



# 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, Duncan Fairley, Coroner, having investigated the death of Ben Wara Plowright

#### **Find That:**

- a) The identity of the deceased is Ben Wara Plowright;
- b) Mr Plowright died in the circumstances set out below;
- c) Mr Plowright died as a result of drowning;
- d) Mr Plowright died between 30 May 2015 and 4 September 2015 at Perth in Tasmania;
- e) Mr Plowright was born in Thailand on 18 November 1994 and was aged 20 years; and
- f) Mr Plowright was a single man and was employed as a photographer at the date of his death;

#### **Background:**

Ben Wara Plowright was born in Thailand on 18 November 1994 and was adopted by Shirley Ruth Plowright and Stephen Plowright when he was aged 2 ½ years. Mr Plowright's only sibling, a sister, was 3 years his senior.

Mr Plowright's early years were uneventful with his childhood being described as happy and secure. He completed year 12 at Launceston College before commencing study at the University of Tasmania. Mr Plowright completed only a single semester of a business degree before leaving University to pursue part time employment. He developed an interest in photography and as at May 2015 Mr Plowright was residing in a room at the Hotel New York, Launceston in exchange for his services at the nightclub as in-house photographer.

I have had regard to the evidence gained during the comprehensive investigation into Mr Plowright's death. Such evidence includes many witness affidavits from Mr Plowright's family

and friends together with relevant medical records. It is apparent from the evidence that Mr Plowright was a well liked and sociable young man without any indication of significant psychological issues.

### **Circumstances Surrounding the Death:**

On Saturday 30 May 2015, Mr Plowright was collected from the Hotel New York by his friend Jordan Heerey shortly after 5pm. The pair planned to have a meal and socialise with friends at 48 Arthur Street, Perth where Mr Heerey resided with his mother and stepfather. It was intended that the group would later travel back into Launceston for a night out. Mr Plowright was required to attend the Hotel New York in order to commence work at the nightclub.

Mr Plowright and Mr Heerey arrived at the Arthur Street residence at approximately 5:30pm having purchased alcohol during the journey. There they joined members of Mr Heerey's family for the evening meal. At about 6:45pm a number of other guests arrived including Aden Morris, Holly Bean, Damien Love, Jordan Brazendale and Austin Page. Mr Plowright commenced consuming alcohol shortly after arriving at the residence and continued to do so throughout the evening.

At approximately 8pm the group noticed a negative change in Mr Plowright's demeanour. He became progressively rude and belligerent. Mr Heerey spoke with Mr Plowright who stated that he had consumed amphetamine in addition to a significant quantity of alcohol. It was not unusual for Mr Plowright to use illicit substances. He was not considered to have a drug abuse issue but was known to have experimented with a number of illicit substances.

Shortly after his discussion with Mr Heerey concerning the use of amphetamines Mr Plowright scaled the fence of the yard and moved into Arthur Street. Together with Mr Heerey, Helen and Ross Turner approached Mr Plowright at a nearby park and after some discussion all decided he would return to the Hotel New York. Mr Turner placed his hand on Mr Plowright's arm in order to guide him towards the driveway of the Arthur Street residence. At this juncture Mr Plowright suddenly became agitated and walked away in the direction of Fairtlough Street.

At 9:33pm Mr Heerey used his mobile phone to contact Mr Plowright. The conversation was particularly brief with Mr Plowright simply saying, "Have a good night" before disconnecting the call. Mr Heerey then spoke via telephone with another mutual friend of the pair, Solomon Scott who had remained in Launceston. Mr Scott called Mr Plowright from his own mobile

phone. According to Mr Scott his friend sounded heavily intoxicated and it was apparent from the ambient noise that he was walking steadily throughout their conversation. Mr Plowright informed Mr Scott that he had “messed up” and that he was in the Launceston mall. At 9:58pm Mr Scott posted a social media message in response to Mr Heerey indicating that Mr Plowright had made his way into town. At the time of receiving the social media message Mr Heerey and his mother were actively searching for Mr Plowright in the Perth area. As a result they returned to the Arthur Street residence.

On 4 June 2015 Jordan Heerey attended at Launceston Police Headquarters and reported Mr Plowright as a missing person. After parting company with Mr Plowright on the evening of 30 May 2015 neither Mr Heerey nor any other member of Mr Plowright’s social circle or family had any contact with him.

### **The Search for Mr Plowright:**

Upon receipt of the missing person’s report Tasmania Police initially obtained statements from those who had last seen Mr Plowright together with mobile phone records in order to establish a time line of events. On Sunday 7 June 2015, a search was conducted from Arthur Street through to Mill Road, Perth and on to Western Junction. The search, which was unsuccessful, involved members of Mr Plowright’s family, Tasmania Police and SES crews. The following day a search was conducted of the South Esk River by two Police officers from Northern Search and Rescue using kayaks. The search party travelled from the Pump Station on Mill Road to the weir adjacent to the Perth Bridge and back to the Pump Station, again with negative results.

A complete search of Perth, Devon Hills and associated areas was completed on Saturday 13 June 2015 with no sign of Mr Plowright being identified. Subsequently, further searches were conducted of the South Esk River region on foot, by motorbike patrols and using the Police Search and Rescue Helicopter. Given the absence of positive results media releases were distributed with a number of news outlets providing significant coverage of the search for Mr Plowright.

On Friday 4 September 2015 two men were kayaking on the South Esk River. At a point approximately 300 metres south from the Pump Station on Mill Road the pair located the body of Mr Plowright, who was later identified during a forensic examination. Mr Plowright’s body was positioned on the western bank of the river partially submerged in deep water but caught in trailing willow branches. Mr Plowright’s position was approximately 1 kilometre

from the Arthur Street residence and in an area without ambient or street lighting. The river bank in the relevant area is readily accessible to pedestrian traffic.

Dr Christopher Lawrence (State Forensic Pathologist) conducted a full autopsy on Mr Plowright's body on 7 September 2015. Analysis of samples taken during the post mortem examination revealed a blood alcohol concentration of 0.081 g/100mL but no other illicit substances. Dr Lawrence observed that the significant delay before Mr Plowright's body was found might account for the decomposition of any drugs in his system and a reduction in the observed blood alcohol concentration. The Forensic Pathologist was unable to find any evidence of foul play and determined that Mr Plowright's death was consistent with fresh water drowning. I accept Dr Lawrence's opinion.

### **Conclusion:**

I am satisfied that Mr Plowright left the vicinity of 48 Arthur Street, Perth at approximately 9:30pm on Saturday 30 May 2015. He then walked east towards the South Esk River where he entered the water. I am unable to say with any degree of certainty how Mr Plowright came to be immersed in the river, however, given the combined factors set out in this finding, including his level of intoxication and the lack of ambient lighting I find that the mechanism involved was most likely an accidental fall.

### **Comments and Recommendations:**

In the circumstances there is no need for me to make any further comment or recommendations. I have completed a review of the search undertaken by Police and emergency services and conclude that such was commenced in a timely manner and conducted in an appropriate fashion.

In concluding, I convey my sincere condolences to the family of Mr Plowright.

**Dated:** 24 April 2017 Hobart in the state of Tasmania.

**Duncan Fairley**  
**Coroner**