

I was a pupil at St. Benedict's school during the period 1972 (Junior School) through 1981 (Senior School), with the obligatory 2 year stint in the Middle School during that time.

This, as I am sure you are aware, was a period when St. Benedict's was even more strongly tied to the monastery than it is today. Girls? As if. Headmasters? Always a monk. Prayers every day, mass once a week.

During my time there I was familiar with some of the people now known to be, or still just suspected of, being paedophiles. David Pearce. Laurence Soper. John (?) Maestri. Along with them were a cast of others who were not, to my knowledge, paedophiles but were just aggressive, violent men with a predilection for beating young boys with sticks, belts or hands.

In terms of what I endured there it is questionable if any of it actually broke the law, *as it stood at the time*. Corporal punishment was permitted, the whole *in loco parentis* thing was exploited to the maximum, and the criminal offence of what I believe is now called *Inappropriate Touching* had yet to be recognised. Maybe it did breach the law at the time - I really am not able to say.

What I can comment on was the fact that David Pearce was, without any doubt at all in my mind, an active paedophile at that time, and I do not believe that his behaviour was unknown to the monastery. The same monastery which is still, today, controlled by the same folks as back then. The current abbot is not a man with whom I am familiar, but his predecessor, RC-F307 is still a force within the community. RC-F307 was a severe man when I knew him. Frankly, from a child's perspective, he was downright scary. Probably to many adults too.

David Pearce was quite a contrast. He was, as the parents saw him anyway, "a real charmer". He was also, as I am sure you have heard from elsewhere, almost universally known by pupils as Gay Dave. I don't mean that some people occasionally jokingly called him that: it was, without exception, his regular nickname. The name was a simple reflection of the facts which every boy in the school knew: David Pearce fancied you. It wasn't something which was gigglingly debated: "Is he? No? Yes?" It was just taken for granted. Every boy in the school knew it.

How did we know it? Many ways. He was so very camp. Not "I'm camp but am trying to hide it". But "camp and I'm going to play it up and make sure you all know it." Overtly camp. Consciously camp. A distinctly odd thing, from a male priest in a boys-only school. He liked touching: the hand on the arm, on the leg, on the shoulder - any opportunity.

All of that could, I suppose, be excused as the actions of a naive, effeminate man, unaware of the implications of his demeanour. Yet before we proceed beyond that, just stop there to consider the implications of this: this man was not in the least inhibited about such behaviour. It's not one or two pupils who observed this. *Everyone* was aware of it. And I do not believe for one single moment that the other members of staff and clergy were unaware of it too.

And, needless to say, Pearce's behaviour went way beyond non-sexual touching. I can remember at least one specific instance very clearly indeed when Pearce had his hand down my trousers, touching me. Very clear in my memory. Captain Pearce, as he became on Friday afternoons, managed to obtain the, for him, dream job of fitting the cadets for their CCF uniforms. This gave him ample opportunity to thrust his hands every which way under the guise of checking the fit. "Oh look - much too loose" - as his hand flapped away down your trousers.

And again: this was very open: this would be with other boys present. No shame.

Yet the monastery will have us believe, laughably, that all of this was shocking news to them when raised 20 or 30 years later. That is just so unbelievable as to be offensive.