



**CORONERS COURT
OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

Inquest:	Inquest into the death of Hugo Fifi
Hearing dates:	16 August 2018
Date of findings:	16 August 2018
Place of findings:	State Coroner's Court, Glebe
Findings of:	State Coroner Les Mabbutt
File number:	2009/471375
Catchwords	CORONIAL – Homicide by persons unknown
Representation:	Coronial Advocate Assisting the Coroner Mr Hart
Recommendation under s 82 Coroners Act 2009	I recommend that the death of Mr Fifi be referred to the Unsolved Homicide Unit of the NSW Police Homicide Squad for further investigation

Introduction

Hugo Fifi died in the early hours of 18 April 2009 in a stairway at a residential unit complex at 64 Fullagar Road Wentworthville. Mr Fifi was 48 years old.

At the time of his death Mr Fifi was attempting to obtain assistance from residents at those premises. Police were called to the location and at 3:51am located Mr Fifi deceased in the stairwell. Mr Fifi's death was treated as suspicious.

Why was an inquest held?

The role of the Coroner pursuant to s 81 of the *Coroners Act 2009* is to make findings regarding:

- The identity of the deceased
- The date and place of that person's death
- The cause and manner of that person's death

Under s 27 of the Act an inquest is mandatory where the manner of death may be a homicide.

Pursuant to s 82 of the Act, a Coroner has the power to make recommendations, including concerning any public health or safety issue arising out of the death in question.

Background

Mr Fifi migrated to Australia from Mauritius in 1984. He married and later divorced. In 2004 Mr Fifi began another relationship that lasted until Mr Fifi was arrested in 2007 and spent time in custody for drug charges.

Upon Mr Fifi's release from custody he lived with his sister then spent some time sleeping in his car before taking up residence with twin brothers Serge and Raymond Guillard at 1/17 Central Avenue Westmead. The premises were known to police for drug use. Mr Fifi had a number of convictions for drug related matters and he was well-known to police. In 1995 Mr Fifi was stabbed. In 2006 he received a depressed fracture to the skull following another assault.

Mr Fifi suffered from a number of health conditions; type 2 diabetes, cirrhosis of the liver, depression and was known to be taking drugs the time of his death.

Events leading up to the death of Mr Fifi.

Shortly before his death police suspect Mr Fifi obtained an amount of cannabis worth several thousand dollars.

On 17 April 2009 Mr Fifi attended Westmead Hospital shortly before 9 pm. He visited Serge Guillard who was in hospital at the time. Raymond was also at the hospital when Mr Fifi attended. Mr Fifi then contacted someone by way of a text message shortly after 11:30 pm in a message relating to the supply of drugs stating "*I'll be there in 10 or 15 minutes*". Mr Fifi made a short phone call to another number with false subscriber details in the vicinity in or near Central Avenue.

Another phone number also with false subscriber details attempted to contact Mr Fifi 12 times between 12:03 AM and 3:19 am. These two phone numbers had been in contact with Mr Fifi throughout the 17th and 18 April.

At 3am on 18 April Mr Fifi's vehicle was observed to park at the end of Howard Avenue Northmead. A male is observed near the car yelling and acting aggressively while speaking on a mobile phone. At 3:30 am a resident in Howard Street heard male voices arguing in the street. Following that a utility motor vehicle left Howard Street at high speed.

Around the same time Mr Fifi somehow made his way to 64 Fullagar Road Northmead. Mr Fifi attempted to get the attention of residents by pressing the entrance door bells on several units in the residential block. Some residents called police who attended and located Mr Fifi collapsed in the hallway, deceased at 3.51am. The distance from Howard Street Northmead to Fullagar Road Northmead is approximately 4 kilometres.

Following his death a number of calls were made to Mr Fifi's phone by the second falsely subscribed phone number.

Cause of death.

A post-mortem examination was conducted at the Department of Forensic Medicine, Glebe on 21 April 2009 by forensic pathologist Dr Van Vuren. The cause of death was Haemoperitoneum resulting from blunt force abdominal injuries.

The examination revealed a number of lacerations and abrasions over Mr Fifi's body and a large bruise to left side of his abdomen. There was a large amount of blood in the peritoneal cavity along with other injuries to the head, left arm, left buttock and the lining of the abdominal/stomach area. Mr Fifi had a high level of methamphetamine in his blood. Other drugs detected were amphetamine, codeine, diazepam and cannabis.

Police investigation into Mr Fifi's death

Detective Senior Constable Matthew Colefax the officer in charge of the investigation gave evidence at the Inquest. The brief of evidence was tendered.

Crime scenes were established at three locations:

- Unit 1/17 Central Avenue Westmead (Mr Fifi's address)
- 64 Fullagar Avenue Wentworthville (where Mr Fifi was found deceased)
- Howard Street Northmead (where Mr Fifi's car was found abandoned)

A lengthy police investigation took place. Police interviewed a large number of witnesses. Information was received from protected sources. Examinations took place at crime scenes and other evidence was obtained and examined including mobile phone data.

Mr Fifi's known involvement with drugs hampered the investigation regarding what information was provided and the credibility of information regarding Mr Fifi's last hours.

At the Central Avenue address Police located blood on the landing and inside the unit. Following testing that blood was confirmed to be Mr Fifi's. Dozens of fingerprints were located inside the unit. Police interviewed a large number of witnesses many who confirmed they had attended the premises previously to buy and use drugs, consistent with police suspicions of the nature and use of the premises prior to Mr Fifi's death.

At the Fullagar Road unit block, Police located Mr Fifi's blood in the stairwell, on doorbell buzzers and on the hallway side of several doors inside the residential unit block. That blood was also confirmed to be Mr Fifi's. How Mr Fifi actually gained entrance into the residential unit block is unknown.

Following the locating of Mr Fifi's car in Howard Street Northmead the vehicle was forensically examined. The vehicle had been ransacked and a metal pole was found on the front passenger seat. Mr Fifi's blood was on one end of the pole. DNA of two other persons in addition to Mr Fifi was located on the other end of the pole. There has been no DNA match on those samples. Despite a full forensic examination, not other material relevant to the investigation was obtained from the vehicle.

Police are of the view two persons who were known to Mr Fifi attended his unit at Central Avenue unit either late on the 17th or early on 18 April. Tracking of the two falsely subscribed mobile phone numbers indicate those phones had travelled from the Central Coast to Westmead on the evening of 17 April.

From information received from protected sources and forensic evidence gathered Police suspect Mr Fifi was seriously assaulted inside his unit at Central Avenue with the metal pole that was subsequently located in his car. Mr Fifi's car was taken and driven to Howard Street where it was ransacked, probably in a search for drugs. The car was abandoned and those persons left in a separate vehicle, most likely the utility.

The distance from Howard Street where the vehicle was located to Fullagar Road where Mr Fifi died is approximately 4 km. Police do not consider given the observations of residents, the distances involved and Mr Fifi's injuries that Mr Fifi travelled to Howard Street.

Police suspect Mr Fifi may have travelled in a taxi to Fullagar Road given the observation of a witness who observed a taxi around that time. However the use of any taxi by Mr Fifi or any recorded taxi fare at that time to Fullagar Road was unable to be confirmed following inquiries by investigating police.

What is unresolved is how or why Mr Fifi travelled to Fullagar Road after being seriously injured. The only connection Police have established with Fullagar Road is the parents of his flatmates used to reside in that area, but at the time of his death they no longer lived there.

Conclusion

On the evidence tendered, both oral and documentary I find that Mr Fifi was severely assaulted at his premises 1/17 Central Avenue Westmead either late on the 17th or early on the 18th of April 2009 with a metal pole by at least two unknown persons.

Mr Fifi's car was taken and ransacked in Howard Street Northmead. Mr Fifi made his way despite his severe injuries to 64 Fullagar Road Northmead arriving sometime around 3am. I am unable to find on the evidence exactly how Mr Fifi travelled to that location, the route he took or exactly why he did so.

At 64 Fullagar Road Mr Fifi attempted to gain entrance to the residential units. Mr Fifi managed to gain entry to the units, most likely a resident remotely admitted him due to the noise. In those premises Mr Fifi succumbed to his injuries and died in the stairwell of the units shortly after 3.30am on 18 April 2009.

I find the manner of Mr Fifi's death was homicide.

Despite a lengthy and thorough police investigation there is insufficient evidence to identify the persons responsible for Mr Fifi's death. Accordingly I recommend the death of Mr Fifi be referred to the Unsolved Homicide Unit, Homicide Squad NSW Police Force for further investigation.

To Mr Fifi's family, his two sisters and his brother and who attended the inquest I offer my sincere condolences regarding the loss of Hugo.

Findings pursuant to s 81 of the Coroners Act 2009

Identity

The person who died was Hugo Fifi

Place of death

64 Fullagar Road Westmead

Date of death

18 April 2009

Cause of death

Haemoperitoneum resulting from blunt force abdominal injuries

Manner of Death

Mr Fifi was assaulted by persons unknown using a metal pole and sustained injuries that resulted in his death.

Recommendation under s 82 of the *Coroners Act 2009*.

I recommend that the death of Mr Fifi be referred to the Unsolved Homicide Unit of the NSW Police Homicide Squad for further investigation.

Les Mabbutt
State Coroner
16 August 2018