THE LIMNER COMPANY



RICHARD COSWAY (1742 - 1821)

Portrait miniature of Lord Henry Fitzgerald (1761-1829), wearing a blue coat, with a white waistcoat and tied cravat, his hair powdered and curled

Circa: 1791

1791

Watercolour on ivory (license V9GLGTJ7)

Oval, 74 mm (2 15/16 in) high

Gold locket frame with glazed reverse

Lord Henry Fitzgerald led the kind of colourful life one would hope of a friend of George, the profligate Prince of Wales (later George IV). The artist, Richard Cosway, was also an associate of the Prince, and, by the date of the present miniature, had enjoyed both his friendship and patronage for over a decade, having held the title of his Principal Painter since 1785. Fitzgerald's portrait follows the style of a number of Cosway's depictions of the Prince and his brothers from around the same date [see two examples at the National Portrait Gallery: NPG 5389, NPG L176]: their gaze averted to the left, a contrived, slightly dishevelled air to their dress and hair, which is powdered, frizzed and coiffed in manner that a regency 'dandy' would be proud.

Fitzgerald was born to Lieutenant-General James FitzGerald, Earl of Offaly and Marquess of Kildare, later 1st Duke of Leinster (1722-1773) and Lady Emily (Emilia Mary) Fitzgerald (née Lennox; 1731-1814), the great-granddaughter of King Charles II by his mistress, Louise de Kéroualle. He was the fourth son of nine born to the couple, as well as ten daughters.

Fitzgerald followed in his father's footsteps with both a military and political career. He entered the British Army while still a teenager and became a lieutenant in the 66th (Berkshire) Regiment of Foot in 1778. The following year he transferred as a captain to the 85th Regiment of Foot, which had been recently raised to provide troops for British interests in the West Indies during the American

Revolutionary War. The 85th Foot was posted to Jamaica where it suffered huge losses from disease and a shipwreck, but Fitzgerald survived and was promoted to a major in 1781 before taking command of the regiment as lieutenant-colonel in 1783. The battered regiment was disbanded on return to England, and Fitzgerald joined the 2nd Foot Guards but would retire from the military in 1792.

Meanwhile, Fitzgerald had also been elected the MP in the Irish Parliament for Kildare Borough in 1783 (until 1790). He does not seem to have been hugely politically active however, rather he was following in a family tradition. Fitzgerald was aligned with the liberal views of his social circle and family, supporting the Whigs but without any great fervour as he did not join the Whig Club until 1797 and did not speak in parliament[1]. He was then persuaded to stand for Dublin City in 1790 and served until 1797.

Fitzgerald's youthful energy may have been diverted from politics towards recreation. A handsome portrait of him by John Hoppner (1758-1810) dating between 1787-89 depicts Fitzgerald in costume for the part of Don Felix. He was said to be a keen and rather talented amateur actor. His performance as Don Felix in the Richmond House Company's production of *The Wonder* in 1787 received high praise, including from Horace Walpole (1717-1797), who stated: 'He is a prodigy, a perfection – all passion, nature and ease. You never saw so genuine a lover. Garrick was a monkey to him in Don Felix…'

On 3rd / 4th August 1791, Fitzgerald married The Hon. Charlotte Boyle-Walsingham, later Baroness de Ros of Helmsley (1769-1831). Cosway's miniature also dates to 1791 and it's likely it was commissioned or almost certainly exchanged as part of their courtship. Charlotte hailed from County Cork, the daughter of a Royal Navy officer who had also served in the West Indies where he perished during the Great Hurricane of 1780.

Tragedy befell the Fitzgerald family too, when, in May 1798, Lord Henry's radical younger brother, Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1763-1798)[2], was involved in a plot for a French-assisted republican rebellion and arrested for treason. Edward sustained fatal wounds during capture and as he lay dying, requested to see Henry but was refused. Henry tried desperately to see his little brother in custody, resorting to sending him letters via an attorney and sending him strawberries. Eventually, Henry was permitted a visit on what would be the day before Edward died in captivity. The event marred the family's reputation and years later, in 1801, Henry was disparagingly described as 'rather tinctured with the principles of Lord Edward'[3].

Fitzgerald took a sojourn from politics in 1802 and journeyed to Paris (after the peace of Amiens) where his younger brother had travelled a decade earlier and been so impressed by revolutionary ideas. The trip did not have such a radical effect on Fitzgerald however and he returned to Ireland before the resumption of war between France and Britain in May 1803.

The year of 1806 saw a number of favourable events for Fitzgerald, possibly due to his cousin, one Charles James Fox's (1749-1806) rise to prominence. Fitzgerald was appointed to the Privy Council of Ireland and as one of the joint Postmasters General of Ireland. His wife, Charlotte also won her claim to the Barony de Ros, for which she had first made a petition in 1790. The barony was the most ancient in the English peerage, having been created in the 13th century, and Charlotte then became the 20th Baroness de Ros. She legally changed her name to Fitzgerald-de Ros, which was also adopted by her twelve surviving children with Fitzgerald. The title was later inherited by their two eldest sons Henry William FitzGerald-de Ros, 22nd Baron de Ros (1792-1839) and General William Lennox Lascelles

Fitzgerald served as an MP again from 1807 (until 1814), this time in the Parliament of the United Kingdom for Kildare. It was during this second phase of his political career in Westminster that Fitzgerald began a relationship with Caroline of Brunswick, the estranged wife of his friend the Prince of Wales. By 1809 he was said to be the Princess's 'favourite *en titre'* and to have ignited her interest in politics. The affair came to an abrupt end however when Fitzgerald's wife and son became ill the following year and he was called home. His son died and while his wife survived, Fitzgerald broke-off the relationship with the Princess. He returned all of Caroline's letters and she is said to have considered his treatment of her "very shabby".[4]

Fitzgerald retired in 1814, making way for his nephew Lord William Fitzgerald to take up the Kildare seat, and returned to what had been his wife's family home, Boyle Farm. There he lived out his days 'surrounded by an affectionate family and numerous friends, who were sure to find under his roof the most cordial reception, and all that was hospitable and convivial'.[5]

[1] Except possibly once in 1811. Thorne, R. ed., *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1790-1820*, 'FITZGERALD, Lord Henry (1761-1829), of Boyle Farm, Kent and Thames Ditton, Surr.', 1986. http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/fitzgerald-henry-1761-1829. Accessed 2 June 2026.

[2] Who had married 'Pamela' Stéphanie Caroline Anne Syms (c.1773– 1831), allegedly the natural daughter of Philippe Égalité, duc d'Orléans and the comtesse de Genlis.

[3] Add. 35701, f. 219; *HMC Fortescue*, viii. 185. Cited in Thorne.

[4] *Glenbervie Diaries*, ii. 36, 37, 54, 70, 89, 91, 110. Cited in Thorne.

[5] *Gent. Mag.* (1829), ii. 174. Cited in Thorne.