

fack families against corporate killers

Steven Allen 23 years old, killed on 9th March 2007 in Bradford

This is as best as I can recall events from Friday 9th March, 2007. I received a phone call at approx 4.10pm on this day, from Mr. Paul Bentley, Informing me that my son Steven had been involved in an accident at work and had been taken to Bradford royal infirmary, Mr Bentley said he would be sending a car for me, this came at approx 4.50pm, I went along with my younger son Mark to BRI, to the accident and emergency dept on the way Mr Bentley told us that it involved lifting equipment and Steven's head had been trapped Mr Bentley seemed very shaken but kept saying Steven was breathing when he left the site, at this point I was worried, but did not say anything to my younger son.

When we got there we were shown to a waiting room, shortly afterwards we were allowed to see Steven, the specialist said he had not seen any body survive this kind of injury but were sending Steven for a brain scan and should there be any chance of recovery we may have to go to Leeds general infirmary, Steven had been sedated and was on a life support machine.

The results came back and there wasn't any thing they could do for Steven, he was going to die from his injuries. At this point I rang my partner and asked him to bring my mum and my 2 younger children, I rang his friends and my family and asked them to inform every one who needed to know.

Mr Bentley was present during all this, and just sat with his head in his hands, there was also a site manager, but he wasn't on site when Steven was injured, two police officers briefly came in and then left.

When Stevens girlfriend and her mum arrived we again went to see Steven, a priest was called and blessed Steven then we went up to intensive care together. We stayed with Steven all night, then next morning I along with my mum, witnessed the brain stem tests, I didn't realise that Steven was officially dead as no one said, I then asked about organ donation, and arrangements were made for transplant coordinator to come from Hull.

All day as the night before, Stevens friends were arriving to say there last goodbyes, also Paul Bentley was there as was the foreman from the previous day.

Steven went to theatre at about 8.30pm on Sat 10th March we all took him down and then went home, the silence was awful.

On Monday 12th March Mr Bentley senior came along with his son Paul to see us at home, he had flown in from South Africa, he brought us a sympathy card. I remember he kept asking if we needed any help I took it to mean financial, I refused it did not seem right.

I made funeral arrangements with local firm and was inundated with people calling out of sympathy.

Mr Bentley was able to give us more information about the incident, he informed us that it was a Probst scissor grab and that DA had been using the 360 machine with grab attachment to lift a pallet with several bags of cement on. The bags had fallen and tipped the pallet becoming wedged in the gripping arms. Steven had pulled the pallet out and the grips had closed on his head. At this point I had not heard from Health and Safety Executive or the police. I have yet to hear from Police.

At this time things were all over the place I have 3 younger children ,and I had to look after them, I remember getting a pack from health and safety with a contact number.

Before the funeral I contacted, the site foreman who wanted to come and see me along with my sons other work colleagues, including the operator of the 360, when they came they were reluctant to say anything.

They brought me Steven's bucket of tools, his fleece, things that were left on site. When they sat in my living room, I asked them about when they were working with Steven, as he often talked about them, I got no response. I then asked them about the incident, Stephen Kelly spoke for them all, his reply was that Steven wouldn't have felt anything it was very quick he didn't see it coming, but that they had all made statements for the health and safety. It wasn't what I was expecting but it was very final. Shortly after this they left, they must have been at my house for over an hour but didn't really want to be there I felt very let down.

The only person who had anything to say was M, who I now know to be the first aider on site that day. I have spoken to him recently and I was glad that he tried to comfort Steven that day even though it was traumatic. He has agreed to come and see me this week but we shall see as I feel Mr Bentley will not allow it.

Since this I have spoken to HSE, they came out to see me and my family at home, I asked one of Stevens friends to be there as he works in the building trade and felt it would be helpful in understanding terms used. We were shown a set of photos which had been taken on Monday 12th March by the HSE. They were various views of the site including one of where Steven was found which was marked by an X, on that same photo there was a pallet of bags of cement neatly stacked and wrapped.

The Investigating inspector from HSE said that she had statements from M, the first aider, D.A. the 360 operator who was in control of the scissor grab, the apprentice and also the site foreman. The site manager was not there that afternoon.

Questions we asked were:

Why did they not use a fork attachment to lift the pallet as the grab was not designed to do so?

Also why did they not use the nets which had been provided with the grab to catch loose materials ?

The HSE Investigation Inspector explained that there was a chain on the grab that was broken. This was a restrictor chain but was unsure of its purpose, she also explained that this piece of equipment was on hire to Bentleys and had been replaced on Tuesday 6th March by the hire company as when they had come out to check the grab, it was

found to be faulty, the chain was broken and the rubber grips were worn. The foreman signed this on site and the old one off, but did not question the importance of the chain.

Whilst the grab was being moved on the 360 arm to where it would be used on site the ground was rough and enough care was not taken to ensure the grips did not bang about on Tuesday when this happened the chain broke. This is mentioned in one of the statements but because no one knew what this chain was for, no one did anything about it .

The restrictor chain stopped the grips closing by approx 12-14 inches, to me this could have saved Stevens life, he may have been injured but not killed.

The HSE also explained that the police attended the site on Friday and took photos they were darker but are the only ones to show the site as it was as on the Monday when HSE went in things had been moved the photos were different , even though the site was classed as a crime scene it is hoped this is part of the investigation also , I have yet to see the police photos.

The piece of equipment known as a scissor grab is made by PROBST it is called a SG 80, it was easy to download and was specific about its use. It was not designed to lift wooden palletted goods, it was not designed to lift uneven loads, it is not to be used in the immediate vicinity at head height. It is designed to move packs of blocks at floor level or packs of slabs. All these actions are shown to cause risk of death if not adhered to, it clearly states that this machinery should only be operated by suitably qualified people and that they should have read the manual that is produced for this piece of equipment before use.

Recently I spoke to the HSE inspector on Friday the 4th May. I asked her what percentage of these scissor grabs come back faulty after they have been on hire the answer she gave me was 35 out of 100. I thought this was quite high and so did she. I thought looking more closely at the manufacturer would be a good idea , but she said to me that there was to be no criminal prosecution brought against anyone from the evidence she had.

Also this day Mr Bentley rang and asked how I was doing. He had been looking into the possibility of me reading the statements made by his staff who were on site that day but when he got back to me after talking to his solicitors they had told him he could show me 2 statements but could not leave them with me or have him make copies. I just wanted to know how Steven ended up where he did that day, what he did from leaving here. I have not contacted him since he has left it to me although he is very keen to provide some sort of memorial to Steven. One time when he rang me he started the conversation off by asking about me , but it then ended by him asking if I had heard from the HSE. I said if they wanted to talk to him I was sure they would ring him.

He volunteered some information about the lads on site how they were all going for counselling, originally he was going to bring them to see me, but they felt they couldn't do it , that's when he mentioned bringing the statements for me to read but his solicitor felt otherwise.

The operator was the only one who in statement to the HSE had said he had a clear view of every thing from his position in the cab of the 360 but no one took the photo from

there to show what he was saying was true. Every year Steven had to fill in a form about his health at work for Bentleys and there was a section to be completed about medication I presume all employees would do the same ?

There are lots of thoughts that come to mind, one that I didn't have was the image the HSE inspector gave me. In one of the statements it is said that Steven tried to pull the grips off his head so he was not unconscious as they made out. Steven was a very fit and healthy young man and was not instantly knocked out as they said. I cannot forgive their lies, his helmet was not brought to me when they brought his things, I was to learn it was wedged in the grips of the grab and the HSE have it.

When I downloaded the manual for the PROBST SG80, it clearly states its capabilities , and it was not designed to be used to lift pallets just solid, evenly balanced shapes, such as packs of blocks or paving slabs, **all other use is prohibited** it says so in the manual. I know that corners are cut on building sites, you read about it all the time ,but Steven was safety conscious. He had been involved in other accidents at Bentleys one in 2003 when he had to be taken to hospital at Liverpool.

Steven loved his job, he had never been out of work since leaving school , never claimed benefit was hardly ever off sick its just so unnecessary its all crap.

By Steven's mother Judith Allen



Two meetings with the HSE and Judith Allen's family and Steven's girlfriend have been held to try to ensure all our questions are answered.

The Inquest will be held at Bradford Coroners's Court on 2nd to 3rd February at Bradford Coroners Court, Magistrates Court, The Tyrls, Bradford BD1 1LA.

FACK will support the family by holding a vigil outside at 9am Monday 2nd February 2009.