

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: HARDING, NICHOLAS

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 HARDING

Date: 28/02/2018

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

My Name is Nicholas HARDING I am a Station Manager at UNION STREET, London Fire Brigade's headquarters. I have given a voluntarily interview on 31st January 2017 at UNION STREET to Civil investigator Paul FULLER and Police Constable Suzanne HARRIS in the presence of my union rep and this statement is taken from that interview, in my statement I will make reference to the following typed up notes regarding my attendance and action after the incident exhibit NJH/1 seal no: MPSZ13186180 and a Map of GRENFELL TOWER Exhibit no: NJH/2 seal no: MPSZ13114164.

The statement is with regard to my attendance at the GRENFELL TOWER fire on 14th June 2017. The people I will mention in this statement are: Station Manager Paul McCLENAGHAN, Station Manager Rob WAINWRIGHT, Watch Manager Gary WILSON, Group manager Richard WELCH and Group Manager Pat GOULDBOURNE, Group Manager Dave ONEAL.

The locations I will mention are: London Fire Brigade headquarters, UNION STREET, VICTORIA EMBANKMENT, GREEN PARK, MARBLE ARCH, BAYSWATER ROAD and HOLLAND PARK ROAD GRENFELL ROAD, BOMORE ROAD, The covered area on the SOUTH SIDE of GRENFELL TOWER and the lobby area of GRENFELL TOWER.

I joined the fire service on 9th January 1995 and completed basic Fire training at SOUTHWARK. In the summer of 1995 I joined Red watch at RICHMOND where I completed my probation to become a substantive Fire Fighter.

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At the end of 1998 I moved to EALING Fire Station on White Watch where I took my promotion exams and became an acting Lead Fire Fighter the rank equivalent today is Crew Manager, Once I became substantive in this role I then started acting up as Sub Officer the equivalent rank today is Watch Manager, I then started working on out duties which involved providing cover as Watch Manager of fire stations all over London covering holidays and sickness or if the station manager was on a course, during this time I was usually only ever at EALING Fire station if the Leading Fire Fighter or station manager was or on a course or on leave.

In 2004 as a watch manager I moved to the training unit delivering training to Fire rescues units, Fire rescue units are crews that have a range of specialist and technical equipment such as hydraulic cutting gear, line and water rescue equipment, they also carry extended duration breathing apparatus (EDBA) for use in more protracted or complicated jobs. They are not usually sent into a fire to rescue casualties but can be used for this purpose.

I also specialised in delivering training on line rescue and water rescue, this was in SOUTHWARK Fire Training School but training took place all over the country at various venues such as SHEPPERTON, NORTHAMTON and OLDHAM I did this for five years and then wanted to go back to a fire station.

In 2009 I moved to White Watch at BETHNAL GREEN as A Watch Manager B, there are two ranks of Watch Manager A and B and this reflects how many people you are responsible for. I stayed at BETHNAL GREEN for a year. This station had a fire rescue unit.

In 2010 I moved to KINGSLAND Fire station which is north of SHORDITCH where I spent 2 years on Green Watch, as Watch Manager.

In 2011 I started the application process to become a Station Manager this was quite a long process as the London Olympics was right in the middle of this process which delayed things. The process to become a station manager requires a lot of training, once qualified we have what are known as tags these are specialisms that require additional training, for example my tags are senior accident investigator, press liaison officer, search and rescue and hazardous materials and environment protection officer, tactical advisor for technical rescue these all require additional training.

As a station manager there are mandatory courses you have to do such as incident command, information management there is a five-day course in Incident command for new station managers and then

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mandatory refresher training this is one-day course with assessment. My training is all up to date and was at the time of GRENFELL TOWER Fire.

My experience of high rise firefighting training is that there are specific operational policy documents and training packages for high rise incidents and has been part of what we do from fire training school all the way through to my current role.

My experience of high rise fires is varied as I have been to quite few during my service and remember the first one I went to as a leading fire fighter based at EALING it was on RICHMOND ground. As we approached I could see a flat high up in the building fully alight with flames punching out of the windows. We have a well-established policies and procedures in place. The initial crews had dealt with the fire and we were being deployed to check adjacent flats above, below and either side the fire flat for fire spread and water damage.

I have attended a number of high rise fires during my service in roles from Firefighter to Station Manager and incident manager in more recent times, as a station manager. I have been Incident Commander for some of them. A station manager can manage an incident requiring six pumps (Fire Engines). As an incident escalates, a more senior officer will take on the role of incident commander. At larger incidents a station manager maybe asked to take on functional roles with in the command structure, the process continues as an incident grows in size or complexity, and this is what happened at GRENFELL TOWER. I was aware of GRENFELL TOWER before the incident but had never been there and had no previous knowledge of it.

Carrying out 72(d) visits is not part of my current role but I have done hundreds of them in the past as a station based officer, as a station manager at a fire station, the crews would send me the results of their 7.2(D) visits.

This would be new visits to new buildings or revisits to update premises information with updates and risk assessments already held on our system. This is our operational risk data base. It includes information that would be useful to the fire brigade in the event of a fire. For example, hazard lists and layout of the building, any unusual features. Location of the nearest hydrant and fixed installations. I would check the information from the crews update the system or ask additional information as appropriate. This is an ongoing process and premises information is constantly updated as provided.

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In 2012 I was promoted temporary Station Manager of KINGSLAND Fire Station, the station had been earmarked for closure I spent a lot time arranging relocation for Fire Fighters to new postings. The station closed 13th January 2013.

I then moved to HOMERTON Fire station which is another Hackney Fire station I was there for about six months before moving to STOKE NEWINGTON as a Station Manager at the end of 2013.

After a couple of years at STOKE NEWINGTON I started making some enquiries about transferring To a new role headquarters in UNION STREET. In 2015 I moved to Operational Policy department, this is my current posting and it is where I was based on the morning of 14th June 2017.

My job role is within the Operational policy department and I work with in the fire rescue team. It is a large department with different teams covering Hazardous Materials, Respiratory Protective Equipment, Technical rescue, Incident Communications and Incident Command. All our activities are covered by policy guidance and part of my job involves writing and reviewing policies. All our policies are reviewed every three years or whenever things change due to legislation, new equipment and techniques being introduced. The training I received in the use of PPV stems from my work in the department, Looking at new equipment and procedures.

Currently and at the time of the GRENFELL TOWER fire PPV fans are only available to a specialist group who have received specific training in their use. We have four fans for use by a team from Specialist Operations group. The team works alongside and in support off the Police in the planning for a response to a terrorist incident involving fire. The group can provide feedback to assist in the project to introduce the capability to the rest of our frontline crews, as part of this project and in order to improve my own understanding of the capabilities of the PPV, I under took a PPV instructors course with Devon and Somerset fire and rescue. This gave me some additional understanding and helped with the writing of my proposal to London Fire Brigade to introduce the equipment more widely.

The Fans come in different sizes the ones I used at GRENFELL are approximately fifty centimetres high by thirty centimetres deep and weigh about thirty kilos maybe a bit more and are on wheels so they can be moved more easily.

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The output of these fans is measured in cubic metres per hour, the output of the fans I used at the GRENFELL TOWER fire are 50,000 cubic metres per hour and I can only describe this as wind strong enough to be uncomfortable if you stood in front of it.

On the night of the 13th of January 2017, I was on a twenty-four hour shift and on call from my home. Outside normal office hours I am available on pager and by telephone from home.

At approximately 0330 on the morning of 14th June I got a call from Station Manager Paul McCLENAGHAN. Paul was working at the incident co-ordinating centre, based in Stratford at the brigade co-ordination centre. Paul relayed the information that there was a big high rise job with multiple casualties, I know Paul really well and I could tell by the tone of his voice this was something different and very serious.

He said I was being mobilised for tactical ventilation, using the PPV fans. The fans are relatively new equipment in London Fire Brigade, and as I explained earlier in this statement I have had some training in their use. They can be used to disperse smoke and contaminants from inside a building and replace these with fresher, cleaner air.

My pager had not gone off but due to what Paul had said on the phone I knew this was serious and would need to get there as soon as possible.

I called the control centre and booked on to status two which means I am on route to the incident, I got in my car put the address of GRENFELL TOWER into my sat nav and drove on blue lights and sirens to GRENFELL TOWER, the roads were clear and dry, I approached the area from my home in [REDACTED] and made good progress into town due to the time of the morning and there was little traffic on the road, I went along VICTORIA EMBANKMENT to GREEN PARK to MARBLE ARCH to BAYSWATER ROAD then right on to HOLLAND PARK ROAD and I first saw the tower when I got to HOLLAND PARK ROAD I believe I saw the south side first, I could see the top of the tower above the buildings around it, I was shocked and slowed my car right down it looked like something from a disaster movie, The top of the building was fully alight with fire on every floor and thick black smoke pluming from the top of the building, I could not believe what I was seeing. I have seen high-rise fires before during my service but in the twenty-three years I had never seen anything quite like this. I felt shocked that a building that big was fully alight, sometimes fire can spread in high-rise fires to neighbouring properties but not the whole building I had never seen that before.

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I parked my car quite a way away from the tower as the roads was congested with fire engines and I knew it would be quicker to get there on foot, I put on my fire gear on and walked up GRENFELL ROAD where I met the tactical ventilation team Watch Manager Gary WILSON and Station Manager Rod WAINWRIGHT, they told me the fans had already arrived. I asked them to Check the fans had fuel and that they were working. I went to find the command unit.

This is a mobile command and control vehicle that acts as a focal point at larger incidents. It co-ordinates the brigade's response and resources at incidents, and is a liaison point for other agencies working at the scene.

They carry out a number of functions, including the co-ordination of our response to the fire survival guidance calls. Fire survival guidance calls are calls made from people in a building that is on fire and for whatever reason are trapped or cannot leave because of the fire, the control officer will keep the person on the phone until fire fighters have arrived to rescue them and will gather information about the fire and offer guidance to the caller on how to stay safe until fire fighters can get to them. I found a command unit south of Bramley Road but it wasn't the right one I and was told the one I needed was on BOMORE ROAD so made my way there and handed in my nominal role board so the command unit knew I had arrived. A nominal role board is a metal plate carried in my car showing my name, number and car registration this shows me at the incident and also details my specialist skills should they be needed and should a role call be needed the command unit will know I am at the fire and account for me.

The roads around the tower where busy there where people everywhere Police, Fire fighters, ambulance staff and members of the public. The command unit was very busy, I was tasked to make contact with Group Manager Richard WELCH in the lobby sector, this was the lobby area of GRENFELL TOWER. This was for a more detailed briefing. I cannot recall who told me this.

I already knew I was attending for tactical ventilation and would be using the ventilation fans. The fans had been requested to protect the stairwell from where fire fighter operations were being conducted. I met up with group manager Richard WELCH on the grass area opposite the leisure centre a little way down from the breathing apparatus main control area that was being run by Station Manager Dan KIPLING who normally works with me at UNION STREET.

Richard told me there was fire on multiple levels and multiple casualties, He said he wanted to pressurise the stairwell of the tower using the fans in the hope this would clear the stairwells of smoke, I remember

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thinking that due to the compromised state of the building at this point, pressurising the stair well might not be possible, but due to the serious nature of the situation, it was worth trying.

We then made our way to the tower under a covered area near some garages to the main front entrance of the building, burning debris was falling from the building constantly and was hitting the floor still alight, it was mainly the melted cladding from the outside of the building.

An aerial ladder platform was parked under the covered area of the service road. This is a Fire Service vehicle with a long extendable ladder. I assumed it had been moved under the covered area to protect it from falling debris. This would have made it too dangerous to use close to the tower.

There was also a safety officer stationed on the south side of the building watching for falling debris. As I got closer to the main entrance of the tower I could see just above the front doors of the building. From time to time large quantities of thick smoke were coming out of the vent and swirling around the entrance of the building, I don't know where the vent was linked to inside the building.

Group Manager Richard WELCH and I picked a round police riot shield each that was on the floor and held them above our heads so we could shield ourselves from any falling debris and waited until the safety officer said it was safe to cross over to the tower and went in through an entrance on the west side of the building, now stood under the building.

Standing under the building looking up I could still see the fire was still as severe as when I had first seen it from my car. Debris was coming down in all sorts of sizes window frames and cladding mainly. The swirling smoke made it difficult to see falling debris some times, but when there were gaps in the smoke, you could see all the way up. There was a safety officer spotting for debris as crews were entering or leaving the building.

I entered the Lobby of GRENFELL TOWER, it was full of water about a couple of inches' deep water was also cascading down the stairs and it was heavily congested with fire fighters in breathing apparatus, it was noisy and there was kit and equipment all around the floor. The atmosphere was lightly smoky but visibility was ok. There was a lot of debris around the building and it was still falling some of it still alight outside.

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There were two Group Managers directing operations Group Manager Pat GOULDBOURNE and Group Manager Richard WELCH. Richard asked me to make a plan for clearing the stairwell of smoke. This is done by pressurising the stairwell with the fans to clear the smoke and replace it with fresher air. I expressed my concern that this might not be possible because the stairwell was already compromised. The doors off the stairwell need to be closed in order to create a slight over-pressure. I thought that conditions within the building meant we were now past the point at which this would be possible. We discussed the possibility of clearing smoke from the lobby area instead. I believed this would be more successful than attempting to pressurise the stairwell and would be worth trying, although I did have some doubts due to the volume of smoke in the surrounding area. The firefighters in the lobby were in 'standby mode'. This means they are wearing their breathing apparatus sets but their masks are not on their faces. They are not using air from their cylinders to breathe at this point. I prepared a ventilation plan for the conditions we were faced with, and discussed these with Richard Welch. I selected a safe position from which to operate the fans. This was under the mezzanine level of the adjacent building, about 10 meters from the front door of Grenfell Tower. The inlet was the front door and some windows next to it that had been removed. Fresh air would be pushed in from here by the fans. The outlet was a smaller door at the east side of the building where smoke would be pushed out of the lobby. The fans had been brought along on their specialist vehicle by Gary Wilson from Union Street where they are kept. Gary had been mobilised from the Brigade Coordination Centre at Stratford. Rod Wainwright had been mobilised on recall to assist with tactical ventilation.

The bridgehead had been moved to the ground floor of the building due to the conditions in the building getting worse. One of the fans did get wet and we had a bit of trouble starting it to begin with, The time was 0500 and the fans where set up and ready to go.

The fans where turned on for approximately 45 second and then Richard WELCH who was in the building with Group Manager Pat GOULBOURNE contacted me on the radio and said the fans where not having the desired effect and to turn them off, the distance the fans where from the building was too far away for them to work but it would have been dangerous to move them any closer, there was also a shortage of clear air outside the building to disburse the smoke in the lobby, I had noticed some vents above the front door the building that I had noticed when I first arrived, whilst discussing how the fan would be used I noticed black smoke was rolling out of them at various times during the course of the day, I think it might have been some kind of heating ventilation system covered by a grill above the front

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door of the building and the way the building was reacting to the fire now meant that thick black smoke was pulsing out of the vents at various points during the course of the day.

The lobby area was the only area of GRENFELL TOWER I went into, on a lot of occasions throughout the incident escorting people in and out of the tower and taking messages to and from although I can't recall who I escorted in and out the building the only information I remember taking into the tower was a man I saw waving a towel out of a window in GRENFELL TOWER.

I then turned the fans off and waited under the covered area for further instructions, With Watch Manager Gary WILSON normally works in the brigade co-ordinating centre in STRATFORD.

The centre wanted him back there and he was keen to get back there and do the job he has originally been tasked to do on the day, so he got away to go back to STATFORD. There was still a lot of people in the area and as the senior officer in that area I decided to make sure everybody was ok and tried to clear some of the hose and debris from where people were walking, the debris at this point was knee deep. It was all under water by this point. I was also asking people as they were coming out the building to grab debris as they came out in order to make a clear path way, I also made sure the safety officer had eyes on the building and to shout if he saw anything falling and no one to cross to the building until he said it was safe.

The fire service divides big incidents like this into sectors and the fans were set up in what became sector 1. At one-point Group Manager Dave ONEAL came through as said "WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THIS SECTOR?", at this point I was only thinking of a ventilation sector, as the most senior officer present he said "ITS YOU".

After using the fans, I became sector commander of sector one, these formalised things for me and I took control of making sure the water supply was constant and keeping a clear path for the Fire crews coming through to enter the building, this was the covered service area where some garages were and the front main entrance to Grenfell tower. There was no briefing for this role but the role changed as the fire continued to evolve.

In this area was the Ariel ladder platform fire engine I had seen earlier parked up under the covered service area now with debris from the building laying all around it, there was another fire engine pumping water fed by a hydrant.

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A relay system had now been set up with Firefighters entering and leaving the building from sector 1 under the protection of police officers holding riot shields above their heads and those of the Fire fighters, moving across to the tower when the safety officer indicated it was safe to do so and ready to warn anyone of falling debris and controlling the flow of Fire Fighters going into the building.

During my time there I saw a body lying in the garage area and knew this person was deceased. I noticed the body was missing a leg, the leg was outside the tower block and was then reunited with the casualty by the ambulance service crews, I heard the casualty had jumped from GRENFELL TOWER and the leg had been severed by hitting a structure on the way down.

I organised setting up a water relay system from a fire engine parked on BOMORE ROAD this was feeding the fire engine pumping water from the covered area directly into the building, four twinned lengths of hose where run down GRENFELL ROAD to feed water to a fire engine) light weight ladder pump (LLP) outside the front door of GRENFELL TOWER.

It was frustrating as I became aware that the firefighters on all the pumps had been there for quite some time breathing in fumes of the engine in an enclosed space and it took quite a bit of time to get other Fire Fighters to relieve him as everyone seem to be tasked elsewhere to other sectors eventually I found a relief.

I saw large quantities of hose and other equipment being relayed into the building under the cover of riot shields, Senior officers and those in supporting roles were also coming in and out of the building via the main entrance walking through sector one. I was thinking about the fire engine pumping water in front of me and I was aware of a Fire engine pumping water from the road above me fed by a hydrant so I started to think about keeping the water supply going.

The main entrance for fire fighters was sector two on the West side of the building, The sector I was in charge of was (sector 1) was a transit route for Fire crews moving from breathing apparatus main control outside the leisure centre to sector 2 on the west side of the building.

The area was by now about 6 inches deep in water with equipment lying around the area as and when the conditions allowed we cleared the area of debris and hose to make a clear path for the fire fighters to get through to sector two, this was a constant operation that went on throughout the day. At some point the Thames water board turned up to clear the drains and conditions in the area improved as water began to

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drain away. An equipment dump was established in sector one to collect up abandoned equipment and equipment that had been buried in lengths of hose in the earlier stages of the incident.

I also arranged lengths of hose to be laid out under the covered area in readiness, this was in case falling debris fell on the hoses feeding water into the dry riser of the building and up to the fire fighters inside the building.

I was already aware that lengths of hose had burst during the incident and coupling of the hose to the fire engine had also failed at points although it had been quickly replaced. A ground monitor had been set up above the mezzanine floor of the block for firefighting and was also worked up the building next door to GRENFELL TOWER extending the whole sector was increased three storeys above the mezzanine level, this meant the hazard area for members of the public outside was extended further as the risk to them had now increased, although I was aware there was a lack of personnel to manage the cordon but to my knowledge there were only a couple of occasions when members of the public came into the cordoned off area and this was managed.

I then became aware of a second casualty in the lobby of the third floor in the adjacent building block, the body was wrapped in a sheet and had been tagged as deceased and I was of the belief this had been another person that had jumped from GRENFELL TOWER and been recovered from the debris zone by LAS staff but moving it to the cordoned off area had been overlooked. The residents of the adjacent block in the area and coming in and out of their doors looking out of windows and I had been made aware that a member of public was taking pictures of the deceased person so I got some tape and cordoned off the area to keep people away from the body and to stop them coming out of their building as this would have increased the risk to them, I then arranged with Police and ambulance staff for the body to be removed from the area where members of the public had access to it. The body was then taken down to be laid next to the other deceased person I had seen in the covered area, then both were removed by the ambulance service and coroners staff. I also remember seeing someone in GRENFELL TOWER waving a towel out of a window in the building on the left hand side.

The day was a constant cycle of running the pumps and making sure water was going to the pumps putting water on the building and making sure fire crews had a clear path through my sector and trying to rotate fire crews working the pumps making sure they had food and water. In normal fire incidents you

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have a dynamic phase and then a clearing up phase the dynamic phase seemed to go on for hours with no sign of coming to an end.

At some point in the afternoon JCB's and supporting equipment were brought in to the area I believe in an effort to shut off the gas supply to the building. Attempts had been made earlier to access the main valve to shut off the gas, The stopcock was located in the basement of GRENFELL TOWER and it had been decided it was too dangerous to access the basement with gas staff due to the falling debris and firefighting operations. The presence of the diggers and personnel operating them increased the noise and foot traffic in the area considerably.

The next event of note was the order for a tactical withdrawal from the building, the order was broadcast over the radio and I directed fire crews and contractors that were leaving the building and surrounding area through sector one and told everyone to go to the leisure centre, I did a final sweep of the area for anyone still in the area before withdrawing myself. My understanding is the order to withdraw was made as the building was making some strange noises and there were a lot of people still in the building and it was believed the risk outweighed the benefits of the Fire crews being in the building as whilst these buildings are built to be strong the building had already behaved in an unusual way and there was a concern of the building collapsing.

In normal circumstances a fire is contained within that flat that is the way flats are designed and why stay put policy for other residents in surrounding flats works because fire does not normally spread the way it did in GRENFELL TOWER. It stays within the flat and at the very worst may spread to flat either side of where the original flat where the fire is.

After the withdrawal I was in a daze and I think I knew I was done at the incident, if I had stayed I felt I would have been more of a hindrance than a help as I was feeling really shattered I collected my role board from the command unit and found my way back to my car, there were people everywhere firefighters, local residents with food and water.

I finally left the incident at 1830hrs and returned home.

I would like to add during my time in service with the Fire brigade I have never witnessed fire spread the way it did in GRENFELL TOWER and during the incident I struggled to find safety officers to work in my sector due to the demands of the other sectors but would like to say the Fire crews in my sector

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worked tirelessly to ensure water was available for firefighting and maintained the safety of themselves and other crew members despite the challenging conditions and the size of the sector.

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