



Courts and Tribunals Judiciary

SWANSEA CROWN COURT
19 DECEMBER 2025

REX

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(1) GERAINT BERRY
(2) STEVEN THOMAS
(3) ETHEL MICHELLE MILLS

SENTENCING REMARKS OF MR JUSTICE NICKLIN

Introduction

1. On 21 October 2025, Geraint Berry and Michelle Mills were convicted by a jury of conspiracy to murder Christopher Mills, the husband of Michelle Mills. Steven Thomas was acquitted of that charge. Additionally, Michelle Mills was convicted of perverting the course of justice. At the first Crown Court hearing, both Mr Berry and Mr Thomas pleaded guilty to possessing an imitation firearm with intent to cause fear of violence to Mr Mills.

Background

2. Christopher Mills is an army veteran. After his retirement in 2014, he worked for a local veterans' charity, Alabare. He met Michelle Mills in 2015/2016, and they began a relationship, later marrying in 2018. Michelle Mills started working for Alabare in January 2024 and became a manager in February. The couple owned a static caravan at Argoed Meadows in Cenarth, where they often spent weekends in the summer months.

3. Geraint Berry and Steven Thomas are also veterans and received support from Alabare, living in flats provided by the charity. Through her work, Michelle Mills knew both men. In the summer of 2024, Michelle Mills and Geraint Berry began a sexual affair, of which Christopher Mills was unaware. There was conflicting evidence at trial regarding the state of the Mills' marriage, but ultimately the jury accepted that Michelle Mills had been plotting with Mr Berry to kill her husband.

The Offences

4. Text messages between Michelle Mills and Geraint Berry in August and September 2024 revealed their discussions about killing Christopher Mills. Mr Berry also sought information about obtaining a firearm and advice on how to make a car explode. At the trial, Michelle Mills told the jury that the discussion with Geraint Berry about killing her husband was all fantasy. She said she never believed that Mr Berry would harm her husband. The jury found that these were not fantasies but genuine plans to kill Mr Mills.
5. On 21 August 2024, Mr Berry emailed to Michelle Mills a fake suicide note, purportedly written by Christopher Mills which he wanted printed. On 27 August, he recruited Steven Thomas, who drove Mr Berry to the caravan park on two occasions on what were clearly reconnaissance missions.
6. On 20 September 2024, Mr Berry and Mr Thomas travelled again to Cenarth. Mr Berry sent Ms Mills a text at 22:04 to say that he was on his way. Ms Mills replied asking whether Christopher Mills would recognise him. Mr Berry had equipped himself with a rucksack containing the fake suicide note, gas masks, cable ties (which had been prepared to be used as make-shift handcuffs and leg restraints), and two air pistols. Both men wore dark clothing, gloves, and balaclavas. As the two men approached the caravan, Mr Berry gave Mr Thomas one of the pistols but said to him "don't worry, this one doesn't work". When Christopher Mills answered the door, Mr Berry struck him in the face with a pistol. Mr Mills fought back, disarmed his attackers, and they fled. Michelle Mills witnessed the attack and called the police.
7. Mr Mills thought that he had been the victim of an armed robbery. Michelle Mills knew the truth. She knew that Geraint Berry had come to the caravan to execute the plan to kill her husband. A short time after Mr Berry had fled, Michelle Mills sent him two text messages: "Police have been called. Get away. Delete all communications, please on both phones." Then a few minutes later. "Are one of u bleeding? I know who was with you. Chris did not recognise you or the other one. I won't say anything".

8. Michelle Mills deleted her own messages. Geraint Berry did not. Later his messages would provide the key evidence to prove the plot to kill Mr Mills. Both Mr Berry and Mr Thomas were quickly apprehended by the police not far from the caravan.
9. Michelle Mills initially lied to the police, claiming not to know the attackers. However, messages on Mr Berry's phone revealed the truth. Michelle Mills was arrested after evidence showed her involvement in the planning.

Impact on Mr Mills

10. Mr Mills has given three victim impact statements. The first statement was given shortly after the incident. In the second statement, provided shortly before the trial, he spoke of the impact on his mental health and was diagnosed with stress and anxiety. He has reported having a lasting scar as a result of being struck with the pistol and the scar serves as a lasting reminder of the incident. He fears that tinnitus that he has developed was a consequent of being struck by Mr Berry. He expresses apprehension and describes himself as a changed person. In the more recent statement, after the trial, Mr Mills has stated that he has lost his job as a result of the offence. He says that day-to-day routines have become a struggle for him and that he suffers from fears and flashbacks. He states that William, his adopted son and son of Michelle Mills, has dropped out of university because of the stress caused by what has happened.

The Defendants

11. Geraint Berry is now 47 years-old. He has eleven previous convictions. His most recent conviction dates from September 2017, a guilty plea for two offences of breach of a restraining order imposed for a previous offence of harassment. Mr Berry also has a conviction for battery in November 2010 for which he was sentenced to a 18-month community order. I have been provided with reports about Mr Berry's constructive work whilst held on remand.
12. Steven Thomas is also 47-years-old. Apart from a driving offence in 2021, he has no previous convictions.
13. Michelle Mills is aged 46. She has no previous convictions. I have been provided with a character reference for Ms Mills relating to work that Ms Mills has undertaken for the Shannon Trust whilst in custody. I also have details of her achievements whilst in prison on remand.

Sentencing Guidelines

14. The Sentencing Council has issued sentencing guidelines for the offences of possession of an imitation firearm with intent to cause fear of violence and for perverting the course of justice. There are no sentencing guidelines for conspiracy to murder. There are guidelines for attempted murder, and it is accepted that the Court can have regard to these guidelines.
15. Turning to the Attempted Murder Guidelines, I assess the culpability as Category B – High Culpability – because of the significant planning and premeditation. I am not satisfied, on the evidence, that the offence was committed for financial gain.
16. In terms of harm, I assess the offence as Category 3. Although I accept that Mr Mills is struggling with the impact of this offence, I am not satisfied that the evidence demonstrates that he has been caused serious psychological harm, as the prosecution submitted. The sentencing guidelines recognise that some psychological harm is likely to be caused by being the victim of offences and the starting points and sentencing ranges reflect that.
17. For a category B3 offence, the Attempted Murder Guideline provides a starting point of 20 years' imprisonment with a range of 15-25 years.
18. Turning to the aggravating and mitigating factors of the offence, I do not treat Mr Berry's previous convictions as a significantly aggravating factor, but he does not have available the mitigating effect of having no previous convictions, which is the case for Ms Mills. The offence was committed in Mr Mills' home. For Mr Berry, there are aggravating features of the use of an imitation firearm and balaclavas. For Ms Mills, she deleted messages and lied to the police in an effort to cover up the offence. Beyond those matters there are no other aggravating factors that have not already been taken into account when categorising the offences on the sentencing guidelines.
19. Mr Berry and Ms Mills fall to be sentenced on the basis of the harm that they intended; which was to kill Mr Mills. There is usually little mitigation to be found in the fact that the plan was not a very good one, that it was poorly executed or that the prospects of successfully carrying it out were slim. Nevertheless, I accept that the Court, in fixing the appropriate sentence in the range, can have regard to these factors as matters relevant to harm to ensure that sentences across the range of offences in the category are proportionate.
20. Turning to the imitation firearm offences to which Mr Berry and Mr Thomas pleaded guilty, it is common ground that the offence falls in

Category A, in terms of culpability because of the significant planning and conduct intended to maximise fear or distress (arising from the use of the balaclavas). I am not satisfied on the evidence that Mr Mills has been caused serious psychological harm by the imitation firearm offence. First, I am not satisfied that the harm described by Mr Mills in his victim statement reaches the level for this category on the sentencing guidelines. Second, but more importantly, this harm was caused by his learning of the conspiracy to kill him, rather than the use of imitation firearms. I assess harm therefore at category 3. Applying the guidelines, for use of an imitation firearm the starting point is 2 years' imprisonment with a range of 1-4 years.

21. As to the aggravating and mitigating factors of this offence, it is an aggravating feature that the offending was part of a group activity in which Mr Berry played a leading role. In mitigation, I am satisfied that there was an element of coercion or exploitation of Mr Thomas by Mr Berry.
22. Finally, the guideline applicable to perverting the course of justice. Ms Mills' offence falls to be categorised as culpability A, because of the seriousness of the underlying offence. Harm is Category 2. The deletion of the messages was, I am sure, done to destroy evidence of the conspiracy (and not simply to hide her affair with Mr Berry). The lies to the police had limited impact on the police investigation because of the speedy apprehension of Mr Berry and Mr Thomas and the subsequent retrieval and analysis of the messages on Mr Berry's phone. There was therefore some impact on the administration of justice, but it was not serious. Applying the guidelines, the starting point is therefore 2 years' imprisonment with a range of 1-4 years.

Reports and Assessment

23. Pre-Sentence Reports have been prepared for each Defendant.
24. In his interviews with the probation service, Mr Berry has sought to minimise his role and denies that he had any intention of killing Mr Mills. He told the probation officer that the discussions between him and Ms Mills was directed simply to Mr Mills "getting hurt and beaten up" and that on that evening he had travelled to Cenarth with the intention of hurting Mr Mills and "giving him a hiding". The fake suicide note that Mr Berry had prepared and taken with him that night demonstrates that this was not the limit of the plan. Echoing Michelle Mills evidence at trial, Mr Berry told the probation officer that discussion between them of killing Mr Mills was all fantasy.
25. Mr Berry reported that he had used cocaine and cannabis and consumed alcohol on the evening of the attack on Mr Mills. He said that he had done

so for 'Dutch courage'. Mr Berry did question whether Michelle Mills had been "playing mind games" with him.

26. Ms Mills' Pre-Sentence Report concludes that Ms Mills has almost no insight to her offending, minimises her actions, demonstrates no empathy and regards herself as a victim. There is no remorse. The author of the report states that Ms Mills' involvement in the current offence "is indicative of highly manipulative behaviour and demonstrates the lengths she is willing to go to in order to achieve her desired aims". Set against that, the pre-sentence report and a separate psychologist report do shed significant light on the difficult childhood and trauma experienced by Ms Mills. I accept the submission made by Ms Rees KC that Ms Mills' background does perhaps explain the speed of the development of the relationship with Mr Berry.
27. I accept from the evidence at trial and from the Pre-Sentence Report that, at the time of the offence, Mr Thomas was struggling with bereavement following the suicide of his brother, and that he had mental health vulnerabilities. At this low point, he was particularly susceptible to being recruited by Mr Berry. There was an element of false or misplaced bravado in the text messages sent to Mr Berry and his willingness to get involved. He could and should have withdrawn from assisting Mr Berry on the evening of 20 September 2025 as soon as it became apparent what Mr Berry intended to do. Mr Thomas bitterly regrets his actions and expressed remorse in his meeting with the probation officer which the officer considered to be genuine. He apologised to Mr Mills in the meeting.
28. There are two psychiatric reports for Mr Berry. Mr Berry has been diagnosed with complex post-traumatic stress disorder, but otherwise has no other psychiatric issues or mental disorder. I have a report dated 1 October 2025 from a clinical psychologist who states that Ms Mills has a diagnosis of complex post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, anxiety and depression.
29. I have had regard to the Sentencing Council's overarching guidance "Sentencing offenders with mental disorders, developmental disorders, or neurological impairments". I do not consider that the diagnoses of either Mr Berry or Ms Mills substantially affected their culpability at the time of the offending and there is nothing in the reports that suggests that it did. The mental health issues of each defendant are of course relevant matters to be taken into account for the purposes of mitigation.
30. Although the the probation officer has assessed both Mr Berry and Ms Mills as presenting a high risk of serious harm to Mr Mills I am not satisfied that the criteria for the imposition of a life sentence or an extended sentence are met in the cases of Mr Berry or Ms Mills.

The prosecution does not submit that the evidence supports a finding of dangerousness for the purposes of the regime of extended or life sentences. Neither Defendant has previous convictions for specified offences and the current offending is linked to a very specific set of circumstances which are unlikely to materialise again. Any risk of serious harm that either Defendant might present in the future can be adequately addressed under the terms of the determinate sentences that I will impose and the licence regime that will apply to them.

Sentences

31. Mr Berry and Ms Mills are each to be sentenced for two offences. In fixing the appropriate sentences for these offences I will treat the conspiracy offence as the lead offence and, applying the principle of totality, will fix a sentence that reflects the overall criminality and impose a concurrent sentence for the other offence.
32. In respect of the imitation firearm offence, Mr Berry and Mr Thomas both pleaded guilt at the first Crown Court hearing. The law provides that they are therefore entitled to a 25% reduction on the sentence that would otherwise have been appropriate. The sentences I am about to impose will reflect that reduction. Geraint Berry and Michelle Mills will be liable to serve two thirds of the sentences of imprisonment that I impose before being eligible for consideration for release by the Parole Board.
33. The time each Defendant has spent on remand awaiting trial will automatically count towards the sentences. Any relevant statutory surcharge will be added to the sentences. I make the order for forfeiture sought by the prosecution in relation to items seized in connection with the offences.

Geraint Berry

34. Together with Michelle Mills, you planned to kill Christopher Mills. You devised the plan and led its execution. You recruited Mr Thomas to assist you and, that evening whilst intoxicated, you equipped yourself with items that demonstrate that your intention was to kill Mr Mills, probably by gassing him, and to make it appear to be a suicide. However incompetent that plan was in its formulation and execution, and however unlikely it was to be achieved, your intention was to kill. The steps you took in preparation to accomplish that aim were no fantasy, they were a chilling reality. Your plan was thwarted by the remarkable fortitude and courage of Christopher Mills who fought off you and your accomplice. Your mental health issues do provide some limited mitigation, but you have demonstrated only limited insight. I have made a modest reduction of the sentence to reflect the fact that the plan to kill Mr Mills was highly unlikely to have succeeded.

35. For conspiracy to murder, you will be sentenced to **19 years' imprisonment**.
36. For possession of an imitation firearm with intent to cause fear of violence, you will be sentenced to **18 months' imprisonment**. This will be served concurrently with the sentence for conspiracy to murder.

Michelle Mills

37. Together with Geraint Berry, you planned to kill Christopher Mills. He may have been largely responsible for devising the method of killing your husband, but you had encouraged Geraint Berry to execute it. The evidence strongly suggests that, in the weeks leading up to the attack, you cultivated and exploited Mr Berry's animosity towards your husband and encouraged him to find a way to get rid of him, not as some fantasy but in reality. From his text messages to you, you knew that the chilling truth was that Geraint Berry on his way to Cenarth that night. After the plan failed, the speed with which you set about destroying the evidence of the messages you had exchanged with Geraint Berry shows that you knew very well that they would incriminate you. Your principal personal mitigation comes from your lack of previous convictions and your childhood trauma, but the aggravating factors mean that your overall criminality is equal to that of Geraint Berry.
38. For conspiracy to murder, you will be sentenced to **19 years' imprisonment**.
39. For perverting the course of justice, you will be sentenced to **18 months' imprisonment**. This will be served concurrently with the sentence for conspiracy to murder.

Steven Thomas

40. You played a subordinate role to Geraint Berry in the use of imitation firearms to cause Mr Mills fear of violence. You have no relevant previous convictions and your personal circumstances at the time of the offence mitigate the sentence that would otherwise have been appropriate.
41. You will be sentenced to **12 months' imprisonment**.
42. It has not been suggested that the sentence for this offence should be suspended, but I am satisfied that the seriousness of the offence means that appropriate punishment can only be achieved by a sentence of immediate imprisonment. However, given the length of time you have spent on remand, the effect of this sentence is that you will be released once the necessary formalities have been completed.