

# News of the World hacking trial ends: Scandal still poses threat to Britain's ruling elite

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The trial of former *News of the World* (NotW) editors Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson and others connected with phone hacking has ended with Coulson, former head of communications of Prime Minister David Cameron, found guilty of conspiracy to intercept voicemail messages. Brooks, the former head of billionaire oligarch Rupert Murdoch's media-empire in Britain, was acquitted.

Former NotW managing editor Stuart Kuttner was found not guilty of conspiring to hack voicemails. Brook's PA Cheryl Carter, her husband Charlie Brooks and News International's former head of security Mark Hanna were cleared of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

The jury reached a no verdict on two remaining counts that Coulson and NotW former royal editor Clive Goodman conspired to commit misconduct in public office by paying public officials for the acquisition of royal phone books. Mr. Justice Saunders will hear Monday whether the Crown Prosecution Service will launch a retrial.

Coulson is to be sentenced next week and faces a maximum jail sentence of just two years.

His predecessor, Brooks, was found not guilty of four charges, including conspiring to hack phones when she was editor of NotW and making corrupt payments to public officials when she was editor of Murdoch's daily, the *Sun*. She was cleared of two charges that she conspired with her former secretary and her husband, Charlie Brooks, to conceal evidence from police investigating phone hacking in 2011.

The trial followed the revelations of industrial scale criminality at the NotW, including hacking the phones of hundreds of individuals and the bribery of police officers. The NotW was closed down by Murdoch in July 2011 as the result of 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. The phone of another murder victim, Clare Bernal, was also

hacked within hours of her death in September 2005.

Prior to the trial, former NotW chief reporter and news editor Neville Thurlbeck pleaded guilty after the police found voicemail tapes of former Labour government home secretary David Blunkett. Also pleading guilty to hacking offences were former newsdesk executives, Greg Miskiw and James Weatherup. In January Dan Evans, another former reporter, became the fourth journalist at the paper to plead guilty.

Those pleading guilty are to be sentenced this week.

Glenn Mulcaire, a private investigator who specialised in hacking, formalised a lucrative relationship with the NotW in 2000. Between 2001 and 2006, £95,000 to £105,000 was paid annually to Mulcaire.

The scale of Mulcaire's hacking on behalf of the NotW was staggering. By August 2012 4,744 potential victims of his phone hacking had been identified by the Metropolitan Police. Along with incriminating News International paperwork and emails, Mulcaire kept 8,000 pages of notes detailing those who were targeted and almost 700 tapes of voicemails and other recordings. Each one of his notes included the name of the journalist who had "tasked" him to acquire personal information. In total, 5,600 taskings were found on notes at Mulcaire's home, an average of more than four for every working day. Some 2,200 "taskings" had the names of Miskiw, Thurlbeck, Weatherup or another NotW journalist written alongside them.

Brooks was acquitted following evidence being presented to the jury that Mulcaire received more than 540 such "taskings" from journalists while she was NotW editor. The Metropolitan Police have proved and presented in court 12 incidents of confirmed hacking during her time as editor. One of those was the case of Milly Dowler.

While only Coulson was found guilty, it is expected that this is just the beginning of more legal proceeding against many others charged with hacking offences. It is reported that Dan Evans, a show business writer for the NotW,

targeted around 1,600 people for alleged hacking, with police informing 90 people per week that they were possible victims of this criminality. Evans was a former *Sunday Mirror* reporter, who said he was employed by the NotW due to his hacking expertise.

After the trial, the Press Association stated there are a 5,500 total of victims of NotW phone hacking, with 1,000 classified by police as “likely victims” as opposed to “potential victims.”

According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Police investigating the phone hacking scandal in Britain were left feeling ‘absolutely shattered’ by Tuesday’s verdicts...”

The trial proved the adage that “Money talks,” as Murdoch threw vast resources at it in order to obtain the best legal team available. Each of the defendants was represented by a team of lawyers, including a QC. It is estimated that News Corp’s legal fees covering five of the seven defendants, including Brooks and Andy Coulson, stand at more than £60 million. The legal team assigned to Brooks alone was understood to be earning about £30,000 a week

In a trenchant analysis of the case, *Guardian* journalist Nick Davies noted, “Lawyers and court reporters who spend their working lives at the Old Bailey agreed they had never seen anything like it, this multimillion-pound Rolls-Royce engine purring through the proceedings. Soon we found ourselves watching the power of the private purse knocking six bells out of the underfunded public sector.”

He added, “The cost to Murdoch ran into millions. Against that, the Crown Prosecution Service had only one full-time solicitor attached to the trial and one admin assistant.”

The Press Association reported that Murdoch’s parent company, News Corp, has already paid out £268 million to alleged victims of phone hacking, with 718 people settling claims with News International, its British arm, before May 31.

Despite this, the NotW hacking scandal is far from over and still poses a significant threat to Britain’s ruling elite.

The guilty verdict against Coulson has opened up the possibility that News UK, renamed from the previous “toxic” News International who owned the NotW, could be charged with crimes as a corporation. As the *Guardian* notes, this “in turn could potentially lead to the prosecution of members of the UK company’s former board of directors, potentially including Rupert and [his son] James Murdoch.”

Rupert Murdoch is expected to arrive in Britain shortly to be interviewed by the Metropolitan Police, according to the *Guardian*, “as a suspect as part of their inquiry into allegations of crime at his British newspapers.”

The newspaper said this move by the police was first made last year, but they agreed to a request from Murdoch’s lawyers to postpone the questioning until the hacking trial

was over.

More fundamental still, the scandal goes right to the heart of the British political establishment with both major parties, Conservative and Labour, having long and intimate relations with Murdoch’s media empire.

Prior to the trial, Prime Minister David Cameron was forced to acknowledge, “The truth is, we have all been in this together—the press, politicians and leaders of all parties—and yes, that includes me.”

Despite growing allegations of Coulson’s involvement in phone hacking, Cameron recruited him, straight from his leaving the NotW in 2007, to be his director of communications when he was the leader of the opposition. This criminal then continued in the same role when Cameron became prime minister in 2010, only being forced to leave the job in 2011 as the allegations grew.

Cameron tried to distance himself from Coulson, issuing an apology for hiring him *before* the trial ended and earning a rebuke from Saunders. He was forced to cite Attorney General Dominic Grieve, whose spokesman said he had given legal advice on the apology.

Labour has sought to make political capital from Cameron’s predicament, but has much to conceal over its own longstanding connections with Murdoch. During the trial it was revealed that former Prime Minister Tony Blair offered to help Brooks and advised setting up an inquiry to “clear” her and her husband of any wrongdoing.



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