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**JURISDICTION** : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
**ACT** : CORONERS ACT 1996  
**CORONER** : SARAH HELEN LINTON, DEPUTY STATE CORONER  
**HEARD** : 15 OCTOBER 2024  
**DELIVERED** : 22 OCTOBER 2024  
**FILE NO/S** : CORC 3328 of 2023  
**DECEASED** : GUEST, SYDNEY RONALD

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*Catchwords:*

Nil

*Legislation:*

Nil

**Counsel Appearing:**

Senior Constable C Robertson assisted the Coroner.

**Case(s) referred to in decision(s):**

Nil

Coroners Act 1996  
(Section 26(1))

**RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH**

*I, Sarah Helen Linton, Deputy State Coroner, having investigated the disappearance of **Sydney Ronald GUEST** with an inquest held at Perth Coroners Court, Central Law Courts, Court 85, 501 Hay Street, Perth, on 15 October 2024, find that the death of **Sydney Ronald GUEST** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was **Sydney Ronald GUEST** and that death occurred on **an unknown date** and at **an unknown place** as a result of **an unascertained cause** in the following circumstances:*

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## INTRODUCTION

1. Sydney Ronald Guest (known to his family as Ron) was born and raised in Bridgetown. He was last known to be alive in the late 1960's. Family members realised he had gone missing when a truck he had been driving was found abandoned. They spoke to local police at the time, but no formal missing person report was taken by the police. Family members searched for him, but never found him, and they eventually formed the belief he had died as he never made any contact with any of his family again.
2. The first formal report about Ron's disappearance was made to police in 2022. After reading a newspaper article relating to attempts to identify some unidentified human remains found in Chidlow in 1979, a family member contacted the WA Police to ascertain whether the remains might be Ron. Detectives spoke to some of Ron's surviving family members and established Ron was not a match for the unidentified remains found in Chidlow. However, the information obtained was used to create a new missing person report for Ron.
3. The missing person investigation commenced on 10 June 2022, but very little information was able to be obtained. On the basis of the limited information that was able to be obtained by the WA Police in relation to Ron's disappearance, I determined that pursuant to s 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA), there was reasonable cause to suspect that Ron had died and that his death was a reportable death. I therefore made a direction that a coroner hold an inquest into the circumstances of the suspected death.<sup>1</sup>
4. I held an inquest at the Perth Coroner's Court on 15 October 2024. The inquest consisted of the tendering of documentary evidence compiled during the police investigation conducted into Ron's disappearance, as well as hearing evidence from Senior Constable Isaac Watkins from the WA Police Missing Persons Team.

## BACKGROUND

5. Ron was born on 3 August 1927 in Bridgetown, Western Australia. He was the youngest of seven children and grew up with his parents and siblings on a farm in the Bridgetown area. Ron had limited schooling and his focus was on helping on the family farm.<sup>2</sup>
6. As an adult, he left Bridgetown to find work in different parts of Western Australia, including Perth. Throughout his life, Ron generally worked in practical trades and performing odd jobs, as well as driving taxis for a period. He was said to have lived a simple life, without amassing significant possessions and never really putting down roots. He never married and although there was some speculation he may have fathered a child while living in Perth, there is no evidence before me to support such a finding.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Section 23 *Coroners Act* Direction of Acting State Coroner dated 30 August 2023.

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

<sup>3</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

7. There is evidence Ron had experienced a significant health issue as a younger man, when he was diagnosed and treated for tuberculosis. Little else is known about his medical history, although there is evidence from one family member that suggests he may have had some mental health issues prior to his disappearance, in particular some anxiety.<sup>4</sup>

### **MISSING PERSON REPORT**

8. Helena Guest contacted Crime Stoppers in 2019 after reading a newspaper article about the remains found in Chidlow in 1979. In response to the Crime Stoppers report, Detectives Chapman and Kopsen from the Special Crime Squad – Homicide Unit, went to Helena’s home in Greenbushes on 26 March 2022 and spoke with Helena and her daughters Valerie Toohey (nee Guest) and Lorraine Guest. They spoke at length about their knowledge of Ron’s life and disappearance.<sup>5</sup>
9. Helena was the widow of Ron’s eldest brother, Ernest Guest, so she was Ron’s sister-in-law. In 2022, she was Ron’s oldest living relative, and the only one left from that generation. Her daughters Valerie and Lorraine were Ron’s nieces. Sadly, Helena Guest is also now deceased.<sup>6</sup>
10. At the time of his disappearance, Ron was around 40 years of age and described as being about five foot seven to eight inches tall, of a slim build and weighing around 70 to 80 kg, Caucasian with a tanned complexion and being typically clean shaven with short brown hair. Despite his previous tuberculosis infection, he was known to smoke cigarettes, which was corroborated by a photograph showing him smoking.<sup>7</sup>
11. Based on his physical description, as well as the timeline when he disappeared, police were satisfied that Ron was not the victim of the Chidlow incident.<sup>8</sup> However, the information provided by Helena and her daughters was sufficient to initiate a missing person investigation for Ron.

### **INFORMATION RELATING TO RON’S DISAPPEARANCE**

12. In the late 1960’s, Ron was experiencing financial difficulties, so he moved to live with his brother Alfred (Alf) and Alf’s wife Lillian and their five children at an address in The Crescent, Maddington. Alf and Lillian died some years ago, so the police were unable to speak to them about their recollection of events, but police were able to contact their daughter, Christina Pember, who provided police with information about that time.<sup>9</sup>
13. Christina recalled that Ron moved in to her family home in 1967. She was able to be specific about the year as she was studying nursing and left home in 1967 to study onsite at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital in Perth. As she left, Ron moved into her old

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<sup>4</sup> T 5 - 6; Exhibit 1, Tab 2 and Tab 3.

<sup>5</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

<sup>6</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

<sup>7</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

<sup>8</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

<sup>9</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

bedroom.<sup>10</sup> Christina told police that “Ron was a bit of a drifter back at that time”<sup>11</sup> and her parents took him in to help him get back on his feet. Ron was about 40 years of age at the time.

14. Alf owned a business providing wooden poles to the WA State Electricity Commission (SEC). Alfred also owned a number of trucks as part of the business. Ron borrowed one of the trucks sometimes in order to collect firewood and sell it for his own income.<sup>12</sup>
15. On an unknown date between 1967 and May 1970, Alf received a call from a service station or garage (exact business and location undetermined) that the truck Ron was using had been found abandoned there. Christina believes it was found in the Cannington/Thornlie area. Alf went and collected the truck. Christina recalled he was concerned at the time due to what he found in the truck. She wasn't certain exactly what was located, but believed it was something significant, such as Ron's wallet, that he wouldn't have been likely to have just left behind.<sup>13</sup> Helena, on the other hand, believed it may have been Ron's pet dog, which again suggested he had been planning to return.<sup>14</sup>
16. Helena had told police that it was understood there had been a disagreement between Ron and Alf over something prior to the truck being found abandoned.<sup>15</sup> Christina was asked about this and told police she aware that there was some friction between Ron and some of his other siblings, particularly one sister, but she did not know of any issues between her father and Ron at that time. However, I note she was not living at home by that time.<sup>16</sup>
17. Christina was married in May 1970 and she remembers that her Uncle Ron was not present, which leads her to believe that he disappeared in either 1968 or 1969, after she went to Perth and before her wedding.<sup>17</sup> Helena also told police that Ron definitely did not attend his mother's funeral in 1972, which also assists with the timeframe.<sup>18</sup>
18. Alf is believed to have attended the Cannington Police Station to report Ron's disappearance around the time of the truck being found, but the family recall that Alf was told by police that he was not able to make the missing person report due to the fact that Ron had no criminal record.<sup>19</sup>
19. Christina recalled that her father put a lot of effort in over the years to try to locate Ron. These efforts included putting advertisements in newspapers about Ron's disappearance and liaising with the Salvation Army to see if they could assist. She believed there was a rumour at one stage that the Salvation Army had found out that

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<sup>10</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

<sup>11</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3 [7].

<sup>12</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

<sup>13</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

<sup>14</sup> T 6 – 7; Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

<sup>15</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 7.

<sup>16</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

<sup>17</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

<sup>18</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 7, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2 and Tab 3.

Ron had purchased a train ticket to the Eastern States, but this was never confirmed and there is no indication he contacted any family members who lived in the Eastern States. The only other evidence to suggest he may have moved interstate was a possible sighting by a cousin who believed they may have sighted Ron driving at taxi in the Eastern States.<sup>20</sup>

20. Christina told police that as far as she is aware, there has never been any confirmed sighting of Ron since his disappearance. The only alleged sighting in Western Australia was by an old neighbour from the Greenbushes area who believed they may have been picked up in a taxi driven by Ron, working under a different name, in the 2000's. I note Ron would have been at least in his early seventies by that time.<sup>21</sup>
21. Christina understood her father had made inquiries into both alleged sightings with taxi companies, but nothing ever came of it. There had been two well publicised deaths in the family after Ron's disappearance and Christina's parents had looked for Ron at both funerals, but he was never seen. All efforts by Alf and his wife Lillian to find Ron were unsuccessful, and they died not knowing what had happened to him.<sup>22</sup>
22. Another of Ron's nieces (and Christina's younger sister), Maureen Munro, was also spoken to by police. She had also been living in the house in Maddington when Ron moved in, but she had been in her early teens at the time and had little recollection of her uncle. Maureen did recall her father's truck being found abandoned at a service station and there had been some rumours he had moved to the Eastern States, which had never been confirmed. Like her sister, she recalled that her uncle's disappearance had a noticeable effect on her parents and they never stopped looking for him.<sup>23</sup>
23. Two of Christina and Maureen's brothers are sadly now deceased, but their younger brother William (Bill) was spoken to by police. He was too young at the time to have any proper memory of events, and could not add any information to the information provided by his sisters.<sup>24</sup>
24. Helena had been able to identify Lloyd Green as a friend of Ron's from the Greenbushes area. Unfortunately, police enquiries established that he had passed away, but his daughter confirmed that her father had known Ron as a childhood friend. She also recalled that Ron had visited her father in Boyup Brook in the late 1960's, but did not provide any information to suggest Ron had been seen alive after that time.<sup>25</sup>

### **'PROOF OF LIFE' CHECKS**

25. As part of the police investigation, enquiries were made with a number of government agencies and other institutions across Australia to see whether there was any record of contact with Ron after he was last known to be alive in the late 1960's.

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<sup>20</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

<sup>21</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

<sup>22</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2 and Tab 3.

<sup>23</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

<sup>24</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 7, p. 2.

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

26. Ron's family had indicated they did not believe he had ever travelled overseas. Enquiries with the Department of Home Affairs indicated they have no records for Ron, confirming he had not travelled on an Australian passport overseas at any time.<sup>26</sup>
27. Enquiries also confirmed there are no Medicare and/or Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme records for Ron, nor any records held by Centrelink.<sup>27</sup>
28. Enquiries also found no record of Ron on any electoral rolls or on any police databases, and no record of his death with the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages in any Australian jurisdiction.<sup>28</sup>
29. A search of unidentified remains, with the assistance of DNA from a male relative, did not lead to any matches from any State or Territory.<sup>29</sup>

### CONCLUSION

30. I am satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that Sydney Ronald Guest, otherwise known as Ron Guest, is deceased. He has not contacted any family members since at least the early 1970's and there is no evidence of his existence within Australia after that time. I am satisfied that if he were still alive today, there would be some record to corroborate that, particularly given he was not a man of means and would need to either be working or receiving a government payment and as he aged he would be expected to have had contact with Medicare or the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, at the very least. His family believe he is deceased, and I am also satisfied this is so.
31. While the circumstances of Ron's disappearance were uncertain in terms of the exact timing, all surviving family members agreed that he had not been seen since at least the early 1970's and that the timing of his disappearance coincided with Alf Guest being notified that his truck had been found abandoned at a service station in a way that raised some concern for Ron's welfare. There is no evidence as to how the truck came to be left there and no evidence as to where Ron went after abandoning the truck. There were some rumours amongst some family members suggesting Alf and Ron had a minor disagreement leading up to that point, but no agreement as to what it might have been about. Alf's two daughters had no knowledge of any form of disagreement, but did recall that both their parents, but particularly their father, were deeply affected by Ron's disappearance and never stopped searching for him.
32. I note the circumstances surrounding Helena Guest's report to WA Police and observe the answer could be as simple as Ron went looking for firewood in the bush and died by way of accident or natural causes. His history of anxiety and the fact he was in some financial difficulties, along with the observation that he had left something personal in the truck that was unusual, could also suggest his state of mind was moving towards self-harm. There is a myriad of other possibilities, including a

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<sup>26</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 7 and Tab 11.

<sup>27</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 9 and Tab 10.

<sup>28</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2 and Tab 12.

<sup>29</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

possibility that Ron moved to another state and died there before he could contact family, although I believe this is unlikely.

33. On the evidence before me, I am unable to reach a conclusion as to when, where or how Ron died. The only finding I am able to reach at this stage is that Ron is now deceased. His cause of death must remain unascertained and I make an open finding as to the manner of death.
34. The Guest family provided a photograph of Ron taken at a time before he disappeared, which is included below. It is possible this may prompt the memory of anyone who recalls seeing Ron from that time and can assist with further evidence of what happened to him, although the lapse of time understandably makes that unlikely.



S H Linton  
Deputy State Coroner  
22 October 2024