

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Ian Stuart Donaldson

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is Ian Stuart Donaldson. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1943 and I am presently seventy-five years of age. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

General

2. I was put into care at Nazareth House in Aberdeen when I was just three months old. When I was ten years old, I was sent to Australia as a child migrant and spent six years in care at Boys' Town, Bindoon, Western Australia (WA).

Life before going into care

3. I have since found out that my mother was [REDACTED] and I think my father was called [REDACTED] but I don't know what his second name was. I'm not sure why I was placed in care. While I was in care I never knew anything about my mother or father.

Life in care - Scotland

Nazareth House, Aberdeen

4. I have been shown a document which contains information regarding my entry into Nazareth House in Aberdeen on 8 July 1943. I am recorded as Ian Stuart Donaldson, born in Aberdeen on [REDACTED] 1943. The document also shows that I left on 7 May 1953, when I was ten years old. I believe that the information contained in this document is correct.
5. I can't remember much about Nazareth House in Aberdeen at all, not even what the nuns were like or anything about the routine.

Migration

Selection/information

6. I remember a man and a woman came to see me at Nazareth House and asked if I wanted to go to Australia. I think they were from the Government, but I don't know who they were. I said I would go, because I didn't think I really had a choice.
7. They never told me anything about Australia, I'd never even heard of it before.

Migration Papers

8. I have been shown a copy of a migration form that relates to me. I see that my mother signed the form on 20 February 1953 giving permission for me to go.
9. My weight is recorded on the form, but I don't remember getting any sort of health check before I left.

Leaving Scotland

10. I remember the steam train from Aberdeen to Southampton and going over the Forth Rail Bridge on it. A couple of lads from Nazareth House in Aberdeen went with me, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I was good friends with [REDACTED] who was much the same age as me, [REDACTED] was a bit younger.
11. When we got to Southampton we all had to wait with other kids who were going before we were allowed on the ship. I think there were seven boys and seven girls all going to Australia.

Journey on the RMS Otranto

12. I remember a bit of the journey on the ship, which was called the Otranto. It was a big passenger liner and I believe there were about two-and-a-half thousand people on board.
13. Being young lads, we just about got thrown off the ship because we were mucking around so much. We used to chuck a ball about and it would hit other passengers. The crew would chase us, but we would just run away.
14. A man and a woman looked after us on the ship, I don't know who they were. Every time we got something like fruit or lollies, we'd put it in our cabin and the man and woman would steal it off us.

Arrival in Australia

15. I have been shown a copy the passenger list for the Otranto, which shows that the ship arrived in Fremantle on 4 June 1953. The list records me as 'Master I. Donaldson' and that I was to be going to Boys' Town, Bindoon, WA. That is correct.
16. We stayed at Clontarf Boys' Home for the night when we came off the boat and then [REDACTED] me and two of the other boys who had also been on the ship were taken up to Bindoon on the back of a truck. I didn't know the other two boys that went with me. The other three boys that had been on the ship, including [REDACTED] stayed at

Clontarf. There was no protection over the back of the truck and the journey must have taken about three hours.

Life in care – Australia

Boys' Town, Bindoon, WA

General

17. Bindoon was run by the Christian Brothers and was in a valley in the countryside. It's a big place with lots of ground all around. I have photographs of the place which show the work the boys did. We boys built half the place while I was there.
18. I would guess there were about three hundred boys at Bindoon and probably fifteen monks with five or six lay staff. There were also some nuns and one of them looked after the infirmary. The monks dressed in black robes and looked like Dracula.
19. Brother **MDJ** was **[REDACTED]** and the other Brothers included Brother **MDV**, Brother **MDW**, Brother **MDF** and Brother **MDY**. Brother **MDY** was **[REDACTED]**. Those Brothers were real criminals who should never have been allowed to do what they did.

First day at institution

20. I have never forgotten my first day at Bindoon because I had to use the toilet and it was starting to get dark. One of the Brothers, I don't know which one, was hiding in the dark with the lights dimmed right down. I turned round and saw him dressed up in his black robes and got such a fright that from that day onwards I never wanted to go to the toilet when it was dark. Instead I ended up wetting my bed most nights.

Mornings and bedtime

21. There were three dormitories with fifty-odd kids in them as well as some kids sleeping on the verandas outside. There were beds along each wall and more in the middle.
22. We were woken at seven in the morning and after we got up we'd have a wash and then have breakfast. After breakfast we went to church, every day.
23. We also had church in the evening and then, about seven o'clock, we went to bed.

Bedwetting

24. If you'd wet your bed you'd get a flogging with a strap. The beds had plastic sheets on them so that the mattress wouldn't get wet and that meant you'd be sleeping in your own urine if you wet the bed. In the winter I'd wake up freezing, shaking with the cold. This went on for about three or four years until I wasn't so afraid to go to the toilet at night.

Washing and bathing/Hygiene

25. We washed our face and hands in basins every morning and there was hot water most of the time. Every evening we'd have a shower as well. There were a few individual shower cubicles as well as a big one that a few boys could use together. Next to the showers was a Roman bath where we would wash our feet before getting in the shower.

Mealtimes

26. We ate our meals in a separate building and the Brothers ate in their own dining room. A couple of times I had to go and clean up after the Brothers had eaten. You should have seen all the food they had. It was a lot different to what we boys had.
27. Our food was not good. I did not like veggies at Bindoon, although now I do. There would be fish on a Friday and maybe stew during the week. Sometimes our main meal might be pumpkin which had lumps in it. It was terrible.

28. I'm not too sure what happened to any boy that didn't eat their food. I think they might have got hit or belted by the monks.

Clothing

29. We never wore any shoes, only open-toed sandals and it was cold sometimes. I used to get chilblains a lot of the time, it was terrible. All we wore, the whole year round, was a pair of shorts and a shirt. I don't think I ever saw a jumper or a jacket.

Schooling

30. We only did a bit of school every now and then. In all the years I was at Bindoon, I only did about six months schooling in total. Like every other kid there I was used as slave labour.
31. I was a real dummy when I left because I'd never learnt anything. I wasn't really interested in reading, although there was nothing to read anyway.

Leisure time

32. I don't remember having much leisure time at all. The monks would take us up to the oval sometimes and we might play football or something, but most of the time we were working.

Healthcare

33. There was an infirmary among the buildings at Bindoon. We would go there if we were ill or had any injuries and the nun would treat us. My health was pretty good most of the time.
34. I did go to the hospital in Perth to get my tonsils out and we also used to have to go to the dentist in Perth.

Religious instruction

35. Religion was a big thing at Bindoon. We had church twice a day, in the morning and the evening, every day, including at the weekends.

Christmas and birthdays

36. There were never any presents for Christmas or birthdays, we never had any of our own possessions anyway. I don't have any memory of Christmas and I didn't even know when my birthday was.

Visitors

37. There used to be a lot of tourists who would come and look around Bindoon. I recall once when I was about nine years old one of them gave me a packet of cigarettes. I can still remember the brand. I've been smoking ever since.

38. The Welfare Department would come and inspect the place from time to time, but I never spoke to any them. The Brothers were cunning, they would have six or seven boys all dressed up to meet them and we would be put away out of sight. The Welfare would see these boys and think we were all getting looked after properly.

39. I have no recollection of ever going out to visit anyone or stay with them while I was at Bindoon.

Family and friends

40. I never had any contact with my family when I was at Bindoon. I never heard from them, and I never wrote to them. I didn't even know anything about them.

41. I really only had [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] an Irish boy, as friends at Bindoon. We had our own little gang and I didn't associate with any of the other boys.

42. I wasn't aware of either of them having contact with family back home either.

Emotional care/support

43. I couldn't go near the Brothers if I had any worries or concerns, I didn't trust them.

Work

44. We boys at Bindoon were used as slave labour. While I was there the main building, which was Brother MDJ pride and joy, was finished. The building had three floors, with dormitories on the left hand side and verandas outside, which had beds on them as well.
45. My work involved lifting bags of cement and taking it on a wheelbarrow along the scaffolding. There was no health and safety. Maltese boys who were staying there had covered the floors in terrazzo tiles and another of my jobs was to clean the tiles up.
46. We were shown what to do by the older boys that stayed there, I remember one of the older boys was called MIT. There were no adults involved in the work, although I think one of the Brothers would be watching over us.

Pocket Money

47. We were given 'two-bob' a week for all the work that we did. At that time I thought that was great. We used to go to the lolly shop in the school and buy chips or whatever with the money we got.

Running away

48. I ran away from Bindoon a few times and ended up hiding in the bush where I had built a little den with [REDACTED] and a couple of other friends. It was built well so that if it was raining we wouldn't get wet. We would steal a chicken and cook it in the den and sometimes be away for a night or two.

49. When we went back we'd get the biggest flogging of our lives. We'd get the strap and we'd get booted and everything.

Nature and frequency of abuse

50. If the Brothers couldn't keep us in line we'd get a flogging. They all had leather straps hanging from their belts, which were about sixteen inches long and an inch thick, with strips of lead in them. They used to hit us with those straps and it used to hurt really badly. They loved doing it, that's how they were.
51. Most of the Brothers liked hitting kids. Boys were physically abused by the Brothers all the time. All the Brothers were the same, Brother MDJ Brother MDV Brother MDW and Brother MDF. Another Brother, Brother MDY used a wooden cane all the time that had a steel rod inside.
52. After we'd washed our feet in the Roman bath, before we got in the shower, we'd have to get our feet examined by Brother MDY. Nine times out of ten I hadn't cleaned behind my ankles and before I knew where I was he'd whack my ankles with his cane.
53. One day, while I was working in the dairy and just before I knocked off, Brother MDV asked me to shut the barn gate. I did and when I went down the next morning Brother MDV accused me of not shutting it. I think he was just trying to pick on me because he was that sort of man.
54. He tried to corner me so I picked up a pitchfork and warded him off. I dropped the pitchfork and ran away, straight into Brother MDJ. He asked me what was wrong so I told him and he grabbed me by the arm and took me back to the dairy.
55. Brother MDV then appeared and they shut the door and gave me the biggest flogging of my life. They even booted me in the head. I was black and blue for about four weeks afterwards.
56. The Brothers had pet boys who were a bit older. One of them, who was a couple of years older than me, was called [REDACTED]. He's dead now. These boys would

come round our beds at night and touch us sexually to warm us up for the Brothers. A lot of times I would get out of bed and hide under another bed. Sometimes I would run away to my den in the bush.

57. This went on for about four or five years until I was brave enough to stand up for myself.
58. I saw the older boys going to other boys beds as well, but I didn't take much notice of what they were doing. I wasn't really aware of other boys getting sexually abused, but I know now that there were.
59. A couple of times Brother MDV and Brother MDF tried to manhandle me sexually, most of the time I managed to get away. I provided details of what happened to me to the Christian Brothers when making a further application to them for redress. I have provided a copy of this claim to the Inquiry. I confirm that the facts stated in it are true.

Reporting of abuse

60. I never reported anything that happened to me. I couldn't, there was no one to tell. If I had said anything to any of the Brothers I'd be flogged again.

Deaths of boys at Bindoon

61. I believe there were about five boys killed at Bindoon while I was there. One boy had been sliding down the balustrade when he fell off and banged his head on the cement. The other four were accidents while the boys were employed as slave labour.
62. My friend [REDACTED] was killed at Bindoon. A few of us boys were loading bags that had been getting washed in a dam onto a cart. There was no Brother there to supervise us. The cart had two big wheels and we were the horses. [REDACTED] had been sitting on top of the bags on the cart when he fell off and one of the wheels ran over his neck.

63. I told one of the other boys to go and get one of the Brothers while I stayed with [REDACTED]. When the Brother arrived they took [REDACTED] to the infirmary at Bindoon. As far as I know [REDACTED] was never sent to Royal Perth Hospital, he was kept in the infirmary. He was in a coma there for three-and-a-half weeks before he died.
64. It was all hushed up and I don't even know whether any family he might have had in Scotland were ever notified. Like a lot of things with the State Government and the Christian Brothers it was swept under the carpet.
65. None of the Brothers ever asked me how I was afterwards. I wasn't given any support at all.

Life after Boys' Town, Bindoon

66. There was no preparation for life once we left Bindoon. There was a carpenter's shop and a mechanic shop and I went there sometimes and learned some stuff, but that was it. I look back now and think my head wasn't screwed on right when I left. I drank a lot and I got into a lot of fights.
67. I left Bindoon in 1959 and stayed with some people called MEA in [REDACTED] at Mount Lawley, for about nine months. They were terrible, just like the Christian Brothers. I would get up at five o'clock every morning and spend the day working my guts out. I did all the heavy work and their son did nothing.
68. The Welfare were supposed to check on me while I was there but they never did. The Christian Brothers never did either. They just couldn't be bothered.
69. One morning I didn't get up and the woman came to get me. We had words and they sent me on the train to Perth, telling me I had to meet someone. It was all lies and I ended up with nowhere to go.

70. After that I got a farming job with a young couple called Mundy. They were very good and I stayed with them for five years. After that I worked for a company for about ten years driving a front-end loader delivering wheat. I went all over the State.
71. I've worked all of my life and got a job with a contractor on a BP refinery. I ended up spending twenty-eight years in that job.
72. I got together with a woman and we lived together for about sixteen years. I brought her six kids up, none of them were mine.

Other action taken

73. I took part in a class action against the Christian Brothers in 1997. I tried to sue them and they gave me two thousand dollars. That wasn't good, that was like getting a kick in the backside.
74. I participated in the Redress WA scheme which was a scheme to provide redress to those who had been abused or neglected in the care of the State of Western Australia. Dr Philippa White of the organisation Tuart Place helped me compile a statement. I also wrote a lot of letters every time I thought of something. At first I never mentioned the sexual abuse in any of those letters because I was too ashamed. It was only after my lawyer advised me that I did mention it.
75. The statement was submitted in October 2008 and I have provided a copy of this statement to the Inquiry. I have also provided a copy of my letters. I confirm that the facts stated in these documents are true.
76. I got forty-five thousand dollars. It could have been eighty thousand, but the WA State Government reduced it. I think I should have got a lot more, other boys got more.
77. The WA State Government has changed the law regarding the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse and there is now a further opportunity for redress from the

Christian Brothers. I have submitted an additional claim and it will hopefully be getting settled shortly.

Treatment/support

78. I often come to Tuart Place and see other people who have been in care as well as the staff there. It makes my day to see everybody, but I've never had any counselling or support. Before that I had nowhere to go.

Records and family tracing

79. All I used to have was a copy of the extract of my birth certificate and when I went for a job as a fitter at the BP Refinery they wouldn't accept it. BP also asked for a record of my schooling so I rang Bindoon up and they told me they had no record of me being there.
80. It took me a long time to get my birth certificate. Eventually Dr White of Tuart Place got it for me. It had been held by the Australian Welfare Department and then by the Department for Child Protection. I only got it about seven years ago, when I was sixty-eight years old.
81. I also have a copy of an Annual Report of Australian Child Migrants for the Catholic Child Welfare Council of England and Wales, dated 15 October 1956. In that report is my name and comments that my behaviour was very good and my school progress was excellent. It also says that my state of health was very good. The report also mentions that I correspond with friends or relatives in England and that I visit an Australian family. I not too sure what that is referring to too. I certainly don't remember writing any letters and I never visited anyone while I was at Bindoon.

82. I also tried to get records of my time in care from the Christian Brothers, but I never got anywhere. Since I started coming to Tuart Place, they've helped me get some, although there wasn't much available.
83. One of the boys who had also been a child migrant mentioned tracing my family. I made some enquiries with the Christian Brothers Ex-residents and Students Service in Subiaco and they worked with the Child Migrant Trust (CMT) to trace my family.
84. A lady called Joan Kerry of the Catholic Child Welfare Council did some research and around 2001 I found out I had a sister in Scotland. Margaret Humphreys of the CMT then came out to Australia and she took a video of me to show my sister in Scotland.
85. In April 2003 either the Australian or the British Government, I can't remember which, paid for me to fly over to the UK and I met Joan Kerry there. I was over for five weeks and met my sister in Dunfermline but all we had was just a shake of the hand. I actually got on better with my brother-in-law [REDACTED]. We stayed in touch and they ring up every Sunday.
86. Two or three years ago the U.K. Family Restoration Fund paid for me to go back to Scotland and I met my sister and [REDACTED] again. [REDACTED] and I went back to Nazareth House in Aberdeen that time and we met the sister in charge. She asked me if I remembered anything about the place, but the only thing I remembered was the big number 34 on the front wall.

Nationality

87. I got my driving licence without any problems the day I turned seventeen. I've never had any problems getting my health card, my pension or free transport either.
88. I also never had any difficulties getting an Australian passport. I had to get naturalised to get a passport, but I didn't have any problems because I'd been in the country for such a long time. I think the CMT actually paid for my passport. I could probably get a passport from the U.K. too, if I wanted to.

Other matters for relating to migration

89. I am aware that there were inquiries into child migrants by the British Government in 1997 and also by the Australian Senate in 2001 and 2002. I never took part in either of those.
90. I know that there were apologies from the Prime Ministers of the Australian Government and the British Government, but the Christian Brothers have never apologised.

Impact


91. The fact that I never got an education and Bindoon said they had no record of me stopped me getting a job at the BP Refinery. I was pretty upset about that.
92. I have had bad neck pains for some time now and one of the bones is actually out of joint. I wonder now if that is a result of getting beaten so much. Particularly the beating I got from Brother MDJ and Brother MDV in the dairy.
93. My Redress WA statement which I have provided to the Inquiry provides details of the impact that my experiences at Bindoon have had on me.

Final thoughts/Lessons to be learned

94. I go back to Bindoon now and again to put flowers on my friend, [REDACTED], grave. I had to get permission to do it and had to get escorted by security because I believe some of the boys had been smashing the Brothers' graves. I took a photo of [REDACTED]

gravesite one time. Bindoon is now used as a college for girls and boys, so you can only go in the holidays.

95. If I remember right, the Christian Brothers had about forty-four thousand acres at Bindoon, although now they've only got about six thousand left. The rest has been sold and it had been worth a lot of money. I believe the land had been given to the Christian Brothers by the farmer whose name was Musk. It is my understanding that when the farmer gave the land to the Christian Brothers, he put a condition in that the boys had to get a block of land each.
96. A trust fund was set up as a result of the Christian Brothers class action in the late 1990's. In the following few years ex-residents could ask for things like a new fridge or washing machine.
97. I love Australia and there's no way I would ever move back to Scotland, even though my sister and brother-in-law wanted me to. My sister was upset when I said I wouldn't, but Australia is all I know.
98. I think all the people that were put in the care of places like Bindoon should get compensation. A lot of them went through hell. I can see that in them when I go to Tuart Place. Money may not heal them, but it would be something.
99. The State Government, the Australian Government and the British Government put us in those situations and they must have known what was going on. Not once did I ever get a visit from the Welfare or the Government to see how I was treated. It was all hidden under the carpet.
100. The Christian Brothers should have been looked into properly before they were ever allowed to look after children. They were the worst offenders in the world. It was frightening being at Bindoon, especially at night.
101. 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.. 6/12/2018