

The not so silent witness - Developing a forensic science oral history project:

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Forensic Science is a topic which captures the imagination of the public, they engage out of interest and exposure to both popular culture and the ever present media coverage of the use of science within the criminal justice system. Currently the provision of forensic science in the UK is undergoing an enormous period of change. The closure of one of the longest running forensic providers (the Forensic Science Service) after 80 years and the potential loss of both the collective knowledge of practitioners could have a devastating effect on the heritage of this profession. There is currently no formal mechanism to gather and record the history and development of forensic science in the UK. In particular we are at risk of losing the extensive, unique and highly informative personal experiences of practitioners that can be used to enrich the written record.

The UK has one of the richest heritages in the world in the development of Forensic Science as a profession. Early developments in forensic medical and toxicological studies, the linkage of fingerprints to the individual and the development of DNA fingerprinting were all pioneered in the UK. The Centre for Forensic Science at the University of Strathclyde also has a long history in the use of scientific analysis towards the investigation of criminal events and is intimately linked with the development of forensic science in the UK over recent decades. From its earliest days the University has had an association with high profile case work. Frederick Penny 1839-1870 professor of chemistry at Anderson's University, Strathclydes precursor institution, worked on notorious Victorian cases such as that of Madeline Smith and that involving Dr Edward Pritchard, the last man to be publically executed in Glasgow. In 1880 Dr Henry Faulds, who studied at Anderson's university, suggested a connection between fingerprints and the individual and in more recent times Professor Brian Caddy provided evidence in the Birmingham six bombing, Guilford 4 case and the Oklahoma bombing as well as reviewing the use of Low template DNA across the UK judicial system following the Omagh bombing trial. Strathclyde thus, occupies a truly unique position in the historical development of forensic science education, policy, practice and research in Scotland and further afield. The current Professors, Jim Fraser and Niamh Nic Daeid, continue to promote Strathclyde's strong link with professional practice and have independently worked on cases such as the Yorkshire Ripper, Rachel Nickell, Damilola Taylor, the McKie fingerprint inquiry, the Roger Casement Diaries and recent terrorist cases such as the transatlantic airline terrorism attack and the Dhiren Barot case. The historical footprint combined with the current change environment formed the basis and impetus for a new research project involving the development of a forensic science oral history project by CFS in collaboration with Professor Arthur Mclvor and Dr David Walker of the Scottish Oral History Centre also at Strathclyde (<http://www.strath.ac.uk/humanities/research/history/sohc/>).

The project, now completed its pilot phase, seeks to preserve and make available the invaluable forensic science heritage developed in the UK for the inspiration of current and future generations. The project so far has digitally recording and preserved a number of oral narratives from within this sector and as far as we are aware this is the first project of its type in the UK. The project develops the scope for a dynamic and novel oral history centred on practicing and retired forensic science professionals. The materials collected already form a rich base for research, historical information and public engagement.

The project as a concept, addresses the deficiency in the provision of any formal record of the memories of the individuals engaged within the forensic science sector over the past 60 years and our aspiration is to present this as a 'living history' for current and future researchers. The creation of a series of linked timelines (relating to developments in forensic science, historical developments and specific judicial and legal developments/cases occurring with in the same time frame) is the next phase of work and will create a context within which the oral histories can be placed. This will enrich the engagement opportunity and experience by members of

the public, researchers and those from outside the forensic science community. This approach will place the material and significant landmarks of forensic science development in the context of other relevant events during the same time period. Ultimately, the development of an interactive website for the project will create a point of information and contact for users of the oral history archive.

The current cohort of interviewees consisted of some of the most notable forensic scientists in the UK whose range of experience in forensic biology, chemistry and police work has impacted positively on some of the most notorious crimes witnessed in the last 50 years. With birth dates ranging from 1924 to 1967 their testimonies cover a wide range of topics from early educational influences and latter progression in the development of new techniques to the changes in the structure of forensic science provision and education. Many of the Issues that are associated with the presentation of expert testimony in court are also discussed. The interviews provide insight of the personal commitment, professionalism and dedication that is required for this career. Important case work is also cited such as Stephen Lawrence, the Provisional Irish Republican Army bombing campaigns, Robert Black, Lynette Whyte, Roberto Calvi amongst many others. The testimony graphically reveals the often painstaking examinations that have to be conducted in laboratories as well as the tragic outcomes that are found at scenes of crime. One interview was conducted within Strathclyde University with all others conducted at the respondent's homes. All of the interviews were recorded digitally (48kHz 16 bit) using a Marantz PMD660 and two external microphones with XLR sockets. The recordings are now archived and available in WAV and MP3 formats and safely preserved on an external hard drive, CD-R and computer hard-drive. Full copyright clearance exists for all recordings with only minor variations and therefore can be analysed and utilised by future researchers.

Currently the following people have had their oral histories recorded:

Sue Black, Professor of Anatomy and Forensic Anthropology and past President of the British Association of Human Identification (BAHID), and the current President of Association for Science Education (Scotland)

Alistair R. Brownlie, OBE, LLB, SSC, NP

Brian Caddy, Professor of Forensic Science and Member of the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission (SCCRC)

Jim Fraser, Professor of Forensic Science and Director of the University of Strathclyde's Centre for Forensic Science

Angela Gallop, Professor of Forensic Science and Chief Executive of Axiom International Limited

Christopher Gannicliffe, Lead Forensic Scientist (General Biology) at Scottish Police Services Authority Forensic Services

James Govan, Retired police officer with the Scottish Police Services Authority

Graham Jackson, Professor of Forensic Science, Metropolitan Police Forensic Science Laboratory and Forensic Science Service (Home Office)

Paul Millen, Paul Millen Associates and former Head of Scientific Support for Surrey Police

Ann Priston, Biologist with the Metropolitan Police Laboratory and Forensic Science Service (Home Office), current president of the forensic science society

Further Information about the research work can be obtained from Professor Niamh Nic Daeid (n.nicdaeid@strath.ac.uk).