

Thursday, 7 February 2013

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(10.00 am)

(10.10 am)

(Proceedings delayed)

Housekeeping

THE CORONER: Good morning.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Very briefly, before the jury come in, can we just note that I haven't received any indication from anyone of any disagreement to the proposals that I made about witnesses whose statements can be read under Rule 37, so we will look to read some of those probably tomorrow. I also note that there's been no disagreement to the suggestion that Mr Davison's statement, which was circulated in draft, be finalised and then read.

THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Was anyone intending to make objection but hasn't yet done so? All right, that's very helpful from everybody, thank you very much, that's a useful way forward.

Yes, could the jurors come in? Thank you.

(In the presence of the Jury)

THE CORONER: Yes, good morning everybody, and congratulations to everyone for managing to get here despite the transport disruptions, thank you very much.

Yes, Mr Maxwell-Scott, we're going to begin with

1 Mrs Nuhu, I think?

2 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes, we are. (Pause)

3 She should be here in two or three minutes.

4 THE CORONER: Thank you.

5 FATIMA NUHU (affirmed)

6 THE CORONER: Thank you very much, Mrs Nuhu. Please sit
7 down.

8 A. Thank you.

9 THE CORONER: If you want just put your bag on the floor
10 beside you, thank you very much. There's a microphone
11 in front of you. If you could speak closely to it that
12 would help us, because we need to hear what you say, all
13 right?

14 A. Yeah.

15 THE CORONER: Take a glass of water, or perhaps Jo will pour
16 you a glass of water, thank you very much.

17 Mr Maxwell-Scott who is standing is going to begin
18 by asking you questions on my behalf, and then there may
19 be some questions from others after that, all right?

20 A. Okay.

21 THE CORONER: If at any time you need a break then just tell
22 me, thank you very much.

23 A. Thank you.

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Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good morning, Mrs Nuhu. Could you give the court your full name please?

A. My full name is Mrs Fatima Nuhu.

Q. I'm going to be asking you some general questions about your knowledge of Lakanal House and then some questions about your experience of the fire on 3 July 2009. We are hearing evidence from at least ten people who were residents of Lakanal House at the time of the fire in July 2009, and we'd like to ask each of them essentially the same questions about their awareness of fire safety advice and of the layout of the building, so that we can build up a complete picture.

Starting with fire safety advice, I'll ask Mr Clark to show you a document that starts at page 1050 in the advocates' bundles. That's the first page of a four-page London Fire Brigade leaflet. What I'd like you to do is to look in your own time at each of the four pages and then tell us as best you can whether you recognise it or not, whether you think you've ever seen it before. It finishes on page 1053.

A. No.

Q. Thank you. Then if you turn on to page 1054, this is a two-page document, and if you could look at page 1054 and over the page to 1055, and taking as long as you

1 need, ask yourself the same question: do you recognise
2 it, do you think you've ever seen it before?

3 A. No, not at all, no.

4 Q. Thank you. Then if you turn on a few pages to page 1068
5 in the same bundle, if you look in the bottom right-hand
6 corner you'll see a number 27. This is part of a longer
7 document, but I'd like to ask you to look at this page
8 and then the next two pages, the third one of which has
9 a 29 in the bottom right-hand corner.

10 Again, taking as long as you need, ask yourself
11 whether you think you recognise these pages, whether you
12 think you've ever seen them before or not.

13 A. No.

14 Q. Thank you. Can you remember if at any time before the
15 fire on 3 July 2009 you received what's known as a home
16 fire safety visit? Just to explain, this is when
17 there's no fire in your flat, but a fireman comes to
18 visit you to give you some general advice about fire
19 safety matters. Can you remember if you ever received
20 such a visit?

21 A. No.

22 Q. You don't think so?

23 A. Yeah -- no, I can't really remember, no.

24 Q. Thank you.

25 Turning then to what you knew about the layout of

1 Lakanal House before the fire in July 2009, firstly
2 which flat did you live in?

3 A. 80, flat 80.

4 Q. Whom did you live there with?

5 A. My husband and my two children.

6 Q. How long had you been living there for in July 2009?

7 A. About six months.

8 Q. Thank you. At the time, do you think you knew how many
9 floors there were in the building?

10 A. No, I don't really.

11 Q. Do you think you knew how many flats there were in the
12 building?

13 A. No, no.

14 Q. Were you aware that all the flats in the building were
15 essentially identical in layout?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. If I could then ask you about --

18 A. Sorry, could you repeat the question?

19 Q. The previous question was whether you were aware that
20 all the flats were essentially identical in layout.

21 A. No.

22 Q. If I could then ask you about whether at the time you
23 lived there you would have been able to help direct
24 someone to find another flat in the building, so --

25 A. No.

1 Q. -- if I just finish -- for example if you met somebody
2 outside the front entrance who said "I'm trying to get
3 to my friend in flat 52", would you at the time have
4 been able to help them get there in any way?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Do you remember that on the upper floor of your flat you
7 had a kitchen and a lounge and there were doors from
8 each of them leading to balconies? Shall I show you
9 a photograph of one of those balconies to remind you?

10 That's a photograph taken on a balcony at
11 Lakanal House, and that's a photograph taken also on
12 a balcony but looking in the opposite direction. So in
13 one direction there is a wall at the end, nowhere to go,
14 and in the other direction there is a door. Do you
15 remember those balconies?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. At the time when you lived there before the fire, do you
18 know where the door that we see in that photograph led?

19 A. No.

20 Q. Did you know that if you went through there you could
21 find your way to the central staircase and out of the
22 building?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Does it follow from that that you didn't know at the
25 time that these were fire escape balconies?

1 A. No.

2 Q. I'm now going to move on and ask you about your
3 experience of the fire on 3 July 2009. Is it right that
4 you had been working a night shift the night before --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. -- and you came home and you needed to have some sleep
7 before working again the next evening?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Did you set an alarm clock to wake up at a particular
10 time?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Mrs Nuhu, you made a statement on 16 July 2009. Was
13 your memory of events better then than it is now, some
14 three and a half years later?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Would it help you to have a look at that statement while
17 you are giving your evidence?

18 A. Yes, please.

19 Q. So that starts at page 428 of the statements bundles.
20 Do you remember what time you set your alarm on your
21 mobile phone for?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Have a look at page 430, four lines down. Do you see
24 that at the time in July 2009, two weeks or so after the
25 fire, your memory was that you'd set it to go off at

1 4.30 pm?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. You think that's right?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. When you woke up that afternoon, was that because the
6 alarm had gone off, or did you wake up before the alarm
7 went off?

8 A. I woke up before the alarm went off.

9 Q. After you woke up, did there come a time when your
10 husband drew something to your attention because he
11 could smell something?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. After that, did you become aware of the sound of one or
14 more fire engines approaching the building?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Looking at the top of page 431, did you see a fire
17 engine approaching Lakanal House when you looked out of
18 your kitchen window?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. I'm going to show you an image that represents the
21 layout of flats like yours, that had their bedrooms and
22 kitchens on the east side of the building. You lived in
23 flat 80 --

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. -- and so you were on the 11th floor?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. When you went onto the corridor, your front door would
3 have been the first door on the right-hand side?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. If you look on the screen here, this represents what
6 a flat like yours, that has its front door on the
7 right-hand side of the corridor, on the east side,
8 looked like inside. Just to refresh your memory, you
9 see that there would be a hall, two bedrooms ahead of
10 you, a bathroom to the right, and stairs leading to
11 an upper floor on your left.

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. If you were to go up the stairs within your flat, there
14 would have been a kitchen on the east side of the
15 building, above one of the bedrooms --

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. -- and a lounge on the west side of the building?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. What you recalled in your statement in July 2009 was
20 looking out of the kitchen window, which would have been
21 on the east side, and seeing a fire engine approaching;
22 is that right? At the top of page 431.

23 A. Yes, I don't really understand the layout of the --
24 about, you know, the east and west side.

25 Q. But it was the kitchen window --

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. -- is what it says in your statement.

3 A. Yes, yes.

4 Q. After you'd seen the fire engine and therefore became
5 aware that there was a fire somewhere nearby, did you
6 and your husband do something to investigate what was
7 happening; did you have a look outside your flat to see
8 what was happening?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Do you remember what you did?

11 A. Yes. We went downstairs.

12 Q. Downstairs within your flat?

13 A. Yes, and we opened the front door.

14 Q. Opened the front door of your flat --

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. -- to the corridor of the 11th floor?

17 A. Yes, yes.

18 Q. Can you remember what it was like in the corridor at
19 that time, and whether, for example, there was any smoke
20 or whether there were any problems in seeing the length
21 of the corridor?

22 A. Yes, there was smoke, white and dark, coming from one
23 side, and there was a lady carrying a baby and another
24 man coming from the other side.

25 Q. At that time, was there any smoke in your flat at all?

1 A. Yes, when we went back in with the lady carrying the
2 baby, the toilet was filled with smoke, white smoke.

3 Q. Just going back for a moment, is it right that the lady
4 with a tiny baby came into your flat?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. But the man didn't, he made his way somewhere else --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. -- and you didn't see him again?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. The lady with the tiny baby, she was black, and that was
11 Helen Udoaka with her baby daughter Michelle; is that
12 right?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. So, as you said, they came into your flat and the first
15 place where you noticed smoke in your own flat was in
16 the bathroom?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. I can tell you, because the records establish this, that
19 at 16.36, so 4.36 pm, your husband called 999?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Do you remember him doing that?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Can you remember whether or not he was in your flat when
24 he did so?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Can you remember whether Helen Udoaka and her baby were
2 with you at the same time he called 999?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Was Helen Udoaka using a mobile phone from time to time
5 to call people from your flat?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Whilst you were in your flat, did your --

8 THE CORONER: Sorry, Mr Maxwell-Scott, just wait a moment.
9 (Pause)

10 Mrs Nuhu, it's very hard. Do you want a short
11 break? All right, yes. We'll just take a five minute
12 break.

13 (The witness left the court)

14 THE CORONER: Members of the jury, would you like to go with
15 Mr Graham just for a five minute break?

16 (In the absence of the Jury)

17 THE CORONER: I wonder if anyone would have any objection to
18 Mr Maxwell-Scott leading Mrs Nuhu rather more than
19 perhaps one might with witnesses.

20 MR MATTHEWS: None at all, and the discussion we were having
21 was exactly along the same lines. I think if there
22 isn't any objection, we'd all encourage him to lead her
23 very fully, even to the extent of reading out relevant
24 passages of the witness statement.

25 THE CORONER: I think that might help. Is there any --

1 Mr Hendy, are you happy with that?

2 MR HENDY: We'd be in favour of most of the statement being
3 read and just asking the witness to confirm that the
4 passage just read is what she recollects.

5 THE CORONER: I think she might find that more helpful.

6 Thank you very much. All right, just a few minutes'
7 break.

8 (10.37 am)

9 (A short break)

10 (10.39 am)

11 (The witness returned)

12 THE CORONER: Yes.

13 (In the presence of the Jury)

14 THE CORONER: Thank you, yes.

15 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Mrs Nuhu, I'm conscious that you gave
16 a very detailed statement in July 2009, and also that
17 towards the end of last year you gave a further
18 statement to clarify one or two matters in the first
19 statement. So what I'm going to do from now on is I'll
20 read out selected passages from the statements and ask
21 you to confirm that they are correct, and there will
22 only be a very small number of additional questions that
23 I'll ask you that aren't covered directly in the
24 statement.

25 I think you have the statement in front of you at

1 page 432, and about two-thirds of the way down, it
2 refers to your husband and says:

3 "He started to rip up the curtains and then tied
4 them together into a rope. I said to him, 'What are you
5 doing?' and he said we have to be prepared. I was
6 really starting to panic at this point."

7 That was how you recalled it two weeks or so after
8 the fire.

9 A. (The witness nodded)

10 Q. Looking three lines further down, your statement read:

11 "At some point Rasheed [your husband] went out onto
12 the balcony from the kitchen and called for us to join
13 him."

14 I understand from the statement, if you could
15 confirm, that you all then went out onto the balcony to
16 join him.

17 A. (The witness nodded)

18 THE CORONER: Is that right, Mrs Nuhu? Yes.

19 A. Yes.

20 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you.

21 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: The statement says a line further down
22 that you then heard the smoke alarm in your flat go off,
23 and that was a smoke alarm at the top of the stairs.

24 Turning over the page to 433, in the fourth line it
25 says that:

1 "As we came out onto the balcony, because of the
2 position of our flat in the block we moved along the
3 balcony to the next adjacent flat."

4 Moving down four more lines, you said back in
5 July 2009:

6 "I think the next flat would have been number 81.
7 I remember the woman from number 81 because I'd seen and
8 spoken to her on several occasions before."

9 You are correct that the next flat along would have
10 been flat 81, and you would have been at the door of the
11 lounge of flat 81.

12 If you look about two-thirds of the way down that
13 page, 433, there's a sentence that says:

14 "I saw her open her balcony door from inside to let
15 us into her flat."

16 That would have been Dayana Francisquini, who lived
17 in flat 81, and is it right that she let you in --

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. -- and you then all went into that flat?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Two lines further down, the statement says:

22 "She was really kind when we went into her flat.
23 There was no smoke in this flat and she appeared to be
24 very calm. We all went downstairs next door and into
25 the bathroom of the flat."

1 So that was the bathroom of flat 81. I won't take
2 you to it, but in your second statement, you agreed with
3 something that your husband had said in a statement of
4 his, that there was no smoke in the bathroom of flat 81
5 when you first went into it.

6 A. (The witness nodded)

7 Q. I can see you nodding, is that right?

8 A. (The witness nodded)

9 Q. In the bathroom, there were those of you who had come
10 from your flat and Dayana Francisquini and her two
11 children were already in there.

12 A. (The witness nodded)

13 Q. At the very bottom of page 433, you wrote in July 2009
14 that:

15 "She was quite calm. She gave us towels to put over
16 the children's noses and mouths to stop the smoke going
17 in."

18 If I take you then over to page 434, in the middle
19 of the page, there's a reference to "Woman (2)", which
20 is Dayana Francisquini. Is it right that she was
21 receiving telephone calls on her mobile in the bathroom?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Then three lines further down, the statement says:

24 "We had tried to decide between us what was best to
25 do and we thought then that the best thing was to stay

1 in the flat and wait for people to come and get us. We
2 then noticed smoke coming from a vent in the bathroom.
3 The vent was on the bathroom wall opposite the bathroom
4 door."

5 The statement reads as if that's the first time that
6 you noticed smoke in the bathroom and the first place
7 that it came from was the vent in the bathroom wall?

8 A. (The witness nodded)

9 Q. Is that the right way to read it?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Then the statement describes attempts made to cover the
12 vent to stop the smoke coming in, and about eight lines
13 from the bottom, says:

14 "Rasheed said something like, 'You can't stay there
15 holding that forever, have you got something like
16 sellotape?'"

17 Then Dayana Francisquini briefly left the bathroom
18 then returned with some sellotape, closing the door
19 again behind her:

20 "I didn't go out of the bathroom at this time. At
21 some point I remember seeing smoke that was coming from
22 somewhere else, other than through the bathroom vent,
23 but I have no idea where it was coming from or when that
24 was."

25 Between them, Rasheed and Dayana Francisquini used

1 the sellotape to stick something over the bathroom vent.

2 In the final line of that page, 434, it says:

3 "Smoke started to come into the bathroom under the
4 door."

5 If you are able to remember how long it was between
6 the bathroom vent being covered up using something and
7 sellotape and smoke starting to come under the bathroom
8 door, then please do tell us, but if you can't remember
9 it doesn't matter at all.

10 A. (The witness shook their head)

11 THE CORONER: You can't remember?

12 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Then your statement at the bottom of 434
13 says:

14 "I was getting more and more panicked and worried.
15 Rasheed opened the bathroom door and went out.

16 [Dayana Francisquini] followed Rasheed out of [the
17 bathroom]. No-one else followed him out at this time.
18 They shut the door after themselves."

19 You stayed in the bathroom with three older children
20 and Helen Udoaka and her baby.

21 The statement goes on to describe Dayana
22 Francisquini rushing back into the bathroom and shutting
23 the door, but your husband at this time was out of the
24 bathroom on the other side of the door. Is it right
25 that your husband didn't come back into the bathroom

1 after this point?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. So there was a time when your husband wasn't in the
4 bathroom but Dayana Francisquini had come back in, and
5 you say in the sixth line on 435 that:

6 "She had previously been really calm, but the
7 expression on her face had just suddenly changed and she
8 was panicking."

9 Then a couple of lines lower down:

10 "[Dayana Francisquini] said 'Fire, fire, mattress'."

11 A couple of lines below that, we see that you said:

12 "Let's get out, let's get out."

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. She said no, and was pointing and talking about water,
15 but you didn't fully understand what was being
16 described?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Then if I take you about two-thirds of the way down the
19 page, there's a sentence that says:

20 "I decided to go then and ran out of the bathroom."

21 It doesn't matter if you can't remember, but if you
22 can remember how long you think you were in the bathroom
23 when your husband wasn't there, then do tell us.

24 It doesn't matter at all, Mrs Nuhu. But you decided
25 to run out of the bathroom with Yasmin, who I think was

1 your younger daughter, in your arms and you ran up the
2 stairs in flat 81 and out onto the balcony, and is that
3 the same balcony that you'd been on when you made your
4 way into flat 81?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. We see in the final two lines of page 435, Miriam, who
7 was your elder daughter, must have followed you up the
8 stairs and out onto the balcony, and when you got there
9 your husband Rasheed was there.

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. If you look on to page 436, the second line says:

12 "We were all together on the balcony, that is
13 Rasheed, Miriam, me and Yasmin, who I was still
14 carrying. No-one else was with us. As I got out onto
15 the balcony I just started shouting, because I could see
16 people downstairs on the ground. There were lots of
17 people. I was shouting 'Please, help us'. I remember
18 that Rasheed was starting to tie the rope he had made
19 onto the balcony rail as I came out onto the balcony."

20 The court has seen photographs of that, of you and
21 your husband and the rope and it's not necessary for me
22 to show you them.

23 A couple of lines down it says:

24 "The smoke was coming from both sides of the
25 balcony. Everywhere was filled with smoke, I couldn't

1 even see. It was black smoke. I could feel heat from
2 everywhere. It was hottest from below where I was
3 standing, but heat was coming from all sides."

4 In the middle of the page, four lines below that:

5 "There was a lot of thick black smoke now and most
6 of it was coming from the direction of where the
7 stairs/lift is."

8 Then if you look three quarters of the way down the
9 page:

10 "At some time I shouted to Rasheed that I wanted to
11 go back inside. I looked back into the building where
12 we had just come from. He said 'Can't you see the
13 smoke? There's nothing to go back to'."

14 Is it the case that, after you got on the balcony,
15 you and your husband and your children stayed there
16 until you were rescued?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. It was better on the balcony than in the flat?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. If you go to page 437, in the middle of the page it
21 says:

22 "We even said about going back inside the flat
23 again, because the smoke was getting too much on the
24 balcony and I was starting to have a hard time
25 breathing. Rasheed said we should stay where we were

1 and wait for people to help us. At the same time
2 firefighters were spraying water upwards. There was
3 really black smoke coming from our flat. It was hard to
4 see. The next thing that happened was we heard a loud
5 banging sound. There were two bangs. At the first one
6 everyone jumped at the sound. We didn't know what it
7 was, then Rasheed said 'They're here, they're here'."

8 That was the firemen coming, wasn't it?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. A couple of lines below that, your statement in
11 July 2009 read:

12 "I didn't see how that door was opened. It was
13 dark, really black, so I couldn't see much. Rasheed
14 said in our language that we should come. There was
15 broken glass on the floor, we had to walk through it.
16 Rasheed had been carrying Miriam, but for Rasheed to go
17 to the door he had had to put Miriam down again.
18 I remember that vividly."

19 You then were assisted out of the building, down the
20 stairs, by firemen, is that right?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Very importantly, you sought to tell them that there
23 were people still behind. We see in the bottom of your
24 statement at 437:

25 "I think after about 20 seconds I just said 'There's

1 a baby, there are people there'. We both said 'There's
2 people up there'."

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Then over the page, that's a point that you kept making,
5 you kept wanting to tell people there were people that
6 still needed rescuing, so the third line of your
7 statement says:

8 "I couldn't say precisely where the other people
9 were, but I kept saying 'Baby, baby'. I can't say how
10 many firemen were there. I got to the point where
11 I collapsed and that's when I remember that someone was
12 holding onto me. They gave me some oxygen almost
13 immediately."

14 Then when you recovered slightly, we see, about six
15 lines further down:

16 "After the second set of stairs, I managed to say
17 again about the others that had been left in the flat."

18 You were being given oxygen from a mask over your
19 mouth and nose, a mask from one of the firemen.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Then about two-thirds of the way down the page, we see
22 that it says:

23 "I was being treated by people checking my blood
24 pressure and things. I was approached by at least two
25 fire officers for information on two different occasions

1 whilst I was being treated."

2 Then, three lines from the bottom, in summary, the
3 paragraph ends by saying:

4 "I did my best to tell them what I could."

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Is it right that a little later on you were then taken
7 to hospital by ambulance and you met up with your
8 husband and your two daughters there?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Mrs Nuhu, thank you very much indeed. I don't have any
11 other questions for you, but it's possible that others
12 may ask you some questions?

13 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Hendy.

14 MR HENDY: Can I just take a moment, madam?

15 THE CORONER: Yes. (Pause)

16 MR HENDY: We have no questions, madam.

17 THE CORONER: Thank you. Any questions? Mr Walsh?

18 Questions by MR WALSH

19 MR WALSH: Thank you. Mrs Nuhu, I'm just going to ask you
20 a couple of questions about your recollection, and if
21 you can't remember then there's no problem about that.
22 It might help if you could just have a look, if you
23 wouldn't mind, at page 431 of your statement. I'm not
24 sure we've had the chance to look at this.

25 I'm just going to ask you about the first time that

1 you opened the door from your flat and you looked into
2 the corridor and you saw the lady and the child and the
3 man in the corridor. This is what you said, it's the
4 third paragraph down, beginning:

5 " There was smoke in the corridor outside our flat at
6 this time. It was coming from the opposite direction
7 that the woman with the baby and the man were coming
8 from. There was a lot of smoke. It was mainly white
9 but with some black in it. I could feel heat as well.
10 It was coming from the direction of the stairs and the
11 lift."

12 Can you remember now whether you could see into the
13 stairway, to see what the smoke was like there?

14 A. No.

15 Q. No. But your impression was that smoke was coming from
16 that direction with the heat, from the stairs; is that
17 right?

18 A. There wasn't any stairs. I could remember -- I normally
19 come -- I normally come in through the lift, we don't
20 normally use the stairs.

21 Q. All right. Just over the page to 432, there are really
22 only just two or three matters. At the top of the page,
23 the fourth line down, in the middle of the page, we see
24 the sentence:

25 "We closed the door to the flat at once [when the

1 lady came into your flat], once we were all inside, to
2 stop the smoke coming into the flat."

3 Do you remember smoke coming from the corridor into
4 your flat at that time.

5 A. Yeah, but I can't really remember.

6 Q. No, all right, fair enough.

7 Now I'm going to ask you, you needn't look at the
8 page, when you were in the bathroom in flat 81, do you
9 remember your husband left the -- he opened the door and
10 went out.

11 A. (The witness nodded)

12 Q. Do you remember looking out into the lobby from the
13 bathroom to see if there was smoke in the lobby area,
14 just outside the bathroom?

15 A. I remember that my husband said "We can't -- we can't
16 stay here, we can't all stay here in the bathroom", he
17 needs to go out and see what is happening outside the
18 bathroom.

19 Q. All right. Then of course there came a point when you
20 left the bathroom and you went up the stairs and onto
21 the level above and then out onto the balcony. When you
22 left the bathroom and went out into the rest of the
23 flat, at that time do you remember whether there was
24 very much smoke in the flat itself?

25 A. I can't remember.

1 Q. All right. One more matter: do you think at that time
2 that the amount of smoke that you've told us about in
3 the bathroom was thicker or worse at that time, as you
4 left, than it was in the rest of the flat?

5 A. I think the rest of the flat was filled with smoke, but
6 I can't remember which one is more.

7 Q. Very well. All right, thank you very much, Mrs Nuhu?

8 THE CORONER: Thank you. Members of the jury? Thank you.

9 Mrs Nuhu, thank you very much for coming and thank
10 you very much for taking the time to tell us your story.

11 A. Thank you.

12 THE CORONER: Yes, you're welcome to go, thank you.

13 A. Thank you.

14 (The witness withdrew)

15 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you.

16 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Madam, the next witness is Daniel Sharpe.

17 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you. Mr Sharpe, are you in court,
18 please? Would you come forward? Thank you.

19 DANIEL SHARPE (sworn)

20 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Sharpe, do sit down. Do help
21 yourself to a glass of water. Please could you keep
22 your voice up when you're answering questions, and if
23 you're fairly close to the microphone that will help.
24 If you direct your answers across the room towards the
25 members of the jury that will help them to hear your

1 evidence and also keep you close to the microphone, but
2 you can move the microphone.

3 Mr Maxwell-Scott, who's standing, is going to ask
4 questions on my behalf and then there may be questions
5 from others. Thank you.

6 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

7 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good morning, Mr Sharpe, can you give the
8 court your full name please?

9 A. Daniel Peter Sharpe.

10 Q. I'm going to be asking you about your involvement in
11 attempts to fight the fire at Lakanal House on
12 3 July 2009, and also about any knowledge that you had
13 at the time of the layout of the building and certain
14 features of it.

15 Is it right that back in July 2009 you were
16 stationed at the Old Kent Road fire station?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. At that time were you a temporary crew manager?

19 A. I was.

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

22 A. About 20 years.

23 Q. On 3 July 2009, were you the crew manager for the aerial
24 ladder platform --

25 A. I was.

1 Q. -- A355?

2 A. Echo 355.

3 Q. I apologise, Echo 355. Who was your other crew member?

4 A. My driver was Firefighter Taylor.

5 Q. How much experience at that time did you have of working
6 with aerial ladder platforms?

7 A. About four or five years.

8 Q. Is there special training that one has to go through?

9 A. Yeah, you go to an ALP course, yeah, do a course,
10 a conversion course.

11 Q. Turning then to the events of the afternoon, we know
12 that your fire station and all of its fire appliances
13 were mobilised at 4.21 pm and that the aerial ladder
14 platform and the pump and pump ladder made their way to
15 Lakanal House. If you take up the sequence of events,
16 which is in the jury bundle at tab 12. (Handed)

17 If you look on page 2 of the sequence of events,
18 you'll see that there's reference at 16.26.16 and then
19 16.27.14 to the two other appliances from the Old Kent
20 Road arriving, and then over the page, the second entry,
21 16.29.20, the aerial ladder platform is reported as
22 arriving. That would indicate arriving a couple of
23 minutes after the other appliances.

24 A. That is correct.

25 Q. That fits with your recollection; it wasn't the three of

1 you in convoy?

2 A. I do remember Echo -- out there at the Old Kent Road,
3 Echo 351 and 352 were deployed, me talking to
4 Firefighter Taylor that there was a job on, and we'll be
5 out the door pretty soon. I remember -- remember that
6 conversation.

7 Q. Let me ask you next about where your vehicle was
8 positioned when it arrived. I can help you with this
9 because you drew a diagram three days after the event.
10 That's at page 236 of the advocates' bundles. (Handed)

11 Firstly, do you recognise that as a diagram which
12 you have drawn on?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. To help you and the members of the jury get their
15 bearings, where I'm marking, towards the bottom
16 right-hand corner, that is Lakanal House, and then you
17 have drawn, around the middle of the page, E355 and
18 you've written "First position".

19 A. That's correct.

20 Q. If I show you now photograph 3, which is an aerial
21 photograph, comparing that with the diagram drawn on by
22 you, it suggests you parked somewhere on Dalwood Street
23 between the junction with Havel Street and the junction
24 with the access road.

25 A. I believe so. Obviously, at the time, there was lots of

1 congestion. Echo -- our aerial was quite a large
2 appliance, so I decided -- I told Firefighter Taylor to
3 hang back just a little bit to let other vehicles come
4 in and out, police cars, ambulances, that sort of thing.

5 Q. The decision to park there rather than any nearer the
6 building, was that your decision or someone else's?

7 A. I believe that was my decision at the time.

8 Q. Would it have been possible to park any nearer?

9 A. Not really, because it was a very, very small road, we
10 take up quite a bit of room, there's a lot of double
11 parking there anyway. I believe there's a lot of police
12 cars, fire engines already there, so it was best for us
13 just to hang back just a little bit at the time.

14 Q. Just going back a minute or so in time, I'm going to ask
15 you about a radio message. If you could be shown
16 page 442 in the advocates' bundles. It will be in
17 file 2. (Handed)

18 You probably won't have seen this document before.
19 It's a typed up note of radio traffic on the day of the
20 incident between Lorraine Bushell, who worked at brigade
21 control, and appliances that attended the incident.

22 If you look at the fourth box down, 16.28.26, you
23 see "LB", that's Lorraine Bushell, say:

24 "Echo 351 over."

25 Then in brackets it says "No response", then at

1 16.28.39, your appliance, E355, is recorded as saying:
2 "FS Echo 355, we're in attendance, can I take that
3 message, over?"
4 Do you see that?
5 A. Okay.
6 Q. Then immediately below that at 16.28.54, Echo 355, which
7 is your appliance, says:
8 "355 status 3."
9 That means you're booking in as attending doesn't
10 it?
11 A. That's correct.
12 Q. "Further traffic, over."
13 Then brigade control say:
14 "Yeah, Echo 355, it was just further information
15 regarding the last message about flat 79. The caller is
16 still on the line and is apparently trapped in the flat,
17 over."
18 Then Echo 355 responds:
19 "Yeah, received, I'll pass that on, over."
20 Firstly, do you remember whether or not it was
21 yourself or Firefighter Taylor who was speaking to
22 brigade control?
23 A. I'm not too sure, it could be one of us, either me or
24 Firefighter Taylor.
25 Q. Do you remember that exchange with brigade control?

1 A. I remember there was radio traffic with people in
2 trouble, yes.

3 Q. I appreciate it was over three and a half years ago, and
4 it's going to be difficult to remember things exactly
5 but would it be reasonable for us to assume that both
6 you and Firefighter Taylor would have heard that
7 message, regardless of which one of you actually
8 responded?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. The message ended by either you or Firefighter Taylor
11 saying:

12 "Yeah, received, I'll pass that on, over."

13 Can you recall what was done to pass that message
14 on?

15 A. The message would have been written down on a -- on
16 a paper, so we'd have had a paper copy of exactly what
17 was going on. That would have been given to the officer
18 in charge, John Howling, at the time. That would have
19 been given to him -- spoken to him about it and it would
20 have been dealt with.

21 Q. You say that's what would have happened, and
22 I appreciate that it's over three and a half years ago,
23 but in fairness to everyone I need to ask you whether
24 you have any actual recollection of that happening, or
25 whether you're essentially saying to the court "I can't

1 remember but I think that is what would have happened".

2 A. I remember speaking to John Howling at the time,

3 I remember having the paper in my hand that was given to

4 me, and it would have been acted upon.

5 Q. Lakanal House is not on the patch of the Old Kent Road

6 fire station.

7 A. No.

8 Q. The Old Kent Road fire station is not the nearest fire

9 station, we know that Peckham fire station is, but had

10 you, in fact, ever been to Lakanal House before

11 3 July 2009?

12 A. That's correct, yes, there was a fire there, me and

13 Firefighter Taylor did -- was on that fire.

14 Q. So you'd been there for the purposes of dealing with

15 a fire?

16 A. Correct.

17 Q. Can you recall how many years before the July 2009 fire

18 that was?

19 A. About eight or nine years previously.

20 Q. Can you recall whether the fire that you went to eight

21 or nine years earlier was in a flat or in a communal

22 area?

23 A. It was a flat.

24 Q. In the course of attending that incident, did you go

25 into a flat itself?

1 A. No.

2 Q. What did you actually do on that occasion?

3 A. I remember arriving with breathing apparatus ready to
4 go, the call come out from the officer in charge that
5 there was enough breathing apparatus wearers above and
6 we needed gear up there, high rise incident gear,
7 ie more hose, that sort of thing. I was told to get rid
8 of my set, because it was -- we didn't need it.
9 Basically at that time, whilst taking my fire helmet
10 off, the -- the flat exploded and glass come down, and
11 debris, and I received an injury, basically taken away,
12 from that injury.

13 Q. You made a witness statement in July 2009, on 12 July.
14 I won't take you to it in this stage, but in it you had
15 a sentence about that previous fire, which said:
16 "On that occasion I helped with extinguishing a fire
17 at a premises, I even sustained an injury in the
18 process."
19 A. Correct.

20 Q. But we shouldn't read from that that you actually went
21 into the flat that was on fire, your help was in
22 a different way, is that right?

23 A. Yeah, getting gear to the fire.

24 Q. Madam, would that be a convenient moment for
25 a mid-morning break?

1 THE CORONER: Yes, okay, that sounds a good idea. Members
2 of the jury, a ten minute break, please. Do leave your
3 papers on the desk if that helps.

4 Mr Sharpe, because you're part way through giving
5 your evidence, the strict rule is you must not talk to
6 anyone about your evidence or indeed this matter, so be
7 back in about ten minutes.

8 A. Yes, madam.

9 (11.22 am)

10 (A short break)

11 (11.33 am)

12 THE CORONER: Mr Sharpe, if you can remember to keep your
13 voice up and not speak too quickly, because the
14 shorthand writers are making a transcription and they
15 need to follow what you're saying.

16 A. All right.

17 (In the presence of the Jury)

18 THE CORONER: Thank you.

19 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Mr Sharpe, I'm going to bring you back
20 now to the events of 3 July 2009. Earlier in my
21 questioning we'd reached the point where you'd arrived,
22 you had decided where to park your aerial ladder
23 platform, and you'd done so and you and your crew member
24 had got a message which you told us that you passed to
25 Mr Howling, who was the incident commander at the time.

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. You told us that the aerial ladder platform was a little
3 distance from Lakanal House itself, so it was not about
4 to be immediately deployed to fight the fire from where
5 it was parked, was it?

6 A. That's correct.

7 Q. Presumably you and Firefighter Taylor needed to report
8 to the incident commander to be given whatever task he
9 chose for you; is that right?

10 A. That's correct.

11 Q. Did the two of you make your way together to him, or did
12 you go separately?

13 A. I believe I went first to John Howling, I think I told
14 Firefighter Taylor to stay with the vehicle for the time
15 being.

16 Q. When you met up with Mr Howling, do you recall where he
17 was?

18 A. Yeah, he was at the -- on the grass area, I believe the
19 west side.

20 Q. If I put a photo up on the screen -- not this one, if
21 you wait a moment I'll find it for you. That's
22 an aerial view of Lakanal House, which is the building
23 in the middle of the picture. We looked at this a few
24 moments ago. You told us where your vehicle would have
25 been positioned. Where I'm pointing with the arrow just

1 to the left of the access road on the west side of the
2 building, would it have been somewhere around there?

3 A. That's correct, yeah. I knew it was on grass, that's
4 all I can remember.

5 Q. You told us about passing on the message that had been
6 received by your appliance. What task did Mr Howling
7 give you when you met up with him?

8 A. I remember the -- the first main task I was given was
9 safety officer in that area.

10 Q. What does a safety officer do?

11 A. Around that area, on the front of the flats there, there
12 was a lot of debris coming down in the access road. It
13 was my job to warn people and keep it a safe place so
14 that I could have an overall view of the area, to keep
15 people back and out of the way.

16 Q. How did you go about keeping people back and out of the
17 way?

18 A. I managed to get hold of some -- some tape to cordon off
19 the area.

20 Q. Let me show you a photograph which may refresh your
21 memory.

22 A. That could be the tape, yeah.

23 Q. So that could be the west side of the building, and in
24 the foreground of the picture there's some red and white
25 tape. Is that the sort of type that London Fire Brigade

1 appliances carry?

2 A. Yes, that's correct.

3 Q. So that may be tape that you yourself put up?

4 A. It could be, yes.

5 Q. You mentioned that there was debris falling down. Can
6 you remember more precisely what sort of debris was
7 falling?

8 A. Window frames, glass, some of it was alight, that sort
9 of thing.

10 Q. Do you recall anything being said either by you or in
11 your earshot to Mr Howling -- by him about the fact that
12 some of the debris was alight?

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

14 Q. Do you recall any other task that you carried out before
15 you carried out your safety officer duty and cordoned
16 off an area?

17 A. No.

18 Q. I'm sure you remember that you made a statement shortly
19 after the fire. There's a statement dated 12 July 2009.
20 I'll refer to you that, it starts at page 445 of the
21 statements bundles, and Mr Clark will provide you in
22 a moment with a copy. (Handed)

23 I've put up on screen the first page of your
24 statement. It starts at 445 and it's dated
25 12 July 2009. Do you recognise that statement?

1 A. I do.

2 Q. If you turn to the second page of it, the fourth
3 paragraph describes you meeting up with Mr Howling, and
4 then below that, the penultimate paragraph is three
5 lines long and it says this:

6 "From the amount of radio transmission being made
7 I decided to assist John Howling and began to note
8 events as they occurred."

9 Do you recall that?

10 A. Vaguely, I do, yes.

11 Q. You told us how you made a note of a radio message
12 specifically to your appliance. Can you help us with
13 whether this paragraph is describing that single
14 occasion of recording a note and passing it to
15 Mr Howling or whether it's describing something else as
16 well?

17 A. This would have been radio messages over our personal
18 radios, not the ones on the appliances.

19 Q. So as it reads, it is intended to say that you took on
20 a role of writing down messages or events as they
21 occurred while you were with Mr Howling; is that right?

22 A. It seems that way, yes.

23 Q. Do you actually recall that now?

24 A. No, I don't, no.

25 Q. If you can remember this, or help us with this, then

1 please say so, if not then so be it: can you remember
2 whether Mr Howling asked you to do this or whether you
3 decided to do it yourself?

4 A. I think it was more a case of me deciding to do it
5 myself. Mr Howling had quite a bit of things going on
6 at the time, he seemed to be overwhelmed -- overwhelmed
7 with information, so I started -- I began taking down
8 some important information that was coming over the
9 radio.

10 Q. When you say coming over the radio, you mean coming over
11 your personal radio?

12 A. Yeah, on our personal radios, yes, that we were wearing.

13 Q. Were you recording the information that was coming from
14 any other sources?

15 A. No.

16 Q. So in other words messages that were coming to
17 appliances from brigade control, they were not ones you
18 would have been recording, because you wouldn't have
19 heard them over your personal radio?

20 A. I wouldn't have heard that from the main radios on the
21 machines from where we was then, it would only have been
22 handheld radio messages.

23 Q. You mentioned about Mr Howling being overwhelmed by
24 information. Was that something that was the state of
25 affairs from the outset, or was he initially not

1 overwhelmed by information but over time he became
2 overwhelmed?

3 A. It just seemed that as soon as I -- I turned up, a lot
4 of people was talking to him, giving him information.
5 I believe there was a police officer there as well. So
6 he had a lot going on in a small amount of time.

7 Q. Can you recall whether, as the way this statement is
8 written suggests, you carried out this task before
9 setting up the cordon as safety officer or after it? If
10 you look at the statement you'll see the paragraph about
11 setting up the cordon comes immediately below this
12 paragraph about making notes.

13 A. It seemed to be about that -- that time, yes, that
14 order.

15 Q. Can you recall for what length of time you carried out
16 this task of making notes?

17 A. Not long, minutes, I would imagine.

18 Q. Before you made this witness statement on 12 July, you
19 had made some handwritten notes on 6 July. Do you
20 remember doing that?

21 A. I do remember making some -- some statement nearer the
22 statement, yes.

23 Q. I'll show you that to refresh your memory. To be more
24 precise, they're not notes that you made, they're notes
25 that somebody else made from talking to you. They are

1 page 232 of the advocates' bundles. That's the first
2 page, and at the top of it it's headed "Interviewer, GM
3 Martin Corbett", so interviewee is
4 "Firefighter Danny Sharpe", that's you. The time is
5 1915 hours on 6 July 2009. Then you were asked a series
6 of questions that a number of firefighters were asked.
7 Over the page, there's a long answer where you
8 essentially describe over just over two pages what you
9 did at the fire ground. You started by saying:

10 "I asked FF [I assume that's Firefighter Taylor] to
11 get rigged in fire gear. [Something] reported to OIC
12 [officer in command] Watch Manager Howling. At that
13 time, there were lots of reports of people trapped.
14 Drivers were providing information by control, so I got
15 a pad and started writing down the details. Information
16 of numbers of flats involved were also being transmitted
17 by fire ground radio. I also took these details down as
18 well and left with the BA board."

19 Does that help refresh your memory at all?

20 A. It does, yes.

21 Q. What does it mean by saying at the end of that passage:

22 "... and left with the BA board."

23 A. That -- that would have been what I would have done with
24 the information. The BA board was going up to the
25 bridgehead, but also I would have informed people of

1 what information was on that -- that note. There was
2 also quite a bit of repeated information on -- on the
3 handhelds, so that would have been a factor as well, of
4 the same messages being sent over and over again.

5 Q. When it says "left with the BA board", does that mean
6 that you physically put it down next to the BA board?

7 A. I would have tucked it inside safely.

8 Q. The notes don't say anything about giving your written
9 notes to anybody or telling anybody that you were
10 tucking them into the BA board. Can you recall, three
11 and a half years on, whether you did any of those
12 things?

13 A. No, not at this time, no.

14 THE CORONER: Is the BA board still in court? Could it be
15 brought in, thank you?

16 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: You told us that this was something
17 essentially that you chose to do rather than being
18 specifically ordered to do it by Watch Manager Howling.

19 A. That's correct.

20 Q. Did you tell him that you were doing it, that you were
21 keeping this note?

22 A. I can't remember that -- I can't remember that
23 conversation, no.

24 Q. Does that suggest that you didn't show him the note, or
25 can you not remember?

1 A. I can't honestly say I showed -- showed him the note,
2 but I would have told him -- I would have passed the
3 information on to him, being the officer in charge.

4 Q. Do you think that the respective positions of yourself
5 and him were such that he would have seen you writing
6 and keeping the note?

7 A. I believe he would have done, yes.

8 Q. Go back to your witness statement at 446. The bottom
9 paragraph that we've looked at describes Mr Howling
10 appointing you as the safety officer to cordon off
11 a particular area.

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. As I understand it, that's the first task that you were
14 specifically given.

15 A. That would be it, yes.

16 Q. What about Firefighter Taylor, do you know what, if any,
17 tasks he'd been given at this point?

18 A. I believe that Firefighter Taylor made his way over to
19 our area and basically joined in, mucked in with
20 whatever was going on. I didn't know if he had
21 a specific task.

22 Q. Then over the page on 447, the top paragraph says that
23 approximately 10 to 15 minutes after your arrival you
24 became aware of the presence of a command unit's
25 arrival. Then about three lines further down,

1 John Howling met with one of the command unit officers.
2 Mr Howling provided a situation report. I was then
3 advised to wear a safety officer tabard."
4 A. That's correct.
5 Q. Just help us with this: is that the point at which you
6 started being safety officer, or had you already been
7 working as a safety officer but just without the tabard?
8 A. Yes, I was already working as a safety officer without
9 the tabard.
10 Q. When you were with Mr Howling, did he ask you at any
11 point whether you'd been to Lakanal House before?
12 A. No.
13 Q. Did it come up in discussion between the two of you at
14 all?
15 A. Not at the incident, no.
16 Q. I appreciate everything that you said earlier about the
17 fact that your previous visit was some eight or nine
18 years earlier and that you didn't go into a flat on that
19 occasion, but I'd like to ask you a short series of
20 questions about how you might have been able to answer
21 Mr Howling, if he'd asked you some questions about your
22 knowledge of the building at that time. For example, if
23 Mr Howling had asked you on the day of the fire "Do you
24 know whether each floor of this building has a central
25 corridor or not?" would you have been able to answer him

1 at all?

2 A. I wouldn't have been able to answer that question, no.

3 Q. If he'd asked you "Are the flats in this building on
4 a single floor, or are they maisonettes?" would you have
5 been able to answer him at all?

6 A. Answer, no.

7 Q. I'm putting up on screen a photograph, number 44, taken
8 from near where Mr Howling was standing, not the same
9 place. This is taken from the pavement on the corner of
10 Dalwood Street and Sedgmoor Place. When you look at
11 that photograph you can see that alternate floors have
12 balconies; do you see that?

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. If Mr Howling had asked you "Do you know where those
15 balconies lead?" would you have been able to answer him
16 at all?

17 A. I wouldn't, no.

18 Q. If Mr Howling had said to you when you passed onto him
19 the message about flat 79 "Is there any way of finding
20 out where flat 79 is?" what sort of answer would you
21 have given him?

22 A. Sorry, can you repeat the question, please?

23 Q. We know that your appliance received the radio message,
24 just before you arrived, about a caller from flat 79
25 still being on the line and apparently trapped, and

1 you've told us how you passed that message on to
2 Mr Howling, so assuming that you passed on the message
3 in its entirety, and what you said included the words
4 "flat 79", if Mr Howling had said to you words to the
5 effect "I don't know where flat 79 is, do you have any
6 idea how we can find out where it is?" what sort of
7 answer do you think you could have given him?

8 A. I wouldn't have known the answer to where flat 79 is.

9 Q. Do you think you would have been able to say anything,
10 or suggest any way of finding out?

11 A. We would find -- well, we'd try and contact people that
12 lived there, that sort of thing, if there's any local
13 knowledge. That would have been the first -- first port
14 of call, police officers, that sort of thing.

15 Q. If I take you then back to the chronology of events.
16 You've told us about meeting up with the command unit
17 and being advised to wear a safety officer tabard. Can
18 you remember if there came a point when
19 Firefighter Taylor was given a specific task to carry
20 out? I can refer you to your statement to assist you.
21 447 in the statements bundle, the second paragraph, the
22 second sentence, says:

23 "I instructed Firefighter Taylor to ensure the area
24 I had taped off remained clear."

25 A. Yeah, that was the instruction I gave to

1 Firefighter Taylor at the time, then I -- basically run
2 to the command unit to get my tabard.

3 Q. Can you recall what Firefighter Taylor was doing before
4 you asked him to do that?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Your statement goes on to record you noticing that the
7 flats below the original fire flat themselves began to
8 ignite?

9 A. That's correct, yes.

10 Q. Do you remember that? Do you remember thinking about
11 what it was that had caused that to happen?

12 A. We did notice on the day a lot of the windows were open,
13 curtains and blinds were flapping about, it was quite
14 windy at that level. Debris coming down from above was
15 igniting that sort of material.

16 Q. Igniting curtains flapping out of the windows?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Do you remember pigeon netting at all?

19 A. I do remember pigeon netting, yeah.

20 Q. Do you remember some of that catching light?

21 A. Debris was getting caught in that pigeon netting, yes.

22 Q. When you noticed the flats lower down the building
23 catching fire, what did you do?

24 A. I made a -- an instruction to Firefighter Taylor to get
25 a covering jet, which is like a large hose that we use,

1 to knock down some of the fires on the lower levels.

2 Q. Was that something somebody else had asked you to do, or
3 was that your decision?

4 A. I believe I made that decision.

5 Q. If I ask you to have a look in the jury bundle at the
6 sequence of events, tab 12, and turn in it to page 15.
7 There's a photo there taken at 16.48 that shows a flat
8 on the 5th floor on fire, and then if you turn over the
9 page, there's a photo at 16.49, so approximately
10 a minute later, you now see there's a jet of water being
11 directed at the 5th floor.

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. Is that the jet that was set up because of the decision
14 that you made and the order that you gave to
15 Firefighter Taylor?

16 A. That's correct.

17 Q. Going back to your statement at page 447, the paragraph
18 below the one describing the setting up of the jet of
19 water, the penultimate paragraph on this page, refers to
20 a conversation you had with Crew Manager John Clarke,
21 and then it says:

22 "I was also told that John Howling wanted me to
23 position my aerial ladder platform near the front of
24 Lakanal in the access road."

25 Do you see that?

1 A. Yes, correct.

2 Q. I'm just going to try to work out with you, as best one
3 can, when that conversation might have been. Do you
4 recall whether Crew Manager Clarke had been into Lakanal
5 house in breathing apparatus and come out again at this
6 time?

7 A. I can't remember that.

8 Q. Can you recall how long it was after you and
9 Firefighter Taylor had first set up the jet which we've
10 seen in the photograph at 16.49, but not in the
11 photograph at 16.48? So you see we have a good idea of
12 exactly when that jet was set up. What I'm wondering is
13 how long after that Mr Howling asked you to deploy the
14 aerial ladder platform.

15 A. I'd say it could have been minutes, five minutes, along
16 them lines. It was so quick, the early stages.

17 Q. Was he still incident commander at the time that he
18 asked you to do it?

19 A. I believe so.

20 Q. After he asked you to do that, what happened?

21 A. As it says in the statement, I got someone to relieve
22 Firefighter Taylor on the jet.

23 Q. Because you'd need the two of you to deploy the
24 platform?

25 A. That's right, it's a two man team, yeah. We would have

1 had a good conversation about if we can get the machine
2 round, if it can deploy, that sort of thing.

3 Q. Who would have been involved in that conversation?

4 A. I believe we did have a conversation, me and
5 Firefighter Taylor, and also Firefighter Mullins joined
6 us then, who was also -- we're all aerial -- aerial
7 trained, all three of us, so we had the -- the three of
8 us had a conversation between us.

9 Q. What about Watch Manager Howling, was he involved at
10 all?

11 A. No.

12 Q. What was the upshot of that conversation?

13 A. There would have been difficulty with the amount of
14 debris that was coming down at the time to position the
15 aerial ladder in that area.

16 Q. Was an attempt made to move the aerial ladder platform
17 from where it was parked to the access road as Watch
18 Manager Howling requested?

19 A. I don't think that happened at the time, no, I think
20 Firefighter Taylor, the driver, was still with me,
21 having a chat about it -- having a talk about it.

22 Q. Given that you told us that Watch Manager Howling had
23 given you that instruction, what if anything was said to
24 him about the fact that it wasn't being carried out?

25 A. I would have had the -- the chat with Firefighter Taylor

1 and Firefighter Mullins. I don't know if it happened,
2 but I would have informed Mr Howling of our decision.

3 THE CORONER: Do you remember doing so?

4 A. I can't remember having a conversation, no, but it would
5 have happened, I wouldn't have left it there.

6 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: When you say you would have informed him
7 of your decision -- is "decision" the right word? Is it
8 not his decision or is it open to you to decide, "Well
9 I've been given this instruction, but we're not going to
10 follow it"?

11 A. The incident commander at the time, Watch Manager
12 Howling, he would have left the decision to us to make.

13 Q. Whether or not to deploy at all?

14 A. Whether it was safe enough to put the aerial in that
15 position at that time.

16 Q. When you were explaining to the court what the problem
17 was, what you mentioned was debris falling down, wasn't
18 it?

19 A. There was a lot of debris falling -- debris coming down,
20 yes.

21 Q. If you look at your statement at 447, at the bottom of
22 the page, you say this:

23 "I enabled someone to relieve Firefighter Taylor
24 from the hose jet and planned how we could reposition
25 our aerial platform in the access road. This was

1 particularly difficult due to parked appliances in the
2 vicinity blocking the road."

3 Now, that is a different explanation, isn't it, and
4 that's referring to appliances blocking the road but not
5 referring to falling debris, but the reason you've given
6 the court for the decision not to move the aerial ladder
7 platform was falling debris rather than parked
8 appliances?

9 A. The parked appliances would have been a problem as well,
10 but obviously we could have got rid of those, but the
11 main -- the main problem was the falling debris making
12 the area unsafe to deploy the aerial -- aerial ladder at
13 the time of that incident.

14 Q. If you look in the jury bundle at tab 14, a different
15 tab to the one you're looking in at the moment,
16 Mr Sharpe. The same file, but behind tab 14. If you
17 turn to photograph 10, this is very much later in the
18 events of the day, but it shows, does it not, an aerial
19 ladder platform being positioned in the access road on
20 the west side of the building?

21 A. It does.

22 Q. I'm not in a position to say how many cars were moved in
23 order to achieve that, but it shows the possibility of
24 getting the aerial ladder platform onto that access
25 road, doesn't it?

1 A. It does, yes.

2 Q. Do you think that a final decision was reached not to
3 move the aerial ladder platform to the access road, or
4 did something happen that intervened in your discussions
5 and caused you to go to a different side of the
6 building?

7 A. It all happened in quite a short space of time, while we
8 was discussing about deploying the ALP on that side,
9 that the incident happened on the east side.

10 Q. What was it that happened on the east side?

11 A. While it was -- the three of us were talking about the
12 deployment, a large -- a large noise come from the other
13 side, a large -- of the public that were taped off, and
14 shouts were going up that people were jumping.

15 Q. So what did you do when you heard that?

16 A. I do remember me and Paul Cartwright running round to
17 find out what was going on.

18 Q. What did you find on the other side of the building?

19 A. As we looked up, we noticed a gentleman standing
20 precariously on a balcony with knotted sheets -- it
21 looked like knotted sheets -- and he was pushing himself
22 out onto the balcony.

23 Q. If you look in tab 12 of the jury bundle at page 23,
24 you'll see a photograph taken at 1709 hours which shows
25 a man and a woman on a balcony and some yellow fabric

1 hanging down from the balcony. Does that refresh your
2 memory of what you saw?

3 A. Something along them lines, yes.

4 Q. What instructions were you then given?

5 A. I was told by Paul Cartwright that we need to get the
6 ALP up as soon as possible.

7 Q. Who was incident commander by this time?

8 A. I believe there was a changeover from John Howling to
9 Paul Cartwright. I'm not too sure, it was about that
10 time.

11 Q. Where did Mr Cartwright want the aerial ladder platform?

12 A. On the -- obviously on the east side of the building, as
13 close as we could get to the family.

14 Q. As you understood it, was there any thought or hope that
15 it could actually be used to rescue them at this time?

16 A. Same again, me and Firefighter Taylor and
17 Firefighter Mullins knew we wouldn't be able to get as
18 close to the building as we could, because of,
19 obviously, access bollards, that sort of thing, but
20 we -- we tried to get as close as possible.

21 Q. Was it explained to Station Manager Cartwright that it
22 wouldn't be possible actually to rescue them?

23 A. I believe that conversation occurred.

24 Q. Given that was the case, did he say what he hoped you
25 would be able to do from the aerial ladder platform?

1 A. Basically just get it up there to talk to the family and
2 try and reassure them that help was on their way.

3 Q. I'll show you a photograph in tab 14 of the same bundle,
4 photograph 19. This is a photograph taken at
5 1719 hours. You can see a silver car that's been turned
6 on its side to make way for the aerial ladder platform.
7 Does that refresh your memory of events?

8 A. Yes, it's the first time I've seen that photograph, yes.

9 Q. If one looks at that photograph -- it's helpful because
10 we have the time of it -- how much more would need to be
11 done to the aerial ladder platform to get it deployed?

12 A. In order for the ALP, the aerial ladder platform, to get
13 deployed, you need to get stabilising jacks out,
14 which -- there's four on the machine there. Obviously,
15 that -- that gives stability to the vehicle once it's
16 up.

17 Q. They're not out in this photo?

18 A. Not at the moment, no.

19 Q. So after you get it in position you have to get out the
20 stabilising jacks and then --

21 A. Yeah, you're ready to go then.

22 Q. -- raise the ladder which has a platform cage, is that
23 right?

24 A. That's right, that's correct, yes.

25 Q. When it was raised, was it raised empty or with anyone

1 in it?

2 A. There was me and Firefighter Mullins in the cage and
3 Firefighter Taylor in the chair at the back there, in
4 the console.

5 Q. Given that this photograph was taken at 1719 hours, are
6 you able to help at all with approximately what time it
7 may have been that the aerial ladder platform was set up
8 and raised with you in the cage?

9 A. I have no -- no awareness of the time at that time, no.

10 Q. Were there any difficulties involved in setting up and
11 raising the cage?

12 A. As you can see, there was a tree in the way, which
13 Firefighter Taylor was sorting out with a bow saw, same
14 again, access again.

15 Q. He sorted out with?

16 A. Sorry, as you can see in the photograph, in the middle
17 there --

18 Q. Yes.

19 A. -- I believe that Firefighter Taylor's cutting --
20 cutting the tree to give us more access.

21 Q. Was it cut down before the aerial ladder platform
22 reached its final position?

23 A. At the same time, if I can remember.

24 Q. When the cage itself was being raised, was there
25 anything that delayed that in any way?

1 A. Only of what I've said in the statement, there was
2 a couple of large bangs. What we don't know, we don't
3 know if it was hydraulic, us hitting the tree but it
4 momentarily stopped us, just to make sure that the ALP
5 was still working.

6 Q. But no problem longer than that?

7 A. Not that I know of, no.

8 Q. Once you were in you were up in the cage, what did you
9 do?

10 A. I think me or Firefighter Mullins were shouting at the
11 family to reassure them.

12 Q. They were still on the balcony?

13 A. Yes, they were.

14 Q. What distance were you from them?

15 A. About 50 foot, something along them lines.

16 Q. But they could hear you?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. If I could ask you about conditions on the balcony at
19 that time. I'll show photographs not taken at the time,
20 but taken subsequently of the balconies. We looked at
21 this photograph before, photograph 44. Firstly to note
22 of course is that this is the other side of the
23 building, it's the west side, but it's helpful because
24 it shows the full length of the balcony.

25 If I show you photograph 38, that reminds us that at

1 one end of the balcony there's a wall, that's the
2 furthest from the central staircase, and then at the
3 other end one has a door that, as we now know, leads to
4 the central staircase.

5 The balcony you would have been looking at would
6 have had the flat nearest the central staircase having
7 been severely affected by fire. What I wanted to ask
8 you about was what smoke conditions were like on the
9 balcony, and whether they varied on the one hand at the
10 end by the central staircase and on the other hand at
11 the end furthest from the central staircase?

12 A. I believe the smoke conditions were changing all the
13 time, really, from what we could see. We had quite
14 a good view, obviously, from the ladder platform due to
15 the high winds as well, which was pushing it all over
16 the place. So I couldn't really say for certain how the
17 conditions were at any one time.

18 Q. Is it right that the family remained on the balcony
19 outside from the time when you got up in the aerial
20 ladder platform until they were rescued?

21 A. They seemed to be, yes.

22 Q. In your statement at page 448, what you said at the
23 bottom about the conditions in the final paragraph was
24 this:

25 "No debris appeared to be falling from this

1 particular area of the flats. However, smoke was
2 billowing. It was thick black smoke near the floor that
3 the family were on."

4 A. Yeah, that would have been correct at the time.

5 Q. Then over the page, the second paragraph says what you
6 told the court about being able to communicate with the
7 black family on the balcony, but unable to rescue them.

8 A. That's correct.

9 Q. Above and below that, you talk about getting water to
10 the monitor on the cage, and using the monitor to
11 attempt to extinguish flames and fires on the floors
12 below the 11th floor?

13 A. That's what we would have done, yes.

14 Q. Can you recall whether you used the aerial ladder
15 platform to direct jets whilst the family were still on
16 the balcony, before they were rescued?

17 A. It would have been about the same time, yes.

18 Q. Can you help the court with whether the aerial ladder
19 platform has a facility to direct jets of different
20 power and intensity at your choice?

21 A. Yeah, the ALP's equipped with a monitor, a large water
22 jet. We're talking 2,300 litres per minute. We're
23 talking very heavy duty, which is why you've got to be
24 quite careful with using this sort of monitor in a --
25 a fire of this -- this sort of incident, with people

1 involved. So you've got to use it sparingly, really,
2 use it sparingly.

3 Q. Is it the case that you don't always have to use water
4 at that volume of water per minute?

5 A. No, no, you could cut it down, using it a bit like
6 a spray, like a shower yet, that sort of thing, like
7 a covering jet, a curtain.

8 Q. As well as firing it at full power you can also use
9 what's called a covering spray, is that right?

10 A. That's correct.

11 Q. What are the benefits of a covering spray if there are
12 people still in the building?

13 A. Obviously dispersing smoke, making it more comfortable
14 for them, even just extinguishing small fires around
15 that area.

16 Q. Is it right that there are some risks associated with
17 using the jet at full power which are not there if you
18 use a covering spray instead?

19 A. Yeah, using the jet on full power, it's a big no-no if
20 there's people or firefighters in BA in -- in the area.
21 You could basically kill a person with -- if you got the
22 jet in the right place, especially someone who's wearing
23 breathing apparatus. You could -- it's probably akin to
24 a riot jet that you see in Northern Ireland with that
25 sort of power, you can knock a man down.

1 Q. To what extent do those risks disappear if you use
2 a covering spray instead?

3 A. They diminish is very -- you're not going to hurt anyone
4 with a covering jet or anything like that.

5 Q. Did you use a covering jet, do you think, while the
6 family was still on the balcony?

7 A. I believe I did, yes.

8 Q. Was that because you were ordered to or was that your
9 own decision?

10 A. That was my own decision.

11 Q. Did you see the family get rescued?

12 A. I believe I see the family going inside. We -- we had
13 comms with Firefighter Taylor who was down below, who's
14 my ears and eyes down below, basically, in the console,
15 I believe we got information from him that the family
16 had been rescued.

17 Q. Are you able to estimate how long you were up in the
18 cage of the aerial ladder platform for?

19 A. It was around an hour, but I -- I couldn't specify, it
20 was -- no times were taken at that time.

21 Q. Were you tasked with any further duties after you came
22 down?

23 A. After we came down, I remember in my statement we
24 obviously took on fluids, and basically stayed where --
25 where we was just in case we were retasked to do

1 anything else.

2 Q. From the position you were in, up the aerial ladder
3 platform, you said 50 feet or so away from the balcony,
4 to what extent were you affected by heat and smoke?

5 A. We were affected, same again, because of the wind
6 conditions. One second it was clear, next second it
7 could have been thick black smoke, that sort of thing.
8 A lot of heat was coming out of the 11th floor which we
9 kept an eye on. Basically, it was like a blast furnace
10 up there with the conditions.

11 Q. You, presumably, were not in breathing apparatus?

12 A. No, not at the time, no.

13 Q. What did you feel like when you got down?

14 A. Exhausted basically, yeah.

15 Q. I think that in due course you returned to the Old Kent
16 Road fire station at about 10 pm?

17 A. About that time, yes.

18 Q. My final question is this: looking back over your
19 involvement on the day of the fire, what single
20 additional thing do you think would have most helped you
21 to carry out the tasks that you were asked to carry out?

22 A. Personally, myself, on the day, nothing else would
23 have -- would have helped me in my -- in my capacity as
24 the ALP officer in charge.

25 Q. I think in your statement you said that at the time you

1 were frustrated by the limited effect of what you could
2 achieve with the aerial ladder platform.

3 A. That's correct.

4 Q. That is, as I understand it, a reflection of the height
5 that it reaches as a matter of reality rather than any
6 other --

7 A. The thing with the ALP, the closer you can get to the
8 building, the higher you can get, and obviously be used
9 at the incident, so access was a big problem on both
10 sides. Height would have been no problem once you was
11 in there, but also with the falling debris that was a --
12 a big thing in the -- in the situation.

13 Q. So it was frustrating, but that was the reality of the
14 situation that confronted you?

15 A. That's correct, yes.

16 Q. Thank you very much. I have no further questions for
17 you, but others may have some.

18 Questions from THE CORONER

19 THE CORONER: Mr Sharpe, at the beginning of your evidence
20 when you were talking to Mr Maxwell-Scott, you were
21 talking about messages when you were with Mr Howling,
22 and you referred to -- I think you described it as
23 "tucking a message safely inside a BA board".

24 A. That's correct, madam.

25 THE CORONER: We have a BA board now in court. I wonder if

1 you could just demonstrate to the members of the jury
2 what you mean by that.

3 A. On this -- on this side of the board that we used at the
4 time, this is where our BA tallies would go -- would go
5 into at the bridgehead. I would imagine that's where
6 I put the information. This board then would have gone
7 up to the bridgehead.

8 THE CORONER: Sorry, you are saying that you would have put
9 a piece of paper into the slot where the tally goes, is
10 that what you are saying?

11 A. That's correct, madam.

12 THE CORONER: What happens then when the tally is put in?

13 A. Well I imagine this would have been seen at the
14 bridgehead before the tally would have been put in,
15 someone would have seen that and -- and acted upon it.

16 THE CORONER: I see, thank you very much. Thank you. Yes,
17 Mr Hendy?

18 Questions by MR HENDY

19 MR HENDY: Madam, I don't know whether the jury were able to
20 see that, perhaps they'd like to look a little more
21 closely at the board itself to see the slots where the
22 tallies go.

23 THE CORONER: Yes, please do.

24 MR HENDY: Mr Sharpe, while that's being done, my name's
25 Hendy, I represent some of the bereaved families. Just

1 to make --

2 THE CORONER: Sorry, Mr Hendy, would you wait until the
3 jurors have had a look before putting your questions.

4 MR HENDY: Of course. (Pause)

5 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

6 MR HENDY: Of course, Mr Sharpe, when you put that note into
7 the tally slots, there were no tallies there, because
8 this was the empty board which was to go up to the
9 bridgehead where tallies would then be put in as people
10 were committed wearing breathing apparatus?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. Mr Sharpe, just before I begin, I think my clients would
13 like to commend your initiative in respect of taking the
14 note of the affected flats and also setting up the jet
15 on the ground to attack the 5th floor fires. If that
16 hadn't been done when you did it the fires could have
17 been a lot worse in that building.

18 There's another matter, but I'll come to that in
19 a moment. First of all, can I start by asking you about
20 the earlier fire, seven or eight years earlier. We do
21 have some records of that fire. I appreciate that you
22 were on the ground, you were injured early on and may
23 not have seen very much of the firefighting that went on
24 on that occasion, but I wonder if we could put up on
25 screen, please, page 1081 in the advocates' bundle.

1 It's a bit difficult to see this. Mr Maxwell-Scott's
2 using his skills to reorientate it. Marvellous, thank
3 you very much.

4 On the left-hand side of the page we can see there's
5 a record of your name, "Sharpe, D" -- they've spelled
6 your surname wrong -- and we can see in box 7, as you
7 say, struck by falling glass. Just so that we can see
8 the date of this incident, if we look on the right-hand
9 side of the page, right towards the bottom, there's
10 a line which is handwritten going across, 2.6, "First
11 call to brigade" 1816 hours, and the day is the 4th, and
12 the month is the 9th, September, of 1997. So we can now
13 locate that in time.

14 Then we can see that the incident address is at the
15 top of that column on that page, 81 Lakanal House,
16 Dalwood Street, SE5. If Mr Maxwell-Scott would be kind
17 enough to put up the next page, 1082. We can see in the
18 second column from the left at the bottom there's
19 a heading "Method of fighting the fire". 4.6, "Before
20 arrival of brigade", someone's written nil. Then 4.7
21 "up to stop", and somebody has handwritten there: "1J"
22 which we understand to be jet; from "1P", which we
23 understand to be pump; via DRM, dry rising main; does
24 that make sense to you?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Below that, "One jet from one pump via TL", Does that
2 mean turntable ladder?

3 A. That's correct.

4 Q. So it looks as if the fire was fought internally from
5 a hose connected to be the dry rising main and
6 externally from a jet from the turntable ladder; do you
7 agree?

8 A. Yes, I do.

9 Q. Then if we can ask Mr Maxwell-Scott, please, to go to
10 page 1084, to the lower photograph. I don't know if
11 it's possible to make that a little bigger, or perhaps
12 not. I don't know if whether you and the jury can see.
13 Obviously, we can see the fire in flat 81 at the top of
14 that building. We can actually see the flames and the
15 smoke, and the smoke coming out of the north end
16 corridor vent, but if you look street level, you can
17 just see a ladder going up by the side of Lakanal House
18 which makes it look as if the turntable ladder is parked
19 in the -- sorry, we've lost it for a moment. Yes,
20 Mr Sharpe, can you see that ladder going up from the
21 appliance at street level?

22 A. I can, yes.

23 Q. Is that the turntable ladder?

24 A. Sorry, are we talking -- this ain't the original -- the
25 earlier fire, or are we talking about --

1 Q. No, this is the earlier fire, this is 1997.

2 A. Oh, right. Yeah, that would be a turntable ladder then,
3 yes.

4 Q. While we have this series of photographs up, we can just
5 see the damage that was done. I appreciate you didn't
6 go into the flat, of course, but we'll just see the
7 damage that was done in that flat. It's probably just
8 enough to look at a couple of photographs. If you could
9 go to 1089 we can see the state of the kitchen there,
10 and if we go to 1090 we can see the view from the
11 kitchen looking the other way into the lounge, we can
12 see the windows and the panels below the windows. Then
13 if we go to 1092 we can see the state of the ground
14 floor.

15 Your contribution to the firefighting there was
16 obviously limited by your unfortunate injuries, and you
17 were taken to hospital, I think, in consequence.

18 So let's turn away from that matter and come back to
19 the fire on 3 July 2009. I wanted to ask you about your
20 witness statement at page 447 in the second paragraph.
21 Mr Maxwell-Scott's asked you about this, but I just
22 wanted to confirm with you, in the second paragraph, in
23 the third line, right at the end there, you say:

24 "More debris was falling and I noticed that some of
25 it began to ignite some of the flats below the main fire

1 scene. The debris appeared to be igniting curtains
2 which were flapping about in the wind. It had been
3 a particularly hot day and I noticed a large amount of
4 windows were open because of the hot weather."

5 Mr Maxwell-Scott asked you something about pigeon
6 netting, but as far as you could see, what ignited was
7 not pigeon netting but the curtains inside the flats.

8 A. Yeah, the windows -- sorry, the curtains were igniting,
9 but also the pigeon netting was -- was catching the
10 debris.

11 Q. No doubt it was, but the cause of the fires inside the
12 flats at the lower level was because burning debris was
13 getting blown into the windows and catching the curtains
14 alight.

15 A. Correct, yeah.

16 Q. Mr Maxwell-Scott asked you about the time when you were
17 considering moving the aerial ladder platform to the
18 access road on the west side of Lakanal House, and
19 I wondered if we could help on that by asking you to
20 look at the handwritten note of the interview which you
21 had on 6 July, three days after this fire, which is at
22 234.

23 THE CORONER: Do you have that file on the desk, Mr Sharpe?

24 We looked at it earlier.

25 MR HENDY: This is the advocates' bundle, 234, volume 1.

1 THE CORONER: Thank you.

2 MR HENDY: There at the top of the page you recount, as
3 you've told the jury today, that you instructed
4 Firefighter Taylor to set up a covering jet to reduce
5 the spread of fire. This was more a spontaneous action
6 due to the need to protect people and flats in the
7 building."

8 Then we come to the timing, you say:

9 "After about ten minutes, this had a good effect at
10 reducing the spread of fire. At this stage,
11 Crew Manager John Clarke, who looked like he had worn
12 a BA set, came to me and said he was taking over as
13 safety officer in my area, as Watch Manager Howling
14 needed me to do something with the ALP."

15 So I think you thought earlier today that you'd
16 spent about five minutes on the jet, but do you think
17 your recollection on 6 July 2009 is more likely to be
18 accurate, that it was about ten minutes on the jet?

19 A. Yeah, I'll go with that, yes.

20 Q. It looks as if Mr Clarke had been up wearing BA kit and
21 come down again.

22 A. Looking at my statement, yes, that's correct.

23 Q. Yes. Let's just see what he wanted you to do with the
24 ALP. I'm reading on in the handwritten statement:

25 "This was to try to reposition the ALP to provide

1 a water tower to the front of Lakanal House. However,
2 as myself and Firefighter Taylor were deciding how this
3 could be done, due to a large number of cars in the
4 access road, there were calls from the rear of the
5 building saying people were threatening to jump. The
6 then officer in charge, station manager Paul Cartwright,
7 instructed me to resite the ALP to the rear, to gain
8 access", and so on.

9 Now, you said earlier that you thought that the
10 reason why the ALP couldn't be positioned in the access
11 road to the front of Lakanal House was primarily the
12 debris coming down?

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. I'm going to suggest to you, Mr Sharpe, that you were
15 doing yourself a disservice there. I'm going to suggest
16 to you that whatever the risk from debris was, you were
17 quite prepared to take it to use the ALP in that
18 position, and that there were two reasons why the ALP
19 wasn't put in that position.

20 The first is because the instruction came from
21 Mr Cartwright to move the ALP round to the east side, so
22 before you could do anything, and the second reason is
23 that you thought that the passageway to the west side
24 access road was blocked.

25 Reading the handwritten note, and Mr Maxwell-Scott

1 has taken you to the typed statement as well, do you not
2 think that those were really the reasons why the ALP
3 didn't go to the west side and went instead to the east
4 side?

5 A. I believe the -- I was -- when I was speaking to
6 Firefighter Taylor, my driver, and Firefighter Mullins,
7 that was our main concern, was the debris coming down.

8 Q. Well, if that's right, Mr Sharpe, it's curious that
9 there's no reference to debris coming down as a reason
10 in either the written statement three days after the
11 event or the typed statement nine days after the event.
12 You see the point?

13 A. Well, all I can say is at the -- at the time, that was
14 the reason for not getting the ALP into that position at
15 the -- at that time of the incident.

16 Q. You see, the discussion, I'll just remind you again, in
17 the handwritten statement, the discussion between
18 yourself and Firefighter Taylor:

19 "... deciding how it this could be done due to
20 a large number of cars in the access road."

21 The typed statement says:

22 "We planned how we could reposition our aerial
23 platform in the access road. This was particularly
24 difficult due to the parked appliances in the vicinity
25 blocking the road."

1 Neither of them refer to any insurmountable problem
2 from debris coming down.

3 A. Probably not in the statements, but that's -- that's
4 what happened.

5 Q. You see, those statements, as I said, were made just
6 days after the event.

7 Well, there it is. Can I just ask you about
8 something else as well. If you look in the jury bundle
9 at divider 14, at photograph number 9 and photograph
10 number 10. There is the Greenwich ALP positioned in the
11 access road on the west side of Lakanal House. I take
12 it that that is the position that you and
13 Firefighter Taylor and Firefighter Mullins were
14 considering putting your aerial ladder pump in; am
15 I right?

16 A. That's correct, around that area, yes.

17 Q. What the Greenwich people have done is to reverse into
18 that so that the cage is at the north end, over the
19 front of the vehicle, yes?

20 A. That's -- yes, that's correct.

21 Q. You can get into the cage at the front end by simply
22 lowering it, can't you?

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. So that in the way that they've parked it, and if they'd
25 got in at the front end, the north end, the risk of

1 being injured by falling debris would be significantly
2 reduced, would it not?

3 A. It would, yes, at that time, yes.

4 Q. What Mr Howling, you, Mr Taylor and Mr Mullins
5 contemplated was erecting the ALP in the position that
6 we see in photographs 8 and 9, pulling it up to its full
7 height and attacking fires much as we see in photographs
8 14 and 15?

9 A. That's correct.

10 Q. Am I right?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. I'm sorry, just give me one moment. (Pause)

13 I'm going to leave this issue of what the reason was
14 after this one question: at page 188 of the advocates'
15 bundle -- there's no need to turn it up, for those
16 though want to look at it, that's where it is --
17 Mr Howling made a statement ten days after the fire, and
18 he said, in the fourth paragraph:

19 "I remember discussing the feasibility of E355 [the
20 aerial ladder pump] at that side of the building [the
21 west side] with Crew Manager Sharpe, who said that
22 access restrictions meant that it would be unlikely to
23 be of much use."

24 I just put it to you once again, I think you're
25 doing yourself a disservice. The suggestion that we

1 make is that obviously there were risks from debris,
2 there always is using an ALP in a burning high rise, but
3 that was a risk that you were prepared to take. The
4 problem was getting access to the access road, and
5 before you resolved that problem, the instruction was to
6 move the ALP to the east side; is that not the real
7 position?

8 A. All -- all this is all happening in minutes. Access to
9 that road wouldn't have been a problem, ie we would have
10 moved machines. It was a problem momentarily, but it
11 wouldn't have been a -- a main one. The time that
12 Greenwich's machine went in there, the fire had subsided
13 quite a bit and conditions were -- were much easier, but
14 at the time that was our -- our prime concern.
15 I remember the three of us speaking about the debris
16 situation coming down.

17 Q. Okay. Just one other matter. The blocked access road,
18 you mentioned cars in the handwritten statement and
19 appliances in the other. Can we just see if we can help
20 to resolve that. There's a photograph in the jury
21 bundle, divider 14, at -- I've lost it momentarily --
22 page 18. Page 18 is a photograph of the Greenwich ALP,
23 much later in the evening. We can see the amount of
24 debris that's fallen down and we can also see where that
25 debris has fallen down. But on the left-hand side we

1 can see a row of cars, and the problem with that row of
2 cars is that it prevented the extended jacks coming out
3 from the pump, and we can see that, because the ALP has
4 come as far up the access road as it could in order to
5 extend the jacks on both sides without striking the
6 cars, or being obstructed by the cars; am I right?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. So that was a problem with the cars, and then if we
9 could look at an earlier photograph, which is 6A. This
10 is a photograph which was taken at 16.34. It's not
11 a very good photograph, but we can see the problem with
12 the appliances, and there's a appliance parked across
13 the access road and one in the access road, and those
14 two, you say, obviously could have been moved and would
15 have been moved, if you'd gone ahead with that plan.

16 A. That's correct, yes.

17 Q. Can we just ask for the logistics of that? Are fire
18 appliances parked with their keys left in the ignition
19 and any firefighter can move them, or do you have to
20 find the crew whose appliance it is in order to borrow
21 the keys or borrow the driver to move them; how is it
22 done?

23 A. An incident obviously of this -- this nature, keys would
24 be left in the machines. There's plenty of motor
25 drivers, brigade drivers around and anyone could have

1 moved them.

2 Q. Yes, including yourself --

3 A. Correct, yes.

4 Q. -- or Firefighter Taylor?

5 A. Anyone.

6 Q. Of course if one of the appliances is pumping from
7 a hydrant into the dry rising main then you have to make
8 alternative arrangements to cover that so there's no
9 interruption in the water supply.

10 A. That's correct.

11 Q. But apart from that, it's not difficult to reposition --

12 A. No.

13 Q. -- as long as there's somewhere to go.

14 Thank you, then I think the very last matter that
15 I wanted to ask you about was when you got the ALP up on
16 the east side, you said you thought that you were about
17 50 feet away from the balcony. We have a couple of
18 photographs which may just help to illustrate that.
19 They are at jury bundle, divider 14, at page 7. Does
20 that make sense to you, that photograph?

21 A. It does, yes.

22 Q. That's you and Mr Mullins in the cage, and then at
23 page 8, a slightly different view from the helicopter.
24 That distance between you and the balcony, you reckon,
25 is about 50 feet?

1 A. It seemed that way, yes, give or take.

2 Q. What I noticed from your statement at page 449, right at
3 the top, is that you managed to elevate the cage in line
4 with the 11th floor? Do you see that, right at the top
5 of page 449?

6 A. That's what it says, yeah.

7 Q. Was that the case?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Yes. So the problem was not the height, the problem
10 was, as it were, the reach?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. You couldn't get the cage across because of the
13 limitations with the positioning, the stabilisers and
14 the distance of the base of the appliance from the
15 building.

16 A. That's correct, yeah.

17 Q. Thank you very much indeed.

18 THE CORONER: Ms Al Tai?

19 Questions by MS AL TAI

20 MS AL TAI: Good afternoon, Mr Sharpe. I act on behalf of
21 one of the bereaved families. Just one question,
22 please: we heard that you received a message about
23 an occupant trapped in flat 79 at approximately 16.28;
24 that's correct, isn't it?

25 A. That's correct, yes.

1 Q. We also heard that you arrived just shortly after 16.29.

2 A. That's correct, yes.

3 Q. Just looking at your statement at page 446, do you have
4 sight of that, Mr Sharpe?

5 A. I do, yes.

6 Q. It's just the second paragraph, where you state:

7 "I had a good view of the fire in progress ... I saw
8 that the fire was on the 9th floor and the flames were
9 fierce and licking up to the 10th and 11th floors."

10 At that point did you form a view that any of those
11 floors contained the flat from the message you'd heard
12 about previously?

13 A. No, I couldn't put them together, no.

14 Q. Thank you, Mr Sharpe?

15 THE CORONER: Mr Compton?

16 Questions by MR COMPTON

17 MR COMPTON: Good afternoon, Mr Sharpe, I represent Apollo
18 Property Services. Just one matter, please. Can I take
19 you back in time to when you're first there, and you
20 have reported to Watch Manager Howling.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. You told us about this pad that you start writing down
23 information on. Can we take it that that is information
24 about people trapped in the actual block?

25 A. That's correct, yes.

1 Q. Can you remember anything about the information that you
2 wrote down?

3 A. Not specifically, no, no.

4 Q. Can you give some idea of what you put down. For
5 example, did you put "People trapped" and then flat
6 numbers underneath?

7 A. That would have been what control -- whatever control
8 had sent over the radio, obviously the amount of people,
9 what time, flat number, any other relevant information.

10 Q. So you then tucked that into the BA board?

11 A. Yes, that's correct.

12 Q. Was anyone with the BA board at the time?

13 A. I believe all fire -- fire gear was being collated to --
14 to take it up to the bridgehead, there was a dump of
15 gear.

16 Q. Was, for example, Mr Clarke there, who was going up to
17 the bridgehead?

18 A. I can't -- I can't recall anyone that I can remember,
19 no.

20 Q. Did you say to anyone, "This is an important list,
21 please note it"?

22 A. I -- I would have made sure that that information was --
23 was carried out and informed the relevant people.
24 I wouldn't have left it there and walked away.

25 Q. Wouldn't have done? What can you recall doing?

1 A. Informing John Howling of the information and I did know
2 there was a lot of -- lot of the same information coming
3 over on the radios, and this was being passed upstairs.

4 Q. Did you inform John Howling before you put it on the BA
5 board, the BAECO board?

6 A. I'm not sure at the time, no.

7 Q. Were you aware that someone had already been tasked to
8 compile a list, namely Firefighter Mullins, and that he
9 had written down the critical flat numbers?

10 A. I didn't know at the time, no, but I would imagine, 'cos
11 of your responsibility, if you did hear that
12 information, how critical it was, that it would have
13 been -- a lot of people would have been putting down
14 that information.

15 Q. We're just looking at the duplicating of roles here.
16 Did you ask, "Is anyone taking a note of the information
17 from the control?"

18 A. Not at the time, no.

19 Q. Can you recall speaking to Mr Howling about what you
20 were actually doing, namely recording flat numbers on
21 a list?

22 A. I can't -- I can't recall that -- our conversation.

23 Q. It goes onto the BAECO board, you put it just inside.
24 Was that a safe place to put it?

25 A. It would have been a safe place, yes.

1 Q. It wouldn't have fallen out going up to the bridgehead?

2 A. No, I would have made sure it was stuck in there, but
3 obviously I wouldn't have just left it there, I would
4 have followed up the information and made sure it was
5 given to the appropriate people.

6 Q. That's why I ask you again, can you remember -- and it
7 may be important this -- who you actually spoke to to
8 point out that you had compiled a list, the list was on
9 the BAECO board, about the people trapped?

10 A. No, I can't recall that conversation.

11 Q. When you made your notes about it, and the statement
12 that you have, I think you would accept that it's not in
13 the notes. So when those matters were recorded shortly
14 after the incident, a few days after the incident, you
15 haven't put it into your notes?

16 A. Something I must have forgotten, yes.

17 Q. No further questions.

18 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Walsh?

19 Questions by MR WALSH

20 MR WALSH: Madam, I will be five minutes, or less, probably.

21 Could you look, please, perhaps on the screen as
22 well, please, at photograph 7 at divider 14 of the jury
23 bundle. I'm going to ask you about the use of the
24 aerial ladder platform. Mr Sharpe, it was deployed on
25 the east side of the building, not the west.

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. At that stage there was only one ALP, so it had to be
3 one or the other.

4 A. Sorry, could you repeat that?

5 Q. It had to be either the east or the west at that stage?

6 A. That's correct, yes.

7 Q. I want to ask you what benefits were derived by those
8 who were on the balcony by the efforts that you made to
9 use the jet from that platform. What were you seeking
10 to do with the use of the jet with the persons on the
11 balcony in mind, what was your plan?

12 A. The plan of action was to -- at the time there -- there
13 was quite a bit of smoke, there was sporadic fires that
14 we could see. Basically, extinguishing them fires, if
15 we could put a -- a curtain of water up there, a spray,
16 this can sometimes alleviate the smoke that's
17 dissipating -- you dissipate it, and make it easier for
18 people up there.

19 Q. Right. What you said in your statement at page 449,
20 which I won't ask to go up, because I want to have
21 another look at the photograph is this:

22 "I noticed that the windows to the end of the block
23 of flats which faced Dalwood was emitting smoke and
24 debris. I attempted to address that area. We did this
25 sparingly as not to cause more smoke."

1 Do you agree with that now?

2 A. I do, yes.

3 Q. "The aim is also to allow any flammable gases to come
4 out of the building. If I were to spray water at this
5 area, these gases could be pushed back into the building
6 and potentially affect firefighters whom I knew to be
7 working inside."

8 A. That's correct, yes.

9 Q. So it is not just the danger of using a jet at full
10 power, it is the potential danger, even when you're
11 using a spray, to avoid pushing flammable gases and fire
12 back into the building?

13 A. That's correct, yes.

14 Q. We've heard that Mr and Mrs Nuhu, the family, were on
15 the balcony, and the smokey conditions that there were
16 there. Were you trying to protect them from the smoke
17 and flame?

18 A. That was one of the areas we was trying to address, yes.

19 Q. Do you think you did achieve your aim of protecting them
20 from smoke and flame?

21 A. We hope we did, yes.

22 Q. Sorry?

23 A. We hope we did, yes.

24 Q. Yes, all right.

25 THE CORONER: Madam, do you have any questions?

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Questions from THE JURY

THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you, Madam Coroner, we do have a couple. I know these areas may have been covered by others, but we want to be clear on a couple of points.

In regard to having blocked access on both sides of the building, really, we were wondering whether, in your experience, there were meant to be specific marked areas for emergency vehicles to get access to the block of flats?

THE CORONER: Have you come across that at all, Mr Sharpe?

A. Yes, during my -- my time in -- in the fire service, there are sort of painted areas, but I'm not -- I can't recollect at this incident, no.

THE CORONER: Thank you.

THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Again, you may have touched on this, but we just wanted to clarify: do you think the various obstructions on the day that hindered your attempts to get close, such as parked cars, trees, bollards, railings, whether they were surmountable or something that you couldn't do anything about?

A. A bit of both, really. We tried whatever we could do at the time. Obviously you see the upturned car, that -- that was got out of the way quite easy. Railings might have been a bit of a -- a tricky thing. Obviously the

1 tree we cut down. You just have to think on your feet
2 at the time, really.

3 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay, thank you. Just a last one.

4 We've heard a number of times that you used a covering
5 spray to help the Nuhus on the balcony. When you're
6 using a covering spray, is there some restriction on
7 which way you can point it, does it always need to be
8 sent down, can you send it across, can you send it up,
9 or is it just not effective to go up, for instance?

10 A. The monitor that's on our ALP is basically 360 degrees,
11 so you have a area of where you want to go.

12 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: So effectively you could be on the
13 7th floor but pointing it upwards at a fire on the 9th;
14 is that realistic?

15 A. You could, yes.

16 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

17 Mr Sharpe, thank you for coming, thank you for the
18 help that you've been able to give to us. You're
19 welcome to stay if you want, but you're free to go if
20 you want.

21 A. Thank you, madam.

22 (The witness withdrew)

23 THE CORONER: Yes, so shall we have a break and continue at
24 about 2.05? Thank you.

25 (1.06 pm)

1 (The short adjournment)

2 (2.04 pm)

3 THE CORONER: Yes, the next witness is Mr?

4 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Field.

5 THE CORONER: Field, yes, thank you. Mr Field, are you in
6 court? Yes, would you like to come forward, thank you.
7 Yes, do sit down for a minute. You might want to help
8 yourself to a glass of water whilst we're waiting.

9 (In the presence of the Jury)

10 THE CORONER: Thank you. Yes. Our next witness is
11 Mr Field.

12 WAYNE FIELD (sworn)

13 THE CORONER: Thank you very much, Mr Field, do sit down.
14 Could you please keep your voice up so we can all hear
15 clearly what you're saying, and if you use the
16 microphone that will help, which you'll need to speak
17 fairly close to.

18 A. Thank you.

19 THE CORONER: Mr Maxwell-Scott, who is standing, is going to
20 ask some questions on my behalf and then there may be
21 some questions from others.

22 A. Okay, thanks.

23 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

24 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good afternoon, Mr Field, can you give
25 the court your full name, please?

1 A. Yeah, Wayne William Field.

2 Q. I'm going to be asking you questions about your
3 involvement in attempts to fight the fire and rescue
4 people at Lakanal House on 3 July 2009. Is it right
5 that you were a firefighter at that time --

6 A. Yes, that's correct.

7 Q. -- and that you were generally based at Whitechapel Fire
8 Station, but on 3 July were based at New Cross Fire
9 Station?

10 A. Correct.

11 Q. How long have you now been employed by the London Fire
12 Brigade?

13 A. Ten years.

14 Q. We know that the New Cross pump ladder, call sign
15 Echo 381, was mobilised just before 1639 hours, and if
16 I take to you the sequence of events at tab 12 of the
17 jury bundle. (Handed)

18 If you turn in that to page 7, you can see that your
19 appliance that day, E381, was one of four mobilised at
20 the same time.

21 A. Yeah, that's correct.

22 Q. Records indicate that your appliance was in fact mobile
23 just after 1644 hours and you made your way to
24 Lakanal House in Camberwell.

25 Are you able to assist at all with when your

1 appliance arrived? The need to ask is because it never
2 booked in status 3, as far as I'm aware.

3 A. As we -- as we arrived at the scene, we pulled the
4 appliance into like a cul-de-sac, and as we got off the
5 machine, an officer from the command unit told us just
6 to go straight round after we'd handed in our -- our
7 board.

8 Q. It's probably testing the memory far too much, but if
9 you see the page that you have open where there's
10 reference to the Southwark pump ladder, the Lambeth pump
11 and the Brixton pump, we know the times when each of
12 those arrived. Are you able to recall which of those
13 was there when you arrived?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Then you told us that you made your way on the
16 instructions of somebody from the command unit, and your
17 nominal board would have been given in; is that right?

18 A. Yes, that's correct.

19 Q. Where did you go after that?

20 A. We went round to the -- I believe the front part of
21 Lakanal House.

22 Q. Let me show you an aerial photograph to see if that will
23 assist.

24 A. Okay.

25 Q. This is photograph 3, and in the middle of that picture,

1 where I'm marking now with the white arrow, is
2 Lakanal House.

3 A. Mm-hmm.

4 Q. There's an access road just to the west side of it,
5 which I'm marking now with an arrow, and so to the left
6 of the building is the west side and to the right of it
7 is the east side in this photograph.

8 A. Okay.

9 Q. Are you able to say which side you mean by the front
10 side?

11 A. Okay, where you've actually got the -- the mouse, we
12 came round that side.

13 Q. So you came first to the west side --

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. -- left of the building?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. What did you do when you got there?

18 A. As we got round the corner, there was a -- an officer --
19 there was an officer standing on the corner, so we went
20 to go and get our instructions to find out exactly what
21 they wanted us to do, and at that point there was
22 a gentleman on, I believe, the 11th floor who was
23 threatening to jump.

24 Q. Which side of the building are you talking about now?

25 A. That's the front part, where we came round, 'cos -- hold

1 on a second. Looking on the part where -- we came from
2 where the park was, so we came from round where the park
3 was, so we went round the -- the left-hand side of the
4 building, and there was an officer standing on the
5 corner.

6 Q. Did you come at some stage to an entry control point?

7 A. At the time when we -- at the time when we was going in,
8 there wasn't an entry control point.

9 Q. Mr Field, you gave a statement back in August 2009. Do
10 you think your recollection of events then was better
11 than it is today, some three and a half years later?

12 A. No, it -- I'd probably have to refer back to my
13 statement.

14 Q. That's what I'm saying, do you think you remembered
15 things better when you wrote your statement?

16 A. I remembered things better, yes.

17 Q. Would it assist you to have a look at your statement?

18 A. I can have my statement, but I can also clearly remember
19 the day.

20 Q. If you have a look in the jury bundle at tab 14,
21 photograph 2, does that refresh your memory of anything
22 you saw at some stage that afternoon?

23 A. By the time I saw that, I was on my way out of the
24 building.

25 Q. That is taken on the east side of the building.

1 A. Okay.

2 Q. Can you help us with whether that is the side of the
3 building where you saw somebody on a balcony, or not?

4 A. That was the side where we saw someone on the balcony,
5 yes.

6 Q. Thank you. Before you got to that side of the building,
7 do you recall having a conversation with a member of the
8 public about somebody who was in one of the flats in the
9 building?

10 A. Yes, I do.

11 Q. What do you recall of that conversation?

12 A. The conversation that I had, as we was walking to that
13 side of the building, a gentleman had approached me and
14 said to me that he was on the phone talking to somebody
15 who was in the flats, in their -- in their flat, and it
16 was where there was a blue mattress.

17 Q. If you take up the jury bundle at tab 12 and turn to
18 page 18, there's a photograph there timed at 1651 hours.
19 Let me first ask you in this way: does that photograph
20 help you at all to recall which flat the man was
21 referring to?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Which one was it?

24 A. Second from the top, the third one -- third one going
25 out from if you -- if you was walking in, so it would be

1 the fourth one from the end.

2 Q. Just so we're clear what we're each talking about, there
3 are on the left side of the central staircase six sets
4 of three windows per floor; is that right?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. I'll just get the photograph up on the screen.

7 A. Okay. Okay, if you move the mouse just -- just down
8 a bit to your left -- there, stop there.

9 Q. That window?

10 A. Yeah, if you notice there's a blue mattress.

11 Q. In the most right hand of the three window panes?

12 A. That's right, where you've got the -- the mouse at the
13 moment.

14 Q. Thank you. What did the man say to you about that
15 window?

16 A. He said that he was on the phone speaking to his
17 partner, and he wanted to know whether she should come
18 out or not. At that point, I told him to speak to one
19 of the officers, and then we carried on round the
20 corner. He was explaining to me the whole thing with
21 the -- this conversation. At that time I called
22 an officer and said "If you can explain it to
23 an officer".

24 Q. So this is a conversation you had on the west side of
25 the building, the opposite side to --

1 A. To where I -- where I spoke to the officer on the
2 corner. As I -- this is the side that we was walking
3 towards, so as we was walking towards this side, he
4 approached me. As -- as you're looking at it now -- as
5 you're looking at it now, this is the side when he spoke
6 to me. He then spoke to an officer and we then
7 proceeded round the corner and spoke to another officer.

8 Q. Was anything said in this conversation about what floor
9 that flat was on?

10 A. Answer: no.

11 Q. Was anything said about the number of that flat?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Looking at that photograph, it would be evident, would
14 it not, that persons in that flat were at greater danger
15 than persons in very many of the other flats in the
16 building; would you agree?

17 A. No, not necessarily. The reason I say that is because,
18 depending on where the -- the smoke -- smoke can go
19 anywhere, so at the end of the day smoke can -- it's
20 smoke that's gonna reach you first, isn't it? Smoke was
21 all along that -- that landing, as you can see on the
22 left-hand side to it, smoke's coming out the end. There
23 is a greater danger of fire, but not necessarily smoke.

24 Q. Okay, so they're in greater danger of fire than persons
25 in many other flats?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. I think you just made the point before that that smoke
3 is coming out of the end of the building.

4 A. Yes, and it was coming out pretty thick.

5 Q. It was coming pretty thickly along the corridor which
6 their flat is on.

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. That's not true of the other corridors, is it?

9 A. Sorry? Some are -- there was smoke coming out of all
10 the corridors, but that one was pretty thick.

11 Q. Thicker than the other corridors?

12 A. I can't remember how thick it was compared to the
13 others.

14 Q. When you were given this information by the man, was it
15 in your mind at all to personally pass it on to anybody?

16 A. I did pass it on to an officer.

17 Q. You did pass it on?

18 A. I did.

19 Q. Was it always your intention to do so?

20 A. Sorry?

21 Q. Was it always your intention to do so?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Given that it was your intention to do so, would it not
24 have been useful to have passed it on together with the
25 flat number?

1 A. I wasn't given a flat number, I was just told that --
2 they was having a conversation with the lady -- with
3 a lady, or his partner in that particular building where
4 there was a blue mattress.

5 Q. I follow that, but you're being accurately described the
6 precise position of the flat, aren't you --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. -- and you're going to have in your mind to pass that on
9 to somebody, it would have been possible for you to have
10 asked "What flat number is it?" wouldn't it?

11 A. Well, no because -- I could have, I suppose, yes, but,
12 at the end of the day, it was more to do with me passing
13 that conversation on to an officer. By the time I had
14 left that gentleman, he was already speaking to
15 an officer.

16 Q. Can you recall why you didn't ask him what flat number
17 he was pointing out?

18 A. Well, we was on our way round to the side of the
19 building to help out what needed -- basically what
20 needed helping round the other side. I had left the
21 gentleman in the officer's hands, so I was just
22 following the rest of my crew round to the other side.

23 Q. When you got round to the other side, I think you told
24 us the entry control point wasn't yet set up.

25 A. It wasn't yet set up, no.

1 Q. Who did you pass the information on to that you had just
2 been given by the man?

3 A. I'm not too sure on the officers, as I was doing an out
4 night duty. I was on an out duty, as they call it.
5 I was working at another station, so for me to give --
6 I couldn't tell what you officer it was at the time.

7 Q. Let me ask you then this way: did you tell one person or
8 more than one person?

9 A. When the gentleman had spoken to me, he spoke to me
10 with -- it was just -- it was me, and there was the rest
11 of the crew that I was with.

12 Q. When you passed the information on, did you tell one
13 person or more than one person?

14 A. I told one person, which was the officer.

15 Q. Did you choose this officer to tell for a particular
16 reason, because he was wearing something that indicated
17 a particular job that he was carrying out?

18 A. Sorry? I don't understand.

19 Q. Well, you chose to tell one person rather than several
20 people.

21 A. There was -- there was one officer. He was talking
22 to -- to somebody, and I passed the information --
23 I passed -- told the gentleman to talk to an officer.
24 By the time I had left he was already speaking to the
25 officer.

1 Q. No, you're misunderstanding me. I'm now asking you
2 about the occasion when you told an officer about what
3 the man had told you.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Yes?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. This is now on the other side of the building; is that
8 right?

9 A. This is on the -- the side of the building that we
10 approached. So as we're walking up, this is the
11 building that we can see, we're walking through a park.
12 As we're walking through the park, there's four of us
13 walking, myself -- five of us walking, sorry -- myself,
14 crew manager, watch officer, there was a driver and
15 there was another firefighter. We're walking across,
16 a man has approached me, I've listened to some of what
17 he -- what he said, ie that he's talking to his partner
18 in that particular room. I've then gave him -- given
19 him the information back to turn round and talk to the
20 other officer who was there, so he was talking to
21 an officer.

22 Q. I appreciate that, but I thought you said that a little
23 later on you yourself told an officer about this
24 conversation?

25 A. I spoke to the gentleman and told him to speak to the

1 officer.

2 Q. So are you saying that you did not yourself pass the
3 information on to anybody?

4 A. Information was "Guv'nor, this gentleman has got some
5 information", and he took the -- he took the
6 conversation.

7 Q. Let me ask you to have a look at your witness statement,
8 dated 10 August 2009, which starts at page 451 in the
9 statements bundle. (Handed)

10 Just take a moment and say if you recognise that as
11 your witness statement.

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. If you turn over the page to 452, in the penultimate
14 paragraph, the longest paragraph, you describe the
15 conversation you had with the man where he pointed out
16 to you the windows with the blue mattress.

17 A. Mm-hmm.

18 Q. Then the paragraph under that says this:

19 "I told him that I would pass the information on and
20 we would get a rescue crew to her as soon as we could,
21 because she appeared to be doing the right thing.
22 I passed the information on to a station manager
23 nearby."

24 A. Okay.

25 Q. Is that correct?

1 A. Yeah, that's the information that I gave. That's the
2 information that I gave, I spoke to -- sorry, I spoke
3 to -- I spoke to the gentleman, the gentleman -- I was
4 with a crew that I don't know, I'm working for them for
5 the day. I've took the information from the gentleman,
6 I've then turned round and I've told the guv'nor to talk
7 to him. The guv'nor spoke to him, asked to find out
8 what's going on. I've then passed the information on to
9 the officer.

10 Q. The "guv'nor", is that your watch manager?

11 A. That's the watch manager, officer, guv'nor. Sorry,
12 that's a brigade term.

13 Q. That's absolutely fine, I just want to be clear. So
14 that's Watch Manager Berry who had come with you from
15 New Cross Fire Station?

16 A. Answer: yes.

17 Q. But that's not what you say at the end of this
18 paragraph, you say:

19 "I passed the information on to a station manager
20 nearby. I have consulted the MOBIS end of incident
21 report and I think it was Station Manager Paul Glenny."

22 A. I never consulted the MOBIS.

23 Q. Would a station manager wear something different from
24 a watch manager so you would know --

25 A. Okay, sorry -- sorry to interrupt. Station Manager

1 Glenny was the officer round the other side of the
2 building, he wasn't the same officer.

3 Q. So did you tell Station Manager Glenny --

4 A. Answer: no.

5 Q. He didn't say anything about the conversation with the
6 man --

7 A. Answer: no.

8 Q. But there came a time when you went round to the side of
9 the building that Station Manager Glenny was on --

10 A. Answer: yes.

11 Q. -- which is the side where the entrance to the building
12 via the steps is located.

13 A. Answer: yes.

14 Q. Was it on that side of the building that you saw a man
15 on an upper floor balcony?

16 A. Answer: yes.

17 Q. When you saw him, were you on your own or were you with
18 the members of your crew?

19 A. I was with the members of my crew.

20 Q. What happened after you saw him?

21 A. After we went round and spoke to Station Manager Glenny,
22 as we was talking to him, we noticed -- we heard a --
23 a loud sort of scream, looked up, and there was
24 a gentleman who was gonna -- threatening to jump. At
25 that time we didn't know what floor it was, so, you

1 know, we was talking to the officer and in the end the
2 officer's told us to go up and -- and go and rescue him.

3 Q. Just pausing there, let me show you a photograph. This
4 is timed at 17.09. I'll put it up on the screen for
5 you. Do you see there that there's a man on the
6 balcony, there's a woman next to him, and he's holding
7 yellow material of some form?

8 A. Answer: yes.

9 Q. Does that refresh your memory of what you saw?

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. You were telling the court about the decision to go and
12 get them, in effect?

13 A. Mm-hmm.

14 Q. Can you assist us at all with whose decision it was to
15 go and get them?

16 A. The decision was Station Manager Glenny.

17 Q. Can I just ask you this: did you know his name at the
18 time and, if so, how?

19 A. Whose name?

20 Q. Station Manager Glenny?

21 A. No, no.

22 Q. So how do you know it was Station Manager Glenny?

23 A. Because I -- I knew afterwards that it was him. I met
24 Station -- Station Manager Glenny a few times, not
25 knowing his name, at Southwark -- Southwark training

1 ground. Afterwards, after the incident, it was told to
2 me that his name was Station Manager Glenny.

3 Q. You recognise him?

4 A. Yes, I recognise him.

5 Q. So you're confident that it was him?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Did he seem to you to have any particular job at that
8 moment in time? Was he wearing anything such as
9 a tabard to indicate what his role was?

10 A. Answer: no.

11 Q. Were you given a briefing before you went into the
12 building?

13 A. Answer: no.

14 Q. Not even by your crew manager?

15 A. Basically what happened was after -- while we was
16 talking to Station Manager Glenny, the gentleman
17 decided -- well, he was threatening to jump. I don't
18 know if you can see in some of your photos, but below
19 there was a fencing -- sharp fencing, so obviously if
20 he's gonna jump then we're thinking, you know, he's
21 gonna probably fall on the fencing. At that point
22 Station Manager Glenny said "Look, go and get him", so
23 myself, the crew manager, and two other firefighters
24 went into the building and gone and got him.

25 Q. Was anything said to you by way of instructions or

1 briefing or directions in addition to what you have just
2 told to the court?

3 A. No, we wasn't sure what floor he was on, we was just
4 told to get him, basically.

5 Q. In your own mind, was there any connection between the
6 man you could see on the balcony and what you had been
7 told on the other side of the building about the
8 occupants of the flat where the blue mattress was?

9 A. Answer: no.

10 Q. I'm going to ask you some questions about the time you
11 went into the building, but I need to show you a couple
12 of documents first. So, firstly, in the advocates'
13 bundles at page 1035, which is in file 3, it's on the
14 screen, but Mr Clark will give you a hard copy.
15 I suspect that it's not a document you've ever seen
16 before. (Handed)

17 Am I right, it's not something you've seen before?

18 A. No, I haven't seen this before, no.

19 Q. You're probably not familiar with the format of this
20 document.

21 A. No.

22 Q. Just to explain what it is, your breathing apparatus
23 sets were fitted with the bodyguard system, and one of
24 the things that it does is to record information
25 including start up times and when you go under air and

1 when you shut down, and what this document does is to
2 summarise that information for the crew from New Cross
3 that you were part of that day. You see the column
4 towards the right of the page, "Wearer name" and the
5 third name that we see is yours?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Then if we look across to the middle of the page, where
8 it says "From", our understanding is that the time we
9 should be looking at is the one in bold, so 17.06. I'll
10 show you another document now before I ask you
11 a question. If you look in the jury bundle at tab 14,
12 photograph 20, that is a BA entry control board, and if
13 you turn over the page to 21, you'll see an enlargement
14 of the photograph we've just seen on page 20. If you
15 look closely at the top yellow key tally, can you see
16 your name on it?

17 A. Answer: yes.

18 Q. If you look along your tally, can you see that it says
19 "17.14"?

20 A. Yes sir.

21 Q. That would perhaps appear to suggest that you went under
22 air at 17.06, but handed in your key tally at 17.14.
23 Can you help us at all with whether one of those times
24 you think is inaccurate, or whether there is
25 an explanation for that gap in time?

1 A. Okay. I can't honestly tell you what time -- I can't
2 honestly tell you what time I actually -- we went in.
3 While we was talking to Station Manager Glenny, we had
4 our sets on, when he -- at the end.

5 At the time there was no BA board set up at all.
6 When he said that we should go and get him, he took our
7 tallies, he took our keys, because there's keys on the
8 side of the tallies, he took the keys, he said -- took
9 the keys, and then we went in. So it was Station
10 Manager Glenny who put the time, maybe put -- I can't
11 say he put the times on, but at that particular time we
12 didn't put -- we didn't go to the entry control point
13 'cos there wasn't one. So he took our keys, so I don't
14 know who put the times in.

15 Q. When you said a moment ago that when you were talking to
16 Station Manager Glenny you had your sets on, do you mean
17 by that that you were under air?

18 A. No, no, at the time we had our BA sets on. We just had
19 it in standby mode.

20 Q. After you had handed in your tallies, what did you do
21 next?

22 A. The four of us made our way into the building.

23 Q. Just pause there, I'll show you a photograph of the
24 stairs. Does that refresh your memory, photograph 6?

25 A. Yes, it does.

1 Q. From the moment when you entered the building and began
2 to go up those stairs, were you using air?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Did you use air all the way up?

5 A. Answer: no.

6 Q. Why was that?

7 A. On our way up, when we got to the beginning -- beginning
8 part of the stairs, we saw another officer, don't know
9 the name. He asked us where we was going.

10 Q. Just pausing there. When you came across him, was he
11 somewhere that we can see on this photograph, or
12 somewhere else?

13 A. He was standing by the stairs.

14 Q. Thank you. What did he say?

15 A. He asked us where we was going to. We turned round and
16 we said to him that we was going to get the -- the
17 gentleman who was -- who was on the balcony. He then
18 turned round and said that we --

19 Q. Let me pause you there for a moment. When you said the
20 gentleman on the balcony, were you able to be any more
21 specific about that, which balcony, for example?

22 A. The -- the guy who was -- who was threatening to jump,
23 that's who we was going to.

24 Q. Are you able to give a floor number for where you were
25 going to?

1 A. Answer: no.

2 Q. Can you say then what he said to you?

3 A. The officer asked -- asked us where we was going, we
4 said that we was going to rescue the gentleman who was
5 threatening to jump, then the officer said, "There's
6 a lady in 52", either 52 or 56, one of the two, I'm not
7 too sure, but there was a lady in who was on the phone
8 who needed rescuing too. Our aim basically was to go
9 and get the gentleman.

10 Q. The officer you've just described by the stairs, are you
11 able to describe him further, by reference to his helmet
12 or any tabard he was wearing?

13 A. He just had a white helmet on.

14 Q. What does that mean: watch manager or above?

15 A. Watch manager or above.

16 Q. So you'd gone to the entrance to the building with one
17 set of instructions and you now, as you tell the court,
18 were being given different instructions?

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. Can you assist with what conversation, if any, took
21 place to decide which set of instructions to follow?

22 A. Sorry, can you say that again?

23 Q. You'd been given an instruction to go and rescue
24 somebody on the balcony. You then meet an officer with
25 a white helmet on who tells you to go instead to

1 flat 56. How does it work, do you just follow the last
2 set of instructions you're given or is there some
3 discussion about which set should be followed?

4 A. No, no, our instructions was to get the gentleman from
5 the -- what we found out later on, which was it was the
6 11th floor. On our way up the officer asked if we could
7 go to 56 -- I think it was 56 -- but our intention was
8 to get the gentleman on the 11th on our way up, we saw
9 56 --

10 Q. Just pause there. I don't want to be unfair to you,
11 because you're a firefighter and I'm conscious that you
12 had a crew manager with you in your group of four,
13 didn't you?

14 A. Answer: yes.

15 Q. I just want to know, at the point that you left the
16 officer in the white helmet, what was your understanding
17 of where you were meant to be going first?

18 A. To the 11th floor.

19 Q. Who told you that?

20 A. Station Manager Glenny. We didn't know at the time it
21 was the 11th floor, we was just told to rescue the
22 gentleman on the balcony.

23 Q. Let me take you to your statement at page 454 of the
24 statements bundle. At the top of the page it says:
25 "At the entrance of the building, which is situated

1 on the opposite side to Havil Street, I saw an officer
2 in a white hat. He asked us what our task was and we
3 told him we were going to retrieve a man from the
4 balcony on floor 11."

5 Pausing there, do you think that at that time you
6 did know that the floor you were going to was floor 11?

7 A. Answer: no.

8 Q. Did you have any idea what flat number you were going
9 to?

10 A. Answer: no.

11 Q. Then the next sentence reads as follows:

12 "He told us there was a woman trapped in flat 56 and
13 gave us instructions to get her first."

14 Is that your recollection?

15 A. Answer: yes.

16 Q. So that being the case, can I come back to the point
17 about when you left him and made your way up the stairs?
18 Was it your understanding that you were going first to
19 rescue the man on the balcony, and secondly to flat 56,
20 or firstly to flat 56 and secondly to the man on the
21 balcony?

22 A. Firstly to the man on the 11th floor. On our way up, we
23 saw flat 56 --

24 Q. I'm going to come to that, but the statement says that
25 the last instruction you were given was to go first to

1 flat 56. Can you assist the court with how it was that
2 your understanding was, even after that conversation,
3 that you were going first to the man on the balcony?

4 A. Well, there was four of us, so we could split up into --
5 into two crews -- two crews.

6 Q. At the point when you left the man in the white helmet,
7 was it your understanding that there was a plan to split
8 into two crews, or did that happen later?

9 A. When we was going up to -- our -- our initial task was
10 to go up to the 11th floor, which we didn't know it was
11 the 11th floor at the time. On the way up, we seen
12 an officer and he's asked us if we could go to flat 56.
13 On our way up to the 11th floor, we have seen flat 56.
14 Two of the -- two of our crew would have gone off to
15 flat 56, while the other two goes up to the 11th. We
16 work in crews of twos, so that's the reason being
17 (Inaudible).

18 Q. Help us with this if you can: you can take it from us
19 that flat 56 is at the very end of a corridor, so it
20 might be thought that it's not something that you could
21 come across by accident when trying to get to a balcony
22 high up in the building. Do you know how it is that
23 members of the crew came to arrive at flat 56?

24 A. As we were walking up the stairs, flat 56 was written on
25 the wall.

1 Q. Did all of you go to flat 56?

2 A. Answer: yes.

3 Q. Are you able to assist with why you all went there first
4 rather than going to the man on the balcony?

5 A. Flat 56 wasn't too far from where we was. We went in,
6 realised the woman was okay, and two of the crew took
7 the lady downstairs while me and the crew manager went
8 upstairs to the 11th.

9 Q. If you look at your statement at page 454, the fourth
10 paragraph says:

11 "We went up to flat 56. I believe it was on the 5th
12 floor. The flats were two storey maisonettes. They
13 were accessible on the lower floor from their front
14 doors running off the main internal landing or on their
15 upper floors from external walkways on either side of
16 the building."

17 There's quite a lot of information in that paragraph
18 about the layout of flats in the building. Are you able
19 to say when you first became aware of those matters, so
20 firstly when you first became aware that the flats were
21 maisonettes?

22 A. Sorry, I'm not understanding. You're saying that when
23 I -- when I went upstairs, can I explain what?

24 Q. Well, this is a paragraph describing getting to flat 56,
25 right? It starts by saying:

1 "We went up to flat 56."

2 Do you see that?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Then you include two sentences about the features of the

5 layout of Lakanal House, the first of which is that

6 they're two storey maisonettes, and so my question

7 firstly is: when did you become aware that the flats in

8 the building were maisonettes?

9 A. When we went into the lady's house.

10 Q. Then the paragraph goes on to say:

11 "They [the flats] were accessible on the lower floor

12 from their front doors running off the main internal

13 landing, or on their upper floors from external walk

14 ways from either side of the building."

15 When did you first become aware that the flats could

16 be accessed on their upper floors from external walk

17 ways?

18 A. When we went up -- as we was going upstairs, saw the

19 number on the side, went in, and went actually in the

20 front door, which I realised later on is the actual

21 front door, and the lady was upstairs, as you go in, you

22 go upstairs, she was on the phone speaking to her

23 daughter.

24 Q. So you went to the upper floor of her flat?

25 A. As you walked in, you sort of went up. As you go in you

1 sort of went up and she was there on the phone.

2 Q. Did you go upstairs in her flat?

3 A. We went up -- we went up some stairs, yes.

4 Q. This paragraph ends by saying that on their upper floors

5 the flats are accessible from walk ways on either side

6 of the building.

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. When did you become aware that the upper floors of the

9 flats extended the full width of the building and had

10 walk ways on either side?

11 A. The -- the lady who was on the phone, she was -- as you

12 went up the stairs, she was just there. The two -- the

13 two floors -- as for this written down here, the two

14 floors, there was one on the outside, which was like

15 a -- I didn't -- at first I didn't realise it was like

16 a back part, like a back part of the building.

17 I didn't -- I thought that was the front part, as you go

18 in. The inside part of the -- the stairway, I found out

19 later on that that is the actual front door, and the

20 back part outside was the back doors. When we went in,

21 the lady was upstairs on her phone. As soon as we saw

22 that she was on her phone and she was okay and one of my

23 crews, they was low on air, so they took her out and we

24 proceeded upstairs in the inside.

25 Q. Can you recall what conditions were like on the corridor

1 which flat 56 was on?

2 A. Smokey, but not as smokey as -- it was more smokey

3 obviously as we was going up.

4 Q. I think it's right that one of your crew member's

5 whistle went off, and that was the driver, Firefighter

6 Hull; do you recall that?

7 A. The whistle that gone off, it was going -- well, she was

8 low on air, she was low on air and the whistle was about

9 to go.

10 Q. Is the whistle the same thing as the automatic distress

11 signal unit?

12 A. Answer: no. The same -- the -- the BA sets now, it's

13 all on the same --

14 Q. Don't worry about now, just stick to then?

15 A. Okay, back then --

16 Q. Something different?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. I think it's right that two of your crew members

19 assisted the woman in flat 56 out of the building, but

20 you and your crew manager Mr Ford made your way up to

21 try to find the man on the balcony?

22 A. Answer: yes.

23 Q. As you went up the staircase, what were conditions like?

24 A. They was getting worse as we was going up. As we was

25 going upstairs, it was getting worse.

1 Q. How did you manage to find the man on the balcony?

2 A. As we was going upstairs we had to -- if we'd have gone
3 to the 11th floor straightaway, we would have been out
4 of air. It's not a procedure that we do pretty --
5 pretty sort of like -- we sort of broke rules in -- in
6 a sense, but we -- we took our sets off so we could get
7 to the top. We didn't actually know where the gentleman
8 was, so every time we went up that side of the building,
9 we looked through, there was like a metal door with
10 a glass panel in it, glass wired panel, so we was
11 looking through the glass wire panel to see if that was
12 the floor.

13 Q. I'll pause you there to try and find a photograph that
14 may help you. It's a slightly difficult photograph to
15 get your head around, because it's taken from above, but
16 the white door that one can see there is a door that
17 leads out immediately onto a balcony, and if I show you
18 now photograph 37, that's the other side of the same
19 type of door. Does that help you to remember what you
20 did?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Do you recall going through one or more doors like the
23 one we see in photo 41?

24 A. We went through quite a few doors before we got to him,
25 because we didn't know which level he was on.

1 Q. Did you have any difficulties getting through those
2 doors, any particular delays?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. What were the difficulties?

5 A. Difficulties going trying to get through the little --
6 small -- small window. It didn't have a handle on the
7 other side, so we had to smash the -- the window to try
8 to and get through.

9 Q. Did that delay you much?

10 A. Answer: yes.

11 Q. Can you estimate by how long?

12 A. It was quite some time, because it's only a small
13 window, and trying to -- trying to look through it with
14 all the smoke, we couldn't see. The only way we could
15 see on what floor he was on, because -- because of
16 the -- the curtains or the bed sheets that he had
17 dropped down.

18 Q. Can you remember how many doors like that you broke
19 through before you came to the correct one where the man
20 was on the balcony?

21 A. Probably about three.

22 Q. There came a time when you found the correct door, like
23 the one in photograph 41, and were able to see the man
24 on the balcony, is that right?

25 A. Answer: yes.

1 Q. Can you recall what conditions were like on that
2 balcony?

3 A. Conditions were very smokey, very dangerous, as the fire
4 was -- it was right there too, we didn't have -- at the
5 time we didn't have no extinguish -- no water or
6 anything. As we got to the door, we couldn't break in,
7 couldn't get through that door, but the gentleman had
8 seen us, and risked basically running through past the
9 fire to open the door.

10 Q. So he let you in?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Was there any fire on the balcony? You told us there
13 was smoke, but were there any flames?

14 A. To be honest with you I can't remember. I mean, there
15 wasn't -- if there was flames then it wasn't massive,
16 massive amount of flames at the time.

17 Q. So shall we assume that the issue was smoke rather than
18 flames?

19 A. A lot of smoke, a lot.

20 Q. Was he alone on the balcony or were there others with
21 him?

22 A. At the time that we saw him, he was alone.

23 Q. Did you see others?

24 A. Answer: no.

25 Q. Later on, were there other people with him?

1 A. Yes. As -- when we got through the door, he's opened
2 the door so I've told him to come, and as he's -- as
3 he's coming, he's said no, no, hold on a minute, "Hold
4 on", he said "my wife, and then he's run back, I've
5 grabbed him and I've said no, no, let me go and get her,
6 and I -- me and the crew manager we've gone in because
7 it's quite small and with the BA sets it's quite -- it's
8 quite tight. So as we walked in, the wife's run out, we
9 thought it was just the wife -- we thought it was just
10 his wife, so we're walking backwards to take her out,
11 realising as well that there's two little ones as well,
12 two little girls.

13 Q. Looking back, do you think it may be that the wife and
14 two children were always on the balcony and you just
15 didn't see them at first?

16 A. Maybe, we just couldn't see.

17 Q. When you got the four of them together, what did you and
18 Crew Manager Ford do?

19 A. As we was -- as we got them all together, we had to back
20 out because, as I said, we couldn't turn round because
21 of the space. So we kind of walked backwards back
22 towards the -- the -- past the door a bit, where we was
23 going. We started taking them downstairs, and then the
24 lady said, as we was going down the stairs, the lady
25 said "There's -- there's children next door, there's

1 children next door".

2 Q. Did she say that quite soon after you began to go down
3 the stairs?

4 A. Answer: yes.

5 Q. Did she at any point say what flat she lived in?

6 A. Yes, she said -- I said -- she said -- I said where?
7 She said "81, 81". That's all she kept saying, was "81,
8 81".

9 Q. At that time, did "81" mean anything to you?

10 A. Answer: no.

11 Q. Does it follow from that that, at the time, you didn't
12 connect it with the flat where you'd seen the blue
13 mattress in the window?

14 A. At the time, no.

15 Q. Did there come a time when either your whistle or your
16 colleague Crew Manager Ford's whistle went off?

17 A. Yes, when we got the -- the gentleman and his family to
18 a safe area, as she explained that there was kids in 81,
19 myself and the crew manager went towards 81, and as we
20 was going towards 81 my whistle -- my warning whistle
21 went, so the crew manager said to me, "Look, there's
22 more crews coming up, we'll tell them on the way up; as
23 we're going down we'll tell them as they're making their
24 way up."

25 Q. So as far as you can recall, whose decision was it to go

1 down at that stage rather than go back to flat 81?

2 A. The decision was the crew manager's and myself's.

3 Q. What does the whistle going off indicate?

4 A. Indicates that you've only got a certain amount of time

5 before you're out of air and once you're out of air then

6 you basically suffocate.

7 Q. Of course. If I could ask you to have a look at

8 page 1035 in the advocates' bundles.

9 THE CORONER: I think you might have it on the table there,

10 Mr Field.

11 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: You can see it on the screen.

12 A. Oh, okay.

13 Q. If you look on the screen, do you have that open in

14 front of you as well?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. I haven't asked anyone about this before, and you may

17 not be able to help us with it, but I'll ask you and

18 we'll see how we get on. Do you see that there's

19 a column that's headed "Pressure (Bars)"?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Then under it, it has three columns. It has "Start" and

22 "Finish" and "Used", and "Used" appears to be

23 essentially a subtraction of the finish figure from the

24 start figure. If you look at the "start" column, can

25 you see that there are variations in the figure in the

1 start column, so they don't all start at exactly the
2 same pressure, these breathing apparatus sets?

3 A. Answer: no.

4 Q. Is that something that was known at the time that they
5 might all start with different pressures?

6 A. Beginning of a shift, we do a test on our BA sets,
7 breathing apparatus sets. As long as you've got more
8 than 180 at the time the set's -- as long as you've got
9 more than 180, then, you know, it's passed a test.

10 Q. I understand, but would I be right in thinking that the
11 amount of pressure is directly connected to how much air
12 you can use before the whistle goes?

13 A. Answer: yes.

14 Q. So if you have two crew members starting with different
15 amounts of pressure, then the ability of the crew to
16 engage in tasks while wearing breathing apparatus will
17 be fixed by which member has the lower pressure at the
18 start, because as soon as their whistle goes, you're
19 both going to have to withdraw; is that right?

20 A. Yes, but depending on that -- depending on how hard
21 you're working, if me and yourself go into -- if we got
22 the same amount of pressure in and we're going into
23 a job, my air will probably last a lot less than yours,
24 being the size of you, depending on how much you're
25 working, your work rate. So it kind of goes up and

1 down, depending on your work rate.

2 Q. I appreciate that, but you were with Mr Ford, and you
3 started with a pressure of 182 and he started with one
4 of 211.

5 A. Mm-hmm.

6 Q. There came a time when your whistle went and the two of
7 you withdrew, and by the time you shut down you had
8 23 bars left but Mr Ford had 66 bars, you see?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Did you accompany the family all the way down the stairs
11 out of the building?

12 A. Yes. I -- I -- when we was coming down -- when we was
13 coming actually down the stairs, the gentleman, he kind
14 of ran off. I picked up the two kids, I had the two
15 kids under my arms and the crew manager -- the lady
16 collapsed, so the crew manager had to basically pick her
17 up and carry her down the stairs.

18 Q. I imagine it must have been very hard work carrying two
19 children down the stairs?

20 A. Yeah, considering, you know, that your whistle's going
21 and at any time your cylinder could be finished.

22 Q. Did you come across any other crews on the stairs?

23 A. We came across two crews and explained to them that they
24 need to go to 81.

25 Q. Was anything further said other than "Go to 81"?

1 A. We was just told -- we just told them "Go to 81, 81" and
2 that was it.

3 Q. When you got out of the building, did you make sure that
4 the children you'd carried down were taken to member of
5 the London Ambulance Service so they could be treated?

6 A. I -- by the time I got down to the -- the bottom of the
7 stairs, firefighters was already there waiting to take
8 the casualties from -- from myself and from the crew
9 manager. We -- the first thing that we had to do after
10 we had given in the casualties was to -- by then the BA
11 control -- entry control had been set up, so we went and
12 got our keys to shut down our sets, because we was -- by
13 the time we was both on whistle.

14 Q. Did you and Crew Manager Ford shut down together?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Were you debriefed or asked anything about what you had
17 done, what you had found?

18 A. Again, another officer who was standing by the entry
19 control point asked me what had happened, what did
20 I see, what did I do. I told him what we had done,
21 where we went, and told him that we need someone up at
22 81.

23 Q. I think you remained on duty until around 2030 hours; is
24 that right?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. My final question is this: looking back on the events of
2 that afternoon and your involvement, the tasks that you
3 were given, what single additional thing would have most
4 helped you to carry out the tasks that were given to
5 you?

6 A. I mean, there's not much I could have really -- I mean
7 there's not much I could have done more. I suppose we
8 could have gone into 81, but then would I have come out
9 as well? So I --

10 Q. That's not what I was asking.

11 A. Sir, there's nothing more really I could have done.

12 Q. I'm not suggesting there was more you could have done,
13 I was asking whether there was something additional that
14 could have helped you with what were asked about, so it
15 could be additional resources or additional information
16 or briefing or training.

17 A. Information would have been -- information by someone
18 who's in the flats or someone who knows the building,
19 someone who knows the area, that would have been a lot
20 better.

21 Q. Thank you very much, those are my questions, but it's
22 likely that some others will have some questions for
23 you.

24 A. Okay.

25 THE CORONER: Mr Hendy?

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Questions by MR HENDY

MR HENDY: Thank you, madam. Mr Field, my name's Hendy,
I represent some of the bereaved.

Mr Maxwell-Scott's pointed out that in the sequence
of events your appliance is recorded as having mobilised
at 16.38.56, so just short of 16.39. Can I just take
you to your witness statement, please, at 451. There we
see at the bottom of the page that somebody has written
on your behalf:

"We arrived at the command unit in Havil Street only
a couple of minutes after receiving the call. We were
one of the first six units to arrive."

Is that correct?

A. Answer: yes.

Q. Does it follow, therefore, that if Mr Maxwell-Scott was
to put into his sequence of events that your appliance
E381 arrived at some point between 16.41 and 16.42, he
would more or less be right?

A. Answer: yes.

Q. Can we look at your witness statement at 452. There
were a couple of sentences at the end which you felt
were not true and accurate, so I want to just confirm
with you other parts of this page to see whether your
recollection now is that they were correct or not.
Let's go to the third paragraph, the one that begins:

1 "On Dalwood Street, about halfway between
2 Havil Street and Lakanal House, the New Cross watch
3 manager, who I now know was called Ian Berry, was
4 approached by a man I would describe as Italian looking,
5 he was about 5 foot 10 and wearing a red shirt."

6 Is that correct?

7 A. Answer: yes. I can't remember if he was wearing a red
8 shirt. But answer: yes.

9 Q. We think that might be Mr Rafael Cervi, he is here now.
10 Could you just stand up?

11 I don't know whether you recall his face from --

12 A. I can't remember, to be honest with you.

13 Q. You can't remember, entirely understandable. If I read
14 on:

15 "He was holding on mobile phone in his hand up to
16 his ear and he appeared to have someone on the line."

17 Correct?

18 A. Answer: yes.

19 Q. "My watch manager", that's Mr Ford, yes?

20 A. No.

21 Q. Sorry, who was your watch manager?

22 A. I'm not sure who my watch manager was, I was standby.

23 Q. Okay. Let's read on:

24 "My watch manager was being called to the building
25 by another watch manager further down the road, so my

1 watch manager asked me to see what the gentleman
2 wanted."

3 Are those two statements correct?

4 A. Answer: yes.

5 Q. "Although the man wasn't shouting and screaming, he was
6 visibly concerned. Due to his accent and because he was
7 beginning to panic it was quite difficult to understand
8 what he was saying, but I was able to ascertain that he
9 was on the phone to his wife."

10 All that's correct, yes?

11 A. Answer: yes.

12 Q. "She was in the building and the fire was spreading
13 towards her. She was in the bathroom in one of the
14 flats."

15 All that's correct?

16 A. Answer: yes.

17 Q. "She had blocked the bottom of the door with a towel."

18 Yes? That's what he told you?

19 A. That's what he -- yeah.

20 Q. "I asked him where and he pointed up to one of the
21 windows. I established that the woman was in a flat
22 that was two windows to the left of the blue mattress at
23 the same level as the top of the fire."

24 Yes?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. We've looked at one photo, can we just look again at the
2 series of photos in divider 12 in the jury bundle and
3 look at page -- 18 is the one you were asked to look at,
4 we'll start there and work backwards. You've shown the
5 jury the blue mattress in the fourth set of three
6 windows from the left, and the third of those three
7 windows, right?

8 A. The fourth one, yes.

9 Q. Yes. Can we see it again if we turn to page 16? This
10 photograph was taken a minute or so earlier, or perhaps
11 less than a minute earlier. We see the mattress there.
12 That's what he was pointing to, and that's what you saw?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. If you look at page 70, we can see the fire in, as we
15 now know it to be, flat 79, and the gutted remains of
16 flat 65 below it, and we can see what you were referring
17 to when you said the fire was spreading towards her,
18 because if you look right at the left-hand side, can you
19 just see the edge of that mattress?

20 A. Answer: yes.

21 Q. We can see the fire was spreading towards her, correct,
22 spreading towards that flat, let's say?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Yes. Clearly she was in a position of danger, do you
25 agree?

1 A. Answer: yes.

2 Q. Going back to your statement at 452, if we read the
3 bottom paragraph:

4 "I told him that I would pass the information on and
5 we would get a rescue crew to her as soon as we could
6 because she appeared to be doing the right thing."

7 Is that statement true or false?

8 A. That statement is not -- is not how it is written there.

9 Q. Tell us what actually happened?

10 A. I spoke to the gentleman, spoke to the gentleman and the
11 gentleman explained everything down to that part there.
12 We was walking as a crew round the corner, the
13 gentleman's approached -- approached me. I've said
14 to -- said to the gentleman -- well, that he needs to
15 explain it to an officer. I've told the officer, "This
16 gentleman has got something to talk to you about, blah
17 blah blah," for him to (Inaudible) go and explain it to
18 the -- the officer. The officer was talking to another
19 officer at the time, headed towards the front of the
20 building. That's the last I remember of me speaking to
21 the gentleman.

22 Q. Who was the officer?

23 A. I'm not too sure who the officer was at the time.

24 Q. Was your watch manager back with you at that time?

25 A. He was with us at the time, yes.

1 Q. So it wasn't him?

2 A. It wasn't him, no.

3 Q. What about the statement "we would get a rescue crew to
4 her as soon as we could"?

5 A. Answer: yes.

6 Q. You said that to him?

7 A. Answer: yes.

8 Q. What about "she appeared to be doing the right thing"?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Did you say that to him?

11 A. Answer: yes.

12 Q. As you introduced him to the officer, did you explain to
13 the officer that she was in the flat upstairs with the
14 blue matt recess in the window and pointed that out to
15 him so he knew?

16 A. I pointed that out to the officer, yes.

17 Q. So he could see that that was the flat adjacent to where
18 the fire was raging?

19 A. Answer: yes.

20 Q. The next two sentences in your statement, let's just
21 read them:

22 "I passed the information on to a station manager
23 nearby."

24 Is that correct or not correct?

25 A. I passed it on to a watch manager, it wasn't a station

1 manager.

2 Q. Right. When you say "passed the information on", you
3 mean the conversation that you've just described to the
4 jury, introducing Mr Cervi to the watch manager,
5 pointing out to the watch manager where the flat was?

6 A. Answer: yes, I told the watch manager that there was
7 a lady in the window where the blue mattress is.

8 Q. The last sentence on the page:
9 "I have consulted the MOBIS end of incident report."
10 That's untrue, you didn't?

11 A. I didn't.

12 Q. It's also untrue that you thought that it was Station
13 Manager Glenny, because you say he was round the other
14 side?

15 A. Station Manager Glenny was on the corner -- he was
16 actually on the corner at the time.

17 Q. Thank you.

18 A. Station Manager Glenny was the one who told us to --
19 took our keys for us to go upstairs.

20 Q. When you went round the other side of the block of
21 flats, you saw the man tying bed sheets together as if
22 to make a rope to climb down the building, and Station
23 Manager Glenny tells your crew to get your breathing
24 apparatus on and go up and get the man.

25 A. Answer: yes.

1 Q. The fear was that he was going to jump from the balcony.

2 A. Yes sir.

3 Q. Did you or any of your crew count the floors to see
4 which floor the balcony that he was standing on was on?

5 A. We tried to, we tried to count them, but the way the
6 flats are situated it's kind of hard, because of how --
7 how it goes up. It looks -- it looks like it's like
8 a 8th floor or 7th floor, but really it's like the 11th,
9 because it sort of goes in a zigzag.

10 Q. The closer you are to the building, the more difficult
11 it is to work out which floor is which.

12 A. It's quite difficult to find out, yes.

13 Q. So you had a go but you couldn't be sure, you just knew
14 it was high up the building.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. At the bottom of your page 453, in the last few lines,
17 you explain how your BA sets were turned off to save
18 air. You say:

19 "However, it was apparent to my crew manager that we
20 weren't going to get up to the 11th floor if we had them
21 [BA sets] switched on the whole way. He instructed us
22 to turn them off until we needed them, about three
23 flights of stairs up the building."

24 Did he say anything about the 11th floor, or was it
25 the 11th floor that he had in mind as the target?

1 A. To be honest with you he didn't actually know which
2 floor it was actually on.

3 Q. But did he think it was around the 11th floor?

4 A. I'm not sure.

5 Q. I should say that we now know that that balcony was in
6 fact on the 12th floor rather than the 11th, that's not
7 important.

8 A. Okay.

9 Q. You were given other instructions to rescue a lady at
10 flat 56, and as you were climbing the stairs you see
11 a sign telling you where flat 56 is, and you said to
12 Mr Maxwell-Scott that it would have been possible to
13 split your crew, two and two, two to perform the rescue
14 and two to go up to the man on the balcony, yes?

15 A. Answer: yes.

16 Q. But in fact all four of you went to flat 56.
17 I appreciate the instructions came from the crew manager
18 and you were there simply to do what you were told, but
19 with hindsight, might it not have been wiser to have
20 split the crew so as to save time getting to the man on
21 the balcony?

22 A. In a situation like that, it's quite hard to -- for the
23 crew manager to make a decision in the -- you just --
24 just want to rescue people.

25 Q. If we just look at jury bundle tab 11 at page 1, I don't

1 suppose you will have seen this, Mr Field, before, but
2 this is a diagram of the layout of the flats, and we can
3 see flat 56 there on the extreme left in the middle of
4 the page, yes?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. So that 56 couldn't be further from the central
7 staircase on that side of the corridor, do you agree?

8 A. Yeah, I agree, it must have been 52, then. I did say it
9 was either 52 or 56.

10 Q. We also see that flat 56 was on the 8th floor, which was
11 one of the floors which was not penetrated by fire, and
12 of course you would have realised that as you walked
13 down the corridor, that although there was a bit of
14 smoke, there was no fire anywhere to be seen?

15 A. There wasn't no fire, but as I said already, the smoke,
16 and there's an elderly woman.

17 Q. There were no hoses going to that floor?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Of course you didn't know what the circumstances of the
20 lady in 56 were, but would you agree with me, on the
21 face of it, when you looked down that corridor to see
22 where flat 56 was, it wasn't apparent that her need
23 would be more urgent than a man who was thought just
24 about to be jumping off a balcony?

25 A. Correct.

1 Q. You had difficulty getting to the balcony on the 11th
2 floor, you had to break through security doors on, you
3 think, now three levels?

4 A. Three levels, yes sir.

5 Q. Yes, and that was because your fireman's keys weren't
6 successful in freeing those doors?

7 A. I can't answer that, we didn't have no equipment.

8 Q. Not even --

9 A. We didn't have no keys.

10 Q. No keys at all. So you had no option but to smash the
11 doors to get through?

12 A. Yes sir.

13 Q. You carried out the rescue of the man and his family.
14 You were told by the lady that there were kids in number
15 81, you want to try and get back to rescue them. Can
16 I just ask you this: if you'd had sufficient air to go
17 back and rescue them, would you have gone back the same
18 way, in other words along the balcony that you have just
19 taken them out of?

20 A. To be honest, I didn't realise, I thought that was the
21 actual way.

22 Q. You thought that was the main entrance?

23 A. That's how I could see, so that's as far as I knew. If
24 I'd had air, if I had the air, I would -- to be honest
25 with you, we both wanted to go in, we both wanted to go

1 into 81, but our whistles was going off.

2 Q. Mr Field, no criticism, we all understand that you did
3 whatever you conceivably could, but I'm just interested
4 to know how you would have done it, you would have
5 retraced your steps onto that balcony and gone through
6 the doorway of the -- what, the second flat along?

7 A. How it was -- when we -- when we got there for the
8 gentleman and his wife and his two kids out, myself --
9 I told -- told hem to make their way downstairs from
10 inside, it was smokey but it wasn't smoke like really,
11 really smokey. The gentleman didn't want to go, and as
12 we started to make our way down, whistles went and the
13 gentleman was still standing there, we didn't realise
14 that he was still standing there with his -- with his
15 family. As soon as we came back, he went down the
16 stairs and we had to rescue the other three.

17 Q. I understand that, Mr Field --

18 A. But he would of, we would have went that way, we would
19 of went that way, that's because the lady said there's
20 children in 81, that's the way she pointed.

21 Q. You would have followed your footsteps back and gone
22 thought the doorway of the flat that they'd come out of
23 and tried to make a rescue there, had enough air?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. When you came up to that balcony, because we know that

1 balcony was on the 12th floor, you must have gone past
2 the landing on the 11th floor. Of course, you're in the
3 stairwell rather than the lobby, and when you came down
4 from the 12th floor, again you were in the stairwell and
5 not in the lobby, but on the 11th floor, did you notice
6 any signs of fire as you came up or as you came down
7 again?

8 A. Answer: no. Because they was -- they was fighting the
9 fire from the other side of the building, so we
10 didn't -- didn't see no fire on the way down.

11 Q. I think that's everything. Would you just give me one
12 moment, Mr Field. (Pause)

13 Thank you very much.

14 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Dowden?

15 MR DOWDEN: No, thank you.

16 THE CORONER: Thank you. Ms Al Tai?

17 MS AL TAI: No, thank you madam.

18 THE CORONER: Members of the jury?

19 Questions from THE JURY

20 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you, Madam Coroner, we do
21 have a couple. Mr Field, you were saying earlier that
22 you found flat 56 because it was written on the wall.
23 We've heard from some of your colleagues that it was
24 necessary at one point to write numbers on flats with
25 a red marking crayon I think it was. So was -- when you

1 say it was written on the wall, are you referring to
2 a real sign, or was it written there --

3 A. No, it was a plaque, a plaque.

4 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: It was a plaque?

5 A. Yes.

6 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay, thank you. I realise you
7 had to leave and couldn't do much about that, but it
8 sounds as though your crew manager was able to tell you
9 that there definitely were more crews on the way. At
10 this point, who had the comms set in your crew, and if
11 it wasn't one of the two of you, yourself or your crew
12 manager, were you able to communicate with, for
13 instance, the entry control people on the ground to
14 confirm that there were crews coming up?

15 A. Answer: no. At the time we didn't know that there was
16 a -- an entry control point. On the way down we did see
17 two crews and we did explain to them that -- to go to
18 81.

19 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: But at the point of leaving, you
20 couldn't actually be sure until you saw those crews
21 yourself that there was somebody coming up? It was
22 something that you assumed would happen, rather than you
23 knew.

24 A. Yeah, we didn't know there was -- well, we knew there
25 was crews getting ready to come up, but we didn't know

1 there was crews actually on their way up as we was
2 coming down.

3 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay, thank you very much.

4 THE CORONER: Mr Field, thank you very much for coming,
5 I think all of us in the room appreciate you were coping
6 with very difficult circumstances.

7 A. Thank you, madam.

8 THE CORONER: Thank you for the evidence that you've given
9 to us, thank you.

10 (The witness withdrew)

11 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Maxwell-Scott.

12 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Madam, I know that it's 3.30.

13 THE CORONER: Yes.

14 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I wonder if you might want to take
15 a short break while I ascertain the availability of
16 Mr Ford tomorrow. I understand Mr Ford is available
17 tomorrow, so it's a matter for you, madam, whether you
18 want to start him for a few minutes, or take a break and
19 then start him, or start him tomorrow morning.

20 THE CORONER: Let's have a very short break and then maybe
21 make a start with Mr Ford, since he's been able to come
22 today, and then I doubt we'll finish, but we'll be able
23 to continue tomorrow morning, thank you very much.

24 Right, members of the jury, do you want to have
25 a five minute break? Thank you.

1 (In the absence of the Jury)

2 THE CORONER: We'll aim to finish Mr Ford at about 3.50,
3 something like that. Thank you.

4 (3.32 pm)

5 (A short break)

6 (3.38 pm)

7 THE CORONER: The break ran on a bit, so we will carry on
8 until 3.55.

9 (In the presence of the Jury)

10 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

11 DAVID FORD (sworn)

12 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Ford, is it?

13 A. It is.

14 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you, do sit down. Help yourself to
15 a glass of water. Mr Ford, your voice is quite soft.
16 Could you please keep it up so we can all hear what
17 you're saying.

18 A. Yeah, certainly.

19 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Mr Maxwell-Scott is
20 standing, he's going to ask you questions and there may
21 be questions from others --

22 A. Sure.

23 THE CORONER: -- but we may not get to that until tomorrow
24 morning.

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Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

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

A. David Ford.

Q. I'm going to be asking you questions about your involvement in firefighting and search and rescue on 3 July 2009. Is it right that at that time you were a crew manager based at New Cross Fire Station --

A. That's correct.

Q. -- on pump ladder Echo 381?

A. That's correct.

Q. There came a time when you were mobilised to attend a fire at Lakanal House in Camberwell?

A. Yeah.

THE CORONER: Can you keep your voice up, please, Mr Ford?

A. Yes.

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Just dealing with when that was and when your appliance began the journey to Lakanal House, if you look in the advocates' bundles at page 934 in file 3, it's very small on the screen, but if you look in that bottom third of the page, "Resource status changes", you see there's a large number of units mobilised at 16.38.56 --

A. Yes.

Q. -- the third of which is E381.

1 A. Yeah, I can see it.

2 Q. I've highlighted it on the screen in blue. That is
3 recorded on this document as being mobile at 16.44.01;
4 do you see that?

5 A. Yeah, I see it.

6 Q. Would that indicate in effect that is when the wheels
7 are turning?

8 A. Yeah, I would imagine so.

9 Q. Are you able to assist the court with how long it would
10 take -- indeed, if you can recall how long it did
11 take -- to get from New Cross Fire Station to
12 Lakanal House using, I presume, blue lights and sirens?

13 A. No more than five minutes.

14 Q. Thank you. When you got to Lakanal House, did there
15 come a point when you and your crew members were
16 approached by a gentleman who said that his family were
17 in one of the flats in the building?

18 A. I remember seeing a gentlemen, yeah. I never spoke to
19 him.

20 Q. Do you recall any of your crew members looking as if
21 they were in conversation with him?

22 A. Very vaguely, Wayne, as in Field. Firefighter Field.

23 Q. Firefighter Field, right. Do you know what was said to
24 the gentleman?

25 A. No, I don't.

1 Q. I won't show you it for this question, but when you made
2 a statement on 14 July 2009, you said that he -- so the
3 man who referred to his family being in one of the
4 flats -- was directed to the officer in charge.

5 A. Yeah, I -- I remember him speaking to Wayne and maybe
6 one other. From what I could make out, 'cos it was like
7 to my left, it wasn't something I was actually involved
8 in, he was saying something about his wife and possibly
9 children upstairs in one of the flats, but all
10 I remember of it is the fact that he was directed to
11 a senior officer, because we was here and there was
12 a senior officer maybe, I don't know, 40/50 foot in
13 front of us, and he was directed towards them to give
14 the information. That's basically all I remember.

15 Q. The phrase used in your statement was "officer in
16 charge", is that a reference to the incident commander?

17 A. It could have possibly been, he was a senior officer, he
18 might have been in charge at the time, but possibly not.

19 Q. Did there then come a time when your attention was
20 attracted to shouting and screaming coming from the
21 other side of the building?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Did you and your crew make your way over there?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. You ran over there, I think?

1 A. Sorry, could you repeat that?

2 Q. You ran over, I think?

3 A. Yes, we run over there.

4 Q. What did you see when you got round there?

5 A. Well, as I looked up there was a gentleman which looked
6 like he had sheets tied together. There was a lot of
7 smoke coming out from where he was standing, basically
8 that was it.

9 Q. Was there any discussion between you and your crew
10 members about what you had seen, about the fact that
11 this man was on the balcony?

12 A. There was a senior officer in the vicinity that we
13 approached.

14 Q. When you say "we", who was "we"?

15 A. We as in the crew I was with. I don't remember exactly
16 if it was all four of us, or three, I'm not sure --
17 approached and said to him "Guv, is there something we
18 can do?" He looked up, he obviously knew the situation,
19 what was going on. He was a bit unsure at first,
20 because he'd just come round himself so he was still
21 assessing the situation, and then he -- then he said to
22 myself, "Can you -- I'm giving you a specific task to go
23 and rescue that gentleman". We said -- I remember
24 asking him, "Have you got floors, flat numbers, have you
25 got anything to help us?" and he went, "No, not really

1 at this moment, I'll try and get some if I can", and
2 then we tried counting the floors. As we was trying to
3 get ready at the same time.

4 You've got to realise this was in a very short
5 period of time, a very stressful situation, and we was
6 trying to do the best we can, with the limited
7 information that we had, which really basically was
8 counting the floors as we could and counting across and
9 then -- sorry, carry on.

10 Q. Just pausing there, the man you spoke to, the senior
11 officer, did you know who he was at the time?

12 A. I've seen him before and I have spoke to him, but
13 I didn't know his name at the time, I have since.

14 Q. Who was it?

15 A. Station Manager Glenny.

16 Q. Was he wearing anything to indicate that he had
17 a particular position or function on the fire ground?

18 A. I can't be sure, but I don't think so. It was too early
19 on for tabards and stuff like that.

20 Q. But the upshot was that you and your crew were sent to
21 rescue the man on the balcony --

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. -- and you were not told what floor he was on, as you
24 recall it.

25 A. As we made our way, we sort of went under air on the way

1 to -- to the staircase. There was -- there was a few
2 officers and senior -- there was -- there was a few
3 watch managers, maybe a crew manager, maybe a station
4 manager, were shouting floors and numbers at us. They
5 was all trying to help, but really, in reality, it just
6 made things worse, because they was all different, so
7 really we went with what we thought.

8 I think at the time we thought it was floor 7, and
9 it was about the fourth/third flat in, something along
10 them lines, but then there were people shouting out
11 other numbers, but we don't -- in my mind, I don't know
12 about anyone else, in my mind I was sticking with what
13 I had in my head.

14 Q. What was that?

15 A. That was the 7th floor and it was a flat third along.

16 I think me and Firefighter Hull spoke and we sort of
17 agreed that that looks about the obvious thing. We
18 had -- we had not been given anything to tell us
19 otherwise, other than people just shouting out what
20 seemed to be random numbers. No-one's come up to us and
21 said "Right, it's definitely here, it's definitely
22 that".

23 Q. Did you have any flat number in your head at the end of
24 all of that different information?

25 A. No, no flat numbers.

1 Q. Just on that point, do you recall making a statement on
2 14 July 2009?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. If I could ask for that to be shown to you. It starts
5 at page 460 in the statement bundle. (Handed)

6 Do you recognise that as your witness statement?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. If you turn over the page to 461 --

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. -- there's a long paragraph that starts towards the top
11 of the page and about eight lines in.

12 A. Yeah, I can see it, 80/81.

13 Q. It says:

14 "We asked the station manager, I think Station
15 Manager Glenn, if there were anything we could do."

16 You've jumped ahead to the point I was going to ask
17 you about, where you say:

18 "Another officer arrived, I can't remember who, but
19 they agreed with the task [rescuing the man from the
20 balcony] and told us it was the 6th floor and door 80 or
21 81. I can't remember which."

22 A. Yeah, all I can remember on the time is being given
23 a load of numbers. I do remember the -- given a floor
24 and a number, and as we went up the stairs, they
25 didn't -- they didn't tally, and that put a lot of doubt

1 in our minds if we was going to the right address, so
2 possibly -- I mean, this was a lot nearer to the time,
3 this is now like three/four years later.

4 Q. Of course.

5 A. So whatever's written here, I would stand by what's
6 written more than my memory now.

7 Q. Could I ask you to have a look at a photograph in the
8 jury bundle at tab 14, photograph 21. (Handed)

9 A. Yes, I can see it.

10 Q. It's an entry control board.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. It has inserted into it the tallies of you and your
13 three fellow crew members; do you see that?

14 A. Yeah, I see it.

15 Q. What I wanted to ask you about is do you see the column
16 where it says "Location of team".

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. In the box immediately underneath that against
19 Firefighter Field's tally, can you see what looks like
20 the letters "FLR", possibly, but then what looks like 81
21 and an arrow?

22 A. Yeah, it says floor something and then 81, yes.

23 Q. Can you assist at all with how that came to be written?

24 A. No, when we went into the job, the -- the ECO wasn't
25 actually set up at that stage. We handed our tallies to

1 someone, I can't remember who, so that would mean
2 nothing (Inaudible) reference to what we was doing.

3 Q. Do you think that would have been written after you had
4 gone in?

5 A. Quite possibly. But we was in radio contact, and
6 Firefighter Stevens had a comms set on, and a numerous
7 amount of times I -- she got back to the control to --
8 to verify numbers, and we was getting no help, it was
9 not particularly helpful.

10 Q. Just dealing with that point, were you getting
11 through -- as you understood it, was she getting
12 through?

13 A. Well, I wasn't actually on the radio.

14 Q. I appreciate that.

15 A. She said she was getting through but was given the
16 same -- I think what happened, somewhere along the line
17 that we've gone up the stairs and we met this other fire
18 officer, who I personally can't even remember, but he
19 threw another -- another set of numbers at us.

20 Q. Let me just --

21 A. Yeah, sorry, I'm going too far ahead.

22 Q. Pause there. Were you in court earlier to hear your
23 colleague give evidence?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. So you will have heard what he said about the officer in

1 the white helmet talking about flat 56. That's not in
2 your statement at all --

3 A. No, I remember it being said, but I don't think it was
4 said to me, because I think I must have passed the
5 gentleman at this time and he's told the crew behind me,
6 so it was almost like an afterthought, we've been given
7 a task to do, which the numbers didn't collate to what
8 was up at front of us, the floor number didn't work with
9 the door number, so we didn't know exactly -- we was
10 blind to where we had to go, 'cos the numbers never
11 tallied. So this other guy's come along, which I don't
12 know, 'cos I don't remember seeing him, he's -- I think
13 he spoke to -- sorry.

14 Q. You don't remember seeing him?

15 A. No, I don't remember him speaking to me, he might have
16 done --

17 THE CORONER: Mr Ford, can I just stop you, because
18 Mr Maxwell-Scott's trying to take it step by step, so
19 don't rush on too far, please.

20 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I understand that you don't remember
21 seeing him so let me ask you about it in this way:
22 there's four of you who go into the building as crew.

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. You're the crew manager.

25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. At the point where you start going up the stairs --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. -- where are the crew going, as far as you are

4 concerned?

5 A. The crew -- the crew at the time are following me.

6 Q. Right, but where are you taking them?

7 A. I'm taking them to what I believe to be flat 81 on the

8 7th floor, that's what I believe it to be.

9 Q. Not to flat 56?

10 A. No, and then I remember getting up -- so far up the

11 stairs that there was crews being evacuated at the same

12 time. So we're going up and there's crews being

13 evacuated, and one of the -- one of my crew said "I've

14 just spoken to a station officer", or someone, he said

15 "it's number 56". Well, we -- at this stage, the number

16 we had didn't collate to the floor we had, so we was

17 thinking "Now, is there a change -- another change in

18 this", 'cos nothing seemed to marry up.

19 Q. Just pausing there, when you heard "56", did you think

20 that that was the number for the man on the balcony?

21 A. Yes, yes, I did.

22 Q. So after you'd heard 56, where were you trying to get

23 the crew to?

24 A. I think we was probably on about, I don't know, 3rd/4th

25 floor at this stage, and then someone went, "Oh look,

1 there's a sign saying 56". Don't forget, we're under
2 air at this time, we've got BA on, so it's hard to
3 communicate, so I've gone to the crew, "Let's go to
4 flat 56, we're gonna pass it anyway, let's go to it",
5 and then we got to flat 56, and it was the --
6 a Caribbean lady who seemed to be all -- not really in
7 any distress on the phone.

8 Q. You'd all got to her by then?

9 A. We'd all got to her, yeah, it was pretty much at the
10 same sort of point that we sort of went off to that --
11 to her. We never had to knock any doors down, it sort
12 of opened up to us, so we took that route down to there
13 and at that stage I got there and I realised it wasn't
14 who we was supposed to -- to go and rescue.

15 Q. Until you saw her in the flat, when you went to the
16 flat, did you think there was a possibility you were
17 going to come across the man on the balcony?

18 A. At the time I thought possibly this is was the
19 gentleman. I didn't know it was a lady, all I knew was
20 56.

21 Q. Before you got to her in 56, were there any messages
22 you'd heard over the radio that appeared at all
23 significant?

24 A. Well, I never had a -- I never had a comms set, so this
25 was down to another firefighter with a comms set

1 relaying information. We did -- we did tell them what
2 we was doing, I went "We're going to flat 56", and
3 nothing came back, "Don't go to flat 56", so we went to
4 56. It was literally a two minute journey from where we
5 was, it was not out of our way.

6 Q. Can you recall what the conditions were like in the
7 corridor that led to flat 56?

8 A. What I vaguely remember of it, it wasn't too bad, but by
9 this stage I remember the doors of certain flats being
10 opened and I believe the air was just going through it,
11 so it had blown -- blown most of the smoke out, it
12 wasn't really a bad environment to be in, 'cos that's
13 when we -- well, that's when I decided the -- once we
14 got to there, that we'd take our sets -- undo our sets
15 to carry on, because it was breathable air.

16 Q. So which floors did you go up without using the air in
17 your breathing apparatus, can you remember?

18 A. I can't -- to be honest I can't remember. I remember
19 being in her flat, which was 56, whatever floor that was
20 on, it was fine. That's the first time we dropped our
21 air, that come off there, and from then on, I think
22 we -- I split the crew, which -- you shouldn't really
23 split a crew anyway, but it had to be done, because one
24 of the -- I think it was Firefighter Hull, was low on
25 air, so it just seemed the obvious thing to do is let

1 them take the woman down. So they took the woman down,
2 that left me and Firefighter Field.

3 At this stage I just said to him drop your air and
4 we'll try and conserve as much as we can, and we managed
5 to get back up -- back onto the landing, but I'd taken
6 over comms by this stage, I'd used a handheld radio, and
7 I informed entry control exactly what was going on,
8 I told them we was splitting the crew and we was going
9 to carry on up to flat 81. Whatever floor that was, we
10 didn't know. We asked for more information: "Can we
11 have a floor number?" Still no floor number.

12 Q. Do you know how many levels of floors you got up without
13 having to use air?

14 A. No, no I don't.

15 Q. We've reached the point now where the crew's been split
16 and Firefighters Hull and Stevens have gone down with
17 the woman from 56 --

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. -- and you and Firefighter Field were making your way
20 upstairs to try to find the man on the balcony, is that
21 right?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. Madam, I think that would be a convenient moment.

24 THE CORONER: Yes, that sounds like a convenient stopping
25 point. Mr Ford, I'm sorry we have to interrupt your

1 evidence for a break this evening. Are you able to come
2 back tomorrow morning?

3 A. Yes.

4 THE CORONER: If you could be here for 10 o'clock tomorrow,
5 thank you very much. The strict rule that I ask you to
6 observe is during the break you must not talk to anyone
7 about your evidence or indeed this matter.

8 A. Yes, madam.

9 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Members of the jury,
10 10 o'clock tomorrow morning, thank you very much.

11 Mr Ford, you're welcome to go now, thank you.

12 (The witness withdrew)

13 (In the absence of the Jury)

14 THE CORONER: Yes, so the evidence tomorrow then,
15 Mr Maxwell-Scott?

16 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: The evidence tomorrow will be to finish
17 Crew Manager Ford and then call Station Manager Glenny,
18 and then Dr Bierdrzycki is due to be here to give
19 evidence at 2 o'clock.

20 THE CORONER: Right. Okay, thank you very much. Does
21 anyone have any issues they need to raise? All right.
22 Thank you very much.

23 (4.02 pm)

24 (The Court adjourned until 10 o'clock the following day)

25 Housekeeping1

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DAY 18 OF TRANSCRIPTION OF THE
Lakana1 House Fire
Inquest (CORRECTED) 07/02/2013.