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**Jevon Whitby**

**'He Has Behaved Well?' Seconds, Honour, and  
the Subversion of Duelling by English Society,  
1798-1845**

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# 'He Has Behaved Well?' Seconds, Honour, and the Subversion of Duelling by English Society, 1798-1845.

Jevon Whitby



The Seconds observe in *Squire Boru giving Old Tarpaulin a Quietus in a Duel* by J. Marks.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Marks, re-printed hand coloured aqua-taint of 'Squire Boru giving Old Tarpaulin a Quietus in a Duel', in Anonymous Caricature collection by 'A. Real-Paddy', *Real-Life in Ireland or the Day and Night Scenes, Rovings, Rambles and Sprees, bulls, blunder, bodderation and blarney, of Brian Boru. Esq and his Elegant Friend Sir Shawn O'Dogherty*, (London, 1822).

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## Introduction

*'At a late duel, the parties discharged their pistols without effect, whereupon one of the seconds proposed that the combatants should shake hands. To this the other second objected, as unnecessary, "For," said he, "their hands have been shaking this half hour!"'*<sup>2</sup>

'The Seconds then interfered, and a reconciliation took place.'<sup>3</sup> Thus ended a typical newspaper's report of a duel between two local men of Bristol in 1827. The practice of pistol duelling required each man, or 'principal', to select a 'friend' or 'Second'<sup>4</sup> to orchestrate the encounter and safeguard both his life and reputation on the field of honour. In this case, both 'Seconds' were able to resolve their friends' duel without fatality.

Despite our often romanticised notion of duelling, the male character undoubtedly went through a radical change during the first half of the nineteenth century. Some 'gentlemen' still expected to settle their irreconcilable differences with a stylised 'pistols-at-dawn' duel, but such ritualistic displays of personal courage were rarer; 'satisfaction' demanding less violence. History has understandably analysed such dramatic 'affairs of honour' with sparse regard for the 'Second,' the chosen background figures who organised, negotiated, witnessed, and often prevented these fatal encounters in the twilight years of male duelling culture.<sup>5</sup> Duelling itself had disappeared in England by 1850. Historians have traditionally analysed the decline of the duel from the perspective of the duellist, reasoning that duelling as an institution had become a legally dubious and socially divisive class issue,<sup>6</sup> as R.B Shoemaker and D.T Andrew reasoned,<sup>7</sup> or morally distasteful as S. Banks and V.G Kiernan claimed; undermined by 'functionalist mentalities' about

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2 British Library - British Newspapers 1800-1900 (Hereafter 'BLN'): 'Shaking Hands', *The Bristol Mercury*, 21<sup>st</sup> April. 1832. <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

3 BLN: 'Duel', *The Bristol Mercury*, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1827.

4 S. Banks, 'Dangerous Friends: The Second and the Later English Duel', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32.1 (2009), p. 100.

5 V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History – Honour in the Reign of Aristocracy*, (Oxford, 1988), pp. 138-9.

6 R. B. Shoemaker, 'The Taming of the Duel: Masculinity, Honour and Ritual Violence in London, 1660-1800', *The Historical Journal*, 45.3 (2002), p. 545.

7 D. T. Andrew, 'The Code of Honour and its Critics: The Opposition to Duelling in England, 1700-1850', *Social History*, 5.3 (1980), p. 412.

masculine civility.<sup>8</sup> This dissertation will take an alternative approach: to examine the duel from the positions and motives of the often forgotten 'Seconds,' their function as associates of the duellist, and whether their individual resolutions of personal duels collectively helped to undermine this sometimes dangerous social convention.

Studying the 'Second' presents two opportunities, firstly: an added clarity of historical interpretation. As S. Banks acknowledged, historians have tended to become 'mesmerised' with the romanticised notion of an heroic duellist, such that one now searches the historiography almost 'in vain' for work that considers the Second anything other than 'a mere shadow or agent of his principal.'<sup>9</sup> By straying from the traditional 'duellist-centric' approach stubbornly followed by past 'history of duelling' works, which paradoxically treat duellists as lone participants in a grand social convention,<sup>10</sup> it is possible to escape fanciful narrative. Instead, this work can present a far less emotional insight into many 'insignificant' duels, 'messy' arguments and how, contrary to popular myth, gentlemen were often reconciled peacefully by their friends. In addition, such an approach allows us a powerful new research angle: an examination of this dangerous practice from the quiet 'middle-ground' of English public opinion. By exploring the motives and actions of men who were only indirectly 'involved' in duels, neither as duellists themselves nor as part of (primarily Christian) abolitionist movements, this study is granted an insight into the tacit *de facto* 'toleration' of duelling that was so prevalent in nineteenth century English society as a whole.

Methodologically, this dissertation will use research on thirty-two known pistol duels which took place in the South-West of England between 1805 and 1845, with findings drawn from newspaper, legal and personal reports. Duels were far more common in large cities, in Ireland and surrounding army barracks or naval ports,<sup>11</sup> and as a result most seconds were usually only referred to briefly even in the most newsworthy duel reports; usually by a title such as 'friend', 'associate' or 'gentleman', if at all. By contrast, a duel in provincial England was a more unusual scandal which produced greater levels of

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8 S. Banks, 'Killing with Courtesy: The English Duellist, 1785-1845', *Journal of British Studies*, 47.3 (2008), p. 529.

9 S. Banks, 'Dangerous Friends', p. 87.

10 R. Baldick, *The Duel – A History of Duelling*, (London, 1965), p. 7.

11 S. Banks, *A Polite Exchange of Bullets – The Duel and the English Gentleman, 1750-1850*, (Woodbridge, 2010), p. 114.

public interest and more informative reporting. Therefore, the comparative 'rarity' of duelling in the South-West bequeaths a crucial advantage to this study: the additional level of local detail required to draw extensive conclusions about the actions of otherwise obscure men. Indeed the Second's actions were often disproportionately significant. As research herein will show, some Seconds took to subverting the process of the duel almost entirely to ensure their friend's honour, safety, innocence, or some combination of these. Inventive attempts were made (with varying degrees of humour, extreme and success) to reconcile the parties either on or off the field: duelling rules were stretched to the ludicrous extent of caution, legal authorities were covertly tipped off, duellists were emotionally blackmailed into forced apologies, or pistols tampered with,<sup>12</sup> all until some non-fatal resolution, or 'éclaircissement,' was possible.<sup>13</sup> A chronological progression is clear also: between 1805 and 1825, a mere 8% of studied duels were resolved without bloodshed, between 1825 and 1845 this figure rises to 70%;<sup>14</sup> this dissertation will examine therefore whether the Second was increasingly a 'conciliatory' influence.

If such men could sometimes secretly constitute the 'difference between life and death,' as R. Hopton was first to suggest in 2007,<sup>15</sup> then we must determine who acted as a 'Second,' their motivations in doing so, and how Seconds carried out or subverted the process of the duel. Thus the structure of this dissertation is a very specific one: Chapter one, 'Conceptions of the Second,' will build a model of the 'ideal' duellist's Second from the selection principles advocated by duelling codes and manuals, with which duellists were expected to choose an appropriate friend. Chapter two, 'Resolving a Duel,' will separate this model of the 'ideal Second' from the reality; exploring how Seconds are shown to have acted by the historical record, and to question the notion that all Seconds had ideologically consistent agendas when undertaking the role. Accordingly, Chapter 3: 'Subverting the Duel' will explore whether a Second could undermine a duel, and if collectively Seconds might have influenced the chronological regression of duelling. Every Second was undertaking a dangerous criminal activity; some even considered that 'half of deaths which originate from duels may be attributed to villany [sic] or want of

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12 B. Holland, *Gentlemen's Blood – A History of Duelling from Swords at Dawn to Pistols at Dusk*, (New York, 2003), p. 46.

13 R. B. Shoemaker, 'The Taming of the Duel', p. 535.

14 'BLN' : Figures researched from reports in *The Bristol Mercury*, *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, *Woolmer's Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, *Western Times*, (1805-1845.) (Hereafter: 'BM/EFP/WEPG/RCG/WT/1805-1845.'). <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

15 R. Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling*, (London, 2011), p. 52.

judgement in the Seconds.'<sup>16</sup> With the duel falling from the height of fashion to a lowly crime during this period, who should one choose to ensure victory in 1800, a strong testimony in 1820, or secrecy in 1840? Was it perhaps the choice of friend that defined the severity of the duel instead? What, in short, was a Second 'for?'

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<sup>16</sup> S. Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling with Rules to be Observed by Every Particular Respecting it*, (London, 1790), p. 61.

# Chapter 1

## Conceptions of the Second

*'Procure one to attend you, whose honour, integrity, friendship, and judgement may be relied on; who in the first place will not urge you to throw away your life; nor, in the next, by pressing to have the affair made up, induce you to recede any point that may afterwards injure your character.'* 17

Upon a challenge, each duellist was required to select a 'Second' who would act on his behalf for the duration of the 'affair of honour.' The choice was a critical one: the appointed friend would organise every aspect of the dispute, arranging a time, a surgeon, the location and weaponry. Seconds would be the bearers of all letters, enforcers of formal rules and 'fair play;' would act as character witnesses, and would attempt to protect secrecy, honour and life: the responsibilities were great. Unsurprisingly therefore many authors of guides to duelling, such as A. Bosquett and S. Stanton, agonised on the importance of 'selection.'<sup>18</sup> It was paramount to choose the appropriate 'friend' or as Lieutenant S. Stanton chose to phrase it in his pocket 'handbook' for duellists: 'Nothing... is of more consequence than the choice.'<sup>19</sup> Yet how should one choose?

Historians have largely ignored the issue 'who' the Second was. Perhaps for this reason, our modern conception what a Second was 'for' varies widely. V. G. Kiernan considered such men to bear a 'distinct resemblance to lawyers,'<sup>20</sup> first and foremost an advocate. More recent work has emphasised the symbolic; a personal, almost 'emotional' nature to the choice of friend: S. Banks claimed the Second was a moderating 'safety valve,'<sup>21</sup> a confidant to whom the protagonist could express his troubles. R. Hopton expressed arguably the most artful understanding of the 'selection' process, seeing the Second as a 'macabre version of the... best man at a wedding.'<sup>22</sup>

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17 S. Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling*, p. 61.

18 A. Bosquett, *The Young Man of Honour's Vade Mecum – A Treatise on Duelling*, (London, 1817).

19 S. Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling*, p. 59.

20 V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History*, p. 139.

21 S. Banks, 'Dangerous Friends', p. 101.

22 R. Baldick, *The Duel – A History of Duelling*, p. 64.

It was of course an evolving role, distantly derived from the violent early days of European sword-duelling in which a duellist would, for what was essentially a group brawl, attend with 'Seconds,' 'Thirds,' 'Fourths,' or as many armed colleagues as one could muster to join the fight. As F. Billacois showed, continental European Seconds could even be 'chosen' by drawing lots, or in some cases, men merely asked an impartial stranger in the street.<sup>23</sup> By the nineteenth century however, each 'Second' was generally acknowledged as a solitary non-combatant, not least because wearing swords had gradually gone out of fashion by the 1790s (there was not a single 'sword-duel' reported from the South-West during the studied period)<sup>24</sup> and the pistols that replaced them required watchful umpiring.<sup>25</sup> Henceforth Seconds were carefully 'selected' as the best coordinators for the more ritualistic 'English duel' and thus in order to establish what one's chosen friend was 'for' during this period of English history, it is necessary to examine how authorities on duelling argued one should select the appropriate 'Second.'

\* \* \*

'Handbooks' containing advice for duellists were common during this period, and usually designed to fit inside either a case of pistols or one's pocket for ease of use. Such works contained rules, sample letters, diagrams demonstrating how to fire a flintlock pistol, and in most cases: advice on how to choose a friend to accompany one to a duel. Men were commonly instructed to seek out a 'model' Second, one with particular qualities, although opinion differed greatly as to what these qualities were. Most obviously, every Second needed organisational skill for what Lieutenant S. Stanton's 1790 handbook described as 'the whole management and weight of the business.'<sup>26</sup> Seconds needed to bear letters of challenge (or apology) and secretly arrange a private location.<sup>27</sup> When Leader of the Opposition, George Tierney, challenged Prime Minister Pitt to a duel in 1798 the two never needed to meet in person. In line with ordinary procedure, their Seconds coordinated the entire affair: Tierney's Second bore a letter to Pitt, which included the words: 'Mr Walpole alas has the good will to be the messenger of this, with communication with any

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23 F. Billacois, *The Duel: Its Rise and Fall in Early Modern France*, (New Haven, 1990), p. 66.

24 'BM/EFP/WEFG/RCG/WT/1805-1845.'

25 R. Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling*, p. 214.

26 S. Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling*, p. 59.

27 R. Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling*, pp. 60-1.

friend you may be pleased to name for the purpose of quickly arranging this.'<sup>28</sup> Mr Walforte and Mr Ryder then arranged for a doctor and a brace of duelling pistols to be present in a secluded spot on Putney Heath, and Mr Ryder even received said pistols as a gift for his capable management of the arrangements.<sup>29</sup> Unofficially therefore, at least a modicum of practicality and intelligence was necessary for many of the Second's logistical duties. Illegality necessitated a 'secluded' spot where duellists would not be interrupted, whilst a Second was also supposed to enforce an 'interval' between challenge and duel, such that aggrieved parties could analyse the dispute, prepare, sober-up or apologise. Less euphemistically than one might expect, one anonymous army officer believed a competent Second was one who would not allow his friend to 'stagger from the bottle to the field.'<sup>30</sup>

However books such as that of A. Bosquett in 1817 placed more emphasis on the 'honour' of a perfect Second. An 'ideal' friend was the man of the highest integrity: the one who would ensure that the duel was fought with 'every degree of propriety.'<sup>31</sup> Since men risked death to prove they were 'honourable,' both Seconds would be required to 'witness' their principal's good behaviour; to act (as S. Banks has labelled it) as an 'honour-critic.'<sup>32</sup> It was common for a duellist to be described as 'entrusting his honour to his Second,'<sup>33</sup> and when A. Bosquett cited his own experience as a Second in twenty-five duels, his famous boast was that 'Life or honour was never lost in my hands.'<sup>34</sup> To maintain the reputation and good conduct of duellists, Seconds would need to calmly, impartially, and reliably enforce the strict rules required for 'fair-play.' Duelling codes, such as the 1777 Irish Code Duello (a declaration of formal rules which was published widely in England,) stipulated for example that both Seconds should examine the pistols to ensure that both were equal and smooth-bore: 'Rule 18 - The Seconds load in the presence of each other, unless they give their mutual honours that they have charged smooth and single.'<sup>35</sup> Seconds would also give appropriate firing signals, observe proceedings, and generally

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<sup>28</sup> Exeter, Devon Records Office, (hereafter 'DRO'): MS 152M/C/1798/OZ/11, 'George Tierney, William Pitt – Challenging Pitt to a duel after a charge of obstructing H.M Government – Political and Personal Papers of Henry Addington - 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Sidmouth', fo. 1v.

<sup>29</sup> R. Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling*, p. 220.

<sup>30</sup> Anon., *General Rules and Instructions for all Seconds in Duels*, (Whitehaven, 1793), p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> S. Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling*, p. 62.

<sup>32</sup> S. Banks, 'Dangerous Friends', p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History*, p. 138.

<sup>34</sup> S. Banks, 'Dangerous Friends', p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> C. Ryan, J. Keog and A. Bodkin, *The Irish Code Duello*, (Galway, 1777) in J. L. Wilson, *The Code of Honour*, (1838), p. 45.

ensure that later on, it could be known publicly that their principals fought 'honourably' on polite and fair terms.

In theory, neither man should have a dishonourable 'advantage,' such that Seconds would ensure that the sun shone perpendicular to each man's line of sight and that the ground was even.<sup>36</sup> Advocates of duelling, ideologically committed to honour culture themselves, envisaged men with an equal fervour for honourable behaviour. When such responsible Seconds were depicted in print it was in a favourable light: often less dramatically than their duellists, but as stoic, proud observers; almost militaristic guardians of proper 'procedure.' (See Fig. 1-3.)



(Fig. 1.)<sup>37</sup>



(Fig. 2.)<sup>38</sup>



(Fig. 3.)<sup>39</sup>

However there were also areas of stark disagreement. Attitudes varied widely over the 'judgement' of the ideal Second. Earlier works, such that of S. Stanton insisted that a Second was akin to a defence lawyer; an associate who, whilst not being 'deceived as to the propriety of his attendance,'<sup>40</sup> was to be a representative only, not to judge the 'right' or 'wrong' of a dispute. Nevertheless later works, such as the 1838 'Code of Honour' by John Lyde Wilson, seemed to partially disagree, arguing that Seconds could use their personal judgement to refuse delivery of letters with 'improper or insulting' language, and could

36 R. Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling*, p. 65.

37 J. Marks, re-printed hand coloured aqua-taint of *Squire Boru giving Old Tarpaulin a Quietus in a Duel*, in Anonymous Caricature collection by 'A. Real-Paddy', *Real-Life in Ireland or the Day and Night Scenes*, (London, 1822).

38 J. Gillray, *The Explanation - Inaccurate Pistols and Unwilling Seconds*, Mr Ryder in the peacefully resolved Pitt-Tierney Duel of 1798, (1830) in R. B. Shoemaker, *The London Mob – Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England*, (London, 2004), p.189.

39 Anonymous, 'A Satirical Print' in F. McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-century England*, (New York, 1989).

40 S. Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling*, p. 63.

demand an end to hostility in unacceptable 'consanguinity' cases, such as duels between brothers.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore it seemed unclear whether a Second's priorities were supposed to be 'honour,' secrecy, or safety. If the premise of the duel was to gamble one's safety for 'honour,' the confrontational danger had to be genuine, nevertheless works such as *General Rules and Instructions for all Seconds in Duels*, published in 1793, claimed that a Second's first duty was to make peace and 'reconcile the party aggrieved.'<sup>42</sup> In turn the 1777 Code Duello confusingly demanded that every Second prevent duellists from 'moving closer' to shoot because it caused 'bad cases.'<sup>43</sup> Whether the Second was supposed to be avoiding 'bad cases' of dishonour, or 'bad' legal 'cases' was unclear. Nevertheless all duelling works agreed in some sense that by selecting 'men of sense and judgement,'<sup>44</sup> unjustified fatalities could be avoided; therefore some effort should be made by Seconds to: 'Rule 21 - ...attempt a reconciliation.'<sup>45</sup>

So which of these conceptions represented the genuine Second? Certain advocates for male 'honour-culture,' such as L. O' Trigger, insisted none of the above, claiming that the Second had a higher, nobler purpose: to guarantee that the 'threat of being called to account' for rudeness was a larger system which should deter all men from barbarism and save lives overall.<sup>46</sup> If duellist cowered from the danger, his own Second was expected to 'post' him (make his disgrace public knowledge) thereby deterring other men from such cowardly behaviour and 'purging' the social order.<sup>47</sup> Such was the threat of 'dishonour' that some Seconds made their duels public. One Major Fancourt admitted to acting as a Second in a letter to the *Bristol Mercury* in 1835 because: 'He should feel obliged to contradict' claims of inappropriate behaviour and to ensure the good reputation of his principal.'<sup>48</sup> To the strongest advocates of duelling therefore, a Second was not there to serve a duellist at all, but the society of all 'honourable' gentlemen.

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41 J. L. Wilson, *The Code of Honour*, pp. 2-3.

42 Anon., *General Rules and Instructions for all Seconds in Duels*, pp. 19-20.

43 C. Ryan, J. Keog and A. Bodkin, *The Irish Code Duello*, p. 46.

44 S. Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling*, p. 59.

45 C. Ryan, J. Keog and A. Bodkin, *The Irish Code Duello*, p. 45.

46 M. Coustard de Massi, 'An English Advocate for Duelling', in L. O' Trigger (ed.), *History of Duelling in all Countries*, (London, 18??), p. 68.

47 V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History*, p. 159.

48 BLN: 'The Late Duel', *The Bristol Mercury*, 11<sup>th</sup> August, 1835.

Turning away from theoretical ideas to the historical record, much of this seemed less relevant. If Seconds had any genuinely universal quality, it was to be an 'imperfect' choice, a conundrum which duelling handbooks readily acknowledged when imagining the Second: 'Such friends as these...are not hourly to be met with, yet every gentlemen has most commonly *someone* to apply to.'<sup>49</sup> Out of necessity, most men were indeed forced to choose merely 'someone' at short notice, and for all purposes, as best they could. Certain patterns amongst Seconds do emerge therefore. In the thirty-two duels studied here, only twenty-nine such men were reported with any occupation or title, but by far the largest discernible group were military officers (35%.) outnumbered only by the many unspecified Seconds who were listed only as 'gentlemen' (58.6%.)<sup>50</sup> This trend follows a similar pattern to the identification of duellist's occupations by other historians:<sup>51</sup> the army and navy remained bastions of male duelling culture, and this research suggests that most military duellists chose fellow officers to act as Seconds, perhaps prioritising trustworthiness or experience with weaponry. Every duellist and Second was of course male, duels between women were usually novelties of fiction and no fatalities were ever reported.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, a convention of selecting friends from the same social class is clear. The 1777 Code Duello insisted on 'Rule 14 – Seconds to be of equal rank in Society with the principals they attend,'<sup>53</sup> although this hardly needed to be stated. An overwhelming 93% of Seconds were listed as the same or higher social level than their duellists, with all of the remainder being military officers of lesser regimental rank than their principals, but who could evidently pass as roughly equal in a social context.<sup>54</sup> The term 'friend' was also used synonymously with that of 'Second' in many reports.<sup>55</sup> That the identification of Seconds followed this trend may indicate that most men either slavishly adhered to the rules or, (more likely) chose 'immediate' friends; those of a similar social standing.

In summary, the role of the Second was a demanding, and often highly contradictory one. As a result, one selection pattern for Seconds is immediately visible even from the limited evidence reported: that most duellists ignored the impossibility of finding the

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49 S. Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling*, p. 62.

50 'BM/EFP/WEPG/RCG/WT/1805-1845.'

51 S. Banks, 'Killing with Courtesy,' pp. 532-3.

52 B. Holland, *Gentlemen's Blood*, p. 82.

53 C. Ryan, J. Keog and A. Bodkin, *The Irish Code Duello*, p. 46.

54 'BM/EFP/WEPG/RCG/WT/1805-1845.'

55 S. Banks, 'Dangerous Friends', p. 100.

'perfect' Second in favour of simply asking close friends or experienced men: those who

could be 'trusted' in a general sense Yet this trend does not fully answer our first question Primarily, what was the Second 'for?' If such men were generally selected on a vague basis of 'trustworthiness,' was an 'imperfect' Second to discern his own purpose? How were a dramatically increasing number of duels still resolved peacefully towards 1845? In historical reality therefore, once a Second was chosen, what was he 'for' in the motivational sense?

## Chapter 2

### Resolving a Duel

*'Captain Halsted did all in his power for me... Poor Halsted... he has behaved well.'* 56

'He was of all the parties the least blameable.'<sup>57</sup> Thus ran an Exeter jury's 'acquittal' verdict for Captain Halstead, a Second charged with 'Wilful Murder' after his principal, Doctor Hennis, had been mortally wounded in a duel with Sir John Jeffcott at Haldon Racecourse in 1833. Fortunately for Captain Halstead, evidence in court had placed his 'conduct on the occasion in a very honourable and amiable point of view.' Clearly he had acted 'honourably,' yet the jury also believed that 'he had done all in his power to prevent the duel.'<sup>58</sup> Despite the Captain's partial failure, Dr Hennis had reportedly stated on his deathbed to another friend: 'Captain Halsted did all in his power for me... Halstead should not be put to one penny expense in the prosecution: he has behaved well.'<sup>59</sup> Captain Halstead had tried to save both life and honour peacefully; if he had indeed 'behaved well' as a Second, what motives had dictated his behaviour?

Actual incentives for acting as a Second were limited; some men might well have relished the excitement or violence of a duel, but as A. Bosquett had argued, such 'aggressive' Seconds should not to be selected if one valued one's life.<sup>60</sup> The dangers for inexperienced Seconds were also very off-putting: friends were liable to be prosecuted or at least 'charged' with wilful murder. After the 1844 ban, military officers faced demotion and loss of pension if they acted as Seconds<sup>61</sup> and the danger of loaded pistols, particularly those with fashionably light 'hair triggers,' was always tangible.<sup>62</sup> *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* warned all Seconds of one infamous London duel on Bagshot Heath in 1821: 'which proved fatal to one of the Seconds; in consequence of his standing too near to his man, he was shot in the left side, and died in two hours.'<sup>63</sup>

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56 BLN: 'The Late Duel – Death of Dr Hennis', *The Bristol Mercury*, 25<sup>th</sup> May. 1833.

57 S. ?, 'The Law of Duelling,' *The Law Magazine or Quarterly Review of Jurisprudence*, 3.10 (London, 1833), p. 382.

58 S. ?, 'The Law of Duelling,' p. 382.

59 BLN: 'The Late Duel – Death of Dr Hennis', *The Bristol Mercury*, 25<sup>th</sup> May. 1833.

60 A. Bosquett, *The Young Man of Honour's Vade Mecum – A Treatise on Duelling*, (London, 1817).

61 R. Baldick, *The Duel – A History of Duelling*, p. 114.

62 B. Holland, *Gentlemen's Blood*, p. 84.

63 BLN: 'Fatal Duel', *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, 29<sup>th</sup> November. 1821.

So what drove men to act as Seconds? Put simply: most seem to have been motivated by the very negative consequences of refusing. The requesting man (as demonstrated in chapter 1) was almost certainly an immediate friend in peril and it was therefore considered 'unkind'<sup>64</sup> for any gentleman to turn down another's request for assistance. Providing a duel was witnessed as 'fair,' convictions were unusual (only two known men were executed for 'murder' by duelling in 60 years,)<sup>65</sup> such that many Seconds no doubt suspected their friend would be in danger of dishonour, death or prosecution without their attendance. Indeed any duellist who fought without a Second to witness his good conduct had faced severe punishment: in the mysterious 1808 'duel' of Major Campbell and Captain Boyd, both officers fought without Seconds and the latter was killed in what a trial jury refused to believe had been a 'fair duel,' thus sentencing Major Campbell to hang.<sup>66</sup> In this sense Seconds were motivated similarly to duellists, because as W. F. Schwartz *et al* showed, acting in a duel supposedly benefited the 'society' of all 'honourable' gentlemen, whilst the 'dishonour' of refusing to help severely punished the individuals who declined to participate.<sup>67</sup>

There is certainly evidence that some men felt 'forced' by their peers in this way. Mr Milford, Sir Jeffcott's Second in the aforementioned duel with Dr Hennis, insisted in a letter published by *Woolmer's Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* that 'much mistake' about his unwilling conduct meant he had 'suffered severely in mind and fortune.'<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Dr Hennis made just such a claim about his own Second on his deathbed, that: 'Captain Halstead could not but go out with me... he would not have gone with any other person... it was to serve me... but he was compelled to do so by two other gentlemen.'<sup>69</sup> Clearly the culture of 'honour' placed an emotional and moral peer pressure on both men to become Seconds, even if they were personally opposed to duelling. Therefore, a Second was perhaps the archetypal 'unwilling participant.' Other than for the few men with personal convictions about duelling, most Seconds were compelled to undertake their role in the duel because of an implicit or tangible pressure placed on them by the rest of 'honourable'

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64 S. Stanton, *The Principles of Duelling*, p. 62.

65 R. Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling*, p. 251.

66 R. Baldick, *The Duel – A History of Duelling*, p. 98.

67 W. F. Schwartz, K. Baxter and D. Ryan, 'The Duel: Can these Gentlemen be Acting Efficiently?', *The Journal of Legal Studies*, 13.2 (1984), pp. 332-4.

68 BLN: 'Letter from Mr Charles Milford to the editor of the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette,' *Woolmer's Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 12<sup>th</sup> April. 1834.

69 BLN: 'The Late Duel – Death of Dr Hennis', *The Bristol Mercury*, 25<sup>th</sup> May. 1833.

male society. A Second's honour 'was also on trial.'<sup>70</sup> However, if this was the case, were 'unwilling' men truly supportive of duelling as a dangerous confrontation?

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Both ideas are significant in understanding 'real' Seconds and 'real' duels: firstly that men such as Captain Halstead and Mr Milford were 'pressured' by society to act, but more importantly that 'honour' was not something to be won, as something to be 'witnessed.' As has been shown in the studies of duellists carried out by V.G Kiernan, S. Banks and R. B. Shoemaker, maintaining 'honour' became synonymous with public displays of 'courage' rather than vanquishing one's opponent.<sup>71</sup> By the nineteenth century a 'more restrained standard' of masculine civility developed from the urbanisation of cities and the notion of the 'city gentleman' as part of polite society.<sup>72</sup> As a result, polite conduct meant that duels could well be 'bloodless,' the important aspect was that both duellists were 'seen' by their Seconds (and society) to have courageously gambled their life down the barrel of a pistol for their valued reputations.<sup>73</sup> Despite the contradiction, 'honour' and safety could therefore be reconciled, and it is perhaps for this reason that Seconds felt obligated to 'witness' their duelist's good reputations, but less willing to help 'win' them.

Were Seconds a conciliatory influence? S. Banks insisted during his work on duelling that the Second's powers 'were solely persuasive.'<sup>74</sup> Theoretically this was certainly true, but as this study will show, in reality many Seconds could have had a remarkable practical influence. This study identifies at least five distinct methods by which duels could be resolved peacefully by Seconds; which (as yet generally unnamed in historiography) will be referred to throughout this work as 'prior resolution,' 'reconciliation,' 'forced resolution,' 'enforcement' and 'tampering.' The first category is undoubtedly that hardest to study. 'Prior resolutions,' those disputes that were resolved by friends before a duel ever began, are impossible to quantify. Historians may never know

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<sup>70</sup> V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History*, p. 138.

<sup>71</sup> V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History*, p. 155.

<sup>72</sup> R. B. Shoemaker, 'Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence in Eighteenth-Century London,' *Social History*, 26.2 (2001), p. 207.

<sup>73</sup> R. B. Shoemaker, 'Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence in Eighteenth-Century London,' p. 200.

<sup>74</sup> S. Banks, 'Dangerous Friends', p. 92.

how many messy, 'un-newsworthy' arguments took place between gentlemen that were ended privately. As J. Kelly showed in a study of Irish duels, the causes of challenges could be as laughably slight as being jostled when at the theatre, suggesting that many confrontations were suitably trivial and could be dealt with beforehand by more mature friends.<sup>75</sup> Rumours of one such dispute between two anonymous Bristol men 'of highly respectable connexions [sic]' in 1843 was reportedly 'nipped in the bud' by the 'judicious interference of a friend.'<sup>76</sup> Crucially, such evidence implies that many duels and trivial challenges, which remain otherwise absent from any historical record, never even commenced.

More widely reported were cases of 'reconciliation' on the field of honour itself, where an 'éclaircissement' was reached before fatalities occurred. This was the most acceptable result, from which we gain a modern conception of 'satisfaction.' The honourable Mr Berkeley M.P. and Captain Younghusband's duel in Cheltenham in 1837 was typical, where 'after exchanging shots, the Seconds interfered,' and declared that they, or more abstractly that 'honour,' was 'satisfied.'<sup>77</sup> Since neither gentleman could be said to have shirked from the danger, all reputations remained intact and partial apologies for perceived misunderstandings could follow. A number of infamous political duels followed this amiable pattern: not least those between William Pitt and George Tierney in 1798, Lord Castlereagh and George Canning in 1809,<sup>78</sup> The Dukes of Buckingham and Bedford in 1822,<sup>79</sup> and the Duke of Wellington and Earl of Winchelsea in 1829.<sup>80</sup> Such outcomes make up almost half (47%) of all discernible duel resolutions in this study, suggesting that this was both the most newsworthy outcome (aside from a controversial death) and the most socially acceptable form of 'reconciliation.' It also betrays much about the persuasion of a Second: that reconciliation was likely when both Seconds were able to privately collude, and their 'satisfaction' was far more likely to be accepted at the duel itself where, as V. G. Kiernan pointed out, duellists had a tangible dread of receiving 'an ounce of lead in their thorax,' thus accepting any amicable 'way out' that their friends could offer.<sup>81</sup>

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75 J. Kelly, *That Damn'd Thing Called Honour: Duelling in Ireland 1570-1860*, (Cork, 1995), pp. 115-20.

76 BLN: 'Affair of Honour?', *The Bristol Mercury*, 25<sup>th</sup> November. 1843.

77 BLN: 'Cheltenham Duel', *The Bristol Mercury*, 1837.

78 G. Hunt, *The Duel - Castlereagh, Canning and the Deadly Cabinet Rivalry*, (London, 2008), pp. 135-41.

79 J. N. McCord, 'Politics and Honour in Early-Nineteenth Century England: The Dukes' Duel', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 62.1/2 (1999), p. 106.

80 G. Hunt, *The Duel*, p. 127.

81 V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History*, p. 139.

'Forced Resolutions' were those displayed by such Seconds as Mr Hood to his principle in 1832, whereby the Second refused to participate further without a reconciliation, thereby threatening his friend with an almost certain prosecution by the courts if he continued the duel without witnesses. A noticeably common ending to particularly 'hostile' duels, such resolutions were euphemistically referred to as the Second ending the affair by 'withdrawing his friend, [Mr Steavenson,] from the ground.'<sup>82</sup> Similarly 'Enforcement' was undoubtedly a more severe option, not least because the friend responsible betrayed a complete unwillingness to coordinate the duel and a willingness to 'dishonourably' betray one's own duellist to legal authorities. Nevertheless this too was surprisingly common: one such colourful encounter took place in a Bristol ball in 1841, when a naval officer quarrelled with another man at a card table, resulting in the latter throwing a deck of cards in the officer's face. Someone who was privy to the details of the impending duel 'conveyed' their knowledge to a magistrate, and the parties were apprehended.<sup>83</sup>

However by far the most interesting subversion was that of 'tampering.' The responsibilities placed on Seconds gave them copious opportunities to subtly influence the level of danger in a duel. Methods were many and varied: in 1806 two malevolent Seconds of Plymouth allowed their duellists, (two midshipmen of the navy) 'to fire at only 5 paces distant from each other'<sup>84</sup> perhaps guaranteeing the fatal result. However some, claiming that insults were slight, did precisely the opposite: placing their duellists at a ludicrously safe 14 or 16 yards apart to reduce the likelihood of injury. The anonymous army officer who published *General Rules and Instructions for all Seconds in Duels* insisted on a minimum of 10 paces, thus limiting the possibility of harm even between the most hostile of parties.<sup>85</sup> In other cases Seconds deliberately chose a dark spot in the extreme early morning, when it would be difficult for both duellists to aim accurately,<sup>86</sup> or more obviously: chose to sabotage the pistols by secretly undercharging the gunpowder,<sup>87</sup> replacing the lead shot with peas or, as reported in the case of a duel between two 'very young men' of Cheltenham in 1829, the Seconds simply omitted the shot completely.<sup>88</sup>

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82 BLN: 'Duel', *The Bristol Mercury*, 13<sup>th</sup> October. 1832.

83 BLN: 'Duel Prevented', *The Bristol Mercury*, 20<sup>th</sup> March. 1841.

84 BLN: 'Plymouth Duel', *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, 23<sup>rd</sup> October. 1806.

85 Anon., *General Rules and Instructions for all Seconds in Duels*, pp. 19-20.

86 R. Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling*, p. 61.

87 B. Holland, *Gentlemen's Blood*, p. 46.

88 BLN: 'Duel Extraordinary - Providential Escape', *The Bristol Mercury*, 30<sup>th</sup> July. 1828.

'Tampering' was perhaps the most interesting anomaly, since it betrayed how Seconds wanted to be 'seen' to be behaving 'honourably,' yet were often privately uncooperative with expectations of male duelling culture.

The basic premise of this chapter has been to question the notion that the motivation of men like Captain Halstead was strictly derived from some abstract and official concept of 'honour.' Undoubtedly this was often the case: one seemingly fanatical father wrote a letter to *Freeman's Journal* stating that he would 'rather see his son dead' than dishonoured from having refused to take part in a duel.<sup>89</sup> However many men were also imperfect, 'unwilling' participants, men perhaps unsure about duelling but emotionally peer pressured into compliance by the fear of being outcast from the society of 'honourable' gentlemen, concerned about severe harm befalling a close friend, or both. Furthermore the second half of this chapter has attempted to suggest that the powers of the Second were not always 'solely persuasive' as historians have previously sought to suggest. Notably the shift from the 'winning' to the 'displaying' of male 'honour' meant that often both duellists could survive honourably, and conveniently provided a civilised way for duels to end peacefully. Clearly Seconds had both the motivation and the ability to manipulate duels (for better or worse) and to achieve desired outcomes between their friends. The historical evidence suggests that the number of occasions on which the South-West's Seconds resolved duels grew during the period leading up to 1845, as did the variation of methods by which they chose to do so (see. Fig.4.)<sup>90</sup>

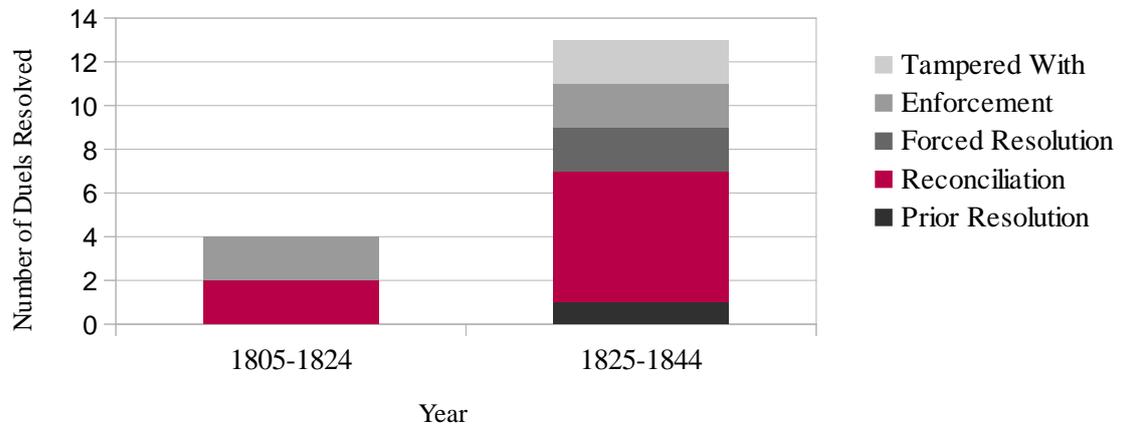
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<sup>89</sup> B. Holland, *Gentlemen's Blood*, p. 91.

<sup>90</sup> 'BM/EFP/WEPG/RCG/WT/1805-1845.'

(Fig. 4.) Duelling Resolutions Reported in the South-West of England by Type

(1805-1845)



## Chapter 3

### Subverting the Duel

*'In due time the pistols arrived, and were duly loaded by the Seconds – who let the victualler into the secret, that the balls were omitted.'* 93

In 1828, M. Fougère published a satirical 'handbook' for duellists. His parody of a duelling advice manual, *L'Art de ne jamais être tue ni blessé en duel sans avoir pris aucune leçon d'armes* ('The Art of Never Being Killed in a Duel Without Taking Lessons in Self-Defence,')<sup>94</sup> implied that one should avoid duelling at all costs by developing notoriety as a gentleman of bravery and valour. This, Fougère joked, required single-handedly capturing an enemy cannon, general, or redoubt in a war; or for civilians, rescuing others from a deadly fire. Should this fail, a sensible man should politely buy lunch for hostile challengers, and replace the pistol bullets with imitations made from wine corks.<sup>95</sup> This amusing take on duelling was an example of how privately, towards the mid-nineteenth century, many men did not conform to previously accepted and idealistic notions of male 'honour.' This chapter will attempt to ascertain whether, if many Seconds fell broadly into this category, their imperfections and unwilling conduct in running the duel undermined the grand convention of duelling as a masculine institution.

For a Second no duel was a 'simple' affair, every dispute was of course unique and illegality ensured that most men would seek to hide detailed information from newspapers but evidence of irregularity grows increasingly common after 1825. One duel between two gentlemen of Bath 1826 was fully 'reported' in only forty-five words: 'On Wednesday morning, a duel took place on Claverton Down, between Sir L. G - and Captain C - y, Royal Navy, both of Bath. The former gentlemen having fired first without effect, the latter discharged his pistol in a side direction, and the affair then terminated.'<sup>96</sup> However clearly this was a simplification of historical fact, in which any complexities of the dispute are firmly ignored.

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93 BLN: 'Bloodless Duel!', *The Bristol Mercury*, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1830.

94 M. Fougère, *L'Art de ne jamais être tue ni blessé en duel sans avoir pris aucune leçon d'arme*, (Paris, 1828), pp. 1 -14.

95 R. Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling*, p. 69.

96 BLN: 'Local News', *The Bristol Mercury*, 17<sup>th</sup> July. 1826.

In contrast, duels such as that of the unfortunate Dr Hennis reveal how 'messy' the legal aftermath could often be. As *The Law Magazine* sadly lamented to its readers, Captain Halstead had in fact not been acquitted because of a proper examination of evidence, but because as an elderly man, he was permitted a chair in court. The jury, unable to see him properly were unclear as to which man was Halstead and so, aware that he might be hanged, refused to sentence him guilty. The words reportedly heard from the jury box were revealing as to the uneasy toleration average men had for duelling and duellists: 'Halstead? Who's he?' to which another replied 'Never mind, say they're all not guilty.'<sup>97</sup> Irregularities on the field of honour itself were more blatant. Even though deliberately firing wide, or 'deloping,' was sometimes considered an admission of personal guilt,<sup>98</sup> such behaviour was increasingly profligate in 'real' duels: men accepted a challenge, but refused to fire upon their opponents. One typical report from 1835 claimed that a Bristol duel '[was] fought Thursday between J. A. Roebuck, Esq., M.P., for this city and Dr. Black, the editor of *The Morning Chronicle*, in which the latter fired first and missed, when Mr. R fired in the air, and the *fracas* terminated.'<sup>99</sup> In this case, Mr Roebuck had obviously felt obliged to face the danger (thus guaranteeing his reputation as an 'honourable' gentleman) but having done so, refused to risk killing his opponent.

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Was this all part of a larger trend of male non-conformism? British newspapers often featured 'Affairs of Honour' columns and a great many reported duels ended like that of Mr Herring and Captain Treby in Bristol in 1827, simply with the words: 'the Seconds then interfered, and a reconciliation took place.'<sup>100</sup> The South-West's newspapers also referenced Seconds who reconciled their friends in an increasingly positive tone towards 1845, as in a case when: 'The praiseworthy interference of two gentlemen, was we are happy to state, the means of preventing a hostile meeting.'<sup>101</sup> Any historian must treat duelling statistics based on these reports with extreme caution, since fatal duels were inherently more newsworthy, however some previous attempts have been made to estimate the percentage of duels where Seconds 'interfered.' Ferreus, a French scholar, estimated in

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<sup>97</sup> S. ?, 'The Law of Duelling,' p. 384.

<sup>98</sup> V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History*, p. 147.

<sup>99</sup> BLN: 'A Rumour', *The Bristol Mercury*, 21<sup>st</sup> November. 1835.

<sup>100</sup> BLN: 'Duel', *The Bristol Mercury*, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1827.

<sup>101</sup> BLN: 'Duel Prevented', *The Bristol Mercury*, 20<sup>th</sup> March. 1841.

1891 that Parisian sword duels were resolved between 18% and 32.3% of the time in the 1880's.<sup>102</sup> In England however, during our period, *The Bristol Mercury* published a small public interest article in 1840 approximating that roughly 30% of all duellists escaped unhurt, suggesting as few as 15% of all duels were 'bloodless.'<sup>103</sup> Modern historians, such as J. Kelly in his study of Irish duelling, have suggested equally morbid figures for the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, estimating that as few as 17.5% of duels were averted or resolved.<sup>104</sup>

The statistical research of this dissertation suggests a higher percentage (46%,) although the overwhelming majority of South-West's peacefully resolved duels happened after 1825. Critically, the total number of duels remained similar throughout the period suggesting that whilst many gentlemen were increasingly ideologically opposed to inflicting harm, they still felt morally obliged (or otherwise pressured by society) to demonstrate their 'courage' by accepting a challenge to duel. The presence of Seconds is also very consistent throughout, again suggesting that 'being seen' to carry out the 'ritual' of duelling was far more important than the outcome itself. Nevertheless, whilst 'duelling' continued to take place, a chronological regression of 'violent' outcomes in duels is clear (see Fig. 5.)<sup>105</sup>

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102 Ferreus (ed.), *Annuaire de Duel: 1880-9*, (Paris, 1891).

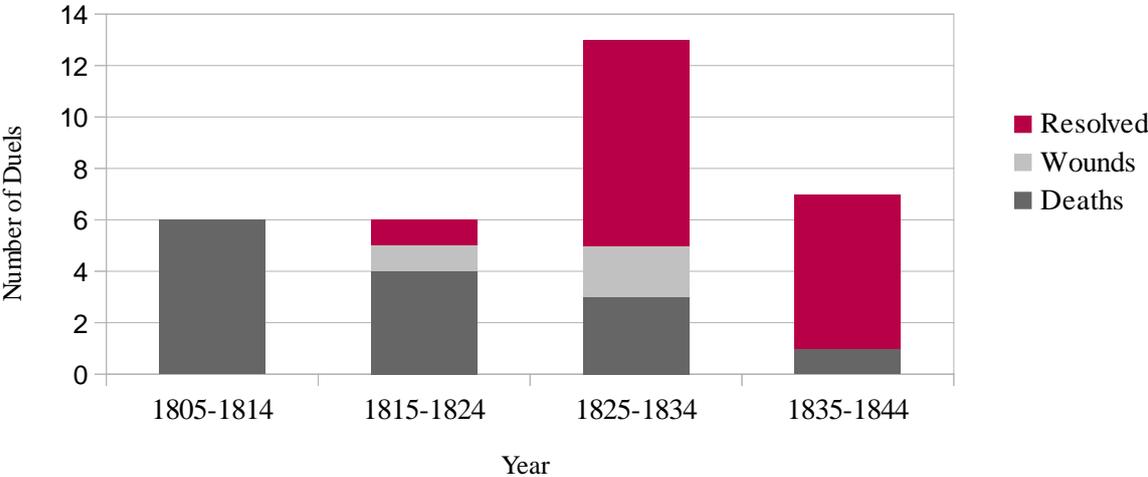
103 BLN: 'Duelling', *The Bristol Mercury*, 31<sup>st</sup> October. 1840.

104 J. Kelly, *That Damn'd Thing Called Honour: Duelling in Ireland 1570-1860*, p. 118.

105 'BM/EFP/WEFG/RCG/WT/1805-1845.'

(Fig. 5) Duels Reported in the South-West of England by Outcome

(1805 - 1845)





(Fig. 6.)109



(Fig. 7.)110



(Fig. 8.)111

However in the context of this study, one could argue that such newspaper accounts, much like the parody of M. Fougère and duelling caricatures, demonstrate a growing discomfort with the brutality, the violence, or the harsh male 'honour-culture' that surrounded duelling. Authenticity was not the issue; that the readership of the South-West's newspapers found such satire amusing suggests that an audience of men were not offended, but rather entertained by, accepting, or even privately approving of humorous subversions of duels. As R. Baldick suggested, increasingly the 'most effective weapon against duelling' was 'ridicule.'<sup>112</sup> If this was indeed the case, then the true 'opposition' to duelling might well have been larger than first thought, if not particularly fervent. Those completely against any 'outlets' for honour grievances between men (mainly idealistic Christian abolitionists whom D.T Andrew labelled as the 'few optimists')<sup>113</sup> were indeed rare; modernisers against vigilante justice and in favour of legal due process were the more common and effective movement which helped stifle the duel.<sup>114</sup> However this research suggests the possibility of a third 'opposition' group: a quiet yet increasingly large

109 J. Gillray, *And Adam had Power over all the Beasts of the Earth*, (1780, London, National Portrait Gallery).

110 J. Gillray, *Patriots Deciding a Point of Honour!*, (1807, New College Oxford).

111 G. Cruikshank, *Killing No Murder or A New Ministerial Way of Settling the Affairs of the Nation*, (1809, The British Museum).

112 R. Baldick, *The Duel – A History of Duelling*, p. 199.

113 D. T. Andrew, 'The Code of Honour and its Critics: The Opposition to Duelling in England, 1700-1850', p. 419.

114 D. T. Andrew, 'The Code of Honour and its Critics: The Opposition to Duelling in England, 1700-1850', p. 422-5.

bulk of coerced gentlemen, a 'silent majority' of those who privately disapproved of violence, and even enjoyed reading of its subversion.

English duelling may well have been an 'honour-culture' from which no 'gentleman' could 'opt-out'<sup>115</sup> of respectably until after 1850. Until then (at least in theory) one was either a 'for' duelling, or 'against' it. However all the subversions demonstrated formed part of a general undertone of sensible 'disapproval' by the middle-ground of male opinion, that only manifested itself when such men were themselves 'involved' with a duel in some capacity. Two processes seem likely: either each resolution of a duel made resolution itself much more acceptable and the process of Seconds resolving their friends duel was perpetuated, or Seconds chose non-violent outcomes as the illegality of duelling was more strictly enforced from the mid-1840's onwards. Either way, it is telling that Seconds increasingly reasoned the same way: that if one 'must' still demonstrate one's masculinity and courage by duelling, then the constructive way to leave the duelling field was indeed with a handshake.

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<sup>115</sup> W. F. Shwartz, K. Baxter and D. Ryan, 'The Duel: Can these Gentlemen be Acting Efficiently?', p. 328.

## Conclusion

Only once in the historical research undertaken here is there any confession of a Second's personal and private disgust at duelling. Dying in agony with a half-ounce pistol ball in his stomach, Dr Hennis revealed that his own Second, Captain Halstead, had compelled him not to fire upon his opponent, rather that one should 'never' fire on an opponent, and that the Seconds had agreed to set the duellists at a hopefully safe fourteen paces distant.<sup>116</sup> That such an admission came only in the wake of a slow, painful death testifies to the tight grip which honour-culture had on unwilling men who nevertheless insisted on 'being seen' to have 'behaved well.' Hence the most aggravating limit of this work is an inherent one: no Second could ever properly voice their dissent without becoming an outcast. As duelling itself shows, the culture of male honour in the early nineteenth century was such that non-conformity meant 'dishonour' and exclusion from polite society. If many Seconds were merely 'compliant' as this work has sought to suggest, then there is little admittance of this. Instead this study must rely on the subtle hints of their underlying discontent; the popularity of duelling satire and subversion, an increasing number of peacefully resolved duels, and the indications from men like Captain Halstead and Mr Milford about the social peer pressure that forced them to become Seconds in the first place.

'Honourable' Seconds who supposedly 'behaved well' were often far detached from the idealised Seconds imagined by advocates of duelling; many were imperfect, unwilling choices, but nevertheless 'compliant' men. Modern day sociologists such as S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger have claimed that 'ritualised personal friendships' have always been a method of social control that help to end 'conflict.' Put simply: that 'formalising' a friendship retains its elements of 'trust,' but that the role of friends to 'mitigate tension' becomes an obligation.<sup>117</sup> This was certainly the case with the nineteenth-century role of the Second: by making one's friend an 'official' of the duel, the power to regulate behaviour and reconcile others became a 'duty' of all polite gentlemen, a trend which only perpetuated as male duelling culture became less violent. Seconds did not cause the

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116 BLN: 'Duel', *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, 23<sup>rd</sup> May. 1833.

117 S. N. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends – Interpersonal Relationships and the Structure of Trust in Society*, (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 9-15.

outright disappearance of duelling, that honour falls to the changing attitudes of civility that influenced them. As advocates of such a theory have always pointed out: the further in time one studies after Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo in 1815, the less fashionable a 'militaristic' standard of English masculinity becomes.<sup>118</sup> However to claim as S. Banks did that a Second was only a 'mechanism'<sup>119</sup> by which an honour dispute could be resolved does not acknowledge the wider implication: that each resolution was part of a larger pattern of less violent outcomes in disputes between men.

Noting this pattern, this study has two methodological weaknesses that ought to be examined. In the first instance the number of duels examined is relatively small and geographically confined to the South-West of England for greater detail. It may well be that duelling, less common in provincial areas, was less fatalistic; its participants more open to the idea of peaceful resolutions, or simply less experienced with firearms. This could indeed be the case: in line with the findings of other historians, the vast majority of duelling injuries or deaths researched for this study were from duels between military men; those perhaps more confident with pistols.<sup>120</sup> If the South-West was generally less accepting of violence is too large a question, the regional disparities of duelling across Europe could alone fill fifty such dissertations. Furthermore there is the ever present danger of using newspaper reports in which, as R. Hopton noted, drama, bloodshed or scandal will always satisfy more column-inches than small quarrels or the private reconciliation of messy arguments.<sup>121</sup> Many minor disputes have no doubt been forgotten by history.

In addition it is worth crediting the institution. As many Seconds who allowed duels to go ahead no doubt suspected, duelling itself could often lead to more amiable relationships. Aside from for those who believed in some divine intervention on the behalf of the righteous, pistols showed no natural favouritism towards the party who were genuinely 'in the right;' incentivising all men to make or accept an apology lest they be unfortunate when the pistols were fired.<sup>122</sup> For many the cold, elevated harshness of 'pistols-at-dawn' was no doubt a 'reality-check' that men needed to reconsider rash behaviour and see an 'enemy' in a more sympathetic light. It is a noteworthy 'moral' in

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118 J. Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, (Harlow, 2005), p. 65.

119 S. Banks, 'Dangerous Friends', p. 104.

120 'BM/EFP/WEFG/RCG/WT/1805-1845.'

121 R. Hopton, *Pistols at Dawn: A History of Duelling*, p. 55.

122 V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History*, p. 139.

many contemporary artistic depictions, such as in Anton Chekhov's novella 'The Duel,' that the protagonists, when faced with death, lie awake regretting their conduct and leave the duelling field the next morning with newly found respect for one another.<sup>123</sup>

However, two conclusions of this study should have the highest significance of all. Firstly, the Second teaches us much about the study of 'history' in general. That men who had such an influence over near-death encounters are almost completely absent from historiography demonstrates perfectly how even professional historians would rather focus on 'duellist' figures, those who fit into a dramatic narrative. That so many duels were resolved is also an education into the infinite complexity of historical causality: trivial insults, well-chosen words, nuanced apologies or minor alterations to pistols by reticent men, all seem unimportant. Nevertheless all could coalesce suddenly with the historically significant: tragic deaths or narrow, legendary escapes.

Regarding the nineteenth century itself, historians have often claimed that duelling and a wider masculine culture of 'honour' died out with what R. Baldick declared to be 'surprising suddenness.'<sup>124</sup> In the space of only fifty years, duelling allegedly vanished 'prematurely,'<sup>125</sup> therein creating a justification for historians to study how changing attitudes could so quickly obliterate a widespread male social convention. This dissertation aims to argue otherwise: studying those Seconds who subverted duels reveals the fragility of male society's toleration of institutionalised violence. Just as J. Tosh has stated, nineteenth-century 'masculinity' was akin to a 'social status' in itself.<sup>126</sup> Thus 'honour' was a social convention which demanded conformity and compliance, even from unwilling gentlemen; considering that so many Seconds were privately uncomfortable with the brutality of 'honour,' it was the 'longevity' of duelling that was incredible. Seen as an historic part of masculine 'culture,' it is instead remarkable that duelling could forcibly persist, and long outlive the approval of so many of its cultists.

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123 A. Chekhov, *The Duel*, (1891) in *The Duel and Other Stories*, (London, 1951).

124 R. Baldick, *The Duel – A History of Duelling*, p. 114.

125 S. Banks, 'Killing with Courtesy', p. 528.

126 J. Tosh, 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain', *History Workshop*, 38 (1994), p. 184.

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