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**Subject:** Johnson stories  
**Date:** Monday, 13 April 2015 14:15:28

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Hi Pam and Mick,

Please see the online news stories below.

I've spoken to Dan Box, and he is unsure yet whether there will be a story in tomorrow's paper, but he is grateful for the backgrounder as he says it has certainly given some perspective to the matter, and that it's not necessarily the big story the Johnsons are pushing. He'll let me know if he's asked to write for tomorrow.

We've had no requests at this time.

Kind regards,

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## Gay-hate murder theory: Third inquest into Scott Johnson's cliff-fall death

Date  
 April 13, 2015 - 1:40PM

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**Rick Feneley**

*News and features writer*

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/gayhate-murder-theory-third-inquest-into-scott-johnsons-cliff-fall-death-20150413-1mju3g.html>

Third inquest into Scott Johnson death

Scott Johnson's death in Manly in 1988 will be re-investigated after the New South Wales Coroner ordered a third inquest be conducted.

The State Coroner has ordered an extraordinary third inquest into the cliff-fall death of American Scott Johnson, whose family believes his "gay hate" killer or killers could be caught more than 26 years after his plunge from Sydney's North Head was ruled to be a suicide.

"The perpetrators are probably still alive and local," Mr Johnson's brother, Steve, said outside the Coroner's Court at Glebe after the decision on Monday morning.

"I think this decision lights a fire under the people who committed this crime and thought they got away with it."

The inquest could question "no fewer than 50 people of interest" and investigate "five gangs or loose groups" who were known to have been bashing gay men in the same area at the time Mr Johnson, a 27-year-old maths genius and PhD student, fell from the cliff near Blue Fish Point, counsel assisting the Johnson family, John Agius, SC, told the court.

Sarah Pritchard, SC, for Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione, told the court that police would not resist a third inquest.

But she "put on the record" that Detective Chief Inspector Pamela Young – the Unsolved Homicide Unit investigator who prepared a 445-page report for the court – did not believe another inquest would lead to a

different conclusion than the open finding delivered by Coroner Carmel Forbes in 2012. Ms Forbes found it could have been suicide, an accident or murder.

Mr Johnson said he had stood outside the same court 26 years ago when Coroner Derrick Hand delivered the suicide finding, based on a hasty "non-investigation" by police, and which he has never believed. A wealthy IT entrepreneur, he has spent about \$1 million investigating the case since 2007, driving his own and police inquiries that have led to the latest decision by Coroner Michael Barnes.

The court could not confirm a report that it was the first time in NSW that a third inquest had been ordered into the same case, although Mr Agius referred to the "historical" nature of the matter. Nationally, it compares with the Azaria Chamberlain case, which was the subject of three inquiries.

Mr Agius told the court it was "beyond comprehension" that Chief Inspector Young's report had devoted a great deal of time to the suicide theory when there was not a "skerrick of evidence" to support it and that this possibility had been "put to bed".

He objected to police having any say in the scope of the inquest, saying the family had no confidence in their position – and claimed that police were opposing a third inquest only last week.

"I don't know who has fallen off their horse since last week," Mr Agius said.

Ms Pritchard rejected that police had ever opposed a third inquest.

The Crown Solicitor had recommended Mr Barnes order the third inquest. But outside court, Mr Johnson said he was disappointed that the wheels of justice would still turn slowly, and it would be at least another year before any formal finding.

Mr Johnson ordered his own investigation in 2007 in the wake of another coronial finding that two gay men and probably a third had been murdered around the Bondi-Tamarama clifftops amid a spate of gay-hate crimes in the late 1980s.

Police experts who gave evidence in that case suspect they could have been among as many as 30 gay men bashed to death over about three decades.

Scott Johnson's body was found at the base of the cliff near Manly on December 10, 1988.

**Do you know more?** [rfeneley@fairfaxmedia.com.au](mailto:rfeneley@fairfaxmedia.com.au)

## Third inquest opened into gay 'murder'

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/latest-news/third-inquest-opened-into-gay-murder/story-fn3dxiwe-1227301825428>

AAP  
APRIL 13, 2015 1:46PM

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**THE coroner has opened a third inquest into the death of a man found at the bottom of a Sydney cliff just over 26 years ago.**

AMERICAN Scott Johnson's body was found at the base of Manly's North Head on December 10, 1988.

It was originally deemed suicide but Mr Johnson's family believe he was a victim of a gay hate crime.

Following a brief hearing in Sydney on Monday, NSW Coroner Michael Barnes agreed to reopen the inquest into the 27-year-old's death.

Detectives in 2013 formed Strike Force Macnamir to review the case after it was featured in ABC TV's Australian Story.

The NSW homicide squad also announced a \$100,000 reward for information about Mr Johnson's death.

No suggestion of foul play arose during initial investigations and the death was ruled a suicide by a coronial inquest in 1989.

But a second inquest held in 2012 returned an open finding and the case was referred to the State Crime Command's Unsolved Homicide Team.

Mr Johnson came to Australia to live with his partner and study mathematics.

He died on the day he should have been celebrating the completion of his doctoral work.

# Coroner requests third inquest into 1988 cliff death of Scott Johnson at North Head

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/northern-beaches/coroner-requests-third-inquest-into-1988-cliff-death-of-scott-johnson-at-north-head/story-fngr8hax-1227301781162>

JOHN MORCOMBE  
MANLY DAILY  
APRIL 13, 2015 1:21PM

**THE death of a man whose naked body was found at the foot of North Head in December 1988 will be reinvestigated after the State Coroner ordered a third inquest be conducted.**

The body of Scott Johnson, 27, an American maths student who had just completed his PhD was found at the foot of the cliff between Shelly Beach Headland and Blue Fish Point.

The first coronial inquest ruled it a case of suicide.

But Mr Johnson's family believed he was murdered in a gay-hate crime, a number of which were subsequently found to have occurred in the late 1980s, especially in the eastern suburbs.

The Johnson family sent American investigative reporter Daniel Glick to Australia in 2007 to examine the case and in 2012, the Deputy State Coroner ordered a second inquest, at which the original coronial finding was quashed and an open finding was returned.

The matter was also referred on to cold case detectives and in 2013 a reward of \$100,000 was offered for information about Mr Johnson's death.

The second inquest heard Mr Johnson was a brilliant mathematician studying on the northern beaches at the time of his death.

He had just received news that he would be completing his PhD and was celebrating becoming an uncle.

A 445-page statement relating to Strike Force Macnamir, which was set up after the second inquest, was submitted to the Coroner ahead of the directions hearing and police said they welcomed that information being scrutinised in the upcoming inquest.

The Johnson family's lawyer, John Agius SC, reportedly told the Coroner's Court today that a private investigation had identified up to 50 of people of interest and several gangs who attacked gay men.