

Secret past of Edinburgh bar boss under scrutiny

EXCLUSIVE

One of Edinburgh's most popular student pubs is being run by an Irish sporting legend who was convicted of harassing a female solicitor.

Former Gaelic football star and All-Ireland title winner Kevin McGourty and his partner Damayanthi Anushka Ponniah have taken over the Earl of Marchmont in the heart of Edinburgh University student-land.

But McGourty's criminal past, which includes being placed on probation for 18 months and a five year restraining order for carrying out a campaign of harassment against a woman, has been kept under wraps from customers.

McGourty, who also goes by the name of Caoimhean MacDhorchaidh, is also under investigation after it was claimed he had posed as a solicitor in a Glasgow court when he attempted to represent an accused person.



Kevin McGourty aka Caoimhean MacDhorchaidh outside The Earl of Marchmont

McGourty, 41, who comes from a famous Antrim GAA family, won

an All-Ireland title in 2010 when he was an integral part of the St Gall's team which secured their first championship title at a packed Croke Park.

Off the pitch, he was accused of sending hundreds of texts, emails and making phone calls to his victim, and turned up at family celebrations which caused the woman "distress and upset". He threatened to send an explicit photograph and video of the woman to her brother and father if she did not speak to him.

He denied all of the charges, alleged to have taken place between April and May 2017, but in 2018 he plead guilty to disclosing a sexual photograph of his victim and of harassing her over a two month period. He was sentenced to 18 months' probation and a five year restraining order prevented him from going within 30 metres of the woman or her brother, to whom he sent the photograph.

In July, the Sunday Mail reported that McGourty, using the name Caiomhean MacDhorchaidh, had appeared at Glasgow Justice of the Peace Court, where he identified himself to court officials and the prosecution as a solicitor in an attempt to represent an accused.

He claimed that he and his firm – The 3 Nations Legal Consultancy/Services – was registered with The Law Society of Scotland and that he held a valid legal practising certificate. When his position was challenged, McGourty told his "client" that he would have to get another lawyer to represent him and then left the court building.



Anushka Ponniah – claims Kevin McGourty is not involved in pub
The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service later confirmed that there was no record of Caiomhean MacDhorchaidh or his firm on the Roll of Solicitors.

A Law Society spokesperson said: “It is a criminal offence for an unqualified person to pretend to be a solicitor. The Law Society of Scotland takes all reports of such impersonation extremely seriously. It’s important that anyone engaging a Scottish solicitor knows that person holds a current practising certificate. We would urge anyone who becomes aware of such misrepresentations to report them to police and to the Law Society of Scotland.”

A spokesman for the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service said: “The Procurator Fiscal is considering this incident and is liaising with the Law Society of Scotland and Police Scotland.”

The Earl of Marchmont is being operated by 3NationsPub Ltd, a company first set up on 16 November 2020 by Damayanthi Ponniah

and registered to an address in Airdrie, Lanarkshire. She resigned as a director on 7 May 2022 and was reappointed as a director on 18 October 2023.



Anushka Ponniah opening up The Earl of Marchmont in Edinburgh – pic Alan Simpson

Caoimhean MacDhorchaidh was first appointed as a secretary of 3NationsPub Ltd on 28 February 2022, which was terminated on 8 May 2022 when he was appointed a director. On 11 October 2023, MacDhorchaidh resigned as a director – but on 19 October 2023 it was noted that since 28 July 2022 that he had been a “person with significant control” and held directly or

indirectly “more than 25% but not more than 50% of the shares in the company”.

Anushka Ponniah denied that Kevin McGourty was involved in the running of the pub and claimed that the operation and management of The Earl of Marchmont business was entirely her responsibility and the tenancy was in her name only.

She told The Edinburgh Reporter: “This is my bar, it’s my name on the lease and he has nothing to do with the business apart from helping me out when I had some staffing issues. A bunch of staff left when I took over the pub and he helped me out with some shifts here and there.

“Why has his past got anything to do with my bar? If you actually look into his background, tell me when was the last time he had any issues with harassment?”

“I have a full time job. I’m trying to do my best running my own business and when he has helped out in the past, he just done it as a favour and I didn’t think there was any issue with that. He’s not involved in the running of the pub. He was not employed, there was no contract, he didn’t even get paid for those shifts, there is no P45, he was literally just helping me out.”

Star Pubs & Bars, part of the Heineken UK group, confirmed they own The Earl of Marchmont but the pub is leased to an independent company to run as their own.

A company spokesperson said: “We are taking this information and allegation seriously and are investigating the situation.”



Kevin McGourty aka Caoimhean MacDhorchaidh – carried out a two month harassment campaign, placed on probation for 18 months and a five year restraining order.