



CORONERS INQUESTS



Inquest of Illegitimate Child of Margaret Fry Suspicious Affair At Stratton

An inquest has been held at Stratton on the body of the illegitimate child of Margaret Fry, of Stratton. The mother of the child was for many years housekeeper to a farmer in Wiltshire, at whose death she and an illegitimate child came into possession of some property. Lately, she has been living at Stratton, and on Monday, the 20th July, she gave birth to a child under circumstances which rendered an inquiry necessary. On the day following the birth she was about her household duties as usual, and on hearing that an inquest was to be held, she sent a request to the coroner that she might be allowed to be present. The coroner at once refused the application.

The coroner, in his opening remarks, alluded to the shocking prevalence of infanticide throughout many districts of the country, and forcibly urges upon the attention of the jury the importance of all persons connected with churchyards and cemeteries refusing to bury any so-called still-born children, without permission and sanction, previously obtained, of the clergyman, churchwarden, or other authority. In this case, it appeared he parish sexton had very properly mentioned the matter to the clergyman, who after inquiry, had permitted the internment to take place. In consequence, however, of certain rumours, the police had communicated with him (the coroner) upon the subject, and he had ordered the body to be exhumed, and it was now awaiting a post-mortem examination.

William Townsend, the parish clerk, deposed to burying the child, which was said to be still-born, on 22nd July. He had previously spoken to the clergyman about it.

Mrs. Rachel Parsons deposed: I am a widow, and live at Cirencester. I have three children. Margaret Fry spoke to me to attend her in her confinement. She called at my house a fortnight after, and said she expected to be confined some time in July. I am in the habit of attending persons in their confinements, and have given great satisfaction. I call myself a nurse. I did not see Margaret Fry many times after this, but I know that she got all the baby-linen ready. I called twice or three times, and she shewed me the baby-linen. I saw her working at it once. On Monday a little girl came for me at two o'clock in the day. I went as soon as I could get ready. When I got to the house, where Margaret Fry lived alone, I found the door unfastened and I went upstairs. I heard her groaning. I found her on her knees on the floor, leaning against the side of the bed. I said, "Oh dear." She said, "Oh dear: the baby is dead." She had her usual clothes on. The baby was lying by her side on the floor. I picked up the baby and looked at it, and saw it was quite dead. I then did all I could to make the mother comfortable. He said she was very sorry the baby was dead. I observed a mark on the head, and also on the shoulder of the body. The appearance of the child was that it had been born dead. I have no particular reason for saying so. I went to the neighbours on each side of Margaret Fry's house, but they were not at home.

Dr. Hodges stated that there were no external marks of violence, and his opinion was that the child had been suffocated, but not intentionally.

The jury returned a verdict in accordance with the medical testimony.

Wiltshire Independent, 6 August 1863