



Western

Australia

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

Ref: 18/18

*I, Sarah Helen Linton, Coroner, having investigated the disappearance of **John Lindsay FIELD** with an inquest held at the **Perth Coroner's Court, Court 51, CLC Building, 501 Hay Street, Perth** on **22 May 2018** find that the death of **John Lindsay FIELD** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was **John Lindsay FIELD** and that death occurred on or about **13 May 1976** in **Perth, Western Australia** as a result of an **unascertained cause** in the following circumstances:*

Counsel Appearing:

Sgt L Housiaux assisting the Coroner

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MISSING PERSON REPORT

1. John Lindsay Field went missing more than forty years ago. He was last seen by his daughter, Josephine Field, when he left home during the evening of 13 May 1976. Ms Field and her son were living with Mr Field, who was a widower. Mr Field's daughter saw him drive away in his blue Ford Falcon. Mr Field had told her that he was going to make a phone call. He never returned.¹
2. At the time he left the house Mr Field appeared to his daughter to be in a very depressed state of mind, which she believed was due to it being the one year anniversary of his wife's death.²
3. Mr Field was reported missing to police the following day, being 14 May 1976. The report was made by Mr Field's brother-in-law, Thomas Craig. Mr Craig told police at the time that he thought Mr Field was experiencing some mental pressure due to a decision he had made to sell his house in South Fremantle and move to a new home in Hilton. Mr Field had paid a deposit on the new house, but had not delivered the remaining money owed.³
4. It would appear to have been an emotional concern, rather than a financial concern delaying the completion of the sale, as Mr Field had money in various bank accounts and had recently won \$30,000 in the State lottery, which was not an inconsiderable sum back in 1976. Checks of Mr Field's bank accounts showed there had been no transactions or movements from those accounts since he was reported missing and thousands of dollars remained in the accounts.⁴
5. Every endeavour was made by police to find Mr Field in 1976, without success.
6. On 11 April 2017 a report was provided to the State Coroner by Detective Constable Kiryn Waldeck of the Missing Persons Team of the WA Police. Detective Constable Waldeck submitted that, based upon the police investigation conducted in 1976 and the years since, it is probable and reasonable to conclude that Mr Field is deceased.
7. On the basis of the information provided the State Coroner determined that pursuant to s 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA) there was reasonable cause to suspect that Mr Field died in or around 1976 and that the suspected death should be investigated. Following that direction it is a requirement that a coroner must hold an inquest into the circumstances of the suspected death.
8. I held an inquest at the Perth Coroner's Court on 22 May 2018. The documentary evidence comprised a report of the police investigation into the

¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

² Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

³ Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 2 and Tab 7.

disappearance of Mr Field.⁵ Detective Constable Waldeck also gave oral evidence to expand upon the information in the report.

HAS DEATH BEEN ESTABLISHED?

9. Mr Craig, who reported Mr Field missing, died himself in 1979.⁶ Other than his daughter and brother-in-law, Mr Field did not engage socially with many people and was described as a 'loner' by his family. Nevertheless, police made contact with all known friends and relatives of Mr Field, but none of them had seen him.⁷
10. Police obtained a physical description of Mr Field and the relevant details of his car. Broadcasts containing his details were initially provided to local police and in regional areas. Media releases of Mr Field's photo and details were later broadcast to the public on commercial radio stations and in the Daily News newspaper on 1 June 1976. Another newspaper report was published in the Daily News, with an accompanying photograph, on 8 March 1978, noting at that time he had been missing two years and his disappearance was still a mystery.⁸
11. No report of Mr Field, or his Ford Falcon, has been provided to police since his disappearance and his vehicle registration has not been renewed in any State or Territory within Australia since it expired on 15 June 1976.⁹
12. Regular checks were made of local hospitals and mental health hospitals as well as land and water searches for a period of 7 months of Mr Field going missing.¹⁰
13. On 16 February 1977, 24 June 1977 and 20 January 1978 the original Missing Person Report was reviewed by police and further inquiries conducted. These included:
 - passport checks with the Department of Immigration;
 - motor vehicle records checks and motor driver's licence checks;
 - criminal record checks;
 - enquiries with the Sudden death and Fire Inquiry Squad into unidentified deceased persons that might match Mr Field's description; and
 - follow up with Mr Field's family, who could not provide any new information.¹¹
14. At the conclusion of the third review, a notation was made on the file that Mr Field was 'presumed dead' pending receipt of any new information to the contrary.¹²

⁵ Exhibit 1.

⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 3 and Tab 4.

⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 2 and Tab 12.

⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 27.

⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

¹⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

¹¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

¹² Exhibit 1, Tab 2 and Tab 18.

15. More inquiries were made with interstate police in relation to Mr Field between 19 March 1979 and 10 May 1979, but all requests returned a negative result.¹³
16. In 1983 the Public Trustee sought an order for leave to swear Mr Field's death. In response, a police officer from the Missing Person Bureau swore an affidavit on 17 May 1983 confirming that no further information had been received in relation to the whereabouts of Mr Field since his disappearance in May 1976.¹⁴
17. In 1989 Mr Field's appearance was the subject of a television show, which led to a few reports to police of possible sightings. All of the reports were followed up and found not to lead to Mr Field.¹⁵
18. On 27 July 1995 police enquired into dental records for Mr Field at the Perth Dental Hospital and were advised that no records were held for Mr Field.¹⁶
19. On 14 July 1999 police made enquiries with Centrelink to ascertain if Mr Field had ever applied for Social Security Assistance. They were advised that Centrelink had no records for Mr Field.¹⁷
20. At the conclusion of the inquest I indicated that I was satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that Mr Field had died but that I would have to give further consideration as to what conclusions I could reach about the circumstances of his death, given the limited information available.

DATE, PLACE, CAUSE AND MANNER OF DEATH

21. I note that Mr Field was born on 3 November 1909 and he was 66 years old when he disappeared. If he were alive today, he would be 108 years old.
22. I am satisfied that Mr Field has died, not merely of old age, but close in time to the date he went missing in 1976. However, there are few details on which to base a finding as to exactly when, where and how he died.
23. The date Mr Field disappeared was significant. It was the first anniversary of the death of his wife. Mr Field's daughter noted he was in a very depressed state that night, most likely associated with this sad event.
24. Mr Field was due to complete the sale of a new house and move from the house where he had previously lived with his wife, around the time he disappeared. Indeed, he had told his daughter as he left that he was going to ring a removalist. His daughter and her son also lived with him but he did not return to them or complete the sale transaction. He had significant assets, but none of them have been touched since the day he disappeared.

¹³ Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

¹⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 2 and Tab 9 and Tab 13.

¹⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 4.

¹⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

¹⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 2.

25. Based upon all of the evidence before me, I am satisfied that Mr Field died sometime on or about 13 May 1976, the date he was last seen.
26. As Mr Field's remains have not been discovered, his cause of death is unable to be determined.
27. The evidence of Mr Field's depressed state of mind, and his comments to his daughter that he would not likely be around for long, support the conclusion Mr Field had some suicidal intention. The fact that neither Mr Field, not his car, has been seen since, supports the conclusion that he went somewhere remote after leaving his house. As he was travelling in his car, he would have been able to go a considerable distance. Even today, more than four decades on, there is substantial bushland in and around the outskirts of Perth, and back in 1976 there would have been considerably more so.
28. Detective Waldeck gave evidence that the evidence obtained by police supports the conclusion that Mr Field committed suicide and it appeared from the initial police reports that this was the view held by Mr Field's family.¹⁸
29. Although I accept that there is evidence to support a finding that Mr Field was depressed and possibly had an intention to take his life, given the other aspects of his death are unknown, and noting that he was 66 years of age at the time he went missing so he was not a young man, I am unable to exclude that he suffered a natural event or perhaps met an accidental death. Accordingly, I make an open finding as to the manner of death.

CONCLUSION

30. John Lindsay Field has not been seen since he left his house on 13 May 1976. There is no doubt that he is dead, particularly noting he would now be the great age of 108 years old if he was alive today. I have found that there is sufficient evidence to find that he died many years ago, on or about the date he disappeared in May 1976. The other circumstances of his death are unknown and are unlikely ever to be known.

S H Linton
Coroner
31 May 2018

¹⁸ T 5.