

DNA bid to give mystery man a name

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A FORMER Adelaide woman is leading a new push to exhume the body of a man found dead on a suburban beach 63 years ago.

Tracey Bryan, now living in Brisbane, has launched an online petition to get the Attorney-General to allow the body of the unknown man to be exhumed from his grave in the West Tce cemetery.

The man's body was found slumped against the sea wall on Somerton beach on December 1, 1948. He has never been identified despite extensive inquiries by police.

An autopsy failed to determine a cause of death and his body was preserved with formalin before burial.

Ms Bryan, who studied genetics at Adelaide University, said she first read about the case in a book on the unknown man by former Major Crime detective Gerry Feltus.

"I thought there has got to be a way to figure out who this guy is through DNA," Ms Bryan said.

"There are now worldwide databases of Y-DNA. The Y chromosome is passed from father to son and in our culture surnames do the same thing - so people with the same surname can have the same genes on their Y-DNA.

Cross-checking DNA from the body could give a surname or potential range of surnames. An exhumation and testing the DNA has the potential to identify a very small pool of individuals, and figuring out who he is is clearly in the public interest."

University of Adelaide director of the Centre for Biomedical Engineering, Professor Derek Abbott, said if exhumation of the body was delayed for another 10 years the chances of getting autosomal DNA would be "permanently lost due to degradation". "The man was deliberately buried in the driest part of the West Tce cemetery with the specific intent that he may be exhumed one day for identification," Prof Abbott said.

Attorney-General John Rau said any application for an exhumation would only be granted if it could be demonstrated that it served a clear public good, "not just to satisfy public curiosity".

Gerry Feltus said the man's body should not be dug up solely for the purpose of taking DNA unless real

evidence on his identity was produced.

"I would put it down as sacrilege if someone just came along and started digging him up because it is interesting," Mr Feltus said.

BODY RIDDLE

- * Body of a well dressed man found slumped against the sea wall at Somerton Beach.

- * He has no identification on him.

- * A piece of paper torn from a copy of the book *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* with the words "TamAm Shud" meaning "the finish" on it is found in his fob pocket months later.

- * The book it was torn from is found and it contained one pencilled telephone number plus of 50 letters.

- * Autopsy performed.

No cause of death given but poisoning suspected.

- * One theory is man is Cold War spy.

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