

## **Coronial Law – request for reports for the Coroner**

### **General Information**

Coroners are required to inquire into deaths reports to them, which appear to be violent, unnatural, or of sudden and unknown cause. The Coroner will seek to establish the medical cause of death; if the cause remains in doubt after a post mortem, an inquest will be held. Not all deaths are reported to the coroner. In many cases a GP or hospital doctor can certify the medical cause of death and the death can be registered by the Registrar of Births and Deaths in the usual way. However, these Registrars must report deaths to the Coroner in certain circumstances. For example if a doctor cannot give a satisfactory cause of death; if the death occurred during or shortly after an operation; was due to industrial disease; occurred whilst the person was in custody, or if the death was unnatural or due to violence or occurred in other suspicious circumstances.

An Inquest is an inquiry into who has died and how, when and where the death occurred and in what circumstances the death occurred, an addition introduced more recently. An inquest is not a trial and does not apportion blame for a death. Possible verdicts include: natural causes, accident, suicide, unlawful or lawful killing, industrial disease and open verdicts (where there is insufficient evidence for any other verdict) or if death is as a result of neglect. The Coroner may bring a narrative verdict, in which case additional text will be included in the verdict.

Currently the Draft Coroners Bill, which was published on 12 June 2006 aims to modernise the coroner system so that it provides a more effective response to bereaved families and others who are touched by the service. The Constitutional Affairs Select Committee held an inquiry into reform and included pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Coroners Bill; its findings were published on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2006. The Government published its response on 7 November 2006; it remains for the draft Bill to go through the Parliamentary introduction process, expected in 2007 as time allows.

### **Powers of the Coroner in relation to the Gosport War Memorial Hospital Police Enquiry**

The Coroner is currently (8 January 2007) awaiting a copy of the official Police Report about their Investigation. Following its receipt and consideration he has the power to open an inquest into any death that he deems to be violent or unnatural, provided there is a deceased body within his district.

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