

No one is infallible (or shotproof)

An article by **Mike Newland**

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As we all know accidents can happen anytime, anywhere and to anyone. However, most shooting accidents are in fact avoidable, providing that constant care is taken and the basic safety rules are always meticulously observed. Quite often mishaps occur, not as one might think, committed by novices or beginners, but involving experienced shots who should know better. Even the rich and famous, the great and the good, are not beyond reproach. All too often it is some totally innocent bystander who is killed or injured as the result and not the careless perpetrator. Here are a couple of examples to prove my point.

Quite surprisingly, Sir Arthur Wellesley was a notoriously dangerous shot. Whilst shooting at Wherstead the Iron Duke peppered the face of Lord Granville, and on another occasion he frightened Lady Shelley's daughter Fanny by his careless use of the gun, whereby her mother advised her terrified offspring to stand behind the Duke so that she might enjoy a greater degree of safety. Perhaps it was on the same day (as Lady Shelley was present on this occasion too) that he peppered an old lady who was minding her own business sitting at the window of her cottage. Justifiably the old woman caused quite a fuss, only to be told by Lady Shelley that *"This ought to be the proudest moment of your life. You have the distinction of being shot by the great Duke of Wellington"*. However, the old woman's pride in the honour that the Duke had bestowed upon her was not entirely restored until he compensated her for her injuries with the payment of a guinea. Elsewhere it is also recorded that the Duke was able to claim a dog and a beater in the columns of his Game Book headed *"Various"*.

A very embarrassing incident made the headlines when Lord Claremont was shot in the backside by none other than the Prince of Wales. I wonder if the noble Lord felt a corresponding feeling of pride having been shot by no lesser personage than the heir to the throne himself? It was reported in "The Times" as follows: *"Lord Claremont, having eaten too hearty a breakfast, retired in a reclining posture behind a furze-bush. Two of the Prince's dogs scented the noble peer and came to a point. His Royal Highness let fly at the bush, wounding his Lordship in the defenceless portion of his body. The Prince's gun hung fire, or the snipe would have received the full charge. Twenty-seven and a half grains of Number Three shot were later extracted from Lord Claremont's bum"*.

The foregoing paragraph raises some interesting anomalies and begs the question as to whether the journalist in point had any particular understanding of game shooting at all. For instance, how can you have twenty-seven and a half grains of shot and why would anyone in their right mind be using No.3 shot for snipe. It does appear that the newspaper reporters of the time paid no more attention to the facts than they do today. The only thing that can be said is that if this really was the case, then when the time came to extract them they would be relatively easy to find, although the degree of penetration would probably have been considerable.

It is only when one realises that even the highest in the land, men who shot on a far more regular basis than you or I, often fail to obey the fundamental rules of safety do we become acutely aware how easy it is

for the casual or occasional shooter to commit similar errors. Let's face it, the shooting fraternity already has more than enough institutions and organisations endeavouring to prevent it indulging in its chosen pastime without Parliament being alienated still further by having its Peers shot at.

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