

Basingstoke Heritage Society

Caring for our town - past, present and future



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Jane Austen Leaflet.....



Jane Austen was born in Steventon in 1775 and grew up in the rectory there with her family – her parents, the Reverend George and Mrs Cassandra Austen, her sister, also Cassandra, and five brothers. By 1801 when her father retired, only Jane and Cassandra moved to Bath with their parents.

Jane's first 25 years were spent in this area; she shopped in both Overton and Basingstoke; she walked to friends at Ashe Rectory and Deane and to Oakley Hall. But maybe most of all she came to her first dances - here in Basingstoke.



This sculpture, representing Jane Austen walking through Basingstoke's Market Place, was created by Adam Roud and unveiled by Jane Austen's biographer, Claire Tomalin, on the 200th anniversary of her death, 18th July 2017.

Salisbury and Winchester Journal of the 28th July 1817:

"On Friday the 18th inst., died in this city, Miss Jane Austen, youngest daughter of the late Rev. George Austen, Rector of Steventon, in this county, and the Authoress of Emma, Mansfield Park, Pride and Prejudice and Sensibility. Her manners were most gentle, her affections ardent, her candour was not to be suppressed, and she lived and died as became a humble Christian"

A Timeline for Jane Austen

- 1775** December 16th Jane Austen born, the seventh child in the family.
- 1787** Jane begins writing her 'Juvenilia'. Three of her novels follow before 1800.
- 1801** Jane and Cassandra move to Bath with their parents.
- 1805** Reverend George Austen dies in Bath.
- 1809** Jane's brother Edward Austen-Knight offers his mother and sisters a cottage in Chawton
- 1811** 'Sense and Sensibility' published.
- 1813** 'Pride and Prejudice' published
- 1815** 'Emma' published.
- 1817** On 24th May, Jane is moved to Winchester where her doctor is Dr Giles King Lyford, nephew of John Lyford of Basingstoke. Jane dies on 18th July and is buried in Winchester Cathedral on 24th July.

POINTS OF INTEREST

JANE AUSTEN

BASINGSTOKE

Jane Austen was born in nearby Steventon in 1775 and lived there until she was 25. These are the places she knew, the locations where she danced and the source of her lively imagination and wonderful characters. It was here that she danced, shopped and visited – this is the world which shaped her novels.

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www.bas-herit-soc.org

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Image courtesy of Hampshire Cultural Trust

This image shows the Town Hall at that time – the 3 buildings on the right are where the Willis Museum is today. Regular winter season Balls were held at or near the full moon and were advertised in the Reading Mercury. There

1 Market Place – Dancing

Here where Lloyds Bank is today was the site of the old Moot or Town Hall.

2 Shopping

Jane's letters mention shops in Basingstoke. Here she writes:

"I went to Mrs. Ryder's and bought what I intended to buy, but not in much perfection. There were no narrow braces for children and scarcely any notting silk; but Miss Wood, as usual, is going to town very soon, and will lay in a fresh stock. I gave 2s. 3d. a yard for my flannel, and I fancy it is not very good, but it is so disgraceful and contemptible an article in itself that its being comparatively good or bad is of little importance. I bought some Japan ink likewise, and next week shall begin my operations on my hat, on which you know my principal hopes of happiness depend."

she had possibly fallen in love. His mother was a great-niece of Jane who married a very distant cousin - a nephew of 'Iris' Tom Lefroy.



5 The Crown, Winchester Street

This is the old coaching entrance to The Crown Inn, one of the town's largest and busiest coaching inns. Jane's father attended a Gentleman's Club here. The space through the arch is the old inn yard. A narrow street at the north end leads into Cross Street.

were also balls for Race Days – the race course was at Kempshott and there was a ball for the King's birthday too. These balls were attended by the local gentry and middling sort. Jane's friends and acquaintances such as the Lefroys, the Bigg girls, Catherine and Alethea, and probably some of the town's professional people. The Austen's doctor, John Lyford and his son, also John, who Jane tried to avoid at a dance at Ashe in 1796.

"I danced twice with Warren last night, and once with Mr. Charles Watkins, and, to my inexpressible astonishment, I entirely escaped John Lyford. I was forced to fight hard for it, however."



Another assembly room was in The Angel Inn opposite the Willis Museum (now Barclays Bank) and this was where Jane *may* have danced. There is no evidence that Jane and Cassandra did attend the assemblies held here, but it seems likely that their Aunt warned their mother of the dangers of such Balls. In specific advice to Jane's brother, James Edward Austen, she warned him to take care not to

"lose your senses by dancing with the Belles of Basingstoke."

Jane's sharp wit is evident. Here, she describes a Basingstoke Assembly in October 1800 ...

"It was a pleasant ball, and still more good than pleasant, for there were nearly sixty people, and sometimes we had seventeen couple. The Portsmouths, Dorchesters, Boltons, Portals, and Clerks were there, and all the meaner and more usual &c., &c.'s. There was a scarcity of men in general, and a still greater scarcity of any that were good for much. I danced nine dances out of ten -- five with Stephen Terry, T. Chute, and James Digweed, and four with Catherine. There was commonly a couple of ladies standing up together, but not often any so amiable as ourselves."



Austen-Knight in Godmersham. Mrs Austen was a poor traveller. Jane wrote:

"We arrived here yesterday between four and five, but I cannot send you quite so triumphant an account of our last day's journey as of the first and second. Soon after I had finished my letter from Staines, my mother began to suffer from the exercise or fatigue of travelling, and she was a good deal indisposed. She had not a very good night at Staines, but bore her journey better than I had expected, and at Basingstoke, where we stopped more than half an hour, received much comfort from a mess of broth and the sight of Mr. Lyford, who recommended her to take twelve drops of laudanum when she went to bed as a compose, which she accordingly did."



This house was the home of the Russell family from about the 1780s and had been adapted into this fine mansion. The Russells were friends of the Austens. Mrs Anne Russell and her niece, Frances Shipperdson were friends of Anne Lefroy at Ashe who noted in January 1803:-

"There is a little dance tonight at Mrs Russell's to which we are all invited... Powletts, Dorchesters and Terrys."

The writer Mary Russell Mitford was connected with this family.

Curiously, a daughter of Goldings, Eliza Apletree, married Harris Bigg-Wither, son of the famous Harris, who proposed to and was accepted by Jane, the engagement being called off the next day.

By 1901 William Chambers Lefroy lived here, a descendant of both Jane's brother James and of the Tom Lefroy with whom



when Jane was in charge of the cooking.

"Mr. Lyford was here yesterday; he came while we were at dinner, and partook of our elegant entertainment. I was not ashamed at asking him to sit down to table, for we had some pease-soup, a sparerib, and a pudding. I wants my mother to look yellow and to throw out a rash, but she will do neither."

"Mr. Lyford gratified us very much yesterday by his praises of my father's mutton, which they all think the finest that was ever ate"



This item was sold to the Rev. Austen of Steventon in 1794. Everyone, but everyone, bought household goods from John Ring. This item was for his daughter, Jane, for her 19th birthday and is now in the British Library.



Lady Jane's sister-in-law, Elizabeth née Blunden, was the grand-daughter of the renowned Mrs Blunden. Lady Jane told this story at the slightest opportunity so surely Jane must have known it. The story line would have fitted Northanger Abbey so well.

POINTS OF INTEREST

JANE AUSTEN

BASINGSTOKE

Mrs Cassandra Austen's poem about the Basingstoke Ball

Thursday 7th November 1799

I send you here a list of all
The company who graced the ball
Last Thursday night at Basingstoke;
There were but six and thirty folk,
Altho' the Evening was so fine.
First then, the couple from the Vine;
Next, Squire Hicks and his fair spouse –
They came from Mr Bramston's house,
With Madam and her maiden Sister;
(Had she been absent, who'd have missed her?)
And fair Miss Woodward, that sweet singer,
For Mrs Bramston liked to bring her;
With Alethea too, and Harriet
They came in Mrs Hicks' chariot;
Perhaps they did, I am not certain.
Then there were four good folk from Worting;
For with the Clerks there came two more
Some friends of theirs, their name was Hoare.
With Mr, Mrs, Miss Lefroy
Came Henry Rice, that pleasant boy;
And lest a title they should want,
There came Sir Colebrook and Sir Grant.
Miss Eyre of Sherfield and her Mother;
One Miss from Dummer and her brother,
The mother too as chaperon;



Mr and Mrs Winhamson;
 Charles Powlett and his pupils twain;
 Small Parson Hasker, great Squire Lane;
 And Bentworth's rector, with his hat,
 Unwillingly he parts from that.
 Two Misses Davies with two friends –
 And thus my information ends.
 P.S. It would have been a better dance
 But for the following circumstance –
 The Dorchesters, so high in station,
 Dined out that day, by invitation,
 At Heckfield Heath with Squire Le Fevre;
 Methinks it was not quite so clever
 For one subscriber to invite
 Another, on Assembly night;
 But 'twas to meet a General Donne
 His Lordship's old companion;
 And as the General would not stay
 They could not fix another day¹.

- 1 Market Place – Dancing
- 2 Shopping
- 3 The Red Lion, London Street
- 4 Goldings, War Memorial Park
- 5 The Crown, Winchester Street
- 6 Cross Street
- 7 Church Street, John Ring's House
- 8 Holy Ghost Cemetery

¹Quoted in Le Faye, Deirdre Jane Austen. *A Family Record*
 Cambridge University Press, 2004 pp 115-116

1762 map courtesy of Hampshire Record Office 23M72/P1/1

