

Boy, 9, crushed to death in front of family by electronic gates

Jason Keet was killed as he reached through a gap in the gates

The 'haphazard' design of a set of electronic gates led to a boy of nine to be horrifically crushed to death by them, a court heard today.

Jason Keet was killed in front of his horrified family as he reached through a gap in the wrought iron gates to push a button to let himself into his grandparents' flat.

His head became stuck in a 160mm wide gap between the hinge of the 6ft gates and the concrete pillar.

After pressing the button the gap contracted to 110mm and Jason's skull was crushed under one tonne of pressure.

His mother Samantha Whittle desperately tried to free him as her daughter Rhiannon, 12, watched on in horror.

Her son's lifeless body was eventually freed after four passersby wrenched the gate off its hinges.

But Jason had already suffered massive head injuries that triggered a fatal heart attack and he was pronounced dead at hospital 45 minutes later.

The horrific accident happened at a block of luxury flats in Branksome Park, Poole, Dorset, on April 13, 2006.

The companies responsible for the site have now appeared in court accused of breaching health and safety regulations.

The court heard how by law the gap in the gates should not have been more than 100mm - too small for a child's head to fit through.

Charles Parry, prosecuting, said: 'There was available knowledge which meant that the distance between the heel and the pillar should not have been more than 100mm.

'This is small enough to prevent young children, or even the limbs of adults, being pushed through.

'If the gap had been less, the boy would not have been able to fit through.



The block of flats where Jason's grandparents live and the gate at the front with flowers left in his memory

'What appears from the evidence is that there was a rather haphazard development of the design done on the hoof.

'It meant that the safety procedures were not followed and that left a risk and a position of danger.

'Health and safety in some quarters does not have a good name. But this case is not about health and safety. This is about safety.'

Bournemouth Crown Court heard Jason and his sister were visiting their grandparents at their 615,000 pounds flat at the time of the accident.

The children had previously reached through the gap to push the pedestrian button situated on the inside pillar as the intercom cost their grandparents 10p when used.

Mr Parry said: 'He (Jason) was leaning through the gap to reach the pedestrian button on the inside.

'It would appear that he was able to activate the gates and was still leaning through the gap when the gates began to open.

'As the gates began to move the gap contracted. That short distance is not enough for a child of nine. It was insufficient for his head and chest and he was crushed by the movement of the gates.'

Mr Parry said the law also stated the button should have been fitted at least 33 inches away from the gate or pillar - too far for anyone to reach through.

In addition, the court heard how of the ten separate safety buttons fitted in the control box for the gate, only a few were activated.

This meant that the movement sensor, designed to halt the gates when an object such as a car blocked their path, only worked when the gates were closing, it was alleged.

Mr Parry said: 'It would only stop the gates when they were closing, it would have no other effect at other times, including whilst they were opening.

'It appears that the efficacy was disabled. If the switch had been on and the beam had been broken, the gates would have stopped, but it was off.'

Pearlview Estates Ltd, which developed the flats, and Electric Gates Services Ltd, which installed the button, are charged with breaching the Health and Safety at Work act.

Directors for both companies are appearing in court to represent the firms.

Faulker Gates Ltd, the company which built and installed the gates, has already pleaded guilty to the same offence.

Jason lived with his mother and stepfather David Whittle in Bournemouth. He was a pupil at the Epiphany CofE Primary School in Muscliffe, Bournemouth.

His father, Bryan Keet, 40, runs his own internet company in Bournemouth.

A statement issued by the family said: 'Jason was a very special little boy. He is missed terribly by his family and friend. We will always cherish our memories of him.