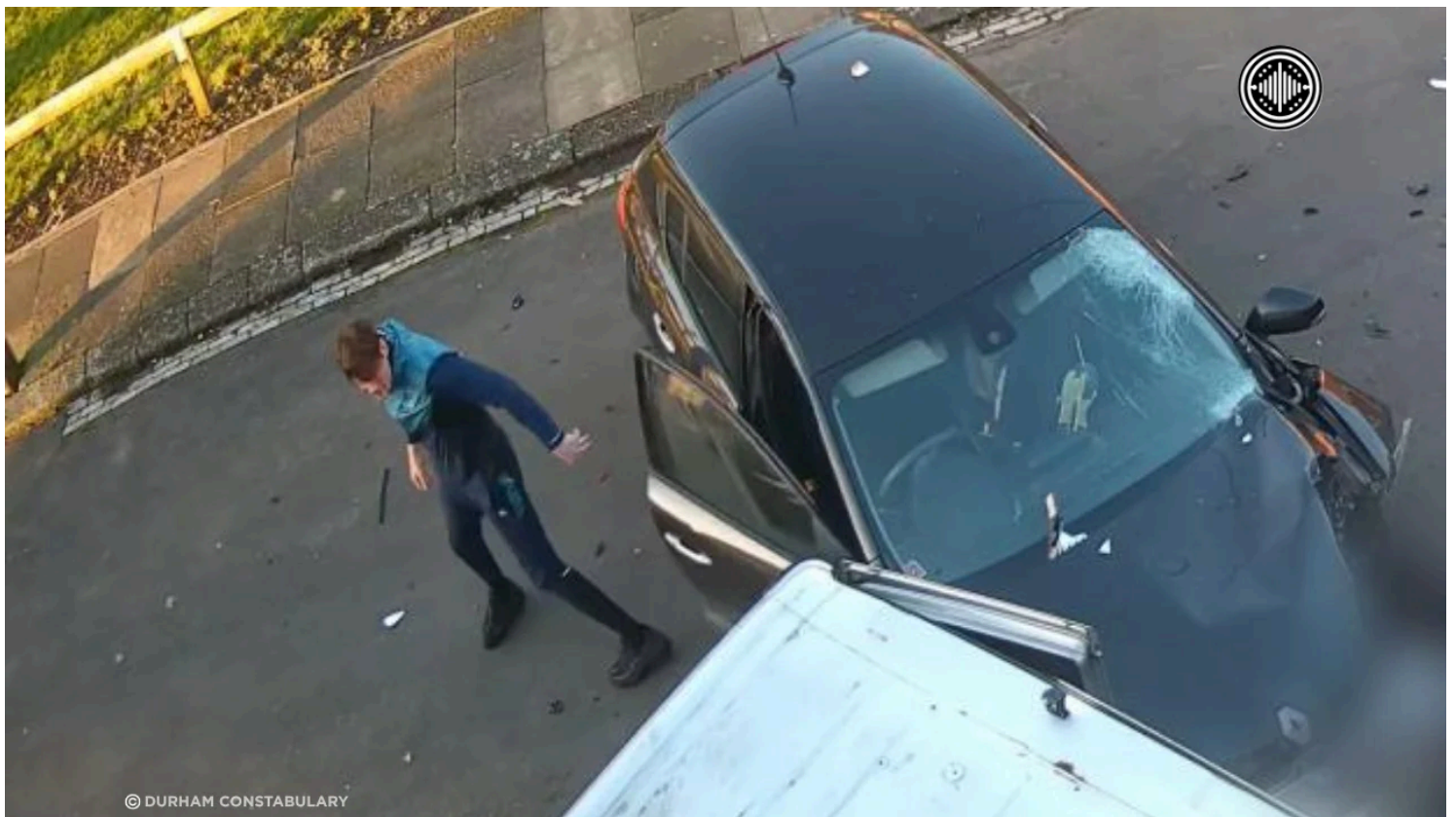


Ferryhill: Driver Jailed After Hitting Bystander

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A man who had been released from prison just hours earlier was sentenced to 18 years after he drove into a bystander in a violent incident in Ferryhill, County Durham.

Hugh Raymond Holmes, 36, from Spennymoor, had walked free from prison on 19 December last year, following a conviction for a previous driving offence. However, by that same afternoon, he had already returned to criminal behaviour, this time with far more serious consequences.

According to Durham Constabulary, Holmes became involved in a confrontation on Faraday Street, where a group of men and women were gathered. During the altercation, he was punched to the ground by a van driver. Holmes left briefly, but soon returned behind the wheel of a car and attempted to run over the man who had struck him.

The van driver managed to escape unharmed, but another resident who had stepped outside in an attempt to de-escalate the situation was hit instead. CCTV footage released by police shows the vehicle being driven directly into the bystander at speed.

The victim, who remains unnamed, sustained a traumatic brain injury, multiple facial fractures and a broken leg that required surgical screws. He spent several months in the hospital and is still undergoing medical care.

Footage from a police body-worn camera captured the aftermath, showing Holmes bloodied and being arrested at the scene. "I wish I were back in jail," he told officers while being handcuffed. When asked how long he had been out, Holmes replied: "Only got out this morning... about half nine."

He was charged with several offences, including assault causing grievous bodily harm with intent, inflicting grievous bodily harm without intent, disqualified driving, driving without insurance, and failing to provide a breath specimen. Holmes admitted to all charges except for the most serious grievous bodily harm with intent, but was found guilty by a jury at Teesside Crown Court after just 20 minutes of deliberation.

He was handed an 18-year prison sentence and disqualified from driving for 15 years.

Detective Constable Lauren Howe, who led the investigation, commented:

"Holmes is a despicable criminal who hadn't learnt any lessons from his previous crime, which he had just been released from prison. He left the victim with critical injuries just before Christmas, and they continue to have a huge impact on him and his family."

She added, "Thanks to the bravery of the victim and the whole community pulling together, we were able to gather overwhelming evidence to charge Holmes and put him back before the court. We hope putting Holmes back behind bars for a significant amount of time will bring some comfort to the victim who, in his own words, continues to stand tall."

The case has drawn attention to the lack of effective deterrents for repeat offenders. Holmes' swift reoffending raises concerns over the effectiveness of current rehabilitation

policies and the level of supervision placed on offenders following release, an issue that continues to put public safety at risk.