



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

REGINA v MICHAEL SAMUEL COWEY

Sentencing remarks of The Honourable Mr Justice Edis

Norwich Crown Court

11 December 2020

The statutory surcharge will be imposed in the appropriate sum.

On 19th June 2020 you murdered Gemma Cowey, born as Marjoram, who was your wife. You are 49 years old and she was 38. You had two children with her during your 6 or 7 years together, and each of you had had children in previous relationships who are all affected by the loss of this beloved and loving woman. You knew all that when you did this, and this murder was your final act in exercising abusive and coercive control over her. Before you killed her over a period of years, according to her mother, you “destroyed” her by undermining her self confidence and taking away her happiness. You subjected her to a life of fear, using the children as instruments of coercion.

She had told you in January 2020 that she was leaving you. At that time she made a complaint to the police about controlling behaviour and made a witness statement about it. She had done something similar before in 2016. On that earlier occasion, she withdrew her allegation and the relationship continued. On this occasion she also withdrew her complaint, but that was on condition that you sought medical help. On one occasion you had a knife and caused her to fear for her life, but you did not use it. You have a long history of blaming your behaviour on mental illness, and she had been trying to persuade you to do something about it.

This behaviour towards her closely followed your behaviour towards your previous long term partner, Jenna Preston. That relationship had started when you were 27 and she was 14. She became pregnant by you when she was 15. You treated her with violence, abuse and obsessive controlling jealousy until she finally managed to break up with you and get a court

order to keep you away from her. I am going to set out what she said because it places what you did to Gemma Cowey in its context.

In April 2011, I agreed to meet up with him to see the children. We met in a pub and everything was ok until I received a text from a girlfriend. Sam then launched out of his seat across the table to try and grab my phone. He then grabbed me by the hair and dragged me out of the pub towards some fields behind the cemetery. He then smashed my phone. He forcibly grabbed my arm and I felt like he was crushing it and accused me of cheating on him and totally "lost it". He scared me, I believed by the look in his eyes the tone of his voice that he was really going to hurt me. As people started to look and the children to cry, he came to his senses and apologised. He then started begging me to come back to him. The only way that I knew I would be able to get away was to promise him that I would come back. If I didn't promise then he would never have let me leave. He then took the girls back with him on the bus.

I agreed to meet him again 2 days later. He arrived with just Liam and didn't bring the girls. Liam was only 2 years old and was asleep in his buggy. Sam wanted to go to the fields where there was a wooden bench. I felt unnerved as something was very wrong and something was about to happen. It felt completely different and there was no negotiating with Sam. Usually he would listen with a bit of reasoning however he wouldn't listen to me this day and just stood over me. He was wearing a green bomber jacket and had his hand in the right-hand pocket. He kept fidgeting and wouldn't sit down, just towering over me. He then said to me "after today you will be doing nothing". It was then that I saw the knife in his pocket. I reached over to the buggy and nipped Liam's leg hard so he woke up crying.

That means that before you killed Gemma there had been two incidents when you had had a knife when your relationship was in difficulties, once with Jenna Preston and one with Gemma Covey.

This is very similar to your behaviour as described by Gemma in her statements which she made before you killed her. The pattern is confirmed by many others, including other previous partners.

The point of setting all this out is that you have behaved in this way towards your partners over a period of many years, and you have not done it only at periods when you say you were suffering some incidents of mental illness. You have not been doing this because you are ill,

but because that is the man you are. This is what the doctors mean when they say you suffer from personality disorders.

The man you are is a violent, controlling, selfish, bully. You have always been that and you probably always will be. That is why you killed Gemma: because she challenged your control by leaving you, and you could not stand that.

This history is a very serious aggravating feature of this case. You have some convictions, which are old, but your history is not reflected in your criminal record because you could and did control your victims so that they stayed with you and did not pursue complaints to the police.

The next seriously aggravating feature of this case is that you planned it. You took with you two knives and lured her to a quiet place where you tried to make her conform to your demands and when she did not, you killed her. I am sure that when you went there you planned to try and force her to come back to you, but you planned to kill her if she did not. She had managed to spend 6 months away from you, and was getting her life back. She was never going to agree to your demands and she was doomed.

Next, this was an attack of great brutality. She screamed, according to witnesses, for some time. For all that time she must have been in terror. She knew what was happening because there are defensive wounds as she fought for her life. She eventually succumbed, but according to you she spoke to you as she was dying. There were multiple stab wounds, including many directed at the neck and chest area. Some of these were driven home with severe force. You were merciless.

Next, you did this in a way which has caused maximum damage to the children. You used Callum as bait to lure her to her death. You used Liam to help you escape by bringing you clothes to hide the blood. Before it happened you said things to them which were threats to Gemma and they live with the guilt of having failed to protect her. What you did was in no way their fault, but guilt is not a rational emotion, particularly for a child.

The consequences of this have been set out in heart rending victim personal statements which have been read to the court. They describe their own grief, and also the terrible harm you have done to all the children in this case. Gemma is not your only victim, your own children are your victims too.

The only mitigation is, first, that you were yourself the victim of some serious abuse when you were a child. Your own upbringing provokes real sympathy for the frightened child you were, but it does not justify the man you have become.

Secondly, you admitted what you did at the time of your arrest and afterwards and have pleaded guilty at the earliest opportunity. You will receive credit against the minimum term of 1/6th, the maximum which is allowed. That is a sufficient reflection of your remorse which you have expressed through your counsel.

I reject any suggestion of provocation falling short of the defence of loss of control. You created the situation in which she was cornered in private by an armed man. There is no evidence other than your own of what exactly happened in that mortuary, but everything that happened was your doing and not hers.

Equally, this is a case where there was a clear intent to kill. That was of the kind I have described when the crime was being planned, but when you took the knives from your socks you had decided to kill. There is no mitigation from any lesser intention.

The starting point is 25 years because you took your knives to the scene specifically in or to kill, if that is what you decided to do.

That requires an increase to reflect the very serious aggravating features I have identified, before discounting for the plea.

The minimum term in this case which you must serve before you can be considered for release is 23 years. You will receive credit for the 158 days spent on remand prior to this hearing. If that calculation is in error it can be corrected administratively. There will be concurrent terms of 2½ years on each of counts 2 and 3.

When you have served that sentence, you will be over 70 years old. The Parole Board will decide then whether you can safely be released. You should not harbour excessive optimism about that: your personality is firmly entrenched and makes you dangerous to anyone with whom you are in a relationship.