

The Coroner

About 1/3 of deaths are reported to the Coroner in one way or another; this page has little relevance in other circumstances.

The Coroner is appointed by the Home Secretary to investigate deaths within a geographical jurisdiction. For instance, we have a Coroner for Poole, Bournemouth, Christchurch and East Dorset; there is another Coroner for West Dorset, and another for New Forest and Southampton. The Coroner is usually a Lawyer and has his own Court where he may hold Inquests. It is an ancient office that dates back nearly 1000 years to just after the Norman Conquest in 1066.

In public, we only tend to hear of the Coroner when there is something sensational in the news, however, he is involved in about one third of all deaths, most of which are not sensational at all.

Certain causes of death or circumstances leading to a death must be reported to the Coroner. If the cause of death is in anyway unnatural or contributed to by industrial illness or alcohol then the Coroner must be informed. Likewise, if the cause of death is not clear or if the deceased had not been in the very recent care of a doctor, the Coroner must be informed. If the deceased person is to be moved out of the country or death was abroad and is to be brought into the country, the Coroner must always be informed.

Sometimes the Coroner will issue a certificate acknowledging that he has been advised of a death but stating he sees no need for further enquiry by his office.

Other times the Coroner may ask for an autopsy examination to clarify the exact cause of death. The body of the deceased will be collected by his officers and a pathologist will perform the autopsy; this is all paid for by the Coroner's Office. Usually, when a natural cause of death is discovered, the Coroner issues a death certificate and releases the body of the deceased back to the family/executors very soon afterwards.

On occasions the Coroner will hold an Inquest and may keep the body of the deceased within his jurisdiction for a longer period although following recent changes to the system, it is unlikely the body will be held for more than two weeks even in extreme cases.

Please see our 'Links' page on the website for further details about our local Coroners.

Interestingly, the Coroner is also responsible for adjudicating in respect of treasure that is found.