

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: SAUNDERS, NEIL

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 8 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: N SAUNDERS

Date: 27/11/2017

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

This is my account of the fire at Grenfell Tower in the early hours of Wednesday 14th June 2017.

On 27/11/2017, I was interviewed by DC Katie BENNETT and PC Nonso ANIDI in the presence of Fire Brigade union representative Firefighter Martin THOMPSON at Brixton fire Station. During the interview, I will refer to the note that I made after the incident. This note was made at Paddington fire station between 1100hrs and 1200hrs on the 14/06/2017.

I will mention number of people:

The crew from Fulham fire station, Watch manager Glynn WILLIAMS, Fire Fighter Chris BATCHELOR, Fire fighter HILL, all these fire fighters along with me came from Fulham fire station on the day of the incident. I will also mention Watch Manager Stuart BROWN and Fire Fighter Rick NUTTALL, based at Battersea Fire station. I will mention the people I met at the scene - the crew from Wandsworth Fire station: Fire Fighter ZAID, Fire Fighter Scott BELL and Fire Fighter Jonny WRIGHT. Finally, I will mention Watch Manager Jim BERRY from Richmond fire station, Watch Manager Dan MORRISON, Fire Fighter Aidrian TOPPING and Fire Fighter Scott ELLIOTT based at Tooting Fire station, and an ex-colleague, Fire Fighter Gary TOOTILL.

I will mention the Grenfell tower and the internal layout of it up to the 3rd floor. Throughout the incident, the highest floor I went up to was the 10th/11th floor.

As you walk in through the Grenfell tower entrance, there is a glass wall to your right in the ground floor lobby, with a door that led to the stairs, and the stairs will lead to an open floor area. Along the open floor area there is a balcony which overlooks the ground floor lobby. In the balcony area, there is another door

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which leads to the stairwell. The stairwell is really tight and it then led to the 3rd floor where the bridge head was initially located. I believe the stairwell is the similar layout to all the stairs from 3rd to 10th floor. I will be unable to describe the 10th floor lay out because of the condition of the floor at the time I attended, it was smoke logged and very difficult to see anything.

I joined the London Fire Brigade in 2002, after I joined I went to the training school at Southwark where I did the initial training course for 16 weeks and then a 4year probation period at Tooting Fire Station.. This training involved ladder drills and other firefighting drills in the station. At the end of the 4 years I was given an assessment before I was passed..

I have been at Tooting fire station for 15 years and currently on the Red watch. I am quite experienced in firefighting, I have attended a lot of fire incidents which involve houses, car incidents, and people underneath trains and attended an incident where someone was stabbed in the neck. I have no specialist training however we do refresher courses on High- rise blocks, like drills which involve creating a bridge head, setting dry riser and knowing how to use the breathing apparatus in the event of fire. I am trained to use standard breathing apparatus. We do refresher course on breathing apparatus once every year.

In addition to training, we do high-rise drills regularly, we do drills at the station, which involves creating a bridgehead, reporting in your breathing apparatus and wearing all your gear, this training is basically for you to know what to do during fires in High-rise blocks. Refresher training for High-rise blocks course is between 2 or 3 times each year and it involves drills on a drill tower that is located at a Fire station. Some drill towers will have 4/5 floors and we do scenarios, for example where a flat will be on the 4th floor. It is hard to do a realistic high rise drill because you need to go to a high rise building, the building needs to smoky so that you can't see before it can be realistic. This drill tower training is not ideal but it is sufficient for what the brigade can actually do. I have been to a couple of fire incidents in high rise buildings but not as often as house fires.

I had never been to the Grenfell tower before the fire incident and had never been there for a familiarisation visit. However I have been on familiarisation visits to high rise tower blocks in Tooting where I am based. I do not know any pre-prepared fire plan for Grenfell but we have procedures for all High rises and I am sure that Grenfell tower is no different and will have its own procedures. The familiarisation visits involved visiting high rise blocks, to find out what floors you can set your hoses, lengths of hose we might need in event of fire to the furthest flat, where a dry riser is located within the building, check if the lift is working properly and find out where you can park the appliances and at the end of the visit, paperwork will be filled in and updated in the computer system to show that the

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familiarisation visit has been completed. Such visits happens once or twice a year but it goes across the 4 watches.

I have never worked for the fire safety department, however I am aware that when the compartment of a building fails and the fire is moving down, the bridgehead has to be moved to lower floor to continue firefighting and I believe that this procedure is pretty much the same everywhere.

On 14/06/2017, I was on standby at Fulham fire station which means that I have to report for work at that station rather than Tooting fire station because of a shortage of staff. My duty that night ran from 2000hrs to 0930hrs in the morning. FF Chris BATCHELOR, FF HILLS, W/M Glen WILLIAMS and I were riding on a pump ladder, Fulham fire station has one pump ladder that has a 13.5m ladder and a 9m ladder. The appliance carries cutting equipment, branches, hose and thermal cameras. FF BATCHELOR and I were in the back seat and we are BA wearers, FF HILL was the driver that night and W/M WILLIAMS was in the front and in charge, That night, we attended an incident in Chelsea for an automatic fire alarm going off and as we arrived at the incident location, we were informed that they are about to send out a stop message which means that we were no longer needed at the incident because the crew that arrived before us had been in and investigated and found that it was a faulty alarm. After that we updated our status to 6, which means that we are available to attend an incident on the machine.

At this point, I heard on the radio while I was seated at the back of the appliance that there was a fire incident at Grenfell tower, which had been made a 10 pump fire. It quickly increased to a 15 pump persons reported fire, which means that the officer in charge believed that people are compromised by the fire or people have made their way out. It was then made into a 20 pump fire. At this point I realised that it is a serious fire incident. After we updated our status, a message came straight to the appliance for us to attend the scene. We made our way to Grenfell tower - I can't remember what time this message came to the fire engine.

While on our way to the incident, I thought that it was going to be a big fire because I have attended fire incidents where 20 pumps were required. Sitting in the new-style fire engine, you can't really see anything from the window. The location we were going to is not familiar to me. At a point as we are approaching Grenfell tower, we had to turn around because of road works, we couldn't get through it, and so we took a different route to get to the scene. I could see Grenfell tower from a distance - there was a flame going up the outside of it, it seemed like the fire was coming from the side of the building. From where I was looking from, it seemed that the right hand side corner of the building was on fire and the fire was going up (I draw a building showing the side that was on fire and the direction the fire was

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travelling). I cannot remember how far away we are from the building, there were other buildings blocking my full view to the fire, I could only see from 4/5 floors upwards, and I couldn't see the bottom part of Grenfell tower. However, there was clear evidence that the building is on fire and on few floors. The fire looked like a normal flame to me and moving in the wind.

We parked at a location where I cannot remember the name of the street because it is not an area that I am familiar with but I know that we walked for 5 minutes to get to Grenfell tower, and I remember that we walked through a grass area to my left before we got to Grenfell tower (I draw the direction I use to get to Grenfell tower). At the location we parked FF BATCHELOR and I put on our breathing apparatus with other firefighting equipment and start walking towards Grenfell tower. When we arrived it was apparent that the fire had spread on the outside of the building and there were multiple floors involved, there was a lot of smoke coming out from the building. At this point I was not concentrating on what was around me, as we got closer to the tower, I saw that the fire was big and going higher and higher with a lot of panels falling out of the building, plus windows falling out from flats but all that was in my mind at that time was to get into the building. I don't know the layout of Grenfell tower but I know there was no fire in the entrance to Grenfell tower but there were a lot of smoke coming from the right corner of the building. As I was approaching the building, I could see a lot of people trapped in the building waving their phone lights and I could see that flat lights were on. The people trapped were particularly on the upper floors of Grenfell tower, to the side of where the entrance is located and there was stuff falling out from the right side of the building. Standing facing the entrance to Grenfell tower, the flame is towards the back of the building on my right hand side (I have a drawing to show where the fire was on the building) and smoke coming from my left hand side. There was a group of firefighters and a few crews from London ambulance service standing around very close to the entrance to the tower. (I drew two sketches of the tower, the first showing my view of the tower from the appliance and the second showing my view when I arrived on scene).

As I walked straight into the main entrance, which is at the ground floor, I saw FF Ricky NUTTALL and 1 other firefighter from Battersea fire station. In the ground, there is a glass partition to your right, with a door at the end that lead to the stairs, the stairs then lead to the mezzanine. FF BATCHELOR and I went to this mezzanine which has an open floor and stood at the balcony area which overlooks the lobby area on the ground floor. There were a lot of firefighters in the ground floor lobby area at that point. We waited on the balcony area with about 4 other firefighters, who were not familiar to me, to be called through to go up to the bridgehead before we will be committed. While we were waiting to be called

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through, we handed our branch to a crew that was committed before us and a few minutes later, the governor, whose name I cannot remember — I believe he is from Hammersmith, came and said “NEXT TWO, MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A HOSE AND BRANCH.” The governor was standing by the door at the end of the mezzanine which leads to the 3rd floor. FF BATCHELOR and I stepped forward and we were directed to the stairs which leads to the 3rd floor where the bridgehead was located and we went up there with two 45mm hoses. Thermal Image Camera and a branch which was handed to us by other crews waiting to be called through. The stairwell was very tight, it wasn’t a big area, and you have to step aside so that people coming downstairs could go through. While going up to the 3rd floor, there was a mixture of firefighters and civilians coming downstairs. When we got to the bridgehead, there was more open space there.

At the bridgehead which was at 3rd floor, we were briefed about a Fire survival guidance call (FSG) on the 10th floor at Flat 74, I cannot remember the name of the officer that briefed us before I handed my tally. The Tally has the following information: My name, my station, breathing apparatus number and how much air in it at the time I handed in my tally. At the bridgehead they calculate how much time I should spend in there and the time I am due out, all this information then goes to the board that is located at the bridgehead. As I was making my way up to the 10th floor, we were informed that the bridgehead would be moved to the lower floor. I don’t know which floor but I think it was the ground floor and the reason for moving the bridgehead is because the fire was spreading and the condition was getting worse. It was very difficult going upwards because of the conditions in the stairwells. The stairwell was not wide enough, I struggled to walk passed people in the stairwell, there were FFs carrying casualties downstairs, some of the residents were walking downstairs on their own. At this point I was unable to smell anything because I was wearing my BA mask, visibility was clear on the lower floors but when we got nearer to the 8th floor, the visibility was poor at this stage due to smoke logging — the smoke was thick. You have to stop to allow people to walk past you and at this point I was unable to see markings on the walls, I can’t remember lighting in the stairwells but I could hear shouting like when firefighters are coming down with casualties they will shout so that people can make way for them. In addition to that, I can hear people shouting, screaming and crashing and banging that sounds like things falling down from ceiling and walls but I couldn’t tell. There was a constant stream of casualties descending downstairs and the stairwell was congested with a lot of people. While going upstairs, I can’t remember if the doors that lead into other floors were closed but I think they were all closed.

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When FF BATCHELOR and I got to the 10th floor, and I opened the door that leads into the 10th floor, a thick big black smoke came out, the thick black smoke level on the 10th floor is from the floor to the ceiling, and it was very difficult to see anything because it was total darkness. At this point I crawled (because it would generally improve the conditions created by a fire but visibility was still zero) straight ahead but to the left, into the 10th floor lobby, unable to see anything. I couldn't even see the layout of that floor. During the briefing we were not informed the location of Flat 74 on the 10th floor and it was too hot to move further. Whilst crawling I was shouting "CAN ANYONE HEAR ME, MAKE A NOISE" but I didn't hear anything - it was silent. While crawling on the floor, due to the heat I hear FF BATCHELOR shouting from behind me "WE NEED TO GET BACK AND SET UP WATER" I don't know if FF BATCHELOR was directly behind me or standing at the door at the time he shouted out to me. It was on the 10th floor I believe I left my thermal imaging camera because I couldn't use it to see anything.

I crawled back out towards the direction I came in and went up the 11th floor stairwell. I bowl out one of my 45mm hoses to the floor below to plug it to the dry riser because you can't set up water on the floor where there is fire. The floor was heavily smoke logged and difficult to see anything, we didn't know the layout of that floor and it became apparent that we were not going to find a dry riser to plug my hose. At this point I saw the crew from Wandsworth fire station (FF ZAID, FF Scot BELL and FF Jonny WRIGHT) carrying someone but I was unable to see the person they were carrying, they said to us that it was smoky on the 11th floor lobby. It became apparent that every floor above 10th floor was smoky. FF BATCHELOR and I went back again to the 10th floor to try and complete the FSG task. I crawled a bit further into the 10th floor this time, as far as I could, in the same direction I took the first time but it was so hot, so dark and felt even hotter plus I couldn't see the door numbers. I tried to make noise to see if anyone would hear me. As I was crawling, I could feel that my arm was burning through my tunic, I can't remember if FF BATCHELOR called me back but I had to go back because the conditions were too bad. I cannot remember how long we spent on 10th floor/11th floor stairwell.

At this point I heard a voice shouting for help 1 or 2 floors above, I think it was between the 11th/12th floors. It was a male voice. We went upwards and found a firefighter on his own with an unconscious lady, struggling and it was clear that the FF was obviously exhausted. I don't know the FF's name. The FF said "I CAN'T GET THIS LADY OUT ON MY OWN I NEED HELP". FF BATCHELOR took one of the lady's arm, the FF took the other arm and I took her legs and started heading downstairs. I cannot remember the description of the FF but I think he was quite tall.

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Going downstairs was difficult as the stairwell was small, smoky in the upper floors and clearer in the lower floors. At this point, there were not a lot of people in the stairwell. We took the unconscious lady to the ground floor where there is glass partition wall and other FFs came to assist us with carrying the female and at this point we handed her over to them. When I say that the lady was unconscious, it is because nothing was coming from her, I don't know if she was breathing or burnt but there is evidence of smoke inhalation. I can't describe the female but she was wearing either a T-shirt or nightdress and was naked from waist down.

While we were downstairs, we knew that we did not have enough air to go back up and complete the FSG task. We went and collected our tally and it was at this point we spoke to the officer that was in charge of the entry control board and said "WE DID NOT MANAGE TO GET THE PERSON OUT AT THE 10TH FLOOR" and we explained why. I don't know whether another crew were briefed to return to flat 74 and I don't know the officer that was in charge of the entry control board that we briefed. At the entry control board, I saw there were a lot of flat numbers and floors written on the wall at the bridgehead. Fire survival guidance (FSG) means when someone trapped in one of the flats by a fire, is on the phone to our control and control remain on the phone until a rescue is carried out. I am aware of the stay put policy but I am not aware if the stay put policy was being used at Grenfell tower on the night of that incident.

While in the ground floor lobby where the bridgehead was moved, I noticed a lot of numbers written on the wall and I believe this was the FSG calls that were coming in. I remember I took off my breathing apparatus mask in the ground floor lobby. This was where I saw a woman and her daughter walked down by other firefighters - I assisted them by taking FF BATCHELOR's helmet that was left on floor and put it on the woman's head to protect her from the falling debris from the building, and walked the woman out of the building. An officer with a white helmet approached me and took the woman from me. I cannot remember the description of the woman. FF BATCHELOR walked the woman's daughter outside (this girl is roughly in her teens, but I can't remember her description). After walking the woman outside, I noticed there were bits of debris falling out of the building. I remember I left the building and turned left and went to sit on the wall on my own. At this point I was feeling breathless and exhausted, it was at this point I shut off my breathing apparatus. Shutting my breathing apparatus off means to shut off the cylinder.

While seated on the wall next to the grass area outside the Grenfell tower drinking water I met up with FF BATCHELOR again. A man was walking around near us, it seemed that the man was asking other firefighters to chat to someone over the phone. FF BATCHELOR went to tell him to go back as he was

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getting closer to the building and it was dangerous because of the condition of the building. As FF BATCHELOR got closer to the man, the man handed a mobile to him and he ended up speaking to someone who was trapped in the building. He spent a long time speaking to the woman trapped in the building. It appeared that man's sister and her daughter were trapped in the building. (I indicated on my drawing where FF BATCHELOR spoke to this man and where we were seated) The description of the male who handed over the phone to FF BATCHELOR is black male, 5ft 8 inches and I don't know his age.

While seated on the wall, WM BROWN asked me to go and get drinking water for firefighters who were about to be committed into the building, I went and got water and took it to the officers who were seated close to where police officers who were using Riot shields to escort people in and out of the building. Whilst giving out this drinking water, I noticed there was another entrance to the side of the building further past the main entrance and there were a lot of firefighters there waiting to go in, I handed out the drinking water and left.

It was at this point that I felt that I was ready to go back into the building. I went and changed my cylinder and saw that FF BATCHELOR is still on the phone with the female that was trapped in the building. I saw the crew from Wandsworth fire station who I'd met earlier at the stairwell and I told them I would go in with them because my partner is still busy on the phone. A few minutes later WM BROWN said that 5 BA set wearers were required at the side entrance. As I walked closer to the side entrance with the crew from Wandsworth, I noticed that there was a lot of debris at the base of the ground floor close to entrance. This is where WM Jim BERRY said we needed 5 BA wearers in the ground floor lobby it appeared that he was the one who requested 5 BA wearers.

As we walked into the ground floor lobby through the side entrance of the building there was a room, like a holding area, in the lobby area, with a lot of riot police officers, there were few other firefighters in that lobby area waiting to be briefed before going up. I believed the ground floor lobby was where the bridgehead had been relocated. At this point we were informed that a 45mm jet hose will be charged which we would take up to the 4th floor for firefighting. It was at the stage that the ground floor lobby became smoky so someone smashed the glass to allow the smoke to escape but smoke started coming into the lobby because there was a fan outside that was blowing the smoke inside the lobby area. We waited for ages before we were briefed but officers with EDCA cylinders were sent in first. After we were briefed we proceeded to the 4th floor with the 45mm jet hose that was charged. Before going to the 4th floor I saw WM Dan MORRISON near the bridgehead but I was not sure if he was the one that was

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managing the bridgehead and at this point, the entry control board has been moved to the bottom of the stairs at the lobby area in the ground floor. When I got to the mezzanine level, I saw firefighters without BA sets there helping out in carrying stuff.

Going up to the 4th floor was straight forward, as we got to the floor, I went into one of the flats to my right, but I cannot remember the flat number. I walked into the living room and it was pretty burnt but there were pockets of flames in different areas within the flat, I was the one operating the 45mm jet which I used to put out the flames and systematically went through the other rooms to put the flames out. At this point, I handed over the branch to other ff's to put the flames out and by the time we left that flat the fire was out, we didn't spend a long time in the first flat because we had other flats to go into. We went into other flats on the 4th floor where there were pockets of fire that we put out before strategically going into other flats and systematically searching the flat to make sure that no one is left there. The visibility in the 4th floor at that time was fairly clear in some of the flats as a lot of windows within the flats that I went into were burnt out and had fallen off. I did not hear the alarm in Grenfell tower nor did I see any sprinkling. The door of the first flat we went into was open but we smashed one or two other flat doors to gain access.

From the floor, we dragged the hose up to the 5th floor. The lobby area on the 5th floor was smoky, and we did not do any firefighting on the 5th floor because one of the firefighters from Wandsworth fire station, air in BA set was running low, the condition at the 5th floor lobby was not that smoky.

While going downstairs, I saw other FFs without BA sets helping to drag a hose upstairs and when I got to the lobby area, I noticed that there were a lot of FF's waiting to be committed into the building and at this point, I left the building through the same way I entered. I left the building with the help of the riot shielded police officers, walked around for up to 10-15 minutes and returned to the grass area where I shut my BA set (I have indicated on my drawing the direction I took back to the grass area).

While seated in the grass area for a bit, I saw some crew from tooting fire station (FF Aidrian TOPPIN, FF Scot ELLIOTT and other FF's that I can't remember from other boroughs). FF ELLIOT has not got a partner, so I volunteered to partner up and go back to the building and it was at this point that FF BATCHELOR came and informed me that our crew are leaving. I don't know what time of the day it was but I remember I saw Gary TOOTILL I don't know where he is based but he is on blue watch. When I left it was day light and looking at the tower at that time, it wasn't in a good state and there was a lot of smoke. I think at the point, there was an area ladder platform from Surrey being used but I can't remember if it was in use at that point. I don't know how many hours I spent at the incident.

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As we were leaving FF BATCHELOR informed me that the lady who he was on the phone with had a baby that she'd said had died before she finally dropped the line.

I cannot remember what time we left the scene. When we left, we went straight to Paddington fire station where we were offered counselling and it was here that I wrote my statement between 1100hrs and 1200hrs, which I referred to during this interview on 27/11/2017. I handed over the note I made to the fire brigade on the same day. During the time I spent at the scene, I did not witness any near misses and I did not get any injuries.

I will exhibit the following in this statement:

NAS/1: Drawing of my view to Grenfell tower in the appliance on my way to Grenfell tower and at the scene.

NAS/2: Note I made on 14/06/2017 at Paddington fire station which I referred to during my interview.

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