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Thursday, 24 January 2013

(9.45 am)

Housekeeping

THE CORONER: Do sit down, thank you. Good morning everybody. Before we continue with the evidence, there are just the case management issues left over from yesterday that we need to deal with. So far as Mr McGurran and Mr Snazell are concerned for tomorrow, I've sent round an email with a suggestion. I hope that everyone has had it and has had an opportunity to consider it. It's all rather short notice. Has everybody had it, first of all?

Well, I'm not seeing anyone saying no, they haven't. Does anyone have any submissions they want to make on that? Mr Matthews?

MR MATTHEWS: Madam, yes. In advance of you coming in I've shared my views with as many as I could. In short, I fear that the idea of Mr Snazell's hats being separable is a little artificial, and I think it would be unwise for him to give evidence in parts, because I can certainly see the potential for what he says about familiarisation to be relevant to some of his other hats, in terms of knowledge of the borough and responsibilities for the borough, so my preferred course would be, at the minimum, simply Mr McGurran to give

1 evidence on the issue, but I have to say I can't quite  
2 see the need for that evidence to come now in any event.

3 It seems to me there are a lot of issues that the  
4 jury are hearing about where we're all aware that in the  
5 future there'll be evidence very relevant that may  
6 answer a lot of the questions we have on those issues.  
7 If there's a need in terms of timetabling to call  
8 Mr McGurran tomorrow then fine but, as I say, I can't  
9 see the need for violence to be done to the timetable to  
10 accommodate this issue now.

11 THE CORONER: I see. All right, that's helpful. Thank you,  
12 yes. Anyone else? Mr Hendy.

13 MR HENDY: Madam, my difficulty is that I got back to my  
14 chambers last night only to find my password wouldn't  
15 work on my computer so I couldn't open Mr Snazell's and  
16 Mr McGurran's witness statements and I couldn't read the  
17 exhibits. My solicitor's very kindly printed them off  
18 for me this morning, but I haven't had a chance to go  
19 through them and I have to say that's one of the  
20 difficulties in the case, being presented with a lot of  
21 material at the very last minute.

22 So I'm not in a position to express a view as to  
23 whether it's appropriate or not to split Mr Snazell, but  
24 I do share Mr Matthews' view that there wouldn't appear  
25 to be any desperate urgency to hear these witnesses

1           tomorrow, and there does appear to be plenty of other  
2           evidence we could be getting on with.

3   THE CORONER: All right, thank you. Anyone else? Mr Walsh?

4   MR WALSH: Well, there's very little more than I can add to  
5           that which I said last night, but I will say this:  
6           insofar as Mr Matthews' concerns about Mr Snazell's  
7           evidence go, I cannot myself see any reason why he  
8           cannot be asked questions about the discrete area of the  
9           brigade policy, the borough policy concerning  
10          familiarisation as opposed to other matters. I can't  
11          see myself why there shouldn't be the ability to do  
12          that.

13                 As to why Mr McGurran may give evidence tomorrow, it  
14                 is true there are other issues which will have to wait,  
15                 but the reason why Mr McGurran was thought to be  
16                 appropriate tomorrow was because we have recently heard  
17                 from all of the Peckham crews as to what they did, not  
18                 only the fire but prior to that in familiarisation  
19                 terms, and it seemed like a perfectly appropriate time  
20                 to do it. Because Messrs McGurran and Snazell were  
21                 originally timetabled to be heard together, it seemed  
22                 appropriate for the purposes of tomorrow. But there we  
23                 are, those are my views.

24   THE CORONER: All right, thank you. Yes, anybody else?

25                 Mr Maxwell-Scott, do you want to make any observations?

1 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: In terms of practicalities and where we  
2 are on timetable, as I said to the court yesterday, we  
3 have Mr Birkett definitely lined up, and he will take,  
4 one assumes, under an hour. Mr Davison is unlikely to  
5 be ready to give evidence tomorrow, so it is Mr Birkett  
6 and then other, realistically, London Fire Brigade  
7 witnesses.

8 At the moment Deborah Real is scheduled, so if she  
9 were to give evidence tomorrow, then in any event we  
10 would be moving towards some thematic issues as well as  
11 purely chronological accounts, and it is a matter for  
12 you whether you want to have that sort of evidence from  
13 her or whether you want to hear from Mr McGurran and  
14 possibly Mr Snazell as well.

15 If we hear from Mr McGurran, I believe we could also  
16 hear from Mr Moore, who carried out the familiarisation  
17 visit on either 2 May or 30 May, and from a timetabling  
18 point of view, in terms of filling the day I would have  
19 thought that a combination of Mr Birkett, Mr Moore and  
20 Mr McGurran would get towards filling the day.

21 THE CORONER: Yes, I see.

22 MR WALSH: May I just help in relation particularly to  
23 timetabling. It could be, it depends how many questions  
24 there are of Mr McGurran, but it is not impossible to  
25 take a view that Messrs McGurran and Snazell might be

1 longer than a day, I suppose, depending on the questions  
2 which Mr Matthews has hinted at, and therefore if the  
3 day were to occupy Mr McGurran and Mr Moore, who is one  
4 of those who carried out a visit, and Mr Birkett, that  
5 probably would be no bad use of the day. It wouldn't be  
6 the end of the day if Mr Snazell, in due course, then  
7 took up the theme.

8 THE CORONER: All right. Yes, any other contributions?

9 Well, that's very helpful all round, thank you very  
10 much. I'm conscious that if people have material very  
11 late in the day then it's always a problem to be  
12 preparing.

13 Whilst there are good reasons for asking Mr McGurran  
14 to give evidence now, the Peckham crews having given  
15 their evidence, it seems to me that it is evidence that  
16 could be dealt with later in the inquest, so I think  
17 that probably the better course of action is to take  
18 Mr McGurran and Mr Snazell later in the hearing as we  
19 had originally intended.

20 So I think the better course is not to have  
21 Mr McGurran tomorrow but to include him later, at the  
22 same time as Mr Snazell. So far as tomorrow is  
23 concerned, then we shall certainly need Mr Birkett and  
24 Ms Real and Mr Moore, and it may be that there are other  
25 statements that could be read.

1 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Probably getting towards the end of  
2 statements that it's suitable to read at this stage, but  
3 I can liaise with Mr Clark about possibly finding one or  
4 two Metropolitan Police Service witnesses.

5 THE CORONER: Yes. Okay, that sounds helpful. All right.  
6 I don't know whether it's appropriate to discuss now or  
7 maybe leave you all to give some consideration as to the  
8 extent to which Messrs McGurran and Snazell should be  
9 giving evidence about the detail of other premises. I'm  
10 happy to put that on one side for the moment and we can  
11 deal with any questions on that shortly before they give  
12 evidence, but if you would all give some thought to that  
13 that would be very helpful.

14 All right. Okay, yes, is there anything else that  
15 we can usefully deal with before the jury come in? All  
16 right. In that case let's have a short break and see  
17 whether the -- in fact, Mr Clark, are the jury ready to  
18 come in? I know it's a bit early, but are they ready?

19 MR CLARK: I'll check, madam.

20 THE CORONER: Thank you, please do. Unless anybody needs  
21 a break before they come in? All right.

22 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Madam, just before the jury come in,  
23 Mr Atkins and I have prepared a very short schedule of  
24 the times and durations of 999 calls made by Mr Hydar  
25 and Miss Obanyano, and we will provide those to you and

1 the other parties.

2 THE CORONER: Thank you.

3 MR CLARK: They're just using the facilities, madam, and  
4 then they're ready.

5 THE CORONER: All right, I'll just give everybody a short  
6 break and let me know when we're ready to come in.

7 (9.55 am)

8 (A short break)

9 (9.58 am)

10 (In the presence of the Jury)

11 THE CORONER: Thank you, do sit down. Good morning, members  
12 of the jury. We were continuing with Mr Mechen's  
13 evidence, I think that's right.

14 MR ATKINS: Yes, please.

15 THE CORONER: Mr Mechen, would you like to come forward?

16 TONY MECHEEN (continued)

17 THE CORONER: Good morning Mr Mechen, you're giving your  
18 evidence on oath, thank you very much. If you could  
19 remember to speak close to the microphone that would be  
20 very helpful.

21 A. Okay, I will.

22 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Atkins.

23 Questions by MR ATKINS (continued)

24 MR ATKINS: Mr Mechen, good morning. Let's just remind  
25 ourselves where we had got to in your evidence. You had

1           been telling us that you had gone up to the bridgehead  
2           which was on the 7th floor and we had looked at the time  
3           at which you and your colleague, Mr Mason, had started  
4           up your breathing apparatus equipment, and the last  
5           evidence that you gave yesterday was about radios, so  
6           that was the point that we had got to.

7    A.   Okay.

8    Q.   You also told us earlier on in your evidence that the  
9           reason that you were being committed was to relieve the  
10          crew from Peckham who were running low on air?

11   A.   I believe so, yeah.

12   Q.   So you were going to go up to the 9th floor to help them  
13          and to take over from them?

14   A.   To take over, yes.

15   Q.   When you went up to the 9th floor, to the fire flat,  
16          were the Peckham crew still there or had they already  
17          come back down?

18   A.   I'm not 100 per cent sure whether they was -- whether  
19          they'd already come down or whether they were there.

20   Q.   Do you remember passing them on the stairs?

21   A.   I don't remember, no. I mean, we were detailed to just  
22          go into the flat and take over from where they were.

23          I can't -- I don't think they were there, I think they'd  
24          already left the flat by the time we entered.

25   Q.   When you reached the fire flat, was there another crew



1 from Old Kent Road there?

2 A. Yeah, there was, yeah.

3 Q. Can you remember, was there ever a time when there were  
4 six of you all at the fire flat?

5 A. I don't believe so.

6 Q. In which case, it sounds as though, by the time you got  
7 there to join your colleagues from Old Kent Road, the  
8 crew from Peckham had already withdrawn.

9 A. Yeah, I think they must have done.

10 Q. Is it right that there was already a hose in place  
11 running up the stairs and towards the fire flat?

12 A. Yeah, that's what we followed to establish where the  
13 flat was.

14 Q. When you went into the corridor on the 9th floor,  
15 outside the fire flat, what were conditions like in the  
16 corridor?

17 A. I don't remember it being too smokey, I think it was  
18 quite clear.

19 Q. By the time you arrived, were crews already inside  
20 flat 65?

21 A. Yeah, people were already inside and the windows had  
22 already completely burnt away, so I think it was sort of  
23 venting itself, the fire, I mean it cleared a lot of the  
24 smoke.

25 Q. Did you go into flat 65 yourself when you arrived?

1 A. Yes, I did, yeah.

2 Q. Could you just tell us what you could see on the floor  
3 that was on the same level as the front door?

4 A. It was completely burnt out, I don't remember actually  
5 seeing a front door. The flat was completely burnt out,  
6 it was gutted.

7 Q. Was it still on fire?

8 A. I think there were small pockets of fire on the  
9 downstairs level.

10 Q. What were the other crew from Old Kent Road doing when  
11 you and Mr Mason arrived?

12 A. They were dousing pockets of fire on the -- on the lower  
13 level.

14 Q. Could you tell us what condition the stairs were in, in  
15 the flat, that led from the lower floor to the upper  
16 floor?

17 A. As I remember it, the stairs were totally gone, they  
18 were completely burnt out.

19 Q. Were you able to use the stairs to gain access to the  
20 upper floor?

21 A. No.

22 Q. Why not?

23 A. They'd just completely burnt away.

24 Q. Did you manage to gain access to the upper floor?

25 A. We -- when we got in there, we were told a three --

1 a three-piece extension ladder had been requested, and  
2 it was on its way up, so that we could gain access to  
3 the upper floor.

4 Q. Was the ladder brought?

5 A. It was brought, yeah, by Firefighter Miller, I believe  
6 I said in my statement at the time.

7 Q. Where was the ladder put?

8 A. Directly where the old staircase would have been.

9 Q. Did anyone then go up the ladder?

10 A. Yeah, me and Pete Mason took turns, one footing the  
11 ladder, one going up the ladder, 'cos it was still  
12 alight on the floor above, so we took turns in putting  
13 the fire out on the floor above.

14 Q. Why did you take turns?

15 A. Just 'cos it was quite -- it was very hot up there, so  
16 we just done little intervals each just to keep the heat  
17 exhaustion down.

18 Q. When you went up to the top of the ladder to fight the  
19 fire, what were the conditions like on the upper floor?

20 A. The same as the bottom floor, it had completely burnt  
21 out, it was still fire -- it was still alight, so we was  
22 actually fighting the fire. It was alight as I looked  
23 up to the right. I seem to remember the kitchen had  
24 completely burnt out already, but I know there was fire  
25 to the right, I can remember that, to the front of the

1 building.

2 Q. Were you and Mr Mason the first pair to fight the fire  
3 on the upper floor?

4 A. I believe we were, yeah.

5 Q. When you were at the top of the ladder fighting the  
6 fire, could you see all the way on each side to the back  
7 wall of the upper floor?

8 A. I could see to where the glazing on the -- is it the  
9 east side? Where the glazing -- where the debris was  
10 coming down we said was the west side, didn't we? So  
11 I could see to the west side. I believe when I looked  
12 up to my left it was the kitchen area, I couldn't say if  
13 I could see to the back wall.

14 Q. Were you able to see how far to either side of the  
15 ladder the flat extended, to get an impression of width?

16 A. I believe -- I think we could, yeah, I think we could.

17 Q. Were you able to see how far the upper floor extended,  
18 for example, compared to where the central corridor was  
19 on the flat by the front door?

20 A. That would be kind of looking back on myself, wouldn't  
21 it? It was kind of -- where the staircase went up,  
22 I remember -- I remember seeing forward to the right and  
23 to the left, I can't honestly say looking backwards,  
24 I can't -- I mean I would have done, but I can't  
25 remember.

1 Q. Was there a lot of smoke on the upper floor?

2 A. Yeah, it was heavily smoke-logged, yeah.

3 Q. Did there come a point where your colleagues Mr Belmont  
4 and Mr Sanchez had to turn around because they were  
5 getting low on air?

6 A. There would have been, yeah. I can't actually remember  
7 when but there would have been.

8 Q. At the point when they left, did that just leave you and  
9 Mr Mason?

10 A. That's correct, yeah.

11 Q. Can I ask you please about two separate incidents that  
12 I understand occurred when you were inside the building?

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. The first was an occasion when your alarm on your  
15 bodyguard unit went off --

16 A. (The witness nodded)

17 Q. -- and the other is an occasion when a crew manager,  
18 Crew Manager Clarke, came and asked for assistance.  
19 Can I just begin by asking you which of those two  
20 incidents -- well, for a start, do you remember those  
21 two things happening?

22 A. Yeah, the first incident obviously happened to me, it  
23 was my alarm that went off, but I believe  
24 Crew Manager Clarke spoke to Firefighter Mason, and  
25 Crew Manager Clarke and Firefighter Mason went off

1 searching, so -- but I don't know about that incident.

2 Q. Could I ask you which of those two things happened  
3 first?

4 A. I wouldn't be able to tell you. I think -- well,  
5 I can't say I'm guessing, can I? I honestly don't know.

6 Q. Well, I won't ask you to guess, but perhaps if we  
7 explore each of them it may be that you'll remember the  
8 order of events.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. If we think first, then, about Crew Manager Clarke. You  
11 say he came and asked for help from Mr Mason.

12 A. Well, this is from Pete's statement, yeah. I don't  
13 actually remember that, I'm just going by what Pete --  
14 Firefighter Mason said yesterday, I didn't speak to  
15 Crew Manager Clarke myself, I don't think.

16 Q. Do you remember at any stage Mr Mason leaving you so  
17 that you were there in the fire flat by yourself and  
18 Mr Mason had gone with Crew Manager Clarke?

19 A. Yeah, I -- I remember standing by the doorway while  
20 Mr Mason went off, Firefighter Mason went off. I was in  
21 the doorway just dousing. I think there were still  
22 a couple of small pockets of fire on the lower level  
23 then.

24 Q. Was that usual, to be fighting a fire but to be by  
25 yourself rather than as part of a pair?

1 A. It's not usual, but then that whole fire wasn't usual.  
2 Firefighter Mason was only walking down a corridor, not  
3 far from me, I was at the doorway of the flat, so we  
4 were -- we was -- we was in sight, you might say.

5 Q. At that point, to the best of your recollection, was  
6 your radio equipment working?

7 A. No, I don't think it would have been then.

8 Q. When Mr Mason went with Crew Manager Clarke, did they  
9 stay in the same corridor that you were in, the same  
10 side of the central staircase?

11 A. Yeah, as far as I know, yeah. I mean, you'd have to ask  
12 them that.

13 Q. The second incident then, when your alarm went off, can  
14 you remember where you were when that happened?

15 A. I think I was footing the ladder while Pete was  
16 upstairs -- Pete was at the top of the ladder, and I was  
17 trying to get radio contact, and of course when I'm  
18 concentrating footing the ladder and trying to get radio  
19 contract -- contact, I'd obviously stayed still for too  
20 long, the alarm on our bodyguard set, which is what we  
21 carry on our breathing apparatus set, has motion sensors  
22 in it, so if you don't move your alarm goes off.

23 So I'd been standing still for -- I don't know how  
24 long it is, 30 seconds maybe, I'm not sure, and it goes  
25 into a pre-alarm and then goes into a full alarm, but

1           whilst I was trying to communicate I -- I couldn't hear  
2           the pre-alarm, so it went into full alarm, it activated.

3    Q.   When the alarm activates, does it make a sound?

4    A.   Yes.

5    Q.   Were you able to hear the sound of it activating?

6    A.   The full activation, I could hear, yeah, but the  
7           pre-alarm, no. The pre-alarm is like a little beep and  
8           the full activation then you can actually hear.

9    Q.   Once the alarm is activated, can you turn it off?

10   A.   No.

11   Q.   What do you have to do in order to deactivate the alarm?

12   A.   You have to return to the bridgehead where the ECO is,  
13           the entry control officer who's taken your tally off you  
14           with a key on it that you put inside the bodyguard and  
15           it deactivates it.

16   Q.   Did you do that?

17   A.   That's exactly what we done, yeah.

18   Q.   Did you go down by yourself or did Mr Mason go with you?

19   A.   No, I think we went down together, I think we stayed  
20           together for that bit. Yeah, we went down and  
21           deactivated it.

22   Q.   At that time was the bridgehead where it had been when  
23           you went up on the 7th floor?

24   A.   It was at that time, yeah.

25   Q.   Were you able to deactivate the alarm?



1 A. Yeah, I deactivated the alarm, yeah.

2 Q. Were you then given any instructions about what to do  
3 next?

4 A. I think it was at that point that I informed that we had  
5 no radio contact, no comms, and we was told by a crew  
6 manager, I'm not sure of his name, to stay on the  
7 9th floor, to go back up and carry on with what we were  
8 doing and they will come and -- someone will come and  
9 get us, or obviously if we -- if our air goes low then  
10 we just come down anyway.

11 Q. The arrangement was that although you were not in radio  
12 contact somebody would come up from the bridgehead on  
13 the 7th floor if there was a need to contact you?

14 A. Yeah, there was, yeah.

15 Q. Equally, if you needed to withdraw for any reason, you  
16 could go back to the bridgehead on the 7th floor?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. Do you remember what you did on the 9th floor, when you  
19 went back up?

20 A. I think there was -- 'cos -- yeah, I think there was  
21 a -- a small fire in -- a pocket of fire had developed  
22 again in the lower floor of the flat by a cot. We put  
23 that out and then we -- I think we were banging on the  
24 doors then. We went knocking on doors a lot, across the  
25 rest of the floor to make sure no-one was still inside

1           their flats.

2    Q.   Was that on the same side as the fire, or was it on the  
3           opposite side of the stairs?

4    A.   Both sides, we were knocking.

5    Q.   Both sides of the central staircase?

6    A.   Yeah, I think so, yeah.   Yeah, I think we went right  
7           along the corridor.

8    Q.   Did you find anybody in their flats?

9    A.   There was no answer on none of the flats, no.

10   Q.   Do you remember why it was that you left the 9th floor?

11   A.   I believe it was because we was -- our air supply was  
12           low.

13   Q.   How did you become aware that it was time to turn  
14           around?

15   A.   You just check your gauge and you know that you're  
16           running low on air.

17   Q.   Was that a decision you made yourselves, or did anybody  
18           come to speak to you?

19   A.   No, we made that decision ourselves, if our air's going  
20           low then -- you have to give yourself obviously enough  
21           air to get yourself down the staircase and back out.

22   Q.   Could I ask you please to look at page 152 of your  
23           statement, you remember we looked at it yesterday?

24   A.   Yeah.

25   Q.   If you could look, please, towards the bottom of

1 page 152, the second to last paragraph?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. About halfway through that paragraph, you say that

4 Mr Mason came over to join you, and you were then

5 shortly joined by the crew manager who:

6 "... informed us that our time of whistle was due

7 and we had to get out."

8 A. Oh, right.

9 Q. Do you remember that happening?

10 A. I don't now, but if that's what I wrote at the time,

11 this -- this was obviously written only a week after,

12 then yeah. He must have come up and told us to leave

13 then.

14 Q. So do we understand that, as well as having somebody

15 bring you a message that it was time to leave, you were

16 also able to check the gauge on your own equipment?

17 A. Yeah, we keep an eye on our own air, but I must admit

18 I'd forgotten that he come to tell us to leave, but if

19 that's what I writ in this statement then --

20 Q. If we just read on a little further, the statement says:

21 "All three of us went down to the 7th floor where

22 the bridgehead was, but it had moved."

23 A. That's correct, yeah.

24 Q. We know of course that when you went to get your alarm

25 deactivated that the bridgehead was still on the

1           7th floor.

2    A.   It was still there then, yeah.

3    Q.   Had you heard, by radio or any other communication that

4           the bridgehead had moved until the time that you went

5           down at the end of your shift?

6    A.   No, 'cos I can remember going down the stairs and

7           thinking, "Where's the bridgehead?"

8    Q.   Where had the bridgehead moved to?

9    A.   I believe it had moved to the 3rd floor or the 2nd

10           floor.

11   Q.   If we look back, please, at the table that we saw

12           yesterday with the various times for the bodyguard data,

13           you remember that your name appears four lines from the

14           bottom on the right-hand side.

15   A.   Yeah, that's correct.

16   Q.   We can see the time, 17.02, which I've just highlighted

17           in blue, the time when you stopped breathing air through

18           the breathing apparatus equipment?

19   A.   Yeah.

20   Q.   That would be the time that you passed back through the

21           entry control point and replaced the tally and you

22           stopped using the breathing apparatus?

23   A.   That's correct, yeah.

24   Q.   Could you please give the jury an impression of the

25           conditions that you encountered when you were

1            firefighting on the 9th floor?

2    A.    The upstairs compartment was very hot, the -- that's why  
3            we took turns in going up and down the ladder.    The  
4            smoke wasn't too bad whilst firefighting because, like  
5            I say, the glazing had gone so it was self-ventilating  
6            itself, but it was very, very, very, very hot.

7    Q.    When you passed through the entry control point on your  
8            way out, did you speak to anybody to explain what you  
9            had done?

10   A.    Yeah, the -- the procedure is to just give a briefing of  
11           what you -- what task you done and where you'd been.  
12           I would have given that to the crew manager at the time  
13           who was on entry control.

14   Q.    Can you remember who that was?

15   A.    No, I can't, sorry.

16   Q.    Do you recall whether there was any discussion about the  
17           layout of the building at that time?

18   A.    I don't recall.    I could say -- I can say that there  
19           would have been, but I don't recall.

20   Q.    After you had left the building I think it's right that  
21           you did what's called a fire ground A test --

22   A.    Yes, I did.

23   Q.    -- so that you would be ready to be committed to the  
24           building a second time if that was necessary.

25   A.    That's correct.

1 Q. Were you asked to set up a ground monitor --

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. -- with Mr Mason?

4 A. Yeah, that's correct.

5 Q. What was the purpose of the ground monitor?

6 A. The ground monitor, I believe -- because of the spread

7 of the fire already on the 9th, the ground monitor would

8 then -- the fires that had now taken place on the 5th,

9 I believe, and the 3rd -- the ground monitor would cover

10 the outside of them flats to stop spread above -- stop

11 the fire spreading from the outside to the flats above.

12 Q. Did you and Mr Mason operate that equipment for a time

13 directing water onto the building?

14 A. We did, yeah.

15 Q. After that did you remain at Lakanal House, available in

16 case there were any tasks that needed to be carried out?

17 A. Yeah, yeah.

18 Q. But in the event there was no need for you to go back

19 into the building?

20 A. We didn't get recalled, no. I think we -- we queued up

21 in a -- in a holding area, but there was enough

22 personnel to keep going in until our relief time came,

23 which meant we left the job.

24 Q. I've put a diagram on the screen, which is the view of

25 the west side of Lakanal House --

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. -- which shows the building as it would seem to somebody  
3 standing outside it. Can I just show you a second  
4 diagram which has on it the numbers of the different  
5 flats.

6 A. Right.

7 Q. So if one knew where all of the different flats were it  
8 would be possible to draw a diagram like that?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Could I ask, during the course of the day did you build  
11 up that sort of mental image of the building where you  
12 would be able to say which flat number was in which part  
13 of the building?

14 A. No. I mean you -- you get given specific tasks to do  
15 what you do, and we was obviously sent to flat 65 to do  
16 our job, but no, I didn't take -- there was no time  
17 where I was thinking about the layout, I was just going  
18 to where I was supposed to be and fighting fire.

19 Q. Did anybody speak to you after you had come out of the  
20 building about the layout or what you had learned about  
21 the layout when you had been committed into the  
22 building?

23 A. Yeah, I mean during our debrief -- I can't recall  
24 exactly what was said in the debrief, but the idea of  
25 the debrief is to explain exactly where you've been,

1 exactly where you went, describe the flat from the  
2 inside, what it looks like, what the layout is. So  
3 they're the things you go through in every debrief.

4 Q. Mr Mechen, I have one final question for you, which is:  
5 what single additional thing do you think would have  
6 made your work easier on 3 July 2009?

7 A. This fire's so unusual, I -- better comms, better  
8 communications maybe, but now that has been improved by  
9 the London Fire Brigade, so --

10 Q. Mr Mechen, thank you very much, those are all the  
11 questions that I have.

12 A. Thank you.

13 Q. Others may have some for you.

14 Questions from THE CORONER

15 THE CORONER: Mr Mechen, you described how when Mr Mason  
16 went off with Crew Manager Clarke.

17 A. Yeah.

18 THE CORONER: I think you were left with the jet, so were  
19 you alone at that point?

20 A. I would have been alone, yeah.

21 THE CORONER: We heard from other firefighters that one  
22 person's on the front of the jet and another is helping  
23 with the hose, and there may indeed be other pair coming  
24 up behind also helping with the hose, but there you were  
25 left -- not left, but you were by yourself holding the



1 hose. Were you able to cope?

2 A. Yeah, the reason you have people behind you is when  
3 you're manoeuvring the hose, but if I'm just in place  
4 and the branch's handle can be opened, so it's not full,  
5 so I wouldn't be using full power, so I can carry on  
6 dousing the fire --

7 THE CORONER: I see.

8 A. -- still working but just obviously on my own while  
9 other people are tasked what to deal with.

10 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

11 Mr Hendy?

12 Questions by MR HENDY

13 MR HENDY: Mr Mechen, I have some questions on behalf of the  
14 bereaved families and my name's Hendy.

15 The first one is this: that when you were directed  
16 up to the 7th floor, where the bridgehead was and then  
17 to attend the 9th floor to search for people, that is  
18 an order which you received personally along with your  
19 colleagues from Incident Commander Howling, is it not?

20 A. I believe so, yeah, that was in my statement.

21 Q. Does it help just to look at the statement you made  
22 a week after?

23 A. It would, yeah.

24 Q. It's page 149 right at the bottom:

25 " ... returned to main Ops ... reported to

1 Incident Commander Howling. He then directed us up to  
2 the 7th floor where the bridgehead was and then to  
3 attend the 9th floor to search for people."

4 Yes?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. But in fact when you got to the bridgehead you were told  
7 to firefight?

8 A. Yeah, yeah, that would have been correct.

9 Q. The next was this: that you were the BA radio  
10 operator -- that's very inelegantly phrased, let me  
11 start again.

12 Of the two of you bearing BA equipment, Mason and  
13 Mechen, you were the chap who had the BA radio set with  
14 the earpiece and the microphone in the breathing  
15 apparatus.

16 A. That's correct, yeah.

17 Q. Before you -- when you handed your tally in on the 7th  
18 floor, before you started the BA set, you completed  
19 a communications check with that apparatus?

20 A. That's correct, yeah.

21 Q. It was functioning well then?

22 A. Yeah, the signals were fine.

23 Q. You're on channel 6?

24 A. I might have been on channel 6, yeah.

25 Q. Now, when you were inside fighting the fire, the

1 three-piece ladder arrived, which in your statement you  
2 mentioned was brought up by Firefighter Miller.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. In your statement, perhaps you could just look at it,  
5 page 151, three paragraphs down, says:

6 "I completed regular communications checks and also  
7 did this for the other crew as theirs had stopped  
8 working."

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Just pausing there, when you say, "I completed regular  
11 communications checks," do you mean you completed  
12 several in the course of your visit, or --

13 A. Yeah, it was working -- it was working for a time, and  
14 because theirs weren't working, you just report your  
15 gauge readings so the entry control officer knows your  
16 BA set's functioning properly, there's no leaks or  
17 no-one's losing air at an alarming rate.

18 Q. So the position is that just after the ladder arrives,  
19 you check your BA communications system on channel 6 by  
20 calling the chap at the bridgehead, presumably?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Yours was at that stage working or not working?

23 A. I don't know, 'cos that's -- that's when my ADSU went  
24 off at the bottom of the ladder, so that's when  
25 I started having problems with my radio.

1 Q. Right. Then you say in that part of the statement that  
2 the other pairs had stopped working, along with  
3 firefighter Sanchez's breathing apparatus  
4 communications, so then on channel 6 you called Sanchez,  
5 or he calls you, to check that channel 6 is working on  
6 his breathing apparatus, and it's not.

7 A. No, Sanchez was trying to call the bridgehead, but no,  
8 his had packed in.

9 Q. Could you hear him through your earpiece calling the  
10 bridgehead or not?

11 A. I can't remember -- I couldn't say I could actually hear  
12 him, you've got to remember, there's so much -- there's  
13 so much radio communications going on that I couldn't  
14 say if I heard him, I couldn't say that.

15 Q. Understood. Then if we just look over the page at the  
16 top of page 152?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. You say around the same time -- I'm sorry, forgive me,  
19 can we just pick it up at the bottom of 151 to get the  
20 context.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Your alarm had gone off, because of inactivity, you've  
23 explained all that.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. At the bottom you say:

1            "I tried to radio the incident commander to inform  
2            of the false alarm activation and that I was okay, but  
3            it wasn't received due to a different channel possibly,  
4            so I then tried to transmit to the entry control officer  
5            to inform him that I was okay, but there was no response  
6            to my transmission."

7            We'll just read over the page at 152, if we may.

8            A. Yeah.

9            Q. I'll wait until the jury get it up. At the top of 152  
10           you say:

11           "At around the same time, the entry control officer  
12           had been trying to contact me via the comms for the  
13           gauge readings. I was replying but he didn't respond  
14           and continued to request."

15           So is the jury to understand from that that your BA  
16           radio kit was at that stage not working on channel 6?

17           A. Yeah, I believe it must have been then, because what  
18           I say -- what I mean when I say I tried to contact the  
19           incident commander to let him know that my ADSU had gone  
20           off and it's a false alarm, the incident commander's  
21           outside, so he'll be on channel 1.

22           Q. Right.

23           A. So that's why when I say he'd be on a different channel,  
24           I realise then "Well, he's going to be on channel 1,  
25           let's try and get hold of entry control and just let

1           someone know that I am not in trouble and it's just  
2           an alarm that's gone off".

3   Q.   Right.  Just to make it clear, when you're trying  
4           channel 1, is that on your personal radio?

5   A.   No, I wasn't trying to -- no what I done was, I've  
6           pushed in me button to radio, and then I've realised  
7           that he's gonna be on channel 1, he's not going to be on  
8           channel 6, so I can't get hold of him on my BA comms  
9           radio, so I then just asked for the entry control  
10          officer to try and just inform him.  I didn't actually  
11          change channels physically.

12   Q.   Right.  So all this is about your BA set, you didn't use  
13          the personal radio?

14   A.   No, the personal, no, because your personal radio sits  
15          on you, you're wearing your firefighting gloves, you've  
16          got all your gear on, you can't change channels in the  
17          middle of a job.

18   Q.   When you're wearing gloves the controls are too fine to  
19          operate, I understand.

20   A.   It's just not feasible to change channels, no.

21   Q.   So the position was that for some reason  
22          Firefighter Sanchez's BA radio set wasn't working, and  
23          nor was yours?

24   A.   Mmm-hmm.

25   Q.   Did you ever get to the bottom of that?

1 A. No, whether there's something in the building -- some  
2 buildings you have problems communicating through,  
3 I don't know, I really don't know. I wouldn't -- it's  
4 not.

5 THE CORONER: Mr Mechen, please don't speak too quickly,  
6 because the typists need to make a note of what you're  
7 saying.

8 A. All right, sorry.

9 MR HENDY: You went down to the bridgehead, you got your  
10 tally reset, your alarm switched off. You returned to  
11 the 9th floor. On page 152, if you still have it up, in  
12 the fourth paragraph you say:

13 "I returned to the 9th floor with Firefighter Mason  
14 and we went to the furthest end of the corridor where  
15 the fire had been and began to bang on each of the  
16 doors. We still had our breathing equipment on."

17 Had you realised that Mr Clark and Mr Bennett had  
18 already carried out that operation on that part of the  
19 corridor?

20 A. No, we wouldn't have realised that.

21 Q. Later, you went on to set up and operate the ground  
22 monitor, and we've heard quite a lot of evidence about  
23 that.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Mr Mason told us, and indeed he wrote it in his

1 statement, that it was directed to -- he said:

2 "This was a jet being used to spray water at the  
3 9th and 11th floor."

4 He explained how difficult that was, you could only  
5 do it momentarily?

6 A. Yeah, with the wind as well, we weren't -- we were  
7 getting nowhere with getting up there, so I believe we  
8 then moved down to the lower levels and, like I say, was  
9 trying to prevent the fire spread from the outside.

10 Q. Right, and then you were hitting around the 7th and the  
11 5th floors?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. The final matter I wanted to ask you about is this: that  
14 on page 154 you say in the middle of the paragraph that  
15 you were approached by a man from the flats who informed  
16 you that the bushes to the right of the building had  
17 caught alight by falling debris?

18 A. Sorry, what paragraph's this?

19 Q. This is just in the middle of the page, if we just pick  
20 um:

21 "He informed me that the bushes to the right of the  
22 building ..."

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. We know who "he" was, he was the chap from the flats  
25 opposite:





1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. How would you describe the fire on the 10th floor, ie  
3 the area where you were accessing by the ladder?

4 A. Well, I believe we put the majority of that fire --  
5 I think we put all that fire out on the top floor by the  
6 time we left the flat, so by the time we left the flat,  
7 the whole flat was out and, like I say, it wasn't really  
8 smokey because there was no windows, it was clearing  
9 itself pretty quick.

10 Q. Okay. So as you were knocking on the doors on the  
11 9th floor corridor --

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. -- if any of those doors had been answered, what was  
14 your advice going to be to the residents in those flats?

15 A. We was gonna take them down.

16 Q. Thank you.

17 Questions by MS AL TAI

18 MS AL TAI: Good morning, Mr Mechen.

19 A. Good morning.

20 Q. I act on behalf of Mark Bailey?

21 THE CORONER: Sorry, could you get closer to the microphone,  
22 please.

23 MS AL TAI: I apologise. I act on behalf of Mark Bailey,  
24 Catherine Hickman's partner. Just to clarify something  
25 you answered recently to my learned friend Mr Dowden,

1           you believed you put out the fire on the 10th floor; is  
2           that correct?

3    A.   I believe we did, yeah.

4    Q.   Were you aware at the time that the fire had spread?

5    A.   No.

6    Q.   So as far as you were concerned, at that point the fire  
7           had been put out?

8    A.   Yes, that's it, we really thought that was -- it was all  
9           out --

10   Q.   Thank you very much.

11   A.   -- and hadn't spread at all.

12   Q.   I apologise. Thank you, Mr Mechen.

13   THE CORONER: Mr Compton?

14   MR COMPTON: No, thank you.

15   THE CORONER: Mr Walsh? Oh, I'm sorry.

16                                    Questions by MS NAQSHBANDI

17   MS NAQSHBANDI: Mr Mechen, you were asked yesterday by  
18           Mr Atkins what you could see when you arrived, and you  
19           said:

20                    "I recall seeing smoke punching out, some flame, and  
21                    there was a lot of debris falling. It appeared to be  
22                    parts of a window frame and some soft furnishings."

23   A.   That's what it looked like, yeah.

24   Q.   So the same topic, in your witness statement, it's at  
25           page 149, the second paragraph, third line, you said:

1           "Part of the falling debris that I remember was  
2           parts of the window frames and carpet. There was also  
3           other items which were alight."

4           Understandably, you can't be precisely sure of what  
5           the debris was, but it was some form of burning  
6           material?

7   A. Yeah, correct, yeah.

8   Q. Thank you very much.

9   THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Walsh?

10  MR WALSH: No, thank you.

11  THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Members of the jury, do  
12           you have any questions? Thank you.

13           Mr Mechen, thank you very much for coming and thank  
14           you very much for the help that you've given, and  
15           I apologise again for having had to interrupt your  
16           evidence yesterday.

17  A. That's all right.

18  THE CORONER: You're welcome to stay if you'd like, but  
19           you're free to go if you'd prefer.

20  A. Thank you very much.

21  THE CORONER: Yes?

22  MS AL TAI: Excuse me madam, I do apologise, I was just  
23           approached by my learned friend Mr Dowden and I might  
24           have a further question for Mr Mechen.

25  THE CORONER: Mr Mechen, sorry, please could you come back

1           again?

2   MS AL TAI:   I do apologise.

3                           Further questions by MS AL TAI

4   MS AL TAI:   I'm sorry, Mr Mechen, I don't mean to hassle  
5           you.

6   A.   That's all right.

7   Q.   Just one further question, actually, relating to the  
8           answer you gave just a moment ago, in respect of the  
9           fact that you thought that the fire had been put out on  
10          the 10th floor.  We know that your radio system wasn't  
11          working at that time.  Were you able to relay to the  
12          bridgehead that you thought the fire had been put out on  
13          the 10th floor?

14  A.   We'd have told them that on our debrief.

15  Q.   I'm sorry, I couldn't hear?

16  A.   Sorry, on our debrief when we went down, that's when  
17          I would have given any information over, because  
18          obviously we wouldn't comms I couldn't transmit at the  
19          time, so I would have told the people what we done and  
20          how we done it when I got back to the bridgehead, so  
21          I would have done it then.

22  Q.   I see, thank you very much, Mr Mechen?

23  THE CORONER:  Thank you.

24   (The witness withdrew)

25  MR MAXWELL-SCOTT:  Madam, the next witness is

1 Robert Bennett.

2 THE CORONER: Yes. Mr Bennett, are you in court? Thank  
3 you, would you like to come forward, please.

4 ROBERT BENNETT (affirmed)

5 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Bennett. Do sit down. Do help  
6 yourself to a glass of water.

7 A. Thank you.

8 THE CORONER: You'll appreciate that the microphone is on  
9 but you need to be quite close to it for your voice to  
10 be picked up. We do need you to be close to it, so when  
11 you're giving your answers if you could perhaps look  
12 across to the jurors and that will help them and also  
13 help to keep you close to the microphone.

14 A. Yes, madam.

15 THE CORONER: Mr Maxwell-Scott who is standing is going to  
16 ask questions initially on my behalf and then there will  
17 be questions from others.

18 A. Okay.

19 THE CORONER: Thank you.

20 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

21 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Can you give the court your full name  
22 please?

23 A. Yeah, my full name is Robert William Bennett.

24 Q. Is it right that at the time that we are concerned with,  
25 the fire on 3 July 2009, you were employed as

1 a firefighter based at the Old Kent Road fire station?

2 A. I was, yes.

3 Q. At that time, how long had you been working for the  
4 London Fire Brigade?

5 A. A little over seven years at the time.

6 Q. I take it that you still work for them?

7 A. I do, yes, yeah.

8 Q. Had you been to Lakana1 House before you were called  
9 there on 3 July 2009?

10 A. No, I've never actually visited the premises at all.

11 Q. In that case I'll turn straight away to asking you about  
12 your involvement in attempting to fight the fire on  
13 3 July.

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Is it right that you were called out from the  
16 Old Kent Road fire station and that you travelled to the  
17 fire on pump E352?

18 A. Yes, that's correct.

19 Q. Do you remember who was on that pump with you?

20 A. On the appliance, the officer in charge was  
21 Crew Manager Clarke, the driver was Firefighter Mason,  
22 and on the back was Firefighter Mechen and myself.

23 Q. Records which the jury have in their sequence of events  
24 indicate that your appliance arrived at approximately  
25 16.27.

1 A. Yeah, that must be correct, yeah.

2 Q. Do you recall which other appliances were already on the  
3 scene?

4 A. Already on the scene, there was Echo 371, which was  
5 Peckham's pump ladder, Echo 372, which was their pump,  
6 Old Kent Road's pump ladder, which was Echo 351, and  
7 then I believe we turned up next with ALP, the aerial  
8 ladder, just pulling up behind us.

9 Q. So you think that you were the fourth appliance to  
10 arrive?

11 A. I believe so, yes.

12 Q. E351, which had Watch Manager Howling on it, was there  
13 when you arrived?

14 A. That's correct, yeah.

15 Q. Then the aerial appliance from your fire station arrived  
16 shortly after you?

17 A. Yeah, I didn't actually see if they pulled up behind us,  
18 but I'm sure they were following us at the time.

19 Q. Whilst you were on your journey from the fire station,  
20 did you notice anything to indicate what you were going  
21 to?

22 A. Not initially, but en route we heard over the radio that  
23 the control had received further calls for the fire, and  
24 I believe they classed it then as a four pump fire, and  
25 as we drove, I believe, down Commercial Way we did see



1 the smoke from the -- from the building.

2 Q. Do you remember hearing any messages over radio about  
3 anybody being trapped in a flat?

4 A. No, I didn't, no.

5 Q. Do you remember hearing any flat numbers?

6 A. No, I didn't, no.

7 Q. When you arrived at the scene, who, as far as you  
8 understood, was the incident commander?

9 A. I believe it was John -- Watch Manager Howling.

10 Q. Was he the person who gave you your first tasking?

11 A. He was, yes.

12 Q. What was the first thing that you were asked to do?

13 A. We were asked to put a cordon around the -- around the  
14 building.

15 Q. Who asked you to do that?

16 A. I believe it was Watch Manager Howling.

17 Q. Did you do that on your own or with any of your  
18 colleagues?

19 A. No, it was with Firefighter Mechen.

20 Q. Do you remember why it was thought to be a good idea to  
21 set up a cordon at that time?

22 A. Generally, we -- with any incident we try and put  
23 a cordon up, but in this situation there was falling  
24 debris and there was members of the public still in and  
25 around the bottom of the building, so it was best to

1 sort of keep everyone away, to keep everyone safe.

2 Q. At this stage, were you on the west side of the building  
3 or the east side of the building, getting your briefing?

4 A. I believe it was the west side.

5 Q. Can you recall whether the debris that was falling was  
6 alight, or whether any of it was alight?

7 A. When I saw it, there was -- there was bits alight.  
8 I couldn't tell you what material it was, but there was  
9 glass and putting the two together, because it was  
10 glass, I thought it may have been window material, so  
11 I was thinking trims or plastic or something like that,  
12 but I couldn't -- I couldn't 100 per cent say it was  
13 this sort of material.

14 Q. Did you hear anybody who was in a more senior position  
15 to you commenting on the fact that, as you recall it,  
16 some of the debris that was falling was alight?

17 A. I don't believe so, no.

18 Q. I am just going to draw your attention to a map that you  
19 marked up shortly after the incident, which is at  
20 page 115 of the advocates' bundles. It's on the screen,  
21 and you'll be provided with a hard copy in a moment.

22 A. Yeah. (Handed)

23 Q. My understanding is that this is a map that you made  
24 some marks on on 6 July 2009, and it has your name at  
25 the top of it. Do you recognise that?

1 A. I do, yes.

2 Q. Looking towards the bottom right corner, you have drawn  
3 what looks like a circle that's not quite a complete  
4 circle, if you follow it round with my white arrow.

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Can you just explain to the members of the jury what you  
7 were indicating there?

8 A. That was roughly where we put the cordon up. It  
9 wouldn't be -- I mean, at the time, because around the  
10 bottom -- bottom of the building we were struggling to  
11 find things to tie it to. I think at one point round  
12 the back I think we had to sort of tie it round a tree  
13 branch.

14 Q. If you could help us as best you can with what the other  
15 markings are. Lakanal is obviously in the middle of  
16 that incomplete circle --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- and just to the right of it, it looks like you've  
19 written "ECO"; is that right?

20 A. That's right, yeah, that's where I set up an ECO, entry  
21 control point.

22 Q. We'll come to that, that was rather later on, wasn't it?

23 A. That was, yeah.

24 Q. That's what you've indicated. Then it looks as if to  
25 the north of Lakanal House there are two rectangles with

1 "Q6" and "Q7".

2 A. That's correct, yeah.

3 Q. Can you help us with what they are?

4 A. The Q6, that was our initial -- that's where we stopped

5 when we initially turned up, and the Q7 is where the

6 appliances were resited, because we had to get the

7 aerial in.

8 Q. So you started at Q6 and then there came a time, which

9 we'll talk about later, when your appliance moved to Q7

10 to allow the aerial ladder platform to go where you had

11 previously been?

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

13 Q. Thank you. Q11 we see to the west of Lakanal?

14 A. Yes, I've got that, yeah.

15 Q. Do you know what that's referring to?

16 A. I can't recall that, no.

17 Q. Don't worry about that for the moment.

18 A. All right.

19 Q. After you had completed the cordon that we've heard you

20 describe and we've seen on your map, what did you do

21 next?

22 A. We reported back to Watch Manager Howling.

23 Q. Who else was with you when you reported back to him?

24 A. At the time, Firefighter Mechen.

25 Q. Do you remember where your colleagues Mr Mason and

1 Mr Clarke were at this time?

2 A. I believe Mr Clarke was still with  
3 Watch Manager Howling, and I couldn't -- I couldn't say  
4 where Firefighter Mason was.

5 Q. Did Mr Howling then give you a new task?

6 A. He did, yes.

7 Q. What was that?

8 A. The task was to put breathing apparatus on and then to  
9 go to the bridgehead.

10 Q. Did he tell you what he wanted you to do when you got to  
11 the bridgehead?

12 A. At that point he didn't, no.

13 Q. Who else did he give that same briefing to?

14 A. Sorry, to go the bridgehead?

15 Q. Yes.

16 A. Crew Manager Clarke, Firefighter Mason,  
17 Firefighter Mechen and myself.

18 Q. So the four of you were tasked by Watch Manager Howling  
19 to go to the bridgehead and your recollection is that  
20 you would go to the bridgehead and essentially get  
21 instructions, is that right?

22 A. That's correct, yeah.

23 Q. Isn't possible that Watch Manager Howling might have  
24 given some additional instructions to  
25 Crew Manager Clarke which you didn't overhear or which

1           you don't recall today?

2    A.   That's possible, yes.

3    Q.   As far as you were concerned, you were going to go to

4           the bridgehead and then you were going to take it from

5           there?

6    A.   That's correct, yeah.

7    Q.   Did you then put on breathing apparatus --

8    A.   We did, yes.

9    Q.   -- and then make your way to the bridgehead?

10   A.   The bridgehead, yeah.

11   Q.   How did you go, did you take a lift or did you use the

12           stairs?

13   A.   I believe Crew Manager Clarke and myself took the

14           stairs.

15   Q.   Do you know what Mr Mechen and Mr Mason did?

16   A.   I followed Crew Manager Clarke, and as soon as we got in

17           we just run up the stairs and I couldn't -- the others

18           were behind, so whether they took the stairs or lift up

19           I couldn't tell you, I'm afraid.

20   Q.   So from that first moment in time, going into the

21           building, you had become a pair with Mr Clarke?

22   A.   That's correct, yes.

23   Q.   Did you come across anybody coming down the stairs?

24   A.   No, we didn't, no.

25   Q.   So you made your way to the bridgehead on the 7th floor

1 without encountering anyone on your way?

2 A. No, we didn't, no.

3 Q. When you got to the bridgehead on the 7th floor, was  
4 that in the staircase itself or was it outside of the  
5 staircase?

6 A. That was within the staircase itself.

7 Q. Can you help us with who was there? Restarting that,  
8 perhaps how many people were there?

9 A. I know Firefighter Miller was there. There was a crew  
10 manager from Peckham who I don't know his name.

11 Q. How did you know he was from Peckham?

12 A. I presumed because we were the only machines there at  
13 the time.

14 Q. Entirely logical, you knew the two Peckham appliances  
15 were there, you knew that there were no other appliances  
16 yet from other fire stations, you didn't know who he  
17 was, so you therefore assumed he was from Peckham.

18 A. I did, yes.

19 Q. How did you know he was a crew manager?

20 A. He had markings on his helmet.

21 Q. So he was there; was it Firefighter Miller?

22 A. Firefighter Miller, yeah.

23 Q. Do you recall anyone else?

24 A. I -- I couldn't honestly -- I couldn't honestly say if  
25 there was anyone else there. At that time, people were

1 starting to move up and it was getting quite crowded.

2 Q. Was someone acting as the entry control officer?

3 A. Yes, they was.

4 Q. Was that Mr Miller?

5 A. I believe that was Mr Miller, yes.

6 Q. Were you then given a task by the crew manager from

7 Peckham?

8 A. I believe it was, yeah, to knock on the doors along the

9 11th -- sorry, on the 9th floor.

10 Q. Is it the case that he gave that to you, or that he gave

11 it to Mr Clarke, who then told you what the task was, or

12 can you not recall?

13 A. I can't recall, I'm afraid.

14 Q. But your understanding was you were going to knock on

15 the doors on the 9th floor.

16 A. Doors of the 9th floor, yeah.

17 Q. Did he give that you task before or after you started up

18 your BA equipment?

19 A. I believe it was before.

20 Q. Did you then start up your breathing apparatus?

21 A. We did, yes.

22 Q. When you say "we," that is you and who?

23 A. Crew Manager Clarke.

24 Q. This is a document at page 1036 of the advocates'

25 bundles. It's up on the screen. I think it very likely



1           that you've never seen it before.

2    A.   I haven't, no.

3    Q.   I also think it likely that you're not familiar with the

4           format of that document.

5    A.   No, I'm not, no.

6    Q.   Let me help you with what it is.  The breathing

7           apparatus that you and your colleagues wore has

8           a bodyguard system on it which has the ability to record

9           some information and in particular when you start up and

10          when you close down, and this page is a summary of the

11          information for the firefighters from the Old Kent Road

12          fire station who wore breathing apparatus on the day of

13          the fire.  In some cases we know that some of your

14          colleagues wore breathing apparatus but the data has not

15          survived, so Mr Mason is an example of that.  But in the

16          third line down, where I'm marking your name now --

17   A.   Yes.

18   Q.   -- can you see that?

19   A.   Yes, I can.

20   Q.   Then if you look to the left under the column marked,

21          "from" you see the time of 16.42.49.

22   A.   I do, yes.

23   Q.   So our understanding is that you started up your

24          breathing apparatus at that time.

25   A.   I believe so, yes.

1 Q. Then you'll see two lines below we have Mr Clarke. He's  
2 marked in yellow, and the reason for that is that there  
3 was a battery change on his system before the data was  
4 downloaded so the data is not as reliable as yours.

5 A. Oh right, okay.

6 Q. Can you help the court with whether or not you and  
7 Mr Clarke essentially started up your breathing  
8 apparatus at the same time?

9 A. I believe we did, yes.

10 Q. I'm going to ask you now about something you said in  
11 your witness statement that you made on 12 July 2009,  
12 and if necessary we'll have a look at it.

13 A. Okay.

14 Q. Let me just tell you what it says first. It's on  
15 page 157 of the statements bundle. You said this:

16 "Myself and Crew Manager Clarke then were asked to  
17 knock on flats (windows and doors) to alert any  
18 occupants to evacuate."

19 That's what you said on 12 July 2009. Does that  
20 ring bells, does that sound right?

21 A. I believe so, yeah.

22 Q. It probably would be useful to show you your statement,  
23 if you could be provided with that. It starts on  
24 page 156. (Handed)

25 Just take a moment to have a look at it and

1 recognise it. The first page, 12 July 2009.

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. This is the second page, and I'm asking you about  
4 something in essentially the middle of the page, where  
5 I have my cursor.

6 A. Yes, I can see that now.

7 Q. I want to ask you a bit more about that, because there's  
8 quite a lot of information in that single sentence. You  
9 say that the two of you were asked, and we're assuming  
10 that's by the crew manager from Peckham, is that right?

11 A. I believe so, yes.

12 Q. You mention knocking on flats, and you mention not only  
13 doors but also windows. We know that there are no  
14 windows on the internal central corridors in Lakanal  
15 House, so if you were going to knock on a window you  
16 would have to be on the outside of the building. So  
17 I am interested in whether at this time you think the  
18 crew manager from Peckham was asking you to knock not  
19 only on doors but also on windows.

20 A. I can't remember. I'm sorry, I can't remember.

21 Q. That's what you wrote at the time.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Help us if you can with this: if he did say to you,  
24 "knock on windows and doors," did you have any thoughts  
25 in your own mind about "how are we going to knock on

1 windows?"

2 A. Normally what we do, we just bang on a window. I'm  
3 sorry, is that what you're asking?

4 Q. I'm interested in how you thought you would get to  
5 windows to bang on them.

6 A. I don't know, as I say I've never been to the actual  
7 building itself, so whether -- I mean, some doors have  
8 vision panels.

9 Q. They do.

10 A. So I was -- I don't know, I was --

11 Q. That's how you remember it?

12 A. That's how I remember it, yeah.

13 Q. You didn't necessarily think to yourself, "windows"  
14 means the outside of the building?

15 A. Not at that time, no.

16 Q. Okay. Then just continuing the sentence, you were asked  
17 to do it, to do the knocking, to alert occupants to  
18 evacuate. Your statement says you and Mr Clarke were  
19 asked to knock on flats to alert any occupants to  
20 evacuate; is that what you think you were asked to do?

21 A. Yes, I believe so, yes.

22 Q. The occupants of which flats, or which floors, as you  
23 understood it, were you being asked to evacuate?

24 A. The 9th floor.

25 Q. On both sides of the central staircase?

1 A. I believe so, yes.

2 Q. So your understanding at the time of your task that you  
3 were given before you started up the breathing apparatus  
4 was to evacuate all flats on the 9th floor?

5 A. Yes, it was, yeah.

6 Q. That was Mr Clarke's task as well?

7 A. Yes, it was, yeah.

8 Q. Having been given that task, you then went upstairs to  
9 the 9th floor to start carrying it out?

10 A. We did, yes.

11 Q. If you could take up jury bundle at tab 11.

12 THE CORONER: It's just being given to you.

13 A. Okay. (Handed)

14 THE CORONER: Mr Maxwell-Scott, we'll need to find a short  
15 convenient break point at some stage.

16 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes. That's a diagram that's been  
17 prepared as part of the investigation after the fire to  
18 assist us in this case.

19 A. Okay.

20 Q. I'm taking you to it at this stage because it shows not  
21 only where flat numbers are in the building but also  
22 because it shows north, west and south, so it helps to  
23 get one bearings because it's relevant to how in your  
24 statement you described what you did next.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. You say that you began knocking on the flat doors along  
2 the southern corridor.

3 A. We did, yes.

4 Q. Just so we're clear that it was indeed the southern  
5 corridor, was it the corridor that didn't have the fire  
6 flat in it? Let me pause and help you.

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. I wouldn't automatically assume that it was completely  
9 straightforward to know whether you were facing north or  
10 south, east or west, when you were inside the building.

11 A. That's right, yeah.

12 Q. But I can tell you that the fire started in flat 65,  
13 which was on the north corridor, the closest flat to the  
14 central staircase. So the easiest way of checking  
15 whether you were in fact in the southern corridor is to  
16 ask you: were you in the corridor in which there was  
17 a flat on fire with hoses running into it and  
18 firefighters attacking it?

19 A. No, it -- no, it wasn't, the corridor was completely  
20 clear.

21 Q. So you're right, you were in the southern corridor.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Looking at this diagram, you were therefore in the  
24 corridor that had eight flats in it, numbered 57 to 64.

25 A. That's correct, yes.

1 Q. It's probably simplest to ask you this at this stage:  
2 did you ever go into the north corridor where the fire  
3 flat was?

4 A. No, I didn't, no.

5 Q. Is it right that you knocked on the flats on one side of  
6 the south corridor and Mr Clarke did the others?

7 A. That's correct, yes.

8 Q. You did the west side --

9 A. That's correct, yes.

10 Q. -- which means that you did, as you walked down the  
11 corridor on your right, 63, 61, 59 and 57?

12 A. That's correct, yes.

13 Q. Would I be right in thinking that you didn't find anyone  
14 in 63, 61 or 59?

15 A. No, I believe it was the last flat, the door we knocked  
16 on.

17 Q. So 57 was the first flat that you found occupied?

18 A. I believe so, yeah.

19 Q. When you knocked on it, did somebody answer?

20 A. They did, yes.

21 Q. Can you describe as best you can their appearance?

22 A. He was a black gentleman, very tall, medium build.

23 Q. That's fine, thank you. That's helpful. Was Mr Clarke  
24 with you at the time that you then spoke to that  
25 gentleman?

1 A. I believe by that time he was, yes.

2 Q. Had there been a time when you were in the south  
3 corridor when Mr Clarke wasn't with you in that  
4 corridor?

5 A. I don't believe so, no.

6 Q. So he was going down one side, you were going down the  
7 other side?

8 A. That's correct, yeah.

9 Q. What were conditions like in that corridor at that time,  
10 as you were knocking on doors?

11 A. At that time it was -- they were very good. There  
12 wasn't that much smoke.

13 Q. So, for example, when you went into the corridor, could  
14 you see to the end of the corridor where there's  
15 ventilation?

16 A. Yes, you could, yes.

17 Q. You told us that you knocked on the door of flat 57 as  
18 we have now worked out together. Did you go into the  
19 flat itself?

20 A. Doorway/hallway.

21 Q. What did the man who had answered the door do?

22 A. He then went up the stairs and his wife then came down  
23 the stairs with a baby and a young daughter.

24 Q. Did you go up the stairs?

25 A. I didn't, no.



1 Q. What, in essence, were you saying to that family?

2 A. We're evacuating people, so there was time to get any  
3 belongings they needed, so I believe the husband done  
4 that and I took the lady, the baby and the young girl  
5 back to the stairwell.

6 Q. So you saw him go upstairs and then come back downstairs  
7 with a woman and two children?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Do you recall what the woman looked like? If you don't,  
10 just say so.

11 A. I'm sorry, I don't, no.

12 Q. If I attempted to prompt your memory by suggesting that  
13 she was a black woman in her mid-20s, about 5 foot 2?

14 A. No.

15 Q. You don't know one way or the other?

16 A. No, she was a black -- black lady, but I don't think she  
17 was that young. From memory, I don't think she was that  
18 young.

19 Q. Were the children a girl aged about six and a baby?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. You, for obvious reasons, thought they were a family.  
22 As it happens, we may hear evidence that she and the two  
23 children had in fact come from flat 59 into flat 57, but  
24 you didn't know that at the time.

25 A. No, I didn't know that.

1 Q. What assistance did you give that group of four people  
2 to get out of the building?

3 A. I led the lady and the two children to the stairwell.  
4 Once we went through the end door, further down the  
5 corridor, that's where the fire flat was, and at that  
6 time there wasn't a lot of smoke, but it was smokey, and  
7 I sensed the six or seven year-old panicking a little  
8 bit, so I picked her up and just walked down the stairs  
9 with them, and the father followed.

10 Q. If I can help you perhaps, you would have got through  
11 a set of these doors from the opposite direction into  
12 a lobby area with some lifts; does that sound right?

13 A. That sounds about right, yes.

14 Q. Then there would have been another set of doors looking  
15 like this, and the fire flat would have been through  
16 those doors?

17 A. That's correct, yes.

18 Q. Obviously you didn't go through there, you went down the  
19 central staircase?

20 A. Into the staircase, yes.

21 Q. Do you remember how far down the staircase you went  
22 carrying the little girl?

23 A. I can't remember exactly. No, I'm sorry, I can't  
24 remember exactly.

25 Q. Do you remember what the conditions were like in the

1 lobby area, if you were standing essentially where that  
2 photograph was taken, on the 9th floor?

3 A. It's -- it's just the -- the lift lobby areas? As  
4 I say, it was -- it was a bit smokey, but it was -- it  
5 wasn't too bad, from a firefighter's point of view.

6 Q. When you got into the central staircase at the 9th floor  
7 level, what was it like there?

8 A. That was clear.

9 Q. Clear all the way down?

10 A. It was clear all the way down, yeah.

11 Q. Do you remember if Mr Clarke came with you down the  
12 stairs?

13 A. He didn't, no.

14 Q. So then there came a point when you let the family make  
15 their own way to the bottom, is that right?

16 A. That's correct, yes.

17 Q. What did you do then?

18 A. I then ran back up to the -- to the 9th floor -- to the  
19 bridgehead, where I then met up with  
20 Crew Manager Clarke.

21 Q. So you're now on the 7th floor, the bridgehead?

22 A. That's correct, yeah, where the entry control point is.

23 Q. Madam, that's probably a convenient moment for a short  
24 break?

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

1 Members of the jury, if you want to go with Mr Graham  
2 that would be helpful. If you want to leave your papers  
3 on your desks that's fine. If we could be back ready to  
4 begin at 11.25, please. Thank you.

5 Mr Bennett, because you're giving your evidence, the  
6 strict rule is that you must not talk to anyone about  
7 the case or your evidence.

8 A. Yes, madam.

9 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

10 (11.15 am)

11 (A short break)

12 THE CORONER: Do sit down, thank you. Yes.

13 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Mr Bennett, we'd just reached the point  
14 where you had helped a group of four people to safety in  
15 terms of getting to the central staircase where it  
16 wasn't smokey and you knew they could make their way  
17 down to the bottom without you having to help them any  
18 longer, and then you made your way back up the stairs,  
19 reached the 7th floor, found the bridgehead was still  
20 there, as you would have expected.

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. You found Mr Clarke there as well.

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Just before we follow the story on, let me ask you about  
25 radios. Had you been using radios, sending radio

1 messages, whilst you were carrying out the tasks that  
2 you have told us about so far?

3 A. No, we hadn't.

4 Q. Would you have been hearing messages coming over your  
5 radio?

6 A. Normally, on -- every breathing apparatus set doesn't  
7 have comms. On my set there wasn't a comms and,  
8 I believe, on Crew Manager Clarke's set there wasn't  
9 comms either.

10 Q. So those are the special comms, breathing apparatus  
11 masks?

12 A. There's nothing different within the actual set itself  
13 but it's just a radio's connected to it.

14 Q. Is that the one that is often set to channel 6?

15 A. That's correct, yes.

16 Q. As it happens, you weren't using it to send messages  
17 yourself?

18 A. No.

19 Q. When you got back to the bridgehead on the 7th floor,  
20 who was there?

21 A. I believe Crew Manager Clarke, Firefighter Miller, and  
22 there was another firefighter there which I -- I didn't  
23 know.

24 Q. Was that other firefighter acting as the entry control  
25 officer, or is that what Mr Miller was doing?

1 A. I still believe it was Mr Miller.

2 Q. Were you then personally given another task, as in  
3 somebody spoke to you and said, "Do this next"?

4 A. No, both Crew Manager Clarke and I just went straight  
5 back up to the 9th. Crew Manager Clarke had cleared the  
6 other side and we went to the next floor up, which we  
7 believed was the 10th.

8 Q. So just taking that slowly. When you say  
9 Crew Manager Clarke had cleared the other side, do you  
10 mean he'd cleared the other side of the south corridor,  
11 or do you mean that he'd gone onto the north corridor  
12 where you had never been?

13 A. That's correct, yes.

14 Q. The second?

15 A. The north -- sorry, yeah, the north corridor.

16 Q. So your understanding was that in the time that you had  
17 been helping the family down the stairs and making your  
18 way back up, Crew Manager Clarke had gone on to the  
19 north corridor where the fire flat was --

20 A. (The witness nodded)

21 Q. -- and cleared it?

22 A. That's correct, yes.

23 Q. That's a corridor that you told us that you yourself  
24 never went onto.

25 A. That's correct, yes.

1 Q. The next task that you carried out was to attempt to go  
2 higher up in the building?

3 A. That's correct, yes.

4 Q. Whose idea was that?

5 A. I don't believe we had a discussion, we just -- we just  
6 went up to the next floor.

7 Q. Was it a question of following Mr Clarke, and him taking  
8 you in that direction?

9 A. I couldn't really say, we just --

10 Q. You just did it?

11 A. We just did it, yeah.

12 Q. Together you went to try to go higher up in the  
13 building?

14 A. We did, yes.

15 Q. What route did you take to go higher up?

16 A. The stairs.

17 Q. So you went up the central staircase?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. So the next level up, was that?

20 A. We did, yes.

21 Q. Therefore the 10th floor?

22 A. That's correct, yes.

23 Q. I'll show you a photograph that may assist you with what  
24 you found. That, as it happens, is a photograph taken  
25 on the 2nd floor, but it's representative of what the

1           stairwell looks like on the even-numbered floors. So  
2           you'd have a door like that on either side at the 10th  
3           floor level; does that sound right?

4    A. That looks familiar, yes.

5    Q. When you got to that sort of place within the building,  
6           what did you and Mr Clarke do next?

7    A. We couldn't get through that door, there was no handle  
8           on our side, so Crew Manager Clarke used a sledgehammer  
9           to break the glass panel and he put his hand in to open  
10           the door from what would be the inside.

11   Q. Can you just confirm that there would have been doors  
12           looking like that on either side of the central  
13           staircase?

14   A. I'm not sure about both sides, because after we went  
15           through this door, there wasn't anything, you couldn't  
16           go anywhere, so we then come back through, and that's  
17           when we went out onto the balcony side.

18   Q. I'll take that slowly. The members of the jury have  
19           been to the building as well, on a site visit. You got  
20           through one of these doors by the method you explained?

21   A. Yes.

22   Q. When you got through it, did you find yourself in  
23           an area that was of similar size to the lift lobby on  
24           the floor below but with no access to the lifts?

25   A. That's correct, yes.



1 Q. When you got there, did you go on from there or did you  
2 go back to the central staircase and try something else?  
3 A. We went back to the central staircase, and then on the  
4 other side of the staircase, that's when we found the  
5 doors -- a door -- a door was open, and we went through  
6 there --  
7 Q. Just pausing there, did you then find yourself in a very  
8 small space with doors on either side of you leading to  
9 balconies?  
10 A. I can't remember the actual two doors, but it did lead  
11 to a balcony, yes.  
12 Q. You then went out onto a balcony --  
13 A. We did, yes.  
14 Q. -- turning, according to your statement, onto the east  
15 side balcony of the southern half of the building?  
16 A. That's correct, yes.  
17 Q. That's, again, the side which didn't have the flat that  
18 was on fire?  
19 A. That's correct, yes.  
20 Q. If you take up your jury bundle again at page 1 of  
21 tab 11, which I think you may still have open. We can  
22 see you were going along the 10th floor on the south  
23 corridor, where we see the numbers 64, 62, 60 and 58?  
24 A. Yes.  
25 Q. I'll explain more about that in a moment. Did you walk

1 the length of that balcony?

2 A. On the south side, yes, we did, yeah.

3 Q. Let me show you a photograph of one of those balconies.

4 That's a view of one of the balconies at Lakanal House

5 looking back towards the door that you would have come

6 from.

7 A. That's correct, yes.

8 Q. That's a closer up view of the door. That's a view

9 looking in the other direction. So you would have been

10 walking along a balcony like that with a dead end at the

11 end.

12 A. That's correct, yes.

13 Q. What steps were you taking to see if there were any

14 residents in those flats and to evacuate them?

15 A. We were trying the doors and banging on the windows.

16 Q. There was no answer?

17 A. There was no answer, no.

18 Q. Were you able to look through doors and windows?

19 A. Yes, there was, yeah.

20 Q. Just pausing for a moment to look at this photograph.

21 It's a view taken from a higher level, so it may take

22 you a moment to get your bearings, but that is

23 an example of the door on an even-numbered floor that

24 leads to a balcony. So you would have gone through

25 a door like that to get to a balcony?

1 A. I believe so, yes.

2 Q. Do you remember how you opened that?

3 A. I believe it was already open.

4 Q. Thank you. When you walked the length of the balcony,  
5 knocking on doors and windows and looking in, did you  
6 notice that you were passing rooms that were sometimes  
7 kitchens and sometimes not kitchens?

8 A. I -- I wasn't taking a mental note, no, I wasn't, no.

9 Q. Were you able to see how far into the rooms you had  
10 visibility?

11 A. Some were very good, 'cos some didn't have curtains in,  
12 so you could literally see to the other side of the  
13 room. Others had curtains which was a bit more  
14 difficult to -- to see.

15 Q. The ones where you had good visibility, at the limits of  
16 your visibility, what could you see at the other end of  
17 the room?

18 A. Just the other -- just a room.

19 Q. Did you notice or were you able to see that, on that  
20 floor, the flat stretched the whole width of the  
21 building, so leading to, ultimately, windows at the  
22 other end of the room you were looking through?

23 A. I don't recall seeing them, no.

24 Q. Did there come a point when, having walked the length of  
25 that corridor and noticed that there were no residents

1 to evacuate, you realised that your air was running low?

2 A. We did, yes.

3 Q. So what did you and Crew Manager Clarke do as a result?

4 A. We then went back to the bridgehead on the 7th and

5 closed down our air.

6 Q. So you closed down at the 7th floor bridgehead?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. There's no need for me to bring it up on the screen, but

9 the records indicate that you closed down at 16.57.09,

10 so you'd been using air in the breathing apparatus for

11 just over 14 minutes.

12 A. Yeah, that -- that must be correct.

13 Q. Who was at the bridgehead when you got back there?

14 A. I believe Watch Manager Payton was there at the time.

15 Q. Do you know him?

16 A. I do, yes.

17 Q. The crew manager from Peckham who'd previously been

18 there, had he gone, or are you not sure?

19 A. I'm not sure.

20 Q. Who seemed to be in charge?

21 A. I believe at that time it was Watch Manager Payton.

22 Q. That was a change from when you had last been to the

23 bridgehead?

24 A. It was, yeah.

25 Q. Did you have any kind of debrief with him at the

1 bridgehead?

2 A. We did, yes.

3 Q. As best you can remember, what did you say?

4 A. I believe Crew Manager Clarke told him the 9th floor --

5 the flats had been -- been checked and everyone was out.

6 Q. Do you remember if Mr Payton asked you or Mr Clarke any

7 questions?

8 A. I don't know, I can't remember.

9 Q. Are you able to help us at all with how long in time the

10 debrief lasted?

11 A. I would say -- it's difficult to say: a minute, minute

12 and a half.

13 Q. Was anything said by either you or Mr Clarke to the

14 effect that the flats each had two floors to them, that

15 they had internal staircases?

16 A. I don't believe we did, no.

17 Q. After you'd had that debrief with Mr Payton, did you

18 then make your way down the central staircase --

19 A. We did, yes.

20 Q. -- with Mr Clarke?

21 A. With Mr Clarke.

22 Q. Who was the incident commander when you got to the

23 bottom?

24 A. We reported back to Watch Manager Howling, but at that

25 time I didn't know if he was still the incident

1 commander. I didn't know what other machines had been  
2 sent on.

3 Q. Of course. I apologise, it would have been better to  
4 ask you who you reported back to, but that person was  
5 Mr Howling?

6 A. It was Mr Howling, yes.

7 Q. Did you then have some form of debrief with him?

8 A. I can't remember. No, I'm sorry.

9 Q. Did you have a conversation with him?

10 A. I know he had a conversation with Watch Manager Clarke,  
11 because he tasked him another -- he gave him another  
12 task, but I'm -- I'm not sure if he -- I'm not sure if  
13 there was a debrief.

14 Q. Did Mr Howling ask you personally any questions, as best  
15 you remember?

16 A. I don't think so.

17 Q. Was there any discussion that you were part of or  
18 overheard about the fact that the flats had internal  
19 stairs and were therefore on two floors?

20 A. I don't believe so, no.

21 Q. I should have asked you earlier, but we talked about the  
22 fact that, by reference to the diagram, we know that you  
23 had attempted to evacuate flats 75 to 64. When you were  
24 in the building, did you know what the flat numbers were  
25 that you were knocking on the doors of?

1 A. I believe most doors had numbers on, and I believe we  
2 relayed that back to Watch Manager Payton. I believe  
3 Crew Manager Clarke noticed what numbers they were.

4 Q. In the discussion with Mr Howling, did you say or  
5 overhear any conversation about which flat numbers had  
6 been cleared?

7 A. At that time, I can't remember, I'm afraid.

8 Q. Or more generally about which floors or which corridors  
9 had been cleared?

10 A. Again, I can't remember, I'm afraid.

11 Q. Did you take part in or overhear any conversation with  
12 either Mr Payton or Mr Howling about the fact that there  
13 were balconies which led in one direction to flats and  
14 in the other direction to the central staircase?

15 A. I didn't, no.

16 Q. You then had a short break, I imagine?

17 A. At that point, as I say, Crew Manager Clarke was given  
18 another task, and I took his breathing apparatus back to  
19 the -- the fire engine along with mine to restow it back  
20 on the appliance.

21 Q. Did there come a time which you referred to earlier when  
22 you showed us your map when the aerial ladder platform  
23 was moved to where your appliance was originally parked?

24 A. Our fire engine was moved so -- to give access for  
25 the -- for the aerial ladder platform to -- I think it

1           was to try and make entry near -- nearer the bottom of  
2           the flat.

3    Q.    So it was so that there was space for it to manoeuvre?

4    A.    Yeah, yeah.

5    Q.    Was that the aerial ladder platform from the  
6           Old Kent Road?

7    A.    It was, yes.

8    Q.    In order to try and give that aerial ladder platform the  
9           best opportunity to get to where those directing  
10          operations wanted it, did you help in moving some cars?

11   A.    I helped starting pumping a car, sort of pumping it on  
12          the suspension to move it over, and then it was then  
13          that I was asked to be an entry control officer.

14   Q.    You were asked to be an entry control officer on the  
15          other side of the building where you marked it on the  
16          diagram that we saw?

17   A.    That's correct, that's where it was set up, yeah.

18   Q.    Did you then continue to carry out that task for several  
19          others?

20   A.    I did, yes.

21   Q.    Did there come a time when Watch Manager Howling became  
22          the person in direct control of the entry control point?

23   A.    When -- when it was first set up, yes.

24   Q.    On the east side of the building?

25   A.    On the east side, yeah, on the ground floor -- as



1 I marked it on the map.

2 Q. So you would have been working with him, you operating  
3 the entry control board?

4 A. That's correct.

5 Q. He would have been briefing crews, is that right?

6 A. Watch Manager Howling along with a Crew Manager Hider.

7 Q. Were you in a position to overhear what briefings were  
8 being given to crews who were being committed into the  
9 building at that time?

10 A. Not really, no. With an entry control point, the crews  
11 were being briefed and, as they were going in, then  
12 I was making a note of their time in and working out how  
13 much air and how much time in they've got without --  
14 with breathing apparatus, there's a safety margin, and  
15 the crews were being briefed and then the tallies were  
16 handed to me, and then I was doing all the workings out  
17 and then the crews were being committed.

18 Q. Is it the case that you could see that they were getting  
19 a briefing, but you weren't close enough to hear what  
20 was being said?

21 A. Yeah, that's correct.

22 Q. Can you assist the court at all with approximately how  
23 long they were being spoken to for those briefings?

24 A. It's difficult to say, but the crews going in were  
25 turning round reasonably quick, so I believe the -- the

1           briefings were direct, "In you go."

2    Q.   As well as seeing crews being committed into the

3           building, you of course were seeing a number of crews

4           coming out, and you would have to give them their

5           tallies back and mark them off on the board?

6    A.   That's correct, yes.

7    Q.   At least one firefighter you would have seen coming out

8           in a exhausted state and needing some medical

9           assistance?

10   A.   He -- he was, yes.

11   Q.   Had you carried out an entry control officer task before

12           at other fires?

13   A.   Yes, I had, yes.

14   Q.   How did this one compare in terms of the pressures and

15           how busy it was to previous fires?

16   A.   Compared to say a normal house fire, generally in

17           a house fire you -- you may get two or -- two or three

18           crews, which is probably three quarters of a BA board --

19           sorry, breathing apparatus board, and these were

20           numerous crews going in and we were using numerous

21           boards, so it was -- it was very busy.

22   Q.   Your statement suggests that running the entry control

23           point was busier than you'd ever dealt with in the past.

24   A.   It was at that time, yes.

25   Q.   Just putting up on the screen a representation of the

1 west side of Lakanal House, viewing it from ground  
2 level.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. I'm going to then place over it an image that shows  
5 individual flat numbers. To what extent in the course  
6 of the hours you spent at Lakanal House did you  
7 personally begin to build up a mental picture like that,  
8 so that if somebody said a flat number you could look up  
9 at the windows and think, "it's that flat," or "it's in  
10 that rough part of the building"?

11 A. I couldn't have done that.

12 Q. Did you get any sense of whether people around you had  
13 that kind of mental picture?

14 A. I believe so, but I -- I couldn't -- I couldn't be 100  
15 per cent sure. But I, I presume as crews were coming  
16 out and the debriefings, it would have all been marked  
17 down somewhere.

18 Q. That's your assumption?

19 A. That's my assumption, yes.

20 Q. Then finally, if I could ask you this: what single  
21 additional thing do you think would have helped you most  
22 on the day of the fire to carry out the tasks that were  
23 given to you?

24 A. I think -- I think initially at a big job like that  
25 I think it's just more resources, yeah.

1 Q. Thank you very much. Those are my questions.

2 A. Thank you.

3 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Hendy.

4 Questions by MR HENDY

5 MR HENDY: Mr Bennett, my name's Hendy, I'm representing  
6 a number of the bereaved families.

7 Can I ask you, please, to first look at the diagram  
8 that you marked up which is in advocates' bundle  
9 page 115. (Handed)

10 Thank you very much. Just one question about  
11 that -- do you have it -- the "H" in a square that's  
12 marked in seven places over the map, I presume they're  
13 fire hydrants?

14 A. They are, yes.

15 Q. Would you or your crew know where the fire hydrants are,  
16 and if not, how would you find out?

17 A. Most appliances have what we class as a hydrant location  
18 book, and the system we have now, because we've got  
19 a MDT, it's like a digital thing, it's all on there now.

20 Q. I understand that's how it's done now, but back in  
21 July 2009, would you have maps like this? This is  
22 obviously a Fire Brigade map showing the hydrants.  
23 Would this be available?

24 A. It would be available from the command unit, yes.

25 Q. From the?

1 A. From a command unit.

2 Q. From a command unit?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. You're Old Kent Road. You wouldn't have one of these  
5 maps for the Peckham fire ground, presumably?

6 A. No, we wouldn't, no.

7 Q. Okay. Thank you. We can put that away. You were asked  
8 about you and Crew Manager Clarke going onto the  
9 9th floor, and you were taken to a sentence in your  
10 statement which reads:

11 "Myself and CM Clarke were then asked to knock on  
12 flats (windows and doors) to alert any occupants to  
13 evacuate."

14 That advice to occupants to evacuate is something  
15 that came from whom; who told you to alert the occupants  
16 to evacuate?

17 A. I can't remember, I'm sorry.

18 Q. Your objective, you and Mr Clarke, was to evacuate the  
19 occupants on both the north and the south corridors on  
20 the 9th floor?

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

22 Q. You're clear that you went on the southern corridor,  
23 that's the corridor that didn't have the fire flat on,  
24 and that the flat with the two adults and two children,  
25 and the little girl that you picked up, that was

1           definitely on the north side?

2    A.   South side.

3    Q.   On the south side, forgive me.

4    A.   That's correct, yes.

5    Q.   So if Mr Clarke says, as his statement indicates that he

6           might, that you picked up the -- sorry, that:

7           "The young girl panicked as we went past the fire

8           flat and Bob picked her up."

9           He must have got confused about that, because of

10           course he went both sides, didn't he?

11   A.   Crew Manager Clarke did, yes.

12   Q.   Yes, but it must be an error in his recollection, if he

13           thinks that you picked up the girl because she panicked

14           as she went past the fire flat, because your evidence is

15           that, as you reached the staircase, you sensed her fear

16           and that's when you picked her up?

17   A.   That's correct, yes.

18   Q.   Yes. This is not a criticism of CM Clarke or indeed

19           yourself.

20   A.   No, that's all right.

21   Q.   One can understand how errors are occasionally made.

22           Anyway, when you got to that flat with the two adults

23           and the two children, your statement says that:

24           "The male occupant went upstairs and almost

25           immediately sent his partner down holding a baby and his

1           six or seven year-old daughter."

2           Presumably at that point you realised that this was

3           a maisonette and not a single floor flat?

4    A.  No, I mean all I could see was the stop of the stairs,

5           I wasn't aware that it went to the left.

6    Q.  No?

7    A.  No.

8    Q.  Understood, but you knew that it had two storeys, as it

9           were?

10   A.  Yes.

11   Q.  You finish on the south side of the north corridor -- or

12           rather you escort the family downstairs.  You return to

13           the 9th floor, you meet up with Crew Manager Clarke

14           again --

15   A.  On the 7th floor.

16   Q.  -- on the 7th floor.

17   A.  Yeah.

18   Q.  Both of you make your way up to the 9th floor then.  He

19           presumably told you then that he'd performed the

20           equivalent clearance of the south side of the 9th

21           corridor?

22   A.  North side.

23   Q.  I'm so sorry, forgive me.  It's not a good day for me.

24           Let me start again.

25           So you meet up with him on the 7th floor and he

1 tells you "I've done the north side, the fire side".

2 A. I believe he did, yes.

3 Q. So when you get to the 9th floor again, you're both

4 comfortable that all the occupants are out on the 9th

5 floor?

6 A. Yes, we are.

7 Q. So you make your way up to the 10th floor, and in order

8 to get into the 10th floor you have to smash open

9 a door, he hits the glass panel in the escape door with

10 a sledgehammer to smash the glass, reaches in and opens

11 it from the inside?

12 A. He did, yes.

13 Q. Is that because you didn't have a drop key or because

14 the drop key didn't function?

15 A. I didn't notice a drop key function there. I didn't

16 notice a --

17 Q. Hole for the key?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Maybe it was just the swiftest way to get in?

20 A. I can't remember, I'm afraid.

21 Q. Can't remember?

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Okay. You go in on the east side and the north end of

24 the block?

25 A. Sorry, where's -- once we've gone through -- opened the



1 door.

2 Q. Yes, you get into the balcony which runs along the  
3 eastern side of the block facing north -- facing south?

4 A. South, yes.

5 Q. Facing south.

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Right, and you looked through the windows, as you go  
8 along, and knock on them. If you're on the east side,  
9 it's a lovely sunny afternoon, presumably you could see  
10 the sun coming in from the other side?

11 A. I didn't notice that to be honest.

12 Q. Well, you can't recall it, but you must have noticed it,  
13 mustn't you, because there's windows at both ends? The  
14 jury visited the premises quite recently, and there was  
15 no sun that day, but -- it doesn't ring a bell with you?

16 A. It doesn't ring an bell, no.

17 Q. Okay. Did you realise as you were walking along that  
18 you were actually looking into the upper floors of the  
19 flats that you had checked on the 9th floor?

20 A. No, I wasn't aware of that.

21 Q. Could you see the heads of the staircases rising between  
22 the lounges and the kitchens?

23 A. I couldn't, no.

24 Q. Well, perhaps you didn't realise what they were when you  
25 saw them?

1 A. Perhaps, but we was running along, banging on doors,  
2 banging on windows.

3 Q. You could see that none of them were bedrooms, though,  
4 couldn't you, or don't you recall?

5 A. I'm sorry, I --

6 Q. It's three years ago, absolutely. But you didn't check  
7 the western side, and it occurred to me that you  
8 wouldn't need to because, from the eastern side you  
9 could see right through the building, so there would be  
10 no need to go onto the western side? Is that something  
11 that you can recall? Is that a process of thought that  
12 you can recall?

13 A. No, I can't recall that I'm afraid, no.

14 Q. When you reported to Watch Manager Payton, you told  
15 Mr Maxwell-Scott a few minutes ago that  
16 Crew Manager Clarke told him that the 9th floor flats  
17 had been checked and everyone out, and that was  
18 a reference -- does that mean that when you were  
19 reporting to Watch Manager Payton you still didn't  
20 appreciate that the 10th floor that you had checked from  
21 the balconies was not part of the 9th floor flats?

22 A. I wasn't aware of that, no.

23 Q. Because of course you hadn't checked the fire end of the  
24 building from the balcony side, had you?

25 A. No, we hadn't, no.

1 Q. Yes, thank you very much.

2 A. Thank you.

3 THE CORONER: Mr Dowden? Thank you.

4 Ms Al Tai?

5 Questions by MS AL TAI

6 MS AL TAI: Good afternoon, Mr Bennett, I act on behalf of  
7 Mark Bailey, Catherine Hickman's partner. Just one  
8 brief question, following some of the responses you gave  
9 in answer to my learned friend's questions, can we  
10 assume then that at the time that you were on the 10th  
11 floor that you hadn't realised that that was a fire  
12 escape for the 9th floor flats?

13 A. On -- on one of the doors, as -- it's the first time  
14 I saw this picture today, there is a panic bar on the  
15 back of the door, so now presuming, but at the time  
16 I didn't know.

17 Q. You weren't aware at the time?

18 A. I wasn't aware, no.

19 Q. That's all I have, Mr Bennett, thank you.

20 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Walsh?

21 Questions by MR WALSH

22 MR WALSH: Yes, just one or two, thank you very much.

23 Mr Bennett, I just want to clarify one or two matters in  
24 relation to the evidence which you gave concerning,  
25 first of all, the extent of the smoke that you could see

1 in the south corridor on the 9th floor.

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. So you were going along knocking on doors. That was  
4 what you had been tasked to do. You mentioned that  
5 there was smoke but it wasn't particularly troublesome  
6 to you as a firefighter. You made the point that:  
7 "To a firefighter it wasn't too troublesome, to me."  
8 You had your BA on, of course. To a member of the  
9 public, the perception of the smoke-logging intensity  
10 might be completely different?

11 A. Yes, yeah.

12 Q. No doubt we may well hear about that in due course, but  
13 when you took the family from the flat, we've heard in  
14 answer to questions from Mr Hendy just a few moments ago  
15 that it was your colleague Mr Clarke's potential  
16 perception that the young girl that you had seemed to  
17 panic at some point, seemed to show signs of panic, and  
18 you picked her up?

19 A. At that time the -- the young girl was with me.

20 Q. Yes, and you picked her up?

21 A. I did, yes.

22 Q. Why did you pick her up?

23 A. I sensed -- I sensed her fear, and I didn't want her to  
24 hesitate, because we were just going through into the  
25 lift lobby area, and there was a bit of smoke there from

1 the fire flat.

2 Q. Yes, of course. Now, it was put to you a few moments  
3 ago by Mr Hendy that Mr Clarke's perception might have  
4 been that you picked her up as you went past the fire  
5 flat, but of course what you're saying is that you came  
6 into the lobby with the fire flat of course adjacent to  
7 it and you were able to pick up smoke from the fire flat  
8 in the lobby area?

9 A. That's correct.

10 Q. That's what the position was?

11 A. That's correct, yes.

12 Q. All right. It is difficult, I know, because you are  
13 being asked to recall relatively fine detail here from  
14 three years ago, conversations and so on.

15 The last thing that I want you to confirm is that  
16 which you mention in your statement right at the very  
17 end, which you have been taken to by Mr Maxwell-Scott to  
18 some extent. It's at page 158 of your statement, the  
19 very last paragraph. It might be helpful if that is put  
20 up, actually. Thank you. Some of this has already been  
21 put to you, but if you don't mind I'll just put it  
22 again:

23 "This was an unusual situation for me in my seven  
24 years' experience as a firefighter."

25 First of all, what was so unusual about it?

1 A. The amount of wearers and the quick turn around.

2 Q. You made the point, which has already been put to you,  
3 that the running of the ECP was busier than you had ever  
4 dealt with in the past. You mentioned, of course, how  
5 many pumps were there and so on. The traffic in and out  
6 of the building was frequent and numerous. It was  
7 stressful to work in these conditions and space was very  
8 limited at times. Where was the space limited?

9 A. Once the entry control point had been taken back up to  
10 the 3rd, the entry control point was in the lift lobby  
11 area, so at times we had the entry control there, we had  
12 crews coming out, crews going in, it was just a lack of  
13 space, it was very tight.

14 Q. The jury have seen the stairwell and the width of the  
15 stairs, so you have firefighters in BA going up and down  
16 those stairs, crossing each other, you're at the entry  
17 control point carrying out the duties that you have to  
18 do, very busy, instructions being given left, right and  
19 centre, no doubt?

20 A. Yes, that's correct, yes.

21 Q. All right, thank you very much.

22 A. Thank you.

23 THE CORONER: Thank you. Members of the jury, do you have  
24 any questions?  
25

1 Questions from THE JURY

2 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Yes, thank you madam coroner, we  
3 do, just the one. The door that -- this may have been  
4 covered already, but we just want it clarified.

5 The door that Crew Manager Clarke broke into with  
6 a sledgehammer, we were just wondering whether  
7 Firefighter Bennett said that led them into a vacant  
8 space when they got through and seeing the vacant space  
9 made them turn back into the lobby area. By "vacant  
10 space" I believe we mean the space between the fire  
11 escape door and the second door that you go into, that's  
12 about that wide, I guess, does that make sense?

13 THE CORONER: Thank you. Can you clarify that for us,  
14 Mr Bennett; are you able to help us on that?

15 A. Yes, please.

16 THE CORONER: Just to take you back, Mr Clarke has smashed  
17 the panel with a sledgehammer and opened the door and  
18 you have gone in. Can you remember what you saw when  
19 you got through that door?

20 A. It was just a little room, really.

21 THE CORONER: Just a room. Can you remember what was --

22 A. Yeah, little room. We looked either side --

23 THE CORONER: When you got into that, could you describe the  
24 little room? Could you see doors either side of you?

25 A. There was, yes.

1 THE CORONER: There was.

2 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay, thank you.

3 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr Bennett,  
4 thank you for coming and thank you for the help that  
5 you've been able to give us. You're welcome to stay if  
6 you would like, but you're free to go.

7 A. Thank you, madam.

8 Further questions by MR HENDY

9 MR HENDY: Madam, just before he goes, just arising out of  
10 your last question, I wonder if I could clarify, once  
11 you've gone into the little room and seen the door on  
12 either side, it was through one of those doors that you  
13 went in order to get onto the balcony; is that right?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Right. Then I've not quite understood.

16 A. From -- from memory, it was -- they might not have been  
17 doors, but it was all blocked, we couldn't gain access  
18 to what I thought was going to be the corridor.

19 Q. How did you get onto the balcony? There was a door that  
20 was smashed in order to get onto the balcony, that's  
21 what I understood your evidence was?

22 A. I don't believe the door was smashed, no.

23 Q. The glass panel in the door was smashed with  
24 a sledgehammer?

25 A. To the balcony?



1 Q. Your statement says:

2 "Before we entered the balcony corridor, we had

3 forced open a metal door from the staircase area. This

4 door had a glass vision panel and CM Clarke used the

5 sledgehammer to smash the visual panel glass and then

6 reached through to unlatch the door."

7 So you go through that --

8 THE CORONER: Sorry, Mr Hendy, before you go any further,

9 could we have back the photograph, please. I think it's

10 photograph number 11. We'll come back to 41 in

11 a moment. Sorry, not 11, no, it's the photograph --

12 yes, photograph 15.

13 Yes, that was the photograph that you were taken to,

14 Mr Bennett, when Mr Maxwell-Scott was asking you about

15 smashing the panel.

16 A. That's correct, yes.

17 THE CORONER: I think you said that Mr Clarke smashed that

18 glass panel with the sledgehammer?

19 A. He did, yes.

20 MR HENDY: Right, so you go through that door. How did you

21 get onto the balcony then?

22 A. We didn't, we come back through that door, and the

23 balcony was on the east side.

24 Q. Yes, but how did you get onto it? Was there another

25 door to go through?

1 A. There was a door and it was already open.

2 Q. Right, thank you very much.

3 A. Sorry.

4 THE CORONER: Thank you. Okay, thank you very much.

5 A. Thank you, madam.

6 (The witness withdrew)

7 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Clarke -- are we asking him to --

8 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes.

9 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Clarke, if you'd like to come forward,  
10 please?

11 JOHN CLARKE (sworn)

12 THE CORONER: Mr Clarke, thank you. Do sit down.

13 A. Thank you.

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

15 A. I'm fine, thank you.

16 THE CORONER: Please when you're answering questions, if you  
17 could speak as close to the microphone as you can, that  
18 would help. If you face the jury when you're answering  
19 the questions, that will help the jury to hear and also  
20 help you to keep close to the microphone.

21 A. Thank you.

22 THE CORONER: Mr Maxwell-Scott who's standing is going to  
23 begin by asking you some questions on my behalf, and  
24 then there'll be some questions from others.

25 A. Thank you.

1 THE CORONER: Thank you.

2 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

3 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good afternoon, Mr Clarke, can you give  
4 the court your full name, please?

5 A. John Edward Clarke.

6 Q. I'm going to be asking you about your involvement in  
7 trying to fight the fire and rescue people from  
8 Lakanal House on 3 July 2009. I think it's right that  
9 at that time you were a crew manager based at the  
10 Old Kent Road fire station?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. For how long had you been a serving firefighter at that  
13 time?

14 A. 20 years.

15 Q. How long had you been based at the Old Kent Road?

16 A. I went there the previous November.

17 Q. When had you been promoted to crew manager?

18 A. I was still doing the development for a crew manager, so  
19 I'd started the job maybe a year earlier.

20 Q. Is it right that when you went to Lakanal House on  
21 3 July that was the first time you'd ever been to the  
22 building?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. You attended as a result of a call out; is it right that  
25 you travelled there on E352 --

1 A. Correct, yeah.

2 Q. -- and that it was in total, you thought at the time  
3 correctly, the fourth appliance on the scene?

4 A. Correct, yeah.

5 Q. So there was an appliance from the Old Kent Road fire  
6 station that had arrived before you?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. When you got there, you would have found two appliances  
9 from Peckham already there?

10 A. Correct, yes.

11 Q. The records that we have indicate that your appliance  
12 arrived at 16.27 hours. What were your immediate  
13 impressions when you arrived?

14 A. As we were driving to -- you could see it was quite  
15 a well developed fire. We had had radio traffic that it  
16 was a multiple calls fire. I think we also had persons  
17 reported come over the radio as well.

18 Q. So you think that, whilst you were on your way from the  
19 fire station to Lakanal House a message came over the  
20 radio saying that persons were reported?

21 A. I recall so, yeah.

22 Q. Do you recall any flat numbers being given?

23 A. No.

24 Q. You gave a witness statement on 12 July 2009. Was your  
25 memory of events better at that time than it is today?

1 A. I would say so, yes.

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

3 A. It would, yes.

4 Q. That starts at page 160 in the statements bundle?

5 A. Thank you. (Handed)

6 Q. Just take a moment to have a look at that. Do you  
7 recognise that as your statement dated 12 July 2009?

8 A. I do.

9 Q. On the first page, you describe in the first paragraph  
10 approaching the scene and arriving and seeing the  
11 Peckham appliances and then it says this:

12 "I realised that more assistance would be required  
13 for this fire, in particular an aerial ladder platform."  
14 Was that your immediate impression on arrival?

15 A. I was doing a calculation in my head, if you will. It  
16 was quite a serious fire going, multiple calls, it was  
17 a congested area. I figured that more space would be  
18 needed and I was convinced more appliances would be  
19 coming, would be needed.

20 Q. That calculation that you were making in your head on  
21 arrival, can you help us with what number of appliances  
22 you were thinking would be required?

23 A. Well, it's not something that was my call.

24 Q. I appreciate that.

25 A. It was sort of a judgment I've made over years of

1           experience that it was quite a serious fire and  
2           potentially a lot of people could be in residence above  
3           the fire. That was my thinking.

4    Q. The word "calculations" was yours not mine, so I'm going  
5           to probe with you whether those calculations involved  
6           a number of appliances that you were thinking would be  
7           required?

8    A. Not at that time, no.

9    Q. So because of that thought process, that more assistance  
10           would be required, in particular an aerial ladder  
11           platform, you got the driver to park in a particular  
12           place, is that right?

13   A. Yeah, I -- I asked him to pull onto the pavement. As we  
14           were pulling on the pavement, I saw a hydrant in front  
15           of us, so I asked the driver to walk past the hydrant in  
16           case we needed it and I left it -- left it there, but  
17           right by the public house.

18   Q. If I ask you to have a look at page 146 in the  
19           advocates' bundle, we'll see a map that you marked up at  
20           the time. (Handed)

21           Do you recognise that?

22   A. I do.

23   Q. The capital A with the circle round it in  
24           Dalwood Street, is that where your appliance parked?

25   A. That's correct.

1 Q. We see just above it the "PH" for public house, is that  
2 right?

3 A. Correct, yeah.

4 Q. Did you then make your way round to the west side of the  
5 building, the front side where the lifts are?

6 A. Yes, I did.

7 Q. What other senior officers were present when you got  
8 there?

9 A. Sorry, can I -- can I just clarify west?

10 Q. Of course.

11 A. On this map, I was on the side where it says  
12 "Fontenelle".

13 Q. Yes, that's the west side.

14 A. Yeah, that's the west side. Yeah, that's where I went  
15 and I liaised with Watch Manager Howling.

16 Q. Whom you know, because you were from the same fire  
17 station?

18 A. Yeah, he was my boss.

19 Q. Was there also somebody from Peckham fire station who  
20 was having a discussion with Mr Howling?

21 A. I believe Crew Manager Willett was at the time.

22 Q. Did you know him?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Did you know at that time which of them was the incident  
25 commander?

1 A. I would assume at that time it was Crew Manager Willett.  
2 I -- I believe they were actually in the middle of  
3 handing over, though.

4 Q. Were you part of the conversation that took place  
5 between the two of them?

6 A. I observed a little of it. They were both under quite  
7 a lot of pressure, they were looking at handing over.  
8 I really didn't want to interrupt. It was about this  
9 time I suggested to John about throwing up a cordon  
10 around the building.

11 Q. So you arrived, they were already in a conversation  
12 which you assumed to be a handover conversation --

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. -- and you didn't want to interrupt. Did you overhear  
15 anything that was said?

16 A. I don't recall.

17 Q. Do you remember any mention of persons reported?

18 A. Again, I don't recall during that conversation.

19 Q. Do you remember any flat numbers being mentioned?

20 A. At that time, no.

21 Q. So what did you do?

22 A. I was aware that there was falling debris and people  
23 were exiting the building. There was people stood  
24 underneath the building. I thought they were in  
25 immediate danger, if you will, so I suggested to John



1           that myself and Old Kent Road's pump crew threw up  
2           a part of the cordon at the other side of the building.  
3           We went underneath the building and we started to put up  
4           a cordon and move people away, whilst keeping an eye on  
5           people exiting the building to make sure they didn't run  
6           into any falling debris.

7    Q.   Did you notice at that time whether any of the falling  
8           debris was alight?

9    A.   Some -- some was alight, yeah, and some was glass.

10   Q.   Did you overhear any discussion between Mr Howling and  
11           anybody about the fact that some of the falling debris  
12           was alight?

13   A.   I don't recall anyone else's discussion on it, no.

14   Q.   So you got under the building at ground floor level to  
15           the east side?

16   A.   Correct, yeah.

17   Q.   Were there a number of people there?

18   A.   Yeah, it was, quite a crowd had started to gather, yes.

19   Q.   Did you start to form a cordon?

20   A.   Yeah, we started to get the crowd to move away.  The  
21           other members of the crew were actually putting up the  
22           tape to hold people back.

23   Q.   Did any members of the crowd say anything in particular  
24           to you that seemed significant, potentially significant?

25   A.   Yes.

1 Q. What did they say?

2 A. A few people were suggesting flat numbers and talking  
3 about friends in the building. It was a bit of a melee  
4 though, with a lot of people talking at once, and I was  
5 trying to sort out who had information and who didn't,  
6 and I gleaned a few flat numbers from that that  
7 potentially could have had people in them.

8 Q. We're discussing this in a rather formal setting in  
9 a courtroom some three and a half years later, so please  
10 feel free to give the jury a flavour of what the  
11 atmosphere was like with the crowd and people trying to  
12 give you numbers.

13 A. Kind of hard to convey. It was quite manic, though.  
14 A lot of people saying a lot of things all at the same  
15 time, and I was really -- there was only me there to try  
16 and sort them into some kind of logical order.

17 Q. Were you keeping a note in your head, or were you  
18 writing the numbers down?

19 A. Once I got the numbers, I tried to transmit them to  
20 John Howling over the radio. I also have to say,  
21 though, that the radio traffic -- we only had one  
22 channel available, and it was very busy at that time on  
23 the airwaves.

24 Q. Did he say anything back to you over the radio to  
25 indicate that he'd received the messages you gave him

1 about flat numbers?

2 A. He didn't, no, so I went and found him.

3 Q. Just before we come to that, as well as people giving  
4 you flat numbers, bearing in mind that they were outside  
5 the beast(?), outside of the building, were people at  
6 the same time as giving them to you pointing up to try  
7 to indicate where those flats were?

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

9 Q. Were you getting occasions where different people were  
10 giving you the same flat number, or not?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Your statement on page 161 says:

13 "I can't remember all the numbers, but one woman  
14 kept on saying 78 then 79. Number 94 rings a bell and  
15 the others I think were in the 60s."

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. You then went back to Mr Howling and gave him those  
18 numbers face to face as best you could, is that right?

19 A. I did, yeah.

20 Q. Did he make a note of them?

21 A. I seem to recall at that time he'd allocated another  
22 firefighter to start collating numbers, as numbers were  
23 coming over the main scheme radio as well from our  
24 control room, and I believe Mark -- a firefighter called  
25 Mark Mullins was collating that information at the time.

1 Q. When you say "collating", do I understand it that the  
2 theory was he was taking not only the numbers that you  
3 had given Mr Howling, but also the numbers that were  
4 coming over the radio from control --

5 A. Yes, I believe so.

6 Q. -- and any other numbers that other people were  
7 providing as well.

8 A. I believe so, yeah.

9 Q. Were you then in a position to say to  
10 Watch Manager Howling, "I've done that task, I've set up  
11 a cordon, I'm now ready for another task"?

12 A. In effect, yeah.

13 Q. What task did he give you?

14 A. He asked me to get my entire crew together, so there was  
15 four of us.

16 Q. The four that had travelled on the appliance together?

17 A. Correct, yeah. What he wanted me to do -- or my  
18 briefing was to try and get above the fire, assess the  
19 spread of the fire, if I came across any door numbers  
20 that corresponded with door numbers I'd been told, to  
21 check that flat out.

22 Q. Your focus was on getting above the fire?

23 A. Yes, he really wanted to know the extent of the fire  
24 above the original fire flat and how far it had spread.

25 Q. Did he say why?

1 A. He didn't really need to, to me.

2 Q. Can you just explain why that is so?

3 A. Sure. His initial resources had gone to putting the  
4 fire out in the flat itself. John's concern was where  
5 else and how far had the fire travelled above. I think  
6 I was the first person who -- available who could take  
7 a team and have a go at trying to find that out.

8 Q. Presumably you were having this conversation on the west  
9 side of the building and, from time to time, the two of  
10 you would have been looking up at the fire?

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. Was there something that --

13 MR HENDY: Madam, I think Mr Maxwell-Scott should perhaps  
14 not lead on this part.

15 THE CORONER: All right, let's see how we go on that.

16 MR HENDY: Shall I just speak to Mr Maxwell-Scott --

17 THE CORONER: Yes, okay, yes.

18 MR HENDY: -- to explain my concern. (Pause)

19 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: You were explaining to the jury why you  
20 didn't need to be told that there was a concern about  
21 flats above the fire flat. I just want to ask you what  
22 you could see from the west side of the building,  
23 looking up.

24 A. What I could see was that fire in the flat on the 9th  
25 floor looked like it had breached through the -- it was

1 hard to tell. I mean, one was assuming it was a window  
2 to a sizable extent and was -- actually managed to lick  
3 up, if you will, the side of the building. It was a hot  
4 sunny day, windows were open in the building. It would  
5 be not hard to see why it could breach floors above.

6 Q. When you were looking up and having those thoughts,  
7 where was Mr Howling?

8 A. This -- this was during -- he was stood next to me,  
9 yeah, it was whilst he was explaining what he wanted me  
10 to do.

11 Q. Which side of the building were the two of you on?

12 A. The Fontenelle side. Sorry, have we decided that's the  
13 east?

14 Q. It's the west side.

15 A. Yeah, the Fontenelle side of the building, that would be  
16 the west side.

17 Q. You'd previously been setting up a cordon on the east  
18 side?

19 A. Correct.

20 Q. How had you got from the east side to the west side?

21 A. Underneath the building.

22 Q. Each time you'd gone underneath the building?

23 A. Correct, yeah.

24 Q. Having had that tasking given to you, what did you do?

25 A. I gathered my crew together. We got breathing

1 apparatus, we got some breaking-in gear. I gave a very  
2 short and simple brief to them -- this is whilst we were  
3 gathering together our BA and breaking-in gear -- that  
4 we were going to try and get above the fire and assess  
5 the spread. I had said, though, that it's a dynamic  
6 situation and we might meet something else we need to  
7 deal with along the way.

8 Q. Who was it you said that to?

9 A. The whole crew. Tony Mechen, Bob Bennett and Peter  
10 Mason.

11 Q. What did you then do after you had given that quick  
12 briefing?

13 A. When we were ready we -- we entered the building. We  
14 went straight up the stairwell, straight to the  
15 bridgehead on the 7th floor.

16 Q. When you say "we," who was with you going up the stairs?

17 A. That -- at that time, us four were considered a crew,  
18 I was considered to be leader of that crew. We all went  
19 together.

20 Q. Your recollection would be that Mr Mason and Mr Mechen  
21 came up the stairs with you rather than taking the lift;  
22 is that right?

23 A. That was my recollection, yes.

24 Q. Was there any particular reason that you took the stairs  
25 rather than the lift?

1 A. It might sound silly but speed. By the time we'd have  
2 sorted out where the lift was, do we need to call it,  
3 had a fire control been implemented in the lift, my  
4 assessment was we would reach the 7th floor quicker by  
5 just going straight up the stairs. To be honest,  
6 I didn't even notice nor look for a lift.

7 Q. Sorry, I didn't quite catch that?

8 A. I didn't even notice or look for a lift.

9 Q. Let me show you a photograph of the lift area.

10 A. Sure.

11 Q. That's a view looking through a door which has two lift  
12 shafts through it, and this is on the west side of the  
13 building. You don't recall seeing that area at all?

14 A. Not really, no. I went straight in and straight up the  
15 stairs.

16 Q. Because if you were coming from the west side of the  
17 building, this lift shaft area is on the west and the  
18 stairs as you know are on the east side of the building.  
19 Did you not see any firefighters in or around that lift  
20 lobby area?

21 A. Again, there could well have been. I don't doubt it,  
22 but I was kind of focussed on my task, and it was in and  
23 up the stairs.

24 Q. Do you recall that you made a second witness statement  
25 in April 2010?



1 A. I do.

2 Q. If I can ask you to turn to that. It starts at page 164  
3 in the statements bundle. Do you recognise that?

4 A. I do.

5 Q. If you could turn in it to page 166. You'll see the  
6 statement follows a question and answer format. At the  
7 top of this page you were asked:

8 "Do you recall why you didn't use the lift when  
9 going to the bridgehead?"

10 You said:

11 "I think I used the stairs because people were  
12 coming down them and were panicking. We met people  
13 along the stairs and this led us in that direction.  
14 I was sure the stairs we were on would lead to the  
15 bridgehead and I wanted to end up at the right place."

16 Is that your recollection today?

17 A. Yes, it is.

18 Q. What did you mean by using the stairs because people  
19 were coming down them and were panicking?

20 A. Anyone -- anyone coming down the stairs, I thought,  
21 might have been a little reassured by seeing us going  
22 up, and if along the way we could say "You're fine, keep  
23 going down the stairs, the door's at the bottom",  
24 I thought that would have been a good thing.

25 Q. You didn't think it was going to be any slower, from

1           what you've told us?

2    A.  No, I didn't.

3    Q.  Did you in fact come across people coming down the

4           stairs as you went up them?

5    A.  I recall so, yes, but it -- my recollection is very

6           vague.

7    Q.  Did there then come a point when you reached the

8           bridgehead?

9    A.  Yes.

10   Q.  Can you help us with how many people were at it when you

11           got there?

12   A.  I can't recall how many.  I met John Dennis, who was in

13           charge of the bridgehead at the time.

14   Q.  You knew him?

15   A.  I know John, yeah.  My focus was on the -- the

16           conversation I had with him.  There was an entry control

17           officer there.  I really can't remember who or who else

18           was there.

19   Q.  Mr Bennett, would he have been with you?

20   A.  Yes.

21   Q.  What about Mr Mason and Mr Mechen, do you remember

22           seeing them?

23   A.  Yes.

24   Q.  In your first witness statement dated 12 July 2009, you

25           said that Mr Dennis was running the bridgehead and he

1 was under a lot of pressure at that point. Can you just  
2 explain that to the jury and give them a flavour of what  
3 it was like there?

4 A. Again, it was clear we had a dynamic, changing  
5 situation. The bridgehead is a pinch point: equipment  
6 meets there, crews meet there, and from there the works  
7 disseminated outwards if you like.

8 John Dennis was on his own and he clearly had quite  
9 a lot of tasks to perform at once. There was quite  
10 a bit of shouting going on between crews, not shouting  
11 as in arguing, but shouting as in clarity and -- and  
12 orders and things like that.

13 Q. Did you have a conversation with Mr Dennis when you got  
14 there?

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. Did you say to him, "I've been sent up by  
17 Watch Manager Howling and tasked to look into the  
18 situation above the fire floor," or words to that  
19 effect?

20 A. No, not that I recall.

21 Q. Do you think that you got across to Mr Dennis the fact  
22 that you had been given a task by Mr Howling?

23 A. What I recall from the conversation with John was the  
24 immediate pressure he was under to relieve the crew  
25 fighting the fire in the flat and also that he had

1 definite information that there was people in the flats  
2 along that corridor.

3 Q. Just pausing there, when you say along that corridor,  
4 you mean along the corridor which had the fire flat in?

5 A. Correct.

6 Q. So did he ask you to do something?

7 A. Yeah. The discussion me and him had, it seemed that  
8 the -- the problems he had were more imperative than the  
9 task I'd been given, so I took the decision to help John  
10 out with the problem with the fire flat and the people  
11 who needed rescuing or at least evacuating.

12 Q. You decided to retask, in the jargon?

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. On the basis of the conversation you had with Mr Dennis,  
15 would he have appreciated, do you think, that you were  
16 making the decision to retask, or do you think he  
17 thought you had been sent up, in effect, to do what he  
18 asked you to do?

19 A. I've no idea.

20 Q. As you say in your statement, I'll just put it up for  
21 you, it's at page 161. You say, about halfway down:

22 "The guys fighting the fire on the 9th floor in the  
23 flat, which I believe was 64 or 65, needed immediate  
24 back up, and he [Mr Dennis] was desperate for the other  
25 flats on the fire floor to be searched and he had no-one

1 to do it, so I split my crew in half."

2 That was a decision that you made at the time?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. So Mr Mason and Mr Mechen went to help in the fire  
5 flat --

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. -- and you and Mr Bennett went to search flats?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. The statement continues:

10 "The fire flat was next to the central stairwell, so  
11 we went and banged on the doors of the flats further  
12 down the corridor that had the fire between them and the  
13 stairwell."

14 Just pausing there, if you take the jury bundle at  
15 tab 11, page 1. (Handed)

16 That's a representation of the building showing flat  
17 numbers and also helpfully showing north, south and  
18 west. The fire flat is flat 65, and therefore when you  
19 describe in the statement banging on the doors of the  
20 flats further down the corridor that had the fire  
21 between them and the stairwell, that would be  
22 a description of flats 66 to 70; do you see?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Just before I go any further on this, I should recap and  
25 say that by this point you would presumably have started

1 up your breathing apparatus; is that right?

2 A. That's correct, I was having the discussion with John,  
3 I was also starting up at the same time.

4 Q. At the bridgehead?

5 A. At the bridgehead.

6 Q. Was there anyone with you who started up at the same  
7 time?

8 A. Yeah, I believe the other three members of the crew did.

9 Q. Your statement goes on to say:  
10 "The smoke in the corridor was not that bad, and  
11 I was happy that I could get people along the corridor  
12 at that point."

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. You're talking there about the north corridor with the  
15 fire flat in it?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Is it your recollection that Mr Bennett was in that  
18 north corridor with you?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. I'm not sure if you were in court earlier when he gave  
21 his evidence or not.

22 A. I was.

23 Q. His recollection -- in that case, you will have heard  
24 that he didn't go into the north corridor. Do you think  
25 you may be mistaken on this?

1 A. My recollection is that we went past the fire flat.

2 Q. You recall doing so yourself?

3 A. Yeah, with Firefighter Bennett.

4 Q. I understand. Then your statement says:

5 "The first person we took out was a man in the flat

6 opposite the fire flat."

7 When you say "opposite," do you mean he came out of

8 the opposite side of the same corridor?

9 A. Across the corridor.

10 Q. Across the corridor -- you have put it much better than

11 me -- which would be flat 66?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. I ask you about it because there may be evidence that

14 the occupant of flat 66 in fact left the building by

15 walking down the stairs on his own some 15 or 20 minutes

16 earlier. How confident are you that you helped somebody

17 out of flat 66?

18 A. I'm not particularly number confident.

19 Q. Yes.

20 A. Someone -- we did get people out of three flats along

21 that corridor, one being a single male on his own. It

22 certainly wasn't in the dramatic rescue sense. I mean,

23 the guy opened the door and we escorted him through to

24 the bridgehead and then he took himself down the stairs,

25 but that most certainly happened, yes.

1 Q. Then your statement says:

2 "The next was a family of four who were more

3 frightened and took time to gather a few bits and they

4 wanted to put wet towels around the children's heads.

5 The young girl panicked as we went past the fire flat

6 and Bob picked her up."

7 Again the statement is putting that as being

8 a family from the north corridor, isn't it?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Is that your recollection?

11 A. That's my recollection, yes.

12 Q. You heard Mr Bennett's evident that he thought it was

13 the south corridor?

14 A. I did, yes.

15 Q. In terms of what the family of four looked like, did it

16 include a black woman aged about 25 who was about

17 5 foot 2 in height with a six year-old or so daughter

18 and a baby?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. You too have this recollection of Bob picking up the six

21 year-old girl?

22 A. I was stood right there when he did it.

23 Q. Did you accompany them with Mr Bennett down the stairs

24 to any extent?

25 A. Only as far as the bridgehead.



1 Q. Did then Mr Bennett continue on down the stairs with  
2 them?

3 A. He did, yeah.

4 Q. After he'd gone down the stairs and you were not with  
5 him, what did you do?

6 A. Could I look at my statement to refresh my memory; is  
7 that okay?

8 Q. Yes, we're on page 161. Just towards the very bottom.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Three lines from the bottom:

11 "Bob escorted that family all the way out of the  
12 block."

13 A. Yeah. Then -- well, as this statement says then we did  
14 one of the flats on the right, and there was an elderly  
15 lady in there.

16 Q. Called Beatrice?

17 A. Correct.

18 Q. When you say in the statement:

19 "We then they want back and got an elderly lady,  
20 Beatrice."

21 Who was the "we" as far as you remember?

22 A. I seem to recall Bob being back by then. Again, I'm not  
23 sure, if I'm perfectly honest.

24 Q. If I can help you in this way: we know that a lady  
25 called Beatrice Obanyano lived in flat 68, and we know

1           that she was rescued by firefighters at a time when she  
2           was on the telephone to the London Fire Brigade making  
3           a 999 call.

4   A.   That's correct, yeah.

5   Q.   We know that the time when she was rescued, if one works  
6           it out from the call, was just before 16.53.

7   A.   Yeah, I've no reason to doubt any of that.

8   Q.   To put that in context with the time that you'd been  
9           using breathing apparatus for, Mr Bennett started up his  
10          set at 16.42 and subsequently closed it down at 16.57.  
11          Can you help us with whether you closed down your set at  
12          the same time as Mr Bennett, or before or after?

13  A.   It would be around the same time, because we exited the  
14          building together.

15  Q.   So on that basis, you rescue the lady called Beatrice,  
16          whom we know to be Beatrice Obanyano, about four minutes  
17          before you closed down your set.

18                 I want to ask you next about what you did with the  
19          time that was left on your breathing apparatus.

20                 Madam, it's moving on a little bit to a new topic,  
21          which we wouldn't complete in five minutes.

22  THE CORONER:  All right, well in that case it seems  
23          a sensible time to have a break.  Members of the jury,  
24          if we start again at 1.55, is that convenient for  
25          everybody?  Thank you very much.  Please go with

1 Mr Graham.

2 Mr Clarke, you're part way through giving your  
3 evidence, and the strict rule which I do require you to  
4 adhere to is that you must not talk to anyone about the  
5 case or about your evidence, so the safe thing to do is  
6 to have lunch by yourself. Please be back here to  
7 continue at 1.55.

8 A. 1.55, thank you.

9 (12.56 pm)

10 (The short adjournment)

11 (1.53 pm)

12 Housekeeping

13 MS AL TAI: Madam, briefly before the jury comes in I wonder  
14 if I could address you on something.

15 THE CORONER: Of course.

16 MS AL TAI: I've canvassed an idea with my learned friends  
17 about possibly perhaps having a brief period of time in  
18 which to digest the information received on the various  
19 disks we received earlier this week.

20 THE CORONER: Yes.

21 MS AL TAI: I think it would be highly useful.

22 Unfortunately, I haven't had an opportunity to go  
23 through the various disks that we've been presented with  
24 and I think it's highly relevant.

25 I can't really make submissions more than that on

1 the basis that I haven't had an opportunity to go  
2 through it, but I think it would be extremely useful  
3 that we were given a period. I understand that we have  
4 a tight deadline in which to keep to, but certainly  
5 I think it would be most useful for us to have that  
6 period of time.

7 THE CORONER: All right. In practical terms, what are you  
8 asking for?

9 MS AL TAI: Anywhere between half a day and a day, madam.

10 THE CORONER: Right. When do you want it?

11 MS AL TAI: When convenient. The sooner the better, I would  
12 imagine, on the basis that it might be relevant to  
13 evidence that's forthcoming.

14 THE CORONER: Okay. All right, is that supported by others?

15 MR HENDY: Madam, yes. We would support that. In fact that  
16 task is something that we've managed to do in our team,  
17 but I just warn my learned friend that it took my  
18 assistant solicitor two days to go through all those  
19 photographs. There are a lot of them and it's not as if  
20 one can just flick one's finger, as on an iPhone, you  
21 have to download each one and then you have to decide  
22 whether to download it to keep it for future reference  
23 or not. So it's a big job.

24 As I say, as far as our team is concerned, we've  
25 done that task, but on the other hand, there are many

1 tasks that have been left aside due to the volume of  
2 material that we've received since the beginning of the  
3 inquest, which I certainly could use a day for. One of  
4 them is going through the transcripts.

5 THE CORONER: Mr Maxwell-Scott, what are we looking at in  
6 terms of the diary at the moment? What is tomorrow  
7 looking like?

8 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: At the moment, tomorrow we have  
9 Mr Birkett, who is the expert witness who's going to  
10 talk about locks, who I anticipate will take under  
11 an hour, and then your indication earlier was that you  
12 would want Deborah Real to give evidence, and there was  
13 the possibility of Mr Moore being available. He is  
14 available tomorrow, I see. There's no statement from  
15 him, there doesn't need to be, he will simply tell us  
16 that he did a 72D visit to Lakanal in May 2009. He will  
17 be short, he will be half an hour or so, I would have  
18 thought, not more.

19 THE CORONER: If we were to limit ourselves to those  
20 witnesses tomorrow, we might finish at lunchtime?

21 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I doubt it with Deborah Real, because of  
22 the wider issues that that throws open, which I think  
23 people will want to ask questions about. It may be  
24 unrealistic to think that Mr Birkett and Mr Moore and  
25 Deborah Real would be completed by lunchtime. It

1 depends a bit upon the extent to which others have  
2 questions for Deborah Real.

3 MR WALSH: The position with Deborah Real is that, as  
4 I understand it, Mr Maxwell-Scott wishes to adduce the  
5 transcript of the relevant call through her, and I think  
6 initially we thought that that was going to be it from  
7 her point of view and there would be a more senior  
8 control person later on.

9 Mr Hendy very helpfully and properly has indicated  
10 that he would wish to ask a number of questions  
11 concerning not just the transcript but how control  
12 operates and training and so on of whosoever is called  
13 to deal with that. Inevitably that would take longer  
14 than just adducing the transcript.

15 We have given consideration to whether it is more  
16 appropriate to swap her with a more experienced person  
17 to deal with those questions, and we're still thinking  
18 about it, but in any event it will take some time. But  
19 if there were to be a half or a reading day, and that  
20 were to be tomorrow, we could use that to cut it down or  
21 to sort it out, I suppose.

22 THE CORONER: Yes, so in terms of the overall timetable it  
23 would only be if -- as there is some discussion at the  
24 moment about whether Ms Real, as to whether she is the  
25 right person or not, if we put her on one side, then we

1           could maybe deal with Mr Birkett and Mr Moore and finish  
2           there, and then it would finish there. In terms of the  
3           overall timetable it would simply be a question of  
4           slotting in Ms Real or her substitute, because everybody  
5           else is already timetabled, is that right?

6   MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: That is right. Certainly if we didn't  
7           have Ms Real tomorrow we could have a very short day.  
8           We have to have Mr Birkett, but Mr Moore is optional,  
9           but I would expect him to be short. The combination of  
10          the two of them, I would think, would not take us past  
11          the morning break.

12   THE CORONER: No.

13   MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: We could sit for an hour and a half  
14          perhaps and do both of them. That would certainly be  
15          an option.

16   THE CORONER: All right. Well, if we were to do that, then  
17          that would give everybody three quarters of tomorrow to  
18          do some private work. Would that be helpful?

19   MS AL TAI: Thank you, madam, I'm grateful. I'm just  
20          conscious, given my learned friend's observations on the  
21          fact that perhaps it's more than a day's work, I'm not  
22          sure if three quarters of a day would suffice, and  
23          I appreciate all the efforts that everyone's making in  
24          respect of timetabling, but perhaps it would be that  
25          a full day would be required.

1 THE CORONER: Well, Ms Al Tai, I think the full day would be  
2 a luxury. I think at the moment, looking at the overall  
3 timetable, three quarters of a day is the best that  
4 I can offer you. But if you find that you have  
5 particular problems then perhaps you would let me know,  
6 all right?

7 MS AL TAI: I'm grateful, thank you.

8 THE CORONER: Thank you. All right, because everybody needs  
9 to know for whom they need to prepare for tomorrow and  
10 we also need to make sure that witnesses are given as  
11 much notice as possible as to whether they're needed or  
12 not.

13 I think the position that we're in is that we'll ask  
14 Mr Birkett and Mr Moore to give evidence tomorrow but  
15 then we'll stop at that point which will give everybody  
16 a chance to do some private work, all right?

17 Thank you very much. All right, so anything else  
18 before we ask the jury could come back?

19 Thank you. Yes, can we have the jury back please,  
20 thank you.

21 (In the presence of the Jury)

22 THE CORONER: Thank you. Yes, Mr Clarke, you're giving your  
23 evidence on oath, thank you.

24

25



1                   Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT (continued)

2   MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Mr Clarke, we had reached the point where  
3                   you had assisted Beatrice Obanyano from her flat and she  
4                   had been escorted down the stairs from the bridgehead,  
5                   and I was going to turn to ask you about what you did  
6                   next. Did you return and have any conversations at the  
7                   bridgehead?

8   A. Yes, I spoke with Watch Manager Payton.

9   Q. You hadn't seen him at the bridgehead before, is that  
10                  right?

11  A. No, I assume he took over whilst I'd been dealing with  
12                  the people in the flats.

13  Q. You assumed he was now in charge of the bridgehead?

14  A. I certainly did, yes.

15  Q. Mr Dennis, was he still there?

16  A. He was still there.

17  Q. What conversation did you have with Mr Payton?

18  A. I gave him a brief sort of precis as to what we'd done.  
19                  He did make notes of the flats in particular that we'd  
20                  taken people out of.

21  Q. Just pausing there, were you able to give Mr Payton  
22                  a description of what you'd done by reference to any  
23                  flat numbers?

24  A. Yes, we gave him the numbers of the flats we'd taken  
25                  people out of.

1 Q. This may seem like an obvious question, but how had you  
2 known what the numbers of those flats were?

3 A. I believe I read them off the doors at the time.

4 Q. The visibility was good enough to do that?

5 A. Absolutely, yes.

6 Q. Did he write down in your presence the flat numbers?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Was there then any discussion about what you should do  
9 next?

10 A. Well, I was -- I was with Firefighter Bennett, I'd also  
11 told Watch Manager Payton the original task I was given  
12 to do. You may recall it was going up above the fire  
13 and if I came across flat numbers that I had previous  
14 knowledge of, to check those out, but generally check  
15 the fire spread.

16 Q. So just pausing there, at this stage, in this  
17 conversation with Mr Payton, you now told him what it  
18 was that Watch Manager Howling had originally asked you  
19 to do?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. If I could just take you to a couple of passages in your  
22 second witness statement that deal with that, starting  
23 at page 166. This is your second statement. I didn't  
24 ask you about this earlier -- on reflection I probably  
25 should have done -- because in this part of the

1 statement which I'm highlighting you refer to the fact  
2 that there was a dilemma in your mind between the fact  
3 you'd been given a task originally by Mr Howling, but  
4 then you were being told other things by Mr Dennis back,  
5 in the first place, at the bridgehead. Your statement  
6 here says, looking back in time:

7 "These competing priorities created a dilemma.  
8 I couldn't get through to Watch Manager Howling due to  
9 radio traffic. I felt my priorities had to change.  
10 I asked Crew Manager Dennis to tell Watch Manager  
11 Howling if he could."

12 So that's a description of the decision that you  
13 made and told us about before the lunch break, and it's  
14 an additional description of you attempting to convey  
15 that message to those in command?

16 A. That's correct.

17 Q. Then if you turn over the page, in the second paragraph  
18 here, it says:

19 "By this time, Watch Manager Payton had taken over  
20 the bridgehead. He took a note of the number of flats  
21 and numbers of people we had assisted. He noted this  
22 down. He asked us how much air we had. I decided we  
23 could manage a few specific tasks."

24 Do you remember how much air you did have?

25 A. No, I really don't recall.

1 Q. "I was still conscious at that time our first briefing  
2 had not been met, so we wanted to get a look at the  
3 floor above. I was also conscious there were numbers in  
4 the 70s I'd been told about."

5 So that relates to the discussion that you had with  
6 Mr Payton at this stage, whereas you'd just been telling  
7 the jury you told him what your first tasking had been  
8 and that you hadn't yet carried out, is that right?

9 A. Correct.

10 Q. So what did he ask you to do as a result?

11 A. When I -- when I explained the original task to him,  
12 I remember judging we had enough air, but we certainly  
13 didn't have excessive air. So I said:

14 "I'm going to attempt to at least try and complete  
15 some of that first task."

16 Q. Did he agree with that?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. So where did you then go next?

19 A. We went up one floor. To put it into context, though,  
20 I do have to say, up until now, I hadn't realised they  
21 were maisonettes, I still believed them to be flats.

22 Q. So you say you went up a floor; how did you go up  
23 a floor?

24 A. Up the stairs.

25 Q. I'll show you a photograph that may assist you with

1 remembering what you found when you went up a floor.  
2 That's a photograph, as it happens, taken on the  
3 2nd floor. It's representative of the even-numbered  
4 floors in the central staircase. Does that help to  
5 refresh your memory?

6 A. It does.

7 Q. So what did you do when you found yourself in that  
8 situation?

9 A. The -- the door was presented as you see it on the  
10 photo. By far the quickest way to open it, in my  
11 opinion, was to break the glass, put my hand through,  
12 open the door from the inside, which is what I did.  
13 I can't recall exactly what was behind the door. I do  
14 remember, though, there was nowhere to go and no  
15 progress to be made once we went through it.

16 Q. Just pausing you there, perhaps you can help us, just  
17 with giving us a feel for the size of the space you  
18 found yourself in. Was it quite a small confined space  
19 about the size of the witness box you're in now or was  
20 it more like the size of the lift lobby, albeit without  
21 lift doors?

22 A. As -- as I recall, roughly the size of this desk.

23 Q. What did you do then?

24 A. We -- we looked across the corridor and saw another  
25 door, so we went to try that one.

1 Q. Where did that lead?

2 A. That door was open. It led into a space that had a door  
3 off to the left and right and that --

4 Q. Just pausing there, the space you were in now, was that  
5 different in size to the one you've previously  
6 described?

7 A. I seem to recall it being larger.

8 Q. Was there a vertical red dry riser pipe, can you  
9 remember?

10 A. I really don't recall.

11 Q. Do you remember lift shafts?

12 A. I really don't recall.

13 Q. So what did you do from there?

14 A. From there, we went through the left-hand door and we  
15 went along the balconies -- the balcony, banging on  
16 windows, shouting, that kind of thing, but every --  
17 every flat we looked into, or every maisonette we looked  
18 into, was completely clear. I could see into all of  
19 them, I could see the whole room; there was no-one in  
20 there and we were getting no replies.

21 Q. Just pausing there, you would have been walking along  
22 a balcony with a balustrade at about waist height on one  
23 side of you --

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. -- and doors and windows on the other side of you. Can

1           you remember whether the doors and windows were on the  
2           left or your right?

3    A.   I seem to recall my left.

4    Q.   If you take up the jury bundle at tab 11, page 1.  
5           I think the description that you've just given would  
6           involve you walking from the central area on the west  
7           side southwards with the doors and windows on your left.

8    A.   Correct.

9    Q.   Can you help us with whether you were doing that on your  
10           own or whether anyone was with you at the time?

11   A.   No, Firefighter Bennett was with me at the time.

12   Q.   You may not be able to help with this, I don't know, but  
13           did you have a feel whether you were on the side of the  
14           building that was most affected by fire?

15   A.   I believe we were on the opposite side.

16   Q.   Which would be the east side, wouldn't it?

17   A.   Yeah.

18   Q.   I think you were in court earlier today. Mr Bennett's  
19           recollection, as I understood it, was of walking on the  
20           east side in the southwards direction, and therefore  
21           with doors and windows on his right. How confident are  
22           you of your recollection?

23   A.   No more confident than he is.

24   Q.   Could you see into the rooms you were walking past?

25   A.   Yes, I could.

1 Q. Could you see what sort of room they were? For example  
2 were they bedrooms or kitchens, or --

3 A. Lounges and kitchens.

4 Q. What was the visibility like in those rooms?

5 A. Clear.

6 Q. Looking into the distance in those rooms, what could you  
7 see?

8 A. I recall being able to see the whole room in every flat  
9 we looked in.

10 Q. Could you see windows at the other end of the room?

11 A. I don't specifically recall windows, but the rooms were  
12 very light.

13 Q. Can you help with whether there was sunlight streaming  
14 in towards you or not?

15 A. I don't recall.

16 Q. Could you see the top of the staircase?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Did there come a time in the events of the day when you  
19 realised that the flats were maisonettes?

20 A. Yes, at about this point in time.

21 Q. At about this point. Is it right that you didn't find  
22 anyone in any of the rooms that you ran past?

23 A. No, nobody.

24 Q. So what did you do then?

25 A. We made our way back through the door we had come



1 through and we -- we did another air check. Between the  
2 two of us, we did decide we didn't really have enough  
3 air to carry out any more meaningful work, there's  
4 nothing we could have started that -- we really wouldn't  
5 have got through it, so we decided to withdraw.

6 Q. Putting aside the question of which balcony you were on,  
7 is it the case that you carried out this task on one  
8 balcony and one alone?

9 A. Yeah, it is. If it helps clear up confusion -- I don't  
10 know if I've got my lefts and rights here -- but when  
11 I'd finished the job, I did form the impression that I'd  
12 just looked into the lounges of the maisonettes of the  
13 people I'd just helped evacuate/rescued.

14 Q. That's very interesting, but is there any particular  
15 reason why you formed that view?

16 A. I really can't remember, I just remember that was my  
17 impression after I'd done it.

18 Q. Having decided that there was not enough air to carry  
19 out any more meaningful task, where did you go?

20 A. Back to the bridgehead.

21 Q. Who did you find there?

22 A. Again, Chris Payton, Watch Manager Payton, and  
23 John Dennis.

24 Q. Where did you close down your BA set?

25 A. At the bridgehead with the ECO.

1 Q. Were any of your crew with you, closing down at the same  
2 time?

3 A. Certainly Firefighter Bennett was. I really can't  
4 remember whether Tony Mechen and Pete Mason were there.

5 Q. You can take it from me that the evidence indicates that  
6 Mr Bennett closed down at 16.57.

7 If I could ask you then about any discussion you had  
8 with Mr Payton at the bridgehead.

9 A. I did -- I did briefly explain to him what we'd done,  
10 but my big impression at the time was -- was to get  
11 across to Chris that these are maisonettes, they're not  
12 flats. By that -- by then he knew that, and I don't  
13 know if he knew that from prior knowledge or it had  
14 become apparent during the incident, but he definitely  
15 indicated to me that yes, he -- he knew they were  
16 maisonettes.

17 Q. Was there anything said about the fact that there was  
18 an escape route from maisonettes on their upper floor  
19 along balconies to the central staircase?

20 A. Nothing was said, no.

21 Q. Was there anything else said in that debrief that we  
22 ought to know about?

23 A. No, as far as I can recall, it was just me expressing  
24 surprise that this late in the day it hadn't dawned on  
25 me that these were maisonettes, when I found out these

1           were maisonettes.

2   Q.   Where did you go after that?

3   A.   We went down the stairs and back out of the building.

4           I was -- I went to look for John Howling to try and

5           explain what I had and hadn't achieved.

6   Q.   Did you find him?

7   A.   I did.

8   Q.   Where was he?

9   A.   Could I just refresh my memory?

10  Q.   Yes.  Do you want to look at your first statement?

11  A.   Yeah.

12  Q.   So page 162.  I think the passage you want is -- it

13           says, where my cursor is:

14                 "We updated Chris Payton at the bridgehead before

15           returning to the grass at the front.  I met Watch

16           Manager Howling."

17  A.   Yeah.  Yeah, I met him at -- well, where it says, at the

18           grass at the front of the building.

19  Q.   I'll take you to what you say in each of your statements

20           before asking you about it.  This case:

21                 " ... and told us that our task had changed."

22                 Then the statement goes on to talk about other

23           matters.

24                 Then your second statement in 2010 at page 168 says

25           in the third paragraph:

1            "We went back to the bridgehead, told  
2            Watch Manager Payton we were out of air and what we had  
3            done. I made it clear that we had only reached the 10th  
4            floor. We then left the building and I returned to  
5            Watch Manager Howling who was on the west side of the  
6            building on the grass. I briefed him on what we had and  
7            had not achieved. I explained we had looked at the  
8            upper floor of the 9th floor maisonettes but had not  
9            managed to get to the floor above."

10           Does that help to refresh your memory?

11        A. Yeah, that's -- I was just keen to tell him I hadn't  
12           achieved what he'd originally given me to do.

13        Q. Did you, in the conversation you had with him, discuss  
14           the fact that the flats were maisonettes on two floors?

15        A. Yeah, I believe I did.

16        Q. Give me one moment. (Pause)

17           We've seen that there's no reference to that in your  
18           first statement, but there is reference to it in your  
19           second statement. How confident are you that you got  
20           across to Mr Howling the fact that the flats were  
21           maisonettes on two floors?

22        A. I'm -- I'm reasonably confident, because it was kind of  
23           one of the key factors in -- in why I couldn't achieve  
24           it. I do have to say though it was -- 'cos I'm not sure  
25           if John was -- Mr Howling was still IC the incident or

1 not, but he was incredibly busy with an awful lot to  
2 deal with.

3 Q. Your second statement, which is on the screen, says he  
4 was under considerable pressure. What were you trying  
5 to get across by that?

6 A. Just trying to set the scene and the context in which  
7 I was giving him information. I wasn't the only one  
8 giving him information, he had plenty of information  
9 coming at him.

10 Q. How long did this conversation with him last?

11 A. A couple of minutes or so, before we moved onto what he  
12 wanted me to do next.

13 Q. When you say a couple of minutes, is that a couple of  
14 minutes of his undivided attention?

15 A. Absolutely not, no.

16 Q. Do you think that at any time in the conversation there  
17 was reference to the fact that there was an escape route  
18 from flats on their upper level via balconies to the  
19 central staircase?

20 A. No.

21 Q. What task did Mr Howling give you to do next?

22 A. He nominated me as a safety officer, mainly because the  
23 person who was doing safety officer at that time was  
24 capable of operating an aerial ladder platform and he  
25 needed that person to do that.

1 Q. Perhaps you could just help the jury with what a safety  
2 officer is.

3 A. Sure, it's -- generally at larger fires, they're  
4 sectorised into areas. Each area has to have a sector  
5 commander and a safety officer who's in charge -- the  
6 name's in the title -- of safety within that area,  
7 watching members of the public don't wander in, watching  
8 for all aspects of safety, trip hazards, falling debris,  
9 that kind of thing, and they wear a yellow tabard with  
10 "safety officer" written on the back.

11 Q. Is it right that a little later on you then assisted in  
12 setting up a ground monitor --

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. -- which would be used to direct water jets at the  
15 building from outside?

16 A. Yeah, it's a little more powerful than a hose would be,  
17 the idea being that it's worked from the ground and can  
18 throw water further.

19 Q. I don't need perhaps to take to you it, but your  
20 statement says there was mixed success with that. It  
21 struggled to hit the 11th floor; is that right?

22 A. That's correct, yeah.

23 Q. The statement also says:  
24 "There was so much radio traffic it was difficult to  
25 tell where the firefighters were within the building."

1           Is that right?

2   A.   That's correct, it was also an important point in -- in  
3       how that ground monitor was used.

4   Q.   Can you just explain why that is?

5   A.   If the ground -- if the ground monitor hit an area that  
6       was on fire, it could push the fire and smoke onto  
7       firefighters, or people waiting to be rescued. That's  
8       why it was -- the intention was to use it liberally to  
9       try to let it rain down on the fire rather than force  
10      anything. We didn't want to push debris and fire onto  
11      people when we didn't know where they were.

12  Q.   Is it right that by the time you came out of the  
13      building, which I'm assuming would have been shortly  
14      after 5 o'clock, that other floors of the building were  
15      now on fire?

16  A.   Certainly the 11th was by then, yeah. I do believe by  
17      then falling debris was starting to catch. There was  
18      nets over windows to keep birds out, and there were  
19      spikes to keep birds away. I believe by then debris was  
20      starting to catch on the nets and the spikes, which  
21      meant that the maisonettes at a lower level would catch  
22      alight, could catch alight.

23  Q.   You continued in your role of safety officer for about  
24      four hours in total?

25  A.   Correct.

1 Q. There came a time when the aerial ladder platform from  
2 Greenwich was set up, but that also had limited success  
3 in your view?

4 A. It did have limited success. I seem to recall it broke  
5 down as well.

6 THE CORONER: You recall it what? I didn't hear what you  
7 said.

8 A. It had limited success, and I believe it broke down in  
9 the end as well.

10 THE CORONER: It broke down?

11 A. Yeah.

12 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I'm putting up on screen an image of what  
13 the building looks like at ground floor level on the  
14 west side without any flat numbers.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. I'll put over it now what the flat numbers in fact are.  
17 What I wanted to ask you was: in the time that you were  
18 at Lakanal House -- and we bear in mind of course that  
19 it's the first time you'd ever been there -- to what  
20 extent were you able to build up a mental picture like  
21 that, so that if somebody said a flat number you would  
22 have knowledge of where it was either precisely or  
23 roughly?

24 A. After I went outside and I was safety officer, that --  
25 this is the view I had of the building. Having got some



1 people out the flats, I knew that sort of roughly late  
2 50s to 70 was on the 9th floor. I could guesstimate --  
3 if that's a word -- roughly what floor flat numbers  
4 would be.

5 Q. Thank you. Finally, I'd like to ask you this: what  
6 single additional thing do you think would have helped  
7 you most on the day of the fire to carry out the tasks  
8 that were given to you?

9 A. If I'd have known it was maisonettes and if I'd have had  
10 a map such as in front of me now with flat numbers on  
11 it.

12 Q. Thank you very much. Those are my questions.

13 A. Thank you.

14 Questions by MR HENDY

15 MR HENDY: Mr Clarke, my name's Hendy, I represent three of  
16 the bereaved families.

17 You said that on your way to the fire you understood  
18 that it was a persons reported incident?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. "Persons reported" of course is a term of art both for  
21 the fire service and the ambulance service, isn't it?

22 A. I don't know about the ambulance service.

23 Q. Okay, well let's say for the fire service certainly it's  
24 a term of art, it has a special meaning, doesn't it?

25 A. Certainly, yeah, I mean to me it would intimate that

1 people are inside the building.

2 Q. It means people are trapped and they need to be rescued?

3 A. That's what we take from it, yes.

4 Q. If an incident is persons reported, it means that rescue

5 has a particularly high priority?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. I wonder if I can just correct your recollection,

8 though, Mr Clarke. In fact, there was no message of

9 persons reported on your way to the incident. We know

10 what the messages were, but nobody said "persons

11 reported", does that refresh your memory?

12 A. I can agree with you that I have faulty recollection,

13 yeah.

14 Q. You see, if you look at -- I wonder if we could have

15 advocates' bundle page 415 put up. Thank you. This is

16 part of the transcript of the radio traffic between the

17 control radio officer, Vicki Barnet, who's "VB1" in this

18 log, and the mobile appliances and command units, and so

19 forth, attending the Lakanal incident. It's all timed.

20 If you look at the first entry for 17.23, Ms Barnet,

21 in the second entry against her name, "VB1", says:

22 "Charlie Uniform 4 ..."

23 Let's just pause there, that's the command unit that

24 was in position by 5.20, yes?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. She says:

2 "Charlie Uniform 4, just for your information,  
3 control commander at control is making this incident  
4 a persons reported. We haven't actually had that  
5 priority from anybody at this incident. Over."

6 Does that tally with your recollection, that it  
7 wasn't until 5.23 that afternoon that anybody had made  
8 this a persons reported incident?

9 A. The record speaks for itself there, I think.

10 Q. Indeed. The person who made it persons reported was not  
11 somebody on the fire ground but the control commander at  
12 control, it appears; is that unusual?

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. Can I suggest that the Fire Brigade response, and  
15 perhaps even your own, might have been different if it  
16 had been persons reported at the outset?

17 A. The Fire Brigade's may, I don't think mine would.  
18 I described earlier from years -- a certain amount of  
19 years of experience, seeing a fully involved flat with  
20 floors above it, I -- I would assume that I would be  
21 looking to rescue people from a fire like that. I don't  
22 think it would have coloured my own response.

23 Q. Thank you. Well, we can explore that with others. You  
24 explain how when you got, I think, to the east side of  
25 the building you were met by a whole crowd of people who

1 gave you -- I'm reading from your statement:

2 " ... gave me loads of flat numbers, telling me  
3 there were people inside. I transmitted details of  
4 these flats to the watch manager. In all, there were  
5 about eight flats. I can't remember all the numbers,  
6 but one woman kept on saying 78 then 79. Number 94  
7 rings a bell, and others, I think, were in the 60s."

8 So about eight particular numbers were given to you.  
9 When you say you transmitted details of these flats to  
10 the watch manager, that would be Watch Manager Howling?

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. And when you say "transmitted", do you mean on your  
13 personal radio --

14 A. That's what I tried to do at first, yeah.

15 Q. -- which would have been on channel 1?

16 A. Correct.

17 Q. So that everybody on the fire ground who wasn't  
18 listening or committed to BA and listening on channel 6,  
19 everybody else in the fire ground would have heard you  
20 say those numbers?

21 A. Correct.

22 Q. But of course your message was addressed to Mr Howling  
23 and others might not have paid such attention?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. I'm trying to be fair. You say that you spoke to

1 Mr Howling who asked you to search flats and assess the  
2 situation above the fire floor. Mr Maxwell-Scott put to  
3 you that that was done in a face to face conversation.  
4 I'd just like to explore with you whether that might not  
5 have been done over the radio.

6 Let me just tell you what Mr Howling has recorded in  
7 his statement, and no doubt will tell the jury. For the  
8 advocates it's page 278 in the third paragraph. I'm not  
9 going to put this up for the jury. He's going to say:

10 "Once this was done [tasking the cordon to be set  
11 and so on] I radioed through the list of flat numbers  
12 I had at that time and I instructed him [you, Mr Clarke]  
13 to lead the pumps crew in, in BA, to check those flats  
14 as a matter of priority and check the conditions above  
15 the floor."

16 So his recollection -- and this is a statement that  
17 he made on 15 July -- was that he had done that by  
18 radio. Could that be right?

19 A. I recall it being done face to face.

20 Q. The only significance of that is this: that your  
21 description of your conversation face to face was with  
22 your crew around you, as I understand it, is that right?

23 A. Certainly John and I talked face to face when he gave me  
24 the task. Whether the crew were around me at the time,  
25 I don't recall. Once we were gathered together, I did

1 say to them, "This is the task we've been given".

2 Q. You see, it just occurred to me -- and nothing may  
3 ultimately turn on this, but it occurred to me, and I'd  
4 like your reflection on it -- that Mr Mason told the  
5 jury that his understanding from the crew, because he  
6 was the driver and was a bit slow to join them, was that  
7 he was to go to the 9th floor in order to assist in  
8 firefighting.

9 Mr Mechen told the jury that he had heard from  
10 Mr Howling himself, who said "Go to the 7th and then to  
11 the 9th in order to search" and Mr Bennett told the jury  
12 that it was at the bridgehead that he was briefed to  
13 search the 9th floor, and it occurred to me that the  
14 message to go above the fire floor was something that  
15 only you may have heard by radio from Mr Howling?

16 A. No, I heard it face to face from Mr Howling.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. My recollection is that I briefed my crew that's what we  
19 were gonna do.

20 Q. You switched on your BA, we see, at 16.42.18, and in  
21 your second statement at page 168, you were asked  
22 a question:

23 "Do you remember when the fire spread to the 11th  
24 floor?"

25 Your answer was:

1            "I'm pretty sure if it hadn't happened it was about  
2            to happen when we arrived."

3            What I'd like to know is that, when you switched on  
4            your BA at the bridgehead on the 7th floor at 16.42,  
5            were you told that the fire had already gone into the  
6            floor above?

7            A. No.

8            Q. Would I be right in thinking that until you left the  
9            building after you'd closed down your BA, you hadn't  
10           ever appreciated that the fire was established on the  
11           floor above?

12           A. Sorry, could you say that again?

13           Q. Yes. It wasn't until you went out of the building -- we  
14           know you switched off at 16.59, so some time after  
15           that -- it wasn't until you went out of the building  
16           that you realised that there was an established fire on  
17           the 11th floor?

18           A. That's probably when I fully realised. I did get the  
19           impression that there was a good chance that would  
20           happen from the moment I pulled up, though.

21           Q. One further matter about the instructions that -- or the  
22           tasking that Mr Howling gave you. In his witness  
23           statement, again this is simply for the advocates and  
24           not for the jury, it's 287, he says that you were:

25           " ... deployed to establish where the flat numbers

1           were in relation to the fire. I considered that the  
2           flats remote from the fire would mean reassurance while  
3           we put the fire out. His role was to go to the  
4           bridgehead, give information on where the flats were,  
5           get to the residents in that area and if possible go  
6           above the bridgehead, staying within the lobby, and  
7           starting to think about setting that up as a search  
8           sector."

9                       How does that tally with your recollection?

10          A. It's more detailed than my recollection.

11          Q. What about the bit about staying within the lobby, do  
12             you remember that?

13          A. No.

14          Q. Staying within the lobby would mean presumably not going  
15             onto the fire escapes?

16          A. Absolutely.

17          Q. He went on, I'm reading the next sentence:

18                       "If possible, act upon the flat numbers and if there  
19             was the opportunity to get the people out quickly."

20                       That you do recall?

21          A. I do.

22          Q. So before you went in, your task was to, if you could,  
23             identify the numbered flats that you'd heard about and  
24             get the people out if you could safely?

25          A. Correct.



1 Q. Going back to your witness statement at 161, perhaps we  
2 could have that up again. At 161, just above halfway,  
3 there's a line that begins with the word "Bennett" in  
4 capital letters, and then three lines below that,  
5 there's a line that begins with:

6 "At the 7th floor, John Dennis was running the  
7 bridgehead and he was under a lot of pressure at that  
8 point. The guys fighting the fire to the 9th floor in  
9 the flat, which I believe was 64 or 65, needed immediate  
10 back up and he was desperate for the other flats on the  
11 fire floor to be searched and he had no-one to do it."

12 Now, when you say he was desperate for those flats  
13 to be searched, he was also desperate for them -- any  
14 residents who were found there to be evacuated, correct?

15 A. That's correct. The impression John gave me was that he  
16 had positive information that people were in those  
17 flats.

18 Q. Yes. Sorry, you've taken the wrong emphasis from my  
19 question. I'm not worried about how urgent his command  
20 was to you, but the fact was that he wanted residents  
21 who were found to be evacuated?

22 A. Correct.

23 THE CORONER: Mr Clarke, we are not familiar with the first  
24 names of these various firefighters. You have probably  
25 heard that we're referring to them by their surnames

1 will you please do the same so that you don't confuse  
2 us?

3 A. Certainly.

4 MR HENDY: So you split your crew in half. You and  
5 Mr Bennett go on search and rescue, if I can put it that  
6 way, and Mr Mechen and Mr Mason go in to help the  
7 firefighting.

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. I wonder if your memory is quite right about the  
10 searching thereafter. You remember Mr Bennett was very  
11 clear to the jury that he'd searched only the south side  
12 of the block of flats, in other words the end of the  
13 block of flats where the fire was not. You, I think,  
14 searched on both sides, am I right?

15 A. Again, my recollection's gonna let me down.

16 Q. It's three years ago.

17 A. My strongest recollection is walking past the fire flat,  
18 removing people from flats opposite -- on the opposite  
19 side of that same corridor. I believe I possibly went  
20 to the other wing of the building to check doors, but  
21 this -- this was the only place we -- we found people.

22 Q. Well, we may be able to help with information that's  
23 elsewhere in the papers.

24 A. Sure.

25 Q. Let me see what we can do. You say in your statement on

1 the same page at 161, some half a dozen lines up from  
2 the bottom:

3 "The first person we took out was a man in the flat  
4 opposite the fire flat, and we took him down to the  
5 bridgehead."

6 Now, the flat opposite the fire flat is number 64,  
7 and there was a man there, Mr Kayode, and he did go  
8 down, he -- 66, sorry, I beg your pardon. That's number  
9 66. The door is opposite number 65, where the fire was.  
10 Mr Kayode lived there. He's given a statement, and he  
11 says he went out of his flat without any firefighters  
12 being there, but he was certainly in the flat opposite  
13 the fire flat. So that would be on the northern end of  
14 the block of flats, right?

15 A. Okay.

16 Q. Perhaps we could have Mr Maxwell-Scott's wonderful  
17 diagram which shows the flats with the numbers  
18 superimposed. Do we see 66 there? Thank you. So 65 is  
19 the one towards the centre which was on fire, 66, the  
20 arrow on the screen is looking at the lounge/kitchen.  
21 Obviously the bedrooms are downstairs and on the other  
22 side, yes?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Right. So the first person is the man in the flat  
25 opposite the fire flat. So you certainly looked on the

1 fire flat side, the north side of the block of flats.

2 Then you say:

3 "Next was a family of four who were more frightened  
4 and took time to gather a few bits, and they wanted to  
5 put wet towels around the children's heads. The young  
6 girl panicked as we went past the fire flat and Bob  
7 picked her up."

8 Now that reads as if you'd taken that family from  
9 the north end and gone past the doorway of 65 into the  
10 lobby. Mr Bennett's evidence was no, they come from the  
11 southern end, you didn't go past the fire flat, but  
12 obviously when you got to the top of the stairs you were  
13 very close to the fire flat.

14 Now, that family would appear to be the Hydar  
15 family, and they live at number 57 which, if you look at  
16 Mr Maxwell-Scott's diagram, is right on the end of the  
17 southern end of the block of flats. It seems unlikely  
18 that you and Mr Bennett could have found a family of  
19 four and that Mr Bennett could have picked up two  
20 children. It must be, must it not, or the likelihood is  
21 probably that your recollection may be slightly at fault  
22 and that family were collected from 57 and taken down  
23 the southern corridor?

24 A. It would appear so.

25 Q. Then the penultimate sentence on that page says:

1            "We then went back and got an elderly lady,  
2            Beatrice, from the end flat on the right."

3            In answer to Mr Maxwell-Scott, you thought that you  
4            had done that with Mr Bennett. In fact, Mr Mason gave  
5            evidence that he had been called away from firefighting  
6            by you and he had gone, and the advocates may well look  
7            at page 144 with you, to a flat where there was a lady  
8            who was, when you opened the door, stood at the top of  
9            the stairs who was on the phone, and you and Mr Mason  
10           took her to safety. Now, her flat number was number 68,  
11           which is again on the north end on the fire flat side,  
12           do you see?

13          A. Yeah.

14          Q. So it looks to us as if you had rescued people both from  
15           the north end and from the south end?

16          A. It would appear so, yes.

17          Q. No doubt when you were in the southern corridor you made  
18           it your job to knock on all the other doors?

19          A. Yes.

20          Q. That's why when Mr Bennett told the jury earlier that  
21           you had reported to Mr Payton at the bridgehead that the  
22           9th floor was cleared of occupants, or words to that  
23           effect, is because between the two of you, you had  
24           knocked on the door of every single apartment on the 9th  
25           floor, both south and north, and assured yourself that

1           anybody who was in there had come out and been  
2           evacuated?

3    A.   Correct, yeah.

4    Q.   Now, after your report to Mr Payton at the bridgehead,  
5           you still had enough air to do a bit more, so you made  
6           an attempt to look at the next floor, and you've  
7           described to the jury how you got there. I just wanted  
8           again -- this is no criticism of you, please understand  
9           this, we all know this is three years after the  
10          events -- but I just want to probe with you whether it  
11          is in fact right that the balcony along which you went  
12          had the windows on the left-hand side rather than on the  
13          right-hand side.

14                 Mr Bennett has told the jury that you went onto the  
15                 balcony on the east side of the being, that's the other  
16                 side from the diagram that we have in front of us, and  
17                 walked to the southern end of it, in other words, away  
18                 from the fire flat, which would have meant that the  
19                 windows were on your right-hand side. So let's just  
20                 consider if the windows were on the left-hand side it  
21                 would have meant that you had gone -- you both agree  
22                 that you were on the eastern side. It would have meant  
23                 that you'd gone left, as it were, at the back of this  
24                 building. You would have gone past the fire flat, or  
25                 below it, wouldn't you, on the 10th floor?

1 A. Correct, yeah.

2 Q. I just wonder whether that prompts your memory to think  
3 no, we didn't go past the -- definitely didn't go past  
4 the fire flat when we were on the balcony?

5 A. No, we wouldn't have, because all the flats we saw in  
6 were clear, and you're absolutely right, the fire flat  
7 would not have been clear at that time.

8 Q. Yes. So on reflection, Mr Bennett's probably right, you  
9 walked south on the east balcony?

10 A. Correct, yeah.

11 Q. You were able to look into each flat, you could see  
12 right across it, they were all empty, and indeed with  
13 hindsight we know why, because either you or he had  
14 knocked on every door and got everybody out.

15 I think Mr Maxwell-Scott asked you, but I wonder if  
16 I could ask you again. We know it was a very sunny day,  
17 we know that the east side was in shadow, the west side  
18 was in the afternoon sunshine. Can you now visualise  
19 again looking through those flats and seeing the sun on  
20 the other side?

21 A. I really can't. The rooms were very clear and it was  
22 then that the penny was dropping that these were  
23 maisonettes.

24 Q. Yes.

25 A. That was the information I gleaned most from that.

1 Q. One thing was clear, though: since you could see right  
2 across, although you didn't have enough air anyway,  
3 there was no need to walk on the western balcony on the  
4 southern end because you'd checked it from the eastern  
5 balcony?

6 A. That would be correct, yeah.

7 Q. Did you realise then that since they were maisonettes  
8 and since you'd got everybody out by going to the  
9 9th floor and knocking on the doors that there was  
10 really no need to go onto the balconies on the northern  
11 end of the flats because you had knocked on all the  
12 lower doors, therefore you'd cleared all the  
13 maisonettes?

14 A. Sorry, can you explain that again?

15 Q. Yes. You realised they were maisonettes, you realised  
16 when you were on the southern balcony on the east side,  
17 you realised that the reason that there was nobody there  
18 was because you had knocked on the doors on the lower  
19 level and got everybody out?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. It followed, therefore, that there was no need to check  
22 the balconies at the north end because you knew that  
23 you'd knocked on the doors on the lower level to get  
24 everybody out and therefore if you'd gone along those  
25 balconies, past the fire or not, there would be nobody



1           there?

2    A.   That's logical, it wasn't my thinking at the time  
3           though. My thinking at the time was we'd done the one  
4           balconies, checked the air, how long have we got, it's  
5           then that I decided that our time was up.

6    Q.   It's relevant for this purpose, though, isn't it: when  
7           you subsequently report to Mr Howling, were you saying  
8           to him, "Listen, we've checked all the maisonettes on  
9           the southern end, we've checked the lower floors of the  
10          maisonettes on the northern end but we haven't checked  
11          the upper floors", or were you saying to him, "Well,  
12          there's no need to check the upper floors, because we've  
13          been into every flat"?

14   A.   I certainly didn't say that. Your logic would follow,  
15          but --

16   Q.   When you reported to Mr Howling, the fire on the 11th  
17          floor was very evident. You and he both knew that  
18          there'd been no search and rescue on the 11th floor,  
19          either south or north end, and you both also knew that  
20          there was no firefighting of the fire on the 11th floor;  
21          am I right?

22   A.   Yeah.

23   Q.   Right, the final thing I wanted to ask you about was the  
24          aerial ladder platform from Greenwich, which you recall  
25          being set up, but you thought it had limited success.

1 In your statement, you say:

2 " ... limited success, as it appeared to me there

3 wasn't enough space in which could operate efficiently."

4 You say it broke down as well. Now, the Greenwich

5 aerial ladder platform was on the west side of the

6 building, the one that we're looking at on the diagram,

7 and it was at the northern end, which is the left-hand

8 side --

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. -- on the fire flat's side of the end of the building.

11 You say it broke down. Do you mean it broke down when

12 it was in position, or it broke down as it was on its

13 way to the fire ground?

14 A. No, no, it was used, it did -- it did deploy itself. At

15 some point during this operation, though, I believe it

16 broke down.

17 THE CORONER: Do you know that directly of your own

18 knowledge?

19 A. Sorry, say that again?

20 THE CORONER: Do you know through your own knowledge?

21 A. It's what I saw.

22 THE CORONER: Okay. What did you see?

23 A. The cage went up to a few different windows, and then

24 it -- it brought itself down. I believe the operator

25 was Crew Manager Lynch(?). I seem to recall him





1 A. I'm a bit -- I'm Mrs. I'm a bit ...

2 THE CORONER: A little bit hard of hearing, are you? All  
3 right, we'll try and make sure we keep our voices up.  
4 Mrs Obanyano, if you could make sure you speak close to  
5 the microphone, please, so we can hear what you're  
6 saying, all right?

7 A. Yes.

8 THE CORONER: Mr Maxwell-Scott who is standing up is going  
9 to ask some questions on my behalf, and then there may  
10 be some questions from other people in the room, all  
11 right?

12 A. Yes.

13 THE CORONER: If you need a break, just let us know, all  
14 right?

15 A. Okay.

16 THE CORONER: Thank you.

17 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

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

20 A. My name is Beatrice Obanyano.

21 Q. Mrs Obanyano, I'm going to be asking you some questions  
22 about your knowledge of Lakanal House and about your  
23 experience of the fire on 3 July 2009.

24 A. Okay.

25 Q. You're one of at least ten residents who are going to be

1 giving evidence to this court, and we're asking each of  
2 them essentially the same questions about their  
3 knowledge of some fire safety advice and of the layout  
4 of the building. I'm going to ask you those questions  
5 in the same way to help us build up a picture of what  
6 people knew and understood. If I could ask, first, if  
7 you could be shown a document that starts at page 1050  
8 in the advocates' bundles. (Handed)

9 A. No, I have not seen this.

10 Q. It sounds as if you've anticipated my question, which is  
11 you haven't seen it before, is that right?

12 A. Yes, I haven't seen it before.

13 Q. If you turn on to the document starting at 1054, please.  
14 There's a two-page document. Do you think you've ever  
15 seen that before?

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

17 Q. That's fine, that's absolutely fine. If you could move  
18 on then to page 1068, please. In the bottom right-hand  
19 corner, there's a number 27. So this is part of  
20 a longer document and we have three pages of it: this  
21 page, the one over the page, and the one after that.  
22 Just take as long as you need and tell us whether you  
23 think you recognise it, whether you think you've ever  
24 seen it before or not. (Pause)

25 A. No, I can't remember.

1 Q. Thank you.

2 A. It's possible -- possibly it was there, but I didn't see  
3 it.

4 Q. Thank you. Do you remember ever receiving what's called  
5 a home fire safety visit, which is when a fireman comes  
6 to your flat, not when there's a fire, but on a normal  
7 day to give you some advice about fire safety matters?

8 A. No.

9 Q. Thank you. You can put that file away now. I'll ask  
10 you about your knowledge of the layout of Lakanal House  
11 and your flat within it. Firstly, did you know how many  
12 floors there were in the building?

13 A. There were 13 floors.

14 Q. Did you know how many flats there were in the building?

15 A. No.

16 Q. Did you know that all of the flats in the building had  
17 essentially the same layout?

18 A. The ones on the floor I was, they were all similar, but  
19 I've never entered anybody else's, but they was -- the  
20 side I was, they were all similar, so I'm assuming that  
21 the whole thing is the same.

22 Q. Thinking about your flat, the upper floor of it, do you  
23 remember having a kitchen and a lounge and doors from  
24 each of them leading to balconies?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Let me show you a photograph of a balcony which may help  
2 to refresh your memory. That's a photograph taken of  
3 one of the balconies at Lakanal House, and in one  
4 direction you look towards a wall, it's a dead end, and  
5 if you look in the other direction it looks like this.  
6 Do you remember those balconies?

7 A. Yes, yes I do.

8 Q. If you see the picture I'm showing you now, page 36, and  
9 a close-up view is 37, did you know where that door led,  
10 the one you can see in the picture?

11 A. No, sorry, I can't remember. What I knew is that from  
12 there, there's a door leading to the kitchen, that's the  
13 back door. The door at the end will open to the exit,  
14 taking you to where you can get the lifts. I don't know  
15 whether that is the door I'm looking at. If you come  
16 out from -- for instance, if I come out from my flat,  
17 immediately to my left is a door leading to where I can  
18 get the lifts. I'm not sure whether that's the door  
19 you're showing me, but within the flats, from the  
20 kitchen, there is a door leading outside.

21 Q. So if you're in the kitchen of your flat, there's a door  
22 that leads outside --

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. -- onto a balcony?

25 A. Yes.



1 Q. On the balcony in one direction you get a view like this  
2 towards a door at the end of the balcony?

3 A. Oh yes, I remember.

4 Q. Do you think you've ever been through that door?

5 A. No, never.

6 Q. Did you know where it went?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Did you know why there was a balcony there and a door  
9 leading off it, what the point of it was?

10 A. Not really, 'cos I never made use of it.

11 Q. Thank you. Did you have any feel for where other flats  
12 were in the building? We know that you lived in  
13 flat 68, but if somebody had asked you for directions to  
14 get, say, to flat 22, would you have been able to help  
15 them at all?

16 A. No.

17 Q. I'm now going to move on to asking you questions about  
18 your experience of the fire at Lakanal House on  
19 3 July 2009. Is it right that you were at home on your  
20 own that afternoon?

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. Did there come a time when you noticed black smoke  
23 through one of the windows?

24 A. Yes, yes I did.

25 Q. Did you telephone 999?

1 A. Yes, I did.

2 Q. You may not know this, but as it happens the practice is  
3 that 999 calls to the London Fire Brigade are  
4 tape-recorded, and it's therefore possible to find out  
5 the time that they are made and to type up a note of  
6 what everybody says. So I'm going to ask you now to  
7 have a look at what you said in that call. This is in  
8 the advocates' bundles starting at page 768. (Handed)

9 I can help you and help the court in this way: call  
10 number 28, which starts towards the bottom of that page,  
11 is a 999 call that you made which started at 16.28.08  
12 and ended at 16.29.44. Do you see that's the beginning  
13 of call 28?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. So it starts with the operator saying, "Fire Brigade".  
16 You were the caller and you said "Hello." then over the  
17 page on 769, the operator said "Fire Brigade" and you  
18 said, "Yeah, I can't come out. I can't come out".

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Then three lines further down, you said:

21 "There's smoke all about the place. I didn't notice  
22 on time."

23 Do you see that?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Then four lines or so from the bottom of the page, by

1 the holepunch, the operator said:

2 "Okay, we're listen -- we're dealing with flat 79.

3 Is that above you or below you?"

4 You said:

5 "79, six, yeah it's above, I think it's above me."

6 Then turn over the page to 770, the final three

7 things that are said, the operator said:

8 "Now listen, is there any smoke in your property?"

9 You said:

10 "Yes, in the corridor."

11 Can I ask you about that. Do you remember whether,

12 before you phoned 999 you had opened your front door?

13 A. No, I hadn't.

14 Q. Did you open your front door at any time before the

15 firemen came and rescued you?

16 A. Yes, I did.

17 Q. When you opened your front door, did you step out into

18 the corridor?

19 A. No.

20 Q. You just had a look?

21 A. Yeah, I -- I just couldn't, 'cos the smoke was hitting

22 me so I had to shut the door immediately. I just -- it

23 was too much for me to stand.

24 Q. Then if you look at page 771 in around the middle of the

25 page, there's reference to background noise and people

1 talking, and then the operator gave you some advice, she  
2 said:

3 "Yeah, they're clearing it at the moment. So just  
4 open your window and stand by the window."

5 Then that call came to an end, at the top of  
6 page 772 you said:

7 "Bye bye."

8 That was now 16.29.45, and you then made another 999  
9 call which started almost exactly three minutes later,  
10 at 16.32.46. Do you remember what you did in between  
11 finishing one 999 call and then calling 999 again?

12 A. To be quite honest with you I don't -- there was no such  
13 redialling of 999, 'cos at first time I dialled 999 and  
14 I said, "There's fire at Lakanal House", and the voice  
15 said, "yes, I know, we are sending reinforcement". That  
16 means there were firemen already, that's how  
17 I understood that statement, so she said they're sending  
18 in reinforcement, and I remember that while I was  
19 talking to her, I was using my mobile to talk to my  
20 children just to inform them that there's fire in  
21 Lakanal and I'm trapped, I can't come out, maybe that's  
22 the back -- background noise.

23 Q. I can help you with that, because the records that we  
24 have show that you called 999 at 16.32, and that you  
25 then remained on the line to them for just over

1           21 minutes until you were rescued, so I'll show you what  
2           was said in that call now, and that starts at page 774.  
3           We're now going to be looking at call 31, which starts  
4           towards the very bottom of that page. Do you see the  
5           operator said:

6                 "Fire Brigade."

7           Then a caller, which was you, said:

8                 "Yes, I'm on, I'm worried by smoke. The smoke is  
9           coming into -- into my apartment, and I can't breathe."

10           Then turn over the page, the operator said at the  
11           top:

12                 "Okay, okay, can you get to the window?"

13           You said:

14                 "Yeah, I opened the window and the whole thing's  
15           came, gone in there."

16           Just about a third of the way down the page, by the  
17           holepunch, you said:

18                 "I'm stuck, I can't come out, smoke is still coming  
19           in."

20           Can you remember and help the court at all with why  
21           you thought at the time that you were stuck and couldn't  
22           come out?

23   A. Well, the thing is, is I didn't call two times, that's  
24           what I'm trying to clear. She said to me, please don't  
25           drop the phone, so she talked me through until the

1 firemen came to get me out.

2 So there was no second calling, that's what I was  
3 trying to say, because I never dropped the phone from  
4 the time I stopped talking to her, because she was  
5 saying to me, do this, do the other and I did the ones  
6 I could. The ones I couldn't I didn't do them, like  
7 opening the window, because I knew that oxygen assists  
8 combustion, so I shut all my windows, the ones I can't  
9 reach.

10 Q. Let me just ask you about that now, because that's the  
11 bit we're coming to on this page. So in the middle of  
12 the page, you said:

13 "It's coming in through the windows, that I --  
14 somebody advised me to open."

15 Then you said:

16 "I've shut the windows now."

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Three lines further down the operator said:

19 "No, you've shut the windows?"

20 You said:

21 "Yes."

22 Did you manage to shut all the windows in the flat,  
23 do you think?

24 A. No, it was in the sitting room, when I went downstairs  
25 to go into the room -- the bedrooms, I couldn't, because

1 smoke has taken over -- over the rooms, so I had to run  
2 upstairs back to the sitting room and shut -- by that  
3 time I've shut the windows.

4 Q. If you look at page 776. If you see at the very top of  
5 the page the operator asks you:

6 "Is there any other part of the flat you can get  
7 to?"

8 You said:

9 "No, I can't come out."

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Then just over halfway down the page, the operator said:

12 "Which room are you in there?"

13 You said:

14 "Sorry, I'm in the sitting room upstairs."

15 Do you remember being in the sitting room upstairs?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Then if you turn over the page again to 777, do you  
18 remember your smoke alarm going off in the middle of the  
19 call?

20 A. No.

21 Q. If you look in the middle of the page, the operator  
22 says:

23 "Oh, try and keep calm -- is that your smoke alarm  
24 on someone else's."

25 You said:

1                   "Yeah, it's my own, my smoke alarm?

2    A.   I can't remember.   Am I allowed somebody to guide me in

3           this particular, because --

4    THE CORONER:   Mrs Obanyano, if you can't remember, just say

5           you can't remember.

6    A.   Okay, I can't remember.

7    MR MAXWELL-SCOTT:   Then just three lines further down, the

8           operator asks you about stopping smoke, and you are

9           recorded as saying:

10           "I shut the windows now."

11   A.   Yes.

12   Q.   Is it right that you in fact hadn't managed to shut all

13           of the windows?

14   A.   No, the ones upstairs, the one in the sitting room,

15           I shut.   The ones downstairs in the bedroom I couldn't,

16           because I tried to but I couldn't get in, there was

17           smoke all over the place, I couldn't see anywhere.

18   Q.   Then if you go over the page to 778, by the top

19           holepunch, the operator said:

20           "Yeah, is there -- there's no other room you can get

21           to?"

22           You said:

23           "No, each room is full of smoke."

24   A.   Yes.

25   Q.   Do you remember if you went into all of the rooms or



1           whether you guessed that they were all full of smoke?

2    A.  No, I tried to enter, I couldn't.

3    Q.  Thank you.  If you go over the page to 779, starting in  
4           the middle of the page, the operator is now talking back  
5           to you about the layout of your flat.  So the operator  
6           said:

7                 "So you've got a flat on two floors, have you?"

8           You said:

9                 "Yes."

10          The operator said:

11                 "Okay, right, so I'll put that you're on the higher  
12          floor of your flat."

13          You say:

14                 "Yes."

15          The operator said:

16                 "Okay, and the smoke's only coming in the window,  
17          but it's downstairs as well, is that what you're  
18          saying?"

19          You said:

20                 "Yes, yes."

21          Then if you turn on to 782, at the top of the page,  
22          the first thing that you said that we see here is:

23                 "No, I can't get down there, it's full of smoke.  
24          I can't see to get down."

25    A.  Yes.

1 Q. Is that when you were up in the lounge still, do you  
2 think?

3 A. Yes, I was still upstairs. She was asking me if  
4 I can -- what did she say?

5 Q. Then a little further down the page, just above the  
6 second holepunch, the operator asked you:  
7 "What floor are you on?"  
8 You said:  
9 "Er, floor 9."  
10 The operator repeated it back to you:  
11 "You're on floor 9?"  
12 You said:  
13 "Yes."  
14 Then the operator said:  
15 "Okay, we are passing all the information to the  
16 firemen."  
17 A. Yes.

18 Q. As you turn onto 784 --  
19 THE CORONER: Sorry, can I just ask you to take Mrs Obanyano  
20 to 783 --  
21 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Certainly.  
22 THE CORONER: -- the first reference to the operator,  
23 because it just picked up on something that Mrs Obanyano  
24 remembered about the operator talking about extra  
25 firemen coming.

1 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Thank you very much. Do you see the  
2 operator said:  
3 "They're asking for extra firemen now so there's  
4 going to be even more firemen coming."  
5 Do you see that towards the top of page 783?  
6 A. Yeah, what she said when I call, she said "Yes, we know  
7 there is fire, because we're sending reinforcement".  
8 That is that statement, so I don't know. So that means  
9 I didn't know there was fire before, that's why I was in  
10 this -- that statement meant that there were firemen  
11 already and they are sending some more people, that's  
12 how I understood it.  
13 Q. Thank you. Then if you go to 784, do you see that  
14 there's a bit towards the very top where you mention the  
15 name Julie:  
16 "Julie come quickly."  
17 A. Yes.  
18 Q. Is Julie your daughter?  
19 A. Yes.  
20 Q. Was that when you were phoning her on your mobile?  
21 A. Yes.  
22 Q. Then you had to explain to the operator that your  
23 daughter wasn't with you at the flat, but you were  
24 calling her?  
25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Then if you turn to 790, at the very bottom of the page,  
2 the last thing you say on this page is:  
3 "I've shut all the doors and window, but smoke is  
4 still coming in."  
5 A. That's correct.  
6 Q. Over the page at 791, in the middle of the page, the  
7 operator said:  
8 "Oh, I thought it was coming in the window, no, and  
9 up the door, but you can't."  
10 You said:  
11 "No, the windows are all shut."  
12 The operator said:  
13 "Yeah. They are all shut, so has that stopped the  
14 smoke coming in?"  
15 You said:  
16 "It's still coming in."  
17 A. That's correct.  
18 Q. Does it remain the case that you'd shut all the windows  
19 on the top floor, but you hadn't been able to shut them  
20 on the bottom floor?  
21 A. Yes, that's correct.  
22 Q. Then if you go on to 796, the final three things that  
23 are said on this page, you're recorded as saying:  
24 "I'm inside the house, I'm inside the house, I can't  
25 get out, there's smoke everywhere."

1           The operator said:  
2           "Are you talking to the firemen?"  
3           You said:  
4           "Yeah, hold on, I'm talking to my daughter, one  
5           minute please."  
6    A.   Yeah, that's correct.  
7    Q.   That was on a phone, again? She wasn't in the flat, you  
8           were calling her on the phone?  
9    A.   Yeah, I was calling her on the phone.  
10   Q.   Then if you go to 803, please. Starting in the middle  
11           of the page, the operator has been talking about how the  
12           firemen are going to find you in the flat, and the  
13           operator runs through with you where you are, and says  
14           this:  
15           "Yeah, the firemen do know you are there, so  
16           hopefully, right. You're on the upper level of your  
17           flat?"  
18           You said:  
19           "Yeah."  
20   A.   That's correct.  
21   Q.   The operator said:  
22           "The bedrooms are downstairs and you're on the upper  
23           level."  
24           You said:  
25           "Yeah."

1           The operator said:  
2           "Yeah, all right, how many rooms on that level?"  
3           You said:  
4           "One, the sitting room."  
5           The operator said:  
6           "Sitting room?"  
7           You said:  
8           "Yeah, that's right, and the kitchen behind."  
9           Then if you go to 807, please.  
10          Towards the very bottom of the page, do you see that  
11          you said:  
12          "Somebody's knocking, let me see."  
13   A.   Yes, that's right.  
14   Q.   That, I imagine, must have been a very great relief for  
15          you.  
16   A.   Yes, the firemen.  
17   Q.   I can see you're smiling about it. How many firemen  
18          were there, do you remember?  
19   A.   I can't -- about three or four. They were standing --  
20          they were knocking at my door, and I said "Oh, let me  
21          collect my keys", they said "Come out", so I came out  
22          with the mobile that I was still holding.  
23   Q.   If we look over the page, we can see that then the  
24          fireman picked up on the call, so background voice, it  
25          says:

1 "Hello love, you're okay."  
2 You said:  
3 "How did you open the door?"  
4 Is that because they'd knocked the door in?  
5 A. Yes.  
6 Q. You probably didn't mind about that at the time?  
7 A. No.  
8 Q. Then towards the bottom of the page, you said:  
9 "I'm coming now, I'm going downstairs, yes, have to  
10 fetch the key."  
11 Then the operator said:  
12 "Hello, Hello, is that the firemen, hello, hello?"  
13 Then the door can be heard creaking and then the  
14 operator says:  
15 "Hello, I think she's gone, yeah, hello, hello."  
16 We've checked the time of the call and the knocking  
17 on the door that you report at the bottom of page 807 is  
18 at 16.52.56. How did you then get out of the building,  
19 do you remember?  
20 A. Went down the stairs.  
21 Q. The central staircase?  
22 A. Yes.  
23 Q. Did someone come with you all the way to the bottom?  
24 A. Yeah, I was in front and the firemen were behind. Two  
25 were holding me, I think two were walking behind, and

1           they took me down the stairs.

2   Q. Did you need any medical assistance at the time?

3   A. No, I was breathless, no doubt, because I've been

4       inhaling a lot of smoke, but I didn't want to go to any

5       hospital, I told them I didn't need to go to hospital.

6   Q. But I think you went and saw your GP --

7   A. Yes, I did.

8   Q. -- a few days later?

9   A. Yes.

10   Q. When you made a witness statement on 11 July 2009, at

11       the very end of it you said that when you went

12       downstairs to leave, you couldn't because of the smoke.

13       You closed the door and opened the door to your bedroom,

14       and when you did that the smoke was so thick you had to

15       close it immediately.

16   A. Yes.

17   Q. Your intention was to close the bedroom windows. Then

18       you ended by saying:

19                "It was at this time that I told the lady on the 999

20       line that I was trapped and I couldn't get out."

21   A. That's right.

22   Q. Can you remember at all whether that all happened before

23       you phoned 999, or whether it was something that

24       happened in the middle of the call?

25   A. It was something that happened middle of the call.



1 Q. Thank you very much indeed, Mrs Obanyano, I don't have  
2 any further questions.

3 THE CORONER: Thank you.

4 Questions by MR EDWARDS

5 MR EDWARDS: Thank you, Mrs Obanyano, I'm acting with  
6 Mr Hendy on behalf of three of the bereaved families.

7 I just have one question for you, please. Would you  
8 look at page 808, which is part of a transcript? This  
9 is where the firemen come into your flat, and  
10 Mr Maxwell-Scott's already referred you to the section  
11 which says:

12 "How did you open the door?"

13 You are saying that to the firemen, the fireman then  
14 says:

15 "Are you on your own?"

16 You say:

17 "Yes."

18 The fireman says:

19 "Coming up now, come on then."

20 You ask if you can get your key. The fireman says:

21 "Okay."

22 You say:

23 "I can come downstairs."

24 As far as you remember, did the fireman actually  
25 come up the stairs in your flat and collect you from the

1 upper floor and bring you downstairs?

2 A. He collect me from -- I came downstairs, because what  
3 happened, if you come to our flat, downstairs you have  
4 two bedroom, one this way, one that way, then you climb  
5 the stairs to -- to the living room/sitting room, where  
6 you have sitting room and kitchen. When they knocked,  
7 I had to come down through that smoke to meet them.  
8 They were standing -- they didn't come inside the flat,  
9 but they were standing by my door and I came out and  
10 they took me downstairs.

11 Q. So they never went upstairs in your flat?

12 A. No, they -- no, they came to the -- I don't really  
13 understand your question. They came, they stood, in  
14 front of my -- of our flats.

15 They stood in front, they didn't come inside the  
16 flats, that's what I'm saying, 'cos they had already  
17 ascertained that I was alone, I was alone in the flat,  
18 so I'm standing, they're looking at me, I don't think  
19 there was a need for them to come upstairs to check.

20 Q. Thank you very much.

21 A. You're welcome.

22 THE CORONER: Thank you.

23 MS AL TAI: No thank you, madam.

24 THE CORONER: Mr Walsh, do you have any questions?

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Questions by MR WALSH

MR WALSH: Just a quick one. Mrs Obanyano, I ask questions for the Fire Brigade, by the way.

I think before you called the Fire Brigade obviously you could smell smoke and you were aware of smoke outside the building which was thick black smoke, do you remember that?

A. Yes.

Q. There came a point when you opened the door into the corridor to look at the corridor and a few moments ago you described how the smoke -- you had to push the door closed because the smoke was so strong.

A. Yes, yes, that's right.

Q. Could you have escaped, do you think, on your own, through that thick smoke?

A. Never. I wouldn't have liked to have locked myself inside the building if I knew I could escape. I've never seen smoke like that, it was going around and it was thick. There was no way I could have ventured out into that kind of smoke.

Q. Yes. So there was no way you could go out into that smoke, as you described?

A. No.

Q. Inside the flat, your flat at that time, there was less smoke than out in the corridor, than outside?

1 A. That's right.

2 Q. But there came a point when the smoke started to come  
3 into your flat more. How were your lungs feeling while  
4 you were waiting for the Fire Brigade?

5 A. Well, the truth of the matter is that the state of my  
6 lung was the least of my concern. My concern was to get  
7 out of my house. I couldn't breathe, I was feeling  
8 tightness -- because I know that if I hadn't shut the  
9 doors in the sitting room it would have been worse,  
10 because by the time I thought, "Okay, let me run  
11 downstairs and shut the windows", it was too late,  
12 I couldn't get in the bedrooms. So I ran back where it  
13 was a bit better until the smoke started seeping in  
14 through the windows and the door, because there is no  
15 door to enter the sitting room, it's open.

16 So I'm sure the smoke was coming through the doors  
17 from the bedroom, the windows were in the bedroom.

18 Q. Yes, I see. Of course, the firefighters arrived and  
19 took you down the stairwell. What was it like as you  
20 went down the stairwell being held by the firefighters?  
21 What was the smoke like there?

22 A. What I notice, when we were going down, some hot liquids  
23 were falling on me and I said "What is this, why is this  
24 so hot?" They say it's the water they try to use to put  
25 out the fire coming down, so that's -- and it was still



1 I do hasten to add it's not through idleness on our  
2 part, but you appreciate that there's a great deal of  
3 work to be done in preparation by all of the teams and  
4 we do need a bit of time to do that.

5 So I look forward to seeing you tomorrow morning at  
6 10 o'clock. So please remember, no talking to anyone at  
7 all about the case and please don't do any research of  
8 your own. Thank you very much.

9 Yes, are there any case management issues we need to  
10 deal with before we finish? We've dealt with them all,  
11 all right.

12 (3.45 pm)

13 (The Court adjourned until 10 o'clock the following day)

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15	Housekeeping .....	1
16	TONY MECHEN (continued) .....	7
17	Questions by MR ATKINS (continued) .....	7
18	Questions from THE CORONER .....	24
19	Questions by MR HENDY .....	25
20	Questions by MR DOWDEN .....	33
21	Questions by MS AL TAI .....	34
22	Questions by MS NAQSHBANDI .....	35
23	Further questions by MS AL TAI .....	37
24	ROBERT BENNETT (affirmed) .....	38
25	Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT .....	38

1	Questions by MR HENDY .....	76
2	Questions by MS AL TAI .....	83
3	Questions by MR WALSH .....	83
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5	Further questions by MR HENDY .....	88
6	JOHN CLARKE (sworn) .....	90
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10	Questions by MR HENDY .....	137
11	Questions by MR DOWDEN .....	155
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**DAY 8 OF TRANSCRIPTION OF THE**  
**Lakanal House Fire**  
**Inquest (CORRECTED) 24/01/2013.**