

Children had to bow and salute to care home staff, child abuse inquiry hears

The Herald: Brian Donnelly [@BrianDonnellyHT](#) Senior News Reporter 27th June 2017



A CHILDREN'S home where staff were convicted of sexual and physical abuse was warned of giving children decades ago, an inquiry has heard.

The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry in **Edinburgh** heard that the Quarriers Home was contacted by the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, a donor and a visitor over concern over "thrashings" as far back as 1937 but there is no record of any action.

Children in the home near Bridge of Weir that housed mainly children from the **Glasgow** area were expected to bow or salute to their superiors, the inquiry heard.

It also heard that seven house mothers and fathers - those looking after the children - were convicted of physical and sexual abuse after the year 2000 for crimes against 23 children between 1955 to 1981.

Eighteen females and five males were targeted in that catalogue of abuse.

The inquiry heard there was evidence pointing to children being punished for wetting the bed and being locked in cupboards, while the organisation's rules outline how many times to strike a child whether on the hands for a girl or both hands and posterior through normal clothing for a boy - up to eight times with a strap for a boy over 14 at one stage.

In a letter from chairman of the official called James Kelly wrote to all to house parents about “thrashings”.

He wrote, in 1937: “Severe thrashing not only makes nervous wrecks of some boys, it hardens others and produces defiance rather than penitence.”

He added that “thrashing is loathsome and unnecessary”.

James Peoples QC, inquiry senior counsel, said: “Even then there was a concern, by the standards of the time, that there was excessive corporal punishment being meted out?”

Alice Harper, Quarriers chief executive, told the inquiry: “Yes.”

Children were often not believed.

The hearing before Lady Smith heard the Quarriers, one of **Scotland**’s best known homes of the last century that looked after thousands of vulnerable children, have not been able to provide one completed logbook that includes punishment records, despite it being in the organisation’s rules, or standing orders.

The inquiry also heard house fathers and mothers were not necessarily trained or had any qualifications until the 1960s.

Alice Harper, Quarriers chief executive, said that the only requirement was that the couples or individuals had “Christian values and a love of and an interest in children”.

The village of about 43 cottages first opened in 1878 and was later named after its founder William Quarrier.

Many of the children were also sent abroad.

There was no formal interview process for house parents at one stage, but perhaps a reference from doctor or clergyman would aid employment.

An empty logbook of a kind used between 1958 and 1988 which required details of punishments given to children was given to the inquiry but none was available from this entire period.

No records of inspections were available.

James Peoples said: “Is there any evidence that the organisation at any stage took an organisational decision to not retain those records, this particular form of records, like logbooks and punishment books?”

She said: “We have not been able to find any evidence that there has been an instruction to destroy the records.”

Mr Peoples outlined the description in the standing orders at one point of “the objectionable habits of children who are bed wetters and soiling their bed and wearing apparel are very difficult to cure.

“The utmost sympathy is felt for the house mothers who have to deal with the consequent inconvenience”.

The rules add: "In dealing with such cases house fathers and house mothers should consider how they would handle the same condition if the children were their own.

A line in bold in updated 1944 rule book directs against making children sleep on rubber sheets.

At its peak in 1930 the village had 43 cottages housing a total of 1400 children in total.

The inquiry continues.

