

IN THE CORONERS COURT
OF VICTORIA
AT MELBOURNE

Court Reference: 2012 / 0923

FINDING INTO DEATH WITH INQUEST

Form 37 Rule 60(1)

Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008

Inquest into the Death of: UNKNOWN SKULL

Delivered On: 10 April 2013

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

Hearing Dates: 10 April 2013

Findings of: K. M. W. PARKINSON, CORONER

Police Coronial Support Unit Leading Senior Constable N. Harrison

I, K. M. W. PARKINSON, Coroner having investigated the death of UNKNOWN SKULL

AND having held an inquest in relation to this death on 10 April 2013
at Melbourne

find that the identity of the deceased was UNKNOWN SKULL
and the death occurred at a date or a place unknown from an unknown cause.

in the following circumstances:

1. This is a summary Inquest in relation to certain unknown remains, the remains comprising a skull. On Tuesday 13 March 2012, tradesmen undertaking electrical re-wiring of unoccupied premises at No.11 Watson Street in Glen Iris located a shopping bag containing what appeared to be a replica of a human skull. Police were contacted and the remains transported to the Coroners Court of Victoria.
2. Police investigation revealed that the remains were likely to have been in the possession of the late Dr Ernest Richard Edwards, who was born in 1901 and had died in 1966 who had formerly resided and who had practiced as a GP.
3. Dr Edwards's daughter and son were contacted by police and they confirmed that the skull had originally been located at Dr Edward's domestic premises in Malvern from where he also practiced medicine for a large number of years.
4. They stated that around 1924 their father took a position for two years as ship's doctor on board a passenger cruise ship which travelled to Hong Kong, and that was around 1924/25.
5. There was also a suggestion that Dr Edwards may have come into possession of the skull during his World War II service. Dr Edwards was a member of the Royal Australian Air Force posted in Darwin, it would not be unusual for those times for him to have flown outside of Australia on an unrecorded mission to nearby locations such as Papua New Guinea or other nearby surrounding islands.
23. Police have been unable to establish the circumstances surrounding the death of the deceased, outside of the possibility that the deceased met his death as a result of some act of war.

24. On 13 March 2012, the skull was conveyed by police to the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine in Kavanagh Street, South Melbourne. The skull has since been examined by Dr Soren Blau, a forensic anthropologist. Dr Blau's examination of the skull has established the following:
- The skull is of human origins. It is most likely that of a male. It is not possible to determine the exact age of the skull. That the skull is most likely that of mongoloid ancestry. It is not possible to comment on the time since death, however, circumstances suggest this is more than likely a historic case. The individual has evidence of sharp forced trauma to the right lateral side of the head.
25. The skull has also been examined by Dr Michael Bourke from the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine and Dr Bourke's examination of the skull has established the following:
- The skull is of human origin. The skull did not appear to be of Aboriginal descent. There is a large incised injury to the posterior aspect of the skull as seen in a machete type injury, but as Dr Edwards may have served in the South Pacific during World War 11, it is possibly a war trophy.
26. I am satisfied that the remains were human, that the identity is unascertainable, and that the circumstances of the death of the person associated with the remains is unable to be determined.
27. I am also satisfied that the ancestry of the remains is unable to be determined with any precision, although, as reported as the forensic anthropologist, Dr Blau, and the forensic pathologist, Dr Bourke, they are likely of Mongoloid morphology and not likely to have been of Aboriginal ancestry.
28. It is unclear how the skull was obtained by the doctor concerned however it was possibly obtained during the course of war service or post-war service in or around the Pacific.
29. The skull is described by the forensic anthropologist as of human origin, most likely that of male, not possible to determine the exact age of the skull and as I have already indicated, most likely of Mongoloid ancestry.
30. The forensic pathologist and the anthropologist were unable to comment upon the time since death, however, were of the view that it was likely a historic case. That is consistent with the fact that the remains have been identified as being in the possession of Dr Edwards since at least 1940 and perhaps earlier.

31. Dr Bourke indicated that there was a large incised injury to the posterior aspect of the skull, which was consistent with a machete type injury. This may be consistent with a death in war - time circumstances, however I am unable to conclude as to that matter with any certainty.
32. In those circumstances, I find that the remains are unidentified. The circumstances of the death of the person with whom the remains are associated are unclear and unable to be determined.
33. There has been no application by any person for return or recovery of the remains. In those circumstances it is my order that the remains be dealt with by the Coroner's Court of Victoria by way of arrangements being made for burial of the remains at an appropriate location.

I direct that a copy of this finding be provided to the following:

The Investigating Member of Victoria Police.

Signature:



K. M. W. PARKINSON
CORONER
Date: 10 APRIL 2013

