

John Nichols
Literary anecdotes of the eighteenth century,
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LITERARY ANECDOTES
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...

BY JOHN NICHOLS, F. S. A.

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<additions to the third volume>

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P. 529. Some varying statements having been thrown out in the Gentleman's Magazine respecting the Writers of the History of Rochester, the following particulars were communicated by Mr. Shrubsole: "The History originated with Mr. Fisher, in

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the Summer of the year 1771. At that time he proposed it to Mr. Shrubsole, and asked for his assistance in composing it, which was readily granted; and Mr. Shrubsole employed his leisure time in that work all the following Winter. In the Spring of the year 1772 he presented his good friend his various papers on the subject. How suitable they were to Mr. Fisher's purpose, he will not enquire of that gentleman, since he has, from under Mr. Fisher's own hand, full evidence of his high approbation of what was sent him for his History. Mr. Shrubsole supposes that he hath a just claim to about half of the History of Rochester; but he readily acknowledges that Mr. Fisher was far more obliged to the Rev. Mr. Denne, of Wilmington, than he was to him; for that gentleman wrote the History of the Priory, and by far the most valuable part of that work. These things Mr. Shrubsole is able to authenticate by various letters from Mr. Fisher, written at that time. Mr. Shrubsole had the pleasure of near thirty years very friendly correspondence with that truly-worthy and sensible Gentleman, whose letters, on various subjects, were so agreeable, that Mr. Shrubsole has copied the most material parts of this correspondence, which fills three folio volumes." Gent. Mag. LVI. pp. 908, 994; LVII. 696, 1052.

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<additions to the ninth volume>

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P. 549. The following Letter was addressed to Dr. Ducarel:

“Sir, Rochester, Dec. 28, 1771.

“The Rev. Mr. Jones was so obliging as to acquaint me with your kind inquiries after the History of Rochester, which I am now printing. Though well acquainted with your eminent station in the learned world, yet, being entirely unknown to you, I could not presume, or I should earlier have solicited your approbation of my plan. – From motives of curiosity rather than with views of publication, I have for years past collected, as opportunity offered, whatever either in print or MS. related to this City; expecting Mr. Thorpe’s work would render any thing farther unnecessary: but, when the ‘Registrum’ appeared (although it contains an invaluable treasure of materials) yet a concise connected History of the

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Antient State of this Place was still wanting. – This is what is now attempted. – The ‘Registrum’ has proved of great use, of which every acknowledgment will be made. – When the person who compiled this Work had nearly completed the copy, I submitted it to two gentlemen in the County (whose favours in trade I had long enjoyed) for their approbation; they have condescended so far, as not only to read and revise, but also to enrich it with many valuable additions from their own Papers.

“It will contain more than 300 pages, above 100 of which are employed on the Civil History, Castle, and Bridge; upward of 100 more on the Cathedral, Priory, and Bishops. The remainder for the Public Charities and Tours. This latter part may seem to you trifling; but the great number of people visiting Margate in the season, and the many inquiries for a thing of that kind, determined me in its favour; and I have reason to think it will augment the sale of the book: with this view also a portable size, and a small price, were judged most proper.

“Presuming on your inquiry, I have ventured to trouble you with this faithful account of the work I am now printing; happy if in any respect it shall be thought worthy your countenance. I print 1000 copies at an office I have lately established in this City. I hope it will be finished by the end of March. – Any Subscriptions by the beginning of that month will be very acceptable. Mr. Thorpe has favoured me with his own name, and with those of some of his acquaintance. To a very respectable List of the Gentry and Clergy of the City, &c. I shall be proud to add the name of Dr. Ducarel; and, if I could be favoured with the names of any of your learned Friends and acquaintance, it would add to the obligation of your unknown, but very respectful and most obedient servant,
T. Fisher.”

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<This letter from Fisher to Ducarel – who did indeed subscribe for a copy of the book – is the clearest account we get of the history of Fisher’s ‘History’. The man who put them in touch was the Rev. Henry Jones (d. 1799), usher of the King’s School, vicar of Bearsted, minor canon of Rochester. There is, notably, no mention in Fisher’s letter of Samuel Denne; perhaps it was Ducarel’s idea that he should be invited to contribute. – C.F. May 2012.>