

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Norma Valerie BARNES

Support person present: No

1. My name is Norma Valerie Barnes. Everyone knows me as Valerie. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1931. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Personal background and qualifications

2. I was born and spent my early life in Yorkshire. I realised from an early age when I was at school that I wanted to work with children. I left school at the age of sixteen and went to London. I worked for a year as a nursery nurse in a residential home. I am not sure but I think it was owned by Dr Barnardos. All the children were under five. I worked there for two or three days a week and the other days I went to a polytechnic and at the end came out with a National Nursery Examination Board certificate. The course was run by London County Council. After that I worked for a year in a day nursery and qualified as a nursery nurse. That was Carlton Hill Community Nursery, Maida Vale, London
3. At nineteen I went back to Yorkshire where I worked in a school nursery in Doncaster. I sometimes helped out in the primary school classes when they were short of staff. It was when I was working there that the head teacher told me I was wasted working in the nursery and that I should go into teaching.
4. I decided to apply to St Katharine's College in Liverpool where after two years I obtained my teaching qualification. I then taught at a Church of England school in Huddersfield. I got married there when I was 22. I worked there until I was 24.

5. In 1956 my husband and I moved to Scotland to follow my husband's work. In Scotland I had to work for a further year in teaching before they gave me a teaching qualification. In England you only need two years teaching experience but in Scotland it is three. I got work with Peebleshire Council and did supply teaching at country schools like Traquair and Innerleithen primary schools and also for Barnardos at Craigerne Residential School.

Craigerne Residential School, Peebles

6. In 1960 Mr Nicholson, the head teacher at Craigerne Residential School, offered me a position as a teacher. I worked there for around a year and a half and then I took a break to spend some time with my husband and our son. I don't remember a lot about my first spell at Craigerne. We moved back to England for a few years and in 1963 I opened a private nursery. My husband got a job back in Scotland and we moved back to Peebles. In 1966 I went back to work at Craigerne where I worked until 1971.
7. Craigerne Residential School sat in its own grounds. The boys lived in the main house where there was also the kitchen and the dining room. Built at the back of the main house three classrooms had been built and a hall. My classroom was part of this hall. From when I left in 1961 and returned in 1966 a new building had been added on to the main house which was more accommodation. The number of boys living there had increased from twenty to around thirty.

Craigerne Residential School staff

Recruitment procedures

8. I can't actually remember applying but I must have done. I am not sure back then what vetting was done. I am certain that I must have provided references from previous employers. I remember I had an interview with the headmaster and Mrs

Betty Trembath who was the Divisional Children's Officer, Scotland for Barnardos. They actually wanted me to live on the premises but I didn't want to and they agreed that I could live outside the school grounds. I told them I could offer a lot more to the boys if I was allowed to have the weekend off. It took a lot out of me dealing with these boys. I didn't do any additional training even though I was dealing with maladjusted boys. There was no requirement to get any special training.

Structure at Craigerne

9. During my first spell Mr Nicholson was the head master. He was very good and I thought very highly of him. When I returned in 1966 Peter Norris was the headmaster and he was excellent. I don't think the school could have had a better headmaster for maladjusted children. He was a Quaker. My husband and I used to jokingly call him and his wife Peter Pan and Wendy. They were such good, kind people. Peter Norris died last year.
10. Pat Campbell was another teacher and he too was very good. He taught the oldest class. The boys respected him because he had been a pilot during the war. He lived in a bungalow just down the driveway from the main house. There was another teacher but I can't remember his name. He was a little odd but he seemed fine with the children. He left following a breakdown. A woman replaced him but she couldn't cope with the children and she too had a breakdown and left. They weren't suitable and shouldn't have been teaching maladjusted children. There was obvious difficulty in finding someone else suitable for this job.
11. Staff were encouraged to be residential but I didn't think this was particularly healthy. Everyone needed a break. In the main house there were other members of house staff. The main ones I remember were husband and wife. He was a house master but I can't remember his name. He was the main member of house staff and the other staff would answer to him. I can't remember their names. Peter Norris was in overall charge of everything. In the house there were cleaners and a cook. It can't have been easy working round the clock with these boys. Several of the residential staff left when I was there.

Personal role and duties

12. I was there as a non-residential day teacher and I was responsible for the children in my class. My main role at the school was to teach the boys reading, writing and arithmetic. I taught all three subjects. When I started, Peter Norris told me that he wasn't going to tell me anything about the background of any of the boys. He said that when I was ready I should approach him and ask. I was happy with this because I didn't think I needed to know. I had very little to do with the boys outwith school hours but I did go on school trips and take the boys out in my car. I also organised concerts which we did for the boys' parents. The boys loved doing this.

Life at Craigerne*General*

13. Craigerne was a school for maladjusted boys. The boys came to the school at the age of seven and left at twelve. All the boys were very bright but were disruptive and challenging. They came from all over the country and the local authorities where the boys lived, paid for them to go to Craigerne. All the boys referred to me as Mrs Barnes.

New admissions

14. Peter Norris would always welcome the new boys to Craigerne and help them settle in to the house. He would then bring the new boys to me. I knew that the boys might take a lot of time to settle in and I helped them all I could.

Daily routine

15. I had no involvement in the morning routine in the main house. All I know is that the house staff would get the boys up in the morning and give them their breakfast. I arrived at the school about half past eight most mornings then left at the end of the

school day. The boys would come over from the main house at nine o'clock. Once or twice a week Peter Norris would hold a service for the boys in the small hall next to my classroom. It wasn't religious and often he would read a chapter from a book. The boys were spellbound. He might then finish off with a short prayer. When Peter didn't have a service I would start the school day with a prayer in my classroom.

Mealtimes

16. The boys had their meals in the dining room in the main house. They had all had breakfast before they came to the classrooms, and I left before the evening meal. The only meal that I ever ate with the boys was at lunchtime in the main house. Teachers supervised the boys at lunchtime. We took it in turns. All the boys ate at the same time. The food was good. I have never had a bad school meal. Sometimes I went home for lunch because I only lived a short distance away across some fields. The boys weren't made to eat if they didn't want to. These boys were the kind that if they didn't want to eat something they would end up throwing their food about. This happened with some of them in their early days at the school before they learned what was acceptable.

Washing and bathing

17. Some of the boys in the classroom wet themselves and occasionally soiled themselves. I usually took the boy over to the main house. The house mother, or whatever she was called, would take the boy and clean them up. This didn't happen very often. I think we kept a record where a child had soiled themselves. All the other boys accepted what happened and there was never any ridiculing or mocking of the boy who had wet himself.

Clothing / Uniform

18. There was no school uniform. The boys just wore their own clothes. I think the main house staff would arrange for new clothes when they needed it.

Leisure time

19. The boys used to play outside in their free time but that was sometimes difficult because they were in an uncontrolled and unsupervised area. The boys were generally very competitive. We taught them team games during school time but often there would be fall outs between the boys. When that happened we just abandoned the game and went back to the classroom. This didn't happen very often.
20. I had plenty books for them to read in my classroom and there was a library in the main house. We had some board games in the classroom which we might have played once all their work was done. It was only the mature children who played with the board games. The younger boys were just a bit too volatile to play these kind of games.
21. We had sports days at the school but they weren't very successful. The boys were very difficult to deal with in this type of environment. When the boys got older and had been at the school for a while their behaviour had improved so it was better.
22. We held concerts in the summer and at Christmas time for the relatives. That was when I was most likely to meet the parents if they bothered coming. The children would usually leave with their relatives after the concert to go home for the holiday period.

Trips and holidays

23. I didn't really have anything to do with the boys out of school hours apart from sometimes at the weekends and other times we would go on trips. Sometimes I would take all the boys in my car and we would go to the River Tweed and they would go swimming in the river. Other times we would go on nature walks, go to the museum or to the park. We did these things during school hours and sometimes after school had finished. Mr Norris would arrange for the boys to go camping. He did a lot for these boys.

Schooling

24. There were three classes at Craigerne. Children were divided according to their age and ability. I had the youngest of the three classes. When I first started there were seven or eight boys in my class. This increased to ten or twelve during the course of my time there. All the boys had high IQs but they couldn't read, write or do maths. They were disruptive but as soon as I got their respect and attention they learned quickly. I got some of them to read within a week. To work with these boys you had to have a certain type of temperament because of the challenges they brought.
25. At break times the boys could really do what they wanted. They could go over to the main house or play in the school grounds. I would often go over to the main house for a coffee and say hello to the house staff. One teacher would supervise the children. A bell would ring for the end of break time and the boys would come back into the classroom. The actual learning lessons were given first thing in the morning as I found the boys' concentration level was higher at that time. As well as the three Rs I used to teach them about nature and wildlife. We did various projects on animals.
26. Whenever the boys become disruptive or unsettled I would read them poetry. They loved when I did this, especially for some reason Spike Milligan poems. This would settle them down. I got the boys to do a test every week to check on their progress. I never read the results out to the whole class because I didn't want to embarrass them or make those with lower marks feel inferior.

Healthcare

27. As far as I remember the boys got a health check before they came to Craigerne. They had their sight and hearing checked. There was a local doctor that the boys went to. It was at a practice in Peebles. The doctor would come to the school if any of the boys were poorly. The boys had regular check-ups at the doctor. There was a dentist in Peebles and the boys were taken there by the house staff. I don't

remember a child being taken to the hospital but a boy may have been taken with a broken arm or something like that. I never went to the hospital with the boys.

Religious instruction

28. A local minister came for a while but he wasn't a success. He came once a month. He was better once he cut his services down because before that he went on too long. I said prayers in the morning at the start of the school day in my classroom. This was my decision to do this. I don't think the other teachers did this. I think religion is important as it all helps with the discipline.

Christmas and Birthdays

29. The boys went home for Christmas. The relatives would generally come to the school on the last day of term and take them away for the Christmas holidays. If the boys didn't have a home to go to they were sent to another Barnardo's home. I can't remember the name of the home.

Running away

30. Some of the boys used to run away. I remember this happening more when Mr Nicholson was the headmaster. It didn't happen so much when Peter Norris was the headmaster. I think he had sorted the boys out. When they ran away it was usually at night time. I am not aware of any time in my classes that the boys were missing because they had run away. I don't know if the boys were punished if they ran away.
31. There was one time I had popped home at lunchtime and my neighbour approached me and asked if I had seen his car. It turned out two boys from the school had run away and found his car with the keys still in it, so they stole it. The police got the boys and the car on the other side of Peebles.

Visitors / Inspections

32. Relatives would come and visit their children more or less when they wanted. A lot of the time parents would say they were coming but didn't turn up and let their child down. It was very sad. Some of the boys didn't even want to go home at weekends when they were allowed. They wanted to stay at Craigerne. The boys were allowed to go home one weekend every term if they wanted to or if they had somewhere to go. We sent school reports to the parents and some parents were more interested than others.
33. Psychologists from Edinburgh used to come into the school and speak to the boys. They never really spoke to us, the teachers. They spoke to the boys on their own and who knows what they were told by the boys. I have no idea who arranged for them to come or what the purpose of them speaking to the boys was. They came once every month and spoke to the boys individually in private. I remember one of the psychologists was George Thompson and he was doing his doctorate on maladjusted children. He didn't come regularly. He asked me to fill in forms for him and other stuff so I helped him. We never got any feedback from these meetings.
34. Social workers would come in and speak to the boys, but I am not sure how often they came. I didn't really have any dealings with them and I didn't think very highly of them. I considered them to be a waste of money. They spoke to the boys on their own and in private.
35. Inspectors from Edinburgh or Glasgow used to come once a year and visit the school and do an inspection on the teaching side. I can't remember if it was the same people who came every year. They inspected the school. I think there were different inspectors who checked the main house. I never saw any report but I assume Peter Norris would have received that. There were never any issues highlighted to me.

36. Mrs Trembath from Barnardos used to visit quite regularly and she spoke to us and the children. She would just come down and have a chat with us and see how things were going.

Review of care / detention

37. As far as I am aware the children who were with us were reviewed on a regular basis by Peter Norris. I only know of one boy who went back to live with his parents following a review. Most of the parents weren't fit to have their children back and some parents didn't want their children back. I don't know who reviewed the children with Peter. I am not sure how often these reviews took place but Peter often asked me how the boys were progressing.

Family

38. We used to have parents nights at school and some of the parents came. Unfortunately more often than not the parents we really wanted to see didn't come. I used to encourage the children to write home to their parents once a month. They would write the letters and we would address the envelopes for them.

Discharge / Life after Craigerne

39. Boys left Craigerne at the age of twelve. They had to move on because we weren't trained to teach above that age. They went to another Barnardo's establishment but I can't remember the name of it, although some of the boys would have gone back home to their family if they had one. Peter Norris used to take children, when they were about to leave Craigerne, on a familiarisation visit to the next school they were going to.

Discipline and Punishment

40. There was no written discipline code of conduct. Peter Norris left it for me to set my own standards and decide on a level of discipline. The only thing Peter Norris and I

disagreed on was the boys swearing. I did not allow any of my boys to swear in my classroom. His opinion was that they should be allowed to swear, but he let me run the class the way I wanted to. The boys quickly learned what they were allowed and not allowed to do in my classroom. If boys were doing something that wasn't right I would tell them so and that was the end of the matter. They would be told to get on and do their work and if they weren't finished they wouldn't get out at break-time. It was all about being fair with the boys. I never kept a record of any discipline.

41. Some of the boys played up and were naughty expecting to get put out of the classroom. This was what had happened to them in other schools they had been at. I didn't and I kept them in the class where I could keep an eye on them. In my whole teaching career I never once used the belt on a pupil. I never saw and I don't think any other teacher used the belt. I never saw any of the other teachers having to discipline the boys.
42. If there had been any issues with the boys that I needed to take further I would speak to Peter Norris. Alternatively I could speak to Pat Campbell. I do not recall any situation when I needed to speak to either of them about any situation or problem that I couldn't handle. The only thing we would do was swap funny stories about some of the antics that the boys got up to.
43. There was a book held by Peter Norris where any discipline administered was to be recorded. It was in his office. He showed me this book at the start. I never wrote anything in this book because I never needed to.

Abuse

44. I never saw anything at Craigerne that I considered to be abuse. I never saw any of the other teachers hit any of the boys.

Reporting of abuse whilst at Craigerne

45. If any of the boys had any issues or worries about anything I suppose they would come to me for advice if they wanted to. The problem with some of these boys is that they told lots of untruths.
46. I know that lots of the boys used to tell untruths to the psychologists when they came to visit them. The boys used to tell me what they had told them and it was all made up. I spoke to the psychologist and said that I hoped they didn't believe everything that the boys told them.

Leaving Craigerne

47. I left Craigerne in 1971 because I wanted to go back into an ordinary school. I had been there five years and I loved the boys but I needed a change. I went back to teaching in the community with a view to considering coming back if I felt that I wanted to. Pat Campbell did the same as me and he left and became the headmaster of a small primary school in a village near Findhorn. I left and went to Peebles Primary for five years. I then decided I wanted to go for a deputy headmaster position and I worked at Danderhall Primary school in Midlothian. I worked there for fifteen years. I retired at the age of 62.

Lessons and Hopes

48. The role of the head teacher is the most important person in the school. If the right head teacher is selected then good staff will follow. Staff must be caring people who want to work with children. I hope this Inquiry stops abuse happening to any children.
49. 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.....

29. 8. 18.