



FINDING OF INQUEST

An Inquest taken on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen at Adelaide in the State of South Australia, on the 24th day of July 2014 and the 28th day of November 2014, by the Coroner's Court of the said State, constituted of Mark Frederick Johns, State Coroner, into the death of Ian John Davidson.

The said Court finds that Ian John Davidson aged 60 years, late of 30 Bowen Road, Tea Tree Gully, South Australia died at 16 Nelson Street, Kilburn, South Australia on the 20th day of March 2012 as a result of stab wound of chest. The said Court finds that the circumstances of his death were as follows:

1. Introduction and reason for Inquest

- 1.1. Ian John Davidson died at the premises of his partner in Kilburn on 20 March 2012. He was 60 years of age at the time. He was found to have a single stab wound to his chest. At the time of his death, which I found to have been self-inflicted using a knife that was found at the scene, Mr Davidson was refusing requests of police officers to leave the premises. The police officers had been called to attend the premises in response to a telephone complaint made by Ms Weetra, who was Mr Davidson's partner. She had requested that police remove him from the house. At the time Mr Davidson was subject to bail conditions that required him to keep away from Ms Weetra. Mr Davidson was well aware of those bail conditions and the likelihood that police would arrest him for having been found to be in breach of them. In the circumstances I am satisfied that Mr Davidson's death was a death in custody within the meaning of that expression in the Coroners Act 2003, and this Inquest was held as required by section 21(1)(a) of that Act.

2. Cause of death

- 2.1. A post-mortem examination was carried out by Dr Langlois of Forensic Science South Australia and he gave the cause of death as 'stab wound of chest'¹, and I so find.

3. The events of 20 March 2012

- 3.1. I heard evidence from the investigating officer, Detective Sheridan. He described the investigation and the events of, and leading up to, 20 March 2012. I am satisfied that Detective Sheridan's investigation was extremely thorough and comprehensive. His investigation revealed that there was no evidence of any other person having been involved in the inflicting of the fatal stab wound as Mr Davidson was entirely alone inside the house at the time it occurred. Furthermore, I am satisfied as a result of the evidence given by Detective Sheridan and the numerous documents and statements gathered by him in the course of his investigation, that the attending police officers acted appropriately and bear no responsibility whatsoever for Mr Davidson's tragic death.
- 3.2. The events of that day were as follows. Police officers were called to attend the Kilburn premises in response to a telephone complaint made by Ms Weetra who was requesting that her partner, Mr Davidson, be removed from the home. Soon after the arrival of the police they spoke briefly to Mr Davidson who had secured himself inside the house by means of a locked screen door. The police were aware that Mr Davidson was under bail conditions that required him to stay away from Ms Weetra.
- 3.3. Detective Sheridan gave evidence that Senior Constable Loader and Constable Colclasure arrived at the premises at 4:15pm and spoke to Mr Davidson through the locked front screen door of the premises². Mr Davidson refused to come out from the premises and he informed the police that he did not want to get arrested because his mother's funeral was to take place the following day and he wanted to be able to attend it³.

¹ Exhibit C2a

² Transcript, pages 32-33

³ Transcript, page 34

- 3.4. The two police officers continued to negotiate with Mr Davidson and had three separate conversations with him through the locked screen door. The last reported communication with Mr Davidson is able to be ascertained by means of a transcription of the SAPOL Comcen recordings⁴. They show that at 1638 hours, or shortly prior to that, police had spoken to Mr Davidson who was still refusing to leave the premises.
- 3.5. Police officers Loader and Colclasure made statements that after this communication everything was quiet for approximately five minutes. At this point they became concerned and decided that they would enter the premises. They effected entry by means of a key that was provided to them by Ms Weetra, who had approached them while they were outside the house⁵.
- 3.6. The next Comcen transmission is timed at 1647 hours and it is a request that an ambulance attend the premises. This transmission likely took place less than a minute after police gained entry to the premises⁶.
- 3.7. Detective Sheridan said that three police officers, namely Sergeant Wilsdon of Holden Hill's patrol, Senior Constable Loader and Constable Colclasure entered the premises. They located Mr Davidson lying on the ground inside the house and they noted that there was a knife on the ground next to him under his left arm. They noted that there was blood and that his eyes were fixed and looking at the ceiling. They requested that an ambulance be called.
- 3.8. Sergeant Wilsdon obtained a tea towel from the kitchen and Constable Loader used it to apply pressure to the chest wound. At that point the officers noted that Mr Davidson was still breathing, although shallowly, and there was a faint pulse. Some short time after this the officers noted that Mr Davidson stopped breathing and they were unable to find a pulse. They immediately commenced CPR until the arrival of the ambulance. Tragically, the ambulance officers were unable to revive Mr Davidson and he was pronounced deceased by the paramedics at the scene⁷.

⁴ Exhibit C55a

⁵ It transpired that Ms Weetra had left the premises and was in a neighbour's house when she realised that the police had attended the premises

⁶ Transcript, page 35

⁷ Transcript, page 37

- 3.9. Dr Jayakumar Menon was a senior psychiatric registrar at the Royal Adelaide Hospital Emergency Department⁸. On 14 March 2012, that is six days before Mr Davidson's death, Dr Menon examined Mr Davidson in the Royal Adelaide Hospital Emergency Department. Mr Davidson had been brought in by police officers from the cells for psychiatric assessment. He had been arrested but was subsequently released on bail and was at liberty, clearly enough, on 20 March 2012. In any event, he was examined at the request of police officers because he had made remarks that caused them to be concerned about whether he might harm himself. Dr Menon stated that he found no acute psychiatric diagnosis and no current risk of self-harm. He found no evidence to detain Mr Davidson under the Mental Health Act. Dr Menon said that Mr Davidson was fully aware of his situation and was clear that he would not do anything further which might sabotage his chances of being present for his mother's funeral. Dr Menon found him fit to be discharged to go back to police custody.
- 3.10. Dr Jules Begg is a consultant psychiatrist who had examined Mr Davidson for the purposes of a court appearance in January 2012, that is three months before his death⁹. Dr Begg noted that Mr Davidson had been in a relationship with Ms Weetra for some 18 months and that it was a relationship characterised by a dependency need on Mr Davidson's part, despite his reports of abusive behaviour by Ms Weetra towards him when she was intoxicated. Dr Begg thought that Mr Davidson had a recurrent depressive disorder in the context of dependent personality features. He thought that Mr Davidson was likely to have difficulty with the expression of aggression and was more likely to withdraw and be passive in his expression of anger, but when put into situations in which he did not feel there was any alternative, he may react in an impulsive and dangerous manner. Dr Begg said:

'Considering his past history there is a risk of further impulsive actions, and these are more likely to be directed at himself rather than at other people. He assures me he is going to see his general practitioner to discuss his medication. There are many other medication options that would be suitable.'¹⁰

⁸ Exhibit C24a

⁹ Exhibit C23b

¹⁰ Exhibit C23b

4. Conclusion and recommendations

4.1. In my opinion, Mr Davidson's actions on 20 March 2012 were consistent with the opinions expressed by Dr Begg. In my opinion, the actions of police in attending at Ms Weetra's request on that day were entirely appropriate and they acted in a restrained manner. They only entered the house when they were concerned for Mr Davidson's safety. Tragically, by the time they found him, it was too late to prevent his death by his own hand. I have no recommendations to make in this matter.

Key Words: Death in Custody (police); Suicide

In witness whereof the said Coroner has hereunto set and subscribed his hand and

Seal the 28th day of November, 2014.

State Coroner