

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

ISH

Support person present: No.

1. My name is ISH. My date of birth is 1956. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Life before going to boarding school

2. I was born in Alnwick, Northumberland. My parents were and . My father was a chartered accountant and my mother was a retired nurse. I was brought up in the Gosforth area of Newcastle. I had one sister, , who was two years older than me. She died about five years ago. didn't go away for secondary school. She went to Gosforth Grammar School.
3. I went to Ascham House School in Gosforth from the age of four and a half to thirteen. I stayed on an extra year at Ascham House because I was sitting the scholarship exam for Merchiston. By that stage, the decision had been taken that I would go away for school rather than to the local fee-paying grammar school. My parents gave me an option about further education. Effectively, they asked me what I wanted to do. They told me that I could go away if I wanted. They had narrowed it down to two schools, Merchiston or Rossall in Blackpool. If I had stayed at home, I could have attended Royal Grammar School, Newcastle which is where my two sons subsequently went.
4. I thought that I quite fancied the idea of going away to school. I didn't know anything about either Merchiston or Rossall so I asked my parents why they'd selected them. Ascham House was a sort of feeder school for Rossall and a lot of boys from Ascham

went there. I think that there had only been a handful of boys who went to Merchiston from Ascham. My parents knew a Scottish school's inspector, Jimmy Cameron, who described Merchiston as being the happiest public school in Scotland. Certain public schools in Scotland had a bit of reputation for being quite hard-line, but that was why they settled on Merchiston.

5. I went to visit Merchiston within the year before I started there. I liked the set-up. I thought that the grounds looked fantastic. Merchiston had a reputation for rugby, which I was good at. It seemed to have a lot of facilities. I had no idea what to expect because I didn't know anything about public schooling, but I told my parents that I'd quite like to go there. I think the recommendation of Jimmy Cameron, the school's inspector, also swayed my views.
6. To get into the school, I also had to sit the common entrance exam. It wasn't a very challenging exam. I used to joke that if you could spell your name on the exam paper, you got in. After I arrived at the school, I was offered a scholarship which partially paid the school fees. That was the icing on the cake as far as my parents were concerned. They had been financially prepared for me to go to Merchiston without the scholarship, but it saved them some money.
7. I had a very happy childhood. Neither of my parents had been to university. I think that I was the first one in the family to follow a privileged educational background. My sister went to a fee-paying school in Newcastle. She was very political and she asked to be moved out of it and into a state school. She felt that fee-paying schools were wrong. I didn't have those views at that stage. My parents were alive to what their children wanted. They allowed me to choose where I wanted to go.

#### **Merchiston Castle School, Colinton Road, Edinburgh**

8. I went to Merchiston in [REDACTED] of 1970 when I was thirteen. I was one of very few people who went there at that time of year. I think it was something to do with sitting the scholarship exam. Most of my friends from Ascham had left the previous term, but I

stayed on an extra term with other boys who were being prepared for the scholarship exam. That seemed to be unusual in comparison to the Scottish system. I arrived at the school, having sat my common entrance exam. I then sat the scholarship exam while at Merchiston, maybe about a month after I arrived. There were other boys from Scottish prep schools who sat the scholarship exam with us, but they hadn't started at Merchiston at that point. I remember that the results were announced in the school dining hall. It was announced that I had got a scholarship. It was also announced that [REDACTED] who subsequently became one of my good friends, got a scholarship but he hadn't started at the school yet.

9. One of the reasons that Jimmy Cameron described Merchiston as happy was the house system. Most public schools had house systems where you went into a house and stayed in that house throughout your schooling. You would be living with boys aged from thirteen to eighteen. Merchiston had a completely different system. It wasn't house based. We did have houses, but that was really only to have inter-house sports competitions but we moved from building to building, within our year group, so that everyone living in a house was roughly the same age, every year.
10. I think there were between 300 and 400 boys at the school, probably about 350. The age range was thirteen to eighteen/eighteen and a half. Some boys left at sixteen after sitting their O'levels. There were a lot of farmers' sons at Merchiston. A lot of parents wanted their sons to have a public school education, but also wanted them on the farm as soon as possible. I think they disappeared after sitting their O'levels..
11. I was still younger than most people when I went to Merchiston so I went into Pringle House for my first term. Pringle House was usually for boys who hadn't been away to boarding school or were quite young for their year. It was separate from the rest of the school, down at the bottom of the drive into the school. The housemaster there was James Rainy Brown. If you looked at Merchiston, there was the main teaching block and round the back, off to the left were Chalmers East and West. On the right-hand-side were Rogerson East and West. After Pringle, I moved on into Chalmers West for a year where the housemaster was George Donaldson. I then went into Chalmers East, where the housemaster was Ivor Valentine Balfour-Paul. The next year, I went

to Rogerson East, which was on the other side of the school. The housemaster there was Kenneth Houston. My housemaster in Rogerson West was Brian Thompson. There were probably 75 to 80 boys in each house and about 25 prefects who were allocated between the various houses.

12. I'm not sure how many teachers there were at Merchiston, but I would say there were probably about forty or fifty. Donald Forbes was the headmaster throughout my time there. The headmaster was quite removed and we didn't see a lot of him. He was a pretty ineffectual guy. I understand that his services were subsequently dispensed of when O'level and A'level results were going down and down.
13. Housemasters had day to day pastoral care for the boys. There were also other masters who lived in rooms in the houses. Most of the houses had bachelor masters. CDR [REDACTED] was an example of that in Rogerson East. The housemaster there was Kenneth Houston. He was married and lived in a house on the grounds of the school. They had built some new bungalows and he was one of the first to get one. CDR [REDACTED] CDR [REDACTED], who was a bachelor at the time, had his own rooms in Rogerson East, which meant that there was a figure of authority there other than the prefects.

### **Routine at Merchiston**

#### *First day*

14. I can remember the early days of being at Merchiston. My parents drove me to the school. I had a massive trunk with all my stuff in it, including my kilt. I went into Pringle House initially. There were probably ten boys in the dormitory with five beds on either side. I was put in a bed next to a boy called [REDACTED], who also came from Newcastle. He had been to Newcastle Preparatory School. I knew him because I had played rugby against him when I was playing for Ascham. He was a good rugby player. We became good friends. I'm still very good friends with him and I was his best man. I think it was probably a deliberate act on the school's part, to put me near someone from Newcastle.

15. I think the prefect in Pringle might have shown us around. There were only two prefects in Pringle. One of the prefects was [REDACTED], who I subsequently met. I think he became the assistant to the Earl of [REDACTED]. The two prefects in Pringle were nice guys. I think the school deliberately selected sensitive, sensible people to give a soft landing to those who were younger and hadn't previously been away to school.

*Mornings/bedtime*

16. Essentially, the procedure was that for each year you were at the school you progressed up one house with boys of your own age. The only boys who weren't the same age as you were the four or five prefects. They were allocated a room in the house so they didn't sleep in the dormitories with the other boys. I think that was very unusual. I haven't come across any other schools that had that system. I thought that it was a good system. I think it did prevent the bullying that I've heard went on in other boarding schools.
17. I think we got up about 8:00 am. If you were doing fagging, you sometimes had to get up earlier to get your duties out of the way. I have a recollection of bells, like a fire alarm, ringing to get you up. We then went for breakfast in the main dining room. There was a roll call in the evening to make sure everyone was in their dormitory at a certain time. After roll call, you had about fifteen minutes to read. A prefect would then come in and say "lights out" and put the lights out. I presume lights out was earlier for the younger houses. I wasn't aware of any bed-wetting.
18. In the more senior houses, you were likely to be late for roll call if you'd snuck out of the grounds to go to a pub. We used to do that after rugby matches, which was a privilege for the rugby team. The senior roll call was at 10:00 pm, which was pub closing time in Edinburgh. We weren't supposed to go to pubs, but they knew that was where we went. It was against the rules, but the staff almost turned a blind eye to that.
19. I think there were four dormitories in each house. There was a dorm captain, who was a boy seen as being more responsible. He was encouraged to report any issues to the prefect. In Pringle, there were two prefects who had their own bed studies. They were

available through the night. In the other houses, the prefects slept in the prefects' room, which was close to the dormitory. If there was a commotion, the prefects would hear it and come out and issue blue papers.

#### *Mealtimes/food*

20. The main dining hall was near the study blocks. The whole school ate meals together and we ate within our house groups, sitting at long tables. There was a top table where the headmaster sat along with the prefects. I think the headmaster ate with us at lunchtime and sometimes at dinnertime.
21. The food was pretty terrible. There was a lot of haggis at breakfast time, which you either like or you don't. I like it now, but I didn't like it then. The food was quite greasy and not quality fayre. I do remember people saying that they were hungry. Some of the more senior boys used to go into the kitchen, asking the kitchen staff for bread and things, because they weren't getting enough food. I don't ever recall being hungry but I do recall the food not being very good. If you didn't like the food, you went without. A couple of times a week there would be something like sausages or chicken, which were considered good meals. Chips featured large as well. Sometimes, all we were eating was chips. There were a lot of stews as well, but the quality of the meat was pretty ropey. For the money they were charging, they weren't providing the service.
22. We were allowed to take a tuck box to school, but it had to last the whole term. I can remember my Mum packing Jamaican ginger cake in my tuck box.

#### *Washing and bathing*

23. Each house had its own washroom. It had about thirty washbasins alongside each other where you could go and wash. At the end of each dormitory, there were showers and a bathroom. You only had a bath once a week. At the beginning of the term, the bath rota went up. You would select your bath night and arrange to have the same night as your friends. There were either six or eight baths next to each other. Bath night was seen as a great luxury. You would go and wallow in the bath and spend



about an hour in there, chewing the fat with your friends. Merchiston wasn't particularly warm and the baths were one of the only places you could actually get warm. People would keep the hot tap running and the baths would overflow into the drain in the middle of the room. We had unlimited hot water on that one night, which was our luxury of the week.

24. There were four or five communal showers in a cubicle at the end of the bathroom. Boys who weren't having baths could shower there. I think there was another shower area for after rugby. We were playing rugby most days so we would obviously have a shower after that.

#### *Clothing/uniform*

25. During the school week, our uniform was white shirts, which we wore open collar, shorts with long socks. We never wore ties, except for formal events. You had to become a prefect in order to wear trousers. There were eighteen and a half year olds with hairy legs in shorts. It was a great incentive to become a prefect early, so you could get out of your shorts. If you were going into the shop in the nearby village, Colinton, you had to go in your shorts as a sixteen year old. If you were going out to Town we were allowed to wear long trousers. I think we might have had to wear a tie on those occasions, but I can't quite remember.
26. There were weird privileges when it came to uniform. For example, the standard school uniform was a blazer and a white open-necked shirt. If you were in the rugby team and you got your colours, you got a silk collar on your rugby shirt. It was a privilege of the rugby team to wear their rugby shirts under their blazers instead of the white shirt. Another strange privilege was that prefects were allowed to wear their collars up. It was a ridiculous thing with people walking around with their collars up, just to designate, "I'm a prefect and it's a privilege."
27. At the end of each dormitory there was a housekeeper's room. We would put our washing in there. Our clothes all had to be labelled with name tags. The laundry was then organised by one of the housekeepers, but we had to polish our own shoes. Each

house had a kilt room where we kept our kilts, which was used by some of the boys as a smoking room. It was up in the attic, away from the staff.

### *Schooling*

28. The quality of the education was poor. My parents weren't rich. They did struggle because the fees for Merchiston kept going up. I don't think that they were getting value for money when I consider the quality of education that my children had. I did read a statement given to the Inquiry by CGJ [REDACTED]. He was a master who was apparently at Merchiston when I was there. He must have come latterly because I don't remember him. He gave evidence about the interview process that he had gone through. He had failed to get a job at any state school. During the interview at Merchiston, he said that they were more interested in whether he played rugby and his sporting ability than his teaching ability. I would have to say that was my experience.
29. The teachers, with very few exceptions, were appalling. The quality of education was not of the first degree. I became very lazy when I went to Merchiston. Ascham was and still is recognised as a very good academic school. I had reached a level where I was being pushed all the way through. I arrived at Merchiston and basically coasted for about three or four years. I tried to get myself back in gear again when it came to A-level time and there were some better quality masters in the A-level years. It was almost too late. I think that I'd lost the work ethic.
30. I think the timing of lessons was rather dictated around rugby training. We had lessons in the morning. I think there were then lessons from about 4:00 pm until about 6:30 pm. Rugby came before that. My recollection is that on a Saturday, there were only lessons in the morning but there were always rugby matches. If you weren't in the first XV, or playing in one of the other teams, you were required to go and watch the first XV on the rugby pitch.
31. There was a room where we sat at a designated time to do our homework. I think we did our prep for about an hour and a half in the evening. It was around 7:30 pm to 9:00



pm or that sort of time. I think it was supervised by a master, but it might have been a prefect. As I recall, there were benches facing against a wall, all the way around three quarters of the room.

32. There was a library at the school. It had a large makeover half way through my time at the school and I can't really remember the previous library. Latterly, the library was in one of the quads. It had been converted from an area where we used to wait to go into the dining room. It didn't have a lot of good books. During my A-levels, if I wanted to do some extraneous research I would go to the library at the Bridges in Edinburgh and take books out from there. I think that was seen as unusual, that I would want to go out and get books when there were books in the school library.
33. I had a lot of time for the Latin master, Eric McKay. There were only two of us who took Latin A'level so it was almost like a private tutorial. He tried to encourage boys to read books with something that I think was called the Highers Library. I don't know who funded it, but I think he might have funded it himself. You could go and get Penguin paperbacks and it had quality reading material. I read a lot of books from that library.

### *Sport*

34. If you did well at sports, you did well at Merchiston. I was in all the first rugby teams, progressing up the school. That was seen as being as almost better than my academic achievements, the fact that I had a scholarship and was in all the A classes. There were some masters who were more enlightened, but doing well in rugby was seen as the preeminent thing to achieve. Being in the first XV gave you certain privileges within the school. The rugby team were held up on some sort of pedestal.
35. We played cricket in the summer, but I wasn't in the cricket team. There was also a fives team, but not many people played fives by the time I went to Merchiston. It was a sport in decline. There was a tennis team, but it was seen as almost a niche sport. There weren't many people who played it. Basically if you played tennis, you got into the team. We did athletics in the summer and cross country running in the winter. I did

cross country and athletics as well. Rainy Brown was largely in charge of athletics and cross country running. Rugby and cricket were the only sports that were mandatory. I think you could choose whether to do the other sports.

### *Leisure time*

36. They were very big on us doing things and being members of clubs at Merchiston. None of the clubs particularly interested me. They had things like Scalextric Club. Playing sports was quite a big thing, so my leisure time largely revolved around that. There was a very nice fives court so I used to play fives. In the summer, I played tennis. They didn't have a squash court in those days so we used to go away to play squash. One of the masters, George Mieras, used to take about ten of us to a private squash club in the school minibus. In Rogerson East, there was a full-size snooker table. I was quite good at snooker and I used to play a lot of that as well.
37. There was a room where we could play our own records, before we got to the age when we had our own studies. I got my own shared study when I was about sixteen. When we were in the junior houses, there was nowhere we could call our own apart from the room that had a record player and a few sofas. There was occasionally a TV set up in the day room. It would be brought in with great ceremony and all of the boys would go in to watch, almost like a cinema. It was usually only for something designated as important, like state events or major sporting events like the Commonwealth Games. I can't actually remember what we got to watch, but TV didn't feature much at Merchiston. I did read a lot of books, which I got from Eric McKay's Highers library.
38. There were games, like chess and draughts, which we could play in the day room. Each house had a day room downstairs and dormitories upstairs. You could sit in groups in the day room, playing chess or reading. Between lessons and rugby, we could go to the shop in the village. We were also allowed into town a certain number of times a year. Your parents left a certain amount of money with the housemaster. We had to get formal permission and put our long trousers on.

39. We would go drinking in town, which was obviously not allowed. I remember that there was a number 10 bus stop on the way to Colinton. We would have to hide behind the wall and get changed. We would go down the drive in our school uniform, but we would bring jeans and a t-shirt or whatever. Someone would keep an eye out for the bus. We'd then jump over the wall just as the bus was arriving.

*Personal possessions*

40. I can recall lockers, but I can't recall locks on the lockers. A lot of our school uniform had to come from Aitken and Niven on George Street. There was a very small suitcase with a specified size. It was about the size of an Easyjet carry-on bag. It had a little lock on it, which was the only thing we were allowed which locked. Our parents would give us money for the term, which was kept by the housemaster. We could access that whenever we wanted, but it had to last us the whole term. There were some boys who came from very wealthy families. The school specified that we were only allowed a certain amount of money so that somebody who was super-rich wasn't left with a lot more than others. Everybody had the same amount and it was up to you how you drew down on that amount. There was a tuck shop in the school, but I didn't tend to use it. It was down in the basement somewhere. Most people tended to go to the shop in Colinton because it was an excuse to get out .

*Trips and holidays*

41. I went to away matches with the rugby team. I think the furthest we usually travelled was to Strathallan or Glenalmond. The first XV also went on a rugby tour to Surrey. We played Dulwich and Crawley, which involved getting the train. We went down on the sleeper which was a new and rather exciting experience for me. There were options to go on ski trips, but I didn't ski so I didn't do that. I think that those were the only trips, other than to the theatre in Edinburgh. I don't recall any trips abroad.
42. I went home at half term and at the end of term. My trunk and I went back to Newcastle. By and large, there was a bus organised because there were a few boys from Newcastle. The bus went via St. Boswell's and picked up some people there.

*Healthcare*

43. There was a Matron, who you would go to with your bumps and scrapes or if you were feeling poorly. She had a consultation room in the main school block. She would deal with minor things. If it was anything more serious, they would call in the doctor. There was also a sanatorium. If anybody got really poorly, they would go there. I think it was part of the Pringle House complex, down at the bottom of the drive. I think Pringle House had originally been the school sanatorium. They decided to make part of it into an introductory house. It had beds in it which were like the other beds in Merchiston. They were like hospital beds or prison beds. They were metal structures. Not many people went into the sanatorium. It was usually just if you had some sort of flu or major illness that required monitoring.
44. At the beginning of the school year, we were seen by a dentist who came into the school. The dentist had to declare you orally fit. He used to comment that I had the worst set of teeth in the school but the best looked after set of teeth. He always asked me who my dentist was because I'd had a lot of fillings. He said that my dentist was an artist. We also had a health check at the beginning of every term from a doctor who came into the school. I can remember being asked to drop my trousers and cough twice. I can't recall anybody needing to go to hospital while I was there. I assume that some people did because occasionally I would see someone with a plaster or something. Nobody in my close circle needed to go to hospital.

*Religious instruction*

45. There were two services every Sunday. There was a Sunday service in the morning, usually conducted by the headmaster. All of the boys went to that and we wore kilts. Apart from things like balls, it was the only occasion when we wore our kilts. On Sunday evening, there was another service [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] CDR [REDACTED] There was also a service on a Wednesday evening, which was a sort of religious ceremony. I was never clear on the origins of it, but it involved touching of hands. The prefects would walk out of the chapel. Boys would have their

hands out on either side and the prefects would touch their hands. The services were held in the school chapel, which was in the main school building.

46. We all said Grace before meals, but the main prayers were twice on Sundays and on Wednesday evenings. Throughout all the houses, there were boys who had adopted Christianity and held prayer meetings. Sometimes they met with the chaplain and sometimes they just met with other boys. There was also religious instruction in classes, but this was something separate whereby these boys had decided that God was a driving force in their lives and that they wanted to hold regular prayer meetings.

#### *Christmas and birthdays*

47. I went home for Christmas. I don't recall there being any Christmas celebrations at Merchiston. It was just the end of term. I think school ended around 14 December, so it was a couple of weeks before Christmas. I can't remember there being a tree or anything. Birthdays weren't celebrated. They were just a non-event.

#### *Visits/inspections*

48. Sundays were the days when we were permitted "leave-outs". They had to be organised in advance with the housemaster. Twice a term, my parents would come up from Newcastle and take me out for the day. We had the Sunday service in the morning, which parents didn't attend. I think that was at 11:00 am. Parents would arrive around midday. They would park their cars in the quad. After service we got changed into long trousers, blazer and tie and went out with our parents. I think we were allowed out from 12:00 pm until about 7:00 pm.
49. I think my parents only came twice a term because of the distance. I had friends who came from Glasgow and they saw their parents more often. There were very few day boys at Merchiston. There were some boys who were boarders, but lived in Edinburgh. My recollection is that they used to go home every weekend, but they had to be back in the school on Saturday and Sunday nights.

50. I think there was an option for your parents to elect someone else to take you for a leave out. That didn't actually happen for me. The only visitors I had were my parents. I don't recall any inspections while I was at the school. My parents' friend, Jimmy Cameron, was well retired by the time I went to Merchiston. In retrospect, I think he was well out of touch in recommending the school. He might have been right that it was happy, but I think that if he'd seen it he probably wouldn't have been recommending it.

*Family contact*

51. The only contact the school had with my parents were reports at the end of term. There was nothing like a parents' evening. There was no involvement from parents in your education, other than receiving a report from the school about how you'd done during the past term. It was posted to them.
52. My sister became very left wing and totally disapproved of private schools. She always refused to come with my parents when I had leave-out. She wanted nothing to do with Merchiston. We didn't really speak about it. Now, I wish I'd had the opportunity to ask her why she didn't come to see me.
53. My parents and I corresponded regularly. I certainly wrote to my parents once a week and received a letter once a week. My mother kept my letters for quite a while. I think we could write to our parents as much as we liked. Our letters weren't read by any staff and I used to seal my letters and put them into the post box. In the senior houses, Rogerson East and West, it was possible to make phone calls. I've never been very big on having anything other than a procedural conversation by telephone. I tended to express my views and feelings in letters to my parents.

*Running away*

54. I think most boys were fairly happy at Merchiston. I almost went to Rossall School in Lancashire. I'm aware of several boys who ran away from Rossall because of bullying



and other things going on there. I'm not aware of anybody who ran away from Merchiston.

### *Bullying*

55. Bullying wasn't a major issue at Merchiston. In any school, you're going to get bullying of some sort. There would be ridiculous things, like in the swimming pool someone might roll his towel up into a rat's tail and flick you and that sort of thing. By and large, boys would look after boys. If someone was known to be going after another boy, other boys, quite often the rugby team boys, would discourage him from doing that. I'm not aware of what the school's policy was on bullying because I don't think it was a particular issue.

### *Fagging*

56. Fagging was still going on when I was at Merchiston. The junior house boys had to fag for prefects. It meant that the junior boys had to do some menial chores for them. I was allocated to a boy who was head of the rugby team, [REDACTED]. I had to polish his shoes and clean his rugby boots prior to matches. It wasn't an abusive relationship. It was just understood that it was what would happen. That went on until I became a prefect and I was allocated a fag.
57. You had to pay your fag a nominal amount. I think it was £1 or something. I completely disagreed with the system. I told my fag that I'd pay him the money but that I didn't want him to do anything because I disagreed with it. By the time I left, I had been making quite a few noises about quite a few things, including beatings.

### *Prefects*

58. I was quite young when I became a prefect. I think I was sixteen. In theory, the role of the prefect was to ensure that the system worked as it was intended to. They were also supposed to ensure that there weren't any infractions of discipline. If a prefect saw that a boy was doing something wrong, such as being late down to roll call or

fighting, then the prefect had the authority to give out a blue paper. It involved setting a task. The classic punishment was, "Great Britain, political, 100 names." The person then had to trace out a map of Great Britain, colour in the political areas and write a hundred names of towns or cities on the map. To get the blue paper, the pupil had to go to the housemaster so the housemaster knew that the boy had committed some minor offence. In the morning, before breakfast, the boy would have to get up along with the prefect. The prefect would sit with the boy while he traced the map, coloured it in and put names in it.

59. I thought that punishment was insane. I used to set essays on esoteric or, philosophical subjects instead, just to try and exercise the brain of the boy who had been punished. I was challenged about it by one of the housemasters. He said that wasn't the way they did it and it was usually just maps. There were junior prefects and senior prefects and I was a junior prefect for a long time. I think they realised that they'd made a mistake when they made me junior prefect. I never got to senior prefect because I started making waves about various things.
60. Once you were made a prefect, you were taken into the housemaster's confidence. You would have meetings with the housemaster and he would ask how certain boys were doing. You then realised that you could have an influence on the way that the school behaved towards its pupils. At least I certainly thought that I could have an influence. I was making adult decisions whereas before I had just been a pupil in the school, doing what I was told. When I was a prefect, I was involved in the consultation process. I could argue the toss with the housemaster and say things, like fagging and the blue paper system should be revisited. Depending on who the housemaster was, he would listen or just ignore you. Other than that, there wasn't any kind of student body that would make representations to the school about the way that it was run. The only time that the pupils had any opportunity to have an influence on school policy was in their roles as prefects.

*Discipline*

61. There were no written rules at the school. Everything that was a rule was purely conveyed orally. There was never anything that we knew we could or couldn't do that was committed to paper. If you misbehaved, there was the blue paper system. If you had done something beyond the blue paper, you might be referred to the housemaster by a prefect. That might involve a beating. If you were caught doing something wrong by a master then they would have the right to do whatever they wanted to do to punish you.
62. Corporal punishment was largely the tawse. I think the tawse was a unique feature of Scottish schools. There were some English masters who arrived at the school and didn't use the tawse. They used the cane. For example, CDS [REDACTED] an [REDACTED] teacher who was a housemaster at one stage, used the cane. By and large, it was the tawse that was used for corporal punishment. It was used by masters, not by prefects. The use of corporal punishment by prefects had been done away with before I arrived. It was never administered by the headmaster. Nobody ever saw the headmaster in relation to discipline.
63. The sort of things that corporal punishment was used for were someone being late for roll call, fighting, disobeying rules, like going into town when you weren't supposed to, drinking and smoking. Smoking was the big one. Smoking was seen as the most heinous crime that you could commit at Merchiston. It was CDR [REDACTED]'s big bugbear. He would patrol the grounds, trying to find smokers. He would no doubt say that it was to stop them going down a wicked way, but our view was that it was because he could beat people once he had found them smoking. I was only beaten once during my time at Merchiston. I didn't smoke. My vice was drinking and I was never caught.
64. I can recall some people not being allowed into town as a punishment. It might have been in line with corporal punishment. Going into town wasn't a regular thing. It was only allowed a certain number of times a term, but I do remember some people being effectively gated.

65. I'm not aware of anybody who refused to carry out their prefect's orders. I read CDR [REDACTED] CDR [REDACTED]'s evidence to the Inquiry and he referred to "beatable offences". I suspect that failure to carry out a prefect's orders would have been considered a beatable offence. There was never really any real rebellion at all when I was at Merchiston, except after I was beaten. Normally, everybody just did as they were told and accepted the system, however wrong it was. In my latter years, I did start to kick up against it, especially after I was beaten.

### **Abuse at Merchiston**

66. Every year, we had a Highland ball for the senior boys. There were girls from St. Dennis', St George's and St. Leonard's Schools. There were a couple of practices for the Highland ball where the girls were bussed into the school. The practice took place in the school hall. We were taught the relevant dances that we would be doing at the Highland Ball and there was a break at half time.
67. I think it was around October 1973 when I was sixteen or seventeen. During one of the breaks, a boy called [REDACTED] and I organised to go back to our study and, along with two or three girls, have a cup of coffee and listen to some music rather than stay in the hall. We hadn't been told that we couldn't do that, but I'm fairly sure we knew that we shouldn't do that. It was a bit of a showing off thing about our musical tastes. We would take the girls back to our study and play Genesis or whatever it was and relax in a more informal way. It was completely innocent.
68. We were just sitting there, having our coffee and listening to music, when a prefect came in. He didn't actually say that we should go back to the hall or anything. He just came in and disappeared. We went back to the hall after the break and continued with Highland ball practice.
69. I think it was the next day that CDR [REDACTED] called [REDACTED] and me to his room, which was in Rogerson East. He said that he'd been told about us bringing the girls back to our study. He said that it was outrageous and a breach of trust. He said that he was

going to beat us both and that we should go away and get our rugby socks. The socks were used to bind boys' wrists. In the past, boys beaten with the tawse had damaged the veins on their wrists so they were bound by rugby socks.

70. [REDACTED] and I both went away and came back. I had to wait outside CDR [REDACTED]'s study while [REDACTED] went in first. There was a sort of expectation about what would go on. There was a numbering system. You always got the same number on each hand. A minor thing would result in three and three. Five on each hand was something pretty serious. The worst that either of us had heard of at the time was six and six and that was for smoking. When I was outside the study, I was counting and thinking about how many I would get. There seemed to be a long time between each of the strikes. [REDACTED] was making a lot of noise. There were a lot of tears and shouting coming from the room. That wasn't unexpected because CDR [REDACTED] was known as a savage beater. It was known by boys that he would hurt you as much as he could.
71. I do recall that I counted twelve strokes, albeit not one and then another in sequence. There was quite often a long gap between strokes. [REDACTED] told me subsequently that it was because he was telling CDR [REDACTED] that he couldn't take any more. When I discussed it with him later, he said that he had seven on one hand and then effectively collapsed. He got five on the other hand before he was in such a state that CDR [REDACTED] stopped the beating.
72. I went in, expecting that I was going to get six and six. You never saw CDR [REDACTED] in his shirt sleeves, but he was in his shirt with the sleeves rolled up. He was sweating because of the effort he'd already expended on [REDACTED]. I'd never been beaten before so I didn't quite know what to expect. I held my hand out, sideways on. I had been told that was a way to avoid the tawse striking the pad of your thumb, which was the most painful part. He immediately said that I had to hold my hands out straight. He positioned me in the middle of the room. He took about two paces back so I received a running jump. He went to the side of his room, next to his sideboard, took two paces and then brought the tawse down with incredible force. It was quite a thick piece of leather. He used all of his might. It was incredibly painful.



73. I subsequently spoke to other boys who had been beaten by other masters at Merchiston. They said that the master would just stand there and hit them with the tawse. CDR [REDACTED] was basically giving as much force as he possibly could to administering this beating. I remember thinking that it was the most painful thing I'd felt in my life, but I was determined not to let CDR [REDACTED] see that he was hurting me. I didn't like CDR [REDACTED] at all. I knew that the man was a sadist because of what he had done to other people. I knew that he used to seek out people to administer beatings for smoking.
74. CDR [REDACTED] used to search around to try and find people. There were certain places that were known to be places where smokers did go, such as under the bike shed or a loft space in the study block that you could crawl into. I think he knew about them and he would patrol around them. I'm sure that it wasn't in order to eradicate smoking. I think it was to satisfy his own pleasure in beating people. I know that happened many times each term, but he never gave more than six and six. Before I was beaten, you knew that was the worst that you were going to get.
75. I was determined that he wasn't going to see that it was hurting me. I kept looking him in the eye and I kept holding my hand up, but it became harder and harder. I was holding my hand out, but it was gradually going lower. I remember putting my left hand under my elbow to try and hold my right hand up. I'd heard [REDACTED] getting what I thought was six and six. When he got to six, I put my right hand down and held my left hand up. CDR [REDACTED] said, "Keep your hand up." I thought that was strange.
76. I ended up receiving nine and nine, which was unheard of. It was a record in the school. It was ludicrous. I didn't cry. I was determined that CDR [REDACTED] wouldn't see me cry. [REDACTED] did come out a bit of a mess. Understandably, he was sobbing and very upset. I didn't cry because I was determined that this sadist was not going to get the better of me. I kept looking him in the eye. I wonder whether he went up to nine because he was trying to break me and he wasn't achieving it.
77. I came out and there were a lot of senior boys around. I was a year or two below the eldest boys in the school.. They were all waiting and running the washbasins with cold



water. My hands were in a terrible state. They weren't bleeding, but they were massively puffed up. I was in the rugby team and I couldn't play rugby for about a week after the beating. My hands were just such a mess. They were bruised and swollen. I can remember the senior boys asking how on earth I'd put up with it and that it was the worst they'd ever seen and I recall one of the senior boys, [REDACTED] say "He's gone too far this time"..

78. There was a school protest after we were beaten. It was organised by senior boys to signal to CDR [REDACTED] that he was out of line. I can't remember what day the beating happened on, but there was a Sunday evening service shortly afterwards. I wasn't aware that it had been organised, but someone told me later that the word had gone round that the protest was going to happen. CDR [REDACTED] was [REDACTED]. We used to sing hymns. The organ was playing away and nobody sang. The only people in the school who sang were the choir. It came out that they were granted a dispensation because otherwise they could have been singled out if they hadn't sung. The rest of the school didn't sing the hymns as a protest against what had happened. I remember CDR [REDACTED] shouting at one point, "Sing, sing!" They didn't sing because of what had happened in the beating.
79. I would come across CDR [REDACTED] after he beat me, but I didn't have any dealings with him. He was a [REDACTED] teacher and he had taught me in the junior years of the school. I would see him because he was there every day, even at weekends. I could tell that he didn't like me. I'm sure that he thought that I wasn't a team player. The truth was that some of the masters were real inadequates and I think that he was one of them. There were a number of teachers who had been boys at Merchiston, gone to university and come straight back to Merchiston. CDR [REDACTED] was one of those. I think they hadn't experienced life at all. After the beating, maybe I did try and rile him by looking defiant and contemptuous without straying across any boundaries. I do remember receiving a report at some stage that said I was surly and that I should take more part in the general school activity. I think I'd become fairly disaffected by Merchiston.

80. I can't remember any other masters noticing my injured hands after the beating or commenting in any way upon the incident. I certainly know that CDS [REDACTED] had heard about it. He was my A-level [REDACTED] teacher at the time and it was a smallish class. It was more chatty than a formal lesson. I think that what happened must have got out, but I don't know who specifically knew about it. None of the masters ever spoke to me about it. Beating was just something that happened in the school. I don't even know whether beatings went on record or were referred to the headmaster.

*Possible sexual abuse*

81. I know that allegations of sexual abuse have been made against some of the masters at Merchiston. James Rainy Brown was my housemaster in Pringle House. I've read evidence that was given to the Inquiry about him. All I can say is that I never experienced any kind of abuse with him at all. He was a bit of an odd man. Like CDR [REDACTED] CDR [REDACTED], he'd been a pupil at Merchiston, gone away to university and come straight back again. He coached me at athletics and cross country running. He was very big on fitness and athletic prowess. He would take people away on mountaineering expeditions. I didn't join the mountaineering club, but I never heard from anybody any suggestion that he'd ever done anything inappropriate.
82. I'm aware that CDS [REDACTED] gave evidence to the Inquiry using a pseudonym. He was my [REDACTED] teacher and I was also a prefect in his house. He was married. I wasn't aware of anybody suggesting that he had done anything inappropriate. Eric McKay was my Latin master. Undoubtedly, he was homosexual. He was a bachelor who lived in the school. He was known as Dandy McKay because he dressed very stylishly. He was an eccentric, but I wasn't aware of any suggestion that he'd done anything inappropriate. I spent two years in his class studying A-level Latin. There were only two of us in the class and he would regularly sit on a bench next to me, helping me with translations. There was nothing inappropriate at all and I was surprised to read about allegations against him.
83. There was a master who arrived when I was a fairly senior boy. He was an [REDACTED] master called OZK [REDACTED]. He was quite an eccentric. He arrived at the school, a



devout Catholic and obviously gay. He dressed like an Edwardian gentleman with starched collars and old fashioned, formal suits. He would hold tea parties. He invited people to his room to have Earl Grey tea, which was seen as something very sophisticated. I think he sought out what you might call the intellectuals. I went to one of these tea parties, but I decided that it wasn't for me. It was all a little bit mannered. I didn't come across any abusive behaviour by him. I was told subsequently by people that those tea parties were sort of seen as quasi-grooming, but that is all hearsay. I subsequently became aware of the incident which involved him propositioning boys who had arrived back at the school after a trip to town, drunk. That occurred after I had left the school and resulted in OZK being dismissed. When I heard that, I wasn't surprised because he was an oddball.

84. I was very surprised when I read about sexual abuse at Merchiston. It wasn't something that I was aware of at all.

#### **Reporting of abuse whilst at Merchiston**

85. I wasn't aware that being beaten by CDR had caused any change in my personality or anything like that. However, the holiday after the beating had taken place, my mother asked me if something had happened at school. I said no because I didn't want her to know about the beating. For some reason, parents weren't told about these things. She said that there was definitely something wrong, that I was withdrawn and had a chip on my shoulder about something. Eventually, I told her that I had been beaten. The full circumstances of how I was beaten and how savagely I was beaten came out.
86. My father came home from work and we discussed it. My parents were both absolutely outraged by it. My father said that he wasn't having it and that he was going to go to the school and complain about it. He made an appointment to see the headmaster. He told the headmaster that he wanted CDR to be in the room when he made the complaint. He wanted to have a confrontation with him and for him to explain why he had behaved in such a barbaric way. My father wasn't a violent man. He was very

mild-mannered, but the headmaster told him that wouldn't be helpful. I wasn't in the room when this conversation between my father and the headmaster took place, but my father reported it back to me. The headmaster assured my father that the complaint would be brought to CDR [REDACTED]'s attention and acted upon. Unless the headmaster lied to my father, CDR [REDACTED] would have been aware that my father had gone to the school and made a complaint about him.

87. Donald Forbes was an inadequate sort of person. My father came back from his meeting with him and said that he was a singularly unimpressive man and asked whether I wanted him and my mother to take me out of the school. I thought that it was too late by then because I was heading towards my A-levels. I thought it would be too disruptive. So far as we were concerned, I was doing well at the school. I was doing well academically and I was doing well at rugby.

### **Leaving boarding school**

88. Having got a scholarship at Merchiston, the expectation was that you would apply to Oxford or Cambridge University. My sister had attended Keele University for a year, but other than that nobody in my family had experience of going to university. There was certainly no family history of going to Oxford or Cambridge. There was one master, Mervyn Preston, who had been to Cambridge. He was very keen on pupils going there. I applied to Cambridge in the first year of doing my A-levels. I got an offer from Cambridge, went down for an interview and failed the interview.
89. The school didn't do anything to prepare us for these interviews. I went into it blind. Two of my children went to Oxford and I know that their schools spent time preparing them for interview. I think that was a failure on the part of Merchiston. Having failed to get into Cambridge, I applied to Oxford the next year before sitting for my A-levels. I got the right exam results but I failed that interview as well.
90. After my father complained to the headmaster, my treatment at Merchiston deteriorated. His complaint is one of a potential number of reasons for that. I've read

my school reports after the incident. The headmaster didn't refer to the beating again. I appear to be doing well. I'd applied to Oxford University, but I didn't get in. There were comments such as, "We wish him well."

91. Something happened subsequently which made me think that I was victimised after my father complained. Having not got into Oxford, I had an interview at Newcastle University. I was interviewed at the law department there by one of the tutors. During the interview, he was looking at my UCCA report, which contained something written by the school headmaster. The tutor stated that I hadn't been very popular at my school. I didn't know what he meant. He said that my headmaster clearly didn't like me. He read it out and I still remember it. The headmaster had written that I had been a "pernicious influence within the school". The tutor asked me what happened. I told him that all I could think of was that there was disciplinary incident that my parents complained about and that, secondly, I'd made a point as a prefect of trying to reform some of the practices at the school. I had tried to do away with blue papers and beatings. I still remember the tutor saying, "Oh, schoolboy politics. Never mind." I was offered a place at Newcastle.
92. I thought that was a terrible thing. The headmaster had effectively secretly tried to blight my prospects of getting into university. At least the tutor at Newcastle told me what he had said. I wasn't aware of it when I went for my interview at Oxford. I got the right results in my exams for Oxford, but I didn't get in. In the background, something was happening that caused the headmaster to put that on my UCCA application. In retrospect, my view is that it was because my father complained. I don't think that the other things I did as a prefect could be described as a "pernicious influence".

### **Life after leaving boarding school**

93. After leaving school, I got a law degree at Newcastle University. I went on to study for the Law Society finals and became a solicitor. I became a partner in my firm and retired about ten years ago. I remained in Newcastle, where I have a lot of good friends. I still have two friends from Merchiston, one of whom lives in Newcastle and one of whom



lives in St. Andrew's. I got married in 1985 and one of my friends from Merchiston was my best man. I had three children, but one of my children died.

94. I haven't attended any school reunions. I did go to one rugby reunion, which was held at Murrayfield. It was a centenary of a rugby match between Edinburgh Academy and Merchiston. Someone got in touch with me and said that the first XV from my year was putting together a table. I went to that and decided never again. It was a fairly boozy do and it was okay seeing a couple of people, but I felt that there was an awful lot of positioning and people trying to prove how well they'd done. It wasn't for me.
95. I visited Merchiston with my wife before we had children. We were seeing friends in Edinburgh and I took her to show it to her. It was the middle of winter and there were blizzard conditions. There were little boys of thirteen, out playing rugby in the snow. She was horrified. I have taken my children to Merchiston, purely to show them where I went to school. [REDACTED] my son who died, asked why I hadn't sent him there. That was in the days of Harry Potter. I told him that it was nothing like that.

### **Reporting of abuse**

96. In [REDACTED] I was reading [REDACTED] newspaper. I saw a report about Merchiston and abuse there. The person in the article was described as [REDACTED] and I think it said that he was 65 or 66 years old. I realised that he must have been there when I was there. The only [REDACTED] I knew was [REDACTED], who was a contemporary of mine and a friend. I had a school register book. I looked up [REDACTED] and it couldn't have been him because he was the wrong age.
97. I spoke to [REDACTED], who I had befriended in Pringle House and who subsequently became the headmaster of another school in Scotland. He told me about the Inquiry and said that I could read all the evidence online. I buried down into that and worked out that <sup>HYD</sup>[REDACTED] was a pseudonym. I then worked out the boy's actual name. I think he was in the year below me and I didn't have any particular dealings with him at school. When I was reading his evidence, he mentioned an incident at the Highland



ball practice and two boys being savagely beaten. I realised that he was talking about me.

98. That caused me to read further into the evidence and I realised that CDR [REDACTED] had made a statement with the pseudonym James. In reading his statement, I saw that he acknowledged that he had been a hard beater, but that he had "never done it with gusto". He certainly did do it with gusto. He said that there had never been any complaints about his beatings. That just wasn't right and it really irritated me. What had happened all those years ago was certainly wrong.
99. The two friends whom I am still in touch with from Merchiston say that my beating was one of the standout events while they were at the school. [REDACTED] went on to be a headmaster. He is fairly cautious in the words that he uses. I asked him how he would describe CDR [REDACTED] and he said he would describe him as a sadist. Undoubtedly, he was a sadist. His nickname at the school was "CDR [REDACTED]". I don't know where that name comes from, but it was always pronounced with what I considered to be contempt.
100. When I read what I believe to be CDR [REDACTED]'s evidence to the Inquiry, two things stood out for me. In relation to his days at Merchiston as a pupil, he was asked whether he understood that there was a maximum number of blows you could receive. He said that it depended on which house you were in, but that he thought the maximum was six and seven on either hand. That was odd, because you always got the same number on each hand. You would either get six and six or seven and seven. I don't recall seven and seven ever being administered. Prior to my beating, the highest I'd ever heard of was six and six. He was asked whether it could be higher than six and seven. He said that he'd thought about that and that he didn't think it would have gone much higher. He gave me nine and nine.
101. He was asked about discipline. Counsel to the Inquiry asked him if he recognised that he was known as a teacher who would beat. He said, "I'm waiting for the word." In my view, he was waiting for counsel to use the word "sadist". He then replied that he was

not proud of it, but it was the reality. I think he knew that he was known as a sadist and he was a sadist.

102. I read the statement of the teacher with the pseudonym "James", who I believe to be CDR [REDACTED]. At paragraph 87, he stated: "I have never been the subject of a complaint for being overzealous with the tawse. I didn't own a tawse and so I had to borrow it from Brian Thomson who was the housemaster of Rogerson West." I am clear in my recollection that CDR [REDACTED] was subject to a complaint. I'm sure he would have been aware of that because of what the headmaster said to my father. The whole tenor of that is almost suggesting that he didn't own a tawse and so he didn't use it very much. As I've already said, he was certainly overzealous and regular with his beatings.
103. I was aggrieved about what I had read at the time. I decided that I wasn't going to let it go unanswered and that was why I contacted the Inquiry. I told the person that I spoke to that I was one of the boys who was beaten by CDR [REDACTED] and that he had said there had been no complaint, but that just wasn't true because my father did complain. The person I contacted at the Inquiry referred what I had said to the police, so I didn't actually make a complaint to the police myself. Detective Constable Billy Tortora of the National Child Abuse Investigation Unit in Livingston then got in touch with me. I gave a statement to the police in July 2022. The police have told me that the case is currently with the Procurator Fiscal.
104. Billy Tortora and the female officer who came to Newcastle with him were outraged by what I told them. I worried that I was wasting people's time with all this. I told Billy Tortora that the main thing I wanted was for somebody to go back to CDR [REDACTED]. I would like someone to show him what he said to the Inquiry and show him that someone is calling him out about it. I don't care whether or not CDR [REDACTED] is prosecuted. If someone could go back to him and say that what he did was outrageous, that would be a great result for me. I just hope that he lives long enough for someone to knock at his door and say that what he did fifty years ago was very wrong.

## Impact

105. My wife would say that the abuse I experienced at Merchiston did have an impact on me. I never thought so, but occasionally it was referred to when I spoke to my two friends from Merchiston. In the time since I left, we spoke about the time CDR [REDACTED] beat me two or three times. I thought that I'd put it to the back of my mind. It was really only [REDACTED], when I read the article in [REDACTED] newspaper and subsequently read the statements on the Inquiry website, that I started burrowing down into it. I read statements around it. I became quite indignant about CDR [REDACTED] and the fact that I felt he had lied to the Inquiry. I wanted that to be brought out. My wife said she thought that it had affected me more than I had thought. She said that the fact that it was bothering me so much meant that it must have done. I didn't think that it had. I still don't think that it has particularly, other than the fact that it certainly affirmed my view that I wouldn't send my own children away to boarding school.
106. I was removed from Newcastle and my parents' ambit of control. In the course of my own children's education, we had a lot to do with parents' evenings. If something was going awry, you could step in very rapidly and stop it going awry. Because I was removed from my parents, they could get away with murder at school. The murder, in my view, was the poor education. The school wasn't really called to account on that. Even without the CDR [REDACTED] incident, I never would have thought about sending my own children away for school.

## Records

107. I have a book that is a school register of Merchiston 1974 to 1993 (although it lists all pupils from 1920 to 1993). It lists the names of boys in individual years, what their school achievements were and where they are now. It has something at the beginning about who the masters were and pictures of the school. I don't think there's been another such book since. I thought that it would be interesting to have it. Although I wasn't interested in attending school reunions, it was interesting to see what had happened to certain people.



108. I've never applied to see what records Merchiston hold about me. I didn't know that there would be any records. My school reports are all handwritten. I'm not even sure they had photocopiers in those days. I don't know whether they'd have been written out a second time and retained by the school.
109. Following my discussion with the Inquiry Team, I made a Subject Access Request for my school records and have produced to the Inquiry Team a copy of my Housemaster's (Brian Thompson's) report in Rogerson West that reads: "Seems honest (and normal – beaten for taking St Denis girl to his study in company with [REDACTED] and 1 other St Denis girl)," which provides confirmation of the incident I have described. There is no copy of the headmaster's UCCA report in those records but I have made a Subject Access Request to Newcastle University to see if they still have it.

#### **Lessons to be learned**

110. I think it is important to have a culture whereby pupils are encouraged to raise concerns with the school, without fear that it might impact upon their progress within the school. Looking at my own situation, the fact that my father complained prejudiced my position. There could be an anonymous system whereby you could raise concerns and know that those concerns are going to be acted upon. I know that there was a board of governors at Merchiston, but we never had access to them at all. The headmaster was a very remote figure and you would never go anywhere near him. Your only route was to go and see your housemaster. I think that there would always have been a concern about that because you'd be seen as someone who was kicking against the system. I think that a lesson to be learned from that is that people should be encouraged to raise concerns that they have, rather than being frightened to raise concerns.

### Hopes for the Inquiry

111. I hope that the Inquiry brings to account people who have thus far escaped accountability in whatever way, whether it's naming and shaming or whether it's actually being prosecuted. I would hope that can be achieved. I think that the culture has changed so much since my days at school. If there were still to be something inappropriate going on, I would hope that it would discourage people from behaving in that way. You do hear about other schools such as Ampleforth, where abuse went on much more recently than my day at school. I don't know if it is still happening in schools. I think the problem at the time when I was at school was that people probably didn't think that they were accountable and they could get away with things. I think that now, the likes of this Inquiry will make people think twice before abusing a child. Hopefully it will make people think twice.
112. 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.....

ISH

Dated.....

30 March 2023