

# The Jane Austen Society of North America

VANCOUVER REGION - NEWSLETTER NO. SIX - MAY, 1984

## JANE AUSTEN'S NAVY - B.R.Cook

(Our special thanks to Barrie Cook for this background information which helps us put Lieutenant William Price, Captain Wentworth, Admiral Croft, et al, in perspective. Mr. Cook is a copy editor with "The Province" newspaper, and has been a "shot 'n' sail" fan since reading the Hornblower stories of C.S. Forester in the old "Saturday Evening Post" in the 1940's and '50's.)

For 30 of Jane Austen's 42 years, England was at war, and usually with France. When Napoleon Bonaparte was at the height of his power, and casting covetous eyes at England, the only thing standing in the way of an invasion was the Royal Navy. And when the time came to carry the fight to Bonaparte's front door - for although wars can be lost at sea, they cannot be won there - the troops to win the war were carried in British bottoms, escorted by British warships.

Life aboard ship varied tremendously. For many, aboard the weather-beaten line-of-battle ships that blockaded the harbours of the French fleet, it was boring. There was the constant effort of making or taking in sail, to keep perfect station without running afoul of other vessels in line, and that was almost all there was to do.

The captain of such a vessel had a great deal of free time. If he had done his job properly, his officers were taking care of the routine handling of the ship, and his admiral was making whatever decisions needed to be made for the fleet as a whole. Those who did not have someone to share their isolation took up solitary pursuits: gardening, for some, in tubs and boxes; scientific study, for others. Some thought of ways to improve the lot of the common sailor, others thought of ways to make his life more miserable.

The other officers had more to do in the actual operation of the ship, but they still had enough time to take part in theatrical productions or poetry competitions. Where the captain lived in splendid isolation, the lieutenants and other officers shared much smaller quarters and lived, in effect, in each other's pockets. Small things became another's anathema. They needed the dinners to which they invited the captain, or to which he invited them, to break the monotony.

(Incidentally, lieutenants could be much older than the captain. Promotion for lieutenants was not automatic; the jump to commander or captain was by selection, not seniority.)



Forward, the ordinary seamen might play musical instruments or sing and dance on the forecandle in their free time. Or carve bone or ivory. Many fine whale-bone carvings - called "scrimshaw" - have come out of the forecandle. Some of the men might have wives or other women aboard. It was frowned on, but naval officers usually turned a blind eye to it, as long as the practice didn't upset discipline. They knew the men were virtually condemned to the ship for the duration of the war, and if having a woman aboard kept them happy, well...

That, by the way, is where the expression "show a leg" comes from. The sailors weren't permitted to sleep in, so when the boatswain's mates came through the men's quarters and saw a hammock still occupied, they'd yell: "Show a leg there". If the leg was hairy, it was probably male; if hairless, probably female.

It was not unknown for a captain to take along a woman, sometimes his wife but more often a mistress. And before the practice of permitting women aboard Royal Navy vessels was abolished in the 1840's, it was a common courtesy for the wife of some officer to be offered passage - for example, if she was going to a foreign station to meet her husband. Her presence made a decided and usually pleasant change to the routine of shipboard life. Patrick O'Brien, in "Treasure's Harbour", observes: "the quarterdeck as a whole became a model of correct uniform - loose duck trousers, round jackets and the common broad-brimmed low-crowned straw hats against the sun called "benjies" gave way either to breeches or at least to blue pantaloons and boots and to good blue coats and regulation scraper, while the foremast hands often sported the red waistcoats reserved for Sunday and splendid Levantine neckerchiefs."

While the men in the blockading line-of-battle ships were condemned to a life of boredom, those aboard frigates and smaller vessels had a chance for more freedom and prize money. The captain of a frigate, although by far the best-paid person aboard, still made no more than eight shillings a day (the pay increased with the "rate" of the ship, and the captain of a "first rate" of 100 guns or more would be paid 21 a day, while the captain of a "third rate" or 64 to 80 guns would be paid 13 shillings a day.) On half pay - ashore and without a ship - a captain would get much less; one at the top of the seniority list might get 10 shillings a day, but most would get six. Still, that was more than the pay for lieutenant by far. On active duty, most lieutenants would get about five shillings a day; on half pay, they would get three. There was no half pay for midshipmen.

Dudley Pope points out in his "Life in Nelson's Navy" that the romantic picture of the boy midshipman is in error. "The midshipman's berth in most ships of war, whether a frigate or a flagship, usually had a scattering of boys under fourteen years old, but the majority of them were between twenty and thirty, with some forty years old or more." These were men without the influence to get a position as a lieutenant.



In the days of Jane Austen, a prospective naval officer had to rely heavily on family influence to get anywhere. He would prevail upon some captain to take him to sea as a "captain's servant". After three years' service,

he would automatically be rated a midshipman. After six years' service, he would have to sit an examination for the rank of lieutenant. Pope describes the situation: "The !captain's servants' were in effect the captain's apprentices. From 1794 they were allowed £6 a year; before that they received nothing. These boys could be anyone ranging from the captain's son or nephew to the eager offspring of a friend. Some captains were not above taking along a tradesman's son in return for not being pressed over a large bill."

The lure of the sea was the prize money the sailors might make from captured French or Spanish vessels. In a brisk action with a French frigate, a sailor might make £4 or £5 (his monthly pay was £1 4s), if the frigate was bought into the service by the Admiralty. The captain would make quite a bit - two-eighths of the value of the captured ship - but the admiral under whose orders the captain was sailing would get one-eighth. It was to an admiral's advantage to give cruises to good or lucky captains, or lucky captains, or just to his favourites - and on some stations an admiral could get rich very quickly. Jamaica was one. Admirals on the West Indies station usually had two or three years to make their money - and they usually did. But no one wanted to stay in the West Indies too long - it was a sickly place and could be deadly.

Life wasn't all pride and prizes. During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, according to Pope, the Royal Navy lost 1,874 killed in battle. But 72,000 died from disease or accident on board ship and another 13,600 died in ships lost by accident or weather.

It's difficult to say what there was about the period to maintain so much interest for so long, but interest there is. From Frederick Marryat, who sailed with the dashing Lord Cochrane in 1806-09, through the acknowledged master, C.S.Forester, to current practitioners such as Dudley Pope and Patrick O'Brien, writers have found the Navy of that time fascinating. Why? Perhaps the ship-to-ship battles were seen as the logical extension of knightly jousts, something more stately and soul-satisfying than the showdown at the O.K.Corral of American westerns.

Whatever the reason, the fascination persists, and the legends last: Nelson, Cochrane, Rowley, Broke - all contemporaries of Jane Austen - will be remembered as long as ships swim.

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## UMBRELLAS IN "PERSUASION"

Margaret Parker phoned to tell me she had been reading the article on umbrellas in the February Newsletter, where I said I didn't think that Admiral Croft would use an umbrella. Margaret was re-reading "Persuasion" shortly afterwards and came to the passage where Anne and Lady Russell were visiting Kellynch for the first time since the Crofts had settled there. Admiral Croft suggested that Anne might like to go over the house. "You can slip in from the shrubbery at any time, and there you will find we keep our umbrellas hanging up by that door." So I was wrong - obviously naval officers as well as army officers made good use of umbrellas. Thank you, Margaret, for setting us all straight.



## A VISIT TO "JANE AUSTEN COUNTRY"

(Mary Coleman has recently returned from a delightful visit to England. Here is her account of her trip).

On a pleasant Sunday in April my brother and I left Portsmouth and drove north in search of Steventon and St. Nicholas' Church. We drove through Winchester but did not stop. I had been there before and would have liked to visit the Cathedral again. However, my brother found driving conditions in cities horrendous and wanted to get out fast, and I understood his feelings.

(We had visited Bath briefly in March on a cold windy day. That was a return visit for us both. We did visit the lovely Abbey, but that was about all.)

We had a hard time to find Steventon, but the country roads wound through beautiful rolling green hills. Steventon is not the least bit "touristy" - no mention of Jane Austen anywhere. I don't think the inhabitants mind if no one ever finds them.

When we got there we saw a sign TO THE CHURCH, so followed a long narrow uphill road which leads only to the church. And there was this dear old church, nestled (it really is the only word) in the trees. We got there at 11:45 a.m. and a service was in progress, so we did not go in. There were five cars outside. When I listened at the keyhole I heard one voice speaking quietly, so I think it was a communion service. There is a graveyard surrounding the church, and stretching away from that, fields of daffodils were in bloom.

We then had lunch at the Crown Inn in Alton, where pictures of the poet Edmund Spenser and of Jane Austen adorn the walls. Spenser lived in Alton, and of course, Jane Austen was a Hampshire native, so they claim her too.

Next we drove to Chawton and visited Jane Austen's cottage, which is a museum. Donna Short gave us a good account of this last May.

It was a treat to me to visit Chawton Cottage. It is not "pretty" or "quaint", nor is it at all grand. It is a square pleasant comfortable cottage, right on the village street. A house across from it was having its roof re-thatched. Although Jane Austen's cottage is a museum and in some ways a "tourist trap", selling postcards, bookmarks, etc., it is beautifully kept, and I felt an atmosphere of peace and serenity and sensibleness which surely must emanate from Jane Austen herself. There were examples in her bedroom of her skilful embroidery, and a wonderful quilt, made by Jane and her mother and sister. It is hanging, with a cover of sheer material, and of course one is requested not to touch.

Two days later we visited Lyme Regis, and walked on the Cobb, where poor silly Louisa had her accident (in "Persuasion"). There are a number of old flights of stone steps there, but one flight in particular I felt sure was Louisa's. The part of the Cobb nearest to the shore was rebuilt in 1827, so that narrowed the field of my search. We had lunch at the Cobb Arms, and I bought postcards of the Cobb, which mentioned Jane Austen's "Persuasion".

## OTHER REGIONS

Members of JASNA will already have received their copies of "Quips and Quotes", with information on what other Canadian regional groups are doing. Here is a little more news.

Toronto: On April 5, the Toronto group offered "coffee and congenial conversation", suggesting members bring their favourite passage from the writings of Jane Austen to share. Toronto celebrates its 150th birthday this year, and the local group is making plans for their own celebration on June 16 and 17. On Sunday the 17th, there will be a concert by two pianists, "An Afternoon with Jane Austen", part of the ROM's exhibition, "Georgian Elegance and a New Land, 1745-1820".

New York: Plans have been completed for their May afternoon musical programme, "presented by Dr. Wallace and two associates, about Jane Austen and Emily Bronte, paralleling their musical preferences and literary styles". Following dinner, Professor Wallace will give a talk on "Jane Austen and Mozart".

Chicago: An interesting Newsletter from the Chicago area describes their Gala Day at the end of March. The morning speaker was Dr. Raymond Headlee, "Jane Austen Confounds a Psychoanalyst". In the afternoon, they enjoyed a staged reading of "Persuasion", and then Professor Wiesenfarth spoke about "The Case of Pride and Prejudice". Their next meeting will feature an interior decorator speaking about what the rooms in the novels would have looked like.

Philadelphia: On May 30th, this group will hear a lecture by the writer Selma James, an expansion of parts of her latest book, followed by tea and coffee during the question period.

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A "NUNCHEON" on JUNE 24. at BROCK HOUSE.

"Nuncheon" - a light repast taken between meals, a lunch. (OED)

Jane Austen used the word in her letters, spelling it "noonshine". I don't know whether this was a local pronunciation, or a family joke. In any case, I have reserved a private room at Brock House, on June 24, at 12:30, so we can get together and enjoy "the pleasures of friendship, of unreserved conversation, of similarity of taste and opinions". We will each select our own choice from the a la carte menu, and the price should be approximately \$10.00 to \$11.00 each, which includes an entree, a plate of fresh fruit, sweet rolls, and coffee or tea.

The entertainment will be selected readings - please bring your favourite passage from the novels, or a choice bit of biography. You will not be "obliged to read the whole of it aloud...with a smile, a look, a shake of the head, a word or two of assent or disapprobation" - if you prefer, you may be like Elizabeth Bennet, who "listened, wondered, doubted, and was impatient for more", or merely look forward, like Fanny Price, to "the fairest prospect of having only to listen in quiet, and of passing a very agreeable day".

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## READING AND LISTENING ???

Which character in the novels did the following reading:

- 1) "...before he had, with very monotonous solemnity, read three pages, she interrupted him."
- 2) "there...he could read his own history with an interest which never failed".
- 3) "It will be natural for me...to speak my opinion aloud as I read."
- 4) "...reading aloud the most material passages...with strong indignation."

..... and listening:

- 5) "...he was listening with an air which proved him wholly unmoved by any feeling of remorse."
- 6) "She caught every syllable with panting eagerness."
- 7) "...was not only listening also, but even encouraging him by significant glances."
- 8) "...he listened to his clear, simple, spirited details with full satisfaction."

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## MEDICINE IN JANE AUSTEN'S TIME

On ~~March~~ 23, Dr. John Norris discussed Jane Austen's patients (fictional), her doctors (real), and her last illness. Most of the patients in the novels are treated with mockery - they are valetudinarians like Mr. Woodhouse and his daughter Isabella, who compare illnesses and doctors with anyone who will listen, hypochondriacs like Mary Musgrove in "Persuasion", and faddists preoccupied with cures, spas and fashions in health care, in "Sanditon".

There were three gradations of medical men in Jane Austen's time. The apothecary manufactured and dispensed drugs and administered to patients. Mr. Perry, in "Emma", was "an intelligent, gentleman-like man", but this was a concession on Jane Austen's part, something not expected in the usual apothecary, who was considered socially inferior, of lower status than a curate, schoolmaster or solicitor. An apothecary had little formal education; he was apprenticed to another apothecary, and qualified when he had written an examination. He could do simple medical and surgical procedures, massage and set fractures, but knew little in the way of diagnosis: Mr. Robinson, in "Persuasion", "felt and felt, and rubbed and looked grave". Jane Austen's own treatment was largely from the apothecary, Mr. Curtis, of Alton, on whom she modelled Mr. Perry.

Surgeons were fewer in number, were also apprenticed, but were often men of some education, and with other qualifications, such as apothecaries. They treated skin diseases and performed all surgical procedures. Without anaesthetics, they were trained to operate with great rapidity, and some were men of high skill. Jane Austen was moved to Winchester a few months before she died, to be under the care of a surgeon-apothecary there.

Physicians, socially and professionally the highest of the medical men, had university training, an MD degree, and other qualifications. There are no physicians in the novels. Although Jane Austen's paternal grandfather was a physician, they were not in the regular sphere of life around her.

Medical men of Jane Austen's day did not understand the cause of disease or the location of internal diseases. The origin of disease was considered environmental - swamps caused fever; contagious - spread from person to person; or from a person's predisposition to disease. Treatment was usually by trial and error. Disease was thought to be an imbalance of the four humours: fever was warm and wet, and therefore the treatment was to draw off the warm wet blood. Or drugs were used to re-direct the balance.

Jane Austen's last illness began in the Spring of 1816. She suffered languor, palpitations and faintness, gastro-intestinal upsets and skin discolouration, gradually weakening, with periods of remission, until her death in 1817. It is now believed that she had Addison's disease, an infection of the adrenal glands on the kidneys. This disease was identified in 1855 by Addison, associated with Grey's Hospital in London and the leading pathologist of his day. It is a hormonal disease, and self-accelerating. Jane Austen nursed her brother Henry in late 1815. He may have had a mild attack of typhoid, and this infection may have been the initial cause of her disease. Today drugs can allow a patient with Addison's disease to lead a normal life: JFK had Addison's disease.

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### PROPERTY IN THE NOVELS

Sitting around a table firing questions at Dr. James Winter on April 27, we learned about the laws governing property, inheritance, entails and responsibilities of landlords, relevant to the four estates in "Pride and Prejudice". The smallest, Longbourn, had probably been in the family for generations. The estate, with an income of £2,000, was about 2,000 acres, with perhaps ten to twenty leased out farms. (Dr. Winter gave us a useful formula: 1 acre results in an income of approximately £1). It was too small to have a bailiff, Mr. Bennet would deal directly with the leasehold farmers, and was probably a better landlord than he was a husband or father. The Bennets had no London house, but as land-owning gentry, would expect to be present at any county function.

Netherfield was a larger, more important local estate, probably about 5,000 acres, but sold or mortgaged, and leased to Bingley. The Bingley fortune of £100,000 was made in trade, and the possession of an estate would enable the family to move upwards socially. The master of such a big house, with a corresponding large ballroom, would be expected to hold balls there, and be a social centre of the community. The Bingleys, however, would have no long family tradition of responsibility to the people on the estate and in their community.

Rosings represents another step up. It is a large new house, built by Sir Lewis de Bourgh ("from the city") to attract attention and display his wealth. The daughter owns the land, but until she marries, the widowed Lady Catherine has control. Once again there is no long tradition of responsibility, but Lady Catherine is behaving properly - much as we dislike her - in looking after the people on her estate.

Pemberley is a large estate of about 10,000 acres, including people and villages dependent on the Darcy family. But the family feels deeply that with privilege go social duties and responsibilities. Darcy is shocked that Bingley would think of leaving his estate "in five minutes" - this is not the action of a responsible proprietor.

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## QUIZ ANSWERS

- (1) Mr. Collins reading a sermon to the Bennets. (P&P)
- (2) Sir Walter Elliot reading the Baronetage. (Pers.)
- (3) Mr. Knightley reading Frank Churchill's letter. (Emma)
- (4) Catherine Morland reading a letter from Isabella Thorpe. (NA)
- (5) Darcy listening to Elizabeth after his first proposal. (P&P)
- (6) Marianne Dashwood listening to Elinor speaking about Willoughby. (S&S)
- (7) Mr. and Mrs. Elton at the ball. (Emma)
- (8) Sir Thomas Bertram listening to William Price tell of his adventures.  
(MP)

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## MORE "WATSONS"

Jack Grey, in New York, sends information on two additional completions of "The Watsons":

In 1850, a niece, Catherine Hubback, wrote one called "The Younger Sister".

And another collateral descendant fairly recently completed the novel again: "The Watsons: A Novel by Jane Austen and Another" (London, Peter Davies, 1977). This is in the Vancouver Public Library.

Joan Austen-Leigh sent along bibliographical information about the completions, including the mention that "Another" is David Hopkinson, a descendant of Catherine Hubback.

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## LOST AND FOUND

A "lost" manuscript of the composer Joseph Haydn, written in Jane Austen's lifetime, has recently been found in a farmhouse in Ireland. It contains two movements from a mass of 1786 that was probably never performed and is "of great significance to Haydn scholarship" said Professor H.C. Robbins Landon, of the music department at University College, Cardiff.  
"Vancouver SUN", 20 Feb. 1984.

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## JANE

Browsing in the local library, I came across a book about names, and looked up "Jane" - first used in Tudor times (before that it was "Joan"), and most popular from 1700 to 1850. Famous owners of the name include Henry VIII's queen Jane Seymour, Lady Jane Grey, "Jane Eyre", and then - "Jane Austen, the most famous woman novelist. She wrote 'Pride and Prejudice' when she was 21."

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## And Last, but by no means Least:

Thank you to Joan Austen-Leigh and Mary Millard, of Toronto, for their very generous donations.

Eileen Sutherland.