The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post , Friday, March 6, 1891

CHILD SUFFOCATED IN DEAN FOREST.

THE FATHER COMMITTED FOR MANSLAUGHTER.

Mr M. F. Carter, coroner, held an inquest on Wednesday afternoon, at the police station at Coleford, Westdean, touching the death, which occurred on the 1st inst., of John James Bourne, son of James Bourne collier, of Joyford, near Coleford.

Susan Bourne, mother of the deceased, deposed that on Saturday night last her husband on reaching home pulled her hair and assaulted her, because she quarrelled with him about wages, and at length having put the child into bed she went away and slept that night at the house of a Mrs Barnett. She was away from the child, who was four months old, several hours. Next morning she went back home, and noticed foam on the child's mouth. On waking, the child lay dead on her arms. Witness and her husband then told the police, when she told them untruths, saying she had been in bed with the child all that night. She made that statement because she did not wish it to be known that they quarrelled.

James Bourne gave similar evidence.

Elizabeth Barnett told the coroner that the mother of the deceased came to her house on Saturday night in her nightdress. She left the house at five o'clock, and half-an-hour afterwards returned and said the baby had died during the night.

Rose Barnett deposed that at the woman's request she and a lodger went to try to pacify the husband. They found him hiding under a hedge with a stick in his hand. He chased his wife, but she got from him. When the woman returned to the house witness heard the husband call out to her and say the baby was dead. The child appeared to be well on Saturday evening.

Leslie Trotter, registered medical practitioner, deposed that he made a post-mortem on the child. He considered that there was evidence of a slow process of suffocation. The child had been overlain, or covered with clothes, or it might have turned over on its face and so become suffocated.

The Coroner said it was evident the parents had been making wilful misstatements all through their evidence. No doubt the wife had done her best to screen her husband. He, the coroner, did not think any guilt attached to her, but the father at the least had been grossly and culpably negligent.

After half an hour's deliberation, 10 jurymen were in favour of a verdict of manslaughter. The coroner again addressed them, and in the end a verdict to that effect was returned.

The man was then, on the strength of the coroner's warrant, handed over to the custody of Supt. Ford. Subsequently he was brought before a magistrate and remanded.