

Ms Heather Mills v The Mail on Sunday

Clauses noted: 1

Ms Heather Mills complained to the Press Complaints Commission through her representative, David Law, that an article published in The Mail on Sunday on 7th March 2010, headlined 'The 100 British celebrities who really matter', was inaccurate in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice.

The complaint was not upheld.

The article was a celebrity top-100 list, compiled by Piers Morgan, with a short piece about each individual featured. Heather Mills appeared in the list at number 100 and was the subject of considerable criticism by Mr Morgan, who described how he felt "eternal shame" at having "introduced [Ms Mills] to Paul [McCartney]", her former husband.

Ms Mills said that this claim, which had been made on numerous occasions over the years, was incorrect. In fact, Sir Paul had seen his future wife speak at the Daily Mirror Pride of Britain Awards and had contacted her afterwards. They had not met during the event itself, let alone been physically introduced by Piers Morgan.

Ms Mills also said the piece was inaccurate in stating that she was the writer of "nothing but bleating letters of complaint to newspapers and divorce lawyers" (which, claimed Mr Morgan, was in contrast to Sir Paul McCartney, "the brilliantly talented writer of Yesterday and Hey Jude"). She had, in fact, "written at least three books and is currently working on another".

The newspaper said that, in 1999, Mr Morgan - who was then editor of the Daily Mirror - had invited both Heather Mills and Sir Paul McCartney to his newspaper's Pride of Britain Awards. During the event, at which Ms Mills made a speech, Sir Paul and Mr Morgan had been seated next to one another. Mr Morgan told Sir Paul all about Ms Mills and why he had invited her to the awards.

Mr Morgan's recollection was that he had physically introduced the pair to one another as guests mingled after the awards ceremony. But, in any case, it was not in dispute that, at Mr Morgan's specific suggestion, Sir Paul called Heather Mills after the event and offered to make a substantial donation to her charity. The couple began dating soon afterwards and it could not be doubted that Mr Morgan was the conduit for their getting together.

The newspaper noted that Piers Morgan had made the disputed claim many times in the past and it had never before been called into question by either Ms Mills or Sir Paul.

Adjudication

The central dispute related to Piers Morgan's claim that he had "introduced" Heather Mills to Sir Paul McCartney. Ms Mills said Mr Morgan had not physically introduced the couple; Mr Morgan said his recollection was that he had indeed done just that, during a Pride of Britain Awards event in 1999.

The Commission was not in a position to reconcile these conflicting recollections, especially given the passage of time (indeed, it noted that no complaint about this matter had been made in the past, despite Mr Morgan having made the claim on numerous occasions). However, it was not in dispute that it was at an event organised by Mr Morgan's newspaper that Sir Paul had seen Ms Mills for the first time, that he contacted her shortly afterwards (apparently at Mr Morgan's suggestion) and that he and Ms Mills subsequently began dating. Given that Mr Morgan had invited both guests to the event, the Commission did not consider that it was misleading to suggest that he had effectively

been the means to their introduction. It did not consider, therefore, that there had been a breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice.

With regard to the other point of complaint, relating to Mr Morgan's claim that Ms Mills was the "writer of nothing but bleating letters of complaint to newspapers and divorce lawyers", the Commission acknowledged that Ms Mills had written a number of books. However, in the context of a comment piece, the Commission considered that readers would generally have recognised that Mr Morgan was making a rhetorical point about the relative merits or memorability (in his personal view) of Sir Paul McCartney's written work and Ms Mills' written work. There was no breach of the Editors' Code in relation to this part of the complaint either.

Adjudication issued 03/06/2010