



# 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, Simon Cooper, Coroner, having investigated the suspected death of Michael John Holmes

### **Find That:**

- (a) The identity of the deceased is Michael John Holmes;
- (b) Mr Holmes died in the circumstances described in this finding;
- (c) Mr Holmes died sometime after 26 July 1988;
- (d) I am unable to find the cause of Mr Holmes' death; and
- (e) Mr Holmes was born in Hobart on 9 May 1953 and was aged 35 years at the time of his death; he was separated and unemployed at the date of death.

### **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 Michael John Holmes.

**Background:**

Michael John Holmes was born at the Gore Street maternity hospital in Hobart on 9 May 1953. His parents were Norma McBean and John Holmes. Mr Holmes senior reportedly committed suicide when Mr Holmes was aged about 10. His mother remarried.

Mr Holmes had six siblings. He grew up in the Scottsdale area and received his primary education there.

After completing his secondary education in Hobart, Mr Holmes was employed for a time at Walsh's Printers. He married firstly Dianne Carleen Nichols on 16 February 1974. The marriage was of a short duration. With Ms Nichols he had a son, John, but after separating from Ms Nichols had little, if any, contact with his son.

He had another son, Troy Holmes (a.k.a. Percy), with a Ms Rosie Percy in the late 1970s to early 1980s. Troy committed suicide in 2003.

Mr Holmes was employed as a clerk in the State public service in the 1970s from time to time.

On 20 May 1981 he married Mary Catherine Padman. Together they had a daughter, Alice Brickhill-Holmes. After about seven years of marriage Mr Holmes and Ms Padman separated. Mr Holmes had little contact with Alice after the separation.

It is apparent from an examination of Mr Holmes' medical records that he had a long-standing problem with alcohol. In addition, there are a number of recorded attempts by him to commit suicide commencing in the mid-1970s. Mr Holmes was hospitalised for psychiatric treatment on a number of occasions suffering from anxiety and depression.

There are at least three recorded suicide attempts for which he received treatment. The most serious of which was an occasion in August 1986 when he shot himself in the head causing serious injuries from which he made a limited recovery. At the time he had been working as a scallop splitter but after being released from hospital he seems to have never worked again.

At the time of his disappearance he was living in a boarding house at 253 Elizabeth Street, Hobart, opposite the Elizabeth College. The boarding house is no longer there. It was in effect a refuge for alcoholic and homeless men. Mr Holmes had his own room in which he lived and shared a kitchen and bathroom with other residents. Mr Holmes lived at the boarding house for approximately 12 months before he went missing.

It would appear that by and large Mr Holmes was a loner in the time leading up to his disappearance. He seems to have spent his days either in his room at the boarding house or at the Black Prince Hotel located in Elizabeth Street. This hotel he visited most days.

On 26 April 1988 whilst drunk and trying to cross a road, Mr Holmes was run over by a car. He suffered serious injuries as a consequence. At about the same time he spoke with his sister and a friend about the fact that he was contemplating suicide.

In the lead up to his disappearance Mr Holmes appears to have had some contact with his estranged wife, Ms Padman, who then lived in Kingston, and friends Mr Terry Irwin, of Warrane, and Mr Ian Sherrin, of Cradoc.

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

Mr Holmes was last certainly seen alive by his then landlord, Mr Robert Jackson, on Tuesday 26 July 1988. He was reported missing to Tasmania Police by his cousin, Ms Wendy Farrington, on 28 October 1988.

Mr Jackson told investigating police in 1988 that he went into Mr Holmes' room on Tuesday 26 July 1988 after noticing that he was not there. Mr Jackson apparently found the television and the heater turned on and the door wide open with the keys in the door. He told police that "two young blokes" called to see Mr Holmes shortly after this. He told police he could not recognise the "two young blokes if he saw them again", and that he subsequently cleaned out Mr Holmes' room and disposed of the contents to the Salvation Army. Mr Jackson did not report Mr Holmes as missing to Tasmania Police.

Mr Holmes was reported missing to Tasmania Police by his cousin, Ms Wendy Farrington, on 28 October 1988. Thereafter an investigation was conducted into Mr Holmes' disappearance. No trace of Mr Holmes in Tasmania, or in any other jurisdiction on the mainland, has ever been found. It was discovered that his Social Security payments had continued to be paid into his nominated bank account but that that account had not been accessed since the middle of July 1988.

Friends and family of Mr Holmes were spoken to by police. Enquiries were conducted through the Bureau of Criminal Intelligence in relation to his bank accounts, criminal activity, medical and dental treatment. Media releases were also done at the time. No trace whatsoever of Michael John Holmes was able to be found. Specifically, his body was not located.

The file was subsequently reviewed from time to time. Checks were undertaken in both 2008 and 2011 with Tasmanian prisons, various government departments, including Department of Health and Human Services, Housing and Mental Health, ten of the most common financial institutions, and all State and Territory police jurisdictions, unidentified bodies, all State transport systems, Centrelink, and Births Deaths and Marriages in Tasmania. No trace whatsoever of Michael John Holmes was able to be found. In the circumstances I am satisfied that Mr Michael John Holmes is dead. I am unable however to identify the cause or mechanism of his death. It may be that he committed suicide, a distinct possibility given his history of suicide attempts and discussion with his sister and at least one friend in the lead up to his disappearance indicating that he was contemplating that course. Equally, he may have died as a consequence of accident or possibly met with foul play. However

the investigations, comprehensive as they have been, have not revealed evidence that would enable me to reach a concluded view to the necessary legal standard.

**Comments and Recommendations:**

The circumstances of Mr Holmes' death are not such as to require me to make any recommendations or comments pursuant to section 28 of the *Coroners Act* 1995.

I wish to convey my sincere condolences to the family of Michael John Holmes.

**Dated:** 11 November 2015 at Hobart in the state of Tasmania

**Simon Cooper**  
Coroner