

SCAI WITNESS STATEMENT

by

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1. WHO I AM AND WHERE I WORK

I am the Director of Education Projects for the Royal Over-Seas League and its former Director of PR and Development. I joined ROSL in Summer 1993.

I am based in the London clubhouse at Park Place, St James's Street, London SW1A 1LR. This is a large Listed Building of three properties put together and has 84 bedrooms for members to use, seven conference rooms, restaurants, bar, cellars and a concert hall.

When I joined the League in 1993, ROSL also had a clubhouse at 100 Princes Street, Edinburgh which also had bedrooms, meeting rooms, restaurant, bar and cellars. This clubhouse was closed in 2018 and it was subsequently sold in 2019.

I mention the layout of the buildings and the closure of the Edinburgh clubhouse as this has had an impact on research for SCAI and on the League's approach to archives and record keeping over the years.

2. WHAT I PROPOSE TO SAY IN THIS STATEMENT

Before outlining what I propose to cover in this witness statement, I should first like to say how sad and utterly overwhelming it was to learn about child migration in the first place and more recently to hear witness statements about the appalling treatment that many received in the country to which they were sent.

As the DG has mentioned, ROSL deeply regrets its involvement which was, as we have learnt from expert witnesses, far more proactive than previously thought.

Having spent some 25 years trying to understand the whole situation of child migration, and more recently taking the lead trying to find out what happened to ROSL's missing child migration records, I propose to say how it came about that I was asked to write the first draft for ROSL's reply to SCAI questions; some of the challenges of research along the way and to give a brief overview of ROSL's approach to record keeping now and in the past.

3. WHY I WAS ASKED TO DRAFT THE FIRST ROSL STATEMENT AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY USED

I was asked to research and prepare ROSL's answers to questions from SCAI in 2018 as I had previously assisted the former Director-General, Major General Roddy Porter with research into ROSL's involvement with child migration for his witness statements to IICSA.

Although I had not attended any of the IICSA hearings – except for that given by Major General Porter in June 2017 – when he retired that same month, I was delegated by the ROSL Central Council to be the main point of contact on child migration matters until the arrival of a new Director General in December 2017.

Following a letter from SCAI in September 2018, the present Director-General, Dr Diana Owen, asked me to continue this research - which involved different dates and questions from those of IICSA - and

to provide answers as far as possible to SCAI questions concerning children whose primary care originated in Scotland.

This first response was forwarded to SCAI with a covering letter and methodology statement in early 2019.

4. METHODOLOGY RE AN OVERVIEW

As mentioned in Dr Owen's statement, ROSL appears to have delegated most of its child migration activities to its Migration Committee, established in 1926 and based in London, originally to support adult migration.

However, since ROSL had not been able to locate any minutes or correspondence from this Migration Committee, or its successor the Migration Bureau, research at ROSL HQ, Park Place, London SW1A 1LR, was therefore largely reliant on the brief reports from the Migration Committee to be found in ROSL Annual Reports, equally brief reports in the Central Council Minutes of the time and back editions of 'Overseas' magazine (Established in 1917. British Library has all editions).

Other documents researched at ROSL HQ for a general overview of ROSL child migration activity included those presented to the House of Commons Health Committee's Inquiry into the Welfare of former British Child Migrants whose third report was published in July 1998, and a small amount of correspondence, press cuttings and documents prepared for the Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse (IICSA) re Child Migration during 2016 – 2018.

5. METHODOLOGY RE SCOTTISH BRANCH INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD MIGRATION

With regard to child migration involving those whose primary care originated in Scotland, Scottish Branch reports in ROSL Annual Reports (held at the London clubhouse) were the main source of information.

However, in early November 2018, a photo album containing over 90 press photos of children attending tea parties at ROSL HQ between 1949-54 before sailing to New Zealand or Australia, was discovered amongst items sent to the London clubhouse from ROSL's Edinburgh clubhouse.

Photocopies of those pictures with captions giving the name, age and hometown of children whose primary care originated in Scotland were forwarded to SCAI.

Also forwarded was a relevant strip cartoon from the Daily Mirror of March 24 to 29 1952 which sought to highlight the benefits of child migration to New Zealand and the encouraging views of Mr Cyril Bavin as mentioned in the recent expert witness report.

In mid-November 2018, further boxes of archives from the Edinburgh clubhouse were searched and nothing further of relevance to this Inquiry was found.

6. INCORPORATION OF EXPERT WITNESS COMMENTS INTO SECOND ROSL SUBMISSION

In September 2019, ROSL gratefully acknowledged and incorporated the additional information from Professor Gordon Lynch into a second, amended statement.

The main reasons why this additional information was not in the original submission was that we had been advised that there was no need to duplicate statements that could be found on the IICSA

website and this was helpful in so far as it allowed more time to search archives from the now closed Edinburgh clubhouse.

We were also keen to try and answer the actual questions as they related to Scotland and having few records ourselves, ROSL has seldom been in a position to either corroborate or expand on the detailed research of others who have had access to material held by other organisations.

7. APPROACH TO RECORD KEEPING AT ROSL LONDON CLUBHOUSE

PRE 1993

I do not have any personal knowledge of this time but it is worth mentioning that between 1925 – 1979, ROSL owned three other nearby properties in London, these being no's 3,4 and 5 Park Place and in 1936/7 added a new Westminster Wing to the one remaining property that it does still have.

Most regrettably, history does not relate in which of these premises child migration records and minutes were kept or where Mr Bavin presumably had an office. It is also possible that at the start of the Migration Committee in 1925, he worked from home or elsewhere as he was not then a member of staff.

The Edinburgh clubhouse was purchased in 1930 and a new wing opened in 1975. In the 1990's it was still considered a potential home for some items from the London clubhouse – usually books by members and small items of furniture or plaques.

OVERVIEW 1993 - 1995

RECORDS

ROSL is a membership organisation for adults and personal 'records' as defined when I joined ROSL in Summer 1993, related mainly to members of which there were then around 18,000.

Until the 1980's when these were computerised, I understood that they were kept in card-index boxes with names, addresses, date of joining, age, number of reciprocal cards requested, subscriptions paid etc per person. These had been kept in the membership office.

MINUTES

The minutes of Central Council, Executive, Future Policy, House Advisory, Membership and other Committees were kept in the Director-General's Office or on shelves in the Strong Room where other items such as the ROSL seal were stored in a safe within the Strong Room.

The strong room key as far as I remember was kept by the Director of Admin and Finance who had an office nearby and application to enter the strong room could be made to him or the DG's office. I do not know who had the code to the safe and presume this was the Director of Admin and Finance/DG.

ANNUAL REPORTS AND 'OVERSEAS' JOURNALS

Back copies of early Annual Reports were in the then DG's office. Current Reports were stored in the PR area and elsewhere. Early copies of the Overseas magazine were in several places: in the then

balcony of the then St Andrew's Hall, in cupboards near the Westminster Entrance and in other spaces around the building.

PLANS, BUILDING AND FINANCIAL RECORDS

Plans and records relating to building works were kept in the General Manager's office and Maintenance office. Financial records were kept in the Finance and Administration office and a room on the third floor.

CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The then Cultural Affairs Department which organised music and art competitions had storage areas behind the stage in the then St Andrew's Hall and elsewhere.

PR AND DEVELOPMENT

My own Dept had a storage cupboard in a corridor and my two staff were also situated at desks in this corridor until office renovations in the late 1990's.

FILE ON CHILD MIGRATION

Anything to do with ROSL's role in child migration (which I first learnt about in 1995 from the then DG, Robert Newell) was to be referred to the DG's office where a file was kept.

I learnt that my predecessor and the Editor of Overseas magazine had helped the DG with photocopying relevant articles and photos in back editions of 'Overseas' as and when required and I therefore inherited this role after joining ROSL.

I also learnt that the London clubhouse had been searched from top to bottom for additional material relating to ROSL's involvement in child migration and that the Edinburgh clubhouse and ROSL branches also did not have any additional material.

It was extremely difficult to get one's head around the whole situation especially after seeing films like Sunshine and Oranges and The Leaving of Liverpool.

The then DG had a similar difficulty especially when we looked at photos in 'Overseas' of very young children leaving for Australia or New Zealand. The DG's mother had told him that poverty was so extreme in the 1920's/30's that her generation could perhaps more easily understand how very poor families thought a better future could be found overseas for their children.

ADVICE AT THE DG'S RECEPTIONS RE CHILD MIGRATION

This whole topic of child migration sometimes came up with members from Australia at the DG Robert Newell's Tuesday Evening Receptions for those staying in the clubhouse at which I was usually required to attend.

On one such occasion (probably around 1996) a ROSL Member who had grown up in Australia took me aside and said he thought we may have difficulties finding out more about child migration 'because a lot of child migrants just don't want to talk about this time. And that includes those who have a happy and successful life now'. I took this advice very much to heart and it later occurred to me that he might himself be a child migrant.

COMBINED PR DEPT/WALK IN INFORMATION CENTRE AND CHILD MIGRANT INQUIRIES

As my department was also a walk-in information centre, 1993 – 2011, and required by Robert Newell (ROSL Director-General 1991-2011), to be open during work hours to members and the general public, we did not always have the time to make or retain lists of all those who visited.

I recall at Robert Newell's request, helping researchers - including child migrants who had contacted him - to look through back copies of 'Overseas' and was helped in this by the ROSL Shop Manageress who would assist with reserving a reading table and chair in the Central Lounge which was near the Shop. She or I also helped with any requested photo copying, logging in and out of the relevant editions and so on.

THE MISSING CHILD MIGRATION FILES AND RECORDS

Concern in the mid 1990's was so great at having no detailed records, files or card index boxes relating to the individual children and the absence of any Migration Committee minutes, that I volunteered to undertake another search.

Part of this search was with the long-standing Cultural Affairs Director as both he and I needed storage space – which incidentally we did not find - and then with the Maintenance Manager, this time to include the boiler room and the roofs in case there was a structure there in which boxes or files could be stored but there was none.

Searches revealed numerous cupboards, under stair spaces and cellar rooms which contained a variety of items from the essential stacked chairs for the then 7 conference rooms, disused furniture from bedrooms and sitting rooms, quantities of hoovers and cleaning materials for the then 5 floors of bedrooms and old files relating mainly to receipts for bedroom stays and membership.

I imagine the weight of paper items stored was several cwt, furniture and catering utensils in tons

8. SPACE AND STORAGE DIFFICULTIES

Space and Storage were a perceived and constant difficulty.

This was partly due to the need to make as many spaces as possible income-generating and being a Listed building, it was difficult to change the layout to accommodate a centralised storage system.

The economic recessions after WW2 (during which part of the Westminster Wing was bombed) had left ROSL in a financially precarious situation. Finances improved after the sale of the three properties in Park Place owned by ROSL since 1925 and the funds raised were used to renovate the present property.

Although responding to child migrant inquiries took priority over pretty much anything else in the 1990's as far as the DG's Office and my department were concerned, other generally perceived priorities in the 1990's were saving the League financially, increasing membership and making financially productive use of available space.

This became even more important as the other Commonwealth club in London with similar facilities started to go under and was later sold. This highlighted ROSL's continuing vulnerability and increased the focus on ensuring financial sustainability for the future.

At the present time, several of the 16 storage rooms in the basement have been turned into offices, including my own - which was once the stationary cupboard.

9. SUMMARY

In summary, archives were and still are in several places around the clubhouse.

In 2005 I made a request for searchable digital archiving but this was turned down due to cost – then £30,000. But as outlined below, this is now a priority.

ROSL did not employ an archivist or librarian and there was no register of where items were stored.

As renovations progressed - a sixth floor of bedrooms was added to the Westminster Wing in 2003 and in 2006 the then St Andrew's Hall with its storage balcony was refurbished to become a concert Hall - staff stored items as best they could.

They also had to take into account that a lot of the storage spaces had to be allocated to the needs of catering, kitchens, cleaning and the stacking of chairs used in the conference and rooms.

10. WHERE WE ARE NOW - MOVING ARCHIVING UP THE PRIORITY AGENDA

Being a listed clubhouse for its 16,000 members, it is understandable that issues of compliance, upkeep and renovation have taken priority in keeping ROSL afloat.

However, under the present DG, archiving and a better means of record keeping are under way with Quotes being sought for digitalisation during February 2020. Five companies have been asked to tender for this exercise.

In 2019 ROSL welcomed a documents intern from University College London to help with rounding up archive material prior to digitalisation and she will be returning in June this year, 2020.

A second intern will also be starting this Summer.

In addition, a member of ROSL's Central Council who is a qualified archivist, is acting in an advisory capacity on the best way to handle and store archive materials.

11. THE ONGOING MYSTERY OF THE MISSING FILES AND RECORDS

The inquiry may wish to know what we think may have happened to the minutes of the Migration Committee and Migration Bureau and the individual records of the children it migrated or helped to migrate.

It is possible that these were extensive - apart from personal details there would presumably have been details as to how children got to their ships, where they stayed before sailing, who looked after their suitcases and many other questions.

Apart from searches by several staff in the 1990's, I and others have more recently gone through as many extraneous files as possible both in London and in the boxes of papers stored in the empty Edinburgh clubhouse before its sale, to see if there was any record of these being stored elsewhere. And have found no such record.

Although this is conjecture, the following are possibilities:

Disposal or storage elsewhere due to sale of ROSL properties in London

Between 1925 - 1979 ROSL owned three other properties in Park Place (now reduced to one) and in 1936/7 added a new Westminster Wing to this current London property.

It is possible in view of WW2 bomb damage, building disruption and the need for extra storage space in the late 1970's while no's 3,4 and 5 Park Place were on the market, that these records were destroyed if there was no legal requirement to keep them and if it was thought at the time that such records were duplicated or held elsewhere.

Possible storage of photo album with books at the Edinburgh clubhouse

The Edinburgh clubhouse was purchased in 1930 and a new wing opened in 1975. In the 1990's, it was considered a potential home for small items such as donated books, other shelf items and a series of donated wall plaques from London. I understand that the Edinburgh clubhouse had already been searched for Migration files in the early 1990's so how the photo album of children attending tea parties at ROSL London before sailings to NZ and Australia, 1947-1953, came to be stored there, remains a mystery. A possible explanation is that it was part of a consignment of hard backed books and visitors' books sent to the Edinburgh clubhouse from the London clubhouse.

Possible storage off site

Whilst we have searched everywhere possible within our ownership, it is just possible that the records could turn up in the future in some other location. However, I have not seen any records of storage facilities outside ROSL premises. In 1997 when organising the ROSL exhibition for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Edinburgh, I asked the then DG, Robert Newell, about the possibility of storing these large panels off site but learnt that ROSL did not have any off site storage facility due to rental costs. The panels were therefore taken to the London clubhouse for storage behind the stage in the then St Andrew's Hall and occasional use at fund raising and other events.

Although several thousand pages of archive material has been read, it is also possible that with searchable, digital archiving a new clue could emerge as to what may have happened to them.

12. THE FUTURE

There is now an ongoing commitment to further research into ROSL's role in child migration and we are working to be able to provide greatly improved searchable archiving for child migrants in the future. We are very grateful for the impetus and new information that has come from the IICSA and SCAI inquiries and especially for the bravery of child migrants who have shared their experiences.

