

# Tobias Smollett

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**Tobias George Smollett** (c. 16 March 1721 – 17 September 1771) was a Scottish author, best known for his picaresque novels, such as *Roderick Random* (1748) and *Peregrine Pickle* (1753).



Tobias Smollett

## Contents

- 1 Biography

- 2 Works
- 3 References
- 4 External links

## Biography

Smollett was born at Dalquhurn, now part of Renton, in present-day West Dunbartonshire, Scotland. He was the son of a judge and land-owner, and was educated at the University of Glasgow, qualifying as a surgeon. His career in medicine came second to his literary ambitions, and in 1739 he went to London to seek his fortune as a dramatist. Although unsuccessful, he obtained a commission as a naval surgeon on the HMS Chichester and travelled to Jamaica, where he settled down for several years. On his return, he set up practice in Downing Street and married a wealthy Jamaican heiress, Anne Lascelles, in 1747.

His first published work was a poem about the Battle of Culloden entitled "The Tears of Scotland", but it was *The Adventures of Roderick Random* which made his name. It

was modelled on Le Sage's *Gil Blas*, and was published in 1748. Smollett followed it up by finally getting his tragedy, *The Regicide*, published, though it was never performed. In 1750, Smollett took his MD degree in Aberdeen, and also travelled to France, where he obtained material for his second novel, *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, another big success. Having lived for a short time in Bath, he returned to London and published *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* in 1753. He was now recognised as a leading literary figure, and associated with the likes of David Garrick, Oliver Goldsmith, Samuel Johnson and Laurence Sterne. In 1755 he published a translation of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, which he revised in 1761. In 1756, he became editor of *The Critical Review*.

Smollett then began what he regarded as his major work, *A Complete History of England*, which took from 1757 to 1765. During this period he served a short prison sentence for libel, and produced another novel, *The Life and*

*Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves* (1760). Having suffered the loss of a daughter, he went abroad with his wife, and the result was *Travels through France and Italy* (1766). He also wrote *The History and Adventures of an Atom* (1769), which give his view of English politics during the Seven Years' War under the guise of a tale from ancient Japan.

He also visited Scotland, and this visit helped inspire his last novel, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), published in the year of his death. He had for some time been ailing from an intestinal disorder, and had sought a cure at Bath and eventually retired to Italy, where he is buried at Leghorn/Livorno.

There is a monument to his memory beside Renton Primary School, Dunbartonshire, on which there is a Latin inscription composed by Dr. Johnson. The area around the monument was improved in 2002, with an explanatory plaque.

## **Works**

- *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748)
- *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751)
- *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753)
- *A Complete History of England*
- *The Life and Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves* (1760)
- *Travels through France and Italy* (1766)
- *The History and Adventures of an Atom* (1769)
- *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771)

## References

- Rousseau, George S. (1982). *Tobias Smollett: Essays of Two Decades* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark).
- Rousseau, George S. (2004). *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature, Culture and Sensibility*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 1-4039-3454-1 (Paperback) ISBN 1-4039-3453-3 (Hardcover)

## External links

- Works by Tobias Smollett at Project Gutenberg
- Online editions of his works

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