



Western

Australia

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

Ref No: 9/14

*I, Rosalinda Vincenza Clorinda FOGLIANI, State Coroner, having investigated the suspected death of **Arnold James KING**, with an Inquest held at Perth Coroner's Court, Court 51, CLC Building, 501 Hay Street, Perth on **10 March 2014** find that the death has been established beyond all reasonable doubt, that the identity of the deceased person was **Arnold James KING**, and that death occurred between **7-13 November 2011** at **Ravensthorpe, Western Australia** from **unknown causes** in the following circumstances -*

Counsel Appearing :

Sergeant Lyle Housiaux assisting the State Coroner

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INTRODUCTION

1. As at November 2011 Arnold James King (the deceased) was an 84 year old man living on his own in Ravensthorpe in Western Australia. Following the death of his wife in December 2010, the deceased had been treated for depression, including one period of hospitalisation just under two months before his disappearance.
2. At this time, in addition to his depression, for which he had been on medication, the deceased was also in considerable financial debt.
3. The deceased had undertaken the work of a “dogger” and he had extensive knowledge of bush craft and of the local areas of bush around Ravensthorpe and its surrounds.
4. Witnesses’ descriptions of the deceased shortly before his disappearance range from observations to the effect that he was frail and not himself, with difficulty walking, to the deceased being his usual self with no significant difficulty walking. These inconsistencies may be explained having regard to timing of those observations and the age of the deceased.
5. At some point between 7 and 8 November 2011 the deceased left his home in Ravensthorpe and disappeared. The last known sighting of the deceased was on the afternoon of Monday 7 November 2011 and by the morning of 8 November 2011 the deceased could



not be contacted when his grandson, Mr Mark King, went to his home.

6. On 9 November 2011 the deceased was reported missing to the police, by his grandson.
7. An extensive and well coordinated land and air search was undertaken between 10 and 13 November 2011 and failed to locate the deceased.
8. On 28 February 2013 the State Coroner, Mr Alastair Hope received a letter dated 21 February 2013 from Mr Warren King, the deceased's son. Mr Warren King advised that his father, the deceased, was 84 years old, had gone missing from his Ravensthorpe home on about 6 or 7 December 2011 and had not been seen or heard of since.
9. Mr Warren King also advised that his father had been reported as a missing person to the Ravensthorpe police and that the Ravensthorpe police had commenced an investigation.
10. On 28 February 2013 the State Coroner wrote to the Commissioner of Police advising him that he had received the letter from Mr Warren King and that he had reasonable cause to suspect that the deceased had died and that the death was a reportable death under section 23(1) of the *Coroners Act 1996*. The State Coroner by that letter directed that the deceased's suspected death be investigated.
11. Under section 23(2) of the *Coroners Act 1996* 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 a person has been established beyond all reasonable doubt, into how the death occurred and the cause of death.

12. I held an inquest on 10 March 2014 as required. The documentary evidence adduced at the inquest comprised the investigation report of Acting Sergeant Christopher Neale together with the brief of evidence compiled in relation to the investigation.

THE DECEASED

13. The deceased was 84 years old and was affectionately known in the Ravensthorpe community as “Bunty”. He was a well respected member of his community. The deceased lived on his own in Spence Street, Ravensthorpe and had depressed since the death of his wife in December 2010.¹ Shortly before he disappeared he told witnesses that he found it difficult to go back to his dark lonely house in the evenings² and that he found he was missing his wife more than normal.³
14. At an earlier stage he had told a witness that if it ever got too hard he would take his “Strychnine tablet”⁴. There was no evidence of poisons at the deceased’s home nor any evidence that he had access to Strychnine. I do not consider this to be a statement of

¹ Ex 1 Tab 4

² Ex 1 Tab 5 and T.16

³ Ex 1 Tab 9

⁴ Ex 1 Tab 6



an intention to take Strychnine. It is a comment which is broadly consistent with his depressed state of mind.

15. Between 16 and 23 September 2011 the deceased was admitted to Ravensthorpe Hospital and treated for depression⁵. He was discharged on 23 September 2011 when he said he was going to visit his sons. About a month before the deceased disappeared he was seen by one of the doctors from Ravensthorpe Medical who observed him to be depressed and not very mobile⁶.
16. In addition to his depression and the frailties associated with old age, at the time of his disappearance the deceased was also a diabetic. He kept a record of his blood sugar levels in an “Accu-Chek” diary⁷, which was recovered from his home.
17. Around mid to late October 2011 the deceased travelled to Perth for a period of approximately two weeks to spend some time with his two sons. His grandson describes the deceased as being “back to normal” when he came home to Ravensthorpe⁸.
18. In early November 2011, after being home for about one week, the deceased then travelled up north with a friend from Ravensthorpe who is a farmer, Mr Robert Ernest Lloyd. The deceased spent five days at Nalbarra Station with Mr Lloyd and his wife and is described by

⁵ Ex 1 Tab 2 and T.16

⁶ Ex 1 Tab 3

⁷ Ex 1 Tab 20

⁸ Ex 1 Tab 4



Mr Lloyd as seeming fine and able to walk around well.⁹

19. On 5 November 2011 (Saturday) Mr Lloyd dropped the deceased off at his home in Ravensthorpe and again describes him as seeming fine.¹⁰
20. Police inquiries into the deceased's financial status show that around this time he was in considerable debt. Whilst the deceased's credit cards were at their maximum credit limit,¹¹ further transactions by the deceased occurred on these accounts. At the time of his disappearance the deceased's debts included the following¹² -

Financial Institution	Closing Debit Balance
Commonwealth Bank ¹³	\$24,927.59
American Express ¹⁴	\$ 8,479.97
GM Holden Mastercard ¹⁵	\$17,468.63
Total	\$50,876.19

21. There has been no activity with the deceased's bank accounts since his disappearance other than by his sons for the purpose of settling utility and rate notice accounts.¹⁶
22. It is clear that at the time of his disappearance the deceased was still grieving over the death of his wife. He was also exploring options for paying off his outstanding debts.

⁹ Ex 1 Tab 5

¹⁰ Ex 1, Tab 5

¹¹ T.15

¹² T.15

¹³ Ex 1 Tab 24

¹⁴ Ex 1 Tab 23

¹⁵ Ex 1 Tab 25

¹⁶ T.15



EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE DISAPPEARANCE

23. On Saturday 5 November 2011, after Mr Lloyd dropped the deceased home, the deceased rang his grandson to let him know he was back home. The deceased's grandson went to the deceased's home and spoke with him and describes him as seeming well¹⁷.
24. The next day Sunday 6 November 2011 the deceased's grandson again saw him and they discussed a trailer in Perth, with the deceased suggesting that his grandson go and have a look at it. His grandson left Ravensthorpe for Perth at about 2pm on Sunday 6 November 2011.¹⁸
25. On Monday 7 November 2011 there were a number of sightings and some contact made with the deceased. These are set out below:
 - (a) Mr Lloyd went to the deceased's home in Spence Street Ravensthorpe to drop some things off which the deceased had left in his car. At that time, the deceased seemed fine. This is the last occasion upon which Mr Lloyd saw the deceased¹⁹;
 - (b) At about 9.45am Reverend Harold Stanley Lee, of the Ravensthorpe Anglican Church saw the deceased at the bottom service station at Ravensthorpe when he was filling his car with fuel. The deceased pulled up next to him driving his white Sigma and they started chatting. The deceased started to fill a red jerry can

¹⁷ Ex 1 Tab 4

¹⁸ Ex 1 Tab 4

¹⁹ Ex 1 Tab 5



with fuel and Reverend Lee states that he did not appear to be acting any differently from normal and that he looked physically well. The deceased told Reverend Lee that he had enjoyed his trip up north with Mr Lloyde but was glad to be back²⁰;

(c) Ms Kathy Elsa Mehew, the Grocery Manager at IGA, saw the deceased in IGA. She states the deceased said hello but did not stop to talk, which was unusual for him, and that his face was pale and vague. She noted that he was walking slowly²¹;

(d) Between around 3:00 to 3:15pm Ms Karen Ann Sinclair, a nurse at Ravensthorpe, was in Morgan Street and she saw the deceased driving his Sigma Sedan west and turning into Queen Street. Ms Sinclair has known the deceased for 35 years and she knows his vehicle. She waved to him but he did not respond.²²

26. In connection with the timing of his disappearance the deceased made two relevant entries concerning his blood sugar levels in his Accu-Chek diary which was recovered from his home on Monday 7 November 2011.

They were as follows²³ –

Before breakfast 8.4

Night time before bed 8.2

²⁰ Ex 1 Tab 8

²¹ Ex 1 Tab 9

²² Ex 1 Tab 7

²³ Ex 1 Tab 20



The Accu-Chek diary was found by the deceased's grandson when he accessed the deceased's home on Thursday 10 November 2011. The night time entry in the Accu-Chek diary goes to show that the deceased was at his home around the evening of 7 November 2011.

27. The deceased's grandson had in fact returned to Ravensthorpe at about 8 or 9pm on the night of 7 November 2011 though he did not contact the deceased that night²⁴.
28. On Tuesday 8 November 2011, the deceased's grandson went to the deceased's home on three occasions, in an endeavour to locate him. These are set out below:
 - (a) At about 8 or 9am the deceased's grandson came into town and went to the deceased's home but found that it was locked up.²⁵ At that time the deceased's grandson also noted that the water pump that was connected to the rain water tank had been turned off. One possible explanation proffered was that that would happen if the deceased were going away somewhere;²⁶
 - (b) About 1½ hours later the deceased's grandson, returned to the deceased's home and found everything still locked up;
 - (c) At about 6pm that same day the deceased's grandson checked the deceased's home again. On this occasion

²⁴ Ex 1 Tab 4

²⁵ Ex 1 Tab 4

²⁶ Ex 1 Tab 2 and T.4



he opened the house, and noting that the deceased's mobile was not on the table, rang Mr Lloyd, the Ravensthorpe Hospital and his mother in an endeavour to ascertain the deceased's whereabouts. No-one knew where the deceased was and the deceased's mobile went to message bank²⁷.

29. On the morning of Wednesday 9 November 2011, Mr Lloyd and another contacted the deceased's grandson because they wanted to find the deceased. The deceased's grandson contacted one of his uncles to ascertain whether the deceased had taken a bus back to Perth.²⁸
30. At about 5pm, on Wednesday 9 November 2011 the deceased's grandson again accessed the deceased's home, searching it more assiduously and on this occasion found the deceased's mobile and wallet in the bedroom. At about 8.30pm on that date, the deceased's grandson rang the Ravensthorpe police to report him missing.²⁹
31. In response to that telephone call, that same evening Acting Sergeant Neale attended to search the deceased's home together with Constable Wood and the deceased's grandson. Police found no persons and no signs of violence or other suspicious circumstances. The deceased's car keys, wallet and mobile were at the

²⁷ Ex 1 Tab 4

²⁸ Ex 1 Tab 4, T.4

²⁹ T.4



house. Due to the darkness, they agreed to meet the next morning³⁰.

THE SEARCH

10 November 2011 (Day 1 of the Search)

32. On Thursday 10 November 2011 Acting Sergeant Neale, Constable Wood and the deceased's grandson searched the deceased's house, gardens, vehicles and out houses, but to no avail. Acting Sergeant Neale contacted Sergeant Townsend of the Hopetoun Police to seek his assistance to instigate a land search for the deceased.
33. At 7am on Thursday 10 November 2011 Sergeant Townsend of the Hopetoun Police attended at the Ravensthorpe Police Station and took on the role of Incident Controller due to his land and sea rescue qualifications. The Ravensthorpe Police Station was set up as an Incident Control Centre. Sergeant Townsend appointed Acting Sergeant Neale as Operations and Planning Officer.
34. Shortly thereafter an initial systematic search of the deceased's premises and the area in its vicinity was undertaken, based upon a two kilometre radius from the deceased's home. The decision concerning the scale of the initial search was made taking into account the deceased's last known sighting and the observation that he was not very mobile. Persons involved in this search included the Ravensthorpe SES, members of the

³⁰ Ex 1 Tab 2, T.4



Ravensthorpe Enduro Motorcycle Riders Club, local residents, and friends of the deceased.

35. The objective was to search all known areas that the deceased frequented. Search groups were arranged and maps and grids were drawn up.³¹
36. On this same date the deceased's grandson found a footprint on the "Desmond Track", ten kilometres east of Ravensthorpe which lent some hope that the deceased's whereabouts may be ascertainable, However it was later found by police not to match the deceased's shoe³². At 7:40pm the search for the deceased was suspended for the day with plans to resume at 7:00am the next day.³³

Friday 11 November 2011 (Day 2 of Search)

37. On Friday 11 November 2011 at 7am the second day of the search began and it was escalated to include an air search. A plane with SES spotters was sent from Esperance and despatched to outlining points that the deceased may have visited³⁴. The air search covered an area of approximately 200 square kilometres.³⁵
38. Within a couple of hours after the 7am start, the Gnowangerup SES and the Esperance SES arrived to assist the Ravensthorpe SES. Ground crews were

³¹ T.5 and Ex 1 Tabs 14-16

³² Ex 1 Tab 2 and Tab 21

³³ Ex 1 Tab 3

³⁴ Ex 1 Tab 3 and Tab 17, T.5

³⁵ Ex 1, Tab 17 Map indicates 11 sweeps, 300 metres apart at an altitude of approximately 250 feet



briefed and maps and search grids were allocated for Ravensthorpe and its surrounds.³⁶

39. Messrs Warren and David King, the deceased's sons, arrived in Ravensthorpe and they were briefed on search efforts to that point by the police.
40. Houses previously not searched were completed and surrounding bush land was searched, all to no avail.
41. At 5:20pm the search was concluded due to all avenues being exhausted³⁷.

Saturday 12 November 2011 (Search Re-started on the First Occasion)

42. The search was re-started on 12 November 2011 due to a potential sighting of the deceased.
43. At around 10:45am on 12 November 2011 Ms Kris Nicholson, a truck driver, was driving along Old Aerodrome Road on the way to Esperance, heading east. As she drove along the Phillips River Crossing she saw the face of an elderly person in the bushes to the right, looking scrubby or dirty. She was not sure if it was a male or female person. She reported it to the police because she knew they were looking for the deceased but she was unable to say whether it was the same person as in a photo she was later shown. Because she was driving a road train up a steep hill she was unable to stop³⁸.

³⁶ Ex 1 Tab 3 and Tabs 14-17, T.7

³⁷ Ex 1 Tab 2 and Tab 3, T.6

³⁸ Ex 1 Tab 11



44. At 1pm as a result of Ms Nicholson's information, Sergeant Townsend was recalled to duty as Incident Controller at Ravensthorpe to re-start the search assisted by Acting Sergeant Neale and Senior Constable Harrison³⁹.
45. In the early afternoon local SES and the Ravensthorpe Enduro Club members again attended the Ravensthorpe police station area and were deployed to the new search area. They were supplied with relevant maps and search grids. This search focussed on both sides of the Phillips River in a northerly and southerly direction, with motor bikes going along the dry riverbed for 5kms in either direction, and SES volunteers on foot searching the surrounding bush for a couple of kilometres either way.⁴⁰.
46. This area being searched was approximately 12km from the deceased's home.
47. At about 5:30pm due to all avenues being exhausted, the search was again concluded (for the second time).
48. However, shortly after it was concluded, on that same date the police received information from Ms Helen Mathieson Dyszel to the effect that she was out walking with her husband on the track west of the corner of Ravensthorpe Golf Club, and that she saw a pair of glasses on the track⁴¹.

³⁹ Ex 1 Tab 3

⁴⁰ Ex 1 Tabs 3 and 14, T. 11 and 12

⁴¹ Ex 1 Tab 12



49. The glasses were identified by the deceased's son Mr Warren King as belonging to the deceased⁴² and also later confirmed by the store manager of OPSM Esperance as having been prescribed for the deceased⁴³. When Mrs Mathieson found the glasses they were visible and positioned in the middle of a wide cleared fire break.
50. The track where the glasses were found had already been searched previously⁴⁴ because it was thought the deceased might have walked from his home towards the Ravensthorpe District Hospital (close by) and that he may have become disoriented⁴⁵, heading down that track, behind the hospital. It is not possible to conclude why the glasses had not been found when the track was searched previously.
51. Sergeant Townsend, Acting Sergeant Neale and Mr Rowe of the SES went to the location where the glasses were found but due to the time of day, a decision was made to recommence the search at 7am the next day⁴⁶.

Sunday 13 November 2011 (Search Re-started on the Second Occasion)

52. At about 7am on Sunday 13 November 2011 Sergeant Townsend and Senior Constable Harrison arrived at the Ravensthorpe Police Station and Sergeant Townsend

⁴² Ex 1 Tab 2

⁴³ Ex 1 Tab 13

⁴⁴ T.13

⁴⁵ T.13

⁴⁶ Ex 1 Tab 2 and Tab 3



became Incident Controller assisted by Acting Sergeant Neale and Senior Constable Harrison⁴⁷.

53. Shortly thereafter the SES search teams were briefed and supplied with relevant maps and search grids⁴⁸. There were four teams on foot and they were concentrating on the area where the deceased's glasses were found.
54. At 2:30pm on Sunday 13 November 2011 after the area where the glasses were found was extensively searched with no result and no other leads, the search was finally discontinued. This was the third and final cessation of the search⁴⁹.

OVERVIEW OF THE SEARCH

55. The search was well organised and systematically executed. Over four consecutive days it covered a land search of approximately 25 square kilometres and an air search of approximately 200 square kilometres.
56. The efforts of the police, SES volunteers (Ravensthorpe, Gnowangerup and Esperance), Ravensthorpe Enduro Motorcycle Riders' Club, local residents and the pilot involved in the search are commendable. Whilst the search was concluded on two occasions (and properly so given the circumstances) it was also promptly re-started when information came to light that lent some

⁴⁷ Ex Tab 3 and Tab 16

⁴⁸ Ex 1 Tab 3

⁴⁹ Ex 1 Tab 2 and 3



hope that the deceased may be found. It involved a total of 38 search personnel.

57. In his evidence Acting Sergeant Neale described the bushland surrounding Ravensthorpe as dense, steep terrain with lots of mine shafts out there, including ones not listed on maps.⁵⁰

CONCLUSION AS TO WHETHER THE DEATH HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED

58. The deceased has not been seen or heard from since 7 November 2011. Nor has he accessed his bank accounts.
59. In my view the evidence establishes beyond all reasonable doubt that the deceased died between 7 and 13 November 2011 somewhere in the bushland around the town of Ravensthorpe, Western Australia.

CONCLUSION AS TO HOW DEATH OCCURRED

60. It is not possible to be satisfied as to how the deceased died. Given his age and fragile state of health, coupled with the difficulties associated with dense and steep terrain around Ravensthorpe there are several possibilities as to how the deceased died. He may have left his home to go to the Ravensthorpe District Hospital and then ended up on the track behind the hospital, became disoriented and got lost in the bush. If he got lost in the bush he may have experienced dehydration, exacerbated by his diabetic condition or a

⁵⁰ T. 7-8, Ex 1 Tab 17



cardiovascular event. Another possibility is that he sustained injuries from a fall. However, this is speculation.

61. Whilst I cannot exclude that the deceased died from the actions of another person, there is no evidence that raises a suspicion in that regard.
62. At the time of his disappearance the deceased was grieving over the death of his wife and he was burdened by debts. However there is no clear and cogent evidence from which it may be inferred that the deceased intended to take his life.
63. Accordingly I make an Open Finding as to how death occurred.

CONCLUSION AS TO CAUSE OF DEATH

64. It follows from the Opening Finding that I cannot be satisfied as to what caused the deceased's death.
65. Accordingly I make no finding as to the cause of death.

R V C FOGLIANI
STATE CORONER

May 2014

