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Wednesday, 13 February 2013

(9.56 am)

Housekeeping

THE CORONER: Yes, good morning, do sit down. Yes,
Mr Maxwell-Scott, good morning.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: A small number of housekeeping matters.

THE CORONER: Yes.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Firstly, I have received a small number
of comments on the proposal that we prepared in relation
to the expert evidence of David Crowder.

THE CORONER: Yes.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: The gist of it is that I haven't received
any objection in principle to what is perhaps the most
important features of the proposal, namely that, at
least on the first occasion that he gives evidence, we
won't ask him to express opinions on the length of time
for which specific features of the building or materials
should have been able to withstand fire and smoke, and
we won't ask him about which individuals or
organisations were responsible for ensuring that
requisite level of performance.

Again no objections have been raised to our proposal
that, at least on the first occasion that he gives
evidence, properly interested persons and the jury
should also be prohibited from asking him about such

1 matters.

2 The points that have been made essentially are
3 points of detail, valid points. One of them has been
4 about the eliciting of evidence of test results, because
5 some of the tests were carried out, either by BRE or by
6 others on the instructions of BRE, and a point has been
7 made about the desirability of a glossary to explain
8 terms like non-combustible and the like, and a point has
9 been made about the desirability of a chronology
10 specific to the fire reconstruction, so setting out when
11 various important things occurred in time from the point
12 of ignition in the test onwards, and we will be
13 following up those points of detail.

14 THE CORONER: Well, thank you very much. They sound very
15 sensible, practical points, and overall it sounds like
16 a workable solution, if everyone's content with that.
17 Thank you very much, thank you for your help with that.

18 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: The second point of housekeeping is to
19 say that we hope and expect to serve the expert report
20 from David Walker on Friday of this week.

21 THE CORONER: Yes. Thank you, and apologies to everyone
22 that that's been more delayed than we would have wanted.

23 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Then turning to the timetable today:
24 there is Mr Simmons' evidence to be concluded;
25 Deborah Real to give evidence briefly, I believe that

1 that remains the application, I see nods; then it's been
2 suggested to me, and I'm content, that we call Mr Hale
3 before Mr Chidgey.

4 THE CORONER: Okay, that sounds fine.

5 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Mr Hale, then Mr Chidgey and then
6 Mr McGurran.

7 THE CORONER: Thank you very much very much, that is very
8 helpful. Does anyone else have any other points to
9 raise?

10 MR HENDY: Madam, yes I do. Just reflecting on the
11 remainder of the cross-examination to Mr Simmons
12 overnight, a point occurred to me which I've explored
13 with Mr Maxwell-Scott and mentioned to Mr Walsh, and
14 that is that the jury, of course, don't know whether or
15 not the lady from control who took the call from
16 Catherine Hickman is going to give evidence or not, and
17 therefore they may be wondering why poor Mr Simmons is
18 being given a rather hard time about matters where he
19 can only speak of his own general experience and
20 practice in the control room but can't give evidence as
21 to the mental processes of the lady in question.

22 I thought, and I've suggested it to my colleagues
23 who I think agree, that the jury should perhaps be given
24 an explanation amongst which would be the fact that
25 nobody, absolutely nobody, wants to put this poor lady

1 through any further ordeal. It must have been the most
2 horrific experience of her life, she must have suffered
3 very gravely over it and whether or not she can remember
4 the mental processes that led her to the decisions and
5 the course of action she advised must be a moot point.

6 THE CORONER: No, that's a very fair point, thank you for
7 raising that. I'm happy to make that point to the
8 jurors before we continue with Mr Simmons. I'm sure
9 that would be very helpful. Thank you for raising that.

10 MR HENDY: I'm grateful.

11 THE CORONER: Yes, perhaps we could ask the jurors to come
12 in. Thank you.

13 (In the presence of the Jury)

14 THE CORONER: Yes, members of the jury, good morning, thank
15 you. We're just about to continue with the evidence of
16 Mr Simmons. You will recall that he hadn't finished
17 giving his evidence when we finished yesterday. I think
18 it would probably be helpful for you if I just explained
19 that we were not going to be calling to give evidence
20 the operator who actually dealt with the call with
21 Catherine Hickman.

22 I think we can all try to imagine that it must have
23 been the most horrific experience for her and a most
24 distressing one, and I think that it's not fair to
25 expect her at this stage, so long after the event, to be

1 trying to recall the thought processes that she went
2 through when she was actually conducting that call.

3 So that is why we have asked Mr Simmons to come
4 along as one of the more senior officers in the control
5 room to deal with the matters that we're covering with
6 him. So I hope that that gives you a better
7 understanding of the approach that we're taking, and my
8 apologies for not having made that clear before, all
9 right? Thank you very much.

10 So we're going to continue with Mr Simmons'
11 evidence, and then briefly have evidence from Ms Real,
12 and then from Mr Hale, Mr Chidgey and we hope to start
13 with Mr McGurran, if not finish him, today. So that's
14 today's timetable.

15 Thank you very much. Mr Simmons, would you like to
16 come back? Thank you very much.

17 HARRY SIMMONS (continued)

18 THE CORONER: Yes, do help yourself to a glass of water,
19 Mr Simmons, thank you very much. Mr Hendy will continue
20 with his questions, thank you.

21 Questions by MR HENDY (continued)

22 MR HENDY: Good morning, Mr Simmons.

23 A. Good morning.

24 Q. Mr Simmons, yesterday Mr Maxwell-Scott explored with you
25 number of calls that were made to control room operators

1 and pointed out that not all of them had been given the
2 "stay put" advice that Catherine Hickman was given;
3 others were advised to escape.

4 He explored that with you and one of the things that
5 you said in response was that there was a variation in
6 operators, and I'm sure the jury can appreciate, of
7 course, that each operator is an independent human being
8 with their own thought processes and modes of approach
9 to these sorts of problems, but I wonder whether you
10 would agree with me that the fact that there is
11 a variation in operators makes it yet more important
12 that they should all observe the basic principles
13 applicable to taking FSG calls?

14 A. Sitting in this room today, I would agree with you.

15 Q. I'm sorry?

16 A. Sitting in the room today, I would agree with you, but
17 there's not necessarily the situation when you're
18 inundated with a call and dealing with a call in
19 a situation that control officers face.

20 Q. We do agree, don't we, that the basic principle is
21 "Escape if it's possible to do so"?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. What I would suggest was that in that control room there
24 were some operators in whom that basic principle had
25 become overlaid by a culture of reliance on rescue,

1 because rescue was the normal thing that happened in
2 a FSG call.

3 A. I disagree.

4 Q. You disagree, but your statement said, and we looked at
5 it yesterday, it's the bottom of page 493 --

6 THE CORONER: Hang on, shall we just get the statement in
7 front of Mr Simmons?

8 MR HENDY: Of course. We have it on screen there, can you
9 read that, Mr Simmons?

10 A. It's very difficult with the varifocals on the screen.
11 It's very small.

12 Q. Have the hard copy then. (Handed)

13 It's that sentence we looked at yesterday at the
14 bottom of the page:

15 "This culminated in a state of disbelief when we
16 discovered that, contrary to our unflinching belief, the
17 persons had not been rescued, including Catherine
18 Hickman who was on the phone to the operator right up to
19 the point she lost consciousness."

20 A. That was my belief, and still is my belief. I consider
21 that an operator made in hindsight -- having only seen
22 the transcript very recently, and being able to see it
23 in black and white yesterday with you, that a mistake
24 was made, not a general malaise, but a mistake was made
25 on the day.

1 Q. Well, you say it was a mistake. I just wonder whether
2 the lady wasn't carrying out the general approach in the
3 control room that if you told somebody to stay put, the
4 overwhelming likelihood, and indeed the experience of
5 all the people in the control room, was that they would
6 be rescued.

7 A. The overwhelming workload in the control room of the
8 day, I believe, led to a mistake being made. I do not
9 believe it was a general malaise that any operator had.

10 Q. Well, I think malaise is a word that you use, but I am
11 not putting to you. What I suggest is that lack of
12 training and lack of reinforcement of the basic
13 principle of escape that is possible to do so had been
14 overtaken by the experience of control room staff, and
15 that experience was that in almost 100 per cent of cases
16 if you advised somebody to stay put the Fire Brigade
17 would rescue them.

18 A. I have experience where fire survival guidance given has
19 resulted in a successful rescue, but I still believe
20 that the expectation is there because of history that
21 the people will be rescued. I do not believe that
22 anybody within that control room, including myself,
23 would rely totally "stay in the premises and you will be
24 saved". I believe on this occasion a mistake was made
25 under the pressure that the entire complement of control

1 room staff were in.

2 THE CORONER: Mr Simmons, you keep saying "a mistake was
3 made". As you've heard me explain to the jurors, we are
4 not asking the operator in question to come to give
5 evidence and, in fairness to that operator, I really
6 must point out that she isn't going to have the
7 opportunity to answer that point that you're making and
8 I think for that reason it's important that you focus on
9 the overarching point which Mr Hendy is putting to you
10 as to the experience of all those in the control room
11 and the training and experience which lay behind
12 the call itself.

13 MR HENDY: Let's move on, Mr Simmons, I think we have your
14 evidence on that point. This unflinching belief that
15 Catherine Hickman and others would be rescued, as
16 I understand it, rests on two propositions. Let's see
17 if we agree. The first proposition is that if there's
18 a fire in an high rise block that fire would be
19 contained within the particular apartment for up to
20 an hour.

21 A. I don't know the exact times, but the information I had
22 been given over the years from operational personnel
23 that are fully conversant, or should be fully -- that
24 that would be the likelihood.

25 Q. That would be an assumption shared throughout the

1 control room?

2 A. It's the only reason that I would know that information,
3 because I was told it by an expert.

4 Q. Yes. So that's the first basis for your unflinching
5 belief. The second basis is that once the London Fire
6 Brigade have arrived at a fire ground, rescue of persons
7 trapped who had been identified to the Fire Brigade on
8 the fire ground would be imminent?

9 A. My previous experience was that would be the case.

10 Q. Yes. Yesterday, Mr Maxwell-Scott explored with you some
11 passages from the call from Catherine Hickman to the
12 particular operator, and I'd like to ask you some points
13 about that as well. I'm not covering the same ground as
14 he is, I ask for a different purpose.

15 Could you have a look in the jury bundle, please, at
16 tab 17. Can we just see what information passed from
17 Catherine Hickman to the particular operator. On page 1
18 in the second entry for Catherine, she identifies the
19 flat number:

20 "I'm at flat 79."

21 Yes?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. But she also gives some further information in that
24 answer, and she says:

25 "The flat below me, there's flames coming out the

1 window."

2 So from that answer, the operator would know that
3 she, Catherine, believed she was in the flat directly
4 above the one that was on fire; do you agree?

5 A. I agree, because I've got this in front of me, yes.

6 Q. If we look at the next but one entry for Catherine,
7 that's at 00.19, it says:

8 "Yes, yes, but the fire's below me, in the flat
9 below."

10 So there can't be any doubt that she believes she's
11 in the flat directly above the one that's on fire, yes?

12 A. From what's in front of me, yes.

13 Q. We can see that the operator acknowledges that in the
14 next answer, 00.22:

15 "Yeah, I know the fire's below you, which is why you
16 can't go down."

17 Then if we look at page 5, she says at 04.09:

18 "... and the flat, I think's on the 9th floor, which
19 is the one below me."

20 It looks like a direct reference to the same point,
21 doesn't it?

22 A. Can you say the time again, please, sir?

23 Q. Yes, 04.09, or 16.25.36. If we take the timing from the
24 third column, which is the duration of the call, that's
25 probably the best one. So it's the second entry for

1 04.09. Do you have it?

2 A. Yes sir.

3 Q. If we go to page 9, there's a long answer from Catherine

4 at 08.56, towards the bottom of the page, she says:

5 "I'm really [something]. Oh God, you don't expect

6 this after seeing fires, fires in other flats, and

7 I thought 'Oh God how awful', 'cos there's a lot of

8 tower blocks around here, but I never thought it would

9 happen right underneath me."

10 Then she speaks of a lot of noises as well.

11 So, so far, we've established that she's in flat 79,

12 and that the fire is directly below her, in the flat

13 below her, right?

14 A. My -- this is my understanding from seeing this

15 yesterday, yes.

16 Q. Then if we go back, she gives some other information.

17 If you look, please, at page 5, just below the answer

18 which we looked at a few moments ago for 04.09:

19 "I think it's on the 9th floor."

20 The operator says:

21 "Yeah, okay."

22 Then Catherine says:

23 "It's a maisonette, I've got two floors."

24 So now we have a third piece of information, that

25 she lives in a maisonette consisting of two floors,

1 right?

2 A. I agree, yes.

3 Q. Just pausing a moment. If we look at your statement --
4 leave this open, but just look in your statement at 493,
5 would you? In the middle paragraph on that page, you
6 say:

7 "At the time of the incident, it was our
8 understanding within the control room that Lakanal was
9 a 11 storey building and we were unaware of the
10 maisonette design or that there were exterior escape
11 routes."

12 Unaware of the maisonette design, is that because
13 you had forgotten that Catherine Hickman had identified
14 that it was a maisonette, or was that information never
15 passed to you?

16 A. You're asking me to comment on a transcript that I saw
17 last week and we went through yesterday, and not hearing
18 any of the conversations between -- and not being in
19 a position to be able to monitor the call between
20 Catherine and my operator.

21 Q. Understood. Does it follow from that that you wouldn't
22 have known at the time that it was a maisonette?

23 A. I wouldn't have known at the time of the incident, and
24 my statement was made a year after the incident.

25 Q. You would have known at the time of the time?

1 A. I wouldn't have known at the time.

2 Q. I'm so sorry, it's my hearing.

3 A. I wouldn't have known it was a maisonette at the time.

4 Q. Right.

5 A. I became aware of it subsequently --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. -- and my statement was made a year after the event.

8 Q. Right. If we go back to the transcript of the call, if

9 you look at page 10 in divider 17 at the top of the

10 page, we can see that the operator is well aware that

11 Catherine's in a maisonette, because she says at the top

12 of the page, 09.28:

13 "Well, you're in an maisonette, so can you get to

14 the bedroom upstairs?"

15 Catherine then says:

16 "No, I think -- the thing is the kitchen and the

17 living room's upstairs and the bedroom's downstairs."

18 So the operator knows that this is a maisonette.

19 There's another piece of information that the operator

20 knows, and that is that Catherine has balcony. Can we

21 just see what's said about that, if we look at page 2,

22 please?

23 A. Did you say page 2, sorry?

24 Q. Page 2, if you wouldn't mind, Mr Simmons, yes, page 2 in

25 tab 17. 00.57, at the top of the page, Catherine says:

1 "Shall I go out, shall I go on the balcony
2 outstairs?"

3 Probably "upstairs", but whatever, she's talking
4 about going out the balcony.

5 At page 3, right at the bottom of the page, 02.38,
6 she says:

7 "I'm out, I'm out, I'm out on the balcony and the
8 smoke's going in the other direction."

9 Then if we look at page 11, she says this at 11.13,
10 just below halfway down, she says:

11 "Okay, will they [the firefighters] come on the
12 balcony where the fire escape is? Oh God, it's really,
13 it's like orange."

14 So the operator now knows that there's at least one
15 balcony and that Catherine believes it to be a fire
16 escape. Once again, the lady's not coming to give
17 evidence, and I'm not going to criticise her for
18 overlooking the reference to a fire escape in such
19 a tense and dramatic situation, but one thing is clear,
20 that there was a balcony?

21 A. I agree.

22 Q. At the top of that page 11, the operator was asking
23 where Catherine was, and Catherine says:

24 "Um, well, no, I'm in the --"

25 She was about to say lounge, clearly:

1 "Hello, kitchen now it's really bad."

2 Operator: "Right."

3 Catherine: "That's west something, where it's
4 obviously west."

5 It looks as if Catherine's kitchen therefore is on
6 the west side, at least she can see to the west. If you
7 look at page 12, again at the top of the page, Catherine
8 says:

9 "I'm in the lounge."

10 Operator: "You're in the lounge now."

11 Catherine: "I'm facing east near Peckham."

12 Operator: "Right, okay, is the smoke still coming
13 up?" and so forth.

14 So Catherine is clearly orientated between the west
15 side and the east side. Now, the information, as
16 I understand it -- Mr Walsh will correct with questions
17 to you if I have it wrong -- that was communicated by
18 control to the firefighters on the ground was simply
19 that this lady was trapped and smoke-logged in flat 79
20 on the 11th floor, right?

21 A. As far as I'm aware, yes.

22 Q. Do you agree with me that it would have been helpful if
23 the firefighters on the ground had been told that this
24 was a maisonette and that there was at least one
25 balcony?

1 A. If I had been aware of this information, I would have
2 ensured it would have been passed to the crews attending
3 the incident. I was not aware of the content of this
4 call until about a week ago when I saw the transcript.

5 THE CORONER: Mr Simmons, what we're trying to understand
6 from this is the wealth of information which was being
7 given to the operator and the mechanism for passing that
8 on to those on the fire ground, and whether that was
9 done. So if you'd just focus on that objectively, we're
10 not looking at what you personally were aware of or were
11 doing, what we're trying to understand is the mechanism
12 by which this should have been passed through; do you
13 understand?

14 A. Yes, it would have been -- should have been passed
15 verbally and if possible, if time allowed, we would have
16 made a message of it that would be sent to -- confirmed
17 it and sent to the radio operator for onward
18 transmission.

19 MR HENDY: The most critical piece of information was the
20 fact that Catherine Hickman was in the flat immediately
21 above the one that was on fire. That information, too,
22 should have been communicated to the fire ground, should
23 it not?

24 A. If I'd have been aware of it, I would have ensured it
25 would have been passed.

1 Q. I'm sure you would, Mr Simmons, but as the coroner
2 rightly says, this is not a criticism of you. I'm just
3 asking you to confirm whether that information should
4 have been passed to the fire ground, for whatever
5 reason.

6 A. Yes, it should have been.

7 Q. We've discussed the "stay put" policy and the escape
8 policy, and I don't want to cover that again, but if the
9 assumption was made by the operator that Catherine
10 Hickman would be safe in her compartment for some time,
11 and that the Fire Brigade would rescue her, that
12 position may have changed with circumstances, and would
13 you agree with me that operators should be alert to
14 a change of circumstances which may change the advice
15 from "Stay put" to "Get out"?

16 A. I would say yes.

17 Q. Well, let's just see how the circumstances were with
18 Catherine Hickman. If we start, please, on page 3,
19 she's been speaking so far about smoke outside the flat,
20 and at 01.53, towards the top of the page, she says:
21 "It's -- there's black smoke coming right up outside
22 my window."
23 Then she says a couple of other things, and then at
24 02.08 she says:
25 "Yeah, but there's fire coming through my

1 floorboards now. I'm in smoke."

2 Just pausing there, Mr Simmons, before I ask my
3 question, there was some discussion amongst the
4 advocates yesterday, and people listened again to the
5 transcript to see whether in fact Catherine said, rather
6 than "I'm in smoke", "I mean, smoke" and Mr Edwards who
7 listened to it over and over again last night tells me
8 it's not possible to say whether it's "I'm in" or
9 "I mean, smoke" but for the purposes of my question,
10 let's assume that there wasn't fire coming through the
11 floorboards, she simply said that she was in smoke,
12 okay, and what she meant was that there was "Smoke
13 coming through my floorboards". Would you agree with me
14 that that was a critical change in circumstances?

15 A. I would say that it is a change in circumstances.

16 Q. Let's go on to page 6. At the top of the page, at
17 04.49, she says:

18 "I can, um, I can hear it crackling and everything."

19 She can obviously hear fire burning, can't she?

20 A. I'm making an assumption from that information, yes.

21 Q. On the next page, on page 7, if you go to 05.53, the
22 fourth entry, she says:

23 "Oh God, yeah, it's going to be awful, um, um, the
24 flat's filling up with quite a lot of smoke, I mean."

25 Operator: "But you're on the balcony."

1 Catherine: "Well, I can go out, but there's smoke
2 sort of blowing away from me."
3 Operator: "Where is -- is the flat, flat full of
4 smoke?"
5 Catherine: "Um, the balcony. Oh God, I'm shutting
6 the door, the balcony's full and people are screaming
7 and going first."
8 Then a little further down, at 06.24, the operator
9 says:
10 "Is it -- is there more smoke on the balcony or in
11 your flat?"
12 Catherine: "No, well, it's -- there's more smoke on
13 the balcony on the side like Havil Street. It's
14 raging."
15 Operator: "Don't go back in if your flat's full of
16 smoke. It's the smoke that'll do you damage, you see."
17 Catherine: "No, but I think it's really smokey."
18 Then if we go to page 12, we looked at the first few
19 lines, she was in the lounge facing east near Peckham:
20 Operator: "Is it -- is the smoke still coming up
21 Catherine, or is it?"
22 Catherine: "Yes, both sides."
23 Operator: "Is it still, is it just in all the
24 rooms?"
25 Catherine: "Yes, it's coming up through the

1 floorboards downstairs but it's outside on the balcony."
2 Operator: "And is it coming up the floorboards where
3 you are or is it just downstairs?"
4 Catherine: "No, just downstairs, but coming."
5 Operator: "Right, listen to me. Now, what I want
6 you to do is ..."
7 Catherine: "It's really smokey now."
8 So it's quite clear 12 minutes into this call that
9 smoke has come into Catherine Hickman's flat, isn't it?
10 A. It is.
11 Q. Would you agree with me that once you have smoke in
12 a flat, the advice must be escape if possible: if
13 possible?
14 A. Yes.
15 Q. If we look at page 16, we're now 16 and a half minutes
16 into this call, and if you look at the second entry for
17 Catherine, 16.44 into the call:
18 "Oh my God, no, listen, I can see flames at the
19 door."
20 So now we don't merely have smoke in her apartment,
21 we have flames as well.
22 A. That's the -- what it says on the transcript.
23 Q. The advice must be, "Get out if you can".
24 A. I agree with you.
25 Q. Just give me one moment. (Pause)

1 One of the potential means of escape -- with
2 hindsight, of course, we know the relevance of it to the
3 Nuhu family -- that was mentioned in this phone call,
4 we've looked at the references, was the existence of
5 a balcony. Do you think that the -- let me put it
6 another way. Should the advice have been to see whether
7 the balcony offered a means of escape?

8 A. That would have been an option for advice.

9 Q. Well, we've looked at the documents and Mr Maxwell-Scott
10 took you through three of the documents yesterday, and
11 I took you through an earlier one in 1994. They all
12 mention balconies as a possible way out, don't they?

13 A. They do.

14 Q. I think we can leave the call to Catherine Hickman now,
15 and just let me ask you a couple of more general
16 questions. In your statement at 492, if you'd look at
17 that, in the last paragraph on that page, three lines
18 down, you say:

19 "Communication with the scene was predominantly one
20 way and we only received limited information from the
21 incident. These are known as informative messages and
22 are recorded in the incident report. There were only
23 two during the first hour, timed at approximately 16.46
24 and 17.21."

25 The jury will recall those, they're where the

1 incident commander's reported that 12 per cent of the
2 9th floor was alight, and so much per cent of other
3 floors and so on. Those were the informative messages,
4 weren't they?

5 A. That's correct.

6 Q. The one thing that the fire ground didn't communicate to
7 you was the fact that they did not know where flat 79
8 was, correct?

9 A. That's correct.

10 Q. Had you appreciated that they didn't know, you say what
11 you would have done at the top of page 493. If you go
12 five lines down, you say:

13 "... they were having trouble identifying individual
14 premises within Lakanal. Had we been aware of this, we
15 may have considered advising the caller to assist in
16 identifying their location by hanging a sheet from the
17 window or something similar."

18 In this case, of course, the information -- there
19 was no need for Catherine Hickman to hang a sheet out of
20 the window, the information control could have given to
21 the fire ground was that Catherine Hickman was in the
22 flat directly above the initial flat on fire, correct?

23 A. It could have been given, yes.

24 Q. That advice about hanging a sheet from a window to
25 identify where the caller is is advice that's given in

1 some of the documents that Mr Maxwell-Scott looked at
2 yesterday. I don't think the jury have seen those
3 references. Can we very quickly look at that together.
4 For this we need volume 4 of the advocates' bundle at
5 1760. (Handed)

6 1760 is the third page of the fire survival guide --
7 THE CORONER: Sorry, could you just wait a moment, we're
8 just turning up the page.

9 MR HENDY: I'm so sorry, madam.

10 1760 is the third page of the fire survival guidance
11 which you told us yesterday the control room operators
12 could call up on their screen if they wanted it, and in
13 the middle of page 1760, under the heading "Assist in
14 rescue", the third bullet point is:

15 "Attract attention -- put a marker out out of
16 a window -- blanket/coat et cetera. Shout to passersby
17 and to firefighters searching. Pass information to
18 crews. Try to get another con officer ..."

19 What is "con"?

20 A. Control officer.

21 Q. "... to do the messages to incident commander. [Put]
22 another control officer to inform ambulance/police ..."

23 So this device of identifying the flat that the FSG
24 person is in by putting a marker out of a window is part
25 of the standard procedure, isn't it?

1 A. It is, from the instructions, yes.

2 Q. We needn't go there, it's also in identical terms at
3 page 1782 in the fire survival guidance.

4 So you in the control room, not you personally, the
5 control room didn't know that the firefighters on the
6 ground didn't know where flat 79 was, but by the same
7 token, there were no questions from control to the fire
8 ground, were there?

9 A. There were not, we were passing information -- we were
10 passing the information that I believed we had to the
11 incident commander via the appropriate appliance or
12 command unit.

13 Q. Well, except that the information that the lady lived in
14 a maisonette, that she was in a flat directly above the
15 fire and that she had a balcony was not information that
16 was passed to the fire ground, and might have assisted
17 them if it had.

18 A. It probably would have assisted them if we'd made them
19 aware of the information, and if I had been aware of the
20 information, I would have ensured it was passed.

21 Q. The last matter I wanted to ask you about was this, and
22 it comes from page 490 of your witness statement. It's
23 the last sentence of the second paragraph on that page,
24 the paragraph beginning, "I received". If you look at
25 the last sentence it says:

1 "There's also a distinction between 'persons
2 trapped' requiring fire survival guidance and the term
3 'persons reported', which is a term used by fire crews
4 at the scene and relates to information received at the
5 incident regarding persons unaccounted for."

6 Just first in relation to "persons reported",
7 "persons reported" is a term, of course, used by control
8 as well.

9 A. Not as a general course. "Persons reported" is
10 a message that originates from fire -- from the fire
11 ground and in my career this was the first time to my
12 knowledge that it had originated within the control room
13 because of the circumstances in front of me.

14 Q. Yes, of course it was you that made it "persons
15 reported".

16 A. That's correct.

17 Q. "Persons reported", of course, denotes a particular
18 urgency because it requires people who are trapped to be
19 rescued.

20 A. Not necessarily. The term "Persons reported" can
21 originate from an incident commander receiving
22 information from a caller, a neighbour, not directly
23 involved in the incident, saying they have not seen
24 their neighbour for X number of hours, the neighbour's
25 house is on fire, and the incident commander makes

1 an assumption that persons could be involved in the
2 property fire they have yet to enter.

3 Q. Understood, but "persons unaccounted for" gives the
4 incident a particular urgency, doesn't it?

5 A. From the fire ground, yes, if it's "persons reported" --
6 if we -- if control had received a persons reported
7 message from an incident, it would be an immediate
8 ordering of ambulance, senior officers and any
9 supporting appliances that were required.

10 Q. Right. Now, the other aspect of that sentence I wanted
11 to ask you about is the reference to Fire Survival
12 Guidance with capital letters: capital F, capital S,
13 capital G; Fire Survival Guidance. Now, this is a term
14 very familiar to those in the control room, right?

15 A. It is.

16 Q. We looked at it yesterday, but perhaps we could just put
17 it up on the screen again, page 1704. It's a document
18 from 1994 called:

19 "Emergency call handling techniques. Fire Survival
20 Guidance."

21 THE CORONER: Sorry, just let Mr Simmons get it.

22 MR HENDY: I'm so sorry, madam. Do you have it now,
23 Mr Simmons?

24 A. Yes, I have it, yes.

25 Q. You remember this opening page, and we looked at some

1 parts of it yesterday, but here we have "FIRE SURVIVAL
2 GUIDANCE", all in capital letters, dated 1994, which is
3 when you started of course, so the term "fire survival
4 guidance" was familiar to you from the beginning of your
5 experience in the control room?

6 A. I started my career in 1969.

7 Q. Forgive me.

8 A. This was introduced some 20 years into my career.

9 Q. Right, but from 1994 onwards you were familiar with
10 it --

11 A. I was familiar with it.

12 Q. -- and so would the control room have been?

13 A. All control officers that joined the London Fire Brigade
14 after that date would have been trained in fire survival
15 guidance during their basic training.

16 Q. What it means is guidance given by the control room over
17 the telephone to somebody who is in a building.

18 A. That's correct.

19 Q. The importance of that is that you have a direct means
20 of communication with the person who feels trapped, and
21 you're able to give advice and you're able to obtain
22 information.

23 A. That is correct.

24 Q. Do you agree with me that it would have been helpful if
25 "fire survival guidance" was a term that was familiar

1 throughout the Fire Brigade?

2 A. It would.

3 Q. Yes, thank you very much, Mr Simmons.

4 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Dowden? No. Ms Al Tai?

5 MS AL TAI: I'm just checking, one moment please madam.

6 I think that's okay, thank you madam.

7 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Compton?

8 Questions by MR COMPTON

9 MR COMPTON: Yes. Good morning, Mr Simmons. Can I just ask

10 you one short matter, please. Can you go on the

11 advocates' bundle at page 1504.

12 THE CORONER: We can't hear you very well, Mr Compton, is

13 that 1504?

14 MR COMPTON: Sorry, I'll move this up. Is that better?

15 THE CORONER: Thank you, yes.

16 A. Can I confirm you said "1504"?

17 MR COMPTON: Indeed. This is a document that starts at

18 1493, which is:

19 "Generic risk assessment 3.2. High rise

20 firefighting."

21 It may be a document that you've never seen.

22 THE CORONER: Could you just take Mr Simmons to the front

23 page?

24 MR COMPTON: Yes, it's 1493, the front page.

25 A. I've never seen the document at all.

1 Q. I just want to ask you one matter, please, about
2 page 1504. Before I do so, the history appears for this
3 document that it was generated, and with an earlier risk
4 assessment, following a very serious fire involving
5 a high rise block at Harrow. Did you know about that
6 high rise block? It was one of those blocks where
7 I think two firefighters and a resident were killed.

8 A. I don't recall an incident such as that in the London
9 Fire Brigade. I'm not saying it didn't happen, because
10 it obviously did, but I can't remember every fire that
11 I dealt with in -- in high rise blocks in the Fire
12 Brigade, and so I'm not aware of this document or the
13 circumstances causing it to be originated.

14 Q. I understand that, I just want to ask you a point.
15 I said Harrow, it was at Harrow Court in Hertfordshire.
16 It was a fire on 2 February 2005. If you can take it
17 from me, as a result of that it raised a number of
18 concerns that brought about an earlier risk assessment
19 and this document we're looking at now. But that's the
20 background.

21 A. I believe you're talking about the fire in Stevenage,
22 which I do recall now, because it received considerable
23 press coverage --

24 Q. Yes.

25 A. -- and following that there was an assessment

1 operationally of high rise buildings and, to my
2 knowledge, bearing in mind I've been retired for two
3 years, that all high rise buildings have a code that was
4 given to enable control to order an increased attendance
5 to all fires in high rise buildings, even if we didn't
6 have a record.

7 THE CORONER: Sorry, could I just stop you there, just wait
8 for the questions, thank you.

9 MR COMPTON: I just want to take you to one paragraph,
10 I appreciate your evidence, but can we just go to the
11 second paragraph and I want to ask your comments on
12 this:

13 "Consideration should be given to the development
14 and adoption of a system to provide role related
15 relevant information concerning the premises to all
16 personnel."

17 That's my emphasis:

18 "This should include call handlers ..."

19 That would have included you, would you agree?

20 A. I would agree that.

21 Q. Yes.

22 "... first and subsequent responders, and responding
23 supervisory officers. Fire and rescue services should
24 consider the development of common call handling prompts
25 to elicit and gather appropriate, relevant and timely

1 information about the nature of the incident, affected
2 areas, floors, et cetera."

3 Then it goes on to talk about how to deal with the
4 call handling.

5 From your evidence, it would appear that that wasn't
6 happening at the time of this dreadful tragedy.

7 A. From my understanding, yes, that is correct.

8 Q. Would you agree that it is a good idea to share
9 information about such items as the physicality or the
10 layout of the building --

11 A. I would agree with you, yes.

12 Q. -- and that bearing in mind we live in a age of
13 computers, that such information about the layout of
14 a building, including the knowledge that a building
15 contains maisonettes on single flats would be good
16 information to be contained within the control centre?

17 A. It would if the systems were available to the control
18 officers and to command units that that could be done.

19 Q. Forgive me, but we have mobile data terminals on fire
20 appliances; would you agree?

21 A. We have, but I'm not sure -- I personally am not
22 familiar with their capability.

23 Q. Well, they contain operational information, they contain
24 the intelligence about the buildings, so that would
25 enable firefighters to have the knowledge and the

1 preplanned awareness of those particular buildings.

2 A. I was aware of the development of the mobile data
3 terminals, but to my knowledge that information that was
4 on the mobile data terminals was not available in that
5 format to Fire Brigade control.

6 Q. There's no linkage, as far as you know, up to today?
7 I appreciate you're retired.

8 A. I would say no.

9 Q. All right, well, we can ask somebody else. I have no
10 further questions.

11 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Walsh?

12 Questions by MR WALSH

13 MR WALSH: Thank you, madam, Mr Simmons. I'm not going to
14 keep you very long, but I need to explore -- just for
15 a few minutes, about five or ten minutes -- with you
16 some principles that you applied when you were operating
17 in a senior role within control.

18 First of all in relation to MDT terminals which
19 you've just been asked about, the MDT terminals in fire
20 engines, and so on, weren't available at the time of
21 this fire.

22 A. I believe they were being introduced, but I'm not sure
23 when.

24 Q. All right, we've heard evidence about that, but I won't
25 ask you about what's happened subsequently. Would you

1 mind having a look in the advocates bundles, page 1395,
2 at a document which you looked at briefly with
3 Mr Maxwell-Scott yesterday. We can see at F.2 that
4 there is the table of calls, at least in relation to the
5 timeline, that were made on that day.

6 It's a total of 60, 59 at the bottom of the
7 left-hand column, "Lakanal related" and including the
8 first it's 60, and indeed you mention that in your
9 statement. Now, between 1600 hours, the first entry on
10 the column on the left, and 16.59, that is 4 o'clock
11 until 5 o'clock, there were 44/45 calls in that space of
12 time. That was obviously the most intense period of
13 time when calls were being received by control.

14 A. That's correct.

15 Q. Do you remember being in control at that time and being
16 aware of how busy the control officers were?

17 A. I was in the control room for the duration of that time,
18 from approximately 1600 until I was relieved by the
19 oncoming watch about 1830.

20 Q. Yes, you made the point in your statement, and I needn't
21 take you to it, that in relation to that period of time,
22 of those calls there were four ongoing fire survival
23 guidance calls, one for flat 79, one for flat 68, one
24 for flat 57 and one for flat 80 or 81, depending upon
25 time of the call.

1 A. That's my recollection.

2 Q. Each of the control officers who were dealing with those
3 fire survival guidance calls were dealing with different
4 situations, obviously?

5 A. They were indeed.

6 Q. Can I now take you, please, to the jury bundle behind
7 divider 17, and I appreciate that you were not the
8 person conducting this call, but as a result of the
9 questions which have been put to you earlier, I just
10 need to take you to some exchanges.

11 Do you mind looking first at page 3 behind
12 divider 17? I'm going to ask you about not so much what
13 was being said and what was in the mind of the operator
14 here, but about policy in relation to smoke. Can we
15 look at the entry for 02.08. Catherine Hickman says, in
16 response to a question:

17 "Yeah, but there's fire coming through the
18 floorboards now, I'm in smoke."

19 I'll adopt Mr Hendy's approach. If we assume that
20 that "I'm in smoke" should read "I mean, smoke," what
21 the operator was being told, if that is right, is there
22 was smoke coming through the floorboards?

23 A. I would make that assumption, yes.

24 Q. Catherine Hickman asked what should she do, should she
25 get out, and then if we come down to 16.21.27, the

1 operator says:

2 "I want you to go into another room where the smoke
3 isn't."

4 Catherine replies that she would go, and then she
5 says she's going upstairs. Then at 02.34, without going
6 through every single piece of exchanges, the operator
7 says:

8 "I am -- the smoke, are you in another room now
9 where the smoke isn't coming through?"

10 So those are the questions she's asking. From
11 a control operator's point of view, on fire survival
12 guidance calls, or in relation to any call, when
13 an operator is aware of the fact that there is smoke
14 coming into a flat of this kind, what is the primary aim
15 of the operator, what is the policy and what would the
16 training lead you to expect the operator to try to do,
17 when there is a report of smoke coming into a room?

18 A. To try and keep the caller safe by ideally, "Can you get
19 out and can you stay out?"

20 Q. Yes, and if it's in a high rise situation, where there
21 is smoke coming into a room in a flat, what would be
22 tried first by the operator?

23 A. Again, I would go for "Get out and stay out", but if
24 that was not possible, to get into a room where -- get
25 an individual into a room where it is safer.

1 Q. All right. Would you mind moving to page 7? This is
2 a point, at 06.02, that Catherine says:
3 "Um, well, I can go out, but there's smoke sort of
4 blowing away from me."
5 Then the operator says:
6 "Where? Is the flat full of smoke?"
7 Then of course Catherine, being on the balcony at
8 that stage, says she's shutting the door:
9 "The balcony's full and people are screaming and
10 going first."
11 Then if you just jump done to 06.24, and the
12 exchange of questions there. The operator says:
13 "Is it -- is there smoke on the balcony or in your
14 flat?"
15 Then Catherine replies about smoke on the balcony,
16 the operator says:
17 "Right, okay."
18 Catherine: "I hope I shut all the windows, I think
19 so."
20 Operator: "Don't go back in if your flat's full of
21 smoke. It is the smoke that'll cause you damage, you
22 see."
23 So it's very difficult for you to comment upon this
24 particular conversation, but if an operator, if
25 a control officer is being told that there's a balcony

1 and there's a person on the balcony, that there is
2 a great deal of smoke in the flat, would it be expected
3 for the operator to say, "Well, don't go back into the
4 flat if it's full of smoke"?

5 A. I would expect the instructions to not go back into the
6 flat to be given.

7 Q. With that context in mind, I want to ask you about the
8 dilemma that control officers face in circumstances of
9 this kind. Obviously, the control officer is remote,
10 not in the room or in the block or even on the fire
11 ground, but remote from the scene.

12 A. Very remote.

13 Q. How much reliance does the control officer have to place
14 upon what the control officer was being told by the
15 person to whom he or she is speaking?

16 A. Basically everything, you have to take what the response
17 is to the questions or information given.

18 Q. A further dilemma which control officers will face is
19 that being remote from the scene, what control officers
20 will not know is what the activity and the development
21 of a fire is elsewhere in the premises which are
22 separate or outside of the premises in which the caller
23 is speaking from.

24 A. That is correct.

25 Q. What dangers are there, for example, in a situation

1 where there is a fire in premises, about advising
2 someone to open an exterior door into -- by "exterior"
3 I mean a door from a flat into, for example, a corridor.
4 If a control officer was advising a person to open that
5 door and go out of a flat into another corridor, and
6 then, for example, into an escape balcony, what dangers
7 are there which an operator has to bear in mind in those
8 circumstances?

9 A. That by any information or any instructions they pass to
10 the caller or the person trying to be saved we could be
11 passing them into further danger.

12 Q. You could be passing them into further danger?

13 A. Yes, moving them from an area into another area based on
14 information they're giving, that -- it is very difficult
15 and you have to sometimes interpret what the caller is
16 saying and the information -- and I believe I said it
17 yesterday -- that the caller information in
18 a situation -- in an emergency situation -- is not
19 100 per cent reliable.

20 I believe I said yesterday morning that we've had
21 occasions where a caller 300 yards from a building
22 that's on fire is more panicky than the person in
23 a property in imminent danger.

24 Q. Yes, all right, so people will be different in different
25 circumstances. But just lastly on this topic, what

1 dangers are there, even if you are aware that there is
2 an escape balcony outside, which leads to a fire door,
3 which opens into a stairwell, and there being other
4 doors to gain access to that, what dangers would
5 an operator have to be aware of in advising a person to
6 leave premises, go along a balcony, through a fire door
7 which might close behind them, and then into
8 a stairwell?

9 A. The stairwell itself could well be the source of the
10 fire or heavily smoke-logged because of the fire.

11 Q. So it follows, and I think Mr Maxwell-Scott put this to
12 you yesterday, that there are very fine judgments to be
13 made, particularly when one is looking at smoke-logging,
14 as to whether someone should remain where they are or
15 whether they should leave and what mechanism is adopted
16 for them to leave.

17 A. Very fine lines.

18 Q. Yes, all right. Thank you very much.

19 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Walsh. Members of the jury, do
20 you have any questions?

21 Questions from THE JURY

22 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you, Madam Coroner, we do
23 have a few.

24 Bearing in mind the volume of calls you were
25 receiving, would Catherine's call not be of the highest

1 priority as she was actually trapped, and would your
2 colleague have had any assistance with the call?

3 A. At the time that Catherine's call was being received,
4 I believe there are there were three other fire survival
5 calls, plus several -- we had 60 calls for Lakanal
6 itself, plus other incidents in the brigade area that
7 need to be answered. We had 13 staff on duty, some
8 assigned to other duties: operating the radio system;
9 and three supervisors trying to collate information,
10 act, instruct the work loads, the supporting work loads
11 to the crews attending other incidents, attending
12 Lakanal House, responding to officers.

13 The situation was on that day that with the numbers
14 available to me, I could not give what would be my
15 preferred option of having a supervisor assigned to each
16 of those fire survival calls. We had four fire survival
17 calls, three supervisors. If we'd have all got involved
18 in one of them, there would have been nobody to deal
19 with the fourth fire survival call, there would be
20 nobody to supervise the workings of the London Fire
21 Brigade control.

22 THE CORONER: Then deal with briefly the second part of the
23 question, which, just briefly, Mr Simmons, was whether
24 the operator speaking to Catherine Hickman was given
25 some assistance within the control room?

1 A. She was given some assistance, but at what time that
2 assistance was able to be given I cannot be certain.

3 THE CORONER: Thank you.

4 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you. Another one of our
5 questions is perhaps tied into that. Is there any
6 facility in the control room, when handling calls, for
7 the operator to share the call with colleagues? Perhaps
8 if you were having a conversation you could put it on
9 speaker phone or both plug into something to both be
10 listening, that sort of thing.

11 A. That is the normal circumstances for fire survival calls
12 under normal circumstances, that a supervisor would sit
13 adjacent to the operator taking the call, plug their
14 head set into a separate jacket and monitor, prompt the
15 operator taking the call.

16 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay, thank you. Moving away
17 I think from that topic, we've heard that you weren't at
18 brigade control getting much response from the fire
19 ground. Is there anybody in the control room that is
20 detailed to monitor the channels used on the ground,
21 such as channel 1, 2, 6 and 10 that we've heard were
22 used?

23 A. They are fire ground radios, they have no interlink, to
24 my knowledge, with the main radio channels used by the
25 control room.

1 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: So I guess what I'm getting at is
2 that perhaps if brigade control had been able to listen
3 in to the radios of people like the firefighters or
4 incident control, they may have realised that the people
5 on the fire ground weren't aware of where flat 79 is;
6 would you agree with that?

7 A. If we'd had that facility, and only if staff had been
8 available to do that, to enable that to happen, I would
9 have had to have the facility -- the technical facility
10 to do that and staff available, otherwise I would
11 have -- to do that, I would have had to have taken staff
12 off other duties.

13 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: So in 2009 you didn't have the
14 facility to do that, even if you had have had staff
15 available?

16 A. We don't -- we didn't have the facility, I don't believe
17 the facility was available when I retired, and I'm not
18 sure of the technical ability to provide that into the
19 control room.

20 THE CORONER: Thank you.

21 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay. Sorry, just a couple more.
22 I know that the incident was made "Persons reported" by
23 yourself and that often that's something that is done by
24 the people on the fire ground.

25 There seems to have been a lot of confusion between

1 people on the fire ground, at various levels, people in
2 brigade control. Would you say that everybody has
3 exactly the same definition of "Persons reported", or do
4 you think it perhaps varies between firefighters,
5 brigade control; is it a grey --

6 A. The term "Persons reported" has one definition, and it
7 originates from the incident commander, it does not
8 normally -- this was one exception -- originate from the
9 control room. Every other incident of "Persons
10 reported", the message originates from the incident
11 commander.

12 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: So it always means exactly the
13 same thing, regardless of the danger or lack of
14 danger --

15 A. It is a message -- it is a message that indicates
16 from -- from the incident ground, from the incident
17 commander, that persons may or may not be involved.

18 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay. Our last question, this is
19 in regard to the generic risk assessment 3.2. We do
20 realise that this is the first time you have seen that
21 document, the one with the orange cover, I believe it
22 was. To what extent would a document of this type be
23 likely to be circulated across the Fire Brigade, to
24 watch manager level; would it be something only the
25 commissioner would see or is that something that you

1 very sorry that you were, I think, here most of
2 yesterday, not all of yesterday. We did not get to your
3 evidence, I do apologise for that, but thank you very
4 much for coming back today.

5 A. That's fine.

6 THE CORONER: You'll also have realised sitting at the back
7 that it is not that easy to hear in some parts of this
8 room so if you could bring the microphone closer to you,
9 please, and try to speak closely to the microphone, that
10 will help us to hear what you have to say. All right?

11 A. Okay.

12 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Mr Maxwell-Scott, who is
13 standing, is going to ask you a few questions on my
14 behalf and then there may be some questions from others.

15 A. Okay.

16 THE CORONER: Thank you.

17 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

18 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good morning, Ms Real.

19 A. Good morning.

20 Q. Could you give the court your full name, please?

21 A. Deborah Rebecca Frances Real.

22 Q. I'm going to ask you a short number of questions about
23 your role at brigade control, and firstly I'll ask you
24 to look in the advocates' bundle at 1369. (Handed)

25 This is a staff management structure chart for

1 brigade control in the London Fire Brigade. It is found
2 within a report for the London Fire Brigade by the
3 London Fire Brigade on the role and actions of LFB
4 control. You may or may not have seen the report
5 before, but you may have seen this on the screen
6 yesterday?

7 A. I have seen the report just recently.

8 Q. Thank you. By reference to the chart, what I wanted to
9 do was to ask you when you joined the London Fire
10 Brigade and then about the jobs that you held within
11 brigade control. Firstly, when did you join the London
12 Fire Brigade?

13 A. I joined the London Fire Brigade in 1992.

14 Q. Did you start working in brigade control or somewhere
15 else?

16 A. No, I started with the fire safety department.

17 Q. When did you join brigade control?

18 A. I joined brigade control in January 1998.

19 Q. What job did you take on when you first joined brigade
20 control?

21 A. I was a control officer.

22 Q. So looking at this diagram, if for example you were on
23 the Green Watch, you would have been one of 16 control
24 officers?

25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. Were you in time promoted to become a senior control
2 officer?

3 A. Yes, I was.

4 Q. When was that?

5 A. That was approximately 2005.

6 Q. In July 2009, were you a senior control officer attached
7 to Green Watch?

8 A. I was, yes.

9 Q. If I ask you about the training that you received on
10 fire survival guidance calls, when, if at all, did you
11 receive formal training on those?

12 A. I received training, I believe it was towards the end of
13 my training course as a control officer, and that would
14 have been in 1998.

15 Q. Did you receive any formal training on fire survival
16 guidance calls after that?

17 A. No, I didn't.

18 Q. Is it right that you were working in the control room on
19 the afternoon of 3 July 2009?

20 A. That's correct.

21 Q. Did you at any point have a role in listening in on the
22 call between an operator in the control room and
23 Catherine Hickman?

24 A. I did, yes.

25 Q. Can you recall at what stage in the call you began

1 listening in on it, so in other words how long it had
2 been going on for before you first listened in on it?

3 A. I can't remember at what point I listened in, because
4 I actually took two fire calls myself, I then requested
5 the ambulance, I spoke to the police and possibly then
6 I started listening in to the call after that. So
7 I can't recall at what point.

8 Q. Was there a particular reason why you started listening
9 in on it?

10 A. Well, as a supervisor, we would always, if we realise
11 a control officer's taking a fire survival guidance
12 call, we would always want to listen in as soon as
13 possible to support that control officer. So it --
14 I became aware that the control officer was taking
15 a fire survival call.

16 Q. Can you recall whether you were the first supervisor to
17 carry out that role of listening in on the fire survival
18 guidance call with Catherine Hickman or whether you took
19 over from another supervisor?

20 A. I believe I was the first person to listen in.

21 Q. Thank you. If I could ask you to have a look at
22 page 1758. Firstly, can I ask you if this is a document
23 that you recognise?

24 A. Yes, it is.

25 Q. It's a reference information file about fire survival

1 guidance calls which is available on the London Fire
2 Brigade intranet --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. -- and it's something we've heard can be pulled up on
5 the screen by a control operator.

6 A. That's correct.

7 Q. Is this something you were familiar with back in
8 July 2009?

9 A. Yes, it is, yes.

10 Q. Can you help us by recalling whether or not this was
11 ever up on the screen, the operator's screen, whilst you
12 were supervising her call with Catherine Hickman?

13 A. I wouldn't be able to say, because I was monitoring from
14 a distance, so I will not have been able to see the
15 screens of the operator.

16 Q. So does it follow from the answer you've just given that
17 whilst you were monitoring the call, you were not
18 sitting next to the operator?

19 A. No, I was not.

20 Q. Did there come a time when a different supervisor took
21 over from you in supporting the operator?

22 A. Yes, there did. At some point during the call, a senior
23 operations manager was called down into the control room
24 and she then took over monitoring the call, and at that
25 point I then monitored another control operator that was

1 taking a fire survival call.

2 Q. If I take you back to page 1369, you've just told us
3 that a senior operations manager took over from you in
4 monitoring the call and supervising the operator. By
5 reference to this cart, are we talking about one of the
6 two senior operations managers who was more senior than
7 Mr Simmons?

8 A. Yes, that's correct.

9 Q. Are you able to assist at all with how long it was that
10 you carried out the role of monitoring and supervising
11 the call?

12 A. I can't remember.

13 Q. It's difficult, I know, but if I ask it in this way: can
14 you remember whether at the time that you ceased acting
15 as monitor supervisor, Catherine Hickman was still
16 talking?

17 A. Yes, she was.

18 Q. Thank you very much, I have no further questions, but
19 others may have some.

20 THE CORONER: Thank you. Ms Al Tai?

21 Questions by MS AL TAI

22 MS AL TAI: Good morning, Ms Real.

23 A. Good morning.

24 Q. I act on behalf of Mark Bailey, Catherine Hickman's
25 partner. I don't propose to ask you too many questions,

1 a lot of them have been covered by your colleague,
2 Mr Simmons. As you can understand, we won't be hearing
3 evidence from the operator who took the phone call from
4 Miss Hickman, so it's of vital importance that any
5 information you can give us will be of assistance to the
6 jury and to my client, Mr Bailey. I should add that
7 we're most grateful as well for your attending.

8 A. Thank you.

9 Q. Can I understand that in your role as a supervisor
10 supervising these calls you would monitor; could you
11 just briefly tell us how that monitoring would take
12 place?

13 A. I can monitor from my position by pressing a button
14 which is -- I can mimic the call, so I can listen to the
15 call as it's happening.

16 Q. So essentially do you have an extra set of headphones
17 that enable you to listen to the call as it's taking
18 place?

19 A. I have -- sorry, I have my own headphones anyway for
20 calls that I take, so I can just press a button, a mimic
21 button, and I would then be listening to the call.

22 Q. As if you were on the phone with the individual on the
23 other end?

24 A. Yes, I can't actually speak to the caller, but I can
25 listen to both the operator and the caller.

1 Q. How do you provide guidance to the individual you're
2 supervising?

3 A. It would just be verbally, I could walk over to the
4 operator, so -- yeah, it would just be verbally.

5 Q. On that morning, if you can recollect, whilst you were
6 supervising the operator's phone call with Miss Hickman,
7 how did you provide guidance; was it through your head
8 set or did you walk over, as you say?

9 A. I can't actually remember whether I did. I know
10 I listened in to the call, part of the call, but I can't
11 recollect whether I actually provided any advice or if
12 I asked any questions, I can't remember that.

13 Q. Just briefly to cover one topic we've been brought to
14 several times, it's in respect of fire survival guidance
15 calls, and you've been shown the documents in respect of
16 that. Is it your understanding from the training you
17 received that individuals would be expected to be
18 rescued by the London Fire Brigade --

19 A. Yes, absolutely, yes.

20 Q. -- and your position as a control officer, a senior
21 control officer, would be premised on that; is that
22 correct?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Ordinarily, when you're in the role that you are --
25 I understand you can't recollect anything from that

1 particular day -- but generically speaking, when you're
2 trying to assist an operator, how would you do it, would
3 you go up to them, would you speak to them, or would you
4 rather just do it through the remote set that you have?

5 A. Now?

6 Q. In 2009.

7 A. In 2009, we were in -- the control room was quite small,
8 so you were able to speak if you were sitting near to
9 an operator, you would be able to listen to the call and
10 talk to the operator at the same time, but if they were
11 some distance away, then I would get up and walk over to
12 the operator and speak to them face to face.

13 Q. Is it the occasion that the operator would ask you for
14 assistance, or is it something that you would give
15 regardless?

16 A. Well, the control room we were working in in 2009,
17 personally it became apparent quite quickly that if
18 a call -- call taker was taking a difficult call, it
19 became apparent quite quickly, so if I was able to,
20 I would listen in straight away.

21 Q. I understand that. What I think I mean to ask you is if
22 it appeared that the operator was taking a call that was
23 difficult, would you provide assistance on cue, or would
24 the operator have to ask you for assistance?

25 A. I would provide assistance, if -- if I noticed that the

1 call taker was taking a difficult call, I would provide
2 assistance straight away.

3 Q. Our understanding is, of course, that you can't
4 recollect anything from that particular day in respect
5 of advice that you might have given the operator, or
6 questions.

7 A. No, I can't.

8 Q. Thank you, Ms Real.

9 THE CORONER: Thank you, Ms Al Tai.

10 MR COMPTON: No questions.

11 MR WALSH: No, thank you, madam.

12 THE CORONER: Ms Real, thank you very much for coming and
13 for the assistance you've been able to give us. You're
14 welcome to stay if you would like, but you're free to go
15 if you would prefer.

16 A. Thank you.

17 (The witness withdrew)

18 THE CORONER: Yes, would that be a sensible time for our
19 mid-morning break?

20 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes, it would.

21 THE CORONER: So, members of the jury, please be back for
22 11.40, thank you very much.

23 (11.31 am)

24 (A short break)

25 (11.41 am)

1 THE CORONER: Thank you, yes.

2 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: The next witness is Mr Hale.

3 THE CORONER: Thank you, yes. Can you just remind me of the
4 page number.

5 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: There is no statement from him.

6 THE CORONER: Ah, that's why I couldn't find it. Thank you.

7 (In the presence of the Jury)

8 PETER HALE (affirmed)

9 THE CORONER: Mr Hale, thank you very much. Do sit down,
10 and help yourself to a glass of water. Please when
11 you're giving your answers, could you keep your voice up
12 and speak closely to the microphone. Mr Maxwell-Scott,
13 who is standing, will initially ask questions on my
14 behalf and then there may be questions from others.

15 A. Okay.

16 THE CORONER: Thank you. If you direct your answers across
17 the room towards the jurors, then that will help them to
18 hear and keep you close to the microphone, thank you.

19 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

20 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good morning, Mr Hale. Can you give the
21 court your full name please?

22 A. Peter Robert Hale.

23 Q. I'm going to be asking you questions about a visit that
24 we understand that you and your crew made to Lakanal
25 House on 30 May 2009. Is it right that at that time you

1 were based at Peckham Fire Station?

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. Were you a crew manager at the time?

4 A. That's correct, yes.

5 Q. When did you join the London Fire Brigade?

6 A. In 2004.

7 Q. When were you promoted to crew manager?

8 A. Approximately January 2007.

9 Q. Thank you. The visit that you made to Lakanal House on

10 30 May 2009, can you tell us whether, as far as you

11 recall, that was the first time you'd been there or

12 whether you'd been there before?

13 A. I don't recall, I don't remember.

14 Q. We understand from information from the London Fire

15 Brigade that eight of you in total went on 30 May 2009:

16 yourself, who was the crew manager, Crew Manager Milner

17 and six other firefighters, in other words the whole

18 watch that day. Would that be a fair assessment?

19 A. Yeah, I don't remember the visit in question, or the day

20 in question, but I've been shown and I've seen a copy of

21 the station diary and it confirms that eight personnel

22 attended the visit at Lakanal House on that date.

23 Q. So two points, then: you don't personally, three and

24 a half or so years on, remember the visit at all --

25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. -- which I can understand; and, secondly, you confirm
2 that it was the whole watch, so all firefighters on duty
3 during that shift who went on the visit?

4 A. The station diary shows that, yes, everyone went.

5 Q. Thank you. At that time, so in other words back in the
6 summer of 2009, can you help us as best you can with how
7 many familiarisation visits, sometimes known as 72D
8 visits, you would have done each month?

9 A. It would vary from month to month, but we'd do at least
10 one a day.

11 Q. Can you remember what proportion of them would have been
12 to residential tower blocks?

13 A. Not in terms of the figure, but a high percentage,
14 a high number of them would be to tower blocks and
15 blocks of flats.

16 Q. Should we understand from your answer that you mean more
17 than half?

18 A. Yes, more than half.

19 Q. I appreciate of course that you don't remember this
20 visit itself, and you've given your answers about the
21 fact that you would have been doing one or so of these
22 per shift during the day and that more than half of them
23 would have been to residential tower blocks.

24 Can I ask you instead then some general questions
25 about what the practice would have been at the time back

1 in 2009, before the Lakanal House fire, when conducting
2 a familiarisation visit in a residential tower block.
3 Firstly, what was your understanding at the time of the
4 purpose of carrying out such a visit at all?

5 A. My understanding, my knowledge, a 72D is to look for
6 facilities and installations to assist us carry out
7 firefighting and rescues.

8 Q. Turning that into lay persons' language that I and the
9 members of the jury can understand, what sort of
10 facilities and installations are you referring to?

11 A. We would -- we would check the communal part of the
12 building, like the internal stairways, dry risers,
13 inlets and outlets, the fire lift, things along those
14 lines, and hydrants, location of hydrants.

15 Q. So just pausing there and looking at those in turn,
16 outside the building, you would have looked for hydrants
17 so that you know there is a suitable water supply --

18 A. That's correct.

19 Q. -- to plug the appliance into, and then in turn the
20 appliance would be plugged into the main dry riser
21 inlet, is that right?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. So you would look at the main dry riser inlet at ground
24 floor level?

25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. Then you mentioned also dry riser outlets. Can you help
2 us with whether the practice would have been to inspect
3 all the dry riser outlets, or just a sample?

4 A. The practice is to check all dry riser outlets.

5 Q. And would have been at the time?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. We know in Lakanal, I can fill you in on the details,
8 that that would have meant looking on the odd-numbered
9 floors, so 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 and 13.

10 A. That should have been done, yes.

11 Q. You mentioned looking at the lift, because of the
12 fireman's lift function; is that right?

13 A. Yes, that's correct.

14 Q. Would the visit have been conducted in effect with all
15 eight of you going round together or would you have
16 split up and into smaller groups, in terms of the
17 general practice?

18 A. There's -- there's no set in stone way of carrying out
19 the visit. Sometimes some of the crew start from the
20 bottom of the block, some make their way to the top and
21 work up and down and meet in the middle, at times we'd
22 all go to the stop, systematically work our way down.
23 There's no set in stone way of carrying out, conducting
24 a 72D visit.

25 Q. Should we understand then that on different occasions it

1 was done in different ways?

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. I think I'm right in saying that when an appliance

4 arrives at a tower block to carry out firefighting in

5 a high rise building, sometimes the crew members on

6 arrival know that they are going to have specific tasks

7 that fall to them. So, for example, I think the driver

8 would generally do things at ground floor level in

9 relation to setting into the dry riser, and won't be

10 somebody who goes straight up into the building in

11 breathing apparatus; is that right?

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. Does the person who's the driver change from day to day,

14 or is somebody always the driver?

15 A. No, we usually have a number of drivers on the watch,

16 and the roles are located at role call in the morning,

17 so in that role call, somebody will be nominated to

18 drive. That's how it's done.

19 Q. So thinking about how that would work on a 72D visit,

20 it's not the case that somebody always knows that

21 they'll be the driver and therefore might specifically

22 focus on matters at ground floor level --

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. -- because they might be the driver one day but not the

25 next day?

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. What about looking for signs within the building, would
3 there have been a practice back in spring 2009 on a 72D
4 visit of looking to see firstly whether there were signs
5 indicating fire exit and means of escape?

6 A. That should have been the case.

7 Q. Should have been the case. Then, secondly, what about
8 looking for signs that give an indication of the layout
9 of the building, like a mini plan or something that
10 tells you where particular flats are within the
11 building?

12 A. Usually there's a plaque of some description by the
13 lifts which tells you X number flats is on X floor.
14 That is what usually I go by.

15 Q. Just thinking about your answer, is it your evidence --
16 and you must of course say if I'm getting this wrong --
17 that in your own experience of working on the patch of
18 ground covered by Peckham Fire Station that there is
19 usually some kind of plaque by the lifts at ground floor
20 level that gives information about where flats are.

21 A. Usually.

22 Q. On a 72D visit, would it have been the practice in
23 spring 2009 to have checked whether or not there was
24 such a sign?

25 A. Not specifically checked, but it would have been

1 noticed, we wouldn't specifically look out for it.

2 Q. You wouldn't specifically look out for it?

3 A. I personally wouldn't specifically look out for it.

4 Q. What about looking for and assessing what the potential
5 escape routes are within the building. Is that
6 something that would have been done on a 72D visit?

7 A. We make ourselves aware of where the escape routes are,
8 ie the doors, but we couldn't actually enter these
9 doors, because as far as we're concerned that's not
10 a communal part of the building, that's a private part
11 of the building.

12 Q. So just breaking that down, I think that part of your
13 answer is to the effect that on a 72D visit you wouldn't
14 go into an individual flat.

15 A. That's correct.

16 Q. I understand that, that's what I expected you to say.
17 Were you also, saying, however, that you would have
18 looked to see what the available escape routes were from
19 individual flats in as far as you could tell from
20 outside?

21 A. Outside of the building, or outside of the flats?

22 Q. Either. Given that you're not going into a flat, to
23 what extent would you consider what the escape routes
24 are from individual flats?

25 A. Each -- we've got high rise buildings of similar

1 description to Lakanal, with those metal doors, we'd
2 just make sure they're there, make sure we're aware that
3 they're there, but we wouldn't actually open and check
4 them.

5 Q. I think what I'll do is I'll come back to that when
6 I show you some photographs towards the end of my
7 questions.

8 Would it have been the practice to carry a notebook
9 when doing a 72D visit, so that if there was something
10 that you wanted to note as you saw it, you had the
11 option of doing so?

12 A. There would be at least one person with a notebook.

13 Q. We've seen that on the visit in May 2009 you would have
14 been one of two crew managers.

15 A. That's correct.

16 Q. So the two of you would jointly have been the most
17 senior persons present and presumably, because of your
18 rank as a crew manager, you were quite often one of the
19 most senior people present on a 72D visit?

20 A. That's correct.

21 Q. Would it have been your practice at the time to carry
22 a notebook yourself?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Would you from time to time make notes as you went
25 round?

1 A. I'd only make notes if I found something that was
2 untoward or was defective. If it was fine, I wouldn't
3 make notes.

4 Q. Does it follow from what you just said that if you went
5 round the building and you didn't find anything that was
6 in your mind defective, you probably wouldn't have any
7 notes at the end of the visit?

8 A. That's correct.

9 Q. So such notes that you would have would be of defects?

10 A. Mm-hmm.

11 Q. What would happen to those notes if you did find
12 defects?

13 A. What would happen to them when we got back to the
14 station?

15 Q. Yes, because at the moment these are just presumably
16 handwritten notes, so they're not particularly formal,
17 but they would have on them one or more defects. What
18 would be the next step?

19 A. Go back to the station, I'd -- I'd -- we'd inform the
20 other crews, the other watches, we've got a handing over
21 book in the office, we'd make any notes in there, so any
22 oncoming watches, the office staff read them and filter
23 it down through the watch, reverbing(?) to the other
24 watches. We can obviously email neighbouring stations
25 to inform those, or email other watches. We have

1 a liaison between us and the local authority, if need be
2 we can inform her. We've got a fire safety department,
3 we can inform them if need be, and we'd consider
4 informing our MC, control, that there's a possible
5 defect.

6 Q. I can see that there's a whole range of possibilities
7 open to you, and no doubt if you find a very serious
8 defect you might pursue all of them or at least some of
9 them?

10 A. That's correct.

11 Q. What about more minor defects, would they always be
12 followed up in a more formal written document than just
13 the handwritten notes?

14 A. Can you explain what you mean by "minor defect"?

15 Q. Well, let me ask you then in this way: on every occasion
16 that your handwritten note showed a finding of a defect,
17 would there always then be a more formal written
18 handover note of it?

19 A. Should be.

20 Q. Would there always, in your experience, also be
21 something said verbally, or would it just sometimes be
22 done in writing?

23 A. Both, verbally and writing.

24 Q. Verbally, would that be to somebody like the station
25 manager, or would it also be to people on other watches?

1 A. Again, both.

2 Q. To what extent did you overlap with other watches to
3 provide an opportunity to pass on information verbally?

4 A. Sorry, could you explain what you mean by overlap?

5 Q. Well, you're on whichever colour watch you're on, and
6 you will arrive for duty, and when you arrive the other
7 watch will end its duty, and you will then do your
8 shift, if I can call it that, and at the end of that
9 shift you will go off duty. So what I'm wondering is
10 the extent to which that shift pattern has built into it
11 any time to have a verbal handover from shift to shift.

12 A. The verbal part will be for the oncoming, or the watch
13 taking over, and hence we have the back up of the
14 handing over book, so any watches we don't get to speak
15 to, it's in there, and any notes, any findings that we
16 may think they need to know about.

17 Q. What if a finding was -- not that there was a defect,
18 but that the layout of the building was to some extent
19 unusual, or more complicated than usual. Presumably
20 that's not something that you would specifically write
21 down in your notebook, because it's not a defect; is
22 that right?

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. Is that something that would be passed on in any way?

25 A. I would say no.

1 Q. If I can then show you some photographs of Lakanal
2 House, just to see firstly whether they jog your memory
3 and secondly to ask you about the practice of looking
4 for certain features.

5 Firstly, this is photograph 44, and it's
6 a photograph taken more recently, so after the fire, of
7 Lakanal House showing mainly the west side of the
8 building. A major difference between how it looks in
9 this picture and how it looked at the time is that this
10 barrier at ground floor level would not have been there.
11 Firstly, does that jog your memory in any way?

12 A. No, I've been past the building many times.

13 Q. If I show you then photograph 6, this is how it would
14 have looked at the time. This is the other side of the
15 building. Those are the stairs that are the beginning
16 of the single central staircase. I think that that
17 doesn't remind you of anything either.

18 A. No.

19 Q. Photograph 7 is in the lift lobby area at ground floor
20 level, and do you see above you the two lift shafts
21 there's a sign?

22 A. I can see that.

23 Q. Photograph 8 is a close-up of that same sign and, as
24 I understand it from your evidence, you would usually
25 expect there to be a sign like that in a tower block.

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. You wouldn't have checked if there was or was not one,
3 but would probably have noticed it in the course of
4 checking the lifts, the presence of the lifts and the
5 fireman's lift?

6 A. I may have noticed it, but wouldn't look for it
7 specifically.

8 Q. Thank you. Photograph 43 is taken on one of the
9 odd-numbered floors, and it shows a dry riser outlet,
10 and, as I understand it, the practice would have been
11 for the crew to check each of these.

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. If I take you back to photograph 44, you'll see that
14 there are balconies on alternate floors; do you see
15 that?

16 A. I see that, yeah.

17 Q. I'm going to show you the next photograph 45, which is
18 a photograph from the same angle but taken with a zoom
19 lens, so this is a closer view than you would get with
20 the naked eye. Can you help us with whether the
21 practice back in spring 2009 would have been to consider
22 whether or not those balconies escape routes?

23 A. I'd say experience tells us that they are -- they would
24 be escape routes.

25 Q. Because there is obviously a difference, is there not,

1 between the available means of escape from the building
2 as a whole, which in this case is the central staircase,
3 and then the available means of escape from flats, in
4 other words how one would get from a flat to the central
5 staircase, whether there is more than one way of doing
6 it.

7 A. Sorry, can you repeat the start of the question, please?

8 Q. You told us earlier that means of escape would be
9 considered when you are doing a 72D visit, and what
10 I was going to ask you about was the fact that when you
11 talk about means of escape, you could be talking about
12 two things, one is means of escape from the building as
13 a whole, but you might also mean means of escaping from
14 flats, and what I'm trying to find out is the extent to
15 which, back in spring 2009, a 72D visit would have
16 thought about both of those things.

17 A. I can't recall, I can't recall.

18 Q. But you did say that from your own experience you would
19 have thought that those balconies were a means of
20 escape.

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Thank you very much, those are my questions. Others may
23 have some.

24 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Edwards?

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Questions by MR EDWARDS

MR EDWARDS: I'm Mr Edwards on behalf of some of the families.

Do you ever remember receiving any formal training about what you were supposed to do on a 72D visit?

A. I don't recall any formal training now.

Q. Any informal training, guidance?

A. Only when I carried out high rise lectures myself, there's a passage in there that we should look for X, Y and Z when carrying out 72Ds.

Q. Are you able to remember now what that says, the passage that you're referring to?

A. Not word for word, but I've conducted a lecture fairly recently. It says we look for things like I highlighted earlier, dry risers, the main stairwell, is it clear of rubbish, things along those -- that I mentioned before really.

Q. Mr Maxwell-Scott asked you earlier about fire escape routes, and I just want to understand what your response to his question was. You go up the main stairwell, would it be your practice to also go along a fire escape and see where it reaches a flat?

A. No.

Q. Would you note where a fire escape comes out, mentally note where it comes out?

1 A. Mentally, yeah, we wouldn't --

2 Q. You also referred to a handing over book when you might
3 note defects or anything that you discovered about
4 a building so another watch could see it. I take it you
5 personally haven't checked the handing over book for
6 30 May 2009?

7 A. No.

8 Q. May I ask you to turn to the advocates' bundle, the
9 fourth volume, page 1676, please. (Handed)

10 Do you remember ever having seen this document
11 before?

12 A. I don't -- I don't remember it, no.

13 Q. Thank you, no further questions.

14 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Dowden?

15 Questions by MR DOWDEN

16 MR DOWDEN: Yes, my name's Dowden, I act on behalf of one of
17 the families. We know, and I was looking for
18 a photograph but I can't see one, when you go up the
19 stairs, we know that there is a corridor which reaches
20 all the flats, and on the next floor up there's
21 a balcony and the access is via that balcony. However,
22 to get to that balcony, there are two doors which you
23 need to go through.

24 Did you, when you were looking at the common areas,
25 check those doors to see where they went to?

1 THE CORONER: Would it help you, Mr Hale, to see the
2 photographs?
3 A. Yes, please.
4 THE CORONER: I'm sure Mr Maxwell-Scott will be able to find
5 them for us.
6 Mr Dowden, is that the photograph you were thinking
7 of?
8 MR DOWDEN: Yes, it is, I'm very grateful. Do you recall
9 doors like that?
10 A. Sorry, I don't recall them, sorry.
11 THE CORONER: Then you wanted another photograph, that one?
12 MR DOWDEN: I'm very grateful. Going back to the first
13 photograph, going up a building and being met with
14 a door like that, which leads off from what is obviously
15 a common area of the building; did you look to get any
16 idea as to the type of area that would be behind that
17 door?
18 A. I don't recall, sorry.
19 Q. Would it be your practice to see whether you had any
20 means of access to that type of area --
21 A. Again, I don't recall.
22 Q. -- for example, via a drop key to explore where that
23 went to?
24 A. Perhaps, if -- if we had the key, the correct key, yeah,
25 we'd try and open it up.

1 Q. Thank you.

2 THE CORONER: Did you carry a drop key when you when you
3 went on a 72D visit?

4 A. Yeah, we have a -- a small bag of different keys, and
5 there's one contained in there.

6 THE CORONER: But you wouldn't have used it on a door like
7 that, you're saying?

8 A. I can't say with any certainty that we did.

9 THE CORONER: Okay, thank you. Yes.

10 Questions by MS SANDERSON

11 MS SANDERSON: Sorry, just one question, Mr Hale. Can I ask
12 you about this: are you aware of any distinction between
13 a formal and an informal 72D visit, or are they just
14 a 72D visit?

15 A. Well, 72Ds -- I'm assuming -- they're formal, we have to
16 do those, they're in our diary, but as -- as a watch and
17 I assume as a station, we carry out a lot of ad hoc
18 visits. We just go and look at different blocks at
19 a given time.

20 Q. If you saw defects on those visits, would you still
21 record those?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Thank you?

24 THE CORONER: Mr Compton?

25

1 Questions by MR COMPTON

2 MR COMPTON: Just on that point, was this a 72D visit?

3 A. Again, according the diary -- I don't recall, but
4 according to the diary it was a 72D visit, yes.

5 Q. The whole point is to gather information, is it not, so
6 you, the firefighters, can have information that's
7 available to assist them in fighting any fire if it
8 happens to break out?

9 A. That's correct.

10 Q. I mean, the balconies that we've been referred to, you
11 wouldn't know whether they were in fact fire escapes
12 unless you actually went and visited them, would you?

13 A. That's correct, but when we come out on a 72D, we check
14 the communal parts of the building. That fire escape
15 that goes round the back, that's someone's personal part
16 of the building.

17 Q. But wouldn't you make an effort to understand if that
18 was part of the fire escape structure of the building,
19 or, for example, it could simply be balconies with
20 compartments for separate flats? Would it be part of
21 your brief to find out whether those balconies were in
22 fact escape routes?

23 A. Not that I'm aware, no.

24 Q. All right. So the notes are taken and the notes go to
25 the station. Is it within your knowledge that they

1 actually go down on what we call operational information
2 forms?

3 A. I don't know, sorry.

4 Q. Where did you think the information that you had
5 generated would go to; what would be the final port for
6 that information?

7 A. Again, it would depend on what sort of information I'm
8 passing on. If it's something fairly major, as I say,
9 it goes to the appropriate department, be that Fire
10 Safety or Southwark Council.

11 Q. Were you aware that operational information forms could
12 be generated by your visits, which would actually then
13 go on the appliances so that those on appliances being
14 called to a fire could check for that information and be
15 prepared for a fire?

16 A. In 2009, no.

17 Q. You never knew that?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Can we look at 1672 for a moment, page 1672? This is
20 an operational information form that was on appliances
21 in the folders on the appliances, the system's changed
22 since, and this was on the art college. Have you never
23 seen this sort of form before?

24 A. My apologies, sir, I have seen these before, my
25 apologies.

1 Q. This is the whole point of 72D, isn't it, it generates
2 vital intelligence on a building? You were asked
3 earlier, and I think your brother officer Mr Moore also
4 said -- this is not a criticism -- that you would not
5 put on any notes the complexity or layout of a building?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. As a matter of note -- I hope this isn't an unfair
8 question -- can you understand why it might be important
9 to actually record unusual features of a building?

10 A. I can understand, but where do you draw a line, where
11 would you stop?

12 Q. Well, if you have maisonettes, it's quite useful
13 information, isn't it, when firefighters attend, to know
14 that entrances are on alternate floors and so forth,
15 that sort of information?

16 A. It is useful, but we're going to -- as I say, we carry
17 out lots of visits and we do go in to lots of
18 different -- lots of maisonettes.

19 Q. Well, this is a high rise block, isn't it?

20 A. It is.

21 Q. It's one of the old fashioned buildings. If we look at
22 this operational information form, I appreciate it's not
23 generated by you, do you see there in the description
24 that we have on the predetermined attendance, right at
25 the top, you even have information for example, do you

1 see, "Pump ladder, 1, pump, aerial not needed". Do you
2 see under the description of the art college, you
3 actually have "Basement and three floors", and there's
4 information provided: "brick built, timber floors,
5 slated roof", and so on. Is that your understanding of
6 what these sort of forms would generate?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Do you see "Comments":

9 "No access to car park on Peckham Road for
10 appliances."

11 The sort of critical information firefighters need
12 so if they turn up at a high rise fire, such as Lakanal,
13 they're going to know that there may be obstructions and
14 so forth so they're forewarned; do you agree that that's
15 important information?

16 A. I agree, yes.

17 Q. In this case, because Camberwell College of Art had
18 [redacted], it was important enough to generate
19 a firefighting plan that you can see overleaf; do you
20 have that?

21 That sets out such information as hydrants and so
22 on. So that is the document that then goes forward onto
23 the appliances. We now know, did you know, it's all on
24 mobile data terminals?

25 A. It is now, yes.

1 Q. When you were in the block doing your visits, did you
2 notice padlocks on any of the risers at all?

3 A. I don't recall, but I imagine there -- going by the
4 picture I've just seen.

5 Q. What would your reaction be if you'd seen a padlock on
6 a riser?

7 A. We often see padlocks on risers, I don't know what
8 reaction I'm supposed to have.

9 Q. What would you note about that?

10 A. Nothing specific, risers -- most risers have locks on
11 them.

12 Q. If someone's put a padlock on a riser, is that going to
13 cause problems for any firefighter attaching a hose?

14 A. Well, no, we'll have a key, if not we'll break the
15 padlock.

16 Q. So in a emergency situation, where you're trying to load
17 up the hoses and fight a fire, you don't think it would
18 be important to have a riser free of a padlock?

19 A. No.

20 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Walsh?

21 MR WALSH: No, thank you, madam.

22 THE CORONER: Members of the jury?

23 Questions from THE JURY

24 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you, Madam Coroner, we have
25 three.

1 We do realise that you don't recall the specifics of
2 the visit to that particular building, and I think you
3 also mentioned that you don't always take the bag of
4 keys on 72D visits. Would it --

5 THE CORONER: Hang on.

6 A. I didn't say that.

7 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: My mistake.

8 THE CORONER: I think it was to the contrary, it was
9 normally that he would take the bag of keys.

10 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay. The point of my question
11 was: on a 72D visit, we've heard that it's practice to
12 test the dry riser outlets.

13 A. Sorry, I didn't say test them.

14 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: I think you said something about
15 you see if they're -- sorry, it was a visual appraisal,
16 wasn't it?

17 A. Visual.

18 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Sorry, my mistake. We've heard
19 from a number of your colleagues who were at Lakanal on
20 the day that they had problems with the drop keys not
21 opening doors.

22 A. Right.

23 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: So are the doors tested in any
24 way, are the drop keys tested, whether on every floor,
25 or randomly, in the course of a 72D visit?

1 A. On this specific one or in general?

2 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: No, I realise you can't remember
3 that one.

4 A. We do try opening doors with our drop keys, yeah.

5 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: So that would be part of it?

6 A. Yes.

7 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you. We've seen earlier
8 a form -- I think it's a LFEPa form -- which did
9 actually have information about the fact that it was
10 maisonettes, which floors, and that sort of thing. Are
11 you familiar with that sort of document that may have
12 been done by the LFBPA in --

13 A. Sorry, what page was that on?

14 THE CORONER: Let's pull it up. 1676, I think, is the
15 document. Let's pull this up and make sure that's the
16 document you were talking about. Was that the one you
17 mentioned?

18 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Yes.

19 THE CORONER: Do you have that Mr Hale?

20 A. Yes.

21 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Having a look at that, you have
22 a lot of information which it was suggested might be
23 good to go on the other form that we saw for a different
24 property. Would this be the type of -- if you had
25 access to this type of document, would it be something

1 that you would take to a 72D visit and update it, or
2 that sort of thing, annotate it?

3 A. This is -- it's the first time I've seen this document,
4 I've never seen it before.

5 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay, thank you. Another thing as
6 far as --

7 THE CORONER: Well, can I just stop you there. This is
8 hypothetical: if you had had it, would it be helpful to
9 have taken it to update if appropriate?

10 A. Yes.

11 THE CORONER: Thank you.

12 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you for clarifying that.
13 Another question about regular 72D visits, again not
14 specifically Lakanal, would something that you would be
15 looking for, just looking from floor to floor for
16 instance, not just be signs to indicate where flats are,
17 would you also be keeping an eye out for whether there
18 was clear signage for escape routes or is that not
19 something that you'd be looking for, for instance, those
20 signs that have the little green man running?

21 A. Yeah, we would make a conscious effort to look for them,
22 yes.

23 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: If they weren't there, would that
24 be something that you would note down as a defect to
25 follow up?

1 A. It should be.

2 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you. Sorry, just one more,
3 I think. We've heard that the dry risers are on every
4 other floor, but presumably the crew -- your crew
5 performing the 72D visit didn't know that before
6 entering the building. They may perhaps have assumed
7 that they would be on every floor. Would it -- or
8 should it -- have been -- I guess what my fellow juror
9 might be trying to ask is would it be a matter of course
10 to go to every floor had in a building like that, or
11 would you just go to every second floor, or --

12 A. We'd go to every floor, because we don't -- you don't
13 assume everything, so we'd go to each floor.

14 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Just let me check. (Pause)

15 Okay, that's all, thank you.

16 Questions from THE CORONER

17 THE CORONER: Is it unusual to have dry risers on alternate
18 floors rather than every floor?

19 A. No, there's a couple of blocks of flats on our ground
20 that have a similar sort of thing.

21 THE CORONER: Okay, thank you very much.

22 Further questions from THE JURY

23 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: I'm sorry, I've just been handed
24 one more question, my apologies. On the wall signs for
25 floors, in this case -- and you've said these types of

1 signs are common across flat blocks -- it did say on the
2 index sign for the flats that they were flats, you know,
3 flat number 81, that sort of thing.

4 If the firefighters on the 72D visit had realised
5 that these flats were indeed maisonettes, is this
6 something that the Fire Brigade would note to follow up
7 with the council, perhaps to change their sign to say
8 maisonettes?

9 A. Not to my experience, no.

10 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay. Thank you, that's all.

11 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Hale, thank you very much for
12 coming and thank you very much for the evidence which
13 you've been able to give to this inquest. You're
14 welcome to stay if you would like, but you're free to go
15 if you would prefer. Thank you very much.

16 A. Thanks.

17 (The witness withdrew)

18 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Maxwell-Scott?

19 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Madam, the next witness is Mr Chidgey,
20 whose statements start at page 523 in the statements
21 bundle.

22 TIM CHIDGEY (sworn)

23 THE CORONER: Thank you. Do sit down, Mr Chidgey. Do help
24 yourself to a glass of water. When you're giving your
25 answers, please could you keep your voice up and keep

1 the microphone close to you.

2 A. Okay.

3 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Maxwell-Scott, who is standing,
4 will ask you questions on my behalf, and then there may
5 be questions from others.

6 A. Thank you.

7 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

8 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good afternoon, Mr Chidgey, can you give
9 the court your full name, please?

10 A. Carl Timothy John Chidgey.

11 Q. Is it right that back in July 2009 you worked for the
12 London Fire Brigade?

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. When did you join the London Fire Brigade?

15 A. 1981.

16 Q. By July 2009, what rank did you hold?

17 A. Deputy assistant commissioner.

18 Q. Can you just explain briefly to the jury what that
19 means, and how that fits into the structure?

20 A. Okay, yes. We have the commissioner at the top, deputy
21 commissioners, assistant commissioner, and then deputy
22 assistant commissioner, coming down to group manager.

23 So my role was based at headquarters, and at that time

24 I was head of operational planning.

25 Q. So do we understand that your rank came immediately

1 above that of group manager?

2 A. Yeah, that's correct.

3 Q. I'm going to be asking you today about your involvement
4 in the attempts to fight the fire and carry out search
5 and rescue operations at Lakanal House on 3 July 2009.
6 You have made two witness statements in relation to your
7 involvement. If I could just identify those with you
8 first, starting firstly at page 523 in the statements
9 bundle.

10 A. All right. Yes, I've got it on the screen.

11 Q. Mr Clark will provide you with a hard copy. (Handed)

12 Is that your first statement you made on
13 16 July 2009?

14 A. Yes, it is.

15 Q. Then if you turn on to page 528, is that your second
16 statement dated 14 May 2010?

17 A. Yes, it is.

18 Q. That follows a question and answer format, and we see on
19 the first paragraph of page 528 that you had access to
20 your first statement, an incident report and plans and
21 photographs when making your second statement.

22 A. Yes, that's correct, yeah.

23 Q. If I take you then to the events of the afternoon of
24 3 July, where were you when you were first notified of
25 the fire?

1 A. I was actually at my desk in Union Street, which the
2 London Fire Brigade headquarters.

3 Q. If I take you to your first statement to see what you
4 said there about being notified, this is at page 523.

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. You say at about 4.50 pm you were paged and informed of
7 a six pump fire in progress, and you then phoned
8 control.

9 A. That's correct.

10 Q. A couple of lines further down, you say that you were
11 committed to the incident at 1651 hours, and spoke with
12 control.

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. You say something then about the conversation, and then
15 about another six lines further down, you say that,
16 whilst you were on the phone, your pager went off again
17 stating the incident was to become an eight pump
18 incident.

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. If I ask you then to look in your witness statement at
21 page 528, this is the question/answer statement, the
22 second statement, and you'll see that the first question
23 that you were asked was:
24 "What can you recall regarding the fire survival
25 calls when speaking to control?"

1 You began your answer by making what seems to me the
2 entirely fair point:

3 "I'm sure there is a tape of this call."

4 Then you went on to do what you could to recall the
5 conversation. So let me first ask you this: was there
6 a single telephone call that you made to control or was
7 there more than one?

8 A. No, single phone call.

9 Q. You will probably be pleased to hear that there is
10 a tape of the call and a transcript of the call, so
11 I will ask you about that rather than about what you
12 said in your statements, when you didn't have the
13 transcript in front of you.

14 A. Okay.

15 Q. So if you turn in the advocates' bundles to page 479.

16 (Handed)

17 I think it's clear from your evidence that you would
18 have expected your conversation to be taped and
19 therefore that it would be possible to produce
20 a document like this, but have you in fact ever seen
21 this before?

22 A. No.

23 Q. I'll bear that in mind in terms of the speed with which
24 we go through it. So it's a conversation between
25 an operator at brigade control and G7, is that your call

1 sign?

2 A. That was my call sign, Golf 7, yes.

3 Q. The time of the call is given as 16.45.59 and it starts
4 with the operator saying:
5 "Paging."
6 You say:
7 "Hello, paging G7."
8 Then you are informed of a six pump fire in
9 progress, and the operator said to you:
10 "They haven't made it persons reported yet."
11 Then they relay to you some information of the type
12 that one might have in a informative message; is that
13 right?

14 A. I did not, I -- I mean, reading it, I wouldn't say
15 I remember that without reading this, but, yeah.

16 Q. I wouldn't expect you to remember it without reading it,
17 that's why it's helpful to have this document.

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. The first thing about that is that almost the first
20 thing you're told is that "they haven't made it persons
21 reported yet".

22 A. Mm-hmm.

23 Q. Can you help us with whether somebody in your senior
24 position would read something into whether or not it was
25 a persons reported incident, and it's the sort of thing

1 that people like yourself wanted to know straight away
2 when being told about an ongoing incident like this?

3 A. The comment by the control officer that "they haven't
4 made it persons reported yet" came before I understood
5 that we had fire survival calls. But in respect of the
6 control officer knowing that, I can understand why she's
7 said they haven't made it persons reported yet, not all
8 fires are persons reported, even within high rise
9 buildings, but you would expect the vast majority to be
10 persons reported calls.

11 Q. Just pausing there, I think perhaps what I'm trying to
12 get at is do you think she's getting in there first
13 saying this, because if she doesn't say it, your first
14 question is going to be "Is it persons reported?"

15 A. Absolutely, one of my first questions would have been to
16 ask if they'd made it persons reported, so she's making
17 that clear to me that in her opinion they should have
18 made it persons reported, even though it hasn't been
19 made persons reported, that's how I would have
20 understood that. Going on further down --

21 Q. Just before we go on.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Why would you ask almost straight away as a practice "Is
24 it persons reported?"

25 A. You want to know if people are involved in the incident

1 that you're -- currently, at this stage I was remote
2 monitoring, but you -- you know, one of the key pieces
3 of information that I would require would be: had we
4 individuals involved in this fire?

5 Q. If the answer is no it's not persons reported, without
6 any other information, in your own mind at your desk are
7 you immediately thinking, "Oh, well it's not too serious
8 then"?

9 A. Not necessarily that it's not too serious, because as it
10 happened on this occasion, they've forgotten to send it,
11 so it's one of those pieces of information that you
12 gather, you get the answer to it, and then you keep that
13 information in your mind when you're getting all the
14 other information that you would normally get in the
15 course of events.

16 This was slightly different in terms of my pager
17 went off through this phone call, which made pumps
18 eight, therefore I was mobilised, so some of the
19 questions, if it had stayed at six, some of the other
20 questions probably didn't get asked to tell you the
21 truth, because I knew I was going down. But one of the
22 questions that any officer monitoring an incident would
23 ask is to confirm if it's persons reported or not.

24 Q. So just bringing out some of the detail that's implicit
25 in what you've been saying, while it's a six pump fire,

1 your interest is limited in the sense that, if it
2 remains a six pump fire, you're not going to have to
3 leave your desk; is that right?

4 A. Not necessarily. It -- there's -- how can I explain
5 this?

6 Q. That's not a criticism in any way.

7 A. No --

8 Q. Perhaps if I finish off: once it becomes an eight pump
9 fire, you have to go to be the monitoring officer?

10 A. You are ordered to attend, absolutely, yes. At a six
11 pump fire, you have a group manager in charge and you
12 have a station manager who's running the incident, the
13 incident commander, with a DAC, a deputy assistant
14 commissioner, remote monitoring. If there's some
15 concern to the remote monitoring officer, and in this
16 situation that was me, that made me feel that incident
17 wasn't being managed correctly, or there were some alarm
18 bells ringing, and one of them may have been the persons
19 reported not being sent, then I can say to control, "I'm
20 going to attend that incident", so I can put myself onto
21 the incident, even though it's still a six pump fire.
22 Okay, so it's not -- it's not from the viewpoint of
23 "That's good, I'll get on with my work", it's not that
24 viewpoint at all.

25 You're still gathering the information from a remote

1 position, and as long as the control officer is giving
2 you the answers that you want to hear, that the
3 information's coming back to them from the incident
4 commander, that you get a feel that the incident's being
5 managed correctly, they're not asking for any more
6 resources, I probably wouldn't attend. But the option's
7 always there for me to attend.

8 Q. I understand that. It sounds from the answers you've
9 been given that the remote monitoring you describe is
10 perhaps more active than I'd appreciated.

11 A. Yeah, it's relatively active. As active as you can be
12 down the telephone line, yeah, you are gathering
13 information via control.

14 Q. So your focus when remote monitoring is on trying to
15 gather information from control -- from listening to
16 radio traffic as well?

17 A. Absolutely, yeah.

18 Q. Thank you. Looking then further down the notes of what
19 was said, before I interrupted you, was there something
20 specific that you wanted to draw attention to?

21 A. It was the -- when we got to start to talk about the
22 survival calls.

23 Q. That's the longest answer, isn't it?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. What is said by the operator is:

1 "What it is, we've got two or three of our operators
2 actually talking to callers with fire survival, because
3 we seem to have a number of members of the public
4 trapped on the 9th and 10th floors. The fire isn't in
5 their flat but they can't leave their premises, and
6 unfortunately two of them are panicking quite seriously,
7 and the operators -- unfortunately the operators are
8 struggling to keep them calm."

9 Then you say in response:

10 "Are we getting that info down there to them?"

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Meaning?

13 A. Meaning is that information that the control operator
14 has just passed to me getting to the -- to the incident
15 commander.

16 Q. To which the answer was:

17 "We, we have passed all this, as soon as we realised
18 this was happening, we passed it to Peckham, the first
19 machine in attendance. But I think, obviously they are
20 having to deal with the fire before they ..."

21 Then you ask:

22 "Have you got the command unit down there?"

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. The operator said:

25 "He -- don't think he's in attendance yet. He is,

1 they are aware."

2 Then she says:

3 "Sorry -- we're having such dreadful trouble,
4 dreadful system."

5 Do you have any recollection of what that might have
6 been a reference to?

7 A. I think she's talking about her system, because above
8 she talked about her freeze -- sorry, she talked above
9 about her freeze -- her screen freezing.

10 Q. Yes, you're slightly right, in the first long answer.

11 A. "Screen keeps freezing on me", so I assume that's what
12 we're talking about.

13 Q. Would you have understood at the time what was meant by
14 talking to callers with fire survival?

15 A. Would I -- yes, absolutely.

16 Q. What would you have understood? I ask because we've
17 heard from other operational personnel who didn't
18 understand what was meant by "Fire survival" in the
19 sense that it wasn't a term that they were familiar
20 with, but you would have been familiar with it at this
21 time?

22 A. I was familiar with the term "Fire survival call".

23 Q. What did you understand by it?

24 A. That we had a control operator talking to a member of
25 the public who has phoned control saying they're in some

1 difficulty.

2 Q. Over the page at 480, I think we see here about a third
3 of the way down a reference to what you talked about,
4 which is the fact that in the middle of this call you
5 are paged, and it's been made pumps eight and therefore
6 you're mobilised.

7 A. Yeah. Yes, that's correct.

8 Q. For the record, our timings indicate that the "make
9 pumps eight" message was sent at 16.49.

10 A. Right.

11 Q. Does it follow from what you were saying earlier that
12 once you're mobilised your focus is on ending the call
13 and getting to the incident ground?

14 A. Yes, very much so.

15 Q. You say in your statement at 523 -- I'll just take you
16 to that -- that you went to your car, you put on your
17 blue light and proceeded to the scene:

18 "Whilst driving I was listening to my radio, where
19 I heard the incident had become a make pumps 12 and also
20 a request for aerial ladders."

21 Just pausing there, our records indicate that that
22 message was sent at 1704 hours.

23 A. Okay.

24 Q. Then you continue in the statement:

25 "This then meant that when I got there I would be

1 the incident commander."

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. Is it at 10 or at 12 pumps?

4 A. 10, 10 pumps.

5 Q. But at 12 it's also somebody of your level?

6 A. I think actually it's -- do you know, not being
7 operational now, I've completely forgotten. I think the
8 AC takes over at 12, I'm not sure.

9 Q. Just to put your non-recollection into context, is it
10 right that you've now retired from the London Fire
11 Brigade?

12 A. That is correct, I've retired from the London Fire
13 Brigade a year ago. So -- sorry, that is -- just
14 thinking about that one, I would be in charge of a 12,
15 it's above 12 that the AC's in charge.

16 THE CORONER: By that you mean the assistant commissioner?

17 A. Assistant commissioner, yes.

18 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: If I then take you in the advocates'
19 bundles to page 935, I don't know how familiar you are
20 with this, but you can see if you need to on the
21 previous passage that the column where one has the
22 number 17.12.50 against G7 is for time of arrival.

23 A. Yeah, I'm familiar with this.

24 Q. So you were logged as arriving at 17.12. I'm going to
25 ask you one or two questions about, in effect, whether

1 you might have arrived slightly before that. So firstly
2 how would you book in that you had arrived? What does
3 that time of 17.12.50 actually represent?

4 A. I can't honestly remember if I booked in with the
5 command unit, or if I booked myself in. I've got
6 a feeling I booked myself in on the radio, which would
7 have meant I pulled up, and I pulled up behind the fire
8 investigation unit.

9 When I pull up, I'm not in fire gear, I have to get
10 rigged. I would have put my radio on, my fire ground
11 radio on, and I believe I would have booked in
12 attendance via the car radio, because I had a car radio,
13 with control, although I'm not 100 per cent clear if
14 I did that or I did that on the command unit.

15 Q. So the first point is unlike on an appliance, you can't
16 just press a button and it automatically registers that
17 you're there?

18 A. No.

19 Q. So you have to send a message over the radio?

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. You might have done it yourself, but you might have
22 asked the command unit to do it?

23 A. I've got a feeling I did do it myself, if I had to go
24 either way, because when I got onto the command unit,
25 they were very busy, and I doubt they'd have got me

1 booked in that quickly.

2 Q. Just pausing there, if you did get the command unit to
3 do it and they were very busy, then they might in fact
4 have sent the message some minutes after you had
5 arrived?

6 A. Correct. But if you take -- can I just say, if you take
7 the timescale of 17.12, and I was still at my desk at
8 10 to 5, so 16.50, my car is parked some minutes away
9 from where Union Street is, it's actually parked in
10 Southwark Training Centre, so I would have had to walk,
11 or run to my car, get in the car and then go and have
12 a quick look in the atlas where it was, so that would
13 tally with that journey, 15 to 20 minutes.

14 Q. I'm going to take you back to your statement, and then
15 I'm going to show you a couple of messages that were
16 sent around this time, because it may assist. So
17 firstly your statement at 524. About 10 or 12 lines
18 down, you describe being on the command unit:

19 "There were three staff on the unit and I asked what
20 the last message was that was sent. They had a message
21 from Group Manager Freeman which they were just about to
22 send. The message detailed the number of floors
23 involved and the extent of the fire and people
24 involved."

25 Then you go on to say:

1 "I tasked one of the staff to phone the control to
2 get the details of the fire survival calls and flat
3 numbers."

4 It's that reference to tasking the staff to phone
5 control that I'm interested in, and if I then ask you to
6 look in the advocates' bundles, firstly at page 540.
7 This is a conversation between command unit 4 and
8 brigade control just before 17.12. It seems to be
9 initiated by command unit 4.

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. There are two aspects to it. One is the request for
12 a local authority liaison officer, but secondly command
13 unit 4 saying:

14 "We here are aware of people in four flats."

15 He gives the numbers.

16 A. Right.

17 Q. So just bear that in mind. Then if I ask you to look at
18 page 350.

19 A. In the same bundle?

20 Q. Yes. No, in a different bundle, sorry. (Handed)

21 This is now 17.24, and it's another conversation
22 which seems to be started by command unit 4 telephoning
23 brigade control, and at a very early stage in it, it
24 says:

25 "Can you confirm for me the numbers of the flats

1 that you've had telephone calls, where they are claiming
2 there are people trapped?"

3 You see that?

4 A. Yes, I do.

5 Q. Then if I take you back to your statement at 524, the
6 way the events are set out in your statement -- by which
7 I mean the order in which you describe them -- is that
8 you firstly described the phone call with control trying
9 to get details of fire survival calls and flat numbers,
10 and then lower down the page, where I'm marking on the
11 screen with the arrow, about ten lines from the bottom
12 of the page, you then talk about sending a message to
13 say that you were now in charge of the incident and:

14 "I also requested a local authority liaison officer
15 due to the number of residents involved."

16 Do you see that?

17 A. Yes, yes.

18 Q. This is no criticism of you at all, but in terms of
19 trying to pin down what may have happened by reference
20 to the telephone calls from command unit 4, the
21 reference to the local authority liaison officer seems
22 to come in an earlier call --

23 A. Mmm.

24 Q. -- certainly at 17.11, and what I was wondering was,
25 whether having looked at those you think you might have

1 been on scene and the person responsible for asking for
2 the call at 17.11 to be made?

3 A. It's -- it's certainly possible. I can't remember, but
4 it's certainly possible.

5 Q. If I then go slightly further up the statement, you say
6 that, about six or seven lines down:

7 "On the command unit I took an appraisal of the
8 boards, which gave a overview of officers in attendance
9 and duties. There was a hand drawn sketch on
10 a whiteboard of the high rise, as you would look at it."

11 Can you recall now what was going on in the command
12 unit, what you could see on the boards that were there?

13 A. Well, there wasn't a lot on the boards. I would have --
14 I would have expected more to -- more information to
15 have been put onto the boards, but that said, I had no
16 previous knowledge of how busy the staff were in terms
17 of what they were doing prior to my arrival. Normal --

18 Q. Just pausing there, you certainly would have liked
19 more --

20 A. I would have certainly liked more.

21 Q. -- and without some kind of explanation or justification
22 by way of what had been going on or when people had
23 arrived there, you would have expected more?

24 A. I would have expected more. Can I just add that my
25 attendance within 20 minutes is -- is a little bit

1 unusual for a deputy assistant commissioner to get there
2 that quickly, it's because I knew the road and I wasn't
3 far away. You would normally -- and the fire was
4 also -- the incident was made -- was quite dynamic and
5 made up quite quickly, which resulted in senior officers
6 attending a little bit more rapidly, shall we say, so in
7 previous experience there's a lot more on the board than
8 there was on this occasion, by the time I got there.

9 Q. Madam, if I might just finish this topic before the
10 break. You said a little bit more about your
11 impressions on arrival at the command unit in your
12 second statement, page 529. You were asked:

13 "Can you recall the information available to you on
14 the command unit?"

15 In May 2010, you said:

16 "There was not a lot of information initially
17 available to the command unit. The CU staff confirmed
18 to me that they were just setting up."

19 Did they tell you how long they'd been there?

20 A. No, they didn't.

21 Q. "I am not fully aware of the CU set up procedure in
22 detail, but everybody seemed to be doing something.
23 Operational boards were ready and prepared to facilitate
24 the booking of people in and out of the incident."

25 When I read that, the impression I had was perhaps

1 that they were blank. Is that --

2 A. Sorry, what do you mean?

3 Q. You say "Operational boards were ready and prepared to

4 facilitate the booking of people in and out of the

5 incident", and I wondered if that was a way of saying

6 that there was nothing on them, but people were ready to

7 start writing on them.

8 A. No, that doesn't mean that, sorry if that's given the

9 wrong impression there. The one thing they were doing

10 was booking people in -- into the incident, so there's

11 one officer that takes any appliances, fire engines

12 turning up, and senior officers, they would take their

13 nominal roll board and book them into the incident, and

14 that was being done.

15 Q. Is the operational board that's being referred to the

16 headline board?

17 A. No.

18 Q. It's something different?

19 A. Yeah, the resource board is something by the -- sorry,

20 by the nominal role board who is in attendance. The

21 headline board is what the structure of the incident

22 looks like, ie who the incident commander is, monitoring

23 officer, sector commanders.

24 Q. Can you recall if there was a headline board?

25 A. There's a headline board on every CU. What you're -- it

1 was -- it was sparsely populated.

2 Q. What I'm then particularly interested in, before we take
3 a break, is about what you describe in both your
4 statements as a sketch on a whiteboard of the high rise.
5 Can you recall, and I know we're some years on, what was
6 on that sketch when you first saw it?

7 A. Not specifically, but normally a sketch is literally as
8 it suggests, a sketch, it will be a quick diagram
9 showing the incident, I'm not sure if it showed the
10 number of floors. It may well have shown which floor
11 the fire had originated on. That would be really basic.
12 It may -- it may have shown more, but I can't remember
13 in detail.

14 Q. One can imagine a sketch being more or less
15 sophisticated, more or less detailed, can you give any
16 impression of whether this was a very crude, simplistic
17 sketch, or whether it was more detailed and
18 sophisticated?

19 A. Crude and simplistic would be the description.

20 Q. Can you recall whether there were any floor numbers on
21 it?

22 A. No, because it was -- I was just thinking of that as you
23 asked that question, 'cos it's much later on, at the
24 silver meeting, from the LALO that we get the details of
25 how many flats there are in this building, and I was

1 quite surprised at the number that they told me, but
2 that was a -- that was gone 6 o'clock.

3 Q. Can you recall whether there were any flat numbers on
4 the sketch?

5 A. No, I can't recall that.

6 Q. Can you recall whether any flat numbers were written on
7 any whiteboard in the command unit?

8 A. Well, the -- the fire survival flat numbers were written
9 up. I'm not sure if they were written up before I asked
10 for them or once they got the information back, but they
11 were -- that was one of the things I made sure was on
12 the whiteboard. So on my arrival, they may have had
13 four numbers there, which I didn't initially see, but
14 following the conversation with control via the command
15 unit, the numbers were (1) verified and (2) they were
16 definitely on the board then.

17 Q. Tell me if I'm getting this wrong, but part of your
18 answer seemed to me at least to suggest that you asked
19 for some flat numbers to be written on the whiteboard.

20 A. I would have made sure that they were on the whiteboard.
21 They may well have been there. That's slightly separate
22 from the actual fire, because you have the fire and the
23 diagram of where the fire is, which floor it's on, and
24 then the other priority -- well, not the other priority,
25 the priority -- were the fire survival calls in relation

1 to the fire, so they would have been written there as
2 well.

3 Q. So is it fairest to say that you cannot remember one way
4 or another if there were flat numbers written on the
5 whiteboard when you arrived, but if there weren't, you
6 made sure that there were?

7 A. Yeah, I can't remember specifically if they were there
8 when I arrived and first stepped on the command unit.

9 Q. Madam, that would be a convenient moment for the break.

10 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Members of the jury,
11 a break for lunch, and we'll continue at 2.05, please.
12 Thank you very much.

13 Mr Chidgey, because you're part way through giving
14 your evidence, the firm rule is that you must not talk
15 to anyone at all about your evidence or indeed about
16 this matter. So the safest option is to have lunch by
17 yourself.

18 A. Okay.

19 THE CORONER: Could you be back by 2.05, please?

20 A. Yes, madam.

21 (1.06 pm)

22 (The short adjournment)

23 (2.05 pm)

24 THE CORONER: Thank you.

25 (In the presence of the Jury)

1 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you.

2 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good afternoon, Mr Chidgey. Before the
3 break, I was asking you about what you found when you
4 first arrived at the command unit which was command
5 unit 4. Can I ask you next this: approximately how long
6 did you remain at the command unit before first going to
7 have a look at the fire ground and the operations that
8 were being carried out themselves?

9 A. Some time, that would have been probably an hour, one
10 hour.

11 Q. Am I right in thinking that certainly for an officer of
12 your seniority it would be normal practice to operate as
13 incident commander from a command unit?

14 A. That is correct, yes.

15 Q. If I take you to a passage in your second witness
16 statement at page 530. We see there's a question:

17 "What was the activity like on the CU [on the
18 command unit]?"

19 About halfway through that answer, you talk about
20 your handover with Mr Freeman, and then you say:

21 "He said that there were fires on a number of floors
22 and we were having trouble getting to them. He had
23 a bridgehead in place and he had committed a number of
24 breathing apparatus wearers to tackle the fires and to
25 rescue and assist people from the building. I said to

1 him early on that it felt like we had an arsonist
2 running around."

3 Of course, we know there wasn't, but the statement
4 says that, and it says:

5 "It initially appeared to me that we had fires
6 ranging from the 4th/5th floors through to the 11th/12th
7 floors. In my experience fires in residential flats
8 don't spread like this."

9 Just so we're clear about that as an initial
10 impression, that is one based on you at the command unit
11 and the information that is being made available to you
12 there?

13 A. In reference to the -- the range of fires from 4 to 5th
14 to 11 to 12, is that what you mean.

15 Q. It's quite a vivid impression you've given, "I felt that
16 we had an arsonist running around", you had fires on all
17 sorts of floors. That is a not a visual observation.
18 That is what you are being told and that is you trying
19 to process the information.

20 A. That -- that is correct, yes, that would have been
21 part -- that is part of the handover that Group Manager
22 Freeman gave me.

23 Q. Before the break, I was asking you questions about when
24 you arrived and contact made with control after you
25 arrived, and you said you thought you might have booked

1 in personally rather than through command unit 4. I now
2 have a reference that may help us on this, and this is
3 at page 399 in the advocates' bundles. Do you see the
4 bottom entry, 17.11.14, there's a mix of radio traffic
5 on it, as far as I can see, but there comes a point
6 about halfway through it, where it says:

7 "M2FS Golf 7 status 3."

8 That is repeated four times, do you see that?

9 A. I do.

10 Q. Is that you booking in status 3?

11 A. It would appear that is me booking status 3, yeah.

12 Q. From what one sees here, does that give any clues as to
13 how you're booking in, where you are?

14 A. I would have been using the radio in my car, and the car
15 was about 20/30 yards from the command unit. I don't
16 vividly recall, but I would imagine at that stage I was
17 rigged and soon after sending that message I would have
18 made my way to the command unit.

19 Q. It's interesting that that is so close in time to the
20 telephone message sent also at 17.11, albeit at
21 17.11.52, at page 540. This is in a different file of
22 advocates' bundles, not in the witness statements.

23 A. Right.

24 THE CORONER: You probably have it on your desk.

25 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes, you have it open, thank you. This

1 is the call which talks not only about the local
2 authority liaison officer but also command unit 4 saying
3 "We are aware of four flats", and gives the numbers. Is
4 it possible that on your drive to the fire ground,
5 having heard about fire survival calls, your very first
6 act was to go straight into the command unit before even
7 booking in status 3 and said, "Get onto control now and
8 tell me what those flat numbers are"?

9 A. That couldn't tally with me sending a message, that's
10 the only thing, because that -- the three -- sorry, the
11 399, yeah, the last one you referred to.

12 Q. Yes.

13 A. That is -- let me just have a look. Yeah, that's me,
14 I'm pretty sure that's me sending that message. That
15 means I must have sent that from the car, because
16 I wouldn't have sent a message myself from the command
17 unit.

18 Q. No. I suspect what I'm asking you about would only work
19 on the timings if the first thing you did was get out of
20 the car, go to the command unit and say "Tell me what
21 the flat numbers are of the fire survival calls and if
22 you don't know phone control now", and having done that
23 went back to the car and made status 3 and then rigged
24 up then; is that possible?

25 A. No, I wouldn't have gone back to the car, definitely

1 wouldn't have gone back to the car, so I can only
2 surmise that I re-emphasised the message and they'd
3 already made contact with control -- yeah, with control,
4 regarding the -- what page -- 540 page, which is control
5 calling -- sorry, the CU calling control. They may well
6 have initiated that before I got there, but it was
7 something that I re-emphasised.

8 Q. From what you say, it sounds as if they'd just done it
9 before you got there.

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. We see just for the record the flat numbers given are
12 68, 79, 82 and 80. If I take you back to 399, we have
13 you booking in status 3 there, then over the page at
14 400, at 17.14, command unit 4 told control that you were
15 in attendance, and then at 17.19, we know they're
16 running a bit behind on this message, they said that
17 Group Manager Freeman was now the incident commander.
18 He told us that had happened quite a while before that
19 message.

20 Then at the bottom of page 400, there's a message
21 that starts at 17.19 and goes over the page, and this is
22 an informative message from Group Manager Freeman; is
23 that right?

24 A. Yes, that's right. I may well have been on the command
25 unit then.

1 Q. I think you were, because I think in your statement you
2 talk about asking what the last message that was sent
3 was --

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. -- and being told that they had a message from
6 Group Manager Freeman which they were just about to
7 send.

8 A. Right, that would tally then. Group Manager Freeman
9 wasn't on the command unit when I first stepped onto the
10 command unit, so I wouldn't have taken over in that
11 respect. I can't take over as incident commander until
12 I've had a formal handing over procedure and told the
13 previous incident commander that I'm now in charge, so
14 that message would have gone and that's quite right for
15 that message to go in his name.

16 Q. I understand. So it sounds as if when you went to the
17 command unit and asked to see the last message, what in
18 fact you got to see was a message which was not yet
19 sent, it was just about to be sent.

20 A. Was just about to go, yeah.

21 Q. Did Group Manager Freeman then come to the command unit
22 and your handover with him took place there?

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. Can you recall from memory what was the key -- what were
25 the key points that he made in that handover?

1 A. I think some of what's been referred to on page 530 in
2 terms of the evidence you were just going through.

3 THE CORONER: Do you mean 540?

4 A. No, of my statement.

5 THE CORONER: Sorry, looking at your statement.

6 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Let me have a look at that with you then.

7 A. Effectively, what I'm saying is that Group Manager
8 Freeman would have covered some of those areas that are
9 mentioned in there, ie the range of fires from the
10 4th/5th through to the 11th/12th. He would have given
11 me a breakdown of the way that we were trying to tackle
12 the fire at that time, where the bridgehead was placed,
13 that we were -- whether we had firefighters in the
14 building with breathing apparatus. He would have
15 confirmed what water resources were like, if they were
16 sufficient or not, and on this occasion they were.

17 I'm not sure if we touched on the use of the aerial
18 at this stage and without doubt we would have had
19 a discussion about the fire survival calls, because as
20 I appointed him the operations commander, that was one
21 of the tasks, I made sure that he had the flat numbers
22 written down on a piece of paper, and he was going back
23 to focus our attention on gaining access to those flats.

24 Q. That's what you say at the top of page 530. This is in
25 response to a question:

1 "Can you remember what the command unit staff did
2 with the information that they gathered from control
3 regarding the fire survival guidance calls?"

4 Your answer in your second statement was:

5 "It was written on a piece of paper and handed to
6 Group Manager Freeman, who I had designated as the
7 operations commander. I am not sure if it was written
8 on the board in the command unit. Previous experience
9 of fire survival guidance calls taught me to place
10 a high priority on these calls. They were given
11 a higher priority in my mind."

12 Then you go on to say:

13 "Group Manager Freeman had that information and
14 I understood that it was one of his priorities. That is
15 why we started the fire, search and rescue strategy
16 using the extended duration breathing apparatus crews."

17 Looking also at your first statement, certainly the
18 themes that come through as priorities when you first
19 arrive and talk to Mr Freeman are the fire survival
20 guidance calls and the tactic of committing extended
21 duration breathing apparatus teams.

22 A. Yes, that's -- that's pretty much correct. I had
23 previous experience of a fire survival call -- that's
24 why I wrote that piece in there, probably a couple of
25 years before Lakanal -- passed the information by

1 control, took it down to the scene, and that fire
2 survival call was dealt with and resolved, without any
3 issues, may I add. So you know, that was my previous
4 experience within the last two years of dealing with
5 a fire survival call, so it was given a high priority by
6 me.

7 Q. In the discussion that you had with Group Manager
8 Freeman about the approach he was taking to the
9 incident, the tactics and the priorities, can you recall
10 if there were any areas where you disagreed with him?

11 A. No, he -- he made it clear to me that the -- the
12 ordinary BA sets we have on the fire engines, which are
13 called standard duration breathing apparatus, were not
14 able to give the crews sufficient air to get up to the
15 top of the building, because by this stage we've now got
16 the bridgehead outside the building. It all happened
17 very -- very close to each other, this -- this
18 conversation and with the bridgehead moving, and Group
19 Manager Freeman came up with the suggestion that we use
20 EDBA, extended duration breathing apparatus crews, which
21 was a tactic and a plan that we used right through to
22 the end of this incident, and was clearly the right plan
23 to -- to go with, because it gave firefighters more
24 amount of air in their cylinders to reach the top
25 floors. So there was no disagreement in terms of his

1 tactics and what I was thinking.

2 Q. Can I just clarify you knew what it was that was
3 requiring the bridgehead to be outside the building and
4 crews to start up their breathing apparatus outside the
5 building? We've heard of two particular features of the
6 incident, one was the fact that there was a fire on the
7 5th floor, and the second is that there was
8 smoke-logging in the building, including to some extent
9 in the stairwell. Would either of those on their own
10 have required the bridgehead to be on a low floor or
11 outside the building altogether?

12 A. My understanding, if I recall this correctly, was that
13 the area where the bridgehead was set up, which was on
14 the 3rd floor, two floors below the fire on the 5th
15 floor, was being compromised by smoke, and I'm pretty
16 sure that's what Group Manager Freeman told me the
17 reason for it being moved. As unusual as it is, and
18 that is very, very unusual, I've never come across that
19 before, I didn't -- I didn't question the decision to
20 move the bridgehead, because the bridgehead commander
21 would have the safety of crews in mind. You cannot
22 start up in breathing apparatus in smoke, because you
23 get smoke inside the set, so I didn't -- I didn't
24 question the decision other than, you know, "Why are we
25 doing this?" and it reiterated the issues that were

1 going on at the time, that the staircase was compromised
2 throughout the building with smoke.

3 Q. So just pausing there, you asked why the bridgehead was
4 outside the building --

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. -- because that was a surprise.

7 A. Yes, absolutely.

8 Q. Something highly unusual, and you were given an answer
9 which satisfied you, and I'm not suggesting that it
10 shouldn't have satisfied you, I just think it's helpful
11 for everybody to understand the impact of these two
12 different features. So if I ask you in this way: if
13 there'd been no smoke-logging at all in the stairwell,
14 but a fire on the 5th floor, is it right that the
15 bridgehead would have needed to be on the 3rd floor but
16 not higher than it?

17 A. On the 3rd floor, that's correct, yeah.

18 Q. If there'd been no fire on the 5th floor, and no fire on
19 the 7th floor, and thus the highest places in the
20 building where there were fires -- well, the only
21 place -- had been the 9th floor and the 11th floor, but
22 there'd been smoke-logging throughout the central
23 staircase, the bridgehead would still have needed to be
24 outside the building so the crews could start up in
25 clean air; is that right?

1 A. The bridgehead could have been on the lowest possible
2 floor where it was clean air, so depending where the
3 smoke -- the staircase was compromised to, if that
4 stopped at a higher floor level then the bridgehead
5 could have gone back in.

6 Q. The point you were making about Group Manager Freeman's
7 tactics -- can I just take you to your second statement
8 at page 531? In the second answer there, the fourth
9 line, you start by saying:

10 "I had the impression that Group Manager Freeman was
11 frustrated because of the location of the fires, this
12 meant that he had difficulty getting crews to access the
13 top floors. Group Manager Freeman seemed concerned
14 about how it was progressing but then came up with the
15 idea of using extended duration breathing apparatus to
16 access the top floors."

17 Over the page, the bottom answer of 532, you say:

18 "My strategy continued to be through the use of EDDBA
19 crews in accessing the top floors of the building, as
20 this seemed to be the only way to get up to the top
21 floors of the building."

22 Does that capture the sense of frustration at
23 realising that the standard duration breathing apparatus
24 crews were of very limited usefulness in dealing with
25 matters on the 11th floor, given that they were having

1 to start up outside the building?

2 A. Absolutely, yeah, I think you -- you've summarised that
3 correctly.

4 Q. If I take you quickly to some further actions taken at
5 the time that you were incident commander, you told us
6 about requesting a local authority liaison officer,
7 that's in your first statement. Can we just be clear
8 that that was not at that stage about asking for plans,
9 it was about the fact that there were a number of
10 residents involved?

11 A. It was twofold, it was for both of those, actually.

12 Q. It was both?

13 A. Yeah, the local authority would have had details of the
14 building which would have been very useful to us as the
15 fire progressed, so yeah, it's with that in mind, and
16 with the fact that later on at the resolution of the
17 incident, you're going to have a large number of people
18 who are displaced from their -- you know, from their
19 flats, and they will need catering for.

20 Q. The way you put it in your first statement, which was
21 just under two weeks after the incident, was:

22 "I also requested a local authority liaison officer
23 due to the number of residents involved."

24 A. Yes, so -- okay.

25 Q. There's not a lot of detail in that sentence.

1 A. No.

2 Q. You're saying that it was for two reasons?

3 A. Yes, the LALO, the local authority liaison officer's --

4 one of the roles is to cater and manage the number of

5 residents that have been displaced from the building,

6 and it was clear that they were going to be displaced

7 from the building for a considerable period of time, but

8 the other aspect to the -- to the local authority

9 liaison officer's role is to be able to give us

10 information about the building. If they don't have it

11 on them, they're able to access that information via the

12 town hall.

13 Q. Are you confident that that was something that you asked

14 for at an early stage, plans via the local authority

15 liaison officer?

16 A. It would have been one of the things that the liaison

17 officer would be able to provide, it's not an automatic,

18 "I need plans". At that stage I didn't know that we

19 didn't have any detailed plans, other than what I was

20 looking at the screen, I mean the group manager didn't

21 have any plans, but there may have been a plan inside

22 the building that people had missed, I don't know. But

23 it's all like covering those aspects of looking a little

24 bit further ahead with regard to the incident.

25 Q. Just trying to be clear on what you were asking for.

1 Were you asking for the physical attendance of a local
2 authority liaison officer?

3 A. Yes, absolutely.

4 Q. Without more information being given to them, that might
5 result in them attending but without any plans.

6 A. Okay, I see what you're saying. I didn't specifically
7 ask for the plans with the local authority liaison
8 officer, but they would have been able to access those
9 plans.

10 Q. So that may have been in your thinking, but what you
11 were actually asking for was "Get a local authority
12 liaison officer here".

13 A. Yes, as a point of contact.

14 Q. I understand. On the theme of plans, you told us that
15 one of your first actions and priorities was to get the
16 flat numbers associated with the fire survival calls.
17 Did you then engage in conversation with command unit
18 staff or Mr Freeman or all of them, about "Where are
19 these flat numbers in the building?"

20 A. We had that conversation, and we were unclear in terms
21 of where all the flats were, which floor they were on.
22 I seem to recall that Group Manager Freeman was aware
23 that they were on at least the 9th and above. I can't
24 be absolutely sure about that, but it quickly came back
25 that we were having difficulty accessing anything over

1 the 7th or 8th floor, I think, at the time, because of
2 the fires.

3 Q. I appreciate that it's a long time ago, and I appreciate
4 also that your focus would have been on trying to solve
5 the very difficult situation you found, rather than
6 reflecting on how it had reached that state of affairs,
7 but appliances had been on the scene since approximately
8 16.23, and can you remember having any human emotion of
9 surprise at the amount of information available about
10 where the flats were in the building, or rather the lack
11 of information about where they were in the building?

12 A. I can't honestly remember if I -- if I was told where
13 they were in the building or not, I really can't recall.
14 I seem to have some vague recollection that Group
15 Manager Freeman knew they were on at least the 9th or
16 above, because there was a concerted effort to get to
17 the 11th floor, which I can only imagine that we must
18 have had some information that one of the flats was on
19 the 11th floor, but I can't remember specifically being
20 told that.

21 Q. Do you remember having any thoughts long the lines of
22 surprise at the information and knowledge or lack of it
23 about the layout of the building?

24 A. Not something I dwelt on, because you're -- I can
25 understand why you're asking that question, but it's --

1 the surprise would have been fleeting, because you're
2 focussing on trying to resolve the issue, not trying to
3 look to blame people in terms "Well, why haven't you got
4 that information, what have you got, let's try get on
5 with it and let's try to resolve it". So it was very
6 much trying to move it forward as opposed to "We can
7 have this chat later of why didn't you get that
8 information earlier, why wasn't it available to us?"
9 But at that stage it's dealing with what you've got and
10 trying to come up with a plan to resolve the incident,
11 and the priorities, include the fire survival calls, as
12 quickly as you can at that stage.

13 Q. Well that's why I asked the question in the way I did,
14 because I appreciate that it would be a completely
15 unhelpful distraction from the task in hand to be
16 thinking, "Well, I'm surprised that we don't have more,"
17 but people are people, and you told us that when you got
18 firstly to the command unit you would have expected
19 there to be more set up --

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. -- and I just wondered whether you had the same sort of
22 thought process about the knowledge you were being
23 provided with about the layout of the building.

24 A. Yes, I would say yes to that, but not something that
25 I dwelt on. The thing that did surprise me more than

1 anything was the fires being on the various floors, I've
2 never been to a high rise incident where fires travelled
3 downwards as well as upwards in the building, in a high
4 rise building, and that took -- that took a moment to
5 actually digest that and think, you know, what have we
6 actually got here. Hence my initial thought that we had
7 an arsonist running around the building.

8 Q. Then if I take you back to some of the orders that you
9 made as incident commander, if we look in the advocates'
10 bundles at page 401.

11 THE CORONER: It's in bundle number 1, I think you have it
12 on the desk.

13 A. Thank you, madam.

14 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: In the middle of the page, in the middle
15 box, at 17.21 command unit 4 sent a message requesting
16 another fire rescue unit, and that was presumably part
17 of the strategy of using extended duration breathing
18 apparatus crews to reach the higher floors?

19 A. That is correct, yes.

20 Q. Then in the box below that, whilst we're on this page,
21 we see brigade control telling the fire ground that the
22 control commander at brigade control is making this
23 incident persons reported, because that priority hasn't
24 yet been made by anybody at the incident.

25 A. Right.

1 Q. Mr Simmons, who gave evidence yesterday and this
2 morning, who was the control commander at brigade
3 control who made it persons reported, said that, in his
4 experience, which at the time spanned 40 years, it was
5 the first time that he could recall persons reported
6 being made by brigade control rather than by an incident
7 commander.

8 A. Right.

9 Q. Would you agree with the thrust of his evidence, that
10 this is something extremely unusual?

11 A. Yes, I would agree with that.

12 Q. Does it follow from that that persons reported ought to
13 have been made by an incident commander before this
14 time?

15 A. Absolutely.

16 Q. What difference, if any, would it have made to how the
17 incident was dealt with, if it had been made persons
18 reported earlier?

19 A. It wouldn't have made any difference to the tactics used
20 by operations officers on the scene, absolutely nothing.
21 It would have given a clear indication to monitoring
22 officers and people who were attending that it was
23 a confirmed persons reported fire and that we had people
24 involved, plus the back up that control do in terms of
25 attendance of ambulances, but they were already there.

1 But it is an important point to say that should have
2 been said, absolutely.

3 Q. So it certainly should have been sent, but the
4 impression I'm getting is that in practical terms it
5 wouldn't have made a great deal, if any, difference?

6 A. No, it wouldn't have made any difference to the
7 operations on the incident ground, because the people
8 trying to resolve the incident were all aware that there
9 were fire survival calls and persons involved in the
10 building, correct.

11 Q. Then if you look at page 415, the second box, 17.34,
12 shows that you requested another fire rescue unit,
13 because you made it up to 3 FRUs.

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. You see that?

16 A. I do, yeah. Sorry, yes I do, yes.

17 Q. I think that ultimately the number of FRUs that attended
18 the incident increased --

19 A. To six.

20 Q. -- increased to six. Do you think that it would have
21 been better to request more fire rescue units
22 immediately after that initial conversation with
23 Mr Freeman about the tactic of using extended duration
24 breathing apparatus crews?

25 A. Yes, I do. Can I just add one thing?

1 Q. Of course.

2 A. The initial idea of the EDBA was to tackle the top
3 floor, 11th floor. I still envisaged that the standard
4 duration BA sets would be sufficient to do the lower
5 floors, but as time wore on it was clear that the EDBA
6 was being used throughout the building, hence the make
7 up for FRUs.

8 Q. Can I summarise that to say that you initially had
9 a tactic of EDBAs going to the 11th floor, with standard
10 duration breathing apparatus dealing with the lower
11 floors, but over time the standard duration breathing
12 apparatus crews were not even useful on some of the
13 lower floors?

14 A. No, absolutely, and you'll see with the timings of the
15 messages that it didn't take that long to realise, we
16 were only at 17.34 there when we made them three, and
17 I'm not sure when it was made six, but it probably
18 wouldn't have been that long after either.

19 Q. Then at page 417, towards the end of that first box, we
20 can see that at 17.43 you made pumps 15 and requested
21 two more station managers?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. Just back on the use of FRUs and extended duration
24 breathing apparatus, did you originally envisage that
25 those crews would just carry out search and rescue, or

1 did you envisage them also doing firefighting?

2 A. Yeah, both. Absolutely both. The "make pumps 15" was
3 to resolve the incident, we'd had firefighters there for
4 over an hour, a number had already worn twice and
5 effectively they couldn't be worn again, so we had to
6 supplement with fresh crews, hence the make up and
7 request for more fire engines.

8 Q. We heard evidence from a crew manager of an EDBA crew
9 saying that, as it happened, the briefing he got when he
10 went into the building was he was going to carry out
11 search and rescue, but he ended up firefighting, and he
12 thought that EDBA crews were not particularly suitable
13 for firefighting and that their role was more
14 appropriate for search and rescue. I just wonder
15 whether you would agree with that sentiment but say
16 "Well, we had to do something", or whether you wouldn't
17 necessarily share that sentiment?

18 A. I wouldn't agree with that. There's no reason why he
19 couldn't use his EDBA set and fight fire as well, in my
20 view.

21 Q. So he would regard an EDBA set as multi purpose,
22 available both for firefighting and search and rescue?

23 A. It wasn't a tactic that had been used before. To my
24 knowledge, it had never been used before in -- in this
25 respect, where we've used EDBA crews to do -- get to the

1 seat of a fire, but it -- we -- that's how we ended up
2 resolving the incident, was using EDBA, so the evidence
3 is there for all to see, it was the EDBA crews that
4 resolved the fire, so the tactics worked.

5 Q. I can understand that you had to do it and that it was
6 a suitable tactic in the situation you found yourself,
7 but is it right that they are specialist rescue crews?

8 A. Absolutely, but they are firefighters as well, you know.

9 Q. Then at about 6 o'clock in the evening you attended
10 a silver meeting; is that right?

11 A. That's correct, yeah.

12 Q. Around the time that it started, Assistant Commissioner
13 Turek had arrived at the scene.

14 A. That's correct.

15 Q. As monitoring officer, but as the number of appliances
16 increased, he was required under the policies at the
17 time to become incident commander?

18 A. That is correct, yeah.

19 Q. He took over from you shortly after you came out of the
20 silver meeting; is that right?

21 A. That is right, yeah, that's correct.

22 Q. Just on that point about silver meetings, to pick up
23 something you said in your second statement, this is at
24 533 in the statements bundle. There's a question:
25 "What was discussed at the silver meetings?"

1 The first of which, as we know, was about 6 o'clock.

2 You answered:

3 "One of the key issues was that we had no idea of
4 how many residents or flats were in the building.

5 I remember mentioning this to Group Manager Freeman when
6 I first got there. He said they had no plans and no
7 idea about the make up of the building. I raised this
8 at the silver meeting and the local authority liaison
9 officer was tasked with finding this information out."

10 Is that correct?

11 A. Yeah, that is correct.

12 Q. Just a couple of other points from this second
13 statement. At 530 --

14 THE CORONER: Sorry, before you move on, can I just query
15 something still looking at 533. I think you prefaced
16 your question, Mr Maxwell-Scott, by saying the first
17 silver meeting was at about 1800 hours, and then if you
18 go down to the next question underneath the one we were
19 looking at, Mr Chidgey says the first silver meeting
20 happened at about 18.30. In fact, in the line of the
21 questions, it's recorded at 19.50. Shall we just try
22 and clarify that time?

23 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes, absolutely --

24 THE CORONER: Maybe you're coming to it anyway.

25 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: No, I wasn't. I think I put it to you

1 that you had the handover with Assistant Commissioner
2 Turek after you came out much the silver meeting.
3 Am I wrong about that?

4 A. No, you're -- you're right. The handover was after the
5 silver meeting. AC Turek -- Assistant Commissioner
6 Turek arrived on the command unit and, as far as I can
7 remember, he wanted to go out on the incident ground,
8 I informed him we were about to have silver meeting and
9 he asked me to attend it, so the handover was completed,
10 or he took over as incident commander, after that.

11 Q. The records that we have indicate that he took over as
12 incident commander at 1819 hours, having arrived at the
13 scene at 1751 hours.

14 A. Right.

15 Q. Does that suggest that the silver meeting did in fact
16 take place some time around 18.00 and had finished by
17 18.19?

18 A. Yes, that does, I mean, if I can just say, that 18.30,
19 it does say "about", I wasn't exactly sure at that
20 stage.

21 THE CORONER: No, I understand that, I just wanted to be
22 clear, thank you. Yes, thank you.

23 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Then if I take you back to 530, the final
24 two lines on that page say:
25 "I remember having a conversation on the fire ground

1 about an hour later when walking round with Director
2 Gary Dobson."

3 He's somebody who's even more senior than you? He
4 was Mr Turek's monitoring officer, that is right?

5 A. He was Mr Turek's monitoring officer, that's correct.

6 Q. He was the most senior member of the London Fire Brigade
7 on the fire ground that day?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. Then your statement says that:

10 "Group Manager Freeman said he had the numbers and
11 [in fact] showed me the paper that the numbers were on
12 and that they were a priority."

13 This is now the top of 531. You were asked:

14 "Can you remember what the numbers were?"

15 You say:

16 "I remember that there were four numbers, two of
17 which were 79 and 81."

18 Is that right, that later in the incident Mr Freeman
19 still had the sheet of paper with the numbers on and was
20 able to produce it?

21 A. Absolutely, yes. I'm just trying to think when that
22 hour was an hour later from. The walk -- the walk round
23 with Director Gary Dobson was after AC Turek had taken
24 over as incident commander, so it was about 6.30.

25 Q. Then finally a couple of points you made in your

1 statement about fire survival calls, firstly at 534.

2 The second line of your answer, towards the top of the
3 page, says that:

4 "At the scene of operations, operational officers do
5 not have the facility to directly participate in the
6 fire survival guidance call and talk to the fire
7 survival guidance call resident directly."

8 Then before I ask you the question, if I show you
9 over the page at 535, you were asked:

10 "Might it have been possible to get information to
11 the FSG call residents to do something different once
12 the fire started to behave unexpectedly?"

13 The first sentence of your answer was:

14 "I think that is something we need to look at."

15 I'm interested in those two answers and what
16 appeared perhaps to be an underlying theme about
17 desirability of incident commanders, or somebody
18 delegated by them at the fire ground, being able to have
19 direct communication with trapped residents.

20 A. Or certainly with the control operator who's speaking
21 to -- to be the resident. I mean, it's obvious from
22 what I've written there that the control operator is
23 following certain guidance which they have, but it's
24 very difficult to get really current information to the
25 control operator in terms of what's the best course of

1 action for the resident to take. 99 times out of 100
2 the apartment or the flat that the individual is in is
3 the safest place to be, but on this occasion it wasn't.

4 Q. Mr Simmons told us that the technology didn't allow
5 a three-way call with, in other words, the resident and
6 brigade control and someone on the fire ground, all on
7 the line together, but there would be nothing to prevent
8 in theory the brigade control operator being asked by
9 somebody at the fire ground to ask a question to
10 a resident on the line, or indeed pass them some advice;
11 it wouldn't be impossible, would it?

12 A. Sorry, could you just say that again, because something
13 was going through my mind about the call?

14 Q. There would be nothing to prevent an attempt being made
15 by somebody at the incident ground saying to somebody at
16 brigade control, "I understand you are on the line to
17 somebody in a fire survival guidance call, please ask
18 them a question", in other words indicate where the flat
19 is by doing something at a window, or "Please give them
20 some advice such as 'get out on a balcony because you're
21 going to be safer there'". That would be possible,
22 wouldn't it, putting aside questions of whether it's
23 something that's been done before and how it would work;
24 the technology would allow it?

25 A. Yes. I mean, I know we are looking at this in

1 hindsight, but the -- that -- I suppose, in some
2 respects, there should have been a conversation back
3 to -- from the command unit to the control operator to
4 get a progress report, that's one thing I can't remember
5 asking for and I don't know if they did, but the -- the
6 plan was moving on quite quickly then in terms of our
7 EDBA plan and I was quite hopeful that we would achieve
8 our task by using that, but clearly it took longer to
9 put the fire out on the 9th and 11th floor than I was
10 anticipating, or was hoping.

11 But in terms of getting information, it's something
12 that's got to be looked back -- looked at in terms of
13 the control operator and what the firefighters are
14 doing, what the incident commanders are doing, and how
15 close they are in respect to achieving their tasks as
16 well. It would be -- it would be handy if the control
17 operator knew a little bit more about what the
18 firefighters were trying to do, I suppose. Quite
19 difficult to relay that, because that's happening at
20 a remote place in some respects from where the command
21 unit is, and it would be the command unit team speaking
22 to the control operator, so it's bringing those three
23 areas together. It won't be easy, but I'm sure there's
24 something that will be done.

25 Q. My final question is: looking back on your time at the

1 incident as the incident commander, what single
2 additional thing do you think would have most helped you
3 to carry out your task that day?

4 A. The plans of the building and the layout would have
5 helped in knowing where -- exactly where the flats were
6 and where these calls were being made from and
7 pinpointing them, but by the time I took over and at
8 that, you know, 5.20/5.30 scenario, there was so much
9 activity in terms of people coming out, the bridgehead
10 being moved, the stair -- the means of escape being
11 compromised on all floors, I don't think a plan would
12 have made a huge amount of difference -- it would have
13 made a -- in terms of being clear in your own mind where
14 we're focussing, it would have made a difference, but
15 I don't think not having a plan prevented us from doing
16 anything as quickly as we could on that occasion.

17 Q. That's helpful. Just to be clear, I wasn't asking you
18 the question about what, if anything, would have made
19 a difference to the outcome by the time you became
20 incident commander, it was simply you had to deal with
21 a situation as you had it, what one additional thing
22 would have been most helpful to you at the time and your
23 answer is the plans?

24 A. The plans, yeah.

25 Q. Thank you very much, those are my questions.

1 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Hendy?

2 Questions by MR HENDY

3 MR HENDY: Mr Chidgey, my name's Hendy, I represent some of
4 the bereaved.

5 Just taking up that last point, I don't suppose
6 every appliance, certainly appliances outside Peckham,
7 couldn't have a plan on their appliance of every high
8 rise block in Peckham, clearly?

9 A. No.

10 Q. But no reason why there couldn't be plans in a safe
11 fireman's box on the outside of a block of flats like
12 Lakanal House?

13 A. I agree.

14 Q. If you were asked to make a recommendation, would that
15 be amongst them?

16 A. It would certainly be one of the considerations, yes.

17 Q. The second matter I wanted to ask you about was this: in
18 your witness statement at 523, you say in the fourth
19 line:

20 "During this statement I will refer to the incident
21 report."

22 That's clearly a document that you've had open in
23 front of you while you made the report, and it enabled
24 you to put in various timings and so on. Am I right in
25 thinking that the incident report is a continuous report

1 of all the logged events at a fire incident?

2 A. Yes, that is correct. It's -- it's notorious for not
3 being absolutely correct the whole way through.

4 Q. Some of the timings may be delayed --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. -- and there may be matters which for one reason or
7 another got omitted.

8 A. That's correct.

9 Q. The next matter I wanted to ask you about was this:
10 I got the impression -- or the jury may have got the
11 impression from your evidence that when you arrived and
12 after you'd spoken to Group Manager Freeman you were
13 impressed with his grip of what was happening and his
14 plans for dealing with it, and you were content to leave
15 him as operations commander, would that be fair?

16 A. Yes, that would -- that would be fair. I wouldn't use
17 the word "impressed", I would use the words I was
18 confident in his -- in his handover, in terms of the
19 information that he had, and what he was trying to do to
20 resolve the incident.

21 Q. You were confident, too, in the priority that he was
22 giving to rescues.

23 A. Yes, and I reiterated that myself with the fire survival
24 calls, so his -- in his mind, you know, he may have had
25 that as a key point but, even if he didn't, I left him

1 without any doubts that was a key priority when he went
2 back out and undertook his role as operations commander.

3 Q. Conversely, would it be fair to say that you were not
4 very impressed by what had been done prior to Mr Freeman
5 taking over?

6 A. Are you referring to previous incident commanders?

7 Q. Well, I'm not referring to anybody in particular, I'm
8 just referring to the picture that you had of the
9 incident when you arrived at 5.11 in the afternoon.

10 A. The way you've worded it, I wouldn't use those words.

11 Q. No, put it in your own language, please.

12 A. Okay. I was -- I expected to have more information on
13 the headline board and information within the command
14 unit than I did have but, as I said earlier to
15 Mr Maxwell-Scott, I was unaware at that stage what that
16 command unit had been doing, how long they'd been there,
17 so although I was surprised, you know, it's -- they may
18 have been tasked with gathering information and not been
19 able to set up the unit as I would have expected, and
20 the other thing is I did arrive relatively quickly for
21 a senior officer of that rank to a fire of that nature,
22 so they didn't have a lot of time to put it all
23 together, I suppose.

24 Q. Well, you say that, but we know from the logs that they
25 arrived at 4.38, you logged status 3 at 5.11.14, so

1 they'd been there for just over half an hour when you
2 arrived.

3 One of the things you asked them to do was to phone
4 control to get the details of the fire survival callers
5 and the flat numbers, and that presumably was because
6 you were not confident that they already had that
7 information in a form that you could use?

8 A. It was also following my initial call when I was paged
9 at my office in Union Street, that the control
10 operator -- I was under the impression that she gave me
11 two numbers at that time, but looking at the phonecall
12 log earlier, it doesn't seem that she did, so I'm not
13 sure how -- not sure how that happened, but in my mind
14 I wanted to make sure that we had up to date information
15 from control in terms of the status of those fire
16 survival calls. It wasn't anything specifically to do
17 with the command unit crew. Even if they'd have had the
18 fire survival call numbers up with information, I would
19 have still asked them, "Ring back and get the latest
20 information", because I wanted it because I knew I was
21 going to be in charge.

22 Q. Okay. I think Mr Maxwell-Scott suggested to you that
23 they might have made a call on your behalf within
24 seconds of your logging on but, for a variety of
25 reasons, we think that that can't be right.

1 A. No.

2 Q. Because they had certain information, and when one looks
3 at the call that they made at 5.11 or just after,
4 they're not actually asking for confirmation of all the
5 latest information. We think the call that they made at
6 your request was at page 350 in the bundle, which is
7 timed at 17.24.

8 So it's about 13 minutes after you'd logged on, you
9 got kitted up, you walked to the command unit, you'd
10 taken in what was going on, you'd looked at the boards
11 and so forth, and then we see in the fourth entry, CU4,
12 speaking to somebody at control, says:

13 "At the 12 pump fire, can you confirm for me the
14 numbers of the flats that you've had telephone calls
15 where they are claiming there are people trapped?"

16 Then the numbers are listed:

17 "60 -- sorry, 68.

18 "68.

19 "79, 80, 81.

20 The command unit says:

21 "Right, definitely 81, not 82?"

22 Then there's further discussion about 81, and then
23 towards the bottom of the page, command unit 4 says:

24 "So, all right, can we just confirm 68, 79, 80, 81?"

25 Then the control adds to that 82. So we have five

1 numbers: 68 79, 80, 81 and 82, yes?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. I wonder if you could look -- is it in this volume at
4 page 180? Yes, it is. This document at page 180, could
5 we just turn that upside down as it were -- is a piece
6 of paper, and it's very difficult for you to tell,
7 Mr Chidgey, but we and the jury have seen the original
8 of this, and it was a piece of paper that was folded in
9 half so that the numbers 68, 79, 82, 80, 81 and a query
10 against 50, when the piece of paper is folded, they're
11 on their own in that half of the page, you see?

12 A. Mm-hmm.

13 Q. Now the evidence that the jury has heard is that those
14 numbers of those flats were written on that bit of paper
15 by Mr Best, and the remaining stuff on the other half of
16 the page was written by Mr Glenny, so Mr Best had given
17 this piece of paper to Mr Glenny, Mr Glenny or Mr Best
18 had folded it over, and Mr Glenny had put it on his
19 clipboard and written what is now on the screen, the
20 bottom half of the page.

21 Those numbers coincide with the numbers that control
22 had passed to command unit 4 at 5.24, and I wondered
23 whether you have any recollection of seeing that bit of
24 paper. It wouldn't have had that stuff on the bottom
25 half of it, it would just have those numbers on it.

1 An impossible question isn't it, three and a half years
2 later, but I ask it all the same?

3 A. It's not so much that, I wouldn't have had direct
4 contact with Mr Glenny or Mr Best, so the way the
5 numbers were approached and the information about that
6 was -- was very much within the command unit staff,
7 Group Manager Freeman and myself, in terms of numbers
8 being transmitted between us, and whilst there was --
9 I'm sure Martin -- Group Manager Freeman had a piece of
10 paper with the numbers on, because he showed it to me,
11 I'm not sure it was this piece of paper.

12 Q. No, we think it probably wasn't, it was probably
13 a different piece of paper. That was a piece of paper
14 which I think subsequently you gave to Mr Freeman.

15 A. I believe I did, yes.

16 Q. You personally gave it?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Not via Mr Glenny or anybody else?

19 A. No.

20 Q. Were you aware that others had gathered numbers of flats
21 requiring rescue before 17.24? Mr Mullins, for example,
22 on one of the first appliances to arrive had made a list
23 which he'd given to Mr Payton who had put it in his
24 pocket and taken to the bridgehead?

25 A. Not specifically. That information would have come back

1 via the handover from Group Manager Freeman in terms of
2 the information he knew at that time, and --

3 Q. If he'd known?

4 A. If he'd have known it, so I wouldn't have got that
5 information from the previous incident commander below
6 Group Manager Freeman. Group Manager Freeman had to
7 know that incident. Can I just say --

8 Q. Please.

9 A. -- looking back at this information now, it tends to jog
10 the memory in some respects, that the command unit staff
11 may well have been on the phone when I arrived on
12 that -- at that time at 17.12, or whenever it was, and
13 I'd said to them about the fire survival calls, and they
14 said they've already got that information. I seem to
15 remember something along those lines, but I still asked
16 for it again. I think they felt because they'd just
17 come off the phone that they didn't do it again and
18 hence the delay of about another ten minutes when
19 I asked for an update and they hadn't phone, so I asked
20 for an update. In my mind that could have explained
21 that delay, but --

22 Q. Yes. One you had that up to date list and you spoke to
23 Mr Freeman, we've had his evidence and Mr Foster's
24 evidence that extended duration BA crews were sent as
25 soon as practically possible, within a few minutes, in

1 fact, up to the 11th floor, to effect a rescue, is that
2 right?

3 A. That was my understanding, absolutely.

4 Q. With that in mind, I just wanted to come back to this
5 issue of persons reported and your evidence in answer to
6 Mr Maxwell-Scott that persons reported should have been
7 recorded earlier, but you say it would have made no
8 difference tactically. I just wonder if we could think
9 about that for a moment. I can see that it would have
10 made no difference to you, Mr Freeman, or Mr Foster,
11 because you acted immediately as soon as you had the
12 numbers to try and effect a rescue, but might it not
13 have made a profound difference to those who were in
14 charge before you, who didn't attempt a rescue from the
15 11th floor?

16 A. It would have made -- the thing with a persons reported
17 call, and a message being sent to control, officers and
18 appliances with crews on attending would get that
19 message, and they arrive knowing that there's possibly
20 people involved and possibly people who need rescuing,
21 so for oncoming crews and officers mobilised to the
22 incident, they're given a forewarning that there's
23 people possibly involved.

24 In terms of officers who were there initially, I'm
25 not going to speak for their actions, I don't know what

1 they've said to you or what they've said in court, but
2 I find it very difficult that they didn't realise there
3 were people involved and the fact they hadn't sent
4 persons reported would have made a huge difference to
5 the way they tackled that fire.

6 That's not for me to judge, but I go back to the
7 point that if the message would have been sent, it would
8 have been an important message for oncoming officers and
9 appliances to be made aware of that, but I still feel
10 that for a residential high rise fire, initial officers
11 in charge would clearly prioritise the fact that there's
12 people likely to be involved.

13 Q. Well, of course, I understand your answer, Mr Chidgey,
14 but I ask the question to see whether this is part of
15 the explanation to the conundrum that faces the jury.
16 Here we have a situation where the first crew to get to
17 the 11th floor to effect a rescue was the Niblett BA
18 crew at about 17.36, which is to say one and a quarter
19 hours after Catherine Hickman first called control,
20 54 minutes after Rafael Cervi called control, 51 minutes
21 after Helen Udoaka called control, and the jury may just
22 be wondering how on earth a delay of such extent could
23 have happened before a rescue was attempted. That's why
24 I offer to you the possibility that persons reported
25 might have been part of the explanation.

1 A. Not a major part in my view, no. Can I just add to
2 that, though. The length of delay is obviously
3 something that the court's looking at and the jury are
4 looking at, but in -- in terms of firefighters trying to
5 do their job, I've got no doubts that they -- they would
6 have tried to do that job in the best way they're
7 trained.

8 The -- the thing about Lakanal House was that as
9 I said earlier, you have -- I've never been to -- I've
10 been to a good number of high rise fires, and I've never
11 seen a fire go downwards as well as up, I've never seen
12 a means of escape being compromised throughout the
13 building, and I've never seen a bridgehead moved, where
14 it's got to be moved outside. So those combination of
15 factors, in my view, had a -- you know, had a bearing
16 in -- in terms of the time it took to get to the 11th
17 floor, without doubt.

18 Q. Indeed, Mr Chidgey, you could add other factors, no
19 plans, no-one knew where flat 79 or 81 was?

20 A. I agree with you, but having no plans doesn't stop us
21 tackling the fire and going up inside the building, but
22 having huge numbers of residents coming down the only
23 means of escape, requiring assistance, takes away what
24 the firefighters have been tasked to do, which is to go
25 up and fight the fire, and they're dealing with people

1 coming down the stairs in distress.

2 Q. Well, nobody could suggest that only one factor was the
3 cause of the tragedy?

4 A. No.

5 Q. It's a complex problem, and the jury are well aware of
6 the many factors that played their part. Just a couple
7 of other matters. We've heard from Mr Paffett, who was
8 designated a mapping officer. He told the jury that his
9 task was to map where the various appliances were round
10 the building. Mr Chidgey, is that really an important
11 task to be carried out when you have people to be
12 rescued and fires to be put out?

13 A. It's part of the command unit's set up in terms of
14 knowing where the appliances are, where they're
15 positioned, which appliances we've got there. It's more
16 of how we structure and resolve the incident overall.
17 In terms of priorities, that individual would not have
18 been used for fighting fire and rescue, that's not their
19 role, their role is part of the command unit and that's
20 one of the functions of the command unit.

21 Q. Can I ask you, please, to look at page 528 in your
22 statement. Mr Maxwell-Scott took you to this and you've
23 referred to it a couple of times, the question at the
24 bottom of the page:

25 "What can you recall regarding the fire survival

1 calls when speaking to control?

2 "I'm sure there's a tape of this call."

3 Then you set out your memory including that you
4 thought that she passed over two flat numbers, and we've
5 looked at the call now, I'm not troubled about that.
6 What I wanted was the sentence which begins on the third
7 line from the bottom:

8 "I'm sure that I took the number of the FSG calls,
9 I'm sure that I took the details."

10 What I wanted to ask you was when you -- of course
11 you were writing this in retrospect, much later, nearly
12 a year later, when you say you took the number of the
13 FSG calls, does that mean the number of the flats from
14 which they were made or the telephone numbers?

15 A. No, not the telephone numbers, the number of the flats.
16 Even today, and looking at this log, I was convinced
17 that I took the numbers, but that's what I'm referring
18 to there, the flat numbers.

19 Q. Of course. It's possible, Mr Chidgey, the explanation
20 is that you heard on the radio the number of a couple of
21 flats, that might have been the explanation.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Anyway, I don't think anything turns on that.

24 The final matter was something that Mr Maxwell-Scott
25 took you to at 535 in your witness statement, which is

1 this issue about information being passed from residents
2 to officers on the fire ground and you said, in answer
3 to Mr Maxwell-Scott's question, that there wasn't a --
4 you didn't ask for a progress report, and perhaps you
5 should have done, and so on.

6 I just wanted to ask you about information passing
7 the other way. Of course, as I understood your answer,
8 you were saying more information should have been given
9 by the incident commander on the ground to control to
10 pass on to the resident, but what about information
11 flowing the other way? If there'd been a direct means
12 of communication, or even indirectly through control,
13 an obvious thing for the incident commander, or somebody
14 on his behalf, to have asked was "Where is this lady in
15 flat 79? Where is it in relation to the fire that we
16 can see burning in the flat below?"

17 A. Yeah. Yeah, that's a fair point, information could have
18 come down from control. I think they'd made a couple of
19 early efforts in terms of getting that information down,
20 but later on, around this time, anyway -- I think
21 from -- from my point of view, and from Group Manager
22 Freeman's point of view, we knew where the -- what the
23 numbers were.

24 We knew we had a plan to try and reach those
25 numbers, and in some respects no more information coming

1 from the control operator would have got us there any
2 quicker. We didn't have something that we were holding
3 back waiting for more information, we were focussed on
4 getting crews up to the floors to fight the fire and to
5 get to those fire survival call flats. We didn't get --
6 we didn't give the information back and control didn't
7 give us information and --

8 Q. No. Mr Chidgey, I don't criticise, and my clients don't
9 criticise anything that you, Mr Freeman, or Mr Foster
10 did. You did your best as quickly as you could to
11 effect a rescue of the flats on the 11th floor,
12 understood.

13 But if it had been possible to communicate earlier,
14 isn't an obvious thing that might have happened, or
15 which would have helped, is if an earlier incident
16 commander had said "Right, flat 79 in trouble, flat 81
17 in trouble, I'm standing at the west side, I'm looking
18 at the building now, somebody get hold of the callers
19 and tell me where those flats are so I can send somebody
20 up", or even, "I can see the balconies, it would be safe
21 if they came out on the east side of the building if
22 they walked to the north end."

23 That sort of communication seems so strikingly
24 lacking in this incident.

25 A. I wouldn't disagree with what you're saying. There is

1 an expectation, though, that the flats and the
2 compartments within those flats are a safe point to be,
3 a safe place to be, and you've got to take that into --
4 into mind when you're saying that an incident commander
5 should have done this, should have done that, because at
6 the back of his or her mind, they're also thinking,
7 "Their flat should be safe".

8 Q. Yes.

9 A. It's not -- it wasn't the original seat of origin,
10 because of that on the 9th floor, therefore, "I know the
11 fire was on the 9th floor, this is on a different floor"
12 and it's just trying to digest that information. I'm
13 not saying what you're saying is wrong, not at all, but
14 the incident commander is also digesting that
15 information thinking they should be, the people who are
16 on the calls, should be safe within their flats and we
17 will get to them.

18 Q. That's understood and these are matters we probed with
19 early incident commanders, particularly from the moment
20 when it's visually seen that the fire is no longer
21 contained within a particular compartment, but
22 I shouldn't ask you about it and I don't.

23 Thank you very much, Mr Chidgey.

24 THE CORONER: Mr Dowden?

25

1 Questions by MR DOWDEN

2 MR DOWDEN: May name's Dowden and I ask questions on behalf
3 of Mr Francisquini. Just a couple of questions. When
4 you were in the command unit, did anybody come back to
5 you from the fire ground to give you any information as
6 to the layout of the building?

7 A. Can you just repeat the first bit, when I was on the
8 command unit, did you say?

9 Q. Yes, did any firefighter come back from the fire ground
10 to give you any information? When I say "firefighter",
11 I mean any rank.

12 A. Right, throughout my tenure as incident commander?

13 Q. Yes.

14 A. Yes, they did. In terms of -- it was initiated by me
15 sending them out there, so I had officers that were
16 coming to me and I wanted the latest view. I didn't
17 want to -- I couldn't expect the operations commander to
18 come back, because they were -- Group Manager Freeman
19 was managing the bridgehead and the tactics in
20 dealing -- trying to reach the upper floors and put the
21 fires out, but I -- I think I've got it in my statement,
22 I sent an officer out, Group Manager Andrews -- I may
23 have sent one out before that as well, I'm not sure, to
24 get me the latest information in terms of what was going
25 on. It was very difficult with all the radio traffic to

1 speak to Group Manager Freeman without him being
2 interrupted.

3 Q. I think it was clear that what wasn't coming back was
4 any information as to the actual layout of the building.

5 A. No, no, absolutely, I agree with that.

6 Q. As a result of that, did you make any further requests
7 for that information?

8 A. What, in terms of trying to get that information back
9 from the operations commander?

10 Q. Well, from anybody anywhere at the scene?

11 A. Later on, when the LALO turned up, the local authority
12 liaison officer, that's one of the discussions that we
13 had, that we wanted a plan of the building in terms of
14 knowing the number of residents, but not having a plan
15 and a perfect layout of the building didn't affect the
16 fact that we had firefighters in there looking.
17 I understand what you're saying --

18 THE CORONER: Mr Chidgey, let me interrupt you. Mr Dowden's
19 question was whether any firefighter of any rank gave
20 you that information --

21 A. No.

22 THE CORONER: -- whether you sought it from anybody.

23 A. No.

24 MR DOWDEN: We've heard on various occasions about flats
25 being constructed to contain fires for about an hour.

1 It's right that the fire service knew of this fire just
2 after 4.20 in the afternoon, and you arrived on the
3 scene just before then. What concerns did you have at
4 that stage that fires may be spreading?

5 A. Well, as I referred to it earlier, my initial thought,
6 I'm -- I'm not a fire safety expert in terms of the
7 London Fire Brigade, we have fire safety officers, one
8 of them happened -- happens to be Group Manager Freeman,
9 funnily enough, who was the incident commander before
10 me, hence my thought process that we had an arsonist
11 running round, because I didn't -- my initial thoughts
12 were -- weren't that the fire safety of this building
13 had been compromised. Group Manager Freeman's views
14 were different to that, he did feel that the -- you
15 know, there's possibly something not right here in terms
16 of fire safety with these -- with these fires on the
17 various floors.

18 So in terms of answering your question, yes,
19 something along those lines, you would expect
20 a residential flat to be able to hold back a fire for
21 a certain amount of time to allow people to escape.
22 Clearly it wasn't happening on this occasion.

23 Q. Thank you.

24 THE CORONER: Ms Al Tai?

25 MS AL TAI: No, thank you, madam.

1 THE CORONER: Mr Compton?

2 Questions by MR COMPTON

3 MR COMPTON: Officer, just this matter, please, Ben Compton,
4 I act for Apollo Property Services. The jury have heard
5 a little bit about such matters as the Coanda effect and
6 wind impact on buildings, and we also know it was a very
7 hot day. When you arrived there, did you note that in
8 fact it was windy and that it was very gusty, there were
9 gusty winds coming round that building?

10 A. I -- I can't recall. From leaving my car, which was
11 parked, I can't remember the name of the roads now,
12 the -- it was in the same road as the command unit if
13 that helps, I was only 30 -- 30 yards away from them, so
14 I literally walked from my car to the command unit.

15 Q. Well, I understand, it's a long time ago. The only
16 other matter is that, as far as fires starting up below,
17 did anyone draw to your attention that what had been
18 happening was that debris had been falling down and that
19 the windows, because of the hot day, had been open and
20 debris seems to have been getting into flats below,
21 catching the curtains and so on, and that was the cause
22 of the fires below.

23 A. I only found that out much later.

24 Q. I mean, I appreciate what you say, that you hadn't
25 yourself, with your experience, come across this, but

1 one can understand the mechanics of it, would you agree,
2 of debris coming down and catching fire within the flats
3 below from the open windows?

4 A. Once it was explained to me of how it happened, clearly
5 the mechanics of it can happen like that, because it did
6 happen like that, but I wasn't aware of that until much
7 later in the incident.

8 Q. Very well. Thank you very much.

9 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Walsh?

10 Questions by MR WALSH

11 MR WALSH: Just one matter. It's in relation to the use of
12 EDBA.

13 A. Right.

14 Q. You told us earlier on that, as far as you were
15 concerned, that was the first time that EDBA had been
16 used for firefighting purposes within high rise.

17 A. That is correct, yeah, yes.

18 Q. You also said it was the first time in your experience
19 that the bridgehead had had to be moved in a high rise
20 outside the building like that.

21 A. That is correct, yes.

22 Q. Of course it was the moving the bridgehead that required
23 the use of the EDBA teams.

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. What I want to ask you is in relation to the incident

1 commanders before you arrived, and before the need to
2 move the bridgehead arose, would there have been any
3 reason for them at all, the earlier commanders, to
4 consider the unusual use of EDDBA crews?

5 A. No, not at all, not at all. The bridgehead,
6 I understood, was on the 3rd floor when I arrived.
7 Normal procedure when fighting a fire on the 5th floor,
8 the incident commanders would be looking to use standard
9 duration BA to facilitate that.

10 Q. All right, thank you very much indeed.

11 THE CORONER: Thank you. Members of the jury?

12 Questions from THE JURY

13 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you, we have two questions.
14 Our first question, and again it is to do with the EDDBA,
15 we've heard how useful that was, but also that the EDDBA
16 wearers were only associated with the fire and rescue
17 units. Is there any particular reason that all
18 firefighters, or a wider selection of firefighters,
19 aren't trained for EDDBA wear rather than just standard
20 apparatus?

21 A. Is there any reason why they're not trained as EDDBA
22 wearers?

23 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Yes.

24 A. The London Fire Brigade -- I don't really want to speak
25 for the London Fire Brigade, not being in the London

1 Fire Brigade anymore, but going back to then, the
2 London Fire Brigade had 16 -- we may have only had 10
3 then -- no, must have had 16 fire rescue units at that
4 time. They have a complement of firefighters trained
5 to -- to serve on those fire rescue units. It's quite
6 an intensive course to go onto a FRU. I can't see it
7 would be practically feasible to have every firefighter
8 trained up as an EDBA crew for the length of training
9 and course.

10 THE CORONER: Simply for the use of EDBA, not the other
11 tasks associated with those who are attached to
12 a specialist FRU.

13 A. Possibly, madam, but the EDBA is only kept on the FRU
14 trucks, so --

15 THE CORONER: Yes, well I think the thrust of the jurors'
16 question is: is there any reason why EDBA should not
17 have been kept on the standard appliances?

18 A. I don't think I'm really in a position to answer that,
19 in terms of --

20 THE CORONER: Right, well we'll deal with that with others.

21 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you. The other's more of
22 a procedural question. We've heard of how yourself and,
23 with other incident commanders, the most senior officer
24 on the -- on the incident site doesn't automatically
25 come in as incident commander, but instead as monitoring

1 officer. Is there any particular reason that the
2 highest officer, as they're required after a certain
3 growth of the incident, for instance at "make pumps
4 eight" or that sort of thing, is there a particular
5 reason that -- that the highest ranking officer comes in
6 as monitoring and, to me -- and correct me if I am
7 wrong -- to me, that sounds like a support and
8 supervision role; why do they do that rather than taking
9 over straight away as incident commander?

10 A. The policies -- the operational policies that we use
11 state a certain number of fire engines will attract
12 an incident commander of a certain rank. The monitoring
13 officer's role is there to support that incident
14 commander, so they're always of a higher rank, and
15 that's the procedures we use, so if we always had the
16 most senior fire officer as the incident commander,
17 everything, you know, is down to that individual,
18 whereas by using this method, you have a support officer
19 who can guide you, especially for newer officers who are
20 in the role, they may --

21 You know, they need exposure to these incidents, and
22 there are a various types of incidents the
23 London Fire Brigade go to, and it's a way of ensuring
24 they've got direct support alongside them to say, "Have
25 you considered this, have you considered that?" without

1 yourself to a glass of water and turn on the microphone.

2 (In the presence of the Jury)

3 MICHAEL MCGURRAN (sworn)

4 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr McGurran, do sit down. Thank
5 you very much. Please if you could keep your voice up
6 when giving your evidence, that would be very helpful.
7 Mr Maxwell-Scott, who's standing, is going to ask
8 questions on my behalf and then there will be questions
9 from others, but I doubt we'll get to those other
10 questions today.

11 A. Thank you.

12 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Madam, at what point in time should
13 I look for a convenient moment?

14 THE CORONER: Just before 4.00, please, I think.

15 Is that convenient to you as jurors? Yes, thank you
16 very much.

17 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

18 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Could you give the court your full name,
19 please?

20 A. Michael Gerald McGurran.

21 Q. What is your current position?

22 A. Station manager at Peckham Fire Station.

23 Q. Is it right that you were not personally involved in the
24 attempts to fight the fire or carry out search and
25 rescue operations at Lakanal House in July 2009?

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. The reason you're here to give evidence is because of
3 your position as station manager of Peckham Fire Station
4 at the time.

5 A. That's correct.

6 Q. When did you join the London Fire Brigade?

7 A. February 1984.

8 Q. When were you promoted to station manager?

9 A. I was promoted in 2001.

10 Q. When did you become the station manager of Peckham Fire
11 Station?

12 A. I believe around 2003.

13 Q. You made a witness statement recently at the request of
14 the coroner, and one of the things you said at the very
15 end of it was this:

16 "On occasion, I would go with crews on 72D visits,
17 particularly for those premises that they were proposing
18 to remove from the list. The frequency of visits was
19 being reduced."

20 Don't worry about that bit for a moment. You say:

21 "I would do this approximately four times a year."

22 So do I understand from that that, in your time as
23 station manager for Peckham Fire Station, it was your
24 practice about four times a year to accompany your crews
25 on 72D visits?

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. We've heard evidence that a good proportion of 72D
3 visits would have been to residential tower blocks.
4 I don't know if you were in court earlier when
5 Crew Manager Hale gave evidence, but he thought that
6 over 50 per cent of 72D visits were to residential tower
7 blocks.

8 A. I think I'd say that we have -- a 72D visit is a --
9 a general visit where crews can go out and inspect
10 a premises or any place for purpose of means for
11 firefighting. We have an out of site duty schedule with
12 the station which contains about 75 premises across the
13 station's ground, of which about 25 are high rise
14 premises, so what he said was probably correct in the
15 sense that they go out and look at all types of
16 premises, but we have a core function of looking at
17 about 75 that we visit annually.

18 Q. So did I follow from what you're saying that you're
19 giving a more precise figure and you're saying that
20 a third of the premises that you visit for 72D visits
21 are residential tower blocks, 25 out of 75?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. We've established that you went out on 72D visits
24 approximately four times a year as station manager. Can
25 we assume that some of those were to residential tower

1 blocks?

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. Let me ask you firstly in this way: between 2003, when
4 you became station manager of Peckham Fire Station, and
5 the date of the fire, July 2009, were there any changes
6 that you made to your practice in the way in which did
7 you a 72D visit to a residential tower block, or did you
8 do it the same way each time in each of those years?

9 A. It was done the same way, no -- no changes.

10 Q. What I'd like to do then is to ask you some of the same
11 sorts of questions, firstly, that I asked Crew Manager
12 Hale about what your practice would have been when you
13 led a 72D visit to a residential tower block.

14 Firstly, would you have conducted the visit taking
15 the whole watch around with you or would you have split
16 them up to carry out different tasks?

17 A. That would depend. If I was carrying out the visit,
18 then the function of my visit would have been like
19 an audit to see how they carried out the visits or, as
20 I said, if a building was going to come off the 72D
21 register, then I would have gone with the crew for that
22 purpose. If I was going round, I would have kept all
23 the crew together with me.

24 Q. I think you're giving a flavour, that may be slightly
25 artificial and unrepresentative of what may happen when

1 you're not there, because you're going to with them --

2 A. That is to say what Crew Manager Hale said, there's

3 nothing wrong with, say, on larger tower block, some of

4 the blocks we've got are 21 floors, if one crew starts

5 at the bottom of the block and the other crew starts at

6 the top and then they check the floors as -- as they go

7 all the way up, then that would be -- the visit would be

8 done, if you like, in half the time, and I would expect,

9 you know, the same result: if there were any defects

10 they would record them on their -- on their way.

11 Q. Do I understand that there's nothing wrong with

12 splitting the crew up?

13 A. There's nothing wrong with doing that.

14 Q. It's up to an individual choice on the day how it's

15 done?

16 A. Correct, yeah.

17 Q. What about note keeping? Would you carry a notebook

18 with you as you went round so you could write things as

19 you saw them?

20 A. I would or I would get someone -- one of the crew to

21 make any notes of any defect we would find during the

22 visit, or any changes to the -- the layout, if you like.

23 Q. Would you expect your firefighters at Peckham Fire

24 Station, when you're not there, to carry a notebook with

25 them and write things down as they see them?

1 A. They would carry something to write down where the
2 defects were, yes.

3 Q. In terms of things that would be checked, we've heard
4 evidence that they would check about hydrants and water
5 supply, I'm sure you would agree with that: they would
6 check the main dry riser --

7 A. Correct.

8 Q. -- you're nodding -- and they would check the fireman's
9 lift function, if there was one.

10 A. Correct.

11 Q. What I'm more interested in is whether there would be
12 a checking of the means, firstly, of escape from flats
13 out into communal areas, so in other words whether you
14 would give consideration to how does one get out of
15 a flat; what are the different options to a resident?

16 A. On a 72D visit, they would check the common areas. The
17 appliances also carry keys, I think that was brought up
18 earlier, that they can access through lobby doors, and
19 if -- if you like, Peckham Fire Station ground has got
20 three similar blocks to Lakanal, one of them being
21 Castlemead, so that's one of the premises where I went
22 with crews on a -- on a visit, and that was at the
23 request of one of the residents there, before Lakanal,
24 when we were -- we were visiting different blocks, and
25 on that occasion we used the keys to inspect the lobby

1 area to the balconies. We didn't actually go out onto
2 the balcony, because there was like a vision panel and
3 you could see that the balconies were clear.

4 Q. Given that you say you've been to somewhere similar to
5 Lakanal -- I'll put some photos up in a moment -- but
6 firstly would you, on a 72D visit, go into an individual
7 flat?

8 A. No.

9 Q. Then if we look at the communal areas that you're
10 talking about, is it right that you would expect each
11 dry riser outlet to be inspected?

12 A. Correct.

13 Q. So in a block like Lakanal, which happened to have them
14 on alternate floors, you would expect crews to look for
15 them on each floor?

16 A. They would walk up the staircase, which would, as you
17 take them, pass the mezzanine floors, so they could look
18 in every floor on the way up.

19 Q. If you pause there, I'll just get some photographs for
20 you to have a look at. (Pause)

21 Firstly, I should ask, have you ever been to
22 Lakanal?

23 A. I haven't been to Lakanal before the fire, but --

24 Q. You've been there since?

25 A. I've been to one of the blocks that was a similar

1 construction to Lakanal.

2 Q. Have you been to Lakanal since the incident?

3 A. I've been -- I was there the day after the fire.

4 Q. With that introduction, this is a photograph taken in
5 the central staircase on what happens to be
6 an even-numbered floor, so not a floor where there are
7 central corridors leading to the front doors of flats.

8 This is photograph 15. The door that one can see
9 there leads to a lobby area which on even-numbered
10 floors would have in it lift doors and dry riser
11 outlets, but the even-numbered floors is simply a lobby
12 area, which then leads to -- I'll show you photograph
13 41 -- to an area like this. This is a photograph taken
14 from above, but showing an area on an even-numbered
15 floor, from which one can go through the door one sees
16 there and get out onto a balcony. If I show you then
17 photograph 37, that's the opposite side of the door on
18 41.

19 A. Okay.

20 Q. So that's the arrangement on the even-numbered floors at
21 Lakanal House. Going back, then, to the beginning of
22 that journey at photograph 15, would you expect crews on
23 the 72D visit to go through that door?

24 A. They might well go through there with the keys that we
25 had on the appliances. We had, on occasion, not had the

1 right keys for certain blocks, and have had to request
2 more keys off the council if a lock had been changed,
3 but they would have had keys to get through that door,
4 or should have had keys to get through that door.

5 Q. I'm going to try to pin you down a bit more on that
6 answer which began with the phrase "they might well".
7 Would you expect them to see if they carried with them
8 a key that opened that door?

9 A. I would expect them to, yes.

10 Q. If the key opened the door, you would expect them to go
11 through it?

12 A. I would expect them to go through that door, I wouldn't
13 necessarily expect them to go through the balcony door,
14 because there's a vision panel in it and they could see
15 if it was clear or not.

16 Q. So going then to photograph 41, you would expect them to
17 get into that area you can see in the photograph, and
18 you would expect them to look through the vision
19 panel --

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. -- and you wouldn't necessarily expect them to then open
22 that door?

23 A. No.

24 Q. What would the purpose be of looking through the vision
25 panel?

1 A. In the past there have been occasions when there had
2 been rubbish and bikes and other equipment left by
3 people out on the balcony -- balconies, so, you know, on
4 occasion we've had to go back and enforce that the
5 balconies have been clear.

6 Q. Why would it be important for the balconies to be clear?

7 A. Because it's a very narrow balcony, and that's the --
8 one of their means of escape.

9 Q. That's the point, isn't it? It's not just about the
10 practicalities of people living and using the balconies,
11 they need to be clear because they're a means of escape,
12 and that's why you'd be interested; is that right?

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. It follows from the questions and answers we've been
15 working through that you would expect one of your crews
16 doing a 72D visit to establish that on the even-numbered
17 floors there are balconies that provide escape routes to
18 the central staircase and from there out of the
19 building; do you agree?

20 A. Correct, I agree.

21 THE CORONER: Sorry, can I just stop you there, there's
22 someone at the back there using a mobile phone or
23 something there; would you please stop? Yes, you, I'm
24 looking at you.

25 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: You told us that you wouldn't expect the

1 crew to go into a flat, I understand that. Would you
2 expect the crew to work out that the flats are
3 maisonettes?

4 A. They -- they should know they're maisonettes from the
5 outside of the building, because it's obvious -- also
6 we've carried out home fire safety visits in most of
7 the -- in fact, Peckham's got 125 blocks of flats over
8 five floors, and in the past few years we've carried out
9 home fire safety visits in 124 of them, so they are
10 familiar with different blocks of flats.

11 Q. Does it follow from your answer that you would expect
12 them to work out that the balcony escape routes on the
13 even-numbered floors are an escape route available to
14 people whose front doors are on the odd-numbered floors,
15 because they're maisonettes?

16 A. Correct.

17 THE CORONER: We're just after 4.00, Mr Maxwell-Scott, how
18 are you doing?

19 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I was just going to ask about
20 expectations of looking for signs, to round off this
21 topic.

22 THE CORONER: All right, okay.

23 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Would you have expected your crews on
24 a 72D visit to look for the presence of things like fire
25 escape signs?

1 A. I would expect them to notice some of the signage on the
2 building. They are looking for signs, they're looking
3 for signs on the dry riser outlets, they're looking
4 for -- they would be looking for the -- the flat
5 numbers, they'd probably need them just to work out
6 a bit of the layout of the building on a visit, and
7 where to go to from what -- you know, what floors they
8 would get access to.

9 Q. In communal areas, would you expect them to look to see
10 if there were adequate fire escape signs?

11 A. I would expect them to -- in the communal areas, they
12 would be looking at the -- the lobby doors, they would
13 be looking at if there were exit signs, yes.

14 Q. Then if I finally show you a couple of photographs about
15 a sign at ground floor level, this is in the lift lobby
16 area --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- and you can see that there is a sign above the two
19 lift shafts --

20 A. (The witness nodded)

21 Q. -- I can see you nodding. If I show you a close-up at
22 photograph 8, that is that sign. Firstly, in your
23 experience of your ground as station manager of Peckham
24 Fire Station, how unusual or unusual is it for there to
25 be a sign like that at ground floor level in a tower

1 block?

2 A. It's usual for a sign to be like that. Marie Curie, the
3 sister block to Lakanal, has a sign in exactly the same
4 place.

5 Q. Would you expect your crews to check that such a sign
6 was there on a 72D visit?

7 A. I know that it's not -- I would expect them to -- to
8 notice it. I wouldn't say it was like a -- something
9 that they would maybe come back and say it wasn't there.

10 Q. So you would expect them to notice it, but if it's not,
11 am I right in thinking you wouldn't regard it as
12 a defect?

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. Therefore, they don't necessarily specifically check for
15 it?

16 A. No, but they might say there was no sign to say where
17 the flats were, as most blocks have some visual aid as
18 to where the flats are.

19 Q. Madam, that's a convenient moment.

20 THE CORONER: Lovely, thank you very much.

21 Mr McGurran, thank you very much, I'm sorry we
22 haven't been able to complete your evidence today, are
23 you able to come back tomorrow?

24 A. Yes.

25 THE CORONER: Please be here for 10 o'clock. Because you're

1 part way through giving your evidence, the strict rule
2 is you must not talk to anyone about your evidence or
3 indeed about this matter at all; is that understood?

4 A. Yes.

5 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

6 Members of the jury, I'm sorry we've kept you
7 a little later this evening. 10 o'clock tomorrow, thank
8 you very much.

9 (In the absence of the Jury)

10 Housekeeping

11 THE CORONER: Yes, so how are we looking like for tomorrow?

12 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Well, firstly we have Mr McGurran to
13 finish, then on the current timetable we have Mr Snazell
14 and then Firefighter Towler, Watch Manager Chapman and
15 Ed Daly. But there are a number of discussions taking
16 place about several of those witnesses, which I can
17 summarise as follows: firstly, those who had said they
18 wanted Mr Chapman to attend no longer do --

19 THE CORONER: Okay.

20 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: -- and I sent an email at lunchtime to
21 say I was going to propose that he be read, and
22 obviously I don't necessarily expect people to have
23 absorbed that yet or have a position on it, but perhaps
24 one can see in a moment whether they do, but that was
25 the proposal.

1 Secondly, Mr Hendy said to me in the break half
2 an hour ago that he might have reached a position where
3 Mr Daly would be read now that he's provided a clearer
4 statement within the last few days. So that is where we
5 are on that.

6 I was going to propose before I heard that that
7 Mr Towler be put off to another day, because I regarded
8 him as the lowest priority of the witnesses currently
9 scheduled for tomorrow, and I didn't think we would
10 reach him, and I believe he could come back another day.
11 It may be that if he's put off to another day it might,
12 in the end, be an agreement in fact to read him.

13 Then the final point to raise before others have
14 their say is that Mr Snazell, whom we mentioned before
15 as wearing several hats, has one which relates to fire
16 risk assessment in that on the papers he had some
17 involvement in discussions between the
18 London Fire Brigade and the London Borough of Southwark
19 about the training of employees of the London Borough of
20 Southwark in fire risk assessment. I need to look at it
21 more closely overnight, but I have a concern that if his
22 involvement was relatively limited, there may be
23 disadvantages in opening up that whole new topic with
24 a witness whose involvement in it was peripheral, and
25 also there is the fact that we don't yet have the

1 witness statement from Sheila Keogh, the Southwark
2 witness, who deals with that topic.

3 I just mentioned this in the short break to
4 Mr Walsh, and he said there would be no practical
5 difficulty about Mr Snazell giving evidence on two
6 occasions, so what I propose to do is to look at it more
7 closely overnight and then indicate, probably firstly by
8 email when I've reached a provisional view, and then in
9 court at 10.00 am, whether it is my proposal to not ask
10 Mr Snazell tomorrow about fire risk assessment issues.

11 THE CORONER: Yes, I see, all right. Thank you very much.

12 Does anyone want to add to what Mr Maxwell-Scott has
13 just said at this stage?

14 MR HENDY: If it helps, Mr Maxwell-Scott and you, madam, our
15 position is that having thought about it we would be
16 content for Mr Towler to be read. He was one of the
17 extended BA crew that went to the 11th floor. We've had
18 Mr Niblett already, and what he says is not
19 controversial. Mr Chapman we've already agreed could be
20 read, and now having read Mr Ed Daly's fresh statement,
21 we're content that he should be read as well.

22 THE CORONER: Well, that's very helpful, thank you very
23 much. Any other contributions to that? So those who
24 haven't yet spoken, is your position that you still need
25 some time to reach a conclusion, or you have no

1 objections to what's been said?

2 MR WALSH: I'm sorry, I didn't speak. No objection at all
3 to that which Mr Maxwell-Scott outlined.

4 THE CORONER: Well, that seems very sensible. So it would
5 be very helpful if all those whose statements will be
6 read can be told as soon as possible that we don't need
7 them tomorrow so that they don't come unnecessarily and
8 they can plan their day. That would be helpful. Yes,
9 in which case it looks as if tomorrow's going to be
10 manageable then, doesn't it?

11 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: It does, and I'll have to break the news
12 to Mr Atkins that Messrs Towler, Chapman and Daly, whom
13 he's busy preparing, may not be called to give evidence.
14 I'm sure he would like to know as soon as possible.

15 THE CORONER: I'm sure he would.

16 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: So should we leave it that people will
17 perhaps email me and Mr Atkins as soon as possible if
18 they think they do require Mr Towler, Mr Chapman or
19 Mr Daly, or even may require them?

20 MR MATTHEWS: I think the silence is an acceptance.

21 MR COMPTON: Yes.

22 THE CORONER: Right.

23 MR DOWDEN: I'd just like a short period of time, I've
24 agreed one of the witnesses, I'd like just to have
25 another look at two of them.

1 THE CORONER: Okay, that's helpful. All right.

2 Well, so far as Fire Brigade witnesses are
3 concerned, no doubt Mr Walsh and his team will be able
4 to tell anyone who isn't actually wanted, and we'll just
5 need to make sure that someone contacts Mr Daly before
6 close of business today if he is not going to be wanted
7 either.

8 All right. Thank you very much. All right, that's
9 very helpful. Any particular problems anyone has that
10 they'd like to raise?

11 Okay, 10 o'clock tomorrow then, thank you very much.

12 (4.12 pm)

13 (The Court adjourned until 10 o'clock the following day)

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DAY 22 OF TRANSCRIPTION OF THE
Lakana1 House Fire
Inquest (CORRECTED) 13/02/13