# Mental health unit breach leads to fatal attack on churchwarden in Somerset



In a tragic incident that has left a community reeling, 38-year-old David Parish escaped from a secure psychiatric unit and subsequently attacked 86-year-old churchwarden Beryl Purdy in her own home. The attack occurred on March 27, 2023, in Broomfield, Somerset, when Parish, armed with a makeshift weapon, brutally assaulted Mrs Purdy after locking her husband, Peter, in the kitchen. Despite her efforts to defend herself with a golf umbrella taken from her garden, Mrs Purdy succumbed to her injuries and was pronounced dead at the scene.

Parish, who had been under the Mental Health Act due to paranoid schizophrenia attributed to cannabis use, was detained at Rydon Ward in Taunton. His psychological deterioration followed a marriage breakdown in 2021, further complicating his mental health. The court proceedings revealed that prior to the attack, Parish had left the secure environment of the hospital unnoticed as the door had been left open. His subsequent actions included shaving his head and beard, which may have been an attempt to conceal his identity before invading the Purdy home.

During his recent sentencing at Bristol Crown Court, Parish pleaded guilty to manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility. Judge Saini described the incident as devastating, labelling the actions of Parish as unfathomable given the nature of the assault, which was not premeditated but shockingly violent nonetheless. The court was presented with poignant victim impact statements that detailed the profound grief experienced by Mrs Purdy's family. Her husband expressed unimaginable sorrow, while their son, Nick, lamented the senseless nature of the crime, particularly the circumstances that allowed a mentally unstable individual to enter their home.

Parish's release from the mental health unit has prompted discussions regarding the safety mechanisms surrounding the treatment of individuals with severe mental health issues. The family's frustration resonated when they called for reforms to ensure enhanced public protection against individuals capable of such violence. They criticized the six-year prison sentence handed down to Parish, intimating that it does not reflect the severity of the crime or account for the enduring trauma their family now faces. They described their grief as a "life sentence of torment," underscoring their belief that the punishment should address the psychological ramifications on the victims’ families and the wider community.

The police response and community safety protocols are also under scrutiny in the aftermath of the incident. Avon's police force confirmed that an investigation is underway to reassess how Parish managed to escape the psychiatric ward unnoticed. This incident has sparked broader conversations about the intersections of mental health care and public safety, raising crucial questions regarding the responsibilities that psychiatric facilities hold in protecting both their patients and the community. As the community mourns the loss of Mrs Purdy—a cherished figure in Broomfield, known for her kindness and dedication as a churchwarden—the call for systemic changes becomes ever more urgent, with many urging for solutions that prevent such tragic outcomes in the future.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14747531/Moment-escaped-psychiatric-patient-caught.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/crime/bristol-crown-court-bez-police-bridgwater-somerset-b2416553.html> - A plea hearing was scheduled for David Parish, 36, charged with the murder of 86-year-old church warden Beryl Purdy in Broomfield, Somerset, on March 27. Parish was initially sectioned under the Mental Health Act and later charged after being released from a secure mental health unit. The case was heard at Bristol Crown Court, with a plea and trial preparation hearing set for October 20. Mrs. Purdy's family expressed devastation over her loss, describing her as a caring person and a long-standing church warden.
3. <https://www.independent.co.uk/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. He pleaded not guilty to murder. During the brief hearing at Bristol Crown Court, Parish appeared via video link and confirmed his name and plea. Prosecutor 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, setting a provisional sentencing date of March 1 before High Court judge Mr. Justice Saini.
4. <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. Initially sectioned under the Mental Health Act, Parish was charged after being released from a secure mental health unit. Police responded to reports of a burglary in progress at Mrs. Purdy's home, where she was found seriously injured and later died. Mrs. Purdy's family expressed devastation over her loss, describing her as a caring person and a long-standing church warden.
5. <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. Initially sectioned under the Mental Health Act, Parish was 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 on September 22. Detective Inspector Deb Hatch of Avon and Somerset Police stated that the investigation aimed to provide the family with the justice they deserved.
6. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/bez-bristol-crown-court-bridgwater-somerset-police-b2415186.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. Initially sectioned under the Mental Health Act, Parish was 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 on September 22. Detective Inspector Deb Hatch of Avon and Somerset Police stated that the investigation aimed to provide the family with the justice they deserved.
7. <https://totalcrime.co.uk/murderbook-2020-2025/> - The 'Murderbook 2020-2025' is a compilation of notable murder cases in the UK during this period. It includes the case of David Parish, 36, who was charged with the murder of 86-year-old church warden Beryl Purdy in Broomfield, Somerset, on March 27. Parish initially denied murder but admitted manslaughter due to diminished responsibility. The prosecution accepted his plea. The case highlights the complexities of mental health issues in criminal cases and the legal proceedings that follow such incidents.