



**THE CENTRAL CRIMINAL COURT
OLD BAILEY**

11 April 2012

HH JUDGE PETER THORNTON QC

SENTENCING REMARKS

REGINA v GORDON THOMPSON

1. Gordon THOMPSON - You have pleaded guilty to three counts of burglary and one count of arson being reckless as to whether life would be endangered. All four charges arise out of the riots in Croydon on 8 August 2011.
2. That day was a bad day for Croydon and the people of Croydon. Shops were broken into and looted, a bus was attacked and set on fire, groups of people roamed the streets looking for trouble, missiles were thrown, bystanders were threatened and, perhaps the most shocking event of all, the House of Reeves furniture store was set alight and burned to the ground, putting lives at risk. That is the factual context in which your involvement must be considered.
3. First, you, with many others, looted the Iceland store in Surrey Street, stealing bottles of alcohol which you proudly displayed outside, leading to your photograph being displayed on the front of the Croydon Advertiser. That is the burglary in Count 2 on the original indictment. All references to Counts will relate to that indictment.
4. Then an hour or so later the Centrale shopping centre was broken into. The numbers of people who rushed in were so great that the security officers could do nothing but stand back and watch. You and a large group waited across the road until the centre was ripe for looting. Then you went in and up to the first floor to the House of Fraser. You helped hold the shutters up for others to enter and then went in yourself and stole from the store (burglary, Count 3). The cctv footage shows a truly shocking stream of people, mostly young, younger than you, entering and leaving the store with clothing and jewellery, some returning more than once. You were a part of that looting. When the police arrived the mob fled, scattering stolen goods all over the pavement and roadway.
5. Some 20 minutes later you are seen outside the House of Reeves, your distinctive red top bulging with stolen goods. This is - was - a landmark store, a furniture store of the Reeves family business which had stood on that site for over

140 years, proudly giving its name to its location, Reeves Corner. You were about to bring all that to an end. First, you pulled out the glass window which somebody else had shattered. You were one of the first to enter the shop. From inside you stole a laptop (burglary, Count 4), then left the store and handed it to somebody else.

6. Then you were heard by an eyewitness to say: 'Let's burn the place', and you asked, 'Who's got a lighter?' A lighter was handed to you. You walked back to the shop window, leant in on your own and made two attempts to set fire to a sofa inside. The cctv catches the flash of the lighter on each occasion. The second attempt was successful (arson, Count 6). The sofa - then the shop - was quickly alight. Meanwhile you stood back and watched. Mobile telephone footage seems to show you celebrating what you had done. You certainly boasted to another eyewitness with these words: 'It was me, I did that, I burned Reeves Corner'. While House of Reeves burned to the ground you left with your looted possessions.
7. By your plea of guilty to arson being reckless as to whether life would be endangered you knew when you clicked the lighter that there was a risk that lives would be put at risk, but you nevertheless went ahead and took that risk. This was a deliberate, wilful act of shocking, dangerous vandalism.
8. The fire was devastating as you must have realised to some extent that it would be. In cold money terms the damage to the building was over £1 million, a figure now assessed with consequential loss approaching £3 million. In the road the fire was so intense that the tramlines melted, with a repair cost of nearly £330,000.
9. But the real cost was in human and emotional terms. The Reeves family lost their historic business, something they, and generations before them, had lived and worked for all their lives. Their loss was priceless. The trauma they have suffered is inestimable. Furthermore, the lives of local residents were put seriously at risk. The flames reached across the road, where there were numerous flats above the shops. Monika Konczyk, for example, had to jump out of a window to safety. She jumped because she believed she would die from the fire. The image of her falling went round the world's press. Other neighbours had their windows blown out and smoke poured in, just as dangerous as fire. The police were banging on doors to get residents out. Hira Latif's three year old child was screaming with fear; her two year old was terrified. Adults and children alike were crying in distress. Another witness, Mark Atkinson, fled his flat just in time; everything he owned was destroyed. Some of the residents, from statements I have read, suffered sleepless nights, were afraid to go out and their close relationships suffered badly afterwards. All of this makes this charge so serious. It is extreme good fortune, and no thanks to you, that nobody died or was seriously injured. But they will be scarred emotionally, for a long time.
10. All in all this was a course of criminal conduct by you on a grand scale and in the context of widespread lawlessness. As the Lord Chief Justice said in *R v Blackshaw* [2011] EWCA Crim 2312: 'Those who deliberately participate in disturbances of this magnitude, causing injury and damage and fear to even the most stout-hearted of citizens, and who individually commit further crimes during the course of the riots are committing aggravated crimes. They must be punished accordingly, and the sentences should be designed to deter others from similar criminal activity.'

11. For the purpose of sentence your admitted conduct is also aggravated by your many previous convictions. You are 34 years of age and have convictions on 20 separate occasions including a robbery in 2000 when you were involved with others who were armed with knives and a machete in a violent robbery in North London.
12. There is little mitigation in your favour except for the following. First you pleaded guilty at an earlier stage to the Iceland and House of Fraser burglaries, and you pleaded guilty to the House of Reeves offences on the second day of your trial, immediately after the prosecution opening. You must have due credit for your pleas of guilty. Second, no witness had to give evidence and some of them were understandably fearful about coming forward. Third, you have expressed some remorse for destroying the Reeves family business. Fourth, I am grateful to your counsel for his helpful submissions. These matters will all count in your favour.
13. I am satisfied, inevitably, that the custody threshold is passed. The sentence I am about to pass is the least sentence that the gravity of these offences demands in all the circumstances, taking account of the aggravating and mitigating factors, and considering the sentencing authorities on burglary and arson including the case of *Blackshaw* on riot offences. I have also considered the decision of HH Judge Chapple in the case of *Burls* (Inner London Crown Court, 20 February 2012), and the Sentencing Council Guideline on burglary.
14. I have heard submissions about an indeterminate sentence. My conclusion is this. Although the public is clearly at risk in the future from some harm caused by you (as the Pre-Sentence Report spells out), I am not entirely convinced that the relevant provisions of Chapter 5 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 apply. The offences, particularly the arson, were committed in a wholly unusual context, unlikely to recur again. You have not committed this kind of offence before. And the Pre-Sentence Report, although addressing risk and harm, never actually uses the phrase 'serious harm'. I shall therefore pass a determinate sentence.
15. First, Count 6, arson being reckless as to whether life would be endangered. My starting point is 13 years imprisonment, reduced by a little more than 10% for your very late plea of guilty to 11 ½ years. That sentence is loaded to reflect the aggravating features of burglary at the same premises and the two earlier burglaries, all part of one course of unlawful conduct on the same evening. Hence the other sentences (which are deliberately outside the guidelines because they are repeated looting offences) will be concurrent. They are: 2 years imprisonment for each of the burglaries in Counts 2 and 3 and 3 years for the burglary on Count 4 (each reduced to that figure by your guilty pleas). That makes a total sentence of 11 ½ years imprisonment in all.
16. I order that all days spent in custody will be deducted from that sentence. At present the number of days is estimated at 241 days. Should that number be incorrect, it can be altered administratively.
17. In the ordinary way you will be released after you have served half of your sentence, and then be on licence for the remainder. If you offend again or breach the terms of your licence you may be returned to prison.
18. In the circumstances compensation is not appropriate, nor are prosecution and defence recovery costs.

