

The Jane Austen Society of North America

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JOHN WORDSWORTH - Eileen Sutherland.

*... their brother dead ...
Will be remember'd with such holy,
True, and perfect melancholy
That ever this lost brother John
Will be their heart's companion.*

Mary Lamb sent Dorothy Wordsworth these "poor lines...written...with strong feeling", on hearing of the drowning of John, younger brother of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The family and friends were devastated at the news of his death, and for months afterwards their letters reiterated their shock and grief. Constance Pilgrim, in her book, Dear Jane, speculates that Jane Austen's "unknown lover" was John Wordsworth. If so, Jane Austen would have shared their feelings of shock and sadness, but hers would have had to be private.

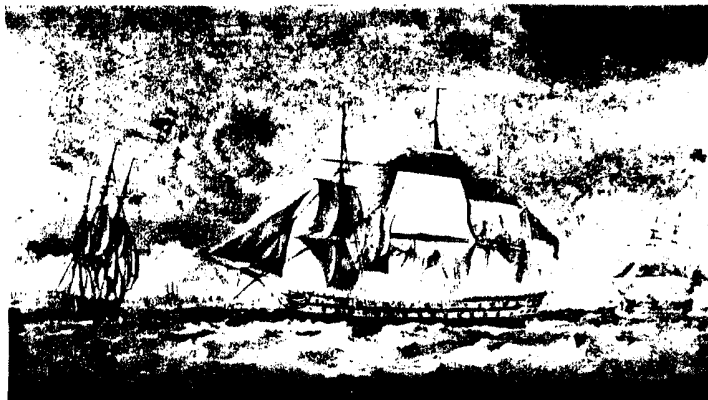
John Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth, Cumberland, on December 4, 1772, the fourth of five children. His father was an attorney, and agent to the "Bad Earl" of Lonsdale, notorious for never paying his debts. The Wordsworth family was owed almost £5,000, not paid till many years later, by the Earl's heir.

Although his mother died when he was six, John had a happy early childhood. He was taught by the village schoolmistress, and then went to an excellent Grammar School at Hawkshead, where he must have studied the Classics, although his letters give no evidence of any interest in Latin authors. When their lessons were done, the children were free to roam as they pleased, boating, fishing and swimming in the lakes and climbing the hills. Dorothy later wrote of John, "[He] was called a dunce because, poor Boy, he loved his own solitary dreamings, wanderings with his fishing rod, or social Boyish sports, better than his Master's tasks".

At the end of 1783, when their father died suddenly, Dorothy was sent to live with a cousin, and the boys with their grandparents. Here life was not happy - they were treated as poor relations, were scorned by the servants, and suffered petty tyrannies from an uncle.

An older John Wordsworth, a cousin of John's father, was well established as a captain in the East India Company, and John decided to go to sea. He was "active, a sportsman, with good common sense and no fear of loneliness", according to a biographer - obviously a good temperament for his chosen occupation.

After early voyages to Barbados, Jamaica and America, John joined his cousin as a midshipman on the Earl of Abergavenny. (In his letters, John spelled it as it was pronounced, Abergāny). They took out English



The Earl of Abergavenny, East Indiaman.

goods to Bombay and China, and returned with cottons, raw silk and tea. The East India Company policy allowed each officer limited space aboard its vessels for goods for private trading. Over the next few years, John's trading ventures were modestly successful.

Between voyages, John visited William and Dorothy, spending eight months with them at Dove Cottage in 1799. Here he helped plan and plant the gardens, furnish the cottage, and plant trees. Coleridge met him at this time on a walking tour, and wrote to Dorothy of him as "a man who hath solitary usings of his own Intellect, deep in feeling, with a subtle Tact, a swift instinct of Truth and Beauty".

When a new Earl of Abergavenny was commissioned, and his cousin had retired, John applied for the post of captain, and was sworn in, January 1801. He managed to get together an amount of £9,000 to invest in his voyage for personal trading, from Dorothy, William and other relatives. The elder John Wordsworth had made an impressive fortune during his trading years; John was not to be so fortunate. The Napoleonic Wars forced up prices on the goods he bought in England; a delayed sailing meant that other ships would reach China ahead of him; part of his trading goods were woollens and the market fell drastically at Canton at this time. The trip outward suffered a bad loss. The homeward bound venture, however, was more successful and offset some of his losses - the price of teas from China had risen sharply and John made more money than he had expected.

At last money was received from the estate of the late Earl of Lonsdale. John seems to have taken for granted that his sister and brothers would invest in his trading ventures - one of the reasons he was determined to make a fortune quickly was to be able to help William. The brothers were willing to invest without security, but Dorothy was not - for the first time in her life she had money, and she was unwilling to risk her future independence. However, John was able to invest a considerable amount for his 1803 voyage, which was moderately profitable. On the return voyage, the convoy was intercepted by a French fleet off the Malay Peninsula. The English proved too formidable and the French fleet retreated after the exchange of a few cannon shots. The East India Company was pleased with this outcome: John received 500 guineas and a piece of commemorative silver worth 50 guineas, more than four times his wages for the trip.

As soon as John returned to England he began to try for a voyage that would be more lucrative than the previous ones. He was fortunate to be offered a trip to Bengal and China which seemed to be the opportunity he was waiting for. His investment this time was £20,000 - he might gain £12,000 on the trip to Bengal alone; passengers on board would be worth over £3,000; between Bengal and China, rice and opium would be profitable commodities, and teas on the return voyage would increase his profits. "I shall make a very good voyage of it", he wrote to William.

The fleet sailed on February 1, and almost immediately ran into heavy gales. The order was given to turn back, but the Earl of Abergavenny, the last ship in line, missed the tide on which the rest of the fleet safely made harbour. Off the south Dorset coast at a bank of rocks and stones known as the Shambles, the tides are powerful and dangerous. The ship was caught in a sudden calm and, unsteerable, was swept crashing onto the rocks. When the tide changed, the Abergavenny got clear and John tried to make for the nearest sandy shore. But the hull was too badly damaged and the ship began sinking rapidly. Only about two miles from the beach, a gust of wind struck suddenly and the ship foundered, settling with her masts jutting above the water. Many of the men managed to cling to the rigging until rescue arrived, but John was not among them. His body was recovered over a month later and buried with other victims at Wyke Regis. 155 of the 387 persons aboard were saved, either rescued from

the wreck itself, or drifting to safety on bits of wreckage or in the ship's boats. An official enquiry completely acquitted the captain and officers of any "neglect or misconduct". One of the surviving passengers testified to John's "steadiness, judgement, and ability, and in the serious hour of danger firmness and resolution".

There is no evidence in the Wordsworth letters that John ever met Jane Austen. According to Cassandra's story, passed on by her niece Caroline Austen, they met a young man at a seaside resort about 1801, "whose charm of person, mind and manners was such that Cassandra thought him worthy to possess and likely to win her sister's love". They expected to meet him again, but later heard that he had died suddenly. There are no letters of Jane Austen's remaining from the summer of 1801 until 1804. They may have been destroyed, or Cassandra stayed close to Jane for some time. Most biographers accept the story but consider the man unknown. There is no appropriate period in John Wordsworth's last years of life when he could have been this "Unknown lover".

It is interesting to notice, however, how much Captain Wentworth resembles John Wordsworth. Captain Wentworth's first ship was the Asp, sent to the West Indies; John's first voyages were to Barbados, Jamaica and America. Their boyish enthusiasm and delight in their ships is identical: "She was a dear old Asp to me. She did all that I wanted. I knew she would", said one captain. "I have this evening returned from visiting my Ship. Indeed, indeed she is a most noble one", said the other. Both were intent on making their fortunes quickly. Captain Wentworth spoke of the "pleasant days when I had the Laconia! How fast I made money in her!" John gloated to his sister-in-law, "O what a rich dog they say I am to be. I have had £5,000 offer'd for my voyage". Captain Wentworth "was confident that he should soon be rich: full of life and ardour, he knew that he would soon have a ship, and soon be on a station that would lead to everything he wanted". John wrote to Dorothy: "I suppose there is little doubt but that I shall make at least £6,000 this voyage...once I get the command of ten thousand pounds I shall do, our China voyages are now most excellent". Both were conscientious masters of those in their command. From the Laconia, Richard Musgrove had, "under the influence of his captain", written to his parents. John praised his men, "The officers I like well...the Midshipmen are the finest lads I ever saw".

The business ability of both young men was put to the service of others. Captain Wentworth helped Mrs. Smith recover her West Indies property, "by writing for her, acting for her, and seeing her through all the petty difficulties of the case". John, busy as he was preparing for his next voyage - "I am employ'd all day in shipping men, and with Tradesmen of every description" - took over William's affairs, negotiating with publishers, correcting misprints, and supervising publicity, for the publication of Lyrical Ballads.

A description in one of John's letters: "I have been on shore this afternoon to stretch my legs upon the Isle of White - the evening primroses are beautiful - and the daisy's after sunset are like little white stars upon the dark green fields" - inspired an early version of one of William's poems, The Daisy.

From his letters, John Wordsworth sounds like a worthy lover of Jane Austen, and the idea of their meeting and loving each other for a few brief weeks makes a delightful story. I'm sorry it is probably not true.

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MARRIAGE

When Charles Darwin was considering marriage, he set down the pros and cons of his proposed situation: against marriage were the costs of a wife and children, and the freedom of bachelorhood; on the side of marriage were having children, and the companionship a wife would offer - "better than a dog anyhow".

- From Darwin Papers.

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MacDARCY? - Kathleen Glancy

A friend - an English friend - of mine once told me that as she loved Scotland and Pride and Prejudice she thought Jane Austen should have made Darcy a Scot. A charming notion, but on thinking it over, it won't do, for two reasons.

First, P&P is only a couple of generations removed from the 1745 Rising. Putting the action of the book at the latest date it can be, 1812, would put the year of Darcy's birth at 1784. Assuming his father was then about 30, and his father the same age when he was born, Darcy's grandfather would have been in his early 20s in 1745. This would mean that, if the family were to be in the 10,000 a year income bracket in 1812, he would have had to have been on the winning, but distinctly unromantic, side. At best, he'd have to have been neutral. He can't have been Out.

Of course, as an Englishman, he could respectably remain In and help Darcy's great-grandfather rally his tenants to defend the boundaries of Pemberley from the wild Highlanders (they got as far as Derby), but if he'd been a Scot -- well, the Campbells are only now recovering their reputation after being on the Right but Repulsive side.

Far more important, Wickham's supposed wrongs couldn't happen in Scotland. A Church of England living was tremendous job security. Only three things could take away a living once presented - death, voluntary resignation, or doing something so awful you got unfrocked. The Church of Scotland, however, doesn't have livings at the disposal of patrons, and never did. A Church of Scotland minister is appointed by the elders of the Kirk Session and if he does not behave can be removed by them too. The local laird may well have influence over the elders but he can't force them to do anything they choose not to do. He may himself be of the Episcopalian (the Scottish equivalent of the Church of England) persuasion, and if so he may employ a domestic chaplain* - but that post has nothing like the status or the security of an English parish. And there is no other profession that does carry a lifetime guarantee of income. So the only thing that Mr. Darcy the elder, had he been a Scot, could have done for his godson was leave him money to train for a profession - and Wickham could not have convinced anyone that he had no redress in law if Darcy withheld that.

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*There are Scottish Episcopalian churches now, but there weren't in Jane Austen's day to any great extent, and those that there were, were disposed of by the local bishop.

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"To return to the question of character. What do we mean when we say there are 'real people' in a book? If you examine the works of JA, who, everyone agrees, was a creator of characters, you will find that the 'real people' in her books are not so often the heroes and heroines as the minor characters: Lady Catherine, Mr. Collins, Mr. & Mrs. Bennet, Lady Bertram, poor Miss Bates, Emma's friend Harriet, the timorous and valetudinarian Mr. Woodhouse. These beings are much more thoroughly and wonderfully themselves than the heroes and heroines are able to be; the reason for this is, I think, that they are comic". Mary McCarthy: On the Contrary.

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ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

Dear Jane - Constance Pilgrim (1971)

Ever since Cassandra Austen tantalized the world by mentioning that her sister Jane had once met a man who was worthy of her love and who reciprocated her feelings, readers and critics have tried to find out who this "nameless and dateless" lover could have been. In Dear Jane, Constance Pilgrim makes the suggestion that it might have been John Wordsworth, brother of the poet.

Using letters, memoirs and contemporary accounts, as well as supposedly biographical data from characters and episodes in the novels, Pilgrim follows up every possible linkage between the lives of Jane Austen and John Wordsworth. Unfortunately, there are gaps in the records which make any definite conclusion impossible: John's letters date only after 1800 (Pilgrim thinks it was an acquaintance that dated from 1797 until his death in 1805), and many of Jane Austen's are missing for the key years.

The cumulative effect of Pilgrim's possibilities is very persuasive, but one must bear in mind the reiteration of such words as "may", "possibly", "very likely", or "it was not impossible that..." throughout the account. The book is ingenious speculation, but it is a pleasant, charming story of "what might have been".

This is Ilyria, Lady - Constance Pilgrim (1991)

In this second book, Constance Pilgrim does more painstaking research into the background of Jane Austen's novels and letters. It is divided into three parts, Life, Rambles, and Friends. In the first section, Pilgrim uncovers more "evidence" about John Wordsworth's connection to Jane Austen, as well as contemporary reminiscences that add to our knowledge of them both.

The Austen family took holiday trips to the seashore and to Wales, and in the part entitled Rambles, Pilgrim follows in their footsteps, as much as possible - she visits the small towns, discovers what old coaching inns would have been there at the time, where they might have walked to see fine views, and what other sights might have attracted the Austen group, linking these places with passages in the novels.

In the last part, Friends, Pilgrim follows up obscure biographical details of such acquaintances of Jane Austen as Anne Sharp, the governess at Godmersham, or others barely mentioned in Jane Austen's letters.

Once again, this is much speculation, but it is interesting and delightful for a pleasant few hours' reading.

Jane Austen: A Reassessment - P.J.M.Scott (1982)

In contrast to Constance Pilgrim, Scott believes that the novels should be studied entirely apart from any biographical details. He would like to see the letters, also, ignored in artistic criticism. "It would be the millenium if all authorship were suddenly anonymous", and no "obfuscating material would hinder the study of the fine intuitions of the author's work".

As the title indicates, Scott reviews the six novels and the fragments in the light of major criticism of the last few decades, reinforcing or disagreeing as he sees fit. His style is awkward - too many inversions, double negatives, and made-up words (he uses, for example, "jubilate" and "festivate" in place of the usual "celebrate"; "abrupt" and "eyelet" as verbs; and archaic words like "meed", "gratulate" and "faluting").

But Scott makes some interesting points. He has a good knowledge of contemporary criticism and quotes freely from apt passages. He considers that Jane Austen

let Emma off too easily after her inexcusable manipulation, but he depicts the frustrations of Elizabeth Bennet's life if she had not married Darcy, and the motivation behind Elinor's love for the dull Edward Ferrars - and why Jane Austen deliberately made him so dull) - is well thought out. Mansfield Park is called a "flawless masterpiece" - perhaps an excessive evaluation - but the relationships among Fanny, Edmund and the Crawfords are well elucidated. Throughout, Scott gives carefully considered reasons on which he has based his opinions.

Between Self and World: The Novels of Jane Austen - James Thompson (1951)

The publisher's "blurb" on a dust-jacket is meant to whet your interest and entice you to buy the book. Don't read the dust-jacket on Between Self and World! With phrases like "the objectification of social relations under capital", or "intimacy functions to efface the ideological contradiction...", this effusion reminds me of Sir Edward Denham's addiction to "hard words & involved sentences" in Sanditon, whereas the book itself is interesting, informative and thoroughly "readable".

In the first chapter, for instance, entitled "Clothing", Thompson discusses which characters in the novels show excessive concern about dress, and what this tells us about these characters; Jane Austen's own interest in buying and making articles of clothing; the position of fashion in the last of the 18th century; and the economic aspects of life for a young woman, real or fictional, of the period. Other chapters explore a variety of concerns: marriage proposals, loneliness and intimacy, the limits of language, the analysis of character, courtship and marriage. This is an old book, but it can still give us an insight into Jane Austen's work, and add to our enjoyment of the novels.

More:

We also have a booklet, Jane Austen in Winchester, donated by Eileen Rogers, and an audio tape, Jane Austen Songs, home-recorded from a CD and donated by Keiko Parker. (Bonus: Jon Kimura Parker in concert fills out the remainder of the tape).

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PLEASE NOTE: If you borrow a book or tape at a meeting, it must be returned by the next meeting. If you cannot attend, please arrange for someone else to return it for you. (If you put your phone number on the card, another member may want to pick up the book or tape when you are finished with it).

Videos and audios especially are very much in demand, and your cooperation in this matter will be appreciated.

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We regret to announce that one of our members, Blanche (Bonnie) Clarke, died suddenly on November 26, 1991, aged 73. Donations in her memory to the Canadian Diabetes Association would be appreciated.

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I AM THAT BARONET - Kathleen Glancy

One of the jokes about Sir Walter Elliot, and I am fairly sure it was deliberate, is the nature of the title of which he was so proud. By Jane Austen's day it was an award of merit, given to those successful in the military, naval or political fields but not so much as to merit a peerage. Historically, though...

King James VI (& I) had a bright idea. Already he was charging a fee for knighting people. How much more might he charge if he made the "Sir" hereditary? So he did. Wattie Elliot, the pretty young man who had followed his king south (1), couldn't then afford one and the king felt he had paid him off enough by giving him a modest estate in Cheshire. Mr. Knightley (2) of Donwell Abbey, on hearing of the new "honour" said in plain unaffected gentlemanlike English that he had better uses for his money, like a new bull. Mr. Tilney (2) of Northanger Abbey, who was more like his descendant Henry than like Henry's papa, thought the whole idea very funny indeed. Mr. Darcy (3) of Pemberley, who had met the king on his way down from Scotland, said he was a fearful uncouth little parvenu with an incomprehensible accent from whom Mr. Darcy would not buy a used horse much less a quite unnecessary title. Mr. de Bourgh of Rosings and Mr. Bertram of Mansfield Park bought one apiece, however.

Two generations later, King Charles II was in rather a quandary. There were a lot of gentlemen who had beggared themselves fighting for his father, and he couldn't give back any of their estates if he needed the support of the present incumbents. Ah, but he could give out titles --- so Wattie's grandson became a baronet and married an heiress from Somerset.

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- (1) It could well have been - Elliot is a Scottish name, as is Dalrymple.
- (2) These families had to have been around in Henry VIII's day, to seize their respective Abbeys.
- (3) I think they'd be around, too. It's a Norman name, and it may be worth noting that of all the gentlemen who can trace lineal male lines of descent from the Conquest, none are peers. Being a peer was dangerous - mere esquires who eschewed the Court and politics and stayed on their estates with their wives having more sons than those who did not do so stood a better chance of survival.

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WHILE YOU WERE A GOOD LITTLE GIRL WORKING YOUR SAMPLER AT HOME.

"Patty Polk did this & she hated every stitch she did in it.
She loves to read much more."

(From a sampler worked in 1800 by a ten-year-old schoolgirl. One has to smile at her honesty, and to admire the loving tolerance of the mother or governess who allowed it.)

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OLD RHYME

Humpty dumpty sate on a wall,
Humpti dumpti had a great fall;
Threescore mene and threescore more,
Cannot place Humpty dumpty as before.

This rhyme first appeared in print in Gammer Gurton's Garland, in 1810.

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OUR CORRESPONDENT ABROAD - Jocelyn Cass:



**Jane Austen's
Emma is one of the
books a charity,
backed by The
Times, is sending to
the former
Soviet Union**

"A happy New Year to you and Ron and the Vancouver JASNA members. Please remember me especially to Esther and Mary.

We visited Steventon last week - in winter one sympathizes somewhat with Miss Bingley's view of mud-splashed skirts. It is a very heavy dark mud, and there is a great deal of it! "

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In her letter, Jocelyn enclosed a map and a "walk" in the neighbourhood of Steventon, this notice from The Times, and a leaflet describing some "Heritage Weekends": Capability Brown gardens, Roman remains near Portsmouth, William Morris homes, a train journey in vintage rail cars, or a "taste of grandeur" near Bristol. For more information, contact Eileen Sutherland.

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POPULARITY

"Not long ago, a party of friends were sitting at luncheon in a suburb of London, when one of them happened to make some reference to Maple Grove and Selina, and to ask in what county of England Maple Grove was situated. Everybody immediately had a theory. Only one of the company (a French gentleman, not well acquainted with English) did not recognise the allusion.

A lady sitting by the master of the house...said, 'What a curious sign it is of Jane Austen's increasing popularity! Here are five out of six people sitting round a table, nearly a hundred years after her death, who all recognize at once a chance allusion to an obscure character in one of her books'."

- A Book of Sibyls, by Anne Thackeray Ritchie (1883) Preface.

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PIANOFORTES IN THE NEW WORLD

About the same time that Frank Churchill was making his sensational trip to London for a haircut - and buying a Broadwood pianoforte for Jane Fairfax - an obscure German immigrant was making the first pianos in Canada. In his small workshop in Quebec City in 1816, Friedrich Hund constructed several instruments for sale to a pioneer population with a growing interest in music and music making.

- "Keyboards for Canadians" by Wayne Kelly (Beaver, Dec.1991)

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This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, comes out four times a year: February, May, August and November. All submissions on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome. Mail to the Editor: Eileen Sutherland, 4169 Lions Avenue, North Vancouver, B.C. V7R 3S2. Price to non-members: \$4.00 per year.