

News of the World phone-hacking trial begins in UK

By Robert Stevens
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The trial of former *News of the World* editors Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson, and six others, began at the Old Bailey court in London last week. They are charged with a total of 19 offences.

The now-defunct *News of the World* was published by the billionaire oligarch Rupert Murdoch's News International, the British subsidiary of News Corp. The publication's closure in July 2011 was forced by mass revulsion after it emerged that leading figures at the tabloid had hacked the phones of many people, including politicians and celebrities—and, above all, the voicemails of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler in 2002.

Brooks, a close friend of Murdoch and Prime Minister David Cameron, is charged with phone hacking, misconduct in public office and perverting the course of justice. Coulson is charged with phone hacking and misconduct in a public office. He became Conservative Party director of communications after leaving the *News of the World* in 2007, before taking up the same post for Cameron when the latter became prime minister in 2010.

Stuart Kuttner, managing editor for 22 years before his retirement in 2009, is charged with phone hacking. Ian Edmondson was assistant editor with responsibility for news at the *News of the World*. He was given a senior role as head of news in 2005, when Coulson was editor of the paper. Clive Goodman, also on trial charged with misconduct in a public office, was the *News of the World*'s royal editor until 2007.

Cheryl Carter, charged with perverting the course of justice, was an executive assistant who worked with Brooks for almost two decades, including during the time Brooks was editor of the *News of the World* and its daily sister, the *Sun* newspaper. Carter remained in the role when Brooks was promoted to News

International chief executive in 2009.

Also charged with perverting the course of justice is Mark Hanna, head of security at News International for more than four years.

Charlie Brooks, the husband of Rebekah since 2009, was not a News International employee and is charged with perverting the course of justice. He is another close friend of Cameron since their school days at Eton.

The trial is expected to last until April of next year, with the charges brought after three separate police operations were mounted over a period of 33 months.

Brooks and Coulson deny all charges, but the trial opened with an admission of guilt of conspiracy to hack mobile phones by three former *News of the World* news editors, Greg Miskiw, Neville Thurlbeck and James Weatherup. They are not on trial and were employed at the newspaper during the six-year October 2000 to August 2006 period when it was edited by Brooks and Coulson.

Andrew Edis QC said that private investigator Glenn Mulcaire, who was convicted of hacking in 2007, also pleaded guilty earlier this year to three new counts of conspiring to hack phones.

Edis told the court that that the pleas of guilty by the four proved that the previous claims of News International, that the hacking was the work of Goodman alone, were false.

Managers, including Brooks and Coulson, “must have known” about the hacking, he said. The jurors must ask “whether these people were doing their jobs properly, in which case we say that they must have known what they were spending their money on, they must have known where some of these stories came from.

“Either they were doing their jobs properly, or at

least three—and we say four—of the news editors were running this operation with Glenn Mulcaire—a great deal of phone hacking—and the management never even noticed.”

Edis continued, “There was phone hacking done for the benefit of the *News of the World* and at its expense. It started when Mrs Brooks was the editor and continued after Mr Coulson took over.”

Published just once a week, the *News of the World* “wasn’t [Tolstoy’s] *War and Peace*,” Edis said. “It wasn’t an enormous document. It was the sort of publication if you were its editor you could take an interest in its contents without too much trouble.”

He charged that Brooks had been involved in a “cover-up” following the exposure of allegations of criminality at the *News of the World* when the hacking crisis became public in 2011.

The prosecutor also disclosed that Brooks and Coulson had an affair for at least six years from the late 1990s. Explaining his reasoning for revealing the affair, Edis said, “What Mr Coulson knew, Mrs Brooks knew too. What Mrs Brooks knew, Mr Coulson knew too. That’s the point.”

Brooks had written a letter to Coulson in February 2004, reading in part, “The fact is you are my very best friend, I tell you everything, I confide in you, I seek your advice, I love you, care about you, worry about you, we laugh and cry together. In fact without our relationship in my life, I am not sure I will cope.”

Edis said in revealing the affair he was not making a “moral judgment.... But Mrs Brooks and Mr Coulson are charged with conspiracy and, when people are charged with conspiracy, the first question a jury has to answer is how well did they know each other? How much did they trust each other? And the fact that they were in this relationship, which was a secret, means that they trusted each other quite a lot with at least that secret, and that’s why we are telling you about it.”

The court also heard that Mulcaire profited to the tune of hundreds of thousands of pounds for his illegal hacking on behalf of the *News of the World*. Edis said that Mulcaire had an “exceptional” arrangement with the *News of the World* that allowed him to earn £413,527 over six years. The jury was told that Mulcaire’s first payment by the paper was in 2000, for which he earned £1,769.23 a week—equivalent to £92,000 a year. Mulcaire was paid by Managing Editor

Stuart Kuttner a total of 221 times.

Edis said to the jury, “You are going to have to take a view on how much pressure they were [under] at the *News of the World* to get stories, so they strayed into criminality in order to do it, and also how much the editor was involved in the whole process.”

Edis raised other issues pointing to further alleged criminality. Brooks had personally authorised payments of £40,000 to a senior official from the Ministry of Defence. Edis said the official had access to secret material and was trusted. He added, “but over a long period of time she [the Ministry of Defence official] sold an awful lot of information for an awful lot of money.”

According to an e-mail exchange with Goodman, Coulson had agreed to pay an unidentified Buckingham Palace police officer for royal telephone directories. These directories could then be used to assist hacking. During the course of the police investigation 15 of these directories were found in Goodman’s home. Two of the directories were said to match the timeframe of the e-mail exchanges.

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