

HEALTH: Lawyer who helped relatives of serial killer's victims joins Gosport families' battle for inquiry

Shipman solicitor to probe hospital deaths

THE solicitor who represented relatives of Harold Shipman's patients has been hired to help families of elderly patients who died at a Gosport hospital.

Relatives contacted high-profile lawyer Ann Alexander, who won court action forcing the government to hold an inquiry in public into the deaths of Shipman's patients.

The senior partner at Alexander Harris Solicitors today criticised the police and health groups involved in investigating deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital for their apparent lack of action.

Miss Alexander said: 'It is of particular concern to learn that yet again serious questions must be raised about the conduct of health care professionals and the failure of the police to carry out a sufficient-

by Saxon East
The News

ly thorough investigation.

'These are families who have also raised their concerns with several administrative bodies including the health authority and government ministers over the past five years and yet it is only now that the authorities seem to be taking note.

'We have seen in the case of Harold Shipman how delays resulted in the worst possible circumstances. Urgent change is required to prevent similar situations happening again and to restore and maintain confidence in the National Health Service.'

Miss Alexander met with relatives for the first time over the weekend and will now sift through all the information they have compiled before deciding how to proceed.



Ann Alexander

Families won case for public inquiry

ALEXANDER Harris Solicitors was contacted by the relatives of the patients who died under the care of Dr Harold Shipman.

After Dr Shipman was convicted for killing 15 of his patients, the government was going to hold an inquiry in private.

But Alexander Harris Solicitors won court action which forced

the government to hold it in public.

That inquiry looked at how many patients died under Dr Shipman and the circumstances surrounding their death.

The next stage of the inquiry - which will not be heard until 2003 - will look at what the authorities did to stop Dr Shipman killing his patients.

The new development comes just days after health bosses revealed an internal management document highlighted fears about drug prescribing practices at the hospital in 1991 - seven years earlier than inquiries so far have concentrated on.

Relatives who hired Miss Alexander believe the deaths of

a number of patients could have been down to the wrong level of drugs being administered.

As reported, Dr Jane Barton - who was in day-to-day charge of the treatment of some elderly patients until she left in July 2000 - looks set to be charged with serious professional misconduct by

doctors' regulatory body the General Medical Council.

There is no suggestion that Dr Barton, or any other member of staff at the hospital, deliberately harmed any patient.

Once solicitors from Alexander Harris have reviewed the evidence, options could include putting pressure on the government to set up an inquiry.

Cardinal at centre of inquiry over paedophile

THE head of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales is at the centre of a major police investigation. It was revealed today.

Police have asked the Crown Prosecution Service for advice over an inquiry involving Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, former bishop of the diocese of Arundel and Brighton.

The inquiry relates to claims that in the 1980s the Cardinal, during his time as bishop, turned a blind eye to a priest he knew to have paedophile tendencies who was later convicted of sexual offences.

Sussex Police have contacted lawyers over inquiries involving the Cardinal, who was also formerly a priest in Fareham.

A spokeswoman for the CPS said: 'Sussex Police contacted the CPS for advice as part of their inquiries involving the Cardinal and we gave them advice.'

A spokesman for the Roman Catholic diocese of Portsmouth Barry Hudd said: 'I believe the Cardinal has said he will co-operate with any investigation but cannot say anything further.'

The Archbishop, 70, is the spiritual leader in England and Wales for more than four million Catholics.

He was made a Cardinal by the Pope in February last year.

Shopkeeper's gunpoint ordeal captured on camera

THIS is the moment when a balaclava-clad robber held a terrified shopkeeper at gunpoint and demanded cash.

The masked man entered Britannia Wine Stores in Victoria Road North, Southsea, and walked up to the counter brandishing a small black handgun, terrifying the shopkeeper and a customer.

The 59-year-old shopkeeper ran into a room behind the counter, from where he called police.

His attacker attempted to break into the till but gave up after a few minutes and fled empty-handed, still wearing the black balaclava.

He was seen running across the road and heading south in the direction of St David's Road. The shopkeeper was left distressed and shaken by his ordeal.

Officers fear the robber - who they believe had a genuine weapon - may strike again.

Detective Constable Nick Hodge said raider's distinctive red jacket could play a vital part in tracking him down.

The man is described as white, in his early 20s, 6ft with a stocky build and round glasses.

The red, cotton, elasticated jacket had a blue horizontal band, with a red band inside, that went across the chest and round both arms. There was also a white emblem on the left hand side.

Southsea Detective Sergeant Laurie Mullen said: 'We are treating this very seriously. Anyone who walks into a shop with a gun is going to be locked up for a long time.'

Anyone with information about the robbery at 10pm on Thursday should telephone 0845 0454545 and ask for Southsea CID.



The robber points a gun at the shopkeeper and demands cash as a customer looks on in horror.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Fire-ravaged ship leaves harbour

PORTSMOUTH: A fire-ravaged ship brought into Portsmouth after her cargo caught alight has left harbour - taking her hazardous cargo with her.

Fire crews from Portsmouth, Havant and Waterlooville braved thick smoke and searing temperatures when they clambered inside container vessel Wester Till after a fire started.

Floods claim row

SOUTHSEA: Residents today hit back at Environment Agency claims that people are failing to prepare for another winter flood disaster.

The agency says only one householder in 20 has taken action to cope with future flooding.

But June Merrigan, of Ravenswood Gardens, said: 'What can you do apart from putting your house on stilts?'

Huge coffee event

FAREHAM: A school will take part in a national event aiming to raise £3.5 million to fight cancer.

The West End Centre at Neville Lovett Community School is to host a coffee morning from 9.15am to 11am on Friday.

The event is part of the national World's Biggest Coffee Morning campaign organised by McMillan Cancer Relief.

Rescue reunion

SOUTH: Sailors of a stricken minehunter rescued by plucky civilians half a century ago are being sought in time for the 50th anniversary.

HMS Wave broke free from her moorings and ran aground in foul weather off the Cornish coast on September 30, 1952.

A reunion is planned in St Ives for crew and the residents who helped rescue them.

Details from ex-sailor Brian Sandom on (023) 8045 2996.

Jewellery stolen

FAREHAM: A gold chain and games console was stolen after burglars broke into a home while the occupants were away.

The burglars broke into the home in Butser Walk through the patio doors and then stole the chain, worth £330, and the PlayStation 2 games machine.

WHAT THEY SAID



'I knew from the first moment I saw him that he was the one,' Former Gladiator Rio, Jane Omorogbe, on her wedding to Bick Graham.