



IN THE CROWN COURT AT NOTTINGHAM

THE KING V. LAWRENCE BIERTON

20 DECEMBER 2023

SENTENCING REMARKS OF THE HON. MR JUSTICE PEPPERALL

1. Lawrence Bierton, you are now 63 and have been convicted by this jury of the murder of Pauline Quinn. In reaching that verdict, the jury rejected your defence that your responsibility for killing Mrs Quinn was diminished by reason of your alcohol dependency disorder. Mrs Quinn is the third elderly and vulnerable woman that you have murdered in her own home.
2. The murder of Pauline Quinn was as senseless as it was brutal. On the afternoon of 9 November 2021, you surprised Mrs Quinn by leaping over the garden fence separating your two properties. You asked for money in order that you could buy alcohol. When she refused your request, you pushed her to the floor and pursued her into her own living room. Mrs Quinn activated the alarm cord in her bungalow in a desperate attempt to summon help. You then set about bludgeoning her to death with a wooden coffee table. The activation of the alarm cord automatically caused the system to make an audio recording. That recording captured a number of loud bangs which, I am sure upon the evidence, was part of your murderous attack on Mrs Quinn. You repeatedly targeted her head striking her with such force that she suffered – among other serious injuries - a comminuted fracture of the skull and significant brain damage. The defensive injuries to Mrs Quinn’s arms indicate that at first she sought in vain to protect her head. Mrs Quinn will then have lost consciousness and death would have followed within no more than half an hour. In all, you caused 29 separate injuries. Expert evidence revealed that you struck her at least fourteen times; ten of which were to her head.
3. The severity of Mrs Quinn’s head injuries, the extraordinary area over which blood was spattered, the sickening sound of wood being smashed over your victim’s head, and the breaking of the light fitting indicate the ferocity with which you attacked this defenceless and disabled woman. I am satisfied so that I am sure that you used severe force lifting your weapon high above your head and repeatedly smashing it into Mrs Quinn’s skull with as much force as you could muster. There is no doubt upon the evidence that you intended to kill your victim.

4. While some care is required in interpreting the audio recording, what is also clear is that there were long pauses between the bangs. Upon the evidence of that recording and the verdict of this jury, I am satisfied so that I am sure that this was not an explosive frenzied attack but a crime committed by a man who remained in control. In my judgment, you callously considered the need and location for further blows in order to ensure that your victim was dead.
5. There are a number of serious aggravating features of this offence:
 - (a) First, your victim was particularly vulnerable. She was an elderly and disabled woman.
 - (b) Secondly, she was murdered in her own home where she should have been safe.
 - (c) Thirdly, this was a brutal and sustained attack in which you targeted Mrs Quinn's head.
 - (d) Fourthly, you used a weapon to commit this offence.
 - (e) Fifthly, Mrs Quinn will have suffered mental anguish and physical suffering as she was startled by you at her back door, as she was pursued into her property, and as she sought to defend herself against your attack.
6. The most significant aggravating feature of this case, however, lies in your past. Mrs Quinn was murdered just 18 months after you were re-released on licence following your 1996 convictions for the murders of Aileen Dudill and Elsie Gregory. On 25 June 1995, you and a man called Michael Pluck beat Ms Dudill and Ms Gregory to death in their Rotherham home. The two sisters were elderly and disabled. They were known to you and Pluck because you had done some gardening work for them. Ms Dudill's skull was fractured and she was then smothered to death. Ms Gregory suffered more extensive head injuries. Like Mrs Quinn, she suffered a comminuted skull fracture and brain damage. She also suffered fractures to her neck, breastbone and five ribs which were consistent with having been stamped on. The sisters' house was then set alight. Ms Gregory's charred dentures were found in the garden shared by you and Pluck. The jury at your trial rejected your alibi defence and on 30 May 1996 at the Sheffield Crown Court you were sentenced to two terms of life imprisonment.
7. There are a number of extremely worrying parallels between the 1995 murders and the murder of Mrs Quinn:
 - (a) All three women were elderly and suffered at least some degree of physical disability.

- (b) All three were known to you.
 - (c) Like Ms Dudill and Ms Gregory, Mrs Quinn was killed in her own home.
 - (d) All three women were subjected to extreme and sustained violence.
 - (e) All three women suffered very substantial blunt-force trauma to their heads and fractured skulls. Like Mrs Quinn, Ms Gregory suffered particularly serious head injuries.
 - (f) There was no apparent motive for the killing of any of these women.
8. One of the conditions of your licence upon your release from prison in May 2020 was that you should only live at premises approved by the Probation Service. At an earlier hearing, the former Recorder of Nottingham, His Honour Gregory Dickinson KC, rightly directed that the Probation Service should report to the court how it came to approve your residence at Rayton Spur. Saika Jabeen, the Head of Nottinghamshire Probation Delivery Unit has presented her report to the court. She explains that a bungalow at Rayton Spur was offered by the local authority on the basis that you were over 60. The police sensibly raised their concerns in view of the circumstances of your earlier offending and the risk that you posed to elderly and vulnerable people. Notwithstanding that prescient warning, the Probation Service approved the address. Ms Jabeen rightly accepts that that decision was flawed and that you should never have been housed among elderly and vulnerable residents on your release from prison. Mrs Quinn was entitled to expect better and the system plainly failed her.
9. The court heard a moving victim personal statement from Mrs Quinn's daughter, Lisa Rummery. The statement was made on her own behalf and on behalf of her siblings, Janice and Thomas Quinn, and her aunt, Catherine Rawson. Mrs Rummery described Mrs Quinn as a much-loved mother, sister and grandmother. She was caring, generous and funny; the sort of person who would do anything for anyone. Mrs Rummery spoke poignantly of the enormous hole left in so many lives and of the deep anguish and psychological trauma that Mrs Quinn's nearest relatives have suffered through knowledge of her violent murder.
10. On your behalf, Mark McKone KC argues that the Court should find that this offence was mitigated by the fact that you were suffering from the effects of alcohol withdrawal even though the jury rejected the defence that your alcohol dependence disorder was a significant contributory factor in causing you to kill Mrs Quinn. I do not agree. While it was common ground between the psychiatrists at trial that you

were dependent on alcohol, it was in dispute that you were in a withdrawal state at the time of this offence. I do not accept that your alcohol dependency provides you with any mitigation in this case. On the basis of the evidence that you had consumed a not insubstantial quantity of alcohol and drugs on the morning of your offending, the lack of any objective evidence of symptoms of withdrawal on the CCTV footage, and the clear evidence of the purposeful and controlled way in which you were able to function both at the time of this offence and in its immediate aftermath, I am sure that you were not substantially affected by the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal at the time of killing Mrs Quinn.

11. Mr McKone also argues that there is evidence of remorse. Certainly you acknowledged that Mrs Quinn did not deserve to die, but the evidence at trial suggested that you were more concerned by the effect of your criminality upon your own family. If that is wrong and you feel remorse, it rings rather hollow when Mrs Quinn was the third elderly and vulnerable woman to die a brutal death at your hands.
12. There are, in my judgment, only two matters that can be said in mitigation:
 - (a) First, after your initial denials, you admitted this killing in your fourth police interview.
 - (b) Secondly, given the lack of any apparent motive for this killing and the fact that you did not take a weapon with you, I cannot be sure that there was any significant planning.
13. While you pleaded guilty to the theft of Mrs Quinn's car keys, the initial charge of robbery was not proceeded with. Accordingly, I accept that this was not a murder committed for gain but rather that you opportunistically took Mrs Quinn's car after her murder.
14. For the offence of murder, I am required by law to pass a sentence of life imprisonment. Section 321(3) of the Sentencing Act 2020 provides that the court must make a whole-life order if the offender was 21 or over at the time of the offence and the court is of the opinion that, because of the seriousness of the offence, it should not make a minimum-term order. In all other cases, the court must fix the minimum period that must be served before the offender is eligible for parole. Further, by s.322(3) of the Act, in considering the question of seriousness, I am required to have regard to the general principles set out in schedule 21 to the Act. Paragraph 1 of schedule 21 provides that where the seriousness of the offending is

exceptionally high and the offender was aged 21 or over at the date of the murder, the appropriate starting point should be to impose a whole-life order. Parliament has provided that the whole-life starting point would normally be appropriate where an offence of murder is committed by an offender who has previously been convicted of murder. It is common ground that I should take such a starting point in this case.

15. All offences of murder are, of course, extremely serious crimes. Even within that context, the seriousness of your offending is exceptionally high both as a matter of ordinary language and in the technical sense in which that term is used in schedule 21. Accordingly, the starting point is that I should pass a whole-life order.
16. In *R v. Reynolds* [2014] EWCA Crim 2205, the then Lord Chief Justice observed that where a whole-life order is called for, often, perhaps usually, the case will not be on the borderline such that the facts will leave the judge in no doubt that the defendant must be kept in prison for the rest of his life. Lord Thomas added:

“The whole life order is reserved for the few exceptionally serious offences where, after reflecting on all the features of aggravation and mitigation, the judge is satisfied that the element of just punishment requires the imposition of a whole-life order.”
17. It has been said to be a sentence of last resort. While I must have regard to schedule 21, I must also be astute to consider carefully the facts of this case and avoid a rigid application of the statutory guidance. [See, generally, *R v. Stewart* [2022] EWCA Crim 1063.]
18. You have now been found guilty of the senseless and brutal murders of three elderly and disabled women in their own homes. You showed each of your victims no mercy as you callously inflicted devastating head injuries upon them in sustained attacks in which you used extraordinary levels of violence. The particular aggravating feature of this case is that you murdered Mrs Quinn in the same brutal fashion just months after being released on licence for the 1995 murders of Ms Dudill and Ms Gregory. I am left in no doubt whatever that you must never again have the opportunity to walk the streets and endanger women in their homes, and that the only just sentence in this case is that you should remain in prison for the rest of your life.
19. For the offence of murder, I pass a sentence of life imprisonment. In accordance with s.321(3) of the Sentencing Act 2020, I make a whole-life order. I therefore direct that the early-release provisions will not apply in your case. I impose no

separate penalty for the offence of theft. Further, I direct that you will pay the statutory surcharge.

20. Take him down.