

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

OJA

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is OJA. I prefer to be called OJA. My date of birth is 1977. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before Keil School

2. I lived with my parents and my sister who is eight years older than me. Both my parents were teachers and we had a stable family. My dad was a teacher at Clydebank High School and my mother was at a school in Helensburgh. Both my parents worked in state schools. We stayed in Balloch, close to Keil School. I went to Haldane Primary School which was a normal state primary school. I had friends there. There was an element of religious tension at school because St Kessog's Catholic Primary School was right next to Haldane Primary School.
3. We lived in the Vale of Leven area which was quite rough. Balloch is in the Vale of Leven. My dad definitely didn't want me going to the school where he worked. My sister had gone to Glasgow High School and my parents didn't want me to go to the local secondary school so they decided to send me to Keil School which was about eight miles from where we lived in Balloch. Although I knew a couple of people who were going to Keil, none of my close friends from primary school were going to Keil so I didn't have any friends there.
4. My parents told me in Primary 7 that I was going to Keil School. My parents didn't discuss the proposal with me so much as they told me I was going. I think they wanted to maximise my academic potential. I did tell them I didn't want to go to Keil. I didn't

want to go there right from the start but the decision wasn't mine. I got some stick from my friends about going to Keil. In Vale of Leven, there was a certain amount of snobbery associated going to anywhere other than the local school. I think I got two weeks longer in the summer holidays as Keil started its term later than the state schools.

5. I remember I had to do an entrance exam to see about a bursary to go there. The exam was held at Keil School. My parents took me there for the exam and I had a tour about the school. It was very formal, almost military in some respects.

Keil School, Dumbarton 1988/9 to 1989/90

6. I was eleven years old when I started first year at Keil School. I had to get the bus from the main street in Balloch to the school. It was a private minibus and it picked up kids along the route to the school. I had to stand in the street in the distinctive green and yellow blazer but fortunately it was earlier than the time when kids would be going to the local school. You didn't want to be seen in that blazer because it made you a target.

Routine at Keil School

7. The regime at Keil was quite harsh. They used violence to keep us in line. The prefects were called Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs. The Chiefs were sixth year pupils and the Deputies were fifth year pupils. They were mostly huge guys who played rugby. They all had the remit of disciplining the younger kids. It was mainly beatings, or dead-arms. Most of them were very handy with their fists and their feet. Each Chief and Deputy had a squad made up of pupils from all the years below them. I think the allocation of squads was based on whether a pupil was a day pupil or a boarder. There were about ten or twelve pupils in my squad.

8. The squad I was allocated to had a Chief called [REDACTED]. He was quite manipulative and crafty about enforcing school rules. There was a phase of pupils using the inside of ball point pens as a blow dart with needles from Armistice poppies. [REDACTED] would ask junior pupils if he could borrow their pens, to check for condensation which would show if it had been used as a blow dart. In my opinion he didn't do anything without there being a benefit to him. He didn't do anything to support the younger pupils. [REDACTED] was the deputy Chief when I arrived, he was [REDACTED]. He then became the Chief when I went in to second year and [REDACTED] had left. He wasn't too bad but most of the Chiefs took delight in enforcement of the rules.

First day

9. I arrived on the minibus. I was just out of primary school and didn't know anyone at the school very well. All the other boys who got on the bus were huge as they were much older than me. I found the first few days of school hard. I didn't settle but then again I didn't want to settle there.
10. When I got to the school there was assembly and I learned that there was assembly every day. The pupils would come in first and then the teachers would come in and deliver some sort of lecture or prayer. I think there must have been some kind of meeting for the new first years but I can't remember that level of detail. I think there were perhaps about 300 pupils at Keil. I don't know what proportion were day pupils as opposed to boarders. There were some girls at Keil School, but it was mainly boys. Some of the girls were Chiefs and Deputies too.

School

11. **SNR** [REDACTED] was Mr **CGC** [REDACTED] I also had a Housemaster called William Bain. There were three houses but I can't remember their names. There might have been a Head of Year but I can't remember.
12. You were randomly allocated to a house, even if you were a day pupil like me. The boarding pupils didn't really treat day pupils that differently even though they were

encouraged to do so. They had a nickname for us and they called us, "Huns" but it was nothing to do with sectarianism. Even the teachers would refer to day pupils as "Huns". However there wasn't any bullying of day pupils by boarders just because they were day pupils.

13. We had assembly in the morning followed by classes until about 10.45 am. Then there was a short break where we would go to the common room for our year. There were more classes until lunchtime, then cleaning duties, then more classes after lunch until about 3.00 pm, then rugby or some other sport. I did play rugby but I wasn't very good. They divided us up according to age so first year's would play against first year's etc. I think the sixth year had a first and second team but the lower years just had one team per year. The school used playing fields in Dumbarton but I don't know if they belonged to the local authority or if they were private.

14. I don't think that some of the teachers at Keil School were particularly qualified to teach. I remember the geography teacher asking my class what the capital of Scotland was, and the answer given was Edinburgh. She was adamant that the capital of Scotland was London. When people tried to insist on correcting her, she gave them punishment exercises. I can't remember that teacher's name.

15. Mr Evans was the chemistry teacher and he was ok. Mr Bain, my housemaster, was the Physics teacher. We got all three sciences physics, chemistry, and biology at Keil School right from first year. Mr McMurdy was the maths teacher. He did have a temper but he was reasonably straight. Mr ECB was the [REDACTED] teacher and he had quite a violent temper. He was quite a bad character. I remember him being right in your face bellowing at you. He had quite a short fuse. If you weren't good at [REDACTED] he would blow up. He didn't have a good teaching attitude. He was just a bully. I think I remember Mr ECB throwing something at someone but I can't remember for definite if he ever hit anyone. I can't remember any particular comments he made, he was just angry. Mr Smith was the Deputy Head teacher. He taught a subject too but I can't remember which one.

16. People in positions of authority in the school often had their own children as pupils at Keil and I have wondered if they got some kind of cash incentive to have their children there.
17. After school the boarders would have to do prep. I did mine at home as at the end of the school day I would get the minibus back home. We had exams at the end of year. I did ok but I didn't do well at physics or maths.
18. There was no real change for me between first and second year at Keil School. I had the same housemaster and I was in the same squad. The chief would have left school and the deputy became the chief, I can't remember his name. It was probably slightly easier for me in second year because I was learning the systems of the school and learning to avoid fists and feet. When the school had a games period, I knew how to get away from the school two to three hours early to avoid confrontations.

Mealtimes/Food

19. As a day pupil, I was only at Keil for lunchtime. We went into the refectory and each squad had their own table. The teachers had the top table. We had to queue up to get served our lunch. We would say a prayer before we ate. The food was absolutely dreadful. The chef at Keil was called Dello. He stayed on the grounds of the school and [REDACTED] at the school.
20. After we had lunch each year would go to their common room until it was time to go back to class.

Washing/bathing

21. They had showers at Keil School as we were playing rugby most days. The showers were open-plan. The showers weren't supervised. The Chiefs and Deputies weren't there. As far as I remember you were just left in your year group to get on with it. I can't remember if Mr Bain came into the shower room. There weren't any problems in the showers but I just remember they were dirty and unhygienic. I think most times

I would not shower at school, I would just go home and get a shower there. The principal reason was that the showers were unhygienic. There wasn't any sexual abuse in the showers that I suffered, but the level of horseplay went beyond what I would say was normal. Some boys would put bars of soap in the end of a towel and hit you with that, rather than just flicking a towel at you.

Clothing/uniform

22. The school uniform at Keil was a green and yellow blazer. We also had a green and yellow tie. We wore trousers most of the time but we had a kilt for travelling to sports matches and things.

Leisure time

23. They had cadets at Keil School. I think the history teacher had some connection with the cadets. We had uniforms for cadets and we wore combat trousers, lightweight trousers, and dress trousers. We went to the rifle range above Faslane. They had new rifles there called SA80's. I don't remember doing any parades as I don't think I was in the cadets long enough.

Chores

24. After lunch we had to clean the school. We had to sweep the floors and Hoover the carpets. I had to clean the history classroom. It seems unbelievable that we had to do this when our parents were paying for us to attend the school. One of the female student deputy's called Arlene supervised my cleaning duties. She was alright.

Religious instruction

25. There were prayers for the Queen in the morning. We also had to go out onto the lawn in the morning and sometimes stand in our squads and salute the Union Jack. It was very militaristic and it was a throwback to the days of Empire. There were prayers at lunchtime too. There were some Chinese, Pakistani, and African boys boarding at the

school. I don't know if any provision was made for their religion. I don't know how they would have felt about that.

Trips/Holidays

26. I can't recall any school trips other than going to play rugby and other games against other schools. I was in the team once or twice, but I was dreadful. The whole team were not very good. We had to wear a kilt with our blazer when we travelled to matches. We were the only school that had to wear a kilt. Teams from the other schools used to make fun of us for that.
27. During the Easter school holidays the Chinese pupils possibly stayed at the school. I think they were from Hong Kong. There were two Chinese pupils in my class. Their English was not good and they tended to just stick together. I think they struggled in class.

Birthdays and Christmas

28. My birthday is in [REDACTED] so it wasn't celebrated at Keil School. Boys who did have their birthday during term time would have it celebrated by being given the bumps. This involved everyone standing in a circle around the boy, singing Happy Birthday, while charging in and out and kicking the boy. It was supposed to be jolly banter but it would usually dissolve into a fight.
29. The school was not decorated at Christmas. I have a vague recollection of a Christmas dinner or some kind of celebration.

Visits/Inspections

30. I don't know if the boarders had visits from their parents. I can recall some siblings being at the school together. I am not aware of siblings being deliberately separated from one another.

31. I can't recall any official visitors or inspectors. I can't remember anyone speaking to me on my own about my experience of the school.

Healthcare

32. There was a sickbay which was pretty grotty. There was a matron but I can't remember her name. The only time I had to see her was when I got kicked by [REDACTED]

Running away

33. I had developed escape strategies by the time I reached second year. In the afternoon we would have sports such as rugby. If you weren't playing rugby you were supposed to do another activity like tennis. However no-one monitored whether you turned up to these activities so I used to leave school early. I would sneak out of school about 2.30 pm and get the bus home. It was the local bus that I got and not the school minibus. It was 40p for a child fare but I can't remember how I got the money for the bus fares. I would get off the bus about ten minutes from my house. The area between my house in Balloch and Keil School was a concrete jungle. You didn't want to go through that area wearing a Keil blazer so I used to stick my blazer and my tie in my bag. I carried a normal jacket with me and wore that instead. My parents didn't know I was skipping school because I used to play at a farm near my house until it was the correct time to go home. The farmer didn't ask why I wasn't at school, I think he knew I hated it.

Discipline

34. Corporal punishment such as the belt was no longer in use at Keil School when I was there.
35. The chiefs and deputies were horrible, power-hungry individuals. The chiefs and deputies had the power to issue punishments to younger pupils. They could give you, "a Copy" to do. This would mean copying out the school rules. Any chief or deputy could give you a Copy, not just the ones in charge of your squad. If you got a Copy

from a chief or deputy, you would have to get that signed off by your form teacher so if you got several at one time, they would know about it. I think if you got a certain amount of Copies at one time, that would lead to an automatic detention. I had about three or four Copy punishments in my time at Keil School.

36. Teachers could also give out detention or what they called, "NH" which would involve going out with a shovel or a rake and cleaning up the grounds of the school. I don't know what NH stood for. If you got detention you would be kept inside for an hour or two. I only got given detention once but I ended up not having to do it. I can't remember what I got detention for. I was usually too scared to do anything wrong. As a day pupil, I would have had to come in to school at weekends for detention.

Abuse at Keil School

37. I was bullied by a number of pupils who were violent. In addition to [REDACTED] there was [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] who was quite handy with his fists. There were two brothers called [REDACTED]. There were some others whose names I can't remember. All of them were violent towards me, even if it was just giving me a dead arm. Over the two years I was at Keil School I was subjected to violent abuse every week although I did everything I could to try and avoid it. I still feel very upset thinking about it now.
38. William Bain, who was my housemaster, is in jail now. He was convicted of sexual abuse of pupils at Glenalmond, but Keil wasn't mentioned in the report that I saw. He never sexually abused me, but he was inappropriate. His behaviour would not be tolerated now. I think he acted inappropriately with everyone. He was very cuddly with me and he would make me sit on his knee. I can't remember the circumstances of where that happened.
39. On one occasion Mr Bain was talking about which parts of your body have bones in them. He started talking about his penis. He said to me, "It sometimes feels like it's got a bone in it." That incident possibly took place in the room behind his physics

classroom. He had a room with soldering irons and things. I can't remember if anyone else was there. I don't remember enough about the incident to give you a true picture, I can't remember if that happened in first or second year. At that age I didn't have the vocabulary to describe someone as a paedophile but I wasn't comfortable with what he was saying. Sex was a taboo subject in my family and it wasn't something that was discussed. I had the feeling that what Mr Bain had said to me was wrong but I couldn't bring myself to approach my parents about it.

40. When I was in first year at Keil School there was a rumour going around that Mr Bain had raped a boy in my year called [REDACTED]. I can't say if he did or not but it was picked up on generally that Mr Bain was creepy. I can't remember who told me about this, it was all round the school. I didn't speak to [REDACTED] about it, I wasn't that friendly with him. [REDACTED] was a boarder at the school. I do not know if there was any form of police investigation about Mr Bain when I was at school.
41. Mr CQL the [REDACTED] teacher was very aggressive. He would invade your personal space and shout aggressively just inches away from your face. That happened to me and I recall seeing that happen to others. I think he may have hit a pupil but I'm not sure. Some memories of my time at Keil School are very strong but others are much more vague.
42. One morning at assembly I got kicked in the back by [REDACTED] who was a deputy, he would have been in fifth year. [REDACTED] was a big rugby player. At assembly the chiefs and deputies would stand on benches at the side. As a reprimand for him perceiving me to be mucking about [REDACTED] jumped off the bench and kicked me in the back and I went flying. It wasn't so much that it was sore but it was embarrassing. He shouted at me to, "Get back in fucking line." It may sound like a relatively trivial incident but I was just a wee boy when that happened and it has had a major impact on me. This happened just before assembly was due to start so the teachers weren't in the room. It may have happened in my first year at Keil School.

43. Chiefs and deputies used to give other pupils a dead arm or a dead leg. The first time that happened to me, I was shocked by how painful it was and I cried. Violence was routine. You weren't getting broken bones but getting hit or pinned down was quite common. When I was younger I wrestled with the notion that I had allowed these things to happen to me. I was never brought up to hit back in that type of situation. Maybe if I had been things might have been better, or maybe I might have turned out worse.
44. The minibus to and from school could be quite bad. It was a large minibus with about fifteen to twenty seats. There were two day pupils who were quite physical, quite violent. Their names were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They would have been in fourth year when I was in first year. They were quite handy with their fists and liked to dish out violence. They liked bullying people and they bullied me on the bus. The minibus was a McTaggart's coach. The bus driver was aware of what was going on in the bus but he never intervened.
45. I remember one boy from Manchester that I was quite friendly with getting punched by a few of the other boys who were leaning over the seats on the minibus. The fact that the boy was from Manchester and had a different accent was enough of a reason for him to get a hiding.
46. I don't know if I would have got on any different if I had gone to secondary school in Vale of Leven but I didn't get on well at Keil School.

Reporting of abuse at Keil School

47. I did tell my parents about the abuse I suffered at Keil School. They mainly took the attitude that sticks and stones may break your bones but names will never hurt you. I did tell them about the incident where [REDACTED] kicked me and they did go to the school about that but I don't think there was any action taken against [REDACTED]. Some senior person at the school told my parents that he had been reprimanded but he wasn't demoted from his position as deputy.

48. I think I did report the day-to-day abuse to my parents as well. I just think they thought there was no alternative to me being at Keil School but I don't understand why they would think that. I think that's why I started running away from the school in second year. I just had to take matters into my own hands.

Leaving Keil School

49. I left because my parents were relocating up north to look after my grandmother. We moved north during the school holidays and up until I was told we were moving I was under the impression I would have to go back to Keil School for third year. I was delighted when my parents told me I wouldn't be going back. I went to [REDACTED]'s High School in [REDACTED] which was not far from where we lived. I think that unlike the Vale of Leven, the school in [REDACTED] lived up to my parents' expectations. When I went to secondary school in [REDACTED], I found that I was ahead of the pupils there in some subjects but not others.

Life after Keil School

50. I got on ok at school in [REDACTED] and I stayed on for fifth and sixth year. I was never really interested in academia at school. I find the things I was being taught at school more interesting now. I wish I'd done more at the time but I was deliberately rebelling. I got five Highers at school.
51. After school I went to university. I studied Forestry at Aberdeen University initially and after that I studied Environmental Health at Glasgow University. I have been working as an Environmental Officer for the last fifteen years. I have lived and worked all over Scotland. I am now living in Scottish Highlands with my partner.

Impact

52. I felt embarrassed about going to Keil School, I still do. There was a sense of shame at the time because all my pals were at state schools. I couldn't explain these feelings to my friends at that age. I needed a strong role model to help me through that time and I didn't have one.
53. It is not as much of a problem for me now but growing up I wrestled with the idea that I had allowed the abuse I suffered at Keil School to happen to me.
54. For a time after Keil School my confidence was shot. I was put on beta blockers at the age of seventeen but they didn't do me any good and I wouldn't take them again. Due to having panic attacks I was referred for counselling by my G.P. and I have tried hypnosis and things but none of them helped me.
55. With regard to my housemaster from Keil School, William Bain, I found it very strange that the media reports about his conviction for abuse made absolutely no mention of any abuse at Keil School. I know it might sound paranoid but I did wonder if the people who were in charge of running Keil School might still have some influence in public life or with the media.
56. I took up Karate at the age of sixteen and Thai boxing after leaving school. My confidence was in pieces after leaving Keil School. I used to suffer from panic attacks and I had no confidence whatsoever. I couldn't go into somewhere like a hall full of people. Through martial arts I rebuilt myself from the shy wee laddie I was. It gave me great confidence. I also gained confidence from having a drink of alcohol when socialising as it made me feel relaxed and let me switch my mind off. I am not a heavy drinker but it did help me to relax at university by having a drink.

57. I have forgiven all of the people who abused me, even [REDACTED]. I have come to realise that they were a product of the environment at Keil School. They were shaped by the regime at the school.

Reporting of Abuse

58. I have never made a report to the police about the abuse I suffered at Keil School. I wish I had but I wanted to protect my parents, I didn't want them involved. I felt it was for myself to deal with. I suppose as an adult I didn't have the motivation to report it and I was also ashamed of having had this abuse done to me. I was ashamed of my background and I didn't want anyone to go over it all.
59. I have not told my parents all of the details of the abuse I suffered at Keil School. I want to protect them from it, I don't want them to feel guilty. It is a can of worms that I just don't want to open.

Records

60. I would like to know if there are records from my time at Keil School. I believe that Keil School has now been redeveloped for housing. I would be a bit scared at looking at my records from Keil School because I have tried to close that chapter of my life. I understand there is an organisation called Future Pathways that could assist me in getting my records.
61. I would like to know who profited financially from Keil School because there was systematic physical and sexual abuse that went on. There were things that just shouldn't have happened. There should have been someone who had a duty of care towards the pupils and there should be recourse for those who have suffered. I am not motivated by any financial considerations, I just want to make sure it doesn't happen to anyone else.

Lessons to be learned

62. It is difficult not to sound spiteful against boarding schools. You hear about people wanting to keep the charitable status of boarding schools. I don't really know the arguments for or against this but I think there need to be inspections of boarding schools. I don't remember any inspector coming in to Keil School and speaking to us. There should be someone from a regulatory body coming in and speaking to pupils. There needs to be someone responsible for keeping an eye on these places, not just a box-ticking exercise. I don't know what went on before but it certainly didn't benefit us pupils in any way. Having a light shone on these places is what's needed. I'd like to think society has moved on from how things were in those days.

Hopes for the Inquiry

63. I would like there to be an acknowledgement that what people have reported as having took place at Keil School and elsewhere did take place, to have that out there in the public domain.

Other information

64. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

OJA


Signed.....

16 October 2020

Dated.....