



STATE CORONER'S COURT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Inquest: Inquest into the death of Daniel Shane Vella

Hearing dates: 3 August 2015

Date of findings: 3 August 2015

Place of findings: State Coroners Court, Glebe

Findings of: Magistrate Harriet Grahame, Coroner

Catchwords: Unsolved Homicide

File number: 2011/389092

Representation: Steve Kelly – Coronial Law Advocate – Advocate assisting the Coroner

Findings:

Identity of the deceased

The identity of the deceased is Daniel Shane Vella

Date of death

Daniel died on 26 March 2011

Place of death

Daniel died at Royal North Shore Hospital, St Leonards, NSW

Cause of death

Daniel died as a result of a single gunshot wound to the shoulder, chest and abdomen

Manner of death

Daniel Vella was shot at the "Pretty in Ink" tattoo parlour as he worked on a client. Two men entered the shop unannounced. One of the men was carrying a revolver and shot Daniel at close range. The identity of these men remains unknown despite extensive investigation. Daniel's death is an unsolved homicide.

Recommendations:

The investigation into the death of Daniel Shane Vella should be referred to the Unsolved Homicide Unit of the NSW Homicide Squad for further investigation in accordance with the protocols and procedures of that unit.

That consideration be given to offering a substantial monetary reward for information leading to the conviction of any person or persons for the murder of Daniel Shane Vella.

Non-publication order made pursuant to section 74(1)(b) Coroners Act 2009

Pursuant to s 74(1)(b) the following evidence shall not be published

-Any information that could tend to disclose the identity of suspects A, B or C.

- All statements which have been tendered during the inquest, with the exception of the statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood (Exhibit 1, tab 1). The order does not extend to the still photographs at Exhibit 1, tab 8 or to footage previously released by the NSW Police Force, that is the CCTV footage of offenders entering the premises and up until the point immediately before the discharge of the weapon.

IN THE STATE CORONER'S COURT
GLEBE
NSW
SECTION 81 CORONERS ACT 2009

REASONS FOR DECISION

1. This inquest concerns the death of Daniel Shane Vella.

Introduction

2. Daniel was born on 30 October 1970. He was 40 years old when he died on 26 March 2011. He had been working as a tattoo artist for over 20 years. He had worked at various tattoo parlours and had been at "Pretty in Ink" at West Ryde for around three and a half years. His work had been published in a number of tattoo and industry related magazines.
3. At the time of his death he was living with his partner, Natalie Handley in Toongabbie, NSW. He had one child from a previous relationship who was living interstate. He was also survived by his mother and two sisters.
4. While Mr Vella was a motorbike enthusiast, there is no evidence to suggest that he was a member of any particular Outlaw Motor Cycle Gang (OMCG) or club. While he had a minor criminal history, but there is no suggestion that he was involved in any organised criminal activity or crime group. There appears to be no evidence that he had any significant enemies or ongoing disputes.¹

¹ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [10]

5. Shortly before his death, Daniel had been investigating leaving “Pretty in Ink” and working in a new tattoo shop which was to be established in Crows Nest. It is unclear how many people were aware of this fact.²
6. On Saturday 26 March 2011, Daniel attended work at “Pretty in Ink”. At around 9.40pm that evening, Daniel was shot while working on a customer’s tattoo. He died shortly afterwards.

“Pretty in Ink” Tattoo Parlour

7. The “Pretty in Ink” Tattoo Parlour was owned by Adam Lincoln and Kathleen Purdie. It is located at 986 Victoria Road, West Ryde. At the time of the shooting Mr Lincoln was a member of an OMCG.³
8. As in many other tattoo shops, those working at “Pretty in Ink” were sub-contractors. Others working at the shop during the period before Daniel’s death included JF, DO, TB and DR.⁴
9. The shop faces Victoria Road. The front room contains a small reception area with customer seating and a glass counter. Behind the reception area are the tattooing work stations. There are two client chairs and various storage cupboards and counters. At the back of the tattooing work area is a small storage area and kitchenette where a rear door is located. The rear door leads to the outside where there is a concrete driveway. It appears certain that the back door was often left unlocked while staff were present in the building.⁵The driveway leads out onto Gaza lane. This area was used by clients and staff from time-to-time for smoking. The area has a cyclone wire fence and gate which has a slide bolt and padlock to secure it to the post.
10. At the time of Daniel’s death, the shop had a CCTV security system operating which captured both the exterior of the front of the shop (Victoria Road footpath facing east) and the rear driveway facing Gaza Lane. There was also surveillance of

² Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [11]

³ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [18]

⁴ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [22]

⁵ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [115] and elsewhere

the front reception area and of the tattoo work stations. Police were able to obtain this footage from the owners of the shop. The footage itself is of quite high quality, however the offenders have disguised themselves so that their faces are not clearly visible. This footage shows two persons entering the shop and then one person entering the tattooing area, where Daniel is shot at close range.

The shooting on 26 March 2011.

11. Daniel arrived at work around 6pm and parked at the back of the shop. JF and DO were already at work.
12. About 8.30pm that evening SF arrived at "Pretty in Ink" to have his final appointment with Daniel, who had been working on a large tattoo for him over a number of sessions. At that time Daniel's co-worker JF and his client HM were at the other work station in the tattooing area of the shop. DO, who was an apprentice tattoo artist was in reception and a Canadian tourist, Ms KK was waiting for her appointment.⁶
13. About 9.40pm the CCTV operating at the parlour captures two men walking from the direction of Gaza Road and into the rear driveway of the shop. One man is wearing a light grey coloured "hoody" top with the hood up and pulled forward. It may have the writing "G STAR RAW" on the front on his chest. He is wearing blue adidas brand tracksuit pants and running shoes. He has, what appear to be, pink washing up gloves on his hands. He is clearly of a very solid build. He is carrying a handgun. The second man is also wearing a "hoody" top and light coloured full length pants. He is also wearing running shoes and gloves. He does not appear to carry anything into the shop and is not seen entering the tattoo room during the shooting.
14. The larger man is seen to approach the work station where Daniel is tattooing SF. Both men seem oblivious to his entry, while it appears that JF sees the gun before the shot is fired. The offender points his gun in the direction of Daniel and from a distance of about one metre shoots into Daniel's upper arm or shoulder area. Daniel falls to the floor.

⁶ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [31] onwards

15. The offender then fires four further shots in rapid succession into the walls and ceiling of the parlour. He immediately turns and leaves.
16. Daniel and the three other men manage to run out of the front of the parlour to Victoria road. At the same time the CCTV captures the two offenders running out of the back of the premises towards Gaza lane.
17. The two men were in the parlour for around ten seconds. Only the shooter enters the work room. Both men are wearing gloves and neither is heard to speak or touch anything. Both men are wearing hoodies and hold their heads down as they enter the building so that it is difficult see their features. One witness, JF describes them as "Islanders" but there is little other description.⁷
18. Emergency Services were called and Ambulance Officers arrived at the scene around 9.45pm. At that time Daniel was sitting on the footpath with a t-shirt wrapped around his left bicep. He was able to speak with Ambulance Officers and told them that he had been shot. He was placed on a stretcher and as the vehicle left the scene his condition began to deteriorate.
19. Daniel was declared dead shortly after his arrival at Hospital.⁸
20. The post mortem examination revealed that the bullet entered Daniel's body on the lateral deltoid region of the left arm (shoulder region), exiting in the left lateral axilla (underarm or armpit). It re-entered the left medial axilla and was recovered from the subcutaneous tissue of the right flank. There was associated damage to the left lung, diaphragm, stomach, pancreas, small intestine and liver. The splenic vein (major vein near the liver) was also damaged by the projectile.⁹

⁷ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [47]

⁸ Statement of Dr Jennie Martin – also quoted in Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood

⁹ Autopsy report for the Coroner (Pathologist Dr Kendall Bailey) –also quoted in the statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood

The Investigation

21. Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood gave evidence of the police investigation at the inquest, summarizing the many lines of inquiry that have been pursued since the shooting.
22. Constable Brett Rose and Constable Olivia Ferreira arrived at the scene at about 9.54pm. They spoke with JF and obtained a version of events from him and others at the immediate scene. A crime scene was declared and the premises were secured. Early Sunday morning Senior Constable Fenella Duriavig attended and commenced a detailed crime scene investigation.¹⁰ A fingerprint examination of the scene was also conducted by Detective (Technical) Watson and Crime Scene Officer Amanda Scott.¹¹
23. A ballistics expert also attended to examine the scene.¹² At a later stage five recovered bullets (four from the scene and one from Daniel Vella) were examined at the Forensic Ballistics Unit. The bullets were .450/.455 calibre. They had been fired from a revolver so no cartridge cases were available for examination. Unfortunately, although microscopic examination was undertaken, to date there has been no ballistic match which would indicate that the firearm used in this shooting has also been used in any other known firearm related incident. After viewing the CCTV, the expert was of the view that the weapon appeared similar to a Webley revolver, however there are numerous other manufacturers that make similar looking guns.¹³
24. The investigation was thorough and wide reaching. Statements were taken from all those who were present at the scene and persons closely associated with the business were also spoken to. Initially a canvas of the area was conducted looking for possible eyewitnesses or other useful CCTV footage. While there were some reports of witnesses hearing gunshots or loud bangs, there was little concrete

¹⁰ Statement of Senior Constable Duriavig

¹¹ Statement of Detective (Technical) Watson

¹² Statement of Scientific Officer Tim Berry

¹³ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [80]

evidence that emerged from these early inquiries.¹⁴ Investigations followed reports of cars seen in the area at the relevant time, also to no avail.

25. Numerous avenues of inquiry were pursued by investigating officers. These included

- Attempts to identify clothing items worn by the offenders with manufacturers and retailers.¹⁵
- Use of a forensic photography expert in an attempt enhance the CCTV footage with a view to identification.¹⁶
- Investigations into the background of Mr Vella in an attempt to find any relevant information or dispute.¹⁷
- Investigation into aspects of the tattoo industry and other known recent disturbances connected with the tattoo industry.¹⁸
- Various suspects were investigated as a result of crime stopper and intelligence reports.¹⁹
- There has also been considerable work done investigating potential suspects, in particular suspects A, B, and C.²⁰

26. Despite the extensive investigation, the homicide of Daniel Vella remains unsolved. The crime scene investigation has so far provided no useful forensic evidence or information that might assist in a positive identification of the offenders. While the quality of the CCTV footage is good, the offenders are well disguised so that only their body types can be ascertained clearly. While it is likely the offenders had a vehicle nearby, no vehicle has yet been identified. It has not yet been possible to match the bullet taken from Daniel or those found at the

¹⁴ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [93] onwards

¹⁵ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [131] onwards

¹⁶ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [136] onwards

¹⁷ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [137] onwards

¹⁸ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [141] onwards

¹⁹ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [154] onwards

²⁰ Statement of Detective Sergeant Tim Attwood [161] onwards

scene. The offenders were only in the premises very quickly and wore gloves. For this reason no useful fingerprints or DNA evidence has yet been identified. No witness has so far been able to make a positive identification.

27. While numerous leads have been followed through, the investigators have not yet been able to identify a firm motive for the shooting.

28. It is a tragedy for the community and for the Vella family that the offenders have not yet been apprehended. One can only hope that further investigation or advances in technology will one day make it possible.

Findings required by section 81 (1) Coroners Act 2009 NSW

29. As a result of considering all the documentary evidence and the oral evidence heard at inquest, I am able to confirm that the death occurred and make the following findings.

Identity of the deceased

The identity of the deceased is Daniel Shane Vella

Date of death

Daniel died on 26 March 2011

Place of death

Daniel died at Royal North shore Hospital, St Leonards

Cause of death

Daniel died as a result of a single gunshot wound to the shoulder, chest and abdomen

Manner of death

Daniel Vella was shot at the "Pretty in Ink" tattoo Parlour as he worked on a client. Two men entered the shop unannounced. One of the men was carrying a revolver

and shot Daniel at close range. The identity of these men remains unknown despite extensive investigation. The matter remains an unsolved homicide.

Recommendations

30. Section 82 (1) of *The Coroners Act 2009* authorises a coroner presiding over an inquest to make recommendations concerning matters connected with the death that are designed to contribute to public health and safety or to prevent deaths occurring in similar circumstances in the future.
31. This case is concerning as it is clear that two potentially violent people remain at large, despite extensive police investigation.
32. The following recommendations are made to the relevant Ministers and authorities.
 - The investigation into the death of Daniel Shane Vella should be referred to the Unsolved Homicide Unit of the NSW Homicide Squad for further investigation in accordance with the protocols and procedures of that unit.
 - That consideration be given to offering a substantial monetary reward for information leading to the conviction of any person or persons for the murder of Daniel Shane Vella.

I offer my sincere condolences to Daniel's family

I close this inquest



Harriet Grahame

Coroner

August 3 2015