

Personal Statement

Many people have heard of the horrific abuses committed by the late John Smyth, about which there has been significant media coverage.

For nearly forty years I have kept it private (known only to a few) that I am myself a survivor of John Smyth's abuse. In fact I was the student who first reported this abuse to Mark Ruston on 12 February 1982, and I was also the person who approached the Safeguarding Adviser in Ely Diocese in July 2013. I have not wanted this experience to label or define me, and I have always wanted to leave it in the past. But now, having been warned that others intend to put my abuse in the public domain without my consent, I want to tell my story - if only so as to tell it accurately. There is a forthcoming book by Andrew Graystone which I understand names me as a survivor. Mr Graystone has never contacted me to ask for permission to identify me as a survivor or to tell my story - indeed, he has never asked for my own account. While his references to me and my story in his book may echo aspects of my statement here, he has not obtained this account directly from me. Instead, it would seem more likely that others, including those I have spoken or written to, have provided details about me to Mr Graystone without notifying me or seeking my permission.

I am conscious that there is much about the overall picture that even now I don't know. I know who a few, but not all, of my fellow survivors are. Even to those known to me, I have hardly spoken, if at all, about my experience or theirs. I have huge gaps in my knowledge - for instance, what happened among leaders of the Iwerne camps after I went to see the vicar in February 1982, what happened in Zimbabwe (other than what has been published), and what happened between my approaching Ely diocese in 2013 and the documentary on Channel Four in 2017 (at the time of writing I now know more, from the very recent Titus Trust timeline). Despite becoming (in 2011) vicar of St Andrew the Great (the same parish and people as the Round Church, but in a bigger building), I inherited no files on this matter. I only became aware in 2017 that Mark Ruston, the vicar to whom I had originally reported the abuse in February 1982, had compiled a contemporaneous report, and only in 2018 of the contents of that report.

This ignorance has made me hesitate yet more in telling my own story, and I am sorry now if anything I say looks blind to the experience of other survivors. I don't doubt that when the full story is told, it will be harrowing, horrible reading which will include many shocks, including to me. But I can at least tell my own story of involvement, particularly with reference to 1982 and 2012-2013: please read it as that, as an account only of those aspects of this case with which I've had direct, first-hand involvement.

1979-84: My abuse and God's deliverance

My story begins in the happiest of ways. Having been an atheist when I left school, between school and university I began to change my mind. In October 1979 I came as a fresher to Trinity College, Cambridge. In November 1979, I came to a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was through the Trinity College Christian Union

that I understood the gospel for the first time. I joined the Round Church, which was just along the road from my room. I loved the Bible teaching, which made such sense of life in a new way. I met Mark Ruston, and he told me about the Iwerne camps. I went for the first time in the summer of 1980 - not quite for a full camp, before a climbing trip to the Alps.

The following summer, 1981, I went back, and it was then that I first found myself drawn into John Smyth's orbit. He was one of the leaders. He was charming, plausible and distinguished (a QC), so when he invited me to go and visit him and his wife for a night at their house near Winchester over the Christmas holidays, I sensed no danger.

After supper, he read me extracts from a book by A W Tozer; the theme of his out-of-context quotes was discipline. As I recall it, he also referred me to Bible verses from Proverbs 3 and Hebrews 12, which are about the Lord's discipline. He did not tell me what this was leading up to - instead, he suggested I ask a friend or two whom he named (also Iwerne campers, also Cambridge undergraduates) what this was all about when I got back to Cambridge. That night I remember waking up with an inexplicable sense of unease - there was something wrong I couldn't put my finger on. Of course, now I realise that I was being groomed. But that was just it - I couldn't spot it at the time.

On returning to Cambridge for my final Lent term, in January 1982, I asked a fellow undergraduate who Smyth had told me I could speak to what this was all about. He explained that it was a matter of enduring a physical beating to drive out sins such as lust or pride. I found this deeply disturbing, but instead of simply rejecting it, there began a battle within me to see if I was wholehearted enough to go through with this. After all, Scripture had been quoted, and I was aware of sin in my life.

After some days I surrendered to what I thought was the dutiful path. The same student then offered to come with me to Smyth and we drove to Winchester some time in January 1982. That evening Smyth and I went out to his shed, while the other person remained in the house with Anne Smyth. As for what happened in the shed, my fellow-survivor Andrew Watson was accurate when he described the beating as "violent, excruciating and shocking." It was ferocious and humiliating. I never went again. I am unable to forget this experience.

The next day I returned to Cambridge and the Lent term went on. It was a busy time, with the run-up to finals. But life could not now be normal. I struggled inwardly to process what I had experienced and was experiencing. It was a time of terrible turmoil. For the first time, I had doubts about the reality of the Christian faith. More than this, what had happened was so different from the very happy and wholesome experience I'd had at church, Christian Union and camp, and the liberating teaching of Christ.

The trouble was that this struggle all had to be private. I could not talk to Mark Ruston or to the leader of Iwerne, David Fletcher: Smyth had told us not to. "They wouldn't understand", he said. So I had to read my Bible for myself to try to work out whether all this was actually what Christianity says. With the wisdom of

hindsight, the answer is blindingly obvious, but I was still a fairly new Christian. I was mixing either with fellow victims who had been brainwashed into accepting Smyth's line, or with others I couldn't talk to about it.

However, we had learnt at church and camp to read the Scriptures for ourselves. As I pored over my Bible, light began to dawn. I was struck how Paul warns the Colossians about the false teachers with their harsh treatment of the body but who "lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Colossians 2:23). I read of the thorn in Paul's flesh in 2 Corinthians 12, whose value I had been assured of, but which turned out in an immediate sense to be "a messenger of Satan". A favourite verse of Smyth's, Hebrews 12:4, "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the shedding of your blood", was in fact written to Christians experiencing persecution. Moreover, and most importantly, since the Lord Jesus had died on the cross for our sins, why should we need to suffer for them? And more. I was now beginning to doubt whether Smyth's approach was Biblical.

Finally, one morning, Friday 12 Feb 1982, I was reading Psalm 23 and noticed verse 1: "*The Lord is my shepherd.*" "That's it!" I realised. "**The Lord** is my shepherd - not John Smyth!" The pieces now fitted together. I knew now that I didn't have to refer everything to Smyth and it wasn't his discipline to which I had to submit. So I rang Mark Ruston, and asked if I could see him urgently. I visited him that morning and told him everything. I had an enormous sense of relief. He was horrified. There was no sense that I had told him something he already knew – quite the contrary. Immediately, whatever else he'd planned for that day disappeared, as he now made urgent efforts to ascertain the facts and asked for my assistance in contacting the few others in Cambridge whom I knew to be involved.

The rest of that day is a blur, but I remember going round several Cambridge survivors with Andrew Watson, talking to them to persuade them that this was wrong, and telling them that Mark now knew. At some stage later that day, Andrew and I reported back to Mark. Mark, meanwhile, had contacted the leader of Iwerne, David Fletcher. David urgently wanted to hear from me all about this. I met him that weekend and told him everything. He told me that he had very recently received an anonymous letter alerting him to Smyth's involvement in this vicious practice and it all now made sense. After this point, things moved out of my hands. No longer weighed down since I had raised my concerns with others, I applied myself to my studies in the run-up to finals. The nation, meanwhile, was at war in the Falklands.

I did not entertain any thoughts of speaking to the police. I thought I had become involved in this practice willingly, even though the reality turned out to be so horrible. I don't recall any of us survivors discussing that. At the time, I wanted nothing more than to work for my finals and put the matter behind me.

I didn't know anything about the conversations that must have happened in the Iwerne leadership following my disclosure. I was just a student. Even now I know very little about what was said and done. In August 1982 I moved to America - I had received an award to allow me to do a masters in fluvial geomorphology at Colorado State University. I spent the next 17 months there, the most exciting part

being the fieldwork for my thesis, right next to an active volcano, Mount St Helen's. It all felt a long way from Smyth.

1984-2011: the years between

After America, I took a job teaching geography in my old school, Eton College. I had the opportunity to teach a subject I loved (still do!) and also to be involved with the school Christian Union (which I'd been praying for). I took on the job for a year, and ended up doing ten, eventually becoming Head of Department. During this time I met Rachel, and we married in 1990. I was relieved to be able to share with her, in confidence, what had happened to me.

During these years I continued to attend Iwerne. This might seem surprising, given the Smyth connection. But I didn't see it that way: Smyth was so different from the rest of my experience of the camps and of the people involved. The camps supported the work of our school Christian Union. I don't recall any significant conversation about Smyth during this period, other than hearing that he'd moved to Africa.

In 1993 David Fletcher, by now Rector of St Ebbe's Oxford, contacted me to ask if I could make a written submission of my story to an enquiry in Zimbabwe. It had emerged that Smyth was carrying on similar activities in boys' camps there. I provided a written account of my experience, reference to which was included in a document called the Coltart Report. It was horrible to learn of continued abuse, but I assumed that the enquiry meant that Smyth was being formally dealt with. This was certainly David Fletcher's objective in asking me for a written account of my own experience.

Towards the end of my time as a teacher we began to wonder if God might be nudging me towards ordained ministry. In 1994 I left the Eton staff and went to train at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. My last involvement as a leader at Iwerne was in 1995. I was ordained to a curacy at St Leonard's, Exeter, in 1996. Smyth was receding into the past for me, though once I did, rather extraordinarily, bump into a survivor in a pub. In 2002 we moved to Bournemouth, where I had nine years as vicar at Christ Church, Westbourne. I can't remember Smyth coming up at all during this time.

In January 2011 we moved to Cambridge, and I began work as the vicar of St Andrew the Great. I was back in the parish where I'd first understood the gospel.

March 2012 - July 2013

In March 2012, a little over a year after starting at StAG, I received a letter from a fellow survivor, asking if I could find him professional help. We had each known in 1982 of the other's involvement with Smyth as undergraduates, but only in general terms. His letter contained no disclosure of his story, but was written on the assumed footing that we each knew that the other was a Smyth survivor. It was a brief letter, and this was his only request.

The letter was headed "STRICTLY PERSONAL, PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL", and he insisted that I must not contact anyone about this until he and I had some form of contact. I took this very seriously and tried to handle the matter on my own. (Nowadays, and given what we now know, I'd do it differently.) Even now, I only feel able to mention the barest outline of this correspondence. He asked me to respond first by email. I refer to this matter publicly in this statement since I have reason to believe that my correspondence with this survivor is referred to in Mr Graystone's book.

I wrote back within a few days suggesting that he call me in the first instance. I heard nothing for six months until he emailed me in late October 2012, again asking me to arrange independent expert support. He expressly said he didn't want to talk to me or anyone else involved, and he didn't want me to attempt to contact him or get anyone else to contact him.

I confess I didn't know how to arrange appropriate help. I thought of a qualified person to whom he might possibly speak, but was unsure if this would be the right approach. I tried again to suggest he could call me. He did not, but in January 2013 he emailed me again. In reply I suggested the name of this person - a minister with considerable counselling expertise and a background as a psychiatrist - and asked if I could see him on this survivor's behalf. He agreed, so I went to see this contact, to whom I explained the situation and told my own story. He listened with great sympathy and wisdom. However, for good reasons he did not feel able to help. He gave me various abuse help lines to forward to my fellow survivor, which I did.

By now my fellow survivor was becoming increasingly exasperated that I hadn't found him the help he wanted, and I for my part was finding the whole situation very difficult at a personal level (given my own experience of Smyth's abuse). I then tried another psychiatrist who was also unable to help, but who advised me to speak to the Diocesan safeguarding department. So in July 2013 I contacted the Safeguarding Adviser (DSA) to the Bishop of Ely and sought her help with identifying a suitable expert to provide support. In circumstances where I did not know any details of my fellow survivor's history, I had to tell her my own history, in full. Hence the Ely disclosure. She listened with much sympathy and told me that, as a fellow-victim, I should not be expected to arrange support for another survivor, and that I must therefore have no further contact with this survivor; she contacted him herself.

I much regret that I was unable to arrange appropriate support and I understand my fellow survivor's exasperation. I confess I found this correspondence immensely difficult personally. This may have contributed to my not replying to some of the emails from my fellow survivor more speedily, which didn't help. Having contacted the DSA, I followed her advice that I must have no further contact with my fellow survivor. I can see that this may have appeared uncaring to him. I am sorry for that, although I felt I had no choice but to comply with the DSA's advice given her experience in handling safeguarding matters. I understand something of what my fellow survivors feel about what happened to us.

I had no wish to publicly refer to this episode concerning my correspondence with this fellow survivor save to set out my account of what happened given the purported references to this episode in the book.

July 2013 - present

I then heard very little about this matter for 3 ½ years. (I did not know much about what transpired in this period until Titus Trust published their timeline in August 2021.) Then in February 2017 the story broke on Channel 4. I could not myself bear to watch the report and never did. But, distressingly for me, journalists from Channel 4 and the BBC approached me after the Channel 4 broadcast. Someone had obtained my name, as a survivor, and leaked it to them. They did not make my name public, but Channel 4 emailed the church office. So I had to explain everything to our church manager. The BBC reporter asked me for one of those victim interviews in which the interviewee is anonymised by being silhouetted; I declined. I so wanted to put all this behind me.

Following the TV publicity, I told our son and daughters, and some other close family members, for the first time, of what had happened to me. They are now likely to face the horrible task of explaining my history to their own friends who ask.

In April 2017, Hampshire Police interviewed me about what Smyth had done to me. They were good at keeping in contact, and in 2018 I heard that the Crown Prosecution Service had decided that Smyth should be extradited from South Africa, where he was by now living. However, in August 2018, I received a message from Hampshire Police saying that Smyth had died. Thus he would not now face earthly justice.

Media and social media rumblings continued, including a piece in *Private Eye* mentioning my name, though only by hint of association. This was also hard to experience.

Three reviews have since been set up. I have been asked to contribute to one - the independent review by Keith Makin, commissioned by the Church of England, which is due out in 2022.

I have a number of reflections to make on all this, but for now, I simply want to give this personal account of my own personal experience, which I hope will shed a little light on this horrific, dark episode.

Alasdair Paine

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