



MAGISTRATES COURT of TASMANIA  
CORONIAL DIVISION

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**Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)**

*Coroners Act 1995*  
*Coroners Rules 2006*  
*Rule 11*

I, Olivia McTaggart, Coroner, having investigated the death of Michelle Louise Meades

**Find, pursuant to Section 28(1) of the Coroners Act 1995, that**

- a) The identity of the deceased is Michelle Louise Meades;
- b) Ms Meades died in circumstances set out below;
- c) The cause of death was blunt force head injuries, stab wounds of the right neck and gagging; and
- d) Ms Meades died on 17 September 2016 at Clarendon Vale, Tasmania.

In making the above findings, I have had regard to the evidence gained in the comprehensive investigation into Ms Meades' death.

The evidence in the investigation comprises exhibits C1 to C92. These exhibits include the police report of death for the coroner, opinion of the forensic pathologist, toxicology report, statutory declarations of attending and investigating officers of Tasmania Police, statutory declarations and video records of interview of witnesses, statutory declarations and information from family members of Ms Meades, medical records and reports, telephone records and photographic evidence, Tasmania Fire Service investigation report and firefighter statements, police information and Supreme Court of Tasmania documentation.

Michelle Louise Meades was born on 13 January 1965 and was 51 years of age at the time of her death. She had no prior convictions. She had been married to Kenneth Gordon Bennett but in 1988 she was divorced from him after approximately 10 years of marriage. Ms Meades and Mr Bennett had two sons together: Aaron Gordon Bennett and Benjamin John Bennett. Ms Meades did not have contact with Mr Bennett and was estranged from her two sons. Ms

Meades had suffered addiction to methamphetamine (“ice”) and marijuana for approximately eight years before her death. She had been under the care of Drug and Alcohol Services during that period and spent lengthy periods in rehabilitation at Missiondale Recovery Centre. Ms Meades left Missiondale prematurely in March 2016 and then commenced living with a friend in Glenorchy. About three months before her death, she was provided with housing in a unit in Kingston. She had made several friends in her unit block in Kingston and was reliant on those friends to drive her to appointments, which included daily trips to a pharmacy to receive her Suboxone (part of her drug treatment program).

### **Circumstances of death**

There are some common facts surrounding Ms Meades’ death as found by both Her Honour Justice Wood and His Honour Acting Justice Porter in their separate comments on passing sentence. These facts, which accord with the evidence in this investigation, are as follows:

At about 5.15pm on 16 September 2016, Ms Meades caught a taxi from Kingston to Gary Matthews’ unit at 20/7 Saladin Circle, Clarendon Vale to purchase ice from Mr Matthews. Ms Meades knew Mr Matthews and had purchased the illicit drug from him previously.

Danny Andrew Graham was friends with Mr Matthews and had been staying at his unit. Ms Meades purchased a packet of ice from Mr Matthews and/or Mr Graham and spent time in the bathroom injecting or attempting to inject it. Ms Meades then asked if she could buy some more but she only had \$40 left. She was told by Mr Matthews and/or Mr Graham that she could make the purchase, but in addition to paying \$40, she would have to leave her phone as collateral. Ms Meades made the purchase by paying \$40 and leaving her phone.

She left the unit at 10.39pm to catch the bus back to Hobart. Mr Matthews had left shortly before Ms Meades departed the unit. Ms Meades missed the bus and tried to make her way back to Mr Matthews’ unit. She became upset and spoke to various people asking for directions. She also mentioned the drugs she had received from Mr Matthews and Mr Graham and that they had possession of her mobile phone. She found her way back to Mr Matthews’ unit, arriving at 11.54pm, and went inside where she and Mr Graham (the only person there at that stage) used marijuana.

At 12.10am on 17 September, Mr Matthews re-entered the unit, accusing Ms Meades of telling people she had been “*ripped off*” in a drug deal and that her mobile phone had been taken. She denied that she had been complaining to others.

At 12.13am, a taxi dropped off a female by the name of Kylie Jane Hack at 20/7 Saladin Circle. Ms Hack appears to have been staying at the unit at this time. Ms Hack entered the

unit in an agitated state. She said that Ms Meades had been referring to Mr Matthews and Mr Graham as “*junkie dogs*”. Ms Meades denied this. Mr Matthews told Ms Meades that she was lying in this denial as he had spoken with the people to whom she had made the statements. Mr Matthews told Ms Hack to teach Ms Meades a lesson to “*put a bit of fear into her*”. He then made a comment to the effect of “*go, Kylie, hit her Kylie, hit her Kylie*”. Ms Hack was, at the time, under the influence of drugs. Ms Meades, who was sitting on the couch, was extremely frightened and called out “*no*” multiple times.

Ms Hack then punched her twice in the head. She grabbed hold of Ms Meades and they both ended up on the floor in the lounge room. Ms Hack punched Ms Meades, who struck back in self-defence. Ms Hack overpowered Ms Meades and straddled her. Ms Hack commenced bashing her head on the floor and punching her in the head.

After the initial violence perpetrated by Ms Hack, a further violent attack upon Ms Meades followed, during which she was stabbed twenty times in the right side of the neck with a nail scissors and hit forcefully over the back of her head with a golf putter. She was assaulted in this manner until she was dead. At some time during the attack, possibly when she was unconscious, Ms Meades was also gagged.

Dr Christopher Lawrence, forensic pathologist, who later performed an autopsy upon Ms Meades, concluded that cause of death was by blunt force head injuries, stab wounds of the neck and gagging. He noted that the stab wounds were relatively superficial but at least three had penetrated the right jugular vein causing substantial bruising and some bleeding. He also noted that there appeared to be some swelling and bleeding in the brain and that the presence of the gag while unconscious could also have given rise to death.

After she was dead, Ms Meades’ body was then tied up, covered and moved into the bathroom. The unit was then cleaned and evidence of the attack removed.

The next day, her body was moved into a wardrobe. Ms Hack, Mr Graham and Mr Matthews continued to clean up the unit in order to remove evidence of the commission of the crime. In the afternoon, Tasmania Police received information about Mr Graham being held against his will at the unit (but not any information about Ms Meades or the attack upon her). Police officers attended and searched the unit, but Mr Graham was not there. At this time, Ms Hack appeared to be agitated and aggressive with the police. Mr Matthews was also present. The attending officers left without any knowledge of the crime or the fact that Ms Meades’ body was in the unit. Shortly afterwards, Mr Graham contacted the police advising of his location and was arrested on an outstanding warrant on unrelated matters.

On 19 September 2016, Ms Meades was reported missing by Daniel Lawler, her friend.

Early in the morning of 20 September 2016, Ms Hack (either by herself or with Mr Matthews) set fire to the unit in three internal locations (including the bedroom where Ms Meades' body was still in the wardrobe). The purpose was to cover up the crime. Both Ms Hack and Mr Matthews left the unit once the fire had taken hold. After Tasmania Fire Service firefighters had extinguished the fire, the scene was examined by police officers and fire investigators. However, Ms Meades' body was not found during that process. The fire extensively damaged the unit, which was owned by Housing Tasmania and it was ultimately demolished.

On 22 September 2016, the police received information that a body was hidden in a wardrobe in the unit and, upon attending in response to that information, located Ms Meades' body. On 3 October 2016, Mr Graham was interviewed, providing police with a detailed account of the circumstances which led to the death of Ms Meades and identified Ms Hack as the principal offender. He denied inflicting violence or encouraging violence towards Ms Mead but admitted his role in helping Ms Hack bind Ms Meades' body with rope before putting it in a cupboard in a back bedroom and cleaning up.

Ms Hack gave three interviews, all of which she gave different accounts. In her third interview on 4 October 2016, she made admissions that she hit Ms Meades' head against the ground after Mr Matthews said "*hit her Kylie*". She then changed her account, saying that Ms Meades came at her first. She also claimed that Mr Matthews and Mr Graham were primarily responsible for the stabbing and denied helping to clean up the unit.

Mr Matthews did not, in the criminal investigation, provide police with his account of events, as was his lawful right.

## **Charges and Prosecution**

### *Kylie Hack*

Ms Hack was charged with murder, failing to report a killing of a person and arson. She ultimately pleaded guilty to the crimes of manslaughter and perverting justice. In sentencing on 7 October 2019, Justice Wood found that Ms Hack formed a common intention with Mr Matthews and/or Mr Graham to carry out an unlawful purpose, namely, that Ms Meades be assaulted, and that this intent was held during the attack. She also sentenced upon the factual basis that Ms Hack hit Ms Meades' head against the ground but then desisted from further violence. The sentence was on the basis that it was Mr Matthews and/or Mr Graham who inflicted the lethal harm, including stabbing and the gagging Ms Meades.

Her Honour commented as follows in sentencing;

*“I also take into account that the attack was unplanned and not the defendant’s initiative. However, there were serious aspects of her criminal culpability that attended her acts of violence and ultimately, she was a participant in a serious example of the crime of manslaughter. The defendant had a key role in the events that led to Ms Meades’ death by commencing the attack and carrying out the initial acts of violence. She readily followed the direction of Mr Matthews that she attack Ms Meades in circumstances where the situation was volatile; the conduct of the three co-offenders was hostile and accusatory towards Ms Meades and they were, as a group, indifferent to Ms Meades’ vulnerability, fear and distress.*

...

*The fact that the defendant was affected by drugs and alcohol at the material time provides her with no excuse. It does not mitigate the seriousness of her actions. It provides the Court with yet another example of the corrupting and destructive influence of illicit drugs, and the association between drugs, such as amphetamine, crystal methamphetamine or poly-drug use and serious crimes of violence.”*

Justice Wood sentenced Ms Hack to eight and a half years imprisonment commencing on 20 September 2016, and ordered that she be ineligible for parole until she had served five and a half years.

#### *Danny Graham*

Mr Graham was charged with being an accessory to murder and failing to report a killing of a person. He pleaded guilty to both charges. On 19 December 2017, Acting Justice Porter sentenced Mr Graham on the basis that he acted as follows:

- Helped Ms Hack and Mr Matthews move Ms Meades’ body, including wrapping it up and moving it in to a wardrobe;
- Took some of Ms Meades’ property and disposed of it, including her jewellery, SIM card, phone battery and items on her person; and
- Cleaned and vacuumed the unit, including moving a television to cover a hole in the wall pointing to Ms Hack’s violence.

Acting Justice Porter commented that Mr Graham’s crime in deliberately assisting a murderer (Ms Hack) conceal the crime in order to escape punishment was a very serious matter. His Honour noted, however, that Mr Graham was himself fearful of Ms Hack and Mr Matthews and also offered to cooperate with police to provide evidence against them.

Acting Justice Porter commented that Mr Graham was genuinely remorseful and acknowledged the impact of the death upon Ms Meades' family. However, he noted that Mr Graham was nevertheless present during the violent attack leading to Ms Meades' death and did little, if anything, to prevent it from occurring. His Honour stated that Mr Graham showed a "*disgracefully callous disregard and indifference to the death of Ms Meades and the treatment of her body*".

Acting Justice Porter sentenced Mr Graham to a period of five years and nine months imprisonment, with ineligibility for parole until he had served three years and three months imprisonment.

#### *Gary Matthews*

Mr Matthews was charged with being an accessory after the fact of murder and failing to report the killing of a person. However, in June 2021 he was discharged from further prosecution. In this regard, the Director of Public Prosecutions was of the view that there was no longer a reasonable prospect of conviction that Ms Hack and Mr Graham had been successfully prosecuted, and it was not in the public interest to proceed against Mr Matthews.

#### **Comments**

The coronial investigation reveals that Ms Meades died as a result of multiple and vicious acts of violence inflicted upon her as described. Despite the comprehensive police investigation, the only persons present when Ms Meades met her fate were Ms Hack, Mr Matthews and Mr Graham. This fact necessarily affected the ensuing prosecutions.

There are significantly conflicting facts in the two sentencing proceedings: the sentence of Ms Hack in pleading guilty to manslaughter being based upon Mr Matthews and/or Mr Graham inflicting the most lethal violence upon Ms Meades, whilst Mr Graham's sentence involved the fact of Ms Hack alone inflicting all of the violence upon Ms Meades.

Ordinarily, the coroner's role would be, in determining "how" death occurred, which individual or individuals were responsible for inflicting the force that caused death and the consequences of the particular actions.

However, in this case I must not make a finding that is "inconsistent with the determination of the matter by the result of the criminal proceedings", as required by Section 25(4) of the Act. The meaning of this poorly drafted provision is difficult to ascertain. However, in light of the two convictions, it is likely that I would infringe this prohibition if I sought to investigate further the actions of the persons present at the time of Ms Meades' death. The

cause of her death itself is clear, and, given the limitation imposed by the Act, it is inappropriate to make further findings or to hold a public inquest

I extend my appreciation to investigating officer, Detective Sergeant Nicholas Smith, for his very helpful investigation and report.

The death of Ms Meades has been a devastating event for her family members, who necessarily have been profoundly affected by her loss and the brutal and needless circumstances in which she died. I convey my sincere condolences to them and those close to Ms Meades.

**Dated:** 12 August 2022 at Hobart in the State of Tasmania.

**Olivia McTaggart**  
**Coroner**