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Saturday, September 21, 2002

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## The woman who wouldn't give up

In today's 16-page Weekend section: Simon Toft talks to the pensioner who sparked a major hospital inquiry  
**PLUS:** Barry Rutter gives the week's telly a good roasting, Brian Kidd has **advice** on garden ponds, Jeff Reines goes to **Brittany** . . and Lars Trodson welcomes the **autumn**

Inside: Complete guide to the best TV viewing for Saturday and Sunday

### Weekend



**Why  
did my  
mother  
die?**

The OAP who  
won't stop  
fighting until  
she's found  
the truth



Mike Gilson on the trouble with term-time



Ron Brown on the old time bakery round

The News

■ Inside: Complete guide to the best TV viewing for Saturday and Sunday

# Weekend

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PLUS



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*The News*



# GILSON on Saturday

## What do they think of term so far? Rubbish!

SO THEY'RE back at school and the days of crazed summer high-jinks around the house, tying the hamster to the skateboard and tearing up the flowerbeds with ferocious games of football, are gone.

Instead, an incredible transformation has overcome the boys. Now they slouch around the place in their newly-scuffed school shoes, grunting and staring at the telly, the whole effort of five-and-a-half hours at school clearly too much for them.

The sounds of summer, arguing the toss for the sake of it and making 'hilarious' burping noises, are no more, and where once we couldn't get them to shut up, now we have no chance of anything approaching intelligent conversation.

A sample from the other night.

Me: What are your new classes like? Them: OK

What about the new teachers? All right.

Have you learnt anything today? No.

What, nothing? Yeah, nothing.

What was the best part of the day? Lunch.

All right, the next best then? Break.

What about the after-school club? Rubbish.

Rubbish, (ie, that meal was rubbish or your guitar playing is rubbish) is a word used with incredible regularity at the moment. It's nice to see some of the old words coming back, replacing pants and naff, I suppose.

The truth is that when we later attend parents' evening we will actually find out that that day they each wrote a novel, starred in the school production of the Passion Plays and sailed across the Channel in a boat they made from loo rolls and bed linen while dressed in full Tudor costume.

It's just that they don't seem to be able to summon up the energy to tell us about it.

Having said that, last night they turned the tables on me. Coming in from a long, tiring day they pounced.

What did you do at work today? Nothing.

What was the best part? Coming home.

You must have learnt something? Yeah, stop asking rubbish questions of people who have had long hard days at work or school.

## I've got the ocean blues

EVERY now and then, I get a bit worried about the environment. Usually it is sparked by the strangest things.

Take the poster on the wall of my local fish and chip shop showing the sea in which all sorts of creatures swim. Alongside are explanations of the number of them now caught and served up on the nation's plates. It makes frightening reading I can tell you.

For what it suggests is that we are only a few cod away from regularly serving up John Dory with the chips and mushy peas.

Anyone who's ever seen what a John Dory looks like will know that no amount of batter will hide the hideous nature of this creature.

We always read that the stocks of cod and haddock are rapidly declining and that fishing companies are being forced to go deeper into the murky blackness of the oceans to find something for us to eat. Reaching the bottom

feeders cannot be far away.

Which brings me back to that poster. For the John Dory is actually quite a handsome creature compared to some of those who crawl along the bottom. So dark is it down there that most of the fish have had to develop eyes the size of saucers just so they don't bump into each other.

Add a tail and a couple of nasty antennae, feeler-type things and that's about the make-up of the fish of the future.

What kind of life do these things have? At least your average cod and haddock can gambol in the warmer reaches of the upper seas chasing around with their mates until the big net in the sky comes calling.

Surely bottom feeders who lead lonely, miserable, cold lives are not going to be able to rouse themselves to taste nice without a barrow-load of tartare sauce.

Anyone for saveloy?

## COVER STORY

# They saw an OAP, a lady on her own. But I'm very determined



Families are fighting for answers about their elderly relatives' deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital. One of the doughtiest campaigners is Gillian Mackenzie, whose mother died in 1998. **SIMON TOFT** reports.

**WHEN Gillian Mackenzie was a pupil at top girls' school Roedean in Brighton after the war, her house motto translated as 'grit, guts and determination'.**

That was 50 years ago, but today she says: 'I have lived up to that ever since.'

It's a tenacity that has served her well as she continues a four-year fight to get what she believes is justice over the death of her 91-year-old mother at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

Behind the grey hair and the pearls is a woman who's not afraid to make waves.

She says: 'At Roedean I was always encouraged to question things. I can be an extremely obstinate lady. When I think something is wrong I will go all out to put it right.'

It was Mrs Mackenzie's original complaint about drugs given to her mother, Gladys Richards, in 1998 that ended up triggering one internal and three external inquiries into the treatment of patients, the latest of which has been ordered by the government's chief medical officer.



Gosport War Memorial Hospital

It will be carried out by the professor who scrutinised evidence surrounding the deaths of patients of convicted serial killer Dr Harold Shipman.

As a result, other families are now fighting for answers about their elderly relatives' deaths at the Gosport hospital.

When 68-year-old Mrs Mackenzie decided to challenge medical procedures, she knew she had to prepare thoroughly to be taken seriously.

When she first went to Gosport CID with her complaints over her mother's death, she was armed with photocopies from old law books she'd studied.

She says: 'I didn't go to

the police because my mother had died. I went because I thought the law had been broken. I was convinced of that then and I remain just as convinced today.'

When the police initially ruled there were insufficient grounds for any prosecution of hospital staff, it only made Mrs Mackenzie more determined.

She claims: 'I was totally underestimated. They saw an OAP, a woman on her own. But I'm a very determined lady and I still have my marbles.'

Last year she even went back to college to study for an A-level in law. She was forced to give it up in March before sitting the

exam because she had to have eye surgery.

There have been other health problems. In April she was rushed to hospital and diagnosed with kidney stones. She is still receiving treatment. In July, she had to have more surgery on her other eye.

But Mrs Mackenzie is not easily deterred.

She says: 'I have always fought. Every time you do it makes you stronger for the next time.'

'I think for myself and that makes life difficult for other people. People can find me abrasive, but if you keep on submitting and submerging your personality you will end up with more problems than if you speak out.'

She was married to Hamish, a tea planter, and lived with him in Sri Lanka before coming back to Britain in 1967. They had to start from scratch and lived wherever Hamish could get a job. Twenty-five years ago, they arrived in the genteel resort of Eastbourne and a modest detached house three miles from the seafront.

Mrs Mackenzie, who has two children, lost Hamish in 1986. He was in remission from cancer, but succumbed to leukaemia.

She says: 'He was a fighter too.'

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## COVER STORY



'I didn't go to the police because my mother had died. I went because I thought the law had been broken'

## THE STORY SO FAR

GILLIAN Mackenzie complained to police after her mother, Gladys Richards, died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital in August 1998. She had been admitted for rehabilitation after a hip operation at the Royal Hospital Haslar and doctors put her on a mixture of powerful drugs including heroin-based diamorphine.

Mrs Mackenzie believes they crossed the line between treating a patient for pain and contributing to her death. Her official complaint sparked a police inquiry, but the Crown Prosecution Service examined the file and said there was not enough evidence to secure any convictions.

When she protested to the Police Complaints Authority about the way she was dealt with, it upheld her complaint and disciplinary action was taken against two officers.

An internal hospital inquiry was also carried out, but no staff were disciplined as a result.

Another inquiry was conducted by the Commission for Health Improvement, an independent watchdog set up by the Department of Health.

The CHI found there was systematic failure to provide good care, including insufficient guidelines on prescribing painkillers and sedatives, inadequate review of prescribing for older people and lack of supervision.

A draft action plan was sent to the CHI by Gosport health bosses earlier this month.

The government's chief medical officer, Sir Liam Donaldson, has now launched a further inquiry.

Hampshire police has also said it is to resubmit its file on Gosport War Memorial Hospital, complete with the CHI findings, to the CPS.

Mrs Mackenzie and relatives of about a dozen other patients who died at the hospital hope it will convince the CPS that their cases should be investigated further.

This week *The News* revealed that Dr Jane Barton, who was in day-to-day charge of medical care at the hospital until July 2000, is facing a charge of serious professional misconduct by the General Medical Council.

Officialdom and battling against authority doesn't worry her. Last month she wrote to the Attorney-General setting out her views on how her case had been handled by the police and had previously fired off a missive to the Director of Public Prosecutions and several to the Chief Constable of Hampshire. Copies have gone to Tony Blair.

She says: 'I am not in awe of anybody. I have always been a great admirer of Rumpole of the Bailey (a barrister created by John Mortimer and played by Leo McKern), but I always say I take after his wife, who he called "she who must be obeyed".'

She believes more people should complain if they're not happy with how they've been treated.

'I think we have the NHS we deserve because we treat doctors as Gods. They are normal human beings who don't know it all.'

Mrs Mackenzie is an active

member of the University of the Third Age, getting involved in current affairs and music groups. Her interests include psychology and philosophy and she says she never stops learning.

'I find relaxation in the reference library. I'm always discovering something new.'

She has 'a hell of a lot' of paperwork, neatly kept in files in a spare bedroom. She also has her own mini legal library, complete with police training manuals that she has scrutinised to pursue her claims that officers did not properly investigate her initial complaint.

She says of the police and the medical authorities: 'I would have thought they'd realised by now that I'm not going to go away. This is going to take me years, but that doesn't worry me in the slightest.'

'I'm still facing a lot of obstacles. I know it's far from over. But nothing deters me because I believe I'm right.'

Above: Gillian Mackenzie with her mother Gladys Richards  
Below: Mrs Mackenzie asking some tough questions to members of the hospital board during a meeting at Fareham Civic Offices

