

## **Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry**

Witness Statement of

**Desmond Vincent Austin**

Support person present: No

1. My name is Desmond Vincent Austin, I am usually referred to as Des. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1945. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### **Life before going into care**

2. I was born in Glasgow. My parents were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I had a brother, [REDACTED] who was four years older than I was, and a sister, [REDACTED] who was five years older than I was. Both my siblings are now deceased, as well as my parents. I was brought up in Ibrox, Glasgow. My father worked as an auditor for the City Chambers and my mother was a musician, [REDACTED]. We went to mass every Sunday and there were priests in and out of the house all the time. My mother played the organ in church. We had crucifixes and statues all over the house. It was a Catholic household, but very dysfunctional.
3. I attended Lourdes Primary School in Cardonald and then St Aloysius in Langside. I have memories of going to a senior school at Garnett Hill.
4. I was very ill as a child. I suffered from Scarlett Fever and Osteo-Myelitis, which is inflammation of the bone marrow. This particularly affected both of my shins. I weighed only three stone at the age of nine. It was misdiagnosed by the G.P. Eventually, I saw a consultant about the condition and I was operated on the next day, followed by six months of convalescence, when I had to learn to walk again. After that, my mother decided I should go to the east coast for the good of my health.

5. My parents had a very dysfunctional relationship. My mother would get myself, my siblings, or someone else to relay information to my father. She would say, "Tell your father..." I remember my mother attacking my father with a knife and ripping down curtains. My mother could only express herself through control. It was my mother who decided to send me to Carlekemp.

### **Carlekemp School, North Berwick, East Lothian 1955 to 1958**

6. I went to Carlekemp when I was ten and a half, starting in third year. The other choice of school my mother considered was St Joseph's in Dumfries. I can't remember now, how I felt about going to Carlekemp. I wasn't scared, I just didn't know what to expect. I knew it was a Catholic boarding school run by Benedictines. My sister was very kind, she sewed nametags onto my clothes.
7. Carlekemp was twenty or thirty miles from Edinburgh. There were large grounds with lots of space. The school was a grand looking old building. The main building has now been turned into flats. When I was there, there were dormitories with about twenty beds in each one and a study hall. There were 65 pupils when I went there. I know this from records that I have seen, not from my memory of the time. The monks wore black robes and sometimes, around the waist, a cord with tassels. We called the monks Father, and they referred to us by our surnames.

### **Routine at Carlekemp**

#### *First day*

8. I can't remember how we went to Carlekemp the first time, it was probably on the train.

#### *Washing/bathing*

9. I remember the first nights there, going down to the washroom with all the other boys to clean our teeth. It was strange realising I was going to be sharing with all these other boys. Before going to Carlekemp, I had never been to camp or anything.

10. We had baths, supervised by matron. She used carbolic soap and used it to wash our hair as well as our bodies. She would check us for head-lice too.

### *School*

11. [REDACTED] SNR [REDACTED] was Father [REDACTED] MEX [REDACTED]. I don't remember him having an assistant. After him, there were the teachers and the matron. The [REDACTED] SNR [REDACTED] stayed quite close to the dormitories. Most of the teachers were monks and lived in the school. The monks were Father [REDACTED] MEW [REDACTED] who taught [REDACTED]. We called him [REDACTED] MEW [REDACTED] Father [REDACTED] MEZ [REDACTED] taught [REDACTED], Mister [REDACTED] MFB [REDACTED] was the [REDACTED] master and Miss O'Donnell was the matron. She was at the school for forty years. I remember her giving me cod liver oil.
12. There was one boy that I became close friends with, [REDACTED]. We were in the same class at Carlekemp from third year. We were always first and second in the class.
13. The lessons were Monday to Friday and Saturday morning, I think. I enjoyed the reasonable levels of success that I achieved in French, English and Arithmetic. I started learning piano at the age of ten. In my fifth year, when I would have been thirteen years old, I sat the common entrance exam, for entry to public schools. [REDACTED] and I did well in the exam and we went straight into third year at Fort Augustus, the others at Carlekemp went into second year.

### *Religious instruction*

14. We had religious knowledge classes. I can't recall being given any religious awards or tokens.

*Leisure time*

15. We had a television at school, whereas I didn't have one at home. I can remember in 1956 watching a programme called Whacko! with Jimmy Edwards. He played the headmaster of a school, beating the boys. We all watched, it was standing room only.
16. We watched sports, I probably started watching tennis at Carlekemp. We played table tennis and indoor cricket using rulers and rubbers. We could play outside. Sport was a big thing at the school. There were cricket nets where I spent hours trying to learn to bowl properly. We played rugby, hockey and cricket. I was an average sportsman, and if you didn't excel at sports, you were just ignored.
17. In the evenings, we would play Pontoon, and that was probably the start of my gambling addiction.

*Trips/Holidays*

18. I remember going to an Abbey in Haddington. I enjoyed going into the shop, they had crucifixes and rosary beads. I can't remember any other trips or excursions, but other former pupils I am in contact with do. There were also trips for sporting events, to play rugby, hockey and cricket against other schools.

*Visits*

19. Every week, you wrote a letter home to your parents, and gave them your marks for your various classes. You were made to do it. I don't remember getting any letters back.
20. At half term, we would go up to the Marine Hotel, in North Berwick, to see our family. I didn't go home at all during term time. I went home at Easter, summer and Christmas holidays. I did look forward to getting away from the regimented nature of school, although it wasn't that pleasant or enjoyable an environment at home.

### **Abuse at Carlekemp**

21. I misbehaved at Carlekemp. I was strapped occasionally. The belt they used was a short leather belt with a split at the end. I remember being sent to Mr MFB, the [REDACTED] to be punished for something and I was very fearful but he was very gentle with me, there was no pain at all, he almost just stroked my hand with the belt. I remember leaving the room wondering what that was all about. Looking back now, it seems suspicious, as if it may have been some attempt at grooming. That was the only time I was in his room, I didn't have much dealings with him.
22. My [REDACTED] teacher was a Father MEZ. He was a brilliant [REDACTED] but a brutal teacher. He would put a coin on the back of your hand, and if it fell off [REDACTED] he would hit you over the knuckles with a wooden ruler. He did it to other boys too, they told me about it, I didn't see it happen to them. I learned [REDACTED] for years, I did [REDACTED] exams, I skipped grade one and did grades two and three. I did theory exams too. Everything about it seemed to be forced, it was not enjoyable learning.
23. I can recall one boy from the far north of Scotland, he had a very strong accent, and was ridiculed for his pronunciation of some words at assembly in front of the whole school.

### **Leaving Carlekemp**

24. Carlekemp and Fort Augustus were linked, so due to my success in the common entrance exam, it was inevitable that I would go there. At the end of term, we would be gathered together and lined up according to our class places, from best to worst. The list of names would be read out and the boys who hadn't done well would be made to move down the line and end up at the bottom of the line. Those boys would have to repeat the year. It was public humiliation.

### **Fort Augustus Abbey School, Inverness-shire 1958 to 1962**

25. Fort Augustus is on the shores of Loch Ness. You got the train up to Spean Bridge and then a coach, MacBrayne's coaches, for the last thirty miles. I don't remember my first journey there, I just remember the journey in general. A lot of the older boys would sing on the coach, which I found quite intimidating, especially as some of the songs were probably about what things they were going to do to the younger boys.
26. There was a big long driveway up to the school. There was the school building and the Abbey, where the monks were. There was a big cricket pitch and a swimming pool. Someone visiting Fort Augustus would describe it as impressive.
27. You came in the main entrance, and the refectory was upstairs around the corner, along with the study room. On the next level was one of the housemaster's room, the prefect's room, the TV room, the snooker room and the classrooms. Upstairs from that were the dormitories, with about twenty boys in each. There were two houses at Fort Augustus, Lovat and Vaughan.

### **Routine at Fort Augustus**

28. There were boys from eleven to eighteen years at Fort Augustus, around one hundred in total. Father [MFF] was the [SNR] when I arrived there. I find it difficult to call these people Father, I have got no respect for them at all. [MFF] had been at Fort Augustus [REDACTED] From my research, I know that in 1939, the school started the house system and in 1941, [REDACTED]

### *Mornings and bedtime*

29. Your dormitory was specific to the house you were in, with one junior and one senior dormitory per house. My housemaster was Father [MFE], he slept in a room at the end of our dormitory. I was in a dormitory until my final year, when I got a shared room with one other boy.
30. In the morning you got up at 6.45, Father [MFE] rang the bell in Lovat house dormitories, Father [MFG] the housemaster of Vaughan, did the same in their

dormitories. When you got up, you stripped the bed, dressed, and went down to the washroom. We went to mass about 7.45 am. I think the monks took turns to do mass.

31. I have no strong memory of the bedtime routine. I think bedtime started at around 8.30 pm, just after the study period, and got later as you got older.
32. At night, there were patrols by Father [MFE] and the other monks to make sure no one was talking or doing anything. If someone was discovered talking, they would get a beating. Sometimes it was a beating in the dormitory, other times they would be taken to the headmaster or their housemaster. I never had one of those beatings, I was clever, I managed to avoid beatings and I managed to avoid [MFF].

#### *Mealtimes/Food*

33. You sat at certain specific tables in the refectory. I sat at Father [MFE] table. Breakfast was porridge, which we all hated, and toast. We had a cooked breakfast at weekends. Brother Adrian served breakfast, he was quite pleasant. He had an assistant, Rudolph who was Polish and aged about 25. He was a very simple soul, very religious. He was given a hard time by the monks, they were just generally very cruel to him.
34. I remember spending a lot of money on crisps at the tuck shop. I would have three or four packets after lunch. I was constantly hungry because we were out running about, burning lots of energy.
35. In general, I thought the food was all right. I looked forward to mealtimes. If you got something you didn't like, you just got on with it. I'm sure we were told off if we left something on our plate. There probably was a punishment for not finishing your food, there was a punishment for everything. I was never punished for leaving food, I was used to having to eat what I was given from being at Carlekemp. I didn't witness anyone else being punished. I don't recall being given an alternative if you didn't like something. Suppertime was quite late relative to bedtime.

*Washing/bathing*

36. At Fort Augustus, you had so many showers from playing games that you didn't really have baths.

*Clothing/uniform*

37. You wore either a grey or white shirt, tweed jacket and trousers, and a school blazer for special occasions. The blazer was designed to be highly visible, it was bright red and black, so you could be seen if you were outside. I don't remember getting changed for the evening.

*School*

38. Father **MFE** taught **[REDACTED]** Father **MFG** the other housemaster was a teacher, but I never had him. There was a Father Aidan Duggan. **MEW** **MEW** who had been at Carlekemp, was there to teach **[REDACTED]**. There were a few lay staff too. Mr Palmer taught Maths, but he didn't really know what he was doing. He was an alcoholic. He used to go off to the staffroom during lessons and come back reeking of drink. Mr Calvert taught music and Mr Daniel taught English. I felt sorry for Mr Daniel, he was a bit of a fop, and he got a hard time from the class. Mr Fowles taught History. We called him Chick. Some pupils thought he was wonderful but I fell asleep, it was just a monologue. He was amazed when I passed Higher History.
39. After school, we had study periods in the evening, which could go on until bedtime. That made it feel like school never ended.
40. Every week, you would get your marks read out at assembly. Those who hadn't done well would have to go to **MFF** room that night. They knew the procedure, they would get changed for bed and then go to his room. He would take down their pyjama trousers and birch them with a cane. Other boys told me about this at the time I was at Fort Augustus. There was also a situation where **MFF** said that two



boys had received sexually explicit letter from girls. Those boys were given the birch and then expelled. He made a big thing of making sure we all knew about it.

41. The library was probably very good, but I didn't bother much with it. I was a rebel, I just did enough to get by.

### *Chores*

42. There were no chores to do, other than to keep your own bed space and locker clean.

### *Leisure time*

43. The four things I remember most about my leisure time are snooker, table tennis, Pontoon and TV. We had a league for table tennis but I got more heavily into Pontoon. There was big money at stake, two-shillings-and-sixpence. That was how much we got in pocket money, so that was the maximum. The housemaster gave out the pocket money each week. I think the staff were aware we were gambling. I can't recall any punishment from the staff over it, and I can't remember there being any violence amongst the boys if you couldn't pay your debts.
44. We played chess a lot, as well as Battleships and "Book cricket" a form of indoor cricket.
45. There was film night every Saturday night and they showed some pretty decent films but if you did badly at Latin, you weren't allowed to go, and it was the same boys every week who couldn't go. I felt sorry for those boys.

### *Religious instruction*

46. At assembly, we said a prayer and as well as mass every morning, there were also individual masses, which required a boy to be a server, bringing the chalice to the

priest. The attraction of doing that was that you got to taste the communion wine, which was quite nice. When I was ten or eleven my mother took me to Lourdes and I helped to serve mass in the grotto.

47. We had Religious Studies class at school. On Sunday night, we had two sessions at church, and it wasn't optional.

#### *Trips/Holidays*

48. I didn't go on trips. There were trips out relating to certain activities like the sailing club and the walking club, but I wasn't a member of those.

#### *Birthdays and Christmas*

49. I don't remember my birthday being celebrated at school.

#### *Visits/Inspections*

50. Parents did visit at half term, but they didn't really come in to the dormitory. It was usually my mum and my sister who visited me, as my mum's relationship with my dad was very strange. I wrote letters home and I got letters back, as well as fixed odds betting slips from my dad. They sent me the occasional half-crown even though we were not supposed to get any money sent in.
51. My mother befriended Aidan Duggan and invited him to come and stay at our home in Glasgow on two or three occasions. I would have been between fourteen and sixteen at the time. I am concerned that he may have been grooming me for possible abuse. On the last occasion he stayed, he told my mother that I should avoid contact with one of my classmates, as he was, "very sexual" I was aware that that pupil was in a relationship with the matron's daughter.

52. I don't remember any inspections of the school at the time I was there, but I am now aware that there were inspections by the Scottish Education Department.

### *Healthcare*

53. There was a matron who looked after us but I didn't see much of her, as I was fairly healthy by the time I went to Fort Augustus. If you were ill, you slept in the sick bay. I presume the doctor had days when he came in but again, I didn't see much of the doctor because I kept in good health.
54. I didn't see the dentist at Fort Augustus, I saw the dentist when I was back at home.

### **Abuse at Fort Augustus**

55. The prefects were always hanging around. Their role was to discipline the other boys and instil fear into them, they had the power to send you to your housemaster for the belt to ensure that you complied with the school system. Prefects were not allowed to beat boys themselves. Prefects could send you to be belted for anything, such as having your hands in your pockets, talking in the lavatory, talking in the dormitory, having an untidy desk or locker at inspection, or even for looking at a prefect the wrong way.
56. Monks wanted the prefects to do their dirty work for them. The prefects would take a note of your name and say, "Go for the stick." which meant the belt. The prefect would then check with the Brother that you had been for your punishment and strike your name out of their book. One time, I lied and told the prefect I had been to the housemaster. I got away with it.
57. You would tell the housemaster why you had been sent. They would decide on the punishment, how many strokes of the belt you would get. After the belt, you would go down to the washroom and put your hands in hot water.

58. Prefects had fags, usually first or second year boys, to run errands for them and do chores. I avoided this because I went straight into third year. That made it worse because you missed out on learning the system. It was a very hierarchical school. The prefects picked on [REDACTED] and me. I was sent to Father [REDACTED] MFE my housemaster, about ten times in third year. I usually got belted three or four times on each hand, every time I went in. It would have to be something really bad to get as many as six. If a prefect or someone who excelled at sport did something wrong, they were beaten more than the other boys were. Their status was no protection.
59. School taught you to be quite deceptive, but I would rather have learned other character traits. I never saw the headmaster or the housemasters doing any kind act in the time I was there.
60. The free period immediately after lunch was a crazy time. Father [REDACTED] MFE room was right next to the tuck shop and the TV and snooker rooms. In between dealing with other duties, he would nonchalantly carry out his beatings. These would be for the offences that the prefects had deemed it suitable to be sent for the stick. He would do it with his door open, so everyone could see and hear. He would beat boys for the offences that the prefects had sent them up to be punished for. He called it "The Stick" but it was a belt that he used.
61. On one occasion, I was beaten for sucking a sweet that I was finishing after break, at the start of the [REDACTED] class. That classroom was next to Father [REDACTED] MFE room. He took me out of the classroom, took me to his room, and gave me three strokes of the belt on each hand. We then went back to the classroom and he resumed his teachings about the life of Jesus.
62. Most discipline issues were referred to the housemasters but there were instances of boys being hit by teachers, but not taken out in front of the class, just hit where they were seated. I don't think Father [REDACTED] MFE did anything in the classroom, he was quite clever.

63. I remember Father [MFC] losing his rag in one lesson, with a pupil [ ] who could be quite surly. Father [MFC] said, "[ ] get out of the room." It was a question of whether or not he could get to the door in time. Father [MFC] threw a duster at him, the kind made of wood and felt for dusting blackboards. I don't think it hit him.
64. I was bullied. I remember when I had just arrived at Fort Augustus, I was kicked and punched by another pupil. His name was [MKN], he was two years older than me, about fifteen. It was me and [ ] we hadn't done anything to [MKN], it was just bullying and intimidation. I also had my head flushed down the lavatory by another older boy. I can't remember his name. [ ] was one of the prefects. He revelled in his role, and was particularly sadistic towards myself and [ ], giving out punishments for the most menial offences.
65. I didn't have much contact with Father [MFG]. He was the housemaster for the other house. He would end up in a rage with his pupils. He died of a heart attack or a stroke in his sleep at the age of 51. He took us for rugby and he used to call me Jane. He would tell you he was going to run at you and I only weighed nine-and-a-half stone and I wasn't built for rugby. I managed to get to one side of his legs.
66. There was another boy, [ ], I remember him being picked on by pupils and teachers, because he wasn't good academically or with games. Another boy, [ ], I can't remember his first name, he suffered from epilepsy and had fits. He had a terrible time from staff and pupils. Another boy called [ ], he wet himself a lot and was given a dreadful time. Another boy, whose name I can't remember, he was from the far north of Scotland and he was ridiculed for his accent.
67. In 1960, we had a trip out of school grounds along Loch Ness where boys in the older forms would go out in groups of three, and a teacher would take out the younger ones. One of those boys was [ ]. He died on that trip. His body was found in Loch Ness. The school version was that he had slipped, fell in, and had died instantly but I can't believe that they could have any basis for saying that if no one was there to see it. I am now aware of reports that he was bullied at school. The person who took [ ]

██████████ group out was Mr Calvert, the music tutor. He was hopeless, he just sat taking snuff. He was not suitable to be in charge of a group of boys out on the Scottish moors. I find it surprising that a person who, as far as I know, did not have the necessary experience of group supervision, was given that responsibility. Mr Calvert left at the end of that term.

### **Reporting of abuse at Fort Augustus**

68. I didn't report any abuse when I was at Fort Augustus, it was normal. I didn't like it but I couldn't do anything about it. There was no guidance teacher or anyone else you could speak to, there was no kind of buddy system. I don't think I ever told my parents about being beaten by Father ██████████ MFE

### **Leaving Fort Augustus**

69. I did my Highers in fifth year and I got sufficient grades for university but I had no placement to go to, so I stayed on for sixth year at Fort Augustus. I was allowed to just fritter away my time, there was no assistance given for adjusting to adult life outside of school. I just applied to university myself and went to Glasgow to study French and Latin.

### **Life after being in care**

70. I went to Glasgow University after school to study French and Latin. I befriended a Catholic priest who was also studying French. Despite my experiences at Fort Augustus I did not harbour any particular anti-clerical feelings. That was the year that betting shops became legal, I was easily led astray, and I then started working in a bookmaker's in Glasgow when I was 17, although the legal age is 18.
71. I started gambling as a substitute for whatever I was looking for in life. I went from betting shops in the afternoon, to the dog racing in the evening, and then later on, when I went to London, to the casinos late at night.

72. Then I became an Apprentice Chartered Accountant with a firm in Glasgow but I didn't stick at that too long. I wasn't enjoying it. I did a one-year accountancy course at the College of Commerce but then my Osteo Myelitis flared up again and I was in hospital.
73. Next, I decided to be a teacher. I went to Catholic Teacher Training College in Leeds in 1967, and retained my Catholicism during that time. After leaving college, I soon realised that the perceived superiority of having a privileged education, and being a Catholic was erroneous. I started to realise that there were nice people who were Protestants and who were atheists. After leaving college I became disillusioned with Catholicism. I stopped going to mass.
74. I had been studying to be a French teacher, but I changed to P.E. In 1970, I went to a school in Dover but after about eighteen months, I decided teaching wasn't for me. In 1972, I went up to London and started working in betting shops.
75. Next, I became a residential social worker in care homes in Islington, London. That was hard work.
76. Then I went to South Africa in 1976, as my parents had emigrated there. I only stayed for about nine months as I had some kind of rheumatic illness. I came back to Britain, and I was fine.
77. I spent a couple of years working for Manpower, I worked for Securicor as a security guard, I had a lot of dead end jobs. I met up with my old friend from school, [REDACTED]. I was also running for pleasure at this time.
78. The running boom started in 1980 with the first London marathon in 1981. I thought there was room for a book about running, so I wrote a book on all the running races around the country. [REDACTED] worked in publishing, so he helped me get ten thousand copies of my book printed. I sold five thousand copies but I made a loss. I came across a running shop in Camden and I stored my spare books in the back of the shop and sold them by mail order. I got friendly with the owners and became the manager of their shop for six years, from 1982, until I bought the business from them in 1988. I

managed to get four people to lend me five thousand pounds each, and they owned forty per cent of the business. From 1988 to 2002 was a rocky time, I was in danger of losing my flat.

79. In 2001, I met the owners of a cycle shop who wanted to have a running shop in their store. I opened my running shop in their store and I never looked back. I paid off my investors and expanded. I opened seven shops in the London area and I sold the business in 2010.
80. I married in 2003. My wife and I have been together for 22 years. I met my wife in 1996 when I was really struggling. We don't have any children.

### **Impact**

81. At Fort Augustus, I wasn't miserable all the time. I'm not against boarding schools in principle, you are with your peers twenty-four hours a day, you just have to get on with it, and learn to get on with people your own age. In day school, you are back to the protection of your parents. I made the most of it, but in my opinion, it was a waste of seven years of my life because you were constantly fighting against the system.
82. My time at school taught me to be cunning. It was not a loving or caring environment. I don't know what impact this may have had on my personality. There was a constant fear of doing something wrong. It did teach you how to get on with people your own age, but the school can't take credit for that.
83. My attitude to religion has changed during my life. I don't consider myself to be Catholic any more. I don't know if there is anything after life. I don't think this is because of Fort Augustus, I just don't have any faith.
84. There were some good men at Fort Augustus, just because they wore the robes didn't make them bad.



85. I started gambling as a substitute for whatever I was looking for in life. As I said earlier, I went from betting shops in the afternoon, to the dog racing in the evening, and then to the casinos later at night.
86. I don't tend to think about school that often, unless I am in touch with other former pupils or coming forward to the Inquiry.

### **Reporting of Abuse**

87. I went to a school reunion in 1963 as a few of us had kept in touch. We drove up to Fort Augustus and stayed at the local hotel. We stayed up all night playing cards. After that, I didn't really think about school until 2000 when I discovered the website of Fort Augustus [www.corbie.com](http://www.corbie.com) that referred to a book called [REDACTED] by [REDACTED]. He is a former pupil, and was at school with me for two years. On this website, there were various messages from people getting in touch. Everyone was commenting on the wonderful nature of the school and the great memories they had of their time there. No one was saying anything negative about the school so I felt compelled to write and highlight the negative aspects, like the regime of fear and the behaviour of the prefects.
88. I wanted there to be some balance shown. I have provided the Inquiry with a copy of this letter. I posted this on the corbie website, on 21 January 2001, inviting others to contact me and to share any further comments they might have. As a result, a number of other former pupils contacted me, from January 2001. These former pupils were [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] MMG [REDACTED], Sean O'Donovan, Donald McLeod, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED], David Walls, and another person who wished to remain anonymous. Those former pupils disclosed to me, by telephone, by personal e-mail and on the Fort Augustus website, that they had been the victims of physical and sexual abuse. I have provided the Inquiry with a copy of the relevant personal e-mails.

89. These people either wrote to me personally, telephoned me, or spoke to me in person. Although there were some positive comments about boys' time at school, the collective description of abuse at Fort Augustus mirrored by own, in terms of emotional abuse and bullying by staff, of beatings both random and as a part of so-called discipline. However, they also disclosed worse physical abuse and beatings than I had been aware of, and most disturbing of all they disclosed sexual abuse by a number of staff. I found that these reports in particular, exacerbated my feelings towards my time at school, and what I had been through.
90. In August 2001, I wrote a letter to the people who had contacted me, summarising a number of these reports. I have provided a copy of that letter to the Inquiry.
91. Following my posting, in 2001 on the corbie.com web site, and based the replies I received, I contacted Kidscape and received a reply from Michelle Elliot, suggesting that I should contact the paedophile unit at Scotland Yard, to report the abuse that had been mentioned on the site, which I did. However, the police told me that unless the individuals wished to come forward themselves, there was nothing they could do.
92. After the reunion in 2002, things quietened down on the website, as I was writing to people individually, but in 2005, things started to heat up. John Ellis posted on the website asking for information about Aidan Duggan. John Ellis, he is in Australia. He was not at Fort Augustus. He was abused by Aidan Duggan in Australia. He posted details about this on the former pupils' web site. He sued the Catholic Church in Australia for his abuse, and the Catholic Church won. I have provided the Inquiry with a copy of his post, and the replies he received. He commented on the similarity between his story and that of others reporting abuse in Australia, and that if Duggan had acted in a similar way at Carlekemp and Fort Augustus, that may have been the reason for his return to Australia. Whilst he did not wish to disturb old ghosts, he was more than happy to hear from anyone who wished to talk about their experiences with Aidan. He received a response from someone who was in America, someone using the screen name [REDACTED], saying that if John Ellis had been abused then he had [REDACTED] sympathy but that until a former pupil of Fort Augustus came forward and admitted that such an event occurred, then he would continue to think of those men in

habits as sometimes quirky but decent and well intentioned. I have provided the Inquiry with a printed copy of these posts.

93. [REDACTED] was living in Australia at the time of the John Ellis case. He was at Fort Augustus from 1954 to 1958. He emailed me on 4 August 2005, stating that he agreed that physical abuse, and to a degree mental abuse, took place at the Abbey. There were a couple of monks who revelled in beatings, as did most of the sixth form in his first and second year there. He was never aware of sexual abuse taking place by monks, lay teachers or other boys, but accepted it may have been going on, but that he was sure we would have known if it had. He also commented to John Ellis that the memories of abuse only resurfaced after he had been sacked. He challenged how John Ellis could forget fourteen years of sexual abuse.
94. In response to these challenges to John Ellis and denials of abuse at the two schools, I responded, on 12 August 2005, with a post giving extracts of some of the email replies to my original post in 2001 on the corbie.com forum. I have provided the Inquiry with a copy of this post. As a result of this, the tone of further comments changed, they were more supportive and sympathetic, less confrontational. Although there was no apology to John Ellis, there was an acceptance that abuse had taken place at both schools.
95. Then in 2009, there was another web-forum called Fort Augustus Old Boys, which was established by Shaun O'Donovan, for boys who didn't want to go through the main website and there were a lot more boys who came forward to report abuse. This was a closed web site for former pupils of the school. A number of the people who had already contacted me posted comments, as did people commenting openly for the first time. Again, although some comments were positive towards the school, I was shocked by the reports of sexual abuse, I wasn't aware of that at the time and hearing about this has exacerbated my negative feelings about my time at school. I have provided the Inquiry with printed copies of posts from this forum.
96. These former pupils were posting on the forum, describing severe physical beatings that were reported and may have led to [REDACTED] MFF leaving Fort Augustus. They

described grooming by Aiden Duggan, and sexual abuse by him, Father MEZ  
MEZ and the MFH

97. I posted on the old boys website about the topics we had discussed at the 1982 reunion. It was entitled loincloths, lavatories and lashes. I have provided the Inquiry with a copy of this document. When I was first there, we had to wear loincloths in the showers. I don't know if we had nametags on our loincloths or if they were shared. We recalled the practice of flushing the new boys' heads down the toilet. Lashings, discussion of the totally unacceptable level of corporal punishment was a feature of the evening. I have provided the Inquiry with a copy of this. All at that reunion had an enjoyable time.
98. I gave a statement to the police in December 2013, as a result of my involvement in the BBC TV programme Sins of our Fathers. I had been contacted by the producers of that programme and gave my account of my time at Carlekemp and Fort Augustus. Some of my comments were presented in the course of a montage of quotes from former pupils who had been abused. The publication of that programme resulted in renewed emails and posts about abuse at Fort Augustus. Consequently, I became pro-active in encouraging the people who had e-mailed me, to contact the programme's producers. The police then contacted me, asking me to give a statement. I have provided the Inquiry with a copy of my recollection of the information I provided in my police statement and a copy of the further posts and emails that were published following the release of Sins of our Fathers

## **Records**

99. I tried to get my records from Fort Augustus. The producer of Sins of our Fathers asked me to get my records, so I wrote to the solicitors in charge of the archives, but they just sent me my old school reports, nothing about any reports of abuse. Any other records appear to have been destroyed. I didn't get my records from Carlekemp, they have been destroyed or lost.

## **Lessons to be learned**

100. I think there should be a continuation of current checks on schools and Disclosure Certificates for all job applicants. Kids now are not stupid, they know their rights.

**Other information**

101. 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.

Signed.........

Dated.....12/12/2018.....