

Muse & Musings

"The company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation"

Jane Austen Day

Georgian books and politicians

On April 18th we celebrated our Jane Austen Day, as usual, with both morning and afternoon speakers and a delightful lunch catered by the Banqueting Table.



Speakers Amber Adams, James Nagle and our RC Michelle on Jane Austen Day, April 18, 2015.

Our morning presentation was "Reading in the Rectory – did Jane know these books?" Amber Adams, a former librarian and editor at The Queen's University of Belfast, Northern Ireland, gave a fascinating talk about books and manuscripts that Jane Austen may have been familiar with during her lifetime. Amber is editor of *Brontë Studies*, the peer-reviewed journal of the Brontë Society and has served as Program Coordinator of the Calgary branch of JASNA.

She spoke about which books Jane Austen would have read in her father's library, how people acquired books and how books were published and distributed. She spoke about chapmen (pedlars or hawkers), who sold "chapbooks" – cheap editions on rough paper – and song collections called "garlands"; about libraries; about different methods of publication.

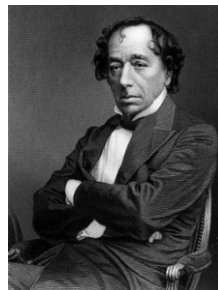
After her talk, the *pièce de résistance* of her presentation was the display of Georgian books from her collection. It has been, she told JASNA members, the work of a lifetime. The collection includes books and papers which

date back to the 1600s. The nucleus of the collection was a group of books rescued from a fire by her late first husband during "the troubles" in Belfast.



JASNA members take a closer look at the wide array of books and documents in Amber's library.

James Nagle, JASNA Secretary and a popular AGM speaker, led a discussion on "Politics in Jane Austen's Time." Jim is a practicing attorney in Seattle with a Juris Doctorate from Rutgers University and a Master of Laws and Doctor of Juridical Science from the George Washington Law Center. He had planned to present on this topic at the Montréal AGM, but was unable to attend due to illness. He gave his AGM talk to his Puget Sound group earlier this year, but when he came here he found that a good deal of his ground was cut from under his feet by the fact that our Parliamentary system – quite foreign to Americans – is essentially the same as the British system.



Benjamin Disraeli, although born Jewish, was able to become Prime Minister (1874) because he was converted to Church of England at age 12. Jews did not get the vote until the 1860s.

Jim spoke about the House of Lords, and the House of Commons; the British franchise – who could vote and how votes and seats were distributed in the populace and the country; how the franchise expanded; about the income qualifications required to run for office. There were "rotten boroughs" where a handful of voters elected

MPs, while large cities, such as Birmingham or Manchester had no seats at all.



William Pitt the Younger, painted by George Romney, became the youngest Prime Minister in 1783 at the age of 24. Charles Fox, painted by Joshua Reynolds, was a Whig politician and great rival to Pitt; he doomed the Whig party to years in opposition by espousing the French Revolution and refusing to revise his position.

Catholics did not get the vote until 1829, Jews until the 1860s and women not until the 20th Century. Secret ballots, which enabled tenants to vote against their landlord, were not introduced until 1872. Nagle also spoke about the origins of the British political parties – Whigs, Tories, Liberals and Radicals.

A lively exchange of views and information on the Parliamentary system versus the American system of government followed his talk.

May 23rd meeting Jane Austen's Discovery



Richard Harvey is a practicing psychotherapist, who has taught for the Simon Fraser Continuing Studies program. He had us guessing whose "voice" Austen was using in various prose passages.

Richard Harvey asks us to consider the central question of what causes us so much delight in reading and re-reading JA's books. More than almost any other author, Mr. Harvey said, Austen's books bring deep satisfaction to her readers.

He suggested many ways of looking at the problem, and why it is a problem. Why do characters and stories that are entirely fiction give us so much pleasure? Is it escapism? Failure of critical attention? Addiction?

He told us that his ideas on the subject continue to evolve. When he first gave a presentation called "Jane Austen's Discovery," he believed her use of empathetic listening – which is what psychotherapists do – was the secret. In *Mansfield Park* Edmund starts as the only character who listens to Fanny Price, who in turn becomes a particularly good listener.

Since then, however, he has come to think it is also her use of free indirect discourse, which he called "narrated monologue," that gives her writing its distinct, ironic narrative voice. The reader is never sure whether it is the voice of Jane Austen, the voice of a character or the voice of an omniscient narrator – sometimes it is a bit of all three. This led to a discussion of different types of narrator such as "monologue" or first-person, seen in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*; or an unreliable narrator, as in Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*.

He focused on a passage in *Mansfield Park* in which Edmund suggests that Fanny should write to her brother and tells her that Sir Thomas will frank it for her, which ends: "She thought it was a bold measure," and asked us, "Who said that?"

With Austen's writing, Harvey contends, literature took a great leap forward and later writers, such as George Eliot, studied Austen to improve their own narrative style.



Daniel Defoe (unknown artist, style of Godfrey Kneller); Jonathan Swift (painted by Charles Jervas); George Eliot, née Mary Ann Evans (painted by Francois Durade).

Member Profile: Lorraine Meltzer

1. *Tell us a little bit about yourself and your life to-date.*

I worked as a teacher of English grades 7-13 in BC and Ontario. I taught regular English, ESL for students transitioning into the regular stream, Creative Writing and Communications 12. I've taught in a psychiatric hospital, juvenile detention centre, and public secondary schools. I also taught in a program for students who were at risk of "falling between the cracks" due to learning difficulties or other factors which affected their performance in school.



Since retirement I have done some editing and lots of tutoring to keep myself intellectually stimulated. I have also belonged to a book club since 2001; I now count those women my friends. In addition, I attend aquafit classes twice a week, volunteer for the Royal City Gogos, a group which is affiliated with the Stephen Lewis Foundation. We work in solidarity with grandmothers in Africa who are coping with the effects of HIV/AIDS on their families and villages. I have season's tickets for the theatre and the VSO. Oh yeah! I love spending time with my family and my friends too. Life is fun and fulfilling!

2. *When did you join JASNA?*

September, 2001.

3. *How did you first get started with JASNA?*

My neighbour and friend, Catherine Morley, had attended a meeting in Kananaskis, Alberta. She found out that there was a JASNA group in Vancouver and suggested we attend together.

4. *What do you like about JASNA?*

I love the intellectual stimulation of the various speakers we have had. I have learned so much over the years. Being a student of literature, this group has revealed to me that any well-written piece has many facets. An added bonus is the superior quality of Austen's writing; I appreciate it more every time I read it. Finally, I thoroughly enjoy spending a morning with a group of women who are interesting and intelligent.

5. *Has JASNA given you any special memories?*

My memories are not specific; they are an amalgam of good feelings surrounding our meetings and discussions. One specific memory which stands out for me, however, is presenting a workshop entitled "Neighbourliness in Emma" with Catherine Morley at the 2007 AGM.



Michelle dressed for the Montreal AGM ball

Michelle's missive

Regional Coordinator's message

Blazing red sunsets and gentle smoke drifting from backyard barbecues serve to remind that summer is here.

A call for volunteers!

Treasurer: Our current treasurer is stepping down this summer. She has done a superb job, and we are

looking for someone to pick up the books she's started. Someone who has a few hours a month to track a few expenses and keep accounts sorted. Please send your inquiries to me at JASNAvancouverRC@gmail.com

Audio setup assistant: We rely on our audio equipment to help us through our meetings. If you would like to learn a little about microphones and speakers, and can arrive 15 minutes before meetings to help with setup, please speak with Lorraine M. (profiled above) or myself. It's less difficult that your home television!

Suggestions and feedback from members are welcome. If you cannot find time with me at our meetings, please email me.

– *Michelle Siu*

This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, is distributed to members by email and posted on our website. Members who so request may receive a hard copy either at a meeting or in the mail. All submissions and book reviews on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome. Editor, Elspeth Flood.

The Editor acknowledges a great debt of gratitude to Lorraine Meltzer for her copious meeting notes, to Laureen McMahon for the pictures and notes she adds to the JASNA Vancouver website and to the contributors to our Facebook page (mostly Joan Reynolds).

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