

Mrs Sylvia Lancaster OBE

It was with considerable sadness that I have learnt of the death of Sylvia Lancaster earlier this week.

I was the trial judge in the case in which her daughter was the victim of a horrific murder 15 years ago. I said all that I wished to say about the facts of the case at its conclusion when passing sentence. I dealt with many murder cases as a junior barrister, Queen's Counsel and Judge, all of them terrible crimes, but the murder of Sophie Lancaster stands out in my memory as the most distressing of them, and I think about the case frequently.

During the trial and its immediate aftermath one feature struck me as remarkable, and that was the dignified and inspirational conduct of Sylvia Lancaster, and of Mrs Maltby, the mother of the other victim in the case, Robert Maltby, whose tribute to his girlfriend was much admired at the time. The trial process is not a comfortable one for the families of victims, and the design of most courts is such that they find themselves in close proximity with the families of the defendants, and sometimes the defendants themselves. Mrs Lancaster was present throughout the trial and sat through what was harrowing evidence for all of us who were involved, but what must have amounted to torture for her. At the conclusion of the trial Mrs Lancaster wrote to me to thank the court staff for their courtesy and concern for her, a gesture which was greatly appreciated. In the decade in which I sat as the senior judge at Preston this was the only time that anyone took the trouble to do this.

After the trial Sylvia set up the charity in memory of Sophie with the object of raising awareness of hate crime, and advocating measures to combat it. I am aware of the excellent work done by the Sophie Lancaster Foundation, and I took part in some events organised in Lancashire concerning hate crime which meant that I had the privilege of meeting Sylvia Lancaster. Out of what can only be described as an evil event, she has been able to do much good, and she was rightly awarded the OBE to mark her work.

I am full of respect for Sylvia, and she, her family, friends and colleagues are very much in my thoughts and prayers at this sad time. I hope that this will be of some comfort. May Sylvia rest in peace, having joined Sophie, her beloved daughter. They will be remembered, with affection and admiration, for a long time.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Anthony Russell". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

His Honour Anthony Russell QC