



Coroner's Court of Western Australia

**RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH**

Ref No: 15/19

*I, Barry Paul King, Deputy State Coroner, having investigated the suspected death of **Andrew Michael Watson** with an inquest held at **Perth Coroner's Court** on **11 April 2019** find that the death has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was **Andrew Michael Watson** and that death occurred **on or about 11 May 2013** in the waters of the **Indian Ocean off Scarborough** from **immersion** in the following circumstances:*

**Counsel Appearing:**

Sergeant Lyle Housiaux assisting the Coroner

**Table of Contents**

INTRODUCTION .....	2
THE DECEASED .....	3
EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE DECEASED'S DISAPPEARANCE .....	5
SEARCH FOR THE DECEASED .....	6
FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS .....	8
CONCLUSION AS TO WHETHER DEATH HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED .....	10
THE CAUSE OF THE DEATH AND HOW DEATH OCCURRED.....	11
CONCLUSION.....	12

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. Andrew Michael Watson (the deceased) was an elevator service technician who lived in a unit in Inglewood. He was last seen in the early hours of 11 May 2013.
2. On 13 January 2017, the deceased's brother, Nigel Watson (Nigel), wrote an email to the State Coroner's Office, requesting that an inquest be held into the deceased's disappearance.
3. Under section 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996* (the Act), where a person is missing and the State Coroner has reasonable cause to suspect that the person has died and that the death was a reportable death, the State Coroner may direct that the suspected death of the person be investigated. Where the State Coroner has given such a direction, a coroner must hold an inquest into the circumstances of the suspected death of the person and, if the coroner finds that the death of the person has been established beyond all reasonable doubt, into how the death occurred and the cause of the death.
4. On 16 January 2017, the State Coroner wrote to the officer in charge of the Missing Persons Team of the Western Australia Police, requesting a report containing information upon which she could have reasonable cause to suspect that the deceased had died and that his death was a reportable death.
5. On 6 November 2017, the State Coroner received the requested report from the Missing Persons Team, and on 22 December 2017 she directed that the circumstances of the suspected death of the deceased be investigated.
6. On 11 April 2019, I held an inquest at the Perth Coroner's Court into the deceased's suspected death. The documentary evidence comprised a brief of evidence which included a report by Detective Senior Constable Christopher Hitchen, together with relevant material.<sup>1</sup> Detective Senior Constable Hitchen provided oral

---

<sup>1</sup> Exhibit 1

evidence,<sup>2</sup> as did the deceased's friend and work colleague, Steve Thurston.<sup>3</sup>

7. I have found that the death of the deceased has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that death occurred by way of suicide. I have found that the cause of death was immersion.

## **THE DECEASED**

8. The deceased was born on 22 July 1966 in Lincoln in the county of Lincolnshire in England, so he was 46 years old when he disappeared. He had eight siblings.
9. The deceased migrated to Australia in 1968 with his parents and siblings. They settled in High Wycombe and the deceased attended school there. When he was young, he was interested in fitness and athletics, and he developed a love for the beach though he was not a strong swimmer.<sup>4</sup>
10. The deceased did not obtain a trade qualification, but until about 2009 he worked for 20 years as a technician for a major lift and elevator company in the Perth metropolitan area.
11. In 2006 the deceased married Deborah Kaye Watson. They separated after two or three years, but it is not clear whether they formally divorced.<sup>5</sup> They had no children. Following the separation, the deceased would regularly call Nigel or one of his sisters late at night to chat about how unhappy he was.
12. A short time after the breakdown of his marriage, the deceased sold his house and travelled to Europe and the United Kingdom for about six months. Upon his return, he began working for another elevator company, where he usually worked nights.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> ts 3 - 13 per Hitchen, C G J

<sup>3</sup> ts 13 - 18 per Thurston S A

<sup>4</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6A

<sup>5</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 1; cf. Exhibit 1, Tab 6A

<sup>6</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6A

13. The deceased was a smoker and drinker, and he became a heavy drinker at times in the period after the marriage breakdown. He smoked cannabis recreationally and experimented with drugs such as cocaine in the 12 months before he went missing. Despite that lifestyle, he remained reasonably fit and healthy.<sup>7</sup>
14. The deceased had not been diagnosed with any psychological issues, but there were times when he was seen to become depressed, and he spoke on the odd occasion of ending it all as he no longer wanted to be here. In particular, he struggled with the death of his brother Keith in 2009.<sup>8</sup>
15. On 18 July 2011 the deceased was taken by ambulance to the emergency department at Royal Perth Hospital (RPH) with a large haematoma to the back of the head after he was found heavily inebriated and in a pool of vomit in the middle of the road. A CT scan of his head showed a large likely arachnoid cyst centred on the interpeduncular cistern, with mild hydrocephalus and a degree of cerebral atrophy. There was no fracture or intracranial haemorrhage.<sup>9</sup>
16. While at RPH, the deceased underwent a psychiatric assessment in which he reported that he had seen a psychologist after the breakup of his marriage. He said that he had then travelled but was unsettled after his return to Perth. He said that his drinking had increased. He admitted to suicidal thoughts but had never attempted anything and doubted that he would. He was diagnosed with alcohol intoxication with possible unresolved grief issues.<sup>10</sup>
17. Financially, at the time of his disappearance the deceased was living from week to week while awaiting a lump sum payment from his superannuation. He tended to spend money helping out friends.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6A

<sup>8</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6A

<sup>9</sup> RPH record

<sup>10</sup> RPH record

<sup>11</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6A

18. The deceased was close to all his family, especially his mother, his sister Christine and Nigel, who lived nearby with his family. The deceased would keep in touch with them regularly, often every day. He kept an eye on his mother and would look out for Nigel's wife, Di, and their children when Nigel was working away. He offered to move in with his mother, but she declined because she felt that he needed to get his life back on track.<sup>12</sup>
19. Apart from spending time with his extended family, the deceased's interests were going to the beach with his dog 'Buddy' and riding an electric skateboard. In the year before he disappeared, he also began to attend strip clubs.<sup>13</sup>
20. About twice a month, the deceased would go out for a drink at a nightclub in Northbridge with his friend and colleague, Steve Thurston, and Mr Thurston's wife, Christine. He would usually drive to the Thurstons' unit in Perth and park his car nearby. They would have a few drinks at the unit and then go to the nightclub. The deceased would often leave the Thurstons at the nightclub and go to a nearby strip club, and the next day he would ride his skateboard into Perth to pick up his car.<sup>14</sup>

### **EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE DECEASED'S DISAPPEARANCE**

21. On Friday 10 May 2013, the deceased had lunch with his mother, Nigel and Di at a pub in Guildford. He had just come off a night shift, so he appeared tired and off-colour. That coming Sunday, he planned to take his mother for an up-market Mother's Day dinner at a restaurant in Perth.<sup>15</sup>
22. On the evening of 10 May 2013, the deceased went to Nigel and Di's house for a few drinks. Some friends also attended and the deceased appeared to be having a good time socialising. During the evening, he exchanged text

---

<sup>12</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6A

<sup>13</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6A

<sup>14</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 7

<sup>15</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6A

messages with Mr Thurston and arranged to go out with him and Mrs Thurston. The deceased gave a normal farewell to his family with hugs and goodbyes, including a big hug from his nephew.<sup>16</sup>

23. The deceased then made his way to the Thurston's unit, though it is not clear how. They had a few drinks and then walked into Northbridge where they went to their usual nightclub. He commented to the Thurstons that it was the best fun he had had in a long time.<sup>17</sup>
24. While at the nightclub, he did not become attached to any women, nor did he have any altercations. According to Mr Thurston, it was a typical night out for them.<sup>18</sup>
25. Around midnight, the deceased and the Thurstons went outside to smoke cigarettes, and Mr Thurston took a picture of him and Ms Thurston in front of two police horses. They went back inside, but the Thurstons did not see him after that.<sup>19</sup>
26. CCTV recording from the nightclub showed the deceased leaving the venue at 12.48 am on 11 May 2013. This was the last confirmed sighting of the deceased.<sup>20</sup>

### **SEARCH FOR THE DECEASED**

27. At 11.30 am on Monday 13 May 2013, Nigel contacted the WA Police to report that the deceased had not attended a Mother's Day family gathering and could not be reached by telephone.
28. Nigel and a brother-in-law checked carpark areas in the Perth and Northbridge areas for the deceased's car. They went to the deceased's unit and entered through an unlocked window but found nothing suspicious. Nigel and other family members continuously tried to call the deceased's mobile phone, without success.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6A

<sup>17</sup> Exhibit 1, Tabs 7 and 10

<sup>18</sup> ts 16 per Thurston, S A

<sup>19</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 7; ts 16 – 17 per Thurston, S A

<sup>20</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2

<sup>21</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 10

29. The deceased did not show up for work on the night of 13 May 2013.
30. On the morning of 14 May 2013, police officers went to the deceased's unit. The doors were locked and no-one answered the door. The deceased's car was not in the carpark. Later on 14 May 2013, Telstra advised investigators that the deceased's phone had been turned off for more than 24 hours. The last outgoing call was to Mr Thurston at 8.34 pm on 10 May 2013.<sup>22</sup>
31. The ANZ bank advised that the deceased's credit card account had not been accessed since 2.01 am Eastern Standard Time on 11 May 2013 from the nightclub where the deceased had been with the Thurstons. The attempted transaction was denied due to insufficient funds.<sup>23</sup>
32. At 2.25 pm on 17 May 2013, Nigel contacted police after he located the deceased's car at the carpark at Peasholm Street Dog Beach in Scarborough. The car was locked.
33. Police investigators attended and found a small notebook on display on the dashboard of the car. On the first page was written 'I love u all' and on the third page was written 'Buddy Daddy loves you. Forgive me I love you all xx please look after yourselves I'm sorry Mum'. Nigel believed that the deceased had written the notes given the handwriting, the reference to Mum and Buddy, and the choice of CD's on the dash and in the CD player.<sup>24</sup> The latter was on a track about a relationship breakup.<sup>25</sup>
34. After the deceased's car was found, police coordinated an extensive air, land and sea search over the following three days. Agencies involved in the search were<sup>26</sup>
  - a. the WA Police Emergency Operations Centre

---

<sup>22</sup> Exhibit 1, Tabs 10 and 17

<sup>23</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 10

<sup>24</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6A

<sup>25</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6

<sup>26</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2

- b. Cottesloe police station
  - c. Hillarys police station
  - d. State Emergency Services personnel
  - e. WA Water Police, including the Police Dive Squad<sup>27</sup>
  - f. Police Air Wing, using a helicopter<sup>28</sup>
  - g. Missing Persons Unit
35. No sign of the deceased was found and no CCTV record was available of the vicinity of the carpark to aid in the investigation.

### **FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS**

36. As part of the investigation into the deceased's disappearance, police investigators, including Detective Senior Constable Hitchen, conducted proof of life checks which confirmed that (as of 2017), since the deceased disappeared:
- a. there had been no claims by the deceased under Medicare or the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme;<sup>29</sup>
  - b. the deceased had not been treated at any Perth metropolitan or regional public hospital;
  - c. no certificates had been received by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages to show the deceased's death or a change of his name;<sup>30</sup>
  - d. the deceased's mobile phone was inactive from 2.00 am on 11 May 2013, at which time it pinged off a tower near Wellington Street in Perth;<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5

<sup>28</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4

<sup>29</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 12

<sup>30</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 11

<sup>31</sup> Exhibit 1, Tabs 2 and 17



- e. Centrelink had no record of any contact with the deceased;<sup>32</sup>
  - f. the Department of Immigration and Border Protection's records indicated that the deceased had not left Australia;<sup>33</sup>
  - g. records of the deceased's bank accounts showed no transactions. At the time of his disappearance, he was in debt;<sup>34</sup>
  - h. the Australian Federal Police and missing persons units in all states have had no contact with the deceased;<sup>35</sup>
  - i. there were no unidentified bodies or remains at the State Mortuary which could be the deceased;<sup>36</sup> and
  - j. the Department of Corrective Services had no records of the deceased being in custody.
37. Public awareness strategies were implemented by police by issuing a state-wide broadcast on 14 May 2013, issuing a media released on 17 May 2013, adding the deceased's picture and profile on the National Missing Persons Coordination Centre website on 17 May 2013, broadcasting the deceased's picture and profile on a Crime-Stoppers broadcast on 6 August 2013, and featuring the deceased on a national missing persons poster in March 2014.<sup>37</sup>
38. Detective Senior Constable Hitchen concluded that all possible avenues of investigation had been exhausted.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 13

<sup>33</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 14

<sup>34</sup> Exhibit 1, Tabs 15 and 16

<sup>35</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 10

<sup>36</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2

<sup>37</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2

<sup>38</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2

## **CONCLUSION AS TO WHETHER DEATH HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED**

39. Detective Senior Constable Hitchen's view<sup>39</sup> was that, having regard to the following circumstances, it was unlikely that the deceased was still alive:
- a. the location of the deceased's car at the carpark of the Peasholm dog beach about 250 metres from the ocean;
  - b. the notes found in the car;
  - c. the results of the extensive search;
  - d. that the deceased was not a strong swimmer;
  - e. the deceased's difficulty in coping with the breakdown of his marriage and the death of his brother, leading to heavy drinking and debt;
  - f. the deceased's uncharacteristic lack of contact with his family and work colleagues;
  - g. the deceased's lack of interaction with federal or state agencies;
  - h. the deceased's lack of use of his bank accounts; and
  - i. the lack of any reported sightings of the deceased.
40. Nigel believed that the deceased had ended his life. He noted that the location at which the deceased's car was found reflected his love of the beach and the times he spent there with Buddy.<sup>40</sup> Mr Thurston also noted that if the deceased was going to end his life, it made sense that he would be at the dog beach because he used to love to take his dog there, so it would have been a natural place to do it.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2

<sup>40</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6

<sup>41</sup> ts 18 per Thurston, S A

41. Nigel thought that the deceased was not happy and could not see a way forward while his siblings were getting on with their lives without, in the deceased's perception, needing him to look out for them. He had struggled to accept his brother's death and he had spoken about ending it all and not wanting to be here anymore.<sup>42</sup>
42. Nigel also considered that the deceased would have been embarrassed by the fact that he had been unable to get cash out of his bank account on the night he went missing, so that he would not have been able to take his mother out for dinner on Mother's Day. That would have played on his mind as an indication that he was a failure.<sup>43</sup>
43. Nigel did not believe that the deceased had planned to end his life; rather, he had likely just thought it all over and made an impulsive decision. He was not a strong swimmer, so once he hit the water he knew that there was no turning back, no pain, no hurt; just peace. In Nigel's view, given the factors which led the deceased to the beach that night, it was only a matter of time before he ended his life.<sup>44</sup>
44. While there is no direct evidence to prove that the deceased is dead, given the factors identified by Detective First Class Constable Hitchen and by Nigel Watson, I am satisfied that his death has been proved beyond all reasonable doubt and I so find.

## **THE CAUSE OF THE DEATH AND HOW DEATH OCCURRED**

45. I am satisfied that, with an intention to end his life, the deceased entered the waters of the Indian Ocean off Scarborough where he became immersed, which caused his death.

---

<sup>42</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6

<sup>43</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6

<sup>44</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6

46. I find that death occurred by way of suicide.

### **CONCLUSION**

47. The deceased ended his life at a relatively early age after what appears to have been a slow downward psychological spiral following the breakdown of his marriage and the death of his brother.

48. While the deceased's last act might be seen as a rational response to what he perceived as a bleak future, the level of his despair must have been profound to have driven him to put aside the knowledge that such an act would cause terrible hurt to those he loved.

B P King  
Deputy State Coroner  
23 July 2019