannot blame the judge or the jury if confusion leads to the guilty escaping punishment, injustice to the innocent or a devaluing of expert evidence.

While obtaining a judicial enquiry will help bring clarity to the many political issues in Scotland I believe it is the responsibility of the Fingerprint Society and IAI to help bring this pantomime to an end. The loss of fingerprint evidence as a major trusted crime prevention and detection tool would be bad enough. Its loss because of the self interested actions of a few of its own experts would be a tragedy.