

FORM 37

Rule 60(1)

FINDING INTO DEATH WITH INQUEST

Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008

Court reference: 1442/09

Inquest into the Death of STRATHEWEN UNKNOWN DVI 11021

Delivered On: 13th May, 2011

Delivered At: Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street, Melbourne 3000

Hearing Dates: 13th May, 2011

Findings of: JUDGE JENNIFER COATE

Place of death: Unknown

Police Coronial
Support Unit (PCSU): Senior Constable Kelly Ramsey

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Court reference: 1442/09

In the Coroners Court of Victoria at Melbourne

I, JUDGE JENNIFER COATE, State Coroner

having investigated the death of:

Details of deceased:

Surname: UNKNOWN DVI 11021
First name: UNKNOWN
Address: STRATHEWEN

AND having held an inquest in relation to this death on 13th May, 2011
at Melbourne
find that the identity of the deceased was UNKNOWN
and death occurred on an UNKNOWN DATE
at an UNKNOWN LOCATION

from

1a. UNKNOWN

in the following circumstances:

1. The human remains contained in case number 1442/09 were located in a residential property in Strathewen in the wake of the massive fires on the 7th of February 2009.
2. The remains were located by a Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) team working on the retrieval of persons missing as a result of the bushfires.
3. The remains located appeared to be almost totally burnt. A forensic anthropologist Professor Chris Briggs located what appeared to be a mandible and some other pieces of a human skull.
4. These remains were conveyed to the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine. The remains were thereafter examined by forensic pathologist Dr David Ranson who completed a report.
5. Dr Ranson examined three separate bags. In the first bag he found a collection of fine fragments of bone which included identifiable portions of the base of the skull together with portions of a skull vault.
6. In the second bag he found a moderate number of largely charred fragments of tooth.

7. In the third bag he found some apparent fabric-like material together with what appeared to be portions of a zip. Also contained within this bag was a clear plastic container containing three bubble wrapped specimens which on opening contained portions of facial bones including portions of lower jaw and other small fragments of bone possibly representing some upper jaw.

8. Dr Ranson advised that examination of the remains in this case indicated that the remains appeared extremely light which, according to him, may indicate that they were originally dry bone tissue. One of the pieces of bone from the first bag shows what appears to be a small vault at one edge of one border of one of the skull vault bones. In the opinion of Dr Ranson, this raises the suspicion that this may have been a medical teaching specimen or skeleton which has been secondarily affected by heat and fire.

9. Dr Ranson was unable to make any comment regarding the possible gender of the remains or the age of the remains.

10. It was the conclusion of Dr Ranson that the characteristics of these human remains suggest that they may have come from a medical skeletal specimen.

11. The owner of the property was contacted on May 5, 2011. She advised that the family had a skull which had been given to them by a friend who had obtained it from a retired doctor. It had been kept in the study which is where it appeared to be located by the DVI team. The skull had been hinged and had been a medical specimen according to the advice given by the family.

Conclusion

11. Given the evidence, it is not possible to make findings as to the identity, where or when or in what circumstances the person died.

12. However, given the examination and opinion of Dr Ranson, together with the evidence as to the nature of the remains located in the premises that had otherwise collapsed as a result of fire and the location of the remains consistent with the family's advice about the skull kept in the study, I am satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the remains located are likely to have come from a medical skeletal specimen that was in situ in the family home at the time the fires swept through on February 7, 2009.

Signature:



Judge Jennifer Coate
State Coroner

Date: 13th May, 2011