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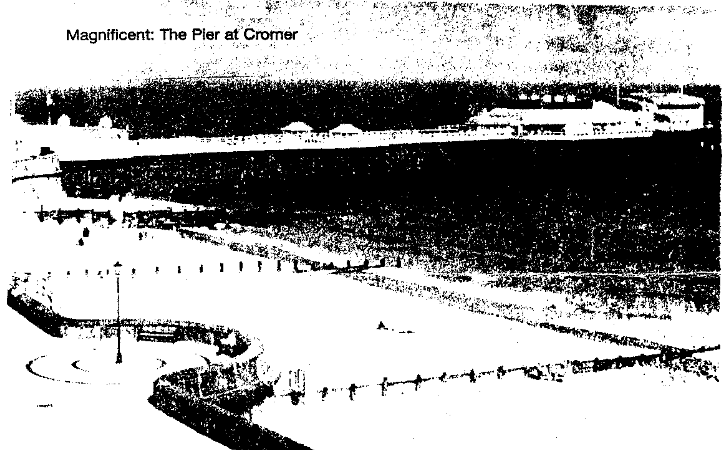
Summer by the Sea. Eileen Sutherland.

In *Emma*, Mr. Knightley and the John Knightleys were visiting Hartfield. The talk, not surprisingly, turned to 'gruel'. Isabella Knightley mentioned the difficulty she had with her new cook when they were at South End in the summer. "Often as she had wished for and ordered it, she had never been able to get anything tolerable." Mr. Woodhouse began lamenting about the 'sad consequences' of that visit.

"I shall always be very sorry that you went to the sea this autumn, instead of coming here . . . and if you must go to the sea, it had better not have been to South End. South End is an unhealthy place. Perry [the Woodhouse doctor] was surprised to hear you had fixed upon South End."

Isabella protested: "We all had our health perfectly well there, never found the least inconvenience from the mud; and Mr. Wingfield [her doctor] says it is entirely a mistake to suppose the place unhealthy . . . He thoroughly understands the nature of the air."


Magnificent: The Pier at Cromer

Mr. Woodhouse kept arguing: "You should have gone to Cromer, my dear, if you went any where - Perry was a week at Cromer once, and he holds it to be the best of all the sea-bathing places. A fine open sea . . . and very pure air."

His daughter mentioned the difference in the cost to go to Cromer rather than South End, but her father insisted: "Better not move at all, better stay in London altogether than travel forty miles to get into a worse air."

At this point John Knightley lost his temper, and sarcastically announced: "If Mr. Perry can tell me how to convey a wife and five children a distance of an hundred and thirty miles with no greater expense or inconvenience than a distance of forty, I should be as willing to prefer Cromer to South End as he could himself."

The "soothing attentions" of Emma and Isabella, and better reflections of the brothers, gradually removed the contention.

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Cromer

On our holidays this past year, we visited Cromer, still a popular sea-bathing resort, as well as an attractive small town. The beach is mostly covered with small stones and some patches of sand here and there. (Remember, Isabella Knightley in *Emma* protested they had 'never found the least inconvenience from the mud' at Southend - no mud at Cromer. Since the town faces North, one has a 180° view of the horizon, and can watch the sun rise in the East and set in the West.

Cromer is a delightful place to spend a few days or weeks in summer. Twisting paths run from the top of the cliffs down to a walkway along the edge of the beach. During storms, the surf crashes at the foot of this promenade. A pleasant broad path runs along the coast at the top of the cliffs, for some miles.

The Visitors' Guide: *A Brief History of Cromer* mentions its origins. During the Ice Ages, the glaciation pushed into place the hills which surround Cromer. When the ice started to melt and retreat, all it had been pushing was left behind: these 'terminal moraines' became the Cromer Escarpment, tree-topped ridges all around Cromer, where today one has the first view of the sea as one enters the town.

Several hundred years later, the site of the future town was part of a large forest and swamp area, holding fossils of many animals of the past - the woolly mammoth, ancient forms of elephants, rhinoceros, monkeys, horses and moose, for example.

Over the centuries the action of the sea has been changing the East Anglia Coast, eroding the cliffs in the Cromer area. But the sea also has provided Cromer's livelihood through fishing, and trading with the Baltic and northeast ports.

In the 1700's, health cures involving seawater became fashionable among the nobility and upper classes, and Cromer became a popular place for sea-bathing, and 'drinking the waters'. For those rich enough to afford it, Cromer became *the* place to visit, renting a house from a fishing family (who temporarily moved elsewhere), or staying at taverns and hotels. Fishing has always been important at Cromer, especially the world famous 'Cromer Crabs'.

Through its history, Cromer seems to have appealed to families with small children, rather than those looking for 'loud brash nights out' - a good reason for the John Knightleys to go there. The town is also noted for a dominating church – 'cathedral-like in its proportions', with the tallest (160 ft.) parish tower in Norfolk.

The first jetty - a vital part of Cromer - running from the beach into deep water was recorded in 1391. For hundreds of years, the successors were used mainly for loading and unloading ships. Later, some form of entertainment was arranged in a building at the sea-end of the jetty, which continues to this day.

On our summer visit, we walked down to the beach area, and out along the pier (as visitors must do, on first arriving there). Clouds obscured the distant shoreline, but we had an excellent view of the beach. At low tide (as we saw it) the stretch of beach was rippled by the waves, and gleamed in the sunshine. It was a prefect place for digging holes, playing tag, or all sorts of games, and local children and visitors were enjoying it. The coast is subject to foggy days with no distant view, but when it is sunny, one can 'see forever'.

Cromer has a 'Canada' street, but nobody in the Tourist Office or the museum knew why. The museum had interesting displays, including 'Victorian times' in Cromer, when sea-bathing became very popular. But there was not much going back to the Austen period.

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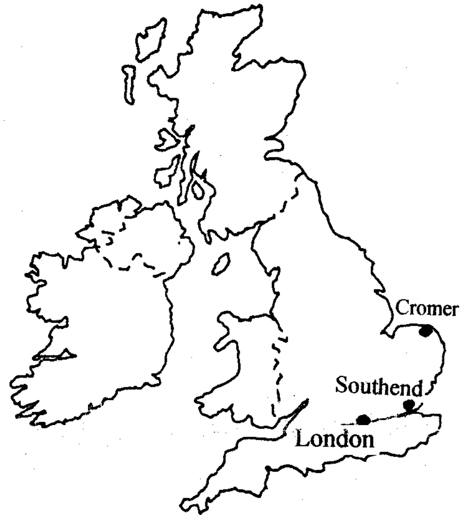
Southend-on-Sea.



This popular resort is forty-five miles east of London, in Essex. It began as a humble hamlet, but when the boom in resort towns took place, it soon grew into a small town.

Jane Austen's brother, Charles, took his family there in the summer of 1813, and rented a house. The Prince Regent's wife, Caroline, and the Princess Charlotte, aged five, were sent there for their health. This increased the "fashion" of the place, but Southend never became one of the exclusive resorts. A contemporary guide-book described it as being 'an asylum to the lovers of quiet and retirement'. In fact, it sounds ideal for the unsociable John Knightley, who just wanted a quiet holiday with his wife and children, away from the bustle and noise of London.

The mud of the beach did deter many visitors, and gave the place a reputation for being less healthy than cleaner resorts. Situated on the Thames Estuary, Southend did have a problem with mud and silt, but its easy distance from London made it a convenient holiday spot for many city dwellers.

Southend is now one of the biggest seaside resorts in Britain, with the longest pleasure pier in the world (1-1/3 miles long), cliff gardens and seven miles of seafront. In Jane Austen's time, Southend had a reputation for being select, partly because it was more difficult to get to.

Emma and Mr. Knightley, after their wedding, spent a "fortnight's absence in a tour to the seaside". Note the word 'tour' - they don't want to commit themselves to either Cromer or Southend, but no doubt they will go to both, and other places nearby.

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From *Bound To Please*, by Michael Dirda.

(From the last chapter, where Dirda talks about the authors that he feels were the most influential stylists of the past century, including Georgette Heyer: "formulaic, but hallmarked by considerable wit, cleverness and narrative care".)

"I wanted to include Georgette Heyer (1902-1974) on this list because her historical novels, largely set in the Regency, represent an entire literary duchy: that of romantic escape fiction, told with wit, and eye for period, detail, and the requisite pull on the heartstrings. For the most, Heyer's young women are willful, clever and independent . . . Heyer is a superb historical novelist --- Jane Aiken Hodge's excellent biography reminds us of how hard she worked to get the slang and fashions of her characters just right. She represents the deliberate recovery of an archaic style --- roughly that of Jane Austen --- and all those fictive acts of literary ventriloquism, from John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* to A.S.Byatt's *Possession* to innumerable Regency romances, owe something to her virtuosity."

(Thanks to Phyllis Bottomer for sending this quotation).

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Women's Writing. -- Eileen Sutherland.

[I have discovered an excellent periodical at the SFU library: *Women's Writing.* In 1998, one issue was a special Jane Austen number. Unfortunately, the journal does not circulate, and most of our members will not be able to read it. From time to time, as I get a chance to read and make notes of the articles, I'll print my summaries: I hope you enjoy them as much as I do.]

"An Easy Step to Silence: Jane Austen and the Political Context" - B.C.Southam.

A common impression about Jane Austen's works is that "politics as such is little mentioned and never discussed." B.C.Southam disagrees. He discusses Jane Austen's political opinions expressed or hinted at in her letters and novels, under five themes: the Austen family politics; the traditional Jacobite loyalty of the Leigh family; Mr. Austen's political manoeuvres; the French Revolution; and the slave trade.

Biographers usually refer to the Austens as a Tory family - only to be expected of a middle class clergyman with upper-class connections and acquaintances. They would have shared the values of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France.* As Southam puts it, "Improvement or innovation was acceptable provided that it was a strengthening of tradition." This sentiment comes across explicitly in Jane Austen's attitude towards the changes her brother Edward was planning for the Great House at Chawton: "making a new Garden...proving & strengthening his attachment to the place by making it better." [*Letters* p.314] Her brothers James and Henry had strong political convictions expressed in the periodical *The Loiterer* which they published while at Oxford. One of its main targets was "the literature of sensibility with its celebration of emotional self-indulgence and extravagance, as assertion of individualism incompatible with duties and responsibilities." They also had anti-Stuart prejudices with which Jane could not agree. Her feelings accorded with the Stuart sympathies inherited from her mother's family - the "loyal Leighs" - with their inflexible loyalty to the House of Stuart.

After Charles I visited Stoneleigh Abbey, the current Sir Thomas Leigh became Baron Leigh of Stoneleigh. In 1745, they were prepared to welcome Bonnie Prince Charlie and his army at the Abbey, but the Prince was over-extended at this point and did not come quite that far south. The other branch of the family, the Leighs of Adlestrop, were equally staunch Jacobite supporters: Jane's great-grandfather Theophilus Leigh refused to recognize William and Mary, or George I, as sovereigns - his loyal toast was always to "the king over the water", the exiled Stuart. His son, Master of Balliol, remained a firm Jacobite for many years, until he sacrificed his principles for Hanoverian patronage. The Stuart cause, supported by France, remained a potential threat until the last heir died childless in 1807. By this time, George III was on the throne and popular, the country was stable and prosperous - a civil war to restore another régime was out of the question.

For many years, however, clergymen, MPs, and holders of public office were required to take an Oath of Abjuration, renouncing "any Allegiance or Obedience" to the Stuarts. Mr. Austen took such an oath when he became Fellow of St. John's at Oxford in 1751; on his ordination; as master of Tunbridge School; and on his presentation to his livings. James and Henry also had to take the oath as Fellows and as clergymen.

The Austen Hanoverian loyalty was pitted against the Leigh Stuart loyalty - a legacy of tension within the family. Jane Austen shows her prejudice in her juvenile *History of England*: her "principal reason for undertaking [the History] being to prove the innocence of the Queen of Scotland." Southam points out the remarkable change in style and feeling: "When Mary Stuart is

the subject, the comic note, the parody and the jokiness disappear. The writing takes on a gravity of tone. It carries compassion for Mary's suffering and her 'scandalous death'."

This was not a prejudice of Jane Austen's youth only. In *Mansfield Park,* Fanny expresses Jane Austen's feelings of romantic affection for the past. Sotherton would remind everyone of an old Jacobite home and family. The chapel had been set up in the reign of James II (he only reigned three years, 1685-88, so the date is quite specific), implying that the Rushworths were probably recusant Catholics observing their faith secretly within the privacy of Sotherton Court.

Mr. Austen, as a country clergyman, scholar and tutor, does not seem to have "a finger in the political pie." However, where the welfare of his sailor sons was concerned, he adroitly obtained influence for their promotions, first from Warren Hastings, well known to him through his sister Philadelphia Hancock, and later from Admiral Gambier, a connection of James Austen's first wife. Jane was intrigued by the details, and used a similar pattern of intrigue in connection with the promotion of William Price in *Mansfield Park*, described in one of the longest sentences she ever used, full of formality, politeness, circuitousness and hypocrisy:

"The first was from the Admiral to inform his nephew, in a few words, of his having succeeded in the object he had undertaken, the promotion of young Price, and inclosing two more, one from the Secretary of the First Lord to a friend, whom the Admiral had set to work in the business, the other from that friend to himself, by which it appeared that his Lordship had the very great happiness of attending to the recommendation of Sir Charles, that Sir Charles was much delighted in having such an opportunity of proving his regard for Admiral Crawford, and that the circumstance of Mr. William Price's commission as second Lieutenant of H.M.sloop Thrush, being made out, was spreading general joy through a wide circle of great people." (MP p.298).

The most momentous and historical event in Jane Austen's lifetime was the French Revolution. The whole family must have watched its progress with a growing sense of anxiety and horror. Mr. Austen's sister, Philadelphia, and her daughter Eliza were living in France and barely escaped in time. Eliza's husband was arrested and executed. Jane Austen loathed everything to do with France and the French for the rest of her life.["He is come back from France, thinking of the French as one could wish, disappointed in everything." *Letters,* p.465] Her feelings were probably too intense to use in her novels, but there are three references to the Revolution - very minor and indirect. [Can you find them?]

For genteel ladies, politics as conversation was taboo. When Henry Tilney brings up a political subject in *Northanger Abbey* [p.111], it was "an easy step to silence." Men could discuss political topics, a woman's place was to listen. For this reason, Fanny's question in *Mansfield Park* about the slave-trade was a bombshell - it could be followed only by the silence of the whole group. Mr. Austen was the trustee of a plantation-owner in Antigua, whose son was a pupil, and became the god-father of James Austen. This background may have given Jane Austen at least a reason for using Antigua as the place where Sir Thomas owns an estate.

Southam effectively demonstrates his contention that "Jane Austen was an intensely private person who shunned public life, but she was not isolated nor insulated from the larger issues of the time."

[*Women's Writing*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1998. Special Number: Jane Austen. Guest Editor, Mary Waldron.]

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Jane Austen: "Nothing but a mind of this subtle, delicate, speculative temper, could have set before us pictures which are at once so refined and so trenchant, so softly feminine and polite, and so remorselessly true." Mrs.Margaret Oliphant, 1828-97.

The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal. (1982) **Philip Mason.**

The ideal of a "gentleman" was prevalent among all classes in English society in the 18th and 19th centuries. Mason traces the development of ideas from Classical times, through the Middle Ages, and the time of Chaucer - courtly love and the courtier, the country squire and the Corinthian. He quotes at length from contemporary novels to study the views of ordinary people of each period. Light and easy to read, the book gives an overview of the principle of gentlemanly behaviour through the years.

"Elegance and Principle" is a chapter on Jane Austen's novels: which characters behave like "gentlemen" - regardless of their social position - and which do not. Dickens, Thackeray and Trollope give additional viewpoints.

The books should be read as novels, but they are social history, too. "They are minute and exact sketches - worked, as she wrote to a nephew, 'with a fine brush on a little bit of ivory, two inches wide' – of the way her people thought about marriage, property, social differences, and the kind of behaviour which was proper for ladies and gentlemen. It is hard to find a single word for this behaviour; it included 'elegance', 'gentility', an air and a manner, but also good taste, sound principles, fidelity, consideration for others.

Austen belongs in spirit to the 18th century. She writes from the point of view of a lady of the lesser gentry at the end of that century and, embedded in her novels, are pictures which illustrate to perfection the ideas as to the proper behaviour of a gentleman.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet received a proposal from Mr. Darcy, who, with many acres, a wide park and a splendid mansion, was allied to the noblest families in the land. She refused him, and defied his domineering aunt with the words, 'In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere [of 'gentlemen']. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal.'

Marianne Dashwood's love, Willoughby [in *Sense and Sensibility*] 'agreed with Marianne about poetry, about picturesque beauty and the infamy of second marriages; a good horseman, he danced well, he had a good taste in drawing and music, . . . but he was lacking in *principle* and he was fickle. He is one of the line of fascinating young men which includes Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*, Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, Frank Churchill in *Emma* and Mr. William Elliot in *Persuasion.* Each of them shows what Jane Austen would call a marked preference for one of her heroines, each fails in fidelity, in staying power, in steadiness.

In *Persuasion,* Anne does not agree with her father that a gentleman had to be a man of property. She thought Mr. Wentworth had a 'gentillesse' she did not perceive in her father. . . ' For a man to be a good landlord is part of his duty; for a lady, the poor are there to be visited . . .' For Emma, 'Good breeding demanded politeness to Miss Bates and principle demanded kindness to the poor, but there was not much notion of common humanity. They were still a different species.'

But in all, "the kind of man Austen and her heroines admired may stand in the line from the time of Chaucer, as a picture of the gentleman."

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Midsummer madness . . .
and the visit of a three-year-old relative, led to this light-hearted fusion of works of two of my favourite authors.

In *Persuasion*, Jane Austen wrote of "the fine country about Lyme", of "descending the long hill into Lyme, and entering upon the still steeper street of the town itself." The Musgrove party of young people, arrived at the inn and arranged accommodations. The next thing to be done was unquestionably to walk directly down to the sea . . . and to admire "the remarkable situation of the town, the principal street almost hurrying into the water, the walk to the Cobb, skirting around the pleasant little bay . . . with the very beautiful line of cliffs, stretching out to the east of the town." Later, Captain Wentworth reported that "the country round Lyme is very fine . . . the more I saw, the more I found to admire."

The next morning, they "went to the sands, to watch the flowing of the tide, which a fine south-easterly breeze was bringing in with all the grandeur which so flat a shore admitted. They praised the morning; gloried in the sea; sympathized in the delight of the fresh-feeling breeze..."

At the end of their visit, they decided to walk once more on the Cobb. "There was too much wind to make the high part of the new Cobb pleasant for the ladies, and they agreed to get down the steps to the lower ." Louisa was stubborn and insisted on being "jumped" by Captain Wentworth. "She was too precipitate by half a second, she fell on the pavement on the Lower Cobb, and was taken up lifeless." Louisa was not of course lifeless, but badly injured, and that was the end of their pleasant visit to Lyme.

In Beatrix Potter's story of *Little Pig Robinson*, she described Lyme - here called Stymouth - as the busy vibrant little seaport she had known from her own seaside holidays. "It is a pretty little town, situated at the mouth of the river . . . whose sluggish waters slide gently into a bay sheltered by high red headlands. The town itself seems to be sliding downhill in a basin of hills, all slipping seaward into the harbour, which is surrounded by quays and the outer breakwater.

There was a harbour and fishing boats and fishermen. They sailed away to catch herrings in nets. Horses and carts were driven into the shallow water at low tide to meet the heavily laden boats."

Her "hero", Robinson, is a little pig who has been sent with a big basket of cauliflowers and daffodils to sell in the market. "He hurried along Broad Street and took the short cut to the harbour, down a steep flight of steps . . . The steps were too steep and slippery for anyone less sure-footed than a cat . . . A smell of ropes and pitch and a good deal of noise came up from below. At the bottom of the steps was the quay, or landing-place, beside the inner harbour. . . The tide was out; there was no water; the vessels rested on the dirty mud. Several ships were moored beside the quay; others were anchored inside the breakwater. Near the steps, coal was being unloaded from two grimy colliers . . . Further along the quay, another ship was taking a mixed cargo on board. Bales, casks, packing-cases, barrels - all manner of goods were being stowed into the hold; sailors and stevedores shouted; chains rattled and clanked."

These two accounts of Lyme were written in different periods and with a different focus, but they complement each other. I think the author of the *Juvenilia* would have appreciated the little children's book, which gives many details of what the Musgrove party would have seen at their brief visit to Lyme.

Eileen Sutherland.

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The Saga of the House of Murray.

Mary Atkins passed along information from the *Irish Times*, regarding the publishing firm of the House of Murray, now owned by Hodder Headline, after 234 years of history, including its association with Lord Byron, Jane Austen, Charles Darwin, and many other noted writers. Humphrey Carpenter John Murray, the seventh 'John Murray' of the family, has written *The Seven Lives of John Murray,* constructed from the voluminous archives of the firm - now fittingly returned to the source in Edinburgh (where Murray began in 1768, under the name McMurray) Calvinist vigour combined with social ease, and foundations were quickly laid with some thousand titles to his name by his death in 1793.

JM2 forged an alliance with Archibald Constable, who paid a young poet-novelist, Walter Scott, a thousand guineas advance unseen for *Marmion, A Tale of Flodden Field,* published in February, 1808, and selling 28,000 copies over three years. Murray's quarter share in the enterprise ensured that their fortunes rose together.

By 1809, staples of the Murray list included Southey's two-volume *Life of Nelson* (perpetuating 'all the colourful myths about its hero, with a scant regard for truth' for nigh on a century), Isaac D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature*, the Edinburgh Encyclopedia, Mrs. Rundell's *Domestic Cookery*, and a new ten-volume edition of Defoe, as well as the *Quarterly Review*, set up in opposition to the whiggish *Edinburgh Review* by born-again Tory, Scott. By October 1812, Murray's was in a new stratosphere with 45,000 copies of *Childe Harold* by Byron sold, and new premises at No. 50, Albemarle Street, to show for it. Here Byron met Scott in 1815, and escapees of Napoleon's France like Mme. De Staël. The firmament was established, feeding the appetites of a new generation of readers and writers in Regency London.

In 1816, Jane Austen, whose popularity and sales in time exceeded Byron's, appeared on the list. Her banker brother, Henry, negotiated a deal with her fourth novel, *Emma.* Jane complained to her sister Cassandra over the advance asked for, calling Murray 'a Rogue of course, but a civil one'. In the same year, Murray published Coleridge's *Christabel and Other Poems*. In 1826, JM2 turned down Wordsworth. Later in the same century, moving with the times, the firm published Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* in 1830, and Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859.

With the help of Dickens and Gladstone, JM3 established the 1842 Copyright Act, keeping 'foreign' reprints out of the United Kingdom and colonial markets. JM4 is given little consideration in this book. JM5 was childless, and a nephew Robin Jock Grey, changed his name by deed poll in 1930, and succeeded as JM6, publishing authors such as Axel Munthe, Kenneth Clarke, and John Betjeman, whose *Collected Poems* (1958) sold two million, and Don Mackean's *Introduction to Biology,* which sold eight million around the world.

This is a fine memorial to a once-great publishing house.

In other letters to Cassandra, Jane Austen mentions her dealings with Murray and the publishing firm. 'Mr. Murray's letter is come. He is a rogue, of course, but a civil one. He offers £450 for *Emma,* but wants to have the copyright of *MP and S&S* included. It will end in my publishing for myself I daresay. He sends more praise than I expected.'

On 23 November, 1815, she wrote to Murray himself, complaining about the delays in the printing of *Emma*, mentioning the work was to be dedicated, by permission, to the Prince Regent, in hope that this fact would speed things up. She got a reply the next day from Mr. Murray: 'he is so very polite indeed, that it is quite overcoming . . . I am, in short, soothed and complimented into tolerable comfort.'

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A Revolutionary Conservation Effort in St. Petersburg.

"The palace is so beautiful and the craftsmanship so exceptional that when you first see Catherine the Great's private retreat outside St. Petersburg, you don't notice the damage. But considering the city suffered two bloody revolutions and a long and terrible siege during the second world war, the fact that the Chinese Palace at Oranienbaum has survived - with its original marquetry floors, wall hangings, tapestries, paintings, silks, gold leaf, and much of the furniture, including a specially imported English billiard table, intact - is barely believable.

Built in six years from 1762 in the latest rococo style . . . much of the palace remains as Catherine left it at the end of her reign. . . . But while it has survived war and revolution, the Chinese Palace may not escape unscathed from a battle with two more deadly enemies - moisture and misguided restoration. British scientists and the private, nonprofit World Monuments Fund, have joined the curator Klementyer and his staff to conserve the palace before decisions are made that may irreparably damage its unique fabric. The development executive of the fund says, 'Other palaces in St. Petersburg are very beautiful and have been carefully restored, but in some cases they are 'rebuilds' from almost total destruction in the war. Here we have a gem that has remained almost untouched since it was built, with the original techniques and craftsmanship.'

A conservation scientist has set up a moisture detection system, to find out where the moisture is coming from. It could be leaking through the roof, or it could be condensation or fluctuations in humidity during the different seasons. It might be rising damp or snow melt coming through crevices from the badly maintained terraces outside. The most likely answer is that it is a combination of all these.

The marquetry floors are a good example. The palace was built on a drained swamp, and these floors are only just above the damp ground. They are original and virtually undamaged. They contain 18 varieties of wood from trees as far away as Brazil, cut in different shapes and sizes which react differently to getting wetter or drier. They must have had a reasonably constant moisture content for the 230 years, otherwise they would have bent and buckled. To dry them out might be the end of them.

The procedure is to monitor the damp and humidity in the palace as it changes hour to hour, collecting data for a year. One difficulty is that much of the decoration is held together either with animal glue or a fish glue made from sturgeon and vodka. It provides a base for gold leaf on the carved wooden frames for silk and glass bead tapestries. It is rare to see work of this quality in its original condition without restoration. The conservationists must do the minimum possible so that others can appreciate it. A tiny fluctuation in humidity can do immense damage.

The curator has kept this palace intact for 33 years. He has done a wonderful job with both great luck and judgment. Without instruments, he has kept the humidity more or less constant. Now the scientists must work out how to prevent any further deterioration.

The need now is to convince people in Russia, against conventional thought, that keeping the place a little damp might be the best thing for the palace."

Paul Brown, *Guardian Weekly, Oct. 15, 2004.*

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Keep your cool in this sizzler.

"What dreadful hot weather we have! It keeps me in a continual state of inelegance." J.A.

Sir Walter Elliot of Camden Place, 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 Elliott, 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 fifteen 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 Camben 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.

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. . . grieving to forego all the influence so sweet and so sad
of the autumnal months in the country.

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