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**HEADLINE: Spinster's killer jailed for life**

David Asbury was jailed for life yesterday for the savage murder of spinster Marion Ross after a majority verdict that vindicated the police, who had been accused by Asbury of framing him with a fingerprint.

He had claimed that an ornamental house-shaped Marks and Spencer biscuit tin found in his house was taken to the mortuary so Miss Ross's print could be put on it.

The jury at the High Court in Glasgow, however, rejected the allegations and found the 21-year-old guilty of murdering Miss Ross and stealing the tin and money from her. The trial had lasted 13 days.

The 6ft 2in Asbury, of Castle Drive, Kilbirnie, showed no emotion during the harrowing case or when he was sentenced to life by Lord Dawson.

His mother, Mrs Amelia Crisp, 40, sobbed in the back of the court as she watched him being led away in handcuffs.

Still unresolved in the case is the mystery of how a woman detective's fingerprint came to be found on a door in the murder house just a few feet away from Miss Ross's body.

Detective Constable Shirley Cardwell denied she had ever been in the house despite the universal belief that fingerprint matching is infallible.

During the trial, Constable Cardwell was warned by the prosecutor, Mr Alan Dewar, about perjury, and now the Crown Office is understood to be examining her evidence with a view to a possible perjury prosecution.

Constable Cardwell, 34, also faces being carpeted by Strathclyde's chief constable.

Miss Ross, 51, a familiar if reclusive figure who always wore a mustard-coloured anorak and pompadour hat, had lived in her semi-detached bungalow at 43 Irvine Road, Kilmarnock, for most of her life, looking after her parents until they died.

Asbury, a joiner who had previously worked on an extension to Miss Ross's house, conned his way in on January 6 by pretending that his car had broken down and that he wanted to phone his mother.

He forced her to the ground, sat on her, crushing her ribs in the process, and stabbed her in the eye with a pair of scissors, which he also left embedded in her throat.

His motive was to steal a nest-egg of cash Miss Ross kept in a Marks and Spencer biscuit tin.

Because Miss Ross was very security conscious and there were no signs of forced entry, detectives concluded she knew her killer and opened the door to him.

For some time her two cousins, 51-year-old security officer James Campbell and his brother William, 47, were under suspicion. In fact James Campbell for a while was the prime suspect because he had access to the house, his prints were found, and there were discrepancies in his work logs.

Detectives questioned him for hours, searched his house, dug up his garden, and for weeks had his shoes and almost his entire wardrobe away for forensic examination.

Mr William Campbell, who did odd jobs and gardening for Miss Ross, was also questioned about his movements at the time of the murder and why his prints were found on a vacuum cleaner near the body.

He also had to explain to police the origin of a tiny bloodstain found in his home.

During the investigation, police and forensic experts discovered 428 fingerprints at the murder scene, of which 235 were so incomplete and fragmented they couldn't identify their owners.

Some belonged to tradesmen who had worked in the house over the years, joiners, plumbers, decorators, and an Artex man.

A cookery book contained 10 prints and was traced to the shop where it was bought.

Most of the prints were from customers browsing through the book but one was identified as that of the girl who sold it.

Asbury first came to the attention of the police when his worried mother reported he had disappeared, leaving a suicide note. Along with the note was a gold crucifix and instructions on where to find his money.

He reappeared the next day, and became a suspect when detectives discovered he had worked with his grandfather, Mr Nimrod Asbury, when his firm built an extension to Miss Ross's house.

A search of Asbury's bedroom revealed a house-shaped biscuit tin containing £1400.

Some of the cash was in £100 bundles - exactly the same way Miss Ross bundled her notes when she was a bank clerkess.

A fingerprint examination revealed both Miss Ross's and Asbury's prints on the box.

Another print found on a Christmas greetings label in Miss Ross's living room was also identified as Asbury's.

Asbury was questioned for nearly four hours, at first answering "No comment" to every question but later claiming he had not been in the house since helping to build the extension two years before.

Eventually, however, he admitted that the day before the murder his car had broken down 100yds from the house. He said Miss Ross had let him in to use the phone and afterwards showed him the decorated and furnished extension he had helped to build.

Asbury, backed up by his mother and his stepfather, Mr William Crisp, 35, also claimed that the Marks and Spencer biscuit tin had been in his home for three years.

He had no explanation as to how Miss Ross's fingerprint came to be on it, although during the trial his defence counsel, Mr William Totten, suggested several times that the tin could have been taken to the mortuary by police so that the dead woman's hand could be put on it.

Asked to explain the peculiar way the notes were tied up with elastic bands, Asbury said his grandfather bundled his notes the same way and had showed him how.

He said the £1400 cash was his life savings and was to have been spent on a new car.

He wrote the suicide note, he claimed, not because he was befuddled by the terrible thing he had done, but because he was a "wee bit depressed and wasn't thinking straight".

Police inquiries also re-vealed that Asbury had been seen prowling around the area in October the previous year.

A neighbour said Asbury came to her house asking for a tow rope despite the fact there was a garage just four houses away. She got the distinct impression he was looking for an empty house.

GRAPHIC: A grim-faced David Asbury is led away in handcuffs after yesterday's verdict. Picture: IAIN McLELLAN; Marion Ross, above, a familiar sight in her neighbourhood because of her slightly eccentric garb, pictured below, during a reconstruction of the crime by police