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v

SIMON RICHARDSON

IN MANCHESTER CROWN COURT (MINSHULL STREET)

SENTENCING REMARKS OF THE HON. MRS JUSTICE BRUNNER
2nd November 2026

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

1. You may stay seated during my sentencing remarks.
2. Simon Richardson, on 30th October you were convicted at this court of the murder of Michael Mullins.
3. You took away a life and in doing so you caused devastation to a family and a community. The court has heard moving testimonies from Mr Mullins's family and friends. They have the profound sympathy of the court and the community in their loss. Mr Mullins was described as a strong Cumbrian man who was proud of his roots. It is plain that he was most proud of his wife, children and grandchild. He was a family man who would show up for everything despite his busy professional life. That profession was teaching, and in following his vocation he became a much admired headteacher and provided inspiration and leadership to so many. His positive influence on others stretched way beyond his own family and way beyond the school gate into the heart of the community.
4. There is only one sentence that the law allows me to pass for the offence of murder. It is a sentence of imprisonment for life. I am also required by the Sentencing Act 2020 to specify a minimum term which must elapse before you can be considered for release on licence.
5. It is important that you – and everyone concerned with or reporting this case – should understand what your sentence of imprisonment for life means. The minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will automatically be released. It is the minimum time that you must spend in custody before your case can be considered by the Parole Board. It is for the Parole Board to say, after expiry of the minimum term, whether or not you are fit to be released. There is no guarantee that an offender will be released

once the minimum term has expired, or at any particular time thereafter. If and when you are released, you will be subject to licence for the rest of your life. If for any reason your licence were to be revoked, such as if you reoffend, you will be recalled to continue to serve your sentence in custody. You will, therefore, face the consequences for the rest of your life.

ANCILLARY ORDERS

6. I am going to deal with ancillary orders first.
7. Disqualification: I consider this to be an exceptional case where a whole-life disqualification from driving is required. I recognise that may impede your eventual rehabilitation, but I find you would be a danger to other road users indefinitely, and such an order is required to protect the public.
8. I make that finding for these reasons. First, you deliberately used your car as a weapon over a prolonged period when committing this murder. Second, your record shows repeated convictions for a range of serious driving offences over a 15 year period which indicate the complete contempt you have for public safety and for the laws which regulate driving. Third, after a previous disqualification for dangerous driving you managed to pass an extended driving test and regain your licence, so the safeguard of a lengthy ban and an extended driving test cannot protect the public from you. Finally, you drove dangerously on the day after the murder at a time when you knew you had seriously injured or killed a man by your driving: despite that knowledge you were apparently unable or unwilling to avoid putting others at risk once again. An extended retest will be required if you ever successfully apply to lift this disqualification.
9. I revoke the existing community order and impose no separate penalty.
10. I impose no separate penalty for driving without insurance.
11. Your licence will be endorsed accordingly.
12. I impose the statutory surcharge.

THE OFFENDING

13. You have never given an account. I base my findings on all of the evidence heard at trial including expert evidence and the evidence of your cousin Ms Gabrielle Debotte who was sitting horrified and shocked in the passenger seat throughout this incident. By their verdict, the jury were sure that you knew that Mr Mullins was underneath your car when you dragged him to his death. The facts I set out below are those of which I am sure having heard the evidence.
14. In the late afternoon of 20th April you drove Ms Debotte to pick up some medication and for an errand of your own. You were driving your black Volvo XC90 which is a large four by four SUV. It had some minor faults but none that would have affected its handling.
15. Before the collision with Mr Mullins you were driving in a way that put others at risk. Analysis of CCTV footage shows that you were driving over the speed limit and at speeds which were inappropriate for the roads. Sixty metres before the collision you were driving at 55mph in a 40mph zone. A witness who was driving a few cars behind you described you as driving erratically, and extremely fast as if you were showing off

or in a hurry. That witness thought you were going to collide with the rear bumper of a small car which you were driving very close to, bobbing and weaving before overtaking. Your cousin asked you to slow down before the collision, but in your arrogance you smirked and said 'I'm a professional driver.' Far from being a professional driver, you were a driver with a terrible record.

16. On that evening of 20th April Mr Mullins was on his way home from work. He was an experienced cyclist, who cycled the 19 miles between his home and Stretford Grammar school where he worked. He left work around 5:30pm in cycling clothes and helmet. He headed out away from Manchester and his route took him along Warburton Lane in Altrincham.

17. At the junction where the collision happened drivers such as you, on Dunham Road, were required to give way to traffic on Warburton Lane, where Mr Mullins was cycling. The junction was well marked and wide: there was a warning sign, then a give way sign, and clear markings on the road. Anyone driving on Dunham Road at an appropriate speed and paying attention would be aware that there was a requirement to give way, and would have had a clear view up and down Warburton Lane as they approached the junction.

18. You were speeding and not paying any attention to the road. Your passenger Gabrielle Debotte was looking. She realised that you were going at such a speed that you were not intending to stop. Some cars on Warburton Lane had stopped but she saw Mr Mullins on his bike. She tried to warn you, shouting 'bike' three times. Other road users described being shocked at the speed you were travelling. You made no attempt to slow down at the junction and drove straight through it.

19. Mr Mullins crossed the mouth of the junction just before you came flying out of it. The front of your car smashed into the side of Mr Mullins's bike and he was thrown off it. The noise of the crash was captured on CCTV cameras at 18:07.

20. Mr Mullins's body hit your bonnet, right in front of you, causing a large dent. His head, protected by a helmet, hit the windscreen, causing a crack which radiated out. That was also right in front of you. He then went under the front of the car, and may have been run over. You slowed down for a split second but then sped off. Gabrielle Debotte said 'we need to get out' but you did not stop to see whether the cyclist was alright. You were thinking only of yourself as you sped away.

21. Witnesses to the collision stopped their cars to help, to call emergency services, and to search for the cyclist. It gradually dawned on people at the scene that the cyclist must have become trapped under your car. Tragically that is what had happened: Mr Mullins's foot had become entangled in the suspension around the front passenger side wheel. Mr Mullins survived the initial collision. He may have been unconscious from the moment of the collision and anyone involved in this case can only hope that was what happened. An expert in trauma medicine considered all of the material in the case including evidence that moaning sounds were heard from Mr Mullins, and concluded that the evidence does not demonstrate that he was conscious after the collision. I accept that expert opinion.

22. The prosecution case was that the murder took place from the time that you were knowingly dragging Mr Mullins under your car. You did not face any criminal charges related to the collision. There may have been a short time when you thought that Mr Mullins had been left on the road, but that did not last for long. As he was dragged on the road surface, a trail of his blood and shreds of his clothing were left behind.

Whether you saw that trail or not, there is no doubt that you knew he was under the car from shortly after you drove into him. As Gabrielle Debotte told the jury, soon after the collision there was a moaning noise coming from underneath the car. You heard it and you said to her 'he's under the car'. She was crying, screaming and shouting at you to stop. Again, shockingly, although you now knew you were dragging a man along a road, you did not stop.

23. Not only did you not stop, but you drove at speed. Soon after the collision Mr Mullins's apple watch, still on his wrist under your car, recorded your speed of around 65mph. Further on, your speed was calculated from CCTV as around 43mph. Those speeds were in a 30mph zone. You dragged him under your car for four and a half minutes, over a distance of 2.2km. As you rounded a corner a witness described your car as driving so fast that it was nearly on two wheels as it came around the bend. You were seen by another driver swerving, and she wondered if you had hit a pheasant or something like that. I am satisfied that those zig-zagging movements were because you were trying to dislodge Mr Mullins from under your car by changing direction rapidly.

24. After about two kilometres you stopped on the corner of a country lane, Wet Gate Lane in Lymm and got out of the car. You walked around to the passenger side, and you saw Mr Mullins, who was still alive. By that stage he had sustained most of the horrific abrasion injuries which were described during the trial and you would have seen a bloodied and severely injured man. Instead of trying to help him, you crouched down and tried to pull him out from under the car, while Gabrielle Debotte sobbed in shock in the passenger seat. You must have worked out that he was trapped by, or near, the wheel, because you got back into the car and moved the steering wheel, before trying for a second time to pull him out. The change in the direction of the wheels was evident from the blood mark left at the corner of Wet Gate Lane.

25. Your attempts were not successful, and so you set off again, still trying to release Mr Mullins by turning your steering wheel from one side to the other, veering from left to right. After 200 metres you mounted a grass bank, again to try to dislodge him. You drove forwards and backwards on that bank. Mr Mullins's foot was released. You reversed off the bank, and in doing so you ran over his torso. Whether you knew he had been released or not, it would have been plain to you that reversing would run him over and cause further severe injury. You left Mr Mullins lying on a grass verge on a secluded country lane, with nobody else around. You did nothing to get help for him.

26. A motorcyclist Mr Besant-Roberts had come across the aftermath of the collision, was told that the cyclist may have been trapped under a car, and followed the bloody trail on the road to find Mr Mullins lying on the grass verge. Shortly afterwards two women in a car also followed the trail and stopped to help. Those members of the public did all they could, as did the emergency services. Sadly Mr Mullins was pronounced dead at the scene as a result of multiple injuries, including full thickness abrasion injuries over large areas of his body, and crush injuries to his chest.

27. Meanwhile you were still focussed on avoiding detection. You swapped vehicles with someone else to distance yourself from the Volvo, and you got rid of, or stopped using your phone. Throughout the night of 20th April you and a male friend were in and out of your cousin's house. You were drinking and playing music. Gabrielle Debotte, upstairs in a terrible state, could hear you laughing and joking. I am satisfied that she was right when she said that you were there to keep tabs on her, to ensure she did

not go to the police. You and your friend talked to her about what to say and what not to say, and how to act. You and your friend scared her: you did not make overt threats but she was scared and did not want you in her house. In the course of the evening your friend made Gabrielle Debotte write a note on her phone with a false account, saying that she had not seen you on the day of the collision at all. She was told that she should give the police that story. You did not dictate the note, but you were right there, listening and going along with it. It was plainly part of your plan to create a false narrative about what had happened, and to ensure that your cousin gave a matching account.

28. The next morning, as soon as you left Gabrielle Debotte's home, she went to work so that she could tell people she knew and trusted about what you had done, and she then went to the police. She did not give the false account, but instead told them what had happened.

29. Police found you, driving a van. They followed you in a marked car and you made off from them. Footage of the police pursuit was played at the trial. You were driving through a densely populated residential area in Failsworth at speeds of over 50mph in a 30mph zone. You drove at speed over a junction into Oldham Rd without stopping and made contact with the central island sending up a cloud of dust. The police driver behind you had to come to a complete stop at that junction to avoid the possibility of a collision. You carried on at speed in narrow streets with cars parked on both sides and blind bends and corners. You stopped after a minute when your path was blocked by another car, and you were arrested. You made no comment in interviews.

THE DEFENDANT

30. You are 35 years old. You have an appalling driving record including careless driving, dangerous driving, and repeated offences of driving with excess alcohol and while disqualified and uninsured. Of note, you have previously tried to drive off to escape detection, including leaving the scene after careless driving.

31. You have previous offences for violence including an offence of assaulting an emergency worker. You were sentenced to a community order for that offence less than a month before the murder.

32. You were on bail at the time of the murder for offences including affray and assault occasioning actual bodily harm.

DETERMINING THE SENTENCE

33. I have determined that the starting point under Schedule 21 is 15 years. That is the submission of both parties, and I agree. That is by no means the end point.

34. I have given careful consideration as to whether this attracts a 30 year starting point. Although you were driving away from an accident, you did not deliberately kill someone in order to cover your tracks, and I agree with the prosecution that this should not be categorised as a murder intended to interfere with the course of justice. I agree that it is not otherwise an offence of particularly high culpability such as to fall within Schedule 21 paragraph 3.

35. The aggravating features are as follows.

36. Firstly, features of the offence namely your persistence, Mr Mullins's vulnerability, and your motivation. As Mr Mullins may have been unconscious from the moment of the collision I do not aggravate the sentence on the basis of his suffering before death. Your persistence is, however, a serious aggravating feature. You heard him moaning for many minutes. I am sure that you knew he was alive and that you thought he was conscious: it is only with the benefit of expert evidence that we now know that moaning may not indicate consciousness. It follows that you knew that you were dragging a man, who you believed was conscious, against an abrasive road surface for four and a half minutes. You drove at high speeds, you ignored your cousin's pleas to stop, you performed manoeuvres which you must have known would cause further injury, and even after seeing the state he was in, you carried on driving and trying to dislodge him. The footage of the car on Wet Gate Lane, swerving from side to side, mounting the bank, and reversing, all with Mr Mullins under the car, is distressing to watch as it captures an astonishing degree of disregard for human life. For every moment that you carried on, you were knowingly using your huge and heavy vehicle to cause serious injury to a man who was trapped, injured and completely helpless as a result of your actions: he could not have been more vulnerable. Why? You did that because you decided that escaping from the scene of an accident was more important than a human life. Although you had many opportunities to change your mind, you repeatedly made the same appalling calculation. I regard your culpability as extremely high, and these factors alone lead to a significant increase from the starting point.
37. Secondly, your previous driving. You have repeated previous convictions for driving offences. I also bear in mind your driving on the 20th April before the offence. As your counsel conceded the accident was entirely your fault and your driving leading up to that point plainly caused significant risk to other road users and your passenger.
38. Thirdly, your efforts to conceal your tracks after the murder as I have outlined.
39. Fourth, at the time of these offences you were on bail for other offences of violence, and were subject to a community order which had been imposed shortly before.
40. Fifth, your driving after the murder. You were convicted of dangerous driving by the jury. When pursued by police on 21st April you again drove with disregard for human life. The collision on 20th happened because you sped out of a junction without looking, and you did exactly the same thing on 21st. By that time, of course, you knew that you had severely injured or killed a man through your driving, and it is remarkable that nobody else was injured in this further episode. Almost all of the high culpability factors in the Sentencing Guidelines for Dangerous Driving apply – you deliberately ignored the rules of the road and showed disregard for the risk of danger to others, it was obviously highly dangerous, you were evading police, you were driving at inappropriate speeds. It is aggravated by your bad record and because you were driving without insurance. Having considered the guidelines, the sentence for that offence falls at the top of the sentencing bracket, and a concurrent sentence of 18 months imprisonment is imposed for that count. The minimum term I impose for the murder will reflect that offence, with consideration of the totality principles.
41. I turn to mitigation. There is very little.
42. The personal mitigation which I have been told about has no effect on my sentence. I take the approach that the prison service should be able to manage your medical condition adequately.

43. I accept that the incident was not premeditated. That carries little weight in the circumstances of this case, given the sustained period over which you inflicted injury.

44. I reject the submission that you only intended to cause really serious harm rather than kill. I accept that your purpose was not to kill him, as your overriding purpose was to escape the scene of the collision. However, I am satisfied that you must have known that death was a virtual certainty given the combination of the speed, the manoeuvring, the length of time, and your continuation even after you had seen him severely injured. That amounts to an intention to kill. Even if I had accepted your counsel's submission on this point, it would not have operated as a mitigating feature on the facts of this case.

45. I also reject the submission that you are remorseful. Your concessions through your barrister at trial were no more than had to be conceded, namely that you were to blame for the collision as you drove through a give-way junction. That does not signal any remorse to me. My view from the evidence and your decision not to give an account at any stage is that you are a man who has had his own self-interests at heart throughout the offending and the trial process.

THE SENTENCE

46. Simon Richardson, for the murder of Michael Mullins I sentence you to life imprisonment. The appropriate minimum term is 25 years. From that term will be deducted the 192 days which you have spent in custody, leading to a minimum term of 24 years and 173 days. You will be taken down now.