

THE SUSAN KNIGHT MURDER



The victim – Susan Knight.

On the 8th July 1976 the newspapers reported around the country the brutal murder of a young woman, her body found between Dromedary and Elderslie, 30 kilometres north of Hobart city. It had been located by a party of 50 police cadets and police officers.

The half naked body of Susan Knight, only 24 years of age, was found off the Dromedary road, where police believed she died of massive head wounds. Head of the Hobart CIB was Detective Inspector Aub Canning who took over. Another heavily involved in the case, Detective Superintendent, J.H. Smith said, “This is one of the most brutal killings I have come across”.

“This latest murder will bring home to topple the fact that serious crimes are increasing to what is mainly a rural State”. (Mercury 8th July)

Susan Knight was a car sales woman, working at Co-operative Motors. She had responded to a call from a potential customer to meet with her on a business basis. She had taken a Volkswagen car to a man calling himself Mr. Bennett and asked to have the car delivered to the Bridgewater Service station for a test drive. She never returned as a result a search was made. After two days of her going missing, about 50 metres off the road they found parts of her clothing and before long her body was found beneath a mound of timber, rocks and sticks. A log had been placed across her head. Her handbag was found close by.

She was the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. L.W. Knight of Sandy Bay. It would have been shocking news for them.

After making the arrangements with Mr Bennett, Susan received a follow-up call from Mr Bennett asking her to meet him instead along the Dromedary Road, three miles from Bridgewater on the eastern side of the River Derwent. Prior the company for which she worked in an advertisement offered customers to test drive their Volkswagen and if wanting to do so, contact Susan Knight.

On the 9th July The Mercury newspaper stated that a man was to appear in court regarding the girl's death. It was a quick arrest and subsequently convicted of the murder was Geoffrey Charles Hunt who was gaoled.

Hunt had actually called into the Glenorchy Police Station and asked for Sgt. Gall as he wanted to confess to the murder. Being told that Gall was not there, he returned home. At the time he was working shift work at the Boyer Mills and was picked up on the way to work on the 7th August 1976 on the Dromedary road just before midnight. He was taken to the Glenorchy Police Station and appeared before Inspector Aub Canning. What followed was an extensive interrogation before Sgt O'Garey. O'Garey was to report that Hunt did not show any sign of emotion. There was a break for breakfast at about 9:10am after which another hour and half of interrogation continued. It was during this time the missing girl Lucille Butterworth was mentioned by O'Garey to Hunt, but in the 2015 Inquiry Proceedings, Hunt stated that he could not remember.*

Hunt again confessed to the murder of Miss Knight. It was he who called himself Mr. Bennett and lured her to a remote location along Church Road off Dromedary Road, sexually assaulted her and bashed her head in with a rock. He was sentenced to life in gaol with a non-parole period of 25 years. This enabled him to be given a fixed gaol term, including a non parole period, instead of an open-ended sentence. He was released in the year 2000, after his psychiatrist Dr. Wilfred Lopes stated that the prospect of Hunt re-offending was minute. This clashes with the psychiatric report of 1976 when it described Hunt as a sexual psychopath.

*Inquiry 1st December



Geoffrey Charles Hunt 2015

Hunt had been seen in the area at the same time and after police arrested him, he made a detailed confession to the crime. Indeed on the day of the woman's murder, Hunt went to the New Norfolk Police station to confess to the murder, but lost his nerve.

On September 28 1976 Hunt had appeared in court and was sentenced for Knight's murder. He lived at Station Street New Norfolk and pleaded guilty to the murder, July 5th. Mr. Justice Crawford passed the mandatory sentence after a 15 minutes hearing in the Hobart Criminal Court.

The court hearing revealed that Hunt after meeting up with Miss Knight persuaded her to drive along Church Road, off Dromedary Road where he did his most foul deed.

Hunt's counsel, Mr. P.J. Wright handed to Mr Justice Crawford two psychiatric reports by Dr. I.P. Burges Watson and Dr. E. Cunningham-Dax.

Mr Justice Crawford said that from the reports it was clear Hunt was seriously sexually disordered. The doctors had indicated that there was a danger of more offences and they had recommended intensive psychiatric examination over the years before Hunt's eventual discharge.

Justice William Cox (8th October 1999) that "It would be in my view that after more than 23 years in custody, (Hunt) should be permitted to seek parole from the board and that any greater restriction upon his ability to do is unnecessary to ensure that justice according to law is not violated", he said, adding, "Whether or not to release him is the responsibility of the Parole Board."

Later he would become the main person of interest in the 1969 disappearance of Lucille Butterworth a coronial inquest beginning in September 2015. It is claimed that Hunt made a full confession to the murder of Butterworth. (See chapter on Lucille Butterworth). Superintendent Ken O'Garey said that Hunt said he had given Miss Butterworth a lift and the pair talked as they drove towards New Norfolk before he attacked her.

THOMPSON THE LAST MAN TO BE HANGED IN TASMANIA.

On a quiet Sunday morning, July 8 1945, little Evelyn Maughan left her home at 100 Goulburn Street, Hobart, to go alone to mass at nearby St Joseph's Catholic Cathedral, corner Macquarie and Harrington Streets.

She did not arrive.

Three months later her decomposed body was discovered at an old cemetery by an interstate visitor, while searching for his father's tombstone. The police were called and on the following day Frederick Henry Thompson was arrested for the murder of Evelyn Maughan.

After being found guilty he was hung 6 am February 14, 1946. He had the dubious distinction of being Tasmania's last executed person. He is buried in an unmarked grave in the pauper's section Cornelian Bay just north of Hobart City.

What follows is a report on the tragic episode.

The Maughan Family

The Maughan family was an old established Tasmanian family. Before moving to Hobart, they worked on rural properties in the Huon Valley, particularly at Castle Forbes Bay

By 1943 the Maughan family was living at 100 Goulburn Street, Hobart. The father, Bernard, was a private serving with the Australian Army and believed to be stationed within Australia. His wife, Nancy Doreen Lila Grace, nee Mason, was daughter of Lionel Laliah Mason who worked on the tramways. Her mother died when she as very young. Nancy and her father, Lionel, lived in the house with