

At the High Court in Glasgow today, Lady Rae sentenced Alexander Pacteau to life imprisonment with a punishment part of 23 years after the accused pled guilty to the murder of Karen Buckley.

On sentencing, Lady Rae made the following statement in court:

"I find it extremely difficult to find words appropriate to describe the dreadful crime to which you have pleaded guilty.

Karen Buckley was a young woman in the prime of life. She was a visitor to Glasgow, studying to expand her knowledge in furtherance of her career in nursing. She was a much loved member of a close and united family.

To you she was a complete stranger who appears, tragically, to have accepted a lift in your car. In a matter of minutes, for some unknown and inexplicable reason, you destroyed her young life and devastated a family.

Not satisfied with killing her so brutally, you went to extraordinary lengths over several days to cover up your actions by attempting to destroy her body. You also concocted a story to tell the police and, to ensure that you remembered the lies which you had told, you even wrote the story down.

Eventually, and only after your detention, you revealed where you had hidden Miss Buckley's body, although by that time the police already knew the location. But still you continued to lie about what had happened and, on this occasion, you fabricated a second story, claiming this time that it was Miss Buckley who assaulted you before you killed her.

Your conduct after the killing succeeded only in adding even more pain and suffering onto the Buckley family. By the time of your first encounter with the police, you must have been aware that her family was anxious for news of her because there had been extensive media coverage seeking information as to her whereabouts, but you kept silent.

I question how any one doing all of what you did over several days can seriously suggest to this court that he did so in a panic. As I said at the previous hearing of this case, your killing of this young woman combined with the extraordinary lengths to which you went to cover it up, display the actions of a callous and calculating man.

You now, through your counsel, claim to be remorseful. Remorse was, however, only expressed for the first time when you pleaded guilty. From a perusal of the criminal justice social work report, it is apparent that in the course of your lengthy interviews with the social worker, at no time did you ever demonstrate or express any regret for what you had done.

That expression of remorse on 11 August might have carried more weight if communicated earlier. And it is difficult, in my view, to envisage someone who is truly sorry for killing another human being, going to the lengths to which you went to cover up your appalling crime, whilst making up false stories about the deceased.

An important matter of law was raised at the pleading diet in August, and that was whether I am entitled to have regard to what you did after the killing in imposing sentence on the murder charge.

I have been informed that when you first appeared in court you faced two charges, including a second alleging an attempt to defeat the ends of justice. The Crown, for some reason, decided not to persist in seeking a conviction on that charge, despite detailing, in the agreed narrative, the many factors which would have fully justified such a charge. The Lord Advocate submitted that I would still be entitled to have regard to what you did as an aggravating factor to the murder charge and he referred me to a number of cases which he submitted supported that approach.

On your behalf, Mr Scullion submitted that I should have no regard whatsoever to anything which occurred after the death as it was outwith the scope of the indictment. I have to say that I found this an extraordinary submission, standing the fact that the defence had agreed the contents of the narrative and had agreed that all of that information should be put before me.

I regret that the Crown, in withdrawing charge two, has to some extent tied my hands in relation to this sentence. As a result, I am not able to enhance the sentence in the manner prescribed in the case of *Chalmers v HMA*, decided by a Bench of five judges in 2014. On the other hand, I have never known a situation in which a judge has been invited to ignore significant material in an agreed narrative, deliberately put before the Court, with the consent of parties.

After reflecting on submissions, I have come to the view that I cannot ignore your conduct after the killing. It has always been the position that what an accused does after a crime to conceal what he did may be an aggravating factor.

In 2009, the Court of Appeal provided guidance in relation to sentencing in murder cases. In respect of one of the accused considered, the Court had regard to what he had done after the murder as an aggravating factor, and that was the burying of the deceased's remains, which were left undiscovered for several years, further aggravated by the distressing consequences to the family.

From a perusal of the original indictment in that case, the Crown had accepted a plea of not guilty to the charge of attempting to defeat the ends of justice, yet the Court of Appeal had regard to the conduct after the murder in selecting an appropriate sentence.

What you did to cover up your crime in the present case is not only such an aggravating factor, it is a matter to which I can have regard:

in deciding what to make of your expression of remorse, and it also is a factor I consider relevant in determining what level of discount I should apply to the sentence.

I shall take into account what was said by your senior counsel in mitigation and your relative youth and I shall have regard to your early plea of guilty, thus avoiding the necessity of a trial. I note too that, although you have a previous conviction, you have no record for violence.

In respect of the murder charge, there is only one sentence which I can impose and that is life imprisonment. I require now to make an order setting what is called a punishment part, and that is, the minimum period of time that you will serve in prison to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence.

The effect of this will be that you will not be eligible for parole or release until the whole of the punishment part has expired.

Thereafter, it will be for the Parole Board and the Parole Board alone to consider whether you still present a risk to the public, or whether you can be released on a life licence, with appropriate conditions. If you are still considered a serious risk to the public after the punishment part has expired you will not be released.

I am also required to consider a discount in this case because of your early plea.

In view of your conduct after the crime and the lengths to which you went to frustrate the strenuous efforts to find Miss Buckley, I shall limit that discount. You also told a tissue of lies about the deceased, causing, as I have said, additional distress for her family.

In these circumstances I am only prepared to discount the punishment part by a period of two years. The sentence will be back dated to 17 April 2015 when you were first remanded in custody.

You will therefore be sentenced to life imprisonment and in view of such a brutal, senseless, motiveless attack on a defenceless young woman - taken together with the aggravating circumstances, all as disclosed in the agreed narrative - the punishment part I would have imposed, but for the discount, is 25 years. I shall discount that by two years.

The resultant punishment part 23 years backdated to 17 April."