

## Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

QPG

Support person present: No

1. My name is QPG My date of birth is 1979. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

### Life before boarding school

2. My father was in the Royal Air Force. As a result, my mother, elder sister, and I, travelled around a lot, going from base to base. My childhood was pretty good. My father was called and my mother was . My father was the youngest of nine from East Kilbride. He worked hard and got himself into the RAF. He worked his way up to the grade of a warrant officer which was the highest you could get before commissioning to be an officer. He worked very hard to ensure that myself and my sister had all of the opportunities that he didn't have. My father met my mother in the RAF. They both joined quite young. Once they got married and started having children, my mum took a step back from her role within the women's RAF. Ultimately, he had the more senior position so we went where his work took us. My mum would pick up bits of work here and there. They provided for us well. My sister, is four years older than me.
3. I was born in North Walsham. I think I only lived there for about a week because my father was posted to Germany. We went around quite a few of the bases. Up until I was aged ten, I went to the closest base primary school wherever we lived.

4. In those days, the Forces gave parents the opportunity to pay to send their children to a private boarding school in the UK as a means to obtain a more permanent and stable education.
5. My sister went to boarding school from the age of ten but she went to St George's in Edinburgh. It was a much more prestigious boarding school which the 'high society' sent their children to. It was one of the best boarding schools in Scotland. She stayed there until she finished.
6. I was sent to Queen Victoria school which was for boys only. It was defined as 'the boarding school for the sons of Scottish servicemen.' There were no day pupils at that time so boys were sent there to stay. I can remember going to another boy's house once. I don't know if he maybe went home at weekends. The majority of the lads were there for terms.
7. I looked forward to starting there because my sister had always come back from her school saying how much she enjoyed it. As much as it was quite hard to leave my mum and dad, it was also exciting to be getting to fly on aeroplanes.

#### **Queen Victoria School, Dunblane**

8. The school was in Dunblane. I think there was a housing estate on the boundary of the school. The main road forked off to the driveway which led to the building. There were huge concrete gates leading up to it. The building itself was quite old, it was a large, classic, old brick institution. There was a large car park to the right and a couple of mobile huts that were used as classrooms. There was a more modern building which was two or three tiered with full class size windows and within that building was the lower house which is where I was for the first two years. There was church next to that building. It all centred on that courtyard. Behind that there were large grounds with a swimming pool, band huts and changing rooms.

9. It was a Protestant school and I was Catholic. On a Sunday, I had to go to the local Catholic church which was a fifteen or twenty minute from the school.

### **Routine at Queen Victoria**

#### *First day*

10. I didn't visit the school before arriving on the first day but my dad had seen it beforehand. My dad travelled with me and we stayed with relatives in East Kilbride beforehand. We didn't see as much of my dad's family as my mum's so I didn't really know them. My sister had always seen more of them than I did. I didn't really know them and there were so many of them, uncles, aunties and cousins. They made me feel welcome enough but I didn't feel like I really knew them.
11. We travelled to the school together. It was my tenth birthday. My dad had bought me some presents for my birthday so there was a sense of that being nice and that he had made a big deal of my birthday. However, once I had been dropped off and left there, it was pretty horrible. I can remember feeling sad that I was alone on my birthday with kids I didn't know.
12. For the first two years, I was in the lower house. I can't remember being greeted or met by anyone. Somebody must have met with me because I was shown to my dorm and bed. There were a lot of other new boys starting that day. I think the dorm was a mix of first and second years. I think we were paired with a second year to 'show us the ropes'. The boys at the school were aged from ten to eighteen. It was boys only throughout my time there. There was only one junior house which I was in. The boys in there were aged ten or eleven. After that you would go to the senior bit.

#### *Staff*

13. I can't remember who was in charge. I can't picture the headmaster at all. There were teachers dedicated to each house. There was a house system. I think once you went into the secondary part, there were potentially two houses. I can't quite remember how

many members of staff looked after the kids in the junior house. The member of staff in charge who lived there so there was someone who was always around. I think there was one teacher who floated around all day. I can remember once having to go to his flat to tell him that I wasn't happy about something that was going on. I can't remember his name but he was forty or fifty. He had white hair which was not too dissimilar in style to my dad's. It was white with a thin side parting.

14. I had an older cousin there. I think my dad found that comforting. He was two or three years above me so I didn't see much of him. His surname was [REDACTED]

#### *Layout*

15. The big classic building housed the food hall, the assembly hall and all the rooms for the older kids. The lower house was in the corner end of the modern school building. It was separate from the older kids. I think the modern building had three floors. On each floor there were two dorms. In each dorm there a minimum of twenty kids. There were six dorms so there were around 120 kids in total.

#### *Mornings and bedtime*

16. I'm sure I was woken up by a call and someone else coming round to make sure you were getting up. After that, you would go to have breakfast. Breakfast was served in the huge dining hall. I think all of the boys of all ages congregated in the dining room. I have some memories of being in a huge hall and only two rows of the tables being filled so I am unsure if they staggered the mealtimes.
17. I think there was a bed time routine of biscuits and milk, cleaning your teeth and then going to bed. I can't remember anything more about the evenings. I can't remember what time we went to bed but we were definitely told to go and do our teeth etc. The lights were put out and there was an expectation that you would go to sleep.

### *Mealtimes/Food*

18. The food was generally of an acceptable standard however, I can remember being given liver once and really not liking it. I was told by one of the teachers that that was all I would be getting. I think I just ate the rest of what was on the plate. I was a fussy eater. I can't remember there being any punishment for not eating meals.
19. There was a tuck shop which you could go to once a day. You could spend your pocket money there. I think they gave us some pocket money in a small brown envelope every once in a while and the amount was written on it. I think they held it centrally. I can't remember where the tuck shop was in the building. I vaguely remember there being a cart coming round when I was in the lower school.
20. I can recall being sent a food parcel, with chocolate and some money in it, from my mum once. I left it on my bed and when I came back to get it, someone had taken it. The money had been stolen and the chocolate had been eaten. I didn't even bother reporting it to anyone.
21. I occasionally saw my older cousin walking across the pathway to go to a classroom. You were very much self-contained in the lower house. There was no contact out-with school hours between the lower and upper houses.

### *Washing/bathing*

22. In the lower house, each dorm had its own shower facilities. There were bathrooms in the middle in each floor. In the upper house there were dorms coming off the bathroom. There were showers and baths. We were encouraged to make sure we were showered and clean by a member of staff. I can't remember being supervised in the shower. I think because there was quite a lot of physical education, there would be importance placed on showering after it to be ready for the next class.

### *Clothing/uniform*

23. The uniform was slightly military. There were khaki trousers, a really thick roll-neck woollen jumper and you had to make sure that your shoes were well polished. You had to leave your uniform at the bottom of your bed neatly packed up, ready for the next day. They would rotate it so that you would put the dirty stuff in your own laundry pigeon hole. Then they would replace it with clean items. In the lower house, the laundry room was on your floor. I have images of the housekeeper ironing shirts outside the room in the lower house. I think there was a permanent housekeeper.
24. The uniform was provided by the school. I vaguely remember being kitted out for it. You were given a number when you started, I think my number was [REDACTED] You were told your number and not to forget it.
25. I think most of the time we were in our school clothes. I recall having to be in your uniform when you went into town. We were also told that we had to be on our best behaviour because we were representing the school. You could occasionally go into town to spend your money but I can't remember how often.
26. In the lower house, there was a small bedside cabinet with a small set of drawers and a small wardrobe. I think in the upper house, there were bunk beds and classic wardrobes. They were used to divide the room up. I don't think we had a key to lock them.

### *Trips and holidays*

27. I can't remember going to the theatre or anything like that. I think it was pretty self-contained.

### *Schooling*

28. The teaching took place in a classic education block which was full of classrooms. I can't quite remember if we had lessons from Monday to Saturday. I think we had a

half day on a Saturday in the senior house. There was a sports ground and there were classic old school changing rooms down at the fields. There were also a couple of music huts. There was a huge band hut on the field where you would learn the bagpipes or the drums. Queen Victoria's bagpipe band played at Murrayfield. They were quite invested in pupils learning traditional Scottish instruments.

29. The academic side of school was alright. It was your standard level of education. Although, I didn't start languages until the final year of my second year. We had religious studies, English and maths. They tried to provide some level of basic sex education. It was very biological. One of the reasons my dad sent me there was because they had some of the best performing results around. I think they coordinated it well. Once you went into the senior school, you had to sign up to one of the three, combined cadet forces. You did army, air force or navy. I can't quite remember which I did. There was a lot of extra curricula on top of formal schooling.

#### *Sporting activities*

30. We didn't have sports everyday but it was big part of the school curriculum. There was football, rugby and cross-country. There was an expectation that you would take part in sports. I was good at swimming so I took part in a few galas there. I can remember towards the end they took us to the local dry-ski slope and being part of the ski team doing a couple of competitions. I can remember travelling across the country in terms of playing in the rugby team so we were obviously taking part in some competition. I hated sport but there was no consideration given as to whether you enjoyed it or not.

#### *Leisure time*

31. I think during leisure time I was just allowed to roam round. I can remember laying out the back of the school grounds. It was a wooded ground and it was really fun playing in it. On the other side of the playing field, there was a forest which you weren't supposed to go into. I can remember playing there. You were generally left to your own devices. I can remember breaking into the swimming pool to swim a couple of times

### *cHealthcare*

32. There was a dentist, a GP and a small infirmary. There was also a barbers on site. The dentist was at the back of the main education building. I can remember going into the infirmary once overnight when there was flu outbreak. I think I was generally checked over but I was starved for 24 hours and then given toast in the morning. I think that was the level of medical intervention they used.
33. We had dental check-ups but I had thirteen teeth taken out when I was there. I think they took them out to let my big teeth to come in. I think it was a standard procedure then.

### *Work*

34. I don't think we had chores. I think at some stage during the weekend, if you had competition, you were competing. I can recall a lot of the time being left to explore around.

### *Birthdays and Christmas*

35. I didn't celebrate any birthdays while I was at the school. I think some of the other boys received a package from their parents on their birthdays. I can't recall any celebrations at Christmas.

### *Visitors*

36. I can't remember having visitors but I think that was due to the fact my mum and dad were far away. I can remember when my grandad died that I was taken out class and met by my dad in a reception room. I remember him telling me he was over for his dad's funeral. I think if he had wanted me to go then I would have gone.

37. I felt quite isolated from my wider family circle. The reality was I was disconnected from my family as it felt very much like my family were in Germany and I was in Scotland.
38. I have no idea if I took a report home with me. I don't think my parents attended any parents' evenings. I have a recollection of the housemaster sending a report once.

#### *External Inspections*

39. I can't remember anyone coming around to inspect the school. They used to do the annual parade which was a big deal. From junior house, you had to do drill. I am sure that would have some relatively ceremonial people who would come along for it. I can remember you had to walk past them and give them a salute.

#### *Family contact*

40. You had access to a public phone that you could use whenever you wanted. I can remember my dad gave me a card that I could use to get through to different countries' landlines to speak to them. When I was in the senior house, there was a public phone. They would always be in a public area like a reception area so there was always people around.
41. I can't recall half terms but I think my dad has referred to me coming home at half terms. My dad used to bring me over at the beginning of the year because he also used it to spend time with his family. I can also remember being on the flights as an 'underage minor' so there would always be an air stewardess allocated to look after me on the flight and then they would get me off the flight and to someone who would be picking me up.

*Punishment/discipline*

42. I remember there was detention and I think I was in detention a fair bit. My understanding was that corporal punishment had only recently stopped when I was there. Some of the older boys talked about how bad some of the teachers had been.

**Abuse at Queen Victoria School, Dunblane**

43. In the lower house, there were a lot of people jockeying for position of 'top dog'. There were lots of new kids trying to prove themselves and second years reasserting themselves. I can remember getting into an argument in the dorm with a second year about something. We had a fight and ended up on the floor in the dorm. He spat a chewed up chocolate digestive biscuit into my mouth. I think his name was [REDACTED] I think he might have been supposed to be looking after me.
44. One of the teachers, Mr Beattie, was outside in the corridor. He was one of the younger teachers and everyone loved him. He drove a Mazda sports car and was very popular. I remember going to him a bit upset to tell him. I think he put [REDACTED] into detention but I also remember him being clear saying something like, "no one likes a snitch". It was the first time I had gone to a teacher to talk about something that shouldn't have happened.
45. Over the course of that time, things would be stolen, such as my money or chocolate I'd bought in town. It wasn't the best of times. After that I didn't tell anyone because that is the message I'd been given from Mr Beattie.
46. In the second year, I was moved. I don't know why or how it came to be. There were a couple of boys who I had been friends with initially but, for whatever reason, they decided they didn't like me. They isolated me, left me out and would trick me into doing things. I can't remember their names.
47. The bullying with those boys went on for a long period of time. I can remember being very unhappy being there 'day in and day out'. I used to go into the school building

with another couple of boys to play around rather than being in the dorm. I would get into trouble for setting off the fire extinguishers, and playing with lighters and aerosols. I think that was something the other two boys could hold over me.

48. It all came to a head so I went to the housemaster in charge and asked to move dorms. From recollection, I can remember him being quite supportive. However, I remember him saying, "there can't be more chopping and changing." I told him I wanted to move anyway. So I moved. I think he might have checked up on me a while later to find out how I was getting on. I can remember telling him I was a bit happier but I can't be sure.
49. The bullying went on for quite a long time. I think it was for at least two terms, or half a year. I think it was so bad due to being in class with the two boys and then having the intensity of having to sleep next to one of them.
50. I saw other kids being bullied or getting into fights. The culture within the school and the kids was that you didn't tell anyone. It was known that that was just not what you did. The incident with Mr Beattie reinforced that feeling for me. The bullying was endemic.
51. In my first year, there was a lad who walked a bit funny because of a disability. Another lad was known as "scarecrow" because he had had surgery and lost his hair. They were easy fodder and I did on occasion take part in that a bit.
52. The bullying was on two levels, there was the emotional and the physical. I moved up in the other house because my cousin was in that house. However he was two or three years above me so wasn't actually in my dorm. It was another case of making friends and not really knowing why they would then isolate and ostracise me. I would always want to know why so there was a cycle of being 'pushed and pulled' with two or three of the guys there.
53. Part of the reason which would always come back at times would be the Catholic/Protestant thing. The boarding school was a predominately Protestant boarding school so being Catholic would be brought up a lot.

54. I tried to reach out to older kids. I recall one lad being really nice to me. He talked about going to raves. I don't know if it was true or not. The physical bullying was by older boys.
55. The physical bullying was at its worst when I was twelve. There were more than twenty kids in the dorms. They were really long and there were bunk beds. There were separate private rooms for the older kids. There were four in each room. They would pretend to be my friend so would invite me in. When I was in there, I was made to be on all fours while some of the older boys kicked me in the ribs. Myself and, I think one of the twins, were told to go on all floors, we were then kicked in the ribs and told that whoever didn't scream out first would be let go. I don't know if staff were aware of this type of behaviour.
56. Another time, I was kicked and they put washing up liquid down my throat. On another occasion, they shoved me into a big, black bin and sat on me so that I couldn't get out. I was in there for a couple of minutes before they let me out.
57. I can't remember any more specific incidents. I just felt like I didn't ever fit in and there being a 'survival of the fittest.' It was a sense of being made to not fit in as opposed to me not trying to fit in.
58. There was a Northern Irish boy called [REDACTED] I think he had an issue with me being Catholic. In amongst all the "you're worthy, you're not worthy", there was always the fact I was Catholic being brought up in a derogatory way. It was another factor that was thrown in my face quite a lot. There was a bit of an undercurrent of it being us versus them. There weren't many other Catholic boys at the school.
59. We had to go to mass every morning and then at the weekend everyone had to go to the Sunday service. The vast majority of boys went to the church in the school grounds. However, the Catholic boys walked to a church in town. In terms of numbers there wasn't enough of us to fill a church. We walked together but I can't remember if a teacher accompanied us.

60. I remember that my Celtic top disappeared. I asked if anyone knew anything about it but no one did. It was a bit like the last straw.
61. I can remember it being bad enough that I tried to kill myself twice. I don't know if I was doing it for attention or if it was because I couldn't see another way out. It was during my time in the upper house. I can remember trying to [REDACTED] in the shared bathroom. The other time, I tried to [REDACTED]. There were really huge windows. I [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Somebody must have got me off quickly. I can't remember who it was. I cannot know what my intentions were but I can remember being deeply unhappy.
62. The housemaster, 'Mr Majeika', was aware of it. He was nicknamed that due to his likeness to the TV character. I think it was him. He had an office on the Cunningham House level. I can remember just being spoken to once. I think it was by 'Mr Majeika' and possibly the headmaster. At the time, it was thought that I had done it as a reaction to my Celtic top being stolen. I can't recall the level of the conversation.
63. When I came out of the meeting, the top was back on my bed. From my memory and what my parents have told me, it was as if that was all it was over. There wasn't any probing into why I was so unhappy that attempting to kill myself was the answer. There wasn't any discussion of me seeing a psychiatrist or a mental health worker. There was nothing like that. I'm not sure if it was the headmaster or 'Mr Majeika' who contacted my parents. 'Mr Majeika' must have known more about what had been going on because he contacted my dad. However, I got the impression from the meeting that if my top was found, the matter would have been in hand.
64. Around this time, the housemaster, 'Mr Majeika' left the school. He blew the whistle on the school. I remember there being rumours at the time that he was just an alcoholic and had had a massive fall out with the headmaster and the board. I also heard through the talk at school, that he would have some sixth formers in his room to smoke

cigarettes. I didn't hear anything else untoward about him. At the time I don't think I gave it much thought but looking back, he was quite eccentric.

65. However, shortly after an organisation came to speak to the pupils. I can remember being in a queue and speaking to them in a room in the school. I can remember telling them my name. They said something like, "we've been waiting to speak to you" and that they had heard my name coming up from other kids' accounts of what had been going on at the school. I don't know where they were from but it was two men in white shirts and ties. I told them about my experiences at the school. I think I told them about trying to kill myself and the bullying. They told me that other people had told them the same.

#### **Leaving Queen Victoria school, Dunblane**

66. I don't think anything happened as result of the meeting with the two men. However, I left the school shortly after it. In the end, I can remember being on the phone to my dad in the reception area and telling him that I wanted to leave. My dad told me to pack my bags and someone came for me the next day. I think the reality would be that if I had told them sooner I would have been out sooner. Certainly, if my mum had known that I had been that unhappy earlier then I would have been out of the school straight away.
67. I left quickly after returning from the half term break. It was probably a week or so later. It was after the spring or summer half-term. The school were aware why I was leaving. I was at the school for just short of three years. I left towards the end of the first year of being in the upper house. The bullying continued throughout my time there. I recall either being in a strange isolated space or also having the additional physical bullying.
68. I wish to incorporate the following extract which is an email from my father. It details his recollection of the events leading up to me leaving the school.

*"I can't remember if your Housemaster wrote or telephoned to tell us that there were problem at Queen Victoria School and that you were being bullied. Mum recalls*

*either he or you mentioned the putting soap in your mouth, he also told us later but can't recall when that you tried to commit suicide by using [REDACTED] We found out later that he either left or was dismissed and the Headmaster and his wife took over as Housemaster.*

*You were due to come home for either half term or end of term and when I picked you up from Dusseldorf I asked you if what he said was true. You confirmed it was, I said then before we got home that you would not be going back but you were adamant that you wanted to go back as you didn't really want to leave and were concerned for another boy who was your friend. I assume he was also being bullied. I'm not 100% sure now how much of this was shared with mum when we got home or if she was aware of the attempted suicide but feel that if she did she would not have let you go back.*

*You were not back long, I think less than a week, when we got the letter from you, and as soon as we got this we phoned the headmaster straight away. I think it was then that he told us that there had been some 'problems' and that he and his wife had taken over. He obviously tried to reassure us that things were now okay and that the suicide attempt was just a prank. He got you to come and speak to us on the phone, we did not discuss any details of bullying we only asked if you wanted to come home and you said yes. I recall the headmaster said he was surprised that we did not have a longer conversation with you. I think he wanted us to get you to stay but mum said there was only one question to ask and you had answered it and we would arrange a flight straight away."*

69. I asked my parents to provide me with their recollection of the events in order to support my recall to assist the Inquiry.

#### **Life after Queen Victoria School, Dunblane**

70. I moved back to Germany. My dad was living off base. I got the bus into the local base to go to school and then back after school. School was fine up until GCSEs. I had friends. I then moved to where I ended up doing my GCSEs. The people who I was

hanging around with weren't really the same as me. They were very sporty and heavily into branded clothing. It hadn't been a part of my world. I had to try to fit in to feel liked. I can remember getting into another pattern of being ostracised and them organising things behind my back. I started speaking to another couple of lads who I met on the bus so I started hanging out with them. So things got better. They weren't part of the clique.

71. We moved back to the UK when I was doing my A-Levels. The kids at the school had all grown up together and had developed friendships. When you move around, you have to adapt and try to fit in. I had to be resilient. I didn't share a huge amount of interest with the friends I had there. They didn't really seem to have any aspirations or want to do very much such as go to university.
72. I went off to university with the mind-set of not really caring whether people liked me or not. I went to the University of Glamorgan to do a Criminology degree. I realised in the third year that I didn't really enjoy the course. However, I graduated from university with a Bachelor of Science degree.
73. I really enjoyed the university experience and formed some really good friendships. Some of them are still in my life and I have a really good circle of friends through the network of university experience. I got into DJing quite a bit with them. I moved to London and set up a record shop with one of my friends in Hammersmith. Unfortunately, it didn't work out. I saved a lot of money from working as a recruitment consultant in London and I went travelling to Australia.
74. I had done my work experience at GCSE level in a forces hospital. I had been interested in working in the psychiatric ward. I spoke to one of the psychiatrists about career prospects.
75. Years later, I decided to retrain in nursing so that I could do a job I quite liked and earn a sufficient amount of money. After I came home from travelling in Australia, I applied to do a diploma in nursing at college. I qualified in 2008. I then moved to Bristol for my first job. I met my wife there and we have two young sons.

## Impact

76. I think that I trying to impress people was informed from going to boarding school, trying to fit in and never receiving that sense of validation or being included.
77. It took me a lot to trust someone for quite a while. I would always wonder if there was an ulterior motive. I think I am quite defensive and don't take criticism well. Throughout my teenage years I was definitely affected by my time at the school. However, I think by the time I went to university I had developed some resilience. I think my time at boarding school impacted me in the sense that I went to university determined that it didn't matter what people thought. I see it as part of my person and my history. When I think about it does make me feel uncomfortable.
78. My wife attended a work conference in Dunblane. While there she saw a newspaper article featuring the school. She mentioned this to me and upon seeing the photograph of the school, it brought things back to the forefront. I think my negative thought cycles have been happening more since I've been thinking about my time at the school again.
79. I'm not sure if it was because I was bullied or because I went to a single sex school but I didn't have a proper relationship until I met my wife. I was interested and didn't feel confident about being open and being in that position.
80. My mum and dad gave me loving care so I had a pretty secure base. They had instilled an amount of core resilience to enable me to deal with it. In terms of when I disclosed what was happening to them, they reacted. They have always been there for me. I feel very fortunate that I have had the support of my family. I have done well in life despite my experience at Queen Victoria school. However, other people, without such support may have fared less well.
81. I haven't had contact with anyone from the school, apart from another former pupil, [REDACTED] whom I spoke to briefly with on 'Friends Reunited.'

### **Treatment/support**

82. I haven't had any treatment but I have done various parts of therapy in training for work.

### **Reporting of Abuse/Records**

83. I haven't spoken to the police about my time at the school and I haven't obtained my records.

### **Lessons to be Learned**

84. I hope that boarding schools have got their welfare and safeguarding in better check. I hope the vetting of teachers has improved and that there are better people who are better at recognising that pupils are away from their families. They are essentially pastoral care.
85. After I took the decision [REDACTED] there should have been welfare, interest and curiosity as to what was going on for me. There should have been support. If a child did that these days, a lot more support is given to them.

### **Other information**

86. Queen Victoria felt like a very hard core, military school. I hope over the time since I've been there, they have realised that it isn't the best way to educate children. I wanted to speak to the Inquiry because my experience paints a picture along with other people that things weren't quite right. It might be that my experience helps paint a picture of a system that allowed worse things to happen.

87. From reading the newspaper article, it struck me that there had been a lot worse things which had gone on. I thought that my experience would support the narrative and that I should add my experience as a piece to a much bigger picture.

88. 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.

DocuSigned by:  
QPG

Signed.....

Dated..... 10 December 2020 .....