

WITNESS STATEMENT

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

Statement of: CHARITY, PAUL

Age if under 18: OVER 18 (if over 18 insert 'over 18') Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

This statement (consisting of 10 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.

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Date: 30/01/2018

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

The following is my account of the fire that occurred at Grenfell Tower in the early hours of Wednesday 14th June 2017.

I have been a firefighter for the last 12 years and have spent the entirety of my service at Wembley fire station. Although my substantive rank is firefighter, I have spent several years “acting up” in rank as a CM (Crew Manager). The latter being my role on the 14th June 2017. I was the most senior officer on my fire engine. The umbrella term “Appliance” is used to describe varying types of fire engines. I will use this term throughout my statement.

I will also mention the following people: Firefighter (FF) Les TUCKER, FF Nicky SANDERS, FF Paul HARRIS, and Crew Manager (CM) Darren BENNETT. All of the aforementioned FF’s are based at Wembley fire station.

Prior to the incident I had never visited Grenfell Tower nor did I have any relevant information in regards to the layout of the building.

In regards to training, we have various courses that are run throughout the year. We have BA training which we complete at training centres dotted around London. It consists of a one-day refresher and a two-day assessment every year. We also have core shift training which is run whenever you are on a day shift. This ranges from working pumps and pumping to just getting the water to work through the fire engine

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and everything in between. It's a vast range of everything and it just goes in the diary to be done to keep everyone refreshed.

On Tuesday 13th June at approximately 2000 hours I came on duty at Wembley fire station where I am based. At 2000 hours we had our roll call and were informed of what appliances we would all be riding that evening. I was told I was riding in charge of the FRU (Fire rescue unit) with a call sign of G306. Our breathing apparatus were all checked and made sure to be safe and in working condition. The evening went as all evenings usually go at the station, I had a chat and a cup of tea before going upstairs to get some sleep at around midnight. As the FRU, all crew members are trained in using EDBA which is the extended duration breathing apparatus. It lasts for approximately 20 minutes more than the standard variation of the apparatus using two cylinders as opposed to one and depending on task.

I was awoken by the sounds of the tannoy blaring and upon making my way downstairs received the ordering from CM Darren Bennett. He advised me that there had been a major incident and that it was a 40 pump fire, meaning that the incident required 40 Appliances. Les was the driver that evening and went to check the map immediately.

I got myself into my boots, leggings, and tunic before getting into the front passenger seat of the Appliance. We then made our way towards the incident. Myself and Les in the front with Nicky and Paul in the rear. I used the Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) to assist us in getting to the incident whilst Les made our way toward the location on blue lights. As we approached Gipsy Corner I could begin to see a glow in the sky although I could not see the building itself, I remember thinking to myself, there are four of us in this truck and all four of us are coming back. As we approach the White City/Shepherd's bush junction, Grenfell Tower comes into eye line and it felt as if my stomach dropped. The fire had engulfed the whole block of flats. We then made our way from the junction to the rendezvous point. I believe we took a left up towards Holland Park Avenue but were unable to make it to the RVP as there were gas works being completed blocking off the road. I told Les to stop whilst I found an alternative route but another Appliance came past us so I asked Les to follow. The area was very busy at this point and cannot be certain of what time it was.

Upon our arrival somewhat near the RVP I dismounted the Appliance and told the rest of my crew to stay inside whilst I booked in with the command unit. I also booked status 3 on the MDT, meaning that we were at the incident. I cannot remember how close or far the command unit was from where the

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Appliance was but once I handed my roll board to the unit I was asked to get all EDBA equipment, sets and cylinders. I was advised that the marshalling area was situated near the sports centre. I remember looking at Grenfell tower but not specifically. I had no time to stand around and take in air. I went back to the Appliance and took our sets from the lockers within the FRU along with the spare cylinders and put them on. There was no reason to take a thermal imaging camera although it may have been missed due to the fact that we were taking extra sets and cylinders with us. We also took a first aid kit that we call IEC, Immediate emergency care. We made our way toward the marshalling area which is where we were separated. Paul was told to join another team whilst Les, Nicky, and I remained together. I cannot remember any of the timings and I do not believe it was necessary for me to know times. The fire ground channel was on channel I on my personal radio but there was way too much traffic for me to get through on it. I then remember hearing a request for EDBA wearers. We were then ushered into the building under riot shields. I believe it was police officers holding the shields. As I was stood in the queue to enter the building a body came down from the building and hit another CM that I do not know. There was a sort of mezzanine floor above us. I believe the body hit the mezzanine before striking the CM. People were in shock, a senior officer came over and took the CM away.

Once I had run the first section, I was handed a riot shield and told to make my way to the building. As I was making my way through I could hear someone shouting for me to stop and go respectively so I obliged. I did not see this person and do not know who they are but I am Thankful.

Debris and parts of window frames were falling from the building and I had to run through running around 10 metres. At this point in time visibility was relatively clear. I could hear things dropping and crashing around me. I then turned around and expected to see my colleagues Les and Nicky behind me but they were nowhere to be seen. A couple of senior officers were all I could see initially but then I saw Paul. I advised him that I could not find Les and Nicky. After a few minutes Les bounced in with bits of debris on his back with Nicky following him. Les had been burned by the falling debris, so I took him into a room that had a sink in it. It was near where we were and was in the corner of the area. I cannot remember exactly what the room was but it had a sink and that's all I needed. I applied first aid to his wound and bandaged it up. I can recall telling the both of them, let's be safe now. Once I had sorted Les out I went into the main lobby area and we all stood waiting in a nice orderly queue. I have drawn and exhibited a rough sketch of what the lobby looked like, this has been provided to police as PAC/2. Once we had gotten to the front of the queue we were detailed with the floors and flats and then the brief was

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repeated. We were given flat numbers 81-84 on the 11th floor and 92, 94, and 95 on the 12th floor. I am not too sure why flat 93 on the 12th floor was left out. I believe it may have something to do with fire survival guidance. The ECO and the sector commander of the bridgehead had particular flats they wanted checked and those were just the flats they gave us. We were told that if we came across any casualties to make a decision on whether or not they were saveable. I remember saying to Les and Nicky again let's be careful let's not be silly. This was nothing that any of us had ever seen before. Once our briefing had concluded we turn our cylinders on, put our masks on and fire hoods up. Handed our tally over to the BA entry officer and they confirm your pressure on your pressure gauge. The tally has my name and my pressure on it so that the entry officer can work out how long my breathing apparatus should last me. Both the extended and standard duration tanks work off the same pressure although the former has two tanks as opposed to one. As a rule, we need a minimum of 240 bar pressure to go in and I would have definitely had more than that because when you test it initially before coming out to a call you need more than 270 bar pressure and anything less you need to change the cylinder. The SDBA usually last around 20 mins with the EDDBA going for a little longer, around 45 minutes. That is with average conditions, walking around at a reasonable pace. We then confirmed all details were correct and began making our way up the stairs.

Visibility on the lower floors was quite good. You could still see where you were going and in front of you. This continued up until floors 7/8 where the smoke got noticeably thicker and visibility became worse. I remember this because it was harder to see the numbers on the walls as we were ascending the stairs. They'd been written again in crayon on the wall, by a firefighter ahead of us I believe. Visibility was very low and the walls were covered in soot, so it was quite nice to be able to go close to the wall and see the number relatively clearly as it was freshly written. As we were rising up the stairwell to the 11th floor we came across a very large body between the 9th and 10th floors. We were advised of this body prior to making our way up and were told to leave the body in situ. We were told to leave it in situ because of the resources it would take to move. At the time I did not know if it was a male or female. I now believe it to be a female, I believe it was the black lady that was a singer who was missing, a rather large lady that was on the news. She was quite big so as a dead weight it would have taken a lot of energy to move her. So someone had made the decision that instead of exhausting resources trying to move her we would leave her where she was because it would have just exhausted 10-15 people trying to move her. We made our way up to the 11th floor, somewhere along the way Nicky got a hold of a TIC (Thermal Imaging Camera). It may have been passed to her by another crew that we saw on the stairs but I cannot

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be one hundred percent certain. Once we had arrived at the 11th floor, we opened the door to the floor we could feel the heat. There wasn't an awful lot to see, it quite smoky. I can't remember if any firelights were working but it was dark. If they were working you couldn't really see that far in front of you to notice. We had our torches on our tunics used our hands to feel and touch the people you are with to navigate. I have drawn a rough sketch of the floor plan on these floors and provided them to police, exhibiting it as PAC/3. Staying in contact is the most important thing in a situation like this. I had the stripes on my shoulders so I went in first. I opened the door and was pretty much hit with the heat immediately. I couldn't see down the corridor, it was completely dark. I didn't have any knowledge in terms of the layout of the floors at that time. To put things into perspective the heat in the stairwell was not that bad, no more than what you kind of experience at a normal high rise flat fire. You obviously get warm walking up the flights of stairs with equipment on because you're not used to wearing it all climbing up 11 flights of stairs, you tend to get a little bit warmer but it was fine. There was just a tremendous difference when I opened the door to that floor. Kind of what you would expect from a fire situation like this but it was a lot hotter than what my body was expecting at the time. Especially since there were no visible flames or fire, only smoke could be seen. So from standing outside the building and seeing all the flames it was quite weird having that heat with no flames. Nicky had the TIC and although I can't remember the exact reading, I remember the first digit being 1.

We couldn't see much so we tried to get down to the floor to inspect the smoke but it essentially went all the way to the floor. Normally you get a little bit lower and closer to the floor you get a smoke layer and beneath it becomes clearer, but this was most definitely not the case in this instance. We got down to the floor and the smoke was everywhere. We came back out and had a quick discussion about what we were going to do. It was way too hot so it was decided between us that we would go up a floor to the 12th floor just to see what conditions were like there. Made our way up to the 12th floor and got in the door. It may have been hot but due to the heat we had experienced on the 11th floor it felt nowhere near as much. I remember walking in and thinking to myself we can go in here it's not as bad. You didn't have that immediate, wow this is way too hot that I experienced on the 11th floor. Visibility was pretty much the same, I could see about a foot in front of me. I entered first with Nicky and Les behind me respectively. Nicky had a hold on me and Les a hold on her. I turned around and made them both aware of the right hand wall. We were to use the right hand side wall to navigate the floor. With our right hands on the right hand wall we started moving through using safe movement. As we progressed we came across a door. It led into a small room that I believe was a rubbish shoot room. It was a very small room. We carried on

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making our way through using the right hand wall, I was continually talking to Nicky repeating "right wall right wall". At this stage I hadn't realised that Les had dropped off. I think I realised when I said "Les!" and Nicky responded with something along the lines of "No it's just me and you". Communicating by continually shouting through my BA to Nicky. As we were not familiar with the layout of the floor, it was easy to get confused which we did towards the end. I just thought if I kept repeating what I was doing aloud in the case that I forgot or became woozy, Nicky would have an idea of what we were doing.

We got into the first flat and dropped down onto our knees to complete door procedure to the best of our ability. Whenever we go into a compartment we have a procedure that needs to be adhered to namely door procedure. You usually have a hose with you so it's about having control of the door, opening it, checking the conditions and if for whatever reason you can't proceed you can safely shut the door. Even though we didn't have a hose with us we decided we would still attempt to conduct door procedure. At least we would have reasonable control of the door especially since we had no idea what was behind the door. Having control of the door is important as if we opened it and the conditions were unbearable we would be able to safely shut the door. I opened the door and remember seeing a glow and a ringing. The flat went in 6 foot or so before it was exposed to the elements. You could clearly see outside. The windows had obviously gone with parts of the brickwork. So it was quite open, we made the decision that we weren't going into that flat because with it being so open I didn't want either me or Nicky falling 11 floors. So we shut the door. The flat was smoke damaged and there was fire damage at the opening. I didn't really look at the condition if I am honest, once I had opened the door and seen the state at which the flat was in I made a judgement call and decided immediately that I was not going in there. The glowing I mentioned was coming into the flat from the exterior of the building, because of the large opening you could see the glow. I made the decision not to proceed because it wasn't safe for either me or Nicky.

I shut the door and again began reiterating to Nicky to stick with the right hand wall. We get to the next door and visibility is still poor, very smoky with almost zero visibility. We conduct door procedure before opening up the door up and the flat is smoke logged. Not much fire damage but a lot of smoke, it seemed that the fire was on the outside of the building which is a very strange circumstance for us. We are used to the fires being contained within a flat. We walked around the flat shouting out trying to search, searching procedure wasn't as strict within the flats. We did not use the right hand wall as it would have taken too long. We opened up airing cupboards and shouted out trying our best to search as thorough as possible.

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We checked underneath the beds and continuously shouted out. You couldn't really see within this flat but it was a case of taking a room each and shouting out as loud as possible to keep each other informed. Keeping in contact with each other again was very important for me, overall it was just a much quicker way of searching the flat than sticking to the right hand wall all the way round.

Once again we were out into the corridor using the right hand wall as we exited the flat. Conducted door procedure at the next door we came across. The 1st flat we checked was completely different to the current and 2nd flat. The 3rd and final flat was in a very similar condition to the 2nd a lot of smoke damage but no obvious signs of fire damage. Checked the flat throughout in the same way we searched the previous one. Searching room by room, cupboards and under beds. Came out empty handed again using the right hand wall to navigate out. So we have come back out and I have seen a light from what I believe is a FF torch on a tunic. I assumed it belonged to another crew that had been detailed to search the same floor. I said to Nicky we have searched the flats we were detailed to search, we looked around and could work out the numbers of the flats. We had searched the flats we were detailed to search so I decided to turn around and go back down. So as we were coming in on the right hand wall, in order to exit you use the left hand wall. You always go out the same way you came in. So I have made a decision here due to the fact that I had seen this torch, in my head someone else is doing the rest of the floor so we can turn around and we will retrace our steps. I have no idea how long we were up there or what time it was. We started to retrace our steps to make our way out and that's when Les called out to me. I didn't respond because I didn't realise it was Les to begin with, he said something along the lines of come here and I responded no we need to leave the same way we came in. He shouted "no you're at the stairwell" before grabbing and pulling me into the stairwell. With visibility at zero, adrenaline, and everything else going it's very easy to get confused making it difficult to work out where you are. We had ended up right where we had begun completing a full 360 if you will.

Satisfied with checking the flats we were detailed we decided would go back down to the 11th floor to see if conditions had gotten any better. As soon as I opened the door the heat hit me like it had initially, if anything the heat was more intense. It was a little bewildering in relation to how easy it was walking around the 12th floor in comparison to the 11th. It was extremely bizarre how from one floor to the next there could be such a vast change in conditions. You could walk around in one with no issues then go down a floor and it was impossible. We walked in a few steps before I heard someone say "it's way too hot in here" I can't be certain who. As the CM and the most senior ranking FF amongst my crew I was

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faced with making a decision. I remember thinking to myself how far do I push them, we are just inside the door and conditions were already pretty unbearable, how much can I ask of them. I wasn't happy to push my crew any further. I got the feeling that if we went any further one or all of us may not come out alive. The three of us had a discussion and decided we could not go any further. We had taken a battering as it was and decided to make our way down the stairs. The EDBA sets are a bit heavier than the SDBA sets. You've gone up 11, 12 flights of stairs you've searched around, you're tired, it's extremely hot and the conditions aren't getting any better. So we made the decision to come down. Made our way back down the stairwell to the lobby area to entry control. I cannot be sure of how long it took us to descend nor am I aware of what time it was. I can't remember much of what I saw on the stairs, I know there must have been hoses but I can't remember seeing them and the same goes for water. We were at some point asked if we were happy going up without a hose, nobody would be happy in those conditions but it's what was necessary so I justified it to myself in my head. Although I distinctly remember the change in conditions as we went up the stairwell, coming down is a blur. I cannot remember what conditions were like.

We made our way back down and upon our arrival at entry control, took our masks off, got our tally back to put into our set. Then we had a debrief with the same officer that had originally sent us up. Informed them of the flats that we checked on the 12th floor, updated them of the conditions on the 11th floor and advised that they either need to improve themselves or water is required on the floor. Once we had finished being debriefed we were sent back out to go to the resting area. I think on the way out is was just a firefighter with a riot shield escorting and myself. As the FF went to go out I had it in my head that I had to turn left so I turned left but was pulled back by the FF who directed me accordingly.

There was a marshalling resting area, the pictures that you see on the news with firefighters sitting down with sets on their back are from this area. There were a few other firefighters from Wembley Red Watch sitting on the floor and resting who had also just come out. The FF from the pump and pump ladder who initially came out earlier on that evening. A few of them were sitting there and I said hello to them and asked how everyone was doing and what floors they all attended. Just a bit of general chat to make sure everyone was okay. There were some officers handing out water. The commissioner was doing her rounds speaking to FF's. She asked us how we were all doing and if we were okay. She told us to relax our dress, to cool down and get some water. We all removed our kit and left them on the floor. I think that was very caring of her. Her presence was much appreciated as after such a large catastrophic incident, having someone so senior showing that she genuinely cared for the welfare of us on the ground, worked

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wonders for morale. She is the Commissioner of the London Fire Brigade and to have her actually be genuinely interested that you were okay made you feel a bit better. So it was quite nice. The fact that she took the time to make sure that people were okay. There was a lot of work done and people went through a lot of stuff, coming out exhausted and having that is quite nice. The simple fact that she took the time meant a lot to me and a lot of other FF's. I can't remember the name of the incident commander although I know he used to be a Station Manager here at Wembley.

After we had rested a little I took Les up to where the ambulance service and HEMS (Air ambulance) were. They made their assessment of his burn and weren't overly concerned with it but then decided it was showing signs of full thickness so advised him to go to hospital. I spoke to a senior officer that I do not know, to inform him of the situation. He liaised with a police officer and Les was taken to hospital in a marked police vehicle. I walked back to the resting area after Les had been taken away. Nicky was sat down where everyone else was so I decided that I'd take a little walk on my own, our fire engine wasn't too far from where we were and I wanted to have a little thought to myself. Whilst I was stood by the Appliance, Paul turned up and we had a little chat about the incident. I can't remember exactly what was said between us although I do know it wasn't much. After a few minutes we wandered back down to where everyone else was resting and noticed that our sets had been taken. I can only presume that someone had taken them, changed the cylinder, and worn them into the building. It's something we are allowed to do, we can change cylinders on a fire ground, test the set and then go in. It was at this point that we were told we probably wouldn't go in again. I can't remember who told us this but I believe it was a senior officer. I believe they had plenty of fresh wearers (FF's who hadn't been inside the building yet) waiting to be deployed. Someone was walking around saying "you don't need to bust a gut to get back in there they have fresh wearers". So with that Paul and I took another stroll back to the Appliance. It was a little busy with residents but it wasn't too bad at that time and it was just somewhere for the two of us to go to have a little chat.

We were approaching daylight at this point and there were plenty of members of the public coming over with food and drink, forcing them down your neck. They were quite nice, really nice in fact. The majority of the people walking past would hand us snacks and tell us "well done". We had one group come to us and start asking questions about the building, you could immediately see the passion in their faces. They were asking if we had been to the 20th and 21st floors. They were worried for their loved ones. You look up at the building knowing the 20th and 21st floors were one of the top ones, you make a judgement in

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your head and I just didn't know what to say to them. At that time I did not want to deal with them, I was physically and mentally drained and I just couldn't. Paul was very good with them and noticed that I was kind of trying to shy away so he spoke to them. I took four or five steps to the left to get away but was met by another group who were asking very similar questions about the top floors. I informed them that FF's were systematically searching each floor. I pointed them in the direction of the command unit and advised them that there may be more information for them there. If I am honest it was a professional approach of me asking them to leave me alone but at the same time pointing them in the direction of somewhere they could get the information they were after.

After they left, we kind of hung around. A few others that were sitting down at the resting area got together with us. We fluttered between the resting area and the Appliance. We then got sent into a church, I can't remember what road it was on but it wasn't far from where the fire engine was. The church had opened their doors to the residents, they had food and drink so we got taken in there to have something to eat. There were a few members of public inside the church who didn't ask any questions but were nice enough to say well done and thank you. Once we had finished at the church we were told we could leave. We had none of our sets or anything like that with us so I went to the command unit to find out. I informed them that I had no BA but they advised me that it was fine because they were being used inside the building. We were directed to go to Paddington fire station for a debrief and that we were expected.

We got back to the Appliance and I drove as Les was in hospital and I was the only other person with a driving qualification. Paul sat in the front passenger seat, Nicky sat in the back and together we muddled our way through the streets of London to Paddington. None of us had any clue where we were going because the A40 was shut. Paul got it up on the map and was directing me. We went down one road but it was closed, down another and again it was closed. The third road had a width restriction so again we had to turn around. Really heavy traffic on the roads at this point but because we were going to Paddington there was no rush. As we were driving down past one particular tube station a woman came running out of a bakery and handed us a load of croissants and muffins which was lovely. I can't remember what time we arrived at Paddington but it was early afternoon I believe. There were a couple of officers sat at the table. I told them what machine we were riding and where we were from. We had a brief counselling session and wrote our notes before being told we were done. Then made our way back to Wembley. I have no idea what time this was, I would have to look at the time I booked off. Timings for the incident were just impossible for me to say as I didn't check the time once whilst at Grenfell Tower. Once back at

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Wembley I took a long shower, a few people were milling about but not much was said. I didn't bother going home I don't think many people did as we were only a few hours away from starting our next shift. Ordered in some pizza for dinner and still not much was said. Started work again at 8pm that evening. Can't remember if we got a call that night.

I have been asked about the stay put policy. This policy in my opinion is a good one. During high-rise flat fires it allows us as FF's to know where everyone is. If the policy had not been in place at Grenfell Tower, we would have had the only stairwell up and down the building blocked by casualties. This would have caused major issues. For regular high rise flat fires whereby a single flat on a floor is containing a fire, it works well. Grenfell Tower was out of the ordinary.

You rack your brains after an incident like this for weeks and months. That instance on the 11th floor when I had to make a decision of what to do. It plays on my mind all the time. Looking back, I would not have done anything different as my number one concern was the safety of myself and my colleagues. I know it's been on the news a lot but I believe sprinklers would have made a massive difference. The way the incident was run in my opinion I think everyone did as much as they could and went way above the call of duty. It's a credit to everyone in the fire service and the police because there were police officers running into the building with riot shields that did not have to. I think all three emergency services worked their socks off that day. In my humble opinion I don't think in a tragedy such as Grenfell Tower that you can change much to try and make the outcome any better than it was.

At the time I provided my statement to police officers, I referred to my Contemporaneous notes which I wrote on the 14/06/2017. I have exhibited these notes as PAC/1. I also drew a plan of the lobby within the tower and a plan of one of the floors, I have exhibited these as PAC/2 and PAC/3, respectively.

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