



Neutral Citation Number: [2020] EWHC 365 (QB)

Case No: QB-2018-006123

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS LIST

Royal Courts of Justice
Strand, London, WC2A 2LL

Date: 21/02/2020

Before :

MR JUSTICE NICOL

Between :

- (1) **Dr Neil Hathi**
- (2) **Mrs Meenaxi Hathi**
- (3) **Dr Sunil Hathi**

Claimant

- and -

- (1) **News Corp UK and Ireland Ltd**
- (2) **Associated Newspapers Ltd**

Defendants

David Glen (instructed by **ACK Media Law**) for the **2nd Defendant**
Neil Hathi in person for the **Claimants**

Hearing date: 12th February 2020

Approved Judgment

I direct that pursuant to CPR PD 39A para 6.1 no official shorthand note shall be taken of this Judgment and that copies of this version as handed down may be treated as authentic.

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MR JUSTICE NICOL

Mr Justice Nicol :

1. This is the trial of a preliminary issue, namely the meaning of an article published in 'Mail Online' which the Claimants allege defames them.
2. The Claimants are the owners of 140 Winchester Avenue London NW9 9TD ('the house').
3. The 1st Defendant is alleged to be the publisher of the 'Sun'. The 2nd Defendant is the publisher of an online newspaper, 'Mail Online'.
4. On 22nd September 2017, the 1st Defendant allegedly published an article in the 'Sun' under the headline 'Medics own pad that houses 35. They live in £1,500,000 home nearby.'
5. On 21st September 2017 the 2nd Defendant published an article in 'Mail Online' under the headline 'Revealed: Landlords of cramped terrace house where 35 Eastern Europeans live in squalor are a family of DOCTORS living in nearby £1.5 million home with two Mercedes in the drive.' A copy of the article with paragraph numbers (and letters for the picture captions) added for ease of reference is attached as an annex to this judgment.
6. The proceedings began on 20th September 2018 when the Claimants issued a claim form for libel against the two defendants.
7. Particulars of Claim followed. They were drafted by counsel and verified by each of the Claimants on 13th December 2018. It may be that there was a delay in serving the claim form and particulars of claim because, on 11th January 2019, Master Yoxall extended the time for service of the claim form and the Particulars of Claim until 30th April 2019.
8. The Particulars of Claim were selective in setting out the words complained of. Apart from the headline and sub-headings, reliance is placed on paragraphs 1,4, 5,6,7, Picture Caption A and paragraphs 41 and 45 of the Article.
9. I have said that the 1st Defendant allegedly published the 'Sun'. It seems that on 28th December 2018 the Claimants applied for an order substituting News Group Newspapers Ltd for the 1st Defendant. In consequence of that application, a consent order was made postponing the time for the 2nd Defendant to serve its defence until 14 days after the resolution of the Claimants' substitution application.
10. The present trial has nothing further to do with the article in the 'Sun'.
11. On 6th November 2019 Warby J directed that there should be a trial of a preliminary issue, namely the meaning of the words complained of in the article in 'Mail Online'.
12. The time for service of the Defence (I presume the Defence of the 2nd Defendant) has been extended until 28 days after the trial of the preliminary issue.
13. The Particulars of Claim plead that the words complained had the following natural and ordinary meaning:

‘That there were reasonable grounds to suspect that the Claimants had illegally let their property to up to 35 people, and profited thereby, living an extravagant and luxury lifestyle on the proceeds of their illegality and the squalid conditions and suffering of their tenants.’

14. As I have said, the time for the 2nd Defendant’s defence has been extended, but in their application notice which led to the order for a trial of the preliminary issue, the 2nd Defendant set out the meaning which it alleged that the article bore, namely,

‘The Claimant are the owners of a house which had been illegally rented out to 35 tenants who had been found living in cramped and squalid conditions following a raid on the property by police and officers from Brent Council and there are grounds to investigate whether they knowingly permitted the property to be sublet in this manner and therefore should be prosecuted for housing law offences.’

15. As I have said, the Particulars of Claim have been drafted by counsel, but the Claimants are now representing themselves. Mr Neil Hathi, the 1st Claimant addressed me on their behalf. The 2nd Defendant is represented by Mr David Glen.

16. Nicklin J. has recently summarised the applicable principles for determining meaning in *Koutsogiannis v Random House Group* [2019] EWHC 48, [2020] 4 WLR 25 at [12]. He said,

‘The following key principles can be distilled from the authorities: see eg *Slim v Daily Telegraph Ltd* , at p 175F, *Charleston v News Group Newspapers Ltd* [1995] 2 AC 65 , 70; *Gillick v Brook Advisory Centres* [2001] EWCA Civ 1263 at [7], *Charman v Orion Publishing Co Ltd* [2005] EWHC 2187 (QB) at [8]–[13], *Jeynes v News Magazines Ltd* [2008] EWCA Civ 130 at [14], *Doyle v Smith* [2018] EWHC 2935 (QB) at [54]–[56], *Lord McAlpine of West Green v Bercow* [2013] EWHC 1342 (QB) at [66], *Simpson v MGN Ltd* [2016] EWCA Civ 772; [2016] EMLR 26 , para 15, *Bukovsky v Crown Prosecution Service* [2017] EWCA 1529; [2018] 4 WLR 13 , *Brown v Bower* [2017] EWHC 2637 (QB); [2017] 4 WLR 197 , paras 10–16 and *Sube v News Group Newspapers Ltd* [2018] EWHC 1234 (QB) at [20]:

(i) The governing principle is reasonableness.

(ii) The intention of the publisher is irrelevant.

(iii) The hypothetical reasonable reader is not naïve but he is not unduly suspicious. He can read between the lines. He can read in an implication more readily than a lawyer and may indulge in a certain amount of loose thinking but he must be treated as being a man who is not avid for scandal and someone who does not, and should not, select one bad meaning where other non-defamatory meanings are available. A reader who always adopts a bad meaning where a less serious or non-defamatory meaning is available is not reasonable: s/he is avid for scandal. But always to adopt the less derogatory meaning would also be unreasonable: it would be naïve.

(iv) Over-elaborate analysis should be avoided and the court should certainly not take a too literal approach to the task.

(v) Consequently, a judge providing written reasons for conclusions on meaning should not fall into the trap of conducting too detailed an analysis of the various passages relied on by the respective parties.

(vi) Any meaning that emerges as the produce of some strained, or forced, or utterly unreasonable interpretation should be rejected.

(vii) It follows that it is not enough to say that by some person or another the words might be understood in a defamatory sense.

(viii) The publication must be read as a whole, and any “bane and antidote” taken together. Sometimes, the context will clothe the words in a more serious defamatory meaning (for example the classic “rogues’ gallery” case). In other cases, the context will weaken (even extinguish altogether) the defamatory meaning that the words would bear if they were read in isolation (e.g. bane and antidote cases).

(ix) In order to determine the natural and ordinary meaning of the statement of which the claimant complains, it is necessary to take into account the context in which it appeared and the mode of publication.

(x) No evidence, beyond publication complained of, is admissible in determining the natural and ordinary meaning.

(xi) The hypothetical reader is taken to be representative of those who would read the publication in question. The court can take judicial notice of facts which are common knowledge, but should beware of reliance on impressionistic assessments of the characteristics of a publication's readership.

(xii) Judges should have regard to the impression the article has made upon them themselves in considering what impact it would have made on the hypothetical reasonable reader.

(xiii) In determining the single meaning, the court is free to choose the correct meaning; it is not bound by the meanings advanced by the parties (save that it cannot find a meaning that is more injurious than the claimant's pleaded meaning).’

17. I note that the Claimants argue that there were reasonable grounds to suspect certain matters, while the Defendant argues that there were grounds to investigate. These are references to what defamation practitioners know as the *Chase* level meanings. As Nicklin J. had previously said in *Brown v Bower* [2017] EWHC 2637 (QB), [2017] 4 WLR 197,

‘They [i.e. the *Chase* meanings or levels of meaning] come from the decision of Brooke LJ in *Chase v News Group Newspapers Ltd* [2002] EWCA Civ 1772; [2003] EMLR 11, para 45 in which he identified three types of defamatory allegation: broadly, (1) the claimant is guilty of the act; (2) reasonable grounds to suspect that the claimant is guilty of the act; and (3) grounds to investigate whether the claimant has committed the act. In the lexicon of defamation, these have come to be known as the *Chase* levels. Reflecting the almost infinite

capacity for subtle differences in meaning, they are not a straitjacket forcing the court to select one of these prescribed levels of meaning, but they are a helpful shorthand. In *Charman v Orion Publishing Group Ltd* [2005] EWHC 2187 (QB), for example, Gray J found a meaning of “cogent grounds to suspect” at para 58.’

18. Although the Claimants have been selective in their choice of the paragraphs and picture captions which they say are defamatory of them (as they are entitled to do), the importance of context means that the Defendant is entitled to say that I must have regard to the meaning of the article as a whole. In the course of the hearing before me, Mr Glen sensibly agreed that it would be artificial for me to determine the meaning of (a) the words complained of for the purposes of the Claimant’s pleading and (b) the words complained of in the context of the article as a whole for the purposes of any potential defence. Instead, he agreed that I should simply consider the meaning of the article as a whole.
19. The Claimants wished me to have certain additional documents which were not in the bundle prepared by the 2nd Defendant. Mr Glen opposed their application.
20. As Nicklin J. said in *Kousogiannis* at [12(x)] no evidence is admissible in relation to the meaning of a publication other than the publication itself. Consequently, I agree with Mr Glen that the additional documents to which the Claimants wanted to refer are not admissible for the purposes of the trial which I have to conduct.
21. Litigants in person are not required to provide a skeleton argument, though they may, of course, do so. The Claimants did so and their skeleton argument is dated 11th February 2020. There were attached to it certain documents. I already had the article itself in the trial bundle prepared by the 2nd Defendant and various other documents to which no objection could be, or was, taken. The Claimants wished me to see the article in the coloured version in which it was available online. I have done so, although I have to say that I did not regard the addition of colour greatly affected the meaning which I gave to the article. The other attachments to the Claimants’ skeleton, I have disregarded for the reason just given.
22. The Claimants’ skeleton was directed at two questions: the meaning of the article and whether it was defamatory. The trial which I am conducting is limited to the issue which Warby J. directed, namely the meaning of the article. He did not require me to consider whether the words complained of were defamatory. That issue is now a composite of two matters: the common law and Defamation Act 2013 s.1. There are good reasons for having a trial of a preliminary issue regarding meaning since that is a severable issue where the evidence required is very limited. The issue of whether a publication is defamatory (particularly whether it satisfies the ‘serious harm test’ in s.1 of the 2013 Act) is a more complicated question and may well require evidence. For that reason, it is less common now for there to be a preliminary issue trial which includes this topic. But that’s as may be. The short reason why I am confined at this stage to the issue of the meaning of the article is that is the limit of the order for this trial. That said, Mr Glen accepted that the meaning which the 2nd Defendant argued the article bore was defamatory at common law. For what it is worth, I agree with that concession.
23. In support of the meaning for which the Claimants contend, Mr Hathi made the following submissions.

- i) It was a recurrent theme of the article to contrast the squalor in which the 35 occupants of the house were living and the luxury lifestyle of the Claimants as owners of the property. This theme was reinforced by the pictures and captions which accompanied the article. The reasonable reader was bound to draw the conclusion that the two were connected and the Claimants' lavish lifestyle was funded by the proceeds of renting the house out to such occupants.
 - ii) This was particularly so if a reader glanced casually at the article. Not all readers would read the whole of the article. A large majority would not get to its end.
 - iii) It was not the case, as Mr Glen had contended in his skeleton argument, that half the article was devoted to the Claimants' account (or that of Sudhir Hathi, the father of Neil and Sunil and the ex-husband of Meenaxi Hathi, who managed the property). It was a mistake to concentrate on the text when the pictures and their captions played such a prominent part.
 - iv) The reasonable reader would understand that the Claimants were being 'named and shamed' because there were objective reasons to suspect them of responsibility for the conditions in which the 35 occupants were living. Why else, a reasonable reader would ask, was such prominence being given to the Claimants' lifestyles?
 - v) The article's headline was a ploy to grab the reader's attention. That, too, contrasted the Claimants' valuable home and their ownership of two Mercedes with the cramped conditions in which the 35 occupants were living.
 - vi) The article repeatedly refers to 'rogue landlords'. The reasonable reader would understand this to be a reference to the Claimants as the owners of the house.
 - vii) Caption E (underneath a picture of Sunil Hathi) said 'Holidays: Sudhir Hathi, husband of Meena Hathi, insisted that the family had no knowledge of the home being lived in by 35 people. He insisted that he believed there were only three tenants. Pictured: Sunil Hathi, a 30 year old doctor, enjoying a holiday in the sun.' The word 'insisted' (particularly when repeated) was likely to arouse suspicions in a reader's mind as to the credibility of what is said. Likewise, caption J was beneath a picture of mattresses side by side and some men lying on them. The caption said 'Squeeze: Mr Hathi said the man had asked him if he had anywhere he could live, so he rented out the house privately to him and his partner and a third man. He claimed that the couple went away on holiday and the third man brought in the other tenants without telling anyone.' Mr Hathi submitted that the word 'claimed' again would prompt a question as to the Claimants' credibility, an impression which was reinforced by the obvious cramped conditions in which the occupants were living.
24. Mr Hathi presented his arguments with admirable clarity and in an appropriately concise manner. However, my clear conclusion is that the article had the meaning for which the 2nd Defendant contends. My reasons are as follows:

- i) While I understand Mr Hathi's comment that the whole article would not be read by all readers, the law firmly adopts the position that the article must be read as a whole. This is one aspect of what is called the 'single meaning rule', that is, whereas in ordinary discourse, different readers may take away different meanings from an article, for the purposes of the law of defamation, a single meaning of the words complained of must be determined. Some articles may have multiple meanings or multiple defamatory stings, but neither party contends that is the case here. That said, the law is not oblivious to the fact that different parts of an article may vary in their prominence or importance. Yet, allowing for this my task is still to reach a conclusion on the meaning of the article as a whole – see for instance *Charleston v News Group Newspapers Ltd* [1995] 2 AC 65, especially Lord Bridge at 72-73 and Lord Nicholls at 73-74.
- ii) I agree with Mr Glen that there is a material difference in significance of a publication which, on the one hand, means that there are grounds to investigate and, on the other, a publication which means that there are reasonable grounds to suspect the Claimants of wrongdoing. It is the distinction between *Chase* level 3 and *Chase* level 2 and is a distinction which goes back to *Lewis v Daily Telegraph Ltd* [1964] AC 234 HL. The difference between the two was recognised by Gray J. in *Jameel v Times Newspapers Ltd.* [2003] EWHC 2609 (QB) at [23]-[25] and quoted with approval by the Court of Appeal in *Jameel v Wall Street Journal Europe sprl* [2003] EWCA Civ 1694, [2004] EMLR 6 at [20].
- iii) The headline is intended to grab readers' attention and the pictures play a prominent part in the article, but they are not such as to render immaterial or otiose or even substantially diminish the impact of what is said in the text of the article.
- iv) The text of the article gives a full account of the Claimants' case – namely that Sudhir Hathi managed the property; that he had let the house to a couple whom he knew and a third man; that he believed that they were the only ones living in the house and that he had had no knowledge of the 35 occupants of the house. He was quoted as saying, 'I was not aware there was anybody else there. I was absolutely shocked to find out what happened. It was unbelievable.'
- v) The article makes clear that the Council's investigation is still in progress. The final paragraphs of the article quoted a council spokesman who said,

[44] "We are trying to track down all the middle men involved in this property. We are trying to establish who the landlord was and who was passing money to who.

[45] "We have had prosecutions in the past where both the owner and the manager of a property have been fined.

[46] "It depends on what the contracts say. The onus is usually on the landlord, but there have been cases where a sub-tenant is prosecuted if a landlord does not know what is going on."

- vi) I agree with Mr Glen that the reference to ‘landlord’ in paragraph 44 would not be understood as a reference to the Claimants. After all, paragraph 44 said that the ‘landlord’ was unknown and needed to be traced, whereas the Claimants’ ownership of the property was known. The landlord in that context would have been understood as a reference to the ‘sub-letter’ mentioned in paragraph 46.
- vii) Paragraph 46 also tells the reader that what is important is knowledge of the use to which the property was being put and it had been made clear in the article that the Claimants and Sudhir Hathi were saying that they had been ignorant of what had been going on at the house.
- viii) Paragraph 46, in particular is important since this captured the Claimants’ case: neither they nor Sudhir Hathi knew what was going on: it was the tenant (or one of them) who was responsible. The article concludes by saying that it was this which the Council was investigating.
- ix) The Claimants’ and Sudhir Hathi’s account is set out in considerable detail.
- x) It is important to emphasise that Sudhir Hathi is not one of the Claimants, but it is apparent from the article that he was effectively managing the property and his explanation was therefore important. According to paragraph 8, Sudhir Hathi lived just 400 yards from the property (which is in Queensbury, north London) while the claimants lived ‘in leafy Middlesex’ (caption B).
- xi) The article also provides some support for the Claimants’ (and Sudhir Hathi’s) denial that they knew what was going on at the house: the problems were said to have arisen recently and were out of keeping with how the property had been used previously.
- xii) Overall, I agree with Mr Glen the meaning of the article was that there were grounds for investigation, but not that there were objectively reasonable grounds to suspect that the Claimants had been responsible for infringing housing laws.

Conclusion

25. The article published by the 2nd Defendant meant

The Claimants are the owners of a house which had been illegally rented out to 35 tenants who had been found living in cramped and squalid conditions following a raid on the property by police and officers from Brent Council and there are grounds to investigate whether they knowingly permitted the property to be sublet in this manner and therefore should be prosecuted for housing law offences.’

Annex: Mail Online article of 21st September 2017

Revealed: Landlords of cramped terrace house where 35 Eastern Europeans live in squalor are a family of DOCTORS living in nearby £1.5million home with two Mercedes in the drive

- Thirty five Eastern Europeans were found living in squalid conditions in Brent
- As many as eight slept in a room, squeezed onto bare mattresses on the floor
- The five-bedroom property is owned by Meena Hathi and her two sons Sunil and Neil Hathi, both doctors, MailOnline can reveal
- The Hathi family live in a £1.5 million detached home nine miles away
- The family posted pictures online showing exotic beach and ski holidays
- Police raided the crowded house on Tuesday and Brent council is investigating
- Meena Hathi's husband Sudhir told MailOnline they knew nothing about the men

1. The landlords of a semi-detached house where 35 Eastern European men were found living illegally in squalor are two doctor brothers and their mother who live a luxury lifestyle, MailOnline can reveal.
2. Council officials and police who raided the house on Tuesday were shocked to discover the huge number of tenants sleeping on mattresses which were crammed on to the floor of almost every room.
3. Brent Council has launched an investigation into the landlords of the property in Winchester Avenue, Queensbury, north west [London](#).
4. Council leaders condemned it as a 'shocking' and 'shameful' example of a 'rogue landlord' exploiting needy people.
5. A MailOnline investigation found that the wealthy owners of the house have a family home worth £1.5 million which is in stark contrast to their rented out property.
6. Land Registry records confirm that the squalid house is jointly owned by Neil Hathi, 31, his brother Sunil, 30, who both work as doctors and their mother Meenaxi Hathi.
7. Mrs Hathi lives in a five bedroom detached house in leafy Middlesex, which has two Mercedes cars parked in the driveway.

[photographs of Meena Hathi and Sunil Hathi]

- A. Homeowners:** The landlords of a semi-detached house where 35 men were found living illegally in squalor are two doctor brothers and their mother who live a luxury lifestyle, MailOnline can reveal. Pictured: Owner Meenaxi Hathi, left, and her son Sunil, 30, right.

[photograph of the Claimants' Middlesex home]

- B. Luxury:** The family home where landlord Mrs Hathi lives is a £1.5million detached property in leafy Middlesex, pictured where two luxury Mercedes cars were parked today.

[photograph of raided property]

- C. Cramped:** In stark contrast, is the property owned by the Hathis in Queensbury, north London, pictured, where 35 Eastern Europeans bed down on mattresses in every available room.

[photograph of bedroom inside raided property]

D. Squeeze: Council officials and police who raided the house on Tuesday were shocked to discover the huge number of tenants living there.

8. Her estranged husband Sudhir Hathi, 65, lives in a detached house worth around £900,000 in Beverley Drive, Edgware, just 400 yards from the raided house.
9. He insisted that the family had no knowledge of the home being lived in by so many people.
10. The businessman, who also has a property rental company, said he rented out the house privately to a couple and another man six-weeks ago and believed they were the only ones living there.
11. 'I am very angry with Brent Council for putting out a statement calling me a rogue landlord which is totally out of order,' he said.
12. 'They also said they were trying to trace me which implied I had run away. But if they just looked on the Land Registry they would find out where I lived.
13. 'I am not going to do a runner as I have a house worth a lot of money. I am not trying to run away from anything.'
14. He added that 'to add insult to injury', he had left a phone message and emailed the council official dealing with the case, but nobody had replied to him.
15. 'I am really a victim here. What they are saying is wrong,' he went on.
16. 'We are not into cheap accommodation. It's not our line of business. We do property development, and bigger and better things.
17. 'This house is a decent property. We are not people who would rent out sub standard accommodation.'

[photograph of Sunil Hathi on beach]

E. Holidays: Sudhir Hathi, husband of Meena Hathi, insisted the family had no knowledge of the home being lived in by 35 people. He insisted that he believed there were only three tenants. Pictured: Sunil Hathi, a 30-year-old doctor, enjoying a holiday in the sun

[photograph of Sunil Hathi on balcony]

F. Luxury lifestyle: Sunil, who describes himself on Facebook as a doctor at Bedford Hospital, said he was aware of the raid on his property. His profile shows pictures of him scuba-diving and skiing and posing for photographs in exotic holiday destinations.

[photograph of Sunil Hathi on skiing holiday]

G. Speaking at his family's home, Sunil, pictured on a skiing holiday, said: 'It's probably best to talk to my father if you want to know anything. I don't know anything about it to be honest.'

[photograph of Sunil Hathi scuba-diving]

H. Getaways: Sunil, pictured scuba diving on another holiday, later left the house in one of the Mercedes cars without commenting further on the controversy surrounding his property

18. Mr Hathi had known one of the tenants for around seven years as he had done some DIY work for him, he said.
19. The man asked him if he had anywhere he could live, so he rented out the house privately to him and his partner, and a third man.
20. He claimed that the couple then went away on holiday and the third man in the house brought in the other tenants without telling anyone.
21. Mr Hathi said: 'I was not aware there was anybody else there. I was absolutely shocked to find out what happened. It was unbelievable.'
22. 'A friend called me last night to say he had seen the house on the news. I then looked at the details on the council website.'
23. 'I spoke to the tenant who I know this morning. He was not aware as well. He is now staying with his father who is not well. I can't get hold of the third tenant. His phone is switched off. His van is still outside the house.'
24. Mrs Hathi who said she was separated from her husband and denied any involvement in renting the property. 'It is nothing to do with me,' she said.
25. Their son Sunil, who describes himself on Facebook as a doctor at Bedford Hospital, said he was aware of the raid on his property.
26. Speaking at his family's home, he said: 'It's probably best to talk to my father if you want to know anything. I don't know anything about it to be honest.'
27. He later left the house in one of the Mercedes cars without commenting further.
28. Sunil's Facebook profile shows pictures of him scuba-diving and skiing and posing for photographs in exotic holiday destinations.

[photograph of bed in raided property]

- I. **Mess: His father said he had rented out the house privately to a couple and another man six weeks ago and thought they were the only people there. He said: 'I am very angry with Brent Council for putting out a statement calling me a rogue landlord which is totally out of order'**

[photograph of men lying on mattresses in raided property]

- J. **Squeeze: Mr Hathi said the man had asked him if he had anywhere he could live, so he rented out the house privately to him and his partner, and a third man. He claimed that the couple went away on holiday and the third man brought in the other tenants without telling anyone**

[photograph of garden of raided property]

K. A near neighbour of the house in Queensbury said new tenants arrived a couple of months ago. 'At first there were only a few guys, but then there began to be more. They had a big party in the garden around four to five weeks ago which went on until 3 am on a Sunday night'

[photograph of numerous mattresses in bedroom]

L. The neighbour said: 'Loads of people were drinking and playing loud music, keeping everyone awake. My daughter complained to the council environmental health about the noise.'

[photograph of mattress in kitchen area]

M. A Brent Council spokesman said the raid on the house was carried out at 6am on Tuesday after neighbours complained about overcrowding, anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping

[photograph of driveway to raided property with white van parked]

N. Council leaders condemned it as a 'shocking' and 'shameful' example of a 'rogue landlord' exploiting needy people.

29. MailOnline found at least two Romanian men who spoke very poor English still living in the problem house today.

30. A neighbour said: 'I had no idea how many people were living there – but I knew it was quite a lot. They were going in and out a lot at night.'

31. 'The house was owed by a family who lived there until they sold it about five-or-six years-ago. It was then rented out and some new tenants arrived a couple of months ago.'

32. 'At first there were only a few guys, but then there began to be more. They had a big party in the garden around four to five weeks ago which went on until 3am on a Sunday night.'

33. 'There were loads of people drinking and playing loud music, keeping everyone awake. My daughter complained to the council environmental health about the noise.'

34. 'The next morning there was a man outside the house who said he was an agent looking after it.'

35. 'Then around two-weeks-ago, this tent appeared in the back garden.'

36. A Brent Council spokesman said on Wednesday the raid on the house was carried out at 6am on Tuesday after neighbours complained about overcrowding, anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping.

37. Council enforcement officers and police found the men bedding down on mattresses in every room except the bathrooms.

38. The spokesperson said: 'Eight men were found sleeping in one of the rooms that was decked wall to wall with mattresses.'

39. 'Even the kitchen contained a sleeping area, while another mattress was found laid out under a canopy in the back garden with no protection against the night temperatures.'

[photograph of Meena and Sudhir Hathi]

- O. Property business: Mrs Hathi, who said she was separated from Sudhir, pictured together, denied any involvement in renting out the property. She said: 'It is nothing to do with me.'**

[photograph of Meena Hathi]

- P. Last week, Brent Council voted in new civil penalty measures to fine rogue landlords up to £30,000 for housing law breaches, such as renting out unlicensed properties. A spokesman said : 'We are trying to establish who the landlord was and who was passing money to who.' Pictured: Businesswoman Meenaxi Hathi**

[photograph of Sunil Hathi]

- Q. The house which originally had three bedrooms was recently renovated with a loft extension to create two extra rooms in the attic, making a total of five bedrooms. Pictured: Sunil Hathi**

40. The house which originally had three bedrooms was recently renovated with a loft extension to create two extra rooms in the attic, making a total of five bedrooms.
41. Cllr Harbi Farah, the council's Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform, said: 'Rogue landlords make their money by exploiting people who can least afford it - it's a shameful practice and this is an especially shocking example.'
42. 'Any landlord treating their tenants unfairly should be in notice - we're coming for you.'
43. Last week, Brent Council voted in new civil penalty measures to fine rogue landlords up to £30,000 for housing law breaches, such as renting out unlicensed properties.
44. A spokesman said : 'We are trying to track down all the middle men involved in this property. We are trying to establish who the landlord was and who was passing money to who.'
45. 'We have had prosecutions in the past where both the owner and the manager of a property have been fined.'
46. 'It depends on what the contracts say. The onus is usually on the landlord, but there have been cases where a sub-tenant is prosecuted if a landlord does not know what is going on.'