

THE DATING OF DOCUMENTS

The dating of documents is one of the most difficult, although most frequently requested, Forensic Document examinations. Other than actually witnessing the creation of a document, it is almost impossible to determine precisely when a document was created. These notes describe some of the features of documents which can be exploited to reveal associations between documents.

Impressions

Examination of the questioned and associated documents using the sensitive method of Electrostatic Detection (ESDA) can reveal impressions of writing from other documents demonstrating if, how and when they have been in contact. It is also possible in some cases to establish the order in which documents were written.

Pen line striations

Ballpoint pens often produce microscopic striations in the pen line which in certain circumstances can be matched to allow identification of a particular pen. They can show that a pen was used continuously throughout a number of writings or documents without changing its relative position to the page.

Watermarks and other features of papers

There are a number of quality paper manufacturers who have introduced changes into watermarks over the years. Other features of paper include marks from the production process and the inclusion of ultraviolet brighteners.

Signatures

Signatures often show substantial changes over the years. If sufficient signatures are available spanning the timeframe in question it may be possible to track the changes in the signature and determine when it is most likely to have been written.

The Giles Document Laboratory

Sandpipers Hervines Road Amersham Buckinghamshire HP6 5HS United Kingdom
T 01494 726784 F 01494 724076 E agiles@gdll.co.uk I www.gdll.co.uk



Dating of inks

Non-destructive techniques can be used to demonstrate differences in inks which are apparently similar to the unaided eye. There has long been controversy over ink dating methods; however, in recent years some limited studies have gained acceptance in the Forensic Document Examiner community.

In general it is accepted that dating techniques apply to ballpoint pen inks and that it may be possible to determine whether an ink has been applied to the paper within the last 18 months or before this date.

However, this is a highly specialised area and there are no laboratories in the UK or Europe that carry out dating of inks on paper. There are a few laboratories in the USA that offer this service. We are happy to direct you to a reliable source for this work. However, it is important to note that ink dating is a destructive technique and requires removal of a significant amount of the pen line of a handwriting entry or a signature.

Typewritings and printings

The introduction of new office technologies allows certain printed documents to be dated. Changes in technologies, typestyles and microscopic differences in typefaces can be used to establish the chronology of documents.

Photocopies

Although it is not possible to date a photocopy precisely, the study of ephemeral trash marks and other marks produced by the photocopier mechanism may allow documents to be linked.

Appropriate comparison material to aid in the dating of documents

The best chance of success is found in cases where there are comparable documents. For example, if the questioned document is a letter, then other correspondence from the relevant period will allow direct comparison of papers, typewritings and printing. Where the questioned document comes from a file of papers, the entire file should be submitted for examination.