Bucks County, Pennsylvania Coroners' Records, 1710–1729

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AMONG THE RECORDS PRESERVED in the archives of Bucks County is a series of inquisitions held by the county coroners, pursuant to their investigations of sudden, violent or suspicious deaths. Seventeen of these documents date from the period 1710–1729. Then follows a long gap during which records have not survived. The file resumes in 1786, and the subsequent records are equally rich in information for both the genealogist and the social historian.

Though the earliest actual inquisition surviving is dated 1710, the office of coroner had existed since the early years of the county, and there are several references to the coroner's investigation of deaths in the court minutes.[1] The first recorded instance was on 12 September 1688, when a "Corroners return" was entered in the court minutes: "A return of the sudden death of Rogr Scott was this day made to this Court under the Jurys hands". Another copy of the court record said his death was "accidental Through is owne Carlesnes".[2]

Other deaths recorded in the court minutes as coroner's returns:

John Ackerman, 11 June 1690, "drowned accidentely" on 11 May 1690.

John Stolon [or Stotton], 10 December 1690, "accidental death."

Elizabeth Chappel, 8 June 1692, "Casual by falling of her horse into the water or neshaminah Creek."

"Unknown pson found neare the mouth of Neshaminah Creek," 8 June 1692, "wilfully murthered."

Richard Atthary [or Athay], 10 March 1696–7, "natural death."

James Hagath, servant of John Scot, 13 September 1699, "by a blow of John Snowdons Horse that he struck him the 5th day of the

7th month 1699 & dyed the day following the boy being driveing the plow when the horse struck him."

Mary Harvey, daughter of Mathias, deceased September 1703, "being under seven years of age . . . Attempting to goe over a narrow foot bridge she fell into the Creeke and was drownded the [-] day of the 3rd mo. 1703."[3]

The following are abstracts of the coroners' records between 1710 and 1729. The date given is the day the inquisition took place, not necessarily the date of the death. Some of the papers are defective, and lacunae or gaps in the text are indicated as [-]. In most of the records, the names of those serving on the coroner's jury are given in the text, and their signatures appear below the report. Here, the jurymen's names are given as they appear in the signatures. If the names as given in the text differ significantly, the alternate form is given in brackets.

21 May 1710.
Subject: Mary Martin.
Place: "at the house of Samuel Martin near Neshamenah Creek."
Report: "being found dead lying at the door of the house of the sd Samuel Martin with one wound mortall through the fore side of her Neck, of the length of three Inches & the breadth of one Inch on either side of her Neck, And one small wound under her right Ear, And one more upon her breast, And several wounds in the In sides of both her hands, being found as aforesd at the place aforesd the twentieth of sd month in the said year about seven a Clock in the Evening [she] was willfully & feloniously Murdered by some person not Certainly know[n], but there being a Cap found under the right arm of the sd Mary Martin which a certaine Negro man of the sd Samuel Martin's named Tobie used to wear, And was upon his head when his master went from home, And none known to be at the house aforesd Except the sd Mary & the sd Negro man from about twelve a Clock of the Nineteenth day of the month aforesd in the yeare aforesd, at which time the aforesd Samuel Martin left the sd Mary his wife well in health (to his best knowledge) And the sd Negro man at work upon his Plantation, And the sd Negro man being fled or absented himself from his service when the sd Mary was found dead lying gives sufficient reason to believe that the sd Negro man was the Murderer. . . ."

Jury: Samuel Griffith (mark), Nicholas Randall, Thomas Woodford (mark), Abraham Vandine (mark), Bartholomew Longstreth, James Kirle (mark), Thomas Davids, William Marshall, John Shaw,

William Stockdale, James Heaton, Henry Comly, Thomas Kimber, James Carter.

Coroner: John Cutler.

17 October 1720.

Subject: Susannah Barras, "aged about three years & a half."

Place: "at the house of Robert Smith."

Report: She "came to her death by Accidentally falling into a Spring over which there was a piece of a Hollow Gumtree sett for the Convenient Depping [dipping] of water & was there Drowned."

Jury: J. Abraham Denormandie, William Silverstone, John Priestley, William Bagley, Michael Hough (mark), John Clay (mark), George Clough, Henry Tomlinson, William Watson, Benj. Harris, Thomas Pilling, Jno. Biles.

[Note: This file includes depositions by witnesses Elizabeth Smith and William Breisford.]

25 January 1722.

Subject: Richard Baldwin.

Place: "at his house in the Township of Bristoll."

Report: "on the twenty third Instant Jan. Between the hours of three and ffour a Clock in the affter noon Intending to go somewhere ffrom home as he was mounting his horse Before he was well settled in his saddle his said horse ran away with him and struck him against a Cart (near the said house there standing) and gave him a mortall Wound whereoff in Less than twenty ffour hours he Dyed."

Witnesses: Sarah Hodgson, Jane Allin, Sarah Logan.

Jury: John Large, Jno. Biles, Rich. Mountain, James Moon, Richd. Hill, Benja. Harris, James Higgs, Jos: Bond, Daniell Jackson, Mat. Durham, Tho. Clifford, Henry Tomlinson.

Coroner: Wm. Atkinson.

9 May 1722.

Subject: James Padwick, "there being Burnt or scorched to Death."

Place: "at Bristoll."[4]

Report: "on the 9th day of may afforsaid about one a Clock in the morning, in the house of one Robert Pritchet in Bed Being, and the said house through some accident taking ffire the said house was Burnt and then and there the said James Padwick Immediately Dyed."

Jury: Nathan Watson, Samuel Bunting, James Watson, John

Brown, Richard Mountain, Benj. Harris, George Clough, Henry Mitchell, Tho. Marriott, Thomas Pilling, John Large, David Palmer.

Coroner: William Atkinson.

31 May 1722.

Subject: William Blow, "Late of Trenton in the County of Hunterdon within the western Division of Nova Ceserea Waterman."

Place: "on the shore near the Plantation of one William Dowdney in the township of Bristoll."

Report: "on the llth day of November Last Between the hours of six and ten a Clock in the evening the said William Blow sailing in a Boat Between Bristoll and Trenton afforsd was in a storm accidentally Cast over-board and Drowned."

Jury: Richard Mountain, Nathan Watson, Tho. Clifford, Willm. Watson, Benj. Harris, David Palmer, George Clough, Jno. Hall, Peter Webster, Henry Tomlinson, Thomas Pilling, James Moon.

Coroner: Wm. Atkinson.

18 April 1723.

Subject: Joshua Chessman.

Place: "at makeffield."

Report: He "in the Barn of John Millnor afsd in Makefield afsd along Being Between the hours of four and ten a Clock in the morning on the day afsd, not having the ffear of God Before his Eyes, but by Instigation Diabolical, willfully With a Roap himself Did strangle, and then and there, Voluntarily a *felo-de-se* of himself did make."

Witnesses: Saml. Baker, Martha Milnor.

Jury: Jonathan Palmer, David Palmer, Euclydus Longshore, John Milnor, John Clowes, Benjamin Taylor, John Scott, Saml. Baker, John Whittaker, John Baldwin, Tho. Yardley, Thomas Story.

Coroner: Wm. Atkinson.

6 December 1723.

Subject: Henry Hartley.

Place: "At and In County of Bucks."

Report: "on the sd Instant December About the houre nine of the Clock at night of the same Day the sd Henry Hartley went from Samuell Bakers mill in order to shut Down the fludgeat [floodgate] and from thence Accidentally fell Down Into the mill Reace, and then and there was Instantly Drownd."

Jury: John Brown, Thomas Harvey, Benjamin Harvye, John Coldween [?], Ruben Pownall, Thomas ffoster, Niell Grant, John Whittaker, John Hough, John Milnor, Matthias Harvye: [————], ffrancis Hag[ue].

Coroner: Richard Hough.

23 March 1722–3.
Subject: Henry Stackhouse, miller.
Place: "at Bristoll."
Report: "(according to Evidence and Circumstance) on the said twenty first of March the said Henry Stackhouse in the mill-house in Bristoll afforsd alone Being, Between the hours of seven and Nine In the Evening, (and Being subject to ffits heretofore) ffell into a ffitt of which ffitt he ffell Down and then and there Imeadiately Dyed, not having any hurt that Could be Received."
Witnesses: Sarah Hodgson, Jane Allin, Sarah Logan.
Jury: Tho. Clifford, David Palmer, Richd. Hill, John Large, Benja. Harris, James Higgs, Jos. Bond, Jon. Hall, Daniell Jackson, Mat. Durham, James Moon, Henry Tomlinson.
Coroner: Wm. Atkinson.

2 February 1724.
Subject: Michell Adkenson.
Place: "att Richland."
Report: "on the 30th day of January Bettwen the hours of Eleven and one of the Clock in the Afternoon of the same day the sd Michell Adkenson was falling of a tree which is adjudged by the wind was down the Contra[r]ly way to his Exp[ecta]tion which sd tree fell on the body of the sd Michell Ackenson and Instantly died."
Jury: Barnabus Rhoads, William Tennes, Thomas Robrts, Lorence Pearson, Thomas Hartly, John Moore, Laure Maden [Maider], John Lester, John Ball, James McVeagh, John Ball "of Plimoth," John Jones.
Coroner: Jonathan Woolston.

25 December 1724.
Subject: Ambrose Barcroft Late of Solebury.
Place: "at Solebury."
Report: "the twentieth day of December afs in year afd in Company with his son Ambrose Barcroft about Thirty Miles from Solebury afd [he was] Rideing through one of the Branches of the River Delaware then & there by reason of the stumbling of the Horse where on the sd Ambrose the ffather then rode He the sd Ambrose the ffather ffell from the Horse afd into the sd River By Means whereof He the sd Ambrose the ffather was then & there Instantly Drownded."
Jury: Ja[cob] Holcomb, Edward Heartly, John Hough, Jams. Hamlton, Henery Paxson, Willm. Scarbrough, Richard Norton,

Matt. Hughes, Samll. Baker, John Scarbrough, George Brown, George Haworth.

Coroner: Jonathan Woolston.

17 May 1724.

Subject: Rebecca Brown late of Newtown, spinster.

Place: "at Midletown . . . upon the branch of Neshaminy Creek Near the fford Comonly Called Cartars fford."

Report: "in Company with [————W]illiam Graves Rideing through the sd Creek at the [————] the sd Rebecca then & there ffell from her Horse [————] she rod Into the sd Creek or water by means whereof [————] the sd Rebecca was then & there Instantly Drownded."

Jury: Henry Nelson, Jonathan Woollston, Joseph Walker, Jeremiah Croasdale, Amas Watson, James Yates, Tho. Rogers Junr., Thomas Davis, Peter Vanhorn, William Hudleston, Nathanael Twining, Jonathan Carlile.

Coroner: None. Proceedings presided over by Jeremiah Langhorne, Justice of the Peace.

25 May 1726.

Subject: James ffox, "Late of Durham . . . Labourer."

Place: "at Durham . . . By Delaware river near a place Comonly Called Monetta Ollack."

Report: "the sd James ffox the Twenty second Day of May . . . went into a Certain Creek (Near the sd Monetta Ollack afd) in Company with Divers other persons in order to Bath himself and then & there plunging himselfe so far into the water that It was over his head & he not being able to swim he the sd James ffox was then & there Instantly Drowned."

Jury: Robert White, Edward moris, Thos. Sisom, Amos That[c]har (mark), Henry Mitchell, Samuel Bonham, Robert Lewis, Stephen Drawer, Richd. few, George Turner, John Heas [Hays], William Varnell.

Coroner: Jonathan Woolston.

4 May 1726.

Subject: Benjamin Lucas, son of Edward Lucas of Falls Township, "being a Child of one yeare and six months old."

Place: "in the fals Township att the hous of Edward Lucas."

Report: "on this 4th day between the hours of Eight and tenn the sd Benj. Lucas was playing neer a Large Spring of Watter that stood in standing water neer 2 foot deep and [accidentally?] fell in to the sd water and was drounded."

Jury: John Cross, Nehemiah Blackshaw, James Harker, John Hillborn, Amos Palmer, Tho. Watson, Samuel Combs, Thomas Ashton, James Downs, Roger Moon, Jonathan Palmer, Amas Watson.

Coroner: Jonathan Woolston.

30 May 1726.

Subject: Walter Thomas, "Late of Rights town [Wrightstown] . . . Labourer."

Place: "at Rightstown . . . near the house of Richard Mitchell."

Report: "on the twenty nineth day of may Last between the hours of Eleven and one of the same day, the sd Walter Thomas into the Miln pond of the sd Richard Mitchell did enter With an intent to wash and bathe himself and being swiming cros the sd miln pond as we suppose was immediately taken with the Cramp of which he sunk down and was drownd."

Jury: Daniel flimind [Flemin], William Kendall (mark), David James (mark), John Chapman, Joseph Chapman, Godfrey Kirk, Richard Mitchell, John Wilkinson, Edward Milnor, Peter Johnson (mark), Cephas Child, John Johnson (mark).

Coroner: Jonathan Woolston.

3 June 1726.

Subject: Adam Pettet, "Late of makefield, Cooper."

Place: "att makefild . . . by Delaware [River?] nere Thomas Yardly ferey."

Report: He "went into the River in Company with Samuell Hough and John Pickren in order to wash and Beath him self then and there plunged him self so far into the water not being able to swim to the shore the water being out of his depth he the sd Adam Pettet was then and there Instententy Drounded."

Jury: John Neeld, Warren Barr, Joshua Richa[rd]son, Thomas Stackhous, William Made [Meade], Henry Janney, Noah Gates, John Lee, Henry Woodward, Nicklos Parkar, Benjamin Jannens (mark), Dan[i]ell Lee.

Coroner: Jonathan Woollston.

21 December 1728.

Subject: John Verity, "Late of Wrightstown aforesaid Weaver."

Place: "at Wrightstown . . . on the Barn floor."

Report: "the said John Verity the Twentyeth Day of December ... went into his Barn with a Design to Kill or Chase a Squierel which was in the aforesaid Barn by which means he the said John Verity happened to fall from a mow or scaffold in the Barn afore said upon

a Boarded Thrashing floor by reason of which fall he the said Jno. Verity Bruised his fore head or left Temple of which Bruise he then and there Instantly Died."

Jury: Wm. Lee, John Lacey, John Worstell, Richard Norton, Jos. Lupton, Richard Parsons, Adam Harker, Stephen Twining, Robart Smith, John Atkinson, Thomas Smith, John Parsons.

Coroner: Jonathan Woolston.

21 December 1729.

Subject: Alexander Tomson.

Place: "att Bensalem . . . at the house of John Bell."

Report: "on the tw[entie]th day of this Instant [he] was falling a tree which [———] Lodged in another standing tree he [the said] Alexa[nder———] the other tree he Runing to avoid danger [———] falling Contrary wise [———] it fell upon [———] Which very Much Bruised [———] In severall parts he the sd Alexander being taken [from] under the sd trees not quite Dead and Langishing for the space of Twenty hours and then Died."

Jury: Danniel Knight, Johannis Sleght, Jacob Sleght, Samuel Worthington, John Holdgate, Owen Mu[r]fee, Abal Hingston, Benja. Field, William Baker, Isaac Knight Junr., George James, Samuel Cary.

Coroner: Jonathan Woollston.

Notes

1. The powers, duties, and records of the coroner are detailed in Sylvester K. Stevens & Donald H. Kent, eds., *County Government and Archives in Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1947), 306–10, with other references on 148 and 255. In Bucks Co., these papers were found among the records of the Court of Quarter Sessions and are now preserved as Record Group 2, Ser. 11, in Bucks Co. Archives housed at the Spruance Library of the Bucks Co. Hist. Soc.

2. References to Coroner's Inquests before 1700 are from *Records of the Courts of Quarter Sessions and Common Pleas of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, 1684–1700* (Meadville, Pa., 1943). Specific entries may be located in the index to these records.

3. *Bucks County Court of Quarter Sessions and Common Pleas, Minute Book, 1684–1715 & 1725–1730*, 373. The records in this volume prior to 1700 are published in the book cited in n. 2, above. Those after 1700 have been transcribed. The typescript is available at the Spruance Library where the original manuscript is preserved.

4. The occasion of this death was a major fire that took place at Bristol during the spring fair. See Terry A. McNealy, "Bristol's Great Fire of 1722", *Mercer Mosaic (Jnl. of the Bucks Co. Hist. Soc.)*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1987), 45.