

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE**

**Claim No. HQ09D05027**

**QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION**

**BETWEEN:**

**BARRY GEORGE**

**Claimant**

**and**

**NEWS GROUP NEWSPAPERS LIMITED**

**Defendants**

**STATEMENT IN OPEN COURT**

**Counsel for the Claimant (Gordon Bishop)**

My Lord, the Claimant, Mr Barry George, has brought this action for libel against the Defendant, News Group Newspapers Limited, in respect of a number of articles which were published about him in The Sun and the News of the World between 1<sup>st</sup> August and the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

Mr George has the misfortune of being well known because of his wrongful conviction in July 2001 (by a majority verdict of 10-1) of the murder of the TV presenter Jill Dando, who had been shot dead on the front steps of her London home in April 1999. Mr George was sentenced to life imprisonment. In July 2002 the Court of Appeal dismissed his appeal. In November 2007, after a long campaign to prove his innocence led by his sister, Michelle Diskin, the Court of Appeal set aside his conviction and ordered a retrial. On 9 June 2008 the retrial started at the Old Bailey and on 1 August the jury by a unanimous verdict found him not guilty.

Immediately after his acquittal Mr George was interviewed by News of the World reporters and the following day by Kay Burley for Sky TV. Mr George agreed to give those interviews because he knew there would be a clamour from the press for his story and he wanted to satisfy the demands of the press as quickly as possible in the hope that that he would then be left in peace to move on with his private life.

On Saturday the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2008 The Sun published articles about the retrial and Mr George, which described a number of matters which had been kept from the jury during the retrial. The Defendant now recognises that those articles would have been understood to mean that there were grounds to suspect Mr George of the murder despite his acquittal. The Defendant accepts that the verdict of the second jury in acquitting Mr George was correct and it apologises to Mr George for any suggestion otherwise.

On Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2008 the News of the World carried a report of the interviews given by Mr George in which he stated that at the time of the murder he was in a disability centre. He also said that an hour later he was in conversation with a woman in the street who became a prosecution witness. Although he accepted he was paying possibly unwanted attention to her she never expressed that to him. The headline for the article was “I didn’t kill Jill Dando ... I was stalking someone else at the time”; the Defendant accepts that Mr George never made that statement.

A number of other articles about Mr George were published in both The Sun and the News of the World in October 2008. Various allegations were made including that he had become obsessed with Kay Burley, that he had pestered a woman whose advert about a dog he had answered and that he had become obsessed with Pam Wright, the fiancée of Steve Wright, the Suffolk Strangler. The Defendant now accepts that, although on one occasion Mr George did cycle to Sky TV studios to try to collect a tape of his interview with Kay Burley, Mr George did not pose a threat and was not obsessed with her nor did he pester any woman who had a dog for sale nor did he become obsessed with Pam Wright.

The Defendant is here today by its solicitor to withdraw publicly the false allegations it made and to apologise to Mr George for making them. It has also agreed to pay him substantial damages and all his legal costs.

**Defendant’s solicitor (Ben Beabey of Farrers)**

On behalf of News Group Newspapers I confirm what my learned friend says and the Defendant takes this opportunity to correct matters and to apologise to Mr George for any hurt and distress he has felt.