

Mark Watson

Call 2011



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Mark's practice is divided into business crime, general crime, and regulatory proceedings.

He is regularly instructed in matters involving high-value fraud, cheating the public revenue, money laundering and related dishonesty offences. Mark represented the third Defendant in the largest counterfeit cigarette and hand rolling tobacco prosecution in the United Kingdom to date.

In relation to general crime, Mark is regularly instructed in matters relating to attempted murder, firearms offences, serious drug offences and violence.

In every single case, Mark takes his preparation extremely seriously, and prides himself on his persuasive and engaging advocacy.

Expertise

Crime

Mark's practice includes murder, serious violence, arson, serious drug matters and firearms offences.

Mark is often instructed in cases which involve complicated sources of evidence such as cellsite, forensic analyses and mobile phone material. His meticulous approach is invaluable in these cases.

Notable Crime cases

Operation Brocatelle [2024-2025] Nottingham Crown Court

Mark represented the first Defendant in a 7 week trial. The first Defendant was accused of leading a major drug operation, supplying cannabis and cocaine, and establishing cannabis grows. He possessed a self-loading pistol and involved others in his criminal activities. Police found large quantities of drugs, cash, and weapons linked to him. Junior alone.

Media coverage:

[BBC](#)

[Nottingham Post](#)

[Nottingham post](#)

[Nottingham Post](#)

R v CHARLOTTE BYRON [2024] EWCA Crim 818

The Defendant was initially sentenced to 27 months' imprisonment.

Mark advanced four grounds. These were:

- The sentence was wrong in principle;
- The "starting point" was too high;
- The behaviour of the judge precluded the appellant from having a fair sentencing hearing, and, linked to this;
- A fair minded and informed observer would conclude that there was a real possibility that the judge was biased.

The Court of Appeal highlighted the judge's inappropriate comments about her pregnancy and insufficient consideration of her family circumstances.

The Court of Appeal reduced her sentence to 21 months, suspended for 24 months, due to her lesser involvement, good character, and significant personal mitigation, including her pregnancy and the welfare of her teenage daughter. The Defendant was released immediately following the appeal decision

Operation Orochi [2024] Chelmsford Crown Court.

Mark represented the first Defendant in a trial alleging a wide-ranging and sophisticated drug conspiracy along with possession of firearms and associated ammunition.

The evidence in the case was a combination of expert evidence, phone material, cellsite, and analysis.

It was alleged that the Defendant that Mark represented was one of the controlling minds of the conspiracy which stretched from London across Essex. Junior alone.

Operation Quadrivium [2024] Canterbury Crown Court.

Junior Counsel alone. This was a National Crime Agency investigation into three Lithuanian nationals concerned

in the fraudulent evasion of the prohibition on the importation of over 285 kilos of high purity cocaine into the United Kingdom.

The drugs were secreted within high security doors, and transported by HGV. It was alleged that a false company was set up in order to give this importation the appearance of legitimacy.

The investigation included enquiries in Poland, Lithuania, and Belgium.

Mark represented the first of two Defendants.

After a two week trial, both Defendants were acquitted, with one co-defendant having pleaded guilty at an earlier stage in the proceedings.

Operation Limbas [2024] Truro Crown Court.

Mark was led by Chris Henley KC, who represented the third Defendant in a trial involving allegations of murder, manslaughter, and perverting the course of justice. The trial presented numerous issues in relation to joint enterprise.

Chris and Mark's client was acquitted of murder and manslaughter, but convicted of perverting the course of justice. She received a sentence of 15 months which meant she was immediately released from custody. Led Junior.

Additional Coverage

[The Guardian](#)

[BBC](#)

[Daily Mail](#)

[YouTube](#)

Operation Blanca [2023-2024] Bristol Crown Court.

Mark represented the first Defendant in an extremely large, sophisticated, and wide-ranging conspiracy involving the importation, production and distribution of vast quantities of Spice, along with money laundering offences involving over \$1 million of cryptoassets. Led Junior.

Operation Arbus [2022-2023] Cardiff Crown Court.

Cardiff Crown Court. Combined Operations Wisdom and Arbus into allegations of Kidnap and Blackmail where the victims were caused life changing injuries.

The evidence involves a combination of phone material, cellsite data, ANPR, CCTV and association evidence. The allegations involve offences occurring both in England and Wales. The ongoing trial involves 12 defendants. Trial one took almost four months before the jury were discharged and the Crown had yet to close its case. Through careful argument, the Crown was not allowed to adduce evidence which would have changed the focus of the case to the Defendants' detriment. Led by [Barry Kogan](#).

R v AW & Ors [2021] Inner London Crown Court.

Mark represented the third Defendant, "W", in a trial involving an unusual allegation of kidnapping which began through Instagram. The case had been investigated by two Police forces and led to complex and difficult issues of disclosure and abuse of process. After a trial which lasted for two weeks, W was acquitted of Kidnapping. Junior Alone.

Operation Nines [2021] Wood Green Crown Court.

The Defendant, a well-known Grime artist, was alleged with other to have been involved in a well-established and long-running conspiracy to supply drugs. After legal argument and application, the Defendant was acquitted and a formal verdict of Not Guilty entered when the Crown offered no evidence. Junior alone.

Operation Florida [2021] Newcastle Crown Court.

The Defendant was part of an alleged conspiracy, stretching across the north of England, supplying large quantities of class a drugs and vast sums of money. Led Junior.

Operation Wozzles [2020-21] Harrow Crown Court.

Allegation of large-scale Conspiracy to commit Burglary, heavily reliant upon mobile phone analysis and cellsite evidence. After issues were raised regarding the cellsite evidence and what the Crown's evidence actually could demonstrate, the Crown reviewed its case and offered no evidence. Junior alone.

Operation Avon [2020] Leeds Crown Court.

Allegation of large-scale drugs conspiracy heavily reliant upon mobile phone analysis and cellsite evidence. Represented the second Defendant as Junior alone.

Operation Segal II [2020] Snaresbrook Crown Court.

Mark represented a Defendant in this operation, involving vast quantities of evidence such as ANPR, Mobile phone and DNA analysis, accused of being involved in a large-scale drugs conspiracy in East London. Following the service of an application to dismiss the case drafted by Mark, the Crown conceded, and the Defendant was acquitted of all matters. Junior alone.

Operation Kingmaker [2020] Reading Crown Court.

Mark was instructed as Junior Counsel defending an allegation of Attempted Murder involving firearms. The case involved vast amounts of mobile phone and cellsite analysis. BBC News, Get Reading and Somerset Live.

Business Crime & Fraud

Mark is regularly instructed in matters relating to high value fraud, cheating the revenue, money laundering, and related financial misconduct.

Mark is regularly instructed to advise pre-charge and is experienced in advising in relation to ongoing investigations and LPP-related issues. He has advised individuals in relation to investigations being conducted by the Serious Fraud Office and has experience of advising in relation to interviews under compulsion and the regime under Section 2 of the Criminal Justice Act 1987.

Mark's expertise and experience is invaluable in cases where criminal offending has arisen from taxation disputes with HMRC, and similar, related issues.

Notable Business Crime & Fraud cases

Operation Daylong [2025] Cambridge Crown Court

Leading junior. Mark represented the first Defendant in the trial. The case involved the trade and distribution of illicit cigarettes in the UK, evading Excise Duty, and related Proceeds of Crime Act offences. Key events occurred on 21 August 2019, with significant cash seizures from defendants.

Operation Rupee [2024] – Southwark Crown Court.

Leading Counsel. Operation Rupee was an investigation by HMRC into extensive and sophisticated allegations of money laundering. The defendants were accused of being involved in laundering the proceeds of criminal activities on behalf of Organised Criminal Groups, by using the bank accounts of various private limited companies in order to send monies overseas and out of the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom.

The predicate offences were not known. The inference that the monies involved in this investigation represented the proceeds of criminal activity was based on the sums of money involved, the manner in which it is deposited into various post offices across the UK and the absence of legitimate trading.

Operation Quartz [2023] – Chester Crown Court

Leading Counsel. The Prosecution alleged that five defendants were involved in a highly-organised and ruthless conspiracy to defraud people, by luring them in with an impressive and professional website advertising building services.

Mark's client was the office manager of the business.

It was alleged that this was a fraud from the outset, and that some 22 separate people and families were the victims.

The locations ranged from the North West of England to Buckinghamshire. The fraud commenced in 2016 and ran until 2018, and the investigation commenced soon thereafter.

After a two month trial, the Jury acquitted Mark's client.

Operation Hairball 2 [2020] – Sheffield Crown Court.

Mark represented the third Defendant in a case involving allegations of very high-value evasion of Excise Duty and the distribution of counterfeit cigarettes. This is the largest commercial counterfeit cigarette and hand rolling tobacco production line discovered in the United Kingdom to date. Case prosecuted by HMRC. Junior alone.

R v M & Others [2021-2022] Harrow Crown Court.

Representing the first Defendant in an allegation of conspiracy to commit arson. The Defendant, a restaurant owner, is accused of conspiring with others and engaging them to set his business on fire for him to claim the insurance money. Junior alone. Case ongoing

Op Isidor [2018-2019]

Representing a director of a company in relation to allegations of mortgage fraud and money laundering. The allegations arose from an investigation by Greater Manchester Police's economic crime unit into the activities of an organised group who had been laundering the proceeds of criminal activity, including drug-dealing, tax evasion and mortgage and property fraud. Led junior.

Operation Electron [2019]

Representing a director of a company in relation to allegations of VAT fraud and Fraudulent Trading offences brought by HMRC and Trading Standards relating to the supply of diesel and biodiesel in Sussex. Led Junior. BBC News (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-49786940>), Mynewsdesk (<https://www.mynewsdesk.com/uk/hm-revenue-customs-hmrc/pressreleases/organised-crime-gang-sentenced-for-ps3-dot-5m-fuel-fraud-2925326>), Kent Online (<https://www.kentonline.co.uk/medway/news/bentley-driving-bootleggers-3-5m-fraud-213068/>) and Romford Recorder (<https://www.romfordrecorder.co.uk/news/romford-man-jailed-3-5m-organised-crime-gang-fuel-fraud-3234034>)

Operation Nike [2018] – Manchester Crown Court.

Case involving allegations of money laundering and large cash seizures conducted by officers from HMRC. Junior alone.

R v JP & Others [2018] – Isleworth Crown Court.

Fraud, money laundering and other dishonesty offences – Led junior for General Manager of company used for fraud on the Director's Loan Account and related offences. Junior Alone. Hillingdon & Uxbridge Times (<https://www.hillingdontimes.co.uk/news/16232740.fraud-offences-amounted-six-figure-sum/>) and My London (<https://www.mylondon.news/news/west-london-news/fraudster-gave-himself-bonuses-pay-14670946>)

Criminal Regulatory

Mark is regularly instructed in case prosecuted by Trading Standards, Local Councils, and related agencies, for allegations relating to financial misconduct or similar offences.

Notable Criminal Regulatory cases

Operation Quartz [2023] – Chester Crown Court

Leading Counsel. The Prosecution alleged that five defendants were involved in a highly-organised and ruthless conspiracy to defraud people, by luring them in with an impressive and professional website advertising building services.

Mark's client was the office manager of the business.

It was alleged that this was a fraud from the outset, and that some 22 separate people and families were the victims.

The locations ranged from the North West of England to Buckinghamshire. The fraud commenced in 2016 and ran until 2018, and the investigation commenced soon thereafter.

After a two month trial, the Jury acquitted Mark's client.

London Borough of Hillingdon v GC and AC – Isleworth Crown Court.

Mark is instructed to represent to first Defendant in serious allegations relating to fraudulent trading over a period of three years. Case ongoing.

Operation Electron [2019]

Representing a director of a company in relation to allegations of VAT fraud and Fraudulent Trading offences brought by HMRC and Trading Standards relating to the supply of diesel and biodiesel in Sussex. Led Junior. BBC News (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-49786940>), Mynewsdesk (<https://www.mynewsdesk.com/uk/hm-revenue-customs-hmrc/pressreleases/organised-crime-gang-sentenced-for-ps3-dot-5m-fuel-fraud-2925326>), Kent Online (<https://www.kentononline.co.uk/medway/news/bentley-driving-bootleggers-3-5m-fraud-213068/>) and Romford Recorder

(<https://www.romfordrecorder.co.uk/news/romford-man-jailed-3-5m-organised-crime-gang-fuel-fraud-3234034>)

Asset Forfeiture & Civil Recovery

Mark has experience acting for Defendants in cases involving the seizure and forfeiture of large quantities of cash, brought by HMRC.

Professional Regulation

Mark is regularly instructed to represent registrants throughout all stages of proceedings brought by their professional regulators such as the General Dental Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, Social Work England and the Health and Care Professions Council.

Mark's professional criminal experience is invaluable when dealing with allegations relating to dishonesty and similar misconduct.

Mark is regularly instructed to represent registrants at all stages of proceedings.

Notable Professional Regulation cases

GDC v MB

Mark represented the registrant in proceedings brought by the GDC before the Professional Conduct Committee. Lincolnshire Live (<https://www.lincolnshirelive.co.uk/news/local-news/dishonest-former-boston-dentist-struck-1450599>) and the Lincolnite (<https://thelincolnite.co.uk/2018/04/boston-dentist-struck-off-for-practising-while-uninsured/>).

NMC v X

X was accused of dishonestly taking Oxycodone, belonging to a patient. The case arose after a nurse and another member of staff purported to attend the Medicine Room and saw X, in front of the Controlled Drug cupboard, drinking Oxycodone.

The allegation took place in 2017 and, following an investigation, X was dismissed and unsuccessfully appealed the dismissal. The matter was referred to the NMC in 2018 and proceedings were commenced. Following a 4 day fitness to practice hearing before a panel where the eye-witnesses and investigator gave evidence, X was acquitted of all matters.

Education

- 2009 – BA (Hons) – History
- 2011 – LLB
- 2013 – Wolfson Scholar
- 2020 – Advanced Diploma in Forensic Accounting – level 5.

Memberships

- Advocacy Trainer (Lincoln's Inn)
- Secretary of the Criminal Bar Association (2022 – 2024)
- Fraud Lawyers Association
- Representative advisory member of the UK Government's Independent Review into Disclosure of Unused Material in Criminal Cases and Fraud Offences

Publications

- [It's all relative – Mark Watson considers the decision of the Upper Tribunal in Frensham v Financial Conduct Authority \[2021\] UKUT 222 \(TCC\) and its impact upon the regulation of those in financial services. Has HMRC closed a window but opened a door?](#)
- [Certainly Uncertain: the future of prosecutions in relation to Coronavirus Support Payments](#)
- [Meet the new fraud, same as the old fraud – Mark Watson considers the latest Budget and outlines concerns about the scope for abuse and the response from the Government.](#)
- [Has NatWest awoken a sleeping lion?](#)
- [The SERCO that broke the SFO's back](#)
- [Not in the Line of Duty – Mark Watson considers the judgment in Campbell v CPS \[2020\] EWHC 3868 \(Admin\) and its impact on the offence of assault on an emergency worker.](#)
- ["Whose interpretation is it any way?" – YFLA newsletter February 2021 edition](#)

Appointments

- Sport Resolutions Safeguarding Case Management Panel (SCMP)

Recommendations

2025

Legal 500

Professional Disciplinary and Regulatory Law: *"He knows what is needed, and takes the most pragmatic route to get there."*

Ranked: Tier 4

2024

Legal 500

Professional Disciplinary and Regulatory Law: *'An advocate who clearly has the trust of his client.'*

Ranked: Tier 4

Awards

LEADING JUNIOR

Legal500

UNITED KINGDOM

2025

