

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

HBB

Support person present: No

1. My name is HBB. My date of birth is 1944. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before going into care

2. I was born in Bathgate. My mum's name was and my dad was called . I had four older brothers, three older sisters and a younger sister. My siblings were called , , , , and .
3. A family that size was not unusual then and there were big families everywhere. There were families of fifteen and seventeen all around us and they all lived in what was known as a 'three apartment' which had two bedrooms. No one knew anything else and we were perfectly happy and content.
4. Life at home was absolutely brilliant and I couldn't complain. The war had just finished and we had nothing, but nobody had anything and we were content. Sometimes I was lucky and got money to go to a matinee but the rest of the time we played in the countryside. I remember icicles on the windows in the winter. There was no such thing as central heating and we had to wait for our dad to light the fire and call us in from outside for a heat.

5. We lived on soup and porridge. I used to get porridge for my dinner and I enjoyed it because I didn't know anything else. Sometimes we dug up potatoes, threw them into a fire and ate them.
6. My father was a regular soldier and he was based in Aldershot. On the day that he was to get demobbed after doing nine years in the army, he had all his kit out on the bed to be checked. The colour sergeant made sure that it was all there before you left the army. I remember my dad telling me that the colour sergeant came in and said "Right, [REDACTED], just put everything back in your locker because war has been declared."
7. My dad ended up in Dunkirk and he never recovered from this. He was in hospital as a result of the time he had spent in the water trying to get on to a boat. He was captured by the Germans but managed to escape. He couldn't work after being at war and he was reduced to going around the streets with a barrow but eventually he couldn't even do that. Consequently, we had to live on whatever meagre pension he could get and we were in dire straits.
8. I had a criminal record. When I was about eight years old there was a field about a hundred yards away from where we lived and I went in and took some potatoes. I only took what I could carry in my bare hands because I was going to give them to my mother. I thought I was doing her a good turn. I was caught by the farmer, Mr Bell, and he reported me to the police. I had to go to court in Linlithgow and I was fined ten shillings. Society was broken where a child stole some potatoes and ended up in court.
9. I went to approved school when I was eleven. I was playing with two of my cousins, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] was a few months older than me and [REDACTED] was a few months younger. [REDACTED] went up to a pram which was outside a house and took some money out of a little bag which was attached to the handle. He took about three shillings and we went and bought sweets with it. We were caught because everyone in our area knew everyone else.

10. We went to court along with another cousin, [REDACTED], who was the youngest of the brothers. He hadn't even been with us when the money was taken but he was up in court too. The idea was that [REDACTED] would go to approved school along with us and get a sharp lesson, to keep him on the right track. It had been decided before we even went to court that we were all going to be sent to approved school because my mother and my auntie told us. I think they were filled in by the probation officer.
11. My mother was in court and she fainted but my father was too sick to go. My mother had to stand in the dock beside us along with my auntie. We were taken straight from court to the approved school just in the clothes we were wearing. [REDACTED] was about eight when we went to approved school and [REDACTED] had his twelfth birthday just after we started.

St Ninian's, Gartmore

12. The probation officer, Mr Finlay, and another person took us in a car. It was quite a long journey to the other side of Stirlingshire. The building was an ancestral home. It was the country home of the Graham family and it was a magnificent building. It was designed by the greatest architect Scotland ever produced. The Graham family had another home outside Dumbarton and they had sold the one in Stirlingshire which was miles from anywhere, surrounded by open fields.
13. There were seventy to eighty boys in St Ninian's. They ranged in age from eight to fifteen. A lot of the boys had come from broken homes but we never discussed why we were there. The majority of the boys were from Glasgow. We were called by our surnames. Nobody knew how long they would be in St Ninian's but you were guaranteed to leave by the time you were fifteen because that was when you left school.

Routine at St Ninian's

First day

14. I think we arrived mid-afternoon. We were driven to the front entrance and a person with a long, black robe and a long white collar came towards us. He was pious when he was speaking to the adults and he brought them in and gave them a cup of tea. We were commandeered down the stairs into the basement. The lockers, the showers and the dining room were in the basement. The maids' room was also there and they repaired the clothing.
15. We had to take off our clothes, shower and get dressed in the clothes they provided. This was always short trousers and a shirt. Everyone was dressed in a similar way. It was like a uniform. We found out later that the man who met us at the door was Brother **MJO** I never saw the probation officer, Mr Finlay, again.
16. Brother **MJO** role was to look after us when we weren't at school. He supervised us when we went for meals and during play time. He was in his thirties or forties. Brother **MJO** should have been in some kind of asylum. The slightest thing would unhinge him and I was one of the slightest things.

Mornings and bedtime

17. The bedrooms were upstairs and they slept four to six boys. I never shared a room with any of my cousins. I can't remember who I shared with but I was in the same room for the duration of my time at St Ninian's. I slept in a single bed and I shared the dormitory with boys of a similar age to me.
18. We were given a nightshirt. It was like Victorian times. After we got into bed Brother **MJO** would come in and we had to get out of bed, kneel down at the side of the bed and pray. As soon as he finished, we got back into bed and a dimmer light came on. We could hear him in the next room doing the same thing. The first thing we

heard in the morning was Brother MJO praying again and we had to get out of bed, kneel down and pray. This happened every morning.

19. We then washed and brushed our teeth. We went back to the bedroom, put our clothes on, formed a line and were marched down the stairway and to chapel. This was within the main building, on the ground floor. We had thirty minutes of morning mass and then we were marched in for breakfast.
20. When we finished our breakfast we went to work. Everybody was allocated a job. I was allocated a job in the main hall which was all wooden flooring along with a couple of others. Brother MJO would get a big can of beeswax and he would put it on the floor. We had to polish the floor using bumpers and that was my job for about a year. When you finished your job you went to school to your allocated class. You got up about 6.30am and chapel was at 7am. We probably cleaned for thirty or forty minutes before we went to school.
21. After dinner we were sent to bed. We didn't have books but the occasional person had a comic to read. When the lights were put out there was an expectation that we would go to sleep immediately.

Mealtimes / Food

22. We were allocated a seat and that was our seat for the duration of our stay. Breakfast was porridge with a little drop of milk. We got cornflakes on a Sunday and on reflection that was to save money on cooks coming in to make porridge. I can't recall anything about my evening meals but the food was edible.

Washing / bathing

23. We had to shower on a Sunday before we went out for the walk. Boys of all ages showered together. That was one of the few times we saw Brother GEC who was SNR. There were five or six showers on each side of the shower room and Brother GEC used to come in and tell each of the boys to turn round and face

him. He would look at their genitals and then he would write something in his notebook.

School

24. We sat a test and we were allocated to different classes. There were three classrooms: the juniors, the intermediates and the seniors. My three cousins were in the juniors and I was in the intermediate group. Even though [REDACTED] was older than me, he was intellectually challenged so he was put in the junior group. We had to learn the catechism verbatim. My education stopped when I went to St Ninian's. Brother Michael was my teacher but they weren't teachers in the true sense because none of the Brothers were trained teachers. Mr MCK [REDACTED] was the only teacher and he was like a judge. He had ginger hair and was always impeccably dressed in a suit and waistcoat. He was in his thirties and he would always come out with sarcastic remarks.
25. After three or four months Brother MBU [REDACTED] arrived and he was going to teach the boys who were mentally challenged, like my cousin, [REDACTED]. He was a nice man. Their class was going to be in the big lounge. Mr MCK [REDACTED] got all the boys in his class who were going to go to the new classroom and he told them it was for the boys who were going to be the bankers. In other words, he ridiculed them.
26. I eventually ended up in the seniors' class which was taught by Brother MCA [REDACTED] and when I went there I was made to print everything. I still have problems today with that. I will be writing something and then I break into print. Brother MCA [REDACTED] was a nice wee man although he punished us by getting us to come up beside him, put out our tongues and putting his nicotine stained thumb into our mouths. This was better than the belt.
27. We went downstairs for the break and there was a big bread board put out with buttered bread. We went back to class and after school we had to go to piping or drumming. We were given a choice but I wasn't interested in any of the music classes.

28. Brother **GEC** was **SNR** and he was an animal. The only time we saw him was in mass because he never mingled. Every Sunday after breakfast the whole school sat in front of Brother **GEC** and he read out the marks we had got at school that week. Each of the teachers graded us. If you got a B- you got sixpence for pocket money, if you got a B you got a shilling. For a B+ you got one and six and if you were fortunate enough to get an A you got two shillings. We never saw the pocket money in hard currency but we went to Brother **MJO** on a Sunday night and we got sweets worth the total.
29. Before Brother **GEC** called out the grades he would bring up about six boys and get them to show him their underpants. They would take off their underpants in front of all the other boys and show them to him. If they were soiled, they were strapped on the hands. Boys would try and wash their pants during the week if they were stained but it was obvious that they had done this. Brother **GEC** would always mouth 'cleanliness is next to Godliness' when he was strapping the boys. These people were deranged.
30. I sat my qualifying exam in Aberfoyle which was the next town to Gartmore. There were qualified school teachers there. This signified to me that the teachers we had in St Ninian's weren't qualified otherwise why did we have to go to a public school nearby. All the boys from St Ninian's went to Aberfoyle to sit the qualifying because it was a mandatory examination.
31. When I was thirteen they were knocking down the concrete bases of Nissan huts which had been used during the war. The huts had been removed but the bases remained. Brother Michael had the brainwave to break all the concrete into bits, take it down about five hundred yards to the tennis court where we always played and get in a machine to pour concrete and level it off. I was taken out of school and made to break up the concrete with a sledgehammer, put it into a barrow and take it down to the tennis court. I was given bacon and eggs every morning because I was doing manual labour and everybody else still got porridge.

32. At the weekends I worked in the gardens with the gardeners. I had lost a year of education before I went to St Ninian's because I had broken my leg so I needed all the education I could get. I had no education in St Ninian's and to make matters worse I was made to start working at thirteen. I was quite happy working, however, because I was away from the system, I was by myself and I could make my own decisions. I was free in a lot of ways because I had nobody watching over me and I had escaped the system. I wasn't losing an education because I wasn't getting one.

Religion

33. Religion at St Ninian's was taken to another level. Their priority was our religious education. I was from a Catholic family and I observed the Catholic teachings but I stopped going to confession when I was there because I was brow beaten.

Birthdays and Christmas

34. We used to get a present. This was a jigsaw puzzle or a book or something like that which we were allowed to keep. We had to go to mass on Christmas day and I think there may have been a Christmas dinner.

Leisure Time

35. In the good weather we played football and chase at night. There were sledges to play with outside. There were two canoes and there were two lochs in the grounds so we were allowed to go canoeing. There was a billiard table and a table tennis table indoors.
36. The full school went out for a walk on a Sunday, dressed in our best clothes. We would march in pairs right down to Gartmore village. I think that was to put us on display to let people see how well and clean we were and well behaved. We were dressed in a suit with short trousers and we walked for about three miles without a rest.

Work

37. We went berry picking in the summer in all weathers. It was industrial picking. We went to Dundee and we stayed in Nissan huts. We had a cord around our middles with a little pail attached to it. When our pails were full we took them off and walked down the drill to empty them into our bigger pail and then we started again. When the big pail was full we had to take it down and get it weighed. The greater the weight, the more you got paid so we used to urinate in the buckets to make them heavier. This all went to make Smedleys jam and I have never touched Smedleys jam since. We got paid at the end and when we finished berry picking we went home to our families for about two weeks with the money. We also went home for a week in the winter.

Visits / Inspections/ Review of Detention

38. Parents could visit on a Saturday or a Sunday. The four of us had a couple of visits from my mother and auntie during our first year there. I think they found somebody who had a car to take them down. St Ninian's was just outside Aberfoyle and it was very difficult to get to and took a long time. It was also expensive and people didn't have any money in those days. I was able to see my mother alone but Brother MJO was around.

39. There were no official inspections.

Healthcare

40. There was a boy called [REDACTED] who had a temperature once. I can't remember what treatment he got. There was a matron who we never saw although she once took me and three or four others to the eye hospital in Glasgow.
41. I think Charlie McKenna cut our hair.

Running away

42. I never ran away but [REDACTED] was from Glasgow and he ran away and took a horse with him. Mr MCK [REDACTED] owned three ponies who were called Gypsy, Queenie and Prince and they were kept at St Ninian's. Mr MCK [REDACTED] had to go and ride the horse back while the police brought [REDACTED] back in the car. When he was back [REDACTED] told us that Mr MCK [REDACTED] hammered him with the bridles. Mr MCK [REDACTED] was another evil man. He lived in [REDACTED] as did the woodwork teacher, Charlie McKenna.

Bed Wetting

43. Bedwetting was quite common. There were no punishments or humiliation. They used to put the boys who did this in two dormitories and the night watchman used to wake them up during the night to go to the toilet. There were two night watchmen who were usually old men from the village.

Abuse at St Ninian's, Gartmore

44. Brother MJO [REDACTED] was unhinged. I found that out to my cost and it didn't take long for me to find that out. On my second day at St Ninian's I came down the stairs from class at lunchtime and Brother MJO [REDACTED] was standing beside the big windows in the basement. My locker was adjacent to the windows. Brother MJO [REDACTED] went purple and shouted at me asking me if I wanted to go too. He grabbed me by the scruff of the neck. He opened the windows and he was shaking. This was the first time I had seen him go into something like a seizure and I didn't understand what was happening. It turned out that [REDACTED] had run away without telling any of us. Brother MJO [REDACTED] took it out on me and he battered me all over the place. That was the first time he had battered me but it wasn't to be the last. I was abused and neglected in every way possible. I started smoking in the approved school.

45. Brother MJO was an evil man and he didn't like me from the first day that he saw me. He hated me. He didn't go into a bad mood, he erupted. It's impossible to try to describe his demeanour. Brother MJO hit me with his hands or whatever was handy and the beatings were erratic. He should have been locked away. I don't think he was involved in any sexual abuse and that is the only good thing I can say about him.
46. After the first or second week one of the boys I was working beside who was in the juniors class told me that my cousin ██████ had been battered by Mr MCK. I called Mr MCK a dirty dog. On a Saturday night they showed the latest films from a projector and this was the highlight of the week. When I sat down to watch the film Mr MCK tapped me on the shoulder and took me into my classroom which was adjacent to the hall. He made me write lines saying 'I must not speak ill of my teachers,' five hundred times. This happened in 1955 and I still remember every single word. I had called him a dirty dog five or six days before that but Mr MCK didn't approach me until the film night.
47. St Ninian's was surrounded by lawns and Brother MJO used to get us all in a line, maybe fifty or sixty boys, and make us kneel down and pull out the grass with our hands while he stood and supervised.
48. There was a boy called ██████ who was called ██████. He came from Greenock. Before I arrived at St Ninian's he kept saying that he couldn't eat porridge but Brother MJO forced him to eat it. He vomited on the table and Brother MJO made him eat his vomit. ██████
██████
49. I was once on a makeshift see saw and I cut my leg on a nail. I went up to Brother MJO and he was praying, so he ignored me. I told him again that I had cut my leg and asked if I could go and see the matron and he battered me for interrupting him. He used to pull up the leg of my shorts and batter me on the back of the thigh with his hand. I eventually went to matron and she dealt with the cut.

50. I don't think the other Brothers witnessed Brother MJO being violent. There were towels on a wooden roller. Brother MJO used to take the roller off and shout and batter it until it splintered. He would also chase us with it. This always happened in the basement and Charlie McKenna was always making more rolls.
51. Charlie McKenna had a woodwork room which was spotless. He taught us all about the different types of saws and files but he would hardly let us touch anything because he liked to keep things pristine. I was drilling at a piece of metal one day and I went up to tell him that I was finished. He took a sixpence out of his pocket and gave it to me. I thought he had given it to me for finishing the job. Everybody had a case in the locker room and I put the sixpence into my case. I went back to the locker room later and two of the boys told me that Charlie McKenna had been into my locker, getting my case, and had taken out the sixpence. He never once mentioned it to me. That was the sort of thing that happened. He knew exactly where to go and get it because money was no good to us because we had nowhere to spend it. He made me feel like a thief because I didn't realise he meant me to use the sixpence as a template.
52. Charlie McKenna ended up in prison and he is dead now. It was obvious that he was perverted. He would give us a smack on the backside at the first opportunity. If we did something wrong he would tell us to adopt the position. This meant that we had to lean over and grab the far side of the work bench. Then he would tell us to 'present our backside' and he would smack us a couple of times with a piece of wood over our shorts. He would find a reason and he was obviously getting some sort of satisfaction out of smacking us.
53. One day we were picking berries at the camp and we got a visitation from St Joseph's Approved School. There were two boys who had been at St Ninian's and because they came from Edinburgh it had been decided that it would be handier for their parents if they were transferred to St Joseph's. I was talking to them at the camp and they were saying that it was great. I thought it would be great if me and my cousins could go there too.

54. I went to SNR [REDACTED], Brother GEC [REDACTED], and I asked him if we could be transferred. He asked me what was wrong with St Ninian's and I started to tell him. He kept telling me to keep on talking. I told him that Brother MJO [REDACTED] hit us and that he was a mad man. He must have told Brother MJO [REDACTED] what I said because about half an hour later Brother MJO [REDACTED] grabbed me and battered me everywhere. I remember thinking that enough was enough and I told him that I was going to get my brothers to him. I knew my brothers would kill him if they got him.
55. The priest was an old man called Father Magrory. He was saying mass one morning and the maids and one of the gardeners and his wife came in a bit late. The priest was on the altar and he heard the noise of the door opening. He turned round and said 'We will wait for the lost tribe of Israel to be seated and then we will carry on.' Even the priest was dysfunctional.

Reporting of abuse at St Ninian's, Gartmore

56. I never told my parents what was happening because I don't think they would have believed me. My mother was probably reassured by her two visits that I was being fed and getting an education.

Leaving St Ninian's, Gartmore

57. Brother GEC [REDACTED] was transferred to St Joseph's Approved School in Tranent and we got SNR [REDACTED] from Bishopbriggs. He was called Brother Benedict and he seemed a very approachable guy. He played football with us and he was what the others should have been. I went and asked him if I could get out on licence. He asked me my name, wrote down all my details and within three months I was out. Nobody had ever approached any of the Brothers and asked them that before because they were so unapproachable.

58. █████ spent a year in St Ninian's and he was the only one to go into the school and leave before he was fourteen. He was completely innocent and he was there for a year to learn a lesson. My other cousins stayed on after I left.

Life after being in care

59. When I got out I was fourteen and I had a year of education to go. I went back to the school that I had attended before I went to St Ninian's. Mr McCabe was still the headmaster. I stood outside his office and he asked me what I wanted. I asked him whether he had been notified that I was coming. He asked me what kind of education I had and before I could answer he told me to go along to class █████ or █████. I went along and it took me about five minutes to realise that I was in the class for the no hoppers. I stayed in school but it was a waste of time.
60. I attended St John's Boys' School in Springboig in Glasgow when I was sixteen. I don't know why I was sent. That was an approved school where the pupils were in charge and the Brothers took a back seat. Boys there were aged fifteen to seventeen. It was dysfunctional but I could look after myself by this stage.
61. My relationship with my family was fine when I moved back. I wanted to travel when I left school. I wanted to join the merchant navy because all the local boys did. If you didn't go down the coal pits you went to the merchant navy. I sent away for the forms which asked which school I had gone to and what education I had. I couldn't get a reference from Mr McCabe so not only had I forfeited my education but also my career.
62. I couldn't get a job because I had no education. I worked on a farm for a while and then I joined the army when I was eighteen. I had just finished basic training when my life caught up with me. I had an old charge for assault and █████ attended court with me. He heard about my other convictions and I was made to leave the army. A year later I joined the medical corps in England and they didn't check my background. I had to tell lies about the schools I had attended to get in but

I saw the world. I was in the army for nine years. At one stage I had two discharge books from the army.

63. I got married when I was thirty one and had four children. I was a long distance lorry driver for a while and I worked in the oil industry and I worked for an electrical company.

Impact

64. I had no education and it goes right back to my wee cousin taking the purse out of the bag. I lost my education but it was the system that did it. The punishment for stealing the money was not appropriate. I could have had a trade if I had had a better education but I never got the opportunity. Not having an education had a monumental effect on my life. It is the foundation of your start in life. The next chapter is how to earn a living and raise a family. St Ninian's took away my childhood and took away my youth.
65. Being in care has affected my attitude to religion. There is not a month goes by without you seeing the Catholic Church being pilloried about the outrages caused by deviant people. I accept that these things have been happening and it makes you question your faith. It is like life itself. You get good human beings and you get bad human beings and a lot of these deviants have found that they can flourish by being members of the church and other organisations. I don't question Christianity because everybody is entitled to their own faith.
66. I consider myself to be a good parent and very understanding. I am not a disciplinarian and I would rather try and talk logically to a child who is misbehaving. When I look at a child or my grandchildren I have a tendency to turn the clock back and imagine what I was doing when I was their age. People do adapt to whatever life throws at them and I wish I had a chance to do that without my life being destroyed by the system.

67. Your childhood just goes in a place like St Ninian's and you lose your innocence. My experiences are indelibly in my mind. I have never spoken to a counsellor or seen a psychologist about my experiences and I wouldn't consider it now because that bridge was burnt a long time ago. I am angry that powerful people decided what my life should be.
68. I love education but I can't get an education now because that has been taken away from me. It has also been taken away from my family because if I had an education I might have had a career. My children didn't get the start in life they could have got.

Reporting of Abuse

69. I have never reported my abuse to the police or anybody else as it would have been futile.

Records

70. I have never recovered my records.

Lessons to be Learned

71. The Brothers were supposed to be teaching us right from wrong. I don't know how these Brothers got permission to look after somebody else's children. If they had wanted to look after children they would have got married and had their own. They didn't have a clue about bringing up a child.
72. I had a friend also called [REDACTED] who lived four doors away. His father was a drunk and his mother had reached breaking point so he was sent to Mauchland in Dumfriesshire which was an approved school. His sisters and his younger brother

were sent to an orphanage but there was no room for him at his age. Approved school seemed to be the answer to everything back then.

- 73. The powerful people that send children to these places need to ensure the places are operating in a humane and dignified way. The local authorities must have been giving these establishments a lot of money and you would have thought somewhere along the line that there would have been accountability. Why weren't they visiting these places? There should be unannounced inspections.

- 74. I don't believe that St Ninian's was the only one or the worst. It will all come out and it is a great thing that evidence is being gathered about it now. If talking to the Inquiry can find someone's ear in a higher place then it is for the good. If I can give my account I hope that people can see that this should not happen again. I'm just a poor witness to what happened all around me. If people like me can be angry in a constructive manner so that things that happened don't occur again.

- 75. The judiciary should be held to account. Everybody should learn from their mistakes. Scholars and the judiciary must take recognizance and responsibility. The judiciary must be enlightened as to what particular institutions are like. They should visit prisons and approved schools or else they are just as guilty as the people that run them in their own devious ways.

- 76. 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.

HBB


Signed.....

Dated..... 9 SEPT 2020