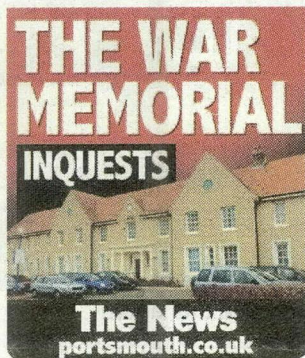


INQUEST: Start of process to find out what happened to elderly patients

Campaigner's long journey to get to the truth



by Chris Owen
Chief reporter

THE woman who first sparked a huge inquiry into deaths of elderly patients at a hospital said she hoped a mass inquest would get to the truth.

It was 11 years ago that Gillian Mackenzie first reported the death of her 91-year-old mother, Gladys Richards (below), to Hampshire police.

That set in motion one of the biggest police probes ever undertaken by the force.

A criminal investigation has now been dropped, but tomorrow

Andrew Bradley, the coroner for north-east Hampshire, will start inquests into the deaths of 10 patients who died unexpectedly at Gosport War Memorial Hospital after being given high doses of powerful painkillers and sedative drugs. They all died while in-patients on Dryad and Daedalus wards between 1996 and 1999.

Mrs Mackenzie said: 'Perhaps at long last these inquests will get to the bottom of how all these people met their deaths.'

'I am pleased for the relatives of these 10 that at last



Gillian Mackenzie hopes the truth will come out about her mother's death

there will be an official hearing. What I still want though is a public inquiry into all the deaths.'

Mrs Mackenzie believes her mother, from Lee-on-the-Solent, who died at the Bury Road hospital in August 1998, was unnecessarily prescribed high doses of morphine.

Her suspicions, as first revealed by *The News*, trig-

gered an initial police probe. There have now been three investigations, the last of which concluded there was insufficient evidence to prosecute anyone.

Mrs Mackenzie, who lives in East Sussex, has spearheaded the campaign, but she is baffled why her mother has not been included in the list of deaths to be examined in front of a

jury over the next six weeks at Portsmouth Crown Court. She was told last week that a separate inquest has now been granted into her mother's death.

Mrs Mackenzie, 75, said: 'I know my mother was 91, but she shouldn't have died when she did. She was not in pain so why was she prescribed morphine?'

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TIMELINE

■ **August 1998:** Gladys Richards dies at Gosport War Memorial Hospital, with daughter Gillian Mackenzie already complaining about her care.

■ **October 1998:** First police investigation is launched, but dropped three weeks later.

■ **November 1998:** A second police probe is launched following further complaints by Gillian Mackenzie. It lasts three months and the Crown Prosecution Service decides not to take it to court.

The Police Complaints Authority launches an investigation into the two police probes following complaints from grieving families.

The complaints are upheld. ■ **October 1999:** Third police inquiry starts.

■ **January 2001:** Police files are sent to the Crown Prosecution Service.

■ **July 2001:** The Crown Prosecution Service decides there is insufficient evidence for prosecutions.

■ **August 2001:** Police ask NHS watchdog the Commission for Health Improvement – now the Healthcare Commission – to look into the deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

■ **April 2002:** Fresh complaints about the latest police probe are made to the Police Complaints Authority.

■ **July 2002:** The Commission for Health Improvement publishes a damning report into events surrounding the patients' deaths, concluding that patients were being put at risk.

■ **September 2002:** The Department of Health asks independent experts to conduct a 'death audit' at the hospital to see if unusual numbers of patients were dying.

■ **November 2002:** Police launch Operation Rochester into the deaths. In total 92 deaths are examined and hundreds of NHS staff are interviewed before the numbers are whittled down by medical experts.

■ **April 2004:** The Police Complaints Authority is replaced by the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

■ **November 2004:** The first files from Operation Rochester are sent to the Crown Prosecution Service.

■ **October 2005:** Head of Independent Police Complaints Commission apologises to families for the 'unacceptable length of time' the investigation has taken.

■ **February 2006:** Families are told the Independent Police Complaints Commission has launched a probe into its own work.

■ **May 2006:** Independent Police Complaints Commission confirms the officer in charge of the previous police probe should have been given a verbal warning over the conduct of the case.

■ **July 2006:** Police say all Operation Rochester files are now with the Crown Prosecution Service.

■ **December 2006:** The Crown Prosecution Service announces that none of the cases will go to court.

■ **June 2007:** Fears are raised that inquest into patient deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital will never be held as seven of the bodies have been cremated.

Legally the coroner can only perform inquests where a body still remains unless the government gives permission.

Portsmouth and south-east Hampshire coroner David Horsley says he will write to the Ministry of Justice to seek consent.

■ **May 2008:** Portsmouth and south-east Hampshire coroner David Horsley opens and adjourns an inquest into the deaths of the following 10 patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital in the late 1990s:

■ **Leslie Pittock, 83,** who died on January 24, 1996. Treated in Dryad ward.

■ **Elsie Lavender, 84,** who died on March 6, 1996. Treated in Daedalus ward.

■ **Helena Service, 99,** who died on June 5, 1997. Treated in Dryad ward.

■ **Ruby Lake, 84,** who died on August 21, 1998. Treated in Dryad ward.

■ **Arthur Cunningham, 79,** who died on September 26, 1998. Treated in Dryad ward.

■ **Robert Wilson, 75,** who died on October 18, 1998. Treated in Dryad ward.

■ **Enid Spurgeon, 92,** who died on April 13, 1999. Treated on Dryad ward.

■ **Geoffrey Packman, 68,** who died on September 3, 1999. Treated on Dryad ward.

■ **Elsie Devine, 88,** who died on November 21, 1999. Treated on Dryad ward.

■ **Sheila Gregory, 91,** who died on November 22, 1999. Treated on Dryad ward.

Complaints from relatives centred on the use of sedatives.

■ **March 18, 2009:** Inquest set to resume and last up to six weeks.