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HEADLINE: Death house puzzle;

Police chiefs pressed me but I did not leave fingerprint, detective tells murder trial

Arnot McWhinnie

FEMALE detective yesterday claimed her bosses put pressure on her to say she had been in a house where a murder was committed when she knew she had not.

Detective Constable Shirley Cardwell's thumbprint was found in the house in Kilmarnock where 51-year-old Marion Ross was murdered and robbed of a tin box containing money.

A box was later found at the home of David Asbury, 21, now standing trial for murder, but his defence has suggested Miss Ross's fingerprints were 'planted' on it.

Constable Carswell, 34, agreed there had been no suggestion that her own thumb print had been 'planted' in the house but insisted she had never been inside the building.

She rejected all suggestions that she left her print while going in to take a 'peep' at the body and refused to accept the thumb print was hers.

When asked how it could have got in the house, she said: 'I am not an expert. All I know is that I didn't put it there.' Constable Cardwell also claimed her treatment at the hands of senior officers was unfair: 'I have been in the police ten years and I am an honest police officer. I just felt I should be believed.'

She said she was suffering from stress and added: 'When you know you haven't been somewhere and they say you have, it gets to you.'

At the High Court in Glasgow yesterday, Constable Cardwell admitted she went to the death house twice during her inquiries but never went further in than the porch.

Her arrival and departure were officially logged by an officer on duty at the door.

She admitted she had wanted to go into the house because it would have been useful in the inquiry to see the interior.

But permission was requested from the detective in charge and she and a colleague were told it was not suitable to go in because experts were still working inside.

The trial before Lord Dawson continues.

Detective Constable Cardwell admitted that in another major inquiry in 1993 involving the death of a child she contaminated evidence.

Her fingerprint was found on a polythene bag which contained the dead baby and she admitted she had handled it without wearing gloves.

Asked Mr Dewar: 'Is it not the case that in the present case your curiosity got the better of you and despite instructions to the contrary you went into the house and touched the door? There is no other explanation for the print being there.'

Replied Constable Cardwell: 'No. I can't give you an explanation. I have no reason to lie. If I was in the house I would have said.'