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Somerton Man mystery: New details revealed of Jo Thomson, nurse in the case

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A new picture of Jo Thomson, the nurse at the centre of the Somerton Man mystery. Was she a spy, a former lover, or neither?

Source: Supplied

THE history of a central player in one of South Australia's great mysteries — the unidentified Somerton Man — can be revealed for the first time.

And the Somerton Man's teeth and calf muscles may be the key in solving a big part of the puzzle — whether he fathered a child with an Adelaide nurse.

University of Adelaide professor Derek Abbott has commissioned a new picture of Jessica Thomson, the nurse the unknown man tried to visit the day before he was found dead on Somerton Beach in 1948. She was also known as Jestyn.

He's hoping the new picture will prompt people who knew Jo Thomson — as she was better known — to contact him as he tries to piece together the mystery.

The well-dressed man, found propped up against seawall at 6.45am on November 30, 1948, with his clothing labels torn out and a half-smoked cigarette on his collar, has never been identified.

An inquest found he died of unnatural causes, theorising it was an unknown poison. It was a common finding in those days when no other cause of death was evident.

The mystery has fascinated South Australia ever since, especially because of still-unbroken codes connected to a book of Persian poetry thrown into the back of a Glenelg doctor's car.



The new picture of Jo Thomson, nurse in the case of the Somerton Man, as she would have looked in 1948.

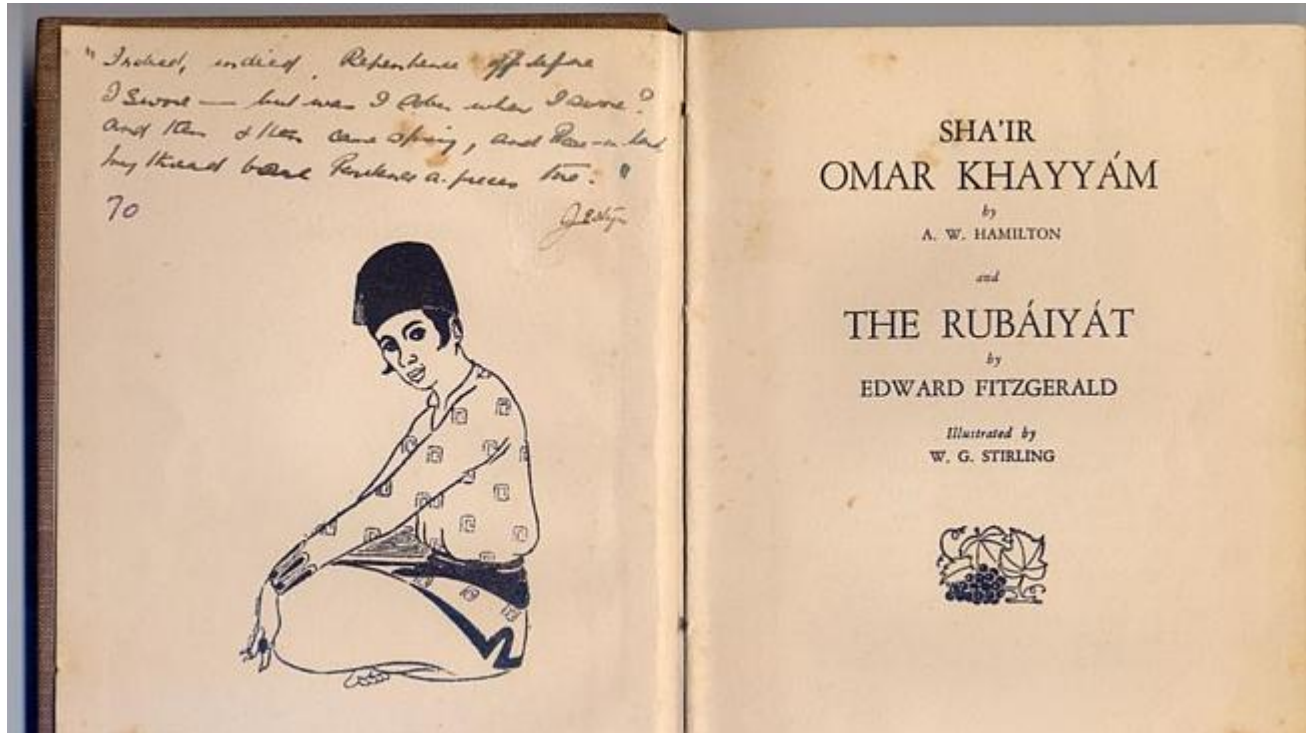
Source: Supplied

It has led to theories he was a spy, or a double agent, and that he was killed by someone — and that Mrs Thomson was also possibly a spy.

The Somerton Man had a piece of paper torn from the book secreted in a pocket, and Jessica Thomson's phone number was written in its back.

Mrs Thomson, who died in 2007 and was known as Jo for much of her life, always denied knowing the Somerton Man.

Prof Abbott, who has investigated the case for years, hopes someone will recognise the nurse.



The front pages of the Rubaiyat found in the doctor's car, with an inscription by Jo Thomson — signed as Jestyn, which was one name by which she was known.

Source: Supplied

He said he now feels comfortable revealing what he's learnt about Mrs Thomson after her family appeared last year on *60 Minutes*.

The family told *60 Minutes* they believed Mrs Thomson and the Somerton Man had an affair and a child — renowned ballet dancer Robin Thomson.

"In 2002, she started telling people she was the nurse in the case but denied she knew the Somerton Man," Prof Abbott said.

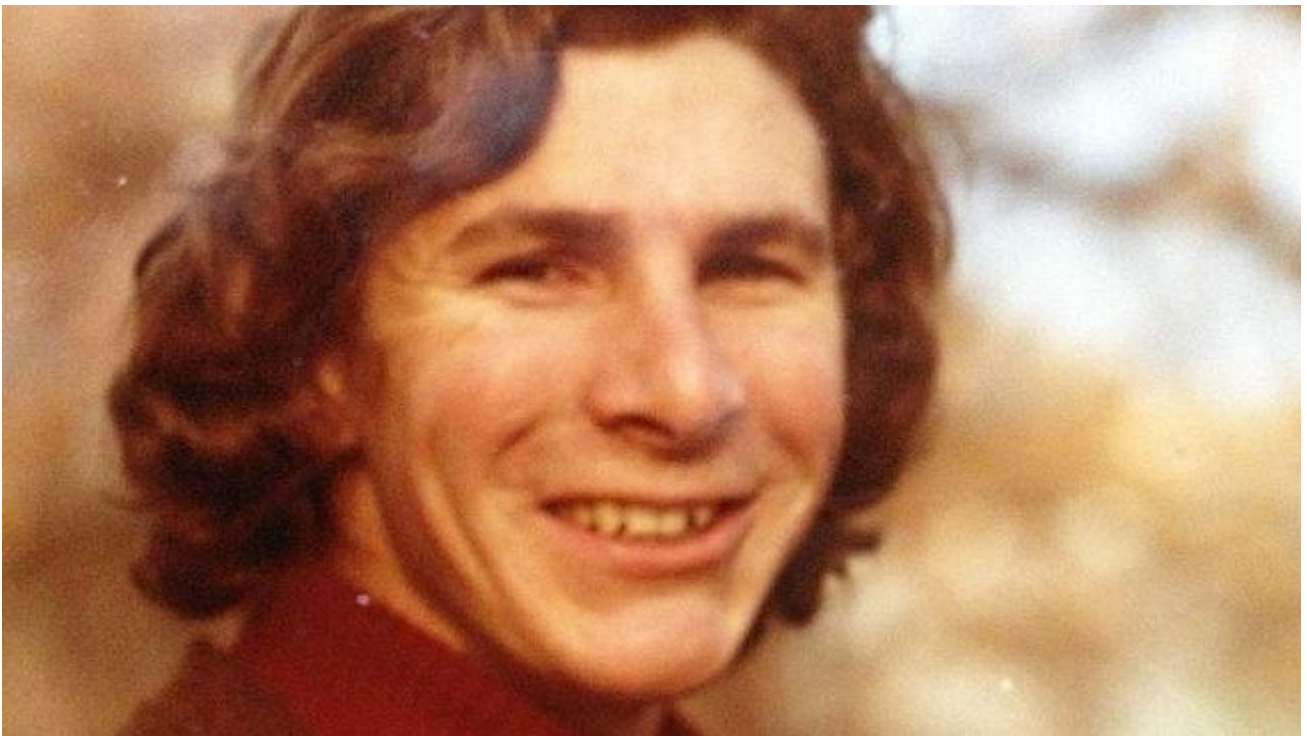
"She had a son, and it was just at the right time to have been fathered by the Somerton Man."

Prof Abbott, who has pushed for the Somerton Man to be exhumed for DNA tests that could be compared to the DNA of Robin's daughter, said there are two key genetic reasons he believes Robin may be the progeny of the pair — his teeth and his ears.



Jo Thomson, highlighted to the right, or Jess Harkness as she was then known, in primary school.

Source: Supplied



Robin Thomson, son of Jo. The canine teeth are next to the front two teeth.

Source: Supplied

"It's not just the timing — the son has an unusual dental configuration in that his canine teeth were next to his middle teeth," Prof Abbott said.

"The inquest said same thing about the Somerton Man — his lateral incisors were missing. Moreover, both have an unusually large upper ear hollow."

It's often been noted that the Somerton Man's calf muscles were very pronounced and high up on

his leg, like those of a ballet dancer.

“There was an early theory he might have been a dancer — and it turns out the man’s possible son became a ballet dancer with the Australian Ballet and the Royal New Zealand Ballet.”

Even their ears have similarities.

Determining if Robin was their son is a key to working out who the Somerton Man was, he said.

“It’s not about the fact she had a son out of wedlock — it tells you the Somerton Man had to be in a certain time and place when Robin was conceived, which places him in Sydney — where Jo Thomson was training to be a nurse — then known by her maiden name as Jess Harkness. You can then look passenger logs of ships and trains pre-1946. To nail his location down is an important part of the timeline.”



Some of the contents of a suitcase linked to the dead man.

Source: News Limited

The Somerton Man was last seen alive lying on Somerton Beach the evening before he died, only a five-minute walk from where Jo Thomson lived in Moseley Street.

She shared this address with second-hand car dealer George Thomson — the pair were not yet married but she had taken George’s surname.

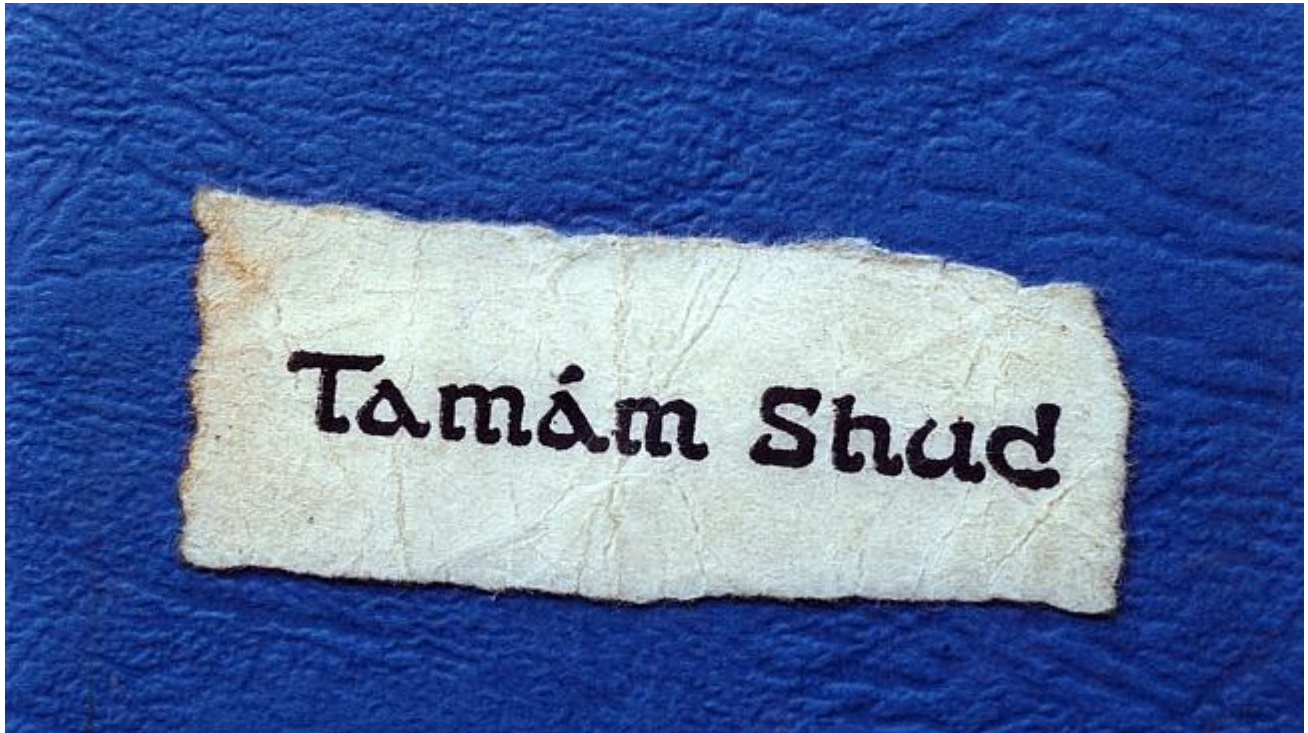
According to Prof Abbott, Robin Thomson was at that stage about 16 months old. He said Jo and George had renewed their acquaintance when she briefly returned to her childhood home at Mentone in Victoria, after suddenly leaving Sydney 1946 where she had been training as a nurse

and living in the nursing quarters.

She failed to take her final nursing exam, the reason annotated as “vomiting”.

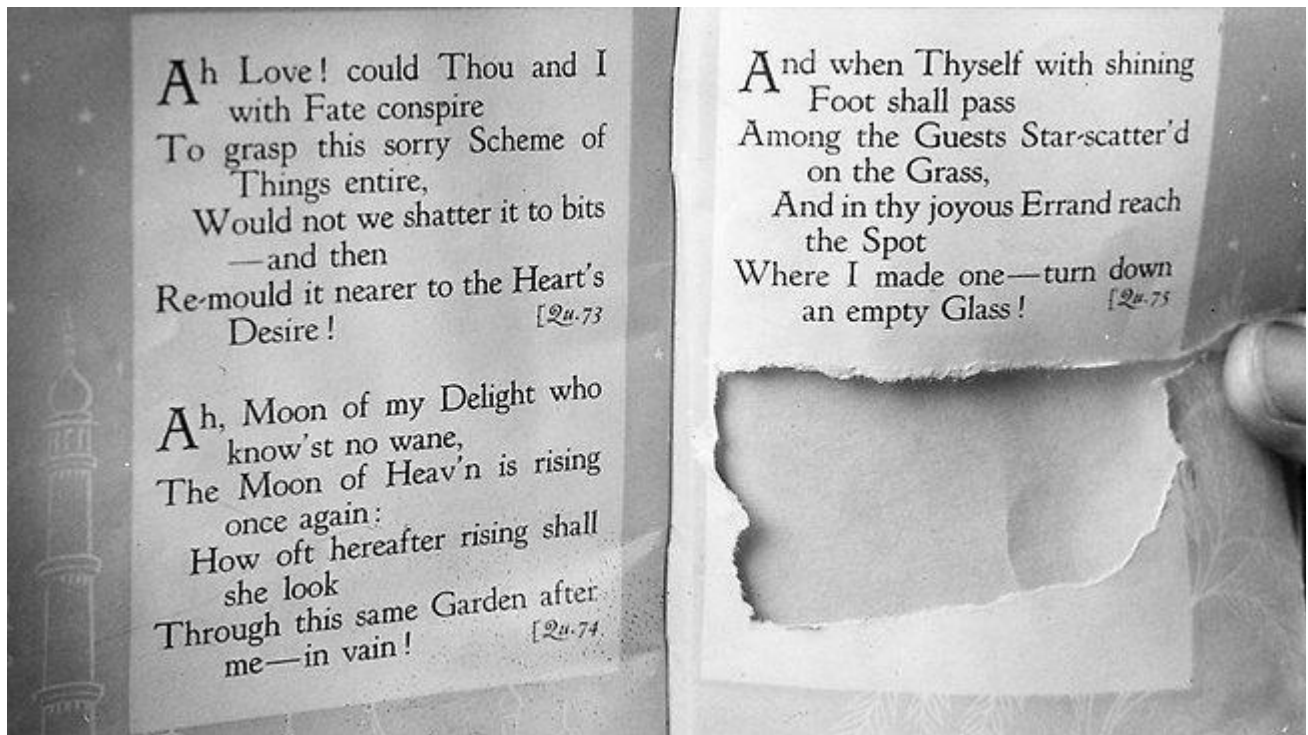
“I wonder if it was morning sickness,” Prof Abbott said.

“She was due to retake the exam but never did so.



The scrap of paper reading ‘Tamam Shud’ — which was found hidden in the Somerton Man’s pockets. It translates as ended or finished’ in Persian.

Source: Supplied



The torn page of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, which reportedly was found in a doctor’s car.

Source: The Advertiser

"It seems she fell pregnant in October 1946, and was gone by November.

"In those days you'd have to leave the nursing quarters if you were pregnant — nurses had to be single and childless to live there.

"So she would have fallen pregnant to the Somerton Man in Sydney in late September or early October '46.

"It looks like she temporarily went back to Mentone but didn't stay long and in early 1947 moved to Adelaide."

In Mentone, George Thomson ran the taxi ranks "so she would have known him", Prof Abbott said.

"He was known in Mentone as 'the man who could get you anything.'

"He worked the black market during the war years — they were chalk and cheese. She liked intellectual company and he was passionate about second-hand cars — they lived completely different lives."

33 51 2/46
0/0 34

(In Black Letters)

Christian {
Name {
in full {
Station or Prison {
prints taken {
Date prints taken {
Signature of Officer {
taking prints {
Rank {

Finger Prints of deceased male person found at Somerton Beach, Adelaide, South Australia, December 1st, 1946.

1. Right Thumb. 2. Right Index Finger. 3. Right Middle Finger. 4. Right Ring Finger. 5. Right Little Finger.

Left

Classification

DIRECTIONS.—Before taking impressions of the fingers hold this form exactly as shown.

Classified and recorded by

Checked by

6. Left Thumb. 7. Left Index Finger. 8. Left Middle Finger. 9. Left Ring Finger. 10. Left Little Finger.

The fingerprints of the unknown man.

Source: News Limited

The two renewed their acquaintance and left Mentone together to pass off as husband and wife in Adelaide and married in 1950.

In the late 50s, years after the Somerton Man had died and she had brushed off the continual questions from police, she spoke in her correspondence of being weary raising children, Prof Abbott said.

"Every so often I feel overwhelmed by the continuity of the chores and the demands of the children,"

she wrote to a friend.

In the late 1960s, she took a job at St Corantyn's, the mental health clinic on East Tce and "loved her job", Prof Abbott said.



Where the dead man's body was found in 1948 on Somerton Beach — to the left of the staircase.

Source: News Limited

"She retired in the late 70s and George died in 1995. Around 2002, she began telling people she was the nurse in the Somerton Man case but denied knowing him."

Mrs Thomson died in Victoria in 2007 and Robin in 2009.

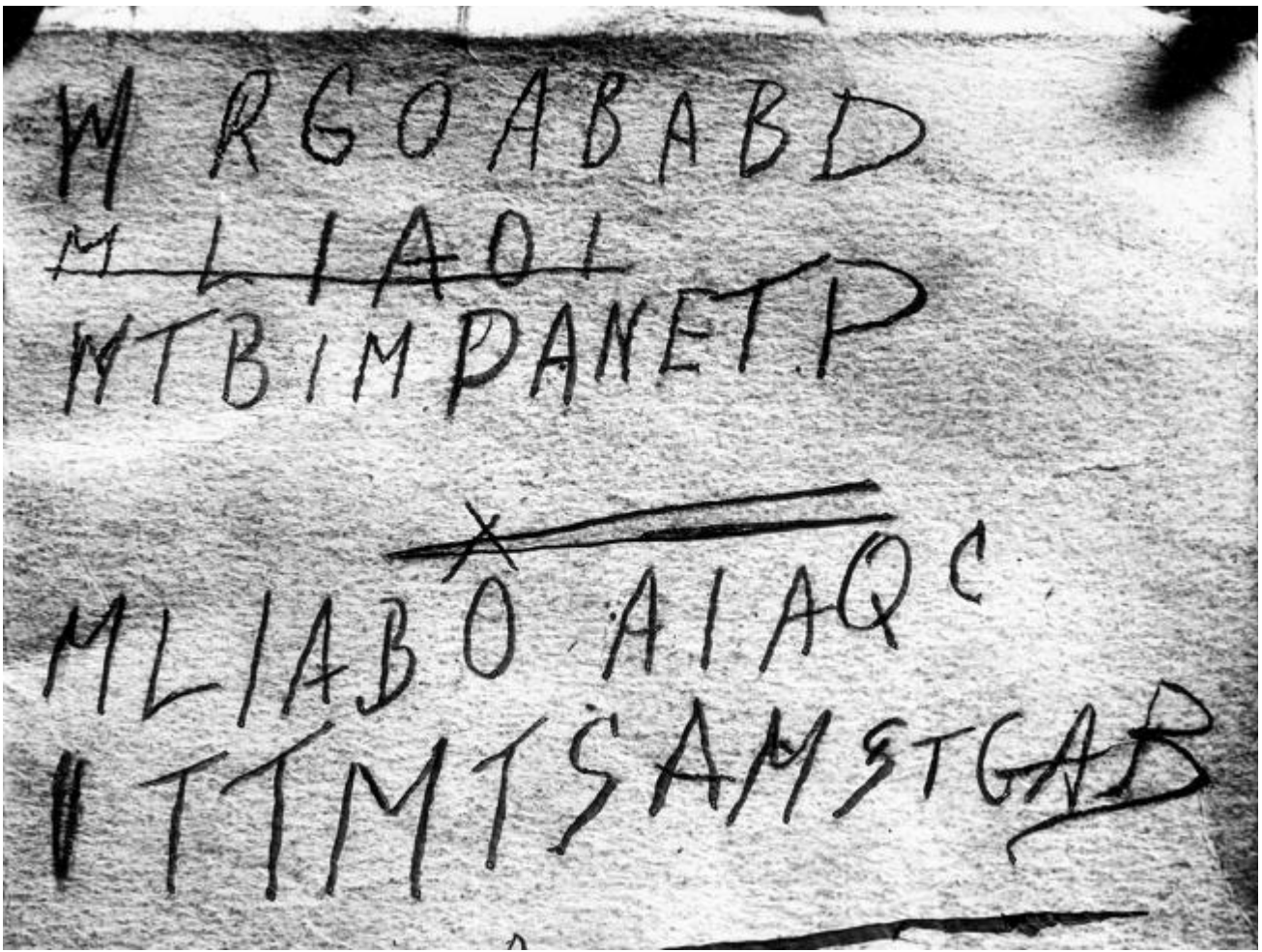
Prof Abbott disregards the spy theory because he says it doesn't fit the available evidence,

"You can access old ASIO records through the national archives — and we have done a run on the nurse's names — and nothing comes up.

"Everything in that era is now out in the open. It just doesn't stack up as a spy thing."

Even the codes don't appear to be actual World War II codes, he says.

"We've analysed that statistically over and over using computer software, they match the first letters of English words.



The codes found in the Rubaiyat.

Source: Supplied



An artist's impression of what the Somerton Man might have looked like when he was alive.

Source: Supplied

"It doesn't appear to have the structure of a secret code and isn't structured in the way World War II codes were constructed."

There are theories, however, of **microwriting visible within the letters of the code itself** (<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/has-part-of-the-mysterious-somerton-man-code-been-cracked/story-fni6uo1m-1226975308014?login=1>) . Microwriting was a known way of communicating in that era.

The labels were torn from the Somerton Man's clothes — another sign some have used in the spy theory. But Prof Abbott discounts the torn labels as a sign he was a spy, and says nothing in Jo Thomson's life suggested she was a spy either.

"There's nothing in her timeline to suggest she went off spy training somewhere, she didn't leave the country," he said.

He hoped the picture and new information could spur someone's memory to provide more information or — especially — pictures of Jo Thomson.

"She kept out of sight, there aren't many pictures of her. People who knew her might have old photos back in the 40s, you never know if a photo turns up with the Somerton Man standing next to her — it's amazing what might open up."

You can contact Prof Abbott at the University of Adelaide or Google his name.

Click here to contribute to the crowd-funding campaign for the case (<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/identification-of-the-somerton-man/x/10497091#/story>)

Sign his petition to have the Somerton Man exhumed here (<https://www.change.org/p/solve->

the-taman-shud-mystery-by-identifying-somerton-man)

Originally published as **Secrets of the Somerton Man** (<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/somerton-man-mystery-new-details-revealed-of-jo-thomson-nurse-in-the-case/story-fnpp66pk-1227374600525>)

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