

IN THE CROWN COURT AT CAMBRIDGE

THE KING

v

DAVID NEWTON

SENTENCING REMARKS

1. David Newton, you may remain seated until I tell you to stand.
2. Yesterday morning, the jury found you guilty of the murder of Mrs Una Crown. It now falls to me to sentence you. Where I make finding of fact against you, I do so only when I am sure of those facts. My conclusion will be consistent with the verdict of the jury.
3. Una Crown was 86 years old when you killed her. She was a widow, living alone in Magazine Close in Wisbeach. She was a slight lady, only 4 feet 10 inches in height. Although advanced in years, she was vigorously independent. She cooked, cleaned and cared for herself. She enjoyed the company of friends, family and neighbours. She was described by her family as “feisty”, not afraid to speak her mind or to stand up for herself.
4. You knew her as a near neighbour and as someone for whom you had done the occasional odd job, notably mending a broken lock on her kitchen door some months before her death. You would pass the time of day with her when you walked your dog around the town. You described her as “a very nice, very kind little lady”.
5. That that is what you thought of her, makes all the more extraordinary the events of Saturday 12 January 2013.

The facts

6. The circumstances of Mrs Crown’s death were explored in enormous detail in the trial and it is not necessary to repeat that detail here. It suffices to say this.
7. At about 5pm that Saturday evening, Mrs Crown spoke on the phone to her neighbour Mrs Swaine. All was well with her. She told Mrs Swaine that she had had her evening meal and washed up the dishes. It appears she then selected the

television programmes she planned to watch and sat down in the armchair in her sitting room to do just that.

8. At some point that evening, she was disturbed by an intruder. The following morning there was no sign of a forced entry into her bungalow, so the intruder must either have had a key to the property or must have persuaded her or forced her to let him in. She was very security conscious and I have the gravest doubts whether she would have let you in if you had knocked at her door. Instead I find as a fact that you had had a copy of her back door key made for yourself when you had bought her a replacement key at the local locksmiths some months earlier. To try to explain why you did that would be simply to speculate. In fact, precisely how you got into her property, is a detail of no real consequence. What matters is that you entered that lady's house that evening entirely uninvited.
9. Quite why you decided to enter Mrs Crown's house is far from clear. I accept that you did not enter in order to kill her; you had no possible motive for doing so. I accept too that you did not enter the property in order to steal. I find as a fact that you did empty her purse after you had killed her, helping yourself to the £80 that you paid into your own bank account on the 15th of January. But that was just opportunistic theft; you grabbing some cash after Mr Crown was dead. That does not explain your decision to enter her bungalow.
10. You had a history of going into other people's property, uninvited, simply in search of conversation and company. You had attempted to visit some female relatives of yours in the town earlier that evening. And in my view, that was what brought you to Mrs Crown's door. You wanted to have someone to talk to. Having the key to her door just made that easier.
11. Be that as it may, Mrs Crown must have been utterly terrified when you came into her house that Saturday evening because I have absolutely no doubt she was not expecting you to walk into her home and did not want you there. Doubtless, she heard a noise and got up from her chair as fast she could, discarding the blanket she had over her knees that cold evening. I find as a fact that she stood to confront you and, I have little doubt, told you to get out. It seems to me likely, given the fact that it was left hanging off its cradle, that she attempted, at some point, to use the phone to call for help. But quite what happened prior to the attack can only be a matter of speculation. What seems to me clear, and what I find to be the fact, is that there was a confrontation between her and you.

12. How the confrontation ended however is not a matter of guesswork. I find as a fact that you first struck Mrs Crown about the head, causing bruising to her ear. I cannot say for sure that you used her walking stick to strike her; you may have used your fist. But there was certainly some blunt force trauma to the side of her head. I accept that you had not brought a knife with you into the property but, faced with Mrs Crown's anger and resistance, I find as a fact that you picked up a long knife from her kitchen and attacked her with it.
13. The post mortem establishes that the knife that was used on Mrs Crown was at least 24 centimetres or 9 ½ inches in length. You used that knife to slit her throat, causing incised wounds running across the front and along both sides of the neck. You stabbed her twice to the left side of her chest causing fractures to the 7th and 8th ribs, and slicing through the intercostal muscle between them. On one occasion, the blade travelled through both lungs and through her heart, exiting her body on the other side of her chest. She tried to hold you off, putting up her hands to try to stop your attack on her and leaving her with characteristic "defensive injuries", particularly to her right hand. This was a ferocious and sustained knife attack on a defenceless old lady in her own home.
14. You then attempted to cover up what you had done by trying to set fire to Mrs Crown's body and her home. You set one fire by her body as it lay on the floor of the hallway and two others elsewhere in the bungalow. They caused only moderate amounts of damage to the body and to the house but the reason for them must have been to destroy evidence of your crime.

The investigation

15. In addition to the injuries to her hands, Mrs Crown's attempts to defend herself had one other significant consequence. In her desperate struggle with the man who was stabbing her to death, she picked up, under her fingernails, some of his DNA. In 2013, DNA testing was not sufficiently sophisticated to enable the forensic scientists to identify anything other than Mrs Crown's own DNA in the material on or under her nails. Some years later however, when the investigation into what had become a cold case was reopened, DNA testing had improved. And when the material under those fingernails was tested, it was your DNA that was identified.
16. The initial police investigation into Mrs Crown's death had been mishandled. The first officer arriving on the scene had not seen anything that he regarded as

suspicious about the circumstances of her death and as a result the scene was not sealed off or protected. The Cambridgeshire Constabulary has, quite rightly apologised to the family of Mrs Crown for that incompetence.

17. The Investigation that followed the re-testing of the material under Mrs Crown's fingerprints has been of a completely different order and has resulted, ultimately, in your conviction.

Sentencing

18. As I said to you yesterday, the sentence for murder, which is fixed by Parliament, is life imprisonment. And that is the sentence I impose. But I must also specify the minimum term you must serve. That expression means what it says, the minimum term is the period of imprisonment you must serve before you are even eligible to apply for parole. I make it clear now that the victim statutory surcharge applies in your case.

19. This is not a case where a whole life term is appropriate. Nor in my view is this a case where the 30 year starting point applies. You did not bring the knife you used to the scene and therefore the appropriate starting point under the statute, is 15 years.

20. There are however a number of very significant aggravating features. They are as follow:

- Mrs Crown, your victim was particularly vulnerable due to her age. She was also vulnerable because of her petite stature.
- I find as a fact that she endured significant mental and physical suffering prior to her death. There was an interlude of some time between you entering the house and the fatal assault occurring, during which time Ms Crown must have been, quite simply, terrified.
- You attempted to destroy the body with the intention, in my judgment, of reducing the chances of the police tracing evidence identifying you as the killer.

21. To those statutorily recognised factors, I add the following:

- The infliction by you of blunt force trauma on Mrs Crown before the fatal attack;
- The repeated use of a large knife to injure and kill;

- The fact that this attack occurred in Ms Crown's own home, where she lived alone, and at night, and which you entered as a trespasser; and
- The theft of the cash from her purse.

22. For the avoidance of doubt I do not treat your previous convictions as an aggravating factors. They are all old and entirely dissimilar to this offending. Nor do I find able to conclude on the facts that you were intoxicated on the occasion of this attack; the evidence of that is unpersuasive. On the other hand, I conclude that your intention at the time of the attack was an intention to kill. I would dismiss any suggestion that you intended only to cause serious harm.

23. There are only two mitigating features, your age now and your poor health. I have as invited, read, and taken into account, the report of the intermediary. I accept that you suffer from depression, arthritis, diabetes, asthma and other conditions and that you have a poor memory. Those matters will make the experience of imprisonment more severe and enable me to reduce the minimum term a little.

Stand up

24. For the offence of murder I sentence you to imprisonment for life. The minimum term you will serve is 21 years.

25. The time spent on remand which I am told by both counsel is **304 days, will be deducted from that term, meaning that you will serve a minimum of 20 years and 61 days.**

Commendation

26. After a disastrous start, this was an impressive police and CPS investigation. It necessitated analysing over 10,000 items of material for disclosure to the court - the largest ever general disclosure exercise by this constabulary.

27. The presentation of the evidence before the court has been impressive. I commend the work in particular of the following police officers:

- DS Dan Harper – Officer in the case
- DS Simon Oldfield – Detective Sergeant Outside Enquiry Team
- DC Gareth Purdy – Disclosure Officer
- DC Nigel Ebdale – Disclosure Officer

- [Retired] Detective Inspector Dave Grierson – 2013 SIO
- Assistant Investigator Graham McMillan – Enquiry Team Officer
- And the leadership of : SIO – D Supt Iain Moor.

28. Finally I want to thank the family of Mrs Crown for the dignified manner in which the have conducted themselves throughout what must have been an entirely harrowing trial.

Mr Justice Garnham

Cambridge Crown Court

14 February 2025