



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

Leeds Crown Court

Regina

-v-

Thomas Wyllie & Alex Bolland

20th July 2018

Sentencing remarks of Mrs Justice Cheema-Grubb DBE

REPORTING RESTRICTIONS APPLY – CARE MUST BE TAKEN

1. Thomas Wyllie and Alex Bolland the jury has convicted you of conspiracy to murder. Tom Wyllie you have also been convicted of unlawful wounding. You are both just 15 years of age and you were only 14 last year when you planned to murder teachers and pupils at the school you attended in North Yorkshire by shooting them in a re-enactment of the April 1999 Columbine school massacre in Colorado USA. You hero worshipped the two teenagers who carried out that atrocity before committing suicide by turning their guns upon themselves.
2. The underlying facts are these. Alex Bolland, you were bullied at [] School over a period of years and although it cannot be described as the worst form of school bullying it had a profound impact on you and the school authorities failed to take your complaints seriously. They failed badly but that failure was no justification for what you went on to plan by way of revenge.
3. Tom Wyllie you had become fascinated by the boundless Internet attention given to American school shootings, devouring content such as actual CCTV footage from the Columbine shooting. You saw yourself as somebody outside the system, someone special. You modelled yourself on the apparent leader of the Columbine pair, Eric Harris and Alex Bolland was to take up the somewhat subsidiary role of Dylan Klebold.
4. Those two teenagers saw themselves as anti-heroes, with the power to choose who lived and who died. They obtained a number of firearms, patently more readily available in the USA than in the United Kingdom, created explosive devices and dressed in distinctive long trench-coats before entering their school premises and killing thirteen children and staff. Some of their improvised explosives did not work and so greater loss of life was prevented. It is self-evident that the unchecked consumption of such material on the internet is capable of poisoning young minds to such an extent that two disaffected murderers who killed themselves after ending the lives of innocent people, can become the focus of adulation and imitation. Children, particularly otherwise alienated children, need to be taught better that

they must exercise self-control in surfing the internet for their own safety and mental health.

5. The conspiracy to murder of which you have been convicted was not wishful thinking or a fantasy. It was a real plot: the jury was sure that you intended to carry out your plan to massacre children and teachers at your own school.
6. Both of you inhabited narrow lives in which you saw yourself as victims and it is clear that rather than be positive influences on each other, you entered into a noxious relationship which pulled each other down further into a selfish obsession with punishing others for the wrongs you felt had been perpetrated against you. Although you, Tom Wyllie never suggested you were bullied, your co-defendant believed you were and other pupils saw you as someone who was disaffected. One boy told the jury that you were both always sad, always trying to hide at the back like outcasts, that you thought you were unique but, “a very different unique.”
7. In May 2017 you used the Internet to download two versions of the Anarchist Cookbook onto your devices. This American publication contains hundreds of sets of instructions for the creation of explosives, booby-traps etc. Subsequently you Tom Wyllie made a number of Internet searches searching for things referred to in the Anarchist Cookbook, such as manufacturing bombs from household items and in October a collection of materials capable of being used, with others, to make an improvised explosive device, that is a bomb, were found in your rucksack. You Alex Bolland took screenshots of pages of the Cookbook which contained instructions for making bombs and shared them with Tom Wyllie.
8. At this time you, Tom Wyllie were regularly searching the Internet to find content about the Columbine massacre and you also searched the dark web to find out how you might be able to obtain guns. This was plainly a joint interest because at one point in mid-May, when Alex Bolland was upset Tom Wyllie’s response was to tell him, “if you’re gonna kill yourself shoot up the school.”
9. That same month Tom Wyllie began a relationship with a 13 year old girl called [A] who had emotional problems and was being treated by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Her father had seven shot-guns and ammunition for them which he kept, at that time, at the family home. These were all legally owned. I am sure that you, Tom Wyllie intended to get hold of these firearms if you could (you nagged [A to get you a picture of the guns and to get hold of her father’s keys so that she could show them to you although she never did). I am also sure that both of you hoped to be able to use them in the attack on the school. I am sure that it was partly in furtherance of this plan that over the next few months you, Tom Wyllie drew [A] into an intense, coercive and destructive relationship. An illustration of the deep harm you did to [A] is encapsulated in count 6. You discussed with her how you could show your devotion to each other. On 2 September you watched a YouTube video called, “How to carve someone” and two days later you used a pen-knife to cut your name, the letter T O M, into [A’s] back. It was done in a filthy enclosure behind a shop which you used as a hideout. This scarification was to be a form of permanent consecration to you. She let you do it because she wanted to please you: it was a sign of the control you held over her. The wounds became infected. The impact statements I have read from [A] and her parents, with which I have exercised appropriate caution in light of disputed contents and the entirety of the jury’s verdicts, speak to the long-term damage you have done to that already fragile child.
10. On 8th September the two of you, Tom Wyllie and Alex Bolland exchanged messages

in which you Alex Bolland said, “I really want to shoot up the school” and “I think it will be so fun”. You were bold enough to discuss this at school where other pupils could overhear you: no doubt they didn’t take it seriously although Alex Bolland responded to sarcasm from one boy, [B] with a firm statement, “We’re actually gonna do it so don’t take it as a joke.”

11. During that month Tom Wyllie conducted internet searches for snuff videos, about breaking into abandoned buildings, whether police can search mobile phones remotely, how to hang oneself, for shooter outfits including combat boots and military jackets and coats, and more material about Columbine.
12. On 28 August Tom Wyllie loaded another video to his YouTube account “Don’t fuck with a God - Columbine edit” which started with a still of a racially motivated mass murderer who killed people at a church shooting. At some point a list of names was created which had contained teachers, including a female teacher who had previously been targeted for an internet hate campaign in which you, Tom Wyllie had a role. There were a number of pupils on the list, some of whom were associated with bullying that you, Alex had been subjected to.
13. On 27th September you, Alex Bolland, asked your mother to buy you a trench-coat. Later you had a conversation on Snapchat with a school-friend [C]. You told her a secret, that you and Tom were planning to carry out a mass-shooting at the school with guns obtained from [A]’s father. The two of you were going to kill pupils who had bullied you. The next morning, she asked if you had been joking and you said, “No, no one innocent will die. We promise.” You also told her that you were not doing it for a while because you didn’t have the guns at that time.
14. To her credit [C] told her mother and later her teacher. As a result, you were both taken out of lessons on 28 September and spoken to by staff. You, Tom Wyllie didn’t admit anything but Alex Bolland made a full confession to a Vice-Principal. He admitted he had sent the Snap Chat messages and explained why. It was because some students were making his life intolerable and he felt they needed dealing with severely: they needed killing. They made him miserable and did not let people learn. There was unpleasantness directed to him and times in lessons when he was unable to learn because of their actions. Alex Bolland you named some: [D, E F & G], and mentioned that you were with Thomas on this. You were looking to buy guns. How? On the internet. Do you mean the dark web? Yes. You claimed you were using bit coins which can be bought with stolen credit cards for £20 a time. The two of you were trying to do this but had not been successful. You started talking about the Columbine shooting and mentioned a film you’d seen on You-tube about the perpetrators. You gave the impression of idolising them thinking that they were doing a service to humanity by getting rid of such people, over 2000 years humanity had destroyed the good aspects of the earth and you had to do what they had done which was to take out those who had infected the gene-pool, to “clear out the underclass.” Only the guilty would die. You did not see yourself living beyond the killing and you and Thomas Wyllie intended to take your own lives. You had read a motivation in the Satanist Bible which you had discussed together and which was a justification for the action you wanted to take jointly- do unto others as they did unto you. Alex Bolland, you delivered all this in a calm and matter of fact way. When challenged you confirmed what you were saying. You were not confused: it was a dispassionate, dead-pan delivery.
15. When you were spoken to later you, Tom Wyllie continued your denials, but Alex Bolland confirmed that you both planned to go into school with a firearm in order to

get rid of those who had wronged you both. Thereafter Alex Bolland, you desisted from any further contact or involvement with Tom Wyllie but Tom did not give up on his ideas. The Diary you created has provided some of the most powerful evidence in the case albeit it was written and drawn after the indictment period. Inside the front cover you wrote, "Sorry if this is found I have committed one of the worst atrocities in British history or I killed myself – Tom" You drew pictures showing armed individuals. I reject your account that this was all made up to impress someone else. This was the continued working out of your mind-set of disaffection, alienation and hatred. Later what you wrote echoed some of what Alex Bolland had said to the VP, that you intended to play the role of God and decide who to let live and die. You described human beings as a vile species which needs to die out. You wrote, "The Human condition is a curse and a burden." These are desperately sad words from a 14-year-old boy, blessed with a family. In light of the jury's verdict they cannot be understood as simply an expression of standard adolescent rebellion.

16. I bear in mind that although you carried out the preparation I have summarized and you created a list of targets, you did not get as far as creating a viable improvised explosive device and you did not actually obtain access to firearms. But achieving your ends was not entirely impossible as is suggested on your behalf Tom Wyllie. You were "a pair of 14-year-old school boys" but you Tom Wyllie had got yourself into a controlling relationship with a girl whose father had several working firearms with ammunition. These were used by him and members of his family. Although Mr [A] had secured his guns properly in locked storage, they were plainly accessible on site with the necessary sets of keys and you believed that [A] had got them out on at least one occasion.
17. Your rucksack was found with items collected for use in preparation for carrying out an attack and creating some form of weapon, including balaclavas, wires and batteries, potential shrapnel, and a bottle of ignitable fluid of unusual chemical composition. I reject the suggestion that this evidence is irrelevant to count 1 because it confirms your state of mind and demonstrates that your intention to perpetrate a serious criminal offence causing harm to others was not deflected by the discovery of your plan to attack the school, in late September. It is plainly relevant to the issue of dangerousness for the purpose of sentence.
18. When you were both arrested by Counter Terrorism officers following an incident at [A]'s home you, Alex Bolland changed your story and claimed that only Tom Wyllie was serious and Tom Wyllie told police none of it was serious at all. The jury has rejected these claims on clear evidence that those exculpatory accounts were no more than both of you trying to avoid responsibility for your actions and intentions.
19. You are being sentenced on the basis that I am sure you had a firm plan, specific targets in mind as well as an intention to carry out indiscriminate explosions, that you had carried out research to prepare for making bombs, you had no firearms in your possession but expected that you would be able to get hold of them in the not too distant future through [A].
20. The main aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by young people and the totemic principle to be applied by every court dealing with a young person is the primacy of regard to his welfare. I have keen regard to the Sentencing Council's Sentencing Children and Young People Guideline which provides overarching principles I must apply. The recent decision in the case of *R v H* [2018] EWCA 689 (Crim), a single defendant, is an example of how acutely distinct every young

defendant is and how sentences must be suitably tailored. There is no case with even similar, let alone identical features as this one.

21. I find the following aggravating features:
 - a. You intended to kill many victims who were either children at school or teachers at work: some of these had been specifically targeted for revenge.
 - b. You planned to use firearms and improvised explosive devices.
 - c. Your attack on the school was intended to cause terror on the scale of school shootings in the USA.
 - d. Your planning was carried out over months and demonstrates a substantial degree of premeditation.
 - e. Tom Wyllie persisted in his planning even after discovery and the intervention of the police on 28th September 2017.

22. For Tom Wyllie, on the count of unlawful wounding I find the vulnerability of your victim aggravates the offence as well as the fact that you drew her in to a damaging dependency on you for her emotional stability and used the scarification of your name into her back as part of it. The cutting humiliated her and has had long term consequences.

23. By way of mitigation you can both rely on your youth and lack of previous convictions as well as the reports prepared for this hearing which set out your various personal difficulties.

24. There is no Sentencing Council Guideline for offences of Conspiracy to Murder which is an inchoate offence, requiring other steps to take place before it is put into effect and the harm intended can be caused. Furthermore, it is not possible to gauge your offending with a direct adult comparator, not least because adults could not have the same relationship with a school and the children there. Adults who conspired to murder a number of people, targeting children, using firearms and improvised bombs, whether or not within a terrorist context, would be most likely to receive life sentences. The notional determinate sentence in such a case would inevitably be in the region of 35-40 years' imprisonment. Allowing for previous good character, the stage the plans had reached, and a degree of personal mitigation commensurate (as far as is possible to evaluate) with the contents of the reports I have seen, this might be reduced to 30-35 years or so.

25. I detect clear variations between the two of you both in terms of your psychological make up, degree of maturity and insight, and your culpability. You are both intelligent. There is good reason to conclude that since conviction both of you have continued to lie to professionals to minimize your own blameworthiness. It is early days. I am sure that you will face many opportunities after this sentencing hearing to engage more decisively with those who can help you to achieve full insight into your offending and to reform your attitudes and thinking. The psychiatrists have found it hard to reach firm conclusions about your mental condition, how you are likely to develop in the future and most significantly, the degree to which you pose a significant risk of causing serious harm by committing specified offences in the future. Your particular circumstances and the stage of development you have reached is of particular significance because sentencing for someone of your age should be individualistic and your maturity may not correspond to your chronological age. Furthermore, care is required to reflect factors that may diminish your distinct culpability. All of these matters feed into the assessment as to future risk that I must carry out. This will be, in the end, a judgment based on all the

evidence I heard at the trial and everything I now understand about you both. It is rightly described by counsel as a “non-scientific exercise” particularly in the case of children because you will continue to develop in ways which are not all predictable at this moment in time.

26. In this context I turn briefly to the reports prepared about you. I have seen helpful reports from the following.

For Thomas Wyllie

PSR from the North Yorkshire Youth Justice Service

Dr John Howard Kent – Psych report 13th July 2018.

Dr Misch – Psych Court report 18/07/18

For Alex Bolland

PSR from the North Yorkshire Youth Justice Service

Dr John Howard Kent – Psychiatric report 13th July 2018.

Dr Tracy King – Psychologist report 10/04/18& 18/07/18

Dr Philip Joseph – Psychiatric report 12/01/18& *Addendum* Psych report 26/06/18.

27. I will not refer to each, or the detail of any, but I have read them all and they have informed my conclusions. I have also considered the measured Notes on Sentence and the oral submissions presented by senior prosecution and defence counsel. I am grateful for all this help in what is an unusual and complex sentencing exercise.
28. As there are differences between the two of you; principally encompassing your maturity, progress, culpability and assessment of future risk the sentences I pass will be different. Each will also be the shortest sentence possible to achieve.
29. Thomas Wyllie you were born on 24 November 2002. In my judgment you bear slightly greater culpability than your co-defendant for which limited distinction in sentence must be made. You were the leader of the conspiracy and took the greater proportion of active steps to bring it to fruition. Your interest in the Columbine massacre followed by the suicide of the two perpetrators goes back to a year before the indictment period: you posted a video called Columbine Edit#1 to your YouTube account in March 2016 and kept it on your phone.
30. I can summarise the material about you as follows.
- i. You come from a settled family. Understandably they are having trouble coming to terms with your convictions. Their understanding and support will be vital in the years to come.
 - ii. You are an intelligent young man with considerable potential. You were in the top classes at school.
 - iii. You have struggled with feelings of low self-esteem and homicidal

thoughts for two years or so before your arrest. You engaged in minor acts of self-harm by cutting. You were given a provisional diagnosis of a moderate severe depression after going for help in September 2017 following the school intervention.

- iv. In custody you have continued to have problems managing difficult emotions and can be extremely upset. You are being cared for by the mental health services.
- v. In a letter to the Court you have apologized to those people scared by your actions. You are ashamed of what you have done and although you don't admit what the jury has found you guilty of, the intention to harm others, you commit yourself to moving on with your life and coming out a better person.
- vi. As to the dangerousness test in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 the opinions of the rapporteurs although not entirely consistent, are fairly clear. Dr Kent finds you to lack empathy which is linked to a sense of anger, paranoia and an ability to compartmentalize normal emotional responses. You are able to create menace and fear in others and you can express homicidal expressions about people who you feel have angered or thwarted you. Much of what you said about the background facts to Dr Kent was considered by him to be unreliable. You continue to deny the offence of conspiracy to murder but are ashamed of wounding your girlfriend. He concluded that depression and personality characteristics which include elements of cruelty, narcissism, and psychopathy were involved in your offending. The depression has resolved but there are enduring elements of high risk arising from your ability to manipulate others, your longstanding interest in Columbine massacre, other interests in violence and homicidal attitudes to others. The author of the PSR assesses that you pose a high risk of causing serious harm in the future. She relies on the psychiatric reports and recognizes that you are beginning to show signs of insight and reflection which bodes well for the future. Dr Mish found no signs of psychotic illness but concluded you have a tendency to be deceitful, controlling and lacking in empathy. The risk of serious harm you pose will, he thinks, reduce in the longer term as long as you are given appropriate support, treatment and risk management.
- vii. You also pose a risk of self-harm which must be carefully managed in your best interest.

31. In your case I am driven to the conclusion that you are a dangerous young offender. This means that you are someone who poses a significant risk of causing serious harm to others by committing specified criminal offences in the future. Detention for life is a sentence of last resort and, although it has been necessary to consider it with care I have decided it is not required or justified in your case. An extended sentence pursuant to section 226B (1) Criminal Justice Act 2003 is necessary to protect the public from you. The unlawful wounding of [A] was part and parcel of your exploitation of that unfortunate girl motivated in part, I am sure, by hopes of getting possession of her father's guns in due course. For the purpose of the relevant Guideline it falls between categories 1 and 2 and has some aggravating features. As I pass an extended sentence on count 1 I will include an uplift for the unlawful wounding in the custodial part of that sentence and order a concurrent sentence on count 6. The uplift will be tempered for totality.

32. On count 1 the sentence is one of 12 years custody with an extended licence period of 5 years. On count 6 the sentence is one of detention for 12 months concurrent. The total sentence is therefore one of 17 years: made up of 12 years detention and 5 years extended licence. You will be able to apply to the Parole Board for release after serving two-thirds of the 12 years (minus the number of days you have spent detained on remand which will be automatically deducted.)
33. Alex Bolland you were born on 27 December 2002. I have no doubt that you were a fully engaged conspirator from at least May 2017, although not the prime mover. I also accept that to some extent Tom Wyllie saw in you an isolated boy who was a good prospect for his lieutenant and you were willing to be drawn into a plot to gain the revenge you sought on those responsible for bullying you and the teachers who had failed to protect you. Nonetheless I emphasise that the nature of the admissions you made to your school Vice-Principal demonstrate that you were not a simple follower or mere vessel of Tom Wyllie's.
34. The most material features gleaned from the reports provided can be summarized.
- i. You have a supportive family background with parents who care deeply about you. I have also read the letters from your mother and father, and your grandfather.
 - ii. Dr Joseph found you to be intelligent and not suggestible. In his opinion you are someone who was not controlled or coerced by your co-defendant. Nor were you suffering from any depressive illness at the time of the offence.
 - iii. You have settled well into detention at Adel Beck Secure Children's Home and are engaging well. You have positive relationships with those working with you. You have been the victim of a physical assault but did not retaliate which is a good sign that you are capable of controlling your-self.
 - iv. In a well written letter to the Court you have explained about the bullying and the impact it had on you. You have also set out your achievements in custody to date which are impressive and show that you are fully engaged in making the most of this difficult situation.
 - v. No mental health disposal is suggested although there is psychiatric evidence that you were suffering from an adjustment disorder at the time of the offence as a reaction to your personal circumstances including bullying at school. This can lead to a negative mind-set towards others.
 - vi. You are receiving mental health support and this will continue.
 - vii. Inevitably there is material before me to suggest, including from the eminent psychiatrist Dr Joseph that it will be best for you if the sentence I pass was short enough for it to be served entirely at the secure unit you are now in. But that aspect of your welfare is just one of the matters I must consider.
 - viii. There are varying opinions about the degree of risk of serious harm you will pose in the future. The author of the PSR concludes that the risk you pose is high as well as unpredictable. She points to a lack of empathy

to your potential victims and she also relies on Dr. Kent's concern that the offence had "significant elements of fixated hatred, narcissism, and callousness" which mean that you will need careful future assessment and management. Dr. Kent's conclusion is that you do pose a risk of causing serious harm to others but the risk is probably not immediate and may depend on other factors such as forming another relationship like the one you had with your co-defendant. Dr Joseph's view is that you are not developing a personality disorder and do not appear to him to present a significant risk of causing serious harm to others.

ix. Generally, it is also recognized that you are motivated and supported such that with careful monitoring the risk you pose can be reduced over time, this time including the time you will be in detention serving a sentence.

35. In my judgement while there is evidence that you present some future risk, I am not persuaded that you fall into the category of a dangerous offender for the purposes of the Criminal Justice Act 2003. However, I have decided that neither youth rehabilitation nor a detention and training order is suitable. Accordingly, I pass a sentence under section 91 (1) Powers of the Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000. The gravity of the offence is so great that I am unable to limit the period to one that you could serve entirely at the secure children's home where you are currently housed. The sentence on count 1 is 10 years detention. This means that you will be released halfway through that period (minus the number of days you have spent on remand which will be deducted automatically.) You will be liable for recall until the whole term is completed.
36. The statutory charge applies and should be dealt with administratively.
37. I also impose a Restraining Order against Thomas Wyllie in favour of [A] in the terms requested by the prosecution, there being no opposition to it and it being justified in all the circumstances.

20 July 2018