



# Judiciary of England and Wales

**REX**

**-v-**

**DARREN OSMENT**

Sentencing remarks of the Honourable Mrs Justice Cutts DBE

At the Crown Court in Bristol

On the 20<sup>th</sup> day of December 2023

1. Darren Osment, I am to sentence you today for the murder of Claire Holland. For this grave offence there is only one sentence prescribed by law and that is imprisonment for life. That is the sentence that I shall impose upon you in due course. However, I am required to determine the minimum period you should serve in prison before you are eligible to be considered for release on parole.
2. It is most important that you and everyone concerned with this case should understand what in fact this means. The minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will be automatically released but the minimum time that you will spend in custody before your case can be considered by the Parole Board and it will be for the Parole Board to say at that time whether or not you will be released. If they say you should not, you will remain in custody. If and when you are released you will be subject to licence and that will be the case for the rest of your life. If for any reason your licence were to be

revoked, you would be recalled to prison to serve your life sentence in custody.

3. Claire Holland was aged 32 years at the time of her death in June 2012. It is clear from the deeply moving impact statements that I have heard and read that she was a warm and vivacious person who was deeply loved. She had experienced difficulty in her early life, but by 2012 was, in the words of her mother, starting a new chapter in her life. She had a new flat, had re-engaged with her family and she was engaged on a programme to stop drinking. She was rightly proud of herself and the efforts that she was making. She had high hopes that she would in time be able to have her children to live with her, children whose contact visits she never missed, no matter how difficult her life was at times. She was happy and optimistic about the future.
4. A fresh start was ahead of her. You robbed her of that fresh start. You robbed her of the future she deserved. You took her permanently from her supportive family who loved and cherished her. You took her from her children, all of whom (including your own son) have had to grow up without her presence and her love. They have understandably struggled to cope with her loss but you have made their suffering so much worse in the way that you have behaved since her death. You must face the consequences of your actions in the punishment that I impose upon you today. I recognise that such punishment cannot bring her back. Those who loved and cherished her must live forever with her loss.
5. For 11 long years no one, except you, knew what had happened to Claire. She went missing on the night of the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2012, never contacting her family or her children again. There was an extensive police missing persons investigation which failed to

find her. You were spoken to in the course of that investigation. You could and should have told the police what had happened. You could and should have admitted that you killed Claire. You did not. You left her family with the agony of not knowing where she was or what had happened. As you sought to move on with your life, you left her family in limbo, caring for her youngest child and trying to give him and her other children answers they did not have.

6. Yet it is clear that you could not live with the burden of what you had done. I accept the prosecution case that you were haunted by it and, seeking to relieve the burden of what you did, you have made confessions over the years – to six people in all. Had you truly been remorseful you would have told the police and faced the consequences of your crime. You did call them in Exeter in 2019 only then to retract the confession you made the following day. Then, as you always have done, you thought only about yourself. Throughout your confessions you have sought to justify what you did, saying that no-one took your son away from you, inferring that if they did they would pay the consequences. You told the 999 operator in Exeter that Claire took your son away from you and so you took “that” (meaning her life) away from her.
  
7. This was a reference to the fact that the son you shared with Claire had been taken into care at approximately one month of age. In 2010 you had been in a relationship with Claire who became pregnant. That relationship was characterised by alcohol misuse by both of you and, I find, by violence on your part. As you conceded during the course of the trial, it was the right thing for your son that he was taken into care at that time, but you were wrong to say that was because of Claire. Let me make it clear to you – both of you were responsible for the fact he could not be cared for at home.

You were both drinking. Rather than care for and help Claire look after him, rather than addressing your own issues with and helping her to address hers, you were critical of and violent to her. The police were called after, I find, you threw Claire down the stairs shortly after your son's birth. She was to tell social workers she was frightened of you. I accept her account given to them that you had strangled her in the past and that she feared you may kill her. This fits, not just with your attitude to Claire, but with the evidence of your character that I heard during your trial. You are in the words of your mother who gave evidence, a "vile drunk". You are quick to temper and abusive and violent to women. Claire was on the receiving end of that violence. It was to her advantage that you separated not long after your son was taken into care in 2010.

8. In the weeks leading up to 6 June 2012 arrangements were made for your son to move to Torquay to be cared for by a relative of Claire's. It seems that he was moved without either of you having a chance to say goodbye and Claire wished to talk to you about that. She called you on 6 June, asking to meet. I am satisfied on the evidence that you arranged to do so. Claire told her sister that she was to meet you after you had finished work, she said the same thing to others that she spent time with that afternoon. She was happy to be doing so. Such happiness was entirely misplaced.
9. It is clear from your confessions and the verdict in this case that you did meet her that night and when you did that you killed her. I consider, against the background of your explosive temper, that your confession to Daniel Lewis was correct in this regard – that you argued when you met after you finished work. She was vulnerable. It was late at night and she had been drinking. When you confessed to others that you killed

Claire, you said to some that you strangled her and to others that you paid for someone else to kill her. I am sure that you killed her yourself. You were living hand to mouth in a hostel and did not have the means to pay someone else to do it. By so saying you were seeking only to distance yourself from the horror of what you had done by inserting another mystery person into the picture.

10. I have said that you could have told the police in 2012 what you had done. You could have done so over the years that followed. You could and should have told them and Claire's family what you did with her body. In your cowardice you have never done so. You have shown not a shred of remorse. Rather you spoke, in an effort to justify what you had done, about Claire in the most derogatory terms, blaming her for your actions. Her family have had to listen during the trial to what you said about her to the undercover officer who was deployed to find out what happened to Claire, never referring to her by her name or even as your ex partner or son's mother, only by words of abuse and scorn.

11. In your confessions you have said more than once that Claire's body could never be found. At times, you have talked about her body being in pieces and suggested that you cut it up. I am sure on the evidence that you were responsible for the dismembering and disposal of Claire's body and, given your reaction around water, that you disposed of her body in the water. For Claire's family's sake and for the sake of your son, I urge you for once to stand up to what you have done in the very near future and to disclose what you did and where her body might be found so that she may be laid to rest.

12. I turn to your sentence.
  
13. In coming to the appropriate minimum term I must first decide where this case falls within Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020. There are no factors which would place this case within paragraphs 2 or 3 of the schedule.
  
14. I have considered whether this was a murder committed with a knife taken to the scene. There is insufficient evidence for me to say that was the case. Given what you have said in some of your confessions and your predilection to strangulation, I consider it more likely that was the means of Claire's death.
  
15. I conclude therefore that the appropriate starting point for the minimum term is one of 15 years imprisonment.
  
16. The offence is seriously aggravated by the dismemberment and concealment of Claire's body. I consider the domestic violence in your relationship with Claire, particularly your earlier strangulation of her, to also be an aggravating factor. Whilst I am sure that you arranged to meet Claire on the night of her death, there is insufficient evidence for me to conclude that there was a significant degree of planning or premeditation in what you did. I consider it more likely that you killed her in temper. I find however no evidence that at the time you killed her you did not intend so to do.
  
17. I find no mitigation. I recognise that you have no convictions for violence but this has little consequence given the evidence I heard during the trial of your violence towards Claire and indeed in a subsequent relationship. Whilst I do not increase your sentence

by reason of your violence to others, I find no mitigation in your lack of convictions for violence.

18. I heard a great deal of psychiatric and psychological evidence during the trial. You do not suffer from a major mental illness, neurodevelopmental disorder or significant personality disorder. You do suffer from alcohol dependency disorder with associated depression and anxiety. I accept that over the years this has led you on occasion to experience suicidal thoughts. It provides however no possible mitigation in this case. You have been offered help with your alcohol misuse on many occasions. You have not availed yourself of that help.

19. I take into account all that your counsel has ably said on your behalf.

a. You are now aged 41 years.

b. I recognise that your conduct will have an impact upon your own family. You will have little contact with your own children as they grow into adulthood without a father. It is often of course that others suffer from the conduct of those who offend. They grow up without a father by reason of your actions.

20. As I have said the sentence is one of life imprisonment. In coming to the minimum term, I step back to look at the total sentence to ensure that it reflects the overall seriousness of the offence. Taking into account all of the aggravating and mitigating factors as exist in my judgment the minimum term I impose is one of 20 years imprisonment.

21. Darren Osment, for the murder of Claire Holland I sentence you to life imprisonment.

You will serve a minimum term of 20 years less the 503 days you have served on remand. Thereafter it will be for the Parole Board to decide when, if ever, you should be released. If you are ever released you will remain on licence for the rest of your life.

22. I recognise the suffering to Claire's family over many years, first not knowing what had happened to her and then during the murder enquiry. I commend them for their dignity throughout this trial when hearing what must have been distressing evidence. They have the condolences of this court. I hope in time they can find a way forward with their lives.