

As I said yesterday in the course of argument this is a unique sentencing exercise. You have each been convicted of 6 counts of manslaughter. Each count represents the death of a child. They ranged in age from 5 to 13. They died as a direct result of the fire set in the hallway of 18 Victory Road in the early hours of the 11th May last year. All 3 of you are responsible for the deliberate setting of that fire. All 3 of you are responsible for those deaths.

I have not the slightest doubt that you, Michael Philpott were the driving force behind this shockingly dangerous enterprise. You Mairead Philpott, the mother of all of those children and you Paul Mosley, a family friend assisted him.

The background to these offences has been rehearsed at length in this court and elsewhere but it is my duty to set it out in sufficient detail for my sentencing decisions properly to be understood.

Michael Philpott

Until February 2012 you lived in one household with your wife and her 6 children, and with another woman, Lisa Willis, and her 5 children, making 11 children in all. You were the father of 9 of the children. You were, by that time, 55 years old. Mairead Philpott was 31. Lisa Willis was 28. Those arrangements had been in place for around 10 years or so. During that period you married Mairead Philpott. Lisa Willis, was a bridesmaid at your wedding. The children were, on the evidence, well fed and clothed. They attended school regularly.

You were obsessed with Lisa Willis. Indeed it was plain to me when you were giving evidence over more than 3 days in the witness box that you still are. In the period before Lisa Willis left on at least 3 occasions you asked Mairead Philpott to agree to a divorce so that you could marry Lisa. Apparently you expected Mairead to remain in the house with the children just as before. Mairead Philpott refused. I shall return to that later.

In February of last year Lisa Willis left you, taking her children with her. She did not dare tell you she was leaving. She told Mairead Philpott that she was taking her children swimming. She and the children left with the clothes they stood up in and their swimming things. You soon realised what had happened and you set about trying to bring her back. The evidence shows that you tried sweet talking her. You tried cajoling and then bullying her. Sometimes you moved between the three tactics. She would not come back. You could not stand the fact that she had crossed you. You were determined to make sure that she came back and you began to put together your plan.

Before I turn to what you did next it is necessary to look at the history of your relationships with other women.

The first with which I am concerned was a relationship with a girl in her teens. You were in your 20s. The relationship was characterised by violence; there were repeated beatings. On one occasion you broke her arm, on another you dislocated her knee with a sledgehammer. You were sure that she was having affairs and would come back from your posting in the army to check on her, repeatedly. Eventually she

summoned the courage to bring your relationship to an end. You did not accept her decision.

You broke into her house, armed yourself with a knife and went to her bedroom where you stabbed her repeatedly in a ferocious attack which left her with life threatening injuries from which she has never fully recovered. You intended, as a jury were later to find, to kill her. When her mother intervened you turned on her. You stabbed her repeatedly in a further vicious attack and you caused her serious injuries. You were convicted of attempted murder and wounding with intent contrary to section 18 of the Offences Against the Person Act. You have, I am rightly reminded, served your sentence for that but it is clear from the evidence that I excluded from the trial that you have repeatedly used that conviction as a means of controlling other women, terrifying them as to what you might do to them if they did not follow your will.

When you came out of prison you married your first wife. Three children were born. You subjected your wife to physical violence throughout your relationship. She never reported anything to the police. She was too afraid to do so. She knew of your past. She believed she could not leave you. She simply hoped that the time would come when you would leave her. And that time came when you took up with a very young Heather Kehoe. She was 16 when she ran away with you, you were in your 40s. She spoke tellingly of life with you; sometimes you were charming, always domineering, always in control. Your initial plan in the early days of your relationship was to find a house big enough to accommodate the children of your first marriage who were to be removed from their mother. In the event they remained living with their mother. Heather Kehoe had 2 children. You controlled her through physical and sexual violence, threats and emotional abuse. Eventually she ran away from you. You prevented her from taking the children and they remained with you for some 6 months. She achieved custody of them only after a protracted court battle. Ever since you have subjected her to repeated allegations, seeking to undermine her relationships with the children. She like the two women before her speaks of the life long damage she has suffered as a result of her relationship with you.

You then met Mairead Philpott. At that time she was a young single mother of one little boy. She told the court that she saw you as her guardian angel and moved in with you. She loved you as she told the court. She also found in that household in the early days of your relationship the security she craved and had not previously found. You then met Lisa Willis as I have described. Mairead agreed to have her in the house. She told the court she was hurt. Of course she was. You did not care. You controlled and manipulated those women as you had controlled and manipulated their predecessors. They ran the household and looked after all the children. They went out to work. Their wages and their benefits went into your account, you controlled how money was spent. Your suggestion that this was a joint account and this was a normal family arrangement was frankly ridiculous. These two young women were not even permitted to have a front door key. You checked on Lisa Willis's relationships at work. Exactly as you had done in your earlier relationships. I accept that the level of physical violence had reduced in recent years, but the level of control, aggression and fear most certainly did not. Women were your chattels, there to look after you and your children (for that is how you describe them all). You bark orders

and they obey. Witness after witness described the dynamics in your household. You were king pin, no one else mattered.

What was plain from the earliest stage of the evidence was the importance to you of your children. In addition to the 11 who formed the household in early 2012 you have another 7. Having heard the evidence and having observed you carefully throughout your trial I am quite satisfied that for you the principal purpose of your many children is to reflect on you. Their needs desires and aspirations were very low on your list of priorities, if indeed they featured at all. You craved attention, you enjoyed the limelight. You courted publicity. You were and remain the centre of your world and it is plain that you require everyone in your life, but particularly the women to make sure that you remain at the centre of their world. Your needs and desires took precedence over everything, everyone else, including your children. You so arranged your life and theirs so that everything was done for the pleasure of Michael Philpott.

I turn back then to the events of the spring of 2012. You wanted to achieve the return of Lisa Willis. The way of achieving that, you decided, was to engineer the return of the children to you. She would then surely follow. In March on a pretext you engineered a confrontation with Lisa Willis and her family which ended with threats from her sister. Within a very short time you had formulated the plan which would lead to the death of those 6 children. You began to plant the idea that Lisa Willis and her family were threatening to set fire to your home. You mentioned it to acquaintances and friends. In April you persuaded Lisa Willis to meet you but she did not repeat the exercise. In May you posted an entry on Facebook identifying her brother in law as the father of her eldest child. This was another of your obsessions. Early in your relationship you had beaten her with a weapon to try and force her to agree with your suspicions. She never did. In early May in response to the Facebook posting she telephoned you. You say she threatened you. You were delighted with that. You called the police immediately and demanded that she be arrested. You were furious that the police refused to do that. You demanded that there be a change of supervising officer, just as (I note in passing) you had done in late 2011 in respect of an assault where the police would not dance to your tune. From the time she came back for clothing in February to the time of the fire you repeatedly sought to use the police to strengthen your position against Lisa Willis. They were not drawn in. A court hearing was set for the 11th May in respect of the arrangements for the children. You told people that you had a plan, something up your sleeve. At trial you preposterously said that the plan was to ask for residence at the hearing on the 11th May. It was obvious nonsense. You knew perfectly well that there was no reason to remove those children from the care of their mother. You had to do something extreme to get your own way. And you did

The means by which you were to achieve the removal of Lisa Willis from the care of her children were outside the comprehension of any right thinking person. The plan, which you had plainly been considering for some time, was to set fire to your home on the night before the court hearing, making it look as though the fire had been set from outside. You would then rescue the children from upstairs via an external ladder. You would be the hero of the hour. Lisa Willis would be arrested and you would have achieved your aim. You had even arranged for the children's school

places to be held open for them for the Monday morning.

It was a wicked and dangerous plan. And you put it into effect with the assistance of your two codefendants. You poured petrol on the floor. Paul Mosley was responsible for removing the containers from your home. You set light to it. After a short while Mairead Philpott spoke to the emergency services. It became clear that there was no chance of a successful rescue and the children perished. The latter half of the 999 call is harrowing evidence of the unravelling of the plan.

The jury were spared some of the most harrowing details of the removal of the children from 18 Victory Road. Mercifully their deaths were swift and, it would seem, without pain. No one could have listened to the evidence of the fire fighters and not be moved by what they had done and what they had seen in their efforts to combat the fire and save the children. Your neighbours were traumatised by what they saw; several of them tried to help. They risked their own safety to try and help. Their bravery was required as a result of your callous stupidity. It is clear that they have been shattered, as has the local community generally by the knowledge that you and your codefendants started this fire deliberately. Within minutes of the fire you were telling people that this was the responsibility of Lisa Willis and her family. You blamed the police for not acting sooner. Lisa Willis was arrested and her children were taken into care. She had nothing to do with this fire, neither did her family. When your friends were gathering around you at the Premier Inn you were eager to hear that Adam Taylor, your neighbour might be responsible, even though you knew perfectly well as the covert tapes show that he had nothing to do with it. You went to the police, reported it and he and his wife were arrested on 6 counts of murder, as you plainly intended.

I recognise as I must that the offences of which you have been convicted are offences of manslaughter and not murder. That means that I sentence on the basis that you did not intend either to kill your children or to cause them really serious harm.

But let me be clear; what you did intend, plainly, was to subject your children to a terrifying ordeal. They were to be woken from their beds in the middle of the night with their home on fire so you could rescue them and be the hero. Their terror was the price they were going to pay for your callous selfishness. In fact they paid with their six young lives. They had no chance of survival and I am quite sure that when you set that fire you were not thinking about them because you simply did not care. You were going to get your own way.

It has been said on your behalf that you were a good father. Lisa Willis said so as did others. They said you loved your children. I cannot give that description to a man who acted as you did.

You lied to the police and you lied to the jury. Ever since the fire your life has been a performance for the public and the police, and then in this court. Your conduct has been punctuated by collapses and shows of distress designed to evoke sympathy where none is merited, designed to manipulate emotion.

I accept you have lost 6 children. I very much regret that everything about you suggests that your grief has very often been simulated for the public gaze.

You made sure that Mairead “stuck to the story”. Checking with her at every opportunity that she wasn’t going to stray, as you put it. You knew that Mairead Philpott would do almost anything for your approval, to please you, to get your attention, as she put it. Without you she would never have become involved in this plan. Because she failed to put her children before you she has lost all of them. Nothing I have seen in your conduct before and during this trial gives me any reason to believe that you had the slightest concern for Mairead Philpott. She too was expendable.

The maximum sentence for manslaughter is life imprisonment. You are a disturbingly dangerous man. Your guiding principle is what Mick Philpott wants he gets. You have no moral compass. I have no hesitation in concluding that these 6 offences are so serious and the danger you pose is so great that the only proper sentence is one of life imprisonment and that is the sentence I impose upon you. The law requires me to impose a period of years that you will serve before you are considered for parole. To reach that period I must identify the determinate sentence you would have served had I not imposed a life sentence. The determinate sentence would have been one of 30 years’ imprisonment. I am required by parliament to halve that to reflect that were this a determinate sentence you would serve only half. The minimum period you must therefore serve before you are considered for parole is one of 15 years. From that I deduct 307 days to reflect the time you have already served on remand to give a term of 14 years and 58 days. Whether or not you are ever released will be a matter for the parole board.

Mairead Philpott

I am not going to repeat the history. Nor do I need to reiterate how serious these offences are.

As a result of what you did in the early hours of 11th May 2012 all your children lost their lives and you have lost all of your children. I accept that you feel their loss profoundly and that your grief is real. It is clear from what has been said about you by Mr Smith that your children were your route to fulfilment. You loved them and cared for them.

I have already made clear that this was Michael Philpott’s plan. I accept that he treated you as a skivvy or a slave, and you were prepared to put up with that. As became clear during the trial you were prepared to go to any lengths, however humiliating, to keep him happy. At an early stage of the trial it appeared that you were entirely downtrodden by Michael Philpott to the extent that it appeared that you felt you had no choice but to do whatever he wanted in whatever way he wanted in any aspect of your lives together. But as the evidence came out it was plain that this was not quite the position. This was put beyond doubt when you gave evidence. You pointed out that you had stood up to him in the past. That is why when he asked you for a divorce on no fewer than 3 occasions you refused him. That was a request you were simply not prepared to accommodate, whatever he said. It is inescapable therefore that when something was important enough to you, you were capable of exercising a choice which was not his choice.

These were your children; your first responsibility, surely, was to them. Instead you joined in with his plan. Putting his obsession with Lisa above the safety of your children. The reality of the plan you went along with and helped execute was that your children were to be frightened out of sleep in the middle of the night and rescued by their father from a fire that should never have been started. The risks were obvious and overwhelming and anyone who has heard the harrowing wailing from you on the 999 call can hear your realisation that this had gone horribly wrong and your children were in mortal danger.

But by then it was too late and you bear your responsibility for that. You put Michael Philpott above your children and as a result they have died. After the fire you threw your lot in with Michael Philpott. You supported him in his quest to get residence of the other children. You complied with his sexual demands to keep Paul Mosley onside.

You lied to the police and you stuck to the story, just as he asked you to, to the police and to the jury. You did not, I recognise, agree to lie about the relationship between Adam Taylor and Lisa Willis when Michael Philpott set about blaming him. Before these offences you had committed no criminal offences. You now have convictions for 6 counts of the manslaughter of your children

I am quite satisfied that a determinate sentence is appropriate in your case but it must reflect the magnitude of these offences. The sentence I pass is one of 17 years imprisonment. Of that you will serve one half at which point you will be released on licence. If you commit any further offences during the operational period of the licence you will be liable to be recalled and may have to serve the balance of your sentence.

Any time that you have spent on remand will be deducted from the period you are to serve.

Paul Mosley

Everything that I have said about the seriousness of these offences applies to you.

Michael Philpott's obsession with Lisa Willis was nothing to do with you. Where his children lived had nothing to do with you. You have young children of your own. You must have appreciated the appalling risk to which these 6 children were to be exposed when this fire was started in their home. And yet you were prepared to go along with the plan and to join in with it to please your then friend, Michael Philpott. I am quite sure that one of your tasks that night was to remove the petrol containers from the scene so that the attack would appear to have come from outside.

You enjoyed the attention that you gained from your proximity to the fire. You boasted of being arrested and bailed for 6 counts of murder. You could not help telling people that this was a plan that had gone wrong. You were going to hand yourself in as "it wasn't fair that Mick was taking all the blame", "what would you say if I told you we rehearsed it all 6 weeks earlier", and so on. When your clothes

were analysed it became clear that petrol additive was on your jeans, your jumper and on one of your shoes just as it was on the clothing of your two co-defendants.

You too are responsible for the deaths of 6 children. As a result you have lost all contact with your own children. You may not see them now until they reach adulthood, if then. Unsurprisingly your former partner wants nothing to do with you in the light of all that has become known about your conduct in the course of this trial. Since you were convicted of robbery as a teenager you have not been in trouble with the police at all but that good conduct is of little assistance when set against the seriousness of these offences.

I see no proper basis upon which to distinguish between you and Mairead Philpott. Accordingly the sentence I pass is one of 17 years imprisonment. You will serve half of that period. Thereafter you will be released on licence. If you commit any further offences you will be recalled to prison and may have to serve the rest of your sentence. Any time that you have spent on remand will be deducted from the period you are to serve.