

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Crime Scene to Court: The Essentials of Forensic Science*, Second Edition

REFERENCE: White P, editor. *Crime scene to court: the essentials of forensic science*. 2nd ed. The Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, UK, 2004, 451 pp.

Peter White describes this book as primarily for support of the teaching of forensic science; but, I agree with him that it should appeal to a much wider readership including police investigators, forensic science practitioners, and students of the courts. Chapters are authored by experienced forensic scientists, many of whom have authored more extensive works within their specialty.

The book contains chapters on: quality assurance and accreditation in forensic science laboratories, the crime scene investigation, trace and contact evidence, marks and impressions, blood-stain pattern analysis and interpretation, the forensic examination of documents, computer-based media, fire investigation, explosions, firearms, drugs of abuse, forensic toxicology, alcohol analysis, analysis of body fluids (more than just DNA), and presentation of expert forensic evidence. The chapters on computer-based media and blood spatter analysis are new to the second edition. The Table of Contents is sub-categorized and an index is fairly complete, making it easy to find needed information.

In the first chapter, Brian Caddy stresses the importance of the crime scene investigation to forensic science, and the theme is carried through most of the subsequent specialty chapters. Following along, Angela Gallop and Russell Stockdale describe a common misconception “that forensic scientists faced with a series of anonymous items can somehow plan and execute an appropriate programme of work, produce results and interpret them in a meaningful way—all without knowing the essential details of what is

alleged (and disputed), where the items came from and what their history is likely to have been.” The new chapter on computer-based media, “as traces of actions performed on a computer,” also recognizes the importance of the crime scene (computer, actually). I wish the chapter had addressed another crime scene tool, the traces on the video surveillance record, so often used by investigators today, and how they might be enhanced.

Trevor Rothwell, in the end, emphasizes the importance of the scientist’s report (more than testimony) in completing the investigation, and offers a detailed format which reflects some forward thinking: name and address, outline of circumstances, outline of scientific work carried out, list of exhibits examined, description of work carried out, interpretation of findings, conclusions, the use of assistants, and appendices (tables, charts, graphs, etc.).

Between the crime scene and court chapters, there are excellent summaries of the essentials of each technical specialty. All of the chapters are well written and accurate. None of the chapters provides sufficient detail to allow forensic scientists to begin an analysis; but the book was not intended to do so. A bibliography at the end of each chapter directs the reader to a few useful texts and articles for further reading, including useful websites.

I highly recommend the book; it would make an excellent undergraduate text and a nice resource for a wide range of readers. It is a little less valuable to American forensic scientists and students because nearly all of the authors make reference to legal and organizational matters that might apply only in the United Kingdom; nevertheless, the British perspective is informative and interesting.

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