



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

Inquest: Inquest into the disappearance of Gerald George Francis
WHITEFOOT

Hearing Dates: 28 October 2025

Date of Findings: 13 November 2025

Place of Findings: Coroner's Court of New South Wales at Lidcombe

Findings of: Magistrate Joan Baptie, Deputy State Coroner

Catchwords: CORONIAL LAW- unexplained disappearance and whether
missing person is now deceased, date and place, cause and manner of death

File Number: 2021/00298010

Representation: Mr D Welsh, Coronial Advocate assisting the Coroner

Findings

The identity of the deceased

Mr Gerald George Francis Whitefoot, who was most recently reported as a missing person to New South Wales Police Force on 11 September 2019, is now deceased.

Date of death

The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the date of Mr Whitefoot's death.

Place of death

The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the place of Mr Whitefoot's death.

Cause of death

The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the cause of Mr Whitefoot's death.

Manner of death

The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as the manner of Mr Whitefoot's death.

Introduction

1. This inquest concerns the disappearance of Mr Gerald George Francis Whitefoot.
2. Mr Whitefoot was born on 8 July 1933, in London, England.
3. Mr Whitefoot did not return to his home at 91 Cabramatta Avenue, Miller on 9 December 1977. His family reported him as a missing person in the period shortly after he failed to return home to the Green Valley Police station, however, police have no record of that 'missing person' notification. The family again reported him as a missing person to Liverpool Police just before Christmas 1977. Again, there is no record of this report.
4. On 7 May 2019, a further missing person's report was filed with Queensland Police. On 11 September 2019, the investigation into Mr Whitefoot's disappearance was transferred to New South Wales Police Force Missing Persons Registry, given that Mr Whitefoot had previously been domiciled in NSW.
5. The investigation was eventually transferred to Sergeant Christopher Knighton at Liverpool City Police Area Command. Sergeant Knighton commenced making a number of enquiries as to the location and wellbeing of Mr Whitefoot. Unfortunately, all enquiries have been unable to establish the current whereabouts of Mr Whitefoot.
6. After all existing lines of enquiry to locate Mr Whitefoot had been exhausted, Sergeant Knighton submitted a report to the Coroner on 15 October 2021, indicating that it was suspected that Mr Whitefoot was deceased.
7. Mr Whitefoot's daughter, Mrs Deborah Devlin (nee Whitefoot), has been present during these proceedings and has provided extensive assistance to the investigating police. I acknowledge the difficulties his family have experienced with the lack of conclusive evidence relating to his whereabouts and fate. I would also like to acknowledge and thank his family members, particularly Ms Devlin, for their contribution and participation in this inquest. I hope that Mr Whitefoot's memory has been honoured by the careful examination of the circumstances surrounding his disappearance.

The role of the coroner and the scope of the inquest

8. When a case of a missing person, who is suspected to have died, is reported to the Coroner, the Coroner must determine from the available evidence whether that person has in fact died.
9. If a Coroner forms the view that a missing person has died, the Coroner has an obligation to make findings in order to answer statutory questions about the identity of the person who died, when and where they died, and the cause and manner of their death. If the Coroner is unable to answer any of these questions, an inquest must be held.
10. In Mr Whitefoot's case, the missing person investigation conducted by the NSWPF has been unable to locate Mr Whitefoot or any physical evidence as to his location since 9 December 1977. As such, it is not possible to answer all of the questions that a Coroner is required to answer, and an inquest has been convened.
11. During these proceedings, evidence has been received in the form of statements and other documentation, which was tendered in court and admitted into evidence. In addition, oral evidence was received from the Officer in Charge of the investigation, Sergeant Christopher Knighton.
12. All the material placed before the Court has been thoroughly reviewed and considered.

A Brief Overview of Mr Whitefoot's Earlier Life

13. Mr Whitefoot left England with his mother and sister, aboard the "SS New Australia" in 1955.
14. Mr Whitefoot met Ms June Markham, and they married on 29 July 1957. Together they had seven children, Sandra, Susanne, Deborah, Christopher, Gerald, Raymond and Michaela.
15. In September 1977, Mr and Mrs Whitefoot separated. Mrs Whitefoot and five of the children moved out of the house at Miller and resided in Newtown. Two of the daughters, Susanne and Deborah continued to reside with their father at the house in Miller.

16. Mr Whitefoot was employed in a number of jobs throughout his life. At the time of his daughter Deborah's birth, he was working as a glass beveller. Immediately prior to his disappearance, he was employed as a groundskeeper at Lurnea High School.
17. MrWhitefoot's medical history was significant only for a fused spinal disc, with no other known intellectual or physical disabilities. He had never been formally diagnosed with any mental health issues. He was prescribed Valium to assist with his ongoing back pain.
18. The police investigation established that Mr Whitefoot was known by several aliases. These included the use of the surnames Whitefoot, Brady, Toms and Tamms, together with the first names of Gerard and Gerald. At Lurnea High School, Mr Whitefoot was known as Gerry Toms.
19. Mr Whitefoot's daughter told Sergeant Knighton that her father had a tattoo on his right arm, depicting a snake wrapped around a sword and the numerals "1952". He also had a tattoo on his left arm, depicting a bird with the words "True love mum".

Last known movements of MrWhitefoot

20. Mr and Mrs Whitefoot and their children resided at 91 Cabramatta Avenue, Miller for approximately 12 years.
21. At the time her parents separated, Deborah was 14 years of age. Mr Whitefoot wanted Deborah to cease attending school, in order to assist him with housework. Deborah stopped attending school at this time.
22. In 2021, Deborah was residing in Queensland and provided a statement to Queensland Police, dated 14 February 2021. In her statement, she recalled that on 9 December 1977, her father came into her bedroom with a cup of tea, which was unusual, as he had never done this before. He asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up, and she told him she wanted to be an air hostess.
23. Deborah recalled seeing her father leave the house and watched him walk through a paddock and over a white pedestrian bridge, which was the usual route he would take to attend work at Lurnea High School.
24. He would usually leave for work sometime between 8am to 8.30am. Deborah recalled that her father usually carried a duffle style bag when he was attending work, however, on this occasion he was not carrying a bag. She

was unable to recall what he was wearing that morning, however, noted that her father usually dressed in a shirt and tie with dress pants, and his shoes were always polished.

25. Deborah recalled that her father would usually return home from work at around 4pm, although this was dependent upon whether he stopped at the pub or not.
26. Deborah informed police that her father did not return home that day. She recalled that after he failed to return home, she discovered that his bank book, clothes and all his personal effects had been left at their home.
27. Two days after his disappearance, Deborah recalled a man attending their home. She had never seen this man before and he did not tell her his name. Deborah indicated that he looked a little younger than her 44-year-old father.
28. This man asked Deborah, "Is your dad home?". She indicated that he had not been home for two days. The man then gave Deborah some money to go and buy some hot chips. When she returned home, the man told her that he would return the following day. The man returned the next day and remained at the house for about 20 minutes before leaving. The man did not return after the second visitation.
29. Deborah told police that one day before her father's disappearance, a friend told her that she had been at Lurnea High School and had seen Deborah's father and said, "Hello Mr Whitefoot." The friend recalled that Mr Whitefoot put his finger up to his mouth and said, "I am not Mr Whitefoot."
30. Deborah and her sister went to Green Valley Police station about four days after their father disappeared to report him as missing. Deborah recalled being told by one of the Police Officers, "What's his name, where is your mother?" and that "he has probably had a domestic, go home and he will probably come back."
31. Two weeks later, Deborah's mother telephoned and asked to speak with Mr Whitefoot. Deborah advised her mother that she had not seen her father for two weeks. Her mother collected Deborah and they both went to Liverpool Police station to report him as a missing person.
32. Mrs Whitefoot re-partnered. It was after this relationship ended that Mrs Whitefoot made further enquiries regarding Mr Whitefoot's status. Deborah recalled that her mother "got the Salvation Army involved in the 1990s". Deborah recalled hearing her mother on a radio show talking about his disappearance.

33. Deborah started her search for her father in the 1980s, when she attempted to have his disappearance aired on the show, "Australia's Most Wanted". She was advised that:

"he had been taken off the missing persons list. I was then told he was put back on and he subsequently featured on the show."

34. Deborah noted in her statement that she

"started talking with NSW Detectives in the late 80's to 90's. I don't recall the Detectives' names. I always had to ring him all the time as he never phones like he said he would. I asked him if he had checked Medicare, Centrelink and he would say he hadn't gotten onto it yet.

More time passed and nothing. We just assumed he was on the missing persons' list.

I then became busy with being a mum, wife and with work and I just assumed he was deceased, as no one had heard anything from him.

In around May 2019 I attended the Maryborough Police station and again reported dad missing. After making this report I started to talk to Detective Senior Constable (now Sergeant) Christopher Knighton from Liverpool Police Station."

35. Deborah recalled that despite being a hard-working person, her father never had any money. Deborah stated that

"I am now aware that the same day he went missing he went to his sister Jean asking for money \$500. Mum said Jean gave him \$80.00. We don't know what the money was for or what time during the day he got the money.

Dad also ran the local horse racing syndicate; there were about 5 blokes in the syndicate. I know mum handed the book to one of the members and she mentioned that there was not much money in the account. It had to be signed by every member for money to be taken out of the account.

I only know dad to have a Commonwealth Bank account in the name of Gerald Whitefoot. To my knowledge this bank account has not been touched since he went missing."

36. Deborah remained in contact with her mother, siblings and her father's extended family in the United Kingdom. None of the family has heard from Mr Whitefoot since his disappearance in 1977. Deborah travelled to the UK and spoke with a number of her paternal relatives. These relatives confirmed that

they were aware the MrWhitefoot had disappeared, but no-one had had any contact with him over the years.

Mental Health Concerns

37. In her police statement, Deborah stated that after her parents separated, her father asked her on two occasions to write a suicide note for him. She estimated that the first request he made was not long after the separation and about 1.5 to 2 months prior to his disappearance. The second request was about two weeks after the first note.
38. Deborah recalled that he told her that he would jump off the Sydney Harbour Bridge and that he would die before he hit the water because he would have a heart attack. Deborah could not recall any further details of the contents of the notes. She recalled that she told him that he was being foolish and perceived that he had consumed alcohol. She believed that he would not act on his assertions. She recalled that in the days following the preparation of the notes, his demeanour returned to normal.
39. Deborah told police that she did not disclose this information at the time of his disappearance as she feared that the Police would not treat the investigation into her father's disappearance with the same level of seriousness if they were aware of any mental health concerns.

The Police investigation after the lodgement of the Queensland Missing Person report

40. Sergeant Knighton became the officer in charge of the missing person investigation in NSW on 20 November 2019.
41. Sergeant Knighton confirmed that the Queensland Police system recorded Mr Gerald Whitefoot's identity as Mr Gerard Whitefoot. The error was transposed onto the NSW Police system. Prior to Sergeant Knighton's involvement, a number of enquiries had been made by both the Queensland and NSW Police with Centrelink, Medicare, Births Deaths and Marriages NSW (BDM), and the South Australian Criminal Record system. During these initial investigations, it became apparent that Mr Whitefoot had used a number of aliases,

including Gerald Whitefoot, Gerald Brady, Gerald Tomms, Gerald Toms, Gerard Whitefoot, Gerard Brady, Gerard Tomms and Gerard Toms. Each alias had a common date of birth, being 8 July 1933.

42. On 3 February 2020, Sergeant Knighton made contact with Deborah by phone and email.
43. On 13 February 2020, a DNA sample was obtained from Deborah. An additional DNA sample was obtained from her biological brother, Raymond, on 24 May 2021. On 24 March 2020 and 3 December 2021 respectively, the Forensic and Analytical Science Service confirmed that a familial search had been conducted on Deborah and Raymond's profiles against all profiles of unknown human remains retained on the NSW and National databases with no matching result. The Department advised that it would continue to search for all potential future matches.
44. On 14 February 2021, Deborah attended the Maryborough Police Station and was shown two images of a male. Deborah confirmed that both images depicted her father, Mr Gerald Whitefoot, date of birth 8 July 1933.
45. After assuming the conduct of this case, Sergeant Knighton made the following enquiries with both State and Territorial jurisdictions, including:
 - Lurnea High School regarding MrWhitefoot's employment. The school administration confirmed that there were no employment records available dating back to 1977. There were no current employees that had been employed at the relevant time.
 - 'Signs of Life' checks were conducted, including checks on banking activity, Centrelink, Medicare and BDM.
 - Requests were forwarded to all Police Missing Persons Units throughout Australia. No interstate Police Services within Australia had any recorded contact with any person who could be identified as being MrWhitefoot.
 - Enquiries were made with the Department of Home Affairs regarding MrWhitefoot's movements in and out of Australia. There were no records that confirmed that he had exited or re-entered the Australian jurisdiction.

Enquiries were made with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. There was no relevant information available regarding Mr Whitefoot relevant to this Department.
 - Enquiries were made with financial institutions, including Bankwest, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, National Australia Bank, Australia and New Zealand Banking Corporation, and Westpac Banking

Corporation. No records have been located which confirm that Mr Whitefoot has possessed or activated any banking accounts since he was reported missing in 1977.

- Enquiries were made with the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC}. No relevant information was forthcoming.
 - Criminal record checks on each known alias were conducted in all Australian jurisdictions. No information matched Mr Whitefoot's details.
46. On 3 June 2020, information was received from Senior Constable Stallard from the South Australian Police Missing Persons Investigations Team in relation to the 'Brady' alias known to be used by Mr Whitefoot. The information received indicated that a person known as Gerard Brady with a date of birth of 8 July 1933 had been identified as a resident of South Australia.
47. On 16 June 2020, Senior Constable Stallard attended the home of this person. The resident provided his identification and confirmed that he had never used an alias. He also stated that he was not the missing person and had never lived in NSW. Senior Constable Stallard was of the opinion that this male bore no physical resemblance to the photographs identified by Deborah as her father.
48. Further contact was made with the daughter of the South Australian resident known as Mr Brady. His daughter was shown the photographs of MrWhitefoot and confirmed that they did not depict her father.
49. On 30 November 2021, enquiries were made with the Australian Bureau of Statistics in relation to life expectancy for Australian males. The information received indicated that the ABS Australian Historical Population Statistics (2019} indicated that the life expectancy for a male born in Australia in 1933 was 63.48 years of age.

The oral evidence of Sergeant Christopher Knighton

50. Sergeant Knighton gave oral evidence on 28 October 2025. He confirmed that he had prepared three written statements for these proceedings, dated 8 November 2021, 12 September 2022, and 26 October 2025. In addition, he had collated the brief of evidence tendered in these proceedings.
51. In his third statement dated 26 October 2025, Sergeant Knighton was able to confirm that his most recent "signs of life" checks produced a negative result.

52. Sergeant Knighton confirmed in his oral evidence that there had not been any credible sightings of Mr Whitefoot in Australia since his disappearance on 9 December 1977.
53. In considering all the available evidence, Sergeant Knighton was unable to confirm that Mr Whitefoot was alive after 9 December 1977. In addition, if Mr Whitefoot was deceased, he was unable to indicate the cause of his death, nor the date and location of his death.
54. In relation to the manner of his death, Sergeant Knighton opined that he may have died from misadventure or suicide, however he was unable to determine the manner of his death.

Conclusions

Is MrWhitefoot deceased?

55. The first finding that a Coroner is required to determine following an inquest into the suspected death of a missing person is whether that person is deceased. This question is required to be determined on the balance of probabilities, and there must be clear, cogent and exact evidence that a missing person had died before such a conclusion can be made.
56. Police enquiries have established that Mr Whitefoot has not travelled internationally since his disappearance.
57. Mr Whitefoot's bank account has not been activated since his disappearance, and he has not made any contact with Centrelink.
58. Police have regularly enquired with Missing Persons Units across Australia and the local morgue, in an attempt to locate MrWhitefoot if he is deceased.
59. Sergeant Knighton indicated in his oral evidence that in his opinion, it is likely, on the balance of probabilities, that MrWhitefoot is deceased, given the amount of time that has elapsed since he has made any contact with family or friends. In addition, he noted that Mr Whitefoot has not attempted to access any bank accounts, social security or health entitlements since 1977.
60. It is noteworthy that at the time of this inquest, Mr Whitefoot would have been 92 years of age and most likely in need of some form of medical care. On the available statistics, he was well outside the likely longevity of his age cohort.

61. In relation to the possible manner of his death, several options are available on the known evidence. They include:
- a. misadventure,
 - b. suicide,
 - c. the possible involvement of a third party.
62. In relation to misadventure, there is no available evidence which points directly to this possibility, although it cannot be entirely discounted.
63. In relation to whether a person has intended to cause their own death, the Court must apply the 'Briginshaw' standard or test. In particular, the Court must be satisfied on the balance of probabilities and have a reasonable satisfaction that there was a particular intention. It is noted that a
- "reasonable satisfaction is not a state of mind that is attained or established independently of the nature and consequence of the fact or facts to be proved. The seriousness of an allegation made, the inherent unlikelihood of an occurrence of a given description, or the gravity of the consequences flowing from a particular finding are considerations which must affect the answer to the question whether the issue has been proved to the reasonable satisfaction of the tribunal. In such matters 'reasonable satisfaction' should not be produced by inexact proofs, indefinite testimony, or indirect inferences. In *R v London Coroner; Ex parte Barber* [1975] 1 WLR 1310 at 1313, Lord Widgery CJ said: [P]erhaps one of the most important rules that coroners should bear in mind.....[is] that suicide must never be presumed. If a person dies a violent death, the possibility of suicide may be there for all to see, but it must not be presumed merely because it seems on the face of it to be a likely explanation. Suicide must be proved by the evidence, and if it is not proved by evidence, it is the duty of the coroner not to find suicide, but to find an open verdict. "
64. Again, the evidence does not permit a finding of suicide in relation to his manner of death.
65. In relation to the possible involvement of a third party, there is evidence that Mr Whitefoot was involved in a gambling syndicate, and that an unknown man attended the family home on two occasions shortly after Mr Whitefoot's disappearance. In addition, there is evidence that he was requesting money from his family shortly before his disappearance. Again, however, this could only amount to speculation, rather than a realistic explanation for Mr Whitefoot's disappearance.

66. The Court is satisfied on the balance of probabilities that MrWhitefoot is now deceased, however, it is impossible to determine the cause and manner of his death on the available evidence. Similarly, it is not possible to determine the date or location of his death.

Findings pursuant to section 81 (1) of the Act

67. Before turning to the findings that I am required to make, I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Mr Durand Welsh, Coronial Advocate, for his assistance.
68. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Sergeant Christopher Knighton for his extensive investigative efforts in this matter and the collation of the brief of evidence.
69. I make the following findings pursuant to section 81(1) of the *Coroners Act* 2009 (NSW):

Identity

The person who died was Gerald George Francis Whitefoot

Date of Death

The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the date of Mr Whitefoot's death.

Place of Death

The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the place of Mr Whitefoot's death.

Cause of Death

The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the cause of Mr Whitefoot's death.

Manner of Death

The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the manner of Mr Whitefoot's death.

I make no recommendations pursuant to section 82 of the *Coroners Act 2009 (NSW)*

On behalf of the Coroners Court of New South Wales, I offer my sincere and respectful condolences to Mr Whitefoot's family members.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joan Baptie', written in a cursive style.

Magistrate Joan Baptie

Deputy State Coroner

13 November 2025

Coroners Court of New South Wales at Lidcombe