

Nine years threading the fibres together

By HUGO TIMMS

Rees Powell's weeks in the witness box have distilled his nine years of painstaking work on microscopic evidence in the historic Claremont serial killings trial.

A scientist at the government ChemCentre, Mr Powell began

SERIAL KILLING CASE

work on the case in 2011, five years before anybody had heard of Bradley Robert Edwards, 51, now on trial for three murders.

Edwards has denied charges that he murdered Sarah Spiers, Jane Rimmer and Ciara

Glennon, all of whom had been enjoying Claremont's nightlife in the mid-1990s.

Mr Powell's evidence, heard in the Supreme Court, is likely to be critical in deciding whether or not Edwards is found guilty.

For four hours a day, eight days in a row, hundreds of graphs and microscopic pictures

have been rigorously scrutinised in the courtroom.

It is this trove of evidence, so slow at times that it has even drawn caustic remarks from Justice Stephen Hall, that the prosecution says establishes a link between the accused and his alleged victims, through microscopic fibres found in

their hair and clothes.

Fibres that are undetectable to the naked eye were left in the hair and on the shirt of Ciara Glennon and in the hair of Jane Rimmer, fibres that the prosecution alleges lead solely to the accused.

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Lone bugler reflects



Alex Kinsey playing the Last Post in front of Brett Pollock, left, and Ludwig Reitzenstein in a dress rehearsal for his Anzac Day salute. Photo: Paul McGovern

Driveway and balcony Anzac Day remembrances in Mosman Park will be enhanced by the strains of the Last Post being played by a bugler under the flagpole in Memorial Park.

On Wednesday Mosman Bay Sea Scout Alex Kinsey, 17, held a dress rehearsal with mayor Brett Pollock and retired Royal Australian Navy Band trombonist Ludwig Reitzenstein.

Alex, a student at the WA Academy of Performing Arts, will play the bugle live from Memorial Park at 6am and 11am on Anzac Day in a private reflection and Brett Pollock will lay a wreath.

The service usually attracts more than 500 people but social distancing rules have prevented any Anzac Day gatherings.

Mr Pollock said he was proud

residents of all ages in the town continued to show respect to older generations.

"For this Anzac Day, I encourage families to do what the RSLWA has asked: light a candle at 5.55am, tune in to the radio and participate in the dawn commemoration that will include The Ode, Last Post and one-minute's silence," he said. "Despite no public gather-

ings, local residents may hear the bugle from where they live.

"I invite all brass musicians to join in with Australian jazz musician James Morrison and stand at their driveway to play the Last Post at 6am.

"I also encourage people in service clubs such as cadets, guides and scouts to wear their uniforms for the morning and for war medals to be proudly worn

on jackets by family members."

Alex said: "This bugle is dated 1918 and it is an honour to play it for such a respectful occasion."

Mr Reitzenstein played trombone in the Australian Navy Band for 30 years until 1988.

Anzac Day
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Bond mansion dodges dozer

By BEN DICKINSON

The riverside mansion where Alan Bond lived at the time of his 1983 America's Cup victory will not be demolished, owner Sue Gibson said this week.

Ms Gibson has applied to the WA Planning Commission to subdivide her 6406sq.m property in Watkins Road into six lots, but said Mr Bond's former house would be kept intact.

"The home itself is historic," Ms Gibson said.

"There is nothing like it in WA so it would be devastating to see it go."

The six-bedroom, eight-bathroom house was designed for Mr Bond by renowned architect Geoffrey Summerhayes. It had a copper roof.

It has since been extensively altered by a string of mining industry owners.

Mr Bond bought and cleared the adjoining block facing Victoria Avenue, using the land as a garden.

Ms Gibson listed the entire estate for \$50million in 2018 but it failed to sell.

Last year she re-listed it for \$35million with selling agent Jody Fewster, who is the late Mr Bond's daughter and grew up in the house.

Ms Gibson and then-partner Steve Wyatt paid \$39million for the property in 2011.

"We have taken on prospective buyers' feedback that the property is simply too big for the modern world and we have made the difficult decision to apply to



Sue Gibson has applied to subdivide Alan Bond's former Dalkeith garden.

the WA Planning Commission to subdivide the back into five lots," Ms Gibson said.

The commission is due to rule on the application by July 1.

The mansion would remain on one 2516sq.m lot while the garden, tennis court and enormous pool would be split across five lots ranging from 722sq.m to 819sq.m.

Plans for a second-stage subdivision that would carve the house site into three lots have also been drawn up.

Ms Fewster would not comment on the plans but said there

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Nine years threading the fibres together

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These fibres vary from blue to grey, and they can be traced to the 1996 Holden Commodore VS stationwagon that Edwards once drove and the navy-blue Telstra workpants he once wore, the State says.

There are 98 of these fibres relevant to the trial.

Yet in order for Justice Hall to be convinced of this essential link, the science must be accurate beyond reasonable doubt.

Mr Powell began giving evidence two weeks ago, and he has spent longer on the stand than any other witness in the trial - which has just completed its 79th day.

He has conveyed to the court how each of the 98 fibres have been photographed, at times using four differing forms of light, and then compared to the comparable fibre in the Holden stationwagon or the Telstra pants.

In court, the microscopic comparisons are placed next to one another and Mr Powell explains their similarity in diameter, delusterant and colour.

He doesn't stop there.

There are hundreds of what are called "MSP Graphs," which Mr Powell testified earlier are more accurate in ascertaining the true nature of a fibre than a microscopic photograph.

The results from an MSP graph can be compared against results from other fibre samples, and it has proved one of the prosecution's most important scientific instruments.

Shown to the court have been pictures of Mr Powell and his colleagues cutting

out portions of seat coverings from the Holden Commodore Edwards was driving at the time of the murders, and which was seized by police on the day of his arrest in December 2016.

They have collected the dust from beneath the seat inserts and also fragments of the car's carpets, the court has seen and heard.

These cuttings, in addition to a pair of Telstra work pants from the mid-1990s, have created the "control samples" against which the fibres discovered on the victims were compared.

The team sampled 124 cars in its search.

If Justice Hall accepts Mr Powell's evidence, then he could find that the fibres found on Ms Glennon and Ms Rimmer originated from Edwards.

The court has also heard how the meticulously described evidence has been the result of years of forensic effort.

In total, ChemCentre scientists have collected more than 10,000 fibres in their investigation.

Less than 0.01% of the fibres turned out to be of any relevance to police.

The rest of the 10,000 fibres now sit in one of the world's biggest fibre databases, and it is used for criminal investigations around Australia.

At the time this edition of the POST went to print, Mr Powell's cross-examination had not yet taken place.

The defence will be calling their own fibre expert.

It is expected that the trial has another six to eight weeks to run.



ABOVE: Police forensic officers examine the Telstra wagon Edwards was driving at the time of two of the Claremont murders.



RIGHT: Seats of the car yielded fibres alleged to match.

Slow motion for an urgent motion

• From page 5

we have the power to make a decision that's inconsistent with that legislation," she said.

Councillor Lyn Jennings said this week's vote was about protecting the proper governance of the city.

"It's about how communications occur and who in the end decides what the city communicates, although it happens to relate to that decision in SAT," she said.

Councillor Angela Hamersley said the council was the governing body of the City of Subiaco and all its responsibilities.

"That's our job, we can't do it if someone else does it for us," she said.

Ms Hamersley said the tribunal judgment was a finding of a state court that had "suggested something should be looked at [at the City of Subiaco]".

"That's a very very serious question and there's a proper process to go through to do that," she added.

In response to questions from deputy mayor Stephanie Stroud, Ms Lavery told Tuesday night's meeting that she had had a video call with Mr Ord, earlier that day.

This was seven weeks after Ms Lavery had publicly written to Mr Ord asking for an "urgent meeting" to discuss the SAT ruling and its implications for the local government sector.

The motion that gives effect to the disclaimer was opposed by Mayor Taylor and councillors Mansfield, Davis and Nash in a 7/4 vote.

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Bond mansion 'historic'

• From page 1

was no intention to demolish Mr Bond's former home.

"I have not had a single buyer who wants to demolish the house," she said.

One overseas buyer had enquired about keeping the pool and garden and building a separate house at the Victoria Avenue end of the site.

There had been significant interest in the land itself from a number of developers.

Ms Fewster said the house would cost between \$35million and \$40million to rebuild.

"It's simply too valuable to demolish," she said.

The house has a boatshed, a marble-floored ballroom and a 21-seat cinema, among other luxuries.

When Mr Bond owned the house he fitted it with a full-sized bar, its taps serving beer from the vast chain of breweries he once controlled.

That bar was the site of a tense meeting at which Mr Bond failed to persuade the Liberal Party front bench to support the Burke Labor government's bailout of Rothwell's Bank after the stockmarket crash of 1987.

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