

A devoted father from rural NSW may have become caught up in a series of underworld killings in the 1980s when he was allegedly murdered, resulting in a mystery that police think involves a notorious gangland figure.

Paul Anthony Norton, who was born and raised in Young, disappeared from Sydney in 1989 after he had taken his two sons to a football match.

His resting place went unknown for years until human remains that had been discovered at a Kurnell desalination plant in 2007 were confirmed as belonging to the 31-year-old in 2019.

In the meantime, an inquest from 1996 determined it was most likely he had been murdered in a crime motivated by his alleged involvement in Sydney's drug trade.

On Monday (4 December), NSW Police called for information into his death and said initial observations had drawn links between his suspicious disappearance and a series of underworld killings in Sydney in the 1980s.

Detective Superintendent Danny Doherty said a large number of inquiries had been conducted since his remains were identified.

"Of note, at the time Mr Norton's remains were located, other remains were found," he said.

"It was a known burial ground for the criminal world, including 'Neddy' Smith and his associates."

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Some of the other remains belonged to 36-year-old model Mark Johnston, whose disappearance in 1986 had also been investigated.

A coronial inquest this year named gangland figure Arthur "Neddy" Smith, who had been in jail serving life sentences for two murders before his death in 2021, as the person responsible for Mr Johnston's death.

"There are strong links in both these matters to the underworld criminals in the 1980s in Sydney. Of main interest has been Arthur 'Neddy' Smith," Detective Doherty said.



The remains of Paul Norton were not found until years after his disappearance.

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Police believe Smith was incarcerated at the time Mr Norton vanished. Also, Detective Doherty, who did not think Mr Norton and Mr Johnston knew each other, said before the 76-year-old Smith died in 2021, he was interviewed about both disappearances and denied any knowledge of them.

“[But] we believe that he was still very capable of running things from his jail cell and that his associates and those involved in the drug trade were responsible for Mr Norton’s disappearance and subsequent murder,” he said.

The detective said Mr Norton, while potentially a minor player, was associated with some “very big players in the drug trade” who would know what happened to him.

“He was a boy from the bush, he ended up in Botany and he was married with a couple of kids,” he said.

“He got mixed up with the wrong crowd, fell into it somehow, and ... whilst maybe a minor player, hung around some very big players and that’s unfortunately what caused his demise.”

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Police are now looking at whether anyone involved in other murders is connected to the case.

“There’s people out there who we believe would have been involved in these murders ... they’re still alive, walking around in the community,” Detective Doherty said.

"Thirty-five years doesn't diminish the criminality of the people responsible and 35 years hasn't diminished the grief of the family."

Devoted dad's sudden disappearance is quite out of ch

# Fears held for butcher's safety

**PAUL** Anthony Norton loved his two young sons — loved them so much that despite being separated from his wife for two years, he saw them at least two or three times a week.

And if the 31-year-old butcher from the inner Sydney suburb of Ultimo could not see them at their Botany home, he would ring.

But his visits and telephone calls stopped abruptly almost three months ago and now police, his friends and relatives fear the worst.

Of the deepening mystery surrounding Norton's whereabouts Detective Sergeant John Hayes of Waverley police said yesterday: "This is totally inconsistent with his usual pattern."

But police stop short of saying they believe the sandy-haired Norton has met with foul play, although they now hold grave fears for his safety.

Adding to the mystery is the fact that Norton's newly-bought blue 1981 Holden Commodore was found abandoned at Sydney Airport on April 9, three weeks after he was last seen.

Norton had been known, on a number of occasions, to have had with him between \$17,000 and \$22,000 in cash.

On the day he was last seen he left the home of his girlfriend, Val Lieb, in Queens Park Rd, Waverley, at 8.30pm.

Police believe he intended to drive to his home



**IF** Paul Norton had any enemies, no one is telling police. On appearance, the hard working Sydney butcher with the boyish smile was not the sort of person who would suddenly take off without telling anyone. But his unexplained disappearance has led police to probe his lifestyle deeply and there are now growing fears, as crime reporter LES KENNEDY reveals, that he may have been murdered.

in Ultimo or visit a friend at Homebush. But he never arrived and his daily telephone calls to Ms Lieb also stopped.

When he failed to contact her and work mates at Cooney's Butcher Shop in Ultimo the following day, Ms Lieb reported him missing.

Yesterday she wept as she renewed an appeal for public assistance.

"It is hard for me to cope on a day-to-day basis not knowing what has happened," she said.

Norton's friends cannot fathom why he should suddenly want to take off without telling anyone, leaving behind all his possessions and more importantly his sons, aged nine and seven.

Also, Norton's savings have not been touched

since he disappeared.

An airport security officer's chance discovery of his vehicle, parked amid 100 rental cars, raises a more sinister theory on his fate.

On appearance the discovery points to his having left town abruptly.

But there is no immigration department or airline record of him having bought a ticket under his own name.

An examination of the vehicle by scientific police found no signs of violence.

But questions about how the car came to be left at the airport have given rise to the theory that it could be a false trail by a killer.

Sergeant Hayes said yesterday this was a common tactic of hit-men, dumping the cars of their victims at airports to give the impression that the owners had left town.

Anyone with confidential information is asked to contact Waverley detectives or the Police Crime Stoppers unit.

Phone the 24-hour hotline on 3323555 or (008) 422199.

A newspaper article from about three months after Paul Norton disappeared.

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Mr Norton worked as a butcher, firstly in Botany and then in Ultimo, which was also where he lived.

He was last seen on 9 April, 1989, after spending the day with his sons at Leichhardt Oval watching a Parramatta Eels vs Balmain Tigers rugby league match.

His girlfriend, Val Lieb, reported him missing on 14 April, 1989, and told police he was last seen wearing a red-and-white-striped shirt, grey trousers, and grey-and-tan shoes.

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On 2 May, 1989, police found his blue 1981 Commodore sedan at the Hertz Car Rental at the Sydney Airport domestic terminal.

"[A police officer said] this was a common tactic of hit men, dumping the cars of their victims at airports to give the impression that their owners had left town," a newspaper article from three months after his disappearance said.

After his remains were identified in 2019, the matter was referred to the homicide squad.



Paul Norton's family has called for anyone with information to come forward. Photo: NSW Police.

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Mr Norton's sister, Margaret Brown, hoped Monday's appeal could provide some answers about what happened to the much-loved member of her family.

"Paul and I were one of six children, and with only four of us remaining, we'd love to find some answers about what happened," she said.

"Even though it's going back many years, we're asking anyone who might have information to contact police."

The newspaper article reported that Mr Norton had two young sons whom he saw at least two or three times a week, even though he and his wife were separated.

"Norton's friends cannot fathom why he should suddenly want to take off without telling anyone, leaving behind all his possessions and more importantly his sons, aged nine and seven," it reads.

***Anyone with information that may assist investigators can contact Crime Stoppers by calling 1800 333 000 or [by clicking here](#).***

*Original Article published by Albert McKnight on [About Regional](#).*