

Muse & Musings

"The company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation"

Jane Austen Day April 10, 2021

Zoom meeting: Mariners and Memoirs

Our usual Jane Austen Day every April normally has two presentations with a catered lunch between, and sometimes other activities. Our last in-person Jane Austen Day, in 2019, featured presentations on corsets and corsets and finished off with a trip to the Metro Theatre's production of *Persuasion*. Then came the plague. After much soul-searching and hand-wringing, we cancelled the March 2020 meeting, thinking we'd still be on for April. Alas, it was not to be. Our next JA Day (April 2020) was our first virtual meeting.

This year's Virtual Jane Austen Day featured morning and afternoon presentations (both live over Zoom) with a Scavenger Hunt between, along with a bring-your-own lunch and interview with special guest Tony Ellison, 94-year-old naval veteran and Janice Mallison's father, who shared some WWII-era naval memories to complement the JA-era ones from our morning speaker.

A week or two before this event, we all received in the mail (from our innovative RC Michelle) an invitation to tea including a placemat, a bookmark and a teabag.

Life at sea in the Royal Navy in Jane Austen's time Presented by Gordon Laco

Gordon Laco, who is a very engaging speaker, is a sailor and historical consultant retired from the Canadian Navy. His rollicking talk about life at sea was generously spiced with anecdotes from his career and from naval history.

His biggest claim to fame was being the technical advisor and historical consultant on the feature film *Master and Commander: the Far Side of the World* based on novels by Patrick O'Brian and starring Russell Crowe. When working at Parks Canada historical sites he discovered his talent for translating and mediating between museum people (who don't want anyone to touch the artifacts) and movie people (who having been given permission to enter Building A immediately start hammering nails into the 200-year-old timbers of Building B). The films he worked on at that time were mostly low-budget documentaries.



Summer 2021: no virtual meeting dates

Due to COVID-19 all **in-person meetings are suspended** until future notice. We currently have no Zoom meetings scheduled during the summer break, although there are tentative plans afoot for some small outdoor activities.

If there is content for an August issue of M&M, the deadline will be

July 26

Please see the program of events on our website for more up-to-date information (thanks to webmaster Lauren McMahon):

[JASNA-Vancouver program](#)



Gordon Laco on the set of Master and Commander (getting in trouble for not paying attention to the director).

The main points he emphasized about life in the Royal Navy were that sailors at all levels were highly trained professionals; that the life was not bad; and that sailors were a valuable asset to the Navy not generally mistreated. They could look forward to receiving pensions. There were Acts of Parliament ensuring they were paid and properly fed. The food might look bad to us, but it was as good as or better than they would have got on land, and generally more plentiful.

Gordon gave a similar presentation for the final plenary breakfast session of the JASNA 2018 AGM in Kansas City, but this one had more Canadian content. In those faraway pre-COVID and pre-Zoom days, Gordon presented by phone as he wasn't able to attend in person, but nevertheless to huge acclaim.

Jane Austen Day Lunch break Virtual Scavenger Hunt

It was with some trepidation that I agreed to organize our first Virtual Scavenger Hunt to be held during Jane Austen Day. That will teach me to have written a Newsletter article some months before relating my positive experience with a similar scavenger hunt that was held during the 2020 AGM. I was a marked woman.



Still, as long as expectations were not too high then maybe it would not be too painful for either hosts or participants. Elspeth Flood, the other host identified for the event, devised some additional clues designed to challenge the participants. We discussed just how many rounds of play there would be time for – possibly five?



We decided that my judging the top score to be around 30 points would be unrealistic and dropped the high score to 20 or more. Well, we underestimated the creativity and athleticism of our members. We quickly zipped through about 11 rounds of questions, and my calculation for the average number of obtainable points soon proved to be widely off the mark. Admittedly, I had also encouraged players to be very generous with their self-scoring. As a result, the top score was 42 by author Syrie James, who surprised herself for “never being first in anything.” The bulk of successful “retrievers” managed to score in the mid-twenties, so easily qualifying for the “Colin Firth/Mr. Darcy Wet-shirt Award of Excellence:” and the rest

coming in just below to earn the “Captain Wentworth Captured Ship Award.”



Bonus points for this tea cozy submitted by JASNA Eastern Washington / Northern Idaho.

During the hunt I was surprised at the range of Austen-themed treasures people possess – Austen bobble-head dolls, Jane Austen “rubber-duckies,” salt and pepper sets, Jane Austen themed tea cozies, and quill pens. The most amazing (worth double bonus points) was a large and heavy fossil from Phyllis Bottomer for this clue: “In *Persuasion*, when Anne, Frederick, Charles and the others went for a November outing to Lyme they might have discovered one of these – find a fossil.” *See the Gallery on the last pages for pictures of some of the swag as well as some people’s lunch place settings.*

By the game’s end I was relieved that people seemed to have had a good time, and no bones had been broken. Everyone had been such good sports; here are a few of the comments posted in the Zoom Chat:

“That was my first Scavenger Hunt – great fun!”

“I got here late and not ready for the game, but I had so much fun just to hear you having fun and laughing ☺”

“Scavenger Hunt was amazing! And I learned something because I didn't know about JA's use of straight pins {for editing manuscripts}. Now we ‘paste’!”

– Joan Reynolds

Jane Austen Day finale

Jane Austen’s Late Works and Family Legacy



Dr. Lise Gaston (pictured) of UBC’s English department spoke about Austen’s “afterlife” in memoirs by her family and in her unpublished manuscripts: the *Juvenilia*, *Lady*

Susan and the unfinished works *The Watsons* and *Sanditon*, which she left *in media res* when she laid down her pen some four months before she died.

Zoom meeting May 8, 2021

Panel discussion on financially vulnerable women

Our panel discussion featured Joan Reynolds as Isabella Thorpe presented in the first person; Phyllis Ferguson on Miss Bates; Janice Mallison on Lucy Steele; Phyllis (again) on Charlotte Lucas Collins; Keiko Parker on Fanny Price; Barbara Phillips on Mrs. Clay and Mrs. Smith in *Persuasion*. Several of the presenters have provided their scripts to be featured in *Muse & Musings*, starting here with Joan and continuing through the next few issues, as we did with the Aunts.

Isabella Thorpe: Financially Vulnerable? Not if I can help it!

My name is Isabella Thorpe. Some of you will be familiar with my story. But let me say **that** story as written down by some inexperienced writer was a complete misrepresentation of the facts as far as they involved me. I will not scold the writer too harshly; she was merely repeating some very scurrilous gossip passed around about me and which she used in her first rather clumsy attempt at a popular novel of the horrid kind. But enough of that. It's just that the whole sorry business forced my mother, sisters and me to leave Bath in a hurry and return to Putney until matters quieted down.



Carey Mulligan as Isabella Thorpe, *Northanger Abbey*, 2007

Let me first tell you the true facts about myself. My home is in Putney with my widowed mother, and younger sisters, and we spend the season in Bath or Tunbridge Wells; my late father was a lawyer and although without any great fortune, he did instill in each of his children the ambition to better ourselves, seek good connections with a view to social advancement, whether in a profession or in marriage. My eldest brother John, a lively soul, is at Oxford, another brother Edward is at Merchant Taylor's school and a third brother, young William, is at sea. And I am well provided with two younger sisters, Anne and

Maria, who look to me to set an example, which I try to do. I am blessed with a happy and affectionate nature – I love to read novels, dance at balls and follow the latest fashions. When in London am sure to ascertain what is the latest style, and I know how to fashion a turban that is the envy of all the ladies in the Pump Room. I have heard it said by many a gentleman and lady that I have great personal beauty, am the prettiest girl in Bath, coupled with an unaffected and amiable disposition! I am sure I do not know myself, but I do seem to be able to attract friends easily wherever I go.

As to those other things you have heard about me. What can I say but that they originated with some scurrilous lies perpetrated by that vile Captain Tilney because I firmly rebuffed his unwanted attentions, but to my great sadness it caused a young man, dear James, of whom I was very fond, to break off his engagement to me; he was the brother of a supposed friend. I was desolate, it was so unfair – you see, I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is not in my nature, and my attachments are always excessively strong. But despite my many letters, he refused to engage with me again. It was all a silly misunderstanding, and why shouldn't a woman engaged or otherwise admit the admiration of other gentlemen? Looking back, it was probably for the best, he was to be a clergyman, and had no private fortune. However, the loss was even more punishing because I had offered the hand of friendship to his younger sister, brought her along into society. She cut me completely after her brother broke off the engagement – which was very hurtful, because you see, I carry my notions of friendship pretty high, there is nothing I would not do for *my* friends.

No matter. I can rise above my damaged reputation that was caused by a number of falsehoods written down about me for all to read by some untried writer. I certainly found out who my true friends were. Since then, I have made it a rule never to mind what people say. They are very often amazingly impertinent if you do not treat them with spirit, and make them keep their distance.

So, of course, what next. As had been said, “single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor,” so I have to have a husband, with sufficient fortune and property to match the kind of life I believe I am destined for. Now being of an affectionate nature I would never marry without love. A suitor that matched my temperament and warmth would be my dearest wish, of course. But I am used to a certain standard of comfort. The trouble is my reputation is somewhat sullied due to *that* book, but I am of an optimistic nature and will continue to find friendship in good society. I have a lot of opportunities ahead of me. Once my brother is qualified, I am sure he will be introducing me to a wide selection of potential suitors, respectable young men of fortune. And Bath is a

wonderfully social city and given time when the social circle has refreshed itself, I will be able to pursue new friendships to my advantage.

What you say, supposing I do not find someone suitable to marry? Lord, I cannot even contemplate that: What would be my options? A governess? – Heavens no, tasked with teaching the family brats, neither a family member nor a servant, that's almost like a trade in human flesh. A lady's paid companion? Having to tolerate the whims of some insipid individual with never a moment to oneself. And as much as I adore my brothers and they me, I do not see someone of my talents filling my days as my brother's housekeeper, closeted in a life of domestic drudgery, beholden to the whims of their generosity and never sure whether I will have a roof over my head should they marry or die.

I have seen others with beauty and social talents find occupation in the theatre and as much as that sounds like a lively pursuit, and one at which I think I would excel, I fear it comes with the taint of being an "actress" and we all know what that really means. I suppose I could follow the example of Maria Edgeworth, Ann Radcliff and Frances Burney and turn my hand to novel-writing – I know I could very easily turn out a horrid tale or two, but it sounds like a very solitary existence. And I really don't see me in a milliner's or draper's shop, do you? Well yes, trying on hats but not *selling* them, heavens no! I could see myself running a school for young ladies, I certainly have the right knowledge of elegant deportment to impart, and it would give me a certain standing in the local community – that might need some further thought, but it is really a last resort.

So, a good marriage it will have to be. And I am sure I will be successful – when I promise a thing, I am scrupulous in performing it! And I am just the kind of young woman that would make a fine attachment, with so much good sense and superior understanding, so presentable in society, always turned out in the very latest of fashion. And healthy! Indeed, I am very optimistic that I will be successful in re-establishing my place in society. Of course, I will not make the same mistake as last time. No army captains or red coats for me, or clergyman. Yes, I feel all kinds of new opportunities coming my way now that I am back in Bath. Why, not too long ago, I was introduced to a very elegant woman, spending her second season in Bath with her widowed father. She is just the sweetest creature, but without a close friend. Last season she had a female companion with her, a young widow, but she has left. (I'm not sure of the whole story, but I sense a betrayal there, some deep bitterness. Be sure I will winkle out the full story.) She also had a younger sister staying here, but she married a Navy Captain of some wealth and they moved away too. So, this new

acquaintance, a delightful creature (her name is Elizabeth Elliot, by the way) seems very eager to have a younger friend around her who shares her enjoyment of balls, fashion, music, society and good conversation. And I am happy to oblige.



Coren Redgrave as Sir Walter Elliot, *Persuasion*, 1995

I am immensely fond of her father, a baronet – he seems to have taken a particular liking to me – I have heard him say he finds me very elegant and pretty and a great asset to their little social circle. He is always very attentive to my appearance and dress – I would scold him when he is so extremely flattering, except that I enjoy his attentions! I know he is an older man, but he is so handsome and fastidious about his person and the sweetest soul, so I am happy to accompany them whenever the occasion arises. La, now **he** would be a good catch: rich, titled, a man of property who appreciates the finer things in life. And with all the right connections. Let me see ... Lady Elliot! That does have a certain distinction. Imagine me, the envy of every valued old friend in Putney, with a carriage at my command, a new name on my tickets, and a brilliant exhibition of hoop rings on my finger! Indeed, I see that as a definite avenue of opportunity for me to follow. Trust me, I won't let some obscure little book with its lies and distortions get in the way of my pursuit of being married to a man of consequence!

[Comments from an objective observer]

After returning to Bath, the scene of her prior embarrassment, Isabella is in damage control. She is aware that she has had a serious set-back and must be even more ruthless and committed to snaring a husband before she is much older and starts "to lose her bloom". Of course, she is far too silly and dazzled by Sir Walter's title to be aware of his true financial situation, and he, of course, is vain enough to be taken in by a skilled and pretty manipulator such as Isabella Thorpe: young, healthy, beautiful, and adept at flattery and flirtation. Potentially she could provide him with a healthy male heir which would secure Sir Walter's continued ownership of Kellynch Hall (unless like Mrs. Bennet, she produces a series of daughters instead).

However, although Isabella is older, wiser and more strategic this time around, I do not think she would be able to sustain her pursuit of Sir Walter; she will be tempted to stray when some apparently better prospect crosses her path, and she will ultimately lose everything. She will be discarded yet again, become a courtesan, and passed around from man to man to survive. She should have followed Mary Robinson's example, tried her hand at acting, writing novels and poetry; then she might have become one of the great celebrities of the period with friends in high places, including the Prince Regent, David Garrick and Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, but I am not sure she had either sufficient determination or talent to succeed in that either.



Mary Robinson as Perdita by John Hoppner, Chawton House Library, Hampshire, UK

Jane Austen's creation of Isabella Thorpe seems to be a further exploration of the coquette that was Lady Susan, and a prototype for Lucy Steele, Lydia Bennet, and Mary Crawford. There are also echoes of Eliza de Feuillide, Jane's "outlandish cousin." She too was adept at flirtation, and captivated both a clergyman and an army man, having been pursued by both James and Henry Austen, but settling on Henry ultimately. The main difference between Isabella and Eliza, is that Eliza had a great deal more experience of the world and significant financial means, thanks to Warren Hastings. (Henry Austen's marriage to Eliza immediately made him a very rich man, able to afford carriages and a fine home in London, until he ultimately lost everything in his bankruptcy.)

— Joan Reynolds

Austen sighting

The Women in Black by Madeleine St John

This lighthearted novel is set in David Jones department store in 1958 Sydney Australia. Madeleine St John worked there one summer as a student and the novel has a young naive student as its heroine. The women of the

cocktail dress department take her under their wing especially the buyer who is a sophisticated Hungarian refugee. She is invited to the Hungarian home for dinner and the following is the exchange with the equally sophisticated husband:

And what are you reading now? He asked.

*I've just finished **Anna Karenina**, said Lisa. I can't decide what to read next, there are so many to choose from.*

How true, said Stefan, and the number always grows, I assure you. But how did you like Anna?

Oh, I loved it. It's wonderful, said Lisa.

*I agree it is hard to think of what should follow it, said Stefan. Perhaps it should be something quite different. Read about another woman, perhaps **Emma**. Have you read that yet?*

No, I haven't.

Oh well that is settled then, said Stefan. Jane Austen I assure you is as great a genius as Tolstoy, whatever they say. Let me have your opinion in due course.

[Donna Orenstein has noted that an adaptation of this novel is currently playing on Netflix and retains the Austen reference. — Editor]

— contributed by Aileen Hollifield



Books & Berries

Zoom meeting, June 12, 2021

This is just the **booklist** from the B&B meeting. There will be more coverage of the meeting in the next issue.

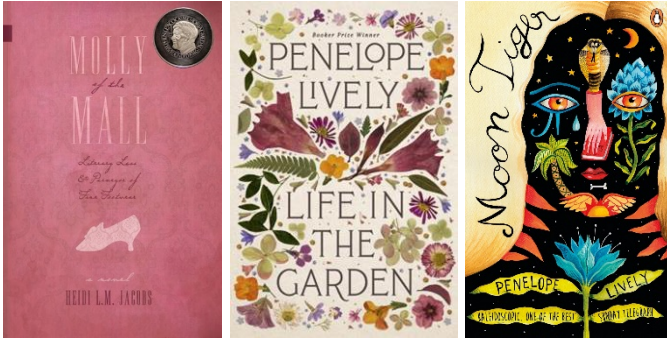
Keiko Parker described her time-travel experience reading stories of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table from these books:

1. *The Arthurian Legends, an Illustrated Anthology*, selected by Richard Barber, Dorset Press, 1979.
2. *Idylls of the King*, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Signet Classics, 1961.
3. *Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur*, Keith Baines rendition, Mentor Classic, 1962.
4. *The Boy's King Arthur*, edited by Sidney Lanier, with illustrations by N. C. Wyeth, Scribners, 1952.

Keiko's **full review** as she presented it will appear in a future issue of *M&M*.

Marjorie Johnson reviewed *The Four Winds* by Kristin Hannah about survival in the famous 1930s dust bowl, which she deems worthwhile reading.

Phyllis Ferguson reviewed *Molly of the Mall* by Heidi L.M. Jacobs, which is Canadian, very funny (won the 2020 Stephen Leacock medal for humour) and has multiple references to Jane Austen's novels. She also reviewed *Life in the Garden* and mentioned other titles by Penelope Lively, such as *How it all Began*, *Family Album*, *Passing On* and *Moon Tiger*.

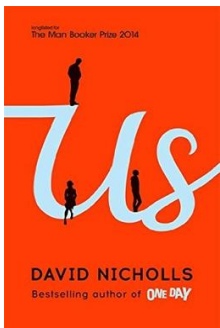


Janice Mallison reviewed *The Gate of Angels* by Penelope Fitzgerald, who has been described as “the mistress of the hint of the sublime.” In this story set in England just before WWI, she deftly constructs a love story between two improbable characters, a physics lecturer at St Angelicus College and a young woman from London who is not from the “marriageable classes.”

Julia Van Delft reviewed *Heartstone* by Elle Katharine White, a fantasy retelling of *Pride and Prejudice* that includes dragons.

Marion Davies, who has been joining our Zoom meetings from her home in Wales, reviewed *The Other Knight Boys*, *Jane Austen's Dispossessed Nephews* by Hazel Jones, a very well researched account of the younger nephews who didn't inherit Godmersham. Not Jane Austen related, Marion also reviewed *Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro, a fictional look into how society might be in the future. – *Compiled by Donna Ornstein*

Austen Sighting Us by David Nicholls



Where the narrator, now in Venice, engages in conversation with a fellow guest over the hotel breakfast buffet:

“I’m Douglas. As in the fir.” A weak joke, I know, but one that might have special resonance for a Scandinavian.

“My name is Freja, but I can’t think of a pun to go with that.”

.....

“Where are you from, Freja?”

“Copenhagen.”

“You speak wonderful English.”

“Do I?” she said, smiling.

“You speak better English than my son!” I said, the kind of pointless jibe that had brought me here in the first place.

“Thank you. I wish I could pretend it was because I read a lot of Jane Austen, but mainly it comes from bad television. Cop shows, detectives. By the age of nine, every schoolchild in Denmark knows the English for ‘we’ve found another body, superintendent.’ And pop songs, too – you’re bombarded from an early age, the same all over Scandinavia.” She shrugged. “Absurd, really, that I speak better English than Swedish. But knowing me, knowing you, there is nothing we can do!”

– *Submitted by Joan Reynolds*

RC’s Corner Michelle Siu

Thank you to our programming committee who put much effort and time into another successful year! And to our volunteers who help put our meetings together, from Austen Extract to *Muse & Musings*, Facebook and our website – it takes many hands to make things work, and many volunteers have their part. It truly makes our gatherings into something to return to time and time again. Thank you!

As organizations across B.C. look to reopen as restrictions are lifted, we too are planning how we will return to in-person meetings. Things will not likely be the same as they were in 2019. So we will take our time to thoughtfully and safely plan to meet again in-person.

We need your input. What is your opinion about in-person meetings? How soon? Would you still be interested in a virtual/online component? We want to know what you are thinking so that our Programming Committee can plan this upcoming year. Please take five minutes to fill out our two-page survey, covering future meetings and in-person gatherings as well as some in-person activities at this link: [Survey](https://forms.gle/vHGdZe6PyZdZzgVW7). We have some early replies but it’s only 15% of our membership. To allow you time to reply, the survey is open for the month of July. If you can’t use the link cut-and-paste: <https://forms.gle/vHGdZe6PyZdZzgVW7>

– *Michelle Siu*

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To contact any of these volunteers, email our Regional Co-ordinator at jasnavancouverrc@gmail.com.

Gallery



Captain Gordon Laco aboard HMS Bee, a replica 1812 warship. A midshipman, such as William Price. Scavenger Hunt: Very Impressive Fossil.



Carol Sutherland's and Joan Reynolds's JA Day place settings; Joan's plate of comestibles.



Jane Austen Day: Placemat beautifully designed and created by Joan Reynolds; Syrie James's bragging-rights-winning haul in the Scavenger Hunt.



Jane Austen Day place settings from out-of-towners: Marion Davies, who joins us all the way from Wales, UK, shares her place setting (for dinner UK time) and her Scavenger Hunt swag. Catherine Davies from Victoria shows another lovely place setting.

This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, is distributed to members by email and posted on our website. Members who so request may receive a hard copy either at a meeting or in the mail. All submissions and book reviews on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome.

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