



JUDICIARY OF  
ENGLAND AND WALES

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-v-

STEPHEN SEDDON

MANCHESTER CROWN COURT

28 MARCH 2013

SENTENCING REMARKS OF MR JUSTICE HAMBLLEN

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**Stephen Seddon –**

You have been convicted of heinous crimes: first attempting to murder your parents and then, less than 4 months later, actually murdering them – a continuum of crime culminating in the cold blooded killing of a quiet, unassuming, elderly couple in their own home on 4 July 2012.

The 4 July was an ordinary summer's day in Clough Avenue, Sale. Robert and Patricia Seddon had just had a lunch of fish and chips. They were shortly to have their afternoon nap. In a few brutal minutes they were dead – murdered at the hands of their own son.

The earlier attempt to murder them was made on 20 March 2012 when you drove a hired BMW car into the Bridgewater Canal with your parents installed in the back seats of the locked car. The jury have found that that was done deliberately and with intent to kill them.

The attempt had been carefully planned. You had hired a car rather than using your own. You had taken the trouble of insuring the excess on the hire car. You took the precaution of taking a crook lock with you so that you could make good your own escape. You had a knife with you in case of need.

On the pretence of taking your mother for a belated Mother's Day evening meal you drove down a route you would not normally take. It ran alongside the Bridgewater canal and was largely without barriers. You drove at speed and, at a point where the embankment was clear of trees and shrubbery, you deliberately drove the car into the dark canal.

Using the crook lock you got yourself out of the car. The plan had no doubt been to make unsuccessful efforts to save your parents. However, a number of people were now at the bank side and your actions or inactions were in full view. You decided you had no alternative but to be seen to try to save your passengers. First you helped get your nephew Daniel, who suffers from severe learning difficulties, out of the car. You sat on top of the car trying to punch out a window with your heels. This had the

predictable effect of making the car more unstable in the water. Despite cries for you to get off the car you failed to do so, at least initially.

By now the emergency services were at the scene. Both the police and the fire services arrived with commendable speed. You had no choice but to be seen to try to assist and you did help your father out of the car. There was, however, nothing you could do for your panic stricken mother. She was stuck in the back seat seemingly resigned to her fate until fire officers heroically rescued her. By the time they did so the car was completely submerged and she was unconscious. She was resuscitated at the canal side and you were all taken to hospital. At the canal bank and at the hospital you manufactured a tale that you may have had a heart attack or a black out. Neither was true and nothing was found to be wrong with you physiologically. Your attempt to take your parents' lives had failed but in the meantime you were happy to take the public accolades of having bravely tried to save them.

Your parents not only had to endure a terrifying, life threatening experience but they also suffered consequent sleeplessness, nightmares, depression and stress. As time went on your father began to suspect that his own son had in fact tried to kill him that March night and he confided these suspicions to his GP the day before his murder.

The reason for the attempted murders and the murders was greed. You needed money. You had lost your job. You had a mortgage. You had a family to support. You had some grand plans. Despite the fact that your parents had always been very generous in supporting you, you wanted more and you wanted it now – hence the plan to kill them and get your inheritance up front.

The attempt at murder having failed, you decided on a more ruthless and definitive method of killing. You obtained a sawn off shotgun from criminal associates. You made arrangements for your family to be away from Seaham and for you to have an excuse to be seemingly stuck there all day. That excuse was provided by an electrical power outage planned for your area on 4 July.

That day you drove to Seaham from the Fleetwood Caravan Park where you and your family had been staying. You left the car in your garage knowing it would be stuck there when the electricity went off. You made arrangements to borrow your brother in law's car. With your car marooned in the garage and you seemingly stuck in Seaham all day you took the precaution of making that known to others and also of leaving your mobile with someone who would be there during the day. In addition you made sure you were seen around Seaham on CCTV during the course of the day.

In fact for the middle part of that fateful day you drove across to the North West. There you went to your parents' house in Sale where you shot them in cold blood and at point blank range with the sawn off shotgun. They died instantly.

Your father was shot from a range of 1 ½ metres as he sat on the sofa in the living room. Your mother was shot as she was lying on the floor in the hallway. The gun was held to her left temple and much of her face was blown away. You then tried to make it look as if your father had killed your mother and then himself. The gun was left placed across your father's lap in a staged murder/suicide.

You were in and out on your murderous business in little more than 15 minutes. You then drove back to Seaham where you maintained your story of having been stuck there all day until meticulous work by the police began to unravel it. Then and only then did you admit to having travelled to the North West and eventually came up

with a story of having been in the Manchester area that day on a drugs run, a tale which the jury have disbelieved and rejected.

In Greek mythology someone who killed a parent would be pursued until death by the Furies.

Throughout time it has been recognised as a terrible and unnatural crime.

You have killed not one parent but both of them.

You have done so for gain.

You have done so having first tried unsuccessfully to kill them by other means.

You have done so by the barbaric act of shooting them at point blank range with a sawn off shot gun.

In effect you executed your own parents. One can only imagine the horror of your parents' last moments in this life when they realised what a monster their own son, who they loved, had become. Mercifully, their deaths were swift.

I have considered the Victim Personal Statements submitted by members of Robert and Patricia Seddon's family which speak of their loss, the impact on Daniel's life and movingly describe Robert and Patricia's lives and character. They were devoted parents and grandparents.

In terms of antecedents you have a number of convictions, mainly for offences of dishonesty, a number of which were committed when you were a juvenile or a young man. The last significant conviction was for a major business fraud in 2000. You have no convictions for violence against a person.

For the crime of murder there is a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment. However, I need to determine whether this is a case in which there should be a Whole Life Order, in other words a sentence which means that you will never leave prison, or a sentence of a minimum term in prison, in other words a sentence which means that there will be a minimum term which you will serve in prison before the possibility of parole and, if so, the length of that minimum term.

Whole Life Orders are reserved for offences of exceptionally high seriousness. Cases which would normally be so categorised are set out in para. 4(1) of Sched 21 to the CJA 2003.

The prosecution submit that this is such a case because it involves the murder of two persons and a substantial degree of premeditation and planning. I accept that it has these features. However, the statutory provisions are not to be applied inflexibly and all the circumstances of the case need to be taken into account in order to decide whether a Whole Life Order is required.

It is submitted on your behalf that a minimum term order would meet the justice of the case.

The appropriate minimum term would have as its starting point that reserved for cases of particularly high seriousness, namely 30 years.

That is because this is a case which has three of the features set out in para. 4(2) of Sched 21, any one of which would normally mean that this would be categorised as a case of particularly high seriousness, namely:

Murder involving use of a firearm;

Murder for gain;

And Murder of two people.

In addition some of the statutory aggravating features are present, namely:

A significant degree of planning or premeditation;

An element of abuse of trust;

And an element of victim vulnerability due to their age and health.

I accept the Defence submission that the attempt to conceal the murder by staging a Murder/Suicide does not amount to concealment of the body within sub-para (g).

Further this case involves not just the murder of two people but also their attempted murder. If those attempts had been successful it would have been a case that came within Sched 21 paras 4 and 5 and in itself merits a determinate sentence of 20 years.

In terms of statutory mitigating factors the only one which is applicable is age. You are now aged 46. A minimum term of 30 years or more would mean that you would be in prison until you are at least 76. The effect of the minimum term could therefore well be to sentence you to die in prison.

Courts may in appropriate cases take age into account so that there is at least the possibility of light at the end of the tunnel. On the other hand age cannot be determinative. There is not one Starting Point for young murderers and another one for old murderers. Age is just one factor to be borne in mind as part of the sentencing process; but it is not determinative of the finishing point.

In mitigation, aside from your age, the main point urged is the lack of recent serious convictions and the absence of any convictions for violence against the person.

I am satisfied that this is a case which involves offending of such seriousness that a Whole Life Order would be justifiable. However, I recognise that such an order is very rarely made and that it remains a sentence of last resort.

On balance, having regard in particular to your antecedent history and all that is known about you, I have concluded that a minimum term sentence will provide sufficient just punishment and retribution if a long minimum term is imposed. There will therefore be light at the end of the tunnel, but it will be a very faint light.

This case has no less than three of the features which call for a starting point of 30 years as well as statutory aggravating features and the need to take into account the attempted murders. In all the circumstances, having full regard to your age and the mitigation urged on your behalf, I have concluded that the appropriate minimum term is one of 40 years.

That means that it will be 40 years before the Parole Board can consider your release. If you are still alive then and the Parole Board decide that release is appropriate you will remain on license for the rest of your life and may be recalled to prison at any time.

The sentence of the court on the murders is accordingly life imprisonment with a minimum term of 40 years, less such time as has been spent on remand.

The sentence on the attempted murders is a concurrent determinate sentence of 20 years.