

◆ ‘Two of the Stoutest Legs in England’

THE 2ND DUKE OF RICHMOND’S LEG BREAK IN 1732

By Timothy J. McCann

The Duke of Richmond broke his leg in 1732. This apparently minor incident is significant because of the prominence of the duke, the distinction of the doctors who treated him, and the wealth of information on the treatment he received, revealed in the contemporary newspapers and the duke’s surviving correspondence. Before the accident the duke was one of a number of occasional and enthusiastic gentleman cricket players. After the accident he became arguably the most important patron of cricket in the first half of the 18th century.

In *A Duke and his friends*, his colourful account of the life and letters of Charles Lennox, 2nd Duke of Richmond¹ in two volumes, his descendant the Earl of March, later the 8th Duke of Richmond, wrote ‘I cannot unearth any particulars of the accident whereby the Duke broke his leg during this winter, beyond the fact that it happened in London, and that the damaged limb was a long time mending’.² But the ready availability of 18th-century newspapers online and the survival of much of the correspondence of the duke’s intimate friends have enabled the story to be reconstructed.

The accident which befell the 2nd Duke of Richmond in 1732 may not seem, at first sight, to be of great historical interest, although any incident involving one so close to the crown – Richmond was after all the grandson of King Charles II – is worthy of note. However, the richness of the sources now available and the standing of the doctors who treated him have meant that a great deal of information about the treatment of his leg fractures has come to light, while the accident had a significant effect on the life of the duke in at least one important respect. Before his accident Richmond was one of a number of aristocrats who played cricket regularly with the Prince of Wales. After his accident, the duke’s interest in the game was transferred to the sponsorship and organisation of cricket teams: first his own eleven, who usually contested matches in London, and then later the famous Slindon cricket team, who played in Sussex as well as in the capital.³

The story was first broadcast by the *London Evening Post*, which reported on 20 May 1732 that ‘On Saturday Morning His Grace the Duke of Richmond had the misfortune of breaking both the Bones of his Leg’⁴ at his London house

in Privy Gardens in Whitehall, and revealed that he had already received the attention of the finest surgeons in London. The duke, the paper added, ‘is now in a fair way of Recovery, under the care of Mr. Amyand, Mr. Pressgrave, Mr. Medcalfe and Mr. Arris’.⁵ Two days later, on 22 May, the *Daily Journal* added that the duke’s leg had been broken ‘by an Iron Back, which they burn wood against, falling on him’,⁶ while the *Daily Post* added the extra information that the break was caused ‘by a vast Piece of Iron falling upon it of nine hundred Weight, which was happily set by Mr. Medcalfe, Mr. Amyand and three other eminent Surgeons’, and reassured their readers that ‘his Grace is thought to be in a fair Way of Recovery’.⁷

The Duke of Richmond was able to call on such an impressive number of surgeons to treat his broken leg for several reasons. The first was his rank and status. As the grandson of Charles II and Lord of the Bedchamber to both George I and II, with a fine town house in Whitehall, he was clearly a man of great influence, and was shortly to become Master of the Horse and a Privy Councillor. Second, he was a member of the Royal Society, having been elected in February 1724, and several of the eminent doctors who treated him, such as Amyand and Cheselden, were fellow members of that august body.⁸ Third, the duke was himself interested in medical matters. In April 1728 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Physicians, and later became an active President of the London Hospital. He was an early patron of inoculation, of which Claude Amyand and some of the other doctors were enthusiastic practitioners.

News of the accident quickly spread abroad. His grandmother, the Duchess of Portsmouth, wrote from Aubigny:

since the day I received the news of your terrible accident I have always been in a continual trance and a lively agitation; I hope my dear Child that as often as possible the Charming Duchess or Mr. Hill will send me news of you and soften the tender anxiety of my heart for you,⁹

while his brother-in-law, the Earl of Albemarle, wrote from Gibraltar 'I hope you have by this time gott safe to Goodwood where the goodness of the Air and gentle exercise will I hope entirely sett you firm upon your Leggs'.¹⁰ Benjamin Keene, the British Consul at Madrid, sent some helpful advice from Seville, writing:

I heartily pity you for what you have suffered and fear that your Island weather will retard the cure, there is now a Sun in my Chamber that would toast a Callus into a Bone in a morning's time, but I cannot for your own sake wish you back again into this Country.¹¹

And Lord Carteret wrote from Germany 'I hope to hear soon, that ye are as nimble and active as ever upon both legs'.¹²

The initial prognosis was good, and the *Daily Courant* confidently predicted that 'His Grace the Duke of Richmond who had the misfortune to break his Leg about a fortnight since, is so well recovered, that tis thought he may be able to go abroad in a few Days'.¹³ His leg was set, and the duke was presented with crutches. On 8 June, Henry Pelham wrote to him 'I rejoice at your Graces growing better and hope these crutches you mention with pleasure, will soon after they are used, be laid aside for two of the stoutest legs in England'.¹⁴ However, the optimism seems to have been misplaced. The duke found that, far from being able to go abroad, he was unable to travel in a coach and was effectively confined to his house. In July, weeks after the accident, he was forced to travel by sea to Chichester in order to get down to his estate at Goodwood.

Richmond gave his own account of the slow progress of his healing in a letter to Martin Folkes written on 16 September.

The reason of my not writing to you in all the while is that I had actually no account of my Legg to give you. That I gather strength I really believe, butt it is so slow that it is scarce perceptible. However I gett up every day, dress, and sett upp in my chair, but they do not thinke it safe to trust too much yett to my

crutches, so I have made butt mighty little use of them as yett. They have not opened the Legg, since last Sunday was fortnight, and don't thinke of opening of it, till next Sunday, so they hope to find a considerable alteration for the better.¹⁵

In the event, the duke was confined to the house for almost four months until, in October, the surgeons who had initially set his fracture were gathered together in Whitehall to give their considered opinion of the state of his leg. The story was reported in the *London Evening Post* of 5 October.

Last Week, his Grace the Duke of Richmond had a Consultation of Surgeons, occasioned by his Grace being confined in his Chamber by a simple Fracture in his Leg, that has been bound up with Splinters and Bandages for at least four Months, upon an Imagination that Nature had not provided a sufficient Callos but that it was too weak to support his Body. Mr. Medcalf and Mr. Harris, Surgeons, gave their joint opinion, that the Leg was well reduced, and that his Grace had a good stamen, blest with an excellent Constitution, and in the Prime of his Years; their Judgment therefore and Experience told them That his Grace might well safely have took the Air at least three Months ago; the two other Surgeons were positive that the Callos was soft and weak, and that they saw his Grace's Leg give way and appear crooked, at least four Months after it was broke; the eminent Mr. Cheselden after he heard all their Opinions, gave his, that all the Splinters and Bandages should be committed to the Flames, and that his Grace might have gone abroad at least two Months ago; which gave great Joy to his Grace's Noble Family, and Honour to the above mentioned Gentlemen.¹⁶

The duke gave his own version of the consultation in a further letter to Martin Folkes on 26 September.

I had Chiselden upon the opening of my Legg on Saturday, and upon examination, he and all the other surgeons agreed the callous was strong and confirm'd, so I have left off my splints, and have taken again to my crutches, and now use them every day; I can lift upp my Legg, turn it any way, and sett it to the ground, butt not to lay my whole weight

upon it yett, however I am sensibly stronger and feel that I grow more every day; I want nothing now but to recover the tone of my muskles, which motion will I dare swear soon procure me.¹⁷

However, there remained some last-minute problems. The duke continued:

Butt I have had some pretty acute pains, only within these four Days, in the shin bone, about an inch below the fracture; which I do not at all like for fear it should be a little detached splinter of the bone, which if it is, must come out, and that it would be both a troublesome and painful job; some of the surgeons say it may be so, butt they all say they believe it to be only a little inflammation of the periostium, butt Chiselden thinks the bone of the Tibia was split down thither. In short it is a little bump, and very sore, and by fits pretty painful, butt in a few days we shall know what it is. Amyand says he is absolutely sure it is nothing butt a little inflammation of the periostium, and that it will be quite gone in two or three days. The Legg is perfectly straite.

It seems that Amyand's diagnosis was correct, and the duke was quick to do his civic duty, and the *London Evening Post* reported that 'yesterday his Grace took the Air for the first Time, before Dinner, in his Coach in Hyde Park. On Monday next his Grace will go to Court to pay his Duty to his Majesty and the Royal Family'.¹⁸ The duke having done his duty and having put his affairs in London in order, the *Universal Spectator* reported that he was finally able to travel down to Goodwood, accompanied by Mr. Presgrave, one of his surgeons, in early October, where he remained to convalesce until February of the following year.¹⁹ On 7 February Colley Cibber wrote to him, rejoicing in his recovery and

heartily wishing that your leg may be able to run up and down stairs after my Lady Duchess as long as you live; however, I believe *Festina Lente* soft and fair is the best Pace you can keep, in so long a Journey of Happiness before you.²⁰

There is no evidence to suggest that the broken leg caused the duke any inconvenience during the rest of his life, but he never played cricket again.

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NOTES

¹ For Charles Lennox, 2nd Duke of Richmond, see *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), viewed at <http://www.oxford.com/view/article/16450>, 1 March 2012.

² Charles Gordon Lennox, Earl of March, *A Duke and his friends* (1911) **1**, 209.

³ Timothy J. McCann, *Sussex cricket in the eighteenth century*. Sussex Record Society **88** (2004), lii–lvi.

⁴ *London Evening Post*, 20 May 1732.

⁵ The duke's doctors were Claude Amyand, died 1740, principal and Sergeant Surgeon to Kings George I and II, Pressgrave, Metcalf and William Harris, 1647–1732, physician, who was a pioneer inoculator for smallpox and an authority on diseases of children.

⁶ *Daily Journal*, 22 May 1732.

⁷ *Daily Post*, 22 May 1732.

⁸ Claude Amyand was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1716 and William Cheselden in 1711. For Cheselden,

see *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), viewed at <http://oxforddnb.com/view/article/5226>, 1 March 2012.

⁹ West Sussex Record Office (hereafter WSRO), Goodwood MS. 8.

¹⁰ WSRO, Goodwood MS. 106, f.464

¹¹ WSRO, Goodwood MS. 107, f.611.

¹² WSRO, Goodwood MS. 110, f.77.

¹³ *Daily Courant*, 9 June 1732.

¹⁴ WSRO, Goodwood MS. 1160, f.1. Printed in Timothy J. McCann, *The correspondence of the Dukes of Richmond and Newcastle, 1724–1750*, Sussex Record Society **73** (1984), 3.

¹⁵ Royal Society of London archives, MS. 865, f.9. Printed in March, *A Duke and his friends* **1**, 215–16.

¹⁶ *London Evening Post*, 5 October 1732.

¹⁷ Royal Society, MS 865, f.10.

¹⁸ *London Evening Post*, 5 October 1732.

¹⁹ *Universal Spectator*, 21 October 1732.

²⁰ WSRO, Goodwood MS. 110, f.78.

