



MAGISTRATES COURT *of* TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION

Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11

I, Leigh Mackey, Coroner, having investigated the death of Noel Joseph Ingham

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Noel Joseph Ingham. Mr Ingham was the victim of murder. Mr Gale was convicted of his murder and sentenced to 23 years imprisonment dated to commence from 30 November 2016 and ordered that he not be eligible to apply for parole until he has served a minimum of 14 years of that sentence. When Mr Gale killed Mr Ingham, he removed and disposed of his head. The head has never been recovered. It is likely that his motivation for cutting off the head of Mr Ingham was to hide the cause and manner of his death.

Due to the absence of the head, a visual identification of the body as being that of Mr Ingham was not possible. Mr Ingham's fingerprints were on a national database, the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS). The body, believed to be that of Mr Ingham, was located in a shallow bush grave in the forest at Dulverton. A fingerprint of the left middle finger was taken from the body was matched with the fingerprints of Mr Ingham on NAFIS. Ms Tobin, who has expertise, and in excess of fifteen years of experience, in the comparison, classification and identification of both latent and inked fingerprint impressions, compared the fingerprint impressions from NAFIS in the name of Mr Ingham with that taken from the body and concluded that the impressions were made by the same person.¹ I accept her conclusion and find that the deceased is Mr Ingham.

Mr Ingham was 58 years of age when he died. He lived most of his life in Queensland and worked managing hotels and resorts. Mr Ingham married and had three children before that marriage failed. Mr Ingham came to Tasmania after meeting and then marrying Shane Attard, a resident of Burnie. The

¹ Affidavit Tracey Louise Tobin sworn 9 December 2016.

marriage was short-lived however Mr Ingham remained in Tasmania living in temporary accommodation before moving into a housing department unit in Ulverstone.

Mr Ingham owned two dogs and planned to breed and sell dogs. Mr Ingham struggled most of his life with an addiction to alcohol however had no immediate health concerns.

- b) An autopsy was undertaken of Mr Ingham by Dr Christopher Lawrence, forensic pathologist. Dr Lawrence's examination revealed several injuries suffered after Mr Ingham's death, including stab wounds to the neck and upper back likely to have been caused by the decapitation of his head. One injury was identified by Dr Lawrence as occurring before death, being an injury to the hand, which was likely defensive.² The hand injury did not cause Mr Ingham's death. It is probable that the identification of the cause of Mr Ingham's death depended on an examination of his head, which given the circumstances, was not possible. Dr Lawrence concluded that the probable causes of death included:

1. A form of blunt head trauma with decapitation;
2. Sharp force injury to the head; or
3. Sharp force injury to the neck with bruising obscured by decomposition.

He further surmised that the decapitation and subsequent burial of Mr Ingham were indications that his death, albeit undetermined, was suspicious. I accept and adopt Dr Lawrence's opinion and find that Mr Ingham died of a traumatic injury to his head and/or neck.

- c) Mr Gale was found guilty following a trial of the murder of Mr Ingham. The trial judge, Wood J, made findings of fact based on the evidence given at the trial and upon which Mr Gale's sentence was based.³ It was found that Mr Ingham and Mr Gale knew each other superficially having met at the Burnie Lodge approximately two years before Mr Ingham's death. At the time of his death Mr Ingham lived in a mostly well-kept housing department two-bedroom unit. He had been living at the unit for a couple of years and had improved and maintained the garden and recently furnished the second bedroom at the unit with a bed and television. Mr Gale moved in with Mr Ingham and became

² Affidavit Dr Christopher Lawrence MB BS, FRCPA sworn 6 February 2017.

³ Comments on Passing Sentence.

attached to the environment and living arrangements which were more comfortable than he was used to. Mr Gale also saw a financial opportunity to obtain a carer's payment from Centrelink if he was recognised as Mr Ingham's carer. Mr Ingham did not need a carer and could live independently. Mr Ingham regretted renting his second bedroom to Mr Gale. These matters led to tensions. Mr Ingham was an alcoholic. Mr Gale had previously been a heavy drinker and had ceased drinking but resumed whilst living with Mr Ingham. Mr Gale attacked Mr Ingham causing blunt force trauma to the head and consequent death. The attack was fuelled by the tensions associated with living in the unit, attempts to access a carer's pension and alcohol. I adopt these findings as identifying the probable circumstances of Mr Ingham's death; and

- d) Following his murder of Mr Ingham, Mr Gale embarked on a course of conduct to conceal the death and his involvement in it. That conduct included burying Mr Ingham in a makeshift bush grave, using his phone to send and receive false messages, disposing, selling, and giving away furniture and fittings from the unit, killing Mr Ingham's two dogs and dumping and burning his vehicle. As a result, it is difficult to precisely identify the date that Mr Gale caused Mr Ingham's death.

The last confirmed sighting of Mr Ingham was when he attended Dr Igbinovia at the Patrick Street Clinic, on 22 July 2016. At this time, he was accompanied by Mr Gale. A further appointment was scheduled with the general practitioner for 28 July 2016 however Mr Ingham failed to attend that appointment. An unknown person contacted the practice on 28 July 2016 and rescheduled the appointment for 4 August 2016. That appointment was not attended nor was it cancelled.

Investigation of the records for Mr Ingham's mobile phone show activity on his device on 28 July 2016 when a call was made to the Patrick Street Clinic at 9.08am and to the Penguin Veterinary Clinic at 9.20am. It is unknown if either call was made by Mr Ingham. The next activity on the phone was on 31 July 2016 when several text messages were sent between Mr Ingham's phone and that of Mr Gale. The evidence reflects that this activity formed part of Mr Gale's conduct in attempting to conceal Mr Ingham's death.

Mr Ingham operated a bank account with National Australia Bank which he used to pay his regular expenditure and from which automatic deductions were routinely made. From that account a picture of Mr Ingham's spending habits can be gained. Mr Ingham regularly used his account for purchases at the Ulverstone

Liquor Mart, and at the East Ulverstone IGA. The last transactions shown on his account at the liquor mart or at the IGA were on 20 and 25 July 2016, respectively.

On 29 July 2016 Mr Gale was detected by Tasmania Police drink driving whilst at the wheel of Mr Ingham's vehicle. Mr Gale's dog was also in the vehicle. Mr Ingham had previously refused to allow Mr Gale's dog to be in the vehicle.

At trial, witnesses, including neighbours of Mr Ingham, gave evidence as to their last sighting of him. The preponderance of that evidence dated the last sighting of Mr Ingham, as late July 2016. Based on the evidence given at the trial, Wood J found that Mr Ingham was killed on approximately 28 July 2016. I accept and adopt this finding.

In making the above findings I have had regard to the evidence gained in the investigation into Mr Ingham's death. The evidence includes:

- The Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Affidavits confirming identity and life extinct;
- Opinion of the forensic pathologist regarding cause of death;
- The comprehensive investigation undertaken by Tasmania Police, and which formed the substance of the evidence at the trial of Mr Gale for the murder of Mr Ingham; and
- Comments of passing sentence of Wood J 2 August 2019.

Comments and Recommendations

Mr Gale has been found guilty of the murder of Mr Ingham. He appealed against his conviction and that appeal was dismissed on 13 May 2024 by the Court of Criminal Appeal. The circumstances of Mr Noel Ingham's death are not such as to require me to make any comments or recommendations pursuant to Section 28 of the *Coroners Act 1995*.

I convey my sincere condolences to the family and loved ones of Mr Ingham.

Dated: 12 May 2025 at Hobart, in the State of Tasmania.

Leigh Mackey
Coroner