



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

Sentencing remarks of Mr Justice Kerr

The King

v

Maureen Rickards

Canterbury Crown Court

9 April 2025

1. Mrs Rickards is not on the video link and I do not seek to compel her to attend. The court is sitting today to sentence you, Maureen Rickards, for the murder of your husband, Jeremy Rickards. The jury unanimously convicted you of the murder on 13 March last, after a trial lasting 18 days.
2. Jeremy was a kind hearted, mild mannered, softly spoken man to whom you had been married for some 27 years when he died at your hands. He was a geologist, working in many parts of the world in the mining of gold and diamonds. He was aged 65 when he died.
3. You met him in Mali in 1997, when you were 23 and he was in his late 30s. You already had a daughter. You were married soon afterwards. He took on your daughter as his own and raised and supported her with you to adulthood. She received a private education and lacked for nothing.
4. Together, you travelled the world, wherever his work took him; eventually settling in this country. I accept that your marriage was a loving one, though also turbulent. You may have been violent towards him but I did not admit evidence of that and I do not sentence you on the basis that you were habitually violent to him throughout the marriage.
5. In 2021, you were living in Canterbury, studying law at Christ Church University. You moved into shared accommodation in St Martin's Road, where Jeremy would sometimes join you. He was in low spirits because he was nearing retirement age and not getting work. The lives of the tenants in the shared house were at times chaotic. You filmed various incidents.
6. Your videos also clearly show you threatening Jeremy, abusing him, using violence on him and expressing an intention to kill him. He was in frail health and largely defenceless against you. The pathology suggests he had been strangled and was recovering from rib fractures when he died.

7. Jeremy would often drink alone at a nearby public house. In mid-May 2024, he was seen by one of the bar staff to have bruising to his face. In early June 2024, you and Jeremy stayed in nearby rented accommodation. Several witnesses gave evidence that Jeremy had quite serious injuries to his face, including a cut or gash to his cheek.
8. He was weak and in a bad way during the stay. He did not change his clothes in three days. The property owners were very concerned for his welfare. You left on a visit to London. Jeremy was taken by taxi back to St Martin's Road, where you had already arrived. Witnesses from the house saw that he had been badly beaten, with black eyes and a cauliflower ear. I am sure you inflicted those injuries.
9. On 7 June, you made a video during which you were beating Jeremy and mocking him, calling him "British boy". You were physically much stronger than him. He begged you to stop hitting him. You said you would kill him. The next day he made his last known call, to top up the credit on his phone. Your voice can be heard in the background threatening to kill him.
10. He may have died on 9 June, the date you later told your daughter he had died. If it was not on 9 June, it was shortly after that. You stabbed him to death in the attic room. He received five stab wounds, two of which pierced his heart. I am sure you intended his death and nothing less. The wounds could not have been inflicted by someone intending only really serious harm.
11. You hid his body in the attic room cupboard, probably for some days. You purchased cleaning products using his bank card. I am sure your purpose was to clean the blood from the carpet in the cupboard. At some point in the days following, you dismembered his body and placed it in a holdall bag, which you hid in the back garden until it was discovered by police.
12. You concocted lies about Jeremy having left for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and taken his own life there. You later faked messages purporting to come from him, to indicate that he was in Saudi Arabia. You purchased the cleaning agents on 20 June, using his bank card. You tried to remove the blood but only succeeded in pushing it downwards, to the underside of the carpet.
13. On 26 June, you paid a local maintenance man to cut the grass and leave the grass cuttings at the back of the garden, where they would help to conceal the holdall bag containing your husband's body. On 28 June, you sent messages to your daughter in Kenya saying that Jeremy had died on 9 June. You became abusive towards your daughter, blaming her for Jeremy's death.
14. She became very concerned about him. She contacted the Saudi Arabian authorities, who had no record of him visiting that country. She reported him to Kent police as a missing person. They started a missing persons enquiry that led straight to you. After a visit from police officers to whom you lied, saying Jeremy was in Saudi Arabia, you were arrested on 11 July on suspicion of fraud because you had used his bank cards to make various purchases.

15. While you were at the police station, police officers discovered Jeremy's decomposing body in the holdall bag. The overpowering odour made them feel ill. You were arrested for his murder. Forensic examination of the attic room and cupboard and the decomposing body, including the presence of insects, linked you to his death, together with overwhelming circumstantial evidence such as the cutting of the grass and purchase of the cleaning agent.
16. For your crime, I am required by law to sentence you to imprisonment for life. I have to determine the minimum term you must serve before being eligible to apply to the Parole Board to be considered for release. A minimum term is not the same as an ordinary sentence of imprisonment where a defendant serves half or two thirds of the sentence before being released on licence.
17. A minimum term is the term that must be served before your case may be referred to the Parole Board for a consideration of your release upon licence. It means the actual length of time that you will spend in prison before that process can take place. Whether or not you are released after that term has been served will be for the Parole Board to consider at the end of the term.
18. The Parole Board will not decide that you can be released unless and until it is satisfied you are not a risk to the public and are ready for release into society. If you are released at that time, or any later time, it will be on licence with specific conditions attached; you may be recalled to continue serving your life sentence if you breach any licence conditions imposed upon you.
19. You are now almost 51 years of age. You have convictions for driving offences which are irrelevant. I treat you as effectively of previous good character, albeit that you were beating your husband and abusing him in the last month or so before he died.
20. This is not a case where I can be sure you took a knife to the scene to use on your victim. The knife may have been already there or you may have brought it from elsewhere in the house. The starting point for the minimum term is therefore 15 years' imprisonment. Your intention to kill Jeremy is already taken into account in that starting point. But it is only the starting point.
21. I must then take into account any aggravating and mitigating factors. The aggravating factors are the following. Jeremy suffered both physically and mentally from your mistreatment of him in the weeks leading up to his death. Your behaviour towards him was controlling and coercive. You brutally beat and injured him in the weeks before he died.
22. There was only a limited degree of planning and preparation. You told him you intended to kill him, a threat he took seriously. In the last video, he said you might kill him. You said you had "googled" how to do it. He was vulnerable and frail, partly because of your mistreatment of him. In the last video he pleaded to be taken to hospital because of his condition.
23. In the attack itself, a knife was used. That is an aggravating feature. So is the ferocity of the attack, causing five stab wounds as well as other injuries. In one of the stab wounds, the degree of force was severe enough for the wound

to pass through the bone of his sternum. I do not accept the submission of the defence that the attack was spontaneous and completely unplanned.

24. After the killing, you desecrated your husband's corpse and took steps to conceal his body and remove forensic evidence from the attic room cupboard. You must have disposed of the murder weapon which was never found; and you disposed of Jeremy's possessions such as his bank cards, passport, clothing and even his wedding ring.
25. You also deleted incriminating text messages sent by your daughter to Jeremy's phone, which was in your possession. You set up a false narrative of suicide to deflect suspicion from yourself. You implicated a vulnerable man who gave evidence at the trial, and others associating with him; albeit, I accept, not by direct accusation but through your counsel's proper questions.
26. In mitigation, you have no relevant previous convictions; you had a long marriage with Jeremy and your daughter. I accept that you loved him. I do not know why you killed him. You will have to live with the loss of him. It is difficult to see any other mitigating features. You have not shown remorse.
27. Taking account of all those factors, the starting point of 15 years is significantly too low and I increase the minimum term to 22 years, but that should include the time you have spent in custody on remand, a period of 273 days. The minimum term will therefore be 22 years less 273 days, which comes to 21 years and 92 days.
28. For the murder of Jeremy Rickards, the sentence of the court is imprisonment for life, with a minimum term of 21 years and 92 days, which is equivalent to a term of 22 years including the time you have already spent in custody. Any statutory charges will be dealt with administratively.
29. I have already expressed my heartfelt thanks to the jury. They had to see and hear distressing evidence over several weeks. I also commend and thank Detective Constable Rachel Scott, the officer in the case; the telephone and digital media officer, Detective Constable Alex Peacock; and their supervising officer Detective Sergeant Ashley Bowles. It was DC Scott's and DC Peacock's first major homicide case.
30. They worked tirelessly to investigate the facts, prepare the case for trial, deal with disclosure issues and organise and present the documents that went before the jury. DC Scott managed the witnesses with compassion and professionalism. Some were understandably nervous. DC Peacock devoted six months to the case. Over 35,000 potentially relevant items had to be reviewed. They have done excellent service to public justice.
31. I end by adding my thanks to the prosecution and defence teams, to the hard working court staff and, not least, to my clerk. None of that will bring Jeremy Rickards back but I hope today's sentence will bring some relief to his relatives, who have chosen not to provide impact statements but to grieve privately. That concludes this sentencing hearing.