

1 Wednesday, 6 February 2013

2 (9.59 am)

3 THE CORONER: Yes, good morning everybody. Can we ask the
4 jury to come in? Is there anything we need to mention
5 first?

6 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I've mentioned this to one or two people,
7 possibly not everybody. I propose to start by reading
8 the statement of Firefighter Sean England, who was
9 always on the list of statements to be read under
10 Rule 37.

11 THE CORONER: Yes.

12 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: There's also extra documents to go in the
13 jury bundle, some more photographs. Most of these have
14 been seen on the screens but they are to go at the end
15 of tab 14 and we have copies.

16 THE CORONER: Good, thank you. And then we'll go onto ...?

17 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Then we'll move onto Crew Manager
18 Niblett.

19 THE CORONER: Thank you. Yes, jury please.

20 (In the presence of the Jury)

21 THE CORONER: Yes, members of the jury, good morning. We're
22 going to begin with the reading of a statement rather
23 than calling a witness, and Mr Maxwell-Scott is going to
24 read the statement of Crew Manager England.

25

1 statement of Mr Sean England

2 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: This is the statement of Sean England,
3 dated 27 July 2009. It reads:

4 "I am currently employed by the London Fire Brigade
5 and I am stationed at Lambeth fire station. I am on
6 Green Watch and on the above date I was on first day
7 duty from 0900 to 1800 hours. I was on H222, which is
8 the pump appliance. The other members of crew on this
9 appliance were Crew Manager Pendleton, Firefighter Baker
10 and Firefighter Keefe. I had been been at Lambeth fire
11 station for about two and a half years. I had never
12 been called to Lakanal in my service prior to this
13 incident.

14 "At about 1620 hours we were immobilised to stand by
15 at the Old Kent Road fire station. I saw the
16 teleprinter message which informed us that there was
17 a four pump fire in progress. We made our way towards
18 the Old Kent Road fire station, but en route we were
19 diverted to what was now a six pump fire at
20 Lakanal House, Havil Street. We parked the appliance in
21 Havil Street near to the junction of Dalwood Street. We
22 walked into Dalwood Street and I could see clearly one
23 of the top floors of Lakanal was well alight. I could
24 see flames coming out of what seemed to be one flat in
25 particular and there was a lot of smoke. I think by the

1 time we saw this Crew Manager Pendleton had booked into
2 the command unit. The three of us returned to our
3 appliance and put on our BA suits. By now, Crew Manager
4 Pendleton had rejoined us. However, he did not have his
5 BA suit on. We then walked back round towards the block
6 and were then instructed by a senior officer to make
7 access to the gardens of Fontenelle House by cutting the
8 metal railings on the Dalwood Street side.

9 "Shortly after completing this task, we were
10 instructed to wait until further detail. At this point,
11 I was asked by Crew Manager Pendleton to move two
12 appliances that were parked in the access road at the
13 front of Lakanal by the Havil Street side. I reversed
14 both appliances across Dalwood Street and parked them in
15 Sedgmoor Place. I then returned to my crew, who were
16 now standing on the opposite side of the block, the
17 Marie Curie side. There were a lot of other crews at
18 this location in BA suits. As we were standing at this
19 location, I could see a little bit of smoke coming from
20 one of the top floors but no flames.

21 "We were then instructed by another officer that
22 they wanted a team of three in BA equipment to go to the
23 9th floor to assist in the search and rescue and
24 firefight using the jet that was already on the 9th
25 floor. We walked up the stairwell to the 9th floor with

1 our BA equipment in use. Prior to entering the
2 building, we had reported to the entry control officer,
3 who I informed of our brief.

4 "Upon making our way up to the 9th floor, the smoke
5 in the stairwell got heavier from about the 3rd floor
6 onwards. We arrived at the 9th floor, walked into the
7 lobby area, and turned right. We walked through the
8 open security fire door and followed the hose into the
9 first flat on the left as you walked down the corridor.
10 As we entered, I saw the branch of the hose was just
11 into the top of the stairs. I believe it was the
12 smaller bedroom was completely ablaze and there were no
13 windows left. In fact, there was very little of the
14 flat left intact due to the ferocity of the fire.

15 "As far as I am aware, we were the only crew in this
16 flat fighting the fire at this time. Within a short
17 time we had extinguished the fire in the small bedroom.
18 We then searched the ground floor of the flat. You
19 could do this by basically standing in the doorway as
20 the fire had destroyed virtually everything. However,
21 we couldn't get upstairs as the stairs were unsafe.

22 "We then went along the corridor banging on doors to
23 see if there were any occupants inside these flats. We
24 were shouting and clearly informing people who we were
25 if there was anyone inside. We got no response and

1 because none of these flats were on fire we returned to
2 the lobby area.

3 "As we entered the lobby, I saw a crew coming down
4 the stairwell. They had an adult male, an adult female,
5 and two children with them. The family were black and
6 the crew were in fact removing their BA face masks in
7 order to give it to the woman to assist her breathing as
8 she was coughing. As the crew were passing us on their
9 way down, they told us there were people on the 11th
10 floor and I am almost certain they said flat 81.

11 I immediately informed control via the radio what we had
12 done on the 9th floor and that we were now going to the
13 11th floor as we had been informed there were people on
14 the 11th floor.

15 "Myself and the two other crew members walked up the
16 stairwell to the 11th floor. When we got there we
17 walked into the lobby, turned right again, and looked
18 towards the security door. It was only slightly ajar
19 and I could see flames licking out of the top of the
20 doorframe. I could also see through the door panel that
21 the whole corridor was ablaze. I had never seen
22 anything like it in my life.

23 "I remember thinking that if anyone was behind that
24 door then they were in serious trouble. All three of us
25 then ran down the stairs, grabbed the hose and took the

1 hose back up to the 11th floor to start fighting the
2 fire.

3 "We were then joined by another crew in EDDBA (extra
4 duration breathing apparatus) who assisted us with the
5 hose. We began to attack the fire and I believe we got
6 as far as just before the front door of the first flat
7 on the left. As we reached this point, the low pressure
8 warning whistle sounded to indicate our air supply was
9 low. Normally you should be outside by this time, but
10 due to trying to get to 81, we fought the fire for a few
11 more minutes, then passed the firefighting on to another
12 crew who were behind us. We could not have done any
13 more. I remember the heat in that corridor was so
14 intense, I have never felt anything like it in my life.
15 At one point, I leant onto the doorframe and such was
16 the heat it burnt straight through my glove. Myself and
17 the crewmen managed to get to the ground floor just in
18 time as our BA air cylinder was exhausted.

19 "We then returned to the ECO and briefed him on what
20 we had done. We took off our suits and cooled down,
21 drinking water to rehydrate ourselves. Shortly after
22 this, I saw a crew and a paramedic exit the building
23 with a young child and a baby, giving the baby CPR. The
24 LAS then began to provide medical assistance, performing
25 CPR on both of them for ages. Both were unconscious and

1 from what I could have see I believe that unfortunately
2 they were dead.

3 "At some point, I also remember seeing an adult
4 female being removed from the building, placed onto
5 a stretcher and taken to the Dalwood Street side. The
6 baby was black, but I couldn't tell what colour the
7 child or female was.

8 "We then assisted in putting up tarpaulins in order
9 to provide some privacy to screen the casualties. Some
10 time after I saw the LAS remove the baby and young
11 child. We then replenished the air cylinders on our BA
12 suits after being asked how many times we had been into
13 the block. We walked back to our appliance to collect
14 the extra cylinders, serviced our sets, enabling us to
15 reenter. We then walked to the holding area which is
16 located by the Marie Curie side of the building. We
17 remained in this area and never reentered the block.
18 I believe it was around 2130 hours when we returned to
19 Lambeth fire station."

20 That's the end of the statement.

21 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

22 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Before calling the next witness, madam,
23 there are some additional photographs to be inserted
24 behind the existing ones at tab 14 of the jury bundle.

25 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you. These are now numbered 1 to

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Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good morning, Mr Niblett. Can you give the court your full name, please.

A. Mark Henry Niblett.

Q. I'm going to be asking you questions about your involvement in attempts to fight the fire at Lakanal House on 3 July 2009. Were you a crew manager at that time?

A. I was.

Q. Are you still employed by the London Fire Brigade as a crew manager?

A. I am.

Q. For how many years have you worked for the London Fire Brigade?

A. 18 years.

Q. How long have you been a crew manager for?

A. 12 years.

Q. Back in July 2009, which fire station were you based at?

A. Lewisham.

Q. Is it right that you were on the fire and rescue unit appliance?

A. That's correct, the FRU, fire rescue unit.

Q. Can you explain briefly to the members of the jury what a fire rescue unit is?

A. A fire rescue unit is a -- an appliance that -- well,

1 one of its jobs is to carry EDDBA, which is a BA set that
2 lasts longer than the normal SDBA set, and its other
3 primary roles are to go to road traffic accidents and
4 special services, things not equating to fire, but it
5 can be fire as well. That's it.

6 Q. If you take up the jury bundle that Mr Clark will pass
7 to you and have a look at tab 10. (Handed) The first
8 page of it, you will see, is headed "Information about
9 the types of appliances that attended the Lakanal House
10 fire".

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. If you go to the third page, you'll see in the middle of
13 the page a photograph of a fire rescue unit.

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Can you assist the members of the jury with, in summary,
16 the equipment that you carry with you in appliances like
17 that?

18 A. Yes. As it's stated there, we have extended duration
19 breathing apparatus. We also have various cutting
20 equipment to assist with RTAs, road traffic accidents.
21 There's also some line access equipment on -- on the
22 machine, so we can work at height. It also carries
23 a boat -- an inflatable boat for flooding, and it's --
24 it's got airbags and rams for lifting. There's --
25 there's a lot more, but that's the general --

1 Q. But you're not a pumping appliance?

2 A. No, there's no pump on the machine.

3 Q. So when you're called to fires, you are called
4 separately from requests for pumps to attend?

5 A. Yes, I believe that the standard for the Fire Brigade is
6 at any -- any fires where it becomes an eight pump fire,
7 they also add an FRU on as an additional appliance, as
8 a special appliance.

9 Q. How long have you worked with extended duration
10 breathing apparatus for?

11 A. I would say eight years.

12 Q. Was your call sign on the day E216?

13 A. Echo 216, that's correct.

14 Q. Who were your crew members?

15 A. There was myself, Firefighter Gilbert, Firefighter
16 Towler, Firefighter Geddes and Firefighter Hill.

17 Q. The records that we have indicate that your fire and
18 rescue unit arrived at Lakanal House at 1702 hours.

19 A. That's correct.

20 Q. Can you tell us what you did on arrival?

21 A. When we arrived, we -- we parked the appliance and then
22 I proceeded to the command unit with our role board and
23 I booked in. I -- I told my crew what I was doing. The
24 brief I got from the command unit was to go back to my
25 FRU and await further instructions there.

1 Q. Is that what you did?

2 A. I did, yes.

3 Q. Did you have any opportunity at this time to see the
4 building itself? Did you see it in the distance?

5 A. Yes, I could see the front of the building at this time,
6 from where we was parked, I believe, and when I walked
7 to the command unit, I believe I could see the front of
8 the building.

9 Q. Did you form any initial impressions?

10 A. The impression I got that there was a -- there was
11 a number of flats involved in fire. I could actually
12 see flats coming out of a number -- fire coming out of
13 a number of flats at the front of the building. It
14 seemed about two-thirds of the way up, from memory.

15 Q. Approximately how long did you wait until you received
16 further instructions?

17 A. Ten to 15 minutes.

18 Q. In that period of time what did you do?

19 A. We -- I spoke to our crew and we -- we all donned our
20 EDDBA sets.

21 Q. So you were ready to --

22 A. Ready to deploy with EDDBA.

23 Q. Did you have any contact with other firefighters or
24 members of the public at this time?

25 A. I never, no. I believe my crew did but I didn't

1 personally have contact.

2 Q. Mr Niblett, you made a witness statement back
3 in July 2009 on 28 July. Was your memory of events then
4 better than it is today, some three and a half years
5 later?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Would it assist you to see that statement?

8 A. It would, yes.

9 Q. That starts at page 360 in the statements bundle, and
10 Mr Clark will provide you with it. (Handed) Do you
11 recognise that as your witness statement?

12 A. I do, yes.

13 Q. Just looking at the final sentence on that first page,
14 you refer to your crew coming back to you and saying to
15 you, amongst other things, that the public were stating
16 that people were still in the building trapped in the
17 upper floors. Does that refresh your memory?

18 A. It does. They did tell me that -- that they had contact
19 with the public.

20 Q. But you didn't yourself at this stage?

21 A. No, I was -- they had that contact, if memory serves,
22 when I was at the command unit, and I walked back to the
23 command unit and they -- they told me of their contact.

24 Q. Then if you turn over to the second page of your
25 statement, in the third paragraph you describe what your

1 view was by reference to a photograph. If you have
2 a look in the jury bundle at tab 12, there's a sequence
3 of events. If you turn in it to page 18, this is
4 a photograph taken some ten minutes earlier. In your
5 statement, I think you refer to being shown this photo
6 and saying that your view was similar except there were
7 more flames issuing from the upper flats?

8 A. That is correct, yes.

9 Q. Where did you then go with your crew?

10 A. Once the command -- officer from the command unit come
11 to the FRU and he told us to proceed to the entry
12 control point, which was round -- I believe it would be
13 classed as the east of the building.

14 Q. If you look in the jury bundle at tab 14, photo 2, does
15 that show the entry control point?

16 A. It does, yes.

17 Q. When you got there, was there an established entry
18 control point as far as you could tell?

19 A. It was being established as we got there, from what I
20 could have tell. It had been moved -- it was in the
21 process of being moved. The bridgehead had moved down
22 from inside the building and as we turned up it was
23 being established.

24 Q. Did you notice anything in particular when you looked at
25 the east side of the building?

1 A. The -- the east side of the building, we could see that
2 there was smoke coming from the upper floors. I didn't
3 see any visible flame. I also saw a gentleman waving
4 a blanket on one of the upper balconies on one of the
5 upper floors.

6 Q. If you look back, now, in the sequence of events at
7 tab 12, on page 23, there's a photograph there that
8 shows a black man and a black woman on a balcony on
9 an upper level of the building, with the black man
10 holding some piece of yellow fabric or sheeting. Does
11 that refresh your memory of what you saw?

12 A. That is what I saw.

13 Q. Could you see any fire or smoke in the area where they
14 were?

15 A. I -- if memory serves, there was smoke coming out of the
16 flat behind him.

17 Q. How did the scene on the east side of the building
18 compare, in terms of fire and smoke levels, to the west
19 side of the building?

20 A. It -- at the east side, the -- the smoke -- there was no
21 flame and the smoke wasn't as severe as the west side.

22 Q. If I then draw your attention to a photograph. If we
23 look first at page 26 of file 1 of the advocates'
24 bundles. I'll just put this one up on screen for you,
25 Mr Niblett, if that's okay. This is just to identify.

1 This is the back of photograph 84167, which you refer to
2 in your statement, and this is the photograph itself.
3 I can rotate that. This is a photograph taken at 17.21.
4 In your statement, you say you believe that your crew is
5 in the photograph wearing the orange-covered EDDBA, but
6 you can't be 100 per cent sure?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. You're referring to this group on the left of the
9 picture, are you, the four of you there, and then one of
10 you walking towards the four?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. What information were you given at the bridgehead that
13 we see in the photograph?

14 A. Is that initially?

15 Q. Yes.

16 A. To stand by.

17 Q. Are you able to say approximately how long you stood by
18 for before being given further instructions?

19 A. 15 minutes, 10 to 15 minutes.

20 Q. Were other crews, as far as you could see, committed
21 into the building in that period of time?

22 A. No. In that ten minute wait, I -- I didn't see anyone
23 go through entry control.

24 Q. If I can just refer you to what you said in your witness
25 statement on this. This is at 361. I've put that on

1 the screen as well. I'm looking at the penultimate
2 paragraph. It says:

3 "We were informed on our arrival that the bridgehead
4 was being moved down from the 6th floor to the ground at
5 the rear of the building. We were told to stand by
6 while this change of location was being implemented. We
7 remained at the location outside the building while two
8 SDBA crews [that's standard duration breathing apparatus
9 crews] ahead of us were briefed and sent into the
10 building."

11 A. That's correct. The -- that happened -- we'd been
12 waiting about ten minutes before that happened, so we --
13 once we was committed -- the two crews was committed and
14 then we was committed straight after.

15 Q. So you stood by and other crews stood by for a period of
16 time, and then other crews, two of them, were committed
17 before you, and then you were committed?

18 A. Yes, straight after those two crews.

19 Q. What was your crew tasked with doing?

20 A. We -- we was tasked to go to the 11th floor and search
21 the -- the whole floor but primarily concentrate on
22 flat 81, because they -- they had reports that there was
23 people still in that flat.

24 Q. Taking this a little bit more slowly, do you know who
25 gave you that task?

1 A. It was a watch manager who was in charge of entry
2 control.

3 Q. Did you know their name? Did you recognise them?

4 A. No.

5 Q. So how did you know they were a watch manager?

6 A. If memory serves, it was their rank markings.

7 Q. Were they wearing any kind of tabard that gave
8 a description of their role?

9 A. Yes, I believe they had a tabard on to say that they was
10 the entry control officer.

11 Q. You've mentioned being sent to the 11th floor and
12 flat 81 being mentioned. Were you told where flat 81
13 was?

14 A. It -- it was -- I was told it was on the 11th floor but
15 no more details were given.

16 Q. Were you told how to get to it in any way?

17 A. No.

18 Q. Did you ask for any assistance or direction on how to
19 find it?

20 A. No.

21 Q. How were you planning to find it?

22 A. We were planning to go -- our brief was to go up to the
23 11th floor. It wasn't believed to be involved in the
24 fire and there was smoke-logging, so my plan was to go
25 up there and actually go down both corridors and

1 locate -- locate number 81.

2 Q. Were you told that there were two corridors, or could
3 you see that from looking at the exterior of the
4 building?

5 A. That became apparent when I got -- got into the
6 building. I wasn't told that.

7 Q. Did you take any firefighting equipment with you?

8 A. We did, yes. We took up a rolled hose -- 45-millimetre
9 hose and a branch.

10 Q. In your statement you say that was as a precaution,
11 because as you've explained, you were not expecting to
12 be involved in firefighting; is that right?

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. Did anyone accompany you up to the 11th floor?

15 A. Yes, my crew, and I also got a HART team assigned to me
16 to assist -- to assist them up to the 11th floor.

17 Q. Those are London Ambulance Service personnel who are
18 specially trained to wear EDDBA?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Do you have experience of working with them in other
21 situations?

22 A. In other situations, yes.

23 Q. Your statement refers to the HART team being assigned to
24 you by the sector commander. Are you able to recall
25 which sector commander it was? Was it sector commander

1 fire or sector commander rescues, or can you not recall?

2 A. I can't recall.

3 Q. So after the HART team were assigned to you, what did
4 you and they do?

5 A. They -- they took a little while to get through entry
6 control. They was taking a while processing. Once they
7 did come through entry control, we escorted them up to
8 the 11th floor.

9 Q. If we look at when that journey started. If you could
10 look in the advocates' bundles at page 1034, which is in
11 file 3. Mr Clark will provide you with it. (Handed)
12 Just to explain, this is very probably a document you
13 haven't seen before; is that right?

14 A. That's correct.

15 Q. It's probably not a format of document that you
16 recognise, but what it is is it's a document that
17 summarises the information that can be taken from the
18 bodyguard system that's on your EDBA set and can be used
19 to provide information about when you went under air and
20 when you shut down. On this page we have the crew from
21 Lewisham wearing EDBA, and if you look in the bottom
22 right-hand corner of that table, do you see your name?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Then if you look across that row to the middle of it,
25 there's a bold time, which is 17.33.49, which we

1 understand to be the time given by the system for when
2 you went under air. You can see, if you look up the
3 page, that your entire crew of five essentially started
4 up and went under air at the same time?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. Is that how you remember it, that you were a crew of
7 five and you started up --

8 A. Yes, we was a crew of five.

9 Q. -- and went in together?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. How did you make your way to the 11th floor?

12 A. The HART team was taking, as I said, some time being
13 processed. We'd moved through entry control, and then
14 for a reason unknown to me it was taking some time to
15 get the HART team through entry control, so we --
16 I decided to send three of my crew up, knowing the
17 urgency of the situation, to get to the 11th floor while
18 myself and Firefighter Hill waited for the HART team to
19 come through entry control, and then myself and
20 Firefighter Hill, with the HART team, made our way to
21 the 11th floor.

22 On the way up, it was -- I think it was about the
23 9th floor -- we also helped with a BA crew that was
24 moving a branch up to the -- moving hose up to the 11th
25 floor.

1 Q. Yes. In your statement you refer to the fact that you
2 encountered a standard duration BA crew pulling a hose
3 from the dry riser on the 9th floor, and you say you
4 came across them between the 9th and the 11th floor and
5 helped them to pull the hose up?

6 A. That's correct.

7 Q. The statement also refers to having passed others before
8 then on the stairs: a firefighter coming down escorting
9 a child and a member of the public holding a baby. Do
10 you remember that?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. How did you know that you had in fact reached the 11th
13 floor when you did?

14 A. If memory serves -- I'm not sure -- I'm not sure if
15 there was any numbering. I rejoined the crew of three
16 and we confirmed together that it was the 11th floor.

17 Q. When you got there, were there other firefighters there
18 already?

19 A. Yes, there was.

20 Q. Are you able to say what they were doing or had been
21 doing?

22 A. It -- it seemed from -- from my -- my view that they had
23 only recently got there. That was because I was pulling
24 the hose up as well to help them fight the fire, and
25 they -- they was, if memory serves, using the branch to

1 try and put the fire out.

2 Q. I'll show you some photographs now to just refresh your
3 memory of the set-up at the point where the staircase
4 goes out into the lobby and leads to corridors. This is
5 taken in Lakanal House but on an undamaged floor, and
6 that shows to the left there's a door that, if one were
7 to go through it, would get you onto the central
8 staircase, and ahead of you there is an entry panel with
9 some flat numbers on it and then there is a door that
10 leads to a corridor.

11 This is a view from a similar area, but looking
12 towards the other corridor, the one running in the other
13 direction. So this is taken from a lobby area which one
14 reaches after coming off the central staircase, and from
15 the lobby area you can get to either corridor. I don't
16 know to what extent that will assist, because obviously
17 the scene that you encountered would have looked very
18 different from that, I'm sure.

19 A. It was, yes.

20 Q. Can you just tell us briefly what you found when you got
21 off the staircase into that lobby area from which one
22 can access the north and south corridors?

23 A. The -- the lobby area itself was heavily smoke-logged.
24 When I reached the 11th floor, we rejoined the rest of
25 our crew and I -- I spoke to Firefighter Gilbert and

1 I asked him if we had located flat 81 yet. He told me
2 he was unable to do this because of the fire. It was
3 then I -- I gazed round him and I saw the extent of the
4 damage down to what would be the north corridor, the
5 extent of the damage down the north corridor, and
6 I could see that one of those doors, it seemed to have
7 been warped and badly damaged by fire, and looking down
8 the corridor all I could see was flame. It looked like
9 the whole corridor was alight.

10 Q. How did you work out whether flat 81 was on the north
11 corridor or the south corridor?

12 A. First of all, I -- I asked all my crew if they'd found
13 it, if they knew. We had a look down the -- the south
14 corridor and there was a -- there was signage to state
15 that the -- flat 81 was down the north side. I can't
16 tell you what range but that -- that 81 fell within that
17 range.

18 Q. In your statement you say you thought the sign said 79
19 to 85, but whatever happened, it was a lower number and
20 a higher number and 81 fell within the range, so you
21 knew which corridor it was on?

22 A. That and we eliminated -- eliminated the left-hand side
23 by physically looking and we could see the numbers on
24 the left-hand side, yes, that's correct.

25 Q. Thank you. Was there, in fact, a fire in the north

1 corridor when you got there?

2 A. In the north corridor? Yes.

3 Q. How severe was it?

4 A. In the north corridor, passed that door, it -- it --

5 about as severe as I'd say it could get. I'd describe

6 it as a full fire. It seemed as though the whole

7 corridor was consumed by fire at that stage.

8 Q. How far could you see down the corridor?

9 A. There was a -- our vision was impaired by smoke. There

10 was a lot of smoke but because of the air currents, from

11 time to time you could see a glow at the end, which

12 I took to be a window that had been blown out.

13 Q. As it happens, what I now have on screen, photo 39, is

14 what would have been at the end of corridors like the

15 one you're describing in their undamaged state.

16 A. Okay.

17 Q. To what extent could you see that at the end of the

18 corridor?

19 A. I -- I couldn't see that at all. All I could see was

20 a faint light which I -- I perceived as daylight.

21 Q. The situation you had found was somewhat different to

22 what you'd been told to expect when the entry control

23 officer had briefed you; that's right, isn't it?

24 A. That's correct.

25 Q. Did that cause you to do anything to let people know

1 that conditions were slightly different to what you'd
2 been briefed?

3 A. Yes, as -- as soon as I realised the extent of the fire
4 that was on that floor and the fact that there was fire
5 on that floor, I -- I tried using my radio comms to let
6 entry control know downstairs the situation.

7 Q. Are you able to recall what channel you were trying to
8 get through to them on?

9 A. Channel 6.

10 Q. Was that successful?

11 A. At first it wasn't. I tried a number of times and
12 eventually I did get that message through.

13 Q. The message being what?

14 A. That we -- we was unable to find flat 81 as the -- the
15 whole of the corridor was involved in what could be
16 described as a full fire.

17 Q. Could you form any impression about whether entry
18 control now knew that or whether that came as a new
19 piece of news to them?

20 A. I -- I couldn't say. They -- they didn't tell me they
21 knew already but I couldn't say.

22 Q. So what did you then do to tackle the fire in the
23 corridor?

24 A. By this time the BA crew that we'd encountered had left,
25 and we, as a crew, using the 45, proceeded to try and

1 put the fire out.

2 Q. Is that the 45-millimetre --

3 A. Sorry, yeah, the 45-millimetre hose jet.

4 Q. Were you able to look into any of the flats on the
5 corridor?

6 A. The -- the -- the flat that I did look into -- there was
7 a flat on the left, the first flat. From memory, the
8 door -- the door had completely gone and when I looked
9 into it, it looked as though the window -- the windows
10 had gone and the panels below the windows had burned
11 away, and basically the whole of that floor was on
12 fire -- the whole of that room was on fire.

13 There was another door in front of that that
14 I believe in my statement I said was another -- another
15 flat, but speaking to people, I think that might have
16 been an utility room. But there was another door in
17 front of that door that I perceived to be a door to
18 another flat, and I could see in there, and if memory
19 serves me correctly I could see daylight into that --
20 that door as well.

21 Q. So what you're describing is the first and second doors
22 that you encountered on the left side of the north
23 corridor?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Just to help you and us to work out where you were, if

1 you look in the jury bundle at tab 11, the diagram on
2 the first page. The way it works is that on the 11th
3 floor north corridor, the flats on the left, of which
4 there are three, are numbers 79, 81 and 83, and the
5 three on the right are 80, 82 and 84. It is correct
6 that each of those flats has, in effect, two doors
7 leading from them onto the corridor. One is a door that
8 goes to an area underneath the stairs and then into
9 a bedroom, and one is the main front door.

10 A. Okay.

11 Q. So the first two doors that you came across would have
12 both been doors to flat 79.

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. The statement that you gave says that you tried to get
15 down low to a better position to fight the fire in the
16 corridor, but burnt your hands and knees on the floor of
17 the corridor due to the hot debris there?

18 A. That is correct.

19 Q. It goes on to say that you had to rotate crew positions
20 regularly because the conditions were so arduous?

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. And that the heat from the fire was producing steam?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. If you look back in the advocates' bundles at the table
25 of bodyguard information at page 1034, do you see the

1 box with information in red type on the left of the
2 page?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Which says:

5 "DSU activated."

6 We can see, looking across, that's for Firefighter
7 Hill. It would appear that that activated at 17.46.56?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Do you recall one of your crew members' DSUs activating?

10 A. I do.

11 Q. Do you remember where you were at that time?

12 A. I was in the corridor, I believe beside him.

13 Q. Do you know why it activated? You may not be able to
14 say.

15 A. I believe it -- it went off because it was left immobile
16 for a period of time, I believe ten seconds. If left
17 immobile, they go off as a safety for firefighters.

18 Q. What course of action was taken as a result of it going
19 off?

20 A. The only -- the only -- once they go off, the only way
21 they can be reset is by putting the BA key back into it,
22 which is at entry control, so I asked Firefighter Hill
23 and asked Firefighter Towler to assist him down to entry
24 control to get his reset.

25 Q. So that would require him to go all the way out of the

1 building?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Is that what happened?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Did firefighters Towler and Hill in due course come back
6 up?

7 A. They did, yes. Firefighter Towler first -- it seemed
8 like only a couple of minutes -- and then Firefighter
9 Hill five/six minutes later.

10 Q. I know it can only be an estimate and that estimating
11 times was probably the last thing on your mind at that
12 stage, but can you give any indication of how long it
13 took for one or both of them to go down the stairs and
14 back up the stairs? I'm just trying to get a sense of
15 how long it takes to walk in particular up the stairs
16 from ground level.

17 A. I believe Firefighter Towler didn't go all the way to
18 the bottom, so --

19 Q. So eliminate him then from your consideration.

20 A. I would say Firefighter Hill took between six and seven
21 minutes. It didn't seem long at all when he was back
22 with us.

23 Q. To go all the way to the bottom and all the way back up?

24 A. Back down, yeah, and I believe he run up and run down --
25 run down and then run up.

1 Q. Is there any reason why you believe that?

2 A. Speaking to him, and just the time it took him. He
3 seemed very fast at getting back to us, the distance he
4 travelled.

5 Q. Whilst they were away, what did you and the other two
6 members of your crew do?

7 A. We carried on fighting the fire in the corridor. We
8 kept trying to -- to push on down -- down the corridor
9 to get into the flats and to locate flat 81.

10 Q. What progress did you make in trying to work out which
11 flat was flat 81?

12 A. At this stage, I kept asking all crew members if they
13 knew where it was at this point, because I knew the
14 importance of finding it, and they kept replying: "We
15 can't see the numbers on the doors. We don't know which
16 one's flat 81."

17 Q. Did you go into any of the other flats on the corridor
18 other than the one on the left as you went into the
19 corridor that you've already described?

20 A. As a crew, we made entry into the flat -- first flat on
21 the right.

22 Q. From the diagram, we can see that that would be flat 80.

23 A. That is correct.

24 Q. What did you find in flat 80? What was the scene as you
25 saw it?

1 A. The scene -- looking into the flat, there was thick,
2 acrid smoke in there. It was actually thicker in the
3 flat than it was in the corridor because the corridor
4 had a degree of ventilation -- natural ventilation and
5 the smoke level was down to the floor in that flat.

6 Q. Was an attempt made to search flat 80?

7 A. There was an attempt to search that flat by Firefighter
8 Geddes and I believe Firefighter Towler went into the
9 flat and the rest of the crew carried on firefighting in
10 the corridor trying to -- the flat didn't seem to be
11 affected by fire. It was smoke.

12 Q. What did they report back to you about flat 80?

13 A. Firefighter Geddes said he searched it the best he
14 believed he could at that moment in time. He stated
15 that he hadn't searched all the flat but he believed
16 that the conditions in that flat was unsurvivable at
17 that time.

18 Q. What happened to Firefighter Geddes after that?

19 A. He also reported as he come out that he was feeling
20 unwell and looking at him, you could see he was having
21 trouble sort of moving. That's what he reported to me.
22 It looked like he was suffering from heat exhaustion.

23 Q. And he, of course, was wearing breathing apparatus?

24 A. He was, yes.

25 Q. Did he then withdraw?

1 A. He did. I believe initially he went back into the lobby
2 to try and compose himself and then he come back to me
3 shortly afterwards and said, "It's no good, I'm just
4 getting hotter and hotter. I need to get out."
5 Q. Did another crew member go with him?
6 A. Yes, Firefighter Gilbert.
7 Q. Was there still fire in the corridor at this time?
8 A. The fire had been suppressed at this time. It wasn't
9 out but it was a lot better than when we got there. But
10 there was still fire in the corridor, yes.
11 Q. Your statement says that you noticed fire had taken hold
12 behind you, nearer the stairwell?
13 A. That's correct. It -- it had travelled behind us,
14 I believe it had gone through the stairwell and it was
15 going down -- it started to burn down the other corridor
16 past the door -- the security door you showed me at the
17 south side.
18 Q. Was that a concerning development?
19 A. It was, because firstly it was our means of escape and
20 it could potentially cut out escape route off, and
21 secondly there was the potential for the south corridor
22 to end up in the same state as the north corridor.
23 Q. So what course of action did you take?
24 A. My -- at this time, firefighters Geddes and Gilbert
25 had -- had gone out of the building. Myself,

1 Firefighter Hill and Firefighter Towler proceeded to
2 extinguish the fire.

3 Q. Did you form any views on whether persons in flats on
4 the north corridor would be likely to have survived the
5 conditions up until the time when you arrived there?

6 A. Yeah, I had a personal view that it -- it seemed
7 unlikely, looking at the present flat on the left and
8 the conditions of the flat on the right, and looking at
9 the -- the fire that was down the corridor. My view at
10 that time was it was -- it was highly likely that the
11 flats further down the corridor had the same level of
12 smoke damage, so it was my view that it -- it looked
13 unlikely to find life down that corridor at that time.

14 Q. What you say in your statement is that. You say:

15 "It was my view that we would be unlikely to find
16 any survivors any further down the right hand corridor."

17 A. Yeah, that was my personal view, but I didn't --

18 Q. When you say "the right hand corridor", do you mean the
19 whole of the north corridor?

20 A. That's the north side, yes, sir.

21 Q. What about the south corridor?

22 A. The south corridor was -- it had smoke-logging in the
23 corridor but there was no fire in the corridor, and I --
24 I believe that anyone in the flats in -- in the south
25 corridor would -- should be -- it was survivable. There

1 was survivable conditions in the south corridor.

2 Q. Was any attempt made to search the south corridor?

3 A. Once -- once we put the fire out, Firefighter Towler
4 quickly banged on the doors to check to see if anyone
5 was in there. That was a quick check. We didn't
6 actually enter any of the flats on the south corridor.

7 Q. Was there any response that he reported to you?

8 A. No.

9 Q. What did you and he do after that?

10 A. When he come out, my original plan was to put that out
11 and carry on back down the north side. When he come
12 back to me, I believe his words were: "Come on, we've
13 got to go", and I took that as him stating that he was
14 suffering from heat exhaustion. I myself at that time
15 was in pretty bad way physically. I was finding it hard
16 to concentrate, and you know, a simple task like that
17 task of moving the hose, which was probably only ten
18 metres/12 metres, it took us considerably longer than it
19 would have done if we was not suffering from the effects
20 of heat.

21 Q. Are you trained to recognise signs of heat exhaustion in
22 yourself?

23 A. We are, yes. We are, yes. We get training at Malton to
24 recognise the signs.

25 Q. What sort of signs were you recognising at that time in

1 yourself?

2 A. In myself, I was finding it hard to concentrate and hard
3 to breathe. I felt my body getting hotter and
4 I couldn't cool down, and I -- I was finding it hard to
5 stand at that time, and yeah, simple tasks were -- were
6 taking, like, you know, five times as long as it would
7 be if I wasn't in that condition.

8 Q. How much air did you have left in your BA set? Are you
9 able to remember?

10 A. I -- I can see from there how much -- how much I had in
11 there.

12 Q. That's very helpful.

13 A. I come out with 157-bar, so I still had air to carry on.
14 The air wasn't the issue. It was the physical side of
15 the issue.

16 Q. The short but important point is that having twice as
17 much air doesn't necessarily mean that you can stay in
18 challenging conditions twice as long because the air
19 itself isn't going to protect you from the effects of
20 the heat or the physical activity, is it?

21 A. No, I'm led to believe with EDDBA, it's normally -- its
22 design is for penetration into complex buildings. We
23 don't normally firefight with it for that reason; you
24 can end up staying too long in arduous conditions.

25 Q. That, in fact, is a point you make at the very end of

1 your statement. I'll just read it to you. You said:

2 "This experience is new to me, because it was the
3 first occasion I have fought fire in EDDBA."

4 Then you give your opinion as follows:

5 "EDDBA isn't designed for firefighting and we were
6 unable to use our full duration because two of my crew
7 were beginning to suffer from heat stress. I would
8 expect to use EDDBA only in search and rescue situations,
9 and from our initial brief I wasn't expecting to be
10 firefighting on the 11th floor."

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. So having formed the view that Firefighter Towler was
13 suffering from heat exhaustion and you yourself were
14 experiencing signs of it, what did you do?

15 A. We -- we then -- the HART team we left by the stairs at
16 the top, because it quickly became apparent -- they was
17 there with us to search and rescue, and it had become
18 a firefighter task, not search and rescue. I knew they
19 still had air in their sets, so on the way down I told
20 them to stay where they were because another crew was
21 coming up and the -- they -- they will take over from
22 us.

23 Q. They had essentially been there all the time under air?

24 A. Under air, yes.

25 Q. But they hadn't been carried out any exhausting duties?

1 A. They'd been sitting down on the stairs where conditions
2 were considerably better.

3 Q. They were less exposed to heat and drawing on the air
4 less?

5 A. Yes, and once -- once I done that, then we went -- we
6 made our way out of the building. About halfway down
7 the building -- I'd say the 6th floor -- Firefighter
8 Towler reported me that he needed to rest for a minute.
9 We took a short break and then we proceeded out of the
10 building.

11 Q. Before you made your way down, were you able to get any
12 kind of message to entry control?

13 A. I -- I tried on several occasions to tell them that we
14 needed relief crews. It -- it came -- as soon as
15 Firefighter Geddes reported that he was unwell and he
16 needed to go, and from, you know, my -- my own physical
17 point of view at that time, we was -- would be unable to
18 stay in there much longer. So on numerous occasions
19 I tried to tell them that we needed relief crews up
20 there on channel 6.

21 Q. Did you get through?

22 A. I -- I didn't get a reply back.

23 Q. You transmitted a message, but you couldn't be sure
24 whether it had been received?

25 A. No. I spoke to Firefighter Gilbert afterwards, who also

1 had a comm set on, and he said all the way down the
2 stairs he could hear my message, but we didn't get
3 anything back. I also tried on channel 1, because you
4 have a comms set that's built into your radio and you
5 have a handheld radio, and I had that as well, and
6 I tried to get that message across on channel 1 as well.

7 Q. If we look at the page that remains on the screen, we
8 can see you shut down, according to this, at 18.05.

9 A. Yeah, that's correct.

10 Q. Would you have done that at ground floor level, when
11 outside the building?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Did you then have any form of discussion or debrief at
14 the entry control point?

15 A. I did, yes.

16 Q. Do you know who that was with, firstly by their name or
17 whether you recognised them?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Then secondly by their position, perhaps indicated by
20 a helmet or a tabard?

21 A. Yes, the gentleman was standing next to the entry
22 control officer, and he -- he appeared to be running
23 entry control. I -- I wouldn't be able to say at that
24 stage whether he was the sector commander or he was in
25 charge of BA, and it was Clerkenwell's EDDBA crew.

1 Q. What did you say to that person running entry control
2 and the Clerkenwell crew?

3 A. I -- I told them that we had worked out that flat 81 was
4 down the north -- north corridor, that the north
5 corridor had been involved in a quite ferocious fire, we
6 had -- we had suppressed that fire but I couldn't be
7 sure it was out, there could still be a few pockets
8 in -- in flat -- which I believe was 79, the first flat
9 on the left, and also I told them that -- where the HART
10 team was, and I told them there was a 45 up there and
11 there was breaking in equipment on the floor below.

12 Q. Did you express any view on the survivability of flats
13 on the 11th floor north corridor?

14 A. I believe I did. I said to the crew and the watch
15 manager at that time that due to the severity of the
16 fire and the conditions up there, I -- I believed that
17 it was unlikely to find survivors if they was down that
18 corridor.

19 Q. For reasons you've explained, you hadn't been able to
20 identify precisely which flat was 81?

21 A. No, the only brief I could give them was it was down the
22 north side.

23 Q. And is it right that you didn't know whether it was on
24 the left-hand side or the right-hand side of the north
25 corridor?

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. Did you see the Clerkenwell EDBA crew be committed into
3 the building?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Just for your benefit, we have records that indicate
6 that that was at 1812 hours, so about seven minutes
7 after you shut down. You had finished your duties in
8 the building, because as an EDBA crew, you're only
9 allowed to be committed once; is that right?

10 A. That's correct.

11 Q. What did you need to do to recover from the symptoms and
12 signs of heat exhaustion that you'd been experiencing?

13 A. As a crew, I believe we sat down for a number of minutes
14 at entry control, where water was available, and we took
15 our BA sets off and took our tunics off to cool down and
16 rehydrate.

17 Q. How long did it take you personally before you felt that
18 you had recovered from your experience physically?

19 A. Physically, I -- I hadn't recovered when I'd left.
20 I felt better but I was physically drained when I left.

21 Q. When you left the --

22 A. When I left the scene, yeah.

23 Q. Which was at approximately 1945 hours?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. You were still feeling the physical effects then, almost

1 two hours after coming out of the building?

2 A. Yeah, yes.

3 Q. I think it's right that while you were recovering, you
4 saw being brought out of the building a baby and a child
5 and an adult female, and that members of the HART team
6 and the London Ambulance Service were attempting to
7 perform CPR?

8 A. That's correct.

9 Q. Did you see any firefighters being treated or needing
10 treatment?

11 A. I did, yes.

12 Q. Your statement says you saw a firefighter being carried,
13 that people were trying to cool him down, that he was
14 conscious but unresponsive and every so often had
15 a convulsion; is that right?

16 A. That is, yes.

17 Q. My final question is to ask you to look back on what you
18 did that day and to ask you what single additional thing
19 you think would have helped you most on that day to
20 carry out the tasks that were given to you.

21 A. A single thing -- the most important thing that I was
22 having the most problems with on that day was my comms.

23 Q. The radio?

24 A. My radio. You know, there was important information
25 I wanted to get down, and it didn't feel like it was

1 getting there.

2 Q. Thank you very much. Those are my questions, but there
3 may be some from others.

4 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Mr Edwards.

5 Questions by MR EDWARDS

6 MR EDWARDS: Thank you. I'm Mr Edwards, on behalf of some
7 of the families.

8 Mr Niblett, just to say before I ask you any
9 questions, I want to make clear there's absolutely no
10 criticism of you or your crew or anything you did on the
11 day of the fire in what were obviously extremely
12 challenging circumstances.

13 Firstly I'm going to ask you about the timings.
14 I just want to get this clear in my mind. Your FRU
15 arrives at 17.02 and you reported to the control unit
16 immediately?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. Is that likely to be within about a minute of arrival,
19 do you think?

20 A. From where it was, it was -- I had to sort of walk from
21 the building, about three minutes.

22 Q. Then you're sent back to your FRU to stand by?

23 A. Yes, that's correct.

24 Q. And at that point you put on PPE and you presumably put
25 on EDBA as well?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Roughly how long does that take, putting on protective
3 equipment and breathing apparatus?

4 A. I -- I already had my fire gear on, so I only had to put
5 my EDBA set on. That's ...

6 Q. A minute?

7 A. A minute, yeah.

8 Q. Then I understand you're standing by for some time.
9 Removing the amount of time you're standing by, just
10 taking into account the time from walking to your
11 control unit to entry control, how long does that take?
12 That must be 30 seconds, a minute?

13 A. Yeah. From where we was, it was probably the same
14 distance as the command unit, so three minutes maximum.

15 Q. Then once you're at entry control, to actually start up
16 your EDBA and get committed, how long does that take for
17 you and your crew?

18 A. Once we get there, and to go through entry control,
19 another three minutes.

20 Q. So, adding all that up, it's three minutes to get to
21 control, one minute to put on your PPE and extended
22 duration breathing apparatus. I suppose you have to get
23 back to your FRU as well after you've first been to
24 control, so let's add another three minutes in there.
25 That makes seven minutes. Removing any delays, it's

1 then three minutes to get to entry control. That's
2 another three minutes, giving ten minutes, and then
3 about three minutes to be committed. So that's 13
4 minutes in all. Do you think it's fair to say that had
5 you not been waiting around outside Lakanal House, you
6 could have been committed within 13 minutes of arriving?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Thank you. Just one further point. You've explained
9 how EDDBA, extended duration breathing apparatus, isn't
10 normally used to fight fires, and we've heard your
11 account of the difficulties that you faced with the
12 heat. Presumably, it's more effort to physically fight
13 a fire than it is to search and rescue, or are they
14 about the same amount of effort?

15 A. No, it's more effort to fight a fire due to the -- the
16 heat and -- and moving the hose, sorry.

17 Q. Yes. So if you'd reached the 11th floor and it had just
18 been heavily smoke-logged but the fire hadn't reached it
19 and there was no particular problem with heat, you
20 presumably could have used all the air or the amount of
21 air that you're meant to use in your EDDBA?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Thank you very much. I have no further questions.

24 THE CORONER: Mr Dowden? No. Ms Al Tai?

25

1 Questions by MS AL TAI

2 MS AL TAI: Good morning, Mr Niblett. I act on behalf of
3 one of the bereaved. Just one quick question: when you
4 were going up to the 11th floor and you were told to
5 look into flat 81, were you informed of flat 79 at the
6 time?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Thank you.

9 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Matthews?

10 MR MATTHEWS: No thank you.

11 THE CORONER: Mr Compton?

12 MR COMPTON: No questions.

13 Questions by MISS NAQSHBANDI

14 MS NAQSHBANDI: Mr Niblett, just a few questions. Can I
15 take you back to page 362, please, and the second
16 paragraph. Do you have that?

17 A. Of my witness statement?

18 Q. Your witness statement, yes.

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. You told us that on the way up the stairs you passed
21 a firefighter escorting a child, and we see there in
22 your statement you recollected that the firefighter had
23 removed his BA mask and was holding it over the child's
24 face; is that right?

25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. Thank you. Just in terms of the conditions, in the next
2 paragraph, you say:

3 "As we climbed higher, the smoke-logging became
4 progressively worse."

5 Is that correct?

6 A. That's correct.

7 Q. The conditions in the right corridor, you've told us
8 something of those, but may I just take you to the last
9 two lines of page 362, where you say:

10 "The fire had been intense enough to penetrate the
11 fire door at the end of the corridor. Flames were
12 crossing over the ceiling above us. The corridor was
13 heavily smoke-logged. Visibility was severely reduced."

14 Is that correct?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Thank you. Mr Niblett, you also told us that the heat
17 from the fire was producing steam in the positions that
18 you were fighting in. Did that have any effect on your
19 breathing apparatus masks and visibility, the steam?

20 A. Not that I recall.

21 Q. Not that you recall. Thank you.

22 Over the page, please, 364, the penultimate
23 paragraph. You said that you noticed the fire had taken
24 hold "behind us near the stairwell and was moving into
25 the left hand corridor and was starting to take hold".

1 Then if you look at the top of page 365 -- and you've
2 also told us this -- yourself and your colleagues
3 attacked the fire in the stairwell and the left hand
4 corridor. Can you help us as to where in the left hand
5 corridor the fire was?

6 A. In -- in the -- in the corridor? I -- it had broken
7 through the -- the fire doors, so there was -- there was
8 some flame in that corridor coming out. I don't know if
9 anything was actually alight in the protected stairwell.
10 From my memory, the thing that was alight in the south
11 corridor, it was past the fire door, so -- because we
12 opened the fire door and done door procedure and that's
13 when we used the hose. I can't remember anything in
14 front of the fire door being on fire.

15 Q. So you can't remember whether in the left hand corridor
16 it was walls, ceilings, floors alight? Doors?

17 A. No. In the left hand corridor what was alight -- it
18 seemed like there was some sort of false ceiling that
19 was alight.

20 Q. Thank you. Just finally, you've told us about the
21 physical and the heat exhaustion. Can you help us
22 a little on the heat exhaustion. Am I right in thinking
23 that's exhaustion from external fire heat, but also your
24 internal body heat?

25 A. Yeah, it's the external heat that can cause it, but it's

1 the rise in your core temperature.

2 Q. Thank you very much, Mr Niblett.

3 THE CORONER: Thank you. Members of the jury, do you have
4 any questions?

5 Questions by the Jury

6 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you, madam coroner, we have
7 just the one. We were just wondering -- Firefighter
8 Niblett, you mentioned very early on that as you went
9 down the north corridor the doors were burnt away.

10 I think we established that the two doors that you saw
11 were actually flat 79, but my fellow juror was wondering
12 whether you were saying that -- you initially mentioned
13 an utility room. Do you mean by that that the first
14 door you came to on your left was also burnt away, or
15 was it just one flat door that was burnt away?

16 A. No, the first door, which I believed was the flat to 79,
17 was burnt away, and then what I assumed was another
18 flat -- there was another door which I believe was
19 actually another door into 79. That was burnt away as
20 well.

21 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay. Thank you very much.

22 THE CORONER: I'm just wondering whether it would help to
23 look at the photograph of an undamaged corridor showing
24 the doors, just to see whether that helps Mr Niblett.

25

1 Further questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

2 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: That's a photograph from inside a flat.

3 You can see that from within a bedroom of a flat there's

4 a door that -- in this it's shown as open -- goes to

5 an area under the stairs, and there's another door

6 behind it that leads onto the corridor.

7 THE CORONER: 17, possibly? No.

8 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: That's a front door, looking from inside

9 it to the corridor.

10 THE CORONER: No, sorry, I was hoping that we might be able

11 to find something to help clarify that, Mr Niblett, but

12 I'm not sure we're going to be able to do that.

13 A. Okay.

14 THE CORONER: All right, well thank you very much for coming

15 and for the evidence that you've given and the help that

16 you've been able to give to us. You're welcome to stay

17 if you would like, but you're free to go if you would

18 prefer.

19 A. Thank you.

20 THE CORONER: Thank you.

21 (The witness withdrew)

22 THE CORONER: Yes.

23 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Madam, this would be a convenient moment

24 for a mid-morning break?

25 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you very much. We'll have a break

1 of about ten minutes. Members of the jury, please go
2 with Mr Graham. Do leave your papers on the desks if
3 you would like to.

4 (11.26 am)

5 (A short break)

6 (11.37 am)

7 THE CORONER: Yes, our next witness is?

8 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Our next witness is going to be

9 Mr Christopher Rose. Just before calling him, can I
10 just indicate that when we come to PC Richard Cox, I'm
11 going to put up on screen two entries from a CAD which
12 will assist with identifying the times when some of the
13 matters which he refers to in his statement took place.

14 THE CORONER: Thank you.

15 (In the presence of the Jury)

16 THE CORONER: Thank you, yes. Is Mr Rose in court? Yes, if
17 you would like to come forward.

18 CHRISTOPHER ROSE (sworn)

19 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Rose, do sit down. Help
20 yourself to a glass of water. You'll see that the
21 microphone in front of you is switched on. You'll need
22 to be quite close to it for the microphone to pick up
23 your voice. All right? You might find it easier if you
24 give your answers across the room towards the members of
25 the jury. That way they will be able to hear what

1 Q. Were you working from a fire rescue unit?

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. For how long, back in 2009, had you been working with
4 extended duration breathing apparatus?

5 A. About three years.

6 Q. If I could take you back to the afternoon of
7 3 July 2009. Who were your fellow crew members that
8 day, do you remember?

9 A. I can only recall some of them. Firefighter Thorpe,
10 Firefighter Farrelly -- excuse me, I can't recall the
11 rest.

12 Q. Were firefighters Badcock and Knight part of your crew?

13 A. Yes, that's correct.

14 Q. Were you working from fire and rescue unit call sign
15 A276, based at Clerkenwell fire station?

16 A. That's correct.

17 Q. There came a time when you were mobilised to attend the
18 incident and records indicate that your unit arrived --
19 if we perhaps take up the sequence of events in the jury
20 bundle at tab 12. (Handed) Actually, I won't ask you
21 to go to it. Is it right that you arrived at about
22 17.38? It's not in there, actually. I'm just asking
23 you from memory.

24 A. That would be about right.

25 Q. Can you recall what you did on arrival?

1 A. We positioned the FRU -- we couldn't get quite close due
2 to road closures and et cetera. We parked up, made our
3 way to the command unit, where we was given a brief to
4 instantly get our EDBA sets on and proceeded back to the
5 FRU unit, then walked back round to the incident.

6 Q. Once you were kitted up, what were you asked to do?

7 A. To immediately go straight to the holding area where the
8 entry control point was located.

9 Q. Are you able to remember which side of the building that
10 was on?

11 A. It was opposite to where the command unit was parked.

12 Q. Did you find an entry control point?

13 A. Yes, we did.

14 Q. If you look in the jury bundle at tab 14, photograph 2,
15 does that look like the entry control point that you
16 found?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Just for reference, that's on the east side of the
19 building.

20 A. Okay, thank you.

21 Q. What did you and your crew do after you arrived at the
22 entry control point?

23 A. We took on some fluids and was waiting to be called
24 forward for a brief to the actions to be taken.

25 Q. Whilst waiting, did you see any crews come out of the

1 building?

2 A. I can't recall.

3 Q. Do you recall how long you waited at the entry control
4 point for until you were given further instructions?

5 A. It did seem a little time. Probably ten to 15 minutes.

6 Q. Did there come a time when you then were given a task
7 and briefed at the entry control point?

8 A. That's correct.

9 Q. Were you all briefed as a crew or was the briefing given
10 to you to then pass on to your crew?

11 A. Briefed as a crew.

12 Q. You probably don't remember the name or may well not
13 have known the name of the person who briefed you, but
14 are you able to say what their position was by
15 reference, for example, to any helmet markings or
16 tabard?

17 A. Well, definitely of a rank of an officer because they
18 wore a white fire helmet as opposed to a yellow one with
19 two black stripes down the side. It was an officer.
20 What rank I don't know.

21 Q. Are you able to say whether they were a sector commander
22 or an entry control officer or some other position, or
23 can you not say?

24 A. I believe I can recall they were wearing a tabard but
25 I have no recollection of what their actual command was.

1 Q. As best you can, what was the brief that was given to
2 you and your crew?

3 A. From what I can recall, it was to make our way to the
4 11th floor and there was a family unaccounted for, or
5 persons, and that's what I can remember.

6 Q. Do you remember if you were told what flat the
7 unaccounted for family was in?

8 A. I have no recollection of that.

9 Q. Do you think you may have been told at the time but have
10 since lost that recollection?

11 A. Yeah, I believe so.

12 Q. Can you recall if you were given any advice or
13 directions about how to find where they were?

14 A. No, I don't believe it was. It was just: "Make your way
15 to floor 11."

16 Q. I'm going to ask you to have a look at a document in the
17 advocates' bundles at page 1032, which is in file 3.
18 You'll be given a hard copy but it's what's on screen at
19 the moment. Firstly, by way of explanation, it's very
20 unlikely you've seen this before.

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. I doubt that you recognise the format of the document,
23 but you'll remember that you and your crew members were
24 wearing extended duration breathing apparatus, which had
25 fitted a bodyguard system, and one of the things that

1 that system can do is to record information, and in
2 particular when the set is started up and when it's
3 under air and when it's shut down. What this document
4 does is to summarise for your Clerkenwell crew that
5 information. If you look in the bottom right area of
6 the table, do you see your name?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Then if you look across that row towards the middle, you
9 can see that the information is to the effect that were
10 under air at 18.12?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. Can you remember where you were when you started up and
13 went under air?

14 A. We was in the holding area, which was outside of the
15 building opposite.

16 Q. Did you start up as crew of five?

17 A. Yes. We started up but it became apparent that there
18 was no entry control board and we can't pass through BA
19 without being administered into a board, so we was under
20 air for a little bit before we actually got committed.

21 Q. Did you then make your way up the stairs and in due
22 course reach the 11th floor?

23 A. Yes, that's correct.

24 Q. It may seem a simple question, but how did you know you
25 were on the 11th floor?

1 A. There was -- an officer, whose rank I'm not aware of,
2 was on that floor that indicated we'd reached it. Can I
3 just add that we were trying to count the floor levels
4 as we were ascending up.

5 Q. But as it happens, there was somebody there at the top
6 to tell you you were in the right place?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. Did he say anything in particular to you that you
9 remember?

10 A. I can't recall exact details.

11 Q. Do you recall whether there were any other crews on the
12 11th floor at that time?

13 A. Yes, I believe there was another crew that was just
14 firefighting what would be right down the end of the
15 corridor. Visibility wasn't great. There seemed to be
16 a lot of steam, indicating a lot of heat. That's it.

17 Q. If you look in the jury bundle at tab 11, the first page
18 is a diagram of the building. That is a representation
19 of Lakanal House, looking from the west side of the
20 building. You can see there's a single central
21 staircase and there are then two corridors. One runs to
22 the north and one runs to the south. Are you able to
23 recall whether, on the 11th floor, you went into one of
24 those two corridors or both of them?

25 A. We entered the one corridor.

1 Q. We know that one of them had been severely damaged by
2 fire, the other rather less so. Does that help you to
3 remember which one you went into?

4 A. Absolutely.

5 Q. Which one was it?

6 A. It was the heavily fire damaged floor.

7 Q. That was the north corridor?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. In the north corridor, were you required to firefight,
10 or could you immediately turn to search tasks?

11 A. Immediately turned to search tasks.

12 Q. Did you search several flats, or one flat in particular?

13 A. What I recall, we entered the first flat, which was on
14 the left, and it was very easy to search this flat.
15 There was hardly anything left of that premises.

16 Q. By reference to the diagram, we can see that that would
17 have been flat 79.

18 A. That's correct.

19 Q. Did you go into any other flats after that?

20 A. We proceeded down to the corridor and came to a door
21 which we was notified by I recall now a crew that was on
22 there it hadn't been searched. I believe that to be
23 flat 81.

24 Q. You say you believe that to be flat 81. Is that because
25 of things you've learnt since or because it was apparent

1 it was 81 at the time?

2 A. From what I've learnt, since there was no signage on any
3 of the doors.

4 Q. By reference to the diagram, is that consistent with
5 your memory and what you've been told? In other words,
6 it was the second flat on the left-hand side?

7 A. Yeah, from memory, that's correct.

8 Q. Did you then go into that flat?

9 A. Yes, we made entry.

10 Q. When you say "we," that was you and your crew members?

11 A. That's it. As a crew -- a crew of five, yeah.

12 Q. When you made entry, what did you see immediately when
13 you got into the flat?

14 A. Heavy smoke-logging, which was more apparent upstairs.
15 I detailed my crew to search the ground floor.
16 I thought we was entering just a normal flat. It
17 appeared that it wasn't the layout that we thought it
18 was, so --

19 Q. Just pausing there, is it right that up until that time
20 you didn't know that the flats were on two levels?

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. But on entry to the flat, it was apparent that they were
23 because you could see a staircase leading up?

24 A. That's correct.

25 Q. If you just wait a moment while I put up on screen

1 a plan that represents what these flats are like inside.
2 Just take a moment. This is a layout of a typical flat
3 which has its front door on the west side of the
4 building. So flat 81 would be an example of such
5 a flat. Looking at the diagram in the left hand corner,
6 just underneath where it says "flat", there's a front
7 door with an internal staircase to the left, a small
8 hallway, two bedrooms ahead of you and a bathroom to the
9 right.

10 Did there come a time when one of your crew members,
11 Firefighter Farrelly, drew your attention to something
12 on the ground floor?

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. By reference to this diagram, or perhaps your memory as
15 well, do you know which room it was where he had found
16 something he wanted to draw to your attention?

17 A. Yeah, it was the bathroom.

18 Q. Did you find that there was difficulty in opening the
19 door to the bathroom fully because there was something
20 behind it?

21 A. It was extremely difficult, yes.

22 Q. Did Mr Farrelly reach round the door to see if he could
23 work out what was the situation?

24 A. That's correct.

25 Q. Did he then shout something?

1 A. Yes, he shouted, "Casualty."
2 Q. What did you understand by that?
3 A. That he'd found persons.
4 Q. What did you do as a result?
5 A. Assisted Mr Farrelly in finding -- in extricating the
6 casualties.
7 Q. Did you and he together move a casualty out of the
8 bathroom?
9 A. That's correct.
10 Q. As far as you could tell, did that person appear to be
11 lifeless or to have signs of life?
12 A. Lifeless.
13 Q. Can you recall what the smoke conditions and visibility
14 were like in the bathroom?
15 A. I can't recall, sorry.
16 Q. After the first person was brought out of the bathroom,
17 can you recall what you did?
18 A. Yeah, we always do on a secondary sweep. I reached
19 round the door and unfortunately located a very small
20 baby.
21 Q. What did you do after locating the baby?
22 A. I assisted with handing that baby over to one of my crew
23 to be taken out. It became apparent we had other
24 casualties in that bathroom as well.
25 Q. How did you feel, both physically and emotionally, at

1 this time?

2 A. It really shocked me. In fact, could I just take five
3 minutes, please?

4 Q. Yes. (Pause)

5 A. It was a -- you know, really emotional finding
6 casualties like that, and very tragic. I also became
7 very aware that my -- my own decision-making was getting
8 a little bit flawed and I was getting exceedingly hot.
9 This was becoming increasingly difficult for myself. It
10 transpired I had to leave that fire floor, suffering
11 some severe effects of stress and exhaustion.

12 Q. You gave a statement some months later, nearly five
13 months later, where you said that after finding the baby
14 everything was just flashes of certain moments after
15 that?

16 A. This is correct.

17 Q. For obvious reasons, does that mean that your ability to
18 remember events after you found the baby in the bathroom
19 is limited?

20 A. Yes, I'd like to point out I was diagnosed with
21 post-traumatic stress. I was off work for seven months
22 with the effects from this fire.

23 Q. Given what you just said and the very difficult
24 circumstances you were in, how confident are you that
25 you did draw to your crew members' attention the fact

1 that there was more than one casualty in the bathroom?

2 A. I can recall even trying to transmit that over the
3 radio, asking for more help. I believe I conveyed that
4 to the rest of my crew, who were in close proximity to
5 the bathroom at this time.

6 Q. Shortly afterwards, did you begin to recognise in
7 yourself that you were feeling very unwell and were
8 experiencing signs of heat exhaustion and other physical
9 problems?

10 A. Yeah, that's correct. It's something that you get
11 taught in the fire service to recognise, but it's
12 a little bit harder to detect in yourself because
13 there's the will to carry on, you know, to save life,
14 but I knew I was in a little bit of trouble when I just
15 couldn't stand up straight.

16 Q. So what did you do?

17 A. I believe I communicated to my crew I had to leave that
18 fire floor and I recall trying to make my way out, where
19 I believed the entry control point was outside. I was
20 bouncing off the walls walking down. I remember passing
21 a HART team. It goes a little bit blurry after that.
22 The next minute I'm outside. It's all a bit sparse,
23 sorry.

24 Q. Do you remember what assistance or help you needed at
25 the scene to recover from the problems you had?

1 A. I believe I was struggling with my breathing. My heart
2 rate was three times over what it normally would be.
3 I remember being carried out of the building by two
4 firefighters. I don't know who. I remember at times
5 being doused in water to cool me down and then being put
6 into the back of an ambulance.

7 Q. Taken to hospital?

8 A. Taken to hospital.

9 Q. Is it right that you were kept in hospital for treatment
10 for several days?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. Thank you very much, Mr Rose. Those are all the
13 questions that I have for you. It may be that others
14 will have some questions.

15 A. Okay, thank you.

16 THE CORONER: Thank you.

17 Questions by MR EDWARDS

18 MR EDWARDS: Thank you. Mr Edwards on behalf of three of
19 the families. I don't have any questions, Mr Rose.
20 I just want to make clear on behalf of my clients that
21 there is absolutely no criticism of you and you have
22 nothing to reproach yourself for.

23 A. Thank you.

24 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Walsh.

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Questions by MR WALSH

MR WALSH: Thank you. Mr Rose, I just want to ask you one matter in relation to things before you went into the building. I'm not going to ask you about the building. I'll show you a statement in a moment, but the statement that you gave some months later just indicated what you saw on your arrival at Lakanal. Let me help you with this and see if you agree with me. On your arrival, while you were waiting to be deployed, did you notice crew members coming out of the building and resting, that those persons looked very hot and tired, it was obvious that they'd been working hard as part of a five man team? Do you remember that?

A. Yes, I can recall that now.

Q. You thought that they had come out due to the effects of heat and hard work. That was before you were committed in?

A. That's correct.

Q. Do you remember that that crew who had come out had passed on some information to you about the fire but that by the time you'd made this statement some months later you couldn't remember what it was?

A. That's correct.

Q. All right. Mr Rose, thank you very much indeed.

THE CORONER: Thank you. Members of the jury?

1 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: No thank you.

2 THE CORONER: Mr Rose, it was obviously an exceptionally
3 distressing experience. Thank you very much for coming
4 and thank you very much for the evidence that you've
5 given to us. You're welcome to stay if you want, but
6 you're free to go if you would prefer.

7 A. Okay, thank you.

8 THE CORONER: Thank you.

9 (The witness withdrew)

10 THE CORONER: Yes.

11 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: The next witness is PC Richard Cox. His
12 statement starts at page 381 in the statements bundle.

13 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you. Yes, is the constable in
14 court? Thank you, yes, do come forward.

15 PC RICHARD COX (sworn)

16 A. My name's PC Richard Cox, 572 Mike Delta, attached to
17 Peckham police station.

18 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Do sit down.

19 A. Thank you.

20 THE CORONER: Do help yourself to a glass of water if you
21 would like. Please, when you're answering questions, if
22 you keep your voice up, that would help us all and you
23 might find it helpful to direct your answers across the
24 room to the members of the jury.

25 Mr Maxwell-Scott, who is standing, is going to ask

1 you questions initially on my behalf and then there may
2 be questions from others.

3 A. Thank you.

4 THE CORONER: Thank you.

5 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

6 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Could you give the court your full name
7 please.

8 A. It's Richard William Cox.

9 Q. I'm going to be asking you questions about your
10 involvement at Lakanal House on 3 July 2009. You gave
11 a short statement about those events on 17 July 2009.
12 Was your memory of events rather better then than it is
13 today, some three and a half years later on?

14 A. Yes, it was.

15 Q. Would it assist you to have a look at that statement?

16 A. Yes, it would.

17 Q. If Mr Clark could show you that. It's at page 381 of
18 the statements bundle. (Handed) If you have a look at
19 that now. Can you identify that as your statement?

20 A. Yes, it is.

21 Q. Just firstly in general terms, the statement describes
22 a series of events. You were giving this statement two
23 weeks after the fire. Were you giving this from memory
24 or by reference to some other documents?

25 A. Partially from memory and partially from a CAD print

1 out.

2 Q. Are you able to tell us whether the events that are set
3 out in this statement are set out in chronological
4 order, in other words there's an attempt to describe
5 event by event in the sequence that they happened?

6 A. Yes, they are.

7 Q. There's a point in your statement which I'm particularly
8 interested to ask you about, where you describe being
9 asked by a senior Fire Brigade officer if you were aware
10 about flat numbering. You then describe speaking to
11 council officials and there was a discussion about
12 contacting somebody at the town hall for plans of the
13 building to be brought to the scene. Firstly, can I
14 just ask you about that in isolation from the other
15 events. Are you able at all to estimate when that event
16 occurred? If you're not or you don't recall --

17 A. I don't, I'm afraid.

18 Q. -- just say so.

19 A. No, I couldn't say exactly.

20 Q. Well, in that case, what we'll do is work through the
21 events that you describe and try and put a time to some
22 of them as best we can.

23 If you go back then to the first page of your
24 statement, you refer to being on duty in full uniform as
25 the driver of a police vehicle in company with PC 583MD

1 O'Sullivan.

2 A. That's correct, yes.

3 Q. Can you just explain for our benefit what the 583MD is?

4 A. Every division is allocated two letters and within that

5 division each officer is allocated a number. So it's

6 a unique identifying number to an officer on a division.

7 Q. Is that the number that you gave to the court when you

8 were sworn? You said, I think, that you were 572MD?

9 A. Yes, that's correct.

10 Q. You describe in the first paragraph of your statement

11 flames emanating from the east side of the building, and

12 you say upon arrival that you and PC O'Sullivan

13 initiated a cordon at the junction of Dalwood Street and

14 Southampton Way. If I refer you to the CAD, which

15 I think is the one you had access to when making your

16 statement. If you look at page 6, and 16.39.40. Do you

17 see that?

18 A. Yes, I can.

19 Q. It says:

20 "583M. We are shutting off Southampton

21 Way/Dalwood Street."

22 A. Yes, that's correct. It's my colleague. It should say

23 "583 Mike Delta".

24 Q. So it should say "583MD", but we can tell that's your

25 colleague, PC O'Sullivan, and is this, in effect,

1 the recording of a message that he has sent --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. -- over radio?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. And his message at 16.39 was:

6 "We are shutting off Southampton Way and
7 Dalwood Street."

8 So the two of you were at the scene by then and were
9 carrying out the action of creating a cordon that you
10 describe in the first paragraph of your statement. Is
11 that right?

12 A. Yes, that's correct.

13 Q. Then the second paragraph of your statement describes
14 a time when the London Fire Brigade were trying to get
15 what you call their platform, which I think would be
16 an aerial ladder platform --

17 A. I believe so, yes.

18 Q. -- into position to fight the fire, and they had to move
19 a parked silver vehicle which ended up being on its
20 side.

21 A. Yeah, they were basically trying to get the aerial
22 ladder closer to the block, but the car was blocking its
23 way, so they rolled it on its side to move it out the
24 way.

25 Q. If you take up the jury bundle, which Mr Clark will pass

1 you, tab 14, page 19. (Handed) Does that photograph
2 represent what you describe in the second paragraph of
3 your statement on 381?

4 A. Yes, it does.

5 Q. For your benefit and for the benefit of the members of
6 the jury and the court, that photograph is timed 17.19.
7 You may wish to write that on it. Then if we turn over
8 the page to the second page of your statement, you
9 describe, whilst being at the cordon, being approached
10 by a Hispanic woman who told you that she had family in
11 flat 81, including children, and that they were hiding
12 in the bathroom of the flat.

13 Before I ask you more about that, I'll show you
14 an aerial photograph of the scene which may assist you
15 to recall where you may have been. If you just take
16 a moment to orient yourself. Lakanal House is in the
17 middle of the picture which I'm marking with the white
18 arrow.

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. And it's a map with north at the top. This is
21 Sedgmoor Place, which is the access road on the west
22 side of the building. Are you able to recall where it
23 was that you were approached by the woman who told you
24 about flat 81?

25 A. I believe I was somewhere near probably the junction

1 with Redbridge Gardens.

2 Q. The junction between Redbridge Garden and
3 Dalwood Street?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Roughly where the red circle is?

6 A. Approximately, yeah.

7 Q. We have heard evidence that a cordon was set up in that
8 area. According to your statement, you then took that
9 information to the meeting point of the London
10 Fire Brigade, which was to the east of the building; is
11 that right?

12 A. Yes, as you see the main tower block, just to the east
13 of it there's a small -- I think at one point they were
14 shops, and it's got like a covered walkway through it,
15 and I walked there and that's where I come across some
16 of the senior officers from the London Fire Brigade.

17 Q. In the jury bundle, if you look in tab 14 at
18 photograph 2.

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. Is that the meeting place of the London Fire Brigade
21 that you refer to in your statement?

22 A. Yes, it is.

23 Q. In your statement, you say you told a senior
24 Fire Brigade officer the information that the woman had
25 passed you about flat 81. Are you able to describe the

1 officer by reference to what they were wearing, so for
2 example their helmet or what the London Fire Brigade
3 call a tabard?

4 A. Yeah, I believe he had a white helmet on, I think it had
5 some bands on it as well, and he was wearing a tabard,
6 but I can't remember what was on it.

7 Q. What did this officer do with the information as far as
8 you could see?

9 A. He made a note of it.

10 Q. What did you do after that?

11 A. I returned back towards the cordons.

12 Q. Did you see the woman again who had given up the
13 information?

14 A. No, I didn't. I apologise; I did. I returned to her
15 and tried to reassure her that the Fire Brigade were
16 aware of the information and that they were doing
17 everything they could to reach those flats.

18 Q. Your statement goes on to say:

19 "Whilst at the rendezvous point, I was asked by a
20 senior Fire Brigade officer if I was aware in which was
21 the flats in the block were numbered."

22 I'll put that on the screen as well. This is
23 page 382. It's about seven lines down. The sentence as
24 it reads is not completely clear.

25 A. No, I think there was a slight typo on my part.

1 Q. Can you assist us with what it says or what point you're
2 making here?

3 A. Yeah, I said whilst at the rendezvous point, I was asked
4 by a senior Fire Brigade officers if I was aware in
5 which way the flats numbered. Basically, he asked me
6 did I know how the numbers on the flats worked on the
7 landings, was it all to one side, evens/odds, et cetera.
8 I explained that I didn't know.

9 Q. What did you do as a result?

10 A. I returned to one of my supervising officers, who was
11 with some council officials, and I asked if they had any
12 plans or if they knew how the flats were numbered.

13 Q. Where were these council officials?

14 A. They were at one of the cordons. I can't recall at
15 which cordon they were at.

16 Q. Were you able to say, because of anything they said to
17 you or anything that they were wearing, what jobs they
18 had within the council?

19 A. I can't recall, no.

20 Q. Your statement says that they were with PS 98MD?

21 A. That's correct, yes.

22 Q. Who is that?

23 A. He was one of the -- I believe he was one of the safer
24 neighbourhood team sergeants who was first on scene.
25 I think he was liaising with the council to establish

1 somewhere for members of the public who'd been evacuated
2 from the block to go to.

3 Q. After that, were you involved in -- or did you hear --
4 any discussion about attempts to get plans of the
5 building?

6 A. The council official said they would contact somebody at
7 the town hall and see if they could get plans brought
8 down to the scene to assist. A short while later, I got
9 the message back that there were no plans.

10 Q. Your statement says that you then continued to man
11 cordons until you were asked to return to the cordon at
12 the junction of Dalwood Street and Southampton Way, and
13 that you'd been there a short time when a Fire Brigade
14 officer approached you and asked you to extend the
15 cordon to close Southampton Way, as they had a further
16 20 vehicles attending. Can I assist you to put a time
17 on that. This is the CAD again. I'm going to ask you
18 to look at 18.21.16.

19 A. Yes, that's my message.

20 Q. That's your message and it says:

21 "LFB have 20 appliances turning up shortly. They
22 want Southampton Way to be closed."

23 A. Yes, that's correct.

24 Q. Just recapping, at the bottom of the first page of your
25 statement you described the moving of a silver vehicle

1 which ended up on its side so that the aerial ladder
2 platform could get into position, and I've shown you
3 a photograph of the vehicle on its side at 17.19. We've
4 just seen a CAD entry for approximately an hour later
5 relating to the London Fire Brigade having 20 appliances
6 turning up shortly. I'm going to ask you whether that
7 assists you at all to try and narrow down when it was
8 that you were first asked about the numbering system for
9 the block of flats.

10 A. I would roughly guess it's probably about half an hour
11 after first getting there, the first message about
12 closing off Dalwood Street, approximately.

13 Q. That message was at 16.39.

14 A. 17.39.

15 Q. 16.39.

16 A. Sorry, yes, 16.39.

17 Q. Just to recap, you had a message about the cordon at
18 Dalwood Street and Southampton Way at 16.39.

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. We had a photograph of a vehicle on its side at 17.19?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. And then we had the cordon being extended because 20
23 vehicles were attending and a CAD message in relation to
24 that at 18.21.

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. And the way your statement is set out, you describe the
2 conversation with the woman about flat 81 and then with
3 the London Fire Brigade officer between the reference to
4 the silver vehicle on its side and the CAD message at
5 18.21.

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. I wonder whether you're able to help us at all to narrow
8 down within that window of time when it was you were
9 first asked about the numbering system of the block of
10 flats?

11 A. I couldn't say, I'm afraid.

12 Q. Or when it was that council officials were first spoken
13 to about the desirability of getting plans for the
14 building to the scene?

15 A. I don't know the exact time that that would have been
16 done.

17 Q. Then I think it's right that after 18.21 you were
18 relieved at the cordon and you reattended the block and
19 you were told you would be assisting the London
20 Ambulance Service when any wounded people were brought
21 out of the building?

22 A. Yes, that's correct.

23 Q. Some time later you were present when five adults were
24 brought out of the building?

25 A. Yes, that's correct.

1 Q. And you remained at the scene until about 2040 hours?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Thank you very much. I have no further questions, but
4 it may be that others will have some questions.

5 THE CORONER: Constable, how did you know that they were
6 council officials that you went to talk to?

7 A. They were with my -- one of my sergeants, PS 98, I think
8 it was, who was talking to them, and he was liaising
9 with them about finding suitable accommodation for
10 people that had been evacuated from the block.

11 THE CORONER: I see. Thank you. Yes, Mr Edwards?

12 Questions by MR EDWARDS

13 MR EDWARDS: Thank you. Mr Edwards on behalf of some of the
14 families.

15 Just one point: you said you spoke to a senior
16 officer and told him about the flat number 81 and that
17 he made a note. Forgive me if it sounds a very obvious
18 question, but do you remember how the officer made
19 a note?

20 A. I believe if memory serves he had a clipboard and he
21 just literally made a quick note on a piece of paper.

22 THE CORONER: Thank you.

23 MR COMPTON: No questions, thank you.

24 THE CORONER: Members of the jury?

25 Police constable, thank you very much for coming and

1 thank you very much for the help that you've been able
2 to give to us. You're welcome to stay if you want, but
3 you're free to go if you would prefer. Thank you.

4 A. Thank you.

5 (The witness withdrew)

6 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Madam, the next witness is Firefighter
7 Hull.

8 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Mr Hull, are you in
9 court? Would you like to come forward, please. Thank
10 you.

11 LAWRENCE HULL (sworn)

12 THE CORONER: Mr Hull, thank you very much. Do sit down.

13 A. Thank you.

14 THE CORONER: Do help yourself to a glass of water.

15 A. Thank you.

16 THE CORONER: It sounds as if you have a good loud clear
17 voice, but please keep it up so we can hear what you're
18 saying.

19 A. I'll try.

20 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Maxwell-Scott is standing.

21 He's going to be asking questions initially on my behalf
22 and then there may be questions from others. Thank you.

23 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

24 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Can you give the court your full name,
25 please?

1 A. Lawrence James Hull.

2 Q. I'm going to be asking you about your attempts to fight
3 fire and carry out search and rescue tasks at
4 Lakanal House on 3 July 2009. At that time, were you
5 a firefighter serving with the London Fire Brigade?

6 A. I was.

7 Q. At that time how long had you been working for the
8 London Fire Brigade?

9 A. I was in my 29th year.

10 Q. Which fire station were you based at?

11 A. New Cross.

12 Q. What appliance were you part of a crew of?

13 A. New Cross' pump ladder.

14 THE CORONER: Sorry, I missed that.

15 A. New Cross' pump ladder, E38.

16 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Was your call sign Echo 381?

17 A. It was, yes.

18 Q. Do you recall who your other crew members were that
19 afternoon?

20 A. Obviously myself. My officer in charge was Ian Berry
21 and the crew at the back was Wendy Stevens, Dave Ford,
22 and a standby officer from Whitechapel, who -- I think
23 his name was Wayne.

24 Q. Was it Wayne Field?

25 A. If you say so, yeah. I just knew him as Wayne.

1 Q. Is it right that at around 1638 hours you were mobilised
2 to attend a fire in the Peckham area which turned out to
3 be at Lakanal House?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Did you then make your way in the appliance with your
6 crew members to the scene?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Do you recall what you and your crew members did on
9 arrival?

10 A. Well I was driving the appliance, so initially we parked
11 the machine up and the rest of the crew went off --
12 well, sorry, Iain Berry, the officer in charge, went off
13 to report in, and then came back and told us to don our
14 equipment and put breathing apparatus on and to report
15 round to the scene of the fire, at which point the rest
16 of the crew put on their BA. I was obviously the
17 driver, so I was -- had to then get myself into fire
18 gear, so I sort of lagged behind by a couple of minutes,
19 so they went off without me.

20 Q. Do you remember which side of the building you first had
21 a view of?

22 A. It was the opposite side from where the entrance to the
23 stairwell was.

24 Q. So it's the opposite side from where the entry control
25 point was?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. You can take it from us that you had a view initially of
3 the west side of the building.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. What were your initial impressions?

6 A. Very strange. I've never -- never seen -- been
7 to a fire where there's three or four scenes of fire
8 initially, so -- initially I thought it was arson, to
9 tell you the truth, when I first saw the fire.

10 Q. Because there were fires in different places?

11 A. Yeah, different levels and different flats seemed to be
12 alight.

13 Q. Is it right that it subsequently became clear to you
14 that it wasn't arson?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. When you gave a statement, you said very vividly that:
17 "All I can say is what I saw looked like something
18 off a Die Hard film set."

19 A. Yes. Very, very, very surreal. Very surreal.

20 Q. And that was someone like yourself, with 28 years'
21 experience of the job?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Which side of the building did you then make your way
24 to?

25 A. Well, initially, after donning my BA, I walked -- the

1 initial fire was obscured by a tree, a large tree, and
2 once I got past that, when I first saw the scene of the
3 fire, I stopped to shout to a colleague I knew from the
4 fire investigation department who was taking photos.

5 Q. Was that Stuart Whitmore?

6 A. It was, yes, and we initially both discussed the fact
7 that it was an unusual looking fire, and at that point
8 we then started hearing shouting coming from the
9 opposite side of the building, so we both made our way
10 round to the other side.

11 Q. That would be the east side?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. What did you notice when you got to the east side?

14 A. Well, there was members of the public pointing up to
15 the -- one of the higher floors, and we looked up and
16 there was a family of four on one of the high
17 balconies -- I didn't know at the time which floor it
18 was -- shouting for help, heavily smoke-logged up there,
19 and initially I could see the -- the guy tying sheets
20 together and trying to lower -- lower himself over the
21 side of the building, or attempting to.

22 Q. Just pausing there, if you take up the jury bundle at
23 tab 12, which is a sequence of events. (Handed) If you
24 turn in it to page 23.

25 A. Yeah, that's what I saw.

1 Q. That's what you saw?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Were people trying to communicate with him in any way?

4 A. Well, there was a lot of shouting from people to get
5 back. I mean, members of the public as well as
6 Fire Brigade, as far as I can remember, but -- and just
7 telling them to get -- get back in and someone's going
8 to come up to help them.

9 Q. What did you and your crew do next?

10 A. Well, initially I realised that the building was being
11 evacuated from all Fire Brigade personnel because the
12 bridgehead had been compromised, which is the control
13 point, which was usually situated two -- two stories
14 below the initial fire.

15 Q. Just pausing there, how did you realise that the
16 building was being evacuated and the bridgehead was
17 coming out?

18 A. I can't remember. I just remember receiving the
19 information.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. At which point I thought: there's people up there that
22 need help, and I saw a fellow colleague which I've known
23 all my career, Paul Glenny, who was a senior officer,
24 and basically conveyed that someone needed to get up
25 there to help these people, so which --

1 Q. Just pausing there, whose idea was it to go up there to
2 try and help the people on the balcony?

3 A. Myself.

4 Q. Whom did you tell about that idea?

5 A. Paul Glenny.

6 Q. What did he say when you told him?

7 A. He initialised and then basically said, "Yes, I think
8 you're right." I can't quite remember the exact
9 conversation but it was agreed that something needed to
10 be done.

11 Q. Are you able to assist us with what role he had at the
12 scene as far as you could tell --

13 A. No idea.

14 Q. -- by reference, perhaps, to his helmet or tabard?

15 A. Well, he was -- he had a white helmet on, so it made him
16 watch manager and above. So -- but I didn't know what
17 his rank was. I just knew him as someone I've known as
18 a fireman all my life, but I didn't know his position.

19 Q. Just to help the jury, is it right that those of watch
20 manager rank and above would wear a white helmet?

21 A. Yes, that's correct.

22 Q. Regardless of what specific task they have on the fire
23 ground?

24 A. That's correct.

25 Q. And the tabards are used to indicate the role that is

1 being carried out by the wearer?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And you can't remember one way or the other whether he

4 had a tabard on or what he said?

5 A. No.

6 Q. So after you had had that conversation with him, which

7 ended, as I understand it, in an agreement that you and

8 your crew would attempt to get the people on the balcony

9 out, what did you do?

10 A. Well, at that point I'd -- I met up with the crew, who

11 were obviously -- I was still trying to communicate

12 with, obviously, because they'd gone off ahead, and told

13 them that, you know, we'd been given permission to

14 actually go up to try and help these people.

15 Q. Just pausing there, just to recap, were any of your crew

16 members involved in the conversation you had with

17 Mr Glenny?

18 A. No, not as far as I can remember.

19 Q. Just the two of you?

20 A. As far as I can remember, it was just me.

21 Q. So you then reported back to your crew?

22 A. Yes, and then obviously reported to my officer in

23 charge, Ian Berry, and said we were to go up and try and

24 help these people. Then it became a little bit vague,

25 but all I remember was at some point Ian Berry was told

1 to take off his breathing apparatus and he wasn't to
2 enter the building and was to help at ground level,
3 which left the four of us. Initially, we basically
4 donned and started up. The control point hadn't been
5 set up at that point. There was no --

6 Q. If I pause you there because there's a couple of points
7 that you've mentioned in the last answer that you gave.
8 The first was about starting up. That's a reference to
9 starting up breathing apparatus?

10 A. That's correct, yes.

11 Q. If I show you a document that will help us with when you
12 may have started up. Can I ask you to look at two
13 things in this regard. Firstly, on screen there's
14 a document that you very probably will not have seen
15 before. If you want to see it in hard copy -- because
16 the print is quite small -- it's page 1035 in file 3 of
17 the advocates' bundles. (Handed)

18 A. No, I've never seen this before.

19 Q. That's what I expected you to say. You've probably not
20 seen a document that looks like this before either?

21 A. No.

22 Q. You'll know that the breathing apparatus that you wore
23 had a bodyguard system fitted to it, and what this
24 document does is to summarise some of the information
25 recorded by the bodyguard system, in particular the time

1 of starting up, going under air and shutting down. If
2 you look on the right-hand side, the second name under
3 "wearer name" is yours, and then if one looks across
4 that row to where it says "from", as we understand it,
5 the correct time that we should be looking at is the one
6 in bold, which is 17.06.

7 A. Mm-hmm.

8 Q. You can see by reference to that that three of your crew
9 members -- firefighters Stevens, Field and Ford --
10 essentially all started up and went under air at the
11 same time?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Secondly, I'd like you to have a look on the same topic
14 in the jury bundle at tab 14, photograph 20. I think
15 you may have been told this morning --

16 THE CORONER: Sorry, could I just stop you a moment.

17 Members of the jury, those are photographs that were
18 handed in this morning. Have you found them okay? All
19 right.

20 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I think you were told this morning that
21 you may be asked about this photograph?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. So you had an opportunity to look at it before you came
24 into the witness box?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Photograph 21 is a close-up, enlarged view of
2 photograph 20. Can you firstly clarify here that we're
3 looking at an entry control board?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. And that the yellow items which are slotted into it on
6 the left-hand side are key tallies?

7 A. Yes, they are.

8 Q. The first four, or the ones that are shown in photograph
9 21, are those of Firefighter Field, then there's yours,
10 Firefighter Ford and Firefighter Stevens?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. The writing is difficult to make out but if you bear
13 with me, it looks as if it says "London Fire Brigade"
14 and, underneath it, "station: New Cross", and then
15 "name", and then "Hull" for you is written in using some
16 kind of marker; is that right?

17 A. Yes, it's Chinagraph.

18 Q. Thank you. Then we see to the right of it but still on
19 the tally itself "17.14". Do you see that?

20 A. Yes, I do.

21 Q. Can you help us at all with what that is?

22 A. That would be the time that you hand your tally over --
23 that's your entry time to an incident after donning and
24 starting up.

25 Q. Who would write that down?

1 A. That would be the entry control officer.

2 Q. Would he do that in your presence?

3 A. Normally, yes.

4 Q. What I've done is I've shown you two different sources
5 of information. One is what we get from bodyguard,
6 which suggests going under air at 17.06, and then
7 secondly the photograph of your own key tally, which has
8 an entry time of 17.14. Can you help us with whether
9 you think that one of those is inaccurate or whether
10 there is some form of explanation for the gap between
11 17.06 and 17.14?

12 A. Yeah, initially, when I donned and started up, I turned
13 my cylinder on. I was then instructed to go and fetch
14 some equipment to take up with me, which I did before
15 going to the entry control, so I was wearing breathing
16 apparatus while I did it.

17 Q. And drawing on air?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Whilst outside the building?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. For several minutes?

22 A. Apparently so.

23 Q. Is that unusual?

24 A. Very unusual.

25 Q. Obviously it will reduce the amount of air you have

1 available to you once in the building?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And the extent to which it will reduce it will depend on

4 the period of time and how physically demanding the

5 tasks are that you carry out outside the building; is

6 that right?

7 A. Yes, it will.

8 Q. So in broad terms you're not doubting the accuracy of

9 both of those sources of information?

10 A. No, not at all.

11 Q. Were you given any further briefing, advice or

12 directions after that initial conversation with

13 Mr Glenny when there was agreement that you and your

14 crew members would go and try and get the people down

15 off the balcony?

16 A. We was told to make our way up to flat 81.

17 Q. Do you recall who told you that?

18 A. No, I'm afraid not.

19 Q. It wasn't Mr Glenny then?

20 A. As far as I can -- I can't remember, to tell you the

21 truth.

22 Q. You can't remember?

23 A. No, I can't remember where the instruction came from.

24 All I knew is that we were instructed to go to flat 81,

25 where the people on the balcony were meant to be.

1 Q. Do you still have that photograph open in front of you,
2 photograph 20? Can you see that written there it says
3 "location of team" at the top of the column? Do you see
4 that? That's pre-written on the board, "location of
5 team".

6 A. I can, yes. I can't quite read it.

7 Q. What you're trying to do is answer my next question,
8 which is what it says underneath; is that right?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. It looks like "81" is written there, yes?

11 A. "81" or "eighth" is what it looks like to me.

12 Q. And then an arrow, and then something underneath. Can
13 you help us with what it says at all or whether it's
14 a short abbreviation for anything you're familiar with?

15 A. No, it doesn't make any sense.

16 Q. And then the "remarks" column. Anything in that that
17 makes any sense to you?

18 A. That should be, I think, the time of whistle, 17.27.

19 Q. Just on that point, column 2 to the left is headed "Time
20 of whistle". It seems to have "17.34" written in it.

21 A. No, I can't see that, sorry.

22 Q. If you go on to photograph 23, the time of whistle
23 column is a bit clearer because the key tally's now been
24 removed.

25 A. Ah, yes, down the bottom. I see it now, yes.

1 Q. Can you see the "17.34" there?

2 A. Yes, I do.

3 Q. Given that there is a specific column, "Time of
4 whistle", with an entry in it, are you able to help us
5 at all with what the "17.27" in "Remarks" might have
6 been?

7 A. No.

8 Q. But you wouldn't have written in any of this yourself?

9 A. No.

10 Q. Are you able to say if you saw somebody write the "81"
11 and the arrow in or not?

12 A. No, I'd already entered the building by the time,
13 I think, information had been written down on the board.

14 Q. So the initial agreement was you were going to get
15 people off the balcony, and there was then a subsequent
16 direction to go to flat 81. To what extent did you
17 regard those as being the same task or two completely
18 different tasks?

19 A. One and same. Flat 81 was where the people we'd seen on
20 the balcony -- that's what I presumed to believe.

21 Q. Did you presume that or were you told it?

22 A. I wasn't told it; I just presumed it, because they were
23 the only four people visible within the building.

24 Q. You mentioned some while earlier, before we looked at
25 these photographs, something about the entry control not

1 being completely set up; is that right?

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. I'll ask you to look, still in tab 14, at photograph 2.

4 Does that refresh your memory at all of the scene on the

5 east side of the building?

6 A. No.

7 Q. We can tell from the photographs that you found somebody

8 manning entry control with a board, whom you were able

9 to give your key tally to?

10 A. Initially, the -- the entry control had been set up, but

11 although there was a board there I didn't actually,

12 personally myself, check myself into any BA control

13 officer. I just basically took my own tally off and

14 gave it to a fellow firefighter, who I presumed was

15 setting up the control and told him where we was going.

16 Q. Was he wearing anything to indicate that he was an entry

17 control officer?

18 A. I can't remember.

19 Q. So may have been, he may not have been?

20 A. He may have been.

21 Q. You told us that somebody told you to go to flat 81.

22 Did they give you any further direction or advice about

23 where flat 81 was or how to get to it?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Did you ask them?

1 A. I can't remember.

2 Q. You told us that you regarded or presumed that flat 81
3 was one and the same thing as the balcony, in other
4 words that the people on the balcony were connected to
5 flat 81. In your own mind, when you'd gone into the
6 building, were you trying to get to the balcony? In
7 other words, were you trying to find the balcony or were
8 you trying to find flat 81?

9 A. Trying to find -- trying to find the people. So
10 I presumed flat 81 would be on the 8th floor, so
11 initially we was making our way to the balcony, which
12 I presumed was where the flat was.

13 Q. Had you given any thought to how you were going to get
14 to there?

15 A. Via the stairwell.

16 Q. Had you given any thought to whether, for example, you
17 were going to try and get to them by getting to flat 81
18 and walking through it onto the balcony, or whether you
19 were going to try and get onto the balcony and not worry
20 about precisely where flat 81 was?

21 A. Initially just to find -- to find the people. I know it
22 was meant to be flat 81 but we presumed that was the
23 location, so initially it was to try and find the
24 people.

25 Q. Did any senior officers speak to you again after you'd

1 left the entry control area that was being set up and
2 handed in your tallies?

3 A. Yes, there was an officer waiting at the bottom part of
4 the stairwell wearing a white helmet.

5 Q. Just pausing there, when you say "the bottom part of the
6 stairwell", were they inside or outside the building?

7 A. I would have thought on the first -- just on the first
8 floor, on the first initial flight of steps, so actually
9 outside the building.

10 Q. I'll try and assist you with a photograph.

11 A. Yes, it was the top of those stairs.

12 Q. Thank you. Was this an officer that you knew or
13 recognised?

14 A. No, I didn't.

15 Q. Can you assist with describing what they were wearing?

16 A. All I can say -- I didn't know if he had a tabard on.
17 All I remember, he was wearing a white helmet.

18 Q. Did any conversation take place between you and him?

19 A. Yes, he inquired where we were going.

20 Q. What did you say?

21 A. I told him we were going to flat 81 to assist four
22 people that we'd seen on the balcony.

23 Q. Did he say anything in response?

24 A. He said, "You realise all crews have been evacuated from
25 the building?" and who give us permission to go in.

1 Q. How did you respond to that?

2 A. I told him that it was Paul Glenny who had given us the
3 okay and that our initial task was to go to flat 81 to
4 assist the four people.

5 Q. Was there any discussion with him about where flat 81
6 was or how to get to it?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Whilst you were with him, did you have any further
9 discussion?

10 A. Yeah, well, he radioed through to make sure that we'd
11 been given permission.

12 Q. Did you say he radioed or you did?

13 A. No, he did. I can't remember what the exact
14 conversation was but it then evolved that if we could
15 get to another flat as well to assist someone that was
16 on the phone to Fire Brigade control. Flat 56, if I
17 remember rightly.

18 Q. So just pausing there, he made radio contact with
19 someone?

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. Were you able to hear what he said?

22 A. If I -- if I did, I don't remember the exact wording.

23 Q. Were you close enough to him to hear what this officer
24 in the white helmet was saying over the radio?

25 A. Well, basically just asking permission if it's okay for

1 us to go in, which -- obviously, he wasn't just gonna
2 take my word. I think he had to get permission from
3 a senior officer.

4 Q. Could you, at the time, hear what was being said in
5 reply?

6 A. No.

7 Q. So you were dependent on what the officer who you were
8 with said to you?

9 A. Correct.

10 Q. Can you recall what he did say to you?

11 A. He said -- I think initially it was that the only crews
12 now in the building was going to be West Norwood --
13 sorry, New Cross' pump ladder, which I was part of, and
14 we were gonna be the only crews in the building.

15 Q. Did you get any impression about whether he was saying
16 as a matter of fact you were the only crews in the
17 building or whether there was an instruction that you
18 were the only crews in the building?

19 A. I was under the impression that all the crews had been
20 withdrawn and we were in fact going to be the only crew
21 in there, going up to flat 81 to assist the people on
22 the balcony.

23 Q. I think you mentioned another flat number a moment ago?

24 A. Flat 56.

25 Q. What was said about flat 56?

1 A. That there was a lady in there that was on the phone to
2 control and if possible to go and see if we could help
3 her.

4 Q. If I can try and be a little clearer with you about
5 this, because we're dealing with an emergency situation
6 where there is a fixed hierarchy and people have the
7 ability to give instructions and orders flowing from
8 a command function. What you've just said was something
9 about checking flat 56 if possible. Did you regard
10 yourself as being given an order or an instruction this
11 time?

12 A. I would put it as an instruction. Initially our plans
13 were to get to flat 81, where we knew definitely that
14 four people were in distress.

15 Q. That's what you said, and that was in itself
16 an instruction you'd been given, wasn't it?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. And that was a brief you'd been given when you passed
19 entry control?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. So after you'd had this discussion with the officer with
22 the white helmet, what did you regard your instructions
23 as being?

24 A. My priority was to get to flat 81. We knew the lady in
25 flat 56 was obviously in the building but didn't seem to

1 be in too much of a distress.

2 Q. Did you consider your instructions had given you

3 an order in which you should carry out these tasks?

4 A. No, I didn't take it as a direct order that we had to

5 get to flat 56. It was just if it was possible to.

6 Q. What I was getting at was did you interpret your

7 instructions as being flat 81 first, flat 56 second?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. Was anything further said before you began to make your

10 way up the stairs, leaving the officer with the white

11 helmet behind?

12 A. No.

13 Q. So as at that point in time, did you and your crew

14 regard your task as being: rescue the people in flat 81

15 first, and deal with flat 56 secondly if possible?

16 A. That was in my mind.

17 Q. What about your crew members, or can you not say?

18 A. We didn't really discuss it.

19 Q. Madam, that would be a convenient moment?

20 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you very much. We'll have a break

21 now, members of the jury, until just gone 2 o'clock.

22 Mr Hull, because you're part way through giving your

23 evidence, you must not talk to anyone about your

24 evidence or indeed about this matter, so the safest

25 option is to have lunch by yourself.

1 A. Yes, madam.

2 THE CORONER: Thank you.

3 Members of the jury, back just after 2 o'clock,
4 please. Yes, Mr Hull, if you could be back just after
5 2, thank you.

6 (1.04 pm)

7 (The short adjournment)

8 (2.02 pm)

9 THE CORONER: Thank you, do sit down. Yes, Mr Hull, do
10 replenish your water if you want to. You're giving your
11 evidence on oath.

12 (In the presence of the Jury)

13 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you, Mr Maxwell-Scott.

14 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good afternoon, Mr Hull. We'd just
15 reached the point in your evidence where you had parted
16 company with the officer in the white helmet at the top
17 of the stairs that we see in photo 6 and were ready to
18 make your way up the staircase. Did you and your crew
19 members then walk up the stairs together?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. You explained to the jury before the lunch adjournment
22 that you were looking for flat 81 as your first task and
23 that if possible you would also go afterwards to
24 flat 56.

25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. Can I ask you to look at a couple of photographs on the
2 screen that show some signage within the central
3 staircase. These are photographs taken after the event.
4 This is in the central staircase, photo 9 on the first
5 floor. You can see a sign on the wall. That's
6 a close-up of it.

7 Then this is a close-up of a similar sign. As you
8 can see, photograph 16 says "3rd floor, 15-28". My
9 understanding is that there are similar signs to this on
10 the odd-numbered floors -- perhaps to be more precise,
11 relating to the odd-numbered floors. So in other words
12 there's a sign that says "1st floor", a sign that says
13 "3rd floor", a sign that says "5th floor" and so on.
14 Did you notice any such signs on your way up the stairs,
15 looking for flat 81?

16 A. No, I don't remember. I don't remember seeing any
17 signs.

18 Q. What was the visibility like in the staircase as you
19 made your way up from ground floor level? In
20 particular, how smokey was it?

21 A. Very -- very little smoke at all.

22 Q. How were you hoping to find flat 81? Did you have any
23 view on which floor it would be on?

24 A. Well, I presumed it was gonna be on the 8th floor.
25 I couldn't speak for everybody else but I didn't realise

1 that the flats were actually two storey at the time.

2 Q. Do you recall what floor was the first floor that you

3 stopped on on the way up?

4 A. It must have been -- we -- well, I remember going up

5 eight -- about 11 flights of stairs, thinking that that

6 might be the level, because at that point we were going

7 upstairs and we couldn't -- we sort of lost an actual

8 location of which floor we was actually on in relevance

9 to the flat numbers.

10 Q. Am I right in thinking from your previous answers that

11 that wasn't because of smoke and poor visibility?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Are you able to recall which floor you found yourself on

14 when you first stopped?

15 A. Initially, no. It was only after I -- I went off to

16 investigate and found door numbers that I realised what

17 floor we were on.

18 Q. What floor were you on?

19 A. On the 5th. Well, sorry, the floor where flat number 56

20 was.

21 Q. So you made your way up the stairs with decent

22 visibility --

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. -- without pausing, and in due course you came to

25 a corridor which had on it flat 56, amongst others?

1 A. We didn't -- I didn't actually see the sign for that
2 floor. All we did -- we stopped to sort of -- to
3 communicate with each other, at which point I --
4 I removed my face mask to actually communicate with the
5 guys, 'cos I was -- I wanted to know if they was as
6 confused as I was.

7 Q. Just working backwards, so that we're clear about this,
8 the corridor that you ended up on had on it flat 56. Is
9 that right?

10 A. No, it was -- we stopped actually on the stairwell and
11 we had a choice of two ways to go. There was a short
12 flight of steps up to a fire door, which was the side of
13 the -- where you entered the building and then there was
14 another way going off to the left, which obviously led
15 round to the doors where I found flat 56.

16 Q. Let me show you a couple more photographs that may
17 assist. I'll take you back to photograph 9. This is on
18 the screen.

19 A. Okay.

20 Q. That's 1st floor level and those are doors leading from
21 the central stairwell to a lobby on the 1st floor.
22 This, now, is the 2nd floor level, again central
23 stairwell, with a slightly different set of doors
24 leading off it. My understanding is that this
25 represents the doors on even-numbered floors,

1 photograph 15, whereas photograph 9 is doors on the
2 odd-numbered floors. Does that help you at all to
3 recognise --

4 A. It does to an extent, and the fact that we was on
5 an even floor -- there was no sign there to say which
6 floor we was on, which made it more confusing for us.

7 Q. The even-numbered floors don't have central corridors
8 and don't have a means of access to flats inside the
9 building. Did you go through, do you think, a door like
10 this on an even-numbered floor?

11 A. Well, that -- that door, I seem to remember, was the one
12 we -- we tried to get into and we'd found that we
13 couldn't open it, at which point I -- one of us -- I'm
14 not sure who it was -- found an axe, a fireman's axe
15 just laying on the floor, and I kind of remember saying
16 to one of the guys: "If you smash the -- we'll smash the
17 window. Maybe we can gain access to it." So we smashed
18 the side glass panel there, which was wired safety
19 glass. I can't remember whether I did it or not or one
20 of the other guys, but I remember leaving the three of
21 them there once we had gained access and I said I'd go
22 through the opposite door at the other end of this smoke
23 lobby to see exactly -- if I could, you know, find out
24 where we were. It was at that point I found we was on
25 flat numbers 52 up to 56, I think it was.

1 Q. Just pausing there to help you with the layout, if you
2 went from a lobby along an internal corridor, you must
3 have been on an odd-numbered floor.

4 A. Okay.

5 Q. That corridor that you've described going along, was
6 that the one that turned out to have flat 56 on it?

7 A. Yes, it was.

8 Q. What was the first flat number that you remember seeing?

9 A. I'm not quite sure. I know it was in the -- in the
10 lower 50s, but the first thing that I -- once I went
11 through on my own through the -- the other door, was
12 seeing a flat on my left completely burnt out, burnt
13 right through, the windows. The -- the entrance door
14 and everything was completely gone, and smoke and small
15 seats of fire visible through the doorway.

16 Q. I've put up on screen now photograph 11. This shows to
17 the left a door from the central stairwell. It's taken
18 from a lobby area between the north and south corridor
19 and the photograph shows a door leading onto a corridor
20 which has flats on it.

21 A. Right, okay. It doesn't look familiar but I knew the
22 door I went through was propped open, so maybe that's
23 why I don't recognise the door in that situation.

24 Q. If you take up the jury bundle at tab 11, page 1. This
25 is a representation of Lakanal House looking from the

1 west side, showing the flat numbers, and the way it
2 works is if you look at the 7th floor, north corridor,
3 numbers 51, 53 and 55 are on the left of the corridor.
4 A. Yes.
5 Q. And numbers 52, 54 and 56 have their front doors also on
6 the 7th floor but on the right-hand side of the
7 corridor.
8 A. Yes, that makes sense.
9 Q. You've just described seeing a flat on the left that was
10 completely burnt out.
11 A. That would have been flat 51, I'm pretty sure.
12 Q. I think it's actually flat 53, but close enough.
13 A. Okay.
14 Q. What I'm just checking with you is when you first
15 noticed flat numbers to give you some indication of
16 where you were, because as I understand it, you didn't,
17 at this time, know precisely what floor you were on?
18 A. That's correct.
19 Q. I think your evidence was you saw flat numbers in the
20 low 50s?
21 A. That's correct.
22 Q. When you saw flat numbers in the low 50s, did you think
23 to yourself at all: "We're in the wrong place, we're
24 meant to be going to flat 81"?
25 A. To tell you the truth, I was just glad we'd actually

1 found one of the flats that we were possibly going to
2 get to help people, so once I saw flat 56, that then
3 became a priority to me.

4 Q. Over flat 81?

5 A. At the time.

6 Q. So did you then make your way to flat 56?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Which was the last flat on right?

9 A. That's correct.

10 Q. What did you do when you got to the front door?

11 A. Knocked the door. The door was closed.

12 Q. What response did you get from the occupant?

13 A. A lady opened the door. Obviously -- she was on the
14 phone, I think, at the time to -- I don't know who,
15 possibly the Fire Brigade control, but she invited me in
16 and then I suddenly realised -- I saw a flight of stairs
17 in front of me which she lead me up to the next level --
18 suddenly realised we were dealing with flats on two
19 levels.

20 Q. Just pausing there, you go through the front door. What
21 are the conditions in there like?

22 A. Clear. The lobby in front of me was quite heavily
23 smoke-logged, but when she opened the door the flat was
24 actually quite clear.

25 Q. So does it follow from that that objectively speaking,

1 she is not in any immediate danger?

2 A. Correct.

3 Q. Turning to how she was subjectively, how did she seem?

4 How was her mood?

5 A. Quite stressed.

6 Q. Did she ask for anything?

7 A. I can't remember. I remember removing my face mask

8 again to -- to give her some sort of reassurance that

9 she was safe, but what I -- our conversation was I can't

10 quite remember.

11 Q. What did you do after that initial conversation?

12 A. I initially -- I told her to -- I was gonna leave --

13 leave her there and then I was gonna come back and take

14 her to safety.

15 Q. What was your plan at that stage? What were you

16 planning to do next?

17 A. Well, I initially thought that if I go back to the other

18 three crew members -- my low pressure warning whistle on

19 my breathing apparatus set was starting to activate,

20 which gave me --

21 Q. That's why I want to pause. Before the low pressure

22 warning activated, what was your plan?

23 A. To go back to the crew of three in the lobby and -- and

24 possibly -- and split the crew up so two went off to

25 flat 81 and two of us took this lady down.

1 Q. Just so we're clear, was that what you were planning to
2 do before the low air warning went off?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. So the crew would be split, two would take her down from
5 56 immediately and two would go up to 81?

6 A. That -- that was what I was thinking, yes.

7 Q. That decision, to some extent, was made for you by the
8 low air warning then going off; is that right?

9 A. That contributed to it, yes.

10 Q. What would the implications be of the low air warning
11 going off for the prospect of the entire crew going up
12 to 81?

13 A. Well initially, I -- because when you enter a building
14 your tally gives you a time out, which means you have
15 a safety -- safety zone on your breathing apparatus set,
16 and once your whistle starts activating, you've
17 basically got up to about ten minutes of air left, and
18 I felt that if I didn't return back to control, it would
19 then have presumed that I'd been involved in the fire
20 and I was in some sort of danger.

21 Q. Did you think about whether it would be possible to go
22 to flat 81 even though your low air warning had gone
23 off?

24 A. I didn't wish to because if I had no air I possibly
25 could have been no use if we needed to put breathing

1 apparatus back on.

2 Q. Is that something you thought about at the time?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Would it have been possible for you to go on your own
5 down from the 7th floor or not?

6 A. It would have been possible, but the fact we'd gone in
7 as a crew of four and then split up into two crews --
8 two crews of two, which is, in brigade orders, not
9 allowed to do -- you go in as one crew, you come out as
10 one crew -- I thought that if at least we split up into
11 two lots of two, we had back up on each other in case
12 anything went wrong.

13 Q. So is it your evidence that splitting the four of you
14 into two pairs was contrary to standard operating
15 procedures?

16 A. Yes, absolutely.

17 Q. And splitting into a group of three and then you on your
18 own would be more contrary, if I can put it that way, to
19 standard operating procedures?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. So what did you do and what happened to the lady in flat
22 56?

23 A. Well, initially I -- I discussed -- I thought at the
24 time Wendy was going to accompany me because it was --
25 I could see she was getting a bit stressed.

1 Q. Is that Firefighter Stevens?

2 A. Firefighter Stevens, sorry, yes. She seemed very
3 stressed. It was her first major fire, and the fact
4 that she was -- the other two crew members with us were
5 people she was unfamiliar with, I felt maybe I should
6 keep her with me, just for safety reasons, just to keep
7 an eye on her.

8 Q. So in terms of choosing who would pair up with you,
9 that's why you chose her?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. What did the two of you do?

12 A. We went -- proceeded back to flat 56, knocked the --
13 knocked on the door again. The lady opened. I then
14 took her inside and told her what -- what the plan was.
15 I got a towel and soaked it in water and told her to put
16 it over her face, 'cos the -- the corridor was still
17 quite heavily smoke-logged and then led her -- led her
18 down the corridor into the smoke --

19 Q. Pausing there, you described what you did with the
20 towel. Do you think that was necessary or just
21 a sensible precaution?

22 A. It's -- you find it easier to breathe. It seems to
23 restrict the fumes going through that you're actually
24 going to take into your lungs. It acts as a filter. So
25 that's why I -- you know, I thought it was a good idea.

1 The fact that we were both wearing breathing apparatus
2 and the lady wasn't, I thought if I instructed her to do
3 this it might put her mind at ease a little bit.

4 Q. Did you then make your way downstairs with her and with
5 Firefighter Wendy Stevens?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Were there any difficulties or problems with smokey
8 conditions on the way down?

9 A. No, the further we got down the easier it became.

10 Q. When you got out of the building, did you have any
11 conversation or debrief with anybody?

12 A. No.

13 Q. What did you do after you and Firefighter Stevens got
14 out of the building?

15 A. Well, the -- the ambulance -- an ambulance crew took the
16 lady away and then we were told to go back to the fire
17 engine and change the cylinders on our breathing
18 apparatus.

19 Q. Is that what you did?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Did you need some time to recover or were you in
22 reasonable condition?

23 A. We were very confused, and I remember we -- we got back
24 to the -- the fire appliance and we took ten minutes
25 out, taking on water and actually discussing what --

1 what had actually happened, but the actual conversation
2 I can't remember word for word. But it was -- I could
3 see she was -- that Wendy was quite distressed, so
4 I was -- I think I was reassuring her.

5 Q. You were not committed back into the building in
6 breathing apparatus; is that right?

7 A. Well, we did on -- we did a test with a new cylinder.
8 When you take a breathing apparatus set out, you have to
9 test it.

10 Q. Fire ground test A?

11 A. Yes. If I remember rightly, it was a C test, which
12 isn't logged anywhere, but it's just something you do,
13 and I remember going back to the -- which was then the
14 BA control which was then set up. We were then told to
15 take our breathing apparatus off and go into a holding
16 area.

17 Q. Did you have any discussion at that stage -- or indeed
18 at any stage -- about what you had done in the building
19 and what your two crew members still in the building
20 were doing?

21 A. I can't recall.

22 Q. You may have done, but you don't know?

23 A. Very possibly, yes.

24 Q. Some time later, did you see casualties being carried
25 out of the building and attempts being made to give CPR?

1 A. Yes, we -- I'd actually met up with Dave Ford and the
2 other guy from Whitechapel, Wayne, and they -- they told
3 me that they'd got the four people out, which I thought:
4 good job. You know, we had basically gone in there and
5 done what had been asked of us, and we were standing
6 around chatting. I can't remember what the length of
7 time was but then I -- I saw someone carrying a baby
8 down the stairs doing CPR on the -- on the baby. I --
9 I think it was a paramedic, if I remember rightly.

10 Q. My final question is: looking back over your involvement
11 that afternoon, what single additional thing do you
12 think would have helped you most on the day of the fire
13 to carry out the tasks that were given to you?

14 A. I think personally that the jobs we were given we did to
15 the best of our ability. It's just unfortunate the way
16 circumstances ended up and people lost their lives, but
17 I think as far as I was concerned -- I wouldn't say
18 proud but glad I was there, really.

19 Q. Thank you very much. Those are my questions, but others
20 may have questions for you.

21 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Edwards?

22 Questions by MR EDWARDS

23 MR EDWARDS: Thank you. I'm acting on behalf of some of the
24 families.

25 Mr Hull, I just want to start by taking you back to

1 the beginning of your evidence. You probably recall
2 that you gave a statement about what happened at
3 Lakanal House to the police, and we have that at
4 page 390 of the witness statements bundle. Can I ask
5 that Mr Hull be given that, please. (Handed)

6 You can see the date is 28 July 2009. Do you
7 remember making this statement, giving this statement?

8 A. Yes, I do.

9 Q. Turn to the third page, which is page 391, please. What
10 you do in the second paragraph of 391 is you're talking
11 about your arrival at Lakanal House. About six/seven
12 lines into the lower paragraph, this is your reference
13 to this being something like a scene from a Die Hard
14 film set. You then go on, a couple of lines after that,
15 to say:

16 "I saw that there appeared to be four different
17 seats of fire and they didn't at first look to be
18 connected to each other. Because of this, my first
19 thought was that this was an arson attack. I saw that
20 two windows or possibly two flats were [that should
21 probably say 'alight'] high up on the block. I now know
22 this was on the 13th floor."

23 It's probably not correct that it was the 13th
24 floor, but don't worry about that for the moment.
25 I just want to ask you about what you saw, what you

1 remember seeing, when you first arrived, particularly
2 when you say two flats were alight high up on the block.
3 Are you able to recall whether it was two flats
4 immediately next to each other or one above another?

5 A. I think one of the seats was -- it looked like about
6 four windows alight above each other, and then there was
7 another window off to the -- as you were looking at it,
8 onto the left, which was alight as well, which
9 I couldn't connect with, you know, getting involved with
10 the other two or the other seat of fire I saw.

11 Q. Thank you. It may help you if I turn you to the jury
12 bundle, tab 13, page 5, or possibly even to tab 14,
13 page 1, which will be easier for you, because there the
14 building is still alight.

15 A. Okay.

16 Q. Is that the sort of view you could see when you arrived?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. And where you say "two flats alight high up on the
19 block" -- or you said four windows a moment ago -- are
20 you talking about what we can see, the flats at the top
21 of this?

22 A. Top right. Top right with the signs of flame coming
23 out, yes.

24 Q. I appreciate I'm asking you to look at this now in the
25 cold light of day, more than three years later, but if

1 you look at the upper flats that are alight, the upper
2 flames, looking at it now, does that look more clearly
3 like two flats than just two windows?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. You then told Mr Maxwell-Scott about seeing a family on
6 a balcony, and you've set this out at page 392 of your
7 witness statement, the bottom paragraph. I probably
8 don't need to take you through that line by line but if
9 I can summarise what you say there. What you said to
10 Mr Maxwell-Scott is you were alerted to a family that
11 were standing on the balcony because you heard some sort
12 of commotion. Then you and your crew went and looked at
13 that family. You were looking straight at them.

14 A. I was -- I was with the -- the fire investigation
15 officer on the other side of the building when we heard
16 a lot of shouting and commotion, and it was the two of
17 us that went round it. I wasn't with my crew when I
18 first spotted them.

19 Q. Right. Did your crew join you later while you were
20 standing with the fire investigation officer looking at
21 the family?

22 A. I think at that point, where -- after we'd seen -- we'd
23 seen the family in distress, I then spoke to Paul
24 Glenny, the senior officer with a white helmet, and
25 that's when we had the discussion about: someone needs

1 to get up there and try and help these people. It was
2 after that -- some time after that point I met up with
3 the rest of my team.

4 Q. Paul Glenny, when you were speaking to him, could he see
5 the family on the balcony?

6 A. Absolutely.

7 Q. Yes. So it sounds as if -- correct me if I am wrong --
8 you see the family on the balcony first with the fire
9 investigation officer. Paul Glenny is not with you at
10 that moment?

11 A. I can't remember. I remember meeting up with him but at
12 the time when I first saw them, I don't think he was in
13 my presence.

14 Q. You decided effectively that you had to go up and rescue
15 this family?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Then you spoke to Paul Glenny about this and he
18 essentially agreed you have to rescue this family?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Now, at that point you could see them, you could see
21 they were on a balcony, but presumably you had no other
22 information about where this family were other than what
23 you could see?

24 A. Yeah, that's -- all I could see was they was on
25 a balcony high up.

1 Q. I appreciate that it may be difficult to remember, but
2 I'm trying to get clear in my mind what your plan was.
3 You've seen a family on a balcony. You've decided with
4 Paul Glenny that you have to go into this building to
5 try and rescue them. It appears to me there's only one
6 way you could do that, and that's by looking at where
7 they are in the building, counting up the number of
8 floors, and saying, "Ah, they are on this floor. I have
9 to get to this floor"?

10 A. That's correct, yeah.

11 Q. Can I just ask you to look back at tab 14, photo
12 number 1 of the jury bundle. I appreciate this doesn't
13 show the family but to work out where the family are,
14 you have to physically count the number of floors?

15 A. Which photo is this, 14 number 1?

16 Q. Tab 14, photo number 1.

17 A. The actual family were on the opposite side of the
18 building, so this picture is no --

19 Q. I appreciate that. The reason I'm showing you this is
20 I think it's the clearest photo we have, unless someone
21 else can help with a clearer one. But you can see the
22 floors are clearly visible on this photo, and if you're
23 counting up to a certain floor, you could probably do it
24 one of two ways. If you don't know the flats are
25 maisonettes, it might be logical just to count the

1 balcony and assume each balcony is a floor?

2 A. Yeah, that's correct, yeah.

3 Q. And if you did know the flats were maisonettes -- and
4 I appreciate you didn't at this point, when you were
5 outside the balcony -- you count the balconies and each
6 balcony would be two floors?

7 A. That's correct, yeah.

8 Q. We know now that the family were on the 12th floor, the
9 family you saw. We also know that at this point you
10 didn't know the flats were maisonettes. Is it likely
11 you would have counted up six balconies -- it's the 12th
12 floor, so six balconies -- and thought they were on the
13 6th floor?

14 A. No. To tell you the truth, once we was told that they
15 was gonna be in flat 81, I took it upon myself to think
16 it would be on the 8th floor, which is the way most
17 flats work. You know, they have 81 on the 8th, 51 on
18 the 5th. That's the way my mind was working at the
19 time.

20 Q. Can I just have a look at your statement which you gave
21 to the police at the time. Page 392, where we were
22 a moment ago. At the bottom paragraph, you set out the
23 family and that you've seen them. Over the page,
24 please. At the top paragraph, you give a little bit
25 more information about the family. Then, at the second

1 paragraph, you say:

2 "Between us, me and my crew decided we had to get to
3 where this family was, so we went round to the staircase
4 on the other side. I then saw Station Manager Paul
5 Glenny, who I've known since initial training, and we
6 said words to the effect that we had to go in to get the
7 family out. We were a crew of four from New Cross."

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. So it looks as if what you're saying there is you saw
10 the family on one side, then you went round to the
11 staircase on the other side and it's there you see Paul
12 Glenny.

13 A. No, that's not correct. Obviously, I've been misquoted
14 there or I've said it wrong. We definitely --
15 definitely I saw the balcony -- saw the people on the
16 balcony on the same side as the entrance staircase.
17 They were on the same side. And I wasn't with my crew;
18 I was with Stuart Whitmore, definitely.

19 Q. Okay. Is it right that you personally had decided you
20 needed to rescue the family before you spoke to Paul
21 Glenny about it?

22 A. I think at that point, within a very short space of
23 time, I thought I needed -- there needed for something
24 to be done, and when I saw Paul, because he was
25 a colleague from all my career, I suggested to him that

1 maybe, you know, one crew should go up there and try and
2 help them and I was quite willing to volunteer.

3 Q. Still in that paragraph, what you say is:

4 "I then saw station manager Paul Glenny, who I've
5 known since initial training, and we said words to the
6 effect that we had to go in to get the family out. We
7 were a crew of four from New Cross. He gave the okay
8 for us to go up. By now, Wendy and I had met with the
9 rest of our crew but I'm not sure when this was. I put
10 my BA mask on ready to go in when Paul Glenny came over
11 and said to take a hose and branch with us and to go to
12 flat 81."

13 From reading this statement, it looks as though
14 there's two stages to this process: the first is that
15 you discuss it with Paul Glenny and you decide to rescue
16 the balcony family. He gives you the okay to go up, you
17 put your BA mask on and you're about to go up. That's
18 the first stage.

19 The second stage is then Paul Glenny comes over to
20 you and says, "Hold on, you need to do some extra
21 things. One is take a hose and branch with you. The
22 other is go to flat 81."

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. You simply assumed, as you said earlier, that flat 81
25 was the same as the balcony family?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Did you have any particular reason to do that, or is
3 that just something that, in the heat of the moment,
4 perhaps understandably, you assumed?

5 A. Well, the fact that we were discussing the people that
6 needed help, and then we got the flat number, you just
7 put two and two together, really, and come up with that
8 must be the flat, you know. They're outside on the
9 balcony. But no-one -- no-one confirmed it. I just
10 took it upon myself that -- why would you want to go to
11 flat 81 and not go and rescue these people that are
12 in -- you know, these other people that are in distress.

13 Q. You've given evidence about ascending the building.
14 Before you go on to actually ascend the building, you
15 said that you spoke to Paul Glenny. Then we can see in
16 your witness statement, on page 393, the second last
17 paragraph, you say just before you go up:
18 "I then heard a radio message saying all crews to
19 evacuate apart from New Cross going to 81."
20 And at that point you were told to check flat 56 as
21 well?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. I don't know whether you can remember that radio message
24 now?

25 A. I can, yeah. I think the radio message came from the

1 guy who was standing at the top of the stairs, who was
2 initially -- I didn't know, but he was the one that
3 asked us where we were going, and I think when he
4 radioed through to get the all clear, I think that might
5 have been the message that came back.

6 Q. You then said you went to try and find a hose to take up
7 with you and some equipment to take up with you.

8 I think it's right that you couldn't find a spare hose?

9 A. Yeah. This was before the encounter with the guy on the
10 stairs. This was initially.

11 Q. Right. You also said that you kept your breathing
12 apparatus on while you did that?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. We can see you talk about this at page 394 of your
15 witness statement. Forgive me, that's the wrong
16 reference. Don't worry about that for the moment. You
17 go and try and find this hose, and you said you kept
18 your breathing apparatus on?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Was there some operational reason on to keep your
21 breathing apparatus on?

22 A. Yes, because once you've started up and your tally's
23 been handed over, then if you take your mask off then
24 the calculations for the amount of time you can be in
25 a incident goes out the window. So therefore as far as

1 the control -- the breathing -- you know, the BA control
2 was, if I'd have took my mask off for five minutes, then
3 I gave myself five minutes longer but as far as they
4 were concerned, I had already used up -- expanded that
5 amount of air, so it becomes a safety issue.

6 Q. Okay. Just talking about you climbing up the building,
7 Mr Maxwell-Scott showed you a few minutes ago some
8 signs. If I can ask you to turn to tab 13 of the jury
9 bundle, please, page 9. You can see this is one example
10 of a sign. This is on an odd-numbered floor, and you
11 can see a sign at the top right with "1st floor" and
12 flat numbers on it. Over the page at page 10 is
13 an enlargement of that sign.

14 So I think you can take it from me there are signs
15 on every odd-numbered floor with flat numbers for that
16 floor in the staircase area. You'll have to take it
17 from me that there are also signs on the landing of the
18 staircase of every even-numbered floor for the floor
19 you're about to reach. So there's a sign on the
20 landing's of the second floor staircase, leading up from
21 the second floor to the 3rd floor, saying "3rd floor"
22 and some flat numbers. There's then another sign
23 immediately by the doors on the 3rd floor like we're
24 looking at on page 9. There's also another identical
25 sign in the lift lobby. So if that helps you, it's as

1 you go through these doors here. Every floor by the
2 lifts there's another identical sign facing the lifts,
3 and I don't think we have a photograph in this bundle of
4 those signs.

5 THE CORONER: Mr Edwards, I do think we need to be a little
6 bit clear about which signs you're talking to Mr Hull
7 about. You should be doing it by reference to
8 photographs, otherwise we're going to get muddled. I'd
9 like you, please, to take him to the photographs of the
10 signs you were talking about on the even-numbered
11 floors.

12 MR EDWARDS: There aren't any in here.

13 THE CORONER: No.

14 MR EDWARDS: I'm not sure I can do any better than that,
15 madam.

16 THE CORONER: Very well.

17 MR EDWARDS: I'm putting to this witness that to get to flat
18 56 he would have to have walked up to the 8th floor and
19 therefore should have passed something like eight signs.

20 A. Well, if it's every other floor, it would have been four
21 signs, surely?

22 Q. Yes, I'm saying every other floor but there's also
23 a sign on the even-numbered floor telling you the flat
24 numbers of the floor you're about to reach.

25 THE CORONER: Well, can you just get to your point,

1 Mr Edwards? This is not a memory test for Mr Hull.

2 MR EDWARDS: It sounds as if you didn't notice eight signs.

3 A. Very possibly. All I remember is us getting -- well,

4 myself getting very confused with the amount of floors

5 we seemed to be going up and not actually getting to --

6 getting to our destination. I think where the confusion

7 came in was not realising that each flat had two floors.

8 So you thought you was going to the 8th floor, where

9 flat 81 is, you went up eight flights of stairs, which

10 we seemed to have gone past. So that's where confusion

11 set in for me. I can't remember observing it -- I must

12 have seen some of the signs, but then not seeing signs

13 every other floor I think confused me more.

14 Q. You've talked about when you reached flat 56.

15 Effectively, it sounds as if what happened is you found

16 flat 56 by accident. That wasn't your priority?

17 A. Yes, absolutely.

18 Q. You then said you went to flat 56 and we can see you

19 discuss that at page 394 of your statement.

20 THE CORONER: Can you get to the point, please, Mr Edwards?

21 MR EDWARDS: Yes, madam, I'm coming to the point. About

22 halfway down page 394, you talk about going into

23 flat 56. You say:

24 "I remember the lady in flat 56 was speaking to

25 someone on the phone. She immediately led me upstairs

1 to the lounge area and I saw the kitchen was up there
2 too. I told her I'd be back and I reassured her."
3 So you go upstairs in flat 56?
4 A. Yes.
5 Q. And at this point you realise they're maisonettes?
6 A. Yes.
7 Q. Did you realise as well, going up the stairs, that the
8 lounge area looked out onto both sides of the building?
9 A. No, I wasn't aware of that.
10 Q. Did you make any connection between the lounge area
11 floor and the balconies that you see from the outside?
12 A. No.
13 Q. This is when your low air sounds and you go and tell the
14 rest of your crew to continue to flat 81 while you go
15 downstairs?
16 A. Yes.
17 Q. Do you remember whether you told the rest of your crew
18 that the flats were maisonettes?
19 A. I can't remember. I don't think I did.
20 Q. One further point on your statement, please. Page 395,
21 please. The bottom paragraph at page 395. This is when
22 you're outside, after you've already been in. You say:
23 "At some point I saw and heard a guy of maybe mixed
24 race appearance. He had tanned skin. He was shouting
25 about his family and why weren't we doing anything.

1 I had to grab hold of him with some other guys to stop
2 him going into the block."

3 I said this was outside after you'd been in. It's
4 obviously outside but are you able to recall whether
5 that was before you went in or --

6 A. No, that was after -- that was after when we was
7 basically told to go in the waiting area, and then --
8 I was walking around handing water out, I think, or
9 doing menial tasks -- I can't remember -- and then we
10 noticed this guy causing a bit of a commotion and
11 shouting, handing out abuse, which -- rightly so after
12 we found out who he was, but at the time we didn't know
13 what he was doing, and he needed restraining because we
14 thought he might run into the building.

15 Q. Are you able to recall whether he said anything about
16 any flat numbers or floor numbers?

17 A. No.

18 Q. Finally, you were asked about the single thing which
19 would help you most by Mr Maxwell-Scott. Perhaps if
20 I can suggest to you that a plan of the building would
21 have been helpful?

22 A. Yes, very possibly, but it was a very, very weird -- in
23 my whole career as a fireman, this has been the
24 strangest incident I've ever been to and all the worst
25 things could have happened.

1 Q. Thank you.

2 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Dowden.

3 Questions by MR DOWDEN

4 MR DOWDEN: Good afternoon, my name's Dowden and I ask
5 questions on behalf of a bereaved family. I'd just like
6 to take you to the point when you were speaking to
7 Mr Glenny about to go in. You've told us that you were
8 tasked as a crew of four to go up initially to 81 and
9 that's because you were concerned about the family there
10 and you wanted to bring them down. When you were also
11 asked to go to flat 56, did it cross your mind that you
12 may have also had to effect a rescue at 56?

13 A. Very possibly.

14 Q. And given that you were committed as a crew of four and
15 you've told us that you'd be expected to go in and come
16 out as a crew of four, did you not mention to Mr Glenny
17 that you thought: "Well, we have a task as it is. Do
18 you have another crew you can send into 56?"

19 A. I think at the time there was a lot of -- lot of
20 confusion going on, and the fact that we was, I think,
21 the only crew that was actually being committed into the
22 building, it might have been an afterthought that seeing
23 as we was going up to flat 81, if we came across flat 56
24 maybe we could offer assistance.

25 Q. Thank you.

1 THE CORONER: Thank you. Ms Al Tai.

2 MS AL TAI: No thank you.

3 THE CORONER: Mr Compton.

4 Questions by MR COMPTON

5 MR COMPTON: Just a short matter, please. Ben Compton.

6 I act for Apollo Property Services. It's really about
7 the weather conditions. You deal with this in your
8 statement at page 392. Perhaps we could just take to
9 you that second paragraph.

10 As we know, these events were much fresher in your
11 mind when the statement was taken. This is when you're
12 walking over to the block, and would this be correct:
13 that you were conscious of the fact that it was a very
14 hot day?

15 A. That's correct.

16 Q. And also that it was quite breezy?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. And when you were standing looking up at the fires, you
19 were conscious of the wind, I think, blowing from your
20 right over to the left?

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. Across the front of the block. Would that be right?

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. Thank you. Was the wind coming in gusts?

25 A. I would say more -- more like swirling.

1 Q. Let's just see what you put in your statement, because
2 I can cut it short. Forgive me.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. "The wind was coming in gusts and was spiralling that
5 was causing really weird smoke patterns."

6 A. That's correct.

7 Q. Does that sum it up?

8 A. Yes, it was blowing the smoke down. I'd never seen that
9 before.

10 Q. Yes. Exactly. You say that in your statement. You
11 recall seeing smoke actually going downwards from one of
12 the windows?

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. And there was also, you could see, some melted plastic
15 coming down as well, that was alright, and also being
16 blown across the face of the building?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. At an angle of about 45 degrees?

19 A. Something like that, yes.

20 Q. This is a very short point, and stop me if I'm wrong,
21 but as far as you're training is concerned, are
22 firefighters made aware that these sort of tall
23 buildings can almost create their own type of weather
24 pattern in the way that the wind comes round and reacts
25 against the building?

1 A. Very possibly.

2 Q. Well, I'll ask -- we can deal with that with somebody
3 else. You had originally thought that this was
4 an arson?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And one can understand your thought processes on that,
7 but when you could see the way the wind was reacting,
8 I think you could then surmise that what was happening,
9 with the smoke and the wind pushing things down, windows
10 open, flats were being caught on fire below because of
11 the reaction with the wind and the debris?

12 A. Yes, but I also didn't realise at the time that the
13 windows opened inwards rather than outwards, which -- in
14 most cases, windows open outwards. Debris and
15 everything falling wouldn't have been blowing into the
16 windows.

17 Q. I think the jury have had a visit and they know the way
18 that the windows can open. They certainly can open
19 where they go outwards and so forth. That explains --
20 as you say in your statement:

21 "I was a bit happier now that this was the cause of
22 the odd fire pattern rather than a deliberate act."

23 A. Yes, absolutely.

24 Q. Thank you. I have no further questions.

25 THE CORONER: Thank you. Yes.

1 Questions by MISS NAQSHBANDI

2 MS NAQSHBANDI: Mr Hull, just one question.

3 Mr Maxwell-Scott asked you if there was any debrief when
4 you came out of the building. May I just take you to
5 page 394 of your witness statement. In the third line
6 up from the bottom, you say:

7 "We returned to ground level and reported back to BA
8 control. I told them our crew had split and the others
9 had carried on to flat 81."

10 Is that right?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. Thank you.

13 THE CORONER: Thank you. Members of the jury?

14 Questions by the Jury

15 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you, madam coroner, we do
16 have two, but I'd just like to confer with one of my
17 fellow jurors just to clarify his question. (Pause)
18 Okay, sorry for the delay.

19 THE CORONER: No, that's fine.

20 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay, the question is that
21 Firefighter Hull admitted to Mr Maxwell-Scott that the
22 priorities were to go to flat 81 rather than flat 56.
23 However, you did the opposite. The question is: did you
24 get your priorities wrong here?

25 A. Did I get them wrong? No, I don't think so. The

1 initial was to go to flat 81, which -- which we knew, or
2 I assumed was where the four people were that were --
3 seemed to be in distress.

4 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you. The second question:
5 when Mr Glenny asked you to fetch hose and branch once
6 you'd already put on your BA, you said you had trouble
7 finding the equipment. Would hose and branch and other
8 gear normally form the high rise pack that we've heard
9 other firefighters speak of or would you have to get
10 them from another location?

11 A. Well, initially you do take them -- if you're going to
12 go up and there's any chance you're going to have
13 a fight a fire, which we didn't know what we was going
14 into, then you would take a hose up and you -- most
15 probably there was stuff up there, but you can't
16 guarantee it, so you do take stuff up with you. You
17 don't go unarmed.

18 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Yes. Thank you. That's all.

19 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

20 Thank you very much, Mr Hull, for coming and for the
21 help that you've been able to give to us. You are
22 welcome to stay if you want, but you're free to go if
23 you would prefer. Thank you very much.

24 A. Thank you.

25 (The witness withdrew)

1 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Maxwell-Scott.

2 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Madam, I'll now read the witness
3 statement of Firefighter Wendy Stevens, which is at
4 page 397 of the statements bundle.

5 THE CORONER: Thank you.

6 Witness statement of WENDY STEVENS read

7 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: The statement is dated 27 July 2009, and
8 it reads as follows:

9 "I am the above named person and I am employed as
10 a firefighter on Green Watch at New Cross fire station.
11 I have held this position for 24 months. I make this
12 statement to describe my actions on 3 July 2009 at
13 Lakanal, Camberwell, SE5. Prior to attending the
14 building on this day I had never visited it before or
15 had any prior knowledge of the location.

16 "On 3 July 2009, I was on day duty, 9 am to 6 pm, at
17 New Cross fire station. I was posted to a pump ladder
18 call sign E381, together with crew members Watch Manager
19 Ian Berry, Crew Manager David Ford and Firefighter
20 Lawrence Hull (driver) and Wayne Field. Wayne was
21 a standby helping us out that day from Whitechapel fire
22 station.

23 "We received a call at approximately 1638 hours to
24 attend Lakanal, Camberwell, SE5. I was aware we were to
25 attend a six pump fire. The call slip said the fire was

1 on the 9th floor. I was aware of no further details.
2 We drove our appliance from New Cross via Peckham road
3 on blues (sirens) and turned into Havil Street. We
4 parked up in the cul-de-sac off Havil Street next to
5 a Brixton crew, I think. We could not get any further
6 up Havil Street. I couldn't see anything of the
7 incident from where we were parked. Once the appliance
8 had been reverse-parked into the cul-de-sac, all of the
9 crew made its way to the command unit. The command unit
10 was parked up in Havil Street further towards the
11 junction with Dalwood Street. The crew was wearing our
12 tunic, helmets and gloves. I believe it was not
13 possible to radio in our arrival time, but this was
14 dealt with by Watch Manager Berry. We were told by
15 Watch Manager Berry to follow him to locate the officer
16 in command to be tasked. We walked towards the block of
17 flats along Dalwood Street.

18 "On my approach to the building (the rear of the
19 building was facing me), I saw a crowd of people stood
20 past the block further up Dalwood Street. There was
21 a member of London Ambulance Service crew and
22 firefighters stood on the side of the building opposite
23 the pub. I could see that one of the flats was burnt
24 out and that the flames were spreading to the side and
25 upwards.

1 "As we were coming towards the building, a male
2 approached the crew. He was a white male with dark
3 straight hair, aged about 35 years old. He was about
4 5 foot 10 with a slim build. He spoke English in
5 a foreign accent. This male was alone and holding
6 a mobile phone. He spoke generally to the crew as
7 a whole. He said, 'My wife and child (or children) are
8 trapped in a flat.' This man was clear in trying to
9 describe the exact location to Watch Manager Berry. He
10 was clearly anxious and obviously worried. I did not
11 hear his exact words to Watch Manager Berry.

12 "At this time, a male member of the London Ambulance
13 Service approached me and asked that we remove a metal
14 fence that was restricting access to the building and
15 casualties and residents coming from it. I reported
16 this request to Crew Manager Ford and he in turn went to
17 speak to the OIC. Watch Manager Berry then instructed
18 the crew to return to our appliance to put on our
19 breathing apparatus (BA) equipment. This we did as
20 whole crew together.

21 "We then returned again to the rear of the block.
22 This time, whilst waiting to be briefed and tasked,
23 I saw a person appear on their balcony at the rear of
24 the building. This balcony was about half way to the
25 top but below the flat that was burn out, to the left as

1 I was looking at the block. I cannot say that this
2 person was male or female, only that the person was
3 black. The person came out for a brief moment but was
4 told by a firefighter on the ground to go back in.
5 I think there was a concern for falling debris from
6 above that person.

7 "I then heard several people from towards the front
8 of the block (on the street) begin to scream. Myself
9 and the crew went to see what was happening. Other
10 firefighters told me that a person had been seen trying
11 to hang tied sheets out of a flat window.

12 "We were then approached by Station Manager Glenn
13 I did not hear his name at the time. I did not hear his
14 instruction personally but heard from the rest of the
15 crew that we had been tasked to rescue a family which
16 had been tying and hanging sheets out of the window. We
17 were instructed to put on our BA gear and went under
18 air. We managed to get some breaking-in equipment but
19 couldn't find a branch or jet for a hose. We went in
20 anyway, working our way to the entrance at the front of
21 the building. Watch Manager Berry remained at ground
22 level. I clarified with Station Manager Glenn that the
23 flat we were going to was number 81. As a crew, we were
24 stopped on our way in by a firefighter officer who asked
25 what we were doing. On telling him, he said for us to

1 complete our task and then to come back down.

2 "On going into the building we got to what I thought
3 was the 6th floor. Crew Manager Ford and Firefighter
4 Hull broke through the communal door but found out it
5 was the wrong floor. I contacted the entry control
6 officer to confirm what floor we were heading towards.
7 I was told it was the 6th floor. We continued up floors
8 to find the family. I then heard Firefighter Hull shout
9 to me that he had found a casualty, and I informed the
10 other crew members. The casualty had been found in
11 a flat and as a crew we went to her. In the flat, I saw
12 inside. It was smoke-logged. The female casualty was
13 on the ground floor of her flat. She was a black
14 female, slightly taller than me at 5 foot 3. She had
15 a limp and a walking stick. I considered this to be
16 an existing condition. We identified this flat as
17 number 56. I reported to the ECO that we had a casualty
18 from flat 56 and myself and Firefighter Hull were coming
19 out with her. Firefighter Hull was also running low on
20 air. Firefighters Field and Crew Manager Ford continued
21 on to our initial objective.

22 "The female from flat 56 could walk well enough and
23 I guided her out of the building with a damp cloth over
24 her mouth. On reaching ground floor level, the female
25 was taken by the London Ambulance Service. I reported

1 to the ECO. I also updated Station Manager Glenny with
2 regard to our actions. I was tasked to charge my air
3 cylinder for possible retasking. I was not asked,
4 following this, to reenter the building at any time.
5 I was, however, engaged on the ground level laying down
6 salvage sheets to identify standby areas for BA wearers
7 and equipment. I also directed crews coming out of the
8 building with casualties to the identified areas.

9 "I left the scene at Lakanal at about 2020 hours
10 with the rest of the crew.

11 "There is nothing that I witnessed on 3 July that
12 went beyond my previous experience as a firefighter or
13 was worthy of particular note. There is nothing else
14 I wish to say about this incident."

15 That's the end of the statement.

16 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

17 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: The final witness today is Firefighter
18 Scott Thorpe.

19 THE CORONER: Yes.

20 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I don't know whether you wish to take
21 a short five minute break at this stage?

22 THE CORONER: Members of the jury, would you like to have
23 a five minute break? Yes, we'll have a five minute
24 break.

25 (3.08 pm)

1 (A short break)

2 (3.12 pm)

3 THE CORONER: Thank you. Yes, Mr Thorpe, are you in court?

4 Yes, would you like to come forward. Have a seat for
5 a moment and help yourself to a glass of water.

6 (In the presence of the Jury)

7 SCOTT THORPE (sworn)

8 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Thorpe. Do sit down. Please
9 could you try and keep your voice up so that we can hear
10 clearly what it is that you're saying and keep close to
11 the microphone. That will help.

12 Mr Maxwell-Scott, who is now standing, will
13 initially ask questions on my behalf and then there may
14 be questions from others.

15 A. Okay, thank you.

16 THE CORONER: Thank you.

17 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

18 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good afternoon, Mr Thorpe. Could you
19 give the court your full name, please?

20 A. Scott Thorpe.

21 Q. I'm going to be asking you questions about your attempts
22 to fight fire and carry out search and rescue at
23 Lakanal House on 3 July 2009. At that time, were you
24 a firefighter based at Clerkenwell fire station?

25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. Are you still employed by the London Fire Brigade?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. What's your current rank?

4 A. Crew manager.

5 Q. Back in July 2009, were you part of a crew with Crew
6 Manager Rose and firefighters Farrelly, Badcock and
7 Knight?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Were you a crew experienced and trained in the use of
10 extended duration breathing apparatus?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. That operated from an FRU rather than a pumping
13 appliance?

14 A. That's correct.

15 Q. Was your call sign Alpha 276?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Do you recall being mobilised to attend a fire at
18 Lakanal House and making your way there that afternoon?

19 A. Yes, I do.

20 Q. What happened, and what did you do, when you arrived at
21 Lakanal House?

22 A. We had parked up on Peckham High Road, outside the
23 council offices, at which point Crew Manager Rose said
24 to put our handheld radios on and he would report to the
25 command unit and we would await further instruction.

1 Q. Did he leave you to do that?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Did you stay where you were until he came back to you?

4 A. Until he radioed to us, yes.

5 Q. What happened when he radioed to you?

6 A. He'd radioed ahead for us to put our fire gear on and to
7 rig in BA.

8 Q. Did he ask you to go anywhere, or did he say to wait for
9 him?

10 A. By the time we'd done that, he'd returned to the fire
11 and rescue unit, so we waited for him and then all went
12 down together.

13 Q. Where did you go to?

14 A. We turned right into Havel Street --

15 Q. Shall I show you a aerial photograph?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Lakanal House is in the middle of this picture which I'm
18 marking with the white arrow know. I think Peckham
19 High Street may be out of the picture to the south.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Havel Street we can see running north/south, where I am
22 marking with the arrow.

23 A. Okay.

24 Q. Does that help?

25 A. Yes. Can you just point out there Lakanal House, just

1 so I've got ...

2 Q. In the middle of the picture.

3 A. Right. I remember walking down Havil Street.

4 Q. Yes.

5 A. I think we then cut across that park because there was

6 a single story building outside of Lakanal House where

7 we were told to meet at the entry control point.

8 Q. In short, did you make your way to the entry control

9 point?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. If you look in the jury bundle, which Mr Clark will pass

12 to you, at tab 14, photograph 2. (Handed) Do you

13 recognise that as the entry control point?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Just for your benefit, that is on the east side of the

16 building.

17 A. Okay.

18 Q. I'm marking the area with my white arrow now on

19 photograph 3. The tree I'm marking with the arrow is

20 the one you can see in the photograph, and there are, to

21 the east of it, low level buildings?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. What happened when you got to the entry control point?

24 A. We were there for about ten minutes and then we were

25 told to report to the entry control officer to be

1 briefed.

2 Q. Do you know who that was?

3 A. It was Watch Manager Howling.

4 Q. Do you know who it was because you know him?

5 A. I knew -- knew after the incident of who it was.

6 Q. Okay. What briefing did he give you?

7 A. The briefing we were given was to go to the 11th floor,
8 form a left-hand search. There would be a branch --
9 hose and branch, locate that, and also locate flat 81.

10 Q. What does a left-hand search mean?

11 A. When you enter a building, you will either be given to
12 go round to the left or round to the right, so --

13 Q. A way of being reasonably systematic so you don't miss
14 things?

15 A. So we don't miss anything.

16 Q. I won't ask you to turn to it, but when you gave
17 a statement about this a week or so after the event, you
18 said you were asked to go right into the corridor, and
19 then do this left-hand search?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. You were specifically told, as you've mentioned to the
22 jury, to look at flat 81?

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. Were you given any directions about how to get to the
25 11th floor? I appreciate you'd been given some

1 directions about what to do when you got there.

2 A. There was no direction given other than: take the
3 stairs.

4 Q. Before you went into the building to carry out that
5 task, did you notice any other crews in the area?

6 A. Lewisham's FRU crew had come out of the building at that
7 point, so we did see them.

8 Q. You saw them. Did you have any discussion with any of
9 their members?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. What was said?

12 A. They basically had said that they had tackled the fire
13 on the 11th floor, there were still some pockets of fire
14 remaining.

15 Q. How did they look?

16 A. Tired, exhausted. Speaking to them with -- they'd taken
17 their face masks off. Their faces were red, the white
18 of their eyes were red, so -- they'd also said that it
19 was -- it was difficult working up there and that they'd
20 gone through all of the -- the air in their sets trying
21 to deal with the fire.

22 Q. You knew there were challenges ahead?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Were you able to then enter the building promptly, or
25 were there any causes of delays before you could do so?

1 A. There was a slight delay in that there wasn't enough
2 entry control boards at the time for us to go in. From
3 what I remember, it was only a short delay.

4 Q. Did you then start up your breathing apparatus and give
5 your key tally in?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. If I could ask you to have a look in the advocates'
8 bundles at page 1032 in file 3. You'll be passed a hard
9 copy in a moment of the document you can see on screen.
10 (Handed) I think it very likely you've not seen this
11 document before; is that right?

12 A. Yeah, I've not seen this before.

13 Q. You're probably not familiar with the format of it?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Just for your benefit, your breathing apparatus was
16 fitted with the bodyguard system and amongst other
17 things that can record information, in particular when
18 the breathing apparatus set is started up and when you
19 go under air and when it's shut down. If you see the
20 row in yellow, your name in it to the right under
21 "wearer name", and a time is given for going under air
22 of 18.12. It appears that your set had a battery
23 changed, which means there's a certain amount of
24 estimating included within that time, but 18.12 is also
25 the time when Crew Manager Rose is recorded as having

1 started up his set. Do you recall if you started your
2 set up at the same time as any of your crew members?

3 A. No.

4 Q. Did you, in essence, start up and enter as a crew?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Did you then make your way up to the 11th floor?

7 A. Yes, we did.

8 Q. What were conditions like in the staircase on the way?

9 A. For the first few floors there was nothing, and after
10 we'd climbed a few more levels, smoke started to appear,
11 all the way up to the 11th floor. Visibility was fairly
12 good but the presence of smoke could be seen.

13 Q. Do you remember seeing signs on the way up?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Did you have any problems in finding the 11th floor?

16 A. No, I was second in the crew, so the person that was at
17 the front -- I may have seen the sign for the 11th
18 floor, but I don't recall it.

19 Q. But it's not the case that you had false starts and went
20 onto lobbies, discovered yourself on the wrong floor, or
21 anything like that?

22 A. No, we went to the right floor.

23 Q. What did you find when you got to the 11th floor?

24 A. When we got to the 11th floor, I've noticed to my left
25 three paramedics in breathing apparatus and then we've

1 turned right and there was some smoke across a -- across
2 a doorway or what seemed to be a doorway. I don't
3 recall opening a door as I think it may have already
4 been propped open.

5 Q. Do you recall that once you come off the staircase you
6 enter a lobby area which leads into two corridors, one
7 on one side and one on the other side?

8 A. Yes, I think that's where the paramedics were.

9 Q. One of those corridors had been very severely affected
10 by fire, one rather less so. Do you recall which
11 corridor you went into?

12 A. We turned right at the top of the stairwell and that was
13 the only corridor we went into.

14 Q. Was it the corridor that had been very severely affected
15 by fire?

16 A. It had been affected very badly by fire, yes.

17 Q. If I ask you to take up the jury bundle at tab 11,
18 page 1. This is a representation of Lakanal House
19 looking from the west side, and you can see that there's
20 a central staircase area running vertically up the
21 building.

22 Then at 11th floor level, the way it works is that
23 on the north corridor, which I believe is the one you
24 went into, on the left you would have flat 79 and then
25 flat 81 and then 83, and on the right-hand side of the

1 north corridor at 11th floor level you would have flats
2 80, 82 and 84. Do you recall passing flat 79, the first
3 flat on the left, which had been very severely affected
4 by fire?

5 A. Yes, there was no way of recognising it was flat 79 as
6 there was nothing left of it.

7 Q. But by reference to this diagram, you recall passing it?

8 A. Yes, yes.

9 Q. Which flat did you go into?

10 A. From this, we would have entered flat 81.

11 Q. Was there any indication that it was flat 81 or was that
12 something you're piecing together now from the diagram?

13 A. No, there was no markings on the door. The branch and
14 the hose had been left where they said they'd been left,
15 so at the time we treated that as flat 81.

16 Q. So in summary, the directions you'd been given at the
17 entry control point proved to be accurate in helping you
18 to find flat 81 once you were on the 11th floor?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Did you and your crew members then go into flat 81?

21 A. Three entered flat 81: Crew Manager Rose, myself and
22 Firefighter Farrelly, and Firefighter Badcock and Knight
23 took the hose and branch and dealt with a couple of
24 pockets of fire on that floor.

25 Q. Was flat 81 on fire at all?

1 A. No.

2 Q. Was there a problem with visibility caused by
3 smoke-logging?

4 A. Within the flat?

5 Q. Yes.

6 A. There was some smoke-logging within the premises but
7 from the doorway you could see sort of like haze coming
8 through from the sunlight through the window.

9 Q. Did you notice that there was an internal staircase?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Is that something you'd been told to expect?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Was the staircase intact, or had it been damaged by
14 fire?

15 A. As -- as you got to the top of the staircase, you could
16 see that it had been damaged by fire.

17 Q. Did you go up it or not?

18 A. We went up it and stopped when we realised it was
19 damaged and returned back down.

20 Q. So what did you and Crew Manager Rose and Firefighter
21 Farrelly do next?

22 A. Firefighter Farrelly had searched the bedrooms and the
23 only door that was left was the bathroom door. That was
24 tried by Firefighter Farrelly and it was locked, at
25 which point he requested for the enforcer and I actually

1 then went out into the corridor to send a message to
2 update the entry control officer.

3 Q. Did something then happen to attract your attention?

4 A. Yes, I heard Firefighter Farrelly shout "casualty"
5 twice.

6 Q. What did you understand by that?

7 A. That they had found two people.

8 Q. Were there any further shouts at this stage?

9 A. Yes, I had sent a message, again, to entry control to
10 say that we'd located two casualties and that I would
11 send further details, and then a third call came out for
12 another casualty.

13 Q. So you would understand each shout of casualty to refer
14 to a separate casualty?

15 A. That's correct.

16 Q. And that's standard practice, is it?

17 A. That is, yes.

18 Q. Did Firefighter Knight then come into the corridor
19 carrying a baby, which he passed to you, and you in turn
20 passed to paramedics?

21 A. That's correct, yes.

22 Q. Did you see the paramedics attempt to perform CPR on the
23 baby as soon as they could?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Did you pass any messages to entry control at this time?

1 A. I can't recall.

2 Q. You had passed one already?

3 A. I had passed one to say that there was casualties.

4 I would have sent another message updating them.

5 I think I sent a message actually requesting assistance,

6 for more crews, because of the number of casualties we

7 had located.

8 Q. Did you see two of your crew members carrying an adult

9 woman out of the flat?

10 A. Yes, I did.

11 Q. Did you then notice Crew Manager Rose in the corridor?

12 A. When we'd returned -- because I'd assisted the two

13 firefighters carrying the lady and then we returned and

14 Crew Manager Rose was standing at the corridor.

15 Q. Can you recall his appearance and how he seemed?

16 A. I didn't notice anything until I suggested we sent

17 a gauge reading down to entry control. We had completed

18 the task that we were asked to do, so we'd give them

19 an update, and he had problems reading his gauge. So

20 I read it for him and then sent the relevant message to

21 entry control.

22 Q. Did you draw any conclusions about how he was from the

23 fact that he was having problems reading his gauge?

24 A. I suppose at the time I just would have put it down to

25 we'd just walked 22 flights of stairs and we were -- we

1 were becoming exhausted as well, so just put it down to
2 the effects of the situation.

3 Q. You're trained to recognise signs of heat exhaustion; is
4 that right?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Were you recognising any in yourself at this time?

7 A. No. We -- we were hot, we'd been working, but there
8 was -- there was nothing -- I put his agitated state
9 down to what we had just dealt with.

10 Q. In due course, did you make your way down the stairs to
11 find the entry control point?

12 A. We completed another task before we went and did that.

13 Q. Was that searching flat 83?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. On your way down, did you find the entry control point
16 had moved from where it was when you entered the
17 building?

18 A. Yes, it had.

19 Q. Where did you find it?

20 A. We believe it was -- had moved to the 3rd floor, but we
21 only found this as we walked passed it and someone had
22 called us back.

23 Q. When you got out of the building a little later, did you
24 see Crew Manager Rose receiving treatment from
25 paramedics?

1 A. Yes, I did.

2 Q. Is it right that you yourself took no further part in
3 firefighting operations that day and returned back to
4 the station, arriving there at approximately 2200 hours?

5 A. That's correct.

6 Q. Thank you very much. I have no further questions, but
7 others may have some questions.

8 A. Thank you.

9 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Edwards.

10 Questions by MR EDWARDS

11 MR EDWARDS: Thank you. Can I ask you to turn to the
12 witness statements bundle at page 400, please. (Handed)
13 This is the witness statement you made on 14 July 2009
14 and the statement you gave to the police. Do you
15 remember making this?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. I just want to pick a couple of points from this
18 statement, please. At page 401, four lines down, the
19 line starting "FRU 3", you then say:

20 "It became apparent that neither ourselves nor
21 Lewisham's FRU had an EDBA emergency crew to back us
22 up -- that is a team to get us out if necessary."

23 Effectively, you went in without a back-up team if
24 something went wrong?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. That's presumably against formal policy?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And to put it bluntly, you were happy to do that? You
4 were happy to go against policy because you thought you
5 might save lives?

6 A. Exactly.

7 Q. And you were happy to take that risk?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Can I ask you now to look at the advocates' bundles at
10 page 247, please. That's the first advocates' bundle.
11 (Handed) What this is is a document -- you can see
12 there are 18 questions set out if you read through, and
13 the answers have been put in bold and your name appears
14 at the top. Do you remember filling this document in?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Did you type out the answers yourselves or were you
17 giving the answers to someone else who was noting them
18 down, do you remember?

19 A. No, I typed them myself.

20 Q. It may be I'm missing it, but I can't see a date on this
21 document. Do you remember whether you typed this out
22 before you gave the statement to the police that we were
23 just looking at or afterwards?

24 A. It was before the police.

25 Q. Turn to page 251, please. Question 17:

1 "Is there anything else you would wish to say about
2 the incident?"

3 I'm just going to read these to you. The first
4 point you make is:

5 "Never told that it was a persons reported fire and
6 it was known that there were people in flat 81."

7 I think the jury has already heard what "persons
8 reported" means, but can you just say what you mean by
9 "persons reported" there?

10 A. It's if you're called to a fire where someone is in need
11 of rescue.

12 Q. Underneath that:

13 "No emergency crew for the first two EDDBA crews."

14 I think that anticipates the point I raised a moment
15 ago, doesn't it?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. "Lack of command and control coming down to the fire
18 ground."

19 What do you mean by that?

20 A. We just felt that there was a lack of information coming
21 down to us.

22 THE CORONER: At what point in time are you talking about
23 there?

24 A. I think -- I think, looking back on this with
25 information that was deemed after the incident, that's

1 where that has come from, whether there could have been
2 more information for us at the time.

3 MR EDWARDS: I'm not sure I've understood that. When you
4 say "coming down to the fire ground", do you mean as
5 you're driving there, there's a lack of information
6 coming to your vehicle?

7 A. No, as we are dealing -- we're talking firefighters,
8 people that are entering the building, doing the job
9 there, so coming down from -- from the command unit or
10 whoever is in charge at that time.

11 Q. Then underneath that:

12 "At no point were we informed that the ECP [I assume
13 that's entry control point] had moved and a bridgehead
14 set up."

15 Just explain what you mean in a little bit more
16 detail there, please?

17 A. Well, as we were -- as we were coming down from the
18 building, our original entry control point was outside
19 of Lakanal House, and by the time we were descending the
20 stairs it had actually been set up on what we believed
21 was the 3rd floor.

22 Q. Then underneath that:

23 "No full debrief."

24 Maybe I can help you with what you mean by "no full
25 debrief", because if you go back a page to page 150,

1 three lines down you write:

2 "At no point were we asked by the ECO if the flats
3 had been completely searched."

4 Is that the same as "no full debrief", is it part of
5 "no full debrief", or is it a separate point?

6 A. No, I would -- that's the same thing.

7 Q. Then back to page 251, please. Finally, under number
8 17:

9 "Senior managers, in general, unaware of FRU's
10 capabilities."

11 Can you just explain what you mean by that, please?

12 A. It was -- that comment was made in that being part of
13 the FRU crews of what we can do, what is available, in
14 general -- not really specific to this incident, but
15 senior managers sometimes don't -- are not aware of the
16 equipment that we carry and some of the skills that we
17 have available to us.

18 Q. Presumably, though, you're filling this form out in
19 response to Lakanal House. You're answering these
20 questions in response to the Lakanal House fire.
21 Looking back, did you have something specific in mind,
22 some specific part of the FRU's capabilities that senior
23 managers at Lakanal House weren't aware of on the day?

24 A. No, I think, looking back on it, no.

25 Q. Thank you.

1 THE CORONER: Thank you. Ms Al Tai, thank you.

2 Questions by MS AL TAI

3 MS AL TAI: Good afternoon, Mr Thorpe. I act on behalf of
4 one of the bereaved. Just briefly: were you informed at
5 all that there was an occupant in flat 79 whilst you
6 were on your way up to the 11th floor?

7 A. No.

8 Q. And were you informed thereafter?

9 A. No.

10 Q. Thank you very much, Mr Thorpe.

11 THE CORONER: Thank you. Any questions?

12 MR WALSH: No thank you, madam.

13 THE CORONER: Thank you. Members of the jury? Thank you.

14 Questions by the Coroner

15 THE CORONER: Mr Thorpe, just one from me. I think that you
16 said that when you entered flat 81, you went up the
17 internal stairs?

18 A. Mm-hmm.

19 THE CORONER: And looked at the upper floor?

20 A. No, we just went up the stairs.

21 THE CORONER: Yes, sorry, but you could see the upper floor?

22 A. We could see that there was an upper floor, but couldn't
23 see there was -- there was some smoke-logging there, but
24 I couldn't tell you the layout.

25 THE CORONER: No, okay. I think that you said that you

1 observed that the upper floor had been damaged by fire?
2 I think that's how you put it.

3 A. Yes.

4 THE CORONER: Can you just describe to me what you mean by
5 that?

6 A. As -- as you came to the top step of the stairs, the
7 internal stairs -- if you can imagine that the top step
8 was basically missing, so you could see the floor of the
9 living area, but then, through the hole, you could
10 actually see the corridor that we had just walked down.

11 THE CORONER: Right. So that was the staircase itself?

12 A. That was the staircase itself.

13 THE CORONER: Was there anything else that you observed?

14 A. Not from -- not from there, no.

15 THE CORONER: I see, all right. Thank you very much.

16 Mr Thorpe, thank you very much for coming and thank
17 you very much for the help that you've given to us.

18 A. Thank you.

19 (The witness withdrew)

20 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you.

21 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Madam, that concludes all the evidence to
22 be called today.

23 THE CORONER: Thank you.

24 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: The plan for tomorrow is to call
25 Mrs Fatima Nuhu and then Crew Manager Daniel Sharpe, who

1 worked with the Old Kent Road aerial ladder platform,
2 and then firefighters Wayne Field and Crew Manager David
3 Ford, who formed part of the crew of four that was also
4 made up of Firefighter Hull and Firefighter Stevens.

5 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. That's very helpful.

6 Members of the jury, thank you very much for your
7 attention today. Tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock? Thank
8 you.

9 (In the absence of the Jury)

10 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you very much. Are there any
11 issues anyone needs to raise before we finish today?

12 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Just very briefly looking ahead.

13 THE CORONER: Yes.

14 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: On Friday, we have Station Manager Paul
15 Glennly and then we have Dr Bierdrzycki, who's scheduled
16 to come for 2 o'clock in the afternoon. If we keep to
17 the timetable tomorrow, Friday would present a good
18 opportunity for me to read some statements under
19 Rule 37. So I've made the proposal about six
20 statements. If I might add to that list a seventh,
21 which is Shamoli Shamme, whom we've heard about before.
22 So that's a potential list of seven statements that I'm
23 proposing be read, and if any objections could be
24 indicated by 10 am tomorrow morning, that would be very
25 helpful.

1	THE CORONER: All right. Could I ask everyone to assist	
2	Mr Maxwell-Scott in that way. Thank you very much.	
3	Thank you. Does anyone else have any points to raise?	
4	Thank you very much. Until tomorrow.	
5	(3.50 pm)	
6	(The Court adjourned until 10 o'clock the following day)	
7		
8	Witness statement of SEAN ENGLAND	2
	read	
9	MARK NIBLETT (affirmed)	8
10	Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT	9
11	Questions by MR EDWARDS	43
12	Questions by MS AL TAI	46
13	Questions by MISS NAQSHBANDI	46
14	Questions by the Jury	49
15	Further questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT	50
16	CHRISTOPHER ROSE (sworn)	51
17	Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT	52
18	Questions by MR EDWARDS	65
19	Questions by MR WALSH	66
20	PC RICHARD COX (sworn)	67
21	Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT	68
22	Questions by MR EDWARDS	79
23	LAWRENCE HULL (sworn)	80
24	Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT	80
25	Questions by MR EDWARDS	116

1	Questions by MR DOWDEN	132
2	Questions by MR COMPTON	133
3	Questions by MISS NAQSHBANDI	136
4	Questions by the Jury	136
5	Witness statement of WENDY STEVENS	138
	read	
6	SCOTT THORPE (sworn)	144
7	Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT	144
8	Questions by MR EDWARDS	158
9	Questions by MS AL TAI	163
10	Questions by the Coroner	163
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
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19		
20		
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