

He showed me their bodies on FaceTime

Murder accused's Scots aunt saw couple dead, trial hears

By **Hugo Daniel**
in Bakersfield, California

A SON accused of murdering his mother and stepfather in the US showed his Scottish aunt live footage of the gruesome murder scene, a jury heard yesterday.

Former soldier Derek Connell, 33, is on trial for the murders of Kim Higginbotham and her American husband Christopher in their US home in April 2016.

The prosecution told the court Connell had picked up a FaceTime call to his mother's iPad from his aunt and had allegedly shown her pictures of the dead couple, both aged 48.

Connell, originally from Shawlands, Glasgow, claimed that he did not know what had happened to them, but in a later police interview he said he 'probably shot them', the jury heard.

Opening the case at Kern County Superior Court, in

'Dead in pools of blood'

Bakersfield, California, Deputy District Attorney Marcus Cuper said Iraq war veteran Connell had recently moved into his parents' home so he could 'get back onto his feet'.

He then played a harrowing recording of a 911 call that Connell's aunt Sonia made to Bakersfield police reporting the killings in the early hours of April 30, 2016.

In the call she described seeing images of her sister and her brother-in-law's bodies in pools of blood.

She told the operator: 'I tried FaceTiming my sister and he [Connell] picked up.



Trial: Derek Connell, left, is accused of killing Kim and Chistopher Higginbotham



He was very calm and said "I don't know what happened". He said my sister and brother-in-law are dead. He just showed me pictures... he's not making any sense... he said he was out and came back and found them like that.'

When police arrived at the bungalow, Connell drove off but was stopped and arrested at gunpoint. He 'smelled of alcohol' and had bleach and blood stains on his jeans. Empty bleach bottles were found in the car's boot, the court was told.

Mr Cuper said 14 guns were found in the house - all in the couple's bedroom - including handguns, semi-automatic rifles and shotguns.

A used bullet casing was discovered 10ft from Mr Higginbotham's body and another was found next to his wife's shoe, he told the jury.

Mr Cuper said Mrs Higginbotham died from a single gunshot wound to the chest. Her husband had gunshot wounds to the neck, chest

and shoulder and also had 'significant injuries to his face and head'.

The court heard that Connell told the detectives he had been drinking heavily that day and was kicked out of a restaurant. He said he had returned home, fell asleep and woke up to find his parents dead. Mr Cuper told the jury: 'He said he did not know

'Obsessed with guns'

what happened to them but that he probably shot them.'

Connell's lawyer, Paul Cadman, set out a different story of what happened, including claims that Mr Higginbotham sexually abused Connell.

He said: 'The stepdad was obsessed with guns and violence and had in his bedroom guns ranging from a handgun to a machine gun.

'You're going to hear that this stepdad raped him and

molested him as a young boy over and over again.'

Mr Cadman said that on the day of the murder, Connell claimed his mother had discussed leaving her husband and said that she was going to kill herself before 'he saw the stepdad kill the mother'.

The jury was told a 'violent confrontation' then occurred between Connell and his stepfather in which he ended up killing Mr Higginbotham.

The lawyer claimed Connell was 'inebriated' in at least one of his police interviews, 'got into a panic' and did not know what to tell them.

Connell faces life in jail without parole if found guilty of the two counts of first degree murder.

His mother met his stepfather while he was stationed with the US navy in Scotland. The family moved to the US more than 20 years ago.

Prosecutors previously dropped a request for the death penalty.

The trial continues.

Swordfish spotted near wind farm site

A SWORDFISH has been seen swimming off the Scottish coast for only the second time.

The discovery was made during an aerial survey by an energy firm working in the North Sea for proposals for an offshore wind farm.

Swordfish, pictured, can reach almost 15ft in length, and the one spotted off the Angus coast was believed to be a young one measuring around 6ft.

The highly migratory and predatory fish was spotted by teams working for



SSE Renewables' proposed Seagreen wind farm site.

The last time a swordfish was found alive in Scottish waters was a decade

ago in the Firth of Forth, when one was caught in a trawler net.

Seagreen consent manager Lis Royle said: 'We're pleased we've been able to help record the second ever spotting of a swordfish in Scottish waters.'

'It's our duty to ensure our projects are built with a detailed understanding of the natural environment and whilst we don't expect the swordfish to make an appearance again, it was great to be able to capture this incredibly rare sighting during our survey work.'

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