

Gerald William Clegg Hill

It's appropriate that the final article in this series should concern Captain G W (Billy) Clegg-Hill because this is the war grave I tend and, as far as I'm concerned, his is the most poignant story I've come across in my investigations. I researched Billy's story long before I started writing these articles and can remember literally shaking with anger at what befell this young soldier.

The honourable Gerald William Clegg Hill was born on 26th August 1932, the second son of Gerald Rowland Clegg-Hill, 7th Viscount Hill of Hawkestone and of Hardwicke and his wife, Elizabeth Flora Garthwaite, nee Smyth-Osbourne. Their first child, the Hon Anthony Rowland Clegg-Hill, succeeded to the title. Billy was christened at St Mary's, Edstaston, Shropshire, with four godparents including a member of the Welsh Guards.

He was educated at [Kelly College, Tavistock, and at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst](#). He served in the Royal Tank regiment, being made Captain on 6th February 1959.

Billy was arrested in 1962, possibly in a police swoop on gay men in Southampton. He is said to have been tried at Somerset assizes, in Wells, found guilty of homosexual practices and sentenced to compulsory aversion therapy at Netley Military Hospital. He may have been offered the alternative of going to prison. (You can find many references to Captain Clegg-Hill online although many of them are just not very accurate reproductions of earlier articles, so the exact events and where they happened are not clear.)

His therapy is likely to have been carried out in P wing of Netley Hospital, the building near D block. Wherever it happened, it went disastrously wrong and Billy was taken seriously ill. He died from coma and convulsions resulting from injections of apomorphine, a potent vomit-inducing drug he'd been administered as part of his aversion treatment. At the time, the coroner listed the death as being due to 'natural causes' perhaps an allergic reaction to the drugs; this was only revealed as untrue thirty years later. A BBC documentary was aired in 1996 detailing his story and alleging medical negligence; Billy didn't receive prompt enough treatment when he was taken ill and may have suffered a stroke brought on by dehydration.

He died on 12th July 1962, aged 29, at Southampton General Hospital; the national probate register gives his address as Rushgrove House, Woolwich and he left his estate of £10778 6s 4d to his mother. I have been told that Billy's parents used to sit in Rownhams churchyard while they were waiting to visit their son. His funeral was held at St John's church on Thursday July 19th 1962.

I found it quite extraordinary that, of all the graves I could have ended up looking after, I have this one; I regard it as a privilege.

Ann Laird - Rownhams November 2015