



JUDICIARY OF  
ENGLAND AND WALES

**In the Oxford Crown Court**

**R**

**-v-**

**Ben Blakeley**

**Sentencing remarks of His Honour Judge Eccles Q.C.**

**25 July 2014**

1. Ben Blakeley, you have been convicted by the jury of the offence of murder. On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2013 you took Jayden Parkinson, a complicated but loving and vulnerable 17 year old girl, into open country near Upton and in the dark of an early winter's evening you murdered her by strangulation. There is only one sentence for this offence and it is life imprisonment. It is my duty however to specify under Schedule 21 to the Criminal Justice Act 2003 the minimum period you must spend in prison before being considered for parole and in doing so I have to identify those features which aggravate your crime and those which may, to a very small extent, mitigate it.
2. I also have to sentence you on Count 2 of the indictment for the offence of doing acts tending and intended to pervert the course of public justice. To this offence you have pleaded guilty on the basis that you buried the body of Jayden Parkinson in the graveyard at All Saints Church, Didcot to prevent the police from discovering her whereabouts.
3. First, I have to identify the starting point for assessing the appropriate minimum term. Given that no weapon was used and that there are no circumstances that would place this offence in the more serious categories referred to in Schedule 21 the statutory starting point is one of 15 years.

4. There are however in my judgment two matters which require a significant increase on that starting point. The first is the violent nature of your relationship with Jayden Parkinson, a vulnerable young person, and the second is your conduct after you had killed her, in particular the heartless and distressing way in which you disposed of and concealed her body. I bear in mind that the second matter is encompassed by Count 2 on the indictment for which a concurrent sentence of imprisonment must be imposed.
5. I am satisfied on the evidence given at your trial that you were both physically and emotionally abusive towards Jayden Parkinson. By your own candid admission you were unreasonably jealous during your relationship and unfairly suspected Jayden of being unfaithful when she was not. You dominated and controlled her every day life by demanding that she should have no contact with other young men; you removed her phone so she could not contact others, and when she was at the hostel at One Foot Forward you demanded that she stay in her room, even to the extent of forbidding her for a while from using the toilet, with the result that she had to urinate in milk bottles. There is evidence that satisfies me that there were occasions when you argued with Jayden when you assaulted her with slaps, punches, kicks, stamps and bites; and there were dangerous attacks upon Jayden Parkinson when you squeezed her neck with enough force to leave marks. In a fit of jealous pique, when you heard that she had been intimate with another young man you deliberately sought to humiliate her by threatening to upload private and explicit images of her onto the internet. Yet, like so many victims of domestic violence Jayden was infatuated with you, her violent abuser, and found it difficult to separate emotionally from you; she may not have been a perfect young woman but you deliberately and selfishly encouraged her emotional dependence on you by manipulating her feelings through fear and neediness.
6. At length in November 2013 Jayden Parkinson, with the help of the support staff at One Foot Forward, found the will-power to end her relationship with you and there is cogent evidence that she became much happier and more confident when she had

taken that decision and was looking forward to a new and better life. Unfortunately, she discovered that she was pregnant and that you were the father, but being a decent young woman she wished to inform you of that fact and to offer you the chance in due course of seeing your child. I am satisfied on all the evidence I have heard that she was in fact pregnant with your child but you utterly refused to believe her, and I am also satisfied that on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December Jayden Parkinson only went out to meet you, against the advice of staff at the hostel, in order to persuade you of the truth about her condition. You then bullied her emotionally into denying her own pregnancy and you manipulated her feelings so that she felt she had no choice but to go with you to Didcot and then into the fields where she met her end. At the time you were in my judgment consumed with anger, having found out that Jayden had been intimate with another young man after she had broken off her relationship with you.

7. There you strangled her to death in a jealous rage and in doing so gave no thought to the possibility that she might indeed have been carrying your child.
8. I make it clear now that although you have demonstrated a pattern of abusive violence in other relationships your sentence is not increased by the way you behaved towards your other girlfriends, because those offences are not before this court; but emotional and physical abuse of the order I have described towards Jayden Parkinson is in my judgment a significantly aggravating factor.
9. I turn now to the way you conducted yourself after killing Jayden Parkinson. To every reasonable enquiry by police officers and others about the disappearance of Jayden you responded with foul mouthed abuse in which you created a web of lies about where she might be, accompanied by obscene imprecations that you did not care where she was and that she meant nothing to you. It required a heart of stone to keep up that pretence, and a heart of stone as well to deal with her body in the way you did. I accept your evidence and that of your brother Jake that you first concealed her body in a ditch close to the place where she was killed. It is clear that you later decided to

move her body, and to a limited extent I accept that you began to have feelings of guilt about where you had buried her.

10. What, however, is shocking to all who have had anything to do with the police investigation and subsequent trial is the knowledge that in the early hours of the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> December 2013 you returned to that ditch and dug up Jayden Parkinson's body. You then crammed the mortal remains of poor Jayden into a suitcase and having prepared a false story to explain your actions persuaded an unwitting taxi driver to help you transport her body to All Saints Church in Didcot. There, with the assistance of your younger brother you had dug a grave for Jayden over the interred body of your uncle Alan, and before dawn of that day you tipped Jayden Parkinson into that grave, with her legs folded behind and tucked into her underwear, and covered her up. Though in your twisted mind you may possibly have thought that a graveyard was a better place for Jayden to be buried than a ditch in a field, there was no hint of respect or remorse in this hasty interment and I am convinced that your primary purpose was to prevent anyone else from ever knowing what had happened to Jayden Parkinson.

11. Jayden Parkinson's burial in this way is not only shocking for all who have listened to the evidence, but it was and always will be an intensely distressing memory for her family; her poor father passed away just before this trial and he must have been haunted before he died by the thought of what you had done to his daughter. I have read and heard the Victim Personal Statements written by Jayden's mother and sister and express my appreciation of the moving way in which their grief and pain has been described. In addition to the distress experienced by Jayden's family it should in my view not be overlooked that in concealing her body in a grave in a churchyard you have also caused the priest in charge and the parishioners whose relatives lie at rest to be upset at the sacrilege done to the memory of those buried there.

12. A further relevant consideration to my mind is that you involved your younger brother Jake in concealing Jayden's body both in the ditch and then in the

churchyard. You have been involved in petty crime for much of your life but he, despite looking up to you, managed to avoid any serious offending until you called on him to help you after Jayden had been murdered. From the witness box you rightly acknowledged that you have now ruined Jake's life, but in December last year you cared not one jot for the trouble you were causing him by demanding his assistance. Whether or not Jake knew that the hole he helped to dig in the churchyard was for the burial of Jayden Parkinson, a matter about which the jury have been unable to agree, you bear the responsibility for involving him.

13. Having said all that, I have to bear in mind that despite all the hurt you have caused and all the public outrage at your wicked behaviour, the increase in the minimum term must be proportionate to the statutory starting position and must take into account any proper points to be made in mitigation. There are in my view four such points. First, I accept that you did not intend to kill Jayden Parkinson but to cause her grievous bodily harm. Secondly, I accept that the offence was not premeditated but was impulsive. Thirdly, I believe that the confession you wrote in prison was motivated by some beginnings of compassion and it was, as the record shows, followed by a formal acceptance that you were responsible for the unlawful killing of Jayden, though sadly not by a plea of guilty to her murder. Fourthly, though in the context of what you have done these are but minor points, there is the clear emotional damage done to you as a child, the fact that you were still only 22 years of age at the time of the killing and the fact that within your relationship with Jayden there were times when you showed her kindness.

14. How then is the minimum term to be appropriately assessed? In calculating the uplift for the offence comprised in Count 2, namely the burial and concealment of Jayden's body to prevent apprehension for the offence of murder, *R v Grimes [2012] 1 Cr App Rep (S) 97* is authority for the proposition that I should decide what the appropriate determinate sentence should be on a plea of guilty to Count 2, and on the basis that only half that sentence would be served in custody whereas the whole of a minimum

term must be served before eligibility for parole arises, I must then increase the starting point by half of that sentence.

15. I have been referred to a number of sentencing appeal decisions, from which it appears that the top of the sentencing range hitherto for a comparable offence committed to avoid apprehension for murder has been 6 years after a plea of guilty; see *R v Lang [2002] 2 Cr App Rep (S) 15*. [In the unreported case of *R v Dennehy and others, 28 February 2014* I note that sentences of 15 years imprisonment after a trial were imposed for the unlawful burial and concealment from the police of three separate victims]. In my judgment the concealment of Jayden Parkinson's body in a grave in a churchyard with the other features to which I have referred, for the purposes of avoiding arrest and prosecution for murder, makes this a more serious and disturbing case than *Lang* justifying a greater, though not a disproportionately greater, sentence.
16. There must then be a further increase to mark the history of your physical and emotional abuse of a vulnerable young woman, conduct which is to be condemned the more in the case of a man with a proved history of violent offending and petty crime. In general terms that would warrant a further uplift of at least three years.
17. Taking these two matters and the other aggravating circumstances into consideration, and bearing in mind that sentences for murder are not mathematical exercises, I am satisfied that before making an allowance for your mitigation the 15 year period should be increased to 22 years and after making such allowance it should be one of 20 years, from which the time you have spent in custody on remand will be deducted. The provisions for a victim surcharge will also apply.
18. Ben Blakeley, on Count 1 of the indictment you will be sentenced to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 20 years less the number of days on remand, a figure that will be calculated administratively. On Count 2 you will be sentenced to a term of eight years imprisonment concurrent. The existing community orders are revoked.