



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

Inquest: Inquest into the death of Janice GARRETT

Hearing dates: 8 March 2022

Date of findings: 8 March 2022

Place of findings: Coroner's Court of New South Wales

Findings of: Magistrate Brett Shields, Deputy State Coroner

Catchwords: CORONIAL LAW – manner and cause of death

File number: 2018/210447

Representation: Mr. T. O'Donnell, Solicitor and Coronial Advocate Assisting the Coroner

Findings:

Identity	Janice Garrett
Date of death	7 July 2018
Place of death	19 Rosemount Drive, Raymond Terrace, New South Wales
Cause of death	Effects of fire
Manner of death	Homicide

Recommendations Nil

Non-publication orders: Nil

Introduction

1. Janice Garrett was born on the 17th of April 1942 to her parents Griffin and Phyllis Brookes and was aged 76 years, 2 months and 20 days at the date of her death on 7 July 2018 as a result of a fire at her home.

Reason for Inquest

2. Section 27(1)(a) of the *Coroners Act, 2009* provides that an inquest is required to be held if it appears the person died, or might have died, as a result of a homicide.

Janice's life and background

3. Janice married David Garrett and together they had three children, Vanessa, Adrian and Lyndon. The family lived in Rosemount Drive, Raymond Terrace, where Janice remained until the end of her life.
4. David passed away in 2006 and Janice eventually began a relationship with a man named Robin Brewer. Robin lived with Janice at Raymond Terrace until he passed away in 2012. After Robin's passing, Janice formed a relationship with Ronald Reeves, known as John, and he lived with Janice in her home at Raymond Terrace. Reeves was the biological nephew of Janice's late husband David, and they had known each other for the majority of their lives.
5. The relationship between Janice and Reeves is reported to have been tumultuous and characterised by disagreement and argument; and Ronald is reported to have been verbally abusive towards Janice. Janice was very close to her children and she would frequently speak to them, and Janice said to them that she wanted Reeves to move out of her home. The relationship reportedly ended in or about April 2018, however Reeves remained living in Janice's house until he apparently agreed to leave a couple of months later. On the 4 July 2018, Reeves organised for a removalist truck to attend the premises and he removed most of his property from Janice's house to a storage unit.

Janice's health

6. Janice had a number of health issues and she had been diagnosed with asthma and bronchiectasis. About two years prior to her death Janice was diagnosed with *Pseudomonas* and was hospitalised. Thereafter Janice required the assistance of an oxygen converter to breathe and mobility assistance. Due to these health issues, Janice lived mostly in the front living room of her house, where slept in a reclining chair as she was not able to lie in a bed.

The events on 7 July 2018

7. At about 12:20 a.m. on Saturday the 7 July 2018, a neighbour was in his lounge room watching television when he heard a car in the driveway of Janice's house. He looked out the window and recognised Reeves' car. The car was parked in Janice's driveway and he could see Reeves in the driver's seat. The neighbour knew Reeves was in the process of moving out and he thought that Reeve's presence at that time of the night was unusual. About two minutes later the neighbour again looked out of the window and he saw flames coming from the side of Janice's house and then heard a loud '*boom*' sound.
8. The neighbour ran out of his house and he saw Reeves reversing his car out of Janice's driveway. He chased after Reeve's car for about 100 metres along Rosemount Drive, before he heard two more '*loud bangs*' coming from Janice's house. He ran back to the house, which was covered in flames, and he called out to Janice. When he didn't receive a response, he tried to enter through the lounge room window and the front security door but was unable to do so.
9. The neighbour looked down the street and saw Reeves' car stopped outside number 1 Rosemount Drive, facing back towards Janice's house. Reeves then drove away along Mount Hall Road towards Watts Street. The neighbour then heard another loud bang come from inside Janice's house and he had to move away. He retrieved his garden hose and began hosing the front of Janice's house. Other neighbours came out onto the street and assisted until the Fire Brigade and Police arrived a short time later.

10. The fire was extinguished by Fire and Rescue NSW, and Janice's body was recovered from inside the front lounge room. Three (3) 9-kilogram gas bottles were located inside the premises, one in the lounge room where Janice was found, and the other two in bedrooms. Three metal fuel containers were located in a room at the rear of the premises, and a further gas bottle and fuel container was located in Janice's vehicle that was parked under the carport.

Investigation and Charges

11. Later on 7 July 2018 Reeves was involved in a car accident on the Pacific Highway, which is thought to have been an attempt to suicide. He was arrested by Police and taken by Ambulance to John Hunter Hospital for treatment for his injuries.

12. Police obtained statements from numerous neighbours in the street who describe the fire and hearing the loud explosions coming from Janice's house. Police also obtained records from Heatherbrae BCF store that confirm that Reeves purchased a 9kg gas container on his account and filled it with LPG gas at the store.

13. On the 9 July 2018, Reeves was charged by Police, inter alia, with the murder of Janice.

The cause of Janice's death

14. Janice was taken to the Department of Forensic Medicine in Newcastle where a post-mortem examination was performed by Dr. A. Cala, forensic pathologist, on 10 July 2018.

15. In the autopsy report dated 30 January 2019 Dr. Cala opined that the direct cause of death is the effects of fire.

Reeves' death

16. On the 22 April 2019, whilst being held on remand at Goulburn Correctional Facility, Reeves was found unconscious in his cell and transported to Canberra Hospital, where he died on 17 May 2019.

17. At the date of his death Reeves had not entered any plea to, or been convicted of, the charges laid against him concerning Janice's death.

Conclusions

18. The evidence establishes, on the balance of probabilities, that the cause of Janice's death was the effects of a fire deliberately set by Reeves in an act of homicide.

Findings

19. The findings I make under sec. 81(1) of the Act are:

Identity	Janice Garrett
Date of death	7 July 2018
Place of death	19 Rosemount Drive, Raymond Terrace, New South Wales
Cause of death	Effects of fire
Manner of death	Homicide

Closing

20. I acknowledge and express my gratitude to Mr. T. O'Donnell, Solicitor and Coronial Advocate, for his assistance both before and during the inquest. I also thank Detective Senior Constable Brad Foot for conducting the Police investigations and for compiling the initial brief of evidence.

21. On behalf of the Coroners Court of New South Wales, I offer sincere and respectful condolences to Janice's family.

22. I close this inquest.

Magistrate Brett Shields
Deputy State Coroner, Coroners Court of New South Wales