

OPUS2

Manchester Arena Inquiry

Day 50

December 16, 2020

Opus 2 - Official Court Reporters

Phone: +44 (0)20 3008 5900

Email: transcripts@opus2.com

Website: <https://www.opus2.com>

Restriction Order



1 Mr Taghdi, and at the conclusion of the restricted
2 session, sir, you indicated to a member of the press who
3 had made submissions what could and could not be
4 reported. Unfortunately, the feed to the media annexe
5 went down at that stage and so they are unaware of what
6 they can and cannot report and I will simply read out,
7 sir, what you said at the end of that session. You
8 said:

9 "You can report the fact that Mr Taghdi said he's
10 not going to come in response to the section 21 notice.
11 You can say that the inquiry is intending to enforce the
12 notice subject to any medical report, and that Mr Taghdi
13 is citing health reasons for not coming and that, having
14 seen some of the evidence at the inquiry, he is
15 concerned about the nature of the questioning."

16 So we hope that has been broadcast to the media
17 annex and that they are now aware of what they can and
18 cannot report. Restriction Order: [redacted]

19 Restriction Order [redacted]

20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.

21 Application re RULE 10 TIMETABLING
22 Submissions by MR GREANEY

23 MR GREANEY: We turn next to deal with the application made
24 by Greater Manchester Police for a variation in the
25 Rule 10 timetable relating to Deputy Chief

27

1 Constable Pilling. Can we set out in very short form
2 what our position is subject to how the arguments
3 develop.

4 The position is that the arguments of, on the one
5 hand, Greater Manchester Police, and on the other hand,
6 the families, have been set out with clarity and it
7 seems to CTI that there are powerful points on both
8 sides.

9 The essential question is: what will enable the
10 inquiry to achieve the best evidence from DCC Pilling?
11 And that means a situation, in our view, in which he's
12 able to answer the questions from the witness box when
13 they are asked as opposed to parking answers and coming
14 back at some later stage or responding in writing.

15 In our view, what is most likely to ensure that is
16 indeed varying the timetable, as has been requested, but
17 with it being made clear to Deputy Chief
18 Constable Pilling that that is expected to avoid
19 a situation in which he parks answers.

20 So we hope that's clear: we think that there should
21 be a variation, but that that should result in questions
22 being answered from the witness box.

23 We do understand that evidence will continue to be
24 heard during the varied timetable and that that evidence
25 may have an impact on what core participants wish to

28

21 (A short break)

22 (10.26 am)

23 MR GREANEY: Sir, we have now come out of a restricted
24 session into an open session. In the restricted session
25 we were dealing with issues relating to a witness,

26

1 ask. But we would simply add that if there is a change,
2 they should be permitted to make further submissions to
3 you.

4 Sir, that is our position and having made that
5 clear, we will now invite Mr Horwell, who we hope is
6 able to join us, to make his application.

7 Submissions by MR HORWELL

8 MR HORWELL: Good morning, sir. I hope I can be seen and
9 heard.

10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You can. You're not quite synchronised,
11 at the moment, Mr Horwell, but we can cope with that.

12 MR HORWELL: All right. I am grateful to Mr Greaney for
13 setting out his views because they are identical to mine
14 in this sense: all that we have sought to do is to
15 strike a sensible balance between Mr Pilling's
16 responsibilities to this inquiry and those which he
17 plainly has to Greater Manchester Police. It is our
18 view, because of the enormous volume of potential
19 evidence that he may give, that an extension is
20 required.

21 I hope that it was obvious from our application that
22 we were not in any sense seeking to take a tactical
23 advantage. Of course, if evidence emerges between
24 Rule 10 responses and the time at which Mr Pilling gives
25 evidence, of course additional matters can be added to

29

1 the evidence proposal and additional documents then
2 added to the proposal.

3 Sir, I would have thought that would have been
4 obvious for two reasons. First of all, I don't think
5 there has been a single occasion on which you have
6 stopped a core participant adding a document to that
7 bundle, even at a late stage, as long as the witness has
8 had time to look at it, and secondly, Mr Weatherby
9 questioned Mr Barraclough on documents that were
10 in addition to those in the evidence proposal and we
11 didn't object.

12 This is not seeking to take a tactical advantage at
13 all: it is attempting to make the best use of
14 Mr Pilling's time to ensure that he can give best
15 evidence to this inquiry. Those are our motives and
16 those are our objectives, and as I have said, in our
17 view, an extension to the normal procedure is justified.

18 Sir, we've set out our arguments in the written
19 application. Unless there's anything further you would
20 wish me to address you upon, those are our submissions.

21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.

22 MR GREANEY: Sir, I know that Mr Weatherby is taking the
23 lead on behalf of the families in relation to this and

24 I would invite him to join us via the link.

25 MR WEATHERBY: Can you hear me, sir?

30

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I can, yes, thank you.

2 Submissions by MR WEATHERBY

3 MR WEATHERBY: Thank you.

4 I'll be very brief. We have put in written
5 submissions, so I don't want to repeat those.

6 Just in terms of Mr Barraclough, there was virtually
7 no document that was put to Mr Barraclough that hadn't
8 been raised in advance. There was some late disclosure,
9 which meant that there were additions to the Rule 10,
10 but it certainly wasn't our intention to put anything to
11 Mr Barraclough that he hadn't had the opportunity to see
12 in advance.

13 With respect to time limits, the time limits on
14 Rule 10 are a practical way in which to administer that
15 process and they are primarily to assist the inquiry
16 rather than the witness, although the two might be said
17 to go hand in hand. We don't suggest that any principle
18 arises in respect of this application other than
19 witnesses generally should not be treated differently
20 with regard to this sort of matter.

21 Also, we have raised the issue of the thin end of
22 the wedge and that Mr Horwell has been good enough to
23 indicate there will in fact be a total of four such
24 applications from GMP as currently thought, MI5 another,
25 and no doubt others who will be watching may choose to

31

1 take a similar approach.

2 Both Greater Manchester Police and Mr Pilling have
3 had the benefit of very detailed expert reports. In
4 short order, they know the areas and the questions that
5 they have to answer. I'm certainly happy to engage with
6 Mr Horwell in a dialogue over any particular issues well
7 in advance of Mr Pilling's evidence. I don't speak for
8 all of the family teams, but I doubt anyone would not be
9 prepared to do similarly.

10 The practical point for us, and no doubt for others,
11 is that teams are preparing for witnesses in real time
12 as well as preparing Rule 10 applications ahead of time.
13 The applications for more time are being made in respect
14 of the bigger witnesses where more work is plainly
15 required.

16 In the particular circumstances of Mr Pilling, the
17 extension sought would mean that the evidence proposal
18 would be sent out at the start of February, that being
19 not long after the start of chapter 10, and therefore
20 before some of the witnesses who are probably going to
21 be relevant to Mr Pilling's evidence are in fact due to
22 be heard. Therefore that, in our submission, creates
23 a difficulty for the process rather than assisting it.

24 Mr Pilling is giving evidence very much about his
25 own area of specialism. He's already had to prepare

32

1 detailed statements and no doubt reviewed the evidence
 2 of his own officers and also the expert reports.
 3 Therefore we simply say that requiring Rule 10s so much
 4 earlier in this case will create significant difficulty
 5 for us. We are not sure how they will assist the
 6 inquiry or indeed the quality of Mr Pilling's evidence.
 7 Sir, those are our submissions unless there's
 8 anything we can assist further on.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, I'm grateful, thank you very much.
 10 I have obviously, as I've said, read the submissions
 11 that you put in, very helpfully put in writing. So
 12 thank you.
 13 MR GREANEY: Sir, insofar as I indicated that there was
 14 a common position as between the families, that was
 15 wrong, because I know that Mr Cooper on behalf of his
 16 families supports the application.
 17 Submissions by MR COOPER
 18 MR COOPER: Sir, we support the application from Greater
 19 Manchester Police, we understand the reasons they're
 20 positing. We support the approach taken by CTI on this
 21 matter. Obviously in due course efforts may need to be
 22 made by a number of parties, maybe our own in due
 23 course, to be asking for extensions to best assist this
 24 inquiry. So we'll show a level of goodwill at this
 25 stage to assist the process and support the applications

33

1 by CTI.
 2 MR GREANEY: Mr Atkinson next, please.
 3 Submissions by MR ATKINSON
 4 MR ATKINSON: Sir, we entirely support the position adopted
 5 by Mr Weatherby and support his submissions both in
 6 writing and in person. We share his concern that other
 7 organisations will adopt a similar approach, which would
 8 result in multiple Rule 10s for prominent witnesses.
 9 The inquiry, for which we are grateful, adopted our
 10 suggestion that chapter 10 and chapter 7 should start
 11 with those on the ground, as it were, and move up
 12 through the organisations. We submit it worked well
 13 with chapter 7 to get a better understanding of how the
 14 operation worked. It will, we submit, have a similar
 15 benefit for chapter 10.
 16 If we are to draft our Rule 10s in relation to the
 17 senior witnesses before we have heard the juniors, it
 18 will inevitably mean having to do that twice. We submit
 19 that is not helpful to anyone and we otherwise adopt
 20 Mr Weatherby's submissions.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much.
 22 MR GREANEY: I don't want if Mr Welch has anything he wishes
 23 to add.
 24 Submissions by MR WELCH
 25 MR WELCH: Only this. Our position is that we support

34

1 Mr Weatherby's submissions. I have nothing further to
 2 add.
 3 MR GREANEY: We have nothing further to add either.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I will give a reasoned decision in
 5 writing, which will be sent round to the parties.
 6 Thank you all for your clear and concise submissions.
 7 Obviously, good arguments on both sides.
 8 Discussion re TIMETABLING
 9 MR GREANEY: There are. Thank you, sir.
 10 We're going to turn next to address issues of
 11 timetabling. Sir, as you know, a detailed email was
 12 circulated to all core participants last evening, but
 13 we will summarise the position now.
 14 The starting point is to state publicly that your
 15 intention, sir, is, we know, to issue your report on
 16 a rolling basis. First, you intend to publish a report
 17 on the key evidential issues that arose during
 18 chapter 7, which of course concerned the security
 19 arrangements at the arena and to make recommendations.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can I just expand on the reasons for
 21 that --
 22 MR GREANEY: Of course, sir, yes.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: -- a little? It's obviously better to
 24 do these things when they're reasonably fresh in one's
 25 mind. Of course I have notes, we have a transcript.

35

1 We have a transcript to read and also I have my own
 2 notes, which I can read, but actually most of us think
 3 that making decisions, giving reasoned decisions is
 4 better the sooner it is after you've actually heard it.
 5 I am also concerned that what we've been doing will
 6 lead into and feed into the question relating to
 7 Martyn's Law. I am very concerned that nothing that we
 8 should do should delay any of that process, rather than
 9 encourage people to get on with it, and hopefully by
 10 giving my views and the inquiry team's consideration of
 11 these matters, that will hopefully get the process going
 12 quicker rather than slow it down. So I don't want to do
 13 anything which might cause any delays along the line,
 14 and if we waited until the end of the inquiry, then it
 15 would substantially delay what goes on. So we're keen
 16 not to do that.
 17 MR GREANEY: Thank you very much, sir, for that
 18 clarification.
 19 The report on chapter 7 will be, as we'll term it,
 20 volume 1 of your report. We know that your aim is to
 21 publish that report -- and we underline the word
 22 "aim" -- before 22 May 2021, the significance of which
 23 date will be lost on absolutely no one. That is, may we
 24 say, highly ambitious and it will require the
 25 cooperation of all core participants and indeed others,

36

1 but nonetheless we know, sir, that you are focused on
 2 achieving that.

3 To that end, the date for closing written
 4 submissions on chapter 7 has been extended to 12 pm on
 5 8 January of next year so as to enable core participants
 6 to develop their points in the light of what I have just
 7 said.

8 Second, sir, you intend to publish a report on the
 9 emergency response to the arena attack and the
 10 experience of each of those who died; that will be
 11 volume 2 of the report.

12 Thirdly, you intend to publish a report on
 13 radicalisation and preventability, chapters 13 and 14,
 14 and that will be volume 3 of your report.

15 Next, the evidence to be heard in further chapters.
 16 The inquiry legal team has undertaken a review of the
 17 timetable in light of progress to date. We predict that
 18 at current progress, the oral evidence hearings would
 19 run through to November of 2021, with chapter 10 alone
 20 taking 20 weeks. We know, sir, that your view, which we
 21 as the inquiry legal team entirely share, is that
 22 that is simply too long.

23 On the one hand, of course, you must receive the
 24 evidence that you need in order to make your findings
 25 and to make your recommendations. That of course is

37

1 critical. But on the other hand, you need to make
 2 findings and recommendations at a stage at which they
 3 are relevant and capable of making a difference.

4 So in short, we need to move, if at all possible,
 5 more quickly so that your volume 2 and 3 reports can be
 6 published as early as possible. So what we as the
 7 inquiry legal team propose to do is to issue a revised
 8 chapter 10 timetable in the first instance, with others
 9 to follow, over the Christmas break.

10 We need to be clear that this is not something that
 11 we are imposing upon core participants. So if that once
 12 they have seen the revised timetable, core participants
 13 consider that a witness that we have removed as
 14 unnecessary or duplicative is in fact needed, they
 15 should say so and we will consider their position. So
 16 what core participants will receive is the chapter 10
 17 timetable as it currently exists, but we will highlight
 18 those witnesses that we consider are no longer necessary
 19 or duplicate the evidence of other witnesses.

20 We can say, sir, although we say it tentatively,
 21 that the discussions we have had so far lead us to
 22 believe that real progress can be made. We would invite
 23 submissions, first of all from the families in response
 24 to what we've just said, although we have telegraphed
 25 it.

38

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you. Mr Cooper.

2 MR COOPER: Sir, certainly on behalf of those we represent,
 3 firstly, we have had helpful conversations with
 4 Mr Greaney in advance of you being addressed, and as you
 5 would expect and anticipate, given conduct over the last
 6 few months, that's been fruitful and will continue to be
 7 fruitful, and cooperation and discussion is, as we say,
 8 vital and we are optimistic that it will produce results
 9 for you.

10 Having said that, I would, on behalf of those we
 11 represent, because we have spoken to them in general
 12 about progress, not the particularity, but in general
 13 about progress, and one thing that is particularly
 14 asserted on me to represent to you from those we
 15 represent is, if you'll excuse me being blunt about it,
 16 the families require a thorough and comprehensive
 17 assessment of all the relevant evidence.

18 Within that context of an inquiry into all the
 19 relevant and a comprehensive inquiry into all the
 20 relevant evidence I add, "whatever time it takes",
 21 in the context of that statement. I don't submit in
 22 whatever time it takes for matters which will not assist
 23 you, but whatever time it takes.

24 Although I hear from my learned friend of
 25 assessments and projections as to how long this inquiry

39

1 will take, and we will do our best to make sure that
 2 doesn't happen, if it has to happen we will be
 3 submitting to you upon the relevant evidence that it
 4 must happen. But we'll get to that at a later stage.
 5 So we support, obviously, what my learned friend has
 6 said to you, emphasising again as strongly as I possibly
 7 can that the families have come on a long journey, this
 8 is potentially the end of their journey, and whatever it
 9 takes, however long it takes, we ask you to allow it to
 10 take place.

11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.

12 MR GREANEY: Mr Atkinson next, please.

13 MR ATKINSON: Sir, the families are on a journey that has
 14 many parts to it, some of which they will probably never
 15 get to the end of, but it is their hope that this part
 16 of their journey will result in positive steps that can
 17 make real change that will ensure that others don't have
 18 to suffer what they have suffered. And they recognise
 19 that the sooner that can be done, the better. We
 20 therefore applaud, sir, your decision to issue a report
 21 in relation to chapter 7 as soon as you have indicated,
 22 because there are, we submit, very clear things that
 23 need to be done and should be done as soon as that can
 24 be achieved.

25 We similarly applaud the steps now being taken by

40

1 your inquiry team to focus chapter 10, which is at risk
 2 of losing the points of significance in a welter of
 3 material unless there is that focus, and we will do all
 4 that we can to help that focus be achieved and, as
 5 further proposals for later chapters come our way, and
 6 we encourage that to happen, we will do the same for
 7 those. We otherwise support what's been proposed.

8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you, Mr Atkinson, I'm grateful.

9 MR GREANEY: I'm going to ask Mr Weatherby whether he has
 10 anything to contribute on this issue.

11 MR WEATHERBY: Yes, thank you very much. I endorse just
 12 about everything that has already been said.

13 May I again strongly and respectfully support the
 14 report being dealt with in stages. One of the problems
 15 with inquiries is sometimes, because of the volume of
 16 material, it sometimes takes a very long time to produce
 17 reports, by which justice is partially defeated because
 18 of the passage of time, but also that recommendations
 19 are made far too long after the evidence is heard. So
 20 we strongly support that approach.

21 May I just raise one minor detail? On the current
 22 plan that Mr Greaney has outlined, chapters 8 and 9 seem
 23 to have been missed, so I just wonder whether some
 24 attention could be paid to where they would fit into the
 25 reporting process.

1 MR GREANEY: Mr Weatherby, we anticipate that chapters 8 and
 2 9 would be dealt with in volume 2 of the report.

3 MR WEATHERBY: That's very helpful indeed.

4 Just in terms of the timetable, we strongly are of
 5 the view that the process should be dealt with as
 6 quickly as possible, but should of course take as long
 7 as necessary. We, on behalf of the families we
 8 represent, don't want this process to go on any longer
 9 than is necessary. It's of course extremely traumatic
 10 for the families and therefore all of us are under an
 11 obligation to deal with this as quickly as possible and
 12 therefore my team certainly will be engaging proactively
 13 with your team to see how far we can sensibly reduce, in
 14 particular, chapter 10.

15 There are various ideas that we hope to be able to
 16 add into that process. There may be areas which are not
 17 in dispute by anybody that can be reduced to lists of
 18 facts which can be agreed, for example, and there may be
 19 ways that we can cut down the amount of questioning that
 20 has hitherto been deemed necessary with some of the
 21 witnesses.

22 Thank you.

23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.

24 MR GREANEY: Sir, next, if Mr Welch has anything he wishes
 25 to add?

1 MR WELCH: Very briefly. We have worked constructively with
 2 your team thus far, we'll continue to do so, and all the
 3 family teams have worked constructively together, and
 4 will continue to do so, particularly in relation to
 5 chapter 10, we hope, in order to cut that down as much
 6 as we can.

7 MR ATKINSON: In relation to when chapters 8 and 9 should
 8 appear, of course it's entirely a matter for you, sir,
 9 because it's your report, but a good many witnesses who
 10 were potentially either chapter 8 or chapter 13 have for
 11 very good reason been put into chapter 13. We would
 12 respectfully suggest that a comprehensive view of
 13 chapter 8 does need chapter 13 to have happened, but
 14 of course that's a matter for you.

15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, thank you.

16 MR GREANEY: That's a sensible suggestion, which we'll
 17 reflect upon. Thank you, Mr Atkinson. We're very
 18 grateful for those remarks. Of course there will be no
 19 rush.

20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I am also very grateful for the remarks.
 21 We have taken longer than was anticipated so far, but
 22 I think this was possibly an area of the inquiry where
 23 there have probably been more surprises than people were
 24 expecting, which has come out of the questioning which
 25 has been asked. That may occur in chapter 10 as well,

1 but there has already been an inquiry and some detailed
 2 examination in relation to chapter 10. There are also
 3 a lot of witnesses, or a number of witnesses, who were
 4 extremely distressed by their experience and if they can
 5 be saved actually going through it again in the witness
 6 box, then I am sure they would appreciate it as well.

7 I'm grateful for the intention to try and shorten
 8 matters as much as we can. I make it perfectly clear
 9 that it will take as long as it needs to take, although
 10 I'd quite like to have some retirement at the end of
 11 this process when it's finally finished. But of course
 12 we will take what time is actually necessary to do it.
 13 We need to look at that.

14 We are also learning as we go along. It does seem
 15 to me to have been a very cooperative process so far.
 16 My case management skills may improve as we go along,
 17 because of not having experience of having to case
 18 manage an inquiry before, which I hope will happen
 19 cooperatively as we go.

20 Let's keep it as short as we can, but obviously
 21 doing everything that is necessary, and thank you for
 22 the work which will be done about that.

23 MR GREANEY: Thank you very much indeed. Having dealt with
 24 that series of issues, we're going to turn now to
 25 evidence. The starting point is for some statements to

1 be read and Mr de la Poer will take what he would
 2 describe as the opportunity to deal with that at this
 3 stage.
 4 MR DE LA POER: Sir, first a brief return to chapter 7.
 5 These are witness statements to be published on the
 6 inquiry website and therefore to be taken as read into
 7 evidence. Three witness statements will be published
 8 later today: a second statement from Liz Forster, the
 9 CTSA from Greater Manchester Police; a second statement
 10 from John Sharkey, part of the SMG Europe Limited
 11 structure; and finally a second statement from
 12 Sergeant Gareth Wilson of British Transport Police.
 13 Next, turning back to chapter 8, there are two
 14 witness statements and an interview to be read and
 15 summarised. The first is from Relative C. For those
 16 who are following, {INQ030675/1} is the basis of what
 17 I am about to put into evidence. Can I make this clear,
 18 that as we have told core participants, all three of
 19 these witnesses provide substantial evidence relevant to
 20 chapter 13, radicalisation, and so this is not to be
 21 taken as the last that we will hear from these
 22 witnesses. However, at this stage, they do have
 23 relevant evidence to give in relation to planning and
 24 preparation.
 25

45

1 Witness statement of RELATIVE C (read) (summarised)
 2 MR DE LA POER: So Relative C first. He says of
 3 Salman Abedi that:
 4 "In his teenage years he was a rough kind of guy,
 5 smoking cannabis. He would be violent, getting into
 6 fights, kind of a bit like a gangster lifestyle."
 7 He goes on to say:
 8 "He grew up a bit, he became happier, more
 9 knowledgeable and he was always smiling."
 10 He says — and I indicate that his statement is
 11 dated 2017:
 12 "About a year ago, Salman started becoming
 13 religious. My mum's view was that his religious views
 14 were too strong and she told us not to listen to him.
 15 My mum would confront Salman about his religious views
 16 and it sometimes resulted in conflict between them."
 17 He goes on to say:
 18 "On 2 March 2017" —
 19 MR COOPER: I'm so sorry to interrupt my learned friend.
 20 I'm trying to follow the statement as my learned friend
 21 goes along. I know he has taken certain steps from it.
 22 If he can just assist me when he's moving paragraphs as
 23 to what pages he's going to, please.
 24 MR DE LA POER: Sir, as you will appreciate, I prepared an
 25 extract from the statement, so I had not prepared to

46

1 move back and forth, but if you will give me a moment,
 2 I will seek to assist.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It may be that you could be sent what
 4 you're reading out.
 5 MR DE LA POER: I am very happy to provide my learned friend
 6 what I have prepared for this and I will take him to
 7 where I have and, as I say, and I hope I made clear,
 8 this is not the last we'll be hearing from these
 9 witnesses, so if there are parts which are omitted,
 10 chapter 13 will provide an opportunity to return to
 11 them.
 12 Relative C says:
 13 "On 2 March, Hashem came to my house. We were
 14 sitting in the sofa room. We had been chatting for
 15 a while and then Hashem asked me if I had an Amazon
 16 account. I told him that I did and he asked me if
 17 I would order something for him. He said he needed some
 18 sulphuric acid for his car. I don't have much knowledge
 19 about cars and how they work, so I had no cause to
 20 question Hashem about why he needed acid. I went and
 21 got my laptop from my room and loaded up my Amazon
 22 account. I recall that we did a Google search first and
 23 then Amazon came up. Hashem looked through the various
 24 adverts and picked out the one he wanted to buy. He
 25 asked me to pay the money which came to a total of

47

1 £69.36, including the postage, and he gave me the cash
 2 there and then.
 3 "He did not give me the full amount because
 4 I already owed him £20 from when he helped me get a tyre
 5 for my mum's car. Again, I didn't think this purchase
 6 was anything out of the ordinary and I hardly gave it
 7 another thought. I have no recollection of the person
 8 or company that was selling the acid, but I have been
 9 shown a summary of my Amazon purchases and my bank
 10 account and I agree the acid was purchased from Italy.
 11 "A few days later, I can't recall the precise day,
 12 there was a card from a delivery company at our house.
 13 The card stated that a parcel had been left at
 14 a neighbour's house, which was opposite ours.
 15 "I went to the neighbour and collected the parcel.
 16 I knew the parcel was for Hashem, it was in a box and it
 17 was quite big and pretty heavy. I don't know the weight
 18 or quantity, but I accept the order was for 5 litres of
 19 sulphuric acid.
 20 "Having collected the parcel from the neighbour,
 21 I took it directly to Hashem's house. I knocked at
 22 their house but nobody was at home. I took the parcel
 23 back to my house and I put it on the stairs. I don't
 24 know who collected it but [and here I'm using the
 25 cipher] Trial Witness 2 must have given it to whoever

48

1 came for it as nobody else was staying at our house
 2 at the time.
 3 "Some time later I asked Trial Witness 2 if Salman
 4 had come to collect the parcel and he said yes. This
 5 doesn't confirm that Salman actually collected it as it
 6 could have been Hashem. We routinely just referred to
 7 Salman and Hashem as Salman collectively and all I can
 8 say is that I confirmed with Trial Witness 2 that they
 9 had collected the parcel.
 10 "I felt slightly embarrassed about them having to
 11 come for it as I felt the courteous thing to do was to
 12 take it to them. I didn't want them to think that
 13 I couldn't be bothered to take it to them.
 14 "On the occasions I had cause to visit Salman and
 15 Hashem at their house, I do not recall seeing or hearing
 16 anything out of the ordinary. There was nothing that
 17 called me particular concern.
 18 "I am aware that Salman had developed strong
 19 religious views. He never really tried to impress his
 20 views upon me, but I think he might have tried to
 21 discuss them with my brother and he may have mentioned
 22 jihad to him. Me and my mum always told Trial Witness 2
 23 that Salman's interpretation of Islam was too strict and
 24 he should not pay attention to him."
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Just before you go on, did Relative C

49

1 give evidence at the trial of Hashem Abedi?
 2 MR DE LA POER: If you would bear with me one moment,
 3 please, sir. I think the answer to that question is
 4 yes, but I will confirm it now.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I just wonder whether his evidence was
 6 read or whether it was given orally.
 7 MR DE LA POER: His evidence was read.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 9 Witness statement of TRIAL WITNESS 3 (summarised)
 10 MR DE LA POER: The next witness, Trial Witness 3, did give
 11 live evidence at the trial, sir. He provided
 12 information to the police by means of a video interview,
 13 the transcript of which runs to some 90 pages. It
 14 appears under {INQ030100/1}.
 15 I propose to provide a very, very short summary of
 16 that. There is considerable detail relevant to
 17 radicalisation and we will liaise with the core
 18 participants about that for the purpose of chapter 13.
 19 It includes the fact that Salman Abedi, according to
 20 Trial Witness 3, said that studying chemistry would mean
 21 that he, Trial Witness 3, would be able to build a bomb,
 22 albeit that he thought that Salman Abedi was joking when
 23 he said that.
 24 All I need to say is that he includes within that
 25 interview the fact that he was aware of a parcel being

50

1 delivered to a neighbour. He indicates it was Hashem
 2 who collected it and that Hashem said it was car oil
 3 in the parcel.
 4 Witness statement TRIAL WITNESS 4 (read) (summarised)
 5 MR DE LA POER: Finally, Trial Witness 4. Sir, I can help
 6 you in answer to your question that he was called as
 7 a live witness in the trial. {INQ030688/1}.
 8 I'm going to pick it up part-way through the
 9 statement:
 10 "I have been asked by officers if I have bought
 11 anything at the request of Hashem or Salman Abedi or
 12 been asked to purchase anything on their behalf."
 13 He goes on to state that he left the UK on
 14 4 January 2017, which provides a reference date for when
 15 this conversation happened. He goes on to say:
 16 "I think it was January 2017 that Hashem Abedi asked
 17 me to purchase a product for his car. I think it was
 18 a liquid, possibly something for the battery. He asked
 19 me if I would have the product delivered to an Amazon
 20 locker, which is a delivery option used by Amazon to
 21 have a product sent to an agreed location."
 22 He goes on to say he was working abroad at the time
 23 of the request, hence the relevance of 4 January.
 24 Picking the statement up again:
 25 "I refused Hashem's request and I told him to get

51

1 the product himself and did not receive any further
 2 requests."
 3 He goes on to say that he was present when
 4 a conversation took place over the telephone between his
 5 boss and Hashem Abedi, that conversation being on
 6 speakerphone so that he could hear what was being said.
 7 He says that the same request was made of his boss and
 8 that his boss also said no. He concludes by stating:
 9 "I found this a very strange request in that I was
 10 being asked to buy something that was readily available
 11 to the general public."
 12 Sir, that concludes the reading today. I shall
 13 endeavour to give Mr Cooper every assistance in terms of
 14 where from those statements that information was taken.
 15 Can I indicate also that a significant number of
 16 further statements will be published on the inquiry
 17 website later today, relevant to planning and
 18 preparation. I don't read out the list, the core
 19 participants have that list already, and indeed we have
 20 provided to representatives of the press a provisional
 21 copy of that list so they know what to expect.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 23 MR COOPER: If it assists my learned friend, I managed to
 24 catch up. He has lots of work to do, I won't press him
 25 on that.

52

1 MR DE LA POER: Thank you very much, sir. It's now just
 2 after 11 o'clock. We understand our next witness is
 3 arriving in the building at about 11.30. We acknowledge
 4 he was originally scheduled for later in the day so has
 5 made arrangements to assist us by coming this morning.
 6 I am not sure exactly when we will be able to start, but
 7 I anticipate it won't be before 11.45, as he'll need to
 8 be spoken to once he's arrived.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Right. This is not a very long witness,
 10 as I understand it. So once we have started, I will
 11 intend to go on until we have finished because that will
 12 be the end of our hearings up until Christmas. So
 13 I hope we finish that in reasonable time so that we can
 14 all finish for the day.
 15 MR DE LA POER: Sir, our expectation -- Ms Cartwright will
 16 be dealing with the witness -- is that he will take
 17 approximately half an hour, including questions from the
 18 families.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think I have probably been told that's
 20 slightly optimistic, but we'll see how we go.
 21 MR COOPER: Mr Di Francesco is taking the questioning, so we
 22 might achieve that.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: There's no reason to think he might be
 24 any quicker than you are! Thank you very much.
 25 (11.04 am)

53

1 (A short break)
 2 (12.03 pm)
 3 MS CARTWRIGHT: Good afternoon, sir, the gentleman in the
 4 witness box is Mr Balaam.
 5 MR KHALID BALAAM (sworn)
 6 Questions from MS CARTWRIGHT
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much for coming earlier.
 8 I know you were due to come at 2 o'clock, so it has
 9 helped us a lot by you coming earlier, so thank you for
 10 that.
 11 MS CARTWRIGHT: Good afternoon, Mr Balaam.
 12 There should be in the bundle in front of you a copy
 13 of your witness statement dated 12 June 2017. Have you
 14 had an opportunity to refresh your memory from that
 15 witness statement?
 16 A. Yes.
 17 Q. Are the contents of it true to the best of your
 18 knowledge and belief?
 19 A. Yes.
 20 Q. I want to ask you -- first of all, you tell us in that
 21 statement that you were employed at a Fast Food Traders
 22 in Trafford as a manager. Are you still employed at
 23 that company?
 24 A. I own the company.
 25 Q. The reason I start asking you that is because you're

54

1 going to assist us today with your relationship with
 2 a gentleman by the name of Ahmed Taghdi and I think it's
 3 right to say that that was a business that was
 4 previously owned by Mr Taghdi's father; is that correct?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. You tell us in the witness statement that Mr Taghdi's
 7 father was killed in Libya in 2011; is that correct?
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. I think in March?
 10 A. 2 March.
 11 Q. Would it be fair to say that you had a close
 12 relationship with the Taghdi family?
 13 A. Yes, I do.
 14 Q. You also describe yourself in respect of your
 15 relationship with Ahmed Taghdi, I think who was
 16 Mr Taghdi's eldest son, as performing a father figure
 17 role for him?
 18 A. Not fully, but I try to support as much as I can.
 19 I would not be able to reach this level, even if he
 20 would like to.
 21 Q. I think you tell us in the witness statement that as of
 22 the time of the arena attack, you'd known Ahmed Taghdi
 23 for about 20 years.
 24 A. Pretty much, yes.
 25 Q. And that as well as visiting the family home, you also

55

1 worked with Ahmed Taghdi because he'd also worked at the
 2 company where you were manager at the time?
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. Just to perhaps get a little bit more detail about the
 5 relationship you had with Ahmed Taghdi, I think you
 6 assisted him with a car for when he was studying at
 7 university?
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. And you would seek to give him advice generally about
 10 how best to support him, almost like a father would do?
 11 A. To Ahmed and to anyone else in the community or asking
 12 for advice, I would do the same.
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Balaam, can I ask you to move your
 14 chair slightly further forward? That's fine.
 15 Thank you.
 16 MS CARTWRIGHT: I want to ask you, please, about a matter
 17 that occurred after the arena attack on 22 May 2017.
 18 You tell us in your witness statement that you became
 19 aware of the arena attack the day after, on 23 May.
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. And I think you also indicate that you knew the person
 22 who at that stage was suspected of carrying out the
 23 attack, one Salman Abedi.
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. Is it right that you also had some knowledge of

56

1 Salman Abedi's wider family?
 2 A. I know his older brother and his father. The young one,
 3 I don't know him much, but I see him as well.
 4 Q. The older brother being Ismail Abedi?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. I think you tell us in respect of the father that you
 7 didn't know him by the name of Ramadan Abedi. How did
 8 you know Salman Abedi's father's name? What was your
 9 understanding of the name he went by?
 10 A. I don't understand the question.
 11 Q. I think you tell us in your witness statement that you
 12 knew Salman Abedi's father by the name Abu Ismail.
 13 A. Abu Ismail, yes.
 14 Q. I think you say you knew them from attending the same
 15 mosque.
 16 A. Yes.
 17 Q. And can you confirm which mosque that was, please?
 18 A. The Didsbury Mosque.
 19 Q. I wonder if you could assist us, please, with
 20 a conversation that you had with Ahmed Taghdi about
 21 knowledge and information he had that was relevant to
 22 the attack and the involvement of Salman Abedi. Do you
 23 recall having a conversation with Ahmed Taghdi?
 24 A. I didn't catch that. Can you repeat the question,
 25 please?

57

1 Q. You tell us in your witness statement and I think you
 2 give an understanding that the date of this conversation
 3 was 26 May 2017.
 4 A. Mm—hm.
 5 Q. And you link it to Ahmed Taghdi speaking to you because
 6 the press were pestering him; do you recall that?
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. So what I would ask you to do, please, is just tell us
 9 what the conversation was that you had, please, with
 10 Ahmed Taghdi.
 11 A. Really, I don't remember the whole conversation, it was
 12 a time ago now.
 13 Q. Of course.
 14 A. But I remember because... From 2009 up to 2014, I was
 15 not in UK, I was in Libya. I came back to UK in 2014.
 16 In that time, I didn't see Ahmed or the family and they
 17 lost their father in 2011, so there is a gap and
 18 I didn't see the family on that gap. However, when
 19 I come in UK I was busy with my own children and
 20 everything, so I wasn't looking at the family or doing
 21 what I'm supposed to do to support or check on the kids.
 22 Then I see the family were not in a very good state
 23 because they were teenagers, so this age was always
 24 fighting and problems. So Ahmed was the oldest, so
 25 I was speaking to him and I try to support him. In our

58

1 country, a young man not studying or working means he
 2 will not do well.

3 But never in my mind comes this type of not well,
 4 though, it is just unwell in the way of teenagers
 5 smoking or doing something bad. However, I told him,
 6 either you work or you study, and I will support either
 7 of them, but do not just stay like this and say you're
 8 doing good.

9 He enrolled in university and successfully did, so
 10 I said, okay, that means I should be supporting more.
 11 It was winter and it was dark, so I see him going and
 12 I didn't want him to leave the university. That's why
 13 I offer to buy him £600, I believe. I'm not very sure
 14 about the price, but it was 600, I think. And I told
 15 him, you will work, do some things like making orders,
 16 contacting the post office. I tried to pay for the car
 17 so I could fill his full time.

18 From that respect, when he comes asking about the
 19 arena or he said to me there is media calling me or
 20 I have been asked to give interview, I have said to him,
 21 what have you done with this — do you know that guy, oh
 22 no, because he is Libyan, but I said do you know him
 23 very well, like, and he said, yes, I know him. So
 24 I said to him if you go through the press, you will not
 25 do your exams, because there were exams or tests to do

59

1 in university.

2 I said, you need to pay attention to your studies
 3 and not go to do this type of informations because
 4 you will waste time and this will be hassle. Plus the
 5 whole community being affected by this matter, so there
 6 was a mess anyway. So I tried to reduce the amount of
 7 problems and make him focus on his studies. That's what
 8 the conversation was about.

9 Q. So what you've just described to us was that
 10 Ahmed Taghdi was asking you advice about whether he
 11 should speak to the media?

12 A. He wasn't asking for advice, because I don't know how
 13 the conversation come, but he was telling me that the
 14 media was contacting him to speak to him, but it's not
 15 advice in the way of advice. I would say, why would you
 16 bother about going to interviews, just do your exams and
 17 don't go to the media.

18 Q. Can I ask you then: did Ahmed Taghdi tell you the
 19 information he had that would have been of interest to
 20 the media at that time?

21 A. I never thought it would be, to be honest with you.

22 Q. And I think you reference that it was a man by the name
 23 of Akram Ramadan that had given Ahmed Taghdi's name to
 24 the press and that's why they were contacting him?

25 A. Yes, I mean, I don't remember the name — if you ask me

60

1 the name now, I wouldn't say, but yes, that was written
 2 in it.
 3 Q. That's the name, I think, you gave in the witness
 4 statement you provided --
 5 A. Yes, yes. I don't remember -- but that's the name he
 6 said.
 7 Q. Is that a man you knew?
 8 A. Not very much. I know the family and I don't know which
 9 one of the family he is.
 10 Q. The inquiry has some knowledge that there was a man by
 11 that name who gave an interview to the BBC Panorama
 12 interview that was broadcast on 29 May. Are you able to
 13 help us as to whether that's the same gentleman?
 14 A. Can you say again, please?
 15 Q. The inquiry are aware of a man by the name of
 16 Akram Ramadan who gave a media interview to the BBC as
 17 part of the Panorama that was broadcast on 29 May 2017.
 18 Do you know if that's the same man that you told us
 19 about in the statement?
 20 A. I don't understand. What's the connections? The same
 21 man --
 22 Q. You have given us the name of Akram Ben Ramadan that was
 23 giving the name of Ahmed Taghdi to the media, and we're
 24 aware of a man that gave an interview to the
 25 BBC Panorama --

61

1 A. I understand. I don't see the programme on BBC, sorry.
 2 Q. Thank you.
 3 Did Ahmed Taghdi give you further information at
 4 that time about things he did know about Salman Abedi?
 5 A. No.
 6 Q. Did he tell you anything about his involvement in
 7 purchasing a Nissan car with Salman Abedi on
 8 13 April 2017 before he went to Libya?
 9 A. No.
 10 Q. Did he tell you anything about knowing where the Nissan
 11 car was stored at Devell House?
 12 A. We did not have any conversation about any other cars or
 13 any connections with Salman Abedi, no.
 14 Q. I just want to complete it, because I'm going to ask you
 15 about a telephone that you took possession of for
 16 a while, so I want to also ask you: did Ahmed Taghdi
 17 tell you anything about telephone calls that he'd made
 18 to Salman Abedi whilst he had been back home in Libya
 19 between April and May 2017?
 20 A. No.
 21 Q. Did Ahmed Taghdi tell you anything about the fact that
 22 he had been to visit the Nissan car on 23 May 2017 at
 23 Devell House?
 24 A. No.
 25 Q. So he gave you none of that information?

62

1 A. No. I just know it (inaudible).
 2 Q. Can I ask you, was there any conversation at that time
 3 with Ahmed Taghdi about whether he should be contacting
 4 the police?
 5 A. Seriously, no, there was nothing to do with -- I don't
 6 have any knowledge of any communications or any
 7 connections between Ahmed Taghdi and Salman.
 8 Q. Mr Balaam, we would hope that your evidence would come
 9 after Mr Taghdi's, but that's not been possible. But
 10 one of the things that Ahmed Taghdi's witness statement
 11 tells us about is he indicates that:
 12 "I did not contact the police after the bombing to
 13 tell them what I knew about Salman Abedi as I was
 14 advised not to by [you]."
 15 A. No, seriously, no.
 16 Q. So you say that would be inaccurate?
 17 A. Of course, yes. Can you repeat that, please?
 18 Q. Within a witness statement, it is indicated -- and
 19 we have not heard the live evidence yet of Mr Taghdi --
 20 that he did not contact the police after the bombing to
 21 tell them what he knew about Salman Abedi because he was
 22 advised not to by you.
 23 A. No.
 24 Q. Could I ask you then about the mobile phone when you
 25 were having the discussion. How is it that you came to

63

1 take possession of Mr Taghdi's iPhone 7, please?
 2 A. That same day when we had the conversations, I really
 3 was trying my best to keep him studying and doing his
 4 work, so I said, how the media contact you, I tried to
 5 make him avoid contacting the media. I said, "How are
 6 they contacting you? Is it by coming to your home or is
 7 it by the phone?" I said to him, "Give me the phone and
 8 go and buy another phone and at this time of the year go
 9 and focus on your study and don't waste the time of
 10 finishing your tasks", and I take the phone him off,
 11 switch it off, and put it in my bag.
 12 Q. Again, just for completeness, had Mr Ahmed Taghdi told
 13 you anything that one of the last conversations he'd had
 14 with Salman Abedi whilst Mr Abedi was in Libya was to
 15 delete his number and all the old chat that had passed
 16 between Salman Abedi and Ahmed Taghdi? Did he give you
 17 any of that information?
 18 A. Ahmed never indicated any connections between him and
 19 Salman, as far as I am aware there is no real friendship
 20 or any kind of communication between both of them.
 21 That's what is my knowledge. I'm surprised to hear what
 22 you're telling me now.
 23 Q. I think you tell us, and we are aware, that on
 24 28 May 2017, Ahmed Taghdi was arrested and was in police
 25 custody.

64

1 On 28 May 2017, Ahmed Taghdi at that stage had been
 2 arrested?
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. And just by way of chronology, I think the police don't
 5 in fact then recover the Nissan vehicle until
 6 2 June 2017, but I think you then become aware again of
 7 the police because they had come to search the premises
 8 where you were a manager over the 8th and 9 June 2017;
 9 is that correct?
 10 A. The search part is correct, but it's quite a long
 11 sentence. Can you repeat it, please?
 12 Q. Of course. Whilst Mr Taghdi was in police custody, the
 13 counter-terrorist police came and searched the premises
 14 that you were the manager; yes?
 15 A. Yes, I dealt with this search, yes, I opened the doors
 16 to them.
 17 Q. When the counter-terrorist police came to do the search
 18 it was linked to the fact that Mr Taghdi was in police
 19 custody, wasn't it?
 20 A. I believe so yes.
 21 Q. Can I ask you why you didn't during that police search
 22 indicate that you had knowledge and possession of one of
 23 Mr Ahmed Taghdi's mobile phones?
 24 A. I don't know if the phone was with me at that time or
 25 not because I returned the phone to the families once

65

1 Ahmed was arrested. I'm not sure what date was, the
 2 return of the phone.
 3 The day the police came and searched the premises,
 4 they closed our business for 2 days. I had to do lots
 5 of work to make sure that our deliveries changed date
 6 and everything. So I was really busy dealing with the
 7 close of the 2 days. It's a very busy place and I was
 8 not -- I didn't pay any attention. I was dealing with
 9 the ...
 10 Q. Just to complete your involvement, in fact it was the
 11 police that then specifically came to you on 10 June,
 12 asking you for the telephone, and it was only at that
 13 stage that you provided the information as to where the
 14 phone was and then sought for that to be provided to the
 15 police?
 16 A. When they ask me a question I answer. So it was, yes,
 17 the answer to their question, where is the phone, I said
 18 the phone is with Taghdi's family. They asked me to
 19 call them and confirm that. I called them and they said
 20 yes with me and I went to the police and we collect the
 21 phone and we give it to them.
 22 MS CARTWRIGHT: Thank you.
 23 Mr Balaam, that completes my questions, but there
 24 are some other questions for you. The indication
 25 is that the questions for the families will be taken by

66

1 Mr Di Francesco.
 2 Questions from MR DI FRANCESCO
 3 MR DI FRANCESCO: Mr Balaam, in answers to the questions
 4 that you have just been asked, you said that you would
 5 advise Ahmed in the same way you would advise anyone
 6 else.
 7 A. Yes, I believe so.
 8 Q. But it's right, isn't it, that there was a particularly
 9 close relationship between the two of you?
 10 A. Of course.
 11 Q. He worked for you?
 12 A. Mm-hm.
 13 Q. You had bought him a car in order for him to advance his
 14 studies?
 15 A. What was that, sorry?
 16 Q. You had bought him a car so he would continue with his
 17 studies?
 18 A. Yes.
 19 Q. You had a close relationship with his and his family
 20 since he was 5 years old, you tried to guide him and
 21 encourage him to live a good life.
 22 When he came to you on the 26th and said he was
 23 being contacted by the media about his friendship with
 24 Salman Abedi, did you ask him whether he was involved in
 25 events surrounding 22 May 2017?

67

1 A. I don't recall asking him -- and this question for me,
 2 it never came in my mind that he was involved. I'm
 3 really shocked that he's in contact with him, so
 4 I didn't ask the question. I don't remember asking him
 5 this question directly like.
 6 Q. You told the police that Ahmed had said to you that the
 7 media were getting in touch because Salman was his
 8 friend.
 9 A. Because he knows Salman, not his friend. He didn't say
 10 it ...
 11 Q. He and Salman had been friends for a very long time.
 12 A. The Libyan community, all these children grow together.
 13 I don't see Ahmed's relationship as a special with --
 14 I didn't know all this now, I know it now, but back then
 15 it was in my mind that all of them, they grow together
 16 and they all grow up together and they know each other.
 17 It doesn't matter I didn't know who's deep and who's not
 18 deep.
 19 Q. You said in answers to previous questions that obviously
 20 the 22 May had had a big impact on the community.
 21 A. Yes, it did.
 22 Q. There must have been significant concern that a member
 23 of the community had been involved in that attack.
 24 People were worried, weren't they?
 25 A. We were all surprised that this Salman was involved and

68

1 it never came in my mind that anyone... We were worried
 2 because of the action of the police, we were not worried
 3 about Salman... because the police action was -- people
 4 are worried about the people to -- because there had
 5 been doors broken and people coming out of their houses
 6 and so we were dealing with this mess and that's what we
 7 were -- the community was in a problem, not that we were
 8 worried we were involved or someone was involved.
 9 Q. But you didn't ask any questions of Ahmed?
 10 A. I don't remember asking him, no.
 11 Q. You mentioned during the course of your evidence about
 12 him and teenagers generally being involved in fighting
 13 and problems. Can you bit a bit more specific about the
 14 types of problems that you were concerned Ahmed was
 15 involved in?
 16 A. We live in Manchester M16, M20. Anyone above 15 years
 17 old in this environment, if you don't work very hard in
 18 an early stage, you would be worried about. So this is
 19 just some worries. It's a teenager, not something in
 20 this scale. We never worry about it in this scale.
 21 Q. Did you know any of the friends and acquaintances, the
 22 people who Ahmed was spending time with during this
 23 period?
 24 A. Personally, even my son is 16 years old and I don't
 25 know. I try my best but you don't know their phones and

69

1 everything. Now when I take the phone, I never open it
 2 and I never take his password of it. There is
 3 (inaudible) but I don't know any of his friends or who
 4 he hangs out with.
 5 Q. You told the chairman that you had attended and were
 6 attending the Didsbury Mosque.
 7 A. I go to mosque, yes.
 8 Q. And that you knew Ramadan Abedi but only as
 9 a consequence of him being the father of Ismail?
 10 A. As a name, not as I know him because he's the father of
 11 Ismail, no. As a name.
 12 Because again, Arabic, we use a nickname kind of.
 13 So instead of saying, what was his name, Ramadan, they
 14 would say Abu Ismail, which is the father of Ismail.
 15 That's the name. Not just to know him because of his
 16 son, no.
 17 Q. Had you ever spoken directly to him?
 18 A. Yes, on lots of occasions, yes.
 19 Q. Had you ever spoken directly to his son, Ismail?
 20 A. Yes. I mean, I'm not sure if I spoke with all of them
 21 perhaps because we see them in the mosque, or on the
 22 Eid, or the Friday prayers. Those times you see them.
 23 Q. Spoken directly to Salman Abedi?
 24 A. I wouldn't say no/yes because perhaps maybe I meet him
 25 at the mosque, say "Hello", and not speaking as

70

1 I speak -- say, "Hello, how are you?" and you just go.
 2 If there were, I don't recall it. I wouldn't say -- If
 3 I didn't swear on the Koran I would say no, but I swear,
 4 so I will say I don't know exactly if I spoke with him
 5 or not. But if I spoke with him it will be, "Hello, how
 6 are you?" and that's it.
 7 Q. We know now that there were people who were going to the
 8 Didsbury Mosque who had extreme views.
 9 A. Yes, we have seen, yes.
 10 Q. Did you have any experience in your interactions and
 11 conversations of people with extreme views?
 12 A. No, no. I don't make conversation in the mosque, I go
 13 pray and then I go home. If people on the way in and
 14 out say hello -- I don't stay, I don't have time to
 15 stay.
 16 Q. Did you know of individuals attending the
 17 Didsbury Mosque who were veterans of conflict in Libya,
 18 who had fought in Libya and come back to the UK?
 19 A. Can you ask again, please? I don't understand.
 20 Q. The people that you were interacting with --
 21 A. What "interacting" mean, please?
 22 Q. Just talking to at the Didsbury Mosque and in the
 23 community more generally. You have told us that there
 24 was no particular exposure to extremism, that you didn't
 25 hear anything in relation to extremist views. Did you

71

1 hear anything about the conflict in Libya?
 2 A. I go to the mosque once every 6, 8 months minimum, like.
 3 I don't go to the mosque regularly, and if I go, I will
 4 go to Friday prayers, which is normally busy prayers.
 5 Since the corona, all this year I didn't go to the
 6 mosque at all, so this is, like, now 12 months I haven't
 7 been to the mosque for example.
 8 If I go (inaudible) my next visit, hopefully, if
 9 there's no Corona, when I go, I wouldn't -- because the
 10 people, I don't know them, even I don't like shaking
 11 hands, so I just pray and get in my car and go home,
 12 I don't do what you are asking me. I don't have
 13 conversations with people who are there because many
 14 nationalities, many colours, and many -- you don't know
 15 them.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think we get the picture.
 17 A. Because it's just the questions...
 18 MR DI FRANCESCO: I was leaving you to complete your answer
 19 and I have no more questions for you, Mr Balaam.
 20 Thank you very much.
 21 MS CARTWRIGHT: I don't understand that any other
 22 representatives have questions for Mr Balaam. Sir, do
 23 you?
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No.
 25 Thank you very much indeed for coming, Mr Balaam.

72

1 You're free to go.
 2 MS CARTWRIGHT: Could I ask whilst Mr Balaam leaves the
 3 witness box, could we go to the holding screen?
 4 Mr Greaney is going to address you, sir.
 5 (Pause)
 6 MR GREANEY: Sir, to say that I'm going to address you is
 7 probably to overstate the position. I was simply going
 8 to indicate that that is as far as we can take the
 9 evidence today and indeed is as far as we can take the
 10 evidence this year.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you, Mr Greaney.
 12 First of all, I would like to thank everyone for all
 13 the hard work that's gone on since September in keeping
 14 this inquiry going in the way it has. We've worked very
 15 long hours and that's not just here, it's working in
 16 preparation for the hearings, so I'm grateful for that.
 17 We've had to listen to some very difficult evidence
 18 since the inquiry started at the beginning of September
 19 it has been difficult for us, it has been incomparably
 20 more difficult for the bereaved families and the
 21 survivors. The Christmas period will, I hope, give them
 22 some respite from the ordeal that they are going
 23 through.
 24 All of us who have heard the tragic stories that
 25 we have heard have been convinced of, if we needed

73

1 convincing of, the need for everyone to do everything
 2 they properly can to remove or minimise the threat from
 3 terrorism.
 4 Thank you to all of you who have sent me and the
 5 rest of the team Christmas greetings. Thank you for
 6 that. I wish you all a healthy, peaceful and restful
 7 Christmas. Thank you.
 8 MR GREANEY: Thank you, sir.
 9 (12.30 pm)
 10 (The inquiry adjourned until Monday, 11 January 2021)
 11
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25

74

1 I N D E X
 2
 3 Application re MR TAGHDI2
 4 Submissions by MR WRIGHT2
 5 Submissions by MR GREANEY6
 6 Submissions by MR COOPER10
 7 Submissions by MR ATKINSON13
 8 Submissions by MR WEATHERBY16
 9 Reply by MR WRIGHT18
 10
 11 Application re REPORTING20
 12 RESTRICTIONS
 13 Submissions by THE PRESS20
 14 Submissions by MR GREANEY22
 15 Submissions by MR WRIGHT23
 16 Further submissions by THE PRESS24
 17
 18 Application re RULE 10 TIMETABLING27
 19 Submissions by MR GREANEY27
 20 Submissions by MR HORWELL29
 21 Submissions by MR WEATHERBY31
 22 Submissions by MR COOPER33
 23 Submissions by MR ATKINSON34
 24 Submissions by MR WELCH34
 25

75

1 Discussion re TIMETABLING35
 2
 3 Witness statement of RELATIVE C46
 4 (read) (summarised)
 5
 6 Witness statement of TRIAL WITNESS 350
 7 (summarised)
 8
 9 Witness statement TRIAL WITNESS 451
 10 (read) (summarised)
 11
 12 MR KHALID BALAAM (sworn)54
 13 Questions from MS CARTWRIGHT54
 14 Questions from MR DI FRANCESCO67
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25

76

77