

What is a coroner?

A Coroner is a judicial office holder. A coroner must be a lawyer or a doctor, and in some cases both.

What do coroners do?

Coroners inquire into violent or unnatural deaths, sudden deaths of unknown cause, and deaths which have occurred in prison. A coroner's authority to inquire flows from the report of a body being within the coroner's district and not from where the death occurred.

It is a coroner's duty at an inquest to establish who the deceased was and how, when and where the deceased came by his or her death. An inquest is about what happened, not who was responsible for what happened.

If the coroner has decided to investigate a death the registrar of births and deaths must wait for the coroner to finish his or her inquiries before the death can be registered. The coroner may ask a pathologist to examine the body and carry out a post-mortem examination. If so, the examination must be made as soon as possible.

Record types

Post Mortem reports: if a person has not been in the care of a doctor within the last couple of weeks before their death, their body will undergo a medical examination by a pathologist to establish the cause of death. Post Mortem reports are formal medical descriptions of the body, including all organs. The report includes the name, age and height of deceased, information on rigor mortis and nourishment, and estimated time of death. Once the cause of death has been established, it will be entered on the death certificate and the body released for burial. The post-mortem report is kept by the Coroner.

Inquest files: in cases where the cause of death is suspicious, or where a sudden or unnatural death has occurred, an inquest will be held. Deaths in prisons and treasure trove finds are also investigated. The date of the inquest will be entered on the death certificate. An inquest is in essence court proceedings: evidence of witnesses is heard and assessed, and the verdict is pronounced by the coroner at the conclusion. Inquests are generally reported in the press in the same way that other court proceedings are. The records contained in an inquest file will typically include the form recording the verdict, minutes of evidence, written reports, and in more modern cases, photographs (which can be graphic) and tape recordings. Until 1926, all inquests were held with a jury, and could range in number between 12 and 24.

Coroner's day books: these record the cases that the coroner dealt with, in date order. The information they record includes the date, name of the deceased, and columns to record whether there was an inquest, and if so, what the verdict was.

What if you cannot find an Inquest paper or a Post Mortem?

Inquest and Post Mortem records can give you a lot of useful information about your ancestor. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that they have survived. In the absence of these records, a report of an inquest might be found in a local newspaper. **Welsh newspapers online** from the National Library of Wales is an excellent source of information. This site provides free access to many local newspapers, including the *Cambrian*.

Common verdicts

Death by misadventure/accident
 Death by natural causes
 Suicide
 Industrial disease (black lung, pneumoconiosis)
 Lawful/unlawful
 Open verdict
 Visitation of God (old age/natural causes)

SWANSEA INQUEST

WORKHOUSE INMATE'S DEATH IN
PUBLIC-HOUSE.

At an inquest at Swansea Workhouse on Monday on Sidney Bryant (65), inmate, who died at the Farmers' Arms on Saturday, death was proved to be due to heart failure, and a verdict of "Death from natural causes" was returned.

Deceased, it seemed, was served with a pint of beer, but did not touch it. He appeared to have become exhausted after walking up the steep hill.

Cambrian 29 October 1909

THE INQUEST.

VERDICT: "WILFUL MURDER."
 "STRANGULATION BY FINGERS."
 PRISONER'S STATEMENT TO THE
 POLICE.

The inquest was opened on Monday afternoon at the Swansea Hospital, before Mr. Coroner Leeder.

Accused arrived in the prison van at ten minutes to three, and was driven straight to the side entrance (Phillips-parade), and the gates promptly closed. Detective-Inspector Lewis was in charge of the van. Mr. Lawrence Richards and Supt. Gill were present at the inquiry on behalf of the police.

Cambrian 18 May 1906

Where were inquests held?

Inquests were usually held in public houses and taverns. Usually these buildings were close to where the deceased and witnesses lived. Inquests could also take place in institutions such as prisons and workhouses, as shown by the three reports.

Swansea Inquest on a Wicklow Sailor,

The Swansea Coroner (Mr. Leeder) held an inquest at Adelaide Hotel on Wednesday on the body of Wm. Kennedy (25), an unmarried sailor, who dropped down dead on Monday evening.

Cambrian 7 July 1905



Mount Pleasant Workhouse, Swansea



Mackworth Hotel, Wind Street, Swansea

Seigniories of Gower and Kilvey

The Seignory of Gower and Kilvey was a marcher lordship established in early medieval times. It contained all that part of Glamorgan to the west of the River Tawe, and also (roughly speaking) the parish of Llansamlet, to the east of the Tawe. This approximates to the City and County of Swansea, with the addition of the communities of Pontardawe, Cwmllynfell, Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen and Ystalyfera. It had its own coroner, whose duty it was to enquire into the circumstances of suspicious deaths within his jurisdiction.

Coroners for the Seigniories of Gower & Kilvey (with gaps)

1728-1788	Gabriel Powell
1793	Robert Dagley
1804-1805	Edward Snead
1805-1824	John Charles Collins
1824-1862	Charles Collins
1862-1900	Edward Strick, Fisher Street
1900-1917	Francis Holborrow Glynn Price, 7 Picton Place, St Helen's Road
1917-1919	Richard White Beor, Temple Street
1920-1954	Charles Joseph Clayton Wilson, Temple Street

What Records do we hold?

D/D SB 31/1-452 Reports of the Coroner of the Liberty of Gower and Kilvey [County Coroner] 1862-1900 (bundled by year)

See the **STRICK & BELLINGHAM (SOLICITORS) CORONERS' RECORDS** catalogue for a more detailed description of the records we hold.

Access to records

The Victorian coroners' records are out of the scope of the Data Protection Act, because all the people referred to in the cases, including the witnesses, coroner and officers, are no longer living. There are no restrictions on access.



Swansea Borough

In 1889 the medieval borough of Swansea was made autonomous from the surrounding county of Glamorgan and became a county borough in its own right. As a result a number of new positions within the council were created including Coroner for the County Borough. Originally the borough lay entirely within the parish of Swansea, bounded by the River Tawe as far as the Bwrlais Brook (a little above High Street Station), along this brook to Cwmbwrla, round Townhill to Cockett, then down Brynmill Stream to the sea, and along the sea shore to the mouth of the River Tawe. By 1918 the borough had enlarged to include the whole of the ancient parish of Swansea, the southern part of Llangyfelach parish, St Thomas, St John-juxta-Swansea, Llansamlet parish, Oystermouth Urban District Council and Brynau parish.

Coroners for Swansea Borough, 1891-2013 (with gaps)

1891-1900	Edward Strick
1900-1910	John Viner Leeder
1913-1930	J. C. Morris, 281 Oxford Street
1931-1932	VACANT
1933-1950	D. H. Clarke
1980-1987	Francis d'Auberville Wilson
1985-2003	John Richard Morgan
2004-2013	Philip Rogers

What Records do we hold?

D/D SB 31/453-543 Reports of the Coroner of the Borough of Swansea, 1891-1900 (bundled by year)

See the **STRICK & BELLINGHAM (SOLICITORS) CORONERS' RECORDS** catalogue for a more detailed description of the records we hold.

SWANSEA'S NEW PUBLIC FUNCTIONARIES.

THE RECORDER, THE CLERK OF THE PEACE, AND THE CORONER.

SWANSEA Borough having been elevated to the level of a County, important consequences follow. Mr. David Lewis has been, as we stated last week, appointed Recorder, and this week, Mr. John Thomas, the Town Clerk, has been chosen as Clerk of the Peace, and Mr. Edward Strick, Coroner of the Seigniority of Gower, has been appointed Coroner of the County Borough. Below we give portraits of the new Recorder and the Clerk of the Peace, reserving that of the Coroner for a future occasion.



Cambrian 28 August 1891 p8

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Swansea Coroner: [COR/S]

Under local government reorganisation in 1974 Swansea County Borough and Gower Rural District were merged to create the new Swansea City Council. Later the boundaries were altered to coincide with those of the City and County of Swansea. The Swansea Coroner covered the area of the City of Swansea from 1974 to 1996. A basement flood in 1971 at the Corners Office in Swansea destroyed all the Coroners records from several decades before.

What Records do we hold?

COR/S 1	Daily Record Books, 1986-1999
COR/S 2	Inquest Files, 1972-1987, 1992-1996
COR/S 3	Post Mortem Reports, 1971-2009

See the **COURT RECORDS** catalogue for a more detailed description of the records we hold.

Access to records

Recent coroners' records are restricted. Anyone requiring access to these records should apply to the coroner.



West Glamorgan/Neath Port Talbot Coroner: [COR/W]

The West Glamorgan Coroner roughly covered the area including Pontardawe R.D.C., Neath Borough, Neath R.D.C., Glyncorrwg R.D.C., and Port Talbot Borough.

Coroners for the Western Division of Glamorganshire (with gaps)

-1822	Griffith Llewellyn of Baglan Hall
1823-1843	Thomas Thomas of Cardiff
1844-1866	Alexander Cuthbertson of Neath
1867-1915	Howel Cuthbertson, Water Street, Neath
1915	Edward Powell (acting Coroner)
1915-1920	L. M. Thomas, Aberavon
1923-1926	B. Edward Howe, 20 Station Road, Port Talbot
-2008	Dr David Osborne
2008-2013	Philip Rogers

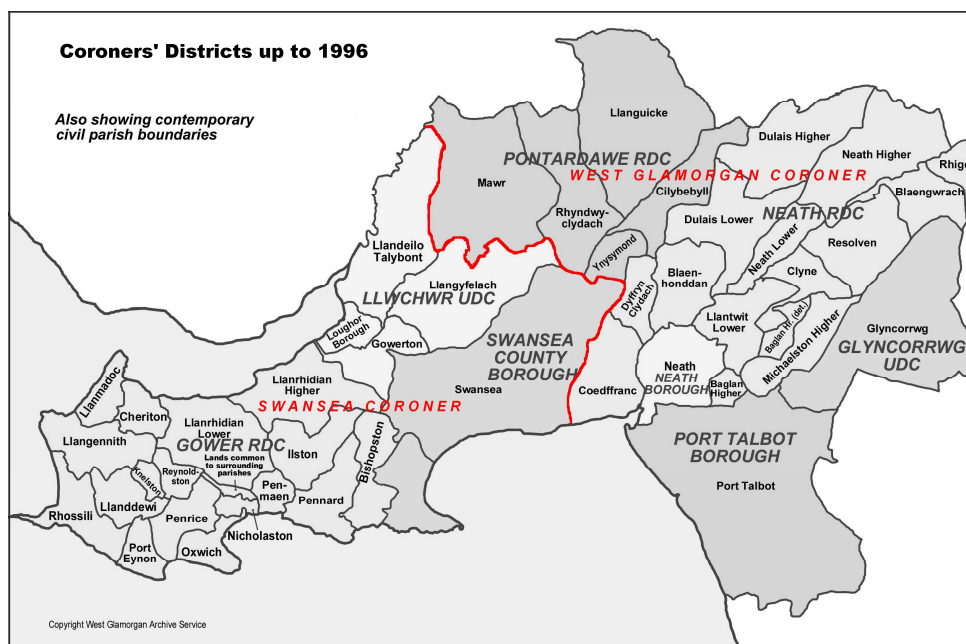
What Records do we hold?

COR/W 1	Daily Record Books, 1921-1933, 1954-1980
COR/W 2	Inquest Files, 1965-1991, 1993, Oct.-Dec. 2008, 2009
COR/W 3	Post Mortems, 1970, 1975-76, 1978-2006

See the **COURT RECORDS** catalogue for a more detailed description of the records we hold.

Access to records

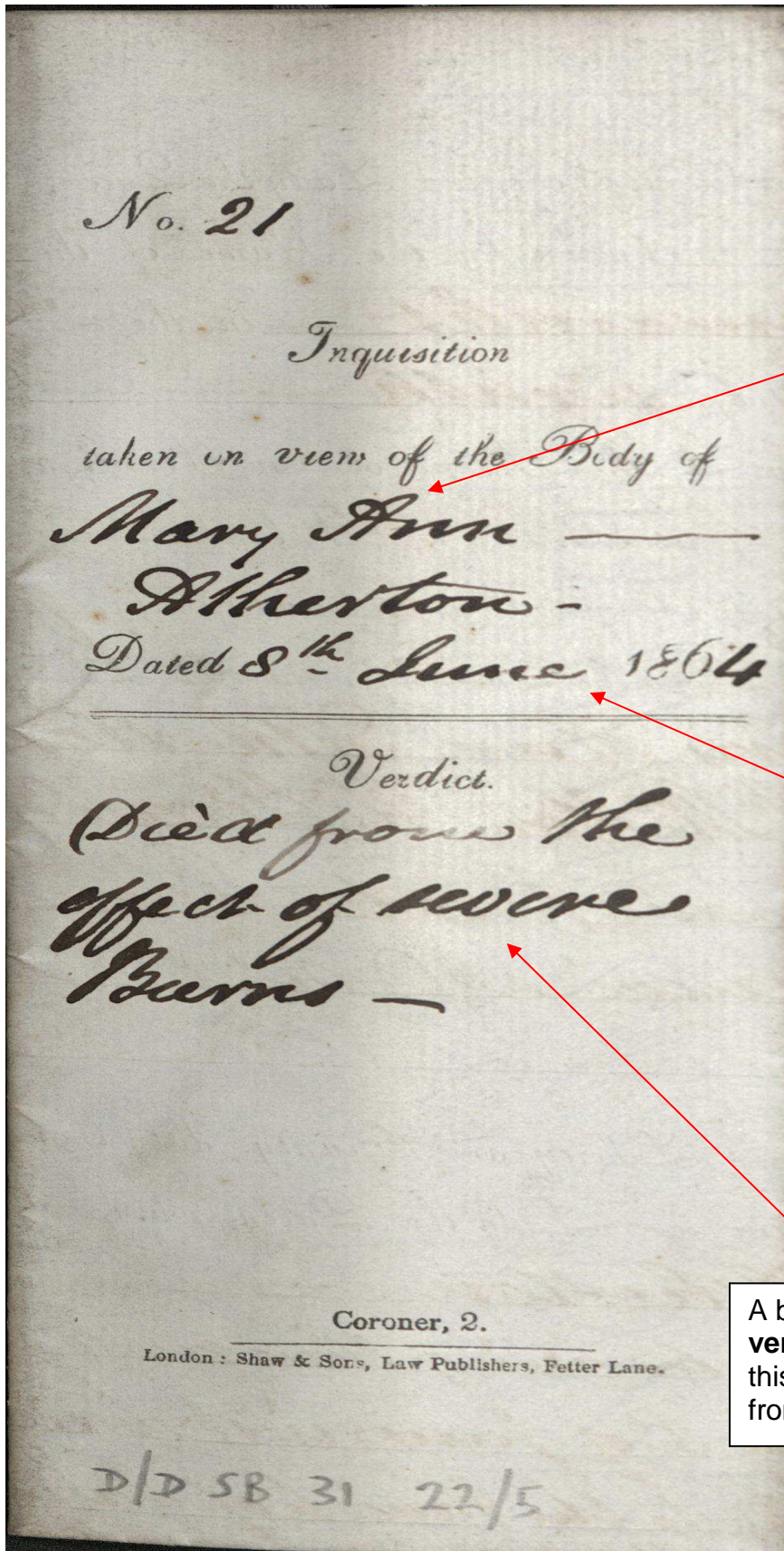
Recent coroners' records should not be made freely available. Anyone requiring access to these records should apply to the coroner.



How to contact the Coroner

The Coroner's Office is located at the Civic Centre, Oystermouth Road, Swansea, SA1 3SN. Telephone: 01792 636237

Document Dissected: A typical Inquest from the Victorian era
[D/D SB 31 22/5]



Name of deceased-
Mary Ann Atherton

Date of Inquest: In this
case it is the 8th June 1864

A brief statement of the **inquest verdict** is included on the front. In this instance, Mary Atherton died from *the effect of severe Burns*.

County: Each county was divided into liberties or hundreds. In this case, the inquest took place in the Liberty of Kilvey, in the County of Glamorgan

Place: Inquests often took place in a room in a public house, inn or hotel. Pubs were close to where the deceased and witnesses often lived. Large rooms were required to house the coroner, jurymen, medical officers and witnesses. In this case, the inquest was held at the *Lamb and Flag*

Parish: The parish in which the inquest was held. In this case, it took place at Llanamlet

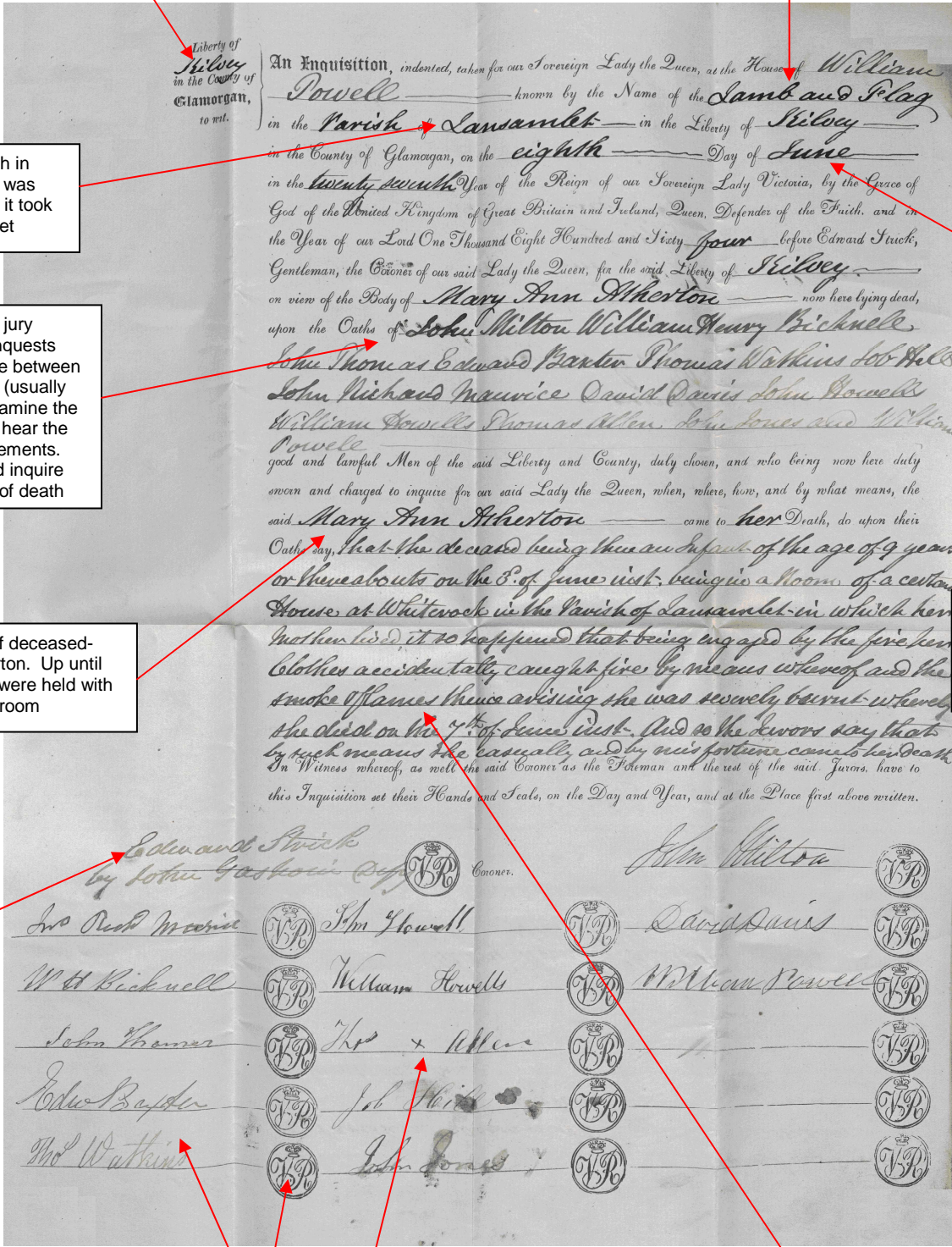
Jury: List of jury members. Inquests could include between 12-24 jurors (usually 12-13) to examine the body and to hear the witness statements. Jurors would inquire into causes of death

Name: Name of deceased - Mary Ann Atherton. Up until 1905, inquests were held with the body in the room

Date: Date of inquest, not date of death. The date is usually written in full - the eighth day of June in the twenty seventh year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lady Victoria (1864)

Age: Age of deceased. Mary Atherton was 9 years or thereabouts

Coroner: Name of the Coroner. In this case, it is Edward Strick



Signatures: Signatures include those of the Coroner and each member of the jury. A wax seal was placed against each name. Notice that one jury member signed with the letter X between his name

Verdict: This is given by the Coroner. It includes details from witness statements and the conclusion from the Coroner and jury as to the cause of death. In this case, Mary Atherton died by accident, due to severe burns after her clothes caught fire