

CITATION: *Inquest into the death of Patrick Joseph Moriarty*
[2020] NTLC 006

TITLE OF COURT: Coroners Court

JURISDICTION: Katherine

FILE NO(s): D0074/2018

DELIVERED ON: 7 April 2022

DELIVERED AT: Katherine

HEARING DATE(s): 7, 8 June 2018
6 April 2022

FINDING OF: Judge Greg Cavanagh

CATCHWORDS: **Person missing with dog on a background of small town feud, suspicious circumstances, extensive searches**

REPRESENTATION:

Counsel Assisting:	Kelvin Currie
Counsel for Frances Hodgetts	Tamzin Lee
Counsel for Owen Laurie	Matthew Littlejohn

Judgment category classification:	B
Judgement ID number:	[2022] NTLC 006
Number of paragraphs:	114
Number of pages:	31

IN THE CORONERS COURT
AT KATHERINE IN THE NORTHERN
TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

No. D0074/2018

In the matter of an Inquest into the death of

PATRICK JOSEPH MORIARTY

ON: 16 DECEMBER 2017

AT: LARRIMAH

FINDINGS

Judge Greg Cavanagh

Introduction

1. Patrick Moriarty (known as Paddy), was born in Limerick, Ireland on 30 March 1947 to Mary Moriarty. The name of his father was not recorded on the birth certificate. Paddy travelled from Ireland to Australia when he was 18 years of age. No relatives have been found in Australia. After arrival he worked on Cattle Stations as a ringer, grader driver and station hand. He was a keen participant on the Rodeo circuit, winning a belt buckle in Darwin in 1996.
2. He had a partner by the name of Dorothy Rankine who worked on stations for many years. They had separated after she retired. She died about 17 years before his death. He was known to have another relationship for a few years between the years 2000 and 2003 but none since that time.
3. He was 165 cm tall (nearly 5 foot 5 inches) and weighed 66 kilograms (10 stone 5 pounds). He had a history of ischaemic heart disease and had stents inserted in 2006.
4. In about 2008 he moved from Daly Waters to Larrimah and in 2010 purchased a disused service station, for \$30,000. He lived there with his black and white Border Collie named Rover.

- Larrimah is 158 kilometres south of Katherine on the Stuart Highway, the road running from Alice Springs to Darwin. It has a population of about 12 people. There is no mobile telephone reception. The nearest services are at Mataranka a town 76 kilometres to the North.



- The services at Larrimah include the Larrimah Hotel, it has a pink panther theme. It has accommodation and a zoo with over 700 birds and animals including a three and a half metre crocodile. Paddy was a regular at the Hotel. He cleaned the camp toilets, did the laundry, made up rooms and tended to the gardens in the mornings, and after lunch could be found sipping beer and welcoming visitors. He sat in a particular chair on the left hand side of the main entrance, out the front of the Hotel with his dog beside him, its lead tied to the leg of his chair.
- Also in Larrimah is 'Fran's Tea House' at the Northern end of Larrimah, next to the only public phone box. Directly across the highway from the tea house is the 'Top of the Town', the disused service station where Paddy lived.
- Paddy's dog, Rover died in December 2016. Eventually, Paddy started thinking about getting another dog and in early November 2017 he was given an eleven month old red kelpie by the name of "Kellie" by a friend who worked a cattle station. Despite being raised on the cattle station Kellie would not run with the pack

of working dogs. She was becoming a pet rather than a working dog. That was one of the reasons the owners were willing to part with her.

9. Paddy liked order and routines. He always wore thongs and a hat or cap. He kept his residence spotless. Everything was in its place. He paid the same attention to detail in his work on the upkeep and cleaning at the Hotel. He had a routine well known to the residents of Larrimah. He walked his dog in the morning down the Rubbish Dump Road and around the circle back to his residence. He then rode his quadbike to the Hotel, with his dog on the back. He worked until about midday and then sat and had some beers. He would leave the Hotel with his dog in the late afternoon at about 4.30pm or, if there were people to talk to, sometime later.
10. On Saturday, 16 December 2017 Paddy followed his normal routine. At about 9.00am he rode to the Hotel on his red Honda quadbike with Kellie on the back. He cleaned the toilets and showers. In the afternoon he went to the bar area of the Hotel. At 2.29pm he made an EFTPOS transaction and withdrew \$40 at the bar. That also was a part of his routine. Having withdrawn the money he provided \$20 to the barman and in return was provided with four XXXX Gold beers. He took the cans and put three of them in a small staff refrigerator out the front of the Hotel on the other side of the entrance from which he sat. After he finished those, he gave the barman the other \$20 and received four more cans which he again put in the refrigerator.
11. That afternoon a couple and their young daughter travelled from Katherine. Before leaving Katherine they went to the supermarket and purchased food including a barbeque chicken. They left Katherine at about midday and travelled to Larrimah where they had lunch. They ate much of the chicken and what was left, they retained in the bag in which it was packaged. They then went to the Larrimah Hotel to have a drink and look at the animals. During the course of the afternoon their daughter patted Kellie. Her mother took a number of photographs of her daughter at the front of the Hotel. Those photographs show Paddy sitting to the left of the entrance in his usual chair.



12. Prior to leaving the Hotel that afternoon Paddy told the owner he wouldn't come to work the following day (Sunday) but would drop in at lunchtime to get the mower to use at his residence. As the light was dimming, Paddy got onto his red quadbike and told Kellie to get onto the back. The mother of the child that had patted Kellie asked Paddy whether he would like the leftover chicken for Kellie. He said he would and she gave it to him. Paddy left the Hotel and rode toward his residence a few hundred metres away.
13. That night at about 10.30pm there was a significant amount of rain. It had cleared by morning. Paddy was not seen on the Sunday or the Monday. At about ten or eleven in the morning on Monday, the owner of the Hotel, Mr Sharpe became concerned and went to Paddy's residence. He knocked and called out for him but there was no answer. He found the back screen door unlocked and went inside. The residence was neat and tidy. Paddy wasn't there and nor was his dog, Kellie. The back gate was open. Mr Sharpe thought Paddy was probably out walking with the dog and so drove along the dump road. But Paddy wasn't there.
14. That evening (Monday) when Mr Rayner another Larrimah resident went to the Hotel to pick up his mail, he was told that Paddy was missing. The next morning

(Tuesday) Mr Rayner and his wife went to look for Paddy. They looked in his residence and around the property:

- a. The rain gauge had not been emptied and it had not rained since Saturday night. Paddy always emptied the gauge in the morning;
- b. His sunglasses were hanging on the left handle of the quadbike. The quadbike was in its place under the carport as was his four wheel drive vehicle. The quadbike keys were on the table. His four wheel drive vehicle keys were not in the residence;
- c. The screen door was unlocked with a mat and besser block against it to keep it closed. That door can only be locked from the inside (and then one of the front doors used to exit the residence). Paddy always locked the back door if he left Larrimah;



- d. The kitchen fan was on;
- e. Both his usual cap and his cowboy hat were in the residence. Paddy was bald and was sensitive about the shape of his head and so wore his cap or cowboy hat when out. However he was not at his property and had neither with him;



- f. Paddy was always very neat and put things away. However his cap was on the table along with his reading glasses and key card;



- g. His medication was in the refrigerator;
- h. There was food in containers on the table as if getting ready for a meal;
- i. There was food in the dog bowl in the bedroom and a pedestal fan that was on pointing toward the bed;



j. The bed did not look as if it had been slept in;



k. The gate at the back of the property was open. That was kept shut if Paddy left town because of the feral donkeys in the area.

15. Mr and Mrs Rayner presumed that Paddy was out walking and had a medical episode. They looked for him along the nearby roads and twenty metres either side. They searched for over three hours but did not find him or his dog. They went to the

Hotel and asked Mr Sharpe to call the police. Mr Sharpe called the Police Communications Centre at 4.00pm on Tuesday, 19 December 2017.

16. Police arrived on Wednesday afternoon and began a search. They found the barbequed chicken that had been given to Paddy by the visitors on 16 December 2017 still sitting in the microwave. They also found a baseball bat under his bed.



17. They searched on foot and with motorbikes looking for any sign of Paddy or Kellie without success. A search team was sent from Darwin (500 kilometres to the north) to commence formal search and rescue operations.
18. At that stage it was still believed the likely scenario was that Paddy had taken the dog for a walk and some medical event had befallen him and accordingly the search was aimed at places where he might have walked and 20 metres either side of the roadways. They used search teams, motorbikes and a helicopter and searched an area of two square kilometres. The medical advice was that he would probably not have been able survive in that environment for more than a few days and the search was suspended at midday on Saturday 23 December 2017.
19. The thinking then changed to the possibility of foul play and on 28 December 2017 the police conducted an evidence search. It concluded two days later on 30 December 2017. The search included motorbikes searching 30 kilometres to the north and south including the area 50 metres either side of the roadway, 35 kilometres along the Western Road and sites such as world war two bunkers and the

like. A helicopter conducted a search out to 10 kilometres. No relevant evidence of Paddy or his dog was located.

20. A further evidence search was conducted from 11 – 14 May 2018. Again nothing of assistance was detected. It was possible that he may have died of a medical event while out walking and his remains not found during the searches. What made that scenario less plausible was the disappearance also of his dog, Kellie.
21. Added to that were various items at his residence: the chicken in the microwave, the items on the table ready for dinner and the dog biscuits in the bowl. It appeared that in the midst of meal preparation something unexpected happened. But not such that he did not have time to close the door and put the mat and besser block in place.
22. Larrimah is a small community. Prior to Paddy's disappearance there were 13 residents. Police were of the belief that someone in the community was likely to have some information that could assist.
23. Detective Sergeant Matt Allen headed the investigation. The brief of evidence of that investigation contains five full binder folders and consists of over 110 statements. I am grateful to Detective Sergeant Allen for a careful and thorough investigation.

The Residents of Larrimah

Barry Burke (Lot 47 Railway Terrace) known as "Cookie", pensioner, born 1946

24. Barry moved to Larrimah about "twenty years ago" to work with William Hodgetts. They worked for an Alice Springs earthworks company on a rotating roster. He also had a Fish and Chip shop. He retired "five or six years ago". He lived alone. His partner lived in Tasmania.
25. He first met Paddy at the Daly Waters Pub. He estimated that to be about "seven or eight years ago". He remembered when Paddy purchased the Top of the Town from Karl Roth's step-daughter. He said Paddy had sold a few of the dongers that were on the property (when he wasn't supposed to) and that caused "a bit of trouble".

26. Four to five years ago he had a “big blue” with Paddy at the Hotel when Paddy accused him of stealing a Mars bar. Since then he steers clear of the Hotel other than for collecting his mail.
27. Over the last few years he had been renovating his house to get it ready for sale. He had been painting in the weeks before the disappearance of Paddy. He last saw Paddy on Wednesday, 13 December 2017, when he went to the Hotel to collect his mail. Paddy was sitting outside with his dog (remembered by Mr Burke to be a black and white kelpie cross). Paddy said to him “hello Cooky”, he replied, “not bad Paddy”. He went home and did not leave his residence again until Sunday 17 December 2017.
28. He didn’t believe anyone would “touch” Paddy. He said “he is a bit of a shit stirrer but not enough for anyone to knock him off”. He thought he might have gone to visit friends or, “probably gone for a walk with his dog and fallen into a sinkhole”.

David Graham (Lot 25 Larrimah) cattle station worker, born 1947

29. David was a usual resident of Kununurra but had been in Larrimah for about six weeks because there was no work in Kununurra. He was staying at a house owned, but not occupied, by people who lived on a property outside Katherine. He had gone back to Kununurra for 13 days to re-register a vehicle and said he only got back to Larrimah on 22 December 2017.
30. Detectives were able to establish that he crossed the Western Australian border from the Northern Territory on 26 November 2017. He was at the Kununurra Motor Vehicle Registry on the morning of 15 December 2017. It appears he then stayed with friends at a farm just outside Kununurra. It was unable to be established when he recrossed the border. His phone records place him at Kununurra on the 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 17th 18th and 19th of December 2017. There were no phone calls and no banking transactions made on 16th December 2017. The last call made from his phone was on 15 December 2017 at 4.31pm. The next was at 7.42pm on 17 December 2017.

31. Larrimah is over 700 kilometres from Kununurra. When spoken to on 27 September 2020 Mr Graham said that he had cancer and wouldn't drive to Larrimah and back in one night. He said he found it hard to see at night so he couldn't drive.
32. He said he had first met Paddy at the Larrimah Hotel when he (Mr Graham) first came to the Northern Territory, he estimated that was probably 15 years ago. He was not aware of any disputes and thought that Paddy seemed like a "pretty good bloke". He said he was in Kununurra at the time Paddy went missing and got back to find the police searching for Paddy.

Frances Hodgetts ("Fran") (Lot 50 Stuart Highway) business owner, "Fran's Tea House", born 1943

33. Fran had lived in the Northern Territory for fifty years, forty-five of those years in Larrimah. She had the teahouse for 35 years. She met Paddy thirty years previously at the Daly Waters Hotel. They were initially on good terms at the time Paddy purchased the Top of the Town across the road from her teahouse.
34. However, things deteriorated. She said she told Paddy not to come to her tea house any more. After her husband retired she ended their marriage and he went to live in a caravan parked at the Larrimah Hotel. Paddy sided with her husband and relations soured further. Part of the issue for her was that Paddy tried to discourage her customers by fencing off the forecourt of the old service station in which he lived to stop tourists parking there while visiting the teahouse. He also put up a sign in the forecourt saying the Hotel had the best pies, and was sometimes unwelcoming of visitors parking on the verge.



35. The other part of the issue was a belief by Fran that both Paddy and her ex-husband were interfering with her property, whether that be by poisoning plants, cutting CCTV cables or flooding her teahouse.
36. From 2010 until Paddy's disappearance Fran made nine complaints to the Police about Paddy:
 - a. 16.06.2010 – Fran believed that Paddy stole her \$200 red umbrella from the front yard. When Police questioned Paddy, he said that he heard that Fran was accusing him and so to “stir her up” he got one of the red umbrellas from the Hotel and put it on a table out the front of his house.
 - b. 21.07.2010 – Fran complained that a quantity of books and memorabilia had been stolen from her teahouse. She suspected Paddy had taken them. However she later rang and conceded it could have been tourists.
 - c. 07.07.2011 – Fran wanted something done about Paddy ‘threatening tourists and scaring them away’ from her business because they were parking on land Paddy believed was his. Police showed Paddy maps indicating the land to be Crown Land. Paddy said he only minded when they parked across his driveway. Fran said she had since installed CCTV cameras and had started defamation proceedings against Paddy.

- d. 17.07.2011 – Fran told Police that Paddy was abusing her customers and placed a glass bottle under one vehicle’s tyres while parked out the front of Paddy’s residence. She said she believed it was Paddy because he had been telling customers the food at the teahouse was “crap” and that it was not safe to park where the vehicles were parking. She provided a list of customer’s names and details who were said to have been abused. Police contacted the people on the list. They all stated they had been parked opposite the teahouse and had been told something to the effect of, “move your fucking van”.
 - e. 23.09.2011 – Fran told Police that someone (she believed to be Paddy) had broken a plastic fitting on a hose connected to her water pump. Police attended and found what they believed to be a perished “O” ring in the fitting.
 - f. 09.03.2013 – Fran told Police that Paddy was in her yard with his dog at 9.45pm in the evening. Her husband confronted him and he claimed he was just retrieving his dog. She said he had been turning her “open” sign to “closed” to disrupt her business. Police served Paddy with a Trespass Notice prohibiting him from entering her property.
 - g. 13.04.2014 – Fran told Police that Paddy was “stalking” her. She said he was sitting in his front yard with binoculars and telling customers that her food was “not very good”. Police told her it was a civil matter.
 - h. 19.10.2016 – Fran made application to the court for a Personal Violence Restraining Order against Paddy. The Court dismissed the application and ordered Fran to pay \$500 costs to Paddy.
 - i. 23.09.2017 – Fran told Police that her ex-husband and Paddy had tipped oil over her new plants. Police could not establish that either was involved.
37. There were also a few dead kangaroo bodies that were moved by Fran or Paddy to the other side of the road (or over a fence).

38. On 9 August 2017 and again on 16 August 2017 Fran put an advertisement in the Katherine Times newspaper requesting a caretaker and gardener for her property. The advertisement read, “XXXX”
39. Another advertisement was run in the Katherine Times on 23 August and 30 August 2017 seeking a “wet season casual”. The first advertisement was shown to Mr Owen Laurie who made contact and commenced as caretaker and gardener at her property on 4 September 2017.
40. When Police attended in December they found \$7,000 in cash in Fran’s freezer. She said it was her “super”.¹

William Hodgetts, “Billy” (caravan parked at the Larrimah Hotel) also known as “Lightcans”, pensioner, born 1944

41. Billy said he had been in Larrimah since 1983. He was married to Fran for about 50 years when they separated in 2014. He has since stayed in the caravan park at the Hotel.
42. He said he met Paddy more than 20 years ago at either Brunette Downs or Heartbreak Hotel. When Paddy moved to Larrimah they became friends. They saw each other most days.
43. He likely last saw Paddy on the morning of 16 December 2017 when he came to the Hotel to work. He said that Paddy had not mentioned any problems and his health had been good lately. He said Paddy going missing was completely out of character.

Leonard Hodson (46 Railway Terrace) pensioner, date of birth not known

44. Leonard had lived in Larrimah on-and-off for about 14 years. He travelled down to Victoria each year around Christmas time.
45. He said he had known Paddy for 14 years. He said they were “good mates”. They had arguments but would always have a beer together and make up. He said the

¹ Transcript page 82

Rayners were not talking to him (Leonard) because one day when they were broken down he and Barry Burke had driven past without seeing them.

46. The last time he saw Paddy was at the Hotel, possibly on the morning of 16 December 2017. He told Paddy he was heading off to Victoria in the coming days and Paddy told him he was thinking of going to visit a friend in Bowen, Queensland. He said if he went he would put his dog in a kennel and fly.
47. He heard that Paddy had gone missing and drove over to his property to make sure he wasn't trapped under a vehicle. He didn't go inside the residence. He left to travel to Victoria on 19 December 2017.

Owen Laurie (Lot 50 Stuart Highway) caretaker, gardener and pensioner, born 1946

48. Owen worked on railways until his mid-thirties, then the timber industry and after many more jobs, went to Pine Creek in the Northern Territory where he worked in mine maintenance. He retired at 65 years and parked his caravan at Manbulloo Station where he worked as a bore runner. There was some uncertainty as to whether the Station was going to be sold and a friend showed him an advertisement in a local Katherine paper by Fran seeking a gardener and caretaker. That was in about August 2017.
49. He rang Fran and she told him to come down for a chat. When he got there she told him about all of the problems with Paddy. He said if he had been told that prior to travelling to Larrimah he would not have gone. He said he could still smell glyphosate poisoning in the ferns from when plants were poisoned. He was provided a small bungalow and in return for the accommodation undertook the gardening on the property. He did not associate with anyone in the town other than Fran. He did not go to the Hotel and most in town had not sighted him.
50. Although he heard a lot about Paddy he said he only spoke to him on one occasion. That was on the morning of 13 December 2017.

Karen Rayner (Lot 51 Stuart Highway) owner and bookkeeper at the Larrimah Workshop, born 1969

51. Karen and her husband, Mark had come to Larrimah in November 2015. They were the youngest permanent residents. They had purchased the mechanic's workshop and another residence. When they first arrived Mrs Rayner worked at the Larrimah Hotel feeding the animals. In March 2016 she was promoted and managed the Hotel for a couple years. While at the Hotel she became good friends with Paddy and admired him for greeting and talking to the customers.
52. She remained at least doing the books at the Hotel for the owner until a dispute arose with Richard, the barman, in mid-2017. They stopped going to the Hotel after that, however remained good friends with Paddy. He called in for about forty minutes on Friday afternoon, 15 December 2017.
53. Paddy also picked up his swag that had been left at the Rayner's by someone else. That same swag was noted to be in the back of his utility after his disappearance. When the Rayners heard Paddy had gone missing they searched for him. They were unhappy that it took so long for them to be told that he was missing.

Mark Rayner (Lot 51 Stuart Highway) mechanic, born 1955

54. Mr and Mrs Rayner had settled in Larrimah in November 2015. They had previously stopped off in Larrimah during Easter in 2015. They were on their way to Western Australia. At that time they had met Paddy. They thought Larrimah to be an interesting place.
55. Later that year they returned and purchased the Larrimah Workshops. Mr Rayner was in the process of repairing Paddy's ride-on lawnmower. He was waiting on the parts at the time of Paddy's disappearance.
56. He said Paddy was probably the "only one in Larrimah we would have gone out of our way to help".

Roberta Roth ("Bobby") (lot 56 Mahoney Street) pensioner, born 1938

57. Bobby had lived in Larrimah with her husband since 1998. She had worked for Fran, washing dishes for an hour or two a day for about five years. She was paid \$10 an hour. In the latter part of her employment Fran asked her to keep money for

her in their safe. It totalled about \$30,000. Her employment was terminated when Fran hired Maurice Darby.

58. Bobby didn't mix with Paddy or speak to him other than a passing greeting. Paddy didn't generally speak to her either and she thought when he did he was being rude. She said he was very rude and obnoxious when he was drunk. From her residence she could see him riding his quadbike to the Hotel each morning. She had noted that when he got to the Hotel the barman's dogs would bark a lot. She thinks she last saw him riding to the Hotel on the 14th or 15th December 2017.

Karl Roth (lot 56 Mahoney Street) retired, born 1945

59. Karl had been in the army for about 20 years. After that he was "over in the west shooting feral animals". He later worked for Northern Territory Museums in Alice Springs. Karl and Bobby moved to Larrimah with their two daughters in November 1998. Karl retains ownership of eight firearms. Until the recent past, Karl and his wife had conducted the local Fire and Emergency Rescue Service in Larrimah.
60. One of their daughters, Dianne, had the lease on the Hotel and owned the Green Park Caravan Park when they arrived. She sold the Top of the Town to Paddy.
61. The only persons that Karl seemed to like in town were Barry Burke and "Billy" Hodgetts. For the first ten years Karl got on well with Fran and Bill Hodgetts. But the relationship with Fran had waned. When his wife worked for Fran, Karl undertook "odd jobs":

"I was sort of the call out to go and fix things and yes, sometimes several times a day, 'can you come and fix this', 'can you come and fix that', 'can you do this'. It got to the stage where I was very unenthusiastic about it ... she'd come and I'd bolt out the back door."

62. At Fran's request Karl ordered and installed CCTV cameras. The last thing Karl fixed was a problem with Billy's television. Karl spent a day and a half trying to find the problem. He traced it to a cut cable. He said Fran later admitted that she cut the cable. Karl said, "that was the last thing I ever fixed for her".

63. He had known Paddy for many decades. They first met at Brunette Downs in the mid-eighties. He said that if Paddy had a few beers in him he had a bit of an “Irish temper”, although “never physical”. They had arguments over the years, usually about Paddy lighting fires at the wrong time of year. The last time he saw Paddy was on 14 December 2017. Paddy was on his quadbike with a trailer on the back going to the rubbish dump.

Barry Sharpe (Larrimah Hotel) Hotel owner and operator, born 1942

64. Barry had been in Larrimah for 27 years and had owned the Hotel for 14 years. He said that when he had arrived the town was bigger and busier. There had been two service stations, the Top of the Town at the northern end and the Green Park Tourist Resort at the southern end.

65. He first met Paddy in Daly Waters and after he came to Larrimah they became good friends. He described Paddy as “a good natured, happy-go-lucky man”. Barry had a particular chair he sat in near the front entrance to the Hotel opposite the seat in which Paddy sat. They sat and talked most days. He said Paddy had told him he was having “on-going arguments” with the new caretaker at Fran’s place.

66. His recollection was that the last time he saw Paddy was on the afternoon of Friday 15 December 2017 (although it is likely to have been 16 December 2017). He said Paddy usually left the Hotel by 4.30pm, but on that day he didn’t leave until about 5.30pm. He told Barry that he wouldn’t come to work the next day but would drop in around lunchtime to pick up the lawn mower to mow his lawn. He said Paddy was wearing thongs, work shorts, a blue flannelette shirt and a black cap with the pink panther hotel logo.

67. Paddy didn’t return the following day to get the mower and the day after that Barry went to his place to check on him. He said it just looked as if Paddy had gone for a walk. After driving around the Rubbish Dump Road and finding no sign of Paddy he went back to the Hotel. However when Paddy did not come to the Hotel the next day Barry went back and had another look. Everything was the same and after discussing the situation with others he rang the Police.

68. He said it was extremely out of character for Paddy to go away without telling him.

Richard Simpson (Larrimah Hotel), farming and barman, born 1968

69. Richard had visited the Northern Territory from time to time. He had been working at the Hotel on this last occasion for about nine months prior to Paddy going missing. The time before that had been about nine years earlier. He had met Paddy at the Daly Waters Hotel and then again at the Larrimah Hotel. Each day Richard, Barry and Paddy sat talking at the front of the Hotel. He said he never had a cross word with Paddy and admired his work at the Hotel. He said Paddy was “exceptionally good” in his work. Paddy told him he wanted to live to be a hundred.

70. Richard had three American Staffordshire Terriers (one male, two females). He used to walk them in mornings along a dirt road at the back of Fran’s property. However he said that the man there tried to sic his dog onto Richard’s dogs and so from then on he just walked them near the front of the Hotel. He generally kept his dogs away from the Hotel. His male dog had once met Paddy’s dog, Kellie and they got on well. However, he did not introduce his female dogs, he said, “they’re not the nicest little princesses”.

71. He last saw Paddy when he left “at about 6.30pm” in the evening on what initially he thought was Thursday evening. He later thought that was more likely Friday evening (and it was actually Saturday evening). As to his ability to remember the days he said, “Like I say, every day is the same, mate, so I can sit here and try and think about this forever and I still couldn’t actually confirm the exact dates”. In any event he remembered it was the day that Paddy said he would not be working the next day but would drop in at lunchtime the next day to pick up the mower.

Events just prior to Paddy and Kellie going missing

Council rates

72. On 20 November 2017 the Roper Gulf Regional Council issued an overdue rates notice in relation to the Top of the Town where Paddy lived. He had not paid rates since he purchased the property. The notice was for \$5,140.48.

73. On 4 December 2017 Paddy went to his bank in Katherine and obtained a bank cheque for that amount. That left about \$8,000 remaining in the account. He provided the bank cheque to the Council that same day. There was no previous demand or threat of legal action made. However the police investigation noted that Paddy had attended the meetings of the Larrimah Local Board on 2 June 2017 and 13 October 2017. At those meetings it had been stressed that continued non-payment of rates could result in the Council selling properties.

Neighbourhood feud

74. There was a dispute in the days leading up to Paddy's disappearance. It concerned Paddy, Fran and Owen. Fran said two visitors who had been staying with her left on the morning of Tuesday, 12 December 2017. On that same morning Owen went to Katherine. After they all left, Fran said she looked out of her bedroom window and saw Paddy drag a dead kangaroo across the highway then throw it on her property. She said he was standing in the middle of the highway with his dog (she described the dog as black with white around the neck²). She said he saw her looking and smiled at her. That was said to have happened at about 7.00am.

75. Owen came back at about 4.00pm that day. The next day Fran was travelling to Darwin for a couple of days. Before leaving, she went over to the shed and said to Owen, "That mongrel across the road bloody threw a kangaroo under me bloody window".³ She said he responded, "I know, I could smell it" and "I have just had words with him about the dog coming across the road". At the time she said she anticipated that Owen would remove the kangaroo, although she said he later told her he couldn't find it. Initially she said that was the extent of the conversation and she couldn't remember anything further being said.⁴

76. The way that Mr Laurie told the story, Paddy's dog had crossed the highway. It was not on Fran's property and not barking. Mr Laurie said to Paddy, "keep your fucking dog at home", Paddy responded, "shut-up" and Owen said, "come over

² Interview with Fran Hodgetts 24 December 2017, p13

³ Interview with Fran Hodgetts 24 December 2017, p6

⁴ Transcript of evidence to court 8 June 2018 p88

here”. He said Paddy was at the front of his house, largely obscured by the shade cloth. He said voices were not raised or aggressive. He said Paddy did not come over and they both then returned to what they were doing and nothing further was said.⁵

77. Richard, the barman at the Hotel, was having a coffee at the front of the Hotel that morning. With him were his dogs. He said he heard Kellie barking and initially didn't pay much attention. However he then heard a raised and angry voice. One of his dogs began to bark and all three dogs started heading toward the angry voice. He called them back. He then observed Kellie barking across the Highway and he saw Paddy walk out behind her and across the road. He heard an exchange of words although could not work out what was said.

78. After lunch that day Richard asked Paddy what had happened. Paddy said Owen had said to him, “you need to shut that fucking dog up or I'll shut it for you”. Paddy said he responded by saying “You mind your business old man, my dog can bark where it wants, it's none of your business. Shut your mouth or I'll take your knees out from under you”. Richard said to Paddy, “be careful mate” and Paddy replied, “It's all good, I've got a baseball bat”.

79. Fran gave an account to Police on 30 December 2017. On that occasion she said that Owen responded to her mention of Paddy throwing the kangaroo in these terms:

“Oh, I've already had words with him, I told him to keep his fuckin dog over there and he told me to shut up and I said come over here and I went to jump the fence and Paddy ran inside, fuckin weak as piss”.⁶

80. Fran said, she said to Owen:

“Hang on, don't do anything stupid. I'm going to Darwin, I don't wanna have to come back and bail you out of jail”.

81. Fran then drove to Darwin where she purchased water features and plants for the garden. She returned on 15 December 2017 at 4.15pm. When she got back Owen

⁵ Transcript of evidence to court 8 June 2018 p116

⁶ Audio statement pp 40-42

said to her that he “didn’t do much”, he stayed inside because he didn’t want any “hassles”.⁷ The next day they set up the water features and put the plants in the ground. She closed the tea house at about 11.30am because there were no customers.

82. On the evening of 16 December 2017 Owen received a malware message on his computer. It indicated he should call a telephone number. He went to the public telephone box and made two calls to the number mentioned in the message.

Inquest dates 7 and 8 June 2018

83. I opened the inquest on 7 June 2018. The police investigation at that time was not complete however it was likely to take some time and given the ages of the residents of Larrimah, it seemed that their evidence should be taken sooner rather than later. Over 7 and 8 June 2018 I heard from the officer in charge of the investigation, the officer in charge of the search for Paddy, the former owner of Kellie, the dog and nine of the residents of Larrimah.
84. Of interest, the evidence from Fran Hodgetts about conversations with Mr Laurie was generally disputed by Mr Laurie. He said she talked a lot and tended to embellish things. His recollection of the conversation between Paddy and himself on the morning of 13 December 2017 was that Paddy’s dog had crossed the highway and was near the fence where he was working. He told it to get going. It went straight back across the highway. Paddy was calling the dog from his front veranda and was “partly obscured” behind shade cloth. Mr Laurie said he said to him, “Keep your dog at home Moriarty”. Paddy replied “shut up”. Mr Laurie said “come here” and gestured for him to come over. He did not and that was the end of it.
85. He said that was the only time he had spoken to Paddy and never saw him at any time apart from when Paddy was travelling on his quad a hundred or so metres away. He said if Paddy was standing in front of him he would not recognise him.

⁷ Interview with Fran Hodgetts 24 December 2017, p30

86. Mr Laurie said the conversation was not aggressive although he may have sworn. He said that Fran had at some stage told him that she didn't want to bail him out of jail but he did not think she said those words on that occasion. He said that if Paddy had crossed the road there may have been a confrontation and he may have given Paddy "a bloody good hiding". But that did not occur because Paddy didn't come over the road and he didn't expect that he would. He conceded that he had said, "If anyone touches my plants it will be the first murder in Larrimah", but said it was said jokingly and he had "no intention to murder anybody over a garden".⁸ He agreed that he had a quick temper.
87. He said he did not like answering the questions asked by police because he didn't want his answers to be wrongly construed. He mentioned that it has happened that people have been wrongly accused by police and ended up in jail.

Further Police investigations

88. Police continued to investigate the disappearance of Paddy over the next few years. That included the listing of a reward of \$250,000 and the receipt of further information and allegations. There were in particular two persons that indicated they had information as to how Paddy met his demise. Those allegations were thoroughly investigated.

Further allegations

By Wayne Ledwidge

89. On 11 July 2019 Wayne Ledwidge provided a statement to the investigating police. He said that on a date late in 2017 he attended the Katherine Government Centre with his neighbour, Brian Roberts. At the MVR office, a woman (he later identified as Fran Hodgetts) said: "Hey Brian how are you?" Wayne alleged that Brian and the woman then had a conversation. His recollection of that conversation was:

"She said that the old man was still giving her a hard time and has taken her to court, costing her a lot of money. She said she needed to

⁸ Transcript page 127

get rid of him and she would pay \$10,000. She said she had \$9000 cash but could get more.”

90. She then wrote down her phone numbers on the back of papers Brian was carrying. Once back in the vehicle Brian told Wayne that his mate would do it for \$10,000.
91. Wayne said it was only weeks later, when the news came over the radio that Paddy and his dog were missing. Brian is alleged to have said: “he didn’t need to do the dog”. Brian passed away in hospital on 14 April 2019 of natural causes.
92. The police investigation established that Wayne, Brian and Fran were in Katherine on a number of days including 30 August 2017 and 1 December 2017. However, Brian’s phone records did not indicate any calls to phone numbers identified as belonging to Fran. Phone data placed both Wayne Ledwidge and Brian Roberts at Katherine or north of Katherine on 16 and 17 December 2017.
93. The analysis of Brian’s phone did not assist in establishing who the ‘mate’ might have been and the calls made did not appear to be to such a person. Most of the calls were made to Wayne, a female friend, the Health Clinic and a neighbour. The neighbour’s phone was utilised on 16 and 17 December 2017 and was at all times in Katherine or north of Katherine on 16 and 17 December 2017.

By Michael Pangquee

94. On 30 September 2018 Mr Pangquee contacted police with information about who may have killed Paddy and his dog. He said he personally had nothing to do with Paddy’s disappearance. He made his first statement on 5 November 2018. Mr Pangquee is a truck driver and operates earth moving equipment and cement tankers, usually in north-western Australia.
95. In January 2018 he said that while in Broome a workmate had told him over a period of time that he and a friend had picked up Paddy and his dog and had driven to a location near a quarry in Mataranka. They had a drink and his friend snuck up behind Paddy, shot him and then the dog. Both were buried nearby in a grave dug previously. They were buried in the same hole with the dog on top of Paddy. The

grave was, “straight over the back, you can see where the machines are working from where the spot is”.

96. Police investigated the story. They found that phone data and work timesheets indicated that both the workmate and his friend were in Western Australia at the time of Paddy’s disappearance. A search of the area near the quarry was of no assistance. Police spoke to the workmate and friend. Both denied having known Paddy, going to Larrimah or any involvement in his disappearance and death. Phone data indicated that Mr Pangquee was in the Darwin region during the relevant period.
97. During his evidence Mr Pangquee said he would rate the reliability of the information at a 5 out of 10.

Resumption of the inquest

98. The inquest resumed on 6 April 2022. Mr Pangquee and Mr Ledwidge gave evidence and Fran Hodgetts and Owen Laurie were recalled to provide further evidence. Fran denied that she knew Brian Roberts or had ever had a conversation with him. She denied that she had offered money for Paddy to be killed.
99. Detective Sergeant Matt Allen provided an overview of the evidence gathered into the allegations raised by the witnesses.

Listening devices

100. Listening devices were installed in Mr Laurie’s residence at Larrimah utilising a warrant obtained from the Supreme Court issued on 28 December 2017. Some of the recordings are of significant interest. Prior to the recordings being played. I told Mr Laurie that there was no obligation on him to respond if the answers might incriminate him. When the first two recordings were played he said it was not him and that he wished to remain silent. Thereafter for the remainder of the recordings he said that he was exercising his right to silence. The recordings were often of Mr Laurie singing to himself or his dog. The transcripts of the recordings are as follows:

9 January 2018

Fuck'n idiots, yeah, tell em what I've done hit with the fucking hammer, yeah
tell em how I've hit ya with fucking hammer, hey how you *inaudible*

14 February 2018

Inaudible ... well they didn't fuck'n find the hammer, well they can't get me for
anything!?

23 February 2018

Killerate'n hammer, I say, it's a killerate'n hammer, a killerate a killerator.

(Singing songs with guitar)

I got a slobbery bunch of coconuts, they're rolling in the bay, rolling, rolling in
the bay.

I killerated old paddy with that fuck'n kilerated him. I struck on the fuck'n head
and killerated him. Struck him on the fuck'n head and killerated the bastard.

Struck him on the head and killerated him, struck'd him on the head and
kilerated him, basherated him. Doof. Yes he did, basherated him. Oooooohhh me
cock.

25 February 2018

Fuck'n killer bastard. You killed fuck'n Paddy up the bum. You fuck'n killed
Paddy, doonged him on the head. Donged him on the head. *Inaudible* fucken
donged. *Inaudible* ... oooh *inaudible* lay laa you fuck'n killed Paddy, hit him on
the head. Oooooohhh bum bum. You killed Paddy, and hit him on the head.

Smacked him on the fucken nostrils, smacked him on the fucken nostrils ... with
me claw hammer. Smacked him on the fucken nostrils with a claw hammer.

Smacked him on the nostrils with me claw hammer, smack him on the nostrils
with me claw hammer. Smack him on the nostrils with me claw hammer,
smacked him on the nostrils with me claw hammer. Smacked him on the fucking
nostrils with his claw hammo. She smacked him up the nostrils with his fucking
claw hammer.

25 February 2018

Smacked him on the nostrils, buk buk buk, smacked him on the nostrils buk buk buk. Smacked him on the nostrils, buk buk buk *inaudible* smacked him up the nostrils buk buk, buk. Ruby, Ruby snickey snickey snooo hmmmmm.

1 March 2018

You gotta find out who fucking done it mate, that's if you don't find the fucking body, to find out who done it. What you reckon there is a body somewhere and you want to find out who done it, and who did it. I can tell you, you are not finding out, I tell you fucking repeatedly, you are not finding out, you are not finding out.

24 May 2018

Dancing with my baby in the middle of the night, dancing with my baby in the middle of the night, I had a fight, in the middle of the night, I had a fight, diddle lee dum oh fuck me, diddle lee dum oh fuck me. What was I doing? *Inaudible* you brush my dog. I'm not your friend cunt aye ... *inaudible* ... did I win? Did I win? *Inaudible* you're full of fucking shit mate, full of fucking shit *inaudible*. Fuck me dead mate, *inaudible* fuck me dead Sand digging aye ... sand digging like that? Bashing up people Oh right, right, right mate ... *inaudible* ... tell that ... *inaudible* I know that He's a good bloke ... he's a good bloke *inaudible* ... he's a good bloke. He's terrible No wonder I fucken belted him. No good ... *inaudible* fucking he would have been yee hee to the coppers, no wonder I fuck'n belt him mate, he would have been going yee hee hee to the coppers. I tell ya that. Yee hee, hee to the coppers I tell ya. I *inaudible* belt the cunt he would have been yee, hee hee to the coppers.

5 June 2018

Ruby what did you do with my book? I kill you myself, I kill, I kill pup dog, I kill pup dogs. Ha ha ha ha ha bye see ya goodbye, hoo roo bye see ya bye, goodbye see ya hoo roo bye.

Comments

101. In my opinion Paddy was killed in the context of and likely due to the ongoing feud he had with his nearest neighbours. He likely died on the evening of 16 December 2017. He had ridden home from the Hotel, put the mostly eaten chicken in the microwave, put his wallet on the table and his hat in its usual place, put the dog food in the dog's bowl and got his own meal out of the freezer. He then went outside with his dog. There is no evidence as to where he went, however it is likely that the new plants at Fran's place were of some attraction.
102. The feud with Fran Hodgetts had been escalating. It was over a year since the 7 September 2016, when Fran and Paddy entered an agreement to be civil to each other.

REF. No. 1
DATE 7th Sept. 2016.
PAGE No. _____ OF PAGE _____

AGREEMENT

We, Fran Hodgetts and Patrick Moriarty
hereby agree to:

- limit interactions to necessity
- if one person waves, the other will wave back
- to respect each others' privacy
- to leave past matters in the past, as long as it doesn't re-occur

specifically:

- plant + property damage
- property theft
- interference with persons + business items

- smile at each other

[Signature] Patrick Moriarty

[Signature] Fran Hodgett.

[Signature] Kate Ganley.
witness J.P. NT.

103. But Paddy continued to have the sign outside of his premises stating that the pub had the best pies in town for \$6.00. That was known to irritate Fran.
104. On 29 August 2017 Fran called Police alleging that her plants had been poisoned, she thought with Roundup. She blamed her ex-husband and Paddy but said she had no proof because her CCTV camera lines had been cut.
105. It was soon after that, likely 4 September 2017, that Mr Laurie commenced residing at Fran Hodgetts premises. He said he could still smell glyphosate on the plants. He was there to tend to the garden and be the caretaker, especially when Fran was away from the premises. She told him of her history of troubles and he said “Nobody’d want to touch the garden ... I’ll look after it for you”.⁹
106. It was said to be ‘a few weeks later’ when Mr Laurie was putting new plants along the fence that Fran warned him, saying, “Don’t put them there the boys will poison them ...”. He replied “Any fuckin bastard comes in here and poisons my fuckin garden, I’ll be the first murder in Larrimah”.¹⁰ Mr Laurie agreed that is what he said but said he was only joking.¹¹
107. But on 23 September 2017 Fran called the Police again. She said that her plants had an oily substance all over them and she suspected that her ex-husband and Paddy had poisoned them again. She said her gardener was collecting leaves so she could have the substance analysed. Mr Laurie said that the plants died but he did nothing.
108. It was at the beginning of November 2017 that Paddy acquired a one year old Kelpie, Kellie. He had her de-sexed on 9 November 2017. It is unlikely that she was restrained in the yard and there is ample evidence to indicate that on at least one occasion she crossed the highway and was at Fran’s fence line. There is also some evidence that she was barking across the road.¹²

⁹ Fran Hodgett’s audio statement d.ated 24 December 2017 page 60

¹⁰ Fran Hodgett’s audio statement dated 30 December 2017 page 8

¹¹ Transcript 8 June 2018 page 127

¹² Evidence of Richard Simpson, Transcript page 60, 61

109. Paddy told one of the customers at the Larrimah pub in early December 2017, “Them over the road, they don’t like her, if Kellie keeps on barking (she or they) are going to shoot her”.¹³ Fran told a customer at her tea house that Kellie, “was always wandering all over the place and was going to get hit by a car one day, as he keeps coming across the road sniffing around”.¹⁴ Mr Laurie said there was an occasion when he was fencing and Kellie came over the road and started barking at him. He said he “hunted it back”.¹⁵
110. Fran left to buy more plants and water features on the morning of 13 December 2017. Just prior to her leaving Mr Laurie told her he and Paddy had words. Fran returned on the afternoon of 15 December 2017. The following day (16 December 2017) she and Mr Laurie set up the water features and planted the plants. It was that same night that Paddy went missing.
111. Pursuant to section 34(3) *Coroners Act* I am not permitted to include a finding or comment that a person may be guilty of an offence. However I will refer this investigation to the Commissioner of Police and the DPP.

Formal Findings

112. Pursuant to section 34 of the *Coroner’s Act*, I find as follows:

- (i) The identity of the deceased is Patrick Joseph Moriarty, born on 30 March 1947 in Limerick, Ireland.
- (ii) The date of death was 16 December 2017. The place of death was Larrimah, Northern Territory.
- (iii) The cause of death was not able to be determined.
- (iv) The particulars required to register the death:
 1. The deceased was Patrick Joseph Moriarty.
 2. The deceased was of Caucasian descent.
 3. The deceased was a retired ringer.
 4. The death was reported to the Coroner by Police.
 5. The cause of death has not been confirmed.

¹³ Kylie Rixon Statement 4 August 2020 paragraph 11

¹⁴ Joanne Segond von Banchet statement dated 5 August 2020 paragraph 13

¹⁵ Mr Laurie, audio interview 24 December 2017 page 16

6. The deceased's mother was Mary Teresa Moriarty and his father is unknown.

Referral

113. I believe that offences may have been committed in connection with the death of Patrick Joseph Moriarty and in accordance with section 35(3) *Coroners Act* I report my belief to the Commissioner of Police and the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Dated this 7th day of April 2022.

GREG CAVANAGH
TERRITORY CORONER