

## Mystery in the Christie mould

Now that Rory Christie is officially innocent, a deeper murder mystery worthy of Agatha Christie remains.

Who killed Susan Christie and where is her body?

Are police looking more closely at anyone associated with the case?

Vital exhibits lost, a laptop computer sold by the police between trials and forensic howlers are just some of the problems that litter this case.

Then there is the small matter of hundreds of hours of audio surveillance of Rory Christie's home and phone that was not revealed to his defence lawyers before his first trial (see page 11).

These did not come to light until a member of Mr Christie's team noticed one word of police jargon while sifting through a pile of documents.

Despite the scientific investigation being the most expensive in WA after the Claremont serial killer investigation, basic errors were made.

Visible in a police video of the crime scene are the great police-issue boots of the camera operator tramping from outside Mrs Christie's Daghish unit to the inside.

Police and civilians walked in and out of the unit before it was declared a crime scene, searched through cupboards and drawers and took things away.

A piece of bloodstained yellow foam cut from her three-seater couch by police has been lost. It could have yielded vital clues (see page 7).

Mr Christie's laptop computer, which he said he used on the morning he was said to be killing Susan Christie, was sold at a police auction for \$600 after the first trial.

Deep in its hard drive, vital date and time records could have been recorded.

The hard disk was wiped clean before the sale.

Another baffling mystery is the question of a Chicago Bulls T-shirt and white shorts, the last clothing Mrs Christie is known to have been wearing.

From witness statements and police photographs, these clothes apparently reappeared in Mrs Christie's wardrobe weeks after she disappeared, after an earlier unsuccessful search for them (POST, 26/11).

Then there is the puzzling matter of Mrs Christie's last phone calls, apparently unsuccessful attempts at 10.30pm to contact the girlfriend of one of her lovers.

The number called was on the page of her phone book that had been marked with a pencil and contained a tiny fragment of glass.

And bloodspatter expert Joe Slemko's assessment of the crime scene (see report page 6) raises the strong possibility that Mrs Christie was not killed in her flat but left with her killer.



Smiles of freedom: Rory Christie leaves court with his lawyer, Tom Percy, QC. Picture: Paul McGovern.

## Series of shocks that freed Christie

"I'm somewhat shocked," said Rory Christie seconds after Justice John McKechnie directed his jury panel of 17 men and women to find him not guilty of murdering his wife.

It had been the last of a series of shocks over 30 days for Mr Christie and his legal team as the trial heard 107 prosecution witnesses.

Standing at the top of the wooden staircase leading to the grim cells far below Court 2 of the Supreme Court, Mr Christie broke into a rare grin.

He was hugged by his lawyers, Tom Percy QC and Belinda Lonsdale, and shook hands with his instructing solicitor Ian Farquhar. He had just been staring at his fourth

Christmas inside the maximum security prison at Casuarina, for a crime he has always denied committing.

But before his defence had even started, the judge threw the prosecution case out of court.

Justice McKechnie said there was a defect in the evidence, and Mr Christie had no case to answer.

As Mr Christie (36) emerged for his first taste of freedom since August 2002, he looked at the sky like an uncaged bird.

And like an uncaged bird, he was uncertain about what to do next.

He had only one burning ambition - to go to the beach for a swim, then head to

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Rory and Susan Christie on their wedding day in 1995.

## Sex offender upsets locals

Some Claremont residents are outraged that a convicted child sex offender, released from custody and given a suspended sentence, is back operating a business in an area frequented by young children.

They say they want him out of the area and are concerned for the safety of children using John Mulder Park, on Davies Road between Lapsley Road and Lakeway.

Simon Delmage Cairns (26), proprietor of The Cane Clinic in Lakeway, pleaded guilty in the District Court to one count of indecent dealing with a 15-year-old girl and another of sexual penetration of a 13-year-old girl.

The offences took place as the girls were walking to Rossmoyne Senior High School on the morning of December 2, 2003.

He was living in Craigie at the time of the offences.

On November 18, Cairns received a nine-month suspended prison term and was placed on an intensive supervision order for

12 months.

The order required him to have counselling and be closely supervised by Community Justice Services officers.

His name would go on a police register of sex offenders.

But local residents say they were not aware that Cairns had been released from custody until they saw him at his business premises in the past week.

Cairns worked in the furniture business with his father, Brian, and took over the running of the business after he died in 2002.

A resident, who asked not to be identified, said:

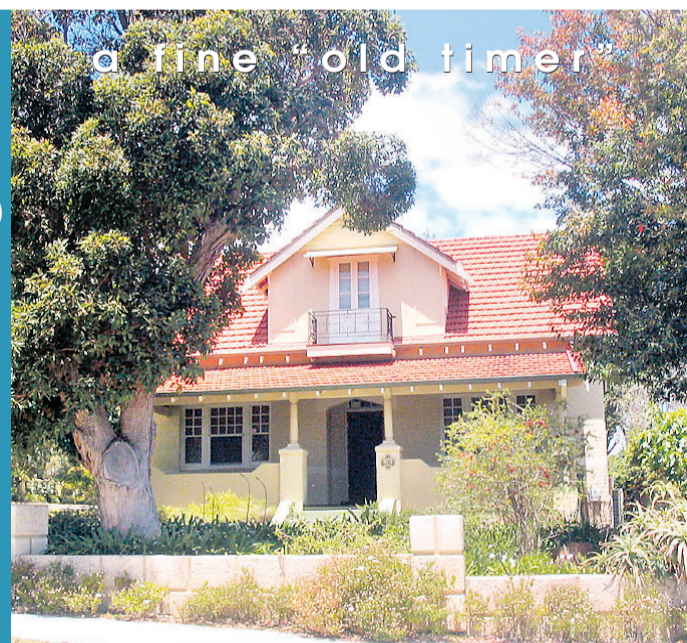
"We were not made aware he was out - how does this happen?"

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# Series of shocks that freed Rory Christie

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**FOR NEWS ON YOUR DOORSTEP**

the beach for a swim, then head to Canada to see his son Frazer, now aged nine.

Accompanying Mr Christie and his step-father, Ron Christie, will be Frazer's elder brother, Mrs Christie's son by her first marriage.

Frazer flew to Australia earlier this year with Mr Christie's sister, Dana, and visited his father in jail.

Dana and Mr Christie's mother in Canada were the first to be phoned by Ron Christie with the news of Mr Christie's sudden release.

Dana had sat through the first trial in 2003 and was devastated by the guilty verdict.

Ron Christie had dared not be optimistic this time. At the previous trial he had been so confident of the result that he had bought Rory Christie a ticket home for the day of the verdict.

On Thursday night Ron Christie bought dinner for Mr Christie's defence team and supporters - civilians who worked behind the scenes to gather evidence for his appeal and retrial.

The series of trial shocks started with a letter from the prosecution advising the defence that they would not be calling Gregg Baird as a witness.

Mr Baird was a man who advertised in a swingers' magazine and visited the units where Mrs Christie lived the last night she was seen alive.

He had advised the prosecution that he had a clear recollection of seeing a mustard-coloured Jaguar car parked outside Mrs Christie's flat as he entered the block.

The owner of a similar car had



Former girlfriend Michelle Terdich.



Drycleaner Wayne Fowler.

denied knowing where Mrs Christie lived.

In a rare move, Mr Baird was called as a witness by the judge, who said there was a chance of a miscarriage of justice if he did not give evidence.

At the end of the trial, Justice McKechnie ruled that there was no evidence given at the trial capable of proving someone else was responsible for Mrs Christie's death.

The second shock came when Michelle Terdich, Mr Christie's partner at the time Susan Christie disappeared, gave evidence.

## Sex offender's release upsets Claremont locals

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"Quite a few locals want to know what we can do to make our community safer."

Another said: "I am concerned about the number of children in the area and schools and that the Cane Clinic backs on to a park near a playground."

In determining the sentence, Judge Bill Groves said he considered that Cairns had been in custody for 5½ months since his bail was revoked on June 2, 2005.

He was granted bail of \$10,000 with a further surety of \$10,000 when he was charged in February.

As a condition of his bail he was not to contact victims or witnesses.

At a later court appearance in March his bail conditions were tightened to specify "not to loiter within 500m of any school".

On June 2, Cairns' bail was revoked and he went into custody.

Judge Groves said the bail revocation followed "evidence be-

fore the court to the effect of your continuing behaviour which suggested, perhaps, breach of the bail conditions".

In reaching his verdict, Judge Groves said Cairns' guilty plea spared victims the ordeal of giving evidence and suggested remorse.

The risk of reoffending had been assessed as "at the lower-risk end of the medium to low category", Judge Groves said.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, Robert Cock, has confirmed he is considering whether to lodge an appeal against Cairns' sentence.

Tensions between residents and the Cane Clinic have been longstanding.

A civil action bought by Claremont council against the site being used for this type of business was lost in the Supreme Court in May.

Cairns told the POST he did not want to comment.

## Perry Lakes bill soars

• From page 3

"Training tracks could run through the community.

"Why couldn't public open space be integrated into training circuits and public art?"

Mr Llewellyn said the housing development did not have to be very high density.

Building could be two or three times the height of existing trees to complement the landscape.

A Greens suggestion for a light rail system to service the sports facilities and new housing estate was not on the cards, said Ms Farina.

"At this stage the proposal would be to increase bus services to the area," she said.

Ms Farina said the Minister had rejected a suggestion from Liberal Norman Moore to defer the Bill until after Christmas so there could be more talks with the council.

"The government is of the view

that further negotiations with the Town of Cambridge would be unproductive," she said. "Time is now of the essence.

"The community needs and expects a resolution of this matter."

She rejected a suggestion that Wembley Golf Course land could be resumed and said the government would guarantee Cambridge a \$50 million return from the project.

On the eve of the debate Cambridge council agreed to get legal advice about mounting a Supreme Court challenge if MPs passed the Bill.

The debate was continuing as this edition went to press.

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## Blood test not done



RIGHT: The POST first threw doubt on the blood evidence 16 months ago.

• From page 7

the surface silk. He said the stain on the surface of Mr Christie's Zegna tie had not stained the white lining.

He said he had not tried to replicate what was found on the Zegna tie because he did not know how the stains got there.

Dr Webb gave evidence that he had tested for DNA a big number of stains found in the unit.

Some had tested positive for blood but no reportable DNA could be extracted.

Three tests for blood were known to give false positive results at times.

Others matched all or some of the DNA profile of some of the 103 people swabbed by the police for matching against the samples found in the flat.

Some gave partial profiles that showed only the sex of the donor, while others gave mixed profiles where

one donor could be identified but not the other.

Several other witnesses gave evidence of bodily fluids in the flat.

Mrs Budrikis and an upstairs neighbour said Mrs Christie was minding a friend's unsterilised female dog.

The neighbour said the dog was recovering from surgery.

Mrs Kelli Budrikis said there was a big stain, possibly dog urine, near Mrs Christie's bed.

Subiaco doctor James Batalin said he treated Mrs Christie three weeks before she disappeared for slivers of glass in her heel while she was living in Currie Street.

He said there would be some bleeding from her heel, but not a great deal. "She said she had broken a glass on top of a coffee table," she said.

Dr Batalin said he had noted Mrs Christie's alcoholism in 1994.

The year before she disappeared he had prescribed her anti-depressants.

## How it all went wrong

• From page 6

days making carved coffee tables in the prison woodwork shop.

A computer expert without a computer, he says he is often mind-numbingly bored.

It helps that he's been a fitness nut who has trained alone for long hours. And an older recidivist bank robber, who is a carpenter, provides advice and some conversation.

Christie earned a place in the privileged self-care unit, where 12 cells with their own bathrooms cluster around a communal kitchen. He

cooks for the unit every Monday night. The five non-cooks wash up.

He speaks to his son Frazer, who lives with his grandparents in Canada, about three times a week.

Each night before bed he kisses Frazer's photograph goodnight.

By the time Susan Christie, almost inevitably, met her tragic end, there was no doubt that chaos swirled around her one-bedroom ground-floor flat in Currie Street, Daglish.

Her drinking and promiscuous behaviour had driven the smartly dressed young Canadian out of their house in Harvey Road.