

IN THE CROWN COURT AT BRISTOL

Mrs Justice May

R

-v-

KODI-SHAI WESTCOTT

RILEY TOLLIVER

BDJ

BJM

Sentencing Remarks

Reporting restrictions: Reporting restrictions imposed under section 45(3) of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 continue to apply to two of the defendants, who are referred to in these remarks by use of computer-generated random initials BDJ and BJM. Part 1 of these remarks delivered to BDJ and BJM will not be published.

Part 1

Kodi and Riley

You were part of a group which attacked and killed two boys last January. The boys were called Mason and Max. They were your age Kodi, and younger than you Riley. They had done nothing wrong. They did not attack your house Kodi, they had nothing to do with it.

You have heard how much pain you have caused to their mums, their sisters, their families. When their boys were stabbed and died it was such a shock for everyone, so terrible and so very very unfair.

No one can turn the clock back. No one can go back to how it was before. Mason and Max's families must go on without them in a different way now. Your lives will change now too. As Mason's sister said, there are no winners here.

There are rules which I must follow when I sentence you for these murders. The first rule is this: the only sentence I can give you is one that will affect you for your whole life. It is called Detention at His Majesty's Pleasure. What it means is that if you are released in future, you will always be supervised. You can be returned to prison if you do anything wrong again. Whether you will ever be released depends on how well you do whilst you are inside. That is what people mean when they talk about your

rehabilitation. You must work hard at that. If you work as hard as you have been doing already then you will have a good chance of being released. But that is something that people called the Parole Board will decide in future.

The Parole Board cannot start to think about releasing you until you have stayed inside for some years called a minimum term. I have to set that minimum term. The rules set a starting point. I have to think about the things that made the murders worse. Those increase the minimum term. I also think about the things about you which should count in your favour; those lower the minimum term.

Kodi, You ran after Max and stabbed him. It was a deep wound. We have all seen the knife that you used, it was long and sharply pointed. You used that knife to stab Mason as well on your way back to the car. You knew it was very wrong to take that knife and attack anyone with it. We saw you hiding your knife afterwards. You got rid of your phone. Your brother took your clothes and burnt them.

Your starting point is 20 years.

The offences are made worse by these things: taking and using that long and dangerous knife. How scared Mason and Max would have been, being chased by four boys they didn't know. Boys who were carrying those long knives. Mason being stabbed and dying outside his front door where his mother has to walk every day. People in their homes right there, whilst you are running down their street with those knives. Whilst you are stabbing boys who live there. The group of you going there and doing that, all for revenge on Westers.

The things that count in your favour are these: You were not well looked after growing up. I am not going to go into detail but I have read about your father's illness and his death and your mother's difficulties. Your older brother moved away so you were the oldest there with you mum, looking after the others, trying to feed them. You have not done anything like this before, not hurt anyone or injured anyone. You have told your youth justice worker that you felt you had to carry knives for your own safety. Your home life meant that you missed out on a lot of schooling. You have educational difficulties but you are going to classes now and doing well. People like you, they like talking to you and want to help you. They think that you are worth helping and that if you had had help before you might not have done these terrible things. You have said how sorry you are for the pain you have caused and I believe you.

I have thought about all of this and everything that people have written about you. This is your sentence:

You will be detained at His Majesty's Pleasure. The minimum term is 23 years 44 days.

Riley, you were the oldest. You took a baseball bat, you did not have a knife. You chased after Mason with that bat. You can be seen appearing to use it twice but there were no bruises on Mason, only one on Max.

Because you were 17, the starting point for you is 27 years. But I agree with the experts that your thinking was more like a much younger boy when you joined in with that attack.

The offences are made worse by these things: Being in a group with others who had long knives. How scared Mason and Max would have been, being chased by four boys they didn't know. Boys who were carrying those knives. Mason being stabbed and dying right outside his front door where his mum has to walk every day. People in their homes right there, whilst you are running down their street with those knives. Whilst you are stabbing boys who live there. The group of you going there and doing that, all for revenge on Westers. You knew how wrong it was to take a weapon and attack those boys. You got rid of that bat later.

The things that count in your favour are these: You were not well looked after growing up. I am not going to read out any detail but I have seen what has been said about the adults in your life. You were not properly cared for, and bad things happened around you. Your home life meant that you missed out on a lot of schooling. Staff where you are now say that you are trying really hard and doing really well. You have completed some some cadet training and got certificates which you are really proud of. Staff who work with you like you and like working with you. Your youth justice worker says how sorry you are. I have read your letter and I believe you.

I have thought about all of these things and everything that people have written about you. This is your sentence:

You will be detained at His Majesty's Pleasure. Your minimum term is 23 years 47 days.

Part 2

The court is sitting without robes, as we did during the trial. We did this as there are four young defendants, three of whom were and are still children.

On 15 November 2024 after a trial lasting 6 weeks, a jury convicted all five defendants of the murders of Mason Rist and Max Dixon.

Antony Snook, aged 45, was sentenced on 19 November 2024. Today the court is sentencing the four young defendants, Kodi Westcott (16 at the time of the murders, 17 now), Riley Tolliver (17 at the time, 18 now) BDJ (15 at the time, 16 now) and BJM 14 at the time, 15 now.

How the killings happened

The killings occurred against a backdrop of long-standing postcode rivalry and hostility between certain factions living in the neighbouring districts of Hartcliffe and Knowle in South Bristol. At about 10.07 on the evening of Saturday 27 January 2024 three youths, hooded and masked, each carrying a large machete or killer zombie type weapon, went into the front garden of an address in Hartcliffe and attacked it, throwing bricks and large stones, appearing to challenge whoever was inside to come out. The attack broke every front window and injured a woman inside. She was at home alone with her son Kodi. Kodi was then aged 16. The attack was captured on a CCTV camera positioned on the front of the house. The three attackers were believed to have come from Knowle. To-date none of the three have been identified or apprehended. The court learnt at trial that this was the third such attack on the same house in recent months, none of them leading to any arrest.

Kodi's older brother Bailey (then aged 22) was notified. He was living some 10 minutes away by cab from the family home. Such telephone records as the police were able to obtain showed that Bailey started calling round family and friends immediately, reporting that his family home had been attacked and his mother injured and that "Westers" had done it. One of the first people that Bailey called was a friend of his, Antony Snook. At 10.10 when Bailey called him Snook was driving back from Swindon with BDJ in his car.

CCTV shows Bailey arriving at the family home at 10.37. Snook is shown pulling up in his Audi Q2 12 minutes later at 10.49. 5 minutes after that, at 10.55, Snook walked out to his car with Kodi and BDJ. Although hidden from the CCTV both boys were armed with long knives, machete or zombie killer type, taken from the house.

At trial Snook, who was the only one of the defendants to give evidence, said that someone had asked him to drive the boys to a safe house. This was an obvious lie which the jury rightly rejected. I am sure that he was asked, and agreed, to take the boys on a revenge mission to Knowle. On the way he picked up Riley, who was armed with a baseball bat, and BJM, also armed with a long knife.

Snook drove that armed group over to Knowle, arriving there shortly after 11. There he drove them around the streets for some 14 minutes, "sharking" as the prosecution put it. Passing down Ilminster Ave for the first time they saw a teenage boy. The boy was Max Dixon, walking down to his friend Mason's house. Snook turned the car and, driving back, the group saw another boy come out of a house and start to walk down the street with the first. The second boy was Mason Rist.

As none of the young defendants answered questions in interview or gave evidence at trial, and as Snook plainly gave a false account to the jury in his evidence, it is impossible to know what prompted the boys in the car to decide to attack Mason and Max. One can only assume they thought, wrongly, that Mason and Max had had something to do with the earlier attack on Kodi's family home. Snook drove past, turning the car once more before stopping beside Mason and Max on the pavement. The four armed boys in the car

got out and went over to them. CCTV from houses along Ilminster Avenue captured most of the terrible events of the next half-minute.

Riley and BDJ were the first to reach the boys on the pavement. Riley can be seen raising the bat and bringing it down. The two boys fled back in the direction of Mason's house, Mason running over to the opposite pavement, Max on the near pavement. The CCTV camera at Mason's front door captured Mason being chased by BJM and Riley, Max being chased by Kodi and BDJ.

BJM stabbed Mason once, Mason fell and Riley can be seen aiming a blow at Mason with the bat. Riley and BJM then ran back to the car. Meanwhile, out of sight of any camera, Kodi stabbed Max who kept running. Kodi turned back to the car, stabbing Mason again on his way back. BDJ carried on chasing Max for a short time, appearing to lunge at him as Max turned sharply away into the road. BDJ followed for a moment before turning and running back to Snook's car. Snook made a turn in the road before driving back past Mason, by this time on the ground badly wounded, and racing home.

The whole attack, from the moment the armed boys got out of the car to the last one getting back in, lasted 33 seconds. In that time Mason received two stab wounds, one to his front, 21cm deep inflicted by BJM and one to his back inflicted by Kodi. Max received a single stab wound to his back inflicted by Kodi. The wounds to both boys allowed them to carry on running for a short time but in each case the internal damage which had been caused was un-survivable, the blood loss too great. Members of the public, police and paramedics did all they could; the boys were rushed to hospital but could not be saved. They both died shortly afterwards.

Snook dropped off two of the boys on the way back to Hartcliffe. He took Kodi and BDJ back to Kodi's house. CCTV shows both boys running in carrying long knives. Within minutes Bailey is captured on CCTV at the back of the house carrying out clothes and setting a fire in the back garden. Bailey had by this time been joined at the house by his friend Jamie Ogbourne (aged 26), who can also be seen outside tending to the fire. Ogbourne later took Kodi and BDJ to his house where they stayed overnight before leaving the next day.

Bailey and Ogbourne pleaded guilty to 2 counts of assisting an offender arising out of their actions after the boys arrived back. They were sentenced yesterday.

The police traced Snook almost immediately by the car registration, captured on ANPR going in to Knowle. It was not long before they had identified the link to the house in Hartcliffe and, through that, the identity of other suspects including these four young defendants. The house in Hartcliffe was searched the next day. Eight knives in all were recovered, including the two taken to Knowle by Kodi and BDJ. These two knives were truly fearsome – one a machete with a 48cm blade, the other a killer zombie type, black

with a 51cm partially notched blade ending in a sharp slender point. It is an offence to sell such knives in this country.

No phones belonging to any of the young defendants were recovered. Nor was the knife which BJM used to stab Mason.

Mason and Max

Mason, 15, and Max 16 had been best friends for a long time. They were simply and tragically in the wrong place at the wrong time; they had had nothing whatsoever to do with the earlier attack on the address in Hartcliffe, or with any strife between the neighbouring districts. The CCTV capturing their brutal cutting down by these defendants is shocking and distressing viewing.

The court has seen and read moving personal statements from Max and Mason's mothers and from two of their sisters. Mason's sister Chloe Dore and Max's mum Leanne Eklund bravely stood up in court today to tell the defendants about their loss and how it has affected them. All speak to the terrible grief they have suffered, and will continue to suffer. Mason and Max were good boys from homes where people loved them very much. They had their whole lives ahead of them.

The shock of such vicious weapons in young hands causing deaths on a residential street affects everyone in the community, even those who did not know Mason, Max or their families.

Nothing can undo the dreadful events of that night last January. Nothing can bring Mason and Max back. No sentence which this court passes can lessen the sense of loss and grief caused to their families. Nor does it represent in any way the value of those young lives.

The application of Schedule 21 of the Sentencing Act 2020

By law, the only sentence for murders committed by people who are under 18 at the time is one of Detention at His Majesty's Pleasure (section 259 Sentencing Act 2020). In this case, for each defendant there will be two such sentences running concurrently, side by side.

Such a sentence affects the offender for their whole life. If they are released, and that can only happen if the Parole Board decides in future that it is safe to do so, they are released on licence, with rules they must follow. They can be returned to prison immediately if they break any of those rules, or if they commit any further offence. It is in that way that the sentence protects the public.

The sentencing court is also required to set the minimum term of detention which each defendant must serve before he can be considered for release. Schedule 21 to the

Sentencing Act 2020 sets out the steps which the court must follow when setting the minimum term.

When setting the term for an offender under 18, as three of these defendants still are, the court is required by law to have regard to their welfare. For all defendants the court must also take account of any relevant overarching sentencing guideline, here the Sentencing Council Guidelines Sentencing Children and Young People (“the Child guideline”), in particular paragraph 1.5 which is in my view so relevant to the present case that I set it out in full:

1.5 It is important to bear in mind any factors that may diminish the culpability of a child or young person. Children and young people are not fully developed and they have not attained full maturity. As such, this can impact on their decision making and risk taking behaviour. It is important to consider the extent to which the child or young person has been acting impulsively and whether their conduct has been affected by inexperience, emotional volatility or negative influences. They may not fully appreciate the effect their actions can have on other people and may not be capable of fully understanding the distress and pain they cause to the victims of their crimes. Children and young people are also likely to be susceptible to peer pressure and other external influences and changes taking place during adolescence can lead to experimentation, resulting in criminal behaviour. When considering a child or young person’s age their emotional and developmental age is of at least equal importance to their chronological age (if not greater).

The guideline on Sentencing Offenders with Mental disorders, Developmental disorders, or Neurological Impairments applies to defendants over 18 years, so potentially to Riley, although his developmental age and maturity, as revealed by the reports I have read about him, is so very much lower than his chronological age as to make the Child Guideline in my view more relevant so far as he is concerned.

The law recognises that children and young people are to be treated differently from adults. The minimum terms which I set for each young defendant are much shorter than they would be for an adult. I keep in mind also that all the defendants are young and must be sentenced in the hope that they will one day be rehabilitated and live useful lives in the community. I acknowledge how unjust that must seem now to the families and friends of Mason and Max.

All counsel are agreed that the facts of this case, involving the murders of two people in the same incident, would engage paragraph 3 of Schedule 21 had the defendants been adults at the time. Paragraph 5A of Schedule 21 sets out the equivalent starting points which apply to child offenders, depending on their chronological age at the time the murders were committed. The starting points under paragraph 5A as applied to these

defendants are as follows: Kodi, who was 16 at the time, 20 years. BDJ, 15 at the time, 20 years. Riley, 17 at the time, 27 years. BJM, 14 at the time, 15 years.

These are the starting points but not the end points. The law is clear that chronological age of children and young people is not at all the same as developmental age. When considering the true level of culpability, just taking a defendant's chronological age may not be a reliable indicator. I must also seek to ensure that relatively small differences in chronological age (BDJ being just 8 months older than BJM, Riley being just 1 year older than Kodi, for instance) do not result in an unfair disparity bearing in mind that this was a group attack by the defendants acting jointly. There are some differences in roles – Riley had a bat not a knife and neither he nor BDJ actually inflicted fatal injuries – and I will take those into account.

Aggravating and mitigating matters need to be factored in. Aggravating factors are things that make the offences worse; mitigating factors are matters which count in favour of a defendant.

In balancing the relevant factors for each defendant I have been much assisted by the number and quality of expert and professional reports for each. Most particularly, for sentencing purposes, by long and thoughtful reports prepared by the Youth Justice Service. Where I do not mention all the reports individually everyone should understand that I have read all of them, for each defendant, most carefully.

Here, the murders are seriously aggravated by the following:

- (1) the fact that the victims were innocent children. One of them, Mason (aged 15) was killed right outside the front door to his home.
- (2) Mason and Max must have been absolutely terrified at being confronted and chased with such fearsome weapons.
- (3) The fact that this was a revenge attack.
- (4) The fact that the attacks took place on a residential street, in the middle of a neighbourhood community where people were at home.

The prosecution have suggested that there was significant premeditation and planning. Whilst I am sure that there would have had to have been some planning and preparation, by someone, to put together the group of young defendants, to arm them and to line up Snook to take them, I cannot be sure that any of these young defendants was primarily responsible for that preparation. I have had regard, in this respect, to the reports prepared on each, giving details of their level of intellectual functioning and their family backgrounds. The evidence suggested that Kodi and BDJ may have put on more layers of clothing before going, but I do not count that as significant planning. Snook was responsible for the planning and preparation involved in the drive around Knowle and that was significant so far as he was concerned. As I see it the boys were primed, not prevented as they should have been, by the adults around them. They went, reckless and

armed, with revenge and very little else in their minds. Having heard the evidence at trial and having read all the reports about each boy I do not believe that any of them intended to kill Mason or Max. This was not a case where there were multiple repeated stab wounds, moreover though disastrous in outcome, it was a short-lived incident. The prosecution in its sentencing note accepts this. However, as I pointed out at the time of sentencing Snook, the chance of a fatal outcome is so high when using such dangerous weapons to inflict wounds, that it is really meaningless to talk of not having an intention to kill. For Kodi and BJM, whilst I accept that they did not set out actually to kill Mason or Max, the fact that they both used those large knives in anger to inflict deep wounds to each victim significantly lessens the mitigating effect for them of that lack of intention.

I also accept that each defendant has expressed sincere remorse for their actions. The Youth Justice Service has in each case explored with them what this means and has satisfied themselves that each defendant understands and that their feelings of shame and regret are real. BJM has also expressed it in a letter which a care assistant has written out for him; Riley has written his own letter which his counsel read out on Monday. Kodi expressed his regret through counsel and through the YJS report writer, I bear in mind also that Kodi admitted to being the one who stabbed Max, even though that act was not captured on any CCTV. BDJ has also expressed his shame and guilt through the Youth Justice Service and through his counsel.

These features apply to each of the defendants. I now turn consider each defendant individually.

First, Kodi. Kodi, 17 now, has no previous convictions cautions or reprimands. The Youth Justice Service report makes very sad reading. I shall not repeat the details here, it is enough to indicate that Kodi's background is one of scarcely believable neglect and deprivation, leaving him, as at last January when he was arrested "the furthest point a child can be from thriving [and] achieving their full potential...". Every one of the adverse childhood experiences listed as relevant in the Child Guideline applies to him. He has missed most of his schooling. His level of intellectual functioning as shown by psychological testing conducted earlier this year by Ms Williams is the equivalent of Key Stage 2, being ages 7 to 10. The Youth Justice Service report records that Kodi has been targeted because of his older brother's involvement with the neighbourhood rivalries, for the colour of his skin and for coming from Hartcliffe; Kodi has grown up in the midst of postcode hostility, where carrying knives has been normalised by the adults around him and regarded as necessary for his safety. As the Youth Justice report points out, Kodi was likely to be in a state of hyper-vigilance, keyed up all the time, the attack on his house that night precipitating the calamitous response which resulted in these terrible crimes. By contrast, and most encouragingly for his eventual rehabilitation, Kodi has done very well in custody, where he has had, for the first time, the support and encouragement that a child should have. His attitude and temperament have been noticed by staff and other

inmates, who truly value him. It has led the Youth Justice Service report writer to conclude her long and careful report by saying this: “Professionals who have worked with Kodi over the last ten months have repeatedly hypothesised that offending behaviour could have been prevented if he had been provided with the nurture essential for trauma recovery”.

Next, BDJ, 15 at the time, now 16. BDJ has 2 recorded convictions for carrying knives, which is a concern, but which I do not treat as aggravating the present offences. The YJS report refers to adverse childhood experiences, whilst noting that he has the benefit of a supportive and caring mother. BDJ was convicted of these murders on the basis of secondary liability only; he carried a large knife and chased Max with it but he did not use it to stab either boy. BDJ has educational and learning difficulties, Dr Green’s and Dr White’s reports identify clinical indicators for a number of mental disorders of the types which the adult guideline specifically identifies as affecting culpability. Mrs Vigars points to the adverse effects of these mental disadvantages born and raised within a neighbourhood of community tensions. She asks rhetorically what choice BDJ could really have made, with his disadvantages and returning to a house with adults full of tension and anger, bent on revenge. BDJ has also benefitted from intensive education and support at his placement, where he is doing well.

Riley, 17 at the time, is now just 18. He has two cautions for criminal damage from some years ago. They are irrelevant for present purposes. Riley was profoundly disadvantaged growing up: again I shall not provide details but there was constant neglect and deprivation in his home, growing up with adults who did not or could not provide basic nurture. His childhood too was adversely impacted by the neighbourhood rivalries and by a culture at home where knives were normal. He has had very little schooling; only now, in custody, has Riley been able to get the type of help which has allowed him to learn to read and write. He has handwritten a letter addressed “to the court and to the families” which his counsel read out on Monday. His test scores place him at the lowest level of intellectual function for his age of all the defendants, in an already very low-scoring group. Dr Broderick, consultant psychologist, described Riley’s IQ as within the learning disability range, so low as to constitute a mental disorder “likely to significantly impact his ability to act in a considered and reasoned manner, especially at times of heightened stress or significant interpersonal pressure.” Riley too has shown encouraging signs in detention of what his rehabilitation could achieve: he has worked hard at completing training courses and is proud of what he has managed to accomplish; the adults who work with him are impressed by his hard work and are fond of him. His resettlement worker explains that he presents as a child who is much younger than his chronological age, bearing out Dr Broderick’s assessment.

BJM, 14 then, 15 now, is the youngest of the defendants. His home life was also appallingly impoverished. He also was assessed as being “the furthest point a child can

be from thriving [and] achieving their full potential” on his arrest earlier this year. The Youth Justice Service report records that in the 9 months since being detained BJM has gone up two shoe sizes and has grown. He is now having his most basic needs met, but regrettably only in custody. Like the other defendants he has missed most of his schooling, his adults just not seeing to it that he went to school. He too is assessed as extremely low intelligence, Dr Indoe, the psychologist who assessed him, pointing out that his scores were more typical of a child aged 7-9 years.

These are all the matters which I must balance, for each young defendant, in arriving at the appropriate minimum term in each case. I must also seek to ensure that any disparity between the minimum terms is no more than a fair reflection of the age difference between them along with any differences in their roles and their personal mitigation.

For Kodi, the starting point of 20 years is aggravated upwards by the matters I have indicated. I have recorded the matters of mitigation which I have taken into account in his case, which are strong as to his adverse family background and its effect on his maturity and culpability. For him, however, the mitigating effect of a lack of intention to kill is significantly less than for the other defendants, even BJM, since Kodi used his knife to stab both boys. He stabbed Mason when Mason was already injured. In Kodi’s case, a year older than BDJ though they share the same starting point, the aggravating factors outweigh the mitigating ones. The minimum term in Kodi’s case is 23 years 44 days, being 24 years less the 321 days that he has spent on remand.

BDJ has the same starting point in schedule 21 as Kodi, 20 years, although he was a year younger, at 15 not 16, and just 8 months older than BJM. BDJ is fortunate to have a supportive and loving mother at home. The aggravating factors that I have identified apply equally to BDJ as to all. BDJ was a wholly secondary party, albeit taking and chasing with a long knife, he did not actually stab either boy. In my view the mitigating features in his case slightly outweigh the aggravating ones. The minimum term in BDJ’s case is 18 years 44 days, being 19 years less the 321 days he has spent in detention on remand.

Riley: The starting point in Schedule 21 for Riley, 17 at the time, is 27 years. In his case, even more than the others, his chronological age belies his much lower developmental age, for the purposes of assessing the true level of his maturity and culpability for these offences. The aggravating factors apply; however although Riley was in a group where others were carrying large knives, Riley’s weapon was a bat. Although it looked on the CCTV as if he swung the bat at Mason, Mason had no blunt force injury. Max had a nasty large bruise to his shoulder, which I am sure was caused by Riley’s bat, but that was not at all a fatal injury. The fact that Riley carried no knife and that he inflicted no fatal injury lends considerable weight to a lack of intention to kill. In my view the mitigating features, including a marked lack of maturity, outweigh the aggravating ones. I set the minimum term in his case at 23 years and 47 days, being 24 years less 318 days spent on remand.

BJM. The starting point for BJM, who was the youngest at 14, is 15 years. The aggravating factors apply to him. For the reasons I have already given, the mitigating effect of a lack of intention to kill is less, since BJM actually used his knife to stab Mason. The mitigation afforded by his background together with his intellectual and developmental difficulties is strong. It is added to in his case by the plea which he entered at an early stage to the murder of Mason. He would be entitled to full credit for that plea. However a similar reduction does not apply to the murder of Max, of which BJM was convicted after trial as a secondary party, so a full 1/6 reduction on the whole would not be right. Ms Brunner suggested that a 2 year reduction would be appropriate, as reflecting 1/6th of the 13year starting point which would have applied to a single murder committed by a 14 year old with a knife. I conclude that this is too great a reduction, given the allowance for totality taken into account in the 2 year difference between the 13 and 15 year starting points. I have concluded that the just and proportionate reduction for BJM's plea to Mason's murder is somewhere between 12 and 18 months. Taking this into account along with the other mitigating features, I set the minimum term in BJMs case as 15 years 229 days, being 16 ½ years less 318 days spent on remand.

Defence solicitor commendation and Intermediary commendation

A fair trial depends on defendants being well represented, whoever they are and whatever they have done. Defending at a murder trial is always complex and challenging. Defending children at a murder trial is so much more so; the defendants in this case have all been particularly vulnerable by reason of their personal circumstances. It has been an especially demanding piece of work for the solicitors representing these young defendants, where the public outcry has been great and the distress of Mason and Max's families so understandably acute. Reeds and Allen Hoole are the two firms who have between them supplied the four skilled individuals who have represented the defendants here. I want to commend them for their hard and difficult work, and say how grateful we are to them for doing so well the job of defending that has to be done.

I also want to commend the valuable work of the intermediary who was here for the whole trial and sentence, assisting the youngest defendant.