# Court ruling exposes security failures at mental health unit after fatal attack on elderly church warden



A recent court ruling has highlighted serious lapses in mental health care protocols following the tragic death of Beryl Purdy, an 86-year-old church warden, who was brutally attacked in her own home. David Parish, 38, who was found guilty of manslaughter by diminished responsibility, was sentenced to six years in prison for the fatal assault. He struck Mrs Purdy with a large golf umbrella, which he had stolen from her porch, after breaking into the house on March 27, 2023.

Parish, suffering from paranoid schizophrenia exacerbated by cannabis use, had been temporarily detained under the Mental Health Act at Rydon Ward in Taunton. On the day of the incident, he managed to leave the secure unit through an unlocked front door, raising critical questions about patient management and security protocols at the facility. The court found that his schizophrenia had triggered psychotic episodes that affected his judgement, leading to the random and senseless violence against Mrs Purdy.

During the court proceedings, Prosecutor Anna Vigars KC detailed the harrowing scene discovered by police, where Mrs Purdy was found with severe head injuries, her body concealed behind a fridge freezer. A post-mortem confirmed that her death was a result of blunt force trauma. Her husband, Peter Purdy, described the harrowing grief experienced by the family, expressing profound anger over the circumstances that allowed the attack to occur. “We are serving a life sentence of torment knowing that we were unable to save Bez from her attacker,” the family stated, voicing their disappointment with the sentence and calling for improved public protections.

As investigations continue into how Parish was able to escape the mental health unit, the judge, Mr Justice Pushpinder Saini, questioned the accountability of the facility, implying that there may be systemic flaws in how mental health patients are monitored and secured. In light of this incident, he remarked on the pressing need for accountability in mental health services, particularly those serving vulnerable individuals.

Parish’s defence argued that his mental health had stabilised and he felt genuine remorse for his actions, which brings forward a complex discussion about criminal responsibility in cases where mental illness plays a central role. Despite this, his release into the community remains a concern for the Purdy family. Peter expressed his ongoing anxiety about returning home, knowing that Parish could eventually be released back into society.

The case underscores a broader issue within the intersections of mental health care and criminal justice. Detective Inspector Debbie Hatch remarked that the incident illustrates the tragic and complex dilemmas faced when addressing serious mental health issues. Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the Somerset NHS Foundation Trust promised a thorough investigation into the circumstances surrounding the attack, with commitments to review security arrangements at the Rydon Ward, ensuring such a lapse does not happen again.

As the community mourns the loss of a beloved church warden, the aftermath of this case serves as a poignant reminder of the vulnerabilities faced by individuals with severe mental health conditions, the devastating impact of failed systems, and the urgent need for reform in mental health policy and practice to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744571/Psychiatric-patient-churchwarden-secure-unit-jailed.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.wsfp.co.uk/news/prosecutors-accept-manslaughter-plea-from-man-who-killed-broomfield-woman-bez-purdy-663164> - David Parish, 36, pleaded guilty to manslaughter by reason of diminished responsibility for the death of 86-year-old Beryl 'Bez' Purdy in Broomfield, Somerset, on March 27, 2023. Parish was initially detained under the Mental Health Act and later charged after being released from a secure mental health unit. He was remanded in custody, with sentencing scheduled for March 1, 2024. Mrs. Purdy's family expressed devastation over the loss, highlighting her role as a caring church warden for 20 years.
3. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/crime/bristol-crown-court-bez-police-bridgwater-somerset-b2416553.html> - David Parish, 36, appeared in court charged with the murder of 86-year-old church warden Beryl Purdy in Broomfield, Somerset, on March 27, 2023. Police responded to reports of a burglary in progress at Mrs. Purdy's home, where she was found seriously injured and later died. Parish was initially sectioned under the Mental Health Act and then charged after being released from a secure mental health unit. He was remanded in custody, with a plea and trial preparation hearing scheduled for October 20, 2023.
4. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/crime/bez-bristol-crown-court-police-avon-and-somerset-police-high-court-b2486582.html> - David Parish, 36, admitted to the manslaughter of 86-year-old church warden Beryl Purdy by reason of diminished responsibility. During a brief hearing at Bristol Crown Court, Parish appeared via video link and confirmed his plea. Prosecuting barrister Anna Vigars KC stated that psychiatric reports from both the defense and the Crown supported the plea. Judge William Hart remanded Parish into custody, with sentencing set for March 1, 2024, before High Court Judge Mr. Justice Saini.
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/bristol-crown-court-police-avon-and-somerset-police-high-court-b1135459.html> - David Parish, 36, pleaded guilty to the manslaughter of 86-year-old church warden Beryl Purdy by reason of diminished responsibility. During a brief hearing at Bristol Crown Court, Parish appeared via video link and confirmed his plea. Prosecuting barrister Anna Vigars KC stated that psychiatric reports from both the defense and the Crown supported the plea. Judge William Hart remanded Parish into custody, with sentencing set for March 1, 2024, before High Court Judge Mr. Justice Saini.
6. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/bez-somerset-bridgwater-police-avon-and-somerset-police-b2414987.html> - David Parish, 36, was charged with the murder of 86-year-old church warden Beryl Purdy in Broomfield, Somerset, on March 27, 2023. Police responded to reports of a burglary in progress at Mrs. Purdy's home, where she was found seriously injured and later died. Parish was initially sectioned under the Mental Health Act and then charged after being released from a secure mental health unit. He appeared at Taunton Magistrates’ Court and was remanded in custody to appear at Bristol Crown Court on September 22, 2023.
7. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uknews/2023/09/20/news/man_appears_in_court_charged_with_murdering_church_warden-3629464/> - David Parish, 36, appeared in court charged with the murder of 86-year-old church warden Beryl Purdy in Broomfield, Somerset, on March 27, 2023. He was initially sectioned under the Mental Health Act and then charged after being released from a secure mental health unit. Parish appeared before Taunton Magistrates’ Court and was remanded in custody to appear at Bristol Crown Court on September 22, 2023. Detective Inspector Deb Hatch stated that the investigation aimed to provide the family with the justice they deserved.