

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

JDV

Support person present: No

1. My name is JDV. My date of birth is 1960. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.
2. I was previously employed at Merkland children's home, Moffat, Secondary Institutions - to be published later and at Dumfriesshire Council.

Merkland Children's Home, Moffat 1978 to 1982

3. Merkland was a children's home on the edge of the town of Moffat. There were a maximum of four girls and ten boys at Merkland. The age range was from primary school, up to sixteen years old. I think the youngest child I ever saw at Merkland was seven or eight years old.
4. Peter Harley was responsible for running Merkland. There was another member of staff, PXG, who was SNR. I didn't have any line manager. Peter Harley was in charge. What he said went.

5. I do not know how Peter Harley got the job at Merkland Children's Home. I would assume it was through the newspaper. I don't know if he had any childcare qualifications, I wouldn't ask such a thing. One assumes they took him on, and he did have the qualifications.
6. I am sure that P X G worked with Peter Harley wherever he worked before and P X G followed Peter Harley to Merkland. I can't remember where they worked before.
7. I started at Merkland as a volunteer, just one evening a week. My mother had in , and I was heavily involved in that. Peter Harley was very popular in Moffat. Everybody knew him. was very interested in horses, and I think he attended . That was the connection that led to me volunteering at Merkland. I cannot remember how long I spent as a volunteer at Merkland before starting to work there, probably a couple of months.
8. Then, a part-time job at Merkland came up and I got it. When I started working at Merkland I did not have any qualifications in childcare. I just got a phone call one evening, it must have been from Peter Harley, asking if I could go to Merkland that evening. I said yes and went straight away. The reason I remember is because it was out of office hours. I had just washed my hair.
9. The interview was conducted by PLS , P M O and Peter Harley. PLS and P M O were social work managers based at Gordon Street in Dumfries. They interviewed me and I got the job.
10. The interview process was very informal. I did not have to provide references. There was no probationary period as far as I was aware. I do not know how Merkland recruited other staff. I can only presume that they advertised.
11. My contract working at Merkland Children's Home started on 12 July 1978. I remember the start date because my contract finished on 12 July 1982. That was just a coincidence.

12. My official title was part-time housemother. I worked at Merkland two evenings and either Saturday or Sunday. I did stay overnight, but only when Peter Harley and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] JDW were away.
13. When you went into Merkland, the office was on the left and the living room was on the right. Next to the office was the girls' bedroom. Across from the girls' bedroom there was definitely a toilet and a sink that the girls used. There must have been another door for a shower because girls, and female members of staff, were never allowed upstairs.
14. Upstairs, there was a big cupboard opposite the staircase where they kept the clothes, blankets, and things like that. To the right was a big bedroom for boys. Next to that was a toilet and shower. On the left there was another big bedroom for boys. After that I think there was a toilet and bath. Further down was the male member of staff's bedroom.
15. Then there were panels followed by a door with glass panels. You opened that and went upstairs to the attic where Peter Harley stayed [REDACTED] [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. I think [REDACTED] would have been ten years old when I started. [REDACTED] was older and [REDACTED] was the oldest.
16. It is difficult to say how many staff were on duty at any time in Merkland because Peter [REDACTED] lived in the attic, but [REDACTED] always downstairs. In addition to Peter and JDW being around there would be a housemother or housefather and a part-time worker on duty.
17. Regarding the other staff at Merkland, there was Janet who was a housemother. She was a full-time member of staff and she slept-in at Merkland. I don't know Janet's surname. When Janet left, there was Alison who was also full-time and slept-in. Alison's surname was Caven, but she got married and it changed to Glynn.

18. There was a man called Brian. I think his surname was Watson. He was a part-time housefather and part-time gardener. There was a male member of staff called Gerard. Something tells me that there was someone either before or after him. There was also another male called Bill Mathieson. They were all housefathers and they all lived-in.
19. There were domestic staff too. There was a cook, a laundry lady and at least two cleaners. I think the first cook was JDW's mother. She left and I think the next cook was Avril Rogerson. I don't know if there was another cook in-between. The kids loved being in the kitchen at weekends.
20. Other than myself, I do not recall any volunteers working at Merkland either when I was volunteering, or when I became a member of staff.
21. Towards the end of my time at Merkland the staff were Peter Harley, JDW, Alison, myself, Bill Mathieson, and Brian.

Staff training and procedures

22. I did not get any induction training at Merkland, and I did not get any appraisals from Peter Harley. I did not get any job description, and I did not get any training at all while I was at Merkland. I was not aware of any policies at Merkland, I cannot even remember us doing a fire alarm test. I do not know what training arrangements were in place for any of the other staff.
23. I don't know how children came to be placed at Merkland. I don't know if they were assessed before they came. Children were constantly coming and going at Merkland. The strange thing about Merkland was that you could go in one day and there would be a certain number of kids. You could go back in at the end of the week, and half the kids would be gone.

24. I never got told why the children were at Merkland, or where they had gone when they left. I assumed that the children had gone back home. I think I once asked where they had gone to, and I was told it was none of my business. It would have been Peter Harley who told me that. Some children stayed at Merkland for a long time, others were there just for a couple of nights.
25. I don't know what they were trying to achieve with children at Merkland and I have no idea who sent the children there. As I was told, it was none of my business.
26. There was no guidance or discussion around policies regarding what we should be doing to look after children. It just ran like a home. The kids went to school, came home, got changed. Tea was at 5pm. The children might have had clubs to go to, then it was bedtime.
27. We were not given any instruction on child protection, complaints, restraints, discipline of children, staff discipline or record keeping. Back in the day, the social workers had files. I cannot remember ever seeing files at Merkland. Our job was to look after the children. Anything else, the social workers and Peter Harley dealt with.
28. We did not attend any meetings for the children, we did not attend any children's panels, we did not write reports or write a day log. If there was any incident involving the children like children fighting or falling and getting injured, we would have reported it to Peter Harley or JDW.
29. I can only remember one such incident. I was in the dining room, and I heard a child crying. I went through to the scullery and one of the wee boys was crying. I asked him what was wrong, and he said that PXG, SNR, had killed one of the kittens. I reported that to either Peter Harley or JDW. I do not know how it was dealt with. I do not know if PXG had killed one of the kittens. I can't remember if there were kittens. If there were, I didn't have anything to do with them.

30. I was never taught what to do if a child mentioned that they had been abused. I don't remember any mention of child protection guidelines.
31. Regarding the leadership style of Peter Harley, he was in charge and that was it. There was one team meeting I was at in the four years I worked in Merkland. There may have been other meetings that I didn't know about.
32. The meeting I attended took place a few months before Merkland closed. I can't remember what was discussed at the meeting, but I remember thinking it was different because all the staff were in the room.

Routine at Merkland Children's Home

First day

33. My first impression of Merkland was that it was a happy house. Kids would be playing. I cannot remember there being a lot of noise. There was a massive garden and a caged football pitch. There was a wooded area.
34. Around the back of the house, there was the basement which housed the kitchen, laundry, boot room, toilet, the dining room, the scullery, and another back door. Sometimes I had to go down and lock both back doors, which was spooky.
35. The relationship between the staff and the children seemed good. There were no signs of any problems when I first went in.

Mornings and bedtime

36. All the sheets from the beds would be put in a basket and taken away. Then a new basket would arrive, full of beautifully ironed cotton sheets. A couple of times it was my job to empty the basket into the cupboard at the top of the stairs.

Mealtimes/Food

37. The food at Merkland was excellent because Avril was the chef in the Balmoral Hotel in Moffat. The shift work at the Balmoral didn't suit her so when the job at Merkland came up, she was straight in. The children all liked the food that they got. I don't remember any child refusing to eat what they were given.

Washing/bathing

38. There must have been a shower room downstairs for the girls and there must have been the same upstairs for the boys. The boys' bathroom was much bigger.

Leisure time

39. The children played football on the caged football pitch. We used to play bingo. I think that was on a Sunday night. Everyone would be there.
40. If Peter Harley was taking the minibus out, half the children would be in the minibus before he got there. The boys seemed to be out an awful lot in the minibus with Peter. I don't know where they went, I didn't ask. My job was to look after the girls. I suspect the girls may have gone out in the minibus too, but I don't know.
41. JDW [REDACTED] was very into arts and crafts. She got an interest in etching glass. All the glasses suddenly had flowers on them. All the girls got very much involved in that. JDW [REDACTED] did carpet making too and all the girls did that.

Healthcare

42. The children were all registered with a local doctor and a local dentist. If the children were unwell, I assume the doctor would have come to Merkland, although I never saw that.

43. I don't know if any of the children were on medication at Merkland. I don't know if the staff at Merkland needed family permission to give the children any medication.

Trips and holidays

44. We went to Kilwinning for a holiday. As far as I know, all the children went on that holiday. It was on a farm. It could have been for a week, it was certainly for a few days. I took my car. Peter Harley [REDACTED] took a caravan. [REDACTED]. We were all in tents. I remember that Peter Harley [REDACTED] took [REDACTED] dog, a St. Bernard. It ended up sleeping in my tent, and it snored. The second night it poured with rain and I got soaked because the tents were rubbish. I ended up sleeping in my car.

Work

45. The children had to do dishes, we all did. I took my turn. They had two big sinks, and one of them was a sterilising sink. It was filled with boiling hot water. You put the plates and cups into big containers and dipped them in the boiling water for a minute or so. Then you took them out and within a few seconds, they were dry. Then they got put away.

Review of care

46. Social workers did come and visit children at Merkland. I remember one social worker called Matthew Marchbank. He had wild hair. There was another social worker called Fiona Douglas. PMO [REDACTED] and PLS [REDACTED] were management at the social work department.
47. There could have been others who visited, but I might not have been introduced to them. I didn't see any of those social workers at Merkland children's home other than in relation to their official duties. They didn't come to Merkland to socialise.

48. I didn't see the social workers speaking to the children when they visited, but that doesn't mean it didn't happen. They might have done. The social workers would speak to Peter Harley and JDW.
49. I did not see PMO or PLS, or any social worker, being abusive to or ill-treating any of the children at Merkland.
50. When children were leaving Merkland, I don't know if they got any help from the social work department with that transition.

External Inspections

51. I was not aware of any inspections being carried out on Merkland by the care inspectorate or anyone else.

Pastoral care

52. I am not aware of any trusted person in Merkland, or an external person who came in, who a child could talk to about any problems they had. I presume that should have been part of my role as a housemother. There were no 'sit down' discussions with the children regarding how they might be feeling about being in Merkland.
53. In my role as housemother, we might be out with the girls or doing arts and crafts. It depended on the weather. It was very quiet during the week, most things happened at the weekend. I didn't have any discussions with the children about their home lives or why they were in Merkland.

Family contact

54. I can't remember if any of the children had visits from family.

Discipline

55. I have no idea if the children had a code of conduct explained to them when they came to Merkland. The children's behaviour in general was very good. I was never aware of any children being segregated. I never had to discipline any child. I didn't see any child being restrained at Merkland and I didn't witness any behaviour that would have merited a child being restrained.
56. I only came across discipline at Merkland once. I couldn't tell you what the little boy had done, but he got the belt. The boy might have been about twelve years old. The belting had to be witnessed. Peter Harley asked me to get the belt book, which was in a filing cabinet in the office. When I opened the drawer, the belt book was the only thing in the drawer. I didn't look inside the book, I just handed it over. Peter Harley wrote something in the book.
57. Peter Harley struck the boy on the hands with the belt. I cannot remember how many times he was hit. I can't remember what type of belt Peter Harley used but I think it was like a tawse belt. I remember thinking that if it happened again that a child had to be belted, I was going to refuse to be there because it was so distressing.
58. To my knowledge, Merkland was never the subject of concern by any member of staff or any external body or person due to the way children were being treated. If there had been any concerns, I do not know if there were any guidelines on telling their parents.
59. I am not aware of any child complaining about the way they had been treated by staff. There were no guidelines given to me on how to deal with any child making a complaint. I did not receive any complaints from children.

Abuse at Merkland Children's Home

60. There was no definition of abuse given at Merkland. I can't remember the word abuse being used at all. Even with the benefit of hindsight, I never saw any abuse between the children, or abuse by staff towards children apart from the belt.
61. The only thing I saw which I questioned was one day I heard a lot of laughter coming from Peter Harley's office. I had a look and Peter Harley was handing out pocket money to the children. There was a record book for the pocket money.
62. Peter Harley had the money to give out and in his other hand, he had the belt. The children had to try and take their pocket money before Peter Harley could hit them with the belt. I remember thinking, "Really?" but the kids were all laughing. I didn't see any of them getting struck with the belt, but it would have been sore if Peter Harley had hit them.
63. The chairs in the dining room had holes in the back. I could be sitting having my tea with the kids and Peter Harley would sneak in and flick the belt through the hole and hit my back. I nearly died of a heart attack, but the kids thought it was funny. The amount of force Peter Harley used flicking the belt wasn't sore, but it would hurt enough to make you squeal. I don't know if Peter Harley did that to any of the other staff, but I think he did it to children.
64. I can't remember if the belt Peter Harley used to flick through the hole in the chair was a belt for holding up your trousers or a tawse belt.
65. If any child had been abused at Merkland, I would hope it would have come to light. I would hope that a member of staff would have seen it. I can't remember Peter Harley being angry or hearing him shout. Maybe he saved that up for when staff weren't around. I don't know.

66. I was never the subject of an allegation of abuse or ill treatment of any child who stayed at Merkland while I was working there.
67. I was never involved in any investigation of any allegation of the abuse or ill treatment of any child who stayed at Merkland while I was working there.
68. I was never involved in handling civil claims, reports, or complaints about the abuse or ill treatment of any child who stayed at Merkland while I was working there.
69. In 1995 I became aware of a police investigation into alleged abuse at Merkland. I was interviewed by the police about abuse in Merkland.
70. There was one incident I told the police about. Peter Harley used to hire a bus, with a driver. I am not sure how long that lasted but I remember being on that bus. All the Merkland children would go on the bus, but also a lot of local children too. The bus would take them to the swimming pool in Dumfries. There was only one time I went on the bus. Everything was fine. I didn't go in the pool, I sat in the gallery.
71. There was a little boy called ██████ who was staying at Merkland. He definitely had learning difficulties. He had the most beautiful smile that would melt you. ██████ came out of the dressing room to go in the pool, and he was covered in bruises. I thought, "Oh my god." When I got back I went straight to see Peter Harley.
72. I told Peter Harley that ██████ was covered in bruises. I was mortified. My assumption was that ██████'s bruises had been caused by other boys bumping him into a wall or nipping him. I never saw any boys do those things to ██████. I just assumed it was other boys. Whether it was or not, I do not know. I told Peter Harley what I had seen, and he said, "Right. Fine." There was no big deal made of it, at least as far as I am aware.
73. I can't remember if Peter Harley was surprised when I told him about ██████'s bruises. Peter Harley was not at the swimming pool that day, I think that is why I was there.

74. As far as I can remember, [REDACTED] didn't get any more bruises after that. In terms of me being able to tell if he had any further bruises, I was only at the swimming pool that one time. However, I did see [REDACTED] in the laundry with Mrs Violet Whybrow, the laundry woman. I went into the laundry and she was busy ironing. She gestured to a cupboard at the back of the room and [REDACTED] peeked his head round the corner, laughing. I think he had wet himself or soiled himself and Violet was sorting him out. He only had a little thin vest on, so if there had been any bruises I would have noticed them, especially after seeing him at the swimming pool.

75. I told the police my account of [REDACTED]'s bruises. I can't remember what else I told them about. The police did not ask me about any other specific incidents at Merkland or anything to do with Peter Harley. I did not have to go to court to give evidence. The police did not come back to see me to ask for any further details. I do not know how big the statement was that I gave to the police. I did not get a copy of my police statement.

76. Apart from Peter Harley, I do not know of any person who was convicted of abusing children at Merkland Children's Home.

77. Regarding Peter Harley's conviction for abusing children, I only know what I read in the newspaper. I read that he was convicted of sexual abuse against boys. That was after I was interviewed by the police. It must have been in 1996, after his case went to court. I thought it was unbelievable. How could anybody do that to children? How could it have happened without him being found out?

78. The newspapers were describing a man that I did not know, because Peter Harley did not come across like that. He came across as caring, nurturing, quiet. He was good with the children. Everything was his way as far as the staff were concerned, I don't know if he was like that with the children, but they behaved.

79. What I read about Peter Harley, didn't match what I saw. In retrospect, since reading the reports of his abuse, I haven't thought that there were any signs that I missed at the time.
80. Things happened that I wasn't aware of until later. For example, Violet Whybrow came to work at **Secondary Institutions - to be published later**. I used to give her a lift in and out. One day she said to me, "Can you remember the time that you brought the blankets down?" In the cupboard at the top of the stairs where they kept clothes, there was a shelf where they had tonnes of blankets for the beds. **JDW** asked me to feed the blankets down to the laundry room, to get them freshened up for the winter. That made total sense to me.
81. But Violet Whybrow told me that was the third time that had happened because she and **JDW** had fallen out and this was **JDW**'s way of getting back at Violet. But Violet was very cunning. When she realised what was going on, she put a thread in the corner of the blankets, so when they came down again she could recognise them. When Violet was asking me about the blankets, I think she was asking to see if I knew why **JDW** was really having them brought down, but I didn't know the real reason. It made sense to me that we would freshen the blankets up for the winter. That is an example of the kind of thing where you don't know you are doing something that is wrong .
82. As far as the social work department bosses asking me about the children or Peter Harley, **PMO** used to have a wander around Merkland. If I was around he would ask me, "Is everything okay?" and I would answer, "Yes." That was it. None of them specifically asked me about Peter Harley or **JDW**.
83. I didn't have a lot to do with **PLS**, but funnily enough he went on the trip to Kilwinning when we got soaked. It is because he didn't come to Merkland socially that I remember him being on that holiday. He didn't have a shirt and tie on. I don't know if he had a tent or if he slept in his car. I always thought that was a bit unusual, not peculiar but he was quite high up in the social work department. I have a memory

that when we got washed out of the tents, the boys moved into a byre or a shed. There was no one on that holiday other than PLS [REDACTED] who was not either staff at Merkland or a child staying at Merkland.

84. I don't know if Peter Harley was ever subject to being monitored by the social work department. It was a different world back then.

Staff at Merkland children's home and other persons

JDW [REDACTED]

85. JDW [REDACTED] mainly dealt with the girls. As I have said, she was very arty. There was always something on the go. I would say in the main she was really good. I don't think she had an awful lot to do with the boys. JDW [REDACTED] was at Merkland the whole time I was there. I never socialised with Peter Harley or JDW [REDACTED]. I only ever met them when I was at work.
86. I never saw JDW [REDACTED] discipline the children. As far as abuse of the children is concerned, there was one incident. We were sitting at the front door having a cup of tea. There was me and JDW [REDACTED], and I think there were a couple of girls. There was a little boy who we only had at weekends. During the week, he would be at Hannafield in Dumfries. He had mild learning difficulties.
87. The boy asked JDW [REDACTED] if he could have a cup of tea. JDW [REDACTED] told him to get a cup. He raced off to get a cup and JDW [REDACTED] emptied the teapot. The boy came back and tried to get a cup of tea, but of course there wasn't any. He was distraught. He ran into the hall and up the stairs and into the bedroom on the right. He wrecked the place. I went after him, and I couldn't believe what I was looking at. For such a small boy he had enormous strength.

88. I calmed him down and we put everything back where it should be. I took him down and Avril made him a cup of tea. The boy wrecked the room because he knew what had happened with the teapot being emptied. He was so upset. I didn't tell JDW JDW that the boy had wrecked the room, that we had put everything back, or that I had taken him downstairs to get a cup of tea.

89. My feeling about what JDW had done was one of disbelief. I didn't tell the social work department about. I had no contact with the social work department other than when social workers visited Merkland, which was not often. I don't think that boy's social worker ever visited him at Merkland children's home.

Peter Harley

90. Other than what we have already discussed, I didn't see Peter Harley abusing or ill-treating children at Merkland Children's Home. Regarding the incident with the belt, I didn't consider reporting it because he was allowed to do that at the time, although I was shocked that he was allowed to do it. They were belting children in schools at that time.

91. I didn't hear of anyone else saying that Peter Harley had abused children.

[REDACTED]

92. [REDACTED]

PXG [REDACTED]

93. I don't know how long he was at Merkland children's home. The male members of staff didn't seem to last too long. It didn't mean anything to me at the time but looking back my thought on that is that the male staff bedroom was next to the boys' bedroom. If

there was no male member of staff, that is where Peter Harley slept. If the abuse happened at night, that would make sense.

94. I don't know if the male members of staff who didn't stay long were sacked or if they left. I think Bill Mathieson was there the longest. There is nothing in my memory to say that Peter Harley's attitude to these male members of staff was bad.
95. I did not see P^{XG} [REDACTED] abusing children or mis-treating children at Merkland. I did not hear any account of him abusing children. There is nothing in my memory to say that P^{XG} [REDACTED] wasn't okay, apart from the kitten allegation. One day, I turned up for work, and he was gone.
96. As well as having [REDACTED] accommodation in Merkland, Peter Harley and J^{DW} [REDACTED] [REDACTED], but I think it was only for a week. [REDACTED]. It was out on the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] it. If you go up by the butchers in Moffat, [REDACTED] when you come to the junction [REDACTED] I remember [REDACTED] there. Something tells me [REDACTED] during their time at Merkland. They certainly [REDACTED] in Dumfries after they were at Merkland.
97. Children at Merkland were not allowed to go to the homes of staff members. It's not that there was particular guidance given on the subject, it just didn't happen. I was not aware of any children going to Peter Harley's house.

R^{FD} [REDACTED]

98. I don't know who this is, the name doesn't mean anything to me. I am informed that he was a chemistry teacher who used to visit Peter Harley at Merkland. That wasn't during my time at Merkland, but then again I have no recollection of this man at all. I don't have any memory of people coming in to visit Peter Harley or J^{DW} [REDACTED], or of them hosting social events at Merkland.

RFB

99. I do not know who this is. I am informed that he was a local police [REDACTED]. I am not aware of him being in Merkland. There was one time that I recall a police officer being there. I was in the kitchen with the cook and Peter Harley came in with a police officer. Why he was there, I have no idea. He just said hello and then walked back out again.
100. I do not know who the officer was and I do not know why he was there. He had his police uniform on, but I do not know what rank he was. [REDACTED] was in the police so I know that [REDACTED] would have [REDACTED] on his uniform, but I only saw the officer at Merkland for about twenty seconds.
101. I do not think there were any children around when the police officer was at Merkland.

Reporting of abuse at Merkland Children's Home

102. The only matter of concern that I witnessed at Merkland was the bruising on the young boy [REDACTED]. I reported that to Peter Harley.

Leaving Merkland Children's Home

103. I left Merkland children's home because it was closing down. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later
104. When Merkland was closing, Peter Harley was only offered the post of deputy head of Ladyacre. There were two children's homes closing at that time, Merkland and Springbells. Deirdre Laird was the unit manager of Springbells and Peter Harley was the unit manager of Merkland. They both thought they were going to get the top job at Ladyacre, but they were both offered the deputy head position. [REDACTED] Secondary Institutions - to be published later

105. [Redacted]

106. I remember the last few weeks in Merkland were quite stressful. [Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted] there was a lot of feeling of tension. And the kids must have been upset with what was happening.

[Redacted]

107. [Redacted] my time at Merkland finished on 12th July 1982.

108. [Redacted]

109. [Redacted]

110.

Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Life after working in children's care homes

111. Secondary Institutions - to be published later I was put in the newly formed fostering and adoption team at the council. My role was as a research and information officer. It was a huge team because it was covering the whole of Dumfries and Galloway. We covered Stranraer, Newton Stewart, Kirkcudbright, Castle Douglas, Dumfries, Annan, and Lockerbie.
112. There had been managers for the teams in each of these areas and each team would have social workers and a fostering and adoption officer, with each team working individually. The idea was to bring all the fostering and adoption officers together to make one team. That's what they did. There were two members of staff who were like deputy managers. One of them managed residential and out-of-region placements, and the other managed the fostering and adoption team. I worked with the latter.

Records

113. In my role as a research and information officer, I did not see any records relating to Merkland Children's Home. I didn't get access to any records. My job entailed

collecting information on who was in foster care, and who were the foster carers for them. I had to put that information on a card system for my manager.


114. It took quite a while, but in doing that work we found that there had been £40,000 in overpayments to foster carers. It was the first piece of work I had to do in my new job and when I showed my manager she said that it couldn't be right. However, it was double-checked, and it was absolutely correct. I got a few brownie points for that.
115. In my role as a research and information officer, I did not have access to any records relating to Merkland children's home. I did hand over some records regarding Merkland to the police. These records related to the earlier phase of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry relating to fostering.
116. A lot of the area social work offices were being closed, and all of their records had to be emptied out. Those records were all sent to the central store and a team was put together to go through all the records and catalogue them. I had nothing to do with that, but then just before Covid we received a Section 21 notice from the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry. That caused a bit of panic in the sense of people not being sure how to deal with such a notice.
117. I was working with a colleague called Neil Whittaker who was a wizard on the computer. The request for documents from the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry was for records from 1930 to 2014. We decided to deal with the request by decade. Then Covid hit, and an awful lot of staff didn't have anything to do. So, they were given boxes of documents to go through. We had a spreadsheet to fill in if we found any information relating to the abuse of children. Obviously, the details of the children who had been at Merkland would have been in amongst all of these boxes of files.
118. There was a request for information regarding **FEV**, and **PLB**. There could have been others. I am not sure if the request came from their solicitors, Digby Brown, or it could have been another Section 21 request. My boss and Ms McIntyre, the solicitor for Dumfries and Galloway council at the time, got all the

information about how Merkland was dealt with, about the counsellors that were brought in, about the apology in the newspapers, and all that kind of stuff.

119. They put it all together including a copy of FEV [REDACTED]'s file. I personally did not hand that over to the police or anyone's solicitor. I just helped put it together to make sure every scrap of paper was in there, and then I gave it to Ms McIntyre, the council solicitor. I had to do that because my colleague Neil Whittaker was on holiday at the time.
120. I have heard stories of files from Merkland being destroyed or misplaced. Only the children's social workers had the files. They wrote the files. We had a filing cabinet at Merkland but there was only the belt book that was kept in it. I think the pocket money book was kept in the locked drawer of the desk where the pocket money tin was.
121. I think the stories about files being destroyed or misplaced would have been correspondence between Gordon Street Social Work Office and Peter Harley. What I heard was years ago. Someone asked me if I had heard that records had been found in the attic at Merkland. The building was getting turned into flats. I wasn't told this by anyone directly involved but I was told that the builder had found records in the attic.
122. The builder apparently telephoned the Gordon Street Social Work Office to report this, and he was told to destroy the records. Any correspondence between Gordon Street and Peter Harley would have the council logo on it. I think this would have taken place after Peter Harley had left Merkland children's home, but before he was convicted of abusing children there. I think this was also before I was interviewed by the police.
123. All of us who had worked at Merkland knew about this issue with records being found in the attic. I didn't give it a second thought until I was told again about records being found in the attic. It was also said that Peter Harley made more money than the director of social work because of payments for his petrol allowance, and overtime. Peter Harley would have been paid for a lot of overtime because we kept losing male

members of staff. Peter Harley would have been paid additionally for sleeping over at Merkland.

124. I never ever saw a file on a child when I worked at Merkland. At the time I did not see any records for any child in Dumfries and Galloway. I only saw these later on, just before COVID in 2020. These were Social Work files and not Unit files. There was a social work file for each child. In each file you would find a one-page report written by the unit manager. So, there was obviously a meeting, and they had been asked for a report, and that one little bit of paper was what they got.

125. There were no other children's homes in the Dumfries and Galloway council area who had records relating to the children they had cared for, for the time we were asked to look at. 


Secondary Institutions - to be published later

126. I am not quite sure when individual children's homes started to keep records. Each home had to keep a register of children coming in and out. I never saw a register for Merkland 

127. 
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128.

129. At the time, I don't know if other children's homes in the Dumfries and Galloway area had records of children in their care or other records. I never saw records for places


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Allegations that have been made to the Inquiry against me

FEV

130. I remember FEV. He was lovely. I remember the night he came into Merkland. There was FEV, his brother and I think a boy called . They came from foster care because their foster mum was not well. I remember it so well because I had to make them some tea and I am useless at cooking. I went to the larder, and I got soup. I put it in a pan, and I boiled it up. It was condensed soup, and I forgot to put the water in. It's things like that that you remember, isn't it?
131. Regarding FEV's age when he came to Merkland, he was small. He would have been about twelve. I didn't have much to do with FEV in Merkland. He was one of the boys and I mainly dealt with the girls. Don't get me wrong, we all sat down at the table and ate. It wasn't boys' table or girls' table, it was just everybody in. If the younger boys were out having a kick-about and I went out and had a kick-around with them, FEV might have been there.
132. At page 17 paragraph 85 of his statement, FEV states, "*There was nothing normal about Merkland. All you got was abuse from Peter and JDW. One other staff member, whose name was JDV was abusive to the kids. None of the other staff were abusive. In my opinion, the others were all complicit as they knew what was happening.*"
133. On page 24 at paragraph 122 of his statement, FEV states, "*JDV was another member of staff who was physically abusive. It never happened to me, but I saw her hit other kids. She was terrible. A lot of people weren't happy that she didn't get charged when the police were investigating Peter Harley.*"

134. I never sanctioned or punished [REDACTED]. That was not my job. I did not ever abuse [REDACTED]. I did not abuse any children. I have no idea why he would say that, or what he thinks he saw.
135. [REDACTED] went to [REDACTED: Secondary Institutions - to be published later]. And I met him years later, [REDACTED: Secondary Institutions - to be published later] it must have been before 1995. He was really tall, a good looking lad. He was with his partner and I'm sure there were two kids. We chatted and he was just lovely.
136. I have no idea why [REDACTED] would say these things about me, but I did read his statement and there were quite a number of things in it that were incorrect.
137. For example, [REDACTED] said that Bill Mathieson broke Peter Harley's leg. I don't know, I wasn't there, but Peter Harley's leg was broken. [REDACTED] said that Peter Harley slept in the bedroom next to his. Absolutely not. Where would Bill Mathieson have slept? Bill Mathieson was still working at Merkland. They got a hospital bed and put it in the office. That is where Peter Harley slept, so if there was any Atari game, it was in the office, not in the room next to [REDACTED]'s bedroom. Things like that are really incorrect in [REDACTED]'s statement. But I have no idea why he would say that about me.
138. Although I did not hit children at Merkland, I would agree that such a practice would constitute abuse by a member of staff towards a child. Of course it would.
139. On pages 24 and 25 at paragraph 123 of his statement, [REDACTED] states, [REDACTED: Secondary Institutions - to be published later] *She was a totally different member of staff in that home. She was brand new. It must have been because she was working under Harley that she was bad. She was only a young woman. She must have been only nineteen or twenty."*

140.

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141.

142.

143.

144. In answer to the question, *"If you didn't see or hear of any abuse at Merkland, then how could such allegations have been made and Peter Harley convicted of abuse?"*

All I can say is there have been lots of reports of paedophiles in children's homes and places like that. The big question has always been, "How did they get away with it?" The answer is they are clever and they don't do it in front of people.

145. They must have such menace about them. There would also be the feeling of guilt felt by the survivor of abuse. How do you start that conversation? It is like they learn to live with it or are able to exist with it. We carry around a lot of things with us all the time. To actually see the words makes it real. It is shocking.

Lessons to be learned

146. We are talking about the most vulnerable children. It is really hard. You can't staff a building so that people walk about in twos. The training of staff is better now. Secondary In

Secondary Institutions - to be published later
Secondary Institutions - to be published later

147. Secondary Institutions - to be published later

Secondary Institutions - to be published later Merkland was a regime run by Peter Harley.

148. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but when I was in Merkland it seemed to be a happy place. The children played and had good food. They were the best dressed going to school. They always seemed to be out and about. But I was only there part-time.

Other information

149. 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.

JDV

Signed.....

Dated..... 16 February 2026