



MR JUSTICE WALL

IN THE CROWN COURT AT CANTERBURY

R -V- CALLUM WHEELER

SENTENCING REMARKS

1. Callum Wheeler, it falls to me to sentence you for the murder of Julia James on 27 April last year. You pleaded not guilty but were convicted by the jury after trial. Your sentence must be one of life imprisonment. I must now set the minimum term you will serve before the Parole Board can consider you for release. You and everyone else in court should understand three things about that minimum term. First, you must serve every day of it before the Parole Board can even consider releasing you. Second, even then the Parole Board will only release you if they are satisfied that it is safe and appropriate to do so. Otherwise you will remain in custody for the rest of your life. Third, even if you are released from custody, you will remain subject to the life sentence for the whole of your life which means that, if necessary, you can be returned to custody at any time.
2. The victim of your crime was Julia James. She was only 53 years old – a much loved mother to Bethan and Patrick and wife to Paul. She lived in Snowdown and worked as a special constable in which role she had apparently earned a considerable amount of respect from the members of the local community. I have heard from Mrs James’ husband and her children who have read out to me their Impact Statements. Your actions, Callum Wheeler, have not just served to end one life prematurely but have also have devastated the lives of the whole of her family. It was apparent from the impact statements how loved Julia was and how keenly her loss is felt by her whole family. You have removed that family’s main support and their sense of security and well being possibly for ever.
3. On 27 April last year, Julia James went for a walk with her dog in Ackholt Woods near to her home. It was an area where many dog owners went to exercise their pets. Mrs James was a regular visitor as for her that woodland had a special significance.

4. You were also in that area that day. You lived in Aylesham which was also close to the woods. You knew the woods well. You had been seen in the area of the woods and around the point where you must have ambushed her by members of the public on a number of occasions over the preceding six months. You had also been seen acting strangely in nearby roads on the street where Mrs James lived. You knew how quiet it was and therefore how relatively easy it would be to attack someone there without running the risk of being disturbed. That day, you were there with the settled intention of attacking someone. You went armed with a large, heavy metal bar which could have been of no use to you other than to use as a deadly weapon. It was railway jack weighing over 3kg. You had taken that bar to the woods on days preceding this murder although I cannot say with certainty whether you were looking for victims on those earlier occasions or simply carrying out reconnaissance for the attack to come. I am driven to the obvious conclusion that this attack was not a spur of the moment aberration by you; rather, it was an attack which was planned and thought through in advance.
5. Although you had been seen in the woods by Mrs James and her husband on a previous occasion, I cannot conclude that you had singled her out as a target before you went there that day. Despite that I am able safely to deduce that you were looking for a lone female victim and that you were sexually motivated. I draw those conclusions from evidence that you made a number of searches of the internet in the period leading up to this attack which were sexual in nature and included references to “rape”. You exhibited highly sexualised and inappropriate behaviour after your arrest including masturbating in front of a female police officer and making sexually explicit suggestions to one of them. You threatened while in custody to go back to the woods on your release and rape and kill another woman. You have also said that raping a woman would satisfy your needs and would be justified and that you would assault females and they deserved to die. Further, DNA evidence establishes that you touched Mrs James’ clothing in the area of her breasts in the course of your attack on her. Those marks could only have been left there by virtue of a deliberate touching of her in that area: the top on which the mark was left was covered by a coat and jumper at the time at which Mrs James’ body was found and so your DNA could not have been left there innocently or by an accidental touch in the course of the brutal attack you launched on her.
6. There were no eye witnesses to what you did but I can draw a number of safe conclusions about what happened from the available evidence. You must have ambushed her in the woods and chased her. That much is clear from the spike in her heart rate, a quickening of her movements and a sudden change of direction as recorded on her Apple Watch, as well as from the evidence that her spectacles were recovered some distance from her body. She sustained a fracture to her wrist which suggests that she must have fallen to the ground. Shortly after that her watch recorded that all movement ceased, her heart rate slowed, which on the facts of this case was evidence that she had by then sustained a brain injury, and a few minutes thereafter that her heart stopped beating altogether.
7. When you ambushed her she was vulnerable: she was walking alone with her dog and there was nobody else walking in the woods to whom she could turn for help.
8. You launched a brutal and vicious attack on her on the ground, hitting her numerous times to the back of the head with the heavy bar. The injuries were so widespread that the pathologist when asked how many times you hit her could only say, “*not one or two but*

whether it was 8, 9 or 16 I cannot say. A large area of her head had collapsed so I could not say how many blows had taken place before then". There were no significant defensive injuries suggesting that she had no ability to try to save herself. The evidence indicates that Mrs James would likely have been rendered unconscious by the first of these heavy blows and so unaware of what happened thereafter. The result of the attack was that she sustained catastrophic and fatal injuries to her head and brain. You fractured her skull into many fragments and injured the base of the skull. She died from a combination of catastrophic blood loss and brain injury. There is evidence that at some stage during the course of your assault on her, you moved her body a short distance and then continued your attack in the new location.

9. After the attack you had the presence of mind to cover up some of the blood on the ground and wrap up the weapon so as to conceal it and put it away before you left the scene. Mrs James' body was discovered later that day but you were not arrested until some time afterwards. In the meantime you kept abreast of developments in the investigation by conducting searches on the internet. You also went back to the area in which you had killed Mrs James and watched the police as they went about their investigation. I can infer that on some of those occasions you took the murder weapon out again with you.
10. You were arrested on 7 May at your home address although you were resistant to their initial attempts to do so. The murder weapon was subsequently found in your bedroom.
11. You made no admissions to the police in interview but did tell them that "*you can't to go into the woods and expect to be safe*" and that sometimes you do things you cannot control. You were abusive about Mrs James although you said that you did not know her and voiced the opinion that she deserved to die.
12. I set the minimum term by reference to Schedule 21 Sentencing Act 2020. I have no doubt that the appropriate starting point is one of 30 years, that being the starting point set by Parliament in cases where the seriousness of the offence is particularly high such as a murder involving sexual conduct. This is agreed by both counsel to be the appropriate starting point in your case.
13. There are significant aggravating features to your offending. First, this was a planned and premeditated offence as is evidenced by your prior acquisition and retention of the murder weapon or which you had no innocent use, your earlier visits to the scene of the killing (on occasions in possession of that weapon), and your internet searches on the subject of rape. Your actions in the immediate aftermath of the attack before leaving the scene, such as concealing the weapon from public view, are highly suggestive of an attack fully thought through before it was carried out. Second, the extreme nature of the violence used by you in the course of the attack. Dr Biedrzcki, the pathologist, described the injuries caused by the blunt force trauma inflicted by you to the head of Mrs James as the worst he had encountered in his professional life. Over thirty small fragments of bone became detached from her skull in the course of the attack. Third, the nature of your victim – a lone woman in a quiet area. It was an attack which in combination with other similar offences reported in the press in the recent past has caused understandable fear and concern among members of the public who find themselves in a similar vulnerable position to that in which Mrs James found herself that day.

14. The only mitigation is your age and your previous good character. You were 21 when you committed this offence and are 22 now. You had reached adulthood but I accept not full maturity. You have no previous convictions.
15. At your trial you accepted that you were responsible for the killing but put the prosecution to proof as to your intent. In those circumstances I should record that I am sure that you had an intention to kill and not merely an intention to cause really serious injury. Therefore, I do not reduce your minimum term on the basis that you had that lesser intent.
16. I have read the psychiatric reports on you. Your medical history is set out in them and I am aware that you are currently an in-patient at Broadmore Secure Psychiatric Hospital. However, in his latest report, Dr Nabi is clear that "*there is no clear evidence of a direct link between [your] disorder and the offence*". In those circumstances I am not urged to reduce the minimum term on account of the contents of the psychiatric reports and I do not consider it necessary to do so.
17. The significant aggravating features outweigh your limited mitigation. I have concluded that the appropriate minimum term in your case is one of 37 years less the time you have spent in remand which I am told is 423 days.
18. Callum Wheeler, stand up. For the murder of Julia James I sentence you to life imprisonment with a minimum period to serve of 37 years less 423 days. The surcharge applies and the order should be drawn appropriately. Take him down.
19. I cannot leave this case without commending certain people for their actions.
20. Firstly, the family of Julia James who have come here today to make obvious the extent of their loss. They have acted with courage and great decorum and deserve this court's admiration and respect. We all offer them our sincerest condolences.
21. Secondly, the bar. This must have been a most difficult trial to conduct from both sides and all involved obviously did their best to ensure that the jury were able to concentrate on the one issue they had to decide without clouding their task with extraneous evidence.
22. Thirdly, this was an admirable investigation. I have read of the efforts of the police officers and others involved in it who worked tirelessly to bring Mr Wheeler to justice. I am asked to commend in particular the roles of Detective Inspector Moss who supervised the investigation, Detective Inspector Adam Marshall, who assisted him, DS Le Jeune, DS Barker and DC Oliver, for their efforts in collating the evidence, PCSO Carmichael who acted with great calmness and responsibility when the body of Mrs James was discovered, Tanya Hayward, who controlled the crime scene, and Isobel Globson, Manjit Canth and Kate Humphries who have acted as family liaison officers.
23. Finally, I commend all those civilians who acted in a public spirited way to advance this investigation, in particular Gavin Tucker, who provided important evidence as to the

movements of the Defendant in the period before the murder, and the Gillie family who found Mrs James' body.