

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

PVF [REDACTED]

Support person present: Yes

1. My name is PVF [REDACTED]. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1982. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before boarding school

2. I grew up in [REDACTED] Galloway. I am the oldest of four children. My family are farmers, and I grew up on a farm. My parents were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. My mum and dad were not educated to tertiary or university level. My dad did one term at agricultural college and then came back to work on the farm. My mum was a P.E. teacher, so she went to a further education college in Cramond.
3. My dad was very hard working, and he was very successful as a farmer. He always worked with his hands on the farm, and he is well thought of in [REDACTED].

4. Before the age of eleven, I look back on my childhood as being idyllic. I was helping my dad on the farm and going to school in [REDACTED]. I was adjudged as being very bright. I was top of my class all the way through primary school.
5. At the age of eleven I went to Edinburgh. I visited two different schools. I went to Edinburgh Academy, and I went to Merchiston Castle School. These were the two options chosen by my parents. I sat entrance exams and performed in interviews with both establishments. I was offered scholarships to attend both schools, although I believe the scholarship for Merchiston Castle School was more generous in terms of financial assistance. I believe that was the main reason that school was chosen.
6. The day that they had me at Merchiston was a lot of fun. There were mind puzzles, intelligence tests, two or three interviews, and essays to write. They took us on tours, and we played water polo in the pool, it was great.
7. The visit to Edinburgh Academy was different, but it was still good. I stayed overnight at Edinburgh Academy. I met a couple of the parents, a couple of the older boys, and prefects.
8. I am not entirely sure why my parents sent me to Edinburgh, rather than me going to [REDACTED] Academy. I believe that sport is very important to my mother and to my father. My father is incredibly keen on rugby, he was the captain of his team. In the 1990's sport throughout Scotland in the state sector was going through a philosophical change. Competition was seen as being damaging to the self-esteem of many pupils.
9. Towards the end of my primary school the traditional races, like the one hundred meters sprint, were replaced by hoopla, rounders, and things that were a bit more 'cuddly'. My family did not approve of that, and I can sympathize with that view. I think they must have seen school in Edinburgh as having greater opportunity for me.
10. Merchiston Castle School is the pre-eminent school for rugby in Scotland. It is an assembly line for producing Scottish internationalists. Although rugby was an amateur sport originally, Merchiston Castle School has continued to produce many professional

rugby players over the years. That was front and center of the brochures that we were sent. There were seven senior teams that were competitive.

11. I wouldn't have got to Merchiston Castle School if it hadn't been for my scholarship. My parents saw it as an opportunity all round that they should take. So, off I went to Merchiston, at the age of eleven.

Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh 1994 to 1998

12. Merchiston Castle School is located in the south-west of Edinburgh. It is all boys at Merchiston. There were five or six boarding houses scattered around the school. [REDACTED] for my boarding house [REDACTED] House, were [REDACTED] and James Rainey-Brown.

Routine at Merchiston Castle School

First day

13. I remember arriving on my first day at Merchiston Castle School and being shown the dormitories. I remember saying goodbye to my mum and dad and being quite distressed. I was eleven years old, and I gave my parents each a big hug, but my dad's hug was not quite so reciprocal. I remember being quite upset.
14. I was introduced to [REDACTED] during my induction. He was [REDACTED] for [REDACTED] House. He had a son in a local prep school who would eventually join Merchiston Castle School too. James Rainey-Brown was [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I remember Mr [REDACTED] being quite snobbish towards my father. I think [REDACTED] adjudged that my dad was quite unsophisticated. That probably coloured my relationship with [REDACTED] and he was quite unkind to me.

15. Mr James Rainey-Brown was very eccentric. He was a loud presence. The first time I met him I was reading a newspaper in one of the common rooms. Mr Rainey-Brown burst through the door and stopped still. He asked, 'Is this the new boy?' and the person I was with said that I was. I couldn't stop staring at him. He kept referring to me in the third person. He said to the person I was with, "He keeps staring at me." Mr Rainey-Brown came across as very eccentric, and I think he knew it.
16. It was difficult the first night at Merchiston Castle School. I remember a boy, [REDACTED]. He was either [REDACTED], or [REDACTED] prefect in [REDACTED] House. The prefects had their own rooms, almost like university accommodation. [REDACTED] took me into his room, sat me down, and told me everything was going to be alright. He was always very kind indeed.
17. [REDACTED] was [REDACTED] the first fifteen rugby team, so he was a big deal. His girlfriend was the older sister of a boy in [REDACTED] House called [REDACTED]. She was always very friendly to me as well. We always saw them out and about.

Mornings and bedtime

18. My first boarding house was [REDACTED] House, which was for eleven and twelve year old pupils. I spent two years there. In my third year, I moved to Chalmers West House.
19. They woke us up in the morning with music over the Tannoy. They would always play Billy Joel's Uptown girl or something similar first thing in the morning. I don't know what time it was but it was fairly early. It was about 7:00 am or 7:30 am. You knew you had a set amount of time to get out of bed once the music started and go and get your shower. Then we would get dressed.
20. There might be some things to do in the morning before lessons started, like choir practice. Then we had to go for breakfast as well.
21. At night, there was a total restriction on talking once the lights were out. I can't remember what time lights out was, I think it was 9:00 pm. If you were caught talking

after lights out, then you would be punished. The most common punishment was called 'The Bench' where you had to sit on a bench outside the housemaster's office for a couple of hours, or you would get lines. I used to read voraciously and still do. I could read in the dark, by the twilight that came through the window. In the summer, when it didn't get dark until 10:30 pm there was plenty of opportunity to do that.

22. The prefects would be walking about after lights out, making sure that everyone was behaving themselves. If anyone was talking, the prefect would issue punishment and tell the housemaster.

Mealtimes/Food

23. The whole school ate in the same dining hall. The thing about [REDACTED] House was that, as a newer building, it was on the very edge of the grounds of the school. We had to walk between a quarter of a mile and half a mile to the dining hall, which was in the middle of the central building of the school.
24. The food at Merchiston Castle School wasn't great. It probably wasn't of the greatest nutritional value. There was a lot of square sausage in the morning. There was a lot of powdered milk, you could sometimes see the powder on the top of the jugs that they put out. However, they did feed us, and it was a big enterprise.
25. I guess the deeper point regarding nutrition and weight is that you are by yourself in a dormitory full of twelve other people. You become very self-conscious about your body, very self-conscious generally. I remember sitting at the edge of my bed looking at my thighs and thinking that I was still not as athletic as some of the other guys. I wondered about cutting down on food or running about a bit more.

Washing/bathing

26. The showers and the bathrooms weren't in the dormitories, or adjacent to the dormitories. You had to walk along a corridor, but the showers and bathrooms were

always in the same building. You had to walk a fair distance in your towel or your dressing gown.

27. Living in a dormitory with other boys, you become very self-conscious about your body, but your body is changing over time. Also, you see a lot of naked bodies. All the showers were communal, so you were getting in and out of the shower with twenty naked boys all the time. That has a psychological affect on what you eat, what you put into your body. There is obviously safeguarding around that. I remember one of the teachers saying that separate shower cubicles, would have to come in soon for legal reasons.
28. I remember a few years down the line, there was an incident involving one of the cleaning ladies. The cleaning ladies had to clean the sink outside the shower. One of the cleaning ladies that was new kept making comments about boys' penises as they came out of the shower. She kept her job, but she got told off by the housemaster and the head matron.
29. It wasn't unheard of for Rainey-Brown to pop his head round the shower curtain and tell you to hurry up, or tell you to get to lessons, or sometimes to pass on a message.

Leisure time

30. There was some free time in the evenings after prep. We could kick a ball about. I played piano so I had to find time for that. There was a piano in one of the recreation rooms in [REDACTED] House, otherwise there was the dedicated music block, which was up the drive towards the main body of the school.
31. I would have to get permission to use the piano in [REDACTED] House, because it was in a communal area. It was more common to use the facilities in the music block. The facilities in the music block were to university standard. There were lots of little rooms in the music block, some with pianos, some with lockers to keep other instruments in. I think there might have been keycard access to the music block. It was a very impressive building.

Trips and holidays

32. There were lots of trips we went on at Merchiston, quite a wide variety of things. On one level we were out and about to different cities playing rugby. We went to St Andrews, Aberdeen, Glasgow, Perthshire, and lots of places in Edinburgh.
33. There were various trips to museums in Edinburgh. You were allowed out without staff if you went with a pal. You could get the bus from outside the school and go into town to buy records or a book.
34. There was a ski trip I went on one year. It was a resort in France, I can't remember where. We got up to various high jinks, trying a beer and buying firecrackers that we couldn't get at home.
35. James Rainey-Brown organised many camping trips and many biking trips to the Pentland Hills. We went sledging there too. We used to get fertiliser bags and cut holes to poke our arms and heads through. Those were our sledges. We would find a slope on the Pentland Hills and launch ourselves down the hill face first, like penguins. It was a lot of fun.
36. The school holidays were quite big. There was a four week break at Easter, about ten weeks over the summer. These were very big holidays indeed. I went home all the time during the holidays.

Schooling

37. I think assembly was twice a week at Merchiston Castle School. I'm not sure what time it was, something tells me it was in the middle of the day, rather than in the morning. Although I might be wrong.

38. There were a lot of lessons at Merchiston. The quality of it was variable. A lot of the teachers went to Oxford or Cambridge universities and that was subtly or not so subtly emphasised in much of the school's promotional literature.
39. The school day itself was a little bit unconventional compared to a state school. There were different activities throughout the day, like choir practice, which you would have to find time for. The main difference from a state school was that lessons would go on until about 6:00 pm. There would also be lessons on Saturday mornings. However, the school broke up the lessons in the middle of the day with sports like rugby. Rugby was in the afternoon and then there were two more lessons for about three hours that would take you into the evening.
40. I was very good at school. I think I might have won [REDACTED] academic prizes in my second year, but that is not to say that the teaching was all good. There were some teachers who were better than others. There was one teacher called [REDACTED] QZA [REDACTED]. He was the housemaster of my house in third year. He was very good indeed. He pushed me with my writing. He asked me to redraft things and make them better.
41. There was another teacher called Stephen Campbell, he was the main maths teacher. He was also pretty good. He was quite inexperienced and he cared a lot. He wasn't perfect but he was one of the good ones. The main thing he had in common with [REDACTED] QZA [REDACTED] was that they were both guys from the West of Scotland, which I found to be a good thing. Most of the teachers were from the South of England. They were much colder, more sarcastic, and slightly crueller as well. The handful of Scottish teachers were more easy for me to identify with.
42. Mr Rainey-Brown taught me maths and science at Merchiston. I have to say that my feelings about that man are very mixed. I kind of pity him. I believe that he was a very damaged individual. He was also very warm and nice to me as an individual. He could see that I was struggling with homesickness. He could see that I was struggling to fit in. He took an interest in my happiness. That said, I do believe that Mr Rainey-Brown was sexually attracted to children.

43. There was the issue of the occasional visit from a guy called Reg. He came in to the school at the invitation of Mr Rainey-Brown. Reg fancied himself as a linguist. He had written several books about accelerating your learning of certain languages. He was a very eccentric man. Reg would hand pick a selection of pupils for language tuition, in a small hot-house environment. He might leave a couple of pamphlets about his technique of language learning.
44. I remember one afternoon we had an hour of learning Russian. It was very strange that Reg dropped in and out of the school at the behest of no one but Rainey-Brown. Presumably Reg had no teaching qualifications and no background checks were done. Other teachers would have been aware of his presence. Having read the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry statement of the headmaster Andrew Hunter, he put an end to Reg coming to the school. I believe that Andrew Hunter also shared the fact that the head of modern languages at Merchiston wanted Reg to have nothing to do with the curriculum at the school.
45. There were good teachers that I feel I should mention. Frank Hadden was the P.E. teacher. He went on to become the Scottish rugby coach later in life. Charles Swan who was a history and P.E. teacher was also very good. There was a female music teacher who I believe was called Mrs Nicholls who was quite nice to me as well,
46. There was also mandatory homework time, which we called Prep. That was two to three hours in the evening, each day.
47. I think that on the face of it, I should have been a golden boy at Merchiston and in many ways I was. I was very good at sports, I was winning lots of academic prizes, and I was playing music. But at the same time, I never really fitted in. I couldn't really speak to my family about anything. None of my family had ever had any experience of private boarding school. Very quickly I realised that they couldn't relate to any aspect of my life. That was a burden I had to carry. It still is to a degree.
48. The experience I was going through was completely alien to my family. You have to see it from their perspective, it was a different strata of society for them. All of a sudden

my father had access to other parents, people who had been Scottish rugby internationalists, people who were very rich or sophisticated. However, on a daily basis, my parents couldn't plug in to the emotional challenges of somebody in that situation.

49. It was very isolating for me going to Merchiston and very isolating coming back home because I couldn't talk to my family. It took a long time to fit back into village life. I didn't really have many friends anymore because they were all at a local school in [REDACTED]. Then I was back to Merchiston again. I'm not a psychologist but I have read that the trauma involved in that is almost like a bereavement and because you are going back and forward all the time, it is almost like you are being bereaved multiple times with the same person.
50. The environment at Merchiston was quite testosterone heavy and I am quite a thoughtful chap, quite a sensitive guy. I found it quite difficult. I have to say that some of the teachers were quite sarcastic and unhelpful in their own way. I became a teacher later in life and I am sure I was influenced to do so by my time at Merchiston. It really brought it home to me how poor the pastoral care was there, compared to today, but also quite poor in general terms.
51. Scotland is quite a snobby class driven society in a lot of ways. I had the wrong accent. I was a teuchter from [REDACTED]. I was also highly achieving but I was never really interested in the game of being a leader, I would rather read a book.
52. I could also see the hypocrisy of being at boarding school. You could see that the other boys there were no more able or intelligent than boys in any other public or private school in the country. So, my heart was never really in Merchiston as a concept.

Sporting activities

53. I lost weight drastically over the first six weeks that I was at Merchiston Castle School, to the extent that my mother took me to the local doctor. I think it would just be a case of puppy fat going but I was very thin and I remained very thin at Merchiston Castle

School. I think it was because I was getting more exercise. There was a lot of sport. It was incredible how much they were able to squeeze out of us.

- 54. I trained for rugby three times a week, and I played rugby on Saturday against another private school. I think that was a source of quite a lot of pride for my family.
- 55. On top of the rugby there would be two lots of swimming and two lots of generalised P.E. There would be other sports, and in the evenings we would kick a football or a rugby ball about.

Healthcare

- 56. There were two matrons at Merchiston and they were kept busy with various rugby injuries. As I was growing and entering puberty my Achilles tendons were quite sore. They were always getting stretched and pulled. I visited the matrons quite regularly for that. On one occasion they took me to hospital in Edinburgh for some non-emergency ailment, I can't remember what it was. The matrons were quite easy to manipulate, to get you off school if you wanted to.
- 57. Due to my weight loss, my mother took me to the local doctor after the first half-term. As it turned out, the doctor was a trustee of one of the other public schools, a place called Strathallan. He gave me the all-clear and made a joke as we were leaving that this wouldn't have happened if I had gone to another school.

Work

- 58. We didn't have to do work in terms of cleaning or laundry. They had cleaners who came in and you put your dirty laundry into a basket and that was collected and washed for you. Your name was on every item of your clothing so it would be returned to you.
- 59. We had to make our beds and keep everything neat and tidy. I can't remember but I expect that if you didn't do it to a high enough standard, then there would be some

kind of punishment. There might have been some kind of requirement to keep your rugby boots nice and clean too, but it wasn't too onerous.

60. We didn't have to do any fagging, i.e. work for teachers or senior pupils.

Birthdays and Christmas

61. There were instances of boys being jumped on their birthdays by a group of lads, stripped naked, and tied to a tree. I kind of wanted that to happen to me, because that could be something I could present to my parents, and the school as being something incontrovertibly bad, and I could use it as an excuse to leave the school. I mentioned it in passing to a bully. On my birthday four or five boys came into the dormitory, grabbed me, took me outside, stripped me and left me. It was a horrible experience. I think I reported it, I certainly made sure that the staff were aware of it.
62. The headmaster made the boys who stripped me naked pay for my birthday pizza. I invited three or four friends to join me and the pizza was paid for by the bullies. I used that situation as a lever to eventually leave Merchiston Castle School, although it was still very difficult for my parents to let me leave.

Bed Wetting

63. I didn't have a problem with bed wetting and I am not aware of it being a problem issue for others within the school.

External Inspections

64. I am not aware of any external inspections taking place at Merchiston Castle School while I was there.
65. Obviously things have moved on since I was at Merchiston Castle School, and that is a good thing I never saw any inspectors at Merchiston and I don't think the standard

of the teaching was that good either. It is perhaps a cliché about private schools, but a lot of it is run on sarcasm, and run on class.

Family contact

66. During term time, my contact with my family was usually via telephone calls. My grandmother wrote to me every week. I wanted to write back to my grandmother but I didn't know where to start verbalising how I felt about the school.
67. It was quite extraordinary to me but the school staff would listen in on your phone calls home. The phone lines were tapped. I know this because another boy told me that when I was on the phone home to my parents, he was in the housemaster's office and he could hear everything that I was saying over the phone, and described it to me. The housemaster wasn't in his office at the time, it was just the other boy for some reason. I think that is quite a nasty invasion of privacy.
68. Another reason why I believe the boy who told me the school was listening in to my phone call is that there was a trip to Murrayfield for the rugby. Back in those days, it was common for people to invade the pitch after the game finished. We saw the head boy doing a pitch invasion and took that as encouragement and did it ourselves. The school found out about it and we were all punished with detention. I complained about this to my dad in a telephone call and told him that we had seen the head boy doing it. About a week later, my detention got mysteriously cancelled. I think the teacher must have been listening in to my call.

Prefects / senior pupils

69. There were about five or six prefects in [REDACTED] House. Prefects were assigned to all the different boarding houses. They were there for pastoral reasons, to offer a bit of leadership, although that wasn't always the case.
70. The prefects could issue punishments. There were various forms of punishment. For minor infractions you would get the bench, which was just a bench you had to sit on

as a punishment for a couple of hours. It was outside the housemaster's office. Other things would be lines or detention for more serious things. Prefects had the ability to set these punishments, but teachers did as well.

71. There was no physical punishment when I was at Merchiston Castle School. There was however a lot of emotional punishment. I think when you have an all male environment hierarchies emerge. It is almost like a wolfpack. If you are someone who is confident or can project confidence and hide their insecurities, then you will rise in stature. However, if you are someone who is more circumspect you are going to suffer.
72. I think that once you show weakness, it gets exploited. One of the prefects noticed I was in distress. He took me out of bed one night saying that there was a phone call for me. He took me round the corner and asked if another boy was bullying me. I said that he was and the prefect sympathised with me. That meant a lot, and it stuck with me.
73. The prefects were good people, for the most part. However, I want to point out one prefect who was not. About six months into my first-year things like sweets and possessions started to go missing. Not just my things, many other people's too. It became like an urban myth. We called him The Scran Thief, because of all the food going missing.
74. One day the housemaster called an assembly and announced in quite grandiose terms that the Scran Thief had been caught. He didn't say anything else, but then we noticed that one of the prefects was missing. I can't remember the name of that prefect. He had been suspended for two weeks. It turned out this prefect was not only stealing food, but he was also stealing high value possessions from individual boys and taking them to a pawn shop on Lothian Road for money.
75. I had two things that went missing, my tennis racket which was worth £100 and my Nintendo Gameboy. I never got those back. The thing that sticks in my mind is that I never reported them missing, because I had already lost faith in the school's ability to do anything about it. I felt kind of vindicated about that because in my mind, those

thefts should have been an expulsion level matter but the thief was back after two weeks and resumed his duties as a prefect. It felt very humiliating that this chap was back as if nothing had happened. It was swept under the carpet. In retrospect, that was an indication to me that I was also getting ground down quite quickly.

Abuse at Merchiston Castle School

76. I decided to come forward to the Inquiry, having been made aware of the work of the Inquiry through the press. Initially the main incident that I wanted to discuss with the Inquiry was a trip I went on with James Rainey-Brown. I believe that he has been discussed at length in statements submitted to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. The first time I wanted to discuss him was when I found out that he had committed suicide.
77. James Rainey-Brown was a bachelor. He was a Christian and probably believed in some kind of muscular idea of Christianity and the outdoors. He ran a trip to an island called Rua Fiola. A man called Torquill Johnston-Ferguson was bequeathed the island and over time, he would build an outdoor camp there, almost like a resort. It was exclusively for the use of various pupils of private schools around the country. Rainey-Brown and Johnston-Ferguson formed a bond. Rainey-Brown would take children in a minibus for a week in the summer to Rua Fiola. I put my name down and went on the trip.
78. Before I came to the Inquiry I did some research about Torquill Johnston-Ferguson. It turns out that there was an allegation of child abuse against him at this island, by another pupil. About 2015, I walked passed a newsagent and saw what happened to Rainey-Brown. An allegation had been made by a pupil against him and he committed suicide just before the police came to take him away for questioning.
79. It was the summer after my first year at Merchiston Castle School. Before the trip to Rua Fiola I had been at home for the first week of the summer holidays. Then my parents packed my bag and drove me back to Merchiston Castle School. I went back into [REDACTED] boarding house. The idea was that I would spend the night alone in the

boarding house and the others who lived closer to Edinburgh would arrive in the morning for us all to get in the minibus and drive to Oban to get the ferry to the island.

80. I was by myself in the boarding house. I was fairly comfortable in the environment and I knew where everything was. I chose a bed and got settled in for the night. Then Rainey-Brown came in and he said that he was going to sleep in the bed next to me.

Out of all the beds in the dormitory, let alone the whole boarding house, he chose the one next to me. Then he said, 'I hope you don't mind but I sleep naked.' He left that hanging in the air waiting for a response. It was almost as if he was waiting for permission from me for whatever was going to happen next. To my eternal credit, alarm bells started ringing in my head. I made sure that I said nothing at all, so the moment passed. But it was still me and Rainey-Brown in the room by ourselves.

81. After I failed to say anything about him sleeping naked, Rainey-Brown said, 'Look out the window.' The dormitory looked out onto a playing field at the far end of which was an oak tree. He said, 'A lot of boys, for a dare, get up in the middle of the night, sprint round the oak tree naked, and sprint back to their room. What do you think of that? Should we do it?' Again, he just left that hanging and again I said nothing. He didn't push it further and we went to sleep. It was only after Rainey-Brown died that I looked back on that incident and thought it really wasn't okay.

82. These are things that you just have to deal with. The next day we all jumped in the minibus and Rainey-Brown drove us up to the highlands and life moved on. There was one thing that happened on the trip. Rainey-Brown caught me making a slightly off-colour sexual remark to another boy. He put his arm around me and asked me what the remark meant. He jogged me a bit and asked me what it meant. I didn't say anything and I guess he took the hint after that.

83. There was no problem with Torquil Johnston-Ferguson when I was on the island. I have to say that I was surprised when I heard of the allegations against him. There was no indication of anything untoward with him. There was one time I got mud on my

backside. I was in the shower washing it off and he did help me, but it is my judgement that there was nothing untoward or sexual in what he was doing there.

84. Before this incident I had been aware about what some other boys were saying about Rainey-Brown. Rainey-Brown was always quite an eccentric character. In his mannerisms and the way he would draw attention to himself in a room, he reminded me of Jimmy Savile, and I am not drawing other parallels between them but in terms of their eccentricities and mannerisms they were similar.
85. There were things that boys complained about, for example Rainey-Brown would come into the shower sometimes to pass on a message. When he took rugby practice you had to change out of your pants and put swimming trunks on underneath your rugby shorts. I think it was to save on washing. Sometimes boys would forget and have their boxer shorts on underneath their rugby shorts. With rugby being a physical sport that would easily be seen. If Rainey-Brown saw that, he would make you take your pants or boxer shorts off there and then, at the side of the pitch. You would then play the rest of the match in your rugby shorts without any pants. Boys complained about that.
86. Rainey-Brown would also massage boys on the table, if they had sore legs. I think that was done privately, he had his favourites. I remember one of them was called [REDACTED]. I didn't witness this but was told that it went on. I read someone else's testimony on the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry website that jogged a memory of boys discussing that Rainey-Brown would often line boys up in a row, kneeling away from him, over a bath filled with water and had them ducking for apples. It would be like a competition for three or four boys.
87. There were urban myths which were passed around among the boys about comments Rainey-Brown had made. Comments about genitalia and that kind of thing.
88. There was one day that Rainey-Brown whipped a boy with a towel and left a red mark. I'm not sure of his name. I saw that incident with my own eyes. It was in the changing rooms, and to be fair the boy did suggest it as a laugh. Rainey-Brown took a towel and

whipped him right away. I just thank my stars that it was the nineties and not the seventies in terms of what went on.

89. My parents were completely taken in by Rainey-Brown. They just thought this was what an upper-class British gentleman looked like. My belief is that all eccentricity has pain in its heart. I believe that eccentricity is a coping mechanism for something.
90. I was a scholarship pupil and the first thing that my parents did was take me to the thrift shop. I was wearing hand-me-down sports gear but I didn't get marked out by the other pupils for that. We didn't have much money and my accent back then was more teuchter, rural Scottish. That marked me out amongst the pupils and it probably marked me out to some of the teachers too.
91. I remember one geography class that was all about where we went on holiday. Somebody said they went to France or Spain. There were only two boys in the class who didn't go on holiday in the summer, that was me and a Pakistani lad whose dad had got rich running corner shops in Edinburgh. I knew not to say that I hadn't been on holiday, so I lied and said that I had. The other boy told the truth and he was faced with sarcastic comments like, "Shall we have a whip-round for him?" That kind of thing happened a lot.
92. I think a lot of the teachers found themselves overwhelmed at Merchiston. Sarcasm was a way of dealing with it. I remember one teacher smelled me as I came into the classroom. Someone must have said that I smelled bad because he then said to the class, 'He smells okay to me.' and everybody laughed. I can't remember that teacher's name, but he taught English. These teachers had all been to Oxford or Cambridge universities but they just weren't very good at teaching. It seems that Merchiston used the attendance at Oxford or Cambridge as a branding mechanism rather than on particular teacher's ability to teach.
93. I was verbally abused by [REDACTED] Mr [REDACTED]. Over the course of a couple of years [REDACTED] saw me crying on the telephone to my mum or dad and made sarcastic comments about it.

94. There was also verbal abuse from the head of Chalmers East boarding house, Mr OPA [REDACTED]. He was okay but he was overwhelmed and sarcastic.
95. There was another chap from the highlands called Mr Coull. I would often drift off in lessons and there would be a degree of shouting about that. He was also assigned to me pastorally. That didn't go well. I just kept staring at my feet and saying nothing. That would result in him shouting at me again.
96. There were other instances of teachers shouting at me. Over time, I felt ground down by it. I became quite passive. My academic performance wasn't what it was, I was no longer in the top rugby team, and my confidence was really taking a knock. That is when I decided that I had to leave Merchiston at all costs.
97. There were no other abusive things that went on with teachers. However, there was one boy called [REDACTED] who kept a knife. It was a hunting knife, like a Bowie knife. [REDACTED] was a bully, a bigger lad in my year. He was a nasty person to be around. One day I went to my wardrobe and my shirt was shredded. It had presumably been cut to ribbons by the knife. I didn't mention that to anyone. When you are getting bullied, it is difficult to open up so I didn't say anything. I think [REDACTED] might have struggled a bit after he left Merchiston.

Reporting of abuse at Merchiston Castle School

98. I didn't make any reports of bullying or abuse to anyone at Merchiston. With that prefect who had been stealing getting brought back it was almost as if the institution was behind them. Therefore, the institution is against you as someone wanting to bring forward something that is adverse to the school.
99. Although I liked the prefects on an individual level, it was almost like your place in the hierarchy was being reinforced and there was stuff that you shouldn't really talk about, so I didn't mention it. It would have taken a great deal of bravery to start speaking up

about this. I think it was almost as if, if I had mentioned abusive behaviour, that I would be disappointing people. I would have been inconveniencing my parents, changing their opinions of the school, and shattering their illusions. And at the end of the day, it wouldn't have made any difference. There would have been no question of me leaving Merchiston at that stage. I felt kind of trapped and smothered in that sense.

100. There were perhaps different forms of control that were acting on a conscious or unconscious level. Merchiston didn't really feel like a very supportive place.
101. Maybe it was some kind of trauma response but there were some things that I wouldn't talk about. Maybe I thought on one level that they were things that weren't worth talking about, that I wasn't worth sorting out in that way.

Leaving Merchiston Castle School

102. I had been an A star pupil when I started at Merchiston. I then went down to a B+. When I left Merchiston and went back to state school, I went back to being an A star pupil.
103. When I did eventually decide to leave the Merchiston Castle School, QZA turned up in the headmaster's office and offered to be a mentor and provide for me pastorally, but my mind had been made up by then.
104. Merchiston was a difficult environment for me emotionally. If I had a different family and was able to talk about the issues that were affecting me more, then it would have been different, but Scottish farmers are not best known for their emotional eloquence. Every time I went home, or spoke to my family over the phone, it was such a struggle. That precipitated my decline both academically and socially within the school.

Life after boarding school

105. I left Merchiston Castle School after the summer term in 1998. I then started back at secondary school in [REDACTED] in September 1998. I crash-coursed my standard grades in one year at [REDACTED] and got all A's. The next year I did my Highers.
106. When I had gone to Merchiston Castle School, I had to repeat a year because I was joining their system which would have involved sitting English GCSE exams. When I moved back to [REDACTED], I was in the year below where I would otherwise have been if I had stayed in [REDACTED]. That was a bit tricky, but it was what it was. I passed all the exams and then did well in my Highers. I wanted to stay on for sixth year, but my parents were anxious for me to catch up with my previous year group and just go straight to university.
107. I had a place sorted out at Edinburgh University to study a science subject. However, I didn't go. For one thing, it felt strange to be going back to Edinburgh and for another thing, I felt I was being rushed by my parents. It felt like the same process as going to Merchiston all over again. I felt I was being pressurised by my family, without really discussing it. The thing with my family is that they are not very good at discussing things. That has been a stumbling block throughout my life with them.
108. I decided to take a year out. I worked on the farm with my dad and then went to university the next year. About three months into that year out, I developed quite serious clinical depression. I was put on a course of antidepressants and I began visiting an educational psychologist. That was all very unpleasant indeed. I think I got as much help as I could have done from the state.
109. I did one year at university studying law. I didn't like it at all, so I took a year out. Then I went back to university and did a four-year course in economics and graduated with a degree in that. I did manage to make university work for me and to enjoy it.
110. I was a teacher in a scheme, similar to the English scheme Teach First, which is very intensive. They deliberately place you in underperforming schools because they

identify you as the difference that could change the school's performance. They train you up on the job, in the evenings, and at weekends. I was placed in schools in a couple of demanding locales in London. I found it very difficult and I found it very rewarding. I don't think I could have done that without my experiences at Merchiston Castle School. On some level, I think it was an attempt to self-therapize, to process my previous experiences.

111. The school I went to eventually was incredible to be a part of. It was a school in a demanding part of inner-city London, with 80 per cent free school meals. They turned it into one of the best performing schools in the country through a mixture of tough love, discipline, and hard work. It was great to be a part of that environment.
112. I realised eventually that I wasn't cut out for teaching, and that it was just something that I needed to do for myself. Then I moved into various finance roles.
113. In my current job and throughout my career I have found it difficult to settle. I have found it difficult to reconcile where I am at with my ambition. I have often moved from job to job in white collar roles. I am enjoying my current job. I work in environmental policy and finance for the government. It is interesting and stimulating. I am quite hopeful of a future there.
114. I am back at university part-time now doing a masters degree in genetics which I am really enjoying and I am doing very well at. I am just doing that because I enjoy the subject. It is a source of passion for me.

Impact

115. I think that being at Merchiston Castle School undoubtedly placed a wedge between me and the rest of my family, and in one form or another that wedge has stayed in place to this day. I am the eldest child in my family, and the eldest child usually takes over the farm but that hasn't happened. I find it difficult to work with my father, and it is difficult to hold a conversation with him. I find that I am quite suspicious of my father

in some ways. To be fair to them, my experience at Merchiston Castle School is outwith their terms of reference, their experience, and probably their capabilities as well. I am hopeful that things will improve.

116. During Covid I went back home to my parents for eighteen months. I engineered a couple of situations where I could talk about things. I talked about my emotions and I talked about how I felt about my parents. They said that they found that very useful, and that they hadn't thought about things in that way before. However, these opportunities for discussion with my parents are very fleeting. More often than not, they accuse me of wanting them to prostrate themselves in front of me, or of wanting to humiliate them.
117. My father is a difficult man to talk to at the best of times, and there have been a couple of times when I have felt humiliated by my attempts to talk to him. It has felt like I am opening up, almost to be taken advantage of, shut down, or dominated. When I have opened up to my family, it does a bit of good for a short period though.
118. My relationship with my siblings is good but difficult. I am the academic one in the family. My sister always found it difficult to be in my shadow. My brother always wanted to take over the farm, and I never had any interest in doing that. I am far too academic for that. I couldn't drive tractors all day, it would drive me nuts.
119. That situation has made it difficult for me to talk to my brother as well. It is my absence from the farm that has allowed him to pursue his ambition. Another difficulty is that my brothers are quite into rugby, and I had had enough of rugby at Merchiston Castle School. I felt that rugby wasn't worth pursuing whereas, all credit to them, my brothers have done well in rugby. Both my brothers have been offered professional rugby contracts at different times. I am very proud of them for that, but it wasn't a route I wanted to take.
120. I wouldn't say that I am estranged from my family, but we are at arms length. When I was nineteen years old and visiting my psychologist, it was suggested that I may just have to accept this. Our experiences had made us different. My siblings didn't go to

private school. For one thing they wouldn't have got the scholarships. For another thing, I think that my parents were chastened by the experience I had had, so they decided not to send my siblings to private school.

121. I was always striving to leave Merchiston Castle School, I was pushing to do that for four years. I feel that pattern has persisted throughout my life in one way or another. I always find myself looking for something new or a new opportunity. I have found it very difficult to stay in one place. I also think that over time I have had quite a difficult relationship with authority.
122. I think it took until I was a teacher for the penny to drop that I had to work on myself emotionally in order to be a more successful, better person.
123. Sometimes in the past I have become very frustrated with work. I have snapped at people and alienated people on many occasions. I have no doubt that was due to my difficulties at boarding school and also with regards to my family. Having said that, I am enjoying the work I am doing just now. I am finding it interesting and I think that is all you can really ask for.
124. My physical health has been affected by my time at Merchiston Castle School. I have gone to a lot of therapy over the years and been for a lot of counselling. The positive physical effect of the counselling has always blown my mind. I have come out feeling that the knot in my stomach that is perpetually there has gone. My back doesn't feel as sore anymore. My Sciatica has disappeared. It has taken time for these physical effects to gradually go away. They are still there to an extent, but the fact that the counselling has helped tells me that there has been a mental or emotional component to it all.
125. I think I have carried round a lot of anxiety from my time at Merchiston Castle School, and that has impacted upon me in the workplace. It has impacted on my relationship with my family.

126. During Covid I really made an effort trying to open up to my family but it came to blows and I now no longer talk to my youngest brother. I think that over time I feel that I have had to fight for my experiences to be taken seriously. Therefore, my reason for contacting the Inquiry is more personal than some people who might be looking for justice, or just the fact that they will be taken seriously.
127. Life is never linear, it is not a straight line, but I think maybe I could have pushed harder in terms of my career. When you go to university and you are depressed, you have to get rid of the depression first, and I think it is only now that I feel that I am in the situation where I can begin to enjoy life and take seriously the opportunities it has for me. I am 42 years old now, and most people leave university at 22, so it is a case of working out what I can do with the 25 years of my career that I have remaining, working out how best to leave a mark.
128. I am quite a serious person and I tend to think quite deeply about these things. That can manifest itself negatively in the sense that I am not in the moment or might pontificate about things too much. Again, it is just about living my life and not beating myself up too much either.

Treatment/support

129. After I developed depression I was referred to a Dumfries and Galloway Council educational psychologist. That helped, and I was put on very strong anti-depressants. They at least helped me to sleep, which was good too. But they really cast a shadow over my twenties.
130. I think I will benefit from talking to the Inquiry about the wider emotional strains and experiences I have been through.

Reporting of Abuse

131. I have never made any report about the abuse I experienced at Merchiston Castle School. Speaking to the Inquiry is the first time I have spoken about it.

Lessons to be Learned

132. I don't think boarding schools should exist, I think they are an entirely artificial concept. There are maybe some circumstances in which you could understand it, for example children with parents in the military or diplomatic roles. But as a means of educating a child you must begin with the principal that boarding school is wholly sub-optimal on almost every level, to be taken away from your family at the age of eleven, and to be placed in the care of strangers 24 hours a day, for six weeks at a time. Again, it is a source of frustration with my family that they couldn't see that, but it seems so obvious to me.
133. I don't know if my parents have a revised opinion of boarding school given my experience of going to Merchiston Castle School. I don't think my parents think about those kinds of things. I think that there are reasons for people to point to private schools as being successful institutions. People come out of boarding school with high paid jobs, but when I was at [REDACTED] Academy, there were two pupils in the year above me who went to Oxford University, and there was a girl in my year who ended up at Harvard University.
134. There are mechanisms around networking effects or class effects that will promote an image of success thereto, but I think it is wholly illusory. At least in my day, if you had the right education in a normal school, you could succeed. If you wanted to be a rugby player, then perhaps Merchiston Castle School was for you, but that wasn't a priority for me, and I don't think it should be a priority for anyone else.
135. I think with my experiences as a teacher, I can expand a bit more. As a teacher, safeguarding is undoubtedly a pain. At times male teachers were almost like second-

class citizens, because as any teacher would tell you that it is a bad idea for a male teacher to be left alone in a classroom with a pupil, particularly a female pupil. Safeguarding is however there for a reason, and my experiences with Mr Rainey-Brown inform that. But safeguarding is much better now than it was in the 1990's, and it was much better in the 1990's than it was in the 1970's. Although I believe that Merchiston has had its fair share of problems with teachers more recently too.


Hopes for the Inquiry

136. I came to the Inquiry because I wanted to share, to get things off my chest. It feels good to do that, to validate myself as someone who should talk about these things. That is incredibly important.
137. In terms of how the Inquiry can improve things, I think it is important for wider society to know how things are in boarding schools. It is not something that should be dismissed, but it is not something that should be valorised either. It is an experience in its own right. I think that many people dismiss boarding school in a positive way, by saying that it is there for a purpose. Other people dismiss boarding school in a negative way by saying, 'Emotionally damaged toffs are running the country. What did you expect?'
138. I think it is true to say that sunlight is a very potent disinfectant, and that standards of safeguarding should be even higher in private schools than they are in mainstream schools, and they are very high in the mainstream schools that I worked in. I think that private schools should invest in safeguarding to the utmost extent, with emotional and psychological support for pupils on a more regular basis, and being sure that teachers weren't protecting the institution, which happened on several occasions when I was at Merchiston Castle School, especially with James Rainey-Brown. He shouldn't have been anywhere near children.
139. I think it is good that places like Merchiston Castle School are beginning to open up. But I think that even today private schools are getting away with things.

140. You could say that the experience of the boys is very important too. When you think emotional abuse or sexual abuse of children, you perhaps automatically gravitate towards the female experience. If someone is emotionally abusing a boy, that is still bullying.

Other information

141. 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.....15 - MAY - 2025.....