

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

FIE

Support person present: No

1. My name is FIE. My date of birth is 1967. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. I wrote to the Inquiry in 2021 to provide information about my experience of Aberlour and Gordonstoun. I wrote in the terms that are set out in paragraphs 3 – 43 of this statement.

Background

3. I am writing this letter to help highlight the systemic neglect and abuse I suffered as a boy pupil of Aberlour House and Gordonstoun from 1976 to 1985. My concern is that you may focus on one-off events and abusers and not understand how we were institutionally neglected; how the culture of bullying was well established and accepted, and why many of us suffered events whose consequences still impact our lives. It was not one or two 'Bad Eggs' in the school, but a complete environment.
4. The events I describe for me were life altering and have significantly affected outcomes in my life. After seeking help from a therapist, I understood that these incidents were not things to be ashamed of, but things that happened to me as a child in environments in which I was not protected and that I should speak up about them. I shall attempt to document some of them below. It is by no means exhaustive, but an indication of the kind of things that would happen daily or weekly to us. I can have these events corroborated by three to five people with whom I am in contact: they were daily and commonplace.

5. About me: I am a successful musician. I have produced albums that have sold a few million copies, I have been nominated twice for [REDACTED] as a composer, and I am a [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] where I live in Bermuda. At Gordonstoun I was head of the fire service and [REDACTED] House, and achieved fairly good academic results and once I became a senior, was active in school life. Yet, at age fifty-three, I am still wrestling with what happened, seeking therapy for and trying to modify my behaviour to the standard of a normal person.
6. My intent here is not to expose one individual, or seek convictions, but to show you what life was like for us. Essentially, the school failed in their duty of care and protection to us. Gordonstoun was worse than Aberlour, but I will list events from both.

Aberlour (From 1977 Headmaster Toby Coghill)

7. Aberlour had a less violent culture than Gordonstoun. I went at nine years old. The point I would like to illustrate here is how the school didn't take care of us or our wellbeing, rather than pointing at any specific abuser, or alleging sexual abuse, it just seems to me the standards and controls were poor, and as a parent I would be deeply upset if my son reported this.

Abuse at Aberlour

8. I did not experience pupil-to-pupil bullying at Aberlour, but there are a few incidents that don't make sense or seem appropriate to me, that indicate either the masters were not proper or the pupils were not being taken care of.
9. Chinese Burns. At Aberlour in Darnaway dormitory on the ground floor. We have been playing around as kids do, getting ready for morning inspection. We have been giving each other Chinese burns for laughs. Horsing around and swearing. Our English teacher has been listening outside. He comes in and is angry. He gives us all adult Chinese burns himself to punish us for the swearing I think. I just remember twelve kids sobbing and holding their forearms. He says, "*I'll show you what a real Chinese burn is like*".

10. Mr^{CFP} study. I'm playing outside with friends under trees. Mr^{CFP} calls me in as if I've done something wrong. He takes me into his study and draws the curtains in the middle of the day. He gives me sherry to drink, I'm close to twelve years old. He makes me feel special in glowing school reports and tells me I have a gift as a writer. I like him very much, but years later there are parts of our relationship that concern me, that might be described as grooming. I don't feel that his behaviour towards me was appropriate.
11. Watched in showers. Mr^{CFP} watches us in the showers often. There's already a matron there to supervise us. Why is a grown man watching boys shower? In addition, see Mr^{FTC} photos of us in the shower. Why are teachers photographing us in the shower? Why are adults watching us?
12. I'm forced to fight other kids to avoid getting beaten up, I'm forced to fight other boys like [REDACTED]. We punch and hit each other to avoid being beaten by the bullies. We are maybe ten or eleven.
13. We copy our weekly letters home from the blackboard. A teacher has to approve what we've written before it's sent. I use cartoons on my mails to try and communicate with my parents.
14. We are so hungry we steal milk from the corridor and drink it in the bushes. I hide fruit in my jumper and eat it under the bedcovers at night.
15. The ice forms on the inside of the windows. We are not allowed to close them, so snow falls on the end of the beds nearest windows. It hits -20C, but the school insists we still wear shorts and we must run every day topless before breakfast.
16. The toilet seats and floors are covered with semen for the next 10 years. My job was to wipe it off when I was assigned toilet cleaning, and many other kids were cleaning toilets as part of our normal duties.
17. Kids have repetitive nightmares and sleepwalk screaming. It all goes unreported. We are not allowed to use the telephone to call.

18. My feeling here is just the standard of care extended to us was poor. Perhaps this was the accepted nature of institutions at this time, but when I read it, it resembles a borstal or a camp for juvenile offenders.
19. We have to stand in the middle of the room naked. We read erotic passages from books with flashlights pointed at our genitals to see if we become erect. There is no abuser here, but it's an indication that we were not being taken care of in a way our parents would expect.

Gordonstoun (1980 – 1985)

Abuse at Gordonstoun

20. I was in Altyre house at Gordonstoun. From the very first night we were bullied and it was apparent there was little involvement from the teachers in the safety or wellbeing of kids after class hours. At 9 pm the juniors would go to bed, and we were thus captive for bullying. It was apparent that new kids needed to be 'taught a lesson' and our weaknesses probed.
21. The door would be kicked open and four or five seniors would come in and bully us. For years we had our nipples twisted and it would have been a very unusual day if you didn't see black and blue nipples of at least one kid in the showers. It was a perennial thing for us. Beds would be tipped over with us under the sheets, dead arms and legs given and just outright beatings. Finally the door would close and we would hear the sobbing of the other children in the darkness. It was as if we were part of a sport. It was well known and accepted, bullying was taking place amongst the pupils.
22. Children were bullied to the point of nervous breakdown or collapse. My good friend [REDACTED] had a temper that would suddenly crack. He was baited constantly as a game to see when he would explode. A kind of mental torture. Kids would fiddle with his stereo or take his books, waiting for the moment he lost it. Some kids like [REDACTED] just had breakdowns from the bullying and was mentally destroyed, having to leave

the school. There was a long tradition and acceptance of bullying. It was considered a senior's right.

23. Typical events for me personally and others on a weekly basis would be 'wedgies'. Bullies would grab a kid and pull his underpants up until they were ripped off over the head. Obviously this would leave welts on the legs from the friction and is exceedingly painful. I, like many others, would be lifted up and hung from the coat pegs in the hall in Altire by my underwear. This is something you would see weekly, these are not one-off events. Shreds of underpants were a common sight.
24. Kangaroo Court: again another bullying, fun event was to convene 'Kangaroo Court' in the main room of the house. This shows you the publicly accepted nature of bullying. It was an excuse to find some junior guilty of some imaginary crime and punish them for it. There were hot water heating pipes that ran through the ceiling. In my case, with a friend, we were made to strip naked and hang from these pipes in front of the crowd. Even though the pipes burned, the first person to let go would be punished further.
25. Personal Property hardly existed. Your locker, your food, your bike, your duffle coat. At any point any or all of these items would be stolen. You would see seniors wearing your duffel coat as they had names on the shoulder, but you couldn't ask for it back. You would find your bike in the bike shed stripped - no wheels, no brake pads, etc. Your tuck box would be routinely raided to search for food, your locker emptied for clean clothes. There was no consequence for stealing.
26. Later in life I have had issues where I either accept relationships that are not safe for me, or people treat me in ways that are not physically safe for me. No one can understand why I don't leave, or change locks, or call the police and I believe this is why. Over ten years you become habituated to this unsafe world and accept it as normal.
27. My brother was tied to a chair and thrown out of a window. Maybe an eight-foot drop.

28. Seniors fired a crossbow through the study walls (plasterboard) while kids were in the room during study time, 7 – 9 pm. These things are typical and went on for years.
29. Darts were thrown by [REDACTED] down the corridors where kids were. It was considered a sport to see if you could hit kids in the legs.
30. Personally, I received a black eye from [REDACTED] when I pointed out he had stolen my scarf from my locker. I walked around for weeks with a black eye. No teacher ever asked.
31. 'Mr Whippys' were given out. A Mr Whippy is when you force a kid's head down the toilet and flush so his wet hair then resembles a Mr Whippy Ice Cream. Just a normal day.
32. Mr Lofthouse came into the common room to announce that pupil, [REDACTED] had been expelled late in 1985. He had been caught twisting a kid's nipples with pliers. We were supposed to be shocked. He told us "*if we ever see anything like that we should report it*". These kind of things had been happening daily for us kids for years, and now after five years they were telling us this was wrong. It was considered a right to bully and it was looked forwards to by each successive year; the privilege of beating up the new 'sprogs'.
33. I later became [REDACTED] at Altyre and announced a zero-tolerance towards bullying, for which I was condemned by other pupils. After I left the school I heard the kids returned to bullying.
34. When I went to University I began to realise my childhood had not been like other kids, no-one else had these kinds of experiences. My new English teacher at London University would ask me to sit beside him in front of the class and stroke my knee. I did this because I had no boundaries and was conditioned to this kind of behaviour by Gordonstoun.
35. There was a shared delight in creative bullying. Kids would have a noughts and crosses board drawn on their back and be sent to find a specific senior at the other

end of the school to add a 'cross' then have to return, for the original senior to add a cross. And so the game would continue, with the hapless 'board' running to and fro. These were not official punishments, just whims of older kids.

36. People were locked in Laundry baskets and placed under a cold shower on their birthday. A typical game.
37. Typical event: being thrown into a drainage ditch on the way to supper. Bullying was just part of my daily life. I got off easier than many others.
38. I was aware that one or two boy pupils were being raped by other boys. Many of us were well aware in the sense we heard rumours or gossip. Not the girls who succeeded in their convictions but concerning Bruce House. I know how a kid who has been raped walks. I'm ashamed that I didn't speak up or understand this. The culture of not telling and silence was so strong amongst pupils.

Impact


39. I could go on with the behaviour that I experienced at Gordonstoun. These are typical incidents, not things that lead to convictions I understand, but over years and years it had a lasting impact on me. I find myself in therapy at fifty-three, still learning to behave like a grown man, because of the mental damage I suffered.
40. Of the four closest friends I had at school, none of us has been able to sustain a marriage or have a boss, we are all working for ourselves. I suspect our trust in authority was devastated.
41. Personally I have had problems with poor boundaries, having grown up in a world where boundaries were not respected. I was unable in life to speak up for my needs, having spent a decade in a place where to speak your need was only a clue to bullies as to how they could further torment you.
42. I have been perceived as disloyal by some, as my experience was that any form of loyalty would expose you to further harm, as when the bullying began you would be

included. My marriage failed because I had never learned to speak up for myself, because I lived so long in a world where my needs were of no account.

Other information

- 43. As I said in my opening paragraph, I'm trying to illustrate at Gordonstoun there was a wide and well-accepted culture and tradition of bullying. The school failed us by not only not identifying this but failing to protect us from this behaviour and exposing us to long term mental health damage. This was not what we deserved and my intent here is to contribute this account for the record so that future pupils may avoid this chaos that still haunts me decades later.

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

Signed..... 

Dated..... 07 May 2024