

Witness Name: Keith Nigel Beetlestone

Statement No: **WITN4773001**

Exhibits: **WITN4773002 - 8**

Dated: 19 March 2021

## **INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY**

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### **WRITTEN STATEMENT OF KEITH NIGEL BEETLESTONE**

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I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 18 February 2021.

I, Keith Nigel Beetlestone, will say as follows: -

#### **Section 1. Introduction**

1. My name is Keith Nigel Beetlestone. My date of birth is GRO-C 1958 and I live at GRO-C I am married with two children who are 32 and 30 years of age. I am a computer programmer.
2. I intend to speak about my late father, Edwin Beetlestone, Dob GRO-C 1912, who was infected with Hepatitis following a blood transfusion. My family and I have never been made aware of the particular type of Hepatitis that my father contracted. In particular, I will discuss the nature of his illness, how the illness affected him and the impact it had on him and our family. He passed away on 30 May 1986 aged 74.

3. I also intend to highlight the fact that I have not been able to secure any compensation from the Skipton Fund on my father's behalf as he was infected some 40 years ago and any record of the transfusion from which he contracted Hepatitis, is no longer obtainable. Nor are the medical professionals who treated him.
4. There is also a marked disparity between his death certificate and post-mortem report with regards to the role of Hepatitis and liver failure as a cause of death, which, I believe, may also have impeded my claim. I will go on to discuss this later in my statement.
5. I can confirm that I have chosen not to have legal representation and that the Inquiry Investigator has explained the anonymity process to me. My family and I are not seeking anonymity.
6. The Inquiry Investigator has explained to me the 'Right to Reply' procedure, and I understand that if I am critical of a medical professional or organisation, they will have the right to reply to that criticism.

## **Section 2. How Affected**

7. It is my belief that my father was infected with Hepatitis following a blood transfusion to treat a haemorrhage in 1977. He was also given blood in the late fifties to early sixties, also for a haemorrhage and therefore it is also possible that he was infected on this occasion.
8. My father worked in senior management for various cable manufacturers. In 1946, he was moved to a factory in Birtley, Co-Durham. He married my mother, the daughter of his landlord, in 1948. There is a 12 years difference between my mother and father. My brother was born in 1949.

9. At some point in the late fifties to early sixties, I have been told that Dad was working very hard for the business, his work took him all around the UK and also America to look at cable manufacturing machines. As a result I believe his health suffered and he had an internal haemorrhage due to stress. I note in the Post mortem report that Dad had a 'past history of partial gastrectomy for a duodenal ulcer' **Exhibit WITN4773002**
10. In order to identify the source of the bleeding, he was opened up. Part of his intestines and stomach were removed. I wasn't really aware of this at the time as I was only 3 or 4 years old. It may have even occurred before I was born.
11. We moved to Chislehurst in 1966. As far as I am aware my father's health was fine. I don't remember any trips to hospital. No problems were reported. He didn't drink or smoke. He was basically tee total. His idea of a drink was an occasional Harvey's Bristol Cream.
12. I went to Loughborough University in 1976. During the Christmas period of 1977, I discovered my mother sobbing in bed. My brother wasn't around at the time. She told me that a few months prior, in October or November, my father was admitted into Farnborough Hospital in Kent with a haemorrhage. He was given a blood transfusion, which was, I believe, standard practice at the time.
13. I can't remember if he started looking yellow over Christmas. He was then admitted to the intensive care unit in Farnborough after suffering another haemorrhage. They took one look at him and told him that he had jaundice and hepatitis. He was placed in solitary isolation.
14. They obviously thought his condition was serious, as we weren't allowed to visit. Even the staff seemed to be avoiding him. I assume that they pumped him up with blood to purge his system. He was in Hospital for a couple of days. When he came home, he looked extremely yellow. I then returned to university.

15. As a family, we were all aware of my dad's hepatitis infection and that it was blood borne and highly infectious. My mother was advised that if he had a bleed, she was to avoid touching the site and should wash herself in any event.
16. Whilst he was convalescing in bed, I distinctly remember that my mother was still sleeping beside him and thus potentially, had a degree of exposure to the infection.
17. Dad appeared to get better. He wasn't particularly slim but he was reasonably healthy. He walked and gardened. In 1981, my parents moved from Chislehurst to Builth Wells, Powys in Wales in order to be closer to my brother whose first daughter had been born. When they moved to Wales, my father's hospital notes from Farnborough didn't go with him. I am not too sure what happened in relation to his doctor's notes.
18. In 1986, I had been to visit my parents for my birthday. This was on a Sunday. I was married by this point and working in London. My father was complaining of numbness in his left arm. He assumed that he had pulled a muscle whilst gardening. He was having difficulty moving it.
19. Later that day 25<sup>th</sup> May, my wife and I returned to my mother in laws house in Cottingham. After we had arrived my mother contacted us to say that Dad's condition had deteriorated and he passed blood whilst on the toilet. He had an internal haemorrhage again.
20. He was admitted into County Hospital on 26 May 1986 with Haematemesis and Melaena which evidences that he was vomiting blood and passing black tarry stools which apparently is indicative of an internal bleed.
21. My mother called for an ambulance and on their arrival they couldn't get the stretcher down the bungalow corridor and had to bring him out

on a wheelchair, which they weren't very happy about. Dad was admitted to Hereford Hospital.

22. They operated on him to try to identify the source of the bleeding, which in hindsight was totally the wrong course of action. I don't know if he was passing fresh or dried blood. At the beginning of the week, his condition was relatively stable. As the week progressed, his condition deteriorated. Whilst he was in Hospital, apart from trying to make him comfortable, there was not a great deal of medical scrutiny as to the root causes of his condition.
23. He wasn't very well at all. On 29 May 1986, He was given a vagotomy by C.J.C. Renton as described in the letter from him to my fathers Doctor dated 2 July 1986. **Exhibit WITN4773004**. I will refer to this letter later in my statement.
24. We were informed that Dad had taken a turn for the worse and was very ill. We drove to the hospital and arrived at about 8pm to find that he had passed away ten minutes earlier.
25. My mother was at home when she received the news of my father's death. She didn't see my dad the day of the operation; he never came around after the operation was completed.
26. My father died on 30 May 1986. He was 74. The post mortem examination report, dated 3 June 1986, notes that he had a past history of gastrectomy and that he 'had been transfused before the gastrectomy and developed hepatitis which was said to be due to transfusion'. He became jaundiced and developed 'haptic encephalopathy due to protein overload'. I understand this to mean that his brain function was affected, as his blood was not being cleaned properly due to the state of his liver.

27. The Post mortem report details that, an external examination described him as 'obese' and 'deeply jaundiced'. The liver was described as 'enlarged and had a mottled yellow cut surface. The appearance of the liver favoured fatty change rather than hepatic necrosis but it will be checked histologically.'
28. It is an interesting point that the pathologist requests histology. I have never seen or been told the result of the histology. This is exhibited at **WITN4773002**.
29. The interpretation notes that; 'This man had obviously had severe gastro-intestinal haemorrhage but there was no evidence of any blood in the stomach or proximal small bowel to suggest that there was fresh bleed immediately before his death. There was no evidence of oesophageal varices and no ulcer was seen in the remnant of the stomach or in the duodenum. However, the partial gastrectomy specimen was not received in the pathology department for examination to see if there was astomal ulcer or other source for bleeding. The patient had a large coronary atheroma and hypotension due to gastro-intestinal haemorrhage. The patient was also jaundiced and had a large fatty liver. The liver will be examined histologically.
30. The cause of death on the pathologist report lists 1a) Myocardial infarction 1b) Coronary atheroma and hypotension and 2. Gastro-intestinal haemorrhage and liver failure (fatty liver).
31. It should be noted that despite a reference in his medical history, the interpretation and cause of death omit any mention of his infection with Hepatitis. For as long as I remember, he was slightly overweight. Yet, he never seemed to eat a great deal. His breakfast would consist of a cup of tea and lunch; a slice of bread. Moreover, as I have earlier iterated, he was practically tee-total. Therefore, I can only speculate that the cause of his obesity was due to his enlarged liver caused by his Hepatitis infection.

32. When my mother obtained the post mortem through the doctor, once again, there was a sense of resignation towards the deterioration of my father's health and ultimate death. It was really a case of, 'he's died, everyone's got to die at some point, you can't turn around and prove that if X Y or Z had been done, the circumstances would be any different'.
33. My father's death certificate, dated 2 June 1986 lists the primary cause of death as gastro intestinal haemorrhage with previous gastric ulcers. This is exhibited at **WITN4773003**. This is contrary to the post mortem report **WITN4773002**, which lists a heart attack as the primary cause of death. Moreover, the death certificate also omits any reference to liver failure. I am somewhat concerned by the disparity between these two sets of documents. It is of note that Dads death Certificate was issued on 2 June 1986 the day before the Post Mortem.
34. As stated previously, on 2 July 1986, Dr C J C Renton, the surgeon who oversaw my father's care at Hereford County Hospital, wrote to his GP, Dr Harris: 'You will remember this unfortunate patient of your who was admitted under my care on the 26<sup>th</sup> May with haematemesis and melaena. I carried out vagotomy on 29<sup>th</sup> May, but, in fact, the operation proved too much for Mr Beetlestone and he died the next evening. Post mortem examination showed myocardial infarction and coronary atheroma and hypotension. There was also liver failure. I am sorry were unable to help'. **Exhibit WITN4773004**.

### **Section 3. Other Infections**

35. My father was never told which form of Hepatitis he had been infected with. Moreover, as far as I am aware, he did not contract any other infections as a result of the contaminated blood he received.

#### **Section 4. Consent**

36. To my knowledge, my father was treated with his consent and knowledge, albeit, that he was not informed of the risks associated with the blood that he was given.

#### **Section 5. Impact**

37. In 1975, with the introduction of the early retirement scheme, my father capitalised on the opportunity and retired, aged 63. By 1977, he was fully retired and as such, did not face any financial difficulties as a result of his infection with Hepatitis.

38. My father was born in Paddington and lived in London. He moved to Grove Park where his father ran a newsagent and a dairy. He used to go to the Proms at the Albert Hall. He was a hard worker and a very hands-on man.

39. In later life, in Chislehurst, as a family we didn't go out very much. During the week he went to work and during the summer weekends he would garden or in winter, decorate the house. After his retirement for the first couple of years he spent most of the time sitting in the chair, worn out and exhausted and recharging his batteries. Latterly his energy levels improved to the point he undertook more DIY. He installed central heating in our home and he kept himself very busy.

40. After my father's death, my mother never had another relationship. She was 62 at the time. She handled the funeral herself. She had to reevaluate her life and how she spent her time when he was no longer around. Within a year or two, she had become a member of the golf club and gardener's club.



41. As soon as my parents relocated to Builth Wells, my father was unable to obtain dental treatment because the staff were concerned about the occupational risk of his Hepatitis infection. I do not know the details of the dental practices that refused his treatment.
42. I do not recall there being any problems with funeral arrangements. However, the undertakers might not have even been told about his Hepatitis. It wasn't something one broadcast at the time.
43. In 1992, my mother was diagnosed with a lump in her breast. She underwent a full mastectomy. In fact she was admitted to the same ward Dad died on and that brought back painful memories for her.
44. In 2005, she fell out of bed with a fractured hip. When she was taken to hospital, she was diagnosed with bone cancer. Mum survived for another 3 years. She died in July 2008, 22 years after my father's death. She was riddled with hotspots all over the spine. It is pure conjecture that the deterioration of her health and ultimate death might have been caused by my father's Hepatitis. It is not something that can be proved.
45. My children, who are now in their thirties did not have the chance to meet their granddad.

#### **Section 6. Treatment/Care/Support**

46. As previously iterated, my father was never told which type of Hepatitis he had been infected with. Nor was he ever offered or provided with treatment.
47. When he came out of Farnborough in 1977 having been diagnosed with Hepatitis, he was put on bedrest and may have been seen by a doctor a couple of times. I am aware that he was given a course of

pills which he was still taking in 1979. I do not know whether Dr Harris continued him on this treatment when his care moved from Chislehurst to Builth Wells in 1981.

48. From his diagnosis in 1977 to his death some 8 or 9 years later, his condition was simply left unmonitored. His liver was never examined when he was alive nor was he given a liver biopsy. It seemed that his infection was quickly brushed under the carpet.

49. As far as I am aware, my mother was never tested for Hepatitis. Neither I nor my brother have been tested.

50. By the time of my father's death, as a family we were not made aware of the stage of his liver failure or whether or not he had cirrhosis.

## **Section 7. Financial Assistance**

51. Sometime in 2011, I heard on the radio that the Skipton Fund was providing bursaries or some financial benefits for those who had been infected.

52. On 17 February 2011, I wrote to the Skipton Fund with a view to making a claim on my father's behalf. I enclosed a comprehensive set of documents including but not limited to; the registration form, his death certificate and the cover letter for the post-mortem examination. This was received by Skipton on 21 February and exhibited at **WITN4773005**.

53. This was followed by a further application, dated 1 July 2011 and is exhibited at **WITN4773006**. It was received in August of that year. I was required to prove that my father had been infected by

contaminated blood. I thought, how on earth do I retrieve medical notes from 20 or 30 years ago?

54. When my mother was unwell, I was regularly in contact with the medical centre in Builth Wells. However, the doctor who treated my father had retired. The coroner's notes were sent to the Welsh Central Office in Swansea. I gave them a call and spoke with Mr Alex Bowman, Registration Department, Business Service Centre, 36 Orchard Street, Swansea. SA1 5AQ. Tel 01689 863000. I was told that these notes were only retained for 15 years and that they were now gone.
55. When my mother was alive, she was extremely frustrated that my father's medical records were not transferred from Farnborough to Hereford. She crucified herself over it. There was definitely a record of his Hepatitis at Farnborough and on his doctor's notes in Chislehurst.
56. Farnborough Hospital as far as I'm aware, falls under the Bromley Regional Health Authority and this has gone through so many different modes including demolition and restructuring. I don't have much hope that they will have retained anything.
57. The Skipton Application form also stipulates the requirement for one's GP to counter-sign the form. This would be fine if my parents had attended the same GP practice throughout their lives. However, they moved around the country, from Kent to Wales. What is the likelihood of my current doctor in East Sussex knowing anything about my father's circumstances?
58. On 11 August 2011, my GP, Dr Andrew Sikorski from Belmont Surgery in East Sussex, wrote to Skipton to the effect that he had no involvement in my father's medical care, albeit that he could be of assistance if necessary. This is exhibited at **WITN4773007**. I do not know if he countersigned my application.

59. On 7<sup>th</sup> October 2011, I received a letter from Shane Baker, the Senior Scheme Assistant at Skipton. **Exhibit WITN4773008**. The letter basically stated that they were unable to proceed with the application due to the fact that pages 3 and 4 of the application form had to be completed by a medical professional, signed and stamped by the completing clinician.

60. As I said earlier, this was impossible due to the lapsed time frame. I had already asked my GP to send a letter, which he did. Thereafter, I did not have any further communication with Skipton. I basically gave up on the process.

61. Skipton did not recognise my claim. It is my belief that Skipton was set up on the assumption that claims would be made by people infected after 2000's. The scheme was not built to deal with those who were infected historically, some 30 to 40 years ago, when medical records are no longer available.

62. Skipton has been set up very rigidly. If the applicant meets the criteria, payment will be provided. However, if they do not meet the criteria, they will not receive payment. There is no grey area or flexibility.

## **Section 8. Other Issues**

63. It is as well known that contaminated blood was being used in the mid to late seventies. Whether there had been contaminated blood prior to that I do not know.

64. I've not got any idea what blood and or products my father was given. The blood wasn't being heat-treated. I am not aware that there were

any measures at the time that could be have been taken to prevent contamination.

65. I am not seeking to blame or point fingers, as I am aware of the privilege of hindsight. However, I think it is troubling that there are a number of reports of Hepatitis infections from the mid-late 1970s'. I also do not think it is right that my father's infection was not properly diagnosed nor investigated. Nor do I agree with the way that trusts such as Skipton have been formulated so that those claiming on behalf of their loved ones have been obstructed from making a perfectly valid claim due to the passing of time.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed GRO-C\_\_\_\_\_

Dated 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021