

Az Papers Synopsis.

Law: The Azaria Papers

Synopsis.

Seven week old Azaria Chamberlain was taken by wild dingoes from the family's tent at the camping ground at Uluru in the Central Australian Desert at dusk on August 17th 1980. Her body was never found, but swaddling was discovered near dingo lairs at Ayers Rock a week later.

Rumours quickly spread, nationwide, that the babe was sacrificed at the Rock by her religious parents. An Inquest in December found that a dingo, perhaps with a pack, had slaughtered the child. Rumours persisted. Police in the Northern Territory secretly re-opened an investigation and the Supreme Court secretly quashed the Inquest Finding, appointing a different Coroner to preside over a second Inquest. Mother Lindy and father Pastor Michael were committed for trial, she for Murder, the Pastor as an Accessory.

The trial, held in Darwin, began in September 1982. All eye-witnesses supported the Chamberlains. The prosecution called many scientific witnesses to counter the eye-witnesses and carry the burden of the Murder charge. By the trial's final day, October 29th 1982, the dozens of journalists in court predicted success for the Defence. The jury convicted. Mrs Chamberlain was sentenced to imprisonment for life. Her cell was in Berrimah Prison, Darwin, for the next two and a half years.

The Azaria Papers collect the articles written at each notable development in the case, for news presses and journals, together providing a commentary on the progression of the most appalling miscarriage of justice in Western legal history.

Chronology:

Early 1980 Chief Ranger Derek Roff warns his department of danger to small children and babies who 'may be considered as possible prey' by dingoes, requests permission to cull the worst. His request is refused.

June 11 1980 Azaria Chamberlain born in Mount Isa.

Aug. 17 1980 Dusk, Azaria taken by dingoes from the family tent in the camping ground at Ayers Rock.

Feb. 29 1981 1st Inquest finds Azaria's death caused by dingo Attack.

Nov. 18 1981 Supreme Court quashes Coroner's Finding, in secret, appoints a second Inquest under a different Coroner.

Feb. 2 1982 Second Inquest commits Lindy Chamberlain to trial for murder, husband Pastor Michael as an Accessory.

Sept.13 to October 13 1982

Trial, accused both convicted, Lindy Chamberlain sentenced to life imprisonment.

Feb. 7 1983 Federal Court Appeal opens, closes on

April 19 Appeal unanimously denied.

Feb. 22 1984 High Court denies their Appeal, voting 3 – 2.

Nov. 1985 The book *Evil Angels* is published by Penguin Books.

Nov 12 1985 Report of Brian Martin, Solicitor-General is published, supporting the prosecution's case.

Feb. 2nd 1986 David Brett, an English mystic, falls during a night-time climb of Ayers Rock. His body, found by police, was partly devoured by dingoes, and lay close to an over-garment once worn by Azaria, partly buried in the sand, near the dingo lairs.

Feb. 7th 1986 Lindy Chamberlain is released from prison.

May 8th 1986 to May 22nd

A Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Chamberlain convictions by Justice Trevor Morling concludes he has 'serious doubts' about the Chamberlains' guilt.

Sept 15 1988 Court of Criminal Appeal quashes all convictions against the Chamberlains.

1992 The Chamberlains are granted \$1.3 million in compensation.

Dec 13th 1995 A third Coroner refuses to follow the Court of Criminal Appeal's finding, and determines instead that the cause of Azaria's death 'cannot be determined.'

Feb 2012 After a series of dingo attacks on humans, a fourth Coroner's Inquest finds Azaria's death was caused by dingo attack.