

1 Wednesday, 23 January 2013

2 (10.00 am)

3 THE CORONER: Good morning, do sit down. Thank you very
4 much all of those who were involved in sorting out
5 answers to some of the jurors' questions during the
6 visit. When the jury come in this morning, I'm
7 proposing to take them briefly through the answers which
8 have been agreed, and then I'm going to ask Mr Atkins to
9 read the statement of Mr Malcolm Smith, which is at
10 page 16 of the bundle of statements to be read, so that
11 we can deal briefly with any questions of gas supply.
12 Does anyone have any difficulty with that? All right.
13 Then can we ask the jury to come in, please. Thank you.

14 (In the presence of the Jury)

15 THE CORONER: Members of the jury, good morning. You will
16 remember that the questions which you asked during the
17 site visit on Friday were assembled and put on together
18 into themes, and there were some answers given and there
19 were a number of questions where answers were
20 outstanding. We have been able to find or sort out
21 answers to a number of the questions which you put, and
22 Mr Graham is just about to distribute to you the list of
23 questions which you've already seen and some of the
24 answers which we've been able to add. So if you'd just
25 like, please, to hand those out, Mr Graham, and I'll

1 take you through those, members of the jury. Thank you
2 very much.

3 Just looking at that, you'll remember that the
4 questions which were asked in the morning are printed in
5 black and the questions asked in the afternoon are
6 printed in red. If you look at question 12, you'll see
7 that there's an answer that has been added in green.
8 The question was:

9 "In relation to the escape balconies, were the
10 balconies inspected or cleaned to make sure of access?
11 Did the escape doors work on the day of the fire? Was
12 there easy access and no rubbish? Were there any
13 regulations to keep the area clean?"

14 The answer is this: there was no evidence obtained
15 during the investigation that suggested the existence of
16 any difficulty with access to and along the escape
17 balconies on any floor of Lakanal on 3 July 2009, or
18 that this was a relevant issue during the course of the
19 fire.

20 If you turn over the page to the answer to
21 question 13, which was in relation to the kitchen in the
22 flat that we looked at. The question was:

23 "Were there gas meters in the other flats?"

24 The answer is it is believed that many, if not all,
25 of the flats had gas meters within the kitchen. There

1 is no evidence or suggestion that gas meters or their
2 position are relevant to any of the issues to be
3 considered by the inquests.

4 Then down the page to question 19, the question was
5 asked about a water tap which was located beside the
6 rubbish chute that we looked at, and the question was
7 asked what it was for. The answer is this: the water
8 tap in the rubbish chute area was not part of any
9 firefighting equipment and is not relevant to any of the
10 issues to be considered by the inquests.

11 Then over the page, there's a question, number 26,
12 in relation to smoke alarms. The question was where
13 were the smoke alarms and did they link more than one
14 room, for example the kitchen. The answer is this:
15 there were no smoke alarms in the common parts. Some
16 tenants had fitted smoke alarms in their own flats. The
17 handbook at page 1068, which of course we've looked at
18 a number of times, advised it.

19 Then finally over the page, question number 32. In
20 relation to the doors on the east side of the third
21 floor landing, the question was asked whether these were
22 fire doors, and the answer is that the doors on the east
23 side of that third floor landing were fire doors. All
24 right? So if you want to file that paperwork, I think
25 it's behind tab 16 in your jury bundle.

1 Now, members of the jury, that leaves some questions
2 to be answered. A number of the questions will be
3 answered by some of the witnesses to come. You'll also
4 find that as the evidence unfolds some of the questions
5 will turn out not to be of great significance and so
6 there may not be answers but you will understand that in
7 fact they don't need to be answered. But that, I think,
8 will become clear as we work through the evidence.

9 Question number 13 related to gas meters, and
10 I thought it would be helpful at this stage if we just
11 dealt briefly with the question of gas meters, and
12 indeed gas supply, so that we can put that into context
13 and you can understand what the evidence is on that. So
14 with that in mind, I'm going to ask Mr Atkins, on my
15 behalf, to read a statement which has been given by
16 a Mr Malcolm Smith which concerns this issue. All
17 right? Thank you. Yes, Mr Atkins.

18 Statement of MALCOLM SMITH read

19 MR ATKINS: Madam, members of the jury, this is the
20 statement of Malcolm Smith, who is a network safety
21 manager for Southern Gas Networks. The statement is
22 dated 14 July 2009 and is at page 16 of the advocates'
23 bundles. Mr Smith says:

24 "I'm network safety manager for Southern Gas
25 Networks. I have held this role for ten years and

1 I provide operational safety support for network
2 operations. I have worked in the gas industry for
3 33 years.

4 "On Tuesday, 14 July 2009 I attended Lakanal House,
5 Camberwell, SE5. I was in company with my colleagues
6 Dave Raymond, Jeff Baker and Steve Lydon. We inspected
7 the gas installation in flat 65, which is located on the
8 9th and 10th floors. The incoming gas supply was capped
9 at the ECV (which is the emergency control valve) under
10 the sink in a kitchen cupboard on the 10th floor. There
11 was no sign of any gas leakage, as there was plastic
12 waste immediately above with no sign of burning. The
13 outlet pipe was disconnected and plugged as there was no
14 meter fitted in the flat.

15 "I then attended flat 79 on the 11th floor. The
16 rising pipe, made of steel, with no joints visible, had
17 no signs of an ignited gas leak.

18 "I then attended the 12th floor, still in flat 79.
19 A section of Supalux board was removed from the service
20 rising duct. This exposed the T-joint supplying the gas
21 to the kitchen in flat 79. This T-joint showed no lines
22 of leakage or ignited gas from the joint. The meter
23 installation was intact and a two-minute, 28-millibar
24 test was conducted, which was sound. No pressure drop
25 to indicate a leak was observed during this test. The

1 meter was located in a kitchen cupboard. A second test
2 was applied at 19 millibar to test the pipework upstream
3 of the meter regulator for two minutes. There was no
4 sign of any leakage.

5 "There is no sign of any ignited gas leak on the
6 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th floors."

7 And that's the end of the statement.

8 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. So, members of the jury,
9 I hope that helps to put into context, that the question
10 of glass supply, gas leaks and so on are not issues you
11 need to be concerned with at all. Thank you very much.

12 Right, we're now going to have some evidence from
13 firefighters. Yes, so the first witness is?

14 MR ATKINS: Firefighter Anthony Belmont.

15 THE CORONER: Mr Belmont, yes. Would you like to come
16 forward, Mr Belmont.

17 ANTHONY BELMONT (affirmed)

18 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Belmont. Do sit down. Do help
19 yourself to a glass of water. I see that the microphone
20 in front of you is switched on. You need to be speaking
21 quite close to the microphone itself for your voice to
22 be amplified and we do need you, please, to do that.

23 A. Okay.

24 THE CORONER: It might help to achieve that first if you
25 bring the microphone closer to you, and secondly, when

1 giving your answers to the questions, if you face across
2 towards the jury. That, I think, might help.

3 A. Okay.

4 THE CORONER: Mr Atkins, who's standing, is going to ask
5 some questions of you on my behalf and then there'll be
6 other questions from others in the room, all right?

7 A. Okay.

8 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

9 Questions from MR ATKINS

10 MR ATKINS: Could you please tell the court your full name.

11 A. My full name is Anthony John George Belmont.

12 Q. Mr Belmont, I'm going to be asking you some questions
13 about your knowledge of Lakanal House and your
14 involvement in fighting the fire there on 3 July 2009.
15 Could I ask, to begin with, how long you've been
16 a firefighter?

17 A. I've been a firefighter for 16 and a half years.

18 Q. And for how long have you been employed by the London
19 Fire Brigade?

20 A. Just over seven years.

21 Q. I take it you still work for the London Fire Brigade?

22 A. That's correct, yes.

23 Q. Mr Belmont, unless I say otherwise, my questions are
24 going to be about how things were done before or on the
25 day of the fire, rather than things that have happened

1 since.

2 A. Okay.

3 Q. Is it right that at the time of the fire you were

4 a firefighter?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And that you were stationed at Old Kent Road?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. Before 3 July 2009, had you ever been to Lakanal House?

9 A. I'd never been inside, but I'd been to incidents where

10 I'd been outside.

11 THE CORONER: Can I just remind both of you that we have

12 a couple of people here who are typing to make

13 a transcript, so please don't speak too fast. Thank

14 you.

15 MR ATKINS: Yes, you said you had been but that you hadn't

16 been inside?

17 A. That's correct, yes.

18 Q. Why had you gone to Lakanal House on those occasions?

19 A. Certain incidents that you go to may require

20 a predetermined attendance and for those incidents we

21 had been part of the predetermined attendance but might

22 not necessarily be needed, as was the case, so we

23 remained outside.

24 Q. Had you ever approached the building on those occasions,

25 or did you remain in your appliance?

1 A. I'd never -- I might have exited the vehicle, sitting
2 outside, but I'd never been closer than the pavement
3 outside the actual building.

4 Q. If I may, I'll just ask you a few questions about your
5 knowledge of the layout of the building. Did you know,
6 for example, that there was a single central staircase?

7 A. I don't believe I did know that, no.

8 Q. Let me show you a picture of it on the screen there.
9 Was that an entrance that you had ever been to?

10 A. No.

11 Q. Did you know how many floors there were in the building?

12 A. I couldn't have said an exact number other than, you
13 know, estimating what that number would be from outside
14 the building. But I didn't know an exact number, no.

15 Q. Thinking, then, about 3 July, when you attended on the
16 day of the fire, when you arrived did anybody give you
17 a briefing about the layout of the building?

18 A. I've got no recollection of getting a briefing regarding
19 the layout of the building, no.

20 Q. Were you shown, for example, any plans or diagrams
21 explaining what the layout was?

22 A. No.

23 Q. I'm going to ask you some questions about what you did
24 on the day, what your involvement was, and as we go
25 through, at certain points, I may ask you what you had

1 learned about the layout of the building while you were
2 there on the day.

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. As we go through, please do feel free to let us know if
5 there came a point when you realised something about the
6 layout of the building that struck you as important.

7 A. Okay.

8 Q. Is it right, then, that you were called out from
9 Old Kent Road fire station?

10 A. That's correct, yes.

11 Q. And the time of the call out was about 4.21?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Did you travel to Lakanal on a pump ladder?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. With the call sign E351?

16 A. That's correct, yes.

17 Q. Can you remember who else was on that appliance with
18 you?

19 A. On that day there would be watch manager John Howling
20 riding in charge, Firefighter Mark Mullins was driving
21 the appliance, and on the back seats were myself,
22 Firefighter Nico Sanchez and Firefighter Alex Miller.

23 Q. When you were on your way to Lakanal House on the
24 appliance, did you do anything to get ready?

25 A. Yeah, we did. I would have been rigged in my fire gear

1 before I left the station, and en route I would have put
2 my breathing apparatus set on, fastened the straps ready
3 to wear on exiting the vehicle.

4 Q. Why would you do that on the way?

5 A. Just because of the seconds that it would save, you
6 know, instead of putting it on when you actually got
7 there.

8 Q. When you got to Lakanal House, what could you see when
9 you looked at the building?

10 A. Once we got, you know, a few roads away, you could see
11 the building, and I was aware of a lot of, you know,
12 smoke from -- from the region of the fire, and once we
13 got to sort of, you know, the base of the building, you
14 could see debris falling down from the flat involved.

15 Q. Could you see what it was that was falling?

16 A. I don't believe I stopped to give it too much of a look,
17 but I knew it was the window frame that had sort of
18 broken apart and landed at the base of the building.

19 Q. Could you see whether any of the material that was
20 falling from the building was on fire?

21 A. I mean, obviously it's quite a long time ago, but, you
22 know, I do believe that I was aware that some bits were
23 still on fire, yes.

24 Q. Where was that material landing?

25 A. From what I could have see, on one side of the building

1 where Peckham's -- one of Peckham's machines was parked.
2 I could see the debris falling on the sort of paved area
3 just in front of that, almost -- from my recollection,
4 almost in line with the central staircase, around that
5 region.

6 Q. Were there other crews already there, other fire
7 engines?

8 A. I can remember seeing one of Peckham's fire engines.
9 I was aware that there were two but I didn't see the
10 second one, so -- but I was aware that Peckham turned up
11 first with another one of their machines, followed by
12 us, and I believe the fourth one was our pump from
13 Old Kent Road.

14 Q. Were you able to see, when you arrived, what those other
15 crews were doing?

16 A. I wasn't specifically looking at individuals, what they
17 were doing, although I was generally aware that efforts
18 were being made to set into the dry riser and secure
19 a water supply.

20 Q. Just so we understand, is that the process of attaching
21 the appliance first of all to a hydrant and then
22 connecting the appliance to the dry riser?

23 A. That's correct, yes.

24 Q. So that water is available then for firefighters to
25 connect to hoses inside the building?

1 A. That's right.

2 Q. Once you had got out of your fire engine, what
3 instructions were given to you?

4 A. As I said before, I was rigged in my breathing apparatus
5 set. I believe I made my way to a kind of grass area in
6 front of the building and I was carrying pieces of
7 equipment. I believe on that day I had a -- an entry
8 control board and a length of 45-millimetre hose and we
9 were told to sort of wait there for further
10 instructions.

11 Q. You've mentioned a control board. Is that the breathing
12 apparatus entry control board?

13 A. That's correct, yes.

14 Q. Is that equipment that you've mentioned known as the
15 high rise kit, so the entry control board, the hose and
16 so on?

17 A. Basically when you turn up to a high rise incident,
18 there's a list of equipment that needs to go up to the
19 bridgehead and, you know, as part of that crew you --
20 you take some of that equipment. On that day I took
21 a 45-mill hose and the entry control board. Other
22 people would have taken other things, but -- as long as
23 the stuff on that list turn up at the bridgehead ready
24 to be used.

25 Q. Who was it who gave you the instruction to take the

1 equipment and go into the building?

2 A. I don't remember a particular person. Quite often when
3 you turn up at jobs like this it's -- you know, you kind
4 of, as a crew, get your heads together. I mean, I'm --
5 what I don't know is -- I imagine that some bits would
6 have duplicated by Peckham's crew but, you know, you
7 kind of grab things that you know are going to be
8 needed. I don't remember being instructed by anyone who
9 specifically told me to take those things, but knowing
10 that was on the list, it was stuff that I grabbed, and
11 you know, as I said earlier, Peckham's crew would have
12 probably taken other stuff. You know, it might have all
13 been duplicated, but it's stuff you know would have been
14 required.

15 Q. So it's clear that as a crew, as an team, you were going
16 to take that equipment inside the building?

17 A. That's correct, yes.

18 Q. Where were you going to go in the building in the first
19 instance?

20 A. Once I was given orders, which would have been by my
21 watch manager, John Howling -- we were told to go into
22 the building and use the fire lift to go up to the 7th
23 floor, I believe, which was where the initial bridgehead
24 was, so we were told to go up there and liaise with the
25 crew manager.

1 Q. Did you, in fact, use the lift to get up?

2 A. Yes, we did, myself and Nico Sanchez used the lift to
3 get to the 7th floor with the equipment that we took.

4 Q. If I could just show you quickly two pictures of the
5 area around the lift on the ground floor. Do you
6 recognise that as the lift lobby on the ground floor?

7 A. Obviously it's a long time ago, but from my recollection
8 that does look like the -- the lift, yes.

9 Q. Can you see in between the two lifts on that photograph
10 there's a sign towards the top of the picture, just
11 where the cursor is?

12 A. Yeah, I can see that.

13 Q. If we just go on to the next page, it's a close-up of
14 that sign.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. Can you remember whether you or any of your colleagues
17 saw that sign as you were going into the lift?

18 A. I can't remember any specific point where I looked at
19 that, but as a general rule, on entering a building like
20 that I would have -- I would have looked at that, but
21 I can't remember specifically on that day whether I did
22 or not, no.

23 Q. Is it right then that you went up to the 7th floor,
24 which is where the bridgehead was?

25 A. That's correct, yes.

1 Q. Can you remember who it was that was breathing apparatus
2 entry control officer when you got there?

3 A. I'm afraid I can't -- can't remember who it was, no.

4 Q. What was the plan? What were you going to be asked to
5 do, having reached the bridgehead?

6 A. I didn't know -- at that point, I'd only been told to go
7 to the bridgehead. I didn't know what I was going to
8 get tasked with. I would imagine I would at some point
9 start up and actually wear breathing apparatus, but at
10 that point I didn't know that that's what I was gonna
11 do. I was going to get to the bridgehead and await
12 further instructions.

13 Q. When you got to the bridgehead, did somebody give you
14 further instructions?

15 A. That's correct, yes.

16 Q. What were you asked to do?

17 A. I was asked to start up and don my breathing apparatus
18 and to go and assist the crew from Peckham who would be
19 attacking the fire.

20 Q. Were the crew from Peckham, as far as you knew, already
21 there fighting the fire? Had they gone in ahead of you?

22 A. I knew -- I knew they was ahead of me. I did not know
23 at what point they were, you know, in their actions.
24 I didn't know whether they'd set the hoses up. I just
25 knew they were at some point above me, you know, in

1 readiness to start something. I didn't know what that
2 was.

3 Q. Can you remember where you were when you started up?
4 Were you in the stairwell or were you by the lifts?

5 A. From my recollection -- again, it's a long time ago --
6 I would have started up where the entry control board
7 was, which would have been at the bridgehead on the 7th
8 floor, and I would have made my way up from that point.

9 Q. If you think back, can you remember whether there was
10 any smoke in the area where you started up your BA
11 equipment?

12 A. Generally, from what I remember, there was a little bit
13 of smoke from that point onwards. I couldn't -- I've
14 got no recollection, really, of whether it was that
15 thick on the 7th floor, but I imagine there would have
16 been a little -- little bit of smoke, but that's as good
17 as it gets, really.

18 Q. So perhaps a little bit of smoke, but not so much that
19 it would prevent you starting up your BA?

20 A. That's correct, yeah.

21 Q. When you started up and you were ready to pass through
22 the entry control board, is it right that you hand your
23 tally key to the person who has the entry control board?

24 A. That's right, yeah.

25 Q. And that's how you can keep track of who's inside and

1 how long they've been inside?

2 A. That's correct, yeah.

3 Q. If we could just think, please, about the time at which

4 you started up, the time at which you were committed.

5 I've just put on screen a document which may help us to

6 work out what that time was. Have you ever seen this

7 document before?

8 A. No, I've not seen this before.

9 Q. It may well be that you're not familiar with the format

10 of it either.

11 A. No, I've never seen it or that format, no.

12 Q. What this document does is to summarise data that was

13 downloaded from the bodyguard system from the breathing

14 apparatus equipment and then analyse it to work out what

15 happened at different times. If we could just look,

16 please, in the bottom right-hand corner. Do you see

17 where the cursor is, I've just highlighted your name?

18 A. Yeah, I can see that.

19 Q. So that's your line, if you like. Then if we follow it

20 along to the left, can you see there's a time 16.35.34?

21 A. Yes, I can see that.

22 Q. So that would suggest that you started up your equipment

23 around about 16.35?

24 A. Yeah, I agree with that, yeah.

25 Q. If we look right at the top of the page, again on the

1 right-hand side, there's the surname Sanchez?

2 A. Yeah, I can see that name, yeah.

3 Q. Which is your colleague Nicholas Sanchez, from the same
4 crew?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. Again, if we follow it over to the left, there's a time
7 of 16.34. So is that right, that the two of you were
8 there together and you started up your equipment at
9 about the same time?

10 A. Yeah, I mean obviously the (Inaudible) doesn't lie. If
11 that's what it says, then yeah, I would imagine it to be
12 true, yeah.

13 Q. Could I ask you, please, about radio equipment. What
14 radio equipment was available to you?

15 A. It's standard procedure that, you know, when you have
16 a crew of breathing apparatus wearers, at least one of
17 you has to have what they call a Barry(?) equipment,
18 which is a radio system fitted to your breathing
19 apparatus set. I've got no recollection on the day who
20 was wearing that. I don't know, perhaps my partner,
21 Nicholas Sanchez, might have further information on
22 that. I don't know, but certainly one of us would have
23 done.

24 Again, going back to when it happened, procedures
25 might have been different. I know if there's not Barry

1 equipment available and there is a fire in the property,
2 you are allowed to use your personal radio as a -- as
3 your communications, so we'd have had either the Barry
4 equipment or, you know, a personal radio. But there
5 would have been some form of communication on that day,
6 yes.

7 Q. So just to recap then, there are two sorts of radio
8 potentially: the one which is built into the BA
9 equipment --

10 A. Yes, correct, yeah.

11 Q. -- and then also your personal radios?

12 A. Yeah, personal radios, yeah.

13 Q. And the standard procedure would be that somebody in the
14 team would have the breathing apparatus radio equipment?

15 A. That's right, yeah.

16 Q. But in any case, all of you would have your personal
17 radios; is that right?

18 A. Personal radios. Yeah, correct.

19 Q. Are you able to tell us which radio channels are in use?
20 Does all of that radio equipment operate on the same
21 channel?

22 A. Generally speaking, when you're using breathing
23 apparatus, you would switch to channel 6, unless
24 instructed otherwise to do so. So anyone wearing Barry
25 equipment, you'd be able to talk to the -- like the

1 radio operator, who would be next to the entry control
2 officer, who would be able to pass messages backwards
3 and forwards, and you'd also be able to listen into the
4 communications of other teams who were talking to that
5 person as well.

6 Q. So two points perhaps. First of all, it's a two way
7 radio, is it? You can send messages and you can receive
8 them?

9 A. That's correct.

10 Q. And also you can hear what other crews are doing,
11 messages that are being passed. So everyone's on the
12 same channel 6?

13 A. Assuming everyone's on channel 6 you would be able to
14 hear them, yes.

15 Q. You've mentioned that one of the people who would be
16 listening to that traffic is the entry control officer.
17 Would there be anybody else, perhaps outside the
18 building, who was listening to it?

19 A. As the incident progresses -- initially you might -- the
20 entry control officer would have a radio who would be on
21 channel 6. As the incident progressed and there were
22 more people there, ideally you'd have a comms operator
23 who would take over that from the entry control officer,
24 because there's obviously a lot to do. I don't know at
25 that point that I was wearing breathing apparatus

1 whether there was a comms operator. I suspect there
2 probably wasn't enough people to do that, so ...

3 Q. Is it right then that after you had started up your
4 equipment you went up to the 9th floor?

5 A. That's correct, yes.

6 Q. By walking up the stairs?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Can you just describe to the jury what the conditions in
9 the 9th floor corridor were like?

10 A. From my recollection, as you progressed from the 7th up
11 to the 9th floor, there was -- there was, you know, as
12 you would expect, more smoke the further you got up to
13 that level, and once you got to the sort of 9th floor
14 I seem to remember it being quite -- a reasonable amount
15 of smoke in the corridor at that time.

16 Q. How were you able to find the flat that you were looking
17 for?

18 A. I think the crew from Peckham had already located the
19 flat, so as far as myself and Nico Sanchez were
20 concerned, it was just a matter of liaising with the
21 crew from Peckham.

22 Q. When you caught up with the Peckham crew, had they
23 already gone into the fire flat or were they still
24 outside it?

25 A. From my recollection, when we made contact with them,

1 they hadn't gone inside, no. I seem to remember that,
2 you know, as I was walking up the stairs the hose for
3 the initial entry was kind of in the process of being
4 charged as we were walking by it, so they wouldn't have
5 been ready to go in until that was fully charged anyway,
6 and by the time --

7 Q. Sorry to interrupt. Do you mean that the water pressure
8 was building up?

9 A. That's right, yeah, and by the time we sort of got to
10 where they were, that process was -- was sort of nearing
11 completion, so we kind of turned up, you know, as they
12 were ready, you know, to go in.

13 Q. Could you just explain to us how the four of you then
14 managed to open the door to the flat?

15 A. From my recollection, the -- looking at the door, it had
16 all obviously been damaged quite severely by the fire,
17 which had -- you know, the integrity of the door
18 wasn't -- wasn't very (Inaudible). I seem to remember
19 one of Peckham's crew, you know, going away for a moment
20 to get what we call breaking-in gear, an enforcer, to
21 take the door in.

22 Q. Breaking-in gear?

23 A. That's right, yeah, tools that we have basically for
24 smashing in doors. So one of the guys, Lyndan --
25 I can't remember his surname -- he momentarily went off

1 to get this piece of equipment. I seem to believe at
2 the time, looking at the door, believing it didn't --
3 wasn't going to take much to -- you know, to push that
4 door through, and giving it quite a -- you know,
5 a sturdy push. That's all it really took. So that was
6 the initial, you know, entrance into the property.

7 Q. Just pausing there, could you see before the door was
8 open that there were flames on the other side?

9 A. I mean, I would have to refer back to my statement that
10 I gave to recollect this point, because in my statement
11 I do believe that I looked through the letterbox. I was
12 aware that obviously there had been a serious fire.
13 I can't remember seeing flames necessarily, but that
14 doesn't mean there weren't; it's just I've got no
15 recollection of it. But I do seem to remember looking
16 through the letterbox.

17 Q. We know that you made your statement on 12 July 2009, so
18 a little over a week afterwards. Do you think that at
19 the time you made that statement your memory was better
20 than it is now?

21 A. I would say so, yes.

22 Q. Would it help you to have a chance to look at your
23 statement?

24 A. Yes, I'll have a look at my statement.

25 Q. I wonder if Mr Clark could provide you with a copy of

1 your statement. It starts at page 130. (Handed) Just
2 looking at the first page, do you recognise that as the
3 statement that you gave?

4 A. I do, yeah.

5 Q. Can I ask you to turn on to page 133?

6 A. I'm on it.

7 Q. If we just look about three lines down from the top of
8 the page. You say:

9 "All four of us reached the front door of the flat
10 that was on fire at the same time. The door was closed
11 at this time."

12 Then you say:

13 "I knelt down and looked through the letterbox."
14 As you were just mentioning to us. You say:

15 "The area inside was completely ablaze. I could see
16 nothing distinctive other than flames."

17 Why did you look through the letterbox to begin
18 with?

19 A. Only just to, you know, get myself an idea of what might
20 be behind the door. It seemed like a sensible thing to
21 do, you know, just ...

22 Q. Then if we just look back to the statement, we can see
23 that after you had looked through the letterbox, you
24 blasted a jet of water through in a effort to extinguish
25 the fire immediately beyond the door?

1 A. Again, yeah -- I mean, my memory of that day is -- you
2 know, it's three and a half years ago now but, you know,
3 that's what I wrote so I believe that to be true.

4 Q. Once the door was opened, who did what?

5 A. Again, you know, I'd have to refer back to what I wrote.
6 The guy Lyndan from Peckham had gone to get the
7 enforcer. When he came back, as I said, I'd made, you
8 know, quite a sturdy barge on the door to open the door.
9 Charlie, who was Lyndan's partner -- because you have to
10 be, you know, two wearers together in BA -- you know, we
11 waited for Lyndan to come back, because they were going
12 to go into the compartment to fight the fire. When
13 Lyndan came back, erm, from my recollection and through
14 reading the statement, that's when they made their
15 entrance to the compartment and began fighting the fire.
16 Our -- our task really was not to fight the fire with
17 them but kind of feed the hose through and manage the
18 hose, which is -- you know, a charged length is quite
19 a heavy piece of kit really, so it helps to have someone
20 backing them up, basically.

21 Q. So at that stage the pair from Peckham was Mr Simons and
22 Mr Fournier?

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. Lyndan and Charlie, as you say, had gone in to fight the
25 fire, and you were supporting them by helping with the

1 hose?

2 A. That's correct, yeah.

3 Q. At that time, when you first went into the flat, were
4 you able to get up onto the upper level of it?

5 A. To be honest, myself and Nico Sanchez, we didn't really
6 progress initially that far into the flat, because that
7 wasn't really our roles, you know. Like I said, it was
8 to manage the hose. Later on, when the crew from
9 Peckham -- when their air ran low, we changed over --
10 took over the firefighting. It would have been at that
11 point that we sort of investigated, you know, the fire
12 upstairs.

13 Q. So there came a point when they were running low on air
14 and they had to withdraw?

15 A. Yes, that's right, yeah.

16 Q. And they handed over to the two of you?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Did that happen before anyone else joined you?

19 A. Yes, it did, yes. There was no-one -- there was no-one
20 inside the room other than the two from Peckham and, you
21 know, myself and Nico Sanchez.

22 Q. So once you took over then you went into the flat to
23 fight the fire?

24 A. That's correct, yeah.

25 Q. At that stage, then, can you just describe for us what

1 things were like on that floor, the floor where the
2 front door was?

3 A. I seem to remember that -- you know, that the whole flat
4 was devastated by fire. All the windows had completely
5 gone. There was just an open space where the windows
6 were. There was just, you know, from my recollection,
7 not a patch of that flat that wasn't, you know, from
8 what I could have see, totally touched by that fire.

9 Q. Were you able to go up onto the upper level?

10 A. Although I was aware that there had been a staircase
11 there and there were remnants of that staircase still
12 there, there was no way that you could walk up it to
13 gain access to the upper level.

14 Q. Why was that, because it was so badly damaged?

15 A. That's correct, yes.

16 Q. Did anybody do anything to try to get access to the
17 upper level?

18 A. That came later on. When the crew from Peckham
19 withdrew, it was agreed that they would get what's
20 called a short extension ladder, which, for those that
21 don't know, is a three-piece small ladder that's carried
22 on a fire appliance. So we left it at that, that they
23 were gonna bring it back. As it happened, two more
24 people returned with it. It wasn't the crew from
25 Peckham, but I believe it was firefighters Tony Mechen

1 and Peter Mason who came back later with that short
2 extension ladder that gave us access to the upper floor.

3 Q. Those two firefighters that you just mentioned, Mr Mason
4 and Mr Mechen, were they also based at Old Kent Road?

5 A. That's right, yes.

6 Q. They were your colleagues. And did you say that they
7 came to join you and brought a ladder with them?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Did you then use the ladder to try to get up to fight
10 the fire on the floor above?

11 A. Yes, we did. We pitched the ladder to give us access to
12 the upper floor and began, from the head of the ladder,
13 fighting the fire.

14 Q. Can you remember where you put the ladder?

15 A. I believe that the ladder was pitched through the
16 opening that the original staircase would have gone up
17 through and kind of at a 90-degree angle to where that
18 staircase would have run.

19 Q. To begin with then, once you put the ladder in place,
20 who was it who went up to fight the fire from the
21 ladder?

22 A. That was me.

23 Q. Can you please tell the jury what you saw on the upper
24 floor when you went up the ladder?

25 A. When I went up to the upper level, there were some kind

1 of partition at the top of that point. I was able to
2 spray water on certain points of the upper level. From
3 my recollection, I seem to believe pushing down some
4 kind of partition to give me a sort of wider field of
5 view, which I did, and I continued to spray water on
6 anything that I could see was alright.

7 Q. You told us that on the lower floor, where the front
8 door was, when you went into the flat, actually you
9 could see all the way out into daylight because the fire
10 had burnt through the back wall?

11 A. That's correct, yeah.

12 Q. On the upper level, were you able to see what was to
13 either side of you?

14 A. To be honest, I can't remember, to be honest.

15 I remember there was, you know, a similar condition, as
16 in everything had been, you know, touched by the fire,
17 but other than that I've got no recollection.

18 Q. Did there then come a point when you realised that you
19 and Mr Sanchez were getting low on air and that you
20 would need to withdraw?

21 A. That's correct, yes.

22 Q. If we just look back to that table that we had a moment
23 ago. If you remember, you're in the bottom right. If
24 we follow that along, we can see that you stopped
25 breathing air through the BA equipment at just before

1 5 o'clock?

2 A. Okay.

3 Q. At the point when you withdrew, you were going to go

4 back down to the bridgehead?

5 A. That's correct.

6 Q. Back to the entry control point. Where was it at that

7 point when you came out? Was it still on the 7th floor,

8 or had it moved?

9 A. I believe it -- by that point it had moved.

10 Q. Can you remember where it had moved to?

11 A. I seem to remember it being moved down to the ground

12 floor.

13 Q. So does that mean that actually you had to come out of

14 the 9th floor and then, what, walk down all the flights

15 of stairs to the ground floor in order to retrieve your

16 tally key?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. At that point, then, when you were passing back out

19 through the entry control point, did you have

20 a discussion with anybody about what had happened and

21 what you had done?

22 A. Yeah, I did. Sort of standard procedure is once you've

23 done a task, to debrief, you know, somebody -- a crew

24 manager or watch manager, whoever that may be -- about

25 what you've done just so that the details of that can be

1 passed to the necessary persons.

2 Q. Are you able to remember who it was that you were

3 talking to?

4 A. I believe it was a watch manager called Chris Payton

5 from Southwark fire station.

6 Q. What information would you have passed on to him?

7 A. I would have basically told him what we done in the

8 flat, as in, you know, extinguished a large part of the

9 fire. There would -- it would have been, you know, the

10 upper level that we hadn't reached but we passed that

11 responsibility onto the oncoming crew, which I believe

12 was Tony Mechen and Peter Mason. You know, details like

13 that, just outlining what we done.

14 Q. Could you please just give the jury a sense of what it

15 was like for you doing that work that you've described,

16 what conditions were like.

17 A. From my recollection, that day the conditions were --

18 you know, some fires you go into and there's a lot of

19 smoke and you can't see your hand in front of your face.

20 The only benefit that we had was because the windows had

21 gone through a lot of the smoke and hot gases that you

22 normally have to encounter had sort of disappeared

23 through the window. So in that respect, you know, that

24 kind of helped us out, but it was still -- you know, any

25 job in a high rise situation, there's a lot of equipment

1 that has to be carried up, so -- you know, it was a hot
2 day as well, but, you know, anything other than that --
3 I can't really say more than that, to be honest.

4 Q. Once you came out of the building, then, did you have
5 a bit of a breather and a drink of water?

6 A. That's correct, yes.

7 Q. Did anybody else come and speak to you after you had
8 left the building about what had happened inside or what
9 the conditions were like?

10 A. I've got no recollection at that point of anybody
11 telling me what -- other than what I could see with my
12 own eyes, being told about what was going on inside, no.

13 Q. Of course you stayed at Lakanal for some time after
14 that, in case you were needed for other tasks?

15 A. That's right, yes.

16 Q. I think it's right that first of all you did what's
17 called a fire ground A test?

18 A. Yeah, that's correct.

19 Q. Is the point of that then that if you needed to go back
20 into the building, you were ready to do that?

21 A. Yeah, I mean, a fire ground A test is you -- you change
22 the cylinder on your breathing apparatus set. You do,
23 you know, a quick once-over to make sure everything's as
24 it should be, ready to -- to wear again if necessary.

25 Q. Then after that, first of all you were given the job of

1 going to the bottom of the main staircase in order to
2 show people who were coming out of the building where
3 they could go for treatment by the ambulance services?
4 A. That's right, yeah.
5 Q. And then later on, in fact you did go back into the
6 building, again with Mr Sanchez, in order to rescue two
7 people from flat 75?
8 A. That's right, yes.
9 Q. Is it right that flat 75 is on the 11th floor?
10 A. Yes.
11 Q. If we just go back to the table, again, looking at your
12 line at the bottom there, and this time at the lower
13 numbers, can we see there that the two of you went in at
14 perhaps about 6.15?
15 A. Yeah.
16 Q. So obviously that was a later stage in the day?
17 A. Mm-hm.
18 Q. You were going up to the 11th floor, so higher up in the
19 building.
20 A. Yes.
21 Q. Are you able to remember what the smoke was like when
22 you went into the building the second time?
23 A. That second time I went in -- again, I was wearing
24 breathing apparatus, so you're kind of -- you know, you
25 don't necessarily suffer the effects of the smoke but

1 you're obviously aware it's around you. I seem to
2 remember that generally the closer we got to the 11th
3 floor, the more sort of smoke there was in the
4 stairwell. When we got actually to the corridor that
5 led off the central staircase down to the flat in
6 question, I seem to remember it being, you know, not to
7 the level that you couldn't see your hand in front of
8 your face -- we was able to identify doors and stuff
9 but, you know, there was a reasonable amount of smoke in
10 that corridor.

11 Q. I've just put a diagram on the screen to show us all
12 where flat 75 is. You have the floor numbers going up
13 on the right-hand side to the 11th floor, and we can see
14 then that flat 75 is on the 11th floor on the opposite
15 side of the central staircase to where the fire started.
16 Is it right, then, that you and Mr Sanchez went into
17 flat 75 to look for the people who were inside and you
18 eventually found them on the balcony?

19 A. That's correct, yes.

20 Q. In your statement, you say that you were considering how
21 to get out of the flat again, how to help them out of
22 the building, and it seemed to you that the only viable
23 route was the way that you had come in?

24 A. That's correct, yes.

25 Q. So that was to go up the stairs to the 11th floor, along

1 the corridor and through the front door?

2 A. That's correct, yes.

3 Q. Did you know at the time that an alternative route would
4 have been to go from the balcony, along the balcony and
5 through the fire door back to the central staircase?

6 A. I -- I didn't know, no, at that time. I wasn't aware
7 that that was available to me.

8 Q. But you and Mr Sanchez helped them?

9 A. That's correct.

10 Q. And told them they needed to hold their breath to make
11 it through the flat and down into the corridor?

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. And you brought them back safely to ground level?

14 A. That's correct.

15 Q. I think it's right that you can't wear breathing
16 apparatus more than twice in a incident?

17 A. Yes, that's right.

18 Q. Is it the case though that after you had been in
19 a second time, you heard somebody from the ambulance
20 service say that there was a lady trapped on the 11th
21 floor who needed help?

22 A. I'm not sure if I heard that from the ambulance service.
23 I think I heard that information being relaid to my
24 watch manager John Howling. That's when I picked up on
25 it, yes.

1 Q. So at that point, did you, in fact, ask for permission
2 to go back into the building to try to help with that?

3 A. Well, after the incident where we'd brought the people
4 down from the 11th floor, I was going through the
5 process of debriefing my watch manager. That -- that
6 was on -- I believe the bridgehead was on the first
7 floor at that point, and that's when I heard that there
8 might be somebody upstairs that needed bringing down, so
9 as you said, I made it known to my watch manager that,
10 you know, if you require me to do that then, you know,
11 I'd be prepared to go up there.

12 Q. So as a result of that you went in, did you, without
13 breathing apparatus that time to try to go up to the
14 11th floor?

15 A. That's correct, yeah. I mean, obviously I was aware
16 that I might not be able to get up as far as the 11th
17 floor, but I was prepared to go up as far as I could,
18 you know, given the resources that I had.

19 Q. I think it's right, looking at your statement, that you
20 got up to about the 9th or 10th floor, but then your
21 progress was stopped by thick smoke?

22 A. Even on the day I was never sure exactly what level we
23 got to. That was kind of like an estimate, really, that
24 it was the 9th or 10th floor. What with the heat of the
25 moment and -- you know, I wasn't entirely sure but that

1 was where, roughly, I thought we stopped, at the 9th or
2 10th floor, yeah.

3 Q. On your way up, you encountered four firefighters who
4 were helping a lady out and you helped them to bring her
5 out of the building?

6 A. That's correct, yes. It was an extended duration
7 breathing apparatus crew who had found a lady and
8 decided to bring her out.

9 Q. I think after that you were available still at the
10 building to help with any work that needed to be done?

11 A. That's correct, yes.

12 Q. Until you were released and you were told that you could
13 go back to the fire station?

14 A. That's right, yeah.

15 Q. If I could ask you just to look at the diagram on the
16 screen. I appreciate that's a computer diagram that
17 shows the west side of the building and it shows, if you
18 like, how it appears to somebody standing outside, so
19 somebody who didn't know where flat numbers were. If
20 I could just go back to the diagram that we looked at
21 a little earlier. That's the same view, but this time
22 with numbers on to show which flat is which. Could
23 I just ask: to what extent did you, on the day, build up
24 that sort of picture, where you could visualise which
25 flat was where in the building?

1 A. I'll be honest: right from the time I went into the
2 initial flat to fight the fire, I was a little bit
3 confused about the layout. You know, you went into
4 a flat that had an upstairs and the upstairs part was
5 kind of -- ran at 90 degrees to the -- you know, the
6 flat downstairs, and I think that confused a lot of
7 people, the layout. You know, I -- it wasn't -- you
8 know, I can't remember when I found out, but I wasn't
9 even -- don't remember the fire escapes that were, you
10 know, built into the building. So I couldn't exactly
11 say at what point I realised the layout, but I knew that
12 there was a confusing aspect to the layout of it.

13 Q. Do you think you got to a stage where, if somebody had
14 said to you: "Right, we need to go to flat number 60",
15 you would have been able to work out where it was?

16 A. I think I could, yeah. I could have worked out where
17 flat 60 was, yeah.

18 Q. How would you have done that?

19 A. Well, that's not a thought process that I had on the
20 day, so I can't, you know, speak from memory. I guess,
21 you know, if someone had have said that to me, I would
22 have looked at the plan on the foyer to the building but
23 because that never occurred to me, or I was given that
24 task to do, it's not something I've ever given thought
25 to really.

1 Q. I just have one final question, which is this: what
2 single additional thing do you think would have helped
3 you most on the day?

4 A. The only -- the only thing -- you know, there's been
5 talk for a while of having like a high rise bag, as
6 such, on fire engines. You know, instead of having
7 people grabbing dribs and drabs of pieces of equipment,
8 you know, this bag would have been on the machine and --
9 with everything ready to go. I can't say that that
10 would have changed anything, but, you know, to me,
11 that's always seemed like a good idea.

12 Q. Mr Belmont, thank you. Those are all the questions
13 I have. There may be questions from others.

14 THE CORONER: Mr Belmont, a moment ago you said to
15 Mr Atkins -- he asked you whether you'd be able to work
16 out, as an example, where flat 60 was. You were asked
17 to go up to flat number 75, so can you tell us how you
18 found flat 75?

19 A. Again, it's quite hard to remember back to that day.
20 I believe I was told what floor that flat was on, by my
21 recollection. I could be -- I could be wrong, but from
22 what I remember, I do believe somebody told me it was on
23 floor number 11.

24 THE CORONER: I see. All right. Thank you very much. Yes,
25 Mr Hendy.

1 Questions from MR HENDY

2 MR HENDY: Mr Belmont, my name's Hendy. I represent three
3 of the bereaved families. Just a very few questions,
4 please. When you first went up to the 9th floor wearing
5 breathing apparatus, you described how, when inside the
6 flat, you could see that the window had gone. Do you
7 remember?

8 A. That's correct, yes.

9 Q. We actually have some photos that might illustrate that
10 from the outside. We need to bear in mind, I think,
11 that as Mr Atkins established with you that you were
12 wearing breathing equipment on the first occasion from
13 16.35 until 16.59. So with that in mind, can we just
14 look at the photos in the jury bundle. Tab 12, page 9.
15 (Handed) This is a photograph taken at 16.40, and the
16 lower window affected by fire is the window of the flat
17 that you were in on the inside. I appreciate you might
18 not quite have got there by 16.40, because after you
19 started the set you had to get to that location, but
20 that was its condition five minutes after you'd started
21 your set. Is that what you were looking at from the
22 other side, as it were, outwards?

23 A. That's correct, yes.

24 Q. We have another photo at 11, where we can see that
25 window again at the bottom. There we can also see that

1 the fire -- and this photo is at 16.42, so you might
2 just have been inside at that stage. There we can see
3 that the fire has climbed across the balcony and is now
4 attacking the 11th floor. Do you see? Obviously you
5 wouldn't have known that from the inside; is that right?

6 A. No, that's correct, yes.

7 Q. You shut down your BA set at 16.59.34 -- it's at
8 page 1036, but I don't think we need to go there --
9 which is just seconds before 5 o'clock in the afternoon,
10 and you debriefed with Watch Manager Payton. You made
11 your way down the stairs to the ground floor, out into
12 the street, back to your appliance, which had been moved
13 and was now opposite the pub in Sedgmoor Place?

14 A. Mm-hmm.

15 Q. You did a fire ground A test to check your air?

16 A. That's correct, yeah.

17 Q. For the next occasion, if there was one, and then in
18 your statement it says:

19 "We were told that there was no need for us to be
20 deployed as BA wearers at this stage."

21 I just wanted to see if we could establish when that
22 was that you were told that "there was no need for us to
23 be deployed as BA wearers". Could I suggest perhaps ten
24 minutes to get down and over to your appliance and to
25 debrief, another five minutes or so to do a fire ground

1 A test?

2 A. To be honest, it would just be guesswork on my part.

3 I mean, those things take, you know, a certain amount of

4 time. From what you've said, it sounds a reasonable

5 time, but it would just be total guesswork to put a time

6 on it, from my point of view, because I don't -- I don't

7 know, to be honest.

8 Q. All right, so some time after 5 o'clock you were told --

9 can you remember who told you that "there was no need

10 for us to be deployed as BA wearers at that stage"?

11 A. I don't know the name. There was just a hive of

12 activity at that point with lots of firefighters and

13 officers.

14 Q. Anyway, what you did next was you were asked to go to

15 the bottom of the stairs at the centre of the building

16 to show casualties where to go to receive treatment for

17 the London Ambulance Service, and that's what you did.

18 A. That's correct, yes.

19 Q. So I wonder if we could see if we have any chance of

20 estimating how long you were doing that for. 15/20

21 minutes, or longer?

22 A. That sounds reasonable, but --

23 Q. Just a guess?

24 A. -- on the day it would just be a guess, yeah.

25 Q. Understood. You were then briefed to carry out a rescue

1 of two people from 75 Lakanal House. You put on BA gear
2 again and we know from the table that Mr Atkins showed
3 us that you switched that gear on at 18.15.33. Between
4 switching off on the first time at 5 o'clock and
5 switching on again at 6.15, can you remember carrying
6 out any other duties other than directing residents who
7 needed it for treatment by the London Ambulance Service?
8 A. No, I can't. Not to say that that didn't happen, but
9 I've got no recollection.
10 Q. You make your way then to the 11th floor to effect
11 a rescue from number 75, and you go in and we know that
12 that was to the south of the building. Can you
13 remember, when you got to the 11th floor, what was
14 happening on the north side, which we know is the side
15 on which the fire was and 79 and 81 and 65 were?
16 A. I didn't really investigate -- you know, when I got to
17 the top of the stairs, I went in one direction, and that
18 was in a different direction, and I just stuck to the
19 brief that I had and it didn't really involve me
20 going...
21 Q. Were there other firefighters there? Can't remember?
22 A. In my mind I've got no recollection, but again, that's
23 not to say that there wasn't.
24 Q. We're all very conscious that it was three years ago.
25 You went out onto the balcony. You went upstairs in

1 the flat and went onto the balcony, which we now know is
2 an escape balcony but you did not know it was at the
3 time. You saw a black man in his 30s, maybe early 40s,
4 with a lady. Was that balcony on the sunny side or the
5 shady side? In other words, was it on the west side or
6 on the east side?

7 A. If I could see a diagram, you know, to orientate myself
8 with the top-down view of the building, then I imagine
9 I'd be able to --

10 Q. Well, we have a map. Would that help? It might do.
11 Let's have a look. There's a map at the jury bundle,
12 divider 11 at page 4.

13 A. Yeah, I mean on that -- looking at that last picture
14 that you showed.

15 THE CORONER: Would you like to just have a look at the
16 diagram?

17 A. Yeah, any diagram --

18 THE CORONER: You should have the jury bundle in front of
19 you, I think. If you turn to divider 11, page 4.

20 A. As we look at the diagram on the screen, the side that's
21 to the right-hand side would be the side of the
22 rescue -- or the people who were on the balcony. On the
23 earlier one it had "surgery". The side that the surgery
24 was on, so -- I don't know whether that was the west --

25 MR HENDY: So you think that was on the east side?

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. Which would have been the shady side? That doesn't
3 help. Understood?

4 MR MATTHEWS: Sorry, forgive me for interrupting. It just
5 strikes me that behind divider 13 we have a colour plan,
6 page 2, with "surgery" marked on it, which might help
7 the witness.

8 MR HENDY: I'm very grateful. That's a much better map.

9 A. Yeah, looking on that diagram, they were on the balcony
10 on the side where the surgery is.

11 Q. On the side there?

12 A. Yeah, that's right, yeah.

13 Q. More or less where the word "Lakanal" appears?

14 A. Well, I wouldn't necessarily say where the word is, but
15 certainly on that side.

16 Q. Then, after you have taken off your breathing gear, you
17 come downstairs and you have a conversation with Watch
18 Manager Howling and you learn that there's a woman on
19 the 11th floor. You can't wear breathing equipment
20 again, and therefore I think, on behalf of my clients,
21 we'd like to express our gratitude for the fact that you
22 and your colleague went up there without breathing
23 equipment in a block of flats where there were four
24 fires burning in an attempt to do whatever you could to
25 effect a rescue.

1 A. Thank you.

2 Q. And you were stopped. You couldn't go any further
3 because of the smoke on the 9th or 10th floor?

4 A. That's correct, yes.

5 Q. The final thing is that in your statement you describe
6 a woman being carried by four firefighters. I wonder if
7 you could just look at this statement without it being
8 put up on the screen. I don't want to distress anybody,
9 but if you could remind yourself of some of the words.
10 Page 136 of the witness statement. I don't know if
11 Mr Clark has it. Perhaps you have it in front of you.
12 I'm very grateful. I apologise to the jury, but they
13 will understand why I don't want all this read out. If
14 you look half way through that top paragraph, there's
15 a line that begins "vents in the wall". Do you see
16 that? Just running down the first few words of each
17 line, perhaps about halfway through the paragraph?
18 Page 136? Can you see it says "vents in the wall."?

19 A. Yeah, I have it.

20 Q. Just read to yourself the next four or five lines, will
21 you, to remind yourself of what you wrote then.

22 A. Yeah, I've read those.

23 Q. I'm grateful. The one sentence I did want to read out
24 there was you wrote this:
25 "This woman was being carried between four

1 firefighters."

2 That's right, isn't it?

3 A. That's right, yeah.

4 Q. I think Mr Atkins summarised it by saying "helped", but
5 she wasn't being helped. She was beyond help. She was
6 being carried. That's right, isn't it?

7 A. That's right, yeah.

8 Q. Thank you very much indeed, and again I express my
9 gratitude for what you did.

10 THE CORONER: Mr Dowden?

11 MR DOWDEN: No thank you.

12 THE CORONER: Ms Al Tai?

13 Questions from MS AL TAI

14 MS AL TAI: Good morning, Mr Belmont. I act on behalf of
15 Mark Bailey, Catherine Hickman's partner. Just one
16 quick question, please. At the time that you left
17 flat 65 because of your breathing apparatus, what was
18 the condition of the fire like in flat 65?

19 A. On -- on the lower level of that flat, from what I
20 remember, you know, the fire had been extinguished, but
21 you've still got a compartment that's very hot. There's
22 a lot of -- you still have a lot of steam and smoke
23 rising. So although it seemed that most of the fire was
24 out, which I'm sure it was, it still needed what we
25 refer to as damping down.

1 parked but, you know, I jumped off wearing breathing
2 apparatus and, you know, relatively quickly I was inside
3 the building, so it was not something that would have
4 stuck in my mind other than a rough idea of where it was
5 parked.

6 Q. Absolutely. That's why I asked it in the way I did. We
7 all appreciate that, but you think that was the vicinity
8 in which the engine was parked?

9 A. I would have thought that's the vicinity, yes.

10 Q. The other matter is this: you mentioned that you were
11 attending -- you're based at Old Kent Road?

12 A. That's correct, yes.

13 Q. Because of "predetermined attendance"?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. I think you need to be a little gentle with us on these
16 technical terms. Can we establish this, then: in
17 Old Kent Road, in the fire station, out the teleprinter
18 would come any call from Lakanal to a fire?

19 A. At Old Kent Road, we would only get details of incidents
20 that affected us, so any machine based at Old Kent Road,
21 even if had been out driving around, it would come out
22 over our teleprinter. If it was a different station and
23 we weren't affected or going to it, we wouldn't get
24 details of that.

25 Q. Right. I asked it very badly. What I'm trying to get

1 your help on is: we've heard about Peckham being the
2 local fire station to Lakanal. You're called out from
3 the off at Old Kent Road. Is that because of
4 predetermined attendance?

5 A. I don't know -- you see, because I'm not -- sort of --
6 I don't know, really, the process that went on before we
7 got there. I don't know whether we got mobilised
8 because Peckham had requested us or whether it was part
9 of a PDA.

10 THE CORONER: Well, Mr Belmont, if you don't know then don't
11 worry. We'll deal with it with somebody else.

12 MR MATTHEWS: Thank you very much.

13 THE CORONER: Mr Compton?

14 MR COMPTON: No thank you.

15 THE CORONER: Mr Walsh?

16 Questions by MR WALSH

17 MR WALSH: Thank you very much. Just briefly, would you
18 just have a look behind divider 12 of the jury bundle at
19 the photograph which you were earlier asked to look at,
20 page 9, please. Do you have that, Mr Belmont?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. You told us that there came a point when you were up at
23 the top of the ladder fighting the fire on the upper
24 floor of the flat?

25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. There came a point when you had to leave because of air
2 and another crew took your place?

3 A. That's correct, yes.

4 Q. I just want you to have a look at this photograph and
5 then perhaps another one after that. I'm going to hold
6 it up. You can see the lower part. You've already been
7 taken to it by Mr Hendy. We can see lighter vapour or
8 smoke coming from the flat on the lower level, the
9 bedroom level. Do you see that?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. And then above, on the upper level, with the balcony
12 attached to it, the lounge area and so on, we can see
13 darker smoke and flame?

14 A. Okay, yeah.

15 Q. At 16.40.26, when this photograph was taken, what is
16 that lighter smoke at the lower part indicating to you?

17 A. To be honest, it could mean a number of things, but I'm
18 not really in a position to say what that could be. It
19 could be some fires producing that colour smoke or it
20 could be steam. It would just be guesswork on my part.

21 Q. If it's guesswork, I won't ask you to go any further.
22 Thank you very much.

23 THE CORONER: Members of the jury, do you have any questions
24 for Mr Belmont?

25

1 Questions by the Jury

2 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you, madam coroner. We have
3 three.

4 First off, we've heard from other firefighters from
5 other units that they had some trouble with the radios.
6 Did you experience anything like that yourself?

7 A. It's pretty hazy, my recollection of what, as a crew, me
8 and Nico Sanchez -- what our radio was like. I do seem
9 to remember hearing, you know, difficulties about
10 radios, but I mean -- you might want to question Nico
11 further on that, but I've got no recollection other than
12 what I've heard other firefighters say on the day, that
13 there were problems.

14 THE CORONER: Thank you.

15 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Another question: when you were in
16 flat 65, whether it was when you first got there or when
17 you left, was the partition wall between the two
18 bedrooms there or burnt away?

19 A. I'm aware that when I stuck my head up to the upper
20 level there was some kind of partition in there, but
21 I can't remember --

22 THE CORONER: Mr Belmont, could I just interrupt you? This
23 would be on the lower floor.

24 A. Oh, on the lower floor. There was partitioning.
25 I don't know what was bedrooms, what was living rooms,

1 such was the devastation, but there was certainly some
2 kind of partitioning still left in that lower -- lower
3 level.

4 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay. I do actually have two
5 because I've just been handed another one. When
6 reaching the 7th floor where the bridgehead had been,
7 were you surprised to find it not there or could you
8 anticipate where it might actually be in going down?

9 A. Yeah, I do seem to remember being surprised, although
10 obviously somebody told me why it had moved and there
11 was a good reason. So yeah, initial surprise, yeah.
12 I didn't -- I couldn't have guessed where it had been
13 moved to other than someone would have told me where it
14 was moved to.

15 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay, thank you. Our final
16 question: since Peckham was not your locality, your
17 usual place, were you tasked to back up firefighters
18 from Peckham station because they may have a better
19 knowledge of flat layout?

20 THE CORONER: I don't think that Mr Belmont's going to be
21 able to answer that from his own knowledge, so thank you
22 very much.

23 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you.

24 THE CORONER: Mr Belmont, thank you very much for coming and
25 thank you very much for the help that you've given.

1 day of the fire rather than things that have happened
2 since. At the time of the fire, is it right that you
3 were a firefighter?

4 A. That's correct.

5 Q. And you were stationed at the Old Kent Road fire
6 station?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. Before the day of the fire, had you ever had reason to
9 go to Lakanal House?

10 A. No, I didn't.

11 Q. You hadn't been there before?

12 A. No, I didn't.

13 Q. Does that mean that you didn't have any prior knowledge
14 of the layout of the building?

15 A. I didn't have prior knowledge of that specific building.

16 Q. In that case, what I'll do is to ask you about what
17 happened on the day and what you did, and from time to
18 time as we go through, I may ask you about anything you
19 learned about the layout of the building during the day.

20 A. Okay.

21 Q. Of course, do feel free yourself to tell us at any time
22 if there was something that you found out that you think
23 is important.

24 I think it's right, then, that you were called out
25 from Old Kent Road fire station?

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. And that the time of that call was about 16.21?

3 A. That's correct.

4 Q. You travelled to Lakanal on the pump ladder?

5 A. That's correct.

6 Q. Which has the call sign E351?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. Are you able to help us with who else was on the
9 appliance with you?

10 A. At the front was the driver Mark Mullins, John, our
11 watch manager, John Howling, and at the back it was my
12 colleague, Alex Miller, and -- and the gentleman that
13 was here before, and myself.

14 Q. Mr Belmont?

15 A. Belmont. Tony Belmont.

16 Q. Did you do anything while you were on the way to Lakanal
17 House?

18 A. Yes, we were getting ready everything we could need to
19 go to the top of the building or where we were going to
20 go and fight the fire, and I remember listening to
21 a message that they, through the radio, make pump four,
22 which obviously means that it's a real job, because
23 sometimes the fire that we get called are not so big as
24 this one was, so you get more switched on when you
25 listen to a message like that.

1 Q. So first of all, you knew that you were on your way to
2 a big building, a tall building?

3 A. That's right.

4 Q. And the fact that you had heard this message, "make
5 pumps four", meant that you knew that it was a real
6 fire; is that right?

7 A. That's right, and then we got all the gear ready to go
8 to a high rise building, which it was the case of this
9 one.

10 Q. What was that gear that you got ready?

11 A. We got ready all the breaking-in gear. We assigned
12 different tasks to the members of the -- of the truck --
13 who was gonna carry the hoses, who was gonna carry the
14 breaking-in gear, who was gonna carry the branch -- so
15 as soon as you jump off, everyone knows what he's doing
16 and there is no delays and we go as quick as we can.

17 Q. When you arrived at Lakanal, can you remember where you
18 parked?

19 A. Yes, we parked just on the right side of the building as
20 the --

21 Q. Does that help? So north is to the top, and then you
22 have Fontenelle to the west and Marie Curie at the time
23 east.

24 A. Yes, we did park at that corner, at the north.

25 Q. Where?

1 A. Just above -- just where you got the -- around there,
2 a little more into the -- more into the other street.
3 That's right, yeah. A little bit further north. Right
4 there.

5 Q. So on the junction of Dalwood Street and Sedgmoor Place?

6 A. I cannot read the name of the street -- yeah,
7 Dalwood Street.

8 Q. And then Sedgmoor Place --

9 A. Is there, right there, yes.

10 Q. -- is this road running here, so on that corner?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Was yours the first fire engine to arrive?

13 A. No, I believe we were the third fire engine to arrive.

14 Q. The jury has already heard some evidence that there were
15 crews from Peckham who had arrived first?

16 A. That's right.

17 Q. And then perhaps you joined them after that. When you
18 arrived, were you able to see what those other crews
19 were doing?

20 A. Yes, I did. Right outside the fire engine there was
21 a lot of debris falling for -- I can't remember what
22 floor it was, but they were getting the water ready
23 into -- from the -- from the mains into the building.
24 I remember seeing the watch manager making a cordon to
25 avoid people crossing into all the debris falling from

1 the building, and at that time all the debris, which it
2 was big pieces of frames, alight -- I remember one of
3 them went underneath of a car, alight, and quickly the
4 watch manager, from the indications of one of my
5 colleagues and myself, extinguished the fire underneath
6 of the car, and then after that I've seen some people
7 getting the lift ready to make sure we could have
8 a quick access to the floor. Yeah, just about that.

9 Q. Just pausing there then. Obviously, a lot going on all
10 at once.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. You said there was debris falling. Was that falling
13 from the building itself?

14 A. Yes, that's correct.

15 Q. And some of that material you said was on fire?

16 A. Yeah, yeah.

17 Q. Where was it landing?

18 A. It was landing in -- on that map, you had -- you had
19 a garden on one side, and there's a little street here.
20 That's right, yeah. The debris was falling just where
21 you got the cursor there, around there, somewhere around
22 there.

23 Q. So on the west side of the building?

24 A. That is -- sorry.

25 Q. On the west side of the building?

1 A. On the west side of the building, that's correct, yeah.
2 One of the machines was parked at the beginning of the
3 street and I think the other one was right at the end.

4 Q. You mentioned a moment ago that a cordon was being put
5 up?

6 A. That's right.

7 Q. That is something that some firemen were doing?

8 A. Yeah, some of my colleagues and -- I can't remember if
9 the police were there at the time, but definitely was
10 a cordon.

11 Q. What was the purpose of the cordon?

12 A. It was for no-one to cross underneath of where the
13 debris was falling, not even people -- 'cos what happens
14 is if someone sees the debris falling on top of my car,
15 obviously the first reaction is to go and save your car.
16 But you cannot do that. We're gonna look after your car
17 as best as we can. So that was the purpose of that.

18 Q. Can you help us with where the cordon was? Did it go
19 all the way around the building?

20 A. I can't remember. I don't recall that. I don't think
21 it went around the building at that time. Only on that
22 street, but I can't remember now precisely.

23 Q. You told us then that the other crews were doing jobs
24 including charging the dry riser, getting water to the
25 building?

1 A. That's correct, yeah.

2 Q. And also getting the lift ready?

3 A. That's correct, yeah.

4 Q. What could you see when you looked at the building?

5 A. I saw quite a lot of black smoke coming out, and as

6 I say, the debris falling down. Quite a lot of debris

7 falling down. That's about it. Only on the west side

8 of the building.

9 Q. Is that both for the smoke and the falling debris, just

10 on the west side?

11 A. That's correct, yeah.

12 Q. At that point, could you see any fire, or was it only

13 smoke?

14 A. I don't remember seeing any fire. I think it was smoke.

15 Q. So what was the first thing that you were asked to do?

16 A. We were asked to support the Peckham crew, which -- it

17 was already on -- going to flat 65 on the 9th floor.

18 Q. Do you think you knew the flat number at that time? Do

19 you think somebody said to you it was 65?

20 A. I think so.

21 Q. And also that it was on the 9th floor? Is that

22 something that you were told?

23 A. Definitely.

24 Q. So you were going to support the Peckham crew, and they

25 were there before you?

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. In the first instance, then, where were you going to go
3 to? Once you went into the building, what was your
4 route?

5 A. We went up -- up the lift, and then we came out of the
6 lift on the 7th floor where was the bridgehead. We
7 carried part of the gear that we decided to carry when
8 we were on the truck, and then we -- we got our brief on
9 the 7th floor.

10 Q. Could I ask you then: when you took the lift, you took
11 that from the ground floor?

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. Is that right? This photograph I've just put on the
14 screen is a photograph of the lift lobby on the ground
15 floor. Do you recognise that? Do you remember that?

16 A. I can't remember that, to be honest.

17 Q. Can you see, just where I'm putting the cursor at the
18 top of the page --

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. -- there's a sign on the wall?

21 A. Yeah, I know what that is.

22 Q. You know what that is. On the next page there's
23 a close-up.

24 A. Yeah, Southwark.

25 Q. Do you remember whether you saw that when you went into

1 the building?

2 A. No, the first time I went into the building I didn't see
3 that, but I did the second time.

4 Q. In fairness to you, somebody had told you what floor you
5 were going to, so you knew where the bridgehead was?

6 A. Yes, I did, yeah.

7 Q. When you got to the bridgehead on the 7th floor, can you
8 remember who was in charge there?

9 A. I believe it was -- I can't remember.

10 Q. Had you been told before you went into the building what
11 it was you were going to do or was that something you
12 were told when you got to the bridgehead?

13 A. No, we were told to go to the bridgehead and then we got
14 the -- the brief there.

15 Q. You went to the bridgehead and were briefed?

16 A. And then be briefed there.

17 Q. So when you got to the bridgehead, what brief were you
18 given?

19 A. To support the Peckham crew. They already had a hose
20 with water, so it's just to feed -- sometimes it's very
21 difficult, because it's two floors so you actually need
22 to manage. It's very important for the crew ahead to
23 have someone supporting them.

24 Q. So let's just explore that. You were on the 7th floor
25 at the bridgehead?

1 A. That's right.

2 Q. The crew from Peckham, were they there at the same time
3 as you got there or had they already gone ahead?

4 A. They had already gone ahead.

5 Q. Is it right that they had gone to the 9th floor?

6 A. To the 9th floor.

7 Q. To the 9th floor where flat 65 was?

8 A. That's correct. I didn't know where they were but they
9 were in front of us.

10 Q. I see. And they had a hose with them?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. Where was that hose connected to? Where was the water
13 coming from for that hose?

14 A. I believe there was -- it was connected to the 8th
15 floor, but I cannot recall that at this precise moment.

16 Q. But to some part of the dry riser below the 9th floor?

17 A. That's correct, yeah. Below the 9th floor, definitely.

18 Q. Is it right that when you passed the breathing apparatus
19 entry control point you start up your equipment?

20 A. That's right.

21 Q. And you hand in the tally key from the bodyguard unit?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. Can you remember where you were when you did that? For
24 example, were you in the stairwell or were you by lifts,
25 by the dry riser?

1 A. I believe we were in the stairwell, right, sort of in
2 the middle.

3 Q. Can you help us with whether there was any smoke there
4 when you started up your equipment?

5 A. Not on the 7th floor.

6 Q. If we could just think, please, about the time when you
7 started up your equipment. I'll turn it the right way
8 round for you.

9 A. Okay.

10 Q. I've just put a table on the screen. Have you ever seen
11 this table before?

12 A. No, I haven't.

13 Q. I'll explain what it is. It's a list of all of the data
14 that was downloaded from the bodyguard equipment, which
15 shows when the different units were started up and shut
16 down.

17 A. Okay.

18 Q. If we could just look, please, at the top right hand
19 corner. Do you see where I've just put the cursor, we
20 have your surname?

21 A. Okay.

22 Q. So that's your line going across, and then if we look
23 further to the left -- do you see where the cursor is
24 now?

25 A. Okay.

1 Q. That shows that you started up your equipment at about
2 16.34. Then if we look, please, towards the bottom of
3 the page, do you see in the bottom right hand corner
4 your colleague's name is there, Mr Belmont? If we do
5 the same thing as we go across, we can see that he
6 started up at about 16.35?

7 A. Okay.

8 Q. I just wanted to ask you: is that how you remember it?
9 The two of you were there together and you started up
10 your BA sets at the same time?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Because you were being committed as a pair?

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. I think each of you has a personal radio which is
15 attached to your tunic?

16 A. That's correct.

17 Q. Is there also some radio equipment that's connected to
18 the breathing apparatus equipment?

19 A. That's correct. Every -- every team -- every two
20 firefighters always have one radio.

21 Q. So in addition to the ones that are attached to your
22 tunic?

23 A. That's correct. Sometimes we don't take the one that is
24 issued to us because it's not safe in atmosphere where
25 there are gases. We -- we say intrinsically safe.

1 Basically, it's got a little spark inside, so when you
2 press the button, the push-to-talk button, it's got
3 a little spark inside. So if the atmosphere is
4 potentially explosive, you can actually cause more
5 damage. So that's why we carry another one specifically
6 for fire onto the breathing apparatus sets. So we tend
7 to take the one that we -- personal radio, take it off.
8 And it's also on differently channels as well.

9 Q. Can you remember on this occasion, did you have both?

10 A. I don't remember.

11 Q. You don't remember?

12 A. I don't remember.

13 Q. Do the two sorts of radios operate on the same channel
14 or do they operate on different channels?

15 A. You set the channel. The one attached to the breathing
16 apparatus is always on channel 6, unless you get briefed
17 to change it. For instance, if you go underground it's
18 a completely different channel, but for fires it's
19 channel 6. And the other one can be channel 2 or
20 different channel, depending on what you're doing.

21 Q. Sorry to interrupt. On the breathing apparatus sets, is
22 it always channel 6 for every crew, so everyone would be
23 on the same channel?

24 A. Everyone would be on the same channel so everyone knows
25 exactly what is happening.

1 Q. Other than crews who have been committed to fight in the
2 fire, who else would be listening to that channel?

3 A. That channel is listened by the person in charge of the
4 control board for the breathing apparatus, which in this
5 case, as soon as the incident progressed, it would be
6 a radio operator because it's a lot of information for
7 one person to take and do the message at the same time.

8 Q. And where would those people be? First of all, the
9 person with the entry control board, where would they
10 be?

11 A. They are the people on the 7th floor in this case. They
12 were at the 7th floor in this incident.

13 Q. So both the person with the entry control board and,
14 later in the incident, the radio control operator?

15 A. That's correct.

16 Q. Both inside the building on the 7th floor?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. Would there be anybody outside the building, perhaps,
19 who would be listening to the same channel?

20 A. Yes, again, if the incident progresses, we have what we
21 call a command unit, which -- they know exactly what is
22 happening and they've got a radio connected to -- to
23 channel 6 as well.

24 Q. So they would also have an idea what messages were being
25 passed from those such as yourself fighting the fire

1 back to the bridgehead?

2 A. Correct.

3 Q. Did you, at any time during your involvement in the day,
4 have problems with your radio, times when you couldn't
5 make contact?

6 A. Right at the end of our wear, we did have a little
7 problem with communication.

8 Q. Was that the first time you entered the building?

9 A. The first time, yes, that's correct.

10 Q. So right at the end. Obviously we'll get to that part
11 of the story later, but what was the nature of the
12 problem?

13 A. We don't know the nature of the problem, but we didn't
14 have -- normally when we send a message we always have
15 a message back so you know the message has been
16 received, and I remember we didn't have that back. It
17 was right at the end of our time, so we went down
18 anyway.

19 Q. So the problem was that you were sending messages but
20 you weren't getting a reply, and so you weren't sure
21 that your message had got through?

22 A. That's correct. It wasn't sending messages, it was --
23 (Inaudible) the last message.

24 Q. Is it right that there's a protocol for how you send and
25 receive radio messages?

1 A. Correct.

2 Q. So if you're not able to follow that protocol, you're
3 not sure whether the message is being sent and received
4 properly?

5 A. Correct, therefore if you don't have communication,
6 unless you can otherwise, you should leave the incident.
7 Which we did, is what I'm trying to say. It was right
8 at the end of our wear so we were happy to go and try to
9 solve the problem and see what happened with the
10 communication.

11 Q. So either you have normal radio communications and
12 everything works, or you make some alternative
13 arrangement, and if you don't have one of those two
14 things then you withdraw?

15 A. Correct, yeah, depending what you're doing, obviously.

16 Q. Depending on what you're doing.

17 A. Of course.

18 Q. When you left the bridgehead, then, when you were
19 committed, did you walk up two flights of stairs to the
20 9th floor?

21 A. Correct.

22 Q. Then you have to go through a door, don't you, to get
23 into the corridors where the flats are?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. Could you tell us how you found the flat you were

1 looking for?

2 A. We -- what we did was to follow the hose and we had
3 a brief to stick to the left-hand side of the corridor,
4 and then this is the way we found the other crew. And
5 on the way, we were looking and searching every wall for
6 features and landmarks because -- something very
7 important: every time I go into a fire or into a place
8 where there is limited visibility, I always look and try
9 to map everything that is around, because I know I'm
10 going to be the eyes for my colleagues, so as soon as
11 I come back out, I will tell them: "There is a little
12 egress or regress on the left-hand side. You've got
13 a door, you've got these, you've got this pipe," so they
14 will feel confident as they're progressing into the
15 incident that they've recognised what I've told them,
16 basically, so I'm always looking.

17 I was second on my crew so -- my colleague was in
18 front of me, so I had a little bit more time to carry
19 the hose with one hand and to search with my other hand
20 to see what other features were around me, to recognise
21 any features.

22 Q. Did the hose then lead you to the Peckham crew? Were
23 they holding the end of the hose?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. So at that point there were four of you; is that right?

1 There were the two from Peckham and then you and your
2 colleague, Mr Belmont?

3 A. That's right.

4 Q. Could you please give us an idea of the conditions in
5 the corridor at that time? Was there a lot of smoke?

6 A. Yeah, it was very -- very smokey and very difficult to
7 see anything and the condition were hot, but not as hot
8 as we found them in the flat.

9 Q. When you arrived, had the Peckham crew already opened up
10 the door and gone into the flat, or were they still in
11 the corridor?

12 A. I couldn't see that. I was a little bit behind them.
13 I couldn't see that because of the smoke. I knew they
14 were doing something. I heard some banging and I heard
15 some water. We always spray water and check the door.
16 We shout to see if there's anyone around, because
17 obviously if the door is gonna fall and if someone --
18 it's very easy someone is right on the other side of the
19 door, so we always take into consideration everything,
20 although we want to do it as quickly as we can.

21 Q. Can you remember how the door was opened on this
22 occasion?

23 A. I don't know about that.

24 Q. Could I ask you just to have a look at your statement,
25 please. Mr Clark, the statement begins at page 138.

1 It's a statement which is dated 12 July, so a little
2 over a week after the day of the fire. (Handed) Do you
3 think at that time your memory of what happened was
4 clearer than it is now?

5 A. To be honest, I've got a little bit of mixed feeling,
6 because now, knowing that I was coming here, I remember
7 a lot of things that I don't think I put in here,
8 which -- I don't even know if they are 100 per cent,
9 because I've been to many incidents after this, so --

10 Q. This was a statement --

11 A. I think that's probably clearer than now, I would say.

12 Q. The statement is clearer than now?

13 A. I would say.

14 Q. Could I just ask you then to look at page 138. Do you
15 recognise that as the statement which you made?

16 A. It looks like mine.

17 Q. For example, we can see your name, can't we, at the top
18 of that page?

19 A. Yeah, that's right. At the top, yeah.

20 Q. If I could ask you to just turn two pages on, to
21 page 140.

22 A. Okay.

23 Q. Towards the top, just on the page before, you said:
24 "The flat door [then it continues] was partially
25 open, which allowed us to use the branch through the

1 opening. We could not open the door fully at this stage
2 and so, using the breaking-in gear, Tony ..."

3 Is that Mr Belmont?

4 A. That's right.

5 Q. "... and I forced the door off its hinges."

6 So does that help you to remember how you opened the
7 door? If you can't remember, just say so.

8 A. I can't remember.

9 Q. When it came to going into the flat, who was it who went
10 into the flat first? Was it the two of you or was it
11 the Peckham crew?

12 A. The Peckham crew.

13 Q. What was your role when they had gone into the flat?
14 What were you doing?

15 A. Feeding the hose in -- into the flat, helping them, and
16 checking for the conditions as well.

17 Q. I think we gather that the hose, when it's full of
18 water, is very heavy?

19 A. Very heavy.

20 Q. So you were helping them by feeding the hose to them so
21 that they could fight the fire?

22 A. Correct, yeah. You won't be able to pull the hose
23 yourself. It won't move.

24 Q. Could you see inside the flat what things were like on
25 the floor where the front door was?

1 A. Yeah, there was a toilet on the right-hand side, a very
2 damaged staircase on the left. There was another room
3 after the toilet, open plan like lounge, or -- the room
4 was completely gone by the time we got there. There was
5 no window, nothing. It was a big, massive opening,
6 which sort of shock us at the beginning, because I never
7 seen that before.

8 Q. Could you see flames inside the flat?

9 A. Yeah, we saw flames, yeah.

10 Q. Where was the flame?

11 A. I can't remember where was the flame.

12 Q. Can you just give us an impression? Was it a situation
13 where almost all of the flat were on fire or were there
14 pockets of fire in different places?

15 A. I recall the situation on this particular flat, probably
16 the part of the fire we call the decay, where you still
17 have some heat, quite a lot of heat -- almost everything
18 that is in the flat is gone, meaning that the table
19 doesn't look like a table anymore -- it's just a pile of
20 black debris -- and the window was gone, which is
21 probably the window I saw falling when we arrived to the
22 incident, and I clearly remember the wind coming into
23 the -- through the opening into the building.

24 Q. You mentioned a moment ago that the stairs were damaged.
25 I take it they'd been burned by the fire?

1 A. Correct.

2 Q. Were you able to use the stairs to go into the upper
3 level of the flat?

4 A. No, we couldn't.

5 Q. Why not?

6 A. Because it wasn't safe to go on the stairs, so we
7 requested a ladder. So at that time the communication
8 was working so we requested a ladder.

9 Q. Using your radio equipment?

10 A. That's right, yeah.

11 Q. Did there come a point when the two firefighters from
12 Peckham were running out of air and so they had to
13 withdraw?

14 A. Correct.

15 Q. They then passed the hose on to you and the two of you
16 took over?

17 A. Correct.

18 Q. After you had sent that message saying that you needed
19 a ladder, did somebody bring you a ladder?

20 A. Yes, they did. Another crew came -- came right after
21 they left.

22 Q. Do you know who they were, the crew that came
23 afterwards?

24 A. Peter Mason and Mr Mechen, Tony Mechen, from
25 Old Kent Road as well.

1 Q. Once the ladder had arrived, were you able to use it to
2 get up to see what was on the floor above?

3 A. Yes, we did. We put the ladder up on top of the other
4 one and we made the --

5 Q. Sorry, on top of the -- where the stairs were?

6 A. That's right, and then we made the area safe to progress
7 into the next room.

8 Q. How did you do that?

9 A. We basically climbed the ladder very carefully, and
10 again, holding the ladder and passing the hose
11 through -- we were four or five firefighters at that
12 time, and then we took turns because it was really hot.
13 The feeling was that at one level it was not -- not very
14 hot, and then the next level was quite hot. So it was
15 quite difficult to fight the fire at that time, so we
16 took turns. So one went up, came down, and then the
17 other one went up, came down, until we run out of air on
18 our breathing apparatus and it was our turn around time,
19 and then we handed the hose back to our colleague. At
20 that time the fire on that floor was almost out.

21 Q. That was what I wanted to ask you next. So at the time
22 that you and Mr Belmont left the flat, when you withdrew
23 because your air was low --

24 A. That's right.

25 Q. -- had you managed to put out the fire on the lower

1 floor, or was there any fire still burning there?

2 A. To put the fire on the lower -- on the lower part of
3 the -- it was --

4 Q. The lower floor first. Was there still fire there?

5 A. No, no fire on that floor, no.

6 Q. What about the upper floor?

7 A. It was on fire there. There was sort of kitchen or
8 something like that.

9 Q. So you were passing the hose on to your colleagues,
10 Mr Mason and Mr Mechen, so they could carry on fighting
11 the fire on the top floor?

12 A. That's right, and then we left after that.

13 Q. When you were on the ladder fighting the fire, were you
14 able to see what was on the upper level?

15 A. Yeah, I just said I think it was a kitchen, but
16 I couldn't see any more because we didn't actually
17 progress into -- it was so hot at that moment and there
18 was quite a lot of flames, right at the beginning we
19 didn't actually progress into that flat. We did fight
20 the fire from-- from the top of the stairs.

21 Q. Sorry, you say that you didn't progress? Do you mean
22 that you didn't get off the ladder onto the upper floor?

23 A. That's right, not at that moment. I think they did
24 after, but we didn't.

25 Q. What was the visibility like on the upper floor when you

1 were at the top of the ladder?

2 A. It was good visibility. Let's say, I don't know, half
3 a metre from the floor, and then there was quite a lot
4 of smoke moving quite fast at the top.

5 Q. Could you see, when you got to the top of the ladder,
6 that the flat extended on both sides of you?

7 A. I don't remember that.

8 Q. Could you see, for example, to the back wall on the
9 upper floor?

10 A. I don't -- I didn't see the back wall. I saw something
11 like a cupboard and a shelf. That's why I thought it
12 was a kitchen, but I wasn't sure at that time what it
13 was.

14 Q. I understand. You'd just got to the point in the story
15 where you said that your air was running low and you had
16 to withdraw?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. You told us earlier that there was a point in all of
19 this where you found that there were radio difficulties?

20 A. That's correct.

21 Q. Could you just help us with how those two things fitted
22 together?

23 A. Shall I tell you what happened that day or what I think
24 happened that day?

25 Q. Just in terms of the order in which things happened, was

1 it that you realised that --

2 A. Okay, so what we did, we withdraw the incident, and then
3 we walk down to the 7th floor, which is where we
4 started, and we couldn't find anyone down there. So at
5 that point we carry on walking down the stairs and we
6 end up going out of the building wearing our breathing
7 apparatus.

8 At that point, we were directed by a station manager
9 or watch manager -- I can't remember now -- to go back
10 into the building to the 3rd floor, because the
11 bridgehead was moved from the 7th floor to the 3rd
12 floor. At that point, we didn't know that this incident
13 was circulating rapidly and randomly as well.

14 So we went back to the third floor, and then we did
15 close our set and we got our tally back on the 3rd
16 floor, and it was moved into like a lobby area. So
17 that's why, when we came down the stairs, we couldn't
18 see it, although we passed the 3rd floor. It was on our
19 right-hand side inside a room we didn't know about.

20 Q. When you came out of the 9th floor, is it right that you
21 were expecting the entry control point still to be on
22 the 7th?

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. And you were surprised when there was nobody there?

25 A. Correct.

1 Q. You then explained that you went down all of the layers
2 of the building, all the way down the stairs, and you
3 didn't, at that point, meet a new bridgehead on the 3rd
4 floor?

5 A. Correct.

6 Q. And the reason for that, you think, is that although it
7 was on the 3rd floor it was in the lobby area --

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. -- rather than in the stairwell?

10 A. Correct.

11 Q. So you went to the ground floor but then you were sent
12 back in, you went up to the 3rd floor and you found the
13 bridgehead in the lobby area?

14 A. Correct.

15 Q. Does that mean that you hadn't received any radio
16 message saying, "The bridgehead is now being moved.
17 This is where it's going to"?

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. Where did the radio problems fit in? Were there
20 messages that you tried to send or messages that you
21 thought you weren't receiving that you should have been?

22 A. By -- by the look of things, radios are reliable up to
23 certain point. Obviously if you go 100 walls in between
24 you and the other person, maybe you don't get reception.
25 What I think happened is they moved the bridgehead at

1 the same time we lost connection, and the 3rd floor and
2 the 9th floor -- it didn't work, for whatever reason.
3 It was right, sort of -- right at the same time.

4 Q. Could you give the jury an impression of what it was
5 like carrying out that firefighting in the building,
6 what the conditions were like?

7 A. When -- when we got there, to the flat, to me it was
8 like a textbook normal fire. High rise building, no-one
9 involved, so we don't have to rescue anyone. We just
10 need to fight the fire. We enjoy fighting the fire, so
11 it's a bit relaxed. It's no problem. There's no
12 people -- it's not -- we don't have to save any lives.
13 But when we came out of the building, I thought I was in
14 a completely different fire. I thought: "It can't be
15 the same building. I don't understand what's happening
16 here."

17 Q. Can we just pause there to work out what time that was.
18 Going back to this table, if we look again on the top
19 line where your name is, do we see that the time when
20 you stopped using the air breathing equipment was just
21 before 5 o'clock?

22 A. Okay.

23 Q. You said that you thought it was a completely different
24 fire?

25 A. Correct. What I thought is: as soon as we go back down,

1 our two colleague will extinguish the fire on the 9th
2 floor, so six of us are going to be working on a sort of
3 textbook type of compartment -- we call them
4 compartment. That, to me, wasn't a compartment because
5 it didn't have a wall, therefore it's not a compartment.
6 And when we come out, we have fire and flames and smoke
7 in both the east and the west side of the building, in
8 different floors as well, which it didn't make any sense
9 at all.

10 Q. When you got to the bridgehead on the 3rd floor, having
11 come out of the building and gone back in, was there
12 a handover or a debrief with an officer there?

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. What information did you and Mr Belmont pass on to the
15 entry control officer?

16 A. We did pass different information because we have
17 differing experiences personally, but we -- as a team,
18 we did basically pass the information that the fire was
19 extinguished on the lower part of the flat, there was
20 a big opening, and I can't remember exactly what else.
21 But I do remember to pass information that there was
22 another door before the -- the door that goes into the
23 building, which at that time we sort of realised was the
24 escape -- the fire escape door for that lower -- lower
25 part of the -- of the flat.

1 Q. Just thinking about that other exit, was that another
2 door which led from the flat into the central corridor?

3 A. Correct. So basically the flat had windows in one side,
4 staircase inside as you walked in. Right underneath of
5 the staircase, if you have a picture like that, you have
6 a door there and there was another door which is the one
7 we made enter in. So we came in this way and I remember
8 a door on the left-hand side.

9 Q. And you passed that information on to the officer at the
10 entry control point?

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. Do you remember who that was?

13 A. I believe it was Chris, the watch manager from
14 Southwark.

15 Q. Would that be Christopher Payton?

16 A. That's correct.

17 Q. When you had finished, then -- you'd been to the
18 bridgehead on the 3rd floor and you came out of the
19 building again -- is it right that you got a drink,
20 cooled down, changed your fire hood and had a bit of
21 a breather?

22 A. That's correct, yeah.

23 Q. But there came a point later on, I think, where you went
24 back into the building using breathing apparatus, again
25 with Mr Belmont?

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. If we just go back to the table. Looking this time at
3 the lower numbers, we can see that it was at about 6.15
4 that you started up your BA equipment. Are you with me?
5 Just where the --

6 A. Oh, okay, sorry, yeah.

7 Q. Because we have a line for second BA wear, the second
8 time you entered the building. So at about 6.15?

9 A. Okay.

10 Q. Can you remember what tasks you were carrying out
11 between the time that you came out of the building the
12 first time and the second time you went in in breathing
13 apparatus?

14 A. We did divert some people to the London ambulance,
15 feeling sick or disorientated. Just after we drop
16 our -- our gear, we were helping diverting people,
17 because quite a lot of people came at that time, just
18 helping them to go to the right place and be safe.

19 Q. When you were asked to go back into the building,
20 I think it's right that you were asked to go and help
21 two people who were in flat 75?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. You were told that that was on the 4th floor?

24 A. That's correct.

25 Q. Can you remember where that information had come from?

1 In other words, who told you that it was on the 4th
2 floor?

3 A. I can't remember who told me.

4 Q. Did you go up to the 4th floor?

5 A. I believe on the way up to the 4th floor we saw a sign
6 and I informed the bridgehead that the flat 75 actually
7 was on the 11th floor. So at the end we went to the
8 11th floor, not to the 4th floor.

9 Q. So you realised that what you had been told wasn't
10 right?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. And you successfully worked out where flat 75 was so
13 that you could go there?

14 A. Yeah, because of that sign. That's correct, yeah.

15 Q. Is it right that you made your way into flat 75 and you
16 found a man and a woman who were on the balcony?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. And you helped them to get out of the building by
19 walking them back through their flat, so back into the
20 building and down the stairs into the corridor?

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. And then down the central staircase to the ground floor?

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. Did you appreciate at that point that it would have been
25 possible to walk from the balcony, where you found them,

1 along the balcony, through a fire door and back into the
2 central staircase?

3 A. No, we didn't know that.

4 Q. At that time, when you were on the 11th floor and the
5 12th floor helping them, how much smoke was there?

6 A. A little bit of smoke but not -- not much.

7 Q. I think it's right that they were able to come out by
8 holding their breath as they passed through the flat?

9 A. Correct.

10 Q. And then you helped them downstairs to the road. After
11 that, did you remain at Lakanal House in case there were
12 any other jobs that you could help with?

13 A. Yes, we did, yeah. At that time, I think we realised
14 that that wasn't a textbook fire, and so -- we knew it
15 was a lot of people inside so we wanted to help, and we
16 dropped our sets and we just wanted to go and knock
17 doors and do whatever needed to be done to help the
18 people in the building.

19 Q. I'm sure we can all understand that. I'm just going to
20 put on the screen a diagram which shows the west side of
21 the building. So it's not a photograph, but it's
22 intended to show what that side of the building would
23 have looked like.

24 As you can see, on the building itself there isn't
25 anything on the outside to show you which flat is which?

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. Can I then show you the same thing but with some flat
3 numbers added on top. So in other words, if you knew
4 where every flat was, you could imagine those numbers
5 onto the side of the building and see where each flat
6 was.

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. What I'd like to ask you is whether, at any time during
9 the day at Lakanal House, you got to the stage of having
10 that sort of map in your mind, so if somebody had said,
11 "I need to go to flat 40", you would have known where in
12 the building it was?

13 A. I didn't know where flat 40 was, except for the sign.
14 By the time I look at the sign I knew there were --
15 obviously, and the sign says --

16 Q. Is it this sign?

17 A. That's correct, yeah. So I knew about that, that the
18 flats were not only on one floor, they were on two
19 floors. Because I went to the first flat, I knew more
20 or less the layout of that flat, and normally in these
21 type of buildings we know that they kept replicate.
22 When we went to flat 75, I believe the layout of the
23 building -- of this flat was exactly the same as 65. If
24 not, we knew there was a staircase on the left and we
25 were on the east side of the building and then we came

1 back to the west side of the building and then back into
2 the staircase. So by that time I knew more or less the
3 layout of the building.

4 Q. So you had noticed some important features of the
5 layout, first of all that the flats were across two
6 floors rather than one, and that -- well, you'd seen two
7 flats and the internal layout was the same?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. Did anybody speak to you about the layout, to find out
10 anything that you had learned?

11 A. I can't recall having that conversation, but I always
12 tell things like this to -- to my colleagues and
13 managers so everyone knows everything. Because as
14 I said before, it's very important to know your
15 landmarks. So by that time I knew that every flat in
16 the lower level had two doors, so if we need to break
17 one of the doors, we know it's the same flat. And by
18 that time, what we didn't know is the balcony was the
19 escape for the top floor. So the -- the lower floor had
20 the door, extra door, and the upper floor had the
21 balcony.

22 Q. Could I please then just ask you one other question,
23 which is: what single additional thing do you think
24 would have helped you most on the day of the fire? So
25 for example, it might be something which, if you had

1 known it, would have been useful, or a piece of
2 training, perhaps?

3 A. For what we did? Nothing, really, but for the whole
4 incident, maybe. For what we did, it was okay. The
5 information we have was -- was good. We did the task we
6 had with the information we had, and it was -- I can't
7 say anything else about the rest of the incident.

8 Q. Mr Sanchez, thank you very much. Those are all the
9 questions I have. Others may have questions for you.

10 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Hendy.

11 Questions from MR HENDY

12 MR HENDY: Mr Sanchez, my name's Hendy. I represent three
13 of the bereaved families. The problem with the radio
14 communications. Can I just be clear: you could hear
15 what was being said by others but as far as you could
16 make out, they weren't hearing you?

17 A. I can't remember if I was carrying the radio that day,
18 but I do remember the last message we sent, no-one
19 replied to that message.

20 Q. Can you just help us a bit further: is that because
21 there was nothing coming through or because what was
22 coming through didn't relate to the message that you'd
23 sent?

24 A. I don't know. I don't know about that.

25 Q. Okay. You described very graphically how you went into

1 what you thought was a straightforward fire and when you
2 came out again it was -- I forget the words you used,
3 but it was something really perhaps quite extraordinary
4 that you saw.

5 We know that your BA was switched on at 16.35 and it
6 was switched off at 16.59, so I wonder if you could help
7 the jury by going through with me events that have been
8 recorded in a time plan for the jury to see what
9 developments there were. I appreciate you didn't know
10 about these things, because you've told us what you were
11 doing from the time that you switched on to when you
12 switched off. But if we could go in the jury bundle to
13 divider 12 and start at page 2.

14 THE CORONER: Do you have the jury bundle, Mr Sanchez?

15 A. Sorry?

16 THE CORONER: Mr Clark's just getting it for you. (Handed)

17 MR HENDY: I also wanted to pick up the numbers of London
18 Fire Brigade personnel, because in your evidence just
19 now you said that when you were fighting the fire that
20 meant that "there were four of us altogether on the 9th
21 floor". I want to just explore that in a moment.

22 Let's go to the fifth entry down, 16.23.57, E371
23 arrives. We know that had four London Fire Brigade
24 personnel on board.

25 THE CORONER: Sorry, do you have that, Mr Sanchez? It's on

1 page 2 of divider 12, and it's the fifth box down.

2 A. Okay, yeah.

3 MR HENDY: Yes? So E371 arrives, with four personnel on
4 board. Then a few entries further down, 16.26.16, E351
5 arrives, and that has five personnel on board, yes?
6 Then there's an entry which we think is wrongly timed,
7 but it doesn't matter for the moment. 16.26.22 -- but
8 we think it was earlier -- E372, Peckham pump reports,
9 and that had four personnel on board. Then at 16.27.14,
10 E352 reports in, and that had four firefighters on
11 board. So that's 17 by that stage.

12 If we go over the page to page 3, 16.29.29, the
13 second entry, we see that the aerial ladder platform
14 from Old Kent Road, your station, comes, and that has
15 two personnel on board. So there are 19 LFB people
16 there by then.

17 Let's just pass on to -- I think we can pick it
18 up -- the next time that the jury should have in mind is
19 16.35, which is when you switched on your BA kit.
20 That's not marked on here but it would be somewhere at
21 the bottom of page 3 if one was to mark it.

22 So now you're making your way to the fire on the 9th
23 floor, and if we go to page 6, we can see that at
24 16.38.33, a few seconds after, or half a minute or so
25 after you'd switched your -- sorry, three and a half

1 minutes after you switch your BA kit on, a command unit
2 reports in attendance with two LFB personnel. So now
3 there are 21 LFB personnel on the fire ground.

4 If we go to the next page, page 7, we can see that
5 at 16.38.56, E381 from New Cross is mobilised. I don't
6 know if that means that they've actually arrived or not,
7 but if they've arrived, that's a further five LFB
8 personnel, which would make 26 in total.

9 Then we can pass over the next photographs until we
10 get to page 9, where we can see that the fire that
11 you're fighting in the bottom floor -- this is at 16.40,
12 five minutes after you'd switched on your BA gear.
13 I don't think it matters, but you may have got to the
14 fire by then or you may have been very close to it. At
15 any rate, there's white vapour coming from that, which
16 we would suggest is probably steam from the Peckham crew
17 applying the hose to that. Would you think that's
18 right?

19 A. That's correct.

20 Q. You can see that the fire has gone to the upper floor of
21 that maisonette. We can see it raging behind the
22 balcony there, and we can also see the flat above that,
23 which we now know is flat 79. There's a better picture
24 of that at page 11.

25 We're now at 16.42, and we can see that the fire has

1 taken hold of flat 79 on the 11th floor. You, of
2 course, would have been completely unaware of that,
3 fighting in the lower flat; am I right?

4 A. That's correct.

5 Q. We can see that just a minute before that, at the top of
6 the page, 16.41, H242 from Brixton reports in with
7 a further four personnel --

8 THE CORONER: Mr Hendy, we have yet to have evidence as to
9 the number of firefighters on most of these engines.

10 MR HENDY: Well, madam, I was taking it from the material
11 that was placed before the jury at divider 8.

12 THE CORONER: I see. Very well.

13 MR HENDY: If I'm wrong, I'm sure I'll be corrected. So
14 16.42, the fire is -- would you say that's well
15 established on the 11th floor?

16 A. Well, it's difficult to say, only because you need to
17 see the smoke moving. You need to see how the building
18 breathe. I mean, it's an art. To read the smoke is
19 an art, so it's very difficult to say just by the
20 picture how developed was the fire.

21 Q. I see, understood.

22 If we go to page 12, the bottom entry there,
23 16.45.45, E331, the Southwark pump ladder reports in
24 attendance. Again, from the information given to the
25 jury, there's five LFB personnel on board, which would

1 make 36 in total at that stage.

2 At 16.46 on page 13, we can see the state of the
3 fire now on the 9th and the 11th floor, and another
4 picture at page 14 at 16.47, and then on page 15 at
5 16.58, we can see fires beginning on the 7th floor, and
6 by 16.49, on page 16, we can see that there's a fire on
7 the 7th and on the 5th floor and a jet that's been
8 directed to the 5th floor.

9 You're still fighting the fire at this stage inside
10 the flat 65 on the 9th floor, and you were relieved by
11 Mr Mechen and Mr Mason. We needn't go there, but we
12 know from the breathing apparatus records that Mr Mechen
13 switched on his BA gear at 16.47. So he would have
14 taken a few minutes, no doubt, would Mr Mason, to make
15 his way into flat 65 to take over from you, and then you
16 made your way out of the fire. You had to go right down
17 to the bottom and then back up to the 3rd floor before
18 you switched off at 16.59; is that right?

19 A. That's correct.

20 Q. In your statement, just going back a moment with that
21 context behind us, you said that when you went in first
22 to flat 65, "there were four of us altogether on the 9th
23 floor". But of course, we know that Mr Dennis was on
24 the bridgehead. Was he with anybody, do you recall, or
25 not?

1 A. I think there was somebody else, but I can't recall.

2 Q. You can't recall. We know that Mr Willett and
3 Mr Howling, who you mentioned in your statement, were on
4 the ground floor. Mr Willett was the first incident
5 commander and Mr Howling took over from him. So there
6 were seven, possibly eight in fact, committed to that
7 firefight when you went into that flat, right?

8 A. And someone was in charge of the lift.

9 Q. Someone was in charge of the lift, that's right. They
10 took you up?

11 A. Yeah, and that person stays there.

12 Q. Certainly. And we know that when Mr Mechen and Mr Mason
13 came, they were part of a four man crew, and Mr Clarke
14 and Mr Bennett too had been directed to the 9th floor,
15 not to fight the fire but to carry out search and rescue
16 on that floor.

17 Right, just to two more quite quick questions. You
18 wear BA for the second time, switching on at 18.15 that
19 day, and you're told to go to flat 75 on the 4th floor.

20 A. That's right.

21 Q. And you go up to the 4th floor with breaking-in gear but
22 your statement says:

23 "We couldn't access the floor because of the
24 security door and so went to the 5th floor."

25 Just explain to the jury why it was that you

1 couldn't access that security door.

2 A. I think it was like one of those key magnet that you've
3 got that opens the door and -- so we wanted to make sure
4 we break in the door that need to be break, and that --
5 I think at that time we realised that that wasn't the
6 floor, when we looked at the -- at the panels.

7 Q. Did you try the drop key or whatever keys you had with
8 you?

9 A. I don't recall that. But I will -- I will try the key
10 before I break a door, so -- I can't remember but that's
11 what I would do.

12 Q. Anyway, whatever it was, you felt that you couldn't pass
13 the security door, you say, so you went to the 5th floor
14 and you saw an information sign showing that flat 75 was
15 in fact on the 11th floor. That's when you realised
16 that you were six floors short?

17 A. That's right.

18 Q. And you relaid that information to control, the fact
19 that flat 75 was on the 11th floor. You turned left
20 into the corridor. Flat 75 was on the right-hand side.
21 That, I think, was on the north side of the building.
22 The fires that we've been looking at, if you still have
23 page 16 open --

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. -- we can see were on the south end of the building?

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. Did you by any chance look towards the south side of the
3 11th floor?

4 A. I did, yeah.

5 Q. What did you notice?

6 A. I didn't see any -- anything. You're always looking for
7 the conditions around you because you have to go back,
8 so you're always looking left and right, up and down,
9 and I didn't see anything that would cause any problem
10 for the people we rescued to go back the same way we
11 came up. So I didn't see anything --

12 Q. No hoses or firefighters then?

13 A. I can't remember now.

14 Q. Can't remember.

15 The final thing I wanted to ask you about was this:
16 Mr Atkins asked you whether, for example, you would know
17 where flat 40 was. If we just look at that sign that he
18 showed you. I think it's at tab 13 of the jury bundle
19 at page 8. It is in fact, unless you're
20 a mathematician, practically impossible to work out
21 which floor any flat is on. Can I suggest to you why
22 that is? It's because you would need to know that there
23 are 14 flats on each floor. So if somebody said to you:
24 "Where's flat 58?" you would have to divide 58 by 14 to
25 work out that it went five times, and then you'd have to

1 know that each floor was alternate, so rather than being
2 on the 5th floor, it would in fact be five floors up,
3 which is the 9th floor.

4 A. We do -- we do a visit to our grounds. So we visit
5 every building around, and Southwark is part of our
6 ground in Old Kent Road. So we know the layout of these
7 type of buildings. It's not the only building in
8 Old Kent Road area of Peckham. We know -- it's quite
9 clear if somebody says you need to go to flat number 3,
10 what it states on the sign is that if you want to go to
11 flat number 3, you go to the 1st floor, although --

12 THE CORONER: Mr Sanchez, I', going to stop you there,
13 because when you spoke to Mr Atkins right at the
14 beginning, you said you didn't know the building. We'll
15 talk to others about getting to know the building.

16 A. Okay.

17 MR HENDY: I think the short point I'm putting to you,
18 Mr Sanchez, is that unless you have this in tabular form
19 or some kind of diagram, it's impossible for
20 a firefighter to work out what floor 71 happens to be on
21 unless you have --

22 A. 71 is on the 11th floor.

23 Q. Well, you know now, but you wouldn't have known before.
24 I'm not trying to criticise you. I'm just saying it
25 made your task, you and other fire fighters, very

1 Q. You didn't. But you would have been expecting to have
2 been told it was moving?

3 A. That's right.

4 Q. Would you have expected the person sending that message
5 to have you acknowledge that message?

6 A. That's correct.

7 Q. Thank you.

8 THE CORONER: Miss Al Tai?

9 MS AL TAI: No thank you, madam.

10 THE CORONER: Mr Matthews.

11 Questions from MR MATTHEWS

12 MR MATTHEWS: Mr Sanchez, sorry to go back to something
13 you've already dealt with, but I just want to check
14 we're understanding what you're saying. Lakanal, this
15 building, is, as it were, on your patch of Old Kent Road
16 or not?

17 A. No, it wasn't. It's Peckham's ground.

18 Q. Right. But you said something about you're used to this
19 type of estate or this type of building?

20 A. We used to visit different type of buildings.

21 Q. Right.

22 A. And we are -- we've seen Southwark signs before and we
23 understand them.

24 Q. And that's what you meant about the sign that was up on
25 the screen?

1 A. Correct.

2 Q. By being familiar with Southwark buildings, you're used
3 to looking for that type of sign?

4 A. That's correct. It's quite self-explanatory, the sign.

5 Q. Thank you very much.

6 A. You're welcome.

7 MR COMPTON: No questions. Thank you.

8 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Walsh?

9 Questions by MR WALSH

10 MR WALSH: Can I just clarify that, just that last point
11 that Mr Matthews was asking you about. The sign, then,
12 on page 8, that sign is on the ground floor outside the
13 lift, as we've heard.

14 A. I can't recall where it was.

15 Q. Right. Well, if that's the sign we're talking about,
16 it's above the lift on the ground floor. I just want to
17 check whether there's any confusion about this or not.
18 I don't know, but you indicated, in answer to questions
19 from Mr Hendy, that you said in your statement that
20 you'd gone up to the 5th floor to go to a flat on the
21 11th floor, and realised that in fact it was on the 11th
22 floor because there was a sign on the way up. I'm going
23 to put this to you: I'll be corrected if I'm wrong but
24 I don't think there is a sign other than that one on the
25 way up, telling anybody where flats are on any floors

1 other than the floor that you happened to be on.

2 Now, when you answered questions from Mr Atkins
3 earlier on, he said, "Where did you get the information
4 from that allowed you to know that flat 71 was on the
5 11th floor?" And you said that was from this sign above
6 the lift?

7 A. From a sign that looks exactly the same.

8 Q. Right.

9 A. I don't know where it was in the building, but I
10 remember that because of that --

11 Q. It was a sign that looked like that that gave you that
12 information?

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. All right. That will do. Thank you very much.

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

17 Questions from the Jury

18 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you, madam coroner. I have
19 two questions. We heard at an earlier point -- it was
20 the gentleman who first came, telling us about how fires
21 work. We've heard at an earlier point that flashover is
22 when the compartment and contents all burst into flame
23 because it's gotten so hot. I was just wondering if
24 Firefighter Sanchez, when he was in flat 65 --
25 presumably that would have already occurred in bedroom 1

1 but I was wondering if you might be able to clarify if
2 flashover had already occurred in, for instance, bedroom
3 2 and upstairs?

4 A. Definitely not upstairs, and the bedroom was part of the
5 lower level, so probably was involved in the flashover,
6 or the flashover helped the bedroom to burn as well.
7 But definitely not in the upper level.

8 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay. Thank you. My other
9 question: given the low visibility interest, the smoke
10 when you were in the building, how did yourself,
11 I guess, rather than as a group -- how did you know
12 which door to break in? You mentioned that one of them
13 was burning, but having visited the site, it appeared to
14 us as though both the front door of the flats and the
15 safety door underneath the stairs are similar height, so
16 I was wondering how, as firefighters, you could tell the
17 two apart in heavy smoke?

18 A. They are the same height but they are completely
19 different doors. So one hasn't got anything to grab.
20 It hasn't got any key holes or handles or anything, so
21 it's just flat. It's a flat panel if you want to say,
22 right next to the wall.

23 And that wasn't my task. When I got there, they
24 already recognised the door that we had to go in, and
25 I can't remember if it had the number on the door or

1 not. I think it did, but I can't remember that.

2 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: But they are quite distinct?

3 Thank you very much.

4 A. Yeah, they are.

5 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Sanchez. Thank you very much

6 for coming and thank you for the evidence that you've

7 given. You're welcome to stay if you like but you're

8 free to go if you prefer.

9 A. Thank you very much.

10 (The witness withdrew)

11 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you. Mr Mason next? Thank you.

12 Would you like to come forward, Mr Mason.

13 MR HENDY: I notice that the time is 12.50. Of course we

14 can start Mr Mason's evidence now.

15 THE CORONER: I think we'll do that, yes. We'll have to

16 interrupt, I'm afraid.

17 PETER MASON (affirmed)

18 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Mason. Do sit down. Do help

19 yourself to a glass of water if you would like.

20 A. Thank you.

21 THE CORONER: You may have heard me say to others that you

22 need to keep close to the microphone in front of you,

23 please, so that your voice is amplified, and if you

24 could give your answers facing the jurors, that would

25 help them and also help you to say close to the

1 microphone.

2 Mr Atkins is going to ask questions on my behalf
3 initially and then there will be questions from others.

4 A. Okay.

5 Questions from MR ATKINS

6 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Can you please tell the court your full
7 name.

8 A. Peter Mark Mason.

9 Q. I'm going to ask you some questions about your knowledge
10 of Lakanal House and also what you did when you attended
11 the fire there on 3 July 2009. To start with, how long
12 have you worked as a firefighter please?

13 A. At the time of the incident or now?

14 Q. From now.

15 A. About nine years.

16 Q. How long have you been with the London Fire Brigade?

17 A. All that time, nine years.

18 Q. I take it from your uniform that you still work for the
19 London Fire Brigade?

20 A. That's right, yeah.

21 Q. Unless I say otherwise, the questions that I'm going to
22 ask you are all going to be about how things were either
23 before or on the day of the fire, rather than about
24 things that have happened since.

25 A. Okay.

1 Q. So is it right that at the time of the fire you were
2 a firefighter?

3 A. Yes, that's right, yeah.

4 Q. And you were stationed at the Old Kent Road?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Had you ever been to Lakanal House before 3 July 2009?

7 A. I believe I may have been there once for a person shut
8 in a lift, as it's not on Old Kent Road's fire ground,
9 but I don't think I've actually gone into the actual
10 building itself.

11 Q. So you had been there perhaps once for an incident which
12 wasn't a fire?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. And you think that you hadn't gone into the building?

15 A. Definitely not.

16 Q. Did you have any prior knowledge of the layout of the
17 building?

18 A. No.

19 Q. I'm going to ask you some questions about what you did
20 on the day, what your involvement was, and as we go
21 through, as with the other witnesses we've heard from
22 this morning, I may ask you questions about what you
23 learned about the layout of the building.

24 A. Okay.

25 Q. On the day, I think you were called out of the

1 Old Kent Road fire station --

2 A. That's correct, yeah.

3 Q. -- at about 4.21?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. And you travelled to Lakanal House on pump E352?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. In fact, I think you were driving?

8 A. That's correct, yes.

9 Q. Did you already know where Lakanal House was?

10 A. We'd visited a place called Sedgmoor -- a road called

11 Sedgmoor Place, I think it was, quite a few times,

12 because we'd gone to quite a few automatic fire alarms

13 there, so I was aware of the vicinity of where the

14 actual block was.

15 Q. So did you have any difficulty finding it?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Can you help us with who else was on the appliance with

18 you?

19 A. I believe it was Crew Manager John Clarke, myself

20 driving, Firefighter Tony Mechen and Firefighter Bobby

21 Bennett.

22 Q. What could you see in the distance as you approached the

23 building?

24 A. On the way there, there was quite a lot of smoke, on the

25 way there, and upon arrival what I could see quite

1 initially was fire coming -- punching out through the
2 9th floor windows.

3 Q. Are you able to tell us where you parked when you got to
4 Lakanal? If I put up the diagram we had earlier, just
5 to get your bearings. Lakanal is this block in the
6 middle where I've put the cursor.

7 A. I believe it was -- there's a pub on the north side.
8 Just outside the pub on the north side. That's right,
9 about there.

10 Q. And you parked outside that pub?

11 A. That's right, yeah.

12 Q. Did you arrive at Lakanal at about the same time as the
13 other Old Kent Road appliance?

14 A. I think we were about 10/15 seconds behind it, yeah.

15 Q. Did you travel there together in convoy?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. What was the first thing that you did when you arrived?

18 A. As soon as I got there -- as I was driving, I didn't
19 have my fire gear on, so as soon as we got there, we
20 realised it was a very serious fire in progress, so as
21 the driver, I had to go and get my fire gear on straight
22 away.

23 Q. Do you know what the other members of your crew were
24 doing while you were putting your fire gear on?

25 A. I believe they all went off to liaise with the officer

1 in charge of the incident at the time, which I think was
2 Barry Willett. It was Crew Manager Willett of Peckham.
3 I think it was in the process of getting transferred
4 over to our guv'nor, Watch Manager Howling.

5 Q. Is that what you would expect, that you would arrive at
6 the scene and somebody would then go and speak to the
7 officer who was then in charge of the whole operation?

8 A. Yeah, from there, they will gives us orders on what they
9 would want us to do.

10 Q. We've heard from the other witnesses this morning that
11 there was debris falling from the building to the
12 ground. Was that something you saw?

13 A. Yeah, I saw a lot of glass coming down to the ground,
14 which made it quite dangerous driving underneath where
15 the fire was.

16 Q. Could you see whether any of the material that was
17 falling was on fire?

18 A. I don't recall whether it was or wasn't. I can't
19 remember.

20 Q. Do you remember the cordon being set up?

21 A. I don't recall that, no.

22 Q. You weren't involved in that?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Once you had put your fire gear on, what was the next
25 thing? What were you asked to do?

1 A. I believe I was ordered by Crew Manager Clarke to put my
2 breathing apparatus set on and to go up -- make my way
3 up to the 7th floor where the bridgehead was. On my way
4 there, I grabbed two lengths of 45-millimetre hose under
5 each arm and made my way up to the 7th floor.

6 Q. So you were asked to go up to the bridgehead, you were
7 told that it was on the 7th floor --

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. -- and you were told to take some equipment with you?

10 A. I don't believe I was told to take equipment with me.
11 It's just something that you do kind of automatically.
12 It would be better -- whether or not they had it up
13 there or not, it was better to take something -- over --
14 overestimate than not have anything at all.

15 Q. Madam, that may be a convenient place to break.

16 THE CORONER: All right, thank you very much. We'll have
17 a break now for lunch. Can we continue at 2 o'clock
18 sharp by the clock in this room? Thank you very much.

19 Mr Mason, because you're part way through giving
20 your evidence, the rule is that you must not talk to
21 anyone at all about this case, so please make sure you
22 have lunch by yourself, and please be back here for
23 a 2 o'clock start.

24 A. Okay.

25 (12.57 pm)

1 (The short adjournment)

2 (2.00 pm)

3 THE CORONER: Do sit down, thank you. Yes, Mr Mason, you're

4 giving your evidence on oath.

5 A. Yeah.

6 THE CORONER: Yes, can we have the jury in please.

7 (In the presence of the Jury)

8 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you.

9 MR ATKINS: Mr Mason, before lunch you were telling us that

10 you and your crew had been called out from Old Kent Road

11 fire station, that you had arrived at Lakanal House and

12 you were telling us what you did when you first arrived

13 there.

14 A. That's correct, yeah.

15 Q. The last thing you were telling the jury before the

16 break for lunch was that you were instructed by Crew

17 Manager Clarke to go up to the bridgehead on the 7th

18 floor.

19 A. Yeah, that's right, yeah.

20 THE CORONER: Can I just stop you for a moment. Your

21 microphone's not switched on. There's a switch in the

22 centre. That's fine. If you could keep close to the

23 microphone.

24 A. Okay, yeah.

25 THE CORONER: Thank you. Yes.

1 MR ATKINS: Is it right that Crew Manager Clarke was one of
2 the firefighters who was with you on your appliance?
3 He'd come with you to the scene?
4 A. He was in charge of our appliance, yeah.
5 Q. He was in charge of your appliance?
6 A. That's right, yeah.
7 Q. And was the whole of your crew to go up to the
8 bridgehead, all four of you?
9 A. I'm aware that Crew Manager Clarke and Firefighter Bobby
10 Bennett had already gone. Myself and Firefighter Mechen
11 were to go up after we had gathered some equipment.
12 Q. So all four of you were going to go up to the
13 bridgehead. The two of them had gone ahead and you and
14 Mr Mechen were following on behind?
15 A. That's right, yeah.
16 Q. How did you and Mr Mechen go up to the 7th floor?
17 A. We got on the lift.
18 Q. Did you take the lift all the way up to the 7th floor?
19 A. Yes, we did, yeah.
20 Q. This picture that I've just put on the screen is
21 a picture of the lift lobby on the ground floor.
22 A. That's correct, yeah.
23 Q. So is it right that that's how you would have gone into
24 the building? You would have gone to the lift lobby,
25 got into the lift at the ground floor and gone up on the

1 7th?

2 A. That's right, yeah.

3 Q. Can you see in the background on the wall, between the

4 two lift shafts where I've put the cursor, there's

5 a sign?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. If I just go onto the next picture, we have a close-up

8 of that sign.

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Can you remember whether you noticed that sign when you

11 were going into the building?

12 A. I don't believe I did notice the sign, no.

13 Q. Had anybody given you any sort of briefing about the

14 layout of the building?

15 A. No, they hadn't, no.

16 Q. Did you see anybody else as you were getting into the

17 lift and going up to the 7th floor?

18 A. I can't remember if I did or didn't, no.

19 Q. When you arrived at the bridgehead then on the 7th

20 floor, can you remember who was in charge?

21 A. I remember there being an entry control point set up,

22 which I believe there was a firefighter and a crew

23 manager there.

24 Q. When you arrived, had your colleagues, Crew Manager

25 Clarke and Firefighter Bennett, already got there?

1 A. I can't quite remember now.

2 Q. Had they also used the lift or did they go up the
3 stairs?

4 A. I think they used the stairs, 'cos they weren't with us
5 in the lift.

6 Q. Did there come a time when the four of you from your
7 crew were together at the bridgehead?

8 A. I can't remember but there may well have been, yes.

9 Q. Had you already been told what you were going to be
10 asked to do, or was that something you were told when
11 you got to the bridgehead?

12 A. No, we got told that when we got to up to the 7th floor
13 bridgehead, what our briefing was going to be.

14 Q. What was the briefing going to go?

15 A. To go up and assist the firefighters on the 9th floor,
16 that were fighting the fire on the 9th floor.

17 Q. Were there already firefighters, so far as you knew, on
18 the 9th floor at the time you reached the bridgehead?

19 A. Yes, there was, yeah.

20 Q. In the area where the entry control point was on the 7th
21 floor, can you help us with how much smoke there was, if
22 any?

23 A. I can't remember at the time -- from now. I can't
24 remember, as it was such a long time ago. I don't
25 remember there being a massive amount of smoke in the

1 bridgehead floor.

2 Q. Was the bridgehead in the stairwell or in the lobby by
3 the lifts?

4 A. I don't remember where it was.

5 Q. Is it right that when you are ready to be committed to
6 fight the fire, you take out the key from your breathing
7 apparatus set and you hand it to the person who's
8 looking after the entry control board?

9 A. That's right, yeah.

10 Q. Could I just ask you to look at this page, please. Have
11 you ever seen it before?

12 A. I haven't, no.

13 Q. Just so that you understand what it is, it's a document
14 that summarised information which was downloaded from
15 the bodyguard equipment.

16 A. Okay.

17 Q. So it contains information about the times at which
18 firefighters started up their breathing apparatus
19 equipment and also the time when the equipment was shut
20 down. Can I ask you to look on the right-hand side. Do
21 you see there's a column for the wearer's name?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. And if we go two lines down there's a line in red and
24 your name is there.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Then if we follow across to the left, we see "data
2 overwritten".

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. Do we understand that you wore breathing apparatus on
5 the day?

6 A. I did, yes.

7 Q. You used it?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. And you removed your key from the equipment and handed
10 it to the officer with board?

11 A. Yeah, 100 per cent, yes.

12 Q. But it seems from this that if data was recorded, it's
13 no longer available because something else has been
14 recorded on top of it.

15 A. Okay.

16 Q. Did you, at the time you left the bridgehead to go up to
17 the 9th floor, go with Firefighter Mechen?

18 A. Yeah, as he's my BA partner, we both went together.

19 Q. So it was the two of you starting up at about the same
20 time?

21 A. That's right, yes.

22 Q. Could I ask you, then, just to look further down in that
23 column on the right-hand side. Mr Mechen is just by the
24 cursor. Do you see that?

25 A. Yeah, I see that, yes.

1 Q. If we follow across to the left, we can see that he
2 started to breathe air through the equipment at 16.47.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. So would it be fair to say that if that's when he
5 started, you started probably at about the same time?

6 A. Yeah, within seconds, yeah.

7 Q. Were either of you using radio equipment that was built
8 into the breathing apparatus set?

9 A. I didn't have any, but I was aware that
10 Firefighter Mechen had a radio set attached to his BA
11 equipment.

12 Q. Did you have any radio equipment?

13 A. No, I don't believe I did, no.

14 Q. Can you remember whether, in the time that you were in
15 the building, you had any difficulty, the pair of you,
16 with radio communications?

17 A. I remember at one point during the -- the incident that
18 Firefighter Mechen told me that his comms set was no
19 longer working.

20 Q. Perhaps as we go through, when we reach that part of
21 your account, let us know.

22 A. I can't quite remember when it was exactly but I know
23 it's at some point when we were in the flat on the 9th
24 floor fighting the fire.

25 Q. When you left the bridgehead, you went up to the 9th

1 floor by going up the stairs?

2 A. That's right, yeah.

3 Q. Did you pass anybody on the stairs?

4 A. I don't remember if I did or didn't.

5 Q. How did you find the flat that you were looking for?

6 A. Along the 9th floor, it was quite -- at the time,
7 I thought quite heavily smoke-logged. As we were going
8 up to assist the crews that were already fighting the
9 fire, we followed the hose up into the flat that the
10 hose had gone into.

11 Q. When you got to the flat where the fire was being
12 fought, can you remember how many other firefighters
13 were there?

14 A. I can't remember. I know obviously Old Kent Road's pump
15 ladder, Firefighter Sanchez and Firefighter Belmont were
16 there. I can't remember if Peckham's initial crew were
17 still there or they'd gone. I can't remember.

18 Q. At the time you arrived, is it right that firefighters
19 had already got inside the flat, they'd opened the door
20 and they were inside fighting the fire?

21 A. Yeah, they were inside the flat, yeah.

22 Q. The jury have heard already that the staircase in the
23 flat had been damaged by fire, and that it was necessary
24 to use a ladder to get up onto the upper floor.

25 A. That's right.

1 Q. Did you receive a message asking for a ladder? Were you
2 involved in that?

3 A. No, I wasn't involved in that, no.

4 Q. So far as you know, did Mr Mechen bring a ladder with
5 him?

6 A. I can't quite remember how the ladder got up there,
7 whether or not it was us or Peckham's initial crew.
8 Obviously I just remember there being a ladder at some
9 point in the early stages of us being in the flat.

10 Q. Was there a time you think when you and Mr Mechen were
11 fighting the fire alongside that crew from Peckham,
12 Mr Simons and Mr Fournier?

13 A. I don't remember fighting the fire with them, only with
14 the Old Kent Road pump ladder crew, firefighters Sanchez
15 and Belmont.

16 Q. So do we take it from that that the crew from Peckham
17 either turned around before you got there or that they
18 didn't stay very long once you had arrived?

19 A. More than likely, yes.

20 Q. When you first arrived, what was your role?

21 A. As a driver, it would have been to help out the driver
22 of the first -- first crews there to help them set into
23 the hydrant, set into the dry riser.

24 Q. I'm sorry, I haven't asked the question very clearly.
25 When you arrived at the fire flat --

1 A. Oh, sorry.

2 Q. So you were joining your colleagues, you said Mr Sanchez
3 and Mr Belmont. Who was doing what?

4 A. I can't remember who was doing what because it was quite
5 smokey in there, but they were in the process of
6 fighting the fire, I believe taking it in turns going up
7 and down the ladder. Myself and Firefighter Mechen --
8 I don't know if we had a 45-mil jet with us at that
9 time. We were on the ground floor of the flat
10 monitoring all the hot spots that kept on reigniting.

11 Q. So on the ground floor of the flat, can you give us
12 an impression of how much fire there was?

13 A. When we got there, there wasn't a massive amount of
14 fire. There was various hot spots where the fire had
15 been -- had been put out, but because it was still
16 extremely hot, reigniting, so there were multiple bits
17 of fire because the whole ground floor near enough was
18 damaged by fire.

19 Q. What were you using to fight that fire if your
20 colleagues had the hose at the top of the ladder?

21 A. I can't remember if we had a hose or not at the time,
22 other than their hose that they had. I can't remember.

23 Q. Is it right that a little later on your colleagues,
24 Mr Belmont and Mr Sanchez, were running low on air and
25 so they had to return to the entry control point?

1 A. That's right, yes.

2 Q. Did you and Mr Mechen then take over from them?

3 A. Yeah, we took over, because the fire was still -- on the
4 upper floor of the flat was still there, not as bad as
5 what it had been when we first got there, but there was
6 still -- there was still fire on that top floor of the
7 flat.

8 Q. If you hadn't been up the ladder to begin with, how were
9 you able to compare how it had been when you first
10 arrived to how it had been when you took over?

11 A. I think just -- I couldn't really put something on it,
12 really.

13 Q. Well, for example, could you feel a difference in
14 temperature, or were you hearing messages being passed
15 down?

16 A. It would probably link into both. It was obviously
17 extremely hot in the flat anyway, so I would imagine the
18 crew that were probably coming out, Old Kent Road's
19 crew, had said to us what had happened once -- when
20 they'd been up the ladder fighting the fire to what it
21 was like now.

22 Q. When you took over using the hose, you and Mr Mechen,
23 what was the fire like on the upper floor?

24 A. As far as I can remember, most of the fire had been put
25 out, but there still was -- there still was flames on

1 the floor -- on that floor.

2 Q. While you were fighting the fire, did you have any
3 contact with Crew Manager Clarke?

4 A. Throughout the job, when Firefighter Mechen had told me
5 that his comm set wasn't working, our only kind of
6 communications was Crew Manager Clarke, who came up at
7 one point whilst we were in the flat to say that he
8 needed assistance for someone that was stuck in the flat
9 on the 9th floor.

10 Q. Can I deal with those two points separately then,
11 please. You said Mr Mechen was saying that he was
12 having difficulties with communications?

13 A. That's right, yeah.

14 Q. Do you know what they were? I don't mean in a technical
15 sense, but what it was he was having difficulty doing?

16 A. As far as I was aware, that his -- when we checked in
17 at entry control, his comm set was working because you
18 do a test with the entry control officer to establish
19 that your comms is working at that time. It was
20 working, and when we were in the flat, for some
21 reason -- obviously I don't know -- the comm set no
22 longer worked.

23 Q. What did Mr Mechen do when he found that the comm set
24 didn't work properly?

25 A. I don't know what he done. I know that he informed me

1 to say that his comm set wasn't working.

2 Q. Did that prompt you to do anything at that stage?

3 A. I suppose in normal circumstances you would probably

4 look at exiting the flat because there'll be no -- no

5 established communications between you and the entry

6 control point, but I believe at the time we were quite

7 confident that we were -- obviously not in an safe

8 place, but we were more than competent to deal with what

9 was happening without keeping comms established.

10 Q. Moving on to the second point, you said that Crew

11 Manager Clarke asked for assistance to help somebody in

12 one of the flats?

13 A. That's right, yeah.

14 Q. And that that was a flat on the 9th floor?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Did either of you offer him assistance?

17 A. As far as I can remember, Crew Manager Clarke came up to

18 me and asked me for assistance to get to that flat to

19 help get the person out.

20 Q. And did you help him?

21 A. Yeah, and there I informed Firefighter Mechen that I was

22 going to leave him, went off with Crew Manager Clarke

23 and walked down the corridor. I don't recall what

24 number flat it was. Knocked on the door. No answer.

25 Managed to barge the door open, and upon doing that, saw

1 a lady at the top of the stairs on the telephone, and
2 then -- from then escorted her to safety.

3 Q. When Crew Manager Clarke came to speak to you to begin
4 with to say that he needed assistance, did you know how
5 he knew that there was somebody in the flat who needed
6 help?

7 A. He didn't say at the time. He said he needed help and
8 there wasn't time for me to question where he'd got the
9 information from, just he needed help and to go and help
10 him.

11 Q. Did he know which flat to go to?

12 A. Yes, he did, yeah.

13 Q. At the point that you went with Crew Manager Clarke, did
14 this leave Mr Mechen on his own?

15 A. It did, yes.

16 Q. Was that normal in the context of fighting a fire
17 wearing breathing apparatus?

18 A. In a -- in most circumstances, you never leave your BA
19 partner in the process of -- once you've checked in with
20 entry control, you stay together -- you're supposed to
21 stay together at all times, but at the time it was quite
22 exceptional circumstances that -- although it was
23 against protocol per se, it was the right thing to do to
24 leave him. We both obviously would have talked at the
25 time. He felt safe to be what he was doing, that I

1 could go and assist Crew Manager Clarke.

2 Q. Yes, I want to make it clear that I'm not criticising
3 you. We're just trying to understand whether what
4 happened was usual or not, and you're saying that
5 usually the two of you would stay together?

6 A. Yeah, usually you never -- you never leave your BA
7 partner.

8 Q. Had you been able to use the radio equipment to tell the
9 bridgehead that you were going to split up?

10 A. No, by that point the comms had already failed for
11 whatever reason.

12 Q. After you had found the lady who was in this other flat
13 on the 9th floor, what did you do next?

14 A. After escorting her to safety -- I can't remember at
15 what point I left her with Crew Manager Clarke -- I went
16 back to the flat on the 9th floor where we were fighting
17 the fire, went back to assist Firefighter Mechen with
18 what he was doing.

19 Q. Other than going into that lady's flat and coming out
20 again, had you left the corridor? Did you, for example,
21 walk down a few flights of stairs with her, or did you
22 stay on the 9th floor?

23 A. I'm pretty sure I stayed on the 9th floor, and I think
24 once we'd got past, I think, one of the doors I left her
25 with Crew Manager Clarke.

1 Q. When you rejoined Mr Mechen, did the two of you carry on
2 fighting the fire in flat 65?

3 A. That's right, yes.

4 Q. Was there a point when Mr Mechen's alarm went off on his
5 breathing apparatus equipment?

6 A. I believe at some point it did, yes.

7 Q. Can you explain to us why that would happen, what it is
8 that causes the alarm to go off?

9 A. When you've got your -- your bodyguard set -- when you
10 take out the tally it arms the set, and I think --
11 I can't remember the exact amount of seconds, but if
12 there's no movement within the actual bodyguard alarm,
13 it will go off into a pre-alarm and then a full alarm to
14 say that you effectively -- I think it's when -- if you
15 were to fall over at a job or something like that and
16 couldn't move your arms or anything like that, it will go
17 into alarm to tell others around you that you were in
18 distress.

19 Q. So if you were immobilised or trapped, the alarm would
20 sound if you don't move?

21 A. That's right, yeah.

22 Q. Do you know why it was that it sounded on this occasion?

23 A. If I can just elaborate on that. There's two types of
24 ways that it can go. You can also press a button to put
25 it straight away into alarm. I don't know what happened

1 with Firefighter Mechen, but for some reason, the alarm
2 went off. Whether it be manually or automatically,
3 I don't know.

4 Q. Can you remember whether the time when his alarm went
5 off was before Crew Manager Clarke had come to ask for
6 your help or afterwards?

7 A. I can't remember, but I believe it would have been
8 afterwards.

9 Q. What, if anything, did the two of you do about the alarm
10 having gone off?

11 A. I can't remember.

12 Q. Is it possible to turn the alarm off yourself? If the
13 alarm on your equipment is set off, can you turn that
14 off or do you have to --

15 A. You'd have to go back to the entry control point to
16 retrieve your tally and key and insert it back into the
17 actual bodyguard to silence it.

18 Q. So in this case that would have meant leaving the 9th
19 floor --

20 A. That's right.

21 Q. -- going back down to the bridgehead --

22 A. That's right.

23 Q. -- and, as you say, reinserting the key and then taking
24 it out again?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. If you don't do that, does the alarm continue to sound?

2 A. It just keeps going, yeah.

3 Q. Can you remember whether you did go down to get the
4 alarm turned off?

5 A. I can't -- can't remember.

6 Q. Could I ask you please to look at a statement that you
7 made. It's dated 12 July 2009, so a little more than
8 a week after the day of the fire. It's at page 142.
9 (Handed) Do you think your memory at the time you made
10 this statement on 12 July was clearer than it is now?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Do you recognise this as being the statement you made?

13 A. That's right, yes.

14 Q. Could I just ask you, please, to look at page 145, that
15 first big paragraph on the page. You say:

16 "I continued to hit the hot spots in the flat with
17 the hose to the upper floor. Firefighter Mechen was
18 trying to contact control and realised it wasn't
19 working. As he tried to do this, his alarm started to
20 go off on his breathing apparatus but I don't think he
21 could hear it."

22 Then you explain why the alarm sounds. Then a few
23 lines down you say you decided to make your way to the
24 bridgehead on the 7th floor to get the alarm switched
25 off and to receive further instructions?

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. Do you think that's right, looking back at the
3 statement?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Then you carry on by saying you arrived at the
6 bridgehead on the 7th floor and there was an officer
7 present, and he instructed you to go back up to the 9th
8 floor because there was a person who had been reported
9 as still being inside?

10 A. That's right, yeah.

11 Q. At that point, as you've explained, you didn't have
12 radio equipment --

13 A. No, I didn't, no.

14 Q. -- so that you could pass messages because it wasn't
15 working, and you were told that they would come up to
16 get you when they wanted you to come out?

17 A. That's right, yeah.

18 Q. Did you then go back up to the 9th floor to carry on
19 with the firefighting?

20 A. We did, and we searched all the flats that were on that
21 floor but there was no-one there.

22 Q. Can you just explain to us how you carried out that
23 search. What did you do?

24 A. Just going round to each flat, knocking on the door,
25 opening the letterbox, having a look into the flat.

1 Quite a lot of the flats there were quite clear of
2 smoke, so if there was no answer, it wasn't like someone
3 was in a dangerous environment. It was quite
4 smoke-free, so if no-one had answered the door and once
5 we looked through the letterbox there was no signs of
6 smoke, we were happy that if there was someone in there,
7 they could have answered the door, and we went through
8 all the flats.

9 Q. Sorry, I should have asked: are these the flats that
10 were on the same side as the fire was or on the opposite
11 side?

12 A. On the same side.

13 Q. So you were knocking on the doors and looking through
14 the letterboxes of the flats that were on the same side
15 as the fire?

16 A. That's right.

17 Q. And there was nobody there so far as you could see?

18 A. No.

19 Q. I think eventually there was a point where you and
20 Mr Mechen found that you were a little low on air and
21 that it was time to turn around?

22 A. That's right.

23 Q. If I could just take you back to this table. We know
24 there's no data available for you, but if we look down
25 again to Mr Mechen, we can see that he is recorded as

1 having turned off his equipment at 5.02.

2 A. Okay.

3 Q. Can you please explain to the jury what it was like

4 fighting the fire in those conditions?

5 A. It was very hard indeed because it was quite -- the fire

6 itself, although it was not as serious when we got

7 there, the heat was still intense and there was quite

8 a lot of smoke, so it made it quite a difficult

9 environment to work in.

10 Q. When you left the 9th floor, did you go back down to the

11 7th floor?

12 A. I can't remember at the time whether or not the

13 bridgehead had moved by then or not.

14 Q. Had you been told that the bridgehead was moving, or was

15 that something that you discovered for yourself later

16 on?

17 A. I can't remember.

18 Q. Did you, at any rate, track down the entry control point

19 so that you could retrieve your tallies from the entry

20 control board?

21 A. We did.

22 Q. Was there any debrief at the entry control point?

23 A. As a standard procedure we would have debriefed with

24 someone, whether an officer within the entry control

25 board or an officer nearby, what we'd done, what the

1 environment was like on the 9th floor, what we'd found
2 and what we'd seen et cetera.

3 Q. When you were fighting the fire at the top of the
4 ladder, were you able to see, on both sides of you, what
5 was in the flat?

6 A. Yes, I think I could, yeah, although the flat was --
7 that top part of the flat was quite devastated by the
8 fire, so in terms of what I could have see, it was just
9 basically all burnt out.

10 Q. Can you remember whether you could see to the back wall
11 on both sides?

12 A. I can't remember.

13 Q. Do you think you realised at that time that on the upper
14 floor the flats touched both sides of the building, the
15 east and the west side?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Can you remember whether the layout of the building was
18 any part of the discussion you had with the officer when
19 you went back out through the entry control point?

20 A. We would have debriefed in terms of what we had done
21 within the flat and where things were for us to do it,
22 things like the staircase and stuff like that, where the
23 ladder was, where the staircase was, just to give
24 a brief outline of how the flat was laid out.

25 Q. Once you had left the building, was there any time

1 during the rest of the day where somebody came to speak
2 to you about what you knew about the layout of the
3 building or anything you had found out when you had been
4 inside?

5 A. I don't believe so.

6 Q. Once you had come out of the building, were you able to
7 see how the fire had developed?

8 A. Yes. All the time that we were in the building, as far
9 as me personally was aware, the fire was only on the 9th
10 floor, so when we come out from the building it was
11 quite a shock that the fire had spread to what other
12 floors it had spread to.

13 Q. Which floors could you see it had spread to?

14 A. Because I was only looking from the outside -- I didn't
15 stand around and study it -- it just looked like the
16 fire had obviously spread up and down, from above the
17 9th floor and below the 9th floor.

18 Q. And that struck you as being something that was
19 surprising?

20 A. Very surprising, yeah.

21 Q. In your statement as well you mentioned that you saw
22 firefighters who were wearing the extended duration
23 breathing apparatus?

24 A. That's right, yeah.

25 Q. And that was something which pointed out to you that it

1 was obviously a serious incident --

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. -- if they had been brought in?

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. After you had come out of the building, I think it's

6 right that you made yourself available to carry out any

7 tasks that were needed?

8 A. That's right, yeah.

9 Q. To begin with, you went and collected some water for

10 other firefighters who needed it after having been in

11 the building?

12 A. That's right. I believe I did a fire ground A test and

13 then made myself available for whatever needed to be

14 done.

15 Q. A fire ground A test, that meant that you were ready to

16 be sent back into the building if that was necessary?

17 A. That's right, yeah.

18 Q. You were asked to set up a ground monitor, is that

19 right, with Mr Mechen?

20 A. Yeah, as far as I'm aware, the ground monitor was

21 already in the process of being set up and it was for us

22 to assist and help in getting that set up and working.

23 Q. Can you just explain to us what a ground monitor is.

24 A. A ground monitor is -- instead of firefighters holding

25 onto a branch, a ground monitor is something that is set

1 up and put on the ground way down that can project
2 water, as far as I know, further than what a branch
3 could with firefighters holding a branch, with the aim
4 that -- the fire was then on the 5th and 7th floors,
5 I believe -- to try and attack that fire from the ground
6 floor.

7 Q. So a more effective way of firing a jet of water from
8 ground floor level outside the building to floors higher
9 up the building?

10 A. That's right, yeah.

11 Q. As well as that, in your statement you mention that you
12 were involved in putting out a small fire at ground
13 level. Some bushes, I think, had caught fire and you
14 were involved in putting that out?

15 A. I don't remember, but most probably, yeah.

16 Q. And you were available to be sent back into the
17 building, but in the event nobody asked you to go back
18 into the building?

19 A. I was available and I remember putting my BA set on
20 again, not actually under air with the mask on, and
21 going to a holding area, being basically made available
22 if I needed to go up in BA again.

23 Q. What was the holding area?

24 A. It was where -- obviously things had progressed by the
25 time I got there. It was where a lot of firefighters,

1 standard duration BA and extended duration BA, all the
2 wearers were waiting there to be called into going up
3 into the flats, so it was just a kind of holding area
4 with everyone ready to go.

5 Q. I've just put on the screen a diagram which shows the
6 west side of Lakanal House, and as you can see we have
7 the numbers that tell you where the different flats are.

8 A. Okay.

9 Q. So for example, number 65 is where the cursor is. If
10 you look at the building from the outside, you have
11 a view which is much more like that, don't you? So all
12 of the flats are very similar and of course they don't
13 have numbers on to say which flat is which.

14 A. That's right.

15 Q. Could you help us with this: to what extent during the
16 day did you build up a picture in your mind of which
17 flats were where, like the one we looked at a moment
18 ago?

19 A. Because of the nature of what was happening, you don't
20 really get a chance to stand there and -- as
21 a firefighter, you don't get a chance to stand and have
22 a look and see where things were and what was happening.
23 Obviously you can see -- I think that's more the aim of
24 officers being on the ground, so they can manage and see
25 what's happening.

1 Obviously when we went up initially the fire was
2 only on the 9th floor and when we came back down and
3 looked up from the building to set up the ground
4 monitor, it was obvious then that somehow it had spread.

5 Q. You, of course, only went into the building on one
6 occasion. You went to the flat which you already knew
7 was the flat which was on fire?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. And then you didn't have cause to go into the building
10 again?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Just one final question then, please: what single
13 additional thing do you think would have helped you on
14 the day and made your life easier?

15 A. As already mentioned, this high rise kit that you can
16 have in a bag that was trialled. It may well have
17 assisted getting things to work quickly, although in my
18 personal opinion, things were quite quickly established
19 on the day anyway, but to have something like that
20 instead of a lot of firefighters carrying up gear -- one
21 bag full of gear would free up firefighters to do other
22 jobs in my belief.

23 Q. Thank you. Those are my questions. If you would be
24 good enough to wait there, others may have some.

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Questions from MR HENDY

MR HENDY: Mr Mason, my name's Hendy. I represent three of the bereaved families. Just a few very brief questions for you. I wonder if we could put on the screen page 143 of your witness statement. I'm sorry, let's just remind ourselves what this document is. Can we look at 142, first of all.

This is a witness statement you made on 12 July 2009, so just over a week after the fire; correct?

A. That's right, yeah.

Q. Do you remember making this witness statement?

A. Yes, I do, yeah.

Q. Is it true and accurate to the best of your knowledge and belief?

A. It is, yeah.

Q. Can we look at 143, please. If we read together the second and third paragraphs. It says:

"Upon arrival, the rest of the crew went to see the officer in charge. I think this was a Peckham officer. I used this as an opportunity to put on my fire gear. The rest of the crew returned in a matter of minutes. As I started on my way to them, I was told that our orders were to put on our breathing apparatus and go to the 9th floor to assist other firefighters.

1 "We went back to the pump to collect our gear and
2 started to make our way to the block of flats. I could
3 see smoke and flames coming from the 9th floor on the
4 west face of the block. There was also debris and
5 glass..."

6 And so forth. Do you remember who it was that told
7 you that your orders were to go to the 9th floor?

8 A. I believe it was Crew Manager Clarke that gave us the
9 initial orders that we're going to have to put on BA and
10 the fire was already on the 9th floor, so we would be
11 going to the 9th floor to fight the fire on the 9th
12 floor.

13 Q. And when you saw smoke and flames coming from the 9th
14 floor, you assumed that that was the fire you were going
15 to fight?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. And indeed it was?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. And that's exactly what you did. You went to the 9th
20 floor in order to fight the fire and there you fought
21 it?

22 A. That's right, yeah.

23 Q. And once your time had come with the BA set you then
24 came out?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. If you'd been asked also to go to the 7th floor, or the
2 11th floor, no doubt you'd have recorded that in your
3 statement?

4 A. Of course, yeah.

5 Q. The second matter I wanted quickly to raise with you was
6 this. If you could look at page 145, please.

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. In the first full statement that says "I continued to
9 hit hot spots" and so on, you say Firefighter Mechen was
10 trying to contact control and realised it wasn't
11 working, and you explain how the BA communication system
12 wasn't working.

13 A. That's right.

14 Q. But right at the end of that paragraph, you say this:
15 "We were told that they would come up to get us when
16 they wanted us ..."

17 That's from the bridgehead:
18 "... to come out as we had no radio contact."

19 I understand obviously you had no radio contact
20 through Firefighter Mechen's BA communication system.
21 What about your personal radios? Were they not working
22 either?

23 A. I can't remember if I had my radio on -- on my tunic or
24 not. If I did, it may well have been on a different
25 channel to the BA channel, number 6, therefore we

1 wouldn't have had that information. I can't quite
2 remember.

3 Q. So would the system be -- the protocol -- that as long
4 as one of the pair of BA crew have the BA radio
5 communications in their face mask, the two of you
6 wouldn't trouble to put your personal radios on
7 channel 6, which, I think, is the BA frequency?

8 A. Yes, if it's already established that one of us has
9 already got comms then --

10 Q. You'd waste no further time and get on with the job?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Then I wanted to ask you about the last paragraph on
13 that page. You're talking about the ground monitor that
14 you set up. You explained that, and in the third line
15 of the last paragraph you say:

16 "This is a jet which was being used to spray water
17 at the 9th and 11th floor. The fire had reignited
18 there. By this time I noticed a lot more people and
19 pumps arrived. I could see that the 11th floor was also
20 now alight."

21 Water comes from a 70-millimetre hose to the ground
22 monitor?

23 A. That's right, yeah.

24 Q. You could hit the 9th and 11th floor, but on a windy day
25 such as this, it was variable whether you could maintain

1 the jet on the particular place you were aiming at?

2 A. The best that we could get out the jet was on the 5th
3 and 7th floor. It was struggling to get to the 9th and
4 the 11th.

5 Q. Right. When you were hitting the 7th and the 5th floor,
6 did you know whether any firefighters were fighting
7 those fires from the inside?

8 A. Sorry, say again?

9 Q. When you were with the ground monitor, aiming at the 7th
10 and/or the 5th floor, did you know whether or not there
11 were firefighters within using their hoses to attack?

12 A. On the 5th and 7th floor?

13 Q. Yes.

14 A. I didn't know.

15 Q. Presumably you have to be a bit more careful if there
16 are firefighters inside, but it's still possible to
17 assist them by striking from the outside. Would that be
18 right?

19 A. Yes, yes.

20 Q. The final matter I wanted to ask you about was this: on
21 page 146, you took readings with a thermal imaging
22 camera to find out what the temperatures were on the
23 11th and 9th floor, and you reported your findings to
24 Station Manager Cartwright. Then you were told to put
25 on your breathing apparatus and report to the east side

1 of the building, and you noticed then that the aerial
2 ladder platform was in place at the north east corner of
3 the block. We'll hear more about that, but when you
4 were there, did you notice whether or not it was in
5 action or simply that the appliance was in position?

6 A. I believe they were in the process of putting it into
7 position and getting it to work.

8 Q. Did you notice at any time the aerial ladder platform on
9 the west side of the block?

10 A. No.

11 Q. I think you left that fire ground ultimately about
12 8 o'clock?

13 A. Around that time, yes.

14 Q. Perhaps you hadn't gone round to the west side for the
15 latter part of your time there?

16 A. I can't recall.

17 Q. Okay. I won't press you. Thank you very much indeed.

18 A. Thank you.

19 MR DOWDEN: No thank you.

20 MS AL TAI: No thank you, madam.

21 THE CORONER: Mr Walsh.

22 MR WALSH: Thank you very much.

23 Questions from MR WALSH

24 MR WALSH: Just picking up a theme of questions which

25 Mr Hendy was just asking you, Mr Mason, he reminded you

1 that in your statement you had said -- and indeed you
2 said so today -- that when you went back down to the
3 bridgehead, to the 7th floor from the 9th floor, you
4 were ordered to go back to the 9th floor, as we've
5 heard --

6 A. That's right, yeah.

7 Q. -- to search and rescue. You were told that they would
8 come to get you when they wanted you because your radios
9 weren't working?

10 A. That's right, yeah.

11 Q. So am I right then in understanding that it was possible
12 that neither of your radios were working, either the
13 BA comm or personal radio?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. But you were prepared nonetheless to go back upstairs
16 for the purposes of search and rescue?

17 A. Yeah. Just because of the fact we didn't have comms
18 didn't for myself seem a good enough reason not to go
19 back up.

20 Q. No, on the basis, of course, that someone would get you
21 or you would come yourself if you ran out of air?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Then a little bit later -- you needn't perhaps look at
24 it, but there's a paragraph in between the end of that
25 paragraph and the beginning of the next, which says:

1 "Our air began to run low ..."

2 A. That's right.

3 Q. "... and the crew manager from the entry control came up

4 and told us to come out, as the bridgehead had been

5 moved to the ground floor."

6 A. That's right, yeah.

7 Q. So somebody did in fact come up, tell you the bridgehead

8 had been moved, so you knew, and therefore you needed to

9 go down?

10 A. We were told to come out, yeah.

11 Q. All right. I said one issue, but it's just occurred to

12 me: in relation to the monitor that you were using

13 downstairs, that's already been described by Mr Hendy

14 effectively as a piece of artillery.

15 A. That's right, yeah.

16 Q. Standing on legs, 70-millimetre hose --

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. -- which throws out water at a tremendous capacity?

19 A. That's right, yeah.

20 Q. Now, obviously you can't use that sort of attack on

21 a fire if there are firefighters inside?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Just explain, just in case we're assuming that everybody

24 knows why, why not?

25 A. If you start applying water to the flats that are

1 already contained with fire, it can prove to put
2 firefighters that are fighting the fire in that flat in
3 some sort of risk, due to the steam coming off of the --
4 from the water being applied to the fire and steam
5 coming off. It's basically something that we wouldn't
6 normally really do.

7 Q. No, and if you aim a monitor, a 70-millimetre hose, at
8 full pressure through a window, will it knock a person
9 over?

10 A. I would imagine so, yes.

11 Q. Yes. So if there are firefighters inside, or there may
12 be firefighters inside, fighting the fire from the
13 inside, that's one of the reasons why you don't use it
14 to attack in that way?

15 A. That's right.

16 Q. What about if there are residents potentially in
17 a building? What's the position then?

18 A. Sorry, I don't quite understand what you mean.

19 Q. What's the impact of recognising that there may be
20 residents inside a building upon the way in which you
21 use a monitor to aim water at a building?

22 A. What, the impact on the people --

23 Q. Yes, do you have to be concerned about the fact that
24 there are residents inside the flats?

25 A. Of course, yeah.

1 Q. Right. Okay, thank you very much.

2 THE CORONER: Members of the jury?

3 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: No, thank you.

4 THE CORONER: Mr Mason, thank you very much for coming.

5 Thank you very much for the help that you've given us.

6 A. Thank you.

7 THE CORONER: You're welcome to stay if you would like but

8 you're free to go if you'd prefer. Thank you.

9 (The witness withdrew)

10 THE CORONER: I think we're going to ask Mr Udi to give

11 evidence next; is that right?

12 MR ATKINS: Madam, yes.

13 THE CORONER: Yes. I think it's going to be helpful if we

14 have a very short break before he begins. How long do

15 we need? About five minutes?

16 MR ATKINS: Yes, please.

17 THE CORONER: All right. It's 3.45 now. If we could come

18 back in five minutes by that clock.

19 Members of the jury, just a short break now, so if

20 you want to leave your papers here for now that will be

21 fine.

22 (2.47 pm)

23 (A short break)

24 (2.53 pm)

25 THE CORONER: Yes, can we ask the jury to come back in,

1 please. Mr Udi, do sit down for a minute.

2 (In the presence of the Jury)

3 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you.

4 KELVIN UDI (sworn)

5 THE CORONER: Mr Udi, thank you very much. Do sit down.

6 Mr Udi, let me begin with an apology. I know that you
7 came along to court to give evidence last week and we
8 ran over and we didn't have time to get to your
9 evidence, and I'm extremely sorry about that. Thank you
10 very much for coming today. Thank you.

11 You'll see that there's a microphone switched on in
12 front of you. If you could speak quite close to the
13 microphone, please, that would be helpful. That's
14 lovely, thank you.

15 A. Is that all right?

16 THE CORONER: Yes, that's excellent. It might help if, when
17 you're answering your questions, you look ahead at the
18 jurors because that will help you to keep lined up with
19 the microphone.

20 A. Okay.

21 THE CORONER: If you'd like to help yourself to a glass of
22 water, you're very welcome. Mr Atkins, who's standing,
23 is going to ask questions on my behalf and then there'll
24 be other questions from the rest of the room. All
25 right?

1 A. Okay.

2 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

3 Questions from MR ATKINS

4 MR ATKINS: Can you please tell the court your full name.

5 A. My name is Kelvin Udi.

6 Q. Mr Udi, what I'm going to do is to ask you some
7 questions first of all about what you knew about the
8 layout of Lakanal House -- that is the building -- and
9 then secondly about the events of 3 July 2009. So we'll
10 deal with this in those two sections.

11 You're one of about ten former residents of Lakanal
12 who are going to be giving evidence to the inquests, and
13 we're asking each of you essentially the same set of
14 questions about what you knew about the layout of the
15 building and about fire safety advice that may have been
16 given to you. The idea of it is to build up a picture
17 of what the residents of Lakanal House knew. So at this
18 stage, I am not asking you about what happened on the
19 day of the fire; I'm asking you more generally about
20 what your knowledge was of the building before the fire.

21 Could I begin then, please, by asking you about fire
22 safety advice. What I'm going to do is to show you two
23 documents, and what we would like to know in the case of
24 each document is whether, to the best of your
25 recollection, you have ever seen them before, whether

1 you recognise them. The first document is at page 1050
2 in file 3 of the advocates' bundle. Mr Clark is just
3 going to hand it to you now. (Handed)

4 It's a four-page document prepared by the London
5 Fire Brigade. If you would just take your time and
6 look, please, from page 1050 to 1053. Can you tell us,
7 having have a chance to look at it, is that a document
8 you've seen before?

9 A. No.

10 Q. Could I ask you then, please, just to turn on to
11 page 1054 in the same bundle. It's a document which is
12 two pages long, and it's the same question. Just have
13 a look at it, take your time, and then tell us whether
14 you think you've ever seen that document before.

15 A. No.

16 Q. Have you ever, so far as you can remember, looked at the
17 Fire Brigade's website about fire safety?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Can you recall whether, when you were living at Lakanal
20 House, you ever received what's called a home fire
21 safety visit? That is when a firefighter comes to your
22 flat to give you advice about fire safety.

23 A. No.

24 Q. Can I please show you just one more document, then,
25 page 1068. If you look in the bottom right-hand corner

1 of that page, can you see a little number 27? There's
2 a number 9 in brackets in the bottom right-hand corner,
3 and then, just a little bit to the left of that, is the
4 number 27.

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. So you can see that's page 27 of a longer document, and
7 what we've done is we've lifted three pages of that
8 document out and put them in this bundle. You have them
9 at pages 1068 to 1070. Again, please, could you just
10 look at those pages and tell us whether you think you've
11 ever seen that document before.

12 A. No, but I do remember seeing something about the smoke
13 alarm. That was the only thing I remember, like
14 a little leaflet, something -- something on a leaflet
15 that was passed through our doors and it said we should
16 always have a -- make sure that our smoke alarms were
17 working. I think that's the only thing I remember.
18 I think that was in a council booklet, not in the fire
19 safety. It just tells you how to live in -- because my
20 mum had a book which says, you know, "Southwark
21 council". You know, there's a booklet, when you get
22 into an apartment. It tells you about the stuff you can
23 do in then apartment. I think that's the only thing we
24 received, but nothing about fire safety.

25 THE CORONER: Mr Udi, when you're talking, you're talking

1 away from the microphone and we can't hear you, so just
2 make sure that you do speak into the microphone, please.

3 A. Okay. Do I have to say that again?

4 THE CORONER: No, that's fine, thank you.

5 MR ATKINS: Just on that point, did you have a smoke alarm
6 in your flat?

7 A. Yes, we did.

8 Q. If I could move on then, please, to your knowledge of
9 the layout of the building. Is it right that at the
10 time of the fire you were living in flat 86?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. And that was on the top level of the flats?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. I think it was right at one end of the building, wasn't
15 it?

16 A. Yeah. It was the last flat in the building.

17 Q. The last flat on the top floor at one end?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. I've put a diagram on the screen. Do you see we have
20 the floor numbers on the right-hand side, going up? If
21 we go up to the 13th floor, we have flat number 86 there
22 on the 13th floor, right at the south end.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Did you know at the time, without looking at that
25 diagram, how many flats there were in total?

1 A. No.

2 Q. Did you have a rough sense of how many there were?

3 There were obviously at least 86.

4 A. I didn't know it was that much. I just thought, you

5 know, 13 floors. I knew there were loads of flats --

6 I knew there were loads of flats but I never knew how

7 many, like, it was just, like all in one place.

8 Q. Did you know whether the flats on the inside were all

9 the same or not?

10 A. I had -- I had, like, a little idea that, you know, the

11 planning of the house might have to be different due to

12 the structure of the building, so -- that's just what

13 I thought.

14 Q. Then, thinking about your flat, if we wanted to go your

15 flat -- if we imagine going up in the lift to the 13th

16 floor, you would then come out of the lobby, wouldn't

17 you, through a door into the corridor?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Then you'd walk along the corridor and there'd be

20 a front door --

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. -- into the flat. Is it right that on the lower floor

23 of the flat there were two bedrooms? Do you remember

24 that?

25 A. Yes, there's two bedrooms, yeah.

1 Q. Two bedrooms. So if I just ask you to look at this
2 picture, which you probably haven't seen before. Do you
3 see we've got the central corridor running in between,
4 first of all, two bedrooms on the east side of the
5 building and two bedrooms on the west side? I think in
6 your flat, the bedroom windows faced out east towards
7 the other block called Marie Curie?

8 A. Yeah, I guess so.

9 Q. Can you remember which side of the block your flat
10 faced?

11 A. I think mine -- mine was on the east. Mine was on the
12 east, yeah.

13 Q. Then, thinking about the upper floor, do you remember
14 that you would go up the stairs and then there was
15 a kitchen at one end and a lounge at the other?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. And the kitchen would be above the bedrooms and the
18 lounge was on the other side. Is that how you remember
19 it?

20 A. Yes. Yeah, that's the layout.

21 Q. Do we take it that you were aware that there was
22 a balcony on both sides, on the kitchen side and on the
23 lounge side?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Had you seen on the balconies that there were doors at

1 one end? I'll show you the sort of thing I have in
2 mind. Can you see that this is a view along one of the
3 balconies and that there's a door at the end there with
4 a green sign?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. If I just show you the next pictures, which is
7 a close-up. At the time, had you seen doors like that?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Did you know where those doors went?

10 A. Not really.

11 Q. Had you ever been through one?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Did you know what the purpose of those doors was?

14 A. Yes. In case of fire, in case of a fire.

15 Q. Thank you for that. Could we move on then, please, to
16 the question of what happened on the day of the fire.
17 Is it right that on that afternoon you were at home with
18 your younger brother?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Who I think at that time was 14?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. At one point in the afternoon, he came to you and said
23 that he could smell that something was burning?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. And as a result of that, the two of you went upstairs in

1 the flat to have a look to see if you could find out
2 what it was?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. But you found that there wasn't anything in the flat
5 itself which was burning?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. After that, you went out onto the balcony of your flat?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Was that on the lounge side, so in other words the side
10 which wasn't where the bedrooms were?

11 A. We went through the kitchen one. The lounge one ...

12 Q. Can you remember what you saw when you went out onto the
13 balcony?

14 A. We just saw, like, loads of smoke just coming up from
15 the building. Like loads.

16 Q. Where was it in relation to you?

17 A. I think the first -- the first view we looked at was
18 through the -- the back, which was from the kitchen, the
19 kitchen area, and after that we didn't see -- we just
20 saw, like, a bit of smoke, and then we went outside,
21 downstairs. We went outside, and when we opened the
22 door we saw, like, a really thick black smoke and just
23 like -- (Inaudible) corridors, or ...

24 Q. How long do you think it was between you going out on
25 the balcony and seeing the smoke, outside the building,

1 and then going out through your front door into the
2 corridor?

3 A. A few minutes? Maybe -- we tried, like -- we was
4 looking through the -- we was looking through the --
5 like, you know the back area, which was the kitchen
6 because we had to go upstairs first to check if anything
7 was burning on the kitchen, because we could smell,
8 like, wires and loads of stuff, so then we went through
9 the balcony and the kitchen area and we looked through.
10 We saw, like -- we saw a bit of smoke. Didn't see the
11 whole fire; just, like, white smoke, and then we was,
12 like, a bit curious, like: what's going on? So we went
13 out to, like, the main door that goes into our house and
14 then we saw really thick black smoke just oozing out
15 into, like, our building, like. It was coming, like --
16 you could see it coming slowly from door to door.

17 Q. So by the time you had got to the front door of your
18 flat to go out into the corridor, already there was
19 quite thick smoke outside your front door?

20 A. Yeah, very, very thick black smoke, yeah.

21 Q. What was the visibility like? For example, could you
22 see from your flat's front door, which we know was at
23 the end of the corridor, down to the central stairwell?

24 A. No, it was covered with thick black smoke. Couldn't see
25 nothing.

1 Q. Having seen the smoke and that there was a lot of smoke
2 in the corridor, what did you decide to do?

3 A. I just -- the first -- the first idea was just to run
4 down. So I think what we did was just -- I just got my
5 shoes on. I can't remember -- I think -- yeah, I think
6 I was barefoot. Like, we was not thinking about
7 anything. We were just, like: we need to get out of
8 here as soon as possible, so I just got my little
9 brother and we decided to run down the stairs, 'cos you
10 know with the -- the lifts, it's not good to take --
11 I remember somebody said it's not good to take the lift
12 during incidents like this, so ...

13 Q. The decision to leave, was that a decision that you made
14 very quickly?

15 A. Yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely, because the smoke was just
16 coming very, very hard, like, you see -- when it goes
17 past a door you can't really see the door anymore, so it
18 was, like, coming really slowly to the end of my
19 building. So we just had to run. We just knew that it
20 was something really serious, so we ran downstairs.

21 Q. When you went out into the corridor outside your flat on
22 the 13th floor, did you see anybody else there?

23 A. To be honest, it was, like -- no, not a lot of people.
24 I didn't see a lot of people there. That's what -- I
25 was like -- we did try to -- on our way downstairs, we

1 was knocking on people's doors to come out but I think
2 they were not in. But we didn't see a lot of people --
3 yeah.

4 Q. You made a statement back on 14 July 2009, so in other
5 words, just under two weeks after the day of the fire.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. Do you think at the time you made that statement your
8 memory of what happened was clearer than it is now?

9 A. Yes, yes.

10 Q. Mr Clark, could you please show Mr Udi a copy of his
11 statement. It's at page 69. (Handed)

12 Mr Udi, first of all, could I just ask you to look
13 at that page. Is that the statement that you made?

14 THE CORONER: Do you recognise that, Mr Udi?

15 A. Yes, yes.

16 THE CORONER: Thank you.

17 MR ATKINS: Can we please then turn one page further on to
18 page 70. Mr Udi, do you see in the second paragraph on
19 that page you explain that you opened your front door
20 and you saw that the corridor was filling up quickly
21 with smoke. Then a little further on than that, you say
22 you ran with your brother down towards the stairs and
23 remember that you saw an African lady with a baby in her
24 arms and another young child with her.

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Do you remember meeting her and her children in the
2 corridor?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. You say that she was on the phone:

5 "She was standing in the doorway to the flat nearest
6 the stairs on our side of the block. She was probably
7 in her early 30s. As we passed her, she asked me if the
8 lifts were working."

9 You say you don't think you answered her because you
10 were just trying to get downstairs, very understandably,
11 and you told us that you knew that in a fire situation
12 you wouldn't use the lift.

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. You, of course, had your younger brother with you as
15 well, and you wanted to make sure that you got him out
16 of the building safely.

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Could you please give us an idea of how hot it felt in
19 the corridor on the 13th floor. Could you feel the heat
20 at that stage?

21 A. It was -- it was very hot.

22 Q. Did the temperature change as you went downstairs?

23 A. I think it got -- it got -- it got, like -- it was --
24 I think that was one of the worst things. Yeah, it
25 was -- it was very hot. It was hard to breathe, so it

1 was -- it was terrible. As we got -- as we kept going
2 down, you know, I think to, like, the 7th floor or so --
3 I can't really remember the floors but I know midway it
4 was very hot, like burning. You could smell, like,
5 everything burning, so yeah.

6 Q. Was there smoke in the stairwell?

7 A. Yeah, as we go downstairs, the -- as we went downstairs,
8 the -- the smoke was really thick, like. I'm talking
9 about midnight-thick, like you can't see nothing at all.
10 You can't see nothing at all, you can't see no-one.
11 I saw a few people running upstairs. I don't know why.
12 I recollect a few people running upstairs and telling
13 them: "Go downstairs, go downstairs."

14 Q. Sorry to interrupt you. The people who were running up
15 the stairs, were they residents or were they
16 firefighters?

17 A. I don't recollect seeing any firefighters when I was
18 going downstairs. I think it was just residents, people
19 from the -- residents that were running upstairs.

20 Q. In your statement, you mention that at one point the
21 temperature was so hot that it made you feel dizzy?

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Could I just ask you to look, please, again at your
24 statement, this time in the middle of the page. Do you
25 see the paragraph that begins "As I went downstairs"?

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. Then on the third line of that paragraph, you say:

3 "Near the bottom, on about the 2nd or 3rd floor,

4 I saw about four firemen heading up the stairs."

5 And they told you not to run. You don't think that

6 those firemen were wearing any breathing masks, and they

7 were just walking not running?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Do you think that's right, that you passed some firemen

10 at that point?

11 A. Yeah. But -- well, the firemen that we saw -- I just

12 saw them walking around, to be honest, just -- when I

13 went downstairs, like, there were firemen, but the fire

14 truck that came didn't have, like, the hose, you know,

15 like, the fire hose and that. The people that were

16 there were just -- I think they were, like, grouping

17 together to go upstairs or some sort -- but there was

18 nothing happening. There were people just, like --

19 I think they were grouping together again. They were

20 talking to see what they were gonna do. No-one was

21 fighting the fire.

22 Q. And you and your brother then made your way down the

23 stairs out of the building. Did you go back into the

24 building at all after that?

25 A. No, no.

1 Q. So you came out of the building and you stayed outside?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. When you came out of the building, what were you able to
4 see?

5 A. I saw -- I saw a fire truck. As I said, there was
6 nothing happening, literally. It was just, like, the
7 truck was there and the firemen were just like grouping
8 up to go upstairs, but by that time there was, like,
9 explosion, smoke everywhere, like. It was -- it was
10 like -- to that extent where it's got -- the
11 firefighters were not fighting it, so it was, like,
12 really -- the fire was coming out really hard, the smoke
13 has gone all throughout all the buildings, so -- and
14 still --

15 Q. I'm sorry to cut you off. Could you see where the fire
16 was at that time?

17 A. Yeah. I think it was, like, midway, like, 7th/3rd
18 floor. I'm not really too sure what -- I know it was
19 midway.

20 Q. Did it seem to be just one part of the building that was
21 on fire to begin with?

22 A. I think there was, like, two buildings on fire, like.
23 Literally, you could see the flames of the building
24 burning out, so therefore everything in that house is
25 burnt down, as you could see, so, like, the fire was

1 really coming out. There was an explosion -- gas
2 explosions already when we went downstairs, yeah.

3 Q. By "two buildings", do you mean two floors?

4 A. Two flats on the same level.

5 Q. Do you mean side by side?

6 A. You know, like, on the row, there's, like -- where the
7 flats is. For example, my flat and the one next to me.
8 So that's where -- yeah, something like that.

9 Q. So two flats where the front doors on the corridor would
10 have been next to each other?

11 A. Yeah, yeah. There was flame and you could hear, like,
12 loads of glass explosion, bangs and stuff like that.

13 Q. In your statement, you say that after you came out of
14 the building you went and you stood a little way away
15 from the tower block and you took some video footage on
16 your mobile phone; is that right?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. What I'd like to do then, please, is just play the video
19 that you took. Do you know when you took the footage
20 whether it recorded sound?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. I think you'll find that this version of the footage
23 doesn't have sound.

24 A. Okay.

25 Q. But we have the footage itself.

1 Just to explain to the members of the jury, madam
2 coroner, I'm going to play it in a window that is not
3 the full size of the screen because the resolution of
4 the clip is such that if you make it too big, it becomes
5 blocky and harder to see what is happening.

6 THE CORONER: I see, thank you.

7 MR ATKINS: Madam, I'm being told that others have been able
8 to get sound. I'll play it first of all as it is, and
9 then --

10 THE CORONER: Yes, let's look at it. I'm not sure whether
11 sound is going to add anything. Let's just look at it
12 and see what we can see.

13 (The video was played to the Court)

14 MR ATKINS: Mr Udi, do you recognise that as the clip that
15 you took on your mobile phone?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. In your statement, you say that you believe you started
18 to film that at 4.34 pm?

19 A. Yes.

20 THE CORONER: Is the timing digitally recorded on that?

21 MR ATKINS: Madam, not on the copy that we have. It may
22 have been on the original. We don't know.

23 THE CORONER: Thank you.

24 MR ATKINS: Mr Udi, thank you. Those are the questions that
25 I have for you. Others may have some more questions.

1 THE CORONER: Thank you.

2 Questions from MR HENDY

3 MR HENDY: Madam, can I just take a moment to speak to
4 Mr Atkins.

5 THE CORONER: Yes, of course. (Pause)

6 MR HENDY: Thank you, madam. I was just trying to see how
7 we could resolve the particular problem that arises
8 because we can't hear the sound.

9 It's just this, Mr Udi: have you listened to the
10 recording recently?

11 A. No.

12 Q. No, okay. Well, I think all the advocates had better
13 put their heads together and listen to it and we'll come
14 up with something agreed between everybody that we can
15 put before the jury without troubling Mr Udi.

16 THE CORONER: Right, if it's something which we can deal
17 with without having to ask Mr Udi to come back.

18 MR HENDY: Absolutely. Whatever it is, it's on the
19 recording.

20 THE CORONER: I see. All right. But we don't need to ask
21 Mr Udi about it?

22 MR HENDY: We don't. I was just asking him on the
23 off-chance that he may recall it. Thank you.

24 THE CORONER: Do you have any questions for Mr Udi then,
25 Mr Hendy?

1 MR HENDY: I don't, no.

2 THE CORONER: Mr Dowden?

3 Questions from MR DOWDEN

4 MR DOWDEN: Good afternoon, my name's Dowden. I ask

5 questions on behalf of Mr Francisquini. You say that

6 you saw people running up the stairs?

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. Do you remember how many people?

9 A. Not -- not a lot, because as I said, the smoke was quite

10 thick, so, you know, the people -- I just saw people

11 running upstairs. I can't recollect how many, but it

12 was a few.

13 Q. And they continued to run upstairs and you went

14 downstairs; is that right?

15 A. Yeah, yeah.

16 Q. I think you've told us that the general impression you

17 got by the time you got outside the building is that

18 there were firefighters there. Did you notice one or

19 two fire engines when you got out?

20 A. I saw -- I saw a few -- I saw a few of them, but as

21 I said, they were not doing anything. They were just,

22 like, grouping up.

23 Q. Thank you.

24 THE CORONER: Ms Al Tai?

25 MS AL TAI: No thank you, madam.

1 MR COMPTON: No thank you, madam.

2 THE CORONER: Mr Walsh?

3 Questions from MR WALSH

4 MR WALSH: Yes. Mr Udi, I just want to clarify a couple of
5 things. I ask questions on behalf of the Fire Brigade.
6 It must have been a terrifying experience for you that
7 day, running down those stairs. When you got to the
8 bottom of the stairs, the impression was that the
9 firemen were grouping together around the fire engines,
10 and you took that video on your phone at, if the time is
11 accurate on it, 4.34.

12 A. Yeah, I guess so, yeah.

13 Q. Just for your information -- can I just help you with
14 that -- at 4.34, if that is the right time, or
15 thereabouts, firemen had managed to get inside the
16 building and go up the stairs and ensure that there was
17 a proper water supply going up the stairs through the
18 appliance, and they were just putting on breathing
19 apparatus on the 7th floor, ready to go straight to
20 flat 65, which is where the fire was, to attack the
21 fire. So that was 4.34.

22 In your statement, what you indicate at the time
23 that you came down the stairs, as Mr Atkins has already
24 put to you, but I want you to clarify it a bit more --
25 you say this. Have a look at it, by all means, but you

1 TONY MECHEN (affirmed)
2 THE CORONER: Thank you very much, Mr Mechen. Do sit down.
3 Do help yourself to a glass of water if you'd like.
4 Please use the microphone. You'll need to be quite
5 close to it, so if you direct your answers across the
6 room towards members of the jury then that will help you
7 to stay close to the microphone. Thank you.

8 Questions from MR ATKINS

9 MR ATKINS: Can you please tell the court your full name.

10 A. Tony Stuart Mechen.

11 Q. Mr Mechen, I'm going to be asking you some questions
12 about what you knew about Lakanal House and about your
13 involvement in fighting the fire there on 3 July 2009.
14 Could I begin, please, by asking you how long you've
15 been a firefighter.

16 A. 12 years.

17 Q. For how long have you been employed by the London
18 Fire Brigade?

19 A. 12 years.

20 Q. Is it right that you still work for the London
21 Fire Brigade?

22 A. I still do, yeah.

23 Q. Mr Mechen, unless I indicate otherwise, the questions
24 that I ask you are going to be concerned with how things
25 are before the fire or on the day of the fire, rather

1 than things that happened afterwards.

2 A. Okay.

3 Q. Is it right that at the time of the fire you were
4 a firefighter?

5 A. That's correct, yeah.

6 Q. And you were stationed at Old Kent Road?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. Before 3 July 2009, had you ever been to Lakanal House?

9 A. No.

10 Q. In that case, I'll move immediately on to asking you
11 about what happened on the day, and from time to time
12 I may ask you about what you learned about the layout of
13 the flats or other information about the building.

14 A. Okay.

15 Q. Is it correct that you were called out from
16 Old Kent Road fire station?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. And the call came through at about 16.21?

19 A. (The witness nodded)

20 Q. You travelled to Lakanal House on an appliance with the
21 call sign E352?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. Which was the Old Kent Road pump?

24 A. That's correct.

25 Q. Can you remember who else was in that appliance with

1 you?

2 A. I believe Pete Mason, who you've already heard from, was
3 driving, crew manager John Clarke was in charge and
4 Firefighter Bobby Bennett on the back with me.

5 THE CORONER: Mr Mechen, can you just make sure you do get
6 close to the microphone, please, thank you.

7 A. Sorry.

8 MR ATKINS: Did you do anything to get ready when you were
9 on the way to Lakanal?

10 A. I believe I would have rigged in my fire gear or just
11 made sure my gear was just ready to go, yeah. I believe
12 I would have rigged in my fire gear.

13 Q. When you got there, can you remember where the appliance
14 parked?

15 A. I'm referring back -- since reading my statement,
16 I believe we parked outside the pub.

17 THE CORONER: Outside ...?

18 A. Outside the pub on -- I can't think of the name of the
19 street.

20 MR ATKINS: If I just show you this diagram we have up on
21 the screen. Do you see Lakanal is this building here
22 where I have the cursor?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Then you have Dalwood Street running from right to left
25 across the top, east to west, and the road running north

1 to south is Sedgmoor Place.

2 A. It's the pub on the corner of Sedgmoor.

3 Q. So about where I have the cursor?

4 A. About, yeah. I think the pump was parked around there,
5 yeah.

6 Q. Did you arrive at pretty much the same time as the other
7 appliance from Old Kent Road?

8 A. I believe so.

9 Q. When you arrived, presumably you looked at the building
10 from the outside. What could you see at that point?

11 A. I recall seeing smoke punching out, some flame, and
12 there was a lot of debris falling.

13 Q. Could you tell what it was that was falling?

14 A. It appeared to be parts of window frame and some soft
15 furnishings.

16 Q. Was any of that material on fire?

17 A. Yes, it was, as it was falling, yeah.

18 Q. Could you see where the material was landing?

19 A. Just directly in front of Lakanal House.

20 Q. Which side of the building was this on? If we just look
21 back at this diagram --

22 A. It's where your cursor is there.

23 Q. On this side?

24 A. Yeah, we were in the service road, I believe, and -- I'd
25 walked round there and the debris was falling just

1 straight, obviously, down and into the road in front.

2 Q. When you arrived, did you report to an officer?

3 A. Yes, I believe we reported -- John Howling was my watch
4 manager at the time, riding the pump ladder, and we'd
5 have gone straight to John Howling so he could detail
6 what our duties would be.

7 Q. Can you tell us what the first job you were given was?

8 A. The first job I was given was there was people start to
9 gather around at the -- is it the west side?

10 Q. The side you've --

11 A. Where the debris is, yeah.

12 Q. -- taken us to a moment ago is the west side.

13 A. Yeah, the west side, people starting to gather, so we
14 immediately went to the machine, got some tape and
15 cordoned off an area to keep -- a 20-metre area/25-metre
16 area to keep the public away from the falling debris.
17 You can see the tape.

18 Q. I've just put a photograph on the screen and you've just
19 pointed out there the tape in the foreground, the red
20 and white tape. Is that Fire Brigade tape?

21 A. That's Fire Brigade, tape, yeah. That's what we'd have
22 run in.

23 Q. What was the purpose of the tape?

24 A. To keep the public away from the falling debris.

25 Q. Could you tell us, please, which parts of the building

1 were taped off?

2 A. I can only tell you for what I had done, and I recall
3 taping -- as you can see where the tape starts, that is
4 the end of the building, around there, over to a green,
5 around again, and it would have gone round the back --
6 round the front of that fire engine.

7 Q. So was the cordon on one side of the building?

8 A. The cordon I did, yeah. The cordon I did, it was on one
9 side of the building.

10 Q. We can see there, can we, then, that the appliance and
11 the firemen are inside the cordon?

12 A. We'd be inside of the cordon, obviously, keeping people
13 out.

14 Q. And everyone else would be on the other side?

15 A. That's correct.

16 Q. Once you had done that job, did you go back to Watch
17 Manager Howling?

18 A. I believe I did, yeah. I would have gone back, let him
19 know that that -- that job was completed and -- just to
20 see what he'd detail us to do next.

21 Q. What did he ask you to do next?

22 A. I think then we were told to go and put our sets on,
23 which is our breathing apparatus, which is kept on the
24 back of the machine, rig up, put them on and -- I think
25 we were detailed then to go to the 7th floor, which was

1 the bridgehead. If I recall correctly, I'm sure I was
2 told that Peckham's crew were running low on air, so
3 we're going to be going straight up and straight in.

4 Q. You knew at that point that there was a crew from
5 Peckham who were there before you and that you would be
6 going to replace them?

7 A. I seem to remember that, yes, yeah.

8 Q. Did you know where in the building the fire was, where
9 they were fighting the fire?

10 A. Yeah, we'd been detailed -- Watch Manager Howling told
11 us it was on the 9th floor. The bridgehead would be on
12 the 7th, go up to the 7th, get yourself ready to start
13 up, and then -- we knew the fire was on the 9th floor
14 and obviously you follow the hose that's already run out
15 to the actual entrance of the flat.

16 Q. How did you get up to the bridgehead on the 7th floor?

17 A. I remember going -- getting the lift to the 5th and then
18 walking up two floors.

19 Q. Was there any particular reason to go to the 5th and
20 then walk two floors rather than going directly to the
21 7th?

22 A. I think just a bit of extra safety, just to make sure
23 there's no smoke-logging if something has changed while
24 you're in the lift and the bridgehead would have moved
25 down. Just give yourself a couple of floors of grace.

1 Q. If the bridgehead were to be moved, would you expect
2 that information to be passed on by radio?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. So that you would know before you went there that it was
5 being moved?

6 A. Yeah, but I'm also in a lift. There could be problems
7 with communications. You never know. So it's just
8 a bit safer to go a couple of floors below.

9 Q. Do you recognise that photograph which shows the lift
10 lobby area on the ground floor?

11 A. If I'm honest, I don't.

12 Q. Presumably when you went up in the lift, you went from
13 the ground floor? You didn't go into the building,
14 climb the stairs and then --

15 A. Yeah, and I totally understand that's where I would have
16 gone, but it doesn't ring a bell to me at the moment.

17 Q. If you follow the cursor, do you see on the back wall,
18 between the two lifts, there's a sign?

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. I'll just go on to the next picture, which is a close-up
21 of the same sign. Can you remember whether, when you
22 went into the building, you noticed that sign and the
23 information on it?

24 A. I don't recall noticing that sign, no.

25 Q. At the time when you were first going into the building,

1 did you see anybody else there other than your
2 colleagues?

3 A. Referring to my statement, I think at the end of my
4 statement I -- I've written that I saw a -- a black
5 gentleman walk out and had a brief conversation with
6 him, but I don't recall that now, if I'm honest.

7 Q. The person you've just mentioned, do you think that was
8 somebody who lived in the building?

9 A. I believe it would have been, again referring to the
10 statement, but ...

11 Q. Well, shall I take you to it?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. If I begin by saying it's a statement which you made on
14 12 July 2009. I see you have a copy with you already.
15 Do you think that your memory of events was better at
16 that time than it is now?

17 A. Definitely, yeah.

18 Q. Could I ask you then to just look at the first page of
19 the document in front of you.

20 Mr Clark, do you have a copy of the statement in the
21 bundle? It's page 148. Perhaps we should use that
22 copy. (Handed)

23 Mr Mechen, please just have a look at page 148. Do
24 you recognise that as a copy of your statement?

25 A. I do, yes.

1 Q. Could we turn then, please, to page 155, which is the
2 last page.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. In fact, it's the last paragraph. You say there was
5 a male that you saw on either the ground or the first
6 floor when you first entered the building. So that's
7 before going up to the bridgehead?

8 A. Yes, so that must have been the ground, obviously,
9 because I got the lift, so I just -- yeah, it must have
10 been the ground.

11 Q. You say that you told him to leave the building. He was
12 saying that his brother was down the corridor and he was
13 then dealt with by another firefighter or officer?

14 A. Yeah, because obviously my duty had been detailed to me,
15 so while I was going on to get on with what I was
16 doing -- from reading this, I must have passed him on to
17 someone, saying, "Look, deal with this, I've got" -- you
18 know.

19 Q. When you went up to the 7th floor, who was in charge?

20 A. I believe it was a crew manager standing by at Peckham,
21 but he was standing by from Addington, so I don't
22 actually know his name. It was a crew manager.

23 Q. Can you remember where the bridgehead was, which part of
24 the floor it was in?

25 A. No, I can't, no. It was on the 7th but ...

1 Q. Can you say, for example, whether it was in the
2 stairwell or whether you were standing next to the
3 dry riser?

4 A. I believe it was in the stairwell.

5 Q. Was there much smoke at the bridgehead?

6 A. By the time me and Firefighter Mason got up there --
7 this is the other gentleman's statement, but no, it had
8 cleared a bit. It wasn't that smokey.

9 Q. You said that you knew that you were going to be going
10 up onto the 9th floor.

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. So there was a point where you took out the key, the
13 tally from your BA set?

14 A. Yeah, that's correct.

15 Q. And you handed it to the person who had the entry
16 control board?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. If I can just show you this table, please. It's a table
19 which shows data which was downloaded from the bodyguard
20 system, and it records the times at which the BA
21 equipment of different firefighters was started and shut
22 down. If we just look, on the right-hand side there's
23 a column for wearer name and about two thirds of the way
24 down, where the cursor is, we have your surname.

25 A. Yeah, I see that.

1 Q. Do you see that?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. So your line is the line that follows along to the left
4 of that.

5 A. Right, yeah.

6 Q. Can you see that the time when you started breathing air
7 through the BA set was about 16.47? Can you see that?

8 A. Yeah, sorry.

9 Q. Where the cursor is. It's quite small. So 16.47,
10 that's when you started to breathe air through the BA
11 equipment?

12 A. Right.

13 Q. Did you go through the entry control point at the same
14 time as Mr Mason?

15 A. I did, yes.

16 Q. If we look further up the page, do you see the red line
17 at the top?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. His name is on the right-hand side and then to the left
20 that says "data overwritten"?

21 A. Yeah, I can see that.

22 Q. Would it be fair, then, to say that although we don't
23 have his data, his time is likely to be similar to
24 yours?

25 A. Yeah, it would be the same as mine, bar a couple of

1 seconds.

2 Q. Could you please tell us what radio experiment you had
3 with you when you went up to the 9th floor?

4 A. I had a comm set, which is attached to the BA set and
5 which you call a Barry set, and I -- I believe I would
6 have had my -- I would have had my personal radio on my
7 tunic.

8 Q. Taking them in turn, then, the set which is on the BA
9 equipment, is that part of the BA equipment?

10 A. It's part of the BA equipment, yeah. That's set at
11 radio wave 6, so that's our communications for BA.

12 Q. What about your personal radio? Would that also be set
13 to channel 6?

14 A. No, that's normally set to channel 1 for fire ground.

15 Q. Why is that?

16 A. That's for talking on the fire ground. Your BA set, you
17 only wear that when you're in a fire. So that's going
18 to say at 6 no matter what, because you only use 6 when
19 you're in a fire. Your personal radio sits at 1 because
20 most of the time you're outside a fire and then it can
21 be changed, but if you're carrying comms on your set,
22 obviously that's the radio you'll use while you are
23 fighting fire.

24 Q. Do you carry out any sort of check before you are
25 committed to fight the fire to make sure that your

1 communications equipment is working properly?

2 A. You do, yeah. You report your signals and they report

3 them back.

4 Q. Did you do that on this occasion?

5 A. I did.

6 Q. And you found the equipment seemed to be working?

7 A. The signal was fine, yeah.

8 THE CORONER: Have you come to the end of a topic,

9 Mr Atkins?

10 MR ATKINS: Madam, that may be a convenient place to break.

11 THE CORONER: Yes.

12 Mr Mechen, I'm very sorry we haven't been able to

13 complete your evidence today and I'm sorry it has been

14 interrupted. I apologise. Are you able to come back

15 tomorrow morning?

16 A. Of course I am.

17 THE CORONER: Thank you have very much. So you're free to

18 go, but please remember this: that you're part way

19 through your evidence, and the strict rule, which I do

20 ask you to observe, is that you must not talk to anyone

21 at all about this case, about your evidence. No

22 colleagues, no friends, no family. So have a think on

23 the way home as to how you're going to answer the

24 awkward questions as to what you've been doing today.

25 A. That's fine.

1 THE CORONER: So back here at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning,
2 please, thank you.

3 A. Thank you very much.

4 (The witness withdrew)

5 THE CORONER: Members of the jury, we'll have a break there.
6 Please come back tomorrow morning for a 10 o'clock start
7 and please don't talk to anyone overnight about the case
8 at any time and please don't conduct any research of
9 your own. Please remember the warnings I gave you at
10 the very beginning. Thank you very much.

11 (In the absence of the Jury)

12 Housekeeping

13 THE CORONER: I think before we finish it would be helpful
14 if we just deal with some broad case management matters.
15 So tomorrow we will obviously continue with Mr Mechen,
16 and then I think the plan is to have Messrs Bennett and
17 Clarke; is that right?

18 MR ATKINS: Exactly so.

19 THE CORONER: Yes. Okay. I think we're hoping that we
20 might have a resident or two, are we?

21 MR ATKINS: Madam, we are hoping to hear from Mustapha
22 Hydar, Beatrice Obanyano and Robert Kayode. I was just
23 waiting to here back from Mr Clarke with confirmation
24 that they will be asked to attend.

25 Can I say also that I'll look into this question of

1 the sound on the video recording, and if it is possible
2 to play it with the sound then perhaps we might do that
3 after Mr Mechen's evidence.

4 THE CORONER: All right. That would be very helpful.
5 Someone in the room thinks they've managed to find the
6 sound part of the video, have they?

7 MR HENDY: I am not normally very good at these things, but
8 I just stuck the disk in and the sound was there.

9 THE CORONER: Okay, well, if you could pass on your magic
10 trick then that would be very helpful.

11 Yes, Mr Maxwell-Scott, we're just saying that
12 tomorrow we're part heard with Mr Mechen, so we'll
13 continue with him and then I think we have Bennett and
14 Clarke, and Mr Atkins was just mentioning names of
15 residents whom I think Mr Clark is contacting to see
16 whether they're able to come tomorrow.

17 MR CLARK: Yes, they are, madam.

18 THE CORONER: Oh lovely. Thank you very much.

19 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I don't know if it was said already, but
20 it should be Mr Hydar, Miss Obanyano and Mr Kayode.

21 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. All right. Yes, any
22 other case management issues that anyone would like to
23 raise?

24 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I should raise the timetable for Friday.

25 THE CORONER: Yes.

1 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Which is less fixed than we have been
2 thus far and less fixed than any other day next week.
3 What the timetable originally said was as follows:
4 Deborah Real, who was the supervisor working at brigade
5 control, John Birkett, who was an expert witness who
6 will deal with the analysis of the locks in flat 79
7 after the fire, and a witness to deal with the telephone
8 records of Dayana Francisquini and Helen Udoaka. His
9 name is James Davison.

10 So that is what the timetable said, but if I can
11 update as follows: Mr Birkett we are intending to call
12 on Friday, and I anticipate that he is coming and
13 available. Mr Davison won't be able to give evidence on
14 Friday, but we are in touch with him about preparing
15 a statement which we hope will answer all the questions
16 that people have, and we hope to be able to circulate
17 that very shortly.

18 Within the last half hour, I, being outside the
19 room, have had the benefit of being able to email to
20 everybody two signed witness statements, one from
21 Station Master McGurran, the station manager from
22 Peckham fire station, and the other from Group Manager
23 Andy Snazell, who was the Southwark borough commander.
24 Mr McGurran's statement is complete, in the sense that
25 it covers the issues in broad terms that we should wish

1 to ask him about. Mr Snazell's statement is
2 deliberately limited to essentially the same issues as
3 Mr McGurran's -- in other words, familiarisation, 72D
4 inspections and the implementation of the Southwark
5 borough plan for September 2008, or rather
6 dated September 2008.

7 The London Fire Brigade would like Mr McGurran to be
8 brought forward to give evidence on Friday, and they
9 would like Mr Snazell to be brought forward to give
10 evidence on Friday but only in relation to those same
11 topics. So in other words, their preference and
12 request, as I understand it, would be that Mr Snazell
13 would give factual evidence on two occasions: firstly
14 the familiarisation-type issues on Friday, and then
15 secondly, on a subsequent occasion, all other issues
16 he's able to help the court with. Very briefly, my
17 recollection is that he may have some knowledge of the
18 fire in 1997 and he had some liaison with issues
19 relating to the London Borough of Southwark and fire
20 risk assessment matters before the fire.

21 So it's fair in summary to say that Mr Snazell wore
22 a number of hats which we are interested in, at least to
23 some extent, and the London Fire Brigade proposal is
24 that he will give evidence wearing only one of those
25 hats on Friday, and obviously if that were to work,

1 there would need to be general agreement that any
2 questions by both myself and properly interested persons
3 and indeed the jury were limited to that one topic on
4 Friday.

5 THE CORONER: Yes, I see.

6 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: No doubt Mr Walsh will be able to
7 elaborate on that as required, but in order to plan
8 a timetable for Friday, it's necessary to work out where
9 one's going to go with Mr McGurran and Mr Snazell. As
10 I said, at the moment the only definitely fixed witness
11 in my proposal is Mr Birkett, and there is therefore
12 scope for some flexibility as to which London
13 Fire Brigade witnesses give evidence. Possibly
14 Mr McGurran, possibly Mr Snazell as well, possibly
15 Deborah Real, although she could be moved a little later
16 back.

17 There have also certainly been discussions between
18 myself and Mr Walsh about one of the firefighters who
19 was involved in the 72D visits in May 2009. You will
20 recall there was one on 2 May and one on 30 May.
21 I believe it is possible that someone to deal with one
22 but not both of those visits might be available on
23 Friday, but perhaps it's best to hand over to Mr Walsh.

24 THE CORONER: Yes, I suspect that I'm not alone in not
25 having seen either of the statements, so we're all

1 working slightly in the dark.

2 MR WALSH: Yes, and there's a reason for that. What
3 Mr Maxwell-Scott has just said is more or less right.
4 I say "more or less" because while it is right that the
5 London Fire Brigade think that it's appropriate for
6 Mr McGurran to give evidence on Friday, my understanding
7 was that it was Mr Maxwell-Scott's preference, with
8 which we take no issue. We're perfectly happy for him
9 to give evidence on Friday, and because of the way in
10 which the evidence has been adduced, perfectly properly,
11 in relation to familiarisation issues, it seems
12 appropriate that he should give evidence on Friday, so
13 we're perfectly happy that that should be so.

14 But we were notified -- that is the Fire Brigade
15 were notified of certainly, madam, your interest in
16 familiarisation issues, and in relation to matters that
17 Mr McGurran might help the inquest with concerning the
18 way in which Peckham at least goes about doing its
19 familiarisation, and it is for that reason that we
20 thought it appropriate to prepare a statement so that
21 there is advanced knowledge of what he would say. So
22 that has been prepared and that is now served.

23 The reason why we think that Mr Snazell should give
24 evidence at the same time is firstly because, at the
25 moment, both of them are scheduled to be giving evidence

1 on 13 February together in any event, so there is
2 clearly overlap between the two. Insofar as
3 familiarisation issues are concerned, I strongly suspect
4 that questions will be asked of Mr McGurran about how
5 the Fire Brigade goes about its policy of obtaining
6 information for the purposes of 72D, which Mr Snazell
7 can answer more authoritatively, and it seems more
8 appropriate -- or appropriate, at least -- for those
9 issues to be considered at the same time.

10 The alternative would be that Mr McGurran gives
11 evidence on Friday about various matters, and then the
12 important matters that Mr Snazell may be able to assist
13 with in relation to brigade policy and practice could
14 not be asked of him until 13 February. So it's
15 a practicality issue, really. The reason why we suggest
16 that they should be heard together on the
17 familiarisation issue is simply to keep that chunk of
18 evidence together, which would make more sense and could
19 be more easily understood by the jury.

20 Can I respectfully suggest that there isn't any
21 reason why it shouldn't be understood that that is the
22 purpose for which he is giving evidence on Friday, and
23 any questions about other matters, other issues that
24 Mr Snazell may assist with, can, of course, be answered
25 upon the day that he was originally listed to give

1 evidence at a later time. It won't add any time to the
2 inquest, because it will be dealing with one issue there
3 and other issues at a later time. So that's the reason
4 why we would like that to be so.

5 What we could certainly do is provide Mr McGurran on
6 Friday so that he could give his evidence and be asked
7 questions first, and have Mr Snazell here so that if
8 issues do arise during the course of his evidence --
9 that is Mr McGurran's evidence -- which are better
10 addressed by Mr Snazell, he will be here and can be
11 called into the witness box to deal with those discrete
12 matters without treading upon other ground that he may
13 be required to deal with later. That's the position.

14 THE CORONER: I see. All right. Thank you very much.

15 I invite submissions from others.

16 MR MATTHEWS: Can I say on behalf of Southwark that in
17 relation to Mr Snazell, I've not obviously had
18 an opportunity to read the statements yet, as you
19 haven't, madam, and I understand that there are
20 the number of hats referred to by my learned friend. It
21 may be something where it's most sensible for us to read
22 the statements and then perhaps speak between counsel as
23 to whether or not that's going to be practical. It
24 sounds like there are practicalities that will benefit
25 from both witnesses being heard together, but I would

1 welcome a little time just to look at the statements
2 first.

3 THE CORONER: All right. Any other contributions? No?

4 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: All I would say at this stage is that
5 Mr Walsh is absolutely right to say that I have
6 expressed the view to him that I would be in favour of
7 Mr McGurran giving evidence on Friday, but I have also
8 expressed reservations about the idea of calling
9 Mr Snazell in two chunks. But I wanted to hear what
10 others have to say and obviously we will want to reflect
11 on it overnight.

12 THE CORONER: Well, I think that I shall certainly find it
13 helpful to read the statements before making any
14 decision on that, and I imagine that will apply to
15 everybody else. I am anxious that people have proper
16 time to prepare for witnesses who are coming.

17 Can I suggest this: that we leave it to tomorrow
18 morning, which will give everyone a chance to read the
19 statements overnight and consider the proposal, and
20 maybe if we could start together to deal with this at
21 maybe 9.45 so that we can make a decision and get this
22 out of the way before we start the evidence again at
23 10 o'clock. Does that sound acceptable to everybody?
24 All right. So shall we do that.

25 The statements have been circulated, you say, by

1 email?

2 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: They have, yes.

3 THE CORONER: All right. Well that's helpful. Thank you
4 very much. Is there anything else? Yes, Mr Hendy.

5 MR HENDY: Madam, just two matters: one is I've suggested
6 this to Mr Maxwell-Scott, but I wonder whether, in the
7 fullness of time, he could undertake to produce a sort
8 of updated timetable on a weekly basis so we can do some
9 formal planning.

10 The other point was that if all the representatives
11 could gather for a couple of minutes, there might be
12 a way in which we could very quickly resolve the Kelvin
13 Udi film point, it occurs to me.

14 THE CORONER: All right. That would be very helpful. All
15 right, does anyone else have any points to raise?

16 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: No. Once the witnesses for Friday have
17 been decided by you, madam, then I will circulate
18 an updated timetable.

19 THE CORONER: That would be very helpful. Thank you very
20 much.

21 All right, well then -- I'm sorry, Mr Compton.

22 MR COMPTON: Just one matter. I was asked by
23 Mr Maxwell-Scott about the witness --

24 THE CORONER: I can't hear you.

25 MR COMPTON: I'm so sorry. I was asked by Mr Maxwell-Scott

1 about the witness Tony Morgan, who I understand is
2 unwell at present. Our position is that we're happy for
3 him to be read, rule 37, but I understand that there may
4 be others who do require him. I don't know what the
5 current position is on that, and I don't know if
6 Mr Maxwell-Scott can help on this matter.

7 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: One thing I'll say at this stage: when I
8 circulate the new timetable what I was going to suggest
9 is that when we naturally reach the end of all the
10 witnesses who are residents we can review the position
11 in relation to Mr Morgan at that stage.

12 THE CORONER: All right. Thank you very much. Yes.

13 MR COMPTON: The only other matter, madam, was John Birkett,
14 the expert witness. I don't imagine anything turns on
15 this any longer, but I don't know if any consideration
16 has been made to making him a rule 37 witness, or
17 whether he is required to attend. I simply raise that
18 for consideration.

19 THE CORONER: Could I leave all of you to give some thought
20 to that and maybe we could pick that up tomorrow morning
21 before 10 o'clock. I note that suggestion. Thank you
22 very much.

23 All right, yes, anything else? Well, thank you very
24 much.

25 (4.02 pm)

1	(The Court adjourned until 9.45 am the following day)	
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3	Statement of MALCOLM SMITH read	4
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19	Questions from MR ATKINS	108
20	Questions from MR HENDY	141
21	Questions from MR WALSH	146
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DAY 7 OF TRANSCRIPTION OF THE
Lakanal House Fire
Inquest (CORRECTED) 23/01/13