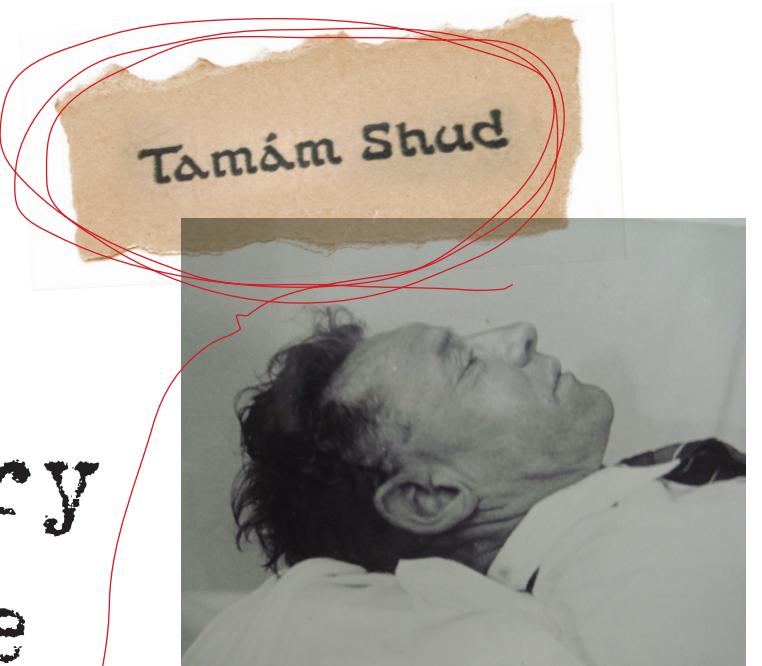


The Mystery of the SOMERTON MAN

A corpse on a beach in southern Australia looked like an open-and-shut suicide case, but then detectives found a code secreted in a pocket that hinted at more sinister goings on. More than half a century later, the suspected murder of 'The Somerton Man' continues to baffle detectives...

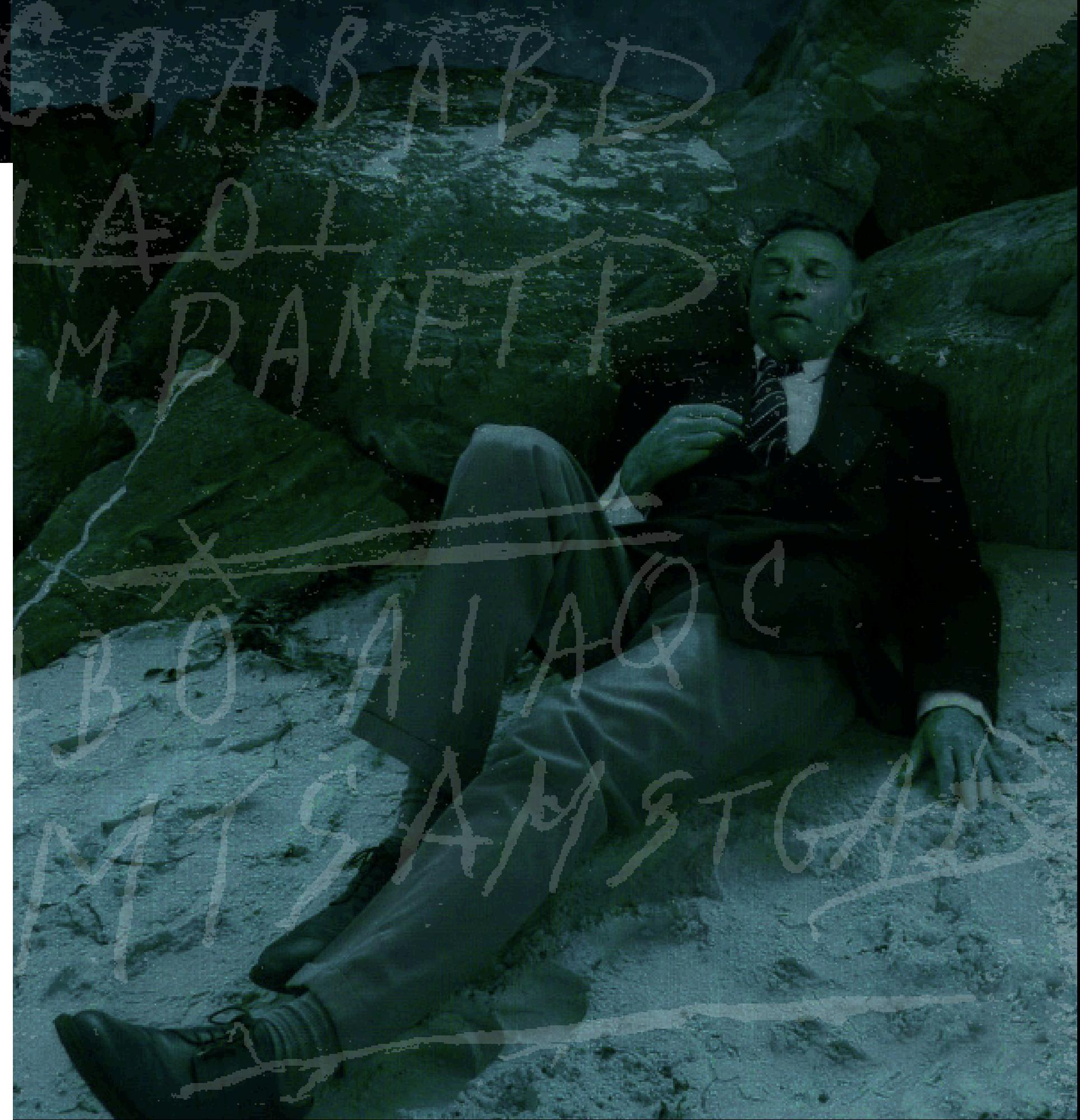


The Somerton Man as he was found (right), slumped against the rocks on Somerton beach near Adelaide. Note, his shoes are clean as if he has been placed in this location

The man lay slumped against the sea wall, facing out to the ocean. He was well-attired if over-dressed for such balmy summer weather, and had caught the eye of a passing husband and wife, who commented on his unusual appearance and posture as they strolled hand-in-hand on Adelaide's Somerton beach. Suddenly, the man raised an arm, a jerky movement that could have been intended to shoo away one of south Australia's untold bothersome mosquitoes. Startled but unconcerned, the couple carried on.

A short time later, a teenager and his girlfriend noticed the man, too. As dusk set in, they casually watched what bit of him they could see as they sat down on a bench above and behind him for a quiet cuddle. There was no movement from him. "He must be drunk," said the girl, reasoning that the idler would otherwise have been slapping at the infernal bugs that hung in clusters in the cooling evening air.

The stranger was still there when the married man who had first seen him went out for an early swim the next morning. In exactly the same position as he'd been the night before and now attracting a small crowd, it was clear that he was dead. On closer inspection, he appeared to be in his mid-40s and had the look of an Eastern European. He was well-built, muscular, and there were no signs of a struggle. >





The ensuing autopsy concluded that the man had died at around 2am – but that his death had not been from natural causes. The pathologist's report suggested some type of poison had been used, even though none was found in the body. Assuming suicide, police set about trying to find out who the man was so they could inform the next of kin. What they got, however, was a series of riddles that would go on to bewilder some of Australia's most seasoned detectives and to challenge the world's greatest minds for decades. That day – December 1, 1948 – was the start of one of the most enduring and sinister mysteries of the last 100 years.

According to the pathologist, the dead man was five ft 11 inches tall, with hazel eyes and fair to gingery coloured hair. He had powerful shoulders, a narrow waist and toes that met in a wedge shape, like those of a dancer or someone who wore boots with pointed toes. His calf muscles were taut, just like a ballet dancer's, and his hands were smooth. All of the labels in his clothing had been ripped out, and he was utterly devoid of ID. He had no money on him, and no markings on his body to suggest anything suspicious had happened.

In his pockets were a used bus ticket from Adelaide city centre to a bus stop not far from where he was found, as well as an unused train ticket from Adelaide to the same spot. The autopsy revealed the man had eaten a pasty several hours before his death, but this was ruled out as the likely source of the poison which had caused his stomach to fill with blood.

When fingerprints failed to turn up any matches and no comparable dental records could be found, Scotland Yard were called in to help, although it seemed for a moment that it was all for nothing as local papers were already naming the dead man as one EC Johnson, a 45-year-old from nearby. That story fell apart

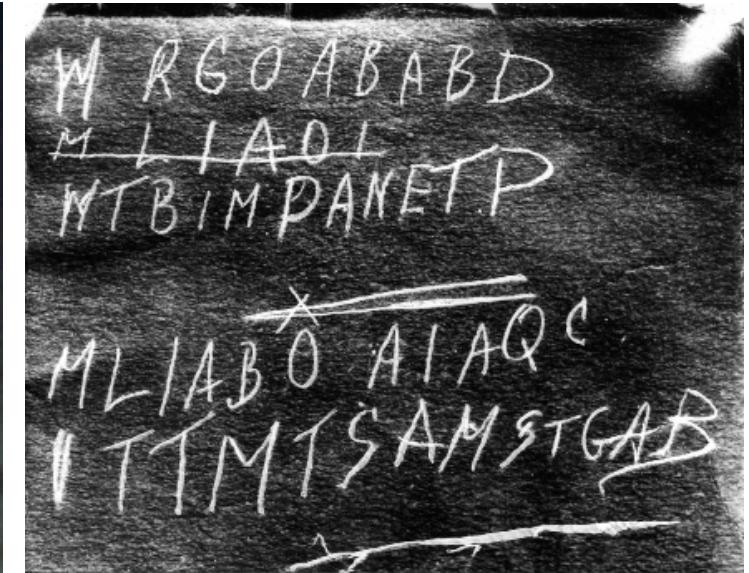
Clockwise from left: Police released this picture of the deceased with no useful response; the ticket attached to the Somerton Man's suitcase left at Adelaide station dated the day before he was found dead; the contents of the suitcase included an electrician's screwdriver, a table knife that had been sharpened down to a point and some scissors; Somerton beach; all that remains of the mysterious "Jestyn" is this artist's impression



somewhat when a bemused Mr Johnson strolled into the police station to identify himself the next day.

Over the next few weeks, there were several positive identifications of the body, all different, and none were accepted as plausible by the police. Then, on January 14, a discovery at Adelaide Railway Station added a new twist to the case. It wasn't much help to the investigators, but it was enough to catch the attention of the local newsmen, who sensed a mystery growing by the day. The find was a brown suitcase with its label removed, which had been checked into the station's cloakroom on November 30, the day before the man had been found dead. There seemed little question it was his.

Inside the case, police found a dressing gown, a pair of slippers, some trousers and some underwear as well as an electrician's screwdriver, a table knife that had been filed down to a short, sharp point, and some scissors. As with the dead man's clothing, all ID marks on the clothes had been torn out – except for one vest with the name "T Keane" written inside it. Police quickly deduced this was unlikely to be the dead man's name as it was the only tag that had been left in. They tried to trace a local sailor named T Keane but to no avail. However, when some of Keane's shipmates came in to look at the body they were adamant it wasn't him. As no other T Keanes were missing anywhere in the world, the vest was deemed to be of no significance, possibly having been picked up at a second-hand store. Trying to piece together what had happened, detectives theorised that their man had arrived in Adelaide on the overnight train from either Melbourne, Sydney or Port Augusta, checked in his suitcase and bought a train ticket to the beach at Somerton. Finding the station's restroom closed, he had showered and shaved



All of the clothing taken from the suitcase (left) had had the labels removed aside from one vest with the name "T Keane" which proved to be a dead lead. (Above) The code found in a copy of *The Rubaiyat Of Omar Kayyam*

at the public swimming baths next door, returned to the station and, probably having missed the train, took the bus instead. But they were still no nearer discovering who he was.

In June 1949, coroner Thomas Cleland was instructed to conduct an inquest into the death and heard evidence from an investigating pathologist that was to add further intrigue to the mystery. The pathologist explained how the dead man's shoes were remarkably clean and not really consistent with someone who had been wandering around all day. He theorised that the man could have been deposited on the beach after he was dead.

If the man had been brought to the beach after he was dead, though, who had been witnessed slumped against the sea wall in exactly the same place on the night of November 30? The couple who first saw the man were adamant they'd seen him raise his arm – was that the final spasm of a poisoned man, or had a lookalike been setting the scene in order to keep the investigation focused on that particular spot? The case was about to get weirder still when a reinvestigation of the dead man's clothes turned up a tiny scrap of paper, hidden in a small trouser pocket.

Printed on the paper, which had clearly been taken from the pages of a book, were two words: Tamam Shud.

Literary experts explained that the words meant "the end", and that they were taken from the last page of a book of Persian poems called *The Rubaiyat Of Omar Khayyam*: not a typical book for the average Aussie to be carrying around. Furthermore, studies of the paper revealed that it had been torn from a particularly rare edition.

What police didn't yet know was that three years earlier another supposed suicide victim called Joe Marshall had also been found with a copy of this ancient book by his side in Sydney – or that a woman who testified at Marshall's inquest was found dead 13 days later, face down, naked, in a bath with her wrists slit. More intriguingly, Marshall was found just one kilometre from where a woman who would come to be known only as "Jestyn" gave a copy of the same book to an ex military intelligence officer called Alf Boxall around the time Marshall died. Boxall, police later discovered, was alive and well, still had his copy of the book.

Once police discovered which book the Tamam Shud line was ripped from, they put out an appeal to the public to see if they

could trace the actual copy – a copy missing its back page. Within days, a local doctor – whose identity has also been suppressed – walked in holding a copy of the book which he said had been tossed into the open window of his car the night of November 30. The back page was missing.

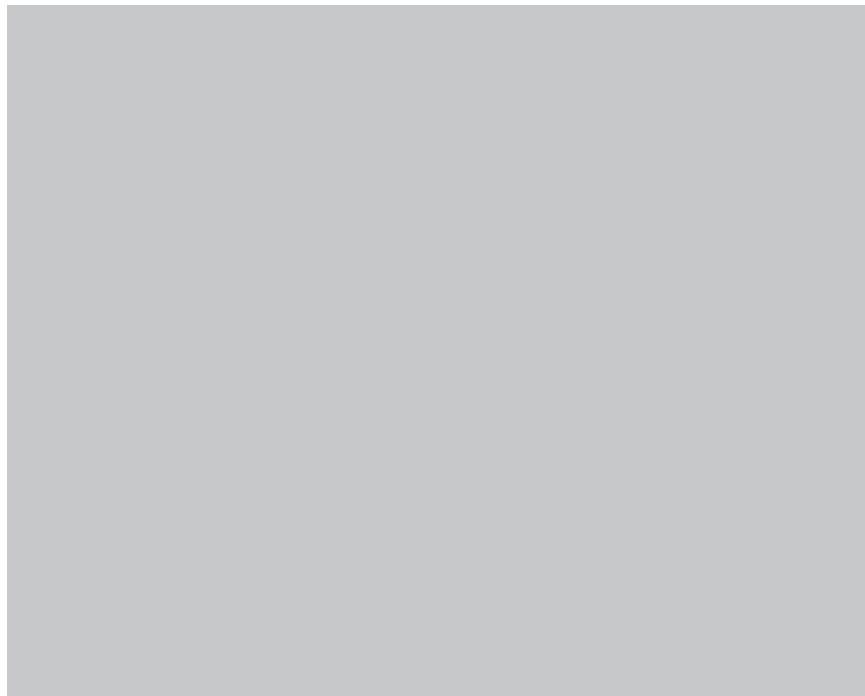
Tests conclusively revealed that the paper in the dead man's pocket had been torn from that book, and there was more for the police to go on: inside the back cover was a series of letters, a code of some sort. To this day, the code remains unbroken:

WRGOABABD
MLIAOI (which had been crossed out)
WTBIIMPANETP
MLIABOAIAC
ITTMTSAMSTGAB

Also found in the book was a phone number which led police to a former nurse living just 800m from where the Somerton Man was found. When questioned, the former nurse told police that a stranger had been asking a neighbour about her around the time that the Somerton Man arrived in town. For reasons still unknown, police decided to leave her identity out of the investigation files. She became known by just one name: "Jestyn".

One theory is that the Sydney death three years earlier was merely a coincidence, that "Jestyn" was the lover of both the Somerton Man and Alf Boxall, and had given each of them a copy of *The Rubaiyat* as a love token. When the Somerton Man paid her a visit in November 1948, she spurned his advances, he secreted a meaningful snippet in his pocket, tossed the book into a car, took a poison and went to the beach to die. Easy.

But why was the Somerton Man in such great shape? Why had he so painstakingly got rid of all traces of ID? And was it mere coincidence that all this happened in the nearest big city to Woomera, a top-secret missile launching and intelligence gathering site? The Cold War was in full bloom, and Soviet spies had been secreted all over the world. Was the Somerton Man a Russian spy? Were "Jestyn" and former military intelligence officer Alf Boxall >



The locations of where the man was found and where "Jestyn" lived (left); and the grave of the unknown man found on Somerton beach (above) on which flowers are still laid by an unknown person or persons on the anniversary of his death

involved? Was the Somerton Man's code a Russian cipher?

John Ruffels, a Sydney postman who was researching a book about foreign espionage in Australia at the time a documentary about the Somerton Man was being made in 1978, told reporters, "The atmosphere was right in Adelaide in 1948 for a foreign power to have a spy there. Quite a few Eastern European migrants were being used in the construction of the Woomera rocket base. It's hard to say if the Somerton Man was a Russian spy or a British intelligence officer or a British defence scientist who turned traitor. My theory is that he'd been captured just after he'd discarded the book and injected with something."

Alf Boxall, interviewed for the same documentary, looks decidedly uncomfortable when asked if the mysterious "Jestyn" knew of his military intelligence career. When reminded of the theories that the Somerton Man was a spy, Boxall squirms even more. "Quite a melodramatic thesis, isn't it?" he smirks, awkwardly.

Throwing yet more confusion into proceedings was the documentary's interview with Paul Lawson, a local taxidermist who had made a plaster cast of the Somerton Man's head and shoulders for the police before the corpse was buried. Lawson had the job of showing this bust to several people during the process of trying to identify him. "I wouldn't know about that," Lawson says, nervously, when asked if anyone ever made a positive identification. Clearly agitated, he then tells the reporter, "By the way – you're on cagey ground here."

The two original investigating detectives interviewed for the documentary appear similarly ill at ease with the reporter's questions. Thirty years on, it looked like something was being covered up. Were the police under orders to keep their mouths shut about the murder of a spy? Or were they simply trying to protect the married "Jestyn" from having to publicly reveal a string of affairs? It is likely we will never know.

Whatever the truth, the case of the Somerton Man remains officially unsolved. His briefcase and belongings – "surplus to requirements" – were destroyed in a clear-out in the mid-80s, and the best code-crackers in the world have been given the chance to decipher those enigmatic scribblings to no avail. Alf Boxall died in 1995. "Jestyn" is thought to have passed on in 2007. As for the ballet connection or the strange tools found in the Somerton Man's suitcase, no one knows if they were in any way significant. To this day, every spring,

a person or persons unknown leave fresh flowers on the Somerton Man's grave – proof that this is a mystery that refuses to die.

Sixty years on, the Somerton Man continues to be a talking point around Adelaide, where, for the past few years, a local professor and some of his students have been trying to crack the code.

Professor Derek Abbott, Director of Adelaide Uni's Centre for Biomedical Engineering, thought the series of letters found in the back of *The Rubaiyat* would be the perfect project for his students to get their teeth into. The Professor now believes that the letters in the code signify the first letters of a sequence of words – just like LOL has become known as an abbreviation for 'laugh out loud'.

"Most people intuitively feel the code represents the first letters of words," Professor Abbott tells *FHM*, adding that his students went on to provide statistical back-up for the theory, and also concluded that the words were most likely to be English. "The students also did experiments by getting English-speaking people to deliberately write down nonsense letters at random," he says. "By doing so it became clear that the code really has the structure of a natural language and is not gibberish."

If these armchair sleuths are right, Professor Abbott admits it will be virtually impossible to guess which words the letters might represent. But there may be an answer. "We hope to write a new kind of search engine," says Professor Abbott. "One that looks for sequences of words beginning with specific initial letters. We will then search the web for absolutely anything that uses the same letter sequences. No one else has thought of doing this yet."

Sporadically, another piece of the puzzle like this will fall into place, giving rise to the hope that the case of the Somerton Man may yet be solved. In 2009, a brief, uncredited clip of an interview with a now very old Paul Lawson appeared online.

Seemingly keen to put the record straight, the man who made the bust of the Somerton Man explains how a Mrs Thompson – the implication is that she is the mysterious "Jestyn" – was shown the plastercast in July 1949. According to Lawson, she took one look at it and visibly changed. "She looked down at the floor and wouldn't look at it for the rest of the interview," Lawson says with a sad smile. And yet it's his look to the camera that arguably says more. Shrugging his shoulders and raising his eyebrows, he appears to be saying, "And that's all I know," but it also looks like Lawson – who had been forced to make the bust in the morgue with three detectives standing over him – is saying something else, too. Something like, "I don't want to be involved in this any more. So leave me the hell alone..."