

DEFENDANTS ACQUITTED OF TERROR ATTACK PLANNING

CST's UK Foiled Terror Plots database does not include terrorism cases in which defendants were accused of plotting a terror attack but acquitted at trial of attack planning. Below are summaries of these cases, from 2013 to the present.

For details on the criteria used to classify database entries and an analysis of the trends and pattern of UK attacks and plots, see CST's Terrorism Databases Explainer and Infographics.

CST has endeavoured to be as accurate as possible, which is a challenge in the absence of an official public record of foiled plots. Contact us on research@cst.org.uk if you think there is an error or omission.

CASES

- Hampshire teenager (unnamed male) – 2020
- Richard Smith – 2019
- Sam Imrie – 2019
- Gabrielle Friel – 2019
- Hisham Muhammad – 2018
- Yousaf Shah Syed and Haseeb Hamayoon – 2014
- Erol Incedal – 2013

HAMPSHIRE TEENAGER – 2020

Date of arrest: June 2020

Ideology: Alleged Islamist Extremism

Location: Eastleigh, Hampshire

In June 2020, an unnamed teenage boy (aged 14) from Eastleigh, Hampshire, was arrested and charged with plotting a jihadist-inspired terror attack. On 9 October, the jury found the defendant not guilty.¹

Prosecutors claimed that he had converted to Islam and was radicalised by online extremist material during the pandemic lockdown. They claimed in court that he researched how to make explosives, constructed a series of IEDs containing shrapnel and recorded a video saying he wanted to be a martyr.

The teenager's defence lawyers, however, argued that he was "*pretending*" to plan harm.² They told the court that he was a neglected child. The teenager also told the court that he was previously in foster care and, upon returning home, his mother's partner physically abused him.

1 [‘Boy, 15, found not guilty of terror plot’](#), BBC News, 9 October 2020

2 [‘Terrorism-accused boy ‘was beaten at home’](#)”, BBC News, 2 October 2020

RICHARD SMITH – 2019

Date of arrest: November 2019

Ideology: Alleged Right-Wing Extremism

Location: Aberdeen, Scotland

In June 2022, Richard Smith, formerly from Aberdeen, Scotland, was found not guilty of terrorism and explosives offences.³ He was arrested in 2019 and later charged with planning to commit far-right motivated acts of terrorism in Scotland, between August 2018 and November 2019, which he denied.⁴ The trial began in late May 2022 at the High Court in Edinburgh.

Smith, who is diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, was accused of carrying out extensive research into the making of detonators, explosive devices and homemade firearms all for the advancing of anti-Muslim, neo-Nazi and other racist causes. When police raided his property, they reportedly discovered chemicals that were 'precursor' substances for explosives.⁵ They also discovered on his devices literature linked to the far right and tweets to London's mayor Sadiq Khan.

Smith's defence counsel argued that he had a legitimate interest in chemistry and did not pose a threat:

*"He is not some lone wolf terrorist operating out of his bedsit in Aberdeen. He has Asperger's. He has autism. He may have poor communications skills. He may appear to be a bit pathetic. But he is not a terrorist."*⁶

³ Dave Finlay, ["Chemistry fan' cleared of terrorist bomb-making'](#), *The Times*, 15 June 2022

⁴ Danny McKay, ["Aberdeen man, 26, faces terrorism charge following chemical discovery'](#), *The Press and Journal*, 15 November 2019; ["Man accused of planning terrorist acts in Aberdeen'](#), *BBC News*, 20 December 2020

⁵ Dave Finlay, ["Chemistry fan' cleared of terrorist bomb-making'](#), *The Times*, 15 June 2022

⁶ Ibid.

SAM IMRIE – 2019

Date of arrest: July 2019

Ideology: Right-Wing Extremism

Location: Fife, Scotland

In October 2021, Sam Imrie (aged 22), from Glenrothes, Scotland, was convicted of terrorism offences, having threatened to set fire to the Fife Islamic Centre.⁷ He was arrested in July 2019.

Imrie was convicted of making statements online that encouraged acts of terrorism (via posts on Telegram) and collecting information useful to someone preparing an act of terrorism. The latter charge related to being in possession of right-wing terrorist manifestos written by 2019 Christchurch attacker Brenton Tarrant and 2011 Norway attacker Anders Breivik.

Imrie was also found guilty of two counts of wilful fire-raising, driving under the influence of alcohol and possessing both indecent photographs of children and “extreme” pornography. A USB stick belonging to Imrie reportedly contained extreme images showing dead girls being subjected to sex acts.⁸

Imrie, however, was found not guilty of planning a right-wing terrorist attack against the Fife Islamic Centre in Glenrothes.⁹ Prosecutors accused Imrie of planning to target the Islamic centre and to livestream footage of the attack on social media.¹⁰ Imrie allegedly drove to the centre while in possession of a petrol can and reportedly “carried out observations”, using his phone to film the facility and surrounding area. He reportedly tried to access the Islamic centre repeatedly and uploaded photographs and video footage of the facility onto the Telegram platform.

Imrie set fire to leaves at a cemetery in Markinch, Fife, causing damage to a headstone, as well as starting a fire at Strathore Lodge in Thornton, Fife. Imrie possessed neo-Nazi, anti-Muslim, anti-Jewish and other violent racist material.

At trial, a counter-terrorism detective testified about violent and racist messages Imrie allegedly posted in a Telegram channel called “Fashwaveartists”.¹¹ A police expert also testified that Imrie’s computer allegedly contained thousands of images that were “anti-Jewish, anti-immigrant, anti-black, anti-everything”.¹²

In December 2021, Imrie was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison.¹³ In April 2022, Imrie failed to have his sentence reduced on appeal. The Court of Criminal Appeal upheld the earlier judge’s sentence.¹⁴

⁷ [‘Fife man convicted of terrorism and other offences’](#), Police Scotland, 27 October 2021

⁸ [‘Terror suspect Sam Imrie ‘had photos of dead women on USB stick’](#), *The Times*, 18 October 2021

⁹ [‘Man convicted of terrorism offences’](#), BBC News, 27 October 2021

¹⁰ [‘Man accused of plotting terror attack on Fife mosque’](#), BBC News, 8 October 2021

¹¹ [‘Terror suspect ‘told Telegram that Nicola Sturgeon should die’](#), *The Times*, 13 October 2021

¹² James Ward, [‘Glenrothes mosque attack: Suspect had racist images on computer, court hears’](#), *Evening Standard*, 14 October 2021

¹³ [‘Terrorist who threatened to set fire to Islamic Centre jailed’](#), Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, 2 December 2021

¹⁴ [‘Glenrothes man fails to have terrorism sentence cut’](#), BBC News, 8 April 2022

GABRIELLE FRIEL – 2019

Date of arrest: August 2019

Ideology: Incel / Mixed, Unclear, Unstable Ideologies

Location: Edinburgh, Scotland

In December 2020, Gabrielle Friel (aged 22), from Edinburgh, was found guilty of an offence under Section 57(1) of the Terrorism Act 2000, relating to the possession of an article for terrorist purposes.¹⁵ Friel was arrested in 2019 on terrorism charges.

In January 2021, Friel was jailed for ten years; he is also subject to a serious crime prevention order that will run for five years after his release, controlling use of mobile phones and the internet, and he will be subject to notification requirements for 30 years.¹⁶

Police found at Friel's home a high-powered crossbow, machete, telescopic sight, steel tipped crossbow bolts and a tactical vest. Authorities initially suspected that Friel was planning a mass casualty attack, but a charge of attack planning under Section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006 was found "not proven".¹⁷ Therefore, Friel's case is not included in CST's UK Foiled Terror Plots database.

Friel's social worker grew concerned in 2019 that Friel was fixating on mass murderer Elliot Rodger, who killed six people in a stabbing and shooting spree in California in 2014.¹⁸ Rodger had become an infamous figure in the incel movement, and Friel said he felt "an affiliation" with Rodger.¹⁹

Friel had also carried out online research into the "incel" (involuntary celibate) ideology, weapons and mass murderers, including incel-motivated violence.²⁰ He admitted being obsessed with mass killings like the 1999 Columbine High School mass shooting in Colorado.

In a separate incident in 2017, Friel wounded a police officer with a knife at Edinburgh College. He spent six months in a psychiatric hospital and was later ordered to carry out 300 hours of community service. Following Friel's conviction in December 2020, Detective Superintendent Paul Grainger, Senior Investigating Officer, said as follows:

"This prosecution related to concerns raised by Mental Health and Social Work professionals around Friel's purchase of these weapons and concerns about an extremist and violent mind-set in August 2019, which led to an early intervention and his arrest.

*This is the first case of this kind in Scotland where the Involuntary Celibacy (Incel) ideology was identified as being a motivating factor and thus allowing the libelling of Terrorism Act offences. This represents a landmark verdict in the UK around a non-traditional terrorist ideology."*²¹

¹⁵ ['Police Scotland statement following conviction of Gabrielle Friel'](#), Police Scotland, 15 December 2020

¹⁶ [HMA v Gabrielle Friel](#), Judiciary of Scotland, 12 January 2021

¹⁷ ['Police Scotland Edinburgh City Division Scrutiny Report'](#), Police Scotland, April-December 2020: p. 14; Jonathan Hall Q.C., ['The Terrorism Acts in 2019'](#), Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, March 2021

¹⁸ ['Police Scotland Edinburgh City Division Scrutiny Report'](#), Police Scotland, April-December 2020: p. 14

¹⁹ ['Weapons haul man jailed for 10 years under Terrorism Act'](#), BBC News, 12 January 2021

²⁰ ['Man owned crossbow for terrorist purposes'](#), Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, 12 January 2021

²¹ ['Police Scotland Edinburgh City Division Scrutiny Report'](#), Police Scotland, April-December 2020: p. 14

HISHAM MUHAMMAD – 2018

Date of arrest: June 2018

Ideology: Alleged Islamist Extremism

Location: Whitefield, Greater Manchester

In June 2018, Hisham Muhammad (aged 24), from Whitefield, Greater Manchester, was arrested and charged with engaging in conduct in preparation for acts of terrorism, contrary to Section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006. On 24 August 2020, he was found not guilty.

Prosecutors accused Muhammad of planning an ISIS-inspired terrorist attack on military locations near his home in Whitefield. Muhammad, a Bermudian national, was suspected of planning to use knives, axes or a bear-claw weapon in the attack. He was also accused of modifying a drone to use in a terror attack.

Muhammad was accused of carrying out hostile reconnaissance of Castle Armoury Barracks in Bury and searching for military and armed police bases online. Police found Islamic State and jihadist material on devices in Muhammad's home. He admitted in court that he viewed the Islamic State video 'My Revenge' eight times for "*research purposes*".

The court heard that Muhammad thought that ISIS was created by the United States to stir up Islamophobia, and that he did not believe the Manchester Arena bombing and Westminster Bridge attack had occurred.²² The prosecution said that he also questioned whether the video of Lee Rigby's murder was real.²³

A jury failed to reach a verdict in the first trial, and the retrial commenced in July 2020 that resulted in clearing Muhammad of attack planning. Muhammad's cousin, Faisal Abu Ahmad, was found not guilty on one count of Section 38(B), Terrorism Act 2000 (having information which he knew or believed might be of material assistance in preventing the commission by another person of an act of terrorism and failing to notify the authorities).

²² ['Conspiracy Theorist Cleared of Planning Terror Attack'](#), Court News UK, 24 August 2020; Peter Macgill, ["Islamic State supporter from Bury planned lone wolf terror attacks", court told](#), *Bury Times*, 28 July 2020

²³ Lizzie Dearden, ["Isis supporter 'worked on modifying drone for use in UK terror attack'"](#), *Independent*, 28 July 2020

YOUSAF SHAH SYED & HASEEB HAMAYOON – 2014

Date of arrest: November 2014

Ideology: Alleged Islamist Extremism

Location: West London and High Wycombe

In November 2014, UK police arrested four suspects three days before Remembrance Sunday. Nadir Ali Syed, Yousaf Shah Syed and Haseeb Hamayoon were later charged with being “*jointly engaged*” in preparing for committing acts of terrorism.²⁴

They were accused of planning to behead a soldier, police community support officer or poppy seller during Remembrance Day (the fourth suspect was released with no further action).

In June 2016, Yousaf Syed (aged 20), from High Wycombe, was found not guilty of preparing a terrorist act in 2014.²⁵ The judge also cleared Haseeb Hamayoon (aged 29), of west London, after the jury failed to reach a verdict. The prosecution did not pursue a third trial.

Separately, Nadir Syed (aged 22), from Hounslow, west London, was convicted in December 2015 of preparation of terrorist acts (contrary to Section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006). Nadir, who is a cousin of Yousaf Syed, planned an ISIS-inspired beheading attack around Armistice Day/Remembrance Sunday in November 2014.

Nadir Syed’s plot is recorded in CST’s database of UK Foiled Terror Plots²⁶:

London Armistice Day beheading plot – 2014

Incident Summary +

Ideology	Modus Operandi	Target Type
Jihadist extremism	Stabbing, Vehicle ramming	Police-military-security, Public area

²⁴ ‘Beheading plot: Three terrorism suspects in court’, BBC News, 20 November 2014

²⁵ Dominic Casciani, ‘Pair found not guilty of Remembrance Day beheading plot’, BBC News, 16 June 2016

²⁶ CST Foiled Terror Plots Database

EROL INCEDAL – 2013

Date of arrest: October 2013

Ideology: Islamist Extremism

Location: Southwark, south London

In October 2013, Erol Incedal (aged 26), from Southwark, south London, was arrested along with Mounir Rarmoul-Bouhadjar (also aged 26) from Whitechapel. Incedal, a law student, was accused of plotting a terrorist attack similar to the 2008 marauding attacks in Mumbai, India perpetrated by Lashkar-e-Taiba.

In 2014, Incedal was convicted of possessing a terrorist document, but the jury failed to reach a verdict on the more serious charge of planning an act of terrorism under Section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006.

According to the prosecution, material recovered from Incedal's mobile device included a photograph of a synagogue in London, an address for Tony and Cherie Blair and material supporting ISIS. The prosecution also claimed that the defendants had not settled on a particular target but considered targeting either a limited number of individuals, an individual of significance or an indiscriminate Mumbai-style attack.

In March 2015, however, Incedal was acquitted of this charge at a retrial, which was held partly in secret.²⁷ Incedal had denied preparing for acts of terrorism and was cleared of planning attacks. In April 2015, he was jailed for 42 months for possessing a bomb-making document.²⁸

In 2014, Rarmoul-Bouhadjar pleaded guilty to possession of a terrorist document and was jailed for three years.²⁹

²⁷ Ian Cobain, '[Student cleared of London terror charge after partially secret trial](#)', *Guardian*, 26 March 2015

²⁸ '[Erol Incedal: Jailed for 42 months over bomb-making manual](#)', *BBC News*, 1 April 2015

²⁹ '[Man admits owning bomb-making guide](#)', *BBC News*, 9 October 2014; David Anderson Q.C., '[The Terrorism Acts in 2014](#)', Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, September 2015