

## SPY RIDDLE

IT is a case that has baffled and intrigued South Australians for more than half a century. Nearing the 56th anniversary of the discovery of a man's **body** at **Somerton Beach**, MATT CLEMOV looks at the bizarre circumstances - the mystery man may have been poisoned - and why he has never been identified.

THE most significant clues - two words from an ancient Persian poem and a coded scrawl on a discarded book - still have experts stumped.

WITH the world gripped by the oncoming Cold War, was he a Soviet spy - or simply a desperate loner looking for a quiet place to end his life?

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How G-G calmed vice-regal storm

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Illus: Photo (color): body of man found at somerton beach  
 Photo (color): soviet union flag  
 Photo (color): rocket  
 Photo (color): major-general michael jeffery

Library Heading: Unidentified bodies - South Australia  
 Mysteries

Keywords: murder sa corpse

Column: extra

Section: FEATURES

Type: Pointer

SUM-20041107-2-073-K090994

## Sunday Mail

Sunday Mail (SA), Edition 1 - State

SUN 07 NOV 2004, Page 076

### 'Poisoned' in SA - was he a Red spy?

By: Matt Clemow

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IT is the start of the Cold War and Australia is gripped by paranoia about communism and the spread of Soviet power. Wounds still raw from World War II and memories fresh of the awesome power of the atomic bomb, the country sees Opposition Leader Robert Menzies launch his campaign against the Red Menace.

At the same time, the British are moving into Woomera to start the controversial "Blue Streak" missile program, heightening Australia's perception of its important role in world affairs.

In Adelaide, the **body** of a man, without identification and apparently poisoned - is found on a suburban beach. Before long, as the case becomes more confused, speculation starts that he is a Soviet spy.

Hard-nosed detectives initially treat the case as just another **body**; illness or suicide are the first suspicions.

"Someone will turn up and identify him in a couple of days," they say.

Wrong. Almost 56 years later, nobody has.

The case develops into one of the most intriguing deaths in the history of South Australian crime.

Unlike most unsolved crimes, this is not a case of not enough clues. There are too many - and too few make sense.

When the man was found by swimmers at **Somerton Beach** on December 1, 1948, he was carrying only a bus ticket, an unused train ticket, sixpence and an Army Club cigarette packet, which contained cigarettes of a different brand, Kensitas.

He was well dressed, clean-shaven and had no distinguishing marks.

When an autopsy reasoned poison had caused his heart to stop about 2am, police thought they had a murder, or even a suicide. But blood tests found no foreign substance - although poisoning remained a prime suspicion among some officers.

It was back to square one and detectives did not know where to search for more clues.

Eventually, the clues found them when workers at Adelaide Railway Station uncovered an unclaimed suitcase of brown material which was checked about 11am on the day before the man's death.

Inside, they found clothes identical to items he had been wearing, along with a brush, a knife and a pair of scissors.

They also found a name: T. Keane. But there was another name: Kean.

Neither name matched that of any known missing person in any English-speaking country, and the dry-cleaning marks - 1171/1, 4393/3 and 3053/1 - remained unidentified.

Now, more than half a century later, one of the state's most decorated detectives is still on the case.

Soon to be retired Detective Senior Sergeant Gerry Feltus has been delving into the mysterious circumstances of the Somerton man for more than a decade, mostly in his spare time.

One day, the 61-year-old says, he may even write a book outlining the facts of a case he first learnt about as a young detective working in Major Crime.

But it's hard work; all the evidence has been destroyed or lost over the years and most witnesses have died. Only a plaster cast of the man and a few photos remain. That, and hundreds of newspaper clippings.

But his eyes light up when he talks about the case. He speaks of the conspiracy theories, the logic and the unknowns. Each option is packed with possibilities.

"I first became interested in the case when I was at boarding school at Somerton Park in 1956," he said. "During winter it was too cold to swim, so walks were arranged and we often walked past the location where the **body** was found and the older people would tell us about 'the guy who was murdered there'."

So what is known about this seemingly European man who appeared to be aged about 45? What is certain is that - for whatever reason - he was at Adelaide Railway Station on the morning of November 30, 1948.

Detectives meticulously checked incoming train records and deduced he had most likely arrived on the Overland from Melbourne at 9.15am. But trains from Port Augusta (or Woomera) and Sydney via Broken Hill were also options.

WITH the thinking that he had arrived on an overnight train, police believed he went to the nearby City Baths, showered and shaved. He then bought a ticket for the 10.50am train to Henley Beach but, mysteriously, never validated the pass. He checked in his luggage at the cloakroom and put one part of ticket G52703 into his luggage. The other half has never been found.

Dressed in an American-tailored jacket, shirt and tie and well-polished shoes, he walked across the road and paid sevenpence for a bus to Glenelg from the front of the Strathmore Hotel.

At Glenelg, he got off in front of the then St Leonard's (now Watermark) Hotel on Anzac Hwy. Little is known of his activities in the next 14 hours, other than he ate a pastie. After that last meal, several witnesses saw the man lying in the sand at the top of the beach opposite the old Crippled Children's Home.

They later told police he appeared to have been smoking.

One of those witnesses was local jeweller John Bain Lyons, who was enjoying a stroll along The Promenade with his wife.

Like everyone, he thought nothing of the man - he could just have been a drunk or a businessman enjoying the evening sea breeze. But when Mr Lyons returned for a swim the next morning, he again saw the man, but realised he was dead. He hurried home to call Brighton police station.

When police arrived, they saw the man's left arm was lying beside his **body** and the right arm was bent double. A half-smoked cigarette was on the right collar of his coat.

That was it - no wounds, no bruises, no weapon. His eyes were open.

For the next two months, police used the press and Interpol in a bid to identify the man. Their efforts were in vain.

They then took the unusual step of publishing a photograph of the dead man in newspapers around the world.

As many as 50 people viewed his **body** at the City Morgue. But there were no positive identifications.

All those who thought the man was their long-lost brother, grandfather, uncle or lover could not solve the riddle.

Eventually, in June, a plaster cast was made of the man by Adelaide Museum taxidermist Paul Lawson, before a pauper's funeral at the West Tce Cemetery - a site he passed on that bus ride to his death more than seven months earlier. The funeral was paid for by the South Australian Grandstand Bookmakers' Association and arranged by Laurie Elliott.

Laurie's nephew, prominent funeral director Tony, still follows the case today and speaks about it regularly at conferences.

During the coronial inquest in April 1949, a Professor Cleland re-examined the evidence and found something the police had earlier missed.

He found a tiny, scrunched-up piece of paper in the inside fob pocket of the man's trousers. It only deepened the mystery.

The words "Taman Shud" were written on the paper, but detectives Len Brown and Raymond Leane did not know what they meant. A local reporter told police they were the last two words of the poem The Rubaiyat written 900 years ago by the Persian poet Omar Khayyam and translated into English at the end of the 19th century.

The words are roughly translated as "The End" or "The Finish" and the poem's last verse before the words Taman Shud read:

And when thyself with silver foot shall pass  
Among the Guests Star-scatter'd on the grass  
And in your joyous Errand reach the Spot  
Where I made One - turn down an empty Glass!

Police instantly linked this to their early suicide poison theory - but there was still no evidence to support their supposition.

All they had to explain the death was two words and a mysterious suitcase.

Again, as the death looked like never being solved, the police received a new piece of evidence when a Glenelg doctor revealed he had come by a copy of The Rubaiyat in unusual circumstances.

Unexplained, someone had thrown a copy of the book into the back of his unlocked car while it had been parked in

Moseley Sq the night before the man's death.

The copy had a piece torn out of its last page. The missing piece was "Taman Shud".

Even more mysterious was a code scribbled on the inside cover in pencil - a code that remains unsolved today.

Fresh with what they believed was their missing link, detectives Brown and Leane tried to trace the origins of the book.

They found a telephone number in the back and contacted a former nurse, who was living in South Australia.

She told police she had once owned a copy and had given it to a soldier, Alf Boxall, when she was working in Sydney.

"We've got him," police thought. "All we have to do is find Boxall's family."

But the search again led to a dead end when they found Mr Boxall - alive and well.

He admitted having a copy of The Rubaiyat and showed it to police - intact and with no code scrawled in the back and no missing "Taman Shud".

The woman, who at the time lived in Glenelg - just a short walk from where the man's body was found - still said she knew nothing of the Somerton man.

She said she gave the book to the army lieutenant as a gift in 1945, but later married. Police kept no record of her name.

It was also suggested the soldier was involved in intelligence work during World War II - adding to the intrigue of their coincidental involvement. Detective Senior Sergeant Feltus said the "spy theory was often raised".

"It is one of the most intriguing subjects I have ever dealt with," he said.

"It is a complete mystery and because there is so much unknown detail many theories come into play.

"One branch-off is the 'Spy Theory' and this in itself cannot be excluded. The link between the location of where the body was found, the contact number of the nurse and the link between the two copies of the book are also a mystery.

"The so-called code in the book also opens up another can of worms."

Throughout all the twists and turns of this remarkable story, the code has proven the most intriguing. It has been passed on to thousands of people - but no one can shed any real light on it.

Leading mathematicians, astrologers and code-breakers have all tried to crack it using their own theories. The note even was given to Naval Intelligence in the 1990s.

A Tasmanian man has spent most of the last year trying to match the letters to numbers in a scene reminiscent of Russell Crowe in the movie A Beautiful Mind.

And a New South Wales man believes the answer is in lining up the letters to musical notes.

But while many have their own theories, none makes any more sense than the case itself. All the lingering questions remain: Was it suicide or murder? Was he a spy or a jilted lover? Was the mystery nurse involved in any way? How did he die? Where did the poison and/or the luggage ticket go?

After 56 years, police are no closer to answering any of these questions.

DNA evidence is available to police in hair strands at the police museum, but there is no evidence to match it to.

His fingerprints were distributed around the world, but recorded no match.

All police know is his last meal was a pastie.

Will this case ever reach "Taman Shud"?

NOVEMBER 30, 1948

BEFORE 10.45am

> A TALL, tanned man, about 45, walks from Adelaide Railway Station to the City Baths, behind Parliament House, where he showers and shaves.

BETWEEN 10.50am & 11.10am

HE returns to the railway station and pays sixpence for a train ticket to Henley Beach. He then checks his bag into the cloak room.

ABOUT 11.10am

> HE crosses North Tce to the Strathmore Hotel and catches a bus to Glenelg.

ABOUT 11.40am

> HE gets off in front of the St Leonard's Hotel on Anzac Hwy.

> SOMEWHERE in Glenelg, he eats a pastie, his last meal.

DUSK

> HE is seen lying, apparently alive, in the sand at the top of the beach opposite the old Crippled

Children's Home.

DECEMBER 1, 1948

6.30am

> HE is found dead.

JUNE 14, 1949

> HE is buried at West Tce Cemetery.

WHO WAS HE? This picture of the dead man was widely published in Australia and overseas, with police encouragement, in an attempt to identify him. Police still hope someone will come forward with information.

CRACKING THE CODE

THE letters scrawled on the back of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam which the mystery man threw away a short time before his death have long fascinated code breakers. AT the back of the book, in pencil, were printed the lines:

> MRGOABABD  
 > MTBIMPANETP  
 > MLIABOIAQC  
 > ITTMTSAMSTGAB

RENOWNED code breaker Jim Gillogly, a California computer scientist, believes the letters are just as likely to be his actual thoughts. Rather than spell them out, the man may simply have used the first letters of words.

FOR example, MLIABO could represent "My Life Is A Bundle Of..."

ITTM could be "I Think That My..."

"THIS is credible for a suicide note," Mr Gillogly says.

ANOTHER code-breaking guru, British scientist and maths whiz Simon Singh, concurs with Mr Gillogly's theory, saying the note "doesn't appear to be too complicated" and the letters are likely to be acronyms from a message to himself or an associate.

DETECTIVE Senior Sergeant Gerry Feltus, who has been involved in the case in recent years, says if this theory were applied, the last line could be "It's Time To Move To South Australia Moseley Street

Caption: PAYING RESPECTS: Salvation Army Captain E. Webb says a prayer over the man's coffin. Others who are known to have attended the burial included funeral director Laurie Elliott, Advertiser police roundsman Bob Whittington, a police Sergeant Sutherland and funeral assistant Claude Trelvelion.  
 RIGHT: The small headstone with its brief inscription at the head of the pauper's grave  
 UNCLAIMED: Detectives with the man's suitcase  
 LAST RESTING PLACE: Where the body was found at Somerton  
 MISSING LINK: The copy of The Rubaiyat with the tornout section on the last page

Illus: Photo: dead man found at somerton beach  
 Photo: funeral of man found at somerton beach  
 Photo: grave of unknown man  
 Photo: suitcase belongings of unknown man  
 Photo: site where body was found  
 Photo: note of letters in code  
 Photo: torn page of book 'the rubaiyat'

Library Heading: Unidentified bodies - South Australia  
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Column: extra

Section: FEATURES

Type: Article

SUM-20041107-1-076-2028174V30

## Sunday Mail

Sunday Mail (SA), Edition 1 - State

SUN 07 NOV 2004, Page 073

### No Title

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Eight weeks in a human hell

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