

Freemans Journal

Thursday 14th October 1830

AFFAIR OF HONOUR

We mentioned, in the FREEMAN of yesterday, that O’Gorman Mahon M.P., and Mr. J.J. Murphy had left Dublin on the preceding day, accompanied by their respective friends, for the purpose of settling a dispute by exchange of shots. The parties proceeded to Kildare, having been hunted by the police, O’Gorman Mahon could not fight near the city, or within the Dublin Police District, and met on the Curragh at two o’clock yesterday.

O’Gorman Mahon was seconded by Mr. J.R. Ottiwell and Mr. Murphy, by Sir John M. Doyle, K.C.B. The former gentleman was accompanied by several friends, and the latter by Mr. Costello, Mr. Dunn, and Surgeon Mitchell. The ground, 12 paces, being measured, the principals took their stand, and the signal being immediately given, they fired almost at the same moment.

O’Gorman Mahon’s ball hit Mr. Murphy on the ring finger of his right hand. This was very fortunate under the circumstances, as the bullet was diverted from its course to the body by a ring which Mr. Murphy wore, and which was completely shattered. We regret to say Mr. Murphy’s finger is severely injured.

It is gratifying to us to be enabled to state that the parties became reconciled before they quitted the ground. Both gentlemen evinced great coolness. We have been informed on the best authority that Mr. Murphy had not intended to fire at his antagonist.





Vincent Brooks Day & Son, Lith.

'Mhagthamma'

Charles James Patrick Mahon (17 March 1800 – 15 June 1891)

Known as the **O'Gorman Mahon** or **James Patrick Mahon**, was an Irish nationalist journalist, barrister, parliamentarian, and international mercenary.

Mahon, the eldest of four children, was born into a prominent Roman Catholic family in Ennis, County Clare. His father was Patrick Mahon of New Park, who took part in the Rebellion of 1798; his mother Barbara, a considerable heiress, was the only daughter of James O'Gorman of Ennis. Mahon studied at Clongowes Wood College, where he was one of the earliest pupils, and at Trinity College Dublin, where he took his BA in 1822 and his MA in law in 1832. Until his father's death in 1821, he was sent an annual allowance of £500; afterwards, he inherited half the family property, also becoming a magistrate for Clare. He soon adopted the title "the O'Gorman Mahon", O'Gorman being his mother's maiden name. This was in part intended to give the false impression that he was the head of the Mahon clan.

In 1830, Mahon married Christina, the daughter of John O'Brien of Dublin. She was an heiress and had property valued at £60,000 in her own right, which gave Mahon the resources to seek election to parliament. The couple spent little time together, and she died apart from him in Paris in 1877. They had one son, St John, who died in 1883.

Born in a time when duelling was relatively common in Ireland, Mahon later claimed to have instigated and fought thirteen duels; and in these, to have been injured in six but to have drawn blood in seven. These enhanced the tall, striking Mahon's dashing reputation.



A brace of duelling pistols, manufactured by James Purdey & Sons, London.



Pistols at dawn

Duelling in the Victorian age

How to have a Victorian duel

1. Find an enemy

Common as quarrels are, finding an opponent is tricky. Challenge the wrong man and, as a Colonel Lumley discovered in 1868, he will turn the matter over to his solicitor. Instead of gaining satisfaction, you will be derided in open court as a modern-day Don Quixote of dubious sanity. An aristocratic opponent, particularly one with links to the army or politics, is more reliable.

2. Select a weapon

If you are a skilled swordsman, or a reckless youth like the son of the American ambassador to Spain, you can elect to duel with short swords. But you are much more likely to use pistols.

Your weapon will be very similar to the purpose-built flintlock, single-shot duelling pistols used since the early 18th century. Hair triggers and rifled barrels to improve accuracy are frowned upon.

3. Find a friend

The difference between a duel and a brawl is procedure. As such, finding a good second is essential. He will request an apology for you and then issue a challenge. At the duel, he will measure the pre-agreed 10 to 15 paces, load your pistol and, if you are lucky, connive with the other second to load it with clay balls. But remember to bring a surgeon too.

4. Choose a location

The key attributes of a good duelling site are that it is flat, open, relatively unpopulated and yet accessible. England's many grassy commons might be tempting but, as the Earl of Cardigan found out when he was arrested post-duel in Wimbledon Common in 1840 by a local miller, they are also accessible to officious Englishmen. A lonely beach in Belgium is your best bet.

5. Flee the scene

If your opponent is fatally wounded, you have a poor chance of escaping British law. A Lieutenant Hawkey fled from Southsea beach to France after fatally wounding his opponent in an 1845 duel, but ultimately returned to face justice rather than spend his life in exile. Otherwise, you have the option of keeping quiet – but you will be in good company if you succumb to the temptation of boasting about your brush with death.

Dr Margery Masterson is a teaching fellow at the University of Bristol, who is currently researching violence in the Victorian era.

Link: <https://www.historyextra.com/period/victorian/pistols-at-dawn-duelling-in-the-victorian-age/>