

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Brother Christopher BROWN

Support person present: Yes

Others present: Blair Johnson, Clyde and Company Solicitors

1. My name is Chris Brown. I was known as Brother Brown. My date of birth is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] 1941. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Life before joining Christian Brothers

2. I started school in Ledsham in 1955 and stayed there until O'level stage and then I attended an establishment in Toddington where I completed my novitiate and two years scholasticate. During that time I was also studying for my A levels.

Childcare Qualifications and training

3. I attended Strawberry Hill in Twickenham for three years and completed my teacher training. I gained a Teaching Certificate with distinction.

Career

4. I taught in St John Plessington, Hooton for a couple of years. After that I attended the University of Liverpool where I completed a Bachelor of Science degree in

Chemistry and Biology. Following that I taught in Prior Park College in Bath for a year. I had the role of Senior House Master.

5. I subsequently spent a year in Gibraltar and I then returned to England to help teach young men who were training to be Brothers.
6. I went to St Ninian's for a short placement before I went to Rome to complete my tertianship. After my time in St Ninian's I returned to Liverpool to teach in Nugent High School.

Time spent working at St Ninian's, Falkland

7. I worked at St Ninian's in Falkland from 1st September 1981 until 1st January 1982.
8. I was interested in situations where children were struggling and that is why I joined the Brothers. I took great pleasure in being able to deal with children like that. I understood that St Ninian's was for children from broken homes and poor families. They were looking for Brothers who would go there to do sports and get on with difficult children. Everybody within the Christian Brothers knew what your talents were. It was a small province. I knew I would be able to use my experiences from living in the countryside.
9. I knew Brother [REDACTED] LNC well and he had worked at St Ninian's so I was interested in helping. I knew the Brothers who were teaching there. I knew it as a place where you were helping people. It was a good place where children were getting help.

St Ninian's, Falkland

First impressions

10. I could see it was a place where children needed help. It took children from broken homes in inner Glasgow who had problems in the family and raised their level. It was a great place. St Ninian's was outstanding in the way they cared for children. You would never see anything wrong going on.

Layout at St Ninian's

11. St Ninian's was set in a country area with hills behind. We used to take the boys to the hills to run around and they loved challenging each other.
12. The rooms downstairs were used as classrooms and kitchens. The boys slept upstairs in dormitories. Your own room would be at the end of the bedroom corridor.

Pupils at St Ninian's

13. I can't recall any of the names of the boys. The boys aged from eleven or twelve up to O' level age although they didn't do O' levels at St Ninian's. I would guess there were thirty to forty boys there but perhaps less.

My role at St Ninian's

14. They wanted someone who was active and could do some sports. They wanted someone who could teach and care for people. I taught science, maths and English. I didn't have any additional training to work at St Ninian's. You just knew what to do. You just went in and helped. It was common sense. As well as teaching, I did games. You didn't stick to specific jobs. You just did what needed to be done.

Management structure

15. There was a community of Brothers who lived in St Ninian's. You were there for the children and that was the important aspect. Within the Brothers you just got on with whoever was there. I suppose you would have told Brother Paul Kelly if there was a problem but as a teacher you had to discipline. It was all part of the job.

Staff at St Ninian's

16. Some lay staff would stay overnight and some would come in during the day and go home at night.

Routine and life at St Ninian's, Falkland

Admission

17. If there was a broken home in Glasgow they would get in touch with St Ninian's. I don't remember if there were new arrivals when I was at St Ninian's. If there was a new boy you would be told about what sort of home he was coming from. Brother Paul Kelly would normally have done this. He was very organised in that way.
18. I know St Ninian's didn't have enough funding. There was more than there used to be and there were some very generous Brothers down the country who would help out if you were stuck. All you had to do was ask.

Daily routine

19. We didn't get the boys up massively early. Once they got up they would have breakfast and then ready to do some work.

20. After breakfast the boys had to make their beds and then go to the classrooms for school.

Sleeping arrangements

21. The boys slept four or five in a room. There were rooms all over. A Brother would have his own room at the end of the corridor and would sleep with his door open. If there was an uproar going on you would make sure the boys went to sleep. You wouldn't want any chaos going on.

22. There were a certain number in a dorm. The older and younger boys were separated. If there was a problem with a particular dormitory, you would know and you would be aware of that.

23. I can't recall what time the boys went to bed.

Washing and bathing

24. The boys had to wash and brush their teeth when they got up and one of the Brothers would check this had been done. There was no set rota for the Brothers to supervise but if you were around, you would help out.

25. There were no routines for washing and bathing but the boys had to have a shower every day. The boys had a shower after games which they did every day so they would not need to have another shower.

Food

26. I can't picture the canteen now. I don't believe the Brothers had rigid roles in the canteen. We may have had roles and a rota but I don't recollect. I remember the food being okay. The women in the kitchen did a good job. I think the Brothers ate similar food to the boys. I believe if the children didn't like the food that they would have been dealt with very sympathetically.

Clothes

27. We weren't too strict about uniform. If the boys didn't have something, we would provide it. As far as I can recall the boys had their own clothes. We never took them out shopping for new clothes or shoes. There were a couple of ladies who did the laundry.

Chores

28. I'm sure there would have been something but I can't recall what.

Leisure time

29. There was table tennis and other games. I think there was a television. I don't think there was a big demand for books but I suppose the boys could get books if they wanted. Reading was encouraged to get them educated.
30. There wasn't a playground but there was an area around the home where the boys would play. They could use the pitches if they wanted.

Trips

31. I can't remember going to the cinema or having any other outings.
32. We may have taken the boys for a football game to Kirkaldy. We would have hired a coach to take them there. I have had a bus licence for years but I don't remember driving the minibus during the time I spent at St Ninian's.

Possessions and pocket money

33. If the boys had something valuable I think it would be handed in and looked after for them. I don't recall the boys receiving pocket money.

Birthdays and Christmas

34. I think the boys went home for Christmas. I think birthdays would have been celebrated in the normal way.

Bed-wetting

35. I am sure bedwetting would definitely have occurred and it would have been dealt with in a common sense way. The sheets would have been sent down to be washed. The Brothers were not on duty throughout the night but listened out and reacted if they heard anything.
36. The boys were free to go to the toilet during the night.

Schooling

37. There would have been academically weak children and stronger children. We would have been aware of the situation. I think the academic studies were confined to the mornings but I can't recollect fully.
38. The boys were taught by both lay staff and Brothers. I don't know if any of them held qualifications. The education at St Ninian's was good. It was common sense and fitted for the situation. It was not like a normal school. The children were not given any homework. All work was mainly done in the classroom.
39. The children did not take examinations and did not gain any qualifications to my knowledge. On the practical side the children did things like woodwork and metal work. I don't recall them doing cooking or being taught how to budget.

40. In the afternoons there were games which included running and football. This was when we got the best out of the children. We didn't have them playing rugby because it would cause too many frictions.

Healthcare

41. I think there was a nurse that the boys could refer to if necessary. They would be taken down to the doctor or the doctor would have been called in if required.
42. I think the boys attended a dentist in the village or nearby.
43. I don't know if there were medical records kept.

Religious instruction

44. I presume there would have been something but nothing too heavy. I don't recall the boys having to attend mass. The religion you taught was by your own life. It was to suit the needs of the boys.

Visits from friends and family

45. I don't think there was a set day for visitors and I don't recall there being any visitors. The boys would go home sometimes but definitely not weekly. I don't know if there was a visitors' book.

Visits from social workers

46. I don't remember any social workers in those days.

Records and record keeping

47. I don't recall records being kept and I did not keep any. I left prior to St Ninian's closing down so I did not see where any records would have been stored.

Inspections/review of care

48. The Brothers would keep in touch so they would call to visit St Ninian's sometimes. This was not a formal arrangement. They would be happy it was ticking over. There may have been reports available but I didn't look at them.
49. I don't recall any review of care happening while I was there. I am unaware of the procedure for discharge.

Sibling contact

50. I don't recollect there being any sibling groups and I am unsure as to whether there was a policy to keep siblings together.

Discipline and punishment

51. There was good discipline. There were no written rules but the boys would have known what was right and what was wrong. Any bullying would have been stamped on but I was not aware of any while I was there and I don't recall any specific discipline. There was no corporal punishment to my knowledge. I didn't witness boys being disciplined in a physical way, just being told off verbally.
52. I don't think there was a punishment book.

Brothers at St Ninian's

Brother John Mark Farrell

53. John was there when I was there. He could have been the headmaster but I don't recall. I don't recollect having had many dealings with him. He was a good person. I wouldn't suspect him of anything. I didn't hear anything about him abusing children. I am aware he was convicted of abuse against children but I would be very surprised if it was true. Just because someone is convicted it doesn't mean to say they are guilty.

Brother Paul Vincent Kelly

54. I knew him before I went to St Ninian's. He was a good guy. He was a sporty man. I think he was there during the whole period when I was at St Ninian's. He was in charge overall in many ways. All the Brothers looked up to Paul.
55. I witnessed him interacting normally with the boys. I can't recall him disciplining boys. He did a good job. He dealt with children who were homesick. The children who came to Falkland were from broken homes. They could cause problems if they were left with other boys in bedrooms so Brother Paul would deal with that. I didn't suspect him of anything untoward.
56. The boys would be around his bed at night and he would make sure they would settle in their duvets. I recall boys spending the night in his room to allay their fears. Paul had his own methods. I had no concerns about this. He did terrific work. These boys were from broken homes and he was great with them. He was a good guardian and a good person.
57. Paul Kelly is in jail now. In my mind, Paul Kelly in jail is a complete injustice. It should be shouted from the rooftops. Paul is in jail for being good. He was great with those children and the poor man is in jail. It is completely wrong. They got it wrong. I know this having lived there and having seen what went on.

58. I accept it would be considered most unusual nowadays for boys to spend the night in the bedroom of a Brother but I had no concerns at that time. There were no complaints about Brother Paul during my time at St Ninian's and no hints about any inappropriate behaviour. There was so much goodness around Falkland. I was surprised when I saw there had been allegations of abuse in Falkland.

Lay staff at St Ninian's

BHB

59. I have fond memories of BHB. He was a good guy and he was good with the boys. I had no concerns about him and I never heard any complaints. He was a good character. He was tremendous. He did [REDACTED] with the boys like [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. The boys loved BHB. He was so understanding.
60. He would stay late at night because he got on so well with all of us. He had a good sense of humour. He was brimming with goodness. BHB used to say, 'You just do what has to be done'.

Closing thoughts

61. I have not given any statements to third parties or been questioned by the police in relation to my time at St Ninian's.
62. I am unaware of any complaints or civil claims arising from St Ninian's.
63. I believe the boys could have spoken to anybody if they were unhappy and anybody would have helped. I was not made aware of any such concerns. If there were concerns you would find somebody to speak to but there was no procedure in place.
64. I did not witness any behaviour I considered to be untoward during my time at St Ninian's.

- 65. I haven't a clue where the allegations of abuse have come from. You would have to look at the people making the complaints to see if they are motivated by any reward. I find it quite strange.
- 66. Forty odd years have passed and what was done for those children at that time was brilliant. I couldn't find any fault with any of the Brothers. In the Catholic Church, they were walking saints.
- 67. The thing that stands out for me during my time there was the good that was done. Paul Kelly worked his socks off for those children.
- 68. The fact that people have been condemned to jail means there is something wrong with the system. The whole justice system is wrong and needs to be looked at very carefully because that is a person's life. Brother Kelly would not have done the things he has been convicted of and he has been sentenced to ten years in jail. Just because he was convicted does not mean he was guilty. That is my opinion.
- 69. I don't recall anything untoward happening at St Ninian's and that is what makes me suspicious of all these Inquiries. I am very suspicious. Especially regarding what happened to Paul Kelly.
- 70. 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..... 4 / 5 / 2019