

Scandal drove Shirley to the brink of suicide

THE father of Shirley McKie has lifted the lid on his daughter's "agony" ahead of a fateful week in the family's 15-year fight for justice.

Iain McKie hopes that the public inquiry report into the fingerprint scandal that drove his daughter to the brink of suicide can bring closure to the traumatic ordeal he says has now marked many lives.

The Fingerprint Inquiry Scotland, chaired by retired Northern Ireland appeal court judge, Rt Hon Sir Anthony Campbell, is set to announce its findings this Wednesday.

It's understood the dossier could make strong criticisms of the way forensic evidence is gathered and handled, giving recommendations that may have international implications.

Last night Mr McKie, a retired police superintendent, explained: "People need to start taking some responsibility."

"The system was seeking to crush my daughter. That's something no father can accept."

Shirley, from Troon, Ayrshire, was accused of leaving a fingerprint at the Kilmarnock home of murder victim Marion Ross in 1997.

She denied she had ever been in the house but was initially suspended,

EXCLUSIVE

By Euan Duguid

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sacked, then arrested by Strathclyde Police.

Ms McKie challenged the findings of fingerprint experts working for the Scottish Criminal Record Office and was later cleared of perjury in 1999.

The case, however, cast a shadow over the Scottish forensic system and with continuing public concern, Scottish Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill announced in March 2008 that a public inquiry was to be held.

The inquiry has since examined the steps taken to identify and verify fingerprints associated with and leading up to the court case against Ms McKie in 1999.

With the announcement looming, last night Mr McKie revealed his family are steeling themselves for what they hope is the final act of a traumatic saga.

"Shirley has been unable to escape the almost constant attention for 15 years.

"She's trying to lead as quiet a life as she can in Troon but whenever the issue is raised again it brings back the same old fear and pain."

Mr McKie continued: "She didn't want the inquiry. She just wanted it all to go away."

When the inquiry



■ Shirley McKie (above) and her father Iain (left) have said they'll accept the outcome of the inquiry.

opened in October 2008, Mr McKie said he and his daughter would "accept" the findings.

He stands by that assertion but last night said: "I'm expecting other people to do the same."

"That would include the Government, the Crown Office, the Police and the fingerprint authorities."

"They need to publicly accept these recommendations."

"I don't know what the

recommendations are and while I hope it will criticise those who deserve it I also hope it will point the way forward for fingerprinting and the forensic sciences in the UK and further afield.

"We hope the system will finally have the courage and the morality to listen and act."

"Real change is required in the way we use and prepare expert evidence in Scotland, the UK and internationally. Unless that happens then, quite bluntly, the report's wasted."

Despite insisting he now wants to draw a line under the affair, Mr McKie stressed: "Marion Ross was brutally killed and that has never been properly investigated by the police."

"The whole thing that really matters in all of this that the murderer of Marion Ross is found."

"That has been lost in all of this."

■ January 1997: Marion Ross murdered on January 8 in her Kilmarnock home. Shirley McKie denies leaving her fingerprint at murder scene.

■ March 1998: Shirley McKie arrested in "dawn raid" and charged with perjury.

■ May 1999: Unanimously cleared of charges of perjury.

■ December 1999: Discharged on medical grounds. Successfully fights

police decision not to give her full pension.

■ June 2000: Justice minister Jim Wallace confirms print was not hers.

■ February 2003: Loses action against Strathclyde Police.

■ December 2003: Allowed to take civil case against Scottish Executive.

■ April 2004: Strathclyde Police demand £23,000 in legal costs from Ms McKie.

■ February 2006: Ms McKie accepts £750,000 from the Scottish Executive.

■ April 2006: Justice 1 Parliamentary Inquiry started.

■ October 2008: Public Inquiry is announced. Proceedings start early in 2009.

■ December 2011: The findings of the public Inquiry expected to be announced on Wednesday.