



**CORONERS COURT  
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

<b>Inquest:</b>	Into the death of Braydon Worldon										
<b>File number:</b>	2018/390705										
<b>Hearing dates:</b>	30 and 31 March 2021										
<b>Date of findings:</b>	1 April 2021										
<b>Place of findings:</b>	Wagga Wagga										
<b>Findings of:</b>	Deputy State Coroner E.Truscott										
<b>Catchwords:</b>	Coronial Law-Cause and manner of death-hit and run- rural road-identification of vehicle and mechanism of injury										
<b>Representation:</b>	Coronial Advocate: Ms B. Notley										
<b>Findings:</b>	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%;">Identity</td> <td>Braydon Worldon</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Date of Death</td> <td>18-19 December 2018</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Place of Death</td> <td>546 m west of Worldon Lane on River Road, Wantabadgery, NSW 2650</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cause of death</td> <td>Multiple Blunt Force Injuries</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Manner of death</td> <td>Braydon was struck by a vehicle such as a medium to heavy rigid vehicle or similar while he was a pedestrian on River Road, between about 9.30 pm on 18 December 2018 and 1 am on 19 December 2018</td> </tr> </table>	Identity	Braydon Worldon	Date of Death	18-19 December 2018	Place of Death	546 m west of Worldon Lane on River Road, Wantabadgery, NSW 2650	Cause of death	Multiple Blunt Force Injuries	Manner of death	Braydon was struck by a vehicle such as a medium to heavy rigid vehicle or similar while he was a pedestrian on River Road, between about 9.30 pm on 18 December 2018 and 1 am on 19 December 2018
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<b>s74(b) Non-Publication Orders &amp; s65 Access Restrictions</b>	Given that this matter remains an ongoing police investigation any items contained in Ex 1 and Ex 2 are not to be published and access to these exhibits is not allowed unless with the specific approval of coroner who will provide an opportunity to the NSW Police to be heard.										

IN THE LOCAL COURT  
WAGGA WAGGA  
NSW

Section 81 Coroners Act 2009

## REASONS FOR DECISION

### Introduction

1. This is an inquest into the death of Braydon Worldon. Braydon died between 9pm on the 18 December 2018 and 1am on the 19 December 2018 on River Road, Wantabadgery. Braydon was found deceased on River Road a little over 540 m west of his grandfather's home where he had lived all but for the last four years. He had died from injuries after being struck by a motor vehicle. The driver of that vehicle did not stop. Braydon was just 15 years old.
2. Braydon was born on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2003 to his mother Crystal Worldon. He did not have a relationship with his biological father. Braydon and Crystal lived with his grandfather, John Worldon on the property known as 'Lumeah' which is located on Worldon Lane, Wantabadgery. The house backs onto Crown Land known as Worldon's Reserve which is on the northern bank of the Murrumbidgee River. Worldon Lane is like a long driveway to the reserve past the house and the letterbox is on River Road where the Lane intersects. Worldon Lane is about 750 m west of the Tenandra Road intersection. The bridge over the river on Tenandra Road is about 350 metres south of that intersection and it is a further 270m to the Old Hume Highway.
3. Worldon Lane is about 9.5 km east of Wantabadgery and 35 km east of Wagga Wagga. Located around the area are minor roads that connect to rural properties which ultimately join larger roads. According to the 2016 census the Wantabadgery community has a population of 187, consisting of 91 families, living in 43 dwellings.

4. Braydon and Crystal lived alone with John Worldon. Braydon was very close to John “shadowing” him wherever he went. John taught Braydon how to hunt and fish and Braydon loved the outdoors. Braydon had a mild cognitive delay and experienced learning difficulties at school particularly with reading and writing and at some stage he was diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and he took medication for this until he was about 12 of 13.
5. When Braydon was about ten years old Crystal began a relationship with Peter Lees, who is known as Toby. Toby came to live in a caravan on John’s property and later when John left the area to work in Oberon, Toby moved into the house with Braydon and Crystal. Later Crystal’s brother James and his partner and children also moved into the house to share the rent.
6. Toby started working on a property less than a kilometre away over the river called “Sunnybrae” which is at the intersection of Old Hume Hwy and Tenandra Road, Mundarlo and owned by John and Debbie Blackwell.
7. Toby was engaged to carry out fencing work and later the arrangement included other rural work and he commenced living there in his caravan with Crystal and Braydon. The caravan was a short distance from the Tenandra Road Bridge and their camp was between the river and the Old Hume Highway. Mr and Mrs Blackwell lived across the road in the refurbished school house and Mrs Blackwell’s mother lived in the homestead just a few hundred metres away.
8. The caravan was powered by generator and solar energy but the bulk of food was kept in refrigerators and freezers in a shed behind the homestead which was across the road.
9. Braydon became close to Toby who describes their relationship as ‘like mates’ rather than step-father and son. In addition to working at “Sunnybrae”, Toby did contract work at other properties in the local area. Braydon would accompany Toby carrying out a variety of rural tasks such as example fencing, mustering, shearing and weed spraying. He became Toby’s “shadow” and much preferred those activities than attending school. Brayden stopped attending school altogether in early 2018 despite efforts of the school and Toby and Crystal to encourage him to go.

10. Braydon was described as a good kid, a polite young man whose appearance was always neat and tidy. Mrs Blackwell said that Braydon helped Toby with the work and was 'very good at it.' Braydon loved fishing, rabbit trapping and hunting. Mr Blackwell described him as his Huck Finn – referring to Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer's carefree and adventurous friend.
11. Braydon was described as coming into his own and no doubt he was excited to be old enough to work in his own right. The Blackwell's were waiting for Braydon to turn 15 so they could employ him on the farm. Debbie thought that 'Braydon was turning out to be a lovely young man who had a future ahead of him in the farming industry.'
12. Braydon was close to his great-grandmother June Worldon and he was loved by his family of grandfather, aunts, uncles and cousins. Braydon's family attended the inquest with Toby and Crystal and Mr and Mrs Blackwell attended. They all want to know what happened to Braydon and who was driving the vehicle which struck him.

#### **Events of 18 December 2018**

13. On the 18 December 2018, Braydon turned 15. In the morning he and Toby worked on 'Sunnybrae' until about 11 am by which time it was over 40 degrees. Braydon was wearing his usual work clothes: blue wrangler jeans, maroon RM Williams shirt, a Toolteam cap and dark brown puma boots.
14. Braydon and Toby returned to the caravan and spent the rest of the day in the shade. Crystal had driven into town in the morning taking June into town for their weekly shopping returning at about 1 pm. Crystal had given Brayden a 4 pack of pre-mixed drinks for his birthday and a case of beer for him to drink over the Christmas New Year period. There was no plan to celebrate Brayden's birthday as Christmas would be the time for everyone to get together.
15. In the afternoon Crystal, Braydon and Toby spent time together in the shade at the caravan. Toby was drinking ciders, and Braydon was watching something on his phone which he kept charged in Toby's land cruiser utility.

16. At about 5 pm a couple of friends who Braydon had done some work for dropped in for about an hour and had a couple of beers for his birthday and he drank about two bottles of his beer. During this time Braydon had a phone conversation with his friend Jack Hamilton ribbing him for not ringing him for his birthday. Jack described Braydon as being cheeky and happy on the phone call.
17. About 6.10 pm Toby asked Braydon to help him move some sheep on 'Sunnybrae'. Braydon said he shouldn't have to work on his birthday but Crystal told him that everyone works on their birthday and the job wouldn't take long. In his evidence in the inquest Toby said that he thought Braydon was okay about it. In her statement to the police Crystal said she thought Braydon was cranky or angry about being asked to work on his birthday. That was the last time Crystal saw Braydon.
18. Toby and Braydon set up a sheep spray unit and then crossed the road and Toby drove his utility to move sheep from a paddock to the orchard area near the shed to ready for the following day. Mr Blackwell saw Braydon run down to the open gate to prevent the sheep entering the road and he shouted out to Toby if they needed a hand, and Toby said they did not. That was the last time Mr Blackwell saw Braydon.
19. Toby and Braydon were finished by 7-7.30 pm and Toby drove his vehicle back to the camp and Braydon told him he was going to the shed where the food and drinks were. That was the last time Toby saw Braydon. Toby gave evidence in the inquest and like Detective Wall; I am of the view that he had no part in Braydon's death.
20. Toby and Crystal stayed at the caravan and at some stage Crystal probably cooked dinner but Braydon did not come home. Crystal presumed he was staying away as that is what he did when he was cranky and so she thought it was not particularly unusual.
21. Toby gave evidence at the inquest and said that when Braydon went to the shed after completing their job he didn't seem angry to him and that he had helped with the sheep with no problem. When Toby went back to the caravan he drank a few more ciders and at about 10.30 he and Crystal went to bed. Before going to bed, Crystal left the caravan and looked for Braydon. She could not find him and thought he was still cranky so he he was hiding from her as this is something he

would do. She thought he would come home when he wanted and that he would be home when she awoke in the morning.

22. About 1.00 am Ian Jones was returning home from work travelling east along River Road. He was the only vehicle on the road. He drove around a curve in the road and noticed something on the road about 300 metres in front of him. About 150 metres out he could see that it was a person lying on the roadway. Mr Jones drove very slowly past and he could see blood. He stopped and checked for a pulse, which he was unable to find, and contacted triple zero. Mr Jones waited for the emergency services and reports that no other vehicles drove along River Road prior to the arrival of emergency vehicles.

### **Investigation into Braydon's Death**

23. The NSW Police from Wagga Wagga and Gundagai attended at the same time as the ambulance. Detective Senior Constable Stan Wall from the Tumut Station was tasked at 1.45 am and travelled to the scene. He has ultimately led the investigation and gave evidence at the inquest. The scene was attended by Detectives, and Accident Investigation Unit Officers.

24. Senior Constable Brendon Follington from the Metropolitan Crash Investigation Unit (Sydney) and Senior Constable Chris Nocente from the Central West Crash Investigation Unit arrived at 7.15 am on 19 December 2018 and carried out an examination of the scene.

25. Detective Wall describes that it was a warm, dry, cloudless moonlit night with good visibility. He too said that there was no traffic on River Road at that time. He describes the surrounding area of that part of River Road as being generally flat rural paddocks, sparsely timbered and rural fencing runs parallel with each side of the road. The speed zone of the road is 100 kmh.

26. Senior Constable Follington describes that part of River Road as running in a generally east/west direction with one lane in each direction with no lane markings or any raised reflective markers. Either side of the road is well cleared without any overgrown vegetation. The surface of the road is sprayed bitumen which is a common surface in rural areas and in areas with low traffic volumes.

27. Senior Constable Nocente describes that the road was 6m wide without markings. Braydon lay on the southern side of the road with his head towards the centre of the road measured as 2.1 m from the southern edge of the roadway. Braydon was lying on his right side facing west. He was wearing the same clothes as the previous day. His cap was 2.76 m north of the kerbside but in line with him and 26 cm from the northern edge of the road.
28. About 2.76m west of Braydon was a broken glass bottle and liquid indicating an easterly directed spill. Some glass from the broken bottle was also found underneath Braydon. Senior Constable Nocente determined from the direction of the glass and spillage from the bottle that the vehicle which collided with Braydon was travelling in an easterly direction.
29. The glass was a broken bottle of one of the pre-mixed drinks Braydon had received for his birthday. The lid was still on the bottle. Braydon likely had the bottle in his pocket and it smashed when he impacted with the road and he then rolled a little further coming to a stop close by. The injuries Braydon suffered were so severe he would have died on impact with the vehicle.
30. The police investigators examined the scene and looked for any evidence to assist in the identification of the motor vehicle and how it had come to collide with Braydon. They did not locate any debris from any vehicle nor were there any tyre marks on or off the road. There were no tyre marks or friction marks indicating that the vehicle had braked suddenly. The absence of such marks however does not preclude the vehicle having had its brakes applied at some stage.
31. The police engaged in a thorough canvas of neighbouring properties and drivers who used River Road. Numerous vehicles and occupants were identified, who used or were in the vicinity of River Road on the evening of the collision. The police interviewed all identified persons. Each advised the police that when they travelling along River Road they did not see any other vehicle or Braydon. Apart from Mr Jones, the last known vehicle travelled on the road at about 9pm – 9.30pm. The driver of that vehicle stated he was driving westerly and when he drove past Worldon Lane he saw a calf on the side of the road so slowed down. He did not see any person or other vehicle on the road. He said it was dark however with high beam his visibility was clear.

32. Detective Wall obtained the precise measurements from where Braydon lay to the apex of the corner where Mr Jones said he first saw him. That distance is not 300 m but rather about 145m.
33. Detective Wall has interrogated telephone records, telephone devices and telephone cell towers to no avail.
34. An extensive media campaign has been conducted by NSW Police concerning Braydon's death. The campaign has been continuing in the form of radio, print, social media and podcast. Information received as a result of that campaign has been investigated but no person or vehicle associated with Braydon's death has been located. Detective Wall has continued to make enquiries further to all information received.

#### **Why Braydon was on River Road**

35. Braydon's clothing was examined in an attempt to locate evidence about the motor vehicle. It was noted that there was some flakes of dark green paint. However, it was not from a vehicle but rather it matched paint samples taken from John Worldon's letterbox.
36. How Braydon's clothing came to have paint from the letterbox seems to be explained by Mr Worldon finding his letterbox on the ground when he drove out on the morning of 19 December. It would seem that sometime after going to the shed for food and drink, Braydon has walked across the Tenandra Road Bridge and after 9.30 pm was on River Road and Worldon Lane. Why Braydon would have interfered with Mr Worldon's letterbox is unclear but Mr Worldon says that on two earlier occasions the letterbox and pole had been knocked down. He said it would have taken some effort for Braydon to have removed it from the ground where it was positioned at the corner fence post.
37. Why Braydon was up at River Road is also unknown. Mr Worldon said that he thought he had left a birthday greeting to Braydon on his phone but was not sure if he had received it. It seems that though Mr Worldon had returned to live in the house a couple of years after Braydon moved to Sunnybrae he and Braydon though very fond of each other did not spend the time together like they had



previously. Mr Worldon gave evidence and he does not think that Braydon came to his house because had he done so the dogs would have barked and they did not. He said that there would have been no lights on in the house from about 10 pm. It may be that Braydon was merely watching his grandfather's house from River Road which at about the location of where he was he would have had a good view of it across the flat paddocks.

### **The Post Mortem Examination**

38. An autopsy was performed by Doctor Lyons on 24 December 2018. His report was reviewed and finalised by Doctor Du Toit-Prinsloo on 12 July 2019. Braydon had catastrophic head, skeletal and cardiac injuries.

39. The report describes the cause of death as multiple injuries. The report also describes that a sample of cavity blood indicated a high blood alcohol level (.108 g/100ml), urine (.099 g/100ml) and vitreous humour (.060 g/100ml). However, Dr Du Toit-Prinsloo commented that centrally obtained blood can result in higher measured alcohol. Using a conversion factor, Dr Toit Prinsloo suggested that Braydon's blood alcohol level was most likely .057g/100ml. She opined that this did not contribute to the cause of death.

40. Dr Du Toit-Prinsloo was asked further questions in writing to determine if it was possible to opine what injuries resulted from impact with the vehicle and those from impact with the road. She was of the opinion that the injuries could have been occasioned by either impact and she was unable to advance any opinion as to the mechanism by which they occurred.

41. To further this inquiry Detective Wall sought an expert report from Mr William Bailey, a Mechanical and Biomedical Engineer who relevantly has extensive expertise in assessing pre-impact vehicle manoeuvres, crash causation and injury mechanisms.

42. Mr Bailey was provided the post mortem report and photographs, and radiology report and imaging and numerous photographs and statements relating to the crime scene.

43. Mr Bailey gave evidence further to his written report in the inquest. Referring to the findings relevant to the broken bottle and liquid, Mr Bailey agreed with Senior Constable Nocente's opinion that the vehicle was travelling in an easterly direction. He opined that the vehicle was likely travelling at 90-110 kmh. An impact at that speed would project Braydon about 45-80m ahead. On that basis Braydon could have been about 65- 100 m west of the corner when he was struck.
44. Mr Bailey considered that the major impact force was to the lower half of the skull and over the right scapula from the rear view with a component from the right side. He opined that Braydon was in an upright (standing) position on the road with his back to the vehicle but facing north-east at about 30 degrees. He was unable to indicate, whether Braydon was stationary or moving or whether he was on the side or centre of the road. He noted that the police did not locate any tyre marks off the road.
45. Mr Bailey described that the force involved in this impact was so great and sudden to cause such catastrophic skull, thoracic and cardiac injuries. He considered that such injuries would not occur if Braydon had been in any other position such as lying down or kneeling or sitting on the road or being conveyed by a vehicle and falling to the roadway.
46. Mr Bailey was of the opinion that Braydon's injuries were consistent with having been struck by a vehicle fitted with a frontal bulbar, the bulbar possibly having a forward protruding style. He notes that the posterior skull fracture is consistent with an upper height bulbar of 1.5-1.6m height and the next bar being at a height of 1.3-1.4 m causing the injury to Brayden's ribs and right scapula and upper arm fracture.
47. He opined that such height measurements were compatible with a larger vehicle in the medium rigid to heavy vehicle range fitted with a bulbar or possibly a smaller vehicle fitted with an oversized (and incorrect) sized bulbar. Mr Bailey noted that the injury pattern and lack of laceration injury was consistent with the bulbar being rounded and without defined edges.
48. Mr Bailey said that it was likely that the vehicle impacted with Braydon at least 45 m and up to 100m west of his final location. He was unable to opine what, if any carriage prior to separation from the vehicle occurred. It was possible that

some braking movement or other factors would cause separation. In his report he discussed the location of Brayden's cap but was unable to explain its location as factors such as wind vortex from the vehicle's movement played a role. He considered the possibility of the vehicle having travelled over Braydon without the wheels coming into contact with either Braydon or the cap. I find that it is highly unlikely that this occurred given Braydon's location close to the centre of the road.

49. Mr Bailey said the sound of impact would be sufficiently loud to be heard inside the cabin but he was unable to say what other sounds were in the cabin. He opined that though Braydon may not have been in the driver's field of vision immediately prior to impact given the height of the vehicle, the driver would likely be aware that he had hit something.

## **Conclusion**

50. It is not possible to determine where Braydon was when the vehicle came around the corner. It may be that Brayden was not on the road and not in the field of vision but entered the impact zone at a point so immediate to impact that the driver did not see him prior to impact.

51. Whether Braydon was moving and/or miscalculated the proximity of the vehicle is possible given that he had been drinking alcohol. That he had interfered with Mr Worlton's letterbox is suggestive that he was acting somewhat impulsively and possibly recklessly. Such distractions and inhibitions could have contributed to Braydon being inadvertently in an unsafe position on the road.

52. Such speculation does not help Braydon's family cope with his sad and premature death. What would assist Braydon's family is the driver of the vehicle or a person to whom the driver has spoken comes forward to the police to explain how the collision happened and why they did not stop.

53. I commend Detective Wall for his commitment to this investigation. Detective Wall has inspected every vehicle he could find in the area matching the descriptors described by Mr Bailey. He has pursued all avenues of inquiry even spending the evening of the second anniversary of Braydon's death at the location. When he learned that December was a time when apiarists transported bees at night on River Road in pursuit of river gum honey, Detective Wall

thoroughly pursued that line of inquiry. However, despite people being co-operative and prepared to show their work diaries and records to establish where their vehicles were on the night Braydon died, Detective Wall has not been able to establish the identity the driver of the vehicle.

54. Though the inquest is closed today it can be announced that, thanks to Detective Wall's application, the Minister of Police has approved the offering of a \$250,000 reward to any person who comes forward with information leading to the arrest and conviction of the driver of the vehicle which collided with Braydon on 18 December 2018.

### **Findings**

55. I now enter the formal findings of this inquest:

Braydon Worldon died 546 metres west of Worldon Lane on River Road, Wantabadgery, NSW 2650. Braydon died of Multiple Blunt Force Injuries when he was struck by a vehicle such as a medium to heavy rigid vehicle or similar while he was a pedestrian on River Road, between about 9.30 pm on 18 December 2018 and 1 am on 19 December 2018.

Magistrate E Truscott  
Deputy State Coroner  
1 April 2021