



**STATE CORONER'S COURT  
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

<b>Inquest:</b>	Inquest into the death of Margery Joyce Taylor
<b>Hearing dates:</b>	20 February 2015
<b>Date of findings:</b>	20 February 2015
<b>Place of findings:</b>	NSW State Coroner Court - Glebe
<b>Findings of:</b>	<b>Magistrate Michael Barnes, State Coroner</b>
<b>Catchwords:</b>	CORONIAL LAW – Missing person; cause and manner of death
<b>File number:</b>	2014/150957
<b>Representation:</b>	Sgt Harding assisting the <b>State Coroner, Magistrate M. A. Barnes.</b>
<b>Findings:</b>	<b>Identity of deceased:</b> The deceased person was Margery Joyce Taylor  <b>Date of death:</b> Ms Taylor died on or about 7 September 1978  <b>Place of death:</b> Ms Taylor died at or near Warren, NSW  <b>Manner of death:</b> Unascertained  <b>Cause of death:</b> Unascertained

*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 or suspected death.*

*These are the findings of an inquest into the suspected death of **Margery Joyce Taylor**.*

## **Introduction**

Margery Joyce Taylor was 50 years of age when she was last seen on the 7 September 1978 in Warren, NSW. Despite extensive searches being made of the local area in the days following her disappearance and prolonged investigations by police and those assisting me, no trace of her has been located.

This inquest is convened to determine, if possible, whether Mrs Taylor is still alive. If it is found that she is not alive, I am required, if possible, to determine, when, where, by what cause and in what manner her death occurred.

The circumstances of Mrs Taylor disappearance and any evidence of her actions or lack thereof after that time will be considered in order to make the required findings.

For reasons which have not been adequately explained, despite her family reporting Mrs Taylor's disappearance to police the day after she was last seen, it was not reported to a coroner until 10 May 2014. That delay has significantly impacted upon my ability to receive evidence that might otherwise have been relevant to this inquest.

## **The evidence**

### ***Social history***

Margery Joyce Heath was born on 1 June 1928 in Ballart, Victoria.

In 1944, she married John TAYOR and they had six children. Mr Taylor died in 2001. Only two of the children are still alive. Throughout the marriage Ms Taylor remained at home attending to her children and house duties. When first married, the couple lived on a grazing property in Wilcannia where the three youngest children were born. In 1949, the family moved to Byrock Station where the other children were born. Mrs Taylor remained living there until she and her husband separated in 1975, apart from a period in the early 1970s, when she moved into Bourke so that the younger children could attend school there.

Since at least the 1950s, Margery suffered from mental illness that is variously described in her medical records as bipolar disorder, depression, hypermania and depressive psychosis. She was admitted and treated continually for these medical conditions that resulted in self-harming behaviour that could be classified as suicide attempts. Her last hospital admission for treatment of psychiatric illness was two months before her disappearance

There was a long history of severe domestic violence between the Mrs Taylor and her husband. One of her surviving daughters, Coral Taylor, said she witnessed physical assaults of her mother.

In 1975, this abuse led to Margery separating from her husband and moving from the family property at Byrock to Warren, a nearby town where two of her children and

their families were living. Initially she lived with one of those children and then rented a flat at 2/56 Bundameer Street, Warren. She was dependent on a separated wife's pension and supplemented that through babysitting. Her husband remained in the homestead on the property.

She visited her daughter Coral in Papua New Guinea and Coral visited her in Warren during this period. Coral says it was clear her mother was not coping well.

### ***Circumstances of the disappearance***

After her discharge from hospital in July 1978 and in the weeks prior to her disappearance Margery was not well. Allegedly, one of her daughters had encouraged her to discontinue her psychotropic medication.

For some time Margery had been regularly attending the local Catholic church after having converted to Catholicism or at least having explored that possibility. There is some suggestion she had an unusually close relationship with the priest but there is no evidence that this was inappropriate.

On the evening of 7 September, Mrs Taylor went to mass at the church. According to reports from one of her daughters who was present, she was acting very strangely, singing to statues and allegedly saying she was going to heaven. She left the church at about 7:15pm.

The initial missing person's report recites that after leaving the church Mrs Taylor visited "a friend" and left that person's company suddenly claiming she had an appointment to attend to. Regrettably, this was not followed up at the time and so we now have no way of knowing who that friend was or what exactly transpired during their meeting.

### ***Searches and investigations***

It had been raining in the days preceding Mrs Taylor's disappearance. The Macquarie River, which runs through Warren, was in flood and had broken its banks in many places.

The day after Mrs Taylor was reported missing the local Volunteer Rescue Association undertook a search as far downstream as their boats could traverse. They did this again the next day. There was no sign of Mrs Taylor but in his statement, one of the volunteers who took part in the searches describes the volume of fast flowing water and a huge build-up of flood debris that would have made locating a submerged body almost impossible.

It is necessary to note that at the time of Mrs Taylor's disappearance, her estranged husband was at his rural property and unable to access the township because of the flooding. He can therefore be excluded from having any involvement in the disappearance.

Once local police responded unsuccessfully to the report of Mrs Taylor's disappearance, the incident received no further follow up, until it was reactivated in 2014.

Since that time, the usual searches of government records and health institutions have been undertaken. Those inquiries revealed no contact between Mrs Taylor and

any government service or health care institution. No registry of birth death and marriages has any relevant entries.

Her surviving family members say there has been no contact from Margery since she went missing on the night of 7 September 1978. They say and I accept that were she still alive, they believe she would have contacted them.

### **Findings required by s81(1)**

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

#### ***The identity of the deceased***

The deceased person was Marjory Joyce Taylor.

#### ***Date of death***

Ms Taylor died on or about 7 September 1978.

#### ***Place of death***

Ms Taylor died at or near Warren, NSW.

#### ***Cause of death***

It is likely that she died as a result of being swept away by flood waters. However, the evidence is not sufficient to allow me to make that finding. There are other possibilities that cannot be discounted. Accordingly, the cause of death is unascertained.

#### ***Manner of death***

There is a strong possibility that Mrs Taylor deliberately threw herself into flood waters while suffering the effects of mental illness. However, the evidence is not sufficient to allow me to make that finding. I cannot discount the possibility that she accidentally fell into the river or wandered off into the bush. Accordingly, the manner of death is unascertained.

I close this inquest.



Michael Barnes  
NSW State Coroner  
Glebe Coroners Court