

Henry Fielding and the wealthy heiress

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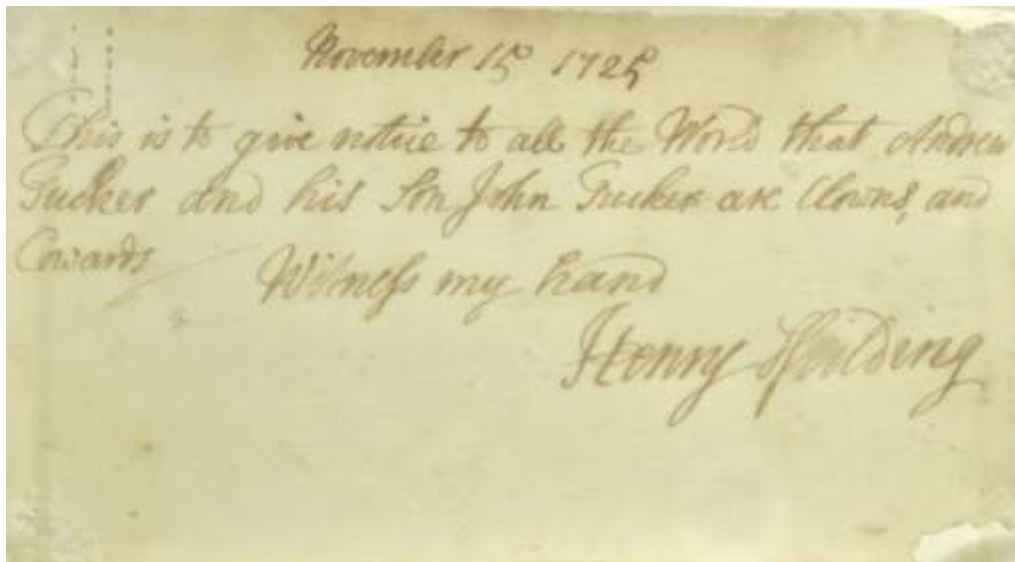
Mr Cyril Wanklyn, of Overton, Lyme Regis, writing in *Pulman's Weekly News* on Tuesday, on the archives of Lyme Regis, relates an adventure of Henry Fielding there in 1725, Mr Wanklyn says: -

Just as Tennyson, at Lyme Regis, in 1807, impatiently waved aside the offer to show him the spot where Monmouth landed, exclaiming 'No, no! show me the spot where Louisa Musgrove fell.' so a discerning reader will turn rather to the name of Henry Fielding (or rather Feilding) in the index than to that of Monmouth. Pages 73-74 record the proceedings taken in the mayor's Court at Lyme Regis against the future novelist on the day after he had attempted to abduct the wealthy heiress, Sarah Andrew. This had occurred as the young lady was going to church with her relatives from Tudor House, Church Street (now the old Tudor café), on Sunday, November 13th, 1725. Fielding's attack was beaten off, but Andrew Ticker, Sarah's guardian, lodged a complaint against him in the mayor's Court on the following day.

Fielding was young, handsome, unruly, and fresh from Eton. With Etonian hauteur he was going to appear before no tribunal of 'fad and greasy citizens,' but sent his valet, and henchman, Joseph Lewis, to represent him. And so Andrew Tucker 'craved the surety of the peace' against Henry Fielding and Joseph Lewis. Fielding got off easily, but took a revenge. The form of this is well known. On the next day, Tuesday, November 15th, he left Lyme, but before doing so he stuck up somewhere in the town the following holograph half-sheet of notepaper: -

'This is to give notice to all the World that Andrew Tucker and his son John Tucker are clowns and cowards. Witness my hand Henry Feilding.'

The original holograph is now one of the most valued exhibits in Lyme's Museum.



FIELDING'S FIRST LOVE AFFAIR

The *Times* commenting on Mr Wanklyn's discovery said on Tuesday: - "It is rash, perhaps, to call it Fielding's first love-affair, although the boy, fresh from Eton, was only eighteen at the time; but at any rate the love-affair on which new light has been thrown by the researches of that most learned and indefatigable student of Lyme Regis, Mr. Cyril Wanklyn, is the first known to history, and it came at least five years before the beginning of the great, the genuine love-affair of Fielding's life - that with Charlotte Cradock, his first and adored wife. What other mischief the young man was up to so far from his home at

east Stour, near Shaftesbury, is not known; but the doubtless charming orphan daughter and heiress of Solomon Andrew, merchant, took no great harm from the scrape. She was packed off to another guardian, in Devon, whose son she afterwards married, like a good girl. And the baffled suitor, whose story Mr Wanklyn has filled out, took his revenge by posting her Lyme Regis guardian and his son as 'Clowns and cowards.' It may have been agitation which caused him to spell his name with the e before the l, since in later years it was his jest and his boast that his branch of the family had learned - what other descendants of his great-grandfather, the Earl of Desmond, had not learned - how to spell. If that offensive notice had been all that he wrote to relieve his feelings, none could blame him much. But he did what seems really rather a shame (for there is no evidence that the lady had done anything to deserve his contempt); he dashed off a very clever impudent, school-boyish, 'modern' version in heroic couplets of the first half of the sixth satire of Juvenal. But when he polished it and published it in later years in his 'Miscellanies' he had the grace to apologise for it, as it 'was all the revenge taken by an injured lover.' The calf-likes even of our most eminent men are seldom worth knowing; but it is not so with Henry Fielding. Out of that boyish turbulence and fire of his grew that noble generosity which made him one of the wisest and greatest of his kind."