

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Patricia Helen Baxter or ROBERTSON

Support person present: No

Background

1. My name is Patricia Robertson. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1948. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Qualifications & Employment History

2. I have a certificate of Education from Dundee College of Education. Between 1969 and 1970 I worked at Polkemmet Primary School, West Lothian County Council. I started at Fornethy Residential School, in 1970 and stayed there until 1984. This was under the Glasgow Corporation. Between 1985 and 2013 I worked in Heybridge Primary School and Silver End Primary School, both in Essex County Council.

Experiences at Fornethy Residential School, Kilry

The Institution / Culture

3. Fornethy Residential School was in Kilry, Alyth, Blairgowrie, Perthshire. Its purpose was to give children a break in the country. My first impressions of Fornethy were that it was big, warm, friendly and efficient. During my time there I would describe the culture as warm, friendly and happy. I would say there was a good, caring relationship between the teaching staff, children and domestic staff.

My role and recruitment at Fornethy Residential School

4. I was employed at Fornethy from 1970 to 1984, becoming deputy head around 1975/1976. I was interviewed for the post by the Deputy Director of Education. I have no recollection of any provision for references. There was a one-year probationary period. My line manager was the head teacher. I don't recall any monitoring. There was no training involved.

Structure and recruitment of staff

Staff structure

5. There was SNR SNR and three teachers at Fornethy. SNR SNR, Mrs LBD, was SNR. Miss Fletcher was SNR. Miss Fletcher was supportive. There was a routine and a timetable in place.

Recruitment of staff

6. I was not involved in the recruitment of staff and as such I have no knowledge of the recruitment policy and practices. Students from Dundee College of Education attended at weekends to allow a teacher to have a long weekend off once a month. I don't know if references were obtained for these students or if referees were spoken to. As deputy head I didn't 'manage', I worked alongside and supported other members of staff.

Training

7. I was not involved in training and/or the development of staff or others.

Supervision/ appraisal/ evaluation

8. I was not involved in the supervision, appraisal or evaluation of staff. Students were supervised on a Saturday.

Policy/Strategic Planning

9. While at Fornethy, I was not involved in, or had responsibility for, policy in relation to the care, including residential care of children. Nor did I have any involvement in, or responsibility for, strategic planning in relation to Fornethy.

Children / Routine at Fornethy Residential School, Kilry

10. Children were placed at Fornethy by Glasgow Corporation. I do not know the criteria for them being placed there. They had a medical examination in Glasgow prior to being placed. The head teacher was informed of any relevant information from the medicals. Children tended to stay at Fornethy for four to six weeks. There were fifty to seventy girls at any one time, depending on staff ratio. The girls were aged between five and twelve. There were thirty to forty children per adult. Fifteen to twenty at class time in the morning.

Mealtimes / Food

11. The children were provided with home cooked, basic food. If they didn't like what was on offer, they were encouraged to try new food.

Sleeping Arrangements

12. There were seven dormitories, each holding from seven to fourteen girls.

Washing and Bathing

13. There were toilets and washrooms near the dormitories and two large shower rooms on the lower ground floor.

Leisure time

14. The children spent their leisure time walking, paddling in the river, playing in the park and playground. On wet days they could play games in the playroom or in the gym. There were organised day trips to the seaside and safari park. The girls were also taken to agricultural shows, events and local farms. Small groups would be taken swimming on a weekly basis, and to church on Sundays.
15. There were no informal trips. Individual staff did not take individual children out of the school.

Healthcare

16. The housekeeper and the local doctor dealt with any health problems the children might have.

Schooling

17. From Monday to Friday mornings, the children were divided into small, age relevant classes.

Chores

18. The children did not do any manual work at Fornethy.

Visitors/Reviews

19. There were no visitors, either family or professional and no reviews were carried out by Fornethy.

Leaving

20. When the children were leaving, their belongings were checked and packed by a member of the domestic staff. They had lunch before returning to Glasgow by coach. Two ladies escorted the girls on the coach. The girls weren't given any support by Fornethy once they had left the school, I don't know if they did from Glasgow Corporation.

Living arrangements

21. All the teaching staff were resident at Fornethy. The head teacher had a flat. The teachers' bedrooms were on the same corridors as the dormitories. The teachers and domestic staff had access to the children's residential areas. The teaching staff were responsible for the children's residential area overnight, but no-one was awake and on duty overnight.

Discipline and Punishment

22. The children were verbally disciplined and punished by the head teacher and the teaching staff. There was no physical punishment at Fornethy. There was no formal policy or code of conduct in relation to discipline and punishment. Discipline was never the responsibility of more senior child residents.
23. The type of behaviour that might result in discipline or punishment would be chatting at the wrong time or arguing with another girl. They would receive a verbal telling off from the head teacher or one of the teachers. There was no physical punishment administered. Very occasionally children were given a 'time out' for five minutes or so.
24. I did discipline children myself, verbally and by giving them a 'time out'. There was no record or punishment book kept of when children were disciplined or punished.

Restraint

25. Restraint was never used on the children, and I never restrained any children during my time at Fornethy. Children were never removed from other children or placed in a room alone. Medication was never administered as a means of restraining, sedating or calming a child.

Concerns about the institution

26. To my knowledge, Fornethy was never the subject of concern, within Fornethy itself or to any external body or agency, or any other person, because of the way in which children were treated. I don't know to what extent the parents of the children were made aware of any concerns.

Reporting of complaints/concerns

27. There wasn't a complaints or reporting process in place if any child in Fornethy, or another person on their behalf, wished to make a complaint or report a concern and we did not receive any complaints.

Trusted adult/confidante

28. There wasn't a dedicated person at Fornethy, or outside of it, to whom a child could speak about any worries they had. The children chatted freely with teachers and cleaners. Children, in practice, didn't raise concerns and no child ever raised concerns to me.

Abuse

29. During my time at Fornethy, it didn't have a definition of "abuse" in relation to the treatment of children. I never saw any behaviour that I considered to be abuse of any kind taking place at Fornethy and no children ever reported abuse to me.

30. I can be confident that, if any child was being abused or ill-treated, it would have come to light at or around the time it was occurring by talking to other children and the domestic staff. Abuse could not have happened at Fornethy and gone undetected.

Child protection arrangements

31. There was no guidance or instruction given to staff, including managerial staff, on how children in their care at Fornethy should be treated, cared for and protected against abuse, ill-treatment or inappropriate behaviour towards them, whether from staff, other adults, or other children.

External monitoring

32. We occasionally had informal visits from officials from Glasgow. They did not speak to the children either individually or as a group. The officials did not speak to me while they were at Fornethy.

Record-keeping

33. There was no record-keeping to my knowledge. I cannot comment on the historical position as regards record-keeping.

Allegations of abuse

34. I was never the subject of an allegation of abuse or ill-treatment of a child or children who resided in Fornethy when I was there.

Investigations into abuse – personal involvement

35. I was never involved in any investigation on behalf of Fornethy into allegations of abuse or ill-treatment, or into inappropriate behaviour by staff or others towards children.

Reports of abuse and civil claims

36. I was never involved in the handling of reports to Fornethy by former residents, concerning historical abuse, nor was I ever involved in the handling of civil claims made against Fornethy by former residents, concerning historical abuse.

Police investigations/ criminal proceedings

37. I did not become aware of police investigations into alleged abuse at Fornethy. There were no convictions of child abuse against me when I started at Fornethy Residential School in August 1970. I was found guilty at Glasgow High Court on a number of charges relating to my time at Fornethy Residential School between 1970 and 1984. I was sentenced at Glasgow High Court on 3 December 2025.

Convicted abusers

38. I do not know any person who worked at Fornethy who was convicted of the abuse of a child or children at the school.

Leaving Fornethy Residential School

39. I left Fornethy as I got married and moved to Essex. I didn't ask for any references.

Helping the Inquiry

40. I did not see any abuse while I was at Fornethy. I cannot explain why such allegations of abuse have been made. I don't see how I can help the Inquiry in this regard.
41. In my view, lessons that can be learned to protect children in places like Fornethy, now and in the future are in policies, induction, records and awareness.

Convictions

- 42. As stated above, I was found guilty at Glasgow High Court on a number of charges relating to my time at Fornethy Residential School between 1970 and 1984. I was sentenced at Glasgow High Court on 3 December 2025.
- 43. There were no convictions of child abuse against me when I started at Fornethy Residential School in August 1970.
- 44. I have been asked, if I have been convicted of an offence against children in an institution, describe how I was able to commit the offences undetected and if others were aware of my behaviour, what was done about it? If nothing was done, why do I think this was? As I never abused any children, or witnessed any abuse by other staff, I find this question difficult to answer.

Other information

- 45. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed..... 

Dated..... 11. May 2026