



Jane Austen Society of North America

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INVALID CHAIRS - E.Sutherland

James Leigh-Perrot, Jane Austen's uncle, was troubled by gout, and he and his wife spent part of every year in Bath, so that he could "drink the waters" and bathe.

Edward Austen Knight also visited Bath (in June, 1799) to try to cure an indeterminate illness. He drank the waters, bathed, and tried "Electricity" treatments. A few weeks later, Jane wrote that his symptoms "make us think of the Gout - perhaps a fit of it might cure him." (His apothecary did not suspect gout at all).

Edward was able to get around the city without much difficulty, but Mr. Leigh-Perrot "over-walked himself at first, and can now only travel in a chair, but is otherwise well". Sedan chairs were popular in the city, with its steep streets, but in this case Jane's uncle possibly also used a wheeled chair.

There was nothing new about chairs on wheels, used for transporting people who could not walk. The earliest known wheeled chairs were designed in the late 16th century. Balthazar Hacker of Nuremburg in 1588 invented a chair on wheels which could be transformed into a bed. But the first true invalid's chair was designed for Philip II of Spain by a Flemish nobleman, Jehan Lhermite. A drawing shows a chair with a quilted, upholstered back, with padded arms hinged for easy access, and ratchets to adjust the angles of the back and foot-supports.

Lhermite claimed, "Though it was but of wood, leather and ordinary iron, it was worth ten times its weight in gold and silver for his Majesty's comfort."

Once the idea of "comfort" became common, new inventions modified the chairs. Most were intended for the elite, but in 1655 a paraplegic clockmaker made himself a chair propelled by metal cogwheels turned on cranks. "Sleeping chairs" using cogwheels, with leg-supports, castors, and reading desks attached, were acquired for Ham House in the late 17th century. John Evelyn described what he had seen in Rome: "A conceited chaire to sleep in with legs stretch'd out with hooks & pieces of wood to draw out longer or shorter." In the V&A Museum is a leather wing-back English sleeping chair of this period with rods to its reading desk and iron ratchets. The "wings" of wing-backed chairs helped keep the invalid from falling sideways and protected from draughts. Where these chairs had castors, they were operated by a turning shank near the hand of the occupant, or were pushed by an attendant.

The true ancestor of today's wheelchair is the Merlin Chair,



invented by John Joseph Merlin (1735-1803). The important innovation is the propelling device - the chair is flanked by full-sized wheels, with light outer wheels of slightly less diameter, which enable the user to control the vehicle without dirtying his hands on the main wheels.

We have come a long way from invalids being trundled in a wheelbarrow, or hobbling along on makeshift crutches, as seen in Breugel's paintings or Raphael's tapestries for the Sistine Chapel. Designing an improved wheelchair has not kept pace with other scientific or mechanical developments. Even electrically-operated ones are difficult to manoeuvre in confined spaces. No provision has been made for extra warmth for the occupant's extremities. The adjustable back with a headrest, the facility to put the feet up, or to raise the chair arms in order to slide out sideways - all assets of King Philip's chair - are seldom or never included in modern chairs.

Gout is no longer a common complaint of elderly gentlemen in Bath or elsewhere, but Mr. Leigh-Perrot would not see much difference between a modern wheelchair, and the one which propelled him to the Pump Room in the late 18th century.

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NICKNAMES

"Children were notably affected [by social change in the 18th century]. Hitherto children had attracted little attention...Childhood was traditionally a stage of life passed over without much notice. Calvinism had reckoned souls sinful from birth, needing to be beaten into obedience and reason. Not being civilized or rational, they were no company for adults. But this all changed. From Locke to Rousseau...liberal religion and Enlightenment pedagogy argued for the natural innocence of children and hence their potential for rational thought and civilized behaviour. In polite society at least, children's feelings, cuteness and wishes came to command interest and even respect... Most significantly of all, affluent parents began taking conspicuous pride in their offspring. For instance, child portraits became suddenly popular (Reynolds could charge up to £150)...

Children even became foci of consumption, the toy market in particular increasing by leaps and bounds. Books, playthings and educational aids poured onto the market. Old games such as hoops, trap-ball and barley-break were being replaced by instructional toys such as Wallis's Educational Cards for the Amusement of Youth (1785)...with improving morals...

As a mark of childhood's new privileged state, children came to be dressed less as miniature grown-ups, being allowed to wear looser, less formal clothes. Gentlefolks started to nickname their little ones as Sukey, Jackee or Dickee (though first-born were less likely to be given pet names). At her birth in 1775, Jane Austen's father wrote,

'We have now another girl...She is to be Jenny, and seems to me as if she would be as like Henry, as Cassy is to Neddy...' [These Austen nicknames did not outlast childhood - only Francis was called by the shortened form of his name].

- English Society in the Eighteenth Century: Roy Porter (1982).

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A RUMOUR FROM ONTARIO

The Writing Desk, from Toronto, reports the possibility that the Stratford Festival will be producing Pride and Prejudice next year - I hope it's true. If you hear any definite word, please let me know.

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WHY DID SHE SAY IT?

"One of the literary world's most enduring enigmas is what caused Fanny Knight, Jane Austen's favourite niece, to write so disparagingly about the aunt she once adored in a notoriously critical letter written long after the novelist was dead. Hitherto obscure, Fanny became the object of widespread odium for denigrating one of the nation's favourite writers, and it is in an effort to explain the apparently inexplicable that Margaret Wilson has written Almost Another Sister - the very words used by Jane to describe her beloved relative. A short biography - source material on Fanny is as hard to come by as it is on Austen herself - it relies extensively on the letters sent by the author to Fanny which amply illustrate her affection, and which serve to point up what many saw as a betrayal. (George Mann, 175pp, paperback, 9.95)."

- From "Book Briefs", THIS ENGLAND, Summer 1998.

[Part of Fanny's letter to her sister, in 1869: "Yes my love it is very true that Aunt Jane from various circumstances was not so refined as she ought to have been from her talent, & if she had lived 50 years later she would have been in many respects more suitable to our more refined tastes. They were not rich, & the people around with whom they chiefly mixed, were not at all high bred, or in short anything more than mediocre & they of course though superior in mental powers & cultivation were on the same level so far as refinement goes"].

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SANDITON

"Although written in a more elegant age than our own, Sanditon testifies that human nature doesn't change very much: fortune hunters are still at work; true love still triumphs over all obstacles; developers never die."

- From a review in Booknews, Scottsdale, AZ, via the Chicago/Illinois News.

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CHAWTON HOUSE UP-DATE - The Writing Desk, Toronto (Nancy Stokes, ed). August 1998.

According to a clipping from *The Daily Telegraph*, May 16/98 (my English cousins are always on the look-out for me), Chawton House, built in 1585 with wings added in the 1650s, is "a sad sight". But Cassandra and Adam Knight (brother and sister), direct descendants of Edward Austen-Knight, are acting, respectively, as landscape designer and architect for the restoration and work has begun on the house. Restoration of the surrounding 273 acres of park and garden will begin if an application for £4.8 million to the Heritage Lottery Fund is successful. As you probably know, the house has been let on a long lease to the newly-created Centre for the Study of Early English Women's Writing, set up by Sandy Lerner, an American JASNA member. The Lerner collection of nearly 4,000 early books written by women (most before 1830), will provide "a focus for the centre, which is intended to spread interest in early women's writings to everyone from schoolchildren in nearby Alton Primary School to research professors from North America." Richard Knight is the owner of the freehold of Chawton House and will be responsible for the management of the surrounding land. The article ends with, "The restoration of the park and gardens to their appearance in Austen's time is a key part of the scheme. They will be used to explain to students the importance of landscape in the novels of Austen and her contemporaries."

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LIBRARY CORNER - Dianne Kerr.

Concerning our recent acquisitions: Mason Hurley, Joan (aka Joan Austen-Leigh) - FOUR CANADIAN ONE-ACT PLAYS.

Passacaglia, the first one, is a well-drawn presentation of four quite different women in a retirement home. Mason Hurley's lifelike characters display their various temperaments and reveal past lives, through interaction not only with each other but with their matron and a new young attendant -- a sprightly 19-year old ready to please her charges, and anxious to prove herself. A common, though not always shared, love of both words and music is used to evoke our sympathy and empathy for all these women.

Fugue for Female Voices, the second play, presents seven sharply-drawn entertaining vignettes. Each solo character reveals much of herself talking to an unseen character who assists with the revelation by seeming to listen sympathetically and ask appropriate questions which we do not hear. This effective device gives the impression that we are hearing some things people tell only to a stranger whom they expect not to see again. Mason Hurley's versatility and feeling for people is impressive.

Death Seat, the fourth play, is a poignant evocation of the fragility of life, the misunderstandings and misunderstandings between people, their sensitivities, and lack thereof. All of these plays make good reading; all have been performed frequently -- unfortunately no plans are afoot for future presentation; plays are better appreciated on stage.

Inukshuk is the third play. A First Nations friend of mine very kindly agreed to review this one for us, as follows:

Pauloosie - wanting to retain the old ways and stop the intrusion of the white-man's ways that will make them lazy.

Etuk - the ever wise, silent observer, who may actually welcome change.

Emily - the youngster who now sees the value of her culture, albeit through others' eyes; wanting to make an impression on her boyfriend.

Moses - the lazy and irresponsible son, who suddenly sees the errors of his ways.

Sila - the hardworking obedient wife, who spontaneously rebels and asserts herself.

This obviously needs performance to get a real sense of the play and whether the dialogue and characters actually work. I get the sense that an aboriginal audience would get caught up in whether the characters ring true and whether this is how things might unfold -- I did. But a non-aboriginal audience wouldn't be caught up in this analysis.

At first reading I noted a sense of familiarity with the surroundings and characters. I come from a small aboriginal community. While my culture may be different from the Inuit, the same sense of family is very similar. I was troubled by the seemingly educated dialogue at times from the actors, which took away some of the realism. Also, I am not convinced that the life-changing events would have happened in one evening; I am not sure this is how life unfolds, but the drama is there. The classic struggle!

ADDITIONS:

McAllister, Neil: "Inside Jane Austen's Hampshire", in The People's FRIEND Magazine, 12 July, 1997. A delightful article with charming photos of gardens, churches and homes; McAllister is an honest soul; I didn't find one statement to which I could take exception on the grounds of falsehood or inaccuracy. Donated by Amelitta Berretta: accepted with pleasure.

Leeming, Glenda: Who's Who in JANE AUSTEN and THE BRONTES, 1974. Donated by Eileen Sutherland, and a very nice donation indeed; you'll all want to be borrowing this; it is like the Oxford Companion To... Series. Haven't read yet, but Leeming's definitions/descriptions seem carefully calibrated to the importance of the characters.

Austen, Jane: The HISTORY OF ENGLAND By a partial, prejudiced & ignorant Historian. (Copy #3; we have 2 paperbacks). Hardback. 1993. A complete facsimile of the original text, with illustrations by Austen's sister Cassandra. Introduction by A.S.Byatt; a note on the Text by Deirdre Le Faye. This is very nice indeed. Has not only the

facsimile text, but also a Transcript appended. Cassandra's illustrations (in my opinion) although greatly improved by being in colour, and full-size, still don't "come off" quite so well as when seen in original, in the British Museum. You will enjoy Jane's own handwriting. Donated by Eileen Sutherland; happily received.

Evans, Mary: Jane Austen & The State. 1987. Donated by Eileen Sutherland. I believe that Eileen has not read this; I am not sure that she would endorse it. Some snippets: "Mrs. John Dashwood behaves towards her husband's sister-in-law (Elinor?) with cold-blooded ruthlessness..."; "Indeed, at the present time the policies of the British Conservative Party positively endorse the belief that people's poverty is in some way related to their moral capabilities."; "...Jane Austen remarked that she had, in Fanny Price, created a character who would not be liked by everyone..." (make that Emma); Fanny Price is unaffected by (Henry Crawford) "...precisely because she is disinclined to value either property or socially constructed concepts of sexual and personal charm...". Really?? But it is a short book (87 pages), easy to read, and not entirely without merit. My taste isn't everybody's.

By a Lady of Distinction: Regency Etiquette, The Mirror of Graces (1811). Also donated by Eileen Sutherland, at my request. Eileen's opinion is that this is not as meaty as the title suggests -- more devoted to sermonizing and bombast than to informing; with which I now concur. But it was generous of Eileen to donate it -- and it DOES have some highly entertaining Recipes, Notes, and Illustrations.

Shepherd, Patricia M.: Come Into the Garden, Cassandra. 1983. Edited and designed by Joan Austen-Leigh; published by JASNA. Illustrations by C.E. Brock and Hugh Thomson (sic). Also donated by Eileen Sutherland; a happy addition to our library. This is a very delightful slim volume of limerick type verses, each of which will give you a good chuckle.

[I must confess that these "donations" from me were actually donated for our library by a good friend, who deserves all this credit. E. S.]

Dear Fellow Members: Thank you excessively for your scrupulous attention to my reiterated pleas that you return only into my hot little hands. But -- you've picked up another horrible habit. In the last few months no fewer than 4 (FOUR) of you have walked off with BOTH the item AND the card. Shame!! Warning!! I'm prepared to name names!

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ANTIQUARIAN BOOK FAIR

"The literary interests of earlier generations are well captured in a handful of desirable books. The New Jersey dealers D&D Galleries have a copy of the first edition of Camilla by Frances Burney for £4,900, with the excised inscription on the title-page of Volume One: 'Accepted by Dear Miss Owen from H:L:Piozzi - Septr.1796'. When the novel was published, Mrs. Piozzi (Hester Lynch Thrale) recorded that 'No one says a good word for Camilla'. Miss Owen may be her relative Margaret Owen (1743-1816), who was also a friend of Burney's, though Johnson thought her 'empty-headed'. For rather less money, £3,000, James Cummins Bookseller of New York, has a second edition of Coleridge's poems (1797) inscribed by De Quincey: 'Given to me by Robert Southey Wednesday November 11, 1807'; this was the day before the undergraduate De Quincey, who had just met his hero for the first time, gave Coleridge £300. The painter Benjamin Robert Haydon hero-worshipped Napoleon; for £650 Christopher Edwards has a second edition of the English translation of Campaign of General Bonaparte in Italy, 1796-7 by F.R.J.de Pommereul (Edinburgh, 1800) which has Haydon's signature on the title-page and the date 1817."

- Henry Woudhuysen (TLS June 5, 1996)

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JANE AUSTEN. A LIFE: David Nokes (NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997). E.Sutherland.

Writing a new biography of Jane Austen is difficult - there is little factual information about her life, and almost nothing new to say.

David Nokes decries the attempts of the Austen family to "censor" the descriptions of their sister and aunt, to gloss over her touches of witty malice, or to suppress any mention that referred to her and other family members as less than angelic. He doesn't consider the Victorian morals of the period when the early memoirs and reminiscences were written. And he refuses to understand Cassandra's desire to keep from public display her sister's private feelings.

Nokes has endeavoured to write a biography which includes every bit of the truth about Jane Austen's life. Unfortunately, in his determination to expose everything in his "warts and all" account, he seems obsessed with the "warts" and loses a sense of proportion. He dwells on Warren Hastings' fortune obtained from trading in opium and precious stones - the source is the embittered Tysoe Saul Hancock who was himself not able to amass the fortune he dreamed of. According to Nokes, Edward Austen did not attend his father's funeral in Bath; Frank did not visit his sister Jane in the last days of her life. Nokes makes no attempt to justify or even explain these absences.

But Nokes has found the name of the parish clerk who was paid to look after the handicapped Uncle Thomas Leigh and brother George Austen. He builds up a picture of their pathetic and hopeless lives. Nokes admits that "money from the Leighs and Austens had been adequate (but scarcely generous) to meet the needs of Mr. Thomas and Mr. George." He describes the "solemn edict: There were to be no visits, no letters, no family memorials or family records beyond what was necessary for the maintenance of the poor child's life. It would be almost as if the boy had never existed." No source is given for this "edict", or of the gloomy picture of the two men's lives. And no mention of the fact that both Thomas Leigh and George Austen lived into their seventies, and perhaps led a peaceful, happy and healthy life on the farm. Nokes sees only the "idiot brother" kept out of the sight of the family.

Nokes looks for the worst interpretation of any information he has collected. For example: "Infant mortality at this period was always high, but reading through the Steventon parish register, it is noticeable how many of the village illegitimate babies met early deaths: John, the bastard child of Mary Bennett, privately baptized on 23 June, 1753 and buried nine days later; William Jolliffe, the bastard child of Christian Collins, baptized in May 1774 and buried the following August; William Edmund, the 'base-born' son of Sarah Tilbury, baptized in January 1789 and buried in May." [p.59] Read this quotation carefully and you will see not "many...babies who met early deaths", but three babies who died young over a period of thirty-six years!

When Nokes points out the lack of knowledge of Jane Austen's life, he accuses other biographers of being "happy enough to supply this gap [1801-4, in Bath] with their own partial or hearsay accounts. But what they can offer is, at best, a hazy reconstruction, made up of rumour, speculation and surmise." [p.240]. Nokes virtuously affirms that he himself never pads out his book with imagined speeches: "In this biography, the speeches put into people's mouths are not invention, and those who wish to verify their accuracy may find the sources in the footnotes. Nothing is spoken which cannot be authenticated, and no incident presented for which there is not documentary evidence. But in the disposition of a character's thoughts, as in the interpretation of his actions, there is some degree of invention." [p.6]. That is, if a person says something in Nokes' book it can be verified, but if he is merely said to be thinking something, anything goes.

Nokes even feels quite free to imagine Jane Austen's thoughts at various times. He accepts, with apparently no doubts, that Catherine Morland's childhood occupations were modelled on Jane Austen's own. "It was of herself she was thinking when...; She well knew the like frustration of...; Like Catherine, she would far rather play at

boys' games...; She, too, 'greatly preferred cricket'...; She, too, 'was noisy and wild'. [p.82]. Jane Austen described a "real, honest, old fashioned Boarding school" in Emma; Nokes affirms: "That was just how she remembered the Abbey School" in Reading [p.84]. Page after page is filled with these speculative thoughts and feelings.

Here is one example, among dozens. Nokes recounts the well-known story of Jane Austen's acceptance one evening of a proposal from Harris Bigg-Wither, and her change of mind overnight, and refusal the next morning. Nokes wonders what went on during that night: Did Cassandra think what a difference such a marriage would make to her life? Their tender intimacy could never be the same again. She would only be a visitor henceforth in Jane's home, no matter how dear a visitor - it could never be the same. What advice did Cassandra give to her sister that night? Nokes then suggests a comparison with the fragment of a novel, The Watsons, begun the next year, a novel full of sibling rivalry, one sister a traitor to another, one trying to steal away a sister's fiancé, to prevent another sister from marrying - was this a bitter echo of Jane Austen's feelings from that night of anguished indecision? "It is the emphasis on 'rivalry, treachery between sisters' that strikes a disturbing note. Could there have been rivalry - even treachery - between the Austen sisters?"

No 'rumour, speculation or surmise' on Nokes' part? This is typical of his treatment of any problematic event in Jane Austen's life.

Minor nuisances are the lack of a family tree, and no identification of many of the people he writes about. One of Hancock's business projects was supplying "chunam" to the East India Company; Nokes mentions this three times, with no explanation of just what this product is. Another needless repetition is the fact that Edgerton Brydges was the author of Fitz-Albini, also mentioned three times. Also, no matter how much she would have liked to be, "Isabella Tilney" [p.109] never did achieve that name. These are minor objections, but annoying.

At the same time, Nokes' writing is fluid, easy to read, smoothly flowing. He has a siren-like quality of luring you on, catching and holding your attention. It is like having a TV on in the same room: no matter how trashy the programme, you cannot not watch it, cannot concentrate on your book without being aware of the distraction. Unless you are tied to the mast, you are seduced into reading page after page, hoping (in vain) for a nugget to appear in the next chapter.

I read the book cover to cover, and then reacted furiously at the waste of time.

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"HE CAME DOWN BY YESTERDAY'S COACH" (Emma)

"We set out at half past 2 o'Clock in the Afternoon [from Manchester]... fare inside to London two Guineas.

The Road we came lay through Wilmslow, Congleton, Newcastle, Stone, Woosley Bridge, where we paid four shillings apiece for Supper. Litchfield, Tamworth, Coventry, Dunchurch where we breakfasted at 6 o'Clock in the Morning, Daventry, Towcaster, Stoney Stratford, Dunstable where we had a very good Dinner & well cooked, St. Albans & Barnett to London where we arrived at Halfpast 6 o'Clock having been only 28 hours on the Road. The Weather was fine the Roads good without Dirt or Dust, & all the Country looking charming from the forwardness of the Spring, & some genial Rains which had fallen a day or two before. ...

I was quite delighted with the Country. There was a deal of Grass Land all the way, and very well stocked particularly with Sheep. But whether the Land was Meadow or Pasture it was perfectly clean from Rushes or Rubbish of any kind & looked beautiful. The Farms were well attended to & I do not remember ever passing thro' so long a distance where there was so little of Common Land Waste or unimproved or even neglected Land. I observed several Fields which had been very lately drained in the manner we are now draining at Atherton." (P.182) [May 11, 1819]

- A Lancashire Gentleman. The Letters and Journals of Richard Hodgkinson. 1763-1847. (F. & K. Wood, ed. 1992)

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Highways and Byways in Jane Austen's Life - No. 4 - by Keiko Parker

I shall remain in Surrey this month, and present two scenes from this "garden of England." Looking at the illustration by Hugh Thomson entitled "Timbered House in the Market Place, Godalming" in *Highways and Byways in Surrey* by Eric Parker, I was reminded of the Crown Inn in *Emma*. And then my thoughts ran to another street scene in the same novel. I refer to the one in which Emma stands at Ford's doorway while Harriet does her shopping inside. How complacently she surveyed the mundane activities in a village street!

The very next moment, she spies Mrs. Weston and Frank Churchill all but knocking at the Bates's door, but at that same moment they, in turn, see her at Ford's, and come over to speak to her. She would not be so complacent, if she knew the intrigue in Frank Churchill's heart!

The second scene is that of Box Hill. I need scarcely dwell on the dramatic events of that ill-fated picnic that ends with Emma's tears of remorse. Eric Parker's book states: "Box Hill must be pretty nearly the best-known hill in the world. It has all the advantages. It is within



Timbered House in the Market Place, Godalming.

easy reach of London for school treats, excursions, choir outings, week-ends, and all other journeys in open air; it has a railway station at its foot, and several inns, and a tea-garden at the top, and a hundred Bank holidays have left it unspoiled. The box-trees that name the hill are the finest in England. Box-trees love chalk, and here they drive their roots into the crown and scar of a cliff of chalk"

When I climbed up Box Hill on my Jane Austen Tour in 1990, I could see miles in front of me from the hilltop. Although Box Hill may no longer be such an attraction to school children and choir groups as described above, there is still a railway station and at least one inn where we stayed. The entire area still retains that air of old-world serenity.

How ironic it is that Emma is at a high point in her life at the Box Hill picnic, and yet, at the same time, suffers acute mortification that plunges her into self-examination of her conduct towards Miss Bates. Only through undergoing such a trial, does our heroine prove herself worthy of all that a Mr. Knightley could offer.



View of Box Hill, Misty Day.

ROYAL APPRECIATION

A London antique dealer is offering for sale "An ormolu and ebonised inkstand, containing two pen trays, a cut-glass sand caster and inkpot, and a taper holder and snuffer."

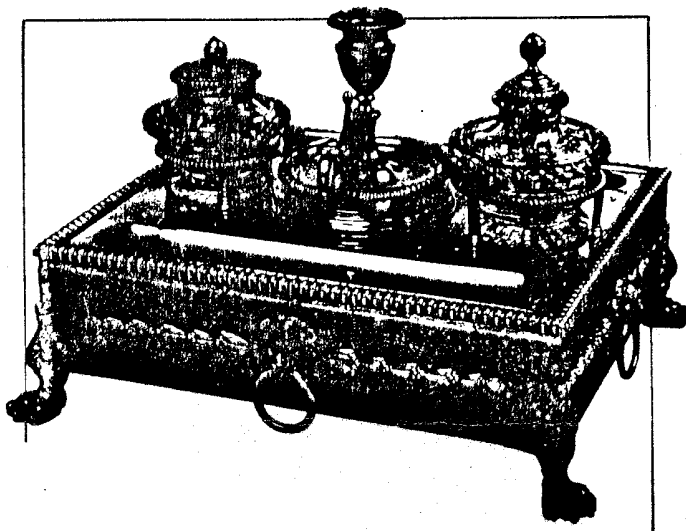
This had been presented in 1814 by King George III to his personal physician, Dr. William Heberden, who had dropped all other patients to attend the King's final illness.

The inkstand was accompanied by a gracious note from the King:

"Sir, You will oblige me exceedingly if you would allow this inkstand which accompanies this note to stand on your table as a proof of my gratitude for your kind attention during my illness which no one can be more sensible of than

Your friend

George."



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NEWSTEAD ABBEY CAMPAIGN: LATEST. The world-wide protest against the proposal by Midland Mining Ltd. to extract coal from beneath Newstead Abbey Park, ancestral home of Lord Byron, continues while we await the long-delayed independent study. The petition, which many JASNA members have signed, has grown to more than eighteen thousand signatures. Members should continue to write to The Rt. Hon. Chris Smith, PC, MP, Minister for Culture, Media, and Sport, at 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH. Telephone 44+171+211+2013; Fax: 44+171+211+2006. Send copy of your letter to Mrs. Maureen Crisp, The International Byron Society, The White Lady, Newstead Abbey Park, Nottinghamshire, England NG15 8GE. Telephone: 44+1623+797392; Fax: 44+1623+796856.

Meanwhile, the glorious Abbey and Park were open to visitors throughout the summer as usual. A Jane Austen Ball in June and an exhibit emphasising the Gothic "ruinous perfection" were among the attractions that marked the 200th anniversary of the Poet's accession to the Barony and the Abbey.

THE MILLENNIUM MEETING IN BERMUDA

Plans have been completed for a joint meeting of the Jane Austen Society of Britain, JASNA, and the Jane Austen Society of Australia, in Bermuda in May, 2000.

Bermuda was the home for a number of years of both Jane Austen's sailor brothers, during their naval careers. The week-long conference will include guest speakers, receptions, a visit to the Dockyard, and optional tours around the island.

Cost will be about £1,775, including airfare from Britain - there would be a discount of approximately £500 for those making their own way to Bermuda.

For more details, see Eileen Sutherland.

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LADY SCOTT AND MRS. ELTON

At first, the novels of Sir Walter Scott were written anonymously, but after the publication of Guy Mannering (c.1815), "people now began to feel these works could come but from one Authour, particularly as a few acres began to be added to the recent purchase of the old tower of Abbotsford, and Mrs. Scott set up a carriage, a Barouche-Landau built in London, and which from the time she got it she was seldom out of, appearing indeed to spend her life in driving about the streets all day."

- Memoirs of a Highland Lady (V.II, p.72): Elizabeth Grant. (1898)

Grant goes on to write about Lady Scott: "half educated in Paris, very silly and very foolish..."

One wonders if Jane Austen knew this about Lady Scott, before creating Mrs. Elton, or is it just a coincidence?

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HISTORY FOR BEGINNERS

There have been many descriptions of what history is, e.g. 'A vast Mississippi of falsehood' (Matthew Arnold); 'Fables that have been agreed upon' (Voltaire); 'A confused heap of facts' (Lord Chesterfield); 'Little more than the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind' (Gibbon); 'The biography of a few stout and earnest persons' (Ralph Waldo Emerson); 'A cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of man' (Shelley); 'Bunk' (Henry Ford)...

And then there is Catherine Morland's version, in Northanger Abbey:

'But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in...The quarrels of popes and kings with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all - it is very tiresome.'

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James Boswell, author of the biography of Dr. Samuel Johnson, inherited the family seat of Auchinleck in Ayrshire when his father Lord Auchinleck died in 1782. He entertained a constant stream of guests. Drink was the main entertainment .

"The principal liquors so generously dispensed at Boswell's table [were] rum, brandy, gin, mountain, sherry, madeira, lisbon, port, claret. Guests at Auchinleck were offered no whisky, still at this time considered, as Robbie Burns energetically put it, 'a most rascally liquor', 'only drunk by the most rascally part of the inhabitants'."

- From review of James Boswell's 'Book of Company' at Auchinleck 1782-1795

Viscountess Eccles & Gordon Turnbull, editors. (TLS June 5, 1998.)

This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, is issued 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 per year.