



SEMINAR REPORT

Preview of the Index of Coroner's Inquest Files

Tuesday 28th May 2014

Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast

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1.0 Background

On 28th May 2014 the Commission for Victims and Survivors (CVSNI) held a policy seminar in conjunction with the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

The purpose of the event was to:

- Provide groups and individuals with a preview of the Index of Coroner's Inquest files;
- Give a practical demonstration of how to search or browse for information; and
- Raise awareness of PRONI's services.

The seminar was held in advance of the Ministerial launch on 29th May 2014.

2.0 Attendance

There were 18 attendees at the seminar from across the victims and survivors sector including groups and service deliverers, members of the Victims and Survivors Forum and individuals.

3.0 Seminar content

Adrian McNamee, Head of Policy, Research and Development at CVSNI, introduced the seminar. He advised that the purpose of the event was to provide the sector with a preview of the index prior to the Ministerial announcement and encouraged attendees to engage with PRONI staff.

Margaret Smith, Director and Deputy Keeper of the Records, advised that PRONI will be publishing an index of 13,169 Coroner's Inquest files on its electronic catalogue on 29th May 2014. She advised that the original files are preserved by PRONI and relate to individuals who died during the period of 1969–1999.

It was highlighted that the files contain information relating to over 3,000 people killed during the Troubles, however it was noted that PRONI does not hold records relating to everyone killed during the Conflict.

Attendees were advised that the index also contains information relating to individuals who died as a result of suicide, cot death, industrial or agricultural accident or whose death was unexplained.

David Huddleston, Head of Records Management, Cataloguing and Access, provided an overview of PRONI's work and highlighted services that are available via the online and onsite catalogue.

The inquest records include varying levels of detail such as the inquest verdict, post mortem report, witness depositions, police report and in some cases photographs of the scene of the incident.

It was stated that most of the inquest records held by PRONI dating from 1969–1999 are not yet open to the public. If the records are currently closed PRONI will respond to the request under the Freedom of Information Act (2000). This legislation allows for any individual to request access to information held by a public body. All requests should be sent to PRONI in writing either by mail or email.

If PRONI hold the records, PRONI is obliged under Freedom of Information Act (2000) to consult with the responsible authority, in this case the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Justice about the release of the record. After the consultation the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister, as Keeper of the Records, will make a decision on the release of the records.

Some information however may be exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (2000). If information falls under one of these

exemptions PRONI may not be able to release it. Some of these exemptions relate to health and safety and personal information.

With regards to accessing the Coroner's Inquest files, the process was summarised as:

- Request to PRONI (email or by writing);
- PRONI to consider request taking into consideration Freedom of Information requirements and any appropriate consultation with the Department of Justice and/or the Northern Ireland Office;
- PRONI to contact applicant once outcome arrived.

Wesley Geddis, Records Management, Cataloguing and Access Section, provided a practical demonstration of how to search or browse for information.

The seminar concluded with a tour of the building and a viewing of the public search area.

4.0 Conclusions and further information

The creation of the catalogue will allow the public to identify what is held on file and in particular it will be of benefit to those victims and survivors, individually or through groups, who wish to find out if an inquest record is held by PRONI.

CVSNI would like to thank PRONI for engaging with the victims and survivors sector prior to Minister Ní Chuilín's announcement on 29th May 2014.

The online index can be accessed on the PRONI website at www.proni.gov.uk