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*The extraordinary story of  
the Australian butcher who  
said he was a baronet*



# THE CLAIMANT

**PAUL TERRY**



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*The public would say such things could never happen. And yet the chief characters did exist, and the incidents did happen.*

— MARK TWAIN



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## — Author's Note —

**T**he direct quotes in this book were sourced from newspaper reports, books, court records, diaries and letters. Where conversations are generally accepted they have been presented as such. Where dispute arises, the text attributes the source of the quotes. For example, the Claimant's robust encounter with the lawyer Bowker is taken from the very partisan Edward Kenealy in his *Trial at Bar of Sir Roger Tichborne*. So, too, are the words of the Dowager Lady Tichborne at the moment of her reunion with her 'son'. Many of the undisputed conversations that form part of the dialogue in this book can be found in newspaper reports at the National Library of Australia's excellent website, [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au).



## — List of Characters —

- Lord Edward Bellew* – A tattooed nobleman.
- Andrew Bogle* – A Doughty family servant and supporter of the Claimant.
- Sir William Bovill* – The judge in the Claimant’s civil trial.
- ‘Tom Castro’* – A humble Wagga butcher.
- Mary ‘Castro’/Tichborne* – Tom’s wife.
- The Claimant* – Once known as Tom Castro, he claimed to be Sir Roger Tichborne.
- Sir Alexander Cockburn* – The lead judge in the Claimant’s criminal trial.
- Charley Cox* – The owner of an important pocketbook.
- William Cresswell* – A ‘lunatic’ with a mysterious past.
- Lily Enever* – The Claimant’s second wife.
- William Gibbes* – A gullible Wagga solicitor.
- Vincent Gosford* – The Tichborne estate steward.
- Henry Hawkins* – A highly effective barrister.
- John Holmes* – The Claimant’s solicitor.
- Edward Hopkins* – Former Tichborne family solicitor and the Claimant’s fishing partner.
- Dr Edward Kenealy* – A brilliant but erratic barrister.
- Mary Ann Loder* – Arthur Orton’s sweetheart.
- Jean Luie, aka Carl Lundgren* – A very important witness.
- Colonel Franklin Lushington* – Tichborne House tenant and Claimant supporter.
- John Moore* – Roger Tichborne’s valet.
- Guildford Onslow, MP* – A great supporter of the Claimant.

*Lady Katherine Radcliffe, nee Kattie Doughty* – Roger Tichborne’s cousin and true love.

*Arthur Orton* – A mysterious butcher’s son from Wapping.

*Edward Rous* – A publican and supporter of the Claimant.

*Lord Horace Rivers* – An aristocratic supporter of the Claimant.

*Richard Slate* – A friend of Tom Castro.

*Agnes (Theresa) Tichborne* – The Claimant’s oldest daughter.

*Lady Henriette (the Dowager) Tichborne* – Roger’s mother.

*Roger Tichborne* – The missing heir to the Tichborne baronetcy.

*Lady Mabella de Tychbyrna* – The originator of a 12th century curse.

*George Whalley, MP* – A supporter of the Claimant.

*John Whicher* – A private detective.

## — Prologue —

**T**he fat man in the courtroom no longer had a name. Once he had called himself Tom Castro, butcher from Wagga Wagga, Australia, but now he claimed to be someone far more important – the missing Sir Roger Charles Doughty Tichborne, baronet of Tichborne Park in Hampshire.

It was a claim not without merit. Dozens of people who knew Tichborne, who was assumed lost at sea years earlier, were certain Castro was indeed the heir to one of England's oldest fortunes. In homes and pubs and streets and halls across Britain, tens of thousands more were so fervent in their belief that they transformed him from man to monument.

What was in a name? For the fat man, everything. If he won he would be titled and wealthy. If he lost, he faced disgrace, ruin and even prison because Roger's noble and powerful family were certain the butcher from Wagga was neither Castro nor Tichborne, but Arthur Orton, son of an East End merchant and one of history's greatest impostors.

Now known as 'the Claimant', he had emerged from a place few had heard of to assume the ancient position he said was his. In May 1871, the first of two marathon trials began to establish whether he was telling the truth. At the centre sat the Claimant, an enormous mass of humanity whose grand ambitions and imperious air made him the most recognised man in the United Kingdom.

Broad-faced, bewhiskered and stylishly dressed in the latest fashions, he gave an impression of utter solidity and unshakable confidence. Around him sat legal men, made small

and lean by his imposing bulk. It was their job to poke and prod at a story that seemed outlandish beyond the limits of credibility, yet also hummed with possibility of truth. On benches above the Claimant sat the gentlemen of the jury. They would decide if he was baronet or butcher.

At first glance it seemed there should be no case at all. The Claimant was rough-spoken and hard-handed; Tichborne had been a coddled aristocrat. The morbidly obese Claimant threatened to burst out of his finely tailored clothes; Tichborne had been angular and thin. The Claimant's only language was English, spoken (some said) with a Cockney accent; Sir Roger's first language was French and his English was heavily influenced by his Parisian upbringing. And, importantly, Tichborne supposedly had tattoos on one arm but the Claimant had none. To the Tichborne family it was proof the Claimant was a brazen fraud, and with a fortune to protect, they were willing to spend almost all of it to stop him.

But he had powerful support. The only person who had always maintained hope of finding Roger Tichborne alive – his widowed mother – accepted the Claimant with an open heart as her long-lost son. It had the world asking, how could a mother not know her own child? And there were others equally certain Tichborne had returned from the dead: parliamentarians, peers, doctors, lawyers and loyal servants to the family all swore on their honour that the Claimant was indeed the prodigal son, home from the wilderness.

True, he had forgotten things that Roger should have known intimately, yet he could recall dozens of small details of Roger's life that meshed perfectly with the truth. He knew the names of Roger's pet dogs and descriptions of the paintings that hung on the walls of his ancestral home. He remembered names and recognised faces. He could share memories of moments in Roger's youth and he seemed to hide a hint of

refinement behind a mask of coarseness. Most of all, he *looked* a lot like a Tichborne.

In his smile, the broad sweep of his forehead or the heavy line of his eyebrows, people saw traits that clearly reminded them of members of that ancient family. To some, the resemblance was so strong it was impossible to think he could be anyone *but* a Tichborne. What was more, it was said that the Claimant and Tichborne shared the same unusual facial twitch – a compulsive tic of the eye. The Claimant even had Roger’s knock-kneed walk. Surely this could not be coincidence, the believers argued. The odds otherwise were unthinkable.

And if that were not enough, there was another argument, one best debated behind closed doors. It was not fit for the ears of ladies but among themselves, gentlemen quietly discussed something about the Claimant that was very unusual: his penis retracted into his body like that of a horse. As remarkable as this was, however, it was not the point. The really compelling argument was that Roger Tichborne may well have had the *very same condition*.

It combined to put a case so convincing that when the Claimant visited the Tichborne estate, he was greeted by a brass band and a joyous mob that welcomed him home from the dead. The enthusiasm spread like a fever through British working-class hearts and soon he was feted as a hero, the figurehead of a movement that threatened to turn Victorian society on its head.

His tests came in the two longest trials ever held in England. The first sought truth, the second, justice. At the end of each day at court, thousands jostled in the streets for a glimpse of the Claimant tipping his hat from the leather seats of his carriage. At night, hundreds more filled halls and theatres to hear him speak, and cheered themselves hoarse as they gave him money and support. As a wronged aristocrat with the

heart and manners of a working man, he was to his lower-class fans both flag-bearer and celebrity.

Against him was a worried but powerful ruling class that would do whatever it took to bring him down.

His story wound from crowded London streets into quiet rural villages in South America and over the sun-baked hard lands of the Australian bush. It was a tale of intrigue, adventure, mystery and even – some said – murder. It spawned a media and souvenir industry on a scale never seen before. It inspired stage shows, books, songs and operas. Reputations were made and destroyed, fortunes found and lost, a noble family's 900-year dynasty was brought almost to ruin, and the courts reached their verdicts to acclaim and fury.

But the Claimant had the last word.

When he died, the Tichborne family gave his widow permission to bury him in a coffin bearing Roger Tichborne's name, the Claimant's final act of provocation in a lifetime of controversy. And at the end of his spectacular existence the same questions remained: if he *was* Roger Tichborne, why did so many deny it? And if he was an *impostor*, how did he manage to fool so many more?

## CHAPTER 1

# — A Very Unattractive Man —

**T**here was not much to talk about in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, in 1866.

The creeks were running high with unexpected summer rain, raising hopes that a drought might be over, and those hopes were fulfilled when rain returned late in autumn. In winter, two bushrangers got tongues wagging when they robbed a man in the hills to the east, but they were soon caught, the excitement over. In spring, a visiting musical troupe raised eyebrows when a female performer appeared on stage dressed as a man, and controversy raged over a church choir's insistence on chanting rather than singing the responses to the Commandments at services. To cap off this unremarkable year, readers of the town's only newspaper were astonished to learn that a swooping magpie had knocked a pipe from a man's mouth as he walked past the racecourse.

Little wonder then, by year's end, an intriguing story that had started as a rumour some twelve months earlier became an event so exciting it made the town world famous. The subject of this story was an unlikely fellow to merit such interest. His name, or so he claimed, was Tomás de Castro (plain Tom Castro to his friends), and at first glance there was nothing remarkable about him.

Tom was a butcher who plied his trade from a bark-and-slab hut half a block back from the long and dusty main street. Few who met him could have doubted his occupation. Not one to bother much with personal hygiene, his wardrobe consisted of two or three blue dungaree shirts and a pair of

moleskin trousers, all liberally coated with the blood and marrow of the beasts he butchered and sold from his humble store. On gala days, he added a tarnished red sash to his ensemble. He was a very ordinary man making a hard living in an equally hard and ordinary bush town. Or so it seemed.

About halfway between Sydney and Melbourne, Tom Castro's Wagga Wagga was little more than a street that roughly followed the course of the winding Murrumbidgee River on its long journey west. The wide streets, few as they were, were dusty, rutted tracks in the hot months and soupy strips of mud and manure in the cold, damp weeks of winter. Much of the place had an air of impermanence: roads were dotted with stumps of hastily felled gum trees and river flats were studded with triangles of canvas, tent homes for the poor who could not afford a hut of bark.

There were a few buildings of substance that showed the town was looking to the future. A steam-powered mill ground local grain into flour, several new banks tried to give an impression of stability and there were plans to build a post office. The Australian Hotel, an expensive eighteen-room edifice of brick and iron, perched atop a little rise in the main street. Nearby was an equally solid two-level store where stockmen and servants from runs and stations came to buy food, tools, hardware, dressmaking material, lace, ribbons and hats. These fine buildings had pride of place on the high point on the main street, and not just because of the social status it conferred. As the townsfolk had discovered to their cost, the low-lying areas along the river were plagued by sudden, terrible floods that carried off ramshackle dwellings and their occupants with deadly ferocity.

Wagga was a young town, settled in the early 1830s by illegal squatters who saw wealth on the green river flats and in the rolling hills that cascaded down from the Great Dividing Range to the east. Soon, however, a rowdy element moved

in as labour for the squatters. By the 1840s, almost half the population was made up of ex-convicts, who were put to work in the area's steadily growing agribusinesses. Wagga Wagga was now a tough little town with a reputation for violence and disorder. There was a need for police to catch the criminals and a jail to house them. By 1862, the town had ten police and an ugly-looking prison that frowned over the rear of the courthouse, as if daring the ruffians to try their luck.

Alcohol was often at the core of the strife, and a man looking for a drink in Wagga Wagga did not have to look far. Hotels and grog shops had sprung up on both sides of the river, and the main street boasted pubs of varying sizes and quality, many concentrated in a cluster at each end of a new toll bridge that spanned the river between the main part of town and the broad floodplain of North Wagga.

The abundance of hotels pleased Tom Castro. He was a man who enjoyed a drink, though he was not always welcome at every pub in town. Where one chose to drink depended on how one was brought up. The Australian Hotel on the rise in the main street was for the well-to-do and not a place where Tom was comfortable, which was a pity because it was conveniently close to his place of work. His little store and place of residence sat behind the pub amid of a jumble of stables, sheds and cottages. Tom did not much mind missing out on the attractions of the Australian; there were other working-men's pubs on both sides of the river and he was welcome at them all. If, after a drink or two, he hinted to his mates that he was secretly better suited to the finer pubs, none believed him.

He was an affable type with many friends. Among his greatest mates was Dick Slate. Slate was a person of some education, if a little wayward. They enjoyed many a drink together until Slate left town to drive a mob of cattle to Melbourne, 450 kilometres south, a departure so sudden that it

might have had more to do with the late-night ‘bushwhacking’ of a drunken farmer than cattle.

Nobody gave it much thought at the time. It was only later, when the man who had once called himself Tom Castro was famous, that people remembered Slate was from Hampshire in England. Many wondered what lessons the butcher might have learnt from his wayward friend but by then it was too late to ask. Slate was never heard of again.

Tom liked to big-note himself. On fishing trips to the river with another friend, he observed that the winding, sandy banks lined with stately red gums were a good place for ‘a man to build his own estate’. With a subtle nod, he hinted it that was something he just might do. He let it be known that he could ride in a carriage, or dine at the Australian Hotel, should he wish to. He even thought about buying a hotel of his own. His friends thought little of this boasting. If he had secrets to hide, nobody was much interested.

But Tom Castro was no mere butcher. By 1866 his fellow townfolk knew him to be the heir to the fortune of one of England’s oldest families. As strange as it seemed, the rough-spoken, happy-natured butcher was apparently not just another penniless bushman making a living in a rough town, but a noble-blooded gentleman with grace, title and fortune. It was almost beyond belief.

But there *was* something mysterious about him. His past was cloudy. Everyone knew he had lived in South America and could ride a horse and lasso cattle, but the rest of his history was filled in only by hints and nods. He was the subject of all sorts of stories. One linked him to a bloodthirsty outlaw, and another to the unsolved murder of a stockman. But the big story about Tom Castro that always burnt brightest with a hint of truth was one he spread himself.

Tom Castro made his first confirmed appearance in Australia in 1859 when he turned up in the New South Wales town of Deniliquin, where he worked as a butcher. His departure from that town was sudden and rancorous, and might have been related to an ill-advised affair with a young lady. Tom was not missed in Deniliquin but nor was it forgotten that while there he hinted at aristocratic birth and supposedly drank from a silver flask inscribed with 'Tom Castro' on one side and the initials 'R.C.T.' on the other.

From Deniliquin he made his way to the western town of Hay, where he ran the Queen's Mail across the plains. Later, he headed east to the hills at Tumut, where he operated a butcher shop that soon went broke. In the summer of 1864 he moved to Wagga and worked as a butcher in that one-windowed wattle-and-bark hut behind the Australian Hotel. A small compartment at the rear served as his bedroom, where he was lulled to sleep by the mournful lowing of cattle at the town saleyards just a stone's throw away. It seemed that Wagga was just another stop in the journey of this rambling bushman.

Tom liked to keep an eye on local affairs, and soon after his arrival in Wagga his attention was caught by the notorious bushranger Daniel 'Mad Dan' Morgan, who shot and killed a worker on a station near the town of Culcairn to the south. A few days later, Morgan struck again, this time in the rugged hills near Tumbarumba to the east, where he shot dead a police sergeant. The failure of the police to catch him annoyed the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which declared, 'The aggression of this villain Morgan caused great indignation, and the inhabitants of the district consider it a disgrace to the government and the police that he is still at large.'

Tom was more intrigued than indignant. He was fascinated by Morgan and hinted that he had met the bushranger on a number of occasions. He even let it be known that he was considering hunting Morgan down and personally bringing

him to justice. As it happened, Morgan would fall to other hands, but his life had a postscript that dovetailed into Tom's.

Later, Tom was intrigued to read a story in the *Wagga Express*. Headlined 'FREAKS OF FORTUNE', it told a fascinating tale of how a gardener labouring in the grounds of the humble Cookardinia Hotel, 80 kilometres south, was not a humble gardener but the rightful Earl of Stafford.

Cookardinia, with its rectangular hotel of weatherboard and scattering of cottages lining a dry creek bed, was an unlikely place for an earl, and the newspaper was sceptical. However, it reported in good faith that the lucky gardener had already received £1000 from his estate and a further £15,000 was due to arrive in the next mail from England. The gardener, observed the paper rather pompously, was 'much superior to his present position; this may or may or not be, but we presume some allowance must be made for the romantic halo which such an occurrence cast for the time, upon the hero thereof'.

Like the *Express*, Tom had no idea whether the story was true or not. He might have been surprised to learn that the earldom of Stafford had been extinct since 1762. The Cookardinia gardener, William Stafford Perrott, had laid claim to the title and was using whatever money he could eke from it to enthusiastically drink himself to death. Tom preferred to believe it was true. He enjoyed tales with a romantic twist. If he liked people to know that, like the gardener, he too was of noble birth, then nobody much cared. At least, not at first.

Tom had arrived in town looking for a wife. This was difficult enough for any man in a town of fewer than a thousand people, most of whom were male. But in his case it was even harder, partly because he was a very unattractive man. Now aged about thirty, he was five feet nine inches tall and running to fat. He had a broad, jowly face framed by whiskers and a twitch in his forehead above the right eye. Some of his upper

teeth were missing, his speech was coarse and he was a little too fond of the bottle to make good husband material.

These were all liabilities for a man looking for a mate but Tom had one more shortcoming – a serious one that might have done little to endear him to potential wives. He had a rare genital deformity that caused his penis to withdraw into his body. Although it functioned effectively, it spent most of its time hidden away like a mouse in a hole. Later, this condition would take on an importance that went far beyond its value as a medical oddity.

In 1864, Castro met Mary Ann Bryant, a servant at a pub in North Wagga, while he recovered from a fall from a horse. Mary, who was remembered unkindly as ‘a big lump of a girl’ and ‘a person of low and vulgar habits’ had recently moved to Wagga from the town of Goulburn in the Southern Tablelands, south of Sydney. One of eleven children of a widow, Mary had been brought up in harsh poverty. When she arrived in Wagga, she was carrying a child to an unknown father. Tom was no catch, but Mary was not in a position to choose and when he proposed, she accepted.

A few months later, she delivered a little girl she named Annie. On a hot Sunday evening in January 1865, the couple married in a service conducted by a Wesleyan minister at a private home. The groom signed the wedding certificate as Tom Castro, son of a Chilean merchant. The illiterate Mary signed with a cross.

The newlyweds moved into a tumbledown shack on the banks of the Wollundry Lagoon, a shallow, tree-lined billabong that curved away from the town’s main street like a gigantic brown snake. Their home was a windowless jumble of timber that rested precariously against a chimney of decaying bark. From this unimpressive hovel, it was a short walk to Tom’s shop a few blocks away.

Not that he was much of a worker. He preferred to do



*Tom Castro's hovel, the first home of 'Tom' and 'Mary Castro' in Wagga. Its only luxury was the fireplace with a chimney built by Mary.*

as little as possible, which did not impress his wife. On one occasion, she roundly abused him after he refused to shuffle across the dirt track outside their home to fetch a bucket of water from the billabong. Luckily, the strong and thickset young bride could work hard enough for both of them and she rebuilt their home's decaying chimney with some secondhand bricks.

It was no small comfort. In a Wagga summer an egg can be fried on a piece of tin in the sun, but on winter nights, heavy grey fogs close in like a damp shroud, sometimes not lifting until after lunch. On clear nights, stars blaze in a cold black sky and in the mornings, thick frost coats the ground like frozen white paint. At these times a warm fire was the family's only luxury.

Mary kept busy scrubbing floors and taking in washing. Tom went to work as often he needed to and, eternally good-natured, he could be heard whistling as he butchered sheep and cattle and sold the cuts at his little shop. The Castros, it seemed, were no different to any other working-class family in the little town on the big river.

In the year of the marriage, a bookshop opened in the main street. Tom was an avid reader and it was possibly from this shop that he bought books to read by candlelight in the

evenings as Mary busied herself with the baby and keeping their little home habitable. Tom's taste in literature ran to the romantic. He enjoyed 'sensation' novels by Gerald Griffin, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Captain Marryot. One of his favourites was Braddon's *Aurora Floyd*, the dramatic story of a beautiful and rich young woman who concealed a dark and dangerous secret. It was a tale of deceit, blackmail and murder, and he was so impressed with the words of the story's villain that he paraphrased them on a page of his pocketbook: 'Some Men has plenty money and no brains. And some Men has plenty Brains and no Money. Surely Men with plenty Money and no brains were made for Men with plenty brains and no Money.'

Tom was in the latter category, with brains enough but no money. He was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, with outstanding debts of £200. Among those pursuing him was a local solicitor, William Gibbes, acting for one of Tom's creditors. In a meeting, Gibbes discussed with Tom the possibility of insolvency. Tom was initially attracted to what seemed an easy way out of his problem but backtracked rapidly when Gibbes told him that declaring bankruptcy under a false name could render him liable to criminal charges.

Tom asked Gibbes whether it would be a problem if he failed to declare property he owned in England, which made the lawyer's ears prick up. He was even more interested to hear that Tom had 'a great horror of the sea' because he had been in a shipwreck. There were rumours swirling around town about Tom, and Gibbes was a man who kept his ear to the ground. These 'secrets' seemed to confirm there was more to the butcher than it seemed.

But rumours were grist for the mill in a town where everyone knew everyone else, so Gibbes did not pay them much mind until August 1865, when an intriguing advertisement appeared in the newspapers. Placed by a missing person's

agency in Sydney, the notices appealed for information about a young British aristocrat and heir to a fortune, Roger Charles Doughty Tichborne, who had not been seen since sailing from the port of Rio on the ship *Bella* in 1854. The *Bella* had been lost along with all on board. But according to the notice a handful from the ship were thought to have survived. Importantly, an alluring incentive was offered to anyone who could find the missing heir among those survivors:

It is not known whether the said Roger Charles Tichborne was amongst the drowned or saved. He would at the present time be about 32 years of age; is of a delicate constitution, rather tall, with very light brown hair and blue eyes. Mr Tichborne is the son of Sir James Tichborne... (now deceased) and is heir to all his estates. The advertiser is instructed to state that a most liberal REWARD will be given for any information that may definitely point out his fate. All replies to be addressed to Mr Arthur Cubitt, Missing Friends Office, Bridge-street, Sydney, New South Wales.

It was never established whether Tom saw the notice but Gibbes' wife certainly did, and when she told him about it, he hurried to the Wagga Mechanics' Institute where he found it in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. It seemed to Gibbes that, just maybe, Tom might know something about the missing Roger Tichborne. Life as a bush solicitor was not lucrative and to Gibbes the idea of a 'most liberal REWARD' was most appealing. Backed more by hope than evidence, Gibbes began to convince himself that Tom was the missing Tichborne.

A few days later, Gibbes engineered a meeting with Tom as he stood under a verandah smoking a pipe. Gibbes got straight to the point.

'I know who you are!' he cried. 'Shall I call you by your real name?'

Tom was alarmed. ‘For God’s sake, don’t! I don’t want my family to know,’ he replied and turned away.

But as he did so, he slyly waved the pipe and Gibbes could see the bowl had been inscribed with the initials ‘R.C.T.’. Under persistent questioning, Tom admitted he was the missing son of an English nobleman. He had survived a shipwreck, and had been picked up in a lifeboat by the crew of another ship and taken to Melbourne. He had changed his name and turned his back on his family so his younger brother, to whom he had been close, could claim the title.

Gibbes thought he had found his man. On 9 October, he dashed off a letter to the missing person’s agent, Arthur Cubitt, whom he had met briefly in Sydney a few years earlier.

I ‘spotted’ him, I think, some time ago, and could find him, I think, and if I could would urge him to disclose himself. He was hugely disgusted when he found I had detected him, and his real name has never passed between us. I should like the further particulars to enable me to be certain, that is quite certain, for I have scarce any doubt.

Without waiting for Cubitt’s reply, Gibbes struck an agreement with Tom. His identity would be kept secret for five months, as would the details of his marriage. Finally, and most importantly, Tom would require money from the Tichborne family should he have to go to England to claim his inheritance.

Meanwhile, Gibbes wrote to Cubitt, suggesting they share £250 in reward money from Roger’s mother, the Dowager Lady Tichborne. Cubitt was equally keen to get his hands on the reward, but his plans did not necessarily include Gibbes. In November, Cubitt wrote to Lady Tichborne

in Paris, declaring that her missing son had been found in Australia. Events were being set in train that, once started, were impossible to stop.

Gibbes' growing conviction that Tom was a baronet was strengthened when the butcher visited the solicitor's family home. As Gibbes' wife got up to leave the room, her husband noticed Tom opened the door for her with 'the easy grace of a gentleman ... he did not bow too little or too much'. To Gibbes' way of thinking it was further proof that the rough-handed butcher was hiding his true light under a bushel. Encouraged, the solicitor decided to press his case and warned Tom, 'if you don't write home to your mother in a month, I'll do it for you'.

Under pressure, Tom scrawled out a poorly written letter to the Dowager Lady Tichborne in December. He apologised to her for the 'truble and anxiety I must have cause you by not writing before' and made it clear that he had fallen on hard times since his disappearance all those years ago. Importantly, he offered two details as 'proof' of identity.

Of one thing rest Assured that although I have been in A humble condition of Life I have never let any act disgrace your or my Family. I have been a poor Man and nothing worse. Mr Gibbes suggest to me as essential That I should recall to your Memory things which can only be known to you and me, to convince you of my Identity. I don't think it needful, My Dear Mother, although I send them, namely, the Brown Mark on my side and the Card Case at Brighton ...

Much was later made of the 'Brown Mark' and of the 'Card Case' but in the meantime, Tom and Gibbes hoped it would be enough. Tom wrote to the Dowager that he had made up his mind to face the sea and take up his proper position and title. To do that, he would need money.

‘The Passage Money and other expences,’ he wrote, ‘would be over Two hundred pound.’

The rest of the letter has not survived but its intent was clear: the money for the homecoming would have to come from the woman he claimed as his mother. With this letter on the way to the Dowager Lady Tichborne in Paris, and others flying back and forth between Gibbes and Cubitt as they jockeyed for a share of the reward, the man who called himself Tom Castro could do little but wait.