

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

MIE

Support person present: No

1. My name is [REDACTED] MIE. I am known to most people as MIE. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1975. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going to Fort Augustus Abbey School

2. My mum's name is [REDACTED] and my father is [REDACTED]. Both sides of the family are from Islay and I lived there from when I was a baby. My father became a trainee police officer and we moved to Dunoon on the mainland to begin with, and then moved to [REDACTED] in 1979. My family is protestant. I have a younger brother who was born when I was aged thirteen.
3. We lived initially in one of the police houses as my dad was a local police officer. I went to the small primary school in [REDACTED]. When it came to choosing a secondary school for me it was decided that Hermitage Academy in Helensburgh was a bit rough, and private school would be better for me. I think my mum wanted me to go away to school to get me away from home life. They considered a couple of boarding schools before they saw an advert in the Oban Times for Fort Augustus Abbey School and there was an assisted places scheme available. In reality my parents ended up bankrupting themselves to send me to this school, and it became clear to me later on that they really couldn't afford it.
4. I went to visit the school sometime in my primary seven year and had a tour round with the [REDACTED] SNR, Father [REDACTED] MRQ and the then-head boy who was coming

to the end of his time there. I saw the dorms and was shown round. The head took us into the cloisters, but women were not allowed in there. He told us more about the school, its history and its ethos. I recall that we stopped at Bridge of Orchy on the way back. I wasn't daunted by what I'd seen, it seemed like an adventure. I hated getting into trouble and I was the son of a local police officer. I was very shy, but quite precocious and keen to please my mother, and being at the school was something she wanted for me.

Fort Augustus Abbey School, Inverness-shire

5. I started at Fort Augustus Abbey School on [REDACTED] 1986 when I was aged eleven. The school was run by English Benedictine monks. There were around eighty-five boys when I started there. They taught in the English school system. I have a photograph of the school taken in the mid-1980s. The school was trying to get money to do up parts of the buildings to modernise the school. This process of modernisation was happening as I started at the school. There was a warren of dorms and staircases and there was also a more modern wing that had been built in the 1950s or 60s. There were large grounds. There was a church and a chapel and a gym area and archery sheds. Some areas of the school were closed off to the pupils and there was a garden that was closed to us.
6. There were two houses when I started, Vaughan and Lovat. I was placed into Vaughan house. I think there were thirteen boys in my first year. The housemaster for Lovat was Father [REDACTED] MER and the housemaster for Vaughan was Father [REDACTED] MFC [REDACTED] MFC
7. The juniors had their own dorm of mixed ages between eleven and fourteen and the senior boys also had their own dormitory. The fifth and sixth formers had their own study rooms in their own wing. I never went into the sixth form wing.

Routine at Fort Augustus

First day

8. My first day was horrendous. Every aspect of that day and the days that followed was terrible as were the months that followed it. I arrived late in the day and the senior boys came to help me with my trunk. I arrived with my second hand trunk and I had 'I love Islay' stickers on the trunk and the holes were covered up. Before they left me on that first day they told me to be a brave boy. I found some boys who came from Colonsay who were starting at the school at the same time as me.
9. The housemaster for Vaughan was Father [REDACTED] MFC. He came to greet me and my parents and took us up to the dormitory for junior boys. The junior dorm was quite far back into the building, in the back of beyond up wooden staircases. My parents were told by Father [REDACTED] MFC to go home and not prolong things. I was left to get on with things and it was utterly overwhelming. A prefect was there in the dorm and I didn't understand anything about prefects at the time.
10. I had been allocated a bunk bed with another boy, [REDACTED]. On the first night there was not much sleeping as there was so much talking by the other boys. We were told to not talk or we'd get belted. I don't remember sleeping much that first night, I just remember lying awake crying and other boys telling me to be quiet. The prefect was there to try to ensure we didn't talk after lights out.
11. On my first morning I refused to get out of bed because I was crying so much. A boy called [REDACTED] came into my cubicle to tell me to do as I was told and get out of bed. My roommate, [REDACTED], got up and starting to get on with the routine but I was crying my eyes out. The older boys from second and third years were telling us to get on with it. In retrospect it was like a first day in prison.

Mornings and bedtime

12. In the dorms there were partitions between the beds and there were both singles and bunk beds with metal bed springs. There were open shelves within each cubicle for our clothes.
13. We were woken at 7:15 by the long tube lights being switched on and a prefect telling us to get up. If lights went on and you didn't wake up, a hockey stick or cricket bat was used by a prefect to wake you up. They used them to whack the metal ends of the beds to wake you up, and they may also pull the bedcovers off at the same time.. I recall being yanked out of bed by a prefect and that happened to others as well.
14. We then had to go from the attic level to the showers which were located in the dungeons of the old fort. So we'd troop down there from the dorm in our pyjamas to wash ourselves, and these were within the same building. This was for the boys from first year to fourth year. The fifth formers had a separate area, as did the sixth formers. You had to have permission to use the showers, you were only allowed to wash. If you wanted a shower in the morning you had to ask your housemaster for permission the night before, or on the morning if you happened to see him. Any one of the house masters could supervise the showers, but mainly it was **MFC**. Apparently a house master had to supervise the showers to ensure that only boys with permission were using them and he told me that himself. He claimed that there was limited hot water and also he had to ensure that the boys washed themselves properly.
15. Then we had to traipse all the way back up the stairs to get dressed. Then we went to the junior study hall for thirty minutes of prep before breakfast. If you didn't want to have this time in the study hall you could attend a religious service.
16. Bedtime for the junior boys was at 8:45pm. Each night a sixth form boy, a prefect, had to stay in the junior dorm and one stayed in the senior dorm. The sixth formers had their own single bedrooms in their own wing of the school, and they resented having to sleep in our dorm. **MRQ** had his room in their wing too as he didn't stay with the other monks in their quarters.

17. The junior dorm was mixed and there was a total of about twenty-five to thirty boys from first and second year. There were two dorms, one for juniors and one for the senior boys, and they were mixed with boys from both Lovat and Vaughan houses. I never made it to the senior dorm.
18. The junior dorm had a door at the end of the room that led into the area where the monks slept. This door opened into one of the boy's cubicles. I can still remember the sound of that door opening. Every night, after lights out, a monk appeared from that door to give evening prayers. His name was Father Anthony. The boys called him 'apple head' on account of the shape of his head. He held a torch that would light up his face as he said the prayer from his bible and it was a strange sight. I liked him. He was a nice, quiet man and I have fond memories of him. After the prayer he would go back through the doorway into the monks area.
19. There was violence and unhappiness in the dorm. My parents were brought up on the Billy Bunter stories and they had visions of the boys enjoying midnight feasts and pillow fights in the dorm. These things simply did not happen. Boys were taken out of bed to be belted by the housemaster. The prefect would turn the lights out and tell us to be quiet and then inevitably one voice would start talking, then a second and a third. In truth I would be sitting petrified in case I got belted and not joining in with any whispered conversations in the dorm.
20. Sometimes it would be one of the housemasters coming back into the dorm through their door to catch us out. I remember [REDACTED] MER [REDACTED] doing it, and taking his shoes off so he was walking whilst wearing socks so we couldn't hear him. If he caught a Lovat boy talking he would take him to his study to be belted and if it was a Vaughan boy he would be sent to [REDACTED] MFC [REDACTED]. Boys were not belted in the dorm. Those were the steps they took to catch boys talking after lights out so they could belt them, and that would be 'twice one'. This meant each hand was hit once with the belt. I knew it was twice one because other boys would come back and tell us, and also the prefects had told us that was the punishment. I didn't get it as I made sure I didn't get into trouble by not talking after lights out. I was a policeman's son after all. That came with

its own problems, as I wasn't being belted I was seen as being a favourite of the monks.

Mealtimes / Food

21. The food generally was appalling. I was always hungry. The food was prepared by a couple who lived in a tied house and some villagers. Breakfast was Rice Krispies or Frosties and we usually had porridge and boiled eggs on Sundays. There was no toaster so we had ordinary bread, and there was marmalade in the morning. Lunch would be soup, and this was thin and watery, with vegetables. A dessert was a yoghurt or sometimes something with custard. It was certainly not what I was used to at ██████████ Primary.
22. They served up chicken legs that were uncooked. I took a chicken leg back to the kitchen to show them it wasn't cooked and it was inedible. I was simply told to go back to my seat and eat it. We only ate well on a catholic feast day and there would be more food that was nicer.
23. If you didn't eat the food you were given, you could take it or leave it. The food would be taken off you. There was no force feeding. There was a set time to eat food for my year. The evening meal was at 6 pm and we queued up at the refectory in accordance with class years. The school was obsessed with organising us in accordance with class order. At the start of the week the fifth years would queue up first for meals and then the order would go through fourth, third, second and eventually first years. Occasionally the first years would be fed first and the fifth years would be last, but in reality the older ones pushed past the younger ones.
24. The monks who were teachers and the lay teachers ate in the same refectory at a separate table. There was a long queue at lunchtime and we had less time to eat lunch. The teachers got the same food as us. The head might have some food brought for him specially. The monks who didn't teach ate in their own refectory and I don't know what they ate.

We had our own tuck boxes, but my parents didn't know about this when I started at the school as it wasn't on the official list of items. Father [REDACTED] MFC [REDACTED], my housemaster, arranged for the school joiner to make me a tuck box. Most boys would be straight out of the refectory after a meal to raid their tuck box for food and those were kept in in the dorms, but mine was kept in [REDACTED] MFC [REDACTED] study.

Washing / bathing

25. The showers were in the dungeons of the old fort. There was one big room with rows of sinks and one bath tub for the whole school and lines of showers. The water in the sinks was cold, but there was hot water in the showers.
26. You could only get a shower in the morning with the permission of your housemaster that you got the night before or on the morning of the shower. This meant the house master knew who was getting a shower. There were three housemasters, as Father Anthony was a junior housemaster, but he never supervised it. it was only ever [REDACTED] MER [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] MFC [REDACTED], and almost also it was [REDACTED] MFC [REDACTED]. On the times it was [REDACTED] MER [REDACTED] he would just walk up one alongside the showers and say something in passing, but he appeared to be looking for trouble only. [REDACTED] MFC [REDACTED] would stop and pause to boys individually and instruct us on cleaning technique and in my case tell me to shower with older boys to ensure I got hot water. These would be his favoured older boys from my house.
27. In the afternoon, after games, all the boys were required to shower and this involved having to queue in towels waiting for a shower to be free. There would also be older boys trying to pull the towel off you or trying to whip you with twisted up wet towels. As first years, we had run to the showers in order to try to get there and shower before the older boys so we could be dry and dressed before they got there. The junior play field was the furthest away from the school building so it wasn't always possible to get back in time. . [REDACTED] MFC [REDACTED] supervised both the morning showers and the afternoon showers

Clothing / uniform

28. The clothes I was expected to have were purchased by my parents in line with the list of required items sent by the school. My parents had scrimped and saved to get every item that was on the clothing list. Other boys had their uniform purchased from a place in Edinburgh that was considered the best place to go. It was very expensive. My uniform came from cheaper shops, apart from my red school blazer and the tweed blazer.

School 1986 - 1990

29. After breakfast we went to assembly and then off to classes. If you didn't do the morning prep you could go to church. The monks stayed in the monastery and gardens all day. In the first and second year we stayed in our own part of the school and we had a our own classrooms. We then stayed there until 12:30 doing various classes. Then it was lunchtime. At 1:45 games would start. There were games every day at a certain time. There were different sports in different terms. Rugby in autumn, hockey in winter and athletics and cricket in summer. We stopped games lessons at 3.30 for afternoon tea from a big tea urn, with bread and jam before starting lessons again at 4 pm and finishing at 5 pm or 5:30.
30. From 5:30 to 6 pm would be the first half-hour of prep, and we had prep before having our evening meal between 6 and 7 pm and then after that there was more prep time until 8 pm. That was followed by a short break before another session of prep between 8:15 and 8:45, as in the morning you could choose to attend a church service instead. We were then expected to go up to the dorms as it was our bedtime.
31. The sixth formers wanted us to get to bed as quickly as possible so they could go off to watch TV in their own wing. I soon discovered that games were played to try to catch you talking or reading after lights out. The prefects were hiding in the dark to catch you out so they could either assault you or send you to the housemaster for belting. I soon discovered the scale of belting was 'twice one' up to 'twice six'. That meant one belt on both hands, up to six belts on each hand from both house masters using a Lochgelly tawse.

32. The Lovat housemaster, [REDACTED] MER [REDACTED] was also still caning boys. My housemaster, Father [REDACTED] MFC [REDACTED], had stopped belting boys and he told me quite early on in the school that he had put a boy in hospital the previous year. He did not tell me his name. He explained to me that the flesh on the back of that boy's thighs was too thin. He kept a stick on his mantelpiece that he had broken on that boy, and as it was a nice stick he kept it. I saw it myself and it was there for anyone to see.
33. The art classes became part of my release from the violent school environment. They were held in a separate classroom and I loved going there. The art teacher, James or Seamus Coleman started teaching at the same time as I started at the school. He was a recent graduate so he was really young. I loved art and the art department was the coolest place to be.
34. There were about twenty monks when I arrived in the mid-1980s and very few young ones. They would be Brothers as they were not yet ordained. I caught one once with another man and that was my first experience of witnessing what I understood homosexuality to be. Young monks tended to disappear. My first experience of attending a funeral came at Fort Augustus for one for the older monks who died when I was at the school. It was the first of many funerals.
35. The boys were the cash cow that kept the monastery alive and maintained their lifestyle. There was a definite split between the monks who liked the boys and the ones that didn't want anything to do with us. Several of the monks were alcoholics. One in particular I knew kept a bottle of gin under his cassock. [REDACTED] SNR [REDACTED] [REDACTED] MRQ [REDACTED] as far as I could see, hated being a monk. He spent most of his time in army fatigues chopping wood or tending to his [REDACTED]. These were unhappy men. Then there were various lay teachers who had varying levels of educational attainment and several were old boys who were not good teachers and couldn't work anywhere else.
36. In terms of the quality of education, it was average. It wasn't good. When I eventually left I went to Hermitage Academy in Helensburgh and I got a better education. I passed everything I did there. After, attending Fort Augustus very few made it to university.

My report cards reflect that in the comments given as they were not about academic achievement and more about how I got on with other boys.

37. The drama teacher appeared to me to be an alcoholic, his surname was Davidson, and I had to direct the school play one term because he was frequently drunk and he wasn't there. The [REDACTED] teacher and the [REDACTED] teacher, MIF, were very violent. The [REDACTED] teacher, MIG, was renowned for it. During class he would punish and humiliate pupils by hauling a boy out of his stool by his hair and putting him down again whilst shouting 'acceleration' and 'deceleration'. He'd do it over and over whilst you were screaming. He did that to me and to other boys. It was a regular occurrence in his class. He'd also attempt to set fire to your blazer in a demonstration.
38. I continue to despise camping because of my experience at Fort Augustus. We had to go to camps in the back of beyond up the hills that were six or eight miles away. The teachers didn't want to be on it and the pupils didn't want to be on it. MIG really didn't want to be there. There was one hike when I moaned every step of the way. We were almost at the campsite and he was coming back driving in his Land Rover and he knocked me over and down a slope with the car wing mirror. I wasn't injured. He just drove off and there was no way he didn't know what he'd done. He also liked to try to be everyone's pal, and on one occasion he confiscated a pornographic magazine from one of the pupils in class and told us how we shouldn't believe the photographs as they were all airbrushed.
39. There was a big scandal in around 1988-9 school year. They'd hired a new [REDACTED] teacher after the previous one, Paul Vallot, had left. The new teacher, George Nicholson, came in my second year. He sent a letter to every parent about MIG and his poor teaching and he was hoarding resources in the [REDACTED] that was affecting other aspects of [REDACTED] teaching. He had problems at school and he stopped being a teacher as he was basically a whistleblower. MRQ was sacked as SNR after this letter was sent out. He was replaced as SNR by MEW.

Fort Augustus school 1990 - 91

40. I went back to Fort Augustus in [REDACTED] 1989 for one half-term and then my parents money finally ran out and Father [MFC] was no longer paying my fees. They took me to school at the start of the second half of the term after mid-term break and the [SNR] [SNR] [MEW], took me into his office and told me I couldn't stay as the fees had not been paid. I had £10 on me that was for my pocket money and I had to use it to purchase my bus ticket. I was taken to Fort William by a teacher and put on a bus and told to go home. I then had many months of not going to any school, not even the local one. At one stage, later on, my dad drove me to the school at the start of term in the hope that they would take me back and offered them various credit cards that the school wouldn't accept. We drove back to [REDACTED].
41. I then went back to Fort Augustus at the start of the next school year and the school dropped me back a year. I went back in 1990 when they used their credit cards. I should have been in fourth year, but had to drop to third year so I wasn't in classes with boys I knew. By this stage I had it in my head I would be better off at Fort Augustus as a poor boy in a posh school, rather than being a posh private school boy in a state school. So at some level, I wanted to go back there and I believe I was institutionalised by this stage and couldn't manage anywhere else.
42. When I returned I was an atheist. A new monk had appeared called Ninian Ward. We got on quite well and he was a jovial guy. He was now taking religious knowledge classes and we'd get into furious fights in class. Religion fed into every aspect of the school and symbols of the catholic religion were everywhere in the school, there was a crucifix on every wall.
43. I'd also have robust discussions with the [REDACTED] teacher, [MIF], particularly regarding his views on homosexuality. My report cards can reflect what I was like in class at this time. At age twelve or thirteen I was writing out the prayers and the catechisms as they were taught to me and this changed when I went back at fifteen.

44. When I went back to Fort Augustus I'd put on a growth spurt and I ingratiated myself by going into the rugby team. I got a team together from other boys who were not allowed in the First XV and we played the First XV, and beat them at rugby. All the other boys were smokers and so unfit. As a result I became part of the First XV team.
45. I was also in a smaller study room as I was older. The small study rooms were for two, three or four boys only. It was a better system and it was better not being in a dorm. The corporal punishment stopped at the end of second year and that made school life better and the physical chastisement had stopped.
46. Father **MFC** had left and there was a distinct change in the school. The teachers couldn't belt you anymore and this punishment was replaced. Instead you'd be sent to the library and made to kneel and hold heavy books with arms outstretched or you had to do exercises in there until the early hours. I only experienced that once with my friend **██████████**. That was in the summer term and we'd been talking in our bedroom near to the windows and one prefect was looking for excuse to get at us for talking after bed time. We were sent to **MER** and then made to hold books in the library.
47. After Father **MFC** left I became the unofficial school librarian and also I became the **██████████** teacher as **MFC** had been the **██████████** teacher for decades and I had learned **██████████** through him. I was probably trying to make myself indispensable so they wouldn't send me away again, but the school still did.
48. When I came back to Fort Augustus after my time away, they had brought in a lay teacher from England who had somehow become a housemaster. He did private film sessions for boys in the evenings and I didn't like that either and had nothing to do with it as it made me feel very uncomfortable. I just didn't like the idea of these sessions but have no idea what they were like.
49. **MER**, formerly the housemaster for Lovat, had become my housemaster. When I came back to Fort Augustus there was another monk who was becoming more

senior, Stephen Geddes, and he'd become the Vaughan housemaster. The house won an inter-school competition and he brought in beer for all of the boys to drink, including the juniors and I refused to have any as I wasn't yet eighteen. He'd also brought in vending machines as a money maker and got me a can of Pepsi from the machine instead.

50. When I went back for another year in 1990, my parents used their credit cards to pay my fees. They couldn't pay their own household bills and their telephone was cut off so I couldn't contact them. I went on a school trip to climb [REDACTED]. We were in the minibus and we were parked about [REDACTED] from my parents' house and I wasn't allowed to go and see them. [REDACTED] MIF just wouldn't let me and I don't know why. I was complaining and groaning about this because I wasn't allowed to go and see my family. [REDACTED] MIF was driving the minibus and we were then on our way to play hockey and I was still complaining. He just pulled over and punched me in the face. It was the only time that I swore and I asked him what the fuck he was doing. I was sixteen by this stage and not the little eleven year old I was when I started at the school.
51. We arrived at the place where we were playing hockey and I set out by myself looking for Helensburgh. I had no clue about how to get there, but guessed it was about four or five miles away. I luckily found some dog walkers who helped point me in the right direction and I reached the outskirts of the town. I was found by one of the boys who was out looking for me. [REDACTED] MIF had sent out a search party for me. I'd also phoned my aunt from a phone box and reversed the charges and she was coming to get me. The other boy, a prefect, asked me to go to the train station with him. He told me that [REDACTED] MIF had sent boys out to find me and he was worried about me and was very sorry.
52. We went to Helensburgh Central and found [REDACTED] MIF sitting on a bench outside. [REDACTED] MIF was saying how sorry he was and he was under some stress as he had recently become a father. My aunt showed up and offered to take me to her house or to [REDACTED]. We then had to find her some money for her to go over the Erskine Bridge to get home and I agreed to go back to the minibus.

53. The next day we travelled to Lochore Meadows to a naval event and we were going on a boat trip. I can't swim but I was made to go out in a dinghy on the loch along with everyone else. My boat overturned and I was in the water. My lifejacket was very poor and not helping me to stay afloat, and I had to be rescued by the safety boat. I was shouted at for not swimming and I had to explain I couldn't swim, and was then shouted and sworn at for being in the dinghy in the first place. The lifeguard then started screaming at [REDACTED] MIF [REDACTED] for putting a boy who couldn't swim onto the water.
54. Later on, we were in a leisure centre area at Lochore Meadows and I was standing outside with another boy and I was attacked by three local lads. The local police, from Fife, came to take a statement. [REDACTED] MIF [REDACTED] was very worried because of the police involvement and he had punched me earlier on. I went back to the minibus by myself as everyone else was getting changed then I found myself apologising to him for the things that had happened and him accepting it. I had no idea to this day if he had any teaching qualifications. I don't know if Paul Vallot or any of the others had any either.

Religion

55. I was brought up protestant. It was suggested by the headmaster that I should convert. I was expected to attend a church service somewhere, and if that wasn't at school it was in the village. Only one other boy went to a religious service in the village. I went to the school service.
56. We had to take religious knowledge classes and we weren't taught about any religion other than Catholicism. There were occasional aspects of sex education taught by an elderly monk who was also the piano teacher. I was being taught aspects of biology in the religious knowledge class through parables about the spreading of seed on fertile ground. He took religious knowledge in my first few years. He'd repeat scripture or catechism to us and we had to repeat it back. It was drilled into us. We had three-weekly exams and a three-weekly marking system. No aspects of any other religions were considered.

57. There was mandatory attendance at a service during the morning and only one boy went to the village. For the Sunday service we were split into our houses. We went to vespers on a Sunday evening. There was some rare free time before and after breakfast on Sunday. During the week there was another morning service and you had the option of going to it or doing prep. The boys went to the service to avoid having to do even more prep. What struck me very quickly was the formality of the Catholic service. Boys were required to serve as altar boys, and even I had to do that eventually. I remember one senior boy fainting during the Sunday morning service and they didn't even stop for him.
58. My best friend at school was [REDACTED] and we used to be at the back of the church welcoming people in, including villagers, and giving out hymn sheets so we didn't have to go in, and we could sit at the back. I was being bullied by some of the senior boys who would kick me through the gap in the back of my chair. This was the 1980s and pixie boots were in fashion and they had pointed toes with steel tips that hurt when they were dug into the small of my back.
59. There had been one particularly bad episode in school when one of the senior boys was kicking his boots into my back and whispering that I was sucking Father [REDACTED] MFC cock. We had to sit in the chapel in class order and in order of position in that class, so the other boys knew where I would be sitting. I'd stood up and threw the song sheets I was holding and stormed out. I went to hide in the monastery. There was a search party sent to find me and one of the monks found me. I was taken into [REDACTED] MRQ [REDACTED] MRQ's office and we all got into trouble for behaving in this way in church and we were told to find other ways of dealing with this. I was told "how dare you do that in a church". I was expected to have just put up with that sort of behaviour.
60. I never went to confession, I wasn't Catholic. I had no sins to confess to. Father [REDACTED] MFC was frequently trying to get me to go to confession and I'd constantly say 'no, I'm not Catholic'.

Leisure time

61. I had very little free time. There was time given for reflection in a side section of the church, but I never recall any boy doing that. After the Church service on a Sunday, there was a forced walk with a master or [REDACTED] SNR, [REDACTED] MRQ in the hills with a kettle to heat water. Then we had the afternoon free on a Sunday, but we had vespers on a Sunday evening that we had to attend.
62. At the end of the evening there would be something called a 'social' and once a month, Father Anthony, as a the junior housemaster, had a social and it was basically toast and peanut butter or marmite and a glass of milk. Or your own housemaster would have a social with toast and it would be in their room. I was told that [REDACTED] MFC would get beer for the senior boys after some school victory and I understand that [REDACTED] MER would give beer to the junior boys as well. There would also be late night poker games. When I went back after my time away from Fort Augustus I was much more aware of those things and I didn't want to be part of them or the late night poker sessions with [REDACTED] MER
63. There were set times for us to write home to our families. That was on Wednesday afternoon at prep from 5.30 to 6 pm and on Saturday evening in the study hall. There were prefects walking up and down the hall trying to read what you were writing. You could seal the envelopes yourself and put the stamp on and then put the letter in the school post box, but there was nothing to stop the prefects taking them out of there if they suspected you were writing something they didn't approve of.

Personal possessions

64. We were not really allowed to keep personal things. The richer kids had more possessions, but I had just what was on the prescribed list provided by the school. My things were not quite good enough, and not from the best shop in Edinburgh, but I had just what my parents could afford. I only ever had one trip to Edinburgh as a child and it was to go to that shop for my red dress blazer. The other boys would see the labels in my clothes.

65. I was growing fast and many of my clothes no longer fitted. I could only wear one pair of trousers that fitted me, but you were meant to have two or three pairs. I wore that one pair for the whole term and put the smaller pairs in for washing. If my one pair of trousers got dirty I put boot polish on them to hide the dirt. I was considered to be the peasant boy.
66. There was a lot of pilfering and things stolen. Tuck boxes were broken into and boys would suddenly not be at the school anymore. The housemasters used ultra violet powder on valuable items to try to identify the thieves. You didn't really have anything nice of your own because of this.

Birthdays and Christmas

67. I spent Christmas at home with my family. Birthdays were not celebrated in any way at school.

Visits / Inspections

68. Visits from my family were difficult to arrange. The school didn't want there to be visits. My parents came occasionally and it was always slightly fraught. Any visits had to fit in with times set out by the school and the time was limited. I wasn't sure if I could get away from school at times, if I was in trouble and had detention. I'd have to ask them to speak to [REDACTED] MFC to get me excused. My parents would take me away overnight and we'd have to sleep in the car. We'd go to Inverness. I remember not wanting to go back to school and holding onto the car seats and my father prising my fingers off them. My mum would get [REDACTED] MFC to come out of school to coax me back in.
69. There was just one pay phone in the whole school. There was very little free time to try to use it during the day. My parents would ask me to phone them between 5 and 6 pm on a Friday and it was impossible. There was a long queue for the telephone and no privacy. There was a 15 minute window for everyone. I'd ask them to phone me

back, but something would always go wrong with that and it would takes them ages and a prefect would push in front.

70. The only outside inspection was an annual inspection by the military to inspect the cadet force.

Healthcare

71. If you were ill you'd go to bed and have food brought to you in the dorm. If you were genuinely ill you'd get a day in your bed in the dorm. We had a toilet and urinal and no handwashing facilities. You were expected to stay in the dorm all day. If they remembered, a child from your class would come up with food. There was a door that led from the dorm into the area that the monks occupied. There was no reason for that door being used other than by the monk who used it to enter the dorm to lead evening prayers.
72. I dreaded that door opening and it would be only opened by a monk who had no reason to be in that room at any time other than evening prayers. I was ill in my second year and I was in the dorm. I had a single bed at the time, not a bunk. The door opened and someone walked in. I turned to face the cubicle wall and pretended to be asleep. Someone came into my cubicle and took the covers off me and stared at me. I just lay there and I could feel their breath on my back. I never turned round and have no idea who it was, but it could only have been a monk and not one of the boys. It made me realise that something bad, something sinister could happen if you were alone and isolated from the others.
73. When the BBC documentary came out, some of my account was included. At the time, a 'nostalgia' page was set up on Facebook and there was a lot on there of denial that anything of the nature of the things included in the documentary could have taken place. All the old pupils, some of whom I knew, denied it happened. I'd be the only person saying that maybe we should re-think our views and acknowledge that these things could have happened. It was the closest I had come to acknowledging what happened. I commented that if you were sick you could be a single boy in that room

alone and potentially in the school by yourself and totally defenceless. I was accused of ruining people's memories of the school and the thread was eventually deleted.

74. There was a matron at the school, Maureen Gunn, and she carried out an inspection of the boys at the start of term. We took our clothes off to our underwear and lined up for her and a monk to inspect us. That was the only general care. She was available to see in break times or at the end of lunch time. She dealt with minor ailments and what you'd get was a Disprin tablet dissolved in a tea cup or given Karvol on a handkerchief to help with your cold.
75. In my second year, I trod on a nail that went into my foot. There was a local dump and I had gone there to search for items of historic interest. A wheelbarrow was sent to carry me back to the school. Father MFC bathed my foot in salt water. I went to the local surgery to see the doctor and my foot was bandaged. I was given a crutch to move around on.
76. I was assaulted by a prefect, whom I prefer not to name, because I was too slow in moving around on my crutch. His punishment was to put a noose around my neck and try to hang me in the study hall. He was aged seventeen or eighteen. Nobody came to help me. He threw away my crutch. He thought I could move more quickly and I was faking my inability to walk. I was then crawling on the floor on my hands and knees. He pushed me into the senior TV common room. I was crying and he must have decided he was going too far and sent someone to get my crutch for me.

Bed Wetting

77. Laundry was done once per week. We took our clothes and bed linen to a laundry room near the junior dorm and put them into baskets. We were then handed new sheets to go back with. I wet the bed once and pretended I'd spilt some juice on my sheets. My sheets were held up by the prefect for everyone to see. Otherwise, if the bed linen was wet you'd try to hide the sheet and get them into the basket without anyone seeing it. No checks were made on the beds when we were woken in the morning.

Discipline

78. I soon found compliance very difficult. I had to learn these things quickly, and I, from having been a quiet and shy boy at primary school became non-compliant very quickly. There was a system of 'seniority' which was when an older boy told you to do something and you just had to do it. It could be a simple task like just getting out of a chair to doing something for them such as getting something from their room for them. I simply could not and would not do the task. Almost from the moment I arrived I had a reputation for not following rules and not playing the system. I was frequently having the shit kicked out of me by older boys because I wouldn't do what I was told. The casual violence was constant, and the formal violence was being challenged to a fight and having to go down to the dungeons for a fight. I told [REDACTED] MFC that this happened to me, and I presume that other monks knew that these fights were happening as I can't believe they didn't talk amongst themselves about it.
79. Father [REDACTED] MER would give out 'twice one' for talking after lights out. 'Twice' referred to both hands and 'one' meant you were hit once on each hand. I didn't get into trouble and I wasn't being belted so I was seen as being a favourite. This meant the sexualised language started amongst the boys. They said I was sucking Father [REDACTED] MFC cock. That reputation grew, and as I had poor relationships with the older boys who were violent and I could only go to housemaster to tell him about their threats. If a seventeen or eighteen year old boy wanted to hit me with a hockey stick, I had no way of defending myself as a scrawny eleven year old child.
80. The unwritten rule was you don't tell and you don't 'grass', and in a closed group of boys that was the worst thing you could do. I became closer and closer to the house master [REDACTED] MFC and I started to spend as much time as I could in his study, every break time. The relationship grew, at least in his mind, and for me he was a protector as I knew I would be safe there. I wasn't being battered by other boys and I wasn't being called names if I was with him. His study was a haven for me, but my relationships with other boys got worse and worse.

81. We were allowed in the village of Fort Augustus at set times on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. A typical punishment was being gated and not being allowed out into the village or even into the grounds. You were instructed by older boys to call the villagers 'peasants'. I lived in the small village of [REDACTED] and when I went out into Fort Augustus I spoke to the people in the village. If you were seen speaking to a local girl you were then known as a peasant lover. One of my first nickname's in the school was peasant lover.
82. The prefects caused most of the violence. They had this absolute power over the younger boys and it was something I had to learn very quickly. One of the acts of violence that came from the prefects was known as the 'gray treatment'. It was given out for any minor infringement, such as not getting out of bed or not going to bed. You'd be given a choice by the prefect, to either go to see the housemaster or take the gray treatment I'm not sure where the name came from. The gray treatment was them coming up behind you and hitting you between the legs with a hockey stick. If you didn't do it voluntarily, you'd be held by the arms by boys from your own class, so your back was to the prefect. I remember getting that.
83. Punishments, given out by sixth form prefects, could also be lines, detention or physical work or, if it was more serious, you'd be sent to the housemaster. There was a constant undercurrent of threat of punishments from the prefects. The prefects began to realise that I had become [REDACTED] MFC [REDACTED] favourite and he would not punish me, so they would carry out punishments themselves.
84. One particular master, [REDACTED] MIH [REDACTED], if you caught you with hands in your pockets he would occasionally punch you in the solar plexus. He'd tell you it was bad for your posture. He sometimes also ordered you to do ten press-ups or twenty sit-ups for having your hands in your pockets. He'd been [REDACTED] in Fort Augustus himself and [REDACTED] and he was well loved by the boys. He retired at the end of my second year.
85. I was away from Fort Augustus school for one year and when I went back there had been a change in the regime and style in the school. We'd moved into a different part

of the school and the old dorms had been shut. There was no longer any corporal punishment. I also came back as an atheist.

Abuse at Fort Augustus

Generally

86. Generally there was an air of violence and the threat of violence. It was so insidious and you soon got caught up in it. It stemmed from the general anger of these unhappy monks. It was only once in my life that I have ever contemplated suicide and it was at that school. I struggle to remember when that was, but it was after MFC had left and I can't remember what specifically had happened, but clearly something had. Generally you weren't allowed out of the school and certainly not after 6 pm, but one day I decided to leave the school and walk down to the pier and sat down at the end. I didn't want to go home because there were problems at home and I didn't want to be at the school because it was so awful. There's about a 250 ft drop into the loch and I sat staring at it and contemplating what it would be like. An older monk, MFA MFA, the one I had caught with a bottle of gin under his cassock, came over and started talking to me and asking what I was doing out there. I don't know if he could sense I was in a bad way, but he was trying to encourage me back into the school and was telling me that life's never that bad and I would perk up.
87. There were random acts of violence from teachers who would throw chalk and board dusters and this has become a running joke on the nostalgia websites about old school days. It was never a joke for us. It was clearly an issue for the lay teachers that they couldn't belt the pupils and it was only housemasters that could give out the belt. The SNR MRQ no longer used the belt for some reason. One teacher used to lament that he couldn't issue the belt and he kept his Lochgelly tawse from his old teaching days. He kept it under his black robes and slap it down on the desk on occasion. MER carried his old fencing foil on his person so that he could swish it at us in the corridors. He also had a cane that he would use, like a comedy Charlie Chaplin-esque flexible cane. That was a cane that only he would use and MFC

MFC didn't. I remember Father MFC going purple with anger at the boys in class or on the hockey pitch and he would go utterly berserk.

88. There was also a strange fascination and fixation with the devil at the school. There were séances held and there were Ouija boards. Father MFC had exorcised the biology lab of bad spirits. It was pure fantasy stuff. There was solvent abuse amongst the boys when I went back to the school.

Peer abuse

89. I was told I destroyed the ethos of the school as I was always the one who told on others and reported events to staff.
90. I never understood the seniority system amongst the pupils. There was physical fighting between the boys. I'd be goaded into fighting younger boys and it was a constant theme that older boys would encourage younger boys into fighting with each other as a spectator sport. The fight would take place in the dungeon at 6:30 in evening. There would be a couple of these each week, or sometimes more. If you refused to go there you'd be dragged down. You'd be surrounded by other boys as you're laying into one another. The prefects would be watching and they'd break up the fight and then you'd get punished for fighting.
91. I won almost no fights in the time I was there. I'd be rolling around on the floor in these fights and ruining my one good pair of trousers and using boot polish to cover the scuff marks. There was a second year boy that I got on well with and he was goaded into fighting with me, and we were forced into it. He was as bad a fighter as I was.
92. I managed to get him to stop hitting me and held his arms by his sides and told him we should stop fighting. At that point one of the sixth formers, a prefect, kicked me squarely in the ribs with his pointed pixie boots. That weekend he gave both of us punishments for fighting.

93. The school had an outdoor swimming pool and it was filled with water from Loch Ness, plus buckets of disinfectant that were poured in by the headmaster. After the annual inspection by the cadet force everyone would jump in and the head boy would be thrown in the pool. I was just hanging around laughing. The boys who really hated me saw me and stripped my clothes off me down to my underwear. I was screaming at them that I can't swim and don't put me in the pool. They threw me in anyway. They were dipping me in the water and I was held down by one of the boys. I was starting to black out and the head boy, [REDACTED], came running over and belted one of the boys in the face and got me out of the water and onto my front by the side of the pool. He told me to go inside and dry off.
94. I gathered up my clothes and walked back into the school and as I walked I saw [REDACTED] MFC [REDACTED] watching out of the window and he had witnessed all of it. I had to go past his office and the snooker room to get to the dorm. I saw him later and he told me these things are part of the rough and tumble of school life and I could always come to him if I needed to. He was meant to be a holy man and watched me being half-drowned.
95. After this episode, I began to slowly realise that these boys who hated me had once been the favourites of Father [REDACTED] MFC in the past and no longer were because I'd become his favourite. It meant they were no longer protected by him from the violence so there was a lot of jealousy going on.

Father [REDACTED] MFC

96. The prefects could send younger boys to the housemaster to be belted and they began to realise I was not going to get belted by [REDACTED] MFC. One way for me of avoiding these fights was getting closer and closer to Father [REDACTED] MFC. I was beginning to realise there was something odd going on, but I wasn't getting battered by other boys so that was great. He just wouldn't belt me and he told me constantly how hard it was for him to stop himself from belting me, but he wasn't going to because we were such good friends.

97. The gifts from Father [MFC] started and there were more and more of them. He was also playing my parents and he was phoning them. I would spend break times in his study as it was a refuge. His study was next to the snooker room on the second floor and there was no real reason for me to be on that floor. I have several photographs that he took of me as a boy in his study and he would send them to my parents.
98. He [redacted] in one of the sheds in the school grounds. Often it would be just him and I. Before we went to the archery shed he would get changed in his study out of his monk's habits down to his underpants. I would get up and try to leave the room as this made me feel very uncomfortable and he told me to stay as it was ok. He had a Yale lock on the door and he'd put the snib down before he started to get changed and I would get up to try to unlock the door and he would actually stand in front of the door so I couldn't leave the room.
99. He taught me how to ride a bike as I was so un-coordinated. He gave me a penknife and he bought me a tuck box as my parents had not realised they were expected to provide me with one. I had to keep my tuck box in his study and not in the dorm. He also gave me jewellery, a gold Celtic cross. The rumours increased that I was having sexual relations with a monk. It became common currency within the school and there were stories that we were having a sexual relationship. There was constant name calling and when we had to queue up for assembly the taunts would be the worst.
100. One of the boys who was a very good pianist and singer had re-written the words to a Beatles song to suggest I was having a relationship with Father [MFC]. He used the grand piano that was used for school productions. He had re-written verse after verse and other boys would sing along to it too.
101. [MFC] loved that I went to his study room and went crying to him and it made us closer in his eyes. Another boy went too, but not so much. He was called [redacted]. He was a protestant boy from Edinburgh and also not quite part of the mainstream school. We both spent a lot of time together at the end of our second year, before [MFC] was transferred to Canada. At that time he and I were not getting onto well

and he wanted to stay away from [REDACTED] MFC study, but I still wanted to be there as it was my safe haven.

102. I had a year away from Fort Augustus and when I went back, [REDACTED] was quite different and was a very unhappy person and he left the school. I have no idea why.
103. Father [REDACTED] MFC wrote to my parents and some of these letters and cards survive. He even came to my parents' house and stayed there at least twice. He'd go drinking with my dad and generally ingratiate himself with my parents. I discovered sometime later that he was paying my school fees and was basically keeping me there. His aunt had died and left him money and as a monk he was meant to have no personal property and it was meant to go the monastery. I discovered afterwards that he was diverting some of the money and it was going towards my school fees. He was the reason why I was still able to go to this school. He was also trying to get my parents to tell me this so I would be beholden to him for this gift.
104. I can see now that he was trying to protect himself from any accusations in the future if I should ever suggest he'd done anything wrong. He could then say 'look how much I did for you'.
105. He wrote to me in the school holidays and the mid-term breaks and tell me how much he missed me and signed his letters with 'much love'. I had some hints that other possibly sinister things had happened in the school in the past. I once found a letter hidden in his study, when I was clearing out a desk, that he very clearly did not want me to read and ripped it up. The letter was written to one of his predecessors regarding a case of alleged abuse. I tried to piece it together from the pieces in his bin when I had an opportunity later on. He went berserk and told me it had nothing to do with me and was from some time in the past. I had an awareness that there was something else, something much darker and insidious going on.
106. Father [REDACTED] MFC went to Canada in 1988 and he continued to write to me until 1990 or 1991. He was desperate for me to come and visit him if I could find the money and he would put me up at the priests house. I wrote to him once, I think. He would send me

letters and cards at birthdays and Christmas and he would send me photographs of himself sitting sunbathing outside of his sister's house in Canada.

Reporting of abuse at Fort Augustus Abbey School

107. During the second period of time at the school I was assaulted in the village by a Fort Augustus resident with a drink problem. He hated Abbey boys. He attacked me in the street as I was wearing my school blazer. I went back to school and reported to Stephen Geddes that I'd been assaulted. They were so nervous of the police coming into the school and did not want them to come, but I insisted they were called and a local police officer attended. Nothing ever came from my complaint.
108. There was no one within the school to confide in, no-one such as an inspector or an independent person. The person I was expected to report to was my housemaster which is what I did with regard to the assault in the village. I couldn't do it in confession, I didn't go to it. I was always intrigued about what went on there. I couldn't speak to the matron. She was just a nice lady from the village who we suspected liked a drink herself. I would be reporting on desperately unhappy boys who had no outlets for their feelings. There was no one to turn to and what would I be reporting? I had only suspicions to report regarding Father **MFC** and nothing more, and he would probably just say he was trying to be every one's pal. I have no knowledge of him participating in anything else other than encouraging an inappropriately close relationship with myself as a young boy and he tries to pursue it and doesn't, and then gives up.

Leaving Fort Augustus and life after being at school

109. After the 1990-91 school year, there wasn't any money for me to go back to Fort Augustus. I had some more time off school. Initially my parents were looking at me going to school on Islay and staying with my grandparents. Then this fell through. Then I enrolled at the Hermitage Academy in Helensburgh and went there from 1992 to 1994. I got my Highers, then went on to University in Glasgow to study Scottish History

and Archaeology from 1994 to 1998, where I met my wife. We lived in Partick in 1998 to 1999. In 2000 we moved through to Edinburgh. In the meantime I completed another Masters courses at Glasgow.

110. At this time I had also started to work in and run pubs. I went onto run various pubs in Edinburgh up to 2011. Then I went back to university to start a PhD in UK clearance after the war. Then I got into national and local politics and was involved in both the Scottish and UK referendums [REDACTED]
111. There was a boy who was a sixth former when I was in first form and he had previously been a favourite of Father [REDACTED] MFC and he was just vicious and used cricket bats on me whenever he could. I met him as an adult about ten years later when I was working in a bar in Glasgow. He asked me if I'd been at Fort Augustus and we just had a general chat about the place. Then later on again I saw him again at the bar and I asked him why he treated me the way that he did. He said I deserved it because I wouldn't toe the line and do what I was told. I told him I felt nothing but pity for him.

Impact

112. I spend a lot of time putting on an act. I spend a great deal of time at the back of a room, scanning it for trouble. My wife sees it as a perpetual risk assessment and I look for trouble everywhere. Fifteen years of working in the licensed trade has had an influence too and I got a reputation in the trade for not taking nonsense. I don't drink alcohol myself and I have a low threshold for bad behaviour. I confront bullies head on, whether they have had a drink or not. I abhor bullying in all of its forms. I've done it in politics too and in day-to-day life. These are all things that have come from my time at school.
113. I continue to have a fear of swimming and of pools. I can't swim because of what happened to me at school. I don't dwell on it every day and I am acutely aware, especially since the BBC programme came out that some people at Fort Augustus had a worse time there than me. I just had a bad, lonely time at school and experienced

violence and they had a far, far worse time. I can be objective on that, but it doesn't stop it trickling into my sub-conscious.

114. I feel like I haven't slept properly in thirty years and I never have a dreamless night and there is no going to bed and waking up refreshed. The fear doesn't leave me. I have night terrors and I am back in school climbing the wooden stairs to the dormitory. The dreams are unexplainable at times. I don't remember them when I wake up screaming. I've experienced so much joy in my life since then, but I simply can't escape my sub-conscious. It doesn't go away and my sub-conscious won't let it go. The pub trade came some way to helping me as I wasn't going to bed until very late at night. Now I have left that work I can't sleep until 1 am or later.
115. I have very serious trust issues, especially in entrusting my son to the care of others such as school camps. I can't describe just how hard that was for me to allow to happen. I feel I have a radar constantly switched on. It left me very sensitive and attuned to any hint of predatory behaviour with regards to my son.
116. When I came back to Fort Augustus after my year away, the boy who had been my best friend was so different and so angry and detached and I have no idea what happened to him. I can't ask him that now and I have no idea of what happened to the fourteen or fifteen individuals who were in my year and if something similar happened to them.
117. I hope by giving a statement to the Inquiry that I can offer some context and corroboration for others who were at the school who may come forward to give an account of their abuse. I want the nostalgic accounts of the school in on-line forums to be balanced. I spent a long time contemplating contacting the Inquiry and I hope it may go some way to finally making the dreams stop.
118. I have a mistrust of authority and a fear of communities, and my hackles are raised whenever I encounter any form of bullying. I don't want to be defined by the monks and what they did.

119. I went back to Fort Augustus when they had an auction of their possessions and I've been there twice with my wife. It's been made into flats now and I hoped that the visit would exorcise it and it didn't. Nothing seems to shake it away.

Reporting of abuse after leaving school

120. I was involved in the BBC production about Fort Augustus. I was one of the first people that Murdoch Rogers, the producer, contacted and I quickly made it clear to him that I wasn't sexually abused. They went on to find other people who were.

121. I went to the police in 2014 after the documentary was on the television and part of the investigation is ongoing. When the CID came they took lots of material away and I spent a number of hours with the police over a couple of sessions. Statements were taken and months passed. Then I got two separate letters from the Procurator Fiscal to say there would be no further charges against **MIG** or **MIF**. As explained in the following paragraph, I've heard very little about **MFC** and all of the material they took from me was about him. Then I just left it and I was aware that Murdoch Rogers of the BBC would occasionally contact me, to see how things were. He told me they were pushing the Fiscal about the Australian monk and about **MFC**

122. Then he contacted me to say the BBC were going to make it public again to push the prosecution service. The prosecution service was doing nothing. They asked for the photographs of **MFC**. I contacted the Fiscal to ask for my material back. It took months and I contacted the original CID officer who passed the matter onto someone else who was going to contact the Fiscal. Then the CID officer emailed me to say **MFC** and they wanted to hold on to my material for longer. I found out more through the BBC involvement than I did through the authorities.

123. **MFC**

MFC has just been allowed to retire from his parish, but is still living in the parish house. He is still an active member of his community and the matter rests with the Governor General in Canada. There was an attempt to extradite MFC from Canada to the UK, I think the authorities would prefer it if the old monks simply died. My role has been to pick away gradually at this scab.

Records

124. I have various documents in my possessions, including report cards from school. I have several photographs of myself and other pupils and Father MFC at Fort Augustus. I have numerous letters and cards that Father MFC wrote to me and some to my parents as well as letters that my parents wrote to me at school, but very few of my letters to them, describing my unhappiness, have survived.
125. I made a request for records from the Benedictine Order and next to nothing came back after twelve months other than a basis confirmation that I attended Fort Augustus.

Lessons to be Learned

126. All residential schools and boarding schools should be closed, particularly single sex schools. At least there should be a minimum age for attendance. No inspectors ever visited our school, that I know of. I hope they now visit and inspect private schools. I was robustly in favour of the named person scheme proposed by Scottish Government. In my case my named person would have been a monk, and if one the recommendations of the Inquiry is that there should be a named person for each child, then I hope the children currently in private school have someone from the state sector, someone external from the organisation.
127. There should be a named external person or organisation to telephone and that the name is known to pupils so there is someone for them to speak to and avoid the

isolation that I felt. I had problems at school and issues at home and no-one to turn to. I needed to know about something like Childline to contact and have the opportunity to telephone them. There needs to be more openness. I can't believe that predators no longer exist in the closed school environment and I think the experience I had can still happen now.

Other information

- 128. I have not sought compensation or been offered it by the Benedictine Order.
- 129. 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.

MIE


Signed.....

Dated..... 25/01/2019