

## News

# The Advertiser

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## News

## Professor's 15-year search for answers seeks to crack the secret code to the death of the 'Somerton man' found on an Adelaide beach

- by: James Fettes
- From: Herald Sun
- October 29, 2013 7:30PM




An artist's impression of what the Unknown Man, whose body was discovered on Somerton Beach in 1948, might have looked like when he was alive.

Source: The Advertiser

**A PROFESSOR**  who has dedicated **15 years** to decoding one of Australia's most baffling mysteries hopes a new portrait of the victim could crack the case.

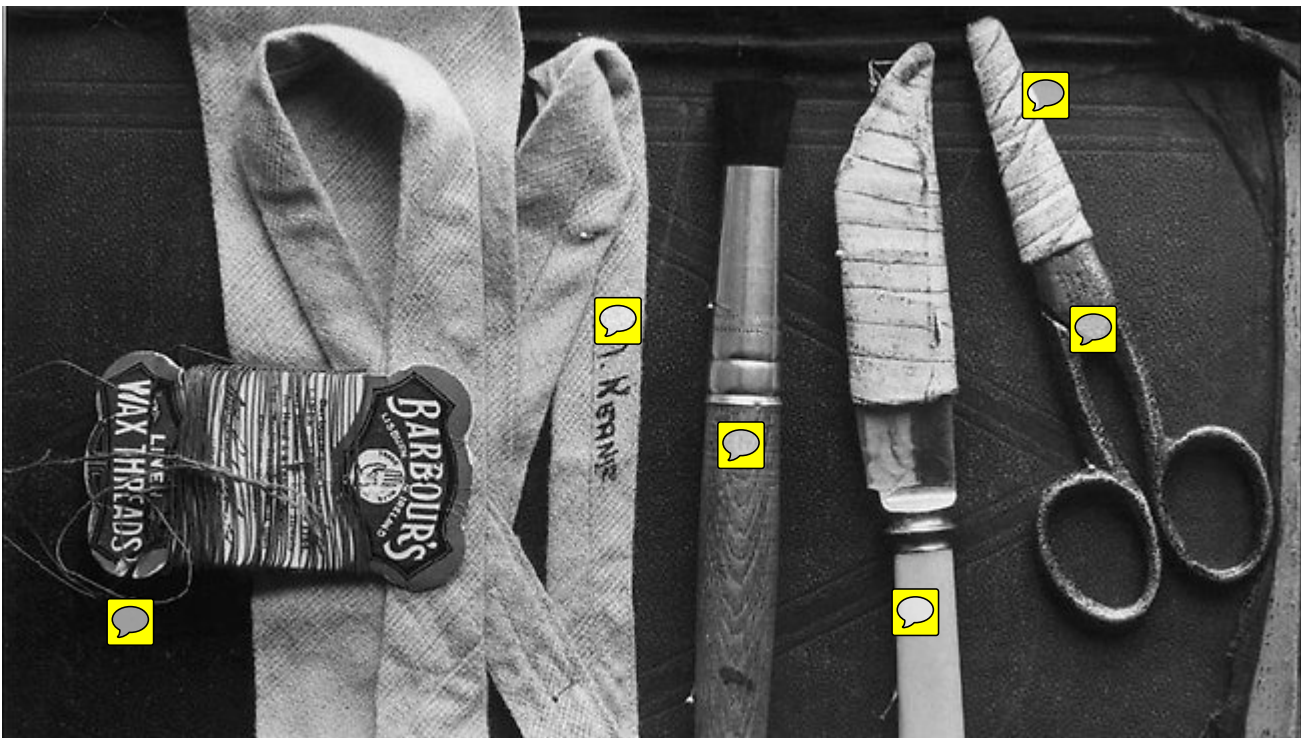
The image, commissioned by Adelaide University's Professor Derek Abbott, reconstructs the living face of a man found dead on an Adelaide beach nearly 65 years ago: The Somerton Man.

It is the latest move in an investigation that spans decades and has raised more questions than answers.

**Professor Abbott** (<http://www.eleceng.adelaide.edu.au/personal/dabbott/>) is just one of  many who have poured thousands of hours digging into the facts behind the case. He has created 3D scans, written lists of commonly reported inaccuracies, and constructed a detailed timeline of the investigation into the unknown man.

With no stone left unturned, theories have been thrown back and forth for years. Was he poisoned? Was he diseased? Was he in love? Was he a spy? Was he a British sailor?

So, who was the Somerton Man?



Items, including wax thread, belonging to the Somerton Beach man. Picture: The Advertiser library

It began on December 1, 1948. The body of an unknown man was found resting against a sea wall at Somerton Beach, in Adelaide, just 15 minutes west of the city.

The post-mortem revealed a fit man with broad shoulders, toned legs and a healthy heart. The pathologist suspected an exotic poison, but no trace was found. In fact, not much was found at all.

In his pockets were a used bus ticket from the city, an unused second-class rail ticket from the city to nearby Henley Beach, a narrow aluminium American comb, a half-empty packet of Juicy Fruit chewing gum, an Army Club cigarette packet containing (the different brand of) Kensitas cigarettes, and a quarter-full box of Bryant & May matches.

Inside his suitcase, found later at Adelaide's main railway station more than a month later, were personal items including a dressing gown and slippers, waxed thread, four ties and stencilling equipment. (See a full list of contents below).

A name, T Keane, was handwritten on one of the ties - but that proved a dead end.



A re-enactment of the discovery of the body found on Somerton Beach in December, 1948

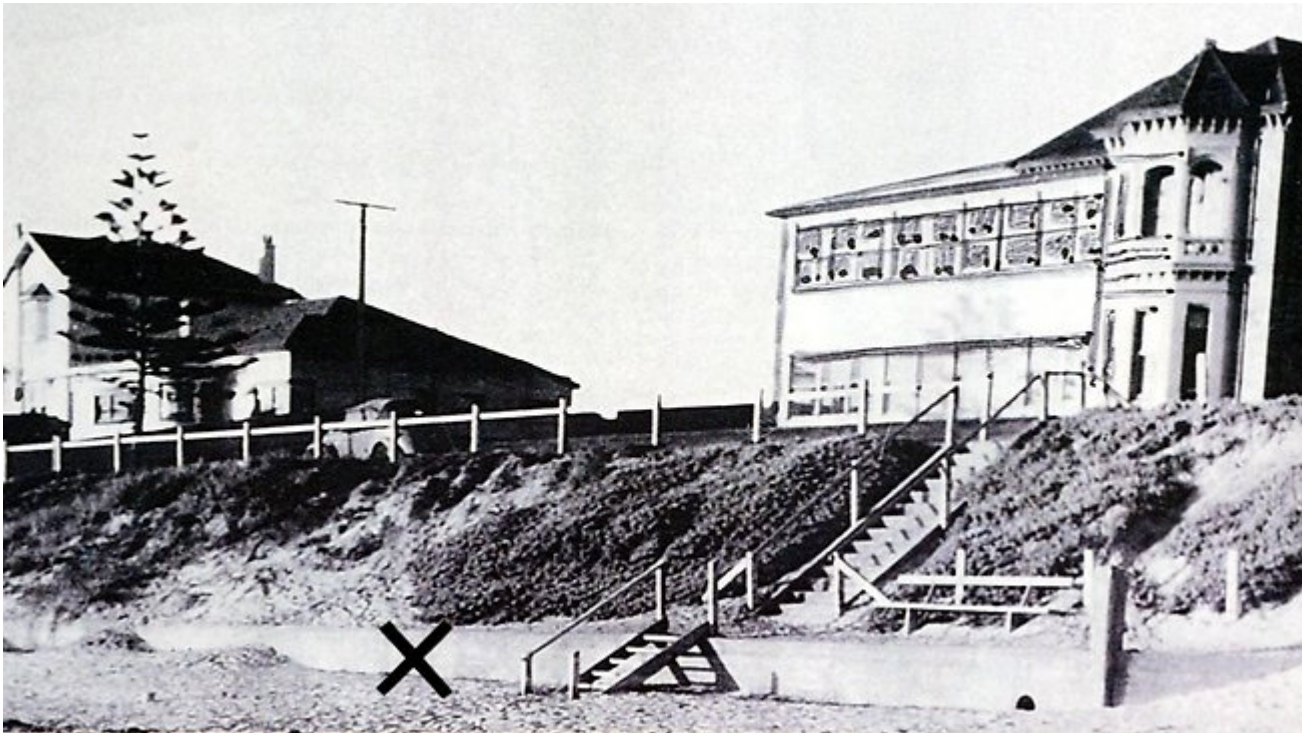
Prof Abbott has **never been entirely convinced** by the poison theory.

"There's **just no evidence** to suggest he was poisoned," he said.

Attempts to identify the man proved even more difficult.

A stream of identifications fell through. EC Johnson, who was named as the dead man by Adelaide's *The Advertiser*, had to check himself into the police station to prove himself very much alive.

Prof Abbott first learned of the Somerton Man in a laundromat in 1995, when he read an article on the case in a magazine.



An image of Somerton Beach in December 1948. The 'X' marks where the unknown man's body was found. Picture: Advertiser Image Library

"What drew me to it was the lack of conclusions. I thought it would be nice to bring it to a close."

As it turns out, his expertise would prove central to his effort to be able to do just that.

Two months after the unknown man's death, a **pathologist** re-examining the body found a small pocket that had been overlooked previously. Inside, rolled tightly and ripped from a book, was the printed phrase "tamam shud".

Translated from Persian as "ended", it had come from the final page of a rare copy of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, a collection of Persian poems.

Soon after, a man approached police claiming to have found a copy of the very same book tossed in the back of his car the same night Somerton Man died.



The body of the unknown man found dead on Somerton Beach in 1948.

But the book - with its missing back page - had a secret. Visible only under ultraviolet light, police found what looked like a code. It appeared to read:

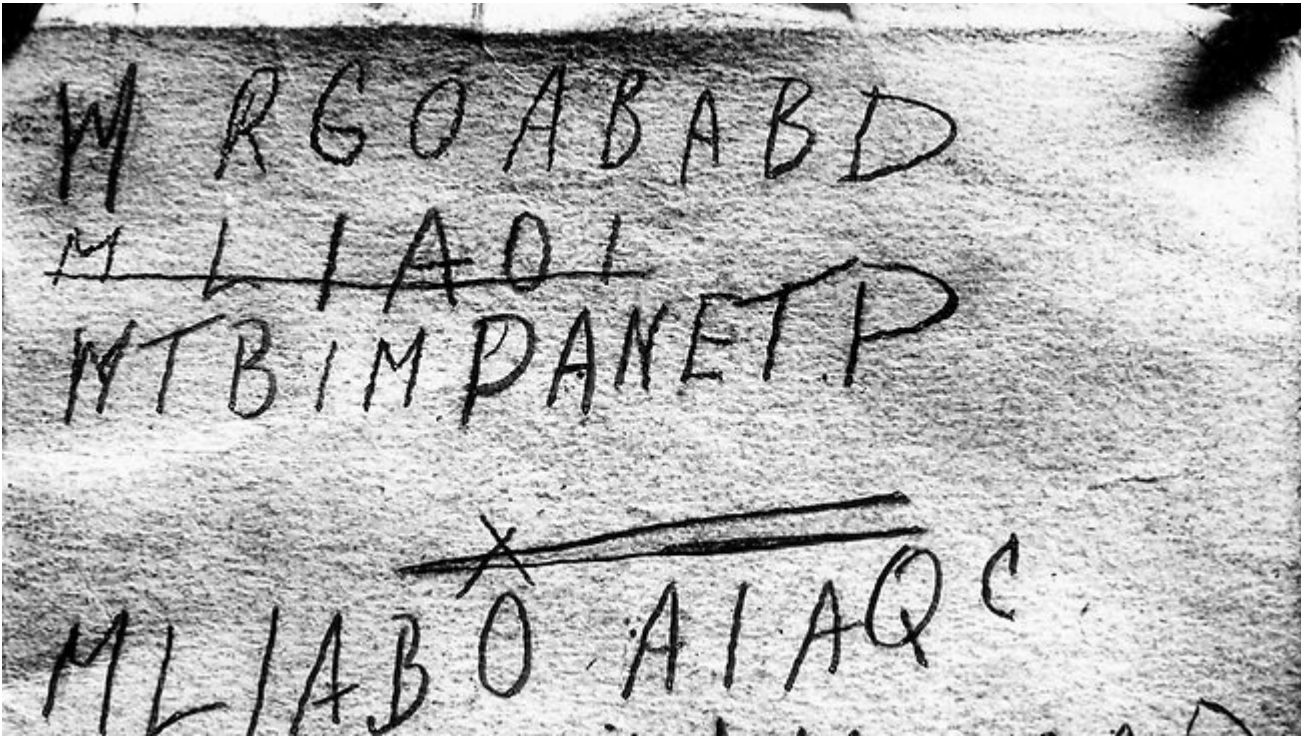
WRGOABABD  
~~MLIAQI~~  
WTBIMPANETP  
MLIABOAIQAC  
ITTMTSAMSTGAB

The second line was struck out, and some letters were unclear at best.

The code does nothing to discourage theorists from thinking that the Somerton Man may have been a Cold War spy, combined with the suggestion he may have been poisoned by enemies unknown.

It was the revelation of the code that prompted Professor Abbott to get more involved in the case. His background in electrical engineering and cryptography meant he could offer a unique talent to the case.





The code found in a book linked to the Somerton Man.

"I thought it would make a wonderful project for my students to look at," he said.


He began setting the code in his undergraduate program. Together with his students, he has helped rule out as many as 40 different potential ciphers.

"The idea is to do statistical analysis on the letters of the code. You can't necessarily tell what it is, but you can tell what it isn't."

But where Professor Abbott has used engineering to try to help bring the case to a close, author Kerry Greenwood hoped she could write a way to her own.

She first learned of the case as a child, as one of the many stories her father would tell her.



The dead man's suitcase contained "expensive belongings"  detectives said. Pic: The Advertiser

"All of his other stories had an ending, but this one didn't. And it's the ones that don't having an ending that stick in your head."

As the writer behind the successful Phryne Fisher murder mystery novels, she resolved to write her own ending to the man's story.

That project eventually expanded into a memoir about herself, her dad and the unknown man, with *Tamam Shud: The Somerton Man Mystery*.

She thinks the theory the unknown man was poisoned might have credit.


"I really am attracted to the idea of a poisoned cigarette, but I don't think I'd be able to get away with it," she said.



Part of the note discovered from the Somerton Beach mystery dead body case reading "Tamam Shud" which translates as "it is finished" in Persian. Picture: The Advertiser

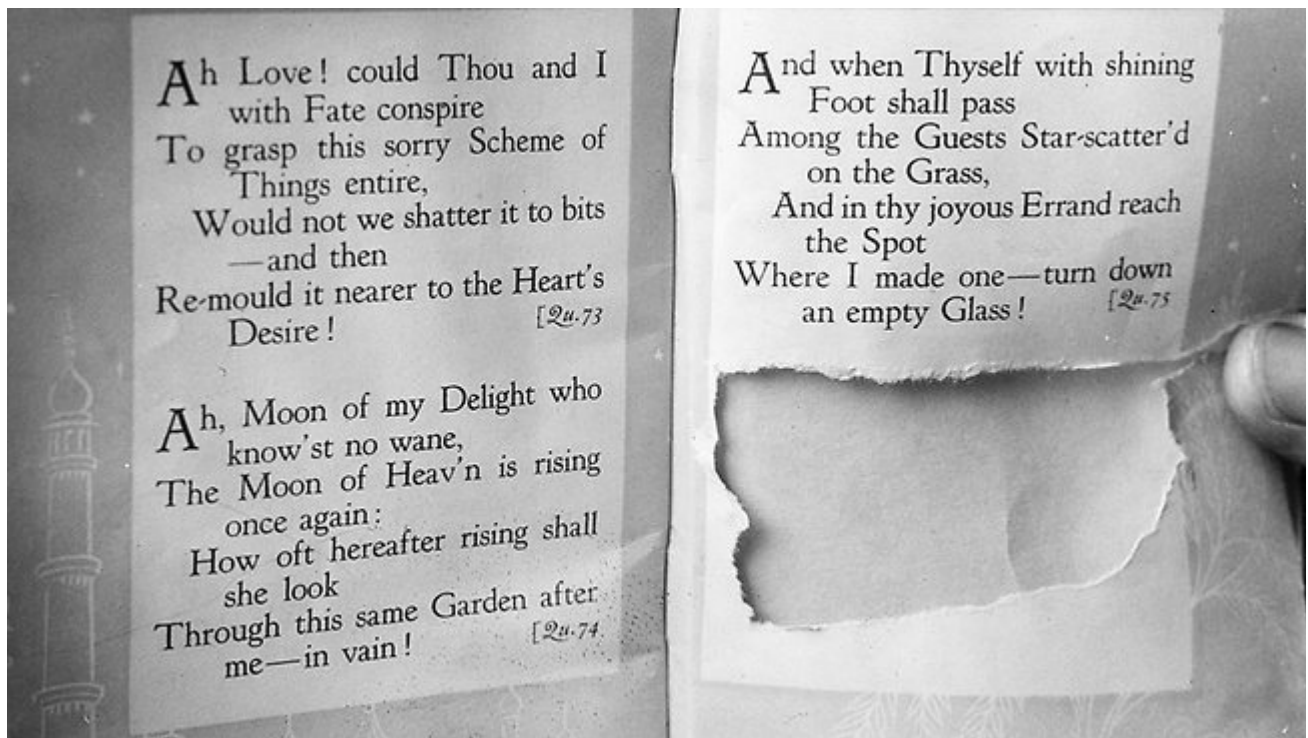
Ms Greenwood spent countless hours researching the case. She enlisted the help of a range of friends and experts to try to understand some of the more complex facts surrounding the case.

They helped her canvas a number of theories, including one that he was killed by a stray snake.

 Another theory was that he was really a British sailor, with some experts **drawing close comparisons with a man by the name of HC Reynolds and the Somerton man** (<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/is-british-seamans-identity-card-clue-to-solving-63-year-old-beach-body-mystery/story-e6frf7jo-1226200076344>) .

But after having hit as many roadblocks as the police did all those years ago, she sympathises with their difficulties.

"Those poor darlings must have been getting crosser and crosser," Ms Greenwood said.



The book found with the body of the Somerton man. Picture: The Advertiser

Despite the setbacks, she remains driven by Somerton Man's story.

"Someone must have lost him, someone missed him. He never came home," she said.

By constructing a clearer picture of Somerton Man in life, Professor Abbott hopes researchers can learn more about his death.

In light of improvements in technology, he filed a submission to South Australian Attorney-General John Rau to have Somerton Man exhumed.

It cited **bone marrow** and genealogical DNA tests as ways the man's origin could be uncovered.





Salvation Army Captain E. Webb with funeral director Laurie Elliott, journalist Bob Whittington, police Sergeant Sutherland and funeral assistant Claude Trevelion at the unknown man's funeral. Picture: Advertiser Image Library.

"Actually knowing in which country he was born would help cut down the search window that we're looking at," Professor Abbott said.

The request was denied. Mr Rau said the submission lacked a compelling case for the public interest.

"I'm obviously disappointed, but I think we still have a chance to convince the Attorney-General. Just because he says no, that won't stop me trying again," Professor Abbott said.

And try again he has: He's helped set up a **change.org petition** (<http://www.change.org/en-AU/petitions/solve-the-taman-shud-mystery-by-identifying-somerton-man>) to lobby for the exhumation. So far, it's amassed more than 400 signatures.

But after 65 years and countless hours of research and investigation, it's hard to think the identity of the unknown man will ever come to light.



Grave of the unidentified man whose body was found at Somerton Beach in 1948. Picture: Advertiser Image Library

"I think we've found out all we can about the Somerton Man," Ms Greenwood said.

Ultimately, as her father told her all those years ago, it is the stories that never get their ending that stick in your head.

**More details of Prof Abbott's timeline relating to the "Taman Shud" case.**

([https://www.eleceng.adelaide.edu.au/personal/dabbott/wiki/index.php/Timeline\\_of\\_the\\_Taman\\_Shud\\_Case](https://www.eleceng.adelaide.edu.au/personal/dabbott/wiki/index.php/Timeline_of_the_Taman_Shud_Case))

A list of the contents of a suitcase found at the Adelaide Central Railway Station, believed to belong to the Somerton Man, also referred to in Ms Greenwood's book:

- Red checked dressing gown



(In Block Letters.)

Christian Names in full { \_\_\_\_\_






Station or Prison prints taken { \_\_\_\_\_

Date prints taken \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Officer taking prints { \_\_\_\_\_

Rank \_\_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_\_

Finger Prints of deceased male person found at Somerton Beach, Adelaide, South Australia, December 1st, 1948.

1. Right Thumb.	2. Right Index-Finger.	3. Right Middle-Finger.	4. Right Ring-Finger.	5. Right Little-Finger.
24	0 1 7	16	0	24
				

LEFT FINGERS

DIRECTIONS.—Before taking impressions of the Fingers fold this form exactly in two.

Classified and searched by \_\_\_\_\_

Checked by \_\_\_\_\_

Fingerprints taken from the Somerton Man, discovered in December 1948, which remains an unsolved mystery. Picture: NewsLtd

- Red felt slippers, size 7
- Undergarments - four pairs
- Pyjamas
- Four pairs of socks
- Shaving kit containing razor and strop, shaving brush

## DEAD MAN FOUND LYING ON SOMERTON BEACH

The fully clothed body of a man was found on the beach at Somerton, opposite the Crippled Children's Home, at 6.30 a.m. today. Up to noon police had no clue to his identity.

The body had not been in the water.

The man was lying on his back against the sea wall. The legs were crossed, and death appeared to have occurred while the man was sleeping.

A thorough search of his pockets revealed no papers or anything that would give a clue to his name.

The man is thought to have been about 40. He was 5 ft. 11 in. in height, and well built. He was clean-shaven, with fair hair slightly grey over the temples, hazel eyes, and was wearing a grey and brown double-breasted coat, brown trousers, socks, and shoes, and a brown knitted woollen pull-over, white shirt and collar, and red-white-and-blue tie.

The discovery was made by Mr. John Lyons, jeweller, of Whyte road, Somerton, who called Constable Moss, of Brighton, and Det. Strangway.

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From "The News" newspaper in Adelaide, following the discovery.

- Light brown trousers with sand in cuffs
- A screwdriver
- A cut-down table knife
- A stencilling brush
- A pair of scissors

Form 685  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
IMMIGRATION SERVICE

SEAMAN'S IDENTIFICATION CARD

ORIGINAL

No. 58757

Name H. C. Reynolds

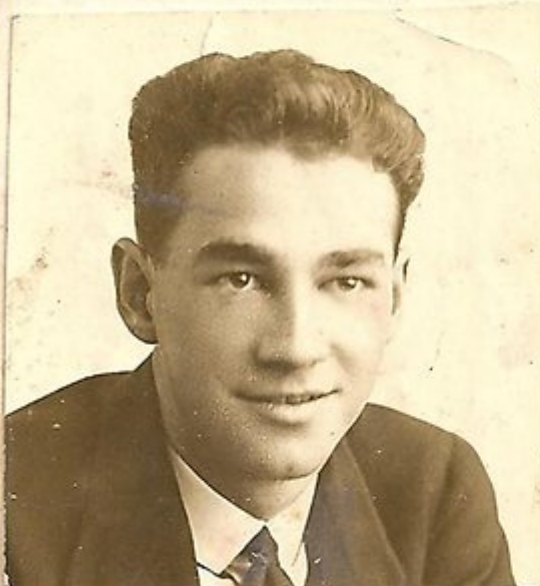
Age 18 on 8 FEB 1918, 191 (Date)

Nationality British

Marks:

(Issued under Rule 10, Immigration Regulations.)

14-1279



US-issued seaman's identification card of British man H. C. Reynolds, one of the men believed to potentially be the Somerton Man.

- A sewing kit containing orange Barbour's brand waxed thread
- Two ties
- Three pencils
- Six handkerchiefs
- Sixpence in coins
- A button
- A tin of brown shoe polish, Kiwi brand
- One scarf
- One cigarette lighter
- Eight large envelopes and one small envelope
- One piece of light cord
- One scarf



- One shirt without a name tag
- One yellow coat shirt (a shirt with an attached collar)
- Two airmail stickers
- One eraser
- One front and one back collar stud
- Toothbrush and toothpaste



(<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/law-order/true-crime-scene>)

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