



MAGISTRATES COURT of TASMANIA

CORONIAL DIVISION

Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

*Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11*

I, Robert Webster, Coroner, having investigated the death of John Michael Williams

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is John Michael Williams (Mr Williams);
- b) Mr Williams died in the circumstances set out below;
- c) The cause of Mr Williams' death cannot be determined; and
- d) Mr Williams died between 20 January and 23 February 2022 at Shorewell Park, Tasmania.

In making these findings, I have had regard to the evidence gained in the investigation into Mr Williams' death which includes:

- The Police Report of Death for the Coroner;
- Affidavits establishing identity;
- Affidavit of Dr Andrew Reid, forensic pathologist;
- Forensic Science Service Tasmania Report of Dr Cory Griffiths - DNA identification of Mr Williams;
- Affidavit of Tracy Williams, daughter of Mr Williams;

- Tasmanian Health Service Digital Medical Records of Mr Williams; and
- Forensic and photographic evidence.

Background

Mr Williams was born in Burnie on 8 September 1951, to Billy and Bettina Williams. He grew up in the Burnie area and worked at the local paper mill for 45 years. He married Kaye Henderson and they had two children, Tracy and Michelle. Mr Williams and his wife separated in 1993 and he became estranged from his daughter Tracy in 2014, and his daughter Michelle in 2017.

Mr Williams had been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure and he was prescribed medication to treat the symptoms associated with those conditions. In 2013, he suffered a heart attack and underwent bypass surgery. He last attended his general practitioner's clinic in September 2021. His sister, Shirley Howard, reported to police that her brother's health had been in decline since early December 2021 which was when she spoke to him to invite him to a Christmas function. Mr Williams advised her he was having trouble walking and breathing and he slept until late in the afternoon. When she saw him on Christmas day he had facial hair, which was unusual for him, and it appeared to her that he had let himself go. Ms Howard last saw Mr Williams in mid-January 2022 at which time he told her he believed he had cancer but he had not had his belief confirmed as he did not like hospitals and would not go and have a check-up.

Circumstances Surrounding Mr Williams' Death

Mr Williams had been a tenant at Gill Place, Shorewell Park, Burnie for many years. Since 2014 he had always paid his rent on time and often in advance. His last rent payment was received by the manager of the property, Housing Choices, on 12 January 2022. By the 23 February 2022, Mr Williams was 6 weeks in arrears and because this was very unusual staff from Housing Choices conducted a welfare check on that day. Spoiled groceries were located at the front door and Tasmania Police were contacted. Officers attended after Mr Williams did not answer the door. Officers located the body of Mr Williams laying on his bed.

Investigation

Neighbours were spoken to and they said they had seen Mr Williams washing dishes in his kitchen about 6 weeks earlier. The last time his phone was used was 20 January 2022.

Dr Andrew Reid, forensic pathologist, performed a post-mortem examination on 25 February 2022. He noted advanced signs of decomposition and that forensic toxicology analysis was not possible because there were no suitable blood, urine or vitreous fluid samples due to decomposition. Dr Reid says the following in his report:

“The cause of death was undetermined. However, there was no evidence of trauma or an obvious non-natural cause of death. The possibility of a natural sudden cardiac death in the context of a clinical history of cardiac disease and previous coronary artery bypass graft surgery, post-mortem findings of calcified coronary atherosclerosis and stenosis, in a background of dense pericarditis, cannot be excluded. There was also evidence of atherosclerotic vascular disease elsewhere consistent with a history of diabetes mellitus. Diabetes mellitus and hypertension are risk factors for sudden cardiac death due to atherosclerotic ischemic heart disease.”

Comments and Recommendations

I have not been able to determine the cause of Mr Williams' death, despite a thorough investigation. The most likely scenario is that death resulted from a natural sudden cardiac death. However, given the extent of decomposition, Dr Reid has not been able to confirm that as the cause. I can, however, given his opinion, exclude a traumatic cause or an obvious non-natural cause of death.

The circumstances of Mr Williams' 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 Williams.

Dated: 30 March 2022 at Hobart Coroners Court in the State of Tasmania.

Robert Webster
Coroner