

Wednesday 29 July 2026

REX

V

JAMES DESBOROUGH

**SENTENCING REMARKS OF
THE HONOURABLE MR JUSTICE SAINI**

1. James **DESBOROUGH** yesterday here at Winchester Crown Court a jury convicted you of the murders of Claudio Aquilino and Daniel Coleman. You murdered these individuals in 2025 on your land at Paramoor Woods, Sticker in Cornwall. I will refer to your victims as Claudio and Daniel as we have done throughout the trial.
2. Earlier in this case on 25 March 2026 you entered guilty pleas to counts of preventing the lawful burial of these individuals but at trial you maintained a not guilty plea to the murders, claiming that Claudio had taken his own life, and that Daniel was found dead by you on your land. By their guilty verdicts the jury rejected those claims.
3. It is now my task to sentence you for these murders. I have been assisted by submissions from Mr Hossain KC and Ms Leila Tai for the Crown and from Mr Brunton KC and Mr Paul Grumbar, who represented you at trial. Mr Brunton KC realistically took the approach that little can be said by way of mitigation on your behalf.
4. Where I state facts in these remarks, I am sure of those facts based on the evidence I heard together with the jury at this trial.
5. While awaiting trial for the murders of Claudio and Daniel, you murdered another person, Steven Kempster, while on remand in Exeter Crown Court. You were convicted of that murder in March 2026 and sentenced by HHJ James Patrick in Exeter Crown Court on 15 June 2026 to imprisonment for Life with a minimum term of 18 years and 94 days. As described by the judge when he sentenced you, you killed Mr Kempster by strangling him as he slept as your cell mate. You had earlier threatened to kill him because of his snoring and carried out that threat. Like the victims in the case before me, Mr Kempster was an older, frail and unwell man. I have been assisted by the reports

from that trial and did not consider I needed any further reports about you for the purposes of the hearing today. You are now aged 40.

6. I cannot of course re-sentence you for the murder of Mr Kempster. But given you are already subject to a life sentence with a minimum term as I have specified, my concurrent sentences for the murder of Claudio and Daniel must reflect your overall criminality.
7. Having seen and heard you give evidence and considering the circumstances in which your murdered Mr Kempster, I am sure that you are a highly dangerous individual who has no regard for the lives of people who you think are worthless. You are a person who can kill using extreme violence with no remorse or indeed reflection on your actions.
8. Before I turn to the sentences, I wish to say a few words about each of your victims. I have read and heard moving victim personal statements from a number of people this afternoon. They include statements from Claudio's uncle, David, and statements from Daniel's younger brother (Tony), his former wife (Rebecca), his daughter (Saphire) and from his mother (Sandra).
9. Claudio was born on 19 March 1968. He had a troubled life and suffered from a long-standing drug addiction, but Claudio kept in daily contact with his mother Anna, who lived in Italy. They spoke every day and she often sent him money. He was a vulnerable person and often suffered abuse at the hands of those who sought to exploit him. He had a loving larger family but as is often the case his addiction and behaviour had led to his isolation from them. Claudio was an intelligent and talented artist and excellent cook, and is described as a person who always had a smile on his face.
10. Daniel was born on 14 September 1981. At the time of murder he had been in a toxic relationship with his new wife Hannah for some time, and the negativity surrounding this relationship played a large part in this trial. At some point you Mr Desborough had a sexual relationship with Hannah while she was Daniel's partner. Daniel struggled throughout his life with alcohol dependency and a number of medical issues which made him vulnerable. He had also had a troubled childhood and faced substantial challenges in this regard. Daniel was a kind caring and loving person. His daughter Saphire's victim personal statement describes in vivid terms Daniel as a wonderful father and how a void has appeared in the lives of all who loved him following his brutal murder.
11. No sentences I can pass today can make up for the unbearable loss Claudio's and Daniel's families have suffered as a result of your actions Mr Desborough. But I must emphasise that the sentences are for me alone to decide applying established legal principles.

12. I turn to the murders. As I will describe, although these murders were committed a few months apart, they shared certain common features. There is a pattern to your killing. Although the murders were separate, the offences are linked in seriousness and it would be unrealistic to separate the two murders when it comes to determining a just overall sentence for all of the offending.
13. Both Claudio and Daniel were befriended by you at Sandy Lodge in Newquay in 2024-2025, where you were co-residents. Sandy Lodge is a multi-occupancy residence which housed people who were homeless and those struggling with addiction. In the spring to summer of 2025 you all left Sandy Lodge, and Claudio and Daniel each came in due course to your land.
14. In each case, you then killed these individuals in Paramoor Woods and did things to their bodies to conceal the cause of death as well as concealing their remains to prevent detection. In each case, you used their banking information and cards to access their funds including welfare benefits for some time after they died. In each case, after killing them you took steps to suggest that they might be alive by using their cards to indicate that they had travelled elsewhere. You attempted to frustrate police investigations by sending messages, forging notes, purchasing tickets and making journeys to create the impression that the victims were still alive.
15. I also find that you killed each of them because they were vulnerable, homeless and physically slight individuals who you considered would not necessarily be missed given their chaotic personal lives. As I have already said, I also find that you did not consider them, given their personal lives, to be worthy of respect as humans. I turn now in more detail to each case.
16. As to Claudio, I find that on or around 18 April 2025 you used some form of extreme violence towards him with an intention to kill him and caused his death. The pathologist could not say how precisely you killed him because after such violence you burnt Claudio's remains in a caravan on your site and tipped what was left of Claudio in the stream on your property. All that remained of him following police searches, DNA and medical analysis were bone fragments and a piece of his flesh caught in a branch next to the stream.
17. At trial you falsely claimed that Claudio had taken his own life and had been found hanging on a tree by you and Daniel Coleman and that it was Daniel's idea to dismember and destroy Claudio's body. That was disgraceful. Although this false narrative does not increase your sentence it does demonstrate the type of man you are and the depths to which you went to avoid responsibility. It was a convenient device to blame your next murder victim Daniel for what you alone did to Claudio's body.

18. As to Daniel, I find that on or around early to mid-June 2025 in your woods you used extreme violence with an intention to kill him and caused his death. Again, the pathologist could not provide a precise cause of death because of what you then did to Daniel's body. You went about dismembering his body by removing his skull, his legs and his arms from his torso. You did this using an axe and knives. You again sought to burn the remains and the main part of his body, the torso, was put by you in a shallow grave near a stream. The remaining parts of his body were found around the site probably having been taken there from the grave site by predators. You also created a concealed path from your cabin to the grave site.
19. I turn to the sentences. By law I must impose a life sentence for each of the offences of murder. The law requires me to specify what is called a starting point which can then be modified to identify the term you must serve before potential early release provisions may apply.
20. The law also says that I must make what is called a minimum term order unless I am required to make a whole life order. I bear in mind that a whole life order is a sentence of last resort, reserved for cases in which the seriousness of the offending is exceptionally high. Ultimately this is a matter for me to assess on the basis of my conclusions as to the facts. My aim must be to achieve a just sentence bearing in mind whole life orders are very rare and reserved for cases where the seriousness is exceptionally high. I bear in mind the need to consider each offence separately when deciding on whether a whole life term is the right starting point.
21. Given the seriousness of each of the murders of Claudio and Daniel which includes all of the matters to which I have made reference surrounding the murders, I consider this is a case where the starting point must be a whole life order in each case.
22. I need then to consider whether the aggravating and mitigating factors suggest a departure from that starting point. There is no mitigation apart from the fact that before the prison murder you were lightly convicted; and I have already taken into account aggravation in my assessment of the starting point which includes the dismemberment and preventing a lawful burial in each case as well as the aims at diverting the police inquiries.
23. I also need to stand back and ensure that the sentences I impose reflect totality and the criminality involved in the murder of Mr Kempster where you are already serving a life sentence with a minimum term of 18 years and 94 days. My sentences will run alongside that sentence.
24. Simply adding a fixed period for the murders before me by way of an in effect additional minimum term to the sentence for Mr Kempster's murder would not result in a just

overall sentence. The murders before me would in and of themselves, were I minded to apply minimum terms, attract very long minima before parole could be considered.

25. I will now announce my sentences.

26. Mr Desborough please stand.

27. For the murder of Claudio Aquilino, Count 1, I sentence you James Desborough to imprisonment for Life with a whole life order. That means that the early release provisions will not apply to you. You will never be released from prison on parole.

28. For the murder of Daniel Coleman, Count 2, I sentence you Mr Desborough concurrently to imprisonment for Life with a whole life order. Again, that means the early release provisions will not apply to you so you will never be released from prison on parole.

29. For the counts 3 and 4 concerning preventing a lawful burial, I sentence you to 5 years imprisonment on each count concurrent to one another and concurrent with the sentences for murder.

30. Mr Desborough can be returned to the cells.

31. Finally, I cannot leave this case without recognising for commendation the following individuals who have been crucial in bringing Mr Desborough to justice:

Senior Investigating Officer – DI Neil Blanchard

Deputy Senior Investigating Officer – DS Martin Key

Officer in the Case – DC Clare Pearson

Heads of search team – Police Inspector Jonathan Matthews and PS Emma Storey-Barrett

Regional Forensic Coordinator – Claire Houston

CPS Reviewing Lawyer – Helen Phillips

CPS paralegal – Ellen Paskin