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Tabloid Hack Attack on Royals, and Beyond



Lewis Whyld/Getty Images

Members of the royal household had their voice mail messages hacked into by News of the World employees.

By [DON VAN Natta Jr.](#), [JO BECKER](#) and [GRAHAM BOWLEY](#)

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IN NOVEMBER 2005, three senior aides to Britain's royal family noticed odd things happening on their mobile phones. Messages they had never listened to were somehow appearing in their mailboxes as if heard and saved. Equally peculiar were stories that began appearing about [Prince William](#) in one of the country's biggest tabloids, News of the World.

[Anatomy of the Phone-Hacking Scandal](#)



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From 1969 to 2010, a [timeline](#) of events at News of the World.

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The News of the World reporter Clive Goodman leaves court with his lawyer after facing charges of illegally accessing voice mail messages.

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The stories were banal enough (Prince William pulled a tendon in his knee, one revealed). But the royal aides were puzzled as to how News of the World had gotten the information, which was known among only a small, discreet circle. They began to suspect that someone was eavesdropping on their private conversations.

By early January 2006, Scotland Yard had confirmed their suspicions. An unambiguous trail led to Clive Goodman, the News of the World reporter who covered the royal family, and to a private investigator, Glenn Mulcaire, who also worked for the paper. The two men had somehow obtained the PIN codes needed to access the voice mail of the royal aides.

Scotland Yard told the aides to continue operating as usual while it pursued the investigation, which included surveillance of the suspects' phones. A few months later, the inquiry took a remarkable turn as the reporter and the private investigator chased a story about Prince William's younger brother, Harry, visiting a strip club. Another tabloid, The Sun, had trumpeted its scoop on the episode with the immortal: "Harry Buried Face in Margo's Mega-Boobs. Stripper Jiggled . . . Prince Giggled."

As Scotland Yard tracked Goodman and Mulcaire, the two men hacked into [Prince Harry](#)'s mobile-phone messages. On April 9, 2006, Goodman produced a follow-up article in News of the World about the apparent distress of Prince Harry's girlfriend over the matter. Headlined "Chelsy Tears Strip Off Harry!" the piece quoted, verbatim, a voice mail Prince Harry had received from his brother teasing him about his predicament.

The palace was in an uproar, especially when it suspected that the two men were also listening to the voice mail of Prince William, the second in line to the throne. The eavesdropping could not have gone higher inside the royal family, since [Prince Charles](#) and the queen were hardly regular mobile-phone users. But it seemingly went everywhere else in British society. Scotland Yard collected evidence indicating that reporters at News of the World might have hacked the phone messages of hundreds of celebrities, government officials, soccer stars — anyone whose personal secrets could be tabloid fodder. Only now, more than four years later, are most of them beginning to find out.

AS OF THIS SUMMER, five people have filed lawsuits accusing News Group Newspapers, a division of [Rupert Murdoch](#)'s publishing empire that includes News of the World, of breaking into their voice mail. Additional cases are being prepared, including one seeking a judicial review of Scotland Yard's handling of the investigation. The litigation is beginning to expose just how far the hacking went, something that Scotland Yard did not do. In fact, an examination based on police records, court documents and interviews with investigators and reporters shows that Britain's revered police agency failed to pursue leads suggesting that one of the country's most powerful newspapers was routinely listening in on its citizens.

The police had seized files from Mulcaire's home in 2006 that contained several thousand mobile phone numbers of potential hacking victims and 91 mobile phone PIN codes. Scotland Yard even had a recording of Mulcaire walking one journalist — who may have worked at yet another tabloid — step by step through the hacking of a soccer official's voice mail, according to a copy of the tape. But Scotland Yard focused almost exclusively on the royals case, which culminated with the imprisonment of Mulcaire and Goodman. When police officials presented evidence to prosecutors, they didn't discuss crucial clues that the two men may not have been alone in hacking the voice mail messages of story targets.

"There was simply no enthusiasm among Scotland Yard to go beyond the cases involving Mulcaire and Goodman," said John Whittingdale, the chairman of a parliamentary committee that has twice investigated the phone hacking. "To start exposing widespread tawdry practices in that newsroom was a heavy stone that they didn't want to try to lift." Several investigators said in interviews that Scotland Yard was reluctant to conduct a wider inquiry in part because of its close relationship with News of the World. Police officials have defended their investigation, noting that their duties did not extend to monitoring the media. In a statement, the police said they followed the lines of inquiry "likely to produce the best evidence" and that the charges that were brought "appropriately represented the criminality uncovered." The statement added, "This was a complex inquiry and led to one of the first prosecutions of its kind." Officials also have noted that the department had more pressing priorities at the time, including several terrorism cases.

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