



STATE CORONER'S COURT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Inquest:	Inquest into the disappearance and suspected death of Helen STACEY
Hearing dates:	29 March 2022
Date of findings:	29 March 2022
Place of findings:	NSW State Coroner's Court, Lidcombe
Findings of:	Deputy State Coroner Carmel Forbes
File number:	2020/240309
Catchwords	CORONIAL – missing person since 1958
Representation:	Mr H Mullen Advocate Assisting
Findings:	Helen Stacey died on or about 19 August 1958. The available evidence does not enable me to make findings as to the place or cause of her death. I am satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the manner of her death was intentionally self-inflicted.

INTRODUCTION

1. This is an inquest into the disappearance and suspected death of Helen Stacey. She has been missing since 19 August 1958 when she was a 19 year old student at Sydney University.
2. Section 27(1)(c) of the *Coroners Act 2009* NSW requires an inquest to be held if it has not been sufficiently disclosed whether a person has died. At inquest a coroner's first task in the case of a missing person, is to consider whether or not she is satisfied that, on the balance of probabilities, the missing person is deceased.
3. If the coroner is so satisfied, she will then examine the available evidence and, if appropriate, proceed to make findings in accordance with s 81(1) *Coroners Act 2009*. That section requires the coroner at the conclusion of the inquest, should sufficient evidence be available, to make findings that a person has died, the identity of that person, the date and place of the death and the cause and manner or circumstances of their death.

Helen Stacey

4. Ms Helen Stacey was born on 30 November 1938 to Mr Robert Stacey and Mrs Minola Stacey. Helen was the older sister to Jeffrey Stacey who has participated in the investigation into her death and into this inquest.
5. As a young girl, Helen was a member of the guides for many years; she also loved hiking and was involved in competitive swimming. She particularly enjoyed her family holidays when they would go to a different spot each summer.
6. Helen was a bright student who gained a scholarship to study physiotherapy at the University of Sydney in 1956.

7. It is clear that Helen's family cared for her dearly. In 1956 Helen and her mother travelled to Sydney from their home in Dapto, before the start of her university course, in order for Mrs Stacey to introduce Helen to various family and friends that resided in Sydney, and who she could visit throughout the university term.
8. When Helen went missing, she was 19 years of age and was living at Dunmore House, Stanmore, a Presbyterian university residential college for women students. Helen was in her 3rd and final year of physiotherapy. Helen fit in well; she enjoyed her course and the hostel life.
9. Helen was also part of her church youth group and would attend the meetings every Sunday night without fail. During the second year of her studies, she would return home about one weekend per month.
10. During a family holiday at Ballina, Helen met a young man with whom she formed a romantic attachment. Unfortunately, the relationship ended.
11. Helen's brother states that Helen had fallen deeply in love with this young man and it was thought that the end of the relationship caused or at the very least contributed to her subsequent mental deterioration.

Disappearance

12. The circumstances of Helen's disappearance were initially investigated by NSW Police. Due to the length of time that has passed, all records and files of this investigation were unfortunately unable to be located. The OIC in this matter, Detective Sergeant Tanya Smith, has made enquiries, and has unfortunately been advised, that there were also no occurrence pad entries for the investigating station from that period. The only available police record from that time is a mention of Helen's disappearance in a 1958 Police Gazette.
13. A large portion of the information available to this court has been provided by Helen's brother, Jeffrey.

14. Medical records from Rozelle Hospital confirm that in 1958 Helen was referred to a Dr Ellard, who was a medical officer at Broughton Hall which was a mental health facility in Gladesville.

15. The referral letter by Dr Maddison includes the following information:

- Helen was brought to him, on or about 15 August 1958, by one of his 5th year medical students, who lived in the same hostel as Helen,
- Helen had been depressed and sullen for quite a period of time but that this had increased in the last week or two, to such an extent that she had discussed the possibility of suicide with this friend,
- Helen had spent a large part of the previous Wednesday walking around The Gap, at Watsons Bay,
- Helen had stated that she had sufficient information on how to make a successful suicide attempt and that she would certainly do it,
- It was also disclosed at this time that she had failed an examination for the first time,
- Helen also indicated that she had no friends of any real importance.

16. In his referral letter, Dr Maddison formed the opinion that Helen was a real suicidal risk and needed urgent hospitalisation.

17. Helen attended Broughton Hall. Dr Ellard's notes state that Helen was unwilling to accept treatment and a great deal of time was spent on attempting to get her to come to the clinic. She admitted that she had been depressed and that she had been wandering around The Gap. Helen appeared to refuse to accept that her behaviour was not what would be considered normal behaviour.

18. Her father, Mr Robert Stacey, created some memoirs of his life in the 1980s. They included information in relation to this period of time. The memoirs note that both he and Mrs Stacey attended Broughton Hall spending the day there. He describes the day as agonising, clearly reflective of how he felt for his daughter. He stated that Helen was in a terrible state,

both himself and Mrs Stacey spent the day, though they were clearly affected by what they saw, they felt that it was the right thing for Helen to stay.

19. As the sun was going down, a nurse told Mr and Mrs Stacey that they would have to leave. Mr Stacey states that Helen was taken to a room in the basement and this upset Mr and Mrs Stacey. He says that he hugged Helen, said goodnight and said to be a brave girl, and try and be helpful, if you can. He told her they would be in touch through the week, and if possible, come up again next weekend and get her and take her home. The nurse then took Helen away and this was the last time that Mr or Mrs Stacey saw Helen. This appears to have been on 18 August 1958.
20. The hospital records reflect that Helen left the clinic without permission on 19 August 1958. It does not appear that Helen had advised anyone that she was leaving, and no notes were left.
21. Dr Ellard's notes state that Helen was suffering from deteriorating mental health. He noted signs of psychosis and that one could only guess at the presence of a severe personality disorder.
22. Police attended the Stacey's residence at Dapto and informed them that Helen had absconded from Broughton Hall. The family immediately travelled to Sydney to search for Helen, again showing how much, they clearly cared for their daughter. They stayed in Sydney for the next week, searching for Helen and when the school holidays began, her brother Jeffrey went to Sydney and helped with the search.
23. The searching continued for a number of months, with no confirmed sighting or contact from Helen.
24. In November 2019, Mr Jeffrey Stacey, contacted the Families and Friends of Missing Persons Unit, after watching a documentary on the ABC. The documentary ended with a statement that anyone with an unsolved missing person case ought to get in touch with the Police. Jeffrey then contacted the number that was provided.

25. As a result of this, the matter was referred to police at Wollongong. Jeffrey attended Wollongong Police Station on 13 August 2020 where he provided a sample of his DNA, which could be run against the database of unidentified people. Jeffrey again attended Wollongong Police Station on 27 November 2020, where he provided a statement along with a number of documents to assist police in their investigations.
26. Continuing the investigation, police obtained a statement from Mr Bruce Pennay who, in 1957, was in a relationship with Helen for approximately 9 months. Mr Pennay informed police that the last time he saw Helen was one month prior to her disappearance.
27. In early 1993, Mr Pennay contacted Jeffrey and advised him of some comments that were made at a school reunion, with a former classmate, suggesting that Helen may have been in Adelaide. Both Mr Pennay and Jeffrey made further enquiries in relation to this information. Neither of them was satisfied the information had any substance.

Conclusion

28. Helen's brother Jeffrey's DNA has been entered into the National DNA System. To date, no potential familial matches were identified in this search.
29. Checks with the New South Wales Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages produced no record in relation to Helen since 19 August 1958.
30. Checks conducted with Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme indicates that she has not made any claims since 19 August 1958.
31. Checks conducted with financial institutions reveal Helen has not operated an account since 19 August 1958.
32. Checks conducted with Centrelink reveal that no records are held.
33. Checks conducted with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection reveals that there are no records of movements by Helen in or out of Australia.

34. Since 1958, she has had no further dealings with Police in NSW or any other state of Australia.
35. Checks conducted with the records held by New South Wales Missing Persons Unit confirm that no match has been made with any identified deceased person.
36. Since 19 August 1958 all relevant activity that you would expect from Helen ceased.
37. If Helen were alive today, she would be 83 years of age. She was close to her loving family at the time of her disappearance with no reason not to contact them over the years.
38. I am satisfied on the balance of probabilities that she is deceased. I am also satisfied that at the time of her admission to Broughton Hall Mental Health Facility that she was a real suicide risk and that sometime shortly after she left that facility on 19 August 1958 that she intentionally inflicted her own death.

I make the following findings pursuant to s 81 (1) Coroners Act 2009

Identity

The person who died was Helen Stacey

Date of death

Helen Stacey died sometime on or about 19 August 1958

Place of death

The available evidence does not allow for any finding to be made as to the place of Helen's death

Cause of death

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

Manner of Death

On the balance of probabilities I am satisfied that the manner of her death was intentionally self-inflicted.

I close this inquest.

Magistrate Carmel Forbes

Deputy State Coroner

29 March 2022

NSW State Coroner's Court

