

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

William Dyer

Support Person present : No

1. 1. My full name is William Dyer. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Background

2. I was brought up in Glasgow and resided at [REDACTED] along with my mother, father [REDACTED]. My father worked as a hawker and spent most of his earnings on alcohol. My mother lived on what was left and although life was hard we were an average family living in the poorer part of Glasgow. I was brought up as a Catholic but was not a regular church goer.

3. I was no angel as a boy and spent a lot of time dodging school. We used to have to avoid the Truant Officers who would take you back to school if they caught you. I also used to steal apples and pears from peoples gardens. I used to climb tall buildings to steal homing pigeons. We used to capture them, play with them and then release them to return home.

4. I also remember from my youth going to the local water tank where I learned to swim. I didn't realise that this would later prove useful to me in my stay at St Mungo's. The water tank was always cold and had lots of debris floating in it.

5. At age 9 or 10 I was "dogging school". I was sent with my mother to a hearing in a court building in Ingram Street, Glasgow. The outcome of the hearing was that I was to be sent to a residential approved school. I remember crying and asking my mother to help me to stop this happening but she was unable to do anything.

6. I was initially sent to a school in St Vincent Street, Glasgow. This school was residential and locked. We had our own bedroom and access to comics and things to entertain me. We were treated well at this place which I cannot remember the name of. I spent a total of two weeks there and was never subjected to any form of abuse. After this period of time I was advised that I was being moved to St Mungo's Approved School in Ayrshire.

Institution: St Mungo's Approved School, Barskimming House, near Cumnock, Ayrshire

7. I was taken from the home in St Vincent Street, Glasgow to St Enoch's Station where we boarded a train to Mauchline in Ayrshire. I was accompanied throughout the trip. On arrival at Mauchline we were met by Brother MJG and Brother LAA. They signed papers and I was put into a car and taken to the school. I remember at the time thinking that the priests dressed differently from the ones I knew. Their uniform was different and I thought at the time that they were failed priests and wore a different uniform.

8. I remember being driven over a bridge and then up a driveway to the big house. I had never seen anything like it as I was used to my small home area in Glasgow. I couldn't understand why I had been brought there.

9. I remember being walked through a courtyard, through the boot room and I knocked on a small door. I was asked to go in and there was a lady there who was the Matron. I think that her name was EIU. She asked me to remove my clothes. When I was naked she hit me and I was knocked to the floor. I was on my own in the room with Matron but Brother LAA was waiting outside. She then inspected my hair and I was told that I had nits or lice and I would need all my hair cut off. I was then given a dose of castor oil and passed over to Brother LAA.

10. Brother LAA made me enter the showers. I had never been in a shower before. He kept making the water hot and cold and I couldn't see anything because of the steam. Whilst I was in the showers I could feel Brother LAA hitting me with a

stick made from a tree branch. He then took me out of the shower and proceeded to shave off all my head hair.

11. I was then returned to the boot room where I was given my day to day clothes to be worn during my stay at the home. They consisted of a pair of boots, a pair of under pants, a vest, a shirt, a jersey, a pair of shorts and a gabardine coat.

12. I was allocated the number 77. All my clothes were stamped with the number 77. At the time I was at the school there were 88 pupils. Most of the pupils were there long term and the release date was when you attained 15 years of age.

13. I was then taken by one of the older boys to my dormitory. I was allocated a bed in dormitory 5 or 6 I can't remember. I slept in the same dormitory throughout my entire stay. The boy that took me to the dormitory advised me not to wet my bed or I would be in big trouble. Fortunately I was not a bed wetter and was never punished for that.

14. Prior to going to the school I was spoken to by [REDACTED] who had been previously at St Marys School, Bishopbriggs in Glasgow. He warned me about what to expect and how to avoid being got at by the staff at the home. I was wise to this and reckoned I could hold my own. He warned me about being touched by the brothers and how to avoid being singled out.

15. I was taught to read and write and must have kept good health as I was never taken to the doctors or to hospital. This was the time of rationing and, unlike other children, my age I was being fed, clothed and given a bed to sleep in.

16. The real bad times were when you were constantly being hit and abused by the brothers. When you would be lying in bed at night wondering when you would get home and missing your family. You also wondered why you had been sent there in the first place.

Routine

17. The daily routine at the school did not change and the weekly routine only varied slightly with weekend activities changing during the course of the year.

18. We would be wakened at 6:30am every morning by Brother LAA coming into the dormitory and clapping his hands together. Anyone slow in getting up would be struck with whatever he had in his hand at the time. Anyone who had wet their beds would have the wet sheets rubbed in their faces and they would be struck about the head. They would then have to take the sheets to the laundry for washing. On the first morning at the home I tried to stand up to Brother LAA and told him to stop hitting ██████████, another boy in the dorm. Brother LAA just turned his anger on me and started hitting me. None of the Brothers would tolerate any form of dissent or insubordination.

19. Next we would have to make up our beds and fold the covers away. We were then put into single line and taken to a room for Benediction. Prayers in the morning were taken by Father McGrory who was the priest at the school. Over the years I tried to tell Father McGrory what was happening during confession. He told me to stop telling lies and say three Our Fathers and a hail Mary. Benediction and prayers lasted for about half an hour every day and then we were made to clean the house. Everyone had a job allocated and were responsible for their own area. It was then off to the dining room for breakfast.

20. My first day I recall being made to eat the lumpy porridge that was put down in front of me. Because I couldn't eat it Brother LAA held my head and forced me to eat the porridge. I was being sick as a result but Brother LAA continued to force the mixture of porridge and vomit into my mouth. This continued until the plate was empty and everything else had fallen onto the floor. The other boys kept their heads down and never said a word.

School

21. After breakfast it was off to the classrooms for lessons. The lessons usually started at 09:00 hours in the huts which had been built in the courtyard. There were three classes, simply numbered one to three. I was placed in classroom three and my teacher was Mr Slaven. The other class teachers were Brother Augustus and Brother Ambrose. Prior to going to the classroom we had to bless ourselves and then in single file make our way to the classroom through the courtyard. Class One was the highest class and was run by Brother Ambrose, Class two was run by Brother Augustus and Class three was run by Mr Slaven. The teachers were trained to provide education to all the boys at the school.

22. When I was in class three I was not able to read and write. Mr Slaven quickly identified this. He got me to sit next to another boy called ■■■ who came from Port Glasgow. ■■■ helped me to learn to read and write and we became best of friends looking out for each other. Mr Slaven behaved like any other teacher you would get in school. He did use the belt if you misbehaved in class. He made you wear a dunce's hat and sit on a stool if you were breaking his rules. I felt that he was fair and that his treatment of you was fair. He helped me to read and write. Mr Slaven also said prayers every day and we had to bless ourselves. .

23. There was never any homework to do as it was never given to us by our teachers. Instead we were expected to do our cleaning and other tasks which were allocated to us. We also took part in sports such as football, boxing and running. We were also taught handicraft and such as basket weaving and making things from raffia. Mr McGowan ran the handicraft workshop

24. There was a playtime at 10:00am and then it was back to school for more lessons till lunch time. Lunch time was between 12:30 and 1:00pm. You were again required to say prayers before and after lunch. Once again you walked single file back to the dining room where you were made to eat everything. I can remember being forced to eat the sago pudding in the same manner as I was forced to eat the porridge. Apart from lumpy porridge and sago the lunch meals were quite varied and quite nice.

25. After lunch there was some play time in the courtyard and then it was back to lessons till 4:00pm when school finished for the day.

After school

After school we were required to tidy up and do our cleaning jobs. My first job was to keep the toilets in the courtyard clean.

26. Prior to tea you were allowed to play in the courtyard for about half an hour.

27. Tea was at 5:30pm and again prayers were said at this meal. After tea it was off to the boot room where we had to clean our boots.

Clothing and hygiene inspections

28. There were three separate inspections every week for our boots our teeth and our underpants. The boots had to be kept very clean and shiny. When the boots were inspected you had to stand in a line and hold them up. If you hadn't managed to get a shine on them and Brother LAA was not happy with the result he would take the boots out of your hands and you would be hit on both your ears at the same time. Brother LAA would also hold your head and strike it off the sink in the boot room.

29. The underpants inspection was held every week on a Friday and if you had any "skid marks" staining on your pants you would be punished by being hit with a stick. The brother would also rub your face with the soiled underpants. You would then have to take them to be cleaned. All the boys knew that you could rub your underpants on the wall of the showers and the substance that came off the wall used to make them appear white. I recall another boy nicknamed [REDACTED] who never got into trouble with staining on his underpants. I met [REDACTED] many years later and he told me that he never wore his underpants through the week and only put them on just before the inspection.

30. There was also an inspection made of your teeth and if they were found to be dirty you would also receive a beating.

31. Bed was usually about 9:00pm. Prior to that you would have to finish your cleaning job. You were sometimes allowed to sit in the boot room and listen to the radio.

32. Lights out at 9:00 pm meant just that and the night shift boiler man would take over. He was called **EIV** and he was involved in sexually assaulting some of the boys. It never happened to me because had prepared me in what to do and how to avoid letting anyone touch your privates. You seldom saw any of the brothers after lights out.

Religious education

33. There was religious instruction day and night. Father McGrory was the priest attached to the school. He seemed to be a very holy man and walked about all day deep in thought or prayer. He took most of the religious ceremonies held at the school. He was not involved with most of the residents and I never saw him striking anyone.

Weekends

34. Saturday and Sunday meant no school. A lot of the time was spent cleaning the house and praying. There were a number of sporting activities available including football and boxing.

35. At the weekend we were also taken to the Abbeyhall Picture House in Mauchline. This involved a walk of about 3 miles into Mauchline. During the walks we would be forced to sing different songs and would be punished for not joining in. We were also given a bar of toffee and a caramel chew.

36. When I first arrived at the home there was no television but after having been there for a while the local shopkeepers in Mauchline got together and presented one to the school.

37. We were never given pocket money but at the weekends we were given chews and toffee. There was a system of star rewards and there was a chart kept on

the wall. If you were helpful and you earned a star which was a hard thing to do, it would go up on the chart. The only stars I ever saw were in the sky or in my head from the "doings" I got from the brothers. After you achieved five stars you were entitled to go on a trip to Kilmarnock. On this trip you were given money and were able to buy an ice cream.

Sports

38. We were also encouraged to get involved in handicraft. We did basket weaving and making mats and things from raffia. I think that the brothers went on to sell these things but we never saw any of the money.

39. I was also a good swimmer having learned to swim as a young boy in the water tank in Glasgow. We would be taken to the river and all the boys would get the chance to swim. Me and another boy, [REDACTED], were always placed down river in case we had to pull out anyone that washed downstream.

40. The home had a very successful football team which won a cup final at Parkhead football stadium in Glasgow. You were actively encouraged to play football.

41. The boxing team trained by Mr Travers was also very successful and used to win lots of medals when they travelled to boxing competitions. Mr Travers was never involved in any abuse. When the boxing coaching was taking place the Brothers were never there. If there was an argument between the boys resident at the school you would be handed a pair of boxing gloves by the brothers and you would square up to each other until the matter was sorted out.

42. I was a very good runner and one of the fastest boys at the school. I used to love sports days and the paper chases we did in the woods. Brother ^{LAA} [REDACTED] used to lay the paper trails in the woods and Brother ^{EIW} [REDACTED] used to go round after and pick up some of the bits of paper to make the trail harder to follow. On sports days you were always rewarded with a toffee bar or a caramel for winning the races.

43. In 1953 in honour of the Queen's Coronation we were taken to a celebration in Mauchline. There was a sports day there and I remember competing against other boys who were local and managing to win races.

Holidays

44. If you did not go home during the holidays you could go on a trip with the brothers to Girvan or Salcoats. We used to sleep on beds made up on the floor of classrooms in local schools. These trips were great fun and we used to be able to play on the beaches.

45. You were entitled to spring, summer and Christmas holidays where you had the opportunity to go home to your family. This would involve a trip from Mauchline to Glasgow by train. You had to be met at the other end by a family member. You were only able to go home if your parents sent the required train fare. Without the money you had to remain at the home.

46. A lot of the boys were not able to go home because their parents did not have the money to send. You could also be held back at the school if you were punished for any reason. I was held back on one occasion.

Visits

47. I only had two visits all the time I was at the school. One was from [REDACTED], when he caught me getting a beating from Brother LAA [REDACTED]. And the only other visit was from [REDACTED]. My parents did not visit at all. If you did have visitors they would have to walk the three miles from Mauchline to the school.

Working whilst at the home

48. We used to go to the local farms and help the farmers by picking potatoes and other labouring jobs including pulling, collecting and burning weeds. As far as I

am aware we were never paid for these jobs although the brothers may have had an arrangement with the farmer which we did not know about.

49. I recall working on one of the farms. There was a shed in which we could see a bicycle in. My mate [REDACTED] and I had never seen a two wheeled bike before. We took it out and tried balancing on it. It was an old rusty bike but the tyres were still hard. To get the bike we had to break off a padlock to the shed. We were caught by the farmer who up till that point had treated us very well. The farmer then met Father McGrory one day and told him what had happened. Father McGrory brought it up before the whole school at Benediction one night and managed to publically humiliate us. Brother LAA punched us both on the head and we had to clean and dub all the football boots as a punishment. We were never allowed to work on the farm again. It was a pity because working on the farm was one of the best jobs.

50. I used to be good at repairing and making basket weaves. I also made items which I learned were sold by the brothers. Handicraft was a big part of days' work.

51. One of the other tasks we had to undertake was to re-lay the gravel driveway from the bridge over the river to the front door of the house. We were given buckets and had to collect the gravel from the bed of the river and spread it on the driveway. These buckets were very heavy for young boys such as ourselves. If we were going too slowly we would receive a "doing" from Brother LAA who was supervising the work. On some occasions Brother LAA would empty your bucket of gravel over your head. The work took four months to complete.

Medical treatment

52. I never remember anyone being ill at the school. All medical issues were referred to the Matron who would administer whatever was required. Certainly I cannot recall anyone being sent to bed. If you had problems with your teeth you would be taken to a dentist in Mauchline. Your teeth were inspected by the brothers every week.

53. I had no physical or mental health problems in later life as a result of my stay at St Mungo's. I cannot remember having any of these problems when I was at the school.

54. In 1970 some 14 years after leaving St Mungo's. I suffered a brain haemorrhage. It required surgery. I don't think that I attribute this to the abuse I suffered at the school.

55. On the whole, apart from the beating and ill treatment I suffered at the home, I had no other injuries. I managed to cope with what happened to me but I can recall every beating and thing that happened to me. I can remember the lay out of the establishment as if I was still there.

Inspections

56. I was never aware of any official visit to the home during my stay there. The only visitors were occasional family members of the boys or other brothers who were members of the De La Salle Order. These brothers would stay for a while and then move on. We did not have much contact with them.

Abuse

57. Brother LAA and Brother EIW hit you at various time throughout the day and there was often no reason for them to do so. They were just cruel. They had sticks or just used their hand to slap and punch us.

58. If someone farted Brother LAA and Brother EIW would ask "Who fouled the air?". If no one owned up they would get one of the boys to go round and smell everyone's bottoms till a culprit was identified. Sometimes if there were no admissions the boys would select an unpopular "culprit" to blame. The "culprit" would then be taken to the boot room where he would receive a beating.

59. You were never allowed to use any bad language at the home and the brothers never used swear words.

60. You were disciplined for stupid things - for laughing, for not singing on the walks we used to go on, for having skid marks in your under pants, for failing to clean you boots properly. On one occasion I was made to stand in the snow barefoot for about an hour and a half for breaking wind.

61. One of my early duties was to clean the toilets used by all the pupils. They would be particularly messy and if I didn't keep them clean I would and beaten. Other pupils who were on cleaning duties would be beaten if Brother LAA or Brother EIW found any dust after the area they were responsible for had been cleaned. On one occasion when someone had not pulled the flush Brother LAA pushed my head into the toilet bowl and right into the faeces.

62. On one occasion on a Sunday, Brother LAA told me that my toilets were not clean. He put me into the showers turning them from hot to cold and beating me with a stick. I ran naked out of the showers into the courtyard where I came across [REDACTED] who had unexpectedly come to visit me. I remember this well as it was one of only two family visits that I had during my spell at St Mungo's. [REDACTED] was about 24 or 25 years old at that time. He asked what was going on. When [REDACTED] challenged Brother LAA he ran off and locked himself in a room.

63. Brother MJG, who was SNR, called the police and dealt with them. I don't know what was said to the police. The police told [REDACTED] that I was in care and that there was nothing that they could do as the home was responsible for my care. [REDACTED] had refused to leave the school until something was done but the police persuaded him to leave. [REDACTED] left with the police after a promise that Brother MJG would speak to Brother LAA to prevent this happening again. The outcome of this was that Brother LAA changed my job from cleaning the toilets to inspecting the boots in the boot room. This was a much easier job. The physical abuse from Brother LAA continued none the less.

64. Brother LAA had a leather belt hidden under his clothing. The belt was kept in easy reach near his shoulder. Brother LAA was able to pull it out very quickly and hit you with it. Brother LAA would hit you on all parts of the body including your head.

65. The penalty for running away and being caught was a beating from SNR SNR Brother MJG. I was subjected to a beating by him on one occasion when I ran away. You were taken to the bedroom of Brother MJG where you had to take down your trousers and underpants. Brother MJG had a thick leather belt which he would use on your bare backside. I remember after having got the belt from him that I ran to the shower room and looked in the mirror and saw the marks from where I had been belted. The marks stayed with me for the rest of the week. When Brother MJG belted you it was always in his bedroom and you were required to expose your bare bottom. I think Brother MJG derived some sort of pleasure from this.

66. On a Monday night [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and me, who were all boys from Glasgow, decided on the spur of the moment to run away. We ran down by the river then managed to make our way to Mauchline train station. No train arrived so we went to a bus stop which was sign posted Kilmarnock. We had no money. We were never allowed to carry money. A short time later we saw a car coming and realised that it was Brother MJG car. Brother EIW and one of the house captains, [REDACTED], jumped out of the car and started to chase us. They caught [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] quite quickly but I was a renowned fast runner and they failed to get me.

67. I hid myself in fields and gardens in Mauchline. I spent the night in a farmer's barn and remember eating raw eggs for breakfast. I realised that I had nowhere to go and couldn't get to Glasgow. I made my way back to the school. When I was crossing the bridge I was seen by Brother LAA who grabbed me and put me in the showers. He was jabbing me with a stick. He then took me to Brother MJG who beat me over my bare backside with a leather belt as I have described previously.

68. Most of the hitting and physical abuse you were subjected to by all the brothers was performed in front of all the other pupils. The only punishments that

were not seen by other boys was the times you were taken into Brother MJG room.

69. Boys who wet the bed were all put into Dormitory 7. I did not know what went on in that dormitory as I never had a bed wetting problem. I can only imagine the punishments that those boys got. If you wet the bed in the other dormitories the sheets were rubbed in your face.

70. Brother LAA insisted that all the boys only looked straight ahead. I was always looking about me and kept getting into trouble with Brother LAA when we were marched into the classroom or on the long walks to Mauchline. As a result of this Brother LAA made me a pair of leather blinkers similar to ones made for horses. I had to wear these blinkers for about two months. As a result of this I was mocked by all the other boys. If Brother EIW, who was a gambler, lost money betting on the horses and the dogs he would take it out on you by beating you for no reason.

71. I don't recall seeing any sexual abuse at the home other than the boiler man EIV who put his hand under the bed sheets of the some of the boys and played with their dicks. I was never subjected to it as I had been well warned by

72. I think that Brother MJG used to enjoy taking down your trousers and underpants and hitting you with a belt on your bare backside. On reflection I think it was odd that he did this in his bedroom, on his own, with the door closed.

73. I remember who was a pupil at the school going on his own on walks with Brother MJG around the school and in the woods. Everyone at the school knew this. I don't know what happened on these walks but was my friend and we used to kid him about them.

74. EIV who was the boiler man and night watchman used to prey on some of the boys. EIV was without doubt a paedophile. He used to be able to go about the dormitories through the night as the brothers were not about. EIV would bring comics and sweeties and give them to some of the boys he had

targeted. EIV would initially prey on the boys in Dormitory 7 who were the "bed wetters". He had an excuse to be there as he was looking after the radiators. EIV would slip his hand under the covers and play with the boys' privates. Everyone knew it was going on but they just kept their heads down and pretended to be asleep. EIV would come back during the night and get some of the boys out of bed. EIV would take them down stairs. We called these boys "ricers" - I cannot give an explanation as to why. I did not see what happened but what else could it have been for?

75. When we were showering every day Brother LAA would come into the shower room. There were 6 showers and we would be in groups of four. Brother LAA would watch us showering. Brother LAA would examine our bodies. Brother LAA would use his walking stick to spread our legs or lift up our arms and make sure we used the carbolic soap provided. On reflection I think that this behaviour may have been sexually motivated.

Reporting of abuse

76. I never contemplated telling the police about what had happened to me as they would never have believed it. There was also a feeling at the time I was in the home that if you spoke to the police you would be a grass. The only other persons we could tell were the abusers. When I finally got home I did not discuss what had happened with my family.

Life after the Institution

77. At age 15 I was finally freed from the school to return home. On the final day I was given a pair of long trousers. I was taken to the train station at Mauchline and put on the train to Glasgow. Brothers LAA and EIW offered their hand to shake. I refused to do it, turned my back on them and walked away.

78. Life treated me well after St Mungo's. I worked at various jobs including a fishmongers, and a pig farm where I learned to drive. I had my own business. I married and had a family. I am now well able to support myself and my family and I have been able to deal with what happened although I can never forget Barskimming House and the abuse we suffered at the hands of the De La Salle Brothers.

Impact

79. I have never considered or wanted to seek compensation for what happened to me. In 2003 I completed and published a book about my experiences living at the school called "My Memoirs Of A Mansion Fit For A Lady But Not For Me". During the research for the book I met up with a lot of other survivors from St Mungo's and shared their stories. We even had a reunion at the house which had been our former school. This was hosted by the current occupants Lord and Lady Strathclyde as the school is now a private house. Lord and Lady Strathclyde were the inspiration behind me writing the book.

80. My book goes on to describe what happened to a lot of the boys I knew of at the school. A lot of them are now dead. A lot of them went on to commit crimes and ended up in jail. A few managed to lead relatively normal lives although they were never able to forget the abuse they were subjected to.

81. Most of the brothers I have mentioned in my statement are now dead. Some years back I heard that Brother MJG was alive and living in a retirement home in Coatbridge. I went to that home at [REDACTED]. I spoke to him and he remembered me. He showed me a lot of photographs which I copied and kept. He was able to tell me that the only surviving brother was Brother MBU who was living in a retirement home in St Helens. Brother MBU was never involved in any of the abuse but he witnessed the other brothers hitting and abusing the boys. I learned that Brother MJG moved on to St Joseph's School in Tranent, East Lothian where he worked till he retired.

82. Brother LAA moved to St John's School on Edinburgh Road. He then worked for the Home Office. He is now dead. I don't know what happened to Brother EIW, Brother Ambrose, Brother Augustus, Mr Slaven or Mr Travers, but Brother MJG confirmed to me that they are all dead.

Records

83. As a result of the visit to see Brother MJG I was able to obtain a number of photographs of the pupils at St Mungo's between 1948 and 1956 when the home closed. I was also able to compile a list of all the pupils that were resident at the school which I have given to you. I also can give you a press cutting from the [REDACTED] dated [REDACTED] 1955 which covers the retirement of Brother MJG from St Joseph's in Tranent.

84. The reasons that I am telling my story today are not for any form of compensation. There are lessons to be learned because the abuse will never stop. There are some things I have not been able to tell you for a variety of different reasons.

85. I hope that the book I wrote will help other survivors as I found it the best way to cope. I will never forgive the Brothers for what they did and for the way they treated us. I have never sought any help or reported what happened to the authorities. I will also speak to some of the other survivors I have contact with to get them to come forward and give evidence. I intend to write another book at some stage.

86. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the inquiry. I believe that the facts stated in the witness statement are true.

Signed . 

Date 12/11/16