

S1117

RESTRICTED

Statement of: MORTEMORE, HARSHA HARJIWAN

Form MG11(T)

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WITNESS STATEMENT

Criminal Procedure Rules, r27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5b

Statement of: MORTEMORE, HARSHA HARJIWAN

Age if under 18: Over 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18')
MANAGER/FORMER ACCOUNTS ASSISTANT

Occupation: EXECUTIVE SERVICES

This statement (consisting of 5 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: HARSHA MORTEMORE

Date: 27/09/2017

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded (supply witness details on rear)

I used to work at St Benedict's School in Ealing between 1996 and 2008. From 1996 to 2005 I was the Senior Accounts Assistant and in 2005 I became the HR Officer.

I have been asked about my memories of Laurence SOPER. When I went to work at the school Laurence SOPER was the Abbot. I used to have regular contact with Abbot Laurence because I managed the accounts. I would have monthly meetings with him re expenditure, church stipends etc. I also managed the monthly allowance given to the monks. Abbot Laurence seemed a perfect gentleman, full of airs and graces. He and Father David PEARCE, to whom I reported, seemed very close.

In 1997 I was thinking of leaving, they didn't want me to go so Father Martin, the Head of the Junior School, offered a place in the Junior School to my son, [Child] I told him that we were not Catholics, but he offered [Child] a place anyway. The plan was that [Child] would be in the office with me before and after school. A senior member of the office staff approached me and told me not to leave my son, who would have been 4 at the time, on his own in the office at any time when Father David or Abbot Laurence were there. The person then told me that [Child] would be safer because they preferred boys with blonde hair and blue eyes. The person then told me that Father David had been moved from the Junior School to keep him away from the younger boys.

Signature: Harsha MORTEMORE
2018

Signature witnessed by: BOB MODDREL

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On most Friday afternoons when I was on my own in the office, Father David would bring 2 or 3 boys to his office. He would shut the door and cover the glass window in the door with paper so that nobody could see into the office. I can't remember how old they were, but they were not from the Junior School, so would have been 11 or older. I was concerned about this so I contacted the Headmaster, Dr DACHS. He told me, "If you know what's good for you keep your head down and do your job." A short time later I was talking to Abbot Laurence and I mentioned my concerns to him. He told me not to worry because the allegations against Father David were unfounded. I said that he was still around boys and Abbot Laurence said that Father David, 'Just liked little boys.' I asked why Father David had been moved from the Junior School and he said because he was 'a sick man'. I said to him, "What about you?" and Abbot Laurence said, "I do like young boys, we all do". I didn't know what to say to that.

I can remember on another occasion speaking to **RC-F41**. He told me that once on a school trip abroad he helped out a boy who as having trouble going to the toilet and he had 'touched him up'. He said that he 'couldn't deny liking little boys'. It seemed to be a term used by the monks who worked with Abbot Laurence. I think this was after **RC-F41** had gone to Court and been found not guilty. When I was having the initial conversation with Abbot Laurence he said, "We look after our own and we deal with our own issues".

I can remember asking Abbot Laurence whether or not there was any truth to the allegations against Father David and he said categorically "No". Father David then approached me and told me that I asked too many questions. I also spoke to Father Andrew about what Father David did on Friday afternoons, he said that it was probably just a private meeting and he didn't want to be disturbed.

I felt that when I spoke to Abbot Laurence or any of them they made me feel that I was delving into something that wasn't my business and that if I pushed it my job was on the line. I told my son **Child** never to go anywhere alone with any of the monks and if one of them approached him to go anywhere alone with them, to go to a teacher. When he was about 4 or 5 he told me that when the boys were playing in the playground either Father David or Abbot Laurence would be in the playground watching them.

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The incidents on Friday afternoons with Father David went on for a long time, but having been warned to mind my own business, I didn't know what to do and trod carefully. When my son went to baptismal classes I made sure that I was always with him, I just wanted to keep him safe.

The first time I knew that Father David was being investigated was when the Headmaster, Chris CLEUGH, called a meeting and told us not to talk to anybody outside the school. I think the first time I heard about the allegations against Laurence SOPER would have been in late 2008, I think I heard about it from other members of staff. I wasn't surprised, it just made me think that everything I had heard was factual.

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2018

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