

COASTAL JAUNTS



PORTSMOUTH

It was whilst Jane was visiting her brothers Charles and Frank, both serving officers in the Royal Navy in Portsmouth, that she was influenced to write Mansfield Park. In the novel she portrays the old city convincingly, touching on the squalor of its poverty. The naval dockyard she describes in Mansfield Park is now a sports field in neighbouring Portsea but the city still features the Georgian architecture which marks its development as a suburb serving the naval personnel who guarded the once heavy coastal fortifications.

SOUTHAMPTON

Jane, her mother and sister Cassandra moved to Southampton after the death of her father in 1805. Jane found living in a city a challenge after her country childhood. We know that the women spent much time out of doors, promenading along the city walls and taking excursions to the River Itchen and the ruins of Netley Abbey. Surviving correspondence also tells us that the three women travelled up the Beaulieu River, passing Buckler's Hard, an 18th century shipbuilding village, and Beaulieu Abbey. Jane also danced at the Dolphin Hotel.

FAMILY TIES

Jane's father, George Austen, (1731-1805) was the rector of St Nicholas Church in the parish of Steventon. Reverend Austen took in boys to tutor.



His wife Cassandra (née Leigh) (1739-1827) was a sociable, witty woman whom George had met while studying in Oxford. Cassandra was visiting her uncle, Theophilus Leigh, Master of Balliol College. When Cassandra left the city, George followed her to Bath and continued to court her until they got married on 26 April 1764, at the church of St Swithin in Bath.



Although a close knit family, by today's standards the household was subject to somewhat fluid arrangements regarding the care of offspring. As was customary for the gentry at the time, Jane's parents sent her as an infant to be cared for by a farming neighbour, Elizabeth Littlewood.



Her brother George, who is thought to have suffered from epilepsy, also lived away from the family home. And the third child, Edward (shown left), was adopted by his father's third cousin, Mr Thomas Knight, eventually inheriting Godmersham and Chawton House, which led him to offer a cottage attached to the Chawton estate to his mother and two sisters, Jane and Cassandra.

Arrangements like these were normal for the time - the family was close and affectionate and recurring themes of family bonds and respectable rural living would play a strong part in Jane's writing.



THE AUSTEN FAMILY – WHAT TO SEE

The most extensive collection of memorabilia relating to the Austen family is showcased at Jane Austen's House, Chawton. See overleaf to find out more...

STEVENTON & BEYOND

EDUCATION AND EARLY INFLUENCES

Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775 at Steventon Rectory in north Hampshire, where her parents had moved a year previously with three of Jane's older siblings. Henry was born before Jane, then a further three siblings arrived, meaning that the Austen brood numbered eight in all.

George Austen, known as 'the handsome proctor' at Balliol College, was a reflective, literary man, who took pride in his children's education.

Most unusually for the period, he owned more than 500 books and was forward thinking in encouraging his daughters to read widely. Again unusually, when Jane's only sister, Cassandra, left for school in 1782, she was accompanied by Jane, aged just seven. Their mother wrote of their bond, 'If Cassandra's head had been going to be cut off, Jane would have hers cut off too'.

The two sisters attended schools in Oxford, Southampton and Reading. In Southampton the girls (and their cousin Jane Cooper) left the school when they caught a fever brought to the city by troops returning from abroad. Their cousin's mother died and Jane also contracted the illness becoming very unwell but, luckily for literary posterity, survived.

The girls' brief schooling was finally curtailed due to constraints upon the family's finances and Jane returned to the rectory in 1787 to begin writing a collection of poems, plays and short stories which she dedicated to friends and family. This, her *Juvenilia*, encompassed her early writings.

Pages from *A History of England*, perhaps the most celebrated of these early works, can be viewed online at the British Library website (www.bl.uk/onlinegallery). Even in this, one of Austen's earliest texts, the reader glimpses the wit that was to come. The prose is peppered with phrases illustrating her flair for detached, literary anticlimax:

'Lord Cobham was burnt alive, but I forget what for.'

STEVENTON WHAT TO SEE

Other than a towering lime tree, offspring of one planted by Jane's brother James, and a clump of nettles that is thought to mark the spot where the family well used to stand, nothing remains at the site of the rectory other than the rural tranquillity that was perhaps as central an element of Austen's creativity as the society of her day.

At St Nicholas Church there is a bronze plaque dedicated to the writer and you can see her elder brother's grave, along with those of other relatives.

The 1000-year old yew, which used to house the key in the time of the Austens, still yields berries – its secret, central hollow intact.

The Wheatsheaf Inn in North Waltham was once a coaching inn and posting house visited by Austen as a child. Today it serves food to passers by. Offering open fires and cosy seating, many of the building's 18th century features are still intact.

Tel: 01256 398 282 Postcode: RG25 2BB.

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janeausten200.co.uk

THE DANCING YEARS

Coming from a respectable family associated with the church, Jane and her sister Cassandra occupied a social stratum bracketed as gentry.

The well-spoken girls enjoyed a busy round of dances and house visits, mingling with the higher echelons of local Georgian society in the great houses dotted throughout the rolling green countryside.

As well as spending time with the family friend Madam Lefroy, who lived at Ashe Rectory, we know that Jane and Cassandra came into contact with the infamous Boltons of Hackwood Park. (Jane dryly comments after meeting the illegitimate daughter of Lord Bolton in the Bath assembly rooms that she was 'much improved with a wig'). She also visited the Hansons of Farleigh House and the Dorchesters of Kempshott Park where Jane attended a New Year's ball in 1800.

Jane Austen's keen observation of the manners and morals of her extended social network was to give rise to her famous plotlines revolving around unsuitable suitors and social position – she started drafting *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey* whilst living at the rectory.

DID YOU KNOW?

Joe Wright's 2005 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* starring Keira Knightly (see overleaf) has scenes that were shot in Winchester.

'Give a girl an education and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well.'

JANE AUSTEN

Take a look at our cricket trail and follow the itinerary that links to this trail.



AUSTEN

Landmarks of the author's life in Hampshire



Jane Austen died in a house on College Street in Winchester after a short illness. Her final resting place is Winchester Cathedral, which is a central landmark of her life. This trail traces her journey from birth to her death giving you an insight into the life and times of this 'Hampshire girl'.



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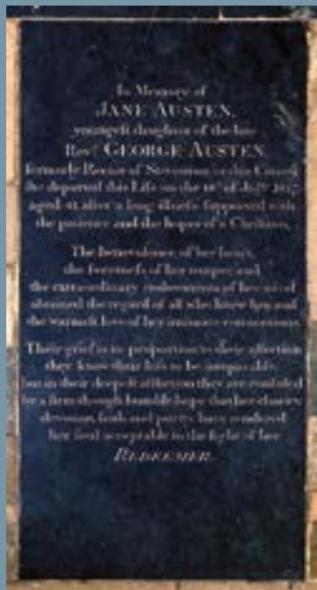


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WINCHESTER - Her final resting place



The house in College Street.
© John Crook 2009



Jane Austen's ledger stone
© John Crook 2009

Jane Austen was buried in the north nave aisle of Winchester Cathedral on 24 July 1817. Cassandra wrote to her niece: *'Her dear remains are to be deposited in the cathedral... a building she admired so much'*. After her death the number of people who appreciated Austen's work steadily grew and in 1870 her nephew Edward wrote a memoir of his aunt and used the proceeds to erect a brass plaque beginning *'Jane Austen, known to many by her writings'*. In 1900 she was famous enough for a public subscription to pay for a memorial window. Today an exhibition detailing Jane's life in Hampshire is situated beside her grave.

It is recommended for those making a special visit to Winchester Cathedral to visit winchester-cathedral.org.uk for opening times.



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DID YOU KNOW?

Colin Firth whose portrayal of Mr Darcy in the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* brought him widespread attention, went to school in Winchester.

His performance in the role was given further renown when he took on the role of Mark Darcy in the Miramax film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* – meaning that Firth's casting lent an ironic, modern twist on the persona of the Austen anti-hero who came good.



Sit back and admire the bench dedicated to Jane Austen which can now be found outside the Mayor's official residence, Abbey House.

The Jane Austen 200 bench was commissioned by Winchester City Council and carved by local sculptor Nicola Henshaw to commemorate the 200 year anniversary of Austen's death. The design was developed using ideas from the children at Winnall Primary School and was previously displayed outside Winchester College.

'Our Chawton home how much we find already in it to our mind, and how convinced that when complete it will all other houses beat.'
JANE AUSTEN, 1809



JANE AUSTEN'S HOUSE MUSEUM

From 1809 until 1817 Jane lived in Chawton village near Alton with her mother, sister and their friend Martha Lloyd. Restored to the rural Hampshire she loved, Jane turned again to writing and it was here that she produced her greatest works, revising all previous drafts and writing *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion* in their entirety.

Remarkably, even now, the approach to Chawton is not so changed by progress as to be unrecognisable from what it was in Jane Austen's day, with thatched cottages remaining. The risk of flooding was a fact of life in eighteenth century Hampshire too, as Jane bemoans in March 1816: *'Our pond is brim full and our roads are dirty and our walls are damp, and we sit wishing every bad day may be the last.'*

A museum to Jane's life, the house in which Jane lived so happily now showcases Austen family portraits and touching memorabilia such as the handkerchief she embroidered for her sister, original manuscripts and a bookcase containing first editions of her novels.

Visitors can stand behind the modest occasional table at which Austen wrote, to admire the peaceful garden cultivated to feature 18th century plants. Although there were adequate bedrooms for the sisters to have their own rooms, Jane and Cassandra chose to share a room, as they had done at Steventon. Jane rose early, practised the piano and made breakfast. We know that she was personally in charge of the sugar, tea and wine stores.

jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk
01420 832 62



'I went up to the Great House between 3 & 4, & dawdled away an hour very comfortably...'
JANE AUSTEN, LETTER TO CASSANDRA AUSTEN, 1814

CHAWTON HOUSE

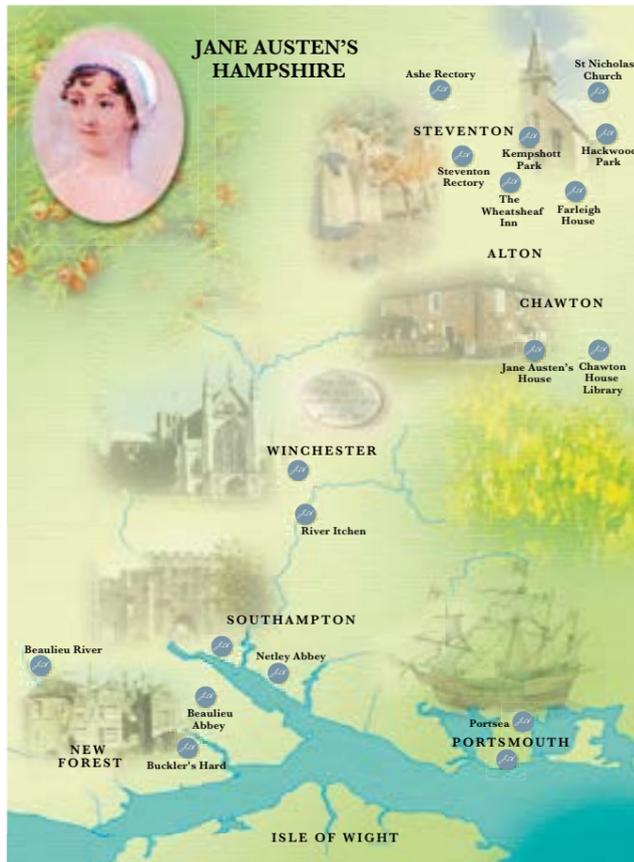
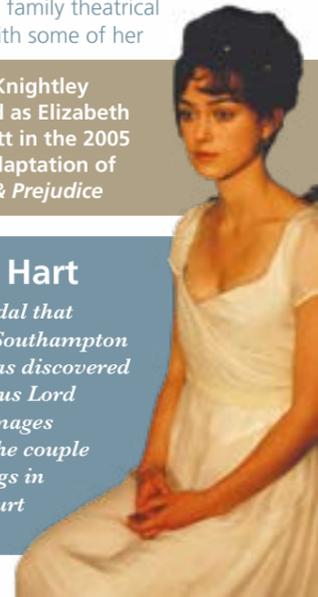
Visitors can walk in Jane's footsteps up to her brother Edward's house, regularly visited by Jane and referred to as 'the Great House' in her letters. This Elizabethan manor house is now home to Chawton House, a registered charity with a unique collection of women's writing (1600–1830).

The house is open to visitors who can see Jane's brother Edward's portrait and travel journal, along with the Knight family dining table at which Jane regularly dined with her family. The peaceful gardens include many of the period features referred to in Jane Austen's novels, such as a shrubbery, a 'ha-ha' and a 'wilderness', along with a walled garden built by Edward Austen. Among the library collection is a manuscript of a family theatrical in Jane Austen's own hand, along with some of her first editions, and works by other women writers of her time, and earlier.

Keira Knightley starred as Elizabeth Bennet in the 2005 BBC adaptation of *Pride & Prejudice*

Scandal in The White Hart

Jane and her sister wrote of a scandal that occurred in Winchester in 1808. A Southampton Colonel's wife, Laetitia Powlett, was discovered in The White Hart with the notorious Lord Sackville. A successful case for damages was launched by the Colonel and the couple were divorced following proceedings in Winchester Diocese Consistory Court in 1809.



For more information on planning your visit call Winchester Tourist Information Centre on 01962 840 500 or see visitwinchester.co.uk



SISTERLY LOVE

It was Jane's older sister, Cassandra, who sketched the only first hand likeness of the author – shown on the upper left of the map above. The tiny portrait, painted in 1810, bears lasting witness to the description of her by Sir Egerton Brydges who had visited Steventon: *'Her hair was dark brown and curled naturally; her large dark eyes were widely opened and expressive. She had clear brown skin and blushed so brightly and so readily.'*