



Adultery and murder: Sir Jock Broughton and his first wife Vera (top left). Diana (left), and with her lover Lord Erroll (top right). Oserian (centre), Erroll's house bought by Broughton after the trial

# THE FINAL PIECE OF MISCHIEF

The killing of the Earl of Erroll in wartime Kenya created a sensation. Now a new letter from Sir Jock Broughton, the man who was acquitted of the murder, has been discovered. JAMES FOX, author of *White Mischief*, explains its significance

THE LAST postcard I received from Cyril Connolly before his death came from Senegal where he had gone to find "the nearest elephants to the Grays Inn Road". It contained a detail about our old collaboration, the mystery of who killed Lord Erroll in Kenya in 1941. He never gave up the search for "any fact or phrase that will suddenly bring it all into focus".

He may be stirring now: an avalanche is upon us. Two film makers, Livio Negri and Warwick Hembry have discovered an extraordinary letter for their documentary on the case *Altitude, Alcohol and Adultery* (the title taken from Connolly), to be shown on Thursday night on BBC1 at 12.10. It is a document I would dearly like to have had. It throws a new and highly unflattering light on the role played in the affair by its central character and femme fatale, Diana Broughton, who later became, as Lady Delamere, the doyenne of the post independence whites in Kenya.

Sir Jock Delves Broughton, millionaire and racing man, owner of Doddington Park in Cheshire, left his wife Vera for Diana, ("one of those angelic blondes of the period") who was 30 years his junior, in 1940. They married in South Africa on their way to Kenya to sit out the war. Within two months Diana had fallen in love with Josslyn Hay, Earl of Erroll, the playboy of the Aberdares. Erroll was shot soon afterwards. Broughton was acquitted of murder in a trial that made world headlines and scandalised wartime Britain. The letter lends weight to the conclusions of my book, *White Mischief*, that Broughton was in fact Erroll's killer.

For a time after the trial it looked as if Broughton and Diana might settle down again together. Then things took another bad turn. The letter is written from Broughton to Diana three months after his acquittal, in October 1942. He is in Mombasa, in a state of terminal depression waiting for a troopship to take him back to England, leaving Diana, who has taken up, to his fury, with the wealthy rancher Gilbert Colville whom she later married.

The descriptions in the letter of Diana's betrayals and affairs — before they went to Kenya and after Erroll's

death — and her humiliation and mockery of him are completely new to the story. Most escaped even the exaggerated Kenya rumour industry and certainly my book. In the second part, Broughton attempts to blackmail her to get her back. I wrote about the blackmail in outline but I never had this letter that propelled the story on to its grim ending.

The mechanics of the blackmail can be summarised. In 1939 Broughton, feeling hard up, persuaded an admirer of Diana, Hugh Dickinson, to "steal" Diana's pearls. Diana received an insurance cheque for £12,000. Dickinson put the "stolen" pearls in a deposit box and gave them to Broughton's solicitors. Dickinson is also in Kenya, in uniform, at this moment. The letter begins:

"DIANA, I am determined to punish you for ruining my life in the way you have done. Up to the time we left England, universally popular, respected, millions of friends and welcome everywhere, I worshipped the ground you stood on and got divorced in order to marry you. On board the boat you became a stranger to me and a completely different human being. You started a f\*\*\* with Tony Mordant under my eyes and I discovered the copy of a letter you wrote to your Italian, the most violent love letter, written when living with me on Doddington writing paper. This was the first time I knew you had double crossed me.

"We got to South Africa where at Cape Town you were bloody to me most of the time. When being thoroughly fed up I said I should like to return to England; in front of the Bailes family, you said, 'I shall stay in South Africa, why don't you return to England?' Charming for me. You made such a farce of our marriage that the Registrar almost refused to marry you. If I had not adored you I should not have been fool enough to marry you but I worshipped you. We came up to Kenya where for about six weeks I was happy. You then started double crossing me with Erroll. Do you think any woman has ever treated any man as badly as you did me? Letting him be divorced from a wife he has lived with not unhappily for 25 years and then telling him



she was leaving him two months after she had married him because she had let herself fall in love. Millions of people fall in love, but they have feelings of decency and do not behave like you did.

"If you had returned to England you would have gotten over it. Erroll was murdered. You say yourself it never occurred to you to connect it with me, till the police put it into your head. You then in your evidence did all in your power to get me hung... Later you say you were convinced I had nothing to do with it. [This was an unfair taunt. Diana never gave evidence in court. It was she who went to South Africa to hire Harry Morris QC who got Broughton off, mostly by creating confusion about the ballistics evidence. Juanita Carberry, to whom Broughton confessed hours after the murder, also overheard Diana screaming accusations at Broughton that he had killed her lover the following day and later Broughton contradicts himself.]

"Can you realise what it is to live with someone who is always telling you how much they were in love with someone else and that you often thought I murdered him.

"After the verdict you were charming to me and were perfectly happy in Ceylon and India (where they went on holiday). We came back and were quite happy till we went on safari with Gilbert Colville. Since that moment everything has gone wrong. You knew he was the richest settler in Kenya, could be useful to you, was easy money and laid yourself out to ensnare him... During the safari you made it clear you hated me and never took the slightest notice

of me, and to rub it in, made the most frightful fuss of Gilbert Colville all the time. I began to hate you for this but took it all lying down."

Diana — in her defence — is being asked to continue her marriage with a man she was sure, as she told me, had killed her lover, Erroll. She is trapped in Kenya, her reputation ruined, socially ostracised, not knowing how to get rid of her husband. She had latched on to Gilbert Colville as her route of exit. Colville, a contemporary of Broughton at Eton, was considered almost an honorary Masai, who lived in hermit-like squalor with many dogs on a huge ranch next to Oserian, the "Djinn Palace", Erroll's old house which Broughton now bought to please Diana — a fatal move, as he soon recognised.

"We have never been anything else but unhappy since we went there. I never objected to you having people to stay but when we had rows you always dinned into me how you were still in love with Erroll. This and your very fervent friendship with Colville and your obvious dislike of being ever alone with me made me depressed, unhappy and hating the place, people, country — everything connected with it.

"I thought things were going better when you had Hugh Strickland to stay... Like the poor fool I was I had no idea of what was happening or why you put him in a room with no lock on the door opening straight out into your rooms till Chappy Bailes told me that he was seen kissing you in your bedroom at the Stanley by a highly amused crowd from Torr's hotel.

"Even then, thinking you had always told me the truth about your 'cold tem-

perament' I didn't suspect what was going on till you were so anxious to get me off to bed one night with a sleeping draught. I watched through the window of your bathroom and saw you actually go and fetch him and return to your bedroom with him, and then listened to him f\*\*\* you not more than three yards away. By the way the whole bed rocked you evidently enjoyed it, like you used to with me."

For the next two nights he waited and watched — the cuckold turned voyeur — "but you both had chills and I saw nothing. The next night I asked for a sleeping draught and went to bed early and watched and saw him walk into your bedroom and get into bed, and you followed and got into bed with him. I then took action."

Diana's reaction was to "have the cheek to suggest" that Strickland stay another four days. "Like the fool I was, still loving you, I forgave it, but since that moment you have been more vile to me than anyone would think possible. It was of course because you were furious at being caught out red-handed." What "maddened" Broughton, he said, "was you telling me it was bad for you and hurt you when I wanted to have you and going to bed night after night with a vigorous man who certainly made your inside so bad that you had to have another operation."

Then, according to Broughton, Diana said she couldn't live with him any more. Her final pretext was a letter she found that Broughton had written to Vera, his ex-wife, asking to be taken back and saying that he hated Diana. Broughton was by now living in Nairobi. Colville had moved into Oserian.

"There was only one possible course left to me and I left. You never even said goodbye to me." He accuses her of ruining him financially — "the trial cost me over £5,000" — and adds pathetically: "You have been consistently selfish in every way, and I have given in to you because you made yourself so absolutely bloody when I did not."

He then moves to the blackmail. "You can imagine how I am nearly dead with depression by now, and all my thoughts have been centered on how I can punish you for what you have done to me. You have double crossed me so many times that I am going to double cross you properly if I find my suspicions justified... I have always been suspicious as to what you had inside the deed box you gave me to give George Green (his solicitor) to keep for you."

DIANA could already see from this sentence — a wicked distortion of events — how he intended to frame her. If Diana didn't start for England in 10 days, he wrote, he would have the box sent to Scotland Yard. "You will then be sent home for trial.

"The penalty for this offence is 14 years hard labour. You are now nearly 29 and by the time you were taken home for trial and sentenced it might take nine months and this would keep you from double crossing me and popping into bed with any strange man until you are 44, and prison is very ageing and I don't think you would find men so easy then. I am wondering how your 'Tigie darling' would react to your confession. At any rate he will have died of old age before you get out of jail.

"You have changed me into a fiend thirsting for vengeance. I think of nothing else. I never sleep for thinking of it. I am determined to see you in the dock

where I was last year because of your love affair with Joss Erroll. I get bloodier minded every day."

In another paragraph he added: "I have not slept for nights, and my nerves have gone to pot from misery and depression and I am only just sane and I am only buoyed up by the thought of revenge at any cost. As I say, hate and love are very akin, and I still love you. I hate you sometimes like you do me, but I miss you every hour of the day and night, and want you back and am determined that swine Gilbert Colville who is the cause of all this shall not have you. I thought how I could punish you both and this is how I am going to do it."

BRUGHTON'S conditions for lifting the blackmail were that Diana should come back and live a "normal" life with him — offering her, in effect, a miserable form of human bondage. "I would take a house, I think, just outside London and we should both have to do jobs of work like everyone else in England. We shall both have lots of friends and I would never have anyone in the house you didn't like, and you would do the same, but I won't have you getting out of bed with other men.

"In England, among your friends you would soon forget and be happy. But if you do show signs of hatred or annoy me when you return I shall act at once... I am not double crossing you nearly as badly as you have me. It is moreover quite useless coming back to me as a stranger or knowing that you hate me, but as my wife."

Diana took the letter to the Attorney General, Sir Walter Harragin. Dickinson made a confession to the police but was never charged. The information was wired ahead of Broughton's arrival. He was met at Liverpool by two CID officers who questioned him and released him. Broughton committed suicide a few days later in the Adelphi Hotel, leaving a note to say that he couldn't face another trial and the disgrace it would cause to his family.

The letter he wrote was copied by Walter Harragin's secretary at the time, Mrs Peggy Pitt, who now lives in Oxford. She held on to it for many years, hoping to write her own account of the trial but recently handed it over to the documentary makers.

The letter adds to Broughton's guilt. In his outburst of rage Broughton never mentions the outrageous fortune of having been tried for a murder he didn't commit. He merely blames the whole trial on Diana's affair with Erroll. He never, in fact, showed the slightest curiosity as to how Erroll met his death."

But perhaps more significant is the pattern of masochism, and voyeurism, the self-victimisation the letter shows — the same pattern he followed when Diana went off with Erroll; pretending to forgive and be a *mari complaisant* and underneath working up into a murderous rage which finally exploded at the end of a gun.

As for Diana, who charmed me as she had charmed others, I could never quite understand why she had made so little objection to my book, against the advice of her friends. Now perhaps I know why. In the end, "Perhaps Africa was to blame," as Connolly wrote. "It insinuates violence, liberates unacted desires." Or perhaps you just shouldn't leave letters lying around.

W. F. Deedes's column will return next Monday