



Jane Austen Society of North America

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THE "RICE PORTRAIT" IN THE NEWS AGAIN

Has the almost incredible controversy surrounding the "Rice Portrait" finally come to an end?

The Austenian world has been divided sharply into two groups: those who strongly affirm that it is a picture of the young Jane Austen, and those who vehemently deny the possibility. For years, debate has raged about the identity of this attractive young woman. At one time the painting was called the "Zoffany Portrait", but now art historians believe it was painted by a more obscure artist. Recently a decision was made to offer the portrait for sale, and the result has been an impassioned and virulent "pamphlet war", mainly fought in the Letters columns of the Times Literary Supplement, as to the identity of the girl in the portrait.

Supporters of the "Of course it is Jane Austen" side rely mainly on the almost watertight provenance of the painting. It first came into the records in 1819 as a wedding gift. After a few well-documented changes of ownership, it was inherited by a member of the Rice family (descendants of Jane Austen's brother Edward Austen Knight) in whose possession it has remained ever since. Opponents point out the vital gap at the beginning of this pedigree. Who would pay a considerable sum to commission a portrait of the younger daughter of an obscure country parson? Francis Austen of Sevenoaks in Kent was wealthy enough - he was the uncle and benefactor of Jane Austen's father, and godfather of Cassandra; his wife was Jane's godmother. But he was noted for being a stickler for male inheritance and primogeniture - not the sort to be "enchanted" by his first sight of a fourteen-year-old female relative. If not Francis Austen, then who? And who owned it from the time it was painted until it came into notice in 1819?

Another aspect of the controversy is how few family members knew about the portrait. Deirdre Le Faye affirms that neither Jane Austen nor any member of her immediate family made any reference to the picture through the years. After Jane's death, Cassandra "spoke constantly to her nieces of their Aunt Jane...Is it possible," writes Le Faye, that Cassandra would "never tell the nieces about it, nor wish aloud that the portrait was in her possession, so that they too could see it?" And, further, "It is quite clear that none of the Hampshire Austens, Austen-Leighs, or Lefroys had the slightest knowledge of the existence of this portrait before it came into the hands of the Rice family."

Fanny Caroline Lefroy wrote in 1883, "I never heard before of the portrait of Jane Austen." She was a daughter of Jane Austen's niece Anna, and was not born until 1820. Yet, according to Claudia Johnson, "She did decide



the portrait was genuine, for when she saw it, she dated it, and left only the whereabouts of its execution - Bath or Kent - in doubt.

However, the portrait was well enough accepted for it to be used in Lord Brabourne's edition of Jane Austen's Letters in 1884; by R. Brimley Johnson, The Novels of Jane Austen (1892 and 1902); by W. and R.A. Austen-Leigh, Jane Austen, Her Life and Letters (1913); and Mary Augusta Austen-Leigh, Personal Aspects of Jane Austen (1920), with no appreciable challenge. [And is still being so used today].

The physical appearance of the girl in the painting has also raised questions. Deirdre Le Faye quotes a contemporary cousin who described the young Jane Austen as "not at all pretty & very prim, unlike a girl of twelve, whimsical and affected." Margaret Anne Doody, literature professor from Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, calls this: "the comments of a jealous cousin." Looking at the Rice portrait, evidently what one sees is what one expects to see. Margaret Hammond, author of one of the books about the Rice portrait, feels that "The Rice picture is simply Jane Austen. If you read the juvenilia, that's the little girl who wrote those wickedly clever pieces in her childhood." Claudia Johnson, Austen scholar of note, describes the young woman as "spirited, ironic and disarmingly self-confident." [Personally, I see "sweet and simpering." E.S.]

The entire debate hinges on the date of the portrait. Those who believe it is Jane Austen, must believe in a date of 1788-89; their opponents argue for a date about 1800-1810, when Jane Austen would no longer be a teen-aged girl. Since the portrait is undated, the whole question revolves around an analysis of the clothing.

The National Portrait Gallery has always maintained that the sketch by Cassandra, which they own, is the only authentic likeness of the author (except a back view, also by Cassandra). Jacob Simon, curator of 18th century portraiture, wrote to the Times: "The portrait can be dated to the period 1800-1810 by a particular combination of features: close cropped hair, very high waistline, a narrow waist ribbon, short full sleeves, long skirt following the line of the body and flat, low-cut shoes." He goes on to cite reliably-dated portraits of families by Samuel Woodforde and John Constable (1803-1804) with comparable clothing.

Richard Wheeler, author of another book about the portrait as a picture of Jane Austen, cites The Corbet Family Group, painted by Benjamin Marshall in 1792 (dated from the known age of a little boy in the picture), saying it includes "a young girl in a dress identical with that in the Rice portrait." Margaret Hammond, also on the pro-Jane Austen side, states that she has "a list as long as your arm of pictures painted by Reynolds, Gainsborough and others showing children in costumes of that sort dating as far back as the date of Jane's birth in 1775."

Claudia Johnson uses similar terms: "high-waisted white gowns were commonly worn in the 1790s." Aileen Ribeiro, costume authority at the Courtauld Institute of Art, dismisses these claims of similarity. She analyses the dresses in depth: "In every case there are differences in such details as the cut of the sleeve, the height of the waistband, the fullness of the skirt, and so on." She goes on: "All the dress historians who have been approached agree on a date in the early nineteenth century. Wheeler is unable to find a dress historian to support his claim...On costume grounds the portrait cannot be Jane Austen, and - in view of the travesty of the costume evidence presented by Wheeler and supported by Claudia Johnson - I want to underline the importance of presenting the arguments on the grounds of dress, responsibly and accurately."

Scientific analysis has also been considered. Wheeler points out that there are four images said to be of Jane Austen: Cassandra's sketch, the Rice portrait, the Collins silhouette [?] and the "soon to be published watercolour painted in 1815 by James Stanier Clarke, Librarian of the Prince Regent." [Presumably this was done by memory after the one visit Jane Austen made to him.] These four portraits have been compared "by independent specialists in medical bio-engineering and physiognomy, using computer-based technology." One of the technical experts reported: "I am led to conclude that there is a strong probability that [the four portraits] are of one and the

same person." Deirdre Le Faye postulates that the Rice portrait is a painting of a cousin of Jane Austen's, Mary Anne Campion: "A miniature of Mary Anne exists, showing her at the age of eight in 1805. Her features are the same as those of the child in the portrait, and her dress almost identical." It would be interesting to know what this computer analysis would have shown if this miniature had been one of the examples tested.

The debate was fierce - passions ran high - denigrations and invective were tossed around indiscriminately by both sides. Margaret Anne Doody asserts that "Deirdre Le Faye "makes sweeping claims" about the agreement of art historians about the date of the dress, and "shows unmistakable symptoms of reaching the end of her resources" when she points out an ambiguity in Doody's letter. Aileen Ribeiro accuses Claudia Johnson of omitting a crucial second sentence in Ribeiro's 1995 statement of opinion about the costume. This was: "Those who desperately wish the portrait to be Jane Austen are being selective about the evidence, citing items of clothing out of context from dated portraits of the period." Wheeler considers his argument about the Corbet Group portrait which he dates at 1792, "leaves the opinions of Deirdre Le Faye, Ribeiro and their supporters in tatters."

Most of this scholarly exchange of opinions occurred in March and April, 1998. There followed a period of quiescence as the combattants licked their wounds and possibly planned further diatribes. But the truce was short-lived.

Now we hear about new, seemingly incontrovertible, evidence. In a letter to the TLS in December 1998, Jacob Simon of the National Portrait Gallery reports:

"New evidence has now emerged. In 1985, the painting was relined by the fine-art restorer Anthea Pelham Burn. To do this, the old lining canvas was first removed from the original canvas, so revealing the stamp of the canvas supplier on the back of the original canvas: 'Wm. Legg, High Holborn, London', as recorded in the restorer's report. The painting was then relined, that is, given a new lining canvas, so covering up the stamp. Such stamps were widely used by artists' colourmen supplying canvases to artists.

"William Legg is recorded as 'colourman to artists' in the London directories at no 163 High Holborn from 1802 to 1806, and then at no 254 Oxford Street in 1807. Legg is not recorded at any other address in High Holborn. Until 1802, no 163 High Holborn is listed as occupied by James Poole, and from 1806 by Thomas Brown. Like Legg, both Poole and Brown were artists' colourmen. The 1807 Post Office directory carries an entry, 'Brown T. Colour and Primed Cloth Manufactory, 163, High Holborn, Successor to Mr. Legg, late Poole'."

Then Simon sums up, with dignified restraint but perhaps a tinge of triumph:

"On the information now available, one can conclude that the canvas was supplied to the unknown artist of the Rice portrait between 1801 and 1806 (the date 1801 allows for the fact that the 1802 directory was compiled in the autumn of 1801). The painting therefore cannot date to before 1801, and probably dates to the period 1801 to 1806 or soon after. However charming the portrait, the identification with Jane Austen can now be eliminated."

Only one question remains - Why in the world didn't he say so sooner?

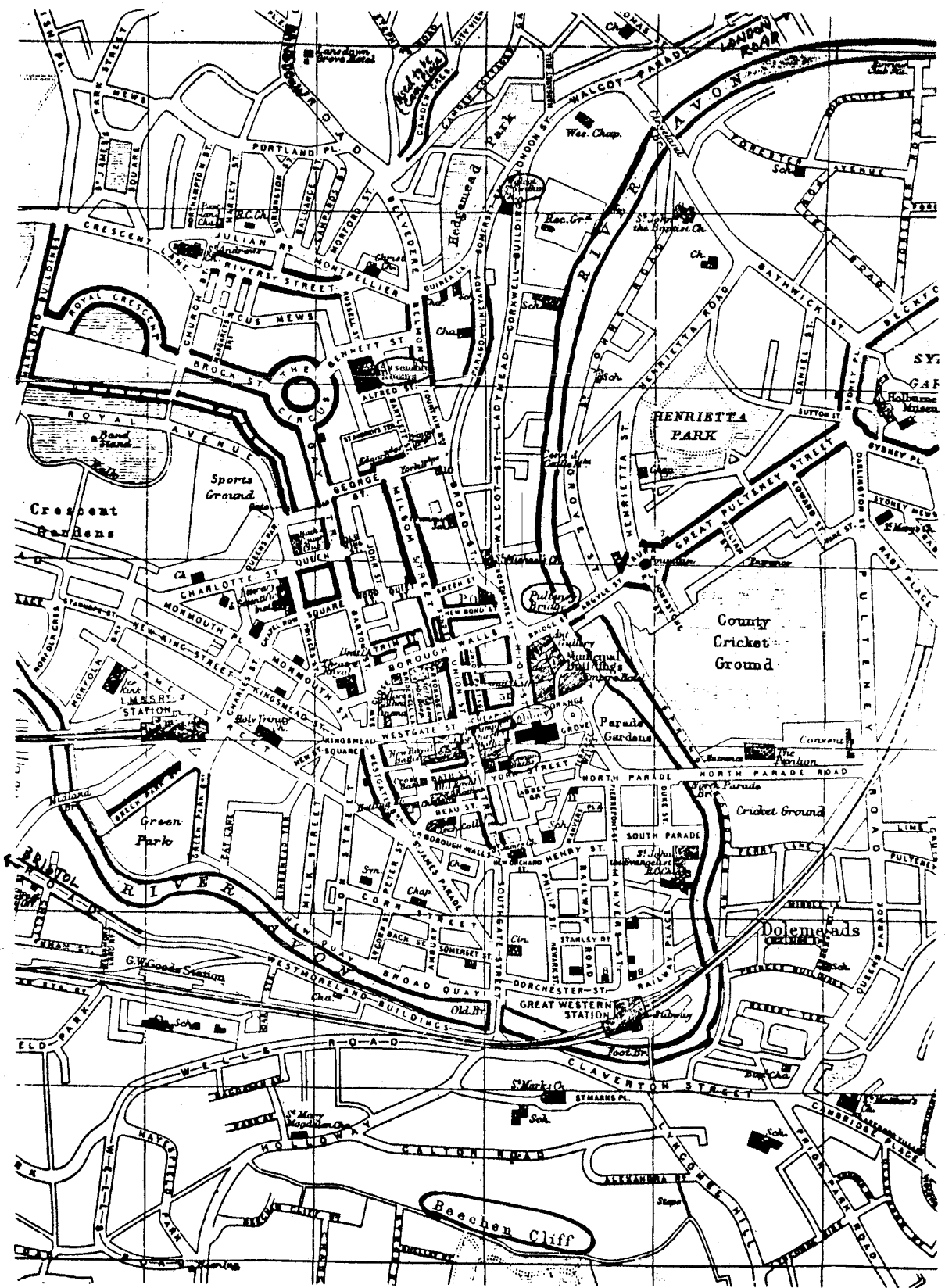
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IN MEMORIAM

It was with sincere regret that we heard of the death in early December of David Macaree. David was born in Scotland, and served in World War II with the Royal Marines and the commandos. He came to Canada in 1955, teaching in Northern B.C., and then in the English Department at U.B.C. In his leisure time, David and his wife Mary spent many happy hours hiking in the local mountains, and they were authors of several guide books to trails in southwestern B.C.

David was a member of JASNA for many years. Although failing health prevented him from attending meetings in recent years, we shall miss David's gentle humour, quiet comments, and thorough knowledge of Jane Austen's works.

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BATH AT THE BIRTHDAY MEETING

It was almost as if we had really gone to Bath - Keiko Parker gave a slide presentation for the annual "Birthday" meeting in December, on Jane Austen's Bath and her Bath Novels. This gave us a splendidly vivid picture of the city and how Jane Austen made use of the various locations in her novels.

A hand-out map of Bath showed the streets, squares and buildings in detail. Keiko "walked" us through the city, starting at the centre around the Abbey, then the mediaeval area, and finally up those famous streets: Milsom Street, Union Street, Gay Street, The Circus, the Royal Crescent, and at last to Camden Place at the top of the map.

Then came the slides. We were shown the various houses where the Austens had lived: Queen Square, almost in the centre of the town, where Jane visited in 1799 with Edward and Elizabeth Austen; No. 1 Paragon, high up the hill near the Assembly Rooms, where the Austens stayed with the Leigh-Perrots while they looked for a house of their own; Sydney Gardens, a long walk to the baths, but on the level, in the newly-developed Bathwick area, the first of the Austen residences; Green Park Buildings, to the west near the river, low and rather damp; Gay Street, a wide avenue leading to The Circus; and lastly, Trim Street, leading off the bottom end of Gay Street, and probably the least expensive of all, their last home in Bath, after Mr. Austen had died.

The homes of the characters in Northanger Abbey and Persuasion were almost as real to us. Keiko pointed out that going up the map was also going up hill in the city, and was the direction in which Bath developed, as wealthy people moved away from the old historical centre and relocated in the higher areas to the north. It is very typical that Sir Walter Elliot chose Camden Place, at the top of the map and at the highest point in the city: he could lord it over ordinary mortals below and look down upon everyone else. He made friends with Colonel Wallis who lived "in very good style" in the large imposing Marlboro Buildings near the Royal Crescent, but was very scornful of Mrs. Smith's residence in Westgate Buildings, right in the middle of the old part of the city (but very near the hot baths, to which she could be taken for treatment of her crippling rheumatism).

Lady Russell had lodgings in Rivers Street, wide and impressive, not far below Camden Place; Lady Dalrymple had taken a house in Laura Place, an imposing diamond-shaped open area across the Pulteney Bridge, eminently suitable for a woman of her status. The Crofts, to Sir Walter's satisfaction, were in lodgings in Gay Street, respectable enough, but well below Camden Place. Jane Austen used her knowledge of all these streets in details in the novels.

In the early days, when she was writing Northanger Abbey (in 1798, about the time of her visit to Bath with Edward and Elizabeth Austen), Jane Austen placed her characters in locations which would indicate something of their status and character, but not with the subtleties she used in Persuasion. The Allens established themselves in "comfortable lodgings in Pulteney-Street", suitable to their wealth and status, but not conspicuously "elegant". It was a fair distance to the Pump Room where Mr. Allen was required to drink the waters, but the way was mainly on the level, not up or down the hills to the north. Mrs. Thorpe - "a widow and not a very rich one" - was settled at Edgar's Buildings, at the top end of Milsom Street, a perfect viewpoint for Isabella to look out a window and see any young man walking up the street. General Tilney had taken a house in Milsom Street itself, right in the centre of things, where he can feel he has everything under control.

In Persuasion, when Anne met Admiral Croft in Milsom Street, she was eager to hear his news of Captain Wentworth, and the betrothal of Louisa and Captain Benwick. But Milsom Street is a wide, busy shopping thoroughfare, crowded and bustling, and he would not tell Anne anything until "they had gained the greater space and quiet of Belmont," a residential street, with no shops or shoppers, running up the hill towards Camden Place.

The White Hart, where the Musgrove party had taken rooms, was centrally located near the Abbey, exactly where the fictional Mary Musgrove could look out the real inn window "overlooking the entrance to the pump room" and see Mrs. Clay and Mr. Elliot "standing under the colonnade..." after "turning the corner from Bath-street."

Keiko finished by telling us of a discovery she had made, by careful reading of the novel and study of the map. Towards the end of Persuasion, after Charles Musgrove has gone to look at a "capital gun," Captain Wentworth offers to escort Anne home. They met in Union Street (appropriate street name), and the direct way was almost due north, straight up the map, along Milsom Street, Belmont, Belvedere, and then to Camden Place. But "soon words enough had passed between them to decide their direction towards the comparatively quiet and retired gravel-walk." Keiko searched and found on the map, and later in Bath itself, the narrow lane called Gravel Walk. (Perhaps it did not have an official name in Jane Austen's time, as she does not give it capital letters). It is a narrow footpath that leads a little north and then turns west, behind The Circus and the Royal Crescent, to Marlboro Buildings. It was a long way around to get to Camden Place this way, but the re-united lovers, "with smiles reined in and spirits dancing in private rapture," were in no hurry, as they "slowly paced the gradual ascent" until "at last Anne was home again." Without knowing just where that gravel walk was, and what a roundabout way they took, we miss some understanding of their reluctance to end that long, leisurely, loving walk together.

Jane and Cassandra Austen left Bath, as one letter says, "with such happy feelings of escape." We had no such feelings - we would have liked to linger much longer in Keiko Parker's Bath. The delectable lunch that followed, however, went some way to make amends, and proved a fitting end of our Birthday celebrations.

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JANE AUSTEN ON THE SPORTS PAGE

Recently in the Vancouver Sun, Ian MacIntyre began his sports column:

"In the BBC series of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, Charlotte Lucas explains the secret of her mismatched marriage to the simpering, annoying, imbecile Mr. Collins.

The Rev. Collins is encouraged by his wife to spend much time in his garden, regularly visit his adored patron and, when home, to sit in his book room, which occupies a part of the house away from her parlour.

'So it often happens,' she concludes, 'that a whole day passes in which we have not spent more than a few minutes in each other's company. I find that I can bear the solitude very cheerfully.'

In the same way, distance is the key to the survival of the hockey marriage between Vancouver Canuck general manager Brian Burke and head coach Mike Keenan..."

Then MacIntyre goes on about the dispute about trading Pavel Bure.

The next week his column was about things he had learned writing a sports column, including: "If you quote Jane Austen in your sports story, no one will get it."

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[I wrote to him c/o the newspaper, telling him not to be disheartened, that some of us knew what he was talking about, and sent him a notice of our next meeting -- but I have not heard back. E.S.]

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A travel article about Surrey ends: "Not to be overlooked is Box Hill, a popular beauty spot near Dorking, and a favourite of visitors from London for its great walks and spectacular views towards the West Sussex Downs."

The Vancouver Sun, Sept.19, 1998.

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Highways and Byways in Jane Austen's Life - No. 5 - by Keiko Parker

This month we travel east to Kent, the shire full of place names associated with Jane Austen, relating either to her life or her novels, such as Ramsgate, Deal, Sevenoaks, Horsmonden, and Canterbury. Not very far from Canterbury is the object of our visit this month, Godmersham, one of the large estates inherited by Jane's brother Edward Austen (later Knight). *Highways and Byways in Kent* by Walter Jerrold (with illustrations by Hugh Thomson, London: MacMillan, 1907) quotes Lord Brabourne (grandson of Edward Knight) thus:

Godmersham Park is situated in one of the most beautiful parts of Kent, namely in the valley of the Stour, which lies between Ashford and Canterbury. Soon after you pass the Wye station of the railway from the former to the latter place, you see Godmersham Church on your left hand, and just beyond it, comes into view the wall which shuts off the shrubberies and pleasure grounds of the great house from the road; close to the church nestles the home farm, and beyond it the Rectory, with lawns sloping down to the River Stour which for a distance of nearly a mile runs through the east side end of the park. A little beyond the church you see the mansion, between which and the railroad lies the village, divided by the old high road from Ashford to Canterbury, nearly opposite Godmersham.

On my Jane Austen Tour in 1990 we attended the Sunday service at St. Lawrence. The church is mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086). The stained glass on the east window is from Norman times and features a grid pattern throughout, symbolizing St. Lawrence's martyrdom at the stake. We saw the Knight family pew, which is now used as a Sunday School area, and the memorial tablet to Edward and Elizabeth Knight. Some members of the congregation were kind enough to demonstrate their skill at bell ringing. From St. Lawrence we walked along the lane. Today, the rectory to our right looks much as it did when a black-and-white picture was taken earlier in this century for a postcard. To our left was the great wall mentioned in the above description. Walking alongside it, I thought to myself, "These people built things to last."

The vast estate, dotted with sheep, with the Great Stour running through it, can only be described as idyllic. Gazing on the magnificent expanse before me, I found myself thinking, "To be mistress of Godmersham might be something!" much as Elizabeth Bennet thought when she first saw Pemberley. But when we stepped inside, my dream was shattered to witness the emptiness and desolation. The beautiful Grecian frieze that adorns the entrance hall has not been cleaned for a long time, and we saw room after room in an unkempt state, with plaster falling off and the wooden lath showing in some places. The beauty, opulence, and comfort which made Jane write, "Yesterday past quite à la Godmersham" (letter of June 15, 1808) were no more.



Godmersham.

I heard that someone bought the estate with a view to gathering all his extended family to live in it, but the renovation cost proved too much. Only the estate manager is living in the gatehouse now. What a pity that this great house, still beautiful to look at, both front and back, should stand so neglected. Is this not a cause for the National Trust to address, I wondered.

JANE AUSTEN. A LIFE: Claire Tomalin (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1997) - E.Sutherland

Our library has acquired the two recent biographies of Jane Austen, by Claire Tomalin and by David Nokes. I have read and enjoyed the Tomalin book.

If you like biographies that are sternly serious and wholly factual, then Tomalin's is not for you. The facts are certainly there, but the author embroiders and embellishes them into a story which reads smoothly and easily like a good novel. Mr. Austen came back from church on Christmas day, 1775, "through the snow and silence." His sister, Philadelphia Hancock probably attended Jane's birth to help out with the housework and the other children: "their cousin Betsy [her daughter, who grew up to become Eliza, Countess de Feuillide] was also there... James, Edward and even precocious four-year-old Henry watched and listened to their cousin admiringly." This is not really distortion, or twisting the facts to suit a preconceived thesis: even if it is all based on the assumption that Aunt Philadelphia was there, it can well be called an "educated guess", and follows reasonably and knowledgeably along.

Later, Tomalin quotes Jane Austen's letter to Cassandra about walking alone to Deane for the first time; Tomalin remarks: "Now that Jane had begun, she must have often walked alone along the lanes made passable by the frost, her feet clinking in their pattens, her imagination working." Tomalin uses words such as "might", "may", "should", and makes guesses and suppositions all through her account, but adds or implies nothing that I considered unbelievable. She provides "local colour" and keeps the story flowing interestingly along.

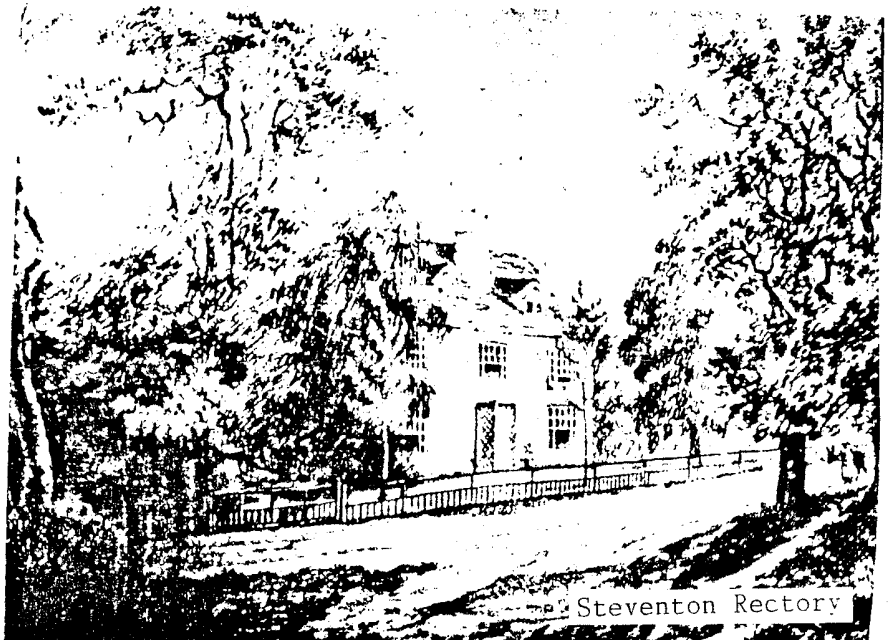
The only case where I thought the evidence and subsequent deduction were weak, was in connection with Tomalin's assertion that the "exiles" of Jane Austen's childhood - being nursed by a village family in her infancy, and sent to school with Cassandra at an early age - had a traumatic effect on her future life.

Tomalin has given us a very readable book - the chapters are short, averaging about ten pages or less. Most have a distinct theme - dancing, neighbours, weddings and funerals, friends in East Kent - but still are worked into the chronological whole.

The story of Jane Austen's life necessarily jumps around a bit, bringing in other people and other events. In some of these cases, I found a lack of specific dates was a bit annoying. Sometimes I was uncertain about pronouns: "Plays and dancing provided a distraction from [Eliza's] anxieties over her son, who had yet to be seen by his father; indeed, she herself had not set eyes on him for more than two years" - set eyes on her son, or her husband the Count?

There is not much new information available to biographers. But Tomalin gives details - new to me, anyway - of neighbours, visits, etc. by references to the diaries, 1790-1817,

kept by Elizabeth Chute. The Chutes of The Vyne were neighbours and friends, more socially exalted than the Austens, but often meeting them at various homes, dining with them, seeing them at balls, mentioning them to mutual friends. The information from the diaries adds to what we know from Jane Austen's letters about the people of the neighbourhood.



The Index is excellent. However, Tomalin mentions that she deliberately kept the Bibliography "short and basic" - it would be "ridiculous" to list all she read during preparation. The section of "Published Material" (two pages of widely-spaced items) is listed chronologically, and is thus difficult to consult. The "Notes" to each chapter do not take the place of detailed adequate references. "James Austen wrote of the 'female foot' not getting through the lanes in mud, snow and flood..." Where did he write it? In another place, "The Cowpers, wanting companionship for their daughter, were in the habit of inviting Cassandra to stay in Bath" - again no reference as to the source of this information.

Though it may have some shortcomings as a valuable reference book, Jane Austen. A Life gives a thoroughly enjoyable picture of Jane Austen's life in the context of her family and her friends, and a good assessment of the importance of her writing -- well worth reading.

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BATH CHAIRS, AGAIN

[Leila Vennewitz, wintering in Southern California, writes about her personal experience with Bath chairs, some time ago.]

"Just received (at my desert outpost) the JASNA November Newsletter. Your contribution about invalid chairs is fascinating. I note you don't mention the term 'Bath chair,' yet wouldn't that be what was often used in Jane Austen's day, in Bath and elsewhere?

Webster's definition of bath (alt. Bath) chair is 'a hooded, and sometimes glassed and wheeled chair used esp. by invalids...' An American dictionary, of course, and perhaps Americans used variants of what I recall as a Bath chair, my impression being gained from early childhood (i.e., during the First World War) spent entirely in provincial England.

There, and at that time, the Bath chair was a common sight being pushed along the sidewalk (for us, pavement). The occupant was usually swathed in a shawl and a throw (for us, rug) well tucked in around the knees. I never saw a glassed-in one, nor one with a hood. The chair was always made of wicker, varnished a reddish brown, and the rounded back extended to shoulder-height. Locomotion was by dint of a single, smallish central wheel, and, as you describe, a 'shank near the hand of the occupant' made guiding from the chair possible. The shank was not an alternative to the chair being pushed by an attendant; in fact, the Bath chair could only be propelled by an attendant.

At the age of eight I severely sprained my ankle so was privileged (as I now see it) to be conveyed in this manner by my mother. We lived by the seaside, and the Bath chair enabled the little invalid to benefit from the salty air as we rolled along the wind-swept promenade.

Your article has made me realize, with much satisfaction, that I must be one of the few JASNA members who can vividly recall this invigorating if antiquated experience, thus linking me up with the long-ago streets of Jane Austen's Bath."

-Leila Vennewitz.

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FASHIONS IN BATH - 1803

"A large card party...a little music, a deal of chat, with a tincture of scandal; Lady Meredith was talked of for being turned out of the Rooms at Bath by the Master of Ceremonies for having no sleeves to her cloaths - the naked elbow appears everywhere with impunity, but the arm above it is not tolerated as yet."

- A Governess in the Time of Jane Austen: Joanna Martin, ed. (1988)

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LIBRARY CORNER - Dianne Kerr.

Hereinafter you will find complete copies of our Library holdings and a Sign-On Sheet. You will have to browse the Library List instead of books. Sorry about that! But we have grown far too fat; and it seems silly for me to keep choosing for you without your input! Please feel free to ask me about any item which interests you; I have read almost everything we possess -- now numbering well over 200 items -- not counting newsletters from Other Regions. Please be sure to fill in the Sign-On Sheet completely: Item wanted; your name, phone #, and the date. PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE A LIST; I will photocopy upon request. Thank you!

LIBRARY ADDITIONS:

Aiken, Joan: ELIZA'S DAUGHTER. 1994. Not a sequel to S&S; 'modelled on Austen'; this is the 20th of Aiken's published novels. Eliza is apparently the daughter of Willoughby (I have not yet read); she spends some time with all 3 Dashwood sisters. Donated by Jean Brown; it looks like a good homey read.

Porter, Margaret Evans: SWEET LAVENDER A Regency Romonace. 1992. This novelist's 4th publication. Also donated by Jean Brown, AND Jane Austen herself appears, chatting charmingly! I haven't read this yet either, but it is a splendid choice for the hard-of-seeing, as it is in out-size print.

Johnson, Claudia L.: JANE AUSTEN - WOMEN, POLITICS AND THE NOVEL. 1988. 'One anonymous critic...in the NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE (1852), (states): "...none but a man, of first rate power withal, can produce a first-rate novel; and...a woman of corresponding genius... can only produce one of a second-rate order" '.

Johnson carefully dissects Austen criticism from Walter Scott, through Chapman and David Cecil and on, pointing out that the: '...mere identification of her kinship...to the men in her family is judged enough to warrant the inference that her social opinions affirmed theirs as a matter of course.'; and noting: '...the implication that Austen's irony, her single most brilliant achievement, was pathological, a problem any good husband could relieve...' Johnson examines a vast host of critical misperceptions.

Johnson concludes her introduction with the recollection of Austen's mocking boast: ' "...with all possible vanity...the most unlearned...who ever dated to be..." -- ... the authoresses (Austen) habitually read were hardly uninformed, and exactly how and why Austen...(shows)...that they and she were otherwise is the subject of this book.'

Johnson claims that NA '...does not refute, but rather clarifies and reclaims, gothic conventions in distinctly political ways...(it) does not ridicule gothic novels nearly as much as their readers.' (34). And '...of all her novels. NA...(is)...the most densely packed with topical details of a political character -- riots, hothouses, pamphlets, and even anti-treason laws authorizing the activities of "voluntary spies".'(41).

"What I felt on hearing that your sister was dying -- and dying too, believing me the greatest villain upon earth..." Johnson points out that: 'Willoughby imagines Marianne's dying breaths pay tribute to his potency.' (67), and is really nothing other than arrogant vanity.

A final tid-bit: 'Austen, unlike her latter-day readers, did not have the benefit of knowing that her impending death would be imparting a gently resigned, autumnal melancholy to all her observations' (144).

I was warned that I wouldn't like this because Johnson is a belligerent Feminist and a militant Socialist; but she is a first-rate Logician, and a thorough analyst. Worth the 110% concentration required, because Johnson's prose is packed - almost on the Miltonic side.

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<p>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.</p>
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