



Coroner's Court of Western Australia

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

Ref 7/20

*I, Evelyn Felicia VICKER, Coroner, having investigated the disappearance of **Fred JACKAMORA** with an inquest held at the **Coroner's Court, Court 2, Broome Court House, Hamersley Street, Broome, on 28 and 29 January 2020, find the death of **Fred JACKAMORA** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt, and the identity of the deceased person was **Fred JACKAMORA** and that death occurred on a date unknown following the 9 November 1983, likely somewhere in an area between Kalumburu Mission and Mount Elizabeth Station in the following circumstances:***

Counsel Appearing:

Senior Constable Craig Robertson assisting the Coroner.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
Long Term Missing Persons Project (LTMP)	2
THE DECEASED	4
Kalumburu Mission	7
DISAPPEARANCE	10
INVESTIGATION	13
HAS DEATH BEEN ESTABLISHED?	14
MANNER AND CAUSE	15
CONCLUSION	15

INTRODUCTION

Fred Jackamora (Mr Jackamora) was last seen on 9 November 1983 at Kalumburu Mission and was never seen again. His stated intention was to walk from Kalumburu Mission to Mount Elizabeth Station, approximately 350 kilometres away, to visit relatives.

The inquest into the disappearance of Mr Jackamora was held in Broome on the understanding the incumbent Bishop of Broome in 2019, Christopher Alan Saunders (Bishop Saunders), had been Administrator of Kalumburu Mission at the time Mr Jackamora left. It was hoped this would facilitate Bishop Saunders giving evidence in person, which unfortunately did not occur.

The documentary evidence comprised the brief of evidence as Exhibit 1, Tabs 1-29 and the Public Notice of Inquest dated 31 December 2019 as Exhibit 2. Oral evidence was heard by way of video link from Senior Constable Smith, who had compiled a report from the papers contained in the Missing Person file and James Berry (Mr Berry) a retired police officer, who visited Kalumburu Mission to facilitate the investigation in 1985. Once Bishop Saunders had been located he gave evidence by way of telephone link from Perth to Broome on 29 January 2020.

Long Term Missing Persons Project (LTMP)

In 2017 it was confirmed there were a considerable number of files relating to the long term disappearance of people who had been in Western Australia at the time of their reported disappearance. Some of the disappearances occurred at a time when there was no or limited jurisdiction for a coroner to examine the circumstances of a suspected death.

Section 23(1) of the *Coroners Act 1996 WA* (the Act) allows the State Coroner to direct an investigation into a suspected death in certain circumstances without a body, for the purposes of allowing a coroner, under section 23(2),

to establish beyond all reasonable doubt that death has occurred. The investigation must be done by way of inquest and will attempt to clarify how the death occurred and the cause of the death. This effectively brings the suspected death into the ambit of s 25 of the Act and allows registration of the death under the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1998*.

The reported number of LTMP made it unrealistic for the Office of the State Coroner (OSC) to absorb those matters into the already long outstanding inquest list in a timely manner. A plan was proposed for a project to clear the backlog of LTMP files once it had been determined the matters fitted the circumstances set out in s 23(1) of the Act. That is, the State Coroner or delegate had reasonable cause to suspect the person had died and the death was a reportable death (s3 of the Act).

In 2018 approval was given for a coroner to work exclusively on the LTMP cases, on a part-time basis for twelve months, as a separate listing from the OSC general inquest list. This followed a pilot project of four inquests conducted in 2018.

In 2019 a coroner was appointed for that project with the support of an in-house Coronial Investigation Squad (CIS) police officer as Counsel Assisting (CA).

Work on the files indicated a number of the disappearances related to specific areas of Western Australia, such as the Kimberley around Kununurra or Broome, and Albany. For these matters it was decided that, while there is always a preference for inquests to be held in the communities to which they relate, especially for Indigenous communities where there is an emphasis on oral history, resources would not be effectively utilised for all matters to be heard in the place of disappearance. Instead matters where the disappearance occurred outside the Perth metropolitan area were considered from the perspective of the best availability for relevant witnesses.

In the case of Mr Jackamora there was a relevant witness in Broome in the form of Bishop Saunders, then Father Saunders of Kalumburu Mission in 1983. It was hoped Bishop Saunders would be able to provide background information on Kalumburu Mission which would be relevant to all persons missing from the Mission area. Despite being summonsed for Broome, by the time of the hearing Bishop Saunders was on a training course/retreat in Perth. Fortunately he was persuaded to give oral evidence by way of telephone link while the court was sitting in Broome. The court was also able to hear evidence from Mr Berry who had been located at Wyndham Police Station when the investigation into Mr Jackamora's disappearance crystallised.

The anticipated outcome of the LTMP project was that by June 2020 the majority of LTMP matters would be resolved and that future missing person files would be dealt with in the normal course of the OSC's usual business.

THE DECEASED

Mr Jackamora was recorded as being born on 1 July 1929 on the Drysdale River Station, Kalumburu,¹ which is confirmed on his Health Care cards, although his name there is recorded as Freddie Jackamurro with an identification number and Medibank information². The Police also have Mr Jackamora recorded as "Mychook Yinangu (Fred)"³ although that is not referred to elsewhere in the papers.

Mr Jackamora is recorded as having two wives, Tingalmede Gnanbery Kananju and later Maudie Booyooridge, but is not recorded as having any children.⁴

¹ Exhibit 1 Tab 1

² Exhibit 1 Tab 8

³ Exhibit 1 Tab 2

⁴ Exhibit 1 Tab 3

Mr Jackamora worked as a casual wood cutter when he was younger and was able to communicate in English. He did not read or write.

Bishop Saunders recalled Mr Jackamora as an older mission resident who lived on both sides of the King Edward River depending on his preference.⁵ He appeared relatively healthy for his age and had a wiry build Bishop Saunders considered well-adapted to long periods of walking. He looked as though he could go on walking indefinitely and was, as many of the older residents, very determined once he set his mind on a course of action.⁶ Bishop Saunders did not recall Mr Jackamora having impaired eyesight, but was not surprised his Healthcare records gave that description as many of the older, more traditional residents suffered cataracts.⁷

In the months before Mr Jackamora disappeared Bishop Saunders noted some deterioration in Mr Jackamora's cognition. He gave as an example Mr Jackamora appearing at the bakery at odd times to collect bread, which was regularly dispensed at the same time each day. Bishop Saunders thought this may reflect his later comments to police that Mr Jackamora was "*going silly in the head*".⁸

There was no evidence of difficulty for Mr Jackamora in the community, although after his disappearance other members of the community described Mr Jackamora as going for a walk to Mount Elizabeth with his dogs because he feared someone wished him harm.

There is nothing in Mr Jackamora's Healthcare record which specifically assists with the identification of skeletal remains. There is nothing recorded

⁵ T 29.1.20 page 22

⁶ T 29.1.20 page 25

⁷ T 29.1.20 page 27

⁸ T 29.1.20 page 23

in dental records. There are however one or two interesting observations which could relate to his disappearance. The record appears to start in August 1968 when the Benedictine monks were in control of the mission.

The very first entry records poor vision in Mr Jackamora's right eye, with minimal cataract changes. No surgery for cataracts is recorded in his later record, which continues until August 1982, with the comment "*vision deteriorating, early cataracts.*"⁹

The Healthcare record goes on to reflect Mr Jackamora's reasonably regular contact with medical people at the mission when he was present, with an entry in 1979 recording him as reported by other pensioners to have "fits" all the time.¹⁰ This is not repeated later and Bishop Saunders was unaware of any reported fits for Mr Jackamora.¹¹

Mr Jackamora's original health card also records his family/wife as Umbari, Umdoli and Tari. The Tari is of interest as Sylvina Tari (Ms Tari) disappeared from Walmbi Camp for a long period of time in 1977. The police recorded the other residents of the camp believed she had walked into the bush to die as was the culture among older traditional Aboriginal people. There is some evidence Ms Tari returned years later and died in late 1981 or early 1982 although there is no official record of her death.¹²

Yilmbut Umbul (Ms Umbul), also a resident of Walmbi Camp, disappeared from the camp in 1982 and some of the mission residents implied Ms Umbul and Mr Jackamora had been in an improper relationship. However, another

⁹ Exhibit 1 Tab 8

¹⁰ Exhibit 1 Tab 8

¹¹ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 27

¹² Inquest Tari 3/12/19

of the residents of Walmbi Camp was adamant that was not true, rather Mr Jackamora visited Ms Umbul because they were related.¹³

The later Healthcare information records Mr Jackamora's wives as those recorded above; without reference to Umbari, Umdoli or Tari family ties.

The only other notable and relevant information about Mr Jackamora was that he had family on Mount Elizabeth Station, approximately half way between Kalumburu and Derby, a distance of approximately 350 kilometres.¹⁴

There was strong anecdotal information, and Bishop Saunders was told the same information by Mr Jackamora himself, that Mr Jackamora had walked from Kalumburu to Mount Elizabeth once before. Apparently it had taken six months, the terrain is very difficult, but he had arrived and visited with his family before returning to the Mission.

Kalumburu Mission

Kalumburu Mission was originally founded by the Benedictine Monks in 1908 as the Drysdale River Mission at the coastal location of Pago due to the good supply of fresh water. By 1936 the water supply was depleted and they moved the location of the mission ten miles inland over a period of years to Kalumburu, on the banks of the King Edward River.¹⁵

There was an aboriginal reserve alongside the mission land and the mission was assigned to "take care of" the community which was in those days under the care of the Native Protector. Due to trade with other cultures along the coastal areas there was a tendency for some exotic diseases to spread rapidly

¹³ Inquest Umbal 2/12/2019 page 5

¹⁴ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 24

¹⁵ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 18

in the exposed Aboriginal community. The provision of medical care to affected groups was one of the purposes of the protection, as was the prevention of the slave trade.¹⁶ The mission in its early days attracted communities from all over the Kimberley area and there are a number of people there from different tribal and language groups.

The mission developed large gardening and farming industries and became largely self-sufficient under the monks. Employment of the people revolved around maintaining the community through education and training aimed at local survival. Bishop Saunders described those as looking after stock, building fences, running boats and luggers, growing food and building. There was a bakery, food store, medical clinic and schooling. The Aboriginal community was alcohol free, although the monastery itself was not.¹⁷

Up until the early 1980s, while the mission was still under the control of the Benedictine monks, money for the welfare of the Aboriginal community was paid to the mission and used to provide for the community. This included providing provisions where necessary to the older members of the community who chose to live on the other side of the King Edward River - (Walmbi Camp). These people lived a more traditional/cultural lifestyle and were not expected to live by the rules and regulations of the mission, were not required to work, and lived largely by hunting and gathering where possible.¹⁸ If necessary, they were provided food from the mission, which they could collect, or it was taken to them by other members of the community. They were also provided medical care as they requested or as necessary. Some of the older members of the mission would live on both sides of the river, but no children were generally raised in the “old camp”.

¹⁶ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 19

¹⁷ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 24

¹⁸ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 20

Bishop Saunders described the monks as keeping very meticulous records of the events in the mission,¹⁹ but that practice did not continue when administration of the mission devolved from the Benedictines to the Catholic Church in conjunction with the Kalumburu Aboriginal Corporation in 1982.²⁰ Bishop Saunders, Bishop of the Diocese of Broome in 2019, was the first representative of the Catholic Church at Kalumburu Mission following the handover from the Benedictines in early 1982. He remained there for 6½ years as “parish priest and the administrator of the Mission, and we still had much to do with regard to the administration of the aboriginal community in those days”.²¹

Bishop Saunders commented that unfortunately his early diaries of events on the mission were destroyed in later floods.²² Following 1980 the Church did not receive funds for the individuals in the community from government. Rather cheques were issued to individuals which Bishop Saunders recalled caused many difficulties and issues over the ability to provide cash for use in the local store.²³

The Aboriginal population at that time was in the region of 300, with only 3-4 huts/camps on Walmbi campsite on the other side of the river. It was not uncommon for the people from Walmbi camp to go walkabout and visit family all over their traditional lands, which extended a long way beyond Kalumburu Mission.

Bishop Saunders also had access to a church plane located at the mission which he could pilot as necessary for the benefit of the mission or community

¹⁹ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 34

²⁰ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 29

²¹ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 18

²² Transcript 29.1.2020 page 34

²³ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 28

members. He had, in appropriate circumstance, used it to help search for missing people both before and after the disappearance of Mr Jackamora.²⁴

DISAPPEARANCE

There is some difficulty with reporting around the exact time of Mr Jackamora's disappearance due to his reputation for going walkabout and his stated intention to Father Saunders he was going to visit family. This is reflected in the available documentation as recorded by the police.

The Missing Person Report (MPR) is dated 5 December 1983.²⁵ It records Mr Jackamora as missing overnight from Kalumburu Mission on the 9-10 November 1983 in good health. He had last been seen on Wednesday 9 November and was believed to have left with one or two dogs. It was reported to the Wyndham Police at 1 pm on 14 November 1983 and records the fact Mr Jackamora had walked to Mount Elizabeth Station some years earlier intending to take 3-4 months, but had instead taken six months.

The MPR goes on to record attempts to search for Mr Jackamora by members of the community and the fact Mr Jackamora believed "someone wanted to do him some damage", wished to avoid being located and was perfectly capable of avoiding detection should he so wish. He was reported as missing by Father Saunders from Kalumburu Mission by radio via Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS).

It is relatively clear nothing was done following that first report as neither Father Saunders nor Wyndham Police in the form of then First Class Constable James Berry (Mr Berry) could recall such an early report. Mr Berry

²⁴ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 27

²⁵ Exhibit 1 Tab 3

gave evidence his own report was written on the day he returned from Kalumburu Mission following his visit there to investigate the disappearance of Mr Jackamora. That report is dated 20 January 1985.²⁶ Mr Berry believed he had gone to Kalumburu when the disappearance was reported, many months after the actual disappearance in November 1983.²⁷

I believe the reason for the delay in the Wyndham Police becoming actively involved in the disappearance of Mr Jackamora was due to the belief Mr Jackamora had gone to Mount Elizabeth and the expectation in November 1983 that he would appear some time in mid 1984. Having originally reported the matter to the Wyndham Police in November 1983, the report was put aside until his family in Mount Elizabeth became worried he had not appeared. It was for that reason Wyndham Police, in the form of Mr Berry, became involved in January 1985. Bishop Saunders could only recall reporting the matter to Police once Mr Jackamora's family in Mount Elizabeth became concerned and he had not appeared.²⁸

Bishop Saunders' recollection of Mr Jackamora's actual disappearance was that Mr Jackamora had told Father Saunders that "he was going to visit friends and relations."²⁹ Father Saunders understood this to be at Mount Elizabeth. The information about going because "someone wanted to do him damage" had not come from Mr Jackamora.

Father Saunders assumed Mr Jackamora would be travelling with others and did not understand Mr Jackamora intended to go alone or within a day or two. He was "quite astounded" by the distance, but was reassured by others

²⁶ Exhibit 1 Tab 5, Transcript 28.1.2020 page 9

²⁷ Transcript 28.1.2020 page 10

²⁸ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 25

²⁹ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 24

that Mr Jackamora had done it before and Father Saunders believed he was capable of such a journey at the time.³⁰

I speculate the original report to Wyndham Police on 14 November 1983 was made before Father Saunders had been reassured by the others on the Mission that Mr Jackamora had successfully completed the same trip before, and while he was still very concerned about Mr Jackamora leaving on his own. He was then persuaded it was not necessary to instigate any further searches at that time.³¹ In addition, Mr Jackamora was reported to have taken dogs with him and the fact no dogs are reported to have returned may have reassured people he was still alive.³²

Bishop Saunders agreed that if Mr Jackamora wished to disappear, it was unlikely he would be found and that men of his background were quite capable of eluding searchers and trackers should they so wish.³³

The one thing that does appear clear about Mr Jackamora's disappearance is that he intended to make a journey to Mount Elizabeth Station as reported to Father Saunders. He was about the Mission on Wednesday 9 November 1983 but had walked off, as he had done before, by the time people were aware of his going some time later on 10 November 1983. His dog or dogs went with him and were not recorded as returning. Later, after mid-1984, reports came from his family in Mount Elizabeth that he had not arrived and they were beginning to become concerned.

It was only at that time searchers seriously began to look for him along his assumed route of travel. Later the police were involved in the fact of the

³⁰ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 25

³¹ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 28

³² Transcript 29.1.2020 page 32

³³ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 26

disappearance.³⁴ By that time it was unlikely Mr Jackamora was going to be located alive.

INVESTIGATION

As stated, while reported in November 1983, nothing other than searches of parts of Mitchell Plateau by local community members were undertaken at that time.³⁵ The terrain between King Edward River and Mitchell Plateau is difficult and inaccessible and a single person wishing to avoid detection could do so easily.

Serious concerns about Mr Jackamora did not arise until late in 1984 when his family in Mount Elizabeth reported no sighting of him, and people travelling through the Kimberley similarly had not reported sightings of him.³⁶

It was only then the matter was reported to Wyndham Police as an ongoing concern. Mr Berry flew to Kalumburu Mission to conduct an investigation, which included searches from the Mission down to the coast and along the rivers with local people including trackers. Both Father Saunders and Mr Berry commented that it was not clear searchers were committed to finding Mr Jackamora due to the elapse of time.³⁷

While Father Saunders had used the Mission plane to help with searches on other occasions there was no point by then in using the plane to search for Mr Jackamora.³⁸

³⁴ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 26

³⁵ Exhibit 1 Tab 3

³⁶ Transcript 28.1.2020 page 9/35 29.1.2020 page 25-26

³⁷ Transcript 28.1.2020 page 20, 29.1.2020 page 25-26

³⁸ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 27

Mr Berry made later enquiries with local hospitals, but could find no trace of Mr Jackamora after November 1983 and later searches of other agencies recorded nothing from Mr Jackamora at all, despite there being a recorded Medicare number for him as an invalid pensioner.³⁹

There simply was no trace of Mr Jackamora ever recorded again and his brother, with a biological kinship, certainly did not report that Mr Jackamora had been located over the following years.⁴⁰

HAS DEATH BEEN ESTABLISHED?

I am satisfied beyond all reasonable doubt Mr Jackamora, who was in his mid-50s died sometime between late November 1983 and mid-1984, somewhere between Kalumburu mission and Mount Elizabeth Station.

I am satisfied he intended to travel between those locations for whatever reason, but somehow met his death along the way. While comparatively fit for his years, he was elderly with deteriorating eyesight and there are numerous possibilities for his death on such a journey. I am satisfied he did not die so close to the mission that his dogs returned or scavenger birds signalled his death, had anyone been looking. By 2019 Mr Jackamora would have been 90 and I am absolutely confident he would have come to the attention of authorities had he survived the journey.

I believe Mr Jackamora would have eventually reached Mt Elizabeth had he been in a position to do so and I am satisfied he died somewhere along the way.

³⁹ Exhibit 1 Tab 8

⁴⁰ Transcript 29.1.2020 page 31

MANNER AND CAUSE

Despite being satisfied beyond all reasonable doubt that Mr Jackamora is now deceased, and was deceased by the end of 1984, I am unable to determine how Mr Jackamora died or the manner of his death. There are numerous explanations in the known circumstances of Mr Jackamora setting out across country on his own over difficult terrain. He could have succumbed to age and frailty and died of natural causes, he could have had an accident which without treatment resulted in his death, or rumour may have been correct and somebody wishing to do him damage found him. There is absolutely no evidence whatsoever of this other than speculation following his disappearance.

In all the circumstances I make an Open Finding as to the manner and cause of Mr Jackamora's death.

CONCLUSION

I am satisfied Mr Jackamora was an older Kalumburu Mission resident who spent his time both on the Mission and at Walmbi camp, where due to his age he was free to come and go as he pleased. Mr Jackamora clearly had relatives in the Mount Elizabeth area he had visited before and it is clear his intention was to visit them again, for whatever reason. He explained this to Father Saunders who believed he would be setting off in company. This was not the case.

I am satisfied Mr Jackamora died and it was likely he had travelled some distance before that occurred otherwise I am sure his dogs would have returned and someone would have commented on that fact.

I think the most that can be said about Mr Jackamora's death, regardless of how exactly he met his death, is that he died whilst undertaking a journey he

wished to undertake. He would have been well aware of the possible risks associated with his chosen course of action.

E F VICKER
CORONER
26 May 2020