

# WOMAN'S DEATH IN LION'S CAGE

## "Martyrdom" Theory Advanced By Doctor

A woman whose mangled body, gripped in the jaws of a young lion, was found in a cage at the South Perth Zoo on March 8, may have chosen a lion's den to end her life in the manner of the early Christian martyrs.

Dr. D. S. MacKenzie, Acting-District Medical Officer, advanced this theory yesterday when giving evidence at an inquest on the death of Dorothy Constance Viveash Bostock (49), of First-avenue, Mt. Lawley.

According to other medical evidence, the deceased was in a depressed state of mind and had "strong feelings of guilt" before she was found in the cage with the lion on the morning of her death.

Dr. MacKenzie said that the deceased may have regarded that method of taking her life as not only effective but also spectacular, and may possibly have regarded it as a means of "expiating" imaginary sins of the past. He had a recollection, he said, of having attended her about 15 or 20 years ago. She was then suffering from a psychosis but was not certifiable.

### Fence Climbed

His post-mortem examination, said witness, disclosed the cause of death to be multiple injuries, dislocation of the neck and shock. He was practically certain that injuries to the shoulder,

snock. He was practically certain that injuries to the shoulder, neck and left arm were ante-mortem; the claw marks and scratches were mainly post-mortem. Deceased was probably conscious when attacked by the lion and in his opinion had climbed the enclosure fence and had been attacked while still facing the fence.

The Coroner (Mr. R. P. Rodriguez): I visited the zoo yesterday and climbed the fence and I found it a pretty difficult operation.

Dr. MacKenzie: The deceased's climbing of the fence is characteristic of a person suffering from mental instability. Persons in such a condition are capable of performing feats of strength and agility considered extremely difficult for even the best-trained athletes.

Dr. L. Wilson, of St. George's-terrace, who attended the deceased two days before her death, said that she was show-

ing signs of mental disorder. She had strong feelings of guilt and was depressed, feeling that her life had been a failure. Witness had offered to give her treatment and in her presence had tried to obtain a bed for her in hospital, but none was available immediately. During the consultation she was calm and rational and did not strike

and rational and did not strike him as being potentially suicidal.

Evidence concerning the disappearance of the deceased from her aunt's home in Hardy-street, South Perth, and of the subsequent finding of the body in the lion's cage, were given by other witnesses. According to Raymond George Smith, a tile fixer, of Norfolk-street, North Perth, he noticed the lion dragging something around in the sand when on his way to work about 7.50 a.m. He recognised it as a naked body.

William Kenneth Lyall, the zoo superintendent, said that the body was lying in the sand with the lion lying nearby when he arrived on the scene. The lion was moved to another enclosure by means of water hoses before the body was removed.

### **"In Expiation"**

Sgt. A. Duperouzel, of South Perth, said that when he saw the body it was lying on the cement flooring with the head submerged in a drinking trough. He found two shoes and several pieces of dress fabric inside the cage. Outside the fence he found tracks in the sand apparently made by a woman's shoes and there were marks on the wire mesh indicating that she had climbed straight up the 16ft. fence.

"I have no doubt in my mind," said the Coroner, "that the deceased was suffering from mental distress and that she had apparently made up her mind to take her own life. I am inclined to agree with Dr. MacKenzie that she had imitated the early Christians by throwing herself into the lion's cage in expiation of some imaginary crime."

He found that she had died from multiple injuries, dislocation of the neck and shock through being mauled by a lion after having deliberately entered the enclosure. Mr. Rodriguez also found that at the time the deceased had been suffering from mental disorder and had been mentally depressed as a result of ill-health.

health.

Sgt. L. H. Scott assisted the Coroner, and Mr. W. Byass appeared for the deceased's relatives.

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