

Mr N Matthews
Coroners Unit
Ministry of Justice
8th Floor
102 Petty France
London
SW1H 9AJ

17 November 2008

Dear Mr Matthews

Hampshire Police Operation Rochester – Death at Gosport War Memorial Hospital, Gosport: Mrs Gladys Richards:

I refer to the correspondence some months ago in relation to my being given consent by the Secretary of State pursuant to Section 15 of the Coroners Act 1988, particularly my letters of 15 June 2007 and 26 November 2007.

I have now received a request from a daughter of Mrs Gladys Richards to open an Inquest into the death of her mother. Mrs Richards was one of the 92 deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital looked at by Hampshire Police as part of Operation Rochester. Mrs Richards died at the hospital on 21 August 1998. Her death was not reported to the then-Coroner and was, in fact, registered by her other daughter. Mrs Richards' body was then cremated. Obviously, no autopsy was carried out.

From the evidence before me, were Mrs Richards' death to occur now, the circumstances surrounding it (i.e. she died before recovering from an operation to repair a hip broken in a fall and may have suffered a subsequent fall post-operatively whilst in hospital) would persuade me to open an Inquest. Therefore, although Mrs Richards died in 1998, now being in possession of these facts I do not believe it would be proper for me not to do so.

However, as Mrs Richards was cremated, I have no legal authority to open an Inquest into her death without the consent of the Secretary of State under Section 15.

I should be grateful, therefore, if this letter could be treated as my formal report/request to the Secretary of State to open and hold an Inquest into the death of Mrs Gladys Richards.

Although Mrs Richards' death was not one of those where a file was submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service by the Police under Operation Rochester, many of the considerations referred to in my letter of 15 June 2007 apply equally to Mrs Richards.

By way of additional information to assist the Secretary of State, I enclose copies of recent correspondence I have received from Mrs Richards' daughter who has requested me to open an Inquest, Mrs Gillian Mackenzie.

I understand that there is now an accelerated procedure for requests such as mine and I should be obliged if it could be applied in this case to allow ample time for an Inquest on Mrs Richards to be included in the programme for the Gosport War Memorial Hospital Inquests scheduled to commence in mid-March 2009.

Yours sincerely

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Encs

cc Mr A M Bradley
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