

Coroners' inquiries

Death investigation and the coroner's inquest. Ian Freckleton, David Ranson. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2006 (iix + 929 pp, \$270.00). ISBN 978 0 195507003.

DEATH INVESTIGATION AND THE CORONER'S INQUEST is an impressive text written by two highly qualified and acknowledged experts in their respective fields. International in scope, the book manages to bridge the gap between legal and standard forensic pathology texts, providing significant information about coronial systems in Australasia, and how forensic practice and the law interact in this forum.

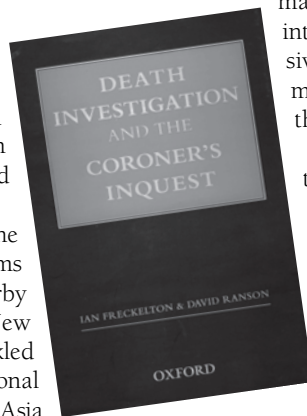
The text is set out in a number of well constructed and easily accessed chapters. One useful and quite fascinating section that sets the scene for the rest of the text deals with the history of the coronial system in England, and subsequently in the colonies, with examples of inquests dealing with the Kelly Gang and the Eureka Stockade.

Particularly useful information is provided on the similarities of and differences between coronial systems among the states of Australia and also those of nearby Pacific neighbours, including New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji. Death-scene investigation is tackled from a number of perspectives, with cross-jurisdictional comparisons of systems in Europe, North America, Asia

and the Pacific providing a useful overview not readily available in other texts.

The various roles of forensic practitioners in evaluating death scenes are succinctly outlined, with an analysis of not only the medical aspects of postmortem examinations, but also a review of the legal and cultural issues associated with body and tissue retention and handling. A review is provided of the variety of techniques that may be used to identify human remains, with a clear demonstration of how computer-assisted photofit images may improve upon original material. The discussion of international disaster victim identification is comprehensive and timely. Helpful advice is given for doctors who may be called to give expert evidence, and the analysis of the process of inquests is extremely useful.

Finally, the review of the strengths and weaknesses of the coronial system, and its likely future, provides a suitable end for the text. This excellent and reasonably priced book certainly fills a niche in the market and will be of use to all lawyers and doctors who are involved in the coronial process.



Roger W Byard

Professor, Forensic Science Centre
Adelaide, SA