



Questioned Documents Service



Key Forensic
Services Limited

A comprehensive range of document and handwriting examination services, designed to support the investigation of criminal and civil offences.

We have a highly-experienced team of Documents Examiners, many of whom have over 20 years experience as practitioners and are accustomed to giving evidence in court. The team has been involved in a number of high-profile investigations including the crimes committed by Dr. Harold Shipman and the Srebrenica war crimes.

Within the Questioned Documents Service we provide:

Handwriting Comparisons

Examinations carried out by a handwriting analyst generally involve the comparison of a handwriting specimen (provable) against questioned (disputed) handwriting. When handwriting of disputed authorship is scientifically compared with a sample of handwriting of known authorship, both similarities and differences are found. The handwriting expert will assess these findings and provide an opinion regarding authorship of the document.

Signature Analysis

Although signatures usually contain only relatively small amounts of handwriting they are often written in an individual stylised manner and a scientific comparison with appropriate specimen signatures can yield useful evidence of authorship. A lack of legibility in a signature is not a limitation provided that the writer produces signatures in a consistent manner.

In signature comparisons the features of the questioned/ forged signature(s) - construction, shape, proportions and fluency are assessed by the expert and then

compared with the same features in the specimen signatures. An assessment of the significance of any similarities or differences that are found, is then made in order to provide an opinion regarding the authorship of the signature.

Alterations and Obliterations

It may be possible to determine:

- Whether a document has been completed using more than one ink.
- Whether any alterations have been made to a document - such as changing a date or altering an amount.
- What is present underneath an obliterated entry - the obliteration could have been made by scribbling over with a pen or by using correction fluid.
- The sequence in which intersecting lines have been written. This can be useful, for example, in determining whether one signature was added before or after another one.
- The text of a pencil entry that has been subsequently erased.

Word Processed and Type-Written Documents

- Identify the means of production of the disputed documents; for example, whether it was typed on a manual typewriter, a single-element typewriter or whether it was produced using an ink-jet printer or a laser printer.
- Whether there are any features of the typing on the disputed document that can be linked to other documents of known origin or to particular typewriters or printers. For instance, damage caused by wear and tear and heavy use can produce imperfect typescript or printer output.
- Typewriter ribbons can also be examined. This particularly applies to ribbons which are intended to be used only once and then discarded, and to correction ribbons.
- As a result of these examinations the expert can give an opinion as to how likely it is that a particular machine was used to produce a suspect document.

Counterfeit Documents

In order to determine the authenticity of a suspected counterfeit document, it is usually helpful to examine a genuine specimen document to establish how it is properly produced. Various factors will be considered by the document examiner, for example:

- The type of paper used (physical properties, optical properties)
- Security features in the paper, such as a watermark
- The printing process used (including use and identification of photocopiers, conventional printing techniques, computer printers)
- The presence of other relevant evidence such as perforations
- Microscopic analysis conducted may reveal tiny imperfections which can link counterfeit/forged documents one to another and possibly to the master document from which they were copied.

Dating of Documents

Determining the date of creation of a document or specific entry is rarely possible. There is certainly no general method for dating ink or typescript. It may be possible to find indirect evidence of age using:

- Electrostatic Detection Apparatus (ESDA)
 - the document may bear impressions of handwriting from some other document of known age.
- Paper examination - the letterheads and watermarks of business or personal stationery will be modified from time to time by the manufacturer. Specimens of such paper from the appropriate time may assist in determining whether a document could have been in existence at that time.
- Typescript - comparison of typewritten documents produced by an organisation over a period of time may show whether a particular typewriter was in use at the relevant time or only more recently. This technique can also be extended to documents produced on a computer printer.

A note on Graphology

Graphology is not a practice which we undertake. It is a means of analysing handwriting with the aim of interpreting the personality of the author, although there is no scientific research which supports the reliability or effectiveness of this. As scientists, we do not consider graphology to be a reliable method of determining authorship of handwriting and signatures.

Document expert profiles

Steve Cosslett BSc (Hons)

Steve holds the degree of Bachelor of Science. He has been a Document Examiner since 1983.

He has examined thousands of cases from a wide variety of investigators mainly the police forces of England and Wales, HM Revenue and Customs, the Benefits Agency, and for solicitors in both criminal defence and civil proceedings. He has been trained to act as a Single Joint Expert. He is experienced in all aspects of Document Examination, especially the comparison of handwritings, signatures, typescripts, photocopies, counterfeit documents, papers, inks and alterations.

He is an experienced witness and has given evidence on numerous occasions at the Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey), Crown Courts, Magistrates Courts, Industrial Tribunals and Police Disciplinary Hearings, and at the Special Criminal Court in Dublin. He has given evidence in a number of high profile cases including the Britannia Park Fraud Trial, and in connection with Operation Bangor, the large scale theft of cheques from a Royal Mail sorting office. He has also worked on a number of other high profile cases such as the enquiry into the postal votes in the Aston Council elections, and the misuse of public funds by NHS employees.

Kate Barr

After starting her career at the Metropolitan Police Forensic Science Laboratory (MPFSL) in 1992, Kate has examined over a thousand cases from a wide variety of investigations and is experienced in all aspects of forensic document examination. She is an experienced witness and has given evidence on numerous occasions at the Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey), Royal Courts of Justice, Crown Courts, Magistrates Courts, Industrial Tribunals and Police Disciplinary Hearings. She has given evidence twice at the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague in relation to the Srebrenica Massacre, leading to the convictions of nine individuals, including the first two convictions for genocide. Kate has also undertaken work for and appeared on the BBC Newsnight programme in December 2007 in relation to the alleged fabrication of evidence by a thinktank.

Contact Us

For more information on our Questioned Documents Service, please contact our Sales & Marketing team:

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