

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Thomas HAGAN

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is Thomas Bremner Hagan and my date of birth is [REDACTED] 1936. I am 80 years of age. My contact details are known to the inquiry.

BACKGROUND

2. Both my parents are dead. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

LIFE BEFORE CARE

3. I have no recollection of anything before I was put into care. I don't know where we lived but I know from the records that Ayr Council put me in to Quarrier's Village, near Bridge of Weir on 24th March 1938 because my mum fell on hard times and she could not look after me and could not cope.

LIFE AT QUARRIERS

4. I don't remember arriving at Quarriers but I remember there were massive cottages and the girls and boys were separated and lived in different cottages. I think there were about 13 or 14 cottages and there were about 70 children in each cottage. The kids were aged between two and probably about 16.

The girls and the boys lived in separate cottages. In the grounds there was also a school and a church, and a big building called Central and people were working in there but I don't know what they were actually doing.

5.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I remember a couple called QKJ/QKK were the house parents for number 25 and the QAB/QCL were the house parents for number 34. There was no other staff in the cottage, although someone would fill in if they were on holiday. I slept in a dormitory with about 8 or 9 other boys.

6.

I think when I first went there at two years old I was in a kindergarten and then at some point went to Cottage 34 with the QAB/QCL. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] After I went to the sanatorium for two and a half years I went to live with QKJ/QKK in Cottage 25.

ROUTINE

Mornings and Bed Time

7. We got up just after 6 o'clock and had our breakfast. I remember waiting in a big long line in the morning for my breakfast and we sat round a big table to eat it if we got any. You didn't get a big breakfast maybe some porridge or a sandwich or something. After breakfast and before we went to school at 9 o'clock we did some scrubbing and polishing, or did the bed mats, or cleaning or other chores. We went back to the cottage for our dinner.

8. After school I went to work with an old man who came from a nearby town and we used to chop up wood in the stick shed and then tie it in to bunches. We never got paid for this because we weren't allowed any money at all in the orphanage. Nobody had any money.

9. At night time when we were in our beds someone would come round and put the lights out.

Food

10. The food was not very good at Quarriers. Sometimes you might just get a slice of bread and butter for your tea if you were lucky.

11. At meal times the house parents sat in a different room at a different table and they had all the best food compared to us. There was a boy who had finished at school who came in to do the cooking for us.

Clothes

12. We didn't have our own clothes and we just had to wear what they gave us. We were not allowed to wear hats and scarves. We were given tacketty boots and rough gear. Our names were not on any of the clothes. Our hair was shaved off and we were like convicts.

Religion

13. We went to church. We had to hold hands on the way there and we could not choose not to go.

School

14. I went to school but I missed out a lot because of all the beatings. I just was not picking anything up when I was there, and when I went to the sanatorium for two and a half years I didn't go to the school at all. I had to self-teach myself how to read. The teachers at the school were okay I suppose. We didn't get any practical work to help us when we left.

Bathing

15. I just remember when we were bathing we would all be told to undress and stand in a line and wait. There was only one bath. When it was our turn two other boys had big floor scrubbers and they would scrub your legs in the bath. Mrs QCL told them what to do. Your legs got all red when you were in the bath. We got a bath nearly every night after school.

Leisure Time

16. We didn't really get any leisure or play time. We didn't have any books, comics, toys not even a radio. We did play a wee bit sport but I was not very good. I liked playing football but we didn't get to do it very often.

Holidays

17. I never got taken anywhere on holiday when I was there and we didn't go on any day trips or anything like that.

18. At Christmas time they tried to make it look good for the visitors and put a couple of Christmas trees up in the church. We would get a present on Christmas day but after two weeks QKJ/QKK would just throw the toys one at a time into the fire. We got things like board games, snakes and ladders and things like that. We didn't get any special food on Christmas day, not even an orange or an apple. We might have got an orange and an apple in our stockings but the older boys would take them out and replace them with a set mouse trap so it would snap your fingers.

19. They didn't celebrate our birthdays, no cards or presents, in fact they didn't even tell you when it was your birthday.

Healthcare

20. There was a hospital on the grounds that we went to if we were not well. There were no regular medicals or anything like that. We didn't go to a dentist, and they didn't even give us toothbrushes. That is why we lost our teeth. Apart from the time I was taken to the sanatorium I never had to go and see anyone because of any injuries. They covered things up so that no-one knew what was going on.

21. For a while I was going back and forward to the hospital within the grounds because I was having problems breathing. I was telling them that they were giving me cold baths and I burst out crying. I was hysterical and I told them all about it.

Running away

22. I used to run away from the orphanage but didn't get very far because the police picked us up at the nearby towns, maybe in Kilmacolm which was the nearest town. I ran away because of the beatings. I used to get beaten when we went back to the orphanage. Nobody ever asked why I ran away.

23. There was one time when I was about 15 years old I didn't really run away but I hid in the loft of the cottage next door and I hid there for a month. The other kids used to pass food to me through the wee window. I could have stayed there longer. When I came down I got another hammering from the QAB/QCL

Visits / inspection

24. Every Saturday was visitor's day for those that were allowed to have visitors. I never had any visitors and my mum never visited me all the time I was in there. When other kids had visitors we were not allowed to speak to their visitors and we had to just sit with our arms folded all the time like dummies.

25. No one ever came to inspect us as far as I am aware.

Discipline

26. There were no written rules and they just pleased themselves. They belted us when they wanted. This didn't just go in the cottages I was in but I didn't see it happening. I just got told that it was going on.

ABUSE

27. The house parents had full control over us. If you were late for school you would get the belt. By the time you got back to the cottage at the end of the day after school, the school would have phoned the house parents and told them so you would get beaten again.

28. If you were sitting at the table at lunch time and you didn't like the food you would get walloped on the face from behind until you ate it.

29. At supper time if you had not done your chores or if you had holes in your socks you would just get sent to your bed and you didn't get anything to eat or drink.

30. I started to wet my bed when I was about 4 or 5. In the mornings because I wet my bed, Mr **QAB** used to drag me out of my bed, remove my bedclothes, pin me to the floor with his foot then beat me with a heavy leather belt. The belt had two tongues and he used to beat me on my bare back side. He then put me in a bath of cold water right up to my neck and left me in there for ages. He would go away then come back and make me tramp on the sheets that I had wet. I was freezing and my legs were red and blue.

31. He did this to me every morning because I would wet the bed nearly every night. I would lie in my bed in the morning scared and shaking waiting

for him to come in to batter me. Because of the cold baths I was having problems with my breathing and I was going back and forward to the hospital within the grounds. In the hospital I told them about the cold baths and what Mr [QAB] was doing to me. I told them to come in some time and they would see for themselves.

32. One day someone from the hospital, I can't remember who it was, came in to the cottage through the back way and I was in the bath. Mr [QAB] was upstairs. She felt the water and it was cold. She got me out the bath and tried to warm me up in lukewarm water in a foot basin but I just collapsed and it was then I got taken in to hospital then got transferred to the sanatorium the next day. I think I was about 4 or 5 when this happened. I was in the sanatorium for about two and a half years.

33. When I was in the hospital waiting to get transferred to the sanatorium Mr [QAB] appeared. He was wearing a bunnet and the staff didn't notice him. He was pretending he was bleeding the radiators and he came up to my bed and I hid under the sheets. He threatened me and said "Wait till I get you". I never told anyone about this.

34. The sanatorium was just outside the orphanage, it was separate from the orphanage. I went in to a sanatorium for two and a half years then when I came out I went to [QKJ/QKK]s in Cottage number 25. [REDACTED]

35. When I got out the sanatorium I was still wetting the bed and the [QKJ/QKK] used to belt me on my hands on the tiles, and then make me tramp my wet sheets in the bath in cold water.

36. Everyone used to get a penny poke of sweets but I never got one because I was a bed wetter. Sometimes I would be dying for a sweetie but I never got one. Mine were just thrown in the bucket.

37. When you were in your bed at night you weren't allowed to speak or make a noise or they would come in and you would get the belt.

38. In the house when we were putting our boots on in the morning in the open shed Mrs QKK would come in and she would ask who was talking and then she would belt us. She would make us put our hands over the tiles in the bathroom and when she belted us our hands would 'stott' off the tiles and that why the boys called it 'stotting off the tiles'. I think I was about eight at that time, and this happened quite a lot.

39. Mrs QKK gave [REDACTED] a real beating when we were in Cottage 25 at the bottom of the stairs and she was hitting him everywhere on his body with a big two tongued belt.. He had not done anything. [REDACTED] then had some sort of seizure and collapsed. I remember Mrs QKK face went chalk white and [REDACTED] was rushed to the hospital in the grounds. I think the next day he was sent to the Edinburgh branch of Quarriers. [REDACTED]

40. I remember one boy [REDACTED] who was in Cottage 34 he got a terrible beating one day from the QAB/QCL. I saw him getting the beating. He was about 12 years old. His dad came to visit him, I think it was the day after the beating and I told him he should tell his dad. His dad came and took [REDACTED] for a walk round the grounds and checked him for bruises. There was a big row in the office after that and his dad straight away took him away from Quarriers.

41. You were not allowed out of the gates and we were confined to the grounds. You were not really allowed out in the grounds either especially anywhere near the girl's cottages.

42. I saw others in my cottage getting belted on the back of the legs. When I spoke to the boys in the other cottages they used to tell me that it was happening to them too.

43. I felt it was like a prison camp and the QAB/QCL and the QKJ/QKK were terrible.

44. The QAB/QCL had at least two sons who sometimes came to the orphanage at the weekends and they used to bully us. One time they tried to make [REDACTED] run but he didn't want to so they dragged him to the ground and pulled him along and his knees were all grazed.

45. I cannot think of any happy memories or good experiences in the Quarriers Cottages. I just remember crying most of the time. I had no visitors to look forward to. I had nothing to look forward to.

REPORTING OF ABUSE

46. When I was running away I would tell people in the villages nearby what was going on in the cottages and they saw how nervous and shakey I was and they said that it sounded terrible but it never went anywhere. I never really told anyone else, apart from other people after I had left the home and when I moved in to digs.

47. We could never tell anyone when the visiting was on at the orphanage because we were not allowed to speak to any of the visitors we just had to sit with our arms folded. There was no one else in the orphanage that we could tell.

48. If you tried to tell Mr QBK anything he would just give you the belt, then he would tell your house parents and you would get beaten again. They would always cover things up.

49. I was interviewed by the police in March 2011 just after the "Time to be Heard" forum. I was contacted the next day after I spoke to the police and I was told that they were all dead so there was nothing they could do. I told them

that I was still alive and I still had to carry this burden with me. I also spoke at the National Confidential Forum but I have heard nothing from the government after these forums.

IMPACT

50. I didn't really know what was happening when I was getting beaten all the time, I just suffered the pain and got on with it. I think I could have died when I was in the cold baths and could have gone under the water at any time.

51. Because of the beatings, I get very, very nervous and I shake a lot, I still go to my doctors because of my nerves. I was shaking like a leaf when I left the Cottages.

52. I never got a proper education when I was at Quarriers so when I left I could not apply for any jobs because I could not fill in the forms. A lot of jobs went past me because I could not apply. For a lot of years I could not read and write and I lost a lot of jobs because I was too embarrassed to tell anyone I could not read and write. After I left the orphanage I have tried to self-teach myself to read and write but my spelling still is not very good. I had to stick to labouring type jobs.

53. Because of what happened to me this has had a serious effect on my confidence and I am not good at speaking to other people especially people that I do not know. I get very nervous and shakey. I have difficulty trusting people and always wary about asking people to help me.

54. I don't have baths now, because I am too nervous to have one. I just have a sponge down. I don't think I have had a bath since I was at Quarriers. I would like a hot bath but I am a bit scared about it and the water would have to be hot. I don't have a bath where I am currently living.

55. I get depressed sometimes and think about what happened to me quite a lot. I have flash backs often. I still have a vision of when I was in the sanatorium and I was lying there and I am sure I heard screams coming from the orphanage.

56. Because we never went to the dentist and they never even gave us toothbrushes I think that is why I have lost my teeth.

LIFE AFTER QUARRIER'S

57. When I was 16 years old the orphanage told me it was time for me to leave and they said I was to go to Edinburgh. I refused to go so I got a beating.

58. The following day I left and went to my mother's, at least I think she was my mother. I only stayed for a very short time because there was too much drinking and fighting between all the caravan type people so I left. I went round some of the farms after that and worked on the farms and also did some gardening work. I went to agricultural college and did gardening and farming working on the potatoes and turnips. I worked in tomatoes for a number of years too. I then worked at a mill and after that I worked for the council doing labouring work, road-works, or in the winter it was gathering leaves. I went back to the farms then stopped work when I was about 65 years old and now just really look after my garden.

59. I married [REDACTED] when I was about 44 and we lived at an address in Prestwick. We didn't have any children. My wife has recently had four strokes and she is now in a care home. I try and visit her as often as I can. I now live in sheltered housing.

OTHER ACTION TAKEN

60. About five years ago I gave my story to the "Time to be Heard" forum and about two years ago I gave my story at the National Confidential Forum. A friend came with me and supported me. I never heard any more from either.

61. I have felt like going back to Quarriers but I have been too frightened.

TREATMENT / SUPPORT

62. The only support I have had is from people I have told and my doctor. Through my niece in England I got in touch with Elaine who worked with In Care Survivors Service Scotland, (INCSS) at the time. She is with me today. Elaine now works for Mind Mosaic and we used to have coffee once a fortnight but now it is maybe once a month. I don't want or need any sort of counselling

63. I still have bother with chest colds especially in the winter time and I blame it on the cold baths I got when I was in the orphanage. Sometimes I get dizzy too and sweat a lot. My doctor is aware and I get lots of medication to help me for my nerves and for my chest.

64. I think I have lost out because of the time bar and believe that because of the beatings I got I should be entitled to some compensation.

RECORDS

65. A lady from the 'Cares Trust' phoned for me and arranged for my care records to be delivered to me. I got my records without any problem. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

66. I hope that things have changed since I was at the orphanage and that what happened to me cannot happen to anyone going in to the care system now.

67. I think the QAB/QCL and QKJ/QKK were terrible and should never have been in that position. I hope that more checks are done on these people so this cannot happen again.

68. I would like to think I could get some compensation for trying to help you and what I have been through. I have had a terrible life what with the bullying and the beatings. They have ruined our lives.

69. 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...  QCG

Dated... ~~15/11/2016~~ 1-11-2016