

Epstein scandal engulfs Britain's Royal family after BBC interview with Prince Andrew

By Chris Marsden
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An attempt at damage limitation by the palace and the BBC has backfired in spectacular fashion. Prince Andrew's *Newsnight* interview with Emily Maitlis sought to refute allegations that his relations with deceased billionaire sex offender and trafficker Jeffrey Epstein included having paid sex with an underage girl. But his answers were met with widespread derision and demands that the Duke of York go to the United States to testify under oath.

Epstein was at the centre of an elite social circle and procured women and underage girls for sexual abuse by himself and others. The prince maintained his relations with Epstein long after he was convicted for his crimes.

In 2008, Epstein served 13 months for procuring an underage girl for prostitution and of soliciting a prostitute. A three-year investigation had identified 36 girls, some as young as 14 years old, he had sexually abused. Epstein was arrested again on July 6, 2019, on federal charges for the sex trafficking of minors in Florida and New York. He died in his jail cell on August 10, 2019. Ruled as a suicide, Epstein's lawyers and many others have alleged that he was assassinated to protect his friends in high places—including the Duke of York.

Andrew's friendship with Epstein was close and even involved arranging for him to pay off the debts of his former wife, Sarah, Duchess of York.

In January, Virginia Roberts, now with the married name Giuffre, alleged in a court case that Andrew, "a former prime minister" and lawyer Alan Dershowitz had sex with her while she was a teenager. Epstein had paid her £10,000 to have sex with the Duke on three occasions, including during a trip to London in 2001, when she was 17, in New York and on a private Caribbean island.

Flight logs confirmed that Andrew and Roberts/Giuffre were in all the places she alleges sex happened. There is a

photo of him with his arm around her waist taken at the London flat of Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein's alleged "madam" and a friend of Prince Andrew. A second girl, Joanna Sjoberg, alleges that Andrew touched her breast while seated with Roberts in Epstein's mansion.

In August 2019, the *New Republic* magazine published an email exchange between Epstein associate John Brockman and journalist Evgeny Morozov from September 2013, in which Brockman mentions seeing a British man named "Andy" receiving a foot massage from two young Russian women at Epstein's New York mansion in 2010. He later "realized that the recipient" of the foot massage "was His Royal Highness, Prince Andrew, the Duke of York."

Pilot David Rodgers claims the prince was a passenger on flights with the financier and Roberts/Giuffre, including to the US Virgin Islands on April 11, 2001.

Last month the right-wing website Project Veritas published a leaked video, revealing that ABC News had suppressed reports of Epstein's sex-trafficking for three years, with *Breaking News* anchor and *Good Morning America* co-host Amy Robach stating off-camera, "Then the Palace found out we had [Roberts/Giuffre] whole allegations about Prince Andrew and threatened us a million different ways. We were so worried that we wouldn't be able to interview Kate [Middleton] and Will [Prince William], that also quashed the story."

This was the background to the November 16 Maitlis interview, recorded in Buckingham Palace November 14.

To give a flavour of the painful episode, Andrew said he first met Epstein in 1999 through his girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell, daughter of the deceased and disgraced media tycoon Robert Maxwell. He had maintained relations only because he wanted to learn more about the "international business world" in his

capacity as a special representative for international trade and investment. Epstein had attended Princess Beatrice's 18th birthday at Windsor Castle in July 2006, but only as Maxwell's "plus one." Beatrice is Andrew's daughter.

Andrew had broken contact with Epstein after his initial conviction, until December 2010, when he visited the financier just four months after he had completed his prison sentence. The duke claimed he had only done so to (again) break off relations. He had considered speaking to Epstein by telephone but decided to meet him face-to-face "to show leadership."

Asked why he had then stayed at Epstein's mansion and attended a dinner party, Andrew said, "It was a convenient place to stay... with the benefit of all the hindsight that one can have it was definitely the wrong thing to do but at the time I felt it was the honourable and right thing to do.

"I admit fully my judgement was probably coloured by my tendency to be too honourable," he added.

Asking about the alleged sexual encounter with Roberts/Giuffre, Maitlis said, "She says she met you in 2001, she says she dined with you, danced with you at Tramp Nightclub in London. She went on to have sex with you in a house in Belgravia belonging to Ghislaine Maxwell, your friend. Your response?"

Andrew replied: "I have no recollection of ever meeting this lady, none whatsoever."

Roberts/Giuffre's accusations were "very specific," Maitlis said, including that the prince had been "profusely sweating." He replied that "I didn't sweat at the time because I had suffered what I would describe as an overdose of adrenalin in the Falklands War when I was shot at and I simply... it was almost impossible for me to sweat." He had only started to be able to sweat again "in the recent past."

"Nobody can prove whether or not that photograph has been doctored but I don't recollect that photograph ever being taken," he said. He had never been upstairs at Maxwell's Belgravia flat and "when I go out in London, I wear a suit and a tie." He was shown with his hand on her waist, but "I am not one to, as it were, hug."

Most importantly, the day that his encounter with Roberts/Giuffre was meant to have taken place, March 10, 2001, he was "at home with the children." He had taken Princess Beatrice to a party at a Pizza Express restaurant in Woking at about 4 or 5 p.m., "And then because the Duchess was away, we have a simple rule in the family that when one is away the other one is there."

"Going to Pizza Express in Woking is an unusual thing

for me to do," he said. "I remember it weirdly distinctly."

He never suspected Epstein's criminal behaviour or saw anything unusual about the large number of guests at what have been alleged to be orgies. "I live in an institution at Buckingham Palace which has members of staff walking around all the time and I don't wish to appear grand but there were a lot of people who were walking around Jeffrey Epstein's house. As far as I was aware, they were staff."

Andrew still did not regret being friends with Epstein. Knowing Epstein had "some seriously beneficial outcomes... The people that I met and the opportunities that I was given to learn, either by him or because of him, were actually very useful."

Maitlis closed the interview by asking, "Would you be willing to testify or give a statement under oath if you were asked?" He replied, "If push came to shove and the legal advice was to do so, then I would be duty bound to do so."

This may yet prove to be the most damaging statement made by the prince. Lawyers representing 10 of Epstein's victims have demanded that he now speak to the FBI.

Gloria Allred, representing five of Epstein's victims, told the *Guardian*, "The right and honourable action for Prince Andrew to take now is for him to volunteer to be interviewed by the FBI and prosecutors for the southern district of New York."

Lisa Bloom, who represents another five victims, said that some of the prince's answers were "simply not credible."

Anna Rothwell, from criminal law firm Corker Binning, said, "Prince Andrew is not entitled to any form of immunity by virtue of his position as a member of the royal family. His friendship with the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein is under investigation by the FBI and he is vulnerable to extradition."

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