



**CORONERS COURT  
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Inquest:** Inquest into the death of Adam Coble

**Hearing dates:** 12 April 2021

**Date of findings:** 14 April 2021

**Place of findings:** Coroners Court of New South Wales, Lidcombe

**Findings of:** Magistrate Derek Lee, Deputy State Coroner

**Catchwords:** CORONIAL LAW – cause and manner of death, homicide

**File numbers:**

**Representation:** Ms S Harding, Coronial Advocate Assisting the Coroner

**Findings:** I find that Adam Coble died on 14 January 2019 at North Richmond NSW 2754. The cause of Adam’s death was a stab wound to the chest. This wound was inflicted in the course of an episode of interpersonal violence between Adam and a known person, Kay Leonard. The manner of Adam’s death is therefore homicide.

**Non-publication orders:** Pursuant to s.74(1)(b) of the *Coroners Act 2009* the publication of any matter (including the publication of any photograph or other pictorial representation) that identifies the following persons is prohibited:

1. CC
2. EW

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## Introduction

1. On the morning of 14 January 2019 Adam Coble was involved in verbal argument at home with his wife in relation to allegations of marital infidelity. This argument eventually came to involve Mr Coble's mother-in-law, and escalated from a verbal argument to a physical altercation. This physical altercation resulted in the introduction of a weapon. As a result of the altercation Mr Coble sustained a fatal stab wound to the chest, could not be saved by medical treatment and tragically died at the scene.

## Why was an inquest held?

2. A Coroner's function and the purpose of an inquest are provided for by law as set out in the *Coroners Act 2009 (the Act)*. One of the primary functions of a Coroner is to investigate the circumstances surrounding a reportable death. This is done so that evidence may be gathered to allow a Coroner to answer questions about the identity of the person who died, when and where they died, and what the cause and the manner of their death was. The manner of a person's death means the circumstances surrounding their death and the events leading up to it.
3. Section 6(1)(a) of the Act defines a reportable death to be one which occurs in circumstances where a person died a violent or unnatural death. As Mr Coble died from traumatic injuries his death was not due to natural causes, making it a reportable death. Further, section 27(1)(a) of the Act provides that an inquest is mandatory if it appears to a coroner that a person died or might have died as a result of homicide. In this case, the available evidence indicates that Mr Coble was involved in an episode of interpersonal violence, and it therefore appears that he died as a result of homicide. It is therefore mandatory to hold an inquest into Mr Coble's death.
4. In this context it should be recognised at the outset that the operation of the Act, and the coronial process in general, represents an intrusion by the State into what is usually one of the most traumatic events in the lives of family members who have lost a loved one. At such times, it is reasonably expected that families will wish to attempt to cope with the consequences of such a traumatic event in private. The loss experienced by family members does not diminish significantly over time. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that both the coronial process and an inquest by their very nature unfortunately compel a family to re-live distressing memories and to do so in a public forum.
5. It should also be noted at the outset that although the evidence gathered during a coronial investigation may give rise to the appearance that a person has died as a result of homicide, such a conclusion (if one is eventually made) does not impose any criminal liability on any person. Indeed, section 81(3) of the Act explicitly precludes a coroner from making a finding that indicates, or in any way suggests, that a criminal offence has been committed by any person. It should be remembered that the functions of the coronial jurisdiction are, in this way, entirely separate from the functions of the criminal jurisdiction.

## Adam's life

6. Understanding the impact that the death of a person has had on their family only comes from knowing something of that person's life and how the loss of that life has affected those who loved that person the most. Therefore it is extremely important to recognise and acknowledge Adam's<sup>1</sup> life in a brief, but hopefully meaningful, way.
7. Adam was born to Anne Skeed and Jack Coble. He had a brother, Erin Lewis, and a sister, Natalie Lewis-Zander. Adam was previously married to Leonie Gatt. They had three daughters together: Tammy, Kristy and Cheyenne. Adam also had a son, Jack, from another relationship. In about 1998 Adam and Ms Gatt divorced. Around two years later Adam met Robyn Coble, and they married several years later. Adam and Robyn had one daughter, CC, together who was 13 years old at the time of Adam's death.
8. Adam previously worked in the upholstery business and showed considerable skill in the trade. There is no doubt that Adam is greatly missed and loved by his family, as demonstrated by the many family members who attended the inquest. It is extremely distressing to know that Adam lost his life too soon, and in such sudden, tragic and violent circumstances.

## Background to the events of January 2019

9. Various family members have described the relationship between Adam and Robyn as being volatile, strained and "off and on". Throughout the 19 years of their marriage there have been periods of disharmony between Adam's side of the family towards Robyn and, conversely, between Robyn's side of the family towards Adam. There is evidence that both Adam and Robyn frequently consumed excessive amounts of alcohol. This tended to have a detrimental effect on their relationship, often leading to arguments between them.
10. Between April 2008 and January 2019 a number of reports were made to police of a domestic violence nature. For the most part, these reports involved incidences of verbal arguments between Adam and Robyn. However, from 2018 there were also reported incidents involving physical violence and property damage. Following an incident on 4 December 2018 Adam was charged with a domestic violence related offence and an apprehended violence order (AVO) was subsequently made against him, with Robyn nominated as the person in need of protection. On 21 December 2018 police from Hawkesbury Police Area Command conducted an unannounced AVO compliance check at the home of Adam and Robyn in North Richmond. Both Adam and Robyn reported that they had not been drinking alcohol (in compliance with the conditions of the AVO) and that they were undertaking counselling to address their alcohol issues.

## The events of 13 and 14 January 2019

11. On the evening of 13 January 2019 Robyn left home on foot for several hours. During this period Adam attempted to contact her by phone, and drove around searching for her. During one phone

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<sup>1</sup> For clarity and convenience, Adam Coble, Robyn Coble and Kay Leonard will all be referred to by their first names in these findings. No disrespect is intended.

call, Adam heard a male voice in the background and asked Robyn if she was having an extramarital affair.

12. Robyn later returned home at around 10:00pm and was observed to be heavily intoxicated. Adam assisted Robyn to bed and later found a mobile phone in her bag. Adam examined the contents of the phone and found a number of sexually explicit text messages between Robyn and a male person who was Robyn's taekwondo instructor. Adam later went to bed and made a number of abusive comments towards Robyn which she did not respond to. That night, CC had a friend who was sleeping over and they both slept in the lounge room.
13. The following morning, Adam left home at around 7:30am and went to the home of Robyn's sister, Kerry Beeck, in North Richmond. Adam showed Ms Beeck some of the text messages that he had discovered the previous evening, and told Ms Beeck that he believed Robyn was having an extramarital affair. Ms Beeck observed that Adam appeared to be upset and distressed.
14. Adam later returned home, where Robyn, CC and CC's friend were all still sleeping. Robyn later woke up, made a coffee and sat in the living room. In the course of a discussion, Robyn and Adam became involved in an argument regarding the contents of Robyn's phone and Adams allegations of her infidelity. The verbal argument escalated leading to Adam obtaining a pair of pliers. He removed his wedding ring and used the pliers to cut the ring, telling Robyn, "*That's what you did to my heart*".
15. Robyn called her mother, Kay Leonard, and told her about the argument. Kay told her daughter that she would make her way from her home in Bligh Park to Robyn's home in North Richmond. Kay arrived about 20 minutes later and was met by CC at the front door. Kay told CC to go to her room with her friend. Kay entered the living room and found Robyn and Adam seated separately and still arguing. Kay informed them both that they could not keep fighting, and that if they were going to continue arguing then Adam could move out if he wanted to and stay with his mother.
16. The comments made by Kay appeared to prompt a reaction from Adam. He stood up and walked past Kay to the kitchen, where he removed a knife from a drawer. He returned to the living room and approached Kay from behind. Adam took hold of Kay's hair with one hand and pushed her face onto the ground. With his other hand, which was still holding the knife, he stabbed Kay in the neck. Robyn immediately stood up attempted to pull Adam away from Kay, and called out to CC for help. In response, CC entered the living room and saw Kay with a knife in the side of her neck, and Adam pinning her to the ground. CC observed Adam to remove the knife from Kay's neck and then use it to stab Kay again. CC's friend also saw that Adam was holding a knife in one hand and using his other hand to pull Kay's hair. As this was occurring Robyn was screaming at Adam and attempting to pull him backwards. CC and her friend fled from the house and CC used her mobile phone to call the police. During this phone call CC told the Triple Zero operator, "*My daddy is killing my mum's wife [sic]. He's got a knife and he's stabbing my mum's mum. He's killing her, hurry up*".
17. Meanwhile, Adam forced Kay onto her back and continued to stab her, impacting with her right shoulder and left forearm. Kay used her left hand to take hold of the knife, whilst using her right hand to strike out towards Adam.

18. As Robyn was unable to restrain Adam, she placed him in a headlock hold and pulled backwards. This caused them both to fall to the floor, as Adam continued to brandish the knife towards Kay. Robyn maintained her hold of Adam in a headlock and Kay was able to use her right hand to take the knife from Adam. Whilst holding the knife and still on the ground, Kay extended her arm backwards in a sweeping motion from the shoulder, and inserted the knife into Adam's chest.
19. In response to CC's call for assistance, Sergeant Colin Williams arrived at the scene as the events within the house were unfolding. Sergeant Williams was wearing a body worn video camera which was activated. As he approached the house he heard Robyn screaming for help. Upon entering the living room, Sergeant Williams saw Adam, Robyn and Kay all on the ground, with Robyn maintaining her headlock of Adam. Robyn said to Sergeant Williams, "Help us, if I let him go he will kill us". Sergeant Williams observed the knife to still be in Adam's chest, and told Robyn that Adam was deceased. Both Robyn and Kay asked Sergeant Williams to call for an ambulance, and he immediately did so.
20. After Kay confirmed that Sergeant Williams was indeed a police officer, she told him, "*I took the knife out of this hand so that he couldn't do any more and I stabbed him, mate*".
21. Emergency services arrived at the scene a short time later. Both Robyn and Kay were later conveyed to hospital for treatment.

#### **What was the cause of Adam's death?**

22. Adam was later taken to the Department of Forensic Medicine where an autopsy was performed on 17 January 2019 by Dr Elsie Burger, forensic pathologist. The autopsy identified that Adam had sustained a stab wound to the chest, just to the left of the midline. The wounded track caused complete transection of rib cartilage, passing through the front part of the left lung through to the back of the left lung, transecting a large artery and a large bronchus in the process. Marked aspiration of blood was seen in both lungs, with a large amount of blood in the left chest cavity. An injury to the neck, in the form of a fracture in the left horn of the thyroid cartilage, was also noted.
23. Dr Burger described the stab wound to the chest as being "*associated with undeniably fatal effects, including significant blood loss, haemo-pneumothorax and blood aspiration*". In the autopsy report dated 18 November 2019, Dr Burger opined that the cause of Adam's death was a stab wound to the chest.

#### **Injuries sustained by Robyn and Kay**

24. Following the arrival of emergency services on 14 January 2019, Robyn was taken to Blacktown Hospital where she was found to have three incised wounds on the palms of both hands, and a wound to her right hand. Robyn was also noted to have a number of bruises and abrasions to her forearms, upper legs and chest. The nurse who examined Robyn later provided a statement to police in which she expressed the opinion that the wounds to Robyn's hands were consistent with the version of events provided by Robyn regarding her attempt to remove the knife from Adam.

25. Kay was taken to the emergency Department at Westmead Hospital where she was found to have an anterior neck wound. She was taken to the operating theatre and treated for wounds to the right neck, right shoulder, right cheek and left forearm. Examination revealed no injury to the major vessels or structures of the neck. Kay was later transferred to the intensive care unit.
26. The next day, Kay was returned to the operating theatre for exploration of the wound to her left forearm where injuries were noted to the ulnar nerve and ulnar artery which were transected and repaired surgically. A partial thickness laceration to the extensor digitorum muscle belly was noted. Further examination revealed a left upper tracheal injury. Kay remained in hospital until 25 February 2019 when she was discharged.

#### Versions provided of the events of 14 January 2019

##### *Kay Leonard*

27. On 6 February 2019, while still at Westmead Hospital, Kay completed a written statement describing the events of 14 January 2019. Kay stated, "*[Adam] came back with a large...knife. He smashed my head into floor and stabbed into my neck. Robyn started screaming, 'You're killing my mother', where she grabbed him around the neck. I yelled to her not to let go or we would all be dead...I ended up on my back. I grab the sharp end of [sic] blade, fighting him off as he slowly started to go unconscious. As he went limp I grab the knife, I reach back as far as I could and stuck the knife in him*".
28. Kay also took part in an electronically recorded interview with police on the morning of 28 February 2019. During the interview, Kay relevantly told police the following:
  - (a) She described Adam as "*grabbing me by the hair, slammed his face down onto the wooden floor and put the knife through my neck*";
  - (b) That when Adam was kneeling over her with the knife raised above her, she "*just grabbed the knife... and I was holding the knife to stop him stabbing me*";
  - (c) That she could not recall "*whether I felt the knife give or whether I put this hand up and actually grabbed it*";
  - (d) After obtaining the knife her right arm "*with the knife in it went back anywhere, I didn't care where it went... And I didn't know where it was going. I could see [Adam], his body, like, in there and I could see it and all I did was, this arm just went straight back and whatever I could do, I did*".
29. On 13 March 2019 police conducted a walk-through of the scene at North Richmond with Kay. During this Kay told police, "*And somehow and this is the God's truth, I don't know how I got the knife. I don't know whether he, because of the way Robyn was holding him, he got weaker or whatever. And, somehow I got the knife and at times I sort of remember taking this arm over which must have had the knife in it... Somehow I think I remember actually bringing this arm over and because my head was pumped into my side, I could actually see him... And then I remember looking at him, lying there and the knife was in him in his chest*".

## **Robyn Coble**

30. Robyn took part in an electronically recorded interview with police on 14 January 2019 whilst still seated in an ambulance at the scene. She provided this version of events to police: "*[Adam] came back and started stabbing [Kay] and didn't stop stabbing her... And he just grabbed her and wouldn't stop so I tried to grab like him [sic] arm so he could stop stabbing my mum. And I don't know somehow it was, it was so quick and somehow I can I, I got him around the neck like this and I held him like that and he was still going like this and stabbing my mum. And she said, 'It's working Robyn he stopping, he slowing down, it's working, it's working'. And I said, 'I can't hold any longer'. She goes, 'Well if you don't hold him he's gonna kill us', and I tried so hard just [sic] choke him and stop him and knock him out. But then he went like this again right [sic] the knife and then Mum went just like that back into him, with his hand on it too*".
31. Robyn also took part in a second electronically recorded interview with police later in the afternoon on 14 January 2019. During the interview Robyn again described placing Adam in a headlock as he continued to stab Kay. She said that she saw Kay grab Adam's hand but not take hold of the knife. Robyn then said: "*[Adam] started slowing down cause obviously the choke must've been started. But he quickly went like that again and that's when, I don't know, Mum just grabbed him and, and, and stabbed him. I don't even remember, I didn't look at him, I didn't, I was worried about my mum*".
32. Later, Robyn took part in a walk-through of the scene with police on 14 February 2019, which was electrically recorded. During the walk-through, when asked about whether she saw her mother obtain a knife from Adam, Robyn again said, "*I thought, maybe, as he [sic] going like that, [Kay] grabbed [Adam's] hand and pushed it back or maybe, oh, I, I, I didn't actually see that*".

## **CC**

33. CC also took part in an electronically recorded interview with police on 14 January 2019. During the interview CC told police that when she went into the living room she saw Kay lying on her stomach with a knife in her neck and Adam's hand on the knife. CC said that she then saw that Adam "*pulled it out and stabbed her in the neck*".

## **EW**

34. CC's friend, EW, also took part in an electronically recorded interview with police on 14 January 2019. She also described seeing Kay lying on her stomach with Adam kneeling on the ground next to her, pulling on her hair with one hand, and with the knife in his other hand.

## **Results of the police investigation**

35. Apart from obtaining the above versions of events, obtaining statements from family members, conducting a canvass of neighbouring residents and arranging for the scene and items located at the scene to be forensically examined, investing police also investigated a number of specific matters related to Adam's death. The outcome of these investigations is summarised below:



- (a) Following the tragic events of 14 January 2019, Adam’s family raised a number of concerns centred around the possibility that the events of that day might have been premeditated. It appears that these concerns are largely related to an incident in October 2018 when Adam was found by Robyn and CC in the bathroom of his home, with injuries to his eye and head. When the incident was investigated by police, Adam expressed the belief that he had been assaulted, although he had no recollection of the particulars of any such assault.

The police investigation at the time revealed that on the evening in question Adam had been drinking with a neighbour, Leanne Duncan, and was observed to be heavily intoxicated. Adam sustained a fall as a result of his intoxication and later returned home, declining medical assistance. The alleged incident was investigated again by police following the events of 14 January 2019. This investigation identified no inconsistencies between the version of events that Ms Duncan told police in 2018 and 2019. In particular, the police investigation identified no evidence of any involvement of Robyn concerning the injuries sustained by Adam, or any connection between events of October 2018 and 14 January 2019.

- (b) Further police investigation was conducted in relation to the mobile phone services used by Adam, Robyn, Kay, CC and the male person with whom Robyn was having an extramarital affair, and communication made using these services. This investigation did not identify any evidence to suggest that there was any preplanning or premeditation associated with the events of 14 January 2019.
- (c) When police questioned Robyn about the nature and duration of her extramarital relationship, the answers provided by Robyn suggested that she was not entirely forthcoming with police. In particular, she declined to provide the name of the male person that she had been in contact with and denied any previous sexual interaction. In contrast, when police spoke to the male person, it became apparent that there had been an extra marital relationship of some six months prior to Adam’s death, which had involved the regular exchange of text messages and phone calls, together with sexual interactions. Investigating police attributed Robyn’s lack of candour regarding these matters to be due to her embarrassment regarding her extramarital affair, and not a result of any attempt to conceal or fabricate the events of 14 January 2019. Having considered the consistency between the versions of events provided by Robyn, Kay and CC, together with the concerns expressed to Sergeant Williams immediately upon his arrival at the scene, there is no evidence to suggest that Robyn’s lack of candour regarding her extramarital affair detracts from the veracity of what she told police regarding the events of 14 January 2019.
- (d) On 21 February 2020 Robyn attended a supermarket in North Richmond and had an encounter with Rebecca Tuckwell, a person known to her and who was working as the deputy store manager at the supermarket. Ms Tuckwell provided a statement to police in which she alleged that Robyn told her, “*Your husband better watch out because I know how it’s done. I have done it and you both know I got away with it*”. When Ms Tuckwell told Robyn that she knew that Robyn had stabbed Adam, Robyn allegedly responded by saying, “*Yes, so you know I will slit his throat and I’ll fucking get away with it*”.

Investigating police conducted an electronically recorded interview with Robyn on 20 March 2020. During the interview, Ms Tuckwell's allegations were put to Robyn. Whilst Robyn agreed that she was at the supermarket on 21 February 2020, she denied making the comments attributed to her and asserted that Ms Tuckwell's allegations were based on a mutual dislike they had for each other. It appears this mutual dislike is based on interactions unrelated to the circumstances of Adam's death. Following investigation of the matter, the police officer in charge, Detective Senior Constable Joseph Conolly, expressed the view that the interaction between Robyn and Ms Tuckwell arose due to their dislike for one another. In evidence during the inquest, Detective Senior Constable Conolly noted that the alleged comments made by Robyn regarding the events of 14th February 2019 are inconsistent with the actual injuries sustained by Adam, and the version of events provided by other witnesses. Having regard to these matters, the incident on 21 February 2020 cannot be reliably used in any way to assess the accuracy of the versions provided by Robyn regarding the events of 14 January 2019.

### **What was the manner of Adam's death?**

36. Having regard to all of the available evidence the following matters relevant to the events of 14 January 2019 are not in dispute:
- (a) A verbal argument took place between Adam and Robyn prior to the arrival of Kay at their house;
  - (b) The verbal argument was a result of Adam's discovery of text messages sent by Robyn which appeared to confirm his existing suspicions of her infidelity;
  - (c) Following the arrival of Kay, the verbal argument between Adam and Robyn continued;
  - (d) A comment made by Kay prompted Adam to take further action;
  - (e) This action resulted in him obtaining a knife from the kitchen;
  - (f) After arming himself with a knife, Adam used it to strike Kay a number of times, causing significant injuries to her;
  - (g) As this occurred, Robyn attempted to restrain Adam by placing him in what has variously been described as a headlock or chokehold;
  - (h) During the course of this physical interaction, Kay managed to remove the knife from Adam;
  - (i) Shortly afterwards, Kay moved her hand containing the knife in a backwards sweeping motion, causing the knife to strike Adam and penetrate his chest; and
  - (j) The penetrating wound to Adam's chest was fatal resulting in Adam being subsequently pronounced deceased at the scene.

37. In summarising the above sequence of events, the following should be noted:
- (a) The versions of events provided by the persons at the scene (Kay, Robyn, CC, and EW) are all generally consistent with one another.
  - (b) The versions of events provided by the persons at the scene to attending police and paramedics in the initial aftermath of the incident were consistent with the versions later provided to interviewing police during more formal electronically recorded interviews and (where relevant) walkthroughs conducted at the scene.
  - (c) There is no evidence of any pre-planning or premeditation in relation to the events of 14 January 2019. Rather, the argument between Adam and Robyn was a result of Adam's discovery of certain text messages on Robyn's phone the previous day. Further, Kay only attended the scene on 14 January 2019 after receiving a phone call from Robyn.
  - (d) The single stab wound to Adam's chest is consistent with the versions of events provided by the persons at the scene in relation to the manner in which Kay used the knife.
  - (e) The injury to Adam's neck is consistent with the versions of events provided by the persons at the scene in relation to the description of Robyn placing Adam in a headlock or chokehold in order to restrain him.
  - (f) The injuries sustained by Kay, in particular the wounds to her forearm and hand which were occasioned in her attempts to remove the knife from Adam, are consistent with the versions of events provided by the persons at the scene.
38. Having regard to the above it is evident that the fatal stab wound to the chest which Adam sustained was inflicted in the course of an episode of interpersonal violence between Adam and Kay. This episode of interpersonal violence also involved Robyn and was spontaneous in nature, having escalated from a verbal argument between Adam and Robyn. The manner of Adam's death is therefore homicide. Again it should be noted that this conclusion is a factual finding based on the available evidence. It should be emphasised that, in accordance with section 81(3) of the Act, this conclusion does not indicate or suggest in any way that an offence has been committed by any person.
39. Having reached this conclusion some mention also ought to be made regarding the operation of section 78(1)(b) of the Act. This section provides a mechanism for certain procedural steps to be taken in relation to the conduct of an inquest, if a coroner forms an opinion as to the likelihood of a known person being convicted of an indictable offence that is causally related to the death of the person who the inquest is concerned with. Its purpose in doing so is to preserve the rights of any such person of interest and the integrity of any consequent criminal proceedings, and to separate the role and functions of the coronial and criminal jurisdictions.
40. As noted at the outset, it is not the role of a coroner, nor the function of an inquest, to determine whether criminal proceedings ought to be commenced against an individual. That is a matter for police and prosecuting authorities to determine. It is further noted that, to date, criminal

proceedings have not been commenced against any person as a result of the events of 14 January 2019. Detective Senior Constable Conolly, as the officer in charge of the police investigation, has expressed his opinion that there is insufficient evidence to support the commencement of any criminal proceedings.

41. Having regard to the consistent version of events provided by the persons at the scene, the absence of any medical, forensic, or other evidence to contradict these versions, what these versions disclose regarding the actions taken by Kay in response to the actions taken by Adam, and the opinion expressed by Detective Senior Constable Conolly, there is no basis to consider that section 78(1)(b) of the Act has been enlivened.

## **Findings**

42. Before turning to the findings that I am required to make, I would like to thank Ms Sasha Harding for her valuable assistance during both the preparation for the inquest, and the inquest itself. I also thank Detective Senior Constable Joseph Conolly, for conducting a comprehensive investigation and compiling the extensive brief of evidence.
43. The findings I make under section 81(1) of the Act are:

### ***Identity***

The person who died was Adam Coble.

### ***Date of death***

Adam died on 14 January 2019.

### ***Place of death***

Adam died at North Richmond NSW 2754.

### ***Cause of death***

The cause of Adam's death was a stab wound to the chest.

### ***Manner of death***

The stab wound was inflicted in the course of an episode of interpersonal violence between Adam and a known person. The manner of Adam's death is therefore homicide.

## **Epilogue**

44. On behalf of the Coroners Court of NSW I extend my sincere and respectful condolences to Adam's family and friends for their painful and tragic loss in such distressing circumstances.

45. I close this inquest.

Magistrate Derek Lee  
Deputy State Coroner  
14 April 2021  
Coroners Court of New South Wales