

Contempt of court and social media case studies

D&F

In July 2015, two teenage girls were put on trial for the murder of Angela Wrightson. Due to the age of the defendants, they were granted anonymity and referred to by their initials (D&F).

After only two days, the judge suspended the trial after hundreds of posts purporting to reveal the identities of the two girls appeared on social media. Aborting the trial cost the public tens of thousands of pounds and led to justice being delayed.

Both defendants were subsequently jailed for a minimum of 15 years in April 2016 following a reconstituted trial at Leeds Crown Court.

#ThinkBeforeYouPost

TM and Thompson & Venables

In March 2019, TM was found guilty of contempt of court after she published information and photographs online purporting to be of Jon Venables.

A court order restricting the publication of any material likely to lead to the identification of Jon Venables and Robert Thompson has been in place since 2001. It is meant not only to protect Venables and Thompson but also those members of the public who have been incorrectly identified as being either of them.

TM initially claimed that she had no idea that it was against the law to post the images. She pleaded guilty at her trial and was sentenced to 8 months in prison, suspended for 2 years. She was also ordered to pay costs of £10,000.

Contempt proceedings for breaching the same court order have also been brought against at 8 other persons in recent years.

#ThinkBeforeYouPost

KM

In January 2018, in the trial of two of KM's relatives, the court issued an order imposing reporting restrictions on naming or identifying two witnesses in the proceedings.

Despite the court order, KM posted videos and photos that she had taken in the courtroom during the trial that identified the two prosecution witnesses on Facebook. The posts also alleged the witnesses were lying and encouraged others to share the post and tag the witnesses.

KM was later found in contempt of court and given a 12-week prison sentence, suspended for two years and ordered to pay £2,000 in costs.

#ThinkBeforeYouPost

EH

In August 2019, despite signs warning against recording the proceedings, EH streamed more than an hour's footage from her partner's crown court trial to Facebook.

This footage was downloaded hundreds of times.

At her High Court hearing in October 2020 EH apologised for her actions, claiming that she was unaware of the laws around recording court proceedings. However, the court found that she had been warned against recording the trial the week before it started.

In February 2021, she was sentenced to a four-month prison term, suspended for two years, and ordered to pay £500 in costs, after being found in contempt of court.

#ThinkBeforeYouPost