

The News COMMENT

It may take time but inquests are worth it

COURT

It has taken a long time. But finally the relatives of 10 people who died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital feel like they may be on the verge of getting some answers.

Yesterday's re-opening of a mass inquest into deaths on two wards between 1996 and 1999 comes 11 years after they began their search for the truth of what exactly happened.

They have not given up ever since Gillian Mackenzie first raised concerns over the care and treatment of her 91-year-old mother, Gladys Richards.

Now they can have their day in court – or rather an anticipated six weeks or more as assistant deputy coroner for south-east Hampshire Andrew Bradley and a jury hear evidence at Portsmouth Combined Court Centre.

It's going to be a lengthy, drawn-out process of witnesses being called and evidence being carefully considered.

At times the bereaved who attend the inquests will find it difficult. But for them it is all about achieving some sort of closure.

We certainly believe a formal inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of their loved ones can help them to feel some comfort and reassurance that every detail has been examined.

So we do not agree with Gosport MP Sir Peter Viggers, who has criticised the decision to hold a coroner's inquiry.

His argument is that the police have already looked into the deaths and decided that no action was required.

In his mind, it's better to let the matter rest.

He is factually right in that the deaths have been the subject of three inquiries by Hampshire Police and a probe by the Crown Prosecution Service.

But, with respect to Mr Viggers, he is not one of those who has lost a much-loved relative. He can't know how much it means to them.

Also, some would say that previous investigations have not exactly been conclusive and that an exhaustive inquiry should have been held before now.

We believe re-opening the inquests is the right way to proceed.

It may take time, but we hope they give relatives the information they feel they are still missing after all these years.