

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Heather LE SOMMER

1. My name is Heather Le Sommer. My maiden name was Skedd and I was known as this until 1990. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1953. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Background

2. I was born in Australia to my parents who were Scottish. My father was an engineer and they moved to Australia after the war. My mother did not like Australia and though I was born there, I was back in Scotland by the time I was nine months old.

Employment history/Qualifications/Training

3. I did not have any qualifications when I left school, but I have since gained an Honours degree in Sociology.
4. On leaving school at sixteen years old I went to work in Quarriers homes for eighteen months as a nursery nurse. I then got a job in Switzerland in a day nursery.
5. While I was in Switzerland, I wrote to Lagarie Children's home in Rhu, asking if they had any vacancies as it was my intention to return to Scotland. I received a reply dated August 1971 from the then matron Mrs Smith, advising me she was happy to interview me on my return to the country.

6. I returned to Scotland in the January or February of 1972, I was nineteen years old. Shortly after returning, I went to Lagarie and was interviewed by Mrs Smith. She told me there and then that I had the job. I started three weeks afterwards as the girl I was replacing was not leaving until then.
7. I started working in Lagarie in March 1972 as a nursery nurse and resided on the premises.

Experiences at Lagarie

The Institution

8. Lagarie was a home for the children of employed sailors who were at sea, going through difficult times and who needed additional support to look after their children.
9. The home took in predominantly primary age children from five years old to twelve years old but also looked after children from three years old. There was one girl there who was of secondary school age, but this was unusual. Her father was a captain. When I worked there, there were two children aged three years old.
10. The children remained in the home for all of the time they were there. They did not go home for holidays or Christmas or for weekends. They could stay for all of their childhood, or some stayed for only a few years.
11. The children and staff in the home referred to each other by their first names.

Culture

12. I remember when I went to Lagarie for the interview I thought it was a lovely place. Mrs Smith, who interviewed me, was lovely as well. This feeling continued once I was employed there. It was a well-structured environment but that wasn't how it ended up after Mr and Mrs Barrie took over.

My role and recruitment at Lagarie, Rhu

13. Mrs Smith interviewed me alone. In the interview she asked me questions about my role at Quarriers and we had a discussion about the pros and cons of the different set ups in Quarriers and Lagarie. Quarriers having everything on site and the children not having to leave the village. With Lagarie being very different. She was very particular in asking me about what I thought about the children leaving Quarriers at sixteen and not having been outside of the isolated community. I was successful in interview and I was given the role of nursery nurse.
14. There were five other girls like me employed in that role. My line manager was Mrs Smith, there were no other supervisors.
15. Our job was to look after the children, get them ready for school, make sure they had clean clothes and to make sure the beds were made.
16. While Mrs Smith was matron, the nursery nurse staff would rotate around the different groups of children. For instance, I would go in for my early shift and I would be told I was working with say the older girls one day and the next day the younger boys. This meant we worked holistically with all of the children.
17. I do not know if references were obtained by Lagarie. I assume so, but I cannot be certain.

Layout and Structure

18. Lagarie was a building on its own with a ground and first floor. Beside the main building was the matron's cottage. At the bottom of the drive there was another cottage where the gardener and his wife lived. Our bedrooms were dotted about the main building.
19. The nursery, where the youngest children slept was situated on the ground floor and the other bedrooms were on the first floor.

20. The children slept in bedrooms with four other children and there were five bedrooms on the first floor and two bedrooms in the tower area.
21. The children were allocated rooms according to their age with similar aged children placed together. Mrs Smith also tried to keep siblings in the same bedroom if they were of a similar age. I do not recall if that stayed the same when the Barries took over.

Matron - Mrs Smith

22. Mrs Smith was employed as the matron when I started at Lagarie. She was a highly trained Sister in the medical field. She had two children and a husband. Mr Smith was an insurance advisor, he hardly ever went into the home but would sometimes drive the minibus.
23. Mrs Smith understood children and was very sympathetic towards them. I think because of her background as a Sister she was very comfortable to take the lead in things. I would go so far as to say she was a very kind human being and she was very child centred.
24. She was also very modern in her views. Her way of working was very relaxed and everything we did was focussed on the children. She would say that Lagarie was the children's home. I remember she refused to have bus coaches coming round the premises for people to look at the home as she insisted it wasn't a zoo.

Other staff

25. There were six nursery nurses in Lagarie, including me. When I started, I worked with, Edith Wilson, Carol Willis, Linda Rait, [REDACTED] who is now dead and Sheila Gardiner, though she was only there for a short period of time. RDM [REDACTED] took over from Sheila.

26. There were also domestic staff who did the cleaning, cooks and there was a gardener Mr Skelton and his apprentice, whose first name I think was [REDACTED] but his surname for sure was [REDACTED]. We didn't see much of the gardener and apprentice, they would come into the kitchen for a cup of tea and they would say hello but other than that they were outside most of the time.
27. I would say we had sufficient staff to deal with the children, we did not have children who were challenging in the slightest.
28. I cannot recall anyone leaving Lagarie while Mrs Smith was matron there.

Training

29. There was no training at Lagarie for the duration I was there. I think I did some shadowing of other staff when I first started but it wasn't formal. It was just other staff showing me how things were done. In addition, there was always another member of staff on duty with me who I could ask if I wasn't sure about something.

Supervision/appraisal/evaluation

30. There was no trial period at Lagarie and no appraisal system for the whole of my time at Lagarie.

Policy

31. I never saw anything like that in Lagarie.

Change of matron during period of employment

32. Unfortunately, the Smiths left in August 1972. Mrs Smith told me they were leaving. She had two children who were about five and three years old and they were starting to call her Mrs Smith instead of mummy. I believe that was one of the reasons she left.

33. I know it was August, because the eldest girl who lived at Lagarie who was called [REDACTED], sat her exams a few months before and she received eight O levels. The Smiths took her out for a meal to celebrate and they left shortly afterwards.
34. Mrs Smith and her family moved up to Cruden Bay in Aberdeen. The staff and I were so sad she left.
35. As Mrs Smith left, she handed me two letters addressed to [REDACTED] and told me to keep the letters safe for [REDACTED]. I didn't question this or think too much about it. I placed them in a box and forgot about them for years. Once I found them, I returned them to [REDACTED]. Mrs Smith's words to me were "She might not get them otherwise".
36. After the Smiths left, another matron called Miss or Mrs Jackson arrived and stayed at Lagarie for about two weeks. She was just holding the fort until the new people came. As staff, we knew someone was coming more permanently while Mrs Jackson covered but did not know who.

Mr and Mrs Barrie

37. Mr and Mrs Barrie arrived in the middle of September 1972, they were the replacement for Miss Jackson. I didn't know anything about where they had come from or what their previous occupation was. I always thought that Mrs Barrie was the matron and the boss. I thought because she was female, she was a replacement for Mrs Smith. Also, Mr Barrie was a Church of Scotland minister who always wore his dog collar and I thought that was his job, again like Mr Smith. After I did a BBC interview with Mark Daly years later, I learnt from him that it was in fact Mr Barrie who was the boss. I think most of the staff thought the same as me.
38. I remember the day they arrived, I was on duty and I recall them coming in the front door. They didn't seem very friendly, but I wasn't too bothered. They didn't introduce themselves to the staff and I'm not sure if they even introduced themselves to the children. I came off my shift and went up to my bedroom in the tower. Carol, who I

worked with, came and said, "Well", meaning how were the new couple. I remember my reply was, "I don't know, but they're not like the Smiths".

39. Things changed dramatically after they arrived. I would go so far as to say everything changed. The first thing that was obvious was their attitude in general to both staff and children, they just didn't seem very friendly. I think I put that down to thinking that they maybe weren't very experienced. They didn't seem like the type of people to be in the care sector.
40. They never held any staff meetings to communicate any changes that they intended to make.

Changes implemented by Mr and Mrs Barrie affecting children

41. One of the first things they did was have the bedcovers removed from the children's beds that matched the furniture. All of the children's bedrooms were lovely and had nice white furniture with pale blue coloured drawers. The bed covers matched everything. I came on duty not long after they arrived and happened to be in a bedroom and noticed the nice covers were away. I went round all of the bedrooms and noticed they were all gone. I went downstairs and spoke to a member of staff who told me that Mrs Barrie didn't like the covers and she had them removed. Those covers were replaced with the old, harsh, jaggy striped blankets that we had on the beds alongside the nice ones. Around that time, we learned that she also wanted the sheets and blankets tucked in a particular way. It looked like a bed in a barracks after that. The softness in the rooms all went.
42. The next thing she did was move the older girls' bedroom to the tower. This was where my bedroom was situated alongside a further empty bedroom. She then moved me from my room and I had to share a room with Carol. My old room was given to a new member of staff called RDM who was allocated to look after the older girls.

43. It only dawned on me years later when I heard what had been going on with Mr Barrie and the girls, that moving the older girls up there and out of the way, was more than likely a sinister move on Mr Barrie's part.
44. The next change they made was that children and staff were banned from using the front door and main stairs. This meant that staff and children could only use the back door and rear stairs.
45. The television room, which also housed a library and books, was then locked and a restriction put on the times it could be used.
46. We used to play the radio and music from the staff office into the playroom but that was stopped.
47. Mr and Mrs Barrie made the oldest girl, [REDACTED], who was studying for her Highers sit in the playroom to study. This came about because Mr and Mrs Barrie found out that Carol, myself, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] had visited Mrs Smith in a local hotel. They were fuming that we had visited. Having [REDACTED] study in the playroom was punishment for [REDACTED] visiting Mrs Smith. That to me just shows how vindictive and cruel they could be.
48. I remember that Mr Barrie would play these strange games with the children, a 'chase me, catch me', game with sweets. I thought at the time it was strange for an old man to be playing games like that. Even at nineteen years old, I thought it wasn't right he was acting like that. I put it down to him trying to show how much the children liked him and how popular he was, but I know he wasn't. Knowing what I know now, it may have been something more sinister.
49. The children definitely noticed the changes with the arrival of the Barries and I would say as a group they became subdued. There was no longer the carry on that we would previously have with running up the front stairs and things like that.

Changes made by Mr and Mrs Barrie impacting staff

50. When the Barries came they allocated specific ages of children to us to look after. I was allocated the older boys and RDM the older girls. Older children were still only ten or eleven years old. I forget who Edith and Linda had. This was a significant change, as with Mrs Smith we would be allocated a group to work with on a particular day.
51. That was one of the main things that annoyed me about the changes. It wasn't right that we worked solely with a certain group. What if a member of staff left? It meant children got too used to one staff member and relied on them too much. I have a card in the house addressed to me and the child had written, 'To mummy, from [REDACTED]'. That's how attached these children got as they had parents at sea for a lot of the time.
52. Staff were no longer allowed access to keys without the Barries permission. They took the keys which had previously been in the staff room and put them in their office. This meant we had no access to the keys for the clothes and linen cupboard and sewing room. Staff then had to request keys from the Barries for access to those places and give a reason for needing same. In essence, what this meant, was that if a child wet the bed, a staff member had to ask for the keys thereby letting the Barries know a child had wet the bed. Bedwetting was one of the things that Mrs Barrie used to humiliate children. There had previously been no issues with changing sheets if a child wet the bed but when the Barries came there was no way of being discreet about it.
53. Mrs Barrie would walk about the home with this great bunch of keys jangling about. To this day I cannot stand the sound of keys rattling as it reminds me of Mrs Barrie and my experiences of her.
54. Mr Barrie then completely changed our off duty. In February of 1973 he also changed the hours we worked. We previously worked a 7am until 3pm. He then extended the shift until 5pm. He would also have us working ten days in a row. He did this by giving us two sets of days off back-to-back, which meant we were then on for ten days in a row. There was never any warning about changes, they just happened.

55. When you worked the back shift from 2pm until 10pm you were then on call from 10pm until 7am the next morning. Mr Barrie then changed the shifts and made your first day off from 7am. Mrs Smith never did that, she always had us finish at 3pm the day before your day off. This meant, with his changes, you had a shorter time off. Again, we never received anything in writing about the changes. Our shifts just went up every two weeks and that was that.
56. The Barries restricted staff use of the laundry facilities. When Mrs Smith was there, we could use it any time after our shift. Mr and Mrs Barrie stopped that and we were only allowed to use it at certain times.
57. Myself and the other nursery nurses used to like sitting up after our shift putting on face masks and trying out new nail polish, but that was another thing they tried to stop. We also used to like to go out to discos. I don't think Mr Barrie wanted that kind of person in the home. The only time I met with him was when he decided it was a "Christian children's home and not a hotel for young ladies" and he put a 10pm curfew on staff. That was the final nail in the coffin for Edith and me. I believe he wanted rid of us.
58. The Barries ran Lagarie like a prison camp. I will never know to this day how they got the job.

Staff changes after Mr and Mrs Barrie arrived

59. Carol and Linda left around the start of December 1972. They left within a week of each other.
60. I have a letter from Linda Rait dated January 1973 which says, "*Dear Heather, I'm sorry for not writing to you before now but I have been kept pretty busy since I came up to Dundee. For the first time in months, I am really happy, my only regret is that I did not leave Lagarie sooner. Many times, I have thought about you all down there*"

putting up with that detestable woman. I honestly don't know how you can bear to work under the same roof as her. I suppose you must be fonder of the children than I was."

I wish to clarify she was not saying she didn't care, she was questioning why we were putting up with the Barries.

61. When Carol left, she left Lagarie without a job. She came up to the bedroom one day and said she had had enough and was leaving. She told me she had been given a brillo pad and told to get down on her hands and knees and scrub the dining room floor. Apparently the Barries wanted the polish taken off the floor.
62. I found a note in my possessions before coming to meet the Inquiry from Carol. It said, "*Dish out the Christmas cards to my boys, my make up hasn't run yet.*" That just goes to show that Carol probably didn't want to leave the place, but she was forced out as she couldn't take it anymore. Just like me in the end.
63. I have an entry in my diary from 19th January 1973 which says, "*I will miss my old room*". I was moved room again after Carol left. This meant I was sharing with a new girl I didn't even know. Their policy was to have staff share bedrooms which never happened with Mrs Smith. They didn't even need all of the bedrooms, so it wasn't because of that.
64. I have another entry from 22nd of January 1973 and I have written, "*work was easy, the atmosphere is awful*".
65. Two staff came in to replace Carol and Linda. One being a girl called Karen and the other, PZF [REDACTED]. I also recall the Barries employed a Miss Stewart as depute matron. I would describe her as Mrs Barries lap dog. The people the Barries employed would never have been employed by Mrs Smith, that's all I want to say about that. RDM [REDACTED], who took Sheila Gardiners position, I believe came from Helensburgh and PZF [REDACTED]'s family came from the same Ayrshire town that the Barries came from. I don't know where they had worked previously. They would shout at the children which I didn't like.

66. I spoke to PZF [REDACTED] a week ago and told her I was coming to meet with the Inquiry and her words to me were "Nothing to do with me, I wasn't in charge of the older girls, was I?" PZF [REDACTED] has also said that after we all left the Barries converted the tower into a flat and employed Mrs Barrie's sister and husband. Once they left another couple were employed and apparently he was evil and made the children get down on their hands and knees and scrub the floor with a toothbrush. The same male used to stalk a child from the school.
67. I believe PZF [REDACTED] knows a lot more about the goings on at Lagarie but as I said she apparently thinks it has nothing to do with her. It really frustrates me that people like her are not approaching the Inquiry.

Children / Routine at Lagarie

68. We did not know anything about children before they arrived at Lagarie. We would get to know that children were coming as we would have to get beds and things ready for them, but we never saw any records about them. It wasn't ideal for us.
69. Sometimes children would arrive with parents but that was unusual. Those that came with parents would tend to be children who were only staying for a few weeks.

Routine

70. We got the children up at just after 7am and got them ready for school. Children had to be in bed by 9pm at the latest but the younger ones went earlier. Because there was restricted television imposed by the Barries it wasn't too much of an issue getting them to bed.

Mealtimes / Food

71. The food was okay. It was made by cooks and I believe Mrs Barrie decided what was on the menu, probably due to financial matters. I don't think there was an alternative if a child did not like something.

72. The children ate in a dining room opposite the kitchen. The food was taken from the kitchen and dished up in the dining room at a dresser, by the matron. The children sat at tables, but they didn't have to stick to a specific table.
73. There were no issues with the food as far as I recall.

Clothes

74. We provided the children with clothes at Lagarie and the clothes were washed in the home by laundry staff. Staff would then collect their clothes from the laundry and put it in their drawers.

Sleeping Arrangements

75. The children slept in rooms with three or four other children. They were placed in bedrooms according to their age and shared with those of roughly the same age. If siblings were around the same age they would be kept together. This remained that way when the Barries arrived.
76. Everyone had access to the children's rooms.

Washing and Bathing

77. Next to the bedrooms were the children's bathrooms. There were three bathrooms on the first floor with a bath in each. The girls had their own bathroom and the boys had their own. There were a bathroom with one shower cubicle. There was an additional staff bathroom on the first floor, but the children didn't use it.
78. Most of the children were of an age where they were capable of getting themselves washed, apart from washing their backs and hair. Staff would run the baths and it was a case of getting them in the bath one after the other. I would wash their back and then

leave them to play in the bath for a bit. The children would get themselves dried and then get their pyjamas on. I don't recall how often they bathed. It seemed a lot.

Leisure time

79. The children played outside in the grounds for the majority of the time when they were not at school. There were swings, a wendy house, a chute and away at the back of the grounds was an area with rope swings and a climbing frame which the Navy had erected. The children could go outside to play whenever they wanted.
80. There was also a playroom with toys where the children could play.

Day trips/holidays

81. There weren't any big trips when I was there. We would sometimes take the children to a picnic at Kidston Park which was near to the home. We would walk there with prams packed with food that the kitchen had made up for us. I don't believe these picnics continued after the Barries took over.

Healthcare

82. If a child was unwell, they would bring in the local GP who I believe was called Dr Campbell. I cannot recall a time when the doctor had to be called. He did however pop in every now and again. I can only remember a child maybe having a cold and nothing worse.
83. If a child required to have medication it would be Mrs Smith who would administer it.

Schooling

84. The children were driven to school in the minibus by Mr or Mrs Smith. Then latterly by Mr Barrie. In the summer we would walk the children to school.

85. They had a school uniform they all wore. On a Sunday night the staff would press the trousers and skirts and sponge down the blazers for school on the Monday.
86. The children had lunch at school and returned to the home about 3pm.
87. The children seemed happy enough at school and I wasn't aware of any issues. Staff didn't have any interaction or contact with the schoolteachers.

Religious education

88. There was a church in Rhu and we would go every Sunday. When Mrs Smith was there, after church, we would return to the home and have Sunday dinner.
89. When Mr and Mrs Barrie took over, we all went to church in the morning on Sunday, but the older girls also went to the Baptist church at night. Mr Barrie gave sermons in the Baptist church.
90. I remember Mr Barrie making a strange comment to me at some point saying one of the residents 'kicked with the left foot'. I know that means, that someone is Catholic, but he really shouldn't have been saying things about other religions when he was a religious man himself. I believe his role of minister was just a cloak and cover up but unfortunately it gave him a lot of power in the community too.
91. The girls went on a Christian trip with Mr Barrie. For that weekend he had asked me if I would swap my days off to let RDM go but I told him I didn't want to. That was one of the occasions he gave me ten days duty in a row.

Chores

92. The children didn't have to do anything in the house in respect of chores when Mrs Smith was matron.

93. Once the Barries arrived, Mrs Barrie insisted that children had to make their own beds and tuck the stripey blanket in a particular way. They also had to polish their own shoes. She tried to sell it as development for the children. I just thought it was going to be bedlam with children and polish.

94. I believe the older girls had to polish the floor at some point, but that wasn't when I was there.

Visitors

95. I don't recall any child having a visitor during the time I was there. There was a sitting room next to the office which could be used for visits, so there is a chance I wouldn't have seen a visit taking place.

96. Although the children didn't have any visits they could write home. I don't recall reading any letters that were sent by children.

97. They did not have telephone calls with relatives.

98. I remember we had one visitor in Lagarie when I was there, his name was Mr Glover. There was a bit of a panic before he came as I believe he was from the British Sailors' Society. I think he visited when the Barries were there. He didn't speak to me and I don't think he spoke to the children. I don't even think he walked around the home, but I am unsure.

99. There may well have been other visitors, but staff would not necessarily have been aware as visitors may have just gone straight into the office.

100. I do recall that the local Bridge club came to visit Lagarie when the Barries were there. They then had an event where they played bridge and I have it in my diary that was on 28 March 1973. On reflection that was a money-making scheme for the Barries.

101. There was another incident that makes me think that as well. There was a donation of money left at the front door before that Christmas, my understanding is that the cash was going to be used for new beds . When I returned after being sick in the January Edith and I had to wash old bed frames that had come from the Mariners home, Greenock, they were obviously second hand. I have no idea what that money was used for.

Christmas/birthdays

102. I wasn't at Lagarie for any Christmas days. During December 1972 I contracted hepatitis and was signed off work over Christmas and New year and returned in late January. Edith had been working over the festive time that year and I remember asking her how it had all gone. She said it was 'bloody awful' that they had the kids sit in a circle and the Barries handed out black bin bags with unwrapped presents within. Apparently once the Round Table left they then took the presents back off the children and put them all in a cupboard. I thought to myself, why would anyone even do that? I am unsure who would have provided the money or the presents I cannot say if it was the Round Table.
103. I did see a Christmas tree in Lagarie before I went off sick. It was positioned in the pulpit area just off the ornate stairs from the front door up to the first floor.
104. I don't recall anything at birthdays, I feel I should remember that because I would have probably been responsible for wrapping a present.

Living Arrangements

105. The nursery nurses lived on site within the main building. Mrs Smith and her family, along with the gardener and his wife lived in cottages in the grounds. All of the other staff lived off the grounds elsewhere.

106. When Mr and Mrs Barrie arrived, they took over the cottage that Mrs Smith had lived in.

Discipline and punishment

107. If a child misbehaved Mrs Smith would talk to the child but she did not dish out any punishments.

108. When the Barries arrived Mrs Barrie would shout and bawl at the children over anything. She would shout up the stairs, "Right youse girls", in her broad Glaswegian accent. I often wondered why she had to shout and bawl, there was no need. She would shout for anything, that was just her personality and it was totally alien to any of us and hadn't been like that with Mrs Smith.

109. She would also humiliate the kids if they had wet the bed. If we had to ask for the keys for the linen cupboard and explained why we needed them, she wouldn't be happy. She would wait for that child and she would humiliate them in front of their peers. She would say, "That's disgusting, you should be ashamed of yourself". It happened to two of my older boys. Because I only dealt with the older boys, I cannot say how many times it happened to other children as I did not witness anything.

110. It got to the stage where I took some extra linen in my bedroom but didn't record that I had taken it. It meant that if a child wet the bed, I could change the sheets without Mrs Barrie finding out. I told my boys if they wet the bed just to let me know and I would sort it. I think it subsequently happened a couple of times and she didn't know about it.

Concerns about the institution

111. I did have concerns about how the home was being run after the Barries were in post.

112. I have since learned from the BBC documentary that [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] had been sexually abused in Lagarie. There was an incident when they all decided they were running away and went to Rhu marina with the intention of sailing on the Clyde to get to Brazil or wherever their father was at that time. They were caught by the police and the girls had apparently told the police what was going on in the home, but they either weren't believed, or nothing was done about it.
113. I have since learnt from PZF [REDACTED] that she tried to report concerns about the Barries to a couple from head office who were filling in for the Barries while they were on holiday. She spoke to them as she thought they were nice and apparently told them of her concerns, in particular, how Mrs Barrie treated the children. PZF [REDACTED] told me on the Barries return she was hauled into the office by Mr Barrie and reprimanded. Nothing changed thereafter.

Reporting of complaints/concerns

114. I never told anyone about the concerns I had about Lagarie after the Barries took over.

Trusted adult/confidante

115. A child could come to us as staff if there was an issue with anything. The child would likely only go to the member of staff of the group they were in. Children did come to me about minor issues with other children, like someone taking their ball but not anything about abuse. This would not be recorded anywhere.
116. Apart from us there was nowhere else for children to go if there was a problem with anything. For staff there was nowhere that we could feel confident that we were going to be listened to.

117. I have spoken to [REDACTED] a previous resident and reminded her I had a bedroom in the tower. [REDACTED] told me the sexual abuse was going on when Carol, Edith and I were working there but she said there was no one she could go to.

Abuse

118. There was no definition of abuse at Lagarie.
119. I did see abuse in Lagarie by Mrs Barrie. There was the humiliation of two boys after they had wet the bed where she called them stupid in front of their peers.
120. There was also a violent incident that I witnessed involving Mrs Barrie. It happened after I had been moved the second time to a room on the first floor just off the back steps. I was on a day off and I was woken up in the morning by a commotion outside my room. I got up and looked out of the door and I saw water spouting out of the radiator outside my room. Little [REDACTED] had a coconut and he had been smashing the coconut against the radiator and it started a leak. There were other children there watching. Mrs Barrie must have heard about it and she came flying through the swing door to the right of my room and clattered [REDACTED] twice across the side of his face and head with her open palm. She didn't even say a word to [REDACTED]. He was stunned and just stood there. The force of the hit was one you might see between two adults, certainly not the force you would use on a child. That was when I knew she was capable of violence and not just shouting and bawling. I felt sick on seeing it.
121. I was the only adult present and there were a couple of kids there, including [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. I now believe [REDACTED] were also present and I found this out years later. I don't think Mrs Barrie initially saw me there but when she realised I was, she said to me, "You're not on duty".
122. I think everyone went downstairs and I don't know what happened after that. It happened in the morning before they went to school.

123. I never spoke to the boy about what happened and I don't think any other staff member did. He wasn't in my group, but obviously that's not an excuse. He would have been in Carol's group, but she had left just before Christmas in 1972. I know this incident happened around Easter time in 1973 as I was in my second bedroom by then. I am unsure who was covering his group then.
124. I never spoke to Mrs Barrie about the incident. The only time I had a proper conversation with the woman was when I had an argument with her about the off-duty rota and how the late shift impinged on a day off. During the argument I also raised the fact that no pickups and drop offs of staff could take place on the grounds and that it had to be done outside. This was another thing that they both brought in. This impacted on my then fiancée who had to drop me outside.
125. How things could change in a place over such a short time and how an atmosphere could be so crippling. There have been times over the years that I have felt guilty about knowing how Mrs Barrie was with the children and the fact that she hit [REDACTED]. But who could I have gone to, especially when Mr Barrie was a Church of Scotland minister and I wore make up and went to discos.
126. I cannot be confident that if a child was being abused at Lagarie that it would have come to light at the time. The reason I say that is because there was no one really for a child to go to, apart from us and then who would we have gone to. We didn't even know anything about the British Sailors' Society or how we could contact them. In addition, the children didn't mix outside the home on a regular basis.
127. It annoys me to this day that there were domestic staff at the home who were twice our age who may well have known of things that were going on but as far as I know didn't say anything. They must have seen something. I spoke to PZF [REDACTED] about Mr Barrie and his 'game' of 'chase me, catch me' and she confirmed it went on all of the time. Other staff must have noticed that. I just hope I'm not the only one that comes forward from Lagarie.

Child protection arrangements

128. There was nothing I was aware of or that we were told about to look for that would reduce the likelihood of abuse.

External Monitoring

129. I am not aware of any external visits or monitoring apart from the visit by Mr Glover, but I do not know what that was for.
130. I don't think anything changed after I left as PZF has spoken to me about stuff that went on in there after I left. Had there been any visits by anyone, I should have thought those things would have been mentioned by staff. I am specifically referring to her saying to me that Mrs Barrie would leather 'her' three or four times a day and she was only three and as far as I know PZF witnessed it. I am unsure which child she means though.
131. And also, that GAD-SPO who either replaced or were employed before Mr and Mrs Barrie's sister, that Mr GAD made the kids scrub the floors with a toothbrush. Also, that Mrs Barrie told another member of staff to clean the ovens.

Record-keeping

132. We had two books when Mrs Smith was there that we used to update. These were kept in the kitchen. There was the duty book which was filled in by whoever was on duty and we would record things like if shoes were polished and various other things that we checked. The entry would be signed off.
133. We also had an incident book where we recorded if there had been any problems with a child. We recorded such things if a child had fallen and if we cleaned a wound and put a plaster on a child. That entry was signed off as well.

134. The only time we were in the office was when Mr or Mrs Barrie were there and that was only to get our weekly pay or collect keys for the cupboards. I am unsure if there were other records in there.
135. I had to write a letter to Thompsons solicitors to confirm that [REDACTED] was a resident in the school. I still have the letter, dated 18 April 2023 which reads, "*To whom it may concern, this letter is to confirm that [REDACTED] and siblings were residents at Lagarie Children's home under the care and protection of the British Sailors Society Rhu. Enclosed, copy of letter with my maiden name and date stamped envelope by Mrs Ann Smith (matron) of Lagarie Children's home Rhu 1971. Yours sincerely Heather Le Sommer.*"
136. I had to write this as there was no proof that [REDACTED] had been there. It makes me think that there weren't any records kept at all.

Allegations of abuse

137. I have never been subject to an allegation of abuse or involved in any such investigation. Nor have I been involved in the handling of reports of abuse of a child at Lagarie.

Police investigations/ criminal proceedings

138. Since I left, I was aware of police investigations into Lagarie. I saw it in the newspapers, but I cannot recall when. It was that the police were investigating Mrs Barrie on alleged abuse but that it had been dropped. I then saw it again fairly recently.
139. I have never given a statement to the police about Lagarie.

Convicted abusers

140. I do not know of anyone convicted of abuse of a child at Lagarie.

Other Staff

KER

141. I have no knowledge of that person.

Anne Miller/Millar

142. I think you are referring to a woman who I have read about who was a previous matron before Mrs Smith. I have heard that she was horrible and I heard that from the children. I did not know her and nor do I know any more.

143. [REDACTED] and her siblings may have been there when Miller was there.

Norman Skelton

144. He was the gardener. He was there for the duration of the time I was there and was employed before I started. I didn't know much about him as he was outside most of the time. He really only came into Lagarie house itself when he came into the kitchen for a cup of tea or coffee.

145. I would have said he was the same age as the Barries, maybe in his fifties or sixties.

146. I did see him interact with the children but only him saying hello to them. I don't doubt the children probably annoyed him at times when he was maybe trying to dig or cut the grass, but I never saw him react to such a situation.

147. I never saw him discipline children or abuse them. Nor did I hear of him abusing a child.

PVS

148. I have no idea who that person is.

GAH

149. I do not know who that is. The one that was there when I was there, was a local boy from Kirkmichael who lived with his parents and was possibly called [REDACTED] with a surname of [REDACTED].

Bill Barrie

150. I have referred to Mr Barrie throughout. To me he was the one that put the rota up and he was the person that played the game with the children with the sweets, the behaviour that I just couldn't put my finger on. I remember also the time when I saw him coming out of the older girl's room in the tower when he said to me that he had been checking the girls were sewing badges on their guide uniform.

151. I never saw him disciplining children and nor did I ever see him abuse a child.

152. I hadn't heard that he had abused a child until seven years ago when I spoke with Mark Daly and he told me.

Mary Barrie

153. Mary Barrie was the wife of Mr Barrie. I have referred to her a lot in my statement.

154. As a couple they seemed to get on okay. I never saw them arguing with each other or anything like that.

Mr GAF

155. I do not know who that is.

Mr GAD

156. I do not know who Mr GAD is.

GAA

157. There was a [REDACTED] who went on to do teacher training, but I do not know or recall a GAA [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

158. He was one of my boys. He was one of the [REDACTED] family. There was [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who was the youngest. All of the children were primary age when I was there. [REDACTED] had some learning difficulties.

159. There was no member of staff called [REDACTED].

[REDACTED]

160. I do not know who that is.

RDM

161. She was employed by the Barries and she got my room. I didn't like her at all.

162. She used to shout and bawl at the children. I remember being in the kitchen when I wasn't on duty one day and she was shouting at my group to get into the dining room. I stepped into the hall and said to her who did she think she was talking to. One of the staff in the kitchen told me to just leave it and to come back into the kitchen.

163. I would say she was one of Mr Barrie's favourite girls.

164. I saw her disciplining children. She would shout at them. I never saw her lift her hands, I don't believe she would do that in front of me or Carol or any of my friends.

165. I never heard of her abusing children.

PZL

166. I have no knowledge of him as a staff member or pupil.

PZF

167. She worked there for five years and as far as I am concerned, she could tell the Inquiry a lot about what went on in Lagarie. She was employed as a nursery nurse and she had the younger girls. I believe her father was a policeman.

168. I found her a cold character, not very empathetic and very matter of fact. She was not the type of person I would have thought would go into childcare.

169. I never saw her disciplining children.

170. I do recall one day I had been days off and she told me when I returned that "I needed to get my boys under control". Apparently, she had been passing my boys bedroom and must have seen or heard something.

171. I never saw or heard of her abusing a child.

MLV (also known as MLV)

172. I do not know that person.

Leaving Lagarie

173. I left Lagarie in June 1973, I was twenty years old. I left because I was fed up and unhappy. The straw that broke me was when Mr Barrie imposed the 10pm curfew. As he imposed the curfew, he also threatened us that if we came in late three times then we would be sacked. I used to only go out at 7.30pm so having to be in at 10pm meant I was out for hardly any time. The Barries made life very difficult for us.
174. I believe that all of the changes and restrictions that the Barries put on us as staff was to get rid of us, which they did. The people I worked with were good at their job and not stupid. As I have said, Mrs Smith would not have employed the staff that the Barries did.
175. Edith and I left on exactly the same day. I just told the Barries I was going that day and I left. There were no thanks, I never asked for one.
176. Edith and I managed to get a job around the corner at a local hotel.
177. In the second week of November 1973, I went up to visit Mrs Smith in Aberdeen and I told her that we had all left. She said that she had advised the Sailors' Society that the Barries weren't suitable for Lagarie. She then went on to tell me that she had received a letter redirected from the Barries to her. I believe it was addressed to the matron, hence why it was delivered to her. She told me the letter said that the sender was aware that they (the Barries) were having problems with staff and the British Sailors' Society recommended a change of staff. This meant the four of us. So, it looked like had we not left we may have been sacked anyway.
178. I went on to get married and have children.

Lessons to be learned

179. I would say that the people who are put in charge of these places need to be scrutinised.
180. Children also need to have someone that they can go to if things are not right.

181. I had heard the Scottish Government were trying to bring in a system where a child had a nominated person they could go to if they were being abused. I seem to recall there was controversy around it and I'm not even sure if it came into force. If it didn't, there needs to be something like that. An outside person that a child can go to.

Other information

182. I have been interviewed about Lagarie by Mark Daly who is an investigations correspondent for the BBC. It came about when I was down in the town one day a few years ago and I bumped into [REDACTED] who was one of the residents when I worked at Lagarie. She told me there was a documentary being produced about the abuse that went on at Lagarie. At this time, I did not know about any abuse except for the [REDACTED] incident. I told her to give them my number and I would speak about that and the changes that the Barries brought in.

183. At the time I spoke to [REDACTED] she was with [REDACTED] who was the oldest child resident when I was there. [REDACTED] remarked to me at that time that she too remembered the incident with [REDACTED].

184. I then met Mark Daly a couple of times. During one of those meetings, I introduced him to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I did an interview with him and I told him about the radiator incident involving [REDACTED]. I also showed him some stuff about the rotas which they filmed. We then went into the grounds of Lagarie house. It was when we were there, he referenced sexual abuse. I told him I did not know anything about that. The penny then dropped for me. Mr Barrie moving the girls, playing the game with the sweets with the children. I could see then in hindsight where that all came from. At aged nineteen there was no way I was thinking that and at that age I didn't know people like that existed. On hindsight his actions were indicative of grooming behaviour. Had there been training and we had been told what to look out for, then the staff would have been all over his behaviour. But on the other hand, I also think, who would have believed us about a Church of Scotland minister? I do ask myself why an

institution would give a sixty-year-old man a job like that in Lagarie with toddlers and young children.

185. Hearing from Mark Daly about sexual abuse also made me remember a time when I walked out of my bedroom when I was still in the tower and the older girls were in the room beside me. This time, I saw Mr Barrie coming out of the girl's bedroom and he said to me that he was just up checking the girls were sewing their girl guide badges onto their uniform. I didn't think much of it at the time but once I had spoken to Mark Daly, these things all came together and what was going on. It all slotted into place.
186. I gave Mark Daly information about Carol and how she had worked with me. Although I did not know where she was staying, I was able to say she had a husband who was a headteacher in a school in Glasgow and he would be able to trace her through him.
187. A while afterwards Mark Daly phoned me to let me know when the programme was coming out. The programme was all about the [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. The programme referenced the [REDACTED] incident but did not go into the detail about it being a radiator, it said something along the lines that the child made a mess.
188. I have been reminded that at the end of the programme I said something along the lines of "I couldn't stay there, I had no idea what lay in store for these children." I agree with that and I didn't. That said, sexual abuse did not enter into my head then.
189. 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..... [REDACTED]

Dated..... 11th December 2025