

**WITNESS STATEMENT**

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

Statement of: FOSTER, PIERS

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

Occupation: FIRE OFFICER

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This statement (consisting of 6 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: P.FOSTER

Date: 05/01/2018

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

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On 05 December 2017 I was interviewed on audio disc by PC Pravin SELVARANJAN and DC Rachel O'CONNOR at Wembley Fire Station. A Union representative, Alan CHINSHAW, was also present at my request. The content of this statement is the summary of the interview and relates to my account of the events I witnessed during the early hours of Wednesday 14 June 2017 when I responded to a fire emergency at Grenfell Tower.

I joined London Fire Brigade in 2002 and have been a fire fighter for approximately 15 years. My Posting is Hendon, my call sign is A40 and my pay number is [REDACTED]9J.

Since Grenfell Tower fire I have blocked it out of my mind. I have not wanted to recall anything that I am about to tell you and I was in two minds whether to attend and provide a statement. I have not spoken to any other fire fighters about my experience thus far. My memory is very vague on detail and I currently cannot remember a lot that happened that morning.

I had never been to Grenfell Tower in my capacity as a Fire Fighter or in any other capacity and have no previous personal knowledge.

On Thursday 13 June we had roll call at 20:00 hours to make sure everyone was there. We then tested our BA (breathing apparatus) sets, completed our inventories and checked our equipment. Afterwards we

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went upstairs, had a cup of tea, sat in the recreation area, probably watched TV. About midnight we have stand-down which is where we can go to our rooms and have a sleep if we wish as long as there is nothing outstanding to do. This time is pretty much our own until we get a call out. I went to my dorm and went to bed. At approximately 01:30 hours I got a shout to standby at North Kensington fire station. This was either received over the teleprinter or over the phone. I cannot recall how I was woken up; I just remember that was the direction I was given.

There were four of us on the pump appliance call sign. (Alpha) A402 Lee WILLSDON was the Crew Manager and he would have been in the front passenger seat; Tom NEARY was driving, and Shaun POWELL was in the rear of the appliance with me. We made our way to North Kensington fire station and I do remember dismounting at North Kensington but as soon as I did I was back on the appliance again making our way to the RVP at Grenfell Tower. Not sure how I know but it was now a 20 pump fire. I have in my notes that we approached Grenfell Tower from the West. I was sitting in the back of the appliance and was not taking any notice of what route we were taking. We parked the appliance in Walmer Road; for reasons I don't know we could not get to the RVP.

We left the appliance in situ, put our BA sets on and went to find the Command Unit. At least 50% of the building was alight. We all (the crew) walked to the fire ground and went to the BA holding area which was located close to the Tower. Under normal circumstances this would be a safe area, but it became very clear that this was not a very safe area as there were huge amounts of debris falling from the building and a lot of this was alight. I had no idea what it was that was falling from the building but there was a lot of it. Now that the outside was unsafe to stand in we were told to enter the building and when we did we were in a type of lobby area. In my head I was thinking, this is a large building, everything was on fire and Twin Towers sprang to my mind. But oddly, I felt safer inside the building than I did standing outside due to all the debris that was falling which was alight. Although the lobby was smoke-logged it still felt better than the outside. There was a senior officer standing outside trying to tell us about the job, but I could not hear anything and had to shout for him to speak up.

If I was facing the front main entrance to the Tower, this lobby area was situated to the left of that. There were two very narrow door entrances into this lobby area; both were narrower than normal doors. I was tasked with Adam to cut away the door frames that we had just walked through. We went to the nearest appliance we could find; I don't know who it belonged to. We dropped our BA sets by the appliance and

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picked up cutting equipment called Holmatro, which is a brand name. Holmatro is large, hydraulic, cutting equipment generally used to cut people out of vehicles.

Later on we acquired grinders and sabre saws which we also used. We made our way back with the Holmatro and the generator to use it. There were two doorways and they seemed exceptionally narrow and it made sense to widen them to allow fire fighters in and casualties out. One of the doors seemed to have a metal security shutter that was extremely difficult to cut through. It was like roller steal, designed not to be broken into. Due to breaking and overheating, we went through several grinder blades and sabre saw blades. They are very good for some things but we were really struggling. From memory I think another Holmatro was brought in. I think the first one was struggling; for whatever reason I just was not coping with the task. I think we eventually got through with a sledge hammer.

I was impressed with the way Adam was working; he was putting everything into it, especially the entrance with the security shutter. Every time we tried to get a different access point on our cuts from the outside, we had to avoid falling debris. This inhibited us from going any quicker since that cutting angle was taken away. We were not wearing masks but we did have our visors down. There was smoke inside the lobby and there was smoke outside, and besides the debris falling, there were also sparks from the equipment as well as dust being thrown up. I didn't notice anything else around me. Other fire fighters had been tasked with getting us more cutting gear; we also had to change blades on the cutting gear. I have recorded in my notes that it took us about 30-45 minutes, but now, when I think back, it would have taken us well over an hour. It was really tough going, but I did make access and egress much easier.

I remember when I was in the lobby and was looking around and there were some very young looking fire fighters there. There was a female fire fighter who looked like a young girl. She had diamonds on her head so it was her first year in the job and the expression on her face was pure fear.

Once we had completed that task, we were then asked to help with hose and casualty management on the stairway inside the Tower. Since we dropped our sets we now were not BA wearers; we were firefighters. To me it made sense to keep us tasked inside the Tower because fire fighters going to and from the building needed help from police and their shields so they did not get hit by blazing falling debris. For me to be assigned outside would have taken up resources, whether it be fire or police, and it would not have achieved anything. We (Adam and I) were tasked by someone senior (I have no idea who) with hose and casualty management. When I entered the stairwell it was immediately apparent to me that the hoses

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needed sorting out. They were tangled from the ground floor upwards so I had to start from the ground floor. The hoses were twisted around each other and you cannot have kinks in the hoses because they cause loss of water pressure. You have to manage each hose as carefully as possible without ruining the supply to whomever is using it up the stairs ahead of you. The hoses were on the stairs where people could trip on them; they were hanging over the handrails and dangling between floors. Hose management is to make sure that they are not impeding on either casualties or fire fighters trying to exit or enter the stairwell. The hoses had been laid in a hurry going up the stairs and could be a trip hazard. They could also be bent and twisted and that can cause water pressure to weaken.

I spent 3 to 4 hours in the stairwell between the ground floor to the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. As I was attending to the hoses there were casualties coming down, so I did flit between the tasks of hose management and casualty management, or helping my colleagues. There were so many people and fire fighters going up and down the stairs that I have no idea of numbers. In this narrow stairwell the casualties were going one way which is down; the fire fighters were going in both directions. A fire fighter might come down with a casualty and pass that casualty to myself or someone else and then go back up. I, in turn, would help the casualty as far as I could and hand them over to someone else. There were other fire fighters helping with hose management but I could not tell who these were.

The hoses did not appear to be as filled with water as one would have wanted them to be. I know from experience that just by treading on the hoses you can gauge pressure. If they are soft there is less pressure; if they are hard there is more pressure, whether the branch open or closed. Even if the branch is open the hose will still have that pressure running through it. They seemed very limp and I could tell there was not a lot of pressure built up in them.

I did tell senior officers downstairs at the bridge head; one was black, one was white, but I don't know names. It was suggested that we get a light portable pump to work from another source. I can only assume that the hoses that were there were initially being fed from machines that were connected to a hydrant which would have been connected to a single water main. It would have been necessary to find another water supply because it was either the supply that was weak or the pumping appliance to where I was on the stairway was adversely affecting the water supply. Adam was tasked with the same duty as I was but we were not working side by side. There came a time that Adam was no longer there and I subsequently heard that he had hurt his ankle but I did not know that at that time.

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The conditions on the stairwell were very bleak. It was exhausting work and I could feel myself getting very tired. The stairwell was filled with smoke and I inhaled a lot of this without wearing a BA set. The heat was immense in the stairwell; the higher you went the more intense it was. Visibility was compromised; the higher I went the darker it was. There was a lot of foot traffic on the stairs. I have no idea how many casualties I helped down or how many were helped by others but the foot traffic up and down was nonstop. There was a large amount of water coming down the stairwell and I was soaked through with this. I could see into the landing areas on different floor levels and some of the doors to the flats were open. I could see burnt and black rooms and not really much more. I could tell especially on the upper floors I managed to get to, that the conditions for anyone doing firefighting or rescuing were going to be very challenging.

I did go onto some of these landings. Some doors had been propped open with hoses and I looked inside those flats. It was impossible in my position to enter the flats; it would have been so far out of policy to either enter the flats or even to open the doors. It is very difficult because before you go into a building you are set a brief. You are told you can go 'out of policy' and you have to make decisions within your own judgement of what you can do. I have no idea who said that we could go out of policy, but it was pretty obvious that we would have to. All I could do, surrounded as I was with the elements of the heat and smoke, was to have a look inside the flats I could see from the landings. I was not tasked with either firefighting or with rescue. I was tasked/briefed to do hose management and casualty management, and was not authorised or equipped to go out of these boundaries.

Whilst I was in the stairwell for all those hours I helped a number of casualties down the stairs. I currently have no recollection of any of these people except for the very last person. I can only imagine that I did not have time to think about whom I was helping in that smoke-filled stairwell, with the lack of vision, darkness, water falling everywhere, people streaming up and down, cries and screams for help. A lot of the time I did not know what level I was on; I just needed to continue with the task at hand. The only casualty I remember is the last one I helped, probably because he is the only one I walked all the way out with. It could have been that I was exhausted and need to leave or I could have been told to leave. With this male casualty, I walked out through the larger exit I had made with the cutters, underneath shields held either by fire fighters or police. Ordinarily when handing over this person to the LAS I would fill in a casualty report form such as 'administered oxygen' and get their name, age, etc and hand them over to the LAS. I would have done this but I can only remember that he was wearing a backpack. I cannot recall any

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other details about him. He had come from the 10<sup>th</sup> floor, flat 72 (recalling from my notes). Once I had handed him over to the LAS the only information I needed to retain would have been his flat number because in a high-rise fire you need to know the location of every survivor so you do not end up sending crew up to look for someone who has already been rescued. So that is why that is the only description of him in my notes and that he was wearing a backpack. The thing that struck me and stayed with me is that he did not have any visible physical injuries. He did not seem to have smoke inhalation symptoms. I asked him if he was ok and he said he was. He must have inhaled smoke unless he could hold his breath all the way from the 10<sup>th</sup> floor to the lobby; whatever smoke he did inhale did not seem to affect him at this time. He was also very calm and was able to speak clearly. Seeing this then gave me some hope that there could still be some survivors in the Tower at that level, or even above, that could still get out.

I think from that point on the level of exertion and concentration gave way to feeling absolutely shattered and thinking: thank God I don't have to think anymore. But in some ways it was worse because I was looking at an absolutely horrific scene knowing people were still in there. While I was in the building I knew what was going on but was focused on the task at hand. Being outside and watching it all again was so horrific. I had gone into the Tower when it was dark, both outside and in, and I had come out to a bright sunny day. There were still people in their flats, some with lights at the windows. I don't know what levels they were on. I knew I was not going back in the Tower. If I was going to don a BA set then I would have taken note of exactly where I should be headed. After a time some of the lights shining from the windows of the tower were no longer alight.

I am not certain of the sequence of events or the timeline from here, but logically I think it was in the following order: After I handed over the casualty to the LAS I went into a pub to use the toilet. The pub was located up a hill along a pathway. Afterwards I remember talking to colleagues, but I cannot remember if they were from Hendon or not. I do remember thinking I had to find my BA set. There was so much equipment lying around, I went to the area where I thought I may have left it. I cannot say now exactly where that was. I went to a grassy area and rested. There were senior officers and fire fighters about but nothing of significance was discussed. There was a general numb feeling because of what we had witnessed and what we were still witnessing as the job was still going on. There was no one getting overly emotional or breaking down in tears. Sometimes you attend a job and come out thinking knowing you have lost a job, like the building has burnt down, or you come out and you think you have won the day and everything is ok. Every now and then, through quite rare, you come across death and I have

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experienced some horrific scenes. I have seen 7 kids (teenagers) killed in one traffic accident. I have seen an old lady that I knew dying, her legs pinned by a double-decker bus and I was telling her she was going to live. I have scooped bits and pieces of people off train tracks; performed CPR on a male covered in his own blood. Individually they were pretty horrific, but nothing compared to the scale of this Tower. So we are sitting out there knowing there is a continuing scene of horror going on.

Sometime after that I was on the appliance. I cannot remember specifics, except I was in the rear behind the driver as we made our way to Paddington. I thought to myself, well that is 'job done' for us. I was numb, there was a very surreal feeling. I have no idea about timing. We arrived at Paddington and sat in a garden area. There were a few other fire fighters there; no one was talking about the job itself, it was just general chit chat. We went inside and were given a debrief of sorts; asked if we were ok, any injuries if we wanted to see a counsellor. I declined this offer. We were all given paper to write down a précis of what we did that morning. Once we completed the notes our crew got back on the appliance. I was soaking wet and just wanted to get back. We do not carry changes of gear on the appliance. From there I have no memory of how long I stayed in at HENDON fire station nor do I remember how I got home. I came back to work for roll call at 20:00 that same evening to be told that one of our colleagues had committed suicide. That was like a double whammy, it just knocked us all for six. Any chance that we were going to discuss the Tower was now not going to happen because the news about the suicide was more personal and immediate. A very difficult 24 hours.

I was fully aware at some point that lives were going to be lost. I am very aware of the 'stay put' policy. I knew from an early stage it would be a huge challenge to keep to that policy. The fire was burning on the outside as well as the burning going on inside. It is hard to imagine how you can over-resource an incident of this type. I think 40 pumps was probably right. I couldn't realistically see how you could get more into the facility. There was a lot of people power being thrown at it. Resource-wise we could have done with taller ladders. I cannot say what could have been done differently. There were a lot of fire fighters and other emergency service people trying their best in an unprecedented situation.

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Form MG11(T)

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I wrote contemporaneous notes on 14<sup>th</sup> June and referred to a copy of these in my statement I exhibit the copy of my notes as PJF/1.

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