

Popbitch on Waxie Maxie

Friday, 02 November 2018

And what of Max Clifford, the famed PR mastermind who failed to protect his own reputation? How could someone so ruthlessly committed to burying bad news, who spent his entire career making problems like this disappear, end up dying in such disgrace in prison? In more ways than one, he only had himself to blame!

Before he was arrested on suspicion of committing multiple sex offences as part of Operation Yewtree, Max Clifford used to have a framed letter hanging on the wall of his New Bond Street office.

The letter was written by Detective Inspector Marjoram of Surrey Police, thanking Max personally for all the work he had done assisting them with their enquiries in Operation Arundel and in bringing Jonathan King to justice.

Clifford really wasn't modest when it came to showing that letter off to those prepared to ask, nor was he shy about discussing his involvement in King's arrest and trial to those who were prepared to listen. Writing about it in his co-authored autobiography, *Read All About It*, the self-styled Master Of The Dark Arts afforded himself some space to expand upon his thoughts on the case a little further.

King and [Gary] Glitter are typical paedophiles, manipulative and arrogant. Their arrogance is necessary for them to squash their guilty conscience. And they need to be manipulative to undermine the victims. The only difference between them and other paedophiles is that they like the spotlight, whereas most prefer to stay hidden away.

Clifford would end up collapsing in his prison cell in December 2017, dying of heart failure halfway through an eight year prison sentence for the indecent assault of four young women and underage girls. Assaults which took place in the same New Bond Street office in which he would hang his special letter from Surrey Police.

The easy read of the Max Clifford story is that he was a deeply guilty man who tried to toss as many people as he could under the bus in the hopes that the ensuing pile-up would be enough to prevent that same bus catching up to him – but the full truth of the matter is a little more complicated.

It's telling that the three qualities Clifford isolates in a "typical paedophile" are a capacity for manipulation, arrogance and a penchant for the spotlight, because not only are those qualities that he had in spades himself, they are also the same three qualities that would ultimately lead to his downfall.

A downfall that started with the case of Gary Glitter.

Like you'd expect any good crisis manager to be, Max Clifford was way ahead of the curve when it came to the modern celebrity paedo panic. Long before Yewtree, long before Arundel, Clifford was already working his angles on this story back in 1997, when Gary Glitter took his laptop into a Bristol branch of PC World.

Glitter was arrested shortly after technicians discovered thousands of images of child sex abuse downloaded on his hard drive, and he promptly found himself splashed across the front pages of the tabloids. This wasn't the first time that Glitter had made the papers for his suspicious sexual proclivities. It was just the first time that the public had paid proper attention.

In both 1987 and 1993, the News of the World had run interviews with a woman (identified at the time as Alison Brown)

about how Glitter had had sex with her when she was 14. Both times the story passed by without so much as a flutter. In light of the laptop revelations however, her story became dynamite. Now that she had renewed relevance, NotW was keen to interview Alison Brown again. This time though, she wasn't acting alone. This time she had representation.

Max Clifford.

Well aware of the story's value to a scurrilous Sunday paper, Clifford took charge of the negotiations on Brown's behalf. As part of the deal, he arranged a special condition where Brown would not only get a five-figure flat fee for her story, she also stood to receive a £25,000 bonus if Glitter was subsequently convicted.

It's undeniably a macabre business, thrashing out the details of conviction-contingent commissions, but there is a pragmatic case to be made for them. When cases as shocking as the Gary Glitter one return a guilty verdict, newspapers which cover the story in any depth are likely to see a spike in their sales. If those papers' supplementary coverage is driven by other people's stories, it's arguably only fair that those people see an equitable share of the profits.

Provided that those people aren't witnesses or claimants in the actual trial itself (therefore giving them an active bearing on the final verdict, as well as a vested financial interest) such bonuses are more a matter of taste than morals.

Complicating matters both legally and ethically, however, Clifford was also trying to convince Alison Brown to take her story to the police and bring her own charges against Glitter – immediately casting doubt on his motivations. Was he really trying to get justice for an innocent victim? Or was he merely trying to multiply the chances of a conviction, fattening up the 20% he sliced off the top of these deals as standard?

In this particular instance, Brown did end up bringing charges against Glitter – and Glitter was eventually acquitted of them. It also shoved her very close to the centre of an active criminal trial, and put her dangling £25,000 conviction bonus onto the radar of the Press Complaints Commission, who launched an investigation into the deal that she had been offered.

The whole thing didn't exactly cover Clifford in glory, but when Gary Glitter was subsequently found guilty and convicted of downloading more than 4,000 images of child pornography, the villain of the story was clear. Glitter was a monster and Clifford, though a little on the unscrupulous side, had helped jail a paedophile – and results were really what mattered here.

Clifford's conspicuous involvement in bringing Glitter down did wonders for his reputation (goodwill that was further cemented by his work securing an arrest and conviction for Jonathan King) – but Clifford's moral compass was famously flexible.

And, as he would soon let slip, he wasn't that careful about letting it be known.

The very first incident that Max Clifford had his co-author recount on his behalf in his 2005 book, *Read All About It*, is how he masterminded the coverage of the David Beckham-Rebecca Loos affair that broke in 2004. The details of that particular tale are entirely unrelated to this story, save for one crucial one that is included on the final page of that chapter.

After explaining the excessive lengths to which he went in order to keep Rebecca Loos' scoop exclusive and out of the

hands of the News of the World's rivals, Clifford freely admits that if Beckham had been the one to call him first, trying to get a lid placed on the story that he'd been shagging his PA, then things might have worked out differently.

He even goes on to lay out the whole plan of action he had in mind – a scheme which hinges around contriving some yarn about Beckham –losing– his phone and a friend –finding– it, firing off some sexy texts to Loos as a –joke–. Then he'd be paid off handsomely to take the heat and keep his mouth shut.

We have no real idea how that plan would have played out (as alibis go –My mate stole my phone!– is piss-weak, even by Clifford's standards). The more pertinent point to draw from this is that Clifford wasn't stitching Beckham up because he thought he was a cheat, a bad husband or a sneaky father. He stitched him up purely because that's where his best margin was.

It's clear that Clifford's attitude regarding indecent assault was equally malleable, as he wasn't always so quick to sue the sex pests of his acquaintance.

Earlier this year, we posted an uncensored segment from an interview conducted with Max Clifford as part of the 2009 documentary, Starsuckers. The names were edited out of the final edit of the film on (sensible) legal advice, but since Clifford's death we've come into possession of the non-redacted original.

In that four-minute video, one of the people Clifford describes his dealing with is former Harrods and Fulham FC owner, Mohamed Al-Fayed.

Speaking candidly, thinking he is off-camera, Clifford claimed that Fayed would routinely grope teenage members of his staff, who would be required to indulge his wandering hands in exchange for their continued employment. In order to prevent anyone from taking these tales to the press and the story getting out, Clifford would be asked to intervene. In exchange for this dubious service, Clifford would insist upon a significant donation being made to a local children's hospice charity, of which he was a patron.

If you're interested in hearing Max Clifford work his way through that moral maze, then he speaks for some length about it in the video above – and it's pretty fucking eye-opening.

(Absolutely coincidentally, but nevertheless interesting to note: the CHASE Hospice – which was the specific beneficiary of Clifford's largesse in this instance – opened in November 2001: the very same month that Jonathan King was convicted and that Clifford's work for the newly-famous Simon Cowell, covering up the £50,000 bail payment from Part One, went full throttle. Now among the list of CHASE Hospice patrons? Simon Cowell.)

Children's charity work was also the preferred cover of noted sex offender Jimmy Savile too. Savile was spared the ignominy that Max Clifford endured by having the good sense to die before he was publicly stripped of all his patronages. Clifford, instead, had to watch his charitable legacy – his last hope of redemption – be dismantled before he snuffed it.

He also mentions his work for Dustin Hoffman, who was one of the more unexpected names to crop up in the #MeToo fallout. Clifford claims that he would routinely pay for all seats surrounding Dustin Hoffman in the cinema and fill them with his own people so that if Hoffman ever did start groping in front, behind or to either side of him (which, Clifford says, was his –thing–) the threat of the story breaking would be contained. Clifford knew who to pay off and how much. The system was highly successful, managing to keep the lid on that story until Hoffman's #MeToo broke.

And, of course, he couldn't go the length of that clip without mentioning his biggest success story: Simon Cowell.

Clifford says Cowell paid him £250,000 a year for seven years "which, at the time of speaking, would take in the years from mid-2001 to mid-2008. That's £250,000 a year to keep unflattering stories about Cowell out of the press. £250,000 a year to take Cowell's calls after every episode of Pop Idol to talk about which of his withering putdowns worked and which ones didn't. £250,000 a year to get him (and keep him) in Rupert Murdoch's good books. £250,000 to strengthen Steve Brookstein when Steve Brookstein was becoming a liability for his burgeoning success with The X Factor. £250,000 a year to keep the source of Jonathan King's bail money secret.

It's not for nothing that Simon Cowell says that hiring Max Clifford was the best decision of his career "and it might never have happened had it not been for Jonathan King recommending him.

But Jonathan King didn't just prove to be a poisoned chalice for Simon Cowell. He would turn out to be a poisoned chalice for Max Clifford too.

The Second Letter

Around the same time that Gary Glitter was first arrested, tried and convicted of child pornography charges in the late 90s, one of the producers at his old record label, Bell Records, was also up on similar ones: Chris Denning, former DJ at the Walton Hop.

Denning spent a lot of the late 90s and early 2000s bouncing between charges of the historic sexual assault of underage boys and producing child pornography. Given the pair's professional proximity at Bell, news reports would often give simultaneous updates on the legal situations of Chris Denning and Gary Glitter together.

It was one such update that prompted Kirk McIntyre to get in touch with Max Clifford about the abuse that he claimed to have suffered at the hands of Denning at the Hop "the inciting incident that led to Mark Williams-Thomas taking a witness statement which implicated a third Bell Records alum, Jonathan King.

(Absolutely coincidentally, but nevertheless interesting to note: Bell Records would later morph to become Arista Records "the same label that Simon Cowell was causing such a stink at that Jonathan King first felt compelled to intervene on his behalf, starting his whole guardian angel routine.)

We covered most of Mark Williams-Thomas's involvement in this story and many of the curious twists that he's put in the tale in Part Two "but his Jimmy Savile documentary did more than just cause Surrey Police to re-evaluate their evidence from Operation Arundel and round up the Walton Hop gang again. Much more famously, his Jimmy Savile Exposure documentary spawned a Metropolitan Police investigation.

The flagship celebrity paedo crackdown: Operation Yewtree.

Yewtree was the one that hauled in the proper jawdroppers, the names that nobody expected. One of the first people to be brought in for questioning was Freddie Starr, one of Max Clifford's earliest clients. It was Clifford who had planted the infamous "Freddie Starr Ate My Hamster" story in the 80s, a tabloid splash so memorable that it is still what people remember about Freddie Starr to this day, despite his four Operation Yewtree arrests.

No sooner was Starr in cuffs, Max Clifford was out in front of a camera, defending the honour of his former client. Seemingly unaware that he was in line for an interview himself in just a few weeks' time, Clifford wasted no time in getting out in front of this story "famously (or infamously) branding it a "witch hunt".

Starr was never prosecuted, but not everyone got so lucky. As well as getting stalwarts of the sex offender scene Gary Glitter and Chris Denning again (on 16 and 13 year sentences respectively), Operation Yewtree also served up sentences for Rolf Harris (five years, nine months), Dave Lee Travis (three months, suspended) and man of the hour, Max Clifford (eight years).

Police who raided Clifford's Walton-On-Thames home at the time of his arrest found another personal letter that he had received, although this one was unframed and tucked away from view in his bedside table. It was from one of his victims. She had written it anonymously and sent it to him the previous year, in 2011.

The letter tells her side of the story in rather stark detail, recounting how the two met, how Max ingratiated himself with her parents, telling them that their daughter had a promising career as a model or actress. She goes on to describe how he then brought her up to his office alone, made her undress for him and how he raped her. She reminded him of the repeat abuses he subjected her too and explained how close she came to suicide. She asked him how he lived with himself, how he could cope knowing his own daughter would eventually find out his secrets, and if he was still abusing children.

For at least a year, Clifford kept that letter in the drawer next to his pillow.

This same woman would testify against him when he was tried at Southwark Crown Court in April 2014. She would tell the jury about how, aged 15, in 1977, Max Clifford had befriended her parents on holiday in Spain. She told the jury that he had tricked her into thinking that a photographer had taken a long-lens snap of her performing oral sex on him and was going to publish it "a photo so detailed that you could "see the freckles". She told the jury how he would call her under fake identities and made her talk dirty to him on the phone in order to get her "Hollywood auditions".

Clifford was found guilty on eight counts of indecent assault in the end, with four different women and girls, aged between 15 and 19.

In exactly the way he had described "typical paedophiles" operating in his own book, it transpired that this is exactly what Clifford himself had been doing.

The manipulation. The arrogance. The penchant for the spotlight. Clifford could have kept his head down when the circle started tightening, and his former clients started getting collared, but no. He wanted to be at the front of the story.

He was ingratiating himself with the families of his victims in the same way he accused Gary Glitter of doing. He was picking underage victims up in his flashy car in the same way he accused Jonathan King of doing. He was using children's charities as a karmic, catch-all cover for his (and others') sexual misconduct in the way that Jimmy Savile did.

By every single measure he set out, Max Clifford was a typical paedophile.

But there's still one final piece of this puzzle to place.

For while there's a satisfyingly circuitous route through this story – one which ties Max Clifford's dobbing in of Jonathan King to Mark Williams-Thomas, who would record evidence about King in his police notebooks which he would later try to sell to the press, something he did in tandem with Max Clifford, who also sold a bunch of stories about Jonathan King after his 2001 conviction, while also taking control of his former protégé, Simon Cowell, incubating his formative career from the potentially fatal fact that he'd stumped up fifty grand for Jonathan King's bail, bail that only became necessary because of the arrest based on evidence taken by Mark Williams-Thomas, who, on the strength of the work he did with Savile, laid the groundwork for Operation Yewtree, which would eventually snare Max Clifford, leading Cowell into the arms of Mark Williams-Thomas even though he was responsible, at least in part, of sending both of his former mentors to the Big House on underage sex offences – there's one really important connection on the Clifford/King/Cowell/Williams-Thomas matrix we haven't discussed yet.

You see, there's actually a much simpler reason that Max Clifford ended up seeing out his final days in prison.

Revenge.

– You Best Not Miss

Not long after he was released from prison in 2005, Jonathan King took a lunch with an old journalist friend of his. When the topic of Max Clifford's involvement in his arrest and incarceration came up, the journalist laughingly noted the irony, given that Clifford was well-known within his circle of friends for being one of the dodgiest scoundrels working. Not just with all the amoral, Master Of The Dark Arts persona. In the usual casting couch, quid pro quo, tit-for-tat ways too.

This journalist recounted the story of a friend of his who said she'd found Clifford's constant braying about how he helped bring Glitter and King to book to be unbearably galling as she had been assaulted by Clifford multiple times when she was 15 after he had befriended her parents on holiday in Spain one year.

You can probably guess where this is going.

King was immediately keen to see this woman's story get a wider airing. Initially, she was reluctant to go public with her experience as she was worried that the story would break her mother's heart as her mother had been so taken with Clifford, and had no idea whatsoever about the repeated assaults.

When her mother died a few years later, King tried again, sending word through their mutual friend that the time to speak out about Max Clifford had finally arrived. Yet even with her mother gone, the thought of rocking the boat while Clifford was still operating at the height of his powers, getting dragged into a huge, isolating scandal like that continued to strike her (understandably) as being deeply unappealing.

She did write Clifford a letter at one point, anonymously, in an attempt to help her overcome her experience – but found that even after professional counselling the prospect of saying his name out loud was still making her feel physically

nauseous.

Try as he might, despite years and years of nudging, King just couldn't quite convince her to shop Clifford in to the cops.

What changed her mind? The 2012 Exposure documentary, *The Other Side Of Jimmy Savile* " hosted by Mark Williams-Thomas.

As part of the resulting police operation, Operation Yewtree, Max Clifford was arrested on December 6th, 2012.

Absolutely coincidentally, but nevertheless interesting to note: Jonathan King's birthday.

Simon Cowell was the first person to publicly issue a statement dropping Max Clifford as an associate when he was finally convicted.

Once again, his big ally and mentor in the industry had been accused and convicted of sex crimes against minors " and, once again, Cowell had made a bee-line to befriend the person arguably most responsible for it.

When King went down, Cowell turned to Clifford. When Clifford went down, Cowell turned to Mark Williams-Thomas. He'll just have to hope and pray that MWT doesn't let him down in the way that so many have let him down before.

Cards on the table though, we have a suspicion that Williams-Thomas won't even be Cowell's next big headache. In fact, since starting this series two weeks ago, it seems that another friend and associate of Simon Cowell has pushed himself right to the front of that particular line, as Sir Philip Green has been causing quite the commotion in legal circles recently.

Cowell has been extremely close friends with billionaire shitbag Sir Philip Green for many years now and, in 2009, the two of them decided to go into business together. The result was a global entertainment company that Cowell would take the lead in directing in terms of content, formats and intellectual property, and Green would crunch the numbers. A company called Syco Entertainment.

Green's number-crunching credentials were called into question in 2015 when he brought BHS to its knees, leaving the company's pension fund with a £571m deficit, while his family took a spookily similar £586m worth of dividends over the course of his ownership.

Now, in late 2018, he is embroiled in a separate injunction scandal, trying to gag the Telegraph from reporting on a story that involves alleged sexual and racial harassment. The media storm is bringing forward all sorts of other stories about Green's bullying behaviour (fittingly, precisely the sort of media storm Max Clifford would once have been able effortlessly to diffuse).

What's the relevance of all of this? There's not much. Only that Green still owns 5% of Syco Entertainment, the company which makes the true-crime series *The Investigator* " co-produced by Simon Cowell and Mark Williams-Thomas.

What on earth will The Investigator Series Three be about? Guess weâ€™ll have to wait and seeâ€¦!