

19th March 2009
FORENSIC INVESTIGATION “CRIME IN FOCUS”

Concentrating on the photographic elements associated with his work, this title neatly describes the Presentation by Peter Goadby -Watt, Head of the Forensic Faculty of the Metropolitan Police Academy at Hendon.

To a packed audience Peter explained that the Metropolitan Police is London’s biggest employer, with 55,000 staff. There are 35,000 police officers, 2,500 PCSOs and 17,500 civilian police staff – all with a huge £3.5 Billion budget.

The Forensic Services Directorate (FSD aka SCD4), once termed the Directorate of Forensic Services until it became confused with a certain sofa company, comprises 1,500 “Borough” based Crime Scene Examiners, 80 specialist photographers, 200 fingerprint examiners and 15 DNA Scientists



In 1871 Parliament decreed that all prisoners should be photographed and by 1880, 14,000 prisoners were on file. It was not until 1901 however, that crime scenes were first photographed – and that was using a confiscated camera!

With a Home Office grant of just 19s 10d the first Scotland Yard photographic “experiment” with a full time photographer was launched in 1902, expanding in 1905 to a full department - still utilising confiscated equipment but now with a budget of £100.00. 1924 saw the purchase of the first 35mm ‘Leica’ camera for £79.00 and between 1955 and 1981 the branch was civilianised, moving to SE17, Elephant and Castle, in 1986.

Now known as the Specialist Evidence Recovery Imaging Service (SERIS), the service continues to develop. While many techniques used remain the same, advances in technology have enabled many more facilities to be available.

The most challenging factor however remains the availability, and type, of light. Accuracy is essential and it is for this reason that the service took a while to move from wet film to digital photography as both achieve different results.

Surveillance photography has its own specific protocols. Which of these two photographs is adequate for a conviction?



Would you stand and take a photograph with a missile headed your way?

The Metropolitan Police SERIS enjoy a world wide reputation and are active all over the world, attending major disasters, such as the Bosnian War and Asian Tsunami, to aid victim identification and train local officers in forensic techniques.

With such grisly subject matter Peter and his team work hard to remain dispassionate, objective and professional as it would be very easy to become too involved in personal tragedies.

We thank Peter very much for his time and applaud him and his team for their success.