



**CORONERS COURT
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

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| Inquest: | Inquest into the disappearance and suspected death of Joel Sheiles |
| Hearing dates: | 8 March 2017 |
| Date of findings: | 8 March 2017 |
| Place of findings: | State Coroners Court, Glebe |
| Findings of: | Magistrate Teresa O’Sullivan, Deputy State Coroner |
| Catchwords: | CORONIAL LAW – Cause and manner of death Missing person |
| File number: | 2015/364062 |
| Representation: | Sergeant Timothy O’Donnell, Sergeant Assisting |
| Findings: | <p>I find, on the balance of probabilities, that Joel Sheiles is dead. He died sometime after 25 February 2014.</p> <p>The available evidence does not allow me to make any finding as to where he died, or the cause or manner of his death.</p> |

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| Recommendation: | I recommend that the death of Joel Sheiles be referred to the Unsolved Homicide Unit of the NSW Homicide Squad for further investigation in accordance with the protocols and procedures of the Unit |
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This decision has been prepared without the benefit of a transcript.

The Coroners Act 2009 (NSW) in s81 (1) requires that when an inquest is held, the coroner must record in writing his or her findings as to various aspects of the death.

These are the findings of an inquest into the disappearance and suspected death of Joel Sheiles.

REASONS FOR DECISION

Introduction:

This inquest concerns the disappearance and suspected death of Joel Sheiles.

The Inquest:

The first task facing a coroner in a case such as this is to determine whether the missing person is actually dead. If that can be safely established the coroner must continue to make further findings as to the date and place of death and in relation to the manner and cause of death, in the usual way.¹

The police brief of evidence was tendered at the inquest through the officer in charge, Detective Senior Constable Andrew Booth.² Three other witnesses gave evidence at the inquest. Joel's former partner, Julie Irwin gave evidence via Audio Visual Link (AVL). His friend of ten years, Frank Nicholson Snr gave evidence via telephone and Frank's son, Frank Nicholson Jnr gave evidence via AVL from Goulbourn Gaol.

Section 81 (1) of the Coroners Act 2009 (NSW) requires that when an inquest is held, the coroner must record in writing his or her findings. These are my brief findings in relation to the suspected death of Joel Sheiles.

The Evidence:

Background:

Joel Anthony SHEILES was 39 years of age the last time he was seen in 2014. Joel was born on the 4th August 1974 to Lillian Savona and Anthony Sheiles at Crown Street Women's Hospital in Sydney.

¹ Section 81 Coroners Act 2009 (NSW)

² Exhibit 1, Police brief of evidence

When he was around 7 years old his parents separated and he grew up living in Epping with his mother and younger sister, Christina Sheiles. He attended primary school at Epping public school, and high school at Eastwood Marist College, and later Carlingford High School. Despite being a rebellious student and being suspended on a number of occasions, he completed his Higher School Certificate. When Joel was in year 12 that he began using recreational drugs, starting with cannabis and then progressing to heroin, which was to become a long-term addiction for Joel.

Joel was involved in a motor vehicle accident in 1993 when he was 19 years old. He sustained serious injuries to his pelvis and required extensive physiotherapy. As a result of this incident, he had lost a degree of flexibility and mobility. In 2010, Joel underwent spinal surgery when a spinal tumour was detected. He continued to suffer from back pain following this surgery. Joel also suffered from severe asthma.

Joel's lifestyle following this was heavily influenced by his addiction to Heroin. He began supplying drugs, predominantly to feed to own habit. He failed to remain in a steady job and his involvement in crime increased. In 2012, Joel moved into a unit which he obtained through St George Housing. This was at 606-608 Hume Highway, Casula. This remains his last known address.

When was Joel last seen or heard from?

The last time his sister Christina SHEILES saw Joel was Christmas time in 2013. Christina describes Joel on this occasion as being "pretty miserable and still affected by drugs. He wasn't very happy at all. He wasn't very talkative at all". Following that, Christina had a phone conversation with Joel on 30 January 2014. She describes this conversation as being about "basically if my son Christopher needs anything for school". This was the last contact Christina had with her brother Joel.³

On 20 February 2014, Joel checked himself into Gorman House Detoxification unit. Records show that he was "self-referred to detoxify from heroin and alcohol" Upon admission he denied having any suicidal intentions or experiencing any hallucinations. On 23 February, Joel decided to discharge himself from Gorman House against advice. This was reported to have occurred at about 10:51pm. Joel came under police notice at about 2:40pm on the 24th February 2014 exiting a known drug premises on South Liverpool Rd, Busby. He was described as being polite and compliant with police directions. He was searched by police with nothing of interest found.

Joel's phone records show that he was actively using his phone every few minutes between 24th and 25th of February, with the only substantial break being from

³ Exhibit 1, Tab 3

11:29pm on the night of the 24th, until 8:24am on the morning of the 25th. The last call made on Joel's mobile was at 11:30pm on the night of the 25th of February. This final call was made to the business number of Mr Ali CHARAFEDDINE, who owned Scrap King Metal Recyclers. Mr CHARAFEDDINE has no recollection of the phone conversation. There has been no known contact with Joel since this time.

Joel's bank account records show that he continues to receive Centrelink benefits. The last transaction was a withdrawal of \$650 on the 7th March 2014, which has since been identified as a withdrawal made by Joel's mother, who also had access to the account. Since that date no one has accessed this account, despite the amount of money in it continuing to build.

On the 3rd April 2014, Christina SHEILES officially reported Joel missing to Blacktown Police.

Joel was due to appear at Liverpool Local Court on the 23rd of April 2014 to face a charge of larceny. He failed to attend. A warrant was issued by the Magistrate. This warrant is still outstanding.

All relevant signs of life checks have been completed by the Officer in Charge and the Missing Persons Unit. No signs of life have been detected and Joel's whereabouts remain unknown.

Links to outlaw motor cycle gangs:

During the investigation, two separate sources provided information to the officer in charge, Detective Senior Constable Booth, that Joel had mentioned a link to an OMCG. Julie Irwin stated that Joel had mentioned that he had caught up with an old school friend who was in an OMCG and he suggested that there may have been a role for him.

During an initial telephone conversation with Jodie Hansen, she told Detective Senior Constable Booth that Joel told her in February 2014 that he had botched a drug transaction and as a result of this, his mate had been murdered. Joel told Hansen that he felt extreme guilt for this and as a result, he was going to approach the people responsible and sort the issue out.⁴ Hansen did not make herself available to police to provide any further information. None of the witnesses who gave evidence at the inquest could provide any further information regarding Joel's links to any OMCG.

The officer in charge, Detective Senior Constable Andrew Booth, in his statement dated 7 March 2017, described the investigations he made into Joel's possible links to an OMCG.⁵ Whilst he was unable to confirm any direct link, he was of the opinion that Joel had met with foul play.

⁴ Exhibit 1, Tab 5

⁵ Exhibit 1, Tab 36

Findings required by s81(1)

As a result of considering all of the documentary evidence and the oral evidence heard at the inquest, I find, on the balance of probabilities, that Joel Sheiles is dead. He died sometime after 25 February 2014.

Whilst it is likely that Joel has met with some foul play, the available evidence does not allow me to make any finding as to where he died, or the cause or manner of his death.

Recommendations:

Given the evidence before this inquest, I recommend that the death of Joel Sheiles be referred to the Unsolved Homicide Unit of the NSW Homicide Squad for further investigation in accordance with the protocols and procedures of the Unit.

I would like to thank the officer in charge of the investigation, Detective Senior Constable Andrew Booth. I would also like to thank the Advocate Assisting me in this inquest, Sergeant Timothy O'Donnell.

I offer my sincere condolences to Joel's family, in particular to his sister, Christina. I acknowledge how difficult it is for the family of a loved one who is missing.

I close this inquest.

Magistrate Teresa O'Sullivan
Deputy State Coroner

Date 8 March 2017