

Duel events: September 1790

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The print is called ‘The Tipperary duellists or Margate heroes.’ It shows two men almost touching each other, the one on the left aiming his pistol while the one of the right is about to use the butt of his as a club. A man stands behind and between them; he wears a round hat, long coat, and top-boots. A figure on the right, in regimentals, with a large cocked hat and spurred boots, stands disconsolately with his hand on the hilt of his sword, not looking at the principals. Behind is a low wooden railing. All are dressed as would-be men of fashion, but this is not how a fashionable duel was meant to be fought. This is no gentlemanly encounter, no standing on the spot, aiming and firing, with seconds in attendance to ensure that all is done by the book; this is more disorganized, more like a brawl, which, indeed

as we will see, it ends up being.

At this time, the end of the 18th century, duels were fought to defend reputations and to demonstrate courage. Fighting a duel was a way of confirming status; by agreeing to a duel you implicitly accepted that your opponent was a gentleman since it would be unthinkable to fight a duel with someone who was not. The aim of a duel was not to actually kill your opponent. The number of deaths arising from duels was relatively small, largely and counter-intuitively, as a result of the change from swords to pistols as the weapon of choice.¹ Duelling pistols generally did not have sights, making them difficult to aim and, indeed, it was considered bad form to deliberately aim the pistol; duellists were expected to point their pistols at the ground before firing,

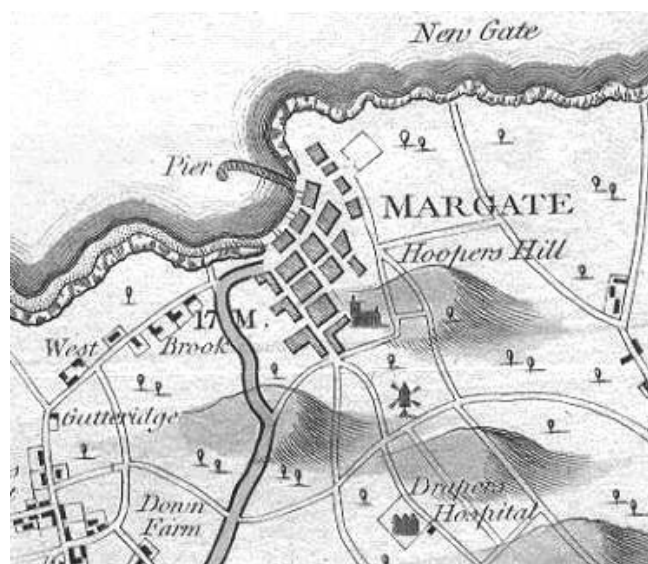
and then to simply raise them and fire immediately after the agreed signal.

Duels were illegal and so were generally fought in private, often in isolated spots on the outskirts of a town or city, but this created a problem; the aim of fighting a duel was a public affirmation of honour, but this would only be achieved if the public knew that the duel had been fought. It was therefore not uncommon for an exchange of letters to appear in the newspapers following a duel, both sides hoping to influence public opinion in their favour.¹ There might also be recourse to the courts as a way of redressing an affront. The duel between the two 'Margate heroes' was not unusual, therefore, in resulting in a flurry of letters to the newspapers and ending up in a court of law. Reading these letters and the court cases gives us an unusual insight into fashionable society in Margate at the end of the eighteenth century.

Duels were most commonly fought between military men, and our two heroes were, indeed, both military men. The military were present in the Isle of Thanet as part of the battle against smuggling along the Kent coast. Regiments of Light Dragoons were often posted on the coast, including at Margate, with the regimental headquarters being in Canterbury. In 1789, the 15th or Kings Light Dragoons were stationed along the coast,² to be replaced in 1790 by the 16th Light Dragoons.³ Regiments of foot were also important in anti-smuggling operations and were also based in Canterbury.⁴ The presence of officers from these regiments must have added much to the gaiety of Margate. Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* thought that nothing could beat an officer dressed in uniform. Although the town she dreamt of was Brighton, the same is likely to have been true of Margate; 'In Lydia's imagination, a visit to Brighton comprised every possibility of earthly happiness. She saw, with the creative eye of fancy, the streets of that gay bathing-place covered with officers. She saw herself the object of tens to scores of them at present unknown.' The army, as well as offering the chance for glory on the battlefield, was attractive to those who thought of the officers' mess as a gentlemen's club, as a place for unrestrained gambling, drinking and womanizing. Gambling in fact could become something of a problem; many officers became involved in gambling rings and found their gambling debts getting out of hand.⁵ All these factors played a role in the duel illustrated in the print of the Margate heroes.

The duel was fought between Lieutenant Patrick Leeson of the 79th Regiment of Foot and Colonel Thomas McCarthy (or MacCarthy, his name being spelt both ways); both were originally from County Tipperary, hence the title of the print.⁶⁻⁹ Around midday on 10th September 1790, Leeson was dinning in Margate at

Mitchener's New Inn on the Parade with Lieut. George Munro of the 16th Light Dragoons and some other friends when they were interrupted by Captain Alexander Malcolm of the 65th Regiment of Foot. Captain Malcolm was carrying a message for Leeson and Munro from McCarthy and a Mr. Massey Stacpoole (or Stackpole, there again seeming to be no agreement as to how his name should be spelt), formerly an officer in the Oxford Blues. McCarthy and Stacpoole were challenging Leeson and Munro to duels that afternoon, the choice of who should fight whom being left to Leeson and Munro to decide. Munro's reply was simple - he refused to fight either of them: "I have throughout declared, from Mr. McCarthy being a stigmatized character.... that I never would give him the meeting of a Gentleman. As to Mr. Stacpoole, I have no quarrel with him, and don't think it incumbent on me to meet him." We will see later why Munro considered McCarthy to be no gentleman. Leeson had the same opinion of McCarthy and would not meet him 'as a gentleman,' but he sent McCarthy the message that, instead, he would walk alone from five o'clock till six that evening, at Hooper's Hill,¹⁰ wearing his sword and carrying a brace of pistols, 'and be ready to defend myself against any assassin that will there attack me.' He was less concerned with Stacpoole, but said that 'he was ready to fight him whenever he thought proper.'



Captain Malcolm duly conveyed these messages to McCarthy and Stacpoole, returning to let Leeson know that an eager McCarthy only waited for a post-chaise to take him to Hooper's Hill where he would also go walking with a brace of pistols. These arrangements rather left Stacpoole out in the cold. With Leeson fighting McCarthy, Munro should have been fighting Stacpoole, but Munro repeated that he had no quarrel with Stacpoole, and so would walk on Hooper's Hill

unarmed 'and that Mr. Stacpoole might shoot him if he thought proper.' Stackpole clearly thought that this would be rather unsporting, telling Captain Malcolm, when the message was passed onto him, that 'he could not think of firing at an unarmed man.'

There is now no way of knowing exactly what happened on Hooper's Hill that afternoon, except that whatever it was, it was pretty undignified. In the version submitted to the newspapers by Munro,⁷ Leeson went walking on Hooper's Hill unaccompanied, 'expecting to meet Mr. McCarthy also alone; but to his great surprise perceived another person with him, wrapped up in a great coat, and a round hat down to his eyes; on which Mr. Leeson, seeing that disguise, immediately exclaimed – Is your name Stacpoole? – Did you come here to assassinate me? – If not, leave the ground, as otherwise, if I fall, and have the power of speech, my last words will accuse you of murder. – Mr. Stacpoole, notwithstanding, declined leaving the ground, and even approached nearer with a brace of loaded pistols in his hands.' Leeson claimed that he was 'still walking when I received the first fire of Mr. McCarthy, and kept on walking whilst I was firing and fired upon.'¹¹ Leeson and McCarthy each fired two pistols, missing both times. But Leeson claimed that McCarthy then fired a third time, presumably using one of pistols that Stacpoole had brought with him. It was then says Leeson that 'I clubbed my pistol, and ran on Mr. McCarthy, who was still armed and facing me. I thought of nothing else than to remove his remaining pistol. It was only when I was collared by Mr. Stacpoole that I turned on him with the butt end of my pistol, and I defied them both to fire at me.'¹¹

In agreement with this version of events, Munro reported that he was walking leisurely up to Hooper's Hill with some friends whilst the duel was taking place: 'Upon the five shots being distinctly heard by all the Gentlemen who were at some distance from the ground I exclaimed to Mr. Fraser who was with me, "Mr. Leeson and Mr. McCarthy have fired five shots; how can that be, when Mr. Leeson had only a brace of pistols?" We then perceived Mr. Stacpoole behind Mr. Leeson, and collaring him, whilst Mr. McCarthy, who luckily for Mr. Leeson, saw us, remained with a loaded pistol in his hand, and close to him. We ran up immediately, disengaged Mr. Leeson, who accused Mr. McCarthy of having fired three pistols to two, which was acknowledged by all the Gentlemen present.'¹² Munro and his friends, including John Silver, a well known surgeon in Margate, sent a signed statement to the newspapers testifying that although 'Mr. McCarthy did deny to have fired three pistols to Mr. Leeson's two, Mr. Leeson had no friend immediately near him; Mr.

McCarthy had a Mr. Stacpoole, who had a brace of pistols loaded, besides two brace which Mr. McCarthy took with him loaded to the field. Mr. Leeson had only one brace. After the firing had ceased and we joined them, satisfied of having heard five fires, Mr. McCarthy was accused by Mr. Leeson of assassination, and firing three pistols to two, besides a reserve of one more, independent of a brace of pistols Stacpoole had. Mr. McCarthy denied this; and upon our telling him we saw a pistol lying in the field, he denied it, and challenged us to find it. We did find a pistol on the ground, which had been discharged; and our opinion on the whole is, that Mr. Leeson was very unfairly met.'

Massey Stacpoole, on behalf of McCarthy, submitted a rather different version of events to the newspapers:¹³ 'The parties having met on the appointed ground, approached each other within the distance of about ten yards; Col. McCarthy then fired. The fire was returned by Capt. Leeson, who then advanced in a circular manner, and, at the distance of about four yards, received the second fire of Col. McCarthy, and afterwards approached close up to him, fired at him, missed him, and in a violent gust of passion, clubbed his pistol at him. Col. McCarthy then jumped back, took another case of pistols, called on Capt. Leeson to keep off, and desired him to charge again if he was not satisfied. This Capt. Leeson declined, and the parties separated without a reconciliation.'⁷

In a later letter to the newspapers⁸ Stacpoole gives further details of his version of events. First, he had understood from Captain Malcolm that Leeson would be accompanied by Munro on Hooper's Hill, so that he went expecting to fight either Leeson or Munro and not as a second to McCarthy; the absence of Munro, he said, left him in a very awkward position: 'The only alternative which remained to me was to quit the ground, or to assume the office of Mediator. It was impossible for a man of any feeling to hesitate, and I therefore immediately chose the latter.' Stacpoole then went on to say that only four pistols were discharged, 'the last of which was fired by Capt. Leeson, at Col. McCarthy, within the distance of half a yard!' following which he, Stacpoole, 'rushed in, at the risk of my life, to prevent his [Leeson] striking Col. McCarthy, and the latter most probably from shooting him in return. – When I afterwards challenged Capt. Leeson to load his pistols, and fight me on the spot, I was again provoked by every opprobrious appellation which language could supply.' Stacpoole then said that while this was going on, Munro and five others came to the ground, and Munro 'proceeded to rail at Mr. McCarthy in the most scurrilous language.' Munro 'insinuated that Mr. McCarthy was cased [wearing protection]; this he refuted by opening

his waistcoat and shirt. He then called on Mr. Munro to fight him; but this gentleman, in an officer-like manner, proposed to *box* it out. . . .’ a version of events dismissed by Munro as being ‘too ridiculous to gain any credit with those that know me.’¹²

Continuing his explanation,⁸ Stacpoole reported that ‘Some countrymen coming up at this time, one of them picked up the empty pistol, which had been fired by Col. McCarthy. Mr. Leeson immediately seized on this opportunity of exciting the mob, by stating this as a *third* pistol which had been fired against him. – Much clamour was raised by this insinuation, and though Mr. McCarthy and I drew our ramrods, and shewed each one brace of pistols still loaded, the tumult was kept up by Capt. Leeson, Mr. Munro, and their associates; and without the protection of his *second* brace of pistols I doubt whether it would have been practicable for him [McCarthy] to regain his carriage in safety.’

To back up his version of events, Stacpoole published an affidavit signed by Samuel Brown, his servant.⁸ Brown said that his master ‘was not in any ways disguised, but was in all respects dressed in his usual manner.’ He also said that only four shots were fired, not five, and that after Leeson’s last shot missed, Leeson ‘clubbed his pistol at Colonel McCarthy, in order . . . to strike him; upon which Colonel McCarthy started back, threw away the two empty pistols, and pulled another case of pistols out of his pocket. . . . Colonel McCarthy did not fire either of them, but called out to Mr. Leeson to stand off, and load again. . . . that by this time his master had got between Colonel McCarthy and Mr. Leeson, and having out his hand to Mr. Leeson’s breast, in order to keep him from rushing at Colonel McCarthy, with his pistol clubbed, as before mentioned; very violent and outrageous language was made use of by Mr. Leeson, who abused Mr. Stacpoole, as well as Colonel McCarthy, in the most scurrilous and opprobrious terms, and repeatedly held the butt end of his pistol to his master’s head; notwithstanding which his master continued, with great temper and coolness, to interpose between Mr. Leeson and Colonel McCarthy, until Mr. Munro and three or four others came up, when great altercation and scurrility ensued . . . , that upon the appearance of some other persons, Mr. Leeson having alleged that three shots had been fired by Colonel McCarthy, and one of the Colonel’s pistols (which he had thrown out of his hands as before mentioned) having been picked up, both Colonel McCarthy and Mr. Stacpoole produced their respective case of pistols, drew their ramrods, and shewed that each pistol was loaded; notwithstanding which the clamour, confusion, and prejudice of the mob, occasioned by the misrepresentation of Mr. Leeson, and further excited by Mr. Munro and others, became

so great that it was impossible to give, or to hear any explanation.’

McCarthy also published an affidavit from Edward Kite,¹⁴ servant to John Benson, keeper of the Royal Hotel in Margate, saying that he had driven McCarthy and Stacpoole in a post-chaise to Hooper’s Hill, that he was present during the duel and that there was only a case of pistols fired by each party, making four shots in all. He also said that ‘had it not been for the interference of Mr. Stacpoole, who ran in between Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Leeson on the firing of the last shot, fatal consequences must have ensued, and this deponent saith, that Mr. Stacpoole received the most scurrilous abuse from Mr. Leeson, which he supposes was in consequence of this interference.’

Munro was not impressed by these affidavits: ‘It will not be by the affidavit of a *menial servant*, who probably could not read what he has sworn, that the world will be deceived.’¹² All this was of course very unsatisfactory. Whatever the truth of the number of shots fired, it seems to have been generally agreed that Leeson was badly done by: ‘Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Stacpoole quitted the field, hissed and reprobated by every gentleman present.’⁷

The print satirising the event, published in London on 19th September, shows McCarthy on the left with Leeson on the right about to use the butt of his pistol as a club. Stacpoole is the figure standing behind and between the duellists, shown in the disguise that he denied wearing. The figure on the right in his regimentals is presumably Munro, looking as if wished he was anywhere but there.

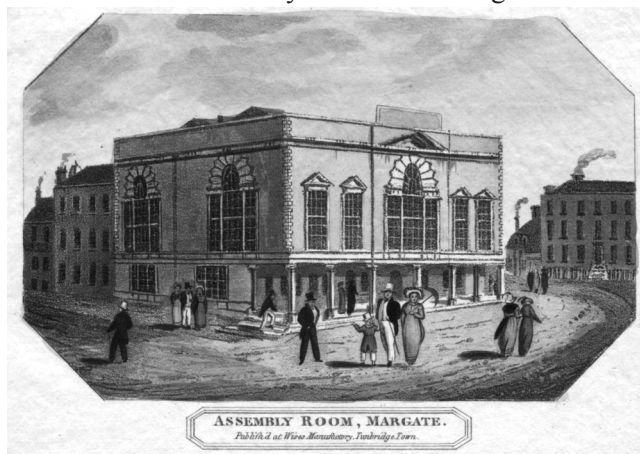
Following the duel, by unfortunate chance, Leeson, Munro and McCarthy were all present that evening at Silver’s Library in Cecil square.^{6,7} Leeson arrived at the library at ten, and, not surprisingly, found the topic of conversation to be that afternoon’s duel. Leeson was happy to give his version of events, and of the events that led up to the duel, of which more later. Unfortunately, all this was said in the hearing of McCarthy, provoking McCarthy to tell the company that he had sent a message to Leeson after the duel saying that if he [Leeson] ‘was not satisfied, he was ready to give him a second meeting, which was, however declined.’ An angry Leeson then struck McCarthy with his stick and a scuffle ensued, in which the pair crashed into a chair and fell struggling onto the floor: ‘it was in that situation, that Mr. McCarthy drew a sword from his cane, with which he was going to stab Mr. Leeson in the side, when Mr. Munro took it from his hands.’ McCarthy was then overpowered by Leeson’s friends, McCarthy receiving several wounds ‘and it was with great difficulty, by the assistance of his friends, that he reached his lodgings in Cecil square.’

Leeson and McCarthy then both made hasty retreats to London.

For a few days the papers reported that McCarthy's life was in danger from the beating he had received in the library. Indeed, on September 16th it was reported that 'there are very little hopes of his recovery from the consequences of the stabs and bruises he received.'¹³ A warrant to arrest Leeson and Munro and the others involved in the scuffle was granted by Sir Sampson Wright, the chief magistrate at Bow Street,¹⁵ but despite a vigilant search by the Bow Street officers, Leeson could not be found; it was suggested that he had fled to County Tipperary, his birthplace.^{13,16} But a few days later, McCarthy had made a remarkable recovery and Leeson had been found and, together with Munro and a Mr. John Buchanan, a tailor, he was brought up on the warrant issued against him at Bow Street, and bailed for £500 and two sureties of £250 each.^{17,18} Not to be outdone, Leeson had likewise taken out a warrant against McCarthy, so that McCarthy was also called to Bow Street and was bailed for the same amount. These warrants were settled by mutual agreement without coming to trial¹⁹ but an action by McCarthy against Leeson, Buchanan, Munro and others came up at the Maidstone Assizes in August 1791.²⁰ John Buchanan and Munro were acquitted, and Leeson was fined £30.

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But why did McCarthy and Stacpoole challenge Leeson and Munro to a duel in the first place? To understand that we need to go back to the beginning of September.⁶ A group of officers had established a mess at Benson's Royal Hotel in Margate to which



Benson's Royal Hotel and Assembly Room

Munro, who was quartered in Ramsgate, was invited. He obviously had a good time there, and during a lively and drunken conversation, he talked about an occasion at which he had been present at Drury Lane theatre in London some years earlier, when Leeson had 'pulled McCarthy by the nose' and kicked him around the lobby of the theatre. According to Munro, McCarthy's

response, rather unheroically, was to 'call the Guard to his relief, who took Colonel McCarthy away and left Captain Leeson in triumph.' McCarthy came to hear of this conversation, and took exception to what he saw as a reflection on his 'honour and character,' denying that any such shameful event had ever taken place. He demanded either an apology from Munro or 'satisfaction' for the insult. Munro wrote to McCarthy refusing a duel:¹⁴

'Sir

I have been extremely ill for some days past, otherwise should have wrote you before; men, when drunk, often say things, that when sober they would highly disapprove, this was exactly my case, when I introduced your business, and Leeson's, at Benson's – before your brother, another Gentleman, and an acquaintance of mine, - Mr. Malcolm: since I have been unguarded enough so to express myself, I must now, both in justice to Mr. Leeson (*my particular friend*) and myself, affirm, *that every word I said about your affair with him, is exactly as I represented it* and as he will be here in a few days, if you think it necessary, he will come forward *and avow* what I should not wish, the old business, you seem inclined to bring on the carpet again. My character, Mr. McCarthy is established, and my fighting you, I must confess, I think would not add to its stronger foundation.

I am, Your humble Servant,

MUNRO

Ramsgate, Sept 3, 1790.

Although this letter verged on an apology from Munro to McCarthy, it did not retract the claim that Munro had been present when McCarthy had been shamed by Leeson; Munro's refusal to treat McCarthy as a gentleman and accept the challenge to a duel must also have been a bitter pill for McCarthy to swallow. Indeed, McCarthy was not happy to leave matters as they were. It is at this stage that Massey Stacpoole enters the story. As Massey Stacpoole tells it, he wished to smooth things over between Munro and McCarthy, and, 'having an equal respect for Colonel McCarthy and Lieutenant Munro, I interfered as a friend to both.'⁸ After much toing and froing between Munro and McCarthy, Stacpoole achieved what seemed to be a breakthrough.¹² Munro agreed that Stacpoole should write a short note on his behalf to McCarthy, saying that he 'had no premeditated intention to bring Mr. McCarthy's name forward at Benson's Hotel, and that being in a state of inebriety, I did not recollect what I had said, but that I agreed to withdraw the whole conversation of that evening.'¹² Stacpoole took the note to McCarthy and

McCarthy accepted it as the apology he had been looking for, thanked Stacpoole for his trouble, and considered the whole incident closed. Stacpoole then returned the note to Munro and let him know that all was settled. Praise was heaped on Stacpoole from all sides for his successful mediation. But then it all started to fall apart. The following day (10th September) Munro heard rumours that he [Munro] had made an ‘ample apology’ to McCarthy, which was not how he saw things – he did not consider that he had made an apology at all, certainly not an ample one. He started to have doubts about exactly what message Stacpoole had passed to McCarthy. Munro, together with Leeson and another friend (Mr. Fraser), decided to visit Stacpoole in his lodgings in Margate that afternoon to get to the bottom of it all. Not knowing where he was staying, they were lucky to meet a friend, Captain Malcolm, who was able to take them to Stacpoole’s lodgings.^{12,21} Stacpoole had evidently pushed the boat out the night before, and reports that ‘I was indisposed and had therefore but just arisen. I received the gentlemen with civility, not entertaining a doubt that they were come to hear Mr. Munro repeat his thanks for the accommodation which I had so recently effected.’⁸ But Stacpoole was to be disappointed: Munro wanted to know where the rumour of an apology had come from, and Leeson wanted to know why Stacpoole had involved himself in the affair at all. In Stacpoole’s version of events,⁸ Leeson said to Stacpoole that ‘he considered my interference for so great a scoundrel [McCarthy] as an offence of such a nature, that I may consider myself as insulted by him. He then raised his hand, waved it at me, at the length of my room, and bade me receive that as a blow!’ Stacpoole then said to Munro that he considered him ‘as an accessory to the insult’ he had just received from Leeson and that he therefore ‘called on him...to fight me in half an hour,’ an offer that Munro refused. Whilst continuing to demand satisfaction from Munro, he assured Leeson that ‘if I survived the duel with his friend, I should assuredly give him a meeting.’ Munro, Leeson and Fraser then left. A little later, McCarthy arrived at Stacpoole’s lodgings, and, hearing what had happened, said that he would fight Leeson. Stacpoole and McCarthy finally agreed that they would send a joint challenge to Leeson and Munro, leaving it to them to select who would fight with whom, with the outcome that we already know.

So how could the note written by Stacpoole be interpreted so very differently by Munro and by McCarthy? Munro’s suggestion was that he and McCarthy had actually been looking at two different versions of the note and that Stacpoole had switched between them.^{12,22,23} The note shown by Stacpoole

to McCarthy read: ‘When I introduced Mr. Thomas McCarthy’s name, I do declare I was in a state of inebriety, and I was under a mistake by saying I was present when he received an insult from Col. Leeson – but whether it was so or not, as I have no premeditated intention of offending Mr. McCarthy, as it is already mentioned my being in a state of inebriation, I beg to withdraw the whole conversation of that evening.’⁸ But this was not the note that Munro had agreed with Stacpoole, which, whilst agreeing to withdraw the drunken conversation, insisted that he had been present when McCarthy was insulted by Leeson. Munro had seen Stacpoole put the original note into a sealed envelope, but Munro suggested that Stacpoole had then switched this original note for the different version that had been read by McCarthy; Stacpoole then switched the note back to the original one when he returned it to Munro. Munro suggested that this idea was not farfetched: ‘Men of Mr. Thomas McCarthy’s and Mr. Stacpoole’s description have such abilities, that they could easily slip one paper instead of another, before the eyes of an unsuspecting man, without being discovered.’¹²

Munro had by now completely changed his opinion of Stacpoole:¹² ‘In the first interview I had with Mr. Stacpoole, the appearing warmth of his hypocritical friendship ... led me to believe there was not *a more harmless creature and a better man in the world*. – He left me with these sentiments at Ramsgate, when he set off for Margate, to speak to Mr. Thomas McCarthy; and in quitting the room, he told me that he felt himself exceedingly happy to have had an idea which would put an end to the business without any further explanation; and that if I would agree to withdraw the conversation at Benson’s Hotel, there was no occasion to say one word more about it.’ This brilliant idea of Stacpoole’s was, Munro believed, to use slight of hand to switch between two versions of the note to McCarthy. Munro consequently no longer believed Stacpoole to be a gentleman; indeed he now referred to him as ‘a notorious character.’ He had heard disquieting rumours about Stacpoole’s behaviour as an officer in the Oxford Blues and ‘the manner in which he was dismissed from the Regiment.’ The result was that Munro was not willing to meet Stacpoole ‘as a gentleman.’

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These then were the immediate events that led from the telling of the story of McCarthy’s nose being pulled at the Drury Lane Play house to the challenge from McCarthy and Stacpoole to Leeson and Munro. To understanding the nose-pulling story we need to turn the clock back a further six or seven years. On 10th October 1783 an anonymous and scurrilous article appeared in the Morning Herald.²⁴ The article concerned

an unnamed 'adventurer' who was starting to make his way in London: 'Our hero cannot trace his decent from very high origin! – His father, old Patrick Q---, was a good honest labourer in the silver mines in the county of Tipperary. Young Paddy was a smart lad, and was taken into the family of Mr. Pritty, where he acted occasionally as dog-boy, and whipper-in.' After a variety of jobs 'he entered into the service of Capt. Bayle of the Navy . . . His master was under the necessity of going to Spa [in Germany] on account of his health, and Paddy, like Spado, improved every opportunity of picking up little things on the way; - his abilities soon became notorious, and our youth was once more turned out *sur la pavé*, to shift for himself.' The reference to Spado is likely to be to Posides Spado, a eunuch of the Roman emperor Claudius, who, like other eunuchs in the Roman empire, gained great influence through his position as a chamber servant. Our anonymous author then makes his meaning clearer: 'Paddy was now in the bloom of twenty four – a clever, good-looking fellow, full of flesh and blood, and the very picture of the rosy Goddess of Health – Lord Findlater was at Spa at the time of Paddy's emancipation – he happened to suit *his taste*, and the noble peer retained him in the number of his domestics. To dwell on the *nature* and *variety of his services* in a newspaper, would over-step the bounds of prudence - it is enough that my Lord was *sensible* of them, and that he was so, he convinced the world by purchasing a commission for his *favourite*, who now struts a *gallant Captain!*' Lord James Ogilvy, 7th Earl of Findlater, was a Scottish nobleman who, for 'personal reasons,' chose to live most of his life abroad. An obituary²⁵ describes how, rather late in life he took a wife 'with whom he lived but a short time,' a phrase that helps make clear the nature of Findlater's 'personal reasons' for living in exile.

Leeson easily recognized himself as Paddy. According to his obituary,⁹ Leeson was born in Nenagh in county Tipperary in 1754 into a small farming family: 'the wealth of his family consisted only of a few cows and horses, and a farm, on which three generations had subsisted with peace and competence,' The young Leeson was clearly intelligent and his father wished him to enter the Church but Patrick was more interested in the army. At seventeen he went to London, and studied at Mr. Alexander's academy at Hampstead, and then, with the financial support of 'a Scottish nobleman' [presumably Lord Findlater] he went 'to the celebrated academy of Angers, in France; where he had the double advantage of finishing his military studies, and at the same time of learning the French language, which he spoke, ever after, with fluency.... He was soon after appointed a lieutenant in a regiment of foot, in which he conducted

himself with the propriety of a man who considers the word soldier and gentleman as synonymous terms.' Leeson exchanged his lieutenancy in the 62nd regiment of Foot for a cornetcy²⁶ in the 16th regiment of Light Dragoons in 1782.²⁷

So who was the author of this anonymous article? Leeson quickly came to hear that the information for the piece had been provided by McCarthy although the actual author was a Rev. Dunbar. McCarthy, when challenged by Leeson, apparently denied any involvement, but the Rev. Dunbar admitted that he had been the author, basing the article on a note given to him by McCarthy.^{11,28,29} Leeson demanded to have this note, which Dunbar refused to give him, 'conceiving it to be a point of delicacy and honour.' Leeson then 'insisted on his meeting him the next morning,' a Sunday, in a field near Battersea bridge. Here 'they took their stations at eight yards distance, and Mr. Dunbar received Mr. Leeson's fire; Mr. Dunbar then informed Mr. Leeson that he had not discharged his pistol, and asked him if he was satisfied? – Mr. Leeson, in the most gentleman-like manner, declared that he was entirely so – on which Mr. Dunbar immediately fired his pistol into the air. Mr. Dunbar then produced the facts in Mr. McCarthy's hand-writing, and delivered them to Mr. Leeson, in whose possession they now are.' All this because Dunbar thought he would be labelled a coward if he gave up the note to Dunbar 'before he had received [his] fire.' Presumably with tongue in cheek, the *English Chronicle or Universal Evening Post*³⁰ commented that after the duel 'the Reverend Duellist went to perform divine service at a parish church to which he has been lately appointed curate. In this we think there was nothing wrong; for after trying to take away the life of a fellow creature, nothing can be so proper as to go to prayers, and make our peace with the Deity.'

The day after the duel between Leeson and the Rev. Dunbar, a second duel took place in the same field near Battersea bridge, which was to have much graver results, and an effect on our story.^{11,30} In Leeson's regiment, the 16th Light Regiment of Dragoons, was a 16 year old cornet, George Munro, who, of course, we have already met. Munro was said to have made derogatory remarks about a Mr. Green, a friend of McCarthy. Green challenged Munro to a duel; Munro, being young and inexperienced, asked his fellow officers what he should do; they said he should fight the duel. This he did with fatal results. As described by Leeson,¹¹ 'After the exchange of four shots each, at five yards distance, between each of which an endeavour to extort a written apology from Mr. Munro was attempted, (Mr. Green relying on Mr. Munro's youth and inexperience, but he had too much honour, integrity, and firmness to be

drawn into such a snare,) on the fifth fire (Mr. Munro having first been wounded) Mr. Green received a shot that proved mortal; he lived till the next day, and the last words he uttered were, that he had been milled in the business; that he hoped no prosecution would take place against Mr. Munro, who had acted in the most noble and honourable manner.' Munro remained bitter about what he conceived to be McCarthy's part in these events; in 1790, coming again into contact with McCarthy he said that he 'recollected with horror an unfortunate event in my life of which he was the cause, and which I shall for ever lament.'¹²

With the proof of McCarthy's role in producing the anonymous article in his possession, Leeson went looking for McCarthy, and found him at the Drury Lane theatre. There McCarthy apparently again denied any involvement, and, when challenged to a duel by Leeson, refused. This then led to the infamous nose-pulling. As Leeson described events later,¹¹ he felt that he was 'under the necessity of pulling his nose, and kicking him round the lobby; but this treatment could not rouse his manhood even to an effort of self defence.' McCarthy's explanation, published in letters to the newspapers, was that he could not fight a duel with Leeson, because Leeson, with his humble beginnings, was not a gentleman.^{29,31} To prove the point, McCarthy published several affidavits from people who had known Leeson when he was a servant to John Boyle and to Lord Findlater. McCarthy then brought a legal action against Leeson, for a 'violent assault,' although, as we have seen, in 1790 he was denying that any nose-pulling had ever taken place.^{11,12} The jury awarded him the derisory damages of five pounds. Leeson then brought an action against McCarthy for libel; Leeson was supported by 'many gentlemen of considerable military and personal rank, with the officers of the several corps in which [he] had served.'³² The general view seemed to be: 'let the former part of any man's life be ever so obscure, it is no reason why he should be wantonly insulted.'³³ Leeson was awarded £100 in damages.³² McCarthy was unable to pay these damages and the associated legal costs, and fled to the continent, leaving his friends to pay his debts.^{11,34} In a bizarre twist, following this escape, McCarthy's brother, Dennis McCarthy, was arrested in mistake for him by several of McCarthy's creditors.^{35,36} On hearing of the arrest, Leeson had his attorney lodge a detainer against McCarthy, so that McCarthy would be held in custody until Leeson was paid what he was owed. Unfortunately, Leeson's attorney, after learning that the wrong McCarthy had been arrested, did nothing about it for several days, with the result that Dennis McCarthy remained in jail. Leeson's attorney gave as his reason 'this his client was a violent man and that if

he had discharged him [Dennis McCarthy], he said his client would have shot him.'³⁵ Who exactly was going to be shot, the attorney or Dennis McCarthy, is not clear, but either way it does not paint a very nice picture of Leeson. Dennis McCarthy subsequently brought an action for false imprisonment against Leeson and was awarded damages of £1000.

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Why McCarthy felt that Leeson should be attacked in the newspapers is a mystery. We know very little about McCarthy, except that he claimed to be of the ancient family of McCarthy's of Spring House in the county of Tipperary.⁸ A friend of Leeson's described McCarthy in 1783 as a 'gambling adventurer' and suggested that he 'came under the vagrant act, as I had every reason to believe, he had no visible means of subsistence, or settled place of abode, but depends for his livelihood totally on his success in gambling, and the share he has had meanness enough to take in the wretched wages of prostitution.'³⁷ Leeson also suggested that McCarthy's title of Colonel was an assumed one with no real justification,¹¹ and Munro referred to McCarthy as a 'self created Colonel.'²³ Adopting a title in this way was not that unusual; at Bath, for example, professional gamblers 'were well known to change *mister* into *captain* or *colonel* and one even went as far as to take the title of Baron (Baron Neuman).'³⁸

But if McCarthy was a professional gambler, Leeson was not much better. After rising from his humble beginnings to become an officer in the dragoons, things started to go wrong for him. Quoting his obituary:⁹ 'The gaming table now presented itself in all its seductive charms. He could not resist them; and an almost uninterrupted series of success led him to Newmarket, where his evil genius, in the name of good luck, converted him in a short time into a professed gambler. At one time he had a complete stud at Newmarket; and his famous horse Buffer carried off all the capital plates for three years and upwards. As Leeson was a man of acute discernment, he was soon initiated into all the mysteries of the turf. He was known to all the black legs,³⁹ and consulted by them on every critical occasion.'

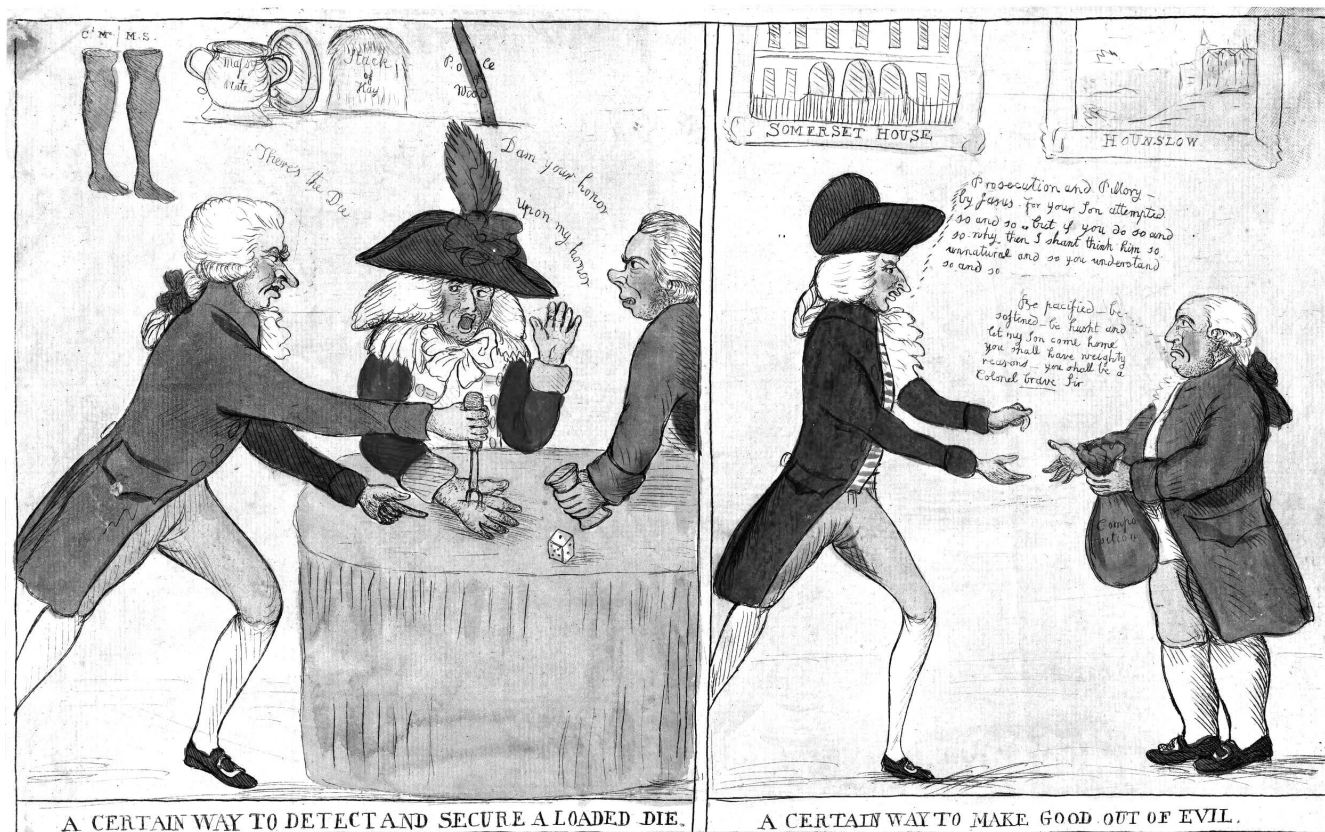
Certainly, by 1789, mention of Leeson and his horses frequently appeared in the sporting paper *World*,⁴⁰ but his interest in gambling started much earlier, as shown by an extraordinary case in 1784. In May of that year, Cornet Duroire of the Horse Guards brought an action for conspiracy to defraud against Leeson, the Rev. John Dunbar and several others.⁴¹ The grounds for the case were described in a letter to the newspapers by Leeson:⁴² 'Being in company with Mr. Duroire, at Wood's Coffee House, about four months ago, our adventures with

women became the subject of conversation. A girl was mentioned with whom we were both acquainted, but in whose affections Mr. Duroure pretended to have a particular interest. The situation and character of the girl rendered this pretension so perfectly ridiculous, that I could not forbear to observe upon it in a manner which alarmed the vanity of Mr. D. who instantly proposed a bet of twenty five pounds that she would prefer him to me, which I accepted. This bet was, at several subsequent meetings, increased till it amounted to upwards of £200. . . . A day being at length fixed for deciding the bet, by a reference to the lady, it was agreed that she should be requested to declare "which of us she would prefer, if both were to offer their services to her for that evening?" The question was accordingly proposed, and her answer was given decisively in my favor.' Duroure refused to pay the debt, instead instituting the case for conspiracy to defraud, which was finally rejected by the court of King's Bench, 'on the principle of an immorality in the transaction, no less of the part of the plaintiff than of the defendant.'⁴³

All in all, at the time of the Margate duel neither Leeson nor McCarthy had unblemished characters. This explains a second print published in London towards the end of October 1790: 'Honourable Situations the Tipperary Duellists or Margate heroes have hitherto

stood in.' The print contains two compartments. The first compartment, labelled 'A CERTAIN WAY TO DETECT AND SECURE A LOADED DIE' clearly relates to McCarthy and Massey Stacpoole. Two men are throwing dice, one seated behind the table, the other standing on the right with a dice box in his hand. A man on the left has pinned the right hand of the man in the centre to the table with a fork, saying 'There's the Die.' The unfortunate man in the centre has raised his left hand and shouts 'Upon my honour' and his opponent says 'Damn your honour.' The man in the centre is wearing a cocked hat and regimentals. Under the picture are the words 'Baron Neuman,' to make it clear to the viewer that he should be thinking of Baron Neuman, the notorious Bath gambler briefly mentioned above. The scene relates to an occasion when a man with whom Baron Neuman was playing cards suspected that the Baron had concealed a card under his hand, and so seized a fork, which was conveniently handy, and thrust it through the Baron's hand, fixing it to the table, exclaiming 'Monsieur Baron, if you have not a card under your hand, I beg your pardon.' However, on releasing the hand, a card was indeed found.⁴⁴

In the top left of the panel are two shaded legs, representing blacklegs, labelled 'Cl. Mc.' and 'M.S.,' for Col. McCarthy and Massey Stacpoole, respectively.



HONORABLE SITUATIONS
THE TIPPERARY DUELLISTS OR MARGATE HEROES HAVE HERETOFORE STOOD IN.
Pub'd by J. Dalton, 11 St. Pauls Church Lane, London. Oct. 20. 1790.

Along the top are a tankard and dish labelled 'Massey Plate,' and two objects labelled 'stack of hay' and 'pole of wood' making a clear reference to Massey Stacpoole. The implication seems to be that Stacpoole, and possible McCarthy, had at some time been caught cheating at dice.

The panel on the right is more obscure. It is labelled 'A CERTAIN WAY TO MAKE GOOD OUT OF EVIL.' The figure on the left, fashionably dressed and wearing a cocked hat, says 'Prosecution and Pillory - by Jasus. For your Son attempted so and so, but if you do so and so, why then I shant think him so unnatural and so you understand so and so.' The less fashionably dressed figure on the right is handing over a bag inscribed 'Composition,' and answers, 'Be pacified - be softened - be husht and let my Son come home you shall have some weighty reasons - you shall be a Colonel brave Sir.' Over the head of the man on the left is a picture of Somerset House and over that of the man on the right is a picture of a large building labelled 'Hounslow,' possibly showing the large gunpowder mills there. Does this show an attempt at blackmail? Blackmail is suggested by the bag labelled composition, since that word can mean an arrangement to pay a sum of money in lieu of some obligation. Do the references to 'your Son' and 'my Son' suggest that the figure on the left is McCarthy, attempting to blackmail Leeson's father on the right? It is clear that the figure on the left is meant to be Irish, but the significance of Somerset House and Hounslow is now probably lost for ever.

McCarthy's eventual fate seems to be unknown, but Leeson's obituary paints a sad picture of his later life.⁹ Despite attempts to reform, Leeson remained addicted to gambling, 'a train of ill luck preyed upon his spirits, soured his temper, and drove him to that last resource of an enfeebled mind — the brandy bottle. As he could not shine in his wonted splendour, he sought the most obscure public houses in the purlieu of St. Giles's, where he used to pass whole nights in the company of his countrymen of the lowest, but industrious class, charmed with their songs and native humour. It is needless to point out the result of such a habit of life — Major Leeson, that was once the soul of whim and gaiety, sunk into a state of stupor and irritability. ... He expired in the midst of a conversation with a few friends, and waved a gentle adieu with his hands, when he found that his tongue could not perform that office.'

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The duel between Leeson and McCarthy dominated conversation in Margate during September 1790. It seems very possible that it was this that encouraged a second duel fought a few days later, a duel with fatal consequences.¹⁸ The duel was between Thomas

Stephens, 24 year old law student at Lincoln's Inn and Anderson, an Attorney, and arose from a trivial incident the previous evening in 'one of the rooms adjoining to the public rooms at Margate,' probably a reference to the Assembly Rooms in Cecil Square.^{45,46} Stephens opened a window behind an 'infirm gentlemen,' a Mr. Butler, who objected to the draught. Stephens then closed the window, but said to Butler that he [Butler] should be 'more cautious of giving an affront,' as being an invalid 'would not always protect him.' Anderson, a friend of Butler, heard this and thought 'this advice to Mr. Butler was rather ill timed, and far from civil.' Stephens accused Anderson of interfering, and Anderson replied that 'he would meet him the next morning at nine o'clock.' Stephens returned with his friend, Captain Campbell, who was to act as his second. Campbell tried to smooth things over, but Stephens refused to let matters drop and even suggested that they 'settle the business immediately, and proposed that pistols might be brought' so that they could 'fight in the room.' Anderson, not surprisingly, laughed at this and said that the proposal was just bravado. Stephens complained that Anderson seemed to be treating him as if he was drunk, and Anderson admitted, that yes, he did think Stephens was drunk. Stephens replied 'Very well, Sir, I shall expect to see you tomorrow, nine o'clock, at Kingsgate.'

The following morning Anderson and his second arrived at Kingsgate in a coracle and pair, and Stephens and his second arrived in a post-chaise from Benson's Royal Hotel.⁴⁷ Whilst the seconds were trying to find a way to end the disagreement, Stephens and Anderson, conversed, over breakfast, 'on various independent topics, such as the weather, &c.' Anderson had agreed with his second that 'he would accede to anything, consistent with his character as a gentleman to avoid coming to extremities,' but Stephens had made it clear to his second that he wanted an apology for the expressions used about him by Anderson. This was the stumbling block; Anderson felt he could not apologize for words he denied having used. The seconds failing to settle, the pistols were loaded, and they all proceeded to the ground, near Mr. Wragg's at Kingsgate.⁴⁸ The seconds again tried to settle matters, but Stephens insisted that Anderson make an apology without, apparently, making it clear exactly what Anderson should apologize for. Anderson then asked Stephens 'to point out what part of his conduct gave him offence, "that if it could be explained he would be happy to do it to his justification."' Stephens complained that Anderson had called him an 'upstart' and Anderson denied this, saying that Stephens 'must be mistaken in supposing he had said so.' Although Stephens' second

thought that this was quite sufficient to end the affair, as Anderson ‘could not make an apology for words he had not used,’ Stephens seemed determined to have a duel, further accusing Anderson of having called him ‘a bravo,’ which Anderson admitted, saying that he thought Stephens’ behaviour had justified it.

So the ground was measured out, at nine paces, and it was agreed that they would fire together at the word of command. Stephens and Anderson took their places; Stephens fired first, and both he and Anderson missed. The two seconds were then about to try again to reach a settlement, but Stephens called out to Anderson ‘Come, Sir, take your other pistol.’ They then both presented, and fired together, Stephens receiving a fatal wound in the head, just having time ‘to take his watch, hold it out to his second, and exclaim – “Here, Campbell, I’m a dead man – take my watch and property” and instantly dropping, breathed his last.’^{49,50}

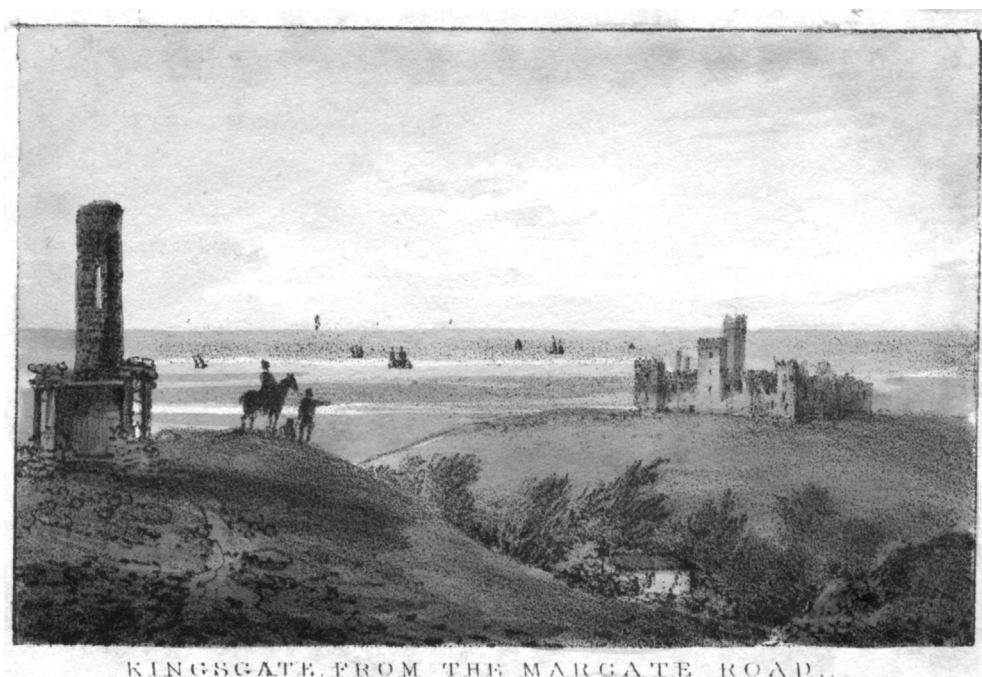
Initial reports said that ‘Mr Anderson and his second sent their servant for a chaise, but an almost immediate alarm being given, they were discovered secreted behind some bushes, and being taken into custody were conveyed to Dover.’⁴⁷ Later reports suggested something more dignified. Anderson’s second was reported to have changed his clothes with his servant and so escaped to France.⁵⁰ Anderson, however, apparently made no attempt to escape and returned to his rooms in Benson’s hotel where he was arrested.⁵¹ An inquest on Stephens at Margate returned a verdict of manslaughter,⁵² and Anderson was bound over to

appear at the Dover sessions in December; Leeson and McCarthy were also bound over to appear at the same sessions. On 23 December, Anderson was acquitted by the jury.⁵³

The death of his son must have been a particularly hard blow for his father, Philip Stephens, since of his three sons, two had already died, one of a fever in India, and another after a fall.⁵⁰ Stephens was buried in a plain brick tomb in St. Johns churchyard, with the inscription:⁴⁶

In memory
of *Thomas Stevens*, Esq.
who died Sept. the 20th, 1790,
aged 24 years.
(He was the only son of Philip Stevens, Esq.
Secretary to the Admiralty;
and was killed in a duel at Kingsgate, near Margate,
at the time above specified, by ——— Anderson, an
attorney in London,
at the second discharge of the pistols.)

Duels were rare in Margate; the two fought in September 1790 were the only ones to receive extensive coverage in the London papers and that between Leeson and McCarthy was the only one to be illustrated in prints on sale in the London print shops. Duels might sometimes have been fought over matters of high importance, but that was not true of either of the Margate duels. In relationship to another duel in which one of the participants died, the *Kentish Chronicle* in



KINGSGATE, FROM THE MARGATE ROAD.

Kingsgate from the Margate Road

1791 commented: ‘The duellike most others, was the consequence of *fear* – the fear of what might be said and thought, if they did not expose their lives to each other.’⁵⁴ Apart from anything else, duels were bad for business: *The Times* reported that ‘Margate, from this circumstance [the Stephens-Anderson duel], and from the tumultuous affair between Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Leeson, that happened but a few days before, is losing its company every hour.’¹⁸

Notes

- 1 Shoemaker, R. B., *Historical Journal*, 2002, Vol. 45, p. 525.
- 2 *Kentish Chronicle*, June 2, 1789.
- 3 *Kentish Chronicle*, September 21, 1790.
- 4 Douch, John. *Rough Men: A history of old-time Kentish smuggling*. Crabwell Publications, Dover, 1985.
- 5 White-Spinner, Barney. *Horse Guards*. Macmillan, London, 2006.
- 6 *The Times*, September 14, 1790.
- 7 *The Times*, September 17, 1790.
- 8 *The Times*, September 20, 1790.
- 9 *Sporting Magazine*, April, 1803, Vol. 22, p. 28.
- 10 Hooper’s Hill was an open space near the Fort.
- 11 *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, September 29, 1790.
- 12 *The Times*, September 29, 1790.
- 13 *The Times*, September 16, 1790.
- 14 *The Times*, September 22, 1790.
- 15 *World*, September 15, 1790.
- 16 *Public Advertiser*, September 16, 1790.
- 17 *London Chronicle*, September 21, 1790.
- 18 *The Times*, September 21, 1790.
- 19 *Kentish Chronicle*, December 14, 1790.
- 20 *The Times*, August 15, 1791.
- 21 *Public Advertiser*, September 22, 1790.
- 22 *The Times*, September 28, 1790.
- 23 *The Times*, October 7, 1790.
- 24 *Morning Herald*, October 10, 1783.
- 25 *European Magazine*, 1811, Vol. 60, p. 475.
- 26 A cornet in the Light Dragoons was a 2nd lieutenant.
- 27 *London Corant Westminster Chronicle and Daily Advertiser*, January 14, 1782.
- 28 *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, October 18, 1783.
- 29 *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, October 23, 1783.
- 30 *English Chronicle or Universal Evening Post*, October 18, 1783.
- 31 *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, October 25, 1783.
- 32 *London Chronicle*, December 4, 1784.
- 33 *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, December 6, 1784.
- 34 *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, March 15, 1784.
- 35 *Whitehall Evening Post*, December 7, 1790.
- 36 *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, January 28, 1791.
- 37 *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, November 4, 1783.
- 38 Bee, John, *The Works of Samuel Foote, Esq.*, Vol. 1, Sherwood, Gilbert and Puper, London, 1830.
- 39 Black legs was a term applied to gamblers, referring to the word ‘rook’, the term used to describe the cheating of a sucker, as in the phrase *to rook a pigeon*.
- 40 *World*, September 11, 25, and 30, 1789.
- 41 *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, May 11, 1784.
- 42 *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, June 23, 1784.
- 43 *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, June 19, 1784.
- 44 *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 1812, Vol. 82, p. 349.
- 45 *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, October 5, 1790.
- 46 Cozens, Z., *A Tour through the Isle of Thanet*, pp. 15, J. Nichols, London, 1793
- 47 *Kentish Chronicle*, September 14, 1790.
- 48 *Public Advertiser*, September 23, 1790.
- 49 *Whitehall Evening Post*, September 21, 1790.
- 50 *London Chronicle*, September 21, 1790.
- 51 *Public Advertiser*, September 24, 1790.
- 52 *Public Advertiser*, September 25, 1790.
- 53 *The Times*, December 3 and 23, 1790.
- 54 *Kentish Chronicle*, July 15, 1791.