



IN THE CORONERS COURT
OF VICTORIA
AT MELBOURNE

Court Reference: COR 2016 0678

FINDING INTO DEATH WITH INQUEST

Form 37 Rule 60(1)

Section 67 of the Coroners Act 2008

INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF MATT ROBERT CRAMPTON

Findings of: **CORONER DARREN J. BRACKEN**

Deceased: **Mr Matt Robert Crampton**

Date of birth: 10th July 1976

Date of death: 14th February 2016

Cause of death: 1(a) **CARDIORESPIRATORY ARREST
DURING PRONE RESTRAINT INCLUDING
PRESSURE ON THE NECK OF AN OBESE
MALE USING METHYLAMPHETAMINE**

Delivered on: 12th August 2019

Delivered at: Coroners Court of Victoria,
65 Kavanagh Street, Southbank, Victoria 3006

Hearing date: 29th November 2018

Counsel assisting the Coroner: Sarah Gebert, In-House Solicitor Service

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HIS HONOUR:

BACKGROUND

1. On 14 February 2016, Matt Crampton was 39 years old when he died in the main street of Heathcote, the Northern Highway, after a confrontation with the owner of a take-away food shop and a number of others. Mr Crampton was the son of Robert and Diane Crampton and the younger brother of David Crampton. Mr Crampton's death was a tragedy at least contributed to by the modern scourge of methylamphetamine.
2. At the time of his death, Mr Crampton lived in Heathcote with a long-term friend who described Mr Crampton as being happy in the month before his death; he was, she said, *"always the joker of the group...He loved to do the cooking and just generally loved having a laugh"*.¹ Mr Crampton was single, the father of four children from two relationships and employed by Tas Gas laying gas pipes in northern Victoria. Mr Crampton had a criminal history of methylamphetamine use and of violence ostensibly associated with drug use.²
3. Shortly after he was last released from prison in 2011, Mr Crampton used a considerable amount of Ice³ with his then girlfriend over three days immediately before 14 February 2011. His girlfriend reported that after she woke up in the flat they then shared on 14 February 2011, that she found furniture and knives strewn around the unit and Mr Crampton missing.⁴
4. Police found Mr Crampton on 16 February 2011 in an agitated and paranoid state with an injury to his left ankle. Mr Crampton was subsequently taken to the Alfred Hospital and relevant records reveal that he told staff that, effected by taking Ice, he thought that people were chasing him and so he jumped from the balcony of the flat some three metres to the ground injuring his ankle. He explained that believing that people were chasing him he ran for about two kilometres.⁵
5. In December 2012, Mr Crampton consulted Clinical Psychologist, Stephen Pinkus who described him as suffering from chronic depression, addiction and possibly Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from childhood trauma.⁶

¹ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 53.

² Coronial Brief of Evidence, pages 42, 48 and 52.

Coronial Brief of Evidence, Exhibit 54 contains Mr Crampton's full criminal history.

³ A commonly used term for the crystal form of methylamphetamine.

⁴ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 48.

⁵ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 540.

⁶ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 63.

THE PURPOSE OF A CORONIAL INVESTIGATION

6. Mr Crampton's death was a reportable death pursuant to section 4 of the *Coroners Act 2008* (the Act) because it occurred in Victoria and it appeared to have been unexpected, unnatural and violent.⁷
7. Unlike other courts in Victoria, the Coroners Court conducts inquisitions.⁸ The legislative obligations of a coronial investigation are to ascertain,⁹ if possible, the identity of the deceased person,¹⁰ the cause of death,¹¹ and the circumstances in which the death occurred.¹²

MATTERS IN RELATION TO WHICH THE CORONER MUST, IF POSSIBLE, MAKE A FINDING

Identity of the Deceased

8. On 17 February 2016, Coroner Audrey Jamieson determined that the person whose death is the subject of this inquisition was Matt Crampton, born 10 July 1976.

Medical Cause of Death

9. On 15 February 2016, Dr Heinrich Bouwer, a Forensic Pathologist practising at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine conducted an autopsy on the body of Mr Crampton and drew a report in which he opined that the cause of Mr Crampton's death was:

“Cardiorespiratory arrest during prone restraint including pressure on the neck of an obese male using methylamphetamine”.

10. Dr Bouwer's report describes evidence of blunt force trauma to the anterior and posterior of the neck, multiple abrasions, a congested upper chest and head, heavy congested lungs and a mild left ventricular hypertrophy. Dr Bouwer's report describes evidence of neck compression in the form of intramuscular and soft tissue bruising of the anterior and posterior neck, together with a fracture of the superior horn of the right thyroid cartilage. Dr Bouwer was unable to say precisely how these injuries occurred nor was he able to ascertain the precise mechanism of Mr Crampton's cardiorespiratory arrest.¹³

⁷ Section 4, *Coroners Act 2008*.

⁸ Section 89(4) *Coroners Act 2008*.

⁹ Section 4 of the *Coroners Act 2008* requires certain deaths to be reported to the coroner for investigation.

¹⁰ Section 67(1)(a), *Coroners Act 2008*.

¹¹ Section 67(1)(b), *Coroners Act 2008*.

¹² Section 67 (1)(c), *Coroners Act 2008*.

¹³ A toxicological examination revealed the presence of methylamphetamine at 1.5mg/L and amphetamine at 0.2mg/L in the blood, and also the urine.

11. Dr Bouwer's report sets out that at the time of his death Mr Crampton was suffering from natural disease including mild left ventricular hypertrophy and that toxicological analysis of Mr Crampton's blood and urine detected methylamphetamine and amphetamine.
12. In his report Dr Bouwer refers to finding no facial or mucosal petechiae albeit. Dr Bouwer says that although the absence of petechiae would make positional asphyxia unlikely, it could not be excluded with any certainty.¹⁴
13. Dr Bouwer says the absence of intracranial haemorrhage or traumatic brain injury suggests that punches delivered by the assailant were unlikely to have caused or contributed to Mr Crampton's death.¹⁵
14. Dr Bouwer's report concludes that the cause of Mr Crampton's cardiorespiratory arrest was in all probability multifactorial and related to Mr Crampton:
 - (a) Having consumed illicit drugs;
 - (b) Then being in an agitated state;
 - (c) Being physically restrained;
 - (d) Having had force applied to his neck and torso; and
 - (e) Natural disease.

And contributed to by:

- (a) The combined effects of methamphetamine and noradrenaline;
- (b) A prone position in an obese man with prominent abdomen resulting in diminished respiratory exertions;
- (c) Pressure on the neck causing a degree of upper airway obstruction; and
- (d) Left ventricular hypertrophy that may predispose to sudden onset rhythm disturbance and arrest, particularly in the setting of cardiovascular stress.

Evidence as to Circumstances

15. Victoria Police, Homicide Squad investigated Mr Crampton's death. Detective Sergeant Mark Hatt prepared a coronial brief of evidence (the Brief). Detective Senior Constable Vin Schalken from the Homicide Squad gave evidence at the inquest.

¹⁴ Positional asphyxia is caused by an individual's inability to breathe adequately and can occur accidentally or due to certain forms of physical restraint.

¹⁵ See Circumstances of Death below. Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, Medical Examination Report of Dr Heinrich Bouwer dated 14 July 2016, paragraph 11, page 20.

16. The circumstances following are drawn from Detective Senior Constable Schalken's evidence and the material contained in the Brief.
17. On 12 February 2016 at approximately 6.30pm, Mr Crampton drove his then girlfriend to the Wallan railway station from where she caught the train to Melbourne planning to stay the weekend.
18. After Mr Crampton's girlfriend caught the train his telephone records record him making a call to a man who lived in Wallan whom the police allege sold the Ice.

Evening of 14 February 2016

19. At approximately 9.10pm on 14 February 2016, the driver of a motor car travelling north along the Northern Highway near Heathcote saw Mr Crampton standing in the middle of the road waving a torch, apparently in an attempt to stop cars. The driver had to suddenly stop his car and narrowly avoided hitting Mr Crampton. The driver described Mr Crampton shining the torch around into the bush by the side of the road very erratically as if he were looking for someone. Mr Crampton told the driver, "*they're after me, they're after me*".¹⁶ A passenger in the car told police that Mr Crampton looked to her like "*...he was just really scattered, jittery, panicked...under the influence of something*".¹⁷
20. The driver drove off and decided to stop at the Heathcote police station and report what he had seen.¹⁸
21. At about the same that the first car stopped a second driver also driving along the Northern Highway toward Heathcote saw Mr Crampton on the Highway. This driver braked hard to avoid colliding with the first driver's car which was then stopped in the middle of the road. The second driver reports Mr Crampton wandering around on the road and nearly being struck by a silver car travelling in the opposite direction.
22. In his statement to police the driver of the second car reported seeing the first car drive off and Mr Crampton suddenly opening the front passenger door of his, the second car and getting in with a dog with him. This driver describes Mr Crampton as being bare-footed, acting weird, dripping with sweat, very worked up about something, agitated, anxious and out of breath. He recalls Mr Crampton telling him to "*drive, drive, drive...take me to the Heathcote Police Station*".¹⁹ This driver described Mr Crampton as being lucid, not apparently drunk and able to form sentences and have a conversation.

¹⁶ Coronial Brief of Evidence, pages 57 – 58.

¹⁷ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 60.

¹⁸ Coronial Brief of Evidence, pages 57 – 58.

¹⁹ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 64.

This driver said that Mr Crampton told him that “...people were out there trying to kill him...had been on his property...his neighbour had alerted him that there were people after him...that he wanted to go to the police station because people were out there trying to kill him”.²⁰ A passenger in this car, a registered nurse, told police that she thought that Mr Crampton looked like he was “...on drugs and psychotic”.²¹

23. This driver took Mr Crampton to the Heathcote Police Station, which they found to be closed. When they arrived at the police station they found the first car that Mr Crampton had stopped on the Highway parked outside the police station. The car carrying Mr Crampton stopped and Mr Crampton opened the door and he and his dog got out. Mr Crampton was seen to wander around the street zig-zagging erratically then he walked north up High Street carrying his torch.²²
24. At approximately 9.34pm a member of the public rang ‘000’ and told the operator of a man, now thought to be Mr Crampton, running around in the middle of the main street of Heathcoat and asked the operator to send the police.²³
25. At about this time a man walking along High Street Heathcote saw Mr Crampton running and waving his torch around. This man said that Mr Crampton told him to “...ring Jayden they’re after me – I’ve really pissed some people off, what I have I done.....I’ll get you youse bastards – I know you’re in there”.²⁴ The man described Mr Crampton as running up and down the road erratically. The man described Mr Crampton running into him and banging on a gate next to the flour mill.²⁵ At approximately 9.40pm, this man saw Mr Crampton run to ‘George’s Kitchen’, a takeaway food shop at 169 High Street, Heathcote, and bang on the front window with his torch yelling to be let in as “they” were going to get him.²⁶

George’s Kitchen

The man saw Mr Crampton banging on the door of George’s Kitchen saying “...let me in let me in...” and told police that he thought that Mr Crampton was having a psychotic episode.²⁷

²⁰ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 65.

²¹ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 68.

²² Coronial Brief of Evidence, pages 66 and 69.

²³ Coronial Brief of Evidence, Exhibit 21: call to 000, transcript of call is Exhibit 22, Appendix A, page 201.

²⁴ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 75.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 82.

²⁷ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 75.

26. The man described hearing a window smash and going back to his car, driving to a near-by service station, calling the police, telling the operator that Mr Crampton had broken windows at George's Kitchen, and that he had bailed up the family inside. The man told the operator that Mr Crampton appeared to be drug affected, was carrying a solid torch, was extremely dangerous and agitated. The man was worried about the people in the shop, requested an armed response,²⁸ and then drove back to George's Kitchen.²⁹
27. At this time the manager of George's Kitchen, was in the shop with his 18-year-old step-son, and his 11-year-old son. The manager told police of seeing Mr Crampton banging on the front glass door of his shop and describes him as very agitated and yelling, "*Let me in...They're gunna get me!*". He told Mr Crampton, through the closed door that he could not let him in, to which, Mr Crampton said, "*they're gonna get me, they're gonna get me*". The manager recalls the glass in the door smashing and Mr Crampton entering the shop through the broken door. The manager's step-son ran toward the back of the shop and the manager's son began screaming. The manager recalls finding himself in a scuffle with Mr Crampton and recalls Mr Crampton hitting his son in the chest with the torch, pushing him into a small storeroom and closing the door.³⁰ The manager said that his son became hysterical and screamed out, "*Dad are you all right?*".³¹ The manager described grabbing Mr Crampton around and under both arms from the front using '*not a lot of force*' to try and calm him down.³² Mr Crampton grabbed the manager in a similar fashion, kept saying "*they're going to get me*" and they became locked together.³³
28. The manager referred to later seeing marks on his chest that Mr Crampton caused by grabbing him. In his statement the manager describes struggling with Mr Crampton "*for what felt like hours*" during which Mr Crampton pushed a cash register off a bench, shoved things off a *bain-marie* and threw a coffee cup at his step-son. The manager's step-son ran out into the street and flagged down a passing car that happened to be driven by an off duty local policeman.
29. While this occurred the manager was struggling with Mr Crampton during which time he was able to open the storeroom door and free his son whom he told to "*Run outside*".³⁵ In his statement to the police the manager describes there being broken glass on the floor of the shop,

²⁸ Coronial Brief of Evidence, Phone call is marked Exhibit 27, transcript of call is Exhibit 28, Appendix D, page 224.

²⁹ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 75.

³⁰ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 84.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 84.

³³ Ibid.

³⁵ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 84.

not having any shoes on, not having seen where his son went, and being "...really worried" about where he was. He describes Mr Crampton as being hysterical.³⁶

30. At 9.41pm the off-duty policeman rang '000' and requested police attendance, went into the shop where he saw Mr Crampton was grappling with the shop manager and tried, unsuccessfully, to calm Mr Crampton down. Still locked together the manager and Mr Crampton made their way outside through the broken door.³⁷
31. Once outside, Mr Crampton and the manager separated. Mr Crampton ran into the Main Street and tried to get into a number of passing cars. He managed to open the door of a car driven by a lone woman. On entering the car, he pushed her and yelled for her to drive away.³⁸ She drove a short distance and Mr Crampton got out of the car and ran back toward George's Kitchen. This woman describes Mr Crampton running back towards the manager as if he was going to attack him and they started wrestling.³⁹ She described the manager wrestling Mr Crampton to the ground, jumping on his back and both of them rolling around on the ground before the off-duty policeman came to the manager's aid.
32. The manager said that when Mr Crampton ran back towards him, he tried to stop him re-entering the shop by grabbing him around the upper body. He described both of them falling to the concrete pavement near the gutter and using a headlock to restrain Mr Crampton. In his statement he said:

"I tackled him and we fell to the ground on the footpath in front of the shop. It was more or less like a rugby tackle, he ran straight into the front of me and I grabbed him with my arms around the torso and waist area. I just wanted to stop him from going back into my shop and hurting anybody.

I'm not sure who fell on top of who, but we both fell together and I quickly grabbed him in a headlock and I squeezed as hard as I could to hold him. I put my left arm around his neck and held my left wrist with my right hand to make the headlock...I didn't have him in a headlock very long, 30 seconds maybe a little bit more".⁴⁰

33. The manager's son states that Mr Crampton threw salt shakers at his brother, hit him with his torch and that his father:

³⁶ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 85.

³⁷ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 100.

³⁸ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 115.

³⁹ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 116.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

*“grabbed the man and wrestled with him, and as the man hit – tried to punch my father in the head, my father grabbed him around the neck and pulled him to the ground as the man was struggling, as the off-duty officer was trying to hold him down”.*⁴¹

34. Evidence from other witnesses does not report Mr Crampton entering the shop a second time. It is likely that in this part of his account the manager’s son conflates what occurred when Mr Crampton was in the shop earlier and his father’s struggle with Mr Crampton after he got out of the woman’s car and ran back toward him.

35. As the manager was struggling with Mr Crampton the policeman told him to let go of Mr Crampton around the neck,⁴² and put Mr Crampton’s right hand behind his back. The policeman grabbed Mr Crampton’s left hand and instructed the manager where to put his knee and when the manager did, the manager said that the policeman:

*“...told me to grab the blokes other arm and put it behind his back and to put my knee ‘down there’ and indicated near his back. I grabbed the other arm and put it behind his back and I went to put my knee on his back, but... said ‘not there, put it down on the side.’ So I put my knee down on the ground”.*⁴³

36. At this point and completely unexpectedly the boyfriend of the woman whose car Mr Crampton has stopped and entered ran out of the darkness and punched Mr Crampton once or twice on the chin with a clenched right fist; the policeman intervened and stopped him.

37. The manager asked the policeman if he had any handcuffs or cable ties to hold Mr Crampton when the policeman told him to let Mr Crampton go as he seemed to be having trouble breathing.

38. The manager said he released Mr Crampton immediately.⁴⁴

39. The policeman estimated the time from when he saw the manager wrestle Mr Crampton to the ground to when he asked him to release him to be about thirty seconds.

40. In his statement the policeman said that:

“The guy went down face first. I didn’t hear any impact that would make me think he hit the ground hard. I didn’t see any blood or injury on his face from the impact. I didn’t see him put his arms out to break his fall. I think [the manager] had his left arm around his neck. I went to the guy’s left hand side, grabbed his left arm and put it up behind his back.

⁴¹ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 358.

⁴² Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 87.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 86.

There was no resistance. I didn't have my knee on his back or anything like that, as he was offering no resistance".⁴⁵

41. The policeman stated that Mr Crampton was lying face-down on the concrete when he heard air escape from his mouth, his shirt was damp, and his skin was very hot. He checked for breathing, but could not feel any, and his pulse was racing. He touched Mr Crampton's eye but had no response so rolled him onto his back and commenced cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) with the assistance of another male while his, the policeman's, girlfriend who had called 000 continued talking to the 000 call-taker.
42. Sometime after 9.56pm, an ambulance arrived outside George's Kitchen and expecting to treat a person in cardiac arrest found the policeman performing CPR on Mr Crampton. The paramedic found that Mr Crampton had no palpable pulse and fixed dilated pupils. The cardiac arrest protocol was commenced and after 43 minutes of resuscitation with no improvement, the treatment was ceased at 10.47pm and Mr Crampton was declared deceased.⁴⁶

Other investigations

43. On 15 February 2016, police interviewed the policeman in relation to Mr Crampton's death in the presence of a Professional Standards Command member in line with practice. The manager was also interviewed by police on the same day. No criminal charges were filed.⁴⁷
44. The man who punched Mr Crampton was arrested, interviewed and charged in relation to punching Mr Crampton.
45. Detective Senior Sergeant John Greene from Professional Standards Command oversaw the investigation and gave evidence at the inquest. He told the Court that after considering the policeman's conduct and all surrounding circumstances that no disciplinary breaches were identified.⁴⁸

COMMENTS PURSUANT TO SECTION 67(3) OF THE ACT

46. At approximately 8.30am on 15 February 2016, police went to Mr Crampton's home and took photographs including photographs of an orange-capped syringe, a nearby silver coloured spoon apparently with the remnants of a pool of liquid in it, a cigarette lighter, an electrical cable not plugged into any electrical device, and a small 'ziplock' plastic bag containing a small amount of white powder. All these items in close proximity are consistent with them

⁴⁵ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 100.

⁴⁶ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 146.

⁴⁷ Coronial Brief of Evidence, Statement of Detective Senior Sergeant John Greene dated 5 May 2017.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

being used to intravenously inject drugs.⁴⁹ A second uncapped syringe was photographed in another room of the house.⁵⁰

47. Mr Crampton's post mortem blood samples showed his use of methylamphetamine. How much he used between when he dropped his girlfriend off at the Wallan Railway Station and the fight in George's Kitchen is not known. Methylamphetamine is notoriously insidious and commonly causes erratic, violent behaviour; it is dangerous to those who consume it and not infrequently to those with whom users come into contact whilst under its influence.
48. The evidence shows that Mr Crampton's conduct posed a serious threat to the shop manager, his young son, his step-son, the policeman, passers-by including the young woman into whose car he forced his way into and potentially anyone else with whom he came into contact on this night. The manager understandably fearful for the safety of his son and step-son as well as himself, acted with considerable restraint.
49. The efforts of the policeman too, who did not stint at intervening in a violent dangerous melee when not on duty, and supported by other police deserve the community's gratitude and admiration. There is no telling what would have happened had the manager and the policeman not tackled Mr Crampton. A policeman showing such dedication to his community is going far beyond what some might consider to be his duty.
50. These events have had effects beyond those present on the night. Mr Crampton's father came along to the inquest and obviously distraught and fighting back tears, told me something of his son and his struggle with methylamphetamine use. He told me too of his and his family's anguish at Mr Crampton's death in these circumstances.
51. Our community is bedevilled by the effects of illicit drug use and the often violent conduct of those consuming methylamphetamine plagues us. No simple panacea exists.
52. One of the tragedies of these events, is that I am unable to offer anything tangible to Mr Crampton's family to ameliorate their distress. Harm minimisation and public policy reintegrating those who, for one reason or another, find themselves alienated and at the margins of our society together with the provision of resources to those seeking to rid themselves of the scourge commend themselves as effective strategies. Concerted efforts by law enforcement agencies to pursue and prosecute those profiting by illicit drug manufacture and sale support such aims.

⁴⁹ Coronial Brief of Evidence, photographs 115 – 122.

⁵⁰ Coronial Brief of Evidence, page 35, (needle and spoon containing substance). On 15 February 2016, police conducted a search of Mr Crampton's rental premises and located a snap-lock bag with a white powder, believed to be amphetamine residue, a syringe cap and a case with a syringe in it next to the couch in the lounge room.

FINDINGS

53. Having investigated the death of Mr Crampton and holding an Inquest in relation to his death, I make the following findings, pursuant to section 67(1) of the *Coroners Act 2008*:
- (a) The identity of the deceased was Matt Robert Crampton, born 10 July 1976;
 - (b) The cause of Mr Crampton's death was cardiorespiratory arrest during prone restraint including pressure on the neck of an obese male using methylamphetamine and occurred on 14 February 2016 in the vicinity of 166 High Street, Heathcote in the circumstances set-out in paragraphs 15 – 45 above.
54. I convey my sincerest sympathy to Mr Crampton's family and friends.
55. Pursuant to section 73(1) of the *Coroners Act 2008*, I order that this Finding be published on the internet.
56. I direct that a copy of this finding be provided to the following:
- (a) Mr Robert Crampton, Senior Next of Kin and father of the deceased;
 - (b) Detective Senior Constable Vin Schalken, Homicide Squad; and
 - (c) Detective Senior Sergeant John Greene, Professional Standards Command.

Signature:



DARREN BRACKEN
CORONER

Date:

3 SEPTEMBER 2018

