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## Practice Profile

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***Sam is a specialist criminal barrister, instructed for both prosecution and defence. His practice is focused on serious and complex cases, usually involving organised crime, violence, firearms, drugs, and fraud. He is on the CPS General Crime, Serious Crime, and Fraud Panels at Level 3.***

As a committed advocate, Sam places great emphasis on thorough preparation and engaging with the real issues in a case, allowing for first-class advocacy before judge or jury. Formerly an IT developer, Sam is at ease conducting cases involving digital evidence. He draws on his experience to quickly analyse and present high-volumes of complex information. He is experienced with cases consisting of many moving parts, usually involving complex facts, multiple defendants, and lots of pieces of evidence to sift through.

Recent instructions have included:

- Leading junior in an eight-handed money laundering case arising from a sophisticated fraud against a telecommunications company.
- Sole and led junior in various EncroChat (Operation Venetic) cases, including a seven-handed conspiracy to supply cocaine and a three-week trial involving technical admissibility challenges.
- Led junior in a 16-week importation trial, involving 270kg of cocaine, 2500kg of cannabis and 18.6m duty-free cigarettes hidden inside shipping containers.
- Led junior in an attempted murder arising from the alleged sale of a revolver, where a 12-bore shotgun was then fired twice through the letterbox of a dwelling.
- Led junior in the final trial of Operation Melrose, the investigation into the deaths of 39 Vietnamese migrants found inside a lorry in Essex in 2019.
- Led junior in a 'Flying Squad' conspiracy focused on an OCG committing a series of robberies and burglaries across London.
- Led junior in a complex diminished responsibility murder trial, prosecuting a defendant with a previous conviction for an unlawful killing in similar circumstances.
- Sole junior in a sophisticated fraud involving complex computing evidence, where the defendants had created a website to steal online banking information.
- Sole junior in a computer misuse and fraud case, where the defendants had allegedly sold access to the NHS Covid-19 vaccination database.
- Sole junior in a three-handed conspiracy to defraud a vulnerable victim of £170k.

Sam has also been instructed in several long-term projects, including the Post Office 'Horizon' disclosure review, an SFO disclosure review, and a secondment to one of the CPS Crown Court teams. He was recently a keynote speaker at the Cityforum Digital Forensics Summit, presenting on the uses of digital forensic evidence in jury trials.

Outside of law, Sam is a keen skier, snowboarder, and scuba diver. He previously competed internationally for Great Britain in Canoe Marathon.

Sam's Privacy Policy can be downloaded [here](#).

## Areas of Practice

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- Prosecution
- Serious & Organised Crime
- Cyber Crime
- Homicide
- Financial & Corporate Crime
- General Crime
- Confiscation, Civil Recovery & Asset Forfeiture
- Road Traffic
- Regulatory & Professional Discipline

## Appointments

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- CPS General Crime Panel at Level 3.
- CPS Specialist Serious Crime Group Panel at Level 3.
- CPS Specialist Fraud Panel at Level 3.
- CPS Specialist Proceeds of Crime Panel at Level 2.
- The Bar Council IT Panel.

## Qualifications

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- MPhil, Criminology, University of Cambridge.
- LLB, Law, University of East Anglia.

## Scholarships and Prizes

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- Sir Louis Gluckstein Prize for best advocate - Lincoln's Inn.
- Levitt Scholarship - Lincoln's Inn.
- Buchanan Prize - Lincoln's Inn.
- Lord Denning Scholarship - Lincoln's Inn.
- Hardwicke Scholarship - Lincoln's Inn.
- Runner-Up, Law Reform Essay Competition - Bar Council.
- Clare Hall Bursary - Clare Hall, University of Cambridge.
- Prize for Exceptional Achievement - University of East Anglia.

## Publications

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Sam is the author of 'A Practical Guide to Digital Communications Evidence in Criminal Law' - a textbook aimed at practitioners looking to understand the most common types of digital communications evidence used in criminal prosecutions. It can be purchased directly from the publisher or from Wildy. A sample chapter is available here. He has also been asked to present Webinars on digital evidence, specifically 'Using Mobile Telephone Data' and 'Call Data, Cell Sites, and Internet Records'.

Sam also publishes a free weekly 'updater' of criminal law news - intended for practitioners, law students, and anyone with an interest in the criminal justice system of England and Wales. You can subscribe to Witness here.

Sam has published two mobile apps for criminal lawyers. Crime Fees is a free criminal legal aid calculator for barristers and solicitors. Available for iOS, Android and macOS, it can be downloaded here. Crime QRH is an easy to use guide to criminal offences for criminal lawyers and court advocates - a searchable database providing quick access to key details e.g. max sentence, guidelines, class of offence, dangerousness provisions. Available for iOS, Android and macOS, it can be downloaded here.

## Recent Advisory Work

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- Disclosure Junior - CPS (major pre-charge investigation).
- Disclosure Junior - CPS (Op Tarthra - murder).
- Disclosure Junior - CPS (Home Office immigration fraud).
- Post-Conviction Disclosure Review - Post Office 'Horizon' Cases.
- Disclosure Review - SFO (fraud).
- Secondment - CPS East of England Crown Court Unit.?

## News

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### Series of Serious Domestic Violence Offences

16 April 2024

Sam Willis prosecuted a defendant for a series of serious domestic violence offences committed during the course of an 18-month relationship. The defendant had falsely imprisoned, strangled, and assaulted his partner. When this was reported to the police, he made repeated telephone calls to her in breach of his bail conditions. After a 5-day trial, the jury convicted the defendant on all eight counts including false imprisonment, non-fatal strangulation, and witness intimidation.

### Containers filled with 270kg of cocaine, 2,500kg of cannabis and 18.6m cigarettes

15 December 2023

Charlotte Hole and Sam Willis prosecuted two importers for bringing into the UK 270 kilograms of cocaine, 2.5 tonnes of cannabis and 18.6 million duty-free cigarettes, all hidden inside shipping containers. Valued at £24m, the drugs had been vacuum-packed and then secreted inside crates of animal feed, yams and oranges. The cigarettes were concealed in a similar manner, hidden inside crates of snack food, coconut fibre and biscuits - the tax that should have been paid on them if imported lawfully totalled just over £9m.

The case followed an extensive investigation by the South West Regional Organised Crime Unit, who became involved when a farmer discovered 189kg of cocaine in a shipping container full of animal feed. The defendants had unsuccessfully tried to divert the container to their warehouse in London so that the drugs could be removed before the container reached the farm.

During the 16-week trial, the conspiracy was evidenced using material from numerous encrypted communications services. The jury heard technical evidence involving cell site analysis, VPN services, and IP address resolution.

Charlotte and Sam were instructed by the CPS Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID).

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/drug-smugglers-foiled-farmer-jailed-over-ps29-million-plot>

<https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/news/2023/12/importers-of-vast-amounts-of-illegal-drugs-and-cigarettes-jailed/>

<https://www.swrocu.police.uk/news/2023/12/importers-of-vast-amounts-of-illegal-drugs-and-cigarettes-jailed/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-67733286>

<https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-12-16/pair-jailed-after-15m-of-drugs-hidden-in-animal-feed-delivered-to-farm>

## Conspiracy to assist unlawful immigration

27 November 2023

Ben Holt led Sam Willis in the prosecution of Caolan Gormley who was charged with a conspiracy to assist unlawful immigration into the UK. Gormley was the last defendant to come before the Courts charged with offending linked to the thirty-nine Vietnamese migrants who were found deceased in a trailer in Purfleet, Essex. Two further defendants pleaded guilty prior to trial; one to thirty-nine counts of manslaughter. Mr Gormley was convicted after a trial at the Central Criminal Court. He is due to be sentenced on the 30th November.

Instructed by Russell Tyner and Miguel Grana of the CPS SEOCID.

Final member of people-smuggling gang linked to 39 migrant deaths convicted | The Independent

## 28 years for man who killed sister-in-law with a hatchet

10 October 2023

Catherine Pattison and Sam Willis prosecuted this case of murder, which concluded this week with the court imposing on the defendant a life sentence with a 28-year minimum term. During a 3-week trial, the court heard how the defendant had brutally attacked his sister-in-law with a hatchet but claimed that he had been suffering from paranoid delusions that caused him to see her as a manifestation of the devil. The prosecution's case was that this 'sham defence' had been concocted by the defendant after his arrest to avoid the consequences of his actions. Earlier in the year a jury at the Central Criminal Court had rejected the defendant's account, convicting him of murder and making a threat to kill.

Catherine and Sam were instructed by CPS Homicide.

<https://news.met.police.uk/news/man-jailed-for-murdering-his-sister-in-law-in-ilford-473469>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-67057664>

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12610525/illegal-immigrant-murdered-brothers-wife-london.html>

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/hallucinating-killer-hacked-sister-law-31146179>

## OCG prosecuted for spree of commercial burglaries

22 June 2023

Following an eight-week trial at Croydon Crown Court, eight members of an organised crime group have been sentenced for their involvement in a spree of commercial burglaries across London. Prosecuted by Charlotte Hole and Sam Willis, the group targeted bookmakers and other shops, typically breaking in during the night using sledgehammers. In total they carried out 12 burglaries of commercial premises, and a robbery at a cash and carry, over a period of 4 years. They stole tens of thousands of pounds in cash, and caused hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of damage to buildings, security systems, and businesses. The robbery involved a staff member of the cash and carry being assaulted and then bound hand and foot with cable ties whilst others sought to enter the building.

Ladders and tools were used to scale walls and breach roofs or walls of premises to gain access to the area where a safe was located. They then either removed or broke into the safe to steal cash, using hand tools and angle grinders. CCTV cameras were destroyed or blacked out, or the hard drives removed altogether as forensic countermeasures, and alarm systems were destroyed or the cables and power supply were cut, in an attempt to

avoid detection.

Investigated by the Flying Squad, the evidence against the eight defendants included CCTV, covert surveillance, forensics, mobile telephone downloads, and cell site mapping.

Charlotte and Sam were instructed by the CPS Complex Casework Unit.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/croydon-burglary-gang-jailed-met-flying-squad-b1088840.html>

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12213239/Gang-masked-bookie-burglars-stole-50k-string-raids-jailed.html>

## **OCG jailed for 26 years**

13 February 2023

Dickon Reid and Sam Willis prosecuted this organised crime group who were facilitating illegal entry into the UK by providing false passports in exchange for cash. Over a six-week trial, evidence against the seven defendants was presented showing numerous trips to European cities where false passports were handed over to customers of the OCG who then used them to board flights to the UK.

Dickon and Sam were instructed by the CPS East of England Complex Casework Unit.

Gov.uk Yahoo News Article

## **Recent Cases**

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### **Op Serious [Snaresbrook] 2024**

Using EncroChat to supply an AK-47, an Intratec Tec-9 automatic pistol, ammunition, and cocaine

Sam Willis was instructed as led junior to prosecute this EncroChat Operation Venetic case involving the supply of an AK-47 assault rifle, an Intratec Tec-9 automatic pistol, ammunition, and cocaine. The nature of the case and the issues at trial required the calling of three different expert witnesses to give opinion evidence on firearms, drugs, and cell site mapping.

### **Op Vivalas and Kikifeet [CCC] 2024**

Revolver found after a stabbing, then a shotgun fired into a home through a letterbox

Dickon Reid and Sam Willis prosecuted the joint case arising from Operations Vivalas and Kikifeet. After a stabbing in North London, police found a loaded Turkish revolver inside the victim's car. Less than 48-hours later, three masked men fired a 12-bore shotgun through the letterbox of a house connected to the stabber. The prosecution's case was that the two incidents were linked - the second being a revenge attack for the first.

## Op Tamora [Isleworth] 2023

Containers filled with 270kg of cocaine, 2,500kg of cannabis and 18.6m cigarettes

Charlotte Hole and Sam Willis prosecuted two importers for bringing into the UK 270 kilograms of cocaine, 2.5 tonnes of cannabis and 18.6 million duty-free cigarettes, all hidden inside shipping containers. Valued at £24m, the drugs had been vacuum-packed and then secreted inside crates of animal feed, yams and oranges. The cigarettes were concealed in a similar manner, hidden inside crates of snack food, coconut fibre and biscuits - the tax that should have been paid on them if imported lawfully totalled just over £9m.

The case followed an extensive investigation by the South West Regional Organised Crime Unit, who became involved when a farmer discovered 189kg of cocaine in a shipping container full of animal feed. The defendants had unsuccessfully tried to divert the container to their warehouse in London so that the drugs could be removed before the container reached the farm.

During the 16-week trial, the conspiracy was evidenced using material from numerous encrypted communications services. The jury heard technical evidence involving cell site analysis, VPN services, and IP address resolution.

Charlotte and Sam were instructed by the CPS Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID).

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/drug-smugglers-foiled-farmer-jailed-over-ps29-million-plot>

<https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/news/2023/12/importers-of-vast-amounts-of-illegal-drugs-and-cigarettes-jailed/>

<https://www.swrocu.police.uk/news/2023/12/importers-of-vast-amounts-of-illegal-drugs-and-cigarettes-jailed/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-67733286>

<https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-12-16/pair-jailed-after-15m-of-drugs-hidden-in-animal-feed-delivered-to-farm>

## R v. V [CCC] 2023

Hatchet killer convicted of murder

Sam Willis, led by Catherine Pattison, prosecuted this murder where the defendant was relying on the partial defence of diminished responsibility. The defendant accepted that he had killed his sister-in-law by brutally attacking her with a hatchet, but claimed that he had been suffering from paranoid delusions at the time that caused him to see her as a manifestation of the devil. The prosecution's case was that this 'sham defence' had been concocted by the defendant after his arrest to avoid the consequences of his actions. Following a three-week trial the defendant's account was rejected by the jury and they convicted him of murder and making a threat to kill. Complexities included contested opinion evidence from four psychiatrists and the admissibility of the defendant's previous conviction in Moldova for the unlawful killing of his ex-wife.

Sam was instructed by CPS Homicide.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/svetlana-mihalachi-killed-ilford-hatchet-immigration-brother-in-law-met-police-crime-b1096093.html>

<https://www.essexlive.news/news/essex-news/ferocious-killer-murdered-sister-law-8621385>

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12326551/amp/Illegal-immigrant-murdered-sister-law-hatchet-reported-Home-Office-calmly-texted-husband-tell-wife-dead.html>

<https://news.met.police.uk/news/man-convicted-of-the-murder-of-svetlana-mihalachi-in-ilford-470047>

### **Operation Forte [Croydon] 2023**

Spree of commercial burglaries across London committed by OCG

Sam Willis, led by Charlotte Hole, prosecuted this case of an OCG committing a spree of commercial burglaries across London. The group targeted bookmakers and other shops, typically breaking in during the night using sledgehammers and then cutting open the shop's safe using power tools. Investigated by the Flying Squad, the evidence against the eight defendants was presented over four weeks and included CCTV, covert surveillance, forensics, mobile telephone downloads, and cell site mapping.

Sam was instructed by the CPS Complex Casework Unit.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/croydon-burglary-gang-jailed-met-flying-squad-b1088840.html>

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12213239/Gang-masked-bookie-burglars-stole-50k-string-raids-jailed.html>

### **R v. S and A [Luton] 2023**

Long-running employee fraud against the NHS

Sam Willis prosecuted this case of fraud by false representation and abuse of position, where an NHS worker had been submitting fabricated timesheets that were then paid by his partner (a manager in the same department). During a two-week trial, various strands of evidence collected by the NHS Counter Fraud Authority were presented to the jury, including timesheets, emails, door access records, and computer access logs.

Sam was instructed by the CPS Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate.

### **Operation Lynne [Chelmsford] 2023**

OCG providing false passports for cash

Sam Willis, led by Dickon Reid, prosecuted this organised crime group who were facilitating illegal entry into the UK by providing false passports in exchange for cash. Over a six-week trial, evidence against the seven defendants was presented showing numerous trips to European cities where false passports were handed over to asylum seekers who then used them to board flights to the UK.

Legal issues during the case included the use of evidence from foreign law enforcement authorities, the admissibility of a modern slavery expert's opinion on the evidence, and the extent to which a claim to be a modern slave could amount to an abuse of process.

Sam was instructed by the CPS East of England Complex Casework Unit.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/people-smuggling-gang-jailed-for-26-years>

## Operation Caliadne [Woolwich] 2022

EncroChat cocaine supply conspiracy

Sam Willis, led by William Davis, prosecuted this EncroChat OCG who were involved in the supply of 30+ kilos of cocaine around London. The case was in the first wave of prosecutions following the infiltration of the Encro network, and the trial involved several admissibility arguments relating to the source, integrity and reliability of the data. A further complicating factor was that the lead defendant's wife was a serving Met Police officer.

Sam was instructed by the CPS London Complex Casework Unit.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/b3a210dc-7986-11ed-bcd8-855e06175970>

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1700940/Julian-Agalliu-metropolitan-police-drugs-encrochat-system-uncovered/amp>

<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/met-police-pc-agalliu-cocaine-cannabis-encrochat-barnet-kensington-b1042254.html?amp>

## R v. S, W and W [Wood Green] 2022

£170k voodoo money cleaning scam

Sam Willis prosecuted this case of conspiracy to commit fraud by false representation, where the defendants had convinced a vulnerable victim to give her life savings over to them to be 'cleansed' of voodoo. The evidence presented over an 8-day trial included hours of audio recordings, showing that the defendants never had any intention of returning the £170k cash.

## Operation Lexes [Southwark] 2021

Bollywood 'cash for visa' scam

Sam Willis, led by Rupert Kent, prosecuted this high-profile 'cash for visa' scam, focused around a company pretending to be involved in the Bollywood film industry. The 16-week trial resulted in unanimous guilty verdicts against six of the eight defendants. The jury heard how the 'employees' had been transferring their own money to the company, which was then used to pay the wage bill. This facade disguised the reality - that the company was not trading, that the 'employees' were not doing any real work, and that the 'employment' was merely a vehicle for the sale of worker visas. Sam was instructed by the CPS Special Casework Unit.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10337687/Fake-agent-helped-53-students-stay-UK-false-references-phoney-production-company.html>

## Operation Localizer [Kingston] 2021

Seven-handed conspiracy to supply cocaine from London to Brighton (EncroChat material)

Sam Willis, led by Ben Holt, prosecuted this criminal enterprise to transport large quantities of cocaine from London to Brighton for onward distribution. The evidence came from call data records, a surveillance operation, and 'EncroChat' Operation Venetic material, which all had to be carefully presented at trial.



### **R v. S [Norwich] 2021**

s.18 stabbing after threats exchanged over social media

Sam Willis prosecuted this serious act of violence, arising out of an argument on social media between two young men. The case involved a significant amount of digital material, including social media messages, audio recordings, and CCTV. The 5-day trial required careful presentation of the material and sensitive handling of a vulnerable witness giving evidence through a variety of special measures.

### **R v. A [Aylesbury] 2020**

Employee theft of £45k by manipulating computer records

Sam Willis was instructed by the CPS Complex Casework Unit to prosecute this theft case. The Defendant had been manipulating the computer records at her workplace, in order to steal £45k during her three years of employment. Sam was able to use his previous IT experience in order to collate and condense the 500 pages of computer evidence into a clear schedule for the jury.

### **R v. C [Guildford] 2020**

Supplying software to 'DDOS' websites and gaming servers

Sam Willis defended in this computer misuse and money laundering case. The offences involved the supplying of software used to 'DDOS' websites and gaming servers (temporarily disabling them). The served evidence consisted of 30,000 pages of computer logs, and links to other defendants in the USA introduced additional complexity.

### **R v. N [Newcastle] 2020**

12-handed conspiracy to evade £2.6m duty on tobacco

Sam Willis was instructed as led-junior in this 12-handed tobacco importation matter. The overall duty evaded was calculated to be over £2.6 million. Preparation for the case required extensive analysis of mobile telephone billing data.

### **R v. K [Lewes] 2019**

Stalking through Facebook, involving 74,000 pages of computer extracts

Sam Willis, led by Paul Walker, defended in this five-week trial involving allegations of stalking. The prosecution evidence consisted of 74,000 pages of Facebook extracts and computer downloads. The ability to analyse large quantities of digital evidence was crucial to the defence case - it led to a 40-page defence bundle being placed before the jury to provide context and balance to the 550-page prosecution bundles.

## **Articles**

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### **Credit for Guilty Plea at PTPH**

Since the Sentencing Council updated the guideline on 'Reduction in sentence for a guilty plea' (effective from 1

June 2017), the importance of the plea indicated in the Magistrates' Court has significantly increased for cases going up to the Crown Court.

Although the guideline is at pains to point out that it is designed to 'encourage' rather than 'pressure', that comes in the form of severely limited exceptions for when full credit (33%) will be available at anything other than the first appearance in the Magistrates' Court.

Several years on from the introduction of the new guideline, this article looks at cases in the Court of Appeal where claims for full credit have been raised.

The full article can be read [here](#).