



# Judiciary of England and Wales

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-v-

**Sarah Hadfield  
Anthony Hadfield  
Steven Corbett**

**In the Crown Court at Teesside**

**Sentencing Remarks of Mrs Justice Cockerill**

**10 July 2023**

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. Sarah Hadfield, Anthony Hadfield and Steven Corbett you have pleaded not guilty to murder but guilty to the manslaughter by unlawful means of Adam Thomson on 4 January 2023.
2. I have had the benefit of arguments on sentence from Mr Lamb KC for the prosecution and Mr Elvidge KC, Mr Makepeace KC and Mr Singh KC for the defendants supported by their juniors Ms Constantine, Mr Hunt, Ms Greenhalgh. The latter doubtless had much input into the excellent sentencing notes which I have received. I take account of everything counsel have eloquently said.
3. I have also heard from Mrs Joanne Thomson, Mr Thomson's mother, who has provided a very moving Victim Personal Statement which was read to the court this morning and which I have read more than once. That statement makes clear the loss which Mr Thomson's family has suffered. In particular she speaks of the pain of seeing her son in the mortuary, of the fact that the pain of his loss will never go away and of the devastating effect on Adam's father for whom he was a devoted and much loved carer. She feels that since Adam's death his father has lost all interest in living. She speaks eloquently also of the terrible effect on Adam's brother, who devotedly sat with Adam's body that terrible night. And finally she reminds us of the truly appalling loss which this crime has inflicted on Adam's adored three year old daughter, who struggles to process her loss. I am well aware that despite Mrs Thomson's hope that this sentence can bring some relief to them, no sentence which I can impose can possibly heal or make up for Mr Thomson's family's enormous loss.
4. Sarah Hadfield, Anthony Hadfield, Steven Corbett, in deciding upon the sentence for this offence I must set out my conclusions upon the evidence. I have accepted your bases of plea and must sentence you only upon the basis of those bases of plea and the other facts that I am sure about. If I am not certain about something I must give you the benefit of the doubt.
5. The essential facts, on the basis of which I will sentence you, are as follows.

## THE FACTS

6. On 4 January 2023 Anthony Hadfield was at the house of his partner in Sydenham Road Hartlepool. His partner had previously been in a relationship with Mr Thomson and was the mother of his daughter but was now living apart from him.
7. On the evening of 3-4 January Mr Thomson decided to go to his ex partner's house. He was armed with a knife. He spent some time trying to force entry into the house. In the end he succeeded. What appears to have happened was that there was one altercation within the property and Mr Thomson's former partner was injured with the knife. Mr Thomson ran off when Anthony Hadfield appeared. However in a while he returned. Shortly after 0300 on 4 January 2023 the police received a telephone call reporting that the door to the property was being kicked in.
8. Adam Thomson again gained entry to the house. This time there was a fight between him and Anthony Hadfield. In the course of that fight, in which, as the basis of plea makes clear, Anthony Hadfield was acting in defence of himself and his partner, both were injured. Anthony Hadfield grabbed the knife's blade to stop himself being stabbed. At some point the blade also injured Mr Thomson's face.
9. Anthony Hadfield then rang his sister Sarah Hadfield's partner Steven Corbett. That call was not recorded but he was fearful and upset. The basis of Mr Corbett's plea is that the message was to the effect that Anthony Hadfield had just been stabbed and that his partner had also been injured, having been slashed to the arm.
10. It is apparent and indeed obvious that this message was such as to cause alarm, perhaps particularly to someone woken in the middle of the night some 2-3 months after the arrival of a new baby. Mr Corbett basis of plea says that Anthony Hadfield sounded incredibly distressed and that he was concerned for the welfare of Anthony and his partner.
11. Mr Thomson again left the property. Anthony Hadfield immediately ran to the kitchen and fetched a knife – a black handled steak knife, which was apparently lying around having been used for dinner, as it had food remains on it. He then went outside to see where Mr Thomson was. At this point lawful self defence ceased.
12. Meanwhile Steven Corbett had woken Sarah Hadfield and told her what was going on. They were, as their bases of plea say, concerned and they decided to drive round to check on Anthony Hadfield and I am also sure to provide him with support. They wasted no time. Both went dressed as they had been for sleep – Sarah Hadfield in Garfield pyjamas, Steven Corbett in shorts and a vest top. Steven Corbett grabbed a utility type kitchen knife from their kitchen. Sarah Hadfield, who had no licence to drive and had never passed a driving test, drove the car.
13. Outside the property in Sydenham Road the three parts of the equation came together with fatal results.
14. Neighbours alerted by the noise gave statements to the effect that Sarah Hadfield drove towards or at Mr Thomson, mounting the kerb before she stopped. She made no contact with him at this point. While parts of the neighbours statements conflict with the expert evidence, this does not. It also aligns with Sarah Hadfield's previous conviction for a driving offence. Steven Corbett left the vehicle and was joined by Anthony Hadfield in chasing after Mr Thomson. Both of them had knives which they were carrying in their hands as they ran. Steven Corbett fell somewhat behind quite quickly, but continued towards Mr Thomson at his own pace.

15. Driving along Sydenham Road Sarah Hadfield again drove toward Mr Thomson, but he evaded her, stepping behind a parked car. She reversed backwards, hitting another car and turning in the direction Mr Thomson had gone. With the other defendants closing in on him (Anthony Hadfield near, Steven Corbett somewhat further off), Mr Thomson ran across the road in front of the car. At the same time Sarah Hadfield accelerated towards him or his close vicinity. Over the short distance involved she was travelling at about 9mph – in other words about twice walking speed and barely faster than Mr Thomson was running in the same direction. She hit him. Not hard, and less hard for the direction of travel, but she hit him. The evidence suggests that she braked within a second of hitting him, which suggests that she braked the very instant she realised she had hit him.
16. Mr Thomson hit the front bumper of the car which propelled him (in the normal way) partly onto the bonnet. But something stopped him being fully picked up onto the bonnet. It appears from the expert evidence that by chance one foot may have been trapped by a wheel. As a result instead of being quite gently stopped up onto the bonnet, at the probably cost of a few bruises he was dragged into the road and under the car. Because the car was braking it did not run him over. He was trapped under the car in a position where he could not be given first aid. He suffered crush injuries which caused his death. He was pronounced dead at the scene at 0320 hours.
17. The defendants did try to move the car off Mr Thomson at once. I entirely accept that they did so in attempts to assist the deceased. But to no avail. And as the police began to arrive they all ran off. When later apprehended they gave untrue accounts.
18. Before passing on to the sentencing exercise I add my conclusions as to the facts:
  - a. This tragic outcome arose out of two things. The first was split second emotional decisions made in a high stress situation in the small hours of the morning. Anthony Hadfield decided not to call the police but instead to go after Mr Thomson with a knife. His family alerted decided not to call the police but to go and help him.
  - b. There was no serious premeditation. This is not a situation of a decision being taken to extract revenge. This is people in crisis making very bad reactive decisions.
  - c. The seizing of knives by Anthony Hadfield and Steven Corbett was not deeply pondered. It was another split second decision, driven by the knowledge of the knife which Mr Thomson had and had used. There was a considerable defensive element in the decision.
  - d. However this was equally not a case of those involved trying to drive Mr Thomson away. However confused the original decision-making was, having formed a group, the group went after him.
  - e. Sarah Hadfield drove directly at Mr Thomson more than once. She did not intend to cause him serious harm, as the basis of plea - and the prosecution's acceptance of that plea, makes clear. I will add that I am myself sure that this is right.
  - f. But as her plea also concedes any sober and reasonable person would recognise that what she did was dangerous ie. that it exposed Mr Thomson to the risk of some harm. Again, I am sure that is right. Driving a car towards someone is dangerous, even at low speed. Sarah Hadfield wanted to stop Mr Thomson,

whether by touching him with the car or making him fall over in his attempts to evade the car.

- g. Sarah Hadfield was not driving fast. At the speed she was driving in the normal course of events Mr Thomson would not have been seriously injured. Indeed he might have avoided any injury at all. But driving at a person is a high risk business. When things go a little unexpectedly the most serious consequences can result - as they did here.
  - h. Sarah Hadfield braked the instant she realised she had touched Mr Thomson.
  - i. The running off and the false accounts given by the Defendants were the product of panic, horror at the enormity of what had happened - and an overoptimistic hope that they might not be found.
19. This crime has therefore caused tragedy for two families. As a result of what happened Adam Thomson is tragically dead at the age of just 30. I have outlined the devastating effects on his family. As a result of what happened Sarah Hadfield's family – four children, the youngest just 8 months old - will spend some years without either their mother, their father Steven Corbett or their uncle Anthony Hadfield.

## **SENTENCING PRINCIPLES**

20. The objects of sentencing in criminal cases are set out in s 57 of the Sentencing Act 2020. I have regard to those objects. Pursuant to s. 59 of the same Act I must also follow any sentencing guidelines which are relevant to the offender's case unless I am satisfied that it would be contrary to the interests of justice to do so.
21. The Sentencing Council has provided guidelines to judges sentencing for the offence which I am considering and covering other matters relevant to this sentencing exercise. The guidelines are intended and very carefully designed to do exactly what their name suggests and assist any court in achieving a right and proper balanced sentence according to the facts of the individual case.
22. In this case I have regard to the Guideline for Manslaughter, and also the Guideline on Reduction in Sentence for Guilty Pleas and the General Guideline: Overarching Principles. I have asked counsel whether I should also have regard for comparison or range setting purposes to the new Guideline for Causing Death by Dangerous Driving. The answer from both Prosecution and defence was in the negative.
23. I have also had the possibility of a life sentence under ss. 285, 283 of the Sentencing Code drawn to my attention. It is common ground that s. 283 is not applicable to any of the defendants. It is not seriously in issue, and I have no hesitation in concluding, that a life sentence under s. 285 would not be appropriate in this case. This was a one off offence which arose out of a situation of high emotion. None of the defendants are persons who

create a significant risk to members of the public of serious harm occasioned by the commission of further specified offences.

24. The Prosecution has also rightly drawn my attention to the possibility of an extended sentence under s. 279 of the Sentencing Code. Again I am satisfied that this is not a case for the imposition of an extended sentence.
25. I therefore focus on the Manslaughter Guideline. That Guideline require me to assess the culpability of the offence, the harm in the case of any case of manslaughter being taken as being of the utmost seriousness. Having chosen that starting point I am required then to take into account aggravating and mitigating factors in the case.

### **THE PRINCIPLES APPLIED**

26. The Prosecution has suggested that this should be categorised as a Category B case albeit at the lower end, on the basis that death was caused in the course of an unlawful act which carried a high risk of death or GBH which was or ought to have been obvious to the offender. As an alternative it posits this as an upper end of Category C.
27. The Defence notes for each defendant have contended that the case is a Category C case in that this was a case where there was no high risk of death or GBH which ought to have been obvious, particularly given the speed involved.
28. In many cases involving a death caused by an impact from a car (deliberate or not) it is likely to be the case that the offence falls into Category B – that is because of the damage which any car (being a heavy object moving at speed) may well cause even without any intention to cause harm let alone serious harm. I have considered carefully whether simply because of that potentiality I should follow that course.
29. I am however satisfied that this is not a case where one can say that the risk of death or GBH was high such that it should have been obvious to Sarah Hadfield. On many occasions the combination of speed and the mass of the car will inevitably mean an obvious high risk of death or serious harm. But in this case the obvious risk was, because of the low speed, not the causing of serious harm. It was the causing of some probably minor harm. There was an obvious risk that death or GBH might result, but that was a remote contingency. The risk of what happened occurring was not obvious. It follows that this case falls within Category C, though tending more to the top end than the bottom.
30. For Category C the starting point before taking aggravating and mitigating factors into account is 6 years custody, with the upper end of the category being at 9 years. In my

judgment an appropriate starting point which reflects what I have concluded about where in the category this case fits, is 7 years.

31. It was submitted for Steven Corbett that I ought to make a distinction as to culpability between him (accessory, some way off physically at the moment of impact) and Sarah Hadfield as driver. I do not agree. Steven Corbett has pleaded guilty to manslaughter on the basis of accessory liability. He is liable for encouraging or otherwise participating in the primary offence. He is liable for the offence as committed by her. In addition we are not at a point where a difference of intent can make a difference because the offence is not one of intent, and there can be no real distinction as to the foresight issue.

32. I then turn to the aggravating and mitigating features for each Defendant.

33. Sarah Hadfield

a. Aggravating factors:

i. There are convictions in three categories though this will be a first imprisonment:

1. Offences of dishonesty in 2003 (aged 15), 2004 and 2011;
2. Assault / battery in 2008 and 2010; and,
3. Driving offences (2008 and 2019)

I would not be minded to put much weight on the older offences. However the 2019 conviction is pertinent as it includes driving towards a group of people and then fighting. I therefore must put some weight on at least that conviction.

ii. There are then a series of facts which are common to all defendants:

1. Use of weapon (car) – this is the major common aggravating factor
2. Presence of a child (marginal as Riley is nearly adult)
3. Premeditation – as the facts I have found indicate I do not conclude that there was much in the way of pre-meditation, but equally the circumstances do not permit me to count it in the defendants favour as the incident was one which went on for some little time and the joint enterprise aspect involves a degree of deliberation.
4. Location: this was rightly mentioned, but given the timing is not a point of real weight
5. Distress and alarm caused to onlookers: again rightly mentioned, but given the time of day this is less serious. Having said that the witnesses Mr Hornsey and Ms Hickman demonstrate the capacity for this to happen.

b. Mitigating factors:

- i. I do not accept absence of relevant recent convictions – the recent driving conviction is relevant.
- ii. I do however accept remorse, that you are genuinely upset for what she has done to the family of Mr Thomson. I noted your reaction to the

evidence being led and in particular to the Victim Impact Statement and I do accept that you are truly appalled by what happened and sorry.

- iii. I also give some credit for your unavailing attempt to assist Mr Thomson.
  - iv. The big mitigating factor for you is that you are sole or primary carer for dependent relatives. You are a mother of 4 children aged 16, 13, 12 and 8 months, for whom you have been primary carer. It is plain to me that you have been a good mother to them. This is a devastating blow for them all. As has been rightly conceded for you the relevance being a sole or primary carer of children is a factor that will carry less weight in more serious cases such as this. It does however remain a relevant mitigating factor
- c. Personal mitigation: Mr Elvidge KC has pressed with great skill the tragic side of this case for your family, the trauma you have suffered from unintentionally causing Mr Thomson's death and the suffering that has caused to both his and your family. I note and commend your intention to make good use of your opportunities and to put yourself in a position where in due course at least the youngest child may be able to return to your care. However in mitigation terms this adds nothing to your remorse and caring responsibilities, which I have already taken into account.
- d. Bearing in mind all of these factors I conclude that the sentence before credit for plea would be 7 years.

#### 34. Anthony Hadfield

- a. Aggravating factors:
- i. You do have relevant previous convictions for offences of violence (robbery) as well as for drugs offences and driving offences. However while account has to be taken of them they are sufficiently long ago that they should not be given too much weight. I also note your lack of convictions for any offences involving causing serious injury, though since this is not a crime of intent and nor were you the primary actor, the relevance is marginal.
  - ii. Offence committed on licence. I have to take this into account as a statutory aggravating feature.
  - iii. As to the concealing of the weapon and leaving the scene, relied on by the prosecution, these are factors which do fall to be taken into account but do not weigh particularly heavily in the circumstances of the case. This is not deliberate concealment or cool escape. It is, for both aspects, panicked and horror struck reaction.
  - iv. There are then the common aggravating features which I have noted which must be given due weight.
  - v. It might be said that you were the leading in a group activity but that has rightly not been pressed.
- b. Mitigating factors:

- i. The big mitigating factor relied on for you is the question of self defence. It is said that the facts are such there is very significant mitigation in the way in which the violence started, developed and the fact you were acting for the majority of the time in lawful self defence and defence of another before that situation changed after very considerable provocation. The problem is that that situation did change. Mr Thomson left. You got a knife, you followed him, you did not call off your family but joined in effectively hunting Mr Thomson down. This is not a near miss on self defence. Nor does this does not fall within "history of significant violence towards offender by the victim". That would potentially have been open to your partner, but not to you.
  - ii. It follows that some credit can be given but it is not a situation where very considerable credit can be given to offset the aggravating factors.
  - iii. You did to some extent attempt to assist Mr Thomson before fleeing and are entitled to some credit for that.
- c. Personal mitigation: Mr Makepeace KC has reminded me of the fact that you had been doing very well steering clear of trouble and that this argument was literally brought to your door by Mr Thomson. He also prays in aid the fact that you will be losing credit for time on remand because you were on licence. I have also seen evidence of the good use which you are making of your time in prison. The reports say that you are an asset to the MOD Nets Workshop where you are a mentor to others as well as being proactive in problem solving.
- d. Bearing in mind all of these factors I conclude that the sentence before credit for plea would be 9 years.

### 35. Steven Corbett

- a. Aggravating factors:
  - i. There are convictions but none are serious or of any relevance.
  - ii. Actions after the event: concealing knife, going on the run for 5 days and disposing of mobile phone. Although you were more successful in evading the police for a while and the full extent of this cannot be put down to panic the content of your actions is only slightly more serious than that of Anthony Hadfield.
  - iii. Then we have the common aggravating factors.
- b. Mitigating factors:
  - i. Here I do accept that there are no relevant convictions. While you are not quite of good character, your convictions leave you not far off it and you are entitled to some credit in the balancing exercise for this.
  - ii. I do also accept remorse, and some attempt to assist the victim
- c. Personal mitigation: Mr Singh KC has emphasised your effective good character and the way in which you have effectively used your time while on remand. I have

seen the evidence of the work you have been doing while on remand and it is very much to your credit in personal terms. I also accept on the personal mitigation front that 3 of Sarah Hadfield's children are yours also. While you were not the primary carer you had an important and significant caring role for them I am prepared to view this as a relevant mitigating factor albeit not to the same extent as Sarah Hadfield.

- d. Bearing in mind all of these factors I conclude that the sentence before credit for plea would be 6 years.

36. Then there is that question of credit for plea. Strictly speaking this is a plea on the first day of trial, which attracts a 10% reduction. I am however alive to the fact that there are nuances here. Manslaughter, though an available plea was not on the indictment. The prosecution were not open to a single defendant solution. There were shifts in representation which made a joined up approach difficult to the point of unfeasibility. This was not a case of delay to assess the strength of the prosecution evidence. There is a real element of delay consequent on a need for advice and information. In those circumstances I am prepared to allow in the region of 15% for the guilty pleas which spared Mr Thomson's family from hearing the detailed evidence of his final moments, the witnesses from the unpleasantness of giving evidence and reliving a very upsetting event, and the youngest defendant from the ordeal of a murder trial.
37. There are three other matters which must be mentioned. The first is disqualification from driving for Sarah Hadfield. On this the prosecution remind me that: under section 34 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988, where an offence is subject to obligatory disqualification (as manslaughter by a driver is) the court must disqualify unless it finds special reasons not to do so. The minimum disqualification is 2 years, there is no maximum. This process requires some explanation. It is for a period to be determined with reference to the custodial element of the sentence - particularly the release point for any custodial sentence. The aim of the order is to ensure that the discretionary disqualification period is geared to the seriousness of the driving element of your offending and the protection of the public – but that it is served after the release from prison.
38. The second matter is that under s 153 Sentencing Act 2020 the Court has the power to deprive Sarah Hadfield of the Ford Focus car used in the commission of the offence.
39. The third matter is forfeiture orders. Application is made under s 143 Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 for forfeiture and destruction of knives recovered which were linked to Anthony Hadfield and Steven Corbett.

## **THE SENTENCE OF THE COURT**

40. Plainly, given the nature of the offence, only a custodial sentence can be justified.
41. In respect of Manslaughter, the least possible sentence I can impose having regard to the seriousness of the offence and taking into account the matters I have already explained is as follows:
  - a. Sarah Hadfield: 5 years and 11 months (or 71 months) in custody
  - b. Anthony Hadfield: 7 years 7 months (or 99 months) in custody.
  - c. Steven Corbett: 5 years 1 month (61 months) in custody.
42. Anthony Hadfield, because you were on licence any decision on release will involve a decision by a parole board. Because of the length of that sentence you will serve two thirds of your sentence in custody before you are eligible to be considered for release by the parole board.
43. Sarah Hadfield and Steven Corbett: from your sentences will be deducted the 185 (Sarah Hadfield) and 181 (Steven Corbett) days which you have already spent on remand in custody. You will be automatically released when you have served half of your sentence
44. As to Sarah Hadfield and disqualification:
  - a. I impose a discretionary disqualification period pursuant to s. 34 Road Traffic Offences Act of 3 years (36 months). I do this bearing in mind the purpose of the order (protection of the public) and the circumstances of the case.
  - b. It is then necessary to add an extension pursuant to s 35A of the RTOA. That will be a period of 18 months (ie. equal to half the sentence imposed for the principal driving offence).
  - c. There is then an uplift pursuant to s35B of the RTOA to cover the period to be served for manslaughter. That uplift is 17 months to reflect the balance of the sentence for manslaughter.
- 45. This leads to a total disqualification of 71 months - but allowing for the time spent on remand and in custody prior to sentence (185 days) the period of disqualification from today's date is 1945 days or 64 months 25 days.**
46. In addition I order that you must pass an extended driving test before the disqualification is lifted.
47. I also make orders:
  - a. A Deprivation Order in relation to the Ford Focus
  - b. Forfeiture of the knives which are exhibits NG5 and NG4
48. Finally, the statutory surcharge applies to this offence and will be added to the Court record in the appropriate amount.