

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of "The Expert Witness"

REFERENCE: Walls, H. J., *The Expert Witness*, John Long Ltd., London, 1972, 201 pages, £2.25.

This personal review of the career of the retired Director of the Metropolitan London Police Laboratory ("Scotland Yard") is subtitled "My Thirty Years in Forensic Science." It was, one suspects, aimed more towards the lay reader rather than the forensic scientist. Nevertheless, it will be of interest to the professional and should be read for the example it provides of how to communicate with (as opposed to lecture to) the lay person.

This ability is of vital importance to a profession whose prime function is to provide juries with complete information on which they can base important decisions. Dr. Walls in this, as in his previous book "Forensic Science," has demonstrated his talent for simplifying, with accuracy, complex concepts. A good example is his description of the problems of grouping dried blood stains and some of the newer systems for this. American readers in particular will appreciate the deliberate understatement technique which so often characterizes the style of English authors and speakers. ("... two bullets from a .45 Colt automatic had gone through Lord Vivian 45 bullets at close range are things which it is inadvisable to get in the way of.")

Although the details of the cases described will not hold the same interest for the forensic scientist as they will for the interested amateur detective, some of the descriptions will strike a responsive note on the sympathetic ears of the professional. "In the laboratory we have in the past received more often than I care to remember a bucket brimming with sloshed-in organs and a bold request for their analysis for 'poisons'." Those who have done many examinations of fire scenes will recognize the feelings which prompted, "They also often wonder why there has so often to be an icy wind on the day after a fire and why if it is not raining it has to be snowing."

This book does have a value to the forensic scientist as a personal history of the development of the forensic science service in the United Kingdom. The future researcher into the history of forensic science will be grateful to Dr. Walls for recording and preserving details which might otherwise be lost and particularly for his retrospective personal view of pioneers in the profession such as L. C. Nickolls. For this alone, this book deserves to be on the night stand if not on the desk of the forensic scientist.

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