

RESTRICTED (when complete)

MG 11(T)

WITNESS STATEMENT

CJ Act 1967, s.9; MC Act 1980, ss.5A(3)(a) and 5B; Criminal Procedure Rules 2005, Rule 27.1

Statement of **(Wayne) Aaron CLARKE** URN:

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Age if under 18 **Over 18**..... (if over 18 insert 'over 18') Occupation: **Police Inspector**.....

This statement (consisting of **7**..... pages 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 anything in it which I know to be false, or do not believe to be true.

Signature: Date: **11 November 2015**.....

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

This statement refers to a critical incident at the Coronet Nightclub following a GBH by stabbing.

I am the above named Inspector with the Metropolitan Police Service and am currently posted as the Duty Officer for Southwark Borough Police. I am responsible for the day to day management of Emergency Response Team B (50 Constables and 5 Sergeants), and my role involves the operational running of the Borough's policing response, assessment and risk management of calls for police service during my tour of duty, as well as the resourcing and managing of police incidents. I am a senior officer within the Borough and in my capacity as Duty Officer, during evenings, nights and across the weekend, I am the senior police officer on duty on Southwark Borough. I have been based in Southwark Borough since April 2015, previously posted to Hackney and Camden boroughs. I have served in the Metropolitan Police Service for 9 years.

On SATURDAY 7th NOVEMBER 2015 at 22:00 hours, I assumed command and responsibility as Duty Officer, callsign MD1 Nights until 07:00 the following morning. My resources for that period were four (4) uniformed Sergeants and thirty-three (33) uniformed constables, four (4) plain clothes constables, one (1) Detective Sergeant and three (3) detectives, to cover the entire Borough of Southwark. The Borough were dealing with a High-risk Missing Person and were monitoring two (2) potential sites for unlicensed music events, which required close scrutiny given the disorder in Lambeth Borough the previous weekend. There were also numerous small bonfire night events. Notwithstanding the resource-intensity of the incident I will shortly outline, our normal call to service from members of the public during the above tour of duty was 33x immediate-grade calls and 34x priority graded "soon" calls. It was a busy shift, to the extent that extraordinarily, to my knowledge at least 10 units (20 constables) were unable to return to the station for a meal break, and I am aware of several other units, including myself, having to curtail their meal breaks and leave food to respond to incidents - this is not normal practice and can be termed an exigency of duty.

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Continuation of Statement of (Wayne) Aaron CLARKE

At 02:30 hours on SUNDAY 8th NOVEMBER 2015, several calls were received summoning police to the CORONET CLUB, 28 NEW KENT ROAD, SE1 (CAD 1377/8NOV 15 refers). I am aware of the Coronet Club and have attended incidents there previously in relation to acts of violence and disorder involving persons who are or have been patrons at the venue prior to or during the incidents I have attended. I had previously engaged with the head doorman of the venue only a couple of weeks previously in relation to a costumed event being held. On this occasion, there were reports of a male stabbed and of approximately 15 males fighting inside the venue. Other officers were dealing with another incident in an adjacent street involving persons who had only recently left the club. Several officers were despatched to the scene, including two uniformed supervisors, Sergeant's RANDALL 24MD and McANDREW 49MD. I monitored the radio channel, because further information started to emerge that firearms may have been present in the club, and this changes the tactics available to deal with such incidents. It became apparent that my attendance at the location would be necessary given the extent of the information and the number of persons at the venue.

I arrived at the venue at approximately 03:00 hours. At this time, I observed approximately 50-80 persons waiting outside the venue in groups, and a queue of approximately 150 people waiting to enter the club. I would describe the queue as largely good-natured but there was some atmosphere with the groups standing outside; it is difficult to describe but it is a sense of aggravation and disquiet arising from the body language, tone and nature of those standing around. As I started to get briefed by PS RANDALL 24MD and the head doorman, I observed several males emerge from the direction of the queue, fighting and one was swinging a large glass bottle at another - I could see a male covered in blood from an apparent head wound. I was aware that only a few Southwark police units were available and in attendance, and had already requested the support of additional officers from surrounding boroughs. At that moment, I felt we had insufficient officers to deal with the crime scene inside the club, the disorderly conduct outside the club, and the possibility of further suspects and disorder inside the club. I was briefed that a firearm had been seen inside the club by the head doorman; that disorder had occurred subsequently including tables and fire extinguishers being thrown; it could not be made clear who the suspects were, or whether or not they remained in the venue. The incident was clearly not contained nor in control. During the briefing, I was informed there were further fights and disorder inside the club. I did not authorise entry of my officers into the club because there were simply too few officers to enter the venue at that time in a manner which would be either effective or safe. I was assured that the fire exits were closed, staffed by door staff, and the only exit was through the front door. There were approximately 2000 people remaining in the venue.

I held a discussion around options. I considered 1) allowing the status quo with venue staff dealing with incidents

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as appropriate; 2) to use Licensing Act powers to compel the club to close, which may result in serious disorder for which I was currently insufficiently resourced; 3) to assist the club in voluntarily closing in a systematic and controlled manner, thus enabling the identifying of possible suspects and preventing further serious acts of violence. I decided that it would be both impracticable and inflammatory to search persons upon exit, and would more likely result in discarded contraband rather than identification of offenders. At 03:15 hours, I agreed that the club would turn away those in the queue and police would help disperse those crowds, before the club would switch off music and ask patrons to leave. An officer would overtly film to gather evidence of disorder and assist in identifying suspects of the original offence. This plan was put into action, but before the initial crowds had been dispersed, at 03:30 hours, I became aware that the music had been turned off and people were starting to leave the venue. I was still awaiting additional resources from other boroughs - London Boroughs of Kingston, Sutton and Lambeth all provided additional resources, as well as traffic officers and dog section in attendance.

At approximately 03:50 hours, I became aware of crowd pressure issues inside the club, apparently due to the large number of people queuing for cloakrooms which was restricting the exit. The front side fire exit had already been opened up to alleviate congestion but an officer inside the club reported this was not effective and was not assisting those towards the rear of the club. At this time, I was hoping the venue had suitable contingency arrangements and appropriate intervention from venue staff would manage this. I continued to monitor, and at one stage, entered the club with PS LUNN 34MD and two other uniformed officers, but the crowd was too densely packed for us to make any progress, and our presence was agitating people. What I could observe was cramming at the cloakrooms, who were unable to handle the situation in any sort of orderly fashion, resulting in people pushing and grabbing. I was concerned that the crowd would spill past the table, which was placed across the cloakroom entrance, and the pressure would force patrons inside with nowhere for them to go. I pushed my way back outside to gather some officers and ordered them into the cloakroom area with the intention of forming a public order "bubble" around the cloakroom, in order to force the closure of the cloakroom thus enabling patrons to be encouraged outside in the first instance. Whilst outside, I was informed there were further scuffles in ELEPHANT ROAD SE1, but I did not have sufficient resources to deal with that at that specific moment. I made the decision for police intervention within the club because I had a genuinely held belief that I was about to preside over an incident resulting in crushing injuries of patrons inside the club, and in the belief that venue staff were neither in control of the situation nor acting with any immediacy or urgency. In short, I believed the situation was deteriorating and would result in death or serious injury if police did not intervene. To give context, at the same time as I was making out this decision and rationale, and gathering officers to make the intervention, I could also observe door staff chatting with patrons in a casual manner at the main entrance, giving rise to my belief that communication amongst the venue staff could not be sufficient for the scale of circumstance to be understood by all staff.

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With PS McANDREW and about 6 other officers, I re-entered the club at around 04:00 hours and we pushed through the crowd in section five until we reached the cloakroom. There was no queuing system, people were just gathered around the table and those at the front were being squashed against the table by those behind them. There were metal railings in the middle of the aisle, which were also becoming a point upon which people were being squashed against. One of my officers pushed the table into the cloakroom and we formed an absolute cordon across the entrance. I told the cloakroom staff to stop serving, but this was not immediately acted upon and a couple of staff were still taking tickets over us, or trying to hand out coats. The staff in the cloakroom seemed unaware of the situation outside the cloakroom and did not appear to be in communication with other staff within the venue. I would describe it as chaotic and confused. I told PS McANDREW that I needed to be outside to coordinate matters, and asked him to take primacy at the cloakroom as per the hot brief we had undertaken immediately before entering the venue. I pushed my way back outside - between the cloakroom and the exit, I did not encounter any venue staff.

Once outside, at 04:07 hours, I declared the incident a critical incident. A critical incident is one where the effectiveness of the policing response could adversely affect a victim, their families, or the community. I decided the police must now take primacy for the response to this situation, and I approached a doorman at the foyer entrance. The contrast was stark - there were 3 or 4 venue staff manning the main entrance and foyer area, with around 10-12 patrols standing around chatting. There appeared to be no urgency or sense of what was happening less than 10 metres away in the cloakroom area. I told the doorman we had closed the cloakroom, that patrons would need to leave and queue outside where there was ample space, and we discussed queuing options. The doorman tried to communicate via radio with the head doorman, but he could not hear properly because of background noise wherever he was. I told the doorman to work something out, that people needed to leave first and the venue would need to establish how people were to retrieve their coats. I then went back outside and ordered a road closure for eastbound traffic to reduce the risk of collision as the pavements started to swell with people. I could not close westbound traffic because there would be no diversion available, it would require resources to manage the traffic, and it would reduce capacity of public transport which was inevitably starting to take some of the members of public away from the scene. Despite the closure of the cloakroom, people were still not leaving the club promptly or orderly. There was an increasing crowd at the front fire exit, which in itself was starting to prevent effective egress. I could not see any venue staff seeking to control patrons at this location. Amongst the crowds of people, I can smell cannabis and see people openly smoking joints. At least some of those concerned had emerged from the club. In comparison, open drug use at this time was too trivial to enable intervention.

As further serials of officers arrived, I sent some officers to ELEPHANT ROAD to assist with minor disorder that I was told was occurring. At 04:23 hours, I was asked to provide officers to assist in ejecting people and

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encouraging their exit. At 04:29 hours, I was updated that venue security were now forming a link to draw the last of the personnel outside. At around 04:38, I went to the front fire exit and could see this area was now far less congested. I took the decision to cancel any further off borough units who had not yet arrived. I was also made aware that the rear fire exit had been opened in order to alleviate congestion.

At this point, I met with my Detective Sergeant, MD5N, to obtain an assessment and brief of the initial incident to which we had been called. I entered the venue and he showed me the likely location of the fight and an apparent scene which had been established. He showed me the toilet to which the victim had been taken. We discussed investigative strategies and options around scene preservation. Whilst in the venue, as many of the patrons had now dispersed, I got the first sense of the venue, and notably, could see the metal canisters of nitrous oxide, commonly referred to as 'hippy crack', lying on the floor throughout the venue. I would estimate I observed well in excess of 100 canisters. I was surprised by this given the knife arch and search regime in play at the venue entrance. That a knife, a firearm, and all of these canisters could have been secreted into the club was of serious concern. It also accounted for some of the behaviour of some patrons, who seemed very drunk but were not under the influence of alcohol.

Upon conclusion, I went outside the venue again to continue my overview. Myself and PS RANDALL walked around the edges of the site and satisfied ourselves of the current position. By this point, people were starting to dissipate and I would describe it as a normal Saturday night at kick-out time - the pavements were busy, people were seeking taxis and waiting for buses, there was no major disorder. At 04:52 hours, I fully re-opened the road and by around 05:00 hours, I had started to release off-borough units to return back to their own stations with thanks. At 05:07 hours, I reverted the police radio channels back to a single despatch channel, and soon after I returned to the police station. The crime scene remained open with a couple of officers.

On SUNDAY 8th NOVEMBER 2015, myself and my team re-commenced duty at 22:00 hours. Immediately after briefing and parade, this being the first practicable opportunity to do so, I held a debrief with the Southwark officers who were on duty and in attendance earlier that morning. From that debrief, which was noted in the Incident Management Log, a number of concerns were raised, some of which I already shared. The main themes of these concerns were poor communication at the venue; ineffective searching regimes; the inappropriate behaviour of venue staff towards patrons, in respect of professionalism and over-friendliness; a lack of coordinated planning by the venue for such evacuations; the open use of drugs and nitrous oxide by patrons.

There was no Public Announcement when the music had been switched off which created immediate confusion with guests as to what they should do - this led to the surge on the cloakroom. The action of switching off the music to indicate guests should leave was not coordinated with police, and led to confusion from patrons, venue

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staff and police. Not all venue staff had suitable communication (i.e. radios) so, whilst the police were able to effectively communicate with each other, venue staff were not able to act coherently as a team and parts of the venue team were isolated from the issues engulfing the club. The head doorman became involved to the extent there was no direct link with police to coordinate the response. Whilst venue staff were helpful and accommodating of requests, component parts of the team did not act in unison or with the same purpose. This, to me, indicates a lack of training or a lack of understanding of relevant procedures.

Whilst the venue has metal detectors and search wands, staff stated they do not use them on everyone. Staff stated that the alarm goes off for everyone, as they are all wearing some sort of metal, and they only wand people they have concerns around. This approach is not systematic, and the front of the club is so busy that although there is an attempt at a sterile area, it is possible that door staff are distracted enabling persons who have completed the search regime to take items from people outside the barrier. Of specific concern, friends of the victim of GBH were seen in possession of a knife; another male was seen in possession of a firearm; a not-insignificant amount of nitrous oxide was brought inside the venue; and people who had vacated the venue were, almost immediately, consuming cannabis, leading me to believe they had been in possession of it inside the club. This is purely the examples of possession we are aware of on this single occasion.

Officers stated they had observed door staff holding casual conversations with friends who were patrons of the venue. Whilst this does not breach any legislation, it does draw concern as to the impartiality of the venue staff in dealing appropriately with who they search and what they find. As earlier stated, the search regime in place is clearly not an effective one, and I view this personal approach as a probable contributory factor.

A venue with a capacity of 2,400 people should have appropriate procedures in place for a variety of circumstances. The need to evacuate a venue can be foreseen, yet the staff response was not well-coordinated. Section 7 of the Health & Safety At Work Act 1974 provides specific legislation relating to the duty of every employee to take reasonable care of all other persons through acts or omissions. A lack of training or understanding of emergency procedures, and an inability to communicate with other venue staff in other parts of the building, would seem to be a breach of this general duty. In this instance, crowd pressures and the failure to foresee this risk or act upon it could have resulted in serious injury or worse. There was no obvious RVP or place for people to go, which caused me to have to close the road. The venue had no plans in place for people to recover their property, which should be an obvious concern in the pre-planning of an effective evacuation procedure. This point alone makes clear to me that some venue staff were unaware of any such procedures and their role within that.

The open use of some drugs and the obvious use of nitrous oxide, mixed with persons who are drunk, was deemed by my officers to be a contributory factor in the unwillingness of some patrons to act upon instructions once police intervened to secure public safety. I have already made clear the concerns relating to search regimes. Finally, the officers who arrived first on scene to the initial GBH stabbing, stated their concerns that the scene

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management had not been effective - insufficient venue staff responded to enable securing of the scene - and the removal of the victim to the waiting ambulance was hindered by a perceived lack of venue staff to manage the crowd that had gathered, placing the officers, ambulance crew and victim at risk of a volatile group. Further, that the fight had escalated to the throwing of items and there were insufficient staff available to make suitable intervention. No suspects were detained or identified from this incident.

In my various dealings with the Coronet Nightclub, whilst I have found the venue staff I have encountered to be personable and willing and eager to help, I do have serious concerns around the management of the safety of those attending as guests and the processes they have in place to deal with foreseeable risk; the seriousness with which the venue approaches the need to prevent contraband and weapons from entering the club at the outset; and the response and ability to deal with acts of violence that occur therein. In my view, at the current time and with the venue's current structures and processes in place, there remains a serious risk to public safety if the venue remains open, and we were lucky on this occasion to have been able to rely on the prompt mobilisation of police officers from across South West London, abstracted from their own duties and obligations, to assist in intervening successfully to prevent further injury or disorder.

I tender this statement into evidence.

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