



MAGISTRATES COURT of TASMANIA
CORONIAL DIVISION



Record of Investigation into Death (Without Inquest)

*Coroners Act 1995
Coroners Rules 2006
Rule 11*

I, Simon Cooper, Coroner, having investigated the suspected death of Christopher George Jackson

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

- a) The identity of the deceased is Christopher George Jackson;
- b) Christopher George Jackson died in the circumstances set out below;
- c) Christopher George Jackson died as a result of drowning;
- d) Christopher George Jackson died on or about 18 December 1958 on the Derwent River near Kangaroo Bay, Bellerive in Tasmania;
- e) Christopher George Jackson was born in Hobart on 16 October 1941 and was aged 17 years at the time of his death; he was a student and unmarried.

Jurisdiction:

The investigation of deaths in Tasmania is governed by the *Coroners Act* 1995. Section 21(1) of the Act provides:

“A coroner has jurisdiction to investigate a death if it appears to the coroner that the death is or may be a reportable death.”

‘Death’ is defined in section 3 of the Act as including a suspected death.

‘Reportable death’ is defined in the same section as meaning, *inter alia*, a death which occurred in Tasmania and was unexpected or the cause of which is unknown.

Thus if a Coroner suspects (on reasonable grounds) that a person has died and the death meets the definition of a reportable death, then that Coroner has jurisdiction to investigate.

For reasons which will become apparent in this finding, I am satisfied that jurisdiction exists to investigate the disappearance of Christopher George Jackson.

Background:

According to a birth notice published in The Mercury newspaper on 18 October 1941, Christopher George Jackson was born in Hobart on 16 October 1941. At the time of his

disappearance he was living at his home at 9 Dallas Avenue, Taroona with his father John. Contemporary reports suggest that Christopher wished to join the Navy but that his father did not support that as a career choice. Given that he was only 17 years of age, for Christopher to have lawfully joined the Navy he needed his father's written consent which was not forthcoming.

Circumstances Surrounding the Death:

Christopher was last seen at about 10.45pm on 18 December 1958 on a vessel which was heading from the direction of the then Wrest Point Hotel towards Bellerive wharf.

According to the contemporary police file the boat was operated, and possibly owned, by a Ronald Claude Johnson. Christopher had organised the cruise on the boat.

Christopher had been drinking with a group of friends on the night he disappeared. The group was celebrating the completion of the school year. It consisted of Christopher, Geoffrey French, Graham Jackson, Gordon Armstrong, Ken Macleay, Neville Johnson, Harry Cox and Keyran Rooke.

Before boarding the boat some of the young men had been at the Telegraph Hotel where they had consumed alcohol. Christopher was one of the group who had been at the Telegraph Hotel.

After the young men boarded the boat they continued to drink alcohol. The boat made its way to a wharf (or jetty) near the site of the current Wrest Point Casino.

The boat spent some time tied up at that wharf. The young men consumed more alcohol. Eventually the boat headed to the eastern shore of the Derwent River. It stopped briefly at Rosny Point. Upon the arrival of the boat at the Bellerive wharf it was noticed that Christopher was missing.

A search for him seems to have been commenced more or less straight away.

Unfortunately no trace of Christopher was ever found. Police were involved in the investigation into his disappearance at an early stage.

The possibility that Christopher had deliberately left the boat and in some way made his way to the mainland of Australia to join the Navy was considered as at least a possibility during the initial investigation. The possibility was investigated but no trace of Christopher was ever found in the Royal Australian Navy (or any other branch of the defence force). Indeed, the suggestion that he had done so seems inherently unlikely for there is nothing to suggest he had access to money, clothes or transportation. None of his friends provided to police any detail that would suggest that this could have occurred.

It is apparent from a recent re-interview by police of two of the witnesses - Gordon Armstrong and Harry Cox - that on the night in December 1958 all of the young men on board the boat, including Christopher, had consumed a considerable amount of alcohol, much more than the contemporary statements to police tend to suggest. This was explained as being the result of a desire, perfectly understandable, to keep from their parents the amount of alcohol that each had consumed.

Although no one seems to have seen or heard Christopher fall from the boat into the water on the night of his disappearance, it seems to me on the balance of probabilities, that this is

the most likely explanation for his disappearance. The fact that no one saw or heard him fall from the boat is explained, in my view, by the considerable amount of alcohol that the young men had consumed.

No evidence has emerged since Christopher's disappearance that any person has had any contact with him. No evidence exists which suggests that he is alive or has been alive at any time since late in the evening of 18 December 1958.

Enquires were conducted in the recent past with a number of government agencies (both State and Federal), as well as all State and Territory police jurisdictions information holdings, Centrelink, Medicare and the 10 most commonly used financial institutions in this country. No record of Christopher was found as a consequence of these investigations.

I am, in the circumstances, satisfied that Christopher George Jackson died late in the evening on 18 December 1958 when, having consumed alcohol, he fell from a boat into the Derwent River. It is most likely that he drowned as a consequence.

Comments and Recommendations:

The circumstances surrounding this matter do not require me to make any comments or recommendations pursuant to section 28 of *Coroners Act 1995*.

In concluding, I convey my sincere condolences to the family of Christopher George Jackson.

Dated: 31 May 2016 at Hobart in the state of Tasmania

Simon Cooper
Coroner