

In the Cambridge Crown Court

R v Karl Hutchings

-----  
Sentencing remarks 9<sup>th</sup> July by HHJ Mark Bishop,  
Hon. Recorder of Cambridge  
-----

1. You have pleaded guilty to the gravest of crimes : the murder of Julie Buckley who was last seen alive on 28 January 2025 when she disappeared. As you now accept, you had killed her whilst she was at your home; and having taken her life you then deprived her of any dignity in death by dismembering her body into 10 pieces and burying them in a field at Wimblington. You changed your plea to guilty on 15/9/25 14 days before your trial was due to commence. The next day you told officers where the body could be found. It has taken additional time for the work to be done on those remains to establish as much information as possible about the end of Julie Buckley's life. This work largely accounts for the time that has passed between your plea of guilty and this sentence.

What happened

2. You and Julie Buckley were known to each other and were both addicted to Class A drugs. Ms Buckley was seen driving her car with a male who I am sure was you in the passenger seat on 27 January. She was last seen alive at a Budgens store on 28 January in March. She was staying with you at your address at Christchurch east of March. The last time her phone was used was on 29 January at 1242 when a message was sent from her phone (I am sure it was sent by JB) concerning a drugs purchase referring to you as 'Cal' stating ' amazingly now he is getting angry cos I asked him were it cud be': I am sure that this was a message from JB speaking of your anger at her in the context of illicit drug use.
3. Based on the evidence of last movements and this message, it is estimated that you killed JB between afternoon of 29 January and the morning of 30 January 2025 at your home.
4. You were next seen on 30 January at a One Stop shop in Manea driving JB's car alone and you used her bank card to make food , alcohol and cleaning product

purchases. Those cleaning products were purchased by you to clean up after the murder. You tried to withdraw some money on her card which was unsuccessful.

5. Around 1 hour later you used her card at One Stop shop in March and 2 successful withdrawals of £250 and £90.
6. That evening 30/1/25 after 9 pm JB's car was seen to leave your home : I am sure you were driving it. You have later explained that you were making a number of journeys to where you had dug the shallow grave to take bags of body parts there. By the 30/1 you were either going to Wimblington to dig the grave or beginning the process of transporting body parts to the grave.
7. ON 1 February you went to the home address of a friend- first name Caroline- where you told her you had some women's clothing for sale which she purchased. You returned to this friend's house uninvited on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> February ( so some 4 days after JB last seen alive) saying that if she wanted anyone killed you could kill them for her: she asked if you had done anything stupid and you could speak to her about it if you had and you said 'I can't until I've got rid of her and cleaned up'.
8. You then gave an account to this friend how you had killed JB saying that you had hit her over the head with a hammer and she had taken 24 hours to die: you then revealed that you had dismembered the body and she was in black bags at your home.: you said you had done it because she would not take you to get your drugs script which you had not taken for 3 days. You told the friend that you were being wound up by JB who was taking drugs in front of you and not giving you any: you then gave more detail of what you said you had done to her.
9. During this time you were still driving around in JB's car telling people that she was in rehab and that you intended to sell the car: and people should not worry about what JB might say about that. You did sell the car on 10 February for £500.
10. You then went to see another friend – first name Amanda- on 12 February and she found you to be ' scary and unwell'. You described a rumour that you had killed JB as a ' joke'. You tried to sell JB's mobile phone which she refused to buy.
11. You were arrested at this friends address the next day 13<sup>th</sup> February. Interviewed on 14 and 16 February: you said you had last seen JB a couple of weeks before and when the conversation with Caroline was put to you, you said that what you had said was a joke.

12. Following arrest your house was searched and forensic testing done: part of the carpet in the living area was found to be missing and there were burnt items in the garden:

- (i) The forensic scientist examined the kitchen and bathroom: in a very cluttered house she noted that the bath and shower were very clean in comparison; there was the possible presence of blood near the taps of the bath: no visible blood
- (ii) There was a blood stain on the bathroom sink which had transferred as a result of contact with a patterned surface such as a glove
- (iii) In the living room the sofa was missing the arms on both sides: there was extensive blood staining on the seat and back cushions: the majority were heavy contact blood stains associated with heavy runs of blood which pooled in crevices in the sofa. On the upper left of the sofa there was directional blood staining radiating back to a central point; there was circular contact blood staining on the lower part of the left cushion back. There was heavy contact blood staining on the right hand cushion. There was no evidence of pooling of blood beneath the sofa which indicated that either there had been cleaning or that any flooring present at the time of the blood loss had been removed
- (iv) There was a box of clothing in the living room with a pair of jeans which were heavily blood stained which corresponded with blood staining on the sofa. I am sure the clothes had become bloodied at the same time as the sofa when you murdered JB
- (v) The wall in the living room had been cleaned

13. Her conclusions were :

- (i) There had been at least one impact into wet blood on the sofa (or something that was wet with blood) towards the centre of the sofa- we know that this was from your the attack on JB. One explanation for the findings of blood on the sofa was that a blood stained head had been low down on the left of the sofa back cushion and then the head may have slumped to the right hand side of the sofa
- (ii) Areas around the lounge door handle, the light switch and other areas in the living room, the radiator in the hall and the outer surface of the kitchen door had all been cleaned : 2 of these areas tested positive for blood although no visible blood was observed..

14. DNA recovered from swabs at the address indicated to the forensic scientist that it was likely that JB was assaulted at the address and shed blood. By your plea you now accept that this blood was shed when you murdered JB. Outside in the wheelie bin other items were recovered which had evidence of blood on them: from this evidence and by your plea, it is clear that JB's blood was likely to have been present on a sponge scourer which was used to clean up the blood after you had killed JB
15. A forensic scientist examined the area of burning in the garden and found that there had been more than one bonfire, the most recent area of burning contained carpet (which I am sure was from the living room where her blood had been spilled), also in the latest bonfire was underlay, clothing and other items. There were burnt items in the wheelie bin indicating that the remnants of the fire had been cleared up and thrown away.
16. All this is evidence of an extensive clean up operation in an attempt to hide the evidence of what you had done.
17. A blue and black reciprocating saw was found on 20 February at sixteen Foot Bank near Manea: JB's DNA was located on the handle which gave a chemical reaction to the presence of blood. The saw blades were also recovered with some human hair which was found to be JB's hair.
18. In the days following your plea of guilty and informing the police where you had buried JB's remains, these remains were found in a grave near Wimblington which had been dug by you with hand tools. There were 10 separate body parts which were not wrapped or clothed in any way. The parts lying nearest the surface had had straw laid on them.
19. Examination of the remains found that there were 2 rib fractures which were likely to have occurred near the time of death.
20. Also found were at least 11 forceful impacts to the head – most at the top and or back of the head. These defects occurred when the bone still retained its organic component in the peri mortem period when the bone responds to trauma as 'fresh' bone. There was also blunt force trauma to the back of a middle bone on the left hand.
21. The pathologist also examined these remains: she found that the skull injuries were associated with multiple blunt force impact: the shape was typical of a hammer. The 11 separate head impacts would have ranged from moderate

impact to severe impact. There would have been some degree of traumatic brain injury including severe brain injury . There were recent nasal fractures which could have involved a facial assault around the time of death. The injuries to the back of the left hand could have be defensive injuries indicating JB was conscious when attacked. Toxicology showed the products of taking illicit heroin and also cocaine in JB's body.

22. There has been assessment of what occurred when you killed her . After you PG, you told a teacher, Ms Littler, in front of other prisoners at HMP Peterborough , that you had hit JB over the head with a hammer which made her woozy and then you hit her over the head again which had ' finished her off' : you said that you had put the body into the bath and then cut the body up. This is not the same account you gave to your friend Caroline before your arrest where you spoke of it taking 24 hours for her to die with other detail of what you did.

23. Dr Fitzpatrick Swallow's pathology opinion was that:

- (i) Damage to the skull showed 11 separate head impacts consistent with a hammer
- (ii) there were no injuries which should have been immediately fatal; it was entirely possible JB survived some hours after the attack but Dr FPS stated that it could not be said whether this extended as long as 24 hours. However, she noted that the drugs found in JB's body had been taken shortly before her death. If she was unable to self-administer the drugs then then that means that D would have been responsible for injecting her with those drugs.

24. I find as follows: I am sure that D delivered blows to the skull with a hammer, when JB had taken drugs but was conscious, and then hit her again and killed her.

25. I do not believe that it is likely that this took place over a 24 hour period for the following reason: if the drugs were taken shortly before death, I am sure that is because JB voluntarily administered those drugs to herself. It is inherently unlikely that D who is a class A drug addict, would waste Class A drugs by injecting them into someone else – particularly someone he had attacked out of anger. There is evidence from (i) JB's final text message on 29 January of D getting angry in the context of drugs, and (ii) what D said to the friend Caroline, that JB would not take you to get your script, she was taking drugs in front of you

and you had not taken drugs for 3 days, when you attacked her with the hammer.

26. I sentence you on the basis that there was an argument in the context of JB's drug use in front of you, when you lost your temper and you repeatedly hit JB on the head with a hammer which made her 'woozy' before hitting her again until she died. She would have known she was being attacked in this way notwithstanding her drug use and attempted to defend herself hence the injury to the back of her hand. The evidence of blood on the left and right sides of the sofa indicate movement of JB when she was being attacked.
27. You then aggravated the seriousness of what you had done by treating her body with no respect or dignity in death: the body was stripped and her hair was cut and then you dismembered her with a saw, the better able to bury her in a shallow grave.
28. Before your arrest you had spoken to your friend Caroline about the use of a ligature and JB breaking free having being tied up after having been repeatedly hit on the skull with a hammer but taking 24 hours to die. I do not accept that this is a likely scenario, given that JB had been hit 11 times on the skull with a hammer and with the significance of her recent drug use as I have explained. So I reject that as a factual basis for sentence.

### Sentencing Framework

29. This does not fall into the category para 2 for a whole life tariff: nor is it suggested that it does.
30. So I must first assess the appropriate starting point for the minimum term you must serve of your life sentence.

Schedule 21: para 3:

31. I have considered whether this was a murder (i) done for gain or (ii) involving sadistic conduct. The Crown do not submit that the murder was done for financial gain, although following her murder you made cash withdrawals and purchases on her card, and sold her clothes and car: these factors aggravate the sentence, but on the facts of this case I do not consider that the murder was done for this purpose. I have also considered whether the murder involved sadistic conduct: this would have been established if the death had been as

protracted as D suggested to a friend before his arrest. However for the reasons I have explained above, I do not regard this as likely particularly given JB's recent drug use which I am sure was self-administered. I am sure that the attack came as you described it to Ms Littler the teacher at HMP PB. This murder was particularly brutal, but it does not fall into the category of 'sadistic' as defined in Bonellie 2008 EWCA Crim 1417.

Schedule 21: para 4

32. This murder does not fall within para 4 as a case where a knife or other weapon was 'brought to the scene'.

Schedule 21: para 5

33. This means that the appropriate starting point for the minimum term to be served is one of 15 years under para 5.

34. I must now assess the considerable aggravating features under para 9 in this case:

- (i) Sub para (a): that JB was particularly vulnerable because of her drug addiction and associated mental health problems is not disputed: I am sure she was lying on a sofa having recently taken drugs as you well knew, when you attacked her.
- (ii) Sub para (c) : I have considered whether the blows with the hammer to the skull causing her to be 'woozy' before D delivered the final blows causing her death, could be said to have inflicted mental or physical suffering on JB before death. I am satisfied that she would have been aware that she was being attacked in this way even intoxicated by drugs and therefore this attack with 11 blows to head with a hammer would have inflicted some mental and physical suffering on her before death. I note the presence of injuries which are consistent with defensive injury.
- (iii) Sub para (fa): sustained and excessive violence towards JB is present in this case. 11 hammer blows to the skull are sustained and excessive violence. This aggravating factor sub para came into force from 28/2/24
- (iv) Sub para (g): concealment, and dismemberment of the body: this significantly aggravates the sentence on the facts of this case: the concealment lasted from her death between 29/1-30/1 until D pleaded guilty on 15/9/25 and he identified the field where he had buried the remains. Thus for 9 months he had concealed the location of the body. The grotesque act of dismemberment with a reciprocating saw was preceded by the further indignity in stripping the body and cutting her hair. The body pieces were not clothed in any way but simply cast into a shallow grave that you had dug. The inhumanity of the act of murder is

aggravated to a significant extent by your egregious conduct in what you did with the body.

35. I also consider further aggravating factors from the Overarching Guideline
- (i) I have already taken into account the nature of the attack with a hammer and so I do not double count this
  - (ii) In respect of any drug intoxication that you may have had at the time of the murder, it seems more likely that your lack of access to drugs, at a time when JB had drugs, was a reason for the outbreak of violence. Your drug addiction provides the context for his violence and some aggravation to the sentence.
  - (iii) Your conduct in selling her clothes and car and making purchases and cash withdrawals on her card is also an aggravating factor
  - (iv) You have previous convictions mainly for shoplifting offences (the last being 2023) consistent with his drug addiction, and there are 6 violence convictions but none since 2011. These convictions have some aggravating effect upon the sentence
  - (v) Your actions after the murder in the extensive clean up and your attempts to destroy evidence including disposing of the saw in the Sixteen Foot Drain near Manea.

36. I consider the mitigating factors set out at para 10:

- (i) I accept that you did not plan to kill JB: this was an eruption of violence in the context of drug use.
- (ii) I have read the witness statement of Ms Gilder-Haddon at 147: she is the neighbourhood response officer for Clarion Housing who provided the accommodation for you. She visited in January and February 2025. This statement provides evidence of your vulnerability to others, your chaotic lifestyle and your reluctance to engage with Ms Gilder-Haddon: the mental health nurse had refused to go into the property because of needles. It is accepted you had been discharged from psychiatric hospital in August 2024: so I accept that that you had your own mental health vulnerabilities which I take into account.
- (iii) Disclosure of location of the body: I do not regard this as a mitigating factor in itself. When he disclosed the location, the aggravating effect on sentence of concealment ceased at that point. It does not turn into a mitigating factor. However, disclosure may go to the issue of remorse which I now deal with.
- (iv) Remorse (Overarching Guidelines): I have read your letter to me dated 16/6/26. Firstly, you tell me that you did not intend to kill JB: I do not

accept that: – I think that when you ‘lost it’ and hit her on the head with the hammer 11 times you did intend to kill her. I have already accepted that there was no prior planning.

Secondly, you explain why it took you so long to admit to killing JB. You say you did not want to think about what had happened or admit that you had killed her, but there came a time when you were prepared to do so and then the psychiatrist saw you again. You tell me that you were hoping for a report from him that would support a lesser verdict of manslaughter on grounds of diminished responsibility: but that was not his opinion which you say you found difficult to accept – although you eventually did. And thereafter you pleaded guilty to the murder on 15 September.

Thirdly, you say that you revealed the location of the body because you knew how important it is for someone to be laid to rest properly and for the family to know where she is.

I take into account your own vulnerabilities in reading this letter. However, I do not find this letter persuasive evidence of remorse for your murder of JB and what you did to her remains for 2 reasons:

- (a) The public acceptance that you had killed JB came only after the psychiatrist report made clear you did not have diminished responsibility for causing her death; that public acceptance of killing her came only when there was no other realistic option open to you some 2 weeks before trial.
- (b) You had hidden where she was buried for 9 months and revealed it only when it was clear that you had no realistic alternative than to plead guilty. The hiding of the body is a severely aggravating factor as I am sure you knew: I do not think you revealed the location of the body because of a sudden realisation that it was important for JB to be laid to rest properly and for her family to know where she was. I think you judged that you had more to gain than to lose by disclosing the location of the body.

Also, having read the account of Ms Littler the teacher at HMP Peterborough in whose class you were after you had pleaded guilty, I find your expression of remorse for the death of JB in your letter to me does not sit well with how you were talking to Ms Littler and her class about the murder and your response when asked what you had done with the body, when asked by others in the class (even though by then you must have disclosed its location).

Even having taken into account your own vulnerabilities, I cannot accept that what is contained in this letter expresses genuine remorse for what you have done.

However, a reduction in the sentence will be made for your plea of guilty.

37. I have been referred to R v Atkins and Periera 2024 EWCA Crim 1316 where the body was largely not recovered and there were counts of perverting justice and preventing the burial of a corpse. The criminality of all these counts were considered together when assessing the minimum term for murder. I note that the sentencing judge in that case found that the D may have initially been acting in self-defence, unlike the case before me. The CA increased the minimum term on a reference to 21 years. Ms Summers KC does not suggest that this sets a tariff but demonstrates the relevant factors that were considered on the facts of that case
38. The appropriate starting point for the minimum term is 15 years, but then taking the aggravating and mitigating features into account after trial I set the minimum term at 23 years.
39. You pleaded guilty: the maximum deduction for a plea of guilty to murder is 1/6<sup>th</sup> which is over 3 years 10 months (ie 46 months).
40. From the time D was found to be fit to plead on 30/7/25, you could have entered a plea of guilty based on the fact that you denied murder but admitted manslaughter on the basis of diminished responsibility. Although it was communicated informally between counsel that the killing of JB was not in dispute, in the absence of any change of plea in open court, the case had to continue to be investigated and prepared for a trial and a PNG to murder. A great deal of work was required to investigate 'proof of life' of JB over this period. There were 7 teams investigating this involving over 2000 police hours. This work was required because you were waiting to see if you had a partial defence available which could result in a manslaughter rather than murder conviction. I do not believe in these circumstances you are entitled to a full deduction for credit for the plea that eventually came 2 weeks before trial. I recognise that you had a choice and the fact that you chose to plead guilty means you are entitled to some credit but I will reduce the credit by around half.

Half of 46 months is 23 months .

The minimum term is there 23 years less 23 months which is 21 years 1 month

38. Time on remand: 506 days . This will be deducted from the minimum term as you have already served those days. 21 years 1 month less 506 days

### Stand Up

The sentence for murder is fixed by law. This means there is only one sentence I can pass, namely a sentence of life imprisonment.

I must decide the minimum period that you must serve before you are first considered for release on licence. I consider the appropriate starting point is 15 years but having considered all the features in this case, including the aggravating and mitigating features as I have explained, I fix the minimum term which you will serve in custody, before the Parole Board may first consider your possible release, at 21 years 1 month.

The 506 days which you have spent on remand in custody will automatically count towards your sentence.

That is therefore a minimum term of 21 years 1 month less 506 days ( which is 19 years 254 days)

The Parole Board will then decide whether you can leave custody at that stage, and if so on what terms. If you are refused parole at that time you will remain in custody, subject to regular reviews by the Parole Board. If and when you are released you will be on licence for the rest of your life. If you break the terms of your licence you will be liable to return to custody.

VS: £228