



**CORONERS COURT
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

Inquest:	Inquest into the disappearance and presumed death of Andrew Patrick Reuben Corton
Hearing dates:	11 September 2025
Date of judgment:	11 September 2025
Place of judgment:	Coroners Court of NSW, Lidcombe
Judgment of:	Deputy State Coroner, Magistrate David O'Neil
Catchwords:	CORONIAL LAW – Missing person, mental health, last sighting years prior to report of person missing, residing in boarding houses and subsequently homeless, regular train travel, polite interactions with police, cannabis use, schizophrenia
File number:	2024/00342130
Representation:	1) Coronial Advocate assisting: Alison Storm

Findings

Identity: The person who died is Andrew Patrick Reuben Corton

Date of death: Mr Corton died on or after 9 January 2013

Place of death: Unascertained

Cause of death: Unascertained

Manner of death: Unascertained

Orders and Notations:

Non-publication orders pursuant to section 74(1)(b) of the Coroners Act 2009 and notations pursuant to section 65(4) of the Coroners Act 2009 have been made in this inquest. A copy of the orders and notations can be found on the registry file.

Introduction

- 1 Andrew Patrick Reuben Corton known as Andrew Patrick Corton, who I shall refer to as Andrew, was last seen by Queensland police officers on 5 November 2012 at Coral Esplanade in Cannonvale QLD.
- 2 Cannonvale is 150 kilometres north of Mackay.
- 3 On 9 January 2013 there were two transactions on Andrew's Westpac bank account. The first was a \$20 withdrawal from an automatic teller machine in Hurstville and the second was an EFTPOS transaction for \$9.40 at the cafe at Audley in the (NSW) Royal National Park.
- 4 Andrew has not been seen since 5 November 2012, and there have been no transactions on his bank account since 9 January 2013.

The role of the Coroner and the scope of the inquest

- 5 The role of the Coroner in a case such as this is to make findings firstly as to whether the missing person is actually dead and only if that can be established, to make further findings as to the date and place of death and the manner and cause of death.¹
- 6 The decision about whether a person is dead is considered a threshold question in a missing person case.² The decision is to be made on the balance of probabilities guided by the test determined in the High Court of Australia in the case of *Briginshaw*³ which requires that the level of satisfaction required to conclude that death has more likely than not occurred should take into account the seriousness of such a finding. At common law, there is a presumption in favour of a continuance of life,⁴ however, it is not a rigid presumption, and the

¹ s81, *Coroners Act 2009* (NSW) .

² Dillon H and Hadley M "The Australasian Coroner's Manual", Federation Press 2005 at p.15.

³ *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336.

⁴ *Axon v Axon* (1937) 59 CLR 395.

circumstances of any given case must be carefully examined before a finding of death can be made.

- 7 In addition to deciding these questions at the conclusion of proceedings, the Coroner may, if appropriate, make recommendations in relation to matters arising directly from the evidence if they have the capacity to improve public health and safety in the future.⁵

Coronial Investigation

- 8 Detective Sergeant Andrew Donaldson was the officer in charge of the coronial investigation into Andrew's disappearance. The material gathered during that investigation was placed before me today as exhibit 1. That material included statements from police and civilians, inquiries with financial institutions, government agencies, state and territory police forces, and resulted in the production of records from Campbelltown Hospital, the New South Wales Police Force, the Westpac Bank, and other relevant agencies.
- 9 All of the evidence within the brief of evidence has been considered in coming to the findings set out below.

Mr Corton's background

- 10 Andrew was born on 11 April 1978; he was aged 34 at the time he disappeared. Andrew has an older sister, Lisa, and three younger half siblings, Thomas, Debbie, and William. Andrew and Lisa share the same parents, Elizabeth and Paul, who separated when Andrew was 18 months. Both parents later commenced new relationships with Paul soon becoming a father of Andrew's half brother and sister. As Andrew became older, he became estranged from his father, Paul, and his half siblings.
- 11 When Elizabeth commenced a new relationship after separating from Paul, the family lived in the St Mary's area, and Andrew went to Bennett Road Primary School at Colyton. He went there from kindergarten to year 5.

⁵ s82, *Coroners Act 2009* (NSW).

- 12 He was popular at school and enjoyed playing with the other children who lived on their street. He also played soccer and joined the scouts.
- 13 Unfortunately, with the end of Elizabeth's relationship, the family's housing became unstable, and they moved home several times. In 1989, the family settled in Camden, and Elizabeth married Stephen Hook. Andrew had a close relationship with Stephen and his stepbrother, Christopher, throughout the remainder of his childhood and into his early 20s. After Colyton Primary, Andrew attended primary and secondary school in Camden where he was popular and active.
- 14 At age 5, Andrew had been diagnosed with dyslexia, causing him to struggle with learning. He did not do well academically and left school in year 9 after he turned 14.
- 15 When Andrew was 13, he commenced playing rugby and joined the cadets. When he was 16, he began working as a brickie's labourer. When he was aged 18, the family moved to Bribie Island in Queensland. Andrew and Christopher were particularly close during this period. They both worked as brickies labourers in Brisbane and enjoyed fishing together. After a few years, the family moved back to New South Wales, living in Minto until approximately 2005.
- 16 As a teenager, Andrew began smoking cannabis, drinking alcohol and frequenting pubs in Minto, Leumeah and occasionally in the city of Sydney. He would often binge drink until his money ran out and not return home for days.
- 17 Andrew's use of drugs and alcohol exacerbated his developing mental health issues. He commenced to show symptoms of his then undiagnosed paranoid schizophrenia. The experience of the courts in New South Wales and evidence worldwide continues to draw a link between cannabis and schizophrenia. Tragically, many in the community see cannabis as a relatively harmless drug. Magistrates, judges and police would argue otherwise.
- 18 Andrew's mental state deteriorated during his early 20s. He began showing signs of paranoia and grandiose thoughts relating to his finances. He lacked motivation for self care, stayed in bed for long periods of time and needed reminding to shower and change clothes. Andrew found it difficult to maintain employment and continued to live with his parents.

- 19 In August 2002, at age 24, Andrew's stepfather, Stephen, was instrumental in arranging for Andrew to be involuntarily admitted to the Campbelltown Mental Health Unit. Andrew's mental state had further deteriorated. At times he would shout at people who weren't there and at other times he would laugh inappropriately.
- 20 During this admission, Andrew was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. After his discharge, Andrew was under the care of the Macarthur Mental Health Team and he returned to the family home where he continued to be supported by his mother and stepfather.
- 21 In 2005, Andrew had two further admissions to the Campbelltown Mental Health Unit. The second admission occurred when Andrew was experiencing paranoid delusions. He had assaulted Stephen the week prior. Unfortunately, this incident caused his relationship with his stepfather to break down and their previously close relationship ended. Following his discharge, Andrew moved out of the family home and began living in boarding houses and shared accommodation in and around Sydney.
- 22 From 2006 Andrew had little contact with his mum and sister. They believe that Andrew did not have a mobile phone or email or a social media presence. In April 2009 and June 2010, Elizabeth attended upon Andrew in a boarding house in Darlinghurst. In 2009 Andrew didn't open his door and Elizabeth didn't get to see him. In 2010 Andrew didn't open the door but spoke with her through the door. This was the last contact Elizabeth had with Andrew.
- 23 In April 2009 Lisa took her eldest daughter to visit Andrew at the boarding house. Andrew opened the door and they spoke for a short time. He declined her offer of lunch and suggested she leave as it wasn't a safe place for her. Lisa remembered him as looking healthy and that he appeared to be functioning well cognitively like he was when complying with his medication. This was the last time Lisa saw Andrew.
- 24 In 2010 Lisa moved with her husband and children to Victoria. Elizabeth separated from Andrew's stepfather, Stephen, in 2009. In 2013 she moved to Victoria where she married her husband. Upon taking his last name she became known as Beth Taylor. She told police that Andrew wouldn't know she had changed her name or moved interstate because she has had no contact with Andrew since her visit in 2010. In 2014 Stephen Hook told Lisa that in 2010 or 2011 Andrew had come to the house in Minto where Stephen was still living. Andrew asked for his mum but Stephen told him she had moved away

and he didn't know where she was. Andrew became upset and left the house. Stephen has since passed away.

- 25 There has been no further contact with Andrew by friends or family. Lisa and Beth have conducted their own separate inquiries to locate Andrew. In 2011 Lisa contacted a Sydney based charity asking for their help to find Andrew. In July 2024 Lisa sought community assistance for information about Andrew through posts on Facebook pages such as "searching for lost friends and family". No one came forward with information about Andrew or his whereabouts. In September 2024 Beth travelled to Sydney to speak with family and she also spoke with charities who assist homeless people in the Sydney area. Andrew was not known by any of the charities Beth approached. The only information she obtained was from the St Vincent's Mental Health Service who said their last contact with Andrew was in 2007.
- 26 In August 2024 Beth reported Andrew as a missing person to Constable Laura Jore at Moama Police Station in the Murray River Police District. Throughout all the years since they had last spoken with Andrew the family had been waiting hopefully for some sign that Andrew was alive. In the circumstances, that was completely understandable. Beth provided a description of Andrew, gave the Constable photographs of him from when he was in his early 20s and described Andrew's tattoo of a grim reaper which was on the right side of his chest. Beth also provided a photo of a tattoo as an example of what the tattoo may look like. Detective Sergeant Andrew Donaldson took carriage of the investigation and began conducting inquiries with financial institutions, government agencies and state and territory police forces. He also obtained records from Campbelltown Hospital and the New South Wales Police Force.
- 27 Detective Sergeant Donaldson established that during 2002, Andrew had four interactions with New South Wales Police, including an event from 6 August where police assisted the Macarthur Mental Health Team transport him to the Campbelltown Mental Health Unit for an involuntary admission.
- 28 Campbelltown Hospital Records show that Andrew was admitted to the mental health unit in 2002 and 2005 and indicate that Andrew's care was later transferred to the Rozelle Mental Health Hospital.
- 29 Between 2005 and 2013, Andrew had minimal contact with his family. However, the various records gathered during the investigation provide some insight into Andrew's life in that period. Between 2006 and 2012, Andrew stayed in boarding houses on Palmer Street, Darlinghurst. These boarding houses were either privately owned or funded by government welfare agencies to provide

housing and crisis accommodation for homeless people in the Sydney area. New South Wales Police Force interactions with Andrew occurred at train stations in the city of Sydney and Southern Sydney or in Sydney Parks. Andrew was usually alone when spoken to by police. Occasionally, he was seen with other men who appeared to be his friends. Detective Sergeant Donaldson made inquiries into these men, identifying only one who was still alive. The detective Sergeant wrote to that man, however the man did not reply.

- 30 Andrew rarely came under police notice because of unsocial behaviour or criminal activity. He was respectful to police and the community and was never charged with any offences. The majority of Andrew's interactions with police officers came about because he regularly travelled on trains without a valid ticket. This is a not unusual circumstance amongst the homeless population. He was often observed to have a large black bag in his possession, occasionally appeared to be drug or alcohol affected and disclosed that he used cannabis. On 15 October 2012 at Sydenham train station, Andrew was given a warning for not producing a valid train ticket.
- 31 He told the officers he didn't have money, and he was homeless living in bushland at Engadine. Police believed he was homeless based on the state of his clothing and personal hygiene. On 16 October 2012 at Central Station, Andrew was issued an infringement notice for not producing a valid ticket. These were the last recorded interactions with Andrew by New South Wales police.
- 32 In 2012, Queensland police interacted with Andrew on three occasions, twice in August in Brisbane city and once in November at Cannonvale. In August, Andrew came under police notice as he appeared to be homeless and mentally ill. Andrew told the officers he was sleeping in the nearby park lands and declined offers to refer him to community outreach services. On the second occasion, he told the officers he was travelling to Sydney the following day.
- 33 On 5 November 2012, police officers spoke with Andrew after reports from the public that he was intoxicated at the park and scaring children. The officers observed him to be homeless and asked him to move away from the area which he did without issue. This is the last time Andrew is known to have been seen.
- 34 Westpac bank records show Andrew was a customer from 10 November 1997. In 2009, Andrew changed his home address from the family home in Minto to 165 Palmer Street, Darlinghurst. This remained his residential address on record until 13 April 2012 when he changed it to 1/54 McLeod Street Cairns, Queensland. Between 2011 and 2012, Andrew's mailing address was regularly changed to different Westpac branches around Sydney. The last time it was

changed was in August 2012 to a Westpac branch in Martin Place. The transaction records provide snippets of information which give insight into Andrew's activities.

- 35 From 2009 to August 2012, Andrew was withdrawing money, with staff assistance, in the branches. In May 2012, he began consistently withdrawing cash from ATMs and using EFTPOS for in store purchases. Between November and February in 2010, '11 and '12, the majority of Andrew's transactions were in and around the Engadine, Hurstville and Sutherland areas.
- 36 Banking records confirm that Andrew was in Queensland during 2012, staying in the Cairns area between February and May, and from August to November. Between 11 and 23 December 2012, there were seven EFTPOS transactions totalling \$713.89 at Sydney Kathmandu stores. On 7 January 2013, there was an EFTPOS transaction of \$90.00 at Take A Hike store in Wollongong. These transactions are in my view suggestive of Andrew planning to undertake a substantial bushwalk.
- 37 On 7 January 2013, Andrew received his fortnightly payment of \$695.60 from his Centrelink pension. His transactions between 7 and 9 January 2013 indicate he was in the Hurstville and Engadine area and had travelled to Wollongong on 7 January. On 9 January 2013, Andrew withdrew \$20.00 cash from an ATM located at the Caltex Service Station on Princes Highway at Hurstville and made a \$9.40 EFTPOS payment at the Weir Café in Audley in the Royal National Park. The distance between those two locations is about seven kilometres. There have been no further transactions on this account since 9 January 2013.
- 38 The Royal National Park is 16,000 hectares of mixed terrain including the Hacking River; ocean cliffs and beaches; forest; bushland; creeks; waterfalls; natural ponds; sealed roads; fire trails; walking tracks; valleys; cliffs and caves. The only permanent buildings are the Audley Dance Hall and Audley Boatshed, both sitting on the bank of the Hacking River. The dance hall is a large building which contains the Weir Café, Royal National Park Visitors Centre and function rooms. Bushwalking or camping include risks of injury and death from drowning; falling from cliffs; rockfalls; floodwaters, as well as venomous snakes, spiders, goannas and kangaroos. The Royal National Park is well known as being a place for homeless people to rough sleep, either in temporary camps or in one of the caves in the park.
- 39 Based on Andrew's EFTPOS transactions at Kathmandu, in December 2012, and New South Wales police force records of Andrew disclosing he was

sleeping in bushland at Engadine, it is quite possible that he was living in the National Park as at 9 January 2013.

40 Detective Sergeant Donaldson conducted signs of life checks which involved obtaining records from Government and financial institutions to determine the last recorded interactions with Andrew. The result of Detective Sergeant Donaldson's inquiries were:

a. Andrew had only one bank account which was with Westpac Bank.

b. Border Force recorded no departures.

c. State and Territory police records from New South Wales and Queensland show the last contact with Andrew was on 15 November 2012, by Queensland Police.

d. Services Australia records indicate there were no Medicare claims after June 2012. Andrew's postal address was 1/15A Phyllis Street Minto, New South Wales. There was no recorded residential address.

41 On 7 November 2024 the New South Wales police force media unit released a news article and Facebook post asking for information on the whereabouts of Andrew. Included were photos provided by Beth, and details of locations where Andrew was known to have frequented. On the same date, an unknown person contacted Crime Stoppers to report a male matching Andrew's description had worked at Mulloon Creek Natural Farms between 2020 and '21, and went by the name, Brendan. Based on this information, enquiries by Detective Sergeant Donaldson resulted in a male being identified who later assisted police by meeting with them and providing a drivers' licence; that person was not Andrew.

42 Detective Sergeant Donaldson arranged for DNA samples to be collected from Andrew's mother, father, sister and half siblings. There are no dental records or recent medical history to assist with identification purposes should any subsequent finding cause the need for identification to arise.

43 The New South Wales Police Force incidents and emergency standard operating procedures (SOPS) regarding land and search and rescue operations require confirmed information regarding where the missing person was last known to have been and when they were there, in order that they might limit any search which is undertaken. Unfortunately, a land search operation in this case could not occur due to the size and varied terrains of the park. There

would need to be further information to focus the search area, however, based on the evidence at this stage, it cannot be confirmed if Andrew remained near Audley, or travelled into other areas of the Royal National Park, or, indeed, elsewhere.

Recommendations

- 44 In this matter, there is no need for me to make any recommendations. The only issue that might normally arise in an inquest relating to a missing person would be a consideration of the steps undertaken by the police. Given, in particular, when the police were notified, police have conducted all relevant enquiries. I am satisfied that the decision to not undertake a search was the correct decision and was consistent with the standard operating procedures. Given the effluxion of time, and the lack of any detailed information where Andrew may have last been beyond the Audley café, the decision was the correct decision. It is clear that the Detective Sergeant has undertaken all relevant enquiries, and the investigation has been completely thorough.

Formal Findings

- 45 In relation to the formal matters, I am satisfied that Andrew is deceased. The following factors are relevant to that determination:
- a. No claims have been recorded since 5 October 2012 under Medicare.
 - b. No pharmaceutical items have been recorded since 5 October 2012 under the PBS system.
 - c. Most instructive, in my view, is Andrew's sole bank account with Westpac, as was set out in some detail, in Ms Storm's opening. Andrew's transactions on that account were regular to the extent of being almost daily. On many days, there was more than one transaction. Since the entry relating to the Weir Café, Audley, on 9 January 2013, the only entries are deposits. (Somewhat surprisingly, they have continued and when the last enquiry was made by Detective Sergeant Donaldson, the balance was \$268 849. I have no idea what sort of checking systems the Federal Government has in relation to these matters but, possibly, after the completion of this inquest, formal steps might occur).
 - d. Other relevant factors are the lack of contact with police since 2013. Those interactions were, or could be appropriately described as, a

feature of Andrew's life. They were always, as the police observed, from Andrew's part, co-operative and they were as a result of him travelling on trains or being in a park.

- e. Additionally, there's been no contact with family members. In my view, it's of significance that Andrew sought to find out about his mother sometime in 2010, or '11, as reported by Mr Hook. That followed on from the occasions when his mother had spoken with him briefly when he was living in boarding houses in Sydney. I think it quite likely, if he were alive, Andrew would have made further attempts to contact his family.
- f. Another important factor is that Border Force has no record of Andrew departing Australia. In not accessing his bank account, he would not have had the funds to travel overseas, but it's an important check conducted by the Detective Sergeant.

46 Whilst I am satisfied to the requisite standard that Andrew has passed away, the available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to where Andrew died or the cause of his death.

47 Accepting as I do that it was Andrew who used his bancard at the Audley Weir café on 9 January 2013, it is quite possible that he sought to go further into the national park, but I can't exclude the possibility that he may have sought to go hiking or camping somewhere else. It's also possible that he died reasonably soon after 9 January. However, again, I can't exclude the possibility that he lived for a period of time after that. In those circumstances, in relation to date of death, I will confine the finding to on or after 9 January. As I have said, I don't need to make any recommendations. I also noted at the outset, as did Ms Storm, that Andrew's name on his birth certificate is Andrew Patrick Reuben Corton. Albeit he, like most people, was rarely referred to by those three Christian names the formal finding will reflect what was on his birth certificate.

THE FORMAL FINDINGS ARE

The person who died is Andrew Patrick Reuben Corton. Andrew died on or after 9 January 2013. The place of death, the cause of death, and the manner of death are all unascertained or, what's referred to as open findings.

Concluding Remarks

- 48 In conclusion, I'd like to express my gratitude to the coronial advocate assisting me throughout the coronial inquiry, Ms Storm, for her assistance both before and during the inquest. I also thank the officer in charge, Detective Sergeant Andrew Donaldson for the very thorough investigation and the work he's done in preparing the brief and presenting it for the inquest.
- 49 Finally, on behalf of myself and the Coroner's Court, I express my sincere condolences to Andrew's family and his friends. It's an extremely difficult circumstance to deal with when someone is missing, and my thoughts are with you all.
- 50 I close this inquest

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David O'Neil". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D' and 'O'.

Magistrate David O'Neil
Deputy State Coroner
Coroners Court NSW
11 September 2025