

GRIEVING BRIDE-TO-BE'S

**How was
a tagged
thug free
to break
curfew
and beat
my fiance
to death?
The law's
failed us**



EXCLUSIVE

By Antonia Hoyle

IT was going to be the perfect wedding and, with less than three months to go, Alexandra Corke had planned it meticulously.

A string quartet would play as she walked down the aisle, and 200 guests were to enjoy a live band in the evening. Her gown was made to measure - a beautiful, ivory silk taffeta creation.

But, on the day of her final dress fitting last May, the wedding - and the wonderful life she'd planned - were cruelly snatched away from her.

Her fiance, Christian Noble, was killed by a drunken thug - an electronically-tagged prisoner freed early on licence - while trying to break up a fight.

And Alexandra was left to face the future without the man she adored.

Speaking with Christian's wedding ring hanging round her neck, in the week his killer - Sam Sturnham - was convicted of manslaughter, she says: "The days before he died were the happiest of my life.

"We were going to have a dream wedding and then start a family. We wanted a boy and a girl and had even chosen names.

"I still can't believe that he has gone. I hope that, one day, I'll be happy again. But at the moment I'm just existing, not living."

Alexandra's grief is compounded by anger - because Christian was killed by a thug who had been let out of prison after just two months and, although he was tagged, had been able to escape his curfew.

Sturnham, 29, from St Albans, Herts - who was, coincidentally, in the same year as Alexandra at school - had served half of a four-month sentence for his fourth drink-driving conviction.

On being released from prison, Sturnham had been fitted with a tag which indicated whether he was at home when he was supposed to be. But, after using a brief trip to hospital as an excuse, he went on a massive binge-drinking session.

After downing up to 21 pints, Sturnham got into a fight with another pub customer, Gary Hill. When Christian, a roofer, tried to break it up, Sturnham knocked him unconscious. He died of brain injuries the next day, aged just 34.

"It makes me so angry," says Alexandra, 29. "Sturnham shouldn't have been let out early in the first place. And if he was, he shouldn't have been able to break his curfew. The system needs to change. This can't be allowed to happen to anyone else."

SHE adds: "Christian wasn't the type to get into trouble. He tried to break up the fight because he had a strong sense of right and wrong.

"I'm not telling my story for sympathy. I'm telling it because Sturnham shouldn't have been out of prison and the police should have been able to track him. They need to learn from this."

Christian's dad David, 60, is also outraged. "Two families have been torn apart by what happened," he says. "Tagging is not working."

The government is coming under increasing pressure to change their Home Detention Curfew scheme, which was brought in to reduce overcrowding in prisons and save money.

Since it was introduced in 1999, 1,021 serious crimes have been committed by prisoners on licence - and Christian is the sixth person to be killed.

In this case, Sturnham was supposed to be at home to have his tag "read" at 7pm.

Staff at the company responsible for the system - Serco - were aware that his curfew had been broken but are not obliged to inform the Home Office of a breach until the following day.

Alexandra, a sales manager, believes that the current system is

FURY OVER LEGAL LOOPHOLE



VICTIM

Christian Noble planned to wed Alexandra Corke but stepped in to break up a pub fight

LOSS

Alexandra, who wears Christian's ring around her neck, has been devastated

KILLER

Tagged thug Sam Sturnham beat up Christian in a pub's car park after a mammoth drinking binge

inadequate. "Once these people leave their homes, they can't be traced. The system's failings have torn apart both my life and those of Christian's family."

She met Christian in 1997, in a bar in their home town of St Albans. "He had a cheeky grin and lovely blue eyes," she recalls. "I made a beeline for him and he took down my number. He kept that piece of paper in his wallet until the day he died."

They moved in together three years later. "We always knew we were going to marry - it was just a question of when."

And in 2004, he proposed at a friend's barbecue. "He said he needed to ask me something," she says. "Then he dropped down on one knee in front of everyone..."

They decided on an 18-month engagement so that everything could be perfect. "I wanted time to get everything right," she says. So

much so that Alexandra was on a pre-wedding detox the night Christian died and wasn't drinking when she met her fiance and his friend at the BlackBerry Jack pub.

"It was a Friday night," she recalls. "I normally would have stayed with them but, because I wasn't drinking, I left early."

She went to bed at midnight and woke at 3am to find the bed empty. "It wasn't like him to stay out that late and I was worried," she says.

Alexandra called his mobile and eventually managed to track him down. Christian was rushed to Hemel Hempstead hospital. "At first, all doctors would say was that he was poorly and the nurses wouldn't look me in the eye."

As the day passed, his condition deteriorated and doctors pulled Alexandra and Christian's family aside to tell them he had died of brain injuries. "I felt disbelief," she

says simply. "Christian was my fiance. There was no way he could be dead." Because they had agreed to donate Christian's organs, he was kept alive artificially until the following morning, when suitable recipients could be found.

ALEXANDRA recalls "I took it in turns with Christian's family to sit with him through the night. His chest was moving and his body was warm. I just couldn't believe it."

"I was telling him I loved him and willing him to wake up, reminding him that we were getting married."

When his ventilator was turned off on May 21, Alexandra plunged into despair. "I just couldn't accept he was gone." The funeral was held eight weeks later. "The church was packed," she recalls. "Christian's brother read out a eulogy and we

played songs by Coldplay and Damien Rice."

Alexandra's dad Michael cancelled all the wedding arrangements. "I couldn't have done without his support. My family, friends and Christian's family kept me strong, and having counselling has helped."

Christian's friends used the money from cancelling the stag do to buy the rings they'd ordered - and Alexandra was determined to mark her wedding date, August 4.

"We got everyone who'd been invited to the wedding together," she says. And on Christian's birthday, last November, she gathered their friends for a night out in his honour.

She made herself go to St Albans Crown Court each day of the trial, which concluded last Wednesday. "I needed to know what went on that night," she says. She learned that after knocking Christian unconscious in the pub's car park,

Sturnham boasted "that was and finished his pint."

"I couldn't look him in the eye when the verdict was read out Alexandra. "We'd known each other for years but he didn't say hello to but he didn't feel any remorse."

Sentencing was adjourned for three weeks for reports on St Albans. "I don't know how long he'll be in there," she says. "Long enough to be happy but I just don't know if I'll meet anyone as amazing again."

Meanwhile, Alexandra knows what the future holds to think that one day I might love again. Christian would've been happy but I just don't know if I'll meet anyone as amazing again."

● Alexandra was not paid for this article but the Mirror is making a donation on her behalf to the Hertfordshire Mental Health Network.

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