

WITNESS STATEMENT

Criminal Procedure Rules, r27.2; Criminal Justice Act 1967, s.9; Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, s.5b

Statement of: WRIGHT, JOHN

Age if under 18: Over 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18')

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 4 page(s) each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: JOHN WRIGHT

Date: 19/12/2017

Tick if witness evidence is visually recorded ☐ (*supply witness details on rear*)

This statement relates to the Grenfell Tower fire that occurred during the early hours of the morning of Wednesday 14 June 2017.

I am the above named person and I am a Firefighter employed by London Fire Brigade. I live at an address known to Police. I have been a firefighter for 28 years. I have previously been based at Battersea Fire Station but for the last 21 years I have been based at Wandsworth Fire Station, West Hill, SW18. The station code for Wandsworth is H33. I am on Red Watch.

On the Tuesday 13 June 2017 I was on duty for the night shift. I commenced duty at 2000 hours. The evening started as usual, we had role call and I was posted to drive the Pump Ladder. The Pump Ladder is a Fire Appliance consisting of a ladder and can be used to pump water from a hydrant. The call sign for the Pump Ladder is H331. Working with me that evening and posted to H331 was Watch Manager John PARKER, Crew Manager Richard McSHEE, Firefighters Zade ALASSAD, Scott BELL and Magz ERRINGTON. After equipment check there were no call outs that I remember until around 0130 hours when the bell sounded telling H331 to mobilise. As I was the driver I made my way to retrieve the printout as to where we were going. The message was to attend Grenfell Tower, W11. The call was to a 20 Pump Fire. The term 20 pump fire tells me that 20 appliances are needed and that means it is a serious incident. Grenfell Tower is not in an area of London covered by Wandsworth, I am not familiar with the

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area and I have never heard or visited the building before. I did not know the route to get there, at Wandsworth we do not carry route cards that cover that area. I went to the appliance and got into the driver's seat. The Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) within the appliance was not working properly, the area of the incident was not highlighted. I asked a member of the crew to navigate using their mobile phone.

I drove out of Wandsworth Fire Station on blues and twos and turned right towards the Wandsworth one way system. I took Putney Bridge Road and then crossed the River Thames over Putney Bridge continuing north along Fulham Palace Road. I went effectively straight across Hammersmith one way system onto Shephards Bush Road. At Shephard's Bush Green I turned right and crossed Holland Park roundabout onto Holland Park Avenue. I turned left into Royal Crescent and travelled north along Saint Anns Road. As I drove along Saint Anns Road I remember there was a road closure, I think this was due to road works so I turned right just before. I cannot remember the road name but there were lots of appliances already parked up here, so I stopped. There must have been around 6 appliances parked in front of me. The journey was clear and must have taken about 10 minutes.

I got out of the appliance. This is the first time I saw the building. I could see flames on the outside of the building. It appeared that the flames ranged from a third of the way from the bottom to a third of the way to the top, the middle third effectively. In my 28 years of being a Firefighter I have never seen anything like this. Watch Manager John PARKER told us to get Breathing Apparatus (BA) sets on and take breaking in equipment towards the building. On our appliance we had a Thermal Imaging Camera (TIC), I did not have possession of it and I do not know who did. Once everyone was ready, I locked the appliance and gave the keys to Watch Manager John PARKER. He took the BA Board which is effectively a register for the BA crews to the Command Unit. Together we made our way towards the tower along Grenfell Road approaching from the south east corner. It was a scene of chaos.

We walked straight into the tower, I was with Firefighters Scott BELL and Zaid ALASSAD. We went into the Mezzanine floor which is where the Bridgehead was. Within the Bridgehead we were briefed by Watch Manager Paul WATSON from Hammersmith Fire Station. We were told that Fire Survival Guide (FSG) calls had been received from flats on 23rd floor, we were tasked with going to those flats writing the number of the flats down on a piece of paper, (I no longer have the piece of paper), I cannot remember the flat numbers specifically. I do not remember anything specific about either of the flats we were tasked

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with Search and Rescue. We climbed the staircase and reached the Entry Control Officer (ECO), I do not know him by name but I recognise him. I handed him my tally, it electronically records the oxygen in the cylinders we have on our backs. I was carrying a Halligan Bar which is a tool used to break open doors, a roll of hose and a branch. These are quite heavy and the hose is awkward to carry as a roll. We were committed to the fire and entered the staircase. I started to climb the stairs, members of the public were passing us coming down the stairs. There was lots of noise on the staircase, I could hear a lot of shouting coming from higher up. As we climbed the staircase the smoke got thicker and visibility reduced. Together we continued to climb the staircase in physical contact with each other so not to lose each other. We had climbed a lot of stairs, I do not remember seeing any floor markings so I checked to see which floor we were on. I placed my face up close to just under a light and I could see the number 10 displayed. I started to climb the staircase again, I reached the 12th floor when suddenly there was a huge injection of heat and the staircase filled with darker thicker smoke. Someone behind me was shouting to come back down a couple of floors so to get underneath the rising heat. Returning back down, I could just make out a male lying on the floor close to the door to the 10th floor staircase, close to the entrance to the lobby.

I placed the equipment I was carrying down. The male laid on the floor on his back, face up. He was half underneath the railing. I could see his eyes were wide open. The male was clothed, I didn't know if he was alive, he was unconscious. As he wasn't there a few seconds ago as I climbed the stairs, I assume he opened the fire door to the 10th floor which also engulfed the staircase with thicker smoke and intensified the temperature. There was no time to waste, Firefighter BELL and I picked the male up, he was quite heavy, approximately 15stone. We could not perform any first aid, the smoke was too thick and I was wearing BA. I took hold of the male by underneath the arms, Firefighter BELL had hold of his legs. Together we started to descend the staircase. I think Firefighter Alassad assisted carrying another casualty. The male was heavy and in those conditions it was extremely hard work. As we descended, the smoke cleared the lower we got. I could see he was a black male, aged in his late 40s, he had a tattoo on his chest, it was writing or a line. We passed the ECO and continued down reaching the Mezzanine floor. Once we reached this area a Station Manager helped us and together with other Firefighters he took the male from us and exited the building. I did not see the male again.

I was with Firefighters BELL and ALASSAD, together and we returned to the staircase, I think our whistles on our BA set were sounding however I checked my pressure gauge and I had about 78 bar left.

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We started to climb the stairs again. As we were making our way to the ECO I met a male coming down the stairs. He was on his own, I assisted him down the remaining steps. The male was white, approximately 60 years old. He had a wet towel over his head. He spoke in an Eastern European Accent. The male told me his wife was still in their flat, she suffers from Alzheimer's or dementia. He told me his wife would not leave with him and asked me to go to his flat and rescue her. The male told me his flat number, I cannot remember it now, but once we had reached the safety of the Mezzanine floor, I left him as he said he was ok to walk and returned to the ECO. I told the ECO the flat number and ensured he was aware that the man's wife was still in there. I collected my tally and made my way back down the stairs. I was exhausted. Together Firefighters BELL, ALASSAD and I exited the building, leaving by the main entrance. We were committed to the fire for approximately 30 minutes in total.

We made our way towards Grenfell Road. We grabbed a drink. Together we spoke about our experience. I looked at the building and the fire had got worse on the outside to when we went in. There were now flames on the external side of the building reaching all the way to the top. I spoke with Firefighter BELL, we were both exhausted however realised we may need to go back inside the building or worse still, we feared that the building may collapse. I saw a Firefighter from the Operational Support Unit struggling to push a trolley full of fresh sets of oxygen cylinders. I went and assisted him push the trolley towards the grass area on the East of the tower. Once there I took a cylinder and exchanged it for my empty one. I was told by an officer to move to the East wall area near a grass area. Together my crew and I waited there and recovered our energy. The fire was still burning flames on the East side of the tower and they were wrapping around to the North side. There were members of the public standing around with us, they were distraught at what was happening. I remember someone did approach us a firefighter from Tooting Fire Station dealt with this person. I did not interact with anyone. I could see what I believed to be Gas alight in some flats. Burning Gas is green colour flame. I did not see any members of the Gas Company at the scene. An Ariel Appliance was extended and directing water around the 9th and 10th floor area. I could see a male in a window, he kept appearing with a torch. He was on the 8th floor or so. The Ariel Appliance was ensuring that the fire did not spread downwards protecting him. I later heard that this male survived. We rested there for at least 1 hour.

It was approximately 0330- 0400 hours. The three of us from Wandsworth Fire Station were joined by Firefighter Neil SAUNDERS from Tooting Fire Station. We had recovered enough to re-enter the

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building. We made our way towards the covered walk way on the south side of the building. Debris was falling from the building so we waited here for Police with riot shields to escort us to and from the building under the cover of their shields. We got under the shields and ran into the building. I could hear debris falling from the building around us as we did this. I kept my head down and did not look up. As we passed the entrance on the South side I saw a human leg detached at the hip area, lying on the floor. We entered the building from the West side, I don't think this is an actual entrance but we walked in. Once inside we were in the Mezzanine floor, the Bridgehead and ECO were now here, the ECO had been further up in the building. We waited in a queue of firefighters for approximately 45 minutes. We reached the front of the queue, an officer briefed us. I do not know who the officer was. The officer told us to work in a 4 person team and to go and search the entire 4th floor. I picked up an Axe, which is all the equipment we had between us. Once briefed we made our way to the ECO and handed in our tallies.

We were committed to the fire again under BA. We climbed the staircase which were clear to the 4th floor. The staircase was filled with smoke but not as bad as before when I was higher up the building. On entering the 4th floor we found a hose with a branch connected near the door, it was set in to the riser. We systematically searched the floor. We started the search with the flat to our left, I do not remember any of the flat numbers. Entering each flat as a team we looked for fire and casualties. The 1 flat we searched the front door was open, there was no fire and no casualties. Moving to the 2nd flat the door was locked closed. I used the Axe to break down the door, chopping at the door to gain entry. Once inside we searched the area. There was no fire and no casualties. Moving to the third flat, the door was open, inside, there was a small fire inside. Turning the water on there was hardly any pressure. The water did not reach very far. With the water on, the hose could be bent, it should be solid full of water. Together we managed to extinguish the fire. There were no casualties. We moved to the next flat, again there was a fire which we extinguished using the hose, beating it back by whatever means we could. We continued with the final two flats on the floor, we did not find any casualties or fires. I remember that one of the flats seemed to be completely untouched by the fire whereas the rest were fire damaged. Apart from the second flat that we searched, all doors were open. Most of the windows had melted due to the heat. I estimate that we were on the 4th floor for about 20 minutes. With all fire extinguished we returned to the staircase, we left the hose and branch on the floor and made our way back to the Bridgehead and collected our tallies from the ECO telling them what we had achieved. There were approximately 30 firefighters in the Bridgehead all waiting to enter the building. We exited the building via the West entrance escorted to safety by the

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Police under riot shields.

As we exited the building we got slightly lost. We ended up close to a set of houses I believe to the West side of the tower. We walked around and ended up back at Grenfell Road. It was daylight. Members of the public were clapping, giving us a round of applause as we walked passed them. We reached the East side grass area, looking back up at the tower the fire was still engulfing the external of the building. I was shell shocked. We left the East side grass area and went to the Salvation Army for some refreshments. We returned to the East side grass area where we waited as an entire crew until we were told to leave the area and attend Paddington Fire Station. It was approximately 0900 hours when we started to walk back to the appliance. I retrieved the keys to the appliance and got into the appliance. There were 4 other appliances in our way and due to cars parked in the narrow streets in took a while to get out of the area leaving around 0945 hours. We arrived at Paddington Fire Station. Together the entire crew of H331 made notes. The notes took around 30-40 minutes and on their conclusion we drove back to Wandsworth Fire Station as a crew, arriving there around midday. Blue Watch who were on day shift had made us breakfast which was nice of them, after eating I was dismissed. I left the station and drove home where I rested. I returned to work for my scheduled night duty at 2000 hours.

The whole incident was extreme. LFB procedures were not fully adhered to, some of the policy was broken. For instance we were sent above the fire without water, which normally should not happen. The fire lift was not used, I do not know the reason why. I remember on entering the building on the first occasion, receiving the brief to attend the 23rd floor, I realised relatively early on that climbing the stairs in the conditions, in full BA kit, carrying equipment, we were unlikely to reach that high before our whistles would sound directing us out of the building. A fire lift which we would have commandeered, would have got us closer to the 23rd floor with air in our cylinders. The stay put policy should enable the fire brigade time to fight the fire and normally is the correct advice, however on this occasion the fire spread too quickly. I have received inputs on how fire can spread externally in a similar but lower scale, I recall the fire at Lakanal House in Peckham, I was not in attendance. I did attend a fire a few months before the Grenfell Tower fire in Shephards Bush, the fire on that occasion spread externally however not to the extreme at Grenfell Tower. On that night the stay put policy advice worked, as did fire doors and other fire measures assisting the brigade in extinguishing the fire successfully and without casualties. The low water pressure that we experienced on our second entry to the building while fighting fires on the 4th

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floor was an issue. The pressure we were getting was like a garden hose, not enough to fire fight.

Although I did not have radio communications myself, only one person in a BA crew has communications, I was aware that the radio did not work properly once inside the tower. Channel 1 is the fire ground channel and Channel 6 for inside the tower while under BA, there were problems communicating. I was surprised that the building only had one staircase, another staircase would have helped. At one point while I was on the East grass area an Assistant Commissioner gave a good speech that I overheard, telling firefighters it was our morale duty to step outside of procedures in order to try and save lives.

After the incident I learnt that the fire started on the 4th floor, the same floor I attended on my second time in the tower. I was not told of this in my brief, however it was not relevant as the fire had spread by then. I did not fight the fire at the very beginning on that floor.

With regards to the training that I have received, it is an ongoing process. I recently was in attendance when the entire Red Watch at Wandsworth Fire Station took part in a Back to Basics Input which focused on fire fighting in a high rise block of flats. Before the Grenfell Tower fire Red Watch at Wandsworth Fire Station attended Park Royal in London for realistic training in high rise block fire fighting. In the area of London that Wandsworth usually cover, there are many high rise blocks of flats, I believe the area of Wandsworth has the second most high rise blocks in the country so we are well aware of the procedures and of the dangers. On average I would say Wandsworth Fire Station attend approximately 2 fires in high rise blocks each year, however none have been on the scale of the Grenfell Tower fire.

I exhibit the following three documents,

Exhibit JOW/1- Notes made by Firefighter WRIGHT sealed with Police Evidence Seal MPSZ1 3085638. These are the notes that I made at Paddington Fire Station after the incident.

Exhibit JOW/2 - Grenfell Tower Elevation sealed with Police Evidence Seal MPSZ1 3085639. On this diagram I have shown the external fire as I first saw it when I parked my fire appliance.

Exhibit JOW/3 -Map of Grenfell Tower Area sealed with Police Evidence Seal MPSZ1 3085640. On this

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map I have illustrated where I saw the human leg, where the fire was on my arrival and where the East
grass area I refer to is.

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