



Western

Australia

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

Ref No: 46/2013

I, Evelyn Felicia Vicker, Acting State Coroner, having investigated the suspected death of **Leslie Graham LEWIS**, with an Inquest held at Perth Coroners Court, Court 51, CLC Building, 501 Hay Street, Perth, on 17 December 2013 find the death has been established beyond all reasonable doubt, that the identity of the deceased was **Leslie Graham LEWIS** and that death occurred on or about the 24 February 2011 in the vicinity of Nong Khai, Thailand in the following circumstances -

Counsel Appearing :

Sgt L Housiaux assisted the Acting State Coroner

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INTRODUCTION

On 4 February 2011 Leslie Graham Lewis (the deceased) left Australia for a holiday in Thailand on a visa which expired in two months.

On 17 March 2011 the deceased's daughter reported him as a missing person to the New South Wales police where she resided.

On 16 April 2011 the deceased's daughter again reported her father as missing as his visa period had expired and she had not heard from him since the 11 February 2011, although she had received a bank transfer from him on or about 14 February 2011.

JURISDICTION

The deceased normally resided at an address in Duncraig, Western Australia. When the investigations instigated by his daughter in New South Wales failed to locate the deceased, the Western Australian police were asked to investigate the suspected death of the deceased, to enable the State Coroner to make a determination as to whether there was a reasonable cause to suspect the deceased had died, and that the death was a reportable death for the purposes of the Western Australian Coroners Act 1996 (the Act).



The State Coroner did have reasonable cause to suspect the deceased had died and that the death was a reportable death, and in those circumstances, pursuant to section 23(2) of the Act, an inquest must be held into the circumstances of the death to determine beyond all reasonable doubt the deceased had died and, if possible, how it occurred.

The deceased was 57 years of age in February 2011.

BACKGROUND

The deceased was born on 10 July 1953 in Rossett, County Denbigh, Wales, United Kingdom.¹ He was an only child and later became estranged from his family.

He later emigrated to Australia and became an Australian citizen on 21 June 1985.²

The deceased qualified as a registered nurse and met his future wife in 1984 in Brisbane at the Royal Brisbane Hospital where they both worked. They were married in 1985 and travelled to Western Australia where they resided in South Perth. The deceased worked as a registered nurse at the Heathcote Psychiatric Hospital.³

¹ Exhibit 1 Tab 1

² Exhibit 1 Tab 2

³ Exhibit 1 Tab 6



The deceased and his wife holidayed in Thailand in 1987 and, according to the deceased's ex-wife, he became obsessed with Asian women. He and his wife separated in 1987 and the deceased went to the UK. He later reconnected with his wife when she travelled to the UK and she then returned to Australia in 1989, when she became pregnant. The deceased followed.

The deceased's daughter was born in February 1990 in Subiaco. The deceased and his ex-wife separated again about one year later due to the deceased's heavy alcohol and cannabis use. On those occasions he became violent.

The deceased and his ex-wife shared care of their daughter Caridwen (Cari), and eventually divorced in 1993.

When the deceased's ex-wife was in a new relationship and became pregnant the deceased sought sole custody of his daughter, which was unsuccessful. The deceased and his ex-wife then shared care of Cari until she was about 14 years of age, when she started to spend more time with her mother.

The deceased continued to travel to Asia on holidays, and had an Asian girlfriend. His daughter became concerned as to the deceased's heavy alcohol consumption and the level of his cannabis use.



In December 2010 the deceased had travelled to Thailand and apparently met a Thai woman with whom he became quite heavily involved. He returned to Australia in early 2011 and advised his daughter he was going to Thailand because he wanted to reconnect with the Thai woman he had met there. He told his daughter he was considering selling up and moving to Darwin because it would be easier for him to travel to Thailand.

During this period it is clear the deceased was communicating with his Thai girlfriend, who he called "Bontao" or "Bon". Emails located by his ex-wife reveal the deceased was communicating extensively with his Thai girlfriend, encouraging her to stay faithful to him and travel to Nong Khai in northern Thailand, where her family resided.⁴

FEBRUARY 2011

Customs and Immigration records indicate the deceased left Australia on 4 February 2011 and records obtained from the Thai government indicate he arrived in Thailand on 5 February 2011.⁵

The deceased called his daughter by telephone on 7 February 2011 and spoke with her. He encouraged his girlfriend, Bon, to also speak with his daughter. His daughter

⁴ Exhibit 1 Tab 8

⁵ Exhibit 1 Tab 49



understood this to be his Thai girlfriend due to her poor English. She believed her father to be intoxicated at the time.

On 14 February 2011 the deceased's daughter received \$1000 by way of bank transfer from her father and this was the last communication of any type she had from her father.

Once the deceased's daughter had reported her father as missing the investigation was initiated by the New South Wales Police. They sought the assistance of the Australian Federal Police and the Royal Thai Police in making their enquiries as to the whereabouts of the deceased. The results of all those enquiries were passed to the West Australian Police who collated the information for the purposes of a report to the State Coroner surrounding the suspected death of the deceased.

CONCLUSION AS TO THE DEATH OF THE DECEASED

Following the deceased's arrival in Thailand it would appear he travelled to northern Thailand in the company of his Thai girlfriend, Ladda Julanan, also known as "Bon", "Boon" and "Bontao" (Bon). Bon appears to have had had family in Poone Pisai approximately 40 minutes from Nong Khai in northern Thailand. They stayed with Bon's family for a few days before moving to Nong Khai.



In Nong Khai the couple stayed at several locations including the Mut Mee guesthouse on the banks of the Mekong River.

All those who had contact with the deceased, including his Australian friends and Bon, reported that while in Thailand he drank alcohol heavily, often consuming a bottle of whisky a day.⁶

One evening after drinking all day the deceased was so drunk he fell over and lost consciousness. He was conveyed to the local hospital by an ambulance. Hospital records indicate he remained there for two days during which time he exhibited symptoms of serious alcohol withdrawal.

The deceased was discharged on 23 February 2011 into the care of Bon and hospital staff advised her the deceased was not to drink too much otherwise he would die. Bon stated to AFP officers one of the reasons the deceased wished to leave hospital was so he could continue to drink. Bon intended to take him to her home town clinic

The deceased was discharged between 3 and 4pm on 23 February 2011 and he and Bon walked to the Mut Mee guesthouse where they checked in. They had stayed there before.

⁶ Exhibit 1 Tab 10



Bon stated that evening they began to argue because she was trying to prevent the deceased from drinking more alcohol. He packed her bags and told her to leave. She advised the police (AFP) the deceased became extremely aggressive, tearing up his passport and throwing his belongings around, so she left that evening and returned to the hospital where her sister was caring for a sick child.

10pm on the evening of 23 February 2011 was the last time Bon stated she saw the deceased.

The deceased and Bon had been booked in to the Mut Mee guesthouse by a Canadian employee, Robert Tilson.⁷

In the early hours of 24 February 2011 Mr Tilson heard noises outside the guesthouse and when he investigated found the deceased lying on a deckchair in the garden looking dishevelled. Mr Tilson formed the view the deceased was intoxicated and when he spoke to him he found he was incoherent and rambling, talking about wanting a room that was safe and he was concerned about a motor cycle. Mr Tilson searched the area but found nothing of concern. He also searched the room the deceased was staying in which was empty other than his belongings.

⁷ Exhibit 1 Tab 12



When Mr Tilson asked the deceased to return to his room he refused and the deceased then left the guesthouse telling Mr Tilson he was leaving and he did not know or care where he was going.

Mr Tilson did not see the deceased again and the following day cleaned his room in preparation for new guests. He placed the deceased's belongings including clothing, a mobile phone and computer into a box which he left in the manager's office.

The following morning Bon returned to the guesthouse but found the deceased had gone and she spent the next few days searching for him with her cousin. She was told the deceased had been seen with blood on his shirt near a temple but had refused an offer to go to the hospital.

Bon reported the deceased to the Nong Khai tourist police as a missing person on 24 February 2011. Later enquiries suggest that on the 24 February 2011 the deceased was observed by an employee of the Pantawee Hotel in an intoxicated state trying to get into a tourist bus and drive it away. There was a short scuffle between the deceased and a bus driver before he was removed from the bus and walked away from the hotel, towards a nearby temple on the banks of the Mekong River.



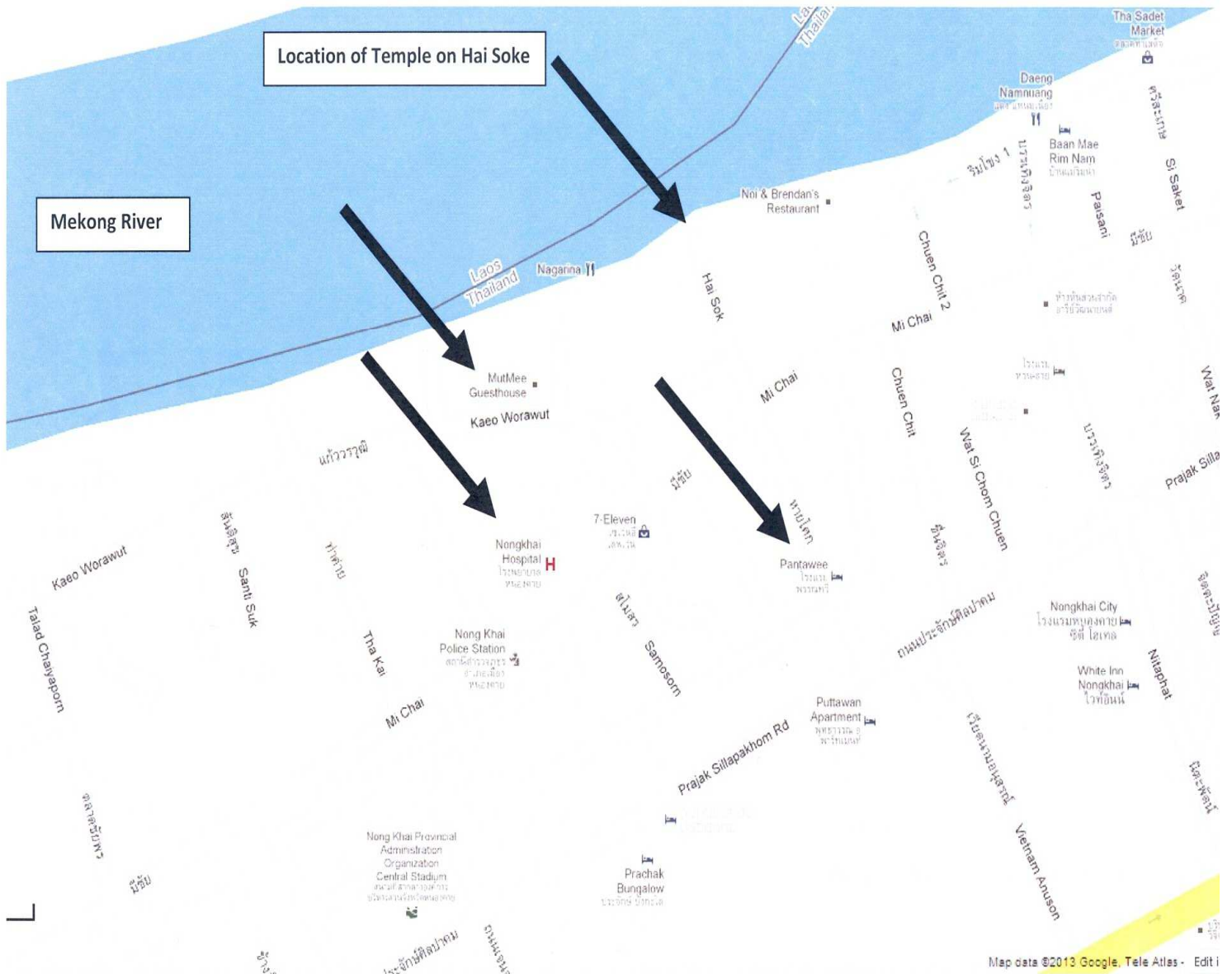
This is the last known sighting of the deceased.



Photograph depicting the temple on the banks of the Mekong River

The temple is on the banks of the Mekong River approximately 300 metres away from the Pantawee Hotel on the same street. Similarly the Mut Mee guesthouse is on the banks of the Mekong River and approximately 200 metres from the Pantawee Hotel.





The person observing the deceased walking away from the altercation with the bus driver described the deceased as dirty and dishevelled, wearing no shoes and appearing to be intoxicated. On being shown a photograph of the deceased she confirmed he was the person she had seen that day.



Bon returned to the Mut Mee guesthouse on 26 February 2011 again looking for the deceased, but was refused access to his belongings because she was unable to prove she was his wife.

None of the investigations conducted by the Royal Thai Police, the AFP, the New South Wales police or the WA police were able to establish any further sightings of the deceased following his walking away from the altercation with the tourist bus driver on 24 February 2011 in an intoxicated state.

The deceased's bank accounts and credit cards have not been utilised since before 24 February 2011, other than for direct debit standing accounts.

There is no record of the deceased either leaving Thailand or re-entering Australia.

The deceased does not match the description of any of the western males found deceased in Nong Khai between 1 January 2011 and 29 May 2012.

None of the deceased's friends have heard from the deceased after the 24 February 2011.



The fact the deceased's daughter has not heard from the deceased is significant. Until mid February 2011 Cari always had some knowledge of the whereabouts of her Father and knew his intention was to return to Australia in March 2011.

Thai Police indicate many people die as the result of falling into the Mekong River which is fast flowing in the vicinity of Nong Khai and their bodies frequently get swept from the area. It is also the case that if a body is found on the banks of the river it is Buddhist custom to dispose of it by burning as quickly as possible, without reporting it to the police.

On the whole of the evidence I am satisfied beyond all reasonable as to the death of the deceased in the vicinity of Nong Khai, Thailand, on or about 24 February 2011.

I am unable on the information available to determine the cause of his death or the manner of his death.

E F VICKER
ACTING STATE CORONER

December 2013

