

## Rex -v- Christopher BELL

### Sentencing Remarks

1. Mr Bell. I am sentencing you today in respect of one offence of being the owner of a dog which caused injury to death while dangerously out of control in a public place. That was an offence committed on 3 October 2023. You entered a guilty plea to this offence at Newcastle Crown Court at the plea and trial preparation hearing on 18 November 2024. You indicated at the South Shields Magistrates Court on 18 October 2024 that you would be entering a guilty plea.
2. You are 45 years old.
3. The relevant facts of your offending are as follows. The victim of your offending was Ian Langley. He was 54 years old at the time that he died. You were, on 3 October 2023, the owner of two American XL bully dogs, one of whom was named Titan. They lived with you at your home address in Shiney Row.
4. On 3rd October 2023, at 6.55 in the evening, two witnesses saw Mr Langley outside of your home address. He appeared to be pacing, and they witnessed him picking up two stones and thrown them at your window. It appeared to the witnesses that one of the stones broken the window. Mr Langley then ran away, crossing the road and into a nearby passageway leading onto a footpath.
5. You were at home, and as a result of what had happened, you ran out of the front door. You had no shoes on at the time. You chased after Mr Langley. You left your front door open. The consequence of that was that your two dogs followed you out of the house and joined the pursuit of Mr Langley. You were heard by witnesses to shout at Mr Langley. Those witnesses did not hear you shout at your dogs. You and your dogs followed Mr Langley into the nearby passageway.
6. Mr Langley had ran for approximately 100m before he was brought to the floor by the XL Bully 'Titan'. Titan was seen to be bearing down on Mr Langley, before knocking him to the floor and taking hold of his neck between his jaws.
7. Ms Graham, who lives nearby, witnessed the attack. She saw Titan latch on to Mr Langley and refuse to let go. Notwithstanding your efforts, it was resisting all attempts by you to pull it away. She believed it may have let go of Mr Langley, before latching on again. You eventually managed to free Titan from him. You returned home and telephoned the emergency services. You were seen to be in a state of panic and distress.
8. Tragically, as a result of the attack by Titan, Mr Langley suffered catastrophic injuries to his neck. Notwithstanding the valiant efforts of members of the public and the paramedics, his injuries were too great and he died.
9. Upon arrest, you spoke to police. You explained the incident in terms of the stones coming through your window and the dogs running after you after you

left the house. You said that your dogs had chased Mr Langley down before you could get hold of them. In your interview, you said that you shot out of the house and that Titan had ran past you in pursuit of Mr Langley. You said you attempted to call him Titan back, but he ignored you. You said you continued to chase Mr Langley as you did not want to lose pursuit of him. You denied intending to harm Mr Langley and were in shock.

10. In determining the appropriate sentence to impose on you, I have had regard to the following:
  - The sentencing council guideline on owner or person in charge of a dog dangerously out of control where death is caused
  - Overarching principles guideline
  - Imposition of community and custodial sentences guideline
  - Reduction in sentence for a guilty plea
  - I have also read the contents of the pre-sentence report, and taken account of everything said on your behalf by your counsel.
11. Having considered the offence-specific guideline, this is, in my judgement, a culpability B – medium culpability offence. I have been told about 2 previous occasions, which are not disputed by you, of aggressive behaviour by Titan towards other dogs.
12. The first was an incident on 26th July 2022, when he ran from your home address into the street and attacked a Yorkshire Terrier. Titan took a hold of that dog's leg and caused a wound. You were seen to emerge from your home, but were unable to stop the attack immediately. You had to ask others for a lighter to burn Titan's nose, in order to stop the attack.
13. The second was on 29th June 2023. Both dogs were not on a lead and were away from your address when they came across a person walking her dog. They savagely attacked that dog, in an incident she describes lasting between 5 and 10 minutes. It was only on account of you throwing water on the dogs that the incident came to an end.
14. On account of those previous matters, it is apparent that you failed to respond to concerns expressed by others regarding the dogs behaviour, although I accept, as is said on your behalf, that there is no evidence of previous aggression to other people. Further, there were a lack of safety or control measures taken in a situation where they reasonable could have been foreseen. At the forefront of your mind that evening, rather than pursuing Mr Langley, you should have ensured precautions were in place to stop Titan from leaving your home. You failed to do that. That failure ultimately led to the death of Mr Langley.
15. I have heard the victim personal statements of Jayke Langley and Paul Langley. It is fair to summarise them as follows – the death of Mr Langley has had a devastating impact on their lives. One can only imagine the extremely difficult

time that they have gone through and continue to go through since the death of Mr Langley.

16. As to harm, the sentencing guideline makes it clear that there is no variation in the level of harm caused, as by definition the harm involved in an offence where a death is caused is always of the utmost seriousness.
17. The starting point for such a medium culpability offence is 4 years imprisonment, with a range of 2 - 7 years.
18. I have considered whether there are any factors which aggravate your offending. You are someone with a significant criminal record – some 32 convictions for 69 offences. I accept that this is your first offence of this kind. There is nothing on your record before now in respect of dangerous dog offences. That being said, you are a persistent offender, and that is, in my judgement, an aggravating factor. Your offending is further aggravated by the significant ongoing effect that this incident had on those who witnessed it. I have heard about two witnesses in particular – one described the whole experience to be quite traumatic to the extent that they have had some difficulty sleeping since the incident. The other described it as shocking, vile, brutal and horrific.
19. I have also considered whether there are any factors which mitigate your offending. I accept as genuine the remorse you have shown. You sought help for Mr Langley immediately by telephoning for an ambulance. You made full admissions to the police. This incident resulted in the dogs being euthanised.
20. I make an upward adjustment to the starting point to reflect the aggravating factors and a downward adjustment to the starting point to reflect the mitigating factors. In my judgement, the appropriate sentence for an adult following contested trial would have been one of 4 ½ years imprisonment.
21. I afford you full credit for your guilty plea. It was indicated at the first stage of the proceedings, at the Magistrates' Court. The credit I therefore afford you is 1/3.
22. The offence is so serious that only a custodial sentence can be justified. The least possible sentence I can impose having regard to the seriousness of the offence is one of 3 years imprisonment. You will serve up to one half of that sentence in custody before you are released on licence. When you are released, you will be on licence and then post-sentence supervision for a total of 12 months after that. You must comply with the terms of the licence and supervision and commit no further offence or you will be liable to serve a further period in custody.
23. Further, pursuant to section 4(1)(b) of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, I am disqualifying you from having custody of a dog indefinitely. If you fail to comply with that disqualification, you may be committing a separate offence, which is punishable by way of a fine.
24. If this is a case to which the statutory surcharge applies, I order it is drawn up in the appropriate amount.

HHJ Scott

27 January 2025

The Crown Court

Newcastle Upon Tyne