



Arson hits a Claremont fitness centre after graffiti and vandalism in recent months. Picture: Arnold Hams

Health club torched

A fire that caused \$1 million damage to the former BC The Body Club building in Claremont was deliberately lit, according to the police arson squad.

The top floor of the building, on the corner of Stirling Highway and Stirling Road, burst into flames on Monday night.

Police said there had been ongoing problems with intrusions into the site.

There was evidence of vandalism and graffiti inside the building. A skateboard ramp had been built on the ground floor.

A brick had been thrown through a plate-glass window from inside.

A small fire was seen there on the previous day, and some youths had been chased out of the building, said Detective Senior Constable Kevin Wisbey.

Will Zampatti (14), of Subiaco, spotted the start of the fire soon after 8pm.

He said it was a small fire in the south-east corner of the first floor, but it quickly took hold.

Will, who was in his family's car, pointed out the fire to his parents, who called the fire service.

Detective Wisbey said the witness's account matched the police investigation.

There was no power to the building.

The seat of the fire appeared to be in a stack of timber in a corner of the top floor.

The fire quickly spread to the straw ceiling and engulfed the top floor once the windows broke, allowing more air inside.

It took four fire units to bring the blaze under control.

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Christie: more questions

New scientific evidence has emerged that throws grave doubt on Rory Christie's conviction for the murder of his former wife Susan Christie, according to people working on his appeal.

The jury was told at the murder trial last September that Susan Christie's blood was on Rory Christie's tie.

Other central evidence was that Mrs Christie was said to have been savagely murdered in her Daglish flat in 2001.

Her body has never been found.

Two new experts have now thrown doubt on this evidence.

If they are correct, Mr Christie's appeal next month could be an eerie parallel to the famous appeal of Lindy Chamberlain, wrongly imprisoned for the murder of her baby daughter Azaria in 1982.

Police said Mrs Chamberlain murdered her baby in the front

By BRET CHRISTIAN

seat of the family car. Her appeal revealed that a chemical used to test foetal blood gave a false positive reaction when placed on sound-deadening material sprayed in the car.

Perth police sprayed the testing chemical luminol on Mr Christie's tie and through Mrs Christie's flat.

The luminol glowed in the dark, an indication that blood was present, even dilute blood that has been cleaned.

But Joseph Slemco, a Canadian police officer and international crime scene blood expert, says contemporary knowledge is that luminol can give a similar reaction to a minimum of eight common substances, including watermelon, citrus fruits, bleach, rust, horseradish, iodine and various plant material.

He said that when luminol glowed it could not be said to be reacting with blood unless further confirming tests were carried out.

Mr Christie's supporters said that for some of the crucial

positive reactions, no evidence had been given at the trial that confirming tests were done.

The supporters say Mr Slemco's work also throws doubt on where and how Mrs Christie was murdered, and how her body was dealt with after the murder.

The tie tests and the police scenario of how and where Mrs Christie was murdered were said by the prosecution to be essential to convict Rory Christie of the murder.

Mr Slemco said some of the extensive bloodstains police said had been found in the flat might not have been blood at all.

The tests were not photographed. Lines thought to show bloody drag marks were not proved to be blood, he says.

Instead, they might have been the wheel marks of a household item such as a vacuum cleaner or wheeled suitcase.

Mr Slemco said all the blood found in the flat had been portrayed at the trial as having been deposited at the same time.

But blood was very durable, he said, and might have innocent explanations.

He said the flat had been contaminated because many people had walked through it looking for clues to the missing woman in the two weeks before it was sealed off as a crime scene.

Even old blood in powder form tracked through the house would show up in luminol tests, he said.

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Alice's problems spiral

A steep spiral staircase is the latest problem to confront Alice, a 77-year-old pensioner diagnosed with mental illness.

"My legs ache and I've been here only one week," she said.

Alice owned an apartment for 18 years in a small Nedlands block - until the Public Trustee sold it when she was in Graylands Hospital early this year.

Now, out of desperation to stay away from Graylands, she has moved into a big block on Broadway occupied mainly by young university students.

Her rent is \$190 a week.

Her friend Pip Gavranich said: "This is entirely unsuitable. It's dirty, with long-term grime."

"I am a property owner and I would never rent a home like this. The shower had raw con-

crete where tiles had broken off and was covered with mould.

"There are damaged curtains and obscene graffiti scrawled on the door.

"The furniture should be at the tip - beds are rusted, the mattress torn and chair bottoms are burst.

"Worst of all, there is a spiral staircase.

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Each week 51,000 copies of the POST are distributed to every household and business in the western suburbs.

These suburbs are shown on the map on page 2. Extra copies are delivered to other selected riverside suburbs.

Alice's problems spiral

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"The toilet is upstairs and Alice sleeps downstairs because she cannot get her big bed up the stairs.

"This is a frail 77-year-old lady," Pip said.

"There is a very good chance she could fall and be hurt badly, or worse, if she has to go up and down those stairs in the middle of the night.

"I have just been around to blow up the real estate agent who rented this property, and they said it has been seen and sanctioned by the Public Trustee."

Pip said she was trying to find a ground-floor apartment for Alice.

She would lodge protests with the Ombudsman and the Mental Health Law Service.

The Public Trustee is prohibited by law from discussing individual cases, but Alice showed her letters from the trustee to the POST.

She says her life has become increasingly difficult since the Public Trustee sold her home.

She has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and is the subject of a community treatment order, which means she must attend a clinic every day for medication.

At the same time, the Public Trustee has been appointed administrator of her finances.

The Public Trustee holds more than \$90,000 from the sale of her home, but she can get to the money only by asking, and then



A steep and curving staircase is a challenge to 77-year-old Alice. Picture by Paul McGovern.

it is released in small amounts.

This week, the Public Trustee refused to give her some of her money to pay for clothes she has on layby or to buy a kettle.

A letter from the Public Trustee this week said: "Although I can appreciate what you want, I am unable to provide you with funds for the above items."

Sue Walker, Liberal MP for Nedlands, has been helping Alice and says she fears other people may be in the same sit-

uation - having lost control of their money and their property without being offered help or other housing.

Ms Walker raised the issue in state parliament this week with a series of questions to Justice Minister Michelle Roberts.

Ms Walker said Tom Percy QC would take on the case for Alice to prepare claims against authorities for negligence and loss of her money.

Surgery, teaching rewarded

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we had to take leave of absence to study overseas," he said.

Now Professor Vaughan supervises basic surgical training at the College of Surgeons, and said it was marvellous there were so many excellent doctors and surgeons coming through.

"Learning is changing - it is much more complicated," he said.

"There is better information, there is legal intrusion which can be a good thing, and communication skills are vital."

One of Professor Vaughan's recent triumphs was the establishment of the Clinical Training and Education Centre (CTEC) at the QEII Medical Centre.

Experts cast serious doubts

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Other tests done locally focused on whether Mr Christie's tie had been cleaned.

Rory Christie took clothes and a tie to Herdsman drycleaners on the days Mrs Christie disappeared.

The trial was told that three stains thought to be blood had been detected visually on one of 40 ties Mr Christie owned.

But an identical tie has had blood placed on it and has then been dry-cleaned. No stain is visible.

Mr Slemco has written a report that is being submitted to Mr Christie's lawyers. People working on the Christie case have pointed out other anomalies in the blood evidence (POST 15/5).

Mr Christie's appeal against his conviction is due next month.

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Underwood bush decision stuns UWA

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caused by an odour buffer zone surrounding the Shenton Park sewage farm.

Professor Robson said UWA had talks with the Water Corporation along with the Environment and Planning and Infrastructure departments.

"We were fairly confident we were going to get approval. We thought the EPA had considered all the arguments.

"We have been trying to get approval for four years.

"We did have a negotiated

position with Mr Kierath when he was planning minister but there was a change of government."

Professor Robson confirmed UWA had been talking to the government about using the Sunset Hospital site but said it was not being considered as a land swap.

"We did talk about a land swap ages ago," he said.

"We have been having discussions about the Sunset site (Dalkeith) as well as to whether we can locate some of our outreach activities there.

"We have talked to government through the public service. We are doing an assessment as to whether it is feasible. It is a separate issue," he said.

Mr Boase-Jelinek said the university could have saved millions of dollars on consultants and lawyers' fees if it had listened to his group.

"We have had the impression all along that they thought the old boys' network would get them through and they have not been prepared to compromise," he said.

"If they had listened to

our concerns and worked with us to develop something environmentally acceptable it would have been done by now.

"We would like to encourage them to sack their advisors and use the environmental, legal and town planning experts they have on their own staff."

Greens MP Giz Watson said she would write to Alannah MacTiernan, the minister responsible for lands, and ask her to acquire the site under the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authorities Act.

Broadway roadwork revisited

The Broadway roadworks are on again after a second U-turn by Nedlands council.

Seven councillors called another special meeting to overturn the decision made last week to do nothing.

That had reversed a vote to create a median strip between Stirling Highway and Cooper Street.

The latest decision, made less than a fortnight before the end of the financial year, means the council will have time to sign up for a \$105,000 federal government black spot grant.

If Main Roads WA agrees, work could start by the end of July, a council spokesman said.

Work at Broadway has been debated by Nedlands council for more than 10 years.

Shopkeepers have repeatedly argued their businesses would crumble if four parking bays were removed.

One of the owners of the newsagency, Margaret Sharman, told the meeting on Wednesday: "The local community, residents in the area and people who work there would like to retain the situation as it is."

Councillors were told there had been 53 accidents, three involving pedestrians, in five years.

Claremont health club torched

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Stirling Highway and Stirling Road were blocked off. One lane of Stirling Highway was still blocked next morning, causing long peak-hour traffic delays.

The lane was re-opened late on Tuesday morning after an engineer declared the structure was not in danger of collapse.

At the time of the fire, the building was nearing the construction phase of a new Inspired Life health club.

Demolition of part of the old Body Club building was finished, and the interior of the two-storey section that is being recycled was being stripped.

The building was insured. Inspired Life partners Chris Ruck and Kim Berger said the new centre would progress as planned, with some delay.

The roof was damaged but the main structure was sound and secure.

Anyone with information about the fire is asked to call Crime-stoppers on 1800 333 000.



Despite the fire, operators of Inspired Life say they still aim to open this year.