
JURISDICTION : CORONER'S COURT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
ACT : CORONERS ACT 1996
CORONER : ROBYN MARY HARTLEY, CORONER
HEARD : 4 FEBRUARY 2025
DELIVERED : 11 AUGUST 2025
FILE NO/S : CORC 3326 of 2023
DECEASED : HARRINGTON, SIMON BRIAN

Catchwords:

Nil

Legislation:

Nil

Counsel Appearing:

Counsel Assisting : Craig ROBERTSON

Case(s) referred to in decision(s):

Nil

Coroners Act 1996
(Section 26(1))

RECORD OF INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH

*I, Robyn Mary Hartley, Coroner, having investigated the disappearance of **Simon Brian HARRINGTON** with an inquest held at Perth Coroners Court, Central Law Courts, Court 85, 501 Hay Street, Perth, on 4 February 2025, find that the death of **Simon Brian HARRINGTON** has been established beyond all reasonable doubt and that the identity of the deceased person was **Simon Brian HARRINGTON** and that death occurred on a date unknown between 10 January 2011 and 10 March 2011 in the vicinity of Butchers Track, Hamelin Pool as a result of an unknown cause in the following circumstances:*

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INTRODUCTION

- 1 Simon Brian Harrington (Simon) was 34 years old when he went missing on 10 January 2011.
- 2 Due to concerns for his mental well-being, Simon's family contacted police to report him missing within hours of his disappearance and police commenced searching for him that same day.
- 3 Enquiries revealed Simon withdrew money from an ATM in Geraldton late in the day on 10 January 2011, so the search for him was directed to that area.
- 4 On 10 March 2011 the vehicle Simon left home in on 10 January 2011 was located abandoned in remote bushland in the Mid-West Gascoyne. Evidence of suicidal intent was found at the scene, however Simon's body has never been located. Simon has not been seen or heard from since he disappeared.
- 5 At the conclusion of the Western Australia Police investigation, Acting State Coroner Linton determined that, pursuant to section 23 of the *Coroners Act 1996* (WA), there was reasonable cause to suspect that Simon had died and that his death was a reportable death. A direction was made that an inquest be held to investigate the circumstances of the suspected death.¹
- 6 I held an inquest into Simon's suspected death at the Perth Coroner's Court on 4 February 2025. The inquest consisted of the tendering of documentary evidence compiled during the police investigation into Simon's disappearance, supplemented by oral evidence from Detective Senior Sergeant Jarrod Manson from the WA Police Missing Persons Team who completed the report into Simon's suspected death².
- 7 Simon's older sister, Michelle Harrington (Michelle), took the opportunity to provide oral evidence about her brother, the police response to his disappearance and challenges she encountered in advocating for Simon as he navigated the mental health system.

¹ Section 23 *Coroners Act* Direction of Acting State Coroner dated 30 August 2023.

² Exhibit 1, Tab 5 Report of Detective Senior Sergeant Jarrod MANSON dated 21 August 2024.

BACKGROUND

- 8 Simon was born in England and migrated to Australia when he was 14 years old along with his parents and older sister, Michelle. He was raised in a loving family environment.
- 9 Michelle recalls her brother as articulate, intelligent and caring. He was a quiet man who conducted himself with integrity. Simon was an animal lover who fostered dogs.
- 10 Simon studied Information Technology after school and travelled to England to work in this field. He became established there, buying a house in Cambridgeshire.
- 11 In July 2007 Simon returned to Perth for his father's surprise 60th birthday celebrations.
- 12 As soon as they saw him at the airport, Simon's family knew that his mental health had declined considerably. The day after he arrived, his sister took him to him to Joondalup Emergency Department due to concerns for his well-being.
- 13 Simon was initially treated at the Mead Centre in Armadale as he was staying at his sister's home in Oakford.
- 14 Simon's family did everything in their power to get him the help he needed to get his mental health back on track. His sister, in particular, did her utmost to advocate for her brother as he battled to find an effective treatment regime.
- 15 In April 2008 Simon's care was transferred from the Mead Centre to the Alma Street Centre located at Fremantle Hospital due to him moving to live with his parents in Coogee. At the time of transfer, Simon had a diagnosis of depression with psychotic features.³
- 16 On 30 August 2008 Simon attempted suicide by hanging but the branch holding the rope broke.
- 17 Simon's treatment with the Alma Street Centre was still active at the time of his disappearance.

³ Exhibit 1 Tab 21 Fremantle Hospital Medical Records for Simon Brian HARRINGTON

MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT PROVIDED TO SIMON

- 18 Michelle gave evidence at the inquest about the challenges she encountered in attempting to advocate for her brother during his ongoing interactions with the mental health system, particularly at the Alma Street Centre.⁴
- 19 Michelle spoke of a lack of involvement afforded to her family to meet and communicate with staff and Simon's treating psychiatrist prior to his discharge from an inpatient admission as well as a persistent lack of follow up care promised at the time of discharge.
- 20 Michelle also felt repeatedly ignored when she questioned medications that caused Simon to sleep for days on end and seemingly caused him to feel more unwell. She explained that she voiced her concerns repeatedly and assertively and was promised return calls which never eventuated.
- 21 Simon's sister raised concerns over the lack of awareness and acceptance of what she believes were clear warning signs that her brother was unwell and required inpatient admission when he presented to the Alma Street Centre on Christmas Day 2010 in crisis. This presentation was something she only learnt about after Simon's disappearance. Michelle believes it was a critical error that Simon's family were not advised about Simon's attendance at the Alma Street Centre on 25 December 2010 at the time.
- 22 Following the inquest Senior Constable Robertson, Police Counsel Assisting, wrote to the South Metropolitan Health Service setting out Michelle's concerns about the care Simon received at the Alma Street Clinic and inviting a response.⁵
- 23 When sending the request, I was conscious of the time that had passed between Simon's period of care at the Alma Street Centre. To their credit, the Health Service went to significant lengths to provide a well-informed response to the concerns raised by Simon's sister.⁶
- 24 Based on their detailed review of Simon's Alma Street Centre records, the South Metropolitan Health Service were able to identify recorded instances of family meetings and post discharge care being provided to Simon.

⁴ T 13 – 44.

⁵ Letter from Senior Constable ROBERTSON to South Metropolitan Health Service dated 28 February 2025.

⁶ Letter from South Metropolitan Health Service to Officer Assisting the State Coroner dated 21 March 2025.

- 25 The current Mental Health Head of Service, Dr Mitul Bhatt (Dr Bhatt), provided input on the Health Service's response to the issue of medication seemingly making Simon sleep excessively and sometimes made him more unwell. Dr Bhatt advised that while medications prescribed to treat mental illness may cause drowsiness, from his experience, the most significant contributing factor to patients being drowsy and not wanting to get out of bed is the underlying depression. Dr Bhatt also explained that it is challenging to manage the side effects of medication versus the risk of patients with psychotic symptoms not being medicated.
- 26 On Simon's presentation to the Alma Street Centre on Christmas Day in 2010, the South Metropolitan Health Service was able to locate the Triage Nurse who met with him. The Triage Nurse has a very clear recollection of her interaction with Simon that day. She sat with Simon and spoke with him about his concerns about re-entering the workforce.
- 27 The Triage Nurse contacted the Duty Medical Officer working at the time, who happened to be Simon's treating psychiatrist. The doctor agreed that it would be helpful for Simon to be prescribed a short course of Quetiapine to help reduce his anxiety and improve his sleep.
- 28 It was confirmed that Simon was aware of the emergency contact numbers available to him and he agreed that he would return to the Alma Street Centre if he began to feel worse over the Christmas long weekend.
- 29 Simon told the Triage Nurse that he was looking forward to Christmas lunch with his family that day.
- 30 Simon's Case Manager followed up with a telephone call to him on 29 December 2010.
- 31 The Health Service has explained that given Simon was an adult patient who did not meet the criteria for involuntary admission to the Alma Street Centre on 25 December 2010, it was not appropriate for staff there to breach the duty of confidentiality owed to him by contacting his family.
- 32 I understand that, with the benefit of hindsight, it could be seen that Simon's Christmas day attendance at the Alma Street Centre was a much more desperate cry for help than it appeared. However, based on the information the Triage Nurse, Duty Medical Officer and Simon's Case Manager had at the time of their interactions with and treatment of

him on 25 and 29 December 2010, I am satisfied that they conducted themselves appropriately.

- 33 As I did at the inquest, I commend Michelle for her willingness to speak openly to me about the challenges and frustrations she encountered as she supported her brother through his mental health challenges. I have no doubt as to the veracity of her experience. Just as I do not criticise the Alma Street Centre or its staff. I am confident they were doing their best to help Simon and his family but am sure they would agree that the system is always under strain and opportunities can be inadvertently missed.

SIMON'S DISAPPEARANCE

- 34 On Monday 10 January 2011, Simon started a new job as a computer software engineer.
- 35 At around 10.30am he returned to the family home and told his father he was unable to cope with the new job and needed to attend the Alma Street Centre to get medication for his anxiety.
- 36 Simon was last seen leaving home driving his sister's green Ford Fairmont vehicle registration 9KK809. His family believed he was travelling to the Alma Street Centre.
- 37 Simon's family quickly became concerned when they realised he hadn't taken his mobile phone or his beloved dog Merc with him. Simon and Merc were inseparable. The last time Simon left his dog at home was on 30 August 2008 when he attempted suicide by hanging. Simon's family called the Alma Street Centre who advised that Simon had not attended there.
- 38 Michelle called police shortly after midday on 10 January 2011 and discussed her concerns about her brother's welfare. An Incident Report was created⁷ and enquiries into Simon's possible whereabouts began immediately.
- 39 Simon's mother made a formal Missing Person Report to police at 1.10pm on 10 January 2011.⁸

⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 3 WA Police Incident Report LWP 110110017499.

⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 2 Missing Person Report for Simon Brian HARRINTON.

- 40 A Missing Person poster displaying Simon's photograph was created and circulated to all policing districts within two hours of him being reported missing.⁹ A 'Look Out To Be Kept For' Broadcast was created on the WA Police Computer Aided Dispatch system.
- 41 Carriage of the investigation was transferred to the WA Police Missing Persons Unit on 12 January 2011.
- 42 Enquires with Simon's bank revealed he had withdrawn cash at an ATM in Geraldton on the evening of 10 January 2011. Upon receipt of this information on 13 January 2011, WA Police issued media releases asking the public to look out for Simon. An article was published in The West Australian Newspaper on 19 January 2011 with a photograph of Simon included.
- 43 Simon's family travelled to Geraldton to assist in the search for him.
- 44 Enquiries with various government bodies and institutions were conducted, but none were able to provide any information as to Simon's whereabouts since the date of his disappearance.
- 45 WA Police arranged for details of Simon's disappearance to be broadcast in the CrimeStoppers section of The West Australian Newspaper on 16 February 2011.¹⁰
- 46 On 21 February 2011 Simon's family arranged for a radio broadcast on a station that covered the entire Mid West Gascoyne District to raise awareness of the ongoing search for him.
- 47 On 28 February 2011 the Department of Immigration & Citizenship confirmed that Simon was not recorded as having departed Australia.

VEHICLE AND OTHER ITEMS LOCATED

- 48 At 4.45 pm on 10 March 2011, the manager of Hamelin Pool Station contacted the Officer in Charge at the Shark Bay Police Station advising that he had come across an abandoned green Ford Fairmont during a maintenance check on the fence line at the property. He explained that the vehicle was located north of Butchers Track approximately 8.2 kilometres east of the North West Coastal Highway

⁹ Exhibit 1, Tab 4 WA Police Missing Person poster for HARRINGTON Simon Brian.

¹⁰ Exhibit 1, Tab 28 CrimeStoppers article in The West Australian Newspaper 16 February 2011.

49 On 11 March 2011 local police officers went to the location described by the Station manager and found a green Ford Fairmont with registration 9KK809. By this time, they were aware of the fact that the vehicle was linked to an ongoing missing person investigation.

50 The officers took photographs of the outside and interior of the vehicle¹¹ before searching the surrounding area.

51 They located an envelope approximately 50 metres north of the vehicle. It was addressed to Simon Harrington and had been sent to him by the Perth Glory Membership Team. The envelope was found partially buried in the dirt. Pieces had been torn from it and placed inside the envelope. When the pieces were put back together it revealed a handwritten note which read as follows:

If you had lived my life you would know how bloody horrible it has been. But you haven't you've lived yours so enjoy it. I've had 6 crownies and I'm at peace with myself and life, so peace out. Enjoy.
P.S. Please cremate me el cheapo stye. Coogee beach path would be a nice eternal home. And look after Merc! You know he needs it. Have missed him so much.¹²

52 Simon's family reviewed the note and confirmed that the handwriting belonged to him.

53 Thirteen State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers were deployed to the area and conducted an initial line search of an area 300 metres wide and 1.5 kilometres long around the vehicle but no other items of interest were located.

54 A comprehensive Land Search and Rescue (LandSAR) operation was conducted in a bid to locate Simon. It was given the name Operation SEWARD and ran for four days from Saturday 12 March to Tuesday 15 March 2011. Personnel and resources involved comprised 13 Police officers, 38 SES volunteers, a fixed wing aircraft, four quad bikes and five Police horses. The area searched on foot covered a two kilometre radius around the location of the vehicle. The aircraft undertook a 780 square kilometre expanding search using the vehicle as the centre reference. Police officers on quad bikes and horses searched all tracks and buildings within 25 kilometres of the vehicle.

¹¹ Exhibit 1, Tab 13 photographs of car; Exhibit 1, Tab14 photographs of inside of car.

¹² Exhibit 1, Tab 15 Photographs of envelope and note found.

- 55 During the search, a rope noose was found attached to a tree approximately 200 metres from the vehicle.¹³ The rope used to make the noose appeared to be new and there was no evidence of it having been used. Simon's family reviewed photographs of the rope and didn't recognise it as coming from the family home. They advised police that when Simon had previously attempted suicide, he had used a newly purchased piece of rope.
- 56 On the final day of the LandSAR operation, SES volunteers found an empty Crown Lager bottle about halfway between the vehicle and the tree where the noose had been located. A search of the vehicle found a cardboard six pack container of Crown lager containing five empty bottles.¹⁴ Enquiries with the manufacturer confirmed the individual bottle found outside the vehicle came from the same batch as the five other empty bottles located inside. This married up with the note on the envelope stating the author had drunk six "crownies".
- 57 An inspection of the vehicle revealed that the petrol tank was near full, the battery was flat and the coolant almost empty. Once the battery was charged and the coolant refilled the vehicle ran well, suggesting mechanical troubles were unlikely to have been the reason Simon stopped the vehicle where he did.
- 58 Despite significant and ongoing efforts on the part of WA Police and Simon's family no further investigative leads have emerged in the time since then.
- 59 Sadly, Simon's father passed away in 2017.

'PROOF OF LIFE' CHECKS

- 60 As part of the police investigation, enquiries were made with a number of government agencies and other institutions across Australia to see whether there was any record which would suggest Simon is still alive.
- 61 Australian Border Force records have Simon listed as ONSHORE meaning there is no official record of him leaving Australia since his disappearance.¹⁵

¹³ Exhibit 1, Tab 16 Photographs of noose.

¹⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 17 Photographs of Crown lager bottles and cardboard six pack container.

¹⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 24 Email from Immigration Status Service dated 25 August 2023.

- 62 Enquiries were made with the Tasmanian, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australian Police Forces, all of whom advised of nil interactions with Simon.¹⁶
- 63 The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages have no trace of a registration of Parentage, Marriage, Death or Change of name for Simon.¹⁷
- 64 Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme records show no interactions with Simon after 10 January 2011. Similarly, Simon has not interacted with Centrelink since before his disappearance.
- 65 Simon has not accessed either of his two bank accounts since that last recorded withdrawal at an ATM in Geraldton on 10 January 2011.

POLICE ANALYSIS

- 66 Having thoroughly investigated Simon's disappearance, WA Police concluded as follows:

Medical records identified S HARRINGTON was diagnosed with numerous mental health conditions and had previously attempted suicide. S HARRINGTON commenced new employment; this environment had previously caused anxiety issues which his treating clinician believes caused a relapse. S HARRINGTON drove the Green Ford Fairmont to a remote location in Hamelin Pool and left a note consistent with a suicide note. A four-day search was conducted, the body of S HARRINGTON was not located. Numerous inquiries with banking and government agencies have revealed no activity or interaction with S HARRINGTON.¹⁸

- 67 Police believe Simon is deceased and that he met his death by unknown means on or around 10 January 2011, in the vicinity of Butchers Track, Hamelin Pool.

CONCLUSION

- 68 Having considered the evidence on the coronial brief and listened carefully to the evidence of Detective Senior Sergeant Manson I was struck by the diligent and committed approach WA Police brought to this investigation. From the outset they showed concern and compassion, and the resources deployed in a bid to locate Simon were substantial.

¹⁶ Exhibit 1, Tab 25 Emails from Missing Person Proof of Life checks from other States.

¹⁷ Exhibit 1, Tab 26 Letter from Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages dated 5 September 2023.

¹⁸ Exhibit 1, Tab 5 Report of Detective Senior Sergeant Jarrod MANSON dated 21 August 2024, p 11.

- 69 In her evidence, Simon's sister Michelle described the police response as fantastic and remarkable. She expressed gratitude for the way her family was treated by police, and the lengths they went to during their search and investigation.¹⁹
- 70 I understand Simon's family have accepted that he is no longer alive and I am satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that Simon is deceased.
- 71 Given Simon's significant mental health struggles, his previous suicide attempt in 2008 and the triggering incident in the morning on 10 January 2011, namely his unsuccessful attempt to start a new job, I suspect Simon died by suicide.
- 72 Simon's family were aware of the unbreakable bond he had with his dog Merc, so the fact that he left the family home on 10 January 2011 without him adds weight to the likelihood he was intending to end his life.
- 73 This is further supported by the suicide note in Simon's handwriting found on an envelope addressed to him not far from the abandoned vehicle and the noose located nearby.
- 74 However, given his body has never been located and, therefore, no post mortem examination possible, I cannot rule out the possibility that Simon got lost and perished in the remote outback near Hamelin Pool.
- 75 On the evidence before me, I am unable to reach a conclusion as to exactly how Simon died. The only finding I am able to reach at this stage is that Simon is now deceased. His cause of death must remain unascertained and I make an open finding as to the manner of death.
- 76 I would like to express the Court's sincere condolences to Simon's sister Michelle and the rest of his family for the loss of their much-loved brother, uncle and son.

R M Hartley
Coroner
11 August 2025

¹⁹ T 15.