

Witness Name: Dom Richard Yeo
Statement No.: 4
Exhibits: 0
Dated: 20 July 2018

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF DOM RICHARD YEO

I, DOM RICHARD YEO, of Downside Abbey, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Radstock, BA3 4RH, WILL SAY as follows:

Background in Summary

Relationship between the EBC and Ealing Abbey

1. The relationship between the English Benedictine Congregation (**EBC**) and Ealing Abbey is the same as that between the EBC and every other monastery of the Congregation. Ealing Abbey is an autonomous monastery of monks, and the powers of the Abbot President and of the General Chapter are described in the Constitutions of the EBC¹. The formal powers of the Abbot President are limited to presiding over the election of an Abbot and conducting the Visitation of the monastery².
2. The principal power of the General Chapter is the power to enact laws which bind the monasteries of the Congregation. This does not, of course, take account of the more informal functions, exercised by the Abbot President, by the officials of the Congregation, and by the General Chapter, of providing advice when this is requested, or on occasion of providing advice even if it is not requested.
3. From 1985 to 2001, the Abbot President of the EBC was RC-F307 a monk of Ealing who was DPA from 1967 to 1991. The Abbot President cannot exercise the powers and duties of his office over his own monastery, and the Constitutions of the EBC provide that these powers and duties are exercised, in regard to the Abbot President's own monastery, by the First Assistant of the EBC; from 1985 to 1997 the First Assistant was Abbot Patrick Barry of Ampleforth and from 1997 to 2001 Abbot Stephen Ortiger of Worth. They exercised the functions of the Abbot President in relation to Ealing during these years, and then in 2001, I was elected Abbot President, and occupied that post until 2017 when I was succeeded by Abbot Christopher Jamison of Worth.
4. When I became Abbot President, RC-F307 ensured that all the documentation I needed was handed over to me, although there was, understandably,

¹ See further paragraphs 11,17 of corporate statement (BNT004910).

² See my corporate statement (BNT004910) for further on the role of the Abbot President, paragraphs 45-51, especially 45-46.

very little material relating to Ealing, since the First Assistant of the Congregation exercised the role of Abbot President in respect of Ealing during his presidency. Since 1997 the First Assistant had been Abbot Stephen Ortiger, Abbot of Worth Abbey, and, as I shall explain below³, he had previously informed me about the allegations concerning Maurice Pearce. On a couple of occasions subsequently I consulted Abbot Stephen about Ealing (about matters other than safeguarding), but I do not think I received documentation about Ealing from him.

Relationship between the EBC and St Benedict's Schools

5. St Benedict's School has never had a formal relationship with the EBC. Before the change of its structure of governance in 2012⁴ a Visitation of the monastery would have included an investigation into its financial situation, and if its activities were to have been found to be damaging the monastery in some way this would have been commented on; but the EBC and the Abbot President have never had any power to intervene directly in the affairs of the school, nor have they sought any such power.
6. When I was Abbot President, I always sought to maintain a friendly relationship with the Headmaster, to show interest in and support for the school. I was asked on two occasions to speak at the school, and was happy to do so, seeing this as a way of showing support.
7. What is written in the preceding paragraph about St Benedict's School applied equally to St Benedict's Junior School.

Relationship between the EBC and St Augustine's

8. St Augustine's School in Ealing has never had any link with the EBC. I believe that it was owned and managed for many years by Augustinian Canonesses. On two occasions, successive Abbots of Ealing asked me for advice about the community of the Canonesses. This was not because they had any jurisdiction over the community as Abbot of Ealing but because the Archbishop of Westminster, to whose vigilance the community was entrusted, had appointed them to be his Vicar for religious, that is to say his representative for dealing with the affairs of religious communities. They consulted me, not because of any position I held within the EBC but because I was able to give them canonical advice.

Relationship with successive Abbots of Ealing

9. Whereas, as I have already explained, the Abbot President has a very limited jurisdiction over the monasteries of the EBC, including Ealing, the Abbot of each monastery, including Ealing, has a very extensive jurisdiction; apart from the cases where his jurisdiction is expressly limited by the law of the Church or the Constitutions of the EBC, in general the Abbot has full authority over both the spiritual and practical life of the monastery.

RC-F307 – **DPA** 1967 – 1991

10. I first met **RC-F307** (**DPA** 1967-1991) in the early 1970s when I was a junior monk at Downside. I got to know him well particularly during the time when I was working in Rome as Secretary to the Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation, from 1980 to 1986. He was elected **DPA** in 1985, and I was at that time

³ See paragraph 16.

⁴ See paragraph 94 of corporate statement (BNT004910).

still Procurator in Curia, that is the representative of the Congregation in the Roman Curia, and I was also Assessor of the Congregation, that is adviser in canon law matters. In subsequent years I worked closely with him on a number of issues, I counted him as a good friend, and when he was [redacted] DPA of the Benedictine Confederation in 1995-1996 we were both living at Sant'Anselmo, the international Benedictine college in Rome. After I became Abbot of Downside in 1998 I continued to have frequent contact with him⁵, and for a few months at the end of his time in office I was a member of his Council. After he retired as [redacted] DPA in 2001 and I was elected to succeed him, I had less occasion to see him on business, but I made a point of trying to see him for friendship's sake whenever I went to Ealing.

Andrew Soper – Abbot of Ealing 1991 – 2000

11. I think I first got to know Andrew Soper (then known as Father Laurence Soper) when he was Secretary of the General Chapter in 1981. From 1986 onwards I was visiting Ealing Abbey fairly frequently, and he was Bursar and Prior. While he was not a close friend, he was always easy to talk to. When he became Abbot in 1991 I had a good deal more contact with him. In 2000, he resigned as Abbot. This was before I became Abbot President, so I would not expect to have been told the reasons for his retirement, but in the archives I received when I became Abbot President I have since seen a letter he wrote at the time in which he spoke of burn-out. I had no reason to think this letter does not reflect accurately his reasons for resigning.
12. I speak later on in this statement about my knowledge of him after I became Abbot President⁶.

Martin Shipperlee – Abbot of Ealing since 2000

13. Abbot Martin Shipperlee became Abbot of Ealing in 2000. When I was Abbot President we met quite frequently as Ealing Abbey's geographical location meant that it was often asked to host meetings which I attended, including many EBC meetings which I often chaired. He was a member of my Council from 2005 to 2009, and on a number of occasions he was my assistant at Visitations at the request of the community being visited; I found his insights and advice were frequently helpful.

Visitations of Ealing Abbey between 2001 and 2017

14. In all, I conducted six Visitations of Ealing Abbey between 2001 and 2017:
 - (a) Ordinary Visitation starting on 1 December 2003;
 - (b) Ordinary Visitation starting on 10 December 2007;
 - (c) Extraordinary Visitation starting on 30 August 2010;
 - (d) Apostolic Visitation, of which I was notified on 5 July 2011;
 - (e) Visitation called for by the CDF starting on 3 June 2013;
 - (f) Ordinary Visitation starting on 26 February 2016.

In accordance with the request of the Solicitor to the Inquiry, each of these Visitations is further described later on in this statement (see paragraphs 79-98 and 101-111).

15. I made frequent visits to Ealing Abbey while I was Abbot President. As I have indicated above, its geographical location made it an ideal place to hold meetings of different kinds, including EBC meetings, and I would frequently stay at Ealing when I had other

⁵ See further paragraph 24 of personal witness statement (BNT006439) dated 9 November 2017.

⁶ See paragraphs 29-34.

engagements in London or before going abroad. On these occasions I would try and speak to the Abbot privately, partly as a matter of courtesy, partly to find out if there were any issues to which I might need to give attention, and partly because I saw this as a way of trying to be supportive to him, in the same way as I would try and be supportive to any abbot. I felt this was particularly important during the years when he was under a lot of pressure because of safeguarding issues. These meetings also gave us an opportunity for informal exchanges about safeguarding matters⁷. For example, I was visiting Ealing in 2009 at the time when Abbot Martin received information from the police about serious allegations concerning Andrew Soper, so he was able to communicate that information to me orally, and we were able to discuss the issues relating to it, in particular the need to inform the Abbot Primate.

Alleged Perpetrators

a. Fr Maurice David Pearce (Maurice Pearce)

16. I first met Maurice Pearce on my first visit to Ealing in 1972. When I had occasion to visit Ealing, he was always kind to me and would make a point of speaking to me as a friend. I think it was in the spring of 2001, a few months before I became Abbot President, that I was first told by Abbot Stephen Ortiger that there were allegations of child abuse against him. He did not give me any details. This came as a complete surprise to me. I assume that Abbot Stephen knew about it because it was he who had conducted the previous Visitation of Ealing. At that time, I had no official role in relation to Ealing, but both Abbot Stephen and I were members of the Abbot President's Council.
17. I do not remember when I first spoke with Abbot Martin Shipperlee about these allegations. My first official engagement with Ealing was when I conducted the Visitation there in December 2003⁸ when the issue came up during interviews with members of the monastic community. They did not give me details of what Pearce was alleged to have done, but they expressed several concerns. In particular, there was concern about him going to the office of the Ealing Abbey Trust, which involved going through school areas, in addition, several monks said that they did not know what the allegations against him were and that they felt that they ought to have been given more information⁹. Some spoke about the anger and distress felt by some members of the school staff. My understanding was that the police had been informed about these allegations, but that they were not taking any action, but I do not remember whether I was informed about that at the time of the Visitation or on some other occasion. I spoke to the Abbot about the concerns which had been raised, but I did not mention it in my report to the community¹⁰ because it called for action from the Abbot, rather than from the community. I cannot remember now the details of my conversation with the Abbot, but what remains in my mind particularly is the concern that Pearce should not go into the school.
18. I understood later (at the time of the Visitations in 2010 and 2011) that a further allegation was made in 2004, that this was also reported to the police, and that the police did not take action, but that in 2006 the complainant brought a civil lawsuit against the monastery because of Pearce's abuse, and damages were awarded against Ealing Abbey Trust. In addition, I have since been told that the judge made

⁷ See further paragraph 31.

⁸ See further paragraphs 85-86.

⁹ DRY's Notes taken during interviews at 2003 visitation_(BNT006981).

¹⁰ Report to the Community re 2003 visitation_(BNT006879).

52. At the time of the Extraordinary Visitation, I was given a copy of the safeguarding policy of St Benedict's School³⁶; however, as this was being examined and checked by the ISI, I did not think it necessary to have more than a cursory look at it: I certainly did not see it as my business to comment on it. I was also given a copy of the review of the safeguarding arrangements, policies and procedures of the monastery prepared by two experts: Mr Philip Wright and Mr John Nixon in 2009³⁷.
53. I would not have presumed to make decisions in regard to anybody accused or suspected of child sexual abuse; any decisions would have been made by the safeguarding experts, or by Abbot Martin on the advice of those experts. I would not have been involved.
54. The only time that I was involved in making safeguarding arrangements for any monk of Ealing was when Abbot Martin and I felt it necessary to alert Abbot Primate Notker Wolf of allegations against Andrew Soper³⁸.
55. One of the issues which emerged at the time of the Extraordinary Visitation in 2010 was poor compliance with safeguarding restrictions. This led to my making an Act of Visitation, in which it was stated that any member of the community who, because of a safeguarding concern, was placed under restrictions was bound, in virtue of the vow of obedience, to observe those restrictions in full³⁹. This meant that a failure to observe the restrictions could potentially lead to the dismissal of the monk in question. By the time of the Apostolic Visitation, a year later, I ascertained, both from the Abbot and from other members of the community, that this was no longer a problem.
56. After Father [RC-F41] had left Ealing Abbey, which I believe was at the insistence of the ISI, he was initially placed in a residence which was not far from a school. Father Peter Burns, a monk of Ealing who was parish priest of Ealing parish and who was very concerned about safeguarding wrote to me to point this out⁴⁰, and I took the matter to Abbot Martin. When I later inquired what had been the result of this, he told me that Father [RC-F41] had been moved elsewhere, and this was confirmed in writing when in May 2011 I received a report from the Abbot and Council about the implementation of the recommendations of the Extraordinary Visitation, in which it was stated that he had moved elsewhere in January⁴¹. My recollection is that he had two moves: first to live in a convent of sisters in [DPA] and later on to a care home, both being locations where Abbot Martin believed there were not the same risks. I think this was communicated to me orally.
57. I know that risk assessments were carried out on Maurice Pearce and on Father [RC-F41] the documentation I received indicated that these had been carried out. I do not know what the findings of these risk assessments were; it would have been the Abbot of Ealing who commissioned them, and who received the reports. I would not have expected to be given any information about these, which would in any case presumably have been confidential to the Abbot and to the monk in question. If they were shared with anyone, it would have been with the safeguarding officers of the Archdiocese of Westminster, not with me.

³⁶ Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy St Benedict's School September 2010 (BNT002385).

³⁷ Review of Safeguarding Arrangements, Policies and Processes - Ealing Abbey (BNT002434).

³⁸ Supervision Plan (BNT006888); Supervision Plan (2) (BNT006898); LS (BNT006967).

³⁹ Extraordinary Visitation of Ealing school dated May 2011_p.8 (BNT002543).

⁴⁰ Extraordinary Visitation of Ealing school dated May 2011_p.6 (BNT002543_006).

⁴¹ Extraordinary Visitation of Ealing school dated May 2011 p.3 (BNT002543_001-005, 007).