

# SCRO cover-up

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Posted by [Pat A. Wertheim](#) on December 30, 1999 at 21:05:31:

Dear friends and fellow fingerprint experts,

I have read with interest and humility, and a measure of appreciation for your support, your comments on this case. When I first travelled to Glasgow to look at the crime scene mark, I did so at the initial request of Mr. Iain McKie on behalf of his daughter, Shirley. My original commitment to Mr. McKie was that I would examine the mark for signs of "forgery" at no charge. Because true fingerprint forgery is so exceedingly rare as to be virtually nonexistent, I anticipated finding the mark to be a legitimate touch, representative of the contact of friction skin with the surface on which it was developed. Such was the case. Everyone, even Shirley McKie herself, accepted the mark as hers.

Imagine my total shock on discovering the erroneous identification -- identified and verified by four SCRO "experts" and subsequently confirmed by a defense "expert." Nothing in my career prepared me for the deep conflicting emotions I felt. And yet ethics dictated a clear course of action. No circumstances could excuse my decision were I to ignore such a serious affront to our profession.

You have read the insightful comments of Dave Grieve in his editorial, "Built By Many Hands," published in the September/October issue of the Journal of Forensic Identification. You have read the story on these [www.onin.com](#) pages, and perhaps on the [www.scafo.org](#) website. You may have seen presentations made at several fingerprint conferences and meetings around the United States. It is a simple story. Shirley McKie, a police officer, was charged with a felony offense on the basis of one fingerprint identification alone. All of the other evidence in the case clearly exonerated her. And yet, so powerful is belief in fingerprints, that one identification outweighed all of the conflicting evidence. The police and the prosecutor charged ahead, arresting Ms. McKie and taking the case to trial. But worse, she was treated with a vengeance reserved only for police gone bad, harder by far than the treatment normally meted out to common criminals.

There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that Shirley McKie is absolutely innocent of the charges made against her. But her innocence aside, even a guilty person has a fundamental right to be confronted with, and convicted upon, the basis of righteous evidence. There is no room in a free and just society for the use of bogus "evidence" in order to convict anyone, no matter how heinous the offense or how certain the prosecution of the defendant's guilt. There can be no compromise on this principle.

For an "expert" to claim an identification between the crime scene mark in this case and Shirley McKie's fingerprints is sheer incompetence. To testify knowingly to this erroneous identification, as some believe happened at Ms. McKie's trial, is perjury.

For the police to cover up the mistake is despicable. For a whole police administration to blindly support their "experts" without seeking a competent outside review is foolhardy.

But now the case is taking on an even more sinister aspect beyond these concerns. I received an email from a fingerprint expert, unknown to me prior to his query earlier this week. He confronted me with the information that he was advised by the SCRO that the images on these internet pages are not those from the Shirley McKie case! The implication is that I have been substituting some other prints in order to justify myself. Thank goodness this expert confronted me, instead of blindly believing the SCRO.

I assure you, good readers, that the images on this site and the SCAFO site are photographs of the original crime scene mark and the inked print of Shirley McKie. They are not the photographs taken by the Strathclyde Police or the SCRO, and thus, in a very literal sense, are not the images presented by the SCRO in court. I was, of course, not provided with their negatives. Rather, the images on these sites are scanned from photographs I made myself of the crime scene mark on the very doorframe that was introduced in the trial, and from inked prints I took myself from Shirley McKie. These are images of the actual crime scene mark and the fingerprint of Shirley McKie that the SCRO "experts" testified matched that mark.

If the SCRO tells you that these are not the images used at the trial, ask them if these photographs don't, in fact, accurately represent the crime scene mark and the inked print of Shirley McKie. If the SCRO persists in their denial, ask them for copies of the mark and the inked print. Judge for yourself who is being open and honest and who is not based on the responses you receive.

When you see a shadow cast on the cave wall but cannot turn and look behind you, you have to try to interpret reality from the limited information available to you. If the shadow looks like a monster, be afraid. There is a sinister shadow in the SCRO's actions in this case. I know not what casts the shadow, but I am afraid of what it portends for the rest of us in our attempts to maintain a high ethical standard in the practice of our science.

We must police our own ranks. We cannot tolerate a perversion of our science by those who would brazenly misrepresent fingerprints to the rest of society for their own petty justification.

What drives the SCRO so fanatically in their denial? What is casting the shadow on the wall? Perhaps there is more to this affair than simply the Shirley McKie case. Perhaps it is time to ask more serious questions.

In the New York State Police less than a decade ago, a mentality was found to have developed that permitted criminal abuse of fingerprints by the "experts" in their zeal to gain convictions. Is this irrational denial by the SCRO of a mistake really an attempt to fend off further examinations by outside experts?

The SCRO was wrong in identifying the mark as having been made by Shirley McKie. They were wrong in testifying to the "identification" in court. They are wrong

in trying to cover it up. And they are wrong in their allegations that I have misrepresented the images on this and other websites.

It is time for an unbiased intermediary to step in and try to identify the monster casting the shadow, and then to slay it. The consequences of refusing to confront the monster are too horrible to imagine.

Thank you for your continued support.

Respectfully,

Pat A. Wertheim