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HEADLINE: Jury told prints did not match

An American fingerprint expert has told a jury a thumb print found at the scene of a murder was definitely not that of an Ayrshire policewoman who has been accused of lying at the subsequent trial.

Detective Constable Shirley McKie, 36, has denied at the High Court in Glasgow ever being inside the house where Miss Marion Ross, 51, was found murdered in Kilmarnock two years ago.

Ms McKie is charged with perjury by telling a murder trial jury a fingerprint found in the house in Irvine Road after it had been sealed by police did not belong to her.

Experts had told the jury her left thumb print was found on the bathroom door pillar.

However, Mr Pat Wertheim, 52, brought by the defence from Salem, Oregon, yesterday said he compared Ms McKie's left thumb print with the print found at the crime scene. He said: "The latent print at the crime scene was definitely not made by Shirley McKie's left thumb."

Ms McKie has denied sneaking into the house to look at the murder scene while it was not guarded. She told a jury yesterday her life had become a nightmare. She had been "humiliated" after being arrested by her own colleagues.

Weeping, she told Mr Donald Findlay QC, defending: "I thought at first it was one big mistake and it's not me who made it. Up until then, I believed fingerprint evidence to be infallible but not now."

Ms McKie said that after being charged with perjury, she had been left isolated and given no support from her colleagues. She said she came from a "police family". Her father, Ian, is a retired superintendent and her brother a sergeant at police training college.

David Asbury, 21, of Kilbirnie, Ayrshire, was jailed for life in May 1997 for Miss Ross's murder.

Mr Wertheim, who has been comparing fingerprints since 1979 as a police officer in Texas and Arizona, studied the prints when he came to Britain as a guest lecturer at the National Fingerprint Society's annual conference in Liverpool in March.

He said the Scottish Criminal Records Office and New Scotland Yard worked on a threshold of 16 points of similarity when comparing prints. He claimed he found only five when examining Ms McKie's prints.

His evidence continues today.