

THE CROWN COURT AT TEESSIDE

R v. Jack LAWSON

SENTENCING REMARKS

The Hon Mr Justice Soole

7 October 2025

Jack Lawson,

1. You have been found guilty of the murder of Craig Yorke at Old Lines, Eldon Lane near Bishop Auckland on 14 December 2024. On that date you were 7 weeks short of your 18th birthday.
2. Your offence arose from a long-standing and simmering dispute which you had with Jack Richardson, who was aged 18 at the time of the murder. In August 2022 Jack Richardson, supported by three others, came to a local park for a fight with your friend Marley Roles. You were present and Marley Roles gave you some gold rings for safekeeping. You put them in a bag. Jack Richardson, supported by two of his associates, then robbed you of the bag and its contents. You reported the matter to the police but ultimately decided not to press a case. As your father said in his evidence, ‘It was agreed between the police, Jack and me that it was better not to make a statement, because of potential repercussions’. The Prosecution do not challenge your or your father’s accounts of the matter and I accept them. It was a striking feature of the trial that Jack Richardson was not called as a witness.
3. Having made your decision about that incident, you nonetheless could not put it behind you. You retained a lingering resentment at Jack Richardson’s conduct, only fanned by your understanding that he was going about boasting of how he had robbed you. On at least two subsequent occasions when you saw him you felt anger and, as you accepted, hatred. One was at McDonald’s in Bishop Auckland a few months before the night of 13/14 December 2024;

the other was at Tesco's car park at about 10 p.m. on 13 December. You were parked up in your white Ford Focus and by chance Jack Richardson arrived and parked nearby in his red Ford Focus. There was some discussion between one of your two female passengers (each aged 16) and Richardson. You tried to reach for a so-called African stick which you kept in the back footwell of your car but your rear seat female passenger sensibly put her foot on it to prevent you taking it.

4. You and Richardson left in your respective cars but you then returned to Tesco at the request of one of your passengers. Minutes later, your friend Marley Roles arrived in his Peugeot van with two passengers, Harry Brown and another. Those three were respectively aged 20, 18 and 16. A knife was passed from the van to the glovebox of your car. This was not the knife with which you subsequently murdered Craig Yorke.
5. Between your departure from Tesco at about 10.30 p.m. and the final incident at about 02.40 a.m. there followed a series of events which included you and Jack Richardson driving around in your respective cars and goading each other to have a fistfight, to take place at a variety of suggested locations including the open land at Old Lines. This included a short meeting between you at Old Lines followed by a high-speed car chase of several minutes through the streets and a heated mobile phone conversation between the two of you. On various occasions you made aggressively violent remarks about Jack Richardson in the course of messages to your friends on the group Snapchat. Your female passengers, younger than you but significantly more mature, pleaded with you to calm down and forget the matter. There were calmer periods that night, notably when you collect a number of their female friends from various places and took them back to their respective homes.
6. By about 00.10 a.m. you had dropped off all these female passengers. You then made contact with your friend Connor Vint (aged 18) and had joined up with all your four co-accused by about 01.00 a.m. You ultimately arranged with Richardson to meet at Old Lines for the intended fight. Your next visit to Old Lines was on foot but no contact was made with Richardson.

7. The open land at Old Lines is reached from High Street, Eldon Lane by a short road called Millbank Terrace. At about 02.27 a.m. you arrived there in your white Ford Focus with Marley Roles and Harry Brown as passengers. You were followed by Connor Vint driving a Vauxhall Astra and with the 16-year-old as passenger. At 02.33.31 CCTV captures the two cars then driving back down Millbank Terrace, away from Old Lines. Just over one minute later, at 02.34.36, you took a video of a knife which was in your lap as you drove along. This was the knife with which you killed Craig Yorke. Your account at trial was that, just before the time of that video image, you asked your passengers if they had anything in case you needed to defend yourself and that Harry Brown gave you the knife. This was emphatically denied by Harry Brown. At 02.37.58 CCTV shows the Astra returning back up Millbank Terrace and the evidence was that the white Focus returned at about the same time.
8. The two vehicles parked up at the Old Lines. At 02.44 a.m. the red Ford Focus drove up Millbank Terrace towards your position. In the car were Jack Richardson, Craig Yorke and Jordan Hodgson. Craig Yorke and Jordan Hodgson were each aged 28. You did not know either of them. Jordan Hodgson had previous convictions for 7 offences of violence, 2 offences of public disorder and 3 offences involving weapons. Craig Yorke had convictions for 2 offences of violence and 3 offences of public disorder. Jack Richardson had no previous convictions. As with Jack Richardson, Jordan Hodgson was not called as a witness at the trial.
9. Although CCTV shows movements up and down Millbank Terrace, it did not extend to the site of the incident on the open land. However the CCTV provided some audio record of the incident.
10. There was a collision between the red Focus and the Vauxhall Astra. At least two hooded occupants of the red Focus got out. You were in the driving seat of your white Focus with the knife in your lap. On your account, which no evidence has challenged, you saw these two hitting the Vauxhall Astra, and

trying to hit its passenger, with African sticks. You got out of the car with the knife in your right hand and went over to try and scare them off. One of them ran away. The other, Craig Yorke, came towards you. He started trying to hit you with his stick. You then stabbed him three times; respectively below the armpit, to the chest and into the right groin. When you stopped, he pushed back, turned round and started running down towards the adjacent field. That run is caught on the CCTV in Millbank Terrace. You denied that you intended to kill or to cause him really serious physical harm and said that you had just stabbed out of instinct. From the CCTV and audio evidence it appears that the duration of the incident, between the collision of the cars and Craig Yorke running away, was about 40 seconds.

11. Craig Yorke collapsed and died outside the nearby home of his cousin Trevor Thompson. Despite the valiant efforts of his son and his neighbour in giving CPR, and subsequently from ambulance paramedics, Craig Yorke was pronounced dead at 03.38 a.m. Jack Richardson and Jordan Hodgson had rendered no assistance and fled the scene.
12. Videos stored on your phone show you in the immediate aftermath of the stabbing holding the blood-stained knife and an African walking stick; and a further image of the bloodstained knife in your lap a couple of minutes later as you drove away in the white Focus. You said that you took videos to show they had run away from you and to show off; and that you did not realise at this point that your victim was seriously injured.
13. Having met up with the others and abandoned the Vauxhall Astra, you drove them all in your white Focus. During the course of the journey you threw away the knife. Having parked up and fled, you were arrested shortly thereafter. In your police interview you denied any involvement in the matter. On 1 May 2025 you pleaded guilty to manslaughter but denied the intent for murder.
14. The medical evidence from the Home Office pathologist shows that the fatal wound was to the chest, the wound track passing between the right 5th and 6th

rib and into the right lung to a depth of 65 mm. There was incised damage to the bone of the 5th rib and nicking to the cartilage of the 6th. Infliction of the chest wound would have required, at least, a moderate to severe degree of force, provided that the tip of the blade of the knife was sharp. There were five separate sharp-force injuries to the hands which were consistent with being defensive injuries. There were some blunt force injuries but the pathologist could not necessarily say if they were caused in the incident. I disregard the latter.

15. On the basis of the CCTV and forensic evidence I am satisfied that the group comprising Jack Richardson and his two associates was carrying at least one knife in addition to at least two African sticks. One knife was found in a nearby bin and I am sure from the DNA evidence that Craig Yorke had held this knife at some stage; likewise that he was wearing a balaclava at the time of the incident. The CCTV also evidence shows Jordan Hodgson holding a knife in the aftermath of the incident, in High Street, Eldon Lane.
16. It was ultimately no part of the Prosecution case that your four co-accused had themselves participated in the assault on Craig Yorke. The case was that each, by their presence and otherwise, had intentionally encouraged your conduct and shared your intent. Their essential case that was they were present in the belief that there was to be a one-to-one fist-fight between you and Richardson, but to be available to protect you if, as feared, Richardson might instead turn up with armed supporters to attack you. In each case the jury acquitted them of both murder and manslaughter.
17. The sentence for murder is fixed by law. This means there is only one sentence which I can give you. Where the offender was under 18 at the date of the offence, the sentence is called detention during His Majesty's pleasure. The law then requires me to fix the minimum term that you must serve. The minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will automatically be released, but is the minimum time that you will spend in custody before your case can be considered by the Parole Board. It will be for the Parole Board to say, at that time, whether or not you will be released. If and when you are

released you will still be subject to licence; and this will remain the case for the rest of your life. If for any reason your licence were revoked, you would be recalled to continue to serve your detention in custody.

18. I have heard the victim personal statements of Craig Yorke's partner and of his mother. These speak in moving terms of the devastating loss suffered by his family, including his two young daughters and his baby son born only in August this year. They provide yet another example of the terrible consequences which the knife culture and its pitiful glorification brings in its wake.

19. For the purpose of deciding the minimum term I must first identify the appropriate starting point under Schedule 21 of the Sentencing Act 2020.

20. For this purpose, the first question is whether you took a knife to the scene intending to commit any offence or to have it available to use as a weapon and then used that knife in committing the murder. If so, the statutory starting point for an offender aged 17 at the date of the offence is a minimum term of 23 years. If not, the statutory starting point for an offender of that age is 14 years. On your behalf, Mr Brooke KC submits that the Court cannot be sure to the necessary criminal standard of proof that Harry Brown did not hand the knife to you shortly before the incident; and, if so, cannot be sure that you brought the knife to the scene. Mr Brooke submits that the fact of the acquittal of Harry Brown establishes no more than that the jury cannot have been sure that he did hand you the knife.

21. I am sure that Harry Brown did not hand you the knife. However, even if I were not sure, the point would be immaterial to the question of whether or not you took the knife to the scene. As already noted, the evidence from CCTV and from the video taken from your phone shows that you were driving your car with the knife in your lap one minute after your car is seen heading back down Millbank Terrace and more than three minutes before the Astra and white Focus returned back up Millbank Terrace and towards Old Lines. I am therefore sure that, whoever the source of the knife, you took it to the scene.

Further you took it with the intent to have it available as a weapon; and then used it in committing the murder. Therefore the statutory starting point is 23 years.

22. However, sentencing guidelines for children and young people, and associated case-law, make clear that the statutory starting points identified for those aged under 18 at the date of the offence be applied flexibly, not mechanistically. In this highly fact-sensitive exercise, the Court must in particular take account of a young offender's level of maturity at the time of the offence and assess the extent to which young age and lack of maturity reduced his culpability in committing the murder: see e.g. R v. Kamarra-Jarra [2024] EWCA Crim 198.
23. For this purpose I have considered the pre-trial expert psychiatric report of Dr Barry Chipchase dated February 2025, the intermediary report of Victoria Chan dated 10 April 2025 and the Pre-Sentence Report dated 3 October 2025. In addition to these expert reports, I have of course taken account of all the evidence in the trial and in particular the whole story of your lingering resentment and anger at Jack Richardson's conduct towards you and of your behaviour across those several hours of the night of 13/14 December 2024.
24. The report of Dr Chipchase includes conclusions that you have a previously undiagnosed condition of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), albeit noting that little or none of the impulsive aspects of ADHD appear to be present. He considers that you are not a daredevil character and are quite likely to think about your actions prior to going ahead with them. He concludes that, because of the ADHD symptoms, you will have a more than average tendency to think and do things with less regard to consequences than an average man of your age; but does not consider that this tendency will be outside the range of normal variation.
25. The report of Ms Chan was inevitably focused on your abilities to follow and understand the court process and questions put to you and recommended an intermediary throughout the trial. I concluded that it was sufficient to have an intermediary when you gave evidence.

26. The Pre-Sentence Report describes your presentation and conduct as “naive, likely due to a lack of maturity and underdeveloped critical thinking skills”; and considers that at the time of the offence you “lacked any understanding or awareness of the potential of a minor conflict to escalate quickly and that the presence of weapons can dangerously change the dynamics of a situation”. I readily agree.
27. Further and telling evidence of your immaturity has come from the whole story of your continued dwelling on your serious mistreatment by Jack Richardson; and then by your (and indeed Richardson’s) extraordinary conduct in the hours leading up to the fatal incident. This was demonstrated, for example, by the car chase through the streets; your wild and pathetic conversation, messages and videos; the changing suggestions of a possible venue for the fight; the intervals when you were doing normal things like taking time to collect and drive home friends of the girls in your car; and then the resumption of attempts to arrange the fight and the repeated back and forth to Old Lines.
28. From all that I have heard about the course of events, I think it clear that your level of maturity at that time was markedly below that to be expected of someone of your age; and that this would should be reflected by downward adjustment of the starting point. In making my assessment I note that the statutory starting point for an offender aged 15 or 16 who takes a knife to the scene is 17 years. In your case I consider that the appropriate starting point is 20 years.
29. Having identified that starting point, the next step is to take account of any statutory and non-statutory aggravating and mitigating factors, to the extent that these have not been allowed for in the identification of the starting point.

Aggravating factors

30. The Prosecution contends that these are:
- (1) a significant degree of planning or premeditation;
 - (2) physical suffering inflicted on the victim before death;

- (3) playing a leading role in a group/gang incident;
- (4) subsequent action to conceal evidence, in particular by your disposal of the knife;
- (5) glorification of the intended/actual incident by the videos showing the knife before and after the killing.

31. I accept that your shameful video display of the blood-stained knife and its subsequent disposal by you are aggravating factors, albeit of limited weight in the overall context; but find no other factors.

32. Thus I do not accept that there was a significant degree of planning or premeditation of what you did. This is because I am satisfied that your intention was to have a one-to-one fist-fight with Jack Richardson; that your messages and video displays were pitiful bravado; that only shortly before the incident you obtained and took a knife to the scene; that you did so because of your fear that he might turn up with armed supporters and in order have it available in self-defence; and that your intent to cause really serious physical harm was formed only in the moments of your encounter with Craig Yorke. Your fear was evidently well-founded.

33. As to Mr Yorke's physical suffering before his death, movingly described in Mr Thompson's evidence, that is the almost inevitable consequence of assault with a knife; and one of the reasons why the statute provides a substantially higher starting point where the offender has brought the knife to the scene. Accordingly in my judgment it would be double-counting to treat it as an aggravating factor.

34. I do not accept that this is to be treated as a group/gang incident. Such a finding would be contrary to the jury's acquittal of your co-defendants. In short, they were present at the scene but had no criminal responsibility for the killing of Craig Yorke.

Mitigating factors

35. Your age and immaturity have already been taken into account in fixing the starting point for the minimum term.
36. I accept that your intention, formed in the moments of your attack on Craig Yorke, was to cause really serious physical harm, rather than to kill; and I give this due weight.
37. Having armed yourself with the knife shortly before the incident, there was an element of premeditation that you might use it. However I accept that there was no premeditation to use it otherwise than if you were attacked by armed supporters of Jack Richardson.
38. I also accept that you acted to an extent in defence, albeit wholly disproportionately and unlawfully, of those in the Vauxhall Astra who were under attack by the two men with African sticks.
39. The next mitigating factor lies in your absence of previous convictions and positive good character. This is further supported by the character references which have been provided. You are not academically strong but the evidence shows your hard work in obtaining the exam passes you needed for your college course in welding fabrication. You then made strenuous but unsuccessful efforts to obtain an apprenticeship. Against that background it is all the more melancholy that you should have acted as you did.
40. Finally, the Pre-Sentence Report records your expressions of remorse and guilt for causing Craig Yorke's death and for the terrible loss which you have inflicted on his family including his three young children. I accept the view of its author that what you say is genuinely felt.
41. Weighing up all these matters, I conclude that the mitigating factors substantially outweigh the aggravating factors.

42. The surcharge provisions apply and the Order will be drawn accordingly.

Sentence

Jack Lawson,

As the law requires, the sentence which I impose on you is one of detention during His Majesty's pleasure.

I turn to the minimum sentence which you must serve in custody before you may apply to the Parole Board to be considered for release.

Having regard to all the matters to which I have referred, I set that minimum term at 18 years less the 295 days you have spent on remand in custody. The minimum term to be served is therefore 17 years and 70 days.