

ALLEGED CONCEALMENT OF BIRTH 1891

On Monday, an inquest concerning the death of the female infant child of Martha Mercer, aged twenty one, single woman, was held at Westfield Farm, before Mr R A Wilson. Mr J H Burt was chosen foreman of the jury.

Mrs King, wife of Mr J F King, in whose employ the mother was as servant, said she had a suspicion as to Mercer's condition and gave evidence as to what had occurred on the day of the birth of the child.

Mr J A Ensor, who was called in, said he attended the girl and made an examination of the body of the child, which was taken from the closet, and found that it had breathed, but very imperfectly. The circumstances led him to conclude that the birth had taken the girl unawares. There were no marks of violence on the child, and it was not fully developed.

In answer to a juror, Mr Ensor thought the child, under proper treatment, might have lived. The jury returned a verdict of "Found Dead".

Friday 18 September 1891

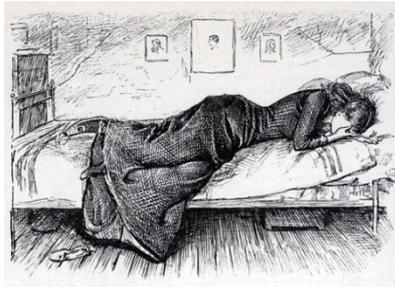
Hindon Petty Sessions

Martha Mercer, single woman, of Donhead St Andrew, was charged with concealing the birth of her female illegitimate child, at Wardour, on 11th September.

Mrs King, wife of Mr Frederick King, of West Field Farm, Wardour, said prisoner, who was twenty one years of age and was in her service as domestic servant. She was suspicious of her being *enceinte*, but had never spoken to her.

On the morning of the 11th September, she complained of being ill, and in the afternoon she left the house, and when she returned she remarked that she was better. But she went to her bedroom, and on witness hearing something fall, she proceeded up the stairs and on the land found prisoner seated on a box. On observing blood upon her clothes, she told her to remain where she was and she went for assistance and sent for Dr Ensor.

Sister Josephine, visiting Sister at Wardour Convent, said she was called by Mrs Gurd to see a person at Mrs King's who was said to be dying.



She went at once, and on the landing saw Mercer lying on the floor, with her head between a box and the wall. She raised her, and seated her on the box, and then observed stains of blood upon the floor. She was then in a dead faint, but on her regaining consciousness, witness asked her what had happened, and she told her that she had had a miscarriage, evidence having been given by Mrs Gurd, wife of Samuel Gurd, of Wardour.

Dr Ensor was called. He stated that he found the body of a female child in the closet near the house. In his opinion the woman was accidentally confined and that the birth took place in the closet. He made a post mortem examination of the body and found that the child had breathed, but that it had almost immediately suffocated. The child was undeveloped, and in all probability would not have lived.

Colonel Best: Is it possible that the girl would not know that she had had a child?

Dr Ensor: Yes

Replying to Supt Bull, Dr Ensor said he stated before the Coroner that, with proper care, the child might have lived.

After a short consultation in private, the Bench returned into Court, and the Chairman announced that they considered the charge had not been substantiated and it would be dismissed. (Slight applause, which was immediately suppressed).

Superintendent Bull stated that in consequence of an open verdict being returned by the Coroner's jury, the police had been compelled to bring the case before the Bench in order that further enquiries might be made. The Chairman said the police had only done what was right.

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