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**JURISDICTION** : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
**ACT** : CORONERS ACT 1996  
**CORONER** : SARAH HELEN LINTON, ACTING STATE CORONER  
**HEARD** : 6 MAY 2025  
**DELIVERED** : 27 MAY 2025  
**FILE NO/S** : CORC 3465 of 2024  
**DECEASED** : LEVAUX, GEORGE WILLIAM

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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, Acting State Coroner, having investigated the disappearance of **George William LE VAUX** with an inquest held at **Perth Coroners Court, Court 85, CLC Building, 501 Hay Street, PERTH**, on 6 May 2025, find that the death of **George William LE VAUX** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was **George William LE VAUX** and that death occurred on **22 March 2022** at waters of the Indian Ocean off Swanbourne Beach from an unknown cause in the following circumstances:*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1. George William Le Vaux (George) was a 70 year old man in poor health when he disappeared in March 2022. He lived next door to his sister, Kathleen Sansom (Kathleen), and she reported him missing to police on 23 March 2022 after she was unable to locate him at his home. Police enquiries established that George had last been seen alive when he was dropped off by a taxi at Swanbourne Beach on 22 March 2022. He rang the taxi driver later that afternoon, possibly to arrange to be collected and taken home, but the call did not connect properly and he failed to answer the taxi drivers calls in return. A search located George's backpack containing his personal effects and his clothing at the water's edge on Swanbourne Beach on 24 March 2022. There was no sign of George and no witnesses came forward to say they had seen him there. There is no evidence anyone has seen him since 22 March 2022.
2. On the basis of information provided by the WA Police in relation to George's disappearance, I determined that pursuant to s 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA), there was reasonable cause to suspect that George 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>
3. I held an inquest at the Perth Coroner's Court on 6 May 2025. The inquest consisted of the tendering of documentary evidence compiled during the police investigation conducted into George's disappearance, as well as hearing evidence from Senior Constable Isaac Watkins from the WA Police Missing Persons Unit, Homicide Squad.
4. At the conclusion of the inquest, I indicated that I was satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that George is deceased and that he died on or about 22 March 2022. I set out below what is known about the circumstances of George's death and what findings I am able to make based upon the limited information available.

## **BRIEF BACKGROUND**

5. George was born in Subiaco on 12 December 1951. He was the youngest of three children and grew up with his parents and two sisters, Carolyn and Kathleen, at 26 Smith Street, Glen Forrest. He left school after Year 10 and got a job in an office doing accounts and sales. He later became a delivery driver and also worked for Main Roads. George married in 1975 but the couple divorced a few years later, just before the birth of his only daughter. The separation was not amicable, but George did his best to keep in regular contact with his daughter over the years. Sadly, George's daughter was the victim of a homicide in 2013, and this affected him deeply.<sup>2</sup>
6. After his marriage had ended and following his father's death in 1985, George moved back in to the family home in Smith Street, where he lived with, and cared

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<sup>1</sup> Section 23 *Coroners Act* Direction of A/State Coroner Linton dated 21 January 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3, Tab 5 and Tab 13.1.

for, his mother. He was his mother's primary carer for approximately 30 years, until her death at the great age of 100 years, on 28 August 2021. His mother's death also took a heavy emotional toll on his mind. George's sister Carolyn recalled that he had largely kept himself at home with his mother after his daughter's death and he had become very close to his mother, so losing her and then continuing to live in the same home on his own was difficult. She told police her brother "seemed to slip into a more depressive state"<sup>3</sup> after his mother's death.<sup>4</sup>

7. The terms of George's mother's will specified that he could live in the Smith Street house for up to a year after her death before the house would then be sold and the proceeds divided evenly between the three children. He had made plans to buy a property but it fell through due to financial issues, which his sister Carolyn recalled upset him a lot. He had been talking about finding a rental but had been finding it difficult to find a suitable place. He still had a few months left at the house at the time he went missing, and his sisters had indicated he could have more time if he needed, so he was not going to be left homeless. However, his housing situation did appear to prey upon his mind.<sup>5</sup>
8. George also had a number of chronic health issues, including very bad headaches, a cracked bone in his neck, back issues and fibromyalgia, all of which caused him severe pain. He had been diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome and on occasion was bedridden. He was prescribed a number of regular medications. George last saw his doctor on 8 February 2022 and mentioned problems with his hearing, which they planned to investigate. His doctor tried to call him for a further consultation on 25 March 2022, but George did not answer. I note this was after his disappearance.<sup>6</sup>
9. It appears George continued to spend a lot of time at home and his primary visitor was his sister Kathleen, who lived next door with her family. He usually rang Kathleen once every day and they would often talk about their mother, which she saw as his way of dealing with his grief. He also spoke to his sister Carolyn regularly on the phone.<sup>7</sup>
10. George and Kathleen had reduced contact in the week or so prior to his disappearance, but she visited him at his house on Monday, 14 March 2022, and they spent about half an hour together. Kathleen recalled he seemed his usual self, but she could tell he wasn't well and it seemed like he had a migraine as he was speaking very softly. The house was in good order and she saw nothing in particular out of the ordinary to cause her any concern for his welfare.<sup>8</sup>
11. Kathleen usually did her brother's grocery shopping as he hadn't been driving due to his health issues. He would leave his shopping list on their shared gate on a Wednesday afternoon and she would collect it and then do the shopping the following day. On Thursday, 17 March 2022, Kathleen collected the shopping list off

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<sup>3</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4 [14].

<sup>4</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 5.

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

<sup>6</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4, Tab 5 and Tab 29.

<sup>7</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4, Tab 5 and Tab 29.

<sup>8</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

the gate, as usual. She bought his groceries and then rang him to let him know she would leave them at the gate for him to collect in the afternoon. He sounded sick with a headache and was very quiet on the phone, but otherwise was his normal self. She saw that he had collected the shopping bags before it got dark.<sup>9</sup>

12. Up to that time, George appears to have been following his normal routine and his family observed nothing to raise their level of concern for him.

### **KNOWN EVENTS ON TUESDAY, 22 MARCH 2022**

13. During the day, George's sister, Kathleen, recalled that her son Kristian mentioned to her that he had seen a taxi pulling out from the driveway of George's house. She assumed he was going to visit his friend Valmai, who is a retired occupational therapist. George had been a regular patient and they had maintained a friendship after she retired. Kathleen was also aware that George would sometimes catch a taxi to the beach at the end of North Street, on the border of Cottesloe and Swanbourne.<sup>10</sup> George was said to have loved swimming at the beach and he would often go out quite far, even when it was cold.<sup>11</sup>
14. Kathleen recalled that her daughter Tamara sent her a text message that evening and told her that George had sent her a blank text message at about 6.00 pm. Kathleen thought this was strange as George didn't usually message people; he would usually ring them. Tamara had previously been quite close to her uncle when she lived with her mother, but she had moved out in 2016 and hadn't had much contact with him from that time. After discussing it, they assumed he had simply sent the message by mistake when using his phone, so they didn't follow it up.<sup>12</sup>

### **MISSING PERSON REPORT**

15. The following day, being Wednesday, 23 March 2022, Kathleen went to the gate to collect the shopping list. It was close to dark at this time. The shopping list wasn't there, which she thought was strange, so she rang her brother. The phone rang out and went to message bank. She tried a few more times, but each time the call went unanswered. She assumed George was sick in bed, so she went with her son to check on him. She let herself in to his house and went to the bedroom, but George was not in bed and she couldn't find him anywhere in the house. She tried ringing his mobile again, but there was still no answer. Kathleen walked back with her son to her own house and on the way they checked George's rubbish bins. He hadn't put them out, which was very unusual.<sup>13</sup>
16. After returning to her own house, Kathleen rang George's friend Valmai to see if she had seen him. Valmai indicated she hadn't seen or heard from him recently. They would usually speak several times a week and Valmai mentioned that George had

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<sup>9</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

<sup>10</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

<sup>11</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5.

<sup>12</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4 and Tab 7.

<sup>13</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

often appeared depressed and made comments to her that he wanted to die during those conversations. He had been talking about buying his own place closer to the beach and had seemed happy at the prospect. He had put a deposit on a property, but the sale had fallen through due to problems with finalising his mother's estate. Valmai believes this added to his depression, although he never mentioned any plans to harm himself.<sup>14</sup>

17. Kathleen also rang her sister, Carolyn, who advised that their brother appeared to have gone missing. Carolyn would normally call George every Monday and try to cheer him up if he was feeling down, and she couldn't recall anything out of the ordinary in their last phone call.<sup>15</sup>
18. Kathleen spent some time calling several hospitals to check if George had been admitted, but was told he was not a patient. She also tried ringing the taxi company but they advised they were not allowed to disclose the job details to her. After speaking to her daughter Tamara again, Kathleen then decided to ring the police to see if they could help locate her brother. She rang the police at 10.11 pm.
19. Police officers went to George's house at 11.08 pm and checked the house, which was secure and showed no sign that George was home although his car was parked in the shed near the house. They spoke to neighbours who indicated they had not seen George for a while. The police officers went to Kathleen's home at about 11.30 pm that same evening to try to obtain some more details. She gave them keys to George's house and they went back to the house and entered it. There was no sign of George having returned, but it was noted to be neat and tidy. Kathleen told them she was worried as it was quite out of character for him to disappear in this manner. She advised the police he had no known enemies and always got along with people.<sup>16</sup>
20. Kathleen and Carolyn have not seen or heard from their brother since this time.<sup>17</sup>

### **LAST CONFIRMED SIGHTING OF GEORGE**

21. Police officers had some initial trouble identifying the taxi, but at 4.12 pm on 24 March 2022, they identified the taxi driver who had dropped George to the beach as Vikram Chohan (Mr Chohan). Mr Chohan worked as a self-employed taxi driver with Swan Taxi and he knew George as he was a regular customer. Mr Chohan told police he had taken George to the beach at the corner of North Street and Marine Parade, Swanbourne, on 1 March 2022 for the first time. Mr Chohan had seen George sit on a bench at that location, but didn't see what else he did while he was there. After about an hour, George had called Mr Chohan and asked if he was free to take him home again. During the return trip, Mr Chohan had asked George why he liked the beach and George had replied, "I have some memories."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 6.

<sup>15</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5.

<sup>16</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

<sup>17</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

<sup>18</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 8 [26].

22. Mr Chohan received a second phone call from George at 10.11 am on 22 March 2022 asking if he was available again to take him to the same beach. They agreed to meet at George's home at 12.30 pm. Mr Chohan arrived at the Smith Street house at 12.20 pm and George was ready and waiting. He was dressed in a blue shirt and jeans and was carrying a bag. During the trip, George asked if they could stop at KFC, so they went to the KFC on Scarborough Beach Road in Innaloo on the way. They then continued on to Swanbourne Beach and Mr Chohan dropped George at the same spot near the bench at the corner of North Street and Marine Parade at about 1.30 pm.<sup>19</sup>
23. Mr Chohan asked him what his plan was and when he wanted to go home. George said it would be about 4.00 pm or 5.00 pm, but he didn't give an exact time. This was around the time Mr Chohan would usually finish, so he mentioned this to George. Mr Chohan noticed that George's body language was very slow, but nothing else seemed unusual. After George paid, he left the taxi and went and sat on the bench for a short time, before Mr Chohan saw him start to walk off along the path towards the beach. That was the last time Mr Chohan saw him.<sup>20</sup>
24. Mr Chohan was in Subiaco at 4.40 pm, which is close to Swanbourne, so he rang George to see if he wanted to be picked up. George did not answer the call, but he called Mr Chohan back at 6.09 pm. Mr Chohan picked up the call but George did not say anything, despite the call lasting 8 seconds. Mr Chohan tried to call him back but nothing happened. He then received a second call from George, which lasted 7 seconds, but again there was no conversation. Mr Chohan tried to call George back several times more, but George never answered. He did not hear from George again.<sup>21</sup>

### **THE SEARCH**

25. Police officers had been making various enquiries to try to locate George from the time they had first received the report from his sister that he appeared to be missing. The level of concern continued to escalate as the hours passed and at 12.29 pm on 24 March 2022, the WA Police State Command Inspector determined a serious imminent threat to George's life or health had been established and triangulation of his phone was authorised under the *Telecommunications Act*. The triangulation indicated the phone was near Swanbourne Beach, between Alfred Road and Seaward Avenue. Foot patrol searches were immediately commenced in the area, as well as WA Police airwing and drones searching from the air. Messages were sent out to members of the public in the local area, asking for information on any sightings. Some information was provided, but all were investigated and found not to relate to George.<sup>22</sup>
26. State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers were notified at about 6.00 pm on 24 March 2022 that the Wanneroo SES was being activated to a Land Search and

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<sup>19</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 8 and Tab 17.

<sup>20</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 8.

<sup>21</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 8.

<sup>22</sup> T 6 - 7: Exhibit 1, Tab 15 and Tab 17.

Rescue in Swanbourne. During the briefing, the SES staff were advised they were searching for a 70 year old man who had last been seen walking in a northerly direction from Marine Parade in Swanbourne and his phone had been pinging off towers in the area. SES members began to search the area and at 8.50 pm, an SES Team Leader located a black backpack and some other property items on the beach. He could hear a mobile phone ringing within the bag. He alerted the control point that he had found a black backpack, clothing items, a floppy hat, towel and a bag of rubbish in a green Woolworths bag. Senior Constable Matthew Waldon attended and seized the items.<sup>23</sup>

27. Senior Constable Matthew Waldon quickly located George's phone in the backpack, so it was clear that the property belonged to George. It was also noted that the clothing items matched the clothing George had been seen wearing on the CCTV images provided by the taxi company. A search was conducted from the spot where the property was located, including the use of canines to try to identify any scent trail, but the dogs were unable to obtain a scent and nothing else relevant was found. There was no indication that anyone had tampered with the personal items and it was inferred they had been left by George at that location, most likely while he went for a swim in the ocean.<sup>24</sup>
28. Sergeant Craig Anderson at Water Police was contacted to discuss whether it was feasible to launch a marine search and rescue. Sergeant Craig Anderson advised that marine search modelling based on the known information indicated a total search area of over 600 square nautical miles and the likely survival time frame was estimated to be very short, and would have definitely passed by this time. It was suggested that if no body had already washed ashore, there was little likelihood it would do so now. Accordingly, no marine search action was recommended.<sup>25</sup>
29. The land search continued for a further period of time, but it concluded on the afternoon of 25 March 2022, noting that it was highly likely that George had entered the water and not returned to shore.<sup>26</sup>

### **POLICE INVESTIGATION**

30. Phone records for George's mobile phone were obtained by police. They confirmed that the taxi driver, Mr Chohan, rang George at 4.40 pm and the call was not answered. The records also showed at 6.09 pm the taxi driver received two voiceless calls from George's mobile. Finally, at 6.16 pm George's niece was sent a blank text. The phone was not used again by George.<sup>27</sup>
31. Banking records showed George's activity and transactions prior to his disappearance, but no activity after 22 March 2022.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 11.

<sup>24</sup> T 7 - 8; Exhibit 1, Tab 12 and Tab 28.

<sup>25</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 17, p. 18 and Tab 18, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 17, p. 20 and Tab 18, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

<sup>28</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3 and Tab 30.



32. A public broadcast for any information did lead to several reported possible sightings of George by members of the public, but all of the reports were investigated and subsequently negated.<sup>29</sup>
33. Carolyn told police that she believes her brother accidentally drowned at Swanbourne Beach on the day he was last taken there by taxi. Carolyn suggested that with his poor heart and bad knees, he may have fallen into the water and not been able to get out again. Despite some of the negative things going on in his life, Carolyn does not believe her brother would have intentionally drowned himself.<sup>30</sup>
34. Senior Constable Isaac Watkins prepared a report to the State Coroner indicating the general opinion of the police investigating George's disappearance is that George is deceased and he died on, or shortly after, 6.16 pm on Tuesday, 22 March 2022 along the coastline of Swanbourne Beach. In his evidence at the inquest, Senior Constable Isaac Watkins noted that George had some significant health issues and could easily have suffered a medical event while in the water. He commented that George could have also suffered some kind of misadventure, such as being dumped by a wave, and in his poor state of health he might not have been able to recover, although he was generally a reasonable swimmer.<sup>31</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

35. I am satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that George died sometime after 6.16 pm on 22 March 2022. He must have gone into the ocean or else his body would have been found during the comprehensive search of the beach area. There is a strong possibility his cause of death was due to drowning, but I also cannot rule out a sudden medical event, given his age and significant medical history. The cause of death must, therefore, remain unascertained.
36. There is insufficient evidence for me to be able to be satisfied of a manner of death. There was evidence before me that George was in a depressed mental state due to grief and serious medical issues, as well as his precarious housing situation. He disappeared at a place that was clearly personally significant to him and in circumstances that were unusual. The way his clothing and personal items were placed does not really give a good indication either way of his state of mind. His attempts to call the taxi driver do, however, suggest he may have been trying to be collected and taken home around 6.00 pm.
37. Ultimately, I am satisfied that George intentionally entered the water, but whether he did so just to go for a swim, having been unable to arrange collection by his taxi driver, or with an intention to end his life is unclear. It is entirely possible he simply went for a swim and then either had a medical event or something else occurred that prevented him from safely returning to shore. Accordingly, I am unable to determine to the requisite standard the manner of George's death. I can only indicate that I am

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<sup>29</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

<sup>30</sup> Exhibit 1, Tab 5.

<sup>31</sup> T 10 – 11; Exhibit 1, Tab 3.

satisfied no other person was involved in his death. Accordingly, I make an open finding as to the manner of death.

S H Linton  
Acting State Coroner  
27 May 2025