

Coroner's records

Background

The office of Coroner was established in 1194, to investigate suspicious or sudden deaths and to protect the financial interest of the Crown. In the post-Norman Conquest years, the coroner held inquests for every dead body found, as many Normans were being killed by local communities. In an effort to stop this, a fine or 'Murdrum' was introduced if the villagers could not prove the body was not a Norman. This is where the word 'murder' comes from.

It was not until 1860 that the County Coroner's began to receive a salary. Prior to that from 1752 they were only able to claim expenses via the Quarter Sessions. The Quarter Sessions also include records of elections of district coroners, coroner's returns, salaries, fees, correspondence, and papers relating to jurisdiction. Other paperwork was also lodged with the Assizes courts, to which Coroners had to hand in their records. These are held at [The National Archives](#)

The Local Government Act of 1888 provided for the appointment of coroners by the County Council and the division of counties into districts, each having its own Coroner. Oxfordshire districts have been combined since 1981, but prior to that the various areas of the county held their own records. These are the identified districts and the years for which records exist:

City 1900-1974, Central 1929-1973, City & Central 1974-1975, Northern 1919-1963, North Western 1964-1976, Western 1926-1964, Southern 1947-1981, South West 1974-1981, Banbury Borough 1946-1974, Oxfordshire North & Central 1975-1981

Where are these records?

Coroner's Inquest records are generally held in County Record Offices, or, if before 1875, in the National Archives. If an original inquest cannot be found, then a report of the inquest may be available via local newspapers.

Oxfordshire History Centre (OHC) holds the Coroner's inquest papers for Oxfordshire for the 20th century with some gaps. All that survives for the 19th century are a few indexed registers, and they merely give name, date and place of inquest. These books cover the period 1877-1905.

More recently, records are retained by the Coroner's office. It should be noted that any record under 75 years old needs the Coroner's permission to access it.

The main sequence of inquest files starts in 1900 and continues to the present day; records over 20 years old are transferred to OHC each year. The inquest papers are boxed according to the date and district, but as the districts have changed

over time it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain the whereabouts of a particular record depending on where the person died and therefore where the inquest was held.

Oxfordshire History Centre has roughly 550 boxes of Coroner's records each containing at least 100 sets of inquest papers.

Where is the catalogue?

Access is via the staff at OHC or the Coroner's office depending on the date of the inquest. OHC staff can provide contact details for the Coroner's office.

A catalogue of the inquest files is currently being compiled by staff and is being made available online on [Heritage Search](#).

More information

- Oxfordshire History Centre [catalogues](#)
- [Visiting](#) Oxfordshire History Centre
- [Contact us](#) to book a visit to consult archive documents

