

Jane Austen Society of North America

VANCOUVER REGION - NEWSLETTER NUMBER EIGHTEEN - MAY 1987

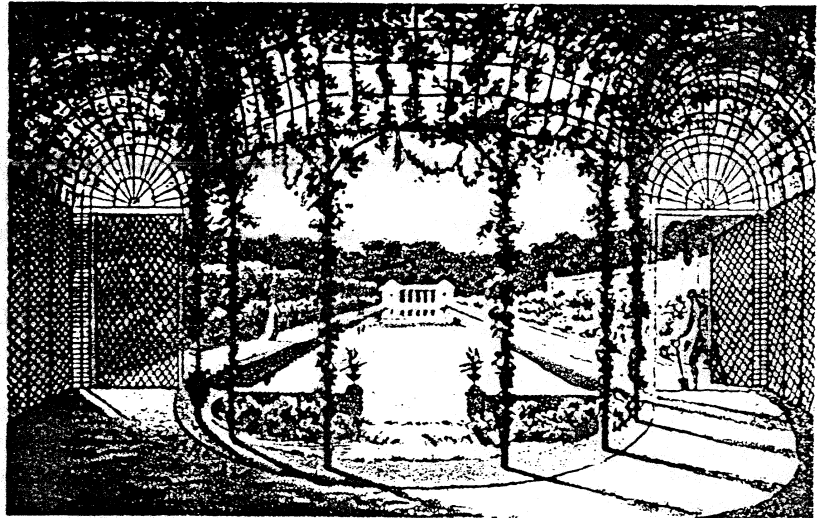
HISTORY OF GARDEN DESIGN

"Friends, books, a garden...Can he want occupation who has these?" Cowper, one of Jane Austen's favourite poets, made this comment in The Task. We are very fortunate to have colourful reflections of English Spring gardens here in Vancouver. The parks are lovely at this time of the year, but also every residential street gives us colourful vistas as we walk by. After our mostly grey winter, we can revel in the early yellows of daffodils and forsythia, then the pinks and deeper reds of tulips, azaleas and rhododendrons, set off by the blues and whites of rockery plants and flowering trees. And now, of course, in full bloom is Jane Austen's favourite, the Syringa, the lilac:

*Laburnum, rich
In streaming gold; syringa, iv'ry pure." (Cowper, The Task)*

"The shrubs which border the gravel walk he says are only sweetbriar and roses, and the latter of an indifferent sort; we mean to get a few of a better kind therefore, and at my own particular desire he procures us some Syringas. I could not do without a Syringa, for the sake of Cowper's Line." (JA Letters).

Our next meeting will keep on this theme of gardens. Dr. Temple Maynard will be speaking on the History of Garden Design, from the first recorded gardens to the "improvements" of Jane Austen's time, with slides illustrating famous gardens in Britain and Europe. The meeting will be on Saturday, May 23, at 11:30. We will have a Pot-luck lunch, and then the talk, with time for questions and discussion at the end. RSVP 988-0479.



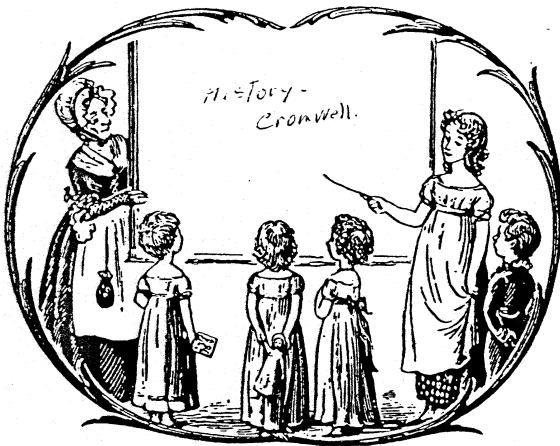
ECHOES FROM THE PAST

A cannon cast in England in 1816 will re-echo across Vancouver harbour again. Five months ago, the popular "Nine O'clock Gun" was removed to have its barrel re-bored and re-lined. With the gun now in its new pavilion at Brocton Point, Vancouverites once more can set their watches each evening at the sound of this Georgian cannon.

TEACHING HISTORY

"Writers of history...were labouring only for the torments of little boys and girls". We do not know what texts or methods Mrs. Morland, in Northanger Abbey, used in teaching her children, but Catherine might have had a more favourable opinion of history and historians if she had been taught from an interesting book first published in the same year Jane Austen wrote her novel.

"Clio as a Governess: Lessons in History, 1798" by J.H. Burns in History Today (August, 1986), is a fascinating article about Richmal Mangnall. She was a student at Crofton Old Hall in Yorkshire in the early 1780's, became a teacher there, and finally the head and owner of the school. She wrote and published an extremely popular book, which remained in print until the late 19th century, Historical and Miscellaneous Questions for the Use of Young People. It was her intention that these questions be used more as a handbook and guide for a tutor than as a school text-book, for she believed strongly in promoting "conversations" based on the questions which would lead to "habits of reflection and observation" in her pupils.

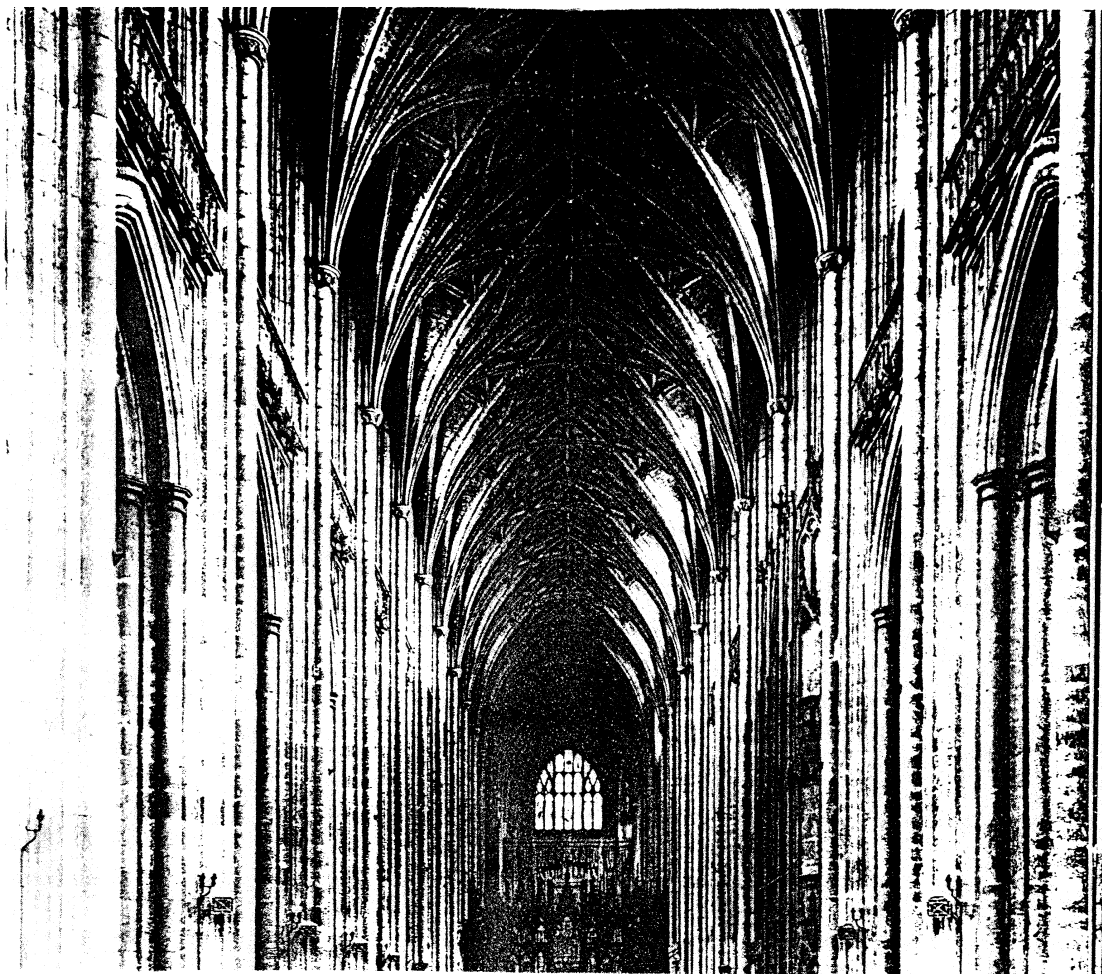


A contemporary, fictional, governess, Miss Lee at Mansfield Park, taught her pupils to "repeat the chronological order of the kings of England, with the dates of their accession, and most of the principle events of their reigns...the Roman emperors as low as Severus; besides a great deal of the Heathen Mythology, and all the Metals, semi-Metals, Planets and distinguished philosophers". As a teacher, Richmal Mangnall did not undervalue this common usage of learning by rote: according to an excerpt from the diary of one of her pupils, "My governess said that those who did not know the rivers off might go away".

Mangnall's Questions, and their answers, however, show her desire to impart to her pupils a broad understanding of the political, social and economic events of history. Most of the answers are fairly discursive, show a good assessment of character and do not lack the quality so much admired by Jane Austen, "candour". About Cromwell, whose two distinguishing traits are "hypocrisy and ambition", she says, "the nation, under his administration, improved both in riches and power"; of Charles II, "he was profligate and capricious, but reigned with almost absolute sway"; of the poet Ovid, "his delicacy of sentiment by no means equalled the purity of his diction"; of Rousseau, "a most singular character, who experienced many vicissitudes in life, chiefly owing to his want of steadiness".

Mangnall revised each subsequent edition until her death in 1820, with comments on contemporary events and developments - the Napoleonic wars, the execution of the French royal family and the aristocracy, Napoleon's escape from Elba and the "Hundred Days", and the Battle of Waterloo. Her strong moral sense and intense patriotism were balanced by her sense of justice and her concern for "discoveries and improvements".

One of Mangnall's "Miscellaneous" questions epitomizes this formidable but interesting personality: "What best promotes a liberal way of thinking? - A thorough knowledge of ourselves, and a candid allowance for the faults of others". Jane Austen herself could not have expressed it better.



INCIDENT IN WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL

"I began my pilgrimage of Winchester Cathedral by gazing up at the top of the north choir screens upon which rest the decorated caskets of Saxon bishops, kings, and that of Emma (not Mrs. Knightley, but King Canute's consort).

Walking down the north aisle, I stopped several times to look both around, and above, at the magnificent stonework. The roof, particularly, attracted my attention; and I moved about, varying my viewpoint, completely absorbed, until, with a shock, I realised I was, by then, encircled by as many as eleven or twelve people. To my horror I saw that all eyes were fixed on my feet. Had I odd shoes on? Odd stockings? Could a stocking be slipping? A swift glance down revealed that I was standing on a dark marble slab engraved with the words:

"In memory of JANE AUSTEN youngest daughter of the late Rev. GEORGE AUSTEN formerly Rector of Steventon in this County. She departed this life on the 18th July 1817 aged 41, after a long illness supported with the patience and the hope of a Christian. The benevolence of her heart, the sweetness of her temper, and the extraordinary endowment of her mind obtained the regard of all who knew her, and the warmest love of her intimate connections. Their grief is in proportion to their affection. They know their loss to be irreparable, but in their deepest affliction they are consoled by a firm though humble hope that her charity, devotion, faith and purity have rendered her soul acceptable in the sight of her REDEEMER."

As I tendered my apology to the bystanders who had been trying to read this inscription, I mentally added one to Miss Austen, trusting that the absurdity of the situation would appeal to her lively spirit and perhaps cause a ripple of amusement in Paradise."

(Thanks to Kay Carter for sharing this note from her friend Vera Hughes, of West Sussex, England)

GOOSE FOR DINNER

Jane Austen used one of her tantalizing phrases, never explained, when she wrote that Dr. Grant, in Mansfield Park, was cross and upset his household because he was "disappointed in a green goose" served for dinner. Why was he disappointed? Was it tough? lacking flavour? too fat? or not fat enough?

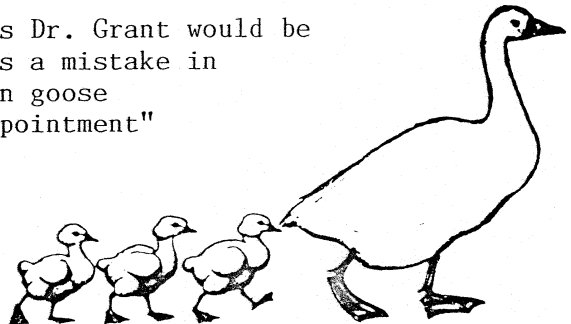
If this had happened after he moved to London - he "succeeded to a stall in Westminster" - it might be more understandable. From as far as Devon or Wales, flocks of geese were driven 150 miles or so to London. Starting around the end of August, they walked 6 to 8 miles a day, their feet sometimes shod in little leather boots, or protected by a coating of tar, sand and sawdust. They grazed on the stubble fields en route, and arrived at the London markets in time for the Christmas trade. They might well be tough and not in the best condition when they were sold.

But at Mansfield, this would have been a local goose, perhaps even one of his own. Almost every family kept geese, which fed on any greenery available and required little expensive fattening before they were ready for the table. Geese lay their eggs in February and early March, and the young goslings feed on the fresh Spring grass. When the harvest had been gathered in August, they would forage in the stubble remaining in the fields. There they would grow fat and be in ideal condition by Michaelmas (September 29), the proper time for eating geese.

Fynes Moryson wrote of the English in the 17th century, "...for geese, they eat them in two seasons, when they are fattened upon the stubble after harvest, and when they are green about Whitsuntide" (seven weeks after Easter, or about the end of May). According to the article by Alma Zook in Persuasions No.8, the Mansfield star-gazing session occurred on the evening of August 15th (or thereabouts). It was earlier that same day that Dr. Grant displayed his annoyance at the goose dinner. Was he eating the goose at the wrong time of year - too late to be really a "green" goose, as he had wanted, but not so fat and mature as it would be in another month or so?

Anyone who enjoyed his food as much as Dr. Grant would be sure to have a good cook. I doubt if it was a mistake in the kitchen. Dr. Grant probably insisted on goose for dinner that day, and brought his "disappointment" upon himself.

Mrs. Goddard, in Emma, was more fortunate. Robert Martin's mother sent her "a beautiful goose, the finest goose Mrs. Goddard had ever seen" when Harriet's visit was over. Robert Martin had picked walnuts for Harriet. That must have been just about a perfect Michaelmas goose.



JANE AUSTEN'S QUILT

Are you familiar with In Britain magazine? In the April issue, a hint is given about one of the feature articles in the next issue - a picture of a diamond-patterned quilt, and these words: "This quilt was made by a famous author; in case of fire, this would be the item saved by the curator of the author's home, now a museum. Details next month". Watch for the May issue.

REGIONAL NEWS

The Toronto Chapter is planning a Spring meeting with member Barbara Anno as guest speaker. Her subject is 18th c. horticulture, and another member will present slides of 18th c. gardens and landscapes. Hugh McKellar has devised a game matching Crabbe's verses with Jane Austen's characters. May 3, at 3:00 p.m.

The annual Ontario Donwell Day strawberry picnic will be held at the home of Mary Millard on June 21st, with members and guests strolling along the banks of the Don River and eating strawberries, sandwiches and tea - it never rains!

A new, busy and active group in Montreal holds regular meetings, and has made interesting plans for the future, including films, discussions, readings and talks.

Chicago's annual Gala will be held on May 16. Entertainment includes a demonstration (and tasting) of making an English afternoon tea, talks on the heroines, the difficulties and pleasures of teaching Jane Austen's novels, a comparison of Jane Austen and Barbara Pym, group readings, discussions, music and dancing - a very full day of delights.

In Southern California, the group has made plans for their December meeting: the theme novel is Mansfield Park, and the guest speaker will discuss life in the British Navy for young men like William Price, and Jane Austen's sailor brothers. The interesting and original meeting place will be the Queen's Ballroom on board the Queen Mary!

And New York, of course, is busy with exciting plans for the Conference there in October. The first letter of details should be coming to us soon.

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ILLNESS OF GEORGE III

"If King George III had not enjoyed sauerkraut and lemonade so much, the American Colonies might not have fought for their independence from Britain". This is the latest theory about the illness suffered by the king during the last decades of his reign.

Just as lead poisoning may have led to the downfall of Rome (lead pipes were used to conduct the drinking water to the villas of the wealthy citizens, and wines were sweetened with lead acetate), the ingesting of lead from lead-glazed crockery and cooking utensils, especially those which contained acidic foods, could have brought on the symptoms which George III displayed - pain, nausea, delirium, blindness and madness - all symptoms of lead poisoning.

According to Dr. John Emsley, a London chemist, the British ruling classes of the period ate enough lead to "cloud their grey matter", and enact legislation which the Americans would not tolerate.

If the American colonists also were taking in too much lead at the same time, it is no wonder the two countries couldn't arrive at an amicable compromise for their disagreements.

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SPRING CLEANING

In "Persuasion", Jane Austen gives one of her few descriptions of interiors, writing of the Great House at Uppercross: "...the old-fashioned square parlour, with a small carpet and shining floor". Before the days of electric floor-polishers and vacuum cleaners, keeping carpets clean and floors shining was a task requiring hard manual labour.

In 1787, Fanny Boscawen, supervising her household from a distance, wrote home to direct the spring-cleaning chores:

"The carpet in our drawing room covers all the floor and has done so perhaps for many years, as its threadbare state witnesseth. Uninterrupted then, and unmolested are all the fleas and other small nations who therein inhabit... Let Dan Martin therefore take up this carpet; let it be turned out upon the lawn so soon as this rainy weather has given place to sunshine and dryness. There let it be shook and beat without mercy by the strong hands of both gardeners. During its absence, let the floor, whose dirt it has so long concealed, be finally and totally rid of said dirt by means of a good scouring... But you will recommend doubtless some able-bodied matron, honest and not pregnant, who will scour this floor once and again till it becomes perfectly clean; after which it may be dry-rubbed by the gardener's wife, using her husband's arms, that is teaching him how to dry-rub a room."

I can imagine that the gardeners at this time of year would consider that they had enough to do outside in the gardens, without being called for house-cleaning jobs like this, but these servants were not the specialists so many employees are today.

84 CHARING CROSS ROAD

Now playing at a Vancouver theatre is the movie 84 Charing Cross Road, adapted from the book of the same title, by Helene Hanff. If you like books, you will probably like this. It is the exchange of letters between a New York book-lover, and the London bookseller who procures most of what she wants. She read mostly non-fiction, and she loved the lovely rich bindings of old used books.

In a letter of 1952, she wrote:

"You'll be fascinated to learn (from me that hates novels) that I finally got round to Jane Austen and went out of my mind over Pride and Prejudice which I can't bring myself to take back to the library till you find me a copy of my own". She describes the copy she receives: "P-and-P arrived looking exactly as Jane ought to look, soft leather, slim and impeccable".

BOOKSTORES

The W.H.Smith bookstores, now known world wide, originated in 1792 as a "news walk", delivering daily newspapers to houses around London's fashionable Berkeley Square. When the first William Henry Smith died, quite young, his widow managed the business until her sons were able to take it over. It has remained a family business to this day.

SIR WALTER ELLIOT OF CAMDEN PLACE, BATH

I have recently come across a delightful bit of background information about Sir Walter Elliot's choice of residence in Bath. Jane Austen seldom described houses in her novels, but she located her characters at addresses that conjured up for her readers exactly the type of house she had in mind.

The debt-ridden baronet in Persuasion, Sir Walter Elliot, is finally persuaded by his man of business to lease Kellynch Hall, and take up residence at Bath, where he can lead a distinguished, self-satisfying life of consequence without too great an expense. Jane Austen settles him in Camden Place, "a lofty dignified situation, such as becomes a man of consequence". It was built about 15 years earlier, and is described in contemporary accounts as a crescent of elegant well-furnished houses, with an extensive and picturesque view - just the sort of address that would perfectly satisfy Sir Walter and Elizabeth. The pediment and the keystones of the buildings were decorated with the elephant head, the crest of the Marquis of Camden - another factor which might have influenced the Elliots' choice. Can you not hear Sir Walter, speaking not only of "our cousins the Dalrymples", but also of "my landlord, the Marquis"?



The history of the development is interesting, however, and reveals Jane Austen's "fine Italian hand". The builders planned a large elegant crescent, Upper Camden Place, wedged high on the side of the hill, with a terrace and carriage-way in front, and Lower Camden Place forming a tangent to the crescent. An alarming series of landslides halted construction. Those houses which were situated on solid rock remained, but the plans for the rest of the development were drastically curtailed.

Thus Camden Place would be known to Jane Austen and her more wide-awake readers as an elegant, fashionable address, but also as a monument to a showy, pretentious failure.

(Information from : Patricia Brückmann, "Sir Walter Elliot's Bath Address", in Mod.Phil. 80-1, Aug.'82)

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LOOKING AT PAINTINGS

"Only through the fine arts can the untitled hope to achieve distinction in society". This was written in 1802 by Noel Desenfans, who tried to follow his maxim by amassing a collection of paintings and objets d'art, and becoming one of the leading London picture dealers. He never did attain the accolade of High Society, however, and his collection eventually was bequeathed, not to the new National Gallery which had snubbed his artist protégé, but to Dulwich College, then a few miles outside the city.

Sir John Soane was the architect chosen to design the new gallery at Dulwich. The gallery was described by David Starkey in History Today (Feb.'86): "a succession of cubes and double cubes, linked by plain arches and top-lit from octagonal lanterns; outside, stock brick and a little Portland stone, the simplicity of the materials off-set by the subtle variations of planes and masses...All is harmony.

It is the representative Regency collection in the representative Regency gallery... Delight is deepened if we remember the bold, brash world of London at the turn of the 18th century from which it sprang, when Art and Money were the two deities of the social scene."

Jane Austen, visiting her brother Henry in London in 1813, amused herself at several art galleries: "...to the Exhibition in Spring Gardens. It is not thought a good collection but I was very well pleased - particularly...with a small portrait of Mrs. Bingley, excessively like her...there was no Mrs. Darcy - Perhaps I may find her in the Great Exhibition, which we shall go to if we have time - I have no chance of her in the collection of Sir Joshua Reynolds' Paintings which is now showing in Pall Mall."

Perhaps Jane Austen might have found the painting she sought at the new Dulwich Gallery. It was built between 1811 and 1814 - just when she was in London, and finding "great amusement among the pictures".

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MONEY

"From 1797 to 1821, gold coins virtually disappeared from circulation; instead the country relied upon bank notes, about half of which were Bank of England notes, while the remainder were issued by country banks."

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"...the 19th century claimed to be the age of money; for example, the increase of banks in England from 280 in 1793 to 626 in 1815."

The Industrial Revolution 1750-1850
Robin M. Reeve.

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DON'T FORGET:

Next Meeting

A HISTORY OF GARDEN DESIGN - Slide/lecture by Dr. Temple Maynard

Saturday, May 23, 1987 11:30 a.m.

Pot-luck Luncheon

4169 Lions Ave., North Vancouver, B.C.

RSVP Eileen Sutherland
988-0479

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