



JUDICIARY OF  
ENGLAND AND WALES

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**-v-**

**STEVEN SANSOM**

**And**

**GEMMA WATT**

Sentencing remarks of the Honourable Mrs Justice Cutts DBE

At the Central Criminal Court

On the 30<sup>th</sup> day of January 2025

1. In the spring of 2024 Sarah Mayhew was 38 years of age. She was a much-loved daughter and the mother of two children aged 12 and 15 years. Life had not always been easy for her. Her greatest misfortune was to know the two of you. Indeed, messages between you show that it was she who introduced you in the summer of 2023. A sexual relationship developed between you.
2. You, Steven Sansom, were on life licence for a previous offence of murder. On 28 May 1999, then aged 19 years, you were sentenced to detention for life for murder and 8 years detention concurrent for an offence of robbery. The Secretary of State (as was then the practice) set your minimum term at 14 years.

That offence, to which you had pleaded guilty, concerned the murder on 24 December 1998 of a mini can driver. Armed with a kitchen knife you intended to rob him. Once at your destination you stabbed him, cut his throat, and stole his wallet which contained £25. The fatal wound was to the right side of the neck, 12 cm long and deep enough to reach the bone of the cervical spine. There were other wounds to his ear and left shoulder as well as defensive wounds to your victim's hands. Having left the scene, you returned to the vehicle and cut the cable to the radio microphone to ensure

that the dying man could not call for help.

3. You were released on licence from that sentence on 18 December 2019, following a decision of the Parole Board. I do not know whether you, Gemma Watts, were aware of the details of this previous offending, but it is clear that you knew Sansom was on licence for murder. You knew therefore that he had the capacity to kill and thereby to act on the suggestions in the messages which passed between you.
4. WhatsApp messaging between the two of you – you Sansom and you Watts – indicates that from the early stages your relationship was characterised by sado-masochistic violence. It is clear from your previous conviction Sansom that you had a propensity for and were prepared to use violence. However, this was not the first time that you, Watts, had been involved in such violent sexual encounters. You had engaged in them long before you met Sansom although I accept you were not the one to mete out violence within them. Video mobile telephone footage showed you Watts being beaten by Sansom with a wooden spoon early in your relationship. You have been seen with bruises following such encounters. On 7 September 2023 you Watts sent Sansom a message in which you stated that should any serious injury or death occur whilst you were with Sansom it should be understood that you entered violent and dangerous sex games with him of your own free will.
5. Over the months that followed you exchanged messages graphically detailing what you would like to do sexually with each other. All involved violence. It is unnecessary for me in these sentencing remarks to go through these in detail. Of importance is that almost from the very beginning of these messages in September 2023 you, Watts, were speaking of sexual intercourse with Sansom when he was covered in someone else's blood. Whether merely fantasy at this stage or the beginning of a sadistic plan, you Sansom willingly engaged in the message exchanges speaking on 11 September of *"Everything looks like meat now don't they? A plaything, something to cut, something to bleed, they all look different now."* The messaging involved wondering what they would taste like. There was discussion about who a third party could be and how you would get them out afterwards. By 24 September you were exchanging messages about eating human meat. I pause to observe that it is not suggested this is what happened to Sarah. You Sansom said nothing was too far. You said it sounded fun when you Watts suggested you could *"fuck, feast and kill [your] way round the country."* You, Watts, were talking about having the blood of so many on your hands.
6. I am quite certain that as graphic messages of sadistic sexual violence passed between you the situation moved from fantasy to a plan to involve a third party who was to be murdered during sexual activity with you. The messages make clear that you were equally involved in that plan. This is not a case of one party's will being overborne by the other. You, Sansom, messaged Watts in October 2023, telling her how you loved how *"fucked up"* her mind was and *"so like mine. Complete twins. It's good."*
7. You discussed some individuals who were possible candidates, including a young man known to you Sansom. Sarah Mayhew featured in your messages. In September

2023 your comments to each other were of Sarah owing Watts money. You Watts stated that even if she paid, she was going on your list. The only inference from what you said and the image you downloaded of a woman's body and the hands which held her covered in blood, is that the list referred to was of people you were going to harm or kill with a knife. You Watts spoke of Sarah in your words "pissing you off" big time and having a lust to stab "a skank". It is of significance that in messages about involving a young woman known to you, you Watts made it clear that whilst she could be your sex toy, she was not to be involved in murder. You were able to set the limits to what should happen. You made no such comment about Sarah.

8. By November 2023 you were discussing getting Sarah to Sansom's flat and cutting her throat. On 9 November, you Sansom asked Watts how "fucked up" she wanted to get. Replying "very" it was you, Watts, suggested getting Sarah to Sansom's flat. You Sansom said you would try if she wanted. You Watts said, "only if it is a deal that she is not leaving in one piece." The conversation that followed included you Sansom saying you could slit her throat over Watts' face. The conversation turned to whether you had the tools, with you Watts saying, "great minds think alike."
9. That discussion clearly was or became a plan. Amongst other depraved conversation about sexual activity, you Sansom tried on repeated occasions to contact Sarah Mayhew. In January 2024 you sent her messages via Facebook and WhatsApp as well as calling her number on several occasions. She did not initially respond to you. By the end of January, she sent you some text messages.
10. You Sansom and Sarah Mayhew had, prior to September 2023, been on some dates together and, it would seem, had engaged in some sexual activity at that time. But you trying to contact her in January 2024 had nothing to do with wanting to resurrect that contact. I am quite satisfied from the messaging before and what happened when you did meet that you had murder in mind. Sarah was not to know that. When you invited her to join you on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024 saying you were having a little party on your own, "felt horny and had some white but not dark" (referring to drugs) she no doubt thought that you really wanted to be with her. When she did not immediately respond to you, you encouraged her to do so saying "please call. I'll wait until 22.00 to start my party. After that we both miss out." A friend of hers, Paul Adams, had heard her on the phone with you and formed the impression that she was trying to impress you, as if you were boyfriend and girlfriend. Fatefully, she agreed to meet you on the evening of 8 March.
11. That she was utterly mistaken to place any trust in you is apparent from what happened thereafter. From 8.15 on that evening, the two of you – Sansom and Watts – were together at Sansom's flat. At around 11 PM you Sansom left and went to meet Sarah. CCTV shows you entering the flats where you lived. She was never seen alive again.
12. It is clear that Sarah was murdered in that flat that night. Precisely what happened cannot be known but your messaging before that night and what you said and did after

it leave me in no doubt that you had lured Sarah to the flat for depraved and violent sexual activity during which she was to be killed. Her fear and suffering must have been acute as she realised why she was there and what was happening.

13. Some weeks after the murder you Sansom tried to justify what had happened by saying “we are not evil. We done the world a service...” You Watts later confessed to the killing at the police station on 8 April following your arrest, saying “she deserved it anyway, dirty crackhead” You told a registrar at Lewisham hospital that you had killed someone before saying “I was there anyway”. You Watts were not just there. You had, together with Sansom instigated, discussed, and carried out a plan to kill another for you own depraved sexual gratification. On 15 April 2024 you told a member of staff at Bronzefield prison that you had cut Sarah’s throat with a knife.
14. Although you tried to clean the flat up after the events of that night and the days that followed, blood attributed to Sarah was found in the kitchen/lounge area of the flat. It is likely that she was killed in that location.
15. Contrary to your attempts to justify what you had done, there was nothing that Sarah did to “deserve” what happened to her. She was an innocent woman, lured to that flat to die in order that you both could act out your blood thirsty and wicked fantasies. You took a woman from her children who must now grow up without her love and support. You took a much-loved daughter from her parents who describe her as a bubbly, chatty and funny person. Her mother describes herself as “broken” and struggling to deal with her daughter’s loss. She misses her every day. Her memories are of a beautiful and wonderful person, but they can never be enough. In serving the sentences I impose on each of you today, you will be punished for what you have done. But no sentence I pass can bring Sarah back and her family must forever live with her loss.
16. That loss is made all the more difficult by your actions after you had killed Sarah. On the 9 March, when Sarah’s body must still have been inside the flat, you carried on as normal. A neighbour describes you Sansom as chirpy when he saw you outside your flat. You Watts had taken your dog for a walk and greeted that neighbour.
17. By the next day, 10 March at latest, you had both decided to cut up Sarah’s body in order to dispose of her remains. Whilst you had in the months before messaged one another about the sexual use you might put with any severed body part I have insufficient evidence to find that this is what actually occurred after Sarah was killed. You Sansom bought a hacksaw and other items on the morning of 10<sup>th</sup> which could be used for that purpose.
18. On 2 April, over three weeks after Sarah had been killed, some of her remains were found by a dog walker in Rowdown Field in New Addington. Further body parts, including her head, were found in the area in a search by the police, some concealed under a metal sheet. You had both visited Rowdown Field on the morning of 11 March. Both of you were captured on CCTV carrying bags of considerable weight.

There is a clear inference that this was when you deposited body parts there.

19. On the evening of 11 March, having returned to Sansom's flat, you both left to go to the River Wandle near Goat Road on Mitcham Common. You then returned to Sansom's flat, leaving 90 minutes later with what must have been Sarah's torso in a suitcase. You went again to the River Wandle, obviously to deposit her torso there where it was found in a lake off the river a mile away on 21 May 2024.
20. The remains found at Rowdown Field were examined by a pathologist. He found bruising to scalp tissues and fractures to the voice box. Following your guilty pleas, no further examination has been conducted to confirm the cause of Sarah's death. The significant decomposition of her body would have made that difficult in any event.
21. You have never showed any distaste or remorse for what you had done. Rather, you joked in messages in March and early May about disposing of someone in a suitcase.
22. On 12 March you, Watts, bought a large quantity of cleaning products. It was obvious after your arrest that extensive efforts had been made to clean the flat. An incinerator was bought and something was burnt in the garden in the days that followed. It is not known what that was. Sarah's clothing and belongings have never been found. Whatever it was, I am satisfied it was connected with her murder.
23. I have said that neither of you has shown a shred of remorse for the murder of Sarah Mayhew. Even after your remand in custody you Watts were writing to Sansom saying "love lasts my evil twin." You have both, however pleaded guilty to that murder and, by reason of your conduct after the murder, to an offence of doing acts tended and intended to pervert the course of public justice. For reasons that I will come on to, I accept that in the case of each of you those pleas were entered at the earliest possible opportunity.

## **Sentence**

24. I turn to sentence.
25. For the grave offence of murder there is only one sentence prescribed by law and that is imprisonment for life. That is the sentence I shall impose upon each of you in due course. However, I am required to determine whether a minimum period of imprisonment should be set for each of you before you are eligible to be considered for release on parole or whether I should impose a whole life order. As you were both over 21 years of age when the offence was committed, by section 321(3) of the Sentencing Act 2020 I must pass a whole life order if I am of the opinion that because of the seriousness of the offence I should not make a minimum term order.
26. That is a question which must be resolved separately in the case of each of you. Your circumstances are different and it does not follow that, if a whole life order is

appropriate for one of you, it is appropriate for the other.

27. If a minimum term is appropriate, I must determine what the period of it should be. The facts underlying the offence of perverting the course of public justice are aggravating features of the murder. I treat them in that way. The sentences for perverting the course of public justice will be concurrent to the sentences imposed.
28. In considering the seriousness of the offence and the appropriate starting point I must consider where in the case of each of you this case falls within Schedule 21 of the Sentencing Act.

*Steven Sansom*

29. Turning first to you, Sansom. You are now 45 years of age. You have been previously convicted of murder. In your case, this case therefore falls within paragraph 2 of Schedule 21 and the starting point for the murder must be a whole life order.
30. A whole life order does not necessarily follow. It should only be imposed when the offending is so exceptionally high that just punishment requires the offender to be kept in prison for the rest of his life. On the facts of this case, considered as a whole, I am in no doubt that this is such a case. I have come to that conclusion for the following reasons:
  - a. There are a substantial number of aggravating factors. First there was a significant degree of planning and pre-meditation to the murder. I am satisfied from the messages sent between you that the murder involved sexual and sadistic conduct which must have caused mental or physical suffering to Sarah. Together with Watts you dismembered and concealed her body afterwards and you destroyed and disposed of some relevant evidence.
  - b. There is absolutely no mitigation. I recognise that you pleaded guilty to both counts on the indictment on 26 September 2024. Those pleas were indicated to the prosecution on 19 June 2024. By so doing you have saved Sarah's family the additional anguish of having to sit through a trial.

The Sentencing Council's overarching guideline on Reduction in Sentence for a Guilty Plea states in terms that where a court determines that there should be a whole life order there will be no reduction for a guilty plea. It is something, however, that I have considered in determining whether the seriousness of the case is exceptionally high and requires a whole life order. I have determined that, notwithstanding your guilty plea it does. As you realistically concede, the plea cannot of itself reduce the seriousness of this case to the extent I can impose a minimum term even of substantial length.

31. I place the offence of perverting the course of public justice into category 1A of the relevant sentencing guideline. It is of high culpability as the underlying offence is the most serious. It was also conduct over a sustained period as well as being sophisticated and planned. It falls within harm category 1 because it had a serious impact on the administration of justice. The extensive nature of the perverting, including the separate deposition of Sarah's torso meant that the precise circumstances and sequence of the murder had to be based on circumstantial evidence. This has a starting point of 4 and a range of 2-7 years imprisonment. Affording 1/3 credit for the guilty plea, the sentence will be one of 5 years imprisonment. This will of course run concurrently with the life sentence imposed for the murder offence.

### ***Gemma Watts***

32. Gemma Watts, I turn to you. You are now 49 years of age. You have an old conviction for theft in 1998. I treat you as a woman of previous good character. Good character carries very little weight in a case of this seriousness.

33. That distinguishes you from your co-accused. This remains an extremely serious case for all the reasons I have identified but in my view, there are no features in your case which would place the offence within paragraph 2 of Schedule 21. A whole life order is therefore not appropriate. That means that I am required to determine the minimum period you should serve in prison before you are eligible to be considered for release on parole.

34. 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 automatically be 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 this 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.

35. The offence falls in my judgment within paragraph 3 of Schedule 21. The seriousness of the case is particularly high as it is a murder involving sadistic conduct. The starting point for the minimum term is therefore one of 30 years imprisonment.

36. Your counsel has submitted that there is no evidence in this case that your murder of Sarah Mayhew involved sexual in addition to sadistic conduct. I reject that proposition. It is plain from your messaging prior to the murder that the reason for Sarah to be invited to Sansom's flat was to involve her in sexual activity during which she would be killed. You rightly accept that this is a murder involving sadistic conduct as a level of pleasure was your motivation. As your messages make clear, that pleasure was sexual in nature. There is a clear and proper inference in my view that

this murder involved sexual and sadistic conduct.

37. There are the same significant aggravating factors which I have already set out in relation to Sansom – there was clearly a significant degree of planning and premeditation; together with Sansom you dismembered and concealed Sarah’s body afterwards and you destroyed and disposed of some relevant evidence. It is also right to observe that mental or physical suffering was inflicted on Sarah before her death. I take care not to double count this factor with your sadistic conduct although they are not entirely the same. The sadistic aspect of your conduct goes to your motivation. Sarah’s suffering is of course focussed on the consequence of your offending to her.
38. I take into account all that has been said on your behalf -
  - a. As I have said you were of previous good character;
  - b. You had a difficult childhood and have had a difficult life and have clearly suffered mental health difficulties for some time;
  - c. Whilst you have been involved in sadomasochistic behaviour for many years you have not been the one previously to mete out violence;
  - d. I accept that this murder would not have happened had it not been for your association and relationship with Sansom. This does not assist you in my view. It is frequently the case that people behave together in ways they may not if alone. This is such a case. You properly do not blame Sansom for your conduct. The messages make clear that this murder was not suggested by him and your will overborne. You were in it together.
39. In truth this affords you little in the way of mitigation for this serious offence. I have read Dr Saleem’s psychiatric report and the chronology of your medical notes with care. As I have said I accept that you had a difficult childhood and in many respects have had a difficult life. You have been diagnosed with Personality Disorder with Negative Affectivity, Borderline pattern (previously known as unstable or borderline personality disorder.) I accept that, amongst other symptoms, this has caused a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships resulting in frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment and a tendency to act rashly in states of high negative affect, leading to potentially self-damaging behaviours.
40. It may be that you were in consequence concerned about losing your relationship with Sansom whom you described to the psychiatrist as perfect for you. In your own words you were obsessed with him and he enjoyed the same type of sadomasochistic sex that you did. I am told you remain obsessed with him. However, as I have already said, it is clear from the messages that you were equally involved in the plan to involve another in your sexual activity and to kill them in the course of it. You were equally involved in the plan that this should be Sarah Mayhew. As you were to tell the member of staff at Bronzefield, you were the one who slit her throat. You were there



when her body was dismembered. You were there when parts of her body were deposited in Rowdown Field and the River Wandle. You joked with your co-accused in messages after the murder. This is not a case of one party's will being overborne by the other.

41. I have had regard to the overarching Sentencing Guideline on Sentencing Offenders with mental disorders, developmental disorders or neurological impairments and considered whether the culpability for your offending is reduced by reason of your personality disorder. As the guideline makes clear, culpability will only be reduced if there is sufficient connection between your disorder and the murder. I take account of your mental health difficulties but I do not find such a connection in your case. As Dr Saleem says you were not suffering from psychosis at the time of the murder. There is no evidence that you were suffering from a mental disorder which made you incapable of knowing the nature of your actions or knowing the difference between right and wrong. Keen you may have been to retain your relationship with Sansom, but it cannot be said that you did not play a full and active part in this well-planned murder.
42. Your strongest mitigation is your guilty plea which I am told you entered before much of the evidence had been served in this case. I have already said that I consider that came at the earliest opportunity. Your legal representatives were entirely right to obtain a psychiatric report before they could properly advise you. As with Sansom, those guilty pleas have saved Sarah's family the additional anguish of having to sit through a trial. As the overarching guideline on Reduction in Sentence for a guilty plea states careful consideration must be given to the extent of any reduction to a minimum term for an offence of murder to ensure that the minimum term properly reflects the seriousness of the offence. Any reduction will not exceed 1/6<sup>th</sup> or 5 years, whichever is the less. I consider that you should be given full credit for your guilty plea.
43. For the same reasons as in the case of Sansom I place the offence of perverting the course of justice into category 1A of the relevant sentencing guideline. I see no reason to distinguish between you in terms of the length of that sentence. I have taken the facts of the perverting offence into account as aggravating the offence of murder. The sentence will be concurrent to the minimum term.
44. Taking all the circumstances of this case into account and prior to any discount for plea I conclude that the minimum term you would serve before you are eligible for parole is one of 35 years. I reduce that term by 5 years to one of 30 years by reason of your guilty plea. From that I must deduct the time you have spent on remand. I am told that is 275 days. The minimum term will therefore be one of 29 years and 90 days.

## **Sentence**

Stand up.

45. Steven Sansom – for the murder of Sarah Mayhew I sentence you to life imprisonment. I set no minimum term in your case. That means that you will spend the rest of your life in prison. For perverting the course of public justice the sentence is 5 years imprisonment concurrent.
  
46. Gemma Watts – for the murder of Sarah Mayhew the sentence is one of life imprisonment. You will serve a minimum term of 29 years and 90 days. 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. For perverting the course of public justice the sentence is 5 years imprisonment concurrent.