

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

**George QUINN**

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is George Quinn. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1955. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Life before going into care

2. My mother's name was [REDACTED] and my father was [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
3. My mother was an alcoholic and my father was a typical man of that era. By that, I mean he would give her £5 from his wages to feed everyone. He would spend more on that for a round of drinks.
4. We stayed in a tenement flat with no electricity. I remember that there was empty bottles of alcohol lying all around the flat. To this day, I can't drink stewed tea, as my mum used to stew the pot of tea on the fire and give it to us. I would say that I was brought up more or less as a street urchin. There was no parental control. I just thought that this was the way that you lived.
5. I remember getting scabies when I was about 6 years old. This was when I was first taken into care. I didn't understand what this meant at that time. I can't recall the names of the first two places where I was put into care. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] At the second place, I was put into a cot when I arrived. I felt like a caged monkey.

6. I can't remember who took me to the first two places or how I got there. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I was only a short time at each of these places. Not long at all, but I can't remember exactly how long it was.

### **Life at Smyllum, Lanark**

#### *First day*

7. The third time I was put into care, I remember that it seemed like a really long car journey from Glasgow. I don't remember who took me in the car, but I'm pretty sure that it was social workers. The reason for this is that is who I would expect to take me. I was just over 6 years old. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
8. When we arrived at the place, that I now know as Smyllum, the first thing I noticed was how big the building was. It seemed to be massive. I was taken into the hallway, then into a room where I was sat on a bench on my own. A nun came in and I told her that I wanted to go to the toilet. She asked what I needed. I said "a shite". The nun slapped me on the jaw and told me that "we don't say that in here". She told me that when we needed the toilet, we were to say it was either a number 1 or a number 2. I can't remember the name of the nun that slapped me.
9. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
10. I was then given some clothes and shown to my dormitory. The clothes I was provided with were short trousers, long socks, vests, underpants, a shirt and a V necked jersey. I was pleased with the underpants and vests as I had never had these before at my family home. I was also given a pair of open buckled sandals and a pair of shoes. In the winter we were given denims to wear. I was then taken to the

mother superior. The mother superior told me that I was there to be educated. I was called by my first name, George. This was always used for the time I was at Smyllum.

11. The first night in the dormitory, kids were crying, myself included. It was a big dorm and a cold place. You weren't allowed to talk, or the nuns would come in and hit you.
12. Nine times out of ten, I slept with the blanket over my head in a state of fear.
13. I have been asked if we had to put our hands out to the side when we were in bed. I can't remember if I did this. I do recall hearing this had occurred with others.

#### *Bed-wetting*

14. I never wet the bed, but there were lots of boys who did. When the nuns found out you had wet the bed, they made a big thing of it. They made a lot of noise, making sure everyone could hear and would know who it was that had wet the bed. They would take the boy out the bed, put the wet sheet over his head and make him stand there. He would be there until the nuns decided to put him back to bed. The nuns would tell the rest of us this is what happened if you wet the bed. The bed wouldn't be changed. You had to change the sheets yourself in the morning.

#### **Routine at Smyllum**

##### *Mornings and bedtime*

15. In the morning, we got up at about six o'clock and had to go to mass. We would get washed, dressed and then go straight to mass. After mass, we went to breakfast. There was no mass on a Saturday.
16. We were normally in bed by nine o'clock every night.

*Food*

17. The food at breakfast was mostly lumpy porridge, which was horrible. Sometimes, you were given corn flakes.
18. Generally, the food was disgusting. It made me retch. The nuns would watch you and make sure that you ate it. They stood over you and forced you to eat it. It was that bad that I tried to hide the food in my pockets. To this day, I cannot eat roast beef, corned beef or butter, because of what the meals were like at Smyllum.
19. Sometimes, at night, we were given jugs of milk to drink. We also got big bits of bread and butter. As I've said, I can't eat butter now. It makes me violently sick.

*School*

20. I think that all the teaching was done at Smyllum. It was a mixture of civilian teachers and nuns that taught us. At that time, I didn't realise I was dyslexic., I couldn't do a lot of what I was asked to. My spelling and writing were atrocious, and my arithmetic wasn't very clever, either. The best of it was I could read anything put down in front of me. I was just a small boy and never knew there was something wrong. I tried to explain to the nuns and teachers, but they never listened.
21. The teachers and nuns would call me stupid and put me in a corner of the class. I made a nuisance of myself when I was in the corner and played on it, so that they would put me out the class. It was maths and English that I struggled with. I was okay with history. I liked it. You were also taught religious instruction. Both the teachers and nuns were very strict and made you do your work. There were classes all day, with a break at lunchtime.
22. School finished about 3 o'clock, and then you had play time for a couple of hours until tea.

23. We were allowed playtime outside. This was the only time that I can remember all of us laughing. In the summertime, we were allowed out a bit later, but we were always in bed by 9 o'clock, no matter what time of year it was.
24. We never mixed with the local children. The only time we went outside Smyllum was for an event in Lanark, such as a big mass. We would march to the town and march back. We were all dressed the same. I think that the locals thought we were "weirdos".
25. If we went to swimming in the town, there was no interaction or opportunity to mix with local children. We only went swimming with the kids from Smyllum. It was straight there and back again.

#### *Chores*

26. The laundry was done by the nuns. The only thing I can remember being asked to do was feed the animals. I didn't mind doing this, as it was pleasurable. There were donkeys and lambs on the farms adjacent to the home.

#### *Leisure Time*

27. You were given pocket money for the tuck shop, but the nuns looked after your personal possessions. [REDACTED] told me after I left Smyllum that my relatives in Canada had sent me silver dollars, but I never saw them. My dad also gave me a pocket watch, which the nuns had told him they would put with my personal possessions. I never got any of these items back when I left Smyllum.
28. I was given access to comics that my dad and [REDACTED] sent me. I swapped these with the other boys once I had read them.
29. There was a television room, and you were allowed to watch TV at certain times. There were also board games available.

*Holidays*

30. We didn't ever get taken away for holidays, other than sometimes at Christmas.

*Birthdays and Christmas*

31. I do remember my birthday when I was at Smyllum. It was nothing big though, just a "Happy Birthday". The rest of the children might sing "Happy Birthday" to you.
32. At Christmas, we would do some concerts in the town. It felt like we were being paraded, and we were forced to smile.
33. Sometimes, at Christmas, we would be taken to people's houses to stay for a few days. You never stayed away on Christmas Day. Nothing was ever explained to me about where I was going or why. You were just dropped off at the house. I remember going to stay with people at Livingston. The people you stayed with would always be nice and do their best for you.
34. The local works used to set up charity Christmas parties. There used to be a Santa and you would get a present. You would also get pop and sweets. This would be the only Christmas present you would get, because Smyllum wouldn't give you anything.
35. One Christmas, I remember that we were taken to John Lewis and given pocket money for Christmas shopping. When I saw John Lewis, I thought it looked like the Empire State Building. It was so big.
36. My dad saw me [REDACTED] on the bus when we were on a Christmas shopping trip with Smyllum. The nun let him take me [REDACTED] off the bus, as long as he had [REDACTED] back that night. Dad took [REDACTED] shopping and bought [REDACTED] lots of presents and sweets. Dad put [REDACTED] on the last train back to Smyllum. I got to keep my presents and I shared them with some of the other kids that I liked. They didn't have anything. I hid my sweets, as I thought the nuns might take them off me., I wanted to share them

with my friends. I'm not sure if the nuns would have shared them with the other kids if they had taken them off me.

### *Visits/Inspections*

37. My father visited me 2 or 3 times whilst I was in Smyllum. I think this was to clear his conscious. He was usually drunk. My mother visited me once and she became ill. They had to get an ambulance for her. [REDACTED] was in the army, so he only visited me once. [REDACTED] visited about two or three times a year. He was a labourer and it cost a lot for him to visit me. [REDACTED]
38. I can't remember any inspections at Smyllum or social work meetings with me to ask how things were for me at Smyllum. There was never any one-to-one meetings where I was asked how I was.
39. If the bishop was visiting Smyllum, they made sure that you were washed, hair done and your teeth were brushed.

### *Healthcare*

40. We had a bath three or four times a week. We had to queue up. Sometimes, we would bath two at a time. We mostly used the same bath water, although sometimes it was changed. The towel was passed to the next person once you had dried, so you hoped you were one of the first to use it. I remember regularly brushing my teeth, but I can't remember any visits to the dentist.

## **Abuse at Smyllum**

### *Abuse by nuns and priest*

41. The nuns would hit you for anything. If you didn't write quick enough. If you were running. It would be an open hand slap. They would also hit you with a ruler or a stick across the legs. I saw a lot of the other boys getting hit by the nuns. I saw the

nuns kicking boys in the shins if their shoes weren't polished. Two of the boys I saw getting hit were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. They were [REDACTED] friends of mine.

42. If you got sent to the priest for doing something wrong, he would give you a slap as well. The priest would give you a warning for being bad. It was very frightening when he spoke with you. I tried to explain to him as well why I couldn't do my school work. I can't remember the priest's name.
43. One time, when I was running, a nun grabbed me by my hair at the top of my head. She pulled it hard and told me not to run. This happened a lot, not just to me, but to other boys as well.
44. What I am amazed at is that I never got the belt when I was in Smyllum. If you got sent to mother superior, it was for a verbal warning. She never hit me.
45. The only nuns names that I can remember are Sister [REDACTED] AGI and Sister [REDACTED] BAI. I can't remember if these were the ones that were bad to me. The novice nuns were normally good and nice to you. They saw what was going on, though.

[REDACTED] BAC [REDACTED]

46. I was a good singer and I got a lot of the lead parts in the pantomime at Smyllum. I liked my music.
47. There was a church in the grounds of Smyllum that me and my friends sometimes went to. One day, we were in there, rehearsing for the pantomime. We were also listening to music on a big box radio that my dad had bought me. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were there. Cliff Richard was on the radio and we were all singing along. [REDACTED] BAC came in. I think he was a [REDACTED] at Smyllum. He said that the music on my radio was rubbish. We asked him who he liked. [REDACTED] BAC said "Andy Stewart" and we all started laughing. [REDACTED] BAC went mad and smashed up my radio by throwing it against the wall. [REDACTED] BAC then started to batter me like a man would do to



another man. He was kicking me on the ground. He kicked me on the head and ribs. I think if he had kicked me any more on the head, he would have killed me.

48. I think the attack might have lasted about 5 minutes before I lost consciousness. I don't remember anything else. I don't remember being taken to hospital. I woke up in a different dormitory from mine. This might have been an infirmary, but I'm not sure. I don't remember being seen by any doctors. The nuns did most of the nursing in Smyllum if you weren't well.
49. After the attack by [BAC] I was in bed for nearly a fortnight. I only got out of bed to go to the toilet. I was in so much pain. The nuns would come in and see me. Some of them were nice and asked how I was. The food in this dormitory was a bit better as well. None of the other children were allowed to visit me. Apparently, [BAC] came for a visit when I was in bed, but wasn't allowed to see me.
50. Mother superior asked me what had happened and I told her about [BAC] attacking me. She said it must have been what I had said to him, as [BAC] wouldn't do that to me. I told her I wouldn't smash up my own radio that my daddy bought me.
51. A few days after I got out of the dormitory, I saw [BAC] coming to visit me. When I first saw him walking up the drive, I thought it was [BAC] so I hid. [BAC] shouted and I realised it was him. I told [BAC] what [BAC] had done to me. [BAC] went ballistic. He was shouting and bawling. The mother superior said she would call the police and [BAC] said that's exactly what she should do. He told the mother superior if he saw another bruise on me, he would sort it out. The police weren't contacted about [BAC] battering me. [BAC] never hit me again after this.
52. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] told me that a lot of the girls got the same punishments as the boys. [REDACTED] had heard what happened to me when I was attacked by [BAC]

53. After this, I started to run away from Smyllum. The first time I ran away I was about 7 years old. I never went far. I stupidly thought if I followed the rail tracks, I would get to Glasgow. I didn't know what to do. I think I got as far as Lanark town centre.
54. The last time I ran away there, was a few of us. The police were involved, and when they found us they took us back to Smyllum. I think it was Sister AGI that dealt with us. She took us into a room next to the mother superior's room and asked, "Who was the ring leader". I told her that it was me to save the rest getting a beating. She asked me why I had ran away. I said it was because of the beatings and that the place was horrible. She then tried to hit me with a shoe. I tried to run away from her. She was throwing things at me, anything at all including her shoe. Once she noticed the bruising, she stopped hitting me and sent me to bed.
55. When I was about 10 years old, I was put into another dormitory that was partitioned. There were screens around your bed and it gave you a bit of your own personal space.
56. As I got older, the beatings were less frequent.
57. That was what Smyllum was all about: the beatings, religious education and discipline. You had no freedom to do what you wanted. They made sure that you had manners and kept to the routine. There was no affection towards you.
58. I was not aware of any other type of abuse like sexual or inappropriate touching.

*Sammy Carr*

59. Sammy Carr was a friend of mine at Smyllum. The first time I saw him, it was outside and he was on his own. I asked him his name and he sort of latched on to us. Sammy was quite small and that was why he was called "wee Sammy". Sammy was very quiet, but liked a laugh.
60. I had noticed that BAC appeared to have an unhealthy interest in Sammy.

61. One day, the nuns got us all together in a room. They told us that Sammy had died because he had been playing with the rats. We were warned not to play with rats. I was shocked, as it seemed that one day Sammy was okay and the next day he was dead. It all happened so quickly. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

62. Recently, I saw a news report on TV by a reporter, David Cowan. The report was about Sammy's death at Smyllum. I contacted the reporter and he came to my house with Sammy's sister. I showed David my photos from Smyllum. I told David I was 99.5% certain that it was Sammy in one of the photos. Sammy's sister looked at the photo and she said that it was definitely him.

### **Leaving Smyllum**

63. I didn't get any notice that I was leaving Smyllum. I was told I was going home. I just assumed that it was back to my mum's, but they said I was going to [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I was away within the week after being told I was going. I was about 12 years old when I left Smyllum. I think I got a small suitcase with some clothes in it. I was taken to the station and put on a train to Glasgow Central.
64. [REDACTED] met me. That's when I found out about the silver dollars and the pocket watch. My dad asked me where it was, and I said, "I didn't ever get it". My dad said he had gave it to the nuns, and he told me about my Auntie [REDACTED] sending the silver dollars.
65. After I left Smyllum, I went back once and visited my friends. I left before their dinner time. It was very depressing, but I think you can become institutionalised. I missed my friends, but not the place.

### **Reporting of abuse at Smyllum**

66. I never told anyone about the abuse at Smyllum, other than talking to my friends there. I never told any family members about the physical abuse when they visited me, other than when I told [REDACTED] about [REDACTED] BAC [REDACTED] battering me. [REDACTED] had a temper and I didn't want him to know about anything else.
67. I first discussed the abuse with my family when I was about 25 years old. I told [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Even then, I don't think I told them all that happened to me at Smyllum. I have since told my wife, [REDACTED] everything about Smyllum.
68. About two months ago, after I saw the report on TV about Sammy, I contacted the police. Constable Chris from Wishaw police station came to see me. He noted a statement about me being assaulted at Smyllum. I also told them that I knew Sammy when I had been at Smyllum. The police were very good and said to me that they wanted to help. The police told me that the case about Sammy was not going any further, as they had done all they could. I never heard anything more about the assault on me at Smyllum that I had reported. I have had no more contact from the police since that day.

### **Life after being in care at Smyllum**

69. I stayed with [REDACTED] after I left Smyllum. I did see my mum and dad, but I blanked my mum for a long time. She didn't have an easy time with my dad. He would beat her up. She suffered from epileptic fits. Once when she had a fit, she fell into the open fire and burnt her side. Mum said she wanted me back and would stop drinking. I went back to stay with her, but after a while, she started to drink again.
70. I went back to [REDACTED] in Pollock, but by this time he had another baby. He had a big family and I got my own flat in Govan. I was 15 years old and since I left Smyllum, I had been in four different schools. I had no qualifications.

71. There was a gang culture in the area and you had to be in a gang. I had no job and my flat became a drinking den. I started to get into a bit of trouble. I was arrested for breaking a shop window. The police charged me with police assault, resisting arrest and house breaking with intent. This wasn't right, as I had only broken a shop window to steal mars bars.
72. I was on remand for three weeks at Longriggend, until the judge had my background reports. I thought I would only get a fine, but when I went back up, the judge said he was doing me a favour and sentenced me to two years in borstal. That was after he had read the social work reports and that I had been in Smyllum. I was 16 when I went to Borstal.
73. The staff at the borstal were all ex-services. They were strict and the discipline was enforced. I only served a year, but it had an effect on me. Even when I was on the bus after borstal years later, I always called the conductor "sir".
74. Not long after I left borstal, I met my wife, [REDACTED] This kept me on the straight and narrow. We were married at 19. I got a job as a labourer. We moved to Govanhill away from the people I had been hanging about with. This let me get on with my life and bring up a family.

### **Impact**

75. I still have the same sleeping pattern as I had at Smyllum. I am always up early. I don't need an alarm to wake me up. I also sleep with the blanket over my head, as I did at Smyllum. When I left Smyllum, I had to toughen up. I had not been exposed to the outside world. Smyllum did me no favours, as it was not regimented in terms of learning you about life in the outside world. It was more all about routine.
76. I find Christmas hard, as I always think back to Smyllum when I had no presents and nobody there for me. I get very teary at Christmas thinking about the kids who got nothing and no-one to come and see them.

77. I know it had an impact on others in Smyllum. [REDACTED] has done two life sentences since he left there.

### *Counselling*

78. About four years ago, I had a lot of health issues. I was feeling very depressed and my GP referred me to a psychiatrist. I told him about Smyllum and he asked how it affected me now. I told him how certain things could trigger my memories of Smyllum. He didn't go too deep into it and I only had one appointment with him.
79. About a year ago, I was referred to another psychiatrist, a woman in Castlemilk. It was part of the well man clinic. I had about twelve visits with her. She went right into things with me and she managed to trigger a lot of my memories from Smyllum. I was told that a lot of my problems now were as a result of my time at Smyllum. These visits helped me a lot.
80. I suffer from depression and I have medication, citalopram, to help me deal with this.

### **Records**

81. I have never seen my records from Smyllum. I wouldn't know where to start looking for them.
82. [REDACTED] took a lot of photographs when he visited me in Smyllum. I still have most of these photos.

### **Other information**

#### *Lessons to be learned*

83. Before a child goes into care, there should be checks carried out on the place they are going to. A child going into care can make or break them. When I was in Smyllum. there was no support and you were broken down.

84. 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.

[REDACTED]

Dated.....5 - 7 - 2017.....