

GRENFELL TOWER INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF MR VIRGILIO CASTRO

Background

1. My name is Virgilio Castro, I am 61 years of age and work as a maintenance supervisor. I am also known as "Larry".
2. I was born in the [REDACTED] My first language is [REDACTED] but I speak English fluently.
3. This statement is about my knowledge of the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017, including my actions that night and my knowledge of the tower and Flat 146 Grenfell Tower, my former home.
4. The police have previously taken statements from me in connection with the criminal investigation into the fire at Grenfell Tower. This present statement is made for the purposes of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry.
5. I have lost many people I knew in the fire. I have also lost all of my possessions including items which were of great sentimental value to me including my late wife's possessions which I will never see again; it would be difficult for anyone to imagine how I feel. Since the fire I have, amongst other things, found it difficult to sleep, I often think about the fire and have suffered breathing problems. However, in this statement I do not intend to explain in any detail the impact the fire and its aftermath have had on me. I also don't intend to speak about events before the fire or in the aftermath; I understand I will have the opportunity to speak about some of these matters in a separate statement for phase two of the Inquiry.
6. I cannot remember everything that took place in the exact order that it happened on 14 June as it all seems jumbled up and confused but this is my account of the events that took place that night to the best of my knowledge. I still find it difficult

to talk about what happened that night and I am still affected by it but I would like to assist the Inquiry in any way I can.

Living in Grenfell Tower before the fire

7. Flat 146, Grenfell Tower W11 1TQ was my home for 26 years. My late wife and I moved into tower in April 1991 just after our daughter Christabel was born. I have watched my daughter grow up in that flat and have many fond memories of living there as a family.
8. At the time of the fire I lived with Christabel who would stay with me between Friday and Sunday. She is a [REDACTED] and works in [REDACTED] so stays there between Monday to Thursday most weeks.
9. My girlfriend Elisa Rabaya would also often stay with me. My friend Genaro had been living with me at the time of the fire.

My neighbours who lost their lives

10. There were six flats on the 17th floor. Sadly a number of my neighbours passed away in the fire. My neighbour Vincent who lived at flat 144 died in the fire. He has been a good friend of mine for many years. My neighbour Khadija, who I knew as Cathy, and who lived in flat 143 also passed away. I am also aware that my neighbours in Flat 142, a family of five who had only moved in relatively recently, all died in the fire.

Plan of the 17th floor and Flat 146

11. Flat 146 was a two bedroomed flat on the 17th floor, on the North East corner of the building. From my windows I had a view of the Kensington Aldridge Academy and the church. I could see the London Eye from all the windows in the flat. At New Year's Eve we could see the fireworks along the Thames.
12. I have exhibited a plan of the 17th floor of Grenfell Tower as Exhibit **VC/1** where I have marked the flat's location and the location of my neighbours' flats.

13. I have also exhibited to this statement as **VC/2** a plan of Flat 146 with the rooms labelled and furniture also labelled. These are not to scale but a rough sketch to which I can add further detail to at a later stage if needed.
14. I have marked the location of Flat 146 on Exhibit **VC/3**. I have also marked the route of the fire on this exhibit which I saw after I had escaped which I describe below.
15. I would generally close the doors inside the flat. However, the internal bedroom doors didn't close properly. The door to my bedroom was broken and wouldn't shut properly, the bottom hinge was broken. The door to Christabel's bedroom was faulty but it could shut if you pulled it up and then closed it.

Changes to my flat over the years

16. My front door was changed at some point, I think it was in 2012. The new door had three hinges and a letterbox that would close. The new door would not close on its own, it only closed to about a 45 degree angle and then I would need to pull it shut. It was also a struggle to lock it.
17. All the windows in my flat were changed with double glazing installed during the recent refurbishment works. I did not have any problems with the new windows that were fitted. However, my flat was definitely warmer before the refurbishment works. I think this may have been because they took hot pipes out from underneath the floors during those works.
18. I have marked on **VC/1** the location where I think a hosepipe - which I now know is called a 'Dry Riser' - used to be located on my floor; it was near the entrance to Flat 143. I think this was removed as part of the renovation works to Grenfell Tower and was not there on the night of the fire.

Problems with the flat

19. I had numerous problems with the flat before the fire and many issues that were not properly dealt with by the KCTMO. I will not go into in any detail in this

statement as I understand the Inquiry will consider these things in its second phase. However, in brief, I can say as follows.

20. Before the refurbishment works my boiler was in the kitchen. The KCTMO wanted to move it to the hallway just inside my front door but I refused and I fought alongside other residents to ensure it would remain in the kitchen.
21. I have suffered problems with having no hot water on occasion. Also, sometimes there was no water at all. The last time I had that problem was a few months before the fire. I also had a repeat problem of flooding from the floors above.
22. I have had problems with the faucet of taps in both my kitchen and bathroom. It took a long time for these to be fixed.
23. The lifts in the tower broke down a lot. There was one occasion when I was stuck in a lift for 30 minutes when it broke down.
24. I had a problem with people leaving rubbish on the landing outside my flat, the door to the rubbish chute was just by my front door. I don't think there was any rubbish left there on the night of the fire and there wasn't any rubbish in the stairwell on my way out.
25. I have been asked whether I could ever smell other people's cooking in my kitchen when the windows were shut, I would say that I could. The new window in the kitchen, installed as part of the refurbishment works, had a vent. It had a string attached to it that I assume would make it work as an extractor fan but I never used it. I think the smell of other people's cooking would come through that vent.
26. I have also been asked whether I could hear noises from other flats or outside when the windows were shut and I would say that I couldn't.

Fire safety measures and advice

27. I have been asked what advice I had been given about fire safety before the fire. I don't remember receiving any fire safety advice. I don't remember being given any advice on what to do in the event of a fire, whether to stay in my flat or to leave. The only signs that I remember about this were ones by the lifts; I only remember the signs saying not to use the lifts if there was a fire.
28. As far as I'm aware Grenfell Tower has never had any adequate communal fire alarm or sprinklers. I know this because I often heard other residents and our residents committee talking about this. On the night of the fire I didn't hear any fire alarms going off at all outside my flat in the communal areas. If I had been offered sprinklers I certainly would have said I wanted them but I was never asked.
29. I have never been aware of fire brigade inspections in Grenfell Tower's communal parts. I never saw this. This is not to say they didn't happen, I'm just not aware of them. There is an error in my police witness statement which says I was aware of such inspections. I am aware from speaking to my daughter Christabel that the Fire Brigade came to the flat after the refurbishment works had been completed, on the Saturday before the fire as she was at home and let them in and signed some paperwork to confirm they had attended. That was on 10 June 2017. She has told me they looked at the smoke detectors inside the flat.

Events on 13 June 2017

30. On 13 June 2017 I had been working in a school, the David Game College. I arrived home at around 10.00 pm that night.
31. The block was how it should be and I don't remember anything unusual about it when I returned. I had to gain access through a key to the main entrance door. When pressing my fob on that front door it also opened an internal door. There

were no other locked doors between the main entrance and the lift, or between the lift and my front door.

32. Neither of the doors on my route to my flat had been propped open or was open; they were not broken and they all closed automatically behind me, as they should.
33. I entered my flat within a couple of minutes after entering the block on the ground floor. I closed all the windows in my flat and I went to bed at approximately 12 midnight to 12.15am. Genaro was already in bed. He was sleeping in my bed. I was sleeping in Christabel's bed with my girlfriend Ellisa. Ellisa and Genaro escaped the tower and are both alive.

My experience of the fire

34. I was woken up suddenly at about 1.15am. I heard the sound of my smoke alarms in my flat. The alarms are linked together and so would usually both go off at the same time and they both did that night. My girlfriend Elisa was shouting "Fire! Fire! Fire!". My friend Genaro was also in our room trying to wake me and Elisa up. Genaro said to me in Tegalang, "Sunung" which means "fire". He was shouting. He looked shocked. He then ran off; he left the flat straight away wearing only his boxer shorts, no slippers or footwear.
35. I went to the hallway and from there I could see into the kitchen and could see the fire there. The fire was outside the kitchen window. The window was closed. I could hear a very loud strange sound like a "Wooo!" The fire was red and around the middle of the window on the outside. I didn't understand why it was making that sound.
36. I went into the kitchen. As I mention above, we have a circular ventilation fan in the top right of the kitchen window and I could see flames coming through this ventilation fan into the kitchen. I was confused and in a panic I wanted to try and kill the fire but I quickly realised I couldn't do anything. There was a strong smell of smoke in my flat but I was not coughing at this point. I have been shown the

smoke and fire descriptors provided to me by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and I would estimate that the smoke looked like image (B). The fire coming in through the window was like image (E) but as if that were cut in half along the middle of the vertical height of the flames.

Escape from the building

37. Me and Ellisa ran out of the flat. I got to just outside my front door and then decided to try and grab my personal possessions and those which belonged to my late wife and my daughter; for example watches, rings, necklaces, and money but Ellisa grabbed me and told me that this was not important. She said it in Tegalong. When I left the flat I wasn't carrying anything, I was only wearing my Fossil watch on my left wrist.
38. The two of us then ran out of the flat. The door to the flat had been left open by Genaro who had left earlier. As I said above, the door would only close to about a 45 degree angle on its own and then remain open. I didn't shut my front door when we left, we left in a panic because of the fire in our flat.
39. There was some smoke in the landing outside my front door. I have looked at the smoke descriptors and would say the smoke was kind of in between image (B) and (C). It was black smoke. I could smell the smoke more now, and could taste it in my mouth and I started to cough.
40. I gave an interview to the Daily Mirror immediately after the fire. This was published on 18 June. There are a number of inaccuracies in that article and I won't list all of them in this statement but, for example, I have never moved flat three floors up and also the journalist recorded me saying: "As we got out into the corridor, I could see the flames were around the edges of the ceiling". This was not recorded properly. I didn't see flames in the corridor, I saw them coming into the top of my kitchen window and along the ceiling as I have described above.

41. Elisa was in front of me and we went straight to the stairwell. I had used the stairs in the past when the lift was broken so I knew where they were. The landing lights were working ok and there were no other people on the landing. However, when I got to the stairwell it was completely dark. I couldn't see my feet and I couldn't see Elisa. It was dark all the way down to the bottom of the stairs.
42. Once we were in the stairwell I realised that most people were coming down the stairs but some people were coming back up. I don't know if there were any firefighters in the stairwell, it was dark so I couldn't see. I was going to follow the people going up the stairs until my neighbour who lives in the flat directly above mine (Flat 156 on the 18th floor) shouted at me not to go upstairs but to go downstairs instead. He kept shouting "no, go down" so we all ran down the stairs. I also thought to myself that the roof door was usually locked so we shouldn't go upstairs. My neighbour is of Indian appearance, I have known him for a long time but didn't know his full name until after the fire. He approached me after the fire to apologise to me for shouting at me that night. I now know his name is Shah Ahmed.
43. All the way down whenever we saw people running up the stairs we stopped them and told them to turn around and go back down the stairs or they would be trapped. There was thick, black smoke in the stairwell on the way down but it seemed to clear after we got below around the fourth or fifth floors.
44. Once we reached the ground floor I ran out of the stairwell and the lights were on in the mezzanine and ground floor lobby area. Everyone was just running out. I ran straight out of the building.
45. On 22 January 2018 a Metropolitan Police officer attended my current home address and showed me a colour photograph exhibit reference number SLH-CC-130, which he informed me was obtained from CCTV system (S) at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017. The image is of me leaving Grenfell Tower wearing a white T-shirt with a blue badge on the front and yellow shorts. I wasn't wearing any footwear. The image is timed by the police at 01.30.52. I do not know how

the police arrived at this time but it is probably right that I left the building at about that time. I looked at my watch once we were outside and realised it had only taken four minutes to get down. When the officer showed me the photograph of me leaving the tower I cried. I still find it difficult to look at that photograph.

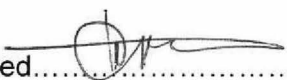
46. I ran to Kensington Leisure Centre and when I was close to the Leisure Centre I turned around and looked up at the fire. There was fire going up in a straight line in the middle of the East side of the building and then it would come around the building towards the North side at the top. The fire spread so quickly, like they'd put gasoline on it.

47. When I was at the Leisure Centre I started talking with other residents and I realised how bad the fire had been. I was standing there, crying because of the shock.

48. The Grenfell Tower fire is such a tragedy; it shouldn't have been allowed to happen and I want the Public Inquiry to ensure it can never happen again.

Statement of truth

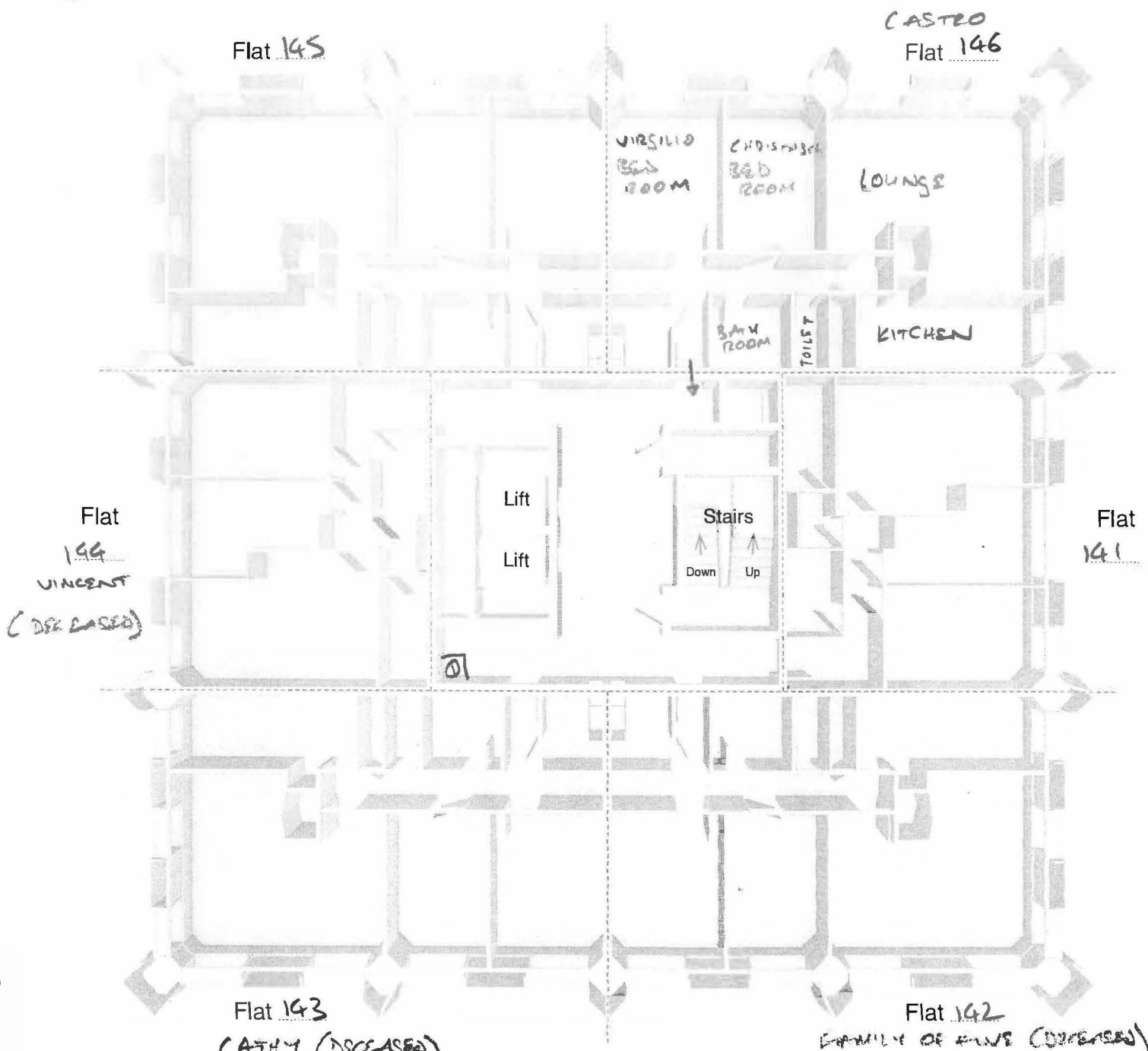
I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed.....

Dated..... 20/9/2018

Grenfell Tower
Typical Residential Floor Plan

n.	Description	Time
①	Used to be dry riser	



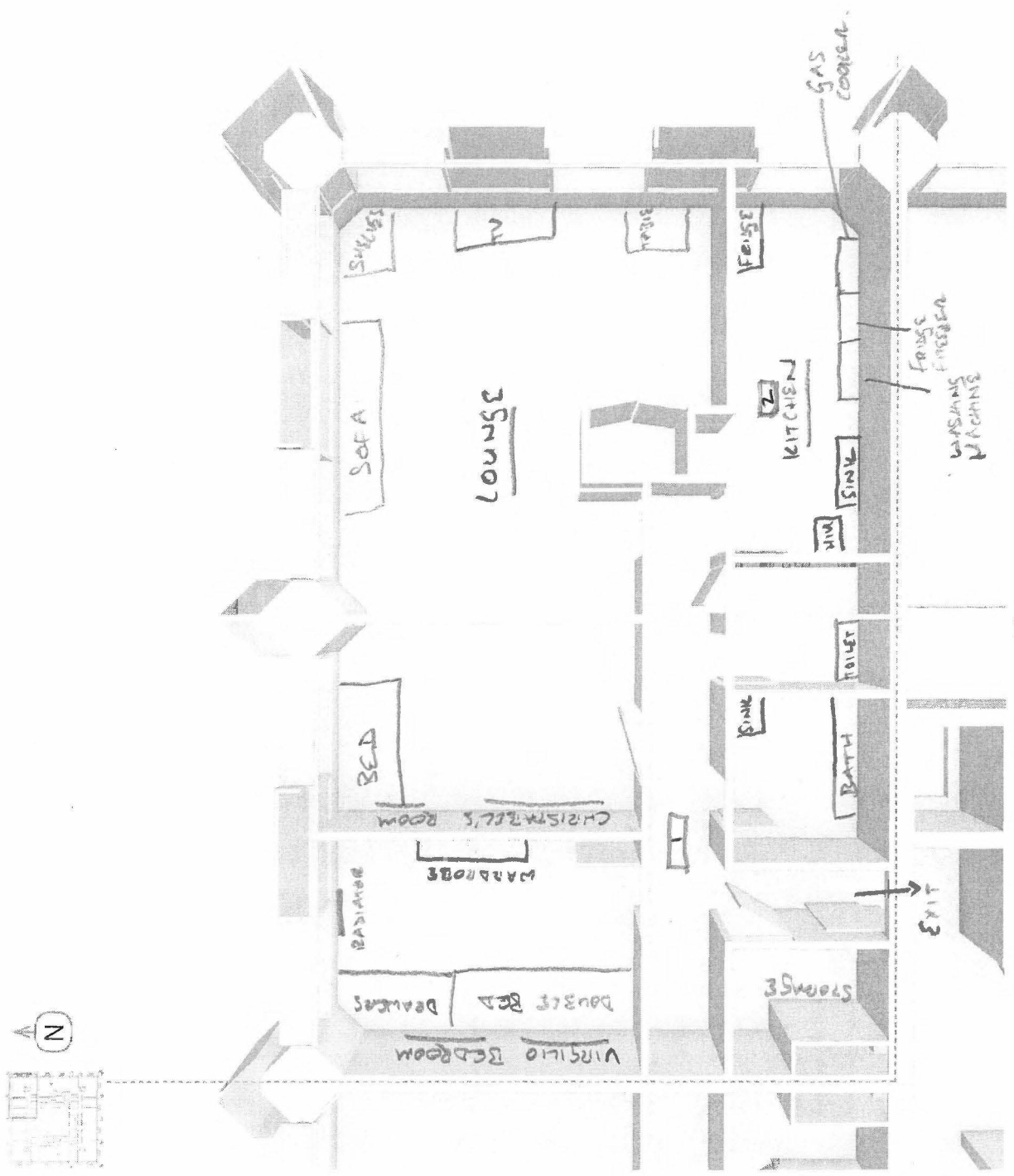
Witness: _____

Floor Number: _____

Solicitor: _____

EXHIBIT VC/2

Grenfell Tower
Typical Residential Flat (Type 6)



Flat
146

n. Description Time

1 R 2 = SHOVE
ATTORNS

Witness: VIRGILIO CASTRO

Floor Number: 17

Solicitor: SHANK DUTTA

