

# The Jane Austen Society of North America

VANCOUVER REGION - NEWSLETTER NO. EIGHT - NOVEMBER, 1984

(1) "Unless they are so stout as to injure their beauty, they are not fit for country walking".

We spent several delightful days of our holiday this year in Kent, "in the steps of Jane Austen". Although Jane Austen and her immediate family considered themselves "Hampshire Austens", they had relatives and friends in Kent, and spent many enjoyable visits there. Modern development has transformed the towns and cities, but many of the small villages and the countryside remain much as they were in Jane Austen's time.

We spent our first night at Sevenoaks, where Francis Austen, the uncle of Jane Austen's father, lived in the "Red House". It is now a modern and progressive small town, but parts of the main street and some of the old buildings would have been familiar to the young Jane Austen who visited there -- the old church, the imposing brick Red House itself, and the three-storey almshouses, built in the mid 18th c., and so no doubt considered modern and a source of pride to the citizens then.

For the next few days we were based in Canterbury, and explored that city much as Jane Austen must have done. Canterbury Cathedral, its surrounding Close, the old gates, walls and buildings would have been very familiar to her. Her brother Edward's adoptive mother Mrs. Knight became a good friend, and Jane and Cassandra always enjoyed a visit to her home at "White Friars" in the Close, often staying overnight and no doubt taking pleasant walks through the streets of the old city.

Edward Austen was adopted and brought up by the wealthy and childless Knights, and lived in the nearby village of Godmersham. He married Elizabeth, the daughter of Sir Brook Bridges of Goodnestone House, and the young couple and their family lived first at the farmhouse of Rowling, about a mile from Goodnestone.



Anne-Marie Edwards, in a little book called "In the Steps of Jane Austen", describes these places and gives maps and plans of short walks through country lanes and footpaths. We took one of the walks, starting at Goodnestone Church. The little village of gabled brick cottages still has the peaceful charm that Jane Austen must have known; the little shop dates from the mid 18th c. She would not recognize the church, however, except for the tower, as it was rebuilt in the 19th c.

We started our walk down a pretty lane, edged with elms, chestnuts, brambles and elderberries. The high wall and trees on one side hid most of Goodnestone House, except for a dignified classical porch and pediment

with an impressive coat of arms above it. Past the Lodge gates, and then past a charming thatched Tudor farmhouse, the lane twisted and turned, giving us beautiful views of woods or farmland, an old white painted post mill, and finally the copse that nearly hid Rowling House. What little we could see showed the driveway sweeping up the hill to a charming rambling house, which must have had lovely views over the fields to the hills beyond. In her letters, Jane Austen describes happy visits to both Goodnestone House and Rowling House, where she and her sister dined, danced, walked and relaxed with Edward and Elizabeth, their family and friends.

Back again through the village to the church, we were taken up the old tower by "old Jack", as the custodian was called by his friends at the Fitzwalter Arms -- a rather unnerving experience, the narrow winding stairs providing very uncertain footing, and the flickering flashlight lighting the way for old Jack himself but not giving us much help as we climbed behind him. The view from the top was well worth it, however, as we could look over the roofs of the village cottages, across the lush Kent farmland almost to the sea, only seven miles away, and below us the walled gardens of Goodnestone House with its "Holly walk" being replanted as it was when Jane Austen walked there.

Another day we drove to Godmersham, the home of the Knights, where Edward was brought up, and where he and Elizabeth moved with their young family when his father Thomas Knight died. The house is in private hands, and not too friendly ones, judging by the notices on the gates that unleashed dogs were liable to be shot. (My family started making jokes about Jane Austen visiting her brother for the annual dog-shoot, but I ignored them). We visited the charming little church, with its semi-circular Norman apse, probably very much the same as when Jane Austen worshipped here. It has memorials to Thomas and Catherine Knight, and to Edward and Elizabeth, and on one of the buttresses outside is a memorial plaque to their children's nurse Sackree, who was mentioned with affection by Jane Austen in her letters.

From the church we walked down a lane beside the Park wall, through the Lodge gates and across a field to the beginning of a footpath which gradually led uphill to the North Downs Way. As we climbed we got a good view of Godmersham House across the fields, and in the other direction the Stour River, winding through meadows and copses. The house was built in the early 16th c., with long low classical lines, and may have been the inspiration for Darcy's house, Pemberley.

In "Companion Into Kent", Dorothy Gardiner writes of one of Edward's plantations, "Bentigh had the charm of being Edward Knight's creation... he had made it from a ploughed field, planted the avenues, plotted the gravel walks...his guests sauntered there in leisurely fashion and took a short way through it to church. The high road at this time closely skirted the adjoining estates of Godmersham and Chilham; going towards Canterbury a traveller had the Stour on his right hand instead of on his left as now. The enterprising Mr. Knight crossed the Stour and planted round about "the Temple", a summer house one may still see from the highway."

Our next stop was the little village of Chilham, which would have still looked familiar to Jane Austen, with its old Norman church and tall tower, and the village square, now a parking lot, surrounded by rows of brick cottages and the old coaching inn, now housing boutiques, cafes,

and antique shops. Chilham Castle, where Jane Austen visited and attended balls, was closed, but we walked down pretty lanes and found a bookshop full of tempting books old and new, including a tiny copy of Jane Austen's "History of England, by a partial, prejudiced and ignorant Historian".

The Kent countryside is prosperous-looking, and the charming little villages are neat and well cared for. It made a delightful few days of relaxing peaceful holiday, driving down the twisting lanes, and exploring a part of the country that Jane Austen would have known well and enjoyed through many visits.

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(2) "He beheld a circle of smart people whom he could not immediately recognize".

"Meet me in St. Louis" was the theme song for almost 200 members who attended the 1984 JASNA Conference there, and it was a "complete party of pleasure". Arriving with our raincoats and umbrellas, we were met with balmy temperatures that reminded us of summer. The hotel was situated in an old gracious residential section of the city, and we walked around admiring the elegant Georgian brick mansions and wide boulevards lined with enormous trees.

Not that there was much time for walking around. Lectures, discussion groups and activities filled most of our time, and the rest we spent catching up with old friends and making new ones. Keiko Parker was there for her first Conference, and has written about it in detail in this year's "Persuasions". Formal lectures were kept to a minimum, and most of the sessions took the form of seminars or discussion groups, on such topics as "The Puzzle of Mrs. Smith", "A Lawyer's Viewpoint of Techniques of Persuasion", "In Defense of Louisa Musgrove", "Family Patterns in the Novel 'Persuasion' ", "Bath as the Background", and many others. The only drawback was the necessity of choosing which ones to attend. **At the wine and cheese reception, a local group demonstrated country dances, more with the wild abandon of Lydia Bennet than the elegant decorum we expect of most of the heroines, and after the dinner we were treated to an excellent dramatic presentation of "Persuasion".**

It was a busy, informative and enjoyable weekend.

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(3) "Your account...gives me very little inclination for his acquaintance".

Many readers have had trouble with the episodes in "Persuasion" concerning Mrs. Smith. What sort of person is she -- a sincere friend, or a self-seeking schemer? What purpose to the plot is served by her "exposure" of Mr. Elliot's true character, since Anne has already decided to marry Captain Wentworth or nobody?

K.K.Collins, in "The Puzzle of Mrs. Smith" at the Conference, looked at the Smith episodes divorced from a question of the plot structure. He considered "Persuasion" to be about knowledge and understanding - of others and of ourselves. Reason cannot be entirely free from prejudices - pre-judgements. Some prejudices block out knowledge, but others give us new insights, shaping and forming our understanding. And here lies the usefulness of Mrs. Smith. Anne must interpret Mrs. Smith's story in her

own way, according to her preconceptions and earlier experiences. Anne admires an "open" character and deplors Mr. Elliot's complete self-control and reserve. Yet through the openness and sincerity of his letter to Mrs. Smith, Anne is enabled to see the insincerity of his present character. Anne's prejudice towards gossip and hearsay must be overcome by the factual details of Mrs. Smith's story. Her "lack of knowledge about him has been, in some sense, a lack of knowledge about herself". Anne's understanding of Mr. Elliot or of herself is not absolute or final, but it has come closer to being complete through her interaction with Mrs. Smith. Professor Collins gave us an interesting new way of looking at this enigmatic character.

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(4) "...the Orchestra's striking up a favourite air".

Something different was the Conference talk given by Robert Wallace on "Jane Austen and Mozart's Last Piano Concerto", illustrated with taped musical excerpts. Both Jane Austen's last novel, and Mozart's last concerto are poignant, restrained, emotional, with little to do with the turbulent aspects of the Romantic movement. Anne Elliot is compared to the solo voice of the concerto, full of poise, receptivity, passionate tranquility, in relation to the larger group, the restrictive conventions of society, and the orchestra.

At the beginning, Professor Wallace showed us, the solo voice displays qualities similar to Anne's in the first volume of the novel -- submissive, restrained, self-contained, an "exquisite tension which does not lead to any resolution". In the second movement, the solo expresses inner pain, yet transcends it at the same time. The orchestra follows the melody with an exact repetition. Again the solo extends its melody and the orchestra repeats it. After painful harmonies, the solo leads out again. The final bars of unison anticipate the buoyancy to come. Anne's emotions oscillate between half-agony, half-hope. She can imagine a second Spring of youth, beauty and happiness. Feelings of buoyancy finally carry Anne and Wentworth to the end of the book.

The concluding radiant melody of the solo voice, repeated by the orchestra, reaches a happy ending only after severe stress and tension. Anne, with a latent strength like the solo voice of the concerto, is able to dominate the world in which she has formerly been submissive.

You may want to re-read "Persuasion" with Professor Wallace's thoughts in mind: "Each work is autumnal but embodies a strong sense of eternal beauty. The attitude towards life itself is the same in Mozart and Jane Austen".

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(5) "You are quite safe, the danger is only mine".

Dr. Gene Ruoff drew an interesting parallel between the story of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth, and that of Desdemona and Othello. (Jane Austen knew her Shakespeare -- one wonders if she had this in mind when she planned "Persuasion".) Shakespeare's story is an adult romance between equals, unflawed at the beginning. The characters are presented in terms of contrast, black and white, masculine and feminine. Othello speaks, acts, has an important vital past. Desdemona feels, listens, lives only in the present. Each complements and completes the other.

In Jane Austen's story, it is the macho Wentworth who tells war stories, and Louisa and Henrietta who have the "greedy ears". The hair-

breadth escapes and exclamations of pity and horror echo Othello and Desdemona. Like "Othello", "Persuasion" turns on misunderstanding and jealousy, Wentworth's doubts and Anne's feelings, Anne's "hints" which encourage Wentworth to declare his love. Dr. Ruoff has an interesting point. Do any other of the novels have Shakespearean analogies?

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(6) "I'll be introduced and dance with her directly".

I especially enjoyed the seminar on "English Country Dancing" at St. Louis, since the ball scene forms such a major episode in "The Watsons". Most of the discussion involved the conventions and manners pertaining to dancing and balls. A Master of Ceremonies at a public ball was a most necessary figure. He was involved with introductions -- a lady did not dance with anyone she did not know -- helping ladies get partners, directing the formation of sets, all the responsibilities of the host at a private ball. It was the duty of a gentleman to dance, not to stand by, and the duty of a lady to accept an offer to dance, unless she was already engaged. The first dance cards listed the programme of dances for the evening; later space was added to put in the names of partners. Private balls were similar to public ones, except that they were of smaller groups of people who knew each other. The decorum was not quite so strict, but men should not show a marked preference for a certain lady, nor dance exclusively with her. Dancing together at a public ball did not involve a close acquaintance -- a nod on the street the following day was sufficient, it was not obligatory to stop and talk.

At public balls or large private parties, a hired orchestra played the music -- stringed instruments, continuo, harpsichord or pianoforte. At a house party, anyone who could play was pressed into service. Dances were in sets, often sets of two, with the same partner. Some were for 6 or 8 dancers, but most dances were formed in two facing lines, with the "top couple" dancing the figures with each other couple in turn, down the row, ending at the bottom, when a new "top couple" would start. A long dance meant a lot of people were waiting their turn, with lots of time to talk as they waited. Most of these dance conventions can be seen in the ball episode in "The Watsons" and the other novels.

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(7) "What's your Game?"

With reference to my remarks in the last Newsletter about the Oxford English Dictionary, Jack Grey from New York sends another example of Jane Austen as a source for a new word:

"Base-ball" - 1815 - Miss Austen, Northanger Abbey: "It was not very wonderful that Catherine...should prefer cricket, base ball...to books".

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(8) "...to inspire Devotion".

Mary Coleman sent this example of one of Jane Austen's own prayers:

"Grant us grace, Almighty Father, so to pray as to deserve to be heard".

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(9) "And what had you for dinner, Sir?"

The gracious and elegant Union Club was the setting for the annual dinner of the Victoria chapter of JASNA, on November 2nd. In spite of the wind and the rain, about fifteen members, one from as far away as Prince George, gathered to enjoy "the company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation", as Anne Elliot described the ideal evening party. A game of guessing the identity of characters from the novels occupied us before dinner, and readings and comments from the novels enlivened the after-dinner period. Pam Jarvis, the president of the Victoria group, read a description of the St. Louis Conference, written by Keiko Parker, which will be printed in "Persuasions" later this year. The final entertainment of the evening was a taped concert of songs from Jane Austen's own music books, performed last summer by the Royal Ontario Museum as one of a series of "Georgian Afternoons". The music, which included several bright and lively country dances, was charming, and the comments and quotations from the novels added interest to the programme. It was a delightful evening, and we could only echo Emma Watson: "How soon it is at an end - I wish it could all come over again!"

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(10) "...listening...to the sound of the music".

In September, Jon Kimura Parker, son of Keiko and John Parker, became the first Canadian to win the first place Gold Medal in the prestigious Leeds International Piano Competition. To celebrate this achievement, the Mayor of Vancouver will proclaim January 27 "Jon Kimura Parker Day", and the Vancouver Recital Society will present "Jackie" in a Special Gala Concert, at the Orpheum Theatre, on Sunday, January 27, 1985, at 8:00 p.m. Tickets are available at VTC outlets, Eatons and Woodwards. It should be an exciting recital.

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(11) "...in Praise of the fullness, brilliancy and Spirit of the Meeting".

Almost all the members who attended the luncheon/discussion last week had recently read "The Watsons", and so we were all in a frame of mind similar to Mr. Watson's - "pleased with what he had done and glad to talk about it". The resulting lively discussion proved that the novel fragment has lots of material to provide the basis for lectures, workshops and discussion groups for future meetings, and for the 1986 Conference. The next meeting, in February, will be a "light lunch and card party", where we will try a few old round games like "Speculation", "Vingt-un", etc. if we can find the rules. You'll be hearing more details later. In the meantime, keep the Conference in mind, and we'll have more discussions of the novel and its characters, and any ideas you have about lively topics for '86.

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(12) "I would rather do anything than be Teacher at a school".

Mary Coleman showed me a newspaper clipping from the "Daily Telegraph" of last August. Among the thousands of visitors who come to see Chawton Cottage each year are many Japanese tourists. The writer of the article, Stephen Glover, described his meeting with one group of English-speaking Japanese teachers. Glover's attitude was rather mocking; he speaks of the

teachers as being "stony-faced...bemused and...restrained" - surely a welcome change from the common touristy gushing and raving that is often encountered. "Pride and Prejudice" was the favourite of nearly all the teachers, but Glover again was scornful of their reasons -- one thought it showed the darker side of human nature (one could argue that the financial dependency of women, the obligation to marry, the toadying of Mr. Collins are all rather dark spots of human nature); another considered the novel showed Jane Austen's love of country-living and sympathy with nature (can that be quarrelled with?); and a third found Jane Austen not at all religious in a specifically Christian sense (her lack of religious references and mockery of specific clergymen have bothered many readers). Glover seems to have been too busy sneering and snickering at these visitors to consider that there may have been a communication problem with his questions and their answers. At one of our lectures a reputable Jane Austen scholar compared the novels with the old Japanese "Tale of Genji". More important than mere differences in material life between modern Japan and 19th c. England, is the insight of one of the teachers, who found "a universality of feeling" in Jane Austen's novels.

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(13) "How soon it is at an end! - I wish it could all come over again!"

One Jane Austen year is coming to an end (December 17), but it all comes over again when you renew your membership in JASNA. Most of the members at the luncheon at Brock House took advantage of the presence of Joan Austen-Leigh to pay their fees on the spot and save the nuisance and expense of postage. For those of you who were not there, an application blank is printed on the last page. The fee is \$10.00 per year, and entitles you to notices about what is going on among the "Great and Grand ones" at the national level, "a great deal of goodhumoured pleasantry" about other Canadian chapters (in "Quips and Quotes", perhaps under a new name), and the annual magazine, "Persuasions", which has "a lively way of retailing a commonplace" and is "a universal favourite". Donations to JASNA and/or St. Nicholas Church in Steventon, are always welcome.

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(14) "...suffering a good deal from Curiosity".

All the quotations are from "The Watsons". Here are the sources:

- (1) Emma Watson to Lord Osborne, speaking of "half-boots".
- (2) Tom Musgrave arriving at the Watsons' unexpectedly.
- (3) Emma Watson to Elizabeth Watson about Tom Musgrave.
- (4) At the ball.
- (5) Tom Musgrave to Emma Watson, referring to his driving her home.
- (6) Tom Musgrave to Lord Osborne at the ball, speaking of Emma Watson.
- (7) Tom Musgrave at the Watsons', where the family is playing cards.
- (8) Mr. Watson speaking of Mr. Howard's sermon at the Visitation.
- (9) Elizabeth Watson to her father, speaking of the Visitation.
- (10) Tom Musgrave, before he comes to the ball.
- (11) Mr. Edwards' opinion of the ball.
- (12) Elizabeth Watson to Emma, speaking of marrying.
- (13) Emma Watson, after the ball.
- (14) Emma Watson, when Tom Musgrave didn't finish what he was saying about Mr. Howard.

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