

## **Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry**

Witness Statement of

**Matthew GEORGE**

Support person present: N/A.

1. My name is Matthew Strannigan Smith George. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1949. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### **Background**

2. Please kindly be informed that the recall I provide below has been provided under the following conditions: I am nearly seventy-five years of age and in poor health; I am residing in poor conditions within prison; and I have no access to my records relating to my employment.
3. In 1974 I completed a four-year educational diploma with post graduate commendation. In 1985 I gained a further education teaching qualification and in 1991 I received a teacher's certificate of provisional registration.
4. I was employed at Kerelaw open school from 1975 until 2004. The recall I provide relates solely to the open school. The Secure Unit at Kerelaw was an entirely separate operation. It employed entirely separate teaching staff and was subject to different inspection processes. I was never employed within the Secure Unit at Kerelaw, therefore my recall does not, in any way, relate to that establishment.

### **Kerelaw School**

5. Kerelaw School was in Stevenston, Ayrshire.

6. Kerelaw was an approved school, then a List D school, then an open residential school providing educational services and a variety of specialist interventions. Those interventions included forensic psychiatry, forensic psychology, educational psychology, specialist addiction care and counselling.
7. My first impressions when I started my employment were that it was a new, purpose built and well-designed establishment, run by professional & caring staff.
8. During my time at Kerelaw I found the culture to be positive and professional with a diverse staffing. The attitude of staff towards children was positive, friendly, caring and professional. Similarly, the relationship that existed between staff and children was caring and professional.

#### **Time at Kerelaw School**

9. I started my employment at Kerelaw in 1975 as a Grade 1 instructor, with general teaching responsibilities and remained in that position until 1985. From 1985 to 1995 I was a teacher with general teaching responsibilities. Between 1995 and 2004 I was an assistant principal teacher with general teaching responsibilities and with added administrative duties to assist the principal teacher.
10. I applied to Glasgow Corporation for the position via an advert posted in the Glasgow Herald newspaper. I was then interviewed by a panel of professionals, including the establishment Headmaster. The panel was headed by Mr Alex Sheriff, the Director of Social Work for Glasgow Corporation. Police checks were completed and I was offered the position of Grade 1 Instructor by Glasgow Corporation.
11. My line managers for my various positions were Murdo McSween, John Cruikshank, Colin McQuarrie and James Hunter. Throughout my career I have been monitored and appraised on a regular basis.
12. I have no access to the details of my training, however I can say that continuous training was provided.

### **Structure and recruitment of staff**

13. The make-up and structure of the staff of Kerelaw included a headmaster, an assistant headmaster, senior managers, middle managers, residential unit managers, assistant residential unit managers, residential care officers, night care officers, teachers, social workers, kitchen staff, psychiatrists, psychologists, addiction specialists, and counselling staff.
14. The headmaster was in charge and there were three headmasters during my tenure. All were excellent managers and visible leaders with high standards of interpersonal, communication and organisational skills.
15. I was not involved in the recruitment of staff and I have no knowledge of the recruitment of other staff. I have no knowledge of the extent to which references were obtained from former places of work, nor what any reference was expected to cover. I have no knowledge of whether referees were spoken to.
16. I have no knowledge of volunteers working at the school. There was, however, a continuous flow of student teachers and social workers who attended on placements. I have no knowledge of the vetting process.
17. I was not a manager at Kerelaw and did not manage others in positions of care or responsibility.

### **Training**

18. In the latter part of my career, when I was Assistant Principal Teacher, I assisted the Principal Teacher with the organisation and administration aspect of the training and personal development of other teachers.
19. The nature and extent of that involvement was organisation and administration. I cannot comment on training or personal development policies and how in practice these matters were implemented.

### **Supervision/ appraisal/ evaluation**

20. I had no involvement in the supervision, appraisal and evaluation of staff.
21. I have no knowledge of the Kerelaw's policy in relation to supervision of staff, staff appraisal, or staff evaluation.
22. I have no knowledge of the supervision of volunteers and I had no involvement in volunteers' supervision.

### **Policy**

23. I had no involvement in, or responsibility for, policy in relation to the care, including residential care, of children. I cannot say whether any such policies changed over time.

### **Strategic planning**

24. I had no involvement in, or responsibility for, strategic planning in relation to Kerelaw and I cannot comment on the strategic approach taken.

### **Children**

25. The young people were generally placed at the school following crisis in a hierarchy of other care placements. Many were placed at the school on an emergency basis, generally through Children's Hearings, from Courts or from Assessment Centres.
26. The length of time a young person tended to stay at Kerelaw depended on the individual's requirements. They were varied and were dependent upon decisions made by the courts, children's panel and the young person's individual home situations. In general, the length of stay did not exceed a period of two years.



27. Up until the late 1980's the school catered for around 90 to 100 boys, mostly between the ages of 14 to 16 years. After this point it became co-educational and the numbers began to decrease.
28. During the early part of my career, the ratio of children to staff/adults was one teacher to approximately 14 pupils. Around the time the school became co-educational, this decreased to around one teacher to approximately 6 or 8 pupils.
29. There were two main kitchens within Kerelaw, which provided a good standard of breakfast, lunch and dinner for the staff and young people. The food was all homemade, on campus. There were also two main dining areas where the teaching and care staff dined in an informal manner together. The teachers were not involved with the young people's personal dietary requirements. I do not know what alternatives were made if the young people did not like the food, however snacks were able to be made within the residential units, for example, toast and tea was provided at supper time.
30. During the early part of my career, there were four residential units at Kerelaw. Each unit had a number of dormitories and each dormitory accommodated 4 boys. As time progressed, the school became co-educational and the layout of the units began a series of changes which took place over the following years.
31. During the early part of my career, the allocated time for the boys to have a shower was after evening activities. The showers were situated on the ground floor of the residential units, opposite the staff office. As time progressed, the layout of the units changed and evolved. I do not know what the showering arrangements were during the latter part of my career.
32. After tea time there was a period of organised leisure time. All the young people and staff attended a school assembly taken by the Headmaster whereby each member of staff provided an activity such as football in the gym, trips to cinema, ice skating, swimming pool, etc. Each young person chose which activity they wished to participate in.

33. There were organised day trips and holidays which required to be authorised by external management. Parent consent forms required to be signed.
34. There were no informal trips. All activities and trips were arranged trips which were authorised by either senior managers and/or unit managers. The details of any young person leaving the premises were recorded with the duty officer and in the unit's log books, as well as being recorded within the daily notes of the young person's care plan.
35. During the early part of my career, groups of young people would often visit staff member's family homes. This was part of a practise which, at that time was known as 'Normalisation'. This practise stopped during the late 1990's when Glasgow City Council produced policies advising that residents should not become aware of where staff lived and staff should not take young people to their own homes without prior approval.
36. The young people were schooled in exactly the same way as mainstream pupils. There were seven classes per day and subjects such as Maths, English, History, Geography, Art and Science were taught at O-Grade level. The young people returned to their respective units during break times, lunch times and after the completion of the school day.
37. If a young person became unwell during class time, they would return to their residential unit with a member of unit staff who would arrange their onward medical care. Every young person was registered with the local dentist and doctor's surgery. The local practice nurse also attended the school on a regular basis. Every young person had an 'RIC3' medical book, which was completed when a medical issue arose. This medical book followed the young person between establishments.
38. Young people did not do manual work.

39. All young people's relatives, their grandparents, parents, siblings and cousins, were welcomed at Kerelaw. These visits were all noted within the visitor's books, unit logs and unit diaries. I was not involved in the organisation of these visits and can therefore not comment on any processes which were undertaken.
40. The young people were visited by an array of external professionals including their designated home social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, addiction specialists, counselling staff, GP's and the local practice nurses, all of whom spoke to the young people on their own. Any reports made were included within the young person's Care Plan and also copies were provided for their Local Authority Social Work files.
41. Assessments and Reviews were carried out on a regular basis to meet the requirements of the Children's Panel Hearings who made any decisions relating to the young person's future.
42. Discharge was decided by the Children's Panel.
43. There were purpose-built facilities on campus which were used to support young people of the appropriate age with their independence and transition out of the establishment. I had no involvement with these facilities and can therefore not comment further.

#### **Living arrangements**

44. I lived at home with my wife and family in a town which was sixteen miles from the school.
45. When I was initially employed at the establishment, I was offered a house on campus, which I refused. Most of the staff at that time were offered accommodation on campus. There were teachers and house mothers/fathers who lived in staff houses at opposite ends of each residential unit. There were also purpose-built staff houses to accommodate the headmaster, the management staff, the school janitor and the school gardener. These houses were situated within the school grounds.



46. The members of staff who had access to the residential areas were residential staff, management staff, night care officers and teachers when they were undertaking planned residential shift duties.
47. Night Care Officers were responsible for the children's residential areas overnight. If problems occurred, on call Management staff were responsible.

### **Discipline and punishment**

48. During the early part of my career, the boys were generally disciplined for unacceptable behaviour by means of loss of weekend home leave. Each week a form was circulated around the staff group and comments were provided regarding each boy's behaviour that week. The outcome of whether the individual boys would be granted home leave was decided in a management meeting.
49. In certain extreme circumstances, the boys would be disciplined by means of the administration of the belt. This was decided by the headmaster and administered by him or the assistant headmaster. During the 1970's there were also two cells which were used by the management staff to securely hold boys who were either a danger to themselves or to others. After belting was abolished, loss of privileges became the punishment. This would be decided and implemented by the residential unit staff after a meeting with the young person to discuss the behaviour in question.
50. As a teacher, I was not involved in the administration of punishment, I am therefore unaware of policy relating to that. There were Children's Rights officers who attended on a regular basis and spoke with the young people.
51. Discipline was never the responsibility of more senior residents.
52. The type of behaviour that resulted in discipline or punishment, included assaults on staff and other young people, defacing school property and staff cars, breaking into staff houses, absconding and stealing cars, carrying or using weapons, bringing drugs



or glue back after home leave, bullying of other residents and any other types of aggressive and intimidating behaviours.

53. If there was a behavioural issue within my class, I would make a telephone call to the young person's unit to inform the residential staff of the issue. The unit staff would attend at my classroom and either the behaviour issue would be resolved there and then or the young person would be removed from the classroom. Other than providing the unit staff with the details of the event, I had no further part in the young person's discipline thereafter.
54. During the early part of my career, the headmaster administered any discipline. Latterly, disciplinary issues were dealt with by young person's residential care officers.
55. During the early part of my career, loss of home leave was used as discipline or in more serious circumstances the belt was given. After the abolition of the practise of belting, loss of privileges was used as discipline, for example not being allowed to participate in a planned outing.
56. Young people were physically disciplined by use of the belt, administered only by the headmaster or the assistant headmaster during the early part of my career. This was generally after a young person had absconded and been involved in crime.
57. I did not discipline the young people.
58. The administration of punishment was recorded in Punishment Books, copies of which were sent on a regular basis by the school secretary to the Social Work Services Group. I do not know exactly what details were recorded within the punishment books, however, I do know that they have been recovered by the police.

## **Restraint**

59. Sometime around the mid to late 1990's all of the staff were trained in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, part of which involved the use of physical restraint. This was undertaken after all other de-escalation techniques had failed.
60. Restraints were implemented after attempts to de-escalate had failed, when situations had arisen whereby a young person's behaviour was escalating out of control, becoming physically aggressive and becoming a danger to others. Restraints were carried out by all members of staff and consisted of a number of staff manually holding the young person, as prescribed by the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention manual.
61. I did restrain young people. I was involved in physical restraints after attempts to de-escalate a potentially harmful situation had failed, during times when physical aggression of a young person was escalating out of control and becoming a danger to myself or others. In my role as Assistant Principal Teacher I was called to assist with the de-escalation of a number of violent incidents.
62. Violent Incident forms were completed and signed by all staff members involved, providing the exact details of all measures taken prior to, during, and after, the incident and detailing any injuries received by staff members or young persons during the violent incident. A 'Life Space' interview was carried out with the young person by a member of staff after the event. The Violent Incident forms were reviewed by the Headmaster who provided comments and any further actions/recommendations to be carried out.
63. Copies of the Violent Incident forms were sent to and reviewed by external management, e.g. Romy Langland, the head of Children and Families at Glasgow City Council. They were then signed by external management and sent back to the school with any further actions/recommendations which were to be explored or implemented. Violent Incident forms were recorded on a tracker. Copies of the completed forms were kept within the young person's Care Plan and a copy was sent to their external Social Work department.

64. Excessive restraints were not carried out on young people.

### **Concerns about Kerelaw**

65. During my career, the school was constantly monitored by organisations such as HM Inspectorate of Education, the Social Work Services Inspectorate and latterly the Care Commission. North Ayrshire Council also carried out annual inspections of the Open School. As far as I am aware, the way in which young people were treated was never the subject of concern to any of these external bodies.

### **Reporting of complaints/concerns**

66. If any child in the institution, or another person on their behalf, wished to make a complaint or report a concern there was a complaints process in place.
67. Complaints forms were situated around the establishment, which were filled in at any time by the young person. Staff would often assist young people to scribe their complaint if their reading or writing skills required assistance. After the complaint had been resolved, copies of the complaint forms were kept within the young person's Care File and also their external Social Work file. I cannot comment on how often the process was used as I had no access to this type of data
68. Complaints were received. These generally related to restraints after violent incidents had occurred.
69. I received a few complaints, which were made against me after dealing with violent incidents. These were fully investigated by a panel of Fact Finders consisting of members of internal and external managers.
70. The complaints were all recorded and have been recovered by Police Scotland. These complaints have been re-tried in the High court, all with 'not guilty' verdicts.



### **Trusted adult/confidante**

71. There were people both in Kerelaw and outside it that a young person could speak to about any worries they had.
72. All young people were assigned a Key Worker who acted like a guardian and would be the go-to person if there were any problems. There were Children's Right's Officers who attended from external agencies. Also, the young people were involved with external agencies such as Who Cares Scotland who would hold external activities. Most of the young people also went home to their families during the weekend. There were also opportunities to speak privately with their home social workers who would often take them out on trips home or to their Reviews or Children's Panels, etc.
73. As the years went on there was far more documentation produced. Posters were placed all over the school advertising children's rights and confidential telephone lines to call.
74. Young people did raise concerns in this way.
75. I am aware of two young people raising complaints against me through an external Children's Rights Officer. Again, these were in relation to dealing with violent incidents. These complaints were passed on to District Managers out with the establishment who carried out investigations.

### **Abuse**

76. I am not aware of any specific definitions of abuse. All staff were aware that disclosures of abuse could potentially be made. All staff members were aware that if abuse was disclosed, they were required to follow procedures of reporting it.
77. I did not see behaviour that I considered to be abuse of any kind taking place at Kerelaw. Similarly, no young person ever reported abuse to me.

78. Obviously, one can never be 100% sure that abuse did not occur, however, for it have to occurred on the scale that is now being alleged and for none of the other residents or staff to have had any inkling about it whatsoever at the material time, does not make any sense.
79. There were multiple agencies overseeing each young person's welfare on a regular basis. To assume that the scale of abuse alleged has been missed by all of these professionals is simply unimaginable.
80. Most of the young people placed at Kerelaw had regular contact with their families and had regular home leave. All of the young people placed at Kerelaw had external home social workers who regularly took them out of the establishment to visit their homes and Children's Panels, etc. During the later years, all of the young people had access to telephones to phone confidential help lines which were advertised on posters around the school. A number of the young people were in regular contact with the police and the police were present at the school on a very regular basis.
81. Every young person had an assigned Key Worker who acted as a guardian. The Key Worker would know everything about the young person in their specific care. If the young person had any sorts of problems, the go-to person was their Key Worker. Some of the young people were in one-to-one contact with visiting psychologists and psychiatrists on a regular basis.
82. Additionally, it is my understanding that the residential staff received child protection training. There was a staff code of conduct detailing that if abuse was suspected, it must be reported immediately.

### **Child protection arrangements**

83. Most young people had been involved with social work services from a young age. Many had been subject to supervision requirements as young children. Many had been compulsorily removed from home through parental abuse. Many presented with complex emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many had challenging behaviour, such

as aggression and violent outbursts towards staff or other young people. Many had problems with drug and alcohol abuse. Many had been involved in serious offending.

84. In general, their education had regularly been severely disrupted, often due to having been excluded from school and/or having had frequent moves between establishments. Every staff member at Kerelaw was acutely aware that the values of the school were to provide protection and to respect and empower the young people to work through their problems. There were a great many success stories as a result of this.
85. Staff were dealing with sensitive matters relating to the young people on a daily basis. All staff were highly aware that the protection of the young people was paramount. Any sensitive matters arising were simply directed to management.
86. There were a number of child protection arrangements in place to reduce the likelihood of abuse, ill-treatment, or inappropriate conduct by staff, or other adults, towards children at Kerelaw. Police checks were made on members of staff. No staff member ever worked on a one-to-one basis with the young people. Every young person was provided with a designated Key Worker. Every young person was provided with a designated Key Teacher. Every young person had an allocated external Social Worker. The management of the school had an open-door policy for all residents. There were staff codes of conduct. The school was constantly monitored by organisations such as HM Inspectorate of Education, the Social Work Services Inspectorate, the Care Commission and North Ayrshire Council.
87. The installation of CCTV cameras in every area of such an establishment would be the only solution to fully protect both young people against abuse and staff members against false allegations.



## **External monitoring**

88. The school was constantly monitored by organisations such as HM Inspectorate of Education, the Social Work Services Inspectorate, the Care Commission and North Ayrshire Council.
89. As far as I am aware, the Inspectors spoke with the young people both individually and in groups, both in the educational setting and in the residential setting.
90. It would not have been possible to leave my class unattended and in the hands of inspectors so in that respect I would say that staff members would always have been somewhere in the vicinity although not necessarily directly involved in any private discussions inspectors may have been engaging in.
91. Inspectors spoke to me at great length. Comments were always made about the high standard of work being produced in my classes and how much the young people were witnessed to be enjoying the subject. The inspectors always gave feedback.

## **Record keeping**

92. The Glasgow City Council policy is that all Kerelaw records should have been kept for 100 years. The policy at Kerelaw was that all records were to be kept indefinitely. There was a 'dead file' room which housed numerous dead files. When the dead file room became full the Headmaster organised to have the records shipped to storage facilities at the local authority.
93. So far, there have been between 500 and 800 boxes of Kerelaw records recovered. In 2004 there was an ex-resident's Dead File Master List completed by Glasgow City Council employee Linda Carmichael. At that time there were 121 boxes containing the personal files of around 3000 of Kerelaw's former residents, dating from their admittance in the early 1980's until 2002.

94. Since the completion of the Dead File Master List, the boxes of Kerelaw documents have been housed at various locations including Ayr Police Office and GCC offices at Nyebevan House, Centenary House, Morrison Street, Stanley Street and the City Chambers, Glasgow.
95. Since the completion of the Dead File Master List in 2004 and being housed at the locations listed above, it now appears that a number of the ex-residents Kerelaw files have gone missing.
96. As well as having a separate set of local authority social work records, each young person had a set of Kerelaw records, as described above, which contained Children's Panel records, care plans, daily information logs, incident reports, education records, regular reviews records, multi-disciplinary meetings records, personal files, absconding records, RIC3 Medical records, Violent Incident Logs, etc.
97. There were also general Kerelaw records such as Unit Log Books, Unit Diaries, Duty Officer Log Books, Visitors Log Books, Night Care Officer's logs, General Office Diaries, senior Management Log Books, Middle Management Logs, Memorandum Files, Vehicle Log Books, Staff Rotas, Daily Incident Logs, Minutes of management meetings, Appointments Diaries, employee attendance records, Roll Books, Leavers Lists, Teaching staff lists, Accident Books, Year Planners, Day Unit Diaries and logs for non-residential pupils. There are also a number of hard drives containing Kerelaw records.
98. During the early part of my career, there was less record keeping than there was towards the end of my career. However, during the early part of my career there were always records of all young people admitted and discharged, individual records of young people containing information on personal histories, medical histories, why the young person was admitted, visits by parents, relatives and friends. There were log books containing details such as visits, outings etc, records of inspections, records of punishments, records detailing the use of the cells, records of absconding activity.

99. The record keeping at Kerelaw was of an excellent standard. There has been recent criticism over the standard of record keeping at the establishment; however, it is my view that the 500 to 800 boxes of Kerelaw records which have been recovered, contain comprehensive contemporaneous records and that it is not the record keeping that was poor, but the way in which the records have been stored and moved from location to location which has been poor.
100. Suffice to say that after all locations had allegedly been fully searched, there was a number of boxes of Kerelaw documents found within an old disused part of Ayr police station and further set of boxes were randomly found at a location within Glasgow City Council storage facilities. It appears that no credible criticism of the standard of record keeping at Kerelaw could possibly be made unless the documents were to be properly sorted and the records which were present in 2004 have been located.

#### **Investigations into abuse – personal involvement**

101. I was never involved in any investigation on behalf of Kerelaw into allegations of abuse or ill-treatment of, or into inappropriate behaviour by staff or others towards young people.

#### **Reports of abuse and civil claims**

102. I was never involved in the handling of reports to, or civil claims made against, the institution by former residents, concerning historical abuse.

#### **Police investigations/ criminal proceedings**

103. I became aware of the police investigation in June 2004 when a number of Senior Management were suspended from their posts followed by my own suspension three days later.
104. The response was one of total shock and disbelief.



105. I have never given a statement to the police or the Crown concerning alleged abuse of children cared for at Kerelaw.
106. I have given evidence at my own trials in 2006 and 2022.

#### **Convicted abusers**

107. Other than myself and my co-accused, I do not know of any person who worked at Kerelaw who was convicted of the abuse of a young person at the institution.

#### **Leaving Kerelaw**

108. I left Kerelaw after I was suspended pending investigation.

#### **Helping the Inquiry**

109. I cannot comment on how it can be that allegations of abuse have been made to the Inquiry.
110. Similarly, I cannot comment regarding information the Inquiry has received to the effect that the experiences of abuse some children had at Kerelaw has continued to affect them and impact on their lives.
111. I have no comment to make regarding what lessons can be learned to protect children in places like Kerelaw, now and in the future.

#### **Applicant allegations**

112. I did not sanction or punish any young person at Kerelaw.
113. I did not abuse any young person at Kerelaw.

114. I cannot comment on why the Inquiry has received evidence suggesting that I abused young people at Kerelaw.

**Convictions**

115. I do not have access to detailed information relating to my criminal convictions, however I can confirm that I was convicted at the High Court in Glasgow in December 2022 of multiple charges of historic assaults which were allegedly committed at Kerelaw over a period of 25 years. For this conviction I received a custodial sentence of 16 years. Prior to that, I was convicted at the High Court in Edinburgh in 2006, of multiple charges of historic assaults, which were allegedly committed at Kerelaw, over a period of 16 years. For this conviction I received a custodial sentence of 10 years.

116. I did not have any of these convictions when I started my time at Kerelaw.

117. I did not commit the offences I have been convicted of. I will continue to maintain my innocence until the day I die.

**Other information**

118. 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

30<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2024