# Psychiatric unit security failures linked to tragic manslaughter of Somerset churchwarden



A tragic incident in Somerset has drawn attention to the ongoing struggles at the intersection of mental health care and public safety. David Parish, a 38-year-old patient with a history of severe mental illness, has been sentenced to six years in prison for the manslaughter of 86-year-old Beryl Purdy, a beloved churchwarden. The attack occurred on March 27, 2023, when Parish, escaping from a secure psychiatric unit, used a golf umbrella—a weapon selected from Mrs Purdy's porch—to inflict fatal injuries.

Parish had been temporarily detained under the Mental Health Act at the Rydon Ward in Taunton. However, the court heard that he was able to escape due to an unlocked door, a glaring oversight that raised serious questions about the security protocols within the facility. "What accountability has there been for the hospital that allowed Mr Parish to walk out?" Judge Mr Justice Pushpinder Saini questioned during the proceedings, emphasising the need for accountability and systemic change. The circumstances surrounding his escape are under investigation, adding another layer of scrutiny to the case.

Mrs Purdy was killed after Parish locked her husband, Peter, in the kitchen of their home, leaving her vulnerable to the attack. Her body was discovered in a harrowing scene, with a neighbour reporting the incident after Peter had raised alarms about his confinement. A post-mortem revealed blunt force trauma to her head, consistent with the use of the umbrella, highlighting the brutal nature of the crime. The devastating impact on the Purdy family is palpable, with Peter expressing a sense of betrayal and loss. "We are serving a life sentence of torment knowing that we were unable to save Bez from her attacker," the family stated, calling for a review of public protection measures concerning those with severe mental health issues.

Parish’s mental state at the time of the attack has been a focal point throughout the court proceedings. Reports indicated that his condition, worsened by cannabis use, had led to significant paranoia and delusions. Notably, his mental health had deteriorated after the breakdown of his marriage in 2021, suggesting that personal circumstances contributed to his unstable state. Following psychiatric assessments, it was determined that his actions stemmed from a psychotic episode that diminished his responsibility, thus leading to the acceptance of a manslaughter plea rather than a murder charge.

The sentencing has been met with widespread criticism, particularly regarding the perceived leniency of the six-year term. Many in the community are concerned that this outcome does not adequately reflect the severity of Mrs Purdy's death and the resultant trauma faced by her family. "I feel let down by the NHS and the mistakes that were made that led to the death of Bez," Peter remarked, further underscoring the need for systemic improvements in mental health care protocols.

The case has raised vital discussions about how mental health is treated within the legal framework, as highlighted by Detective Inspector Debbie Hatch, who reiterated the complexity of mental health issues in relation to criminal justice. The Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, which manages the mental health unit, has acknowledged the gravity of the situation and stated that a full investigation is underway to evaluate security policies within the ward. Such evaluations might lead to reforms aimed at preventing future tragedies.

As the Purdy family navigates their grief, they express a heartfelt hope that their ordeal will prompt positive change to protect others from similar fates. Their tragedy serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in both mental health care and public safety measures.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744571/Psychiatric-patient-churchwarden-secure-unit-jailed.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-66864223)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744571/Psychiatric-patient-churchwarden-secure-unit-jailed.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.wsfp.co.uk/news/prosecutors-accept-manslaughter-plea-from-man-who-killed-broomfield-woman-bez-purdy-663164), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-68129411)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744571/Psychiatric-patient-churchwarden-secure-unit-jailed.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/bez-bristol-crown-court-bridgwater-somerset-police-b2415186.html), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/bez-somerset-bridgwater-police-avon-and-somerset-police-b2414987.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-66864223), [[5]](https://www.wsfp.co.uk/news/alleged-killer-of-bez-purdy-in-court-on-murder-charge-after-release-from-mental-health-unit-639653)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-66864223), [[3]](https://www.wsfp.co.uk/news/prosecutors-accept-manslaughter-plea-from-man-who-killed-broomfield-woman-bez-purdy-663164), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-68129411)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14744571/Psychiatric-patient-churchwarden-secure-unit-jailed.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/bez-bristol-crown-court-bridgwater-somerset-police-b2415186.html)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/bez-somerset-bridgwater-police-avon-and-somerset-police-b2414987.html)

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## 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.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-66864223> - David Parish, 36, was charged with the murder of 86-year-old Beryl Purdy, a church warden from Broomfield, Somerset. After being arrested in connection with her death, Parish was initially sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Following his release from a secure mental health unit, he was charged with murder and was scheduled to appear at Taunton Magistrates' Court. Detective Inspector Deb Hatch stated that this development was a positive step in the investigation and expressed hope that it would be welcomed by the local community, where Mrs. Purdy was a much-loved member.
3. <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 the manslaughter of 86-year-old Beryl 'Bez' Purdy by reason of diminished responsibility. The prosecution accepted his plea after receiving psychiatric reports from both the defense and the Crown, which concluded the same. Parish, who had been held in a secure mental health unit since his arrest, was remanded in custody by Judge William Hart, with sentencing scheduled for March 1. Mrs. Purdy's family expressed devastation over the loss of their dearly loved wife, mother, and granny, describing her as a caring person who would help anyone in need and a long-serving church warden.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-68129411> - David Parish, 36, admitted to the manslaughter of 86-year-old Beryl Purdy by reason of diminished responsibility. During a brief hearing at Bristol Crown Court, Parish appeared via video link and spoke only to confirm his name and enter his plea. Prosecuting barrister Anna Vigars KC stated that psychiatric reports from both the defense and the Crown reached the same conclusion. Judge William Hart remanded Parish into custody, with a provisional sentencing date set for March 1 before High Court Judge Mr. Justice Saini. Mrs. Purdy's family expressed devastation over the loss of their dearly loved wife, mother, and granny, describing her as a caring person who would help anyone in need and a long-serving church warden.
5. <https://www.wsfp.co.uk/news/alleged-killer-of-bez-purdy-in-court-on-murder-charge-after-release-from-mental-health-unit-639653> - David Parish, 36, appeared before magistrates charged with the murder of 86-year-old Beryl 'Bez' Purdy in Broomfield, Somerset. Parish was initially sectioned under the Mental Health Act following his arrest but was charged with murder after being released from a secure mental health unit. Detective Inspector Deb Hatch described the development as a positive step in the investigation and expressed hope that it would be welcomed by the local community, where Mrs. Purdy was a much-loved member.
6. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/bez-bristol-crown-court-bridgwater-somerset-police-b2415186.html> - David Parish, 36, appeared in court charged with murdering 86-year-old church warden Beryl Purdy at her Somerset home. Parish was initially sectioned under the Mental Health Act and then charged after being released from a secure mental health unit. He appeared before Taunton Magistrates’ Court and was remanded in custody to appear at Bristol Crown Court. Mrs. Purdy's family expressed devastation over the loss of their dearly loved wife, mother, and granny, describing her as a caring person who would help anyone in need and a long-serving church warden.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/bez-somerset-bridgwater-police-avon-and-somerset-police-b2414987.html> - David Parish, 36, was charged with murdering 86-year-old Beryl Purdy, a church warden from Broomfield, Somerset. After being arrested in connection with her death, Parish was initially sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Following his release from a secure mental health unit, he was charged with murder and was scheduled to appear at Taunton Magistrates’ Court. Detective Inspector Deb Hatch stated that this development was a positive step in the investigation and expressed hope that it would be welcomed by the local community, where Mrs. Purdy was a much-loved member.