

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

IXZ

Support person present: No

1. My name is IXZ I am known as IXZ My date of birth is 1975. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before boarding school

2. I was brought up in [REDACTED] on the west coast. My parents are both still around. I have a sister who is two years older than me. I went to the local primary school for the full term of seven years. My parents were interested in alternative places to the local secondary school. They were more obsessed than I was with the reputation of that place and words like "opportunities" that come along when people talk about education and, in particular, private education. My parents came from humble backgrounds and were professionals. It surprises me to this day that they were able to put me through Merchiston. They probably sacrificed a percentage of their salaries. My sister went to a private girl's day school.
3. There were a few options explored, including Hutchison's Grammar School (Hutchie), Keil in Dumbarton, and Merchiston. We expressed an interest in Merchiston and visited by invitation. They paid attention to individuals to try to get them in there. The school got you along on your own with your family. They spent time giving you a tour. You'd meet the head teacher and have an interview. There wasn't an entry exam per se. There was for Hutchie, which I passed. I liked the look of Merchiston and was impressed. With a place like that, or any institution, you can't try before you buy in terms of the intangible cultural aspect of the place.

4. It was a fast thing. It had been spoken about from about age ten when I was leaving primary school. All the touring and visits to these places happened over the summer. Ultimately it came down to my preference. We discussed them all and settled on Merchiston. I liked David Spawforth, the head teacher. I found it all impressive and I liked the idea. I was also very apprehensive because I didn't know what I was saying yes to. It was a bit abstract but what you see is impressive with its big buildings and sweeping playing fields. The brochures talked about the usual tropes associated with these schools, which is character building and so on. You don't really know when you're that age.
5. We went up to the school before it started to get all the uniform and sports kit. There was a shop there. They measured me up. You'd to get a trunk to bung your stuff in. It was a nod towards the jail, you put all the stuff that used to belong to you in this trunk that gets put out the way and then you get a uniform. It was a steep learning curve and a realisation that there was much more to this than I thought.
6. There was me and another lad from home going to Merchiston. We talked about it as school came to an end. It was good to have someone from home.

Merchiston Castle School, Colinton Road, Edinburgh

7. I joined the school in August 1986 when I was eleven years old. I left after two academic years, in the summer of 1988 when I was almost thirteen. The school motto was *Ready ay Ready*. The main building had classrooms and there were other satellite buildings that were classrooms. There was a subterranean bit for the choir that you were forced to join. Joining it was learning your fate in terms of the regimented structure and the culture. There were things to do all throughout the day. Every day was planned up until your bedtime, including Sunday. I didn't know the extent of the regimented structure before I joined. I thought I would get down time about three or four o'clock because that was what I was used to. There were pupils from all over the world.

Pringle House

8. The first boarding house I stayed in was Pringle House. I stayed there for one academic year and then moved to Chalmers West for the second year. Pringle House is the first building on your left as you enter through the main gate. There were two age groups, boys in the year below who were younger me and boys my age. The housemaster was James Rainy Brown.
9. There was a front door which was reserved for the prefects and staff. Pupils went through a side door. There was a main corridor. Rainy Brown's office was to the right and his dwelling quarters to the left. There was a living room that was just for him and a desk, and a room he slept in. There was a kitchen as well. The rest of it was different wings and dormitories. There were a couple of big dorms and smaller ones. There were about fifty boys in Pringle House. They did a house meeting once a week where we all gathered.

Housemaster - James Rainy Brown

10. Rainy Brown lived in Pringle House all the time. He was approachable and people could drop in and see him. Whether you wanted to or not was a different thing. I didn't like him much. He was the only member of staff on site during the night. There was a cleaner who he introduced as someone we could engage with and speak to. I can't remember her name. She was okay. There was a structure of prefects and there were three of those. They were pupils in their final year who were sixteen or seventeen years old. We saw them as the nearest thing to adults.
11. There was a carrot and stick thing going on. Rainy Brown liked giving out *Mars Bars* if you were doing well. I only ever got one *Mars Bar*, when I told him he sounded like Prince Charles. Apart from that, I didn't have a terribly good relationship with him. Rainy Brown had his favourites. If he liked you then you'd find yourself in a better dorm. He gave them nicknames, maybe your first name followed by your initial. That meant he liked you. You'd maybe get invites to his wee area with his desk. He called

it the boot room but it was his bedroom where he slept on a mattress on top of a stack of beer. He didn't drink. I saw that and thought how odd it was. It was an odd room full of odds and ends. It looked like a workroom. I was only there the once. That was the time I made that comment.

The other Boarding Houses

12. There were six boarding houses called Pringle, Chalmers West, Chalmers East, Rogerson East, Rogerson West, and Evans. Evans was the final year one. Chalmers and Rogerson were symmetrical buildings. I never made it to Rogerson. If you joined at the earliest point then you'd have two years in Pringle and move as one year group into Chalmers West. You moved through the houses as the years went on and they got much bigger as more pupils joined as well as an intake of day boys. Only about two per cent of the cohort were day pupils. Chalmers West had three or four floors of dormitories, a day room, and that sort of thing. Each boarding house had dwelling quarters for the housemaster.

Staff

13. There was a housemaster for each of the six houses. Rainy Brown was a man apart from the other teachers and had his own little world in Pringle House that he protected. He didn't want to let people in. I'm sure the other teachers heard rumours about him but they didn't ask us anything. Rainy Brown was always in Pringle House or teaching and not socialising much with members of staff.
14. QZA was the housemaster in Chalmers West. He was married with children, which was the difference. Rainy Brown was on his own. I don't remember the other housemasters. The housemasters also taught and Rainy Brown taught physics. The guy was OPA and Mr Turner was his understudy. Mr Hibbins was another music teacher. Frank Hadden was a former Scottish rugby coach. He was a really good guy. There was a swimming teacher called Mr Lemon.

15. There were a couple of female teachers. One taught Latin. Miss Tarbain confused me because I was expecting a man. I thought it was Mr Bain. She taught the violin. We called the female teachers "ma'am". It was as if you were talking to the Queen. That was the culture. There are other teachers I can picture but I don't know their names. We had nicknames for a lot of them.
16. The headmaster had a wee house within the premises. You were invited up there when you joined the school to have a welcome with him and his wife. That was staggered and I was in the third or fourth group that went up. They were very nice and did their best to make you feel welcome. It was all tins of cola and buns, and a couple of games. The headmaster was okay.

Prefects

17. Prefects played a pastoral role. They did roll calls. The ones I met were okay and I felt they were on my side. If I got into bother then I felt they were good. I didn't know about them giving punishments.

Routine at Merchiston Castle School

First day

18. On the first trip through there, I had my first panic attack. I suppose it had something to do with everything that was happening. I was very anxious and it was a sudden release of anxiousness. I bolted for the car door at the roundabout. I wasn't sure what I was doing and we stopped and had a chat about it. My mum and dad were excellent, my mum in particular.
19. It was all very strange and new, and sudden. My parents dropped me off at the door to Pringle House. There was no coming in. There wasn't much of a welcome. It was, "You come in and we'll take over, see you later." Rainy Brown was there. That was the

first time I met him. Your parents leave and you're there alone, not knowing where to start. It's like entering a room full of strangers. It quickly sorts itself out.

20. I was shown my dorm bed and met the people next to me. They were nice. It was a late in the day arrival so it was time to get some food and off to sleep. It really began the next day.

Daily Routine

21. There was a tannoy system throughout the place. You were woken by a siren that was like a ship's siren, every morning. It was loud. You knew what it was and what it meant. It was at 7:15 am or 7:30 am and later on a Sunday. You get up and make your bed. You had to keep it tidy and change your bed yourself every now and again. There was a noticeboard that organised you with when things had to be done. You checked the noticeboard a lot. There were other things on there, like grades and feedback on stuff. There were dorm inspections and you'd get pulled up if your room was a mess. I didn't get into trouble for that, although I did for plenty else.
22. In the dorm was a wee area where you kept your things. It was taken up with what you needed for being at the school, such as rugby kit and shoes. There wasn't much of your own stuff. I had a can of deodorant and a *Walkman* that I could use to listen to music. You were allowed things in the kitchen. You didn't have free rein as to what that would be but there was a fridge. There were no luxuries and little autonomy over what you had.
23. You get ready to go for your breakfast in the main building. You get back. Then you do the choir. I didn't want to do choir. This OPA [redacted] guy came in and said I'd be joining [redacted] I said I didn't want to but everybody was in the [redacted] and there was no choice. I capitulated and grew to like the [redacted]. You'd be called in for rehearsals before big performances to the parents or out in the city at churches. I liked music and the school were helpful with that. I liked playing the violin and the guitar.

24. After the choir you'd get some timetabled learning, a break, more timetabled learning, lunch, and then rugby for hours, every day. I didn't want to play rugby either but that was also not up for discussion. For years, I hated rugby and I've only just started to like it. I liked football but you couldn't play football as a school sport. On the face of it, there was a lot going on and things to do but most of it was regimented. You were doing things that were not necessarily your choice. After the rugby they had some late classes between 4:00 pm and 5:00 pm. That took you up to teatime when we all gathered in a big dining hall.
25. You had a shower after rugby or games. There were a few shower rooms and they were communal. There were two or three baths in a row and they never seemed to be in use. They were open plan so why would you want to have a bath there? In Pringle, Rainy Brown just allowed himself in the showers whenever he felt like it. If he wanted to walk in on you in the shower then that's what he would do. That was common. In Chalmers in the second year, there were changing rooms and you went in and got showered. Chalmers was a very different experience for me.
26. The food wasn't remarkable. Some of it was okay and I don't remember it being all that bad. There were frozen spareribs, baked beans, and deep fried stuff. It was made in the kitchens and they were nice folk. They served your dinners. You sat in your year group and usually with your groups of friends, with a prefect at the table. You were allowed snacks and there was a kitchen in all the houses if you wanted a slice of toast or something. After teatime you'd have a house meeting and a roll call. There was a roll call every morning and night. The prefects did that. Most of the prefects were okay. I didn't come across one that I didn't like.
27. The panic attacks happened a few times at school after the first one. There was a house meeting and Rainy Brown was talking. I switched off, went into despair, and ran out the room. It was a panic attack and I wasn't in control of them.
28. Saturdays were 9:00 am to 12:00 pm for lessons. Sundays you had to attend a church assembly and sing hymns and worship. In the weekend afternoons, you could more

or less do what you pleased. You could play football if you wanted to or play video games or music.

29. The uniform was a kilt, a blue blazer, a beige blazer, trousers, and shoes. There was loads of stuff. Then there was rugby kit and all that.
30. There was a game's room with a game's console. There was an academic library in the main building but no library in the boarding house. In Pringle we spent our spare time in the house. It was all skateboards and movies. There was a room we called the *Rec Room* and we watched films in there. In the second year you could do other stuff.
31. Rainy Brown took us to the Commonwealth Swimming Pool a few times and to a reservoir. You could get "leave out" where you could go into Edinburgh for the day on the bus or into Colinton, the wee village. Your money was kept for you by Rainy Brown and you could ask for it. We never had an overnight trip.
32. It was all rugby in the winter. You had to play rugby whether you wanted to do that or not. I resisted rugby enough to be made the touch judge in the end. I had a flag and called things out. In the summer it turned into cricket and athletics. They had a wee pool where you had swimming lessons and a wee golf course that was more for our free time.
33. I didn't have any problems with the schooling. I thought it was okay. There's nothing memorable. It was English, maths, languages, and a bit of science. Most of my memories are of life away from the academic classes. They were small classes of between twelve and fifteen in order that you could thrive or do better, that was the theory anyway. That was one of the selling points of the place. An hour or a couple of hours were built into your day so that you could do homework. That was done in your house or dorm.
34. The school had a healthcare place and a nurse. I was ill once with a viral thing. You sat out or lay down in there for a day or so. They carried out the usual medicals and jabs.

35. On Sundays they had a church service. There were hymns and worship. I didn't feel immersed in a religious culture. The choir sung a lot of songs of worship and it was religious in theme. All pupils attended the service and there was nothing like you'd see today, with diversity policies.
36. I went home for October break, Christmas, Easter, and summer. The school put on a coach that took us home to Ayr where I'd get picked up. Those were the only times I went home. You could get visits from your parents and I often did. They took you out for a day, by arrangement. My mother noticed that I kept looking at my watch and said would I stop doing it. I've done it ever since. Your whole day is regimented and you grow into that culture of what was happening next and being on time.

School contact with family

37. They had Open Days where parents could come and see what was happening but those were organised, curated days where things were arranged. It was all about shiny shoes and tidy dorms. A couple of times a year, parents could meet Rainy Brown and ask him questions. You could not show up unannounced. It wouldn't be allowed and it all had to be arranged. My parents always arranged it because they were coming from a fair distance away.
38. You got something in writing about your performance and that went to your parents. There was nothing formal or in writing about pastoral care.
39. My mother feels Rainy Brown froze the parents out completely. They weren't allowed into the building and whatever was going on, they were not involved. That was an explicit locking out of parents. My mum speaks about that a lot still today. Rainy Brown made her skin crawl and, straightaway, she thought there was something wrong here and this guy doesn't want us to see anything. He's shutting the door in our face, almost literally. She was suspicious of him.

Pastoral Care

40. I felt I could speak to my friends about stuff if I wanted to but they were also eleven or twelve. I don't think there were any adults I could speak to. There was an old fella who lived in one of the wings called Balfour Powell. We used to go and see him. He was a retired housemaster who decided to stay on the wing. He was a genuinely kind, concerned, old fella. He chatted to you and I probably felt okay speaking to him. We got good vibes off him.

Discipline

41. There wasn't a charter or anything that we were aware of about behaviour or discipline. There was no orientation and you learnt as you went on. The year 1986 was when they abolished corporal punishment. I dropped an F bomb in the dorm and Rainy Brown asked who did it. I said it was me and he was itching to give me a belting. You could smell how badly he wanted to go for whatever they used but he didn't do it.
42. I got into bother here and there and the teachers reported back to your housemaster. You would end up on a list on the noticeboard in the boarding house. You knew you were for the high jump, whether it was gardening or a cold bath punishment from Rainy Brown. If you screwed something up then you'd get a gardening job, if it was mild. He'd say to dig all that up and plant some flowers. I talked too much in one class and there was a disco that night with a girl's school. I had to sit that out and not take part. There were blue papers which was literally a sheet of blue paper with lines. You'd write out a hundred times what you were not to do.

Abuse at Merchiston Castle School

James Rainy Brown

43. Rainy Brown was voyeuristic and devious. The voyeurism involved him exposing himself or encroaching on your privacy. He made lewd and inappropriate comments.

He was corrupt in the sense that there was this toxic culture which was of his own fashioning. He created the culture and operated within it. It was based on free and easy movement between undressed eleven year old children, having punishments that were not appropriate, and day trips. Rainy Brown betrayed a lot of the parents.

44. There was coercive behaviour. If you'd done something wrong then you were on the cold bath list, on the noticeboard in Pringle House. Rainy Brown had you report to the shower room at a certain time of day. It was an odd time when the showers weren't in use, such as 10 am. He was the only adult there. He called it a cold bath and it was unique to him. He was there in his rugby kit with his whistle.
45. I was told about the cold bath and thought, "What the hell is that?" People said you just go in the bath and it is cold water. What they don't mention is that Rainy Brown has you strip naked and stand in a line with other naked pupils, waiting your turn. There were four or five of us. You had to step up and go in this thing. Rainy Brown shoved you down to your shoulders and you'd to wait there a minute. He made sure you were down all the way. Then you got out and went in the shower. That was a punishment and everyone felt awkward.
46. Rainy Brown had a bit out the back called *The Secret Garden*. How creepy is that? It was a walled garden with an outdoor pond. In the summer, you could have it out there, that was the option. Rainy Brown said, "Why don't we make it fun and go into The Secret Garden?" We undressed in the garden and he had us lined up naked outside. I had two cold baths inside and one outdoors. I can't remember what I did to get those. I don't remember doing anything that would have that consequence. In law, I don't know what the behaviour is but I think I'm describing sexual abuse there.
47. I had moved into a dorm at the front of the building. There were only three of us in it. I'd negotiated my way in there and there was a bit more privacy. There was a shower room up from there where there were just two or three showers. I was in there one day, having a shower after a game of rugby. Rainy Brown wandered in. He was naked and wearing just a towel. He hung his towel up and made a lewd remark to me. It was something like, "Ooo, that's a very hard one." He was describing the shape of what he

saw in front of him. The remark was not appropriate and I wondered if I was hearing right. He was comfortable wandering into an area where an eleven year old boy was showering and start bantering with you. It was as if he was saying we were going to have a shower and a chat. I switched off the shower and got the hell out.

48. We went in a school mini-bus with Rainy Brown on trips to the countryside to a reservoir. It was an opt-in thing and you weren't compelled to go. He was the only adult on the trip. Once you were there, he had everyone strip off, skinny dipping. Rainy Brown was naked too. He'd say to have a run up and down the bank and see who's fastest. We were running up and down, eleven years old and bollock naked. At that point, with the cold bath as well, I was thinking this guy was obviously a creep. That's as far as it went and Rainy Brown wasn't physical with me.
49. No-one told any teachers. There was a culture that you didn't snitch. We all thought this was the way things were done and that it was the culture. We thought people knew these things happened, that it was normal, and must be okay because it's happening on the school's watch. We didn't talk about the things we didn't like or present ourselves as hard done by. That's the way eleven year old boys are.

Peer Abuse

50. A good friend of mine was bullied at Merchiston and that was a visible part of the culture. I learned my way around that by using humour and making people laugh. There was a quiz and prizes at the end of year. I was always the clown, or comedian, or the person who does the best impressions.
51. I didn't bully but I was bullied by a guy in the year above me who was very unkind. He threw jibes, called me names, and said stuff. He'd wind you up. There was nothing physical and it was all psychological. It lasted for the couple of years I was there. I was sufficiently away from him most of the time so that I didn't feel I had to speak to anyone about him. I thought I'd just deal with it.

Leaving Merchiston Castle School

52. In the summer of 1988 after the second year, I pleaded with my parents. I had a dark summer in terms of my mood on holiday. We were in Majorca and I spent three weeks in my room, unhappy. It wasn't going well. I said I didn't like it and I asked for freedom. I said it was all regimented and I'd like a bit of autonomy over what I wanted to do. Aspects of the way I felt was probably linked to Rainy Brown but it was all aspects of a culture that I was rejecting. I wanted more control over my day. I managed to persuade them and they let me out. I was almost thirteen years old.

Life after boarding school

53. I went to a Grammar School. It was a 9:00 am until 3:30 pm school. On my first day a female teacher told me I didn't have to call her "ma'am". That's how conditioned you were. I asked a friend what happened next at 3:30 pm and he said he didn't know about me but he was going home. I thought that was fantastic.
54. It wasn't an easy transition. It was better academically. Everything was different. The classes were larger, the day was different, and the support was different. I wasn't an academic high achiever until later life. I stayed at there for the remainder of my secondary school education. I went to university and then into a career. I went back as a mature student and I work at a university now.

Impact

55. Going to Merchiston was my initiation into panic attacks and I've had those ever since. I've received various interventions about those and they can get bad at times. It was a big existential snap that happened at that time because there was a big change in routine.

56. I joined a gym recently and I find it very hard to undress in a public changing room. I have a sense of shame and anxiety. I associate the undressing with humiliation. I think there's other folk watching. That's a consequence. It's a small but significant thing. I think it's there for life.
57. I'm still always looking at my watch and thinking about what's happening next.
58. My mother has felt a lot of guilt about sending me there, as she puts it. I remind her it was an agreement and she didn't send me. She has a lot of concerns with the school. My mother feels Rainy Brown betrayed her and all the other parents.

Reporting of Abuse

59. When I was sixteen or seventeen, I mentioned to my mother what had happened. She has always been easy to speak to. I was still at school in Glasgow. My father knows as well. They were both angry that Rainy Brown was allowed to be in that position. They felt betrayed and disproportionately disappointed in themselves because they said they shouldn't have sent me there. I've said we all agreed I should go there and hope I've made them feel better about that aspect of things.
60. My parents didn't make any complaint. I don't know if it's worth it or not. It crosses my mind from time to time but I don't think I would seek to do that. There were people who had a lot worse done to them. There are people who can't be listened to. There have been suicides.

Treatment / Support

61. I had a counsellor a couple of years ago who I saw about the anxiety. I told him about this and he was horrified. At age eleven you think it's normal but it's only as you grow older you realise how abnormal it is. Speaking about it has helped me.

Revisits

62. I went back twice, once in 1999 with my sister and for a tour in 2018. It's funny I went back twice. I went back for catharsis, to get it out of my mind, and to go back and see the place. It's an important time of your life and your formative years. I felt I had to go back to Pringle because of all of this. I wondered what it was like now and I wanted to see these places again. It was a good thing to see it and get it out of my mind. I don't think I'll be back now.
63. The first time I went back in 1999, Rainy Brown was there. I wanted to look him in the eye and see if he had something to say to me. I wondered if he'd say sorry. I had a quick look at Pringle House. He had very little, if anything, to say to me. I said hello and he was not interested. He didn't want to engage in conversation, whether he was afraid or done with people when they turn into adults. He was cold, cagey, and wouldn't look me in the eye. Rainy Brown was in the same role. He was hawking about the boys waiting to get on the rugby pitch and he was polishing somebody's shoes.
64. I went for a proper tour in 2018, after Rainy Brown had died. I wanted to see what Merchiston was like now and what they would say about him. It seemed better and healthier. I mentioned Rainy Brown and I touched a nerve. Rainy Brown is obviously anathema to them. He's taboo and not spoken about. They were hoping I'd mention another year when I gave them the years I was there. I had mixed feelings. I walked away from a lot of friendships by leaving all of a sudden. That's always bothered me a bit. I'm now back in touch with two people that I haven't seen for 35 years and we're talking about some of this stuff. You now think that place was a very toxic culture.
65. The sights and smells of the place are evocative. It's powerful. They trigger lots of memories and feelings. The smells in particular are what take you back and you remember how you felt at the time. The place was in a vacuum. It was in a place in Colinton where life was normal and then you had this institutionalised school with its policies and processes. You were one of the folk inside, at the mercy of whatever they wanted you to do. All that comes back to you. I walked into the hall where they had

their Sunday service and thought I hadn't smelled that since 1988. I was in the chapel and it was a lot smaller than I remembered.

Records

66. I haven't thought about asking for any records from the school. I probably wouldn't want to engage in a conversation with them.

Lessons to be Learned

67. There was a broken line of reporting and certainly one that wasn't healthy. Rainy Brown either got away with what he was doing or what he was doing was okay with school. It's one of the two. I think there's a bit of both going on, there was some knowledge and they buried their head in the sand. It's about transparency and having quality checks around how these schools operate. None of this stuff would happen now, although I don't know how boarding schools operate now. There's much about them that is the same.
68. There has to be a firm set of expectations around people who are in carer and pastoral roles around monitoring of what they're up to. People can't be left alone in that environment. There have to be two people to hold each other to account. We are in an age of surveillance and I don't know if dorms have CCTV.

Other information

69. I hope the Inquiry will come up with laws, policies, and directives for boarding schools. There should be conditions as they enjoy charitable status. That could be a bargaining chip. They have got to be more accountable. It is a bygone era. We're in an era now where there is a lot more transparency. It can't happen again.

70. Rainy Brown left Merchiston a million pounds in his will. I don't know what they've done with that. Maybe it should be given to the people who are really suffering, who were physically abused by him and find their lives hard to lead, maybe contemplating suicide. It shouldn't be going to a new library. That's honouring him.
71. 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... 7/11/23