



**CORONER'S COURT  
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Inquest:** Inquest into the suspected death of missing person Bruce Robinson

**Hearing dates:** 23 January 2024

**Date of Findings:** 23 January 2024

**Place of Findings:** Coroner's Court of New South Wales, Lidcombe

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

**Catchwords:** CORONIAL LAW – whether missing person now deceased, date and place of death, cause and manner of death

**File number:** 2023/41032

**Representation:** Ms A Storm, Coronial Advocate Assisting the Coroner

**Findings:** Bruce Robinson, who was reported to a missing person to the New South Wales Police Force on 28 October 2022, is now deceased.

Mr Robinson died on 27 October 2022 in the waters of Sydney Harbour near Mosman NSW 2088.

The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the cause of Mr Robinson's death.

Mr Robinson died as a result of actions taken by him with the intention of ending his life.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Why was an inquest held?.....	1
3. Mr Robinson’s background and personal circumstances .....	2
4. Mr Robinson’s medical history .....	2
5. Events preceding 27 October 2022.....	3
6. Events of 28 October 2022 .....	4
Report of Mr Robinson as a missing person.....	4
Initial efforts to locate Mr Robinson .....	4
Identification of Mr Robinson .....	5
Review of CCTV footage .....	5
7. Search efforts to locate Mr Robinson .....	6
8. Is Mr Robinson now deceased?.....	6
9. What was the cause and manner of Mr Robinson’s death? .....	7
10. Findings pursuant to section 81(1) of the Act .....	8
Identity .....	8
Date of death.....	8
Place of death.....	8
Cause of death.....	8
Manner of death.....	8
11. Epilogue.....	9

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 On the evening of 27 October 2022, Bruce Robinson left his home in the Northern Beaches area and caught a taxi to Manly. He did not inform his family that he was leaving home or where he was going. After arriving in Manly, Mr Robinson boarded a ferry bound for Circular Quay.
- 1.2 At 10:25pm, when the ferry was in the vicinity of Sydney Heads, Mr Robinson walked to the stern of the ferry. He was captured on CCTV footage to climb over a railing on the starboard side and jump into the water. None of the crew or passengers on board the ferry observed Mr Robinson or were aware of his actions.
- 1.3 On the morning of 28 October 2022, Mr Robinson's wife and son became concerned when Mr Robinson could not be found at home. They later made a missing person report to the New South Wales Police Force (**NSWPF**). A number of enquiries were made, and search efforts were commenced, to locate Mr Robinson. These investigations later identified Mr Robinson's actions during the previous evening. Despite extensive sea and air searches over the next several days, Mr Robinson could not be located.

## 2. Why was an inquest held?

- 2.1 After all existing lines of enquiry to locate Mr Robinson had apparently been exhausted, the New South Wales Police Force (**NSWPF**) submitted a report to the Coroner on 6 February 2023 that it was suspected that Mr Robinson was deceased. When the case of a missing person, who is suspected to have died, is reported to a Coroner, the Coroner must determine from the available evidence whether that person has in fact died.
- 2.2 If a Coroner forms the view that a missing person has died then the Coroner has an obligation to make findings in order 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 in which that person died. If the coroner is unable to answer these questions then an inquest must be held.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.3 In Mr Robinson's case, the missing person investigation conducted by the NSWPF has been unable to locate Mr Robinson or any physical evidence as to his location since the events of 27 October 2022. As a result, it has not been possible to answer all of the questions that a Coroner is required to answer. Therefore, it is mandatory for an inquest to be held.
- 2.4 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 reported a loved one as missing. 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 sense of loss experienced by family members does not diminish significantly over time. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that both the coronial

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<sup>1</sup> *Coroners Act 2009*, section 27.

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.

### **3. Mr Robinson's background and personal circumstances**

- 3.1 Inquests and the coronial process are as much about life as they are about death. A coronial system exists because we, as a community, recognise the fragility of human life and value enormously the preciousness of it. Understanding the impact that the death of a person has had on those closest to that person only comes from knowing something of that person's life. Tragically, very little is known about Mr Robinson's life. However, it is hoped that what is set out briefly below acknowledges Mr Robinson's life in a meaningful way.
- 3.2 Mr Robinson was born in St Leonards in 1950. He married his wife, Lindsay, in April 1986. They had a son, Mark, together. After living in Balgowlah, Mr Robinson and his family moved to Allambie Heights in about 2015. Mark lived in flat at the rear of the property.
- 3.3 Mr Robinson was employed as an accountant for all of his working life before retiring in several years before he went missing. He was a very fit person, who enjoyed walking his dogs and going on walks with his friends during the week. Mr Robinson had a close network of family and friends.
- 3.4 By all accounts, Mr Robinson was a beloved husband and father. There is no doubt that he is greatly missed, and that the uncertainty associated with him being reported as a missing person has only added to the grief and trauma that his family have experienced after he went missing.

### **4. Mr Robinson's medical history**

- 4.1 Mr Robinson had a history of bronchiectasis with pseudomonas, hypertension, Bell's palsy, iron deficiency anaemia, neutropenia, and immunosuppression. In around 2011, Mr Robinson was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma with a prognosis of 10 years life expectancy.
- 4.2 Between around 2017 to 2018, Mr Robinson was diagnosed with psychosis, schizophrenia and dementia. He was prescribed medication, but experienced episodes of psychosis when non-compliant with his medication regime. Mr Robinson had previously been prescribed olanzapine, which was administered by injection from a community provider.
- 4.3 However, in the approximately five years before he went missing, Mr Robinson did not consistently take his medication. According to Mrs Robinson, her husband did not tolerate the side effects of the medication. As a result, Mr Robinson later ceased receiving his medication by injection and instead consumed it orally each night.
- 4.4 During Mr Robinson's episodes of psychosis, he became fixated on specific events or structures. More specifically, Mr Robinson developed a fixation on a relative, known as Captain Robinson, who drowned when his vessel sank off the coast of Sydney Heads in the 1820s. Mr Robinson believed that Captain Robinson was in purgatory.
- 4.5 As a result, during his episodes of psychosis, Mr Robinson was often found to be wandering the streets, particularly in the Manly area, visiting churches. Mr Robinson was known to attend churches

to speak with ministers to beg for Captain Robinson to be released from purgatory. Mr Robinson also had a tendency to often catch a ferry from Manly as the route travelled past Sydney Heads.

- 4.6 In around 2021, Mr Robinson attended his local church in Beacon Hill and spoke to his minister, voicing suicidal ideation. Due to concerns for Mr Robinson's welfare, police were notified and Mr Robinson was later involuntarily admitted to hospital for mental health treatment.
- 4.7 In late 2021 to early 2022, Mr Robinson had a number of admissions to hospital for severe community-acquired pneumonia. Despite treatment with antibiotic therapy, Mr Robinson reportedly experienced septic shock. His physical health declined noticeably and he was no longer able to regularly exercise or take part in physical activities which he had enjoyed earlier in his life. Mr Robinson's wife observed that her husband's physical decline coincided with a decline in his mental health, and that the overall quality of Mr Robinson's life deteriorated in the weeks preceding October 2022.

## **5. Events preceding 27 October 2022**

- 5.1 On 25 October 2022, Mrs Robinson travelled to Huskisson with some friends, and was due to return on 28 October 2022.
- 5.2 On 25 or 26 October 2022, Mr Robinson was at home when he told his son that he was feeling unwell. Mark offered to take his father to hospital but Mr Robinson initially declined. However, Mr Robinson later called his son and asked to be taken to hospital. Mark took his father to Northern Beaches Hospital (**NBH**) and dropped Mr Robinson off at the emergency department. Mr Robinson remained at hospital overnight.
- 5.3 The next day, 27 October 2022, Mr Robinson called Mark and asked him to visit and to bring some food. Mark went to visit his father at around midday, bringing him some food and coffee, and spent about 45 to 60 minutes having a chat with his father. Mark was informed that Mr Robinson was to remain at hospital due to his low blood pressure, and later said goodbye to his father before returning to work.
- 5.4 At around 5:30pm, Mark saw that he had a missed call from his father. When he returned the call, Mr Robinson informed him that he was ready to be picked up. At around 6:30pm, Mark collected his father from NBH.
- 5.5 Whilst driving home, Mr Robinson asked Mark if he could drop him off in Manly so that he could meet up with a friend named Gary. Mark did not recognise this friend and told his father it would be better for him to return home to rest. Mr Robinson agreed and they arrived home at around 7:00pm. After chatting for approximately an hour, Mark went to his flat at the back of the property at around 8:00pm. This is the last time that Mark saw his father.

## **6. Events of 28 October 2022**

- 6.1 At around 7:30am on 28 October 2022, Mark left his flat and entered the main dwelling of the family home to take the dog for a walk. He did not see his father at this time but assumed that Mr Robinson may have gone for an early morning walk.
- 6.2 After returning at around 9am, Mark noticed that his father was still not at home. After a brief search, and being unable to find his father, Mark called his mother to ask if she knew where Mr Robinson was. However, she had also not heard from Mr Robinson. Mark and his mother agreed that if Mr Robinson did not return home by 10:30am, or if they did not hear from him by this time, that they would contact the NSWPF.
- 6.3 At around 10:15am, Mark used an app on his mobile phone to search for Mr Robinson's location. The search results indicated that Mr Robinson's mobile phone was still inside the family home. Mark subsequently found his father's mobile phone, wallet and backpack in the living room. As it was unusual for Mr Robinson to leave home without these personal belongings, Mark contacted his mother and they agreed to contact the NSWPF.

### ***Report of Mr Robinson as a missing person***

- 6.4 At around 10:28am, Mark called Triple Zero to report his father as missing. Mark informed the call taker that Mr Robinson had a history of wandering off and that he had left home without his personal belongings. Mark reported that Mr Robinson had made some "unusual remarks" the previous night and that there were possible concerns that Mr Robinson may self-harm. Mark also provided a physical description of his father.
- 6.5 A number of NSWPF officers arrived at the family home a short time later. Mark provided further information to police that on the way home from NBH the previous day, Mr Robinson had asked to meet with a friend named Gary in the Manly area.
- 6.6 After examining Mr Robinson's mobile phone, police identified that at around 9:00pm on 27 October 2022 a call was made from the phone to Manly-Warringah Cabs. Further enquiries revealed that a taxi picked up Mr Robinson at 9:35pm on 27 October 2022 and that he was taken to an unspecified location in Manly.

### ***Initial efforts to locate Mr Robinson***

- 6.7 NSWPF officers conducted a canvass of the Manly CBD area, including churches in the vicinity. Enquiries were also made with NBH, Royal North Shore Hospital, Ryde Hospital and Hornsby Hospital and it was confirmed that Mr Robinson had not been admitted as a patient to any of these hospitals. Mr Robinson's physical description was also broadcast on NSWPF radio in the event that he had travelled by ferry to another area, such as Circular Quay. NSWPF also conducted a missing person risk assessment which deemed Mr Robinson to be at high risk due to his medical history, recent decline in health, and non-compliance with his medication regime.

6.8 Throughout the day, Mark also participated in the efforts to look for his father by searching the Manly area and surrounds. After returning home at around 4:00pm, Mark examined his father's wallet and noticed that Mr Robinson's ANZ bank card and Opal card were missing. A short time later, Mark and his mother attended a nearby ANZ branch to make further enquiries. They learned that the last transaction on Mr Robinson's ANZ account was at 9:47pm on 27 October 2022 for a taxi fare with GM Cabs.

### ***Identification of Mr Robinson***

6.9 After returning home from the bank, Mark logged into his father's Opal card account which revealed that at 10:04pm on 27 October 2022, Mr Robinson's Opal card was used to "tap on" at Manly Wharf for a ferry bound for Circular Quay. Mark provided this information to investigating police who made subsequent enquiries with Sydney Ferries. Records revealed that Mr Robinson boarded a 10:15pm ferry service on 27 October 2022 which was scheduled to arrive at Circular Quay at 10:35pm.

6.10 CCTV footage from the ferry was reviewed and Mr Robinson was subsequently identified on the footage at 8:45pm on 28 October 2022. A still photo from the footage was sent to Mark at 9:03pm who confirmed that the photo showed his father.

6.11 At 9:42pm, the NSWPF attempted to send a geo-targeted message to the Circular Quay and The Rocks area to assist in locating Mr Robinson. However, due to Mr Robinson's precise location not being known, and the number of mobile phones in a particular area, the message could not be sent.

### ***Review of CCTV footage***

6.12 At 10:37pm, the General Manager of Assets for Sydney Ferries contacted the NSWPF to advise that, having reviewed the CCTV footage, it became apparent that Mr Robinson jumped from the stern of the ferry into the water in the vicinity of Sydney Heads at 10:25pm on 27 October 2022. The GPS coordinates at the time that Mr Robinson entered the water was subsequently determined to be - 33.82708 S, 151.27342 E.

6.13 The CCTV footage clearly showed that at 10:23pm, Mr Robinson made his way to the stern of the ferry and walked past a passenger seated near the port railing. The passenger was wearing headphones and appeared to be looking intently at their mobile phone. After passing the passenger, Mr Robinson approached a railing at the starboard side.

6.14 At 10:24pm, Mr Robinson looked behind him in the direction of other passenger, who was still looking at their mobile phone and unaware of Mr Robinson's actions. No other passenger or crew member on board the ferry was in the stern area of the ferry, and the CCTV footage from the ferry is not monitored in real-time.

6.15 Seconds later, Mr Robinson climbed over the starboard railing and stood on the side of the ferry with his hands behind him holding on to the railing. One or two seconds later, Mr Robinson released his hold of the railing and jumped into the water and out of sight of the CCTV camera.

6.16 After being advised of the contents of the CCTV footage, NSWPF officers attended Mr Robinson's home to update Mrs Robinson and Mark.

6.17 Mrs Robinson later noticed that Mr Robinson had returned at least six tablets of olanzapine to their container (after apparently spitting out the tablets), indicating that he had been non-compliant with his medication regime in the days preceding 27 October 2022.

## **7. Search efforts to locate Mr Robinson**

7.1 At 11:35pm on 28 October 2022, a NSWPF helicopter was despatched to search the area from South Head to North Head to the west of Dobroyd Point, and then down to Georges Heights including Middle Harbour. The search was unable to locate any sign of Mr Robinson.

7.2 At sunrise on 29 October 2022, a number of NSWPF vessels and jet skis were deployed to search an area in Sydney Harbour from North Head and Sydney Heads to Dobroyd Point. Assets from the NSWPF Aviation Command were also deployed to assist with the search efforts.

7.3 These efforts, under the direction of a designated Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator from the NSWPF Marine Command, continued on 30 and 31 October 2022, with the assistance of Surf Life Saving NSW. The search areas included North Head and Sydney Heads and surrounding shoreline areas, Watsons Bay, Manly Cove, The Sound, Middle Head and Grotto Point. The search was informed by the results of drift modelling of a person in water from Mr Robinson's last known location. At the time that the search commenced, the area of probability (for Mr Robinson to be located on the surface of the water) was over 250 nautical square miles.

7.4 At around 12:07pm on 29 October 2022, the NSWPF contacted Dr Paul Luckin, a marine search and rescue expert, and provided him with information including Mr Robinson's age, physical description and medical history, weather conditions at the time that Mr Robinson entered the water, including a surface water temperature of 19°, wind speed and direction and tidal information. Dr Luckin opined that due to Mr Robinson's frail condition, he had a likely survival period of only "a few minutes" after entering the water. Dr Luckin also expressed the view that, due to these factors and the possibility of marine animal predation, Mr Robinson would most likely never be found.

7.5 Despite extensive search efforts over the following days, Mr Robinson was not found and no physical signs of Mr Robinson could be identified. At 3:15pm on 31 October 2022, the search efforts were permanently suspended.

7.6 Investigating police subsequently conducted signs of life checks to return that the last activity on Mr Robinson's Opal card and banking transactions occurred on 27 October 2022, with no further activity to date.

## **8. Is Mr Robinson now deceased?**

8.1 The first finding that a Coroner must make following an inquest into the suspected death of a missing person is whether that person is now deceased. A finding that a person is deceased is a finding of great significance and gravity, not only for the family members of that person and the emotional



burden that such a finding will invariably bring, but also because such a finding carries with it important legal and administrative consequences. Such a finding is made on the balance of probabilities, but there must be clear, cogent and exact evidence that a missing person has died before it can be made.<sup>2</sup>

8.2 Having regard to the clear evidence from the ferry CCTV footage from 27 October 2022, the opinion expressed by Dr Luckin regarding Mr Robinson's prospects of survival, and the fact that an extensive search for Mr Robinson has not yielded any results indicating that Mr Robinson is still alive, the conclusion that must be reached is that Mr Robinson is now deceased.

## **9. What was the cause and manner of Mr Robinson's death?**

9.1 As Mr Robinson has not been found, no post-mortem examination to determine a precise cause of death has been performed. Whilst the circumstances in which Mr Robinson jumped from the ferry on 27 October 2022 raises the possibility of drowning as the cause of death, it is noted that drowning is a medical diagnosis of exclusion. In other words, a post-mortem examination is required to be performed in order to exclude any other possible natural or non-natural cause of death before a forensic pathologist is able to express the opinion that a deceased person, having been immersed in water, died from drowning.

9.2 Notwithstanding, in some circumstances, a conclusion may be reached on the balance of probabilities that a deceased person died from drowning. However, in Mr Robinson's case it is not known whether, for example, traumatic injury as a result of jumping from the ferry, a medical event as a consequence of the shock of jumping into cold and rough water, or marine animal predation caused or contributed to his death.

9.3 Therefore, in the absence of Mr Robinson being found and a post-mortem examination being performed, it is not possible to reach a conclusion as to the cause of Mr Robinson's death.

9.4 As to the manner of death, it is clear from the CCTV footage that Mr Robinson voluntarily climbed over the ferry's starboard railing on 27 October 2022 and jumped into the water. The CCTV footage of Mr Robinson looking behind him before doing so suggests that, having just walked past another passenger seconds earlier, he intended to check that his actions would not be observed by any other person on board the ferry. This check suggests that Mr Robinson's actions seconds later were done with deliberate intent.

9.5 It is not known whether Mr Robinson was experiencing an episode of psychosis at the relevant time. On the one hand, Mrs Robinson's discovery after 27 October 2022 that her husband had not been compliant with his medication regime in the days prior raises the possibility that he was more susceptible to experiencing an episode of psychosis. On the other hand, Mark chatted with his father for approximately an hour until around 8:00pm on 27 October 2022. During this time, there was no evidence that Mr Robinson was displaying any symptoms of psychosis.

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<sup>2</sup> *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* (1938) 60 CLR 336.

9.6 The evidence is therefore unclear as to whether Mr Robinson was experiencing an episode of psychosis whilst on the ferry on 27 October 2022. Notwithstanding, the CCTV footage clearly establishes that Mr Robinson was acting voluntarily and that he deliberately chose to release his hold of the starboard railing before jumping into the water.

9.7 Given:

(a) the circumstances in which this occurred;

(b) Mr Robinson's declining quality of life in the weeks preceding 27 October 2022 due to his chronic health conditions;

(c) the possibility of psychosis in the context of Mr Robinson's previous fixation on his distant relative who had drowned;

(d) and Mr Robinson's previous suicidal ideation;

the available evidence establishes that at the time of jumping from the ferry Mr Robinson intended to end his life.

## **10. Findings pursuant to section 81(1) of the Act**

10.1 Before turning to the findings that I am required to make, I would like to acknowledge, and express my gratitude to Ms Alison Storm, Coronial Advocate, for her assistance, both before and during the inquest.

10.2 I also thank Senior Constable Joshua Calman for his investigative efforts and for compiling the brief of evidence.

10.3 The findings I make under section 81(1) of the Act are:

### ***Identity***

The person who died was Bruce Robinson.

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

Mr Robinson died on 27 October 2022.

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

Mr Robinson died in the waters of Sydney Harbour near Mosman NSW 2088.

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

The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the cause of Mr Robinson's death.

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

Mr Robinson died as a result of actions taken by him with the intention of ending his life.

## 11. Epilogue

11.1 On behalf of the Coroners Court of New South Wales, I offer my sincere and respectful condolences, to Mr Robinson's family members and loved ones.

11.2 I close this inquest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Derek Lee', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Magistrate Derek Lee  
Deputy State Coroner  
23 January 2024  
Coroners Court of New South Wales