

Press Release

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High Court orders declaration of falsity, damages and injunctions for anonymous letter campaign

Mr Richard Parsons, the Cumbria-based author and landowner, has succeeded in his High Court application seeking relief against a local family who published a series of poison-pen letters into his local community between 2018 and 2020. In a judgment handed down last week, Mrs Justice Collins Rice ordered a rare declaration of falsity, notifying the world that the allegations in the anonymous letters were entirely untrue. She also ordered that the defendants (Mrs Elizabeth Garnett, Mr Allan Garnett and their daughter Mrs Katie Armistead) pay Mr Parsons a total of £22,000 in damages for defamation and harassment, together with his legal costs.

Mr Parsons engaged in pre-action correspondence with the family in 2021, having received denials of responsibility and assurances that the Garnetts would 'vigorously defend' any claim. Mr Parsons issued proceedings in February 2022. Despite asserting in correspondence that they 'look forward to their day in court', the defendants failed to acknowledge service or file a defence: this failure permitted Mr Parsons to apply for not only judgment in default but also remedies under the summary disposal procedure in ss. 8-9 of the Defamation Act 1996 – in particular, a declaration of falsity, to provide Mr Parsons with the vindication which would not be provided by a simple judgment in default. In response the defendants initially stated intent to file for relief from sanctions and permission to file a defence, and indeed prepared a draft defence, but ultimately chose to file neither, and instead requested the court to reject Mr Parsons' application for judgment in default, on the basis that aspects of the (undefended) claim were unreal or extravagant. Mrs Justice Collins Rice did not agree with these submissions, was untroubled by the anonymous nature of the letters or questions around joint publication, and gave judgment in Mr Parsons' favour.

Other claims relating to the underlying events of this matter are still proceeding, but the judgment last week represents both vindication for Mr Parsons and a clear set of guiding principles for how the court will handle such campaigns and similar conduct.

Mr Parsons was represented by [Nigel Tait](#), [Oliver Cox](#) and [James Watkins](#) of Carter-Ruck, and [William McCormick KC](#) of Selborne Chambers.

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