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Monday, 11 February 2013

(10.00 am)

(Proceedings delayed)

(10.20 am)

THE CORONER: Yes, good morning everybody. Are there any issues anybody wants to raise before the jury come in?

MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: No.

THE CORONER: Thank you. Could the jury come in, thank you.

(In the presence of the Jury)

THE CORONER: Members of the jury, good morning. We're beginning the evidence this week with evidence from Professor Bion. Would you come forward, Professor Bion.

PROFESSOR JULIAN BION (sworn)

THE CORONER: Thank you very much, Professor Bion. Do sit down. Do help yourself to a glass of water. You'll see that the microphone is switched on. You need to be fairly close to it for your voice to be amplified, thank you very much. Mr Maxwell-Scott, who is standing, will ask questions initially on my behalf and then there may be questions from others. Thank you.

Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

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

A. My name is Julian Fleetwood Bion.

Q. You're here to give expert evidence to the court in the

1 field of intensive care medicine and you've prepared
2 a report for the coroner dated 22 November 2012. I'll
3 just identify that now for everybody. The first page of
4 it is on the screen in front of you now. Can you
5 confirm that that is your expert report?

6 A. That is my report.

7 Q. If I ask you first briefly about your qualifications,
8 expertise and experience.

9 A. I qualified in 1976, University of London MBBS. My
10 qualifications are: Member of the Royal College of
11 Physicians, MRCP, Fellow of the Royal College of
12 Physicians, FRCP, Fellow of the Royal College of
13 Anaesthetists, FRCA. I'm Doctor of Medicine, MD,
14 University of London. I'm a foundation fellow of the
15 Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine.

16 Q. What current positions do you hold?

17 A. I'm the Professor of Intensive Care Medicine at the
18 University of Birmingham, Honorary Consultant of
19 Intensive Care Medicine and Senior Intensive Care
20 Consultant at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in
21 Birmingham. I'm the Foundation Dean of the UK Faculty
22 of Intensive Care Medicine, which is responsible for
23 trading standards, professional development and so on in
24 intensive care medicine, and I am the past president of
25 the European Society of Intensive Care Medicine.

1 Q. Are you still engaged in clinical duties in the
2 intensive care field?

3 A. Very much so. I'm on a full clinical rota as a clinical
4 academic, which means that I undertake 50 per cent
5 clinical work, 50 per cent academic work, and during my
6 clinical work I do 80 hours [sic] on my feet inside the
7 intensive care unit during the week, including nights,
8 weekends.

9 Q. Thank you.

10 A. I work in the largest intensive care unit in Europe,
11 with 100 beds and 4,000 admissions a year.

12 Q. You have been provided by the coroner with witness
13 statements relevant to the circumstances in which the
14 deceased were found and the attempts made to treat them
15 and also the post mortem reports into each of the
16 deceased; is that right?

17 A. I have.

18 Q. If I ask you to turn to page 3 of your report, you
19 summarise the key findings from the post mortem.
20 There's a table in your report, and it summarises some
21 of the evidence that we heard from the pathologist,
22 Dr Bierdrzycki, on Friday afternoon. Firstly, you note
23 that all six of the deceased had soot in airways as
24 a finding on post mortem; is that right?

25 A. That's correct. I wonder if you'd allow me just to

1 preface my remarks, coroner -- thank you very much --
2 just by saying for the benefit of the families that when
3 I give evidence, it's necessarily very dry and factual,
4 but reading through these accounts they were extremely
5 moving and I'd like to pass on my condolences, if I may,
6 to the family. So excuse me for that necessary
7 diversion.

8 THE CORONER: Thank you.

9 A. The answer is indeed there was soot in the airways of
10 all those who died.

11 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Briefly, what is the significance of
12 that?

13 A. It means that there's particulate material in the air
14 which is breathed in, but the implication is that this
15 was a very significant fire for that to have occurred
16 and it will be a common experience of everyone in this
17 court that swallowing, say, water inadvertently the
18 wrong way can produce a fit of choking, so you can
19 imagine that inhaling soot isn't something that you do
20 voluntarily and it's an expression of the severity of
21 the fire.

22 Q. Turning to your table, you summarise that all six of
23 those who died had a finding of pulmonary oedema on post
24 mortem. Can you say briefly what the significance of
25 that is?

1 A. The most likely cause for pulmonary oedema is the toxic
2 effects of smoke inhalation. Oedema simply means fluid
3 in the wrong place, swelling, so if you've been on
4 an aircraft for a long journey, your ankles swell.
5 That's oedema. Oedema in the lungs is much more
6 problematic than having swollen ankles because the fluid
7 gets in the way of gas transfer, the absorption of
8 oxygen into the bloodstream and the excretion of carbon
9 dioxide. So pulmonary oedema is a problem. It
10 represents leaky lungs. It means that the barrier
11 between the blood and the air sacs has been compromised,
12 and there are broadly two reasons why this would have
13 occurred. Top of the list is smoke inhalation. The
14 other is that these individuals, of course, all died and
15 during that process the lungs may have become slightly
16 water-logged anyway. But the main effect will be
17 attributable to smoke inhalation and thermal injury.

18 Q. Then you set out, in the next column on your table, the
19 different results from the toxicology investigations of
20 carbon monoxide levels, ranging from 23.8 per cent to
21 71 per cent. What I'd like to ask you next is to
22 explain to the members of the jury what the risks to
23 health are from exposure to fumes from a fire in a house
24 or a flat.

25 A. There are at least -- if I can put this into context

1 briefly. The big problem with being in a fire with
2 smoke inhalation is that it interferes with the amount
3 of oxygen available to the body, and there are at least
4 seven factors which contribute to the impairment of --
5 this thing is on the blink slightly. Can you hear me
6 all right?

7 THE CORONER: Yes.

8 A. -- the impairment of oxygen supply to the cells of the
9 body, and that occurs at three levels.

10 Mr Maxwell-Scott's asked me about the toxins
11 specifically, and there are two key toxins in the gas
12 which function at a metabolic level. So the three
13 levels are: environmental effects, the second is things
14 happening at the level of the lungs -- and you've asked
15 me about pulmonary oedema, excess fluid in the lungs --
16 and this is the third level, the sort of metabolic
17 level. The two gasses are carbon monoxide and hydrogen
18 cyanide. These two gasses interfere with the
19 availability of oxygen for the cells of the body.
20 Oxygen is the sort of fuel that keeps everything going,
21 and if you block the supply of the fuel then the cells
22 of the body grind to a halt.

23 So carbon monoxide is the first of these, and
24 probably, in this context, the more serious. Carbon
25 monoxide binds to haemoglobin, which is the pigment in

1 the blood carried in red blood cells, which normally
2 carries oxygen. If carbon monoxide sticks onto the
3 haemoglobin, then oxygen can't stick onto it, because
4 they stick on at the same place. So it prevents the red
5 cells from carrying oxygen.

6 Cyanide, on the other hand, damages the mitochondria
7 in cells, and the mitochondria is the powerhouse -- it's
8 the engine of cells -- and so if those stop working,
9 they're not able to use oxygen and the cells are
10 therefore starved of oxygen and grind to a halt. So
11 a combination of carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide is
12 potentially -- and in these cases, I'm confident, in
13 reality -- was lethal. It blocks oxygen carriage and it
14 blocks oxygen utilisation at the same time.

15 Q. Will there be other toxins in the fumes which may also
16 be a factor?

17 A. There are plenty of other unpleasant substances.
18 I could give you one as an example. If you ever buy
19 smoked cheese -- one of the cheaper brands of smoked
20 cheese -- they contain something called pyrolignic acid.
21 So gas contains acid substances. It contains other
22 toxins and free radicals which also act rather like acid
23 to damage surfaces and cells into which they come into
24 contact. So if you get these substances arriving in the
25 lungs, which are a very delicate structure, then that's

1 what causes the breakdown of the air sacs and allows
2 direct contact between the blood and the air-filled
3 spaces, so that the air-filled spaces become full of
4 fluid and the lungs therefore become water-logged.
5 Think of a sponge, one of those sort of natural
6 occurring sponges with lots of holes in. When you hold
7 it in your hand it's very light. If you put it into the
8 bath, squeeze it below, bring it up, it's very heavy,
9 and that's because it's full of water and that's what
10 will have happened to the lungs of the three adults and
11 the three children who died.

12 Q. What about the effects of heat or of the fact that the
13 smoke fumes themselves may be hot?

14 A. So this is the first level of where some of these
15 factors operate, the environmental level. First of all,
16 heat. We've all had the experience of being in
17 an environment that's hot, and some of us too hot, and
18 if you think back to the summer of -- I forget whether
19 it's 2006, a very hot summer, with temperatures in the
20 40s, in France 12,000 people died as a result of that
21 heatwave. So heat in itself can be a problem, and it
22 certainly causes heat stress to the body in a variety of
23 ways.

24 Then the fire will consume available oxygen and
25 generate carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is also the gas

1 that we breathe out and if you have too much of it in
2 the body then it makes you breathless in order to get
3 rid of it. So if you're in a environment where the
4 oxygen is being used up and there's too much carbon
5 dioxide, then you don't have enough oxygen getting into
6 the bloodstream and the effect of the carbon dioxide is
7 to make you breathe even faster when you don't want to,
8 because the air is so foul.

9 Q. I wanted to ask you next to imagine a scenario in which
10 people are exposed to fire fumes but at non-fatal
11 levels, and to ask you whether, even at non-fatal
12 levels, there would be an impact firstly on a person's
13 physical function and secondly on their mental function.

14 A. There will be, though I think the nature of the effect
15 will vary from individual to individual. So first of
16 all, if you're in an environment that's too hot, you
17 start to become irritable and if the temperature goes up
18 even higher you may start to become confused. Low
19 levels of smoke are pretty unpleasant. If anyone's been
20 near a bonfire and got a whole waft of smoke in your
21 face, you'll know that it makes you cough. And then
22 lower levels of carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide gas
23 will produce initially a degree of breathlessness, some
24 confusion, that sort of level of malfunction.

25 Q. Will there be a potential effect on coordination and

1 ability to move effectively?

2 A. At lower levels -- it depends, I think, primarily on how
3 much carbon monoxide there is, so if there's a certain
4 amount of carbon monoxide which you're breathing in,
5 then it could produce degrees of confusion, but it's
6 primarily mediated through the impairment of oxygen
7 availability to the brain, and the cardiovascular system
8 and the brain try to cope with reduced levels of oxygen
9 in order to preserve vital functions but the higher
10 functions, like the ability to make rational decisions,
11 will certainly be impaired. That's one of the things
12 that may go first and it may not be easy to identify the
13 fact that that's occurred.

14 I could give you, as an example, the effect of
15 altitude sickness. If you were to climb Everest -- and
16 some of my colleagues have done that -- then at the top
17 of Everest the amount of oxygen available to you is
18 a quarter of that which we're breathing in this room.
19 But they still got to the top of Everest -- a huge
20 achievement -- with only a quarter of the amount of
21 oxygen available. But at the top of Everest it's very
22 easy to make silly decisions, like taking your
23 protective clothing off or deciding you don't want to
24 come down, or something of that sort, decisions which
25 might not seem wholly irrational but which, in that

1 context, are lethal, and that's because there's not
2 enough oxygen there for the brain to function in the way
3 in which it does for you or me, sitting here, with
4 21 per cent oxygen in the room.

5 Q. You've described how where there's reduced oxygen
6 because of altitude there's an effect on decision-making
7 ability. Does the same apply if you're in
8 a smoke-filled room where the levels of oxygen have been
9 reduced for that reason?

10 A. Absolutely.

11 Q. So people may not have the same ability that they would
12 have in a room like this to think clearly or make
13 rational decisions; is that right?

14 A. That's correct.

15 Q. If we then move on to consider what it is that causes
16 death from smoke inhalation when one is dealing with
17 higher levels of smoke density and the gasses associated
18 with that.

19 A. There are early or immediate effects, and delayed or
20 late effects. The immediate effects relate to the toxic
21 effects of the gasses that I've described and the lack
22 of oxygen to the cells of the body, which in the end
23 produces confusion and then coma. There's then a short
24 distance between coma and cardiac arrest. Those are the
25 short-term effects in a severe fire of this type.

1 If someone's retrieved from a fire and they're still
2 breathing and the heart is still beating -- maybe
3 they're still conscious too -- and they're taken to
4 hospital, then the sequence of events in terms of
5 potential deterioration relate first of all to swelling
6 of the airway. So if there's been particularly facial
7 burns, but in any circumstance where there's soot found
8 in the airways and the windpipe, then swelling will
9 occur. Just in the same way that if you poured acid on
10 to your hand or you fell over and grazed your leg, you
11 get swelling and pain and redness of that area, so the
12 same thing occurs inside the mouth, the throat, the
13 voice box and the windpipes, and this swelling can
14 become sufficiently severe to cause obstruction to
15 breathing.

16 One of the early things that one has to do if
17 a casualty has got as far as hospital, and if they had
18 the likelihood of a thermal injury and smoke inhalation,
19 is to consider whether a breathing tube needs to be
20 passed into the upper airway in order to prevent the
21 process of swelling from producing airway obstruction.

22 The next level of problem, other than the effects of
23 carbon monoxide and cyanide gas which I've already
24 referred to, is the direct damage to the lungs, and the
25 term given to describe this is "acute lung injury" or

1 the "adult [or 'acute'] respiratory distress syndrome",
2 and you will sometimes see this referred to as its
3 acronym, which is ARDS. This means leaky lungs, where
4 the lungs become permeable, they become water-logged, as
5 I've already described, and individuals in this state
6 will usually need help with their breathing, independent
7 of the need to put in a breathing tube to protect the
8 airway from the swelling that occurs, in order to
9 support their breathing on a breathing machine, a life
10 support machine, a mechanical ventilator.

11 Individuals who get to that point of developing
12 ARDS, the adult respiratory distress syndrome, from
13 smoke inhalation are already in a very high mortality
14 bracket, somewhere around 40 to 50 per cent. So those
15 are the problems that occur later on. They will need to
16 be on a life support machine for a variable period,
17 which might be a few days, or it could be indeed longer.
18 It might be a matter of a few weeks.

19 Then there are further complications related to
20 infection, secondary infection, which may occur in the
21 lungs, with pneumonias and things of that sort, and as
22 part and parcel of all this, you end up with
23 deterioration in other organ systems, which I won't go
24 through now.

25 Q. If I could then ask you about two particular passages in

1 your report which draw attention to some of the evidence
2 in witness statements of persons who attempted to treat
3 those who died.

4 First of all, on page 4 of your report, in the
5 second paragraph underneath the heading "Carbon monoxide
6 is not the only poisonous gas", you draw attention to
7 some evidence that was read to the jury on Friday
8 afternoon about a blood gas sample from Michelle Udoaka.
9 You say:

10 "It was notable that the venous blood gas sample
11 taken during attempted resuscitation of (her)
12 demonstrated a profound lactic acidosis, which, in the
13 setting of acute deprivation of oxygen supply, indicates
14 minimal chance of successful resuscitation."

15 Can you just explain what you mean in that paragraph
16 and the reference after that to the effects of cyanide
17 gas.

18 A. I'll take a step back -- and please tell me if I'm being
19 too physiological and I'll shorten it. Oxygen is the
20 fuel of the cells, but it's not the only fuel. Glucose
21 is the other very important one. Glucose is broken down
22 in order to provide energy for the cells of the body to
23 work. You have to have oxygen at the end of that
24 breakdown process for glucose to be fully used and
25 converted into energy. If you don't have oxygen, then

1 glucose is only broken down along part of that pathway
2 and it stops at a substance called pyruvate, which is
3 then parked in a form called lactate, and it's then
4 stored in the blood, elsewhere in the body, and when the
5 oxygen supply is restored, if it is, then the lactate
6 can be broken down and the glucose pathway starts to
7 work again.

8 The problem with that lactate is that it's turned
9 into an acid, lactic acid. So lactic acid is a very
10 important indicator of the lack of oxygen and that lack
11 of oxygen can occur through various ways. A very
12 obvious one is if you're in a state of shock or if
13 you've had a big heart attack, the heart's not working
14 properly, or a cardiac arrest, then clearly there's no
15 oxygen supply going on and lactate levels will rise very
16 rapidly. So anyone who has a cardiac arrest will have
17 an elevated blood lactate level. The normal blood
18 lactate is around 1. You and I have a blood lactate
19 level of 1 millimole per litre, roughly, but little
20 Michelle had a blood lactate of 22. That's very high,
21 and it's -- except under certain special circumstances,
22 which I won't go into, I would regard a lactate of 22 as
23 being effectively incompatible with life.

24 The acid in the bloodstream, the acid levels, were
25 also very high: a pH of 6.5. Although it's possible

1 that that was attributable to the fact that her heart
2 was no longer beating, I think it's much more likely
3 that it's an expression of cyanide poisoning from the
4 fire, so I think this is part and parcel of the toxic
5 effects of smoke inhalation. And there are studies --
6 and I've quoted one there -- which show that there's
7 a close relationship between the amount of cyanide in
8 the bloodstream and the amount of lactate in the
9 bloodstream. So I see lactate here as a surrogate
10 measure for cyanide, since cyanide levels were not
11 measured.

12 Q. Thank you. Then over the page, at the top of page 5,
13 you refer to the evidence of the paramedic Victor
14 Brooker, whose statement was read to the jury on Friday
15 afternoon, who said in his statement of an adult female
16 and a young male child that "neither of them appeared
17 obviously dead at first" and that they didn't appear
18 cyanosed. What comment do you make about that?

19 A. I thought this was a very revealing observation, because
20 at one level you'd say to yourself: well, a fireman who
21 sees people coming out who have no pulse and aren't
22 breathing and then says they didn't look dead, he must
23 be confused, because it doesn't sound as though it makes
24 sense. But it makes absolute sense. The question is:
25 what was it that he'd noticed? And I think what he'd

1 noticed was that they were pink, as we are, those of us
2 who are Caucasian, and the reason for being pink is that
3 the combination of carbon monoxide and cyanide gas
4 prevents the red blood cells from turning blue, which is
5 what happens in oxygen deprivation. So I think this is
6 another indicator that these individuals had suffered
7 certainly carbon monoxide poisoning but very likely
8 hydrogen cyanide poisoning as well.

9 Q. So the sighting of victims looking pink, rather than
10 being an indicator that they might still be alive or
11 capable of resuscitation, you regard as an indicator
12 that they have suffered, in effect, gas poisoning?

13 A. I do. Instead of interpreting this as "Gosh, they must
14 be alive, surely he should have done something?",
15 I think this just demonstrates how severe the inhalation
16 was.

17 Q. Thank you. Then in the middle of page 5 you set out
18 responses to specific questions. The coroner asked you
19 ten questions and you answered each of them in turn, and
20 I'd like to just go through the questions and answers
21 and identify them with you.

22 Firstly, you were asked about the interpretation of
23 carbon monoxide levels and what significance, if any,
24 you attached to the different carbon monoxide levels
25 recorded in the five persons who died of inhalation of

1 fire fumes whilst they were together in the bathroom of
2 flat 81. What you've written here is:

3 "Post mortem carbon monoxide levels for these
4 individuals ranged (as we've seen) from 23.8 per cent to
5 71 per cent. These are very high. As defined above,
6 the link between CO levels ..."

7 That's carbon monoxide levels, isn't it?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. "... and symptoms is very variable, but there is no
10 question that the levels recorded in these victims are
11 compatible with fatal inhalation injury. Other factors
12 will also have played a part: thermal injury ..."

13 That's heat, is it?

14 A. Correct.

15 Q. "... other toxins in smoke such as cyanide, pulmonary
16 oedema and oxygen deprivation in the fire."

17 Is there anything you want to add to that?

18 A. I don't think so, unless there's anything that's unclear
19 to the court.

20 Q. Thank you. Then you were asked about treatment for
21 smoke inhalation, how would it be treated, firstly by
22 paramedics and secondly in a emergency department of
23 a London teaching hospital. You said that:

24 "Paramedics would provide the ABC of basic life
25 support -- airway, breathing, circulation -- providing

1 chest compressions, use of an AED ..."

2 What is an AED?

3 A. Apologies; an acronym crept in without an explanation.

4 It means an automated external defibrillator. So this
5 is the device that you may see in railway stations and
6 airports and so on which is intended to jump-start the
7 heart. It delivers an electrical shock to the heart but
8 only under one circumstance, and that is that the heart
9 is fibrillating. Fibrillating means that instead of
10 coordinated electrical activity and contraction by the
11 heart, there's discoordinate or chaotic electrical
12 activity, and the heart, if you looked at it, instead of
13 beating in a rhythmic way, would look like a bag of
14 worms.

15 Under that circumstance, an electric shock will
16 knock the heart back into a normal heart rhythm. At
17 least you hope it will. If, however, there is no
18 electrical activity, which we call asystole, then
19 delivering an electric shock is not helpful. If
20 anything, it is harmful. So an automated external
21 defibrillator records what's going on in the heart,
22 makes a judgment as to whether a shock is required or
23 not, and tells the person who's applying the AED to
24 deliver a shock by pressing that button.

25 It was used in one resuscitation and the device did

1 not recommend to deliver a shock, and I am confident
2 that what that meant was that the individual's heart was
3 in asystole. In other words, there was no electrical
4 activity. Why is that important? Because if I were
5 suddenly to develop ventricular fibrillation and
6 collapse on the floor, and the coroner got an AED and
7 applied it to me and the thing said, "Deliver a shock",
8 and she presses the button, if it's done quickly,
9 I probably have a 50 per cent chance of recovering and
10 being okay. But if I'm in asystole, I have a less than
11 5 per cent chance of survival. That's the difference.
12 So in this context, it's a bad sign that it didn't
13 require a shock to be delivered.

14 Q. I think the person that you're referring is
15 Thais Francisquini. We see that in the second
16 paragraph --

17 A. That's correct. Thank you.

18 Q. -- on the page on the screen.

19 Just going back to your answer to question 2, you
20 refer to an AED, which you've explained:

21 "... and provision of oxygen and face mask bag
22 ventilation or incubation if skilled in these tasks."

23 Now, you make a point:

24 "Resuscitating a 20 day-old baby is a highly skilled
25 task. As far as I can tell from the witness statements,

1 appropriate care was provided in very difficult
2 circumstances."

3 If I then ask you to turn over the page, you
4 continue your answer, now turning to what the treatment
5 would theoretically be in a major hospital. You say:

6 "The emergency dependent physicians at
7 King's College Hospital and St Thomas' Hospital were
8 consultants or fellows of the College of Emergency
9 Medicine. Their resuscitation attempts were appropriate
10 and discontinuation was also appropriate in the setting
11 of an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest with asystole,
12 fixed dilated pupils and severe inhalation injury. Had
13 the victims presented with signs of life, then the
14 treatment would have included 100 per cent oxygen,
15 presumptive treatment for cyanide poison, possibly
16 hyperbaric oxygen if this modality had been available
17 (which I believe it is not) and full organ system
18 support in the intensive care unit."

19 And that touches upon matters that you mentioned
20 earlier in your evidence about the potential need to be
21 on life support machines for weeks or longer.

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. Then at question 3, you're referred to evidence the
24 court has heard about the use by Dayana Francisquini of
25 her mobile telephone, the fact that she made and

1 received a number of calls during the afternoon but
2 didn't do so after 1738 hours. Your conclusion was that
3 from that time she lost consciousness from lack of
4 oxygen to the brain; is that right?

5 A. That's correct.

6 Q. Then you were asked the same question in respect of
7 Helen Udoaka's mobile phone usage, the last recorded
8 occasion of her using her phone being 1743 hours, and
9 you make the same point, that from that time she lost
10 consciousness because of lack of oxygen to the brain?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. You were then asked, in question 5:

13 "In respect of each of Dayana Francisquini,
14 Thais Francisquini, Felipe Francisquini Cervi,
15 Helen Udoaka and Michelle Udoaka, were they already dead
16 when firefighters first entered flat 81 at around
17 1820 hours?"

18 What is your view on that?

19 A. I'm confident that they would have been.

20 Q. You were asked then the same question in respect of
21 Thais Francisquini and Helen Udoaka, who were not found
22 until over two and a half hours later, and you said that
23 at the time they were found, at around 2054 hours, they
24 were definitely dead.

25 A. I'm confident that they were dead.

1 Q. And the same confidence in relation to Catherine Hickman
2 when she was found?

3 A. Indeed.

4 Q. Then question 8, you were asked essentially the same
5 point:

6 "In respect of those, if any, who were still alive
7 at the time they were found, were their injuries
8 survivable?"

9 You have said, as you have already have, that you
10 were confident that none was alive but you then make a
11 point about the difficulties of treatment had they been
12 found earlier. Can you just amplify that?

13 A. Well, if one were to rewrite history, if it had been
14 possible to have retrieved them earlier but they had
15 still suffered from severe smoke inhalation -- let's
16 take as an example if they'd been retrieved at the point
17 where they were still conscious -- certainly the adults,
18 because we don't know about the children and it's likely
19 that they may have died earlier. Then those individuals
20 had already suffered severe smoke inhalation and were
21 therefore very much at risk of all the complications
22 which I've mentioned, and would have had a mortality
23 risk which I would hazard a guess was 30/40/50 per cent.
24 It depends so much upon timing, and clearly the earlier
25 people are retrieved the better the chance of survival,

1 and the fire service were doing their best. I'm well
2 aware of that.

3 Q. By that reference to mortality percentages, do we
4 understand that there would have been times at which,
5 had they been found still alive and conscious, there
6 would nevertheless have been a risk that they would have
7 died in the order of 30 to 40 to 50 per cent, even with
8 ideal treatment from then on?

9 A. Well, the quick answer to that is yes. The complex
10 answer is again that it depends on the interval, and the
11 earlier upstream you go, the better the chance of
12 survival.

13 Q. If I take you then to your answer to question 9 --

14 THE CORONER: Sorry, can I just stop you a moment,
15 Mr Maxwell-Scott, we have a fire alarm test at
16 11 o'clock. (Pause) I think we're okay to carry on,
17 thank you.

18 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: In question 9, you were asked:

19 "When, on the balance of probabilities, would
20 Catherine Hickman have needed to be found by the
21 emergency services in order for her to have survived?"

22 Your answer was:

23 "It is difficult to be precise on this matter but
24 I would expect that she might have remained breathing
25 for up to five to ten minutes from termination of phone

1 contact. Burning material from the ceiling was falling
2 on her and after 16.49 there was no verbal contact and
3 the operator could not hear breathing sounds. The
4 latest point at which she might have been retrieved and
5 resuscitated was probably 16.55. I suspect that had she
6 been retrieved at this point, she was still more likely
7 to have died either on the way to hospital or after
8 admission."

9 Is that your opinion?

10 A. It is. Again, it's a matter of probabilities, so the
11 coroner's question I took to mean on the balance of
12 probability, which means that the individual would have
13 had a better than 50 per cent chance of surviving, and
14 it's very hard to pin that down to a specific time.
15 I think the point at which she lost consciousness, she
16 would have had a mortality risk in excess -- well in
17 excess -- of 50 per cent.

18 Q. Then question 10, you were asked essentially the same
19 question about those in the bathroom of flat 81. The
20 question was:

21 "In respect of Dayana Francisquini,
22 Thais Francisquini, Felipe Francisquini Cervi,
23 Helen Udoaka and Michelle Udoaka (and on the assumption
24 that each of them at all times remained in the bathroom
25 at flat 81 after the Nuhu family left it), when, on the

1 balance of probabilities, would each of them have needed
2 to be found by the emergency services in order for them
3 to have survived?"

4 Your answer was:

5 "The last phone call identified to Helen Udoaka was
6 1743 hours but the duration is not known. It seems
7 reasonable to assume that this call was the one referred
8 to in the statement by her husband, Mbet. He recounts
9 that she told him that she could not bear the smoke any
10 longer and that her daughter Michelle was going to
11 heaven. She then became incoherent and the line then
12 went silent. It is likely, therefore, that she became
13 unconscious from hypoxia and carbon monoxide poisoning
14 at this point, and would have suffered a cardiac arrest
15 soon afterwards. If this logged call and the account by
16 Mbet Udoaka are the same, then I would expect that the
17 latest time when Mrs Udoaka might have been retrieved
18 alive would have been around 1745 to 1750 hours.
19 However, by this stage, she was already suffering from
20 significant inhalation injury and would still have had a
21 significant risk of dying from acute lung injury in the
22 ensuing hours or days."

23 Does that remain your view?

24 A. It does. "Significant" meaning more than 50 per cent.

25 Q. You then refer to the children. Of course, there were

1 three children in the bathroom. They didn't use mobile
2 phones so one doesn't have that piece of evidence to
3 rely upon, but you say this:

4 "Children may be more susceptible to inhalation
5 injury than adults and might therefore have died
6 earlier."

7 Is that your view?

8 A. It is.

9 Q. If I then ask you, Professor Bion, and the members of
10 the jury to take up the jury bundle at tab 3. (Handed)
11 What we have there is a sample inquisition form of the
12 type that the members of the jury will need in due
13 course to complete in respect of each of the six persons
14 who died. You'll see -- I'm sure you're very familiar
15 with these -- that they will need to complete section 2,
16 which relates to the injury or disease causing death,
17 and section 3, which includes a time at which the injury
18 was sustained.

19 The jury have heard evidence from Dr Bierdrzycki
20 about the cause of death and they have heard that the
21 cause of death for the five persons in the bathroom of
22 flat 81 was inhalation of fire fumes and that the cause
23 of death for Catherine Hickman was the inhalation of
24 fire fumes and burns. Can I just check with you that
25 you don't disagree with those recorded formal causes of

1 death?

2 A. I do not disagree.

3 Q. Thank you. Then where I hope that you may be able to
4 assist the jury is with section 3 and in particular the
5 time of death. I appreciate that this is probably
6 an inexact science, but can you help the jury, in your
7 expert opinion, with what period of time they should
8 give in respect of each of the six persons who died, by,
9 for example, saying that the time of death was between
10 one time and a later time?

11 A. Just by way of pre-ambble for the members of the jury,
12 I've made the assumption that the heart would stop
13 beating within, say, ten minutes of losing consciousness
14 because of the very low levels of oxygen available to
15 the cells of the body.

16 So the timings that I would give -- do you wish me
17 to mention each individual by name?

18 Q. I would, yes?

19 A. So with Catherine Hickman, I think she probably died
20 between 1650 hours and 1700 hours. 1650 to 1700.

21 For Dayana Francisquini, between 1750 hours and
22 1800 hours. 1750 to 1800.

23 Helen Udoaka, I estimate 1755 to 1805. 1755 to
24 1805.

25 Then for the children, I would think some time

1 between 1745 and 1800 hours. 1745 to 1800 hours.

2 Q. And that is on what we call the balance of

3 probabilities?

4 A. It's very much an estimate.

5 Q. Thank you. It's the best estimate that you're able to

6 give?

7 A. It's the best that I'm able to give.

8 Q. Thank you. Professor Bion, I'm very grateful to you.

9 I don't have any further questions, but it may be that

10 some others will have some questions.

11 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Mr Edwards?

12 MR EDWARDS: No questions, thank you.

13 THE CORONER: Mr Dowden? Ms Al Tai?

14 MS AL TAI: No thank you.

15 THE CORONER: Members of the jury, do you have any

16 questions?

17 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: No, thank you.

18 THE CORONER: Professor Bion, thank you very much for coming

19 and thank you very much for the very clear explanation

20 which you have been able to give to us, and thank you

21 very much for the help that you've given. You're

22 welcome to stay if you would like, but you're free to go

23 if you would prefer.

24 A. Thank you, coroner. I will stay for a while if I may,

25 should you wish to call me again, and once again I'd

1 A. Okay, thank you.

2 THE CORONER: Thank you.

3 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

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

6 A. Derryck Anthony Best.

7 Q. I'm going to be asking you questions about your
8 involvement in the attempts to fight the fire and carry
9 out search and rescue operations at Lakanal House on
10 3 July 2009. What position did you hold in the London
11 Fire Brigade at that time?

12 A. I'm a watch manager A.

13 Q. We've heard about watch managers. What is a watch
14 manager A?

15 A. A watch manager A is two ranks above a firefighter.

16 Q. Does the "A" refer to something in particular?

17 A. Only that a watch manager A and a watch manager B --
18 watch manager B is one rank higher, so it would be three
19 ranks above.

20 Q. At the time of the Lakanal House fire, were you
21 a temporary watch manager based in Lewisham, working
22 from command unit 4?

23 A. I was.

24 Q. You're still employed by the London Fire Brigade. How
25 long have you worked for them for?

1 A. 29 years.

2 Q. If you take up the jury bundle -- Mr Clark will provide
3 you with it -- and turn to tab 10. (Handed) You'll see
4 there a document that's headed "Information about the
5 types of appliances that attended the Lakanal House
6 fire". If you turn to the second page of it, we see
7 reference to a command unit and a photograph. Can you
8 confirm that's a photograph of a command unit?

9 A. Yes, that is.

10 Q. So this is the information that the members of the jury
11 currently have in their bundle about what a command unit
12 is, but we haven't yet heard evidence from anybody who
13 actually worked in command units on a day-to-day basis.
14 If I could ask you firstly about the equipment and
15 facilities that are available and carried in a command
16 unit like command unit 4.

17 A. Right. At the time in question --

18 Q. I should make it clear that all my questions, unless
19 I indicate otherwise, will be about the practices and
20 policies and equipment in place at the time in July 2009
21 rather than now.

22 A. A command unit in 2009 would be housing communications
23 equipment. It would also house computers. It would
24 also have a facility to receive photographic or film
25 footage from helicopters. We also would have

1 a procedure to implement a command structure, with
2 tabards denoting roles of officers on the fire ground.
3 We'd also have facility to assist an incident commander
4 in implementing a relief plan.

5 Q. Just pausing there, let me ask you about the different
6 equipment available to you. You firstly mentioned
7 communications equipment, and we've heard about
8 firefighters and members of the London Fire Brigade
9 having personal radios, for example. What do you have
10 in the command unit in addition to personal radios?

11 A. We have what's called a main scheme radio, which is our
12 link to control. We also have two telephones, which are
13 also linked either to control -- well, they're outside
14 hard lines, like a house phone. We also have a radio
15 for receiving and sending onto the fire ground, like the
16 handheld radios that you see -- that you mentioned
17 earlier.

18 Q. So just pausing there, the final radio you mentioned, is
19 that equivalent to the personal radio used by
20 firefighters?

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. Did the command unit also have the ability to receive
23 messages sent from control to appliances in the way that
24 we hear the pumps had a radio which could listen to
25 messages from control?

1 A. It's exactly the same.

2 Q. So like a firefighter you have a personal radio, like
3 a pump you have a radio that connects to control, but in
4 addition you have telephones; is that right?

5 A. That's correct.

6 Q. Secondly, you mentioned computers. Did the computer at
7 the time automatically display information that was
8 being generated elsewhere -- for example, in control by
9 way of messages -- or did the computer work by allowing
10 you to type information in and search for information?
11 You see the difference?

12 A. Yes, I see the difference. At the time, the computer
13 system we had was called CPS, command planning system.
14 This -- the information on that was generated by what we
15 call CSC, which is command support centre, so someone
16 else would have to upload information physically and
17 send it to that computer. It wasn't generated
18 immediately, so messages didn't come up unless somebody
19 else typed them.

20 Q. When you say somebody else typed them, do you mean
21 somebody in your command unit or somebody elsewhere?

22 A. Either in our command unit or in our resource management
23 centre, not straight from control, so ie messages that
24 you'd hear over the radio, on the main scheme radio from
25 control to the command unit, wouldn't immediately appear

1 on that screen unless somebody in another location typed
2 it in.

3 Q. What would cause somebody in another location to type it
4 so that you could see it in the computer in your command
5 unit?

6 A. If they felt it was of some use to us to type it up or
7 at a later date they wanted to keep a record of it.

8 Q. These will be persons working where?

9 A. In Stratford, in our resource management centre. It
10 used to be at Lambeth and it moved to Stratford.

11 Q. In a significant incident, would you be able to say,
12 "I want somebody off-site -- for example, at
13 Stratford -- to be typing up messages", or do you not
14 have any control over that?

15 A. We don't have any control over that.

16 Q. So unless that is being done for you, then messages that
17 come into the command unit are lost after you hear them
18 on the radio or telephone unless you, within the command
19 unit, make a note of them at the time; is that right?

20 A. That's correct.

21 Q. We've heard reference in the evidence to headline
22 boards. Can you tell us what a headline board is?

23 A. A headline board is like an organisational chart of
24 exactly what's happening at the fire ground, ie you'd
25 have the incident commander at the very top. You'd have

1 also the monitoring officer, all other principal
2 officers on the fire ground, every appliance that's on
3 the fire ground and the relevant sectors that they've
4 been placed into.

5 Q. Is it, in effect, a blank board that you then fill in
6 during the course of the incident?

7 A. That is correct.

8 Q. Is it a whiteboard or are the whiteboards that you have
9 something different?

10 A. It is -- the background of it is white. It has red and
11 yellow colourings in it as well in certain boxes.
12 Mainly it's white, but it's all lined off already.

13 Q. I think it's right that you also carry plenty of pens
14 and paper to enable you and others to take notes if you
15 wish to do so?

16 A. That's correct.

17 Q. I'm going to move on then and ask you about your
18 involvement on the afternoon of the fire. Who was with
19 you as the crew of command unit 4 that day?

20 A. Watch Manager Cook.

21 Q. Did each of you have specific different roles?

22 A. Yes, we did.

23 Q. What were they?

24 A. Watch Manager Cook was the second officer, driver, and
25 communications officer, and I was the team leader.

1 Q. Does that mean that you had different tasks which you
2 know in advance you're going to have to carry out if you
3 arrive at an incident?

4 A. Initially, yes.

5 Q. What are the differences?

6 A. Well, one, the -- Watch Manager Cook will remain with
7 the command unit and I will don fire gear and go out
8 onto the fire ground and seek out the incident
9 commander.

10 Q. I think that you received a message at about 4.20 in the
11 afternoon and left Lewisham fire station shortly after
12 that to make your way to Lakanal House; is that right?

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. Had you ever been to Lakanal House before?

15 A. No.

16 Q. If I ask you then about where you positioned command
17 unit 4 on arrival. I believe that some time after the
18 incident you drew a map and indicated command unit 4 on
19 it, so I will turn to that. It's in the advocates'
20 bundles, file 1, page 116. (Handed) Do you recognise
21 that as a map which you have drawn on?

22 A. I'm just trying to sort of find myself.

23 Q. Okay. If I can help, at the bottom right-hand corner
24 where I'm marking with the white arrow, there is the
25 word "Lakanal" and you can see most of Lakanal House.

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. I'm now pointing up the page, north of it, to
3 Dalwood Street, and if we go west along Dalwood Street
4 you reach the junction with Havil Street. If I take the
5 arrow left, south down Havil Street, there's
6 an annotation on the diagram, which looks as if it says
7 "CU4". Do you see that?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. I'll cross-refer that with an aerial photograph of the
10 area. I'm pulling up an aerial photograph,
11 photograph 3. On this, Lakanal House is in the middle
12 of the page. I'm marking it now with the white arrow.
13 You can see Dalwood Street running east to west. If you
14 go along to the west, you reach a junction with
15 Havil Street. Does that refresh your memory of where
16 you parked command unit 4?

17 A. Yeah, where you have the arrow, that's close enough.

18 Q. Thank you. Was it your decision to park there, or would
19 that be the driver's decision?

20 A. I believe we just both agreed that that would be the
21 best place.

22 Q. I just ask out of interest: why you didn't park any
23 closer to Lakanal House? Because command unit 4 would,
24 in due course, be intended to become, in effect, the
25 command centre; is that right?

1 A. Yeah, that's correct. It's normal practice for
2 a command unit not to park too close to an incident.
3 This is so you that don't block up or get in the way of
4 other emergency vehicles that carry equipment that are
5 gonna be used for firefighting or rescues, also other
6 emergency vehicles like ambulances and police vehicles.
7 So the command unit would normally never be situated too
8 close to an incident.

9 Q. Thank you. Then in terms of when you arrived, if
10 I refer you in the advocates' bundles to page 934, which
11 is in file 3. (Handed) The writing at the bottom is
12 very small, but the sixth row down on the left,
13 "mobilised 16.23.05", and then reading across in that
14 row, do you see reference to CU4, and under the column
15 headed "Arr" for "arrived", do you see 16.38.23?

16 THE CORONER: Can you see that Mr Best?

17 A. Sorry, yes.

18 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: So we take it that you arrived at
19 approximately 16.38?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. What did you and Mr Cook do on arrival?

22 A. I immediately donned my fire gear, grabbed a clipboard
23 with blank paper and a pen and made my way round the
24 corner towards the building of Lakanal House.

25 Q. What were you intended to do?

1 A. Liaise with the incident commander.

2 Q. Did you take anything else with you?

3 A. Initially no. I may -- I may have taken an action plan
4 with me, with the -- with the clipboard. I may have
5 taken -- no, I think that would probably be the only
6 thing I took with me.

7 Q. Did you meet up with the incident commander?

8 A. I did.

9 Q. Was he on the west side of the building on a grassy
10 area?

11 A. On the grassy area, yeah.

12 Q. Who was the incident commander at this time?

13 A. Watch Manager Howling.

14 Q. Did you know him before this incident?

15 A. No.

16 Q. How did he seem when you met up with him?

17 A. Extremely busy.

18 Q. At that time, did you have any information that you
19 needed to pass on to him?

20 A. Not when I first got to him, no.

21 Q. Mr Howling's given evidence already, and one of the
22 things he told the court was that you provided him with
23 a wad of information which he found most unhelpful and
24 a complete distraction. He was referring, I believe, to
25 some form of aide memoire or generic documentation about

1 incident command. Do you recall what he's referring to
2 at all, and can you comment on that?

3 A. He -- he would be referring to what we call an action
4 plan, which is -- it is an aide memoire for incident
5 commanders, more as a jog their memory so they haven't
6 forgotten anything in -- each aide memoire will have its
7 own set out procedure. Let's say for, like, this
8 incident, a high rise incident, I would have given him
9 an aide memoire that said "High rise procedure", and
10 that's -- a lot of officers like that so they can just
11 go down the list and make sure that they are conforming
12 to all the tasks.

13 Q. From recollection, would that be an one or two-page
14 document, or would it be a wad of information, as
15 Mr Howling called it?

16 A. No, it's just a one page laminate sheet.

17 Q. Specific to high rise fires?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. And in your experience, other incident commanders have
20 said to you they found it helpful; is that right?

21 A. In general terms, yes.

22 Q. What were your initial impressions of the fire that you
23 could see from the west side of the building?

24 A. Initially, as I looked up and saw the flames coming
25 out -- I believe it now to be the 9th floor? My first

1 impression, while I was talking to Watch Manager
2 Howling, was there was debris falling and that may be
3 a problem.

4 Q. Could you see what that debris appeared to be?

5 A. It looked like window frames.

6 Q. Are you able to recall whether any of the debris that
7 fell was alight or not?

8 A. Most of it looked alight.

9 Q. You said that the falling debris, in your view, might be
10 a problem. Why did you think that?

11 A. 'Cos there was a -- an appliance parked underneath with
12 two lengths of hose coming out and going into the
13 building -- well, going into what we call the inlet to
14 the riser, dry riser, and there were firefighters
15 walking underneath that building and members of the
16 public at that particular time.

17 Q. I sense from your answer that you saw the falling debris
18 as a potential risk to the safety of people outside the
19 building?

20 A. And -- and firefighting crews as well.

21 Q. Did you, at that time, think that it might pose any risk
22 to other parts of the building?

23 A. Not initially.

24 Q. Did you have any view when you first arrived as to how
25 many flats were on fire?

1 A. Initially, I think I -- if I can recall correctly,
2 I only think there was one flat involved when I first
3 arrived.

4 Q. If you could take up the jury bundle, which I think you
5 have in front of you at tab 12. I'll ask you to look at
6 some photographs which were taken at around the time you
7 arrived, starting on page 7.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. That photograph is the first photograph we have taken
10 from the west side of the building. It's timed 16.39.
11 If you turn over the page, we have another one at 16.40.
12 Is the position where that photograph was taken from
13 representative of where you and Mr Howling were
14 standing, or were you somewhere slightly different?

15 A. Our view would have been a bit different. We were
16 closer and further to the right in that photograph.

17 Q. If you look at those photographs, you can see that there
18 is what you may well have worked out at the time but we
19 now know to be a central staircase. Do you see that
20 close to the middle of the building?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Were you and Mr Howling, as it were, lined up?

23 A. No, more lined up with the actual smoke and flames that
24 you can see coming out.

25 Q. I understand. Then if you look at the photograph on

1 page 9. This is still 16.40. Now, I appreciate that
2 it's a close-up photograph, so you will not, with the
3 naked eye, have had that clear a view, but do you see
4 that that looks as if the fire is affecting clearly more
5 than one floor of the building?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Do you recall when you and Mr Howling first noticed that
8 the fire was affecting more than one floor of the
9 building?

10 A. I can't really recall when I thought it was doing more
11 than one floor because the fire spread up and down
12 really, really quick, so I couldn't put me finger on
13 exactly when that happened.

14 Q. Do you recall any discussion between yourself and
15 Mr Howling when it did spread up but before it spread
16 down?

17 A. I don't recall a conversation when it spread up.

18 Q. Madam, that probably would be a convenient moment for
19 a mid morning break.

20 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you very much. We'll have
21 a ten-minute break. Members of the jury, do leave your
22 papers in the room if that would help, thank you.

23 Mr Best, because you're part way through giving your
24 evidence, the strict rule is that you must not talk to
25 anyone about your evidence or indeed about the case.

1 All right? If you could be back in ten minutes, thank
2 you.

3 (In the absence of the Jury)

4 THE CORONER: Mr Walsh, Mr Best has just been talking about
5 a marked-up whiteboard. I just wonder if that's one of
6 the pieces of equipment that you have in the building.

7 MR WALSH: I'm afraid it isn't, madam, but it may be that we
8 could get one over from Brixton quite quickly, if that
9 would help.

10 THE CORONER: Well, it sounds as if it might help the jury
11 to have a look at it. Thank you very much. Ten
12 minutes.

13 (11.38 am)

14 (A short break)

15 (11.46 am)

16 (In the presence of the Jury)

17 THE CORONER: Yes.

18 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Mr Best, we were talking about the time
19 shortly after which you'd reached
20 Incident Commander Howling. In order that we can
21 understand how you fit into the picture, what I wanted
22 to ask you next was: did you remain at his side
23 throughout the time that he was incident commander?

24 A. To my recall, I think I did. If I didn't, if I left his
25 side, it would have been for only a few moments.

1 Q. So whilst Mr Howling was incident commander, for
2 example, you didn't go to and from command unit 4?

3 A. I can't recall.

4 Q. On the same theme, do you recall a time when
5 Station Manager Cartwright took over from Mr Howling?

6 A. I do remember that.

7 Q. Were you present when he arrived and that handover took
8 place?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Later on, do you recall a time when
11 Group Manager Freeman arrived and took over as incident
12 commander?

13 A. I do.

14 Q. Were you present for that as well?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Your role as team leader for command unit 4 supporting
17 the incident commander, to what extent is that
18 a predetermined role when you turn up and say to the
19 incident commander: "This is the service I provide", and
20 to what extent is it up to the incident commander to
21 task you to do whatever he thinks most useful at the
22 time?

23 A. It is -- it is down to the incident commander to
24 determine how he wants to use his command team. We are
25 his support staff.

1 Q. Can you recall what, if any, task
2 Incident Commander Howling specifically gave you?
3 A. He didn't give me a task.
4 Q. You were at his side for 15 to 20 minutes whilst he was
5 incident commander but he didn't expressly give you
6 a task at all in that period; is that right?
7 A. Yeah, that's correct.
8 Q. So what did you do?
9 A. Initially, I informed him that it might be safer to tape
10 off the area where the debris was falling down. He
11 summoned a firefighter or a crew manager to do so. At
12 that point I also told that individual to grab the
13 incident command wallet and return that to our command
14 unit and bring back a safety officer's tabard with him
15 on his way back.
16 Q. After that, what tasks did you take on to yourself in
17 the absence of being expressly given any by Mr Howling?
18 A. At the time, I was just asking if he felt he had enough
19 resources. It's common for a command officer to start
20 making suggestions to an incident commander about what
21 they might require at the time.
22 Q. By command officer, you mean an officer such as
23 yourself?
24 A. Yes.
25 Q. What suggestions did you make?

1 A. Did he need some more resources? Did he have enough
2 crews available to him? Did he need any other
3 specialist appliances, ie as it was a high rise
4 building, maybe an aerial.

5 Q. Can you recall how he reacted to those prompts from you?

6 A. Mr Howling was constantly on the radio to his own crews
7 whilst I was talking to him at the same time. It was
8 very difficult to find any breaks in what he was doing
9 to actually have a proper conversation with him.

10 Q. I assume that at the time you left command unit 4 to go
11 to the incident commander, the command unit was not yet
12 set up because you left it very shortly after parking;
13 is that right?

14 A. Yeah. In what way do you mean set up?

15 Q. Well, we've heard some evidence that one would set it up
16 by reference to getting the computers up and running,
17 for example, and we've heard some evidence that at
18 a later stage it was not yet set up.

19 A. Right.

20 Q. Perhaps help us with what one does to set a command unit
21 up on arrival.

22 A. Okay, in the initial stages when a command unit arrives
23 and there are only two officers, you have to determine
24 immediately what is required for that incident straight
25 away. So communications at that time were more

1 important than any computers, so Watch Manager Cook
2 would have just dealt with purely that. As a team
3 leader, 'cos the incident commander had quite a lot
4 going on at his incident, it would be very important for
5 the command officer -- team leader, sorry, to stay at
6 his side and assist him, take notes of any messages that
7 he needed sent, and make suggestions as to what
8 strategies going forward.

9 Q. I won't take to you it at this stage, but when you made
10 a witness statement in September 2009 you said that:

11 "The computer system is not always started at the
12 start of the incident because if it's a very dynamic,
13 fast-moving incident the two of us do not have the time
14 or capability to start it up straight away."

15 That's essentially what you're saying?

16 A. That's exactly it.

17 Q. So there is a process of setting up the command unit and
18 getting the computers up and running which has to be
19 carried out at some stage; is that right?

20 A. That's right.

21 Q. Presumably that would not have been started at the time
22 you left the command unit to find the incident
23 commander?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Are you able to assist with when the command unit was

1 set up at this incident? It may be that you're not
2 because you didn't go back there for some time.

3 A. Yeah, if it's a fast-moving incident, it's very
4 difficult for us to -- when there's only two of you, to
5 complete all these tasks, which is why when there's
6 an incident of that nature, you get a second command
7 unit. The second command unit arrives that manpower
8 then assists in you completing your tasks in the setting
9 up process.

10 Q. The communications system that you told us about, does
11 that need to be set up or is that automatically
12 available?

13 A. That just needs to be turned on and is automatically
14 available.

15 Q. We've heard some evidence about the volume of radio
16 traffic at the fire ground and the problems that that
17 caused. Would I be right in thinking that because the
18 command unit has telephones in it, it is best placed for
19 direct communication with brigade control?

20 A. Yeah, that's correct.

21 Q. You and Mr Cook had separated on arrival, him staying in
22 the command unit and you going to join the incident
23 commander. What was the system for getting messages
24 from brigade control to the incident commander?

25 A. Right, the messages would come on the main scheme radio

1 to Watch Manager Cook, and Watch Manager Cook would
2 contact me or the incident commander on the fire ground
3 via -- via our handheld radios.

4 Q. On that afternoon, were there any problems that you
5 recall in messages being passed from Watch Manager Cook
6 to yourself?

7 A. No, we have a dedicated channel called channel 10 where
8 the fire ground is channel 1. So command officers on
9 all command units will invariably change to channel 10
10 just for our own personal communication between each
11 other.

12 Q. So no-one else is on that?

13 A. Not initially.

14 Q. So there's no distraction or interference?

15 A. No.

16 Q. So command unit 4 has the best means of communication to
17 brigade control via the telephone, and it then has
18 a reliable method of communication from Mr Cook to you
19 via channel 10; is that right?

20 A. That -- that's right.

21 THE CORONER: If you're on channel 10, does that mean you
22 automatically can't hear other channels or do you have
23 a dual watch system?

24 A. No, that's correct. I will then lose channel 1 for
25 a moment while I speak to Watch Manager Cook. If I want

1 to change back to channel 1 I can, but I will always
2 inform him that I'm about to do so.

3 THE CORONER: So you can listen to only one at a time. Yes.

4 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Having established that by way of
5 background, and before looking at some specific messages
6 that were being passed at that time, I'd like to refer
7 you to a small number of passages in your witness
8 statement. I'm going to look at the statements bundle,
9 starting at page 476. (Handed) Do you recognise that
10 as the first page of your statement dated
11 21 September 2009?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. If you turn in it to page 479.

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. While we're on this page, I'll just draw attention to
16 a paragraph about some of your early impressions of the
17 fire. At the top of the page, you refer to material
18 coming down that was still alight and was stuck on the
19 spikes. That would be the pigeon spikes.

20 "The pigeon spikes were situated at the bottom of
21 the flat windows and panels. This material, which was
22 alight, was now causing new fires to start on the flats
23 below the original fire. This is unusual. I've never
24 seen in a block of flats the fire move down. I've
25 worked in Deptford for 18 years and dealt with a lot of

1 flat fires. I can say that in that experience the fire
2 in the flat would remain in its own compartment and not
3 spread to another. Occasionally, I have seen a fire
4 spread sideways via the balconies. Also occasionally
5 the fire has gone upwards. I've not seen it go down
6 before."

7 That is your evidence based on your experience of
8 25 plus years in the London Fire Brigade at this time;
9 is that right?

10 A. Yeah, 29 years, yeah.

11 Q. Then if I take to you the second paragraph in that page.
12 I've had this checked against the original. The third
13 word should be "now" rather than "not". So it says:

14 "I was now getting radio calls from Martin on the
15 command unit, who was starting relay information for the
16 use of the incident commander."

17 Then you refer to the dedicated command radio
18 channel. That's channel 10 that you've just told us
19 about?

20 A. That's correct.

21 Q. Then if I ask you to turn on two pages to 481. In the
22 third line, the statement says:

23 "I can say that with all this specific calls that
24 I was aware that control was keeping the phone lines
25 open."

1 Is that a reference to control being on the line to
2 people in specific flats?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. I'll take you to some messages in due course, but
5 looking back today, can you remember when you first
6 became aware that control was on the line to people in
7 their flats?

8 A. I can't recall exact when that was.

9 Q. In that case, wait until I take you to some messages.

10 A. Yeah, yeah.

11 Q. Then at the penultimate paragraph on that page, very
12 close to the bottom, there's a short paragraph that
13 says:

14 "I have just given a general overview of the calls
15 coming in. The volume was so high I can't give
16 specifics about any calls. However, I do recall seeing
17 on the board the flat numbers 50, 79 and 81."

18 Are you able, at this stage, to recall what period
19 of time you're talking about there in your statement
20 when you started seeing numbers written on boards? It
21 comes in a passage in your statement after Mr Freeman
22 has become incident commander, if that assists in any
23 way.

24 A. I had got Group Manager Freeman to get back to the
25 command unit, which is another one of our duties, which

1 is to try and coerce the incident commander off the fire
2 ground back into a sterile environment.

3 Q. Just pausing there, was he the first incident commander
4 during your time at the fire ground who went to the
5 command unit?

6 A. During my time?

7 Q. During your time. So Mr Howling didn't and
8 Mr Cartwright didn't?

9 A. I wouldn't know about Mr Cartwright 'cos I didn't
10 actually see him physically get out of his vehicle to
11 see where he went first, but Mr Howling definitely
12 didn't.

13 Q. But you saw Mr Cartwright from the time when he took
14 over as incident commander?

15 A. I saw him approach Mr Howling.

16 Q. And from then on, whilst he was incident commander, he
17 didn't go to the command unit; is that right?

18 A. I don't recall that happening.

19 Q. Sorry, I took you away from the point we were talking
20 about, which is if you can recall when flat numbers
21 started being written on boards, and in particular flats
22 50, 79 and 81.

23 A. When I returned to the command unit with
24 Group Manager Freeman, these were numbers that were
25 written up on our whiteboard, so I assumed Watch Manager

1 Cook would have written those.

2 Q. That would have been, am I right, the first time you
3 returned to the command unit after you'd left it very
4 shortly after arrival?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. I'm going to ask you to look at a handwritten note in
7 the advocates' bundle at, I think, page 180, and then
8 I'll ask you to look at the original. (Handed) I think
9 that before you came into court this morning you had
10 an opportunity to look at a photocopy of that page but
11 you're now seeing the original for the first time?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Can you assist the court with whose handwriting those
14 numbers -- 68, 79, 82, 80, 81 and 50 with a question
15 mark against it -- are in?

16 A. They appear to be my handwriting.

17 Q. Can you recall the circumstances in which they were
18 written down?

19 A. No, I can't.

20 Q. Do you know approximately when, in the course of the
21 incident, they were written down?

22 A. They -- it's a piece of paper that I would have just
23 written down information I may have received via
24 telephone, just as a short note-taking device, and then
25 I would have transferred that information immediately to

1 our whiteboard and informed the incident commander that
2 these were the numbers that were given to me by control
3 of people trapped in their flats.

4 Q. Before I ask you more about that, do you have any
5 recollection of this at all?

6 A. During the incident, I was taking notes constantly,
7 which is what a command officer does, and every bit of
8 information I receive I give to the incident commander,
9 and I also put it up on our whiteboard so that all
10 officers on that command unit can see it and we can all
11 act on it.

12 Q. Parts of your answer there suggest that you wrote this
13 when you were at the command unit?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. That is your best recollection?

16 A. It would be my best recollection.

17 Q. Does it follow from your earlier evidence that you
18 wouldn't have written this when you first arrived and
19 went to see Mr Howling?

20 A. No.

21 Q. So you must have written it at a time after you had
22 returned to the command unit when Mr Freeman was now the
23 incident commander?

24 A. I believe so.

25 Q. Are you able to help us at all with whether what you've

1 written on that sheet of paper -- and there are also
2 a couple of words on the back of it, so just have a look
3 at those -- whether you're able to say whether you were
4 the first person to write on that sheet of paper or
5 whether others had written on it before you?

6 A. I would best guess -- best guess would be that I was the
7 first one to write on this bit of paper, as that's also
8 my handwriting on the rear of it.

9 Q. The members of the jury don't have a photocopy of what
10 is on the back. Can you just read out, for the record,
11 what it says on the back?

12 A. It says "CM Sharpe", which stands for
13 "Crew Manager Sharpe", "SO," which stands for "safety
14 officer", and "GRN floor" which means "ground floor".
15 Underneath that, it says "SM Foster", which stands for
16 "Station Manager Foster", "S/C", which means "sector
17 commander", and then "bridgehead".

18 Q. Do you have any recollection of what you did with that
19 piece of paper after you'd written on it?

20 A. That bit -- that information would immediately go on our
21 headline board in the selected slot, which denotes who's
22 in charge of what area on the fire ground.

23 Q. You say "that information". Do you mean that piece of
24 paper or do you mean that the information on that piece
25 of paper would have been duplicated on the headline

1 board?

2 A. We duplicate it on a big white headline board with a
3 dry-line marker, so it's big and bold and everyone -- as
4 soon as you walk on the unit, you can see that.

5 Q. Do you recall what physically happened to the sheet of
6 paper that you had in front of you?

7 A. No, I don't.

8 Q. The evidence that we have heard is that the other
9 writing on it which isn't yours is that of Station
10 Manager Glennly. Does that assist you at all to recall
11 what you did with that piece of paper physically after
12 you'd written on it?

13 A. Not really. There's -- we have bundles of paper on the
14 command unit and he might have written on that because
15 it was a spare space.

16 Q. What I want to do now is to ask you about some messages
17 that were coming into command unit 4. If you could take
18 up the advocates' bundles, file 1 at page 344. You
19 probably haven't seen this before.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. It's a typed-up version of a telephone conversation
22 between Paul Real, who worked at brigade control, and
23 command unit 4. It's timed at 16.44, so it's probably
24 fair to assume that it's Mr Cook rather than you who is
25 "CU4" on this; is that right?

1 A. That is probably correct.

2 Q. We see that there is reference in the sixth box to 68
3 and 79, and brigade control say:

4 "We're still talking to both callers. They're in
5 a right old state. There's a lot of smoke in both
6 flats."

7 They go on to say:

8 "68 and 79, I think it's obviously -- I don't know
9 what's going on down there but if they could get someone
10 up there really quick."

11 Mr Real goes on to say:

12 "We've been on the phone to them probably a quarter
13 of an hour now and they are really in a state, both the
14 people. Yeah, both of the flats are unable -- they
15 reckon they're unable to get down to their front doors
16 'cos of the smoke, so they're going to have to force
17 an entry. But if you could do that is a matter of
18 urgency, I'd appreciate it."

19 Then CU4, presumably Mr Cook, says:

20 "Yeah, we'll do that straight away, Paul."

21 From what you've told us about arrangements at the
22 fire ground, that would then have been passed to you by
23 Mr Cook over channel 10; is that right?

24 A. That's correct.

25 Q. Having looked at that now, do you recall that message?

1 A. I recall many messages along those lines from Watch
2 Manager Cook.

3 Q. Just picking out the key points in this message, we have
4 two specific flat numbers, 68 and 79. We have the fact
5 that control are on the line to them and have been for
6 a little while, and they think they're unable to get out
7 of their front doors because of the smoke and there is
8 an agreement that there will be an attempt to force
9 an entry. Can you tell the court, as best you can, to
10 what extent you conveyed those key points to Mr Howling?

11 A. I immediately just informed him straight away that we've
12 got people trapped in flats, the numbers of the flats,
13 and can we dispatch a crew to investigate straight away.

14 Q. You said that he was very busy and you mention some
15 difficulties there were in talking to him, for example,
16 about what task he specifically wanted you to do. How
17 easy or difficult was it to get information being passed
18 to you by Mr Cook to Mr Howling so that he appeared to
19 be absorbing it?

20 A. I'm not sure of the time that I spoke to Mr Howling
21 regarding this matter. I do remember him -- him being
22 in a deep conversation with Watch -- sorry,
23 Station Manager Cartwright when he was trying to do his
24 handover, and he had his radio going. He was trying to
25 do a handover, plus I was trying to interfere and stress

1 to him that we need to get people out -- to rescue these
2 people in these flats.

3 Q. Presumably, you took with you pen and paper when you
4 went from command unit 4?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Did you make any notes while you were at Mr Howling's
7 side?

8 A. I can't recall. With regard to these door numbers or
9 anything?

10 Q. Well, firstly, anything.

11 A. At the time, I was also trying to do an overview picture
12 of the incident, so where appliances are sited. It's
13 another function of a command officer. So normally what
14 happens is when a second unit comes you can have
15 a dedicated mapping officer --

16 Q. Just pausing there, we'll come to the explanation in
17 a minute, but best recollection, whilst you were at
18 Mr Howling's side, did you make any notes at all?

19 A. I can't recall.

20 Q. Now continue with your explanation about your other
21 functions.

22 A. Yeah, yeah. I will be taking notes but it will also be
23 notes regarding where appliances are sited, hydrants,
24 where the building is, like a plan view of the building,
25 just so that I can transfer that back to our boards on

1 the back of the unit when I do eventually get back. So
2 I was writing constantly whilst talking.

3 Q. Do you know happened to notes that you made at the
4 scene?

5 A. No.

6 Q. When was the last time you remember seeing them?

7 A. I don't understand what you mean.

8 Q. You're in a command unit. You're not somebody who is
9 going to be deployed into the building; is that right?
10 You're equipped with as much paper and pens as you need.
11 You're in an position to take notes. You tell us that
12 you did take some notes. What I was wondering is: what
13 happened to those notes and when you last saw them?

14 A. Oh, right, I see what you mean. If I take any notes,
15 when I get back to command unit, immediately those --
16 the information on that will be transferred straight to
17 our whiteboards, or I'll make them more legible
18 somewhere else around that unit. So then that bit of
19 note-taking device that I used initially might be in the
20 bin.

21 Q. If I turn then to additional messages. If I could ask
22 you to look over the page at 345. So we're five minutes
23 on. It's 16.49.49. This is a telephone call, again
24 between Mr Real at brigade control and command unit 4,
25 and in the sixth line Mr Real says:

1 "Any news on getting someone up to 68 and 79?"

2 Command unit 4 is recorded as saying:

3 "Yeah, I've spoken to the incident commander and
4 he's aware of it, and he is ... he's definitely on the
5 case. They've definitely got crews up there."

6 Then Mr Real says:

7 "All right, 'cos the lady in 79, her ceiling's
8 coming down now."

9 Then about four lines further down, we have some new
10 flat numbers, 82 and 80. A little lower down, reference
11 to the fact that one of those flats might have a baby if
12 it. Do you see that?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Do you recall getting that message passed on to you by
15 Mr Cook?

16 A. Again, I can't recall exact those words, but obviously
17 Watch Manager Cook, every time he took a phone call, he
18 would just inform me immediately via channel 10 if I was
19 still on the fire ground. If I was back at the unit by
20 then, it would be verbally. You know, I'm standing
21 almost next to him.

22 Q. Do you recall what steps were being taken to compile
23 a single list of flat numbers from the various sources
24 of information that were coming in to Mr Howling?

25 A. Into Mr Howling? I've no idea what he -- what he was

1 doing with the information I was passing on to him in --
2 with regard to note-taking.

3 Q. You don't recall steps being taken to create a single
4 list and the list being discussed?

5 A. There was steps being taken to compile a list and that
6 was on our command unit.

7 Q. I'm talking about when Mr Howling is incident commander.
8 You don't know exactly what's being done at the command
9 unit because you're not there?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. You're with Mr Howling?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. So what I want to know is whether you recall what steps
14 were being taken, whilst you were at his side and he was
15 an incident commander, to compile a list of flats, the
16 numbers of which were being passed to you and
17 Mr Howling. What's your answer?

18 A. I can't recall.

19 Q. Do you recall any discussion with Mr Howling that you
20 were either part of or overheard about specific flat
21 numbers?

22 A. I can't recall the conversation he was having with --
23 crikey, so fast that he didn't seem to be in charge --
24 or he didn't seem to be the incident commander for very
25 long. He was sort of in the middle of speaking to

1 Station Manager Cartwright as well as his crews, so as
2 far as note-taking, I don't recall that. All I remember
3 is those two in deep conversation and me interrupting
4 them.

5 Q. Do you recall at any point being with Mr Howling and
6 looking up at the building with him and having
7 a discussion about "Where are these flat numbers that
8 we're getting numbers of?"

9 A. No.

10 Q. If I ask you to take up the sequence of events at
11 page 15. This is tab 12 in the jury bundle.

12 A. 12?

13 Q. Yes, tab 12, page 15. There's a photograph timed 16.48.

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. If you look at that, one can see that there are several
16 flats on fire. Do you agree?

17 A. I agree.

18 Q. When you were at Mr Howling's side and he was the
19 incident commander, do you recall being part of or
20 overhearing any conversation along the lines of what
21 were the numbers of those flats that were on fire?

22 A. I can't recall that.

23 Q. Do you recall the part of or overhearing any
24 conversation along the lines of: "Is there any
25 correlation between the parts of the building that we

1 can see on fire and the numbers of flats that are being
2 passed to us?"

3 A. I can't -- I can't recall.

4 Q. I'll ask you then to look at a page in the record of
5 telephone calls at page 356. This is now 16.55. We've
6 moved on about another five minutes, and it's Paul Real
7 on the telephone again to command unit 4, we assume
8 Mr Cook, and in the middle of the page, he says:

9 "Yes, I know I've passed you a few flats where we
10 are having calls from. Flat 79 is the urgent one at the
11 moment."

12 Command unit 4 says:

13 "Yeah, yeah, we've got that written down here."

14 Command unit 4 goes to is a say:

15 "They're doing that as a matter of priority."

16 And Mr Real says:

17 "Yeah, if they can because the -- we were talking to
18 the woman. She's now stopped talking to us and we can't
19 hear her breathing at all."

20 And at the bottom of the page:

21 "79 seems to be the real big problem."

22 On the basis of the evidence you've already given
23 the court, I assume -- and correct me if I am wrong --
24 that Mr Cook would have got on to channel 10 and passed
25 that on to you. Is that a fair assumption?

1 A. If -- if I wasn't back on the unit by then, then yes.

2 Q. Well, it's certainly before Mr Freeman was incident
3 commander, this telephone call.

4 A. Yeah, Mr Freeman wasn't -- the message to state that
5 Mr Freeman might have been incident commander or might
6 not have doesn't mean we weren't back on the unit yet.
7 An incident commander can turn up onto the command
8 unit -- I'll get them back to the command unit and they
9 still haven't actually formally taken over yet.

10 Q. I appreciate that, but the evidence that we have is that
11 Mr Freeman reported in attendance at the incident at
12 16.57.39.

13 A. Right.

14 Q. So that would suggest that this telephone call was
15 before he was incident commander and therefore before
16 you and he went to command unit 4 together.

17 A. Okay.

18 Q. So is it fair to assume that this telephone call would
19 have been passed on to you by Mr Cook? If you don't
20 think it is, then you must, of course, say so.

21 A. No, Watch Manager Cook, as I said before, sent me loads
22 of messages regarding people trapped in flats, and
23 I just kept reiterating those to whoever was incident
24 commander, in no uncertain terms.

25 Q. Well just on that point, in terms of telephone calls

1 that we have records of at this earlier stage in the
2 incident, it's not loads. There was the one at 16.44,
3 there's one at 16.49 -- we've looked at those. We're
4 now looking at one at 16.55, and the next one I have
5 after that is at 17.11. So that's four in the space of
6 25 minutes. Do you recall at the time when Mr Howling
7 was incident commander -- Station Manager Cartwright was
8 perhaps taking over from him or just about to --
9 a message emphasising flat 79 as the top priority?

10 A. I just remember Watch Manager Cook telling me about
11 people being trapped in particular flats and then just
12 relaying the message onto the incident commander.

13 Q. I can understand how you might not, three and a half
14 years after, be able to remember the specific flat
15 number, but do you remember ever being told that one
16 specific flat was higher priority than any others?

17 A. No, I think if -- at the time I might have took them all
18 to be a priority as the fire in front of me looked so
19 severe. I can't be sure.

20 Q. The message that Station Manager Cartwright took over as
21 incident commander was sent at 16.55. I appreciate that
22 does not necessarily mean it was the precise moment he
23 took over. If I ask you about him taking over as
24 incident commander. The evidence that he gave the court
25 is that when he came and met up with you, you were

1 sweating profusely and couldn't give him any
2 information. Can you comment on that? Do you think
3 that's fair and accurate?

4 A. Actually sweating, I can't recall. It was some time --
5 I think everybody in the fire ground was sweating.
6 We're in fire gear. That's about that.

7 Q. The more important point of his evidence was that his
8 recollection was that he wasn't given any specific flat
9 numbers when the matter was handed over to him as
10 incident commander.

11 A. When Station Manager Cartwright arrived, initially he
12 only wanted to speak to Watch Manager Howling, and
13 I was, sort of, you know, on the edges of their
14 conversation. He wanted a detailed brief and Watch
15 Manager Howling was going through the process of doing
16 that whilst trying to run his incident at the same time,
17 and all I did was interrupt with messages from Watch
18 Manager Cook, that there were people trapped in flats
19 and what those door numbers were. So I -- I can't speak
20 whether he took any notice of me, but --

21 Q. But you think that you did interrupt a conversation with
22 Mr Howling and Mr Cartwright to pass on a message about
23 one or more specific flat numbers?

24 A. That's correct.

25 Q. If I take to you your statement at 479 in the statements

1 bundle.

2 A. Sorry, what was the page again?

3 Q. 479 of the statements bundle. The final paragraph
4 refers to you receiving a radio contact from Martin.
5 That is Mr Cook, isn't it?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. "I can't say what time this was. In between or just
8 after Mr Cartwright took over and at about the time
9 Group Manager Freeman took over I received the call.
10 I was told by Martin that there was a person on the
11 phone to control saying that they are trapped in their
12 flat. I can't recall the actual number of the flat.
13 I passed the information on to the incident commander
14 and I do not recall which person it was. It was either
15 Mr Freeman or Mr Cartwright. I do know that every piece
16 of the information that came in was ..."

17 And then it looks like the handwritten version of
18 your statement isn't clear at this point.

19 "... and was then acted on at some stage."

20 To what extent are you confident that you passed
21 information that you received from Mr Cook successfully
22 on to the relevant incident commanders?

23 A. I'm confident I passed the information on, 'cos that is
24 one of my main functions, otherwise, as you said early
25 on, I would be standing there sort of not doing

1 anything. So obviously when my radio went, as soon as
2 Watch Manager Cook gave me the information, whoever was
3 incident commander at the time received it as fast as
4 I did. These incident commanders at the early stage
5 were under a lot of pressure and were taking on board
6 a lot of information. Whether or not they acted on it
7 or it was successful in all the information getting
8 through to them, I can't say.

9 Q. As best you can, can you help us with the extent to
10 which you think you would have conveyed to incident
11 commanders details in addition to simply a list of flat
12 numbers? By "details", I mean things like a person is
13 on the line to control still or -- we've seen reference
14 to part after ceiling's fallen down. Things like that.

15 A. Actual specific details, I wouldn't be able to recall,
16 but it's just the information that these people need
17 rescuing straight away.

18 Q. Your statement on 479 in the bottom two lines refers to
19 the fact that you were now with Group Manager Freeman
20 and you walked around to the east side of the building.
21 If we go over the page, when you got there, you looked
22 up and saw a family looking out over the balcony, a man
23 and a woman there with children, a black African family.
24 They lowered some blankets. Just to assist you to
25 recollect, if you look in the sequence of events, jury

1 bundle, tab 12, page 23, you'll see a photograph that
2 should refresh your memory.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Is that what you're describing in your statement?

5 A. Yeah, that's it.

6 Q. That photograph's taken at 17.09. If I take you to
7 another communication between CU4 and brigade control at
8 around this time, in the advocates' bundles, page 540,
9 which is file 2.

10 THE CORONER: Is this in the second bundle, Mr Best? Do you
11 have that?

12 A. I don't think I have that.

13 THE CORONER: If you just look on the carousel behind you,
14 you'll find the bundle that you're looking for. There
15 should be a label on the front saying 2 of 4.

16 A. I think that's it. Yes.

17 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: We're now at 17.11.52, and a different
18 operator from brigade control talking to CU4, and in the
19 middle of the page, CU4 says:

20 "Also, we here are aware of people in four flats:
21 68, 79, 82, 80."

22 Your statement at page 480, which is where we
23 were --

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. -- ten lines down, says:

1 "I was now started receiving more communications
2 with Martin. All I now wanted to do was to get
3 Mr Freeman back to the command unit so that we could
4 start planning how to deal with this incident."

5 Does that help you to put a timeframe on when you
6 and Mr Freeman went back to the command unit? Some time
7 after you'd seen the black family on the balcony?

8 A. That's exactly when it happened.

9 Q. Then your statement refers to the fact that CU2, the
10 command unit from Islington, arrived and you therefore
11 had the additional support of Andy Paffett, Colin Evans
12 and Andy Huggins.

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. Mr Paffett became the mapping officer, Colin Evans
15 became the command planning system office and
16 Andy Huggens became a general use officer.

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. By that, should we understand that he was essentially
19 free to carry out whatever tasks people wanted to assign
20 him, or is there a specific role for the general use
21 officer?

22 A. At that time, Watch Manager Huggens had just joined the
23 command team and was more an observer than he was
24 a command officer, so any tasks we gave him would have
25 been extremely limited.

1 Q. Presumably he was a reasonably experienced firefighter,
2 was he?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. How many years' service?

5 A. I think the same number as myself.

6 Q. The role of mapping officer, can you help us with to
7 what extent that is about mapping outside the
8 building -- for example, where hydrants are and where
9 appliances are -- and to what extent it's about mapping
10 inside the building?

11 A. Inside the building and also you do a plan drawing of
12 the front face of the building, and it will have marks
13 where your lobby sector or bridgehead is and what floors
14 the fire sector is and search sectors are. You'd have
15 officers in charge of each of these sectors and they'd
16 be denoted by their tabards, so a mapper will detail
17 those and write down the information, bring it back and
18 annotate that to our white board on the back of the
19 command unit.

20 Q. I understand that that is to do with implementing the
21 London Fire Brigade's policy on sectorisation; is that
22 right?

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. What about if there was a need to map a layout of
25 a building and the location of individual flat numbers?

1 Is that something that would automatically be part of
2 the role of mapping officer or not?

3 A. He would only be able to -- he or she would only be able
4 to do that if the atmosphere was okay for them to walk
5 around within that building and do it, or if we had
6 plans of exactly where the numbers are in relation to
7 the corridors and the floors.

8 Q. What I'm trying to get at is whether, as the mapping
9 officer, that person would automatically think: "It's
10 part of my job to make sure they've got a map up and
11 running of the layout of the building, and if they
12 haven't, to create one", or whether that isn't part of
13 their function unless they're specifically tasked it.

14 A. No, if -- if we have to hand plans of the building,
15 we'll use those documents as our plan of the building
16 and put those up on our boards on the back of the unit.
17 Other than that, it is hand-drawn by a mapping officer.
18 But the interior of the building -- obviously if there's
19 fire inside, a mapping officer does not wear breathing
20 apparatus so obviously he cannot enter the building, so
21 any information he can glean from firefighters or
22 officers on site, he will use that to assist in drawing
23 some sort of map.

24 Q. You say at the bottom of page 480, the final four lines,
25 that once you got back to the unit -- that's the command

1 unit -- you can say that you wrote on the whiteboard the
2 information coming from control from people who were or
3 may have been trapped in any particular flat. Do you
4 see that? At the bottom of page 480?

5 A. Yeah, sorry.

6 Q. What I want to ask you is to what extent work like that
7 appeared to have been done or been being done before you
8 returned to command unit 4.

9 A. Yeah, I was just updating what was already written.

10 Q. So Mr Cook had started that process?

11 A. He'd already started that process.

12 Q. Then your statement refers to the fact that there came
13 a time when Deputy Assistant Commissioner Chidgey took
14 over as incident commander. What role did you have
15 after that?

16 A. My role remained the same throughout the entire time
17 I was at the incident.

18 Q. You were his command assistant?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Just back on Mr Paffett's role at 483 in your statement,
21 the beginning of the third paragraph.

22 A. What page is that again, sorry?

23 Q. 483.

24 A. 483. Okay.

25 Q. That paragraph begins:

1 "I have a mapping officer called Andy Paffett who
2 was on the ground, mapping all the appliances et cetera.
3 He was also locating which flat was where and which flat
4 was located on which floor."

5 I think he didn't arrive at the scene until about
6 5 pm. Can you assist at all with when he started
7 mapping which flat was where and which flat was located
8 on which floor?

9 A. When he got there, I just detailed him with that
10 information. He put his -- went back to his command
11 unit, which was parked, I think, almost behind CU4. So
12 he was riding in CU2. He would have then donned his
13 fire gear, grabbed a clipboard and gone out and done it.
14 So however long it took him to do that and go and start
15 mapping. I would have assumed it was five minutes.

16 Q. Do you know from your own knowledge?

17 A. I couldn't tell you.

18 Q. If I just draw attention to the fact that you say in
19 page 485 in the second paragraph:

20 "Throughout the incident there were no complaints of
21 lack of water or problems with water supply."

22 Is that right?

23 A. To my knowledge.

24 Q. You were relieved at the scene by another crew at 10.30
25 in the evening?

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. That brings to an end the questions I was going to ask
3 about the events you were involved in. What I wanted to
4 ask you next was about the extent to which you gained
5 knowledge, on the day, of certain features of
6 Lakanal House, and if you did, when you gained that
7 knowledge.

8 Firstly, did you, at any point, become aware that
9 there were no central corridors on the even-numbered
10 floors within the building?

11 A. I had no knowledge of that.

12 Q. Did you ever become aware that the flats in the building
13 were maisonettes?

14 A. I can't recall if it was after the incident or during
15 the incident that I found that out.

16 Q. Did you ever become aware that on their upper floors the
17 flats extended the full width of the building, in other
18 words having windows on both the east side and west
19 side?

20 A. Again, I can't recall. Obviously I found out later but
21 I can't recall whether that was during the incident or
22 immediately after.

23 Q. I've put photograph 44 up on the screen. This is taken
24 from the corner of Dalwood Street and Sedgmoor Place,
25 and you can see that there are balconies on alternate

1 floors.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. My question is whether there ever came a time at which
4 you were aware that those balconies provided escape
5 routes from the building via a central staircase to the
6 ground floor?

7 A. I didn't know if this particular design allowed that to
8 happen.

9 Q. Sorry, I didn't quite catch your answer?

10 A. I didn't realise whether this particular design of
11 building allowed that facility.

12 Q. At any time whilst you were acting as the command
13 assistant, did you think in your own mind about what the
14 purpose of those balconies was?

15 A. I assume they were people's personal balconies for
16 viewing in their own comfort.

17 Q. If I go to the next photograph, photograph 45, which, in
18 effect, zooms in from where we were, do you see the
19 white door at the end of the balcony?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. Do you remember noticing doors like that?

22 A. Not once, no.

23 Q. I've put up on screen an impression of the west side of
24 Lakanal House, looking from ground floor level, lined up
25 with the central staircase. It doesn't show the flat

1 numbers, though it does show the floor numbers. I'll
2 now place over it the flat numbers as they are by
3 reference to the windows that one can see on the west
4 side. To what extent did you build up a mental picture
5 like that of where individual flats were located in the
6 building?

7 A. What I got from the drawing we had up on the command
8 unit was what floors where people were trapped, what
9 floors they were on. So I'd drawn an outline of a high
10 rise building, sectioned it off in floors, and whatever
11 the door number of the flat that we were told people
12 were trapped in, what floor that was on, I drew that
13 onto that drawing.

14 Q. At what sort of stage in the day did you start doing
15 that?

16 A. This was when I got back into CU4 after -- I think it
17 may have happened after DAC Chidgey took over. I can't
18 recall the exact time but that's about when.

19 Q. Did you, at any stage, become aware that there were
20 signs in the building that provided some clues as to the
21 location of individual flats?

22 A. I can't recall.

23 Q. My final question is this: looking back over your
24 involvement on the day of the fire as command assistant,
25 what single thing do you think would have most helped

1 you to carry out that task?

2 A. More command officers at the initial stage of the
3 incident.

4 Q. Thank you.

5 THE CORONER: Can you just explain what you mean by that?
6 You're only ever going to have one incident commander.

7 A. At early stages of an incident, to provide the incident
8 commander with adequate help and assistance, it would be
9 better if you had more than one command officer. Then
10 the setting up process of the command unit can happen
11 a lot faster, you'll have more hands to put drawings up,
12 to give out tabards, to get the command structure in
13 place, to have a drawing in place to leave the team
14 leader at the incident commander's side and not be
15 distracted with any other function. The comms officer,
16 if he has a lot of radio traffic -- because it's not
17 just radios; it's telephones as well -- he or she will
18 have help in performing that function. Just general
19 more manpower.

20 THE CORONER: I see. Thank you. That's very helpful.

21 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: More command units, like command unit 4,
22 staffed by command officers like yourself?

23 A. Yes, yes, it would be better if we rode with more people
24 on every CU in London.

25 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Thank you. Those are my questions.

1 Walsh the manuscript copy of Mr Best's statement.
2 You'll recall that there were a couple of places in the
3 typed version where there were question marks rather
4 than words and Mr Best has had an opportunity to have
5 a look at the manuscript. It's obviously not his own
6 handwriting, but I was proposing to identify with him
7 three words in the statement and ask him about the
8 headline board before handing over to Mr Edwards.
9 THE CORONER: That's fine. Mr Edwards, would it help if we
10 did that and come back to you?
11 MR EDWARDS: Yes.
12 THE CORONER: That's fine. Thank you very much for doing
13 that and for arranging that to be brought. Yes, could
14 we have the jury, please.
15 (In the presence of the Jury)
16 THE CORONER: Thank you very much, members of the jury. We
17 were just about to start with questions by Mr Edwards,
18 but in fact we're going to put that back for a moment.
19 Mr Maxwell-Scott has a couple of questions additionally
20 to ask Mr Best, and also, as you'll see, the
21 London Fire Brigade over lunchtime have been able to
22 provide a useful exhibit for us to have a look at, so
23 we'll just deal with that first. Thank you. Yes.
24 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Thank you. Mr Best, over the adjournment
25 we have had brought to court a copy of the original

1 handwritten version of your statement, and I know you've
2 had a look at it while you've been waiting to give
3 evidence again. If that could be passed to you and we
4 can try and identify three words in it. I appreciate
5 it's not your handwriting. (Handed)

6 If we do it by reference to the typed statement.
7 You have it in front of you and it's also on the screen.
8 Firstly, on page 477 of the typed statement, about five
9 lines from the bottom, you see it talks about
10 an appliance that goes to an incident carries
11 an incident command wallet containing a board and
12 whiteboard which is A4 in size. Then it says:

13 "This is a ??? from which an incident can be run."

14 If you look at the handwritten version, I've just
15 marked with a yellow highlighter against that passage.
16 Are you able to tell us what the missing word is?

17 A. "This is a pack ..."

18 Q. Thank you. Then if I take on in the typed version to
19 479. The middle paragraph is the one that I put to you
20 earlier in my questions. On the typed version it reads
21 "I was not getting radio calls" and I suggested to you
22 that it actually ought to read "I was now getting radio
23 calls"; is that correct?

24 A. Yeah, that's correct.

25 Q. And then on the penultimate line on page 479, there are

1 some more question marks in a sentence that reads:

2 "I do know that every piece of information that came

3 in was ??? and was then acted on at some stage."

4 Are you able to assist with what the missing word

5 is?

6 A. "Annotated".

7 Q. Thank you. Then, finally before I handover to

8 Mr Edwards, who will question you next, if you could

9 leave the witness box, bring the microphone with you,

10 and then help us with what is now pinned to the witness

11 box so the jury can see it, albeit from a distance.

12 What is that?

13 A. This is called the headline board.

14 Q. Is this something that you carry on all command units?

15 A. Carried.

16 Q. Carried, thank you.

17 A. On all command units, yeah.

18 Q. You carried that back in July 2009?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. If you could just explain very briefly what it is.

21 A. Okay, this is the headline board. When appliances and

22 officers get to an incident and report to a command

23 unit, their details are put down on this headline board.

24 As you can see at the top there, it says "incident

25 commander", so whoever's the incident commander for this

1 particular incident would go in there. Every time a new
2 officer takes over, that name will be rubbed out. It's
3 written on in dry-liner pen so it's easily rubbed out
4 and can be replaced, upgraded, as the incident gets
5 bigger and a new officer comes on.

6 Over here, it's already got "monitoring officer",
7 okay? In that slot next to it is the monitoring
8 officer's name. This will be someone of one rank --
9 usually one rank above the officer who's in charge to
10 monitor their performance and add any assistance to
11 them. The rest are blank. This is for any other
12 principal officers who arrive at the incident. They
13 might be press liaison officer, a water officer, any
14 other function, and we'll actually hand-write those
15 functions in that section there.

16 If I take you to the far left-hand column --
17 sorry -- this column is for all appliances that arrive
18 at an incident. We'll write those appliances' names
19 down there. This is just somewhere to keep a list of
20 appliances initially. Then as the incident develops and
21 we create sectors, whether that be high rise or
22 laterally, we'll then number our sectors or name our
23 sectors, and in each sector, we'll have a sector
24 commander. That could be one of these principal
25 officers up here or it could be an officer on one of the

1 appliances. Then they will go in there, in any of these
2 sectors.

3 Also, they'll have a safety officer with them and
4 occasionally a comms officer with them. All these are
5 denoted in this white and yellow section at the top of
6 the sector boxes.

7 Further down, in this column here, we'll have the
8 number of the appliance that's in that sector. So it's
9 a station number. In that little box "R", if you can
10 see that -- do you see that? That will have the
11 resources on that appliance, ie is it riding four
12 riders, five riders, three riders? That will be in
13 there.

14 On the left-hand side, you'll see a box with
15 a little red arrow. That is relief appliances. That is
16 an appliance that turns up at an incident that may take
17 over after that appliance has finished its time at
18 an incident, and that -- their number will go in there,
19 so you can make a relief plan -- so you can plan exactly
20 where fresh appliances that arrive at an incident are
21 going to take over another appliance. You can set out
22 your relief plan on here so they slide in. As that
23 appliance leaves, they take over, the old appliance will
24 be rubbed off and the new appliance will slide in.

25 If I take you over to the far side. This is for

1 outside agencies, other emergency services. You'll see
2 at the top there's police, ambulance, gas, electric,
3 water, LALO, surveyors, rail -- British Rail, scientific
4 advisers. These are slots for all these relevant people
5 to go into.

6 Q. Can I just stop you. "LALO", is that short for "local
7 authority liaison officer"?

8 A. That's correct. Sorry about that abbreviation. At
9 incidents, because a command unit gets very busy and
10 there's so many people on there, very noisy, it's hard
11 to hear, what we'll often do is take the name and phone
12 number of these relevant parties on this right-hand side
13 and they can go off and sit in their vehicles. If
14 somebody's there for electrics, we might not need them
15 straight away, so they would go and sit in their car.
16 We have their number and their name and as we need them,
17 we call them up. They'll be around the incident ground
18 and we'll bring them back to the command unit to give
19 them instructions and we carry on.

20 We've just got other room here for other people at
21 the incident, other officers, but -- sorry, what I
22 should have started with -- obviously, at the top is the
23 date, the time of call of the incident, the last message
24 we sent, our tactical mode -- which basically means: are
25 we in offensive, which means we're committing crews

1 where we left off and ask you to give us a slightly more
2 detailed description of some of the features you've
3 described. Inside the command unit, you've talked about
4 whiteboards. Are these all physically fixed to the wall
5 of the command unit?

6 A. That's correct.

7 Q. So you can't take them down and bring them outside?

8 A. The -- one of the whiteboards has a blank sheet like
9 this headline board that is just white, which is
10 velcroed to it. It also has whiteboard underneath it.
11 Do you want me to explain why that is?

12 Q. Please.

13 A. Okay. At an incident, the reason that headline board
14 and that whiteboard are detachable is that the command
15 crews also have reliefs. When we spend, say, five hours
16 at an incident and it's near the change of shift or
17 we've just physically, mentally had enough of
18 a battering, another appliance exactly the same, with
19 a fresh crew, will come in and take over from us.

20 To transfer the information over from one unit to
21 the other easily, we have a headline board. We'll take
22 their blank headline board and put it on our appliance,
23 their blank whiteboard and put it on our appliance, and
24 our ones that are filled in will go on theirs, so that
25 if, at any time on our way back to our location, our

1 base station, we pick up another shout, we have all the
2 tools available.

3 Q. I think I understand. So you can swap them from one
4 appliance to another. Are they always inside the
5 command unit?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. And it follows from that, I imagine, that the only
8 people who can see them are people who are inside the
9 command unit?

10 A. That's correct.

11 Q. Physically, how big is the space inside the command
12 unit, roughly, as you compare it to the desk where
13 you're sitting or the area around you?

14 A. I would say it's from the stage -- the width of it will
15 be from where that gentleman's typing to this rail
16 behind me, and it will stop just anywhere in between
17 here and that screen that you're standing behind.

18 Q. Are you describing the physical empty space inside?

19 A. The empty space inside. It has seating inside it.

20 Q. You spoke about setting up the command unit on arrival,
21 when you arrive at the scene of a fire. Just explain
22 what it is you need to do to set up a command unit, the
23 different things.

24 A. Okay. To set up a command unit when you arrive, you
25 first have to switch the power to the back of the

1 appliance so that all the electrical functions work.

2 You start up computers --

3 Q. Switching the power on, is that just like a light

4 switch?

5 A. It's just like a switch on the front of your appliance

6 that sends power to the back. You also have to start up

7 the generator, which keeps the electrics running the

8 whole time.

9 Q. Again, what does that involve, just a switch?

10 A. No, it's a three-phase sort of thing. It's a switch on

11 the front, a sort of cold start button first and then

12 a start button, and it will fire up and it will sound

13 like any motor.

14 Q. So two switches?

15 A. Yes. We also have an aerial or antenna that we extend

16 to give us better reception with our communications

17 devices.

18 Q. How do you do that? Is that another switch?

19 A. That's another switch. You then throw another one or

20 two switches to start up our computers, 'cos we carry

21 four computers on the command unit. That's just the

22 initial start-up before you start to get information and

23 start to annotate that information to the appliance

24 itself.

25 Q. So to get the command unit ready for action, as it were,

1 it's a matter of flicking or pressing perhaps half
2 a dozen to eight switches?

3 A. Yeah, that's right.

4 Q. Are these switches all in one place, or are they located
5 in different parts of the command unit?

6 A. Apart from the one to put the power to the back, which
7 is on the front of the appliance, the rest are all very
8 close proximity on the back.

9 Q. When you say "on the back", you have to be outside the
10 command union to turn these on?

11 A. No, sorry, on the interior of the rear.

12 Q. So presumably all of that would take a matter of
13 minutes?

14 A. Just to turn on, yes.

15 Q. You mentioned that in the command unit you would be
16 using channel 10 for your personal radios. So I've
17 understood correctly, whom would you expect to be using
18 channel 10? You personally?

19 A. And all other command officers at that incident.

20 Q. So if you are away from the command unit physically,
21 it's going to be you using channel 10, the other command
22 officer who is left in the command unit, and any other
23 command officers, for example in CU2?

24 A. (The witness nodded)

25 Q. But you wouldn't expect the incident commander to be

1 using channel 10; is that right?

2 A. No.

3 Q. So in order for you to communicate with the incident
4 commander, you either have to be standing next to him or
5 you have to flick between channel 10 and whatever
6 channel the incident commander happens to be using?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. We've heard evidence that people are using channel 1 for
9 their personal radios, some BA crews are using
10 channel 6 -- I may be confusing the two of them, but
11 it's channel 1, channel 6 and channel 10. Were you
12 personally flicking between those channels, or did you
13 just stay on channel 10 because that's the channel you
14 were expecting to use?

15 A. No, I would have to change to channel 1 at the early
16 stages of this incident to talk to the incident
17 commander if I wasn't next to him.

18 Q. It probably sounds an obvious point: presumably when
19 you're channel 1, you don't know whether someone's
20 transmitting on channel 10 to you and you're missing it?

21 A. Yeah, that's correct.

22 Q. Do you remember whether you ever switched to channel 6
23 to hear what BA crews were saying?

24 A. I don't think I did.

25 Q. You also gave some evidence about the telephone messages

1 between you and brigade control, who are off-site. You
2 said words to the effect that it was better to
3 communicate with brigade control by telephone than it
4 would be by the radio in the appliance. Perhaps I've
5 misremembered. You're looking puzzled when I say that.
6 Do you think it's better to communicate with brigade
7 control by telephone than it would to use the radio?

8 A. Our standard messages with regard to the incident are
9 always sent by main scheme radio. This is not the fire
10 ground radio; it's the main scheme radio. Telephone
11 conversations with control are more of a personal
12 nature. It's not a -- it's not an update of the
13 incident. It will be, like, phone calls control sent to
14 us regarding somebody being trapped. That -- that would
15 be control ringing us, not the other way round.

16 Q. Presumably they have advantages and disadvantages. The
17 advantage, I imagine, is you can have a longer, more
18 detailed conversation without clogging up the airwaves?

19 A. That's correct.

20 Q. The disadvantage would be that no-one else listening in
21 on the radio of their appliance would be able to hear it
22 because it's a telephone call?

23 A. That's right.

24 Q. Do you have file 1 of the advocates' bundle in front of
25 you, please? I'm going to ask you to turn to page 350.

1 A. Could you say that number again, please?

2 Q. 350.

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. You've been referred to a number of telephone
5 conversations. I just want to refer you to this one,
6 which is between CU4 and control. It's timed 17.24.
7 From your memory -- you may not be able to remember, but
8 were you likely to have been in the command unit at
9 17.24?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. If you just take a moment to read this document, please.
12 (Pause) Does that jog your memory? Do you remember
13 this phone call if I show you this document?

14 A. I couldn't be sure whether I took the call or not.

15 Q. Over the page, please, if I just ask you to read the
16 second last entry on that page, the third last at the
17 bottom, it says:

18 "... but said that they could see someone on the top
19 floor in a flat that was burning, but I can't give you
20 any number or anything more than that."

21 Then whoever takes the call at the command unit
22 says:

23 "To be honest, all the flats on the top floor are
24 burning."

25 Presumably that doesn't jog your memory any more?

1 A. Not really, no.

2 Q. Then over one more page, please. This, I think, is the
3 same conversation, the second entry:
4 "Any news on flat 79?"
5 Then CU4:
6 "No, not at all. No, I mean they're trying to get
7 BA crews up there but obviously by the time they get up
8 there they run out of air, so (indecipherable)."
9 I presume that's not going to jog your memory more
10 than the previous sections I've shown you?

11 A. There's been so many conversation with so many different
12 people, it's hard to -- I wouldn't like to say that that
13 was me or it wasn't me.

14 Q. Do you remember thinking at some point or being aware at
15 some point that BA crews were running out of air as they
16 reached the top of the block of flats?

17 A. That was the general perception on the fire ground, that
18 the standard breathing apparatus set wasn't making it to
19 the top floor.

20 Q. Would you turn to page 355, please. This is another
21 telephone call between control and CU4, 17.29. I'm
22 assuming you're not going to be able to remember whether
23 this is you or not either?

24 A. I'm sorry, I can't confirm either way.

25 Q. I understand. It's difficult some years later. If you

1 look at the eighth entry -- it's about halfway down the
2 page -- CU4 says:

3 "Yeah, we've got the crews going into there. We've
4 got a rescue sector going in. We are aware of ...

5 "Right."

6 "... 81, yeah."

7 This is something the jury have heard evidence
8 about, rescue sectors. Could you just explain, if you
9 can, the comment:

10 "Yeah, we've got crews going into there. We've got
11 a rescue sector going in. We are aware of ..."

12 Can you explain what that might mean, in particular
13 reference to a rescue sector "going in"?

14 A. I can't recall that phrase being used, "rescue sector".

15 Q. If you don't know what it means, don't worry.

16 Finally, would you turn to page 401, please. This
17 is a document the jury have seen before, but you I don't
18 think have. What it is is a transcript of radio
19 traffic. The top box, 17.19, from CU4 do M2FS. I think
20 M2FS is control; is that right?

21 A. Control.

22 Q. You can see the top entry on the top box. This is CU4
23 transmitting:

24 "30, three, zero by 10 metres, 20 per cent of 5th
25 floor, 10 per cent of 7th floor, 20 per cent of 8th

1 floor alight. Multiple persons trapped, multiple
2 rescues being carried out. Two jets, dry riser,
3 tactical mode Oscar. Charlie Uniform 4 over."

4 I'm assuming that doesn't jog your memory any more
5 than the previous documents we've looked at?

6 A. That's just a standard message -- informative message
7 that gets sent on all fire incidents.

8 Q. Just looking at the 20 per cent of 8th floor alight, for
9 example, "multiple persons trapped", do you remember
10 transmitting a message saying X percentage of certain
11 floors alight, multiple persons trapped?

12 A. I couldn't say that I personally sent any messages on
13 the main scheme radio. Most of those were sent by my
14 comms officer.

15 Q. In any event, we have that message transmitted from the
16 command unit at 17.19, saying "multiple persons
17 trapped". Then, two boxes underneath that, the entry at
18 17.23, halfway down, VB1 -- this is command transmitting
19 to you:

20 "Charlie Uniform 4, just for your information,
21 control commander at control is making this incident
22 a persons reported. We haven't actually had that
23 priority from anybody at this incident. Over."

24 Does the phrase "persons reported" mean anything to
25 you?

1 A. It's -- it's a phrase we use at an early part of
2 an incident to state that there are people that are in
3 danger or need rescuing.

4 Q. Is it any different from "persons trapped"? Does it
5 have some sort of formal meaning that "persons trapped"
6 doesn't have?

7 A. Yeah, "persons trapped" is making it more detailed.
8 "Persons reported" means there's a possibility there are
9 people involved in the incident we're attending.
10 "Persons trapped" is a lot more specific.

11 Q. Making an incident "persons reported", as far as you're
12 aware, does that have some sort of formal consequence or
13 is it simply a turn of phrase to say there are people --
14 not as serious as trapped, but there are people somehow
15 in trouble?

16 A. It does mean there are people in trouble, what we would
17 send to control to let them know that there are people
18 in trouble and also for them to contact the London
19 Ambulance Service so that they can dispatch units to
20 assist us if the people we bring out from the incident
21 would be in need of medical attention.

22 Q. Thank you. I'm going to move on to a different point,
23 now. Can I ask that Mr Clark pass the original of the
24 note you took back to you, please. (Handed)

25 Before I ask you anything about that, I'm not

1 suggesting you have this wrong but just looking at your
2 handwriting -- five numbers of what you think is your
3 handwriting -- are you fairly sure that that is your
4 handwriting?

5 A. I'm pretty sure it's mine.

6 Q. What I want to try and work out is how that note came to
7 be created, and perhaps more significantly how it came
8 to end up where it was. We've heard from Station
9 Manager Glennly that at some point he must have had that
10 note because we can see his handwriting on it. I want
11 to firstly try and work out where you might have been
12 when you wrote those numbers down. If you were in the
13 command unit and you want to write something down, do
14 you physically have in front of you a pad of lined paper
15 like you might find out of Ryman's?

16 A. We don't have any lined paper in the command unit.

17 Q. So it's plain paper like that?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. And is it part of a pad or is it loose?

20 A. They're all loose sheets.

21 Q. You can probably see from that piece of paper that at
22 some point it's been folded in half. It's obviously
23 suffered some fairly minor water damage because it seems
24 to have some stains on it. There's probably three
25 possibilities: one is that you were in the command unit

1 when you wrote that bit of paper down, that you wrote
2 the numbers down on that piece of paper and left the
3 command unit and gave it to someone else outside the
4 command unit. Another possibility is you were at the
5 fire ground next to the incident commander and you were
6 writing down those numbers as they came to you over your
7 personal radio from someone else, or from people you saw
8 on the scene, and then you gave the piece of paper to
9 someone else at the fire ground. I suppose the third
10 possibility is you were at the command unit and someone
11 comes and takes the bit of paper from you. I appreciate
12 it's some three years down the line. Do any of them
13 sound more or less likely now?

14 A. I wouldn't like to guess which one of those options.

15 Q. Do you ever recall going from the command unit and
16 giving someone a bit of paper at the fire ground?

17 A. I can't recall whether I did or whether I didn't. The
18 chances are I did.

19 Q. Well, if you can't remember, I don't think it's fair
20 to --

21 A. No, I don't want to say "yes" and be wrong.

22 Q. Okay. You were asked about the priority of the flat
23 numbers that you received, and your evidence was words
24 to the effect that you thought any flat was a priority
25 because, looking at the fire, large parts of the

1 building were alight. I want to explore that with you
2 a little bit more. Presumably if you're looking at the
3 building -- we've seen a number of photographs where you
4 have perhaps four flats at most were alight. Presumably
5 the priority is any flat immediately above or next to
6 another flat that's already alight, or did you not see
7 it like that at the time?

8 A. No, that's correct.

9 Q. You also gave some evidence about the mapping officer,
10 and you said the mapping officer didn't wear BA and
11 therefore couldn't enter the building to work out the
12 building's layout internally?

13 A. Not to its entirety, no.

14 Q. Could the mapping officer have been sent, for example,
15 to the 1st floor or 2nd floor, or a floor that was
16 relatively smoke-free, to have a look around and try and
17 work out the layout of the building?

18 A. By my understanding, the bridgehead by -- by then, or
19 close to that time, was now either outside or on the 3rd
20 floor, so you -- you can't go beyond the bridgehead
21 unless you are in breathing apparatus or unless directed
22 that there is a safe way up that's not in a smoke filled
23 atmosphere.

24 Q. Whose decision would that be to make?

25 A. That would be the officer at the bridgehead or lobby

1 sector.

2 Q. Could the mapping officer put on BA to go and have
3 a look around inside the building to work out the
4 layout?

5 A. No, he's -- by -- the fact that he's a mapping officer,
6 normally he's not qualified to wear BA.

7 Q. Thank you very much.

8 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Dowden? Thank you. Ms Al Tai?

9 Questions by MS AL TAI

10 MS AL TAI: Good afternoon, Mr Best.

11 A. Good afternoon.

12 Q. I act on behalf of Mark Bailey, Catherine Hickman's
13 partner. Can I take you to a section of your statement,
14 please. It's at page 481. Can you hear me
15 sufficiently?

16 THE CORONER: The bundle will be marked "Witness
17 statements". Do you have that there?

18 A. Yeah. Okay.

19 MS AL TAI: Do you have it, Mr Best? I'm looking
20 specifically at the top half of the page, and if it's
21 okay, I'll read aloud. It's the portion that states:
22 "I was sending radio messages out to the relevant
23 sector commanders at the bridgehead. I was wanting and
24 asking for the relevant commanders to come back to me
25 when they get to the relevant flats or persons. We

1 were..."

2 I'm assuming -- is that "pursuing"?

3 A. That's correct.

4 Q. "We were pursuing the commanders all the time to result

5 and relevant call. When the relevant flat was

6 visited --"

7 A. Sorry, can I interrupt there?

8 Q. Please go ahead.

9 A. It's not "to result"; it's "to resolve". That's another

10 typing error.

11 Q. Okay, I see. If I can finish that last sentence:

12 "When the relevant flat was visited and people

13 brought out the whiteboard was updated."

14 During that time, were you able to secure any

15 information as to whether those flats that you had

16 received information about had been actioned?

17 A. Some of them. They were -- I'd call up the bridgehead

18 on the incident commander's request because they were

19 the ones initiating: "Can we have an update? Can we

20 have an update?" as an incident commander would do. So

21 I or one of my other officers would contact the

22 bridgehead to get an update on what was happening if

23 they -- if there were crews on their way, and they would

24 inform us if a crew was being sent to that address.

25 Q. In respect of flat 79 and 81, did you receive

1 information on whether either of those were going to be
2 actioned or were actioned or anything of that nature?

3 A. I couldn't say specifically what door numbers,
4 obviously, because it was that long ago, that crews were
5 sent to, but crews were sent to flats to effect rescues.

6 Q. So just to clarify, you didn't receive any information
7 in respect of those flats?

8 A. No, I didn't say I didn't.

9 Q. I apologise.

10 A. I said I received information on a number of flats that
11 crews were being sent to go and effect a rescue, but
12 I wouldn't like to say what specific numbers those flats
13 were 'cos it was so long ago. I couldn't pluck those
14 numbers out the air now.

15 Q. Is that quite an important step to take?

16 A. For us to find out if a crew -- crews were on their way?
17 Yes.

18 Q. Is that a step that would be required to be taken by
19 both yourself and those in the command unit?

20 A. What, to find that information out?

21 Q. Yes.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. So for example, Mr Cook, who was on the command unit at
24 the time, would he also need to receive that sort of
25 information?

1 A. Yes, he would probably be -- want to relay that
2 information back to our control so they could tell the
3 caller that crews are on their way and when they're
4 outside their door, find their -- their location within
5 the flat so they'd speedily be able to get -- get to
6 them.

7 Q. We haven't heard evidence from Mr Cook yet but if
8 I could just take you to a section in the statement. If
9 you could go, please, to page 244, Mr Cook's statement.
10 It's specifically on this topic. (Handed)

11 A. Okay.

12 Q. It's the top half of the page, and it's the second line
13 down, and Mr Cook's evidence in this statement, which,
14 of course, he'll have opportunity to comment on, is that
15 he didn't receive any feedback as to what was happening
16 with the rescue attempts at these flats but he didn't
17 expect to. Is that your understanding as well? Your
18 evidence suggests otherwise.

19 A. What time was this -- that particular ...

20 Q. My understanding is there is no particular time here but
21 it's just a generic position in respect of the rescue of
22 these particular flats.

23 A. Oh, right. This is just when I was speaking to Watch
24 Manager Howling. This is the early part of the
25 incident. Yeah, it's because -- the reason Watch

1 manager, have you yourself acted as an incident
2 commander?

3 A. No.

4 Q. I want to you cast your mind back, really, to the
5 beginning of the incident, when you received the pager
6 to go off to the fire and you're in the command unit.
7 Were you gathering information en route before you
8 attended the actual premises itself?

9 A. Only where it was, only the location. I can't recall if
10 we gathered any more information via listening to the
11 radio or not.

12 Q. Do you have an operational folder within the command
13 unit?

14 A. No, because it's not our -- we don't have specific fire
15 grounds. A command unit can go anywhere in London.

16 Q. Very well. But was anyone monitoring the radio messages
17 coming in about anyone trapped?

18 A. I -- I can't recall.

19 Q. All right. So you arrive at the scene and you go up and
20 you recognise Mr Howling as being the incident
21 commander; correct?

22 A. Correct.

23 Q. You know him? You've met him before?

24 A. I only knew of him. I don't know him personally.

25 Q. You say in your statement:

1 "We do know each other."

2 A. Yeah, it's only -- it's not like he's a close friend of
3 mine in the fire service.

4 Q. You know him as a professional and as a firefighter?

5 A. As a professional watch manager.

6 Q. Very well. Can you just give the jury an idea of what,
7 really, was going on on the ground at the time, because
8 forgive me, you turn up there and you say that
9 Mr Howling appears to be spending his time on
10 communications, on the radio?

11 A. Yes, that's correct.

12 Q. Is that how you would normally expect an incident
13 commander to be controlling the field and controlling
14 the firefighters?

15 A. I also said he was also talking to
16 Station Manager Cartwright. He was also talking to
17 crews on the fire ground, directing -- he was immersed
18 in all aspects of directing operations.

19 Q. Had anyone been sent up to the bridgehead by that stage?

20 A. I couldn't -- I couldn't tell you.

21 Q. Were you aware at that time, at around 4.30 in the
22 afternoon -- by that time, a list of the critical flats
23 had already been compiled by Firefighter Mullins and
24 handed over to Incident Commander Howling.

25 A. I -- I can't recall that.

1 Q. That's pretty important stuff, isn't it?

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. This is "persons trapped" and the names of all the
4 critical flats that are involved in this tragedy?

5 A. That's correct.

6 Q. Were you aware at that stage that any list had been
7 compiled?

8 A. I don't think so.

9 Q. Were you present when Watch Manager Payton was spoken to
10 and the list was handed to him?

11 A. I can't recall that happening.

12 Q. You yourself knew nothing about this building or the
13 layout?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Did that trouble you at all?

16 A. Not at that time, no.

17 Q. Did it seem to you as if anyone else knew about the
18 layout of this building?

19 A. I don't know. I can't recall.

20 Q. All right. I have no further questions. Thank you.

21 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Walsh?

22 Questions by MR WALSH

23 MR WALSH: Thank you, madam. I just want to get some
24 absolute clarity about what you mean when you speak of
25 command officers. It has some relevance to the

1 questions you were just being asked by Mr Compton. When
2 you speak of "command officer", I think you mean command
3 unit officer, an officer in the command unit?

4 A. An officer on the command unit, yes.

5 Q. By contrast with incident commander or operational
6 commander or anything like that?

7 A. Yeah, it's completely different.

8 Q. Yes. It's not intended that you take a command role
9 when you attend with the command unit on site?

10 A. No, we -- we never do that.

11 Q. Yes. Yours is a supportive role?

12 A. Yeah, we're support staff.

13 Q. All right. So when you arrived, you left Mr Cook in the
14 command unit to set up and you thought it appropriate,
15 you've told us, to identify the incident commander,
16 Mr Howling, as soon as possible. You arrived with
17 Mr Howling. You were just asked whether you would
18 expect Mr Howling to be on the radio, whether that's the
19 sort of thing you'd expect a commander to be doing. You
20 answered "yes", I think?

21 A. He's got to speak to his crews that entered the
22 building.

23 Q. When you arrived and you were trying to interrupt
24 Mr Howling and Mr Cartwright in the handover, did
25 Mr Howling appear to be to be fully engaged in his

1 command role?

2 A. It appeared that by the nature of the incident,
3 Mr Cartwright needed a really detailed briefing -- or he
4 requested one -- so Mr Howling was obviously trying to
5 give him that briefing but at the same time he was
6 getting messages from his own crews as well as me
7 interrupting him. He was under a lot.

8 Q. Right. As Mr Compton has just put to you -- but I'm
9 going to ask you to look at it from a slightly different
10 aspect -- at that stage, Mr Howling didn't tell you that
11 he'd already committed people into the building?

12 A. No. I just assumed people were in there because I saw
13 the hose from the fire appliance into the dry riser and
14 you do that to fire up -- the water up the tower, so
15 you've got to have crews entering the building at the
16 other end of it.

17 Q. So you assumed -- we've heard evidence that that is
18 so -- that there were crews already in the building
19 fighting the fire?

20 A. I assumed that was the case.

21 Q. All right. At page 483 of your statement -- this is the
22 last question I'm going to ask you. You were speaking
23 on page 483, second paragraph --

24 THE CORONER: Sorry, could you just wait one moment.
25 Mr Best is just finding it.

1 MR WALSH: Sorry.

2 A. Sorry.

3 THE CORONER: That's all right. No need to hurry.

4 A. Okay.

5 MR WALSH: You see in the second paragraph, you speak about

6 Mr Paffett's role as the mapping officer on the ground.

7 Then about eight lines down, the middle sentence, you

8 say this:

9 "We didn't, at this stage, have any building plans.

10 That was something that we now requested at the first

11 silver meeting from the first point of contact with the

12 local authority liaison officer."

13 Now, the first silver meeting you referred to

14 a couple of pages earlier -- I'm going to take you to

15 it -- appears to have been just after 5 o'clock.

16 A. I think so. I think so.

17 Q. So that was the first silver meeting and at that silver

18 meeting, in attendance from the command unit, were you

19 there?

20 A. I was. I was taking minutes.

21 Q. Yes, you were taking minutes of what was happening.

22 Mr Freeman was there, wasn't he?

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. And there was a representative of the local authority?

25 A. Yeah. I think DAC Chidgey was also present at that.

1 Q. Right. And there were other officers present at that
2 meeting?

3 A. And police and ambulance and all -- all other agencies.

4 Q. Yes. Who made the request of the local authority
5 representatives for the building plans?

6 A. The Fire Brigade did.

7 Q. Right. So that request was made at 5 o'clock. Do you
8 remember when the plans arrived?

9 A. I couldn't put a time on when they came.

10 Q. All right. We'll leave it at that. Thank you very
11 much.

12 A. Thank you.

13 THE CORONER: Members of the jury, do you have any
14 questions?

15 Questions by the Jury

16 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you, Madam Coroner. We do
17 have a few.

18 We were just wondering, Watch Manager Best -- we've
19 heard how the scene was made persons reported by control
20 rather than the incident itself. In your experience, is
21 that a common thing to happen, for it to come from
22 control rather than the incident?

23 A. No, it's -- it can come from either source. Generally
24 speaking, if somebody makes a 999 call and they
25 believe -- they are asked on the phone if there is

1 somebody involved, that's when you'll get persons
2 reported.

3 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: So as soon as control got a call
4 to say that there was people in a flat?

5 A. I -- I don't know -- I don't know if control did or not.

6 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay. We've heard, I think, that
7 there were a total of three command units at the
8 incident in attendance. Yours comes from Lewisham,
9 I believe. You also mentioned that command units come
10 from all over London. Do you have any idea, seeing as
11 you work on these units yourself, how many of those
12 there are across London?

13 A. There are eight command units in London.

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

15 THE CORONER: Are we talking about greater London here?

16 A. Greater London, sorry?

17 THE CORONER: I don't know. You tell me where you say there
18 are eight command units.

19 A. Would you like to know their locations?

20 THE CORONER: No. You said they were in London. I was just
21 wondering how you're defining "London" in this context.

22 A. Oh, the boundaries of the London fire service.
23 I suppose it's within the M25.

24 THE CORONER: Right. Okay, thank you.

25 A. Sorry.

1 THE CORONER: That's okay. Thank you.

2 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you. Does it vary between
3 two and three firefighters on each of those, or is it
4 a maximum?

5 A. We ride a maximum three, minimum two.

6 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Okay, thank you. Again, I'm not
7 sure if this is something you can answer or a different
8 officer. We can see that all the command unit staff are
9 watch managers, yet you've mentioned that your mapping
10 officer wasn't trained in BA so couldn't enter the
11 building. Does this mean that not all senior
12 officers -- for instance, watch managers and above --
13 necessarily have BA training?

14 A. No, what happens is when we became watch managers,
15 unless you keep the skill up -- you're required, I think
16 it's annually or every two years, to go back and retrain
17 on every piece of equipment in the fire service. Watch
18 managers in a command unit won't necessarily retrain on
19 breathing apparatus because we're never inside the
20 building. As to senior officers, some of those keep
21 their skill up and some don't.

22 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: So it is something that needs to
23 be refreshed on a regular basis?

24 A. As with everything, yes.

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

1 A. Thank you.

2 Questions by the Coroner

3 THE CORONER: Mr Best, I'd just like to ask you a couple of
4 questions about the liaison on the main scheme radio
5 between brigade control and the command unit. At the
6 brigade control, you have people who are on the
7 telephone to those who are in flats?

8 A. That's correct.

9 THE CORONER: When you were involved, whether directly in
10 making or receiving calls or in listening to what your
11 colleague Mr Cook was saying, were you aware at any
12 stage of any suggestion made to brigade control that
13 they might ask the callers in the flats for information,
14 for example, as to where they were in their flats and
15 for any detail which actually might assist?

16 A. Only that they were trapped. I believe that one of the
17 callers said that they had a security gate that needed
18 to be got to, opened up first or cut open before we got
19 in, but that's about the only information I can
20 remember.

21 THE CORONER: Well, take that as an example. How was that
22 information then managed? How was that passed from that
23 caller down to people on the ground who actually needed
24 to know that?

25 A. We radioed for a fire rescue unit to get heavy cutting

1 gear to go to that flat, which they did, and cut that
2 gate off, which they did, and effect a rescue.

3 THE CORONER: But from what you say, that was initiated
4 because the caller himself or herself had identified
5 a particular grill which would need particular
6 attention?

7 A. That's correct.

8 THE CORONER: But it wasn't anything that was initiated from
9 the command unit or from brigade control?

10 A. No -- I don't know if brigade control asked them the
11 state of the flat or the access in because I was not
12 privy to that conversation.

13 THE CORONER: Okay, thank you very much. That's very
14 helpful.

15 A. Thank you.

16 THE CORONER: Mr Best, thank you very much for coming and
17 thank you very much for the help that you've been able
18 to give to us.

19 A. Thank you.

20 THE CORONER: You're welcome to stay, but you're free to go
21 if you would prefer.

22 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Just before the witness goes, there is
23 one document that it might be useful to put to him since
24 the silver meetings have been referred to in evidence,
25 because it is a exhibit to his statement.

1 THE CORONER: All right, yes.

2 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: That is in the advocates' bundles at
3 page 888, which I have at the very beginning of file 3.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. This is described as exhibit DB/1. Is that your
6 signature which appears towards the bottom of the page?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. You're identifying that as the first exhibit to your
9 witness statement. If you look at the top, it says
10 "Silver meeting number 1" and then it says, two lines
11 below, "3 July 2009 at 19.50". Do you see that?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Obviously the document says what it says, but do you
14 recall whether there was indeed a silver meeting that
15 took place at approximately 1950 hours?

16 A. If that's the date on it, that's when it took place.
17 Time, sorry.

18 Q. Do you recall whether any silver meetings had taken
19 place before 1950 hours?

20 A. I don't believe any did, 'cos they generally have to be
21 run by the command staff, or facilitated by the command
22 staff.

23 Q. Thank you for identifying that document for us.

24 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you very much, Mr Best.

25 A. Thank you.

1 (The witness withdrew)

2 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Maxwell-Scott.

3 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Madam, the next witness is Watch Manager
4 Martin Cook, and his statement starts at page 239 in the
5 statements bundles.

6 THE CORONER: Yes. Would you like to come forward, Mr Cook,
7 thank you.

8 MARTIN COOK (sworn)

9 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Cook. Do sit down. Do help
10 yourself to a glass of water. Please could you keep
11 your voice up and if you can speak close to the
12 microphone, that will also help us to hear what you're
13 saying. If you direct your answers across the room
14 towards the members of the jury, then that will help
15 them to hear and also keep you close to the microphone.

16 A. Okay.

17 THE CORONER: Mr Maxwell-Scott, who is standing, is going to
18 ask you questions on my behalf, and then there will be
19 questions from others. Thank you.

20 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

21 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good afternoon, Mr Cook.

22 A. Good afternoon.

23 Q. Can you give the court your full name please?

24 A. Martin Peter Cook.

25 Q. Is it right that back in July 2009 you were employed by

1 the London Fire Brigade as a watch manager?

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. And that you formed the other half of the crew of
4 command unit 4 with Watch Manager Best?

5 A. That is correct.

6 Q. At that time, for how long had you been employed by the
7 London Fire Brigade?

8 A. Almost 27 years.

9 Q. Have you been in court today hearing Mr Best give his
10 evidence?

11 A. Yes, I have.

12 Q. Thank you. Before turning to the specific events of
13 3 July 2009, I wanted to ask you a series of general
14 questions.

15 Firstly, when you were at the fire ground, near
16 Lakanal House on the afternoon of the fire, to what
17 extent did you remain at command unit 4 and to what
18 extent did you move away from it at any time?

19 A. I remained on command unit 4 throughout the duration of
20 my stay, about half an hour from the end to
21 approximately 11 o'clock at night. I did step off the
22 unit two or three hours into the incident to get some
23 fresh air but I was very close to the unit, standing by.
24 The first time I went anywhere near the fire ground was
25 at 10.50 that evening.

1 THE CORONER: Mr Cook, please don't speak too quickly
2 because the shorthand writers are making a transcription
3 and they need to follow what you're saying.

4 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: That being the case, to what extent did
5 you have view of the fire ground itself, a view of the
6 tower block, and to what extent were you, in effect,
7 working in a office, albeit one that was very close to
8 Lakanal House?

9 A. Yes, in effect I was in an office. Basically, I was
10 cocooned within the command unit. Visibility out of the
11 command unit is very limited. The windows are extremely
12 small. My view of the fire ground was next to nothing,
13 really.

14 Q. If I ask you then about the sources of information that
15 were available to you. You've just explained to us in
16 essence that you didn't have any visual sources of
17 information, so you would have been relying on what you
18 were told, either over radios or telephones or verbally,
19 and any notes that were passed to you.

20 A. Correct, yes.

21 Q. If I ask you firstly then about the information that
22 came over radios or telephones. Would you have had
23 access, whilst driving to Lakanal House, to the same
24 radio messages that crews in appliances would have had?

25 A. I would have had, but bearing in mind I'm driving the

1 appliance on a blue light and two tones going, quite a
2 large appliance, and my focus is purely on the safety of
3 driving that appliance to the incident. Yes, there was
4 radio traffic but to be quite honest, I had
5 concentration on getting that unit to the incident
6 safely.

7 Q. I can understand that. When you arrive, does it follow
8 that you continue to have access to radio traffic that
9 is going out to other appliances, both at the fire
10 ground and those making their way there?

11 A. Yeah, that is correct.

12 Q. In addition, you would have a personal radio; is that
13 right?

14 A. That is correct, yeah.

15 Q. We heard from Watch Manager Best about the use of
16 channel 10. Was your personal radio permanently on
17 channel 10 so that you could talk to him, or did it
18 alternate between a range of channels?

19 A. Okay. On the command unit, there is the fire ground
20 radio as a built-in unit, which is on channel 1. It can
21 be changed, but I have that on channel 1, as an addition
22 to the main scheme, which we've heard about earlier. My
23 handheld radio, therefore, is on channel 10. I've got
24 no reason to switch it to channel 1; I can hear
25 channel 1 on the fixed radio on the back of the command

1 unit. So I've got both opens channel or being used.
2 I can hear both channels at the same time.
3 Q. So you have channel 1 open and channel 10 open?
4 A. Yeah.
5 Q. Channel 1 is in relation to the fire ground; is that
6 right?
7 A. Correct.
8 Q. So the messages that are being sent by control to
9 appliances are on top of that?
10 A. Yeah, there's the main scheme radio -- the main scheme
11 radio is messages transferred from control to all the
12 appliances throughout London, or certainly southeast
13 London -- and then on channel 1, which is a separate
14 unit, is the fire ground radio and then handheld is
15 a third radio.
16 Q. Then on top of that you have telephones in the command
17 unit?
18 A. Yeah, we have three telephones. One is a mobile
19 telephone. The other two work on mobile SIM cards but
20 are physically connected via a cord to the back of the
21 command unit. So there's three radio -- three phones in
22 total.
23 Q. I think, as we go through the events, we'll see that you
24 used those to speak to brigade control?
25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Would you have spoken to anyone else with those
2 telephones other than brigade control?

3 A. Not that I can recall but it wouldn't be unusual to
4 receive calls from other people on those phones. But to
5 this day I can't remember whether I did take other
6 calls.

7 Q. What sort of people might call you?

8 A. Some senior officer monitoring the incident at brigade
9 headquarters, or we have a command centre and they
10 listen to it. They might want to ask questions about
11 what's going on. Those are the sort of people who have
12 access to those telephone numbers.

13 Q. So in summary, would it be fair to say senior
14 London Fire Brigade officers who aren't at the fire
15 ground --

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. -- and are interested from a distance in what's going
18 on?

19 A. Also control -- brigade control could give the number
20 out to someone. For example, if the LALO was coming on,
21 brigade control might give the LALO the number so he can
22 contact us, for example.

23 Q. We'll come to the way in which you were given some
24 specific flat numbers, but before we do so, in summary,
25 any flat numbers that you had were given to you either

1 by brigade control or over channel 1 or channel 10, or
2 over the mainstream radio that is listened to by
3 appliances?

4 A. Yeah, that's correct.

5 Q. Were there any other potential sources for you to
6 receive information by telephone or radio about flat
7 numbers?

8 A. No.

9 Q. Although of course you might have been told something
10 verbally?

11 A. Correct, yes.

12 Q. If I ask you, then, another general topic, which is
13 about recording information. We've heard that the
14 command unit is equipped with the headline board, which
15 we now see a copy of, and whiteboards and pens and
16 paper. What's the system for dealing with messages that
17 come into the command unit, both messages that are
18 expressly sent to the command unit and then also
19 messages that you just happen to hear? Because as
20 you've explained, you have more than one radio channel
21 permanently open.

22 A. In 2009, there was no method of recording messages apart
23 from messages sent from the command unit on the main
24 scheme to control. For that we had a pad, message pad,
25 and that was duplicated twofold, and every message you

1 sent to control you wrote down before you sent it so you
2 had a hard copy in front of you.

3 Messages coming in or going out on the mobile phone,
4 there was no system in operation within the brigade to
5 register or to record those messages, so any information
6 you recorded was done off your own back.

7 Q. So just pausing there, recapping over that, we know that
8 sometimes you are getting telephone calls with
9 information in them from brigade control but when you
10 are passing information from the fire ground to brigade
11 control, that is done over the main scheme radio?

12 A. Correct.

13 Q. It's those messages which, am I right in saying, you
14 write out in advance?

15 A. Yeah, in advance.

16 Q. On a pad which keeps a duplicate copy, and then you
17 would, in effect, read out what you've written?

18 A. That is correct.

19 Q. Rather like an old-fashioned telegram?

20 A. Correct, yeah.

21 Q. And that is the only type of method in respect of which
22 there was a fixed system for recording messages?

23 A. At the time, yes.

24 Q. Otherwise it was at your discretion, although you had
25 the equipment, by way of pens and paper, to record

1 messages if you wanted to?

2 A. Yes. There was no laid down format for doing it.

3 Q. On the same topic, can I ask you about the role that the
4 command unit might be expected to have as a source of
5 information to a newly arriving incident commander? The
6 members of the jury have heard that the system at the
7 time was that as an incident escalated and more pumps
8 were ordered, that would, from time to time, trigger
9 a change of incident commander, and the new incident
10 commander, if they were a reasonably senior officer,
11 would probably come in their own vehicle and then they
12 would report to the command unit and hand in their
13 nominal board, and that would be an opportunity for them
14 to find out information for the first time at the fire
15 ground; is that right?

16 A. It's not normally expected that an officer coming on
17 would necessarily ask a command unit officer what
18 information he's got, because he would seek out the
19 existing incident commander and glean all the
20 information from him in his briefing. So he had no
21 reason to ask the command unit staff. It's just
22 duplicating what he's going to hear.

23 Q. I'll come back to you on that, but firstly, is it right
24 that you would expect any new incident commander, as
25 essentially the first thing they did on arrival at the

1 fire ground, at the very least to report to the command
2 unit and hand in their nominal board?

3 A. Yes, that's correct.

4 Q. If I could then refer you to some evidence that the
5 court has heard from Station Manager Cartwright, who was
6 the first incident commander to come on the scene after
7 the command unit had arrived. He said this:

8 "Well, my expectation of going on the command unit
9 was that there would be some form of plan of the
10 building and then a list of all the personnel, or a list
11 of the appliances and the officers available, and that
12 they would have a copy of all messages that had been
13 sent from the fire ground and from control. I stepped
14 on the vehicle and all there was on this board where
15 I thought there would be a plan was John Howling, who
16 was the watch manager in charge of the incident, and
17 that was it. I asked for the messages, which they
18 didn't have."

19 Firstly, I'm going to ask you to comment in general
20 terms about whether or not you agree with Station
21 Manager Cartwright's evidence of what the expectation at
22 the time would have been of the extent to which the
23 command unit would be a place to get a written record of
24 messages?

25 A. He would get a written record of messages had I sent any

1 over the main scheme radio, but I can recall that when
2 Mr Cartwright came on, I don't believe we had actually
3 sent any physical main scheme radio messages at that
4 time. So therefore I couldn't give him a copy of any
5 messages because the only messages taken were from the
6 telephone.

7 Q. So I think it follows from the evidence you gave earlier
8 that he would have been right to expect a written record
9 of any messages that command unit 4 had sent, as
10 a matter of course?

11 A. Yeah, if he -- if we had sent messages at that stage, if
12 he'd asked for them, he would have hard copies give to
13 him.

14 Q. But he would not have been right automatically to expect
15 a written record of all messages that you had received
16 from control?

17 A. Absolutely not. There's no way -- we've got no format
18 in which to record that.

19 Q. Well, you have the facility to record it?

20 A. I have, yeah.

21 Q. But you weren't expected to, as a matter of course?

22 A. Correct.

23 Q. Is that your evidence?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. One can see that because you've potentially got

1 information coming in from three sources -- control over
2 the telephone -- perhaps others over the telephone, but
3 firstly the telephone, secondly channel 10, thirdly
4 channel 1, and in fact fourthly, the radio on the
5 appliances -- you would inevitably need to use a certain
6 amount of discretion about what to record. Do you
7 agree?

8 A. Well, firstly, I would have had to prioritise what
9 messages I was going to listen in to. It would be
10 unreasonable of me to listen to all the traffic on all
11 the radios. I'd prioritise the telephone calls to
12 control, and my other priority was channel 10 to
13 Watch Manager Best. What was going on on channel 1 was
14 going on in the background, 'cos I was concentrating on
15 the telephone calls and my communications with my team
16 leader, in which case I would have had no time to have
17 made any notes about those -- to get those messages from
18 the phone to Watch Manager Best is my priority, to do it
19 as quick as possible.

20 Q. We are agreeing. Essentially, I'm saying that it seems
21 to me that it would have been unreasonable for
22 someone -- or indeed the system -- to have expected you
23 to have kept a written record of everything that you
24 heard from each of those four potential sources of
25 information.

1 A. Correct.

2 Q. Not least because some of them would have been
3 simultaneous?

4 A. Correct.

5 Q. If I could ask you then to be shown a document at
6 page 150 in the advocates' bundles. (Handed)

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. I think you'll probably recognise this as your answers
9 to a series of 18 questions that were asked of you
10 shortly after the fire.

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. If you could turn to page 151, I'm interested in
13 something you said in your answer to question 11. You
14 were asked:

15 "What did you actually do?"

16 You talked about entering the rear of the command
17 unit and answering the telephone, and you said:

18 "I was in conversation with a control officer who
19 was passing me information on occupiers who were unable
20 to get out of their flats due to smoke entering their
21 premises. I was writing this information on the board
22 and holding a three-way conversation between myself, the
23 control officer on the phone and Watch Manager Best on
24 the radio."

25 What I'm interested in is precisely what is meant by

1 the phrase "holding a three-way conversation"?

2 A. It would have been that I had the telephone in one hand
3 speaking to control -- brigade control, and a hand-held
4 radio in the other hand, and he was giving me
5 information and transmitting it straight to
6 Watch Manager Best. Perhaps a three way conversation
7 isn't 100 per cent correct inasmuch as the information
8 was being passed three ways.

9 Q. I think what you've described there is perhaps more
10 precisely -- and I don't criticise you in any way -- two
11 two-way conversations.

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Was there a facility whereby the telephone system could
14 be configured so that three people were on a call at the
15 same time?

16 A. No.

17 Q. So if those at the fire ground, whether the incident
18 commander himself or your crew member with him, wanted
19 to communicate directly with control, they would, in
20 effect, have had to do it indirectly through you?

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. And if you wanted to communicate directly with somebody
23 who was trapped in a flat on the line to control, would
24 you have had to do that indirectly through the operator
25 at brigade control?

1 A. I -- I'm afraid I can't answer that because I don't know
2 how brigade control telephone system works. I'm on the
3 end of a phone. I don't know whether he can switch the
4 caller through to me. I don't know.

5 Q. So you don't know one way or the other whether there
6 would have been a facility at brigade control to set up
7 a three-way conversation between yourself, brigade
8 control and somebody trapped in a flat?

9 A. No, no idea.

10 Q. But it didn't happen at this incident?

11 A. It didn't happen, no.

12 Q. Madam, if you wanted to take a five minute break this
13 afternoon, now would probably be a convenient moment.

14 THE CORONER: All right, thank you very much. That's a good
15 suggestion, thank you.

16 Members of the jury, would you like a five minute
17 break? Thank you. Do leave your papers behind if that
18 helps.

19 Mr Cook, as you're part way through giving your
20 evidence, during the break you must not talk to anyone
21 about your evidence or indeed this matter. If you could
22 be back in five minutes.

23 A. Okay.

24 (3.20 pm)

25 (A short break)

1 (3.26 pm)

2 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you.

3 (In the presence of the Jury)

4 THE CORONER: Thank you.

5 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: One short point I want to touch on is
6 about the headline board, which includes on it reference
7 to "last message", something you talk about in your
8 statement. Can you just confirm that the box for
9 completion of "last message" is a very small box, and
10 I'm guessing that it's not intended to record the
11 message itself but rather the time?

12 A. That is correct; the time of the last -- sorry. That's
13 correct; the time of the last message goes in there in
14 time format.

15 Q. When we talk about "last message", I'm guessing from
16 your evidence earlier -- tell me if I'm wrong -- that
17 that is a reference to the last message sent out by
18 command unit 4 to brigade control and recorded on the
19 duplicate pad in the way you've described?

20 A. That is correct, yeah.

21 Q. So it's not a record of the last message either in or
22 out; it's the last message out from you?

23 A. It would have been the last message that the IC would
24 have asked me to have sent on the main scheme radio to
25 control.

1 Q. Thank you. If we turn then to go through some of the
2 key events that you were involved in on the afternoon of
3 the fire, which, given the nature of your involvement,
4 effectively means looking at some of the key messages
5 that came in or were sent out. By way of background,
6 your command unit arrived at the scene at approximately
7 16.38 and you've told us that you had the radio
8 messages, in effect, on in the background whilst you
9 were driving to the scene, but for understandable
10 reasons your attention was on your driving.

11 That being the case, I will pick up messages with
12 a telephone call from brigade control to CU4 at
13 16.44.40, which is at page 344 in the advocates'
14 bundles. (Handed)

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. I'm not sure to what extent you followed the evidence as
17 I've taken your crew member Watch Manager Best through
18 it, so if you need me to slow down do say so, but you'll
19 see it's a telephone call, as we understand it --
20 correct me if I am wrong about that -- between Paul Real
21 and command unit 4. We presume you are the person in
22 command unit 4 here?

23 A. That's correct, yes.

24 Q. There's reference to flats 68 and 79, a lot of smoke in
25 both flats. Control had been on the phone to them for

1 probably a quarter of an hour, they're unable to get
2 down to their front doors, and there was a need to force
3 an entry. You said:

4 "We'll do that straight away."

5 Firstly, do you today have any specific recollection
6 of receiving that?

7 A. I do remember receiving -- receiving a call. As soon as
8 I got on the back of the unit, the phone started to
9 ring. It was a phone call from control. It was a phone
10 call about people in flats. I cannot be exact to say
11 that they were the flat numbers but the transcript says
12 it. So I do remember a conversation along these lines,
13 yes.

14 Q. What would you have done, either during or at the end of
15 the call, by way of making notes?

16 A. On that occasion I can remember clearly that I wrote two
17 flat numbers, which obviously in this case must have
18 been 68 and 79, on the whiteboard next to the headline
19 board, and then passed that information on to
20 Watch Manager Best.

21 Q. In terms of passing it on, would that have been over
22 channel 10?

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. Would you adopt any convention to ensure that you knew
25 he'd received the message wholly and accurately and

1 completely, by, for example, asking him to repeat it
2 back to you?

3 A. No, I wouldn't have asked him to repeat it back. He
4 would have confirmed he got the message, and having
5 worked with Watch Manager Best for several years, I was
6 confident that if he said he got the message, then it
7 was fully understood.

8 Q. Can you assist us with whether you would have passed on
9 the flat numbers and nothing more or whether you would
10 have included further details?

11 A. I would have most definitely passed on further details.
12 I would not have left it just at the flat numbers.

13 Q. The impression you've given -- correct me if I am
14 wrong -- is that you wouldn't perhaps have written down
15 the further details; you'd have written the flat
16 numbers?

17 A. (The witness nodded)

18 Q. You're nodding. Is that right?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. You would have remembered the further details?

21 A. At that time, yes.

22 Q. You wouldn't have written them down, but would have
23 passed them on as best you could?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. If I take you, then, to page 397 in the advocates'

1 bundles.

2 A. 397?

3 Q. 397. This is a matter of a few seconds later, and this
4 is radio traffic between Echo 351 and control, and the
5 first box includes an informative message from Watch
6 Manager Howling. Do you see that?

7 A. I do, yes.

8 Q. I assume here that at this point command unit 4 was not
9 the --

10 A. Command vehicle.

11 Q. Command vehicle. That's the phrase. Echo 351 was still
12 the command pump?

13 A. That's correct, yes.

14 Q. So you would have had this message audible to you in
15 command unit 4?

16 A. Yes, correct.

17 Q. But it would have been something you were overhearing
18 rather than being directly involved in?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. The same goes for the third box, the longest box on this
21 page, which gives a new flat number, flat 57. Do you
22 see that?

23 A. Yes, I see that, yes.

24 Q. You may well not be able to recall now whether you would
25 have noted either in your mind or even written down

1 flat 57, but if you can recall anything just say so.

2 A. I cannot recall that at all.

3 Q. If I move you on then to 16.49 at page 398, over the
4 page. In the top box, we have the "make pumps eight"
5 message, and it looks as if your command unit is still
6 not the command vehicle?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. Then if we go a few seconds later on page 345.

9 A. Sorry, page 3 ...?

10 Q. 345.

11 A. Yeah, 345.

12 Q. This would be a conversation between yourself and
13 Mr Real, I assume?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. He asked you about flats 68 and 79. You're recorded as
16 saying:

17 "Yeah, I've spoken to the incident commander and
18 he's aware of it."

19 Can you just assist us with whether you think that
20 is a shorthand for "I've spoken to Watch Manager Best,
21 who is with the incident commander", or whether you
22 would have actually spoken --

23 A. No, I wouldn't have actually spoken to the incident
24 commander. I would have spoken to Watch Manager Best,
25 who I knew would have been alongside the incident

1 commander at the time.

2 Q. Then a couple of lines further down there's reference to
3 the ceiling coming down in flat 79, and then we get some
4 new flat numbers, 82 and 80. What would you have done
5 with that information?

6 A. Again, that would have been passed on to
7 Watch Manager Best via channel 10. The numbers 82 and
8 80 would have been added to the existing numbers that
9 I'd written on the whiteboard.

10 Q. As before, would it be the case that you wouldn't have
11 made a specific note of the details passed in this
12 telephone call but you would have sought to remember
13 them and then pass them on over channel 10?

14 A. I honestly couldn't remember whether -- whether or not
15 I wrote that down. I can't remember.

16 Q. Then if we look at 1655 hours over the page at 346.

17 A. Mm-hmm.

18 Q. The point I draw your attention to here is that we see
19 flat 79 put in particular focus as being referred to as
20 "the urgent one at the moment" in the middle of the page
21 and "the real big problem" at the bottom of the page.
22 Between that, there's reference to:

23 "The woman has stopped talking to us and we can't
24 hear her breathing at all."

25 Do you remember what you would have done during and

1 after that telephone call?

2 A. Again, that information would have gone to
3 Watch Manager Best via my channel 10 communications.
4 Whether I wrote those details down I cannot be sure at
5 this stage.

6 Q. If I take you now to 398. This is about the same time,
7 so 16.55.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. The third box says:
10 "Charlie Uniform 4 now incident command at this
11 incident."
12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Could you just explain what that means?

14 A. That means we are now taking over as incident command
15 vehicle, so therefore all messages from control to this
16 incident will come via Charlie Uniform 4 -- that's the
17 command unit -- and no longer via Peckham's pump.

18 Q. In the same message, there's reference to the fact that
19 Station Manager Cartwright is now the incident
20 commander. Do you see that?

21 A. I do, yeah.

22 Q. Do you recall Station Manager Cartwright coming to see
23 to CU4?

24 A. Not now, no. That may have come from him himself or it
25 might have come via another source.

1 Q. Do you remember him booking in or not?

2 A. I can't say I do. I had lots of officers booking in.

3 Q. Does the fact that you're now the incident command
4 vehicle provide any indication of the extent to which
5 you had managed to set up CU4 by this time?

6 A. Yeah. To be an incident command vehicle, I'd have had
7 to have set the unit up, inasmuch as the computers and
8 software would have had to be up and running to be ready
9 to carry out our function. That's why there is some
10 delay -- not delay but some time difference between us
11 getting there and taking over. We don't take over until
12 we're fully ready to go.

13 Q. Should I understand from your evidence earlier that by
14 this time there would have been at least some numbers
15 written on the whiteboard?

16 A. Correct.

17 Q. I'll ask you about a couple of passages in a witness
18 statement that you gave in September 2009. This starts
19 at page 239 of the statements bundle. (Handed)

20 A. Okay, yeah.

21 Q. Firstly, if I take you on to 242. Where this comes in
22 your statement is at a point after the second command
23 unit has arrived from Islington, which we know was at
24 about 5 pm, but in the third paragraph on page 242 it
25 says:

1 "I became the comms officer."

2 That's short for "communications officer"; is that
3 right?

4 A. Correct.

5 Q. "It was my job to monitor the fire ground and control
6 radio channels and pass messages back and forth. As
7 I did this, I recorded the messages I was relaying on
8 a pad."

9 Does that also describe what you were doing before
10 CU2 arrived?

11 A. What I was doing before CU2 arrived, in recording
12 messages, again would have been just the fire ground,
13 that relates just to the fire ground. Sorry, beg your
14 pardon, that relates just to messages to control on the
15 main scheme. Yes, I was doing the comms officer's job
16 as well as other jobs before they got there. As I was
17 on me own, comms officer was one of the tasks I was
18 doing, and it became natural for me to become comms
19 officer once all the other officers were in place.

20 Q. Then you talk about this pad again on 244. The
21 four-line paragraph towards the bottom of the page --

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. -- says:

24 "The pad I had recorded my messages on was returned
25 to me by the blue watch relief after the incident."

1 Just pausing there, can you help us with what would
2 have been on that pad.

3 A. This is the messages for the main scheme radio. We keep
4 that pad at the end of every incident. When we get
5 relieved at an incident, all our message pads, bits of
6 paper, messages, are passed over to the next command
7 unit so they're aware of all the messages that were sent
8 on the main scheme radio prior to them getting there and
9 then they came back to us.

10 Q. Do you think this would have had anything on it other
11 than the formal outgoing messages from the incident
12 commander to brigade control that you've described?

13 A. No, it would have been purely outgoing messages on main
14 scheme radio.

15 Q. If I take you back, then, to a series of telephone calls
16 that you were involved in. There's one at 17.11, which
17 is at page 540, file 2 of the advocates' bundles.
18 (Handed) I draw this to your attention because in the
19 middle of the page, you say:

20 "Also, we here are aware of people in four flats:
21 68, 79, 82 and 80."

22 A. Yeah, I can see that.

23 Q. Then if I take you to page 350, which is probably in the
24 other file.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. This is now 17.24, and in the middle of the page, after
2 the numbers 68, 79 and 80 are mentioned, the operator
3 from brigade control says:
4 "81. They're the ones I know."
5 And then CU4 -- I'm assuming this is you again -- is
6 recorded as saying:
7 "Right, definitely 81, not 80?"
8 Then you are told, in effect, yes, 81. Then
9 a little lower down you say:
10 "So, all right, can we just confirm: 68, 79, 80,
11 81?"
12 That, as far as I'm aware, is the first reference to
13 81 in a transcript like this, although it's possible
14 that you could have been told about flat 81 verbally by
15 somebody at the fire ground. Can you comment at all on
16 whether or not --
17 A. I wouldn't have -- I wouldn't have remembered flat
18 numbers being passed verbally, no.
19 Q. By the time you gave your statement in September 2009,
20 would you have been aware that five people had died in
21 flat 81?
22 A. I was aware that five people had died. I can't say
23 I was aware what the flat number was, no.
24 Q. The reason I ask is because there are a couple of
25 passages in your statement, which I'll take you to in

1 a moment, which suggest that you were aware of flat 81
2 at an early stage of the incident. So firstly at
3 page 240 in your statement, the third paragraph from the
4 bottom talks about arriving and setting up the command
5 unit, to give a timeframe for what follows, and then the
6 next paragraph says:

7 "Before I was able to do that, the phone in the rear
8 of the CU started ringing and I answered it. It was the
9 control. They had received calls from occupants of
10 Lakanal House who were unable to get out of their flats
11 due to smoke entering the premises. I noted down the
12 two flat numbers. I seem to remember they were 79 and
13 81."

14 I'll just ask you, in the interests of accuracy,
15 whether you think that reference to flat 81 at that
16 stage is correct or not?

17 A. I think the fact I said, "I seem to remember" --
18 I obviously wasn't clear at that time and having looked
19 at the transcripts of the messages of that telephone
20 conversation, flat 81 is obviously an error. But I did
21 say I "seem to remember". I didn't say definitely
22 flat 79 and 81.

23 Q. I agree, and I simply asked you the question as
24 a question of accuracy, because as we've seen the first
25 telephone call from brigade control to CU4 did mention

1 two flat numbers, but they were 68 and 79.

2 A. That's right.

3 Q. And then on the same point, if I ask you about 243 in
4 your statement. The final paragraph says:

5 "I received the information from control about the
6 people trapped in flats 79 and 81 almost as soon as we
7 had arrived. Control told me at the time that these
8 people were still on the line to them."

9 In the interests of accuracy, do you think that that
10 reference to flat 81 at that stage in the incident is
11 correct?

12 A. Most definitely incorrect. I obviously had 79 and 81 in
13 my head from what I tried to recall earlier, some months
14 later, tried to recall the numbers, and I said -- as we
15 said two pages previous, "seem to remember" 79 and 81,
16 and the fact it was in my head at the time I was giving
17 my statement, and having looked at the transcripts it's
18 quite clear that 81 is a mistake and it's actually 68.

19 Q. Are you able to assist the court at all with when
20 flat 81 was first drawn to your attention?

21 A. I cannot remember, no.

22 Q. You told us at the outset of your evidence that
23 essentially you remained at command unit 4 for almost
24 the entirety of your time --

25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. -- that you were at the scene, and that you didn't leave
2 it for several hours after you arrived.

3 Group Manager Freeman, when he gave evidence to this
4 court about arriving and booking in, said:

5 "I expected to find a command unit crew setting up
6 the command unit ready for it to be used for incident
7 command support."

8 He went on to say:

9 "To my recollection, at the time I first attended
10 the unit, there was no-one on the unit, although there
11 was obviously some signs of activity. Boards had been
12 gathered."

13 Are you able to assist with --

14 A. I would say that Mr Freeman was mistaken. I didn't get
15 off the unit for at least two to three hours. In my
16 statement, I said after two or three hours I got off the
17 unit for some fresh air. That was the first time
18 I stepped off.

19 If you was able to see the layout of a command unit
20 internally -- if you open the door and come onto the
21 unit, two of the seats that are available for command
22 officers to sit at, one of them, which I was sitting in
23 at the time, is clearly obscured by a very large TV
24 screen, which is the computer, and a bank of computers
25 and key boards, and someone coming on the unit could not

1 possibly see who was sitting in that seat. If I'd been
2 transmitting messages and the door had opened, I would
3 not have stopped my message and peered round the corner.
4 Therefore I would not have seen him and he would not
5 have seen me.

6 Q. I believe that you remained at the scene until about
7 2300 hours?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. Let me then turn to ask you about certain features of
10 Lakanal House and whether you gained knowledge of them
11 in the course of the incident. These are essentially
12 the same questions that I asked Mr Best towards the end
13 of his evidence. Did you, at any point, become aware
14 that there were no central corridors on the
15 even-numbered floors?

16 A. Not at all, no.

17 Q. Did you at any point become aware that the flats were
18 maisonettes?

19 A. Only in conversations that I overheard at some point
20 that evening. I got the impression that some of the
21 floors had internal staircases -- some of the flats,
22 sorry, had internal staircases. That was purely
23 overhearing conversations.

24 Q. If I take you to two passages in your witness statement
25 in the interests in completeness. Firstly, 243. In the

1 middle of the page, it says:

2 "Soon after arrival at the incident, a rough
3 schematic plan of the building had been drawn up on one
4 of the boards, but at no time was I specifically briefed
5 on the layout of the building, did I see any physical
6 plans of the building, or were CU officers tasked to
7 find any."

8 Is that correct?

9 A. To my knowledge, yes.

10 Q. Then over the page on 244, just over halfway down the
11 page:

12 "At the time I assumed that the block was comprised
13 of flats and didn't realise until later they were
14 maisonettes. I wasn't made aware of the access routes
15 into the dwellings or the number of dwellings on each
16 floor. I wasn't made aware of any problems accessing
17 any premises."

18 Is that correct?

19 A. That is correct.

20 Q. I presume that you did not become aware that the upper
21 floors of the flats extended the full width of the
22 building?

23 A. Not at all, no.

24 Q. Or that the balconies provided escape routes?

25 A. No.

1 Q. To what extent did you build up a mental picture of
2 where individual flats were in the building?

3 A. I had no mental picture. Like I said at the very
4 beginning, I'm cocooned in the command unit. Very small
5 windows. The only view I had of Lakanal House was when
6 I got off, out the driver's seat on arrival, looked at
7 the block of flats, saw a fire at the block of flats,
8 got onto the command unit. That was probably until
9 11 o'clock, the last -- last time I saw the actual
10 building.

11 Q. I appreciate that your involvement on the day was in
12 a very specific role inside command unit 4, but if you
13 look back over that involvement, may I ask you what
14 single additional thing do you think would have helped
15 you most to carry out your specific role?

16 A. I think the manning levels on the command unit was
17 insufficient. To be left on the command unit as a sole
18 figure working on my own, two telephones ringing,
19 possibly -- I cannot remember -- the main scheme radio
20 may well have been calling us up -- I've got a unit to
21 set up, and which we've gone through before, that
22 setting up. I've got a headline board to fill out and
23 I've got telephones ringing, and that is just too much
24 for one person on the back of a unit.

25 So my answer to that is further -- at least one

1 other personnel could have made that job a lot easier.

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

3 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Edwards, do you have any
4 questions?

5 MR EDWARDS: Yes. I appreciate it's 4 o'clock, but I'm
6 going to be a matter of minutes, madam.

7 THE CORONER: Thank you.

8 Questions by MR EDWARDS

9 MR EDWARDS: I just want to clarify with you the position of
10 the radios in the back of the command unit where you
11 were sitting. There were two radios tuned into the fire
12 ground, one on channel 1 and another on channel 10; is
13 that correct?

14 A. No. There's a fixed radio station at the very back of
15 the unit. At the top is the main scheme radio to
16 control. The second one is the command channel for
17 radio 2, if the senior officers want to have that set
18 up, which is a separate communication link.

19 Q. Is that the one that's tuned into channel 10?

20 A. No, no. And the third one is a fire ground radio that's
21 actually fixed. Exactly the same as a handheld, but
22 it's a fixed unit that can access all the radio channels
23 on the fire ground. That's normally set on channel 1
24 for our convenience. Channel 10 is accessed via by own
25 personal handheld radio.

1 Q. Right. So there's potentially four radios you could be
2 listening to in the back of the command unit?

3 A. Correct, but the -- the middle one wasn't -- wasn't used
4 at that stage.

5 Q. You said there were -- or Mr Best said there were two
6 telephones connected by a cord and one mobile telephone?

7 A. Correct, yeah.

8 Q. And of those, you said two telephones were ringing.
9 I think you have at least three radios in action.
10 I think you very fairly said that was too much for one
11 person to deal with. You said -- and correct me if I am
12 wrong -- your lowest priority was listening to the
13 channel 1 radio messages?

14 A. In the way of radios, yes.

15 Q. Were you even aware that BA crews were transmitting on
16 channel 6?

17 A. I wasn't aware, but my past knowledge would have said
18 they would have been using channel 6.

19 Q. Presumably, though, if you're struggling to cope with
20 the volume of information you're getting, as it were,
21 channel 6 would have been too far?

22 A. I would have no reason to listen to channel 6.

23 Q. And too much for you to be able to cope with?

24 A. Absolutely.

25 Q. Finally, just to clarify one point: Mr Best referred to

1 writing messages down on pieces of loose paper.

2 I understood your evidence to refer to messages on pads
3 of paper. Does one of you have that wrong or are you
4 both talking about different things?

5 A. No, the pad and paper is purely for radio messages on
6 the main scheme from the command unit to control. It's
7 a formatted pad that's laid out. It's actually
8 sectionised and everything. Watch Manager Best would
9 have had no reason to use that pad. That pad's purely
10 for anybody that sends main scheme radio messages. So
11 he's aware it's there but he would have no reason to use
12 it.

13 Q. Okay, so it's two different things?

14 A. Correct.

15 Q. Thank you.

16 THE CORONER: Thank you. Ms Al Tai.

17 Questions by MS AL TAI

18 MS AL TAI: Good afternoon, Mr Cook.

19 A. Good afternoon.

20 Q. Just briefly one matter I'd like to clarify with you,
21 please. If you just go to page 244 of your statement,
22 please.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. This is a question I asked of your colleague, Mr Best,
25 in respect of receiving any feedback as to what flats

1 had been actioned. In your statement, you say that you
2 didn't receive any feedback as to what was happening
3 with the rescue attempts of these flats. Is that
4 throughout the duration of your time in the command
5 unit?

6 A. From what I can recall, yes.

7 Q. You then go on to say that:

8 "I can only assume they were made priorities but
9 I wasn't informed of what searches were being completed
10 or what other dwellings were being searched in."

11 This is on the back of your evidence that you just
12 recently gave in answer to a question from
13 Mr Maxwell-Scott. You suggested that more manpower
14 would have been useful. We've obviously heard
15 information that you were manning many ports, as it
16 were. You primarily were the main link between the
17 scene of the incident and the control unit?

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. Excuse me; brigade control, I meant. Any information
20 you would have received from the scene of the incident
21 in respect of whether flats were being actioned could
22 have been quite useful, I would imagine?

23 A. Yes, but I wouldn't be sending any messages to that
24 effect without the incident commander's authority
25 anyway. I don't see where your question's -- what your

1 question's about, to be honest.

2 Q. My question really is: any information in respect of
3 whether these flats were actioned would have been useful
4 to you to report back to control?

5 A. Any information I give to control would have to come
6 with the IC's name on it, so it would have to come to me
7 direct from the IC.

8 Q. Even that being the case, that would be quite useful
9 information, would it not --

10 A. If it came from the IC, yes.

11 Q. -- to report back to control?

12 A. If he wanted me to, yes.

13 Q. Essentially, what I'm trying to garner is that that
14 information, if it were to go back to control and
15 control were speaking directly to the individual on the
16 other end of the phone, the occupant of the flat, say,
17 they could then inform them of whether or not their
18 flats were about to be actioned.

19 A. Yes, as I say, we are a link, but we are working under
20 the guise of the IC. If the IC wanted that, then
21 I could do that, but I wouldn't do that off my own back.

22 Q. I appreciate that, Mr Cook, and it's certainly no
23 criticism of you. I'm just trying to understand whether
24 that information would have been useful to you.

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Thank you, Mr Cook.

2 Questions by MS SANDERSON

3 MS SANDERSON: Madam, I have about two questions, but I am
4 I'm in your hands, given the time.

5 THE CORONER: Well, members of the Jury, I think it would be
6 very helpful if we could finish Mr Cook tonight, if
7 you're content. Thank you very much. That's kind.

8 MS SANDERSON: Mr Cook, it's just to try to get a little
9 assistance for us about the times of silver meetings.
10 If I could just take you to your statement at the bottom
11 of page 241, please. It's the very last two lines, and
12 what you say is the second command unit arrived from
13 Islington and parked a short distance away on
14 Havil Street. You say it was crewed by three staff:
15 Watch Manager Paffett, Watch Manager Huggens and another
16 watch manager. Then at the top of the next page you
17 say:

18 "Watch Manager Paffett remained on that command unit
19 to set it up so silver meetings could be carried out
20 there."

21 Is that what you recall?

22 A. That's what I recall at the time, yes.

23 Q. We've heard just now from Mr Best that he remembers
24 a silver meeting taking place at 19.50. Are you aware
25 of any earlier meetings taking place on that Islington

1 command unit?

2 A. No.

3 Q. You're not aware of any meeting chaired by Deputy
4 Assistant Commissioner Chidgey?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Thank you. It may be another witness can assist with
7 that?

8 MR COMPTON: No questions, thank you.

9 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Walsh.

10 Questions by MR WALSH

11 MR WALSH: Just two very quick questions. I put to the last
12 witness, Mr Best, that there was a silver meeting just
13 after 5 o'clock. That wasn't correct, so I am not going
14 to put that to you. I make absolutely clear that that
15 was an error. It was indeed at the time specified,
16 which was later.

17 What I do want to ask you about is in relation to
18 the information that you may or may not receive about
19 the results of searches that take place in flats within
20 the premises. You were communications officer. That
21 was your purpose, but let me ask you this: within the
22 command unit -- and we've heard about the headline board
23 but also the large whiteboards -- is it the practice,
24 where it is possible to do it, to mark on the
25 whiteboards not only flat numbers which may need

1 searching but also, if results are available, if people
2 have been evacuated from a particular flat number and
3 that is known, to record that information as well?

4 A. Yes, absolutely.

5 Q. Of course, once the second command unit arrived and
6 a number of officers were given various tasks, there
7 were a number of command officers on the command unit,
8 on CU4?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. And they would have been busy doing things of that kind?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Can you remember now, later on, looking at the
13 whiteboard and seeing that not only were there flat
14 numbers identified but the results of some searches? Do
15 you recall that now or not?

16 A. I cannot recall that now.

17 Q. Very well. Thank you very much.

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

20 Questions by the Jury

21 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you. We just have one.

22 When you realised that you had too much to handle all on
23 your own, we were just wondering whether it's in your
24 power to request more staff, more resources, or do you
25 just have to wait until the IC decides?

1 A. It's not within our power but it's within our
2 jurisdiction to suggest and say to him: "I think we
3 could benefit from further command staff. Could we
4 order another command unit on?" That decision is purely
5 the IC's, but we could suggest that to him. As it is,
6 because it was a six pump -- went up to six pumps, we
7 knew that Islington's unit was en route, because six
8 pumps warrants two command units as a predetermined
9 attendance. So obviously we was aware that the second
10 unit was on the way, but again, it takes time for that
11 unit to arrive because they're not local. There's only
12 eights, as you've heard, in the whole brigade, so for
13 the second one to arrive could be 30 minutes.

14 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you.

15 THE CORONER: Members of the jury, thank you.

16 Mr Cook, thank you very much for the help that
17 you've been able to give us. Thank you.

18 Yes, Mr Maxwell Scott, just a briefing for the
19 jurors tomorrow to let them know what's coming.

20 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes, firstly we'll be hearing from Watch
21 Manager Paffett, who arrived on that command unit 2 from
22 Islington, and then secondly from Mr Harry Simmons, who
23 worked in the control room at brigade control and was
24 the operations manager there.

25 THE CORONER: Thank you very much.

1 Members of the jury, thank you very much and thank
2 you for very kindly agreeing to stay so we could finish
3 Mr Cook's evidence. That was very helpful. See you
4 tomorrow morning for a 10 o'clock start? Thank you.

5 (In the absence of the Jury)

6 THE CORONER: Yes, does anyone have any matters that they
7 want to raise once the jury have gone?

8 Housekeeping

9 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Two very short administrative matters.

10 THE CORONER: Yes.

11 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Firstly, just clarifying that the plan is
12 that Deborah Real will be at court tomorrow, and that
13 after Mr Simmons has given his evidence, we'll take
14 stock of whether or not it's necessary to call her to
15 give evidence. I see Mr Walsh is nodding.

16 THE CORONER: That's helpful.

17 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Secondly, Mr Atkins has some more disks
18 to hand out, so don't leave court without one.

19 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. So in terms of the order
20 tomorrow, we're going to take Mr Paffett first?

21 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes, and then Mr Simmons, and see where
22 we get to.

23 THE CORONER: Yes. Does anyone else have any points to
24 raise?

25 MR EDWARDS: Yes, madam, just one matter in respect of

1 a point you raised on Friday evening about further
2 evidence.

3 THE CORONER: Yes.

4 MR EDWARDS: It's proposed by those instructing me to serve
5 a report from Ronnie King, who is a retired chief fire
6 officer, then to seek your agreement to call Ronnie
7 King. I anticipate that report will be served within
8 days and I can only apologise for omitting to mention
9 that on Friday.

10 THE CORONER: All right. Well, we'll look at that when I've
11 seen the report.

12 MR EDWARDS: Yes.

13 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. Anyone else? Okay,
14 thank you very much. Until tomorrow, thank you.

15 (4.12 pm)

16 (The Court adjourned until 10 o'clock on the following day)

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