

The Jane Austen Society of North America

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CONFERENCE NEWS TO DATE

In less than a month, the Vancouver JASNA Conference will be upon us. Registrations are coming in daily, and the response is gratifying indeed. The hotel is fully booked at present, but later cancellations may open up a little more space. In the meantime, I am trying to get late registrants into other hotels, or B&B situations.

A letter of greetings from the Queen has arrived, and Keiko Parker has worked on a worthy announcement for the Proclamation of "Jane Austen Day" by Mayor Harcourt. The menu for the banquet will include oysters and game birds, as befitting our theme novel "The Watsons". Donna Short has been sampling local restaurants for a guide for our visitors, and Paula Peretto is sharpening her pens and flexing her fingers in preparation for name tags and other items in her attractive calligraphy. Other members have responded with alacrity to my calls for more routine help, and the plans and preparations seem to be well in hand. We have a short breathing space at the moment, before the "employment, hope, solicitude, bustle, for every hour of the day" begins again.

Volunteers will be called for in the near future, and as Henry Tilney said of marriage and country dancing, "Fidelity and complaisance are the principal duties" we will require of you. And at the end, we will share "all the rational pleasures of an elegant society".

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"CHUNNEL" PROPOSED AGAIN

In Jane Austen's lifetime, in 1802, the first proposal for a Channel link between England and France was made, by Napoleon himself. Naturally, at that time nothing came of the suggestion. Twice since then a connection has been begun and abandoned. Now leading banks and construction companies in Britain and France are proposing both rail and road links between the two countries, with the approval if not financial backing from the two governments involved. I cannot think that Jane Austen would approve of such close links with the country which called forth her remark: "He is come back from France, thinking of the French as one could wish, disappointed in everything."



Jane Austen had the opportunity to meet many French refugees and émigrés at the home of her brother Henry and his wife Eliza (whose first husband was a French count put to death on the guillotine) and would hear terrible stories of the new regime in France.

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WEDGWOOD PLATE IN MEMORABILIA AT ART GALLERY

Among the Jane Austen memorabilia which Joan Austen-Leigh has kindly allowed to be on display at the Vancouver Art Gallery during the Conference, will be a plate of Wedgwood china which Jane Austen helped choose for her older brother Edward Knight. We all know of Wedgwood and their beautiful ware, even if we don't possess a dinner service like that described in a letter to Jane Austen's sister Cassandra as "a small-Lozenge in purple, between Lines of narrow Gold; and it is to have the Crest". Edward had been adopted by wealthy distant relations, and lived in the style of the gentry of the time.

"The Wedgwood Circle" by Barbara and Hensleigh Wedgwood give a detailed description of the family and their business enterprises. When the firm was well established, showrooms were opened in London. "Jos chose a site on the York Street corner of fashionable St. James Square. The York Street rooms... were elegant and lofty, the staircases wide, and there was ample space for show-rooms, offices, storage of ware and living accommodation for staff and members of the family...The site was outrageously expensive." This is where Jane Austen and her brother shopped for his new and elegant table ware.



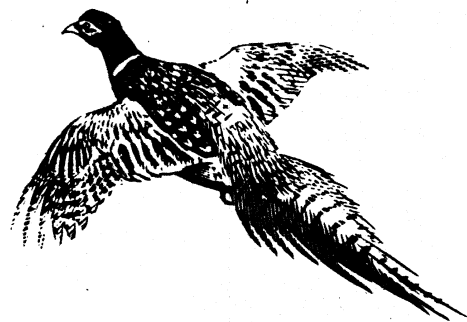
The York Street showrooms, c. 1810

NEW BOOKS

This seems to be the season for new books of interest to Jane Austen readers. They range from light summer distractions ("Miss Abigail's Part, or Version and Diversion" by Judith Terry, one of the Conference speakers), to biography ("Fanny Knight's Diaries: Jane Austen Through Her Niece's Eyes", by Deirdre Le Faye), to essays ("The Jane Austen Companion", edited by J. David Grey, A. Walton Litz and Brian Southam), to reprints of "The Manuscript Chapters of Persuasion", "The Watsons", "Sanditon" and "Volume the Third", Jane Austen's Minor Works. Certainly this short selection contains something for everyone.

HUNTING AND SHOOTING SEASON BEGINS

Jane Austen did not write about events which she had not experienced, and thus we do not find in the novels any exciting gallops in a fox-hunt, or descriptions of skilful shots at partridge or pheasant. She could sympathise, however, with the feelings of the women left at home while their men-folk were out enjoying these manly sports.



In the early 18th century, the usual methods of taking game were hawking and netting. With the introduction of the flint-lock gun, shooting became a fashionable and popular sport. The most famous of all English gunmakers was Joseph Manton, who produced a flint-lock gun so light and such a pleasure to handle that sportsmen took to it with enthusiasm. This may have been like the gun Charles Musgrave was interested in when he escorted Anne home, "sacrificing an engagement at a gunsmith's." He described it to Captain Wentworth as "a capital gun...a good deal like the second sized double-barrel of mine, which you shot with one day round Winthrop."

"Emma" is the only novel in which the gentlemen do not seem to care for sport - perhaps Highbury was too close to London to attract true sportsmen. In all the others, it is taken for granted, as Marianne does about Willoughby in "Sense and Sensibility" that all gentlemen hunt. Tom Musgrave refused a dinner invitation to the Watsons' because he would be out with Lord Osborne's hounds all that day. Edmund Bertram, a younger son, had three horses of his own, two of them hunters, and the first news of Tom Bertram's return from Antigua came in a letter to his gamekeeper. Henry Crawford, with no inconvenience to himself, could mount William Price on "a high-fed hunter in an English fox-chase".

Sir John Middleton's foremost interests were briefly described, "he hunted and shot". Willoughby is introduced as "a gentleman carrying a gun, with two pointers playing round him." His favourite pointer seemed to go on all his walks with him, and ended the day at Barton Cottage, lying at Marianne's feet. One can imagine that Marianne had learned to be as fond of dogs as of "dead leaves", and early in the story she considered "of all manly dresses, a shooting-jacket was the most becoming."

In "Northanger Abbey" John Thorpe bores Catherine with "the effusions of his endless conceit"; his talk of shooting parties, his sport with the foxhounds, and his plans to exchange terriers with a friend. Henry Tilney also keeps terriers - one of the very few things he and Thorpe have in common.

Even Mr. Rushworth, not generally thought of as a sportsman, boasts of his dogs to Maria, "doomed to the repeated details of his day's sport." Tom and Edmund Bertram shoot pheasants in Mansfield Wood, "tolerable sport the first three days", and speak of their father taking "a day's sport there" soon after his return. On the last day of his holiday, "a day of thorough enjoyment", William Price was out snipe-shooting (leaving his sister Fanny "in the course of a long morning...alone...worn down...with a parting worry...languidly" moving to her own room). The Price family could not have afforded hunting or shooting - William must have learned to shoot and ride in the few years he had

been a handsome young naval officer, invited to such social events whenever he was ashore.

Admiral Croft, whose life has been mostly spent at sea, "sometimes took out a gun, but never killed", perhaps because he and his wife had "their country habit of being always together." Captain Wentworth, often out shooting with Charles Musgrove, would have difficulty matching his host's enthusiasm. Charles himself "did nothing with much zeal, but sport", and deplored the fact that his cousin, Charles Hayter, settling "in the centre of some of the best preserves in the kingdom" was "too cool about sporting".

Bingley and Darcy returned to Netherfield "to shoot there for several weeks", and Mrs. Bennet was so delighted that she invited Bingley to shoot Mr. Bennet's birds and offered to "save all the best of the covies" for him. These birds were perhaps the partridges she served for dinner, "remarkably well done". Mr. Watson was not so lucky at the Visitation dinner - "the partridges were pretty high" and were "sent away to the other end of the table."

Lydia Bennet boasts about her new husband: "He did everything best in the world; and she was sure he would kill more birds on the first of September than anybody else in the country." Wickham probably would - he had all the showy, superficial attributes of a gentleman.

The sportsman's life was not always one of pleasure. "Incessant rains" prevented the Bertrams from shooting for several weeks. "A young dog, which had spoilt their sport" sent Charles Musgrove and Captain Wentworth home early. In "English Country Life", E.W.Bovill describes the energy and endurance required: "The shooter had to encumber himself with a ramrod, powder flash, shot belt or pouch, a box of caps or flints, wads and spare gun nipples with a nipple keg [whatever all that is]...Added to all this was the difficulty of keeping everything dry in wet or foggy weather...Injuries, varying from the loss of a finger or two to loss of life, were frequent."

But in spite of all this, sport was a passion with the majority of English gentlemen. One can feel sympathy for Captain Benwick, who is quoted as saying "he never shot".

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NEW WORDS

In "500 Years of New Words", William Shenk chooses what he considers the most interesting word that appeared in English in each year. Some of those he selected which became current usage in Jane Austen's lifetime are jungle, quiz (Jane Austen is cited in the OED for her use of this word, in "Northanger Abbey", "Where did you get that quiz of a hat?"), corduroy, oxygen, skyscraper (in its earliest use, referring to sailing ships), silhouette, pajamas, pemmican, tourism, and the drink names, cocktail, vermouth and vodka.

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GEORGIAN COINAGE

England in Jane Austen's time was in a state of transition, from an agricultural land to an urban industrialized country. One of the aspects of that change was the coinage of the common penny. In "Man Made the Land", Hugh C. Prince describes the changing Georgian way of life:

"The first copper penny to be minted in Britain is stamped boldly with the date of 1797. Unlike a modern penny, it does not declare its value. It is heavy, thick and deeply embossed, a solid ounce to be tumbled with a clatter on a wooden bench, a coin known to collectors as a cartwheel penny...The image it bears is... robust and virile. It speaks plainly of British tastes and habits at the end of the 18th century...It was important in facilitating thousands of everyday transactions by ordinary families. Pennies could buy all kinds of things that had been either prohibitively expensive or unobtainable at any price a century earlier: China tea, Jamaica rum, silk twist, plugs of tobacco, sisal rope, coal tar, whale oil, soap, printed broadsheets, seats at the theatre, metal spoons, teacups, buttons, brooches, calico, velvet, ginger biscuits, scuttles of sea-coal, legs of mutton, jugs of beer. As pennies circulated more freely household spending changed in character, and products from distant parts of the world entered British homes in increasing quantities. Labourers began to drink imported tea instead of beer and to wear manufactured cottons as well as homespun woollens. Things once bargained for at weekly markets or bartered from itinerant traders were now bought in shops, and in place of temporary stalls permanent buildings began to arise in mediaeval market places...Hundreds of towns might boast a solid Georgian bank, a row of well-appointed shops, a coffee house and perhaps auction rooms or a corn exchange of the same period."



A LITTLE HOP AT THE PARK



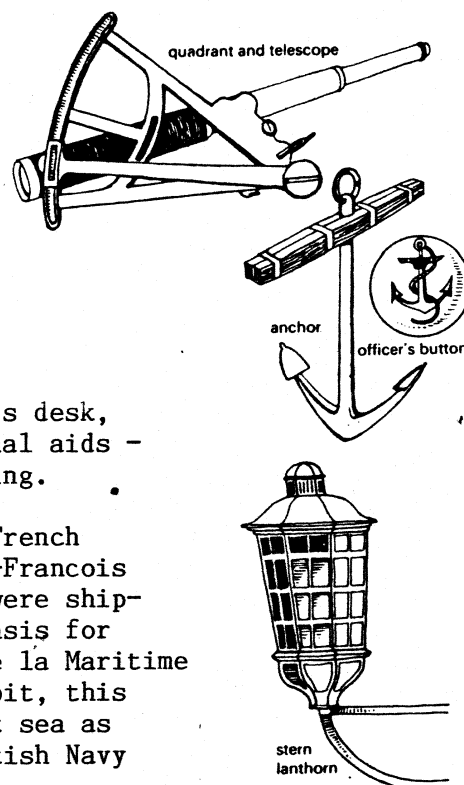
the cotillion dance

When I was in school I thought we were being very clever and up-to-date when we referred to the school dances as "hops". But I discovered Sir John Middleton in "Sense and Sensibility" using the same word: "I remember last Christmas at a little hop at the Park, he danced from eight o'clock till four". The word came into use in English early in the 18th c., meaning "a dance, especially of an informal or unceremonious kind", and was a common expression by Jane Austen's time.

AT THE MUSEUMS

If you are interested in shipboard life in Jane Austen's time, two exhibits at local museums will give you lots to think about. The Vancouver Museum has mounted one of its largest ever exhibits "Captain George Vancouver: A Voyage of Discovery". Here you will see the botanical garden arranged by Archibald Menzies on the quarterdeck of the Discovery, with local trees, ferns and shrubs which were new and interesting to the explorers; a list of necessary supplies for the voyage; artifacts from ships of the time; Captain Vancouver's desk, maps, chronometers, telescopes, and other navigational aids - a trip through history, well displayed and fascinating.

At the Maritime Museum is an exhibit about a French explorer, contemporary with Captain Vancouver, Jean-Francois de Laperouse. He was lost at sea when his vessels were shipwrecked but his journals were saved, and form the basis for this exhibit, assembled with the aid of the Musée de la Maritime in Paris. Not quite so large as the Vancouver exhibit, this display also gives an interesting glimpse of life at sea as Jane Austen's sailor brothers and others in the British Navy of the time would have known it.



TOMATOES AND CUCUMBERS

In "Pride and Prejudice", Lydia and Kitty Bennet, waiting to meet Jane and Elizabeth coming from London, occupied their time "dressing a sallad and cucumber". We don't know what was in the "sallad", but it may have included tomatoes, which were becoming a popular food at this time. Early 19th c. cook books give recipes for tomata ketchup and "pies made of tomatus", and sliced raw tomatoes were gradually finding favour.

Common in North and South America before Columbus arrived, tomatoes taken to Europe were grown as ornamentals in flower gardens, since the fruit of the "love-apple" was considered poisonous. Thomas Jefferson was one of the first to grow and eat tomatoes but most Americans did not eat them until well after the Civil War. In 1820, Robert Gibbon Johnson publicly ate a tomato on the steps of the courthouse in Salem, New Jersey, to prove they were not poisonous.

Cucumbers, on the other hand, were well known in England since the 14th century, although not always appreciated. Dr. Samuel Johnson said, "a cucumber should be well sliced, and dressed with pepper and vinegar, and then thrown out, as good for nothing."

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