

Evidence presented against former editors Coulson and Brooks in News of the World trial

Robert Stevens
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Prosecutor Andrew Edis has presented dramatic new evidence against former *News of the World* editors Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson, on trial in London with six others on charges related to alleged widespread phone hacking.

The Sunday scandal sheet was published by billionaire Rupert Murdoch's News International (NI), the British subsidiary of News Corp. It was forced to close in July 2011 after revelations that journalists had hacked the phones of countless individuals, including murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler in 2002.

Clive Goodman, former royal editor and reporter at the tabloid, was convicted of phone hacking in 2007. He faces new charges in the current trial. Three senior *News of the World* journalists and a private investigator, Glenn Mulcaire, pleaded guilty to phone hacking before the trial began.

Coulson and Brooks claim ignorance of all of this.

Coulson was deputy editor at the newspaper for three years from 2000 and succeeded Brooks as editor three years later. Edis said in 2006 that Coulson told then *News of the World* head of news Ian Edmondson, also on trial, who was investigating a story on television celebrity Calum Best to "do his [Best's] phone." Edis asked the jury, "What does that mean?"

Edis said that 15 royal family-related phone directories were found after a search at Goodman's home. Two of these were illegally bought from royal protection police officers. Goodman, said Edis, emailed Coulson in 2003 requesting that a police officer be paid £1,000 for a directory, saying, "These people will not be paid in anything other than cash because if they're discovered selling stuff to us they end up on criminal charges, as could we."

A cash payment of £1,000 was made to a "David Farish," which turned out to be a false name. Edis stated, "The investigation has never identified the policeman responsible for this," but the communication between Coulson and Goodman and the payment was "clearest possible evidence" of conspiracy to commit misconduct in a public office and linked them to phone hacking.

In 2005 a similar episode occurred with Goodman telling Coulson by email, "One of our palace cops has got hold of a rare and just printed Palace staff phone book. Every job, every name, every number. We usually pay £1,000 for these. It's a very risky document for him to nick. OK to put the credit through?"

Edis said Coulson replied "Fine." The prosecutor told the jury the word "nick" would have "told Mr Coulson precisely that he was paying a policeman to commit a crime."

The court heard that Brooks and Coulson were in regular contact in the days leading up to publication of an April 2002 *News of the World* story based on the hacked phone messages of Milly Dowler, while she was still reported missing. Brooks was on holiday in Dubai and Coulson, her deputy, was editing.

Mark Bryant-Heron, for the prosecution, said the newspaper published a full transcript of a message, mistakenly left on Dowler's phone by a recruitment agency inviting her to an interview. This appeared in a Page 9 story of the first edition of the *News of the World* that went to press shortly after 7 p.m. on Saturday, April 13. This story stated, "The hunt for missing Milly Dowler took a new twist last night when it emerged that messages had been sent to her mobile

phone after she vanished.” It also cited the contents of three messages left on Dowler’s phone.

Around two hours later, Brooks sent a text message to Coulson, who texted back four minutes later. The jury were informed that the content of these texts was not known. However, in the second edition of the paper, printed at around 9:30 p.m., the full text of the hacked voicemails had been removed from the story, now relegated to Page 30, with a different reporter’s byline.

Notes presented to the jury revealed contact, from the same week, between a Surrey police officer and Stuart Kuttner, managing editor of *News of the World*. Kuttner is alleged to have told the Surrey officer that the newspaper knew that the missing Dowler had a voicemail message on her phone from a recruitment agency. *News of the World* reporter Neville Thurlbeck also told Surrey police the paper had accessed Dowler’s voicemail and PIN number and had the recruitment agency message.

Brooks is accused of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

Despite mounting evidence pointing to criminality on a huge scale over nearly a decade by News International, no serious investigation was ever carried out against the Murdoch group until the Dowler revelations were reported by the *Guardian* in July 2011. As far back as March 2007, after Mulcaire and Goodman were jailed for hacking royal family phones, Les Hinton, a senior aide to Rupert Murdoch, told a parliamentary committee that a “rigorous internal investigation” found no evidence of widespread hacking at the paper.

However, from 2009 Edis said the *News of the World* offices were “fevered” due to a parliamentary inquiry into allegations of hacking and a subsequent 2011 police investigation. On Monday Edis told the jury that Brooks had ordered a “clean sweep” of the company’s email database before January 2010.

This cover-up continued and was accelerated after the *Guardian*’s July 2011 exposures.

Edis said in the immediate aftermath of the *Guardian*’s revelations, “A media firestorm was about to engulf the *News of the World*. You can imagine the extremely anxious, if not panic-stricken approach to these developments that must have been going on at the *News of the World*.”

The prosecution explained that Brooks attempted to

conceal evidence of criminality by deleting email records and destroying her own notebooks. A day after the *News of the World*’s closure was announced on July 7, 2011, according to Edis, Brooks and her assistant Cheryl Carter, also on trial, arranged for the removal from a News International archive of seven boxes. These allegedly contained all the notebooks Brooks had used from 1995 to 2007. According to Edis, Carter falsely told the archivist that they were her own notebooks. She also told the police, Edis said, that Brooks had not been in the office on that day.

Prior to her arrest later that month on July 17, Brooks and her husband Charlie concocted a plan to prevent police finding incriminating computers and records at their country home in Oxfordshire, and their flat in central London, alleged Edis. This was part of what was called internally “Operation Blackhawk.” Just hours before their homes were searched by police, items were removed from them.

Closed-circuit television images later showed that Charlie Brooks, at the time when his wife was being interviewed by police, hiding a bag and a laptop behind some bins in the car park below their London flat. These were then allegedly collected, along with other bags of evidence, by News International head of security Mark Hanna and two other security guards, who headed back to the firm’s office in Wapping, in east London.

Edis told jurors that after the police searches were over, a bag containing computers was placed behind some bins in the underground car park of Brooks’s flat. As part of the plot, security staff agreed to log the hours for the car park drop-off as “pizza delivery,” because “you cannot log the hours as perverting the course of justice,” said Edis.

The court heard that the plot was foiled as a cleaner at the apartments found the bundle behind the bins the next day and alerted police. Two hours later Charlie Brooks, with accompanying security guards, arrived to collect the bin bag, only to discover it gone, said Edis.



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