

Unparalled Mystery" Somerton Body Case
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GRAVE in an Adelaide cemetery bears a simple epitaph; "Here lies the body of an unidentified man found on Somerton Beach 1st December 1948." Each spring, flowers are placed on the grave. Does the donor know who the man was? Or are they put there by a stranger, moved by those forlorn words?

Nobody knows.

The mourner's identity, like that of the dead man, has never been established. It is yet another riddle in a case punctuated by question marks, a mystery which even today remains one of the most baffling in Australia. Not even the death mask pictured above was able to solve the identity - let alone the case itself.

Not only is the dead man's identity unknown. There also are few clues as to how he died. It wasn't from natural causes but was it suicide or was it murder?

One theory is that he was involved in espionage. The Cold War had begun and at Woomera, in South Australia, a top-secret rocket range was being built.

Was he a spy who knew too much? If so, on whose side?

Or is there a simpler explanation - a broken-hearted lover who decided to end his life there on the beach?

This week, a program titled The Somerton Beach Mystery attempts to answer some of the questions.

The program, produced and directed Neil Munro, is the second in the

seven-part series titled Inside Story, which began in all states at 8pm on August 17. The Somerton Beach Mystery screens at 8pm on Thursday, August 24.

The series covers a wide range of subjects which, besides The Somerton Beach Mystery, include a woman's search for her real mother after the death of her adoptive parents; the relationship between former jockey Theo Greene and the apprentice jockeys he now trains; and a look at Australia's zaniest businessman, Dick Smith, the man who sailed a dummy iceberg into Sydney Harbour on April Fool's Day.

Somerton Beach Mystery,

New Enquiry On Somerton Body In a letter to the super

reporter Stuart Littlemore discusses some of the theories put forward about the case, talks to leading protagonists involved in the police investigation and does some sleuthing of his own.

The case has all the ingredients of an Agatha Christie thriller. But it's a fact, not fiction, and the final chapter, with a neat solution to the mystery, has yet to be written.

Today, nearly 30 years later, it is still a bizarre jumble of clues leading nowhere.

But on that December morning when the man's body was found on Somerton Beach, south of Adelaide's popular beach resort of Glenelg, there was nothing to suggest this was the start of such a long investigation on which the police file is still open.

Police expected someone to identify the man within days. But no one did.

Then, at the coroner's inquest the doctor who performed the autopsy said the man's stomach had been deeply congested with blood. In his opinion death was caused by heart failure due to poisoning. But no trace of poison was found.

The man had been seen propped up against the sea wall on Somerton Beach on the evening of November 30 by a local businessman and his wife. They saw his arm move and assumed he was drunk. He was also seen by a young couple.

Next morning, when the businessman returned to the beach for a swim, he saw the man again. This time he was dead.

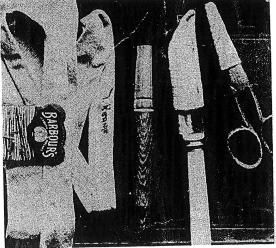
The man, aged about 45, was in good physical condition, and his features suggested he was European rather than Australian. This was significant to those who believed in the espionage theory, as many Baltic migrants were working on the construction of Woomera. His hands, however, showed no signs of manual work.

All the name tags on the clothes he was wearing had been torn off, as were most of those on clothes in an unclaimed suitcase later linked to the dead man which was found at Adelaide's railway station. There



Courtesy of the Adelaide Advertiser

Detectives Lionel Leane (left) and Les Brown with contents of the dead man's suitcase.





Some of the discarded items and, at right, the torn Rubaiyat.

was nothing unusual about the contents of his pockets except for one item, a torn piece of paper on which were printed the words "Tamam Shud."

The meaning of the words baffled Detectives Lionel Leane and Les Brown, the policemen assigned to the case until, at last, a journalist supplied the answer. They

were the last words of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam and meant "The End."

These two words were to become the most frustrating clue in the whole case. Time and time again they seemed to be leading police to a solution but each time they led instead to a blank wall.

In July the following year, a man

contacted police and told them that, on November 30, 1948, he had found a copy of the Rubaiyat in his car which had been parked in Glenelg.

He hadn't realised its importance until he had read a newspaper story about the case. He had then looked at the book and had found a piece of paper had been torn from the last page. The paper with the words "Tasmam Shud" fitted perfectly.

This suggested a rather theatrical suicide note, the dead man presumably tearing the words out of the book which he then tossed into the back seat of a car before going on to kill himself on the beach.

But there was something else. On the back cover were two phone numbers and a jumble of letters which many people believe is a code or cypher. If it is, no-one, including experts, has been able to break it.

The police had better luck with the phone numbers. One led to a woman who said she had given a copy of the book to an army lieutenant, Alf Boxall, whom she had met while nursing in Sydney during the war.

In the hope that one day someone would be able to identify the dead man, a plaster-cast bust was made from his body. The woman, who wishes to remain anonymous, identified this as Boxall.

But Boxall was alive and well.
Police found him in Sydney. He



still had his copy of the Rubaiyat with an inscription, written by the nurse, on the front cover. He also bore a strong resemblance to the dead man. In the TV program, Littlemore interviews Boxall at his Sydney home, discussing the case and the circumstances in which he was given his copy of the Rubaiyat — which he still has.

Littlemore also talks to the policemen, Brown, now a chief superintendent, and Leane, retired, who both give their theories about the dead man and how he died.

One man who believes the dead man was a spy is Sydney postman John Ruffles, who is researching foreign espionage in Australia from 1813 to 1962 for a book. In an interview with Littlemore he gives his reasons for this belief.

And what of the people who came to view the plaster bust of the unknown man in the Adelaide Museum? Did any of them appear to recognise him? The man who made the cast and who showed it to them was Paul Lawson, now a Museums Exhibitions Officer, and he talks to Littlemore about his impressions and about his own conclusions.

Although there are dozens of theories, the police investigation came to a dead end with the discovery that Boxall was alive. The police were left with two copies of the same book, linked by the mysterious woman who had given one to Boxall and whose phone number was found in the other.

Story: Jacqueline Lee Lewes