

Muse & Musings

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

December 14th Meeting

Jane's 244th birthday

On December 14th we were most fortunate to welcome Justin Newell, well-known local lecturer on art history, for a lively and very humorous talk on artists who were contemporaries of Jane Austen. Mr. Newell, a graduate of York University in Toronto, drew from his great store of art knowledge to tell us about (in chronological order by birth) William Blake, engraver, poet and visionary; Sir Thomas Lawrence, portraitist; John Constable, landscape artist, whose paintings are dominated by sky; and Joseph Mallord William Turner (born in the same year as JA), who some consider an early impressionist.



Justin Newell with member Virginia Peteherych

See the last pages for samples of the various artists' works as well as portraits of the artists.

As is usual in December, members enjoyed a wonderful Christmas luncheon with all the trimmings and raised a glass for a "Happy Birthday" toast to commemorate Jane Austen's birthday. We also dug deep to buy tickets for the draw which featured members' donated items. Thanks to all who helped with the set up and decorations, serving the meal, and volunteering for the clean-up. A special thanks to Barbara Phillips for the ham, delicious as always. —from web write-up by Laureen McMahon

Note: Justin will be teaching a [six-week course at UBC](#) "Perspectives on Western European Paintings and Sculptures (1600-1900)" starting March 11th.

The Further Importance of Aunts

For the May meeting, a panel discussed the importance of various aunts in the novels. Elspeth Flood, being editor of this missive, published her piece on Mrs. Phillips in the June issue. Joan Reynolds, who spoke on Miss Bates and Mrs. Gardiner, kindly submitted her two pieces for future issues. Mrs. Gardiner was published in December; here is Miss Bates.

Miss Bates: Jane Fairfax's Aunt

We first encounter Miss Hetty Bates in Chapter III of *Emma*. As a novel, *Emma* is noted for having various key characters who are motherless (Emma, Harriet Smith, Frank Churchill, and Jane Fairfax) – and in the latter two cases the presence of an Aunt is of some significance to the plot.

Miss Bates is the sister of Jane Fairfax's deceased mother, and so is a blood relative, and would have known Jane since she was first born. Although Miss Bates and her mother looked after Jane since she was three years old, Jane has been brought up in a more affluent home by the Campbells since the age of nine, distant from her aunt and Grandmother, so Miss Bates's role as a surrogate mother is less obvious in this novel.



Prunella Scales as Miss Bates in the Kate Beckinsale version, 1996.

As Jane Fairfax's aunt, Miss Bates provides the reason for Jane Fairfax to be in Highbury. Miss Bates herself is a middle-aged spinster, living with her very old mother who is the widow of the former vicar of Highbury. We first

encounter her and her mother as part of Mr. Woodhouse's small social set, being described as "most come-at-able" or accessible – not a lot of competing social demands on their time. She is living in fragile financial straits; other than the "kindness" of members of the small local community, there would be no balls, carriage rides, entertainments or modest comestible treats in her constrained life. She is described as "neither young, handsome, rich" and "boasting neither beauty or cleverness" – in fact the complete contrast to Emma's noted qualities. But in spite of these deficiencies Miss Bates enjoys the "most uncommon degree of popularity in the community."

As Austen further describes:

Her youth had passed without distinction, and her middle of life was devoted to the care of a failing mother, and the endeavour to make a small income go as far as possible. And yet she was a happy woman, and a woman whom no one named without good-will. It was her own universal good-will and contented temper which worked such wonders. She loved everybody, was interested in everybody's happiness, quick-sighted to everybody's merits; thought herself a most fortunate creature, and surrounded with blessings in such an excellent mother, and so many good neighbours and friends, and a home that wanted for nothing. The simplicity and cheerfulness of her nature, her contented and grateful spirit, were a recommendation to everybody.

And then of course, the punch line: "She was a great talker – a great talker upon little matters full of trivial communications and harmless gossip but well liked." And that is how most of us remember Miss Bates, the excruciatingly garrulous character whose squirm-inducing speeches just ramble on – and say nothing. Perhaps. Austen may state that what Miss Bates says is trivial and harmless but in this novel Austen makes a habit of presenting matters to us that are ultimately not all that they seem.

So Miss Bates is a happy woman – but indeed hers is a small and mean existence both in terms of her way of living and the style of her dwelling quarters. She grew up in relative security, but her prospects are bleak. She was never able to marry and have an establishment of her own, or children to care for her as she herself ages. She is not a spinster by choice as Emma is, or as might be the case in today's world. As Mr. Knightley so rightly points out to Emma after the Box Hill picnic, "She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more." She could not be further from the position of Mrs. Gardiner.

It might be a spartan and miserable existence, but Miss Bates makes the best of things. She has Mr. Woodhouse and other neighbours to cheer her and provide her with

many gifts of local bounty: the pork, the apples, and so on. She worries about everyone and recognises everyone's struggles. But the main highlight of her life is her niece, the elegant and accomplished Jane Fairfax. In most things Miss Bates hovers on the periphery of people, but with Jane Fairfax she has the nearest thing to something of her own, someone young and accomplished that she can love and be proud of.



Miss Bates has a letter to share: Tamsin Greig as Miss Bates in 2009 *Emma* (with Romola Garai).

Like many single women of little family and no children, Hetty Bates adores her niece. She looks forward to Jane's letters. They give Miss Bates purpose and meaning – and something to talk about – as Miss Bates never hesitates to share all Jane's news with anyone who can be button-holed to listen to her, all is shared in her fragmented, scattered speeches. Upon Emma's enquiry about Jane Fairfax in Chapter 1 of Volume III, Miss Bates proceeds to talk about her niece for almost the whole chapter, giving Emma only the occasional odd sentence before snatching back the conversation and prattling on again. Her pride shines through each time she mentions Jane's name. She can never get enough of her company.

And better than letters are Jane's visits, awaited with joyful anticipation. Miss Bates cares deeply for Jane and is concerned for her welfare. She worries about her and her health. And Jane, bless her, tries to impose as little inconvenience as she can on her relatives' lives, eats little, refuses a doctor's visit when unwell – she knows her presence costs money they can barely afford. And thoughtfully she brings Mrs. and Miss Bates modest but practical gifts with her.

When Jane arrives in Highbury, it is a shift of focus for Miss Bates from the daily drab of life trying to make ends meet and looking after her mother. Jane's presence is a real tonic for Miss Bates, a breath of fresh air to have someone young, and talented filling her daily routine. For her, Jane is memories of past happy times and plans for her future. It makes her life hopeful. Jane Fairfax in turn cares deeply for her Aunt, and she depends on her Aunt's hospitality as she has no permanent home of her own. It also happens to put her within close proximity to her secret lover, Frank Churchill. Whereas Miss Bates is

hopeful for the future of Jane Fairfax, the niece must see in her Aunt a sombre reflection of what might happen to herself as a single woman with limited prospects unless she can secure a good marriage. At best she faces the prospect of social and economic enslavement as a governess – that is the best she can hope for unless she can marry well.

Miss Bates's purpose in the novel is partly to provide comic relief, albeit we laugh at her rather than with her. Hetty Bates meets everyone, talks to everyone, passes around everyone's news – acts as a social bulletin. She delivers information without edits or filters, merely digressions. Amid all her artless, gossipy ramblings, there are subtle little plot give-aways, if you listen closely. Miss Bates may be of narrow experience, dependent on the kindness of neighbours to relieve the constraints of her life, and is intensely disliked by Emma, but for the purpose of the novel she connects all the characters as she talks to them all – nobody crosses all social levels to the same extent as Miss Bates does. She covers everyone from servants, the parish poor, the professionals, the tradespeople and the landed gentry. While everyone else misconstrues situations, Miss Bates, the garrulous, irritating Aunt, just tells it as it is, without bias. As much as her breathless longwinded speeches are irritating, they reveal much of what is really going on.



Mother and daughter play mother and daughter: Phyllida Law as Mrs. Bates and Sophie Thompson as Miss Bates in 1996 Emma (with Gwyneth Paltrow).

Lastly, her presence at Box Hill and her mistreatment by Emma allow Mr. Knightley to fully demonstrate his gallantry (in contrast to the ungentlemanly behaviour of Frank Churchill). Knightley's subsequent chastisement of Emma fills her with remorse, brings about her deep self-examination, starts her personal growth and finally her way to happiness. If we didn't have Miss Bates to be the chatty irritant in this story, would Emma have ever made it to the sea!

In closing, I hope with the eventual marriage of Jane Fairfax to Frank Churchill, Mrs. and Miss Bates's future

may be assured. Whatever Jane can do to alleviate their poverty, she will do. I like to think of Miss Bates as a happy great-aunt to some of Jane's own children. What a reward that would be for her – and those young children won't mind her prattle in the least. I wish I could be as confident as to her niece's ultimate happiness with Frank Churchill, the consummate deceiver – but that's another story.
– by Joan Reynolds

From Eileen's Archive

Newsletter #104 November, 2008

No Portrait of Mrs. Darcy

Writing to Cassandra from London May 1813, Jane Austen mentioned visits to art galleries where she facetiously looked for portraits of Jane and Elizabeth Bennet in their married roles. "Henry & I went to the Exhibition in Spring Gardens ... I was very well pleased ... with a small portrait of Mrs. Bingley, excessively like her. I went in hopes of seeing one of her Sister, but there was no Mrs. Darcy." (Letters p. 309)

Later in the same letter she wrote: "We have been both to the Exhibition & Sir J. Reynolds', – and I am disappointed, for there was nothing like Mrs. D. at either. I can only imagine that Mr. D. prizes any Picture of her too much to like it should be exposed to the public eye. – I can imagine he wd. have that sort of feeling – that mixture of Love, Pride & Delicacy." (Letters p. 312)

Jane Austen's guess as to the reason for no public display of Mrs. Darcy's picture is echoed in a book I have been reading recently. In *The Georgians: Eighteenth-Century Portraiture & Society*, the author Desmond Shawe-Taylor discusses the theories and practices of portraiture throughout the century, as well as the changing tastes of the public.

"The whole thrust of serious portraiture, especially in the second half of the century, is to suggest both these qualities (i.e. beauty and virtue), even to the extent that a purely beautiful portrait, if at all ostentatious or flashy, is sometimes regarded as compromising its own and its sitter's virtue." He quotes Hoppner, speaking of Sir Thomas Lawrence: "The ladies of Lawrence show a gaudy dissoluteness of taste, and sometimes trespass on moral as well as professional chastity." Another contemporary remarked: "Phillips (Thomas Phillips, 1770-1845) shall paint my wife, and Lawrence my mistress." Shawe-Taylor explains: "The reason a brilliantly painted and glamorous portrait might be considered suitable only for a kept woman is that the principal female virtue of the age was modesty."

The Restoration Court had been noted for its moral and sexual laxity. Even before the beginning of the 18th century, a backlash of outrage at this licentiousness was

growing, and continued steadily throughout the century. By 1770, “society had something approaching a ‘Victorian’ attitude to feminine chastity. Jane Austen reflects this in *Mansfield Park* in the reaction to Maria’s elopement: ‘too horrible a confusion of guilt, too gross a complication of evil, for human nature ... to be capable of.’



In 1760, Gainsborough’s painting of Mrs. Philip Thicknesse (above), a novelist as well as a gifted amateur musician, “may have crossed the shadowy line between the modest and the ostentatious. Some contemporaries found in it something too obtrusively French, something flashy or indelicate – more Mary Crawford and her harp, than Anne Elliot and her piano. Mrs. Delany wrote of the painting at the time that it was, “a most extraordinary figure, handsome and bold; but I should be sorry to have any one I loved set forth in such a manner.” Darcy obviously agreed.

– Eileen Sutherland, 2008, typed out by Joan Reynolds

Member profile

Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer

1. Tell us a bit about who you are and your life to-date.

I grew up in south-western Manitoba. After we left our family farm near Goodlands, when I was four, my father worked for Pool Elevators and then United Grain Growers. In the sixties branch rail lines were being closed as trucks could haul grain much further than horses and wagons whose limits had meant that grain elevators were originally approximately eight miles apart. Therefore, moving often, I grew up in a total of seven other small towns, villages, hamlets and sidings. An education in itself as Jane Austen wrote that “3 or 4 families in a

Country Village is the very thing to work on” while Agatha Christie has her fictional Jane Marple say “human nature is much the same everywhere, and, of course, one has opportunities of observing it at closer quarters in a village.”

Family tradition has it that I learned to read at the age of three by faithfully meeting my elder brother at the bottom of the farm lane to ask him to show me what he had been taught that day. Reading whatever fell into my hands was certainly a huge part of my childhood especially in the three years we lived in a siding of sixteen people with random mainly British library books mailed to us in brown paper packages by a government agency.

I graduated with my Masters in Speech Language Pathology from McGill University just before turning twenty-two and practised my beloved profession for over forty years in all sizes of places from Charlottetown, PEI to Coolbellup in Western Australia. Marrying an Australian mineral exploration geologist who worked in over thirty countries during his career gave me many free evenings for solitary reading after our two children were asleep.

Now that Lindsay and I are both retired we delight in our four grandchildren (two here and two in Montreal) plus a range of other interests. We both continue to read widely and recently counted up twenty plus bookshelves in our home plus neat stacks of art, gardening and military history books that don’t fit well on shelves.



2. When did you join JASNA?

I first heard about JASNA when a member and fellow Sunday School teacher, Marg Clarke, discovered that I had read Austen so lent me copies of *Persuasions*. Once my daughter was in residence at UBC, my Saturday mornings no longer involved driving her and her cello to Vancouver Youth Symphony rehearsals, so I finally attended a meeting as Marg’s guest on October 28, 2000 (a performance by Kim Hicks). I joined soon after and came to a few meetings a year – initially as much attracted by the excellent conversations with fellow members over lunch as by the programs!

3. How did you first get started with Jane Austen?

At our recent panel about aunts, I brought along my Aunt Mary and Aunt Nancy's school copy of *Pride and Prejudice*. I had read it in my early teens during my yearly week-long visit to my Granny's home – I always re-read *Helen's Babies*, Alcott's *Eight Cousins*, some *Anne* books and various Christie mysteries but once I came across this battered slim blue volume. It intrigued me as one of the first books I had read which acknowledged that families weren't perfect! My childhood books had included many featuring orphans plus a sanctimonious set of *Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories*. Either no parents or saintly idealized ones!



Phyllis loves finding Jane Austen on her travels. Last year she wrote: On June 18th we visited Hill Top Farm, home which Beatrix Potter purchased with the royalties from her first four books. This piano, which she inherited from her parents, is similar to the one that Frank Churchill gave anonymously to Jane Fairfax.

When my husband and I were on our honeymoon in England in December, 1977 we visited the geologically significant area of Lyme Regis. Perfect place to purchase a copy of *Persuasion* which led me to several other Austen novels.

4. What do you like about JASNA?

I like the fact that both academics and readers can interact in the same group. I am always saying to people that there are many ways of enjoying Jane Austen's novels! Locally, as I said, I really enjoy the opportunity to talk about books and history with such a knowledgeable, well-read, varied group of fellow members. I am endlessly impressed by the variety of programs that we offer.

5. Has JASNA given you any special memories? New friends? Inspiration to new experiences?

JASNA has unexpectedly given me so much. My life truly would have been very different if I hadn't joined almost twenty years ago.

Writing/speaking opportunities: Realizing that Austen wrote about many people with similar subtle communication and social challenges as some of the clients I saw professionally, I began to write and offer lectures about my opinions. After my first presentation to our local JASNA region an elderly member came up several months later and told me that she had been thinking about and researching what I had described. She said, "Now I understand my ex-husband; now I can forgive him; now I am not angry anymore." Once I realized how helpful this information about Autistic Spectrum Disorders was to many regarding someone in their personal lives, I seized opportunities to speak to various groups across four countries plus wrote a book *So Odd a Mixture*.

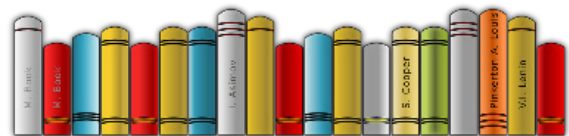
Friendships: We forged particularly close bonds with people with whom we worked on Vancouver's AGM back in 2007 and also with those with whom we have traveled to other AGMs

Becoming a Dance Gypsy: In October, 2005 my husband and I attended our first JASNA AGM which was held in Milwaukee. On the Saturday evening at the ball we had our first experience with a participatory art form, English Country Dancing, which has brought us incredible pleasure and mental stimulation ever since. Besides being very active in our local dance group we have attended over fifteen week-long dance camps in places as diverse as Hawaii and St. Croix. There is a saying "Dancing is a short-cut to JOY!"

Thank you, Jane Austen!

Puzzling People encore at SFU

I have been invited back to offer a course on this topic for SFU's Liberal Arts 55+ program (at the downtown campus) this coming February: "Puzzling People: Two Centuries of Fictional Characters with Autistic Spectrum Disorders." Follow this link – there is still time to sign up: [Puzzling People, SFU](#) For a description of this course as experienced last spring by the Editor, see our Newsletter #139: [Newsletters](#).



Library Corner

Donating Books to the JASNA Vancouver Library

We welcome donations to our Library but are restricted in how many we can keep in our collection*, so please bear in mind the following guidelines:

First, check the current [Library Listings](#) on the JASNA Vancouver website to determine if your book is currently held in the library.

If the book is not currently held in the library:

Email the librarians (Cathleen Boyle: catboyle@shaw.ca; or Jennifer Cothran: msjennifercothran@gmail.com) or bring it to the next meeting, to inquire whether this book would be a suitable addition for the library.

If the book is currently held in the library:

Bring the book to the next meeting so it can be compared with the current holding to determine whether it is a more suitable copy.

Extra copies of books can be donated to the June Book Sale.

*Note: We are currently able to store three boxes of books at St Phillip's Church and each must be light enough to move to and from storage. Therefore, we must be judicious in accepting new books and we can only keep one copy of each book.

Borrowing Books from the JASNA Vancouver Library

Borrowing Books:

1. Choose a book
2. Remove the card from the inside cover front pocket
3. Write your name, phone number and the date on the card
4. Place the card in the index file box

Returning Books:

1. Locate the book's card in the index file box
2. Place it inside the book's front pocket
3. Replace the book in the library box

Note: Books are available for borrowing at February, March, May, June, September, October and November meetings. The library is not available April or December meetings due to special events. – Cathleen Boyle

In Memoriam Viviane McClelland

We have recently learned that former member Viviane McClelland passed away last October 12th following surgery after a stroke. She was a long-time and active member until a few years ago. She served on the Program Committee from 1991, and then as Treasurer from 2005 to 2008 when she was succeeded by Jennifer Bettiol. She was also a frequent contributor to the Newsletter, and presenter at meetings, including such talks as “My Dear Doctor Johnson” co-presented with Margaret Howell

(Newsletter 38, May 1992), and “Maria Edgeworth” with Virgil Oriente, (Newsletter 87, August 2004).



The following papers that she co-authored are currently in our Library:

“A Comparison of the Theatricals in Mansfield Park” with Maureen Korman and “Money and the Struggle for Status in Jane Austen” with P. McIntosh & Jean Oriente.

Viviane enjoyed travel, and in 1991 contributed an article to Newsletter 35 about her visit to Chawton House, at that time in a ruinous state before it was taken over and rescued by Sandy Lerner in 1992.

– with contributions from Joan Reynolds, Keiko Parker, Sandy Lundy, Jennifer Bettiol and others

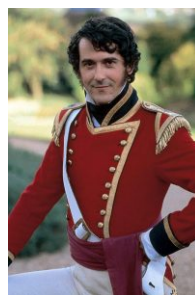
From our RC

Michelle Siu

A new year is upon us. I hope that 2020 should see your wishes become reality –



And I hope to see that meetings will continue to be a gathering of “clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation.”



Hotel registration is now open for the 2020 AGM “Jane Austen's Juvenilia: Reason, Romanticism, and Revolution” in Cleveland Ohio (once newsworthy for its burning river). The AGM has invited Adrian Lukis (Wickham 1995, pictured at left) to the opening event. Mark your calendars for the next two AGMs: Chicago in 2021 on Austen in the arts, and 2022 will be Victoria for Jane in the City of Gardens.

In 2019 we marked the 40th anniversary of our beloved JASNA organization. Please remember to ensure that you have renewed your membership for the national JASNA organization in addition to your local membership renewal. A national membership has the additional benefits of the newsletter *JASNA News*, our literary journal *Persuasions*, monthly members-only updates, and an invitation to attend the Annual General Meeting. Not to be missed!

As we change our calendars to 2020, we also are filling our programming calendar. If you have ideas for a future meeting, have a topic or speaker you would like to see at our meeting, please approach me or any member of the Program Committee: Phyllis Bottomer, Barbara Elliott, Elspeth Flood, Susan Kaufman, Janice Mallison, Barbara Phillips. And join us to help plan – make one of our meetings what you wish to see!
– Michelle Siu



Spring 2020 meeting dates

Mark your calendar!

February 15 “She said Yes!” Panel on the marriage prospects of Charlotte Lucas and Jane Fairfax

Sign up for JA Day: \$40 members, \$50 non-members

Please don’t forget to bring your permanent nametag!

March 21 Video presentation of a breakout from the Williamsburg AGM

April 18 Jane Austen Day: Program TBA

May 16 Dramatic presentation: Lady Elliot at Tea; followed by a panel of Jane Austen’s financially vulnerable women

June 13 Books & berries: book reviews and book sale – bring your used books!

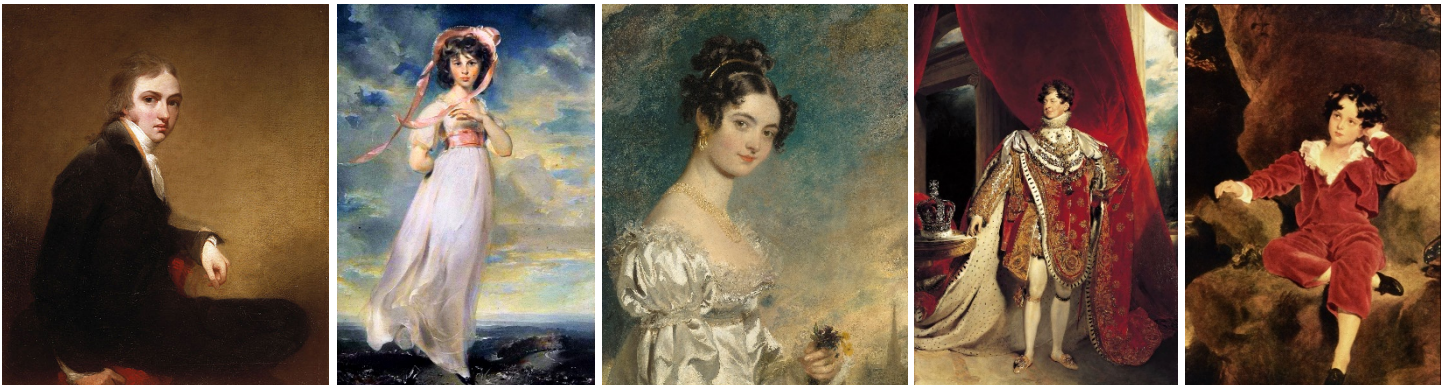
Please see the program of events on our website for more up-to-date information (thanks to webmaster Lauren McMahon): [JASNA-Vancouver program](#)

Gallery

Justin Newell lectured on four artists of Jane Austen’s time in chronological order by birthdate: William Blake (1757-1795), Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), John Constable (1776-1837) and J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851).



William Blake portrait by Thomas Phillips, 1807. The Ancient Days (1794), Newton (1795-1805), Lovers’ Whirlwind (1827), illustration for Dante.



Sir Thomas Lawrence self-portrait, 1788. Miss Sarah Moulton aka Pinkie (1794), Lady Selina Meade (1819), Coronation portrait of George IV, former Prince Regent (1821), Master Lambton aka the Red Boy, 1825.



John Constable portrait by Ramsay Reinagle, 1799. Weymouth Bay 1816, Dedham Vale 1828.



JMW Turner self-portrait, 1799. Tintern Abbey, 1794, The Fighting Temeraire, 1839.



"You pierce my soul"



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.

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