

Read all about it!

Don't let anyone tell you that there is anything new about gossip fodder...

The Member of Parliament for Milborne Port from 1796 to 1804 was Lord Henry Paget (1768-1854). He inherited the title Earl of Uxbridge on the death of his father and was created Earl of Anglesey in 1815. Paget was a renowned cavalry officer and military man, famous for his exploits during the Napoleonic Wars where he led the charge of the heavy cavalry at the Battle of Waterloo, and survived, losing his right leg in the process. Following a string of awards by 1846 he had risen to the rank of Field Marshall.



Paget's home life was equally noteworthy, but for all the wrong reasons.



In 1795, he married Lady Caroline Elizabeth Villiers (1774-1835), and the couple had eight children. Lady Caroline was the daughter of the Earl of Jersey and her mother was a former mistress of the Prince Regent, later George IV.

However, all was not well and London Society was agog and could speak of nothing else!

Described as 'shocking and unaccountable', Paget had an adulterous affair with Lady Charlotte Wellesley, mother of four 'poor little' children and sister-in-law of the Duke of Wellington, who felt that Lady Charlotte's brother, Lord Cadogan, should have been able to stop her living 'and performing' with a married man. Family honour was at stake and in May 1809, Cadogan challenged Paget to a duel, which took place in secret on Wimbledon Common. Both men discharged their pistols but were unhurt.



Family and friends tried to mediate between Paget and Lady Caroline. Paget's father threatened to cut him off without a farthing if he did not return to his wife. All to no avail, he ran off with Lady Charlotte in 1809. To fuel the fire of the scandal, he left behind a letter in which he praised his wife but said that 'he could not resist taking the step he had done'. Paget's family blamed Lady Charlotte, calling her a *maudite sorcière*.¹

Lady Charlotte's husband divorced his wife in 1809 for 'criminal conversation' in and was awarded £20,000 in damages (two million pounds in today's money); Paget had to pay for that 'conversation'!

¹ detestable witch



Lady Caroline sued Paget for divorce in the Scottish courts (where it was easier) and the divorce was granted on 29th November 1810. It became known that Lady Caroline too was having an affair, hers with George Campbell, the 6th Duke of Argyll, whom she married three weeks after the divorce. Paget and Charlotte also married less than week later on 4th December.

Only after the double divorce and two weddings did the scandal abate; Regency divorce was rare and highly newsworthy.

Postscript - When Charles, fifth Duke of Richmond, was engaged to Lady Caroline Paget, daughter of Lord Paget/Marquis of Anglesey, in a private letter to her niece, Jane Austen wrote, *If I were the Duchess of Richmond, I should be very miserable about my son's choice. What can be expected from a Paget, born and brought up in the centre of conjugal infidelity and divorces? I will not be interested about Lady Caroline. I abhor all the race of Pagets.*



Valerie Jackson, June 2023