

R v William Cornick

Leeds Crown Court

3 November 2014

Sentencing Remarks

Mr Cornick, you may remain seated.

Introduction

These sentencing remarks will be divided into seven sections. The first three sections are general. They will concern the victim, Mrs Ann Maguire; the defendant, William Cornick; and the details of the murder. The remaining four sections will be addressed directly to the defendant although he need only stand for the last one. They concern the mechanics of the sentence that I am to impose; the aggravating factors; the mitigating factors; and my conclusion as to the appropriate sentence.

1. Mrs Ann Maguire

Sometimes it can seem inappropriate for a judge's sentencing remarks in a murder case to focus on the victim. There can be an uncomfortable tension between a full explanation of the sentence being imposed on the defendant, and the court's wish to describe the qualities of the person who has been murdered, in order to give a proper sense of the loss that the killing has caused.

However, no such difficulty exists here. Ann Maguire was such a remarkable person that it is only right that I start these observations by focussing on her personality and her achievements. She was 61 and had been a teacher at Corpus Christi Catholic College in Leeds for four decades. She was genuinely loved by her pupils. The court has seen today some of the interviews with those children who had seen her murdered. Notwithstanding the appalling events that they had recently witnessed, many of them wanted to say something about how wonderful Ann Maguire was, both as a teacher and as a person.

Just by way of example, we heard one pupil describe her as “really caring...she sort of couldn’t do enough for people, she was just really lovely to everybody.” Another pupil described her as “more of a friend than a teacher”. And another, when asked what she was like, said “she were wonderful. She were just...she was so nice to everyone, she were kind, she’d always stay back late...her main goal for everyone in that class, she just wanted them to come on top and achieve what she knew they could achieve and you could tell she loved it. You could tell that she loved doing what she were doing every day.”

Similar views were expressed by her teaching colleagues. Susan Francis, the Head of Languages at the school, who bravely intervened during the attack on Ann Maguire, described her as both “wonderful” and “fantastic”. Another

teacher at the school, who in other circumstances might have been an additional victim of the defendant, described Ann Maguire as “an amazing woman and teacher”. Numerous people have spoken about how much she loved her job and how much, in return, her pupils loved her.

Her family have given moving evidence of her numerous qualities.

Her brother in law Brian, described her as “a shining light. She trod her own path and lit up our lives in so many different ways. She was a joy to be with.” Another brother in law, Tom, described “her shining, fun, bright personality, which drew people to her and when you were in her company you always felt you were the most important person in her world.”

Her sister Denise said that Ann was not just her big sister, but was “my carer, my protector, my teacher, my confidante, my role model, the person who inspired me most and in the last 20 years she became my best friend in life. Ann was genuinely one of life’s beautiful, selfless, extraordinary, kind people. She radiated happiness, joy and positivity. Her smile lit up the room and people wanted to be around her, they were attracted to her energy and zest for life.”

And her daughter Emma said:

“She was a wonderful mother. She gave us so much love. I never felt alone in life.... She felt every up and down with me and perhaps more acutely. She was stronger than all of us put together and carried us through many of life’s many challenges. She was an extraordinary person.”

Given all of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that Leeds Town Hall was full to overflowing for Mrs Maguire’s memorial service on 29 September 2014.

For those of us who never met Mrs Maguire or never had the good fortune to be taught by her, the devastation felt at her death is difficult to imagine. But some sense at least of the pain and loss felt by her family can be found in their Victim Impact Statements. It is impossible to do them full justice in these sentencing remarks. But I incorporate into them the following passages:

Her sister Denise said:

“I am overcome with an overwhelming sense of loss and injustice. The fact [was] that Ann was at her place of work doing her job in order to improve the lives of children, stretching them to achieve the best results they could in their up and coming exams, and she didn't come home, and never will again. I’m haunted with thoughts that her life was taken in a place where she felt her safest, most comfortable, respected and in command. I’m angry that she was denied the opportunity to enjoy the retirement she had worked so hard for and was so deserved of after 41 years of dedicated service as a public servant. I’m angry that she will never meet her future grandchildren and be able to nurture and guide them the way she did with

all the other children that were an integral part of her life.”

And her daughter, Emma, said:

“There are many milestones she will miss and many that we will have to get through missing her. We will no longer look forward to occasions, our loss shadows such things. No birthday, Christmas, Mother’s day, weekend home will ever be the same: everything is tainted now. I just want to be able to talk to her. She won’t see me get married or hold her first grandchild, this part of her life was all still to come, she was so looking forward to it. She deserved to live.”

Finally, there are the words of Ann’s husband, Don.

“As a young girl Ann visited the sick and helped the elderly in her local community. The hundreds or maybe thousands of wonderful tributes paid over the months are testament to the person Ann Maguire. The guidance for preparing a victim impact statement advises to avoid turning the victim of the crime into a kind of saint. Such advice does not apply in this case.

Ann was a beautiful vivacious, caring generous human being. She was unique among peers and family. We met and fell in love in the spring of 1972. We were a very quiet private couple constantly dreaming of a rural backwater but the world seemed to shatter our hopes at regular intervals. Now all dreams have gone forever. I am still a Dad but I cannot help my children understand; can’t help them come to terms; can’t help lessen the pain. Mummy would have been much better. I can no longer be a Dad. I fail every day. I need Ann. Parts of our lives have been brutally taken. The centre of our lives is missing. Our very being has been diminished. Facing the world is very difficult. Facing one’s self is very difficult.”

It is therefore all the more inexplicable that this loved and loving woman was the person for whom William Cornick conceived such an irrational and all-consuming hatred; the person that he planned to kill, and then killed – in a public place – in front of children – in such a brutal and cowardly way on 28th April 2014.

2. William Cornick

William Cornick was born on 26 June 1998, so he was in Year 11, and two months short of his 16th birthday when he killed Ann Maguire. He was the son of responsible and caring parents and his family life was marked by love and support. He was successful at school and was in his GCSE year, having already taken and passed five exams a year early. He was regarded as reserved, but amicable, enthusiastic, and a conscientious member of the pupil group. Although he was diagnosed with diabetes in 2010, which meant that he would be unable to pursue an intended career in the army, it does not appear that this diagnosis had any other significant effect on his personality.

However, as he advanced through his teenage years, it became apparent to some of his friends that his personality was disturbed. He began to experience increasing feelings of anger, mainly directed at Ann Maguire, and all of them completely irrational. He spoke to a number of his friends about killing her and at least one other teacher at the school. He told them he had taken to carrying a knife and,

after the murder, the police discovered many images of knives on his mobile phone. He said later that the killing had been always on his mind for three years, since Year 8.

By Christmas 2013 it was apparent to Mr Cornick's mother that her son had a problem with Mrs Maguire, although she did not know that late on Christmas Eve, and into the early hours of Christmas Day, he was exchanging messages with a friend on Facebook in which he spoke of "brutally killing" Mrs Maguire and then spending the rest of his life in jail. These angry feelings led to a confrontation of a sort with Mrs Maguire in February 2014 when the defendant's hatred of his teacher was apparent to all those present at a meeting at the school. He was placed on internal exclusion in consequence of his disrespect and rudeness.

On 25 February 2014, shortly after this meeting and just two months before the killing, he sent a message to a friend on Facebook that said of Ann Maguire:

"...the one absolute fucking bitch that deserves more than death more than pain torture and more than anything that we can understand."

After the killing, William Cornick was the subject of extensive psychiatric and psychological examination. The results of those examinations make chilling reading. In particular:

(a) **Dr Diggle** is an adolescent clinical psychologist. He concluded that William Cornick generally experiences

strong feelings of anger but there was little sign of that in his outward presentation. He had a very high disposition to experience anger without specific provocation and his ability to manage his angry thoughts constructively was limited.

- (b) **Dr Lengua**, a consultant child and adolescent forensic psychiatrist, described William Cornick's anger as "premeditated and predatory" and that one of the dangerous aspects of his personality was that his outward appearance did not disclose his anger. He concluded that the defendant's actions leading up to the killing of Mrs Maguire were "pre-planned, goal directed, and in full knowledge that they were wrong." He concluded that William Cornick posed an extremely high risk of serious violence and could not exclude the possibility that the defendant would kill again.
- (c) **Dr Kent** was the prosecution's leading psychiatric expert. He concluded that William Cornick was at least of average intelligence and found no evidence of any thought disorder, psychotic or other major psychiatric illness. Dr Kent said that the defendant had an adjustment disorder (something with which Dr Lengua agreed) and that this affected the development of his personality at a time when he should have been developing and maturing into an independent person. He noted "a gross lack of empathy for his victim and a degree of callousness rarely seen in clinical practice." He found evidence of personality disorder with some

marked psychopathic traits with a preoccupation with homicide. He said he presented a risk of serious harm to the public and that the risk was immediate and unpredictable, and could cause serious and lethal injury.

There can be no doubt that the defendant is highly dangerous. His complete lack of remorse, which is a significant feature of all of the psychiatric and psychological evidence, is a matter to which I will return later in these remarks. For completeness, I should say that I have read all the reports dealing with the defendant, including the useful PSR from the Leeds Youth Offending Service.

3. The Murder of Ann Maguire

As I have already noted, the defendant had long planned to kill Ann Maguire. To Dr Kent, he said that on Thursday, 24 April, he had decided that he would kill her rather than kill himself. He said he knew he was going to kill her and on the Sunday he decided that it was going to be with a knife, rather than the other options that he had considered, including a blunt object, a gun, and pushing her out of the window. Despite this level of planning, his outward appearance was polite and happy throughout the weekend of 26 and 27 April 2014.

On the morning of Monday 28 April he went to school with two knives in his bag. One was a large and heavy knife with

a cutting edge measuring 21cm in length and up to 4.5cm in width. In addition to a smaller knife, he also had a bottle of Jack Daniels with which he was going to celebrate after the killing.

During that morning, he told a number of his fellow pupils that he intended to kill Ann Maguire and whilst many did not take him seriously, others did, and at one point he threatened to kill anyone who revealed his plan. It was plain that he was excited by the thought of what he was going to do. He told at least one other pupil that he intended to kill two other teachers as well, including a female teacher who was pregnant, and who he intended to stab in the stomach so as to kill her unborn child.

The attack took place in the first lesson after the morning break, just after 11:30am. William Cornick attended Mrs Maguire's Spanish lesson in classroom T51. Some of the class, including William Cornick, then went to classroom T50 so they could work more productively. There, William Cornick showed a fellow pupil the larger of the two knives and experimented with where to conceal it. He then left that classroom, winking at his classmate as he left, and went back to T51.

Mrs Maguire was at her desk at the front of the class, helping a pupil. She was leaning away from William Cornick when he entered the room. William Cornick

approached Mrs Maguire from behind and began to stab her in the neck and back from behind. She was 5'2" and of slim build; the defendant was a foot taller than her and armed with the large kitchen knife to which I have previously referred. The attack was relentless, brutal and cowardly. Mrs Maguire fled but Cornick pursued her, stabbing her as she sought to escape him.

Susan Francis came out of an adjacent workroom to be confronted by a group of pupils running down the corridor, screaming in panic. She saw Ann Maguire running towards her, holding the back of her neck and saying "he stabbed me in the neck". Susan Francis pushed Mrs Maguire into the workroom, and shut the door, courageously holding her foot against it to stop the defendant coming in. Cornick then turned and walked away.

He went back to the classroom he had left and sat down next to his classmate as if nothing had happened. He said he had stabbed Mrs Maguire, and added that it was a pity she was not dead. He said out loud to the entire class "good times", and spoke of an adrenalin rush. The evidence makes clear that he was pleased with what he had done. He was subsequently taken by two teachers to the school foyer and they waited for the police to arrive. Cornick talked to everyone as if nothing had happened and many of those involved were to speak later of his bizarre calmness and air of normality.

Ann Maguire was still alive in the workroom. Susan Francis comforted her but was only too aware that she was probably dying, so she spoke to her about her children and the fact that she was loved. An ambulance was called but on the way to the hospital Mrs Maguire stopped breathing and never thereafter regained consciousness. She was pronounced dead at Leeds General Infirmary at 1:10 in the afternoon.

The subsequent post mortem identified that she had been stabbed seven times to the upper back and neck. One stab caused the knife to pass all the way through the lower neck and another severed the jugular vein. Two other stabs shattered ribs and one of those penetrated her right lung. All of the wounds were inflicted from behind and the pathologist concluded that many were inflicted with severe force. The experienced paramedic who attended to Mrs Maguire described the stab wounds as the worst she had ever seen.

4. The Mechanics of the Sentence

William Cornick, you may remain seated but the following remarks are addressed directly to you.

The sentence for murder is automatic: given your age, it is detention during Her Majesty's pleasure. That is an

indeterminate sentence; it is, to all intents and purposes, a life sentence.

The only remaining matter for me is to fix the minimum term that you will serve. I should make quite clear that this means what it says: it is the minimum period that you will serve in detention before you are even considered for release. This minimum term cannot be reduced or changed or cut down in any way. Moreover, after it has been served, there is no guarantee whatsoever that you will then be released. You will only be released thereafter once the Parole Board decides that you no longer pose a danger to the public. Given the psychiatric and psychological reports that I have read, it is quite possible that that day will never come.

Pursuant to paragraph 7 of Schedule 21 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, Parliament has decided that the starting point for the minimum term for anyone under 18 convicted of murder, is 12 years. Having adopted that as my starting point, as I am obliged to do, I then turn to the aggravating and mitigating factors.

5. Aggravating Factors.

In my view, there are seven significant aggravating factors.

First, there is your extensive premeditation and planning. You decided to kill Ann Maguire months before you did so

and you openly fantasised about it. The plan to kill her was formulated long before the act itself, and included a consideration of possible weapons and methods. You eventually decided some days before the event that you would stab her to death at your school. You took two knives with you, just in case. In every respect, this was a long way from a killing on the spur of the moment.

Secondly, you took a knife to the classroom with the express purpose of killing Mrs Maguire. If you were over 18, that would give rise to a starting point for the minimum term of 25 years. I do not agree with the submission that a consideration of this starting point is wholly irrelevant to your sentencing exercise. Whilst, as I have said, it is not the applicable starting point in your case, its substantial length demonstrates Parliament's intention to punish severely those, like you, who take easily-available household knives to the scene of the crime in order to carry out a planned killing.

Thirdly, Mrs Maguire plainly suffered before she died: death was not instantaneous and the severity of the stab wounds demonstrates the pain that she would have suffered before she died. Moreover, it is plain that both she and Susan Francis knew she was dying as she lay in the workroom.

Fourthly, Mrs Maguire was a teacher, teaching a GCSE Spanish class at a well-known and well-respected Leeds

school. She was therefore fulfilling a public duty. Teachers play a critical role in our society and are in an important position of authority. They are entitled to proper protection, and to expect that those who injure or kill their colleagues are dealt with severely by the courts.

Fifthly, this was a killing which you deliberately chose to commit in public. You killed Mrs Maguire in front of a classroom of horrified 15 and 16 year olds. The damage done to them is incalculable. Many may be traumatised forever by what they saw. Your complete lack of empathy for them, your callous disregard for your classmates, is perhaps the worst single element in this catalogue of aggravating factors.

Sixthly, the level of violence was savage and cowardly. It was an attack on a petite woman in her 60's by a strapping teenager armed with a large knife. It was carried out from behind. It was a sustained attack because even when Mrs Maguire got away from you, you followed her and continued to stab her.

Finally, you have shown a total and chilling lack of remorse. Your lack of remorse was made plain to both Dr Diggle and Dr Lengua. And to Dr Kent, you said:

“I knew what I was going to do; it was what I did. I said I was going to do other stuff but I never got the chance, other murders. It was a triple homicide. What I have done, I couldn't give a shit...I wasn't in shock, I

was happy. I had a sense of pride. I still do. I know it's uncivilised but I know it's incredibly instinctual and human. Past generations of life, killing is a route of survival. It's kill or be killed. I did not have a choice. It was kill her or suicide."

When asked by Dr Kent about the impact of the killing of Mrs Maguire's family and on the wider community, you said "I couldn't give a shit...I know the victim's family will be upset but I don't care. In my eyes, everything I've done is fine and dandy." At one stage, you described Mrs Maguire as "barely human".

In my view, these remarks – your pride in what you did, and your complete lack of remorse – are truly grotesque, and a further significant aggravating factor which I must reflect in the sentence.

In my view, these aggravating factors more than double the statutory starting point of 12 years and, prior to any consideration of the mitigating factors, would lead to a minimum term of 25 years.

6. Mitigating Factors

In my view, there are three mitigating factors.

First, there is your guilty plea. As a matter of law, the maximum credit I could give you is around 4 years (one sixth of 25). However, whilst I agree that some credit is due for your plea, I do not think that it can be the maximum.

There were numerous witnesses to the murder itself, so you could not sensibly have denied the act of killing. And as to the mental element of the offence, the agreed position is that your adjustment disorder cannot affect your criminal culpability. So in my view whilst there must be credit for your plea – which on any view was early – should be no more than 2 years, thereby reducing the minimum term to 23 years.

Secondly, there is the adjustment disorder itself. Although, as I have said, it is properly accepted that this has no effect on your criminal culpability, it is not a condition for which you or your family can be blamed. I accept therefore that it is a mitigating factor and should have some effect on the minimum term.

Thirdly, I accept that, because you were 15 years and 10 months old at the time of the killing, such extreme youth may not be fully accounted for in the 12 year starting point. That applies to everyone under 18, and so could therefore apply to somebody two years older than you were at the time of the killing. In my view, these two further mitigating factors reduce the minimum term to one of 20 years.

I should add that, having made a reduction for your youth, I consider that it is inappropriate to make a further reduction for your good character, which is principally a function of your youth. And whilst I have considerable sympathy for

your parents, who cannot be held responsible in any way for what you did, and whose statements demonstrate the devastation you have visited on them too, it would be inappropriate to reduce the term further because of the effect a lengthy term will have on your family. That was something you should have considered before you decided to kill Mrs Maguire. Instead, just like your classmates, you completely ignored the effect of your crime and its consequences upon them. And whilst I do not doubt their ability to support your possible reform and rehabilitation, ultimately that can only come from you. Thus far, I am bound to note that you have failed to show any signs of either.

The three mitigating factors which I accept, when taken together, reduce the 25 years to a minimum term of 20 years.

7. Conclusion

William Cornick, stand up.

For the murder of Ann Maguire, I sentence you to detention during Her Majesty's pleasure. The minimum term I impose is one of 20 years. That means you will not even be considered for release until the year 2034. As I have said, whether or not you are in fact released then will be a matter for others. The time that you have spent on remand will

count towards the minimum term. The Victim surcharge applies.

You must now go with the dock officer.