

## Book Reviews

fresh account of the original discoveries and their development in Great Britain, Switzerland, and the United States. Your reviewer found the French text very easy to follow, illuminating about the qualities which make research successful, informative, and humorous. Some minor inaccuracies, especially in English names and in the initials of authors, are more diverting than damaging: it is surprising to meet H. G. Wells as an American bacteriologist, though H. H. Wells is evidently intended.

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JEREMY GIBSON and COLIN ROGERS, *Coroners' records in England and Wales*, Birmingham, Federation of Family History Societies, 1988, 8vo, pp. 48, £1.50 (paperback).

This guide is "a first attempt to itemise all extant coroners' records in England and Wales now in public repositories", which is undoubtedly a worthy undertaking. Although published by the Federation of Family History Societies, it is intended for a number of potential users, including historians, archivists, sociologists, criminologists, and coroners themselves.

The introductory sections provide a concise history of the office of coroner, a glossary of terms, select bibliography, useful geographical information on assize circuits and coroners' districts, and a brief section on coroners' records in the Public Record Office by the expert R. F. Hunnisett. The material itself is listed by county, but within the county by period (Medieval, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries, Modern); the same repository, e.g. the County Record Office, can therefore appear three times within a county entry, if it possesses material relating to all three historical divisions. The layout is logical, but it can be rather confusing visually.

The limitations of this publication lie largely in the nature of the material with which it deals, and the information received from repositories. The level of detail given in descriptions varies from place to place (Greater Manchester and Coventry preferred not to have their modern holdings included in the guide at all), and there is, perhaps inevitably, no sort of qualitative assessment of the material. Westminster Abbey Muniments Room, for example, contains some splendid coroners' records; working on some of the eighteenth-century papers, one forms an impression of London streets awash with apothecaries, physicians, and surgeons just waiting for some fatal event to occur, on which they might give evidence. The riches therein cannot be divined from an entry which reads "City and Liberty of Westminster. Inquests and related papers c. 1760–1879". On the other hand, better to know that, than be unaware that Westminster Abbey houses such material. *Coroners' records in England and Wales* will prove a useful reference tool for a wide range of researchers, dealing with a difficult but extremely valuable group of records.

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