

# Inquest records

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This brief guide provides a list of the main series of inquest files, and preliminary enquiry records held at Queensland State Archives.

Inquests are magisterial inquiries held before a Coroner to establish the cause of death, the identity of the deceased, when, where and how death occurred and whether any person is to be charged with a criminal offence. In certain circumstances, inquests into fires may also be held, as well as enquiries with respect to missing persons. Depositions of witnesses, the Coroner's inquisition (a prescribed form setting out the details of the case and the Coroner's finding) and other relevant documents for all inquests held in Queensland are forwarded to the Justice and Attorney General's Department.

Under Queensland legislation, a coroner is required to conduct preliminary enquiries into all deaths that occur under a certain set of circumstances. Under the *Coroners Act 2003*, deaths subject to a Coroner's inquiry include: unnatural deaths such as accidents, suicides and homicides; deaths where the cause is unknown, or where the deceased did not see a doctor in the preceding 3 months; or certain special deaths, such as those occurring in a prison or under anaesthetic. These set of circumstances have varied only slightly since the *Inquests of Death Act 1866*. Upon completion of this preliminary enquiry, the Coroner decides if the death warranted a full inquest.

Inquest files include the date and place of the inquest, the name and occupation of the deceased, the date and supposed cause of death, depositions of witnesses describing the circumstances of the death, the names of any suspected persons, and a statement as to the action to be taken by the Justice and Attorney General's Department. In the case of an inquest into fire, details include the place, date and supposed cause of the fire; the damage, deaths or injuries caused; depositions of witnesses describing the circumstances of the fire; the names of any suspected persons; and a statement of action to be taken.

Files on inquests at Queensland State Archives are from 1859 onwards. An [index](#) on the Queensland State Archives' website is available for the period 1859–1902. After these years, indexes to inquests are available for searching in the Public Search Room. [Search procedure 5, inquests](#) is the step-by-step guide to assist researchers.

Queensland State Archives (QSA) also holds records on preliminary enquiries into deaths. In most cases, no inquests were ordered for these preliminary enquiries. [Preliminary enquiries, Series ID 13415](#) are for the Brisbane area from 1931 – 1962. Early files include some police reports that became inquests and may include information not found on the inquest file. For later years, the files are police investigations into deaths where no inquest was held, and may include a post mortem. The series is in chronological order. There is a surname index of deceased, relatives and witnesses in the Public Search Room.

These QSA reference citations for inquest records are found in [ArchivesSearch](#) (the QSA catalogue).

## Justice Department

### Register of coroners' inquests

9/5/1876–31/12/1979

[Series ID 236](#)

### Preliminary enquiries – Reports on deaths for which no inquests were ordered, Brisbane

Circa 1/1/1931–31/12/1962

[Series ID 13415](#)

### Inquest files

Circa 1/1/1859–31/12/1978

[Series ID 36](#)

All files with the end date up to and including 31/12/1978 have a 30 year Restricted Access Period. Files transferred to QSA in or after 2015 have a 75 year RAP, and many are item listed by the name of the deceased in [ArchivesSearch](#).

### No Inquest files

Circa 1/1/1973–1/1/1976

[Series ID 165](#)

### Preliminary Enquiries into Deaths – Cairns Police District

Circa 1/1/1955–31/12/1963

[Series ID 14879](#)

## Other Queensland State Archives' records

Queensland State Archives does hold other records pertaining to inquests and preliminary enquiries. Additional series including railway and mining accidents and fire inquests are listed under [Agency ID 19 - Justice Department](#) in [ArchivesSearch](#). Also, information about deaths can also be found in the records of the police and local court authorities including Coroner's Courts in Courts of Petty Sessions districts.

When searching for information about a death it is important to consider all possibilities and think creatively. Keep in mind the circumstances surrounding the death and other places information could possibly be found. For example, information concerning the death of a child at school may also be found in school correspondence for state schools, [Series ID 12607](#) files; if the death occurred 'on the job', it may be worth searching departmental files, etc. If the coronial inquest delivers a manslaughter or murder verdict look at [Agency ID 27 - Police Department](#) murder records. Further information in [Brief guide 32, murder files](#).

## Alternative sources not held at Queensland State Archives

### Death certificates

If no inquest is found, it is often a good idea to get check the death certificate. Recent death certificates state details of inquests. A death certificate allows researchers to pinpoint the date of the inquest. Occasionally the time between the death and the inquest is considerable. The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, [index to deaths in Queensland](#) is searchable online at <http://www.qld.gov.au/law/births-deaths-marriages-and-divorces/>. Further information in [Brief guide 24, Birth, Death and Marriage records](#).

## Post mortems

Queensland State Archives does not hold post mortem reports as a complete collection or series of records. Copies of post mortem reports sometimes appear on later inquest files, and police reports into deaths not requiring an inquest. Researchers interested in recent post mortem reports may write to:

The Office of the State Coroner  
GPO Box 1649  
Brisbane Qld 4001 Email: [state.coroner@justice.qld.gov.au](mailto:state.coroner@justice.qld.gov.au)

## Mining accidents

The State Library of Queensland's [Queensland Mining Accidents](#), index of Queensland mining accidents up to 1945, is an online index searchable in One Search. Compiled from the *Queensland Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings* (later know as Queensland Parliamentary papers) entries record the date of the accident, the name of the miner, the mine where the accident took place and other brief details.

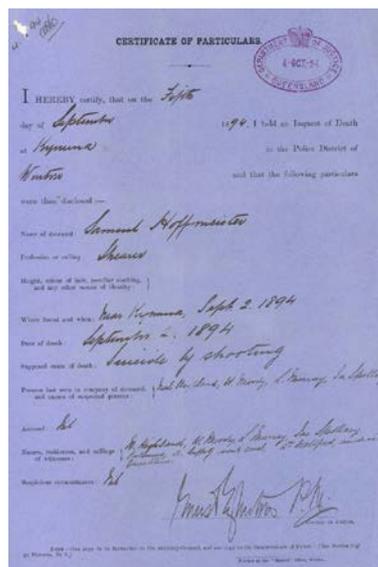
## Newspapers

Historical newspapers are another valuable source of information. They contain death and funeral notices, and often details of an unusual death, an incident resulting in a death, and sometimes state if an inquest was held. Digitised Australian newspapers are searchable online at the National Library of Australia's Trove website at <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>.

Copies of most historical Queensland newspapers are at the State Library of Queensland. The contact details for the [State Library of Queensland](#) are available [here](#).

## Image Queensland

[Image Queensland](#) (the digitised part of ArchivesSearch) enables users to search and view the digital copies of public records, e.g. photographs, documents, maps and plans. The image below is the Certificate of particulars of the death of Mr Samuel Hoffmeister, dated 5 September 1894.



Queensland State Archives [Digital Image ID 2812](#)